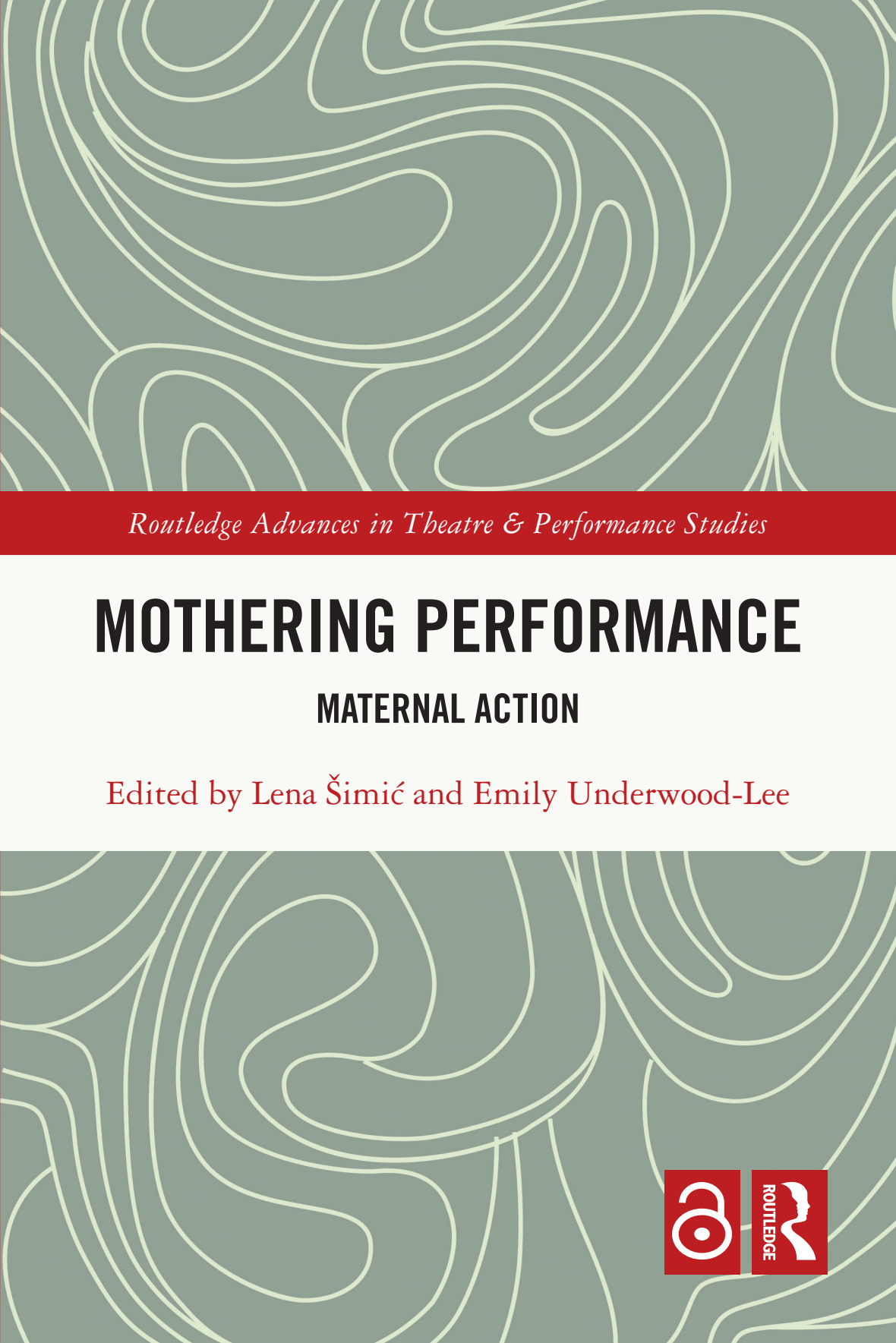
Routledge Advances in Theatre & Performance Studies
MOTHERING PERFORMANCE
MATERNAL ACTION
Edited by Lena Šimić and Emily Underwood-Lee
ROUTLEDGE

Mothering Performance

Mothering Performance is a combination of scholarly essays and creative responses which focus on maternal performance and its applications from a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives.

This collection extends the concept and action of 'performance' and connects it to the idea of 'mothering' as activity. Mothering, as a form of doing, is a site of never-ending political and personal production; it is situated in a specific place, and it is undertaken by specific bodies, marked by experience and context. The authors explore the potential of a maternal sensibility to move us towards maternal action that is explicitly political, ethical, and in relation to our others. Presented in three sections, Exchange, Practice, and Solidarity, the book includes international contributions from scholars and artists covering topics including ecology, migration, race, class, history, incarceration, mental health, domestic violence, intergenerational exchange, childcare, and peacebuilding. The collection gathers diverse maternal performance practices and methodologies which address aesthetics, dramaturgy, activism, pregnancy, everyday mothering, and menopause.

The book is a great read for artists, maternal health and care professionals, and scholars. Researchers with an interest in feminist performance and motherhood, within the disciplines of performance studies, maternal studies, and women's studies, and all those who wish to gain a deeper understanding of maternal experience, will find much of interest.

Lena Šimić is a Reader in Drama at Edge Hill University.

Emily Underwood-Lee is Professor of Performance Studies at the George Ewart Evans Centre for Storytelling at the University of South Wales.

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Mothering Performance

Maternal Action

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Rachel Fallon is a visual artist who deals with themes of protection and defence in domestic realms and addresses the topic of motherhood and women's relationships to society. Her work encompasses sculpture, drawing, photography, and performance and is firmly rooted in the processes of making. As well as an individual practice, she regularly collaborates with other artists and collectives; including The Artists' Campaign to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, Desperate Artwives, Grrrl Zine Fair, and the Magdalene Series. The two disparate ways of working, individually and collaboratively, feed into one another and are therefore equally important parts of her practice. She lives and works in Ireland.

Dr Kristina Gavran is a writer, storyteller, and theatre maker from Croatia, now living and working in England. She finished the Academy of Dramatic Arts (University of Zagreb) in 2007 and gained a doctorate from Loughborough University in 2022. Her research project explored True-Life Storytelling clubs and performers in the United Kingdom. Kristina is an awarded fiction writer; she won awards for her short stories and theatre plays, while her novel "The Palisander Guitar" (Croatia, 2018) was in the finals for the European Literature award. She is a co-founder and associate artist of the theatre company Notnow Collective. Her latest play, "Pepper and Honey", about migration, identity and belonging, was produced by Notnow and toured around the United Kingdom.

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Laura Godfrey-Isaacs is an artist, midwife, creative producer, and birth activist. She aspires to bring her knowledge and experience in the arts together with midwifery to bring fresh interdisciplinary perspectives to inform birth education, practice, policy, and research. She regularly presents at conferences, writes and blogs about birth, and creates interdisciplinary projects and campaigns, such as "Maternal Journal", which supports mental health and well-being through creative journaling, and "Birth Café", an inclusive space to talk about the significance of birth for all. She is Ambassador for Procreate Projects, Co-Chair of the Women's Equality Party's Health Committee, Board Advisor of The International Forum for Wellbeing in Pregnancy, and was a member of the Thought Leadership Group at the Nursing and Midwifery Council reviewing midwifery education standards.

Dr Jodie Hawkes is an artist/academic currently working at the University of Chichester. Jodie's research interests are maternal performance, feminism, class politics, and activist practices. Hawkes is co-artistic director of Search Party (www.searchpartyperformance.org.uk). Formed in 2005, Search Party have created durational, site specific, interactive, and studio-based work for theatres, galleries, public squares, twenty-four-hour parties, high streets, village fetes, parks, shopping centres, across rivers, between bridges, and along seafronts. Their work has been performed in venues and festivals in the UK and internationally.

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Dr Helena D. Lewis, DSW, LCSW, LCADC, CCS, is a theatre scholar-practitioner who uses qualitative research and social work theories to illuminate the nuances of social justice issues that impact marginalized and incarcerated voices. Lewis has twenty-one years of experience working for non-profit agencies contracted with the New Jersey Department of Corrections and State Parle Board to provide residential community release programs (RCRP) for female inmates and parolees with substance abuse and mental health issues. She is currently the Treatment Director for a RCRP where female inmates receive treatment for substance abuse and mental health, as well as participate in work release activities. Lewis obtained her Doctor in Social Work (DSW) from Rutgers University School of Social Work in May 2020. Her research interest includes topics related to incarcerated women focusing on grief and loss and the intersectionality of autoethnography and theatre.

Dr Elena Marchevska's research interest is the relationship between performance, migration, and environmental issues. She has published widely on the issues of belonging, the female body, the border, and intergenerational trauma. She retrospectively and selectively writes about events that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a particular cultural identity. She is an Associate Professor of Performance Studies in the School of Arts and Creative Industries, London South Bank University, and the School's Director of Postgraduate Research.

Dr Sara C. Motta is a proud Mestiza-salvaje of Colombia-Chibcha/Muisca, Eastern European Jewish and Celtic linages currently living, loving and re-existiendo on the unceded lands of the Awabakal and Worimi peoples, NSW, so called Australia. She is mother, survivor of state and intimate violences, poet, curandera, bare-breasted philosopher, popular educator, and Associate Professor at the University of Newcastle, NSW. Sara has worked for over two decades with raced and feminised communities in struggle resistances/re-existencias in, against and beyond heteronormative capitalist-coloniality in Europe, Latin America and Australia and co-created numerous decolonising pedagogical projects of radical healing and community wellbeing. She has published widely in academic and activist-community outlets. Her latest book *Liminal Subjects: Weaving (Our) Liberation* (Rowman and Littlefield) is winner of the 2020 best Gender Theory and Feminist Book, International Studies Associate (ISA).

Dr Leah Salter is a systemic psychotherapist (UKCP reg), a supervisor, and an educator working in multiple contexts in the United Kingdom. This includes practicing within NHS Wales with families and communities, mostly in mental health services. She is also a tutor and supervisor for the Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice at the University of Bedfordshire, Co-director for the Centre for Systemic Studies in Wales, and a visiting fellow at the George Ewart Evans Centre for Storytelling

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Dr Lena Šimić is a Reader in Drama at Edge Hill University, originally from Dubrovnik, Croatia, now resident in Liverpool, United Kingdom. Her research areas include contemporary performance practice, live art, art activism, feminist theatre and performance, and critical arts practice in relation to climate crisis, ecology and environment. Lena has presented her arts practice and research in a variety of academic journals (Performance Research, Contemporary Theatre Review, n.paradoxa, RiDE, Feminist Review, Studies in the Maternal, Journal of the Motherhood Initiative) and in various arts venues and festivals in the United Kingdom and internationally. Her short play, *Three Conversations* in collaboration with her sons, Neal and Sid, was commissioned for Climate Change Theatre Action in 2019. Together with Underwood-Lee, she ran the AHRC funded Performance and the Maternal project (2019–2022). Their recent co-authored publications include "On the Maternal" (2017) *Performance Research* (22:4), *Manifesto for Maternal Performance (Art) 2016!* (2017) and the co-authored book *Maternal Performance: Feminist Relations* Palgrave (2021).

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Dr prOphecy sun is an interdisciplinary performance artist, queer, movement, video, sound maker, and mother of three. Her practice celebrates both conscious and unconscious moments and the vulnerable spaces of the in-between in which art, performance, and life overlap. Her recent research has focused on ecofeminist perspectives, co-composing with voice, objects, surveillance technologies, and site-specific engagements along the Columbia Basin region and beyond. She is the Arts Editor for *Ecocene: Cappadocia Journal of Environmental Humanities* and sessional faculty at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. She performs and exhibits regularly in local, national, and international settings, music festivals, conferences, and galleries and has authored several peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and journal publications on sound design, installation, performance, and domestic spheres.

Emily Underwood-Lee is Professor of Performance Studies at the George Ewart Evans Centre for Storytelling at the University of South Wales. Her research focuses on feminist and autobiographical performance, and narrative in performance. Underwood-Lee has a particular interest in the maternal, gender-based violence, and storytelling in health. She co-convenes the Storytelling for Health conference and sits on the steering group of both the Wales Arts Health and Wellbeing Network (WAHWN) and the WISERD Wellbeing Network. She is co-chair of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Research Network for Wales. Together with Šimić, she ran the AHRC funded Performance and the Maternal project (2019 – 2022). Their recent co-authored publications include "On the Maternal" (2017) *Performance Research* (22:4), *Manifesto for Maternal Performance (Art) 2016!* (2017) and the co-authored book *Maternal Performance: Feminist Relations* Palgrave (2021).

Dr Freya Verlander is a Teaching Fellow in Theatre & Performance Studies at the University of Warwick. She is currently working on her first monograph *(Skin)Aesthetics and Performance: A Study of Skin(s) in Spectatorship*, forthcoming with Methuen Drama. It investigates how the skin functions as the site/sight/sound/taste/smell of spectatorial engagement, (dis) connection, and cross-sensory experience in works of performance.

Verlander's wider research interests are, broadly, in exploring the interfaces between science, the senses, and different modes of performance. She is interested in the intersections of public health and performance – with a focus on the "performance" of public health and safety.

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Christine Watkins has a background in theatre/physical theatre and has been crafting words for speaking in live or broadcast form since 1980. Her body of work includes collaborations with practitioners from a range of performative disciplines, from stage magicians to opera singers, and several investigative art-science collaborations supported by the Wellcome Trust. Recently, she has been drawn to writing and performing solo voice and formal chorus work. She experiences the stories she makes now as having passed over a bridge from those told by a woman in her twenties and thirties to those told by one in her sixties; the threads of her preoccupations make their way continuously across that bridge, emerging from further back than she can remember and seeming to run ahead into the distance. They are Herstory and they are stories of belonging and apartness, of discovery and creation from which we are woven into life.

Dr Carrie Westwater is an artist with an academic agenda. She is currently Lecturer in Creative and Cultural Industries at Cardiff University and is an autoethnographic critical arts-based researcher, theatre director, producer, and performer.

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We are grateful to the AHRC for funding our "Performance and the Maternal" research project (2019–2022) that this book has sprung from as one of the unpredicted outputs, our research assistants on the project Georgina Biggs and Jennifer Verson, and all the speakers and audiences at the online Engage Maternal Forums in 2020. Thanks also go to our colleagues at Edge Hill University and University of South Wales and to the institutions for their support, with particular thanks to the Faculty of Business and Creative Industries at the University of South Wales for funding the open access to this book. Thank you to the Routledge team, who have got behind the proposal, in particular editors Laura Hussay and Swati Hindwan, anonymous reviewers, and the project manager Manisha Singh Pundir. And the biggest thank you goes to all the contributors and their collective maternal action.

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Introduction

Maternal action as exchange, practice, and solidarity

Lena Šimić and Emily Underwood-Lee

Introductions are written at the end of things. Conclusions look out into the future.

Writing this introduction, we find ourselves, necessarily, at the end of the editing process. The book that we are currently introducing, and at some later time, that you are reading, marks the culmination of an intense period of research, writing, and editing. For you, it might be the start of an interest in maternal thinking, or you might be a seasoned maternal practitioner, artist, or scholar with decades of experience behind you. Either way, this chapter must serve as both an introduction and a closing statement. This interdisciplinary collection primarily builds on the work of the Arts and Humanities Research Council funded Performance and the Maternal project, and in particular the "ENGAGE… conversations across performance studies and the maternal" maternal forums, which reached a global audience in autumn 2020.[1] The ENGAGE forums were a series of themed events at which we invited artists, scholars, and practitioners to present on specific themes. The five events focussed on "Maternal Performance", "Storytelling and Mothers", "Performing Climate, Gender, and Maternal Futures", "Migration and (Maternal) Citizenship in Performance", and "Health, Policy and Impact – Maternal Performance Matters". Our choices in who to invite to speak at these events were guided by our desire to open up the topic of maternal performance, to hear from a variety of perspectives, to explore maternal performance and intersectional politics, and to examine maternal performance in a variety of contexts. Following the forums, we invited new contributions specifically developed for this book from selected scholars, researchers, practitioners, and artists exploring the politics and embodied experiences of mothering, its processes, practices, and performance. In particular, we asked for contributions from those people who presented at the forums or those individuals who we believed address particularly pertinent questions around maternal practices from their own particular disciplinary or scholarly perspective. While many of these contributions move away from performance in the specifically theatrical sense, they all engage with how we perform our maternal action in various arenas. From working together with a community of mother/artists and maternal scholars, we have seen the very real value that

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maternal performance can gain from a collaborative, relational approach. It is through community building, and the sustaining of that community, that we come to the word "mothering", which is rooted in action, in making, and caring. In 2022, we have finally settled on this edited collection, which, as the title indicates, moves us further towards the act of doing – mothering is presented here as a verb, an activity.

The maternal necessitates a constant cycle of repetition and reflection, looking both forwards and back. The maternal, whilst lived in the present with all its everyday messiness and incessant demands, is more generally and conceptually concerned with a future, an awaiting of the anticipated child or the time when the children are to leave the nest. We mark milestones along the way to the children's eventual flight into the world, independent of us and yet always still linked. Paradoxically, at the same time, the maternal is preoccupied with collecting memories and thinking back, reflecting, oftentimes nostalgically, at times past, mourning the babyhood, the toddlerhood, the early years. Lisa Baraitser outlines maternal time as pooling and unable to flow (2017). Baraitser calls to mind blood swelling in a blister, in an image that is both visceral and tender. This body, swelling with vital fluid, invites care and attention. We sit in time, waiting for the climactic event of the child's arrival or departure, we sit between imagined future and remembered past. We sit with the memories of our foremothers who in turn sat and waited with and for us. Time is the maternal's keeper, its hope, and its curse.

When thinking through a maternal lens, we are also faced with another paradox – the maternal invites us to look inwards to the domestic realm of home and family, while also looking out into the world. Maternal scholarship, action, and artmaking all invite us to extend our care beyond ourselves, to be guided by compassion, and to think of the legacy that will be left by our actions. In our research to date, we have repeatedly asked ourselves what the world might look like if we all extended the same care to everyone that we offer to our own children, for, as Adrienne Rich (1988 [1976]) has encouraged us to acknowledge, everyone was once some mother's child, even when that mother might have been absent. We have also endeavoured to think further; beyond our intimate personal connections, beyond our communities, beyond our species, and out into the non-human world in order to consider how we might treat our planet with maternal care. This question is utopian in that it invites us to consider a maternal that does not, and never could, exist – the limitations of our individual physical, mental, and material resources would not allow any one person to mother the world and all her inhabitants, and nor would we want to. Instead, this simple question, "what if we treated all the world with the care with which we hope we treat our own children?", may be a guide by which we can begin to move towards collective maternal action. The collective is the key – after all, "it takes a community to raise a child" goes the oft cited maxim. Maternal action, doing the labour of taking care, in all its conflicted, demanding, hopeful, and ambivalent guises, and

moreover, making this work public and relational, is the key theme that runs through all the chapters in this book, which explore what it means to care for others and the conditions that allow us to create compassionate relations and thus to move towards mothering as social action. Maternal action, it seems to us, is also intricately linked with "mothering" and "performance". All three terms are active, and invoke a sense of doing. All three are political and linked to activism, to going beyond the prescribed normative maternal identity, to engage in a kind of struggle for a different, self-defining position which will remain open to the plurality of others. Through the invocation of maternal action, mothers are positioned as active agents, as performers, in the world, beyond the intimate domestic sphere. All three terms, mothering, performance, and maternal action, are also social, they can only be understood in relation to our other and the wider world and its structures, including more-than-human species.

Maternal action that seeks to treat all with maternal care is a struggle to move from the domestic to the public, as we have previously argued after Hannah Arendt (Šimić and Underwood-Lee 2021, 87). To move into the public, is to move from the individualised struggle of a mother at home and to think of mothers as a group; furthermore, we can consider those who mother as a marginalised group, despite the ubiquity of mothering, when considering the patriarchal context in which we live and the devaluing of care. To invoke the group is not to reduce mothers to a homogenised mass; instead, maternal action must be lived by active agents in relation to other active agents, a collective of individuals respecting and working with one another, which Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou have termed "the plural performativity" (2013, 176). Butler and Athanasiou's discussion is based primarily around social movements and bodies engaged in street politics and activism. We are concerned with the maternal, which has predominantly been confined to the domestic; however, when we envision maternal action, we claim that such action must be performed in public and must participate in and be visible to the world. Butler, after Hannah Arendt, remarks that it is when bodies come together as community, they are able to move into the political realm: "bodies in their plurality lay claim to the public" (2015, 71). It is by moving through public space, as a performed and embodied act, that different maternal bodies move towards maternal action. This is visible in the work of all the artists and scholars contained in this edition: their works are public, engaged in the world, and in the artistic, cultural, and political production of alternative notions of motherhood, mothering, and maternal action.

Butler challenges us to notice who has access to the public space in order to move through it in the first place (2015, 77). Maternal action is by no means accessible to all, and it is with caution that we evoke it, nonetheless, it is an ideal to which we can aspire. Furthermore, in the process of mothering there ought to be a degree of othering, of letting go, of distance, of understanding there is no unity or integration. Those who engage in maternal action

through performance reflect upon our mothering as we call it into action, and self-consciously present it to the world. Mothering performance has the capacity to be reflective of the act. The very acts of performance, representation, and art making allow for such critical distance. Mothering performance, the title of this book, has a double meaning: it is about the performance of mothering, as well as the act of mothering, caring, and othering performance as an artform, which is cognisant of its representational frame.

Mothering as a verb is now well-established within maternal scholarship (Ruddick 1989; Knott 2019), but is usefully developed by Andrea O'Reilly, who calls for "matricentric feminism", which is defined in relation to three domains – those of scholarship, activism, and practice (2016). O'Reilly argues that matricentric feminism "can be understood to be, in both form and function, […] a social movement" (2016, 82). The social movement of mothering takes us away from arguments about mothering as essentialist and into the domain of mothering that is, can be, and should be, carried out by anyone, regardless of their gender, capacity to bear children, or choices regarding child-rearing. In the 2021 Preface of the new 2nd edition of *Matricentric Feminism*, there is an explicit call for "matricentric feminism" to move beyond gender towards "resistant and inclusive mothering" (2021, 10), with particular attention paid to racialised and queer mothering. O'Reilly asks us to think about care not only as the responsibility of the mother. She outlines how patriarchal ideologies have highlighted care given by mothers as the ideal, with all other forms of caring labours, for example professional childcare, as second-rate (2016, 20). O'Reilly draws on Sara Ruddick's oft-cited work on maternal thinking to extend her argument about support, compassion, and maintenance as things that everyone needs, and anyone can provide (2016, 31–2). However, as O'Reilly points out, while Ruddick's argument extends care beyond the family home and into peacebuilding, it is still formulated in relation to child-rearing and the care of young children. O'Reilly extends her own thinking into the areas of "othermothering" and "community mothering", which she draws from Njoki Nathani Wanes' Afrocentric analysis of mothering beyond the nuclear family and community-based practices (67) and thus positions care as a social responsibility that she offers as a corrective to individualist post-maternal narratives within the academy, which she sees as symptomatic of a wider social agenda. The urgency with which she states this is compelling:

> decisively and urgently, we must interrupt the received narrative of academic feminism, in particular its normalization of the genderless and autonomous subject, in order to foreground the centrality of women's reproductive identities and lives and the importance of care in our larger culture.
>
> (2016, 162)

This interruption to academic feminism appeals to us. The chapters in this collection each move us towards considering the role of care in society. In 2020,

the Care Collective published "The Care Manifesto", just as COVID-19 arrived and reconfigured our societal attitudes towards health professionals, care workers, teachers, and parents, as well as other key workers. Doubtless the manifesto had been in the making for some time before the pandemic, but its significance was nevertheless heightened because of it. One of the Care Collective's principal arguments is for the understanding of care as promiscuous as well as ambivalent. In discussing "caring politics", the authors write:

> Thus, in order to reimagine a genuinely caring politics, we must begin by recognising the myriad ways that our survival and our thriving are everywhere and always contingent on others. A caring politics must grasp both this interdependence and the ambivalence and anxiety it inevitably generates.
>
> (2020, 30)

Mothers are too familiar with the ambivalence of care, as well-articulated by Rozsika Parker in *Torn in Two: Maternal Ambivalence* (1995). Mothers also still happen to carry most of the care with all its ambivalence, so a call for promiscuity of care is most welcome. Like O'Reilly, The Care Collective, extends its thinking through other-mothering, collective living arrangements, and alternative kinship structures (2020, 34). What is clear is that caring as well as mothering cannot be only performed by mothers, but multiple others too. The call is for "a new ethics of 'promiscuous care' that would enable us to *multiply* the numbers of people we can care for, about and with, thus permitting us to *experiment* with the ways that we care" (33). Once again, the maternal returns us to the relational and multiple.

In thinking about the maternal and mothering as collective community building or action, there arises a question about the relationship between solidarity and friendship, or even love, which perhaps sits more easily when discussing motherhood. According to Arendt, romantic love does not exist happily alongside political thinking because it is completely overwhelming (1998, 242). For Arendt, the lovers are too absorbed by one another to engage with the world beyond them. Interestingly, it is through the figure of the child, the arrival of the child, that lovers can reinsert themselves into the political domain:

> Love, by reason of its passion, destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from others. As long as its spell lasts, the only in-between which can insert itself between the two lovers is the child, love's own product. The child, this in-between to which the lovers now related and which they hold in common, is representative of the world in that it also separates them; it is an indication that they will insert a new world into the existing world.
>
> (1998, 242)

In Arendt's provocative view of the child as the end of love's spell or the feeling of being immersed in love, we are presented with a model of the

maternal as inherently political; an insertion back into the world whose representative is the child. In this collection, we hope to build on this challenge to rethink how we care in order to call for a way of thinking that is informed by maternal action, and to move this beyond the realm of performance, which has to this point been our main area of concern, and into the other arenas that require urgent attention including (but most certainly not limited to) social justice, climate chaos, the challenges of care during a pandemic, responsibilities of decolonising, and care in response to migration. Moving beyond the realm of performance does not mean leaving behind its tropes and its strengths. Performance, even at its very basic understanding, and as the study of a discipline, is linked to the act of doing. Performance connects with the sense of human agency, and engages with the frame of artistic representation which means it is interested in its own reflection, and therefore the potential to re-configure itself, to offer oneself a new narrative. Mothering performance is about taking care of one's appearance, agency, and action in the social and political realm.

For our thinking to be informed by maternal action, it is important to consider what such action might look like in all its complexity. The socially inscribed ideal of maternal action as care might dangerously play into the hands of essentialism and the patriarchy, positioning care as a somehow "natural" maternal state. O'Reilly outlines "ten dictates of normative motherhood: essentialization, privatization, individualization, naturalization, normalization, idealization, biologicalization, expertization, intensification and depoliticalization" (2021, 10) as well as methodologies of resistance for combating those. Similarly, Sara Ahmed notes that much of feminism has been concerned with articulating the stories of women who are deemed unnatural because they are not made happy by their mothering and how compulsory happiness has the capacity to put mother's lives "on hold" (2017, 57). The social expectation that we will strive to make others happy or to be happy ourselves as a goal in itself or to be natural in our self-sacrificing mothering, which Ahmed and O'Reilly urge us to resist, is undone by maternal action. When we speak of maternal action, we speak of something far more complex than "normative motherhood". Maternal action can be peaceful, doting, filled with rage, or utterly disinterested, but all these states change over time. What unites maternal action is not the emotion with which that action is carried out, but that it is necessarily something collective, engaged, and carried out by one body or bodies in relation to an other body or bodies over time. Margo Lowry usefully examines maternal experience as a dynamic movement between ambivalence and love. Lowry argues that the relationship between mother and child is one that could be described thus: "the mother is a hostage to her love for her child" (2021, 8). Even in the most idealised maternal relationship where the child was planned and desired and where the mother has the social, economic, and cultural capital to mother successfully, the mother's feelings for her child will necessarily change over time and will include complex and conflicting emotions; when these emotions are denied,

it leads mothers to feel guilt or shame. Lowry, influenced by a psychoanalytic reading of maternal experience, posits that when the various responses a mother might have towards her child are accepted, we can move towards maternal wisdom (2021, 161).

When we call for maternal action that is in relation to the world, we are not calling for something saccharine, good, or natural. When we call for maternal action, we are calling for a considered approach that takes account of our responsibility and acknowledges that this might be a responsibility that we resent, embrace, or choose to ignore, and that our relationship to our caring responsibilities will fluctuate and evolve. At times, maternal action might usefully employ anger, violence, or destruction. Lowry argues that maternal ambivalence, which she defines as "the mother's loving and hating feelings towards her child" is a profound source of creativity and power (2021, 161). When faced with the many crises to which we are hoping to apply maternal action, creativity and power are certainly what we require. Similarly, Jaqueline Rose, in *Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty* (2018) names mothers as "original subversives"; Rose continues: "I have never met a single mother (myself included) who is not far more complex, critical, at odds with a set of clichés she is meant effortlessly to embody, than she is being encouraged – or rather instructed – to think" (Rose 2018, 18). Being a subversive is about resisting the prescribed narrative and showcasing something else, something otherwise than the expected. This collection, and the examples shown within it, are the much needed otherwise, which we are terming maternal action.

This book is a combination of scholarly essays and creative responses. This approach, which spans disciplines and writerly forms, allows for a critical conversation between theory and practice to emerge and for the development of new knowledge in relation to embodied mothering experience, and maternal performance and its applications. We hope that the book will be of interest to both academics and practitioners/artists working around maternal themes, to researchers and students with an interest in feminist performance, performance by women, and motherhood, and most importantly to those who wish to move towards collective maternal action. Due to the cross-disciplinary nature of the exploration between performance studies, maternal studies, and women's studies, we also offer this collection to those who wish to gain a deeper understanding of maternal experience. We trust that this edition will meet the identified research need for a collection that focuses on maternal performance and mothering from a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives. As such the collection is in conversation with previously published edited scholarship at the intersection of maternal studies and the arts (Chernick and Klein 2011; Epp Buller 2012; Epp Buller and Reeve 2019; Kinser et al. 2014; Marchevska and Walkerdine 2020) to which we are extremely grateful for inspiration and guidance. The aim with our collection is to add to this rich tapestry of maternal art scholarship, now in 2022, post COVID-19 and from intersectional international perspectives.

Our key research findings from our examination of performance and the maternal, since 2015, could be summarised in the assertion that the maternal and performance are allied as durational, relational, and corporeal phenomena. We have been affirmed in our early research proposition that maternal performances and methodologies heighten time (for example interruptions, disruptions, repetition, cycles, boredom, duration, and endurance), relations (to one's child and beyond), and body (for example leakages, changes, protrusions, embodiments, weight). We felt the importance of continuing to analyse maternal performance works through the lenses of body, time, and relations, insistently and somewhat stubbornly working with this idea in order to examine why the performances of mother/artists in particular could teach us so much about the condition of the maternal. Through all our work, we have listened to mother/artists, both through close analysis of their performances and through hearing them talk about their working processes and artworks in 18 interviews that we have undertaken.[2] In this book, we hear the voices of maternal performance makers and those whose professional life involves them supporting mothers. Many are mothers, some are grandmothers, some are childfree. Regardless of the particular maternal identities of the individual authors, all of the chapters in this book speak to maternal themes and action. These essays are tightly connected to contexts and politics. This book is a collective endeavour that the two of us are holding, caring for, mothering. Inevitably, this collection is about connections, plurality, networks, relations, maternal commonality… camaraderie even. Its title has gone through some morphing, but we have settled on "Maternal Action" as subtitle and section titles of "Exchange", "Practice", and "Solidarity" in order to reflect the political intent, activism, and community building detailed in the various chapters.

Our aim when we first conceived of this book was to explore how understandings of maternal performance and maternal action might be changed by working across domains and disciplines. We know that mothering is at once the most common and the most remarkable of acts (Rich 1976), and that it is one of the few universal experiences that we all have, and yet it is overlooked as a phenomena and conversation between disciplines is limited. In this collection of essays, we look outwards – beyond the walls of the theatre and into maternal performance in a variety of contexts including the arts more widely (literature, fine art practice, performance storytelling, and film), health care, social care, peacebuilding, therapeutic practice, and activism to name but a few.

This edited collection therefore gathers a variety of mothering experiences and places the emphasis on the lived material conditions of mothers and those who are child-free. The chapters highlight intersectional perspectives including constructions of the maternal beyond biological relations between mother and child. This collection extends the concept and action of "performance" and connects it to the idea of "mothering", as activity and as activism, as a form of doing, as community building, as challenge to

patriarchal constrictions on mothers. It examines how a performance studies approach can further our understanding of mothering in practice and how performance can inform processes across disciplines. Mothering, as activity, is a site of never-ending political and personal production; it is situated in a specific place, and it is undertaken by specific bodies, marked by experience and context. This book brings together contributions in the form of scholarly essays, artist interviews, and correspondence papers, as well as shorter creative responses and artist pages. Many chapters are written by pairs or groups of authors and take the form of conversations (Entwistle with Šimić and Underwood-Lee, Wason Singh with Broota and Iranna, Dent and Gingell, Saltus with Saltus, Westwater with Nikolajev Jones). Other chapters share details of collaborative practice (Marchevska, Gavran, Lewis, Motta, and Verson) or amplify the voices of mothers (Salter, Godfrey-Isaacs), while still more consider intergenerational reciprocity (Watkins, Breathnach, Hawkes) or directly explore artistic practice through a maternal sensibility (Verlander, prOphecy sun, Fallon). Again, the maternal brings us to the relational and asks us to take action together in "affective alliances beyond claims of similitude and community", to return to Butler (2013, 187). This book addresses the paucity of diverse representations within both the artform of maternal performance and the field of mother studies and maximises the opportunity for inter-disciplinary conversations offered by an exploration of the maternal within both representation and practice, although as cis, white, women who have biologically born children, we are aware of the problems of our claim to diversity. We recognise our privilege and hope that this book contains enough various perspectives and approaches that you, the reader, will be able to find moments of recognition and to see yourself reflected in some way or another, at least in part. A collection such as this cannot seek to represent everyone, and we do not wish to call to visibility the various intersectional identities of the contributors to this edition; however, we do wish to acknowledge that many perspectives are not explicitly apparent in the book and, in particular, no-one has overtly considered LGBTQIA+ or disabled perspectives, although we do know that several authors contained within this volume identify themselves as part of these communities.

This study explores mothering processes, practices, and performance across the disciplines of art, performance, feminism, social sciences, maternal studies, maternal health, and related fields of inquiry. Distinctions between exchange, practice, and solidarity become blurred and many of the chapters could have fitted into any of these sections. The curation of this edited collection might be considered an act of mothering, we did our best and tried our hardest. We aim to be good enough editors to do justice to the contributions offered by the contributors and the investment of time, energy, and resources made by you, the readers.

The first section of the book is named "Exchange" and it is about giving and taking, a transaction almost, but without a guarantee of symmetry and balance. Mothering does not guarantee anything, there will be no easy justice,

yet our constant negotiations and willingness to exchange amongst ourselves as mothers and carers as well as across generations might create some better understandings of maternal and feminist relations. In this section, exchanges happen between academics who are reflecting on their own mothers, thinking back to how they were mothered and how their own identities were shaped through those relationships (Entwistle with Šimić and Underwood-Lee). Exchanges also happen between mother/daughter duos as they reflect on their professional lives as researchers and pedagogues in Bermuda and Wales (Saltus with Saltus) and, in conversation with an interviewer who is a mother/artist herself, on their own different generational journeys as they navigate support networks in India (Wason Singh). Multiple migrant reflections between mother/artists and their children are put centre stage whilst they navigate the hostile environment in the United Kingdom (Marchevska). Collaborative, artistic, and reflective exchanges take place among mother/artists as they negotiate midlife mothering and menopause (Dent and Gingell), whilst we also learn about intimacy across generations (Watkins).

The second section named "Practice" involves contributions from a number of artists/researchers who are working with maternal themes. In this section, we were keen to gather a variety of different performance examples which consider mothering otherwise. The section includes discussion on early motherhood and the particular dramaturgical interventions that such performance work requires (Gavran), writing about dance and movement practice which addresses pregnancy and its transformational potential (Westwater with Nikolajev Jones), and everyday performance strategies as developed by a working mother when caring for small children who are keen for attention (Breathnach). Further chapters reflect on artistic practice which embodies complex care relations on this damaged planet (prOphecy sun), and performative acts of activism which recall the histories of Ireland's Magdalene Laundries (Fallon). Finally, in the tradition of Mierle Laderman Ukeles' work, the section includes a manifesto for a maternal aesth-ethics whilst discussing the work of artist Elisabeth Carlile (Verlander). Our intention with curating and editing these contributions has been about the presentation of political engagement through mothering and artistic practice.

The final section "Solidarity" examines camaraderie and support. Solidarity is about collective care, about common ground, a sense of collaboration and a certain connection through a common cause. Connecting mothering with solidarity brings us unambiguously into politics and interventionist work. The chapters in this section are explicitly political and in some cases interventionist. They gather difficult and complex discussions about race (Motta), class (Hawkes), incarceration (Lewis), mental health (Salter), and domestic violence (Godfrey-Isaacs). We end the "Solidarity" section, which brings together these extraordinary essays, with an affirmative account of maternal performance as peacebuilding (Verson). The book was put together before the development of the war in the Ukraine, but this perspective on peacebuilding has become even more critical and timely given our contemporary

context, and the violent conflicts concurrently taking place in Afghanistan, Congo, Gaza, Myanmar, Sudan, and Yemen, to name a few.

This introduction marks, for us, a final moment of looking back over two years of work by multiple scholars, artists and practitioners. We hope it has served to introduce you to some of the themes that will unfold over the following pages.

We finished writing and editing this introduction in May 2022. As we look back over the works in this collection and ponder what overarching view of maternal action we might come to, we are returned again to time. Introductions are written at the end of things and time does not follow a neat linearity here – just like the maternal, which constantly pushes us to look to both the future and the past while sitting stuck in a pool of seemingly never ending, swelling time, as we drew from both Baraitser and Ahmed earlier in this introduction. The essays collected here seem determinedly of our current time and places. The writers have taken us across continents and through generations, but each chapter ultimately returns us to the pressing challenges we encounter in these hyper individualised times, more so in the aftermath of the pandemic. The maternal turn we have returned to here, might be, as O'Reilly (2016) indicates, a challenge to the climate of accelerated neo-liberalism in which we live. Along with Alice, Ruchika, Zoë, Eve, Christine, Roiyah, Solange, Elena, Kristina, Aleksandra, Carrie, Tracy, Freya, prOphecy, Rachel, Jodie, Helena, Leah, Sara, Laura and Jennifer, we looked back to our biological mothers, to our children, and to our communities, both local and global. We are introduced to a wealth of mothering practices carried out in solidarity. We sit with them, think with them, walk beside them, act in the knowledge of them, and look out together towards a future of maternal action.

Introductions are written at the end of things. Conclusions look out into the future.

Notes

1 For more details of our AHRC funded "Performance and the Maternal" project, see https://performanceandthematernal.com/.

2 For over a decade, we have been exploring the maternal and performance; separately at first through performance practice (Lena starting with *Medea/Mothers' Clothes* in 2004 and Emily with *Patience* in 2008) and then, since 2015, together, when we embarked on the Performance and the Maternal research project, which has delivered a number of research gatherings, forums, artistic outputs as well as more traditional academic writing in journals and books. We have undergone a process of mapping the field, calling for mother/artists and maternal performance scholars' contributions, interviewing a number of artists working around maternal themes, as well as ourselves creating, analysing, and reflecting on artworks and performances.

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Section I

Exchange

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1 Thinking Back through Our Mothers

The editors in conversation

Alice Entwistle with Lena Šimić and Emily Underwood-Lee

> The mother figure brings together, in one moment and one body, all the new beginnings that preceded her and all those beginnings that will follow, collapsing time and relations together.
>
> (Šimić and Underwood-Lee, *Maternal Performance: Feminist Relations*)

> Maternal performance goes over it again and again, we repeat ourselves, repeat our mothers, and our feminist mothers and our performance mothers. … We must remake again and again.
>
> (Šimić and Underwood-Lee, "Manifesto," Day 36a)

As Sheila Heti (2019) remarks, "one doesn't have a child. One does it" (21–22). For most mothers, the imperatives which drive the "doing" of the role force them to split themselves between the relentlessness of an inescapable and urgent "now" and the more distant future of the long term: the circumstances to be anticipated, negotiated, navigated, or headed off on behalf of the dependents for whom they care. In the inexorably forward momentum of the mothering role, self-(re)definition plays a central and complicating part. This process perhaps explains why the discourse has so been slow to centralise the women who faced those same imperatives before their daughters, amid the challenges and chances of their own cultural-historical moment. Those women were themselves produced in an identical process of generational exchange and thus m/othered not only the mothers they themselves birthed, but also successive ones. M/others who, in performing that role, could not but tie themselves and their daughters into that aeons-old, often agonistic, dialogue which Adrienne Rich (1977) searches: "The materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement" (226). M/others who are themselves silently remade in their own daughters' performances of a role Jacqueline Rose (2018) perhaps unforgivingly locates – for any mother – "in the slipstream of their own mothers' unconscious" (110).

As Virginia Woolf (1929) famously observed, "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (69). In the interview which is framed by this chapter, we have self-consciously sought to resist the temptation to overlook or erase the effect of earlier generations, our mothers' and (as far as possible)

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theirs too, on our own mothering experiences and practice. Conducted virtually in the spring of 2021, just as the grip of the COVID pandemic was beginning to weaken, the conversation recorded here was conceived as an attempt to identify and a chance to explore some of the effects and influences on two mother-performers of their own mothers' identities and mothering.[1] The participants agreed on two common objectives: firstly to try to establish and examine the extent and nature of their mothers' impact on the ways in which as daughters as well as mothers, they learned or chose to perform their own versions of motherhood; and secondly – time and circumstance allowing – of those same influences on their creative ideas and identities as both experienced performance-practitioners and critical scholars. We were keen to reflect on the kinds of ideological or practical emphases which (might) have conditioned our mothers' approaches to m/othering; and mark their own highly personal experiences as products of cultural-historical convention, intergenerational dialogue and – of course – performance. To what extent might inheritance – in any guise – be understood to feed into or underlie the tangled strands of habit, ideal, cultural-historical expectation, convention and improvisation comprising the blend of practices we think of as mothering, as the everyday, humdrum, undramatic performance of the maternal?

Alice Entwistle (AE): Reading the discourse about mothering – and the mothers we are and the mothers we hope or are failing to be – I've been struck by the silence around our own mothers. That key figure slips out of sight, even in work self-consciously interested in the role. I know I'm reluctant to talk about something which seems somehow embarrassing. Why is that?

Lena Šimić (LŠ): There is something embarrassing in talking about one's mother. Oftentimes it connects with mother-blaming. I created a performance called *Magdalena Makeup* (2004), which was about the name I was given: Magdalena, my paternal grandmother's name.[2] I carry a certain history with it. I talked to my mother – not my father – about it and she told me a story of a distant aunt on my father's side who died of a broken heart, and my grandmother was called Magdalena after her. I'm no longer Magdalena; I recently changed my name to Lena only because all my life I've been called Lena. Still, I felt somewhat bad about it because it's about stamping and saying: "I don't want to carry this name that you gave me, Magdalena; I want to be Lena." In a way, it feels a bit odd to do that. My mother's formal name is Perica but all her life she's been called Nela, which is an anagram of Lena. My first child is called Neal. So our names all share the same letters … There's a connection between naming and how we take ownership of our name and make something of it. For quite a long time, I called my mother Nela: it was fashionable for a while. (I don't call her that any more, I call her Mum, Mama in Croatian). I guess her first name gives her a position of her own. As my mother, she only exists in relation to me. As if she's not a proper person. I think that's the problem with mothers.

AE: Do you get on with her?

LŠ: Yes and no. I can't say just yes or just no. [Pauses] She exhausts me.

AE: Emily your mother died when you were eighteen and you've said that after that your maternal grandmother, her mother, took over that role in your life. Is this painful for you to talk about?

Emily Underwood-Lee (EUL): It's poignant but not painful to talk about because I've lived more of my life without my mother than with her now. It's quite a joy to think about her and celebrate her.

AE: At eighteen you're on the point of adulthood … that was an important time to lose your mother.

EUL: It certainly was and I was just in the process of leaving home, but she told me she was ill when I was fourteen so my relationship with her changed very dramatically then. I know when I look back it's incredibly rose-tinted; I think of her as a goddess of sorts.

AE: I'm thinking that Lena's "yes and no" is a response which anyone with a mother recognises. If it's possible to set aside the shadow of her illness, how did you and she get along?

EUL: We were very different but also very similar in some ways. My mother came from a certain background but she rejected a lot of the values that she was raised with. She ran off to the theatre, where she met my dad. They were both actors.

AE: So she takes us to the idea of performance.

EUL: Before I was born, yes; they both stopped acting so that they could build more of a life together. And she became a teacher. But by fourteen my politics had developed and in terms of our beliefs, we were at loggerheads. I was vegetarian, I was extremely left-wing, I was getting involved in activism and that was not something she was happy about [laughs]. So massive amounts of conflict but in other ways my relationship with her was wonderful and I do wonder what it would be like now. My dad is really easy-going. My relationship with my mother was much more tempestuous; we clashed a lot. It was intense love but intense fighting as well.

AE: Lena can we return you to your late teens or young adulthood; how was your mum? Was she a cuddly mum? Or do you think you've always felt some ambivalence about her?

LŠ: It's hard to remember because the relationship has changed over the years and the newer memories stay stronger but my mother is also on the right and I'm firmly left-wing so there's a political rift and I think that's been particularly striking since the war, that is, to be more precise, the Yugoslav Wars in the early to mid-1990s which first happened when I was sixteen. Thinking back on what that meant in terms of nationality and politics and how we define ourselves influences my thinking about her. Before the war, there was happiness, yes. My mother was a working mother and I loved that she was independent, she was always rushing around, she had a car, she was the driver in the family, (this is

the '80s: I was born in 1974); she was the one giving me money to buy sandwiches for school …

AE: So she didn't make them; she bought them? What was her job?

LŠ: Sometimes she'd make them but oftentimes I was given money to buy them. She first worked for the Council in what we'd call today Food Quality Assurance; she graduated with a chemistry degree. But then she retrained as a secondary school chemistry teacher. She was a very active working mum. And we were latchkey kids, me and my brother. He was eighteen months younger than me, but only a year behind me at school so we were together a lot.

AE: How much of a part did your father play in family life?

LŠ: He was a very stable presence, coming and going to and from work; he was an architect (he's retired now). I have a very easy-going relationship with my dad; much easier than with my mum. My father's a much more calming presence in general.

AE: So in order to centralise these women, then, can we put ourselves in their shoes? As young women, what were they like? Can we try to recover their experience of mothering, from their perspective?

EUL: My mother seemed to me to be a very natural mother. And as a teacher, she had lots of resources for mothering from her training as well. Long after she had died, my grandmother told me that my mum had told her that she never wanted children. I was so surprised by that because she always surrounded herself with children. So it seemed to me that mothering was easy for her, but that is very much from my perspective as a child. Who knows how she really found it.

AE: What about her own mother? Did her decision to work cause tension?

EUL: I don't think it was the decision to work that caused tension between my mother and her own mother. There was certainly tension but it wasn't about her working, which I think my grandmother was very proud of. My mum was very career-focussed but also very maternal. She was full of contradictions. She came from this very privileged background but specialised in the social work aspects of teaching and did a lot of supporting of kids who really needed it. And she was very vocal about the need to understand people's circumstances and the need to be compassionate and caring. All my grandmother's life – she only died a month ago – was about what people thought of her, you know, doing the right thing, being seen in the right places, and my mum was not like that.

AE: So that was a difficult relationship?

EUL: Yes. So what might be considered my rebellion against my mum is a pattern she set up with her own mother. It's just that I rebelled in a very different way.

AE: What about your mother Lena, what was her background? Was she rebellious?

LŠ: Mum was the first person in her family to go to university so that was a big deal. And her own mother, my grandmother, stayed at home. My

grandmother was extremely loving, wonderful; she never shouted. She was very Catholic. Tragically she lost her first child. He died when he was three and my mother was an infant. I made an interview with my grandmother about this: he was scalded by a pot of boiling coffee which fell all over him, in a horrible accident, which I think marked my own mothering. I'm always very careful when I'm cooking not to put boiling water on the first hob. I realise now that this terrible accident happened when my mother was just three weeks old and my grandmother had this brand new child there … I think her home was a classic traditional background: my grandmother didn't work, she went to church, stayed at home and raised the children. She came from a village, from a family of good standing – there were politicians and merchants in the family – and she married a guy from the island of Hvar. People from the island were considered a bit wild, a bit barbarian, they were fishermen, men of the sea. She might have chosen someone with more standing but she married this Hvar-man and they moved into the city into a new estate, a new block of flats. It wasn't very tall – maybe twelve flights of stairs – but we called it a skyscraper and for her that was absolutely amazing; a new way of living and she loved it. She was so proud of it. By comparison, my mother was much more active. She left home to study in Split (further away than Dubrovnik) and she worked, and was very independent. She wasn't a cuddly mum but as a kid I loved the kind of independence that I got because of her working. I was able to spend the money she'd give me, which gave me lots of freedom. I could decide how to spend the money for lunch; I could follow my own desires. [Laughing] I could spend it on *Bravo* – a German music magazine that we read as teenagers in Yugoslavia.

AE: Did your mother have siblings? And how did she get on with her mother?

LŠ: I think they had a good relationship actually, but there were two more children after her. Her brother who was maybe three years younger than her and then Antonia, the baby of the family, who arrived thirteen years after my mother when my grandmother was forty-two – quite shocking at the time. My aunty Antonia was like a proper cuddly baby. My mother was always strict. She was a proper eldest child. But I don't think she had a difficult relationship with her mother because my grandmother was so easy-going and loving … She had a more difficult relationship with her father.

AE: Do we think we admire our mothers for what they did, for the way they raised us?

LŠ: I admire the fact that she went to university and she had me and my brother and she did her own thing. But the seventies and eighties were different in Yugoslavia; there was a lot of space for women to assert their independence and I'm a product of that. Still I have a complex relationship with her which I think has manifested more since I became a mother myself.

AE: Emily did you admire your mother; did she admire her mother?

EUL: She definitely loved her mother. Whether she *admired* her I couldn't actually say. I don't know if I could say how well they got on … My grandmother judged my mother's life choices, and my mum judged my grandmother as well. I've not thought of the word admire in relation to my mum before; but I definitely try and replicate some of the things she did with my own children, so yes, I probably do admire her.

AE: What about other important influences on them? So they both got degrees, and they both put that training and their knowledge to use in their working lives …

EUL: Mum did her degree late. When she was growing up, I don't think there was any expectation that she would go to university. She was sent to boarding school where the focus was on being trained to be a "nice" woman who would marry well. She did her degree after she'd married my dad and she funded herself. She was definitely a feminist but she wouldn't have called herself that. She used to refer to feminists in really derogatory terms. I remember asking her about the Greenham Common protests that were going on in the 80s and she was appalled by them.[3] She was very anti-Women's Movement but she definitely benefited from it. Always, always, from when I was tiny, the expectation was that I would work hard at school, that I would go to university and be independent.

AE: So the role that she was performing and expected you to perform, is very much as educated, earning, independent …

EUL: She was expected to know how to make chocolate truffles and marry well. My grandmother's greatest aspiration for her was that she would marry someone with a title [laughing]. So there was that whole expectation and she really fought against it. She made herself very independent. She had a career she loved and was proud of. She encouraged me to go to university, to pursue my own interests and desires. The role of strong-minded and resilient woman was something she always performed and encouraged me to perform. I've tried to do the same for my daughters, to model the idea of working, being passionate, and fighting for what I think is right. I'm not sure how successfully I've achieved any of that but I certainly felt that from my mum and have tried to perform that for my own daughters.

AE: Lena would you agree that having a degree – the discipline of learning and learning to think critically – played a part in your mother's life choices and expectations (of you or anyone else)?

LŠ: Absolutely. And it wasn't easy for my mother. She wanted to be an actress. She was in this experimental avant-garde film, and she actually went for a screen-test for a big fiction film, to be a film actress, but she didn't get it. But there was no question of her studying acting; that would have been unreasonable. So she decided on chemistry because she was good at maths and sciences. She went to Split where she had to live as a lodger in a flat. One of her paternal aunts was a nun in a convent in Split

so she'd go there for meals. There wasn't much money and she relied on the convent to eat. She's very intelligent; very clever. She's a very good scientist, a brilliant mathematician. And she loved her students. Emily was describing her mother's compassion as a teacher and mine was the same, she had a lot of compassion for her students. So she has all these qualities and a brilliant mind, but she's very nationalistic. We argue a lot about politics. I'm not sure I'd call her a critical thinker. Or even a feminist …

AE: You mentioned church, which made me think about the links between performance and religious practice. Is your mother religious? Did she have to square her own ideas with her family's religious beliefs?

LŠ: My mum grew up in socialist Yugoslavia and at the time going to church was seen as problematic so it was a kind of activity that was happening out of sight, so to speak. There was this polarity between socialism – in the public world – and family life, certainly for me as a child, and I think my mum had to live with that juxtaposition as well. So even though my grandmother was very Catholic I don't think that my mother's upbringing (and definitely not her schooling) was very Catholic at all, in the '50s and '60s in Yugoslavia. She comes from a very small town near Dubrovnik and she was extremely pretty as a young woman, which was how she ended up in these films. So it wasn't really theatre – she wasn't really interested in becoming a theatrical actress – it was the experimental film world that was attractive to her. I can imagine that coming from a very small town and going to Dubrovnik – the city – must have been attractive. She was 29 or 30 when she got married which was seen as a bit late then. My father and she went to the same grammar school but they didn't get together until after they'd finished their degrees.

AE: Emily was your mother religious?

EUL: My mum was Jewish, my dad was Catholic – that's what they were born into – but they were both completely atheist and didn't have any connection to either of those faiths, apart from cultural ones. So religion, no. They had the theatre: my parents met when they were both in the Unicorn Children's Theatre, in London. They used to say that when they met my mum had a turnip on her head because she was playing a scarecrow … But my mum's greatest love was Shakespearean acting. We lived quite near Stratford so I was raised watching them go to the theatre and this was the generation where you dressed up for it. She'd always wear sparkly jewellery and a beautiful dress and I thought it was the most glamorous thing I'd ever seen. They'd go regularly to watch stuff and I was always encouraged to join kids theatre groups so as long as I can remember I was performing in amateur kids groups and even though I never saw my mum acting professionally because she stopped before I was born, I knew that was what she loved. For my tenth birthday, I was taken to *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, and I was bought a fancy dress and hair things and stuff and that was my birthday present. And it was like an

initiation into my mother's world. But she would hate the kind of live art and performance that I now love.

AE: That's interesting …

EUL: She was really dismissive of that kind of experimental theatre, and of contemporary art (of the time); she had no interest in it. But I was raised with performance being a thing, always, and poetry …

AE: So as academics, when you are theorising maternal performance, and feminist maternal performance, how much are your mothers there, as examples or models of gendered or cultural behaviour? Do you find your mind playing on that performance of the maternal role that produced you, or can you set it aside? Emily, you're grinning.

EUL: It's absolutely there, it's always there! I've written about it too, but I do a lot of editing out because I'm really conscious that I don't want to tell someone else's story. So it's a question of ethics for me. I don't want to misrepresent anyone or reveal things someone else would want to keep private. Because it's also my brother and sister's story, and my dad's story. I've tried many times to write about my grandmother but never published any of it, because of that sense of responsibility.

AE: Lena what about you?

LŠ: I don't write much about my mother in my academic work even though I'm discussing maternal performance or maternal studies. Which I can see is a problem. I did address some of the issues in the *Magdalena Makeup* project: I was talking to my grandmother and my mother; I was trying to create a matrilineal lineage through my arts practice. But when my mother asks "so what are you writing this book about? Maternal performance, what is that?" I say [briskly] "It's about feminist mothering." And leave it there. Because I know she doesn't like my idea of feminism. She is very proud of me being an academic, and working in a university and being a reader, but she's not very proud of me being a feminist performance artist and she was annoyed with me for taking the children to demonstrations. She thinks that I shouldn't be doing that with her grandchildren. And I say "These things I do are actually helping me in my career, you know. This is how I became a reader, how I make my living: by being an activist, by being a feminist …" So I still have to fight for my position as a feminist activist, performance artist, art activist. Do I think of her as having helped to produce me? No, if I'm honest. No. Unless it's through rebellion.

