Givers, Takers, Framers: the Ethics of Auto/biographical Documentary

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

College of Arts, Victoria University
Melbourne, Australia
January 2015

'I Paola Bilbrough declare that the PhD exegesis entitled "Givers, Takers, Framers: the Ethics of Auto/biographical Documentary" is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This exegesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated this exegesis is my own work'.

Signature   Date

Acknowledgements

I would like to give heartfelt thanks to the following people who have made both the exegesis and creative components of this doctoral project possible:

My supervisors Dr Barbara Brook and Dr Megan Evans for an invaluable balance of insight, clarity and warmth; Dr Jane Landman for being a supportive academic friend; my initial supervisor Professor Michele Grossman for early enthusiasm and assistance; Sue Dodd for excellent last minute advice; filmmakers Pietra Brettkelly, Steve Thomas and Maya Newell for speaking to me at length about their work; my parents Christina Conrad and Norman Bilbrough for untiringly sharing family history, and for their belief in me; Setyo Budi for his contributions to both the documentary-poems and exegesis; Antonia Harold for her wisdom about auto/biography and transference dynamics over the years; Louise McDonald and Stuart Mannion for unstinting creative and practical support.

Additionally I want to thank the following friends and colleagues for their generosity, thoughtfulness and contribution to the project in a wide variety of ways: Angher Aguer; Gai Anyieth; Matthew Aulich; Samya Bashir; Hellen Berberi; Bianca De Toma; Sue Frydman; Anne Harris; Olive Jones; Chrisoula Kanaris; Nicola Loder; Kathryn McCool; Martine Murray; Hoang Tran Nguyen; Sarah Nicholson; Suzanne Pollard; David Raco; Daniel Rechter; Kate Stenzil; Najib Warsame.

I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a thou). Separation, dissociation, enclosure within the self is the main reason for the loss of one's self.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1984, p. 287)

ABSTRACT: Givers, Takers, Framers: The Ethics of Auto/biographical Documentary

KEY TERMS: identity, representation, ethics, relationships, auto/biography

The tensions between ethical practice and aesthetic freedom in documentary film are particularly magnified in auto/biographical films that involve representations of family members or participants from a different cultural background to the artist, both contexts that demand a greater awareness of self and other. In this doctoral thesis I use 'auto/biographical' in its most expansive sense to signify the blurring of autobiographical stories with biographical material – the impossibility of telling the self's story without implicating others and vice-versa.

I contend that auto/biographical documentaries are the product of the relationship between filmmaker and participant, a multidimensional relationship that frequently involves shifting power dynamics, unconscious desires and feelings of betrayal. An acknowledgement and analysis of this relationship is integral to ethically responsible filmmaking. Furthermore, a creative process based around reciprocity and transparency can present transformative opportunities for both filmmaker and participants. I demonstrate my argument through two components each weighted at 50%: a creative work comprised of auto/biographical short film and written poetry, and an exegesis of 57,000 words.

The short films (40 minutes in total) and the collection of poems are thematically linked through an exploration of the position of outsider/Other, notions of family, identity and separation. Three of the films focus on my parents' lives as artists on the margins of society and their struggle to make art while raising children. The subject of the fourth is a temporary parenting arrangement I had with a Sudanese-Australian teenager. This exegesis contextualises the creative output and unpacks the research contentions through a close reading of the text *and* context of selected

auto/biographical documentaries including *No One Eats Alone* (Bilbrough dir. 2010), a documentary I made prior to my doctoral project with and about twelve Sudanese-Australian women. Additionally, this exegesis tells the story of the creative work, analysing my role as the constructor of images and narratives.

Both the practical and theoretical components of this thesis make a significant contribution to research by weaving together a nexus of elements that are not normally interwoven. The four films are 'documentary-poems', a genre that occupies a playful space between art, documentary and poetry. The form combines documentary interview material with crafted visual images to create an evocative nonlinear narrative based around memory and imagination. An elliptical understanding – the viewer's own notions of the possible stories and world(s) beyond the frame – is just as important here as what is tangibly represented. Through suggesting possibilities rather than directly stating all the 'facts', the form addresses ethical concerns because it protects particular identities and omits details that could be potentially damaging to those involved. This exegesis employs a critical auto/biographical methodology weaving together my personal perspective (as both documentary practitioner and scholar) with cultural, psychoanalytic and feminist theory, as well as the voices of other filmmakers and writing by arts practitioners. The resulting work is a bricolage of analytical readings, comparisons and theoretical interpretations.

Although this thesis can be viewed/read in any order, my preference is for the following approach that integrates the theoretical and creative components:

1. Introduction and Chapter One

2. Appendix 1: *No One Eats Alone* (not part of the creative component)

3. Chapter Two and Three

4. *Separation*

5. *Porous*

6. Chapter Four

7. *A View of the Boats*

8. *Going with the Wind*

9. *Willing Exile*

10. Conclusion

This doctoral project (Application HRETH 10/147) was granted ethics approval by Victoria University HREC on 24 February 2011.

I, Paola Bilbrough, declare that the doctoral exegesis entitled 'Givers, Takers, Framers: The Ethics of Auto/biographical Documentary' is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This exegesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this exegesis is my own work.

Signature and Date:

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Key Terms

In this section I outline the key terms that I use throughout this exegesis.

Auto/biography. I use Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's (2010, p. 256) definition of auto/biography as signalling the 'interrelatedness of autobiographical narrative and biography with the slash marking their fluid boundary'. In this regard the films that I write about include varying mixes of autobiography and biography. For example *No One Eats Alone* (Bilbrough dir. 2010) is a collage of autobiographical stories told by twelve women, yet invariably it also contains biographical information about those close to the women. Other films such as Hope (Thomas dir. 2007) contain aspects of the auto/biography of both participant and filmmaker.

Character. People who appear in documentaries are not commonly referred to as characters, since this is a term used to describe a fictional protagonist in narrative fiction or an actor playing a role in a feature films or play. Additionally, 'character' is used to refer to 'the aggregate of qualities that distinguish one person or thing from another the 'moral constitution as of person or people' and 'good moral constitution or status' (Delbridge et al 1997, p. 370). Although I use 'participant' throughout this thesis, I suggest that all these attributes of 'character', which frame and shape participants in particular ways to contribute to a particular narrative, can be usefully applied to documentary. The participant may also choose to *play* a particular role. This may have a positive or negative impact because viewers will make moral judgements based on what aspects of the actual person they see on screen.

Identification. Throughout this exegesis I use the term 'identification' to convey the sense of recognition and feelings of connection that can occur between documentary-makers and participants. However, 'identification' has a range of more precise meanings in psychoanalytic theory. Evans (1996, p. 81) has noted

that, for Lacan, 'imaginary identification is the mechanism by which the ego is created in the Mirror Stage'.

Mirror phase/stage. Lacan uses the term 'mirror phase' to refer to when the child recognises its own image in the mirror (at around six months) but still lacks physical coordination. This process of identification is essential to the formation of the ego. The mirror presents to the child an image that is in contrast with her/him in its wholeness (Evans 1996, p. 115). This contrast is initially perceived as a threat – 'the wholeness of the image threatens the subject with fragmentation'. This tension is resolved by the child identifying with her/his image and feeling joy at having attained 'an imaginary sense of mastery' (Evans 1996, p. 115).

Other/other. As a term, 'other' has philosophical, psychological/psychoanalytic, political, cultural and social nuances and implications. I use it a variety of ways throughout this thesis. Here I provide a brief summary of relevant definitions. Emmanuel Levinas's (1969, 1998) philosophical work on ethics focuses on responsibility to the 'Other'. Ethical responsibility for Levinas involves a recognition and acceptance of the alterity of the Other, rather than trying to reduce the Other to sameness.

In a postcolonial context 'Other' was popularised by Edward Said in his seminal text *Orientalism* (1978) to describe the attitude of the West towards the East. Orientalism for Said is part of 'the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures' (Said 1995, p. 7). In ascribing homogenising characteristics to particular groups of people, and thus defining them as both exotic and inferior, the West has been able to justify imperialism. Martin Jones et al (2004, p. 174) have noted that 'othering' 'refers to the act of emphasising the perceived weaknesses of marginalised groups as a way of stressing the alleged strength of those in positions of power'.

Throughout this exegesis I also use 'Othering' to refer to the process of excluding and/or essentialising particular groups of people because of their perceived difference, a difference that may then be seen as a threat to society, or as a subject of fascination. To distinguish between usages in this exegesis I use a lower case 'o' to refer to the generalised 'other' – anyone who is not oneself. In discussing discriminatory, homogenising treatment and representation of particular groups of people I use an upper case 'O' (e.g., 'the Other' or 'Othering'). With regard to quotes I remain faithful to the author's particular expression.

Participant. In reference to a relationship-centred process, I use the term 'participant' throughout this exegesis rather than 'subject' (except where I am quoting or talking about another filmmaker or scholar who uses 'subject'). The term 'subject' has been traditionally used in research (and in documentary practice) to connote the person being observed or studied (as well as the subject *matter*). My choice of terminology also reflects a shift in academia away from a positivist model, which privileges the researcher as figure of objective authority. Citing Weekley (1967, p. 1438), Roger Bibace, Joshua W Clegg and Jaan Valsiner (2009, p. 68) point out that the etymology of the word 'subject' is grounded in uneven power relations, originating from the Latin root verb *subicere* – to subject something to some conditions.

Representation. This exegesis focuses on the problematic nature of interpreting and mediating another person's reality via visual and narrative representation. I use representation to mean an act of imaging or recording a person or their story/point of view as well as to speak about a person or to frame a particular subject or issue.

Use of Names

'Abe' is a pseudonym. The circumstances that I discuss in this exegesis are sensitive and at the start of this project Abe made it very clear that he wanted his actual identity to be private. No other names in this exegesis are pseudonyms. The people about whom I have written have about either consented to be written about specifically in the context of participating in my doctoral project, or had consented to appear in *No One Eats Alone* (Bilbrough dir. 2010). In writing about *No One Eats Alone* I have not used any detail or story that participants were not happy to have included in the film.

Introduction: 'The White Dots'

> My mum used to say, "Oh my Gosh, you're not going to get married; I don't think
> so." She was worried. She'd say, "You're the white dot in the family because you
> don't listen, you don't follow orders." To be a white dot is the opposite colour,
> because we're all black. Girls you have to follow some stuff, do some stuff, even if
> it's against your will... you can't eat in front of a man... you have to sit with your
> legs crossed and when you laugh you don't laugh loud. But somehow I'm the
> opposite to all this. (Angher Aguer quoted in Bilbrough dir. 2010, min. 30:13-31:10)

In this introduction I provide the story behind my doctoral project. I discuss how
No One Eats Alone (Bilbrough dir. 2010), a 35-minute documentary I made
collaboratively with 12 Sudanese-Australian women, about identity and parenting,
shaped the creative and critical aspects of 'Givers, Takers, Framers: the Ethics of
Auto/biographical documentary'. I use my work on *No One Eats Alone* as well as
observations from other practitioners and scholars, to suggest that there are
unconscious elements behind documentary practitioners gravitating to particular
people and topics. I outline how the close relationships I developed during *No One
Eats Alone* initially motivated a desire to make a follow-up film, 'The White Dots'.
In teasing out the representational concerns of this nascent project, I discuss *Hope*
(Thomas dir. 2007) and *Bastardy* (Courtin-Wilson dir. 2008), two reflexive
auto/biographical documentaries that demonstrate a collaborative relationship
between participant and filmmaker. I discuss how issues of ethical responsibility
ultimately led me to abandon 'The White Dots' and focus instead on my own
family background and my attempt to parent Abe, a Sudanese-Australian teenager.

A sense of identification

Towards the end of *No One Eats Alone* Angher Aguer characterises herself as a
'white dot', alluding to the difficulty she has conforming to others' expectations.
This was one of many similar conversations Angher and I had over the course of

three years, but the only one I captured on camera. In terms of aesthetics there is a lot to find fault with. Yet I was exultant – Angher's words seemed to evoke so much about the fraught nature of both family and identity: the desire to be connected to others while asserting one's right to difference and independence.

While the other women lamented separation from family, Angher expressed more ambivalence. During filming she made quips that characterised relatives as a barely believable stymieing force in one's life. In *No One Eats Alone* Angher says that she imagined that Australia was further from Sudan than any other country, yet in actuality she found that her family was inescapable. Off camera she said, with a mixture of frustration and affection, 'they keep turning up on my doorstep like cockroaches from hell'. As we talked, her two-year-old son played under her skirt. 'Marky,' she said, 'Come out from there, you can't go back in!' It struck me that this was not dissimilar to something my mother might have said.

Angher's narrative and story-telling style had personal resonance for me. I read my own outsider story into it, my struggle with family but also my parents' respective struggles with their families of origin. We too were white dots, or, to use the English term: 'black sheep'. I also identified with Angher's characterisation of family as always being close by, if not physically, then psychologically.

Documentary-makers who focus on other people's lives generally choose to film individuals in whom they have a particular interest and who they believe have a compelling story to tell. Director Amiel Courtin-Wilson has commented that *Bastardy* (Courtin-Wilson dir. 2008)

> ...came about through a personal connection with Jack that grew into an insatiable curiosity about his life. Jack Charles is an old family friend and I had grown up hearing stories about his escapades as both an actor and cat burglar. (Courtin-Wilson 2008, p. 8)

Similarly, Maya Newell, the director of *Richard the most interestingest person I've ever met* (2006 dir. Newell), had been fascinated by Richard Blackie's vintage toyshop since her childhood, when she had walked past on her way to and from school. However, it was only as a seventeen-year-old aspiring filmmaker that she visited the shop and plucked up the courage to ask Blackie if she could make a documentary about him and his toys (Marshall-Stoneking 2006, n.p.). Director Bernard Bertolucci, posing the question of why he chooses one actor over another in fictional film, says:

> In those first three or four minutes when I meet them, there are these knots, these secrets, this mystery, which I feel will make my camera curious. What they will bring me then is much more than their technique, they will bring me their hidden identity. (Bertolucci, Shaw & Mawson 2003, p. 23)

In documentary films about real people's lives it is exactly this identity that the filmmaker focuses on. Although this is not 'hidden' in the way that Bertolucci is talking about, there are still mysteries and 'knots' to unravel – and potentially make sense of in terms of someone's character – through the creation of a documentary narrative. Bill Nichols has commented that often documentary-makers

> ...favour individuals whose unschooled behaviour before a camera conveys a sense of complexity and depth similar to what we value in a trained actor's performance. These individuals possess charisma, they attract our attention, they hold our interest, they fascinate. (Nichols 2010, p. 46)

Yet where does this 'avid interest' in particular people and topics over others stem from? As David MacDougal has observed,

> ...many films are in fact declarations of love, if we could but see it. This may take the form of an attachment to a particular social and cultural milieu… or be directed towards particular individuals. It may be freely acknowledged or expressed

indirectly, transferred or sublimated into exploring the relationships of the subjects themselves. (MacDougal 1998, p. 54)

Although both Jack Charles and Richard Blackie are idiosyncratic, charismatic 'performers' with compelling stories to tell, the inference that I derive from both Courtin-Wilson and Newell's comments is that the filmmakers also felt a much less definable connection with Blackie and Charles respectively. Martha Ansara has noted that documentary filmmakers have 'at least some inkling of the deep personal function which making any film fulfils. We all project our human dilemmas upon our choice and treatment of subject' (Ansara 1997 p. 25).

Similarly, psychotherapist Emmanuel Berman has argued that a sense of deep identification can occur for the documentary filmmaker; that the choice of subject material and protagonists is therefore no coincidence (Berman, Rosenheimer & Aviad 2003, pp. 220-221). Rather, attractions to particular topics mirror situations and issues of significance in their own lives in either the present or past. Berman, citing Heinrich Racker (1968, pp. 134-136), has suggested that two varieties of psychological identification may be at work. 'Complementary identification' is demonstrated by a fascination with difference and the other, while 'concordant identification' occurs when a practitioner chooses a topic that mirrors something in their own life (Berman, Rosenheimer & Aviad 2003, p. 220). With regard to *No One Eats Alone*, my response to participants encompassed both types of identification. The women were Other to me, as I was to them, yet aspects of our lives were also concordant. I link this sense of unconscious identification (between the documentary-maker and their protagonist and subjects) to psychoanalytic notions of transference, which I discuss in detail later in this chapter. For now I turn to my work on *No One Eats Alone*, a project that demanded explicit focus on a relationship with a community and formed the foundations for my doctoral project.

No One Eats Alone: *relationships and communal childrearing*

No One Eats Alone (Bilbrough 2010) had grown out of an earlier project, Coffee Means Deep Conversation (Bilbrough 2006), a book of oral histories that I had worked on as a writer with New Hope Foundation (a Melbourne settlement organisation, which works with newly arrived refugees) and a group of women from African backgrounds. The genesis for the film stemmed from mutuality. Particular women had a desire to share more stories, and I was interested in making a film that brought these stories to a wider audience. This developed into *No One Eats Alone*, which was predominantly funded by Arts Victoria under their Community Partnerships program. With this type of funding the artist is expected to be ethically vigilant. There is also an emphasis on relationships and process: 'Proposals to the program must demonstrate capacity to develop a collaborative relationship between the artist(s) and a defined community group' (Arts Victoria n.d.).

When I applied for funding I was required to submit five letters of support from community members and organisations that I'd previously worked with, giving evidence of both my artistic skills and my ability to work collaboratively. Although open to all New Hope clients, the *No One Eats Alone* project exclusively attracted Sudanese-Australian women. Participants had an integral role in project development – I did not have carte blanche in terms of decisions relating to narrative, aesthetics or choice of documentary protagonists. In addition to the film, the project included a booklet of oral histories and a collection of photographic portraits of the participants by Grace McKenzie. This was to ensure maximum inclusion: if a story wasn't able to be included in the film, then I put it in the booklet. In this exegesis I focus on aspects of the *No One Eats Alone* film.

There were a number of levels of collaboration to *No One Eats Alone*. In addition to individual participants deciding what they wanted to express, a Community Steering Group met with me throughout the project to help make decisions about

content. Often this involved balancing individual expression with what the committee perceived to be responsible representation of the Sudanese-Australian community. Although only 35 minutes long, *No One Eats Alone* took around three years to make. The 12 participants all had differing motivations for wanting to be involved and all were juggling parenthood with little support while maintaining strong links with family overseas. This meant that often when I visited someone intending to film them, there was a personal complication that made it impossible. Although highly collaborative, the project still threw up a large number of ethical issues. I discuss some of these issues in Chapter Three.

While I did not 'choose' the participants in a conventional way, the subject matter of *No One Eats Alone* was of undeniable personal significance. Like the women in the film, I came to live in Australia as an adult. Although I migrated by choice from New Zealand, I still felt empathy for the way many participants seemed to be in the process of renegotiating their identities in a new cultural context. The film spoke to my own desire for family (both for a closer connection to my family of origin and for children of my own) as well as my quest to belong. On the days I was not involved in *No One Eats Alone* I coordinated a youth centre in a suburb of Melbourne with a high proportion of residents from refugee backgrounds. My role combined aspects of social worker, parent, teacher, mentor and friend to the young people I worked with. A large percentage of these young people were Sudanese-Australians and either tangentially or directly connected in some way to women involved in *No One Eats Alone*. In this way I was privy to the intimate life stories of each group and gained insight into some of the parenting challenges the women were experiencing.

There were also aspects of my participants' lives that reminded me of my childhood living on two alternative-lifestyle communities. Such an upbringing made me acutely aware of how it feels to be Other; in interactions with the outside world we were frequently ridiculed because of the food we ate and the clothes we wore. Welfare officers occasionally visited the communities to check that children

were going to school; the police conducted marijuana raids. We were looked upon as unruly fringe-dwellers, a potential threat to the moral fabric of society. Children were everyone's responsibility and my father looked after an eight-year-old, who was like my brother for almost a year, until his mother returned without warning and took him away. I formed many such connections with people who subsequently disappeared from our lives. Working with Sudanese-Australians I recalled this ethos of shared care: young people frequently brought their siblings into the youth centre, small children often hopped onto my lap and it was not unusual to eat meals together.

Issues of voice, reflexivity and responsibility

Halfway through making *No One Eats Alone*, I made the decision to take care of a fifteen-year-old Sudanese-Australian, Abe, who was in Australia without his parents. In hindsight, my decision appears to have been a manifestation of my sense of identification with the women in *No One Eats Alone*, a desire perhaps to align myself with them. Equally, however, it could be read as mirroring of the formative experiences of my own childhood. Whatever the exact reason for my decision, I am aware that it wasn't accidental. Ultimately, Abe's stay with me was very temporary. He yearned for a parent figure, yet while he was used to a great deal of freedom, it was also the last thing he wanted. A painful irony was that while I had access to many Sudanese mothers (through *No One Eats Alone*), he did not. At the start of my doctoral project I struggled to find the right creative form in which to articulate the story of our improvised parent-child relationship, a form that did not impinge upon Abe's privacy. I discuss the process of making a documentary-poem about our relationship in Chapter Two.

However, over the course of making *No One Eats Alone* there were numerous other 'invisible' films in the form of stories that occurred off-camera. I developed close friendships with particular participants and crew, such as Angher, who started off as the interpreter and translator before deciding to be in the film, and Hellen

Berberi, a former colleague who took over as translator. Angher was expressive and articulate on camera and wanted to reshoot interviews until the 'performance' was right. However, because of the number of participants, her story had to be abbreviated. Early ideas for the creative component of my doctoral project originated from an unresolved desire. I wanted to make a film with a few women with whom I felt a personal connection, women who characterised themselves as 'white dots' in some way. It seems apparent now that I did not want to let go of the relationships that had formed through collaborating on *No One Eats Alone*.

I had spent hours at Angher and Hellen's respective houses making sense of the *No One Eats Alone* footage and ensuring the subtitles were correct. We'd shared stories about our own lives, and the constraints and contradictions of both Australian and Sudanese society. Both women had also given me practical and emotional support around my attempts to take care of Abe. Hellen, Angher and I were keen to make something else together. Additionally, I decided to work with Samya, the partner of a friend, who, after a screening of *No One Eats Alone,* commented that her mother also called her a 'white dot'. Samya, who was half Sudanese and half Ethiopian and from a Muslim background, told me she didn't fit into either community. Her partner, Daniel, was from a strongly identified Jewish background. I hoped that Daniel, who said he felt like the 'black sheep' of his family, would also participate in a film. However, the exact narrative focus was unclear. I wanted to make an explorative auto/biographical portrait of each person in a way that had not been possible in *No One Eats Alone*, yet I also wanted to tell my own story of parenting Abe.

At the start of my doctoral project, although I was unquestionably making something highly subjective and personal, I was undecided about how explicit I wanted to be in regards to my sense of identification with Hellen, Samya and Angher. For example, would I state in a voiceover what my interest and involvement was, or would I actually be a participant in the film? Angher had suggested that she might interview me. Writing about ethical issues in

documentary, visual anthropologist Jay Ruby argues for a reflexive practice, which reveals documentaries as 'created, structured articulations of the filmmaker and not authentic, truthful, objective records' (Ruby 2005, p. 44). According to Ruby, documentary-makers have a 'social obligation not to be objective' (Ruby 2005, p. 45). However, given that reflexivity is now commonplace in contemporary independent documentary practice, it is pertinent to consider *how* exactly reflexivity might manifest and to what effect.

In considering these questions, I turned to two contemporary Australian documentaries, *Hope* (Thomas dir. 2007) and *Bastardy* (Courtin-Wilson dir. 2008), which both combine auto/biography with an acute political awareness. Each is also a record of a friendship and artistic collaboration between participant and filmmaker – an actual friendship that is documented throughout *Hope* and shapes the film, and that is inferred in *Bastardy*. *Hope* documents asylum seeker Amal Basry's life in Australia after the sinking of the SIEV-X (a boat that sank between Indonesia and Australia in 2001, drowning 353 people) and her quest to ensure that the tragedy is not forgotten. Jack Charles, the subject of *Bastardy*, is an actor, a heroin user for over thirty years, an Indigenous elder and a cat burglar who steals from the wealthy.

There is a startling moment two thirds of the way through *Bastardy* in which the filmmaker suddenly calls the protagonist Jack Charles to account for burgling the house of someone he knows (Courtin-Wilson dir. 2008, min. 56:31). Courtin-Wilson's voice (we don't actually see him) isn't angry – he's matter-of-fact and wants to find a solution. A laptop and a discman have been taken, but according to the filmmaker, 'Mandy' doesn't want to press charges, she just wants Courtin-Wilson to get her ring back from Charles. It's a tantalising scene because we realise that the filmmaker and participant are very involved in each other's lives, although the exact nature of this involvement is not entirely clear. This oblique reflexivity contributes to the film's power because it suggests further stories and contexts beyond the frame.

Hope (Thomas dir. 2007) is a vehicle for the actual voice of filmmaker, Steve Thomas, as well as that of key participant Amal Basry. Thomas and Amal plan to visit Indonesia where she, her son and the other asylum seekers were detained before boarding the SIEV-X. However, Amal is unexpectedly barred from entering Indonesia and asks Thomas to go in her place. Thomas's voice takes over as he retraces Amal's steps. In remembrance of those who drowned, he scatters flowers on the beach in Sumatra where the SIEV-X set off, then takes a trip on a dilapidated Indonesian boat, inviting the viewer to imagine being on a similar vessel with 400 passengers. Although this is an unplanned twist in the story, it is also canny political filmmaking. Thomas's retracing of Amal's journey and his implication of himself in the narrative grounds the difficulties experienced by asylum seekers in common humanity; their problem cannot be ignored as being particular to them – it is *our* problem.

Although I had been certain that I wanted to work with Hellen, Angher and Samya *because* of the personal connection, an ethical/artistic dilemma was almost always present when I met with each woman due to our pre-existing relationship. The dilemma stemmed from my wish to protect each as a friend, while ensuring that enough was revealed about their lives to create a film with narrative tension.

Angher was the most interested in making something explorative. She suggested that we begin the film with her interviewing me about my decision to take care of Abe. Her family had taken care of a neighbour's child when she was growing up, and many of our conversations were about notions of family. However, during the period I had allocated for filming, Angher was seriously ill. When she recovered her time was fully taken up with life was full with parenting her six children, as well as assisting her extended family and community members. After more than half a dozen failed attempts at filming, I had to concede that it was simply too difficult. I did not want to contribute additional stress to Angher's life.

While an ethical issue for practitioners is their responsibility towards participants, of equal concern is the sense of responsibility of participants towards the family and friends they refer to on film. Life-writing scholar Paul John Eakin has observed that 'because our own lives never stand free of the lives of others, we are faced with a responsibility to those others whenever we write about ourselves (Eakin 1999, p. 159).' Eakin's assertion can also be applied to auto/biographical documentary filmmaking. Notions of responsibility however gain *extra* currency in regards to documentary, because it is a narrative and visual medium and a participatory art form.

This sense of responsibility is very dependent on social context and the expectations of particular communities. *Bastardy* is a portrait of an artist, Jack Charles, a raconteur-outsider performing aspects of his own life. In the first few minutes of the film Charles shoots heroin into his arm and declares, 'I feel that if I was to hide any of this, this doco wouldn't be a true depiction, of my lifestyle, of the things I do in my life' (Courtin-Wilson dir. 2008, min. 3:28-3:59). He proceeds to take the viewer on a tour of his life at the margins of society. In one of the places he sleeps – the laundry at the bottom of a housing estate – he tells us, 'I suppose you could say this is the sign of being a very lonely person... I seem to be comfortable being lonely, it hasn't worried me unduly' (Courtin-Wilson dir. 2008, min. 7:28-7:45). A commentary on the houses he's previously burgled in the wealthy Melbourne suburb of Kew (delivered outside the actual houses) is a piece of risky political stand-up comedy. It's risky because of the possible legal ramifications. *Bastardy* actually took seven years to complete as Charles served time in prison for burglary (the evidence of Charles's criminal activities and heroin usage on film raises ethical questions that are beyond the scope of this research).

However, Charles is a professional actor who, by dint of the loneliness he describes, his particular lifestyle and his age, has very little to lose (he appears to have no fear of prison) and perhaps few responsibilities. Neither Samya nor Hellen (in their late twenties and mid-thirties respectively at the time of filming) had the

fluency of a seasoned public performer or the type of freedom exemplified by Charles's life. Further, unlike Amal Basry in *Hope*, neither woman felt compelled to communicate something of political impact to the wider public. As I began filming, it became clear that the filmmaking process and its potential reception affected what Hellen and Samya were prepared to say and, therefore, the narrative. For reasons connected to work, family or community, neither was able to openly discuss what I thought were the most compelling stories. Unlike Jack Charles, they were significantly inhibited by the responsibility they felt to current relationships and to the conventions of the communities they were part of.

Samya was expansive in talking about her life *before* arriving in Australia. However, I wanted to document Samya's life in the present, principally her relationship with Daniel, who had eschewed his culturally conservative Jewish background to follow eclectic interests in alternative medicine and art. But Samya and Daniel were reluctant to speak on film about family and community responses to their partnership. Eventually the couple also confessed anxiety about where the film would be shown. They did not want to risk Samya's ex-husband seeing them together (or his children on screen). Faced with the issue of reconceptualising and reshooting the film, I decided to stop.

Similarly, the area of Hellen's life that I was most interested in as filmmaker – her work and volunteer activities – was largely out of bounds. Hellen works with families in a predominantly white working class suburb of Melbourne that is known for the high number of racist attacks against people from refugee backgrounds. Hellen's role is to help parents to have healthy relationships with their children as a strategy to prevent issues such as depression, adolescent homelessness and the involvement of child protection services. She had told me that often, when she is about to ring the doorbell of the white family she is visiting she wonders how they will respond to a very tall African woman helping them with their lives. Any notion of a woman from a refugee background as victim or of

Sudanese-Australians as powerless Other is upended by this narrative. As a filmmaker I relished the potential to challenge the viewer.

However, due to shared privacies and the potentially inflammatory nature of the topic, Hellen could only speak about her paid and volunteer roles in the most general way. What she was willing to share freely on film was an eloquent and almost unbroken account of her experience of the second civil war in Sudan. She spoke of being separated from her mother and siblings as a ten-year-old and walking for miles with her eight-year-old sister Sarah across the desert with a group of other children and a few adults, many of whom died along the way. The sisters were eventually reunited with their mother and four younger siblings in Kenya, but they never saw their father again. Hellen's testimony was remarkable for its clarity and the way it seemed to conform to a traditional narrative structure.

Hellen was largely unconcerned about how her footage might develop into a film, but it became clear that I could not use it for my doctoral project in the way I had originally intended. In representing my own story alongside the stories of Samya, Hellen and Angher, the inherent message that I wanted to communicate was one of commonality, rather than difference. I did not want to claim that I was the *same* as them or that as Sudanese-Australians they were the same as each other; rather I wanted to highlight the relationship between disparate people's lives. With only Hellen's narrative alongside my own, I could see the problematic nature of the project that I had been unable to fully articulate previously: there was a danger of viewers coming away with the idea that I was either depicting my own experiences as being comparable to those of refugees, or that I was in some sense fetishizing the refugee experience. This was partially a genre concern. I was collecting biographical information for a type of portrait of each woman because I admired each and because I was still to some extent immersed in the experience of *No One Eats Alone*, which had not felt entirely satisfactory in terms of representation of individual stories. However, in the new project there was no specific issue connecting Samya, Hellen and Angher's stories. The obvious visual and narrative

connection was their refugee background and the identity label 'Sudanese-Australian'. Hellen's story of her past and the visual medium of film potentially over-determined her (for potential viewers) as both a refugee and black. In my attempts to tell Hellen's story via a short film I was in danger of inadvertently representing her as an exotic Other.

To a certain extent this was also an issue with *No One Eats Alone*, but in that film the collage approach and the number of women involved helped to mitigate any reading of Sudanese-Australian culture as homogenous. We wanted to show that although there are commonalities shared by Sudanese women from refugee backgrounds, there is no single way of being Sudanese-Australian. My own voice is not part of the *No One Eats Alone* soundtrack because there was no place for it in a film comprised largely of oral histories about Sudanese culture and the refugee experience. In contrast, *Hope* is an issue-based film motivated by Amal's urge to ensure that those who perished on the SIEV-X are not forgotten. Director Steve Thomas's presence and narration become an essential part of the narrative when Amal is barred from travelling to Indonesia. In a sense Thomas is integral because he also represents those who should be most aware of the tragedy of the SIEV-X: white Australians. Retracing Amal's steps is a spiritual and educational journey for both Thomas and the viewer.

Steve Thomas has observed that through making *Hope* Amal's voice actually enabled his own as filmmaker:

> I had been feeling for some time – and I think a lot of documentary-makers have been feeling – that our voices are being taken away by the intervention of broadcasters and commissioning editors... So there I was kind of feeling my voice was being diminished in my filmmaking. And here was Amal who had this very strong voice (and was) speaking out about what had happened to her. And it feels to me in hindsight that in a way I was getting my own voice back through giving expression to her voice. (Thomas, quoted in Kizilos 2007, p. 3)

In making *No One Eats Alone* I was similarly privy to the strong voices of women who were speaking about formative events in their lives as daughters and mothers. Assisting the expression of these women's voices caused me to reflect upon formative events in my own life. At the end of *No One Eats Alone*, however, I still did not quite know how to focus artistically and reflexively on my own life. On a psychological and imaginative level, I identified with aspects of Samya, Hellen and Angher's personalities. Additionally, from my perspective, each woman represented an ideal mother figure for Abe: what I could never quite be because of my different cultural background.

By deciding to move away from recording Samya, Angher and Hellen's stories, I was forced to re-evaluate what I wanted to say. I was left with my own voice; with no one else's to hide behind or mediate. Hanif Kureishi has contended that writers do not always know what the tangible result of their writing will be and that:

> What you discover probably will not be what you originally imagined or hoped for. Some surprises can be discomforting. But this useful ignorance, or tension with the unknown can be fruitful. (Kureishi 2002, p. 279)

Similarly, documentary-maker Andres di Tella (2012, p. 40) writes about 'the eloquence of mistakes and failure'. According to di Tella (2012, p. 40) 'the failure of a project, or the mistake of an idea crashing against reality, can express the truth of that idea or the reality of that project'. The story I was still moved to tell when everything was stripped away – the 'fruit' of my ignorance – was still the story of attempting to parent Abe.

In a similar way, my contact with the Sudanese community and the story of my relationship with Abe led me back to my own parents and their struggle to bring up children while developing identities as artists, identities that were counter to the society they lived in. Running alongside these themes was the theme of repeated loss and separation in my mother's life, a theme that also occurred in my life and

the lives of my three siblings. As children none of us lived with our mother past the age of seven. In my case that meant being brought up by a whole community of people, yet always longing for a mother who was absent: across the other side of the world, at the other end of New Zealand, divorced from my father, married again, and completely (or so it seemed to me) absorbed by her painting. My mother was an artist before anything else.

