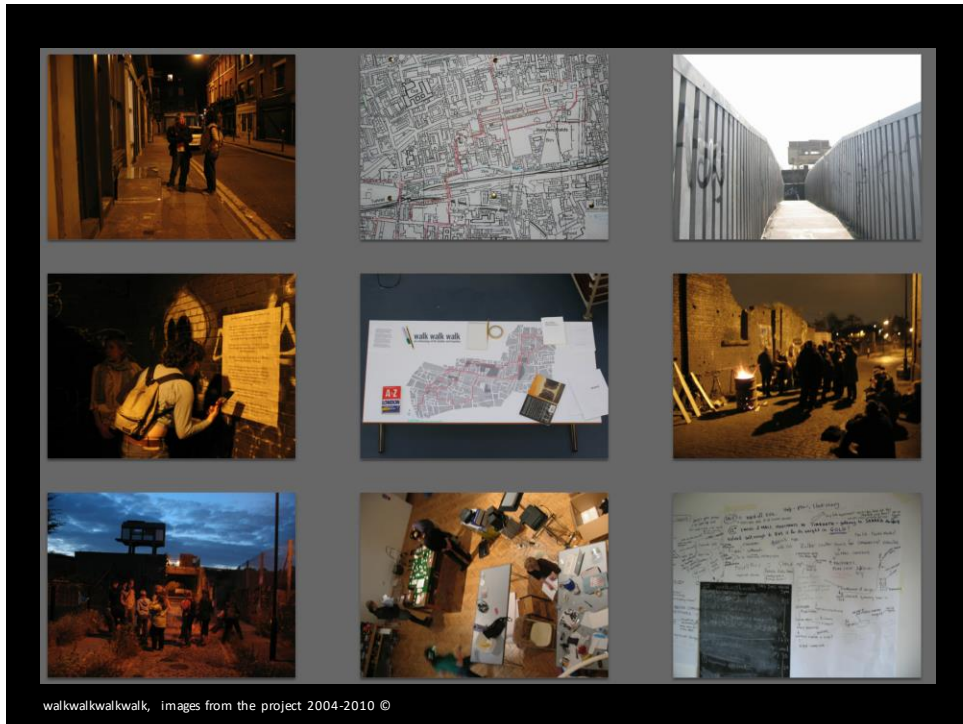


perambulator, n.

gen. A person who walks or travels through or about a place; a traveller; a pedestrian. Also *fig.* Now *arch.*

"perambulator, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2015. Web. 6 January 2016.



I began working with walking, incorporating it into my creative practice, in 2004. In collaboration with the artists Gail Burton and Serena Korda we created a project *walkwalkwalk: an archaeology of the familiar and forgotten* that used our routine walks to explore our local environment; the political meshwork of connections between people and places. We created a series of walks as live art events: nightwalks, a musical walk, guided tours, as well as producing fly posters, films, field recordings, performances and installations.



Flash forward 8 years. In 2012, when my son was a few months old, I was invited to make a walk for a project at Lewisham Art House. Initially I ruled this out. walkwalkwalk were no longer making live work together and my practice before would have required multiple research trips, extensive walking in the area, exploring, planning, preparing. This now felt entirely unfeasible.



Instead of saying no I decided to try to make a piece that would be possible to do with my baby in tow. In the first months of his life, pushing his pram around the area that I lived in, I was struck by the number of detours that I had to take – the route alterations, the small (and not-so-small) impediments to smooth passage. My familiar routes were rudely disrupted, forcing a new relationship with the very physical details of the urban environment. A new radar evolves – seeking out the dropped kerbs and the ramps – avoiding steps, narrow gaps, awkward turns.

perambulator, n.

A carriage for a baby or young child, which may be pushed along by a person on foot. Now usually shortened to *pram*.

"perambulator, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2015. Web. 6 January 2016.



Viewing the city through this new lens feels political. Losing the freedom of easy mobility – a freedom that I hadn't been aware of before – connects me to a massive group of people (predominantly women) in the same position, encumbered by wheels. This became the premise for Perambulator - making this visible through a mass walking with prams. So, simply, pram users were invited to meet at the gallery, and go for a walk around the neighbourhood.