AE: You don't think of her as having propelled you into feminism?

LŠ: Well I know that she's always been extremely independent and that I've picked this up from her, yes. But it wasn't called feminism.

AE: I know I don't think much about how my own mother was mothered. What about you two? The idea of maternal authorship is so potent, and it's so easily corrupted isn't it – as with the tragedy in your family …

LŠ: I think that side of it became clearer to me after the conversation with my grandmother which I filmed, when she was 90 (she died at 92, so

our conversation took place around 2005–2006). Since then, I've started realising to what degree this tragedy influenced how my mother was perceived in this household and how she was mothered, and that she had to carry this tragedy with her, when she became the oldest child. I am also the eldest child – and as the mother of four children I'm really conscious of their different positions in the family. So I started feeling much more sympathy towards my mother at that point. But we still argue a lot, and she annoys me a lot, when she micro-manages me so much, when I'm back in Dubrovnik. I try not to do that with my own children, but sometimes you can't avoid it; you see the patterns and you're thinking "I'm turning into my mother!"

AE: Emily, given what you've said about your own grandmother, do you find yourself thinking about that pattern which Lena's describing?

EUL: I do see your mother in your writing Lena. But yes, my mother was a product of her mothering in that she rebelled against her mothering and I rebelled against my mothering, so that's where the line seems to go. My grandmother was a complicated woman, sometimes incredibly difficult with that kind of micro-management that Lena's talking about. She judged everything. But then as she got older, she softened and was proud of everything that you did.

AE: So can we turn to our mothers' roles in our own daily mothering. How do you find yourself navigating that in your own mothering role, now?

LŠ: I'm not so much in touch with my mother, because I'm in England and she's in Croatia. We have Skype calls and we text now and again. In England I can do what I want, but it's interesting that how quickly, when I go back to Croatia, she turns into someone who is telling me how to run my life, and I change into a narky teenager.

AE: How old is she?

LŠ: She's 77; she had me when she was 31. And I'm really trying to understand why she is so right-wing and nationalistic. *Why* does nationalism mean so much to her; why does she identify so strongly with Croatia? I am someone who has moved through territories: I was born in Yugoslavia and then I became a Croatian. So the whole nationality thing just doesn't make sense to me and I am angry that my parents' generation and older generations have taken my Yugoslav identity – which I wanted – from me, and given me this new Croatian one. But then of course I left all that and became British as well.

AE: Have you asked her why she is right-wing? Or Nationalist?

LŠ: I think that's something I really need to do, but what happens is the emotions overtake me at those moments and I just can't have a conversation, I have to have an argument …

AE: How far can we theorise some of this intensely subjective stuff. So: just as a [grand]mother helps to produce those she m/others conversely, she is also produced by them in much the same way. But it seems impossible to draw general conclusions about precisely how that inevitably

subject-centred and context-bound process occurs, or what it ends up producing, from any of the perspectives involved.

LŠ: Well, I think that my relationship with my grandmother was easier perhaps because there was this space between us. We could be together and really talk and support one another in connecting across the generations. Can we identify some antagonistic relationship there with the mother who m/others …

AE: Which leaves me wondering if there's something inescapably gendered about how we construct our mothers; which perhaps shouldn't surprise and which we can't – in some senses thanks to biology if nothing else – easily set aside. Is the relationship between girls and their m/others just different, by virtue of the biology which typically frames gender identity-formation? Emily you've got two daughters and Lena you've got sons.

EUL: I do wonder how far our mothering of our children depends on how we understand their gender. I have only known being mothered as a girl or mothering girls. I know how my mother was mothered (I think), and I understand how I was mothered and then I repeat those ways of mothering girls. With mothering boys, there is a visible difference rather than a sameness. Of course, this is all dependent on my own preconceptions of difference and is certainly a perspective I'm imposing upon what it means to mother girls. There shouldn't be any difference either way should there, but of course I've been socialised in a certain way and I pass that social construction on to my children, no matter how hard I try not to.

AE: Do you see your mother in your daughters? Do you see your grandmother in your daughters?

EUL: In terms of personality both of my children are quite different from my mother and my grandmother, and I see more of my mother and my grandmother in me than I do in my children.

LŠ: I wanted a daughter. I was so shocked when they told me the first child was a boy! With the second one, I didn't even ask because I was sure it would be a daughter but no … And then I didn't want to be like my mother with two children, so when I had my third child – I was 32, which is around the age my mother was when she started having children – I wanted a boy and he was; and then with the last one I desperately wanted a girl. And it was a boy again. At the gates of the school a woman said "You get what you can handle." At first, I was very offended by this and then I thought no, great! You get what you can handle and I am a mother of four boys! And now I love being a mother of four boys. It feels right for me even though there was an element of sadness about the end of this maternal line. None of my cousins has daughters either. But then I also feel it's good to go beyond biology.

AE: I've always thought that mothering a daughter must be a giant challenge, which I escaped by having sons. I wanted it, but that was partly because I wanted the chance to reply to the way I was mothered. Which now seems ridiculously arrogant.

EUL: Isn't that all of mothering? Certainly, when I had my first child, I was so naive in thinking I am going to do this right this time around. It's nonsense, my children have gone their own way, just as they should, and I'm sure I've made as many mistakes and done as much right as any other mother.

AE: We have to allow for autonomy, don't we? And also, their other parent and the gene mix that brings. I don't know why I ever thought I could predict anything about my children. But perhaps that's one key difference from earlier generations; they assumed that they could predict, and we know we can't. Does the discourse give us a name for the archetype? What do we call her? Foremother? I'd like to name her if I can.

LŠ: I'm thinking about the work on feminist generations, but I think that differs from the mother/daughter line, in which relations are much more fraught and antagonistic. I remember at a conference Griselda Pollock insisting that we can't always resort to blaming the mother.[4] I'm mindful of that. I am also thinking about Alison Stone (2011) writing about feminism encouraging its daughters, all of us feminists, to think and write from a daughter's perspective (58–61).

EUL: And there's Bracha Ettinger (2006), who formulates a theory of the maternal that is compassionate and concerned with ethics, which she terms the matrixial. She states that we have to be compassionate to our other's other. The other's other could be so many things, but it could mean being compassionate to our own mothers rather than blaming them and it could also suggest being compassionate to ourselves as shaped by our mothers.

LŠ: So we come back to this effort to think in her shoes, to try to understand from her position and how she was mothered. And find that compassion.

AE: Is it possible that cultural anchorages – cultural or faith traditions, say – make it easier to mother?

EUL: There's so much that I do. Just ways of doing things sometimes that are quite silly, that I know are inherited, like always cooking with dill … And yes, there's something about a matrilineal culture and the matriarchal role, which has absolutely held in my family.

AE: So can we approach the idea of the mother, as both mothers and daughters, through what connects us? Emily what connects you to your mother, apart from breast cancer?

EUL: Well genetically that comes from my maternal grandfather but I don't think that's the biggest connection. When I was writing about Peggy Shaw's *To My Chagrin* (Shaw's work about her grandson) in our book, I asked my grandmother for the first time what she thought about our relationship and what she thought I might have taught her, and then I reflected on what she'd taught me.[5] Interestingly, again and again, it came back to food: to the idea that you can provide comfort and nurturing and love through providing food. That idea is very strong in me; and it was something my mum did. I can't stand the thought that anyone coming to my house might have wanted a cup of tea and not got one, and I cook the food that my mother and grandmother cooked, and I teach my

kids to cook it. There's something very deeply embedded in me about that, showing nurturing through food.

AE: She said you taught her that?

EUL: I'm trying to remember exactly how she phrased it. There was something to do with settling arguments, and how to be diplomatic, but also about how to make food appear when you think there's no time and there's nothing in the house.

LŠ: And that you're also very patient.

EUL: So that's what she said I taught her. And she taught me a huge amount. Definitely. She taught me about fierceness. I got that from my mother and my grandmother. You just don't take shit. You fight your corner, quite fiercely, and I think both my kids have that.

AE: Lena what did your mother teach you?

LŠ: I would say independence was the first thing. She gave me independence but I guess she also taught me autonomy by example. She showed me how to be a working mother. I mean I never – never – considered not working. There was never a question about whether I would go to university or not; that was just assumed. My mother definitely taught me to do my own thing.

AE: At the start of this discussion, Lena observed how hard it is for mothers to exist outside that name, that relation. I'm now thinking that that's perhaps a particular problem for daughters, specifically. To what extent can a mother-who-is-a-daughter make it possible for her own mother to exist independently of the role? And can we say vice versa?

LŠ: I think this is a very good framing of the problem! I don't think I have a solution, but maybe the acknowledgement we have for our friends' mothers – they are always women in their own right as well as friends' mothers – should somehow be translated, reflected back to our own mothers. Or even the ability to see our mothers through their own friends' eyes, which brings a different quality to them.

AE: I think that's a very helpful way of thinking about it; framing it like that gives us access to the strength to be found in solidarity and community, rather than the tensions and conflicts of contest.

EUL: I really love the concept of this kind of ethical mother-daughter relationship where we can be both mothers and daughters and also reimagine these roles with kindness towards our mothers and ourselves as both mothers and daughters. It's very utopian and I don't think that in actuality it is how I have lived my mothering and daughtering, or if it is how my mother or daughters have related to me. But what a wonderful thing to aspire to – that would be a truly compassionate maternal relationship.

AE: Thank you both very much.

In the context of the polemic in which it appears, Woolf's much-quoted remark about mothers seems thrown away, its truth too obvious to dwell on. Down the decades the comment has been cited or harnessed in much

the same way: for its truistic pertinence, as departure point or conclusion, to any number of possible arguments. However, our conversation suggests that the words are easier to say than carry out. As mothers (who are also critical scholars), if and when we find enough time and energy to pause and reflect on our own mothers, and/or theirs, what resources do we bring to that process? To what extent, in allowing ourselves to consider the processes by which we construct our mothers can we interrupt or evade the kind of subject-centred complexities which load and tune, and have always loaded and tuned, mother-daughter relations? Should we even try?

Collecting the threads of an exchange which was always intended to test the narrow abstractions of the general with the possibilities of the particular, without abandoning the theoretical-critical expertise of the scholar-practitioners it centralises, we find ourselves tilted towards the following broad conclusions. That, firstly, as mothers who are of necessity immersed and absorbed in the now and the about-to-be, it is easy but not necessarily helpful, to ourselves or our children to overlook the complexities which produced our mothers, or theirs. Motherhood is as much a matter of genealogy as socio-historical and cultural circumstance, however the particularities of a family tree might seem to resist the theorist. Secondly, that the connections which weave any mother into a vast community of maternal performance are sometimes more sympathetically accessed across the space which our own mothers occupy. Maternal models – may we name them foremothers? – may be more readily discovered in grandmothers, aunts, even other people's mothers than our own. Does that matter? Thirdly, that the matrix of emotions, imagination, habits and beliefs which produces a mother's performance of her role will always exceed the noun we assign it. By extension, the same matrix can never be held to define or delimit the identity-formation of the children – daughters or not – a m/other may never be able to stop m/othering. As Jessica Benjamin (1988) has observed, mother and child can only formulate a subjectivity in response to their other: "the struggle for recognition requires the self to relinquish its claim to absoluteness" (49). Thinking back through our mothers – and theirs – can no more define them than us. The idea of the maternal in relation (as a dialogic and process-led experience which is both time- and person-bound, and not) can encompass and enable both us and them, as well as the m/others whom any of us might have helped to birth. And finally, that the most important resource we can bring to any of the foregoing recognitions is kindness.

Notes

1 Co-authors of *Manifesto for Maternal Performance (Art) 2016!* Lena Šimić and Emily Underwood-Lee are both established performer-practitioners, mid-career academics and mothers, as well as friends and collaborators. They are being interviewed here by Alice Entwistle, literary critic who takes particular interest in contemporary writing by women, and has in the course of her research conducted many interviews with writers and other kinds of creative artists over the years, many of them – like her – also mothers.

2 For more information about this live art event, see https://lenasimic.art/artsprojects/autobiographical-solo-performances/magdalena-makeup/ and Šimić (2013) "On Foreign Discomfort: Magdalena Makeup Live Art Event" in *Women, the Arts and Globalization: Eccentric Experience*.
3 The Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp was an ongoing protest against nuclear weapons in the United Kingdom, which ran from 1981 to 2000.
4 Lena is referring to "M(O)ther Trouble," a two-day conference held at Birkbeck College, University of London (May 2009). See the special edition of *Studies in the Maternal* journal "M(O)ther Trouble: Motherhood, Psychoanalysis, Feminism" dedicated to the conference, https://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk/issue/380/info/.
5 See Lena Šimić and Emily Underwood-Lee 2021, 169.

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2 Conversations with Mother Artists on the Dynamics of Support in India

Ruchika Wason Singh with Shobha Broota and Pooja Iranna

The conversations in this chapter look at the maternal and artistic roles of two women artists born and living in New Delhi, India. Shobha Broota and Pooja Iranna, a mother and daughter who are both artists, discuss support structures and their personal perspectives on the choices they have made in relation to their mothering and art practices. The two women artists share their challenges and explore the dynamics of the inter-personal relational support that enables their studio practice

Shobha Broota has worked as an art educator at Triveni Kala Sangam (Triveni), a prestigious art centre in New Delhi. Triveni was also the location of her studio and her home, which she shared with her former husband, Rameshwar Broota (also an artist), and their two daughters, Pooja and Sakshi. Triveni provided the backdrop against which Pooja and Sakshi grew up, immersed in the world of art. For Pooja Iranna, now also an artist in her own right, Triveni became a springboard to propel her towards her own artistic practice.

The conversations with Pooja Broota took place on 9th and 13th July 2021, those with Shobha Broota were on 16th July 2021. All took place on Zoom.

A conversation with Shobha Broota

Shobha Broota (born 1943, New Delhi) is an alumna of the College of Art, New Delhi. In a long and celebrated career, she has worked in several genres – from her early portraits, to woodcuts and etchings in the 1970s and 1980s, to paintings in oil and acrylic in which she refined a minimalist, abstract idiom. More recently, she has produced canvases wrapped in fabric, thread, and wool; these are hand-knitted, crocheted, and stretched to create intricate grids and patterns. Shobha's abstract forms have a tranquillity and deceptive simplicity, her lines have rhythm and subtle movement, her colours have a rich resonance, and her surfaces a texture that is complex.

Ruchika Wason Singh: Our discussion today is about motherhood, art practice, and the kind of support system that women artists would like to have, and which they received or did not receive. I want to know your

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story. Could you share with me how you moved between your artistic role and your maternal one, extending from one role to another?

Shobha Broota: You know, I think I had no idea what art as the profession was. I had no idea when I began creating art and I did not think that I was painting to sell or to have exhibitions. Yes, I went to see exhibitions. I used to visit the National Gallery of Modern Art[1] on most Sundays. I used to spend time in libraries because I wanted to understand what other artists were doing at an international level or local level or national level. I had my first exhibition in 1965 and that was all portraits. I was teaching as well as painting. At that time, I had not stepped into abstraction. My exhibition was at All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society (AIFACS).[2] In 1965, I also got married and that changed my life. I used to go to paint at the studio, this was my regular routine and slowly and gradually I got more interested in my work. Side by side, I also became a mother. And all those responsibilities, marriage, developing my art practice, and motherhood, were happening in parallel in my life. It never happened that I stopped painting and working, even if I did not know where the paintings would go, whether they would be appreciated, whether they would be put up in exhibitions. At that time there were hardly any galleries who would pick you up. But I just moved as other people were also moving with me. Looking after children and working, somehow it was very natural to do all these things as a female or a mother or wife or whatever. It was all going on simultaneously. Painting was part of it. And I never regretted that I had a family and never regretted becoming an artist. I do not know what becoming an artist is, but yes, the continuation of work just happened because without that I did not find myself complete. This is how it happened for years and years and years. And I am still painting every day of my life.

RWS: That is very inspiring. The choice to be able to do regular studio practice – it is the most energising thing for an artist.

SB: Fulfilling yourself is a way of giving inspiration to the family and the children and whoever you need to. Teaching also requires a lot of effort and inspiring all age groups all the time. I thought that was my duty as well. I was also completely involved in teaching all kinds of students who came to me. And I do not think my children expected too much pampering. So it was a natural way of living for me.

RWS: You say that you consider motherhood to be something natural and there is no resentment. I feel there is a shift in the way these roles are perceived today regarding the choice of whether or not to be a mother. Now, women can more freely voice and exercise their choice. Not being a mother can be perceived as a sign of liberation.

SB: I have watched people, you know, female artists who were my seniors and also those who were my juniors in the art college. They were seriously into art and they decided not to marry because it took away their

attention from art. I have seen many cases, with both boys and girls, who decided not to have a family. That was happening at the time I began my career and is also happening now. It must have been difficult to understand for the parents of those artists who made the choice not to be parents themselves. Despite family pressure, these artists were strong enough to say, "no, we do not want all this". We just want to paint. But, after years of working, they have not always had the success that they wanted. My personal approach is that one has to complete one's responsibility as a human being. We all require all kinds of experiences and we can express those experiences through our work. I do not know how girls feel now, but at that time it was stressed by the family "You just have to get married and produce children and look after the rest of the family". I think we all knew that this would happen. But then I started seeing that my artist friends were not marrying or having children, they did not have a house. And there they were, just painting. But with many of these artists, you do not get to see their work because nobody picks them up, even having galleries all around Delhi. So you have to become somebody, you have to have a full life as well as an artistic identity. That is my experience. That was my observation of that period. Even men who did not marry and did not have any family and were financially supported by their parents, they devoted themselves to painting, but where are they now?

RWS: When you say artistic identity, what do you mean by that?

SB: Identity means having a name, fame, a body of work, the quality of your work, different art practices, and getting a position or an award. Being ambitious, you sacrifice so much.

RWS: So for you there is no merit to sacrificing family life to become an artist?

SB: First you become a human being and then you become an artist. What will you express if you do not have any experience of anything, or you have no duty to perform as a social being? And performing these responsibilities is not a joke. Being responsible for fulfilling your duties to your husband, mother-in-law, and father-in-law is not easy. But if you are only looking after yourself and nobody else, can that give you pleasure? There must be many who were successful, doing things alone. They have more time to think about all those things. But being a social person, I mean, it is a natural process of life. Giving more time to your work does not make you a better artist. That is an illusion. When you feel a responsibility to make other people happy as well as yourself, then you get more energy to perform your own work, to give attention to yourself as well. Yes, you have enough time. If you can divide time, you can do anything in life. Each activity and each failure also teaches you so much in life. But if you run away from something just for the sake of writing or painting or dancing, then it does not complete your life. You have to experience the pain. You have to experience so many things to become an artist. It is obviously a personal choice. But lack of time is not the reason to not do

things. You have to understand how to divide your time and attention. Running away from responsibility does not make you a good human being. Whatever comes in front of you at whatever time, you have to fulfil that and then your experience of all that enriches you to become an artist. Emotional satisfaction comes from doing, not from running away

RWS: I want to know, when you became a mother, what was the support that you had in terms of childcare? What is it that you did not get? And how was that time for you? How did you manage? What would be a regular routine for you? And what were your challenges? How did you cope with them? Living in Triveni, there are many aspects in which your experience is unique. We do not have the system of child daycare in India, it is a very Western concept, so the whole idea of support depends on some other.

SB: Of course, I had my family, my elders, who supported me throughout my life. Nobody resented that I work or that I teach. I did not get much admiration, in the beginning, but then it was also never like "you are spending so much time on unnecessary activities like art" with my family. I heard from a lot of students who got married that in their family they do not get much support and have been questioned about wasting money and told that they do not have enough space to keep their artworks.

RWS: You have put forth a very important point about the need for support from one's family. Where did these women go once they graduated from the art colleges?

SB: Yes, it is more difficult, especially for women. You need strength and a supportive environment to create where people can accept you. By God's grace or something, I found answers for almost everything. I had to make a place to keep my work. I took many rented places in the town to keep my work because Triveni had limited space. My house had limited space. I had to make a place for myself. That is how I continued working. No one encourages you to leave the children, domestic work, or elders in the family in order to do your work. To do artistic work you need a lot of strength and perseverance. But after a certain point, our parents and in laws watch us performing our works and they have to accept our way of living and perhaps even grandparents help take care of children so we can perform our duties towards ourselves as artists.

RWS: What do you think about the support system that has been given to your generation? Do you think it has also been given to the women who follow your generation?

SB: Things have changed. Money has increased. We had to do it on our own, teaching morning and evening. It was not glamorous then. Galleries did not have money. Nobody had enough money, you know. There were no buyers then to purchase the works.

RWS: So when you had children, did you take them with you to art openings? I do not find them to be very child friendly.

SB: There were not many galleries or exhibitions hence there were less social gatherings too.

RWS: Now you are a grandmother. What kind of support have you given to Pooja since she became a mother?
SB: I mean, I support her well.
RWS: Are you taking care of her children?
SB: Yes, of course.

A conversation with Pooja Iranna

Pooja Iranna (born 1969, New Delhi) is a New Delhi based visual artist. Her art practice revolves around the city and its architectural spaces. Through her work, Pooja Iranna presents manmade structures, which talk of human beings – their presence, expressions, mind and emotions – without physical human presence. Pooja has been working with these structure ever since she started her practice almost three decades ago. She has worked in mediums that include video, photography, and sculpture, and has published numerous writings on her art practice and that of fellow artists.

Ruchika Wason Singh: You have chosen marriage and motherhood as the extended roles in your life, which you perform outside of your studio space. How do you balance your choices?
Pooja Iranna: It is all about balancing your life, balancing what helps you to continue as an artist whilst also feeling responsible for the kids that you have brought into the world, the husband that you chose to get married to. It all depends on you.
RWS: Working in India brings a specific consideration of gender roles. Have you had to have any of those challenges?
PI: Many people have asked me that question, and I also wonder about it. Firstly, art is very personal, it comes from within you. The secondary part is getting the opportunities or feeling that, you know, you are being discriminated against. The society that we are living in, especially women like us who come from the metropolitan areas, we have ample choices. You and I realise that we were brought up in a very beautiful way where the discrimination was not there, where we were equally treated, or we had even more opportunities than our brothers or our husbands would have, and how beautifully we were able to balance is what I feel proud about today.
RWS: But I do feel that we can be privileged, we have all the infrastructure. Yet, when it comes to maternal performance in real life, there is still a prejudice within the people we are situated with in different situations. It could be those from the art field, or it could be in our wider social circles. It can be very tricky and challenging.
PI: It is very tricky and it is very challenging. You have just chosen the right words. So that is why I emphasise balancing.
RWS: And what are the challenges when you are trying to make those choices? There are both personal and professional relationship dynamics, right?

PI: It has been very challenging. You want to work, and if there is no good support system, it will become impossible. But luckily, we have paid professional help coming in, people who carry out domestic chores, people who will take care of our children for a certain number of hours. If you can access that kind of help it is very good. If you are trying to generate that kind of system within your family, it is slightly difficult because they have their own minds, they will have their own egos. Your needs change on a daily basis; suppose today you have a number of guests coming, you will have to sacrifice that day for them. My whole ethos is that if you psychologically, mentally, physically get involved in situations like that, it will just drain you out. You have to be like a witness. You have to be doing everything. But at the back of your mind, it is your work that you are always thinking about.

RWS: One question I want to ask stems from my own experience, and I am curious to know about your experience, and that is the aspect of guilt. In India we have a lot of guilt associated with maternal responsibilities and choosing to continue with are our careers. So have you been able to successfully completely get the guilt out of you?

PI: I think each one of us, whether women or men, just go through these guilt phases. We are made to go through them and we also choose to go through them. There is no end to the expectations from people, from society, from yourself. You have to see how much of it you are ready to take on and how much of it you are ready to ignore.

RWS: Can you define what you understand by the word support? What are the different kinds of support which you think you need?

PI: I think support is a very individual thing, right? What you mean by support might be totally different for my connotation of support. For me, support is when I am not hindered in my thinking. Support is not physical, it is not somebody coming in, helping you in your household activities, or doing the everyday things for you. You have to support and encourage yourself. I enjoy the process of home building, and I am very much involved in the process. I enjoy the beauty of running a family – doing things for your family. I mean, most of the time you are not appreciated by your family, but when things go well, for example you make a good dish for them, the response does not come from them but you know that you did it with love. And that is what it is like to support yourself. You have to support yourself in that sense.

RWS: But what about in terms of pursuing your art practice, do you think validation is also a kind of support? What other kinds of support come from whom?

PI: Whatever the profession, if your family approves of it, even silently, it is a big support. If they do not hinder your creative time, they do not indulge in petty things, they know that this is the time for you to work, and they respect that, it can go a long way. Over the time period, if you

are adamant in telling them that this is my working time, this is the time when I need to be left alone either in my room or in my studio or whatever the space might be, gradually they can understand that. So many of us are like a given for our children but after 9 o'clock, I have done that. After 9 o'clock, my services with you are over. Even if the children do not want to go to sleep, they have to be on their own. I am not available, you know. These kinds of rules, if one can make from the very beginning, I think they go a long way.

RWS: So support is also a negotiation? Or do you want the whole of the sky?

PI: You cannot expect the whole of the sky.

RWS: I know that. But as artists, I think, we can be dreamy sometimes.

PI: When we talk about art, we always talk about the practice that we are doing, but art is interconnected. If you are happy doing a certain job, that is also art. Another thing that I wanted to tell you, that support of a family in the artistic field can be essential. Let's not forget that you are constantly depending on the family for your financial needs because you are not selling your work, or you are not having exhibitions. That kind of support is very difficult for the family to give if they do not see any results. If I am not able to even sell, the problem comes, where do I store my work? Because I am continuously creating, you know, if all the support systems are in place, I am creating. But I need physical space to keep my artworks, which the family finds very difficult to give. So that is what we lack in the support system in India. I cannot hire a cheap space to keep my work, to store my work. Most of us do not know what to do with that work. A small community, let alone artist studio spaces, we do not have those in India. How do we generate money? How do we generate funds?

RWS: Do you relate this also to the whole aspect of working from home and having your studio at home?

PI: A studio at home, for women artists who have children or who have a thriving family, is the most convenient thing. I think we are very privileged that as a profession we can work from home and, at the same time, we are able to look after our families, take care of them, witness the growth of our children, be with them whenever they need us, and be able to maintain that balance. I have certain rules assigned to my children, that this is my working space or time, and they grew up knowing that, this is the time when mother may not be to disturbed. I was working from home all the time until my son turned eighteen and he was ready to go to college. I was handling both my career and my house. Now it has just been three years since I have a space to work in outside my home. But the moment I step into that space, I realise that my productivity becomes much higher; what I was able to produce in four days, I am able to do in just one day because my whole

concentration is on the work and there is no disturbance whatsoever. That is the difference that I feel. But then as a mother, or as a responsible person, when you take on the responsibility of family, I think that balance needs to be there and there is no harm whatsoever in working from home.

RWS: So now that we have talked about the challenges and the whole idea of support, what changes do you think we need in the family and the art system as institutions within which we function?

PI: I have to be very straightforward. I would say that at the moment art spaces are not always very child friendly, in the sense that the art system and the way it functions and the kind of activities we have, are not necessarily so welcoming for the child. Growing up as a child, both my parents were artists and their studios were always open for us. That was how I learned many art techniques rather than learning them from my time at college. I learned as a child. I was really privileged to be around artists, because I would just be part of the discussions about art, probably just a silent observer but a child learns so much from that. I would also see how they were working, how they are thinking, how they talk, all those interrelated things which are needed in the day-to-day practice of an artist. I was very aware of it. We were also given art material if we wanted to work. At that point, there was no discrimination, no "do not come near me". Obviously, you would not be allowed to touch their canvases or their material, but then there was material readily available and you could use it. I did not need to go to an art class as a child, my whole learning was in those studios. When I was working from home, I did not have an external studio to go to and my children were also totally free to come inside my studio space and see what I was doing. And if interested, they would also engage with art. But unfortunately, over the years, my generation has segregated the two things – art work and parenting. I would take my children to all the openings, all the discussions, everywhere they would go with me. But then I slowly realised that the culture was becoming more formal, or more professional, and children were not encouraged to come to these previews. You could sense it, the gallerists were uncomfortable, the artists were uncomfortable. Over the years the art scene has become very formal, now it is only accessible for the elite to visit. That is what the problem has become. We have become over-professional with the practice.

RWS: So that also means that we have sort of detached ourselves from the reality in which we live. You switch from one role to another when you leave the house for an opening and when you come back. You are detaching yourself from reality in some way.

PI: You are detaching yourself from reality. You are acting a thorough professional, which is okay. But then the whole world has become like that.

The whole world has become about your success and how you present yourself – not only how you present your art, but how you present yourself. Which is not a very healthy thing for society or art, because art has to come from the heart. I mean, what is so interesting about it being so formal to that level, you know, where the connection between the art and the artist is lost? Where a child cannot come and ask me 100 questions about my practice, but I am ready to talk to a person who is my client? That is something strange that has happened to our society, which was not seen earlier.

RWS: In London, there is a studio called the Mother House that specialises in having rented studios for women who are artists and mothers and they have integrated childcare. Do you envisage anything like this in India?

PI: I wish we had a support system like that. I mean, there is nothing more beautiful than taking a child to a space that understands what creativity is all about.

RWS: I think one of the things we really need to invest in is empathy. I really think if we really invest in empathy, a lot of other things will emerge out of that. But we do not empathise because we look at art as a product which can be taken into a market. We need to see that what's important is the coexistence of different kinds of identities and different kinds of situations, which can all be equally productive.

PI: Yeah. I think what you said was very right. We need to empathise with each other and we have suddenly, as a generation, grown very self-centred. I guess the COVID pandemic has really created space for empathy. We have realised that we are all human beings, and we all have pain. We all have had psychological, physical, mental, all sorts of problems during this pandemic, and we are human beings first and then professional or successful artists. Empathy has come through this great ordeal and I hope that we will continue to understand the problems of each other and come up with solid solutions. But then we have to actually start thinking about what we can do for each other, how we can solve problems for each other and continue in a better way.

Notes

1 For more information on the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, see http://ngmaindia.gov.in/.

2 For more information on the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society see https://www.aifacs.org.in/.

3 HomeBody

Eve Dent and Zoë Gingell

This chapter is based on a series of conversations that took place in May 2021 between the artists Eve Dent and Zoë Gingell, who have been engaged in a collaborative arts practice as the Mothersuckers Project since 2009, which explores the relationship between motherhood, parenting, and arts practice.[1]

Zoë Gingell (ZG): Our collaboration as artists is interwoven with our way of processing and understanding the stages of our lives and the changes in our bodies, as both the subject and propeller of what we make. The ageing process and life as a post-fertile woman forms the focus of conversations and ideas within our joint practice right now.

Eve Dent (ED): We are both at this unique point in our lives where we can look back at our time as new mothers yet also recognise our mortality as we age and, looking forward, perhaps gain a different perspective on our own parents' viewpoint.

ZG: There is very little that is articulated about the whole life journey for women within visual culture. We usually only see representations of women as having babies or being old, but what about that bit in between? I currently feel compelled to articulate the menopausal process because it is so unspoken. As soon as you start talking about it with women who have not got to that stage yet, they suddenly seem a bit threatened by it, as if, "hang on, I'm not there yet, I've got enough to deal with right now. I don't want to know about what's coming next". In my experience, conversations about the menopause are to be found with older women who have lived through menopause. They are survivors – emotionally as well as physically.

ED: My body has been physically shutting down those processes that before were an external expression of my fertility and potency.

ZG: I am experiencing my declining fertility and changing body as a withdrawal, a diminishing into the invisible. My experience of being visibly fertile when pregnant and breastfeeding was the opposite; belly and boobs all overtly out there Now my body is hidden. This stage of the journey, out of the fertile body, is very a new stage from that which brought us together as Mother/Artists. When we first began working together we

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were exploring the experiences of the transformation of pregnancy and birth, which are extraordinary but also rendered ordinary by their everyday nature. I had to make art about it, to open up the remarkable aspects found in the commonplace. It was a relief to meet someone I could talk to about how I felt within this changed body, where the focus had moved from belonging to oneself to being a provider for another being. This othering of the body from oneself was key to how our piece *Breastcups* began, where the body was externalised in sculptural form.[2]

ED: I was intrigued with my body's ability to produce milk and how my breast marked the threshold between myself and my babies – a shared connected place that is both mine and theirs, a symbiotic place. As breastfeeding mothers, we had also come up against societal pressure to cover our breasts that seemed to stem from a sexual view of the breast. *Breastcups* challenged and explored all these issues and boundaries. Within the performance, as I breastfed my daughter I was also expressing milk via a tube into the sculpted "jug" or breast cups, originally casts of my breasts. We were making a very private act visible.

ZG: My role, collecting the breastmilk and then serving it to the audience, subverted the assumption of who the milk is for, and therefore asked, who the body belongs to. The piece evolved into something much more political, beyond the personal beginnings of it, which stemmed from a kind of alienation I felt from my pregnant body, which was doing things according to its own agenda, i.e. being host to an *other.* Making work about that maternal body's "otherness" helped to process that. After the birth of my baby, I felt much more in sync with my body, as my body had a job to do. Producing milk for my child became my body's primary occupation. Now, in perimenopause, I am trying to understand these huge hormonal shifts, which are happening to me again like unexpected events. I am on the verge of the next epoch, as I felt when I was a teenager. I am on the edge of the unknown. How I choose to frame things now seems critical as I move beyond my reproductive years.

ED: Yes, framing one's physical body and the changes experienced in menopause is important. My experience of the perimenopause was characterised by a sense of being more deeply in tune with myself, of feeling myself very keenly through a range of experiences, which included anxiety and depression. The bodily messages were very strong, like a reckoning with oneself.

ZG: Perimenopause has been, for me, a bit of a crisis in terms of the level on which I identify as a woman now that the potential monthly cycle of hormonal swells is diminishing. It has also led me to thinking about what level I have ever felt defined by my gender, before I became a Mum. Now, I feel that I am going into a neutral space.

ED: I feel at home in my body now, post-menopause, more at peace with it. I feel a solidity and connection to the body as a vehicle for becoming more conscious, more grounded and connected.

ZG: I feel as if I am almost returning to a kind of childlike, pre-pubescent, non-binary sort of self. I am actually really looking forward to the idea of just being free of social expectations. It is an interesting time.

ED: I have a sense of freedom, of a new chapter opening, but there is also a sense of grieving.

ZG: And along with that, there is a consciousness of being superseded by the next fertile beings, our daughters. How they view their bodies is really interesting. It is as if our daughters are preparing themselves for a sexual life, as well as an emotional one; and this is all manifest in the choices they make about how they dress, the exposure of the belly for instance. My daughter's fully aware of how she is going to be seen. I find it interesting how she is negotiating that. Whilst my daughter is exploring how she is seen, my recent work has been very much about feeling that I was just going to disappear, that I could just sink into the furniture, and then into the walls – that there would be nothing left of me. Text has become important – etching my mark into the surfaces of the house, logging the traces of being. The piece *No Doormat* (2020) is a rag rug, which says "ZOË WAS HERE" using the red fabric cut from old tea towels, marked out against grey stained fabric (Figure 3.1).[3] It could be seen as a

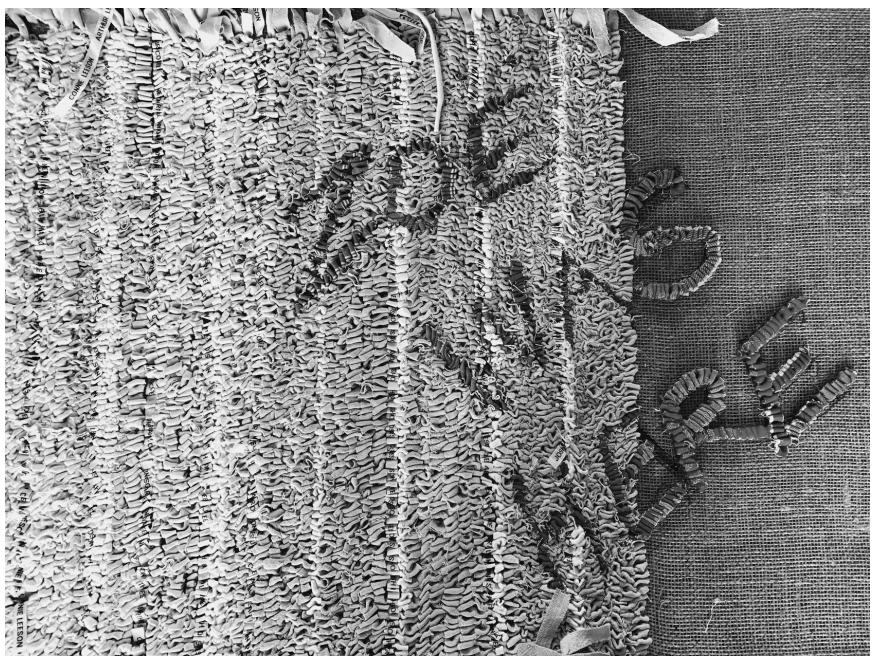

Figure 3.1 *No Doormat* work in progress by Zoë Gingell.

Source: Photo by Zoë Gingell.

shout against the erasure of self by domestic servitude, but it was more an existential cry against the processes of mortality, and fear of dissolution, which I am experiencing now with the apparent ramping-up of ageing in my peri-menopausal body. I wove ribbons embroidered with the names of my children and their father into the rug; we are all there, like strata, lifelines in time. And the red screams out its potency still.

ED: Yes, it is about a sense of the ephemeral nature of it all; the passage of lives moving through our homes, through time. The question is about whether loss is inevitable. The work I did as part of the *HouseMADE* residency in 2016 directly referenced this.[4] In an upstairs room in a derelict house, I did some explorative work with my children and then used a light source to project their shadows onto the walls, some distorted and sliding from the walls to the floor. I traced the outlines of their shadows directly onto the walls of the space. The piece was trying to inscribe, to hold onto something that was sliding away from my grasp – my children and their childhood fading into the walls, fading into the homespace of memory.

ZG: Yes, walls hold the journeys of many lives within them and your piece revealed the traces of that. In the *HouseMADE* project, we were very much dealing with those ideas in parallel. As the curator, I had invited all the participating artists to respond to the idea of "House" and "Home". My own artworks in that show were formed through a process of mapping my childhood home into the site of the house we were working in. I projected my own childhood fears onto the space by placing commands at strategic points in the house via text or sound, which the audience were prompted to obey; the sentence "you must fall into step or something bad will happen" was cut out of the carpet on the stairs. These dialogues with the space mirrored the internal conversations, fears, and compulsive behaviour I developed as a child, which I attempted to assuage via a repeated set of actions. Karen McKinnon links the work I made for the "Household Name" exhibition elegantly back to our *Breastcups* piece:

> For Zoë Gingell, the household building is a container of its past inhabitants – memories and secrets start to appear, to seep through in the form of text… In Gingell's previous works, for example the Mothersuckers Project, the maternal body is explored as a physical, emotional and psychological container. Now, the container is the house itself.
>
> (McKinnon 2021)

ED: I felt my performance, which I did throughout the opening event, resonated with your stair piece. An exploration of the house from the front door to the attic, my piece was also like a childhood game; I gave myself the instruction that I would find ways to travel and explore without touching the ground.

ZG: In 2018, I was invited by the curator, the artist Zena Blackwell, to explore transposing the stairs text piece to a gallery setting as part of the "Household Name" exhibition, which was eventually shown in the Elyssium Gallery in Swansea, UK. I presented the work *You Must Fall into Step* as a lightbox piece and attempted to retain the idea of the house as the conveyor of interior psychological dialogues, despite the new context (Figure 3.2).

Moving on from childhood to thinking about the point we are at in our lives now, and looking ahead as our children move out of childhood, this feels like a pivotal point; if you swing back 15 years, I was holding a baby, flip forward 15 years… will I still even be alive?

ED: With my Mum, things came full circle with me caring for her at the end of her life. Obviously, she was not a child, but the actual practicalities of the care were the same as those you would help a child with and mirrored the care she showed to me when I was little. It was a gift to be able to care for her but also very draining, and quite overwhelming at times. My children were all still at home so I was caring as a mother for them as well as caring for my own mother. I was in the middle.

ZG: And once a parent dies, you are no longer in the middle.

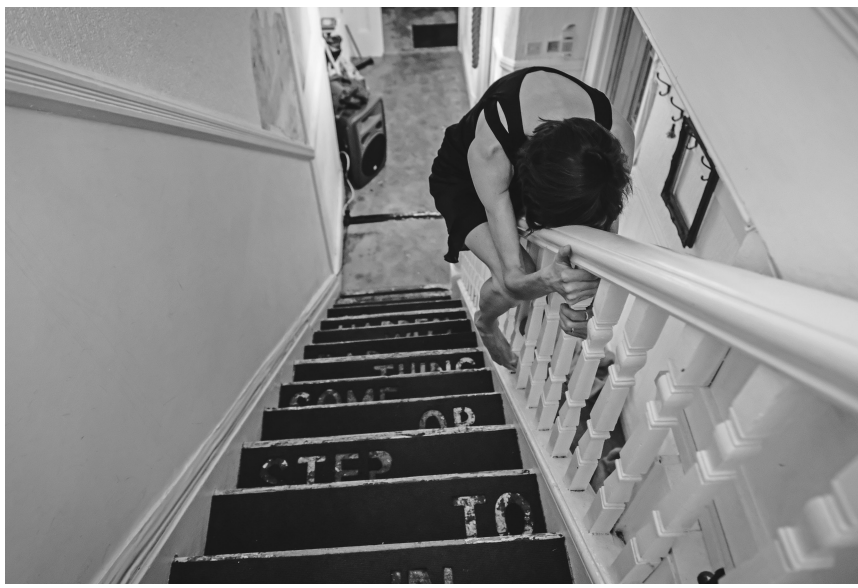

Figure 3.2 *You Must Fall into Step* text intervention by Zoë Gingell and durational performance by Eve Dent, HouseMADE Residency, Brickstock Arts Festival, Cardiff 2016.

Source: Photo by Peter Evans.

ED: Yes, I have been thinking about the nature of that cyclical process. Our mothers die, and then, in theory, we are the next ones to come to death. There is no one ahead of me now.

ZG: And I have also realised that the passage into being and out of being are mirrored. I remember going through the process of labour and the intensity of experience being so heightened. I remember that so vividly. I knew exactly what I needed to do. Everything fused into this intense potency. I remember feeling exactly the same when my dad was dying and the moment of his transition. Something shifted in the molecules as he passed. It was incredible.

ED: I felt the incredible privilege of being with my Mum as she was dying, which I guess people might also feel when they are with someone who is giving birth. This moment, whichever way it is going, coming in or coming out, is just incredible.

ZG: Both when I experienced birth and death, the air was tingling. There was an intense expectancy building – waiting for a movement, either into or out of the very air in the room. An atomic shift.

ED: Birth and death have, for me, both involved an intense waiting. I did not want to miss a second of my Mum's dying. I was speaking the other day to a friend who was with her mum at the point of death, and she described how her mother's body seemed like such a shell after she had died.

ZG: Recently, at the funeral of my friend, the formal ceremony had finished and we were all leaving the room. As I was at the door, I just looked back at her casket and I had this sudden need to touch it. I had to say goodbye to the physical. And I remembered my friend who was in that box, describing her own pregnancy to me, saying that she had not been a very good "carrier bag". I felt I needed to honour the carrier bag that had carried her, as well as her children. How you view this shell, this carrier, is important. I find the metaphor of the body as the container of our lives helpful. The artist Erin Holly cites the book of poetry *Calling This Body Home* (2019) by Grace Cohen as the main source of inspiration for a recent series of paintings; she says "The book helped me to look for a trans reading of the body, the body as an archive rather than a dwelling space" (@erinsammiholly, April 30, 2021). In terms of my own maternal identity – viewing my body as an archive makes it easier to accept what I felt as the loss of my body's potential in peri-menopause; now I view it as my body refocusing its job, rather than being finished. Its potency has shifted, its history held through memory, etched into the fabric of my skin.

ED: It is just moving on to the next bit. The body is completely in flux all the time. I was also reflecting on the ageing process and my Mum's stroke experience; the leaking and losing of bodily control. The shell changes around us. In terms of the life of my body, it has had its own

journey – from infancy, through pregnancy, giving birth, to aging. The body has instructions of what to do.

ZG: The body seems to be more than just a perfunctory machine though. On one level you can view the body as a working vehicle, a bio-machine, but through my understanding of both illness and pregnancy, my body seemed to have a consciousness of its own, one that was out of my control.

ED: Yes, there is a bodily timeline; the external body changes through the aging process and yet that sense of myself feels relatively unchanging. There is an interplay between my body, my bodily experience as a woman, and my sense of self.

ZG: I am thinking a lot about the position of my life beyond the children being children, and about living in the family home with empty rooms again. I am worried that I am just going to be left with all this stuff, and become "the keeper of stuff". It weighs me down. It again reminds me of the body being a kind of archive, and that my house contains the matter of my life, like a body.

ED: When I am up in the attic starting to sort through my Mum's possessions, I come across pictures I drew and toys my Mum kept from my childhood, things that she wanted to hold onto and I think about the stuff from my kids that I am keeping; things that the children have made, and maybe what their children would enjoy. In a sense, we are the curators of what is going to be passed on, what is going to be kept and what is not. Leaving our old house, my daughter told me that this home would always be the keeper of her childhood as it housed her earliest years.

ZG: I now live just across the road from the house where I grew up and where my father died. I walked past it nearly every day when I was taking the kids to school. A new family lives in it now, which I found really hard for a while as, emotionally, I wanted to hold on to that house. My dad built a path around a bay tree that he planted, and I used to make sure the gate was shut every day as I passed so that dogs did not wander in. I still do these little actions, these rituals. They have let the bay tree grow out of the ball shape that my dad carefully nurtured, and I have really got the urge to go in and just trim it, and make quiet little acts of caretaking. I made the piece *Walls* as a way of acknowledging the loss of my father, and coming to terms with that.[5] Using a combination of found recordings – my father interviewing my grandmother from fifty years earlier, the sound of the wind at my grandfather's grave – alongside footage taken walking the length of the wall of the country estate where my ancestors worked, I created a 360-degree vortex of projections of an endlessly moving wall. In the middle of this I suspended a double-helix arrangement of lace bricks containing speakers, each brick was allocated a specific phrase that I had selected from the tapes of my father and

grandmother's voices, as well as recordings of banal soundscapes taken from my house, like the electric hum of the fridge. Each brick was then activated to "speak" by a sensor triggered as the viewer walked around the gallery space. In grief, I was struck by the fact that walls stand longer than people. As the containers of people's lives, could they be the narrators of the lives lived there, as imprinted into the very fabric of the space?

ED: When we left our old house, I wanted to do something in each of the rooms. The kids did some things, rituals or little videos. There was one of the children dancing hysterically in one of the bedrooms. I made a piece in the kitchen. I got an ultraviolet pen and on one of the tiles on the kitchen floor I wrote my son's name, and that he was born there and the date, like you get those blue plaques on buildings. No one will see it but it is there. These are important markers for saying goodbye to places and thanking them for how they have held us and held the family. Clearing out and selling my mum's flat was quite a severing. It was tough because she went into hospital after her stroke and never went back to that home. She did not want to go back even if she could have, she said it would be too painful to see an old life that she could not return to. I was sorting out the flat whilst she was in hospital; there was no time to linger. I feel very sad that there was not more time to thank that home for holding my childhood and my Mum for so many years, fifty years. There is a sadness that I cannot go back there, because emotionally it is still mine as well as belonging to someone else now, because all my childhood was there.

ZG: Houses hold all these events; banal domestic chores as well as high drama: people being born, leaving, and dying and leaving. Then there is the day-to-day management that happens behind the scenes. When you go down a street you only ever see the outside, the lives that people are prepared to show in public. When you walk through a front door, it is like going behind a theatre flat and seeing all the secrets behind it. That is why I find the domestic space such a creative site for making artwork from and within. Looking back at our children's childhoods provokes an awareness of the process of loss, not shaped by nostalgia, but a real sense of the loss of shared time which provided spaces for me to also dream and play. Past ages are present, marked on the fabric of the house as it is on our bodies. Just as our own children are growing and leaving "home", it is us who are going through the physical process of leaving our bodies as we age. There is a process of shift. Making art within the home or out of the matter of life, allows me to carry on with that process of understanding these changes at an immersive level.

ED: Where we stand at this "mid-point" acts as a unique perspective allowing us to see where we are, where we have been, and where we are going, and to acknowledge and honour the body that has carried us.

Notes

1 *The Mothersuckers Project* is a 10-year-old collaboration between Eve Dent and Zoë Gingell, exploring the relationship between motherhood, parenting and arts practice through conversation, performance, and active response. Creating joint artworks alongside their solo art practices, Dent and Gingell formalised the Mothersuckers' Project as an organised body in 2013 to pursue curatorial ambitions within a broader investigation connected to other artists and groups concerned with voicing the maternal experience, placed within a wider consideration of the parental, and the whole maternal life-cycle.
2 *Breastcups* was a performance installation which developed over four years through its various presentations in the UK and France. Within the piece, the maternal breast became many vessels, with the medium and fluids of milk a connective currency initially between Mother and Baby, then between self and other, performers and audience. *Breastcups* 2009–2013 was presented at Experimentica, Chapter Arts, Cardiff; Milkwood Gallery, Cardiff; Fractured Body, Barbican Art Gallery, London; Wunderland, Tactile Bosch Gallery, Cardiff; Café des Halles, France; Metre Cube Gallery, Montignac, France; CORPSfertileBODY, France.
3 *No Doormat* was part of a series of works Gingell made for the Household Name exhibition, curated by Zena Blackwell and shown at Elysium Gallery, Swansea in 2021. It was part of a group show of seven women artists: Adele Vye, Zena Blackwell, Raji Salan, Fern Thomas, Laura Ford, Cherry Pickles, and Zoë Gingell.
4 HouseMADE was a site-specific project by twelve artists invited to respond to the idea of House/Home in a derelict Victorian house in Cardiff in 2016. Commissioned by Fizzi Events, produced and curated by Zoë Gingell for Cardiff MADE, directed by Oliver Lamford and funded by the Arts Council of Wales. It included a day long "House Viewing" public event as part of the Brickstock Festival with durational performances and sited works by Eve Dent, Zoë Gingell, Good Cop Bad Cop, June Campbell-Davies, Jodi Nicolson, 1800hrs, Lauren Heckler, Rachel Helena Walsh, and Simon Gore.
5 *Walls* was begun in 2013 by Zoë Gingell as part of her Creative Wales Award funded by the Arts Council of Wales, and culminated in an installation of the work in progress at Cardiff MADE gallery in 2017.

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4 *Siôl Fagu*

A consideration in four stories

Christine Watkins

Preliminary instructions

A *siôl fagu* is a shawl for carrying a baby or child towards the front of the body leaving one arm free. In this way, the child may be fed, lulled, walked with, spoken to, or more or less ignored for long periods of time while the wearer continues with all their upright activities. This is known as "Welsh nursing" partly because of the connection with the Welsh woollen flannel industry. The traditional Welsh nursing shawl is square, fringed on all sides, and 6ft by 6ft including fringes.

Fold the shawl in half, making a triangle. Wrap this around your shoulders.

Used by mother and child and generally passed from mother to daughter, the *siôl fagu* was often also used by grandmother and child, sometimes by grandfather and child, by other kith and kin, and perhaps further beyond that circle in times of need.

Place the baby high on your body and off-centre. Wrap the corner of the shawl around the baby, bringing the baby back in towards you.

Magu in Welsh means to nurse, to nourish, and also to bring up, to raise. As such it is suggestive of various stages of nurturing.

Take the other side of the shawl, drop it under your arm, keeping it taut. Bring the point of the shawl across the baby.

Every country and culture has its own variety of the *siôl fagu* – they always did. Almost always. Before the flint knap, stone axe or fire stick was the baby sling, pelt or plant fibre woven, remade, and decaying again and again.

Tuck the point of the triangle around the baby.

Two million years carry-wrapped between hip and belly have given child and mother plenty of time to pass on some useful instructions and exchange some pithy remarks. Funny stories begun a hundred or more generations ago whisper a punchline into the ear of a small child making them chuckle in their sleep. Tuning into these exchanges, this exploration of the *siôl fagu* picks up on storylines that speak of our vital connections, our bodily interconnectedness across generations, our groundedness on the earth, and our imaginative ability to take flight.

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The weight of the baby pulling down on the fabric holds it together – no tying, no knotting. Your one hand remains in close connection to perform intimate magic, the other continues external and active in the world.

The *siôl fagu*, passed on through the generations with only the briefest of respites in the blanket box, in time becomes worn and most likely cut down into small cot blankets or short lengths for patching. The weave of the maternal line is reconfigured again and again (Figure 4.1).

When the time comes to speak up

I made three of the following performance stories (*Put a Song in my Breast*, *Lullaby in Pieces,* and *Sip-Sisters, Dearly Beloved*) in 2018–2019 in the nine-month period between the death of my mother and the birth of my first grandchild. During this time, one of my tasks was to "sort" the old family home, ready to be sold. Amongst the many things that needed sorting were a drawerful of old shawls and blankets, including the family nursing shawl; over a hundred years old and turned end to middle to prolong its life (cut and shut, shortening one side and leaving it slightly off-square), it was last seen in action around 1963, worn by my grandmother and my baby brother. These pieces, together with *The Girl who Leapt from the Shawl* (devised in early 2020), are fragments of a larger whole though I have not yet attempted to piece them together into one performance and for now, they function separately. They are intended for spoken voice primarily (recorded or live performance), and also as written text.

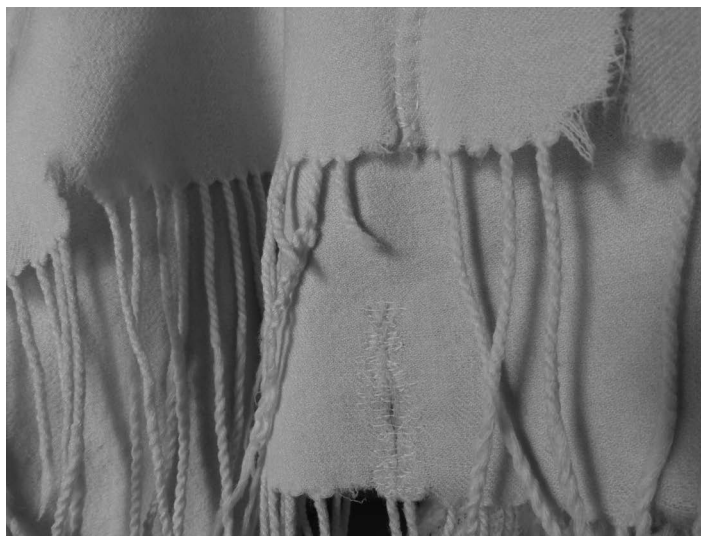

Figure 4.1 The author's family *siôl fagu*, courtesy of the artist, 2021.

Source: Photo by Christine Watkins.

Story 1 *Put a song in my breast*

There was a little old woman and she was standing in the middle of a small concrete yard between her house and her daughter's house. It was morning but she had been there all night. Around her body, a shawl with long fringes was wrapped and from within the shawl there came the almost uninterrupted sound of grizzling. The old woman made very little response to this grizzling. She shifted her weight from one foot to another every now and then and moved her body very slightly, but you wouldn't have called it rocking. Once or twice, she sighed and muttered something almost tuneful, but you wouldn't have called it a lullaby.

Hours passed and, as the morning wore on, still the old woman stood looking towards her daughter's house, but made no effort to continue on across the yard. The sound of grizzling continued to emanate from the shawl. The old woman gritted her teeth and said: "Dyro gân yn fy mron, O Dduw y deisyfwn i."[1]

Eventually, when the morning had ebbed away, she went and stood beneath the only tree that had persevered and reached maturity in the concrete yard; it was a pear tree. And there they were, the old woman and the grizzling child. And the afternoon wore on.