Throughout my life I have been aware of how exotic people find my family situation: the itinerancy, the art, the love affairs and the choice to live communally. Over the years I have been undecided about how much I should reveal, whether to trade upon the perceived eccentricities or downplay them. Other people's perceptions of my life produce a dichotomy: *how lucky you are to be the daughter of artists and have access to all that creativity* or *how hard it must have been to have so little structure or stability in your childhood.* Ultimately both summaries are reductive, but both also have aspects of truth to them. The creative component of this thesis – a collection of written poems and four 'documentary-poems' – confronts this ambivalence about my family by directly exploring my own and my parents' identity as outsiders. An excerpt from an earlier poem, 'Canvastown', evokes the feeling that the thesis explores:

> My mother painted naked, wore a feather in her hair
> My father threw pots in an old cow-shed.
> I half wanted to be the neighbour's child.

> (Bilbrough 1999, p. 23)

Chapter One: Auto/biography as methodology and genre

In this chapter I outline my methodological approach to both the practical and theoretical components. I contextualise my research contentions via a brief review of the work of relevant documentary practitioners and scholars, and consider where my creative work is situated in terms of the documentary genre and ethnographic practice. I provide an overview of arguments around the politics of representation as they pertain to my own work as a filmmaker, particularly representations across culture in which the power dynamic is skewed in favour of the artist/practitioner. In focusing on the relationship between practitioner and participant and the filmmaker's responsibilities around representation I discuss how ethics, as conceptualised by Emmanuel Levinas (1999, 1998) and Judith Butler (2005), may provide a way forward. However, while ethical philosophy may offer ways to critically consider what responsible, respectful behaviour might constitute in the context of the documentary encounter, I suggest aspects of psychoanalysis, particularly the transference paradigm and Jacques Lacan's mirror stage can provide an insight into the complex liminal nature of documentary relationship.

Research contentions

This exegesis demonstrates my contention that auto/biographical documentaries are the product of the relationship between filmmaker and participant, a multidimensional relationship that frequently involves shifting power dynamics, unconscious desires and feelings of betrayal. I contend that an acknowledgement and analysis of this relationship is integral to ethically responsible filmmaking. Furthermore, a creative process based around reciprocity and transparency can present transformative opportunities for both filmmaker and participants.

Contextualising my research: Ethnography, cinéma vérité and collaborative documentary practice

In a seminal essay on documentary ethics in the mid-1970s, Calvin Pryluck (2005 p. 204) noted that the ethical complexity of documentary hinges on the fact that unlike other art forms such as painting and writing, documentaries are reliant on *real* people's life stories and therefore may also have real-life implications. This potential for negative impact is something that I was extremely aware of throughout making *No One Eats Alone* and in my attempts to make 'The White Dots' – a film that didn't eventuate. Widely acknowledged in documentary scholarship, the issue of real-life implications begs the question of what a practitioner's responsibility might be in terms of using a participant's story and image (Aufderheide 2012; Aufderheide, Jaszi & Chandra 2009; Chapman 2009; Pryluck 2005; Plantiga 2008; Nichols 2010, 1991; Ruby 2005, 2000). Although it is impossible to predict the exact outcome of a film, collaborative practices and shared creative input can go some way to mitigating a negative impact.

Here it is pertinent to turn to ethnographic film and the work of pioneering ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch. Ethnography is the branch of anthropology concerned with documenting culture across mediums. Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson describe the practice as:

> [P]articipating in people's lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions… collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which s/he is concerned. (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, p. 2)

Catherine Russell has observed that, given anthropology's development alongside colonialism, the cultural '"knowledge"' of traditional ethnographic film 'is bound to the hierarchies of race, ethnicity and mastery implicit in colonial culture (Russell 1999, p. 10).' Ethnographic film history is 'thus a history of the production of Otherness (Russell 1999, p. 10).' Rouch's film work paved the way for a new way of thinking around ethnographic film practice and broader documentary making, providing an alternative to positioning the subject as Other.

In the late 1960s Rouch screened back footage for the people he had filmed, using a portable projector and generator. He referred to this technique as 'feedback' or 'audiovisual reciprocity' and saw it as a way of sharing authority between the ethnographic filmmaker and participant (Rouch 1973, pp. 11-12). According to Rouch (1973, p. 12) the result of feedback was that 'the anthropologist has ceased to be a sort of entomologist observing others as if they were insects (thus putting them down) and has become a stimulator of mutual awareness (hence dignity)'. Rouch's concept of 'cine-ethnography' is based on the belief that 'rapport and participation' (Rouch 2003, p. 20) between filmmaker and subjects is what shapes the final film. In the 1990s David MacDougall reoriented the notion of participatory anthropology, expanding on the concept in a contemporary context as 'a principle of multiple authorship leading to a form of intertextual cinema', accommodating 'conflicting views of reality, in a world in which observers and observed are less clearly separated and in which reciprocal observation and exchange increasingly matter' (MacDougall 2003, p. 129).

Increasingly, independent filmmakers, visual artists and writers who are not anthropologically trained, and do not necessarily see themselves as ethnographers, have adopted collaborative methods of working with specific communities. This may be underpinned by diverse aesthetic, social and political concerns. As Larissa Hjorth and Kristen Sharp (2014, p. 128) have noted, ethnography has become 'a widely deployed approach and conceptual framework in contemporary media cultures'. Key tenets of an ethnographic approach are the 'reflexive negotiation of self, power, labour and participation' (Hjorth and Sharp 2014, p. 128).

In an Australian context, collaborative art practice that combines political and aesthetic aims is often referred to as community cultural development (CCD). As Lachlan MacDowell (2012, p. 6) has noted, CCD, originating in the 1970s, is a diverse field that reflects a wide range of art forms, communities and forms of engagement. What is salient, despite this diversity, is that the artist collaborates with a community whose members 'take key roles in realising a creative project'.

MacDowell has noted that, in CCD, art making is 'seen as an important mechanism for collective meaning-making and an occasion for dialogue' (MacDowell 2012, p. 6). The artist in this context acts as facilitator/instigator/mentor.

In terms of filmmaking, Pryluck's essay (2005 [1976]) 'Ultimately we are all outsiders: The ethics of documentary filming', is a touchstone for collaborative documentary practice outside the formal field of anthropology. Pryluck applied collaborative participatory principles to documentary making, emphasising the rights of those represented over the collection of information:

> The subjects know more than any outsider can about what is on the screen. Without the insider's understanding, the material could be distorted in the editing process by the outsider... Collaboration fulfils the basic ethical requirement for control of one's own personality. (Pryluck 2005 [1976], p. 205)

No One Eats Alone (Bilbrough dir. 2010) can be categorised as an ethnographic documentary because I spent a considerable time interacting with the women involved, all of whom were Sudanese-Australian. I recorded and represented their stories and presented that 'data' to an audience. However, *No One Eats Alone* was also a CCD project: the way I worked was collaborative and reciprocal and the women participated in the project with an awareness of wanting to combat the way they felt Othered and marginalised within Australian society. The film was an opportunity for dialogue about political, cultural and identity issues, between the participants, between participants and me, and with viewers.

I want to return here to Rouch, as his ethnographic film work contributed to a mode of documentary practice that he and Edgar Morin, a sociologist and filmmaker, termed 'cinéma vérité' – film truth. Cinéma vérité has significantly shaped the development of contemporary documentary. However, the way this mode of documentary has been conceptualised and realised differs in France and America. In America what came to be known as 'direct' or observational cinema was pioneered by documentary-makers such as Robert Drew and Richard Leacock,

who were committed to producing an 'unmediated reality film that would not carry the imprint of its maker' (Lee-Wright & Curran 2006, p. 95). Morin expressed the distinction in this way:

> There are two ways to conceive of the cinema of the Real: the first is to pretend that you can present reality to be seen; the second is to pose the problem of reality. In the same way, there were two ways to conceive Cinéma Vérité. The first was to pretend that you brought the truth. The second was to pose the problem of the truth. (Morin, cited in Lee-Wright & Curran 2006, p. 93)

Erik Barnouw has noted that 'the Rouch cinéma vérité artist was often an avowed participant. The direct cinema artist played the role of uninvolved bystander; the cinéma vérité artist espoused that of provocateur' (Barnouw 1974, pp. 254-255). Similarly, Bill Nichols has observed that the observational mode of documentary 'stresses the non-intervention of the filmmaker' (Nichols 1991, p. 38) while Kate Nash defines it as 'a mode that favours the image, seeking to capture moments as they unfold' (Nash 2011, p. 228). On the other hand, cinéma vérité, according to Nichols, prioritises the 'encounter':

We see how the filmmaker and subject negotiate a relationship, how they act toward one another, what forms of power and control come into play, and what levels of revelation or rapport stem from this specific form of encounter. (Nichols 2010, p. 184)

Nichols cites the example of *Chronique d'un Été* (Rouch and Morin dir. 1960) that 'involves scenes which are the result of the 'collaborative interactions of filmmakers and subject' (Nichols 2010, p. 185). Rouch and Morin planned particular scenes with participants and in some instances gave them tape recorders to record their thoughts (Nichols 2010, p. 185). *Chronique d'un Été* also includes a discussion between participants of their responses to parts of the film.

Echoing Rouch's practice of 'audiovisual feedback', *No One Eats Alone*
participants viewed and discussed interview footage and reflected on the potential
impact of the way they had been represented on film. As a result many participants
retold a particular story. Others rehearsed what they *wanted to say.* Although I did
not share my own story on camera or include my responses to participants' stories,
a practice based around reciprocity was the foundation of the film. The film is
clearly reflexive; I did not hide my presence in particular shots, making it obvious
that the story told is at least partly in response to the questions that I asked. Only
the clearest, most engaging parts of what the women told me about their lives are
included in the film, which is made up of poetic, pieced-together fragments rather
than long takes.

I want to briefly move away from film practice here to site an influential essay by
feminist sociologist Ann Oakley (1981), 'Interviewing Women: a Contradiction in
Terms'. Oakley (1981, p. 42) argues for a 'non-hierarchical' relationship between
interviewer and interviewee', one where the interviewer is 'prepared to invest his
or her own personal identity in the relationship'. Drawing on her experience of
longitudinal in-depth interviews with a sample of women during the transition to
motherhood, Oakley (1981, p. 42) observes that both the duration of contact and
the 'intensely personal experiences of pregnancy, birth and motherhood' meant that
it was actually 'problematic and ultimately unhelpful' to avoid personal
involvement with interviewees. Oakley (1981, p. 49) comments that the role of
interviewer in this type of interviewing could be 'termed "no intimacy without
reciprocity"' This was very much my experience with the participants during the
making of *No One Eats Alone*.

My process also shares commonalities with a range of contemporary Australasian
documentary practitioners and scholars who have turned their focus to
collaboration and the relationship between documentary practitioner and
participant. Anne M. Harris who made seven collaborative films with young
Sudanese-Australian women for her doctoral thesis, has coined the term

'ethnocinema' (Harris 2012) to describe a process driven documentary practice where shared authority and reciprocal relationships with participants can often take priority over purely aesthetic and technical concerns. Maree Delofski (2009), Steve Thomas (2010) and Anna McKessar (2009) have also written about the process of sharing creative input/authorship with participants and how this impacted on the final documentaries.

My methodological framework for both the creative and theoretical aspects of this thesis is strongly influenced by my work on *No One Eats Alone*, which was exploratory and collaborative. The creative component of my thesis used similar negotiated methods. I write about how these methods played out in each context in terms of my relationship with participants and the resulting films. However this exegesis is not an empirical study of collaborative documentary making and as such does not provide a set of collaborative guidelines.

Selection of the documentaries

Although I categorise my own work as a variety of cinéma vérité, the films I discuss by other practitioners largely fit with what Nichols (2010, p. 151) has termed the 'participatory' mode of documentary and later the 'interactive' mode (Nichols 1991, p. 44). While Nichols does not specify collaborative, negotiated practice as being part this mode, he emphasises that the text is shaped by the filmmaker's interactions with her/his 'social actors' via interviews.

My focus in this exegesis is on the complex relationship dynamic between documentary participants and practitioners. Highly relevant is a recent essay by Kate Nash who has suggested that 'observational documentary is dependent on a series of relationships between the filmmaker, participant and spectator and that these relationships can usefully serve as a foundation for ethical reflection' (Nash 2011, p. 228). Extending on Nash's argument I suggest that this paradigm is also pertinent to other modes of documentary (such as vérité or participatory) and that

these relationships shape the content of the film, hence my contention that an auto/biographical documentary is the product of the relationship between practitioner and participant. Also relevant is Delofski's assertion that documentary can be considered 'an outcome and embodiment' of the relationship between participant and practitioner as the nature of their responses to one another are aesthetically evidenced in the text of the film (Delofski 2009, n.p.). Delofski draws on MacDougall (2006) who has written about the ways a film demonstrates traces of the filmmaker's physicality and their relation to the participant.

In addressing my research contentions I discuss aspects of *No One Eats Alone* and the short films I created as part of this thesis, as well as a selection of independent documentaries, which raise ethical questions and, through both text and context, demonstrate a complex relationship between filmmaker and participant(s). These films are: *Richard, the most interestingest person I've ever met* (Newell dir. 2007), *The Thin Blue Line* (Morris dir. 1988), *The Art Star and the Sudanese Twins* (Brettkelly dir. 2008) and *Être et Avoir* (Philibert dir. 2002). With the exception of The Thin Blue Line, these films might be loosely described as being portrait films. I also discuss two documentaries about the respective filmmakers' families *October Country* (Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009) and *Least Said, Soonest Mended* (Thomas dir. 2000), which provide a context for a discussion of the making of three films about my own family. In this discussion I also refer to auto/biographical films made by my mother (*Indecent Exposure* (Conrad dir. 2012)) and my sister (*Floodhouse* (Bilbrough dir. 2004) and *Being Venice* (Bilbrough dir. 2012)). All of the films I have selected can be described as auto/biographical – either because they present aspects of the participants' life story, or both the participants' and the filmmaker's. The use of the documentary interview is of particular relevance to my contentions around psychoanalysis and transference, which I introduce later in this chapter.

In terms of the practitioner's responsibility to the participant, I draw on Nash's contention that 'power flows through the relationship between filmmaker and

participant with both actively influencing the documentary text' (Nash 2011, p. 30). Similarly, Thomas has noted the propensity for documentary-makers and their participants to 'become allies, with shared values and a message that both want to see communicated to an audience' (Thomas 2010, p. 34). As such I do not suggest that the participant is a passive victim who is preyed upon by the filmmaker. On the contrary: I contend that there is something far more complex at work, and it is this intangible, liminal complexity that needs to be acknowledged and examined. I also suggest that degrees of responsibility are contextual and are dependent upon the knowledge and social position of participants.

For this research I have deliberately chosen documentaries for which the power balance is difficult to define and which contradict conventional assumptions about disadvantaged participants. In *Richard the interestingest person I've ever met* (Newell dir. 2007) it seems apparent that Richard Blackie suffers from a mental illness and is vulnerable and socially isolated, yet any assumptions about the exploitative nature of the film are upended by the fact that the filmmaker is only 17. *The Art Star and the Sudanese Twins* (Brettkelly dir. 2008) is similarly ambiguous. Although the film is extremely revealing and hardly flattering to the participant, Vanessa Beecroft, notions of ethical responsibility are called into question by Beecroft's own representational practices: she is a performance artist whose work seems exploitative of others. In my own documentary work, both my parents are artists and as a result are accomplished interviewees, who were aware of the potential consequences of (mis)representation.

As part of my discussion I draw on interviews with the documentary practitioners whose work I discuss, and/or artists' statements included in DVD notes and websites. Some of these interviews (as in the case of Errol Morris) are available in the public domain, while others I conducted myself. Wherever they were available in the public domain I utilised interview material with the documentary participants. However, I did not conduct any formal interviews with participants. Although my focus is on relationships, I have chosen to interrogate the

practitioner's ethical responsibility to the participant, since it is the filmmaker who initiates the documentary project and makes decisions around how that relationship is conducted (s/he can invite collaboration or not as s/he chooses). Conducting formal interviews with participants would have taken the research beyond the scope of this project, which is a creative thesis rather than a full theoretical dissertation.

Creation of the documentary-poems

The short films that accompany this exegesis (*Separation* (Bilbrough dir. 2013c), *A View of the Boats* (Bilbrough dir. 2013a), *Going with the Wind* (Bilbrough dir. 2013b) and *Willing Exile* (Bilbrough dir. 2013d)) were almost entirely made without the assistance of a crew. This was because of the form and the intimate nature of the material. I wanted to interview my parents alone, without having to contend with the possibility of either of them feeling inhibited or needing to perform for extra people in the room. This was particularly pertinent for the interviews with my mother (I discuss this in Chapter Four). The films were shot gradually over a period of three years on a range of HD video cameras. In the first interview I shot with my father I did not have a radio microphone and I initially imagined it would just be a 'test run' to see what my father might be willing to share on camera. However, my father was particularly open and expressive in some of this footage so, although it has poorer audio, I have chosen to include some for its emotional attributes.

In place of a traditional voiceover, which involves preparing and carefully reading a script, I asked my partner and a range of close friends to interview me, as I wanted to maintain the feeling of a dialogue, of my responses to someone with whom I have a connection. I then edited these interviews to create a voiceover. Not working with a crew for most of the interviews with my parents, and for the cutaways, enabled me to shoot footage as I needed (or when my parents requested) in an exploratory, intuitive way over a long period of time.

I used a method of rolling consent in which footage was approved (or vetoed) as it was shot. Many anecdotes (in some cases even single lines) were shot over and over because the subject matter and its exact nuance were of great emotional import to those involved. Other footage had to be reshot for aesthetic reasons; it did not represent the participant in a way that they felt 'true' to them. However, participants only had a right of veto over their own voice and image, not over other participants' stories about them. I make this distinction because my parents cannot speak of their marriage or child-rearing experiences without speaking intimately of each other. Yet there were times where both felt some discomfort around the other's representation of a shared past event or circumstance. If each person were to have had right of veto of *any* story or comment relating to her/himself, there would not be a film.

Decisions around the inclusion of particular material were often a precarious balancing act, causing considerable conflict between my mother and me. I discuss this in Chapter Four. Ultimately, however, the films I have produced are not *equal* co-creations – rather they are a reflection of *my* particular aesthetic and narrative point of view. It is important to clarify that, although this exegesis is concerned with ethical issues in representing others, I do not suggest that the creative work and the processes that I have used are beyond ethical reproach or an example of 'best' ethical practise. Rather, the exegesis contextualises and articulates the aesthetic and ethical tensions and decisions behind the creative pieces and examines how my relationship with the participants shaped the final product and how, to some extent, the creative process shaped and/or altered the relationship.

Navigating genre: positioning the documentary-poems

Form is a matter of clear rules *and* unspoken understandings... It's a matter of need and expectation. It's also a matter of breaking rules of dialogue, crossover between forms. Through such dialogue and argument, form, the shaper and moulder, acts like

the other thing called mould, endlessly breeding forms from forms. (Smith 2012, p. 67)

It is worth noting here that the aesthetic presentation of my films, which accompany this exegesis, is extremely different from that of the films I discuss. I have already positioned my filmmaking process as being informed by cinéma vérité. In further defining my films it is pertinent to mention French poet, novelist photographer and filmmaker Chris Marker, who is best known for the films *La Jette* (1963) and *Sans Soleil* (1983). As Catherine Lupton (2007, p. 8) has noted, Marker had his own version of cinéma vérité. He rephrased Rouch and Morin's term as '*ciné ma vérité*' ('cinema, my truth'). Marker's term is particularly relevant to my auto/biographical films, which are an expression of my own subjective perspective on aspects of my family history. I describe these works as 'documentary-poems'.

This genre – a pairing of two distinct mediums – is influenced by my work as a poet and by the aesthetics of *No One Eats Alone* (Bilbrough dir. 2010). Although *No One Eats Alone* is not part of the creative output for my thesis, it provided a foundation for *Separation* (Bilbrough dir. 2013c), *A View of the Boats* (Bilbrough dir. 2013a), *Going with the Wind* (Bilbrough dir. 2013b) and *Willing Exile* (Bilbrough dir. 2013d). Drawing on Annette Kuhn (2002), *No One Eats Alone* can be described as a 'memory text', although in this case I am mediator of participants' memories. Rather than conforming to classical narrative structure, memory texts may be represented as 'a montage of vignettes, anecdotes, fragments, "snapshots", flashes' (Kuhn 2002, p. 162). This is also an apt description of my written poems, presented in *Porous* (Bilbrough 2013). *No One Eats Alone* (Bilbrough dir. 2010) relies on the participant's personal testimonies, mingling their recollections of Sudan and descriptions of their current lives in Melbourne with archival footage of Kakuma refugee camp and family videotapes of Sudan. The old footage was often overexposed or grainy, lending it an impressionistic quality – like a dream or a memory. The film is intended to be understood on a

subjective poetic level; viewers wanting facts about Sudanese culture or information about the civil wars in Sudan will be disappointed.

Similarly, my work for this thesis relies on personal testimony (mine and my parents') about the past. The title of the written collection of poetry, *Porous*, draws on Zygmund Bauman who cites Michel Maffesoli (1997) in his description of the contemporary world as:

> [A] "floating territory" in which "fragile individuals" meet "porous reality" In this territory only such things or persons may fit as are fluid, ambiguous, in a state of perpetual becoming, in a constant state of self-transgression. (Bauman 2000, p. 2009)

The documentary-poems are visual, dynamic representations of the themes explored in *Porous*. I combine excerpts from interviews – fragments of memory – with visual images: old family and archival photographs as well as footage of the interior and surrounds of my house and my parents' respective houses. This footage is not always intended to be a direct representation of what is being spoken about. Rather, I wanted to evoke multiple and tangential possibilities beyond the frame so that viewers could take their own journeys with meaning.

Agnes Varda has made a strong connection between cinema and poetry in her own documentary work:

> Poetry plays a very important role for me because with words it opens gates and windows. And then you can draw breath or not… I try to open windows for the audience. Open windows for them to leave the film and go and vagabond. (von Boehm dir. 2009, 5:56-6:31)

I suggest that Varda is talking about the role of poetry in stimulating the imagination, and her interest in creating films that, like poems, leave space for viewers to take their own journeys with meaning. This is something that

particularly resonates with my own practice. Although I had specific themes in mind, I approached filming intuitively and in an explorative way, rather than via planning and storyboarding. Given that the terrain was so emotional, it felt essential to find out firstly what my parents were *willing* to share around a particular theme and then piece the fragments together. This approach, which was time-intensive and involved a high degree of anxiety and risk, was also the way I worked on *No One Eats Alone*.

I want to now turn briefly to the work of avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren, who eschewed conventional Hollywood narrative and contended that film, as a primarily visual art-form must communicate through its imagery (Jackson, 2001, p. 40). Renata Jackson has observed that Deren did not consider documentary to be an art form, because the task of the documentary 'is to represent reality' (Jackson 2001, p. 64). It is fair to surmise that Deren was referring to documentaries with very different concerns from mine. However, what is relevant is the way that Deren linked poetry with cinema: in the early 1950s she began to refer to her films as 'cine-poems' (Jackson 2001, p. 51).

Jackson (2001, p. 60) has credited Deren's background in literature as informing the way she thought about film. Before turning to film practice, Deren had written a thesis on the influence of the French symbolist school on poets such as Ezra Pound and Hilda Doolittle, who, along with other American poets, became known as the 'Imagist school'. Jackson asserts that Deren's concept of a work of art was directly informed by Pound's concept of image. In 1913 Pound wrote: 'An image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time' (cited in Jackson 2001, p. 60). In *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*, Deren (1946, p. 51) proposes that in 'film-art' techniques, such as spatiotemporal manipulation through editing and camera work, 'contribute an economy of statement comparable to poetry, where the inspired juxtaposition of a few words can create a complex which far transcends them'.

It is Deren's 'economy of statement comparable to poetry' that I aim for in my documentary practice. Like Deren, I was a student of literature, particularly poetry, long before I began to make films. Imagists such as Pound have been a direct influence on my own work as a poet, and this has carried across into my documentary work, in which I am most interested in economy of communication – of evoking a story with a careful selection of images (the most vivid excerpts from interviews coupled with still photographs and footage). However, unlike Deren, I do not eschew a narrative approach. Both my films and poems, to a greater and lesser extent, rely on a story. While I intend the still photographs and footage to evoke a range of possibilities/feelings for the viewer, meaning is not intended to be obscure or opaque.

Because my written poems in *Porous* (Bilbrough 2013) did not raise any particular ethical issues I do not focus my discussion on them in this exegesis. However, in both Chapter Three and Chapter Four I discuss how particular poems formed the basis for my film work, serving as a type of script for the ideas and feelings that I wanted to express in the films. The poems can be read alongside the films for a fuller, more nuanced narrative.

It is also pertinent to acknowledge that although my work was created in an art context, 'poetic inquiry', is an increasingly popular qualitative research method in the social sciences. Rich Furman, Cynthia Lietz and Carol Langer (2006, p. 3) define the 'research poem' as 'less for expressive and literary means and more for the purpose of generating or presenting data'. Yet regardless of the different intentions behind a poem, they can serve a similar purpose. A poem offers a rich, expressive and immediate way to express an idea that is often difficult to express in another type of text. It can also offer a different insight into an experience or issue for both artist/researcher and reader.

Debbie McCulliss (2013, p. 88) notes that 'the process of writing poetry or thinking poetically' can assist us 'to collect the most relevant themes and phrases

out of the sea of information available'. Poetry can also help 'stimulate an empathetic understanding in the reader' (McCulliss 2013, p. 89). Miles Richardson (1998, p. 451) suggests that for the ethnographer, poetry is 'particularly suited for those special strange, even mysterious moments when bits and pieces suddenly coalesce'. Both McCullis and Richardson's words could be equally applied to the process of making a documentary.

Contemporary documentary

I now want to look further at exactly where my work fits in terms of the documentary genre. As Stella Bruzzi (2006, p. 3) has noted, contemporary documentary is increasingly a heterogeneous and complex form, and in the last ten years there has been 'a shift towards more self-consciously "arty" and expressive modes' (Bruzzi 2006, p. 1). Patricia Aufderheide similarly emphasises the diversity of the genre, observing that a documentary 'can be a trip to exotic lands and lifestyles... It can be a visual poem... It can be an artful piece of propaganda' (Aufderheide 2007, p. 1). However, for many viewers the concept 'documentary' is still fairly restrictive. As Aufderheide has noted, a '"regular documentary"' is expected to have:

> [A]n analytical argument rather than a story with characters, head shots of experts leavened with a few people-on-the-street interviews, stock images that illustrate the narrator's point... perhaps a little educational animation and dignified music. (2007, p. 10)

My work might be construed as the antithesis of this description. Most useful to my practice is John Corner's observation that 'the term *documentary* is always much safer when used as an adjective rather than a noun... to ask "is this a documentary project?" is more useful than to ask "is this film a documentary?"'(Corner 2002, p. 258). Similarly, Jane Chapman (2010, p. 16) has noted 'a blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction, real and not real' is 'enhanced by artists who use a documentary style in their films without necessarily calling the project as a

whole "documentary"'. Chapman (2010, p. 16) comments that 'this phenomenon seems to appeal to artists who want to engage with reality through their own highly personalized line of enquiry'.

My 'highly personalized line of inquiry' (Chapman 2010, p. 16) in this thesis is directly auto/biographical and as such provides particularly rich ground for a playful approach. As Alisa Lebow (2008, p. xi) has noted, the 'personal' or 'first person' documentary can, 'be a diary of thoughts and feelings. It can be a memorial for a relative, friend or lover... a testimony or a poem, an essay or a diatribe'. A relationship with family members or close others is often the subject of the film and a way for the artist to make sense of her/his identity. Lebow (2008 p. xii) has commented that autobiographical film 'implicates others in its quest to represent the self implicitly constructing a subject always already in relation – that is the first person plural'. This type of film fits with Eakin's (1999) notion of 'relational' auto/biography. According to Eakin (1999, p. 86), this form of narrative is 'the self's story viewed through the lens of its relation with some key other person, sometimes a sibling, friend, or lover; but most often a parent'. 'Domestic ethnography', a term coined by Michael Renov (2004) is also an apt description of my creative work for this thesis. Renov (2004, p. 218) contends that domestic ethnography combines 'self interrogation with ethnography's concern for the documentation of the lives of others'. Renov also points out that 'the Other in this instance is a family member who serves... as a mirror or foil for the self' (Renov 2004, p. 216). According to Renov (2004, p. 218), what is most salient about this variety of ethnography is that, 'the desire for the other is, at every moment, embroiled with the question of self-knowledge; it is the all too familiar rather than the exotic that holds sway'.

Methodological approach

> I'm wondering why every act that narrated female lived experience in the 70s has been read only as "collaborative" and "feminist". The Zurich Dadaists worked together too but they were geniuses and they had names. (Kraus 1997, p. 150)

As Chris Kraus pithily sums it up, labelling a work 'feminist' has been a way of marginalising both the work and the artist. However, my methodological approach and its inclusion of my 'female lived experience' is unabashedly feminist, concurring with Liz Stanley and Sue Wise's contention that 'no researcher can separate herself from personhood and thus from deriving second order constructs from experience' (Stanley & Wise 1979, p. 359). Auto/biography in this thesis is both methodology and genre. I use reflexive first-person narration in the exegesis to include my subjective experience and responses in a critical discussion of a selection of auto/biographical documentary films. Additionally, I analyse the process of making four auto/biographical documentary-poems about my family and my improvised parenting of Abe.

In outlining my creative process I have included memories from my childhood and adolescence – my awareness at that time of my parents' difference, their identities as artists and how that impacted on my sense of self. In combining the scholarly and the personal in my approach to film, I draw on the work of Annette Kuhn, who has commented that, 'emotion and memory bring into play a category, with which film theory – and cultural theory more generally – are ill equipped to deal: experience' (Kuhn 2002 p. 33). She continues:

> [P]art of me also "knows" that my experience – my memories, my feelings – are important because these things make me what I am, make me different from everyone else. Must they be consigned to a compartment separate from the part of me that thinks and analyses? (Kuhn 2002, p. 33)

Kuhn further asks whether 'the idea of experience' can be 'taken on board – if with a degree of caution – by cultural theory, rather than being simply evaded' (Kuhn 2002, p. 34). In this exegesis I *do* take experience on board – mixing memory and emotion with a critical, scholarly analysis. A third-person register in a discussion of my own creative work would confer an ill-fitting and awkward guise of objectivity. As Stuart Hall has asserted, 'we all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific' (Hall 1991, p. 35). A first person register enables expression of this specificity. As such my methodology can be situated within what Kraus, has referred to as 'the pernicious hybrid discipline known as "cultural studies"'(Kraus 2004, p. 17). Cultural studies is a discipline, that since the 1970s, 'has used feminisms, historiography, queer and postcolonial theories as lenses through which to view one's own experience of the world' (Kraus 2004, p. 17). Taking inspiration from both Kraus (2004) and Liz Stanley (1992), my exegesis is a bricolage incorporating ideas and analyses from a wide range of sources.

As part of this approach I draw on aspects of both autoethnography and critical ethnography. As Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997) has observed, there are multiple perspectives on what constitutes autoethnography. Both Reed-Danahay (1997) and Alisa Lebow (2008, p. xv) acknowledge the duality of the term – its critical application to ethnographic practice within an anthropological context and as 'a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context' (Reed-Danahay 1997, p. 9).

In a contemporary context, ethnographic and art/media practice are increasingly combined to arrive at new theoretical and representational insights (Hjorth and Sharp 2014; Rutten, van. Dienderen & Soetaert 2013). My work for this thesis (both theoretical and practical components) sits at the juncture between critical ethnography and art. While the primary intent behind the documentary poems was to make a creative work for public viewing, the films also constitute research via the practical exploration of how to represent emotionally sensitive material in a

way that addresses both ethical and aesthetic concerns. As Larissa Hjorth and Kristen Sharp (2014 p. 129) have observed, the ethnographic in art can function as 'a type of method and criticality' and 'provide a nuanced space for the audience and artist to reflect'. Building on this, I suggest that the representational issues discussed in this exegesis have pedagogical relevance for arts practitioners, cultural producers and researchers who represent other people's stories in any medium. They may also be relevant to teaching and social work practice(s).

My methodology fits with Paul Sauuko's definition of a 'subjectivist mode' of critical ethnography, which is 'characterized by a self-reflexive, critical autobiographical or introspective analysis of discourses that have shaped the researcher' (Sauuko 2003, p. 75). Of direct relevance also is D. Soyini Madison's assertion that critical ethnography is not exclusively about the researcher's experience, rather:

> We attend to how our subjectivity in relation to others informs and is informed by our engagement and representation of others. We are not simply subjects, we are subjects in dialogue with others. (Soyini Madison 2011, p. 9)

Additionally, I draw on Ruby's definition of reflexivity as being:

> [S]ufficiently self-aware to know what aspects of self are necessary to reveal so that an audience is able to understand both the process employed and the resultant product and to know that the revelation is purposive, intentional and, not merely narcissistic or accidentally revealing. (2005, p. 35)

Although Ruby is discussing reflexivity in the context of documentary filmmaking, his definition is equally useful in describing a mode of scholarly writing.

The problem of representation

Representational politics are the focus of both the theoretical and creative components of this thesis, namely the tension between ethics and aesthetics; respect for the rights of those being represented versus artistic freedom. Here I discuss the key concerns in representing people across culture as a context for my discussion in Chapter Three of *No One Eats Alone* (Bilbrough dir. 2010) and *Separation* (Bilbrough dir. 2013c). As visual anthropologist Leslie Devereaux has observed, representation is continuously happening in society across 'notional boundaries of psychological, social or cultural specificities' often with 'very little accountability or consideration for those being represented' (Devereaux 1995, p. 5). Yet in the midst of multiple representations, it is now commonly acknowledged that representations of other people are constructed, subjective interpretations. Bill Nichols has described the camera as 'an anthropomorphic extension of the human sensorium' revealing 'not only the world but its operator's preoccupation, subjectivity and values' (Nichols 1991, p. 79). Nichols contends that the 'photographic (and aural) record provides an imprint of its user's ethical, political, ideological and stance' (Nichols 1991, p. 79).

This has implications for who can represent another 'with what intention, in what "language" and in what environment' (Ruby 2000, p. 196). The 'crisis of representation', as Ruby (2000, p. 196) has observed, is one of the most significant conundrums of the postmodern era. With regard to moving image, Jane Chapman has queried 'whether a filmmaker from one cultural background can ever represent another culture in a way that avoids stereotyping and without the film becoming a type of "visual imperialism"' (Chapman 2010, p. 34). Simon Cottle has noted that:

> Across the years, seemingly as a matter of routine, Britain's black and ethnic minorities have tended to be depicted in terms of a restricted repertoire of representations and/or within contexts characterised by conflict, controversy and deviance. (Cottle 1997, p. 2)

Immigrants from African countries do not yet have a long history of settlement in Australia, and are rarely represented in Australian films or on television. However, Cottle's words have direct relevancy. Joel Windle (2008, p. 563) has contended that the representation of African refugees in the Australian media draws on Australia's history of racism as well as on, 'wider colonial narratives about primitive Africa, on the perennial discourse of dangerous youth, and even on fears about American cultural imperialism (in the form of Black "gang culture")'. Citing Kerry McCallum (2007), Windle observes that, 'as with Indigenous Australians, the dominant frame is one of underlying social risk' (Windle 2008, p. 563).

