

The maternal flaneuse: using sensory visual autoethnography to document the experiences of early motherhood in place

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Hoping (2018)

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On down the dead-end street
It's in my feet, your kind
Sun is shining right on my face
This is the place to find

When it's dark your tears are few
It's just me and you
Give me what I need to live
Help me come to you

On this journey you've given me
I'm walking off the time
Now you're walking right next to me
The mountains we will climb

All the feeling I have for you
Standing in your shoes
When I cry you heal my pain
Help me come unglued

The Rapture
How Deep is Your Love

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I have documented my sensory experiences of early motherhood in relation to the places in which they were experienced. This was achieved through mixed media practices of observational filmmaking; documentary photography sound recording and reflective writing on my life with my daughter, which I have combined to create a documentary account. The focus of the research that underpins this documentation is an exploration of mental wellbeing, breastfeeding, mobility and identity; and the interrelation of these themes with place. The autoethnographic approach I have taken is also the subject of this thesis; reflecting on the experience of documenting my own life for the purposes of both academic research, and visual art / film. Analysis of this process and findings is undertaken through comparing and positioning this research practice with other mother-artists and ethnographers. I explore literature from differing research areas; Feminist Geography; Anthropology of the Senses and Phenomenology. I explore film and art works from observational documentary film and photography, interactive documentary and the poetry of motherhood. The findings are presented as a 28 minute documentary film and photo series and as a 40,000 word written thesis. The film and photo series were exhibited together in my neighbourhood in Sheffield in 2018 where much of my early motherhood experience took place as part of this research. This sensory storytelling illustrates themes of the thesis (mental wellbeing, breastfeeding, mobility and identity) in a visual autoethnography. The work also opens up discussion and critical imagining of what I term the maternal flaneuse- a concept I have created and that I explore to build on recent feminist reimagining of the flaneur. These findings also narrate the way emotion work and trauma can be documented and (re)experienced through research using autoethnography, and the ways in which these collective methods can be understood as 'emotionally thick description' to understand the lived experience of early motherhood.

Introduction

This research aims to explore early motherhood experience in place, using visual autoethnographic methods. It seeks to create what I have termed an emotional thick description of this topic, using personal narrative and reflection through the creative practices of documentary film, photography and sound. The iterative process of themes arising, methods tried, and literature I subsequently read influenced and shaped my research questions:

I have undertaken this doctoral study as a practice-as-research project. Practice as research can be defined thus:

In practice-based research, the creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge. This method is applied to original investigations seeking new knowledge through practice and its outcomes. (Skains, 2018)

Therefore, the practice outputs from this approach to the research will ideally be viewed prior to and alongside this written element of the study. These collected works I have entitled *Bearing*. They can be accessed from a password protected page on my website for ease of viewing; please look through all four pages of the website for the collected media. They can also be accessed from the university research repository.

www.rosiereedhillman.com/creative-practice-phd-2020/

Password: Bearing20

Bearing

Many times, the only way I have found a way to write this thesis, is to pretend it is not one. As I write this introduction in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, June 2020, I do so as a way to restructure and consolidate; to hone and clarify; to bring rigour and confidence to the entangled, unruly and often deviating mass of writing and images I have accumulated on my experience of early motherhood. At its heart, what you will find here is an academic and creative memoir that began with the birth of my daughter, on 9th April

2014. In place of her first name, I refer to my daughter as 'A' throughout this thesis. Commencing PhD study in September 2015, this project has run alongside the early years of my daughter's life, and so this work is also a memoir of doctoral study. My life and experiences as a mother have become impossibly and inextricably intertwined with my study of and creative responses to motherhood experience. It is hard to see where one ends, and the other begins.

One of the call to arms for making an application for PhD study was that becoming a mother had made me angry. The place I found myself occupying in the world was changed, and I felt a deep sense of injustice about the way mothers are seen and treated. The work I was doing as a mother was invisible, expected and challenging, yet it was supposed to be second nature. Everything seemed to be different about me and the way I was able to interact with the world. I wanted to understand why motherhood became the identity that subsumed all other identities; and how this serves to further inequality for women. I did not see or hear the experience I was having as a new mother portrayed anywhere. I did not understand how something so intensely difficult could be so undocumented. As a middle class, white woman, I knew that I had lots of privileges that were creating ease for me that I did not even see, yet still I found the experience unbearably challenging. I wondered how women experiencing poverty, or without the many advantages I had, coped with becoming mothers for the first time and all it entailed. I wondered if in fact other women were coping just fine and it was just me. Or even if being middle class living away from family and not having the extended support networks that are more common in working-class communities, was one of the reasons I was finding motherhood so isolating.

We need to understand the contemporary experience of motherhood better and in richer, more nuanced and detailed ways in order to address the burden and pressure women are increasingly feeling in birthing and raising children. There is growing recognition of the mental health challenges women face in pregnancy and early motherhood. For example, 81% of women surveyed by the Royal College of Obstetric Gynaecologists responded that they had experienced a maternal mental health problem. Research exploring the reasons for this growing trend points to a range of factors, including isolation, change in identity, and pressure placed on a couple's relationship. For example, a 2009 UK study outlined in

the Royal College of Midwives report on maternal emotional wellbeing showed that '90% of couples found their relationship deteriorated after their first baby was born (Underdown and Barlow, 2012). The wider report identified the 'transition to parenthood' period as one that caused a deep strain on mothers' mental wellbeing made worse by the 'conspiracy of silence' that surrounded new parenthood (p. 4).

Beyond the initial transition period into new motherhood, mental health issues and stress among mothers has been linked to women's mental load. As breadwinners and household managers, our responsibility for the emotional wellbeing of children, and in remaining the primary carers in the UK (as well as in the US and many other western countries), has been recognised as a significant and unique strain on women. The mental load has seen growing media coverage and attention from academic studies, contextualised by the mood set by fourth-wave feminism and movements such as me too.

The visual representation of women's mental load went viral in May 2017 when *The Guardian* published French comic artist Emma's work entitled 'You Should've Asked' (Emma: 26th May 2017). Another comic by Emma: 'Maternity leave is like a vacation, right?' followed as part of *The Guardian's* three month extended investigative feature on the issues facing mothers entitled 'The Mother Load' (Emma: 5th December 2017). Journalistic and creative responses to contemporary motherhood are backed up by recent studies such as one by Ciciolla & Luther which canvassed upper-middle-class women in the US on this topic. Findings included that 90% of respondents bore the sole responsibility for organising their families' schedules and managing children's emotional wellbeing. This finding was linked to respondents feeling overwhelmed and empty (2019).

I recognised my own experience amongst these trends. Motherhood was characterised by feeling isolated; it destabilised my sense of identity, changed my body and corporeal way of being in the world, and caused a feeling of overwhelm in balancing motherhood with my work, relationship and housework. What I also found to be important across these factors, particularly around isolation, identity and body, was the experience of place- how this changed when I became a mother. This factor was not one I found to be represented in media or popular discourse. Indeed images or stories of mothers in public space or public life are hard to come by. I wanted to understand why my mothering experience was

so distinct when I was out of the house, and the ways that place was felt and understood so differently when encountering it as a mother with a baby or child, compared to the way I moved through public space before having a baby.

Approach

One of the biggest challenges throughout this project has been cauterising the imposter syndrome that has often threatened to sabotage its completion. These doubts have often brought me close to giving up, wondering how I would produce a worthwhile work that has a value and a point to it. Who cares? Is a refrain I have often found myself uttering when I have tried to find a way to structure and present my own experience as 'data' for this research project. I have feared that the reader, viewer, or academy will presume that I think of my own life, my own family as particularly special or remarkable. I have been concerned that readers may think I view my experience as more worthy or interesting than others; a fear of being judged, or seen as arrogant, self-obsessed. As I shall discuss in this thesis, my own life and experience were all I felt I had the capacity to explore, because of my own experience. I did not feel qualified to bring to doctoral study, to produce a documentary or body of photography work about other women's experience of motherhood, while trying to survive and cope with my own. To think of documenting my life as a thesis has seemed too overblown and grandiose- the thinking, learning and understanding have come best when I have taken a softer, more informal approach. This softness has turned out to be one of my research findings. So the tone of the writing in this document is rightly a mixture of reflective, more direct writing, and where needed more formal academic discussion.

Reflecting on my reading outside the PhD over the last five years, I notice that it has contained recent memoirs using the lens of place to frame and understand experience. Allan Jenkin's *Plot 29* (2017), a moving autobiography of his childhood in and out of care told alongside a year of tending his allotment. Amy Liptrot's *The Outrun* (2016) narrating her recovery from alcoholism through reconnection with the natural beauty of Orkney where she grew up. Kate Tempest's *Running on the Wires* (2018), a candid and confessional poetry collection about the breakup of a relationship and finding new love.

I don't consider these authors, documenting their own lives, as arrogant or self-obsessed and have deeply valued the intimacy of experience and authentic voice contained within their pages. In turn, I have come to accept the decision I made to use my own experience. I have done so as a way to explore contemporary issues around motherhood and used visual sensory ethnography to document and create an account of these concerns. I have grown in confidence using my own approach over the course of the PhD, and now view it as a valid and prized method. My personal reflections have the advantage of being unfiltered through another researcher. The only impediment to full candidness has been finding where I wish to install a boundary due to privacy.

Within my PhD reading, autobiographical accounts of motherhood have been of significant influence. I have studied the poetry and memoir of motherhood – Liz Berry; Holly McNish; Rachel Bower- to name a few, that have emerged as a trend in publishing over the last few years. This new commentary on the corporeal and gritty realities of motherhood are backgrounded by the work of those such as Adrienne Rich, who set the bar high in the 1970s for searing, virtuosic writing on how motherhood really is. Running concurrently to the new 'poets of motherhood' has been the work of visual artists such as Natalie Loveless (2012), Lenka Clayton (2016) and Irene Lusztig (2011), who attend to themes of motherhood in a similar way to their poetic counterparts. These works are part of what Loveless describes as the 'new maternalisms': contemporary feminist art that critically responds to the maternal in a way that has not been seen since the 1970s (Loveless, 2012: p. 8).

This connection of my own work to be part of a broader movement to frankly document experiences (in this case, motherhood) that others can connect to and gain understanding through has reassured and inspired me to bring this project to completion. I have come to understand and value myself and my work to recognise motherhood as a process of Becoming after Braidotti, (2002) and reincorporated by Kate Boyer, (2018) with a maternal lens. By favouring the tender, the emotional, the sentimental and poignant in a world that privileges the quantitative; divides the personal from the political; the public from the domestic and the scientific from the arts, we can bring insight that is otherwise lost or overlooked in the academy.

This refocusing of attention in parts of academia (particularly the social sciences) from knowledge being formed from and told by the objective authoritarian and rational voice of god, onto the personal, reflexive and feeling voice of testimony is one of the endeavours of autoethnography. As I discuss in the following pages, through a re-evaluation of my creative practice as autobiographical, I came to understand how this could be used for an autoethnographic approach. Therefore, this research project was conceived from twin influences of theory and art practice, which have emerged as the visual, sensory autoethnography that comprises this thesis and accompanying creative works.

A key motivation for undertaking this study was to apply my skills as a filmmaker, photographer, and visual anthropology graduate to respond appropriately to motherhood and find a form that worked best for the content. Storytelling is a powerful way of creating connection with and understanding others experience. Using visual storytelling to explore the themes around motherhood discussed above is warranted to create connections by raising awareness and understanding. Studies such as this are also needed as stories about the everyday lives of women- the experience of motherhood being a core mode of existence for many women- are hidden, and in film and media, they are underrepresented or untold.

My own experience of early motherhood was heavily characterised by walking- often aimless and usually in the city. Therefore, walking has been one of the methods I used for research in line with this study's positioning in the field of sensory ethnography. Tim Ingold's writing on place informed my interest in exploring this as a juncture, a prism through which to understand my lived experience of motherhood. The interrelationship of the maternal self with place is a growing area of research in the social sciences, and this study seeks to contribute with its unique approach using visual autoethnography as an emotional thick description.

By conceptualising my approach as emotional thick description, I make a contribution to knowledge following debates in anthropology about the use and efficacy of film as a research method, in producing either thick or thin description, after Geertz (1973). In this thesis, I present this concept and explore its use with the film, photography and sound work- Bearing- I made for this practice-led research. I argue that the film combined with

written testimony, photography and sound, embolden understanding of motherhood in a way that only the film or only a written account could not. The reflexivity of my approach as a feminist autoethnography is also an integral part of this approach. Concern with both process and product that integrates emotion in documenting an authentic experience as the research focus. Emotional thick description and emotional knowledge in filmmaking approaches and motherhood experience are crucial findings of the research.

Exploring the experience of motherhood and its relationship to place through creative research practices has bought me to reinterpret and extend the literary and cultural trope of the flaneur, as the maternal flaneuse. I unpack and problematise this concept and its use to understand the unique ways mothers walk, appear in and use public places. Using current scholarship from feminist geography and anthropology of the vision and senses, I explore the socio-political implications for women of the ways my experience of, and, being in public place impacted my identity, agency and mental wellbeing. Responding to the work of feminist geographer Kate Boyer and others, this work contributes to an understanding of maternal spatial experience from a visual autoethnography perspective, enriching understandings gained from existing qualitative studies with larger samples of women. The maternal flaneuse is a creative concept I have developed from my research practices and is a vital finding of the PhD.

The journey of this research project has been profoundly iterative. From the birth of my daughter to the point of submission of this thesis, and beyond: in the future screenings of the film, exhibiting of photographic work from the project, and drafting of journal articles, I consider the work to be a living document. Being both researcher and researched, this work I have written, photographed and filmed is presented here as a thesis to share the insights and understanding I have gleaned from both the processes of its execution as well as the content of my experience as a mother.

Research Questions

Key research questions and sub-questions framing my research:

What can conceiving of a contemporary maternal flaneuse reveal about being a mother in relation to place?

How does a creative, autobiographical account of motherhood and place extend feminist thought in the scholarship around daily motherhood experience?

How does observational film and photography, within the context of autobiographical storytelling, work as emotional thick description?

What can be learnt about the emotion work and labour of using autoethnography for PhD study, and for an account of motherhood?

Boundaries, limitations and terminology

This research project does not intend to assert generalisations or conclusions based on its findings with broad strokes as an autoethnography. The research aims to enrich and contribute to existing bodies of work on the themes of motherhood, concerning mental wellbeing and place. This is achieved through an emotional thick description of motherhood and by using the concept of the maternal flaneuse to expand understanding of mothers existence in, relationship to and agency in public place. This thesis does not intend to be an in-depth study of one set of discourses in its interdisciplinary nature. However, it sets out to bring together theory and texts from feminist geography, feminist philosophy and literature, and anthropology of vision and senses with creative works from documentary film, art, poetry and other media.

In the current climate of protests seeking to break down long-established structures of hierarchy, dominant hegemonic discourses and persistent stereotypes of race and gender, I acknowledge the importance and value of intersectionality in exploring any topic in 2020. As a woman born and raised as a girl, I believe this thesis is a reflection of that experience and I can only speak of the corporeal experience of motherhood in these terms. While I acknowledge other's experiences as valid, both my bodily experience and existential experience of motherhood are strongly defined by my gendered body as a woman. My biology of uterus, breasts, vagina are significant to that experience and are important in

my identity as a woman and as a mother. Given the long history of women's biology being used against them, I believe we have not reached a place where women's biology can be seen as irrelevant or unimportant. Where birth, menstruation and breastfeeding are hidden, maligned and shamed, and, in the persistent mythology across cultures of the female body as dirty. Where women's biology is at the centre and site of male violence, women's biology remains a site of struggle for equality.

Equally important to state is that I celebrate and assert my biology as a woman, to negate the harmful and misogynistic ways that women's bodies have been portrayed, understood and treated. However, this does not negate the existence of or imply criticism of those who experience their gender or biology differently, or who define themselves as women in terms differently to me.

I also acknowledge my privileged experience as a white woman and how race strongly intersects with the experience of motherhood. Pertinent to this study are issues of visibility and agency in public spaces, where race is a significant factor that I do not address directly in this research. I believe further research, testimony and visual ethnography by and from black women would be an important contribution to the findings and themes raised here. Indeed, research and visual autoethnography from mothers across a range of backgrounds, including those across differences in socioeconomic background, sexuality, and routes into motherhood (for example, adoptive mothers), are needed to continue the debate and raise momentum for social change. These contributions are also needed to fill the gaping holes in film and media representations of women's everyday lives beyond white women's experience.

Space, place, landscape and environment are contested concepts, but I do not discuss the debates around these in this thesis due to lack of space, but acknowledge these here. I use the term place in this thesis generically, to describe the immediate physical environment other than where there is a direct discussion of placemaking in more philosophical terms, which I hope will be evident to the reader.

To conclude, this research explores the contemporary experience of the maternal flaneuse. Through an interdisciplinary approach drawing from social science, art and film, the

research highlights concerns and experiences of the mother in place. The process of making an 'emotional thick description' is my other key research finding. I crystallised the collected media over the PhD, different photographic practices, sound recordings, soundwalks, filmmaking and field notes, into an emotional account revealing much about both motherhood, and feminist filmmaking practice.

I crossed the border into the Republic of Motherhood
and found it a queendom, a wild queendom.
I handed over my clothes and took its uniform,
its dressing gown and undergarments, a cardigan
soft as a creature, smelling of birth and milk,
and I lay down in Motherhood's bed, the bed I had made
but could not sleep in, for I was called at once to work
in the factory of Motherhood.

from The Republic of Motherhood by Liz Berry

CHAPTER 1

Background to the Research: Finding Emotional Thick Description, Conceiving A Maternal Flaneuse

Introduction

This chapter discusses the texts, sources and literature I have surveyed in approaching this research project. I set out the fields of study that contextualise this research; and where I see my work sitting and contributing to further knowledge. I discuss the literature I have used to analyse and understand the findings of this project.

The contexts I have drawn on in this research of motherhood and place through sensory documentary practices has been highly interdisciplinary. In thinking about how to bring these various theoretical frameworks, works and texts together, I acknowledge that each contributes an ingredient to the haptic and iterative unfolding of my research, my creative practice, and my experience of motherhood over the course of the PhD study from 2015 - 2020. In this sense, the written component of this PhD has been a living document, constantly added to as I uncover new sources and fields of knowledge.

In this chapter, in line with the processual and somatic nature of emotional thick description, I situate, rationalise and discuss the areas of scholarship and art that I find relevant to the experiences and themes that are echoed in the corresponding practice works. That is to say, the texts and art I have surveyed speak to me and my experience and have been selected to that end, not always accompanied by a complete survey of other works of contemporaries in that area. I explore the ways in which these sometimes disparate texts and works fit together to illustrate, illuminate, de-stabilise and radicalise the ways and contexts in which I have experienced early motherhood. This interrupted and haptic approach to source materials mirrors my mother experience that is unavoidably entangled with the PhD.

I strengthen feminist visual autoethnography as a distinct methodological approach underpinned by emotional thick description by drawing on scholarship and art across

academic disciplines. My intention is to bring feminist viewpoints that address concerns of early motherhood from a socio-political-spatial perspective into dialogue with scholarship from visual anthropology concerned with sensory experience and phenomenology of place. I position my research amongst other enquiries in emerging fields examining motherhood and place, where the maternal experience is a growing topic for scrutiny by artists as well as academics.

I begin this contextual review with *Methodological Approaches*, where I outline and define my process of emotional thick description. I describe my rationale for using an autoethnographic approach in relation to reflexivity and emotional knowledge-making, discussing the influential work of others in autoethnography. I introduce the concept of becoming and how this, together with reflexive research processes and feminist discourse on emotion, in particular the 'killjoy', has defined my conceiving of my research as emotional thick description (Ahmed, 2017).

Following this, I discuss literature from sensory ethnography and anthropology that inform my understanding of the concept of place. This definition is important for understanding my exploration of the flaneur and flaneuse.

I then introduce my idea of the maternal flaneuse, which has been born out of these processes. This thesis uses the maternal flaneuse as a tool for critiquing and reimagining mothers place in the world. I trace my evolution of this reimagined trope back through a discussion of key texts on the flaneur and the flaneuse. I discuss theoretical work by feminists working from cultural and philosophical perspectives and from feminists researching in geography and health studies that have motivated this research project from its inception.

Finally, in part two, I look at *Creative Approaches*, presenting work from documentary film, photography and interactive documentary, and poetry and memoir that have inspired and influenced me in creating the practice work that has led this inquiry.

Part 1 | Methodological Approaches

FINDING EMOTIONAL THICK DESCRIPTION

In this section, I present the background to my concept of 'emotional thick description', an idea that has evolved both out of the literature review, and having reflected on the iterative visual and sensory ethnographic research practices I carried out throughout the PhD. Where traditionally anthropologists 'go elsewhere', I have gone inwards and mined my experience across the senses and emotions to produce my own version of a thick description.

The interpretivist and symbolic anthropologist Clifford Geertz developed the idea of thick description as an ethnographic approach that seeks to understand human behaviour not as it presented in isolation but in the wider contexts in which people live (1973). Geertz was a proponent of seeking to understanding the inner lived experience of people. The well-known ethnography 'Deep Play- Notes on a Balinese Cockfight' (1973) was his first use of the thick description to approach his fieldwork. Thick description is now an established methodology within anthropology and across the social sciences.

I extend Geertz's concept of thick description by describing emotional thick description. The idea of emotional thick description can relate to both the experience that is documented, as well as the process of exploring the experience in terms of the emotion work and reflexivity entailed by the methods used. It can also speak to the experience and responses of the reader or viewer to the work.

Emotional and sensory research approaches can reflect the private spheres and topics they seek to understand. The everyday lives of women, of domestic life and of mother experience are hidden and have been deemed non-research worthy until recent decades. Real and frank commentary, art and representations of women's daily lived experience are relatively new in both the history of art and academic scholarship. In both its creative and academic guises, this thesis cannot be only a cold scholarly document or an emotional reflective journal on creative work. In an attempt to collate the two, it is itself a sensory document. As well as attending to emotions, this research has generated emotions, which

can be understood as emotion work. Arguably the research and study of sensitive or emotional topics might frequently involve an emotional response from the researcher themselves (Behar, 1996). This research seeks to centre emotional response as a valid and rich source of knowledge and learning.

The idea of emotion work in research as a phenomenon has gained traction in recent years, and scholarship exploring this has mainly been contained within social science literature (Swift-Dickson et al., 2008; Sampson et al., 2008). Discourse on emotion has focused on emotion as a by-product and as associated 'work' for the researcher in obtaining or analysing their data. Melzer (2019) writes about her emotional response to documentary film making in her doctoral thesis and calls for further research and recognition on the effect of exploring difficult subjects on artists and academics working in the arts. My research involved emotion work in the way that Melzer describes but fundamentally celebrates emotion and has sought to use this as the primary focus rather than just a secondary outcome. Sadly, emotionality is often still constructed in binary to rationality, intellectual work, and professionalism. As feminists understanding that the personal is political, it is important to value how intimate and emotional accounts can lend deeper understanding to social, cultural and political contexts.

Ruth Behar's *The Vulnerable Observer* (1996) advocates for ethnography that can be personal and emotional, and the gains to anthropology in researchers being authentic about their own personal reasons for pursuing chosen topics. 'When you write vulnerably, others respond vulnerably' (p. 16). By merging memoir with ethnography, Behar advocates transparency from researchers in the ways they encounter their research subjects and the positive effects this has on the researcher, researched and the research itself. Recognising this emotion work as an opportunity for deeper understanding and integrity, Behar's work encourages us to go into ethnography with an expectation that we will do emotion work and that this might be where the learning is. Declaring and exploring our emotion and vulnerability as researchers also provides an opportunity for connection with those whose experiences we seek to understand, rather than this being an uncomfortable or traumatic by-product of the 'real' research (Ibid).

As previously stated, the idea of a thick description as a research method was originally developed by Geertz (1973) as an approach to ethnography within the study of anthropology. The method is now widely used across the social sciences and other disciplines. The *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research* (2009) defines a thick description:

“Thick description is a term used to characterise the process of paying attention to contextual detail in observing and interpreting social meaning when conducting qualitative research. A thick description of a social event or action takes into account not only the immediate behaviors in which people are engaged but also the contextual and experiential understandings of those behaviors that render the event or action meaningful.” (Mills et al. 2009: p. 943)

Approaching my own research as thick description, I feel it is useful to extend this term introducing the idea of emotional thick description as a way to further thicken and enrich the approach. Like Behar, I can see the value of transparency in detailing the ‘feeling’ reasons for approaching a topic and in creating authentic ethnographic accounts which include emotional responses. To deny or reject the emotional world of the researcher is to lose something in the ‘contextual and experiential understandings’ (Ibid, p.943), which thick description strives to capture.

Within visual anthropology, there has been a debate as to whether ethnographic film can be understood as thick description. Those such as David MacDougall assert that film has the capacity to create human knowledge in a way that words do not (1996; 2006). Karsten Hastrup is at odds with MacDougall and other visual anthropologists, strongly asserting that film and photography can only ever be ‘thin description’ in her essay unpacking both ‘visual and textual authority in ethnography (Hastrup, 1992). For Hastrup, a thin description only ever describes; it does not explain.

Contemporary contributions to this debate from those such as Favero (2018) have challenged the idea of thin description being viewed in the negative. Rather than seeking to refute Hastrup’s claims, he outlines the ways in which visual texts as thin description are valuable. In his ‘praise for thin description’ Favero identifies how film brings closeness with the present moment, a ‘thin’ separation of film between experience and recording. The

medium allows direct pre-thinking responses, where the camera records where the attention of the researcher has been drawn, which can easily be obscured in written accounts. Film allows us to go deeper into the multisensory and holds us in that place of wonder and questioning that comes before we start thinking and analysing in fieldnotes or academic analysis. Favero proposes that thin and thick descriptions therefore do not need to be hierarchical.

Favero makes a strong case for this celebration of film as thin description, rather than moaning its exclusion from the status of thick description, and I am aligned with the positive possibilities provided to us, outlined by Favero, in employing film as ethnographic research. I believe, however, that in recognising and re-privileging the tactile, the emotional and the vulnerability of both researcher and researched, it is important that the very qualities Favero highlights be understood as thick description. Indeed, in the case of this study and others like it, where visual accounts that also employ iterations of reflexive writing alongside film and photography, we are able to understand them as emotional thick descriptions.

David MacDougall finds that film creates capacity for somatic responses from viewers:

"drawing from the work of Merleau-Ponty, he proposes that the 'resonance of bodies' ... suggests a synchrony between viewer and viewed that recovers the prelinguistic somatic relation to others of infancy, a capacity that still remains accessible to us in adulthood" (Pink, 2015: p. 145)

These somatic responses are not only to the content of the material but to the directness offered by feeling you are in the seat of the filmmaker experiencing on a multisensory level what they saw and felt. The capacity for one set of senses (vision and sound) to enable, invoke and lead a viewer into the realms of other sensory perceptions is another way in which film can offer multi-layered accounts (Pink, 2015). This attention to the somatic in film practice and viewing underlines how emotional thick description can be understood as an embodied practice, producing embodied knowledge.

In this research, I have therefore drawn on film as well as creative practices that within anthropology are understood as 'cultural forms', having value and interest for ethnographic study as 'expressive systems of human society' (MacDougall, 1996: p. 283). Family snapshots and home videos are presented alongside fine art photography and aesthetically considered documentary film. Embodied research practice in the form of walking is also at the heart of the research. Alongside these visual means, there is this written thesis where I collate academic writing, fieldnotes and reflexive commentary. I consider this collection of ethnography-art practice to be an emotional thick description of motherhood.

My experience of motherhood over the course of this doctorate has been characterised by my role and work as a PhD researcher: my creative direction as an artist and intellectual work as an academic. In turn PhD life has affected my experience of motherhood, my relationship with my daughter and interaction with the places I have inhabited and landscapes I have crossed. My maternal identity is defined not just by the interactions with my child but with interactions with everything- as colleague, friend, PhD student - in all the other ways of being in my life, my motherhood identity is there. Like Behar, I have found this ethnography to be 'embarking on...a voyage through a long tunnel' (Op. Cit, 1996: p.2).

Below I will discuss and outline the literature on autoethnography to explain my rationale for choosing this as my central approach and how this informed the concept of emotional thick description. I then go on to discuss 'becoming and subjectivity,' bringing feminist thought to examine maternal identity making in this research. Becoming has been an important philosophical theme for the process of uncovering my research findings as a filmmaker and scholar, and for emphasising the significance of emotion more broadly on both the processual nature of identity, and processual nature of autoethnography.