Now the pear tree, though it had never played host to a partridge, was the occasional favoured haunt of an owl. And as evening shadows crept across the sky that owl flew in on silent wings and settled in the branches of the tree and fixed its gaze on the garden path, on the place where the mice crossed. The owl made frequent lethal swoops over the path, pouncing on a mouse and bringing it back to the branch and sat there for a while, digesting. Now and then the owl hooted mournfully and each time it did so the grizzling coming from the shawl stopped for a moment and a listening silence seemed to take its place. And every time the grizzling started up again, it was a little quieter. And so it continued all through the night hours – the grizzling, the mournful hooting, and the listening silence.

Throughout all this, the old woman stood unflinching. Tree roots bumped up under the soles of her feet; earthworms threaded themselves between the laces of her boots and around her ankles. Leaves and moths found their way into the folds of the shawl and itched and tickled.

As the second morning dawned, the owl flew off to its day-roost in the woods having out-mourned the child. The only sound now coming from the shawl was the gentlest little snoring. The little old woman sighed with relief and crossed the yard to her daughter's house to see if there was any breakfast going. The die was cast, she thought. The child was melancholic, but it was a keeper.

Story 2 *Lullaby in pieces*

I cannot repeat and can only repeat the tale whispered into my tiny ear as I was held close.

My mother I must tell you was not one for lullabies. Si hei lwli 'mabi[2] *was unknown in our house and* Golden Slumbers[3] *did not fill my eyes nor my ears. When sleep was overdue, Mam sang in snatches and then only when all other forms of recourse had failed. The words of the snatches were strange and the tone brisk, like a lullaby with*

most of its lulling qualities removed. For the most part, they were a heady mixture of unassorted semi-improvised lyrics sung to the tune of the popular revolutionary anthem, The Red Flag.

The people's flag is deepest red
It shrouded oft our martyred dead.
My back's in two and Samuel Jones
Has apricots instead of stones …

And all the while the deep tattoo she patted on my little body grew heavier and more insistent. Her fingers traced swirls, meanders, and zigzags from four thousand years BC through the layers of flannel that bonded me to her. Some of the patterns she just did once, quite fast; I had one chance to memorize them. Was it best to go to sleep or not? I would need this code to decipher all future communications. This was ogham and pictogram, it was linear A and B. This was the sole moment of transmission, and I would probably never find a Rosetta stone.

Listen then. Listen, don't go to sleep – and if you can't hold out then listen in your dreams and see if you can catch the stray echoes of landscapes shifting, suns rising, hills tumbling, joy, hope, and many glories, both dreadful and delightful.

The upshot of my time in the siôl fagu *is that I've learned a story in pieces. And also, whenever I hear* The Red Flag *sung now, I am strangely alert and yet my eyelids grow heavy.*

It waved above our infant might
When all ahead seemed dark as night
Don't sit under the apple tree
With anybody else but me.

Story 3 *Sip-sisters, dearly beloved*[4]

The death of my mother and the birth of my first grandchild, my daughter's daughter, eight months later, are something of a blur. When I left the family house, I took what was left of the old shawl. I took a crêpe bandage and an old safety pin from the bathroom cabinet. I took a broad shallow teacup with its flower-patterned saucer. I took a drawer from the chest of drawers where the blankets were to put the baby in. I took an old thermos flask, with a glass bottle for milk in the top. I thought, "well it was a lifetime or so but now I have captured the essentials".

… When it was time

I placed the cup over one bare breast and the saucer over another, cold china flower patterns, and bound them to me with the crepe bandage. The thermos proved rusty and of little use, but I filled the little bottle to the brim with damson gin.

I went to the circle of women, who were waiting patiently under an old beech tree.

"Witness", I said.

I unbound my breasts and passed the cup and saucer neatly round, from sip-lip to sip-lip it went and came back empty.

I must have spoken a word or two about death, and things that break, about stories our people tell and things we know ourselves, because the women sighed and nodded, but I can scarcely recall.

Only the lightness and the gap where the bandage had held; only the shawl folded in the drawer. And my daughter preparing to birth her own daughter, any time now.

Story 4 *The girl who leapt from the shawl*

There was once a child, little more than a baby and still swaddled in a shawl on her mother's hip, and she was as beautiful as pear blossom and as sweet-smelling as black-currants. One afternoon in the garden, she was woken by the sound of her mother's voice whispering urgently into her ear "Now, child, now, you must leave at once!"

Scarcely understanding, yet recognizing the strange tone in her mother's voice, the child kicked her small foot and as she did so the shawl that had been wrapped around her and her mother fell loose and dropped to the ground, where it lay like the coils of a snakeskin.

The child clung to her mother's body in fright, dug her fingers in and wrapped her legs around her, welding herself to safety. But even as she did so, the fabric of her mother's flimsy summer dress ripped apart and slipped away … and the flesh itself fell away too, so that the child found her fingers grasping the bones of her mother's ribcage. For fear of falling to the ground herself the child began to climb, using her mother's ribs as the rungs of a ladder and, in a few moments, she had clambered up onto her mother's shoulders. But she had only just begun to find her feet on solid ground and up there high on her mother's clavicle bones it was so hard to balance! Instinctively, she reached out for her mother's hand to steady her. But alas! Her mother's right hand was busy picking sweetpeas and her left hand was busy making the sign to ward off the evil eye.

"Oh Mother, grow more arms, or I will fall!" wailed the child.

Then the urgent whisper came floating up again, as if from far below:

"Child, you must leave at once … at once!"

And the child teetered and swayed and desperate to steady herself she reached out and clutched wildly at the empty air. Luckily, at that very moment, a fragrant breeze came swirling around the garden and it lifted strands of her mother's hair so that the child was able to catch hold of the fluttering locks and use them as steadying reins. And to tell the truth, her mother had been growing her hair for this very purpose.

The child looked out across the garden, across the fields, across the mountains. Resting in the cocoon of her shawl, she had not dreamed of such a view. And when she looked down – oh, don't look down, don't look down! She steadied herself, her arms stretched wide and her toes tightening like claws on her mother's shoulders.

She did not look down.

The feeling in the soles of her feet told her that if it was anywhere, the solid ground was ten thousand bodies below her. Indeed, beneath her, she could feel a wobbling wave travelling slowly upwards, through ten thousand pairs of shoulders and ten thousand sets of tightening toes all the way up to her there on the very top like a bird perched on the thinnest, highest branch of a tree.

She wanted to retreat from this dizzying viewpoint, but she could not and so she stood, wavering, teetering, balancing. If anyone had passed that way and looked up they might have thought they were seeing a chick in the nest of the oldest eagle on top of its pillar of stone, fledged and pecking at the stars till they burned bright in its belly. They might have seen the chick hesitate, hop, and glide from the nest on wide wings. Or perhaps they might have seen a small child leap into the air, the last twist of an old shawl falling from her ankles …

The little girl never heard her mother's voice again. In time she learned how to code instructions for flight into milk proteins and teardrops, how to thread them into a lullaby and weave them into a shawl, and how to trace them faintly on skin. In time, perhaps she felt small feet resting and toes tightening, shifting position on her own shoulders. And back in the garden, inhaling the scent of roses deep and voluptuous, the mother and ten thousand grandmothers walked, each one remembering for a moment how they had sailed off into the air, and returned to their rightful place in the teetering tower and the folds of a shawl, like starlings returning from a murmuration to their roost.

Further reflections

A developing female in the womb already holds all her eggs within her foetal body, and so the grandmother's womb nests daughter and embryonic grandchild, like *matryoshka* dolls. A process of feto-maternal microchimerism allows the passage of cells from a developing foetus back into the mother's heart, brain, and other organs, where they integrate into the tissue and dwell for decades or more. The *siôl fagu* might be seen as the first external enveloping garment of motherline; acting as a bridge between the intimacy of these inward connective processes which stretch memory backwards and forwards on a cellular level and the journeys that must now lie beyond. This first tender and robust sheath outside the body, this intimate carry-wrapping, allows the duo to move out into the world and participate in it. The resonances of this beckon to storytellers and story lovers. A weave of memories passes onwards, outwards, following lines of connection between personal narrative (including narratives of the body), the realm of myth, and the everyday world.

The stories that pass between a wearer of the *siôl fagu* and the child that is carried in that shawl happen in an intimate enclosed arena. They are close stories for the baby's ear and for the mother's tongue. The child lies intimately next to the body, across the shawl wearer's beating heart. From amongst the sounds and smells and undulations of the large and small body, all sorts of complexities may flow into our world of story. The breast that we lie against might be an angry one, a stony one, a joyful or inspired one; the heart whose beat we hear might be a resentful heart, a glad heart, a broken heart. But in this place, full and weighty with words and the wordless, we piece together our unique stories. They are formed from

enquiries such as "What is it that I need to know? Where do I belong? How shall I survive or prosper"?

The knowledge (our primary maternal gift) which is coded into us and which we in turn code into our ongoing story arrives in a strange language to speak and to hear. The transmission of vital knowledge moves through pulse, heartbeat, breastmilk, armpit smells, lullabies, soothe-songs, and suck-songs. The Welsh term *bratiaith* is commonly used derisively to mean slang, jargon, or a lesser or broken language. Yet one of its sources lies in the word *brat*, meaning *apron*. It is Aprontongue, one of the disregarded languages of the maternal, and before Aprontongue comes Shawltongue.

As the journeying continues in Shawltongue and Aprontongue, our vital vocabularies are set in motion – the roots of languages that speak of our individuality and bind us to our human line and our earth. All are aspects of mothertongue, the multicoloured common and particular tongue custom-made for the conceiving and performance of a story and of our lives.

Notes

1 tr. "Put a song in my breast, O God I beseech thee". A reconstructed fragment of a biblical quotation uttered in my family and somewhat altered in the handing-down.
2 tr. "Lullay, my baby". "Si hei lwli 'mabi" is a traditional Welsh lullaby.
3 Popular cradle song first published in the play *Patient Grissel* by Thomas Dekker, Henry Chettle, and William Haughton in 1603, with a version recorded by Lennon-McCartney for the album Abbey Road in 1969.
4 *Sip Sisters, Dearly Beloved* was a celebratory act of remembrance, performed as a participatory ritual during a Women's Gathering event at Lower Merripit Farm in Devon in 2019. It was part-devised beforehand, improvised and influenced by the ritual process as it proceeded, and revised to the recounted form above for the page.

5 Mom, Me, and the Maternal at Work

Roiyah Saltus with Solange Saltus

Introduction

Mom (Solange Saltus): Although my daughter Roiyah has invited me to take part in her studies for the last decade in increasingly more evident and visible ways, I have never really questioned my involvement. I have taken her offers as a challenge and a novel thing to do. She is more reflective and searching than me of my hinterworld, and so in preparing this chapter, I have indulged her questions and points of reflection in terms of my mothering and my involvement in her work. I can only do as I have always done and share as best as I can.

Daughter (Roiyah Saltus): My work in terms of performance is once-removed. Once-removed is my very careful way of saying that although my research is rooted in the everyday rituals and practices of people and communities, and although the research outputs are increasingly creative, they remain crafted, captured, or performed by others. I work with dancers, actors, singers, visual artists, and storytellers who – in varying ways, and at times in no way – take my text-riddled findings and make something anew. I also work with my mom, Solange Saltus. Although our bodies were severed from each other over half a century ago, the umbilical connection remains a potent life-force. In this chapter, I am seeking to understand the power of a not entirely resolved and settled connection with my mother that has been such a source of refuge and inspiration during a pivotal period in my academic life. I am seeking to understand why I once hid our connection from colleagues, but not anymore. Thus, the chapter will focus on the maternal *in* and *at* work. I will locate in particular the interweaving of my academic biography as linked to my mother in two studies conducted over the last decade, and the role my mother played as researcher and research participant.

Interwoven into this will be the use and role of digital storytelling (DST), and the stories we produced. Rooted in a first-person reflective account, digital stories contain a voice-over, visual images and sections of text which position this methodology as multimodal (Kim 2016, 221). Since its inception three decades ago, this methodology has increasingly drawn on new digital tools and different ways of storytelling, with the traditional DST format – 2 to 3-minute personal narrative interwoven around text, music, or other audio

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output, and images – evolving in keeping with the ever-increasing diversity in storytelling and ongoing transformation of digital tools (Clarke and Adam 2012, 159; Davis 2011, 528; Austen et al 2018, 27). I will draw on (i) my mom's two digital stories that emerged from the studies, the text of which she carefully crafted (ii) her written reflections and ongoing musing of being involved in the studies and (iii) my text of the digital story that I created (and my 13-year-old son produced) as part of developing this chapter story. My aim is to reveal the changing practice and presence of mothering from mother to daughter, and from the domestic sphere to professional life.

The chapter starts with a brief overview of the two studies – both of which incorporated digital story methodology. Framed by excerpts from our digital stories, the remaining chapter is divided into sections that explore the importance of biography and positionality, notions of mothering and their lasting impact, and the value and insights into the unsayable that emerged from Mom's story. The last section will discuss how working with my mother has shaped intimately both my academic and personal biography. Steered by my mom's comments on drafts of this chapter that became part of our regular video calls, I am writing this chapter from my voice for the majority of the time ("I", "My", and "daughter"), and from my mother's voice ("Mom" and infrequently her pet name "Mommy"), with excerpts from the digital stories described as "Mom's story" and "Daughter's story".

Setting the research context

There is an assumption of expertise in policy (including health and social policy) which often excludes what is variously called lay, community, street, public, citizen, or experiential knowledge. Whilst acknowledging the danger of over-privileging unaccredited or marginalised forms of knowledge, there needs to be spaces for contestation where privileged expertise or dominant narratives are challenged, and where other methods of knowledge creation and generation can be tested. The two studies in which my professional labour with my mother took shape and our relationship as mother and daughter significantly shifted were rooted in the crafting of such spaces of contestation.

The two studies are also linked to the need to explore new modalities and practices that are located beyond the confines of text and within a co-production ethos (Beebeejaun et al 2014, 41). Once dominated by quantitative approaches, over the decades qualitative academic research on health inequalities and lay knowledge has gone some way to provide insight into the relationship between micro-processes and social structures drawing on observation (by the researcher) and text-based articulations of experience and interpretation. Increasingly the arts provide a means of going beyond what is available in everyday textual language (Byrne et al 2018, i25). Art-based methods often provide non-linear ways for others to see what cannot be understood through language alone and also for people to see the mundane differently, to make the familiar strange. In both studies, that I discuss within this chapter, the arts

were positioned as a portal to another understanding of the weight of meaning behind everyday experiences (good and bad, euphoric, and desolate) in ways that allow the researcher and research participant to access, capture and reveal things, feelings and experiences that ordinarily seem unsayable or unreachable.

"In Their Own Words" (2011–2013) was a Wales-wide mixed methods study funded by the Welsh Government. The aim of the study was to capture understandings, experiences, and expectations of dignity in social care encounters, with a focus on older women from Black Caribbean, Chinese, Bangladeshi, and Indian backgrounds. Research evidence indicates the need for studies that explore the salience of dignity from older people's perspectives, and that capture what care with dignity means to them (Saltus and Folkes 2013, 27). Thus, the study aimed to situate their views on the notion of dignity, and the expected social care and support requirements of community-based older women from Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, within the wider context of their life course experiences and social identities.

What the study revealed is that how care is understood, and what care expectations a person may have, are mediated through a complex set of personal, interpersonal, intercultural, and pragmatic factors as well as through wider social factors, including the intersecting impact of ageism, racism, and material wealth (Saltus and Folkes 2013, 41). Moreover, when seeking to understand and explain the attitudes and beliefs of older women from BME backgrounds regarding dignity in care and old age, significant events and changes that have taken place throughout their lives cannot be separated from the multiple identities and social roles women hold. The impact of migration, the varying role played by family and community in understanding articulations of dignity, and the fact that how dignity is experienced, preserved, or diminished has a structural – as well as an interpersonal – dimension, both of which are constructed by the act of recognition, were all identified as key findings.

"Representing Communities" (2013–2017) was an AHRC-funded UK study. The aim of the study was to critically evaluate the processes of co-production in participatory arts-based research methodologies and practices in health and well-being research and – with a focus on five local neighbourhoods across the United Kingdom – to critically assess the ways in which communities, with researchers and artists, create dialogical spaces that allow for the production of new knowledge. All those leading the five embedded case studies were keen to also explore how best to re/present the creative outputs and practices shared and developed with community groups and organisations as forms of knowledge, and thus as crucial to policymakers and in the transformation of places. As well as being recognised as most often being represented through largely negative official discourse, each case study embodied different expressions of the relationship between mobility and emplacement that have changed over time with varying impacts on people's sense of attachment and belonging on the one hand, and experiences of disruption, loss, and grief on the other. Some of the case studies involved classical, "diasporic" communities, and others focussed on places that would

once have been considered fully integrated into society but are now marginalised by large-scale changes in economic life.

The old historic neighbourhood in which my case study was based is a neighbourhood in Butetown. Known more commonly as "Tiger Bay and the Docks" to locals, this area is one of the oldest multicultural communities in Europe. An understanding of this part of Butetown calls for a recognition of the entanglement and entrenchment of multiple migration stories, settlement narratives, and attachments. This is a neighbourhood where, in the "throwntogetherness" (Massey 2005, 111) of space, people have, for generations, lived and intermingled, married and co-habited, interacting and negotiating on an everyday basis cultural, ethnic, and religious differences, and urban multi-culture. Our route to testing methods in which to capture local knowledge and representations of place was via an exploration of urban leisure spaces and activities people had established and maintained for themselves that most often took place in third places (Yuen and Johnson 2017), that is public spaces marked by informality, regularity, and close sociality. We referred to our short intensive immersion into these spaces as "encounters". One driving question that framed these series of emplaced encounters was: What can collective leisure in third spaces, and arts-based activities tell us about place and place-making? As time when on, this extended to questions linked to manifestations of belonging rooted in such place-making activities.

Both studies made use of qualitative data collection methods (i.e., narrative reviews, interviews, and focus groups). Importantly, creative, participatory and arts-based methods were also used,[1] with both studies producing digital stories. In the first study, my mom was not interviewed but in developing the digital story work, I asked her to share her story. She was my "dry run". This was something that evolved from an off-the-cuff remark made during our weekly telephone catch-up call into a meaningful exercise for her, an opportunity to immerse myself in the digital story process, and, for both of us, an unexpected way of interacting, sharing, and working together. At the start of the second study, I asked Mom if she would produce a second story rooted in her experience of developing her first digital story. Her story and her experiences of developing her story were shared in a workshop I hosted with my research team. Then, in another weekly catch-up call, I asked if she wanted to conduct a thematic narrative review of four novels that tell the stories of the lives of older Caribbean migrants who settled, lived, aged, and died in the UK.[2] I recall telling her she would be my volunteer. She agreed, and as part of the process of conducting the review she shared the following written response about this particular request:

> For as long as I can remember a part of me has lived an imagined life which has been informed by books. I wanted to study literature at university but for my family science was the only area worthy of study. That imagined world dimmed as LIFE took over. It was never extinguished! It began to brighten as I read books by African American and African women authors. Thus, when Roiyah asked me (in a fashion only she

has mastered) to be in her research, I eagerly agreed. What I didn't fully comprehend at the time was that she had offered me the opportunity to continue to round my circle of life. She was drawing me back to that imagined life. At this stage in my life that is a gift beyond measure.

Mom worked with me as a member of my team for the next two years – not attending meetings but providing updates and eventually co-writing a draft with another member of the team. Having first introduced her as "my older research volunteer", I told the team she was my mom only after the first year. I told them awkwardly and reluctantly, fearful of their response to what is still an uncommon coupling within academia. It would be some years before I would be able to recognise and articulate meaningfully and without apology my mom's contribution to my academic life as an active participant and collaborator.

Fast forward five years when the opportunity arose to reflect critically on the overall impact Mom had, not only on the two studies, but also on my mid-career transitions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this work is rooted in a digital story. My digital story is a response to her first story. I start my digital story just as she started hers, and in retaining the images of her story, her format and structure and word style, my intention was to have her/her story imprinted in mine. Both stories share the same title: "It's what I want". In the next section, I will draw on excerpts from both stories, along with other written musings captured and conversations over the phone when preparing this chapter to explore the manifestation of mothering more fully *in* and *at* work and its impact.

From where we stand: Positionality and the ties that bind

Mom's story: The Bermuda I grew up in was segregated according to race – the schools, pews in churches, seats in theatres, wards in the hospital, restaurants, jobs everything … every aspect of life. So, in the marginalised community in which I grew up I was taught the importance of respect for self and others, the importance of trying to find out who I was, and, crucially, the importance of making my way in the world … Funnily enough, many of the limitations racism placed upon me as a young person have parallels to the limitations placed upon me as a senior, by ageism. Fortunately, I know now how to respond to attitudes like that and don't let them hinder my making my way in the world.

Daughter's story: The Bermuda I grew up in was desegregated yet fractured by race, class, and colour. So, in the marginalised community in which I grew up I was taught the importance of respect for self and others, the importance of trying to find out who I was and crucially, the importance of making my way in the world. Looking back, I can say that this was taught from the womb. Self-determination, self-love, and self-pride were tattooed on my inner landscape by my mother with a single-mindedness and fierceness of a woman determined to raise her children to do well in the world despite the odds.

Aware of the continuing asymmetrical sex/gender dynamic underpinning dominant notions of western motherhood, my starting point embraces

the notion of mothering as the ever-shifting and varied roles, experiences, attachments, and competencies of child-rearing and caring by people sexed as female at birth, not excluding those who mother children not born to them. The way we form attachments, show affection, and seek to nurture children as part and parcel of a mothering role depends on a host of factors, not least the social context in which such mothering interactions and relationship-making takes place (O'Reilly 2014a). As such, the maternal role is firmly rooted in the social, political, and historical context and the underpinning norms, values, and expectations in which it occurs: Women who mother – as all people – respond to their given circumstances in various ways.

Writing about perceptions of closeness and intimacy in the Jamaican context for example, in their work on notions of mothering and closeness in Jamaican households, Burke et al (2017, 4) argue that any understanding of mother-child relationships must take on board the legacy and continued impact of a complex set of socio-economic, demographic, cultural, and religious influences that are a result of the island's history of slavery, colonialism, and post-independence development and transformation. It is within such a context that this chapter is rooted, with its focus on the life and times of my mother who was born in the (still) British colony of Bermuda, where she has lived for the last 86 years. Furthermore, as a full-time academic who is also a 56-year-old daughter, and single mother of one, living in Wales, the focus is on transnational mothering in mother-daughter relationships in later life.

My mother understood what academics refer to as positionality long before I studied the concept. She was aware from a young age of the ways in which the mixing of enduring social identities such as race, class, and gender shapes and confers – in different social contexts and to varying extents – status configurations that either enable or limit social recognition and the exercise of power. A child of a Black father with a dark complexion who arrived in Bermuda from the Caribbean Island of Dominica decades before, and a Black Bermudian mother with a much lighter complexion, Mom was born with the darkest complexion in her household. She was also, from very young, very smart. This shaped life in many ways. For example, as a child of a migrant, she and her family both belonged and did not belong to Black Bermudian society. As a young girl, it was her intellect that secured her a scholarship to a school that would lay the foundation for her career as an educationalist. This was both an opportunity freely gifted to her brother by virtue of his gender as well as being a still-restricted pathway for a girl from a middle-class family (she had wanted to be a doctor). Courtship as a young, educated woman was shaped by the often-overt calculations of her economic potential as a college teacher and the equally overt othering of her complexion on an island where colourism remained rife and over-determining. Lastly, as she recalls in a telephone call to me, her career as a vice-president of Bermuda's only college was peppered with incidents where she was mistakenly taken to be the secretary, or in the wrong room, or from the catering department.

From our chats, Mom has sought to steer the specific social, personal, and familial contexts of her life as a child, woman, and full-time (now retired)

educationalist. The same goes for her brand of mothering. The care work of mothering – encased as it is in social contexts and lived experiences – is for many women of colour rooted in a need to foster in their children the capacity to navigate numerous hostile environments where race is one of many intersecting factors. Mom's lessons as my two siblings and I grew up were quiet and largely unspoken, imbibed from watching her responses, going into her workplace, and also from how she interacted with us, her students, her colleagues, and friends and family. Captured many decades later, Mom's digital stories speak about this tellingly, drawing on the role played by a network of family, elders, school teachers, friends, and the Black community who provided buffering support, guidance, and advice – key navigational tools. To understand how she mothers starts from such positionality. Moreover, although separated by half a century and the distance between Wales and Bermuda, the particular set of circumstances which shaped her life as a woman and a mother have also shaped mine. In this, her narrative is my narrative. Her story is imprinted in mine.

Mothering love: Ambivalent tactics, un/resolved tensions

Mom's story: When I'm in Bermuda I get reminders from other people … friends, people whom I may have worked with or whom I taught many, many moons ago … they shout out "Saltus, you're looking good, I want to be like you when I grow up". And I reply "hang in there, your turn is coming". And we reminisce and have a good laugh.

Daughter's story: My mom's brand of mothering was not the easy, sweet kind. She is no Madonna. Not least, because doing maternal came hard to her as she herself would tell you. To this day we joke – seriously joke – that she does not have a maternal bone in her body. Although, softened by the long passage of time, Mommy's caring practices and nurturing intimacies remain aloof, guarded and conditional – of the ambivalent mothering kind.

My mom still gets stopped on the streets of Bermuda by her ex-students and work colleagues. This is a source of great pride for me – a pride coloured by gentle irritation and jealousy. For the outward engagement and care Mom showered on the thousands of young people she taught and later, counselled and offered guidance to in high school, as well to those promising members of staff she took under her wing as a college vice-president, did not translate to the same extent within our home. Having described herself on many occasions as not having a maternal bone in her body, perhaps unsurprisingly Mom agreed with the term "ambivalent" when I cautiously introduced it to her a few months ago when I was drafting the text to go with my digital story.

It has taken decades to articulate an understanding of my mom's mothering as rooted in the conflicting normative role expectations from which her ambivalence to be a mother arises and is mediated, and from which my relationship with my mother has always been framed. Recently, when chatting about early drafts of this chapter, she changed my phrase "ambivalent tendencies" to "ambivalent tactics". Although subtle, the word "tactics"

belies a level of intent to mothering based on a somewhat clear determination of the social, personal, and professional circumstances, the attendant norms and expectations, and their subsequent conflicting impacts on her life. Her approach to mothering remains as much a response to her ascribed circumstances as it is an ongoing contestation and re-positioning. Also, key to unpicking and seeking to capture Mom's brand of mothering is understanding family relationships as diverse, fluid, and unresolved. This understanding allowed for a shift from dualistic notions of ambivalence. The messiness and contradiction of inter-generational relationships such as those of mother-daughter (Lüscher and Pillemer 1998, 416) hold both tension and unresolved conflict together with loving intimacies and deep connections – all of which take shape and are transformed across the life course.

Third, as noted above, the maternal imperatives of normative motherhood within the context of an asymmetrical sex/gender dynamic are ones also shaped by an intersecting racialisation. As a Black woman, my mother sits within the reproductive capacities of an othered and subaltern subjectivity. Falling outside of the normative expectations of white western motherhood has led to a focus on the history of slavery and colonialism and the legacy of systemic racism on modern society as linked to the differential treatment of Black women's reproduction and mothering as laid bare for example, in the bodies of work produced by the African American feminist academics bell hooks (2000), Patricia Hill Collins (2002) and maternal studies scholar Andrea O'Reilly (2014a, 2014b). In the United Kingdom, Tracy Reynolds' (2003, 2005) challenge to universal patterns of mothering focuses on Black Caribbean mothers (and those of Caribbean descent). In her work, she draws out the collectivistic nature of mothering, the stigma attached to family models characteristic of some Caribbean households in the United Kingdom, and to the seemingly more authoritarian style of parenting generally and mothering in particular.

Such work is insightful, necessary in terms of progressing our understanding of what it means to be a mother. Such work is also restorative, providing insights into the lived experiences of non-white women, and promoting the value of Black motherhood in the larger public sphere and within Black communities. Lastly, such work has been a much-needed antidote to the largely negative depictions of Black motherhood (or worse yet, its total side-lining and silencing). However, there remain gaps and silences for mothering that falls beyond this frame. For such restorative work has yet to lend itself to spaces in which to explore the lived experiences of Black mothers and their hinterland – and the spaces in which they have forged safe space (the community, the home and within the family, and, for me, the workplace) – that lay outside this particular framing. Of importance, here are notions of mothering that are ambivalent and conflicting. What has become evident is the need to meaningfully explore and to create a space for the "unspeakable" in terms of Black women like my mom and, for that matter, me, and our particular relationships to motherhood.

Shaped by her own upbringing, her life experiences, and her reserved personality, my mom's maternal ambivalence – that is, her desire and distaste for

the normative notions of motherhood as always being emotionally available, nourishing, and self-sacrificing – leant itself to an aloofness and conditionality that has shaped our relationship over the decades. Care was framed by expectation and lessons in responsibility and practical action. We have had periods of great strife and more recently longer periods of harmony and togetherness that sit alongside the unspoken "no go" areas and our triggers and tendencies that rub us in the wrong way. Like my mom and many other family members, I work in education, weaving my own brand of social justice and community resilience. Like I did as a child, my son now stands next to me as I catch up with ex-students and colleagues. I too am now a single mom. I am also navigating ambivalent tendencies. Like Mom, I too continue to work on how best to position and embrace the messiness of motherhood as an embodied performance shaped by contestation and harmony, joy, and displeasure. In all of this is love. Our show of love and intimacy has always been low-key – an emotion and presence to be largely silently assumed. However, like Mom, I have found ways to embed into articulations of mothering ambivalence the love we have for each other as mother and daughter that has unflinchingly bound and sustained us.

As will be explored in the next section, DST provided a way to explore the unsayable for my mom just as it provided a way for us to move our mother-daughter relationship from the private domestic sphere to my everyday working life.

Digital storying: Whisperings of the unsayable

Mom's story: I am by nature a very private person and have therefore shared few of my innermost thoughts with others … however now with age and in retrospect … I am becoming more and more aware that I should add my story to the millions of stories being told by members of my generation. Telling my story was a happy funny experience … and it was also a case of remembering painful occurrences … and the impact of the past.

Daughter's story: Perhaps that's why I didn't know what to do when I saw my mom crying for the first time ever in my life. Mommy crying … I was so shocked! She had been talking about the digital story she had worked on and how she wanted to tell her story, and then she just started crying. I stared and stared … and then reached out and traced my fingers down her arm. Just briefly, just enough, I think. It was a strange, intimate moment when I looked at my mom anew. The moment was made that much stranger because we were not alone or even at home. We were in a seminar room full of members of my research team who taking part in a digital storytelling workshop. Looking back, it was in this moment – stroking my mom's arm to comfort her in front of my new research team – that I stopped worrying about my need for her to be near. To be part of my working life … on that day as I traced my fingers down her arm something gave way.

My pathway to digital stories is rooted in my rising awareness of the need to conduct research that moves beyond text-based interpretation towards the implicit aspects of human life and experience. In trying to get closer, the aim

was to move towards the "unsayable" (Visse et al 2019, 3), or "pre-reflective experiences and sensory-based responses" (Lindhout et al 2020, 2) that shape human life. Such work draws on ways of knowing that are not amenable to numeric calculation, and not fully captured in qualitative(text-based) research approaches but rather lend themselves more readily to methods derived from creative work and arts practice that work to reflect, unearth, or transmit the nuances, unspoken practices and rituals, and affect landscapes that oil and shape people's everyday experiences and perceptions.

Moreover, the participatory practice of DST repositions participants as co-producers of knowledge and the sharing of their selected lived experiences in the development of their digital stories remains as much a research method as it is an act of intervention and of safe space-making for marginalised groups. Although not without limitations (as all methods are), in making central the storyteller's lives the aim is often to position the methods and outputs linked to DST as integral to re/shaping and transforming policy and service delivery, as well as raising awareness of issues of importance to storytelling population groups. There is a social justice ethos underpinning to DST that stretches back decades. Accordingly, the research literature is richly emboldened by the numerous studies exploring the value and role of digital stories that seek to make central and relevant the lives of marginalised groups and subpopulations. Examples include studies addressing learning and education (Robin 2008; Matias and Grosland 2016; Parsons et al 2020) migration and belonging, the health and wellbeing of older people (Hausknecht et al 2019), and those rooted in mothering (Barcelos and Gubrium 2018).

It is the restorative potential of storytelling and its power to be used to convey deeply personal insights and the need to test and pilot this (then) new method that led me to invite Mom to produce her first digital story. It was the need to capture the process involved in DST production that was the impetus for the second story. It was during her public reflection of her story that, quite unexpectantly, the usually unsayable emotions Mom holds close eased out as her voice faltered. As she stated sometime later in her characteristic constrained way, talking about how she developed her story conjured up "very strong emotions". It was the re-telling of her story and her aspirations for her story that opened – albeit briefly – her hinterland. Not every human experience or emotion can be captured in words. The work to produce and share her story moved Mom to tears, providing me with new insights not only into her emotional life, but insights into the power and challenge of arts and creative methods such as DST to provide a layer of nuance, understanding and appreciation, whilst pushing us towards spaces that house the unsayable and unspoken.

Mothering at work

I have always struggled with seeing words once I have written them. The "A", "E", or "S" disappears; the "ing" and "ess" get cut off, and the "may" becomes "might" and "take" becomes "took" as if by some strange magic – lost only

to me. So, with the beady eye and pencil of an ex-college Vice-President, Mom read chapters of my doctoral work and then drafts of my early articles. Although I stopped asking her to proofread work around 2006, the imprint of her early involvement meant my request to her to take part in two studies over the last decade perhaps should not have been that much of a surprise. What has been different in this more recent enmeshment is the level and impact of her more direct and overt involvement in my academic life.

As noted above, Mom played a key role as my academic work shifted towards the arts as a way for me to begin to spotlight and place as important, the evocative and the ineffable. It was during this period that I was most challenged in my academic career. Having spent a decade using qualitative methods, working with creatives, and producing creative outputs such as digital stories, allowed me to access to new ways of data capture and new ways of engaging with research participants. The move towards the arts and performance also unlocked in me the need and courage to embrace affectivity, emotion, and creative expression as key to knowledge generation in new ways. Also, having worked with a wide number of minority and marginalised population groups, the two studies my mom was involved with allowed me, for the first time in my career, to focus and develop work packages that focussed to a significant extent on Caribbean migrants. My work became a matter of the heart, the approach one that allowed for affectivity and new ways of knowing, and lastly, a unique opportunity to work in a different way with my mom, drawing on her expertise, her experience, and her life story, and less on her proof-reading and editing abilities.

Moreover, the overlapping of my academic career and my turn towards arts-based methods came just when I faced a period of subtle micro-aggressive questioning in some quarters as to the utility of the arts in my work and with my choice to work closely with a minority ethnic population group I so closely identified with. Observing the making of her digital story and listening to her reflections on her story in my research workshop reminded me that her story is my story; moreover, her "home teachings" could and needed to become part of my personal as well as academic life. A key step forward for me was embracing my mom and the maternal in and at work.

As I shared in my own digital story:

Daughter's story: My mom joined my work as a breathing, contributing presence seen by others and not part of my … hinterland … my private domestic world when I needed her most. She moved closer as I made a conscious decision to actively lean into my own research passion and to put two fingers up to those who those who thought such research was lazy, obvious, and not pressing and timely. For with her came her home-site teachings. With her I remembered myself. I remembered how she had weathered the storms … I have also learned more about Mommy than possibly any other period, with her [entry into my professional] work being a platform into her hitherto closed private inner world.

Conclusion

Daughter's story: … I am doing what I want to do, having drawn on a woman who continues to claim she does not have a maternal bone in her body as muse, mentor, and mother.

Mom's story: My favourite saying puts all of what I've just said in two sentences: "it's not what you think I ought to want. It's what I think I ought to want".

Notes

1 In "Representing Communities", activities included: (i) production of a feature-length video documentary entitled *Re-presenting African Caribbean Elders in Wales* (https://vimeo.com/116055256); an expansive storify of *Butetown is more than meets the Eye* (https://storify.com/adewis/butetown-more-than-meets-the-eye); five public photographic exhibitions co-designed with local artists and a large performance-based public assembly.

2 Joan Riley's *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987), Thelma Perkins,' *Roundabouts* (2002), Caryl Phillips' *In the Falling Snow* (2010), and Bernardine Evaristro's *Mr Loverman* (2013).

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6 There Are Other Worlds

Maternal knowledge beyond borders

Elena Marchevska

Introduction: imagining new worlds, reassembling narratives

I borrow the title for this paper from Sun Ra's song "There Are Other Worlds (They Have Not Told You Of)" (Ra 1978). The energy undulating from his music drew upon "the interconnectedness of the human, earth, universe, and sounds regardless of diverse and new genres" (Adams 2019). This track was released in 1978, the year I was born, for Sun Ra's album *Lanquidity* (Ra 1978). The song is one of Sun Ra's most haunting space anthems, and easily the most sorrowful. There seems to be a weariness that separates this theme from all the others he composed. Sun Ra's music remained unknown to me until I heard it late one night in a friend's flat in Chicago in 2003, during the monthly meeting we held as a group of disenfranchised students at one of the most expansive art schools in the United States of America. Many of us were from what the West frames as The Global South. These gatherings were for us an embodiment of Frantz Fanon's argument on political solidarity between the Third World masses in the post-war era ([1961]2005). We discussed endlessly issues of representation, and why, at the prestigious institution we all attended (mostly as token students) it was considered passé. But it was the early noughties, and the world basked in excess. The East/West divide was gone, everyone believed we would abolish borders altogether. Gender and race were not considered issues worth discussing any more. But not for us, not for me. Never for us, never for me.

Since 2008, I have been based in the United Kingdom, where I continued my educational journey, yet again as a scholarship student from the fringes of Europe. As I was approaching the end of my degree, Theresa May (UK Home Secretary at the time) declared her aim to create a "Hostile Environment" for migrants (Kirkup and Winnet 2012, 4). Since 2010, migrants in the United Kingdom witnessed countless changes and restrictive measures being placed on almost every migration stream (student visas, work visas, residency permits, etc.). The UK Home Office Hostile Environment policy has since become incorporated into a set of administrative and legislative measures

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designed to make staying in the United Kingdom as difficult as possible for migrants, in the hope that they might voluntarily leave.[1]

The first part of this chapter will elaborate on the complex Hostile Environment phenomenon in the United Kingdom and how it is a contemporary legacy of colonial privilege. I will then talk about how this system has inspired an enormous creative response by artists from migrant backgrounds. It is this creative foil that inspired the chapter. As an artist-researcher-human who mothers, with a complex intergenerational migrant history, I will focus this chapter on migrant knowledge production and art-making as a way to not only understand, but to resist and defy the hostile political climate. I will reflect on the creative practices and intersectional, decolonial methodologies that informed my most recent practice research collaborative project "Finding Home" (2018–2021). I will particularly focus on the work co-created with the artists d'bi.young anitafrika and Mojisola Elufowoju FRSA,[2] who are both mothers. I will discuss two elements that informed our process: time and the creation of migrant-situated knowledge. With this chapter, I am asking: how can we talk about the meaning of maternal care from migrant experience of everyday caring?

In this chapter, I use autotheoretical sketches to capture the complexity of everyday encounters that informed my collaborative creative work. Writing of this kind has been systematically excluded from the wider academic discourse, and has been deemed as too intimate, messy, emotional, fictional, weak, and not rigorous enough. These entries are marked in italics and as reader, you can digest them as stand-alone text or as part of the wider academic context explored in this chapter. I argue that a maternal decolonial autotheoretical approach has the potential to give tools for the future generation of maternal thinkers and artists to recognise their experience and to continue to question the language and power structures of what is considered "knowledge" in academia and culture.

We walk into a room, where an officer needs to take our biometric data. He looks at my younger daughter (born in the UK, but not a citizen) and shifts uncomfortably. We look at each other, he turns around and it seems he wants to leave the room. He turns swiftly back and confirms my daughter's age.

"She is five, right"?

I nod.

"Shall we say, she is too young for fingerprints"?

Based on my experience with Home Office officials, I am hesitant and not sure how to respond to his ambiguous question. He notices my hesitation.

"She is too young for biometric data".

I am glad he makes the decision for us, but also mistrust and years of experience with constantly changing rules, prompt me to ask.

"Are you sure"?

"Yes".

We leave the room after he finishes with my partner, myself, and my older daughter. However, my younger daughter leaves slightly disappointed by being excluded from the odd ritual. We buy her a hot chocolate from the vending machine, while she is watching the loop of a Home Office information video on the screen in the tiny waiting room.

"Am I British now"? my youngest asks. I don't answer.

"There are other worlds they have not told you of, they wish to speak to you". (Ra 1978)

Hostile borders

The UK Home Office Hostile Environment policy refers to a set of government administrative and legislative measures aimed at identifying and reducing the number of immigrants in the United Kingdom with no right to remain.[3] The origin of this wording, as I previously stated, can be traced back to Theresa May's interview with the *Telegraph* in 2012, when she was Home Secretary. These measures were introduced formally by the Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016, with an aim to restrict illegal immigrants renting property in the United Kingdom, driving, having bank accounts, and accessing benefits and free healthcare. According to The Free Movement website, this means that the current UK migration approach "is characterised by a system of citizen-on-citizen immigration checks" (Yeo 2018). As argued by the journalist Daniel Trilling, the border is now extended inwards into the everyday life of migrants. What used to be monitored only at the border crossing, is now becoming everyday monitoring. Trilling also highlights how the Government's aim to control, police, and manage immigration has become more pronounced over the last few decades, due to huge political pressure. This escalated with the Brexit vote in 2016,[4] compounded by pressure from the media and voters, and there were calls for accountability around how many immigrants, and of which sort, were in the country. This prompted the creation of what Trilling calls a "parallel system" for migrants:

> So what you end up having set up is a kind of parallel system just for immigrants, with biometric visas initially, various forms of ID cards for asylum seekers and other kinds of immigrants, people who've been given leave to remain and so on, who are being monitored in a way that the native-born UK citizen population is not.
>
> (Rougho, 2021)

This "parallel system" is deeply ingrained in the experience of many migrant artists in the United Kingdom. As highlighted by a report by Migrants in Culture, based on a UK-wide survey conducted between May and July 2019, 90% of the responders felt angry and/or fearful about the Hostile Environment. The aim of the survey was to collect key information

on the day-to-day experiences of all cultural workers, migrant, and non-migrant, within the parallel immigration system in the cultural sector. The report highlights the impact of the Hostile Environment policy:

> The policy forces landlords, banks, hospitals and employers including universities and cultural institutions to act as proxy border agents in their daily interactions with their patients, tenants, staff and students. The Hostile Environment creates a culture of fear and distrust, and impacts anyone deemed to look "foreign".
>
> (Migrants in Culture 2019b, 4)

The findings of the report are sobering. Since the launch of the Hostile Environment in 2012, both migrants and citizens of colour are experiencing increased discrimination and hardship in the cultural sector. This manifests in overt discrimination and racial profiling, financial pressures, and emotional stress. Also, it demonstrates complacency by the cultural sector, including individuals in senior management, who lack knowledge around the Hostile Environment policy and the specific needs and experiences of migrant cultural workers.

The most distressing aspect of the report is how it considers the impact of the Hostile Environment at the intersection of migration and race. It highlights the links between the current oppressive immigration system and similar systems developed by colonial forces in the past. By trying to depersonalise migrants through data, we see once again the erasure of the experiences of marginalised groups (mostly people of colour and women). This is evident from this testimony section from Migrants in Culture:

> I know that the Hostile Environment Policy causes extreme stress for migrant workers and workers of colour in the cultural sector, as well as creating for those people real conditions of precarity and vulnerability in relation to economic and housing stability, and exposure to racist regimes of monitoring and surveillance. I know, for instance, colleagues and students in the cultural sector who have been detained in detention centres and who are currently at risk of deportation. Additionally, Hostile Environment programmes like Prevent mean that Muslim students in British Higher Education are subjected to standards not applied to their peers: whether this is expressing opinions on politically contentious matters or organising university events. Muslim students have been targeted by Prevent officers at universities in the UK on this basis. All of this has a serious, detrimental impact on those working in the cultural sector and so on the cultural sector itself.
>
> (2019a, 2)

By ignoring the intersectional impact of the Hostile Environment policy, the UK government and public risk falling back to old colonial narratives of

racial superiority. Creating "parallel systems" for migrants and naturalised citizens has a grim dystopian undertone.

Maternal decolonial autotheory

My methodological approach to this chapter, and my collaborative practice research piece "Finding Home", arose from my experiences of working, mothering, and living in the United Kingdom as "non-British". Not being able to identify with dominant modes of thinking, because of my specific postcolonial and post socialist personal history, has been a big part of my migrant journey. I often felt trapped in an existential void, due to my precarious migration status. Many non-Western feminist scholars and artists in Anglo-American academia and cultural sectors also experience this. And though my personal journey might differ from other non-Western feminist scholars and artists, these experiences are all shaped by the same phenomenon, defined by Madina Tlostanova as "coloniality of knowledge" (2016, 214)

There is a need for intersectional methodologies and stories that entangle the maternal and creativity, and for knowledge that escapes Eurocentric definitions and binaries. In maternal studies, there is a need to extend Sara Ruddick's early proposition on maternal thinking as a unity of reflections, judgment and emotion. Her vision of a maternal studies future was of a place/context where "maternal thinkers are respected and self-respecting without making for them/us any claims of moral and political advantages" (Ruddick 1989, 127). However, the field is currently dominated by white, Western scholars and, as observed by Lisa Baraitser and Sigel Spigel, a critical turn in maternal studies is much needed, that will incorporate what Joy James' calls the "captive maternal" (James quoted in Baraitser and Spigel 2020, 1). As argued by Tlostanova et al:

> There is a need for new transversal dialogues that are not only able to locate similarities but also see contextual and historical differences of colonialism and imperialism and understand gender and sexual relations alongside white heteronormativity.
>
> (2016, 223)

Maternal studies as a field needs to nurture dialogues that will carve ways forward, and will encounter intergenerational trauma, colonial damage, and environmental justice. The call for new kinds of dialogues is observed by Andrea O'Reilly, who says that "gender essentialism underpins modern motherhood and gives rise to many oppressive practices" (2010, 377). Motherhood has been sitting uncomfortably at the end of white western feminism, often forgotten or deemed problematic – mainly because the Western definition of motherhood and maternal labour are entangled with European colonial history. But feminists from the Global South and Black feminist scholars Joy James (2016), Manuela Boatcă (2016), Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martins,

and Mai'a Williams (2016), Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (2015) and Dani McClain (2019) have been engaging proactively with the challenges of integrating uncomfortable motherhood dialogues in the everyday practice of liberation and critique. As argued by Fernardo Coronil, a view of capitalism from the (post)colonies – the world's main providers of natural resources – "allows both a fuller understanding of the role of nature and of the role of women's work in the making of European capitalism. Instead of viewing nature and women's labour as 'gifts' to capital they should be seen as confiscations by capital, as part of its colonized other, as its dark side" (Coronil 2000, 358). Boatcă argues that during colonial expansion the religious celebration of motherhood and domesticity was used to colonise the female body and gender roles. The world became gendered and motherhood, along with nature, was put on a false pedestal, while being mined, maimed, and systematically oppressed (Boatcă 2016, 93).

It is not surprising that decolonial scholars are keen to actively reclaim the territory of mothering and choose the verb "to mother" over the noun "motherhood". Mothering is an action done by a range of people, including grandmothers, aunts, and queer and gender nonconforming people who do not identify as women but who see themselves engaging in, as Gumbs Martens and Williams put it, "The practice of creating, nurturing, affirming and supporting life" (2016, 9). Elif Shafak playfully, with a note of sarcasm, talks about how women are indoctrinated to despise showing weakness and embodied forms of knowledge:

> Mrs. Weakness is not a popular woman among the members of our generation. Nobody knows where she is now, but there are rumors that she has been sent into exile to an island in the Pacific or a village on the outskirts of the Himalayas. We have all heard of her, but it is forbidden to say her name aloud. At our workplace, school or home, whenever we hear someone talk about her we flinch, fearing the consequences. While she is not exactly on the Interpol List of the Most Wanted, nobody wants to be associated with her.
>
> (2013, 9)

However, in this moment of multiple entangled eschatological threats, the COVID crisis, refugee crisis, climate chaos, there is a need to acknowledge that this perceived "weakness" actually allows scholars to nurture new kinds of knowledge and creative practice: practice that survives in spite of capitalism. This has been a long battle, a baton transferred from a generation of feminist, decolonial thinkers, border dwellers, and storytellers. It is based on the actual mode of surviving; despite being erased multiple times through history. As argued by Moraga:

> In the face of the world-wide misogynist atrocities and intimate violence, we cannot escape recurring self-doubts about the actual power of

> our acts of resilience against global patriarchy. I admit I have long days of doubt. Perhaps it's my age, the knowledge of the lengthening list of sisters/compañeras who've passed and the sense of my own diminishing years. As so many others have said before me, I don't imagine I will live to see the revolution. I smile at the arrogance of this, that we imagine that our work begins and ends with us.
>
> (2016)

Therefore, I employ a maternal decolonial autotheory, an approach that will allow the future generation of maternal thinkers and artists to recognise their experience and situation as part of a bigger battle informed by systematic oppression.

Project "Finding Home": migrant-led knowledge creation

> *A female child in the tree, a female child under the tree. A female child gazing at the sky. A woman singing in Yoruba. Sounds of pounding yam. Rainbow colours on a chopping board, borsch cooking in the pot. Smells of childhood, something that you hate, something that you now crave. Window inside a window inside a window. Naked female body framed. Letter to male child, to hold on and wait, while mother gathers resources and thoughts. Everyday knowledge not documented, mundane, repetitive, slow. Time welling, extending. Using time to defy, defend, persevere.*

In 2018, I started working on the three-year international research project "Finding Home: Migration, Placemaking & Research Creation". This project, as summarised by the Principle Investigator Professor Marusya Bociurkiw, foregrounds the idea that migration is story, and story is survival (2021, 6). When originally planning the UK side of the project, with the co-researchers Carolyn Defrin and Winstan Whitter, we decided to use an auto-ethnographic approach to studying borders and migration. As argued by the author and academic Shahram Khosravi, this enables research that can "explore abstract concepts of policy and law and translate them into cultural terms grounded in everyday life" (2011, 5). The intersection of the personal and the political was critical to our research. Engaging with other migrant artists over three years, we worked deliberately as co-researchers and co-creators in a non-hierarchical dynamic. We ate together, we took our time, we shared stories of our own personal journeys, and together created a series of four films that explored how we find home when it is so impacted by government policy, social and cultural integration, and intergenerational relationships.

The entire project was driven by migrant artist lived experience (including the research team's own complex migrant journeys) and time was a prominent factor in how the artistic process was approached. We approached time

as an element of the artistic production cycle. More importantly, we also looked at time as a dominant factor in the migrant legal journey (paperwork, visas, financial costs, etc.). Time, on both the artistic production cycle and the migrant legal journey, is suspended time. As argued by Baraitser, "this is time conceived of as a viscous fluid, no longer a line with direction or purpose but a pool, the welling up of present time that will not pass and has no rim" (2017, 1). This viscous fluid time was something that I shared with artists d'bi and Mojisola as migrants and mothers. We discussed the suspended time of early motherhood and care for babies and young children, time that is not measured by hours, but by repetitive tasks. As migrants, this welling up of time was familiar because of the endless waiting, being out of control, being monitored and measured, but never given a realistic "timeline". Both of these actions, caring for children and waiting for documents to arrive, are characterised by an inability to "control time" or to experience "linear progress", defining principles of Western society.

Migrant artists often talk about this relationship to time. This process is what Ayşe Güleç calls the "migrant-situated knowledge" of those directly affected by governmental anti-immigrant politics and racism (2018, 2). Migrant-situated knowledge mediates between the fields of art and politics in order to expose practices of silencing on various societal levels and combat these by making it impossible to ignore. For our practice research approach, we wanted to find a way for our co-creators, the migrant artists that we met through our project, to be able to creatively explore over a prolonged period what knowledge they hold and how that knowledge challenges the Hostile Environment narrative in United Kingdom right now. In the next two sections, I will reflect on the issues of time and knowledge by reflecting on the specific collaborations.

Mojisola's story

With my co-researcher Carolyn Defrin, I meet Mojisola Elufowoju FRSA in the Nigerian restaurant Aso Rock in Dalston, London, UK. She comes out of rehearsal from the Arcola theatre, where she is working on the forthcoming production *Here's What She Said to Me* (Agboluaje 2020), a semi-autobiographical mixture of music, ritual, and poetry about motherhood and families. It has her parents' story at its core, recounting how her mother was disowned by her Christian parents for marrying a Muslim man. While she talks about some of the stories, she is simultaneously giving us advice on what to order. Born in London, Mojisola grew up in Nigeria, where she was looked after largely by her grandmother. She currently runs Sheffield Theatres' resident company Utopia Theatre, which focuses on stories of the African diaspora. When we settle at the table, her son arrives with a beautiful bouquet. He apologises for taking time out of our meeting, but he wants to see his mum and wish her an early happy birthday before he goes travelling again. We see a confident young man and his mother embrace; he joins us for a quick coffee, and we

all get entangled in intergenerational stories of migration. They tell us anecdotes about their lives unfolding between Nigeria and the United Kingdom, he speaks about what it means to grow up black in Northern England.

Mojisola uses food references in her discussion of mothering between Nigeria and England. She recalls ingredients and smells, talks about the processes of making different recipes. Food becomes a mediator and softens the edges of a story that is in places difficult and challenging. We originally plan to film Mojisola at the National Theatre, where she was staff director on Inua Ellams' *Three Sisters* adaptation in 2020. However, the pandemic starts, and our plans change rapidly. To keep the project moving, we devise a set of filming instructions as offerings to our co-creators. We ask them to think about a favourite meal or an object, that reminds them of home. We reach out to Mojisola, now back in Sheffield, and ask her if she can film herself and respond to our provocation (Marchevska et al 2020). After a few weeks, we receive a video and a sound file from her. The video is of Mojisola cooking a traditional Nigerian dinner, pounding yam, and sizzling oil. The sound file is her singing a traditional Nigerian song and reflecting on home and food; she quickly turns stereotypes into clever storytelling:

> Home is where you go after your journey,
> Home is where the heart is,
> When I think about home there is huge link with food,
> where is home, what is home,
> my grandmother, the soil, the earth, my spirit,
> why I cook thinking of home?
>
> (Elufowoju, 2021)

Mojisola reflects on how she was mothered by her grandmother in Nigeria who would tell stories "as she was [doing] your hair, as she was making food – it was just part and parcel of her life. It's why I love writers who use language in a way that stops you in your tracks" (Wyver 2020). She also reflects how this model of caring meant that she was surrounded by her grandmother's traditional Nigerian storytelling techniques, which now influence her work. "Oral traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation, music of the olden days, pre-colonial. I feel my work speaks on a spiritual level because it connects with that" (Wyver 2020). The first time I watch the video draft from Mojisolo, I am transported to our first meeting. Smells flood my memories, and I am nostalgic for our pre-pandemic life. I wish we could all sit again together in Dalston.

Mojisola holds migrant-situated knowledge that with the passing of time opens new worlds, worlds that can hold her, her children, and her culture in new entangled constellations. She offered us part of that intimate, domestic migrant space through her video and singing. And that shifts the ideological boundaries of knowledge *about* migrants, to the intimate lived situated knowledge *of the* migrant.

d'bi's story

The first time I meet d'bi in Brixton market, London, United Kingdom, she suggests we eat lunch together in the Ethiopian restaurant "Habesha village". As soon as I see her, I understand that she is a power force: she stands tall and graceful, with a big smile and head held high, while greeting people in the market in the sincerest way, and gives me a warm, sisterly hug. We sit on a low bench and eat food with our hands. d'bi is finishing a master's degree in London, coming back to education after years in a successful career as an actress, teacher, and dub poet. She immediately tells us how this journey is difficult because she had to leave her sons in Toronto, Canada with her mum, while embarking on a one-year precarious and expensive journey that will hopefully bring her new challenges and improve her prospects. She talks about her complex migrant journey, self-describing as:

> Me—a thrice-diasporic African humxn, being (dis)entangled by a-yet-to-be-named Black-queer/ed-feminist praxis—decolonising personhood, practice and pedagogy—emerging from a 500-year lineage of resistance to colonial violence. In a long-away prior moment: Ancestors abducted as chattel from Africa. Transported to Xaymaca (Jamaica) to toil plantation soil. To fatten the curiosity, bellies, pockets, pride and nations of European enslavers. In (an)other/ed moment: Parents emigrated from Xaymaca to the north of Turtle Island, Kanata—the settler colony called Canada—in search of the absence of colonial trauma, only to (re)awaken in the nightmare of colonization's many-headed hydra in an anti-Jamaican Tkaronto (Toronto).
>
> (anitafrika 2021)

Many narratives that d'bi had carried for years have come together for her since she moved to London. For the first time she decides to explore silence on stage in her MA performance piece *Concrete Jungle* (2019). As a spoken word dub poet, this move is unusual and criticised by some of her tutors and friends. This is challenging for d'bi, but she quickly explains to me that there is a difference between silence and "silenced" in her work. She underlines that people like her, with complex forced migration journeys, are always silenced. The silence is her way of exploring mourning, lamentation, and intergenerational trauma that emerges from these experiences over prolonged periods of time. We talk about what we can do to highlight this journey in the film we plan to make together. After a few months, d'bi sends us her film, a gift that arrives as the pandemic begins to take over our life and our project. The short film is a love letter to her sons, still in Canada, still separated, now even more since the pandemic slows down all the formal immigration processes in the United Kingdom and her sons' applications to join d'bi are stuck somewhere in the ether.