Even representations that are superficially more positive may be problematic. Citing representations of Blackness in popular culture, Hall asserts that postmodernism has a 'deep and ambivalent fascination with difference – sexual difference, cultural difference, racial difference and above all ethnic difference' (Hall 2003, pp. 124-125). Sudanese-British model Alek Wek articulates this desire for the exotic in her memoir, in which she wryly observes that there was journalistic tendency to say she had been discovered in the 'bush' in Africa (contrary to the actuality), 'as if I'd been a primeval innocent afoot in the forest when the great model agency plucked me from the muck without destroying my savage beauty' (Wek 2007, p. 205).

Undeniably, representing other people across cultures presents a dilemma. In representing *only* people who are *not* obviously different from one (in skin colour and cultural/social background) the artist will avoid falling into a trap of inadvertent Othering. However, overly cautious responses to representation can result in a type of political cop-out that may result in even less acknowledgement of – or dialogue with – people from marginalised groups. As Marcia Langton (1993, p. 24) has asserted, the 'easiest and most "natural" form of racism in representation is the act of making the other invisible'. Similarly, Ella Shohat has asked:

> When does the fear of "appropriating" turn into a form of mental segregationism, a
> refusal to recognize one's co-implication with otherness? Gayatri Spivak's
> celebrated question "can the subaltern speak?" might in this sense be altered to ask,
> "can the non-subaltern speak?" (Shohat 1995, p. 166)

Writing about documentary film practice, Catherine Russell (1999, p. 10) has observed that 'new hierarchies and forms of difference are constantly being produced in postcolonial culture' and, as such, 'Otherness is very much with us'. However, Russell (2009, p. 11) has also commented that Indigenous ethnography, as well as experimental and alternative film practices, are opening up a multiplicity of perspectives in audiovisual representation and enabling the term 'other' to be 'transformed, expanded, modified'. Given this context, she suggests that acknowledging rather than 'banishing' the concept of 'the Other' leads to a recognition that each of us are 'the Other's other' (Russell 1999, p. 24). The logical inference of this is that we all have a certain amount of unfamiliarity, difference and even exoticism for one another, regardless of social or cultural background. I suggest that 'Transversal politics' offers a useful potential framework for an ethical representation of others. Cynthia Cockburn and Lynette Hunter equate the concept to 'empathy without sameness, shifting without tearing up your roots' (Cockburn & Hunter 1999, p. 89). Nira Yuval-Davies further describes it as: 'a recognition that from each standpoint the world is seen differently and thus any knowledge based on just one positioning is unfinished' (Yuval-Davies 1999, pp. 94-95). Shohat has also made an important point about self-identification and a certain degree of choice/desire:

> One's ancestral community does not necessarily dictate one's identifications and
> affiliations. It is not only a question of what one is or where one is coming from, but
> also of what one desires to be, where one wants to go and with whom one wants to
> go there. (Shohat 1995, p. 168)

I extend Shohat's contention to suggest that identifications and affiliations are often contingent on time and context – where one is, geographically and

emotionally, at any given point in one's life, and the people one finds oneself with. These factors are not always based on conscious choices.

Relational ethics and practitioner responsibility

In further considering the responsibility of the documentary practitioner to the participant and what respectful interactions in the context of the documentary encounter might look like, I now turn to the work of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. Although Levinas's work does not specifically mention film, his conceptualisation of ethics has been increasingly applied to film and documentary research. Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton (2010), Kate Nash (2011), Sarah Cooper (2006, Michael Renov (2004) and Alisa Lebow (2008) have all applied Levinasian principles to documentary. Downing and Saxton (2010) provide a useful explanation of Levinasian ethics, which I refer to here. I also draw upon the work of Nash (2011) and Renov (2004) since each specifically discusses the application of Levinas's work to the relationship between filmmaker and participant and how this might manifest aesthetically.

Levinas's notion of ethics focuses on the relationship between self and Other. In *Totality and Infinity* (1961), Levinas defines ethics as 'a calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other' (Levinas 1961, p. 43). Based on this statement, Nash has noted that for Levinas, 'ethics is a questioning stance, a critique of those ways of thinking that determine our attitudes to others (Nash 2011, p. 230)'. Downing and Saxton (2010, p. 4) have observed that the catalyst for self-interrogation of attitudes is, 'a primordial encounter with alterity which disturbs our solitary enjoyment of the world, our illusory position of omnipotence and sovereignty'. Downing and Saxton further note that Levinas 'emphasises the "strangeness of the Other and "his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and possessions" (Levinas, cited in Downing & Saxton 2010, p. 4)'. Based on this, Levinasian ethics are described by Downing and Saxton (2010, p. 4), as a

'welcoming of the Other, which does not violate its alterity by incorporating it into a pre-existing totality'.

Nash presents Levinas's notion of what constitutes violence towards the Other as having particular resonance to a discussion of observational documentary. Levinas stated that 'Violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognise themselves (Levinas 1969, p. 21)'. Nash has interpreted this in terms of documentary representation:

> The risk inherent in representation is that of subsuming the other in a totalizing visual system, overlooking difference, and in doing so annihilating the other. To represent is to run the risk of presenting the other as something to be experienced. (Nash 2011, p. 231)

Similarly, Michael Renov has contended that traditional ethnographic film practice, in which the filmmaker 'pretending invisibility, translates and reshapes cultural otherness' can be equated with 'Levinas's notion of "imperialism of the same"' (Renov 2004, p. 152). Renov has suggested that a Levinasian approach to documentary would be 'interactive and reflexive' as opposed to a practice where '"subjects" are transformed into "objects" of knowledge' (Renov 2004, p. 148).

It is important to clarify that although I do refer to Levinasian ethical principles throughout subsequent chapters, I do not use them as a systematic criteria to discuss the texts of films that I have selected for research. The films that I discuss in Chapter Two can be all classified as interactive and reflexive. They do not claim any totalising truth and I suggest that none of them overlook the difference or individuality of the participants. However, all still raise ethical questions in terms of representation of participants, or a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities (evidenced by the ensuing controversies after the release of two of the films). Most pertinent to my discussion of the selected films is Levinas's assertion that violence to the Other constitutes, 'making them play roles in which

they no longer recognise themselves (Levinas 1969, p. 21)'. This is relevant to my contention that documentaries have the power to construct participants as characters. While a participant may deliberately choose to play a performative role, in other cases aesthetic and narrative choices made by the filmmaker can frame a person in a particular way. To 'present the other as something to be experienced' (Nash 2011, p. 231) is to treat them as an exotic object or a character (rather than an equal) and their life as fodder for a story.

However, given that Levinas's work refers to a way of responding towards others, it is far more relevant to a discussion of my own *process* as a practitioner. As such I draw upon Levinasian ethics to shed light on my interactions with and responses to participants in *No One Eats Alone* (Bilbrough dir. 2010) and in the documentary-poems I made for this thesis. With this in mind I want to return to Levinas's conceptualisation of the relationship to the Other. For Levinas, this is not a reciprocal relationship. Rather, responsibility towards the other is prioritised over the self in 'an asymmetry of intersubjectivity' (Levinas 1998, p. 105). The philosopher uses Dostoyevsky's novels to illustrate his position:

> One of his characters says "we are all guilty of everything and everyone, and I more than all the others"... that is the essence of the human conscience: all men are responsible for one another and "I more than anyone else". (Levinas 1998 pp. 105-107)

I suggest that this notion of asymmetrical responsibility has particular pertinence to the role of the documentary-maker in representing other people. While power, as Nash (2011) has asserted, shifts between participant and filmmaker throughout a project, it is still weighted on the side of the practitioner, who chooses whether or not to collaborate (and to what degree). Ultimately, too, it is the participant who is being represented. If one is concerned with the participant's rights, this confers a burden of extra responsibility. I use this aspect of Levinas's concept of ethics with regard to my own work as a documentary practitioner.

A need for vigilance around responsibility is pinpointed by Trinh's observation that, 'in affirming righteously that one opens a space for those who do not have a voice, one often forgets that the gaining of a voice happens within a framed context, and one tends to turn a blind eye to one's privileged position as a "giver" and a "framer"' (Trinh, quoted in Hohenberger 2007, p. 115). Trinh's statement draws attention to the potential for practitioners to be complacent about the unequal power balance inherent in representing others. A logical extension of Trinh's point is to suggest that intrinsic to 'giving' is an equal element of taking. We can usefully apply this to a discussion of documentary to consider how participants are framed and what might have been taken away from them as a result.

Psychoanalysis and documentary

While ethical philosophy offers a possible way forward in terms of the interaction between filmmaker and participant, I suggest that psychoanalysis offers a further way of understanding the complexity and unconscious nature of the documentary relationship. Before I discuss exactly how, I want to look briefly at how psychoanalysis has been influential in theorising fictional film texts. In some respects this provides a point of departure in terms of the way psychoanalytic concepts can shed light on documentary. In the 1970s psychoanalysis was briefly the dominant discourse of British film journal *Screen* (Lapsley 2009, p. 14). During this period, Christian Metz (1975) and Laura Mulvey (1975), in what are now seminal essays, separately theorised the relationship between cinema spectators and screen in terms of the psyche and unconscious processes, drawing on Lacan's concept of the mirror stage.

In the 1990s cinema scholarship turned away from psychoanalysis in what Annette Kuhn has referred to as a 'retreat from Grand Theory' (Kuhn 2009, p. 5). However, Kuhn has suggested that, in a contemporary context that involves a 'plurality' of screens and 'modes of engagement' with screens, that 'cinepsychoanalysis' might

be used as a 'tool rather than an orthodoxy or a straightjacket' (Kuhn 2009, p. 7). This approach has been taken up by Rob Lapsley (2009), who has re-orientated cinepsychoanalysis in terms of using the therapeutic model itself, suggesting that a critic might respond to a film in the way that analyst attends to an analysand. I suggest that a similarly lateral approach can be applied to documentary practice and the relationship between practitioner and participant. As such I draw on aspects of the work of Metz (1975) and Mulvey (1975) as well as looking more broadly at what psychoanalysis as a discipline offers to documentary practice.

In 'The Imaginary Signifier', Metz contends that cinema is 'a technique of the imaginary' (Metz 1975, p. 3). He explains that films are generally fictional narratives, which depend for their signifier on the 'primary imaginary of photography and phonography' (Metz 1975, p. 4). Additionally, the cinema is imaginary in the Lacanian sense; for Metz the cinema screen is the '*other mirror*' (Metz 1975, p. 4) (italics in the original). In 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Mulvey noted that what makes Lacan's mirror phase significant to cinema viewing is that 'it is an image which constitutes the matrix of the imaginary, of recognition/misrecognition and identification and hence the first articulation of the "I" of subjectivity' (Mulvey 1975, p. 10). According to Mulvey, cinema viewing is a reprisal of the early recognition of one's image and subsequent joyousness at the complete and perfect nature of that image.

I now want to consider how the mirror phase might be applied to documentary practice. Rouch commented on the power of the film camera to inspire confessions; describing it as 'an accomplice' and a 'psychoanalytic stimulant, which lets people do things they wouldn't otherwise do' (Rouch, cited in Levin 1971, p. 137). Rouch also observed, 'it's a strange kind of confession in front of the camera, where the camera is, let's say, a mirror' (Rouch, cited in Eaton, 1979, p. 51). Drawing on Rouch, we can extrapolate that the actual *experience* of telling one's story to camera is a re-enactment of Lacan's mirror stage – this itself gives the participant a feeling of wholeness and an 'imaginary sense of mastery' (Evans, 1996, p. 115).

Yet it is worth considering what might occur when a participant watches aspects of their *own* life in the 'other mirror' (Metz 1975, p. 4). The joyous recognition described by Mulvey takes on quite a different nuance in this instance. There may be a sense, as in the mirror stage, that one is more complete and more unified than one actually is, but there may also be dissonance in terms of the way one has been represented by the practitioner; a misrecognition.

In a discussion of the links between documentary practice and psychoanalysis, psychotherapist Emmanuel Berman suggests that a protagonist/patient may wish for the 'director or the therapist... to be the one who will help crystallize one's story' and therefore 'help one understand' (Berman 2003, p. 221). Here I want to turn to cultural theorist Stuart Hall's discussion of identity. Hall has drawn upon Lacanian notions of self to assert that since identity is 'formed through unconscious processes over time... there is always something "imaginary" or fantasized about its unity' (Hall 1992, p. 287). According to Hall:

> Identity arises… from a *lack* of wholeness, which is "filled" from *outside us*, by the ways we imagine ourselves to be seen by *others*. Psychoanalytically, the reason we continue to search for "identity" constructing biographies, which knit together the different parts of our divided selves into a unity is to recapture this fantasized pleasure of fullness (plenitude). (Hall 1992, pp. 287-288)

Being the subject of a documentary would seem to partially offer an opportunity for an: '"identity" constructing biography'. However, the final result may not always be what either participant or practitioner expected. As Stella Bruzzi has noted, the 'truth' of documentaries is not something that is indisputable from the beginning. Rather it is something that 'emerges through the encounter between filmmakers, subjects and spectators' (Bruzzi 2006, p. 11).

Transference: Past feelings, present relationships

I now want to look at the way psychoanalysis can contribute to an understanding of the relationship between participant and documentary-maker. As Agnieszka Piotrowska has pointed out, apart from a few passing observations, psychoanalysis has had little impact on documentary study (Piotrowska 2012, p. 17). Notable exceptions are Piotrowska's own 2012 essay, 'The Conman and I: A Case-Study in Documentary Transference' (which I discuss in detail in Chapter Two) and a conversation in 2003 between psychotherapist Emmanuel Berman and documentary-makers Timna Rosenheimer and Michal Aviad, who briefly explore the encounter between the documentary-maker and participant (Berman, Rosenheimer, & Aviad 2003). This discussion is particularly useful to my research contentions. Piotrowska and Berman focus on the concept of transference and how this might play out in the documentary relationship (Piotrowska 2012; Berman, Rosenheimer, & Aviad 2003). Before discussing the way in which transference is relevant to my own research, I will outline various definitions of the term and its usage.

Transference is central to the psychodynamic relationship, referring to a type of love (erotic or other) that the patient develops for her/his therapist. In his case study of 'Dora'*,* Sigmund Freud described transference as:

> [N]ew editions or facsimiles of the tendencies and phantasies which are aroused and made conscious during the progress of analysis… they replace some earlier person by the person of the physician. To put it another way: a whole series of psychological experiences are revived, not as belonging to the past, but as applying to the person of the physician at the present moment. (Freud 1990, p. 157)

Freud goes on to refer to transference as an: 'inevitable necessity (Freud 1990, p. 158)' and a 'powerful ally' (Freud 1990, p. 159) to psychoanalysis. Jacques Lacan sums up the dynamic with more levity: 'the positive transference is when you have a soft spot for the individual concerned, the analyst in this instance, and the

negative transference is when you have to keep your eye on him' (Lacan 1998, p. 125). Transference is not one-way; the counter-transference refers to the feelings the therapist has for her/his patient. Lacan has observed that 'behind the love known as transference is the affirmation of the link between the desire of the analyst and the desire of the patient' (Lacan 1998, p. 254).

An acknowledgement of counter-transference as integral to the therapeutic relationship has been popularised by analysts who were followers of Melanie Klein's work (Evans 1996, p. 29). Paula Heinmann argued that counter-transference is the 'most dynamic way' for the therapist to understand the patient and that the therapist 'must use his emotional response as a key to the patient's unconscious' (Heinmann 1950, p. 29). In a contemporary context Patricia Hughes and Ian Kerr sound a note of warning when they comment that those working therapeutically have 'their own needs and desires, and the therapeutic relationship is a fertile ground where these may be played out' (Hughes & Kerr 2000, p. 57).

The transference paradigm has broad relevance outside therapy. Michael F. Basch has contended that transference is 'ubiquitous (Basch 1988, p. 134)', and Joseph Sandler that to a 'varying degree' transference 'elements' are present in all relationships (Sandler 1976, p. 44). Similarly, Susan Anderson and Regina Miranda assert that transference is a normal part of interpersonal interaction; that frequently our responses to a person are unconsciously influenced by an earlier significant relationship (Anderson & Miranda 2000).

However, particular types of relationships arguably provide more scope than others for the transference paradigm to occur. Dylan Evans (1996, p. 211) has noted that Lacan's thinking around transference went through a number of different stages. In 1964, Lacan re-articulated transference with his concept the 'subject supposed to know' (*sujet suppose savoir)*: 'As soon as the subject supposed to know exists somewhere there is transference' (Lacan cited in Evans 1996, pp. 195-196). It is this conceptualisation of transference that has been widely applied to the

pedagogical relationship. Robert Brooke has provided a useful summary of this version of Lacanian transference with regard to education:

> For Lacan, transference is best understood as a dynamic structure located partly within a person and partly between people. On the one side is a "divided self," a person (perhaps a patient) who does not understand some part of her own action... On the other side is an authority figure, a person who the "divided self" supposes to know how to interpret the behavior. The person who feels divided looks to the authority figure for interpretation. (Brooke 1987, p. 681)

Brooke outlines how, via talking to the authority figure, who responds either with silence or by asking questions, the patient interprets her own 'baffling behaviour as she thinks the person who "knows" would interpret it' (Brooke 1987, p. 681). Brooke further comments:

> Transference is thus an "essential phenomenon," because we humans vest many different authorities with supposed knowledge. The function of "Subject Supposed to Know" takes place within a describable and often institutionalized structure of interpersonal relations: one person doesn't understand himself, but believes another person can. (Brooke 1987, p. 681)

Using Brooke's Lacanian explanation of 'the subject supposed to know', James S. Baumlin and Margaret E. Weaver further argue that the teacher frequently becomes a mirror for an 'internalised image of parental authority' and that 'often a student has a need that, rightly or wrongly, consciously or unconsciously, he presumes a teacher can fulfil' (Baumlin & Weaver 2000, p. 79). Baumlin and Weaver suggest that when trust has been gained and the teacher has 'elicited a positive transference – the student will look to the teacher as a parent or lover, someone who 'knows' the truth and "knows" what is in the student's best interest' (Baumlin & Weaver 2000, p. 79).

I introduce the student-teacher relationship for two reasons. First, my professional connection with Abe can be best understood in terms of that paradigm. As the coordinator of a youth centre, my role was to primarily work with secondary-school-aged students who were disengaged from school or disadvantaged in some way. As Baumlin and Weaver (2000) and others such as Erin Hanifan and Stephen Appel (2000), Ann Murphy (1989), Christina Murphy (1989) and Arthur W. Frank (1995) contend, quasi-parental relationships are likely to occur in pedagogical settings, paving the way for transference. Arguably, it is an even greatly likelihood in a role such as mine, which combined aspects of teacher, parent and therapist in my work with young people who were experiencing a range of issues to do with school and family.

Second, as I have previously mentioned, *No One Eats Alone* (Bilbrough dir. 2010) was also made with assistance from New Hope, a settlement organisation that offered case-management support services to newly arrived refugees. From the start of *No One Eats Alone* there was a psychological component. When the women began talking about their lives, traumatic stories frequently surfaced first. Some women like Nyankiir Deng, who weeps while singing at the beginning of *No One Eats Alone* and tells her story of leaving Sudan with quiet passion*,* were intent on delivering the best 'performance' of their life story. For others, appearing in the documentary seemed secondary to telling the story to the camera. Berman's contention that participants may hope that the filmmaker will provide an: 'empathic eye/ear' (Berman 2003, p. 221) has resonance here, as does Rouch's observation that the film camera inspires confessions through acting as 'an accomplice' and a 'psychoanalytic stimulant, which lets people do things they wouldn't otherwise do' (Rouch, cited in Levin 1971, p. 137).

Before filming had even begun, I was arguably in the position of the 'subject supposed to know'. The co-producer Chrisoula Kanaris, who facilitated my initial contact with participants and was closely involved in *No One Eats Alone*, is a social worker and most of the participants were, or had been her clients. Many of

these women already had an emotional rapport with Chrisoula. As such, although *I* was not working in a social work capacity, my role and the making of the film was still associated with Chrisoula's work and with a broader 'institutionalized structure of interpersonal relations' (Brooke 1987, p. 681).

Finally, I suggest that some of the psychological dynamics in the pedagogical relationship as articulated by Baumlin and Weaver are of relevance to the relationship between the documentary-maker and participant, specifically the identification of the teacher 'as a parent or lover, someone who 'knows' the truth and "knows" what is in the student's best interest' (Baumlin & Weaver 2000, p. 79). 'Documentary-maker' could easily be substituted for 'teacher' here. In many ways it is easier to make a comparison between documentary and therapeutic encounters than pedagogical and therapeutic. The documentary encounter, particularly the 'participatory' mode (Nichols 2010, p. 151), which relies on interviews, is largely based on listening over a period of time. It is often one-on-one and cannot progress without mutual rapport. However, in documentary practice (unlike therapy and teaching) it is the practitioner who initiates the encounter and the purpose of her/his close attention to the participant is to create a story for a public audience. This adds a third element/presence to the encounter.

Agnieska Piotrowska has observed that while the analyst 'hopes for some kind of knowledge and perhaps "cure" for the analysand', the film made by the documentary practitioner may 'produce knowledge for the spectator, the filmmaker and even the subject of the film – but its nature of being after all a public spectacle invites dangers that are alien to psychoanalysis' (Piotrowska 2012, p. 18). Piotrowska does not explicitly spell out what these dangers are, but one can surmise from her ensuing story about the 'Conman' that she refers to the considerable dangers intrinsic to representation. In allowing the documentary-maker to frame and mediate her/his story for the 'public spectacle' the participant thus leaves her/himself open to the possibility of misrepresentation and betrayal (I discuss this further in Chapter Two). This 'public spectacle' is the crux of the

complexity in the documentary encounter, since it requires a balancing of ethical responsibility with artistic freedom.

I now want to return briefly to Lacan's ideas around transference. Although his concept of the 'subject supposed to know' is the one most commonly associated with his work, Lacan previously defined transference as being intrinsic to the 'speech act'; a dynamic that occurs between two people when something of some emotional import is spoken about:

> Each time a man speaks to another in an authentic and full manner, there is, in the true sense, transference, symbolic transference – something which takes place which changes the nature of the two beings present. (Lacan, cited in Evans 1996, p. 211)

It is worth returning to ethics here, as this particular version of transference appears to inform Judith Butler's notion of ethical responsibility in *Giving an Account of Oneself*. Butler has contended that 'An encounter with an other effects a transformation of the self from which there is no return' (Butler 2005, p. 28). Butler explains that this transformative encounter occurs via communication and postulates that a story has the capacity to change both the teller and listener:

> So "I" tell a story to "you" and we might together consider the details of the story that I tell. But if I tell them to you in the context of a transference (and can there be telling without transference), I am doing something with this telling, acting on you in some way. And this telling is also doing something to me, acting on me in ways that I may well not understand as I go. (Butler 2005, p. 51)

Of integral importance is the phrase 'I may well not understand as I go'. This limit of knowledge about oneself, a fundamental 'opacity', may originate, according to Butler from the fact that the self is 'conceived as a relational being, one whose early and primary relations are not always available to conscious knowledge' (Butler 2005, p. 20). Butler further adds, 'Moments of unknowingness about oneself tend to emerge in the context of relations to others' (Butler 2005, p. 20).

An acknowledgement of this is integral to Butler's concept of ethical responsibility:

> Perhaps most importantly, we must recognise that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at the moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of being human. (Butler 2005, p. 136)

An acknowledgement of 'unknowingness' does not mean that one should give up on attempting to understand oneself in relation to others. For Butler, this limitation calls for a responsibility to critically interrogate oneself within the context of the social world. For Levinas, it is the Other that is never completely knowable, and ethical responsibility requires an acceptance of the 'strangeness' of the Other, his 'irreducibility to the I' (Levinas 1961, p. 43).

In terms of documentary practice and the relationship between the filmmaker and participant, I suggest the principles of Butler and Levinas can be best applied to collaborative practice. In a collaborative context the documentary-maker steps away from a position of authority and shares decision-making power in an acknowledgement of unknowingness, and openness to the possibilities of what the other person might know and contribute. Returning to notions of transference, this might be conceptualised as the documentary-maker accepting a position of the 'subject who does not know'.

Baumlin and Weaver point out that the trust and authority that students project onto their teachers actually facilitates learning (Baumlin & Weaver 2000, p. 82). However, according to Baumlin and Weaver, teachers must ultimately 'repudiate the role of inviolate authority' and refuse to remain the 'subject supposed to know'. They point out that self-knowledge only begins when the analyst breaks the transference at an appropriate juncture in analysis. Hanifin and Appel (2000), drawing on S.A. Appelbaum (1973) and Ann Murphy (1989), contend that teachers have a responsibility to cultivate an awareness of psychological unconscious

dynamics in the classroom, such as transference. I suggest that the same principle can be applied to documentary practitioners who, with knowledge of possible psychological dynamics, can cultivate sensitivity around what both they and participants may bring to the documentary relationship. In turn this can lead to more transparent ethical practice.

Notions of transference with regard to the relationship between documentary-maker and participant take on an intriguing nuance when applied to auto/biographical works where the participants are family members, particularly parents. If we characterise the filmmaker as being in a type of quasi-parental role of authority – Lacan's 'subject supposed to know' – then this reverses and destabilises the actual relationship of parent and child. I contend that this role reversal may pose difficulty in the relationship (and the film) but it may also pose opportunities for transformation. I discuss this in regards to my own documentary work involving my parents in Chapter Three.

Reparation and art

In discussing films that are about members of the practitioner's family ('domestic ethnographies') it is pertinent to briefly consider another aspect of psychoanalytic theory: Melanie Klein's concept of reparation, which she related to artistic practice. Sandra Gosso (2004) has noted that, around 1929, Klein developed a theory of phantasy and the symbolic nature of objects in relation to the infant's psychological development. Klein proposed that babies have a natural element of aggression, an expression of the death instinct (intrinsic to humans). Put in simple terms, the infant's feelings of aggression manifest in destructive attacks on the mother's body, primarily the breast, and on phantasised objects (Gosso 2004, p. 1). The baby projects her/his own aggression onto phantasised objects and fears being destroyed.

In a later stage of development the baby recognises her/his own aggression and feels guilt and remorse for her/his destructive urges. As Gosso has summarised it, reparation is:

> ...the outcome of a primary relational view, in which the baby experiments with aggression towards the mother and the contents of her body, which, finally lead to concern and remorse – feelings from which arise the concern and love that are at the origin of the urge to create. (Gosso 2004, p. 3)

Expanding on Klein, R. Horacio Etchegoyen has stated that reparation is 'a powerhouse for mature energy and creativity in the actual external world' (Etchegoyen, cited in Gosso 2004, p. 2).

Gosso has noted that Klein's ideas about reparation and creativity developed over time (Gosso 2004, p. 5). However, Klein's 1929 essay, 'Infantile Anxiety-Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse' was the first instance of the link between reparation and art (Gosso 2004, p. 1). In this essay Klein uses two case studies to illustrate the concept of reparation and its relationship to creativity. The second case study is based on an article by Karin Michaelis about an artist, Ruth Kjar, whose painting career begins when she experiences a sense of deep sadness at the loss of a painting from her wall. I outline Klein's discussion of Michaelis's article here.

Ruth's distress is resolved when she fills the empty wall with her own painting and experiences both happiness and a desire to continue painting. Klein links Ruth's distress in the response to the empty wall space with the 'profound anxiety experienced by girls' and argues that the little girl 'has a sadistic desire to rob the mother's body of its contents, namely the father's penis, faeces, children, and to destroy the mother herself' (Klein 1929, p. 443). The girl fears that in turn the mother will rob the little girl's body – especially of children. Klein further conceptualised this anxiety as a fear of 'being alone, of the loss of love and of the love object' (Klein 1929, p. 443). Not being able to actually see the mother

increases the anxiety, but this is assuaged by the presence of the 'real loving mother'.

At a later stage of development 'the content of the dread changes… to the dread that the real, loving mother may be lost and that the little girl will be left solitary and forsaken' (Klein 1929, p. 443). In Michaelis's narrative Ruth Kjar goes on to paint a portrait of her sister, an old woman and her mother. Klein observes that 'it is obvious that the desire to make reparation, to make good the injury psychologically done to the mother and also restore herself was at the bottom of a compelling urge to paint her relatives' (Klein 1929, p. 443). Klein interprets the portrait of the old woman as the expression of a 'primary, sadistic, desire to destroy'. This causes a need for renewal and reparation that manifests in Ruth Kjar's portrait of her mother as young and strong. Klein's discussion of the artist's family portraits is of direct relevance to my discussion of the filmmaker's complex motivations in representing her/his family in a domestic ethnography in Chapter Four.

Summary of the chapters

In Chapter Two I contend that auto/biographical documentaries are the product of a multi-dimensional relationship between practitioner and participant. An acknowledgement and analysis of this relationship is at the heart of any nuanced consideration of ethical responsibility. I propose that the transference paradigm can offer an insight into the documentary relationship. As a context for the application of transference, I discuss Piotrowska's essay 'The Conman and I: a case study of transference in documentary' (Piotrowska 2012) before moving on to a discussion of *The Thin Blue Line* (Morris dir. 1988) and *Être et Avoir* (Philibert dir. 2004) as well as *The Art Star and the Sudanese Twins* (Brettkelly dir. 2008) and *Richard the most interestingest person I've ever met* (Newell dir. 2006).

In Chapter Three I discuss the tension between aesthetics and ethics in two specific sections of *No One Eats Alone* (Bilbrough dir. 2010) with a focus on the 'burden of representation' and the dangers of definitive, reductive representations. I discuss how my experience filming a complex story of parental loss for *No One Eats Alone* informed *Separation* (Bilbrough dir. 2013c)*,* a documentary-poem about my attempts to parent Abe. I contextualise the representational issues I encountered as a practitioner with reference to print media representations of Sudanese-Australians, with a particular focus on an article about Abe's friends and peers drinking in a public park.

In Chapter Four I discuss the inherent ethical complexity involved in representing family when the filmmaker may have both artistic and emotional motivations. I suggest that in domestic ethnography 'revenge' and 'reparation' are often inextricably linked and stem from the artist's desire to create meaning from a painful aspect of the past. Representing her/his parents, the filmmaker is in an ambiguous position as s/he is simultaneously like both 'the subject supposed to know' *and* the psychoanalytic client trying to make sense of her/his own life. I further explore the notion of character, suggesting that it may have a double function: while the filmmaker may frame a participant as a character in order to serve a particular narrative, a participant may also choose to 'perform' aspects of her/his life. In teasing out my contentions I discuss *October Country* (Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009) and *Least Said, Soonest Mended* (Thomas dir. 2000). In the second half of the chapter I discuss the process of making three documentary-poems about my parents and myself, with a particular focus on *Willing Exile* (Bilbrough dir. 2013d). As part of my discussion I outline some of the difficulties involved in coming from a family of artists and examine how my sister's and mother's respective auto/biographical films impacted on my representations of my parents.

Chapter Two: Predator, Partner, Therapist: the Missing Story

> I live under a code in life where you don't reveal. You don't reveal your life too
> much… Where you become more behind the curtain for what you do. So yeah,
> you're very, very fuckin' privileged. (Newell dir. 2006, min. 10:51-11:13)

So declares Richard Blackie, reclusive vintage toy dealer, to filmmaker Maya
Newell in *Richard the most interestingest person I've ever met* (Newell dir. 2006).
It is a statement that inspires curiosity – both about the privilege, and about the
dynamic between the two that enables Richard to be so self-revealing. Discussing
the connection between documentary-maker and participant, filmmaker Pietra
Brettkelly has noted that while it is not a friendship, romantic partnership or family
relationship it's 'some kind of melding of all three' (Brettkelly 2013, pers. comm.
6 January). She credits this elusiveness as being part of the reason documentary-
makers are attracted to making films about other people: 'There's something
addictive about it… we get this very sudden very intense entrée into someone's life
and we're allowed to explore and go deeper, if they let you, than anyone'
(Brettkelly 2013, pers. comm. 6 January). Brettkelly's comments raise questions
about the possible ramifications of transforming this 'intense entrée' into a film for
public entertainment and thus a documentary-maker's responsibility to her/his
participants.

In this chapter I approach this question of responsibility as both a film scholar and
a practitioner. I contend that auto/biographical documentaries (involving real
people's life stories) are the *product* of the relationship between practitioner and
participant – a relationship that can encompass elements of parent/child, romantic
partners, therapist/client and predator/prey. An acknowledgement and analysis of
this relationship, which Agnieszka Piotrowska, drawing on Tessa Muncey's (2010)
description of autoethnographic accounts, has termed the 'missing story
(Piotrowska 2012, p. 17)', is at the heart of any nuanced consideration of ethical
responsibility. Additionally, I contend that documentaries, which reveal aspects of

a person's life, have the power to turn participants into 'characters' – this may have different ramifications depending on context. Australian scholar Marcia Langton has argued that any representation of an Aboriginal by a non-Aboriginal is 'an act of fictionalisation' and 'creative authority' (Langton 1993, p. 40). Without intending to dilute the political impact of Langton's contention, I suggest that all documentary representations of others (regardless of culture), as well as those of oneself, are a type of fiction, or as James Clifford has stated in regards to ethnographic texts: 'constructed domains of truth, serious fictions' (Clifford 1988, p. 10). Susan Sontag wrote about the 'predatory' act of taking a picture: 'To photograph people is to violate them... by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. (Sontag 1977, p. 14). Arguably, the documentary medium, which combines moving image and narrative, presents even greater possibilities for predation. David MacDougall observes that 'films can have untold consequences, but all spring from their initial presumptuous act' (MacDougall 1998, pp. 37-38). According to MacDougall:

> The real crime of representation is representation itself. It is no coincidence that some people fear photography as a theft of the soul or that some religions forbid the making of human effigies. By freezing life, every film to some degree offends against the complexity of people and the destiny that awaits them. (MacDougall 1998, p. 38)

A notion of participants becoming 'objects' or characters resonates with the link psychoanalyst Emmanuel Berman has made between the public exposure of documentary participants' stories and therapists' publication of case studies (Berman, Rosenheimer, & Aviad 2003). According to Berman the patient has initially felt proud about the case study, yet later this has changed:

> Part of the feeling is like in *The Picture of Dorian Grey* where the picture painted, that public pronouncement about them, becomes something immobilising. It has turned into an object that ossifies the patients and stops their lively dynamic development. (Berman, Rosenheimer, & Aviad 2003, p. 228)

At stake here are issues of ownership of both the story and, to draw on life writing scholar Paul John Eakin (2008), the self that is attached to the story. Citing the work of neurologist Oliver Sacks, who proposes 'a radical equivalence between narrative and identity', Eakin contends that 'narrative is not merely something that we tell, listen to, read, or invent; it is an essential part of our sense of who we are' (Eakin 2008, p. ix). If we accept, as I do, that narrative is so intimately linked to our notion of identity, then what are the consequences when a documentary practitioner constructs our identity as a 'character' in a way that is alien to us or perhaps trivialises our life in some way? Trinh's observations (quoted in Hohenberger 2007, p. 115) about the role of the documentary-maker as a 'giver' and 'framer' (and my addition of 'taker') are of particular relevance here. And as Nichols has noted, filmmakers who 'set out to represent others' have a different 'burden of responsibility' to those who 'portray characters of their own invention' (Nichols 2010, p. 48). I also turn here to Nash's conceptualisation of Levinasian ethics in relation to documentary: 'To represent is to run the risk of presenting the other as something to be experienced' (Nash 2011, p. 231).

