"Wonderfully ordinary" words from a romantic archive of Elizabeth Jolley's writing for students: Creative process as a garland of fragments

Andrea Wood
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“Wonderfully Ordinary” Words from a Romantic Archive of Elizabeth Jolley’s Writing for Students: Creative Process as a Garland of Fragments.

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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
Abstract

This project, including the visual artworks and poetry developed for the exhibition *Wonderfully Ordinary*, is the outcome of practice-led research into the creative process. Through creative practice—and the development of a personal and fragmentary process of invention—it aims to generate knowledge about creative practice as a form of philosophy in action. Drawing on Paul Carter’s concept of *material thinking* and historical ideas arising from Western Australian author Elizabeth Jolley’s (1923–2007) creative process and writing, it explores ways in which Friedrich von Schlegel’s (1772–1829) philosophical conception of the Romantic fragment might be revealed as a continuing idea of interest and tool for contemporary art production. It also asks how a creative engagement with the archive and the past to which its materials give access, might facilitate the production of new creative works. Critical to this is a set of understandings of history and the archive found in the writings of historian Carolyn Steedman. These understandings address what we can and can’t know about the past, and the transmission and reconfiguration of ideas over time. Ink is used—falling as words, drawings or blots on paper, and dust is applied as a metaphor for the possible interconnectedness between artists and viewers, our relationship to ideas and to nature.

An archive of ink-blots: material translations of connections made between creative process and the chance processes of evolution—an exploration of the shared past of Romanticism and science as *naturphilosophie*—is the result of time spent with the zoological specimen collection at the University of Western Australia. Jörg Heiser’s writing on Romantic Conceptualism, historical understanding of the ink-blot and the artistic practices of Victor Hugo, Bas Jan Ader, Xu Bing and Mark Dion also inform the project. Importantly, the research arises from female experience: the personal challenge of the work of an artist seeking wholeness in the midst of professional and family life, and the fragmentary or increasingly divided and interrupted nature of ordinary days. The fragment and working fragmentarily suggest an alternative to a stereotyped conception of creative production as a necessarily uninterrupted and somehow separate activity conducted at a distance from quotidian concerns.
I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

1) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

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I grant permission for the library at Edith Cowan University to make duplicate copies of my thesis as required.

Signed

Andrea Wood

Date:
I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the people who have been instrumental in the development of this research. I would like to show my great appreciation for the supervision of Dr Paul Uhlmann, whose encouragement and guidance has supported the development of my creative practice from the time of my undergraduate studies. He has been steadfast in his support of this project since its inception in 2008.

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I am grateful for the contribution of Dr Jamie O’Shea and other staff and students at the School of Animal Biology at the University of Western Australia, who provided access to the zoological specimen teaching collection and who shared their knowledge of and enthusiasm for the natural world.

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Introduction

The aim of this research was to create new visual artwork and writing, and to present key ideas arising from the project as an installation of paper, ink and dust in which visitors to a gallery might participate creatively as viewers and readers. As a complementary outcome, this exegesis reflects and examines the development of the project and the resulting exhibition *Wonderfully Ordinary* held at Spectrum Project Space at Edith Cowan University in April and May 2013. Consisting of a collection of drawings and writing in ink on paper, books, ephemera and natural elements—including the installation of branches of a large Marri tree in the gallery—the exhibition explored potentialising aspects of the fragment. That is, the potential of the Romantic fragment—Friedrich von Schlegel’s (1772–1829) philosophical conception of an ongoing “idea” or “project”—as a facilitator for both the creation of new artworks and for creative intersubjective exchange. The aim was for the exhibition to participate in a number of associated conversations, including a dialogue about history and the archive, as well as aspects of creative process. It was therefore conceived on the foundations of my research using methodologies articulated in the discipline of practice-led research.

Estelle Barrett (2007, p. 1) in her introduction to *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* defines practice-led research as “generative enquiry that draws on subjective, interdisciplinary and emergent methodologies that have the potential to extend the frontiers of research.” The interdisciplinary dimension of creative arts research provides for Barrett (2007, p. 7), a “rationale for acknowledging the innovative potential of the fluid location and application of creative arts research approaches and outcomes.” Barrett (2007, p. 7) asserts:
The interplay of ideas from disparate areas of knowledge in creative arts research creates conditions for the emergence of new analogies, metaphors and models for understanding objects of enquiry. Hence the capacity of artistic research for illuminating subject matter of both the artistic domain as well as that belonging to other domains and disciplines of knowledge.

Barbara Bolt (2007, p. 26–34) argues in her essay “The Magic is in the Handling,” that practice must lead research, rather than simply be the research: it is the interplay between inquiry, studio process and exegesis that is crucial to research outcomes. Bolt (2007, p. 31) states “the exegesis plays a critical and complementary role in revealing the art.” This research has been practice-led: primarily practice-based, informed by key texts from other disciplines, and augmented by the process of writing an exegesis.

This exegesis will detail a primarily practice-based project that has been informed by key real life and interdisciplinary experiences and research. Importantly, this project has emerged from female experience: exploring the potential of a fragmentary approach to making creative work as a creative practitioner balancing artistic practice with the demands of work, a developing professional career and the particulars of my own personal life. I have explored aspects of the daily work of an artist in contrast to a conception of creative production as a necessarily uninterrupted, and somehow separate, activity conducted at a distance from commonplace concerns and experiences. I have done so in recognition of the fragmentary or increasingly divided and interrupted nature of contemporary days, and that as one of many notions surrounding artistic activity, the idea of uninterrupted creativity must be understood as a stereotype. The real-life challenge of the project has been to make new creative works and to discover ways to do this as a part of daily life. That is, to develop a personal creative process and to make
new artwork in the midst of interruption: other demands, restrictions, responsibilities and expectations, with the intention that daily life may be illuminated through creative work.

I hoped that these creative works might also be experienced in the gallery as lamps that illuminate daily experiences, moments and objects, with connections made between materials and ideas, or philosophical fragments. Although a “fragment” commonly refers to a piece of anything taken, or broken off, from a greater whole, as a motif in art and literature it also has a history which dates back to the Romantic movement, originating with Schlegel and other German philosophers and writers of the Jena School in the brief period (1797–1802) known as Frühromantik. Chapter One outlines ways in which Schlegel’s philosophical Romantic fragment has been increasingly understood to have relevance to contemporary theories of deconstruction and conceptual art. It details contemporary writing and conceptual art that have been instrumental in the development of this project: Hans Jost Frey’s (1996) philosophical book of literary fragments, Interruptions (an account of deconstructionist approaches to reading texts) and Jörg Heiser’s (2007) survey of the exhibition Romantic Conceptualism including the Romantic themes and poetic art practices of conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader (1942–1975). However, in order to examine connections made between these theories and practices in the development of my creative works and process, it will first be necessary to introduce two major initial sources informing both my understanding of the fragment and my approach to this doctoral research.

In Chapter One I therefore begin by discussing ways in which the aim of developing an installation of creative spaces for viewers and readers—a key understanding of the fragment—was informed by research begun during my honours project into the writing
and creative processes of Western Australian author Elizabeth Jolley (1923–2007).\(^1\)

This research included my reading of a small personal archive\(^2\) of teaching notes and handouts written by Jolley for creative writing students. These papers are a collection of undated teaching notes and photocopied poetry and student writing, with marginalia written by Jolley. As Jolley worked as a lecturer and teacher of creative writing at Curtin University for many years, they are similar to hundreds that might have once existed. This chapter introduces my research into the key ideas arising from these papers. These include aspects of Jolley's creative process, the Romantic fragment, understandings of history and the archive,\(^3\) and conceptual understandings of dust,\(^4\) including how dust relates both physically and metaphorically to my creative practice and to viewers' responses to my work. I also detail the ways in which understandings of the archive and history found in the writings of Carolyn Steedman have been critical to my engagement with the Jolley archive and the key historical ideas arising from it. That is, how the fragment might also be seen to be relevant to understandings of history and the archive, to what we can and can’t ever really know about the past, as well as to the transmission and reconfiguration of ideas over time.

\(^1\) Jolley migrated to Australia from England in 1959 (Dibble, 2008, p. 137). She wrote in an artist’s statement (1981, p. 215): “Perhaps an influence on my work is a small portion of Western Australia. I came to Western Australia in the middle of my life. I realise that the freshness of my observation can distort as well as illuminate. The impact of a new country does not obliterate the previous one but sharpens memory, thought and feeling thus providing a contrasting theme or setting.”

\(^2\) A broad definition of the word “archive” has been provided by Richard Pearce-Moses (cited in Nygaard, T. & Sonsteby, A. 2009, p. 48), writing for the Society of American Archivists: “Materials created or received by a person, family, or organisation. Public or private, in the conduct of their affairs and preserved because of their enduring value contained in the information they contain or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator, especially those materials maintained using the principles of provenance, original order, and collective control; permanent records.”

\(^3\) The past decade has seen a striking increase in the body of literature and research concerned with the form, function and meaning of the archive (Manoff, 2004). This literature touches upon many disciplines, including contemporary visual art.

\(^4\) A primary definition of dust in *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary* is “that which rises in a cloud, as dust, smoke, vapour.” A number of contemporary visual artists work with dust.
This research makes connections between Jolley’s work and a history of Romanticism. However, what has been important about Jolley’s writing for this project has been its usefulness as an index to a history of ideas about art and poetry, and as a model and inspiration for creative work. The focus of my research has not been to uncover, explain or prove anything about Jolley’s life or work, but rather to make connections with ideas of the past in new ways through creative work in, and for, the present. I draw on Roland Barthes’ position on the dialectic between the old and the new: in dialogue with Robbe-Grillet (Robbe-Grillet, 2011, p. 40), Barthes explains his engagement with works of the past and employment of the metaphor of a spiral to account for the way “things reappear and are put down in another place.” As an index to the past, Jolley’s writing might be seen to demonstrate the way that ideas filter through culture or reappear generally. My engagement with Jolley’s writing in this project exists as a real-life demonstration of this transmission, assisting in a direct and material way, in the development of my own work and personal praxis. I was initially drawn to her writing as in it I found expressions of familiar ideas, for example, the Western Australian landscape seen through the lens of European culture, including the vision of the Romantic poets. Insight into my own ideas has therefore been gained in the process. I have experienced directly through reading, writing and creative work ways in which ideas and cultural production in the present are inflected by the legacy of past orthodoxies, in a mutually dependent, entangled way.5

I do not therefore claim that Jolley’s work exists on a particular trajectory of Romantic thought. To do so would be to impose a narrative based on fragmentary evidence, the

5 Steedman’s (2003) book Landscape for a Good Woman explores the literary forms of history writing, and opens with a discussion of the ways history differs from lived experience: the past shapes, and is inseparably entangled with, the present.
aspects of her life and work she chose to share with others. Similarly, although I have explored ways in which aspects of early Romantic thought might facilitate the development of my creative art practice, I acknowledge that many of the aims, ideas and drives of these writers and thinkers were very different to contemporary concerns and to postmodernist theory in particular. As Beiser (2003, p. 3) argues in his book *The Romantic Imperative: the Concept of Early German Romanticism*, it is important to recognise the historical individuality of the Frühromantic period. At the same time, just as it remains impossible to pin Romanticism down—it is a common understanding that there are many romanticisms—and the transmission or reoccurrence of its ideas in a straightforward way, it is also not possible to know exactly what Jolley’s understandings were: the reasons she chose to work in the way she did, or the particulars of her route towards a creative process, apart from what she directly revealed—there are many aspects that make up and make possible creative work and a creative life.

However, both Steedman’s and Jolley’s voices as writers—what I can know of their lives and experiences, and the lives of women represented in their writing—have had resonance for this project, and for me as a female artist balancing creative work with professional and more traditional female roles. Although Steedman, among many other influences, draws on feminist thought, Jolley preferred to distance herself from feminist criticism and debate. She claimed that for many years she worked at her writing in a fragmentary way, using time between domestic responsibilities and other work to collect material that would eventually be reconfigured into her poetry, short stories and novels. Jolley shared aspects of her creative process in a number of essays contained in

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6 Jolley has been criticized for presenting herself and her personal life in particular ways. See Dibble (2008) and Swingler (2012).

Well I work all the time, in my head—on scraps of paper because I can’t remember anything. I cultivated what I call the ability to make the quick note because if I didn’t I never would have been able to write. You see, I was a housewife with three children...I used to write late at night when everybody had gone to bed. I couldn’t have written if I hadn’t made little notes during the day. When I was cleaning and shopping and so on, or when I was talking on the telephone, or when people were talking to me, I would constantly be making little notes. I had masses of little bits of paper in folders. If anybody had asked to see a work in progress it would have been lots of bits of paper with scribbles on.

Jolley’s work habits reflected a life that in many ways parallels my own busy schedule. I have therefore, throughout my engagement with Jolley’s writing, focused on her simple advice in a number of ways. I have worked throughout the day taking “quick notes” (for example, by writing or drawing on scraps of paper or by taking photographs) and then, late at night or early in the morning, rising in the dark in order to make use of her strategies for getting work done. It proved to be an important and productive aspect of my work for this project that also provided unexpected insight into the fragment: I have come to see her manner of working as more than merely practical. Although I cannot know for sure, I suspect there are important gaps, much unsaid, in her statements. Beyond the real-life challenge of living and working creatively, there is the mysterious artistic production of something new,^7^ excitement and satisfaction too, in the dynamic

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^7^ Jolley’s method of inventing and reading fiction parallels Carter’s (2004; 2007) concept of *material thinking*, encouraging new systems of meaning to emerge for both writer (in the
created between materials in the physical world (notes shuffling around in a calico bag, or arranged and rearranged in folders) and the interiority of the writer. And, there are Jolley’s words “wonderfully ordinary,” written in the margin of a student paper: the idea of the transcendent in the everyday contained in words (and perhaps drawings) on paper (see figure 1).

Chapter Two builds upon this brief outline of one aspect of Jolley’s creative process to focus on the ways in which this project, and the fragmentary creative process it tests, have grown in response to fragments. Through a discussion of real-life research and case studies of studio processes, I outline ways in which I have materially engaged with the Jolley archive. Further, by drawing on Carter’s concept of material thinking as well
as philosophical ideas connected to a history of Romanticism, this chapter aims to, in an exploratory manner, unravel the conceptual basis of my understanding of creative process as a form of philosophy in action.\textsuperscript{8} This understanding is based on both the material and conceptual fragment. For example, beyond Jolley’s manner of working fragmentarily, an examination of her writing for students\textsuperscript{9} reveals that she appeared to employ notions of the fragment conceptually in various ways, in order to make creative work in which readers could participate creatively,\textsuperscript{10} and that she perhaps understood the fragment as an idea within art and poetry that stretches back to the nineteenth century.

The Romantic fragment, a form and philosophical line of enquiry associated with early German Romanticism, is a conception of the fragment as an idea, concept or project contained within a larger system of fragments. For Schlegel, the philosophical fragment—a form containing a kernel of potential—was both simultaneously complete and incomplete: a contradiction that might be summed up as philosophically allowable on the basis of a tradition of argument within which the process of becoming is understood as a one of movement and change.\textsuperscript{11} That is, the fragment is both incomplete and complete at the same time because it is always in a process of becoming. The

\textsuperscript{8} Estelle Barrett (2007, p. 1) proposes that artistic practice may be viewed as the production of knowledge, or philosophy in action. Among the methodologies of practice-based research described by Barrett, which draw on this rationale, are the artistic processes described by Paul Carter (2007) in his essay “Interest the ethics of invention” and in his 2004 book Material Thinking.

\textsuperscript{9} I have examined a small collection of Jolley’s creative writing teaching notes, handouts and student writing with marginalia, including the words “wonderfully ordinary” written by Jolley. It was passed to me from a family member.

\textsuperscript{10} For Jolley, reading was a creative act. I am referring to her concept of “sophisticated spaces.” Jolley’s creative process aided her creation of spaces across the narrative, allowing readers to reach their own conclusions about some aspects of characters or events in the story.

\textsuperscript{11} I am referring to a historical tradition rather than more recent writing on becoming by Deleuze and Guattari: that Plato defers to Heraclitus in opposition to Aristotle’s law of non-contradiction will be further explained in Chapter Two.
fragment—an idea or project—is transitional: it moves and changes: although incomplete, it is at the same time complete in itself because it contains the potential of what it may become. Further, our response to this potentiality creates a chain or garland, an interconnected dialogue, of fragments or ideas. Chapter Two therefore attempts, through a chain of interconnected paragraphs, to further explore this concept. It links this conception of the fragment to aspects of creative process and invention through a discussion of Schlegel’s own writing as a method of working philosophically, as well as to Heiser’s (2008) writing on contemporary conceptual art as a practice of producing potentialities.

This doctoral research addresses the personal challenge of creating new visual artworks in the midst of contemporary female experience by focusing on the investigation of materials. Building on research begun during an honours project in 2009, my aim has been to make connections between materials and a number of key ideas contained within or arising from Jolley’s papers, and to participate in a number of relevant conversations. These key ideas included the notion of the archive as both an institutional and an imaginative space of fragments of paper, ink and dust. The initial plan for this research was to continue to reflect on this concept of the archive, but also to make connections between materials and Romantic ideas about the fragment beyond Jolley’s writing. Consequently I developed two primary research questions. I planned to 1) explore the materials of paper, ink and dust, to ask whether Schlegel’s philosophical conception of the Romantic fragment might be revealed as a continuing idea of interest and a tool for contemporary art production; and to 2) ask how a creative engagement with the archive, and the past to which its materials give access, might facilitate the production of new creative works. To answer these questions I planned to engage with a specific archive of fragments, and undertake a short residency at the University of
Western Australia in order to draw items from the School of Animal Biology’s zoological specimen collection. The process of drawing would be a means by which to think about and understand aspects of the Romantic fragment, and to make connections between it and contemporary understandings of the archive. At the same time, I wanted to explore whether the archive—a place of fragments, gaps and spaces, paper, ink and dust—might be a place to make creative connections with ideas from a history of Romantic thought.