After meeting d'bi, I immediately observe that her story is part of numerous transnational care constellations. In migration studies, it is problematic to identify family with a domestic, bounded group that always travel together. Transnational families do not belong to only one nation or place. This fluidity is typical for transnational mothering and influences the ideals behind caregiving. Nancy Scheper Hughes explains:

> Mother love is anything other than natural and instead represents a matrix of images, meanings, sentiments, and practices that are everywhere socially and culturally produced … Consequently, mother love is best bracketed and understood as (m)other loves.
>
> (1994)

Maternal care is not a romantic endeavour.

In d'bi's video we see her moving slowly, we watch her naked body through a white window frame. We also see the image reverberating in the window reflection, endlessly looping. You can't really see her face, partially covered with tightly bound plaits spilling over her body. The white of the frame stands in strong opposition to the orange walls of the room. There is a dark drawing of a tree silhouette parallel to her body, matching, and mirroring. Her voice is intimate and comforting while she describes the pandemic-imposed separation as a feeling when "your chest are under water". She also acknowledges her fear, of being alone in a small cottage in a foreign land away from support structures, but simultaneously observes that, as a society in the moment of panic, we left out the most vulnerable. Here d'bi is practicing the verb "mothering". She observes that all her creative engagements have been cancelled, just like that, but also that she is reminded daily that death comes just like that. She considers her choice to have children in these times and how difficult that decision is while she navigates the hostile waters of the United Kingdom. She says:

> I am the one who chose to be
> to be with my doubts and my fears,
> watching them fall away from me like the leaves of the grandmother oak,
> feeling exposed without them in the forest
> (without my children)
> deep in, without, worse without,
> it's a funny thing about life isn't,
> with this new development, it cuts small scars into my hope,
> I tell myself it is the choice
> I choose to continue, to make,
> while these vulnerabilities swim puddles around my feet
> in which I soak
>
> (anitafrika 2021, online)

In this text, we see d'bi struggling with the time limitations imposed by the pandemic and dysfunctional UK immigration policy. As she poetically implies, this imposed frozen time "cuts small scars" into her hope. But we also see d'bi proactively talking about agency over this stand-still situation and that ultimately transnational mothering is a choice – a choice for a different future.

There are other worlds

> *We often play this game, where we recite letters and numbers in different languages. Mainly because we are constantly stuck between languages and words. They laugh when I can't pronounce words. I often fail to pronounce failure in English. My tongue gets twisted and something else comes out. Maybe this failure to pronounce failure acknowledges my will to not be defeated by the expectations imposed on migrants. I will pass the tests, I will recite the oath, but I will never be able to pronounce failure. And that is ok.*

I argued at the beginning of this chapter that the Hostile Environment in the United Kingdom had an adverse effect on migrant artists. I therefore offered this analysis of migrant maternal creative practice to partially fill the gap that exists in the contemporary maternal studies field in the United Kingdom. I argued that there is a need for an intersectional, transversal dialogue about maternal perspectives, that will enable a better understanding on how to develop a stronger maternal intersectional empowerment movement. To date, the literature (O'Reilly 2010; McClain 2019; Gumbs, Martens and Williams 2016) argues for a repositioning of the word mother, from a noun to a verb, so that care is divested of biology. My study of migrant mothers' experiences documents embodied migrant maternal knowledge creation in the practice of Mojisola and d'bi. We see how their complex creative processes activate the verb "to mother" and deliver intersectional methodologies and stories that entangle the maternal and creativity in an empowering way. As a result of conducting this research, I propose that intersectional methodologies like this are an important contribution to decolonial discourse and can help better the understanding of the eschatological entanglements that are key to us envisioning Other Worlds. This is important for maternal studies as a field because it offers a way forward in how we define and understand the maternal as a feminist position. "There are other worlds they have not told you of, they wish to speak to you" (Ra 1978).

Notes

1 Many of these changes were officially introduced by the Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016 (Taylor 2018).
2 I will refer to the artists d'bi.young anitafrika and Mojisola Elufowoju by their first name in further sections of this chapter, to acknowledge that we worked deliberately as co-researchers and co-creators in a non-hierarchical dynamic.

3 According to Russel Tylor the definition of a right to remain status in the United Kingdom is complex and can occur under a wide range of circumstances. As an example, those with the "right to live or work in the UK" includes: British citizens; EEA citizens; those on certain visas; people with "indefinite leave to remain"; and asylum seekers/refugees.
4 Brexit is the colloquial term used to refer to a referendum held on 23 June 2016, when the majority of the British public who voted chose to leave the European Union. For a timeline of this process, see Nigel Walker's *Brexit timeline* (2021).

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Section II

Practice

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7 Dramaturgies of Support and Interruption in the Process of *Wonderwoman: The Naked Truth* by Notnow Collective

Kristina Gavran

This chapter follows my two maternity leave years; one in 2015/2016 and the other in 2020/2021.[1] During the first maternity year, I was a theatre maker finding new ways to work in an industry that felt hostile to parents and carers. During the second maternity year, I am a PhD researcher, writing this chapter, which reflects on the aforementioned theatre work. The first process included rehearsing, creating, producing, and touring the *Wonderwoman: The Naked Truth* show; and the second process includes the research and writing of this article. In my reflections on both, I focus on the process rather than the result and question how my mothering experience has influenced my practice.

In 2016, Tina Hofman and I, two friends, artists, mothers, and migrants, created a theatre show about motherhood and the mothering experience called *Wonderwoman: The Naked Truth*.[2] Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) supported the show's creation; it received an Arts Council England grant, and toured the country. The same year we started a theatre company, Notnow Collective. Today, Notnow is a thriving organisation with Tina Hofman as artistic director. It has produced three touring shows, collaborated with other artists, parents and migrants, led workshops, and established itself as one of the leading companies supporting parents and carers in the arts. The *Wonderwoman* show and the company's formation resulted from a mothering residency that we embarked on in 2015. We spent a year talking, devising, writing, and learning together. It was messy and chaotic, joyful, and frustrating; children were in the rehearsal room and we were full of both tension and exciting ideas. Nevertheless, the process was necessary for us as mothers and artists. In this chapter, I return to those early stages in which our new roles as mothers were embraced and integrated into our creative practice. I go through old photographs, displaying both my baby and the show. I do a file search on my computer; there are 269 documents with the name "*Wonderwoman*": From tour dates to budgets, from the first messy draft to the final.final.print version of the script. I trace clues like a detective. I watch the video of the performance; it feels like I am watching someone else.

Theatrical performance is elusive, hard to capture from the moment of liveness. Peggy Phelan (1993) established how attempts to capture and reproduce

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the performance change its very essence. Its beauty is in its transience, and it "occurs over a time which will not be repeated" (Phelan 1993, 146). Performance is ephemeral and quickly forgotten. But the process? This is hidden in the rehearsal room like an old costume. I am trying to expose it, remember it, save it, and offer it to future mother artists. When Tina and I started creating the show,[3] we aimed to reveal the theatre system, the work that the audience usually do not see – the process of creating a piece and producing it.[4] Our intention was to reveal how inaccessible theatre is to parents and carers. Now I am trying to capture it on paper. I am in search of the space between the strains where new solutions are invented.

Writing position

> I am writing from the now at which I wonder why I ever suggested this article while on my maternity leave. My now is composed of interruptions – baby grunts, burps – by someone who insistently demands attention, always at the edge of crying. I am not independent or in the right frame of mind for writing an article.
>
> (Šimić 2014, 25)

I stumbled upon this quote; it found me, rather than being part of a well-planned literature review. I felt recognition, reflection, and acceptance. Like Lena Šimić, I also wonder why I had said I would write this chapter on my maternity leave, and yet maternity is the very reason I want to write it. Šimić gave me permission to acknowledge the position and the context in which I am writing – to make my mothering visible. I am on maternity leave from my doctoral research, taking care of my second baby, who is nine months old.[5] With my first baby, I had to re-negotiate my role as an artist, while now I am re-negotiating my position as a researcher. My writing is interrupted, fragmented, and dependent on childcare; which is reflected in the writing style. It is also through my academic writing that my mothering becomes visible. The decision to make visible my mothering still feels radical to me, even though I can see an earlier example in Šimić's writing. It reminds me that negotiation around mothering is always anew, even when other women have done it before me.

I agreed to write this chapter for the same reasons I wanted to create a theatre show in 2015 – I felt as if the urge to write came from deep within my womb, and I was afraid of missing out by not following that urge.[6] I am writing from the point of revolt, sleep deprivation, and resistance. I am writing because I fight for the "presence and visibility" that Elena Marchevska describes as "resistance to the invisibility and silencing of maternal creative work" (2016, 5). I am (again) afraid the world will continue, and I will be forgotten. I will lose my identity as a writer and researcher and become "just" a mother. As if becoming a mother is the metamorphosis in Kafka's nightmare: "One morning, as Kristina Gavran was waking up from anxious dreams, she discovered that in bed she had been changed into a mother".[7] What often

follows the birth of a child is a Kafkian process of an individual being in tension with society. Motherhood was placed upon me by others immediately, while inside I was going through a much slower process of re-negotiating my identity. My framework is to make this mothering visible, expose the hidden labour and demystify the process.

The rehearsal process of *Wonderwoman* was fragmented (with clusters of rehearsal days and scratch nights over a period of one year), and the show itself consisted of different fragments. Yet when analysing it, I feel obliged to use a linear structure. Why am I suddenly ashamed of fragments? I fear they would not be understood or accepted, as if they are some post-dramatic element suitable for theatre, but not academia. And yet, they feel as natural as anything I have experienced before. The call for maternal writing considers both the form and the content, and it is evident in writings that I did for *Wonderwoman* and this chapter (Figure 7.1). I am/was writing between breastfeeding and making peanut butter sandwiches,[8] limited by baby sleep and the school run, and loaded with the baby in a sling.[9] This fragmented process in thinking and writing led to a fragmented theatre play; nineteen short scenes during the fifty-minute performance. The inherent dramaturgy leant itself to the audience dipping in and out. The same fragmented process also reflects in this chapter that consist of fragments exploring dualities of maternal experience.

Figure 7.1 Kristina Gavran writing this article while her baby is sleeping on her shoulder. Working table, July 2021.

Source: Photo by Anish Sebastian.

In her seminal paper "Toward a Woman-Centered University", Adrienne Rich (1979) argued that universities are in their structures male-centred and male-dominated. Rich demanded and imagined a new type of childcare that would benefit both mothers and children. Rich writes:

> It is difficult to imagine, unless one has lived it, the personal division, endless improving, and creative and intellectual holding back that for most women accompany the attempt to combine the emotional and physical demands of parenthood and the challenges of work. To assume one can naturally combine these has been a male privilege everywhere in the world. For women, the energy expended in both the conflict and the improvisation has held many back from starting a professional career and has been a heavy liability to careers once begun.
>
> (1979, 147)

How much have universities improved since then? According to the collection of essays *Mothers in Academia* (Castañeda and Isgro, 2013), which offers a variety of perspectives on the position of mothers in academia, a lot and not much has changed. Doctoral students Astrid Huopalainen and Suvi Satama (2018) explore their dual identities as mothers and researchers. They see it as a process of negotiation between the two in which "motherhood could be a transformative practise that strengthens and develops mothers as professionals, too" (2018, 102). Therefore, I grant myself permission to write in fragments and argue for fragments as a model of maternal performance, no matter how nervous I feel about bringing these fragments to my public academic, theatrical, and maternal performance. In their "Manifesto for Maternal Performance (Art) 2016!", Lena Šimić and Emily Underwood-Lee noted a number of ideas; number thirty-nine reads: "Maternal performance invents its own discourse and discloses its methodology" (2017, 133). Likewise, while revealing my writing process, I invite you, the reader, to embrace this freedom and read the chapter by jumping from fragment to fragment in no particular order.

Tina and Kristina

Tina and I knew each other long before we became mothers. We met in our home country, Croatia, in 2006, while working as theatre workshop leaders. Tina moved to England in the 1990s, while I came in 2013, both with the aim to study theatre. In England, we witnessed each other's motherhoods step by step, how it modified our lives and thoughts, alongside each other's artistic development; Tina is a performer and director, whilst I am a writer and dramaturg. We shared the experience of being migrants while juggling parenting and theatre work.

When we started creating our first theatre show, I took the role of writer and Tina of performer, but soon we became everything: Performers, researchers,

Figure 7.2 Tina supporting Kristina in her writing. Rehearsal and marketing photo *Wonderwoman: The Naked Truth*, MAC, Birmingham, May 2016.

Source: Photo by Fernando Photography.

writers, and producers. As a mother, I also became everything; a performer of nursery rhymes, a researcher for colic solutions, writer of feeding plans, and producer of holidays. I was out of my comfort zone. This shift in theatre happened in parallel to my personal life. I grew, gently supported by Tina. She was a few years ahead of me, both in her theatre practice and mothering experience. Tina encouraged me to step on stage and perform my story (Figure 7.2). I was craving my identity as an invisible writer. I wanted to be one single thing and dedicate my whole being to it. I wanted to be focused. Instead, I was dispersed. Tina was taking care of the kids while I was writing in the other room. I was with the kids while she was calling venues to book our show. One day, we had a fight over our expectations about who did what. The frustration built up over many days and finally overflowed. We yelled and cried and stayed silent in Cannon Hill Park. I do not remember how we resolved it, but the fight ended up in the show. Tina and Kristina, the characters of the show, were singing and dancing, performing "I'm A Little Teapot" for the audience, smiling broadly, while also arguing:

TINA: And who is going to email the producer?
KRISTINA: I work on the script 'til two in the night.
TINA: Nobody cares about that. People just expect a good performance. Do it as best as you can. (*Wonderwoman* 2016)

We turned back to our singing and smiling. Yes, the audience expected a good show and laughed at our clowning. But we also revealed to them our process: interruptions are present even on the stage.

Doubt and perseverance

Why did I say I would write this chapter? Why, why, why? I am overpromising and stretching myself. I am tired and feel I do not belong here. I can hear my baby crying in the other room. I capture this moment and let it go.

Children in the rehearsal room and children in the audience

We were working and looking after our children, complaining that we could not fully concentrate because of them while also enjoying their presence.[10] We questioned our privilege. A mother working in a factory, bound to a machine, would not have the same opportunity. Elfriede Jelinek so beautifully pointed this out in her play *What Happened After Nora Left Her Husband; or Pillars of Society* (1994), which she wrote in answer to the open ending of Henrik Ibsen's (2008) *A Doll's House*. We did not have answers to the burning questions of privilege; we quietly observed them and let go.

At first, children were in the rehearsal room out of necessity, but soon we discovered they brought a specific quality to our work. We embraced the new findings and followed their lead: toys became props in the show, questions steered our devising tasks, every interruption was noted and taken as a prompt for creative exploration.

The show we were creating was aimed at adults (we touched on themes like sex after having children, abortion, and the new mother's mental health), but for parents and carers to see it, we had to open the show and let the babies in. Babies would typically not be tolerated in a theatrical space where the audience is expected to follow the rules and etiquette (be quiet and stay in your chair). On the other hand, we wanted theatres to be inclusive and proposed a radical shift in how to behave and what to expect from the theatre experience. We championed bring-your-own-baby (BYOB) to the theatre, a change that started with fringe companies like Tangled Feet (*Kicking and Screaming* 2016) and Third Angel (*Partus* 2017) who were ready to explore and take risks. This approach gained momentum, and in 2019 baby-friendly matinees were adopted by the West End's Vaudeville Theatre for their production of *Emilia* (Wiegand 2019).

When booking the tour, venues were sceptical; but we persuaded them to take the risk with our baby-friendly matinee. Babies were not just tolerated in the theatre; they were welcomed with space for buggies, soft cushions, lights in the auditorium, and reduced sound levels. During the performance, babies were crawling around the stage, playing with toys, breastfeeding, having their nappies changed, and crying. However, to make the show truly accessible, it was not enough to simply add a matinee to the finished show. Accessibility

was an artistic enquiry, part of our process, and integrated into the making of the show. This would not have been achieved without having our own children in the room during the show's creation: they were the catalyst for this.

Durational residency and short bursts of work

I remember the time in early motherhood as elastic – days were long, but the year passed quickly. Lisa Baraitser, in *Enduring Time* (2017), explores time in relation to care and reveals the political potential of maternal time and the process of repeating. I recognise that political potential only now while reflecting on the process of creating *Wonderwoman*. When it was happening, I only felt frustrated for not working as I used to. We were devising the show over a long period, repeating parts of work at different scratch nights. It was a process that stretched from March 2015 to May 2016 when the show finally premiered and went on tour. Again, the tour itself was fragmented to allow us to care for our children. Usually, in England, artists have three to four weeks to rehearse a show; they go on tour, return home, and start a new project. Instead, we had a long process that was negotiated around money, childcare, other projects, and freelance gigs. This system was developed through trial and error, much like Lenka Clayton's *An Artist Residency in Motherhood* (2016) framework that she offered to other mothers. The self-directed and open-sourced residency/maternity year gives a mother time to integrate her new identity into her creative practice.[11] The *Wonderwoman* year was a transformative time for us to develop our creative practice and establish new work systems. The year was a long process of exploration, but the days were chaotic and surprising.

I wrote frantically in short bursts, at a speed that did not care for typos and caused pain in my fingers. Sometimes, I wrote with one hand. I used to carry a notebook with me in case my baby fell asleep in the park. I was forced to think and write in short bursts of creative energy. I thought and reflected while caring for my baby and doing housework. This newly discovered process of writing also ended up on the stage. While Tina was dancing and doing a movement improvisation, Kristina was performing a free writing task in front of the audience; hunched over the laptop, my writing was projected on the screen. I felt vulnerable and exposed. As I reflect on the past and write about the process in this chapter, I carry my son in a sling strapped around my body. He wakes up in the night; this is the only way to keep him quiet. I am, yet again, making the decision to expose the process of maternal writing and make it visible, even at the cost of vulnerability.

Mothers and artists

Our dual identities as mothers and artists gave us great creative potential, where both roles had to be negotiated and innovative processes established. We created while mothering and mothered while creating. Our attention was divided. We questioned ourselves daily: "So, why then, as women and

artists, are we returning to the question: Is the maternal an impediment to our art practice?" (Marchevska 2016, 3). Like Marchevska, we asked whether our children were interfering with or adding to our creative work. Our process consisted of following actions: researching, reading, talking, devising, writing, drinking coffee, surveying other mothers, presenting fragments of work, distracting kids with toys, negotiating time on screen, resolving fights, and putting kids to sleep. We did not know when we were creating and when we were mothering. The line was blurred. We were committed to our maternal role defined as "the agency required to commit to the long-term care of children" (Takševa 2019, 29), and the same agency and commitment were present in the way we understood our roles as artists. We refused to stop working and creating, and believed our maternal and feminist identities joined together could bring exciting discoveries. While practising our roles as mothers and artists simultaneously, and over a long period, we followed Tatjana Takševa's appeal to "challenge the view that the maternal role and caregiving curtail the exercise of autonomy and self-determination" (40–41).

Rehearsal room and park

We were rehearsing in the MAC, the only possible venue, as it is within walking distance of both of our homes. Any other venue would not be an option – there were so many demands and accessibility issues for this show to be born. MAC is in the middle of Cannon Hill Park. My baby started crawling and walking; he loved swings. Tina's kids were wild and full of energy. The sun was particularly strong that day. We could hear children playing in the playground, and the ice cream van sounded the familiar tune. It would have been lovely to have a cup of coffee in the sunshine, sitting by the lake. But we were rehearsing the show in preparation for the tour. And the guilt of being in that dark rehearsal room was growing inside us.

Loneliness and community

There is/was a feeling that I am the first mother who has ever done/did this.[12] I am/was never alone (as my baby follows/followed me around), yet I am/was lonely. In my daily routine, it is/was hard to see that others have been there before.

When Tina and I were choosing a name for our newly established theatre company, we spent days discussing it as if we were selecting a name for a baby. Finally, we settled on Notnow Collective capturing us saying "Not now!" either to our job or to our children. But why collective? It was only the two of us. A colleague commented that it sounded like a pompous Eastern European joke. Maybe we longed for a collective of other artists instead of loneliness, an ensemble (as in the European theatre tradition) that will spend years collaborating and growing together.

We found our village online (Arnold and Martin 2016) and established new connections with groups like Mothers Who Make,[13] Prams in the Hall,[14]

and Pregnant Then Screwed,[15] that gathered other mothers and artists. We invited dramaturg Duška Radosavljević to join us for a day of rehearsals. She came with her newborn in her arms and a book in her bag – *The Mums and Babies Ensemble: A Manual* (Radosavljević, Rigby and Šimić 2015). We spent a relaxing day talking about the ensemble as a safe space for taking risks. We got mentored in creating a baby-friendly performance by Kat Joyce from Tangled Feet theatre.[16] Amber Onat Gregory (2017) from Frozen Light Theatre shared with us her "tips and tricks" on touring with her two children.[17] In November 2015, we attended the launch event of Parents and Carers in the Performing Arts (PiPA),[18] together with 400 attendees and seventy children in the auditorium of the Young Vic theatre. We felt like activists ready for a revolution, full of energy and new ideas. In our local community, we participated in the thirtieth-anniversary celebration of Women & Theatre, a Birmingham-based theatre company and charity.[19] At the reception, over wine, Janice Connolly, the founder of the company, told us that they used to rehearse with their children present in the rehearsal room long before "it was a thing". It was okay; other women did it before. The community was there.

In May 2021, I got an email from theatre maker Caroline Horton. She had become a mum recently and wanted to talk to me about how one continues working in theatre after having a baby. We spoke on Zoom, each with a babe in arms. For the first time, I saw myself as an experienced mother of two who could pass on advice to others. It was also clear to me that new generations of mothers will demand their place on (or behind) the stage, push the boundaries of what is acceptable, and imagine new ways to create theatre.

Interruptions and new dramaturgies

Interruptions came in series; some were daily and expected (changing nappies, breastfeeding and answering constant questions), while others were unexpected and had to be dealt with as crises (Tina's kids getting chickenpox, or the nanny being late to care for my baby before the show). These interruptions got transferred into the script, from interrupted scenes that repeat themselves in a cycle to interrupted language, movement, and dance. Baraitser defines interruptions as "breaches, tears or puncturings to the mother's durational experiences bringing her back 'again and again' into the realm of the immediate, the present, the here-and-now of the child or infant's demand" (2008, 58). By no doubt, the interruptions we endured during the rehearsal influenced our creative process. Moreover, Baraitser also shows how interruptions can positively impact maternal time by creating a "somatic or sensory mode of experiencing" (68). We felt that type of experience might be our unique gift for the audience.

The wall in the rehearsal room was full of post-it notes in different colours; each presented a scene/fragment for the show. Sometimes, it was hard to find the connection between them. Nevertheless, a new dramaturgy and inner logic of the play was emerging, one that is not linear or coherent but repeats

itself in cycles and employs interruptions and fragmentation as a primary method to tell the story. At one point, different themes, problems, and issues around the choices a mother has to make turned from dialogue into a poem that we yelled in a staccato rhythm.

KRISTINA: Pregnancy yoga, hypnobirthing, breathing exercise, prenatal classes.
TINA: Playgroups, Duplo bricks, school run, get dressed.
KRISTINA: Nap time? Tummy time? Bed-time? Bath-time?
TINA: If you don't eat breakfast, there's nothing for lunch.
KRISTINA: Daddy-time? Me-time? Baby-led or Gina Ford?
TINA: Breastfeeding, bottle-feeding.
KRISTINA: Organic feeding, no feeding.
TINA: Good school
KRISTINA: Bad School
TINA: First choice
KRISTINA: Second Choice
TINA: Third Choice
KRISTINA: Home School
TINA: Unschooled
KRISTINA: Grammar
TINA: School

(*Wonderwoman* 2016)

Reduced to yelling fragments of sentences, we showed the absurdity of maternal work that is often criticised no matter what choice a mother makes. While performing the poem, we showed skill and artistry; we trained for days to follow the fast rhythm and jump into each other's sentences. "Nobody performs *Wonderwoman* better than us", we said to the audience. We were competent in multitasking. However, the pinnacle of the show was a scene in which everything fell apart. Tina left the stage because her children needed her, and the lights were put on. The audience was confused about what was real and what was scripted. We were provoked by Lyn Gardner's (2015) article in the Guardian, "parents in the arts need to stage a childcare revolution". The article advocates:

> The performance industry needs to look much harder at how it supports those with caring responsibilities so they can continue to sustain careers in the arts. We all collude in self-exploitation because we love theatre, but the arts need to recognise that a work-life balance is as important in this industry as it is in any other.
>
> (Gardner 2015)

Instead of self-exploitation, we chose a revolution in the form of a strike. We left the stage; we abandoned our audience. We did not care

about the sentiment that *the show must go on*. Not when our children needed us. But we equally refused to stop being artists. If theatre is not accessible, it has to change, and it has to be re-imagined for both audiences and artists.

Croatians and migrants

When on stage, our accents revealed us as foreigners. We are both Croatians who found a home in England. We are used to having a dual identity; we hold two passports, we speak two languages, we keep books and clothes in different houses. In the rehearsal, we used Croatian for discussions and then switched to English while rehearsing scenes. There are similarities in our experience of migration and motherhood to those that Karem Roitman describes through the metaphor of a journey: "Motherhood and migration are physical, psychological, and social journeys – journeys into new identities, new spaces, and new knowledge" (2019, 42). Our identities as mothers and migrants were equally challenging. We struggled to join conversations at baby yoga classes, and we made sure that at the playground we said to our children, "Share!" in English to perform our good mothering for others. As migrant mothers, we felt even less competent: "Migrant women must learn and develop the cultural competence to perform the motherhood roles of their host culture" (Gaviria et al., 2019, 324). We did not know English nursery rhymes, and we had problems understanding the system of school catchment areas. This criticism was sublimated in the role of an Inspector:

INSPECTOR: So, you think you can be fifty per cent mother. I mean, really. This government is going to ruin us. Rules were much stricter before. Not everyone could qualify to be a mother. But nowadays, they are letting just anyone in; the bar is lower. For cases like you! (*Looks her up and down*) Wonderwoman.

WONDERWOMAN: I will be a good mother, I promise.

INSPECTOR: Your promise is not measurable. This is why we have tests! What is it? No ear for singing?

WONDERWOMAN: No… I just…

INSPECTOR: I am sorry, but without nursery rhymes, you cannot become a mother in this country! Let me hear… Wheels on the bus… too easy. Jack and Jill, no, too dark. Teapot. Sing!

(*Wonderwoman* 2016)

As the scene continued, the Inspector became more hostile and disparaging to Wonderwoman, and the laughter in the audience quickly turned into silence. We exposed how migrant mothers experience isolation because of linguistic and cultural barriers (Gaviria et al. 2019), and how a funny nursery rhyme can turn into a political statement.

Solidarity and shaming

Mothers on or off the stage are constantly criticised and judged. We prided ourselves on how well we prepared snacks for the day in rehearsal and how we engaged the children with activities. We confessed to the audience, "Please do not think that they spend eight hours of rehearsal in front of the screen. This is only for the moment of crisis" (*Wonderwoman* 2016). In the interactive "Shame Game", we instructed the audience to shame awful mothers with us. For example, mothers were punished for texting whilst breastfeeding, giving cartoons on iPad to the kids in the supermarket or secretly eating cookies.

INSPECTOR: Lovely audience, get your pointing fingers out and let's shame this mum together, after three. Ready? One, two, three!
ALL: Shame! Shame! Shame!
INSPECTOR: And to make things even sweeter, I have some nappies for you. On my sign, you can throw nappies on this mum. One, two, three!
(*Wonderwoman* 2016)

The "Shame Game" continued as the audience threw nappies at mothers they disapproved of. However, there were also moments of solidarity. We drank coffee from a flask and shared the loveliest parts of our mothering experience. The audience joined in the improvisation with their examples "I love when babies yawn/I love when I can give them back to their parents/I love how their hair smells of milk/I love to watch cartoons with my kids/I love morning coffee alone". In those moments, there was recognition and solidarity between us.

Failure and celebration

We took risks. Sometimes, we failed. Other times, we celebrated.

The *Wonderwoman* show was interrupted, Tina ran backstage to tend to her children. The lights got turned on, and everyone was confused. I was left on stage alone, apologising to the audience. After a while, Tina came back with guilt and failure on her face. We were facing each other and listing all the reasons why we felt ashamed. Suddenly, we switched to "I am proud…".

KRISTINA: I wonder what Lyn Gardner would think about this?
TINA: I think Lyn Gardner would be proud.
KRISTINA: We staged a revolution.
TINA: I'm proud that we did this show, even if we haven't finished.
KRISTINA: I am proud we got the Arts Council grant.
TINA: I'm proud our kids enjoyed our rehearsals.
KRISTINA: I am proud you came back. But I am sad we didn't come to the end of the show.
("Wonderwoman" movie theme song plays in the distance. Tina intensely looks at Kristina.)

TINA: We can still save it.
KRISTINA: Save the show?
TINA: One interruption does not mean we have failed. Tom [stage manager], hit it!

(*Wonderwoman* 2016)

The music became louder, and the lights turned to red, green, and yellow. We took our "mummy" clothes off. Underneath, we were dressed in tacky, shiny *Wonderwoman* costumes. We did a dance routine full of superhero postures. It was all a bit kitsch and ridiculous. We danced and laughed as the stage lights slowly went down in the most beautiful, theatrical way. We refused to give up being artists.

Notes

1 Calling it "maternity leave year" is problematic as the work never ended or started. I want to show how the bureaucratic language forces me to fit within the system that makes a division between working and caring. As I will show in this article, there is no division between the two actions; these processes influence each other.
2 For more information see https://notnowcollective.com/2016/01/30/wonderwoman-the-naked-truth/.
3 I use the first name to stress out the importance of our friendship and the familiarity we have built through the maternal years we have shared together. Moreover, Tina and Kristina were the names used for the characters of *Wonderwoman* show.
4 Both were equally important. We were not only artists (in the romantic sense, with all the freedom and creativity), but also producers who had to secure funding, organise the creative team, order posters and flyers, call the venues, etc. This is similar to mothering work; it is not all about playing with children, there is so much work around them, from chores to admin.
5 Or so he was when I started writing this chapter. As I write about the process, it is important to acknowledge that working on a chapter is a long process that includes feedback and redrafting. In the meantime, kids grow and the writing position changes.
6 Making a decision from the womb rather than the head can be understood and connected to the intuitive creative work (in that sense, birthing a creative project from one's imagination is parallel to birthing a child), but can thinking from the womb be applied to writing this chapter? I tried to tip into a different state of writing; one that allows intuition, expands creativity, and flow of thought.
7 Paraphrasing the opening lines of Franz Kafka's novel, *The Metamorphosis* (2009).
8 Applies to both present and the past maternity year.
9 He is 11kg! Carrying him while typing is a physical load.
10 When we started, my baby was four months, and Tina's kids were two and four years old.
11 The residency does not have to be aligned with the first year after the baby is born.
12 The past experience of first maternal experience is strikingly similar to the second one I am experiencing now.
13 For more information see https://motherswhomake.org/.
14 For more information see https://www.facebook.com/pramsinthehall/.
15 For more information see https://pregnantthenscrewed.com/.
16 For more information see https://tangledfeet.com/.

17 For more information see https://www.frozenlighttheatre.com/.
18 For more information see https://pipacampaign.org/.
19 For more information see https://womenandtheatre.co.uk/.

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8 Gravida, the Weight and Wait of Pregnancy to Mothering Transformation

A performance exploring traumatic memory and the energy of creation

Carrie Westwater with Aleksandra Nikolajev Jones[1]

The following chapter presents a creative response to our research and development (R&D) process, funded by Arts Council Wales to stage pregnancy and mothering. It takes the form of a choreographic script with accompanying notes from the outcome of this stage in development which was a dance theatre production called *Gravida* (Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff 2018). Director and choreographer Aleksandra Nikolajev Jones created an overarching *Gravida* project as an ongoing civic mission to help inform birthing communities about maternal mental health and embodied trauma whilst also changing representations of the mothering process that tend to avoid these issues. This silencing of experiences through the removal of the discussion, forces the mother into what bell hooks (1989), calls the "the margins" (hooks 1989, 20) and the project explores this "marginalised space" through participatory dance workshops and the production. hooks' work on representations of the "silenced" and unvoiced in "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness" (1989) will be useful when articulating the mission and processes found in the *Gravida* project and will continue to be a source of inspiration throughout this chapter.

The name Gravida came from three separate sources, the first is a novella "Gravida" written by Wilhelm Jensen in 1903 which talks about a "woman who walks through walls". The metaphor of passing through stone is significant here, as it represents a feeling of being fixed into a state by an outside force whilst still being alive and therefore in cycles of movement; the heart still beats the mind still thinks. Gravida is also an Italian medical term used as a preposition for the number of pregnancies a woman has had, for example a second pregnancy would be Gravida Two. For Nikolajev Jones, Gravida is synonymous with pregnancy as a newly experienced weight, or gravity, shown in the ebb and flow of the choreography. These ideas were brought together to name not only the overarching project and the specific production, but also a character. The opening of the 2018 production features a lyrical soundscape where the character "Gravida" tells the audience that they

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too are "Gravida" reminding them that they are also the birthed or in cycles of birthing, as *all* bodies are. For after all:

> The mother is the principle out of which everything is born and to which everything returns.
>
> (Trussardi in Gioni 2016, 11)

Due to the multi-modal purpose of this term, we will distinguish between the project, production, and character by placing in italics the *Gravida* project and *Gravida* production and the character "Gravida", within speech marks.

Staging the traumatised body

Our *Gravida* production explored pregnancy and mothering as cyclical performances that break with stereotypical representations of pregnancy as "blooming". Pregnancy and mothering are instead shown as a time informed by traumatic memory. Through nine stages, or what could be called Brechtian *epíches* (Brecht 1964), Nikolajev Jones establishes an allegorical fluidity and with it shows that there is a possibility of transformation for mothers to move from a state of complex trauma into healing; from a feeling of separateness towards a space of wholeness, authenticity and visibility. The choreography unapologetically explores concepts that are difficult to express as linear narratives. The exhaustion and emotional labour of breastfeeding what feels like the whole world or the confusion of being mother and child in a state of togetherness whilst also apart requires snapshot moments, primed for polyvocality and multiple interpretations which do not have a fixed beginning or end (Westwater 2021, 51–62). By using Brecht's episodic style, Nikolajev Jones achieves a form that focuses on *how* an experience manifests, instead of *what* the experience is as something fixed, allowing for alternative experiences of motherhood to be represented by "pushing against oppressive boundaries set by race, sex and class domination" (hooks 1989 15). Traumatic memory in *Gravida* becomes a layered body script (Nikolajev Jones with Underwood-Lee 2020), a narrative of muscle memory performed as a series of deep dives into not only what informs trauma, but how it manifests within the body, wanting to be released. *Gravida* is presented as a space to explore this deep knowing of what Nikolajev Jones feels is part somatic, part emotional heritage.

Staging embodied conflict

The idea of together/apartness has a further dual meaning as it not only speaks of a transition between biological states from pregnancy to birth and the postpartum journey, but also of the mother herself feeling both together and apart from the representations of pregnancy as presented in society. Research we conducted as part of the *Gravida* project found that often women felt that their challenging experiences of pregnancy and birthing were hidden

among socially pervasive toxic positivity, where feelings of trauma were taboo. Counteracting somewhat hegemonic representations of what pregnancy and birth "should be", the *Gravida* production begins with a television flickering through a catalogue of media propagated ideas of what a "normal" pregnancy looks like. There is a montage of pink bound menstrual products leading into baby bumps as "beautiful", "abundant", "blooming", and "bountiful". These images are juxtaposed with the sounds of war and images of the bombarded body.

There is a long history of pregnancy and mothering being equated to warzones. Artist Barbara Kruger discusses the concept of motherhood as

> becoming a "battleground" for violent clashes to establish boundaries of gender and gender roles [...] it is a sphere that men have all too often usurped from women and over which they have asserted all sorts of rights.
> (Kruger in Gioni 2016, 15)

Gravida does not wade through this war-torn history, but instead accepts that motherhood is at times a battleground not created by women or for women. Motherhood as a battleground is a space that pushes out women's experiences in favour of an usurpation by patriarchal stereotypical representations, such as pink bound and bountiful products. However, this battlefield can also be a space from where women as mothers can start addressing their misrepresentations and trauma, which they may find difficult to articulate, by radically acknowledging where they are and how they are in a "radical openness" (hooks 1989). Nikolajev Jones' work further embraces hooks, "radical openness", by opening up the marginalised mother to "acknowledge" the space in which they find themselves so that they can move from a state of separateness from the self to an authentic self, one that feels "part of the whole". hooks (1989), a black woman marginalised due to her race, sex and social class, discusses this process when thinking about these margins as a space in which to locate one's voice and embodied experiences. She discusses that

> our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between the margin and centre and an ongoing public acknowledgement that we are a necessary, vital part of the whole.
> (hooks 1989, 20)

Like hooks, the *Gravida* project finds that by presenting the taboo stories of pregnant women as frank uncompromising performances they too will be acknowledged as a "necessary, vital part of the whole" (hooks 1989, 20) narrative around pregnancy and motherhood. This possibility urges us to make seen pregnancies as represented by the mother, for the mother: pregnancies which acknowledge pain, acknowledge fear, acknowledge the wet blood and leakages of milk, and are not usurped by an other who speaks from a patriarchal "centre" (hooks 1989, 20) relegating representations of women and therefore mothers as one-dimensional, or as having fixed identities (hooks 1989).

Staging *Gravida* in performance

In the *Gravida* production of 2018, representations of mothering experiences are made by a cast of dancers called mother/dancers to make explicit the mother and the dancer as two distinct identities held within the same body. This duality, hinting at plurality, presents *all* mothers as more than one-dimensional and polymorphous (Gioni 2016, 15). In 2015, *The Great Mother* exhibition in Milan, Italy identified a shift from "object" to "subject" in the "iconography of motherhood in the twentieth century", as a

> transition from the view of women as a one-dimensional creature, reduced to her biological condition, to the conception of her as a polymorphous, manifold, complex subject – from a passive object to active subject of her own representation.
>
> (Gioni 2016, 16)

Nikolajev Jones asks the cast and audiences of the production to experience this same transformation seen in visual art as a choreo-dramaturgical experience. The ultimate aim of *Gravida* is for *all* mothers to be supported into being an "active subject of their own representation" and experience, to be seen and heard in their polymorphous complexity (Gioni 2016, 16), and to "liberate plurality" (Casavecchia in Gioni 2016, 305).

Devised by the cast and under the direction of Nikolajev Jones with dramaturg Jelena Vuksanovic,[2] the *Gravida* production is designed as an ongoing, continuous process of fragmented dance, song, soundscapes, and video projections that are non-hierarchically shared with the audience.

The following dance script should not be read as a genealogical gestation of mothering, but as previously discussed, *epíches* of convergent time – a time of contradictions, and a transformation towards authenticity, amidst conflict.

The dance script for *Gravida* (2018)

Created by Aleksandra Nikolajev Jones (director and choreographer) and Jelena Vuksanovic (dramaturg). Additional sections of visual and audio description by Carrie Westwater.

Stage 1. The waiting: Weighting room (or the bombarded body)[3]

Visual and audio description: The audience stand in a room outside the theatre, the waiting room. On a large screen, images of fluffy pink commercials promoting the gift of motherhood are wrapped around products of menstruation, juxtaposed with the sounds of war. Underscoring this is a further layer of sound. The audience hear a woman newsreader spouting fake news.

The audience are in a state of waiting, in a "bombarded body", with a dual-energy of being both the unborn child and the mother usurped by

patriarchal ideals. The audience hear NATO bombing from within the belly of the mother, the "creative womb" that they enter in Stage 2. The audience are waiting to be born into an unknown space, an unknown experience.

Stage 2. The birth channel

Visual and audio description: The audience are led through an installation of a "birth channel". As they pass through, they are reborn into a theatre reconfigured as a multi-sensory "creative womb" (Stage 3) that holds what Nikolajev Jones represents as the "mother experience", a crucible of polymorphous moments that smells of lavender. There are whispers in the dark. Words strung together as a repetitive soundscape of women asking the audience: "What does it mean to be a woman"?

The "birth channel" installation is made of red wool and is clothed in a rosy warm light, long and layered. With every step the audience takes, they can hear voices overlapping, creating a birth mantra for the audience, as new arrivals, to come. Each word is delivered as matter of fact, devoid of emotion, but at the same time has an air of authenticity, clamouring to be heard. The stage is empty, but for four figures cloaked in white sheets, as Greek statues being protected from dust in a museum.

Soundscape:
What does it mean to be a woman?
Acceptance of the body. Boredom. Fear of losing freedom. The time is passing. Biological clock. Sexuality. Bleeding. Responsibility. Do I want to bring a child to a world as it is? Loneliness. I'm not strong enough. Pain. Why am I told what I can do? Who told you that you're here to give the minimum? Society loves a pregnant woman. Pressure. Am I a good mother? Be beautiful. Talented. Daring. Damaged. Driven. Destructive. Push boundaries. Innovative. Inspirational. Over sensitive. Vulnerable. Respected. Protected. Cared for. Growing life. I'm carrying something inside of me. Only a mother. I lost my name. Death. Meeting of heaven and earth. Music of the Universe. The body that expresses centuries. The body that gives birth to centuries.

Stage 3. Creative womb – I am "Gravida"

Visual and audio description: The voices fade away and the mother/dancers begin to sway gently. A projection of trees appears on the white cloth that drapes them in shadow. As the audience begin to settle into their role as witness, "Gravida" speaks:

Gravida:
I am Gravida.
I'm a mother, I'm a dancer.
I'm an artist.
I'm sad. I'm happy.
I'm full of love. I'm angry.
I am Gravida.

I feel responsible. And reckless.
I am a creation. And destruction.
It all disappears with a beat of a heart that I feel, like mine.
I'm Gravida.
I'm a mother. I'm a dancer.
I'm nobody. And everybody.
I can be.
Everything.

Stage 4. Earthquake

Visual and audio description: There is a moment of stillness, a split moment of an inward breath. A hiatus, as air fills the lungs and the body heaves up, almost suspended … until collapsing with the outward air of exhaustion. For then… each collapse makes room for the next moment, to breathe.

The mother/dancers are moving their heads towards the audience; their eyes are wide open. They contract on the floor with their upper backs arched upwards, like a heart beating on the floor. The body is oscillating, pulsating, moving through the space with a feeling of contraction and force. The choreography is rhythmic, repetitious, and primal in many ways, and somehow the performers are as one with space. The repetition speaks of infinity (Figure 8.1).

Stage 5. Infinity movements, infinity bodies (or, breastfeeding the world)

Visual and audio description: The music moves into more solid ground as the mother/dancers claim their space as new mothers, somewhat apart from the child. They are exhausted but begin to "breastfeed the world". They find themselves against a wall, a wall they suckle. They are food, feeding a generation of the world. Being drained out but also feeding the earth beneath them with their milk to nurture new life, as it begins to grow. This is another cyclical process.

Figure 8.1 Gravida, Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, 2018.

Source: Photo by Noel Dacey.

As they slide down to the floor imperceivably slowly as the music drains out, each mother/dancer is in space of ephemerality, a time of recovery.

Stage 6. Trees (when I was three, I was free)

Visual and audio description: Repeated words and phrasing gradually builds up the scene with paired movement. The mother/dancers fall to the ground. They become trees that are regenerating, coming together in duets first and then all together. Leaning on one another, supporting each other, and balancing their strength through contact.

Mother/Dancers:
When I was a tree, I felt more grounded.
When I was a tree, I was balanced.
When I was a tree, I was stronger.
When I was a tree, I was happier.
When I was a tree, I was more connected.
When I was three… they cut me down. In pieces.
This is the end of me. Nothing left.

Gravida:
When I was a tree …They cut me down.

Stage 7. Stones & dreams

Visual and audio description: Each mother/dancer holds a stone they feel connected with. As the mother/dancers return to a weight and waiting, for after all, how long does a stone wait to be held? They balance on them, or at least attempt to, before toppling over. The mother/dancers hold their stone, feeling the weight of it; up high and low down, cradling it between exhausted but strong legs. They turn them as the tides do. This is again a rhythmical process but less frenetic as the mother/dancers enter a new more relaxed and contemplative state.

Stage 8. Dive

Visual and audio description: Centre stage, a solo mother/dancer moves in a battle between emotional and physical expositions of societal pressures, versus her own intuition. Questions such as "What is stopping me being the best version of myself? What is stopping me being present in the moment? Where is the obstacle in my body? Where do I feel blocked"? race through her body as the mother/dancer tries to make sense of her condition.

The solo mother/dancer's psychological obstacles are represented by her placing her stone in front of her and stepping on it, moving forward and moving the stone to bridge her next new step. She is "stone stepping", moving forward and methodically leaving traumatic memories behind, but still taking some things forward. Migration is a metaphor here as the mother/dancer psychology is in migration.

In the devastation of this conflict, there is a gentle hum of *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* (Anon) as the stone stepping mother/dancer is joined downstage by mother/dancer who finds her voice and begins to sing. She sings an altered version of *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* which fluctuates between being sung softly and subtly and in the next moment, angry and desperate.

Mother/Dancer:
Twinkle, Twinkle little star
How I wonder what you are?
Inside me you seem so far
Up above the ground we've grown.
Now a mother all alone.
Beneath… my breath, not of me, but within and without of me. I have hidden threads. They are… cut… removed… discarded. (…) Water memories on surface membrane skin. Skinned. When I was three, Mummy said that one day it wouldn't be just me. (…) Becoming and accepting – two-ness? Three-ness? Faking it/Making it.
This is my body! My body. (…) My body! (…) Transforming,
transitioning into an-other. Letting go. (…)

Stage 9. Placenta dance and dying swan

Visual and audio description: A new beat comes in. "The placenta dance" is furious in its celebration, showing the power of the mother full of energy and stamina. The mother/dancers are revived in the knowledge that they are connected to the earth, the tree, the stones, the weight, and the waiting, and they feel supported. The dance expands into dynamic statements of physically free, uninhibited limbs flung across the stage. The mother/dancers own their physical and emotional space and as a final motif, each dancer takes the white cloth from the opening as a reminder to the audience of how this journey begins. They spread the cloth out like a screen, separating the mother and child (the audience) in a caesarean section. "Gravida", pregnant and strong, is projected on the screen.

The performers are moving slightly, stopping, and moving again, in their returned cyclical physicality, alluding to perpetual change. Among them is one mother/dancer who is isolated upstage, she represents a metaphorical signet learning to take flight. As the signet transforms into the swan, she takes a moment to test her wings. From the silent darkness comes the voice of "Gravida".

Gravida:
I'm Gravida.
The Earth is pulling me in.
And I have an earth inside me.
I am you and
You are me.

Conclusion

Gravida, as a project and a performance, functions as a platform for diverse counter-hegemonic representations of the mothering experience. Nikolajev Jones' challenge to the lack of diverse representations of motherhood and her attempts to change the status quo is not easy. However, through a methodology of open and honest dialogue, dance, and an exploration of emotional heritage, Nikolajev Jones is slowly changing perspectives.

Notes

1 Co-Directors of the *Gravida Collective* Aleksandra Nikolajev Jones and Carrie Westwater have worked creatively together since 2016. Together Nikolajev Jones and Westwater performed in Gravida. Together they are Mother Artists.
2 Aleksandra Nikolajev Jones (Choreographer and Mother/Dancer). Jessie Brett, Deborah Light, Mary-Anne Roberts, Lara Ward, Carrie Westwater (Mother/Dancers).
3 Here "epíches" will be set out in English as "stages".

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9 Motherswitch

Tracy Breathnach

When I was a child, with four younger siblings, some days my mother would announce "I'm switching my name to Esmerelda." She wanted to be called something other than Mam and in truth, she didn't want to be called at all, which is why she chose a name we would find difficult to say. She was renaming herself to deflect our energetic and verbal tugging and pulling on her nervous system. Her usual coping strategy was to "switch off" or dissociate. Dissociation and shut-down are states of hyperarousal of the parasympathetic nervous system that are natural responses when the system is feeling increasingly threatened.[1] Now, as a mother of two I find myself exploring this dynamic in relation to my sons, looking for resources to stay connected whilst being able to manage the intensity of sensation in my body when I shift into hyper-aroused states.

Motherswitch (2020) is a durational performance project that attempts to discover new ways of relating between my sons and I, in particular my high-energy six-year-old. It involved daily performance actions carried out in our home in May 2020. The actions we created were developmental – each action was a response to, or grew out of, the previous one. We were exploring both efficacy (which ones actually work?) and also playfulness and joy (which ones do we enjoy most?). I discussed this with my sons before we began, and they both agreed in principle to the idea. This essay is the first public iteration of the work.

I developed the concept during lockdown in the Spring of 2020 when our daily lives involved multi-roleplaying on a scale I had never had to do previously: working and mothering all day, every day. My creative enquiry was simple: how can I manage all of this? As a somatic practitioner, my focus is always on the relationship between my internal and external worlds; listening deeply to my body to increase the choices in how I respond and engage with myself and others.[2] This is a daily practice in which I "learn newly, become pain free, move more easily, do [my] life work more efficiently, and perform with greater vitality and expressiveness" (Eddy 2009, 6). I was noticing how my sympathetic nervous system was being activated much more often in this new living context and I wanted to find practical ways to support myself.

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As a performance artist I am interested in transformation – how does art transform the artist through the practice of it? This runs much deeper than changing the way I think and feel about something – within my somatic practice transformation means there is a permanent change within me, which usually signifies old trauma is released.[3] The first time I had experienced this spontaneously was when I performed *twenty minutes* (2012),[4] when I felt a sudden release of energy in my diaphragm and my breathing was instantly and permanently altered. *Motherswitch* happened in real time with my real children. The effects have had real consequences giving me more choices in my responses to my children as a parent through the healing that occurred when I attended closely to my inner experience.

In this essay, I reflect on my embodied experiences of mothering and health focusing specifically on my nervous system, which was constantly aroused during the period of this work. The text is performative: it is interspersed with the actions that we undertook to inflect and interrupt any linear narrative. I encourage you to notice in your body how this might impact your experience of reading.

"Mum."

When one of my children says this word there is an instant activation of my sympathetic nervous system, which I feel alighting and crackling across my back.

"Mum…"

I enter into alert mode easily, quickly. I'm ready for… It's the mother of all switches.

"Mummummummummummummum…"

Some days I can resource myself to stay calm, other days it is like a firework exploding. Single-mothering, working, and home-schooling in the pandemic has brought this into sharp focus.

The act of mothering has a physical impact on us throughout our mothering journeys, from the wild cocktails of hormones that mothering elicits (oxytocin, adrenaline, testosterone, as well as those involved in pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding if these are part of our mothering journey) to the temporary and permanent marks left on our bodies from this act (biting, kicking, punching, bashing, as well as pregnancy and birthing).

Mothering also has an intense daily impact on our nervous system, which in turn impacts our entire "bodymind."[5] Author and Somatic Experiencing practitioner, Kimberley Ann Johnson describes it as "the main switchboard of our body" (Johnson 2021, 15). She explains:

> our nervous system acts as an electrochemical operating system, communicating to us through sensations, nerve activation, neurotransmitters, and other signals how we are in relationship to our environment. It gives us information about what to move toward and about what to move away from. The nervous system transmits, gauges, and relays our sense of safety, both internally, among the other systems of our own body,

> and externally, to other human nervous systems. It's also a bidirectional circuit, so we can use the functions under our control—like awareness, breathing, and movement—to influence our nervous system.
>
> (Johnson 2021, 15)

The autonomic nervous system, which maintains processes without our conscious control, has three branches: the sympathetic, the parasympathetic, and the social engagement. Each of these branches is connected to all our major organs as well as our brain through the vagus nerve, and each behaves in a different way depending on whether we feel safe or under threat.

1 Accents

(Son/*Mother*)

Play with me.

Play with me.

Mum, play with me…

*Well lad [*finest Yorkshire accent*], there ain't no chance of me playing with you right now – I 'ave to work, remember? We've already spoken about it and I said "I'm going to be working for a while on my laptop" and you said "Ok Mum, I'll go on my tablet."*

But I'm bored [attempting a Yorkshire accent].

Well I'll tell ya this, I've got ten more minutes of tapping on these here keys and then I'll play with ya how about that?

Ok.

He goes off.

I continue working.

[Repeat with other accent variations, Scottish, Irish, Welsh etc.]

Because of the way that our nervous system has evolved, we are hard-wired to respond to our children. According to the polyvagal nervous theory offered by Stephen Porges, our human social nervous system developed to ensure a mother's loyalty to her baby who is completely dependent on her for their survival (Porges 2011, 2021). The social nervous system connects our facial expressions and responsiveness to facilitate maternal bonding and social cooperation, which is called "accurate, or attuned, mirroring, and teaches a baby over time how to react to and interact with the world" (Johnson 2021, 22). From our earliest experiences as a baby, our social nervous system is:

> primed through encounters first with our primary caregiver, usually our mother or the person who fed us, and then through the rest of our family system and the other people who formed our communities, as well as all our friendships and relationships throughout our lives. This system holds our primary imprint of whether or not the world is safe, it tells us if we belong or don't belong, and it also signals a person's trustworthiness.
>
> (Johnson 2021, 22).

We perform our maternal bond through our bodies, our facial expressions, our tone of voice, our gestures, our movement towards and away from our children. In my experience, this is not a consistent way of acting. The mother self I perform shifts from day to day. I created a list of mother selves when I was making my first collaborative performance *AfterBirth* (2016) with my eldest son when he was nine.

Which mother? I could be: the calm, patient mother dealing effectively with a baby who does not want to do what he was being asked to do: keeping everything under control; the frazzled mother running between children and tasks: trying to keep everyone safe, and to get everything done; the playful mother who finds fun ways to distract the children: keeping them occupied and engaged, and perhaps deciding to forget about getting things done; the busy mother who ignores what the children are doing in order to get her work done: she gets the older child to look after the younger child so she has as few interruptions as possible.

When I bring a performance framework to my relationship as a parent, then I become more aware of my role-playing, which gives me a bit more space to be able to respond rather than react. In reality, I play all these types of mothers in a single day. What I have observed over the past few years is that the type of mother I have the capacity to be at any one time is based on how resourced I feel. Resourcing in somatic practice is when I can connect to a sense of safety (we can find something in our outer environment, thoughts or within our body that feels safe enough) so that my nervous system can feel calmer (Levine 1997). This process of learning how to calm ourselves is called regulation. So, when I ask the question "How can I manage all of this?" I am asking how can I regulate my nervous system to be able to manage all of this?

2 Synchronous speaking

(Son/*Mother*)

Play with me/*Play with me.*

Mum/*Mum* [both laugh].

Can you just/*Can you just…*

Stop doing that/*Stop doing that.*

I'm bored/*I'm bored* [he pauses, we are smiling at each other, both waiting].

He goes off.

I continue working.

He returns a minute later.

M…/*Can you water the plants please*?

He goes off.

I continue working.

