Bloodline: An Experiment in Knit and Proximity

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Copyright Statement

Abstract

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It was if they might be at the edge of sharing some intimacy, leaning in towards each other, knees and toes close to touching, their shoulders rounded. They sit on two chairs from her old kitchen; the seats shuffled together so that they might each face the other. An early June evening, both of them in summer dresses, two balls of red yarn resting at their feet. They are so close, so close that they each hear and feel the other's breath. She recalls a memory of breathing exhaled air from a brown paper bag, of someone coaxing her towards calm.

She is inhaling her mother.

Bloodline: An Experiment in Knit and Proximity is research by practice that has its origin in an affective encounter experienced during the performance of two women knitting together, a mother and daughter – who simultaneously knit a conjoined red line, *Bloodline* – initiated by the daughter, who is, in this context, both artist and writer.

The research responds to this question: how might I account for a moment of affect, to explain its manifestation in association with knitting and the knitted thing, and to substantiate my hypothesis that the knitted object, and knitting as process, have a unique capacity to explore the issues of proximity and distance that are encountered and negotiated in *Bloodline*?

This research adopts an auto ethnographic and mixed methodology approach to investigate the context, practice and outcomes of hand knitting as illuminating the experience and meanings of attachment, separation and loss – the problematic of being in relation with and to another. It seeks to contribute, through a process of 'close looking' and the production of evocative objects (Turkle, 2011), to a language of textile practice that is as much concerned with the sticky, unpleasant and unknown as it might be with the sensuous and warm.

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my brother, who gave too much, and my sister, but most of all to my mum.

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Author's Declaration

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Signature:

Date:

Bloodline, the first rows.

Chapter One:

In The Beginning

This research concerns my attempt to unravel a moment in the making of *Bloodline*, an on-going artwork with my mother, and to account for how it came to prick me.[1] The research responds to this event and asks, how might I account for a moment of affect, to explain its manifestation in association with knitting and the knitted thing, and substantiate my hypothesis that knitting and the knitted object have a unique capacity to explore the issues of proximity and distance that are encountered and negotiated in *Bloodline*? This research is as much about being touched, in the manner of being affected – 'I am touched' – as it is about touching. The primary making process is hand-knitting, a practice which insists that every loop of yarn must pass through fingers before it is worn or held.

Hand knitting issues from the home (Turney 2009), and is a 'women's legacy passed down through the ladder of generations' (Edelman in Hood, 2013: 50). In the context of an exploration of attachment and loss, it is an appropriate choice, for it requires a certain slowness and stillness and physical intimacy with materials and also between subjects.[2] *Bloodline,* operates cohesively, it knits us – mother and daughter - together in the manner of being 'close knit'. Our knitting in an expression of attachment that contains within it the promise of loss, it will end when one of us is finished. We sit together, and whilst we do not knit for others, and cannot knit for the lost son/lost brother, we keep him in mind, bringing him to our stories and our making and, in so doing, perhaps restore each other, for as I will show, knitting is an act of repair.

[1] The French literary theorist, philosopher, critic and linguist, Roland Barthes appears throughout my work. His definition of the terms studium and punctum, in relation to the photograph (*Camera Lucida,* 1980) are particularly helpful. The punctum describes a moment or thing that is affecting. 'A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).' (1980: 27) The studium is more generalised and describes overall appeal, 'it is of the order of liking, not of loving' (Ibid). I have used these themes to explore my attachment to garments and objects in my research. Elsewhere, I have been influenced by Barthes's attachment to and relationship with his mother. I consider Barthes's writing to be an act of poesis, in that the manner of writing has, in itself, the potential to bring new knowledge to light. I have attempted to adopt this position in my research. Barthes also demonstrated an appreciation of knitting when he described it as 'a manual activity that is minimal, gratuitous, without finality, but that still represents a beautiful and successful idleness.' (Barthes, 1991: 341)

[2] This physical closeness is most apparent in the making of garments for others when fit is measured against the body of the recipient, but is also witnessed in the teaching of knitting, which often involves close familiarity. Knitting's products are often made and given out of love or celebration – a jumper for a son, a hat to welcome a new baby. In this they are gifts and have a cohesive function. (Dilnot, 1993) (Phillips & Taylor, 2009)

And we knit with red yarn. The colour of beating hearts, of love, warmth and tenderness, but also the colour of violence, of spilt blood, of loss, of raw flesh. The just beneath, just contained. The red that carries oxygen through our veins; the same red of fairy tales: red shoes, red capes.[3]

