

I am thinking about precipices.

Google the definition; very steep place, the verge of a cliff, a hazardous situation, a brink.
But to consider becoming a mother as something akin to f

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g seems too immediate,

too melodramatic, too sure of its destination. It also implies a later return to the vertical,

or getting up.

For now, it feels more like moving through, b e c o m i n g ,

although it might still have something to do with letting go.

According to the date predicted by a grainy ultrasound scan observed several months ago, I could
be a mother in a matter of days

or weeks. A small kick to my ribs suggests I already am

becoming.

When we spoke on the phone I said, 'I don't want to make this too much about me'. You remind me it is because of the space I am inhabiting that you asked me to do this. 'You don't even have to mention the work!' you say. We laugh.

Writing in the hesitation of maternity leave before the event of birth, I think about how this transformation of identity might effect my already uncertain position within the world as artist. I get the impression that, despite the life altering demands that accompany having children, artists who are mothers shouldn't make too much of a fuss about it. They should quietly assimilate back into the workforce, caring for their children as if they don't have (several) other jobs and making work as if they don't have children. They should concede to the habits and expectations of an art world that make it intensely difficult for anyone with caring responsibilities to maintain a position within it. And they probably shouldn't make art about it.

A curtain snake coils on the floor, too long for the window. Your daughter sits behind a tall legged table that has the proportions of a stool, drawing in a sketchbook too big for its surface. Her eyes look down at the paper beneath her. Your eyes look at her, then down at the paper beneath you. Observations made in felt tip pen. An infinity mirror with temporal delay.

Mummy doesn't understand the world of men

Making art and being engaged in the art world is absolutely work. However, I often think of the role we take on as artists as being a kind of anti-job, one that isn't (for better or worse) maintained by the structures of wage labour. One that longs for a different kind of existence. The precarity that accompanies this position is navigated in exchange for a way to live otherwise, to be a disruption to the structures that demand rigidity and compliance. This has always been an appeal of the role, but when faced with the practicalities of raising a child, freedom might begin to feel like risk.

Another reason I try not to evaluate my position within the confines of wage labour is self preserving, knowing that when equated in this way, most artists earn well below minimum wage. I think about being a mother and being an artist, both roles underpaid, undervalued, exploited and largely misunderstood. I wonder if I can maintain the two.

My life has been guided by a chain of women who have passed me from hand to hand. The first was my mother, then gran, aunts, sister, cousins, friends. Later came my teachers. You began in this category, and still are, but I now know you in more ways than this. I have come to believe such a life is possible because I have been part of yours.

To speak may be superfluous

The artist-mother may also be criticised in wider society, particularly by those who hold the view that art is a frivolity, available to only the few who can afford to waste their time on it. Within this view lies the suggestion that attempting to live as an artist while also being a mother is a selfish pursuit. And what could be more outrageous than a mother who dares to act on behalf of herself? It is deeply saddening that we have been convinced, in recent times, that making art is frivolous. Creative expression is essential to what it means to be human; to draw pictures, sing songs, play music, mould shapes, write poetry, tell stories. Children understand this innately. Adults forget it, too consumed by self-consciousness, held back by class structures and economic inequality, deceived by ideals of productivity that dictate how we should be spending our time.

Your drawings capture small moments, domestic occurrences. But to turn to overly convoluted readings concerning the 'every day' feels like a step in the wrong direction. Venturing too far into theory loses intimacy. These works express something much more essential. They remind us of the absolute necessity of art making, of how drawing can be a way to understand the world and make sense of what we encounter. They are gentle pauses that gather the detritus of passing moments into a single frame. They are a way of looking, a way of being.

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL

The tutors are on strike again. Worn down and worried about how to continue their pursuit of fair pay when day to day living has become increasingly difficult to maintain. In favour of the collective, they swallow down their worry without water, the edges of their anxieties cut deeper into already dry throats. Banners are stitched, picket lines drawn. A megaphone is pointed towards an office at the top of the building. Cars beep their horns in passing support, cardboard signs with poster paint slogans wave back in gratitude. A chant is instigated, hope is vocalised, fighting not just for themselves and their colleagues, but for our future. Without them there will be nothing left.