Autoethnography

As an emotional thick description of my experience of motherhood and place, literature from autoethnography has underpinned the study.

What is an autoethnography?

"Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience... A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product." (Ellis et al. 2011)

In *Creating Autoethnographies* (2010), Tessa Muncey unpacks various approaches to autoethnography. She underlines the reflexivity at the heart of autoethnography in its relation to the researcher, as well as the way that it is received as 'felt and dialogic' by a reader or audience. She states autoethnography "allows readers their own imaginative relationship to the text." (p. xiii)

Caroline Ellis (in Muncey, 2010) relays a discussion with a student who does not know what autoethnography is. She describes autoethnography as a practice to understand an experience she has lived through, as 'systematic sociological introspection and an 'emotional recall'. Her account speaks to my own experience of undertaking autoethnography, principally:

- Writing the experience as a story*
- The self-questioning that autoethnography demands is extremely difficult*
- Confronting things about yourself that are less than flattering is difficult*
- Difficulty in not being able to take back what you have written, have control over how readers interpret it*
- With understanding yourself comes understanding of others. This is an avenue for doing something meaningful for yourself and for the world."* (p.35-36)

Ellis further states, "most social scientists are not sufficiently introspective about their feelings or motives or the contradictions they experience" (Ibid). This is clearly a strong argument for autoethnography's efficacy in the way it generates knowledge with integrity and authenticity in a way that 'objective' and more structured qualitative research does not.

As an approach for understanding human experience, autoethnography allows us to fathom 'messy worlds' (p.28), by prioritising "*ecological validity over internal validity in research outcomes / knowledge*" (Ibid). I understand this as privileging an account of the rich and multi-layered worlds of human subjectivity and interaction in research, not just acknowledging human bias and involvement in the outcomes of social research but using this for deeper learning about the subject being addressed.

Other ways of expanding and describing autoethnography include highlighting its '*fusion between social science and literature*' (Ibid: p. 30) or as in this research project; social science and art/film practice. In this sense, in its openness and adaptability to interdisciplinary work, autoethnography as "*an account that subverts the dominant discourse*" (Ibid: p. 31). I believe this is because autoethnography allows access to the emotionally thick description of peoples' experience and seeks a holistic picture of subjectivity which cannot be easily sought through other research methods. Pelias states: "*the poetic essay is... an imaginative construction whose truth lies not in its facticity but in its evocative potentiality*" (Ibid). An 'evocative potentiality' is at the heart of this research project's intention, as a sensory, visual autoethnography bound with my own experience of both motherhood and the research experience itself.

Autoethnography can help us understand experience, emotionality and the way cultural experience can be more deeply understood through personal experience. In autoethnography, this experience is often re-laid as a story. Story can be used to convey and explore human experience in areas that are less tangible for traditional academic writing to capture- for example, memory, notions, dreams, senses, the nuances of relationships and mental health experience (Sparkes, 2007, p. 522 in Ellis et. al, 2011)

This storytelling can even (necessarily) branch into part-fictionalising of accounts of our experience, particularly with these types of human experience which are snatched, non-linear and hard to fit into a narrative. In researching the self, I believe storytelling is therefore at the heart of my PhD endeavour and in the field of autoethnography, this is often done through narrative writing, inter-dispersed with theoretical and academic commentary.

I have found a reading of Jackson's (2002) analysis of storytelling important in relation to visual storytelling. He highlights the way images can be used as a prompt not just for creativity, reflection and self-discovery, but in the way it can both be 'a strategy for transforming private into public meanings' and 'as a vital human strategy for sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances' (P. 14-15).

I first encountered the process and practice of autoethnography on reading Brendan Stone's work on mental distress, diary writing and the self (2004 & 2006) when in the beginning stages of thinking for a PhD proposal. Stone curates and coordinates the online multi-media Storying Sheffield project (2010 - ongoing) which facilitates individuals and communities in mapping their stories within the city, particularly around mental wellbeing. The project uses film, photography and creative writing and was an early source of inspiration for the direction of this research project.

Stone discusses how creative outlets are therapeutic, allowing self-reflection and a claiming of a safe space for the distressed self to be (2006). Stone uses examples of journals from his stay in a psychiatric hospital during a long period of mental illness when he was 19, looking back on them now in his early fifties. Stone discussed these in a lecture to his colleagues in the Medical Humanities cross-disciplinary group at Sheffield University (December 2014). In the questions following, he admitted that although he had written about his experience of mental ill-health, published excerpts from his diaries, and talked to audiences of students about his experience having mental illness and accessing mental health services, it was this audience of his colleagues that was the most nerve-wracking for him- even thirty years after writing the journals.

Were the 19-year-old Brendan to foresee his writing presented as part of a university lecture, he would likely not have so freely and unselfconsciously revealed the workings of his mind in distress. I experienced a great deal of creative impotence in the process of undertaking this practice as research, knowing that it would be read and seen as well as assessed and examined.

During PhD study, I was still living the experience of motherhood, whereas Stone's academic articles were a retrospective examination of his much younger experience of mental illness. Like Stone, I as part of the process of doing this research, have come to understand that documenting my own experience was an encounter with my own vulnerability. For Stone, narrative writing during mental distress (2004 & 2006) can reveal and transform the concept of self, which echoes my own findings of the transformative and fertile ground of image-making and storytelling as a process for understanding and becoming.

Working through this vulnerability was a challenge and is a dynamic process as I share the work with more people in different contexts and forums. Writing in the first year of my PhD:

I am not daunted by sharing my experience with others who are also living the experience of early motherhood, but the practice of autoethnography, and in the moment documenting, needs a safe space and a trusting relationship built with tutors in order to work. My willingness to undergo and engage with autoethnographic practice is for other women, my story is a story to be shared with other mothers, and the prospect of academic scrutiny has caused me much creative impotence. My self-protective heckles come up and a stubbornness that my experience of postnatal depression and long term breastfeeding are not mere 'examples', or a self case study to flippantly throw into a module to gain 60 credits. (February 2016)

In chapter two, I further discuss these research methods processes and the ways in which I came to realise these as a key site of the thesis findings.

Exploring the tool of storytelling for transformation in this research, I have looked at studies and projects that document the mental wellbeing of women learning how to be mothers for the first time. For some women, this is a process with a few bumps along the way; and for others- a growing number- it is a period of acute mental distress, anxiety and depression. One in ten women experience mental illness after giving birth (Maternal Mental Health Alliance, accessed 1/7/20). We are who we are because of the narratives we inhabit; narratives we need in order to make sense of who we are, where we have come from and what has happened to us. Others narratives, sociocultural expectations, and

those imposed by people close to us, are also ones we live and inhabit but these are not necessarily freely worn or a 'comfortable fit'. Stone's description of re-authoring the self is a very powerful concept for the reclaiming of agency, identity and sanity through a telling of our own stories in our own voice (Stone, 2015).

BECOMING - Maternal Subjectivities and Identity

The concept of 'Becoming' was developed by philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2002) from Deleuze (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994) to unpack and explain the transitory nature of identity and subjectivity. Braidotti's work is extended by feminist geographer Kate Boyer in her book *Spaces and Politics of Motherhood* (2018) which I have used extensively to inform this thesis for an understanding of maternal identity and states of being in becoming mothers. Like Boyer, I also use the idea of becoming to explore the experience of new motherhood and the ways in which mother identities and subjectivities are inextricably tied to the maternal body, and to place. While Boyer's research is rooted in social science, I extend and share themes of interest to Boyer with a visual autoethnographic treatment.

I have found Sara Ahmed's visionary writing on feminism endlessly useful, particularly her polemic articulating the idea of a *feminist killjoy*. Having been introduced to the killjoy via Kate Boyer's article exploring motherhood and public comfort (2012), I pursued a close reading of Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), which has become a cornerstone in my own pursuit of the emotional in this research. Ahmed integrates the work of feminist scholars, writers and artists over the last few decades into a coherent arsenal to comprehend the extent and pervasiveness of men's violence and women's inequality in contemporary life. She uses these debates and thinking to strengthen her own fierce manifesto for the *feminist killjoy*, a tool box of philosophical and practical ways to resist and break apart the patriarchal forces that seek to bind and silence women.

Ahmed's work is therefore useful in thinking about maternal identity, and the fluid nature of this as a "*movement towards the unknown*" (Boyer, 2018: p. 23). The sense of otherness women feel after birth, the new experiencing of the postnatal body, the new finding of ones sense of self, and ones place in the physical world; are performativities which women are socially expected to engage in and enact in relation to gendered expectations of

motherhood: during pregnancy; from the day their baby is born and over a lifetime of being a mother. 'Doing motherhood' (after Butler, 1990) in relation to these norms is very repetitive, constrained, boring, complex and often an oppressive experience.

A reading of the idea of the killjoy is that there can also be empowerment, euphoria, solidarity and wonder in the living of and being a mother. This satisfaction might be found in a re-writing of the identity of 'mother', as one who is prepared to disrupt expectations about how the identity lives. However, unfortunately, the killjoy also describes the often unchosen way that mothers find themselves disrupting social space or expectations of our gender by existing in spaces that do not seek to accommodate us. Motherhood is an experience lived in the context of a hegemonic discourse with normative expectations on how maternal bodies and identities should be enacted (see feminist scholars on motherhood: Ruddick, 1989; O'Reilly 2006, 2014; Baraitser, 1989; Benn, 1999). This makes living a life beyond these parameters 'work', and in the case of women alive to the politics of this work in relation to their gender, we inevitably interrupt, correct, complain and exist in ways that make us *feminist killjoys* (Ahmed, 2017: p.2). Becoming, therefore, entails both structural and intimate feminist battles to assert ourselves as part of coming to know ourselves as mothers.

Boyer uses becoming to analyse the results from her research interviewing 27 mothers in East London as well as analysis of discussions on five threads by new mothers to the UK parenting site *Mumsnet*. From this primary research, Boyer evidences that pregnancy and early motherhood "mark a period of radical change to the body and body capacities" (2018, p. 22.) The theory of becoming understands subjectivity to be characteristically and necessarily unstable; as past narratives and markers of our selves are disrupted and the sense of self is constantly in dynamic flux (Ibid). It is also characterised by relationality (how we relate to others), and transition; 'passing through different states'; and, 'the becoming subject is a continual point of departure' (Ibid, p. 23). The speed and extent to which women's bodies change in pregnancy, childbirth and early motherhood are inextricably and uniquely tied up in these corporeal 'departures', 'states' and how others relate to us, and we to them. The maternal body's orientation, agency in and somatic exchange with place is also changed in comparison to the pre-maternal body. Place, therefore, has an important role to play in maternal becoming.

In understanding the ways in which place is inhospitable to women, philosopher Christine Battersby interrogates Foucault and others theorising of the 'self' as presumed male. She argues they do not engage philosophically with a self that is capable of birth-giving. Battersby proposes that even when post-modern thinkers such as Foucault are challenging hegemonic discourse, they "*have failed to imagine a self that is embodied as female*" (Battersby, 2006: p.292). An attendance to this bodily difference and capacity of women to give birth is not to insist that women should be defined by this capacity, nor that women must give birth to be fully embodied, but that the potentiality of this bodily difference is intrinsic to women's sense of self.

By seeking to highlight and authenticate the corporeal experience of maternal bodies as inherently gendered, I do so from the perspective of an intersectional feminist. This doing of gender through motherhood need not be in conflict with Butler's critique of dominant and oppressive hegemonic discourse of gender, but rather expresses the maternal experience of being 'woman' as messy and necessarily non-conforming to the 'doing' of feminine gender or indeed 'doing' of motherhood practice (1990).

"Stories (including sexual stories) 'are templates for action and identity. They are sites of reflection, critique, self-making, self-theorisation, and collectivisation'"
(Pollock 1999: p. 187 in Battersby: p.293)

In making visible the reproductive body and emphasising the inextricable factor this has for women's sense of selfhood in a more complicated way, we can start to challenge the female body being the object of men's discourse in art, film and other media. The body is at the fore of experience of early motherhood, and so non-normative narratives about this period and consequently of the re-making of identity are important and also increasingly prevalent at this point in contemporary culture and politics.

Battersby states her intention to highlight "*the philosophical and gendered significance of 'flesh'*" (p. 294). Focusing on bodily functions and embodied experience forming our identities as mothers has been seen as debased or reductive by some. This maintaining of the 'secrets' of women's bodies is one that is championed by patriarchal norms in that it

silences the politics around reproduction and shames and ridicules their discussion as unimportant, weak and even infantile. This echoes the 'conspiracy of silence' finding in the Royal College of Midwives report mentioned in my introduction (2012).

This thesis argues that taking an understanding of maternal experience and transition as inherently corporeal also benefits from incorporating emotion into this corporeal knowledge. In feeling our emotions within the changed or 'departed' maternal body or maternal state, it is possible to explore these as a significant site for knowledge (see Van der Kolk, 2014 on emotion and the body). Attending to emotion enhances thick description.

The politics of looking and theories of power around vision, senses and the body are central anchors for my research practice. As such, my own approach is very concerned with how to represent the experience of embodied motherhood and disrupt the metanarratives and representations of the postnatal body. The embodied experience of early motherhood is still largely taboo and hidden with a lack of social, public or health practitioner discussions of the physical changes and responses the body undergoes during birth and the postpartum period. I was told by my own midwife that there are a number of things, such as incontinence and bleeding post-birth, that women are not told about when they are pregnant as 'we don't want to scare you'. Concurrently the corporeality of motherhood for women is also normalised and expected in UK society where women are still presumed the primary care givers and where celebrity mum's have made pregnant bodies and motherhood visible as commodification and spectacle (Das, 2019).

Social culture's fiction of motherhood is one that Adrienne Rich addresses in 'Of Woman Born' (1972), an autoethnography which frames motherhood as 'patriarchal institution'. Expressing early iterations of the killjoy manifesto formed decades later by Ahmed, Rich uses her memoir-thesis containing reflections on diary entries from when her three children were babies to outline the state of motherhood and the ways in which it curtails and enslaves women. Still alarmingly relevant in 2021, Rich's work speaks to me on so many levels echoing my own experience of motherhood. The politicisation of the oppressive nature of socio-cultural expectations about mothers identity, behaviour, roles; her descriptions of the daily lived experience of motherhood; for example, the new character

internal dialogues take when one becomes a mother (Brendan Stone's 'self-talk' or 'authoring the self'), and the conflict in the identity of mother as artist:

"Once in a while someone used to ask me, 'Don't you ever write poems about your children?' ... For me, poetry was where I lived as no-one's mother, where I existed as myself." (Rich, 1972: p. 31)

This thesis and attached visual autoethnography are an expression of my maternal *becoming*. They necessarily involve self-reflexive discussion on the process as part of the truth of my experience of motherhood as a PhD student, filmmaker and mother. Working through the process of making this visual autoethnography by articulating the experience and the 'brick walls' I have come up against bring light to the ways in which women have obstacles to move through and over that are often invisible (Ahmed, 2017: p.147). This creative and personal work is inspired by the feminist poet and writer Audre Lorde who articulates the validity of explaining life and identity through feeling and emotion in her essay *Poetry Is Not a Luxury* (1977 in Lorde, 1984).

"As they become known to and accepted by us, our feelings and the honest exploration of them become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas... feelings were meant to kneel to thought, as women were meant to kneel to men. But women have survived." (pp. 26-28)

In an interview with Adrienne Rich in the same collection of essays, Lorde states: *"communicating deep feeling in linear, solid blocks of print felt arcane, a method beyond me"* (p. 78). She discusses how she has trusted her way of thinking about things in a way that, to her, is not as ordered or methodical as what she observes in other people. Lorde has cultivated this thinking and identifies it as central to her poetry. She also states how important these 'emotional sentences' are, especially in a world that seeks to dismiss and discredit feeling (Ibid). Lorde argues for women to use this skill for 'courage and strength' in living within and overturning oppressive systems and relationships. In paying attention to our feelings, dreams and the 'poems' we make from them, Lorde states:

"This is not idle fantasy, but a disciplined attention to the true nature of 'it feels right to me.'" (1977 in Lorde, 1984: p. 26)

I hope that my own visual work speaks closely to these words of Lorde's, and conveys what 'feels right to me', both as a mother, and in my approaches as an artist and feminist.

PLACE AND ENTANGLEMENT

This project draws heavily on the work of Sarah Pink, predominantly from her book *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2009). As a fellow alumnus from the Granada Centre, University of Manchester MA in Visual Anthropology, Pink's interest in the Anthropology of Vision and Senses, of place, and ethnographic practices that respond appropriately to these subjects are shared by me. I use *Doing Sensory Ethnography* as a framework for my choice of visual and audio ethnographic methods including walking conversations (soundwalks), and the intention to do research *with* people rather than on them, that is the belief in participatory research. Sensory ethnography is also one of the frameworks I use for analysing and understanding my findings in Chapters 3 & 4. In this section, I discuss the ways in which I draw on sensory ethnography, in relation to anthropological thinking about place.

To explore place in this thesis, I draw on the foundational work of anthropologist Tim Ingold. I use two key concepts from him – *entanglement* and *dwelling*. Ingold's work problematising the very nature of place is useful for my research in understanding the maternal experience of place. Ingold's exploration of place privileges the senses in place making and understands place through the way we ascribe meaning to the world in response to the ways in which we inhabit it.

Ingold expands thinking on place using the theories of phenomenologists Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, who state that human experience is inextricably tied up in our 'ways of being in the world' and emphasise the body 'as the site of our knowledge of the world' (Pink, 2016: p. 20).

Ingold analyses Merleau-Ponty's notion of vision as a way to explain his notion that place is a dynamic concept, not fixed and understood only through our own individual subjectivities:

"...the visual world is given to subjective experience as a cosmos that is open and transparent, that one can see into rather than merely look at, and that continually comes into existence around the perceiver" (Ingold, 2000 p. 265).

The dynamism of place as proposed by Ingold includes his assertion that '*places do not exist as such, they occur*' (2008, p.1808 in Pink, 2015, p.37). The nature of place therefore inherently involves movement:

"there would be no places were it not for the comings and goings of human beings and other organisms to and from them, from and to places elsewhere" (2008, p.1808 in Pink, 2015, p.37)

Ingold defines the environment as a '*zone of entanglement*', where place and space are not fixed, and where human perception including memory, animate and inanimate entities, histories, discourses and thoughts work to create place along the '*lifepaths of beings*' (Ibid). Sarah Pink synergises these concepts of Ingold's with those of Massey (2005) and Casey (1996). She emphasises the importance of both '*the immediacy of perception*' and the '*influence of global power configurations*' in conceiving how we understand place.

On '*the influence of global power configurations*', I draw on feminist critiques to understand the systemic ways power influences women's '*immediacy of perception*' during motherhood, in their *entanglements* with places that *occur* and *come into existence* as they move into and through them (after Ingold). These entanglements include emotional and somatic responses to, within and upon places as an effective component of the composition of place. An emotional thick description is therefore necessarily emplaced and situated, a part of placemaking and place a part of emotional response and feeling. I will go on to outline the maternal flaneuse below, a reimagined trope that uniquely '*brings places into existence*' through the practices of walking and using public place while mothering.

Dwelling: being at home in the world

In *The Perception of the Environment* (2000) Ingold puts forward his *dwelling perspective* as a concept for understanding our relationship to place. This dwelling perspective underpins Ingold's later writing on *entanglements*:

"A place owes its character to the experiences it affords to those who spend time there – to the sights, sounds and indeed smells that constitute its specific ambience. And these, in turn, depend on the kinds of activities in which its inhabitants engage. It is from this relational context of people's engagement with the world, in the business of dwelling, that each place draws its unique significance. Thus whereas with space, meanings are attached to the world, with the landscape they are gathered from it." (p. 192)

Ingold contrasts *dwelling* whereby our existence is inescapable from our immersion in a place, with a *building perspective* where a place has to be constructed in one's consciousness before a person can act in it (p. 153). *Dwelling* suggests the inseparability of people from place; their interdependence on each other for meaning and identity. This is a perspective I propose is useful for understanding mothers experience in place and as an argument for the importance of policies that promote their inclusion in our public places. By actively including all bodies, and offering people on all 'lifepaths' access to public place, this will continue to increase the usability of and sense of belonging citizens feel in public places and in their communities.

Later in this section, I go on to further discuss the work of Sara Ahmed, Kate Boyer and other feminists who critique publics which are not accessible to or hostile to women. I apply their thinking around 'public comfort' to suggest ways in which a dwelling perspective does not take account of barriers and structural power imbalances which prevent and exclude certain groups from realising their connection to and synergy with place in the way that Ingold describes.

FROM FLANEUR TO FLANEUSE

"Every turn I made was a reminder that the day was mine, and I didn't have to be anywhere I didn't want to be. I had an astonishing immunity to responsibility because I had no ambitions at all beyond doing only that which I found interesting"
(Elkin, 2016 p. 6)

Through my research practices and survey of existing literature, I extend arguments by feminists on the relevance and usefulness of the idea of a flaneuse. This thesis proposes an extension of flaneuse to include the maternal experience, which has not been the focus of scholarship on the flaneur or flaneuse previously. I argue here for an emancipation of the flaneuse for a more inclusive problematising of women's unique use of public space and the city through the lens of motherhood.

The Flaneur

In considering the interrelationship of motherhood and place, I discovered *Flaneuse* (2017), a memoir by Lauren Elkin. *Flaneuse* considers the gendered trope of the flaneur, first aesthetically conceived by Charles Baudelaire in his essay *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863) and expanded and brought into the academy by Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project* (1999). Elkin tweaks the French dictionary definition for flaneur, to include women flaneuse:

"Feminine form of flaneur [flanne-euhr], an idler, a dawdling observer, usually found in cities. That is an imaginary definition." (Ibid, p. 7)

In 'Arcades' Benjamin considered not just what a flaneur did and saw, but how he interacted with the world; a world critiqued from Benjamin's Marxist viewpoint, seeing the flaneur as an emblem of the commodification of modern life (Wilson, 1992; Seal, 2013). Sociologist Georg Simmel significantly contributed to the emerging trope of the flaneur in his essay *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903) by discussing the ways that urbanisation promoted individualism and a disconnection of social bonds; the flaneur typified this in his careless, singular and detached movement through time and space. The flaneur is

therefore seen as emblematic of modernism, as both participant and observer of urban life and a tool with which to critique and engage with urban living (Stephen, 2013).

The Flaneur

Over the last century these tropes of the flaneur have endured, adopted as a tool or symbol by scholars, writers and artists. In *Flaneuse* Elkin reimagines the flaneur as female, using her own experience walking in five large cities across the world. Interspersed with her own memoir and diary of times spent in each city, she gives us a literary history filling in the gaps where women writers, artists and bohemians have been omitted as flaneurs and walkers.

Both Janet Wolff (1985) and Elizabeth Wilson (1992) engaged with the idea of a flaneuse to explore the ways in which women were not part of the flaneur discourse of the nineteenth century. Wolff critiqued the equation of public life with modernity, noting women's exclusion from the former. She therefore draws the conclusion both in her original essay and in returning to the subject two decades later, that there can be no flaneuse as the very definition of a flaneur excludes women, in the distinct ways that women are unable to engage with and have agency in the public arena and landscape (Wolff, 2006).

An understanding of a more complicated flaneur in terms of class, invites its reinterpretation and expansion to other characteristics of gender, race, sexuality and mobility. In this case I propose its usefulness to understand contemporary mother experience in relation to place. Wilson usefully draws out the characteristics of the flaneur defined by Benjamin and the ways in which these were inaccessible to women in nineteenth-century Paris (Ibid). She draws attention to a nuanced understanding of the flaneur as more complicated than a mere bourgeoisie dandy, although class was a significant factor in understanding the autonomy and agency of the flaneur in its origins, in specifically excluding the working classes (1992, p. 106). However, for Wilson, there are other interpretations that can conceive the flaneur as characteristically a marginal figure aligned with the underclass; a rebel or bohemian, whose melancholic drifting was symptomatic of an impotence of purpose which was played out in wanderings in the new 'labyrinthine and agoraphobic space of the metropolis' (pp. 107 – 110). While the city

offered (offers) the opportunity for anonymity and finding beauty and connection amongst the new; (Ibid), Benjamin himself critiqued the way in which urban spectacle contributes to the false consciousness generated by capitalism and the weariness this can create in city dwellers (Ibid). The utopian longing for that other than urban life, produced by this weariness, is important to note very briefly here as the experience of the city for me included a 'utopian' migration to the countryside (and then back to the city) during the years researching this PhD.

Therefore, Wilson and others interrogation of the flaneur from feminist perspectives paved the way for Elkin to explore the topic. Elkin draws our attention to the overlooked writers and artists who were easily enfolded into more modern evolutions and adaptations of the flaneur, as well as Benjamin and Baudelaire's Parisian flaneur of the nineteenth century. Elkin discusses the flaneusing of women in the novels of Virginia Woolf and Jean Rhys as well as the urban walking and public life of the authors themselves in London and Paris, respectively. Others such as Wagner (2019) have also focused on literary representations of a flaneuse, contributing to feminist rewriting of the discourses of the flaneur in recognition of the ways in which women have existed in public concurrent with ideas of flânerie. In the chapter devoted to Paris, Elkin writes about Cleo, from Agnes Varda's film *Cléo dé 5 á 7*; and the representation of her agency and autonomy stepping out in the city, stating the important and nuanced narrative by Varda which subverts the gaze of the flaneur in this film (Ibid, Elkin: pp. 236 -239).

Maternal flaneuse and the gaze

The gaze is an important element central to compiling how we define the flaneur, as well as the root of its criticism. The flaneur is voyeur, spectator, occupant and observer (Wilson, 1992). Pollock's formative argument that the flaneur is the very embodiment of the male gaze (Pollock, 1988) has been advanced and fortified by many other feminist writers since (see Dreyer & McDowall, 2011; Solnit, 2001; Susan Buck-Morss, 1986; Carrera Suarez, 2015) in discussions of the objectification and commodification of women in public space.

"...the Victorian determination to control working-class women has been replaced by a feminist concern for women's safety and comfort in city streets... With the

intensification of the public/private divide in the industrial period, the presence of women on the streets and in public places of entertainment caused enormous anxiety, and was the occasion for any number of moralising and regulatory discourses.” (Ibid, Wilson: P. 90)

This legacy sustains in many ways today and is the historical context for considering the conditions and socio-political landscape by which mothers enter the public sphere.

Rebecca Solnit in her book *Wanderlust, a history of walking*, (2001) discusses how across history the female body in public space has been controlled through the male gaze and the threat of male violence. Women walking, running and generally being outside the private sphere expect to have their bodies objectified and sexually consumed. It is where we learn that our gender is dangerous and it is in our interests to behave in a way that is acceptable or risk what’s coming to us for contravening these boundaries (p.234). The morality of women in public historically created a binary between their appearing in public (immoral, disrespectful) and private (respectable, chaste). Respectable women who went out were accompanied by a man and wore a hat or a veil (p.237).

“One of the arguments about why women could not be flaneurs was that they were, as either commodities or consumers, incapable of being sufficiently detached from the commerce of city life.” (p.237)

Historically women’s presence in city spaces in written and visual texts are therefore defined binarily as prostitutes, or kept at home under veils or accompanied by men. The authority’s view of any women walking alone or after dark, was to be considered as sexually deviant. Solnit's chapter on women walking: ‘Women, Sex and Public Place’, describes how women’s navigation of public places remains policed by the fear of sexual harassment, rape and murder by men. Solnit politicises the ways women have been excluded from public space, predominantly in the way that their sexuality has been treated as uncontrollable and ‘public visibility and independence equated...with sexual disrespectability’ (Ibid, p. 237).

Solnit argues that material barriers- such as veils, carriages, red-light districts- were viewed as necessary either to make women's sexuality inaccessible to passers-by, or controlled through visible markers. My research extends this understanding of material barriers to women's sexuality in terms of the 'mother-baby assemblage' (after Boyer, 2018): the embodied and 'leaky' postnatal postnatal body; the baby and its associated objects when in transit (or flaneuseing), as material and existential barriers to women's sexuality being neither commodified or objectified in public, in the same way as a non-maternal flaneuse.

Beyond the bourgeoisie flaneuse

As a new feminist text on the flaneur *Flaneuse* (2017) is an interesting publication, but I did not connect with Elkin's writing, and found the focus of her book lacking in the critical engagement with the original concept of flaneur that it could have had. The text was an account of women writers and artists who had responded to the city in their work, or walked or flaneured in a similar way to their male contemporaries. My main critique of *Flaneuse* is that most women who walk the streets, are not doing so for bohemian, artistic or intellectual reasons but to get from A to B. Elkin does not reimagine the identity of the flaneur beyond gender and does not seek to understand women's unique engagement with city space beyond her own narrow middle-class demographic.

