

to operate differently than before. Where you could concentrate on where you were going, your own troubles or thoughts, or other people, now you are not alone, and yet not walking together with someone equal or able to keep up with you. The child can't see what you can, and you're aware of this. You find yourself explaining the world, wanting to share your impressions and your knowledge. But where should you start when there is so much to show? So you start with the most immediate and close-up. You look where your child is looking so that you can explain or imagine what they see.

What does this mean for the mother's perception? What does this mean for your interaction with the city? You are often split, divided between your own thoughts and the wanderings of your mind, your preoccupations with your work, your art practice, and the instant demands of your child. The child's perception, or rather your imagined projection of the child's thoughts about the world, encroaches on your perception of the world.

You enjoy what they enjoy, you relish the discoveries they seek and they become your discoveries too. You touch the world more closely; you feel the textures and the hard ground, the soft grass, the cold metal of the railing, the sparking fragments of a broken mirror, the shooting pain to the knee as the ground thumps them when they trip.

This is where the world is really transformed for you, where your vision is changed, and if you want to let it, then you can use this

new knowledge, this new way of seeing and understanding time and space, and transform the world around you.

Inevitably with a small child with short concentration span and voracious curiosity, your own thoughts will often be interrupted or scattered, and you'll find yourself digressing, revisiting old thoughts, roaming, playing. But isn't this part of the appeal of the *dérive*? What are the implications for the artist-mother of this altered engagement with the world? What are the effects of making someone else's desires more important than your own (at least some of the time), and adjusting your own to encompass theirs – if they are having fun then you can enjoy your own thoughts more. You can experiment more too.

Does being a mother really mean the loss of ego as it often seems at first or is it a new phase of ego? What does this mean for the artist?

What can the artist-mother contribute to visions of the city, to experiences of the city, to the design of cities? Is the artist-mother a new and more radical model of the artist wanderer, of the artist-nomad, artist-dérivateur, artist-bohemian?

The other question that lies behind this investigation is the status of the artist-parent. It is of course fine to be an artist and a parent if you don't publicise the fact that you have a child, or if the child is just a colourful (usually loud) accessory at exhibition private views. But the image of the artist-father tends to be quite different from that of the artist-mother here. Traditionally (male)

Baudelaire's flâneur is a man. The situationist *dérive* is also, on the whole, the preserve of men. Other latter-day wanderers – the psychologists, the vanishers of Paul Auster's novels, the theorists of slackerdome and hackerdome are men.

The figure of the city nomad, the bohemian with worn shoes, is still a powerful symbol of the artist – authentic and unsettled, unable to stay still. He is to be found inside his culture, taking it all in, wallowing in it, inhaling it, but passing through. He takes inspiration from the city to make his work or makes the walk itself into the artwork, or rather the tale of the walk, with himself as the focal point, the barometer, guide, source of meaning and value. The situationist *dérivateur* also implied or sought to act within the city, to affect change on the environment, to promote a non-consumerist engagement with the world. The legacy of the political thrust of situationism, and subsequent artists' group activism such as that of Group Material, and the practices of the Artists' Placement Group, can be felt in community-based projects and 'socially engaged' art practices in recent years. And now protest movements around the world, such as Occupy Wall Street and Occupy London, are overtly political in their desire to shake up the economic and political assumptions of capitalism.

The current economic devastation may encourage the resurgence of a new generation of flâneurs, and they may perhaps be a foil for the expanding global art market with its rolling carnival of art fairs and biennales and the occasional *bohémianself-destructiveverockstarkstarrinternationalmondadliggeniusartist*

Reflections on the city from a post-flâneur

Ruth Maclennan



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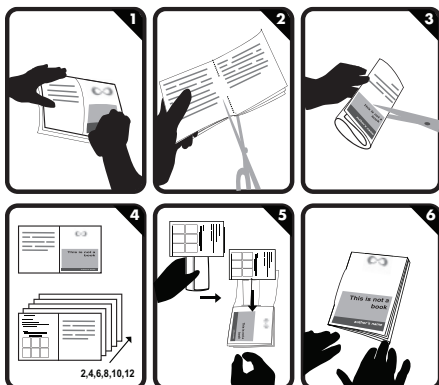
2011-12-15 & © Ruth Maclennan

Published by Proboscis

www.ruthmaclennan.com

Part of the Material Conditions series: diffusion.org.uk/?cat=1043

made with www.bookleteer.com from proboscis



<http://bkltr.it/uHhYzE>

I'd like to consider for a moment this figure of the mother-artist out walking in the city. This is not to belittle the figure of the father-artist, but I am focusing on what I know best. The problem, from an aesthetic perspective, with being a mother, is *a priori*, the essential compromise motherhood entails. For example, the mother cannot be entirely egotistical and still be an effective parent (in the sense of bearing responsibility for looking after