In an art historical context, knitting appears as the manifestation of women supporting young women, of sharing knowledge and wisdom and also as a solitary occupation for women and young girls. Dame Laura Knight's *The Knitting Lesson* (1902) demonstrates this in the knitter's embrace of the older woman whose arms surround her pupil. The undated *Knitting Lesson* of Pierre Jacques Dierckx shows a woman leading eight young girls in sock knitting, a precursor of the contemporary knitting circle. Depictions of solitary knitting abound and include several painted by William Bouguereau, whose *Innocence* (1898) describes how knitting was conflated with the feminine in much the same way as Roszika Parker accounted for the feminisation of embroidery.[4] In Bouguereau's naming, we see how knitting performs as an appropriate pastime for young girls who are both still and quietly occupied. Frida Kahlo's *Dona Rosita Morillo* (1944) in the elsewhere gaze of its subject, suggests knitting as a site of escape, or reverie, much like 'a beautiful and successful idleness.' (Barthes, 1991: 341)

Explorations of the problematic of being consanguineous with another – of sharing a bloodline – include Sally Mann's *Family Pictures* (1984-1991) and Richard Billingham's *Ray's a Laugh* (1995-2000). Mary Kelly's *Post Partum Document* (1973-1979) explores Kelly's relationship with her infant son, and includes his soiled nappies in a particular outing of the abject. It is in this post-modern context that knitting appears as a manifestation of such ideas. Elaine Reichek's *Laura's Layette* (1979) depicts the drawn charts and knitted up garments of her daughter's first outfit, which in its framing and gallery display suggests equivalence between drawing and knitting. Rosemarie Trockel's knitted works continued the transfer of knitting from the domestic sphere into the gallery. In the context of *Bloodline*, Trockel's *Schizo-Pullover* (1988) manifests a particularly challenging intimacy in which two beings –

[3] This paradoxical colour supports the research beyond *Bloodline* enabling thinking on other paradoxes, including knitting itself, which might be described as simultaneously warm and protective, clinging and smothering.

[4] In her seminal text *The Subversive Stitch* (1984), Rozsika Parker accounts for the domestication of stitch via a critical historical account of embroidery. Ultimately, she argues that stitch has been constructed as feminine, that there is nothing natural in the relationship between women and stitch. Although knitting is not Parker's concern, her thinking informs my research and through it I have come to see knitting as similarly socially constructed as feminine. Parker's work has the habit of bringing the truth to light, with which I am similarly concerned. Her book, *Torn in Two* (2005) explores maternal ambivalence, positioning the maternal as a paradoxical site, this has enabled me to think of my practice in similar terms, to understand that things made and given out of love, might contain within them the urge to cling or possess, perhaps even hate.

referenced in the appropriation of 'schizo' – are fused. Annette Messager's *The Boarders*, taxidermy sparrows wrapped in tiny hand knitted blankets brings childhood moments of play – of making clothes for dolls and teddies and the complex burials of family pets – into the public realm and ultimately refers back to its 'sites of production' (Bernadac, 2006: 9) which appear simultaneously as the home and knitting itself. Lindsay Obermeyer's *Connection* (1998) makes an explicit reference to attachment. A red knitted jumper of two bodies and conjoined arms, worn simultaneously by Obermeyer and her adopted daughter. In their husband and husband collaboration, Dutes Miller and Stan Shellabarger crochet a tube that, in its fleshiness, is suggestive of an umbilicus or deflated phallus, a tunnel of sorts that connects them. In their *Untitled (Pink Tube)* and our *Bloodline*, we witness 'The potential of constructing complex objects from a simple, single yarn.' (Hemmings, 2014: 54)

The contemporary concern for knitting to engage with issues of gender is reflected in Mark Newport's hand knitted action heroes, which, without bodies to give them muscular form, are emasculated and flaccid. In this, Newport participates in 'joke work' (Sandino, 2005), Freddie Robins performs a similar gesture in her work[5] and beyond this engages with the paradoxical nature of knitting, the threatened potential violence of its tools in *Craft Kills* (2002) in which the flesh of Saint Sebastian is punctured by knitting needles, the smothering façade of the domestic in *Knitted Homes of Crime* (2002) and the uncanny display of bodies conjoined at the neck in *Headcase* (2000). In all this, Robins brings to language things that might seem beyond words, or at least, beyond sharing, which is also a concern of my research.

[5] A discussion of Freddie Robins's work continues in Chapter 5.

It is as if they were at the edge of sharing some intimacy, leaning in towards each other, knees and toes close to touching, their shoulders rounded. They sit on two chairs from her old kitchen; the seats shuffled together so that each may face the other. An early June evening, both in summer dresses, two balls of red yarn resting at their feet. They are so close, so close that they each hear and feel the other's breath. She recalls a memory of breathing exhaled air from a brown paper bag, of someone coaxing her towards calm. She is inhaling her mother.