The residency yielded unexpected results. An engagement with materials, and with staff and students who study the natural history of species with the passionate aim of using such knowledge to aid their preservation, led me to question my position as an artist. Faced with emotionally moving material evidence (a chaotic collection of physical fragments of bone specimens and dust) and equally moving discussions detailing the consequences of environmental destruction dating from the colonial settlement of Australia, I questioned the aims of my project and creative practice, and felt a desire to participate and contribute to the preservation of the natural environment. My reading, an exploration of the intersection of the natural sciences with Romanticism, led to an increased understanding of the aims of the early Romantics, the fragment, and our human relationship to nature over time. An important article influencing the direction my studio research would take, Alison Stone’s (2005, p. 4) “Friedrich Schlegel, Romanticism and the Re-enchantment of nature”, argues that for the early Romantics including Schlegel and other proponents of naturphilosophie—a theory about the unity of nature—in the early nineteenth century, modernity had brought about the disenchantment of the natural world. Stone asks whether a re-enchantment of nature might aid environmentalism today. She explains that the Romantics thought nature could be re-enchanted through Romantic art and poetry (2005, p. 4). Stone’s article
suggested to me that art and writing might draw on the fragment and a history of Romantic science in order to participate in this discussion. This led to the development of a further research question 3) how might contemporary artworks and poetry be employed to re-enchant nature, to restore a sense of its mystery, and to therefore raise questions and further thought on our human relationship to nature in the minds of viewers and readers in the gallery?

Beginning with an account of the residency, Chapter Three details my investigation of ways in which the material and conceptual development of the visual artworks and poetry contained in Wonderfully Ordinary attempted to answer these questions. In exploration of this question I found that recent writing on conceptual art links it to Romanticism and also explores the potential of the fragment to engage the imagination and thoughts of viewers. Further, it argues that as a social model, conceptual art may be seen as a practice of producing potentialities through creative intersubjective exchange (or dialogue) between the artist and viewer (Verwoert, 2007, p. 174). Although the work of a number of artists who employ this understanding of the fragment has been influential in the development of this project, the ecological focus of Mark Dion’s installations of trees, books, drawings and ephemera and use of Romantic narratives connected with science and natural history provided a particular inspirational model in the final stages of the project. Drawing upon these ecological and Romantic aspects of Dion’s work, Chapter Three details the development of Wonderfully Ordinary, through poetry and text and the artworks I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then, and Great Branches Fall.

However, beyond my desire to participate in environmental discourse, Wonderfully Ordinary, consisting of fragments comprised in just one of many potential new ways,
more broadly sought to create possibilities for multiple narrative readings for viewers and readers. I hoped that *Wonderfully Ordinary* might therefore be seen as a reflection of the fragment in a particular way: as a form of participation within a chain or garland of fragments, or ideas of the past, through a creative process in which ideas pass between the artist, viewer and reader. It was also intended as a meditation upon the serious and sustained pursuit of creative output in the midst of an ordinary life in the present: the pursuit of a sense of wholeness through the manipulation of materials in the everyday. That is, as evidence of interactions between my practice-based research and my research into the creative process, including into Jolley’s creative process and writing and the key ideas surrounding it, the project aims to communicate to viewers and readers something of my search and experimentation in the context of fragmentary contemporary experience over time. More than 200 years ago, the Romantics saw art and aesthetic education as central to cultural renewal, and as the key to the social and political reform required for the unification or development of humankind and human self-realisation, or *Bildung* (Bieser, 2003, p. 49). Drawing on this idea, this doctoral research (a vehicle by which Jolley’s writing for students may be seen to have continued to educate beyond her lifetime) provides a link to both a history of ideas about art and poetry, as well as being a key component in the pursuit of personal development through artistic practice in a contemporary context. At its most Romantic, this project represents a striving for unity—a transformative wholeness—through artistic practice, or *Bildung*.

12 For further discussion relating to the importance of aesthetic education as the key to *Bildung* in the Romantic ideal see Beiser (2003, pp. 93–103).
Chapter One

The Romantic Fragment and the Archive

My doctoral research arises from my interest in creative process as a strategic means to facilitate a successful artistic practice in the context of contemporary female experience. It also arises from my practice of drawing, and fascination with books and the book form. It aims to participate in a dialogue with which many artists, writers and thinkers have been interested: a conversation about thinking, making and perception begun by Romantic writers and thinkers in the eighteenth century. Within this dialogue, the Romantic fragment and fragmentariness are key concepts garnering renewed interest today across a number of disciplines including literary, Romantic studies and visual art. In this chapter I begin by focusing on aspects of deconstruction and literary studies that have informed a multi-directional studio approach to the fragment. I provide a brief survey of the historical trajectory of the fragment as representative of the fragmentation of modern life, and examine connections between the Romantic fragment and deconstructionist approaches to reading texts and the historical archive, as well as Romantic understandings of conceptual visual art. These readings and the process of writing have been an important part of the research.

I draw on a number of key texts including *Philosophical Fragments*, a 1991 translation by Peter Firchow of Schlegel’s writing with a forward by Rodolphe Gasché, and historical ideas about fragments found in Sophie Thomas’s (2008) book *Romanticism and Visuality: Fragments, History, Spectacle* and Linda Nochlin’s (1995) lecture and book *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity* to examine the idea that today, the Romantic fragment can be understood as a philosophical conception that corresponds in various ways with aspects of postmodern theories of deconstruction.
(Gasché, 1991; Janowitz, 1998; Scrivener, 2004). Deconstruction, a philosophical method of reading texts most often associated with Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), has influenced much of the discussion over the last few decades about the nature of texts, books and the book form, including a book of literary and philosophical fragments by Hans-Jost Frey. Frey’s (1996) book *Interruptions*, an additional key text for the purpose of my research, has been a useful resource for my developing understanding of the fragment as it links a history of Romantic thought about the fragment to Derrida’s method of deconstruction and concept of *différance*.

Derrida’s thought is also central to recent debate about the form, function and meaning of the archive. Historian Carolyn Steedman's (2002) book *Dust: the Archive and Cultural History*, written in response to *Archive Fever* (Derrida, 1995)\(^\text{13}\) arises from her real-life experience in archives, and deconstructs traditional approaches to history. Derrida (1995) and Steedman's (2002) texts explore the ways fragments and absence, paper, ink and dust exist in archives, and the way that history is reconstructed through collected and preserved fragments of historical information. Steedman and Derrida question traditional understandings of the archive and history and see the archive as a place of paradox. Consisting of paradoxical fragments, the archive is both an institutional space and a conceptual space (Voss & Werner, 1999, p. 1), and for Steedman (2002, p. 80), also a poetic space. In order to explore the usefulness of ideas about the poetics of the archive and its spaces in relation to the fragment, I draw on a special issue of *Studies in the Literary Imagination* (1999) entitled “Toward a Poetics of the Archive.” Finally, in order to suggest how a reading of the poetics and materials of the archive have informed my creative work I provide a brief outline of recent responses.

\(^{13}\) Steedman (2002) makes the point that *Archive Fever* deals very little with actual archives, but rather is a story about the (psychoanalytic) search for origins.
to interpretations of the archive in contemporary visual art of importance to this project before concluding with a discussion relating to recent interest in Schlegel’s writing in contemporary conceptual art.

**Finding Schlegel’s Kernel in Elizabeth Jolley’s Notes.**

The Jolley archive,\(^{14}\) a small collection of papers, sat quietly in a file on shelves, in packing boxes or cupboards, in various rooms of my own house for more than twenty years, during which time Elizabeth Jolley continued teaching and writing, and then lived out her final years. In the way that objects and papers that seemed important at the time and so were saved and stored but which are now forgotten can accumulate in houses, I kept them without ever reading them. However, I did read Jolley’s poetry, short stories and novels because, as for perhaps many readers, aspects of the author’s history and biography resonated with my own.\(^{15}\) I felt that I had experienced, for example, similar events, thoughts and feelings to those that Jolley (1993) described in her book *Diary of a Weekend Farmer*.\(^{16}\) Although my perspective on this book and Jolley’s life has changed considerably since then, at that time I admired the way Jolley seemed to combine family and professional life with a successful creative practice, because this was something to which I aspired. In 2008, as I planned an installation of drawings to conclude my undergraduate studies and while looking for something else, I opened the file and started reading. I discovered distinctively handwritten pages of

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\(^{14}\) This file, like some others that perhaps have been kept by past students, contains writing by Jolley that has not been published or preserved elsewhere. The Curtin University Archives and the Elizabeth Jolley Collection in the Robertson Library do not include a collection of Jolley’s personal teaching materials. For related discussion and information about archival collections relating to Jolley’s writing and life see *Guide to the Papers of Elizabeth Jolley* in the Mitchell Library. See also Bird (1991) and Dibble (2009).

\(^{15}\) However, Steedman (2008, p. 18) in her article “Intimacy in Research: Accounting for it” makes the point that “history” is not the same thing as the past, and that it “exists in the head of the historian, in the words on the page, and in the conceptual imagination of readers when those words come to be read.”

\(^{16}\) My changing perspective on this book is detailed in Chapter Three.
teaching about poetry: notes, copies and marginalia that I thought could be potentially useful in the development of my own creative process. Reading these papers, I began to see that Jolley appeared to employ notions of the fragment in various ways to make creative work and that she drew on ideas associated with a history of Romanticism. For example, a handout on the reading of poetry contains an idea reminiscent of Schlegel’s Romantic philosophy. Jolley (n.d.) wrote:

Sometimes you read or listen to an utterance that is spread over time and you catch the meaning either at the other end, or if you are smart, half way through. The meaning seems to float, to some degree, free of what seems to carry it.

If you read a poem that really means something to you, you will stop at that poem, you don’t turn to the next or do anything else. You just sit there and let it all wash back like the tide, and then you say, “Oh, I’ve got it.”

It is the ability of the mind to surround the whole when only a part is given.¹⁷

This idea inspired and inform my creative work from that point onwards. As I looked forward to my honours project I anticipated that Jolley might be my teacher. What would she have to teach me?

Creative spaces, inviting the imagination to participate, exist on a number of levels in Jolley’s teaching handouts, as well as in her manner of working and the way in which she constructed her poetry, short stories and novels for readers. Throughout my research,

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¹⁷ For Schlegel, meaning must start in the middle (Benjamin 1996, p. 137) and the universe is in movement as a constant wave (Berlin 1999, p. 105). Schlegel’s Platonic cyclical philosophy indicates that meaning is not generated from the perspective of the whole, but rather the whole may only be seen when a part is missing.
I have responded to these spaces, and have viewed the collection of Jolley’s writing as an archive or a repository of fragments from which to make new creative work. Because of this seed-potential I have come to think of these pages as a Romantic archive. Revealing rare thoughts about the pursuit of communicating poetically to others, it is a small lacuna in the public record of Jolley’s life and work. This absence connects the fragment to the archive, it represents an instance of a general fragmentary or chaotic tendency of the archive. For Steedman, it is often chance that determines whether something is preserved. That is, the archive, either private or personal “is made from the selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and the mad fragmentations that no-one intended to preserve and that just ended up there” (2002, p. 68).18

My honours research, culminating in an installation of visual artworks Thank You (two words) at Spectrum Project Space in November 2009, consisted principally of many small torn and collaged paper fragments containing ink-blots, and writing and drawings in ink, displayed in various ways in the spaces of the gallery. The aim of the work was to make connections between materials and Jolley’s papers. It also suggested directions for my doctoral research. I planned to reflect on the tension between conflicting conceptions of the archive which, is both an institutional space, and an imaginative one, by exploring materials and Romantic ideas about the fragment beyond Jolley’s writing. I planned to investigate the materials of paper, ink, dust and archival fragments in order to make drawings, collages and artist books and to create a series of installations containing these artworks. An understanding of the Romantic fragment would be employed to facilitate an exploration of the archive's potential through new creative

18 Ulrich Baer (2008, p. 54) suggests “What belongs in an archive? Everything that someone does not wish to forget and everything that someone believes will hold the key to the future.”
work. That is, my research would participate in discourse of recent interest in the visual arts about artists’ responses to the archive, and to open the possibility of the archive acting as a catalyst for new creative work.

**The Romantic Fragment**

The fragment, as a working method for making art, has its own history and may be discovered in the writing methods of Jolley and many other creative minds of the past. In order to investigate the Romantic fragment and fragmentariness in the studio, interpretations of history, and understandings of contemporary life, it has been necessary to explore the various meanings of fragments since the 1790s. Importantly, although Romanticism has been more often associated with the poetic interpretation of aesthetic discourse in the form of fragmentary literature, the conception of the Romantic fragment articulated in German Romanticism, in particular by Schlegel in the *Athenæum* period, differs substantially from the meanings of fragments for the English Romantic poets and popular Victorian cultural forms of the fragment. Instead, German Romantic philosophical discourse about art and poetry might, it is argued, be seen as an alternative trajectory of the fragment in response to epistemological problems posed by the part and the whole as explored by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790). Rodolphe Gasché (1991, p. xv) argues that Shlegel’s Romantic fragment is a philosophical concept within a philosophical position derived from Kant’s use of the term “idea.” Gasché explains:

…the Romantic fragment is not a pensée, maxim, saying, opinion, anecdote, or remark, all of which are marked by only relative incompleteness, and which receive their unity from the subject who has authored them…rather than a piece to be understood from the whole of which it would be a remainder, or a broken part, the Romantic fragment

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is a genre by itself, characterised by a concept of its own.

For Gasché (1991, p. viii) Jena Circle fragment theories were revolutionary in intent, and an entirely new philosophical position based on the fragment as a philosophical conception. According to Gasché (1991, p. viii) although Schlegel’s aphoristic philosophical fragments introduce the Chamfortian 19 fragment form to German literature, they more importantly, radically “attempt to elaborate a concept of the fragment—a concept that remains clearly discrepant from the literary devices on which the fragments rely.”

Drawing on Schlegel’s aphoristic writings, Thomas (2008, p. 25) explains how Schlegel’s Romantic fragment contained an idea or a project, an embryo that was both complete and incomplete. Schlegel, she explains, saw the fragment as “like a miniature work of art,” containing a positive, future-oriented kernel (Thomas, 2008, p. 24–25). The fragment was never complete, but rather, would always be in the process of becoming. 20 Gasché (1991, p. xiii) further explains that for Schlegel, the whole towards which fragments strive, the system of fragments, is itself made up again of “a chain or garland of fragments.” At this point however, the Romantic fragment, a philosophical conception and poetic genre, is perhaps best illustrated by a number of Peter Firshow’s (Schlegel, 1991) translations of Schlegel’s fragments that have had particular relevance for my creative work:

* Athenæum * fragment 206: A fragment, like a little work of art, must be quite separated from its surroundings and complete in itself—like a hedgehog.

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19 Gasché (1991, p. viii) explains that the form of Schlegel’s writing arises from the publication in 1795 of Chamfort’s *Pensées, maxims et anecdotes.*

20 Chapter Two further explores the notion of *becoming.*
Critical fragment 120: Whoever could manage to interpret Goethe’s Meister properly would have expressed what is now happening in literature. He could, so far as literary criticism is concerned, retire forever.

Critical fragment 115: The whole history of modern poetry is a running commentary on the following brief philosophical text: all art should become science and all science art; poetry and philosophy should be made one.

*Atheneum* fragment 116: …other kinds of poetry are finished and are now capable of being fully analysed. The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected…

*Atheneum* fragment 24: Many works of the ancients have become fragments. Many works of the moderns are fragments at birth.

*Atheneum* fragment 53: It is equally fatal for the spirit to have a system and yet to have none. It will simply have to decide to combine the two.

*Atheneum* fragment 77: A dialogue is a chain or garland of fragments. An exchange of letters is a dialogue on a larger scale, and memoirs constitute a system of fragments. But as yet no genre exists that is both in form and content, simultaneously completely subjective and individual, and completely objective and like a necessary part in a system of all the sciences.

These philosophical fragments, published during the *Atheneum* period, are a small selection from the hundreds Schlegel wrote in notebooks that he carried with him at all times. Schlegel’s philosophical fragments, complete statements in themselves, are at the
same time incomplete in a number of ways. As thoughts written as they occurred and rarely refined or individually developed further, they may be seen as fragmentary forms of daily writing in exploration of a larger Romantic project about what it may be possible to know. In support of this claim, Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert (2007, p. 16) in her book *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* explores Schlegel’s Romantic project as a philosophy in dialogue with post-Kantian discourse of the period that aimed to show that “the inherent incompleteness of Romantic poetry has important consequences for the status of our knowledge claims.” Millan-Zaibert (2007, p. 16) argues:

> According to Schlegel we do not build knowledge deductively from absolute foundations but rather piece our claims together in a coherent scheme, so absolute certainty is not an appropriate epistemological goal. Greater and greater degrees of certainty are the most we can hope for.