In teasing out my contentions I discuss an apparently disparate selection of films. I focus first on two well-known documentaries, *The Thin Blue Line* (Morris dir. 1988), concerning the case of Randall Harris, and *Être et Avoir* (Philibert dir. 2002, an observational documentary about a one-classroom school in rural France. The key participant in each of these films sued the respective director after the film was released in a dispute over remuneration. Both documentaries have been written about extensively (*Être et Avoir:* Nash 2011, Downing & Saxton 2010, Austin 2005, Bruzzi 2006; *The Thin Blue Line*: Bruzzi 2006, Nichols 1991, Nichols 2010, Williams 2005) in terms of aesthetic style, Morris and Philibert's respective roles as auteurs, and the legal disputes that occurred after the release of each film. My particular contention is that what transpired after the release of each film exemplifies the dangers of representing real people, demonstrating both the blurred and unpredictable nature of the documentary relationship and the tendency for the

key participant to become a 'character'. My analysis weaves together the text and context of each film as well as the perspectives of the respective participants, filmmakers and viewers.

I then discuss *The Art Star and the Sudanese Twins* (Brettkelly dir. 2008), a portrait of performance artist Vanessa Beecroft, and *Richard the most interestingest person I've ever met* (Newell dir. 2006), a portrait of reclusive vintage toy dealer Richard Blackie. Neither film has incurred a legal dispute, although one almost transpired around the content of *The Art Star*, and superficially they appear to have little in common. *The Art Star* has the lush cinematography and lighting of an art-house film. *Richard* is a reflexive, aesthetically modest debut, made as a film course assignment when Maya Newell was just seventeen. However, both films are incredibly intimate psychological portraits. Richard (I use Richard Blackie's first name in this chapter because it appears in the film's title) and Beecroft are each compelling, eccentric 'performers' who, despite their vast differences in economic and social circumstances, share a palpable vulnerability. I suggest that both films verge on being voyeuristic and predatory in terms of how psychologically exposing they are. However, to describe either film as such would be reductive, ignoring the complexity of the participant-practitioner relationship.

Before discussing the above-mentioned films, I want to return to the issue of the practitioner-participant relationship and consider how it has been conceptualised by other practitioners and scholars. Increasingly there is an acknowledgement of the propensity for strong feelings to occur in the documentary encounter. Kate Nash has proposed that *The Good Woman of Bangkok* (O'Rourke dir. 1991) can be read as a metaphor for the documentary relationship, in that it 'makes a claim for the ethical significance of the emotional connection, or lack of connection, between filmmaker and participant' (Nash 2009, p. 21), and 'insinuates a central role for love in filmmaking (Nash 2009, p. 22)'. Further, Nash argues that it is necessary to address the documentary relationship in its 'particularity', that a 'universal abstract approach will not suffice for a practice that depends on the relationship between

one particular individual and another' and that involves 'shifting power relations' and 'ongoing negotiation' (Nash 2009, p. 24). Similarly, David MacDougall (1998, p. 54) has noted that 'filmmakers' attitudes towards their subjects contain the attributes of other relationships ranging from indifference to dislike to the protectiveness of a parent to the attentiveness of a lover'. Amiel Courtin-Wilson has commented on a type of symbiosis that developed with *Bastardy* (Courtin-Wilson dir. 2008) participant Jack Charles:

> As Jack and I became closer, he effectively moved into my house several times and there were periods of months where the filmmaking paled in comparison to the increasingly profound friendship we developed. This intimacy finally culminated in becoming embroiled in Jack's criminal activities to the point where I was unsure if what I was doing was legal anymore. (Courtin-Wilson 2008, p. 8)

Towards the end of *Hope* (Thomas dir. 2007) Steve Thomas comments:

> In the last 15 months Amal had become a big part of my life. I thought I was going to make a film about her, but I ended up making a film with her. (Thomas dir. 2008, min. 1: 38:05-1:38:14)

Arguably, Amal's decision to participate in *Hope* may have been partially linked to a lack of intimacy in her life. Leili Golafshani has suggested that in *Hope* Amal's 'love-starved marital relationship' is partially compensated by the attention she receives from Thomas (Golafshani 2012, p. 4). The empathic connection (and collaboration) between the filmmaker and participant is sustained up until her death from breast cancer – Thomas brings a small camcorder to the hospital so he can continue to film Amal, who, despite suffering the effects of chemotherapy, still wishes to contribute to the narrative.

Love and betrayal

Betrayal frequently accompanies love, and Janet Malcolm has described the journalist (who I suggest is a close relative to the documentary-maker) as a 'kind of a confidence man' ruthlessly in pursuit of a story (Malcolm 1990, p. 3). Yet Malcolm also observes that the subject is not entirely a 'naïve victim' (Malcolm 1990, p. 8). Rather, the connection is a mutually magnetic one: 'Every hoodwinked widow, every deceived lover, every betrayed friend, every subject of writing know on some level what is in store for him, and remains in the relationship anyway, impelled by something stronger than his reason' (Malcolm 1990, p. 32). Further, Malcolm argues that:

> The journalist encounter seems to have the same regressive effect on a subject as a psychoanalytic encounter. The subject becomes a kind of child of the writer, regarding him as a permissive, all-accepting, all-forgiving mother, and expecting that the book will be written by her. Of course the book is written by the strict, all-noticing, unforgiving father. (Malcolm 1990, p. 32)

The same could of course be said for some documentaries – what the participant imagines will be revealed about her/him can take on a rather different slant in the final edit of a documentary (unless the process is collaborative). It is worth noting that the documentary-maker seeks out the participant and, in order to engage with her/him must build significant rapport and trust. As Patricia Aufderheide, Peter Jaszi and Mridu Chandra have commented, 'Any subject's withdrawal of affection may result in denial of access to material in which the filmmakers have invested heavily' (Aufderheide, Jaszi & Chandra 2009, p. 20). Looked at in the harshest possible way, the documentary-maker is a type of predator. Yet, simultaneously the practitioner provides an opportunity for the participant to unburden her/himself without asking for any reciprocal personal interest. I suggest that in auto/biographical documentary (like therapy) the participant receives heightened levels of interest from the practitioner. As Berman has noted, a fundamental motivation for the participant's involvement may be:

> [T]he need to be heard, a wish to be seen, a wish for mirroring, a wish for a
> sympathetic eye, for an admiring eye, for an interested eye, for an empathetic
> eye/ear, of course combined. (Berman, Rosenheimer, & Aviad 2003, pp. 287-288)

As I have stated in Chapter 1, the transference paradigm offers an insight into what can occur in the documentary encounter. I draw upon Baumlin and Weaver's contention (based on Lacan's 'subject supposed to know') that when a positive transference occurs a student 'will look to the teacher as a parent or lover, someone who "knows" the truth and "knows" what is in the student's best interest' (Baumlin & Weaver 2000, p. 79) (here I substitute 'documentary-maker' for 'teacher'). Janet Malcolm's 1982 interpretation of transference also has resonance for a consideration of the documentary relationship in its emphasis on the likelihood of misunderstanding and disappointment. Malcolm (1982 p. 6) contends that transference is underpinned by the idea that personal relations are 'a messy jangle of misapprehensions'. This, she observes, is the tragedy of love: 'we cannot ever know each other. We must grope around for each other in a dense thicket of absent others'. I suggest that, with regard to the documentary encounter, transference can be best understood as existing on a spectrum. It may involve the projection of one particular role over all others or it may encompass aspects of many roles all at once: parent, lover, child, etc. In short documentary projects, where there is comparatively limited contact, there may only be a hint of transference. According to Malcolm transference is the phenomenon of 'how we all invent each other according to early blueprints' (Malcolm 1982, p. 6). Interpreted laterally, this description resonates with the way that a filmmaker may, to a certain extent, (re) invent her/his participant as a character that suits the needs of her/his documentary, and perhaps her/his unconscious.

A story of two con artists

Agnieska Piotrowska has contended that the documentary relationship is one where 'transference of one sort or another will always be present (Piotrowska 2012, pp. 17-18)'. To date, no one else in the field of documentary practice or scholarship has stated it so explicitly. Piotrowska's book *Psychoanalysis and Ethics in Documentary Film* (forthcoming from Routledge at the time of writing) explores the ethical implications of this transference dynamic in both her own work and that of other documentary practitioners. However, in this chapter I confine my discussion to Piotrowska's essay, 'The Conman and I: a case study of transference in documentary' (Piotrowska 2012). The essay is an extraordinarily candid Lacanian-inspired analysis of her interactions with a documentary participant, Oliver Killeen, a serial bigamist who had also posed as a 'consultant psychologist and psychotherapist, specialising in relationship difficulties' (Piotrowska 2012, p. 19). Killeen's performance as a therapist was so successful that he became a television celebrity and syndicated newspaper columnist.

'The Conman' is a supreme example of how complex feelings of love and betrayal manifest in the documentary relationship. Presented as an autoethnographic account, Piotrowksa provides an analysis of both Killeen's emails and her own, and notes, 'I am not just the scholar here, I am a character in the story I am telling' (Piotrowska 2012, p. 19). The filmmaker's description of the transference dynamic that occurred in her encounter with Killeen provides an invaluable model – and point of comparison – for my discussion of the practitioner-participant relationships in the documentaries that I focus on this chapter. However, my interpretation of Piotrowska's actions and reflections as she reports them in 'The Conman' sometimes differs from hers.

Before meeting Oliver Killeen (he was serving a prison sentence), Piotrowska corresponded daily with him for a few months. In his first email to the filmmaker, Killeen addresses her as 'Dearest' and writes, 'thank you for your interest in my

life... and your love' (Piotrowska 2012, p. 20). Because Killeen is a bigamist, his choice of words to Piotrowska have extra significance, if, as Piotrowska (2012), Nash (2009) and MacDougall (1998) have asserted, love plays a central role in the practitioner-participant relationship. The filmmaker notes, in regards to the first message she receives from Killeen, that he 'clearly had literary ambitions' (Piotrowska 2012, p. 19) and that he 'might have started his own imaginary mirror by writing his own autobiography' (Piotrowska 2012, p. 20).

From a practitioner's perspective, a person with this awareness of her/himself as a performer, someone with the 'gift of the gab' and a literary turn of phrase, is often the best kind of interviewee for a documentary. To cite Nichols it appears that Killeen was almost certainly someone who may have conveyed 'a sense of complexity and depth similar to what we value in a trained actor's performance' (Nichols 2010, p. 46). Such a person is an irresistible find for any documentary-maker. The relationship Piotrowska describes is not only one of transference, but one of two wills pitted against each other. Killeen, with his literary ambitions and talent for performance, is also an artist of sorts, and theirs can be read as a battle for artistic supremacy.

Although extraordinarily candid about her response to Killeen and their interactions, the filmmaker glosses over her *own* role as con artist in acquiring Killeen's participation in her documentary. Clearly, right from the beginning Killeen fantasises about the potential for an erotic/romantic relationship with Piotrowska, while Piotrowska's fantasy centres on art: she is intent on getting material from him to complete her film. Piotrowska contends that 'the prospect of a real mirror, a real camera and a real chance of retelling his story the way he would have wanted' was 'clearly too much for Killeen to resist' (Piotrowska 2012, p. 20). She also observes that Killeen told her 'repeatedly' that his auto/biographical writing was 'an invention' and that he referred to himself as a 'character'. In an early email to the filmmaker, Killeen writes, 'My childhood never existed what ever it was I invented and even there had many characters' (Piotrowska 2012, p.

20). From these details we can infer that Killeen had a heightened awareness of what made him fascinating to others and a sense of himself as an artist, but that perhaps he was also removed from reality and/or delusional (his career as a conman is also evidence of this). However, I argue that Piotrowska is rather disingenuous: her comments assume Killeen to have a self-reflective ability and grasp of reality when it seems clear (at least from this essay) that he did not. This absolves her from having to take responsibility for her own actions. Surely it is Piotrowska (as an experienced documentary-maker), who must have known that their relationship could not end happily, that she would not give in to his erotic fantasy, and that she would (potentially) not represent him in the way he wished.

Early in their connection (apparently before she knew the extent of Killeen's violence towards women) Piotrowska writes to her participant:

> I have a sense that sometimes you feel inherently unlovable. This is completely untrue. I might not love you the way you would like me to, but I am very fond of you as a friend, not just the subject of my film. (Piotrowska 2012, p. 24)

This, reflects Piotrowska, may have been her own counter-transference:

> My feelings for this man 25 years older than me were those of a mother to a child: there was also definitely a moment in which my omnipotent fantasy was that I could deliver him from his pain – like a 'good enough mother' would – although clearly the professional in me realized that it was but a fantasy. (Piotrowska 2012, p. 24)

Although this certainly fits a transference paradigm, I suggest, admittedly rather cynically, that the younger Piotrowska (of the email) may also have realised that such an admission of affection would result in obtaining worthwhile footage. By the end of the essay Piotrowska makes it clear that her responsibility is not to her participant but to the women who had been Killeen's victims:

> I walked out on him, like all women he had known had done before, the only
> difference being that I did it on camera, with a demand off-camera for him not to
> contact me ever again. I had to confront him and leave him because of his lies, his
> cruelty and the profound hurt he inflicted on others… but also because it was simply
> the end of the film. (Piotrowska 2012, pp. 24-25)

What contributes to this being an extraordinary story of shifting power dynamics and the politics of representation is that Killeen, a violent predator and conman, is ultimately conned, preyed upon and betrayed by a woman young enough to be his daughter. Killeen was ruthless in his pursuit of what he wanted – multiple wives and celebrity – however, Piotrowska is also ruthless in her pursuit of Killeen's story and in this case it is she who wields the camera and has access to the media. It is worth returning here to the fact of Killeen's previous (bogus) role of television psychotherapist, since there is an uncanny doubling evident in the roles played by each person in the relationship. Recalling Malcolm's interpretation of the transference paradigm, it seems that Piotrowska's behaviour towards Killeen and indeed her representation of him in 'The Conman' combined aspects of both the 'permissive, all-accepting, all-forgiving mother' and the 'strict, all-noticing, unforgiving father' (Malcolm 1990, p. 32).

Erratic, contrary behaviour

Generally, however, the transference dynamic between documentary-makers and their participants are not so explicit nor are documentary-makers so reflective and analytical about their mercenary motivations. I now want to turn to two much cloudier cases of 'love' and 'betrayal' in *The Thin Blue Line* (Morris dir. 1988) and *Être et Avoir* (Philibert dir. 2002). What stands out about the disputes that occurred after the release of these films is the sheer erratic, contrary quality of human behaviour and the unpredictability not only of public responses to a documentary, but of the responses of those represented. Neither the actual texts of *The Thin Blue Line* and *Être et Avoir*, nor the documented behaviour of either of the filmmakers towards their participants, raise any obvious ethical questions. In fact, each film did

the key participant a favour. In the case of Randall Adams the film saved his life. In the case of Georges Lopez the film idealised him – as Bruzzi (2006, p. 227) has noted, Lopez 'comes across as 'inspired, patient, somewhat old-fashioned, slightly stern, but hugely supportive'.

The Thin Blue Line was instrumental in aiding in the release of Randall Adams, who spent twelve years in prison after being wrongly convicted for the murder of Robert Wood, a police officer. The film is the story of Adams, his conviction, and David Harris, the teenager who picked him up as a hitchhiker, and then accused him. Although the film assisted in his exoneration (revealing Harris as the actual perpetrator), on his release Randall Adams sued director Errol Morris. However, Adams stated that money was not the issue: 'After my release, Mr. Morris felt he had the exclusive rights to my life story. He did not. Therefore, it became necessary to file an injunction to sort out any legal questions on the issue (Yeager 2000, p. 1)'. Although Morris attempted to understand Adams's response as the result of being wrongfully incarcerated for so long, it is clear he also saw Adams's actions as a betrayal: 'It was so bizarre and so hurtful and so crazy, that I have never spoken to him since (Bull 2004, p. 9)'. While there was no dispute around representation of image or story, it seems that both filmmaker and participant respectively believed that trust had been breached, and in Adams's case, that something had been *taken* rather than given. Adams's comments infer that, by allowing Morris to frame an aspect of his life and turn it into a story/artwork for the public, he had lost a part of his identity. The reduction of his life to the story of a man who was wrongly accused of murdering a police officer, and who narrowly missed execution, was perhaps what Adams felt he had to wrestle back from Morris.

One has to wonder whether the very considered aesthetic of *The Thin Blue Line*, which Bruzzi (2006, p. 195) has compared to a David Lynch movie, played into this. Could it be a case of art trivialising and neatly packaging a messy and traumatic situation? Was this the final indignity for Adams who, after all, had been

on Death Row? One can only extrapolate, but it seems reasonable to assume that Adams may not have felt entirely comfortable with the fact that what was the indisputable tragedy of his life was, for Morris, an opportunity to make a highly stylised, docu-who-dunnit that Linda Williams (2005, p. 63) has described as 'manifestly staged and temporally manipulated'. As Williams (2005, p. 63) has noted, Morris 'dramatically withholds information' such as the fact that Harris is in prison for another senseless murder, a detail we only begin to register when Harris reaches up to scratch his head mid-recollection and we see he is wearing handcuffs.

Although it is Adams's reputation and life that is on the line, his testimony is not especially prioritised. Nichols has pointed out that filmmaker Errol Morris 'emerges less as a stalwart defender of the innocent than as ironic observer of how facts become woven into disparate and conflicting narratives' (Nichols 1991, p. 99). Adams's is one voice amongst multiple 'confessional, "talking-cure"' accounts (Williams 2005, p. 64). These accounts are accompanied by silent re-enactments of the murder of Officer Woods, which reflect the point of view of the witness and have a dream-like quality. The film is full of visual flourishes: in one re-enactment a chocolate milkshake leaves the window of the police car in slow motion, splattering in a thick pool on the road in a way that is reminiscent of blood. Pixelated black-and-white newspaper headshots of both Adams and Harris, used as a motif throughout the film, turn the faces of the two men into illustrations: iconic characters forever frozen in a particular moment.

The film offers a psychological reason for Harris's murders. Harris recalls how his four-year-old brother drowned when he was three and after that it was 'hard' for him to get 'any acceptance' from his father (Morris dir. 1988, min. 1:33:27). According to Harris a lot of things he did when he was younger were an attempt to 'get back' at his father (Morris dir. 1988, min. 1:33:53). In a final tape-recorded interview, Harris reveals that Adams probably would not be in prison if he had allowed Harris (who had run away from home) to stay the night with him. As Williams has noted, Randall Adams (who was 28 at the time of the murder):

> [P]layed an unwitting role in the psychic history of the 16 year old David Harris, a role which repeated an earlier trauma in Harris's life: of the father whose approval he could not win, and upon whom David then avenged himself. (Williams 2005, p. 72)

Moving away from the actual text of the film it is possible to take this psychoanalytic reading one step further. I argue that David Harris finally found the attentive parent he was looking for in the filmmaker and was 'heard' and 'seen' with an 'interested eye' and an apparently 'empathetic eye/ear' (Berman, Rosenheimer & Aviad 2003, p. 221). Morris has described Harris as both 'endearing and frightening' and 'endlessly fascinating' (Bull 2004, p. 4). The filmmaker has further noted that 'he was kind of a fresh-faced kid at the time of the killing of the police officer. There's something actually sweet, something sympathetic about David Harris' (Bull 2004, p. 4). Ironically, the result of Harris being 'heard' and 'seen' in the context of the film was actual (and unavoidable) betrayal: while being interviewed for *The Thin Blue Line*, he eventually (albeit in an indirect way) confessed that he'd framed Adams and was guilty of the murder of Officer Woods himself. Morris has stated that in his quest to prove Randall Adams' innocence, he was actually Harris's 'adversary' (Bull 2004, p. 5). Intriguingly, while Morris never spoke to Adams again, he maintained a relationship with Harris. In the years after the release of *The Thin Blue Line*, while Harris was on death row, the two exchanged letters, faxes and phone calls up to days before Harris's execution – evidencing an unusual emotional connection (Bull 2004, p. 1). Harris also requested that the filmmaker send the entire unedited interview with him (from *The Thin Blue Line* footage) to his lawyer and family.

Morris has referred to this as a 'surprising request' (Bull 2004, p. 8). Yet I argue that, given the context of Harris's life (he had spent most of it in prison) it isn't especially unexpected. First, the interview is a permanent record of a type of nonjudgmental, unconditional love and attention (the kind that one might wish for from a parent); Harris was not asked by Morris to be anything other than himself. It

is worth noting that, although the contexts are quite different, this bears a similarity to the type of love that Courtin-Wilson appears to offer Jack Charles in *Bastardy* (Courtin-Wilson dir. 2008). Second, Harris may have felt that the interview was, to draw on Hall, an '"identity" constructing' biography – or a Lacanian mirror – something that knitted together the different parts of his divided self, thus making sense of a highly fragmented and unfulfilled life (Hall 1992, pp. 287-288).

I now want to turn to *Être et Avoir*, a film that, via its text, context and the ensuing debate after its release, raises difficult questions about notions of sole authorship. Amy Taubin has referred to *Être et Avoir* as an 'unabashedly humanist film, more concerned with teacher and pupils as individuals than with the pedagogical system within which they function' (Taubin cited in Bruzzi 2006, p. 225). Building on Taubin's description, Nash has suggested Levinasian ethical principles can be applied to the aesthetics of *Être et Avoir* because the film 'preserve(s) the alterity of the Other' (Nash 2011, p. 233). According to Nash, this is demonstrated in the way that the film represents both the children and their teacher, Georges Lopez. Rather than advancing a 'universal argument' the film makes space 'for the details of the children's disputes and their concerns'. Further, Nash suggests that the film shows contradictory aspects of Lopez's personality, presenting both him and his students in their 'complexity', rather than 'trying to render them whole as individuals' (Nash 2011, p. 233). Here I infer that rendering 'whole' might amount to a filmmaker attempting to shape participants into well-rounded balanced characters for the audience's narrative satisfaction.

However, while the text of *Être et Avoir* may demonstrate respect and a high degree of ethical principals towards participants, one cannot ignore the fact that in 2004 Lopez sued filmmaker Nicolas Philibert. Taking it a step further than Randall Adams, Lopez claimed that he was the co-author of the work and should receive a proportion of the profit that *Être et Avoir* had unexpectedly made at the box office (Gentleman 2004a, p. 1) – the film earned 10 million in France alone (Bruzzi 2006, p. 222). Lopez lost the case, and Philibert's lawyer argued that Lopez was a 'model

not the creator' and 'The Mona Lisa did not paint the Mona Lisa' (Gentleman 2004b p. 3).

Bruzzi (2006, p. 230) has argued that Lopez's onscreen persona of the patient, wise teacher was very different from what he subsequently displayed during the public dispute over remuneration. Bruzzi uses this as an example of the performative nature of documentary, but also contends that this representation was due to Philibert's artistry – that, through his editing and framing choices, he had created a character that was extremely complimentary to Lopez. According to Bruzzi, 'It is now impossible to view *Être et Avoir* without being disappointed in Lopez and interpreting him at the very least as a contradictory figure' (Bruzzi 2006, p. 230). I suggest that this is actually a demonstration of the contradiction at the heart of documentary representation – that the characters on screen have other attributes beyond the frame and that real people *are* erratic and unpredictable. Lopez's talents as a dedicated and empathetic teacher as represented in *Être et Avoir* are not necessarily cancelled out by him also being ambitious and perhaps avaricious. It is worth noting that Nash's assertions about *Être et Avoir* allowing aspects of Lopez's contradictory personality to show through serve to emphasise Philibert's respect for actuality. In Nash's reading of the text, Lopez is far more integral to the film.

Philibert is the film's director, cinematographer and editor and, as Bruzzi has noted, *Être et Avoir* is, 'in a intensely auteuristic sense, Philibert's film (Bruzzi 2006, p. 226)'. Yet despite this observation, Bruzzi has contended that the film is 'collaborative' in an aesthetic sense, inferring empathy and a type of identification between maker and main participant:

> There exists an almost conspiratorial collusion between Philibert's filming style, Lopez's personal style and the nature of the teaching he undertakes: all are low key and quiet, all in terms of genealogy belong to a traditional way of doing things – cinematic (observational, responsive), behavioural (gentle, quietly spoken, firm), pedagogical (handwriting classes, dictation, colouring in). *Être et Avoir* is driven by synchronicity. (Bruzzi 2006, p. 226)

Libby Saxton has also suggested that Philibert invites us to view the film as collaborative, quoting the filmmaker as stating:

> I don't make films 'about' I make films 'with'. This nuance is very important… It's not my intention to provide the viewer with lots of facts. I try to create an encounter between the viewer and the people on screen. (Saxton 2010, p. 32)

Philibert's comments align with Nash's (2011) observations on his work – there is an inference that things were simply able to unfold and participants expressed themselves as they wished. However, despite both Bruzzi's reading of the film's aesthetic style and Philibert's description of his work, *Être et Avoir*'s participants were *not* actually involved in the process of filming or editing, which was one of the reasons Lopez was not recognised by the courts as a co-author (Gentleman 2004a, p. 2; Saxton 2010, p. 32).

The details of the legal dispute, combined with Philibert's remarks about making films 'with', provoke consideration of the documentary-maker's responsibility. Roles and relationships in this context lack seem to lack precise definition and boundaries, relying instead on assumptions. Saxton has commented that there was a sense of identification between Philibert and Lopez, who Philibert has referred to as his screen 'double' (Saxton 2010, p. 31). One might extrapolate that a transference/counter-transference dynamic occurred, and perhaps both Philibert were lulled into a false sense of security and a type of love for one another during filming. Ultimately participant and director felt wronged. Lopez believed he'd been misled by the idea that the film would be used 'primarily for educational purposes' (Gentleman 2004b, n.p.). Philibert on the other hand (like Morris) felt 'very hurt and deeply distressed' by the legal action, which he viewed as a 'betrayal' (Gentleman 2004b, n.p.).

It seems probable that while Philibert was concerned with 'creating an encounter' between the viewers and the 'people on screen', *expectations* about the encounter

between filmmaker and participants were left unexplored, perhaps precisely because the encounter during filming had been so harmonious. The end of filming spells the end of an intense relationship (unless a sequel is being made), after which contact between filmmaker and participant is likely to become less frequent. Perhaps Lopez felt ripped off financially and emotionally. The case of *Être et Avoir* reads like a love story gone wrong, with disputes over finances and authorship akin to a bitter scramble at the end of a relationship for what were *assumed* to be shared resources. I suggest that, regardless of Philibert's role as 'creator' or debates around money, *without* the woman who sat for the portrait of the *Mona Lisa* there would not have been a painting; at least not that *exact* one. Similarly, without Lopez's passion for teaching and his screen presence, *Être et Avoir* would have been an entirely different film. Philibert's use of the preposition 'with' rather than 'about' to talk about his filmmaking practice implicitly acknowledges this reliance on the people who appear in his films.

Vulnerable performers: two portraits

Like *Être et Avoir*, neither *The Art Star and the Sudanese Twins* (Brettkelly dir. 2008) nor *Richard the most interestingest person I've ever met* (Newell dir. 2006) were made collaboratively in any practical sense. However, like *Être et Avoir,* both are portrait films that depend on the strength and charisma of the key participant and her/his consuming, obsessive involvement in her/his respective work. Both films continue to provoke and fascinate me as a viewer and practitioner, firstly because of the discomfort I feel towards aspects of the representation of each of the key participants, and secondly because of the complex, intimate connection evident between participant and practitioner, which makes these psychologically exposing representations possible.

Denis O'Rourke has commented that it his own 'unconscious sense of being vulnerable' and 'feeling that all is not right with the world and at the same time wishing it to be right' is what enables people to be so intimate in his films (Spring

2005, p. 135). Vulnerability, albeit of a different variety to that which O'Rourke was referring to, is perhaps what Richard Blackie instinctively responded to in Newell, given she was less than half his age. Throughout the film Richard addresses Newell as 'girl', and it is evident that her company is a source of joy. In the opening scene he comments, 'Do I look fucking ugly on camera or something?' (Newell dir. 2006, min. 2:49-2:51) as if he can't quite believe the attention Newell is paying him – yet he is highly delighted with her gaze, his voice filled with humorous affection and his face lit up with what one can only really describe as love.

This is a film underpinned by an unlikely crush – gentler than what transpires between Piotrowska and Killeen, as described in 'The Conman I', but sharing some key qualities: a significant age gap, woman as filmmaker, man as object of fascination, disparate, mutually unclear desires and psychologically vulnerable participants. In keeping with Newell's age and Richard's personality, however, there is a sweetness and lack of guile in Newell's filmic representation of her relationship with Richard that is wholly different from Piotrowska's representation of her relationship with Killeen in 'The Conman and I'. Yet Newell and Richard's connection is also rich material for a discussion of transference dynamics.

Newell has stated that Richard grew up in foster homes and was apparently the first person in Australia to sue his biological parents for child abuse (Newell 2013, pers. comm. 4 July). While it is impossible to verify this detail, it is significant that Richard chose to communicate this information to the filmmaker. It recalls the content of one of Killeen's earliest letters to Piotrowska, detailing the abuse he endured as a child:

> I was surprised that you did not feel the awful pain I felt when my mother spoon fed me my own shit how she would constantly make that a conversation piece on how she cured me from soiling my pants or how she would gather nettles and flail me on my bare legs. (Piotrowska 2012, p. 21)

Both documentary-makers were privy to intimate, traumatic information that one imagines would normally be the terrain of therapy.

While Oliver Killeen was actually incarcerated, Newell's film represents Richard as being in a type of prison of his own making: he struggles to pay the rent on his toyshop and can't always afford food. Toys, Newell has noted, largely replaced humans in Richard's life. She has stated that Richard suffered from paranoia and had 'shut most people out of his life because he felt that they might steal his toys. (Newell 2013, pers. comm. 4 July). As such, the filmmaker's interest and company must have felt like a gift. Almost the entirety of the film is shot in Richard's shop, which seems hardly more than a cluttered corridor. Newell films Richard, as she does his rows of wind-ups and kewpie dolls, in extreme close-up and comments in voiceover, 'It didn't take me long to realise that it was Richard himself who was by far the most fascinating toy in the shop' (Newell dir. 2006, min. 2:35-2:43). It is only because of Newell's age and inexperience that she can get away with this disconcerting (and perhaps unreflected-upon) summation of Richard, which does in fact sound predatory, suggesting that his appeal for her was at least partially based on his eccentricity and entertainment value. Newell has remarked that Richard 'dedicated his life to the preservation of childhood in the guise of toys and all they evoke' (2006, n.p.). She has since commented that, by filming Richard, 'his life was preserved forever. This was something he was aware of. And that's what he'd devoted his life to – preserving toys – relics from the past' (2013, pers. comm. 4 July).

It is possible to interpret this comment as a reiteration of Richard as a type of toy and Newell's film, to draw on Sontag (1977, p. 4), as a symbolic possession of Richard. Yet it is also worth noting that in contemporary western society we take copious amounts of photographs and video footage in what is perhaps a compulsive effort to preserve (and perhaps possess) the people that we love. Newell's comment is an echo of Richard's own portentous statement toward the end of the film, 'At least if something happens to me, you will have some footage'

(Newell, dir. 2006, min. 47:13). This one line signals how important Newell was to Richard, making any notion of Newell as predator only part of a more richly layered story.

Richard's toyshop also evokes rich layers of possible meaning. Toyshops are the stuff of archetypal childhood dreams, fantasies and longings, and the fact Newell and Richard meet in his shop gives their relationship a feeling of playful innocence. We might also infer from his obsession with toys that Richard is a type of Peter Pan, unwilling to completely leave the realm of childhood. As an introduction to his shop Richard says to Newell:

> Welcome to my palace of the spider and the fly. Think of it; you got people comin'
> in… it's like a spider has its cobweb and it draws insects. So I draw the insects in,
> right, and they bring me their toys. (Newell dir. 2006, min. 2:58-3:16)

In the case of Newell, Richard has drawn in a very curious (in both senses of the word) insect. The metaphor could also be reversed – it is the documentary-maker who draws the toyshop owner into her web in her quest to represent him on film. Although Richard is the adult, he is the one who seems most vulnerable. The film begins with an answering machine message from Richard to Newell as the camera pans over the headstones in a cemetery:

> I don't want you to be overly concerned. I made the decision to shut the shop for
> good. So no one can ever get near me or my life again. You look after yourself.
> Keep your chin up alright? (Newell dir. 2006, min. 0:05-0:31)

The message is a mix of what seems to be parental care towards Newell, and mysterious paranoia. Who is it that Richard did not want to get near him or his life? This question is never fully answered by the film. However, it immediately raises the question of whether perhaps it was the filmmaker who got too close for Richard's psychological comfort. We subsequently realise that it is actually Richard who most needed to look after himself, but tragically could not. Newell, at

least towards the end of Richard's life, was one of the people who got the nearest, both emotionally and in terms of literal proximity. During filming Newell visited Richard up to four times per week for three or so months, yet only shot five hours of footage (Newell 2013, pers. comm. 4 July).

Newell has observed that, 'when you spend this amount of time with someone they become like family' (2013, pers. comm. 4 July). Transference is every bit as evident here as it is between Piotrowska and Killeen. Richard Blackie had a daughter who he had not seen since she was a child. Towards the end of his life he wondered if Newell was his daughter come to 'track him down' (Newell 2013, pers. comm. 4 July). After Richard's death, his actual daughter managed to make contact with the filmmaker, and Newell has commented, 'significantly, Richard's daughter is my age. We are also similar in appearance' (2006, n.p.). Newell herself grew up without a father; she is the child of two mothers who used a sperm donor (Newell 2012, p. 1). Although she has made it clear that not having a father has ever equated to a lack in her life (Newell 2012, p. 1), it is impossible not to wonder whether at least part of her fascination with Richard stemmed from a curiosity about what having a father might be like.

The way *Richard* reveals the toy collector's fragile psyche and the filmmaker's inability to adequately understand and empathise is not always comfortable. We are privy to Richard's increasing psychological instability – his feelings of being sidelined and let down by society. He talks about death, in turn mock humorous, self-pitying and matter of fact. The filmmaker's responses are dispassionate. When Richard says, 'they reckon your pet dogs eat you when you die', Newell asks, 'would you be happy with that?' (Newell dir. 2006, min. 31:44-31:49). Richard repeats the comment and she responds, 'So what's your relationship with your dogs?' (Newell dir. 2006, min. 32:08) The filmmaker's voice is emotionless – perhaps she did not know how to deal with Richard's growing distress or did not take it seriously, but her questions seem both callow and callous.