The younger one holds two wooden knitting needles as the older one watches, watches her daughter cast on 12 stitches, knit across a row and then, picking up loops from the bottom of the first cast-on row, make another 12 with yarn from the other ball. Now there is a bottom and a top and two lengths of red yarn tracing across her lap. She hands her another needle and they begin their task. Winding yarn around needles, pulling through, casting off. It is tricky, much trickier than she had anticipated and for a moment she thinks they might fail, for they are too close to work effectively, stumbling across each other, their knitting needles jellied extensions of their own clumsy digits; there is too much here and none of it works. She imagines herself elsewhere, looking down on them, suspects they look very strange sitting there like that, two women knitting, face to face, knitting this conjoined thing.

They take a while to settle, to learn how to shuffle around each other, to accommodate each other so that their hands and fingers might fall into a rhythm. The first rows build very slowly, more like picking than knitting – afterwards she reflects on that word 'picking'; once there is some distance, some room for manoeuvre, swiftness emerges, and for a moment she notices how beautiful this all seems.

And then, something quite unexpected: when so close to her, needle to needle, she is aware of shifting physical sensations, her throat balled up, shoulders arched, flesh hot, sweat trickles down her back into her knickers, stomach tightened into a fist and her eyes about to prick … threatening to spill. Damn it, damn me, damn this thing.

Out of the blue, out of some deep, dark blue.

It rose to the surface.

And the contrast, her very easy mother chatting freely with anyone passing, sitting back in her chair, left foot tapping out some secret rhythm, smiling her pleasure at being there, being with her. But she herself could not be like that. Instead, different, overwhelmed, consumed by a dreadful anxiety – a truth that seemed to reveal itself in that very instant – she knew she would lose her and it would be too late. She should say something, she thought she might want to say something, was searching for the words. Running around inside her head, which ones are right? In a spin, spinning, fighting to stay there, not to run away, you can't run because everyone is watching, and you can't tell her, you need to make it disappear.

Swallow it down

Bite down hard on the inside of your mouth, just below your bottom lip, hard enough to feel pain, really hard, your teeth close enough that you anticipate the taste of iron on your tongue. Avoid her eyes, don't look at her, look down. Don't feel that, feel this, this spot just inside your mouth, below your lip, just where your teeth threaten to meet. Bite it hard. Hold yourself together.

Just say nothing

Her dignity was salvaged by the curiosity of others, those who came to see what they were doing, and their arrival was felt as a welcome distraction. That intense moment of her undoing had passed. And so the two of them began to knit a narrow strip of joined-up loops from two giant balls of blood-red yarn, a twisting strip like a bridge that spanned the space between them.

Twisting, another unanticipated moment. She really did not expect the turns the line takes, winding around itself, like the twisting double helix of DNA,[6] like an umbilicus, it seems to have a life of its own, to be its own thing. Their energy coiled within it. At first this frustrates her, she wanted a flat line, not this thing, and she makes to undo the twists, which means turning their knitted thing back on itself, but an even messier tangle emerges

[6] DNA, or Deoxyribonucleic Acid, is described as the 'blueprint' for life, 'We talk about DNA as if it's a template, like a mould for a car part in a factory […] But DNA isn't really like that. It's more like a script' (Carey: 2012, p2) that the very first footnote in this story should be one concerned with DNA.

as needles begin to slip out of loops and clash with other needles. She regrets being so visible, all too public. Everyone can see this mess and see her failing. It seems to resist her attempts at undoing, of making it into the thing she wanted, had hoped for; this did not happen when they practised on the swing seat in her garden. This twist will not be undone and she wonders how she could not have known it would happen. So the twisting stays and the two-ply yarn they knit is now thrice plied. But letting it be does not work and the tension in the twist becomes unbearable, knotting the whole thing into a thick red coil. When they move further apart, far enough that she is able to scrape the chair backwards across the floor, untwisting is easier, only a couple of turns are needed to restore something more fluid, a slight discharge of tension, but still she is tethered.

Caught in a taut line hitch

In 2006, I began to knit *Bloodline* with my mum, a project that came into being as an adjunct to a larger body of work that marked the end of my studies for an MA in Fine Art at Swansea College of Art. At the time it seemed like a simple thing to do, and I remember being more concerned with how it might look than what it might mean. For a long time afterwards it languished at the back of my wardrobe, balled up inside a plastic bag. I might occasionally stumble across it when hunting for a mislaid shoe or retrieving a shirt slipped off a hanger. When this happened it would prick me, for I was haunted by the surprise of how I had come so close to being undone by the simple act of knitting with my mum; that day when the grown woman had become 'tongue tied'. It – and the memory of how I felt – never went away and the red knitted line, itself like an embryonic spine, became my 'skeleton in the cupboard'.

Louise Bourgeois tells us that 'To unravel a torment, you must begin somewhere.'[7] In that moment I had been so bound to her it was as if the very binding balled in my mouth, words stuck in my throat. Pull on one thread, the rest will follow, this is the beginning. Writing is my first moment of unravelling. Might I find the words at the end of my fingers rather than on my lips?