The flaneuse is described by Elkin as '*an idler, a dawdler*', (Elkin, *Ibid*: p. 7). This excludes a large majority of women who walk in our cities and public places from being understood as flaneuse. Women that walk the streets in contemporary cities are predominantly in the lowest socio-economic groups, relying on public transport and their legs to get around. However, I wonder if despite their purpose not being necessarily to idle or dawdle if women walking and using public space can tell us something interesting about their experience within it, and things they notice or feel along their routes?

"walking (is) an indicator species for various kinds of freedoms and pleasures: free time, free and alluring space, and unhindered bodies" (Solnit, *Ibid*: p. 250)

In parallel with walking being indicative of a person's leisure time and liberty to freely roam, walking can be seen inversely in contemporary cities as lower in a hierarchy constructed by

middle-class car use and ownership, which has contributed to the un-usability of urban centres (Ibid).

"Cars have encouraged the diffusion and privatisation of space, as shopping malls replace shopping streets, public buildings become islands in a sea of asphalt, civic design lapses into traffic engineering, and people mingle far less freely and frequently" (Ibid, p. 255)

The footloose and fancy-free agenda of the flaneuse that Elkin describes above, and moreover the way she goes on to discuss this throughout *Flaneuse*, is as a middle-class intellectual. Living and studying in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London all before the age of 30 bring a very privileged perspective to Elkin's thesis. In my mind, the most interesting flaneuse might be the ones who would break the mould of the trope, not just through their gender but by the ways in which they flaneuse in such a different way from the bohemian intellectual flaneur. It was with this in mind that I visualise the every-mother image of the new mother pushing a pram. I see these women everywhere, everyday and yet mothers barely get a mention in *Flaneuse* or others of the few texts on this subject.

There is one reference to mothers in the final chapter of Elkin's text, where she discusses her return to her hometown of New York City while she awaits a French visa to continue living in Paris. She discusses how alien '*her own city*' feels to her now, having been away for so long. The example she uses to express this sense of alienation:

"Manhattan was crawling with bankers and their toddlers, and Brooklyn was overrun with yuppies and their toddlers, and the twentysomethings you see on the HBO series Girls. It was as if there were two speeds of life in New York: married, or very very young." (P. 273)

It is ironic to me that the yuppies and bankers Elkin describes here are presumably women who she sees in the streets and in public place, the subject of her thesis. Rather than see this as an example of the modern-day flaneuse in action, Elkin rejects their demographic as interfering with the bohemian, edgy vibe she is used to in these neighbourhoods. The bohemian city seems to define and enshrine the definition of urban for Elkin. She goes on

to note the way areas in New York have been gentrified and are now unaffordable and concludes that: 'after years of getting lost in strange European cities, here I was lost in my own' (Ibid, p. 275). Elkin describes this experience in her own city as so unacceptable that she abandons nights out with friends and old transport routes she once took because it had become so 'unrecognisable' to her. I think it's a great shame she didn't speak to the yuppies and their toddlers, as well as BME, gay, homeless or disabled women to find out their experience of the city (See: Serlin, 2006 on mobility in the city, and new memoir texts on walking from flaneuse with diverse backgrounds such *The Salt Path* (Winn, 2018) (written by a woman with a background of homelessness) and *The Electricity of Every Living Thing* (May, 2018) (walking and experience of autism)).

The idea of the flaneuse and flaneur is therefore open to re-framing in terms of the unique experience of a maternal flaneuse. Reflections related to my experience as a maternal flaneuse are to be found in chapters 3 and 4.

Spaces and Politics of Motherhood

This research responds and contributes to scholarship from feminists across disciplines who have examined motherhood praxis through the lens of space and place. While drawing closely on the methodological framework of these scholars, this research expands the subject area by nature of its autoethnographic and documentary approaches. This research therefore intends to contribute an experiential thread to these existing understandings of motherhood and place through creative responses which emphasise emotion and affect as significant sites of knowledge.

In particular, knowledge and research from feminist geography around contemporary motherhood experience has offered exciting and thoughtful treatments of the ways of understanding socio-political structures affecting mother's interactions and feelings of agency within public space. While the methodological and theoretical arguments made here focus on the ways I have experienced motherhood outside of my home- that is, in 'public' space- I also document and respond to motherhood inside of my home as context to these public experiences. In order to understand mothers' experience out in public, it is

important to understand the private realities contextualising how, why and when they come into other places.

Much has been written by feminists over the last fifty years on the impact of gendered public-private discourses on women's lives, equalities and the significance and pervasiveness of these on the oppressive power dynamics between women and men across cultures and societies, as well as the ways in which race intersects with and further complicates the public-private binary (see hooks, 1984; Amos and Parmar, 1984; Clark Hine et. al, 1993; Jones, 1982; Gunaratnam, Y. and Lewis, G., 2001). The lineage of feminist scholars writing to these debates specific to motherhood that are the foundations for current thinking and research include Sara Ruddick (*Maternal Thinking* 1990); Ann Oakley (*Becoming a Mother* 1980); Katrina Bell McDonald (*Black Activist Mothering* 1997); Andrea O'Reilly (*Redefining Motherhood* 1998, among many other texts on motherhood); Lisa Baraitser (*Maternal Encounters* 1989), Tracey Reynolds (*(Mis)representing the black (super)woman*, 1997), and Adrienne Rich (*Of Woman Born*, 1972) whose work as an academic-artist is referenced throughout this thesis.

This section takes its title from Kate Boyer's book *Spaces and Politics of Motherhood* (2018). First, I discuss her key study of *Mother-Baby Assemblages*. I then explore Boyer's work on *Breast Feeding in Public*, bringing in references from others working in this area.

The second part of this section is an exploration of maternal subjectivities and identity, led by Boyer's proposal for an understanding of maternal identity through the idea of becoming, as introduced earlier. Like Boyer, I draw on the conceptual work of Sara Ahmed, crediting her use of *public comfort* and the *feminist killjoy* as a structure by which mother's experience of place is readily understood (2010). I also develop Ahmed's ideas around public comfort and feminist selves, to recognise the ways I (and others such as those in Boyer's study) experience mothering as a practice of resistance and dissent. Deepening this discussion of subjectivities, I draw on ideas from feminist metaphysicist Christine Battersby, who has sought to reprioritise and draw attention to the ways we understand selves that are female, that are mothers. I go on to tie these ideas together further in subsequent chapters to rearticulate this synergy of feminist subjectivity, feminist killjoy and

becoming in my account of emotional description realised through visual autoethnography as a key finding of this research.

Kate Boyer - Mother-Baby Assemblages

Kate Boyer develops the idea of *assemblages*, after Deleuze and Guattari, in *Spaces and Politics of Motherhood* (2018) and an earlier article '*Motherhood, mobility and materiality: Material entanglements, journey-making and the process of 'becoming mother'*' (Boyer & Spinney, 2015). Assemblages are defined in the latter co-written article and re-problematized and expanded in Boyer's later work, which she positions to advance thinking grounded in new materialism to understand maternal subjectivities. New Materialism is focused on understanding the more-than-human, the messy ways in which social and cultural worlds are non-dichotomous with matter, and the agentic interaction of these in the production of power (Sanzo, 2018).

The intention of my work is not to contribute specifically to these ontological explorations and expansions of new materialism as Boyer does. However I acknowledge that in the drawing together of methodologies and concepts across disciplines in this study; in focusing on the flattening of hierarchical ontology about the way we understand the realisation of corporeal experience and placemaking, and the interplay of one on the other; this research could reveal overlapping positions within sensory ethnography and new materialism. Contextualising my work thus and exploring, could therefore be the project for further research.

My research works from and expands thinking from Boyer and Spinney's earlier, simpler definition of the mother-baby assemblage (2015):

"We advance the concept of mother-baby assemblages as a way to understand mobile motherhood, and consider the emotional and affective dimensions of parenting in public that emerge through journey-making" (p. 1113)

The mother-baby assemblage is therefore a useful concept for understanding and defining the maternal flaneuse. It describes mothers coming together with more-than-human

matter, their babies, mobility, route making, and the interplay of all these on how the world is intelligible and understood in early motherhood.

Being mobile and moving through the world as a new mother is characterised by an engagement with objects and matter experienced through the lens of the maternal. Parenting practices feature objects and paraphernalia that are predominantly unknown prior to having a child and usually feature in and facilitate trips out of the home. For example, toys, nappy changing items, clothes, snacks, prams, car seats and slings. Other 'matter' that parents engage in in negotiating mobilities with babies and children could be transport systems, public, the built environment and weather. All of these come together to form the mother-baby assemblage (Boyer, 2018, p. 37). This assemblage goes out with the maternal flaneuse as she moves from the private to the public sphere, the act of moving through place distinctly encumbered yet prepared. Where the assemblage describes the affective and material aspects of going out with a baby or young children, the flaneuse describes the act of walking and being in place as a mother from an aesthetic, emotional and sensory perspective. The assemblage is a key factor in this experience of place and politicises the flaneuse beyond a trope to describe walking, dawdling and observing.

"mobility is an important dimension through which women come to know themselves as mothers" (Ibid, p. 37)

This moving through the world and mothering in public is often a distinct experience to mothering at home. Some mothers in Boyer's study state that the effort in getting out of the house, and the experience of being out were challenging to the extent that they stayed at home when they would otherwise have gone out (Ibid, p. 45). For others, their unavoidable attachment to these objects meant they found themselves entangled in an aesthetic that was alien to their past selves. The pram, in particular, was an object inherently tied up with mobility that 'fixed' contributor's identity as mothers, where they felt that people did not see past the pram, rendering their identity inseparable from the assemblage. Prams are an important normative 'kinship object' (Carsten, 2004 in Boyer, 2018, p. 40) in the transition to motherhood, usually purchased in pregnancy, and facilitating transportation of baby and associated objects. Walking or rocking the baby in a pram is a popular sleep inducer of babies and toddlers. Despite their uses, their design

and the amount of 'stuff' they facilitate carrying, makes movement through the built environment a challenge.

Mothers bodies become extended by the pram, and their mobility is tied up in its design and ways of moving. Arms and hands are not free when it is in motion (Baraitser, 2009). On the other hand, when not in motion, the pram is a clean place for the baby to sit or sleep while the mother takes a break (Ibid, Boyer, p. 40). I discuss my own experience of prams and slings in chapter 3.

Feminist Killjoy

Sara Ahmed's model of a feminist killjoy (2017) has gained a huge amount of traction and attention through her blog of the same name. The feminist killjoy is someone who disrupts social discourse, public comfort and the status quo to highlight and assert a feminist critique of a situation or comment for example. In *Living a Feminist Life*, Ahmed expands on this idea with her thesis call-to-arms and support manual for surviving life where your feminist politics and lens disrupt patriarchal norms and behaviours.

The killjoy is very useful in thinking about mothering experience in public more widely as well as breastfeeding more specifically, and feeds into my understanding of an emotional thick description. By drawing attention to emotionality, emotion work and women's distress (contextualised by a patriarchal culture and social structure within which we have to live on a daily basis), we disrupt and agitate the fiction of perfect motherhood, of women having it all. Mothering outside of the home involves children's noises, speech, crying, shouting, interaction with furniture, objects, trees, lifts, stairs, checkouts, escalators, lifts, curbs, and especially toilets. All these necessitate a negotiation between social norms and public comfort along with what is 'allowed' 'safe' 'good parenting' 'a learning experience for the child' 'socialising' 'fulfilling basic needs' 'affordable' and, 'physically accessible'.

Elkin, writing in *Flaneuse* describes how out of place she finds children as she flaneuse, it seems that 'toddlers' are disruptive to her feelings of control and freedom in the city. My version of the maternal flaneuse offers a different narrative where women's experience as mothers in the city is seen as a rich experience, of significant and specific value which can

reveal things about place we would otherwise not know or understand, and be all the poorer for.

“Feminism is homework, it is a self-assignment. We have much to work out from not being at home in the world...Feminist theory- what is it? It is something we do at home- both intellectual and emotional work...The world that exists, is where the difficulties and challenges arise.” (Ahmed, 2017: pp. 7- 9)

Ahmed’s work on collective feelings, public comfort and concepts of the “killjoy”, and the “affect alien” can also frame how breastfeeding mothers are perceived when feeding in public (Boyer, 2018).

Breastfeeding in Public

Leading feminist scholars on breastfeeding, such as Bernice Hausman (2012), address the difficulties women experience in breastfeeding, and the declining breastfeeding rates in western countries, by placing emphasis on ‘challenging the constraints on women’s right to feed’ as opposed to shaming women who do not, or who do so for only a short time (Leeming, 2018, p. 30). Challenges and discomfort in breastfeeding in public are identified by many studies as a significant factor in women’s decision not to start or to end breastfeeding (Mathews, 2019).

Using this framework, which Ahmed originally used to problematise the racialising of bodies in the public realm, Boyer highlights how breastfeeding bodies disrupt the comfort of others (Ibid, p. 78). To breastfeed in public therefore requires “willingness to engage in counter-normative behaviour” (Boyer, 2012 p.554). Boyer carried out primary research on the experience of breastfeeding in public. She understands her findings through ‘the two foundational schema of patriarchy’ : the prevalent hegemonic discourse that considers breastfeeding as care work that belongs in the space of the home, and, the normative view that women’s bodies function principally for the fulfilment of male sexual desire (Ibid, 2018, p. 79) (see also Hausman, 2004; Bartlett, 2005; Dowling 2017).

Boyer discusses 'lactivism' in her examination of the culture and use of 'Lactation Rooms' in town and city centres. She explores discourses explaining the need for these spaces in terms of vulnerability and protection. Lactivism describes an individual or group of women breastfeeding in public in order to advocate for or raise awareness for its practice. By freely breastfeeding in public, women are engaging in 'everyday' activism:

" (a) disruption to the social order through day-to-day spatial practice... even for women committed to breastfeeding the experience of integrating it into one's preferred ways of engaging with the outside world was hard work" (Ibid, Boyer: P. 559)

Faeda Chatard Carpenter in "'(L)activists and Lattes": Breastfeeding Advocacy as Domestic Performance' articulates the performativity of the act of breastfeeding and its transformative potential. By bringing the 'domestic' into the 'public' lactivism breaks down the maternal binary of the holy act of breast feeding, versus the failing bottle-feeding mother. It destabilises heterosexist constructs & affirms:

"the socio-political power of galvanised mothering... The collective force of embodied mothers in the public sphere... it 're-casts' the role of mother by disrupting notions of motherhood as inherently acquiescent to patriarchal structures" (2006: p. 361).

Carpenter goes on to note the intersection of class-agency-privilege in relation to women's feelings about and practice of breastfeeding. She describes the discomfort many women (and men) feel seeing breasts in a nursing context due to the way our culture persistently associates breasts with sex and portrays them as highly sexual in media and public discourse.

Carpenter discusses how the performance of motherhood must be both perfect and invisible. The act of breastfeeding – its convergence of flesh, bodily fluids, and fulfilment of basic needs through the body, with public space- is a significant challenge to practice and maintain this fiction of motherhood as sanitised, 'under control' and 'under the radar'. Breastfeeding is therefore highly emblematic of contemporary struggles in motherhood

more broadly and a distinct practice of a maternal flaneuse. I consequently felt it was vital to include a discussion of the feminist literature on breastfeeding in this thesis and relate my personal experience of breastfeeding in public in chapter 4.

Breastfeeding described as an activity of the flaneuse has the opportunity to reveal a unique perspective on the (gendered) experience of the city and of place. Necessarily involving stopping, slowing down, finding a seat and taking one's time, breastfeeding is quite at home even within the early idea of 'flaneur': one who dawdles and idles. I expand on these ideas further in chapters 3 and 4.

Part 2 | Creative Approaches

In this section I discuss works of influence and interest to my research approaches. Across the five years of PhD study, I explored a range of documentary practices. These included smartphone pictures and home movies; self-recorded observational film; conversations with a group of young mothers; sound recordings on my smartphone, and then on a 'proper' field recorder. I was led on co-created soundwalks with contributors; made 35mm film photography; wrote fieldnotes; directed my daughter's dad to film us; worked with a camera person to record observational footage; and, curated an exhibition and film screening. I outline these processes in chapter 2.

Included in this part of the chapter are a selection of works that have influenced and informed these practices, along with critical discussion to outline the reasons for choosing them for my research.

Beginning with documentary, I situate the creative practices used as part of this thesis in the context of other practitioners. I go on to discuss walking as both an art practice and a research method. Concluding this chapter, I explore photography, poetry and visual art that deals with the subject of motherhood.

Documentary

My approach to documentary practices in this project has evolved through iterations which I outline in detail in chapter two. These collective practices I propose to be an emotional thick description, as discussed earlier in this chapter, and to contribute to the field of feminist documentary and autoethnographic film.

Visual anthropologists value the use of film for its capacity to document, describe and observe human experience. Jason Throop considered differing scholars' understanding and use of 'experience'. He unpacks differing interpretations of it and proposes a balance between coherent and disjunctive modes of experience: background and foreground awareness, arguing for the inter-reflectiveness of these when considered by people retrospectively (Throop, 2003).

Like Favero (2018) and MacDougall (2006), previously discussed, Throop champions the use of video to record everyday interactions to capture 'pre-reflective, real-time unfolding of social action'; a challenge with most other research methods (Ibid: p. 234-5). In essence, Throop highlights how filming uniquely records an immediacy and urgency of people being in the world; their reactions and first thoughts, their impulses and mannerisms. This quality of observational film is central to why I love it as a practice.

Grimshaw and Ravetz are visual anthropologists who have advocated for the contemporary reimagining of observational cinema within the discipline as a way to work to decolonise anthropology and move away from a one directional study of the 'other'. They explore ways of breaking down dichotomies between films considered visual ethnography, and films considered worthy of dissemination beyond the academy for their aesthetic and storytelling qualities (2009). My film practice is informed by my training in visual anthropology, but also as a self-taught photographer and I share the goals of Grimshaw and Ravetz to emancipate ethnographic film from its problematic and restrictive past. I have always favoured image-making with as little technological interference as possible, where my presence with the camera is non-intrusive and promotes dialogue with contributors. I favour an approach with minimal intervention or set up, taking my lead from a contributor, and following what unfolds. I am also interested in the aesthetic quality of my work so that I see it being possible to create knowledge through documentary

storytelling, while pushing the boundaries and exploring the form of observational film as a reflexive process.

An example of this approach that has influenced *Bearing*, the film work created for this PhD, is Kirsten Johnson, a cinematographer. Her directorial debut, *Cameraperson* (2016), is a non-narrative feature film created with footage shot throughout her career. The film is a series of seemingly unrelated vignettes curated together to say something both about the human condition and the reflexivity and authorial role of a filmmaker. In some scenes, Johnson includes the setting up of the shot within the vignette or the sound of her reaction behind the camera, which would ordinarily be edited out. This honesty about the humanity, authorship and responsibility of a filmmaker creates a provoking subplot within a film that already includes footage from war zones, Guantanamo Bay and an abortion clinic.

The work of Kim Longinotto has been an ongoing influence to me as a filmmaker with her observational, unobtrusive, raw approach and her focus on women's stories. Longinotto's work has emotional qualities and like Johnson, a compassionate treatment of the contributors in her work (Larke-Walsh, 2019). Stories told by and about women in this style are a rich contribution to feminist documentary. These are important examples that speak to issues raised by feminist film theorists such as Laura Mulvey (1975) addressing the male gaze, Kaja Silverman (1988) seeking the authorial voice of women in cinema, and Barbara Creed, (1993) on psychoanalysis and the stereotyping of 'mad' women on screen.

"Because the sort of films that I'm interested in making involve people really enjoying being in the film. It's about being heard. It's about being valued. I'm going on a journey, and I want them to do it with me." (Longinotto in Hynes, 2015)

The French filmmaker Agnes Varda's work across her career, and particularly her documentary films, has been concerned with place, and grounded in her femaleness as a director (Ince, 2012). An outspoken feminist and critic, Varda's film work is both observational, in the ethnographic sense, and aesthetically structured with the poetry of the image at the fore- qualities in filmmaking my own work aspires to. Reviewing Varda's collected work, Ince draws on phenomenological theory to unpack Varda's feminist approach to her work- principally the way her images are haptic and focus on the sensory

(2012). Varda often positions herself in her own work- *The Gleaners and I* (2000, France), and, *Beaches of Agnes* (2008, France), to name two works. By making herself as the author, visible, she not only raises the profile of the film explicitly authored by a woman, but emplaces herself in the landscapes of her work, reflexivity that creates intimacy and trust with the audience.

This project was influenced in its early stages by the growing canon of interactive documentary film. I am inspired by trans-media works such as *Learning to Love You More* (July, 2002); *Secret Injustices* (Sharon Daniel, 2016); *Door into the Dark* (Rose & Abdalla, 2014); and *Question Bridge* (2012, Johnson et al.). Close influences, in particular, are both the *Quipu Project* (2015, Chaka Studio, Brown & Tucker et al.) in the clever transformation of analogue accessible technology (a phone) into a beautiful online project connecting remote women in Chilean communities and, *The Worry Box Project* (Lusztig, 2011) an online documentary of mothers worries and dreams.

Bearing contributes to an apparently small number of autoethnographic films and projects about maternal experience. *Atomised Mothers* by Michal Nahman (2015, UK) also documents maternal isolation and the social challenges of new motherhood in a middle-class community. *The Black Motherhood Project* (Iwu, 2021 forthcoming USA) is a new documentary using personal stories of the filmmakers and a crew comprising entirely of black women and non-binary filmmakers. The film is set to examine the experience of black mothers in the US around stereotyping and the effects of racism and trauma on how black women mother.

Irene Lusztig took her own autobiographical responses to motherhood and shared them as part of a call to action for mothers to share their worries in *The Worry Box Project*:

“Posited against a contemporary motherhood culture that has become relentlessly optimistic and positive, the virtual worry box provides a safe public space for women to express private worries and negative feelings about motherhood, a taxonomy of our shared fears... The translation of invisible anxiety into material object articulates a polyvocal narrative space of women’s experience that is both intimate and communal” (Lusztig 2010).

Lusztig uses the very public space of online to bring the interior worlds of mothers together in a simple, tactile and intimate way. Her analogue approach- using handwritten notes on small rolls of paper; a real wooden box to keep them in, and an interface that is like the interior of a treasure chest or your mother's jewellery box- gives the piece a feeling of solidity, safety for the worries kept there. This design protects the anonymity and confidentiality of participants wishing to contribute their own worries and enables the piece to be an ongoing participatory project. This approach presumably does not incur huge costs or ethical minefields in order to continue.

Lusztig's choice not to use visual representations of mothers and their children can be seen as deliberate in the work's focus on interior thinking, identity and the mental wellbeing in motherhood. This approach could be seen as a rejection of the canon of normative representations of mothers in the history of art and visual culture more generally (Pollock, 1988). I also hoped to emulate this lightness of touch treatment of a counter-narrative to normative depictions of motherhood for my own approach.

Also demonstrating the desired tactility of a sensory documentary, is *The Quipu Project* (2015- ongoing). Using specially installed analogue, public telephones in remote Chilean villages; *The Quipu Project* allows women whom the government has forcibly sterilised to tell their stories and listen to the stories of other women with shared experiences through the direct phone line. The phone is also hooked up to *The Quipu Project* website, where we are able to listen to the stories being shared. We also have the opportunity to 'take action' by leaving a written message for the women; volunteering to translate testimony; donate money or sign an amnesty petition.

I wish to situate my work within discussions and thinking around 'living documentary' (Sandra Gaudenzi, 2013) and 'documentary ecosystems' (Jon Dovey, 2012); as well as engaging with the debates in art theory such as relational aesthetics, as highlighted and debated by Grant Kester in *Conversation Pieces* (2004) and Claire Bishop in *Artificial Hells* (2012).

I came to think about the flaneuse through walking activities as a mother and in my exploration of walking as a research method. In this section, I outline the field of walking using soundwalks. A soundwalk is an established medium in art practice, where audio recordings are made while walking. For example, the artist Richard Long has been dedicated to walking as his primary medium since the early 1960s, using maps, photographs and sculpture to communicate the different walks he has curated (Solnit, 2001: p. 271). Walking has increasing use in ethnographic studies (Pink, 2015: p. 181). For example, Butler (2006) a cultural geographer, explored soundwalks and pointed to their capacity for combining and exploring place and mobility through a connected embodiment of the walkers. He identified the soundwalks distinct capacity for the prompting of embodied and sensory memory. This embodied and affective experience is intrinsic to emotional description and memory in motherhood experience in place.

The idea of moving through place and responding to place as I moved through it seemed an important thing to document in some way. Photography combined with sound adds to the storying of a walk and conversation, capturing the idea of a place coming 'into existence around the perceiver' (Ingold, 2000). The use of a soundwalk also speaks directly to the world of the flaneuse. This method offers opportunities for reflection as I walk through a place that was familiar to me, reflecting on days spent walking there before, but also things I hadn't noticed previously and emotions that came up through this process.

The corporeal experience of motherhood and its interchange with, and capacity for placemaking, is at the heart of this thesis' knowledge-making. Walking as ethnography prioritises the body as a site of knowing and experience. Concurrent with texts above, which discuss autoethnography's capacity to convey nuance and multi-layered nodes of subjectivity, soundwalks advocate an intimacy both with subject-matter and the reflexivity of the researcher's somatic experience of the ethnographic field they are working in as live and relevant 'data'.

"Embodied learning should be understood as physiological as well as cognitive and affective changes. Analysis does not just happen in our heads but involves all our corporeality" (Pink, 2015 p.142)

Saunders and Moles (2016) study into audio walks found their effectiveness at capturing emotion in contributors' responses, as well as the walk being not just a route or path on a journey but a process of becoming itself. Audio walks as: "*processes replete with multiple pasts, presents and futures*" (Ibid).

In Myers "Conversive Wayfaring" (2010), an audio walk is a co-production. I found the soundwalks co-creative attributes important for reflexivity in research with my contributors. It was important for me as the media maker and 'caller to action' to be guided and directed by the contributor. I was guided physically and also guided by contributors in the direction and nature of the conversation. Being guided could be seen as a way of delegating agenda setting, as Mandy Rose discusses in relation to participatory interactive documentaries such as *Question Bridge* (2012- ongoing), a multi-media documentary that has audio testimony at its heart (Rose, 2014).

Soundwalks necessitate sound recording, and as well as being an ethnographic experience or even performative ethnography themselves, they result in sound works with their own parallel and divergent creative meanings and aesthetics. Gallagher and Prior's work on 'sonic geographies' have identified three ways in which audio recordings work in ethnographic research: 'as capture and reproduction; as representation; and as performance' (2014: p. 8).

The visual anthropologist Andrew Irving's work has focused on people's 'interior dialogue' when walking through places. His work has focused on New York, the US and Manchester, UK. Giving participants voice recorders to talk into as they wander the city, Irving wanted to get close to the inner thoughts people have as they go about their day and enquire whether place was in any way a provocation to these thoughts (2011).

Art, film and motherhood

I believe increasingly that only the willingness to share private and sometimes painful experience can enable women to create a collective description of the world which will truly be ours. Adrienne Rich (1977, p.16)

It is useful to examine the representation of motherhood in art and visual culture in terms of the gaze and power. Acknowledging the work of art and film historians Linda Nochlin (1991), Laura Mulvey (1972), and John Berger (1972). Art that explores and documents contemporary mother experience, re-examining gaze, power, the body and identity has had a resurgence in recent years, with the artist and curator Natalie Loveless terming this new field *New Maternalisms* (2012). Using her own breastmilk in her performative art, Loveless is amongst artists such as those exhibiting at *Project Afterbirth* who are responding across art forms to the adverse conditions of contemporary parenthood.

“The contrast between the representation of pregnancy, birth and new parenthood in the media and our actual lived experiences is starker than ever before, and we are convinced this plays a big part in the increasing sense of isolation felt by 21st century parents and in the rise in perinatal mental health problems of mothers and fathers.” (Oshin and Jager, curators of *Project Afterbirth*, 2015)

The canon of maternal feminist film and related media is epitomised by the work of those such as filmmaker Joanna Davis and others from the Four Corners collective founded in London in the 1970s. Davis’s experimental film *Often During the Day* (1979), examines the minutia of women’s domestic habits and routines in the home. Work by photographer Jo Spence (1988 & 1991) exploring and critiquing the genre of domestic photography and family memory and her own self-portraiture, often using domestic photography archive, were cornerstones for me in exploring my own photography practice.