It is an agonising interaction to be privy to, partly because we have no knowledge of what was left out to serve the dramatic demands of the narrative (or not captured on Newell's five hours of footage). Did Newell, in fact, tell Richard how important he was to her? Was his suicidal despair cyclical and not something to be taken too seriously? On her eighteenth birthday Newell got her leg caught in a Ferris wheel and, during her long stint in hospital and the hiatus in filming, Richard Blackie hanged himself. (Marshall-Stoneking 2006, n.p.) After his death, Newell discovered her telephone number was one of the only two in Richard's mobile (Newell 2013, pers. comm. 4 July).

However, to describe this film as predatory or unethical would be to ignore the way that Newell has chosen to implicate herself in the narrative – the inclusion of her curious, less-than-sympathetic questions is brave. This film is not just about Richard, it is also about Richard and Newell's complex relationship. Early in the film, Richard turns the camera on Newell and encourages her to say something about herself and her interest in his life (Newell dir. 2006, min. 3:32). As Marshall-Stoneking (2006, n. p) has observed, it is a 'powerful and important moment' because it 'establishes Maya as a "character", providing us with a face, grounding her relationship with Richard in something more substantial than a mere voice'. As Newell has commented, 'the role of unseen documentarist would not stand. It became impossible to remain outside the frame… I became part of Richard's story' (Newell 2006, n.p.). Here it is worth returning to Philibert's assertion that he does not make films 'about', he makes films 'with' (Philibert, quoted in Saxton 2009, p. 32). *Richard* is most certainly a film *with* in the sense that it is infused with Newell's presence. Inasmuch as Newell has presented Richard as 'something to be experienced' (Nash 2011, p. 231), she also contributes herself to this presentation,

Italian performance artist Vanessa Beecroft shares some of Richard's psychological fragility, but she is also well-known (at least in the art world) and could be deemed to be predatory and exploitative herself in terms of her representations of others. This presents an intriguing viewing conundrum. Pietra

Brettkelly does not spare her participant any indignity in *The Art Star and the Sudanese Twins* (Brettkelly dir. 2008), which is an extraordinarily exposing portrait. However, given Beecroft's ethically questionable practice, this would seem to be a type of poetic justice, partially akin to Piotorowska's 'conning' of conman Killeen. *The Art Star* is bookended with Beecroft at the Venice Biennale coordinating a tableau of semi-nude 'black' women (representing the genocide in Darfur) lying sprawled on a white canvas. At the beginning of the film we hear Beecroft commenting that she needs 'more blood' (Brettkelly dir. 2008, min. 1:04). At the end of the film the artist orders the models to fall down on a white canvas and sloshes a bucket of fish blood over them. Patches of black paint wash off, revealing pale skin. The inherent racial/cultural appropriation and exploitation that Beecroft's artwork appears to both comment on and *enact* is typical (judging from *The Art Star*) of her work. 'Is it difficult to set this up with 30 black women, to bring them together?' a spectator asks. 'Yes,' Beecroft replies without a hint of irony, 'It is very stressful' (Brettkelly dir. 2008, min. 1:34:49). The scene is both preposterous and shocking, suggesting that, for Beecroft, art trumps all.

Stella Bruzzi has described Molly Dineen's *Geri* (a film about ex-Spice Geri Halliwell) as 'a smug ambush documentary, intent upon wresting control from its subject without telling her – and flaunting the fact that it has succeeded' (Bruzzi 2006, p. 204). The notion of an 'ambush' film is interesting to consider with regards to *The Art Star* since, after the release of the film, reviewers zeroed in on Beecroft's character flaws. Logan Hill commented that the film is 'brutally effective because it lets Beecroft hang herself with damaging quotes and appalling behavior' (Hill 2008, p. 1). However, Brettkelly does not present the viewer with any 'universal argument' (Nash 2011, p. 233). In many respects, without any manipulation from Brettkelly, Beecroft is her own worst enemy. Highly articulate, she has uncanny levels of self-insight and is able to intellectually validate her art, yet her actions are often disturbingly out of sync with her rhetoric. However, 'ambush' implies a complete lack of knowledge on the part of the participant, and a deliberate lack of generosity on the part of the filmmaker.

Although hardly flattering to Beecroft, Brettkelly offers a multifaceted psychological portrait of some depth, which provides some insight into Beecroft's behaviour. In an early scene Beecroft holds out a handful of colourful pills to the camera and gives a rundown of the medication she takes for depression. She laughingly admits to obsessive-compulsive tendencies and outbursts of aggression. She also comments that taking Zoloft means that she is 'in a limbo of beauty where you have no desire and no care for anything… In the creative sense it's very good for me but in the social sense it's not very good' (Brettkelly dir. 2008, min. 6:40-7:08). This scene acts as a possible explanation for some of the artist's apparently irrational choices and suggests that joy and emotional/psychological stability are perhaps only attainable for Beecroft via making art.

It is worth briefly outlining the plot of *The Art Star* before discussing BrettKelly's representation of Beecroft and possible transference dynamics. While in Rumbek, Sudan, taking photographs for her upcoming show at the Venice Biennale, Beecroft breastfeeds twins Mongor and Madit, whose mother has died in childbirth. *The Art Star* documents both the creation of works for the exhibition and the artist's obsessive quest to adopt the twins and take them back to America, where she already has two young children.

The film's promotional poster and the DVD cover show Beecroft's self-portrait as a Renaissance Madonna figure with long auburn hair, breast-feeding Mongor and Madit. Slits are cut in her cream dress for her breasts and while one baby sucks, his hand reaching up to grasp the top of Beecroft's dress, the other child stares back at the viewer. While recalling Renaissance paintings, the portrait owes just as much to a contemporary *Vogue*/Benetton image (with all of the accompanying dubious nuances around cultural appropriation and exoticism). The staging of the photograph is a key scene in the film. Driving to where she is about to set it up, a self-aware Beecroft observes to the filmmaker that what she is doing is 'anxiety'-provoking because:

It's mixing reality with fiction and it hurts, I feel I am manipulating, objectifying, using them… I even could go away with no children, no Sudan, no money but I would have a picture. (Brettkelly dir. 2008, min. 7:32-7:51)

Vanessa Beecroft with Mongor and Madit Akot. Still courtesy of Pietra BrettKelly.

Beecroft further explains the portrait to Brettkelly:

When I do a picture, the elements are also conceptual. So, I'm thinking about the West: white, rich, with the breast's milk feeding these poor creatures just for the pleasure of feeling good – that I'm nourishing them but after all, what am I really giving? Not much, because the population is so big. So, in a way, it's also the representation of the demagogic attitude of the West – the mother, the Madonna, the religious frame. (Brettkelly dir. 2008, min. 11:34-12:00)

However, Beecroft's reflections are largely theoretical. During another photographic session in a church, an angry local woman comes in and demands that the twins be clothed because photographing them naked in a church is not

respectful. Beecroft ignores the request and eventually local women take the twins away. Beecroft barricades the door, exclaiming in exasperation 'These people!' (Brettkelly dir. 2008, min. 59:25).

Both Beecroft's art and her desire to adopt the twins (which she pursues at the expense of her marriage) are contextualised through multiple representations from close others: interviews with Beecroft's parents as well as her husband, Greg Durkheim, with whom she has not consulted about the adoption. Details of Vanessa's lonely childhood emerge: a mother who was unwell and needed the young Beecroft to care for her, and a self-absorbed, absent father. Durkheim is a social anthropologist who describes his wife's character with the slightly dispassionate tone one imagines he might apply to ethnographic fieldwork. He compares her to the fictional orphan Heidi, and comments that, during her childhood, Beecroft 'used to draw these family portraits of families that had 30 family members' (Brettkelly dir. 2008, min. 14:29). However, Durkheim also notes (as does Beecroft) that, in attempting to adopt the twins, she is emulating Angelina Jolie.

The text of *The Art Star* is rich with suggestions of transference. We can infer that through parenting Mongor and Madit, who come from a culture where family connections are paramount, Beecroft seeks to assuage her own lack of parenting and fulfil her desire to be surrounded by a large family. The irony is that her actual children, back in New York, are mainly cared for by a Jamaican nanny. It is tempting to extrapolate that, for Beecroft, the fantasy of parenting – of posing as a breastfeeding Renaissance Madonna – is much more appealing than the everyday reality. What seems extraordinary is that Beecroft actually *allowed* such an exposing psychological portrait. In a consideration of how much Beecroft revealed, it seems no coincidence that the artist told the filmmaker that the filmmaker was like her therapist (Brettkelly 2013, pers. comm. 6 January).

Brettkelly recalls that when she met Beecroft in Sudan she had no idea what a performance artist was: 'I thought maybe Vanessa did modern dance' (Brettkelly 2013, pers. comm. 6 January). This misconception turned out to be in Brettkelly's favour; apparently Beecroft agreed to the documentary because the filmmaker knew nothing about her (Brettkelly 2013, pers. comm. 6 January). It was of some significance that Brettkelly was from New Zealand. For Beecroft this was somewhere completely unknown and unconnected to anywhere else. If Beecroft felt that Brettkelly was like her therapist, one can assume she may have felt she was able to say and do anything. Therapists also (at least initially) know nothing about their clients and are not connected to anyone else in their world. Therapists are supposed to be impartial.

However, I also want to draw a comparison to Piotrowska and Killeen here. In the email where Killeen grants the documentary-maker permission to use their email exchange for her doctoral thesis, he insists on the specialness of their connection: 'but you were the only person i would have granted an interview … (ellipsis and lower case letters in the original) … many before you tried … and many after you' (quoted in Piotrowska 2012, p. 25). This has the nuance of a lover saying to the object of his/her love, 'you are the only one for me'. Beecroft's decision to allow Brettkelly to film her, and also to let the filmmaker know that Beecroft had rejected many others, connotes something similar. There is also a good dose of narcissism in the mix: it seems both Killeen and Beecroft were at pains to let Piotrowska and Brettkelly know just how privileged they were. Similarly, Richard says to Newell at the end of *Richard the most interestingest person I've ever met*: 'You're very lucky… you're the chosen one' (Newell dir. 2006, min. 46:56-47:08).

I suggest that a sense of identification may also have occurred between Beecroft and Brettkelly. When they met, both artists were in Rumbek, Sudan, researching projects: Beecroft her Dafur exhibition for the Venice Biennale, and Brettkelly a television documentary on New Zealanders living in unusual parts of the world. The two women are around the same age and are similarly focused on their art.

Brettkelly has observed that she and Beecroft share a certain impulsiveness and belief in fate. They met one evening under a tree in Rumbek. A curious Brettkelly wandered over from the campfire she and her crew were gathered around to Beecroft and her entourage's campfire. Brettkelly has observed that, 'neither of us like to know what tomorrow will bring…. situations present themselves and certain personalities grab them and take them to another degree. Neither of us believes in any limitations' (2013, pers. comm. 6 January).

Meeting under a tree one evening seems an impossibly romantic start. However, after filming was complete, a shadow of betrayal crept into the relationship. Beecroft tried to place limitations on Brettkelly, and it seems that a legal battle was only narrowly averted. After seeing a cut of the film prior to release, the artist sent the documentary-maker a series of legal documents requesting numerous changes. The filmmaker stood her ground, emphasising that it was her name that would be appearing at the front of the film, which reflected her experience and her 'version of the truth' (Brettkelly 2013, pers. comm. 6 January). Ultimately Beecroft backed down and Brettkelly retained editorial control.

I suggest that the representation of a period in Beecroft's life (that must have been both traumatic and defining) in a film that Beecroft did not stage, may have felt like a type of   betrayal. While one assumes that Beecroft's own profession would militate against any naiveté around the dangers of Representation, Brettkelly has commented that 'Vanessa can be really naive about how people see her' (quoted in Cole 2008, p. 2). *The Art Star* clearly demonstrates what a limited awareness the artist has of the impact of her decisions. Beecroft is shown to frequently prioritise aesthetics above all else, including others' feelings. This is not only with regard to the Sudanese, however: Beecroft's own wedding photograph is an intricately staged tableau that she dissects for Brettkelly with unusual emotional distance, pointing out the way the composition signals that her marriage won't really work.

Similarly, while attuned to how she looks on film, Beecroft seems to have little awareness of the assumptions others may make based on her apparent frivolity. As she explains an aspect of the adoption process to Brettkelly, she pauses and coquettishly asks whether the filmmaker would like a 'yellow background', since she is wearing yellow (Brettkelly dir. 2008, min. 24:20). She moves out of the frame to lean against a nearby yellow wall. We hear Brettkelly's voice reminding her that they are talking about 'very serious subjects' (Brettkelly dir. 2008, min. 24:25). Unperturbed, Beecroft laughingly responds that this is her 'handicap' and that her husband thinks she is 'superficial' (Brettkelly dir. 2008, min. 24:29). Arguably, the implications of this 'superficiality' perhaps sank in when Beecroft saw the entire film for the first time – the filmmaker may not have framed her, or, mirrored her back to herself (in the Lacanian sense) in the way she'd expected. Beecroft may have seen a 'character' she could not entirely admire.

In an interview at the premiere of *The Art Star*, Beecroft commented that the film, 'stripped me of any maternal qualities' and that Brettkelly had 'neglected documenting the natural pace in which the event unfolded or my true commitment to that region and people' (Campbell 2008, p. 1). However, Beecroft also states that while the film affected her 'personal life and interfered with the adoption process', she 'accepted it as part of life's circumstances' (Campbell 2008, p. 1). The interviewer doesn't follow up Beecroft's damning remarks and Brettkelly's reply (if she gave one) is not recorded. What is of interest here is that while Beecroft states that she has been misrepresented, she simultaneously accepts the situation. It would be easy to assume that perhaps Beecroft's interest in fame won out – that, as the maxim goes, 'any publicity is good publicity'. However, I want to return to both the issue of relationship between filmmaker and participant and the notion of character. I suggest that Beecroft's eventual acceptance of the situation was perhaps an acknowledgement of Brettkelly's role as an artist. Aspects of the dynamic between Beecroft and Brettkelly – two artists – can be compared to aspects of the encounter between Piotrowska and Killeen: Piotrowska cons the con man and Brettkelly frames the framer. By insisting on the validity of her particular

representation of Beecroft, Brettkelly beats Beecroft at her own game. After the artist requested that the filmmaker make changes to *The Art Star,* the filmmaker responded, 'I'm doing what you would do in your own art – those women don't have a say in what you do' (Cole 2008, p. 1). I suggest that, like Oliver Killeen, Beecroft had an awareness of herself as a 'character' or a performer in a narrative of her own making (as with her highly crafted photographs). Perhaps she was initially unprepared for the experience of being framed by another artist and the lack of power that entailed. Yet eventually because she *is* an artist who works with images she was able to recognise the Vanessa who features in *The Art Star* as a type of fiction, and the product of the relationship she had with Brettkelly during filming, rather than something defining.

Conclusion: Particularity and vigilance

In this chapter I have demonstrated the importance of acknowledging the complexity of the filmmaker-participant relationship – one that allows, as Brettkelly has observed, 'an intense entrée' into a person's private world (Brettkelly 2013, pers. comm. 6 January). Although there may be a predatory component to the filmmaker's desire for a good story and the act of representing another, each of the films I have discussed are evidence that the person being represented frequently welcomes the interest. Participants have their own needs that they hope may be fulfilled by the filmmaking process. This might range from a desire for a type of unconditional love in the form of 'a sympathetic eye… an admiring eye… an interested eye… an empathetic eye/ear' (Berman, Rosenheimer, & Aviad 2003, pp. 287-288), the attention that a devoted parent or partner might ideally offer, or it may be connected to a belief that the film might somehow solve an issue in a participant's life (as demonstrated in *The Thin Blue Line* (Morris dir. 1988)).

Representation of aspects of an actual person's life can, as Pryluck has pointed out, have real life implications for that person (Pryluck 2005, p. 204). However,

representation and the relationship with the participant are not without dangers for the practitioner. In the case of *The Thin Blue Line* (Morris dir. 1988) and *Être et Avoir* (Philibert dir. 2002), neither Morris nor Philibert came out unscathed and what occurred post release of each film could not have been predicted. Similarly, Newell's interactions with Richard Blackie must have had a significant emotional effect on the filmmaker. I want to return here to Nash's assertion that that a 'universal abstract approach will not suffice for a practice that depends on the relationship between one particular individual and another' (Nash 2009, p. 24). Extending on this, I describe the documentary relationship as one that is potentially multifaceted and inherently unpredictable. It seems apparent from the films I have discussed that neither filmmaker nor participant can ever know exactly what each person may expect from the other or what the exact product of the relationship (the film) will be.

I suggest, therefore, that a documentary practitioner has an ethical responsibility to cultivate clarity and transparency on a number of levels. This is pertinent to roles, responsibilities and authorship (what making a film 'with' rather than 'about' a participant actually entails for all involved); how the construction of a certain narrative and 'character' might impact on the actuality of a participant's life and identity; as well as an awareness of potential transference and counter-transference dynamics and how this might affect each person in the dyad. A positive transference may mean that the participant is more open and more vulnerable than s/he would normally be and imagines that the documentary-maker will be act as a 'permissive, all-accepting, all-forgiving mother' (Malcolm 1990, p. 32). In itself this confers an added ethical responsibility on the filmmaker. As the representation of Vanessa Beecroft in *The Art Star and the Sudanese Twins* demonstrates, even a practising artist may reveal an extraordinary amount in the documentary encounter without much apparent consideration for how their revelations might contribute to a particular narrative. The ethical paradox of the documentary encounter is that, while a practitioner has a responsibility to be clear and transparent, what transpires emotionally and psychologically may be rather unclear.

Chapter 3: Poetic Representation as Social Responsibility

In this chapter I focus on my own film work, specifically aspects of *No One Eats Alone* (Bilbrough dir. 2010), which demonstrates the shifting terrain of the participant-filmmaker relationship and the potential for both positive and negative emotions on both sides. I discuss how aspects of *No One Eats Alone* informed the content and form of *Separation* (Bilbrough dir. 2013c), a documentary poem about my attempts to parent Abe. This film is a companion piece, and response, to the parenting narratives in *No One Eats Alone*. The way *No One Eats Alone* was made in a collaborative community context contrasts starkly with the films I have discussed in the previous chapter. Interactions with many of the participants were mediated through an interpreter and a Community Steering Committee. This was a further mediating influence that affected the content of the film. The process I employed to make No One Eats Alone has its origins in the cinéma vérité techniques of Rouch.

Given these factors, my work would appear to have little in common with the films I discussed in the previous chapter. However, despite my attention to the risks of representation for participants, I do not suggest that a collaborative approach to documentary making provides an easy answer to the ethical complexity inherent in the documentary relationship. In this chapter I want to highlight the difficulty in ethically representing aspects of another person's life story *despite* collaborative processes. I suggest that a filmmaking process that focuses on, and prioritises, relationships confers an added responsibility on the practitioner because it can bring complex representational issues to the fore, issues which may never have arisen, or which may have been minimised in the context of a more conventional documentary production. As a type of negotiated collage, in which each participant decided on the content of her own story, *No One Eats Alone* might be described as conforming to Levinasian principles in that it includes each woman's individual testimony without advancing a 'universal argument' (Nash 2011, p. 233). However, assumptions I made about what was ethical as a filmmaker often differed

greatly from individual participants' perspectives on what should be expressed on film.

Filmmaker Andres di Tella has contended that auto/biography is 'an act of *responsibility*'. Di Tella writes (2012, pp. 35-36): 'I assume responsibility for this story. I answer for it with my life. I answer for my ideas about film and art (and life with my own life… And of course, in so doing, I confess my limitations'. In this chapter I explore this idea of responsibility via a discussion of *Separation* (Bilbrough dir. 2013c), which is a representation of my own highly subjective auto/biographical experience. I also discuss the ethical risks posed by auto/biography, particularly when the people being represented are from marginalised cultural backgrounds.

Representations of Sudanese-Australians in the mainstream Australian media had a significant impact on both *No One Eats Alone* and *Separation*. While making both films I was aware that there was a risk of inadvertently falling into the trap of what Ella Shohat (1995, p. 169) has referred to as 'allegorical representation'. According to Shohat, in texts by/about people from minority cultures, the individual 'is seen, at least partially, as synedochically summing up a vast and presumably homogenous community' (Shohat 1995, p. 169). Echoing Simon Cottle's (1997) research findings on the perspectives of BBC producers from ethnic minority backgrounds, many *No One Eats Alone* participants had a heightened awareness of responsibility around representing personal stories that might contribute to negative perceptions of their whole community.

I return here to Eakin's contention that, 'because our own lives never stand free of the lives of others, we are faced with a responsibility to those others whenever we write about ourselves (Eakin 1999, p. 159).' Although Eakin's observation relates to close others, such as family, I suggest that people from marginalised communities may also carry what has been widely referred to as the 'burden of representation (Cottle 1997)' for a whole culture. This adds an extra layer of

responsibility for the filmmaker, artist or researcher who is mediating representation. A significant part of taking responsibility is acknowledging inherent power dynamics. As novelist Chimamanda Aidichie (2009, n.p.) has noted, 'power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person'. Arguably, definitive representations are always a danger, and I suggest that it is the responsibility of the filmmaker/artist/researcher to find a way to resolve or bypass them.

In this chapter I propose that a poetic approach offers a possible way forward in representing aspects of life stories involving shared privacies and/or sensitive cultural material. This suggests important scholarly considerations for an ethics that is specific to visual representation or video/film methods. Such a consideration is applicable to both contexts in which the central concern is an art product or event, and to those in which the primary concern is research. In discussing a poetic approach with relation to documentary, I return to Varda's description of 'opening gates and windows' for the audience 'to leave the film and go and vagabond' (von Boehm dir. 2009, 5:56-6:31). I also draw on Nicolas Bourriard's notion of relational aesthetics (Bourriard 1998, pp. 20-21), where, as Hjorth and Sharp have observed, it is the viewer/audience who 'is a community to be collaborated with to create intersubjective encounters' (Hjorth & Sharp 2014, p. 128). *Separation*, a deliberately elliptical narrative about an emotionally charged experience, has a similarly intersubjective intention.

The first part of this chapter focuses on *No One Eats Alone*. I briefly summarise media representations of Sudanese-Australians at the time the film was made, which impacted on considerations around content. I then discuss the issues I encountered representing the stories of two single mothers, Ajok and Mary, who were sharing a house and raising their children together. I then move to a discussion of the ethical concerns posed by a story told by an older woman, Bronica, who was devastated by the loss of her daughter. In the second part of the chapter I tell the story of my contact with Abe and the resulting film, *Separation*. I

focus on what 'responsibility' entailed in each context with regard to both auto/biography, and representation. In discussing both Bronica's narrative and *Separation,* I look at the ways in which both ethical and aesthetic considerations function together and separately in the construction of poetic documentary production.

Definitive, allegorical stories: Sudanese-Australians in the media

Novelist Chimamanda Aidichie (2009, n.p.) has observed that the 'single story' of Africa, is often one of 'catastrophe', one in which there 'is no possibility of feelings more complex than pity, no possibility of a connection as human equals'. In 2007, when I began making *No One Eats Alone*, the 'single' allegorical story of Sudanese-Australians in the media was of young Sudanese men as gang members (Windle 2008; Nolan et al 2011). In September of 2007 Liep Gony, a 19-year-old Sudanese-Australian student, was brutally bashed at a Melbourne train station and died two days later from his injuries. Media reports at the time suggested Gony had been assaulted by a gang of Sudanese youths (Nolan et al 2011, p. 656). Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews responded with a public statement about 'some groups (not) settling and adjusting into the Australian way of life' (quoted in Farouque, Petrie & Miletic 2007, n.p.). Subsequently, it was revealed that the attackers were two young white Australian men who had gone out with the intention of committing a race-based assault (Hunt 2010).

It was evident to many *No One Eats Alone* participants that different images needed to be created of the Sudanese-Australian community. The women discussed how they wanted to contribute to their visibility (as women) and challenge what was already out there. While print media has largely depicted young Sudanese men as gang members, documentaries have tended towards a depiction of young male Sudanese refugees as heroes. As Harris has pointed out, while there are numerous films on the 'sufferings and resilience of the "Lost Boys of Sudan"', there is a dearth of films featuring Sudanese women (Harris 2012, p. 36). While *No One Eats*

Alone sought to contribute to redressing this comparative invisibility, my responsibilities as a filmmaker were complex. It is worth noting that the motivations behind the documentary were not only artistic or concerned with telling a compelling story. *No One Eats Alone* also had advocacy aims. This added complexity to the process of filmmaking. As Joke Hermes has contended, advocacy is 'a politically motivated, tightrope act between listening, being of service to others and paternalism' (Hermes 2009, p. 118).

Negotiation and reciprocity

Here I discuss the issues involved in representing Ajok and Mary's stories and ensuring that each had agency in terms of representation. What is most significant was the difficulty I encountered negotiating the tone and content of the material due to my *assumptions* around ethical responsibility. Of particular relevance to my interactions with Ajok and Mary, is Nash's contention that a 'universal abstract approach will not suffice for a practice that depends on the relationship between one particular individual and another' and involves 'shifting power relations' and 'ongoing negotiation' (Nash 2009, p. 24). In this context my own auto/biography and my position as the 'subject supposed to know' played an unexpected role. What transpired is illustrative of Oakley's comment that in longitudinal interviewing there is 'no intimacy without reciprocity' (Oakley 1981, p. 49).

Before going any further, I will briefly summarise what I understood Ajok and Mary's situation to be. The two women were sharing Ajok's small flat. They had six children between them and were each wait-listed for more appropriate public housing. The father of two of Ajok's children lived nearby, but he had another wife and gave Ajok little support. Although under-resourced, Ajok frequently took in friends who did not have stable housing. Oakley has commented that if the interview she was conducting 'clashed with the demands of housework and motherhood' then she often helped with the housework (Oakley 1981, p. 47). I visited Ajok many times before filming began in order to establish what she

wanted to talk about. Similarly, sometimes I helped with housework or assisted with the children. Although Ajok had chosen to be involved in *No One Eats Alone*, I did not want the film and my presence to be an imposition or an added duty.

The story Ajok told on camera was one of loss and abuse. Separated from her mother as a child, she was married at fourteen to a much older man who beat her, and who had other wives. Eventually she had managed to escape, and came to Australia with her two daughters. Just days before we'd started filming *No One Eats Alone*, a woman claiming to be Ajok's mother had contacted her, saying that she'd been bitten by a snake and needed money for medicine. Ajok wept as she related this last part and said, 'When we talk she doesn't sound like my mother and she doesn't speak to me like I'm her child' (Bilbrough dir. 2010, min. 16:33). Mary's story was similarly characterised by separation – firstly from her family as a result of civil war and more recently from her husband, who had gone to Sudan to pay a dowry to her parents and never returned. Mary had heard that he was involved with other women. She said she felt angry with men, and with Australian welfare agencies and governments, for not providing housing. She felt that if she had not been separated from her mother at a very young age, her situation would be very different.

From my perspective both stories raised representational concerns. Although Grace McKenzie, the cinematographer, had respectfully framed Ajok in mid-shot throughout her story rather than zooming in during her distress, I felt a sense of being both a voyeur and predator. Here I was, constructing a narrative from someone's real-life grief – grief that, rather than being a distant memory, was still unfolding. Aware of my role as a 'giver' and 'framer' (Trinh, quoted in Hohenberger 2007, p. 115), I was also worried that Ajok and Mary might later regret exposing this level of vulnerability. I thought that there was a chance that they might feel that something had been taken rather than given. However, while Ajok was not especially interested in the editing process, she was adamant that her story should be included in the film. I suggest that this was evidence of my position

as the 'subject supposed to know' – that as a filmmaker I would know what to do with the footage and, by extension, with events in Ajok's life. As I have stated in Chapter One, it is likely that my work as a filmmaker was closely associated with the co-producer's case management role, which contributed to a perception of my authority/knowledge.

As a filmmaker, my aesthetic interests were just as strong as any ethical concern; I wanted to provide a narrative counterpoint to the stories of loss – a demonstration of Ajok's determination and her support of friends despite her own grief about her mother, and her lack of a supportive husband or stable housing. Without this, I felt the representation of Ajok and Mary was in danger of being reductive – another story of 'catastrophe' (Aidichie 2009, n.p.). When I explained my thoughts, the women reluctantly agreed to continue filming. However, when I arrived a week later, they were uncharacteristically cool.

While we waited for the interpreter they both expressed great frustration and anger about their housing situation. I agreed that it was terrible but I couldn't provide an answer. This made things worse. Ajok wanted to know how I could possibly understand their situation. I had stable housing, was free of the responsibility of children and would never have to experience the difficulty of being a second wife. Ajok was adamant that she did not have a 'happy story' and would not 'make one up' for the sake of the film (Ajok 2009, pers. comm. 8 February). Reflecting now, I suggest that a negative transference had occurred. I was the 'subject supposed to know', who surprisingly did *not* know (or perhaps from Ajok's perspective was pretending not to). I was like a negligent parent who would not provide.

The interpreter never arrived, but Mary, perhaps wanting to smooth things over, persuaded us to continue. During filming she provided the 'happy' story, speaking warmly about her friendship with Ajok, who was silent. As I packed up, Ajok resumed talking about our difference in situation, commenting that my life must be easy. Suddenly angry, I responded that I disliked being childless, I lived miles out

of the city and my last relationship had ended because of infidelity. I *did* have some inkling of men who wanted more than one wife. There was a surprised, shocked silence, then cathartic laughter. We made tea and the tone of the conversation became confiding and anecdotal. Ajok told a story about an uncle who had returned home one evening accidentally wearing his mistress's underpants. Mary said she'd had housing outside of the city, but had felt lonely and isolated. I didn't use the footage shot that day. Instead I used the testimonies that Ajok and Mary had chosen to give previously. During post-production, although their situations had changed, the women expressed no regret about these representations.

I want to return now to my desire for a narrative counterpoint – a story that balanced out Ajok's testimonies of loss and disappointment. While from one perspective I was only ensuring that Ajok and Mary had an awareness of the impact of their stories becoming public, the situation might also be interpreted in a way that is less complimentary to me. Seeking a balanced narrative was an aesthetic concern that served to construct Ajok as a character. I return here to Levinas's notion of violence towards the Other as consisting of 'interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognise themselves' (Levinas 1969, p. 21). Particularly pertinent is Ajok's assertion that she did not have a happy story and 'would not make one up' (Ajok 2009, pers. comm. 8 February).

Rather than accepting her testimony of something that had profoundly affected her, I was asking for a story/performance that would demonstrate the contradictions in Ajok's life, the light and shade needed to make her a well-rounded protagonist. To draw upon Nash I was attempting to present Ajok as 'something to be experienced' (Nash 2011, p. 231). Inadvertently, I was still reducing her life to a narrative – a gesture of taking rather than giving. I could see that my request for a different story also had a naive complacency to it, as if Ajok could switch moods at will.

Returning to the transference paradigm, my outburst of anger towards Ajok can be interpreted as counter-transference, although arguably the 'subject supposed to know' should not lose her/his temper in such a personal way. It is part of a therapist's/teacher's/documentary-maker's role to keep her/his cool. It is worth considering Butler's notion of transference here. Regarding the process of telling a story, Butler has contended:

> I am doing something with this telling, acting on you in some way. And this telling is also doing something to me, acting on me in ways that I may well not understand as I go. (Butler 2005, p. 51)

I suggest that this can be applied to the situation between me, Ajok and Mary. I was undeniably affected by their stories, but the way that the stories acted on me was unclear and I did not know in what way to respond. Similarly my story (in the form of my outburst) acted on Ajok and Mary. Although I contended earlier that my inability to provide an answer to Ajok and Mary's housing problem contributed to the problem because I was *supposed* to know, my spontaneous, angry response to Ajok's anger actually broke the illusion of 'inviolate authority' (Baumlin & Weaver 2000, p. 82), moving me away from the position of the 'subject supposed to know' to a more vulnerable position that was not so radically different from Ajok and Mary's.

Perhaps sharing aspects my own auto/biography so candidly was inadvertently the most ethical response to the situation. Butler (2005, p. 20) contends that 'Moments of unknowingness about oneself tend to emerge in the context of relations to others'. Acknowledging this is integral to Butler's concept of ethical responsibility. According to Butler, 'we must recognise that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at the moments of unknowingness' (Butler 2005, p. 136). I suggest that my angry response was the 'risk' in this situation and evidence of my 'willingness to become undone in relation to others' (Butler 2005, p. 136) – in this case Mary and Ajok. It was also an unplanned demonstration of reciprocity.

The bowl with the hole: the flawed nature of resettlement

I want to now turn to my interactions with Bronica, which vividly illustrate the 'burden of representation', but also the potential power of poetic, non-literal storytelling strategies. Bronica was an eloquent woman in her fifties who had specifically engaged with the *No One Eats Alone* project to address an issue to the Australian government. Her central point was the breakdown of traditional Sudanese family structure. She railed against young people disobeying their elders, drinking and hanging out on the streets and against parents separating. Welfare services, she said, had taken away one of her daughters because of different understandings of discipline. 'We beat our women and children in Sudan,' Bronica asserted, 'and as a community we Sudanese want some authority; we want to continue to do things as they have always been done' (unedited footage 2008, 19 November).

Bronica's narrative triggered an immediate negative response from the Steering Committee, who worried that viewers would believe Bronica's particular version of Sudanese culture as the *only* truth. One woman felt that Bronica's views were offensive and out-dated, and commented that 'white people might think that all Sudanese believe in beating women' (pers. comm. 2008, 5 October). Clearly Bronica's story had the potential to inadvertently contribute to the Australian media's Othering of the Sudanese community. In addition to her use of 'we' to express her individual point of view, aspects of Bronica's narrative fed into the media's representations of young Sudanese-Australians as gangsters. Yet on the other hand, anxiety about how these elements of her story might be understood resulted in a type of censorship of her individual voice.

Bronica's story also revealed how values and definitions often assumed to be universal absolutes are dependent on a combination of personal, cultural and social positions. This was particularly evidenced in the concept of 'child'. Bronica attributed me with the power to ensure that the Australian Government would

listen to her concerns (perhaps as a white Australian and the 'subject supposed to know'), but she also referred to me as 'little girl'. A committee member explained that from a traditional Southern Sudanese perspective the fact that I was unmarried and without children meant that I was not yet fully adult. Based on the western concept of 'child', I had assumed that Bronica's daughter must be between six and ten years old and I felt enormous sympathy. However, further questions revealed that Bronica's daughter was actually nineteen. The daughter's unplanned pregnancy had resulted in a dispute with Bronica and a welfare organisation assisting with independent housing. In a further twist, her daughter did not want to be a parent, so Bronica had taken responsibility for her granddaughter. This was quite a different narrative from the removal of a child by welfare services. It was also one that both the committee and I agreed would, in its current form, evoke far less sympathy and understanding from a non-Sudanese audience.