For Thomas (2008, p. 21), Schlegel’s Romantic fragment was not therefore the fragment generally associated with English Romanticism and popular culture of the nineteenth century. Thomas asserts that Romanticism has been more often associated with the poetic interpretation of aesthetic discourse, often in the form of fragmentary literature. Indeed, by the 1830s English readers and English audiences had become well acquainted with the fragment as both structure and theme, so much so that today the term “Romantic fragment” has become synonymous with the fragment poem as a genre within the English Romantic poetic (Janowitz, 1998, p. 446). Thomas (2008, p. 22) further describes the fragment in the eighteenth century and beyond as a widespread cultural feature, and prevalent in literature of the Romantic period largely due to its place in the aesthetic discourses of the picturesque and the sublime. Thomas (2008, p. 21) describes this popular fragment—a part remaining when the rest is lost, destroyed or
uncompleted—as inhabiting a potentially wide range of materials, visual, textual, architectural and literary, which by leading us “to a confrontation with the materially invisible” may also “direct our attention toward the elusive, the incomprehensible, and the ideal.” Thomas argues, in her discussion of English Romanticism (2008, p. 22), that the fragment became representative of “what eludes representation, and conveys a sense of limitlessness.”

The Romantic Fragment and Deconstruction

As a motif in art, music and literature, the fragment has been employed in various ways since the 1790s. In the late nineteenth century and throughout the first half of the twentieth century, as Jena Circle theories became obscured,21 the fragment became symbolic of the upheaval and fragmentation characteristic of modern life. Broadly put, the fragment in the pre-Romantic, classical sense, where it represented part of that which has been lost or destroyed, or indeed, which must be destroyed, dominated. Linda Nochlin (1995, p. 8–24) in her book The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity describes the use of the fragment in the context of the French Revolution as a trope initially symbolising the destruction of the repressive traditions of the past, which came to represent, in modernist painting, music and literature, the qualities of modernity and the modern city. Nochlin qualifies her discussion of the fragment in relation to modernity by eschewing the formation of an all-encompassing theory. She writes:

Were I to attempt to construct a general theory of the fragment, however, I would be sure to establish it on a model of difference rather than attempt to construct a unified field of discourse…I would feel obliged to

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21 For an introductory discussion on German Romanticism in relation to twentieth century German history see Beiser (2003, p. 1).
dissect or even deconstruct the very construction of modernity—itself a constantly changing discursive formation in which the trope of fragmentation plays a shifty and ever-shifting role (Nochlin, 1995, p. 56).

Nochlin’s conclusion is an account of the shifting role of the fragment in modernity, referencing deconstruction, an approach to the meanings of texts associated with Jacques Derrida and employed by him in his (1982; 1978) books *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference*. Derrida’s use of the words *difference* and *différence* is integral to deconstruction and the post-structuralist argument against philosophical structures that account for phenomena by reducing them to formulas that govern them totally (Bass, 1990, p. xvi). For Schlegel, the fragment, consisting of a “chain or garland of fragments,” could never be completed and might be seen to resemble Nochlin’s (1995, p. 56) fragmented modernity, “a constantly changing and discursive formation” that defies closure and totalising systems.22 Schlegel’s Romantic fragment is associated with the various ways the fragment as a literary phenomenon, and indeed all texts, through the lens of deconstruction, is understood today. Indeed, for Gasché (1991, p. viii), contemporary interest in Schlegel’s writing and the Jena Romantics exigency more generally is “based to a large extent on the premise that the early Romantics’ theory and practice of the fragment prefigure the discoveries associated with contemporary theories on writing and textuality.”


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22 However, it is important to note that for Schlegel, the fragment nonetheless strives for completion. For Beiser (2003, p. 3): “the romantics were…far from postmodern in their striving for unity and wholeness, their demand that we overcome the fundamental divisions of modern life.”
deconstruction and Schlegel’s Romantic fragment are compatible pathways to contemporary understandings of literary texts. For example, if deconstruction aims to “dismantle the structures of meaning, so as to expose the premises on which they are built” (Edgar & Sedgwick, 1999, p. 108), for Frey (Albert, 1996, p. xii), the fragment is merely the place where the contradiction inherent in the method—the systematic explaining away of texts—is most clearly visible. Interruptions employs Schlegel’s understanding of the fragment to ask what might constitute a text for the purpose of literary study. It draws on Derrida’s notion of différance to argue that all texts are inherently fragmentary. That is, for Frey, books can’t escape intertextuality because of the way readers bring their own subjectivities to any reading. Frey argues that a text, like the fragment, is never finished or complete, since its contact with other texts will necessarily continue to open it up to new possibilities of meaning. Chapter Two details the importance of Frey’s book for my creative work, including the aim of the creation of creative spaces for viewers and readers in the gallery. It links this idea to Jolley’s notion of “sophisticated spaces” for readers, and details a case study of the initial stage in the development of a component of Wonderfully Ordinary, a work entitled Marginalia. Frey’s writing, particularly his parable-like short stories were also influential in the development of the work Great Branches Fall, and to my approach to creative writing.

**The Fragment in the Archive**

The fragment appears to have significance for individuals’ responses to the archive. Perhaps because of these gaps and spaces of fragments contained in or missing from the archive, many recent commentators, including visual artists, have responded to the archive as a melancholy place of loss.\(^{23}\) Indeed, the past decade has seen a multitude of...

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\(^{23}\) Ulrich Baer (2008, p. 56) reviews Okwui Enwezor's exhibition *Archive Fever* at New York's International Centre of Photography and writes that many contemporary artists
creative formulations of the archive across many disciplines. Much of this conversation has emerged as an effect of Derrida’s 1995 book *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Manoff, 2004, p. 11). Derrida’s book is a psychoanalytic reading of the archive and a critical study, commenting on the “substantive role the archive plays in the construction and realisation of the state” (Freshwater, 2003, p. 733), challenging the archive’s status as a symbol of truth and alerting us to the way it is shaped by social, political and technological forces. For many scholars in the wake of *Archive Fever*, the archive is a place of paradox of which Derrida (1995, p. 8) asks “where does the outside commence?” Voss and Werner (1991, p. 1), in their introduction to a special issue of the journal *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, entitled “Towards a Poetics of the Archive”, explain, “It is both a physical site—an institutional space enclosed by protective walls—and an imaginative site—a conceptual space whose boundaries are forever changing,” and that, “the history of the archive, on the one hand a history of conservation, is, on the other hand a history of loss.”

For Steedman (2002, p. 80) in her book *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, the archive is both a prosaic place of paper, ink and dust in the form of fragments of historical material, but, paradoxically, also contains oneiric spaces analogous to those described by Gaston Bachelard (1958) in his book *The Poetics of Space.* Bachelard’s (1958) book, is a work of philosophy about the home and the imaginative possibilities of spaces within it. For example, it contains chapters about drawers, chests and wardrobes, corners, nests and shells. Steedman argues that the archive might be seen as a similar creative space containing the potential for new creative work. A place for dreaming, for historians and writers and others—a place of unopened boxes containing, who knows what? A writer’s treasure chest perhaps?
Romantics, and promoted by the Victorians. The discipline of history through archival research was established in the 1830s (Freshwater, 2003, p. 730), a time when interest in history and the fragment in poetry and writing, through the work of the Romantics, had become highly popular (Thomas, 2008, p. 21). History, and the idea of the archive as a place of truth about the past, was established on the premise that artefacts and documents in the archive were evidence of the past and could be interpreted through scientific method (Freshwater, 2003, p. 730). However, perhaps historians, in responding to artefacts in the archive, have seen them as not simply evidence but also as Romantic fragments, as ideas and projects. That is, perhaps the Romantic fragment is connected in important ways with the archive and the discipline of history: Alun Munslow (2006, p. 3), in his book *Deconstructing History*, describes the narratives of history as “story-shaped.”

The narratives of history described by Munslow and others (Freshwater, 2003; Steedman, 2002) might be seen as creative responses to the seed potential of the fragment. Although the history of the archive is a history of conservation which has also been conceived as a history of loss, understandings of human responses to the fragment stemming from the Romantics and recent critiques of the discipline of history, led me to believe it might be possible to engage with the archive and the past as a place of hope from which new creative work may be made. These concerns instigated my plans for

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25 The archive, once firmly established through a tradition of archival research has been increasingly questioned (Freshwater, 2003, p. 730). It is increasingly argued that history, despite a methodology borrowed from the natural sciences, is essentially a literary discipline in which historians refer to archival evidence in the creation and imposition of particular narrative forms on the past (Munslow, 2006, p. 3).

26 Freshwater (2003, p. 730) points out that before the 1830s, history was understood by other means. For example, through epic poetry, historical plays, novels and journalism. See also Lowe (1982).

27 Or, as Steedman (2008, p. 18) writes: “‘history’ exists in the head of the historian in the words on the page, and in the conceptual imagination of readers when those words come to be read.”
research which would, in light of the many creative and compelling recent interpretations and representations of the archive described by Manoff (2004, p. 11), investigate the archive as a place containing the potential for new creative work. It might also be possible, through the fragment, to participate in a dialogue about the archive.

**Xu Bing: Paper, Ink, Dust and Ordinary Life in the Archive**

The fragment is also connected to dust. Researching the fragment led me to experience dust in the archive: the presence of which physically connects us to the past through its particles, and at the same time unites the past to us through the particles we leave behind. For example, I handled papers written on and held by Jolley and thought of our collective dust, perhaps even skin cells mingling on the page. I read her words and found ideas which circulated with my own, which I then tried to interpret and understand through the manipulation of materials. It was my plan to create a space of discovery, a space containing fragments with which viewers could engage and make new meaning, and to involve the viewer in a conversation of dust. Jolley (1992, p. 110) provides an account of the dust of her childhood:

> Before the days of vacuum cleaners for everyone I had to take the rugs outside, hang them over the line and beat them. This was satisfying. To clean the stairs, which were covered with linoleum of the brightly patterned sort, I simply sat on the top tread and slid down collecting the dust on my person. Our house was always very dusty, red brick dust and black coal dust. We lived in a street that ended in the slag heaps from a coal mine. There was a brick works to one side. Beyond the brick kilns there was a bone and glue factory. When the wind was in a certain direction it was advisable to keep the windows closed.
Steedman’s (2002) book *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* is also an account of the dust of industrial England. In reply to Derrida’s (1996) *Archive Fever*, Steedman (2002, p. 17) argues that real dust in the archive can indeed give one a fever. An idea that has continued to inform my creative work is Steedman’s call for an examination of the materials of the archive in order to make connections with the everyday lives and experiences of unrepresented people of the past. Steedman (2002, p. 11) recalls both the fragment and Derrida (1995) when she writes in the context of the archive “an absence is not *nothing*, but is rather the space left by what has gone.” She explains that it is often what is missing from an archive that has the most to tell us about history. She urges us to critically examine what is absent, arguing that the history of everyday life, and experiences of people who do not appear to be represented, can be found in the materials of the archive in a number of ways. That it is possible for us to discover what is absent from the official record and to make connections with ordinary people of the past, by researching the history of the materials of the archive. The archive is a place consisting of paper, ink and dust arising from a history of human labour and life, and the materials of the archive incorporate literal traces, particles of dust, of the historical past. This is an argument for the possibility of hope in the archive since, for Steedman (2002, p. 164) this dust is “about circularity, the impossibility of things disappearing, or going away, or being gone.”

This is an idea of central importance to *Wonderfully Ordinary*. It was my hope that this notion of circularity, our place in the natural world, would be a metaphorical component of the exhibition. Contemporary artist and Zen Buddhist scholar, Xu Bing (2004) explores a similar conception of dust, as well as the material nature of dust in his work *Where Does the Dust Itself Collect?* Xu (Lloyd, 2004) describes dust as “one of the most stable of materials. It’s very peaceful, it never changes. So dust is a very Zen idea”
Xu collected dust from the streets of New York following the attack on the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001. His photograph of dust blown into the shape of a miniature cloud recalls both dictionary definitions of dust (see footnote 6) and Steedman’s argument. That is, it recalls the clouds of dust which arose over New York (which tragically included particles of people who had been in the buildings at the time) as well as the cloud as a symbol in Chinese art which has been described as “representative of the breath of mountains, and symbolic of the life-spirit or chi that animates nature” (Allen, 2009). For Xu, hope arises from the idea (recalling Steedman) that the victims of 9/11 live on, represented by the chi. The physical migration of dust also might be seen as a metaphor for what happens when archival researchers interpret the documents in their care. Archivists bring with them their own histories and ideas and leave behind their interpretations and so become part of the history of that document. I see the migration of dust as a metaphor for a dialogue about poetry started in 1790. Jolley (1991, p. 97) employed a similar metaphor when she wrote, “Perhaps the writer can be looked upon as a sort of sieve through which particles of one culture pass to be a part of another culture.” Within my own artistic practice, I see dust as metaphorical of the creative potential of the fragment on the basis of Schlegel’s Platonic philosophy, which in turn, builds on Heraclitus for whom “becoming” is circular:

The becoming of the cosmos is explained in physical terms: fire dies and is changed into air, air dies and becomes water, water dies to become earth, and so on, an interchanging of life and death between different elements…Heraclitus insists, in fragment after fragment, that this sequence of transformations in the cosmos goes both ways (Nirenberg, 1996).
That is, circularity and new life may be suggested by new poetry and artworks arising from an engagement with ideas, poetry and other writing and artworks of the past. It may be suggested by the employment of particular materials and processes. Throughout the honours project, I experimented with dust in various ways. For example, by following Xu’s (2004) lead in *Where does the dust itself collect?* (see figure 2, 3) I combined my interest in drawing children by taking photographs of dust being blown by a child. I also made a short film of this process. In the early stages of the doctoral research, I made drawings, in various media including ink, relating to this activity (see figure 4).

Figure 2. Xu, B. (2011). *Where does the dust itself collect?* [installation of dust]. Retrieved from http://www.xubing.com/

Following my residency at the School of Animal Biology at the University of Western Australia, I re-examined Xu’s working methods. His inventive studio processes involving the recombination of collected materials that are pregnant with symbolic meaning, in consequently unexpected ways, result in works that are intentionally open to multiple readings and therefore challenge familiar ways of thinking (Erickson, n.d.). In particular, Xu’s ongoing project Background Story, begun in 2004 and employing plant debris, paper, light and shadows to evoke a tradition of Chinese ink on paper, makes connections with the relationship of humankind to nature and therefore suggested useful directions for my own studio experimentation. Without a specific plan in mind, I began to collect leaves, seed pods and other found biological matter such as dead insects and moths, shells and bird nests. I began drawing and photographing these items combined in different ways in the studio. Thinking of the window gallery at Spectrum Project Space, I created a number of small works by pinning this debris to the backs of drawings on rice paper (see figure 5). Held up against a window, the effect was similar to the light boxes employed by Xu (see figure 6, 7). However, although this time in the studio created a number of ideas and the development of works, my engagement with Background Story would most fruitfully inform the decisions I made when choosing and installing similar materials and elements which, among other things, might otherwise be thought of as refuse in the larger scale of the gallery. The decisions regarding the selection of materials installed in the gallery were made as to create an unfamiliar scene that was open to interpretation. Although I ultimately chose not to employ an illuminated screen in the manner of Xu, the arrangement of the work Great Branches Fall (see figure 8), and my use of shadows, the rectangle of the bookcase and the piles of seed pods and other plant material, bears some resemblance to Background Story. These decisions are further explored in Chapters Two and Three.
Figure 5. Wood, A. (2013). *Shadow work (garland)* [plant and insect debris, tape, rice paper]. Artist’s own image.

Figure 6. Xu, B. (2010). *Background Story 6* [light box and natural debris]. Retrieved from http://www.xubing.com
Figure 7. Xu, B. (2011) *Background Story 7* [light box and natural debris]. Retrieved from http://www.xubing.com

Figure 8. Wood, A. (2013). *Great Branches Fall* [Marri branches]. Photograph by Heather Shaw.
Art and the Archive: “The Little Dance”

Reviewing Okwui Enwezor’s exhibition *Archive Fever* at New York’s International Centre of Photography, Urch Baer (2008, p. 56) writes that many contemporary artists approach the archive as “a symbolic or evidentiary access to traumatic memory.” He argues for the possibility of hope in the archive. Baer reaches this conclusion in response to his discovery in an archive in Prague, following the bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York on September 11, 2001, of private love letters written by the poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926). Baer (2008, p. 58) writes that the Prague archive, containing fragments of ink on paper—Rilke’s love letters, allowed him to see the archive as a place from which to make creative work. Baer (2008, p. 56) argues that “there are also archives of joy and life, and it is sometimes possible to exhume hope from among the ashes.” This idea, following the discovery of Jolley’s notes, led me to ask whether it might be possible to discover glimpses into other lives which offer hope and a sense of connectedness to others as well as starting points for our own creative projects in the archive, and whether this is something that fragments and spaces in the gallery can do if we have the opportunity to reflect and fill them with our own interpretations and meanings.

Baer (2008, p. 58) describes Rilke’s love letters as “creating a sense of a beyond in descriptions of everyday things and experiences through the careful manipulation of ordinary language.” Because the Jolley archive contains photocopies of Rilke’s poetry, I wondered how this notion and aim in writing might be connected to Jolley's observation, written in the margin of a student’s creative work, “wonderfully ordinary.” However, rather than creating a sense of a mystical or perhaps spiritual beyond in this sense, my

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28 Elizabeth Jolley used Rilke’s poem “Liebeslied” as the epigraph to her final novel *Lovesong* (1997). Baer (2008, p. 58) describes Rilke as one who “sought to find transcendence in modernity through the figure and experience of love.”
work seeks a transporting sense of connection and wholeness within nature and ordinary life, that may be possible through creative process as a form of knowledge production through being in the moment.\textsuperscript{29} The poem “garland” (see appendix 5), as a part of \textit{Wonderfully Ordinary}, makes connections with Rilke's (1996, p. 33) poem “The Swan” to reflect on this struggle for grace in a very different time, space and life experience.