More recently, photographic artist Arpita Shah’s *Nalini* (ongoing, UK) is an exploration of motherhood over three generations in her family crossing three continents. Karolina Cwik’s raw and uncompromising images of domestic life with her children *Don’t Look at Me* (2021, Czech Republic) have startling similarity to my own photographs made as part of this research.

Portrait work by photographers Sally Mann, Diane Arbus and Francesca Woodman have been long term inspirations on my photography practice. Margaret Mitchell’s photographic essays *Family* (1994) and *In This Place* (2016-17) also chime with my own

photography for this research as personal accounts of her sister and her children living on a housing estate in Scotland. These images echo the work of photographer Sally Mann, (1992), who is known for her confronting and candid fine art photographs of her children growing up in rural America. Both photographers address not only the mundanity of domestic life, but convey the emplaced experience of motherhood and childhood through their striking portraiture. There is reflexivity in the pictures between the artist and her children. Mann shoots using large format, many of the images are semi-set up, and she asks her children to 'hold still'. *Immediate Family* (1992) received significant media attention because of the images of Mann's children naked. Some commentators viewed the images as objectifying or even pornographic, and others seeing the work an important document exploring how '*notions of public and private are negotiated through photography*' (Parsons 2008). These negotiations and concerns are relevant to images I have made of my daughter, and I discuss these tensions further in Chapters 3 and 4.

Domestic photography in the 21st century is not found in a shoebox on top of the wardrobe but on the iPhone and stored in the cloud. Documenting of domestic life and childrens' milestones are a ubiquitous feature of social media, as are mother blogs; websites such as Mumsnet, and facebook groups which document every flavour and niche of parenting. My research intends to bring together photography that moves from the smartphone to portraiture, which I discuss further in chapter two.

The visual artist Tracy Emin has inspired me since I first became aware of art at school. Her autobiographical approach, flagrant vulnerability and unflinching storytelling around womanhood continue to compel me. Ongoing theme in Emin's work are motherhood, madness, relationships, sex, and the body. Her visceral and sensory approaches to documenting the embodied experience of womanhood- addressing taboos of sexuality, abortion, promiscuity, rape, being single and loneliness, make her work a creative context to my own.

Emin curates her art through her life and her life through her art. Working across a range of mediums and regularly using objects and artefacts from her life she uses authenticity, tactility and sensual treatments of her life experiences. Much of her work is situated, or emplaced (See Howes, 2005 and Aston, 2018) in some way in that it interacts with the

places she has positioned it - for example in the series *Baby Things* (2008), she places tiny bronze sculptures of often-found baby objects around Margate. For *My Bed* (1998) and *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With* (1995) Emin creates a place with the works themselves. Drawings are thematically grouped together often with artefacts- for example, used pregnancy tests. The raw, sketchy and realist way Emin depicts her body give the images an explicit edge in the context of normative depictions of women's bodies and sexuality (Corris et. al, 2011).

Mary Kelly's work *Post Partum Document* (1973) is a raw and confronting commentary on the maternal, emerging out of the feminist movement of the 1970s. Kelly's meticulous documenting of child artefacts and milestones explored the mother-child relationship. The work provided a challenge to the depiction of mothers within art history and the role, character, and status of the 'mother-as-artist'. Provoking controversy with its attendance to the domestic reality of being a mother and the minutia of child development, *Post Partum Document* opened a space for women artists to explore the subject of motherhood in more subversive and confrontational ways.

The design of *Post Partum Document* was a visual diary over the first five years of Kelly's child's life. This consistent, ritual documenting can be seen as a way to make sense of motherhood, a resistance to its hegemonic norms and representations and a forging of a unique mother identity. Kelly's attendance to the domestic actions of motherhood, changing nappies, teaching to read, highlight the centrality of work to the lived experience of motherhood.

The work of Lenka Clayton: *Residency in Motherhood* (2012-2014), is a contemporary example of exciting new work responding to artists such as Kelly in its focus on mothers experience of everyday life. Clayton plays with the exclusion of women from the culture of practicing artists, having created the 'residency' in her own home:

"Lenka Clayton is the official Artist in Residence in Motherhood, a conceptual artist residency which takes place inside her own home and life as a mother. This website documents the 227 day residency." (Lenka Clayton from

residencyinmotherhood.com From *Things Found in the Mouths of Babies* series
(Lenka Clayton & collaborators)

Poetry

I find my work responding directly to poetry, and see the work created for this project having a poetic sensibility. Collections published on motherhood in recent years, speak with feminist force and sensorial beauty of the shock, joy and madness of having a baby (See: *Moon Milk* Rachel Bower (2018); *Ten Poems About Babies* ed. Imtiaz Dharker (2015); *Three Poems* Hannah Sullivan (2018) to name just a few). They share a deeply compelling voice, frank, often unsettling and sketch the complexity of motherhood experience. This frankness is found particularly in Holly McNish's debut collection *Nobody Told Me* (2016), where she documents her experience of becoming a mother for the first time. Her writing is recognisable, a solace, in its autobiographic tangibility and spoken-word cadence, and through the form itself- poems; vignettes that suit the rhythm, distractibility, absurdity and poignancy of motherhood, accompanied by fieldnotes from McNish's daily life with her daughter.

Liz Berry evokes the landscape of motherhood in *The Republic of Motherhood*, the surreal dreamscape she creates speaks to the new 'kingdom' women enter when their baby is born. In this poem and others in the same collection, Berry writes insistent imagery, capturing the loneliness and isolation of motherhood. She paints motherhood as its own landscape, its own place- a place we 'cross the border' into; a new territory we find ourselves to inhabit, but more than inhabits us- we are put to work in it, there are rules and regulations we did not know of, the territory of our bodies leads us rather than us leading it, as we did before we were mothers. The protagonist in her poem *becomes* a mother as she walks- I see her as a maternal flaneuse.

CHAPTER 2

Research Practices

In this chapter, I will describe what I did throughout the PhD study to undertake the intended research and how the research project has evolved from September 2015 to February 2020. The process of creating the resulting creative practice works from this project, and concurrently the thinking and academic work that has ran alongside these has been iterative and reflexive.

The first part of this chapter is a piece of reflective writing from key milestones in the evolution of the research, discussing my experience of doing the PhD with personal musings and contributions. These fieldnotes are marked by italics. This autoethnographic text is itself a method in this research project in processing and reflecting on the creative works, the PhD process and my life being a mother. In journal format, this opening section- *What I Did*- fleshes out the rationale for the choices of methods in relation to my own experience of motherhood, and motherhood as a doctoral researcher. As an autoethnography of my own life experience, I feel this personal insight is important and necessary to be contained within the body of the thesis (Ellis, in Mulvey, 2013).

In the second part of the chapter – *Method*- I outline how I came to understand my process and approach as emotional thick description through iterative practices. My concept of emotional thick description as a feminist visual ethnography seeks to extend the debates in visual anthropology around the efficacy and value of the moving image in ethnography.

My approach can be viewed as an extension of sensory ethnography where the instinct to document is led by feelings and emotions rather than thoughts and narrative plans. Importantly, this approach centralises reflexivity in ethnography and politicises the gaze by turning the camera on myself rather than the 'other'. Furthermore, by making emotionality and feeling central to my knowledge making I disrupt ideas about empirical knowledge-making in anthropology (and the broader social sciences) being about comparative studies of objective behaviour and making observations about others. I emphasise the somatic being central to understanding women's experience and the need to make space for this

experience socially and politically as well as in the academy (see Trinh T. Minh Hah, 1989 and her film *Reassemblage*, USA, 1982).

The Methods section of this chapter is structured chronologically, attributing a different creative approach to characterise each year of study over the four years, outlining the practices and approaches I undertook. Throughout the chapter, I use visual examples from the photography and film practice work to illustrate the ways I approached this feminist visual ethnography of motherhood.

In collating these personal media artefacts as a documentary practice, I also reflect here on the affects of using my own life experience in the research. By presenting media from my creative practice here along with commentary, I demonstrate the benefits of this approach in creating authentic, reflexive work. I discuss the associated costs and burdens, as emotion work, when using personal experience in art and research.

WHAT I DID

FIELDNOTES

How to find a form for the collective account of the sensory experience of early motherhood (original thesis title)

January 2018

This project began on the move; maybe in the car, maybe walking with a sling or pushing a buggy. I can't remember the exact day, but I can remember the rush of feeling and excitement describing the idea to my daughter's dad Rory. He had just begun working at his first job as a town planner for nine months or so, and I was trying to persuade him to apply for a PhD. I thought this would mean he would be around at home more to share the care of our 9-month-old baby. The idea was- what would the urban landscape and even architectural design be like if the needs of babies and young children, and the people that cared for them in those spaces (mainly women) were taken into account? What does feminist planning look like? How do the unique corporeal needs of women and children

get fulfilled when / while we engage with and traverse the lived environment? How does place affect the experience of motherhood?

Researching my own idea for a PhD proposal, it turned out that this was the subject that I wanted to explore myself. I didn't need to be a town planner- I was a mother and a film maker and proposing a cross-disciplinary study of this subject really excited me. My excitement grew, fuelled by lots of coffee drunk in cafes that became my make-shift office where I took time out from mothering duties, when I started to think about the possibilities for this idea to be told as stories through an interactive documentary. The focus on place seemed to open up many possibilities for an interactive piece- either web-based, or an immersive installation that was site-specific, that took up space in place, drawing attention to the environment in a way that conveyed mother experience in that space.

Having been offered AHRC funded PhD places at both Sheffield Hallam and UWE, I decided to take up the Bristol offer- the draw of the expertise of the supervisors, the research centre and the adventure. I moved with my family down to rural Somerset, not finding an affordable house to buy or rent in the areas of Bristol we liked and then thinking we may as well try out living the rural dream seeing as we were making a big move anyway. Ha! The plan being to commute into Bristol to work with other UWE PhD students. I commuted into Bristol a day a week to hot desk in the Pervasive Media Studio and worked at home on other days balanced around my daughter. A had started to go to nursery for the first time now that I had started the PhD. I was no longer a stay at home mum! Although, I was still mainly staying at home, and the research and reading was about motherhood.

My PhD application proposed that I would explore the different iterations and forms that an interactive documentary could take in documenting the sensory experience of early motherhood, with a co-creative element at its heart. I wanted to record a range of mothers' testimony on their experiences in place as mothers, particularly around mental wellbeing, identity and the body.

The original idea for this work was ambitious: multi-noded, taking both digital and analogue forms. I felt the stories from this work could fit into multiple formats- film, photography, pod-cast, sensory installation and online idoc. I also intended the work to be

co-created, an ensemble piece where women contributed their own testimony facilitated by an artist intervention, a unique call to action that would invite a contribution from them about their own experience of motherhood. Finding a unique 'hook' or format for an artist intervention for contributors, proved very difficult, and I was really stuck on this up until the beginning of year three of my project. I was not sure whether or not the work would be designed as a living documentary so that audiences could also contribute their own stories through the work's interface design, or through social media.

There was initially no budget for the creation of any of these approaches, and balancing doing a full time PhD with a baby, aged 15 months when I started, meant that there were also serious time and energy constraints in terms of the reach of the project. As something of a dreamer at heart, it took me a while to come to terms with the fact that this piece of work was going to have to be much simpler and less ambitious technically. I also needed to think of ways to include a co-creative approach in the research design as this element was very important to me from the inception of the research.

My initial research design proposed that I make a short piece of work about myself that I could use to show other research participants. I decided on a short film and some photography to demonstrate my approach in terms of the methods I was going to use and to share my own experience of motherhood with research participants. The intention was to reassure through a willingness to disclose my own difficult experiences, initiate conversation on shared experience and create more of a mutual atmosphere in approaching the recording of other women's experience.

I began making observational recordings at home when I could- frustratingly, this came to be infrequently due to a lack of access to camera equipment, the challenges of filming my own life and the belief that this approach was somehow not really 'work'. I also felt what I was recording would be boring to others, was trite and 'worthy', and almost indistinguishable to making a home movie. There was also no differentiation from what was work and what was home, and having been really looking forward to starting my PhD and getting something of a break from the monotony of the home-life I sought to research, I found myself feeling more trapped than ever. Not only was I still stuck in the daily grind

of motherhood and domestic chores I was having to intellectualise them, find aesthetic and storytelling merit in them, and observe myself from both the inside and the outside.

I had not made any creative work since before my daughter was born and had a huge case of imposter syndrome- both on an academic front- fearing my lack of ability to bring all the strands of my project together, and particularly as an artist, a filmmaker- I felt like I had only just started to explore my authorship and approach to making and needed a chance to experiment.

In undertaking doctoral study, the idea that I was doing a P H D made me feel like there wasn't room for making mistakes, experimentation, being unsure, or things going wrong. At this point, I didn't have the confidence in myself to fail or sort of understood that the PhD itself was a forum for exploring my methods and ideas- I didn't need to make something perfect in year one. Thinking about my practice work became an ongoing existential nightmare, and impacted on the postnatal depression and anxiety I was trying to overcome, and to much extent this impact remains even as I write this, as I go over it all.

Trying to grasp and carve out my theoretical approaches seemed like an easier thing to focus on, so much of first and into second year was concerned with thrashing this out. This review of the literature was two-pronged- reviewing visual and artworks, and reading academic texts. Unearthing the canon of mother artists, interactive documentaries and observational filmmakers I admired.

This review of the literature also involved engaging with art criticism and theory, phenomenology and delving into the field of feminist geography. I was led into feminist geography through scholarship from women's studies and health around breastfeeding- particularly in public- and found a rich corner of this field that has been exploring the ways motherhood practices and experiences are interrelated to place, environment, citizenship, community and landscape. Focus on place and also on the more untold experiences of motherhood led me to choose walking as a method for research- walking conversations in specific places to reflect, ramble and recall. These were recorded using only audio with a few accompanying photographs so as to be as uninterrupted and facilitate as candid

conversation as possible. This method also fed into the wish to create a sensory account - by breaking down the methods of documenting into their component parts of sound, stills, moving image so as not to overwhelm contributors but also to emphasise the sensory experience each treatment offered.

Having discounted the filming and photography I had been doing at home as 'not good enough' and being hyper-aware of my own privilege as a white, middle class cis-gendered woman, I felt 'there's no story to tell here'. Feeling too shy to show this work to my supervisory team thinking it would reveal I had been doing 'nothing,' I decided to look outwards for 'real' experiences of motherhood. Amongst this internal narrative about the work I was making at home, my partner and I had decided to move back to Sheffield to reconnect with our support networks there, feeling isolated and financially stretched living in the South West.

My first research participants I found back home in Sheffield and were a group of young women working with the charity YASY - Youth Association of South Yorkshire. I attended a group of young mothers YASY MAMS, an educational and outreach project which provided free childcare to mothers 19 and under while they attended the group. I talked to them about my experience of motherhood, what I did as a filmmaker and showed them my first film CAILLEACH. I worked alongside their project worker Jason for a number of weeks, mainly just chatting and getting to know them. I then did audio recordings with two of the women, unstructured conversations about the experience of becoming a mother and early motherhood. Contact with this group ended when Jason, the project leader lost his funding and the group no longer had time to accommodate me. At this point we had some photography workshops planned- a morning taking photos using smartphones in the city centre.

From YASY I connected with one particular woman, C, who I went on to do some observational filming with. Contact with C dwindled (but remained positive when I did hear from her) over the course of six months after she cancelled a number of arrangements to meet, and then stated she was too busy to continue to take part as her son was unwell.

My second approach to working with participants developed alongside my interest in exploring an idea of the mother flaneuse and in using walking alongside audio recordings to obtain testimony. I wanted to bring place and narrative together. I arranged soundwalks with four women- N / R / T / V - each in a place / a route of their choosing. I took a few photos alongside the audio recordings.

At this point (autumn 2017) in the PhD my mental wellbeing had started to deteriorate, and I was struggling to see the bigger picture of the PhD process in terms of where I had come from and where I was going. Having discounted a large body of my own work as unusable or not good enough and feeling that I had failed in my intention to make an interactive documentary as I had set out to, I couldn't see what it was I was making or how I was going to bring the material together. I was also finding the working conditions of the PhD- working on my own all the time with little structure to my week- challenging. I had become a single mum in March that year and had had to adapt to living on my own, which I found very lonely. This change in circumstances triggered memories and feelings which overwhelmed me.

The material that was being disclosed in the audio walks with mothers- such as suicidal thoughts- was often quite heavy and again triggering of my own thoughts and experiences of early motherhood. I found my role in relation to participants hard to get a handle on and intangible- was I an artist, a filmmaker or academic researcher, or a mother; a contemporary; a friend... a confidante? I was some of all of these and this made it hard to explain to participants what the work was about or for, and, as at this point I wasn't sure myself. I did not feel secure and stable enough in myself, or confident in the work I was making to continue this process of recording with other women- but I also felt like I had failed, and was being lazy or would be 'found out' if I admitted the extent to which I was finding all of this a challenge. It is only writing retrospectively and from a much healthier state of mind that I can narrate this experience as at the time the feeling was just of being stuck, feeling completely overwhelmed and hating what I was doing.

FIELDNOTES

Redefining the PhD July 2018

From February to end of May 2018 I was away from my PhD having taken a suspension of study due to severe stress and anxiety. This breakdown was caused by a number of factors in my personal life but contributing to this was the pressure I found in working with and documenting the experiences of other mothers as part of my PhD research. My role when working with women for the research was quite mixed and unclear given the interdisciplinary nature of my research and approach. I felt unclear whether I was a filmmaker, researcher, peer and on a couple of occasions friend / acquaintance. The conversational approach to the audio walks I was undertaking meant this included a certain amount of self-disclosure about my own experience of postnatal depression and the struggles I had had as a new mother. The original intention in my research design was to share my own experience as a way to destabilise the researcher / subject power dynamic, to approach the work as a co-creative, collective account; and, to help build rapport with contributors. The intimate nature of the material and conversational approach was challenging in terms of boundaries between myself and the contributors. The material was often triggering to hear first-hand, but also to listen over and over again to, in playing the recordings back to edit and analyse the content.

The working day of a PhD students- large amounts of time spent alone, and working from home was also a contributing factor to the distress I was already experiencing. The existential nature of any PhD project, especially one related so closely to my own experience and life, created a feeling of both isolation and claustrophobia, which was not a healthy working life, especially for someone experiencing anxiety. With this in mind, I have now changed my working practices to work outside of the home more and connect with other PhD students in Sheffield.

In returning to my PhD study in June 2018, I suggested some changes to the research practice output, focusing on an autoethnographic enquiry rather than a collective account and I discuss this further in the text below. This has enabled me to have more control over both my time and the story I tell as an 'emotionally thick description' of my own experience of motherhood and place. Autoethnography is both process and product, the method and methodology that underpins all the other theories and approaches I take from in seeking to expand knowledge on this subject.

Having viewed interactive and cross-platform works at Sheffield Documentary Film Festival this June, I began to think more about who the audience are for my film and photography work, and where I see this work being available. All the works were on display in Sheffield's central Millennium Gallery. This highlighted to me the inaccessibility of some of these pieces, and my feeling that a cinema screen is something more tangible and comprehensible to a wider audience. This reminded me that despite any motivations to enact social change, inspire debate, empower the community of mothers I am part of, normalise breastfeeding or whatever, that I still very much need to consider an audience and the experience of storytelling at the heart of my work.

*The interactivity that defines the work I am making will therefore not necessarily be in its presence online, or in a clever interface or potential for user engagement. Viewing Sharon Daniel's piece *Undoing Time* as part of this exhibition at Doc/Fest was informative in this way. The gallery was loud and busy, so I couldn't hear very well through the one set of headphones. There was a queue of other 'audience' 'users' 'viewers' (I am not sure what we were), while I was watching and listening to the work so I felt under pressure and couldn't concentrate properly. I had to sit on the floor as there was no chair and I couldn't see the screen too well straining my neck. There was an American flag which was part of the exhibit, but it just seemed like an inanimate artefact, a gimmick that served to draw the audience attention to the work as being cross-platform, or tactile or immersive and resulted in feeling self-conscious. Overall, it didn't seem to work, even though the subject- long-term incarceration- was compelling.*

The main thing to say is that what I discovered in re-framing the focus of the PhD back to my own experience was that I actually had a fairly solid body of work documenting this through photography, film and audio recordings. Discovering this was a real confidence boost and also revealed something significant about the way women artists, mother artists, people with mental health issues, women in academia- devalue and discredit their own work as irrelevant and not good enough. The subject matter of my work being strongly domestic and autobiographical made me feel that it was not good art and that it was boring, saccharine, mawkish. Comparing myself to other filmmakers and contemporaries, the subject of motherhood seemed to be parochial.

Choosing motherhood as a subject to make documentary work about when networking at Docfest in particular, didn't feel sexy, edgy, radical or relevant to the people I talked to. It was not a ground breaking VR project or using some new technology. Part of this was the position I found myself in as an anomaly among artists and creatives of my age (mid 30s) in that I had a child- so many people are delaying having children or choosing not to have them, particularly in the arts. Among my own friends, I am one of two people who have had a child. This started to make me wonder who I was making this work for and who was going to watch it. This is still something I wonder about.

Despite this, rediscovering and affirming autoethnography as my focus as an outcome of this period of worry and confusion about my work, was really positive. My observational film and photography also became really clear as a focus for the work. It was then exciting to start editing together a film with an editor and to film extra bits of footage to make the rushes I had work as a sensory document of my mother experience. I worked with one of my research participants - R - to do a soundwalk, where she interviewed me as I took her on a tour of our neighbourhood. We used some of this audio within the first iteration of the film. Re-engaging with my own practice and becoming submerged in this was helped by studying other works of autobiography that I came across/rediscovered at this time, often concerned with personal narratives about distress or struggle, framed by place. For Allan Jenkins, his allotment as a lens to frame and story his childhood trauma in the care system; for Patti Smith, her life as an artist lived in cafes; for Sara Maitland, understanding her call to silence through remote landscape.

+++

METHOD

Ethics

The ethics submission for this project can be found in the Appendix. This document was drawn up in the first year of study in coordination with the university ethics committee, who provided valuable feedback on the draft document. As previously stated, the original premise of this study was to focus on the testimony and storytelling of mother contributors

alongside documenting my own experience. The original ethics document reflects this intention and remained relevant for the work that I did do with mothers as an iteration of the research practice method. The testimony from, and images of these women was not part of the final presentation of this project but still informed its development. Participants were informed that their contribution was part of an iterative process and would not form part of an end 'product' or set of research findings.

An ethics update was made to consider the way I had included and documented my daughter in this research project, taking into account her welfare and consent. This update also noted her father's permission for me to include both himself and her in the photographic, film, audio and written work for this PhD. See Appendix.

As outlined in Chapter 3: 'The Maternal Flaneuse', the emotional responses I have had in listening to other women's stories and becoming caught in a panopticon in revisiting my own, was part of the rationale to change the approach of this study.

Documenting my own turbulent experience of early motherhood has had consequences for my mental health that I did not foresee at the inception of this project and was therefore not part of the original ethics submission. Drawing on the work of Ruth Behar (1996) and others, I explore the entanglement of motherhood, ethnography and mental health further in Chapter 4.

Research Design

The research design for this project evolved throughout my studies. It was iterative and reflexive, responsive to my personal capacity for self-exploration and introspection on motherhood experience. Beginning with wide-ranging and ambitious intentions, I have gradually honed and refined my topic through study and understanding of texts both written, audio and visual on motherhood experience. My objective was always to approach the research iteratively, and this framework has allowed the work to grow in the way it has from an interactive documentary ensemble piece; to a sensory, visual autoethnography of motherhood realised through the documentary film and photography work that adjoin this thesis.

Necessarily as an autoethnography this research interrogates, reflects and analyses my own experience. While I see my work as a contribution to wider contemporary conversations and debates about the experience of modern western motherhood; and hope that this interrogation of my own individual experience will speak to and convey more universal truths about the vexed state of motherhood, I understand that ultimately I can speak only for myself and provide this emotionally thick description as a contribution to wider scholarship and artistic expressions of the maternal.

The research design has also responded to the fine-tuning of my research questions, which probe the topic of motherhood across disciplines from feminist thought, the social sciences and art/film practice. Bringing these disciplines together has been part of the project of this thesis in synergising sensorial ways to understand and represent the daily lived experience of motherhood. From this multidisciplinary approach came my concept of a maternal flaneuse, as a way to bring together ideas on mothers place in the world, the visual image of mothers in place, along with a radical critique of the flaneur to draw attention to the ways in which mothers are not able to move with ease and abandon through our streets, parks and city centres- both physically; and figuratively.

Throughout the PhD, I have remained committed to approaching the research through multi-noded practices by deconstructing documentary practices to intensely experience the various components of 'visual media' or 'film practice' from the point of view of the senses and the corporeal. Therefore, sound, moving image, photographic stills, and walking have all been approached as independent practices and then brought together in the final piece of film work. This film – entitled *Bearing* is a 28-minute documentary. The photography work was exhibited under the same name, the exhibition opening at the same time as the film was screened and included over 50 images. These comprised colour images taken on a smartphone and black and white 35mm film portraits. These approaches speak to the questions and topic of this enquiry in a haptic documenting of experiences and moments with whichever medium was most appropriate to use for a response at that time- be that of corporeal, emotional, social or intellectual mother experience.

Data Generation

The generation of data in this practice as research project is characterised as creative responses using documentary practices. Therefore, the data itself is materially made of photographs; sound recordings; film rushes; an edited film and reflective 'autoethnographic' writing, contained in this thesis.

These creative responses have been autobiographical and reactive to things happening in my daily life. Practice work has also been produced through preplanning; in some cases, as responses to the creative work of others, either audio/visual, photography or poetry. Film and photography responded in dialogue with work made earlier in the project, for example, smartphone photography foregrounding me taking 35mm film portraits, and the evolution of the final film edit through around three iterations of the final cut. In addition, soundwalks with contributors generated 'data', which I used to inform my understanding of motherhood experience and the idea of a maternal flaneuse. The format of the walks also inspired my creative practice in including a scene of a walk within the film and reexamining and thinking about my own walking experience with my daughter.

Year 1- Photography

The first year of the PhD creative practice was characterised predominantly by photography. I borrowed a DSLR camera from the university media stores and along with my iPhone, attempted to document daily life with my daughter, during this period aged 18 months – 2.5 years old. I intended to create a bank of images to use as example material to show to co-contributors, other mothers, in talking to them about mother-experience and as a call to action to generate their own creative responses. I was interested in the archive of baby pictures most parents carry around with them on mobile phones; the ways we relate to and within these images, and the stories behind the images.

Smartphone

Image redacted

Untitled – chair 1 (2014)

Image redacted

Untitled – chair 2 (2014)

At this point in the research I had not finalised my research design, and photo image-making was in the form of sketchbook working without having a direct focus. My intention was to make use of, and position the archive of baby photographs I had taken over the first 18 months of motherhood. I wanted to untangle the dichotomy of the way that motherhood is commonly documented in photographs and in the media, and its real-life experience. Domestic photography narrates early motherhood through multiple images of cute babies and their milestones in front of the camera. I felt the authentic representation of the experience of having and raising a baby was missing from these images created for public approval on social media and even family albums. This is perhaps a cynical assessment, as of course, I, along with most other parents wish to preserve the precious happy memories of my daughter growing up. As a documentarian, this one-sided aesthetic was at odds with my urge to uncover the unseen and speak the unspoken. Curating and using these images has been most interesting as I write up the thesis and reflect on the collected works retrospectively. As in these two images – Untitled chair 1, & 2- I oscillated between doting mum taking pictures for posterity to share with family, and photographer, trying to capture the realism of parenthood.

Personal Practice

While I worked on my research design and considered ways to work co-creatively and construct a call to action for the contributions of research participants, for my own pleasure, I took pictures of my daughter using my trusty Minolta x300 film SLR using black and white film. This practice had been neglected since I had been pregnant and when A was a small baby. These images were almost exclusively portraits of my daughter.

I did a small amount of 'self-observation filming using the DSLR I loaned from the university, mainly as an experiment. It was this footage that ended up forming the central motif in my final film piece, as the 'leaving the house' sequence (more below).