The mother-artist is an uneasy, even radical model, still marginalised by the mainstream art world. She no longer appears 'free', which is not desirable for the artist, who should at least be that. And like mothers in other professions, she bears the taint of 'unreliability' (she may put something or someone other than her work first, or have another baby).

for the artist. remain, but her focus is not on the implications of motherhood artists of her own time, and oddly perhaps, some of the issues a hundred years ago explored the predicament of women they are going for a walk. Virginia Woolf, in *A Room of One's Own*, stance against consumerist society. She is going for a walk – to conform or earn a living, or a bourgeois anti-bourgeois the society of the spectacle, or a retreat from social pressures pushing a buggy before her: it is not a gesture of defiance against but particularly the mother. She embarks on her *dérive* daily. This is the mother/grandmother/babysitter/older sibling/carer, keep an eye on. She wheels her chariot into the field, and sits down on the grass, after releasing her charge.

who gets caught up in the performance, and sometimes trampled in the fray.

However, I'd like to look at another figure, a lesser-known, unappreciated, ignored subject – not dismissed, because never even considered. She was never as self-absorbed as the lone flâneur or a member of the gangs of trusty *dérivateurs*. She sees the city differently now; she knew what it was to be one of them, though she never felt quite comfortable with the assumptions of masculine adventure associated with the aforementioned bohemian characters. She is a wanderer, even if it is sometimes only her mind that wanders. Hers is an 'engaged' practice, but with different priorities. She is attracted by different magnets within the city, and dances to an irregular tempo, sings a brighter timbre, and has an altogether other bodily experience of the city. Picture a youngish woman, slightly weary, hair unkempt, eyes alert, comfortable shoes, upper-body muscles flexed, well-toned, legs worn out – used to walking the pavements, bending down, squatting.

She walks at times determinedly, aiming for a short-term destination – a street-side café, a small mangy park or square with a gate, a bench with a bum sleeping on it, a shady piece of grass in the heart of summer, or a covered pavilion in the rainy winter. She notices a tree stump with names carved on it, and a satisfying hole to put small objects into, an old bicycle chain attached to a railing, the bike long since removed, and there, hidden under a bush, a wet, slobbered-over bouncy ball. A satisfactory place to stop: the dangers obvious, but easy to

More widely, if we consider the place, and pace, of children and their adults – not just their parents – in the city, possibilities might well open up for new forms of exchange and contribution to the public sphere, beyond the predominant consumerist values of our society: new inventions, new uses for public spaces, reclaimed places, more curiosity, conversation, and, perhaps, more fun.



This aside is just to indicate the transformation in perception that occurs when you become a parent for the first time and the changed relation to the outside world in the city.

No love yet, just a sense of being of one body, of being part of each other, and yet forever split, and therefore very precious. Outside the winter sun was too bright, the air too crisp, the squeaky noise of the enormous old-fashioned borrowed pram too loud. Passers-by approached and I would prowl around the pram, ready to pounce, to scratch someone's eyes out if they put their face too close. We took a short, familiar walk to Russell Square, past the British Museum, lingering too long at a zebra crossing. Several passers-by spoke to us, as much alerted by the awkward, keen-eyed but absorbed strutting creatures that were the new parents, as by the tiny bundle in the giant pram with his eyes closed. We walked around the square, photographed ourselves, finding it difficult to fit the tiny baby in the frame alongside his hulking parents and pram, let alone capture anything of the city around. The relief on returning home was extreme. The energy expended on this, our virgin flight as parents, was equivalent to a ten-mile walk in our pre-parent lives.

If I left him for a moment, I could easily forget his existence and then be horrified at the enormity of my lapse. Everything seemed enormous at that time – enormous changes, enormous feelings, strange strong tastes and sensations, sharp pains.

and loving a child). I'm not concerned here with whether parents look after a child exclusively, or has hired child-care, or sends the child to a nursery. These are important factors, but they are discussed elsewhere. What I'm interested in is the effect on the artist of becoming and being a mother: the split it causes in the artist's sense of self that has to be addressed; and, the effects of motherhood on seeing and touching the world around her. And following on from this, the impact of the mother-child 'unit', or 'continuum' as it sometimes feels like, on the city through which they move.