Inspiration through reading may therefore be found in the archive. In my own case, inspiration for a new research project, a trail of connections to follow and new creative works arose from a collection of handouts on the writing of poetry. Throughout the course of my research I have found others who have also experienced a sense of this joy. For Jacques Derrida (1995, p. 21) inspiration was found in the Freuds’ former home, now a museum, in a book given to Sigmund Freud by his father. For Steedman (2002, p. 29–31), it was found in the writing of Hester Thrale, a writer whose voice Steedman models in her own work. For Jolley and others, including Gaston Bachelard (1958, p. 8) and more recently Ulrich Baer (2008, p. 58), it was also found in the poetry and the letters of Rilke. Rather than dwelling on loss in the archive, I was therefore encouraged to look for what may be salvaged. These artists and writers found art in the archive, the presence of which “alters the materiality of the archive, undoing its allegedly cemetery ethos and immersing it in communal forms of life, vividly,” perhaps showing us that “the archive begins to seem more womb (site of unborn art, unpublished manuscripts, nascent ways of being embodied in print) than tomb” (Roberts, 2002, p. 302).

\textsuperscript{29} Associated with the twentieth century German philosopher Martin Heidegger, the idea of knowledge gained through \textit{being}, or thinking that is existential rather than calculating, has its beginning in pre-Socratic Greek philosophy (Macquarie, 1972, p. 29). This understanding is reflected in the early Romantic’s rejection of the Enlightenment’s belief in universal standards of truth through the authority of reason, and in Schlegel’s way of doing philosophy (Beiser, 2003, p. 56).
As Baer (2008, p. 56) points out, to understand the archive as not only a place of loss but of joy is a precarious undertaking. However, ink on paper in an archive in Prague, allowed Baer to see the archive as a place from which to make creative work. Although the archive has been seen as a place of loss, it is worth considering the paper on which Rilke wrote words about love, through which we might feel a connection with the everyday humanity of the past: in light of the arguments made by Steedman (2002) I would suggest that the labour and dust of the unrepresented people of the past is contained in this paper. It supports creative work: the placement of ink on paper by a poet. The dust of ordinary life is both on the paper on which Rilke wrote, and is contained within it.

The idea of hope, and the possibility of new life and projects arising from the dust of the past, became an important element that I wished to include in the exhibition *Wonderfully Ordinary*, detailed in Chapter Three. However, my approach to the archive and to the gallery, was also informed by a device Jolley referred to as “the little dance in writing.” She wrote:

...simple rules are in my head when I teach. Teaching has helped me to write in that I have learned to read and to be aware of overwriting or writing in a particular style that is not brought to a satisfactory state. I feel the world is full of evil things and that in writing one can perhaps find acceptance. The little dance in writing is very important. Students, if they become involved with the problems of the world, may stay there and not see beyond the pain and suffering. I have found that students like to ‘put the world right’ in their writing, and so I use exercises to help them understand the little dance in writing... (Jolley, 2007, pp. 267–268)

In her essay “The Little Dance in Writing,” Jolley (2006, p. 267) describes how an author can lift dark, depressing or difficult material by including moments of optimism,
humour or kindness in their writing to avoid exaggeration—“to be more truthful.” Jolley (2006, p. 267) describes the “little dance” as “something that helped me with my writing, helped me to see around my characters, not to overdo one aspect of their lives.” This concept of Jolley’s informed my approach to *Wonderfully Ordinary*. I felt it was necessary to balance the works *I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then* and *Great Branches Fall* with a lighter work. *Great Branches Fall* alludes, through its title and physical components, to loss. I felt that the shadowy and heavy branches and books and bookcase of this work could be offset with a small, lighter work. Therefore, in addition to the balance of light and shadows I employed in the gallery, I also developed a variation of *I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then* as an edition of one thousand take-away posters. The posters were printed using ecological inks on fine, almost translucent, paper. Visitors to the exhibition were free to take a poster if they wished, and I imagined that this dissemination, resembling the operation of the fragment, would continue beyond the gallery as they went lightly into the world and the future to be given away or to rest on walls or to be folded and kept in cupboards or drawers unknown. This work was also informed by contemporary artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ (Dryment, 2012) take-away posters and multiples, including his unlimited edition of posters “*Untitled*” (*Death by Gun*) (1990). Gonzalez-Torres’ work (see figure 9) is conceptually political in a number of ways. Artwork freely given away to visitors may be seen to provide a means by which dialogue with as many people as possible is achieved through the disruption of the consumerist commodification of social relations in the gallery (Vervoert, 2007, p. 171). My own posters are a practical demonstration of the notion that new ideas can arise from the archive, or in response to a reflection on loss. They were taken out of the gallery space, away from the fallen branch, and (one
hopes) into new spaces, where they could potentially spread further thought and inspiration in those who rolled them up and took them home (see figure 10).


Figure 10. Wood, A. (2013). *I can't tell you now what I could have told you then* [posters]. Photograph by Heather Shaw, and with kind permission of Elizabeth Maruffo.
**Jörg Heiser and Bas Jan Ader: The Fragment and Contemporary Conceptual Art**

For Schlegel, the fragment was an idea containing an embryo of potential reaching into the future. Similarly, his philosophical fragments, fragmentary writings about poetry and art, the *Athenæum Fragmente*, have continued to resonate, informing many writers, thinkers and artists throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to today—quietly underpinning contemporary discourse in philosophy, literature and the arts. While the imaginative possibilities of the fragment remains of interest to many writers, it has been asserted (Janowitz, 1998, p. 443) that Jena School fragment theory “lies at the origin of poststructuralist notions of all literary texts being in a state of incompleteness and all literary language as insufficient.” It is of importance for the purpose of my research that writer Jörg Heiser presents the thesis that many ideas central to an understanding of contemporary art, including the fragment, also derive from early German Romanticism, and Schlegel's *Athenæum* fragments in particular.

Heiser (2008, p. 5), interviewed for the journal *Art & Research* argues:

> Conceptualism is indebted to Romanticism precisely in that the latter movement already embodied and explored the incompatibility of trying to create “closed” systems on the one hand and allowing artistic experiment to happen on the other. There was a “seed” of Conceptualism in Romanticism as much as there is a “trace” of the latter in the former, and in both cases the “official” rhetoric often rejected or denied that connection.

What interests Heiser is the potential of a fragmentary exigency in contemporary art: that it is through a kind of relativism of individual fragmentary viewpoints that open dialogue may be possible. Heiser (2008, p.3) describes the artist as one “yardstick,”
where “this relativism of competing ‘yardsticks’ is not just arbitrary, but guarantees that a) everyone is allowed to enter the discussion, but b) has to make the effort to justify their judgements, allowing them in turn to be judged by others.”

For Heiser (2008, p. 3) the role of the artist is to bring the contradiction between subjectivity and universality to life and to “keep making the effort to argue in the midst of experiment, arbitrary feelings and perceptions and doubt.” This idea, particularly as it is exemplified in Bas Jan Ader’s (1971, 1971) works *I’m too sad to tell you* and *Farewell to Faraway Friends*, has been an important model for the development of my individual artworks and writing, and my curatorial approach to developing *Wonderfully Ordinary*. Ader’s works employ the paradox of the fragment to achieve this aim: what is left out indicates the whole. At the same time, the works provide a platform for viewers, bridging the gap between a seeming personal subjectivity and broader human experience. For example, *I’m too sad to tell you*, a silent film of Ader’s weeping face, is accompanied by the absence of an explanation. Heiser (2002, p.3) in his article for *Frieze Magazine* explains:

> This absence of explanation provides a strong paradox: it is as if he is staging, in the same manner as an educational film on anthropology, a basic human behaviour using common facial expressions. But still his crying is moving and his grief seems earnest. It leaves us with the disturbing feeling that we are witnessing an expression of inconsolable sorrow.

This absence creates a space for viewers to make connections with, but not limited to, this aspect of human experience. This idea is discussed further in Chapter Three in relation to my use of text in *Wonderfully Ordinary*. 

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Jolley (n.d.), in a student handout “On the Writing of Poetry” refers to Wordsworth’s remark that “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility.” Conceptual art has however been more often associated with the repudiation of human feeling, arguably stemming from Sol LeWitt’s directive:

> It is the objective of the artist who is concerned with Conceptual art to make his work mentally interesting to the spectator, and therefore usually he would want it to be emotionally dry…the expectation of an emotional kick, to which one conditioned to Expressionist art is accustomed…would deter the viewer from perceiving this art (quoted in Heiser, 2002, p. 2).\(^{30}\)

However, Heiser (2002, p. 4)—arguing that Wordsworth was an admirer of Friedrich Schlegel and his brother, August Wilhelm’s, writing—also employs Wordsworth’s famous words to describe Ader’s work, and makes a connection between them and Schlegel’s paradox, “It is equally fatal for the spirit to have a system and yet to have none. It will simply have to decide to combine the two” (Millan-Zaibert, 2007, p. 209).

For Heiser (2002, p. 4) Ader’s conceptual artworks make connections with tropes of Romanticism including the association of emotion with artists, women and the insane. Further, Ader’s actions and expressions of emotion, as intentionally determined utterances, might be seen as the employment of a system that is simultaneously no system. This aspect of Ader’s work and that of others brought together for the exhibition *Romantic Conceptualism* (2007) is one of importance to Heiser and to the development of my work for *Wonderfully Ordinary*. Rather than representing an unquestioned cliché of artistic subjectivity, the employment of romantic sentiment, nostalgia or emotional content may facilitate openness to dialogue and meaning. The

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\(^{30}\) Philosopher Peter Osborne (LeWitt & Osborne, 2009, pp. 5–29) also links ideas previously associated with early German Romanticism to LeWitt's (1967) *Sentences on Conceptual Art*. 

employment of emotional content in artworks represents a distancing from closed systems that posit one objective world-view. It may be that subjective or emotional content in poetry or visual artworks—a purposeful openness to vulnerability and risk taking, read as intimacy and as an invitation to participate—as opposed to the authority or aura of cool and guarded conceptual works that present as closed, might represent and facilitate a striving toward completion or unity through dialogue.
Chapter Two

Creative Process and the Fragment

In discussion of artists’ methods and methodologies, Jörg Heiser (2008, p. 1) argues that artistic researchers tapping into the complexities of other disciplines must remember what it is that art can bring to the research: “a sense of form, of perceptive qualities and conceptual reflection.” With this directive in mind, an acknowledgement of the complexities of philosophical and scientific discourses into which this project taps is necessary. My review of the various meanings of the fragment has been an attempt to uncover possible studio research approaches to it. In order to explore the usefulness of the fragment as a tool for contemporary art production it has been necessary to approach the research in ways that recognise the fragment’s essential characteristic: its fragmentariness. This research has therefore involved the practical application of theory to an exploration of materials, and to the development of a methodology in keeping with the fragment and fragmentariness. At the same time I have aimed to incorporate real-life experiences into the research. The research has explored a material creative process as a way of approaching the fragment based alongside daily life and a further paradox: the contradictory (and possibly Romantic) assumption that interiority—like the fragment, complete in itself—is yet incomplete.

Carolyn Steedman (1995, p. 15) in her book Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority writes that a contemporary compulsion to search for depth of meaning—in her case, both a personal and a professional search—stems from an “assumption that there is Bildung, a wholeness to interiority, that will figure itself forth, from inside to outside.” This assumption is similar to those upon which the work of many artists, writers and thinkers has been based. For Steedman, it arises along with
contemporary understandings of the self and its development that have their genesis in the late eighteenth century. It is on this basis that I have questioned whether interiority, that inner life of one’s own, might approach wholeness in new ways by a creative material process through which ideas are brought forth from the inside to the outside—from mind to ink and paper—and whether this process might result in new ideas to be contained in forms that then may also be shared with others.

Readers and viewers also contain an inner life, complete in itself, and may participate in creative processes. By reading or looking they also complete the story or picture, creating a chain or garland of complete and incomplete wholes: a system of fragments, a system of ideas. This chapter therefore explores material ways in which I have employed the fragment, in order to make work in which viewers and readers might participate creatively. As a model for a creative process in the context of a multi-faceted daily life, an examination of Schlegel’s fragmentary writing practice may contribute to a discussion about practice-led research. In particular, I refer to practice-led researcher Estelle Barrett’s (2007, p. 1) proposition that artistic practice may be viewed as the production of knowledge, or philosophy in action.31

The Contradictory Romantic Fragment

In Chapter One I suggest that Schlegel’s writing may be seen as an exploration of a larger Romantic epistemological project. Rather than explicitly expounding a theory of the fragment, Schlegel’s writings attempt to elaborate a philosophical conception of the fragment in keeping with his revolutionary scepticism about philosophical enquiry. The fragment’s contradictory key characteristics: completeness and incompleteness, play against each other in every direction. At times Schlegel’s aphorisms only approximate

31 For an introductory discussion on art as knowledge see Eisner (2008).
or approach the ideal of the Chamfortian form. They are variously somewhat unfinished, unrefined or polished, and sometimes not even particularly on-topic (Gasché, 1991, p. ix). The aphorisms, form and philosophical concept at the same time, are representations of ideas as they occur in the mind. They are also an exploration of ideas about ideas. Written in the moment, they come to exist in material form, complete in the physical world in ink on paper in order to be read, and to then exist in the mind of the reader. They contain the potential of what they will become because they move and change materially through a process of becoming: both in the mind and in the external material world.

For Gasché (1991, p. ix), the Romantic exigency arises from the intersection of Schlegel’s unsystematic writings and his engagement with Kant’s theory of the transcendental ideas. Further, for Millan-Zaibert (2007, p. 18) Schlegel’s Romantic project developed as a reaction to the period’s post-Kantian debates in philosophy, reflecting Schlegel’s absorption with the problem of philosophy’s starting point, and his scepticism about basing philosophy upon any absolute, single principles. Explaining that Schlegel referred to particular ancients as “older moderns” who were not “thinkers of the past who belonged in the past”, but rather dialogue partners for contemporary moderns, Millan-Zaibert, (2007, p. 16) argues that Schlegel’s use of the term “Romantic” then:

…became a tool for classifying poetry, but more precisely, it became a way of comparing the past with the present in a way which superseded literary categories: it became a way of comparing the past with the present in a philosophical way.

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32 Gasché (1991, p. xv) explains that ideas in the Kantian sense draw on Plato’s doctrine.
Because Schlegel’s Romantic fragment is a philosophical concept developed in dialogue with philosophical history\textsuperscript{33} it may be useful to approach in in an ancient way. This may be done by deferring to Plato (somewhere near the beginning of Western philosophy since Plato in turn defers to Heraclitus) and an argument about a first principle of philosophy, namely Aristotle’s principle of non-contradiction. For Aristotle, contradictory statements about a thing cannot both be true at the same time (Gottlieb, 2013). That is, Aristotelian logic would dictate that the proposition “the fragment is complete,” is incompatible with the proposition “the fragment is yet incomplete.” However, for Plato and according to tradition, Heraclitus argued that the logic that two contradictory statements cannot both be true of a thing at the same time, only holds for things that don’t change, since things that move or change, he argued, must contain the potential of what they may become (Graham, 2011). Further, for Heraclitus nothing in this world is constant except change or movement. \textsuperscript{34} That these two states, completeness and incompleteness, can be true of the fragment simultaneously is an allowable contradiction on the basis of an understanding of the way the fragment (an idea or project) moves and changes.

The contradictory statement that interiority may be complete and yet incomplete explains something about interiority based on its potential for movement or change. A creative process by which ideas move or change from mind to ink and paper, a process of material becoming, may be a process through which interiority may move or change and in the creation of new ideas approach wholeness in new ways. Although it might

\textsuperscript{33} For further discussion on the early Romantics repudiation of first principles and of Schlegel’s Platonism see Beiser (2003, pp. 56–72).

\textsuperscript{34} Heraclitus was known for his fragmentary, aphoristic style and for self-contradictory statements. See: Cohen, S. (2002). For discussion of Heraclitus and the unity of opposites see Graham (2011). On the role of the law of no-contradiction in Western philosophy see Horn (2012).
seem that my two propositions about interiority, completeness and incompleteness, cannot be true simultaneously, as we have seen, these two states are not always mutually exclusive. The assumption that interiority is both complete and incomplete is based on the idea that interiority contains the potential for what it may become and that this potential must already exist in the present. As a container of ideas, interiority may approach completeness in the progress of ideas as they move between the mind and the material world and the subsequent creation of new wholes, new ideas. If nothing is permanent except movement and change, perhaps the fragment is an expression of the space between incompleteness and completeness, from which movement and change is possible. Its contradiction challenges the binary opposition of complete and incomplete and alerts us to the potential of in-between spaces as spaces where things happen.

Schlegel’s aphorisms are in form, content and manner of writing an exploration of the limits of certainty. Form in art and poetry, shape or appearance, structure or configuration, provides access for viewers and readers to the ideas articulated within it. At the same time, working with form may also provide a pathway to understanding for the artist or poet: painting, drawing or writing may be employed as a vehicle by which to think about and understand the subject at hand. In this instance, the Romantic fragment contains and gives access, by virtue of its relative incompleteness, to an exploration of ideas about ideas—about what it is possible to know—for both reader and writer. The Romantic fragment’s form is characterised by a contradiction because for Schlegel, ideas are also characterised by contradiction: they are both complete and yet incomplete because they move and change or develop over time. In this way Schlegel’s employment of the Romantic fragment might be seen as a means through which to explore or reach understanding about the way ideas themselves move, change, develop, or become, over time.
For Gasché, the aphorisms in the *Athenæum Fragmenta* are representative of Schlegel’s “inability to develop and systematically present his insights and to carry out his innumerable projects.” However, Schlegel’s fragmentary writings, if indeed “notes written on the spur of the moment” (Gasché, p. ix) arise from a practice of writing that might be seen to be a system in itself. My creative work, and the fragmentary creative process it tests, has grown in response to fragments: to ideas contained in Jolley’s writing and creative process and from connections I have made between them and understandings of the Romantic fragment. A creative engagement with the Jolley archive led me to explore the possible meanings of Schlegel’s aphoristic writings on the meaning of the fragment and to his fragmentary practice of writing as a template for a material creative process. These fragmentary writings, direct translations from mind to ink and paper of thoughts and philosophical ideas in the moment they occurred, might be seen as part of Schlegel’s broader Romantic project, as a system (that is no system) developed in order to approach new understanding of what it may be possible to know philosophically. That is, rather than present an explicit theory of the fragment in which everything about it was clearly articulated, Schlegel explored the fragment by employing a fragmentary manner of working and a metaphorical form to contain it congruent with his investigation and in dialogue with his scepticism about ways of doing philosophy. Schlegel’s writing practice—a Romantic project—becomes, in the late eighteenth century, a system for art and radical philosophy in one.