Year 2 – Documenting with contributors

In the second year of the project, I started to work with contributors. I identified women through informal networks of mums that I knew in Sheffield, and through contacting two local charities- Sheffield Light, providing support for women experiencing pre and postnatal mental health difficulties and YASY Mams (Youth Association of South Yorkshire), a youth project for teenage mothers. I approached Sheffield Light as I had experienced postnatal depression in A's first year, and I wanted to speak to other women who had shared this experience. I approached YASY as I was familiar with their work, having previously worked with young people experiencing homelessness and leaving custody in my first career. I knew that YASY did good work and wanted to include young women's experience of motherhood and explore how it was different or similar to my own.

I visited staff in both charities and discussed my project, providing them with information sheets approved through my ethics submission. Sheffield Light put me in contact with a handful of women who had said they would be willing to meet with me, and I worked with one woman, T, and did an soundwalk with her as a result of these discussions.

YASY connected me with their Mams group and I attended their weekly meetings over the course of three months. I gave two informal photography 'workshops' to the group; screened my film to the young women to give them an idea of my approach to filmmaking, and carried out two one-to-one audio 'conversations' with members of the group about their experience of early motherhood. One of these conversations was with C, who I went on to film observationally with on two occasions – once at a playgroup organised by YASY and another occasion at her home. I arranged a handful of follow up meetings with C to continue filming and suggested a soundwalk, but she cancelled these meetings at the last minute. I decided not to pursue this contributor further as she stated that her son was not well and it wasn't convenient at that time.

Soundwalks

I define a soundwalk as approached in this study, as a walk participated in by myself and a contributor where a conversation takes place during the walk, and is recorded (Pink 2008). As discussed in Chapter 1, this method is not only aesthetically appropriate to explore the

idea of a maternal flaneuse, but provides the opportunity of sensory data collection as well as ethnographic knowledge that is emplaced and in motion, responding to fluid surroundings (Paquette & McCartney, 2012). I proposed to contributors to the study that they choose any journey or place they associated with their experience of motherhood, and for us to walk there. I discuss the outcomes of these walks here and in Chapter 3.

The provenance of walking as research method hails from the field of psychogeography (Coverley, 2010) and is a method cited in *Sensory Ethnography* (Pink, 2008) and other anthropological ethnographies (see Irving, 2011). It is more recently being used therapeutically in psychotherapy as well as more informal support work across all areas of community development and mental health. (see Revell & McLeod, 2016 on 'Walk and Talk Therapy').

As an art practice itself, walking has grown from the lineage of the flaneur into various iterations including art practice exploring place and landscape (see work of Richard Long, 2015) and as a participatory, socially engaged medium (see the work of Lefkowitz, 2016) (Evans, 2012).

I chose this approach because it allowed me to be alongside my contributor rather than face to face- there is evidence to show that direct eye contact be confronting when talking about difficult subjects (Op. Cit. Revell & McLeod). I found the act of walking can also be an impetus for discussing, noticing and conversing. The embodied act of walking is both meditative and generative; it allows for a conversation to be 'held' in space, and, or offering a horizon and open space for difficult thoughts or conversations to dissipate into.

My intention to co-create and reduce the distance between researcher and contributor also aligned with the aesthetics of walking with bodies side by side, and the opportunity for (me), the researcher, to be led both physically and conversationally by the contributor.

From Audio Walks with Four Women in Sheffield

V – A walk-in Endcliffe Park, Ecclesall Road in Sheffield. An affluent predominantly white middle class neighbourhood and one of the most used parks in the city with paths through

woodland that lead out into the Peak District National Park. V is an old friend from Sheffield who I know through playing netball. At the time of the walk, she was 39 and had just had her second son, S.

T – A walk through neighbourhood of Sharrow along busy Abbeydale Road, through a playground and into the council flats where T lived when she had her first baby. Sharrow is a relatively deprived multicultural area just outside the city centre. I was introduced to T through Sheffield Light. T was a volunteer peer supporter with the charity, who had previously provided her with support around postnatal depression when her son was a baby.

R – A walk in the Peak District National Park, fifteen minutes drive from Sheffield along a track where R first came running when her son was a baby. R was a friend I made through spending time in my neighbourhood park with my baby, and we got talking in the 'dog free area' the first summer of our babies lives where we were both hanging out alone. R had moved to Sheffield while pregnant from New York with her husband and was new to the city when we met.

N – A walk through woodland behind N's house in Totley, an affluent area in South Sheffield. N was an acquaintance I knew through mutual friends who expressed an interest in taking part in the project when I bumped into her. She lived in a council house in this affluent suburb of Sheffield with her two daughters aged 4 and 10.

N

Totley, December 2017



I feel like I am... more comfortable being outside of the house and being relaxed with the kids than I am being somewhere busy. It's like an extra layer of stress... cos when they're smaller and it's busier, you're sort of very aware of how they are interacting with the environment and cars and other people, and getting out of people's way and all of that. And I don't think... I don't think people are very good at being around children; I think children [hiya (greet someone on our route)] ... I think children... A lot of the time, unless someone's got small children or have small children in their family, or have experience of them that's fairly current, people tend to forget that kids are just loud. They're loud, and they don't have particularly good motor control, all of that. They're just learning how to do things, and people get really annoyed really quickly. So I guess the closer I am around lots and lots of people, the more conscious I am of bothering other people... my children bothering other people. And I don't want to parent like that (laughs) I want them just to... you know, be ok to be kids... and when it's quieter, when we're walking in the woods, they can do that. (N)



T

Sharrow, November 2017



It was harder to get out, at first as you can probably see from all the steps and stuff, but erm, and I used to like [pause]... and I have memories of coming out here, just when R was tiny and just like thinking about jumping off... but I wasn't ever going to do it... [sighs] but, I found it quite hard to walk along here, cos that's... every time I would feel like that and I just remember feeling erm, like completely in despair I guess about everything. But which, you know, I had postnatal depression, PTSD type stuff from everything.



This location; once you can walk around [after birth] there's loads of cafes, parks... you can walk into town... I used to walk down... just, I used to just find something... I remember my Step Mum saying she used to just find an errand to do. I'd be like, so right I'm just going to go and buy some cotton wool balls or something and walk into town and go and get them, just for like... I don't know if it was freeing or, but it just felt a lot better than sitting at home struggling I guess. (T)



R

Burbage, January 2018



So this is the place where... where I finally felt like I was myself again. I was alone, I was being physical, and just the nature of running I was completely caught up in the present I think because... I think V was probably a year old at this point. And I hadn't really been a part from him at all...not a night, not a... whatever just completely with him the whole time.even though running had been a huge part of my life before... but I'd had a C section and I'd been in agony... In this place...I felt like I was rediscovering a part of myself that I didn't have any more that was just completely gone.



Your radius is as far as you roam... as far as I could push V, just as far as I could get on the bus, without worrying about V needing to sleep or needing to breastfeed or you know any of those things... so yeah it was just like a release, I felt very much like a child.



S being my second and having an older child who goes to school is quite helpful for that because we have to be out of the house at a certain time every morning. And so... it can be quite a stressful half-hour between eight and half-past eight but... we're all trying all just trying to get each other out the house. But actually that helps me because I'm dressed then... it's just that that energy sometimes when you've not had a good nights sleep, getting them dressed, sorting your own shit out... but then sometimes it's just a case of throwing a few nappies in a bag and getting out. Because then I'm keeping up the momentum I've had in the morning... especially when he was six months, cos he crawled from six months, I didn't want to be in a small café somewhere with that structured coffee or lunch in front of me cos that wasn't relaxing. And So I really enjoyed the times when we would... you know, I'd go over to a friends house... but it was just a different space and it was set up for a kid and you'd have someone to talk to.

In the early days I would walk for miles you know if I was going into town I would walk in and I would walk back, because it was good for S and it was good for me because that's how I prefer... but now he likes to go for a walk in the sling or the pram but he wants to have done some playing first. So I think to myself, right, I'll do some playing with him and he'll be tired and we'll go for a walk and then we'll go home and have a nap so... with parenting I tend to think it's best to know what their rhythm is and follow it.

Year 3 – Documentary

Observational Film

In the third year of study, as discussed in the fieldnotes at the beginning of this chapter, I changed the research away from documenting the experience of contributors, and narrowed the focus on my own experience and the autoethnographic practice already begun in first year. I returned to film experiments I had started recording domestic life at home using the observational film approach that I have preferred in previous filmmaking (see Cailleach 2014). Adopting this approach was also inspired by work such as that by feminist filmmaker Joanna Davis in her experimental film *Often During the Day* (1978)

*“An early Four Corners feminist film exploring the domestic sphere. The film uses detailed close-ups of a shared kitchen to examine culturally prescribed domestic roles. Scenes are cut with quotes from Ann Oakley's 1974 book *The Sociology of Housework*, read by male voices. A female voice describes her thoughts and feelings about the shared kitchen.” (Four Corners Archive website n.d)*

Three observational sequences that I filmed in spring 2016, winter 2017, and autumn 2018 were in part a response to this work by Davis, and returning to them in the third year of research, I made them the springboard for other observational filming to structure the film around. In my previous film work, I have been keen to emphasise small details, seemingly inconsequential artefacts or details, and so initially I used the camera to observe the detritus of the domestic sphere.



Film still from *Bearing*

Following on from these documents of domestic *mise-en-scène*, I started to film myself and my daughter on the long days we were at home alone while her Dad worked long days out of the house. The main motif that initially evolved and was then riffed on in consequent filming was my daughter and I leaving the house to go out. I wanted to explore and observe this set of activities, and the everyday drama that plays out during this interaction between parent-child, which I knew from other mothers was a common source of frustration and stress.

Leaving the house as an everyday, repeat activity seemed to describe a maternal *flâneuse* in a number of ways. Having one foot in both public and private worlds and gathering the 'mother-baby assemblages' (after Boyer and Spinney), the moment of departure as both an escape and a risk, a step into the unknown of the public place, the street. In chapter 3 'The Maternal *Flâneuse*' I discuss the findings from this practice of self-observation of leaving the house with my daughter, which created the central thread for the film *Bearing*.

In the film *Lift* by Marc Issacs (2001), the frames residents in a high-rise block of flats exit and entry into their home through journeys up and down in the lift. The film takes place entirely in the lift space and employs repetition in the fixed scene, intimacy of the small space, finding drama in the banal, exploring the liminal space between having left home, and being 'out.

Cameraperson by Kirsten Johnson (2017) uses non-linear and non-narrative vignettes of footage she has taken across the world over a twenty-year period as a cinematographer in war zones and as a journalist. Drama is found in the imperfect moments from behind the camera, where for example she sneezes, or unfolding mini-dramas, as young children play unsupervised with an axe.

Like these pieces of innovative observational film, my own practice draws from ethnographic film while also including reflexive and more tactile, experimental components. Observational scenes in *Bearing* were all filmed in different ways from a technical point of view. For the first piece of 'leaving the house' footage, I filmed myself by propping the camera onto a window ledge. The second time around, I set up my camera and got my daughters Dad to hold it, directing him with instructions before we started and with minimal intervention during the filming. The last piece of 'leaving the house' footage, my colleague Scott Dulson filmed me and A using a gimble mounted steady camera, directed by me. We filmed this last piece to respond to these earlier 'found' pieces of footage that I had made, forgotten and discounted earlier in the process. The three scenes are of my daughter aged 18 months, two and a half and four and a half years old. Further discussion of these can be found in chapter 3.

Vignettes

The other direction my practice took during the third year of the project focused on creating cinematic vignettes instead of seeking to create linear narratives around my experience. The choice to make the film with a non-linear narrative grew out of the original intention to make the project as an interactive documentary, a format which often favours non-linear storytelling. Vignettes of domestic details and 'leaving the house' sequences emerged as the central motif for the film component of the work as discussed. The creative decision to use vignettes was taken to emphasise the interruptible and repetitious nature of motherhood.

RaMell Ross, director of *Hale County, This Morning This Evening* (2018) discusses his study of the banal in everyday lives of the people in his Sundance award-winning documentary. He seeks to challenge stereotypes of black people with his observational but non-linear

study of rural life in Hale County, Alabama. By shooting over one thousand hours of footage, Ross committed to a deep observation and witnessing of the everyday, 'black banal' as he terms it, and finding beauty in these everyday scenes (Fraser & Ross, 2019). *Bearing* draws parallels with *Hale County* in its study of everyday life in motherhood. Like director Ross, I took the choice to compose a series of aleatory scenes, building intimacy and sensorial experience for the viewer.

The work of the sensory ethnography lab, particularly the film *Leviathan* (Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Verena Paravel, 2012) has been of influence, including the filmmakers' use of GoPro cameras.

"The film's ongoing self-survey, through its intensive toggling between the viscosity of sensation and the fore-grounding of the labor of production, generates such a phantasmatic ecology, by presenting us images that suspend our habits of understanding." (Thain, 2015: pp. 44-45)

In *Bearing* I intended to create an immersive, tactile experience by experimenting with the use of gopros inspired by *Leviathan*. Using GoPro footage to bookmark the film with immersive imagery of water '*suspends our habits of understanding*' and works to create an extended metaphor, suggesting transformation, identity, and becoming with the return to vignettes of water in different guises throughout the film.

Sound recording

I intermittently made sound recordings of daily life. I feature one of these, a recording of the last breastfeed with my daughter aged nearly three within *Bearing*. This sound piece was initially intended to be heard as a stand-alone work in the exhibition of all the media practices. However, the parameters of exhibiting all the work as I originally conceived in terms of the project budget and technical logistics, meant that this was not possible. Instead we worked this sound piece into the film itself as its own vignette. Chapter 4 discusses this sound work and its significance as part of my emphasis on emotional visual ethnography and the incorporation of ideas of becoming and identity into this finding.

I wanted to feature sound as its own documentary practice to layer and deconstruct the constituent parts of documenting, in order to emphasise the sensory. In the final presentation of the creative practice, there is only one independent sound piece, but careful attention is paid to sound design within the film. For example, at the beginning of the film, sound is layered in the split screens of home videos creating noise and a barrage of sound, as a way to emphasise the accumulation of motherhood experience and identity over time. Tim Ingold unpacks philosophers, specifically phenomenologists study of sight and sound for how we understand human experience, and how sight is privileged in western philosophies around being in, and knowing the world (2000, p.244).

"...perception is not an 'inside-the head' operation, performed upon the raw material of sensation, but takes place in circuits that cross-cut the boundaries between brain, body and world (Ibid)."

By focusing on or isolating sound as a documentary medium, I hoped to convey the multi-sensory perception entailed in motherhood. The merging of boundaries as Ingold describes, between bodies (mother and child) and place, the thinking brain and the whole body as a sensor, vision being just one part of knowing the world (see Gallagher & Prior 2014).

Image redacted

My Girl (2018))

In the same way that I 'rediscovered' the observational footage discussed above, I also began to take the portraits I had been making of my daughter more seriously as creative expressions of the research project. I used a wide-angle lens in all pictures, snapping A in moments at home and outside. The approach was to grab the camera in a moment when an image seemed to be presenting itself; often when the light was good or in response to a felt sense of wanting to document the memory, and the time together. There was no specific strategy of documenting on a set theme, but these have emerged later around identity, loneliness and the liminal space between public-private in mothering practice. I outline and examine these themes in Chapters 3 and 4.

Francesca Woodman's surreal and autobiographical work in black and white has also been an ongoing influence on my own photography. By using her own image to explore gender, less as a self-portrait and more as a way to explore the female body's relationship to its environment, Woodman becomes everywoman in her exploration of and challenge to perceptions of corporeal femininity in works such as *Untitled, Providence, Rhode Island* (1975-8). In my own practice work for this project, my daughter becomes the figure through which motherhood is experienced – an every-child. Importantly the presence of myself behind the camera is felt in the image, as the co-creator of the image with A. The story to be found within the image is both personal and ambiguous. The images are 'self-portraits' of the symbiotic mother-daughter duo or assemblage. Woodman's use of interiors are a comment on the home as a space of female confinement (see Jui-Ch'i Liu 2004) and in my series presented as part of this thesis, discussed further in chapter 4, I found the domestic space to be a site of claustrophobia and loneliness in motherhood. As Woodman uses her images to redefine and exert agency on the problematised private space, I do the same with public space using my images of home to contextualise motherhood experienced outside.

Year 4 – Editing / Exhibiting

After taking a break from this PhD, I returned to the project with a determination to make a finished piece of film work and exhibit the photographs I had accrued to date alongside this. I organised a film screening and exhibition opening event for the evening of November 16th 2018. After scouting different venues and galleries across Sheffield I decided to have the exhibition and screening within my community, Meersbrook in South Sheffield at a local arts café, *Create Coffee*. Although a small venue, the café offered a projector for screening and a fair amount of space to display the photography work. The café also offered this for free, which was important as I had a minimal budget. It was a major draw that the work would be experienced in a public place accessible and widely used by parents and was baby-friendly.

Siting the work within the neighbourhood I had experienced early motherhood framed the project in its context and emphasised the themes of the film and photography in response to the emplaced experience of motherhood. In line with the early research design of the PhD to be co-creative and collaborative, I intended the screening and exhibition to invite a dialogue with audience members. To further this aim, I organised a second screening of the film at 4 pm on November 22nd, billed as a child-friendly event and promoted amongst mother and parent networks on social media.

Images from my smartphone were presented as two large montages hung as part of the exhibition among individual black and white portraits. The two sets of images are in dialogue, communicating in different ways – at turns playful, striking, serious, familiar. They work together, showing the process of image-making, maintaining accessibility to the topic in the relatability of the smartphone format, and suggesting with the use of colour/black and white, snapshot/art piece, different ways the images and stories behind them could be interpreted or read. With the film screened among these works, the audience experienced a multi-layered and immersive piece of storytelling of my motherhood experience.



Child friendly film screening of Bearing at Create Coffee, Sheffield, November 22nd 2018



Answering questions after the screening- photographs of the exhibition can be seen hanging on the surrounding walls

I worked with an experienced editor, Scott Dulson, to edit the film. Scott and I have worked closely together on all my previous film projects including *Cailleach*. It was also clear as the film emerged from an early rough assembly that there were pieces of filming needed to extend established themes or for B roll for the grammar of the film to be effective. Scott, therefore, filmed some additional pieces of footage as the edit developed, directed by me.

The editing process was an important part of the process of reflexivity in this research. It allowed the possibility of emotional remembering and response to the documentations I had made over the previous four years. Editing allowed retrospective space to make sense of the experiences and bring together different recordings and images as an emotional thick description to create a feminist visual autoethnography. Editing was liberating in bringing together disparate footage and ideas into one place and experimenting with sound design and music to bring into being the film as a sensory artefact. Concurrently the edit was fatiguing and frustrating; watching footage repeatedly in any edit is often difficult, but viewing myself on screen as the object of the narrative we were constructing was especially hard. It was incredibly useful to have Scott alongside me as a relatively objective second set of eyes, and a sounding board to work out what worked and which rushes I didn't like simply because my hair looked bad on that day.

Initially editing started by constructing mini-scenes with which to frame the wider structure of the film around. We used the three leaving the house scenes as markers. I was clear from the start that I wanted the tone to be set by vignettes that spoke poetically to motherhood experience without having an in your face message. As the edit process went on, we actually lost sight of this vision and started to try and create both vignettes and work in a more conventional narrative. I believe this derailment from the original vision was caused by the impending screening date. There was much discussion between Scott and I about the audience for the film- taking into consideration both parents and non-parents, and what we needed to do to make the film comprehensible to both.

Bearing is the second film I have made after the success of my first short, *Cailleach*, so there was an undercurrent of pressure that this film needed to meet the same level of

success and reception, which undoubtedly added additional stress going into the edit. The anthropological themes in this PhD and the work's concern with social issues around maternal mental health; social/spatial exclusion, and loneliness made it difficult for me to approach the edit as creatively as if I had not felt a responsibility to speak out about these issues through the practice work.

The edit allowed me to explore ways to reflect on and convey emotional experience without playing to convention and constructing a big 'reveal' scene, or emotional breakdown. I used the edit to create a nuanced set of images that were both deeply personal and specific to me. However, I left enough space and ambiguity to enable the audience to put themselves in mine, and my daughter's place. This emotionality was conveyed through the dialogue of images alongside each other and the use of repetition and examination of the mundane and everyday, rather than the outwardly dramatic or 'emotional'.

During early versions of the film in the edit, there was ongoing tension between finding a story and narrative that spoke to these issues in a way that they could be easily digested and accessed by a broad audience; and pursuing an artful, poetic and new treatment of motherhood experience. By worrying too much about getting a message across and making this message universally understood, what we ended up doing with the first iteration of the film was creating a piece that was not as coherent in its grammar or pace as it could have been. These tensions in creating and realising the finished work reflect debates in wider art theory around social art practices and artist autonomy (see Kester 2004, & Bishop 2012).



Outside of Create Coffee during the film screening November 2018

The screenings in my community in November 2018 were of the first iteration, the work-in-progress cut of the film. Following this screening, a second edit re-worked the existing piece based on feedback from audience members and from mentors in the documentary industry.

After spending time doing paid work following the end of my PhD funding and immersing myself in the writing up of this project, I have returned to the film for a third and final edit. With this iteration, I am returning to the more visceral, sensory and non-linear intentions I had at the beginning of the PhD but lost confidence in producing, in fearing that they would not convey clearly what I wanted to say. Writing and reviewing the project work as a whole and returning to key aesthetic and filmic influences has emboldened me to make the film that I want to make artistically. I approached this final iteration of the film's edit having more confidence that the audience do not need hand-holding to understand the broader message behind a more non-narrative and thematically ambiguous piece of work.

In directing the film, I have negotiated between making a 'message' accessible and understood by my audience, (*motherhood is hard; it's ok everyone finds it hard; look at*

what mothers do; women do important work- value us... etc), while also retaining artistic authorship and seeking creative satisfaction to make something that speaks to the subject of motherhood in a new way. This has been a difficult challenge- the first iteration of the film was too cliched from a creative perspective; the message was front and centre rather than the experience. In the second edit, it was then a struggle to get the *experience* across visually without heavy use of testimony.

The process of writing up has inspired meaning-making through the interweaving of text with images- the space of the thesis for reflection, recollection and remembering. The use of hindsight and space from the works I have created has allowed me to gain perspective on the images and sounds I recorded and understand the place they came from more clearly during the writing up period. Writing here, reviewing the creative practice and curating the images and film work for inclusion have been a process of reincorporation of ideas and stories. The methods detailed here have culminated in reviewing both the process and work created as an emotional thick description, a concept I have uncovered after doing, reading, image-making and writing. In chapter 4, I go onto discuss this finding in more detail.

FIELDNOTES diary entry

Autoethnography, practice, becoming

December 2018

This piece of writing intends to reflect on the process of collating three and a half years of my creative practice, bought together in an exhibition and film screening on November 23rd 2018 in Sheffield.

In the months leading up to the exhibition, I discovered that collating the work was also in a sense discovering the work itself. Both photography and film pieces had been overlooked; totally discounted as not good enough, or deemed irrelevant. Not only did the process of bringing these together in a meaningful way uncover the message and intention of the work as a collective piece, on a personal level it contributed to the continuum of what Kate Boyer has discussed as a becoming in terms of the ongoing

identity shift of maternal being and practice (Boyer, 2018, p. 18). Visually seeing my experience of motherhood- reinterpreting, remembering and resolving what had gone before had an emotional impact on me in the way I objectified and therefore owned my identity as a mother, and what had happened to me and my unique way of holding that identity.

This becoming was part of what my practice documented, but in turn was what the temporality of the practice itself also created or enabled. Boyer explains this discussion of becoming in terms of identity and subjectivity being fluid and in an ongoing process, as transformations (Ibid). The importance of understanding what the experience of this change is like is succinctly stated by Boyer:

“For many women, the experience of new motherhood can bring with it a profound sense of disorientation or deterritorialisation from one’s former sense of self.” (Ibid)

The process of making the work also worked in another way to reveal and understand this idea of maternal becoming, in that my own identity shift has been influenced by myriad other unique factors.

This was a positive outcome of exhibiting and screening the work, but I also experienced an acute amount of apprehension and anxiety in the run-up to the deadline. Personally I was worried about the level of exposure for myself and my family, and for my work in terms of its artistic merit; concern as to whether I was conveying the message I intended; and intellectually wondering if documenting my own experience was a legitimate and worthy enough subject for academic or scholarly enquiry. My commitment to observational documenting meant that once I had committed to uncovering my own story, I felt that to be true to this aesthetic and artistic choice, there almost became ‘no holes barred’ to what I could or should reveal about my experience through the work. This became a pressure during the film editing process treading the line between what was needed to create a watchable, real story; and what I felt comfortable including in terms of my own vulnerability, and the privacy of mine, my daughter’s and my daughter’s dad’s lives.

Second child friendly screening reflections January 2018

I hosted a second screening of the film on December 18th and promoted this to networks of mums on Facebook groups and by email call outs. Showing my work to a room full of parents and mothers-to-be without the ceremony and adrenalin of the opening night was again very nerve-wracking. The presence of children and the small space meant that there was actually not a lot of interaction between myself and the audience, and in the Q&A that followed, only 2 people asked a question.

Thinking about my work as something that starts a dialogue or conversation was and is the ongoing hope and the motivator for exposing and presenting my own experience. However, the added layer of my real-world presence (along with my on-screen presence and being in the photography exhibited) for these viewings is not a positive one for me and I think may stifle people's interaction with each other about the work as they feel as if they are talking about me while I am in the room, so to speak. Inviting feedback and comments for me to read, also felt forced and contrived. In order to feel confident with the work and retain agency over my own presentation of my own experience, the format for audience response to the work needs to happen in a different way without my presence.

Conclusion

"I present my story to show how poetry can be a means of demonstrating embodiment and reflexivity, a way to refuse the mind-body dialectic, a form of feminist ethnography, and a catalyst for social agitation and change."

Sandra Faulkner (2018)

Image redacted

Film still from *Bearing*

In their messiness and haptic nature, the methods outlined in this chapter are part of what I describe as an emotional thick description. I hope that they are viewed and read as a collective that sensorially provokes and moves the audience with a somatic response; a feeling of being in another's shoes (MacDougall, 2006).

I originally proposed that my role in the research project was to intervene with creative calls to action to other mothers to facilitate recall of early motherhood while being an observant participant. This research evolved as the creative call to action, an artist intervention for myself. As a filmmaker and researcher, to inhabit, speak of and find some documentary storytelling in the turbulence of my shift into motherhood, I needed this artist intervention. For Adrienne Rich, the everyday experience of motherhood as work means that art becomes an escape from this, a place to express the other part of oneself separate from mother (1977, p.18).

The nature of autoethnography, PhD study and often artists' practice is commonly solitary and undertaken alone. As discussed further in chapter 4, one of the critical understandings I have drawn on in this research is that motherhood, for me, was characterised by loneliness. The opportunities for relationships and dialogue about mother experience as an artist-researcher were challenging in the duty of responsibility to look after others, represent voices of other mothers when I had yet to understand my own. Nevertheless, the informal conversations with friends, not formally recorded for this research, as well as the soundwalks outlined above (and in the audio file submitted as part of this thesis), have provided opportunities for dialogue on the subjects and themes found here, which I hope to build on after doctoral study is complete. In seeking to understand this life-changing time, there is a value and need to 're-make the self' not in a solitary space, but through relationships and dialogue (Stone, 2015).

Kym Melzer has written directly about her experience of vicarious trauma in producing a series of documentary films as part of her doctorate (2019). She suggests that the social science literature that identifies and problematises emotion work can inform researchers in other areas, suggesting that recognition of emotion work in documentary filmmaking should be taken more seriously. Ethics considerations in planning a documentary project should consider the potential impact of a project not only on contributors but also on filmmakers. The type of personal project contained in this thesis has required a level of corporeal and soul commitment. These intimate contributions go beyond most sensory, ethnographic, and co-creative approaches and have entailed deep emotional reflection.

Consequently, the vulnerability I am offering to the academia with the depth and detail of physical and emotional exposure has its risks, especially now I am an academic and part of a university department (see Behar, 1996). The university's expectation and my own wish to share my research among staff and students have additional layers of complexity when the materials constituting the research are very revealing and candid about the most vulnerable aspects of my life experience. If the university learns about my mental health difficulties, will I be discriminated against? Will students respect me in the same way if they have seen images of me breastfeeding? Will colleagues feel an impetus of over-familiarity or be judgmental after learning about my intimate daily experiences as a mother or my mental health?