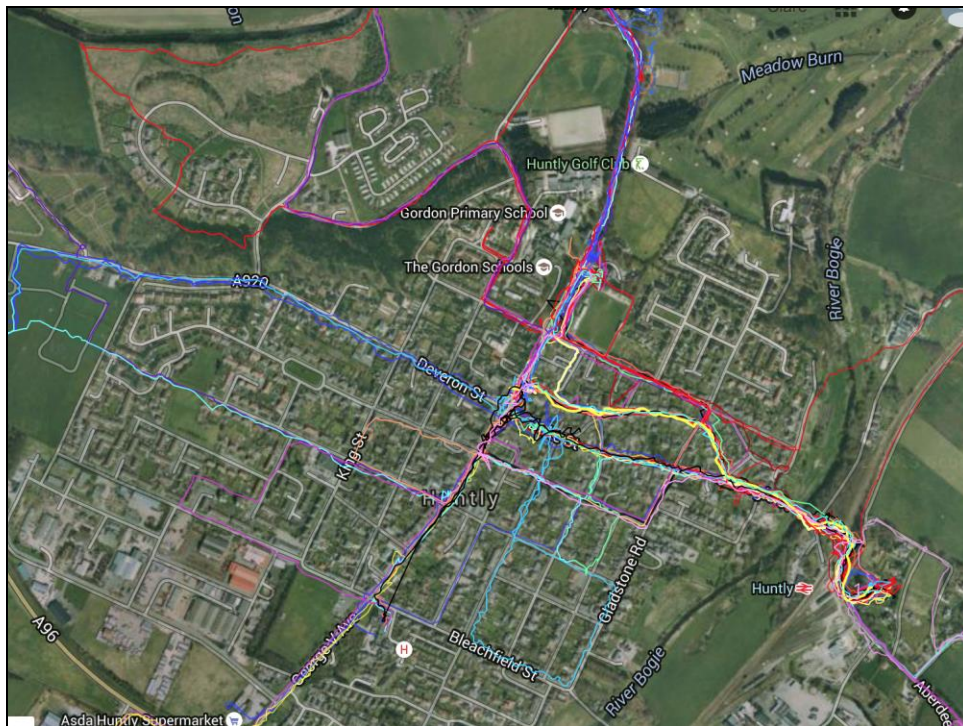
Walking with prams around Lewisham Art House was awkward - kerbs were too high, cars were parked on pavements without leaving enough space to pass, steps were steep, gates designed to block mopeds from driving into parks were difficult to maneuver around. The walkers with prams chatted about their everyday issues (as well as their sleep deprivation levels) and those without prams helpfully lifted, shifted, jiggled and had a go at pushing as we navigated.



By walking as a group we created a performance - the spectacle of multiple prams and their pushers negotiating each obstacle highlighted it far more than a single walker would. But also a space for interaction and sharing, of stories, experiences, anecdotes about the physical and psychological peculiarities of new parenthood.



In late 2012 I started talking with Deveron Arts in Huntly, Scotland, about making a more extended version of Perambulator there. In October 2013 I had another baby, Ruby, so it was not until May 2014 that I made it to Huntly, with both children.



My residency was part of Deveron's *Walking Institute*. Previous projects have included a UK border walk exploring the restrictive visa policies for overseas artists, and the *Slow Marathon* by Ethiopian artist Mihret Kebede - a walked marathon-length route around the town symbolically covering the distance from Addis Ababa to Huntly through collective footsteps. In contrast my proposed walking project would take place entirely within the town, and (as it emerged) on its edges, exploring the everyday walking experiences of parents and carers using prams.


perambulator, n.

spec. A person who performs a perambulation to determine the boundaries of a territory; a surveyor. Now chiefly *hist.*

"perambulator, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2015. Web. 6 January 2016.




In Huntly I walked with mothers and their children, with my kids in our everyday routines, and when I couldn't find anyone to join me I walked on my own with Ruby in the pram – testing the edges of the town for pram accessibility.



WALK ONE!

We arrived in Huntly today, after a very easy journey, and set off almost straight away for a walk into town, to find some lunch and buy a few supplies and to stretch...


[Continue reading →](#)



BABY WALK AND PICNIC, SATURDAY 10TH MAY 2014


Join us for a walk on the pram/pushchair accessible part of Deveron Arts' Slow Marathon route. We'll meet in the Square and walk up to the Clash for a picnic tea, greeting the...