It was evident that what lay beneath Bronica's narrative was enormous and almost unmanageable loss. Describing her life in Sudan in an earlier video interview (which I transcribed for the booklet that accompanies *No One Eats Alone*) she had said:

> We were born, seven of us. Then five died. There were two of us left. My mother and father died. My sister and her child died. My other siblings died and they were not married. There were two of us left. Then war started. (Dhiew quoted in Bilbrough 2010, p. 22)

This matter-of-fact summary of tragedy was the foundation for Bronica's further statement that she managed to ensure that her children 'lived and became adults' (Dhiew quoted in Bilbrough 2010, p. 22). Losing a daughter because of different cultural mores was the culmination of a myriad of losses. Bronica's personal loss was also connected to broader feelings of disempowerment and cultural dislocation. She commented that in Australia 'family' had a different meaning: '… whole families are separated; children by themselves, mother by herself, father by himself. Everyone makes their own way' (Dhiew quoted in Bilbrough 2010, p. 23).

Bronica's rage about young men drinking and hanging around on the streets stemmed from distress about the lack of respect for traditional Sudanese culture and a negation of community elders' power.

From an aesthetic perspective, I found Bronica compelling because of her passionate articulation of her particular worldview. The dissonance around different notions of discipline added complexity to her story. From my perspective it is the combination of emotion and complexity that often drives a narrative. Listening to Bronica's story, a committee member had worried that it might sound as if the Sudanese community were 'ungrateful' for all the settlement assistance they'd been given in Australia. As a non-Sudanese I had no perceived need to feel 'grateful' and Bronica's story did not have the power to reflect negatively on me. As such I admired the independence of her voice. Although the 'facts' of Bronica's story were discomforting, her attitude seemed a courageous dissent from 'happy', 'grateful' refugee voices and as such ruptured overly positive discourses around Australia as the 'lucky country' and refugee benefactor. However, from my perspective Bronica's rage also necessitated a broader context and some kind of resolution as there was a danger of it not fitting into the film's overall narrative and thus alienating or confusing viewers. This aesthetic consideration was quite apart from any anxiety about culturally essentialist interpretations.

However, there was simply not the space or time to tease out the complicated layers of Bronica's story. Responsibility to the whole group of women and the overall narrative logic of the film had to take priority. As a framer I had to a find a compromise: a way to represent Bronica's concerns that did not take away the individuality of her voice, that did not disregard the Committee's views and that 'worked' on an aesthetic level. It is worth returning here to Ruby's argument for a reflexive practice, which reveals documentaries as 'created, structured articulations of the filmmaker and not authentic, truthful, objective records' (Ruby 2005, p. 44). Clifford's description of ethnographic texts as 'constructed domains of truth, serious fictions' (Clifford 1988, p. 10) is also highly relevant.

Ultimately the version of Bronica's story that appears in *No One Eats Alone* is a poetic co-articulation – a 'serious fiction' created by Bronica, Hellen Berberi (the translator) and myself, based on an extended metaphor.

After the first interview on camera, I visited Bronica three more times: once to explain why I could not use the original footage and twice more to shoot new material. Initially I did not expect that Bronica would necessarily pay much attention to my concerns – she had told her story with a great deal of passion and I was uncertain that she would listen to the perspective of a 'little girl'. In fact her response was a positive one. I felt empathic towards Bronica and in turn she treated me warmly, as if, perhaps, I was one of her daughters. In this case the transference dynamic was positive.

As well as discussing the representation of Sudanese-Australians in the media, I spoke with Bronica about *No One Eats Alone* as an artwork with an aesthetic logic. Bronica responded well to this – perhaps because she teaches traditional Sudanese dance and is no stranger to performance. When we visited to film again she was making costumes for her class and offered a narrative that was an expression of her own artistry. Discussions with the committee had involved negotiating acceptable content in terms of the politics of representation. The solution, however, could only really come from Bronica and was dependent on our relationship. The version of Bronica's story that appears in *No One Eats Alone* (both the booklet and film) hinges on a metaphor she uses for the flawed nature of the resettlement experience:

> Australia has cleaned a bowl; they have cooked food and put it in the bowl. We Sudanese came with a lot of interest wanting to eat this well prepared food in a beautiful dish. But the woman who prepared this food has made a hole in the dish and the food falls out. (Dhiew quoted in Bilbrough 2010, p. 23)

Bronica still uses 'we' in this narrative and her story could still be seen as contributing to essentialism. I felt that in this case, however, it was unlikely that anyone would be able to attribute any particular characteristic to the Sudanese

community from her metaphor, except a desire to accept hospitality and partake of something appealing. Throughout filming Bronica had been threading a necklace. To illustrate the bowl she held up a plate of multi-coloured beads and tapped the bottom emphatically with the point of her scissors. Although it is impossible to know Bronica's *exact* intent, the metaphor of the bowl seems to sum up a paradox inherent in resettlement – that of being surrounded by material abundance, but still experiencing loss and cultural dislocation. When I edited the footage, I let this become the central focus. Bronica's separation from her daughter is ambiguous in this final edit, allowing the viewer to believe that she is speaking of a young child. Although a deliberate 'fiction', it is true to Bronica's feelings. While aspects of Bronica's story have been taken away, I would argue that aesthetically the final version has more 'give', since its non-factual nature allows the viewer's imagination to come into play, opening up rather than closing off interpretations. As such it resists homogenising Bronica's story as '*the* Sudanese experience'.

Improvised parenting

I am hardly physically present in *No One Eats Alone* – there are some fleeting shots of me holding the microphone, listening intently and talking to Bronica. Yet I had an intense emotional response to participants' stories and at the end of filming the project felt somehow unresolved. As I have previously mentioned, *Separation* forms the link between *No One Eats Alone* and my own family stories. Halfway through filming *No One Eats Alone* I made a decision to take care of Abe, a young Sudanese-Australian. In this half of the chapter I discuss the making of *Separation,* a four-minute documentary-poem that is my own story of 'parental' loss.

Just as storytellers and artists from ethnic minorities may be hampered by the 'burden of representation', one of the biggest dilemmas for an auto/biographer is how much of their own life can be revealed before others' right to privacy is trespassed upon. Without intending to cause hurt, the auto/biographer may inadvertently do just that. Nancy K. Miller expresses the conundrum thus: 'It is not

my wish to do harm, but I am forced to acknowledge that I may well cause pain –
or embarrassment to others – if I also believe, as I do, in my right to tell my story'
(Miller 2004, p. 157). Like Miller, I believe in this right, but not at all costs. The
creation of any auto/biographical work for me is a process of carefully weighing
my creative impulses against the possible consequences to close others and my
relationships with those others. As such my framing choices and the expression of
my voice in *Separation* needed to be just as considered as my role as mediator and
framer of the women's voices in *No One Eats Alone.*

While working with Bronica on her story, I had a strong urge to tell her about Abe.
Although I disagreed with her ideas around discipline, she conveyed an aura of
warmth and strength. However, feeling as if I might appear to be competing with
her story of maternal loss or trivialising it, I held back. After all, I had brought the
situation upon myself. Abe's story also had uncomfortable resonances with
Bronica's in that government child protection services had removed him from the
care of relatives after allegations of violence. While I had nothing to do with child
protection, I worried that Bronica might see me as being in the enemy camp: a
white family wrecker and part of the flawed settlement experience.

My first contact with Abe was as the coordinator of a youth centre in Melbourne
that he visited daily. His interactions with my colleagues and me were one of the
few constants in his life. Conversations with Abe included typical teenage concerns
such as unfair treatment at school and budding relationships with girls, but they
also touched on the question of how to feel at home in a foreign culture without
family or much acceptance from either the Sudanese or mainstream Australian
community. Abe becoming literally homeless coincided with my decision to resign
from my job (I had bought a house far from Melbourne and it was too far to
commute). One evening, after hours of unsuccessfully trying to find Abe
accommodation for that night, I took him home. He had been sleeping rough and
had lost his wallet and a bag containing his school uniform.

My organisation's code of ethics forbade non-professional contact with clients. Such boundaries are in place to protect the client from exploitation and prevent workers from burning out. Theoretically I had no argument with this. However, the shocking nature of Abe's situation and his distress, combined with my personal ethos of children being everyone's responsibility, overrode a rule that, in this instance, seemed to condone negligence and a lack of humanity. Abe did not have adult support after five o'clock in the evening and I knew he was not an isolated case. I was prepared to weather the consequences of my decision.

Ultimately, Abe only stayed with me half a dozen times or so over a three-month period. While Abe badly wanted the love and care of a parent, he was also used to living independently. From what he told me, I gathered that he had suffered neglect and violence from those supposed to be caring for him, and as a result found it difficult to trust adults. Although he was a sophisticated verbal storyteller he was barely literate in written English, which meant that school was a struggle. Abe also had the beginnings of a serious alcohol problem.

Abe spent most nights out with friends, which was something I had very little control over. I spent countless evenings worrying about how much he was drinking (and who with) and about the possibility of him being seriously injured or killed. Sometimes he'd call in the middle of the night and I'd go and pick him up. Other times I drove around the streets for hours, searching for him, nauseous with apprehension. When Abe was at home he was interested in building a connection. He didn't want to watch television or spend time in his room. He wanted me to teach him to cook and tell him about my actual family. He was puzzled and saddened by the fact that they weren't close by. He hoped that I would marry my partner as soon as possible and asked if he could give a speech at the wedding. However, Abe also expressed distress at the possibility of me having a child and replacing him.

Undeniably, there was a transference dynamic involved in my interactions with Abe. He was looking for a parent and, although I was not entirely prepared to look after an adolescent, I was conscious that I wanted a child. After Abe came to stay, I discovered that his father was unknown and that, when Abe was four, his mother had met another man and left her son in the care of a distant relative. This had a parallel to my own childhood: when I was four my mother had also met someone else and my father subsequently brought me up. Although I had told Abe nothing about my family, he asked one evening, 'Why did your mother leave you?' His tone was careful as if I might still be upset. I did not know if he had intuited something about me akin to himself or whether he was simply expressing sorrow that I currently lived apart from my family.

Although there were many people who disapproved of my actions, my insistence on continuing to talk both about Abe's situation and my non-sanctioned involvement in his life also garnered some support. I was able to secure significant start-up funding for a pilot program aimed at connecting young people who were unaccompanied refugee minors with adult mentors. However, this did not assist Abe as an individual. He needed much more than a mentor. When I eventually moved into the house I had bought outside the city, Abe decided to stay in the area where most of his friends lived. We saw each other less and less because Abe did not have a phone and was not living at any fixed address. When we did see one another we exchanged significant emotional details from our lives, leavening the serious moments with a funny anecdote or observation. If other people were present, Abe told them the story of our connection with what I perceived to be pride and affection. Each time I was left with the awful realisation that there was very little I could do to contribute practically to his life. However, what I *could* do was continue talking about the situation he was in, one that I was on the periphery of, but which was often uppermost in my mind.

A desire to belong and be connected to others in a meaningful way in the face of loss and family breakdown became the basis of *Separation*. In telling the story of

my relationship with Abe, I also wanted to critique a type of cultural segregation: the idea that particular ethnic groups needed to stick together. A concern constantly raised by welfare organisations and the government, during the period that Abe stayed with me, was that his 'own cultural community needed to take care of him' and as such he was not my 'responsibility'. However, no one had stepped forward to take care of Abe. Arguably, many people in his own community did not have the resources to take on a traumatised adolescent when they were experiencing enough difficulties parenting their own children in a new cultural context. From my perspective, many of the concerns surrounding my decision to take care of Abe were based on fear. As David L. Altheide has observed:

> We experience most of our lives through a lens of fear. Concerns, risks, and dangers are magnified and even distorted by this lens. Caution has given way to avoidance. Rarity has been replaced by typicality. (Altheide 2002, pp. 240-241)

The problem with my decision to care for Abe was that it was atypical. While I could not deny Abe's need for support and acknowledgement from his own community, equally I believed that this should not become an excuse for non-Sudanese to remain uninvolved and uninterested. Such an attitude runs the risk of becoming an abdication of personal and public responsibility. It is also an inadvertent variety of Othering – akin to the 'us and them' attitude underpinning media representations of Sudanese-Australians.

Reading 'How the West was Lost'

Two years after I had completed *No One Eats Alone,* Abe's life seemed more desperate than ever: he had quit school and was still struggling with homelessness and significant alcohol issues. I was also aware that, in the media, young Sudanese-Australian men were still predominantly represented as Other. 'How the West was Lost' (Oakes 2012), an article published in June 2012 in *The Age* (Melbourne's principal daily newspaper), was particularly noteworthy in terms of my project

because it was about Abe's friends and peers. While Abe is not quoted, it is likely that he was present when his friends were interviewed. The central focus of the piece is young 'African' men as social problem. 'Before long', Dan Oakes writes, 'stories began emerging of violent robberies… carried out by youths of African appearance' (Oakes 2012, p. 4). Oakes visits a public park in the 'early afternoon' after being told that at that time 'the boys and men who hang around there are likely to be more sober and less aggressive'. According to Oakes:

> The advice, however well meaning, was incorrect. Six or seven African migrants aged between 17 and 25 sat on benches in varying states of drunkenness, some openly swigging from bottles and casks of alcohol. (Oakes 2021, p. 2)

In a country where there is significant binge drinking across ethnic backgrounds, it seems odd that the focus should be particularly turned on a group of young 'African' men as if their drinking is an isolated or ethnically based issue. The individuals are largely invisible in this story – over-determined by, and reduced to, their ethnicity and alcohol usage.

I was aware that the story I wanted to tell involved a young man who, in many ways, superficially conformed to media stereotypes about the demographic he belonged to. Abe hung out with a large group of male friends, favoured an American rapper look and, like numerous other Australian teenagers, drank heavily. However, these details said little about Abe as an individual. Here I return to MacDougall's assertion that the innate vulnerability of participants in documentary film is due to the 'crime' of representation: 'By freezing life, every film to some degree offends against the complexity of people and the destiny that awaits them' (MacDougall 1998, pp. 37-38). I did not want to represent Abe in a way that reduced and over-simplified his life. This presented a significant ethical problem. Given that any representation is highly problematic, what gave me any more right than the journalist to represent Abe at a particularly vulnerable juncture in his life?

During happier times, Abe had sometimes inquired about the documentary and oral history work that I did, and hinted that he would like me to focus on *his* story. Abe is a compelling storyteller with an ear for dialogue and a talent for recalling intriguing detail. However, when I broached the topic of making a film about our experiences as an improvised 'family', Abe shrugged and said, 'Different day, same story, I'm still homeless and it's no secret.' But he was also clear that he did not want to participate. When I asked him why, he tapped the side of his head then mine. 'It's here already. Why do you need to make a film when it's here?'

It is impossible to know exactly what Abe meant by this. He did not say he didn't want me to make a film, but perhaps he was suggesting that our story should remain private. Or perhaps he was commenting on the impossibility of representation to replicate the past. He may have wanted to convey that memory, feeling and imagination are enough. Whatever the case, it was clear that making a film was about my own need to articulate the situation, not Abe's, and that telling it would not improve his circumstances. By telling Abe's story, I was aware that I would be exerting a type of power and authority that was lacking in Abe's current life.

There is no easy ethical answer to this. The only solution (and it is partial) was a reflexive acknowledgement of my involvement in Abe's life and my subjectivity. Without Abe's participation, all I felt I could actually do was frame my own experience on film, making it abundantly clear to the viewer that this was my perspective. Like Bronica's story, *Separation* is a 'constructed domain of truth, a serious fiction (Clifford 1988, p. 10)'. Four minutes in total, it offers fragments of a story. There is nothing in this film that could identify Abe, except to those people who already know us well. I want to now look at the details of my construction of a 'serious fiction'.

Turning personal experience into a documentary-poem

With relation to Abe, I had a hoard of vivid mental images, feelings and snatches of conversation: a dozen possible beginnings for a narrative. Searching for a way to re-present the story of my improvised parent-child relationship with Abe, I wrote the following poem:

Shifty Fruit

Come four o'clock, back to a full room
he'd sing his day across my desk:

the locker he couldn't open, two-finger typing,
mouth dry with the harsh newness of everything.

Ironing his Friday night outfit on the office floor, he said,
I'm good at this. Bring in all your dresses.

He ate chip-dinners at the Laundromat,
slept outdoors, dreamed of finding his mother.

I put apples in his bag and he called them *shifty fruit*.
Steal me, he said, *the government isn't looking.*

At my house he swept each room, stood beneath paintings,
held objects in his gaze, intent on understanding.

He wouldn't go to school without clean socks so I loaned mine.
That evening he said, *Why did your mother leave you?*

Throat full, I couldn't answer. This question I had never asked him.
Silently he washed my socks by hand and hung them out.

(Bilbrough 2013, p. 20)

However, when I paired this text with video images the result was overly explanatory. Eventually my partner interviewed me about Abe and I cut two sixty-minute interviews down to approximately four minutes to form an elliptical narrative, the content of which loosely mirrored what I had articulated in the poem.

The film begins with pieces of black coral against a white cloth that evoke tiny intricate (family) trees. For me they indicate the complexity of relationships. A red and white doll's house is positioned in front of a real house of the same colours. In another shot a collection of old chairs are clustered in a group. My intention was to suggest a longed-for domesticity and a family situation that was out of Abe's reach during the period I looked after him. My own life at the time was far from conventional and I wanted to convey the idea that in a sense Abe and I were *playing* house. A shot of floral dresses moving in the wind on a washing-line confers layers of 'family' meaning for *me*. It references the commonality between an aspect of my life and Abe's – the fact that each of us were separated from our respective mothers as small children. It recalls Abe's offer to iron my dresses when he first became homeless; a gesture of care that could also be read as a way of requesting care from me.

However, exactly what constitutes family is variable. I wanted there to be space within the text of the film the viewer to play or 'vagabond' with meaning (von Boehm dir. 2009, 5:56-6:31). As such these images are intended to evoke a rich array of different feelings, associations and possible narratives beyond the frame. I hoped that they would inspire an empathetic response that perhaps recalled something of significance in the viewer's own life.

Representing intimate others

Abe's actual voice is absent from *Separation*, but it is his voice – or my *interpretation* of his voice – that informs the piece. Abe's very individual way of articulating things felt problematic to represent. I could not reproduce the improvised rap poems he performed for me after school as a way of telling me about his day. I could only speak of my experience of receiving them. Although struck by the linguistic verve of Abe's 'shifty fruit' and his connection between my secretly putting food in his bag and 'stealing' him, I could not use either detail in the film.

I felt that quoting him in the written poem only barely worked. In spoken form – in my voice rather than his – it sounded cloying and sentimental; an embarrassing imitation of a fifteen-year-old's unselfconscious wit. There was also no way to visually evoke the idea contained in 'shifty fruit' – as a metaphor it has layers of connotation, which in itself is 'shifty'. These are aesthetic concerns, but what lies beneath them is awareness of not wanting to appropriate Abe's voice or way of looking at the world, a fear of losing Abe's multidimensionality as a human being.

The gaps in the narrative of *Separation* and my prioritisation of feeling and suggestion over 'fact' aim to protect Abe's privacy and guard against possible essentialist notions of culture. I wanted the film to be a universal story, independent of culture or ethnicity, about the longing for a stable physical and psychological home in the face of a harsher reality. For these reasons I did not focus on Abe's background; the only allusion is my statement: 'sometimes I wished that I was Sudanese, so I could be more like his mother' (Bilbrough 2013c, min. 1:57-2:02). My admission in the film that 'my mother left my father and me when I was five' (Bilbrough 2013c, min. 2: 28-2: 35) is an integral part of this universality, a link between my personal history and Abe's.

Despite my intention, discourses around cultural homogeneity still potentially intrude in an analysis of *Separation*. Given the film is about a relationship, I felt that it needed a figure apart from me. I wanted to show glimpses of a visual presence based on Abe – a shot of him putting on socks and later, hand-washing them. The subject matter also felt so personal, though, that I could not bear to explain it to a stranger. My partner, Budi, was already invested in the narrative. He had met Abe, and in addition to listening to my distress and frustration about the situation over a period of years, he had interviewed me for the film. Consequently, it was not such a stretch for him to volunteer to represent Abe. This added extra, unplanned layers of meaning to the film – stories and resonances beyond the frame. There was a sense of identification in Budi's choice. His background is Indonesian, and, although resident in Australia for over fifteen years, at the time of filming he was experiencing a feeling of cultural displacement. More than once he had commented that aspects of Abe's situation felt familiar. *Separation* was made prior to Budi's return to Indonesia for an extended period. The trip meant a long separation, not only from me but also from his two children, who arranged the rooms of the doll's house before I filmed.

Budi's presence in *Separation* adds a level of dissonance. On a personal level I felt a twinge of discomfort due to the power dynamic that could be construed by my partner playing my 'child'. Additionally he is playing a young man who isn't my actual son and whose relationship with me was sometimes questioned or misunderstood by others. The other uncomfortable issue is one of ethnicity. Budi is roughly the same height and build as Abe and, because his face is never visible in the film, it is possible that he could be of a number of ethnicities and ages. Budi's 'Asian' hair may be jarring for some viewers who have noted the 'Sudanese' detail. I allowed this incongruity, as the film obliquely referenced events and feelings at the time it was made it.

This 'mistake' also fits with the film's form, which is evocative rather than literal – a documentary-*poem*. While it is not my intention, there is also a danger of the type

of 'allegorical' reading described by Shohat (1995, p. 169), a danger of viewers extrapolating that my inference is that all people of colour are a homogenous group. It is worth noting here that what was more salient than Budi's ethnicity with regard to his involvement in *Separation* was our relationship. Although there was a discomfort in my partner playing my 'child', there was a certain emotional truth to it. Children, parents and partners are *all* intimate others, and aspects of each relationship are mirrored or find expression in one another.

Conclusion: relationships and the power of metaphor

In this chapter I have further explored the complexity of the filmmaker-participant encounter. Through a discussion of my own work I have demonstrated that an acknowledgement of this relationship highlights the difficulty of ethical representations. As both MacDougall (1998, pp. 37-38) and Aidichie (2009) have pointed out, there is an inherent power dynamic, and danger in representing others. This danger is particularly pertinent to cross-cultural contexts, in which representations can serve to over-define and homogenise individuals and the marginalised cultural communities they belong to.

Considering this, I have suggested that while auto/biography as methodology and genre can be a way of taking responsibility, it unavoidably raises ethical issues around shared privacies and what is acceptable to say. I have proposed that the creation of an auto/biographical work requires the careful weighing up of aesthetics with the possible consequences to close others and relationships with those others. This has a creative pedagogical function for arts and media practitioners as well as scholars, social workers and anthropologists working with other people's stories, as well as with their own.

Autobiography played an unexpected role in the situation with Ajok and Mary. My initial concerns about representing the women's auto/biographical stories were based around an assumption of what ethical representation amounted to. These

concerns conflicted with what the women actually wanted to express. Ultimately, it was only through demonstrating a lack of authority and vulnerability, a type of 'unknowingness' (Butler 2005, p. 136) that I was able to work in an ethical way. In this situation revealing details of my own life in a gesture of reciprocity was particularly salient.

Relationships were the most important consideration in representing Bronica's story in *No One Eats Alone* and making *Separation*. In each case an awareness of the vulnerability of those involved and the potentially controversial nature of the issues being spoken about on film shaped the final form. Both stories avoid impinging on shared privacies or contributing to cultural essentialism through idiosyncratic, poetic methods of representation. Auto/biographical narratives and relationships beyond the frame also make a contribution to the final texts. My own experience of early separation from my mother and my attempts to parent Abe enabled me to work with Bronica with more empathy and interest than I otherwise might have done. Similarly, the representation of Bronica's story informed *Separation*. On the surface, *Separation* was about my relationship with Abe and his inability to feel at home, but it also alluded to my relationship with my mother and my own feeling of homelessness. A less intended layer of meaning was added by my partner's involvement and his impending separation from his children and me.

Shohat uses the term 'allegorical' to refer to a reductive understanding of representations that point to a paucity of imagination, an inability to accept individuals and culture as multidimensional (Shohat 1995, p. 169). In this chapter I have argued for the value of metaphor (in order to avoid the reductive quality of allegory) in communicating highly emotional events and potentially divisive subjects. Metaphor in a work of art has the power to create wide-ranging associations requiring the viewer to delve below the surface and draw upon sensual, emotional and non-literal understanding. Attempting to pin meaning to a literal visual signifier (such as Budi's hair) and reduce meaning to that signifier is, arguably, an interpretive cul-de-sac. Poetic representations offer a different variety

of 'truth', and can be more expansive in terms of possible meaning for maker, participants and viewers. This has both aesthetic and ethical significance.

Coda

Although I disagreed with Bronica's ideas about physical discipline, I never doubted her parenting abilities. For a long time I retained the desire to tell her about Abe, while also feeling that it would be a type of imposition. Although I have not seen Bronica since the screening of *No One Eats Alone*, our lives indirectly crossed again – in a way that has a certain poetic logic. While I was making *Separation*, a friend of Budi's sustained a serious head injury. In the first few weeks of awakening from a coma, he was unable to feed himself. Budi went regularly to the hospital to care for him, and realised that his friend's aunt was Bronica. According to Budi, Bronica was unsurprised by the connection and welcomed him as a family member, directing him to feed her nephew when she couldn't be there herself.

I hope to be able to show *Separation* to Abe one day. It is approximately the same length as the improvised rap poems he used to perform for me after school. Although I am telling a story about Abe, in another way I am also telling a story *to* him.

Chapter 4. Imaging/Imagining Family: Reparative Narratives

Discussing auto/biographical writing, Hanif Kureishi has commented on the potential for a misuse of power, observing:

> People can be transformed into tragic, comic or inconsequential figures. They are at the centre of their own lives, but you can make them extras. Art can be revenge as well as reparation. (Kureishi 2011, p. 291)

In this chapter I discuss the inherent ethical complexity involved in representing family when the filmmaker may have both artistic and emotional motivations. I suggest that, in 'domestic ethnography' (Renov 2004), 'revenge' and 'reparation' are often inextricably linked and stem from the artist's desire to create meaning from a painful aspect of the past and redefine that past as a way of repairing emotional damage to the self and/or family members. Melanie Klein's (1929) conceptualisation of reparation and its relevance to art are of particular relevance here. The filmmaker's mixed motivations of revenge and reparation may be interpreted as an adult manifestation of both the infant's aggressive, destructive urges towards the mother and her/his remorse and need to make amends for that aggression. Making a film about family members may also be a way to resolve a type of loss or separation. Sandra Gosso has observed that Klein's notion of reparation had developed over time so that, in later years, Klein did not talk about it in terms of a defensive position (originating from aggressive urges) (Gosso 2004, pp. 4-5). In a 1940 essay about mourning Klein wrote:

> The pining of a lost love object also implies dependence on it, but dependence of a kind which becomes an incentive to reparation and preservation of the object…We know that painful experience of all kinds sometimes stimulate sublimation or even bring out quite new gifts in some people who may take up painting or writing or other productive activities under the stress of frustration and hardships. (Klein, cited in Gosso 2004, p. 5)

My use of 'reparation' in this chapter takes into account to Klein's 1929 *and* 1940 versions of reparation. I also use it more broadly to refer to a way the filmmaker may attempt, via the art of documentary, to repair various past family hurts. With regard to her auto/biographical documentary, *Stories We Tell* (Polley dir. 2012), Sarah Polley has commented that 'telling stories is our way of coping; a way of creating shape out of distress (Polley 2012, quoted in Kellaway 2013, p. 2). Notions of documentary-maker as predator take on a different meaning here because the desire for a 'good story' is entangled with the desire to make sense of one's family and, by extension, oneself.

Representing her/his parents, the filmmaker, as an adult-child, is in an ambiguous position. While dialogue about the past can strongly evoke the filmmaker's childhood, reminding her/him of her vulnerability and dependence, the filmmaker as the 'subject supposed to know' is also in a position of authority and may feel the need to call her/his parents to account for past family decisions. However, as an auto/biographer s/he is also, to a certain extent, in the position of the psychoanalytic client trying to make sense of her/his own life. Alisa Lebow has commented that 'most domestic ethnographies may be seen as an effort… to grow up, to make sense of that which had heretofore been only viscerally perceived and poorly understood' (Lebow 2008, p. 57). Lebow (2008) has provided a lucid argument around the application of Lacan's mirror stage to auto/biographical filmmaking, which also has resonance to my own discussion. Lebow refers to Lacan's theory that, because the child is being held by the '(m)other' as s/he looks in the mirror, the autonomy or mastery is illusory. What occurs then is, 'a moment of differentiation from the (m)other even as the image visually reinscribes dependency on the (m)other' (Lebow 2008, p. 38). Lebow contends that the autonomy of the auto/biographical subject is similarly illusory because s/he is:

> ...figuratively being held, or propped up, by the family and it is through reimaging and reimagining the family on film (another screen surface) that the adult child asserts a triumphant (Lacan says "jubilant") stance. (Lebow 2008, p. 38)

Lebow contends that in the same way that the child 'imagines himself or herself to have greater powers than s/he actually has, auto/biographical filmmakers as (perpetual children) do the same' (Lebow 2008, p. 38). Lebow contends that, through filming, the filmmaker attempts to reshape her/his reality.

> The act of going back, if not to the physical childhood home, then to its filmic figuration, enables the filmmaker to reconceive the space and ontology of home. This process of remapping enables the filmmaker to conjure his or her preferred version of the family narrative. (Lebow 2008, p. 38)

'Conjure' is rich with possible meaning in this instance. In addition to having the nuance of a magical act, it also connotes a sleight of hand, an act of trickery that cons those involved in some way. This returns us to a notion of the documentary-maker as predator. In a broad sense all documentaries might be said to be both an act of conning and conjuring, but in the case of domestic ethnography the conjuring/conning has emotional resonance for both filmmaker and participant and is linked to the filmmaker's motivations of reparation/revenge. Further complexity is added by the fact that family members each bring their own auto/biographies to the frame – their own 'mirror' – which may be incompatible or divergent from the filmmaker's 'preferred version of the family narrative'.

In addition to the film being an act of reparation and a way for the domestic ethnographer to 'conjure' a different family narrative, the filmmaker is creating an artwork with aesthetic demands, which may *also* have ethical implications. However, ethical responsibility towards family in the context of filmmaking is far cloudier than it is to participants that the filmmaker is not related to (or who have no pre-existing intimate relationship with the filmmaker). In domestic ethnography the practitioner shares a history with those they are representing – particular past events may be weighted with different emotions for each person. Additionally, the filmmaker may have divided loyalties, which can impact on subjects' representation.

While I have discussed narrative demands and the potential reduction of participants to characters in Chapters Two and Three, in this chapter I contend that in family documentary these factors gain in complexity as particular 'characters'/roles and stories have emotional resonance for both participant(s) and filmmaker. Additionally, while Levinas has contended that violence to the Other is 'making them play roles in which they no longer recognise themselves (Levinas 1969, p. 21)', participants may actually *want* to play roles. However, I suggest that this role-playing can also reveal an important aspect of that person's identity. Discussing *Chronique d'un Été* (Rouch & Morin dir. 1960/1) William Rothman (1997, p. 70) postulates that a 'touchstone' of Rouch's practice of cinéma vérité was Rouch's belief in the camera being 'capable of provoking people to reveal aspects of themselves that are fictional, to reveal themselves as the creatures of imagination, fantasy, and myth they are'. Rothman states that, according to Rouch, '*Chronicles* is not simply a documentary, because the people in the film are provoked to manifest fictional parts of themselves. And it is not simply a fiction film, because the fictions it reveals are real' (Rothman 1997, p. 70).

Extending on this notion I suggest that, in the context of domestic ethnography, role-playing may help to clarify particular aspects of a participant's life or even be used as a form of self-protection. With these contentions in mind I discuss *Least Said, Soonest Mended* (Thomas dir. 1999) and *October Country* (Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009) in the first half of the chapter. Both films span three generations of the respective Thomas and Mosher families, focusing on the complexities of the parent-child relationship. Each film might be considered reparative while also raising ethical questions.

In the second half of the chapter I discuss the process of making three documentary poems, *Willing Exile* (Bilbrough dir. 2013d), *Going with the Wind* (Bilbrough dir. 2013b) and *A View of the Boats* (Bilbrough dir. 2013a), which focus on my parents' struggle to forge identities as artists while bringing up children. I briefly

pause in my discussion of ethics to outline the thematic concerns linking the documentary-poems to my written poems in *Porous* (Bilbrough 2013). I outline some of the difficulties involved in coming from a family of auto/biographical artists and discuss how my sister's films *Floodhouse* (Bilbrough dir. 2003) and *Being Venice* (Bilbrough dir. 2012) and my mother's film *Indecent Exposure* (Conrad dir. 2012) impacted on my own representations of my parents.

The absent filmmaker: an ambiguous representation

October Country (Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009) documents a year in the life of four generations of the Mosher family, a family living in the Mohawk Valley in upstate New York, from one Halloween to the next. The film mixes an observational mode with interviews, giving the viewer an insight into how the difficulties of the past continue to impact on the Moshers' present lives. On release *October Country* received a divided response amongst critics. While many praised the visual style, others were uneasy about the representation of the family, describing it as 'veering awfully close to exploitation' (Murray 2010, p. 1), 'straddling the line between unflinching intimacy and invasive exploitation' (Barker 2009, p. 1) and 'the latest example of cinema documentary as voyeurism' (Scheck 2010, p. 1). At the other end of the spectrum Pamela Cohen described the film as 'a healing force', observing that the film shows that 'the modern-day family is holding strong despite contending with every social ill in the book' (Cohen 2009, p. 1). I propose that *October Country* is a deeply ambiguous representation of the filmmaker's family, one that can be interpreted as both voyeuristic *and* healing.

I briefly summarise the film's content here. Don and Dottie Mosher's daughter Donna has a history of abusive relationships. She had her own daughter, Daneal, when she was a teenager. Now a teenager herself, Daneal, who is struggling to retain custody of her own toddler, Ruby, discovers she is pregnant to her boyfriend Johnny, who is possibly involved in criminal activities. Don's sister, Denise, is on thirteen types of medication and spends time at the local cemetery hoping to

communicate with spirits. Unable to impact on the struggles of their biological family, Don and Dottie foster Chris, who is in and out of jail, and who steals from the Moshers. Despite these complexities matriarch Dottie insists that family is 'everything… the one thing that the government or a bill collector can't take away from you' (Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009, min. 1:42-1:54). Wal-Mart and the Remington gun factory, the major industries in the area, feature in both the *mise-en-scène* and dialogue, leading one to infer that consumerism and violence are persistent social ills in the Mohawk Valley.

On film the participants are extraordinarily honest about their propensity for repeating the same negative life patterns. They are equally open about their hostilities and resentments towards one another. As Murray has commented, the film reveals the family's 'drug problems, legal problems, custody battles, cycles of abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorders' (Murray 2010, p. 1). While baring their emotions, family members are further exposed through the cinematography; the filmmakers favour extreme close-ups of faces and gestures. However, this is no clear-cut case of exploitation, since *October Country* was made collaboratively. Donal Mosher has stated that the family had right of veto, discussing 'every element of the film and what should remain' (Casini & Causero 2009, min. 4:06). Additionally, echoing Rouch's description of the film camera as a 'psychoanalytic stimulant' (Rouch, cited in Levin 1971, p. 137), Michael Palmieri has said that the camera enabled the family to 'voice their concerns and perspectives in a way they don't in everyday life' (Casini & Causero 2009, min. 2:06). *October Country* is a very deliberately constructed artwork with lingering cutaway shots of nature: autumnal leaves falling, a delicate spread of branches against the sky, an icicle dripping. These aesthetic techniques, more commonly associated with fiction, than documentary, signal that perhaps we should at least partially understand the Moshers as characters in this representation of their lives. The family's enthusiasm for dressing up for a Halloween party at the end of the film also infers a degree of theatricality and an awareness of performance.