[7] *To Unravel a Torment You Must Begin Somewhere* is the eighth in a series of nine works collectively known as 'What is the Shape of this Problem?' The collection is held by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, United States of America. https://www.moma.org/collection/works/62545

Writing,
typed words where my
hushed language courses river-like from
my brain.
A silent eddying of smooth words
travelling downstream, through my neck,
towards my arms and hands,
to emerge
as tiny distinct pebbles at the fanlike
delta of my fingertips from where they
pool as silt on my keyboard.
Reflection.
Their source, or point of origin,
is my head and not my heart.
Words alone
will not do.

Much of this research is my continuing attempt to unravel the meaning in *Bloodline*, to try to explain how it came to prick me and become bigger than the sum of its parts. This requires that I interrogate it both as thing and process: the line and the knitting, even its naming. Question everything, put it – and myself – under a spotlight.

Christopher Frayling reminds us that research 'must exist outside of the person or persons doing the research. And the person must be able to tell someone about it' (Frayling, 1994: 1) and here I manipulate his words to my advantage, for my 'telling' is tale telling. My writing and reading, for I hope you might hear my voice in your reading of me, means that I am both visible – in a near, close to literal, sense – and open, in that my disposition is both evocative and revelatory for, as autoethnographer, I am 'often disclosing hidden details of a private life and highlighting emotional experience' (Pace, 2012: 5).

Carolyn Ellis describes autoethnography as 'an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural' (Ellis in Denzin, 2000: 739). And in her own account of writing in this way, Sarah Wall comments that 'Autobiographical writing is part of a new writing imagination that is based on movement, complexity, knowing and not knowing, and being and not being exposed' (Wall, 2008: 41).

Thus autoethnography privileges the experience of being a subject within a wider cultural field. For it to be recognised as valid research, some argue that autoethnography needs to be more analytical in focus, expressing concerns that its evocative quality might eclipse rational interpretation (Anderson, 2006). Ellis and Bochner reject this impulse, claiming that the reader judges the cultural relevance of the autoethnographic text, 'as they determine if the story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know' (Ellis, 2004: 194–5). I have tried to find a middle ground between these two positions that does not sacrifice the personal at the altar of rationality and where my story 'transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation' (Chang, 2008: 43). This has meant the inclusion of a series of in-depth case studies entitled

Cherish,[8] where I have been able to generalise my autoethnography beyond the self. To return briefly to Frayling, in terms of my research 'speaking' to others outside myself,

[8] Jonathan Chapman suggests that 'cherishability is a powerful signifier of an object's capacity to be cherished, loved and cared for […] it is a valuable term for measuring the degree of dependency perceived in a given

whenever I have shared aspects of these stories as conference papers, I have always been approached by someone with another tale to tell. Three of the studies within this body of research arose from such encounters.

It is hard to be authentically oneself. I recognise that my idea of 'me' and who I am is largely constituted through my relationship with others and what I might want them to think of me. This is a universal concern, but is particularly crystallised in the moment of making and sharing a text, especially when that text concerns, as does mine, the lives of others, my family and those close to me. This knowledge haunts my writing and making, becoming a visual manifestation of 'what will they all think of me?' However hard I have tried to resist the impulse towards self-censorship, I have no doubt that there are times when it has broken through, got under my skin and made itself known. When this happens, I recognise a 'sideways glance' appears in my writing and making, an attempt, perhaps unconsciously, to protect others as much as myself. At times I have had to decide how and what I might share, but I try to resist the commonly heard idiom that some things are 'best left unsaid', for as Carolyn Ellis has written: 'honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and doubts and emotional pain' (Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 738).

Beyond the anxiety and pain, there is something of an ethical dilemma in person-centred narratives (Couser, 2004). Sarah Wall, writing from her own experience of overseas adoption, describes how her questions about what was right to share ultimately persuaded her not to publish her original text, but instead to refer to it tangentially. She asks: 'How can I do otherwise than to feel the guilt of making use of another person's life, of borrowing another person's identity, to tell my own story?' (Wall, 2008). My relationship with others is central to this research; what I have to say, to share, involves them and for this reason I recognise that working in this way involves both courage and risk, perhaps the greatest to myself.