**Material Thinking**

The creation of artworks informed by notions of the Romantic fragment presents many possibilities for research, including the use of improvisation or chance, as a strategy to encourage invention. Studio explorations employing chance may facilitate invention for both writer and reader. This is an important aspect of the fragment described by Hans-
Jost Frey (1996, p. 69) as the fragmentary state of being that occurs when improvisation is required. For Frey (1996, p. 69), to improvise is “to begin somehow and see what comes out” and the improviser, like the planner, orders “but always provisionally and sometimes playfully: throwing constellations like dice.” The materials ink, paper and dust may be employed to explore the fragment and chance. The artistic process of pulling materials apart, and the employment of chance in order to put them back together again in new ways is integral to the creative process of invention, and has been explored by many writers and artists. Jolley employed understandings such as these by collecting fragments of overheard conversations and reorganising this material to create her fiction.

Among the approaches to practice-based research described by Barrett which draw on this rationale, and which have contributed to my developing creative process, are the artistic processes described by Carter in his essay (2007) “Interest: the ethics of invention” and in his 2004 book Material Thinking. Carter (Barrett & Bolt, (eds.) 2007, p. 15–16) describes the following: 1) that the process of “material thinking” as a method of critical enquiry is distinguished by the material mediation of the process of invention; 2) that invention is “the state of being that allows a state of becoming to emerge,” and is conditional on “a perception, or recognition of the ambiguity of appearances”; and 3) that the process of invention is as a double movement of decontextualisation, in which “new families of association and structures of meaning are established.” For Carter (2007, p. 16), this double movement characterises any conceptual advance and represents the critical difference between creative research and

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36 See footnote 29.
other forms of critical enquiry—what is pulled apart is put back together again in new ways. Practice-based research, for him, is a method allowing unpredictable and differential situations to influence what is found through the exploration of materials in which particular properties are inherent. I have drawn on this concept in each of the various creative research strategies I have employed.

**Victor Hugo and the development of Marginalia**

Carter’s (2007, p.16), practice-based research methods allow unpredictable and differential situations to influence what is found through the exploration of materials in which particular properties are inherent. Drawing on this concept in the initial stages of the project, I experimented with a variety of inks and paper, including blotting paper. Ink, either as a blot, a random spill on paper, or as writing or drawing, may be used to create notes that are perhaps something like a fragment. They invite the imagination to participate. In particular, the ink-blot has a history that is associated with the Rorschach test and with a number of artists, writers and thinkers who experimented with drawings in ink in the margins of their writing or on the blotting paper on their desks, and who understood the potential of the ink-blot as a starting point for developing an image (Turner, 2011).

In *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art* (2002), Dario Gamboni explores the history of this aim in image making. Gamboni draws on psychology, semiotics and literary theory, including Kantian and Romantic discourse, to explore and analyse Modernist art that requests imaginative responses from viewers. Gamboni’s (2002) book, which indicates connections between visual art, Schlegel’s writing and recent fragment theory, also suggests ways in which my creative work might explore the imaginative possibilities of the fragment. The outline Gamboni
(2002) provides of the history of artistic, literary, psychological and popular understandings of the ink-blot was particularly relevant in informing the direction of my studio research into the materials paper, ink and dust. A number of artists and writers have explored use of the ink-blot (Cramer, 1997; Kuntz, 1966) including the German poet Justinus Kerner (see figure 11) and the Romantic writer-draughtsman Victor Hugo in the nineteenth century (Gamboni, 2002, p. 56).

Hugo’s approach to materials, including his explorations of the imaginative possibilities of ink on paper, has been influential throughout the project. Hugo’s improvisational procedures and practice of tachism, involving the expansion of the suggestiveness of drips and spills of ink, resulted in drawings that shift between representation and abstraction (see figure 12). That Hugo’s techniques included the use of pliage (see figure 13), or folding of papers to create effects, that anticipated the Rorschach test (Vine, 1999, p. 4) is relevant to the development of the work I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then. Also of interest to me was that Hugo was known to have used unconventional materials such as coffee, soot and cigar ash in his drawings.
Figure 12. Hugo, V. (1870). *Evocation of an island* [ink and wash on paper]. Retrieved from http://fineartamerica.com

Figure 13. Hugo, V. (ca. 1856). *Rosette* [pen and brown-ink wash on vellum paper] Retrieved from http://artseensoho.com
I envisaged blotting as a means through which it might be possible to make connections between ink and paper and the ideas accompanying my studio research—to make links between visual art and writing. Popularly imagined as the result of Hugo “cleaning his pen between chapters” (Vine, 1999, p. 6), Hugo’s drawings resulted from an unorthodox and improvisational approach to composition. “Beginning anywhere on the page, evolving his first marks into a fully realised detail, then expanding outward to elaborate the whole composition” (Vine, 1999, p. 4), Hugo’s approach seems close to Jolley’s method of building a story from “quick notes”. Jolly, interviewed by Stuart Reid for the J.S. Battye Library of Western Australia’s Oral History Unit, described her method of starting a composition from a quick note, with no clear plan as to how the story would form:

…those little quick notes I then put out on my table and I write a few pages and then put them in a folder, and then I’ll leave them and then I’ll come back to them and re-write them, and then go a little bit further with it. I might do just a tiny bit, for example the beginning of The Well, the novel The Well. I just have two women brushing each other’s hair, and that’s all I wrote. Just a little scene like that. Then I re-wrote the scene and put a little window high up on the wall that looked over the moonlit stubble, and then I realised that one of the women was much older than the other and that she had adopted the younger one. So I sort of gradually built up those two characters, and then I put them into another situation altogether and wrote a descriptive paragraph. Just the two of them trying on clothes to try to make a parcel to send away to an orphanage, the orphanage where the younger one had come from. Do you see? Bit by bit, it’s like a jigsaw puzzle. You build it all up. It’s fascinating really. (1989, p. 65)

Ink on different papers has particular qualities, therefore in order to make a material connection between my own work and this history, I used large sheets of blotting paper
and a variety of inks, including those made from artist quality pigments, “Quink”\textsuperscript{37} brand writing ink and gold inks for various reasons and effects. I allowed the ink to fall and splash on the paper, to run, dribble, and pool. I then responded to these stains and dribbles in various ways. For example, I blotted the page with another sheet of clean paper or with one already stained with ink, or added water to the ink, creating washes which pooled and dried leaving other textures, blots and stains on the paper. A number of these experiments resulted in large abstracted Rorschach-like blots and fields of ink, while smaller blots invited me to elicit in a more representational way the figures or landscapes they suggested to me.

I installed these works in the gallery Breathing Space at the Edith Cowan University library in Mount Lawley. These studio experiments suggested, in the progress from studio to library gallery, their presentation as a visual response to my reading of Hans-Jost Frey’s (1998) book \textit{Interruptions}. Through a process of decontextualisation and recontextualisation, a material understanding of Frey’s text arose. In the context of the library, I reflected on Frey’s questions about where and how a text begins and ends (Albert, 1989, p. vii). For Frey, the border is a space that readers cross to enter a text, and this seemed to be materially evident in the library. Books contain margins or borders around text. They also contain marginalia—notes by previous readers—and these handwritten notes, or marginalia, might be seen as material demonstrations of readers entering a text and of the readers’ subjectivity at play, since readers interpret texts differently.

\textsuperscript{37} “Quink” or quick drying ink is writing ink developed in the 1930s. Elizabeth Jolley wrote with Quink and may have noticed its particular qualities such as the fact that when water is added, black separates into greens, blues and yellows and bleeds through to the reverse in mottled yellowed stains. Australian artist Joy Hester also worked in Quink (Backhouse, 2004).
Combining ideas, I came to see that ink-blots on paper might be employed as a metaphor for the border crossing that occurs between text and readers in the process of reading. In order to communicate these ideas for what became the small, works in progress exhibition, *Marginalia* (2011), I arranged the works on paper in particular ways in the space, adding text in the form of photocopies of Frey’s writing. I also pinned drawings of figures to the works and wall spaces of the gallery. These figures of children in ink, developed from pencil drawings and photographs of children playing, running, jumping, leaping and falling, when situated near or on the larger works began to take on a different meaning. They became marginalia. They seemed to be travelling, entering or leaving the picture or page—the text. The landscape-like qualities of the larger works became more evident with their addition. This response to the spaces in the gallery, arising from the interplay between studio research employing material thinking, reading and writing, began to suggest ways in which I might progress in the future. Frey’s text was difficult to access because there was too much of it. I could perhaps have highlighted key words in some way, by either removing text or using collage, and I considered writing my own words. At this point, it seemed that the figures of children perhaps most successfully provided entry points for viewers to the larger more abstract works. Perhaps I needed to integrate these elements together into one work.

**Elizabeth Jolley’s “Sophisticated Spaces”**

Brian Dibble (2008, p. 253) in his biography of Jolley, *Doing Life*, describes how for Jolley, writing “was a ‘stepping off into imagination’ from experience and memories [and] that readers took a comparable step into imagination.” Jolley’s methods assisted in the creation of what she referred to as “sophisticated spaces” for readers. These constructions, created by the juxtaposition of narrative events (Dibble, 2008, p. 253), are an example of the way Jolley’s writing seems connected to Romantic
understandings of the fragment. They also arise from a method of inventing and reading fiction that parallels Carter’s concept of invention through material thinking, as a process of deconstruction and reconstruction. Further, Jolley’s working method, employing chance, enabled new systems of meaning to emerge for both writer (in the process of writing) and reader.

I responded to the many statements Jolley made about her working methods, such as:

I have lots of little bits of paper that I will clip together and then I can spread them out. I also have another method. I have a manila folder that I open out, and I might make little squares and write little bits in there so that the pages are actually resting on what is like a map of the structure of the book. (Willbanks, 1992, p. 120)

Jolley provides clear pictures of her working method, and in response I have experimented with fragments of drawings or writing on paper, arranged in different ways. My studio research has linked Jolley’s use of “the quick note”, her scraps of paper and manner of working these together, to a working method for making art. This method has its own history: the history of collage. The artistic technique of collage parallels Jolley’s method of working using “the quick note,” and the way that she arranged and rearranged her writing, creating “sophisticated spaces” for readers in the construction of her short stories and novels. Further, Jolley employed a kind of collage in her writing by collecting fragments of observations and overheard conversations and reorganising this material to create her fiction. A character in Jolley’s novel Foxybaby

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38 This history has also suggested directions for research. For example Kurt Schwitters’ artistic practice, including his collages, have been described as evidence of Romantic themes in his work (Museum of Modern Art, 2009). That is, although the fragment as a motif in painting and sculpture came to be seen as expressive of the fragmentation of modern life (Nochlin, 1995, p. 56), at the same time, many artists also explored the fragment as a means to invite creative responses from viewers. Contemporary visual artists continue to employ the fragment and collage.
(1987, p. 96) puts it this way, “The story will come together from these fragments. This is how the story is made, from little scenes and the thoughts and feelings of people, their ideas and wishes.” This is also how I have come to see the pulling together of key ideas that have accompanied my studio research.

Real Life: An Anecdote about an Echidna and Practice-led Research

Schlegel’s puzzling aphorism “A fragment, like a little work of art, must be quite separated from its surroundings and complete in itself-like a hedgehog” has been examined by a number of writers and theorists.39 Because the hedgehog is covered in pointy spines, or quills, and perhaps because of the revolutionary aspects of German Romanticism and the time period in which this movement arose, Schlegel’s hedgehog has often been interpreted as uniquely, aggressively, separated from the ordinary world. For example, Charles Rosen (cited in Kramer, 1997, p. 148) writes:

Like its definition, the Romantic Fragment is complete (this oxymoron was intended to disturb, as the hedgehog’s quills make its enemies uncomfortable): separate from the rest of the universe, the Fragment nevertheless suggests distant perspectives. Its separation, indeed, is aggressive: it projects into the universe precisely by the way it cuts itself off.

I have thought of Schlegel’s “hedgehog” a good deal throughout my research. I asked myself if dust, which I had employed as a metaphor for interactions in the gallery between my work and viewers, might be something like the points of a hedgehog’s quills: indexes to new work, new thoughts. At the same time I thought of Jolley, composing stories of characters in interior domestic space, whose state of being was

39 As an indication of the intrigue created by Schlegel's use of the hedgehog metaphor, see Kramer (1997).
often illuminated by their relationship to outside elements, that is, the landscape in which they were set. I myself was set in a landscape and was often drawn by the changing light or weather to walk and take photographs. And then, on one of these walks in the bush, I discovered an echidna (a small animal, native to Australia, that has a pelt of sharp spines). Hearing me, the echidna hid under a pile of sticks, and curled up to protect the kernel of its body: spines in soft greys blending perfectly, becoming a part of the dry leaf litter and wood. As I watched and waited, camera in hand, it unfurled its spines. Each point, like the tip of Schlegel’s quill dipped in ink, reached out in the many directions made by the animal’s body as the little antipodean fragment transported itself through the bush. It trundled magically on its way. There was nothing separate or aggressive about it. In a process of movement and change it belonged in every way. I looked. It just was.

My experience with the echidna in the course of my creative research allowed me to make connections between Schlegel’s thought about the fragment and my own creative practice. It was, for me, an example of the way new modes of thinking and possibilities for creative work unexpectedly arise in the process of creative research. It was as though, finally, after a long process of searching and looking, the Romantic fragment simply revealed itself to me. That is, the fragment was embodied in the echidna in multi-directional ways, but most importantly for me at that point, it revealed a space, a gap that is fundamental to the fragment, into which I could step and participate creatively. If I were a character in one of Jolley’s stories, my meeting with the echidna might illuminate something about my state of being: it might perhaps stand in for my search for a creative space for myself.
In Progress: I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then

This meeting with the echidna led me to undertake a short residency at the School of Animal Biology at The University of Western Australia to draw and photograph the specimen collection including the fragmentary remains of echidnas, and to the introduction of drawings of insects and other specimens as motifs in my work, and to an exploration of the shared past of Romanticism, naturphilosophie and Romantic biology at Jena at a time and place when philosophy and science were not yet separated.\textsuperscript{40} For Beiser (2003, pp. 155–156) the post-Kantian naturphilosophen developed a metaphysics that posited an organic view of nature: for Schlegel and other early Romantic thinkers, that nature might be understood as one organism required not only observation and experiment but also a metaphysical explanation, a transcendental deduction of the ‘idea’ of an organism as a necessary condition of the possibility of experience. For Beiser, (2003, p. 156–157) the speculative aspects of naturphilosophie have however been exaggerated while the metaphysical concerns of others also engaged in scientific observation and experiment at the time have been downplayed:

It is one of the more unfortunate aspects of the neo-Kantian legacy that, for generations, it has succeeded in portraying naturphilosophie as an aberration from true science, which follows the path of experiment and observation. Fortunately in recent decades it has become clear that this picture is profoundly anachronistic. It cannot come to terms with some very basic facts: that there was no clear distinction between philosophy and science in this period and that there was no such thing as a pure empirical science limited to only observation and experiment. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, naturphilosophie was not a metaphysical perversion of, or deviation from, “normal” empirical science. Rather, it was normal science itself. From our contemporary

\textsuperscript{40} For further discussion of understandings of the terms romantic biology and naturphilosophie see Richards (2002).
perspective it is hard to imagine a scientist who is also a poet and a philosopher. But this is just what is so fascinating and challenging about naturphilosophie, which has to be understood in the context of its own time as the science of its day.