Donal Mosher's physical absence from the family portrait is the crux of the film's ethical ambiguity. The DVD extras and interviews make it clear that he is a son, brother and uncle to the participants. Although Mosher has described *October Country* as a 'tribute' to the strength of the women in his family his absence gives the film an anthropological quality ('Q & A at the IFC', DVD extra, Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009), Scott has described it 'a chronicle of misery and marginality told from the outside' (Scott 2010, p. 2). Mosher has stated that 'the only thing that changed my course from the kind of life that's shown in our film is the fact that I got exposed to a world outside that' (Tully 2010, p. 13). It is apparent from interviews and 'Q & A at the IFC' that Mosher lives in New York with co-director Michael Palmieri, who is also his partner. We can infer that the disparity between Mosher's life and that of his family may be exactly why he chose not to appear in the film: he may not have wanted to set up an obvious failure/ success binary.

Lebow's contentions around the mirror stage and the auto/biographical filmmaker have resonance here. *October Country* could not be interpreted as representing the 'preferred version' (Lebow 2008, p. 38) of anyone's family narrative. No one is 'miraculously reunited', and 'harmony' is not '(re)introduced' (Lebow 2008, p. 38). However, Lebow has contended that auto/biographical reconceptualisations of family situations are 'often undertaken in an effort to repair certain ruptures or disunities of the filmmaker's identity, as conceived in and through the context of family' (Lebow 2008, p. 38). I suggest that *October Country* can be interpreted as the filmmaker holding up a Lacanian mirror to the ruptures and disunities in his family (who represent a reality he has left behind) as a method of differentiating his own identity.

In my introduction to this chapter I suggested that parents might be 'called to account' in domestic ethnography. I come back to this contention in my discussion of *Least Said, Soonest Mended* (Thomas dir. 2000) and in my discussion of making *Willing Exile* (Bilbrough dir. 2013d), as both films examine the effects of parental decisions and life choices on children. However, this is not the case in *October*

Country. Don and Dottie are represented as concerned parents and grandparents, distressed by their daughter and granddaughter's relationship patterns and similarly disappointed by their inability to impact on their foster son's life choices. The participant whose life is most exposed is Mosher's niece Daneal, and here I discuss the way she is framed in terms of a consideration of the notion of character.

Editing choices contribute to framing Daneal's life in terms of a narrative paradigm; she could easily be the flawed heroine in a gritty coming of age drama. In this way the filmmaker's framing of Daneal *is* voyeuristic – her difficulties are a spectacle for the viewer: 'something to be experienced' (Nash 2011, p. 231). Early in the film Dottie lets the viewer know that her granddaughter has always been 'a trouble child' who has 'made a lot of mistakes growing up' (Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009, min. 3:14-3:30). Daneal reveals that her ex-husband Tony liked to 'throw her around' while she was holding her baby (Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009, min. 18:47). She is now fighting for custody of Ruby, but is resigned to losing her and admits that she is lacking in maturity: 'you can't play mommy if you're not grown up yet' (Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009, min. 19:36). Donna complains to Dottie that Daneal can't really want to keep Ruby because she has the means to do so: government house, food stamps and financial assistance (Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009, min. 20:10). As if this isn't exposing enough, Denise weighs in with her perspective on Daneal's violent ex-partner, and Don observes that Daneal thinks of her father as a 'fairy tale' even though he did drugs, was drunk all the time and 'liked to beat up women' (Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009, min. 26:27-27:03).

After this narrative lead-up, Dottie treats Daneal to the truth about her abusive father, detailing his violence to both Donna and Daneal. Initially, Daneal refuses to believe her grandmother. 'Nineteen years of lies, why couldn't you lie to me now?' (Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009, min. 29:45) she finally asks, weeping. This is a particularly raw moment, which provides a narrative climax and, I suggest, *character* development in both senses of the word. The viewer is provided with a further context for Daneal's self-destructive life choices – her earliest contact with

men has involved abuse. However, we might also extrapolate that this may be developmental for Daneal in actuality: this moment on film may serve to 'crystallize' and clarify an aspect of her life (Berman, Rosenheimer & Aviad 2003, p, 221).

Mise-en-scène serves to further flesh out the narrative pathos of Daneal's situation. Intercut with the contemporary footage is home movie footage of Daneal as a lively little girl in the care of her grandparents, which is in direct contrast to Daneal as despairing young mother. The family's judgements of Daneal's life are underpinned by Mosher and Palmieri's choice of cutaways; while we hear Dottie saying, 'Today we are picking up Daneal and going to the courtroom' (Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009, min. 31:01) the camera pans over the disorder in Daneal's house, lingering on empty soft drink cans and unwashed dishes, a baby's bottle of curdled milk up-ended in a shoe, toys and clothes strewn over the floor. This invites a connection between literal untidiness and broader life chaos – an inference that perhaps Daneal can't look after either herself or her daughter.

A further scene shows Daneal play fighting with new boyfriend Johnny: the couple kiss, slap each other and bicker. Openly chauvinistic, Johnny states that he doesn't believe in women working and that he will be the only financial provider in the relationship (Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009, min. 35:48). Daneal, voice full of frustration and scorn, points out that he is not providing her or Ruby with anything (Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009, min. 36:19). Murray has described the interaction as 'a Jerry Springer moment, exacerbated by the presence of observers' (Murray 2010, p. 1). The scene does have a performative quality, as if Daneal is acting out (in both senses of the phrase) her relationship issues for the camera. However, I suggest that Daneal has an awareness of herself as a character in her uncle's documentary about their dysfunctional family, which is not a completely powerless position. The priority given to Daneal's story in the film reflects a level of identification on the part of Mosher – a type of counter-transference. Janet Malcolm has contended that 'the characters of non-fiction… derive from the

writer's most idiosyncratic desires and deepest anxieties; they are what the writer wishes he was and worries that he is' (Malcolm 1990, p. 149). Daneal's life may represent what the filmmaker fears *his* life may have been like if he'd remained in the Mohawk Valley.

I want to return briefly to the negative responses to *October Country*. To draw on Butler (2005, p. 51), I suggest that films 'act' on viewers in some way and that this may be one of the reasons that responses to auto/biographical films about family can be so strong. Such films may recall the viewer's own family situations and activate complex feelings, associations and memories. In a conversion with Mosher and Palmieri, Michael Tully admits that he had a 'personal reaction' to *October Country* and 'let loose' (Tully 2010 p. 1). Tully doesn't offer any information about his own background, but one might interpret his strong response (and that of other critics) to *October Country* as a variety of transference.

However, I contend that there may also be another dynamic at work in the criticism of *October Country*. There is an aspect of the responses that Others the Mosher family. This occurs in two ways. First, the family's willingness to reveal their less than perfect lives is seen as somehow shameful or undignified. Mosher, citing Barker's (2009) review that referred to 'the Moshers' dilapidated dwelling' has queried, 'dilapidated according to whom? From a cultural theory perspective the question becomes: what is the background of this reviewer? (Mosher cited in Tully 2010, p. 8)' Second, the criticism of exploitation appears to assume that the family is not sophisticated enough to understand the impact of unflattering documentary representation – as if they were ethnographic subjects in need of protection. Given the collaborative nature of *October Country*, we have to assume that the Moshers do not feel any sense of embarrassment about the film's representation of their lives. Patriarch Don says, 'we wouldn't know normal if it fell on us' (Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009 min. 39:44). Extensive research has been undertaken on the influence of reality television on viewer/participant reception (Kavka 2012; Kraidy

& Sender 2011; Corner 2002), which could offer further context, however it is beyond the scope of this exegesis.

A filmmaker's emotional journey

Least Said, Soonest Mended (Thomas dir. 2000) is a film that very clearly demonstrates a desire for reparation and family healing. The 'ruptures or disunities of the filmmaker's identity' (Lebow 2008, p. 38) are also experienced by director Thomas's twin sister, Val, with whom Thomas shares an emotional journey on screen. Like *October Country*, *Least Said, Soonest Mended* represents three generations of the filmmaker's family – in this case in England and New Zealand. The film documents a thirty-five year old family secret: Thomas's twin sister Val's pregnancy at fifteen and the adoption of her baby. Val had no choice in what occurred and the pregnancy was kept secret not only from the wider world but also from her twin brother. Many years later, Val's daughter Karen made contact and a rather uneasy connection was forged.

In direct contrast to *October Country*, the filmmaker is implicated in the narrative of *Least Said, Soonest Mended*, and plays three different roles: narrator, interviewer and participant. Early in the film he describes himself as 'the go-between' and is frequently framed with his mother or sister in a two-shot as he asks them about the past. Illustrating Thomas's go-between role, the two women are never framed together and do not speak to one another directly. Val makes it clear that, although she and Vi write to one another weekly between England and New Zealand (where Val has moved), nothing of emotional depth is ever touched on.

Thomas's presence as an insider means that there isn't anything obviously voyeuristic about *Least Said, Soonest Mended*, however I suggest that Thomas's 'go-between' role raises ethical question because it unavoidably involves divided loyalties. To a certain extent this is an issue in all family films since the filmmaker has a relationship with each of the participants, who are also connected to one

another. However, it is explicitly highlighted in *Least Said, Soonest Mended* as a result of the subject matter. Unlike *October Country*, *Least Said, Soonest Mended* was not collaborative. Thomas has said that power of veto was not discussed, and that offering it to his mother probably would have meant the film would 'never have been finished' (Thomas 2013, pers. comm. 4 June). While it is evident that the entire Mosher family participated whole-heartedly in *October Country*, participation in *Least Said, Soonest Mended* appears to have been more ambivalent.

Thomas has commented that his mother only really agreed to be involved to please her 'favourite son', and that although Karen participated she showed little interest in the film after it was completed (Thomas pers. comm. 2013, June 4). Thomas has also stated that he wanted to reconcile his family and felt that 'getting this story out into the open was a necessary first step (Tudball 2001, p. 98)'. More specifically he has observed, 'I wanted to give Val the opportunity to tell her story because I've always felt guilty that I wasn't available to her at the time' (quoted in Tudball 2001, p. 98). According to Thomas, the way his parents made decisions with 'no discussion or consultation' when he and Val were growing up in Bath in the 1960s meant that he and his sister were 'rendered powerless' (Tudball 2001, p. 100).

While *Least Said, Soonest Mended* empowers Thomas and Val, to a certain extent it disempowers their mother Vi. The 'preferred version of the family narrative' (Lebow 2008, p. 38) is, in Val and Thomas's case, one where people talk openly about emotions. This is in direct opposition to their mother's life philosophy, which is summarised by the film's title. Karen's 'preferred version of the family narrative' also differs substantially from Val and Thomas's version. I want to now look at what these differing versions of the family narrative are in *Least Said, Soonest Mended* and how Vi and Karen are framed as characters.

As with *October Country*, the camera in *Least Said, Soonest Mended* is an arbitrator and 'psychoanalytic stimulant' that enables participants to say things to the filmmaker that they cannot address with one another (Rouch, cited in Levin

1971, p. 137). Interviewed alone, Karen states that she is glad Vi (her biological grandmother) made the decision to have her adopted out (Thomas dir. 2000, min. 45:29) and that she wouldn't much mind if Val and she stopped corresponding, as Val 'doesn't mean all that much' to her (Thomas dir. 2000, min. 47:13). Karen's preferred family narrative is one that prioritises her bond with her adoptive family. This is signalled visually, when the viewer is introduced to her adoptive father, Duncan. Visiting a hollow tree she played in as a child, the thirty-five-year-old Karen holds Duncan's hand as the camera follows. I suggest that rather than Karen feeling that her identity is crystallised and clarified by participation in *Least Said, Soonest Mended*, it may feel fragmented and divided as if she were unable to move beyond the mirror stage.

Karen's actions and words are arguably a defence mechanism, a method of gaining some control over two situations (the film and involvement with her biological family) over which she has comparatively little control. Her definitive assertions may mask far more ambivalent emotions. Thomas has observed that Karen's position in the film was a political one in terms of demonstrating loyalty to her adoptive parents (Thomas 2013, pers. comm. 4 June). However much the limits of Karen's character/role are a foil for Val's outpouring of emotion, providing narrative tension, we are also aware of Thomas's dual role. As well as being a family member he is a storyteller with aesthetic concerns.

With this in mind it is difficult to differentiate between what may be Thomas's emotional and aesthetic motivations in his representation of his mother Vi. In *October Country* Dottie Mosher (the filmmaker's mother) plays a quasi-directorial role, facilitating conversations with other family members for the camera. In contrast Vi is held to account for her past attitudes and decisions in *Least Said, Soonest Mended* via Thomas's voiceover narration, on-screen questions and Val's recollections. While Thomas's interactions with Vi on screen are gentle, he clearly feels resentment about his mother's policy of silence. In addition to the secret of Val's pregnancy, Thomas describes how his mother kept the terminal nature of his

father's illness a secret, depriving everyone of the opportunity to say good-bye. The filmmaker comments, 'I chalked up dad's death as one more time when the truth was kept from me' (Thomas dir. 2000, min. 23:31).

For her part, Val expresses palpable grief and anger about the way that her parents dealt with her pregnancy. She recalls that her mother 'berated' her, telling her that she was a 'slut' and that she'd 'let the family down' (Thomas dir. 2000, min. 3:13-3:16). Val was taken to a boys' home, where she worked in the kitchen for the duration of her pregnancy. She remembers that her parents put her suitcase down beside her bed and left: 'I was absolutely traumatised, gob-smacked' (Thomas dir. 2000, min. 7:04). Val recalls that after the birth they visited with the gift of a teddy bear. She comments, 'what was I supposed to do? Carry it around instead of the baby? ... There's a lot they could have done, Steve… better than buying me a bloody teddy bear' (Thomas dir. 2000, min. 15:35-15:52).

Val's highly emotional address to the camera is juxtaposed with Vi's determinedly cheerful tone. Vi recalls Val's pregnancy and the adoption while cleaning a silver tea service and only looks at the camera intermittently. Her perspective is practical. The family could not afford to keep Val's baby, and although she admits that the 'whole thing was traumatic up to a point' she also says that it was 'all done and arranged so it wasn't any good letting yourself get upset about it' (Thomas dir. 2000, min. 13:57-14:07). Vi recalls that when Val returned home they 'had a good old natter and a cup of tea'. There is a black humour to Vi and Val's drastically different styles of communication. Edited together as a response to one another their accounts form a compelling narrative. Considering this, it is impossible not to return to a notion of the filmmaker as a type of predator. This mother-daughter dynamic is rich material for narrative drama and, while Thomas clearly feels empathy for his family (particularly Val), they are unavoidably a spectacle for the viewer: 'something to be experienced' (Nash 2011, p. 231).

The silver tea service also occupies an ambiguous position in *Least Said, Soonest Mended* in terms of a consideration of ethics and aesthetics. It is a powerful narrative device that literally illustrates Vi's recollections, that contributes to a particular characterisation of Vi and that is of great emotional significance. Vi observes that she always wanted a silver tea service for her 25th wedding anniversary. However, while she got the tea service, she was unable to celebrate because of her daughter's pregnancy: 'People would have wondered where Val was. It would have been strange to say she was down with her aunt and uncle and couldn't get up here for our silver wedding anniversary' (Thomas dir. 2000, min. 9:00-9:15). This is juxtaposed with Val recalling that when her parents visited one weekend her mother brought the tea service. Val was shown a silver plate that she had 'given' to her mother and was told 'vehemently' that it was her fault her parents couldn't have a party (Thomas dir. 2000, min. 10:10).

In this narrative construction Thomas has framed Vi as being unable to demonstrate emotional care towards her daughter. This apparently evidences the filmmaker's divided loyalties: his desire on one hand to repair family wounds through 'getting this story out into the open' (Tudball 2001, p. 98) while on the other hand also seeking a type of revenge for his mother's past refusal (and continued recalcitrance) to talk about distressing family events. It seems that for Vi tradition and conformity to society's mores have taken priority over the discussion of feelings. Recalling MacDougal's observation that 'every film to some degree offends against the complexity of people and the destiny that awaits them' (MacDougal 1998, p. 38), Thomas has commented:

> ...you see people reduced and reduced. It is impossible to paint any of them as full human beings because of the filmmaking process and you have to go through a grieving process about that. It was very difficult to present my mum as a rounded human being. She was actually a woman of great warmth and humour. (Thomas 2013, pers. comm. 4 June)

Thomas's comments are rather disingenuous – they do not fully acknowledge the filmmaker's power as a framer. While a narrative may have a particular imperative in terms of structure and editing choices, one has to ask whether Thomas entirely *wanted* to portray Vi as a woman of 'great warmth'. Klein's (1929) notion of destructive, aggressive urges on the part of the adult artist (Ruth Kjar) towards her mother, which ultimately leads to a reparative representation, resonates here. However, it is arguably what Thomas says in conversation about *Least Said, Soonest Mended* that expresses his reparative urge towards Vi more fully than the film does.

On the other hand, Vi's own resistance to the process of being represented and having to talk about the past may have also inhibited her warmth. Considering these possibilities, it becomes evident that part of the ethical difficulty of domestic ethnography is the way that it can be very difficult to decipher artistic intent from emotional motivations (for both filmmaker and viewer). However, while the tea service is symbolic of Vi's concern with correct appearances, I suggest that it also signals other personality attributes. Evidently Vi is someone who finds it easier to express love through actions and tangible objects rather than through talk. Vi may also have chosen to clean the tea service as a protective mechanism. Her activity of polishing enables her to avoid direct interaction with Thomas and perhaps sidestep intangible and distressing emotions that may be attached to the past. I suggest that this may be a demonstration of Vi's own power: an act of resistance to her children's preferred version of the family narrative.

Thomas was not present when Vi watched *Least Said, Soonest Mended* and only found out much later that when the VHS tape was finished she took it into the back yard and smashed it to bits with a hammer (Thomas 2013, pers. comm. 4 June). Vi's actions are a potent symbolic gesture of power in the face of ultimate impotence. Thomas's documentary version of their shared family history is reproducible and will always be on the public record. One is left wondering whether Vi was offended by the way she was represented, upset by Val's anger or

whether she simply could not bear her children publicising family privacies. Vi's actions suggest a repudiation of Thomas's preferred version of the family narrative, his power as filmmaker and 'the subject supposed to know', and an assertion that as a parent, she actually knew what was best. I suggest that in physically smashing the film Vi was reiterating her own preferred narrative of 'least said'.

The artist as outsider: contextualising my films

In this half of the chapter I discuss the process of making three documentary-poems, which are primarily comprised of interviews with my mother Christina and father Norman, both of whom have been practising artists for most of their adult lives. *Willing Exile* (Bilbrough dir. 2013d) focuses on Christina and Norman's relationship and their struggle as young adults to balance art with parenting. *A View of the Boats* (Bilbrough dir. 2013a) focuses on my mother's relationship with her artist father, Patrick Hayman, whom she met for the first time in her thirties. *Going with the Wind* (Bilbrough dir. 2013b) is about the four years my father and I spent living on two counter-culture communities in rural New Zealand. My discussion in this part of the chapter concerns *Willing Exile*, since making this film raised the most complex ethical issues around representation of shared history and the rights of participants versus artistic freedom.

As I have discussed in Chapter Three, *Separation* (Bilbrough dir. 2013c) was made from the perspective of a 'parent' with an acute awareness of Abe's vulnerability and a determination to do nothing that might make his situation worse. This made the decision to use a pseudonym for him and avoid any literal representation relatively simple. In this case my feeling of ethical responsibility was very clear. However, my relationship with Abe was not one that spanned years with layers of family complexities, hurts and betrayals (real or imagined) to sift through. Filming with my parents, I was the adult-child coming to the material with my own vulnerabilities and unresolved emotional issues. Making *Willing Exile* was a significant part of understanding the early loss of my mother that occurred as a

result of my parents' marriage ending. Klein writes that, for the child, there is a stage of development where there is dread 'that the real, loving mother may be lost and that the little girl will be left solitary and forsaken' (Klein 1929, p. 443). *Willing Exile* (as well as *A View of the Boats*, which is my portrait of Christina in the context of her own parental loss) can be interpreted as a restoration and renewal of the mother-child bond.

The making of *Willing Exile* was also a rich site for angry impulses. Levinas's description of violence to the Other takes on a further nuance here (Levinas 1969, p. 21). I was adamant throughout filming (not necessarily in the most conscious way) that I wanted my mother to play one type of role (which I believed was more authentic and natural) and she was adamant that she wanted to play something quite different. While I strove to represent *my mother* (the person I saw and interacted with when no one else was present), Christina was intent on presenting herself as 'something to be experienced' (Nash 2011, p. 231), as an artist and an actor in a film about aspects of our lives. By insisting on each of our respective versions of the 'truth' I suggest we enacted a type of violence towards one another.

Before I discuss this contention in detail, as well as returning to the notion of the 'subject supposed to know', I will contextualise the documentary-poems by outlining the themes and content that I intended to explore. Foremost for me was what I perceived as my parents' resolute identities as outsiders – people for whom the creation of art took precedence over social mores, and to some extent (or so I have often felt) parenting. Both Christina and Norman felt a consistent estrangement from the society they grew up in and a feeling of difference from other members of their respective families. For much of my life I have also felt like an outsider – although in a different way from my parents. As such, an exploration of my parents' identities has also been a way to 'crystallize' (Berman, Rosenheimer & Aviad 2003, p. 221) aspects of myself, a way of unifying the fragments of experience and self-hood via the '*other mirror*' (Metz 1975, p. 4).

As Christine Brooke-Rose has contended, it is 'possible to feel an exile in one's own country', yet exile can be potentially creative as it has connotations 'of springing forth into a new life, beyond the boundaries of the familiar' (Brooke-Rose 1996, p. 300). Similarly Zygmunt Bauman describes exile as a 'refusal to be integrated – the determination to stand out from the physical space, to conjure up a place of one's own' (Bauman 2000, p. 208). As part of their artistic identity, and rebellion against their own respective upbringings in 1950s New Zealand, my parents were willing exiles from mainstream society. Throughout my childhood we lived in remote, sparsely populated areas, places where my parents could write, paint and make ceramics uninterrupted by consumer society. When my parents separated they each continued their own particular versions of this exile.

For my mother the role of outsider originated in a much deeper sense of alienation – that of not fully biologically belonging to the family she grew up in. Although Christina didn't find out that she had a different father from her siblings until her mid thirties, she had suspected it all her life. In a biography of Christina's biological father, Patrick Hayman, Mel Gooding (2005, p. 71) writes that, in his paintings, Patrick depicted life 'as a kind of "journey", a travelling through strange countries or across seas'. According to Gooding, this imagery is auto/biographical, referencing 'early voyages to and from New Zealand (*once wittily described by a friend as a "twelve year holiday from his family"* (my italics) and his adventures in the near deserted landscape of the South Island' (Gooding 2005, p. 71). According to Gooding (2005, p. 71), a sense of not entirely belonging also related to 'suburban London, where he lived as if in melancholy involuntary exile from some unknown home'.

A notion of the artist as a romantic, depressive misfit looms large in Gooding's description and there are some obvious resonances with my parents' stories of their own lives. However, the detail that rivets me most in this paragraph is the fact that it was Patrick's 'twelve-year holiday from his family' that made *my* family possible. In a sense my mother, my sister, my two brothers and I were exiled from

Patrick all his life – and we grandchildren never met him. There is no mention of my grandmother or mother in Gooding's biography. We have been excised from the story of Patrick as artist. For much of my childhood and adolescence I shared – both involuntarily and sometimes more consciously – my mother's sense of grief about the absence of a father (which translated for me into the absence of a mother), and her sense of being an outsider. This story of the absent parent-artist, and the resulting search for how best to create a feeling of 'home' in the world, is one that I share with my mother.

Patrick Hayman in front of one of his paintings, London, late 1940s. Photographer unknown.

Many of the poems in *Porous* (Bilbrough 2013) condense what I wanted to evoke in *Willing Exile* and to a certain extent *Going with the Wind* and *A View of the Boats.* However, as I had done for *Separation*, I wrote two poems, 'Easy' and 'Porous', specifically as film 'scripts'. What was salient in these poems was not dissimilar from my poem 'Shifty Fruit': the loss of my mother, feelings of dislocation and the transitory nature of my life with my father, which often felt unrelated to what conventional society was doing. Our lives had an ephemeral quality: via a counter-culture philosophy of 'going with the flow' and non-

attachment to material possessions we seemed unable to hold on to anything tangible. Clothes and domestic items disappeared with alarming ease. I wanted to use this as a metaphor for the way that relationships seemed equally transitory:

> We lost things easily:
> clothes my mother had stitched,
> and shaped to hold us.
>
> Ridged with pink and yellow thread,
> flowers and buds, nipples of colour
> A Victorian jacket, she'd reworked,
>
> left in the back of a pharmacist's Holden
> The dust rose behind the departing car
> and a fault-line ran through my chest.
>
> (From 'Easy' Bilbrough 2013, p. 6)

In such an environment domestic objects gained a fetishistic status because they were symbolic of what I felt I did not have: a stable family life with two parents and a house with conventional modern conveniences. 'Porous', although written about my own childhood, particularly links back to *Separation* – 'the brotherhood of chairs' and the 'abandoned houses' appear in this film because I felt that equally they applied to Abe's situation during the time that I attempted to take a parental role in his life.

> **Porous**
>
> At six I was porous: an outline
> filled with shifting colour.
> My mother was somewhere in France,
>
> I dreamt of the salt between us,

waves swallowing all sound.

My teeth sang – each with a different tune

 – and one by one were pulled out.

Hitching from the dentist's with my father,

I noted abandoned houses,

tried on each like a coat.

Curled up in the rooms

I piled objects around me:

cups and saucers lipped with gold,

a brotherhood of chairs.

Cars passed, the day edged towards dark.

(Bilbrough 2013, p. 5)

Representational clashes: shared history in a family of artists

Clashes over representations of shared history can be particularly intense when there is more than one artist in the family. The issue is not simply the manner of representation, but also a question of ownership. The tension between novelist sisters Margaret Drabble and A.S. Byatt is a well-known example. Commenting on her sister's representations of their mother, Byatt has said that she '"would rather people didn't read someone else's version of my mother"' (quoted in Walker 2009, p. 1). Similarly, Australian writers Doris and Lily Brett have battled publically over Lily's negative literary representations of their mother Rose. Doris Brett's memoir *Eating the Underworld* (2001), which documents this battle, is a way of setting the public record straight:

> It has been painful seeing the accounts of my family recounted so publicly by my sister… I have had strangers stop me in the street and commiserate with me for having had such a terrible mother. I find myself saying again and again to them that no, that was not my experience. (Brett 2001, p. 8)

In my family, my father Norman is a writer; my mother Christina is a painter, poet and filmmaker; and my sister Miro is a poet and filmmaker. Both my mother's and sister's work is directly auto/biographical. Like the Moshers, we are extremely uninhibited in talking about our lives and our relationships with one other. Yet public representations of our shared history have caused family tension. I recall at fifteen watching a television documentary about my mother. Christina, her German-born husband and their two sons were represented as a bohemian family leading a romantic subsistence lifestyle in the middle of rural New Zealand. When the documentary ended I realised that not once had my mother mentioned my elder sister and me, the children from her first marriage. Similarly, magazine articles about my mother also neglected to mention my sister and me. I did not know whether Christina had deliberately excluded us, or whether we had been edited out later as extraneous details. Whatever the case, we were outside the frame of her new life. I was painfully conscious that Christina was primarily an artist, which meant that I had no choice but to share her with an audience.

At the start of my doctoral project I thought that I might use excerpts of the Television New Zealand documentary in my own work or at least write about it. However, Christina was adamant that she did not want me to. Over the years, my mother has gone through a number of reinventions, both in terms of the art she has made and her physical appearance. I could only extrapolate that she did not want me to access and make public a version of her so aesthetically different from her current identity. This anxiety around public image was a forewarning of what was to follow throughout the filming process for my doctoral project. Christina found it difficult to relinquish any control over representation and was constantly fearful of being misrepresented and, as she put it, 'marginalised'. Once again I found myself sharing my mother with an audience, albeit a future/imagined one.

In 2012 both Christina and Miro completed auto/biographical films. Here I discuss Miro's films, *Being Venice* (Bilbrough dir. 2012) and *Floodhouse* (Bilbrough dir. 2004), since the representation of my parents and family history had a considerable

impact on the ongoing process of gaining – and retaining – my mother's consent for my documentary poems. From my insider's perspective, *Floodhouse* combines an impulse for both revenge and reparation. The mother character is a narcissistic artist incapable of showing her teenage daughter any affection. Only towards the film's end does she show any maternal warmth: in the final shots mother and daughters sit together and the mother brushes her eldest child's hair. The scene might be read as a device to resolve the narrative, but as a family member I interpreted it as the manifestation of my sister's actual desire for change in a painful relationship. It is an act of reparation (in the Kleinian sense) towards the mother figure (who represents Christina) to show her as capable of expressing love, yet it is also reparative to the filmmaker and the mother-child bond. Although *Floodhouse* is not a documentary, Lebow's comments are of relevance: '(it is) through reimagining the family on film (another screen surface) that the adult child asserts a triumphant (Lacan says "jubilant") stance' (Lebow 2008, p. 38). I suggest that *Floodhouse* 'reconceive(s) the space and ontology of home' by 'reimaging' family relationships.

Similarly, I interpret *Being Venice* as a hurt, angry (perhaps vengeful) response to a dissatisfactory family situation. Protagonist Venice is plagued by fraught relationships. Her love life is unsatisfactory and her ex-hippie father, Arthur, who has arrived from New Zealand to teach creative writing camps out in her tiny Sydney flat. Arthur is largely insensitive to his daughter's emotional turmoil, and the difficult parent-child relationship is the crux of the narrative. A partial resolution comes towards the end of the film: Arthur lies face down on the sofa weeping as he talks through family history. He validates his decision to send the young Venice to live with her grandmother through details of domestic chaos. Venice's baby brother died, Arthur declares, and it was his fault because he fed him carrot juice. Venice had sores all over her legs and she too would have died if she'd stayed. Blame for this is attributed to the crazy mother. Arthur's posture throughout this scene is that of a child. Eventually, Venice takes the parental role and comforts her father who literally cannot face her. Applying a Lacanian reading

one might infer that developmentally Arthur is stuck pre-mirror stage – he is unable to look in the mirror (in this case Venice is the (m)other); and remains fragmented and infantile.

This scene is informed by family history, which I outline briefly here. When Miro was born my parents were in their early twenties and my mother was suffering from debilitating depression. When my sister was six, my parents had another child, Paolo Moses, who died when he was five weeks old. Unable to cope, my parents sent my sister to live with our grandmother in the city. Christina began to paint as a means of psychological survival. As far as I know the sores mentioned in the film are fictional, and my sister was in no danger of dying. But the detail of the carrot juice is something my father has brought up many times over the years. The possibility that he may have contributed to his child's death is something that still haunts him.

In *Being Venice*, the mother-character is not physically present. However, one of Christina's artworks hangs on Venice's wall and is revealed when Arthur uncovers it in the morning – he has put his handkerchief over it in order to sleep. In answer to a query from Arthur about her mother, Venice responds that she's 'as toxic as ever', which prompts Arthur to comment that after thirteen years of marriage he has 'had about enough of the bitch to last a lifetime' (these quotes are not referenced as I saw the film at the cinema and at the time of writing it was not available on DVD). From my insider's perspective these 'fictional' representations of family are ethically fraught territory. It is undeniably my sister's right to turn her own history into art and exercise poetic license in representing the past. However, this has a distressing impact on family members who share aspects of that past. The ethical issue is that in addition to the emotional impact on family members, some viewers may understand fictional detail as actuality. Real people can become conflated with their fictionalised characters and this is what remains on the public record. This is the crux of Doris Brett's distress over Lily Brett's literary representations of their mother (Brett 2001).

It is important to emphasise that my sister is integral to my own representations of family, as events that occurred in her childhood have contributed to the shaping of my identity. I was born after Miro went to live with our maternal grandmother. Having already lost two children, my parents were extremely careful with me. Growing up I felt a sense of guilt about my siblings – as if I was the cuckoo baby who had displaced the two real ones (it is worth noting that my name is the feminine version of my brother's, who died). Growing up I often felt that my own role was to comfort my parents, and to parent my mother. Miro does not appear in any of the documentary-poems about my family because of the tense nature of both our relationship and her relationship with Christina.

Decisions around how exactly to include my sister in the narrative without her direct involvement were complex. I was adamant that she must be included, not only because her position in the family and her separation from our parents was linked to my sense of self, but also because I did not want to re-enact the same practice of exclusion that had occurred in public representations of both my mother and grandfather. However, I was aware that the inclusion of details about my sister in my films needed to be undertaken with sensitivity. Miro demonstrated support through providing numerous family photographs for my project, but when I offered to show her initial cuts of *Willing Exile* she was silent and I did not reiterate the offer.

'Delicate surgery': representing my parents

Returning to Lebow's contentions regarding the mirror phase and domestic ethnography (Lebow 2008), I suggest that by making *Willing Exile* I was attempting to unite two disparate, warring sides of myself in the form of my mother and father, who separated when I was five. My preferred family narrative was one that would let my parents hear each other's perspective and accept one another without feeling erased or disregarded by one other. Equally, I was attempting to

bring together my artistic, theatrical side and my reasonable, empathic side – I did not want either of these parts of my personality to cancel one another out.

Norman, me and Christina, 1973, Waiheke Island, New Zealand.

There was a sense of circularity to the project of investigating my childhood and my relationship with my parents. When my parents separated and my mother went to Europe with her new partner I suffered from abscessed gums – one by one my baby molars were yanked out. My teeth have been very poor ever since, and on my first trip back to New Zealand to begin filming my father, Christina paid for me to have a huge amount of dental work done. The dentist who treated me is an art collector – Christina paid for my treatment in paintings. Emotionally, the loss of my teeth when my mother left was connected to grief. It spelled both the death of the childhood I had known with my mother and the end of my parent's marriage. In both a literal and emotional sense Christina's gesture in my adult life repaired the earlier loss.

My parents were not on speaking terms at the beginning of my doctorate, but once filming began they inadvertently heard more about each other than they had done in years, which created potential for distress and anger. I filmed Christina and Norman separately over a period of about three years in Sydney, Wellington (New

Zealand) and in Castlemaine (near Melbourne) at each of their houses and my own. Making a film that fairly represented each parent was a precarious balancing act that required consideration of the impact of each person's words on the other, as well as the impact of my editing decisions. Discussing her experience of writing a biography of Melbourne artist Howard Arkley, Edwina Preston used the evocative phrases 'psychological barbed wire' and 'delicate surgery' to describe interactions with Arkley's family, and the meticulous care she exercised to preserve the nuance of interviewees' words while still ensuring that the text remained impartial (Preston 2003, p. 208).