The autoethnographic position – because it deals explicitly with personal narrative – has become associated with feminist practices (Ellis in Denzin, 2000: 741). In this it offers a voice or platform to those most often unheard. It also challenges rationalist hierarchical knowledge, as described by Donald Schön, a paradigm in which research is also considered

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object.' (2005: 76) My case study is informed by this thinking. *Cherish* is a series of qualitative one-to-one interviews with volunteers who hold onto hand knitted objects that might be described as cherished. Extracts from these interviews appear throughout this thesis, with consent.

to be separate from practice (Schön, 1983: 26). In adopting this position, I respond to Hélène Cixous's appeal that:

> Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies […] Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement. (Cixous, 1976: 876)

Early on in my journey, an academic asked me why, as a lecturer in contextual studies, I would choose a practice-based PhD; would it not be easier to write? But there was and is something 'in the making' that is revelatory, things that I cannot find without this turning, holding, looping, gathering and unravelling. As Bruce Archer has written,

> There are circumstances where the best or only way to shed light on a proposition, a principle, a material, a process or a function is to attempt to construct something, or to enact something, calculated to explore, embody or test it. (Archer, 1995: 11)

Like Marion Milner's quest to become a painter, I suspected that, whatever I hoped to discover, 'it was not something that could be apprehended in the first instance by an intellectual approach' (Milner, 1981: xix). Making was always high on my agenda. Yet, unlike Milner, I do not seek to separate making or doing from what she describes as the 'intellectual approach', as if the two might be separate entities and as if making did not involve the intellect. Instead, I prefer to describe myself as Schön's reflective practitioner, where my research practice is a 'reflection-in-action', where my thinking – and writing – works upon my practice as much as my practice upon my thinking; together they make loops of articulated thought, just as my fingers articulate the yarn that passes through them and is turned around needle tips and forms the words at my fingertips. I cannot work this out without making, without bringing a wholeness of 'reflection – action – reflection – action' to the discussion. As Schön tells us,

> It is this entire process of reflection-in-action which is central to the 'art' by which practitioners sometimes deal well with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict. (Schön, 1983: 50)

Beyond this, making – and indeed unmaking – have the potential to reveal new knowledge, knowledge 'for me' that might otherwise remain elusive. There have been many such moments, often arriving at times of failure. Elizabeth Wayland Barber begins the preface of her book *Women's Work: The First 10,000 Years* with a description of

knowledge acquisition achieved in this way. In her attempt to recreate a Hallstatt weaving, Wayland Barber mistakes warp for weft and produces an unnecessarily complicated and unsatisfying replica, yet she describes being 'delighted' at her failure, for it was

> another lesson to me that the process of recreating ancient artifacts step by step can shed light on the lives and habits of the original craftworkers that no amount of armchair theorizing can give. (Wayland Barber, 1995: 23)

There have been many such occasions in my journey, moments when work that has taken many hours, sometimes days, must be undone, unravelled or unpicked. Whilst often frustrating, there have been revelations and explanations as to why something did not work, or why redoing was needed for other reasons. Setting out with the ambition of making lots of work, I am surprised at how much undoing and redoing became embedded within my practice, how so many pieces remain unfinished, yet not necessarily unresolved. I am confident in claiming my practice to be as much about unmaking as making, undoing as doing, for I am nothing if not dogged.

But that first attempt at revisiting the moment through writing did enable the realisation that what we were doing, simultaneously knitting a wobbly and imperfect red line, was meaningful; that the very act – process and artefact tied together into a moment of becoming – carried within it the seeds of something that might be 'beyond words' or at least difficult to articulate in words. Perhaps the making – in this case the knitting – might be in and of itself a language. It was as if I had turned to knitting, neither having been properly taught nor having knitted a garment until I was into my fourth decade, in an unconscious attempt to find meaning. It was a language I barely spoke, seemingly so domestically mundane and yet somehow capable of overwhelming me.More than this, my work is a very deliberate gesture to stake a claim for a different voice. A language of textile practice that is bloodied, messy, tricky, vile and yet still potentially caring – protective even – of self and other.[9] A language that embodies within it the best and sometimes the worst of what it means to be human. A language that wraps making and writing together, plies two threads into one, into a two-ply yarn. Many times along the journey text and textile have run alongside each other, brushed each other's flesh, shared pathogens, shared caresses.

[9] Elizabeth Crooke achieves something of this when she writes of the authenticity of the bloodied clothing retained by the families of those killed by British troops during the Bloody Sunday conflict and now displayed in the Museum of Free Derry. Crooke describes such objects, often stained with the blood of those killed and penetrated with bullet holes, as 'sacred and cherished' (2012: 30), 'touched, held and used by the deceased' (Ibid).

Two imagined friendships become apparent in this thesis. The first is with Louise Bourgeois, with whom I correspond as a confidante. Bourgeois represents my artistic manifestation of the 'good enough mother' who revels in her 'badness'. Bourgeois explores the paradoxical nature of attachment in her work and this has parallels with my practice.[10] Here, Bourgeois performs the role of listener, someone with whom I might share ideas, thoughts and concerns.