[Continue reading →](#)




WALK TWO

We are settling in today, unpacking and finding our feet. Just been out for a short walk to get Ernest to have a nap. Here's the route (in red)



IT'S NOT BUGGY FIT



WELCOME

This blog will document the Perambulator project during my stay in Huntly throughout May 2014. It also includes some writing on the project's background and context. More about the origins of the project...

[Continue reading →](#)

Accounts of each of the walks were published on the project blog, along with photographs and GPS map routes. I also produced two larger scale participatory performance walks - live art events that began and ended the project, the *Baby Slow Marathon* and the *Perambulator Parade*



The *Baby Slow Marathon* tied in to another event - Kebede's *Slow Marathon* had been made into an annual event, and was due to take place at the end of my first week in town. I led a small group of pram users along the route that the full marathon walkers used to come into town - going out to meet them, stopping at the point past which we could not wheel any further. We made it halfway up the Clashmach hill, a spot with a bench and a beautiful view, stopping there for a picnic shared with the long walkers as they passed us on their final descent.



As the project progressed people told me about the horrors of navigating the pavements on bin day, about the forest walks that they used to do before they had kids, about different approaches to walking-for-napping. I took a large map into playgroup and asked people to mark awkward spots, narrow pavements, steep steps, slippery surfaces.



This process helped to shape plans for the *Perambulator Parade* the project's final event which sought to collectively perform the awkwardness of pram walking in the town - extending the idea begun with the Lewisham walk, but with a pre-designed route devised in collaboration with local participants.



After the success of the project's first event the *Perambulator Parade* seemed to falter at every turn. It wasn't feasible to get permissions in place to follow a route around so many small streets. I would have liked to have continued without permission - spilling out into the road, getting in the way, causing a nuisance. But I could see that my participants would not be happy about that and that if I did something that they didn't want to do they simply wouldn't come



In the end the parade followed a popular leisure route from the Castle into the town. Around 30 people joined the procession, with a banner, flags, and decorated prams. It made a finale to my project, a performative celebration of pram use, but it only partially did what I had hoped in relation to occupying, commenting on, claiming or disrupting space.



Perhaps it's helpful not to consider the finale as the main event, or outcome, of the project, but to think about how the smaller, quieter activities functioned and operated in relation to my aims. This connects onwards to the project post-Huntly.



Following the residency in Huntly I wrote about, talked about, and thought about the work I did there a lot. Through this writing and talking new opportunities for doing and making started to emerge, prompting me to consider how a project can ebb and flow, shifting scales in different phases.



So the activism at the project's heart swings from a shift in personal viewpoint – reframing life in relation to art, reflecting on mobilities and life transitions – borders, boundaries and obstacles and how they might be overcome. The next phase was a collaborative project with my slightly older son who often operated the camera for these *Perambulator* nap self-portraits, and of course my daughter – without whose need for naps the new works would not exist.



These 'not-walking' performances, necessary preambles to walking, are intimate entanglements with the equipment – the technology of parenting. I am in the pram with her, I am holding onto it rather than to her, so that I don't fall, so the wheels don't slip. I am trying to create an environment as close to lying in her bed next to her as possible. The hood is up so she's not distracted by what's going on around. I 'lie' next to her, my face touching hers, cheek to cheek. I sing the bedtime song. 'ooh la la ley, another evening fades away, you know the golden sun won't disappear for long, because tomorrow is another day, ooh la la lay' (and repeat.....). I am not lying down. I am crouching/kneeling on the ground. I am bracing, one hand on the scooter that is hanging from the pram handle, the other around the far side of the pram, gripping the metal frame. As she starts to drop off I quiet my singing and gradually shift to shushing, softly, repeatedly shhhhhhh shhhhh shhhhh shhhhh shhhhhhh shhhhhhh shhhhhhhhh. I need to shift my weight, my back aches and I'm twisted, I try to move as slowly, as gently as I can but she stirs. We are in the playground and if she sees the other children I think she will want to get out and play. I think of Louise Bourgeois's 'Femme Maison', her comment on the trap of domesticity represented repeatedly in her work; drawn, painted and in sculptural form - the body of a woman crammed head first into a house - her head (her thoughts? her life?) consumed by it. I feel like a 21st Century version of her image. 'Pram face', the derogatory term for a teenage mother, made literal (though I'm a long way off my teenage years). My face, my head, has disappeared into the pram. I am half woman half pram, a mother-machine hybrid. We are so nearly there, so close to sleep – yet I know that it is fragile - that if I