In the project's progression through various iterations, which evolved alongside my daughter growing up, she became increasingly aware of the camera, another layer of reflexivity in the creative practice. For example, where my daughter confronts and explores the camera (see film still above). The collaboration between us has felt co-creative at times. In the process of writing up, she has taken a particular interest in the images contained here and very much loved watching the film, asking to show it to friends and any visitors coming to the house. In this way, the project truly feels like a 'living documentary' (Gaudenzi, 2013). In the images and film work which I present in the following chapters, often to discuss, invoke and recall struggle and painful experience, I have found catharsis, solace and pride. My daughter's interaction with the images, and her sense of agency and authorship in looking at, discussing and delighting in them, has made the process worthwhile, reminding me how far we have both come.

CHAPTER 3

The Maternal Flaneuse – understanding motherhood experience through walking and place

This chapter discusses the maternal flaneuse, a concept I have developed from this research project. I begin with an outline and proposal for the maternal flaneuse and then break the discussion down into sections on 'walking' and 'what mothers do' to expand on and analyse motherhood experience and place. I examine the research themes through my own experiences throughout the chapter, with excerpts from photography and film stills. I present images around these topics with commentary as I consolidate my concept of the maternal flaneuse through evidence from my creative practice.

This chapter addresses the research questions: *What can conceiving of a contemporary maternal flaneuse reveal about being a mother in relation to place? And, How does a creative, autobiographical account of motherhood and place extend feminist thought in the scholarship around motherhood?*

The Maternal Flaneuse

A flaneuse, after the flaneur, is a woman who walks in public place – 'an idler, a dawdling observer' (Elkin, 2017). The maternal flaneuse is a mother who walks in public place, also an idler and an observer. I problematise, contextualise and unpack the idea of the mother flaneuse as a reimagined trope in order to understand what it can contribute to an understanding of women's identity, selfhood and daily life as a mother; and to women's maternal bodies, and the intersection of these key factors with place.

At first the idea of a mother as a flaneuse seems like an impossibility. Encumbered and distracted, how can a mother saunter, dawdle, gaze and absorb? No wonder we were missing from texts and images on the flaneur, and more recently the flaneuse (Elkin, 2017). Taking part in the walking practices outlined in chapter 2 and in reviewing the literature on the flaneur, I propose that a maternal flaneuse is not an oxymoron. Moreover, reimagining the idea of the flaneur to include her is important for visualising more inclusive public

spaces for mothers and others who are not conventional wanderers, roamers or dreamers, in our cities and towns.

The sites of the mother flaneuse are the café, the playground, the school gates, friends' houses, the kitchen. The whimsy and self-analysis, the daydreaming and absorbing of art and architectural artefacts of the city, the people watching which are the preserve of Elkin's flaneuse (Ibid), are not always available to mothers. The flaneuse as Elkin conceives her is distinct from the preoccupied, often harassed, hurried or plodding mother flaneuse. Nevertheless, there are positive and pleasurable aspects to flanerie a la maternelle: the slow afternoon in the park, the walk in the country where you never cover more than 100 meters, the summer spent in the garden with paddling pool. Place is about the convergence of different factors- emotions, weather, those present, sounds, light, surfaces, temperature, smells, and landscape. Moving through place creates an ever-changing sensory and emplaced experience (Ingold, 2000; Howes, 2005).

The idea of a maternal flaneuse has emerged from a critical reading of Lauren Elkin's book on the *Flaneuse* (2017). She defined the flaneuse as follows:

"Flaneuse [flanne-euhze], noun, from the French. Feminine form of flaneur [flanne-euhr], an idler, a dawdling observer, usually found in cities." (p. 7)

This is Elkin's 'imaginary definition', admitting that the word is not included even in most French dictionaries (Ibid). Elkin extends the trope of the flaneur and the practice of flânerie (the act of strolling) to women. The flaneur was first described by Baudelaire in *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863), as a man who walks in the city, a stroller, loungeur or saunterer.

Elkin states that her intention to redefine the flaneur concept is done to encapsulate the experience of women walking the city (p. 11). My thesis goes further and seeks to redefine the concept of the flaneuse to include mothers experience of walking the city. In setting out her stall for a flaneuse Elkin others the mothers she observes in her wanderings and dawdlings at cafes, as women separate or distinct from her:

"I would sit at the Café de la Mairie on Place Saint-Sulpice and watch the world go by: the skinniest women I'd ever seen wearing linen clothing that would be frumpy in New York but in Paris seemed unreplicably chic, nuns in twos and threes, yuppie mothers who let their small boys wee on tree trunks." (Elkin, Op. Cit. P.5)

As discussed in chapter 1, what interested me about redefining the flaneur to be more inclusive, was the overlooked ways women have to engage with the city that could also be understood as 'dawdling, idling': the '*yuppie mothers who let their small boys wee on tree trunks*'. This short description is of women adapting everyday caring outside of the domestic or home sphere. The image described by Elkin raises many questions for me about the fabric of our public spaces, the gendered nature of parenting and caring, and the corporeality of motherhood wherever the mothering is taking place. Womens' movement through the world, their essential embodiment as a critical factor in their sense of self and existence from a metaphysical perspective, makes it essential to interrogate and disrupt male-centric norms of the self in the world to reposition male and female experience as equal.

The trope of the flaneur has had sustained use by artists and writers as a way of exploring the intersection of creative and urban life. Contemporary appropriation of *flânerie* by psychogeographers has maintained the idea of urban walking as a pastime and source of creative inspiration (see Coverley, 2010). Rebecca Solnit's influential work *Wanderlust* extends the idea of walking into political activism, aesthetic preference and environmental necessity. She also recognises the gendered experience of walking in relation to women's access to public spaces historically and today (2001). However, a notable limitation of this text is the manner in which women are presented as a monolith, with no real discussion of black women's experience, for example, or of mothers.

In her Forward Prize-winning poem, *The Republic of Motherhood*, (2018), Liz Berry presents the vulnerability of new motherhood. She imagines the world through the eyes of a new mum, the places she now has to contend with, and the streets she walks with her pram. She describes a vast and lonely landscape, where the mother's identity has been given up 'I handed over my clothes and took its uniform'. The long sentences reinforce a sense of unrest, and the poem is full of bleak imagery- bones, haunting, a cemetery. This

contemporary account by Berry could be a visualisation of the maternal flaneuse, with its rich and sensory evocation of a mother walking in a world that is now changed; to be survived and endured, become an alien place now that she is a mother.

My own lived experience of 'flaneuserie' in motherhood evolved into a *practice method* in my documentary tool kit as part of the research. I carried out audio walks with mothers and photographed and filmed life in the domestic sphere and when flaneusing with my daughter in the city. These experiences of walking and venturing outside since I had a child, especially when understood in the context of and dialogue with mothering in the home sphere, made me realise that mothers' experience walking is something distinct and interesting to explore.

Consequently, my practice findings explore daily life both inside and outside of the home. It became apparent that to understand how place outside of the home is uniquely experienced in motherhood, I needed to give attention to how the home or domestic sphere is felt about and used in everyday mothering. This is necessary in order to contextualise the way that caring (in relation to your child) and being (in relation to yourself) a mother begins in the home space.

Leaving the House

Recurring motifs of leaving the house in *Bearing* visually describe everyday caring and the challenges in moving from inside to outside with a small child. These scenes also work symbolically to explore the nature of liminal space, transition and becoming in motherhood. There are three different scenes with my daughter aged first 18 months, then 2.5 years, and 4.5 years.

Image redacted

Film still from *Bearing* (leaving the house Spring 2016)

In the first scene, jump cuts work to emphasise the length of time it takes to prepare to leave the house. These cuts draw attention to the meandering and distractible process of getting ready and the acts of care involved: preparing snacks to take out, putting clothes

on, remembering nappies, wipes needed for bodily functions or other eventualities. This preparation affects the way that place is entered into. It has been imagined and remembered, encountered in the mind's eye before getting there. I argue that Ingold's 'entanglement' of place is for mothers gendered and that this gendered experience can be understood as part of the entanglement. The way that preparations and imagining affects movement within and perception of a place affect our capacity to feel like equal agents moving through or being in a place. For example, visiting the town centre, the intended destination in this first scene, could be visualised through its obstacles such as curbs, busy roads, length of time walking from car or bus stop to shops, the ports of call available for toileting, and cafes or rest spots that might be welcoming to young children. In the second scene (aged two and a half), we see a negotiation around outdoor clothing and adverse weather. These preparations are emotionally charged, requiring diplomacy and patience, understanding and communication to initiate my daughter into ways to prepare herself to transition from the comfort of home, to the world outside. These negotiations, along with the weather, are elements of the entanglement constituting maternal places. These scenes are a visual representation of ideas from the research of Boyer & Spinney (2016) on mother-baby assemblages.

As well as preparation, leaving the house involves taking activities and objects that are normatively considered to be intrinsic to the domestic or private sphere out into public. Leaving the house scenes demonstrate the transition of caregiving and the materiality of caregiving from private to public sphere.

Image redacted

Film still from *Bearing* (leaving the house Winter 2017)



Film still from *Bearing* (leaving the house Autumn 2018)

There is a sense of gradual freedom being gained through these three scenes as my daughter gets older. Leaving the house is itself a hurdle and challenge to overcome before making it out. Making it out is visibly a relief and achievement. It is a break from home and an opportunity for discovery and exploration. Despite all the planning, much of getting out of the house with a child is about wandering, watching people and other goings-on, and haptic, unplanned encounters and deviations. Learning and balancing the need for preparation and forward-thinking, with patience, a slow pace and flexibility, are part of the process of maternal becoming. These unfolding scenes of leaving the house over a significant passage of time document this becoming through an important routine that is familiar to most parents, an everyday drama that is not found documented in the history books, or even anthropology texts. Despite its ordinariness, leaving the house tells us a lot about maternal experience: the complexities of entering the public arena and the nature of citizenship as a mother. When out and about with a child, mother is the identity to subsume all others. Mothers care not only for the welfare and needs of our child, but manage and internally assess public approval of our way of attending to our child. We are responsible for the public comfort of those around us in negotiating our child's 'impact' on physical place (climbing trees, running around), and on others sensory perception and experience. We monitor our children's noise, smell, communication, and interactions, considering if they are socially imposing on those they encounter (Ahmed, 2017). Entering

public place involves an internal monologue of ongoing micro-decisions and thinking, which form part of one's identity as a mother.

The public-private dichotomy has been an ongoing theme in feminist scholarship and debate since second-wave feminism. It remains an important construct in understanding the obstacles and structures perpetuating gender inequality across many areas of life and society. In particular, the work of Marxist feminist sociologist Ann Oakley (1972; 1974; 1980) explores the ways that the family, as an institution, maintains inequality between men and women. The home and domestic labour within the private sphere serve to keep the public sphere in operation, fulfilling individual basic needs. Women's longstanding association with the private sphere is dichotomous with men's ownership of the public sphere. While being broken down in contemporary society, these longstanding constructs are still withstanding today, and as women have made inroads in the public sphere, they do so as Carol Jones puts it, "as men" (2017, p.6).

"Of course to point out that the private and public spheres are strongly gendered is not simply to suggest that women occupy one and men the other. Rather, this is a claim about the way the activities, roles and so on within each sphere are gendered. When a woman enters the public sphere, she does so like a man, because that is the model of the self-as-citizen which underlies this sphere" (Ibid).

In outlining maternal experience in scenes such as the leaving the house series, I wish to impose a clear feminist agenda onto the way the conventions of the flaneur have been understood. I do this to articulate women's right to take up space and move freely in public places, and more broadly the public arena. Furthermore, the visualisation of women's everyday activity in public place, and how they got there is important in order to normalise our ways of existing and moving through the world, as for many women at some point in their lives, this existence is defined by motherhood.

What does a mother as dawdler or saunterer do and experience in public space? Recognising the gendered nature of public space and how women have unequal agency within it could be a significant component of women's understanding of their identity. Motherhood is another layer of identity that can restrict access, freedom, and citizenship,

but can also allow opportunities for embodied acts of dissent and resistance, as I go on to discuss later in the chapter.

Standing on the precipice of the door, not quite certain about leaving the house after a long time getting ready preparing snacks and putting outdoor clothing on, my daughter reaches up for a cuddle and to be carried. The scene cuts as the door closes and we leave the home behind in the first leaving the house sequence. In the next leaving the house scene we make it out after tears over putting on a coat and hat, and the camera comes with us, stopping outside the door to observe us as we walk away down the hill. In the final scene, my daughter is four and a half. We leave the house with little drama of note, and the camera comes out of the house and follows on our walk around the woods.

The repetition of these scenes build-up to this realisation, finally depicting our carefree walk. We are enjoying our meander through the local woods, playing with leaves, resting on a bench and integrating with the landscape. We are both at ease, and I am now familiar with the slow pace and more able to enjoy the time out together. In nature, there are fewer obstacles or need to worry about others. In retrospect, it would have been more pertinent and convincing for my findings to film a walk into the town centre. I did consider this, but the theatre of it all and the attention it would have drawn to my daughter and me was not appealing. I wanted any filming to be as low on intrusion to my daughter, and this walk in the woods felt the most possible at the time we filmed it from a practical and emotional point of view.

As discussed in chapter one, Tim Ingold's idea of place '*as a zone of entanglement*' (Ingold, 2008 in Pink, 2010 p. 37) is useful for exploring feminist concerns around place. In this final scene in the woods in *Bearing* the nature of place as movement into and between places; a dynamism where environment, human and non-human actors interrelate and respond to each other is visually articulated (Ingold, 2000).

The final scene walking out into the woods is an embodied representation of coming together and sensory knowing. Ingold conceives of the senses as embodied, he privileges sensory knowing above 'cognitive' knowing; recognising the whole being state as a thermometer of and thermostat on surroundings. Massey describes places as

'spatiotemporal events, a collection of stories occupying a space' the coming together of the previously unrelated, a constellation of processes rather than a thing' (2005: p. 141, in Pink, 2015: p.35). My recollections here as a maternal flaneuse thus contribute my own set of stories in place, using sensory knowing, which importantly includes emotion and vulnerability (Behar, 1990), presenting a visual ethnography as an emotional thick description. All three of them leaving the house scenes are the 'coming together of processes' and memories of doing the same process many times.

These ideas can be deepened and problematised further by being layered with the concept of assemblages that Kate Boyer outlines and positions in her book *Spaces and Politics of Motherhood* (2018), particularly Chapter 2 *Mothering with the world: Spatial practice, mobility and material agency in maternal becomings*. Boyer's discussion of the spatial practices of motherhood is from a social science perspective and contribute to the fields of new materialism and feminist geography. The 'data' I have gathered on this topic underpinned in part by Boyer's conceptual framework is presented and analysed in ways that are more interdisciplinary, descriptive, and necessarily subjective than her own approaches by necessity as an outcome autoethnography. I discuss ways in which my findings speak to Boyer's research below in the section on *walking*.

Walking



Film still from *Bearing* 2020

The sensory experience of motherhood is understanding unwritten rules, norms and expectations about how you mother when in public space. (Boyer, 2018) The sensory experience in public space can be extremely different from that in private space. Any mother will tell you that the practice of motherhood necessitates 'getting out of the house. Of course, babies and young children also enjoy being outside, being with other children and being on the move, but it is also for your own sanity. The repeated image of tired-looking mothers pushing their prams around the streets – a trope I mention earlier in this thesis – has been one of the visual inspirations for this project. These mothers may look purposeful, but, in actual fact, they may have just been lapping the same block for an hour.

In *Wanderlust* Solnit explores the aesthetics of walking and its potential as meandering and as movement rather than merely travel. This chimes with my own experience of walking and with that of the mothers I spoke to. As Solnit puts it:

"Walking itself is the intentional act closest to the unwilled rhythms of the body, to breathing and the beating of the heart. It strikes a delicate balance between working and idling, being and doing. It is a bodily labour that produces nothing but thoughts, experiences, arrivals." (p. 5)

The maternal body moving through space has a sensory experience both similar to and distinct from Solnit's description. Through my research practices, readings and observations, I came to some conclusions around mothers moving through space and how this defines a maternal flaneuse: The *rhythms of the body* are experienced in duality as the mother's body acts to support, regulate and fulfil the needs of the baby. The *bodily labour* of the mother-baby out walking, produces *thoughts, experiences, arrivals*, through both bodies in motion together, in synchronicity and symbiosis; yet, the mother's body is also burdened and often at odds with the child's. The embodied labour of motherhood is always in 'production'. Despite being in symbiosis, the baby has no power, control or understanding of where she is going and is at the mercy of her mother. The mother has no autonomy for herself and must prioritise the needs of the baby above her own.

In line with other studies, I also found that mothers are often resented in public space (Richards, 2016), but it is also one of the only places for us to go. Right from birth to school age (the term after your child turns four or five), parents are responsible for the day to daycare of their children with no formalised state childcare in the UK. Parents on lower-income can qualify for the childcare element of tax credits which funds 15 hours of childcare from the age of two, and all 3 – 5-year-olds qualify for 30 free hours if both their parents are working more than 16 hours per week. (See UK Government website, n.d). However, up to age two, unless you can afford to pay for nursery care or a childminder, the days are there for you to fill. Many women, including me, chose/choose to stay at home with their young babies and children or have no other choice than to do so (Office of National Statistics, 2017 & 2019). There has been an increase in men staying at home with their children while their partners go out to work and earn the family wage. However, despite legislation to promote equality of who takes family leave across the genders, the uptake on this by men has been very low in the UK (Ibid).

In the current socio-economic climate in Britain where many front-line services and community projects have closed or been acutely scaled back. For example, the closing of drop-in and sure start centres- where over 1000 centres have closed since 2009- (Sylva, K et al. 2018) resulting in a lack of free activities such as council-run playgroups. Therefore unstructured time, staying at home with the baby, has become the default. Ethnographies such as Nahman's film *Atomised Mothers* links the experience of maternal isolation to the closure of such centres and provision aimed at mothers and children (2015). The nature and experience of staying at home very much depends on your finances, mobility, access to a car or public transport, the season your baby is born in, the baby's health and temperament and your mental wellbeing. Mothers I know or have known over the last six years since becoming a mum myself have filled their days with a range of differing activities and routines to occupy time with their children. Although these activities differ based on the factors just mentioned (and many other nuanced and individual variables), the commonality between us all was that mothers walk.



Still from *Bearing* (2020) – my local sure start centre, now closed down.

For mothers, walking gives an intention to this unstructured time of 'staying at home'. In its nature, the walking is dictated to by the needs, energies and moods of the mother-baby or mother-child unit that day. Often, the walking itself is unstructured with no set route, other than intending to get the baby or toddler off to sleep in either a sling or pram. Alternatively, a route may have been dreamed up to give some reason to leave the house and get outside. Or, the route and location may be determined so that the mother feels at ease, away from situation where the children might be seen to impose or to bother others. These were the ideas expressed by the women I undertook soundwalks with, as presented in my Methods chapter, and resonated with my own reasons for and ways of walking as a mother. These ways of approaching walking chime with the idea of flaneusing – sauntering and dawdling, but they deserve closer scrutiny to understand the socio-political contexts that inspire mothers to flaneuse in the ways and places that they do.

These stills from *Bearing* are taken from a section of the film where I walk alone through the city streets with all its noise and lack of facilities. This purposeful walking allowed me to observe the city anew and experience the difference of being in the city centre unaccompanied without my child. Shots of the shutdown Sure Start Centre and the now-closed public toilets describe a city that is unfriendly to children and excluding and challenging terrain for women with children.

There is a burgeoning interest in walking as a practice in sensory ethnography, and many of these studies, including my own, have been inspired by the work of Sarah Pink (2007, 2008, 2009), who has led the field in this area. One work in this field by Clement and Waitt, a walking sensory ethnography of families journeying on foot in Australia is of particular note to help us unpack maternal care as an affective and gendered practice in urban walking with children (2017). They highlight five areas of action that are underway when women walk with their children: *'preparedness, togetherness, playfulness, watchfulness, and attentiveness'* (Ibid, pp. 1191 - 1198) and link their findings focused on city walkability with the importance of Boyer and Spinney's conception of assemblages in understanding the 'public sphere as a space of care' (p. 1199).

Image redacted

Frome, Somerset 2015

This is a picture I took on a walk I remember well around Frome in Somerset near where I lived for the first year of my PhD study. I did not know anyone in the area and had a whole day just my daughter and me while her Dad was out of the house for twelve hours due to a long commute. This image captures the point she had just dropped off to sleep after me walking round in circles along the river there. I felt very alone that day, seeing other people out and about seemingly getting on with their days. I felt very out of things, without any purpose, and even in walking, I felt like I had no place to go or to be, just wandering, waiting for A to nap. I had been to a café earlier in the day, but there was a limit on how long I could stay, and my baby was restless and trying to run about. I walked for an hour or more, waiting for her to go to sleep, which she eventually did. Then I needed to walk some more so she could have a long enough nap before I went back to the car and drove home.

Walking with my baby was always undertaken with the use of a sling. The baby sling was something I became obsessed with. Somehow in becoming a mother, I became occupied with the ways and natures of slings. I frequented my sling library every week and joined at least ten different babywearing or sling groups on Facebook. My new identity as a mother was acutely tied up (no pun intended) in the benefits of babywearing and materiality of slings themselves. I still have a box of 8 slings under my daughter's bed at a value of over

£600. I lost my mind on slings. I did a Babywearing Peer Supporter qualification so I could volunteer at my local sling library to support other parents in carrying their babies. I was evangelical to all I met about the joy of the sling. In retrospect, this behaviour all sounds a bit unhinged and out of sorts, but also in retrospect, my understanding of it has more complexity and compassion than seeing it as a shopping distraction (which it also was). The sling embodied all the positive things I wanted for my identity as a mother. The sling enabled mobility, walking and closeness with my daughter. The sling gave me freedom of movement with my hands by my sides rather than becoming the silhouette of the mother-with-pram. The materiality of the pram did not appeal- plastic, garish, impractical, encumbering; the aesthetics were all wrong for me.

The pretensions, such as these that I held as a new mother, are now somewhat embarrassing for me to reflect on, but I can also see them as survival techniques I was building around me. Materially I was building my mother-identity through the *mother-baby assemblage* (Boyer & Spinney, 2016).

What Mothers Do – Ways of Walking

On some days I would browse the shops as something to do. Going to the supermarket became a trip out and a significant activity for the day to occupy both my daughter and me. Depending on her mood, this could be a fraught activity. If I really needed to get my shopping done, she could run off in the opposite direction, have a tantrum or want to be fed or cuddled. Sometimes she would agree to go in the trolley but often want to be up and down from the seat. I often carried her on my back in a sling to keep her contained so I could move around quickly. Sometimes she interacted with people in the shop, and we made friends talking to older people or other children she engaged with.



Lidl Supermarket, Sheffield

In her book *Wanderlust*, Rebecca Solnit discussed how women's activity in public is deemed acceptable and how this has evolved over time (2001, p.237).

"Thus women legitimised their presence by shopping... and stores have long provided safe semi-public havens in which to roam. One of the arguments about why women could not be flâneurs was that they were, as either commodities or consumers, incapable of being sufficiently detached from the commerce of city life" (Ibid).

Mothers often shop not because they need to, but to have a purpose to go out and a place to go out to. As a core activity in the daily life of early motherhood and a place to walk to, shopping can feel very mundane. Along with many mothering activities and duties, shopping seems unimportant and seems like the day has been spent doing 'nothing'. But this 'nothing' is not characterised in the same way that Elkin describes for her flaneuse, in the sense of meandering through the city with carefree freedom (2017).

When my daughter was born, a midwife leader of one of the playgroups recommended the book *What Mothers Do (especially when it looks like nothing)* by Naomi Stadlen (2004). I had shared with her how difficult I was finding new motherhood. Stadlen has run a weekly discussion group – Mothers Talking – for over twelve years where women have the chance to share their experiences of new motherhood freely. The book resulting from these groups aims to normalise and reassure common feelings and concerns about how the everyday is experienced with a baby. Stadlen picks out the value and work that women are actually

doing when it feels like 'nothing'. For example, Stadlen unpacks a trip to the shops. To a bystander, it appears that a mother is 'just' doing the shopping with her baby.

"The mother is relating to her toddler in several ways simultaneously. She is guiding him into the kind of behaviour that is appropriate for his age in a public place... sharing her world with him, and it's very demanding." p. 83

Stadlen skilfully turns the political and philosophical arguments around the work, labour and position of motherhood in society, importantly set out by feminists such as Sara Ruddick (1989) and Adrienne Rich (1977), into practical and relatable advice. Throughout the book, Stadlen emphasises the unseen acts of mothering that are often imperceptible to the observer, making each task slower, more laboured, and continually interrupted. And so, it is for mothers walking, and I take these understandings and qualifiers into the proposal for a maternal flaneuse.

I found that I was intensely aware of sounds in a way I had not been before, principally my baby/child's cry and its effect on others while we were out. Cafes and their noisy coffee machines would frighten or awaken my child, and the hubbub of a busy street could be too much for my sleep-deprived and ragged nerves. Thus, sounds changed how I experienced place in motherhood: *"the experience of place can always be potentially grounded in an acoustic dimension"* (Feld in Pink p. 147). To employ Ingold's concept of dwelling, place came into being around me, in the different ways I entered spaces, as a mother, or on my own. As I walked and came into different places, a myriad of human and non-human elements came to bear on the way a place unfolded to me, and I to it. This idea is represented in the film in the scenes where I try to go swimming, go surfing, am singing in the car, and at home washing up.

"The criticism that the political is conspicuous by its absence from my own attempts to formulate a dwelling perspective is entirely just, and troubling. Something needs to be added if we are to understand the dynamics of power in human-environmental relationships, but what should that be?" (Ingold, 2015: pp. 501-508)

As Ingold identifies himself, his dwelling perspective creates a somewhat 'cosy' idea of the world and does not consider systems of inequality. In this 2015 article, Ingold addresses this somewhat in regard to the dynamics of power between human and non-human worlds and beings. To further enrich and deepen the value of a dwelling perspective, we must also consider the varied bodies and backgrounds of people and the ways these intersect with the unfolding of place and as vital elements in the entanglements that make up a place (Ingold, 2000).

The feminist claim is that femaleness - not women, not femininity, but femaleness - is excluded from the public sphere. Women entering it have to leave behind their femaleness. A woman has to act like an unencumbered man. (Jones, 2005 p.7)

For mothers, this femaleness is the necessarily embodied experience of motherhood. The ongoing unseen *mothering* made visible by noticing the tiny acts it comprises: checking, looking, listening, instructing, reminding, negotiating, timekeeping, sensing (Ibid, Stadlen). Like Elkin's *flaneuse*, a maternal *flaneuse* moves slowly, noticing small details, with heightened sensory awareness of everything going on around her, and often with the whole day to fill 'as her own' (2017, p.6). However, this time spent is not carefree, and small details are understood as potential dangers, stresses to avoid, obstacles to navigate (e.g. curbs) or as appreciated joyfully through the eyes of your baby when they encounter something for the first time. The *flaneuse* is a useful moniker for understanding mothers walking, mothers in public place. Therefore, the maternal *flaneuse* is not an impossible figure but a figure that problematises the way we view mothers and motherhood, and the 'access' non-singular, encumbered bodies have to public space, including walking through it.

Assemblages

Boyer discusses how caring in public and mother-baby assemblages can "destabilise received understandings about ways of relating to others in public" (2018, p. 49). And that many mothers in her study experienced "new mothering as a form of othering" (Ibid). Indeed I myself found a deep sense that I was contravening norms of public acceptability and decency in early motherhood (Boyer, 2012). Boyer employs Sara Ahmed's work exploring the feminist killjoy (2017) and the affect alien (2010) to think about the ways

women experience public breastfeeding in the UK, and I broaden this use to include walking and being in public as a mother more generally.



Take your daughter to work day (November 2016)



Whitby beach 2018

These images, taken two years apart and in different mediums (one a smartphone, the other 35mm film), place my daughter behind barriers in place (the yellow lines in the first image and railings in the second). In both images, she looks out over these lines, stood still, watching. These images suggest the exclusion of children from free access to and movement in the places they pass through and inhabit and their vulnerability to publics that do not accommodate or include them. In both images, A stands close to this barrier. Her stance is not passive, and there is a strong sense of her agency, particularly in the scene from Whitby. She is taking everything in and considering the world at her feet. As

observer of the image, we look upon A, in turn observing the place she is in, its sights and sounds. A resounding feature of walking with her was the frequency of stopping to look, rest, to take things in; congruent with others research with mothers on their experience of journey-making with children (Op cit. Clement & Waitt 2017; Boyer & Sinney 2016; Boyer 2018).