This leads me to the second, the paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Woods Winnicott, who developed the themes of the transitional object and transitional phenomena, and the 'good enough mother' in his work.[11] I confess to a fantastical relationship with Winnicott, idealising him as an imagined 'good enough father'. Winnicott described his own approach to research as one of gathering 'this and that, here and there' (Winnicott in Phillips, 2007: 16); somehow, in my attempt to unpack the matter of this research, I have followed a similar route, drawing on the fields of psychoanalysis, ethnography and post-structuralism. At times I move between the close to me of 'I' and the less proximate of 'she' or 'her'; with hindsight, this appears as an attempt at mastery, to manage the discomfort that often emerges in moments of close reflection through a stepping away, of observing myself at a distance.

I began to write a reflective journal at the very beginning of this research, an activity that continues. It has enabled an emerging mode of writing that combines observation, methodology, theory and the personal (Richardson, 2003: 381-2). My engagement with it has nourished what I now understand as a project of equivalence, neither process nor theory led, instead, a plying together of two strands in mutual co-dependence. For this reason, excerpts from the journal are included in this thesis.

[10] I am most drawn to Bourgeois's work with soft materials, particularly *Seven in Bed* (2001) and other works of soft sculpture. *The Brothers* (chapter seven) has a debt to this work, and although my focus is less on the mingling of bodies - the shared heads, limbs and torsos of *Seven in Bed* – and more on the process of their making, Bourgeois's soft sculptures, crafted in her hands, have inspired and enabled their making.

[11] Winnicott's writing supports my investigation of our relationship with objects, in both their creation and use. His conviction that play is crucial beyond childhood in helping the subject to negotiate between interior and exterior worlds, also informs my thinking on making. I am particularly indebted to Winnicott's paper Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena (1953). Its scope – mother, infant, holding, relationships and play – extends across my research and is made particularly evident in my discussion of *Pooh Bear* and the making of *The Brothers*.

It's hard to work on something when its end is so clear, when a very particular end – death itself – is embedded in the process. This knot, lump in my throat, and the very felt sense of being unable to settle to the task: this is anticipatory grief (Leader, 2008: 140), for as Roland Barthes reminds us, we must all come to 'live without the mother' (Barthes, 1980: 75), or at least most of us. In all this, in my writing and also in my making, I grow into a storyteller and find myself blending making and writing into one, 'spinning words together in my head' (hooks in Robinson, 2001: 635).[12] This story is sometimes linear, as stories tend to be, but there are also loops, returns, mistakes and corrections … points at which the two – the work and me – come together, blend even, and others where they threaten to unravel. Such is the pattern of making and lived experience. Nevertheless, there has to be an end and, as Atul Gawande reminds us, 'For human beings, life is meaningful because it is a story […] And in stories, endings matter' (2014: 238–9).

[12] In the context of this research, which embodies within it a concern to give voice to the repressed and unheard, it is important to acknowledge the work of bell hooks in speaking for and on behalf of black women's lived experience in her writing. Here is a black woman giving voice to black women who, in her own renaming, asserts her position vis-à-vis the patriarchy. In my research, I recognize my privilege as a white woman, and also my debt to women like bell hooks, who remind us of the imperative to speak and to be heard. My attempt to 'speak to truth' is informed and encouraged by women like hooks.

Loops, returns, mistakes and corrections

And she was saved by the distance that grew between them.

‘Like wearing my dad’

Chapter Two:

On Knitting and Truth

Like bel hooks, 'I have always been a girl for fibers, for textiles, and for the feel of comforting cloth against my skin' (hooks, [1995] 2001: 635) and, like Elizabeth Wayland Barber, I grew up with 'interesting textiles all around' and a mother who liked to sew (Wayland Barber, 1995: 11), but rarely was there hand-knitting. Instead, there were the scissors, needles, paper and machines of dressmaking, for my mother trained as a pattern cutter and seamstress. The knitter in my family was my maternal grandmother, or Nan. Elsie was many things, not least a matriarch.

My mother's constant making was one of the central themes of my childhood, a making often born out of necessity rather than choice, and often too innovative for her daughter, garments that failed me in my yearning to 'look like everyone else', garments that brought me to the attention of the school bullies, because, combined with my wild head of hair, I always did look very odd.

Knitting, when it happened at home, almost always grew from the strange machine with a rhythmic noise I particularly loved. Mum's *Knit Master* knitting machine had been a gift from my stepfather. From its menacing jaws, in which I once caught one of my long, thick, brown plaits, issued many peculiar knits – tight necks, tighter sleeves, hems that rolled upwards threatening to expose hips, seams that unravelled at the slightest snag – and oddly curated knits – arms from one pattern, front from another and back from no pattern at all – were always a challenge to my emerging sense of self, as if she dared me to wear them, as if I were wearing her fantasy. I loved the to-and-fro swoosh of the carriage, but everything else I feared, especially those teeth – and like some untamed dog, she never really brought it to heel. But her sewing was different; it was and remains her pleasure and my anxiety. The embarrassment I felt when she challenged my sewing teacher on the correct way to make a French seam, and how I lived in the certain knowledge that everything I made would be turned inside out, stitches scrutinised and seams unpicked, everything redone or to remain not quite 'up to scratch'. Unsurprisingly, the sewing needle is not our continuing bond [13] (Klass et al, 1996).