move too soon we will have to start again right from the beginning. I am thinking through all of the things that I need to do, that will be possible to get done once she goes to sleep. I try to hold out, hold on, contorting myself– gripping harder, pulling the pram closer towards me - trying to keep my head, my face, soft, quiet, in the same place. It is a feat of contrasts. When her thumb falls from her mouth I know she is asleep, and I extract myself– slowly, uncomfortably - my foot is asleep, my knee hurts and my wrist bears a print of the handle's form. I ungracefully untangle myself from the machine. De-coupled.



In her book 'Maternal Encounters' Lisa Baraitser discusses a maternal subjectivity, I quote "characterized not by fluidity, hybridity or flow, but by physical viscosity, heightened sentience, a renewed awareness of one's own emotional range and emotional points of weakness, an engagement with the built environment and with street furniture, a renewed temporal awareness where the present is elongated and the past and future no longer felt to be so tangible". This is the opposite of 'flow'. It is awkward, time feels frozen, there is too much to carry, the desired destination/activity is too far away or will be over by the time we get there, the plans will have to change, despite the overload of stuff somehow we do not have the one thing that we need. These are everyday, normal disruptions and realities – but to claim them in relationship to an art practice – to frame them aesthetically – to consider them as performance enables me both to accept them, and work with them in a (slightly) more objective way. Interestingly the positive psychology discussions (for example from Csíkszentmihályi) of 'flow' in relation to creativity, despite contradicting the experiences I describe here in many ways, include a sense of the collapsing of time – of being in a zone so that time stretches or contracts.



Sadly I've run out of Perambulator dictionary definitions to frame the next section of this work, but, following a short pram-free interlude an additional phase of the project began, with the birth of Astrid, in October 2017. I want to return here to Baraitser – this time her comparison of the free runner, or traceur, with the encumbered mother, I quote "the mother-plus-baby-plus-buggy-plus-stuff is out roaming the city. She appears to be the antithesis of the freerunner. Although her body is encumbered she too wishes to 'run', to make a series of feline fluid movements flowing into one another that allow her to navigate the urban landscape". On my home turf I have, maybe, started to crack this – I see lumps in the pavements, raised curbs at a distance, I use the strength in my wrists to tilt the pram – no pause – up and over keeping rolling. I know the width so well that I can judge which gaps I can get through. My mental map of steps, stairs and railings is detailed and recall is instant – a suitable route is in my mind without having to think hard. Should I meet an obstacle I can – again without pause – lift and carry the buggy with the baby in it. I have, perhaps, sometimes, found my flow.



Yet somehow I want more. I started reading Robert MacFarlane's 'the Wild Places' – an account of his journeying around the British Isles, seeking out on foot and by boat, the most remote, hard to reach 'untouched' places. At the start of the book he writes of walking out of Cambridge and climbing a tree. The book goes on to much further, really remote, really wild places, but this 'close to home' connection with nature, with the 'wild' is where it starts. Despite my feat of framing my mother-mobility walking routines as creative performance practice reading this infuriates me. I know that spending a week reaching a Scottish loch only accessible on foot is beyond the possibilities that my life holds, at least for the foreseeable future, but .I WANT TO CLIMB A TREE. I very much want to climb a tree. I am going to need some help.