Recent commercialisation in the city I live in, Sheffield, has not seen parallel development of public toilets and facilities needed for being out with a baby or child. Women's specific needs for access to clean bathroom provision across the life phases- puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, postnatal period, motherhood, menopause (Greed, 2003) make their absence a gender equality issue.

I have been with friends whose children do wees in the gutter in the town centre for lack of open, nearby or sanitary public toilets. I have changed my baby's nappy on the floor of filthy pub and café toilets, on park benches, and on the seat of a train, among other places. Despite the lack of facilities for toileting or changing children in public places, the last decade or so has seen the rise of the nursing room or breastfeeding room. Breastfeeding, even in public, takes place behind closed doors, in private. I return to breastfeeding for further discussion in chapter 4.

A walk in the woods





These film stills return us to the leaving the house sequence near the end of *Bearing* discussed earlier in the chapter. I carry my daughter along the street after a visit to the woods, where we both walked together. As my daughter has grown older, the process of getting ready has got easier, but she is still eager for physical contact when making our way together, asking to be carried in my arms and a sling. The journey is interrupted by getting up and down, adjusting bags and finding toys and snacks. The scene also shows the positives of this interruptibility of journey-making with a child; the close inspection of nature and creative engagement with our surroundings. We do not just pass through a place but embody it more fully- touching, listening and sitting – I am more aware of all of my senses as I see the world through my daughter’s eyes and her naïve yet authoritative embodiment in the place around her.

The scene shows some of the quiet moments of unity and symbiosis between my daughter and I, and with the place we were moving through. This vignette represented the embodied, sensory experience of a maternal flaneuse. The ways of unique interaction with place by walking through it as mother and child, are pleasurable even joyful moments in motherhood. Leading up to this scene, the film shows vignettes that suggest the challenges of going out with a baby or small child, and many of the photographs from my practice work invoke memories of the dislocated experience of being out and about with my daughter, where my attention is pulled in multiple directions. Ironically, I found that these moments of challenge and difficulty out of the house were often impossible to film or document in the moment.



Trip into Bath 2016

This image was an exception, where I made a visual note of a difficult experience, taken on a trip into town to get out of the house. I was potty training my daughter, so in the absence of any public toilets, I got her to try and do a wee before we set off to walk around Bath. While on our walk, we stopped at a café where she again insisted she did not need to go to the toilet. When we sat back down at our table in the café she did a wee all over both of us and all over the café floor. I spoke to the café staff, who were very understanding and came and mopped up around us. I was very nervous about telling them what had happened but they were kind and relaxed about it. My daughter watched, chatted and smiled at them, making the situation less awkward, but I was aware of other customers staring at us, and I felt very self-conscious and as if I had done something wrong and felt embarrassed. I walked through Bath city centre dripping wet, with wet shoes and carrying a very wet toddler. This image shows wet clothes on the pavement as I undressed A and got both of us back into the car to drive home.



Still from *Bearing* (2020)

Experiencing the assemblage of my daughter and myself as an imposition on the world was something I resented and felt angry about. My sense of maternal protectiveness resulted in a feeling of outrage that my child, as a citizen, was not accommodated for in relation to practicalities such as changing facilities, to fulfil her basic needs, and in our culture's sense of shame and discomfort at the uncontrolled emotions and bodily functions

of the mother-baby assemblage. In this way, I have experienced the embodied acts of mothering in public as acts of dissent. I still sometimes find, even as I write just after my daughter has turned six, that in mothering outside the home I am disrupting 'public comfort', (Ahmed, 2010). In busy shops or the town centre, we are out of place and passing through the public sphere as foreigners in a place intended for publics that do not include us. My resilience and strength to accept and resist these feelings of otherness have grown as my daughter has got older and I have *become* more settled into motherhood.

The destabilising of normative interactions and behaviours in public was led by my daughter in her modes of communication, her basic needs and followed by me in how I chose to respond to, encourage or dissuade these. I like to conceive of this 'dialogue', the series of negotiations and discoveries about what we did and the way we were together outside of the house as part of this dissent. '*We create other ways of being when we have to struggle to be*' (Ahmed, 2018 p. 18).

CONCLUSION

Feminist discourse on women and public space often centres around experiences of sexual harassment and assault. Discussions focus on the controlling atmosphere created by these perceived and real threats and how womens' freedom to venture into public space and life is curtailed. Women cannot enact their citizenship in the same way as men (see Solnit, 2001). I noticed that when I had my baby with me, and whenever I have my daughter with me even now, I do not get catcalled or sexually harassed in the street in the same way I did before becoming a mother or if I am out and about alone.

Not only is the maternal flaneuse not walking alone, but she is perhaps not transgressing the unseen public social controls on her sexuality in quite the same way as a woman walking without a child. The way she is seen is different. I argue that the neutralising of her sexual danger or availability through her mother identity makes her more unseen, more invisible in the public realm. As a mother outside, you become encumbering on the public sphere rather than available to the public sphere (Mathews, 2019). The maternal body has a potency and biology, historically associated with the primal, which is confronting to the public sphere and patriarchal heteronormativity. It reminds us of our biology, mortality and

our origins. The maternal body has power, and perhaps it is not controlled, presented for male sexual consumption in the same way that the female body outside of its natal state is.

The maternal assemblage of mother and child outnumbers the observer. Perhaps the biology of the new mother, the postnatal body, the breastfeeding woman confronts too directly; in her embodied, sensorial presence, we cannot avoid both our own bodies or the inescapable knowledge that women bring us all into the world and are responsible for our survival. To encounter a mother and baby, is to witness embodiment. When encountered in the public sphere, in a landscape, on a bus, the fleshy softness of our humanity is apparent.

The maternal flaneuse then as a confronting figure can be a trope we might use for dissent and reclaiming of public place for women. Embracing the inherent joy of observing, dawdling and wandering might also be a positive outcome for mothers who feel the need to rush, hurry and cajole. In taking on the mantle of the flaneur, a maternal flaneuse disrupts the male gaze and asserts herself as belonging to the public realm *with* her babies and children. Out in public, her caring and labour is seen and more easily appreciated and understood. The maternal flaneuse needs public toilet provision, soft curbs, communal and green city spaces- her inclusion can contribute more broadly to our future visions for the gender-inclusive cities we wish to walk in and belong to.

CHAPTER 4

A Feminist Visual Autoethnography of Motherhood

"I speak here of poetry as a revelatory distillation of experience... For women then poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change."

Audre Lorde *Poetry Is Not a Luxury*, 1977

Continuing the presentation of findings began in chapter 3, I present further excerpts from my practice work; photographs and film stills. I have loosely grouped the images into two sections; *Journeys* and, *Interiorities*. I present images with a mixture of personal reflection and insight, critical and theoretical discussion, and some overlap of the two in places.

I draw further on the themes discussed when presenting the maternal flaneuse in chapter 3. However, I have also permitted myself tangents in examining the images of everyday motherhood contained here, allowing for the inclusion of reflections on motherhood experience relating to identity, body and mental wellbeing. This chapter focuses on how a feminist visual autoethnography is uniquely an 'emotional thick description'. By bringing together feminist texts with visual documentary works on a personal experience, this research seeks to make the emotional a central site of knowledge-making.

Contributing to what the feminist artist-researcher Natalie Loveless has termed the area of *New Maternalisms* (2012), this chapter demonstrates how an autoethnographic and documentary practice-led approach expands understandings of these approaches in researching motherhood. Loveless draws attention to the "*resurgence of interest in the maternal within feminist art and theory circles in the first two decades of the 21st century, particularly in North America and England*" (Loveless, n.d). My film and photography from this project joins work by artists across disciplines who have responded to their own motherhood experience. (See, for example, Irene Lusztig; Jo Spence; Margaret Mitchell; Sally Mann; Liz Berry; Holly McNish, among others).

The images I present offer insight twofold, they are personal artefacts, data from the fieldwork of the research, and images for recollection and reflection. In this way, I believe they are to be understood as 'sensory texts' (Pink, 2009 p. 144). In discussing the resonances that visual images and films from fieldwork invoke, Pink states:

("the footage or photographs) imply a much more direct resonance, a re-gaining of ones' past experience and a re-touching of relationships, textures and emotions." (Ibid, p. 145)

As such, the images have served as prompts to memories- emotional and corporeal- which have stories behind them. In recollecting through visual ethnography, I have 'converted private into public meanings' (Jackson, 2001) and explored the background and foreground awareness described by Throop (2003) to understand experience through the use of film. I remember how I felt at the time of the image, and I have a feeling and understanding about that memory in its recollection.

"The process of capturing this sensuous interrelationship, of documenting and representing the multisensory place-making process is...an attempt to represent the rich sensuousness of bodies-in-place to other, sometimes absent, bodies through an audiovisual medium." (Paterson & Glass, 2015)

You will find a mixture of direct and retrospective responses in the catalogue of images below. Beginning with 'Journeys', I explore themes around public/private place. Following this with 'Interiorities', I discuss themes of the body, identity and mental wellbeing.

Part One: JOURNEYS

(The institution of motherhood) has withheld over one-half of the human species from the decisions affecting their lives; it creates the dangerous schism between "private" and "public" life; it calcifies human choices and potentialities. In the most fundamental and bewildering of contradictions, it has alienated women from our bodies by incarcerating us in them. Adrienne Rich (1977, p. 13)



Break 2017

As I recollect and write about the image *Break*, I find opportunity for different layers of interpretation of the image in reference to the capacity of an image to represent the 'body-in-place' (Ibid Paterson & Glass) and 're-gaining of one's past experience' (Ibid, Pink).

Figuratively, the image encapsulates frequent feelings of frustration, disassociation, boredom, claustrophobia and exhaustion over the course of a day at home. I project my own thoughts and recollections of days at home in general onto my daughter's ('A') prone, face down posture in this image. She is caught between the kitchen chairs, constraining herself there to hide or taking a break from another activity. The idea of a game taking place or playfulness in the image is muddled by the sense of A making herself feel safe and contained in this hiding place, perhaps at her lack of agency or resistance to being told off. An anomalous glass is turned upside down under the table, mirroring A's position and generating further ambiguity in the image, perhaps suggesting disorder or conflict; or perhaps a relaxed attitude to housework and domestic order.

The title of the work references the glass (the threat of it breaking, being out of place), A's resting pose; and also my *recall* that I was at breaking point in my own internal reality of

motherhood at this time. The contradictory ways of understanding this photograph as both playful, restful and carefree, whilst at the same time disordered, conflicted and full of tension, rightly conveys the parallel narratives and sensorial experiences that can be underway at once during the mothering day. This scene is photographed in my kitchen, and the narratives described have space at home to generate and contribute to claustrophobia and boredom in the domestic space. However, they also have space to be, to play out, freely evolve and to be private and unobserved.

This image, *Break*, like many of the images for my research on place, was taken in the home. I suggest that the home is the context for the experience outside of the home. Therefore, the maternal flaneuse embodies a reconceiving of the public/private spheres in motherhood as liminal. By understanding the maternal flaneuse we can somewhat deconstruct narratives of the gendered public-private dichotomy and the binary of sanity-madness.

At first, I thought the images I had recorded at home would not be useful or relevant for my proposal of the reconsidered trope of a flaneuse, because the jurisdiction of a flaneuse by definition is outside of the domestic sphere. As I developed this new idea further and how a reinterpretation of the flaneur could be useful; I realised that visual, sensory documentary of the home context is important in identifying where a maternal flaneuse comes from before going out into the public sphere. The borders of these two realms are explored in the film work for this project, as previously discussed, where I present observational vignettes of us getting ready to leave the house to go out. This edge land is also explored here in this 35mm photograph entitled *Why are we leaving, where shall we go*.



Why are we leaving, where shall we go 2016



Still from Bearing (leaving the house spring 2015)

Along with *Rich* (1972), I believe the experience of motherhood can be politicising. Mothers encounter feminist thinking through their lives at home. Being alone with a child for long periods entails being restricted in movement or fitness by ones maternal or

postnatal body. The spatial limitations of the house or flat or room you live in, the street in your neighbourhood, the village, town, city that you no longer inhabit as an individual citizen in the ways you did before becoming a mother; these new maternal worlds become heavy around you. Space, geography, your own body are burdens you encounter in a new way in motherhood. You find the world in a new, unfamiliar, alien way. You become 'other' and understand the world as being "*built only to accommodate some bodies*" (Ahmed, 2017: p. 14), not the maternal body or the mother-baby assemblage (Boyer, 2018). There are new boundaries to learn when becoming a mother.

In early motherhood, the house becomes your primary location. You become familiar with the interior of your home in new ways. It becomes very over-familiar. The house is both a safe haven and a prison. Leaving the house is widely described by friends and in studies (Boyer, 2018) as a military operation. The complex logistics: gathering the items needed, getting dressed, maintaining momentum and keeping good moods all round.



Film still from *Bearing*

The Home

Like other mother artists, I responded to the mother experience by documenting it. Filmmaker Joanna Davis with *Often During the Day* (UK, 1978) and artist Lenka Clayton *Residency in Motherhood* (2012 – 2014) documented the entanglement of

domesticity and mothering, focusing on minutia and repetition. Mary Kelly led the way with her original response to the materiality of motherhood in her exhibition *Post Partum Document* (1973), where she exhibited soiled nappies, milk teeth and other artefacts of early motherhood. This still from *Bearing* (above) responds to the work of these mother artists gone before me. It forms a vignette made up of a series of observational images of detritus in the home.

The landscape of the home, now overrun by the particular aesthetic of chaos of family life, also takes getting used to. Once unfamiliar objects become part of the everyday- toys, crayons, baby beakers, drying washing- they litter the house, they are found underfoot. The interior colour scheme of new motherhood is multicoloured. In Davis's film, men read out passages from Ann Oakley's *Sociology of Housework* (1974) over non-narrative sequences in a kitchen, with details of domestic detritus.

The images above can represent the hidden labour (Op. Cit. Oakley) of emplaced motherhood (Howes, 2005; Pink, 2013). Judith Aston extends the idea of emplacement, conceiving of *emplaced interaction* (2017). I find this a useful idea to explain the thick and emotional ways of being in place that are specific to maternal life. The never-ending list - the mental load - is like a generator going on in the back of mothers' minds, enacted and added to through muscle memory, sensory reminders and in response to the interactions of children/adults within the domestic sphere. For me, the aesthetic and material nature of the home, its clutter chaos and multifunction, reflected my interior headspace of motherhood. This material 'load' externalised, symbolised and contributed to the internal mental load.

Becoming

Image redacted

Meersbrook Park Visit #72098

Just as placemaking happens through our embodied movement of *walking* through it (Pink, 2008), place contributes to identity-making and becoming. Extending Braidotti (2002) and others, Kate Boyer has developed the '*conceptualisation of subjectivity as a process of becoming*' to understand women's interiority in developing their identity as mothers (2018, p. 22). Sharing photography and film stills, I breakdown the ways in which my own experience semiotically represents and further articulates ideas of maternal becoming proposed by Boyer.



Café, Andalucía 2015

Cafes were the ongoing site of mothering in public prior to my daughter starting school. Other than the playground, the café was the predominant forum for meeting with other mothers; yet their suitability, practicality and openness to mother-child assemblages were contested and dynamic depending on the day. I always found entering the café space to be a process of physical and social negotiation. In this image from a holiday at the start of my PhD, A roamed around a restaurant, luckily quite empty as it was the end of the high season. Once babies start to crawl until they are around four, there is no chance of them staying still and sitting up at the table. They want to explore, move and interact; they do not care about accepted ways of being.

On having a baby, I gave up on my favourite independent coffee shops because the local coffee chain was nearby. It was big enough not to draw too much attention to baby screams and breast milk flying around, it had great changing facilities, and you did not feel guilty about spending an hour there and only buying one drink. I even got a loyalty card. These images of my daughter in the playground, a holiday snap in a café, underline how women must visit and exist in places in new ways when they become mothers. I had never imagined how boring a playground could be and how the repetition of visiting this same place felt like an erosion of my identity.

Similarly, the pleasure of a meal out on holiday in Spain was transformed into a stressful experience where I was hypervigilant about where my daughter was, the noise she was making and the fact I could not sit and enjoy my food or drink. These were new experiences in early motherhood and required an internal renegotiation of who I was, my priorities and my position in the world around me. Externally the gaze of those around me on my parenting choices replaced the objectifying male gaze that I had previously felt heavily. The effect was similar in subtly (or not so subtly) monitoring my behaviour and affecting my feelings about myself and my place in the world, both socially and physically.



Small Holding 2018

This picture was taken at my daughter's favourite place to go in Sheffield; Heeley City Farm. I took a series of images of her at the farm as it was a place where we had remarkably divergent experiences. The repetition of going to the same place over and over again made me extremely weary and fed up. I felt a sense of disassociation when we went there and a feeling of being trapped in my life. Even though A loved exploring the farm, seeing the animals and having the same food in the café (cheese toastie and a chocolate milk), I struggled to see and wonder at the world through her eyes when I was in poor mental health. Being there made me feel like I was a bad mum because I could not enjoy being there. I remember one day that we went to the farm, it might have been the day these images were taken, I realised I no longer resented being there, and I felt at ease and present in the experience of walking around being led by my daughter. This was a really significant moment as I understood I was recovering. If Heeley City Farm was bearable, then things must be getting better!

Image redacted

Slippery Stones 2017

Slippery Stones is part of the river Derwent near Howden Reservoir in the Peak District National Park, Derbyshire. It is a popular place for swimming for many people from Sheffield and surrounding areas.

The first image was taken the first time I took A there. It was an overwhelmingly positive experience, and I felt so free and calm being able to enjoy something I liked doing and share it with my daughter. She immediately took to the water and was unperturbed by how cold it was. This image encapsulates the connectedness I felt, with our arms intertwining and her hand resting on my knee, both of us naked as there was no one else there. I felt no pressure to get into the deep pool section of the river and just enjoyed paddling with A.

On another occasion, I went to Slippery Stones with a friend, and this image shows me picking my way through the water to attempt to get into the deeper swimming pool. It was freezing cold, and I did not end up getting in. I felt disappointed in myself and like I had

wasted an opportunity for 'me time' and to be wild and adventurous while I was not encumbered in the state of motherhood. I also noticed I did not feel the need to get in the water in the same way I might have before becoming a mother. I did not feel as competitive with myself. These two experiences of the same landscape highlight the layer of meaning imbued in the landscape in the context of motherhood. The felt sense of the landscape through the identity lens of motherhood.



Film still from *Bearing* – Attempting to swim at Slippery Stones

The very special modes and ways of being that mothers have in their embodied and sensory relationship to the landscape can tell us, both about the lived experience of being in place, and the experience of motherhood. The specific nature of journeying in and being in the gendered, maternal landscape can be storied to describe the idea of a mother flaneuse. Tim Ingold conceptualises place as an entanglement which inherently involves movement (2008). Similarly, Boyer and Spinney discuss how maternal mobility is critical in women coming to know themselves as mothers and to know their 'parented body' (2016). Maternal acts of caring, the interior dialogue of caring, the interrelationship of mother-baby bodies and the materiality of journey making, involving objects of caring and bodily need provision (muslin cloths, nappies, toys, snacks), add other layers of entanglement, after Ingold (Ibid), in place making. These new material objects and new ways of experiencing places with a new body feed into ongoing and dynamic ways of knowing oneself as a mother. Even when I am alone, I am now never alone as a singular being in the way I was before becoming a mother. I always have my daughter at the back of my mind, in things that I see or plans that I make. Freedom from responsibility is felt with greater abandon and joy when there is a moment for 'me time'. Now, I am happiest sharing

the world around me with my daughter with me, and experience place through her, with an awareness for how she might sense and perceive, an openness to her sense of risk, fear, curiosity and delight informs my own sense of the world. This duality of perception, that is emotionally and sensorially led, is part of maternal subjectivity as a dynamic process of becoming. It informs the way I know place as a maternal entanglement. This idea is aptly represented in the image below, where my daughter and I merge with each other, and we in turn reflect and are reflected in the landscape. We are out in the park, but the safety of the car is also visible. We are out walking and I carry her on my shoulders. My daughter yawns while I take a photograph, documenting myself taking images for this project. A further nod to reflexivity in the creative process, the scrutiny of the research themes, and my own self-reflection.



Travelling Circus 2017

After becoming a mother, I found that I relied on the car much more to go short distances. When my daughter insisted on walking during the toddler years, a journey took four times as long. The car became a giant nappy bag or buggy basket on wheels, full of all sorts of cast-off clothes, toys, food scraps and children's books. When my daughter became too heavy to carry by sling or would refuse the buggy, I used the car to drive us to new places

to walk - a park a bit further away from our house or to go into town to shop. We drove to places to walk. Before becoming a mother, I would never have driven such short distances, choosing to cycle or walk instead.

The car has been a safe space for me throughout mothering my daughter. A port in the storm often and a place to rest in between activities. After collecting my daughter from nursery, we would sit in the car in the nursery car park, and she would have a huge feed. I did not feel comfortable doing this in the nursery as I felt like I might be judged for breastfeeding a toddler, as the nursery had expressed surprise that we were 'still' feeding.

Image redacted

Outside Free Rangers Nursery, 2016

This physical reunion after being separated while I was in Bristol at university and A was at nursery therefore took place in the liminal space of the car. Neither in the public sphere nor in the domestic sphere; neither private, nor seen; neither arrived home, nor on the move (Waitt & Harada, 2014). These images of mothering in the car again highlight the way that the public-private binary comes into focus through the lived experience of motherhood. It involves personal decisions about which rules to break and learning to accept the curtailment of certain pre-baby freedoms when out and about. Becoming a mother for me has therefore been a dynamic process of negotiation between dissent and acceptance when it comes to being in place.

Image redacted

Potty training 2016

Image redacted

Naming Day 2015

Image redacted

Car Journey 2015



Still from *Bearing*

Part Two: INTERIORITIES

Breastfeeding



First Holiday 2015



Still from *Bearing* 2020

I felt an eagerness to document myself breastfeeding from when my daughter was first born. I think this was because of a sense of pride at what my body was capable of, a steely determination to exclusively breastfeed her for six months, and then alongside food to “age two and beyond” as per WHO, NICE and NHS guidelines (WHO website, n.d). I also felt a feminist commitment to the corporeal function of breastfeeding. Breastfeeding was also a joint venture; it is recognised by health authorities worldwide as important as one of the first modes of communication with babies (Ibid). Breastfeeding felt like a shared act between my daughter and me.

“...it is important to recognise that breastfeeding is an inherently social activity, because the mother is engaged in act of embodied communication with her child.”
(Giles, 2018 p. 188)

There was also a strong sense for me, of the political act of breastfeeding, and an understanding that it offered an opportunity for my body to traverse and transcend normative ways of being in public as a woman (Palmer, 2009). The evolving practice of breastfeeding between A and myself, from the point of her birth until she had her last breastfeed a couple of weeks before her third birthday, was an intensely private encounter. It was also an activity we undertook with fluctuating confidence levels in public, testing out different locations and positions for feeding. As with other mothering activities, the way

we did breastfeeding at home was the context for the way breastfeeding would be experienced and negotiated in public.

Fiona Giles' fascinating research on the *brelfie* discusses the phenomena where social media and image sharing have been used by women as a way to reframe and claim space for breastfeeding over the last five years (2018). A *brelfie* is a selfie which a mother takes of herself breastfeeding. The key factor in the *brelfies* women posted on their social media channels was being seen to be breastfeeding in public in particular.

While this type of image-making could be categorised as 'virtue signaling' given social media trends for curating an online image, this would be a churlish interpretation. The *brelfie* has become a group action where women insist on being seen differently to normative depictions of their corporeality in the media and elsewhere. As Giles states, the *brelfie* plays with issues around spectatorship, visibility and identity through image-making. *Brelfies*: 'enable women to imagine themselves breastfeeding rather than being situated as onlookers'; 'critique the patriarchal ownership of the breast'; and, 'claim maternal authority by asserting the agency of the mother to post the photograph' (Giles, 2018: p193).

I did not personally post any *brelfies* online as I was not already in the habit of posting selfies and made a decision in general not to include pictures of my daughter in any social media posts. However, I did take photos of myself and A breastfeeding for myself because I found it such a rewarding and positive aspect of early mothering. Seeing other mothers post their own *brelfies* and their pride in breastfeeding on the facebook mum's groups that I was part of gave me a sense of community.

Pages by bloggers such as *Hurrah For Gin* narrating the 'real' and gritty slog of motherhood (see Kirby, K: www.hurrahforgin.com) also made me feel less alone. Identifying with these images and storying of motherhood in non-normative ways helped me to feel more at ease with the way I was doing things, as well as confidence in resisting and problematising expected ways of being a mother, particularly in public, including online publics.

In my own way I have contributed to the collective account of brelfies through the film sequence of my daughter breastfeeding, sound piece contained within the film of her last breastfeed, and the smart phone pictures included as part of my exhibition for this project. In their number taken across a three year period, and in the different media approaches I have used to document them, my brelfies are self-reflexive, embodied visual memories, that also invite dialogue and make a political statement

At home, breastfeeding was often a moment of stillness and a time for zoning out. However, breastfeeding in public was characterised by nervousness around breast milk spraying. This meant that when my baby came off the breast, milk would continue to spray sometimes up to six feet across a room. Later public breastfeeding in toddlerhood was characterised by embarrassment or fear of judgement from others. This was due to the rarity of seeing a toddler breastfeeding in public but also from negative messages I received ranging from a comment from a family member to wider societal attitudes to breasts, sexuality and 'decency' that I had absorbed. The combination of personal and structural messages meant that I understood what I was doing to be abnormal or transgressive. One friend described it like this - "*as soon as they are wearing shoes and can say 'milk' people look at breastfeeding as weird.*"

The dichotomy between the public and private spheres seemed materially broken down in my daily life as a mother. On the one hand, was my experience of bodies' out in the world' through breastfeeding and nappy changing. At the same time, the public and private worlds also became more delineated and reinforced as motherhood made me aware of the social contract that we (my daughter and I) were living within the constraints of, an expectation to keep the private, private. The negotiation of these constraints and the resistance to normative behaviours of bodies in public through openly breastfeeding was a fundamental layer of the meaning I attached to, and motivation for, my breastfeeding activity. Returning to Giles, the 'Brelfie' usefully deconstructs these factors at work:

"the term's reference to posting images online- publicising a contested site of intimate conduct – is possibly one of the most vivid examples of visual protest since bra-burning in the 1960s" (Giles, 2018 p.191).

Sally Dowling's research (2018) on women's experiences of long-term breastfeeding found that women adopted strategies to make it easier to feed their toddlers in public. Strategies included "not meeting people's eyes; not breastfeeding alone; using a corner of the room or turning their backs on others." (p. 64) These are familiar descriptions, speaking to my own experience, although as my daughter got older I found myself discouraging her from feeding in public, where I otherwise wouldn't when we were at home. I found that I was also influenced by one mum friend that I spent a lot of time with, whose own daughter was also a breastfeeding toddler. My friend felt intensely uncomfortable breastfeeding in public once her daughter was walking and this sense of unease affected the way I felt about A asking for milk when we were out.

Breastfeeding in public entailed a concern with, and awareness of, the extent to which my nipple was shown, the amount of my breast outside of the bra, whether the breast comes through the neck of the top (so the whole breast is revealed) or the top is lifted up from the bottom (more 'discreet'). At home, the whole breast or breasts would be out. Many friends report accidentally answering the door to the postman with breasts out of their clothes. Not uncommon with other toddlers, as A got older and had more speech to let me know, she would have a particular way to access the breast from my clothing and a much more mobile way of feeding. For example, half hanging off my knee, legs kicking, waving arms in the air, stroking my face and hair, talking while feeding. In *Bearing* we observe this happening in a scene near the beginning of the film, referenced by the still from the film above.



Image redacted

Ill Baby, 2014

Night feed, 2014

I asked my daughter's Dad to take these (and many other) pictures of me breastfeeding at home. Some of this was me sort of sketching, drafting for ideas in the early months of my PhD when I was trying to work out where my focus was. Many of the images are prior to the PhD, beginning in September 2015 and are born out of my need to document this corporeal experience, as previously discussed. Looking back on the collection of work I have produced I can see a difference in these home images compared to those taken out in cafes or other public locations. In the two images above, I remember wanting to capture the authentic essence of motherhood through the lens of breastfeeding. The use of a camera phone to capture these moments adds to the authenticity of these images as a document which could challenge or re-write the idyllic image of mother and child in wholesome union breastfeeding, epitomised and born out of the trope of the Madonna and child throughout the history of art (see Pollock, 1988).