Babies cannot regulate their own nervous systems and rely on their caregivers to do this in a process of co-regulation. As children grow, they slowly learn how to regulate themselves based on watching others around them, through guidance from caregivers and supportive environments to whom they can

"attach" (Neufield and Maté 2019, 6). The role of mother as "co-regulator" can continue until children are much older, even teenagers. On the other hand, when mothers are overstretched juggling busy work and family lives, or have other responsibilities or other health issues, it can be a struggle to stay regulated themselves – feeling on the edge, wiry, spiky, reactive energy, which inevitably impacts dependants. I can find traits of myself in both and throughout *Motherswitch* I was frequently switching between states of regulation and dysregulation. Equally, I was noticing how this was also true for my son. When he was experiencing dysregulation, he would always come to me. What I began to see clearly was that when he had to do something by himself that he could not do or did not want to do he would become more stressed and would reach to me for play in order to bring him out of the hyperarousal state. One of the key triggers for hyperarousal in me was when he climbed on my chair or my body and I had to use my hand to protect my space.

In her exploration of site-specific performance, Cathy Turner explores "transitional space" from psychologist Donald Winnicott's explanation of the "transitional object" in child development.[6] Turner states: "if all creative activity enables an extension of 'potential space', an engagement in 'transitional process' […] it makes the shifting relationships between 'me' and 'not-me' a field of deliberate enquiry" (Turner 2004, 382). My son does not understand me when I ask him to give me some space because he doesn't perceive the space between us in the same way. In fact, although he is six, he still perceives my body as belonging to him. I am teaching him that he is no longer part of my body, that my body is me, and not-him or not-his. He might not want to learn this.

3 Pulling in

(Son/*Mother*)

[he is climbing on top of me as I work (note he is as tall as my shoulder)]
Osc can you stop climbing on me please? [still climbing]
Love, I don't want you to climb on me. [still climbing]
[I grab him and hug him really tight, I kiss him and we are both laughing]
He goes off.
I continue working.
He returns after a few minutes.

When a mother makes herself present both to her child *and* herself, she engages in an act of radical expansion. She stretches rather than distances herself, binds rather than divides, includes rather than abandons. Instead of thinking about our children as products, multiples, or extensions of ourselves, Hélène Cixous suggests we describe our children as "familiar strangers" (Cixous and Clément 1986, 90). They are wholly other. They are strange, foreign to us. And yet, borne from our flesh, our blood, our children are also intimately familiar to us: "the child is the other but the other without

violence. The other rhythm, the pure freshness, the possible's body. Complete fragility. But vastness itself" (Cixous and Clément 1986, 90).

In *AfterBirth* (2016), I began to think about my relationship to my child in terms of a continuum:

he is close to me	he is further away
(familiar)	(strange)

As I reflected on this in *Motherswitch*, I noticed how I could use my energy and my attention to move towards my son or pull him closer, and I could also push him away and pull myself away or withdraw. He felt all of this. So, when I was working on my computer and all my energy was focused on my task, he experienced the withdrawal of my energy from him. At those times when he wanted connection and I did not want to be interrupted, we immediately had a clash of needs. This is an ethical dilemma which relates to the space between us.

4 Musical theatre

(Son/*Mother*)

Mum, play with me.

[dramatic singing] *Oh Oscar, I would love to play with you right now, but I'm working again! And I need to get these emails done before I finish. Can you play by yourself for a while?*

[climbing on me] *Please don't climb on me while I'm working or we will fall off this chair. You are so big now. You are so big now. You are so. Big. Now.*

Mum, stop singing.

I can't stop singing my son, the songs are just flowing out of my mouth and my lungs. When I want to speak the songs just come and I'll be singing all day loooong.

Mum!

Mum, oh Mum, I am your Mum, Mum, oh Mum, I am your Mum [add some dancing] *Mum, oh Mum, I am your Mum, Mum, Mum, Muuuuuummmm.* [dramatic ending, both laugh]

He goes off.
I continue working.

If I consider it my responsibility to attend to his needs, and at the same time acknowledge that I must also attend to my own needs, then by moving between my responsibility (performed through attention giving) to myself and my responsibility to my son, I am performing a compromise. Jacques Derrida asserts "I cannot respond to the call, the request, the obligation, or even the love of another, without sacrificing the other other, the other others" (Derrida 1995, 68). When I choose to be responsible for him and stop what I'm doing, the part of me that is foregrounded is the mother self. It is an act of tenderness. To him. From me. Tenderness requires sacrifice, it means

ripping and stretching my heart open because in this act I also abandon a part of myself. I abandon the one in me who wants to do her work, the professional self. The act of abandonment triggers my younger self and memories of being abandoned. In her essay on maternal aesthetics, Andrea Liss writes:

> oftentimes the mother's desires collide with her artist self. What distinguishes the feminist mother from the patriarchal model of the mother […] is that the feminist mother cannot carry the myth of the all-loving, all-forgiving and all-sacrificing mother. She still loves, forgives and sacrifices for her child(ren), but not at the expense of the fullness of herself. It is not a matter of "balancing motherhood and work," as the media culture likes to insidiously simplify matters, as if we are really living in a "post-feminist" world. It is the feminist mother's admission that ambiguity is often the norm, an ambiguity that constantly tears and heals between the mother self and the professional self, between the mother self and her sexual self, between the mother self and her own child self.
>
> (Liss 2013, xvii)

Reflecting on the ambiguity that Liss outlines, our series of playful actions used a range of verbal and non-verbal approaches which revealed this interplay of selves and how this was performed through my nervous system in these mother-child encounters. Once again, I asked "How do I manage all of this?"

5 Tickling and wrestling

(Son/*Mother*)

Right, that's it… [I grab him and wrestle him to the floor, tickling and kissing him].

Stop, stop!

So you want me to stop? [hand poised above him].

Yeah.

Ok [gentle kiss].

I get up and go to make a cup of tea.
I make him a snack.
He goes off with it.
I go back to work.

I was raised as a Catholic in rural Ireland during the 1980s and sacrifice, hardship, and suffering were viewed as an intrinsic part of life – it made the promise of heaven even more appealing. When I watched adults around me, I could see how this was often extended to "playing the martyr," in which a person takes on the "weight of the world" and a sense of obligation to carry it, as some sort of unspoken penance for being alive. This was especially true for women, who "carried" the sin of Eve in their bodies. It was extremely rare that I witnessed a woman in my childhood expressing her own needs and

boundaries. It was as though they didn't even know it was an option. Instead, the women I witnessed played a more passive-aggressive role of manipulating social situations to get their needs met.

From watching these behaviours, I learned how to use guilt and shame with a deft sleight-of-hand. I could deflect energy easily with sarcasm. I learned how to disconnect just enough to let people know I was unhappy or angry, but not too much that I couldn't be seen by those around me. We called it "getting odd" with someone. I learned how to internalise and *switch off* from my feelings because it was rarely OK to express them. What I began to notice in *Motherswitch* was that when I felt overwhelmed it triggered a victim-response in me – I was suddenly at the mercy of my child's needs and these conditioned patterns were the quickest reactions to emerge. It was painful to acknowledge them in me. They have power only when they remain slightly under the skin of conscious awareness. Once they were brought into full awareness, I could see them for what they are – learned behaviours borne out of a culture in which women are expected to look after everyone else and be fulfilled by this alone. I made my peace with these aspects of myself and they dissolved, creating more mental and emotional space and discharging some of the stored energy in my nervous system. Now, I had more response-ability for myself and my children.

We both have something we want to get and we learn strategies and tactics to achieve this. Sometimes I feel like an adult and sometimes I feel like I'm six, the same age as you. I mirror you. You mirror me. I wield and subvert my adult authority over you and feel pangs of guilt. You wield your sense of ownership over me and order me to do things for you.

You look to me for connection to feel safe. My inner six-year-old wants this too. Sometimes I can interrupt my own hyper-focused, hyper-aroused "must get this done" which keeps me disconnected from my body and I look at you. Sometimes this is all you need. Sometimes this is all I need.

Sometimes I use language to push you away. Sometimes I switch it to bring us closer. Language as "relation, relationship. It connects. It goes two ways, many ways, an exchange, a network. Its power is not in dividing but in binding, not in distancing but in uniting" (Le Guin 1989). Ursula Le Guin called this the mother tongue.

We play and learn together, alert, engaged, curious, open, pushing and pulling each other, feeling for the edges of our attachment to each other. My old, conditioned patterns appear and are interrupted and discarded as new choices are revealed in this work together. I am grateful for all of this.

6 Taking to the mountain

(Son/*Mother*)

Mum, play with me.

Ok get your socks and shoes on, let's go up the mountain.

We both go off together.

As I outlined at the beginning of this chapter, this has been a transformational performance project for me. In writing this piece, I have understood

more clearly how the actions have changed me and my relationship with my sons. To end, I would like to share some of the key points of learning that came out of the actions for me:

Interrupt – disrupt

When my child is constantly interrupting me, I feel it as an energetic tug pulling my attention away from what I *need* to get done. This causes a spike in my sympathetic nervous system. In order to counter-balance this, my creative responses were to disrupt the pattern of behaviour that was being played out: demanding my attention. This disruption usually brought more humour and made me feel less tense, which immediately helped to ease the situation.

Distract – refocus

I noticed that when I tried to distract him from what he wanted (me to play with him), distraction alone did not divert his focus. Instead, I realised I need to help him to refocus his energy. If he was looking for connection and if I was not available to give him this, I could help him to change direction and connect with another activity.

Increase intensity

Sometimes the most effective approach was to raise the intensity between us, either physically through hugging, tickling, wrestling, or through a dramatic musical theatre interlude. Sometimes I tried hysterical laughing! By making myself bigger energetically it seemed to ground him a bit more, and again allowed me to laugh to release the tension. Physical pressure is vital when our nervous systems are spiking, it grounds the energy and creates a bio-feedback loop that lets the brain know you are receiving the contact you are looking for.

Mirror

Responding to the proposition that the social nervous system is about the parent mirroring the child in order to support their regulation and sense of safety through secure attachment, one of the themes of our games was for me to mirror my son. To observe his energy and to reflect it back often through language. He is too young to understand what I'm doing on a cognitive level, but the impact was always tangible.

Notes

1 See Ruby Jo Walker's map of the arousal states at: www.rubyjowalker.com/PVchart_200706.jpg.
2 Soma is the Greek word for body.

3 For further information on this process, please see Somatic Experiencing https://traumahealing.org.
4 For more information see https://tracybreathnach.com/tracy-about-me/#previous.
5 Within the somatic field the terms bodymind or mindbody are used to describe the connectedness of our mental and physical aspects, arising from Eastern mind-body practices including yoga and martial arts (Eddy 2009, 7).
6 The transitional object (often a soft toy or a blanket) is "the place in space and time where and when the mother is in the process of transition from being (in the baby's mind) merged in with the infant and alternatively being experienced as an object to be perceived rather than conceived of. The use of an object symbolizes the union of two, now separate things, *at the point in time and space of the initiation of their state of separateness* [original emphasis]" (quoted in Turner 2004, 381).
7 At the time of making these performances Tracy was known as Tracy Evans, she has subsequently changed her name to Tracy Breathnach.

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10 Did I Request Thee, Maker, from My Minced Meat to Mould Me Infant?

Or MANIFESTO FOR A MATERNAL AESTH-ETHICS, Proposal for "PROVOCATION and PRACTICE"

Freya Verlander

Introduction

This chapter sets forth a manifesto for a "MATERNAL AESTH-ETHICS" which proposes how maternal aesthetics might gesture towards ethical action through "PROVOCATION AND PRACTICE," before presenting two case studies which model the ideas. The manifesto outlines how maternal aesthetics and maternal practice might be used in works of performance and, more specifically, suggests how the interplay between them has the potential to engage audiences in wider maternal practice(s). While the manifesto section of this chapter draws on a number of works of maternal performance, I focus on two illustrative case studies by performer Elisabeth Carlile in the second part of the chapter. Firstly, on the theme of maternal aesthetics, I consider *Hush Now My Darling* (2016), a performative exploration of a queer woman's maternal instinct in which she shapes a baby from minced meat. This aesthetic form partly inspires my title. In John Milton's *Paradise Lost,* Adam says: "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay/to mould me man?" (1667, 258), a question for God, which lends itself to my reformulation: "Did I request thee, Maker, from my minced meat to mould me infant?" The extended original quote: "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay/To mould Me man? Did I solicit thee/From darkness to promote me?" also functions as the epigraph to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), a text which provokes wider ethical debates surrounding the creation of life and our responsibilities towards those we create, in whatever form – clay, an assemblage of body parts, minced meat, or human baby – this takes. The reformulated title, therefore, draws on these texts and my reading of Carlile's work in which she shapes, in veritably *Frankensteinian* fashion, an aesthetic form provoking similar questions.

Secondly, on the theme of maternal relations, I present Carlile's one-to-one performances of *Rubatosis* (2017), which invite interaction with participants as a form of exchange. I suggest how the framework of this one-to-one

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performance event gestures towards an ethics of responsibility for others beyond the performance. This chapter ultimately argues that performance aesthetics might not only represent the maternal, and aspects of maternal experience, they may also provoke and/or gesture towards the necessity of a wider maternal practice, or social practice drawn from maternal performance. I build on existing scholarship to suggest how such aesthetics might be constitutive, more broadly, of a maternal "aesth-ethics" (Vanraes 2017, 28), a term I use to refer to the ways in which the performance aesthetics and performance of maternal practices might act as a provocation to ethical behaviours and considerations outside the performance.

The chapter opens with my adaptation of Mierle Ukeles' *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!* (1969) which sets out the ideas underpinning this argument. Ukeles' manifesto aims to make visible the everyday maintenance activities, domestic and public, which support human and ecological infrastructures. Ukeles' long-term public maintenance works bring two social sectors, the New York Sanitation Department and the National Endowment for the Arts, into productive, and performative, dialogue (Jackson, 2011, 99). Ukeles' *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969*! calls attention to maintenance roles performed by mothers, housewives, and maintenance workers (for minimum wage or no pay) and proposes that the "CARE" exhibition would "zero in on pure maintenance [and] exhibit it as contemporary art" (1969, 2). The proposal is a feminist critique and Ukeles' subsequent works with New York's Department of Sanitation, including *Ballet Mechanique for Six Mechnical Sweepers* (1983) and *Touch Sanitation* (1978), further develop these themes of labour and interdependence. Ukeles' work makes maintenance workers and maintenance processes visible, as Shannon Jackson suggests, by using "an explicit language of theatre and choreography [which] set[s] up a stage for viewing the existent but otherwise under-noticed spectacles of sanitation" (2011, 100).

In this chapter, I aim to draw attention not only to the way in which maternal aesthetics, within performance works, make visible the maintenance work involved in maternal practices, but also strategies by which such performances might gesture towards, or provoke, an awareness and/or performance of maternal practice(s) that extends (or makes possible the extension of) maternal practices beyond the performance. The case studies I consider similarly address wider systems and intersubjective relationships through the dramatisation of maternal practices, use of specific materials, and facilitation of processes of exchange between performer and audience members which gesture beyond the immediate space. Carlile's *Hush Now, My Darling* (2016), for example, encodes questions of human relations to other species (as product, consumable, or subject) through the performance of a maternal relationship with a baby made of minced beef. Carlile uses an animal-based product but performs maternal acts towards it, as though it were a baby, and thus prompts thinking on wider interspecies relations and food processing systems.

This chapter adopts the framework of Ukeles' manifesto which presents two basic systems: "Development and Maintenance," but re-configures them as Provocation and Practice. The two basic systems here are inherited from Lena Šimić and Emily Underwood-Lee's *Manifesto for Maternal Performance (Art) 2016!* (2017b), in particular their two statements: "**Day 3c.** Maternal performance must be a provocation" and "**Day 2.** Maternal performance relies on the other" (Šimić and Underwood-Lee 2017b, 131), which correlate to Provocation and Practice and also reflect the other half of my manifesto's genetic makeup. Ukeles' two basic systems are linked, respectively, to the psychoanalytic Life and Death drives in which "Development" is connected to the "Life" drive, and "Maintenance" is linked to the "Death" drive. In Ukeles' manifesto, the basic system of Development/Life is connected to creativity and the impetus for individual creation and the Maintenance/Death system is connected to the support roles, or the maintenance practices, required to sustain others and support creativity. In my adapted manifesto, the "Provocation" system similarly links to the impetus for creativity, but specifically outlines ideas for creative aesthetic provocations (which might inspire spectators' thinking or actions) as part of maternal performance. "Practice" recognises links to the ways in which maternal performance is interrelational and makes visible, or cultivates, the more complex social relations imbued in maternal practice(s) and, indeed, the more complex social relations that maternal practices might support beyond the performance space.

MANIFESTO[1]

FOR A MATERNAL AESTH-ETHICS
Proposal for "PROVOCATION AND PRACTICE"

I. **IDEAS**

A. *The Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!* and *The Manifesto for Maternal Performance (Art) 2016!*

I should begin, probably, by saying this is not a manifesto in any traditional sense. And yet it is born of two others: The *Manifesto for Maternal Performance (Art) 2016!* (Šimić and Underwood-Lee 2017b) and the *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969! Proposal for an exhibition "CARE"* (Ukeles 1969). In the *Manifesto for Maternal Performance (Art) 2016!* Šimić and Underwood-Lee consider the manifesto form:

> **Day 36.** I wonder about the form. How do we negotiate the manifesto form of relational content, of correspondence […] How to collapse content and form so that it is a maternal performance?
>
> (2017b, 138)

They are concerned with how best to present the collaboration, which documents daily maternal practices, within the performative manifesto framework of the forty-week gestation period. I also

wonder about form. I wonder how best to represent that this work is in conversation with and, indeed, in relation to – no, born of (?) – its parent manifestos, as well as being performative in the sense of aiming to bring together maternal aesthetics and maternal practice as mutually reinforcing, and generative, ideas.

B. Two basic systems: Provocation and Practice. Did I request thee, Maker, from my minced meat/To mould me infant?
   - Provocation: **Day 3c.** Maternal performance must be a provocation.
   - Practice: **Day 2.** Maternal performance relies on the other.

C. **Day 3c.** Maternal performance must be a provocation; maternal aesthetics can act as a provocation. Maternal aesthetics = representations of the maternal and motherhood & the staging of motherhood and maternal practice as part of performance = provocation.

   Give birth, give birth in a gallery,[2] feed the baby, Lactation Station,[3] set up a breast milk bar, feed an audience, breast feed the baby in front of an audience,[4] tape a bottle of milk to your skin,[5] create a womb,[6] create a womb for audiences to move through,[7] transfer your own uterus – piece by piece – to a jar with formaldehyde, do this in front of an audience,[8] make a baby, make a baby out of minced meat – try to soothe its cries,[9] fill a large goldfish bag full of water and hold it like a baby,[10] teach the baby to talk, talk to the baby, ask the audience to babysit,[11] give the audience something to care about, give them Frankenstein's Creature,[12] give them lifelike dolls with heartbeats,[13] give them skin-to-skin contact, traces of fingerprints in "The Mother" sculpture,[14] the legacy of maternal touch, take care of the audience, tell the participant stories, listen to their stories, back scratch with fingernails on bare skin, brush their hair, clean their ears.[15] At the end, paint a heart on their skin.[16]

D. **Day 2.** Maternal performance relies on the other. "Carriance = care+response-ability+wit(h)nessing in self-fragilization is a direct path to ethics: Witnessing and responsibility to the vulnerable other" (Ettinger 2015, 344).

   Maternal performance gestures towards a potential maternal aesth-ethics by using aesthetics, or maternal materials, and/or performing maternal practices which convey ideas about wider systems, issues, and intersubjective relationships. In relying on the other it invites experiences of "self-fragilzation," or mutual vulnerability, which are conducive to "carriance."

   Maternal performance might, thus, function as a "direct path to ethics" if its aesthetic forms and practices provoke "carriance," or the spectator's motivation towards "care+response-ability+wit(h)nessing" for vulnerable other(s).

E. The proposal for a maternal aesth-ethics would zero in on the specific ways in which maternal aesthetics and practice act as a provocation to action and ethics beyond performance.

II. **THE MATERNAL AESTH-ETHICS PROPOSAL: *"PROVOCATION AND PRACTICE"***

Two parts: **Day 3c.** Provocation, **Day 2**. Practice.

A. *Part One:* **Day 3c.** Maternal performance must be a provocation

"What would my mother think of this?" (Carlile 2016a)

Maternal aesthetics, or representations of the maternal and/or motherhood, must have the capacity to provoke.

Maternal aesthetics may be drawn from maintenance everyday things, and used to create maternal performance.

The performance of the maternal means performing these everyday things – making a baby, representing a baby, soothing, or feeding a baby – but it is the aesthetic forms — the props and the materials — which are used to represent maternal experiences or practices that must be harnessed. Meat. Milk. Eggs. Uteruses. Maternal aesthetics might draw inspiration from memories, questions, bodies, and wider systems which intersect and inform maternal practices.

MATERNAL AESTHETICS MIGHT PROVOKE PRACTICES BEYOND THE WORK.

B. *Part Two:* **Day 2** Maternal performance relies on the other

Maternal performance relies on its audiences. The performer might enact maternal practices, ask the audience to perform maternal practices, or gesture through aesthetics towards the necessity of a maternal practice, as a form of ethics, in wider society.

- the performance of maternal practice might be within the performance space BUT it can also gesture to complex and connective social relations
- it might ask the spectator to assume responsibility for maternal practice as part of the performance OR it might enact maternal practices with the spectator as participant.
- maternal practice, as part of a maternal aesthetics, might provoke the audience to think about the relationship between the performance aesthetics and practice(s) and those beyond the performance space.
- what is the relationship between maternal practice, provocation, and ethics?

Provocation and practice in performance

The purpose of structuring the chapter in this way is to expand on the ideas outlined in the manifesto through the case studies of Carlile's work. I suggest how representations of motherhood, and maternal practices, within Carlile's performance works might model, provoke, or invite (re)configurations of maternal practice when audience members are prompted by aesthetic forms, or participation in one-to-one performances, to consider others. Indeed, works of maternal performance might use the interplay between provocation

and practice to influence a "direct path" to ethical thinking/acting. While the manifesto itself is a playful provocation for considering the potential of maternal aesthetics and practice, it is also imbued with its own (re)productive logic at the level of form (product of two manifestos) and theory with relation to Bracha L. Ettinger's concept of "carriance."

The concept of "carriance," as we saw outlined in the manifesto, is formulated thus: "Carriance = care+response-ability+wit(h)nessing in self-fragilization," which in turn might function as a "direct path to ethics: Witnessing and responsibility to the vulnerable other" (Ettinger 2015, 344). Maternal performance might, therefore, function as a "direct path to ethics" if the aesthetic forms used and/or the practices modelled, or invited, provoke "carriance" – or the spectator's motivation towards "care+response-ability+wit(h)nessing" for other(s). Šimić explains "all humans carry the maternal within them, regardless of their gender, regardless of whether they have chosen to become mothers or not, because all humans carry the memory of being carried" (2018, 406), and, therefore, have the capacity to assume care/carrying responsibilities for others. While maternal thinking proper comes from lived experiences of motherhood and mothering (in whatever form this takes), there is a central idea that we are all always in relation to the maternal.

Didier Anzieu's psychoanalytic theory of *The Skin Ego* (1985) provides a touch-based illustration of a similar idea. Anzieu argues that the infant's skin-based experiences in the original maternal environment serve as a model for intersubjective relationship formation. The infant derives a "skin ego," or a sense of itself as separate from others, through its experiences of skin-to-skin contact, and experiences of care, in the original maternal environment. The maternal environment, here, refers to the infant's primary caregiver. If the quality of contact is responsive and meaningful then, according to Anzieu, the infant imagines a shared skin which connects it to its caregiver. Its sense of "self" is as connected to the mother. The understanding of an individuated "self" arrives following the rending of the imagined "common skin." *The Skin Ego* theorises the infant's process of identity formation – through skin-based experiences – and, therefore, constructs what I refer to as the *legacy of maternal touch*. By this I mean the way in which the infant's experiences of skin-to-skin contact form the template for the touch-based negotiation of later intersubjective relations. While not visibly connected or physically present, the original maternal contact is *always present* in the sense that they are felt, or (re)presented, in future contact and the quality of such contact. The original maternal environment is, therefore, to borrow Ettinger's term, the "mattern" (2014), or the pattern modelled on formative experiences of maternal touch, for the development of wider social relationships and, potentially, a touch-based ethics – how we respond with tact to others.

There are, therefore, similar concepts across Ettinger and Anzieu's works that operate at the intersections between aesthetics and ethics, between provocation and practice, in the construction of maternal practice as social practice beyond the maternal performance (or art) work. And, indeed, how maternal

aesthetics and practice within works might gesture towards the necessity of an ethical response to others beyond it. I am simplifying Ettinger's theories here, but I want to draw the concept of "carriance" into conversation with Anzieu. Arne Vanraes, summarises "carriance" in a useful way for this purpose:

> Through the appeal of carriance's joint endeavour, carrying caring becomes ethical as proto-ethical compassion fosters care-full empathizing, wit(h)nessing informs bearing witness and response-ability inspires taking responsibility.
>
> (2017, 31)

Through "carriance" the idea of maternal practice, or carrying the other, might become a social practice in which "carrying caring becomes ethical [and] inspires taking responsibility" (Vanreas 2017, 31) for vulnerable others within society. To carry the vulnerable other is to practice an ethics of care, to take responsibility for the "other," in a way that is derivative of maternal practice. As Ettinger explains, "Whoever says 'I' is the carrier [and] enters the feminized matrixial ethics beyond gender, sex, or social function – to carry is the primal mode upon which responsibility for the other is patterned, or rather I would like to say 'matterned'" (2014).

Moving on, now, I want to suggest how these more generalised ideas of ethics and aesthetics might be understood in the specifics of live performance. I argue both "carriance" and the legacy of the maternal touch might emerge in works of maternal performance and gesture towards the necessity of a wider maternal ethics and/or touch-based ethics of care. Maternal aesthetics can provoke audience members to wit(h)ness, or witness with the other, during performance. Aesthetics which encourage "witnessing with" have the potential to provoke spectators to assume "carriance" responsibilities for others. This might be within the performance itself or towards the vulnerable others encoded in a work, beyond the performance environment. An audience, for example, may be allocated roles where they are either carried, and cared for, by the performer (for example through touch-based interactions which express care for the participant in one-to-one performances, such as *Rubatosis* which concludes with the performer painting a heart on the participant's skin) or where they are invited to perform the role of carrier – invited to take responsibility for a vulnerable other within the performance (being asked, for example, to care for a life-like doll in Nigel Barrett and Louise Mari's *The Body* (2015)).

Through case study analysis, I suggest that maternal performance has the capacity to provoke maternal thinking and practice beyond the performance space by performing and informing "carriance" practices and more complex social and ethical relations. The two case studies which follow are demonstrative of the way in which aesthetics and the performance of maternal practices might act as a provocation towards "carriance," and signal the potential for a maternal "aesth-ethics."

Provocation: *Hush Now My Darling* (2016)

A crying baby and the voice of the mother trying to calm it down could be heard from a recording, Lissie performed representations of breastfeeding and birth on screen and on the floor … In order to give the impression that milk was pouring from her breast, she had placed a bottle of milk on her skin by adhesive tape and, like a child playing with plasticine, she made a baby out of minced meat (Solakidi 2016).

Central to my manifesto is the way in which "**Day 3c.** Maternal performance must be a provocation" relates to aesthetics (representations of motherhood and maternal practice) in performance works. With reference to ideas outlined in section **Day 3c.** of my manifesto, I focus on Carlile's work *Hush Now My Darling* which explores a queer woman "attempting to understand her own maternal instinct" (Carlile 2016b) and the performativity of motherhood. The work was part of Camden People's Theatre's "Starting Blocks" scheme which supports artists to develop new work during a ten-week residency. It was then staged as part of Camden People's Theatre's *Calm Down Dear*: *A Festival of Feminism,* a festival of feminist theatre which took place in 2016. It has also been staged at Battersea Arts Centre and as part of the 2016 Edinburgh Fringe Festival, programmed by Forest Fringe.

The representations of giving birth, breastfeeding, and comforting the infant are examples of the performance of maternal practice. The milk, taping a bottle to the skin, the meat used to shape the baby, and the sheet Carlile uses to wrap up the baby, are all examples of maternal aesthetics. The artist has an awareness that her experimentation with maternal aesthetics might provoke audiences. When Carlile reflects on the development of her work – "What would my mother think of this?" (2016a) – we see not only the understanding that this work is potentially provocative but also the way in which we are always, in some way, negotiating a relationship with the maternal. What *would* my mother think of this?

In this section, I focus specifically on the minced meat as maternal aesthetic. Below is a list of materials, detailed in *Hush Now My Darling's* Tour Pack, used to create the baby:

- Bowl
- Meat
- Egg × 6
- Milk

*Health and safety warning

– The stage gets dirty with milk and meat (Carlile n.d., 6)

The Tour Pack describes how the "success and failure of caring for a child is physicalised through the creation of a baby out of raw, pre-packaged meat" (Carlile n.d., 2) and residual meat and milk on stage. Carlile writes:

> Within this performance I question the social and familial expectations, that are expected of myself as a queer woman in my twenties, in regards

> to beginning a family and becoming a mother. I try and understand the hierarchy of care given to different species and why I prefer to nurture and mother animals. Through the use of lip-syncing, verbatim text, and excessive make-up, I blur my human identity and attempt to become a cow in order to provide the necessary care for a baby made out of beef; which would have otherwise gone "to waste" and been "tossed" as it is no longer deemed to be of benefit to humans.
>
> (2016b)

We see encoded in the minced meat, and its shaping, a maternal aesthetic which represents an awareness of maternal responsibility. The influence parents have over shaping their children, as well as pressures to shape well, and soothe, are dramatised. Reminiscent of Milton's Adam, who says: "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay/to mould me man?" (1667, 258), Carlile's work lends itself to my reformulation: "Did I request thee, Maker, from my minced meat to mould me infant?" which refers to the act of shaping the infant. The attempts to soothe it, and to feed it, represent responsibilities towards the infant as "other" who, as is often thrown back to parents by their children, "didn't ask to be born." Through the exploration of female and animal bodies, and the aesthetic of blurring human identity with animal, the work also highlights questions of interspecies relationships. In her blog post of 15 February 2016, Carlile explains the minced meat acts as a medium for thinking through "my own relationship to a different species whilst taking into consideration a wider, well recognised relationship between human and animal, the food processing system," (2016a) which exemplifies another way in which the maternal aesthetic emphasises more complex and connective social relations beyond the immediate performance environment. An audience member from a performance at Battersea Arts Centre, for example, comments "as body merges from meat and back, your own responses are overwhelming … feeling the vulnerability of the baby, the animal and the performer as one is quite thought provoking!" (Carlile n.d., 4).

The shaping of the meat also captures the idea of the legacy of maternal touch. Carlile's fingerprints, and the impact of her touch, are legible in the formation of her minced meat baby. The aesthetic might encode an impetus towards action, the realisation of the interconnectedness of bodies, human and animal, m/other, clearly provokes maternal thinking but also has potential to provoke more compassionate behaviours towards others. The idea that maternal aesthetics might provoke audiences, and, thereby, the potential of maternal performance to influence wider social practice, links to Šimić and Underwood-Lee's first manifesto entry: "**Day 1a.** Maternal Performance should always be born of action, of possibility, of making, of creativity" (2017b, 131). Maternal aesthetics might provoke spectators or encode an impetus to action. In Barrett and Mari's *The Body* (2015), for example, spectators were given life-like dolls with heartbeats to look after for the duration of the work and this may provoke spectators to enact maternal practices (here towards the aesthetic form of the doll as representation of vulnerable other). Carlile's work illustrates the

potential to gesture towards an ethics of care towards vulnerable "others" – the vulnerability of animals and babies highlighted through meat form – outside of performance in the way in which maternal aesthetics inform maternal practice(s). The work prompts thinking (and potentially action) on care for infants, how care is and might be extended towards other species, and our ethical responsibilities in relation to food-processing, waste, and other animals.

Practice: *RUBATOSIS*

//One-to-One Performance//2017//

> ***Rubatosis:*** *(n). The unsettling awareness of your own heartbeat.*
>
> **Rubatosis** is an ongoing documentation project which draws attention to individuals' relationship with their own heart, focusing on how to fix "a broken heart." Through one-to-one performances, I spend time with each participant, exchanging stories, anecdotes, and words of wisdom. As a thank you for sharing, the participants are invited to have a personalised heart painted on to their body, wherever they so choose.
>
> (Carlile 2017a)

In this section, I consider Carlile's one-to-one performance work *Rubatosis* (2017), as a case study for the ways in which maternal performances might construct, and utilise, relationships between performer and audience as part of a wider maternal practice. Carlile's *Rubatosis* was staged at The Gate, Cardiff (2017), and as part of an event called "Body, Sense, and Well-Being: A Live Art Event" at Rich Mix, London, in 2018. It is within the framework of the "Body, Sense, and Well-Being" event that I consider *Rubatosis,* specifically the aims, described on the "Body, Sense, and Well-Being" event webpage, to "explore [the] senses and well-being to create an environment for self-care, expression and reconnection" (Poole 2018). The event's webpage explains "you [audience members] can participate or observe the performances and are encouraged to use the resources provided to reflect on your own well-being [and that] the evening is an opportunity to be cared for, but also to reflect on how we are or aren't looking after ourselves and those around us" (Poole 2018). The live art event is indicated as a space where participants can expect to receive care but also one which lends itself to reflective practice – or the possibility to think beyond the event in terms of how participants might practice care for, or carry, those around them. In this sense, the framework of the event might be understood as a provocation to audience members to wit(h)ness, or witness with the other, during performance to question how they might look after others beyond it.

Through the example of *Rubatosis*, I further interrogate Šimić and Underwood-Lee's idea that:

> Performance is relational: the performer is always in relation to the audience and the event of performance is only created in the moment

> that performer and audience member come together; performances are co-created at the moment they are received by an audience, be they a participant or the more traditional theatre spectator.
>
> (2017a, 3)

More specifically, I want to draw out the idea that "maternal performance has the capacity to invoke more complex and connective social relations" (Šimić 2018, 401). Carlile's blog post "Performing Rubatosis for the first time!" (2017b), on her personal website, reflects on her experiences in a way which links to these ideas. She writes:

> I was joined by lots of individuals who shared both their time and their personal thoughts with me […] In effect, I am asking those who choose to interact with Rubatosis to very quickly share their personal experiences with a stranger, in a strange setting. I found myself talking about my own experiences a lot more than I anticipated or planned. Of course, people responded better once I had shown that I was just as vulnerable as they were. What I thought would be a cathartic experience for my participants, became accidentally cathartic for myself as well. I think the most important thing which I have taken away from performing this for the first time, is that this interaction is an exchange and not just a service.
>
> (Carlile 2017b)

While Carlile does not explore maternal themes as explicitly within *Rubatosis* as she does in *Hush Now My Darling,* the one-to-one format in which she "spend[s] time with each participant, exchanging stories, anecdotes, and words of wisdom" models a type of maternal performance through actions of generosity, care, and exchange. Carlile's reflection "I found myself talking more about my own experiences a lot more than I anticipated," and the idea that "this interaction is an exchange and not just a service" opens out on to the concept of "self-fragilization" or shared vulnerability, which is part of carriance. As outlined in my manifesto, participants may be allocated roles where they are carried, and cared for, by the performer. In *Rubatosis,* Carlile creates an exchange process, whereby she carries the participant, but they are also invited to perform the role of carrier beyond the performance. This framework might be understood to support the participants' experience of, or the possibility of, experiencing self-fragilisation; it may prompt participants to undertake carriance beyond this one-to-one experience.

This sense of exchange works similarly to Lynn Lu's one-to-one participatory event *Tend* (2015) which models maternal practice as wider practice and in performance. In *Tend,* Lu offered a similar process of exchange as participants were invited "one at a time – to relate a personal trauma that still troubled them. In exchange, I offered a menu of cherished "solaces" that I received as a child from my mother" (Lu with Šimić and Underwood-Lee 2020, 17). Lu performed acts including "back scratching with fingernails on

bare skin, ear cleaning, hair brushing, storytelling […] lying down side by side" (Lu with Šimić and Underwood-Lee 2020, 18). The scratching on bare skin, as a memory of "cherished "solaces" that [Lu] received as a child from [her] mother" exemplifies the idea of the legacy of maternal touch, or the way Ettinger's idea of "carriance" might be related to Anzieuian theory. Lu's experiences of touch-based contact with her mother form the template for the development of later intersubjective relationships, within the performance framework, that may be negotiated through contact. While not visible, the original maternal contact is always present, felt, or reproduced in future contacts. The original maternal environment in Anzieu's, *The Skin Ego* forms the "mattern," based on formative experiences of maternal touch, for the development of wider social relationships and, potentially, touch-based ethics within works of maternal performance. Carlile's one-to-one performances end with skin-to-skin contact as she paints a heart on each participant's skin (wherever they choose) as a reminder of the intimate interactive exchange which is, then, carried with them beyond the performance space.

Conclusion

This chapter has used the Carlile case studies to suggest how "Provocation: **Day 3c.** Maternal performance must be a provocation" emerges in specific maternal aesthetics used to represent aspects of the maternal experience in performance; and how, in turn, this can be understood in relation to "Practice: **Day 2.** Maternal performance relies on the other" – in terms of the ways in which maternal aesthetics might encode a provocation to wider ethical considerations beyond the performance. To conclude, I briefly draw attention to the following passage, which draws together questions of performance making and the making of relationships in performance, in a summative way:

> What is it specifically about the maternal that could be aligned with performance making? Bracha L. Ettinger's concept of "carriance" asks us to consider each other more compassionately with fragility and care. Such considerations need to at some level include action, which performs our intention. Intentional performance as action is activated through our desires to be in relation, responsive to each other and ourselves. Therefore performance as action might be a space through which the most immediate relations happen in a given context, with intention. Could this public disclosure of immediate relations align the making of intentional performance by action, to the maternal, and its more compassionate, "carriance?"
>
> (Šimić and Underwood-Lee 2017b, 136)

In her interview with Global Arts and Politics Alliance (GAPA), posted on GAPA's website on July 4, 2016, Carlile said "as well as inviting people to think about who they are, I want to remind people to think about how they treat Others. To consider their actions a little more carefully and

think about the reaction it will evoke" (Carlile 2016c). Performing actions, for example, which make visible maternal labour, or which invite the audience into performing maternal responsibilities. In other words, Ettinger's idea that "empathy and containing are not enough, if we want to move from ethics to politics, because they address only the other who is in front of you and don't reach the other *others,* those who are sometimes evoked yet are not there" (2017). When asked if she considered her work to be political, Carlile replied "there are definitely political themes in the work […] It dabbles with community and how we treat each other" (GAPA 2016). It is my contention, however, that Carlile's works are political in the way they ask, or provoke, audiences to consider the ethics of their relationships with others – other species, and wider systems – and to think care-fully about "other *others*" who are not present.

This chapter includes a playful manifesto which outlines ideas on how aesthetics might act as a provocation in works of maternal performance and how the performance of maternal practice might highlight, or produce, complex and connective social relationships. The manifesto ruminates on ways in which aesthetics and practice, within maternal performance, might gesture towards a kind of "aesth-ethics" which, in turn, suggests the potential for maternal practice(s) to become wider social practice. In exposing the social and institutional position of the mother, maternal performance – specifically the choice of maternal aesthetics or representations and staging of motherhood and maternal practices – has the potential to model, invite, and suggest alternative ways of being together in performance and beyond.

Notes

1 The formatting of this section of the chapter is inspired by Ukeles' original manifesto – for example, where Ukeles presented material in bold or italics I have used the same formatting. Similarly, where I have borrowed ideas from *Manifesto for Maternal Performance (Art) 2016!,* such as **Day 3c.** and **Day 2,** I have maintained the original bold formatting in the reproduction of material here.
2 See Marni Kotak's *The Birth of Baby X* (2011).
3 See Jess Dobkin's *Lactation Station* (2016).
4 See Lynn Lu's *Adagio* (2013).
5 See Elisabeth Carlile's *Hush Now My Darling* (2016).
6 See Lisa Reider's *Womb* (2016).
7 See Rebecca Louise Law's *The Womb* (2019).
8 See Natasha Davis' *Rupture* (2009).
9 See Elisabeth Carlile's *Hush Now, My Darling* (2016).
10 See Ali Pidsley's production of Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (2017).
11 See Zoo Indigo's *Under the Covers* (2010).
12 See Eleanor Rhode's production of Tristan Bernays' re-imagining of *Frankenstein* (2017).
13 See Nigel Barrett and Louise Mari's *The Body* (2015).
14 See Donna Huanca's *SCAR CYMBALS* (2016).
15 See Lynn Lu's *Tend* (2015).
16 See Elisabeth Carlile's *Rubatosis* (2017).

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11 Maternal Poetics of Care in Plastic Spaces

prOphecy sun

Introduction

> When I was two, my mommy's body was my wild, insurmountable, and comforting landscape. I would hide in her hair and get my feet warm if I tucked my toes under her body. I remember her carrying me to my crib, and her long beautiful red hair spilling over my face. Sometimes, I even slept between her and Daddy, and beside my sister. Other times, it was just my mother's warmth, lulling me into sleep like a warm breeze, scattering and meandering.
>
> (sun 2018, 109)

Acts of care are complex, they take time, energy, and attention and happen all the time. As exemplified in the vignette above, care is often associated with maternal bodies because they provide soothing or comforting actions. However, care goes beyond the body, as care work is collaborative, embodied, and is critically important for everyone, species, and thing to survive. Bracha L. Ettinger has engaged with and articulated a framework for care that she calls *Carriance,* which she outlines as a universally enate relational experience (Ettinger 2006, 41). She further describes how, whether we are consciously aware of it or not, this acquired knowledge resonates through bodily memories from the act of being carried or carrying (Ettinger 2006, 123). In this way, *Carriance* is intrinsically linked to materiality, bodies, and mothering, which I argue can take a myriad of forms for different human or non-human, animal, bacteria, species, and systems, regardless of whether they are a biological mother or not (Ettinger 2006, 41–92).

Carriance highlights the entwined and interconnected nature of knowledge-making and the generative act of tending to others. As every being or thing lives in a state of constant encounter, I argue that acts of collaboration are both essential and a responsibility. Joan Tronto articulates care as a political obligation and examines how care work impacts every person, species, and thing (Tronto 1993, 1–21; 1998, 15–16). Similarly, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa writes about the many dimensions of care and how multiple species are intrinsically linked through affective and relational engagements

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(de la Bellacasa 2017, 11–13). Further, Bellacasa argues about the omnipresence of care work and the discursive tensions that exist in every encounter, and how it takes up "the livelihoods and fates of so many kinds and entities" (de la Bellacasa 2017, 1). Care considered in these ways provides a useful lens to approach notions of *Carriance* – lifting, caring for – and the immersive ways that care is often endured, carried out, and substantiated in artistic and creative forms (See Bracha L. Ettinger's YouTube lecture: "Subject, Trust, Carriance," 2014).

This chapter develops on Ettinger's definition and references *Carriance* in the following ways: 1) *Embodied Carriance* – as a collaborative approach; and 2); *Relational Carriance* – as connection through more than bodily interactions. Building on these two conceptions of *Carriance*, I present two artworks, *Magical Beast: The Space Within, Out and In-Between* (2018), and *Carrying Others* (2019). Collectively, the artworks articulate how *Carriance* is time-based, embodied, relational and expressed through various interactions, moments of collaboration, and care.

The first artwork, *Magical Beast: The Space Within, Out and In-Between* (2018), is a 60-minute live performance and installation (see Figure 11.1), that presents stories about mothering and performing with a larger-than-life inflatable.[1] In this work, *Carriance* is expressed through the iterative movements, sound, and sensory, breath-based actions of holding and

Figure 11.1 *Magical beast: The space within, out and in-between*, prOphecy sun and Luciana D'Anunciação, 2018. Performance photograph of prOphecy sun holding inflatable by Reese Muntean. Gold Saucer Studios, Vancouver BC, Canada.

Figure 11.2 Carrying Others, prOphecy sun, and Reese Muntean, 2019.

Source: Video still.

releasing the inflatable form. In the work, bodies meld and are entangled in a participatory dance of care and touch that moves beyond the physical form.

The second artwork, *Carrying Others* (2019), is a looping single-channel audio visual installation that features aerial views moving through an urban landscape (see Figure 11.2).[2] In this piece, the audience vertically follows my figure as it moves with a plastic form next to water passages along their journeys elsewhere. In this work, *Carriance* is expressed through the diverse approaches to the human body in relation to landscape, with the use of mobile technologies which impress and extend sensory relationships to the ground and the sky, elucidating an immeasurable relationality.

In addition to the artworks, I present a series of vignettes throughout the chapter. Each contributes to notions of *Carriance* by highlighting the importance of formative stories, memories, and actions that elicit inspiration for my creative practice.

Care beyond maternal care

In their project, *Unwritten Handbook: Invisible Spaces of Parenthood* (2010 – ongoing), Andrea Francke and Kim Dillon point out how parenting is seen as a difficult undertaking, especially when it comes to childcare support and navigating other pedagogical systems (Dhillon and Francke 2016, 12).[3] Similarly, Stephanie Springgay and Debra Freedman attend to notions of care, embodiment, and "m/othering," suggesting how being with other bodies can advance, expose, or even create an ethics of relations (Springgay and

Freedman 2009, 25). Here the emphasis is on an ethics of *being-with*, and how maternal care is fraught with many tensions and unknowns and is ripe with transformative and untangling energy. Arguably, mothered spaces are often filled with invisible moments of care work and notions of self-giving actions.

Contemporary artists also discuss care through its material and theoretical antithesis by exploring our imaginative and ecologically damaging culture of plastic use. Genevieve Robertson (2019), Sara-Jeanne Bourget (2020), and Teodoro Monsalve (2019) actively practice care by seeking out alternatives to synthetics, incorporating locally sourced dyes, pigments, carbon-based compounds, and other materials from the landscape into their creations. Cyril Lancelin (2018), Shih Chieh Huang (2011), Jimmy Kuehnie (2019), and Pipilotti Rist (2004) similarly create inflatable forms from found materials to encourage audience engagement and playful investigations, which illuminate the translucent and nascent potentialities of this material.

Practices of care extend beyond notions of maternal and pre-existing heteronormative concepts of reproduction and move in realms of artistic creation. In my own practice, I articulate the dichotomy of care and toxicity through the material substance of plastic by using plastic as a placeholder for other bodies, persons, or species. Care work extends beyond my body and through acts of connection with other bodies, species, and things. Care articulated here is both limitless and not historically contingent, and "passes within, across, throughout things" (de la Bellacasa 2017, 1). This is an important distinction about care being tangential, as *Carriance* – as both, an action and a concept, verb, and noun – is more entwined, delicate, and nuanced. *Carriance* therefore, disrupts and bypasses cultural definitions of gendered bodies and maternal acts. *Carriance* then, as both a concept and as an action, becomes a salient and interconnected way to engage with political and historical approaches to mothering and implies a sense of responsibility for each encounter and relationship. In this regard, the term also aligns with ideas of co-production and collaboration and becomes a creative framework to consider how juncture, or a site of humans and multispecies, elicit connection. In particular, how care is expressed or enacted in relation or proximity to other bodies, and how technologies, toxic mediums, and creative making can encourage or disrupt further encounters.

I mention these perspectives to draw attention to the complexities of care and to express the ways that carrying, mothering, and being cared for have subsequently inspired creative output in my practice. For instance, mothering has sparked a deep desire for autonomy, agency, fluidity, and authenticity, all commodities in rare supply whilst carrying, tending to, and caring for others. These desires spring forth in all aspects of my life and artistic practice, for example in *Magical Beast: The Space Within, Out and In-Between* (2018), and *Carrying Others* (2019), I demonstrate tending and caring actions towards a toxic and exquisitely transparent form. Thus, actions such as caring for and collaborating with others have become central elements of my creative production.

Plastics, inflatables and material aesthetics

The birth of plastics has forever changed our relationship to the world. Plastics are made from a complex set of materials including cellulose, salt, plants, minerals, crude oil, and natural gas, which, much like *Carriance*, when processed and linked together, forms complex relations: synthetic polymers such as polyethylene, polystyrene, and polypropylene (Costa et al. 2021; Knight 2014). Ubiquitous and mass produced, plastics are used every day because they are malleable, transformative, pliable, mouldable, skin-like, lightweight, and fragile with variable degrees of strength. They can be coated onto other surfaces, textiles or fibres that are worn, painted with, slept on, inflated, sent up into the skies, and used for commercial or domestic spaces. Equally destructive and ingestible, plastics pollute soil, water, oceans, and air and contaminate every facet of our multi species ecosystems (Matthew S. Savoca et al. 2021, 2188). Traces are swallowed, eaten, rubbed onto, and absorbed through the skin, living in our blood stream, stem cells, organs, and bodies. Microplastics like BPA, PBDE (fire retardant), and per-fluorinated chemicals are even passed onto our offspring through breastmilk (Scientific America web).

My artwork explores the mutable potentiality of inflatables through the lens of mothering and connection. Recycled, clear plastics are used in novel ways such as inflating, caring for, and dancing with their shapes in urban and rural environments. The plastics become sac-like and transparent, bodily, mobile, and full of agency; full of transformative and untangling energy that when carried or lifted become lively and chanceful partners.

The artworks

Magical beast: The space within, out and in-between

> *When I was seven, I dreamt of a hidden, miniature doorway that opened from my bedroom into another house in another world. I would curl up asleep on the long chairs in one of the rooms. I have had this dream numerous times over the years. In the last dream, I was being hugged by clear, magical plastic-like walls and whispering voices.*
>
> (sun 2018, 56)

As the vignette above highlights, plastics inform my creative practice in the everyday and in the Dream Space. I define Dream Space as a place for receiving and energizing the potent relations of toxicity and care. It is an in-between space, of potential and manifestation. The Dream Space facilitates embodied moments and brings to fruition the relations between care and toxicity, which I argue transforms, transmutes, and transcends these relations through a material lens.

In the Dream Space, the plastic walls are like arms or a body and are articulated as mothering, bequeathing comfort, holding, and carrying me

through various realms. The Dream Space as articulated here carries breath and action, potency, aliveness, and holds space for boundless meditative engagements between thought and emotion and creative ideation.

This is something innately explored in *Magical Beast: The Space Within, Out and In-Between* (2018), a collaboratively shaped, 60-minute, live movement, sound performance, two-channel audio and video installation that was shown in *Dance in Vancouver* (DIY@DIV) in 2018 (see Figure 11.2). The artwork was co-created with dance artist Luciana D'Anunciação, props builder Meghan Rosner, and curated by Deanna Peters (aka Mutable Subject). The piece demonstrates *Embodied Carriance* through the acts of care that weave between my body, the inflatable, and the audience. For instance, at the beginning of the performance, the audience were given a series of physical and verbal prompts which encouraged them to sit, or move around the shape, touch, care for, push, pull, carry, or lift the larger-than-life inflatable shape. Near the end, I repeatedly pushed the shape into the audience's bodies and faces. Members collectively responded through their own embodied movements, helping to guide the shape across the room and away from their bodies, laughing, whispering, and supporting each other as they moved the form across their bodies, arms and over their heads. In these ways, the audience collaboratively carried, held, and engaged in the creative process. Much in the spirit of other improvised and performance-based approaches, which use physical, written or audio prompts, the goal of this piece was to encourage acts of care towards the object and other audience members.

Through these actions, the artwork highlights the many dimensions of *Relational Carriance* as an affective and relational engagement. *Carriance* thus articulated is shaped by each encounter, feeling, sound, and relationship with other bodies through the immersive ways that everyone inherently moved and cared for each other and the inflatable form.

Carrying Others

> *When I was seven years old, we had multiple cats, kittens and three Afghan dogs. The dogs were mostly friendly and sometimes they would carry me through the yard and around the trees. I remember one of the cats went missing for months, and then unexpectedly returned home on Halloween carrying multiple baby sacs in her tummy.*
>
> (sun 2018)

In the vignette above, acts of care are framed through physical actions of carrying others. *Carriance* in this sense is a delicate dance of lifting and holding. It is complicated and takes many forms and expressions. I argue that acts of carrying can also be understood through a *Relational Carriance* framework, which involves a convergence of actions, bodily memories, and vibrant experiences. Building on these notions, *Carrying Others* (2019), is a single-channel artwork that was co-created with Reese Muntean and shown in a group

exhibition in the Thornlea White Gallery, United Kingdom. The piece demonstrates *Relational Carriance* through collaboratively shaped production methods and creative approaches to filming the human body in relation to landscape. For example, we use drone and mobile technologies to extend sensory relationships to the ground and the sky; the drone in relation to the body, the land, the inflatable, sending and receiving signals from the ground. Audience members were invited to view the work from a distance or intimately by standing or passing by on their way elsewhere up and down a set of stairs. In this sense, the piece explores *Carriance* through the vitality and conversational elements of each encounter.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored two frameworks for *Carriance* using two artworks and formative stories to demonstrate how embodied and relational approaches are aligned with creative junctures and collaborative approaches. *Carriance* thus articulated is an essential element to my creative practice and shapes how I mitigate the complexity of care and toxicity through material substances. I argue that acts of *Carriance* can open, lift, distribute, decentralise, and strengthen affective processes with humans and non-humans, species, organisms, and things. *Carriance* thus considered is vital, potent, immeasurable, and a salient disruptor which invites and celebrates care and collaboration through material and immaterial means and performing bodies.

Notes

1 See video at https://prophecysun.com/Magical-Beast.
2 See video at https://prophecysun.com/Carrying-Others.
3 See Serpentine Galleries artist talk at https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/whats-on/unwritten-handbook-invisible-spaces-of-parenthood/.

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12 Claiming Spaces

Aprons of Power – Places of Power performances

Rachel Fallon

Introduction

I created the *Aprons of Power* (2018) performances during the country-wide Campaign to Repeal the Eighth Amendment. The Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution, Article 40.3.3, equated the life of a foetus with the life of a living pregnant woman; this article was added to the Irish constitution in 1983. It effectively banned abortion, and severely compromised maternal healthcare in Ireland. The *Aprons of Power* series was first performed for the Repeal! Procession by the Artists' Campaign to Repeal the Eighth Amendment (ACREA) at the 38th EVA International Biennale, Limerick, Ireland on 13 April 2018. Founded in 2015 by Cecily Brennan, Alice Maher, Eithne Jordan, and Paula Meehan, the ACREA was initially an online signatory Campaign protesting against the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution.

The *Aprons of Power* (2018) performances were an acknowledgement of women, mainly unmarried mothers, incarcerated in Ireland's Magdalene Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes from the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922 until 1996 (Figure 12.1). According to the Justice for Magdalenes Research website, which functions as the resource for people affected and interested in Ireland's Magdalenes Institutions:

> From the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922 until 1996, at least 10,000 girls and women were imprisoned […] in Ireland's Magdalene Institutions. The women and girls incarcerated included those perceived to be 'promiscuous', unmarried mothers, the daughters of unmarried mothers. These women were primarily working class and poor, the most socio-economically vulnerable whose charge had been handed over to the catholic religious orders by successive Irish Governmental systems. Confined sometimes for decades – many of these women became institutionalised. Most of those who left never spoke of the experience nor of the children taken from them. They were effectively removed from society and silenced.
>
> (JFMR n.d.)

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Figure 12.1 Je me souviens – I remember, *Aprons of Power – Places of power* performance at Sean McDermott Street Magdalene laundry, Dublin.

Source: Rachel Fallon 2018 collection of The Arts Council of Ireland.

Whilst working on the *Aprons of Power*, the question for me was how to portray such a narrative in a symbolic and powerful way that was both ethical and not an appropriation of these already silenced women's stories. The apron, given to these women on their entry to Laundries, was a symbol of subjugation. The *Aprons of Power* performances were intended to subvert the function of the apron as a garment of servitude, the significance of its whiteness as a projector of moral righteousness, and the use of military mottos sewn on the underside. The aprons act as a signifier, a reminder of the Magdalene Laundries and the invisible labour of women. The performances took place

in public places as part of protests. Their performative presence in the streets can be a way of remembering wayward women and disenfranchised mothers, and can act as a reclamation of public space.

In the sections that follow, I discuss the creative process of the making of the *Aprons of Power* and how the meanings were further developed through six site-specific art activist performances collectively known as *Aprons of Power – Places of Power* (2018). I argue for the importance of public visibility of maternal issues. Claiming space of previous significant occurrences in Irish women's history, the *Aprons of Power – Places of Power* performances bear witness to the various roles of women and mothers within Irish state systems in particular, where the maternal body is both invisible and vulnerable.