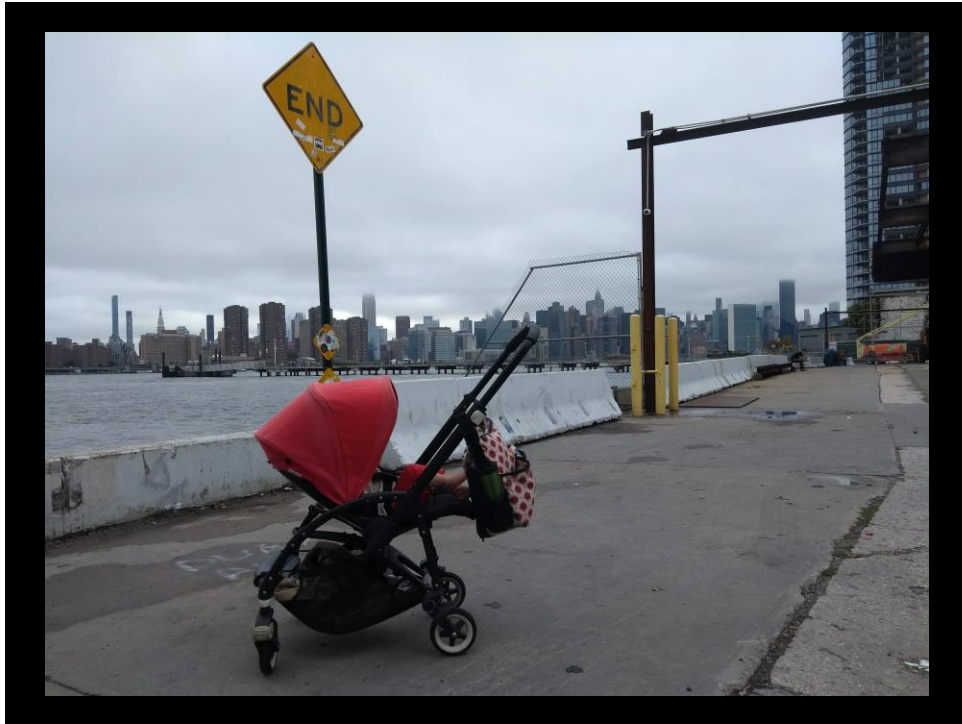


Luckily an invitation arrives from the Ecologies of Practice research group at the University of Surrey, to lead a walking workshop – even luckier they’d like it to be in Blackheath forest, just outside of Guildford.