Bearing April 2014

Breastfeeding was an integral part of my subjectivity and agency in this period. As a journey of becoming (after Boyer 2017) myself as Rosie-as-a-Mother, breastfeeding was a site

where sensory, intellectual, maternal and embodied experience came together. It was a place of stillness and quiet contemplation and easeful communion with my daughter. I found solace in breastfeeding by fulfilling her needs of thirst, hunger and security with my own body. I also employed tactics of dissent and everyday resistance in breastfeeding by engaging in activities that played with public comfort (Ahmed, in Boyer 2012), such as breastfeeding anywhere and everywhere. I engaged with motherhood as a practice of agency-bringing in my own life and made this practice my own, engendered as a feminist place to be.

The last breastfeed

The finale of documenting breastfeeding in my creative practice, was the sound piece included in the film, given text titles on screen: 'The Last Breastfeed'. I used my phone to record the sound of my daughter having one of the very last breastfeeds when I put her to bed. This was a bitter-sweet moment and is still difficult for me to write about and recall when I remember the context around that time, as well as the end of our very happy time breastfeeding. I had become a single parent a month previously and in order to have an easier time of co-parenting as our daughter moved between the two houses she was soon to have, I decided to gradually wean her from the last of her breastfeeding, which were the night feeds.

When I screened the film in my local community back in late 2018, it was this scene that women in the audience told me had moved them to tears in particular. They told me how it encapsulated both the melancholy and the joy that characterises motherhood. I wanted to include this recording as I felt it was important as a witnessing of one of the most intimate acts in mothering. For me this moment symbolised the embodiment of mothering through drawing attention to the end of the symbiosis of my body with my daughters. The end of breastfeeding was the most significant moment in our relationship to date and involved so many emotions and practical considerations, principally how my daughter would get to sleep from now on. These are the concerns of motherhood, which go unobserved and are often of the body and of care. Witnessing these through art, is a way of cherishing them personally, but also as a political act, as a statement of their acute importance, their

significance and acknowledgement of the ways in which women live every day (Lorde, 1984).

These concerns inform maternal subjectivity in the ways described by Battersby, Pollock and Irigaray, who underline the female body's importance as an object of female subjectivity (Battersby, 2006). They also emphasise the fluidity and non-homogenous nature of this subjectivity. Maternal becoming is therefore a process of emotional and bodily evolution.

In the coming to an end of breastfeeding, the maternal body is in flux again, and I had to readjust back into my solo-body state, where I was no longer a source of nourishment. My body no longer transcended from me into my daughter. I understood this as the slow letting go of my child as she became ever more autonomous, and although the end of breastfeeding brought some benefits of freedom (being able to go out in the evening), it was and still is tinged with sadness.

I was ambivalent about sharing this piece of work, and the decision to include it demonstrates how emotion was at the centre of the process of making, as well as in the work itself. I was afraid of 'oversharing' and being cast in the trope of the misty-eyed earnest or smug mothers who post their curated mum lives onto Instagram, narratives I had set out to counter with this project. At the same time, aware of the authenticity of the sound recording containing my daughters slurping and suckling sounds, and the extent to which breastfeeding is still so hidden and side-lined in our society, I was concerned that I would provoke disgust or some other negative response from audience members. If this were to happen, I would feel I had betrayed my daughter by exposing such a tender moment between us. As such I was also reticent about sharing such a private moment, wondering if this was too close, too intimate to screen. Like Ruth Behar, I believe in transparency in detailing the 'feeling' reasons for approaching a research topic or theme and creating authentic ethnographic accounts that include emotional responses. To deny or reject the emotional world of the researcher is to lose something in the 'contextual and experiential understandings' (Ibid, p.943) which thick description strives to capture.

Highlighting breastfeeding in this way- in all its corporeality for mother and child, in the conflicting emotions present around it and its role in identity-making for myself- importantly occupies women's experience on screen, in the public domain. In screening this private and tender moment, I query why our presence in public is so problematic. In understanding women's corporeal, subjective and emotional experiences in ever more voracious, luminous and visceral ways, it is also more possible to clearly understand the ways in which women come up against obstacles or 'brick walls' as Sara Ahmed describes them. If people more broadly can understand women's lives more deeply, then there is greater chance of empathy and awareness of the things that are stopping us, both visible and invisible, and an opportunity to break down those walls that some never encounter.

"If walls are how some bodies are stopped, walls are what you do not encounter when you are not stopped; when you pass through. Again what is hardest for some does not exist for others" (Ahmed, 2017: p. 148).

Motherhood is feminist work. I find motherhood to be an institution intersecting all aspects of daily and personal life, where encountering 'patriarchal obstacles' to living within normality, as an equal and included citizen are unavoidable (Rich, 1972; Ahmed, 2017). To be a mother is to encounter patriarchy in all its overt structural pedagogies, and in its most insidious and unassuming forms (Benn, 1998).

Loneliness

"We learn, often through painful self-discipline and self-cauterisation, those qualities which are supposed to be "innate" in us: patience, self-sacrifice, the willingness to repeat endlessly the small routine chores of socialising a human being. We are also, often to our amazement, flooded with feelings both of love and violence intenser [sic]and fiercer than any we had ever known." (Rich, 1972: p. 37)



Burning things on my own (2017)

I have entitled this section “loneliness” rather than something directly about “mental health” because I want to emphasise my belief that the experience of loneliness was the context for and main reason for my ‘motherhood as madness’ (Julia Kristeva, 2005).

Kristeva has conceived the idea of maternal passion as the distinguishing feature of motherhood which includes capacities for violent love and hate, and includes the cultivating of dispassion in order to be a functioning mother (2005). As a thinker, Kristeva’s roots are in psychoanalysis and some of her discussion of maternal passion is concerned with its relation to oedipal dynamics, which there is not space to discuss here. However, Kristeva’s idea of maternal passion relating to a kind of madness, I find useful for describing my mental wellbeing in motherhood. In this way I describe my ‘motherhood as madness’ in the following section, with accompanying images.

Loneliness, for me, was intersected by and experienced through identity, place, the body and, of course, other people. We all travel through life gaining and disburdening ourselves of traumas, and I carried into motherhood my own forbearances which impacted the mental distress I encountered at this time. I found, however, that the sensorial encounter of loneliness in motherhood was the overarching and root cause of this ‘madness’ or ‘distress’; terms that I use interchangeably to describe this somatic state of mind-body dislocation.



I disappeared (2016)

I disappeared (2016) is an image that references the all-consuming nature of my experience of motherhood, where my daily life and activities as a mother overwhelmed and seemed to erase other parts of my identity. My daughter is prostrate in the bath in this work, her face and body a blur; it is unclear if she is grinning or grimacing. Her body is twisted and there is an ambiguity whether this movement is with grace and pleasure at the bath she is taking, or whether she is squirming and thrashing around. The spectator of the image looks down into the bath as I look in on my own life observing it. The title also references the distance between myself and my daughter in the picture. It is not clear if the *I* is her or me, and consequently where power lies in the scene. My height standing above the bath gives a sense of my control and power in relation to my daughter's nakedness and vulnerability in the water. The image invokes the burden of responsibility on the observer to protect and keep my daughter safe and well, and pervading maternal fear of infant loss. The blurring of the image and the distance between us references the urge sometimes to want to run away from responsibility and return to myself.

I believe that it is crucial to understand subjectivity as non-homogenous among women and explore representations of the maternal that 'disrupt dominant traditions of western modernity' (Battersby, 2006). Thinking about the *lived body*, after Merleau-Ponty, in terms of 'how our consciousness inhabits the world' the corporeal experience of motherhood is also deeply important (Ibid: p. 54). The 'flesh' of motherhood, discussed by Battersby in respect of phenomenologists' understandings of this *lived body*, is the site where internal

and external consciousnesses intertwine with the world and body in space, and come to bare on subjectivity (Ibid).

In exploring the idea of the self, as asserted by Battersby and other feminist philosophers, we must accept the normality of a self that can birth:

"gradually over a period of time, an 'other' emerges from within the body of the normalised female and from the work of child-rearing. This 'other' has its own genetic and immunological patternings; its own spatio-temporal boundaries; its own goals and modes of directionality" p. 39

As articulated above in discussion of the breastfeeding sound piece, there is an inherent loss in motherhood, where one's child moves from conjoined, to symbiotic to independent. Women produce an 'other' in motherhood that could impact identity in that part of ourselves is contained within, or having made another body. In *Bearing*, we see this idea symbolised in the scenes where I am out in the world separate from my daughter.

Feminist loneliness

When I first had a baby, my feminist radar came to be a burden and an impediment to satisfaction and joy in my life as a mother. This was born out of my awareness of the limitations and disadvantages that mothers experience in the context of wider gender equality on a structural level and also, in feeling dislocated and impeded in my engagement with the world in my personal life. Sara Ahmed writes:

I explore how feminism can be experienced as life alienation, how we can become estranged from the lives we are living in the process of recognising how our lives have been shaped or have taken shape. (2017: p.43)

So entrenched with norms is motherhood that many women, including myself, have found a deep sense of alienation from our own lives (Miller, 2007). The process of reviewing and reflecting on the images found here prompts embodied memory (Pink, 2013: p.146), especially when considering the creative work of other mothers, and in the context of

theoretical texts such as that by Sara Ahmed exploring the struggle to 'Live a Feminist Life'.

Reflecting here, I see how I integrated maternal madness or 'passion' into my life through the process of becoming and living as a mother. Thinking about mental health, in terms of hegemonic medical and social descriptions of madness as an experience of the 'other', autoethnography (and art) is, therefore, a political and emancipatory approach to researching and understanding madness.



Still from *Bearing* (2020)

The loneliness I felt and often still feel in motherhood is experienced in multiple layers. In identity through the loss of the pre-maternal self, alienation from the world around me and awareness of the gendered burden placed upon me. I felt it in its somatic isolation and estrangement from one's own body, in loneliness from landscapes and journey making that was once possible. I experienced social isolation from community, from friendship groups, mum cliques, and my relationship with my daughter's Dad.

In motherhood, I first experienced loneliness as a stay-at-home mum. In understanding motherhood as an arm of compulsory heterosexuality (after Adrienne Rich), I felt loneliness from my sexuality, lost in my identity as washer upper; toilet cleaner; breastfeeder and nagger. Then I knew loneliness through the trope of the single mother. Separating from

my daughter's Dad Rory in 2017 and being among a group of friends and a community that seemed to function as a monolith of (mostly childless) couples, I found myself perceived as a siren: wild, dangerous and a threat to other people's relationships. Most of all, I experienced the loneliness of weekends spent alone with my daughter watching other happy nuclear families in the park, and as a single woman in my mid-30s without my daughter when she was with her Dad. I had a foot in the world of mid 30 partying couple-friends, and the other in child milestones, nursery runs and playdates.

Performativity is key to understanding the formation of identities, predicated on gendered norms of behaviour related to worth, acceptability, and belonging. As a form of entrapment, the performativity of motherhood is bound up in corporeal and multisensory norms of interrelating with your child. It manifests, for example, in the expected ways of caring, disciplining, feeding and talking to your child. In the repetition of domestic and caring acts, while at the same time harbouring a feeling of not quite getting it right. Feeling invisible and negotiating who I now was, I felt like I did not understand the world I was trying to navigate: parks, streets, town centre and neighbourhood. It seemed that those around me did not understand me in the same way as before either.

"performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularised and constrained repetition of norms. This iterability implies that 'performance' is not a singular act or event, but a ritualised production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling the shape of the production." (Butler, 1993: p. 60)

My sense of contravening unwritten rules as a single parent was therefore not surprising, I felt my difference in a neighbourhood of couples and young families. I felt a threat to the comfort of lives that performed within expectation and convention. Tea times now consisted of just my daughter and I, where they had previously encapsulated the image of 'family' that we are pervasively sold when I was together with my daughter's Dad. This change made me feel a deep sense of absence, of being 'other'. The same went for holidays, days out and trips to cafes in the early days of finding my feet as a single mum.

Loneliness and place

Loneliness impacted my self worth and sense of self. In loneliness, I lost a sense of context in relation to both others and non-human others. This loss of context was consuming and heightened my sensitivity to perceived rejections and thinking around how others thought of me. I had paranoid feelings that others saw me as alone and therefore did not want to be around me. I felt ashamed of being lonely, of being seen as lonely or alone, in common with others who experience loneliness (Cocozza, 2020).

Image redacted

Still from *Bearing* (2020) – getting ready to go out

Following on from the discussion of place in proposing and exploring the maternal flaneuse in chapter three, I found that my experience of the environment affected and sensorially altered the way I perceived loneliness. The way I corporeally inhabited and understood myself in relation to my street, neighbourhood, city and wider world, including holidays and trips was affected by this sense of loneliness, most significantly when I became a single parent in Spring 2017. *Single Mum Summer* is an image I made during this time. My garden looks lush, the weather is hazy, my daughter is caught amongst the flowers. Moments like this were a reprieve in this feeling of groundlessness and were the times I felt able to pick up a camera. I feel like the love for my daughter is felt in this image, how central she was to everything yet how shallow the image is in telling the full story of life at that time.

The possibilities for engagement with landscape both reduced and expanded as a new mother. The world shrinks to the size of a few streets. Going beyond the local shops seems like an extreme sport. Means of travel becomes complicated- walking requires luggage. Frequent feeding and changing make journeys interrupted and slow. Exhaustion is the framing for decision making. Sometimes, a trip to town, once there, seems overwhelming. You do not know how you will get back home again. The responsibility of keeping a baby alive, safe, not screaming in public is heavy. It is the forceful driver behind all movements and decision making while outside of the home. Driving in new motherhood requires

getting used to distractions and even extreme sensorial stress caused by a persistent crying baby in the back seat.

Image redacted

Single Mum Summer (2017)

As a new mother, I understood from health visitors and midwives that there was a need and impetus to make new 'mum friends', to fulfil the village of child rearing. Meeting these new friends was often contrived and out of necessity, and so this furthered my sense of loneliness in the distance I found from the people I now spent time with.

The home was a site of isolation and entrapment, but going out into the community amplified this loneliness, as I observed other families and friends in the park, pub, supermarket, always with their partners and families. Everyone seemed connected in ways that I was not. When A was at her Dad's I would return home to an empty house. I woke alone. When A was asleep, I came downstairs to an empty living room. Everything was intensified in the context of one adult fulfilling the needs of a child: tantrums and bedtime battles, washing, entertaining, loving, reading, putting to bed, listening, explaining. I lost my temper more readily. There was no one to go on holiday with. Mothering a child alone emphasised my need, as a mother, to be mothered myself. This in turn, intensified the loneliness. Friends came over in the evenings, but the battle to get tea on the table and a child into the bath was intensified under the scrutiny of an observer.

The sound of neighbours – a family with children – through the walls, contributed to the feeling of loneliness and otherness when A was a baby and I had run out of errands to do or games to play. These auditory worlds that leaked through the walls were significant in how I experienced my home as a place of isolation (Ingold, 2000).



Escape Route (2015)

The distress experienced as a consequence of the contemporary socio-cultural model of motherhood is pathologised into being owned by mothers themselves - diagnosed as postnatal anxiety and depression. The responsibility for the difficulties inherent in the experience of mothering is placed at the feet of mothers. In truth it is the way our society has conceived mothering which has created the conditions in which these 'pathologies' emerge. This is furthered in all aspects by the medicalisation of motherhood, where difficulty in experience is considered a fault in the brain rather than a fault with the fabric of society (Speed et al, 2014: p.xiv)

"there is a long standing history of looking for the origins of suffering in the conditions of existence and of understanding the ravings of madness as a commentary on the failings of the society that fostered them" (Ibid).

Conceptualising the distress of motherhood as postnatal depression, for example, obscures the deep structural issues and environmental contexts which create an adverse social, emotional and physical landscape in which to raise a child. *'Ongoing hegemonic dominance of medical frames of reference'* reinforces maternal status as subjugated by the *'wider forces of domination'* (Ibid: p. xvi) - these wider layers of oppression of women as mothers have been discussed by feminists such as Rich (1972); Ruddick (2009); Baraitser (1980) among others.



Snow in February 2018

This image of A and I on the sledge together was taken on my camera phone. I asked my daughter's Dad Rory to take it. At this time, I was in the grip of a breakdown where I was no longer functioning in day-to-day life and was in a state of deep emotional distress. This lasted for around four months. I believe it was triggered by the culmination of different adverse experiences including raising a baby on a low income; isolation from friends and family; two significant moves up and down the country; the separation of my partner and I, and coming to terms with living alone and a single parent. At the time of this picture being taken, I can honestly say that I knew what it felt to experience madness; to feel unarranged, unanchored, in acute distress, at large in, and at odds with the world.

Despite the sadness this memory brings up at a time when I found it difficult to leave the house, looking at this picture of myself with my daughter together sliding down the steep hill of our local park in Meersbrook, I am moved by our presence in the landscape. I am moved by the togetherness and solidarity of motherhood. The sense of belonging- being a child to a mother, and a mother to a child- reminds me of the very crucial role motherhood had in helping me to recover from this intensely difficult period. My struggle in motherhood was overcome through the *becoming* of motherhood, of finding and knowing myself as a mother as an ongoing journey.

Reflecting on images such as this is part of the reflexive process of emotional thick description, which has also fed into my maternal identity-making and this process of becoming. This iterative and reflexive process where at first images did not join up, have meaning or use for the research chimes with Stone's discussion of the narrative form and its antithesis to a telling of madness.

"Inhabiting the sufferers mind is not the singular internal voice of thought- a voice that might be compared to the narrators accent imposing coherence on the disparate fragments of 'story'; on the contrary, consciousness is filled with wreckage, dispersion, obsessional repetition, or, inversely characterised by stasis, aphony, catatonia. Such being states do not fit well with narrative's drive to organise and arrange experience..." (Stone, 2004: p. 18).

There is no mistaking that as well as autoethnography as research method, the process and practices of autoethnography use the same tools as therapeutic treatments in psychiatry, psychotherapy and cognitive behavioural therapy. Stone describes autoethnography as a process of 'self-talk': re-establishing, befriending, legitimising and listening to an autonomous inner voice that guides, reflects and comforts the self (2004). This voice is lost or destabilised during mental distress, and autobiographical writing and reflection is well established as a method for reconnecting with one's own agency, and making sense of past trauma. Telling your own story is performative in actively shaping the self and defines this research as emotional thick description.

The context in which a story is told is important for determining who holds the power in its hearing. For me, this story was re-writing, or re-visualising hegemonic narratives of motherhood. The context of telling this story as art-film-research has enabled me to have total agency and autonomy in how it has been conceived and presented (as opposed to, for example, having executive film producers pushing me in a particular direction). The downside, perhaps, is the intellectualising and analysing of my life experience in ways that have not always been helpful or easy.

Conclusions

“(landscape); as the familiar domain of our dwelling, it is with us not against us, but it is no less real for that. And through living in it, the landscape becomes a part of us, just as we are a part of it.” (Ingold, 2000 p. 191)

Image redacted

Film still from *Bearing* (2020)

My experience of motherhood evolved throughout the PhD as my life unfolded. Writing about the experience as if it was static has not worked. I was a mother to a 15 month old at the beginning of my PhD and now I write as a mother to a 6 year old. I made these creative works in the thick of my experience of early motherhood. Now I have financial stability, a permanent job with an office and colleagues, and have spent 18 months repairing my mental health. It is only with this stability that I feel like I have enough distance to reflect on my own experience of motherhood in the images and film and as a written analysis. In this image from the film, we see resolution in mine and A’s connection and relationship together, observed by the camera just from behind a curtain, as if the world is our stage now and we are at ease on it.

I have felt strongly that the images and film work I have made speak for themselves and I have been reluctant to analyse these visual reflections further. However, what inspired me to finish this thesis has been the themes and reflections that have come out of this mining of feeling and emotions in my creative practice. Expanding knowledge of women’s lived experience of motherhood with a feminist analysis on environments and structures that influence how women live this most personal and emotional life change has felt important. The opportunity to explore the witnessing of my own life experience has therefore turned out to be a privilege.

Part of feeling this positivity is my adoption of being a feminist *mother killjoy* through the work in this thesis. As a feminist killjoy one might disrupt patriarchy with complaints that it is nearly impossible for women to ‘have it all’. We can disrupt the curated image of motherhood by breaking rank with the smug-marrieds, and the kids-are-my-world narratives. We can disrupt the hard edges of the ‘child-free’ movement by daring to complain about a situation we got ourselves into, and chose while still celebrating and

adoring our children. A mother feminist killjoy can disrupt mental health narratives by declaring that having a child, becoming a mother can be an experience of madness. That this experience is not because of something wrong with you, but with the structural impossibilities women live under. It is because of philosophically oppressive ideals about women's roles, identities and bodies that are prescribed us.

Motherhood identity as a liminal edgeland is central to my own experience and strongly relates to my choice to survey this through sensory and visual means. As such, my memories associated with early motherhood are hard to pin down. I found myself at turns mesmerised, choking with laughter, in despair on the bathroom floor, then disassociating at the eye-watering, repetitious boredom of it all. An experience intensely visual but drenched, triggered and coloured by other senses of sound, smell and touch in equal measures, intersected by and inseparable from an ever-changing field of emotions. It is an edgeland I have come to love to inhabit, which also inhabits me.

CONCLUSIONS

"We are subjects under construction, we are always becoming something."

Rosi Braidotti



Godrevy Beach, Cornwall 2014

This is a picture taken on the first family holiday with A to Cornwall in September 2014 when she was five months old. I am sitting breast feeding her on the sand dunes close by to the National Trust car park. We have just been to the lovely beach café where I have had a memorable encounter with a stranger. While waiting for Rory to order our food in the queue, I am sitting with a scone he has set down in front of me to eat as I am ravenous from being up all night breast feeding. Holding A in one arm (breast feeding yet again), I try to put butter, jam and cream on the scone, but keep chasing the plate around the table as I don't have the other hand free to hold it down. I don't think I have ever been so hungry. An unknown woman who is sitting further along sharing the large outside table sees and offers to ready the scone for me. She says she remembers what it was like. She is probably in her early fifties and has her older daughter with her. As she spreads cream and jam on the scone we chat about motherhood, she shares memories of breastfeeding her own children.

This memory although seemingly banal, has stayed with me. The woman's kindness made me feel so seen, and my experience so normal and recognized, at a time when I felt very overwhelmed. The memory is a sensory one, the wind on my face and cold breeze from the sea. The chatter around us in the busy café at the end of the summer. The taste of the scone has stayed with me in particular- I don't think I have ever enjoyed a scone so much. It was absolutely delicious, and I was so hungry.

Below are two images I recorded on returning to Godrevy for a holiday with friends in 2018, leaving A at home with her Dad. I wanted to make these images in response to the first: because I fondly remembered the interaction I had with the stranger in the café, and, out of sentimentality as I missed my daughter on this trip and thought of the passage of time since she was just a baby in my arms. I took a walk from our campsite to the café, around two miles, on my own and experienced something of the sense of flaneurie without having a child by my side. It brought to mind the descriptions of dawdling, idling and people watching that are recounted by Elkin (2017). Although I was not in the urban environment, here I was reading a book in a café, notes from another contemporary flaneuse, Patti Smith, on her art practices and life spent in cafes. Back in Godrevy Beach Café I ordered a scone and coffee and sat down to enjoy the uninterrupted time to read, the opportunity to people watch. I enjoyed these things. But, the place was still entangled with this strong memory of motherhood and my body ached for my daughter's presence to interrupt me, annoy me, climb over me and distract me from my book.

There was no way of unbecoming a mother, even on my own and at leisure I felt as a maternal flaneuse, my mind and body always aware and responding to the world through a maternal sensor and lens.



Revisiting Godrevy June 2018



Revisiting Godrevy June 2018

This research contributes to work examining mothers' interrelationship to place. It contributes and extends social science-based research, bringing emotional thick description and story-oriented testimony from an autoethnographic, visual anthropology and documentary perspective. My film and photography work sits alongside the recent honest exploration of contemporary motherhood by poets such as Liz Berry and Holly McNish, and visual artists such as Lenka Clayton and Irene Lusztig and contributes to the

field of feminist documentary film. The work contributes to wider trends for the authentic portrayal of motherhood in popular culture and social media.

Through visual research methods, the research has explored how moving through and being in place contributes to identity making in motherhood as a process of becoming (after Braidotti, 2002 and Boyer, 2018). My articulation of emotional thick description as a processual, reflexive approach to ethnography that sites emotion and vulnerability at the heart of knowledge-making is novel. The processual nature of focusing on emotion in research entails that this will evolve and look different for each piece of research or fieldwork. However, it fundamentally entails a commitment to delve deep and interrogate somatic responses and feelings of the researcher and researched.

Early motherhood itself is a journey; it is a dynamic practice and experience. This research project has run alongside the unfolding of my own life in motherhood; it has therefore been a witness to and been impactful upon the process of confronting the issues and experiences of motherhood I have encountered. The tension between making a film *about* motherhood experience to educate and inform, and making a film as a mother filmmaker as an artistic expression has been an ongoing conflict and negotiation over the five years of the project. It is only in the last three months, having had some space to review the previous iterations of the film, that I have had the confidence to re-cut the work to make this a more true reflection of my authorship as a filmmaker, rather than a piece that is more universally accessible or digestible by an audience.

The research emphasises that the emotional experience of motherhood is a distinct human experience. Mothers' sensory interrelationship to place tells us about unseen obstacles and power structures that disadvantage, exclude and negatively impact women. Understanding and exploring this interrelationship to place has uncovered ways in which mothers resist and adapt to these patriarchal constraints, challenging normative ways of relating to the public world through everyday motherhood practices and modes of being in the world. Places as experienced and storied by mothers are distinctly gendered. This is important to recognise and name as an extension of Ingold's concept of place as entanglement or dwelling (2000).

Within anthropology of the senses, this work contributes to feminist discourse by privileging somatic and emotional experience of motherhood in place as a centre of knowledge describing women's unique identity with and within the world. This emotional knowledge and experience is useful for an effective critique that destabilises accepted patriarchal norms of self and identity-making.

Documenting my experience of motherhood intends to add to the scholarship in this field where women's reaction to their *experiences* are understood and validated, rather than interpreted as deviant, non-normative, or a 'chemical imbalance'. Instead, these reactions and emotions are reasonable responses to the contexts and circumstances of undertaking motherhood in a socio-political system that side-lines and devalues them.

The experience of loneliness characterised different phases of my experience of motherhood, particularly in becoming a single parent. Loneliness affected the way I experienced place, both private and public. My experience in place was closely tied to my sense of self, self-worth, how I understood myself as a mother and how I conceived my daughter and I as a family. Research centres such as The Centre for Loneliness Studies at The University of Sheffield, are already doing multidisciplinary work in this area and I hope my findings can contribute to this in the future life of this research.

Further Research

While this project is an autoethnography and seeks to offer understanding of the subjects I explore here beyond just the individual by positioning myself as an 'everywoman', ultimately, generalisations cannot be made. Therefore, there are opportunities for the framework and lens of the maternal flaneuse to be used to explore experiences of working class women and women of colour, for example, and the unique ways they encounter and use public space in motherhood. Women – mothers or not – reliant on public transport and whose jobs require a commute across public places, or who are unemployed may flaneuse in specific and interesting ways that are clearly missing from Lauren Elkin's first exploration of this model of a 'woman who walks the city' (Ibid).

It would be fascinating to extend and radicalise the idea of a flaneuse further, researching with groups of women who are most likely to flaneuse and walk, with quite different experiences from that of Elkin's flaneuse. For example, those women who are unemployed, underemployed, homeless, women without access to transport who walk long distances to work, differently bodied women, and how they experience being in and traversing public place.

The research documents my experience of madness in motherhood discusses the ways motherhood experience can contribute to a sense of madness for women. Through my film, sound and photographic works, the sensory and visual representations of this could contribute to the emerging field of Mad Studies in further research. Storytelling my experience contributes to other films and art that disrupt hegemonic narratives of the perfect mother trope. In making visible everyday experience that is 'Mad' experience, I hope that my work can widen perspectives where maternal mental health is pathologised as sickness. The area of Mad Studies was one I came to later in this thesis. An interrogation of the field from a gender perspective and using sensory and visual research methods are potential areas for further exploration. It would be fascinating to employ emotional thick description to deepen insight into the stories of maternal mental health wider than my own particular experience.

Having explored the idea of emotional thick description in this project, I would like to interrogate the concept further theoretically and in its practical use for researchers and artists. I envisage translating the method into use for interactive documentary forms, including presentation through installations, analogue iterations or parts, allowing for interrogation of and presentation of sensory responses in an immersive capacity.

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