Apron

While researching the Magdalene history I came across Tanya Sillem's blog for RTE's "Prime Time" program on the Magdalene Laundries. Sillem refers to the oral history of Mary Merritt, who was imprisoned at High Park Magdalene Laundry in 1947, who states that "the first thing they did was take all my clothes, give me a big serge skirt, a big white apron, a cap and some boots" (Sillem 2012). The idea of an apron resonated with me. My mother had made all five of her daughter's aprons to keep us clean as children and to save on washing. It was only later I realised my brothers had never had such an item of clothing.

An apron is a garment that denotes service, particularly in its plain white form. It is ubiquitous, unassuming, and yet holds its wearer to a high standard of cleanliness in public; however, the history of aprons is both powerful and patriarchal. The Pope wears an apron (gremial), as did Egyptian pharaohs, the biblical Jeremiah wore one of gold, and the Masonic Orders have their adamic apron. Later, aprons formed part of a social structure – a uniform used to absent the individual, the colour coding of the aprons regarding standing in the community – green grocer, blacksmith, tradesman (Beatty n.d.). It was only in the second half of the 20th century that the apron became a garment associated with female domestic ritual and was deemed to be diminutive and subservient. The apron also connotes modesty; it is a garment to cover the genitals, like Eve's nakedness being covered by the fig leaves after her temptation and fall. There is another history, however, where it is the vulva itself that is powerful and protective; that of Anasyrma or the raising of skirts, which is the exposure of the female genitals to ward off danger and curse invaders – a practice which has taken place throughout history and throughout the world as a powerful form of female protest (Blackledge 2020). I liked the idea that there could be a power of cursing in these aprons. That what was seen as a submissive artifact could have huge force and I wanted to return that status of power to disenfranchised women – these missing mothers – through making an apron that could be worn as a garment of power.

Colour and textile choice played a formative role in my creation of the aprons in *Aprons of Power.* Made from white linen on the outside, when lifted they reveal a pink silk underside featuring a wide-open painted eye and black felt lettering. White textiles hold symbolic meaning within our society: the weddings or communion dress, the laundry. The association of white as a symbol of purity and cleanliness was attached to the idea that "fallen" women in the Magdalene laundries could repent for the stains on their souls by literally washing them out of dirty laundry. The colour pink, of pussy hats and inner organs, calls to mind the practice of "the raising of skirts," pink the diminutive of red, colour of the Magdalene, pink the colour of genitalia, the cunt and the underbelly. The stiff white linen contrasts with the soft pink silk on its underside. The painted eyes stand as protection and signifiers of witness. The stark black felt letters come from patriarchal systems; the words adorning the aprons are taken from the words chosen by the military to motivate their forces and articulate their power. I aimed to subvert military mottos, chosen for their ambiguity, turning them on their head to give them new meaning. The mottos in translation become reassuring, as in the Latin of the Italian Penitentiary Guard motto *Despondere Spem Munus Nostrum* which becomes "To Ensure Hope is Our Role" (Polizia Penitenziaria 1999,) or signs of acknowledgement, as in the motto of the Canadian Royal 22nd Regiment, "Je Me Souviens; I Remember" (Pépin 2013, 2021).

In the lifting of the *Aprons of Power* and the appropriation of military mottos, there is an erasure of the individual, a beacon, a performance that does not depend on a particular performer but the becoming of a cypher for every woman – a collective action.

Performances as political acts

Following the *Aprons of Power* performance within the Artists' Campaign to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, I made a decision to further develop the performances to encompass other aspects of feminist and maternal struggles in Ireland. The work not only considered the Eighth Amendment but also lent itself to an exploration of larger power structures. Although it was born from the history of the Magdalenes, it was important to me that the *Aprons of Power* performances could serve as an opening to other conversations about past trauma and new possibilities. Therefore, I staged a series of unannounced but documented performances called *Aprons of Power – Places of Power,* where I gave short solo performances in places, as listed below, that I identified as powerful for both positive and negative reasons in women's histories. I was concerned to acknowledge women's actions in the past that inform maternal and feminist politics in the present. The performances were all short – circa half an hour – but were interesting in the level of attention or lack of attention they received (in particular with a gang of kids in front of the National Maternity Hospital, Holles Street or being chased away by security from

Dublin Castle). I performed five of these actions, walking from place to place over the course of one day, 14 November 2019, and an earlier action was performed in 2018. The performance entailed stopping at specific sites I had identified as appropriate to both the history of each building and the occurrences that had historically taken place there. Once at the chosen site, I stood a moment before raising a specifically chosen apron, pertinent to that site, above my head revealing the text on the underside. With my upper body and face covered, I stood in entrances and direct thoroughfares creating a physical and visual obstruction. The performances were framed in a manner which would evoke curiosity and invite questions. People asked "What are you doing? What does that mean? Why are you standing here in this particular area on this particular street?" Due to the nature of the performance – the wearer's head being hidden – the interaction was often deliberately interruptive; a member of the public would come around behind the apron to find the "face" and ask directly, or they would conduct a loud open discourse in front of the apron.

The *Aprons of Power – Places of Power* performances represented three acts of power and three acts of remembrance exploring the roles women and mothers have played within the Irish state since its inception. These performances aimed to bring visibility to acts of subjugation and acts of resistance in particular in relation to mothers. They were enacted to claim public spaces where the maternal body is often invisible or vulnerable, thereby drawing attention to the public invisibility of maternal issues.

Three acts of power

These acts of power commemorated women who have fought and won.

Grace Under Pressure apron was performed at Dublin Castle in remembrance of Hanna Sheehy Skeffington who threw stones through the glass windows at Dublin Castle in June 1912 in protest that Irish women's franchise would not be included in the Home Rule Bill that was going through the English Parliament. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, born 1877, was a campaigner, writer and activist for women's rights and co-founder of the Irish Women's Franchise League (1908). In Margaret Ward's lecture for the Sheehy Skeffington School she explains that "Hanna and her colleagues in the Irish Women's Franchise League felt that they had no alternative but to take the path of suffrage militancy. She chose the windows of Dublin Castle as her target because it was the seat of British Rule in Ireland and she wanted to emphasise the 'wrongs of many years'" (Ward 2015). My *Aprons of Power – Places of Power* performance was deemed to be illegal according to the security guard on duty the day that I chose to perform it. While photographs are allowed, no written signs or political messages may be shown in front of the building. The apron was considered to fall into this category. Within minutes of raising my apron, I was asked to leave and the security guard's continued presence made it difficult to return.

Fortitude Overcomes All Difficulties apron was performed at Liberty Hall. The Irish Women Workers Union (IWWU) plaque at Liberty Hall in Dublin commemorates the historic 1945 Laundry strike in which the women laundry workers of the IWWU won two weeks paid holiday per year for all Irish workers (The Irish Women Workers Union n.d.). I stood beside the plaque at Liberty Hall with my apron raised, but although people passed by, there was little interaction. This is not a main thorough-fare for pedestrians and with my vision obscured I was unable to document non-interruptive reactions, if any.

To Us Nothing Is Impossible apron was performed at the General Post Office, Dublin. This was the main site of the 1916 Easter Rising and I stood here with raised apron to remember the many achievements of Countess Markievicz. Although she had been court-martialled and imprisoned for her role in the 1916 Easter Rising, Countess Markievicz stood in St. Patricks constituency Dublin in the 1918 British General election and became the first female MP elected as a member of Parliament in Westminster. She did not take her seat (Paseta 2020). Standing between two large pillars, pedestrians passed on either side of me. I was also visible across the wide streetscape. Here it was possible to capture some curious reactions both from the corner of my eye and audibly, but in general people rushed on with heads down. There were a number of protests and protesters with plastic banners/placards in the area that day and my apron seemed to blend into that street scape.

Three acts of remembrance

These acts of remembrance highlight issues which still impact on women and mothers within Irish state systems and have not yet been resolved.

I Remember apron was performed at Sean McDermott Street Magdalene Laundry. The story of the Magdalene Laundry survivors is far from over – the redress scheme enacted following the Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalene Laundries, otherwise known as the McAleese Report, left a bitter taste with many survivors attesting to the adversarial process necessary to prove their right to compensation, while others felt the process of the Report itself was disbelieving of their testimonies (Kenny 2021; JFMR 2017). I raised my apron and stood in front of the main entrance, which would not have been used by the Magdalene women. This is an older residential area with low foot fall. A long, wide, straight road allowed me peripheral views of people approaching. For the most part, the women who passed by here, did acknowledge my presence in some way but did not ask further or interrupt. Most people from this area understand the significance of this large building and the legacy of the laundries.

Under The Law, Freedom apron was performed at the main entrance to the National Maternity Hospital, Holles Street. The National Maternity

Hospital, as its name suggests, situates itself at the centre of maternal healthcare practices in Ireland. This hospital is due to be replaced with the New Maternity Hospital but the proposed co-location lease agreement for the new site would see the hospital being built on land owned by a private company, with a Catholic ethos which is obliged to observe canon law, compromising the commitment to healthcare, in particular areas of maternal care to which the Catholic Church is opposed such as abortion (Shorthall 2021). Although this performance took place at the main entrance to the National Maternity Hospital, not one pregnant person entered the building during my time there. However, I was inundated with children, boys and girls mostly between eight and twelve years old, who were intensely interested and asked many questions such as "What are you doing that for? Can I have a go at using the apron?" There was a sense of general amusement among them as to why an adult would stand in the path with an apron above her head.

To Ensure Hope Is Our Role apron was performed with my back to the Irish Sea to Campaign for the removal of Article 40.3.3. This performance did not take place on 14 November 2019 but at an earlier date 30 March 2018, before the Referendum to Repeal the Eighth Amendment. The act was performed at the beach near my home town in Bray, Co. Wicklow. The path is well trodden by local people and one route culminates in a monumental cross erected in 1950 to mark Holy Year. I situated myself between the cross and the Irish Sea and the reaction from passers by was generally enthusiastic acknowledgement. The Eighth Amendment to the Constitution of Ireland was removed following an overwhelming Yes vote (66.4%) in a referendum on 25 May 2018, yet many women still have to cross the Irish sea to the United Kingdom and elsewhere to maintain their bodily autonomy as the necessary healthcare is still being denied to them within their own country (Enright 2021).

Conclusion

I wonder what is the purpose of such art/activist performances as the *Aprons of Power – Places of Pow*er? In her 2011 lecture "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street" Judith Butler asks "on this account of the body in political space, how do we make sense of those who can never be part of that concerted action, who remain outside of the plurality that acts?" (Butler 2011). This raises huge questions around who is physically and mentally able to be seen in public, who is hidden, incarcerated, disabled, sick, has their freedom curtailed through abusive relationships – how are these persons and their concerns able to be seen in public? It is a difficult though pertinent question.

My intention was that the apron performer could stand proxy for every person who wanted to identify with the causes of erased mothers, bodily autonomy, the right to equal citizenship, and appropriate healthcare. By raising the apron in front of the face of the performer and erasing the individual person behind the apron, the message exists in the context of its

surroundings. The emphatic language of the appropriated military motto such as "To Ensure Hope is Our Role" insists its own power, encouraging us to take up its offer. The stance of the performer – a victory pose, assured of the right to be there and yet incognito – allows the most timid of wearers a sense of disguise.

The aim of the performances is to draw attention to the invisibility of the mother within the visual landscape and to seek to include women from the past in present day dialogues. Silently standing outside these various institutions, apron held high, I created an interruption in the expected scenery. I was remembering the women and mothers who are still fighting for a system to be held accountable and their voices to be taken seriously. I was seeking to send a message of solidarity and acknowledgement of their presence, to give power to their experience, and agency to that voice. Awkwardly standing in the way of doors and footpaths disrupting the flow of pedestrians, I was demanding attention. By using a domestic garment as a medium of dissent against oppressive systems, the aprons signal that we will use whatever means are at our disposal to protest, no matter how ordinary and seemingly insignificant. In wearing the apron, the body becomes an important part of the protest because the body is the site of the resistance.

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Section III

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13 Who Does She Think She Is? Kate Middleton?!

Leaky escapes in un-classy maternal performance

Jodie Hawkes

1. Hospital. 7lbs 2oz. Mum has caught the Megabus to be here at the birth of her 16th grandchild. She has bleached her hair, like a teenager experimenting, it's a sort of fluorescent yellow. Dad's outside having a fag. She's about to meet the in-laws. I lie and say her hair looks nice. Dad brings me a chocolate bar and a can of Coke to the ward. Mum has hepatitis C, maybe it's from dirty drug needles or the blood transfusion in the early 60s to fix her heart, or maybe from the rose tattoo she got on her stomach when she turned 50. You can contract it from birth. Maybe I have it? Maybe the baby has it? I peep through the partitioning curtain, at another mum cuddling her new born, then stare at the tiny, wrinkled thing lying next to me and pick it up, because maybe that's what I'm meant to be doing.

The birth of my first son coincided with the birth of Prince George, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's first baby. Whilst I fed my own tiny baby on the sofa, I watched on TV along with millions around the world, as new mother Kate Middleton famously stepped out of the Lindo wing at St Mary's Hospital in London, carrying the new heir to the English crown, in a maternal mass spectacle that David Cole might call "an ironic, absurd and rather strange foregrounding" that obscures economic and ecological catastrophe, whilst seeking "royal survival and expansion" (2014, 8). Watching on, I performed my mothering as Kate did hers, both attending to our sons, but in very different worlds. I queued up in the pound shop, went to the park, pushed the pram around Cameron's Broken Britain (Jensen and Tyler 2012), wrestled with the rain cover, did the supermarket shop, and posed for family portraits in the garden of our two-bed mid-terrace (rented) palace. Aside from our two sons being born within the same year, Kate and I have other things in common; we are both married, both white, both become mothers of three children, both have two sons and one daughter, both university graduates, both from the south of England, and both aged 39 (we were born nine days apart).

A few years earlier, I was working in London near Trafalgar Square on the day of Kate and William's wedding, another mass spectacle featuring the royal couple. Surrounded by waving union jack flags and partying revellers I was passed cut-out paper masks of Prince William and Kate Middleton's faces to wear as I left the tube. The eye holes popped out ready for mine to

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look through, a sea of fake Kates and counterfeit Williams filling the streets outside. As part of the saturated month-long media build up to the royal wedding, Kate was regularly positioned by the mainstream media as a commoner through a rags to riches princess narrative, that often foregrounded the Middleton family's mining heritage.[1] Despite her highly privileged background, Kate's family were framed in the British press as "aspirational achievers," whose wealth is earnt through "sheer hard work" (Thornton, 2013). After the birth of George, Kate was still often referred to as having the common touch,[2] before words like commoner were slowly replaced with more class-neutral frames such as normal or ordinary.[3] Through this commoner frame Kate and I might also both be described through another shared narrative, in which we are seen to have escaped our working-class legacies (Walkerdine 1997). I also view Kate's public appearances as mother through the lens of performance, in this sense another similarity we hold is that we both make (produce and construct) maternal performances in public places.

2. Years earlier. Primary School. Croydon. My friends ask me why my mum speaks the way she does. My mum calls it common. Embarrassed and a bit ashamed, I tell her not to speak in front of my friends again. So, mum puts on a posh voice after that. A micro performance in the school playground. My mother the commoner in disguise, performing for an audience of other mums and teachers. A performance that is ruptured and made leaky by the way the words stumble inauthentically off her tongue.

Cole articulates the complex production of Kate as media object through the ways in which "history, events, time and space, desire, becoming and thought have been manipulated and (re)presented to obscure the truth" (2014, 201). In considering the gap between Kate and I, and between Kate's maternal spectacle in relation to different understandings of the term common, a performance project was born, *Playing Kate*.[4] The project examines how Kate as maternal media object works to hide any sense of inequality,[5] through a series of maternal performances that "obscure the truth" (201). For Cole, Kate Middleton is "the image, face and body of the royal family" (175) and the central character in the cultural reproduction of the British class system. The mass wedding spectacle produced and reinforced a working-class escape narrative; Middleton through a mass spectacle of ritual and ceremony is transformed in front of our eyes, from her commoner roots into the reified royal object. Cole notes how, for the royal family, the wedding acted "as a means to (re)present power and within this (re)presentation to posit 'themselves' as immovable, timeless objects, worthy and capable of maintaining their positions" (3). In the moment of becoming mother through the birth of Prince George, I consider how Kate transforms from the "image, face and body *of* the royal family" (175) into the image, face and body *that reproduces* the royal family – a maternal performance that instead of entrenching class division through ritual and divinity, obscures class division through the reproduction of a hyper-normality that reaffirms the neoliberal status quo. Neoliberal ideology advocates for a small state and minimal government intervention into the social sphere, citing the importance of individual responsibility, that the

successes and failures of citizens are solely due to their own skill, effort, perseverance etc. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge write:

> …neoliberalism posits a form of individualism that rejects the notion of the public good. By neoliberal logic, people have only themselves to blame for their problems: solving social problems comes down to the self-reliance of individuals.
>
> (2016, 17–18)

The reproduction of Kate as the normal or ordinary girl (who became a princess), changes the way we imagine the royal family, obscuring its excesses through the illusion of progress rather than previous strategies whereby justification was obtained through pageantry, history, and divinity. The idea of confronting the royal family's position is diffused by the image and performance of Kate as an ordinary new mother, who takes on and embodies a neoliberal ideal of self-improvement. Referring to feminist sociologist Angela McRobbie's argument of a neoliberal intensification of mothering, Jacqueline Rose comments that for mothers it is "as if the props of neoliberalism were the most that mothers can aspire to, the highest form of social belonging and agency they can expect" (2018, 17). Through a process of normalisation (Clancy 2015), Kate the maternal media object becomes the embodiment of this neoliberal aspiration and a living manifestation of austerity rhetoric of equality and togetherness as discussed by Kim Allen et al (2015). They note "As a key figure of austerity, Kate performs a tremendous amount of ideological work in defusing resentment at the growing inequalities unleashed since 2008, as the wealth of the global "1%" has continued to grow under austerity" (Allen et al 2015, 913).

Cole's (2014) exploration of the royal wedding as event resonates with a philosophical understanding of the evental moment that, through its emergence, changes our "relationship to reality" (Žižek 2014). Although, perhaps it is the ongoing web of impromptu sightings leaked to the press of Kate as mother, rather than the planned ritual spectacle of the royal wedding that has a more pervasive impact, not in our memories, but as an influence on our behaviours (Cole 2014). In *Playing Kate* I articulate the mythology of these normalising narratives that render Kate the maternal media object – the same as the rest of us in a suppression of class transformation (Figure 13.1). My performance project *Playing Kate* explores how that which is obscured (like my mum's posh voice in the playground) will always *leak* through.

3. Mum scoops the bath water out of the bath every time she needs a wash because if she lets it go down the plug it will leak through to the kitchen ceiling. She does it after every bath because she can't afford to fix the plumbing. She's nearly 70. It's 2021 and the dirty bath water leaks keep coming.

Despite ongoing and significant contributions to understandings of the maternal, motherhood, and maternal performance, there is still little performance and scholarly work that specifically addresses the working-class mother

Figure 13.1 Playing Kate: Outside the hospital, Jodie Hawkes, 2017.

Source: Courtesy of the artist.

in contemporary performance and live art.[6] *Playing Kate* emerged from the intersectional view that it is impossible to separate class in relation to the (maternal) self and society, and that these terms are interdependent with one another to create identities. Collins and Bilge argue that only through an intersectional approach can one understand the ways in which "power relations are intertwined and mutually constructing" (2016, 7). Whilst there is little research into maternal performance and the working-class mother, there is a significant body of research that explores the working-class mother within social, cultural, and media studies. Much of this research considers the way in which through a neoliberal discourse, representations of the working-class mother exist as what Imogen Tyler (2013) would call revolting subjects who need to be transformed so as to escape their social position. Beverley Skeggs notes "the label working class when applied to women has been used to signify all that is dirty, dangerous and without value" (1997, 5). I argue mothers on stage in live art often *perform* "dirty" or "dangerous" through performative acts in which they get messy and revolt in an escape against oppressive, patriarchal and normative conceptions of motherhood. Lena Šimić and Emily Underwood-Lee observe that maternal performance works share a "desire towards articulating the unsayable: a kind of admiration for monstrous, corporeal, viscous and excessive mothers" (2016, 6). Through

my project *Playing Kate* I began to think about these different representations of mothers; the classed dirty and dangerous revolting subject, the excessive performing mothers revolting in live art, Kate the non-revolting maternal media object, my own revolting mother sat in the half filled, dirty, dangerous bath water, and my own maternal experience.

4. I have inherited mum's mousy hair. For my performance of Kate, I borrow from Be-Like-Kate magazine culture through the use of a Kate Middleton dark brown curly wig available for home delivery from Amazon. When the box arrives, it reads "Bring your beauty salon home, NEW WIGS, NEW FEELINGS, NEW YOU!"

Lisa Baraitser articulates that motherhood is commonly referred to as "a transformational experience" (2006, 217) as part of "a discourse that understands these changes in terms of the social, political, and economic realities that structure motherhood" (218). However, Baraitser argues that the transition to motherhood might instead be better understood "as both the painful and playful realisation of the impossibility of transformation itself" (217). From this early moment of shared maternal commonality with Kate, both cradling new-born sons, I began to dress up and re-stage images of Kate. I also developed a studio theatre performance titled *My Son & Heir* (2013).[7] The performance was created with my long-term collaborator and husband Pete Phillips as Search Party.[8] *My Son & Heir* (2013) was a theatre performance that considered what sort of man our own baby son (and heir) would become, in relation to the royal baby. In a video trailer for the show, I can be seen taking my son to the park dressed up as Kate for the first time in public, adorning the new shiny wig. I was acutely aware of strangers (out of shot) staring at me (and my mothering) in a way they had not before. Dressing up as Kate I began to question in which ways I might be escaping, performing, and interrupting the confines of my every day, as I began to encounter my own early maternal experience from a different perspective. Dressed in a cheaper, high-street version of the outfit Kate wears, with glossy fake wig on, I am a picture of both the "painful and playful realisation of the impossibility of transformation" (Baraitser 2006, 217). Baraitser also playfully claims that transformation has other intriguing etymological meanings. These include theatrical contexts such as the sudden and dramatic scene changes in proscenium arch theatre. A dramatic change of scene that Baraitser implies is met with failure, as we "will ourselves to believe what we see, despite the noisy clunk as the backdrop hits the floor" (226). This connection between transformation and theatre and its failure, or its attempt at transformation stilted by the cracks revealed within its mechanisms of pretence, are clearly evident in my attempt or failures at playing Kate.

Playing Kate brings together three threads of critical and creative enquiry: the maternal, class politics and the performance of persona. Following performance artist Bobby Baker's celebrated performance *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* (1988), maternal performance practice in the United Kingdom has foregrounded and valued notions of authenticity through autobiography as a means of creating feminist and maternal agency. Personal anecdotes and the

use of domestic and maternal objects as material for performance practice is widely understood within maternal performance contexts. In my playing of Kate, my own authentic experience is deliberately obscured through the use of persona, as understood through a live art tradition, to foreground the failures of transformation and to articulate a complex reading of class as an often-obscured feature of the maternal performance field. Persona is a performative frame, distinct from the notion of character from dramatic traditions and the performative playing of the self as associated with autobiography in live art. Persona, rather, is a deliberately visible performative frame, engaging with the self-referentiality of postmodernism, that in most cases is underpinned by a sense of selfhood, i.e., the persona is often considered a heightened version of the self. *Playing Kate* explores the ground in-between, using post-dramatic ideas of persona and another mother's biography (Kate) to investigate the space between character and autobiography. Through persona I layer multiple identities in visual dialogue with one another in my attempt to expose transformation. In another of Baraitser's etymological contexts for the idea of transformation, she articulates how the term is an archaic phrase meaning a woman's wig. She writes:

> this odd definition contains a constellation of interrelated meanings about performance and mimicry. Whilst transformation wants to pass itself off as the magical movement between one state and another, it finds itself caught by the coarseness of its own material effects. Just as the backdrop's clunk can never be completely edited out, so the wig's synthetic nylon never fully convinces.
>
> (Baraister 2006, 227)

Transformation in this context cannot deliver on its promise, its own mimetic strategies are apparent, and thus the fakery of the movement between states is exposed. After my performance in the park, with the fake wig, I discovered that I was not the only one dressing up as Kate, there was a whole group of other women (and mothers) who held in common a different desire to look like Kate. This social and cultural phenomenon specific to the internet is playfully named repli-Kating.

5. Mum has agreed to perform in a repli-Kation with me. I carry the wig on my lap in the car. It reminds me of the bump being so big that you can't see your vagina anymore. Or your feet. I tell mum roughly what I'm doing and we begin to film in the kitchen. I push the ash tray into the scene and ask her to tell me about topping up the electricity meter. In my desire to foreground class, I am exploiting her, making my own sort of poverty porn. She puts on the "posh voice" the moment we start recording. I'm not sure if she is playing Carol (Kate's mum), or playing a version of herself, or performing how she thinks I want her to be. Occasionally, she stops and whispers to me, "Can I say that? Can I say this?" It's usually when she is about to say something considered revolting. Something common. I want my mum to say the bad stuff, the stuff she often says to me, but she seems to think I want her to perform a good mum, a

posher mum. We are both enacting classed performance for the other. She whispers to me twice "can I say this?" when talking about the fact me, my brother and one of my sisters all have different dads. I tell her she can say anything and to speak in her proper voice. I'm telling her how to speak again. When I leave, she says "I'm glad I did that, I'll be famous now."

Playing Kate traces the early images of Kate post birth as new mother and the messy re-performing of these images with my own baby, in my locale. The term repli-Kation is borrowed from an online phenomenon where women attempt to recreate Kate's fashion using affordable high street brands. Although, we might assume repli-Kating to be a far wider learnt practice "as KM burrows into consciousness" (Cole 2014, 9). These women and mothers (along with their children) replicate Kate, through online performances as they attempt to copy Kate in as much detail as possible (despite the budget) as they try to demonstrate their shared commonality – to be just like Kate. My research sits within the context of these other women and mothers who copy and recreate images of Kate on social media sites and blogs to produce online content. Many of these accounts exist on Instagram and have tens of thousands of followers, gaining national and international press coverage and coining the term repli-Kate and copy Kat(e)s.[9]

The game for these Instagram repli-Kators is one of accuracy: to be like Kate, to aspire to the combination of values and aesthetic – an appealing mix of charity, duty, glamour, and down-to-earth-ness. Repli-Kation could be understood as a development of the transformation culture found in reality TV, make-over culture, and self-help experts much analysed in contemporary feminist media and cultural studies. McRobbie examines the gender politics of neoliberalism and how they have been articulated within popular culture through her ideas of post-feminism. For McRobbie poverty has been ridiculed through "tactics" operating within popular culture such as class "experts" (2020, 5) in order to produce a transformation of the self "in the hope or expectation of improvement of status and life chances through the acquisition of forms of cultural and social capital" (2004, 99). Kate as the maternal media object operates through more pervasive tactics, in contrast to the expert driven make-over; through repli-Kation women choose to transform (make-over) themselves, without any apparent recognition or directive from Kate. *Playing Kate* considers repli-Kation through McRobbie's understanding of how it might "attempt to alter" (104) Pierre Bordieu's notion of Habitus and through the ways in which "new forms of class differentiation are being produced through processes of symbolic violence" (106). Through the competitive ideals of repli-Kation women are pitched against one another as a further attempt for transformation of the self.

Rather than emulating these aspirational performances of Kate, in *Playing Kate* I choose to repli-Kate the first three post birth appearances of Kate as new mother that mark the nature of her maternal transformation. These images signify key, commonly shared moments in early maternal experience: firstly, as she emerges from the hospital, babe in arms, secondly a series of

unofficial tabloid sightings at the supermarket soon after birth as she attempts to get back to normal, and thirdly, the release of the first family portrait with the new baby, taken by Kate's father in the garden. These repli-Kations involved the creation of three new live art performance projects: *Playing Kate: Outside the Hospital* (2017), *Playing Kate: Her Royal Pie-ness* (2019) and *Playing Kate: Disruptions and Confrontations* (2019) at Motherworks Festival.[10] The three live art performance projects took place in site specific contexts (my local hospital, my local supermarket, my rented house, my mum's house) and in the communal spaces of Motherworks Festival (2019) at The Junction, Cambridge. These communal spaces included performing within the numerous foyer spaces and outside the entrances to the buildings. These early post birth moments (or performances) of Kate outside of the hospital/supermarket/garden shape the image of Kate as good mother, where, despite persistent contextualisation's of Kate as commoner by the media, any notion of Skeggs' (1997) dirty or dangerous mother is eradicated. Herein lies a specific incongruity in the class performance of Kate, that despite narratives of Kate as the commoner-done-good, or Kate the mother *just like me,* great care is taken to hide any semblance of working-class identity. As I struggle with the desire to play Kate from my mum's house, I also think through the classed ideology of the desire to escape (Walkerdine 1997).

6. Mum works at an expensive hotel in Croydon, she's a chamber maid. On the weekend we go with her to work, we help her refill the packets of tea and coffee and watch TV while she makes pointy triangles on the toilet roll and cleans the bed. Our cartoons interrupted every time we move rooms. Mum makes the pointy triangles in our loo roll in the undecorated leaky bathroom at home too. One day after an argument mum runs away (again). This time when leaving mum tries to run dad over, we're inside the car watching. His face framed by the headlights. With nowhere to go mum pays for one night in the hotel. We sip sachet hot chocolate and sleep in the big bed, the next day the council offer us one large bug infested room in a horrible local hostel. We stay there for two weeks before we return home (again).

The notion of escape in terms of aspiration and class can be associated with ideas of change, a transformation, a new beginning, a new and better self. Many of these terms themselves are articulated and problematised with reference to theoretical understandings of the maternal. The maternal is often connected to ideas of beginnings (Arendt 1958), and is traditionally thought of, according to Baraitser, as a transformative experience in terms of "identity, relationship, and sense of self" and the "unique chance to make ourselves anew" (2009, i). These overlapping and complex notions of newness both in terms of class and the maternal are explored in *Playing Kate* through my repli-Kations of public mother Kate.

Skeggs and Helen Wood note that whilst class consciousness might not appear as it once was, class inequality, stigma, and shame are continuously increasing. Those left over are "discarded (literally and metaphorically) as the 'waste' of the 'system'" (2011, 4). From this degrading position of waste, the emphasis turns therefore to the need to transform or escape one's classed

position. The answer that is presented to the working class is the escape route of social mobility, to become "more like their middle-class counterparts" (Lawler 2000, 126). The emphasis on the individual to escape the working-class position reinforces a kind of self-loathing, where in order to survive, the working class "must come to recognize themselves as lacking, deficient, deviant, as being where they are because that is who they are, that is how they are made" (Walkerdine 1997, 39). Steph Lawler (2000) articulates the vulnerable position that working-class women who strive for transformation within their life are placed in. Whilst these women (like my mother) do not escape the confines of their class, their performative pretence (the triangles on the toilet roll or the posh voice in the playground) shows them up as desiring it. As a result, these (imposter) women can become monstrous or grotesque (Russo 1995) "through an association with the desires for the material and cultural objects of middle-class existence" (Lawler 2000, 125) or because they simply want to be taken seriously (Skeggs 1997). Referencing Bourdieu on pretentions and the gap between *being* and *seeming* Lawler argues that, whilst actually escaping your class boundaries is often seen as a heroic act, escapism (pretending you have) is viewed as failure. For Bordieu pretensions are defined as "the recognition of distinction that is affirmed in the effort to possess it" (2010, 249). As Bourdieu notes, pretensions, provoke "calls to order"; "Who does she think she is?" (2010, 381).

In attempting to be like Kate, perhaps I and other repli-Kators are scrutinised as desiring escape, provoking the classed question; who does she think she is? Kate Middleton?! Repli-Kating, as seen on social media, can perhaps be framed through this notion of escapism – the desire of these "normal" women and mothers to be like Kate inevitably falls short. My own performative repli-Kations exploit this gap where the imposter fails to live up to the image of Kate Middleton maternal media object. Whilst recognisable as a copy of Kate, my embodiment of the *Playing Kate* persona revels in the widening of this gap, playfully making obvious my failure to be like Kate, both to reject the neoliberal injunction for self-improvement and to protest at the normalisation of the new royals. I am nothing like Kate, but then again, she is nothing like me. And when we think through the notions of escape that are foregrounded in the representation of Kate as upwardly mobile through pervasive reference to her family's mining heritage as proof of working-class credentials, in relation to my own mother's attempts at escape – to the expensive hotel in Croydon – the logic of neoliberal individualism is undermined. The reality of this attempt to escape amounted to one night in a hotel with triangles on the loo roll, a brief stay in an inadequate, underfunded, and overcrowded hostel, followed by an inevitable return to the leaky bathroom we called home.

7. *Carshalton 1965. Nan stares horrified at the midwife, a tiny male baby already scrawled up next to her. No one else in the room with her to share the disbelief. "Not another one!" Four and a half minutes later, my mother's head crowns, escapes the warm, safe comfort of the past nine months, a hole in her heart not yet detected, the left over, the unwanted, the runt. A mouth to feed.*

Class is the thing that divides Kate and I, and is the thing that escapes, leaks out, through the cheap materiality of my wig and costume but also through my mum's "posh" voice, my lived maternal experience, and my uselessness as an imposter. The spectacle of Kate's maternal performance conceals any notion of the leaky mother, any excess or waste is swept under the (ornate) carpet. In fact, the notion of waste associated with the leaky mother is, in some contexts, deliberately addressed by the staged managed performances of Kate's public mothering that hide any encounters with the reality of mothering. In fact, if we are to consider Kate as a leaky mother, we perhaps have to follow Laura Clancy's (2021) idea of reconfiguring the royal family as a corporation to shift our understanding of the word "leak" to a more political understanding of the deliberate and anonymous leak of information into the public sphere as a means to manage perception. In my repli-Kations I blur the borders between a series of maternal biographies and representations. The layered maternal images create an alternative family album for me, and act as a way to escape the everyday of my maternal experience. Whilst performance allows me to escape the norm of my maternal experience, I argue that for my mum (a "dirty" and "dangerous" subject) the neoliberal aspiration that Kate's maternal figure represents, is futile. My mother was never attempting to escape the limits of her class, she was too busy, escaping her immediate reality of poverty.

My performative restaging of Kate is filled with faking it: the wig, the cheap dress, the wrong location. Perhaps just like Kate, we both run the risk of being found out. Perhaps in my ridiculous attempt to be like Kate, I position my spectator, to relish in the failure, as a moral regulator themselves. Perhaps the only thing that separates me and Kate in my images, in neoliberal terms, is my individual failure: to be a better mother, woman, member of society, perhaps even a better artist in my transformation of Kate. Kate continues to frame our everyday understanding of mother's public work.

Notes

1 Articles celebrating the mining heritage of the Middleton family are widespread and can be found in local, national, and international news and magazine outlets. In the United Kingdom, newspapers including *The Star*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Express*, *The Independent*, *The Evening Standard*, as well as a range of local papers, all ran stories framing her working-class heritage. The 2013 *Time Magazine*'s 100 most influential people list begin their section on Kate by stating "Kate Middleton, whose ancestors toiled in the coal mines of Durham, was an ordinary college girl on a path to an unremarkable life. Then she met her Prince Charming…" (Bedell Smith 2013).

2 Example article in *the Sun* newspaper in 2019 – https://www.thesun.co.uk/fabulous/9698017/kate-middleton-princess-diana-similar-mums-kids/ (Chadderton 2019).

3 Example article in *the Sun* newspaper in 2021 – https://www.thesun.co.uk/fabulous/10284313/relatable-kate-middleton-queen-normal-mum-the-range/ (Devine 2021).

4 References to *Playing Kate* encompass a body of work including video, photography, and live performance created between 2017–19. https://www.playingkate.com/phd-practice.
5 I use the term *maternal media object* as a development from Cole's framing of Kate as media object (2014) as his analysis culminates in the royal wedding, whereas my study specifically focuses on the later maternal transformation of Kate.
6 Notable exceptions include performances *MUVAHOOD* (2017) by Libby Liburd and *CHAV* (2020) by Kelly Green, both of which explore single motherhood.
7 *My Son & Heir* was co-commissioned by The Showroom Projects, Pulse, Mayfest, Sprint, Nightwatch and made with support from the University of Chichester and Arts Council England. The performance toured throughout the United Kingdom.
8 Search Party have created duo performances for theatres, galleries, and public spaces for venues and festivals in the United Kingdom and internationally (2005 – ongoing). For more details of Search Party's work, see www.searchpartyperformance.org.uk
9 Examples include https://www.instagram.com/greatreplikate/?hl=en, https://www.instagram.com/royalreplikate/?hl=en, and https://www.instagram.com/budget_duchess/?hl=en
10 Motherworks is an artistic platform for a range of perspectives on maternal mental health and our experience of motherhood. I performed a series of performative interventions at Motherworks Festival (2019) at Junction, Cambridge. https://www.motherworks.org.uk/

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14 Physical and Symbolic Loss

Composite monologues of women parenting while incarcerated

Helena D. Lewis

For the purposes of this creative work, I will be exploring physical and symbolic losses associated with motherhood through composite monologues based on my qualitative research with formerly incarcerated women who experienced the death of a loved one while incarcerated, and my clinical experiences working with incarcerated women at a Residential Community Release Program (RCRP) that provides substance use disorder (SUD) and work release services in New Jersey, United States. The qualitative research design component for these monologues included the interviewing of five English speaking respondents. Qualitative research methods were believed to be the best way to get thorough and holistic descriptions of the respondents' lived experiences of grief while in prison.

After the research protocol was approved by the Rutgers Internal Review Board for human subjects, respondents were recruited through advertisement flyers posted at three re-entry programs in New Jersey that provide services to formerly incarcerated individuals. The advertisement flyers were posted in a public area accessible to all clients. Research subjects were also recruited through social media postings to Facebook pages that provide services to formerly incarcerated individuals. Snowball sampling (Padgett 2017, 68) was also used to recruit participants by contacting gatekeepers who provide services to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women. A total of eleven potential research subjects responded. Each respondent was screened for the study over the phone. The eleven potential respondents were asked the following questions as part of the pre-screening process for the study:

1. Are you a female over the age of twenty-one?
2. Are you formerly incarcerated?
3. Did you experience the loss of a loved one while incarcerated?
4. Are you currently a DOC (Department of Corrections) inmate residing in a community release program?
5. Would you be interested in meeting with me to discuss your experiences of losing a loved one while incarcerated?

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Six of the potential respondents did not meet the criteria for the interview. Out of the six respondents who did not meet the research criteria: four had not experienced the loss of a loved one while incarcerated; one respondent experienced the loss of a loved one who was incarcerated but had not been incarcerated herself; and another respondent declined my invitation to be interviewed for the study. Current Department of Corrections (DOC) inmates or inmates classified to community release programs were not eligible to participate in this study due to DOC restrictions, and to avoid any potential conflict of interest and ethical issues due to my current position working with incarcerated women.

The five respondents who agreed to meet with me were interviewed individually at a mutually agreed upon location. Individual in-depth interviews (Padgett 2017, 108) were chosen as the data collection method. This method allowed me, as the researcher, to prepare questions in advance and ask follow-up improvised questions for clarity. This method also allowed me to explore the nuances of each respondents' experience of losing a loved one while incarcerated to assist with the identification of workable dramatic premises for the development of characters and monologues, with the intent that these characters and monologues may be incorporated into a one-person show. However, for this chapter, which I also frame as an artistic project, the monologues were specifically created to showcase the experiences of incarcerated mothers.

In addition to using coded data from the interviews of the five respondents, I contacted three former clients and requested permission to use their cases to generate composite monologues based on physical and symbolic losses they experienced as an incarcerated mother. All three former clients consented to being a part of this project and provided me with additional information over the phone and through email. I specifically chose these former clients to contact because their stories as mothers left an impact on me as an artist; and as a social worker, I felt their experiences clinically best illuminated symbolic parental losses experienced by incarcerated women. Pseudonyms were used to name the monologues in order to protect the identity of the respondents, former clients, and their children.

Dealing with loss under any circumstances can be challenging; however, these challenges can be exceptionally difficult for incarcerated women. In the United States, nearly half of all women imprisoned will experience the death of a significant other or a loved one while incarcerated (Harner et al 2011, 454). For these women limited support, counselling services, and fear of punishment for outwardly expressing feelings create barriers to grieving. Priority in prison is placed on security and safety and not the individual mental health needs of the incarcerated women (Ferszt 2002, 243; Mollard and Hudson 2016, 225). The inability for incarcerated women to grieve while in prison can lead to feelings of powerlessness, decreased self-esteem, inadequacy, and can further exacerbate mental health issues (Ferszt 2002, 246).

Grief and loss are of significant concerns for mental health issues because they are often overlooked or ignored as part of necessary services for successful re-entry to society. Most re-entry programs in the United States provide services that focus on parenting, healthcare, counselling, substance abuse, housing and transportation, education, employment, and social support (Scroggins and Malley 2010, 147). Didactic educational groups and counselling services to address grief and loss are mostly absent from correctional and re-entry settings.

Incarcerated women experience significant losses throughout their incarceration that are not limited to the death of a loved one. These losses can be categorised as physical or symbolic losses. Physical losses, according to Rando (1991), are more concrete and easily identifiable than symbolic losses. The death of a child, a spouse, or losing a home are examples of physical losses. Symbolic losses, on the other hand, are not easily recognisable, and are psychosocial in nature; these losses result from changes in status and interpersonal relationships (Rando 1991, 12). Incarcerated women experience symbolic loss in the form of freedom, relationships, safety, privacy, and autonomy (Harner et al 2011,458–460). The losses experienced by women in correctional settings, whether symbolic or physical, are almost always met with disapproval and not validated as real losses by society. This non-validation is known as disenfranchised grief (Harner et al 2011, 455) and can have a significant impact on women entering back into society after incarceration if not addressed.

As an artist, I gravitate towards storytelling and write and perform one-person shows. In these shows I portray multiple characters based on individuals that I have interviewed or worked with in a social work setting. When deciding what to write about in these productions, I ask myself one question, "Did this make me mad or sad?" Ironically, as a social worker I have learned to numb my feelings at work. However, when I go home and begin to reflect on my day, as an artist, if I find myself particularly saddened or angered by something, I know that it is a story or event that I might want to workshop for further use.

I don't have anyone – Jane's story

It's not fair. What she is doing is not fair. I signed the papers to give her temporary custody while I was in here. She was all nice to me until I signed those papers. After I signed those papers that was it. She stopped accepting my calls, she stopped bringing my daughter to see me, she stopped sending me money… She won't even let my daughter speak to me on the phone and the last time I talked to my daughter on the phone they were so disrespectful, and calls me by my first name now and calls her grandmother, "Momma." I went off on her. No, not my daughter. She don't know no better. I said, "She needs to know that I'm her mother and you are her grandmother." That woman (child's grandmother) told me I was harassing her and hung up. I called back

and she told me she was going to call the prison and get me removed from the halfway home. I was so mad. I went to the front office and asked staff to document what happened. Next thing I know, DOC came and picked me up. The counsellors didn't even know they were coming to get me. I know my baby's grandmother called and put in a false complaint. All of this to make me look bad to get full custody. I wrote my boyfriend and told him he needed to do something about his mother trying to take our child, but what can he do? He locked up and got more time than me. I am stressing. My hair is falling out. Look at this bald spot. I can't eat. I lost thirty pounds. Most people come to prison and gain weight. Look at me. I'm down to ninety pounds. I wish my brother was still alive. He wouldn't have let this happen. He would have taken my baby, and we would have been able to live with him when I got out. He raised me after our mother and father died. Now he is dead. He had cancer… I'm twenty-three and I don't have anyone. My daughter is my only family… and I don't even have her.

The last visit – Nadine's story

My baby was six months when I got locked up for this charge. I was doing my thing you know. Selling pills and from time-to-time heroin. But, I wasn't making ends meet you know. Diapers ain't cheap, you can't live nowhere for free. So, I told the dude that supplied me with my stuff to give me a few bags of heroin to sell. I messed around and sold to an undercover and that was the end of my parole. My mother was taking care of my baby, but she old. It got to be too much for her and my baby ended up in foster care. When I was transferred to the halfway home, my counsellor, Ms. Polished, was able to get my visits going with my baby. The first time that I got to see him at the halfway house… I couldn't believe how big he was. He was walking, trying to talk, but I could tell he was a little scared of me. I don't think he recognised me. He pushed my hand away and ran to the lady that brought him. For a minute, I was thinking, "Did this chick bring the wrong baby here?" Then I helped change his diaper and saw his birthmark. He got these two little dark spots on his butt that are close together. Like, little eyeballs. You feel me? Little eyeballs without the white parts of the eyes. So, I knew he was my baby. When the visit was over the lady told me that his foster family wanted to adopt him. I ain't think much of it. Cause, how they gonna just take my baby? Especially with me paroling so soon. I just needed time to find a program that would take the both of us. A few days later Ms. Polished called me to her office and told me the case worker called about my next visit. The adoption was finalised, but I would still get one last visit. I cried. I cried in my room every night. Like, is he gonna remember me when he get older? Is he gonna think I didn't want him? Is he gonna grow up thinking I was a bad mother? Like, is he gonna grow up to be like me? Is he gonna look for me? I wanted him to have something. Something that I brought him. Something that I could give him on our last visit to remember me. So, I put in a slip to

go house shopping with my state check and brought him an outfit. A blue pajama set and on the day of my last visit I felt sick all day. Like, I'm never gonna see him again. I'm never gonna hold him again. I'm never gonna see who he grows up to be. I gave the lady that brought him the pajama set, but she said she couldn't take it with her. So, I hung the pajama set over my bed. I look at it all the time and imagine my baby wearing it… and playing with me.

I can't do nothing for her – Gloria's story

She calls here so much the staff at the front desk just gives me the phone. She been kicked out of every foster home. She went to live with my oldest daughter and got put out for stealing. She went to live with my second oldest daughter and got put out for being disrespectful and arguing. Then she got put in a new foster home last week and got put out again. I told her, "You can't go breaking people's car windows just because you are mad. Those people didn't have to let you in their home, Zana!" Oh, I just get so frustrated thinking about this child. But she thirteen and think she knows everything. She didn't have the same time I had with my other kids. They were twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, and twenty-five when I caught this charge. Zana… Zana was six and just grew up mad. Mad at me for being locked up. Mad we not together. Mad she can't stay at the program with me. I said, "Zana, this is prison. It might not look like prison, but it's prison. You can't stay here. These people is not going to lose their jobs because of you." When we on the phone she just cries. She thinks I can just leave here when I want to. I tried to explain to the best of my abilities that this is a halfway home and I am still an inmate. She doesn't understand or she acts like she don't understand. She just wants me home. And since she been put out the last foster home, I don't even know where she is. I called her ten times today and her cell phone is going straight to voicemail. I'm trying not to think that she done, got snatched up by some crazy person and she in a ditch somewhere hurt. The last time I talked to her, I told her, "Zana, you got to be good so we can be together when I get out." How would that look for me to do these ten years just for her to get locked up before I got released? I can't do nothing for her if she gets herself locked up. I can't do nothing for her now… except talk to her and tell her not to make the same mistakes I made. This is no life… being away from your family. I pray every day for her not to end up in a place like this, but I can't do nothing for her. I want her to be somebody. Not inmate 456123. When I get out of here, I'm going to my mother's house. I'm going to give my mother a kiss, and I'm getting out of New Jersey. I'm going to live with my family in Chicago and I told Zana this. I told her I was taking her with me. I can't stay with my mother. My brother lives with her and I can't be around him. He lied to the police and told them the gun was mine. He took these years away from me. Away from Zana. Now, I don't even know where she is and if I did… I still couldn't do nothing for her.

Two minutes – Lisa's story

My mom was the best. We had a really good relationship you know. Every time I got locked up she would be there for me. She ain't have a lot of money so we couldn't talk on the phone much, but she wrote me letters every week. When I got locked up this time, I was pregnant with him *(Lisa points to her son playing on the floor)*. I knew I had to do things differently this time. When I went into labor they took me from my cell to the hospital. I got to be with him for two hours and they took him away, but I wasn't worried about nothing 'cause I had already made arrangements with the social worker for my mother to take him after he was born until I could get out. When I got back to the prison one of the correctional officers brought me to the social worker's office. I kept asking, "Is anything wrong with my baby?" He told me, "They just asked me to bring you to the office." He ain't know nothing. The social worker sat me down and told me to call my brother. When she told me that, I knew something was wrong. They don't just let you make calls in prison like that. My brother told me my mother was dead. He been trying to get me for two weeks, but I was at the hospital giving birth to him. By the time I talked to my brother the service was the next day. There was no time for me to try to find out if I could get transported to the service from prison. You have to put in a request to go to service and pay for them to take you. All of that takes time. Even if we had time to put the papers in… I had no way to pay for it. My mom was supposed to take my baby and I was going to live with her when I got home. My brother told me he been trying to get in touch with me. He kept calling the prison, but could never get nobody on the phone and he is homeless. So, you know it was kinda rough on him too you know. When he did get through to someone, he told them who he was and they told him someone would get back to him. I guess that is when someone decided it was okay for me to call him. Two minutes. Two minutes is how long they let me talk to him. I tried to get as much information as I could, but you can only find out so much in two minutes. I just knew my mother's church friends were taking care of her funeral and the arrangements. What I didn't know was who had my baby and where we were going to live. The correctional officer took me back to my cell. I wrote a request to make another phone call and it took them two weeks to write back that it was against policy to make personal phone calls. I just wanted to try and find someone to take care of my kid until I got out. No one offered me counselling. No one came by to check on me. If it wasn't for my cellmate and the other girls in there… I don't know what I would have done. They had been through similar situations and were trying to comfort me. But, you can't talk to just anybody in there. If they see you crying, they will try to take advantage of you. When I got out, I was able to get into a program that helps women with children. They helped me get my son back, but I didn't get any counselling at the prison. I even asked to speak to a psychiatrist when I found out my mother died. I was having trouble sleeping. I didn't get called to see the psych for a month. By that time, I was just dealing

with it on my own and I didn't feel comfortable talking to him. I didn't want to make things worse for me. He could have written something down that kept me from getting out and I didn't want that.

I can't wait to go home – Elaine's story

My counsellor came to my room and told me she needed to speak to me. My COVID test came back positive, and the DOC was coming to get me. I just broke down crying. I put in to go to the halfway home so I could go to work and save some money before I got released. That did not happen. Two weeks after I got to the program, they stopped all movement and visits. You don't know how much I was looking forward to seeing my daughter and hugging her. I know she is grown, but she still my baby. That was eight months ago. I couldn't look for work, I couldn't go to school, I couldn't have a visit. Then they started releasing people early. Giving them credit for being locked up during a pandemic. Some of the girls here didn't want to go. Some of them felt safer at the program than home. Some of them didn't have a place to go and some of them didn't even want to apply to be released early. Talking about, "What if they deny me?" Let somebody give me a chance to get out early. You don't have to ask me twice, but I get it, you know. Everyone is not me. My roommate told me she didn't want to fill out the paper because, if she got denied, she didn't want to disappoint her daughter. So, you rather stay here and not take a chance? I don't understand that. Every day that I am away from my kid, I feel like someone is stabbing my heart and now… Now, I'm on quarantine and I hope I make it back to the halfway home. Now, those ladies at the program can say whatever they want about that place, but you cannot tell me that being at a halfway home is worse than being at the prison. We can wear our own clothes there. We have outside movie nights and ice cream… And I know it's not much, but it's little things like that, that makes a person feel human. I made a mistake in my past which I truly regret, and I went to prison… and when it's my turn to go to the halfway home the world falls apart, the halfway home gets shut down cause of COVID-19, I can't work because they won't let us out. Now… I might have COVID-19. I don't want to die here. Away from my family… alone.

Subject Participation

For their involvement in the research component of these composite monologues, the respondents each received a $25.00 Visa Gift Card. Each of the participants stated that they would have done the interview without receiving the $25.00, because they wanted their stories to be told and hoped their participation would lead to changes in the DOC. The former clients, who have been discharged from the program between three months and three years, did not receive any form of compensation and agreed to me using their cases because they also wanted their

stories to be shared in the hope of changing current DOC culture, and advocating for more re-entry programs and improved services and conditions for current inmates. These women also asked for and will receive a copy of this book.

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15 Performing and Transforming the Maternal

A reflexive inquiry using digital storytelling for mutual learning

Leah Salter

Introduction

I have been working with families and communities in various locations for over twenty years, often within the context of maternal wellbeing. This chapter offers reflections from practice using the prompt material of six digital stories, produced in three different locations and three different timeframes.[1]

The story begins at the "Health, Policy and Impact – Maternal Performance Matters" forum, organised as part of the "Performance and the Maternal" research project online maternal forums series where I presented the stories of Lara and Catrin.[2] Lara, a white woman in her early thirties, told her story of becoming a mother following a diagnosis of Bipolar Affective Disorder. Lara is a creative arts graduate and mother of two children, of Welsh and Caribbean heritage. Catrin, a white Welsh woman in her forties, told a story of growing up with a mother experiencing psychosis. She refers to her mother using the Welsh word *Mam* and talks poignantly of the complexities of family life in the context of mental health. Catrin and Lara live in an area that hosts one of the most deprived wards in Wales and both are involved with mental health services.

Capturing these stories, in 2020, I was struck by the courage of the two storytellers to speak out about their experiences from within this context. I was also reminded of other digital stories I have been a part of creating – stories of maternal mental health written and told by Laura, Tammy, Becky, and Mair at different times between 2011 and 2015. I decided to revisit all six stories collectively in order to explore shared themes, for mutual learning.

I reviewed the stories using a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) reflecting particularly on the ways the storytellers describe processes of learning and transformation. As such, multiple voices are present. There is my own voice as practitioner-researcher, then Becky, Mair and Tammy who produced digital stories for a conference in Wales that I organised and co-facilitated in 2011.[3] The voice of Laura is also present. Laura produced her digital story for a "Parental Mental Health" conference that I organised in a British island location in 2015.[4] Lara and Catrin's voices (who produced their digital stories for the already mentioned online forum "Health, Policy and Impact- Maternal Performance Matters") are also heard. All of these

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storytellers have chosen to share their experiences to contribute to health, social care, and therapeutic practice development.

I am not a mother
I am not a mother
And I have lost and hurt
As I nurture other(s)
I am not a mother
And I have dug deep
To protect our future
I am not a mother
And my heart is stretched
With love and fear
I am not a mother
And my belly has scars
Rounding each year.
L. Salter 2021

Backdrop

As this poem suggests, I am not a mother. I am a systemic practitioner, a family psychotherapist, researcher and lecturer, and a white, cis-gender, heterosexual, Welsh woman with associated privileges. I currently work with families in statutory mental health services and with adults in community groups. Much of my work, over the years, has been in Welsh communities characterised/scarred by deprivation. I am not a medic or diagnostician and my practices have purposefully centred community and social interventions rather than pharmacological ones. In all areas of my practice, I position myself not as an expert, but as a learner.

"Mutual learning" or "symmathesy" (coined by Nora Bateson in 2016) is a key cornerstone of my practice and a useful way to describe what happens in formal and informal learning spaces, including group work and conversations with others. In this inquiry, and in all my practices, I am transparently invested in change, not just at a personal level, but at a social one. I do not view transformation as unidirectional. I agree with Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner who say of autoethnographers that we are "…writers (who) integrate emotional, spiritual, and moral parts of (our)selves" (2017, 1). There are multiple dilemmas that can present in the relational contexts of research and practice, not least the issue of consent when stories shared are bound together with family and community narratives; but this is also a rich area for learning.

Systemic thinking, narrative practices, and new materialism as theoretical companions

Systemic and narrative practices are knitted-together, well-worn threads that run through my work in terms of therapy, community work, teaching, training, group facilitation, and research. Of note is the influence of narrative

therapist Michael White, who called on those of us involved in the practice of therapy to separate out problems from people in order to "thicken the narrative" of peoples' lives beyond problem definition (White 1995; White and Epston 1999). Narrative therapy emphasises *double listening* – for stories of trauma and stories of resistance to be equally heard – in psychotherapy and in collective practices with families and communities (White 2007; Denborough 2006, 2008). The aim of listening in this way is "to validate and dignify" (Marlowe 2010, 43) and as such it has been highly influential in my work with groups of people who have experienced marginalisation and oppression and continues to be a helpful lens through which to view storytelling practices.