This has particular resonance for my experience of making *Willing Exile*. Interview footage that I never imagined would be contentious frequently was. In an early interview Norman stated on camera that he and Christina were self-styled exiles and misfits who were 'trying' to be different. Viewing that footage my mother flared up and said that she *was* different – there was no choice in it. I saw my father's comment as a reflection of his personality and his difference from my mother, which was what I was interested in representing. However, I could also see how Norman's comment could be interpreted as an implicit judgment. What he viewed as pretentious, a type of pose, Christina saw as integral to her identity. Ultimately, I used this disparity between my parents' perspectives to construct a narrative. The juxtaposition of their wildly differing modes of expression and worldviews bears a similarity to Vi and Val's contrasting delivery in *Least Said, Soonest Mended* (Thomas dir. 2000) and lends a type of comedy to *Willing Exile*.

In this next section I discuss my interactions with each parent separately because this is reflective of the filming and post-production experience. The three of us were never together – it was only on screen, via the 'delicate surgery' of editing that I was able to unite (suture) my parents. Here I draw upon Jean Pierre Oudart's psychoanalytic notion of suture, which utilises Lacan's mirror phase and refers to the way that, for the spectator, a film stitches together an illusory reality that possesses a semblance of wholeness. It is also worth noting that in medical

terminology a suture is a stitch that holds a wound or cut together (Oudart 1977). It could be said that through the act of filming I was attempting to heal the psychic wound caused by my parents' separation.

Filming Norman: reparative observation

My first trip to New Zealand to film spelled a significant change in my interactions with my father. We had only just resumed contact after two years of silence and many more years of fraught contact. Norman's long-term partnership with a woman whom I did not get along with had negatively affected our relationship, causing us both to feel dismissed and ignored by each other. Norman's new partner was welcoming towards his children, which altered my father's responses to me. However, the act of filming also contributed to a change in our relationship: it was unexpectedly reparative. I interviewed my father in between visits to the dentist, often arriving with a numb face that defrosted into intense pain. He fussed over me, and in turn blossomed beneath the warmth of my interest as an interviewer. As a rather impatient daughter, I had never listened to him as thoroughly as I did when I was behind the camera.

While my interest in my father's life was healing, conversely the act of filming also allowed a certain level of emotional distance. I suggest that I too became a character, and playing the role of documentary interviewer and director was different from the role of Norman's child. To draw on Rouch (cited in Levin 1971, p. 137), the camera was a 'psychoanalytic stimulant' not only for my father, but also for me behind it, enabling me to step away from my involvement in our shared history and provide Norman with 'an empathic eye/ear' in a way that I had not done before (Berman, Rosenheimer & Aviad 2003, p. 221). One of first thing he chose to share on camera was the death of Paolo Moses and the impact of this on my parents' lives. This echoed my experiences with *No One Eats Alone*: many women chose to share something of particular emotional importance before they

could talk about anything else. In the case of both Ajok (Chapter Two) and Bronica (Chapter Three), a traumatic event was all they really wanted to share on camera.

The camera also acted as an arbitrator with Norman, as it does for family members in *October Country* and *Least Said, Soonest Mended*, who address things to the respective filmmakers that they do not say directly to one another. However, in this case the person on the receiving end of Norman's comments about our relationship was me. While Norman was critical of his own parenting skills, he also commented that I was a 'very watchful' child, 'always observing' and 'criticising', and particularly critical of his parenting skills (unedited footage 2011, 17 March). He recalled telling a friend not to ask for my opinion of him if they wanted to hear anything positive. I was present when Norman made that remark to his friend and thought that he was saying I didn't love him enough. I imagined that this made me a difficult and unlovable child.

However, in the character of documentary director, I heard Norman's recollection as an interesting story about a parent-child dynamic and his own lack of confidence as an adult/parent. Ironically, in this interaction Norman was under intense observation from me. However, I suggest that here I was the 'subject supposed to know' and that something about my authority (however illusory) put my father at ease. Norman had no wish to veto any of the footage, trusting that in this role I would 'know best'. After I played back what we'd shot, he phoned his partner and I heard him telling her that I was a 'great' interviewer, and that he thought what he'd said was 'interesting'. It was a representation of himself he wanted to show off to her.

Filming Christina: performance and privacy

My first experience of interviewing Christina on film was similarly harmonious. It was a test-run to see what we might talk about and how that might translate on film. Playing the footage back, my mother suggested that actually this *was* the film

– an unbroken dramatic monologue about a mother-daughter relationship. I agreed that it was beautiful: my mother's voice and manner is full of an ease that demonstrates a happy connection between us. However, in this interview Christina does not mention either my father or sister, or my separation from her as a five-year-old. I wanted to make a film that explored these painful aspects of the past as a way of potentially repairing the 'ruptures' and 'disunities' in my identity (Lebow 2008, p. 38). This emotional motivation was combined with an aesthetic desire to make a compelling documentary with some variety of narrative tension or texture. When I began to explore how I might construct a narrative by intercutting my parents' differing perspectives on their shared history, it became clear that my preferred family narrative was in conflict with my mother's representational preferences.

There is a backstory to the dynamic that occurred between my mother and me while filming. It is a story that is intrinsic to our parent-child relationship and to our broader relationship as two women and two artists. As long as I can remember my mother has performed aspects of her life to people outside the family. On social occasions I have heard the same dramatic, densely poetic monologues, which cover intimate and traumatic events, many times over. As a child and adolescent I was frequently a silent, embarrassed audience. As an adult I have often felt disregarded and left the room, as a shared conversation did not seem possible. We have frequently fought about my response: my mother has felt that I did not want to acknowledge her as an artist. I often felt that her art had taken over and that she could barely acknowledge me as her child. As a result I have been deeply ambivalent about, and critical of, my own artistic practice.

On superficial consideration it might seem that interviewing my mother on film would make up for my unwillingness to listen to her spontaneous performances in the past. However, both Christina and I continued to feel unacknowledged by each other. This was the crux of our representational difficulties. I found that I could not offer 'an empathic eye/ear' (Berman, Rosenheimer & Aviad 2003, p. 221) in the

same way that I had been able to for my father. While I was able to listen to Norman's observations as a documentary-maker, I was unable to distance myself from my emotional responses to my mother's declamatory style of storytelling. While she was intent on delivering her recollections of past events as a dramatic monologue, I could not admire the 'art' of her delivery. Instead I was upset and exasperated by what I frequently felt was a public performance that again disregarded our relationship and shared history.

On a particularly tense day of filming, early in the project, Christina repeated a number of times how repulsive she'd found Norman, and that she'd been so unhappy and unstable at that point in her life, she would have married anyone who had offered to take care of her. She told the story in a number of different voices and tones to ensure that her performance was 'right'. I had heard my mother tell this story on many other occasions and as I filmed my face and manner became increasingly stony. When we took a lunch break, Christina regaled my partner with the same details. I told her that she was sitting across the table from the *product* of her repulsion. And it was not going to be a film about *that*. She responded that I was trying to 'censor' her and I shouted at her to 'fuck off'. This was not an isolated incident; high levels of tension characterised our interactions throughout my project.

It is clear now that we were working in a distinctly different genre from each other. I could not catch my mother unawares with a rolling camera, either going about her day or speaking to me as if we were alone. I had imagined that I would interview Christina and later pair the edited interview with cutaway footage that showed her painting, cooking or scrubbing her kitchen floors (a daily ritual) while immaculately dressed and draped with her customary necklaces. However, this was a battle of artistic wills – Christina wanted to perform in the interviews – walk around, gesture, project her voice as if on stage and stamp the floor if the urge took her. The camera represented an audience and she wanted me to say 'cut' after each 'scene' or short performance. 'Scene' is a particularly loaded term here – my

mother and I largely could not work together without 'making a scene' in the emotional sense.

While I was filming, Christina frequently posed as if for a still photo and said, 'Take a shot of me holding this mask'. Or she would suddenly say, 'what does this look like?' Her preoccupation with how she might look on film echoed Vanessa Beecroft's suggestion in *The Art Star and the Sudanese Twins* (Brettkelly dir. 2008) that she should be filmed against a yellow wall. This was not the only similarity between the two artists. Art is as central to my mother's identity and emotional stability, as it is to Beecroft's. Her life is her art and vice versa. On the occasions that Christina lost her temper she would remind me that she had her own films and her career didn't need further exposure. She was only participating out of generosity towards me. In one piece of footage Christina declares:

> Your mother is an extraordinary actor, poet, artist… so she is going to behave in the way that she needs to. There's no role that's been written for her. I can't be held down. I wasn't able to say things as I wanted to... I was hemmed in. I'm a person who is very free when I speak. I don't want to be hemmed in and told you can't stamp your foot, because it's not how I'm going to behave. (Unedited footage 2012, 21 November)

It is worth noting that there is a split between two very different types of discourse in Christina's declaration. The first part where she speaks of herself in the third person is rather dissociative – as if she, the person speaking is not actually my mother. Here she seems to be both distancing herself from our emotional connection and referring to herself as a character. In the second half, her own frustration and indignation breaks through the role she appears to be playing.

In terms of Levinasian ethical principals towards the Other, this is also a vivid demonstration of how what I wanted from Christina was a type of violence towards her, a refusal to acknowledge her difference. Conversely, Christina also refused to acknowledge my difference as an artist. Talking about aspects of our shared

history, she would often say, 'but I talk about this in *my* film.' I would have to remind her, 'but this is *my* film – it is a *different* project'. She wanted her aesthetic to dominate, even in terms of the shot type. She did not want to be framed in close-up or mid-shot. Her preference was to take up the whole frame from head to toe. On one occasion she insisted that I film her in a corner. There was a certain poetic logic to this given that she felt so cornered by me representing her, however from my perspective the footage is not visually successful. Christina's attempts to control the aesthetic style of the film and my ongoing struggle to control my negative emotional responses meant that the footage I shot was varying in quality. During the editing of *Willing Exile* I was frequently disappointed and frustrated by the framing and lighting, but was forced to use the material because of what Christina had said. Other footage I shot, however, is carefully composed, as is the footage shot by a cinematographer friend. Ultimately there is something appropriate about this diverse mix of visuals – it demonstrates the diverse emotional repertoire of my relationship with my mother. *Willing Exile,* like *No One Eats Alone* is a collage and a product of my relationship with each of the participants – in this case my parents.

What was most contested in shooting *Willing Exile* was the representation of the circumstances around Miro's departure to live with our grandmother. Like Thomas in *Least Said, Soonest Mended*, I had divided loyalties and motivations that mixed revenge and reparation. Out of loyalty to my sister and my own guilt at being the 'cuckoo baby' I was overzealous in trying to get my mother to explain her feelings and express contrition over her separation from her six-year-old daughter. We reshot the scene numerous times and could not agree on any version. Christina was adamant that during that period of her life she was unable to really love or care for anyone and that, after the death of Paolo Moses, painting became a means of survival. She became angry and defensive in response to my probing. Her resistance recalled a moment in *Least Said, Soonest Mended* in which Vi declares to Thomas:

You can ask me all these questions. I can give you what answers I'm capable of giving you but there is no way you can put your thoughts into our time. So whether you think we were right or wrong is hard lines. (Thomas dir. 2000, min. 22:49-22:57)

Being Venice had a significant impact on my own filming. After it was released Christina was even more anxious about being represented and commented angrily that she was sick of being 'publically slandered'. Her distress meant that she spoke about her separation from Miro with a bristling lack of empathy. Eventually she asked me to edit out any mention of her feelings about the separation, because she was afraid that anything she said might cause my sister more distress. I want to return here to MacDougall's observation of representation as something that 'offends against the complexity of people (MacDougall 1998, p. 38)'. Christina's decision not to describe her separation from my sister is an acknowledgement that representation can also offend against the complexity of emotional nuance; that for some events verbal articulation will never be enough to describe what happened. However, withholding certain information is also an assertion of power for the participant. Similarly, in *Least Said, Soonest Mended*, Vi will only disclose so much on camera and appears determined to recollect events in a mundane, rather than an emotionally expressive, way.

Christina's auto/biographical documentary *Indecent Exposure* (Conrad dir. 2012) was also a factor in the tensions around representation. I was reluctant to watch it for fear it would confuse my vision for my own films. For Christina this was painful because she saw it as further evidence of my lack of acknowledgement of her as an artist. A similarity can be drawn between this dynamic and the representation of the father-daughter relationship in *Being Venice*. When Arthur recalls the circumstances of Venice being sent to live with her grandmother it is Venice who takes the parental role. In the case of Christina continually asking for me to pay attention to her film (her own auto/biographical mirror) I felt the parent-child roles were reversed. Usually it is the child asking for validation from her/his parents for her successes in the world. I felt that because of her own need my

mother continued to disregard my position as both her *child* and an artist in my own right.

Indecent Exposure is a self-portrait detailing Christina's childhood, her struggle with relationships and parenting, and her periods of disabling mental illness, which she overcame by becoming an 'obsessed painter'. Christina dresses in drag, smokes a phallus-cigar, stages her own death and talks about being an artist in a world where women are disrespected and reduced because of their gender. At the very beginning of the film she poses the question: 'To be a woman, to be an artist, to be a mother, to have a cunt. How I ask you can one unite these mad aspects?' (Conrad dir. 2012, min. 0:06-0:24). She recalls that her own mother led a life dominated by domesticity and the demands of children and that was her only 'place' in the world (Conrad dir. 2012, min. 10:08) *Indecent Exposure* communicates Christina's desire for a different kind of 'place', despite having children. For her, art provides a way of being at home in the world that is perhaps more real than anything else. The title refers to the way Christina initially felt about making her art public: for years she hid it in cupboards.

In one sense *Indecent Exposure* is an answer to the implications in *Floodhouse* and *Being Venice* that Christina neglected her maternal role. In attempting to represent Christina as my *mother*, distinct from an artist and performer, I could see that she may have felt that I was reducing her. It was a battle to include footage that showed her sewing by hand and ignoring the camera. Editing *Willing Exile* I wanted to ensure that this tension (between us and around motherhood) became part of the text. At the end of the film, referring to her absence in her children's lives, Christina says that the 'condemnation' had been huge and that if she had been a man it would have been very different. She refers wryly to herself as 'the criminal now seated on the yellow sofa'.

When I finally watched *Indecent Exposure*, I *was* able to admire Christina's performance and enjoy her poetry, her sense of the absurd and her ability to play.

In the context of making *Willing Exile*, a spirit of playfulness was also what worked best. Initially I had been determined to capture Christina's vulnerable, tender moments on camera; the aspects of my mother's personality that I saw on the occasions we were alone. It was only towards the end of the project that I realised how deeply private my mother is, despite the intimate details she discloses in her dramatic monologues. When I stopped trying to 'catch' her being my mother and construct her as a parent, Christina and I were able to demonstrate the closeness of our relationship. This is particularly evident in footage taken when we left the camera rolling outside the house as the sun went down and both tried on a variety of Christina's ceramic masks.

I suggest that in this footage I have stepped away from the position of the 'subject supposed to know'. In the frame next to my mother, I am no longer a voyeur behind the camera or a 'giver' and 'framer' (Trinh quoted in Hohenberger 2007, p. 115). In this scene, Christina and I were both able to 'become undone' (Butler 2005, p. 136) in relation to one another and render ethical issues irrelevant. It enabled us to demonstrate our mother-child relationship in the context of *Willing Exile*, without any disagreements around representation. Significantly, there is no sound in this footage – it might be interpreted as representing a playful pre-verbal mother and child bond. Our shadows against the wall are like extra characters. Christina's masks which each of us slowly takes on and off, signal that we both have many faces and identities. The scene demonstrates a type of non-literal, expressive representation that is expansive rather than reductive in terms of meaning making for both participant(s) and viewer; one which recalls Bronica's metaphor of the bowl in *No One Eats Alone*, as well as the imagery that I use in *Separation*. This was the piece of footage that both Christina and I liked best, and that I selected to begin and end *Willing Exile*.

Christina's experience of making *Indecent Exposure* also eventually contributed to her understanding the difficulty of my double role as daughter and filmmaker. My grandmother Margaret had been so angry about Christina's representation of their

shared family past in *Indecent Exposure* that mother and daughter had barely been on speaking terms at the time of Margaret's death. Surprisingly, Christina said to me that even if I had ended up 'slandering' her in my films, she would have had to let me do so because she understood that it was my story and I needed to be able to tell it in my way.

Reparative opportunities

Despite the significant angst both my mother and I experienced while filming, there were also some unexpectedly reparative aspects. A source of pain when my parents separated and I went to live with my father was that I very rarely saw Christina although she initially lived close by. Interviewing Christina for *Willing Exile*, I discovered that her partner had been instrumental in this. This was one of the few moments during filming where I was entirely engrossed in my mother's storytelling because it felt emotionally honest and expressive of real pain rather than being self-consciously dramatic. Christina's partner believed that going between two houses was destabilising for a child and told her that I must choose. Christina says she had no firm idea of her identity or rights and agreed, not realising that I would choose my father. I chose Norman precisely because of my mother's inability to articulate her rights (and, by extension, mine). Many years later my mother's explanation of the situation was healing. I had not realised the extent of her powerlessness.

I included my mother's perspective on this situation in *Willing Exile* because it offers an insight into Christina's emotional make-up and her struggle as a woman. It is an important moment of vulnerability that takes her beyond her performance of 'extraordinary artist'. I want to return here to MacDougall's comment that 'every film to some degree offends against the complexity of people (MacDougall 1998, p. 38). As Thomas has also noted, it was 'very difficult' to represent his mother Vi 'as a rounded human being (Thomas 2013, pers. comm. 4 June)'. I feel similarly about my representation of my parents (particularly Christina) in *Willing*

Exile. As I have previously commented, Christina could not allow me to represent her as a more rounded human being because of her anxiety around representation and her need to have primary (conjuring) control over a self-chosen public face. There is a paradox at work here: while Christina felt that I took her power away by 'hemming her in and telling her 'how to behave', thus reducing the person that she is, I felt that giving Christina the power of veto also sometimes reduced how I was able to represent her in *Willing Exile*.

Making *Willing Exile* also contributed to a change in my parents' relationship that I could not have predicted. Despite Christina emphasising how repulsive she had found Norman, when she watched his footage, she recalled the qualities that she had found appealing in him: his kindness and his willingness to support her as artist. She recalled that after the death of their son, Norman had bought her art materials and encouraged her to paint. They had very little money and my father needed to go to the dentist. Christina suggested that I should film her and Norman at my house as an end to *Willing Exile*. This was the polar opposite of her attitude at the beginning, when she could hardly bear to appear in the same film as Norman.

While I was interested in the possibility of filming my parents together, ultimately I did not go through with it. I did not want to be the go-between with my parents as Thomas is in *Least Said, Soonest Mended* and, given all the representational difficulties I had experienced with my mother, I felt very cautious about the added dynamic of my father's presence. Because filming would have taken place at my house and *Willing Exile* was my project, I felt that this put me in an inverse position of parental responsibility (in addition to what I had already experienced during filming). I was very clear that I was already too emotionally exhausted by the project to continue struggling along as the 'subject supposed to know'.

Eventually, on one of Christina's visits to New Zealand, my parents had lunch without me. When I resumed filming Norman he spoke about his appreciation of Christina's goodwill towards him, and his feeling that they had both developed a

'new level of consciousness' (unedited footage 2012, October 17). Although my 'preferred version of the family narrative' was one where my parents were on speaking terms, I did not include their semi-reconciliation. From an aesthetic perspective, I felt that this would have overcomplicated the film's narrative. *Willing Exile* is primarily a portrait of my parents' relationship when I was a child – it represents our shared history rather than the present.

Conclusion: ethical ambiguity and protective strategies

In this chapter I have discussed a variety of auto/biographical film texts and contexts that explore painful aspects of shared family pasts. In Chapter Two I contended that the ethical paradox of the documentary encounter is that while a practitioner has a responsibility to be clear and transparent to her/his participants, what transpires emotionally and psychologically may actually be rather unclear. This is even more pertinent in domestic ethnography, which involves participants who already have complex relationships with each other. In representing one's own family the domestic ethnographer is in an inherently ambiguous position. This means that there is no single ethical solution either to the problem of representation or the problem of responsibility to participants. Even when a process is entirely collaborative, viewers may take ethical issue with a particular representation, as evidenced by responses to *October Country*. This may be because an aspect of the family representation recalls the viewer's own family relationships or past. As Judith Butler has contended in her conceptualization of transference, the telling of stories acts on the listener in ways that s/he 'may well not understand' (Butler 2005, p. 51).

Drawing on Lebow's application of Lacan's mirror stage to domestic ethnography I have linked the desire for reparation/revenge to the way a filmmaker attempts to 'conjure' her/his preferred version of the family narrative' (Lebow 2008, p. 38) on screen. The filmmaker's emotional motivations as a family member are also frequently entwined with aesthetic motivations, such as telling a compelling story,

which may construct a family member in a particular way. Ethical complexity becomes particularly apparent when there are divided loyalties and a variety of conflicting 'preferred versions of the family narrative' among family members. This is evidenced by Thomas's interactions with his mother in the context of *Least Said, Soonest Mended* and in my interactions with Christina in the context of making *Willing Exile*.

Neither participant wished to be part of the narrative their filmmaker-child wanted to tell. *Least Said, Soonest Mended* and *Willing Exile* can be said to offend against Vi and Christina's respective styles of communication. Vi would have preferred not to discuss the past at all and Christina was insistent on performing it. However, since *Least Said, Soonest Mended* was not collaborative while *Willing Exile* allowed participants right of veto, there was a significant difference in terms of how much power each participant had in terms of their own representation. In regards to the rights of participants Pryluck (2005, p. 205) has asserted that: 'Collaboration fulfils the basic ethical requirement for control of one's own personality'. It is pertinent to consider notions of 'control' here. As I have evidenced in this chapter, while allowing participants right of veto is ethically responsible, it does not necessarily guard against representational difficulties. Representation in *Willing Exile* was extremely fraught. My interactions with Christina often felt like a battle for aesthetic control.

It is worth returning here to Aidichie's (2009) notion of the 'danger of the single story'. In Chapter Three I applied this to the representational homogenisation of Sudanese-Australians, but all documentary participants regardless of cultural background are potentially in danger of having a 'single story' told about them via the way they are framed in a narrative. In domestic ethnography the reasons for this are complex and may be linked to the filmmaker's desire for reparation/revenge. In *Least Said, Soonest Mended*, Thomas's representation of his mother may have been a subconscious act of revenge, a way of rendering her powerless. However,

participants may also choose to play a particular role, demonstrating their own power.

To a certain extent *Least Said, Soonest Mended* and *Willing Exile* respectively reduce Vi and Christina to characters. Vi seems lacking in warmth and emotional capacity and Christina, as the eccentric, exotic artist, appears to both overstate and dramatise everything. A collaborative process that allowed Christina the power of veto paradoxically also meant that her representation in the film might be said to 'offend against' her 'complexity' as a person (MacDougall 1998, p. 38). This was due to the tensions between Christina and me as both mother and child and as two artists. Each of us saw what the other wanted in terms of representation as reductive. However, my decision to focus on my parents' past relationship and the shared history of my childhood also dictated particular narrative decisions. Similarly, the narrative of the circumstances around Val's baby being put up for adoption assists in constructing Vi as particularly unemotional. However, I suggest that rather than simply being framed a certain way by their filmmaker children, Vi and Christina's responses on film contribute to each woman's respective characterisation, specifically as a protective strategy. Playing a role (perhaps subconsciously) is a way for each to guard her privacy and hold on to some power in response to being framed and interviewed. Ironically the 'single story' (Aidichie 2009), a type of linearity that does not give too much of the private person away, may be 'safe' in this instance rather than 'dangerous'.

In closing I want to return to the concept of reparation and the idea that a domestic ethnography might be a 'healing force' (Cohen 2009, p. 1). Cohen's notion of 'healing' with regard to *October Country* is linked to what she views as the film's demonstration of the Moshers' resilience. My own domestic ethnography was healing in that it allowed me (in the character of documentary director) to acquire a more understanding and generous perspective on my parents' lives and decisions than I had possessed previously. Another healing aspect was presented by the footage (which I used to begin and end *Willing Exile)* that shows my mother and I

playing in front of the camera. This footage is perhaps the psychic 'suture' that I was searching for throughout the entire project. It represents a type of reciprocity, 'unknowingness' (Butler 2005, p. 136) and poetic expansiveness. The footage represents a type of nonverbal storytelling in which there are no contested versions of the family narrative and ethical issues become irrelevant.

Conclusion

The origins of this doctoral project began with a desire to make sense of strong emotions in my own documentary practice. Some of the relationships I developed while making *No One Eats Alone* (Bilbrough dir. 2010) were akin to family relationships. Additionally, while editing hours of footage, I became infused with participants' gestures and expressions: the exact cadence of a laugh, a tone of voice or the tilt of someone else's face. It was like the experience of being in love, when one is involuntarily taken over by the presence of the beloved. While making *No One Eats Alone* I was also attempting to parent Abe, a Sudanese-Australian teenager. These emotional connections, which in some ways replicated family relationships, led me to investigate my actual family through the creative component of this thesis: *Porous* (Bilbrough 2013), a collection of written poems, and four documentary poems *Separation* (Bilbrough dir. 2013c), *Going with the Wind* (Bilbrough dir. 2013b), *A View of the Boats* (Bilbrough dir. 2013a) and *Willing Exile* (Bilbrough dir. 2013d).

In this exegesis I have examined the 'missing story' (Piotrowska 2012, p. 17) of the relationship between documentary-maker and participant in auto/biographical documentary. I have contended that this relationship is multidimensional and can encompass intense emotions, including feelings of love and betrayal. Through a discussion of the text and context of a selection of auto/biographical documentaries (including my own work) I have demonstrated that an acknowledgement of this complex connection between filmmaker and participant is integral to a nuanced consideration of ethical responsibility, and that the film is a product of this relationship. In terms of an ethical practice that balances the rights of the participant with the filmmaker's artistic expression I have drawn upon Nash's claim that 'a universal abstract approach will not suffice for a practice that depends on the relationship between one particular individual and another' (Nash 2009, p. 24). My research evidences the specific idiosyncratic interactions and connections that occur in the documentary encounter, often with unpredictable results.

Although my own films are highly negotiated and although I allow participants right of veto, I examined a selection of documentaries in this doctoral research that are, apart from *October Country* (Palmieri & Mosher dir. 2009), not collaborative. My reason for connecting two disparate modes of filmmaking was to demonstrate the difficulty in ethically representing aspects of another person's life *despite* collaborative processes. A filmmaking process that focuses on and prioritises relationships can bring to complex representational issues the fore, issues that may never have arisen in the context of a more conventional documentary production. In this way collaborative filmmaking offers a particularly rich resource in terms of an examination of the liminal nature of the filmmaker-participant relationship. This has value to the larger field of documentary-filmmaking practise and scholarship.

The documentary poems I made for this thesis address the ethical concerns inherent in auto/biographical work through both method and form. In addition to the content being negotiated with the participants, the films combine interview material with visual images to create evocative elliptical narratives based around memory and imagination, rather than providing exact facts and details that could be damaging to those involved. In my discussion of the filmmaking process I demonstrated that the creation of an auto/biographical work requires the careful weighing up of aesthetics with the possible consequences to close others (and relationships with those others). This has a creative pedagogical function for arts and media practitioners as well as scholars, social workers and anthropologists working with other people's stories, as well as with their own.

In Chapter One I provided a context for my research by discussing the way in which documentary practitioners tend to choose subjects and participants that they identify with and that may link to significant/formative experiences in their own lives. I proposed that psychoanalytic theory, particularly Lacan's mirror phase and the transference and counter-transference paradigm can assist in illuminating the complexities of the filmmaker-participant relationship. As Lacan's '*sujet suppose*

savoir' – the 'subject supposed to know' – the documentary-maker may become like a parent or lover to the participant and the experience of telling one's story to the camera can be conceptualised as a re-enactment of the mirror stage, a way of uniting the fragments of self. Klein's work on reparation and art provides a further insight into documentaries that focus on the practitioner's family, a genre which Renov (2004) has termed 'domestic ethnography'.

The work of Levinas and Butler further assist with conceptualising the practitioner's ethical responsibility to the participant, particularly in collaborative documentary. For Levinas, ethics involves an acknowledgement and acceptance of the Other's fundamental difference to oneself. Violence to the Other (unethical behaviour) constitutes 'making them play roles in which they no longer recognise themselves' (Levinas 1969, p. 21). I linked this assertion to my contention that documentaries have the power to construct participants as characters. For Butler, ethics involves understanding the limitedness of one's knowledge about oneself, particularly in relation to others. This is relevant to collaborative documentary practice, in which the practitioner steps away from a position of authority and is open to the possibility of contribution from participants.

In Chapter Two I applied the transference paradigm to a discussion of a selection of auto/biographical documentaries to tease out the multidimensional nature of the documentary relationship and its potential to inspire strong emotions. I examined the way a participant may be constructed as a character and how this may trivialise or over-define a particular aspect of their life. Feelings of betrayal may occur at the end of the relationship, particularly if the representation of the participant constructs her/his life in an unflattering way. Disputes may occur even if the representation is a positive one, evidencing the erratic quality of human emotions and a lack of clarity around the documentary encounter and its outcomes. I argued that a documentary practitioner has an ethical responsibility to cultivate clarity and transparency on a number of levels. This is pertinent to authorship and the way in

which the construction of a certain narrative and 'character' might impact on the actuality of a participant's life and identity.

In Chapter Three I focused on my own practitioner experience in the context of making *No One Eats Alone* and *Separation,* films that concern aspects of the life stories of members of the Sudanese-Australian community. In contextualising the process of making these films I discussed representations of Sudanese-Australians in the media with reference to Aidichie's (2009) notion of the 'danger of the single story' and Shohat's contention that there is a tendency towards understanding all representations of people from marginalised cultures as 'allegorical (Shohat 1995, p. 169) Mainstream media representations had a significant impact on my own work in terms of both ethics and aesthetics.

Discussing the difficulties I encountered working with Ajok and Mary in *No One Eats Alone*, I further demonstrated the unpredictable nature of the documentary encounter and the propensity for both filmmaker and participant(s) to make assumptions. I contended that ethical responsibility and collaboration in this particular instance involved stepping away from a position of the 'subject supposed to know' to a position of reciprocity that involved sharing details about my own life. A discussion of the process of representing Bronica's story about the loss of her daughter demonstrated the 'burden of representation'. There was a risk that aspects of her narrative might contribute to a reductive, allegorical understanding of Sudanese-Australian culture.

In making *Separation*, my own story of 'parental' loss, I experienced similar representational issues. In critically reflecting on both Bronica's story and my improvised parenting relationship with Abe I demonstrated that metaphor, nonliteral imagery and suggestion are a powerful way of representing contested or sensitive material. Poetic representations protect privacy while also opening up, rather than reducing, meaning, thus avoiding homogenous interpretation.

In Chapter Four I demonstrated that domestic ethnography is inherently ethically fraught because emotional and aesthetic motivations are entwined. I drew on Lebow's application of Lacan's mirror stage to domestic ethnography and linked the desire for reparation/revenge to the way a filmmaker attempts to 'conjure' her/his 'preferred version of the family narrative' (Lebow 2008, p. 38). I suggested that Klein's theories on reparation also contribute to understanding the filmmaker's mixed motivations. An auto/biographical film about the practitioner's family may be interpreted as an adult manifestation of both the infant's aggressive, destructive urges towards her/his mother (or parents) and her/his remorse and need to make amends for that aggression. Making a film about family members may also be a way to resolve a type of loss or separation. I argued that ethical complexity becomes particularly apparent when there are a variety of conflicting 'preferred versions of the family narrative' among family members, and when a filmmaker constructs a family member as a particular character. However I also demonstrated that a family member might choose to play a character/role as a way of clarifying her/his own identity or as a self-protective strategy. I demonstrated that there is no single ethical solution in terms of either representation or responsibility to participants in domestic ethnography. Even when a process is entirely collaborative, viewers may take ethical issue with a particular representation that, in a type of transference, recalls their own family relationships.

The process of making *Willing Exile* can be described as a kind of battle for acknowledgement between my mother and me. While I wanted her to reveal aspects of her identity as my mother on camera (what I saw in private), she wanted me to acknowledge her as 'an extraordinary artist'. This tension recalled and reflected seemingly unresolvable historical difficulties in our relationship. In Willing Exile I was unexpectedly able to 'suture' the psychic wound between us when we both stopped insisting on a verbal expression of our respective 'preferred version of the family narrative' (Lebow 2008, p 38). We were able to acknowledge and reconcile both our mother-and-child bond and our individual artistic identities by playing in front of the camera, with no 'subject supposed to know' to direct

either of us. In this situation, which did not involve talk about either the past or the process of making the film, ethics became irrelevant. This scene, like the representation of Bronica's story in *No One Eats Alone* and the whole text of *Separation*, offers poetic possibility in terms of interpretation because it is evocative rather than literal, allowing space for the viewer's imagination.

Here I want to return to my research contention that a 'creative process based around reciprocity and transparency can present transformative opportunities for filmmaker and participants'. Broadly speaking, *all* auto/biographical documentaries involving a close relationship between participant and practitioner might be transformative in the way they impact on each person's life, although the impact is not always positive. It is worth returning here to Butler's conceptualisation of transference, which involves the telling of a story that acts on both the listener and the teller in a way that might not be immediately understandable (Butler 2005, p. 51). As my own experience with my parents evidenced, a negotiated process in domestic ethnography can stimulate change in family relationships. Making *Willing Exile* was particularly transformative because it contributed to my parents and me having a new, reparative understanding of each other. By adopting the character of the documentary director I gained a fresh insight into aspects of our shared pasts, as well as an increased understanding of, and empathy for, each of my parents' respective vulnerabilities.

There were a number of interesting aspects of this project that I was unable to explore due to the constraints of my particular topic and research contentions, but which suggest opportunities for further research. Firstly, for this exegesis I have combined a discussion of the text and context of selected documentaries with the perspectives of the filmmakers, viewers and, where possible, participants. I also interviewed three of the filmmakers whose documentaries I discussed. Interviews with participants were not included in my research. A fuller study might compare the perspectives of practitioners and participants on the documentary relationship.

Secondly, my parents were both highly reflective and articulate about the process of being represented in a film about family. I suggest that research on the perspectives and response of domestic ethnography participants would contribute a valuable strand to research on ethics and the documentary relationship.

Thirdly, when I interviewed both *No One Eats Alone* participants and my father, I noted that the first thing each wanted to talk about was something traumatic. The traumatic story had to be shared before less emotionally significant stories could be told. This tendency, an example perhaps of Rouch's observation that the camera is a 'psychoanalytic stimulant' (Rouch, cited in Levin 1971, p. 137), suggests scope for further research.

Rather than offer any definitive answers to the issue of ethical representation of others in the context of auto/biographical documentary, this exegesis has sought to offer an insight into the ethical issues inherent in the documentary relationship, particularly with regards to the Representation of individuals from marginalised cultural groups and close others, such as family members. Acknowledging the multidimensionality of the documentary relationship, while recognising a certain degree of 'unknowingness' (Butler 2005, p. 20) with regard to oneself, the participant and the film, offers a possible way forward in terms of ethical responsibility.

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