Although Beiser writes that it might be hard to imagine a scientist who is also a poet and a philosopher, I felt it would not be hard for students of animal biology at the University of Western Australia to do so. That is, Beiser describes a history that is in evidence and appreciated in the School of Animal Biology. Although it is necessary to limit claims about the similarities between scientific and artistic research, I was struck by the way a number of chaotic and intriguing spaces of the School: hidden offices and postgraduate laboratories, resembled artist’s studios; a jumble of unfinished and abandoned projects, alongside projects in progress, litter tables and benches in between papers, scientific instruments, jars and containers of materials. I was reminded of Schlegel’s aphorism “all art should become science and all science art; poetry and philosophy should be made one.” The specimen collection is also displayed and kept in ways that might be seen to resemble the ordered and disordered characteristics of the archive. A number of specimens are on display in vitrines in lecture rooms and public areas, but the storage areas revealed a chaotic collection of bones and specimens that has grown over many years through a combination of purposeful collecting and preserving as well as by donation and by chance. One echidna skeleton was found on the side of the road during a field trip and then carefully cleaned and reassembled by a student. In response to my questions about it, it was suggested (J. O’Shea, personal communication, February 11, 2012) that the echidna is perhaps also like the fragment because, as a pile of disassembled bones, it was impossible to put back together without a guide. The collection is prone to insect infestation and the bones are dusty. As they are handled the bones leave behind their dust.
What, I wondered, does the interior of the echidna literally contain? I found that the echidna is not related in any way to the hedgehog or porcupine, but rather is an example of concurrent evolution by which adaptations, spines for example, develop and are retained by species because they have a survival advantage in particular conditions. Referred to as a biologically robust and ancient animal because of the way it walks, the echidna also contains a hidden clue to its particularly ancient past. It is internally structured like a crocodile: the hip configuration indicating a connection with these earliest reptiles (J. O’Shea, personal communication, February 9, 2012). I found, in discussion with faculty members in the School of Animal Biology, an appreciation for the romanticism and history of the natural sciences, as well as for poetry and art.41 Further, on the basis of argument and research concerning the influence of Romantic thought on Darwin’s conception of nature and evolution, it is the process of evolution (revealed in the bones and adaptations of species discovered on voyages around the world42 in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) that unites the biological sciences with Romanticism. Indeed, Millan-Zaibert (2007, p. 10) argues that Romantic thought including Schlegel’s contribution to naturphilosophie and his desire to join philosophy, poetry and science “gave shape to (nothing less than) Darwin’s conceptions of nature and evolution.” For many scientists and thinkers, it is the theory of evolution that comes closest to fulfilling what the early Romantics desired to discover: an underlying wholeness to nature (Richards, 2002). Evolution shows us that nature is always in a process of change and movement and of becoming. The echidna, like the

41 In the eighteenth century, readers of Wordsworth’s poems found advertisements for works of botany, geology, mineralogy and philosophy on the endpapers (Heringman, 2003, p. 1).
hedgehog, really does know one trick,\textsuperscript{43} and it’s an evolutionary one ensuring its survival: it curls itself up like a ball to protect itself. It contains (as we all do) within an evolutionary past: the ancient beginnings of things.

Romanticism shares a past with the complex chronology of historical developments that shaped the emergence of the modern disciplines of literature and science. Richard Holmes, in his book (2008, p. xvi) \textit{The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science}, also states:

> Romanticism as a cultural force is generally regarded as intensely hostile to science, its ideal of subjectivity eternally opposed to that of scientific objectivity. But I do not believe this was always the case, or that the terms are so mutually exclusive. The notion of wonder seems to be something that once united them, and can still do so. In effect there is Romantic science in the same sense that there is Romantic poetry, and often for the same enduring reasons.

In discussion with staff and students at the School of Animal Biology, I observed that nature is seen by them as a place of wonder, however learning and research is approached in material and scientifically measurable ways with an ecological focus. The specimens are used to teach students principles of biology in a material way. While they set up microscopes and dissected frogs, I set about taking photographs and drawing. I returned to this task many times over several weeks and noticed a number of effects. I stopped consciously analysing. I became immersed in the qualities of the specimens and was emotionally moved. I felt compassion as I moved the tiny skulls and bones of the echidnas around to capture shadows, while absorbing their delicacy, the symmetries, the

\textsuperscript{43} Schlegel would have certainly been familiar with the ancient Greek parable about the fox (which knows many things) and the hedgehog (which knows just one big thing). See (Gould, 2011, p.2–3).
almost powdery surfaces and the effects of light shining on and through them. Through handling the material objects, drawing and the process of taking photographs, I experienced a sense of wonder and connectedness (see figure 14).

![Figure 14. Wood, A. (2012). Echidna Skulls [photograph]. Artist's own image.](image)

The drawings and photographs, enriched by conversations with staff and students, became the raw data which I worked with and reflected on in the studio. My aim was to find a way to synthesise the residency with the principal ideas behind my research through a process of drawing and experimentation with ink on paper. The residency had caused me to re-examine my own relationship to nature, and well as to Romanticism and to the project itself. I felt a need to connect the project, and what readers or viewers might experience in the gallery, to a sense of wonder and connectedness to the natural world. Returning to the studio however, I found that rather than reflecting my experience of looking into the spaces of the specimens and the laboratory, the drawings
were literal. They perhaps resembled something like scientific illustrations. How would I translate this experience and the questions it raised in a material way (see figure 15)?

Figure 15. Wood, A. (2012). *Echidna skull* [drawing, graphite on brown paper]. Artist’s own image.

Leafing through my piles of drawings and experiments with ink on paper I pulled out the photographs to look at them again. I started to see that the qualities of the photographs suggested an inky surface to the skulls, almost like veins and capillaries. I dropped a blot of ink onto a drawing to see if I could recreate this effect and watched as the ink dispersed by capillary action on the wet surface of the paper. I drew another sheet toward me on which I had drawn insects and moths, finding that if I blotted the page with another and then dropped ink on it and let it disperse, it created interesting effects. I flicked the ink with the brush and folded a sheet of fine paper and pressed. When I opened it up I found that the process had created something intriguing: a development that would form the basis of a major component of *Wonderfully Ordinary*,
the work *I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then.* It was a Rorschach-like ink-blot suggestive of the fine symmetrical vertebrae of a tiny creature (see figure 16).

Figure 16. Wood, A. (2012). *Ink blot* [ink on paper]. Artist’s own image.
Chapter Three

Wonderfully Ordinary

Friedrich von Schlegel’s Romantic fragment, Elizabeth Jolley’s manner of working fragmentarily, and Paul Carter’s concept of material thinking have contributed to the development of my understanding of the process of making art. I have reflected on the fragment in a material way, using ink in washes and blots on paper, to which I have then responded with further washes and other processes, and by drawing. At the same time, I have made connections between the fragment’s role in this process, with materials, and with contemporary understandings of interiority and the mind of the artist in the moment of creative production, the products of which may then be shared with others.

The ink-blot, associated with the Rorschach test\textsuperscript{44} and interiority (the space of the mind and imagination), might be seen to represent this potential, and it seems something like the fragment. This final chapter explores this idea while detailing the development of works made throughout this project towards the exhibition Wonderfully Ordinary.

Throughout the project I presented a number of exhibitions of works in progress. Marginalia, shown in the window gallery at Spectrum Project Space for Wonderfully Ordinary, had its beginnings in the small work in progress exhibition Marginalia (2011) shown at Breathing Space in 2010. I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then developed following my time in the School of Animal Biology at the University of Western Australia. I showed an initial version of this work of ink-blots at Breathing Space in 2011. An engagement with Heiser and Seifermann’s book-length catalogue of the exhibition Romantic Conceptualism (2007) led to the title of this work and the exhibition I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then held at Freerange.

\textsuperscript{44} For information about the Rorschach test see Framington (2011).
Gallery in Perth in 2012. This exhibition also included larger works in ink on paper incorporating drawings of insects, plants and children. As a development of the Freerange exhibition, *Wonderfully Ordinary* represented a growth in insight about approaches to making and viewing contemporary conceptual art. I employed a material creative process and re-engaged with aspects of my own personal experience in seeking out ways in which to bring new elements together with the project’s key ideas, leading to the inclusion of my own creative writing and to the work *Great Branches Fall*. My aim has been to participate within a chain or garland of fragments or ideas of the past, by employing a material creative process in which ideas pass between the interiority and exteriority of the artist. But this process has also been a meditation on Jolley’s writing and the serious and sustained pursuit of creative production in the midst of an ordinary life in the present.

**I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then**

Alison Stone (2005, p. 5), in her article “Friedrich Schlegel, Romanticism and the Re-enchantment of nature,” claims that the early German Romantics’ ambition to restore a sense of nature’s beauty, mystery and magic anticipates by more than 200 years the concern of some contemporary environmental philosophers to develop a conception of natural things as vital and therefore worthy of respect and care. In their view, an “enchanting” view of nature is one in which nature is seen as poetic, creative and partly mysterious. Stone (2005, p.5) argues that Schlegel thought that nature could not be entirely grasped or predicted through analytic forms of rationality, and needed to be reconceived as enchanted, through cultural means. Stone argues (2005, p. 5) that this view of Schlegel’s implies an appropriateness of care for natural phenomena. The Romantics believed this re-conception was something fragmentary Romantic art and poetry could do. Containing ink-blots and text, *I can’t tell you now what I could have*
told you then aimed to involve viewers and readers in a re-enchanting (poetic) conversation about our relationship to nature. It also aimed to reflect on the early German Romantics’ concept of naturphilosophie and their belief that modernity disenchanted nature by estranging humans from it.

I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then marked a transposition of the University of Western Australia collection to Spectrum Project Space for Wonderfully Ordinary. It evolved from the painstaking production of representational pencil drawings of skulls and bones to the creation of hundreds of inky blots. Fragmentary studio processes involving experimentation and “material thinking” led to a moment when materials, combined and recombined in different ways, created an unexpected outcome: the production of a way of connecting key ideas associated with the fragment with my experiences in the School of Animal Biology. In that moment, the Rorschach-like ink-blot seemed something like the fragment and partly mysterious. Unlike clearly representational drawings or photographs, information confirming that it should be read as exactly one thing or another was missing. Its symmetrical form and relative incompleteness invited interpretation, an attempt to make sense of it as an image. Suggesting biological form, the blot seemed suspended midway in progress toward or away from the formation of an image. That is, either towards completion or disintegration.

The ink-blot is associated with both the idea of the “accidental”\textsuperscript{45} in art as a starting point for developing an image, and the Rorschach with concepts of symmetry. These concepts perhaps arise from the evolutionary basis of our perception of symmetry. Michael Bird (2004, p. 1), in his article “The Perception of Symmetry” writes that the

\textsuperscript{45} Turner (2011) provides an overview of the history of the use of the deliberate accident in image making.
concept of symmetry “includes various ways of expressing the relation of parts (of bodies, buildings, pictures) to each other and to the whole.” He argues that while the human brain evolved to respond to symmetries found in nature, it is the perception of subtle modulations and asymmetries that are integral to most attempts to make sense of the world, so that asymmetry:

evokes feelings of dislocation, even fear. Any strongly asymmetrical shape gets called “strange,” in other words foreign or unrecognisable. The striking asymmetries of Romantic art, with its cult of rocks, storms, ‘unbalanced’ states of mind and impulsive actions, embody this strangeness. These are things that make you feel strange or take you out of yourself (precisely the effect the Sublime was supposed to have). The border between strangeness and recognition is neatly illustrated by the Rorschach blot exercise, in which shapeless ink spillages on a sheet of paper promptly metamorphose into bilaterally symmetrical forms (insects, flowers, faces and so on) when you fold the sheet in half (Bird, 2004, p. 2).

Bird (2004, p. 5) writes that our perception of symmetry “shapes large areas of our experiential and cognitive universe,” and is associated with the binary structures of human systems of thought. In visual art it is also associated with the word mirror, and to miracle or wonder, the act of gazing, to sexuality and reproduction, and to cultural notions of duality including:

…Freud’s inference of conflicts between conscious and unconscious motivation and Jung’s dramatisation of the psychic landscape in the figures of anima and animus, the self and the shadow. (Bird, 2004, p. 5)
My thought was that many varied blots of this “accidental” or unfinished nature\(^{46}\) might speak of the body, cycles of life and the role of chance in the evolutionary process. Both symmetrical and strange, they invite a response from viewers. At the same time these blots and responses, as a result of their association with the Rorschach test, might also speak of the self and the mind within the broader context of biology and the natural world.

Following this initial step, I experimented with papers of various types and sizes, and with inks. I explored scale, colour and consistency of the inks, and the qualities of the paper including colour, texture and the way it responded to ink and water. The size and delicacy of the images and paper was important for the various associations I wanted to invite viewers to make with the work (for example, with fragility and insects and the bones or organs of small animals) and with Schlegel’s description of the fragment as “like a miniature work of art.” I wanted to engage the imagination and feelings of viewers, and by creating many blots, evoke a sense of creative nature—a record of processes of evolution or developing mutations as captured in a moment in the creative process when an image emerges in wet ink on paper. The Rorschach test, associated with the space of the mind and with human imagination and feelings, is also delicate and printed on card at a similar size. An aura of mystery or even magic was hoped for. This might also be suggested by the ink-blot’s association with historical and popular belief in the Rorschach test as a mysterious means to access to hidden or unacknowledged aspects of the personality or mind. I had looked into the small spaces

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\(^{46}\) I did not manipulate the blots further. For a discussion on the history of the art of blotting, including the use of the blot as a starting point in developing an image, see Kuntz (1966). Alexander Cozen’s (1717–1786) blotting techniques, as an aid to invention in English landscape painting, are associated with classicism rather than with Romanticism, however the “suggestiveness” of form of the blot is discussed as a major trope of the Romantic aesthetic (Cramer, 1997, p. 2).
of the echidna and, daydreaming in the laboratory and in the studio, had found them poetic. They reminded me of my own biological connection to the natural world. I reflected on Gaston Bachelard’s (1994, p. 149) description of the miniature’s connection to the mind, “imagination in miniature is natural imagination which appears at all ages in the daydreams of born dreamers.” Perhaps the ink-blot exists at a similar size in the mind, and might provide viewers with a sense of these poetic spaces.

Different paper reacts differently to ink, which when splashed, dribbled, dropped or followed by drips of water, creates different effects. I found that ordinary cartridge paper repelled the ink slightly, and that this allowed me time to press the two sides of a pre-folded sheet together to create different blots. For example, a fine brush dipped in ink and flicked along a fold would, when pressed from top to bottom, create marks similar in scale and shape to the vertebrae of small bone specimens. Cartridge paper varies depending on suppliers, but a particular batch I found was a close match to the surface texture and colour of the echidna bones. I also experimented with mixing colours to resemble those used in old scientific illustrations by muddying the colours with black. I eventually chose to mix and dilute the inks with water to resemble the colours I found in a reprinted edition of Ernst Haeckel’s (2010) *Art Forms in Nature.*

Haeckel (1834–1919) was a naturalist and artist who studied and worked as the first full professor of biology at the University of Jena, and was known for his endorsement of Darwin’s theory of evolution. Haeckel’s prints were influential in the development of designs used for home furnishings and décor associated with *Jugendstil*, the German equivalent of art nouveau (Breidbach, 2010, p. 9). During my residency at the University of Western Australia a professor had shown me his own limited edition book of Haeckel’s prints (see figure 17).
A photograph of Jolley at work at her desk in her bedroom (see appendix 7) shows manuscript pages spread out on a quilted bedspread, photographs in frames and a pattern of floral garlands on the wallpaper behind her. Thinking of Jolley at work at her desk in domestic space, and of the fragment as existing within “a chain or garland of fragments,” I introduced pattern to the work. I intended that the pattern might be read by viewers as something similar to a chain or garland, and might also be suggestive of wallpaper. At the same time I was interested in evoking the history of the ink-blots as a Swiss children’s game, and as a scrapbook pastime in the Victorian era. However, while I wanted the make connections with these domestic associations, the work’s pattern could not be overwhelming. The papers, laid out, contained the fragmentary suggestion of many things including a hint of a pattern, and could be seen as a “system that is yet no system,” a scrapbook collection, manuscript pages, or an archive of imaginary field notes.

I reconfigured the arrangement of the blots a number of times in the studio on the floor and walls, and then in Breathing Space. While in the studio I initially pinned the pages flat against the wall, in the different spaces of the library gallery I made a number of new decisions. I accentuated the fold in the paper and pinned them with fine insect pins in a grid around the two walls. I left a large gap, a partial circle, in the corner. This was a decision intended to connect the arrangement with various meanings of fragments and with the idea of the ink-blots as individual “pages.” Gallery walls can be thought of as being like pages. The corner gap drew the eye upward and mirrored the fold in the page. As I pulled the pinned pages away from the wall to the heads of the pins they seemed to

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47 Turner (2011, p. 7) describes various blot inspired games associated with explorations of the occult, including the parlour game Blotto popular in the late 1850s, which involved making random marks and decoding them. Victor Hugo’s “tache” or “stain” paintings drew on this popular cultural phenomenon.
float, fluttering slightly in the breeze coming through the library doors. They had come to life a little. I was reminded of Jolley’s statement (n.d.) “the meaning seems to float to some degree, free of what seems to carry it.” Further recalling her idea, moving through a gallery, such as reading a poem, may be thought of as a journey experienced over time. Meaning may be caught at the end or perhaps at the middle—at the gap—in the fold of the paper in the process of making the image, as well as within the gaps and spaces of the incomplete and creased symmetrical image.

I wanted viewers to make connections between the ink-blots, the biological body and the mind in time and place. Could another element, perhaps text, facilitate this? I returned to my journal entries and notes dating from my time in the School of Animal Biology and to the words “I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then.” In Chapter Two I outlined how the residency had led me to explore the shared past of the sciences and Romanticism, and the early Romantics’ concept of naturphilosophie. It had caused me to re-examine my own relationship to nature, resulting in a desire to link my creative work to environmental discussion. That is, my experiences in the zoology department had caused me to re-examine the ideas of the Romantics, in part because I was in a place of research focused on understanding aspects of the Western Australian environment. Initially, my interest in ideas from a remote nineteenth century Germany had seemed confrontingly irrelevant to the current environmental concerns and research I was presented with. I wondered if I had misunderstood the Romantics’ interest in science and had not, or perhaps even could not today, correctly understand their worldview. I questioned the relevance today of what were possibly overly mystical or even religious views of nature. In what way could my project and creative work contribute to a discussion of relevance today about nature or the environment?
At home, thinking of the experience of the residency at the University of Western Australia, and the complexities of the Romantics’ approach to nature, I had come across a set of photographs of Grasmere, in the lake district of England, taken by me more than twenty years ago (see figure 18). I immediately felt that they contained some of the qualities of Ader’s photograph *Farewell to faraway friends* (1971). Taken with a small Japanese camera, the photographs of the lake, rowboats and a white swan, possess the nostalgic quality of film and intensity of colour that stands out in this time of digital photography. Remembering that on that day I had walked first to visit Wordsworth’s grave, and then to the lake, I found a book containing a selection of Wordsworth’s (1983, p. 523-526) poetry and read the Tintern Abbey poem “Lines.” Perhaps it would reveal to me something of Wordsworth’s view of nature. I found that Wordsworth’s lines revisit a place of importance from his past and reflect on his changing relationship to nature over time. He compares a youthful, exuberant and bodily experience of nature to more internal, reverent and reflective experiences in maturity.