Storytelling offers a platform for disruption and "diffraction" (Barad 2006) where we can both *reflect back* and *create new.* It can reshape a view of society as something that is already formed into something that we are in the *process* of creating, becoming, "worlding" (Barad 2006; Simon and Salter 2019). We are not just imagining a "preferred future" (White and Epston 1999) we are generating it/them/us. Stories of motherhood, as told by women (and others who identify with mothering, including those who have not given birth) are constantly redefining what we think we mean when using the language we have available to us, and in generating new language/new stories/constructing new meaning.

Gregory Bateson in *Mind and Nature* invites critical thinking about the "false distinctions" drawn between "mind and nature" (Bateson 1972). Karen Barad, in the field of new materialism, further questions these distinctions, bringing forth the concept that human and non-human matter "intra-actively co-constitute" the world, in an ongoing process of "worlding" (Barad 2006, 90). This feels pertinent in storytelling practices. We are, in telling the stories of our lives, in the process of simultaneously "intra-actively co-constituting" ourselves and the world around us, not just in language, but in and through matter (Barad 2006, 168). This is relevant in the construct of the maternal, raising important questions about the entanglement of matter and motherhood. For example, Victoria Law (2016) shares her experiences of becoming a mother as an additional identity to her role as photographer, writer and social/political activist. She writes: "as a new mother, usually with an infant in tow, I could no longer weave through angry or scared demonstrators or crawl through the legs of cops to get that perfect shot" (Law 2016, 61). The material, visceral quality of this quote reminds me of multiple conversations I have had with women adjusting to motherhood and trying to navigate their way through everyday scenarios such as negotiating a busy supermarket with trollies, pushchairs, and overcrowded aisles. One of the storytellers with whom I worked, Becky, touches on this in her story, referencing all the new challenges that come with being a parent. She also discusses giving birth in a medical environment at this crucial, relational time when "no-one even asked me how I was doing".

Social researchers Kate Boyer and Justin Spinney have inquired into the concept of journeying in both a physical and emotional sense when mothers

are attempting to be mobile with a small baby in urban areas, noting the entangled relationships between mother and baby, between baby and pushchair, between pushchair and mother, between pushchair and pavement and so on, emphasising the materiality of the experience (Boyer and Spinney 2016). Jane Bennett (2010), Mel Chen (2012) and John Shotter (2014) present similar examples of how "human being/doing and thinghood overlap" (Bennett 2010). Felix Guattari's (2000) writing on the "three ecologies" of environment, social, and mental also highlights the intersection. Further, Guattari laments the degradation of kinship, which he argues advanced capitalism and individualism has reduced to the "bare minimum of domestic life" (Guattari 2000, 19). Similarly, Donna Haraway's (2016) proclamation to "make kin, not babies" offers a robust critique to anthropocentric notions of life on earth and both re-centres and challenges what we think of as family and community. As such it raises important questions about what we think we mean by motherhood and maternal. Black feminist, radical feminist, indigenous, and queer theorists have been challenging these notions for many years. For example, Wanda Pillow (2006, 2015) contributes to a vital critique of colonialist, westernised views within education, one that retains oppressive structures and marginalises whole communities, including pregnant/mothering students. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens, and Mai'a Williams (2016) and bell hooks (2014) also critique individualising and colonising perspectives of mothering and offer an alternative narrative of parenthood as community activity. Furthermore, bell hooks deconstructs the feminist argument that the performance of motherhood acts as an obstacle to women's liberation. hooks argues instead that if Black women's voices had been heard within the liberation narrative, then another story might have emerged, one where liberation is defined by the *choice* to inhabit the world of home rather than the world of work – a world of unpaid or low paid labour (hooks 2014). These theoretical concepts are crucial when reflecting on the construct of the maternal, and its intersections with social (in)equality. Capturing unheard and/or subaltern stories of motherhood has an important role in challenging the dominant discourse of "the maternal", redirecting towards multiple, intersecting narratives of mothering.

Jerry Lee Rosiek and Jimmy Snyder ask us to question how we are being "good companions" to the stories we hear, as narrative researchers. They frame stories as "not necessarily benign" agents and reference indigenous storywork as influential in attending to the cultural and socio-political contexts of storytelling (Rosiek and Snyder 2018, 10). Being a good companion to stories and storytellers might mean entering into a more obviously political landscape, highlighting injustices at a community or social level, questioning culturally accepted/generated definitions. It might mean, for example, displaying work visually in a gallery, or capturing it digitally, or engaging in research that promotes social action and new learning. Storytelling, just like narrative practices, is never neutral territory. We are always in a political/politicised space (Simon 2014).

Method of inquiry

For this small-scale inquiry, I followed a methodology developed from the six guidelines set out by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006). This involved listening to/watching the stories, making notes (coding) based on not just the frequency of words but also the emphasis placed on words and phrases, making notes on the visual representations in the stories, generating themes from these notes, reviewing the themes, naming them, and then writing them up.

To the six steps proposed by Braun and Clarke, I added time to reflect on the wider contextual information, including my relationships with storytellers, the words they used, and also the visuals and the materials that were used (Salter 2018, 2021). This fits with a reflexive inquiry approach and overlaps with a narrative mode of analysis (Bamberg 2012; Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Clandinin and Rosiek 2007; Salter 2018, 2021). Though Braun and Clarke have advocated for thematic analysis being used as a standalone method of analysis, I have utilised it here somewhat more widely, by linking to stories from practice and the wider theoretical landscape. As such, it offers flexibility alongside a certain amount of rigour, for the purpose of a small-scale, reflexive inquiry intended to enhance practitioner learning. The following four headings represent the primary themes that emerged from that process. They are interwoven with my own reflections and feedback loops between theory and practice.

Private to public

The storytellers – Laura, Becky, Tammy, Mair, Lara, and Catrin – all mention, in some shape or form, the idea of motherhood catapulting women into a more public sphere.

Becky, a white Welsh woman in her thirties, talks about this from the perspective of both the birth experience and new motherhood making her suddenly visible to the outside world and open to scrutiny in a way she had not experienced before. She felt judged as a young mother experiencing post-natal depression, though she rejects the language feeling it blames her children. Becky has a close family whom she values for their support, and has also experienced more intrusive levels of support from the professional community.

Mair talks about the public nature of family life when social care services enter into your life as a parent. Both Becky and Mair live in an area of Wales, an ex-mining community, impacted by high unemployment and other markers of social deprivation. Both talk of feeling criticised and judged by professionals at times when they reached out for help.

Laura, too, talks about the judgement she has felt as a mother with a mental health diagnosis and how she often feels under surveillance, rather than supported. She was born and lives in an island community with the associated levels of scrutiny that come alongside living in close(d) shared spaces.

Lara reflects on how her mental health diagnosis meant that her first experiences of being a mother were in a mother and baby unit, being observed by others, with high levels of intervention.

Catrin and Tammy are looking back, as adults, on their experiences of being children of mothers with a mental health diagnosis. They reflect on the amounts of services they encountered which did not, unfortunately, equate with being given information to help them make sense of their situation. Tammy is a white English woman who has made Wales her home as an adult. She talks movingly about how nobody explained to her what was happening when she was taken into foster care and how she had multiple questions that were not addressed. She tells me that she had concerns about the everyday disruptions to family life. "Foremost in my mind" she says was "the magazine on order in the local shop and the hot cross buns we were meant to have for tea". She also recalls not knowing what would happen to her cats, asking about them without response, and only later finding out that they had been "taken care of". It mattered to Tammy that her questions were unanswered. It also mattered to her that the change in her family situation became public by her removal from her classroom the day her mother went into hospital and Tammy went into care.

When I reflect back over these stories, I notice my memories of working in different contexts overlap and intersect. In my capacity as a family therapist, I have been a witness to the lived experience of children whose lives have been disrupted by parental mental health and I have witnessed parents with mental health diagnoses trying to make sense of the institutional responses and social prejudice towards them. In my experience, when parents have their mental health questioned without due care and sensitivity, their competence, resourcefulness, and creativity often get overshadowed by the narrative of deficit. As all of the storytellers touch on, women, in this context (and their children) enter into a more public sphere where they are heavily scrutinised within a legal framework. For example, I have attended child protection case conferences and other legal meetings where women's mental health is openly discussed, often without clear rationale or consent. Working in the third sector, I have heard mothers being directed to take anti-depressant medication by practitioners with no medical training and have witnessed the damage that overly simplified narratives of blame cause women who are often working hard to take care of themselves and their children, usually with limited financial and social resources. Working within statutory services with adults, I witness similar simplification of complexity when diagnoses are in the frame. I have seen children and parents in complete distress at the point of being separated from each other. I have also witnessed the devastating impact of abuse and neglect on children and the adults they become. These experiences will always stay with me.

Tammy's story reminds me that whilst there will be times when a parent cannot care for their child and legal steps need to be taken to safeguard their children, this needs to be done with compassionate care. When Tammy talks

of being removed from her classroom publicly and taken into temporary foster care in the middle of the school day, the distress associated with this is clear. Though this story relates to the 1970s, as recently as 2007 Barnardo's found, through talking to children impacted by parental mental health, similar stories were still being shared. The list they produced from the feedback from young people includes basic requests to do things like:

> Introduce yourself, tell us who you are and what your job is. Give us as much information as you can. Tell us what is wrong with our mum or dad. Tell us what is going to happen next. Talk to us and listen to us. Ask us what we know and what we think. Tell us it's not our fault. Please don't ignore us. Keep on talking to us and keeping us informed. Tell us if there is anyone we can talk to. It could be you.
>
> (Barnardo's 2007)

Relational (rather than linear) connections

There are numerous studies that highlight the link between parental mental health and psychopathology in children (for example, Oates 1997; Falkov 1998) and there is extensive literature on the impact of maternal mental health and the quality of the parent-child relationship (Crittenden 2008; Prior and Glaser 2006; Rutter and Quinton 1984). This is important research that invites careful reflection on the safeguarding implications of maternal mental health; however, there is limited research that highlights parental competence within the mental health literature (Salter et al 2014). This can leave parents vulnerable to professional certainty that parental mental health corresponds directly with parental deficit. Lara reflects on this in her digital story. She offers a reminder that whilst her mental health undoubtedly intersects with her daily parenting activities, this need not obliterate her resourcefulness and competence as a woman with the aspiration to be the best mother she can be.

In her digital story, Mair talks about reaching a point where she considered handing over her children to the care of social services. She felt overwhelmed by the demands of parenting whilst managing low mood and anxiety and feeling judged by others. However, the story ends with Mair reflecting on how much she is now enjoying being a mother and how she has no regrets despite the births of her three children all being trigger points for periods of mental ill health. This leads to another theme – one of shifting identities.

Evolving narratives of identity

Mair's story, "I'm a mother now", explores this theme poignantly. She reflects that she has been able to feel like a mother to her children since she has felt supported rather than judged. She compares this with previously feeling like a carer, a more detached role, as she saw it. Her story ends with her smiling

directly at the camera saying "I know who I am now. I'm Mair", which also suggests, I think, a shifting identity in herself. Her digital story uses both moving and still images. The story suggests that the space and time that Mair has had to reflect (in therapy and in producing her story) has meant that she has a stronger sense of herself. Tammy's and Catrin's stories also end positively, with a sense of hope that their relationship with their mothers have changed over time. Tammy reflects that one of the consequences of her experience – as a child whose mother spent much of her adulthood in a mental health unit – is that she is a determined, independent, and resilient adult now herself. Catrin reflects how her mother has told her how much she loved her daughter and how she had no regrets despite the mental ill health that had followed the birth.

In her story, Becky talks about having an unplanned third child, called depression, that seems to be an unwanted character in the story; but, as the narrative unfolds, we learn that this view is shifting and she sees it now more as "living alongside" rather than being "invaded by". Laura notes the change in her relationship with her daughter, which she had previously viewed as one where she is only negatively impacting her child, to one where she feels they have successfully navigated the territory together. Laura and her daughter worked together on their own stories in a mutually supportive, creative enterprise. They used photos and stock images to represent key points in their lives.

Materiality of the medium

Digital storytelling invites a relationship between past, present, and future. It often focuses on human relationships and community stories/legacies, but it also requires a relationship with technology. Barad (2003, 2006) calls us to think (as researchers and practitioners) about the apparatus we use, not just the relationship we have *to* it but how we are "entangled" *with* it (Barad 2006). We live in an era, in the Global North at least, where we do not just *have* technology, we *are* technology. Our phones (for example) are a part of our everyday communications, a part of *us*, of what makes us a contemporary human (Barad 2006; Braidotti 2013, 2019; Haraway 2016; Simon and Salter 2020). In this way the digitalisation of storytelling is an expression of contemporary living and the equipment used to produce the story is part of the narrative. For example, when Lara produced her digital story, she did so with the assistance of a digital storyteller (Arts in Health coordinator and artist Prue Thimbleby), but also with a laptop, a memory stick, hard copies of photos, and a scanner to re-format them. Lara also used clay and paints and coloured paper, glue, felt pens, glitter, and a camera to produce material she wanted to photograph. Lara did this in a room with other women, also producing their own digital stories, using similar equipment. The room itself was significant. It had a small kitchen where people could get a hot drink and a biscuit. There were tables in different configurations to make space for

in-the-round exercises and discussion, and individual spaces for people to work with the equipment. When we recorded the voice-overs, another room was chosen that had good sound-proofing and acoustics. All of this mattered. It communicated a kind of care and attention to detail that said "we take this seriously" and "your story matters". Lara commented on this after the process had ended, in a service evaluation questionnaire. She said that, "the editing process was helpful. Although it was emotional it became fun and a safe way to explore a sensitive matter… It was a listening space". I recall that Lara created sculptures from clay that took the form of words and human figures. Becky and Mair both used family photos, which became a theme in itself. Becky talked about the photos representing "the most important people in my life". Mair reflects how photos represent memories and that "good memories take away the bad ones". It was noticeable that some of the photos she had used had previously been torn and then repaired; the tactile quality of the image representing a poignant theme of reparation, that the audio relays. Others, like Lara and Laura, used digital photos and stock images, readily accessible on phones and other personal devices in 2020, perhaps less so in 2011 when Becky, Tammy and Mair made their stories.

Reflections

The prior four headings, as the four primary themes that emerged from the inquiry, have enabled me to reflect further on the connections between theory and practice in the field of the maternal. In sharing their stories, the mothers in this inquiry are also creating new stories for themselves and others, being "transformed" in the telling.

I am reminded of Kim Etherington's writing on narrative inquiry that states that "new selves" form as we tell (and re-tell) stories of our lives (Etherington 2004). Examples from practice highlight this. For example, after creating images and verbally telling her story, Becky reported that her relationship with parenthood and with her mental health diagnosis shifted during the process of making the story. Mair spoke similarly in relation to "knowing who I am now" as a parent and as a woman. Laura and her daughter spoke also about a shift in their parent-child relationship as they were engaged in the making of the stories, a move towards cooperation and mutual respect.

I can relate with this. When I was engaged in my doctoral research between 2014 and 2018, my mother consented to being part of the research. This was not planned, but evolved through the process. My mother shared stories with me in the form of letters, and in return I produced poetry in a kind of creative exchange. She talked honestly, in letter form (in a way we rarely do in conversation) about how she had no expectation that she would be performing parenthood alone and admits that we really "grew up together" as we struggled through. As an adult I admire this honesty. As a child and young adult, I was probably more in confusion than admiration, but I think this was a shared experience. *And* we got through it. This is one of the poems I wrote

for my mum, with reference to the work(s) of John Shotter, social constructionist theorist and philosopher.

"We come into the world moving"[5]
Head first I dive in to this moment, the first moment?
Gliding through the waters that connect me to you, to life
You are tired, spent, done in
And I am bursting with curiosity, with questions not yet formed
A girl! Already becoming a woman, becoming
And still becoming
You look through the world now with eyes no less curious
And I need to look away,
Interrupting intimacy,
Affirming independence
I learnt to be me through you
I yearned to be me through me
We learnt to go on together
Stumbling through, bound by so many moments
Your steps are slower now and mine faster
Mine take me on
To places you might never see
And we are still becoming
"We come into the world moving"
I wonder, mother, are we still moving
Through the world
Or are we, mother, the world moving?
I have so many questions yet
Do you still have time to answer?
Shall we sit and talk
Or shall we walk, though the world, together?

L. Salter 2018

This poem, and the themes from the digital stories I have reviewed, connects with what Cath Heinemeyer (2019, 14) highlights as "fuzzy boundaries between learning, artistic and therapeutic goals". When stories emerge, they also merge, in connection with others, including wider social narratives. There are relational and political goals to personal storytelling, often with the aim of being socially just or making a difference in the lives of the storytellers, the people who listen to the stories, and the communities they live in.

Naomi Sunderland and Nicole Matthews (2019) suggest that "storytellers and their allies in many ways set out to do extra-ordinary things – to amplify stifled voices, to reshape hierarchies of expertise, and to tap into vital new insights on the world" (Sunderland and Matthews 2019, 38). Etherington reflects that she has been encouraged in her practice and research by feedback from readers of her books, who have found the stories of people with lived

experience, presented as first-person narratives, more useful than knowledge gained through more traditional research methodologies (Etherington, 2003). Indigenous storywork researcher, Jo-Ann Archibald (2019) notes similarly, reflecting on how much she learnt through the process of becoming a researcher by listening to the stories of elders and other members of indigenous communities. In a previous paper, my co-author and community storyteller, Jemma Newkirk, has said that stories are "something that everyone has the right to share, but sometimes… can feel trapped within you" (Salter and Newkirk 2019, 115). This speaks to the inherently transformative quality of storytelling and the change it can create for the storyteller *and* listener when the "story held within" is liberated from isolation in the telling (Malpass and Penny 2019, 66). This has been true for me within this project. Reviewing the stories has, no doubt, been transformative. I have made important connections with my own stories that will enhance my practice in new ways.

In summary

In this chapter, I have aimed, to highlight stories from practice and my reflections from learning to add to the growing base of evidence of the transformative quality of digital storytelling. I began by providing context to the piece and introducing the storytellers. I have referenced mutual learning as an important influence within my systemic and narrative practices and key theoretical underpinnings – systemic theory, narrative practices, and new materialism – followed by the themes that were most dominant in revisiting the six digital stories that the storytellers produced. These themes were "private to public", "relational connections", "evolving narratives of identity", and "materiality of the medium". This led to a reflection on mutual learning, personal and collective transformation, and to the loop back into practice.

In terms of methodology, I have drawn on narrative inquiry and autoethnography as reflexive approaches, using a thematic analysis in reviewing the stories. This helped me pay attention to the voices of the storytellers and reflect on my own stories of womanhood and motherhood, highlighting how personal stories intersect with wider social narratives.

Notes

1 Names, and some details of the storytellers have been changed to protect anonymity, though care has been taken to retain the authenticity of the stories. Exact locations are deliberately unspecified.
2 For more information about the "Performance and the Maternal" research project and maternal forums see https://performanceandthematernal.com/maternal-forums/.
3 "Think Family: Mental ill health from the family's perspective" 2011 Conference, Action for Children, Aneurin Bevan Health Board, Children and Young Peoples Partnership.
4 "Think Family" 2015 Conference, Health and Social Care Board, Channel Islands.

5 "We come into the world moving" is a quote from John Shotter. Full quote: "Not only do we come into the world moving, but on coming into one or another kind of context with our surroundings, we are ourselves also continually "moved" (Shotter 2014, 306). I read his poem at a public event to celebrate the life and work of John Shotter, some months before his death. He audibly gasped when I said aloud the word "mother". He too, it seems, was "moved" by the relational context.

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16 Weaving Enfleshed Citizenship (M)otherwise

Sara C. Motta

Our re-membering can be everything as fragments, loose threads, multiple tongues; transversing lack and loss, longing and survivance; enfleshed archiving of the silenced and violated racialised mothers and daughters, daughters and mother; excavating the fecund silence; escape, migration, dispossession, and desire.

We are at once mother and daughter, lover, and sister, comadre (comother) and wisdom keeper, the centre of the subterranean webs, pulsating as pluridiverse rhythms, wild indecipherability to the registers of unreason and antilife that were never ours, flows and re-connection to an ancient-yet-new becoming political (m)otherwise (Motta 2018a, 2019).

Part one: on not re-mapping our trauma

I acknowledge the different Tierras/Lands/Countries from which we come as writer and readers, yet I am writing on Awabakal and Worimi Country. I recognise the sustaining quality of land, sea and sky and the ongoing sovereignty of Awabakal and Worimi peoples. I honour and call to presence the abules of all the lands which meet in me. I am mindful not to reproduce a notion of place, belonging and dwelling that encourages our honouring of place towards an "official" singular idealised place consciously identified with self, whist disregarding the many unrecognised, shadow places that provide our material, existential, ancestral, and ecological support. Instead, I seek to develop an ecological and ancestral form of consciousness and relationship with place as multiple. This acknowledges how our consciousness and connections can extend through time, across space, through the palimpsestic experiences of Tierra/Country across lands, and encompassing not only the human, but the non-human and the more-than-human. I thus also acknowledge how Tierra/Country is enfleshed in our own territories of the body which themselves have been subject to interventions, dispossessions and violences but are also sites of the dark wisdoms of which Patricia Hill Collins (1990) speaks and the erotic of which Audre Lorde (1989) poeticises.[1]

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Return to innocence

I feel it, self-hate
like there is something ugly
about my skin
a disease of the flesh

I feel their hatred
thick congealed bile
inflaming my solar plexus
filling me with their dread

I understand why a brick
gets thrown in their windows
façade, to crack the spread
of the original disease of Whiteness

not phenotypical but phenomenological
not the colour of skin
a subjectivity instead
premised upon our genocide

Fanon's non-recognition[2]
foundational to the colonial divide
epistemological frontiers
trauma derived

and inspired, blankets with small pox
baby milk laced with cyanide
health campaigns to sterilise
stop us breeding, cut off her head

place it on tall sticks
mark possession, mastery and pride
the entryway of the Lettered City
protect the purity of the race

hide the putridness of their homeplace
a landscape of the intimacies
of the patriarchal colonial state
for whom the black mother

begets a savage, monstrous race
a place
of dirt, infanticide
an undignified disgrace

genealogies of forced forgetting.

Veins of Abya Yala,[3] *pulsating*
coursing memories
refusal
to be laid to rest

they shake me from the delirium
In which the mirage of their hatred
Is mistaken
for the real

they sing to me
soothe my pain
wash away the shame
honour rage in ceremony

they stroke my feet
I look down
feel the soil
the roots of my soul

they implore me to take tea
manzanilla, ortiga, milenrama
allow the poderes to nourish my skin
replenish our wholeness

make medicine
with the oceanic pain
imprint the possibilities to remain
despite their dread

they hold my tears
overflowing sacred containers
alchemical grief
ancient release

they remind me
I have a right to life
to weave the thread of our recovery
have home, and hearth and kin

I am innocent
We have always been innocent of their crimes
We are not guilty
I AM NOT TO BLAME

their logics of dispossession
and despair, are not mine
let them go now mijita
allow them to fall

from shoulders and thighs
fly like the eagle, connect with our dead
love, live, breathe in
the majesty of our flesh.
Sara C. Motta, 13 October 2021

Part two: speaking as the racialised and feminised maternal flesh

I could begin writing from the wounds and markings on the communal flesh of the violent onto-epistemological cartographies and mappings of us as non-citizens, relegated to the exteriority of modern/colonial Reason and Political Subjecthood. I could begin from our rendering through the White gaze as objects legitimately subject to biopolitical epistemological regulations that seek to break our kinship structures, pathologize our registers of care, and deny our forms of subjecthood and sovereignty. I could begin from our being systemically targeting as Black, Indigenous, and Indigenous-Mestiza mothers for our centrality in the birthing, tending, and nurturing of these cosmopolitics (m)otherwise. I could speak this in ways that seek recognition from the White gaze and inclusion into its registers of Right, Law, Governance, and Reason; a desperation for decipherability, distorting my body and breath to fit the containments, performing to a rhythm that is premised on my/our negation and reproducing my/our spirit annihilation.

This is a script of right, writing, and rite that I now refuse.

Instead, I take a breath, a deep ancestral breath and commit to writing as ceremony and medicinal epistemology in which the threads of our survivance and flourishing are enfleshed.

I (re)begin.

I bring to memory circles of storytelling and mourning, of the intercultural women's movements in Cali, Colombia (Bermúdez 2013; Motta and Bermudez 2019; Motta 2021) which rupture the registers of the visible within the contours of a system of governance and citizenship, of reason and law, premised upon the ongoing negation of the knowing-being of Indigenous, Black, and working class racialised Mestiza mothers and kin. Into this space of ceremony and/as mandala making, of ancestral re-membering and elemental invocation, we bear witness to the stories of assassination and murder of children and young, of rape and assault of women, of infiltration of police agents into community, of curfews and militarisation of the streets. We bring to thought and communal breath how precarity and abandonment are the foundational logics and irrationalities of a modern/colonial system of governance

and state sovereignty premised upon a death-making onto-epistemological politics that seeks to eradicate Indigenous, Black, and Indigenous-Mestiza political difference and life (Serje et al. 2007; Morgensen 2011). Following from Black feminist Saidiya Hartman (2007) the bodies of Black women are thought of as the naturalised site of gratuitous punishment and violence.

Colonial administrators instituted strict regulations on behaviour, relationship, desire, and policed complex and intimately coded racialised and gendered frontiers, separations and violent orderings of humanness. Independence from Spain in 1820 saw the configuration of the great mestiza-nation presumed upon the heralded disappearance of indigenous communities and the erasure of the presence of Afro Colombians of slave descent. All would become Mestizo now, a process of whitening or blanqueamiento in which "there was no place or future for the Indigenous population… except as a legacy from the past, as a 'stain' that had to be cleaned…in the republic of liberal dreams" (Gros 2000, 536). Strict frontiers were drawn throughout the late 1800s and into the 20th century in the Lettered City (Rama 1996) of civilisation and modernity in which the Ingenious and Afro were rendered uncivil, dangerous, dirty but able to be super-exploited as labourers, domestic workers, racialised mothers separated from their babies and kin caring for the babies of Criollo women. Whilst in the countryside, that wild, untameable tierrra so rich in minerals and resources, indentured slavery reigned, as did ongoing militarised and violent policing by a para-military state as a key US ally in the region over campesino, Indigenous, and Afro communities, ways of life and relationships of kin, and forms of social economy (Chavez and Zambrano 2006). Indigenous communities often felt shame at their roots, denied their wisdoms, hid in plain site/sight, sons and daughters sought to escape the countryside and modernise (Serje et al. 2007). My father who once flew with the eagles and healed with his hands married into Criollo elite, rejected the lineages of my abuela and bisabuela as evil ideas and practises as something to deny, ridicule and hate.

Is not the most powerful of the colonisers' logics, when these logics colonise our minds, relationships and spirits?

The inter-cultural womens' and feminist movement is made up of multiple collectives, movements, experiences and fluid articulations responding to the recent militarisation of popular protests in Colombia. The region of the Valle de Cauca and the cities of Cali and Buenaventura have been the site of some of the richest intersectional feminist movements in the country that weave traditions of Black, Indigenous, Queer, and nonviolent feminisms with traditions of popular and radical education. They are at the heart of reoccupying the nature of the political, political subjectivity in the decolonisaiton, defence, and healing of both the territories of the land and their bodies. During the recent popular uprisings, women of this movement led as madres en la primera linea (mothers on the front line) and as curanderas and medicine women behind the madres de la primera linea in a collective refusal to respect the heavily policed urban frontiers of the modern/colonial city in Colombia. The reoccupations of the racialised flesh visibilise the rigid and violating raced, classed, and gendered cartographies of Cali and cities across Colombia. They represent and enflesh an emergent appearance on their own

terms with their own languages of the political (Bermúdez 2013; Motta 2017, 2018a, 2021). The speaking of the systemic and systematised violences onto their territory-bodies enacts a remapping of processes and technologies of blanqueamiento and embraces a becoming-Indigenous as an epistemological politics of Black flesh (Motta 2021). As Mishuana Goeman describes "[remappings] …mediate and refute colonial organizing of land, bodies, and social and political landscapes" (2013, 3).

This is a refusal of modern/colonial erasure and an other tracing of presence/presents of inter-cultural decolonising and feminising sovereignties and subjectivities The mothers relegated to stories of neglect and incivility, their children's bodies dumped and decapitated in the Rio Cauca, become a cite and sight of scripts of knowing making and survivance that prefigure other forms of (political) life. To be accompanied in grief; to re-write dominant narratives that blame Black flesh for its own annihilation and social death, to hold tender links of re-membering which weave deep time of the ancestors as presence/present is both a collective refusal and an affirmative sovereignty making (m)otherwise. Reason is no longer the domain of abstract mastery and possessive individualism but rather collective embodied re-occupations and healings of the communal flesh. Ceremony is no longer relegated to the territories of the wild outside of political subjectivity and humanness (Blu Wakpa 2016; Mattingly and Blu Wakpa 2021; Motta 2018a). Ancestors, and elements are co-weaved into on-going relation and responsibility, fonts of strength and survivance.

The eagle flies.

She cannot be contained by your borders that maim, exile and separate.

On Worimi lands, so-called south-east Australia, I, with kin from these unceded lands, co-weave with our comadres in Cali an inter-cultural ritual of grief. The borders of nation-states cannot separate us. Our old ones meet; they come to hold the circle; with fire, water, earth, and air, with dried eucalyptus leaf and cleansing burning as we offer our wisdoms to the breeze so they might join in pan-indigenous mourning. The great Mother holds the centre, as three mother-curandera women speak their blessings to and out from her centre – as we journey in collective to Cali, meet with the spirit sister, surround them with protective and nurturing light; sing in Spanish with Indigenous-Mestiza women and First Nation woman from these lands (Figure 16.1).

*Opposite the ceremonial site in which we weave this pan-indigenous magic are mangrove swamps where mud crabs would roam free in droves. Invasion marked the drawing of racialised and gendered frontiers between the urban modern city and the marginal settlements of the periphery; places named violent, uncivil, dangerous, dirty, and black. Where white men might roam at night to rape and pillage and return by day to their place of prestige and positions of power; where massacres occurred to rid the terra nullias lands of unwanted blacks, where custodians of these lands were refused passage to the White clean streets of modern settler sovereignty (*Heath 1997; Maynard 2015). *The mangrove provided a place of refuge; an (in)visible site of safety and protection; a rich ecology of intimacy where Black mothers and their kin could reside and hide from*

Figure 16.1 Grief-Dignity ceremony of solidarity with the madres/mothers and comadres/aunties of Colombia, 9 May 2021, held with permission on unceded Worimi ceremonial land, Mulumbimba-Newcaslte, NSW, so called Australia. Photo of three of the holders of the space-ceremony, Auntie Theresa Ann Dargin, Worimi ceremonial elder (left), Priestess Jann Ravenfeather (centre), Sara C. Motta (right).

Source: Photo by Paul Szumilas.

the foundational and ongoing violences of the modern city of Mulumbimba-Newcastle. The mangroves hold the spirit of those foremothers; of lineages of matrilineal descent, of matriarchal social economies dedicated to life and care and (co)responsibility for self, other and Country. The stolen generation's screams echo through the land beneath our feet and continue to mark the logics of state "protective" intervention into Aboriginal families in these unceded lands.[4] *There are higher rates of child removal from Indigenous families than at the peak of the Stolen Generation; there is ongoing displacement and incarceration; there is the violent reproduction of epistemological terra nullius (Watego 2021). There are so many stories to tell and share in these (in)visibilise(d) spaces and timescapes; stories of grief beyond borders, of Indigenous and black ways of life and knowing-being that have survived despite all, and practises of maternal governance and political being.*

Part three: the (Settler) state is a white woman

These choreographies that violently mark the gendered and racialised frontiers of the urban Lettered City are deeply epistemological in that "the racialisation of bodies is the very ground for subjectification – [we] come into being as knowers/subjects or objects in the form of particular racialised bodies"

(Riggs 2005, 463). To come into being as an unmarked (settler) colonial (political) subject is to be granted the right to name, intervene, judge, narrate, and author the nation-state and sovereignty; whereas, to come into (non)being as a racialised and feminised (m)other is to be denied such marks of modern subjectivity and humanness (Anzaldúa 1987; Lugones 2010; Morgensen 2011; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Motta 2018a; Watego 2021). Such logics of (non)being of nation-state-sovereignty deny and seek to destroy other ways of coming to know, creating knowledge, forms of knowledge, and passing on wisdoms and lore between generations. These logics are premised on the story of epistemological terra nullius, or as Aden Ridgeway has termed it "terra nullius of the mind" (2001). From where I write/rite, this is viscerally embodied in the earth benearth the building beneath me upon which Mulumbimba-Newcastle's University was built through the eviction of one of the last remaining Indigenous camps in 1963 (Maynard 2015, 46). The Lettered City (Rama 1996) is formed and reproduced in relation to the erasure and removal (or more recently assimilation) of the irrational, dangerous, and savage racialised (M)other who is an impediment and block to modernity and progress and a threat to White reason, political subjecthood, and nation-state.

The Collective, a group of precarious intersectional feminist radical educators, in Cali, Colombia, all racialised and feminised mothers, whether that be biologically or through extended kinship networks of comadreando (comothering), are committed to a decolonising and feminist pedagogical politics of life and/as education (Motta et al. 2021). They have spent decades nurturing the conditions of possibility both for the flourishing of liberatory, feminist, and decolonised emancipatory epistemological-politics and for their own survival and flourishing as feminised and racialised women on the margins. Their work involves the co-creation of autonomous political education projects outside and inside the university, as shapeshifters transgressing its violent separations and borders between knowers and known, education and life, and university and community (Bermúdez 2013; Motta and Bermúdez 2019).

In many ways, they are neplanteras of whom Gloria Anzaldúa speaks, those who bridge communities, sociabilities, epistemologies, and subjects on the margins (Anzaldúa 2002, 2015). Nepantleras, as Anzaldúa continues, "are threshold people, those who move within and among multiple worlds and use their movements in the service of transformation" (2015, xxxxv). They are shapeshifters on the margins of the margins, the (m)others of the othered who chose to remain in the margins as a political-epistemological act, as bell hooks describes:

> a space of radical openness a margin—a profound edge … not speaking of [a] marginality one wishes to lose—to give up or surrender as part of moving into the centre—but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.
>
> (1989, 149)

Part of The Collective's visioning and political practice inside of the university, in this case Univalle, in Cali, Colombia, has involved the setting up of feminist collectives and the struggle for the acceptance and accreditation of a Master's in Popular Education and Gender that can embed and embody the kinds of pedagogical practices that decolonise and feminise the project of the neoliberal Lettered City (Motta 2018b). It is co-weaved through the creation of a dialogue of knowledges in which their knowledges, while often without "official" accreditation, have been valued and embraced as the site of wisdoms from which to co-create individual and collective transformations. This has enabled a becoming visible on their own terms, without the need for internalisation of the shame, devaluation, and negation that they have experienced from the official university. A central strand of this critical pedagogical-political practise is the sharing of their stories of discrimination, violence, and exclusion as well as those of resistance, survivance, and feminised/racialised power as a means of creating as they describe:

> A box of tools, a collective vision, the strengths of one is combined with that of others, and we emerge as a Collective that is absolutely fragile and marginal, but we have learnt the power of fragility.
>
> (Collins 1990, 206)

Their pedagogical-political process is embedded in mututal recognition that each subject arrives with a knowing-body of "dark wisdoms" (Collins 1990, 206), with desires, and embraces the aesthetic, affective, and emotional dimensions of knowing-being that the colonial/modern (neoliberalised) university devalues and negates. This involves weaving the dimensions of spirituality, of motherhood, of care for life, of music and ritual, into their practices of co-construction of narratives of themselves and others, and of the possibilities of their lives, which transgress the logics of invisibility and hyper-visibility to which they have been subject in the dehumanisation of the pedagogies and politics of cruelty of Colombian society and politics. It is enfleshed through embrace, as opposed to rejection, of the territories of that which are re-presented as wild regions and their racialised and feminised peoples and which "have been thought to constitute a reality that lies beyond the scope of civilisation … imagined as an Other reality … construed as la Otra Colombia, the Other Colombia" (Serje et al. 2007, 39). As the Collective recount, this has involved re-membering and reclaiming these, their wild territories as sovereign spaces of epistemological and political becoming:

> We cry together, share stories, celebrate life, dance together, arrive together to formal classroom space, the rest of the university and the city. We believe that accompanying each other in both our sadness and our joy generates another type of knowledge and being (political) that ruptures and transgresses the project of the patriarchal capitalist colonial lettered city.
>
> (Author correspondence with Collective, October 10–12, 2018)

The Collective holds and nurtures a pluridiversity of dark wisdoms and dedicate their lives and caring epistemological labours to nurturing a politics of decolonising and feminising emancipatory flourishing and fostering of a pluridiverse political subject of la otra Colombia. The frontier of the "official" university and the margins of precarity that they inhabit have often been policed by White-Mestiza feminist women, with permanent academic contracts at the University, who have claimed recognition and extracted the labours of these racialised neplantera women through the exclusion of members of the Collective from ongoing work and from key places and sites in which official valuation and recognition are performed.

This comes as no surprise for the Black and Indigenous woman, for as Sojourner Truth proclaimed in 1851, "Ain't I a woman?". The urban frontier of the Lettered City of modernity/coloniality was/is premised on the biopolitical epistemological coordination and containment of desire through laws, codes, scientific and expert discourses, material awards, and political recognitions of the hetero-patriarchal family of the White possessive individual in which property, kin, and liberal sovereignty were the highest entanglement (Davin 1978; Morgensen 2011; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Stoler 2002). This was not only a project of patriarchal and capitalist construction of particular gendered division of labour, sex, and power but one enabled only through the destruction and negation of other Indigenous and Black onto-epistemological registers of kinship, care, and social reproduction (Simpson 2017; Stoler 2002; Sydney, 2019). As Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate scholar Kim TallBear's work teaches us "…Indigenous kinshipmaking produces mutual obligations whilst the elimination of those kinship structures enhances Indigenous dispossessions and disappearance" (2016, 1). The forging of the frontier of (settler) coloniality/modernity could only happen through such an onto-epistemological coordination and containment of desire and as Morgensen argues "Indigenous elimination manifestly proceeds through settler regulation of sexual relations, gender identify, marriage, reproduction, and genealogy, and all similar means for restricting resistance Indigenous [political] difference" (2011, 10–11). At the heart of such a "training of the heart" (Slater 2020, 818) and containment of desire into white possessive logic and the project of Empire and modern/colonial (political) subjectivity was the White bourgeoise woman.

The bourgeoise White (mestiza) woman in the (settler) colony was required to both embody and enforce the pinnacle of White motherhood, tied to domesticity and framed with feminised traits of morality and homemaking as opposed to law and public world making. She was a key figure in the construction "of a racial grammar…. installed in the 19th century imperial populations… [through which] a sense of self has been formed and fabricated" (Wekker 2016, 2). Her enforcement of such gendered and racialised domesticity and responsibility for the labours of social reproduction and domestic and sexual labour included both the disciplining of the poor white mother in settler colonial contexts such as so called Australia into the

proper role of wife and mother, and in the forging of a hierarchically ordered racialised dividing line between the black/Indigenous woman (mother) and herself and husband; a line which she was/is the core figure of its policing (Davin 1978).

Domesticity and intimacy were/are key sites in which the choreographies of hetero-patriarchal (settler) capitalist coloniality were/are mapped, ordered, and rendered subject to biopolitical epistemological containments. As Dominic Alessio argues "were it not for the 'Mothers of Empire' there would be no sons, soldiers, sailors or settlers of empire" (1997, 240). Such mappings were/are not benign for they both rendered the White mother to the figure of the (house)wife and negated the Black and Indigenous mother in her entirety. European women were thus recruited into the projects of Empire and settler coloniality to ensure "racial vigilance and virility… and construct a racially coded notion of who could be intimate [and become kin] with whom" (Stoler 2002, 1–2).

Imperial women's role was "extended to all those whose lesser race and lower morals marked them out as in need of imperious maternity" (Alessio 1997, 253). As middle-class White (mestiza) (settler) women joined the workforce in the second half of the 20th century, it is of no surprise that they filled the roles of state social reproduction in social work, early childhood and primary school teaching, nursing, and health visiting for it was from here that they would continue to police the racialised line of negation of Black and Indigenous motherhood (Davin 1978; Motta 2017).

It was and is essential to target the Black and Indigenous mother, for she was/is a key figure in the transmission of kinship relationships, intergenerational wisdoms, and social economies of care (Simpson 2017; Alessio 1997). She was/is re-presented as a monstrous threat to propriety and the modern/colonial family and yet employed away from her children to care for those of the mistress of the house, whilst often subject to the violences of its master (Alessio 1997; Davin 1978). She was/is stripped of her children through complex inter-layered state sanctioned violences of the necessity of precarious work, strategies of assimilation and removing "the Indian from the man" in which white passing/mestizo children were/are removed, violent logics of dispossession from land and kin, and/or the targeting of black and indigenous youth for incarceration or assassination.

I remember the home economics teacher who looked at me for coming in late and breaking the sewing machine needle, for asking questions about gendered school dress and authoritarian rules, looking at me as though I was dirty, smelly, a mess. She grabbed me once, dragged me out of class. I remember the history teacher who, no matter how hard I tried, only ever noticed the well-behaved white middle class girls who had nothing really to say but were neat and tidy and mirrored her; who was I, daughter of single mother, coming in from that public housing estate?

I remember the white woman magistrate who seemed to take pleasure in putting me in my place and threatening to hand over my two-year-old child to an abuser. Who was I to assume I might speak back to the court, Dr maybe but still always-fundamentally

a brown single mumma who was probably asking for it and lying anyway? My stomach drops and I feel as if the ground might swallow me whole as I remember.

Forced to leave another home in less than a year, mid-pandemic and mid housing crisis; white middle class apartments; brown single mumma family. We are not welcome here. Notes kept for little things, lists written, held, furtive white woman eyes from behind curtains, through slightly ajar doors, mistrust and disgust left to fester to then pounce, anonymously of course so there is no right of return or reply, with tales of indeterminate indiscretions and abstract petty unproven non-abidance of rules to landlords. Fear to laugh or cry too loudly; fear to invite over kin; disciplining my children, disciplining myself. We are not welcome here.

It does not therefore come as a surprise, the mistreatments, nonrecognitions, and forced precarities of the Collective from the (settler) colonial/modern state of reason and law at the hands of the White (mestizo) Woman. It is thus no aberration that on the day I write these words the officer who shot and killed Aboriginal woman JC in Geraldton in September 2019, was found not guilty of her murder and manslaughter. As Durrumbal, South Sea Islander journalist-scholar Amy McQuire (2021) states:

> The family had hoped for a just outcome - an outcome that had been denied every single Aboriginal family who had suffered and grieved for those who had died in custody - Mulrunji, John Pat, Lloyd Boney, Robert Walker, Ms Dhu, Ms Wynne, Ms Day, Mr Briscoe, Mark Mason snr. There are so many names, so many families, so many communities, where history tells us there is no "justice" in the white [wo]man's system. Despite hundreds of black deaths, there has never been a single conviction. While blackfellas continue to die behind bars, in paddy wagons, on the street in handcuffs, the police and prisons see this as business as usual, and the coronial processes and the courts legitimate that view.

To re-vision and enflesh a citizenship from Black and Indigenous motherhood thus means inhabiting this figure of the non-mother, the mother-denied, and with it the subterranean territories of peripheral and marginal space that have been rendered abject, irrational, and dangerous. Her citizenship (m)otherwise does not begin through escape from the sphere of social reproduction and the figure of the mother as it is her kin and family that she has been denied. Nor is there any easy investment and inevitable kinship with lineages of White feminisms or *nice* white middle class feminised people for, as Sandy Grande has argued, feminism's failure to acknowledge "the complicity of white women in the history of domination… has positioned mainstream feminisms alongside other colonialist discourses" (2003, 329). We are thus not (yet, or ever) a *we*.

No, her citizenship is emergent in the recovery of the roots and routes of our dismemberment and re-membering of the unbroken ancestral connections with which to bring healing balm to the pain and exile of systemic dispossession and (attempted) murder and kindle our erotic creative desires.

It is a politics of sovereign desire in which homeplace, and Black/Indigenous motherhood become intimate territories of survivance, resistance, political organising, and kinship making beyond the constraints of hetero-patriarchal forms of possessive kinship making/breaking and (political) subjectivity (TallBear 2018, 2020). It is vital not to conflate Indigenous and non-Indigenous feminised experiences of homecoming and home because the aim of (settler) colonialism is for "settlers to make a place their home… [by] destroy[ing] and disappear[ing] the Indigenous peoples that live there" (Tuck and Yang 2012, 6).

Homeplace, kin, (racialised) motherhood, thus take on another meaning as a historical and contemporary place of renewal and self-recovery, where our stories can be told and we can become authors of the script of political being, and where we come home through re-connection and re-membering. This is a feminised and decolonising epistemological politics that does not seek recognition in choreographies which are forged through our onto-epistemological denial and rendition to less-than-human. Rather there is an embrace of the (im)possibility of our passing (Ahmed 1999) in which we cultivate the infrastructures of care that enable us to choose, as an epistemological and political collective in-relation choice, the deep, dark, ancient re-birthing power of (in) visibility and coming to voice and/as political being on our own terms.

Part four: homecoming (to desire)

We invoke the ancestors, abuelas, and four elements before beginning the first of our dialogos de saberes. We then sit in circle, mestiza, black, indigenous-mestiza mothers and daughters and Black and mestiza men, our sons, lovers and brothers, all participants in different and sometimes overlapping intersectional feminist and decolonial movements and political experiences. We read in turns from the story of finding the wild woman/la mujer salvaje. There are moments of silence as we pause to take in some of the depth of the words and wisdoms being spoken. Someone notices that a colibri (hummingbird) comes to hover next to us. A sacred animal spirit and animal totem of the city of Cali. We come to a close of our ceremonoial invocation and collective reading/breathing into life of the wild woman and move to the suggested activity of making our wild woman archetype with cloth and string and other craft elements that had been shared between us. As we stitch, sew, and stick 'her' together, we begin to dialogue about a thematic that has been emergent in our own practise and work in relation to movements and communities deepening the threads of past conversations and dialogues. We discuss the use and exhaustion of occupying the figure of the survivor. Yes, we had all in different ways suffered and continued to suffer systemic violences, and yes, we had moved away from being "victims" spoken about and for in our combined rich political heritages and hi/herstories. But we were tired, tired of constant struggle and being in relation to the Power and Processes that had caused us (in the plural both of those present and those in which we were in relation) harm. We talked, bringing in examples and noting down our reflections onto the white board beside us. We laughed as we pieced together our creations and we told stories of being the survivor and feeling stuck in that binary

subjectivity. We worked towards the insights of the story of the wild woman determining her sovereignty and knowing-being not in relation to Power; not exhausted by the (im) possibility of recognition but as free in relation in the mangrove swamps and margins of our own communities and relations. Of what it might mean and involve to embody together, and despite the violences, the power of black joy and the power of weaving together other modes of living, defending, caring for land and each other. As the time of the workshop moved near to its end, someone suggested ending with a meditation to go to meet our wild woman and listen to her talk to us and offer gifts we might carry with us outside of this sacred time and space.

Now, three years later, this wild woman archetype doll has stayed with us, with many of the participants still in Cali, and others such as myself in different lands and territories. We talk of them not as things but as living archetypal energies and wisdom holders in relation offering us ongoing threads and seeds of a becoming otherwise in thought and practise. Here we see the deeply pedagogical process of meaning-making and of constructing liberatory theory as an enfleshed knowing in relation; as a moment of our coming into (political) being otherwise, as an element in our healing of the exile from self, other, and cosmos of dispossession. This is a thread in our weaving of other relationalities with which to tejer and trensar other modes of communing and enfleshing political subjecthood and politics and/as life with the multiple territories that hold us and which we honour, protect, and nurture. These kinds of epistemological-political processes do not reduce reason to cognition or merely cognitive (individualised) objects and processes; rather, there are multiple languages and literacies of which re-connection to the territories of the body with the territories of Madre Tierra and the Ancestors is key. In these ecologies of critical intimacy (Motta 2019) – as opposed to critical distance that marks the onto-epistemology and containments of reason of modernity/coloniality – we bring together story, ceremony, music, dance, and sacred crafting, affecting connection with our capacity to re-enflesh ourselves in the world and word.

Ceremonies such as that of the Wild Woman/La Mujer Salvaje are our ceremonies in which we co-weave ourselves back to the entirety of our living and creative potential; in which we re-map and heal the intimate territories of our own bodies and psyches in relation. Yet Choctaw scholar-dancer Tara Browner's foregrounding of relation in her discussion of the Anishinaabeg way is also translatable to other Indigenous and Afro ways "in the [Anishinaabeg] worldview, spirituality is not separate from the business of daily life, and activities cannot necessarily be conceptualised within the Western binary categories of sacred and secular" (2002, 35). Nor do the binaries of intimacy and embodiment versus reason and political citizenship hold, for they reproduce our (epistemological) dispossession and negation (Motta 2018a). Creating up from the roots of our survivance and the strength and wisdoms of re-membering and reconnecting to our ancestors, our lineages, and the exiled and shamed parts of ourselves, we heal our inner territories of knowing-being. Like this we re-member our erotic power which, as Audre

Lorde describes, "lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" (1989, 1). It is a deep knowing or joy which forms the basis for an articulation of voice and political subjectivity which once experienced, cannot be forgotten and reburied. Like this we free the wildness of our desire from its misnaming, violation, and maiming (TallBear 2018). Like this we re-unite the Black mother with her kin in relation and with her creative erotic fires and waters of life.

I/we take a deep breath and bring attention to our shoulders and spine, places where we carry the marks of systematic trauma and places which can become tight and contained in the hypervigilance of survival. Inhale – we allow the breath to enter our back ribs and straighten our spines. Exhale – we allow a loosening and relaxing of the neck and shoulders and jaw. Sitting in circle I tend to the tulsi (holy basil), placing her soft sweet, aromatic, and dry leaves into the sacred container to be held by the grandmother replenishing presence of nettle/ortiga and covered with a layer of queen-warrior yarrow/ milenrama – protectress of the blood. I pour the boiling waters as we place her living plant into the centre of the altar. We read of her myths and stories as Lakshmi in Hindu mythology, as elixir of life. We learn of her formal properties – expectorant, adaptogen. We weave multiple threads of learning with her to then become one with her as we journey into the inner territories-in-relation to find her as archetype and ancestor. She is the heart opener; she is the revealing of and revelling in, the possibility to be loved and to love. She gently helps to clear the gunk of unfelt grief from our lungs. She is gentle yet fierce mother/lover.

Our citizenship and coming/re-turning into political being (m)otherwise thus foregrounds interdependence with our plant kin, and more-than-human and non-human kin which as Blu Wakpa describes "transcends human-to-human interactions and presents an alternative to Western epistemologies" (2016, 119). There is the co-creation and co-birthing of a polyphonic healing and homecoming in which the different strands are not in competition but inter-weave, shapeshift, compliment in their plurality (Kimmerer 2013). Enfleshed into our coming into political being (m)otherwise are practices in which we re-learn the divinity of our senses and drop into the world and our bodies in-relation. We learn to see anew, feel anew, taste anew, touch anew, and speak what needs to be breathed into life.

Part five: living across the intimacies of two continents

Hetero-patriarchal capitalist coloniality institutes in the intimacies of desire frontiers of hierarchical disconnection that are policed by the White wo(man) and embodied through the entanglement between heteropatriarchal family and/as the premised of invasion, property, and the Colonia/Modern state, governance and (political) subject. The Black, Indigenous, Indigenous-Mestiza mother is relegated to non-being and monstrous threat on the other side of the policed White frontier of Right, Reason, and Law. She is subject to complex and reinforcing systemic and systematic onto-epistemological violences.

A path to revisioning and enfleshing political subjecthood and being from these subterranean margins of la Otra Colombia and Bla(c)k Australia and the Black, Indigenous, and Indigenous-Mestiza mother is tenderly made through pedagogical practices which suture our systemic wounds and recover the epistemological majesty of black flesh. (Re)learning to live and love across the intimacies of multiple territories of land and body, of time and space, of human and non-human and more-than-human takes us from a place of negation, which can result in our living death, to a place-relation of joy, care, and decolonising love. This is constituted and enfleshed through a praxis of homecoming and awakening of our erotic fires and waters and nurtures our collective creative liberations.

Homecoming to the creative capacities of ourselves as Black, Indigenous, Mestizo-Indigenous (m)others and re-weaving the connection with our plant ancestors and more-than-human and non-human kin foregrounds the sacred enfleshment that is at the heart of what re-visioning citizenship and political subjectivity from the racialised mother can gift to her/us and all.

Notes

1 When I have used capitals for words like Power, Reason in the text this indicates that these are the articulations of the universal and dispossessing gaze of White power (White in Sara Ahmed's (2007) sense of Whiteness). The slippage between I/we is deliberate and is a way to try to indicate that I am in relation to the processes written about, but it is not possible without losing this relationality to drop this into a unitary 'we'. Italicised sections are all her/history: some are temporal-historical shifts in narrative, and others are my personal in relation more recent herstory/present. Re-membering and honouring how Indigenous-decolonising time is cyclical and past and future are present with us now.

2 Frantz Fanon (1961/2004) *Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin Books; see also Gonzalez, Motta and Sepalla 2022.

3 Abya Yala is a notion coined by the Cunas in Panama "to refer to the territory and the indigenous nations of the Americas." The use of this name seeks to "confront the colonial weight present in 'Latin America' understood as a cultural project of westernisation" (Walsh 2007, 236).

4 Since invasion began in 1788 thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have been forcibly removed from their families and communities through numerous government laws, politices, and practices. On 13 February 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made a formal apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples, particularly to the Stolen Generations whose lives had been blighted by past government policies of forced child removal and Indigenous assimilation.

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17 Dispatches from the Front

Midwifery in a pandemic

Laura Godfrey-Isaacs

The title of this chapter, "Dispatches from the Front", recalls testimonies from an armed conflict. At times, working as a midwife through the COVID-19 pandemic felt like a war.

The military terminology characterised us as "heroes"; however, much like the way some soldiers are left with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and find it difficult to adjust to civilian life after combat, I also, at times, have felt the legacy of this experience as a trauma that's difficult to shake off. The United Kingdom, where I am based, seems to have fared particularly badly during this time, with the health service under huge pressure – a legacy, I suggest, of the lower amount of money spent per capita than other European Countries on this vital public service, and the political drive towards privatisation.

Stories from other healthcare professionals who were working on frontline COVID-19 wards tell a similar and worse scenario, and many of my colleagues have either left the UK National Health Service or have taken early retirement as a result.

Dispatch 1

It's April 2020, and I'm on the phone.

"*Hello, can you hear me - I've got you on speaker and I'm working from home … Are you somewhere comfortable as this appointment will take about an hour or more*?"

I'm conducting a pregnancy booking appointment – the first contact. As well as asking a lot of questions about medical history and social circumstances, I would normally be doing some clinical tasks too: taking blood pressure, a urine sample, bloods, and checking height and weight for BMI (body mass index) – however, this will now take place at the first scan at around twelve weeks.

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During the pandemic midwifery care changed dramatically; something I reflect on whilst sitting in my home office having a disembodied conversation with a pregnant woman or person. I am asking the most intimate questions, without the ability to read body language, expression or, even accurately, tone of voice. This appointment helps to establish a relationship between the individual, the midwife, and the maternity service, as well as build trust – a crucial factor for all - but particularly if someone is to disclose possible issues such as domestic abuse (DA).

"*Have you been pregnant before*?"
"*Have you had any vaginal or Sexually Transmitted Infections*?"

I work as a community midwife at a busy London hospital Trust, in a "Traditional Team" which delivers antenatal and postnatal care only. At the start of the pandemic, the whole service was turned upside down and altered radically in a matter of weeks. From a previous schedule of care that included exclusively face to face appointments, either in clinics or in people's homes, we moved to a significant number being virtual. In addition, partners were excluded from face to face antenatal and scan appointments, and birth companions were restricted to one per birthing person and only during established labour and up to four hours after the birth. Postnatally, initially, partners were not allowed on the ward at all. In addition, home birth was under threat as care became further centralised in the hospital and many community teams were merged or had their remit changed.