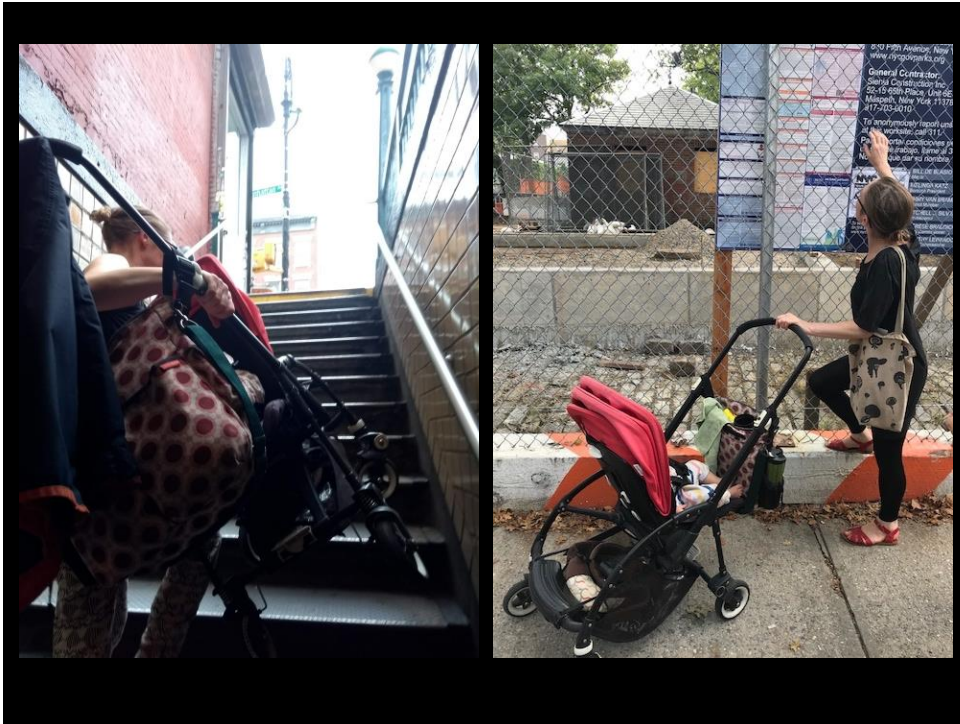


This is a highly unsatisfying experience. Firstly the pram wouldn't unfold. I spend an awkward ten minutes crouched on the ground by the bus trying to release the brake that has got stuck. Then Astrid, aged 7 months, cries when she is put in the pram. The idea was to try to get the pram through the forest— using the group of people participating to enable the carrying, lifting and manoeuvring through this unlikely landscape. And for me to find a tree to climb, with the support crew holding the baby. But she, the primary participant, is refusing to cooperate. I carry her in the sling while the others enthusiastically push the pram – moving it with ease over the dry path, up slopes and through the forest. It turns out we are going the wrong way, we have to turn back, and head in the opposite direction. Now we are pressured for time. The others pushing the empty pram are so fast that I, loaded with baby and backpack, find it hard to keep up. My desire, the plan, the POINT for me to climb a tree is getting lost in the impressive feat of strengths by which the group are speeding ahead carrying the pram. I want to shout STOP – HANG ON A MINUTE – THIS IS MEANT TO BE ABOUT ME. But instead I scramble to keep up – insist that people take turns moving the pram – chat tangentially about mother art and maintenance, networks of support, and fieldwork. The walk is over rather quickly. Although I feel disappointed – I did not get to climb a tree – others have got a lot from the experience. One participant suggests that all fieldwork (he is a cultural geographer) should involve the researchers pushing, or carrying a pram..... What I take away from it is a highly sensory memory – it was a hot day and carrying the baby in the sling made me sweat, a damp layer in between me and her. She was heavy in the sling and I can feel (even

writing this at a distance of a year) the weight of the sling straps biting my hot shoulders, making the muscles tense up into my neck. I was wearing sandals and the forest floor was dry and crumbly with leaf debris, the sensation of it flowing in and out of my toes, getting stuck under my heels. Also the dawning sense of speed – of the walk running away from me – slowly letting go, embracing, accepting the shift in what was happening – no tree climbing today. When when when, and how? will I find another crew to support this?!



One more switch now, between the rural and the urban. The final section of this talk considers a short exploration of New York City, in September 2018, part of the exhibition 'Saunter Trek Escort Parade' at Flux Factory and the Queens Museum.



Conceived of as a counterpoint to the Huntly residency – exploring the limits of the town for pram accessibility – the New York trip sought out the limits for the pram in the urban environment.



My account of the first day's walking includes the following: Downtown Brooklyn is tougher. We soon get stuck on a pavement that goes nowhere, and have to cross through parked cars. We reach steep edges with no drop kerbs, and the cracks in the sidewalk catch at our wheels. After a frustrating half hour of trying to get my bearings, avoiding the huge roads that lead up to the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges, I admit exhaustion and decide to take the subway back to Greenpoint. Jetlag has clearly set in as I manage to walk in circles, failing to find the G-train station that I need. I could take two trains and change, but I'm dreading having to carry the pram up and down into the station, and then up and down to change trains, and then up and up to get out. Finally I get on the right track, walk to the G station, and get onto the subway. I feel weirdly charged with strength, carrying the pram up and down by gripping it across the frame, barely pausing as I push, glide, lift, carry. By the time I get back to Greenpoint I'm really tired, but I have to carry the pram up the steps to the front door of my friend's apartment, and then up the stairs inside as well. This last effort feels like the tipping point. Away from the street life of the city— the excitement of being somewhere new and the visual presence of New York it is harder to find strength. I imagine that this would be my impediment if I lived here – not the walking around the city but the getting out of the house.