Wordsworth’s lines led me to make a similar comparison between my own experiences. That is, as I revisited a place of importance from my past, captured in a photograph, I thought of the distances between myself then and now in time and place, and the ways my relationship to the body, nature and to Romanticism had changed. I thought of the passage of time and place between the early Romantics and today, and the distances between Romantic England and Germany, and Perth, Western Australia, then and now. With Schlegel’s aphorisms and with Ader’s fragmentary words “I am too sad to tell you” in mind, I wrote the words “I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then.” My intention was that these words be taken as aphoristic, nostalgic and unsure or ironic. I wanted them to raise questions. By pairing them with the photograph they might also reflect something of the meaning of Ader’s (1971) nostalgic photograph *Farewell to
faraway friends (see figure 19). In part a meditation on a photograph, a landscape from my own past that also belongs in a time and place reminiscent of Romanticism, these words might invite viewers to meditate on them and other pasts, and to fill them with their own meanings. For example, a white swan on a European body of water might invite comparison with black swans on the rivers of Western Australia. These words, if paired with the ink-blots, might facilitate the link for viewers between time and place I was hoping for and strengthen the connection of the work with a historical discussion about understandings of nature. Perhaps the early Romantics’ approach to nature might contribute to a discussion of contemporary concerns.

Carolyn Steedman: Interiority and Drawing

One of the aims of this project has been to make new creative works and to discover ways to do this as a part of ordinary contemporary daily life. That is, to develop a personal creative process and to make new creative works in the midst of ordinary days with all their demands, restrictions, responsibilities and expectations, so that daily life is illuminated through creative work. Jolley wrote:

She saw the young man standing in the dark…it was as if he had come into existence simply because someone, hopelessly lost among words, has created him in thoughtful ink on the blotting paper (cited in Salzman 1993, p. 11).
I have thought of this passage many times as I have sat at my desk. I have drawn figures of children as “quick notes” on scraps of paper and in the margins of my notebooks and then, as more developed figures waiting or wandering on pages of inky and sometimes blurry landscapes of the imagination. It was not completely clear to me why I drew them, except that I felt the child belonged in the picture. However, I knew the child was part of a mysterious narrative, moving and changing and containing the potential for what he may or may not become. The children were always boys, perhaps like the active heroes commonly found in the books that I read in childhood. They were not simply my sons or any of the boys I have known. It may be that the children were mostly representative of this interior life of my own, desiring expression through creative work.

I had experienced drawing and photographing the small spaces and bones of the echidna in the laboratory as a moment of wonder and re-enchantment, and saw that for the Romantics, the re-enchantment of nature was a role played by the fragment in art and poetry. Similarly, just as my understanding of Schlegel’s hedgehog, as a symbol of enchanted nature, grew out of the residency at the University of Western Australia, insight into the personal and cultural meaning of my own beliefs and artistic practice developed throughout the project and my investigation of the fragment. For Steedman (1995), the desire for wholeness, and striving for self-actualisation (either through creative work or other endeavours) feels natural, almost compulsory as a goal for individuals living contemporary western lives. Steedman (1995, p. 15), investigating this belief, traces the development of the idea of interiority formed in childhood and the eventual expression of this idea in Freudian theory, back to philosophical and literary ideas embodied in the figure of the child acrobat Mignon in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s (1749–1832) novel Wilhelm Meister. Our contemporary understanding of
interiority, Steedman argues, developed alongside the surprising prevalence of Mignon’s appearance and reappearance in Western culture over time.

*Wilhelm Meister* was of particular interest to Goethe’s contemporaries and admirers among the early German Romantics, including Schlegel (1991, p. 15) who wrote:

> Whoever could manage to interpret Goethe’s Meister properly would have expressed now what is happening in literature. He could so far as literary criticism is concerned, retire forever.

Perhaps Goethe’s Mignon might be understood as a form containing an idea in a particular, Romantic, way? That is, as a philosophical concept contained in a form: a combination of art and philosophy together. The character Mignon is a fragment: the figure of the child that has come to represent our inner life (as embodied in the child or interiority) is an idea contained in a form. She is both complete in herself and incomplete at the same time: she moves and changes, she is an acrobat who might be found hanging upside down on a trapeze or perched on top of a cupboard, who changes from girl to boy on stage, and who is ephemeral. She will grow up. Mignon (interiority) is both complete and incomplete. She is complete in herself—containing the potential of what she will become, the inner child of the adult—and in a process of growth, change and movement she is incomplete—an incomplete part of the adult she will be.

**Marginalia**

Following the installation of the work in progress *Marginalia* at Breathing Space in 2011, I had considered the idea of integrating my drawings of children into larger works. Both the child fragment Mignon and Wordsworth’s lines, detailing an enchanted nature experienced in youth, suggested the figure of the child as a motif in re-enchanting art
and poetry. At the same time, as my plan to undertake the residency had arisen through an experience with an echidna while walking, following the residency I had decided to re-connect the project to this everyday experience of nature by documenting my walks with drawings, photography and journal writing. Using large sheets of water colour paper, I poured ink and by pressing the sheets together created grounds on which I then drew, in dusty media such as charcoal and chalk. In response to the marks and stains, I drew the figures of children, insects and wildflowers.

Along with a selection of ink-blots and photographs, I showed these drawings at Freerange Gallery in Perth in 2012 in the exhibition *I can't tell you now what I could have told you then*. This was a valuable experience because it was the first time I had put together a solo exhibition in a public gallery. It was an opportunity to respond to a new and particular space. However, by early 2013, as I reflected on the exhibition at Freerange, it was clear that these sorts of works did not fit with my growing understanding of conceptual art as a vehicle for communicating aspects of the fragment. Framed and hung in the gallery, they presented as very finished and final statements and were, perhaps, overly illustrative and decorative. The connection between the various elements of the exhibition was not clear or strongly supportive of dialogue as suggested by Heiser’s writing on Romantic conceptualism, or Jolley’s concept of “sophisticated spaces.” Ben Robertson (2007, p. 623), in his review of Christopher Strathman’s book *Romantic Poetry and the Fragmentary Imperative: Schlegel, Byron, Joyce, Blanchot* (2006) writes that for Strathman:

Fragmentary writing...creates the same kind of exigency as does Socratic dialogue. A monologue establishes a rhetorical situation in which information is passed in one direction, and this type of situation implies that the thought process behind the discourse is complete. In contrast, a
dialogue invites participation, interruption, contradiction, digression; as a consequence, it is inherently fragmentary. Moreover, its disjunctive nature fosters additional thought about the subject at hand.

Like Strathman (Robertson, 2007, p. 623), I was interested in “how the fragmented-ness of a literary work—whether the work itself is a fragment or whether it is fragmentary—creates different kinds of dialogue and thus encourages continued thought.” I was interested in how this might be achieved in visual art through the manipulation of materials. I therefore returned to my exploration of the way Jolley reconfigured her writing, drawing on a number of descriptions of her editing process. For example:

I realised later on that if I really wanted to write a story seriously I’d have to have separate pieces of paper. It seems a really naïve thought, but it did come to me as a kind of profound thing, that you needed separate sheets of paper and folders. In fact it was my husband who said: ‘Don’t try to cram everything on one bit of paper’. I’d start right up here and I’d fill up the whole page and there was nowhere to write in. He would say: ‘Spread your work out,’—he just said that once, having glanced across—‘Spread it out so you can work in between lines.’ I did start to do that, and would often write in between with different coloured pens so that I could keep the original thing, and then pick up what I had written in, and decide later on, in the rewriting, what I was going to use. That was his idea. It seems very stupid that I didn’t think to simplify things a bit in that way (Grenville & Woolfe, 1993, p. 160).

This description, of coloured pens, lines and separate sheets of paper details the process of mapping out a story with materials. It suggested ways I might more successfully make connections with the key ideas accompanying my studio research and the Jolley archive. Rather than continuing with the idea of drawing on large single sheets of paper, I began to collect together the small, abandoned scraps of paper and drawing
experiments from my studio and desk. I looked again at a number of larger sheets of paper on which I had worked to create grounds for drawing. The accidental marks, dribbles and splashes that had occurred on the backs of the paper were interesting. As I began to tear them up into smaller sections, I saw that they could be seen as fragmentary miniature works of art. I thought of them as “quick notes,” and arranged and rearranged the separate pieces of paper over time with Jolley’s description of her editing process in mind. Combined with a small number of drawings of children in gold ink this process, employing chance, became the model for my installation of the work Marginalia in the window gallery for Wonderfully Ordinary. Further, as I made plans for Wonderfully Ordinary, I employed a similar process using a scale model of the gallery, drawings and photographs as well as models of ideas and a number of elements I had developed in the studio, in order to test out ways I could relate these fragments for the viewer to the connections made throughout the research.

*Wonderfully Ordinary: Paper, Ink and Dust*

My plan on returning to the studio to develop *Wonderfully Ordinary* was to find a way to work with the spaces of the gallery to create an exhibition that would draw together the key elements and outcomes of the project. I planned to include the work *I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then* and to use this as the basis for developing an artist book or books, whereby, for example, the ink-blots could be scanned and printed and then combined in a number of ways—with text, or with a selection of the poetry I had written. I began to work with the model of Spectrum Project Space and drawing, to determine in a material way what might or might not be included in the exhibition. Tables or shelves might be employed to display the imagined book or books. Placing objects within the maquette of the gallery, I imagined the way that visitors might enter and move through the spaces. In order to reflect the spaces of the archive, both a place
of order and of chaos or disorder, I imagined the main area of the gallery as a place of order and quiet contemplation, containing a limited number of works, and the narrow window gallery as more chaotic, as a back room or storage area, crowded and cluttered with objects or drawings.

I continued to experiment with ink on paper. I had reached a point of repeating myself, with a number of works completed using different papers and ink-blots. Another element was needed to pull the exhibition together. Perhaps, I wondered, what was needed was further material experimentation. In addition to Bas Jan Ader’s conceptual explorations of Romantic themes and Victor Hugo’s drawings and use of materials, Simryn Gill’s collections of found fragmentary objects and books were influential to the development of the project at this point. Xu Bing’s (2004-2011) series Background Story and his use of materials, including dust and plant matter, were also influential. In Chapter Two I wrote that Xu arranges plant debris in different ways behind a screen so that, with light shining from behind, shadows are created that recall the themes and effect of ink on paper in Chinese Art. In response, I began collecting objects, books, ephemera and natural objects, dead insects, and plant matter such as leaves and seed pods during my daily walks. I began drawing and taking photographs of the shadows of the objects, or the objects arranged in different ways behind rice paper. I created a number of small works that might be displayed in the windows of the gallery or perhaps

48 The imaginative possibilities of fragments and the archive have long been of interest to many conceptual artists, from Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol to Ilya Kabakov, and On Kawara (Enwezor, 2008; Mereweather, 2006). Within this conversation, the Romantic fragment is also an idea that remains of interest to artists today. For example, in Washed Up (2000), contemporary artist Simryn Gill collected fragments of shells and detritus found on the beach and invited the viewer to consider the history of these found objects (Gill, 2000). Gill’s work Garland (1993–2006) also recalls understandings of the fragment and human responses to fragments because the work invites viewers to bring their own subjectivities to an interpretation of found objects. Gill’s work’s Naught (2013) and Let Go, Let’s Go (2013), created for the Australian pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale also employed found fragmentary objects and books (Hauser, 2013, p. 9).
on a set of shelves, a cupboard or archival storage unit. There was a need, I felt, to anchor the exhibition in some way, to balance the lightness of the paper, and that this might be achieved with a piece of furniture or archival storage unit. I also looked towards Valeska Soares’ (Knighton, 2008; Marti, 2008) poetic wall-works, and the ways in which her arrangements of books, pages of books pinned to walls, and photographs looking through the branches of trees refer to Romantic themes and to the passage of time, and invite the viewer closer for more detailed readings.

Elizabeth Jolley, Mark Dion: Great Branches Fall

Although the drawings with dust, the small shadow works and the photographs were not eventually included in Wonderfully Ordinary, this studio experimentation led to decisions regarding materials that made their appearance in the exhibition, and my use of shadows. I have detailed earlier the connection between ink, dust and paper in the archive and the ways in which I have thought of dust as a metaphor for interactions in the gallery. I also saw the poetry included in the exhibition as a metaphorical conversation of dust beginning with Jolley’s papers and words about poetry. Throughout the project, I have experimented with writing my own poetry. The poem “afterimage” (see figure 20, appendix 9) was written as a development of these earlier experiments specifically for Wonderfully Ordinary. It contains the words “I breathe in particles.” Dust is contained physically within books and collects on them and exists as debris falling from seed pods and tree branches in cycles of regeneration and decay.

In an interview with Ray Willibanks (1992, p. 126), Jolley said:

…the landscape in Australia can be so menacing and frightening, at the same time so beautiful and magical…you can parallel the characters’ thoughts and feelings by the external things and that makes it stronger to
me…Landscape, trees, weather, they’re all a bit ordinary, but they are important.

This statement contains a number of ideas of importance for this project, for *Wonderfully Ordinary* and specifically for the work *Great Branches Fall*, including the Romantic notion of an enchanted or “magical” nature which may be employed in writing and the concept of creative work as a two-way process in ordinary life. For Jolley, the author explores “others” and at the same time may explore the self.49 Jolley explains further in her handout “The Art of Poetry” (n.d. p. 2):

The writer uses invention from his own heart and mind to compose characters and events found in observation. He may use events in his own life and relate these to glimpses of other people’s lives. And he may use the appearance of the landscape and the changing of the seasons to show his characters and their thoughts and feelings. And of course, his own thoughts and feelings may often be revealed in the process of invention.

In my introduction to this exegesis I wrote that I have worked at different times of the day, including very early in the morning or late at night, as Jolley did. I thought of Jolley composing stories of characters in interior domestic space, and the characters’ state of being in the world often illuminated by their relationship to outside elements: the landscape in which they were set. I, myself, was set in a landscape. I have worked in the postgraduate studio at Edith Cowan University, but I have also worked between the other demands of my life, as Jolley did, at home at a table opposite a window. The window looks out at the branches of the large trees surrounding my hills property. I have been often very aware of the outside world while working inside. Looking out, as

49 Maria Suarez-Lafuente explores this idea in her essay “Selves and Others in Elizabeth Jolley’s Narratives” (Bird & Walker, 1991, p. 16).
the morning starts, for example, I watch as the light changes, weather happens, birds call and I have been drawn to go outside, look and take photographs. At the same time, ordinary life, including important family events throughout the cycle of human life, have occurred. I have often thought about the Romantic tradition of painting and writing referencing light seen through the branches and leaves of trees. Jolley’s poem “Great Branches Fall” contained in her (1993) book *Diary of A Weekend Farmer* uses this motif. I have thought of this poem at night when the easterly wind is loud. As it blows through the branches of the trees surrounding my property, it occasionally brings one of them down.

Within this contemplative space, I have kept diaries, my own personal archive of fragments of poetry, observations, notes, and daily thoughts. This daily practice developed as a response to Schlegel’s practice of fragmentary writing and to Jolley’s book. I initially planned to create my own book modelled on Jolley’s approach because it is from this book of poetry, observations and diary entries about everyday life that my interest in her and the real development of my creative practice began. I was drawn to the way that she appeared to combine aspects of her life that were generically not unlike my own (university life, work, family, children, a cottage and land of a certain character in the Perth hills) with another aspect of life which I wished to develop: my creative work. Her experiences and observations on a small rural property, this land she had longed for, seemed to mirror in many small ways similar experiences and observations of my own. I related to them, and wanted to learn to find a way to feed ordinary real life into creative work, as she did.
Diary of a Weekend Farmer is quite a melancholy little book, made sadder by the fact that she has died since then and her place at Chidlow has burned down: two things the book seems to anticipate. Although it contains some “little dances,” it also contains a sense of mortality that Jolley tells us comes with living closer to the landscape and the seasons. Jolley uses aspects of the landscape and other natural elements to illustrate something (perhaps) of her personal experiences and feelings about ageing. She also writes of the ageing and death of a neighbour. When I first read the book I felt I understood what she meant about the traces of former lives on an old property—for example, paths worn down by other feet. I had strong feelings about it, but my responses to her book and my own old house and property, and the remnants of another place in the bush adjacent, were peculiar to me. The book, I see now, although presented as a diary, is a work of fiction, a greater whole that a reader approaches.
through carefully selected excerpts of real life and creative work. Through this selection, this fragmentary work also asks us to participate as creative readers. The book works because it is made up of fragments. It feels like there isn’t much to it—95 pages, a few poems, pictures, lists and diary entries—but the fragment at work conveys much by showing a part. It is the balance between what is included and what is left out that interested me as I developed my plans for Wonderfully Ordinary. The book is so slight, a part of the greater whole from which it came, not just of Jolley’s specific life and writing, but also of the history of Romanticism to which it is connected by slim threads and particles.