My role became a mix of virtual appointments on the phone, as well as face to face consultations, in full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (Figure 17.1).

In encounters, whilst running a face-to-face clinic, wearing mask, visor, glasses, gloves and apron, I try to engage with the person in front of me. My eyes are visible, though barely.

"*How are you?"* I ask, my voice muffled.

In normal circumstances a twenty-minute clinic appointment is a rush and it is difficult to open up the space for concerns, as the clinical tasks dominate, but now, with PPE as a barrier and the need to clean everything between people, it is even harder. I am generally sweaty, stressed, and uncomfortable, and they are often anxious and desperate to talk. They want to know what the latest advice and restrictions are in relation to pregnancy and birth, and often have not seen an actual midwife since booking on the phone up to twelve weeks prior, so have a myriad of questions and want to chat. The mismatch here is worrying, and has led to many tearful exchanges, as I try to balance the needs of each individual in front of me with those of up to seventeen other women a day in the clinic.

Figure 17.1 Laura Godfrey-Isaacs self-portrait, PPE2, gouache on paper, A4 size, image courtesy of the artist, 2021.

Dispatch 2

At first, working virtually felt catastrophic – I had always resisted phone consultations feeling that the relational nature of midwifery made it a poor substitute, but, as I adapted, my language and sensibility changed and I found a strange kind of intimacy surfaced between me and the other person on the line. We were both holed up at home in unusual circumstances. I asked how they were coping with lockdown, we shared how weird it all was. I felt acutely responsible for not only collecting the information I needed, but also supplying reassurance and guidance on how to navigate through these

strange times. I made certain that they knew about their maternity rights and the current guidelines concerning employment, the vulnerability of being pregnant during the pandemic, and that they could access the various sources of information online. Another important issue was explaining the increased risk of COVID-19 for Black women and women of colour who, from initial research, were seen to be more likely to get seriously ill or die from COVID-19 than their white counterparts (Esegbona-Adeigbe, 2020).

"*Are you on your own?*" I ask, in readiness for the routine enquiry about DA.

Knowing the increase in DA during Lockdown – there have been more than double the amount of women killed (Grierson 2020) – I take time to explain all the definitions, including controlling behaviour and coercive control, and how DA often starts or escalates during pregnancy. Domestic abuse charity Refuge reported a 700% increase in calls, while a separate helpline for perpetrators of domestic abuse seeking help to change their behaviour received 25% more calls after the start of the lockdown (Refuge 2020). Several women I speak to tell harrowing stories of domestic abuse in previous relationships; a few are in abusive relationships now and navigating the system to access support has proved more complex. Being forcibly stuck at home with an abuser, when support services and informal social networks are curtailed, is a dangerous and uncertain situation that makes living with and escaping from abuse much harder. Given that DA is difficult to disclose, often due to feelings of shame and fear of not being believed, the reduction of contact with professionals during the pandemic creates further barriers.

"*Have you been feeling down or anxious over the last month?*".

I preface this question with a statement about how strange life is right now and how it is "normal" to be feeling a mix of emotions. How to separate our feelings about the pandemic from other feelings connected with a new pregnancy is complicated. Some express relief at not having to travel to work, and deal with social situations and difficult colleagues, whilst others feel isolated, miss the interaction, and have huge issues juggling work, childcare, and other caring responsibilities. This pandemic affects everyone, but not equally. Some existing mental health issues are relieved by lockdown and others are exacerbated.

There is growing recognition of the serious nature of maternal mental health problems during pregnancy and childbirth – with one in five women in the UK developing a mental health illness during pregnancy or up to one year after birth, seven in ten hiding or underplaying the severity of their illness, and suicide as one of leading causes of death during this time (Knight et al. 2020). Furthermore, services for and understandings of perinatal mental health are patchy, with the threshold for conventional treatments high.

This leads to many women and people who birth having little mental health specialist support, leaving midwives, GPs, health visitors, and women's own families increasingly stretched to help, the consequences of which can have dire short, medium, and long-term effects.

"*Do you know which foods we recommended you avoid in pregnancy*?"
"*Are you exercising*?"
"*What was your alcohol intake before you found out you were pregnant?"*

Early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, the Maternal Mental Health Alliance (MMHA) and Centre for Mental Health were concerned about the increased mental health challenges that women and people who birth faced during and after pregnancy as a result of the pandemic and government-imposed restrictions introduced to tackle it. The MMHA commissioned the Centre for Mental Health to explore just how much of a challenge the pandemic has placed on perinatal mental health and the services that support women, their partners, and families during this time.

The rapid review noted a significant decrease in mental wellbeing during the perinatal period. The main factors outlined by the report included:

- Anxiety of new mothers about catching the virus
- Worries over their baby's wellbeing and that of other family members
- Concerns about being able to cope without normal support being available
- Fears over partners being able to be present in hospital for labour and birth
- Worries over lack and clarity of information on maternity services
- Worries about being penalised if seeking support that falls outside of government guidance
- Concern over job security for expectant mothers, new mothers, and their partners (seemingly an even greater concern for women of colour). (Papworth et al. 2021)

Many campaigning groups, such as Pregnant then Screwed, have also highlighted the extra burden on mothers during the pandemic and sought to bring this to the public and government's attention, from greater job insecurity and increase in workload due to children being at home and off school to formal and informal support structures falling away (https://pregnantthenscrewed.com/covid-19/).

Dispatch 3

"*I am going to send you our contact details… don't hesitate to get in touch if you have any concerns."*

Keeping in touch is a major issue – will the lack of face-to-face contact with midwives hold people back from telling us their concerns, such as reduced foetal movements. I reiterate how important it is to get advice if they aren't sure about something.

"*Unfortunately, you will have to come to all your face-to-face appointments and scans by yourself.*"

This is really tough, and scans are particularly traumatic for those with a rainbow pregnancy – a pregnancy following loss. I suggest they use FaceTime and have their partner close, so they can attend if there are any issues (which is facilitated). These restrictions create huge anxieties for people, and I understand the balance between keeping birth "safe" from COVID-19 transmission for everyone (those using the service and those working in it) as well as recognising the inherent difference between "visitors" and "partners". There is justifiable anger and distress from many and it is incredibly uncomfortable to have to enforce these restrictions. I email the scanning team about one woman, who is extremely fearful of attending a scan on her own, after a previous miscarriage, only to be told that an exception will not be made in this case. That conversation proves one of the most difficult so far, as I try to explain the policy, whilst fully hearing her distress and fear.

"*Have you thought about online Birth Preparation classes*?"

Birth Preparation classes are another area, where I am concerned a loss of information and contact will have a negative impact – however many providers have created online resources. This provides some new opportunities as geography, availability, and mobility are no longer such barriers, and access is increased in some ways. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and The Royal College of Midwives guidelines recommend that face to face antenatal contacts during the pandemic are a minimum of six – the three scans at my trust, plus midwifery appointments at 20, 28, 36 and 40 weeks makes a total of seven face to face appointments, with four virtual midwifery appointments.

The biggest impact may be postnatally, where contact is greatly reduced – Day 5, when we weigh the baby and do the Newborn Blood Spot Test, often being the only face to face visit. In this situation, it is not just the lack of practical, hands-on support that is reduced, it is the social context of the family you miss, where you can often pick up things which are not going well with either the birth parent, or the partner. It is sometimes behavioural clues or environmental ones that help you pick up issues, which might not be voiced or the family might not even recognise themselves as a problem. Worryingly, a recent report details a serious safeguarding issue as the number of babies in England that have suffered serious injury through abuse or neglect during the

Covid pandemic is up by a fifth on the same period last year (Spielman 2020). According to Amanda Spielman, Ofsted's chief inspector, more than half of those babies – 64 in total – suffered non-accidental injuries and eight had died, she explained in a major speech delivered on 6 November 2020 just one day into Lockdown 2. DA is also often picked up during home visits, where behaviours and stresses are noticed in a way that cannot be ascertained over the phone.

There have been some difficult breastfeeding issues, which had to be addressed by a midwife visiting urgently in person or a member of our community feeding team going to a woman's home. All "virtual midwives", including myself, have sent people and babies into A&E or Labour wards with serious issues. The failsafe measures are there to draw on but assessing when this is needed is a skill that needs to be honed.

I miss the interaction of regular postnatal visits, and it is painful to hear the difficulties experienced by people at home – often isolated and alone. My role feels diminished and sometimes reduced to a tick box exercise. And when people do disclose issues, I cannot comfort and reassure as effectively. It is often the small gestures, such as offering a tissue, squeezing an arm, or leaning in to listen closely, that create the significant moments and points of connection.

Dispatch 4

For some midwives, virtual work became the new normal – those shielding or in high-risk groups. This has consequences too, as members of the team are isolated, lack social interaction and do not get to exercise their clinical skills. Some have to work in cramped conditions, without an appropriate chair, using up electricity and other utilities, sharing a space with others or working in their bedrooms, whilst often juggling their own caring and mothering responsibilities.

The Royal College of Midwives brought out guidance on virtual midwifery, which is helpful, but the long-term effect on birth and midwives' practice needs to be assessed as this requires a new way of working, using different communication skills and different forms of monitoring. The possible "advantages" to a maternity service, such as saving time through quicker interactions has not necessarily led to a decrease in workload for midwives as during these times many people were off sick, isolating or not able to work face to face due to underlying health conditions or other risk factors.

Some recent research points to a few positives such as increased breastfeeding rates and even a drop in premature births. A survey of 1219 mothers reported that 41.8% felt that breastfeeding was protected due to lockdown, however 27.0% said they struggled to get support and "had numerous barriers stemming from lockdown", some stopped breastfeeding before they were ready, particularly Black women and those from lower socioeconomic parts

of the community (Shenker and Brown 2020). An unexpected marked drop in premature birth has been seen in research conducted in Ireland and Denmark, with a 90% reduction from previous years in some cases (Cunningham 2020); however, more research is needed to ascertain why this phenomenon occurred.

I'm currently working 50/50, virtual and in direct contact. As I climb the stairs to my home office for another day on the telephone, I look forward to the conversations but would still prefer to be seeing everyone in person.

Dispatch 5

"*Do you have any questions or concerns I can help you with, before we sign off?"*

I hope they have a long list, indicating they are sourcing information and support about their pregnancy and birth ahead of the appointment.

My colleagues and I swap stories of some extraordinary virtual appointments, where we have picked up serious issues, despite the barriers. Funny stories are also swapped, such as when women have been on the phone to us whilst driving, on the toilet, attending a party, or shopping.

A recent report from the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee (2021) "Workforce burnout and resilience in the NHS and social care", described the phenomena of:

> moral distress, where the individual concerned believes that I am not providing the quality of care that I should be providing for the people I am offering services for.

This state of affairs, where both the people we serve and the people delivering the care are affected so negatively by a situation, is grave. The lack of support for pregnant women and the maternity services is mirrored by the lack of consideration and support for mothers generally in the pandemic. And further, the lack of support for healthcare workers, beyond a ritualistic "clapping" – which includes a 1% pay rise (effectively a pay cut), is mirrored by the lack of importance put on care work, whether professional or personal, disproportionally delivered by women (and mothers). Midwives, mothers, and people who birth have borne the brunt of the situation – expected to care in a place that seldom considers fully the implications of such profound changes to structures and expectations, with shifts that are in danger of becoming permanent and regressive.

Midwifery care will hopefully return to "normal", but I will not forget the lack of consideration and value placed on birth and birth workers in the United Kingdom at this time.

This account is dedicated to my incredible colleagues who kept going through the gruelling months of the pandemic, and to the brave and resilient mothers and families who birthed and loved in incredibly difficult circumstances.

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18 Maternal Performance as Peacebuilding

Jennifer Verson

Maternal performance is important, not only for creating a culture and beauty reflective of the global diversity of humankind, but also for its capacity to repair the damage done by historic violence and injustice. This chapter weaves together two of my voices in order to conceptualise maternal performance as peacebuilding. My first voice is that of a peacebuilder and sets out a framework to understand how maternal performance functions as cultural peacebuilding. My second voice is personal as an artist practitioner and a founder and Artistic Director of Migrant Artists Mutual Aid (MaMa).[1] Together, the voices enable me to craft a reflective argument that maternal performance enables a movement through historic binaries of victim and perpetrator. From this position I am able to map the complexity of the impact of mother artists' performance on the social repair of structural and cultural violence.

Cultural peacebuilding is a response to cultural violence and provides an analytical framework to understand the changes that take place through applied performance. Here I am following Nicola Shaughnessy's use of the term (2012) to describe a diverse set of practices and methodologies for creating performances in and with social contexts. I locate the work of Migrant Artists Mutual Aid as both applied performance and maternal performance. In this chapter I narrate cultural peacebuilding through examples of MaMa's performance work.

Maternal performance has the capacity to craft new identities and solidarities in the historic shadow of colonialism, genocide, and slavery. I will narrate how this is done through vignettes of MaMa's palimpsest performances at the International Slavery Museum (ISM). These performances will be understood through the analytical framework of matrixial singing, with impact framed through William E. Connolly's discourse of micropolitical intervention.

My aim is for the vignettes to tell an affective and corporal story drawn from my memories and mementoes of my ten years as the Artistic Director of MaMa. When discussing examples of MaMa's performance work I draw on conventions of qualitative inquiry in everyday life (Brinkmann 2012, 2014) and autoethnographic writing, which locate my voice as an artist as qualitative

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research material. Autoethnographic reflections work to contextualise maternal performance through the lens of lived experience, particularly in my approach to Bracha Ettinger's work on matrixial intersubjectivity (2006).

Taken together, these two voices narrate a discourse of maternal performance fertilising maternal solidarity. This chapter illustrates that this performative maternal solidarity not only impacts on the lived experience of the mother artist but also is amplified through performance to address the structural violence of the UK immigration system.

What is cultural violence?

Culture can be defined as "The distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviour, products, or way of life of a particular nation, society, people, or period" (OED 2021). Cultural violence describes bias both implicit and explicit embedded in all the forms of culture produced by a nation, society, or people. To understand the work of MaMa as peacebuilding I draw on Johan Galtung's (1990) understanding of positive peace as the absence not only of direct violence, but also of structural and cultural violence. Galtung, considered by many to be the founder of peace studies, broadly defines direct violence as causing physical harm, structural violence as policies and laws that result in physical harm, and cultural violence as a type of violence that makes direct and structural violence "feel right – or at least not wrong" (Galtung 1990, 291). Galtung's framing of cultural peace is useful in conceptualising MaMa's performance work within the wider discourses of peace studies.

> One place to start would be to clarify "cultural violence" by searching for its negation. If the opposite of violence is peace … then the opposite of cultural violence would be "cultural peace", meaning aspects of a culture that serve to justify and legitimize direct peace and structural peace.
> (Galtung 1990, 291)

This framing of cultural peacemaking enables memory and identity to be considered as locations for peacebuilding. As I will illustrate in this chapter, in performance the diversity of MaMa visually and sonically enacts identities which challenge exclusionary ethnic nationalisms. From 2016, I have referred to this as new aesthetics of citizenship.

One way to understand the "old" aesthetics of citizenship is through citizenship by blood *jus sanguine* or by soil *jus soli*. The importance of understanding and unpicking the histories of *jus sanguine* has developed an urgency in the ten years since the founding of MaMa as the rights to British citizenship by *jus soli* have been systematically dismantled. Today, children born in the United Kingdom to mothers who are seeking sanctuary must wait at least seven years to be entitled to British citizenship, creating a generation of potentially stateless children born in the United Kingdom (Waas 2007, UNHCR 2015). One is compelled to ask "what are the forms of structural and cultural

ideologies that make this seem normal or inevitable?" This question reveals concerning themes in cultural discourses where ethno-nationalism is performed and portrayed as an inevitable human desire. The creative work of Migrant Artists Mutual Aid is targeted at creating affective environments where an alternative human desire is crafted and felt.[2] In the next section, I frame this process of creating new aesthetics of citizenship through the lens of the matrixial.

Matrixial co-emergence

My personal enquiry into the matrixial emerged from dialogues with feminist maternal studies performance scholar (and co-editor of this volume) Lena Šimić's thinking about Ettinger's work on matrixial trans-subjectivity (Ettinger 2006; Šimić 2018). My relationship with the discourse is fluid and personal and emerged from an excited conversation over one of the breakfasts that has marked the maternal solidarity of Lena over the years of our friendship (Verson with Šimić 2017). These conversations gave me language to describe work I was already doing, providing a framework to describe impacts and implications of the lived experience of performing as a migrant mother with other migrant mothers.

I am a theologian, an artist, a peacebuilder, a social researcher. My friends share discourses and literature like family stories over coffee. Sometimes these family stories crowd my writing as I speak to the power of performance to build peace, sometimes they provide new words to explain the multiplicities of ways that performance crafts change. These stories sometimes leave deep traces on my thinking, become integrated into my stories of the power of performance for peacebuilding. This is my relationship with Ettinger; outside my discipline, speaking to my heart and mind, providing new imaginaries of my long creative work with migrant mothers.

Over the course of time, I built an experiential understanding of how my pregnant and mothering body destabilised binaries of knowing. I carried a pre-Sensient being, knowing the daughter I carried was both separate from and part of me. Ettinger articulated how the knowing of this moment is shared across all humanity, either as carrier or carried (Ettinger 2006). Through this maternal subjectivity the patriarchal "I" becomes a web of experiential "wes" that is ephemeral, yet philosophically explosive. The traces of Ettinger began to cast new light on my experience of performing with my choir.

Ettinger's work frames a post Freudian, post Lacanian, post-phallocentric paradigm for understanding the self and the other that is grounded in maternal physicality/subjectivity. It offers a lens that can be used to look at pleasure and connection between artists creating work and spectators experiencing it. Matrixial trans-subjectivity becomes a useful language when considering the bodily sensation that performers and audiences sometimes experience. The womb here is understood as a matrix: "The womb/matrix is conceived of here not primarily as an organ of receptivity or 'origin' but as the human potentiality for differentiation-in-co-emergence" (Ettinger 2006, 218).

Ettinger offers a unique epistemological viewpoint on how one can know somebody that is different. Differentiating in co-emergence becomes more accessible when one imagines the emergence of life in utero. It is important to note that Ettinger avoids essentialist notions of privileging reproductivity through an understanding that all humans were gestated and have the experience of gestation. It is not only people who give birth that experience the matrixial. The theoretical construction of the matrixial holds terminology to describe embodied experiences.

As a pragmatist feminist social researcher, I conceive and describe the matrixial differently than Ettinger. My research is grounded in an ontology of interconnection that is crafted and understood through the frameworks of systems theory. Systems theory is known across disciplines by different names: complex systems theory (Burns 2014), systems ontology (Heylighen et al 2006). Significant for my ontology of interconnection is the element of this theory which holds that small changes in initial conditions have the capacity to be magnified through feedback loops to create whole systems change. In this chapter I propose that in the work of MaMa these two analytical frameworks, that of the matrix and that of complexity theory, describe the same thing from a different disciplinary vantage point.

Matrixial songs singing together

In 2011, I co-founded Migrant Artists Mutual Aid (MaMa) and took up the role of Artistic Director.[3] MaMa is a cross national network of women, mothers, migrants, artists, academics, and activists who work together to support members of our group who are seeking sanctuary, and campaign for justice in the migration system. We began meeting weekly in 2013 and began singing together as a choir in 2014.

There is a substantial body of literature on the benefits of singing in community choirs alongside protocols developed to aid in the therapeutic benefits (Moss et al 2018; Livesey et al 2012). MaMa performance is more situated within the tradition of socially engaged live art rather than the community choir tradition. The rehearsal and performance process embraces conviviality over expertise. Musical choices have developed over the past years to be grounded in expressing complex emotional identities. The formation of singers when we perform is not only about sound but is a nuanced dance between protecting the identities of members who don't want to be photographed and interweaving confident singers to uplift the less confident ones.

We were standing at the top of the stairs in the International Slavery Museum, I was next to Sophie and we were singing Mariam Makeba's Malaika *for a Refugee Week performance.*[4] *I remember the moment. I had just introduced the song, because Makeba was a refugee from South Africa, and I had reminded the audience that this was a place that we remembered the history of injustice, violence, and brutality as an inspiration to work for justice today, particularly for those seeking sanctuary. Then we*

sang. I can still taste the memory of standing next to Sophie in Liverpool singing. I was Makeba's rising voice for justice, I was in Chicago, my birthplace, my grandmother's birthplace of Russia, Makeba's birthplace of South Africa, and Sophie's birthplace of The Democratic Republic of Congo. These places became one voice for justice as our voices merged.

This merging requires work in performance and work in political solidarity. MaMa's performance fees are put into a legal fund which pays for expert reports, specialist solicitors, and Home Office fees that establish citizenship rights for children of MaMa members born in the United Kingdom.[5] Matrixial singing relies on the embodied trust that is forged through political solidarities alongside the affective experience of the performance. Singing together in public holds a level of risk that is vital to flow, which I discuss later in this chapter.

Adding Goro Ki Na Ka Lo KI *to our repertoire is a story of love, solidarity, and labour. The song, which featured in the 1982 film* Disco Dancer, *was a global sensation which held a strong memory for members. It is the story of Jimmy and the challenges he faces as he becomes an international musical sensation. One of our longest standing members brought the song to the choir as an important song that embodied the dreams and memories from when they were young. It was the most complicated song we had learned in a South Asian language and Francophone and Anglophone members of MaMa struggled with the Hindi for weeks. Accompanied by the brilliant orchestration of Anstey, who adapted it to three chord guitar, and Elizabeth, who was committed to mastering the new language, we practiced over and over again with call and response and on the day when we all finally sang in tune together the sense of collective joy was palpable.* Goro Ki Na Ka Lo KI *was a breakthrough for how we as a group learned the maternal languages and songs of our members.*

As a researcher and mother artist I use the term "matrixial singing" to describe the affective experience of collaboratively rebirthing songs from deep memory. This rebirthing involves multiple knowings of mother tongue and non-mother tongue. The performance of this joy intervenes in affective experience of ethno-nationalist notions of citizenship and fuels the cultural peacemaking necessary in migrant justice work.

Palimpsest performance

At the top of the stairs on the wall as you enter the International Slavery Museum is an engraving with a quote by William Prescott "They will remember that we were sold, but not that we were strong. They will remember that we were bought, but not that we were brave" and the clear simple message "We Will Remember."

I think about this spot and the school groups coming, and the children learning about the violence and brutality of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. How does a child process this information? Over the years, I experienced an audience that saw the Migrant Artists Mutual Aid choir together in this spot and was able to process the history in some way as one that obligates us to work for justice, not become lost in guilt or shame.

This experience in the body of singing together in a spot that is infused with history, with a group of people, of women, of different colours and different religions, was the starting point for my developing theoretical framework for palimpsest performance.

A palimpsest is an ancient manuscript that was scraped clean so that it could be reused, the colours over hundreds of years, however, began to re-emerge under the new text, like a ghost. Thomas De Quincy first used this concept as a metaphor for how memory works, in layers with ghosts hovering underneath the surface that are visible and invisible at the same time. Churjeet Mahn (2016, 2018) developed the concept to consider how spaces could be palimpsestuous in the post-colonial period, and that history was buried under layers that were both seen and unseen.

Palimpsest performance entails performing the layers of history simultaneously, with an affective (not dissonant) aesthetics to develop an embodied understanding of the diversity of history. In site specific performance this enables memory of the past to be experienced as complex and intersectional, more than victims and perpetrators, and enabling new identities to emerge.

The brutality of genocide, slavery, and colonialism can be performed without causing the audience to turn their face away or become lost in guilt and shame. The layers of history in palimpsest performance exist as a reality that informs the present; the resistance performed on the top layer is informed by the knowledge of historic violence and injustice. The diversity of the voices and the unity of language in song becomes cultural peacebuilding as the audience experiences inherited histories as a siren call to stand up for justice that is compelling and inclusive.

Methods case study: songs inspired by Liverpool's migration history

In 2017, I led a team in applying to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in order to deepen MaMa's work with the International Slavery Museum by exploring the exhibits and archives as a group and creating new songs and poems for our repertoire. My core thinking revolved around an instinct that the sensory experience of current migrants performing the history of enslavement and resistance to slavery would evoke an affective response that could potentially undo the dehumanisation of migrants that is endemic in current media, something that is explored in depth by Roland Bleiker et al (2013). Rather than performers and audience members seeing themselves as victims or perpetrators of the trans-Atlantic trade of enslaved Africans, the project sought to create a new context where the legacy of the history of International Slavery could be experienced as a collective responsibility for remembrance and social action against the injustice of dehumanisation.

Over the course of several months, members of MaMa visited the museum for tours and handling sessions (Figure 18.1). The group identified key

Figure 18.1 Author's photo of handling session at International Slavery Museum, Liverpool, UK, 2017.

themes: what it means to be human, the history and importance of communities that resist the injustice of slavery and genocide, our role as a collective in telling these stories. The writing was inspired by the talking drums and the current mineral related violence in the Congo, the history of the Albert Dock, the abolitionist sugar strikes and the Wedgewood abolitionist tea pots, the music of the African Diaspora (particularly The Last Poets),[6] the works of artist Lubaina Himid, the obligations to remember the names of enslaved Africans, and the chains, shackles, and torture instruments. Processing the violence and legacy of the largest forced migration in history through the perceptions of current migrants resulted in moving and evocative new music that developed a new methodology and reflected on the unique practices of the group.

Applied performance applied: play

The members of MaMa responded to their experience in the ISM by creating short written feedback and worked with a professional songwriter in small group sessions, using the feedback to craft song lyrics. This was supplemented with the choir director's personal song writing, and my creative writing. The entire project culminated in MaMa taking creative ownership of the process and working together to write lyrics for *Valobashi*.

Group creativity and play were central to the emergence of *Valobashi*, a creative work by MaMa Musical Director Anstey Gilley which developed in the MaMa session through vocal improvisation with soloist Sahnaz Shanu alongside a structured method that we developed of creating lyrics from mobile phone texts. Shaughnessy points out that "Play-based methodologies are fundamental to the work defined as applied performance" (2012, 37). While performance studies makes great efforts to contain and define the ineffable joy of play (Shaughnessy 2012), play in MaMa focuses on group creativity.

Writing *Valobashi,* involved an innovative methodological process in the field of applied performance. Applied performance is distinguished from other forms of performance through its commitment to affect change "using performance methodologies in social, educational, and community contexts" (Shaughnessy 2012, 32). Play is a significant principle of applied performance, but it is undertheorised in performance groups that encompass members from diverse socio-economic, national, and cultural backgrounds. Mapping the creation of *Valobashi* locates "play" in the MaMa creative process adding specific methodological nuances.

While walking through the exhibits at the Slavery Museum, our guide pointed out something that we knew well, in front of the talking drums, the guide explained how they were used for communication over distance, how we communicate today using our mobile phones, and the role of the minerals used to make mobile phones in violent conflicts in central Africa. Anstey Gilley, the MaMa choir director, knew that our fifth song needed to be about mobile phones.

We failed a few times by considering talking drums too literally and imagining different references to the rhythms. Slow conversations, the type that you have as carers and artists, snippets of ideas while doing other things, moved us to consider how we communicate across distance, how the social function of the talking drum operated in our own lives.

MaMa as an applied performance collective enabled this type of emergence. The structures which I have previously discussed built trust through material solidarity. The collective identity crafted through singing together, alongside the long relationships formed between members of the choir, created a foundation that enabled emergence: flashes of insight, supported by improvisation, structured method, and resources.

In this process play was both flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1997) and group creativity. Flow is the feeling of complete concentration and absorption in a task. The concentration is so complete that people often lose sense of time. While

this is a term often used to describe the creative process of an artist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi considers that to flow requires nine specific elements.[7] MaMa performances tend to embody what is an essential balance between challenge and skill. Many members of MaMa had never performed in public before, the challenge of being in public and then receiving public acknowledgement is an essential element that nurtures positive feedback loops both in the creative process and in political work.

R. Keith Sawyer identifies as the components of group creativity (which encompasses flow and improvisation) "process, unpredictability, intersubjectivity, complex communication, and emergence" (Sawyer 2003, 22). This conceptualisation resonates with my experience of the MaMa meeting where *Valobashi* was created. The long relationships of the group combined with a focus on conviviality and mutual aid rather than expertise create an environment imbued with trust and which supports complex communication.

MaMa meetings involve a continuous shifting of conversation and exchange as people group and re-group having conversations in many languages. While the song writing process itself is structured, the dynamic group relationships constantly shift based on language, age, temperament, and exchange of resources and information. The conviviality and mutual aid of meetings promote a type of intersubjectivity which enables the group creativity which Sawyer describes and positions MaMa easily within the framework he defines as an emergent group.

> In emergent groups, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts; the performance is greater than the individual performers. A performing group is a complex dynamical system (Johnson, 2001; Kauffman, 1995), with many properties typically associated with such systems: sensitivity to initial conditions, rapidly expanding combinatorics as time progresses, and global behavior [sic] of the system that cannot be predicted.
>
> (Sawyer 2003, 263)

The music of MaMa emerges in this way as an unpredictable outcome from the conditions created by the system, which is the weekly meeting.

Framing MaMa as an emergent group enables its maternal performance to be considered cultural peacebuilding. Emergent groups embody a performative interconnection. This performance becomes cultural peacebuilding when it is positioned as a repair to the habits and practices of domination. Ettinger's location of the matrixial as an alternative paradigm to the phallus in psychoanalysis (Šimić 2018) when combined with the forms of creativity described by Sawyer become an analytical framework to understand the creative practice of MaMa. The matrix stands as the metaphorical opposite to the phallus, an analytical frame implicated in domination which leads to structural, cultural, and direct violence (Bourdieu 2001; Confortini 2006; Galtung 1990; Linstead and Maréchal 2015). The matrix enables us to consider interconnection as the opposite of domination and in doing so creates

a framework whereby MaMa's creative processes are an enactment of social repair. This social repair of "domination" as a means of interacting and creating is amplified through palimpsest performance and becomes an accountable and traceable model for cultural peacebuilding. In the next section, I draw out this idea of a rigorous and traceable model by conceptualising these complex dynamic systems as micropolitical interventions.

New aesthetics of citizenship as micropolitical intervention

Matrixial singing holds the potential for political impact through creating and performing new aesthetics of citizenship that destabilise ethnonationalism. Voices coming together in matrixial singing create an open border where identities bleed one into the other. Gloria Anzaldúa conceives of the border as two open wounds bleeding into one another (2009). Migrant identities bleed into each other performatively through matrixial singing and have an impact on both the bodies in performance and the bodies in the audiences. Understanding the changes that take place in audiences can be conceived through the concept of affect. James Thompson (2009) describes a type of affect that occurs through proximity in performance:

> Being next to, of course, is very close – practically touching the 'object' – and this, therefore, means that the affects, the sensations of the work, will course across our skin. Our shudder or stammer comes from this proximity, this intimacy.
>
> (Thompson 2009, 133)

There is a unique type of intimacy as a migrant, hearing natal songs that are lodged deep in memory, sung to you in your maternal language by other migrants. The songs are personal and sacred texts; singing enables an intimacy between sacralities that is important to participants.

I am both a receiver and producer of this experience. I developed an exercise where we drew a map of the world on the floor and we all found our place of birth on the map, we sang to each other the first song that we remembered. We found our places on the map when we started school and sang a song there. We moved on the map to the place we were when we first fell in love. I learned to sing in Hindi, Lorraine taught the choir Shalom Chaverim, which she learned in Nigeria and I learned in Chicago.

Maternal performance as peacebuilding conceives this performative open border as both social repair and micro political intervention. I use the term social repair as an alternative to reconciliation. In the long aftermaths of slavery, colonialism, and genocide, terms like reconciliation imbue a normative notion of personal transgenerational guilt.

To reconcile is to end a conflict and return to peace and coexistence, usually after war. If we talk about reconciliation after colonialism and slavery, we

are projecting acts of violence and war onto a generation which has inherited wealth from colonialism and slavery but are descendants of the perpetrators and descendants of the victims. The history of international law, particularly after World War Two, rejects collective guilt and collective punishment. Performance at sights of commemoration crafts solidarity for justice, crafts an affective identity that spans time, and instils the feeling through performing palimpsest, through performing diversity, through performing maternal friendship and solidarity, that resistance to injustice is the collective legacy that acts of commemoration should awaken.

MaMa performances at the International Slavery Museum question an implicit acceptance of transgenerational guilt in commemoration. This performative open border crafted through matrixial singing positions audience members in a consensual relationship with performers and crafts a new identity of people working towards a common goal – justice and equality in the long aftermath of atrocity.

Matrixial singing as palimpsest performance creates subject spaces for museum visitors where the visitor can relate to the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade as neither a victim nor perpetrator. This new position is one of agency and requires the person to act for justice. The diverse bodies and voices of the MaMa choir enacting and embodying new aesthetics of citizenship become a mirror for the audience who are offered the possibility of seeing themselves in this new position. This new position does not reconcile an assumed guilt but takes action for repair. In the case of the work of MaMa at the International Slavery Museum, palimpsest performance locates a collective agency for repairing the enduring wounds of slavery through justice-based solidarity in real life contexts.

Micropolitical engagements describe a multiplicity of political initiatives at strategic sites of action (Connolly 2013, 40). There is no expectation of a causal relationship to a single expected outcome. Instead, political systems are considered as complex fragilities that are vulnerable to small actions which can change the entire system:

> no ecology of late capitalism given the variety of forces to which it is connected by a thousand pulleys, vibrations, impingements, dependencies, shocks and threads can specify with supreme confidence the stability or potential flexibility of the structures it seeks to change.
>
> (Connolly 2013, 37)

Cultural violence in all its forms can be conceived as uncertain and vulnerable to change. It is supported by a "thousand pulleys." Through this framework, acting on a single pulley becomes a valid temporary action that correlates to whole system change. This change that these actions may "trigger" is positive peace (Webel and Galtung 2007) – which is peace with harmony and justice.

Max Stephenson and Laura Zanotti (2017), following Connolly (2013), suggest embracing multiple modest engagements:

> For Connolly, creativity and reflexivity are examples of political virtues that, by means of multiple micropolitical engagements, may trigger (but not determine) processes of social change.
>
> (2017, 350)

Conceiving of MaMa's performances as micropolitical engagements underpins the understanding of performance as peacebuilding.

The form of political action proposed by Connolly, which is typified by small actions, is applied by Stephenson and Zanotti (2017) to arts and peacebuilding to create a theoretical framework to support the impact of the arts:

> This perspective suggests that political action should not be regarded as an all-or nothing transformative experiment, but instead as an ever-evolving potential that may or may not conduce (and often unexpectedly when it does so) to broad-scale change. Those engaged in efforts to secure social shifts … should therefore be prepared to launch multiple initiatives and to trace their impacts and consequences as best they can as they do … They should be prepared and willing to take actions in the evolving contexts they confront, aware that such steps are needed, but without illusions that any single effort will yield systemic change.
>
> (Stephenson and Zanotti 2017, 341)

Micropolitical interventions provide a framework through which to conceptualise the work of Migrant Artists Mutual Aid as addressing the root causes of the violence of the migration system. We respond to Connolly's suggestion that "you adopt a problem orientation and trace each emerging problem up and down the scale of the micro, the macro and the planetary as the issue requires" (2013, 403). This is a dual praxis approach of simultaneously creating a community of solidarity and intervening in public life through cultural interventions which challenge the ideology that supports the system.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I sought to draw a complex picture of how maternal performance is peacebuilding and support this through my own reflections on the work of Migrant Artists Mutual Aid. In order to take this work seriously, it is vital to conceive of the change that takes place through matrixial singing, the methodology of creating matrixial songs in specific contexts, and the potential impact of these songs on the audience. Importantly, it is necessary to conceive of the opposite of peace in order to craft a methodologically explicit argument for maternal performance as peacebuilding.

My positionality as a practitioner, performer, and researcher enables a self-reflection as part of a qualitative inquiry which produces data and research

materials from memories and mementoes. My methodological explicitness and personal voice embedded within this chapter with details of a specific case study, hopes to offer the possibility of replicability with responsibility. The responsibility is the tangible solidarity and actions against unjust and racist processes, laws, and procedures that are part of the British migration system. The structural violence of the migration system is explicitly tied to the legacy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade through the palimpsest performance of matrixial songs that the MaMa choir performs at the International Slavery Museum. Each performance is a micro intervention in the violence of this system. Each song is an invitation to participants and audiences to create new identities based on justice and solidarity.

Notes

1 Members of Migrant Artists Mutual Aid (MaMa) use both names in different contexts. This habit represents a resistance to be known by one identity "mama" or mother. The interchange of capital and lower-case letters calls to attention an insistence that our identities are complex; some members are mothers of biological children, other members consider mothering in a different way. This use of naming thus reflects an insistence on the collective identities of artists and cultural producers. I reflect this habit in my writing.
2 Affect according to James Thompson "refers to emotional, often automatic, embodied responses that occur in relation to something else – be it object of observation, recall of a memory or practical activity" (2009, 19).
3 In 2011 after receiving my settled status, I began producing cultural fundraisers with Fatima and Anne to raise legal funds for mothers seeking sanctuary. Many MaMa members engage in campaigning and have public facing roles, others choose not to be photographed or named. As an arts collective who performs in public, this is constantly discussed and negotiated within the group. The naming of MaMa members in this chapter reflects this complex history and practice. Members whose names are already in the public realm are named; others have been credited by first name only to respect their choice not to be named.
4 While there are many versions of the song, this YouTube video includes a translation of the lyrics https://youtu.be/Nd2J9a4DACE.
5 In a private conversation with a solicitor used by MaMa, they explained that gender-based asylum claims are often deemed not to have a reasonable chance of success because they are so complex and require expensive specialist expert reports. See Calogero 2020.
6 The track is available on YouTube: *Invocation* https://youtu.be/J0U8FxNJ0vc.
7 Csikszentmihalyi's nine specific elements are: clear goals, immediate feedback, balance challenges and skills, action and awareness merging, exclude distractions, no worry of failure, disappearance of self-consciousness, no sense of time, autotelic (1997).

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Conclusion

On sustaining mothering performance

Lena Šimić and Emily Underwood-Lee

… Conclusions look out to the future.

Dear Emily,

I was in London visiting Gabriel, who had proudly showed me around his university campus: places he hangs out in, where he studies, where he meets his new friends… What a delightful transformation he has undergone this past year – and there we were walking around the campus, a first-year history student, and his proud mother, trying to be unassuming, hiding in the background of his beaming accomplishment and this new life. And I wondered, who am I now, what kind of midlife mother do I appear to be?

Before we met, I did my usual London routine: I took a stroll in Tavistock Square to see the bust of Virginia Woolf, and admired her capacity to come up with an idea for To the Lighthouse *whilst walking around the square. The inscription on the steel plate underneath her statue says: "Then one day walking round Tavistock Square I made up, as I sometimes make up my books,* To the Lighthouse*; in a great, apparently involuntary, rush". In the novel, the mother, Mrs Ramsay dies, Lily Briscoe, the artist survives. In this instance, Woolf divided her female characters into mother/housewife and an artist/"spinster". I wondered about the impossible and unconceived mother/artist figure, would she be a survivor?*

On the ground just in front of me, near the statue, I saw a book. Its cover was hidden, I turned it around. The Power of Women *by Dr Denis Mukwege, the Nobel Prize Winner, a gynaecologist, human rights activist, caring for women, victims and survivors of sexual violence in Congo. The book had a #ibelieveinbookfairies sticker on it. This meant that this book was mine, given to me by The Book Fairies, an initiative which encourages people to gift the inspiring books they have read by hiding them in public. I sat down on a nearby bench and read the Introduction and the first chapter, entitled aptly "Maternal Courage", in which the author describes his difficult birth, and near infant death – the story which was narrated to him by his own mother. Mukwege writes:*

> *I start at the very beginning with the woman who faced down danger and uncertainty to deliver me – and was then called on just days later to save me from illness. The endurance and bravery my mother displayed at my birth was matched only by her lifelong commitment to me and all of her children. She shaped the attitudes of the young man I became, and she also pushed, occasionally using the benevolent*

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> *arts of maternal manipulation, to pursue my dream of becoming a doctor. She was my first hero.*
>
> *(2021, xiv)*

I pondered on the story, admired the bravery of giving birth and looking after an infant in such uncertain and difficult conditions without medical assistance. Then I reflected on the terms in Mukwege's descriptions: "the very beginning", "maternal courage", "benevolent arts of maternal manipulation", "my first hero". I know I sense myself always at some kind of beginning, but not at the very beginning. Not anymore. I don't think of my mother as my first hero, although through the conversation we have had with Alice, which is a part of this collection, I have come to reconsider my mother's role in my upbringing, and started seeing her, whilst mothering me, as a person in her own right, a person who made decisions herself as to how to mother. I feel that we, in the role of being children, are still functioning under the false preconception that our mothers exist only in relation to us, as if there is no other life they could have, and no decisions they make regarding their mothering style. In this description by Mukwege his mother is perceived as concerned primarily with the benefit of her own child: she is pushing him, using the "benevolent arts of maternal manipulation" – this makes me smile in recognition. She also exhibits maternal courage and bravery, daring to birth, care, and support her children throughout her life. What does "maternal courage" consist of beyond birthing in uncertain conditions and lifelong care for one's own children? How do we re-write our mothers and ourselves as mothers – offer a more radical version of them/us? Is this done through a particular form of mothering, through the considered acts of doing, through particular maternal action?

I noted that in my own encounter with Gabriel, I had also somewhat erased myself, became less assertive, less important. My main preoccupation was making sure he was enabled. I couldn't help my own transformation from being a creative and thinking artist/scholar whilst at Tavistock Square and then a devoted mid-age mother walking around UCL campus.

Later on in the week, I learnt that Virginia Woolf's bust is under review by Camden Council, with a view to make all statues inclusive (Simpson 2022; Peacock 2022). This is due to Woolf's expression of racist views in her diaries and "blackface" practice. Finding a book which discusses the activism and power of women of colour just next to the statue offers a new negotiation with mothering, othering and maternal courage. I wonder how do we re-consider our own maternal actions, both in the everyday but also in academia?

Love
Lena

Dear Lena

Last weekend I took the children swimming. Children is not really the right word of course; they are more young women than children now. They were far away from me, down a maze of corridors and through changing rooms, whooshing down slides at great speeds and bobbing over artificial waves in the chlorinated pool. I sat in the café in the foyer, looking through the glass doors out towards the sea, which was also contained and managed in the marina. When we planned this trip, I knew I would have two hours

to myself. The children needed me only to drive them to the leisure centre and pay for their activities. Beyond that, as long as I waited where they could find me, I was free for a couple of hours. Somewhat perversely given the setting, I thought I would use the time to read with this edited collection in mind. Remembering what you had already written in your letter to me about walking around Tavistock Square, and conscious that I would not be able to engage with any long or involved texts, I took with me my copy of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West's correspondence (2021). A passage struck me, which was written by Sackville-West to Woolf on 4 February 1926, when Sackville-West was by the Red Sea writing her travel book Passenger to Teheran:

> *You manage things better. You have a more tidily sorted mind. You have a little compartment for the Press, and another for Mary Hutchinson, and another for Vita, and another for Dog Grizzle, and another for the Downs, and another for London fogs, and another for the Prince of Wales, and another for the* Lighthouse *– no, I'm wrong, the* Lighthouse *is allowed to play beam over the whole lot, [….] But with me, they all run together into a sort of soup.*
>
> *(2021, 49–50)*

The enviousness that Sackville-West has of Woolf's tidy mind resonated strongly with me. I also envy those with a tidy mind – which is something I have never had, and which I also seem increasingly less likely to acquire as I age. Most days I feel like a badly coloured in illustration, constantly straying beyond the lines. It used to be that I overspilt with all the accoutrements of babyhood, now, in my post-fertile years, it is thoughts that run away from me – merging together and interrupting one another as I am less and less able to stay with one subject or to pin down the exact word that has escaped me. Somehow the elements of my life all bleed together, and I cannot separate one from the other. I find myself sitting in a leisure centre foyer, surrounded by chlorine and nappy smells, and unruly children, trying to read lofty texts of deeply sensual pleasure and high-minded intellectual life. Now, back at my computer in my kitchen at home, I find myself reading over the chapters of this collection that we are editing while surrounded by the detritus of my children's hasty departures for school – empty flasks, open cereal packets, yesterday's schoolbooks – all of which mirrors my disorderly mind. I marvel at the idea of a mind as compartmentalised as that described by Sackville-West. But then again, isn't this mess of motherhood, this bleeding between the ostensibly separate areas of our personal, political, and intellectual lives, exactly what we need to move towards maternal action?

In the chapters contained within the collection that we are now concluding, I have read of maternal action from those who mother their others through prejudice, pandemics, healthcare crises, migration, injustice, grief, climate chaos, and aging. I have read of maternal action from those who speak out, amplify the voices of others, or find joyful connections. I have read of maternal action from those who have found resilience when too much is asked. In all these chapters, I am asked to imagine mothering otherwise, mothering as active, mothering as compassionate connection, and mothering as a soupy mess, to borrow Sackville-West's description. We have positioned this text as about solidarity, practice, exchange, and I must remind myself that these are not purely

intellectual pursuits. It seems to me that maternal action is lived through, despite, and because of the bleeding of the maternal into all parts of ourselves, our lives, our communities, our planet. It is in the mess that maternal action is found and a maternal future might be created.

Love
Emily

We have decided to be open here, to think forward into the future. In our Introduction to this collection, we stated all we had intended to say about the essays. We didn't leave any aces up our sleeves for this Conclusion. What has been said in the Introduction, was all that we had. Originally, we never planned to write a conclusion – but an anonymous reviewer pointed out at the book proposal stage that a conclusion "need not be a definitive statement or summing up, but rather a performative weaving through of the multifaceted essays and a lovely way to re-connect to the reader – having read many essays leaving us with critical and creative thoughts and actions". As editors, we are navigators, facilitators, and enablers. We mother the others; the contributors, readers, and each other. And here we are re-addressing you, our reader, again. We are also addressing one another. In the past we have managed writing together through a series of letters to one another. We have tried to work with contributors in this collection through correspondence. For this final version of our book, we have removed the comments we wrote to each other and to the chapter authors as we developed the work together – it would be unfair to leave in anything so unworked – but it is also tempting to make visible the reciprocity, exchange, and process of the writing experience. Have we cheated by removing these when we are concerned with the reciprocity and plurality of the maternal? By using our more personal reflections to open this conclusion, we hope we have reintroduced some of the sense that we have come to understanding together, in relation to one another.

The idea of re-connecting to the reader, as the anonymous peer-reviewer encouraged us to do, appealed to us. Academic books are a curious matter. Often, we, as readers, do not stick with them cover to cover. Of course, there are those special few which we cherish, which we return to. However, generally speaking, academic books, and moreover edited collections, are dipped into – we select what we need, pick out the elements that appeal to us. Therefore, we now give ourselves – the collection of authors and editors – and you, dear readers, permission to play in the chapters of this book however we all may choose. Take those insights and essays that suit your sensibility from this collection, as we will take those that suit us, and consider, with us and through us, maternal pasts, presents, and futures.

Our own mothering stage is one of middle-age and maturity. Our children are mostly grown, some have already left the family home. Perhaps soon we will begin to anticipate grandchildren. Our own parents have now died or are in their senior years. Oftentimes we have asked each other, when do we move on from mothering and maternal matters? That "moving on"

might not be possible in "real life" with our children or from our parents; but, moving on is entirely possible in terms of engagement with maternal scholarship. We could choose to focus on something else. Do we move on, and if we do, how? Where is maternal performance now? Is it in a good place? Where else do we transfer our efforts, with our academic politics? Is the field of maternal studies, and more specifically the topic of maternal performance, an endeavour that is forever linked to the exploration of early motherhood? Is this the ground where newcomers are always welcome and encouraged? And what of mid-career artists who are now beginning their maternal journeys? Josie Long's *Tender* (2019), Hannah Ballou's *go:gaa II* (2021), RashDash's *Oh Mother* (2022), Hot Brown Honey's *Hot Brown Honey: The Remix* (2022), Morgan Lloyd Malcolm's play *Mum* (2021) – are these maternal performances better able to navigate the terrain of mothering and arts practice? Are they offering more assertive, more inclusive, more resistant, possibly queerer portrayals of mothering? The chapters in this book have represented many voices, but many are missing too – those who chose not to be mothers, and queer mothers that so strongly resist what O'Reilly (2021) has named "normative motherhood" or Adrienne Rich (1976) has called "the institution of motherhood".

Reflecting on ourselves, and our stage of life, now, with older children, and an awareness that we no longer want to or no longer can reproduce new human life, we have begun to question our current preoccupations. The mother immersed in her pregnancy, her birth, or getting to know her baby in the post-partum period, which we have elsewhere termed the period of "aftermath" (Šimić and Underwood-Lee 2021), is no longer our preoccupation. We have also published about those early performances we had created when we first became mothers, *Medea/Mothers' Clothes* (2004) and *Patience* (2008) (Šimić and Underwood-Lee 2020). There was something compulsive and compelling about that return, about the attempt to do it "better", to finally understand, or better still, to understand it is impossible to grasp the totality of maternal experience and knowledge. Thanks to Alice Entwistle's conversation with us, which opens the section on "Exchange", and which incidentally also used Woolf's invitation "to think back through our mothers", we have returned back to our mothers' hopes and desires, and the way we have been mothered by them. We have considered the question of how our ability to mother has been formed by the way we have been mothered. We have considered the care that has been given to us, over the years, both in our families, but also more broadly, in our academic and artistic contexts, in our maternal networks. We have consistently referred back to our feminist (grand)mothers (Šimić and Underwood-Lee 2016 5; 2021, 2).

We are still concerned with the figure of an impossible mother, lost to us in the hazy past when the children were little, but also an impossible mother who is our reality. This midlife mother we have become is never something we aspired to be, nor did we romanticise, fictionalise, or dream of this midway mothering stage. However, we are aware that mothering has, for us,

moved from the specifics of daily labours with a baby, toddler, or a small child and towards a desire for and an enactment of collective maternal action through this editing or networking work, through writing and highlighting examples of maternal performance which are explicitly political and engaged in the building of a more compassionate and just world. Thus, our mothering experiences and aspirations have moved from the specifics of a particular person's bodily encounter to an array of possible maternal relations.

In our introduction, we challenged ourselves to think about what a world informed by maternal action would look like; the chapters in this book have provided us with specific, concrete examples of maternal action made manifest in the present through exchange, practice and solidarity. The invitation here in this conclusion is to imagine a maternal future that is radically open, infinite, and ungraspable.

Dear Emily,

I have finally got to reading Melanie Klein's essay "On the Sense of Loneliness" – the writing is rattling in my head. Klein sets out on understanding the sense of loneliness – it's her very last essay, written towards the end of her life, published posthumously in 1963. She writes: "This state of internal loneliness, I will suggest, is the result of a ubiquitous yearning for an unattainable perfect internal state" (Klein 1997, 300). She writes of loneliness which is experienced even when one is not alone, but with other people. She draws it back to early infant experiences and one's capacity to establish a "good internal object" with which comes the core of the developing ego and a sense of security. My analyst suggested this essay to me and also said that it was the only work his own analyst had suggested to him, when he was doing his first course of analysis. I tasked Neal, my oldest son, to buy me the book for my 47th birthday last year. I only read it the other day. It set me onto an uneasy path of considering integration and its impossibility. But I also remain sceptical about it all being about the infant's ability to create that "good internal object" – the breast, or the bottle? I want to believe that a certain understanding and other events in a person's life can undo even the worst of infant experiences. Klein claims:

> *However gratifying it is in later life to express thoughts and feelings to a congenial person, there remains an unsatisfied longing for an understanding without words – ultimately for the earliest relation with the mother. This longing contributes to the sense of loneliness and derives from the depressive feeling of an irretrievable loss.*
> *(1997, 301)*

Again, to what degree is that primary relationship with the mother key to any other connection? Is this the burden the mother ought to carry? Do we demand it as children? Oh, her utter impossibility. "Unsatisfied longing for an understanding without words" could easily be mistaken for sexual satisfaction, but bodily connection, which is beyond instant sexual gratification through orgasm, is something more. I am reminded of our writing about "Aftermath" (Šimić and Underwood-Lee 2021) and the discussion of feminine jouissance as proposed by Jacques Lacan. In the Introduction to Lacan's book,

Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (Lacan 1985, 137) named jouissance as something "in excess". Does "unsatisfied longing" connect to "in excess", to something more, to never enough? Do our longings for understanding without words remain unnamed, or would it be easier to put them into the category of jouissance, the phallic jouissance which is of the infant before the Symbolic and the law? Is it through the act of naming that such a feeling could be addressed, understood and satisfied? Is there a way for this "unsatisfied longing" to be sated through the acts of performance as "maternal action"? I suppose I am stuck in between a desire for understanding whatever unknown appears in front of me and reflective analysis of maternal writing and art.

Something in Klein's writing unsettles me, at this midlife stage of my life, in this considerate space of middle ground. At the end of her life, Klein confirms:

> *Since full integration is never achieved, complete understanding and acceptance of one's own emotions, phantasies and anxieties is not possible and this continues as an important factor in loneliness. The longing to understand oneself is also bound up with the need to be understood by the internalized good object.*
>
> *(1997, 302)*

It's the mother who supplies the good/bad object, it's the infant who manages "the recurrent experiences of losing and regaining" (1997, 304). The good mother, whomever she is in our imagination, knows when not to give in, and when to leave the child. But how can we ask of a new mother to be so cognisant, so organised, so calculative even? You write about a soupy mess of mothering, the ambivalence of it all.

Reading Elisabeth Hanscombe's (2018) account of passing judgement in the delivery suite of a hospital, at an older mother, Barb, and her infant daughter, Amy, who eventually falls off the bed in hospital, I was viscerally reminded of my own first night with Neal in hospital. Utter exhaustion, almost hallucinating state of mind. I picked up my crying baby, my first born, from the see-through plastic cot. He must have been crying, helpless as he was, swaddled, immobile. I breastfed him, whilst wondering if this was the right thing to do. Unsure, alone, I rang for the midwives. I don't think anyone came; or if they did, they re-assured me I was doing the right thing. After finishing the feed, I was too tired to put the baby back in the cot, so I fell asleep with him on me. I woke up in terror. I am not sure how long we were asleep, could have been twenty minutes, or two hours – we were both so unprotected. All turned out fine. But what if, what if… a cold sweat of dark thoughts, what if he fell out of the bed, just like baby Amy in Hanscombe's narrative. As I was reading it, I remembered this fear even before the act happened, as if I had a premonition as to what was to follow.

And now, is there another disaster ahead, as we sail through these midlife waters, assured with Klein's affirmation that no integration is achievable, and with it, no complete acceptance of one's emotions, phantasies and anxieties? Are we, mothers and all others who mother, and those whom we mother, now off the hook, in this new phase? Or is there a hope that some of this knowledge about maternal writing and art helps us sustain our own mothering?

Love

Lena

Dear Lena

There is so much about the maternal that evades us, no matter how much we work on it. The maternal fades, both the specifics of my own mother, whose face only comes back to me occasionally and whose voice I cannot remember at all, and my babies, who have been overtaken by the young women they are becoming, and the conceptual maternal, which changes so much each time we look at it, like light on a wave. In this book we have attempted to examine the maternal through the lens of maternal action, which performs the maternal in relation to its many others and is political and collective. In the act of writing, in this book and in our earlier endeavours, have we pinned the mother down too much? Have we perhaps forgotten too much about the transcendent power of the maternal, the moments when we escape into pure joy, into sensual pleasure, into delight? And what about the terror and horror of the maternal, those moments when I look at my children and the strength of my love for them becomes too much to bear? Are the extremes of early motherhood simply too overwhelming for maternal action? Do they need to be tamed as we reach this midlife stage, so that we might act in solidarity?

You ask if the knowledge and wisdom we have now might help us to sustain our mothering. I hope so, although I am as yet unsure. Marina Warner talks about the three stages of life – maiden, mother, and crone; in Warner's description the crone is wild, dangerous, and made potent through her accumulation of knowledge. I wonder if we are about to become Warner's "knowing crone, adept at erotic arts and powerful with her magic and her secrets" (Warner 1995, 148). Maybe the crone will return us to the state of feminine jouissance you allude to in your letter, and to the passion of early motherhood I mourn above. The crone will sustain us and drive us on in both our mothering and our maternal action. That would really be a future of maternal action to look forward to.

Love

Emily

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