And then there are events that remain 'with me'. The first is the traumatic loss of my brother when I was 19 and he 18 months younger. The second is harder to share.

[13] Here I draw on the work of Klass et al, who suggest that we develop bonds of attachment with significant others over our lifetimes and that these persist beyond death: "humans' continued interaction with people after they have died is a far more common pattern than is severing the bonds with the dead' (2001: 431).

I think back to that moment – the biting-my-tongue, eyes-about-to-spill moment – as extraordinary, a true encounter, of being 'present' in the manner of Merleau Ponty's position of being in the world (1962). Being is not without pain, for its existential equivalent is the absolute erasure of being, of being gone, of nothing. This too is the pain of the close encounter, of looking closely. It can take your breath away.

There is some parallel between such experiences and those Denzin describes as epiphanies: 'Those interactional moments that leave marks on people's lives' and are 'transformational experiences […] Having had such a moment, a person is never quite the same again' (2001: 34). Denzin describes four types of epiphany: major, cumulative, illuminative (minor epiphany) and the relived (2001: 37) – which is what I do here in returning to the moment of *Bloodline*. In this context, my brother's murder is major, the experience of knitting *Bloodline* with my mum – the event which brings this whole project into being – is illuminative and the third, that which is felt and known but rarely given voice, is cumulative – though, as Denzin acknowledges, over time, cumulative epiphanies evolve into major ones (2001: 143). Denzin reminds us that 'Epiphanies are experienced as social dramas, as dramatic events with beginnings, middles and endings. Epiphanies represent ruptures in the structure of daily life' (2001: 38). Described in this way, three things come to mind. The first is the narrative quality of epiphany, which aligns with the storytelling device of autoethnography. The second is an equivalence with cloth, which is brought about in the visceral language of 'rupture', and which resonates with the tearing of cloth or flesh, which Gen Doy describes as discomfort when watching the erotically charged film *Le Cri de la Soie*, and the all-too-closely drawn association between the tearing of silk and female flesh (Doy, 2002: 114). The third is the contrast of the epiphany with the mundane, and its appearance 'as if out of the blue'.

My brother's violent death appeared 'out of nowhere' and its impact left me – and others – 'never quite the same again'; in this it stands as a major epiphany, a trump card for those with black humour. Writing of his father's sudden death, the academic Arthur Bochner describes a similar life-altering experience (Bochner, 1997); nevertheless, Bochner cautions 'against the impulse to place old actions under new descriptions' (1997: 427), particularly in relation to the physical violence dealt him by his father as a child.

In the years of truth and reconciliation that followed World War II, Theodore Adorno asked what it meant to work through the past (Adorno, 1959). At the time, he reflected

that an ambition to work towards closure, even erasure, was incongruent with a proper 'working upon the past' in a way that might 'break its power to fascinate' (Adorno in Pickford, 2005: 89). In Adorno, I find some affirmation that 'to close the books on the past' (Ibid) is neither possible, nor necessarily desirable. Instead, I find myself poking around, raking over ashes, fanning flames and telling tales. The attitude of this work is much less one of closing a door and more one of opening. It is one of contagion that speculates that 'things that were previously in contact with each other continue to act upon each other' (Turley & O'Donohoe, 2012: 1335).

Like the psychoanalyst and writer Stephen Grosz, I have come to question Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's enduring hypothesis that the five stages of grief reach an end in acceptance.[14] Instead, I find myself knowing and feeling that 'The person who mourns goes on living and for as long as he lives there is always the possibility of feeling grief' (Grosz, 2014: 208). In this, I align myself with the concept of continuing bonds. The approach of continuing bonds is at odds with Freud's linear model of grieving, which sees its end in ego detachment and the freedom to find new objects of attachment: 'when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again' (Freud, 1917: 245). But my approach is one borne out in lived experience and witnessed in the qualitative interviews that contributed to this research. When Rob[15] described his navy Aran jumper, hand-knitted for him by his mum more than 30 years previously, as 'an object that helps me feel connected to a woman I loved very dearly' and as 'utterly cherished', he described a very particular continuing bond. As others have recognised (Ash, 1996; Turkle, 2011; Spivak, 2014; Gibson, 2014 and Stallybrass, 1999), objects, particularly garments, are crucial to the enactment of continuing bonds. The inclination to hold onto such things, and even on occasion to wear them, is testimony to our drive to remain connected, to maintain a legacy. Tim, the surgeon son of a ship's surgeon who served in the arctic convoys, is such a collector. I ask him if he might wear the roll necked merchant navy jumper he holds in his lap. He stands, takes off his glasses, pulls it over his head, I ask him how it feels, he smiles: 'like I'm wearing my dad'.