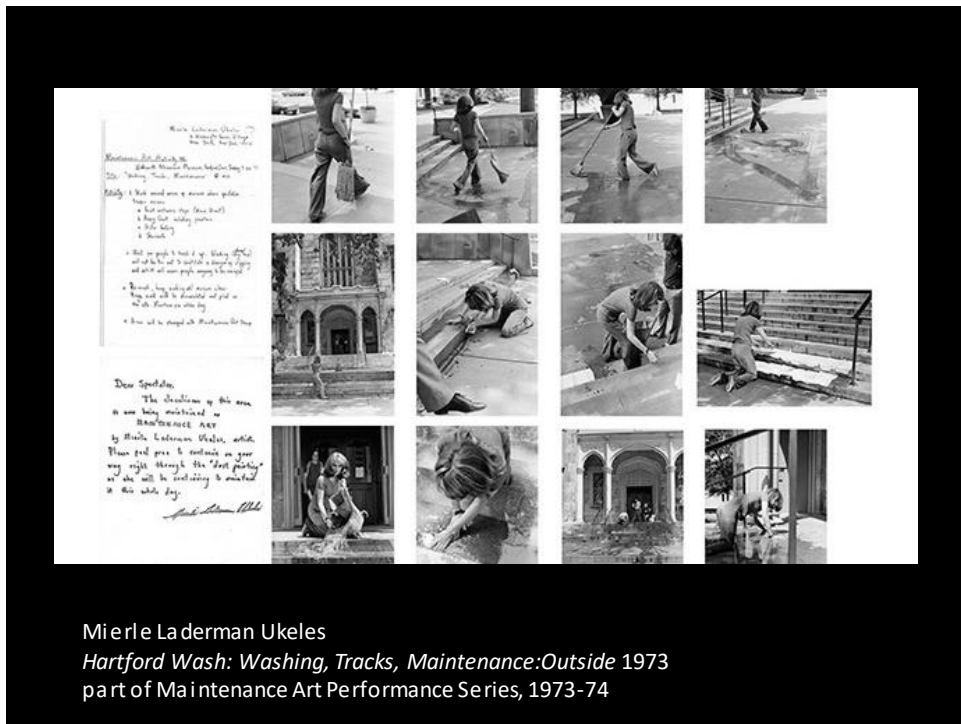


Working through this narrative, 6 years of work, an artwork that responds to my children, enfolding each of them as subject, object and as collaborators it strikes me that I began by thinking of the work as walking. As a walking artist the walk is both research method and outcome, it is a process by which to explore, but also a mechanism through which to perform the findings of those explorations. It constructs situations in which people, participants and co-creators, can shape and structure – can shift the events, changing what happens and how. Both adults operating prams, whose directions and viewpoints and experiences inform the understandings that the work collects along the way, and also the babies and children whose needs and desires force the physical viscosity that characterizes some of these walks. As the work has moved through cycles – sometimes more public, open and shared, sometimes more personal, quiet, one-to-one I think more about my body, my presence, my physicality within it – I think about myself as a walker, but also as a performer – a dancer, a contortionist, a strongwoman. The experience of strength and capability, of lifting, carrying, moving, conquering, is countered by experiences of collapse and despair – of struggle against a raincover that won't fasten over a kicking child in the pouring rain, of an undignified wrangle between a determined toddler who simply won't go in the pram as we approach our bus stop laden with shopping. The bodily memories of these poses, postures, movements and routines are now emerging, perhaps becoming a new project, a new work that considers the choreography of parenting, working away from the children, with other mother artist movers



Louise Bourgeois, *Femme Maison*, 1994, white marble, 4 1/2 x 12 1/4 x 2 5/8".

I mentioned Louise Bourgeois's *Femme Maison* already, in relation to the pram nap self portraits, but I want to close by touching on two other artworks that strike a chord with this work too



Mierle Lauderman Ukeles
Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance:Outside 1973
 part of Maintenance Art Performance Series, 1973-74

Mierle Laderman Ukeles Maintenance Art Manifesto "I am an artist. I am a woman. I am a wife. I am a mother. (Random order). I do a hell of a lot of washing, cleaning, cooking, renewing, supporting, preserving, etc. Also, (up to now separately I do Art. Now, I will simply do these maintenance everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art. I will live in the museum as I customarily do at home with my husband and my baby, for the duration of the exhibition. (Right? or if you don't want me around at night I would come in every day) and do all these things as public Art activities: I will sweep and wax the floors, dust everything, wash the walls (i.e. floor paintings, dust works, soap-sculpture, wall-painting) I cook, invite people to eat, make agglomerations and dispositions of all functional refuse. The exhibition area might look empty of art, but it will be maintained in full public view."



Valie Export, *Schlafstatte*, (sleeping place), 1982

And Valie Export's body configuration series. I first saw these photograph as a foundation art and design student and was struck by their ability to conjure up a physical sensation of the materials of the street. Looking at Export's body curving around a wall, or following the rise of a flight of steps, I can feel the hard, cold stone below her. I can sense the grainy surface of the marble that she arches her head back against, and feel the disorientating tilting downward of lying on a slope. As the live phase of this work comes to a close, the images that have been created through its actions persist in the world, my hope is that they contribute to 'The slow road towards the cultural visibility of maternal subjectivity' Baraitser (2008), p.124

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