I did not create the book I originally envisaged. Instead, in the later stages of the project Jolley’s book became something of a model for developing an exhibition. I wanted to include a small homage to Jolley, a thank you for lessons learnt by reading and engaging with her writing and teaching notes. In Jolley’s poem “Great Branches Fall”, words about loss are connected to the idea of transcendence in the vision of light seen through the branches and leaves of a tree. With the spaces of the gallery, the elements of the project and Ader’s (1971) photograph Farewell to faraway friends in mind, I reflected on Jolley’s words “Wonderfully ordinary,” on the idea of transcendence in everyday life and the loss of this vision of the Frühromantik period. I thought on my aim to reflect something of the early German Romantics’ hope “to restore the beauty, magic and mystery of nature in the aftermath of the ravages of science and technology” (Stone, 2005, p. 4) through my creative work. Looking out from my window, I found myself focusing on a large Marri tree (see figure 21). I had noticed it was dying some months earlier, but now nearly all of the leaves had fallen. The branches in the evening light stood out against the darkening sky like drawings of veins or capillaries. As I sat drawing the tree, I imagined the branches falling though space—but the drawing was
contained within the rectangle of the page. It occurred to me that the branches could be installed in the gallery and that this would anchor and tie together the key elements of the project (see figure 22).


Figure 22. Wood, A. (2013). *Untitled* [ink on paper]. Artist's own image.
Stone (2005, p. 4) argues that the early Romantics perceived “modernity to have estranged humanity from nature and “disenchanted” nature by applying to it a narrowly analytic and reflective form of rationality,” and that rather than representing a retreat into medievalism, the Romantics “sought to create a culture that could reconceive nature as enchanted but in a distinctly modern way.” My hope was that the branches of the tree, installed as contemporary art in the gallery might contribute to this reconception, this Romantic project. It might initiate a process by which the familiar is made unfamiliar in order to challenge commonplace ways of thinking and encourage further thought. In Chapter Two I wrote that Xu’s use of materials challenges familiar ways of thinking. Similarly, Mark Dion (Fusaro, 2011, November 2) describes his 2006 work *Neukom Vivarium* (see figures 23, 24), a large tree trunk installed in a conservatory and on which fungi and other plant matter was encouraged to grow, as a memento mori: a tool for environmental discourse which works in the gallery in this way, “It’s a classic art strategy. It takes something from one place and puts it somewhere else and then we think about it in a very different, profoundly different way.”

Dion’s installations of trees, books and found objects employ contemporary art’s conceptual and artistic strategies to question the domination of scientific explanation and classification at the expense of alternative ways of understanding nature and the past. A number of his installations have the feeling of a theatre set, containing books, drawings and collected ephemera displayed in cupboards or bookcases. Further explanation by Dion of *Neukom Vivarium* contains ideas that were of interest to me in developing *Wonderfully Ordinary*:

This work engages with a lot of systems that are natural. We’re putting this tree into something like a showroom, a classroom, a laboratory. It
makes references to greenhouses. It’s an incredibly interesting hybrid space. But at the same time, it’s very inclusive. People are allowed to go in. They’re allowed to spend time with it. It’s a space that has a very fantastical element, too, with an almost Bernini-like forced perspective. If you don’t feel a bit like you’re Alice falling through the rabbit hole when you walk through the door, then we’ve made a mistake (Art21, n.d. para. 20)

Dion’s description of the (hoped for) experience for viewers of being in the space influenced my decisions as I developed Wonderfully Ordinary. I aimed to create a familiar yet unfamiliar setting the viewer could step into, experience and move through: a bookcase filled with books and other objects, a tree and light falling on and through the branches of the tree to a system or archive of ink blots that is at the same time no system.

Conclusion

In an interview with Ray Willibanks (1991, p. 115-116), Jolley said:

…the feminists don’t care for me. Because…I do say, which is a perfectly true thing, that I can’t do any writing until I’ve got my house things in order and I know what I’m going to cook for dinner. You see I can’t bear to come out from working, if I’ve been working in the daytime, to find the breakfast things there, no shopping done, no idea what I’m going to cook for dinner. See, the feminists would say, “Why should you do the dinner in the household?” But I’ve always taken it as my responsibility. A woman once said to me, “Why ever are you making Horlicks for your son?” She was visiting in the evening and I had said, “Excuse me, I must go and make my son Ovaltine,” that’s what it was, not Horlicks, and she said, “Couldn’t he make it himself?” He was fifteen. I said “Yes, he can, but I like to take it to him. “That was my feeling for my boy.

Elsewhere Jolley (Jolley & Reid, 1989, p. 44) referred to her own inner conflict about her responsibilities as a mother. She also said (Kavanagh, 1989, p. 441), “I think people are not really complete in themselves. They have to seek completion in relationships, in their work, or any gift they may have.” It seems that, throughout the many interviews she gave, the opportunity to discuss the complex challenge of creative production in the midst of family life was missed. Recent writing (Dibble 2008; Swingler, 2012) suggests that Jolley had personal reasons for maintaining her private life. Jolley expressed her interest in exploring the complex lives of women and their relationships through her writing. There is, for me, something important contained in the statement above—a moment when all other demands were put aside to demonstrate to the child that he was important. Reading through her other interviews and statements, I feel Jolley might have, at another time, described this as a moment of “cherishing.” This is a word she
used many times. For me, domestic life has been and is still potentially full of such moments: in my early writing I described myself as tied by a pair of velvet handcuffs to the domestic. Contemporary artist Simryn Gill describes the pull of motherhood in another way that is also familiar, “but there’s this sort of panic that sits at the bottom of the chest as well for me; it was very, very focusing” (Hauser, 2013, p. 8).

The Romantic ideal of Bildung arises from the belief that the rise of modern civil society was accompanied by increasing alienation, estrangement and division and that self realisation—the development of unity with one’s self, others and nature—could only be developed through the ethics of love (Beiser, 2003, p. 30-31). In the introduction to this exegesis I wrote that the real-life challenge of the project, a striving for self realisation or Bildung, has been to develop a personal creative process and to make new creative works in the midst of the fragmentary or increasingly divided and interrupted nature of ordinary contemporary days, with the intention that daily life may be illuminated through creative work. What has become clear is that a fragmentary approach to creative work has arisen not only from the constraints of daily life, but also from the joys of my responsibilities. Kitty Hauser’s (2013) article “Accidental ambassador” on Simryn Gill’s representation of Australia at the 2013 Venice Biennale makes reference to the confluence between Gill’s experience of domestic life including motherhood and her material ingenuity, describing her house as both studio and home. Although pregnancy caused Gill to abandon her studies, Gill states that it was motherhood that precipitated her career as an artist: work fashioned at the kitchen table became a means to make sense of “being alive in this art of the world with my children.” I have also worked at the kitchen table in my own home, beginning with drawing my children and their friends, and then attempting from that beginning to answer questions I had about art and poetry and my own life. I also discovered a passion for what Gill
describes as “the almost pointless problem-solving that art demands,” but which is not pointless. Amongst other things, it has also been for me a way of contributing thoughtfully to family life. Although Hauser’s article makes the process from kitchen table to Venice Biennale sound easy, and although Jolley’s statement may be seen to downplay the female experience of the serious pursuit of making art, I have taken Jolley’s advice:

…you do need time but you don’t wait for time to write, you just keep writing a little bit all the time and it gets written. When I look at a book I can’t think when I wrote it, if you know what I mean. [laughs]. (Jolley & Reid, 1989, p. 66)

The exhibition Wonderfully Ordinary contained the results of multiple studio explorations undertaken throughout the course of this project, including the final process of putting the exhibition together. While I planned the exhibition using a maquette, the real spaces of the gallery determined a number of decisions. During installation, some unexpected results occurred and decisions were refined. For example, I had initially imagined the tree branch to be suspended from the ceiling as if falling. However, the process of walking through the gallery led me to reconsider this idea. There were technical difficulties and health and safety issues to consider but, more importantly, I felt that this would create an overwhelming sense of threat. My plans for the window gallery also changed completely. I had planned to work from the window gallery in the weeks leading up to the exhibition, drawing on strategies employed by Mark Dion and stories contained in Hans-Jost Frey’s (1996) book Interruptions. However my access to the window gallery was limited and, on advice from technical staff, the decision was made not to move the heavy bookcase and other objects in to that space. I chose, instead, to install a variation of Marginalia. This was disappointing:
however I hope something of my aim to make a connection between the themes of Frey’s stories—in which the fragment is explored in descriptions of abandoned rooms—remained in both the window gallery and in the installation of the bookcase in the main gallery.

I had imagined the window gallery as a back room or workroom that might speak of the chaotic spaces of the archive. That is, I had anticipated the bookcase to be filled chaotically with books and papers and other elements. However, in the main gallery, which I saw as a space of order, I ordered the arrangement carefully. Without the contrasting effect, this aspect of the exhibition perhaps, therefore, became overly illustrative. In comparison, the revelation of seemingly disordered materials that is available for viewers of, for example, Xu’s background story (2004–2011), contributes to the possibility of multiple readings of the work: in this way, by overtly revealing his process, Xu shows the viewer that the materials have been arranged in just one of many possible ways. Other aspects of the install process however produced unexpected results that were pleasing. An image contained in Linda Nochlin’s book (1995) *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor for Modernity* (see figure 25) provided inspiration for the installation of the branches. The upright tree branch set against the pillar made a connection for one viewer (G. Pryor, personal communication, May 2, 2013) with cathedrals and their historical architectural association with tree canopies. That one branch lay on the ground was also important, in connection with the body and the poem “afterimage”. Shadows and lighting were the last things to be added. The positioning of the gallery wall divided the space from the other exhibition, but also allowed daylight to light the branches. That the branches and the dust and debris from the branch were lit half in daylight and half in darkness (or twilight) aimed to contribute to the representation of the concept of circularity. The lit corner and the shadows falling on the
wall installation of ink-blots also aimed to bring together shadows and dust, recalling Xu, night and day, and light seen through the branches of trees.

Figure 25. Fusili, H. (1778-79). The artist overwhelmed by the grandeur of antique ruins [chalk and sepia wash]. Kunsthaus, Zurich.

Heiser (Frieze, 2002, p.8), describing Bas Jan Ader’s (1971) *Farewell to Faraway Friends*, a photograph of a lone artist at the edge of the sea silhouetted by a beautiful sunset (which alludes to both the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich and to the postcard tradition of sunsets), writes:

> It is as if Ader is mourning this history of devaluation itself, as if the faraway friends were the early Romantics who once, with fresh eyes, discovered Sublime nature as the mirror of their soul, and whose discovery is now obsolete.
Ader’s photograph, as a response to the transmission of ideas over time and the way that the past and the present are tangled and inseparable, is seen by Heiser as a story of loss. However, in contrast, Ader’s (1971) 16mm film *Broken Fall (Organic)* (see figure 26):

…records a simple act: the artist dangling by his arms from a tree, until he fails to hold on to the branch and falls into the little canal beneath. The tree is obviously a central motif of Romanticism, as is the lone melancholic artist. Within this piece, however, Ader gives these notions a decisive twist into the tragically comic that undercuts an all too clichéd understanding of Romanticist notions of solitude and loss. For what we see is not really an existential threat, quite the opposite—Ader is not hurt. Notably, we don’t see Ader crawling up the tree: the film starts straight with him already hanging in mid-air—and we see him crawling out of the river as it ends. (Heiser & Seifterman, 2007, p. 62)

Figure 27. Wood, A. (2013). Marginalia (detail) [ink on paper, entomological pins] Photograph by Heather Shaw.
This project and *Wonderfully Ordinary* argue that the Romantics’ discoveries are not obsolete. It argues for hope in the archive through the development of new visual artworks and writing. I have read Jolley’s words and Schlegel’s notes and have written my own. The two poems “garland” and “afterimage”, included in *Wonderfully Ordinary* and contained in archival boxes, aimed to connect with ideas associated with Ader’s photograph and with understandings arising from the project: with the biological body and the tree, with Romanticism, with my own interior life and artistic struggle in the everyday, to a sense of time and place, and the idea of the fragment as a garland and transcendental idea. With Jolley’s concept of “the little dance,” Ader’s film and Goethe’s child fragment Mignon in mind, my drawings of children (in the work *Marginalia*) leap into miniature paintings (see figure 27). A final work included in the exhibition (the artists’ multiple *I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then*) which visitors to the gallery were invited to take away with them, also aimed to reinforce this possibility of hope by involving them in a re-enchanting (poetic) dialogue (see figure 28).

![Image](image_url)

Figure 28. Wood, A. (2013). *I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then* [posters]. Photograph by Heather Shaw.
This project has involved the practical application of theory to an exploration of materials, in order to illuminate aspects of a number of key ideas. These include the notion of a contemporary creative art practice as a philosophical activity that is shaped by, and integral to, daily life in the present, but which is also shaped by and entangled with the past. In conclusion, the Romantic fragment was revealed as an idea or project that anticipated, by more than 200 years, current environmental discourse and interdisciplinary approaches to research. In this project it was employed as a tool to participate in contemporary art as both an alternative and an adjunct to scientific means of understanding nature and our human connection to it. Finally, the ambition of the Frühromantische period and the scope of the Romantic fragment and Romantic poetry was revealed as much wider than the literary frame typically used to approach it. The Romantic fragment may be seen as a means to approach wholeness in ways that are not separate from ordinary days:

First (romantic poetry) refers to not only literature but also to all the arts and sciences; there is indeed no reason to limit its meaning to literary works, since it also applies to sculpture, music, and painting. Second, it designates not only the arts and sciences but also human beings, nature, and the state. The aim of the early romantic aesthetic was indeed to romanticize the world itself, so that human beings, society and the state could become works of art as well (Beiser quoted in Millan-Zaibert, 2007, p. 8).

For the Jena Romantics, this aim was part of a more general undertaking to establish a philosophical method for understanding the unity of all branches of knowledge, which “Contrary to standard philosophical wisdom…marks not the beginning of the end of philosophy as a sober discipline that can bring us closer to truth but rather…is a constructive move that fortifies our search for truth” (Millan-Zaibert, 2007, p. 4). That
is, Schlegel’s Romantic project, a desire to bring philosophy, poetry, science, and all spheres of human inquiry into contact with one another, represented a striving for unity and wholeness. Employing an interdisciplinary approach to research, I have hoped to represent this possibility and to communicate something of my own search and experimentation to this end to viewers and readers through the resulting artworks and writing presented in the spaces of the gallery. As an outcome of a cross-disciplinary approach to artistic research, *Wonderfully Ordinary* invited viewers and readers to become involved in a re-enchanting (poetic) conversation about ourselves and our relationship to nature (see figure 29). It aimed to reflect on the early German Romantics’ concept of *naturphilosophie* and their desire for *Bildung*, including the role of fragmentary Romantic art and poetry in the reunification of humans with nature. An “enchanted” view of nature is one in which nature is seen as poetic, creative and partly mysterious: the fragmentary ink-blot and Schlegel’s enchanting and magical hedgehog (or echidna)—poetic, creative and partly mysterious—imply an appropriateness of care for natural phenomena. It was the intention of *Wonderfully Ordinary* to involve readers and viewers in these conversations on the basis of Jolley’s writing on “the capacity of the mind to surround the whole when only a part is given” (Jolley, n.d.). That is, through the employment of fragments.
Figure 29. Wood, A. (2013). Wonderfully ordinary [gallery view]. Photograph by Heather Shaw, and with kind permission of Elizabeth Maruffo.
Bibliography


I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then [Exhibition]. (2012). Perth, Western Australia: Freerange Gallery.


Appendices

A selection of images documenting the project. Images in Appendix 6a copyright Heather Shaw photography.

Appendix 1: Elizabeth Jolley—class handout

Sometimes you read or listen to an utterance that is spread over time and you catch the meaning either at the end or, if you are smart, half way through. The meaning seems to float, to some degree, free of what seems to carry it.

If you read a poem that really means something to you, you will stop at that poem, you don’t turn to the next or do anything else. You just sit there and let it all wash back like the tide, and then you say, “Oh, I’ve got it.”

It is the capacity of the mind to surround the whole when only a part is given.
Appendix 2:
School of Animal Biology, the University of Western Australia
Appendix 2a: Echidna skulls
Appendix 3: Elizabeth Jolley—class handouts and artist's journal
Appendix 4: Ink blots from the exhibition *I can't tell you now what I could have told you then*
I can't
tell you now
what I could
have told you
them
Appendix 5: “garland”

garland

I circle awkwardly
around old ideas from another place,
art and nature combined
seemed golden once

I remember
making chains of dandelions, the blazing corona of the sun
in my eyes, the hopeful, clumsy
splitting of the wilting stems with a thumbnail,
the stained and sticky fingertips

I drive home along the curve of the river
and think I might pull over,
stumble with the black seams into the dark water,
or dive from the jetty, a graceful arc
Appendix 6: Invitation to the exhibition *I can't tell you now what I could have told you then*

I can’t tell you now what I could have told you then

[andrea wood]

an exhibition of drawings: paper, ink and dust

sun jun 3 2012 - sun jun 17 2012
opening » saturday 2 june 2.30 - 5.00 pm

freerange gallery, 350 wellington street, perth 6000, www.freerange.org.au; info@freerange.org.au
gallery times » sunday 3 june, then wed 6 to sun 10 june: 12 - 5pm, wed 13 to fri 15 june: 12 - 5pm
or by appointment contact: 0466 437 136
Appendix 6a: Images from the exhibition *I can't tell you now what I could have told you then*
Appendix 7: Elizabeth Jolley—clipping and notes
Appendix 8: Invitation image for the exhibition *Wonderfully Ordinary*
Appendix 8a: Images from the exhibition “Wonderfully Ordinary”
Appendix 9: “afterimage”

afterimage

near the lake
as though I am still that girl
I lie on the grass

the birds at home in the branches
take off
call out
circle back
while I breathe particles and observe
the sun through pointed leaves

I close my eyes
and witness a vision
in the darkness
the gloriole floats