The powerful feeling of being a mother in the city, and the sense of attachment to your child as dependent and transformative presence, can best be understood by recalling the sensations parents experience when they first take their newborn baby 'out'. The memory of those first moments outside fades, and one gets used to being a parent and forgets the radical transformation it has wrought upon you, forever. I shall describe my feelings on taking my son outdoors for the first time. I'd been indoors for four days since the birth and had had no desire to leave the cocoon of my home – a warm and familiar, safe, dry, place where I could lie down at anytime and only see close family. But finally it got stuffy, and I felt ready to face the world. I wanted to test the anonymity of the street, to show my baby the world, and the world my baby. We dressed and tucked up our tiny, new, unfamiliar, strange creature who had just arrived, announced but still unexpected, whose recently chosen name didn't quite fit yet, who seemed to belong nowhere except attached to me, lying on or by me.

it confirms his virility and creativity in all fields of life. This model is however somewhat outdated, though it still exists in many parts of the world. The artist-mother can of course, sometimes with the complicity of the other parent, perform in a similar vein. There are one or two stories of women artists who had children and were still powerful artists, and their ability to procreate didn't seem to get in the way of their art, or the appreciation of their art. As mothers though, they always seem to be condemned, if not at the time then posthumously by their sons writing memoirs of how difficult it was to be the son of an egotistical, driven artist-mother. Barbara Hepworth is a notable example (with four children, three of whom were triplets). Male artists never get such a rough press, and even if their children write memoirs (Esther Freud for example) the father is somehow always admired and loved even from afar, rather than vilified as almost unnatural. Lucien Freud's promiscuity as a father is rarely noted, while Hepworth's rejection of the role of motherhood is described in disbelieving tones, and furthermore her art always compared to her teacher and colleague, Henry Moore. All in all the artist-mother has been and still is under considerable pressure to behave as if she doesn't have children, in order to

artists were able to father as many children as they liked and the consequences were kept well out of the way, not allowed to intrude upon the bohemian adult sphere of the art world – any of the art worlds. In fact having children in the background (and a docile partner to look after them and take them away when they become too boisterous, or disturb the labours of the father-artist) reflects rather well on the (male) artist.

fit the cliché of the artist-bohemian, either working all night in a draughty studio, or being the (wo)man about town, who can network spontaneously and stay out all night drinking with curators, critics, gallerists, collectors.

The mother's experience of the city changes over time, as children grow and their world expands. But the initial shock of walking through the city as a parent with a baby is the most fundamental change and announces the changes to come: the constantly shifting parameters, new dangers, passions, responsibilities, interests, networks, physical and emotional capabilities, and ageing.

How you move in the city is just one experience transformed by being a parent. As the children grow up, you struggle with new emotions or old fearsome ones exploding out of the past – of love, anger, frustration, hope, fear, and joy. It makes the question of whether art and life can or should be kept separate most acute. They aren't separate. It is the same person after all who is in the front line of the struggle – with ideas, with herself, making art; making ends meet, making sense and making a place for all this.

Some artists will of course continue to have children whatever the pressures, and unacknowledged stigma. But why not start a conversation about parenthood and children and art, that isn't just about keeping the kids occupied in the museum?

whenever they feel like it. Other people are more interesting than trees or flowers, or dogs, and they are there to be addressed, played with, fought over, cried over. How often did you speak to strangers before? Strangers also make overtures to you and your child. There is an engagement with others based on an assumption of shared experience. People often feel children belong to everyone just like famous people – perhaps because they too are beautiful. This promise or threat of unexpected intimacy affects your spatial awareness.

I experienced this especially when visiting a foreign city, Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan. I was there to make a film. This was the first time I'd brought my two-year old son along on a work trip. Whenever we went out together we would meet people, have little immediate, unpredictable exchanges – around a child's swing, on a doorstep, looking for a ball, or just walking along the street. Because of my son, I noticed things I might not have otherwise: like the giant SUVs swerving into a parking lot next to a swing and a climbing frame without any fencing; the intermittent pavements, the fragments of old worn-out Soviet-era playgrounds scattered between the new high-rise buildings, and the lack of children.

So besides the changes to your body and the heightening of your animal instincts about other people, there is a change in your visual focus. Instead of noticing the vistas of the city, or thinking about the big patterns and paths through the labyrinth, you find yourself focusing on close-up space. Distances become longer, because you're tired, or your child is. Time and space seem

That is not to say that one retains this heightened feeling forever, just that once the transformation has occurred it can't be undone. You don't go back to your previous self, and even if you are walking on your own through the city later on, the insights and perceptions that you have gained from that transformation remain with you, and probably affect your attitudes to your art practice, and what you do with it.

I'd like to reflect on some of the transformations that motherhood brings in terms one's engagement with urban public space, to speculate on the often-untapped potential of such non-conformist, non-consumerist attitudes, and their creative potential.

The most obvious change to your walks in the city is to your body. You can no longer swing your arms, or hold an umbrella, or even stand up straight. When you are carrying a baby in a sling or pushing a buggy with a baby and then holding a toddler's hand, you cannot help but empathize with the child's view of the surroundings – if only to prevent accidents. You notice the cracks on the pavement, the excited dog approaching, the empty beer can, or the moon in the daytime. You sometimes talk incessantly about nothing at all to keep your child or yourself amused, providing a running commentary on the birds and the buses, or whatever tiny things are happening as you pass through the world.

When the child is able to move around, particularly when they can walk, they drift into, or ride roughshod over strangers' lives