On Care

In places of creative education, it is rarely the institutions themselves that provide any genuine form of care. In cruel preparation for what lies beyond the campus, the treatment of students within these institutions often echos the lack of care exhibited by the art world towards artists. Similar to the gallery who displays exhibitions thematically examining practices of care, while underpaying their staff and neglecting the material needs of artists, the educational institution markets its thinly veiled care-product in the hope of attracting prospective studentcustomers. It is instead, in the relationship between tutor/lecturer/teacher and student where a genuine notion of care might be exercised, often at odds with the pressures or intensions of the institution itself. This relationship has the potential to extend far beyond the spacial and temporal limitations of the institution, leaking out into other places and lasting far beyond the duration of the course. Unlike the relationship between gallery and artist, institution and customer, the teacher student relationship, particularly when extended beyond the classroom, is not maintained by capitalist profit relations.

However, to talk about care in these terms can feel like another contention. When something so vital enters into language usually reserved for economics, it can begin to sound like another kind of economic exchange. So for now lets say we are friends and I appreciate you immensely.

[THRESHOLD]

It is nothing like falling.

The last few weeks have been earth shattering, explosive, gnarly, transcendent,
sublime.

Exhilarating and exhausting in unequal measure.

Drenched in blood and sweat and urine.

Doused in shit and milk white sick.

I have been torn apart and stitched back together without anaesthetic,

kept a life alive from my breast

and experienced a love so profound and terrifying

it seems impossible.

But no, nothing like falling over.

How have we allowed such a meek image of what it might mean to become a mother
to permeate so deeply?

When in reality we are born in a searing hot hurricane, to the animal scream of a being split
open

Her soul is spilled out

Her body strewn across a soiled floor.

Bleeding from the inside out, she gets up and tries to claw herself back together, a freshly cut
cord still dangling between her legs.

But most parts are too wet and slip through her fingers, or are
unrecognisable as
her own.

A transformation so violent there is no possible return

to before.

You tell me these drawings are made in stolen moments, pauses sliced in between the movement of living. An hour here and there, sitting still and observing, eking out the present. Reality drawn out in blunted colour. I understand this more fully than ever before, now that time has taken on a different texture. It moves quickly, pulls away. Sometimes its speed feels threatening; moments are simultaneously urgent and mundane.

My day is dictated by short cycles of feeding, changing, soothing, so I type with one hand, laptop balanced between my chair and a high legged coffee table. The other arm cradles my baby, propped up by a crescent moon pillow filled with polystyrene balls. Tiny lips echo its shape, as his mouth widens to latch on to my nipple.

[change side]

His head nestles into the crevice of my right arm. I encourage him to continue feeding. He is restless now, face reddened and bobbing against my breast, mouth open and searching. I sit back in the hope that gravity might assist him. He makes contact, gripping, sucking, instigating the release of milk. My laptop now out of reach, I continue to write in the notes app.

Courage calls to courage

When I was a student you showed me a book that changed my life. I don't care for this cliché, but no other phrase seems to convey the immensity of what it sparked inside me. Silvia Federici carried me through formative years and I am forever grateful to you for the introduction. As I return again to her now, like many things since giving birth, her work and my readings of it have taken on a new dimension.

In the early 1970s, the International Feminist Collective demanded wages both for housework and against it, in the hope of gaining recognition and reparation for the largely hidden, yet completely vital, domestic labour carried out by women. Reproduction is examined in marxist terms; the reproduction of the workforce. But to consider reproductive labour as a whole fails to fully recognise the emotional, ecological and bodily dimensions of raising a child. *How my body leaks and aches when he cries. How dopamine floods my brain as his eyes make contact with mine and the corners of his lips reach upwards for the first time. The excruciating worry and unexpected guilt and overwhelming joy. And all that is to come next as we navigate the complexities of living, together. The same sensations are not evoked by a pile of washing.*

**We have a tremendous range of abstract emotions
that we don't pay attention to**

The psychologist places a red dot on the nose of a child sat in front of a mirror. The child reaches for the mirror, mistaking reflection for other. In a few months the child will recognise both the dot and the nose as their own, until then it is possible they still consider themselves part of their mother. It is thought that when children reach this level of self-awareness, new emotions like embarrassment, envy and empathy emerge. Psychologists study the trauma that might be experienced by a child realising that they are, at least in illusion, a separate 'self'. After the experiment, the mother wipes the red dot from his face, a nose made from her own organs. She is reminded instead of how interconnected we are. The cells of each child remain in the mother's body long after birth. We are made up of stars and each other.

You text me on the morning I go into labour and again on the day of his birth. My son is born 17 years 374 days after yours. Our midsummer boys, you say, are the future of the world.