[14] Kübler-Ross's seminal text, *On Death and Dying* (2014), describes five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. They are not necessarily linear in experience.

[15] Rob was one of the first to contribute to *Cherish* and shared his hand-knitted Aran jumper and teddy bear with its hand-knitted school uniform.

For Ellis and Bochner (2000), an autoethnographic study such as this is successful when it produces an affective response in the reader, when it acts upon them. Simon O'Sullivan describes affect as 'moments of intensity, a reaction in/on the body at the level of matter […] affects are not to do with knowledge or meaning; indeed, they occur on a different, asignifying register' (2001: 126). O'Sullivan aligns affect with the pre-symbolic, pre-linguistic and the beyond or before of language – even with that which is incapable of being 'put into words'.

Sarah Pink's writing on sensory ethnography is significant here. Pink's call for ethnographic researchers to respond 'self-consciously and reflexively […] to the senses throughout the research process' (Pink, 2015: 7) is woven into the body of this work, both in its positioning and its methods. One small reflexive adjustment was in the location and documentation of the qualitative interviews for *Cherish*, which reflected Tim Ingold's call to 'follow along where others go and to do their bidding, whatever this might entail and wherever it might take you' (Ingold, 2014: 389).[16]

These early interviews were illuminative points in my research process and supported my 'hunch' that knitted objects are potentially richly emotive and capable of enacting strong continuing bonds. Beyond this, the interviews testified to the potential 'stickiness' of knitted things, in that, although often cherished, they had the capacity to evoke or stimulate feelings of sadness, loss and absence that were not always easily managed or integrated into the psyche. Elizabeth Wilson writes about empty garments at the beginning of her book *Adorned in Dreams,* describing them as 'congealed memories' (Wilson, 2003: 1). It may not have been Wilson's original intent, but the description of clothing as potentially 'congealed' brings to mind Kristeva's thinking on abjection, particularly her encounter with the skin on the surface of warmed milk (Kristeva, 1982: 2).

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[16] In the first *Cherish* interviews, the two contributors – Rob and Rachael – brought their knitted objects to a seminar room in my then place of work, Swansea College of Art, where I interviewed them and my husband took their photographs.

Both interviews provided rich data, but viewed reflexively and also with the anthropologist Tim Ingold's 'observing from the inside' (2014) in relation to fieldwork practice in mind, it was clear that a different approach was needed. Both contributors shared emotive stories but I sensed that they might be affected by the setting and by my husband's presence as photographer. Having trained and worked as a counsellor, I intuited the need for a location that was more place than space and one that was chosen by the participants for their comfort and not mine. All subsequent interviews took place in participants' homes, except for George, whose interview took place in my home. I took all the photographs and recorded the interviews (with consent).

Kristeva's experience has been used as an analogy for the abjection of the maternal body (Tyler, 2001); here, in this context, the association between congealed and abject in relation to clothing invokes a problematic of proximity, that physical intimacy with cloth has the potential to comfort but also to repulse, or at least to bring to consciousness thoughts and feelings that are not always welcome. Pink encourages researchers to attend to all sensations equally (Pink, 2015); for me, this includes physical and emotional repulsion. My daughter, Ruby, suffered from eczema as a small child and her grown-up skin seems to carry a vestigial memory of this.[17] And Tracey Skidmore, who sat behind me in registration at comprehensive school, could be brought to retching by the simple act of me tracing my teeth along the sleeve of my acrylic knitted school jumper. Not everyone finds pleasure in wool.

Mostly I write 'thickly' (Geertz, 1973), a position that emphasises both context and detail, and as an insider (Lundy & McGovern, 2006; Ingold, 2013). Beyond the generalising that occurs in *Cherish,* the primary subjects (Jackson, 1989: 4) are myself and my practice. My attempt to scrutinise the moment of affect in *Bloodline* requires that I adopt a position of 'looking closely', of attending to the fine detail of both process and thing, that particular synchronicity or plying together which combined to produce the affect I understand as my response to *Bloodline*. My hunch that what knitting is, what we were doing and from where we came, all distilled in a moment that was both revelatory – in the sense of illuminative epiphany (Denzin, 2001) – but also overwhelming felt and seemingly beyond logic, affective: 'The "truth" of this story then lies in the way it is told and the possibility that there are others in the world who resonate with this experience' (Ellis, 1993: 725).

In her account of writing in this way, Sarah Wall comments that 'Autobiographical writing is part of a new writing imagination that is based on movement, complexity, knowing and not knowing, and being and not being exposed' (Wall, 2008: 41). It is the exposed that bothers me most; yet I understand that 'the one thing everyone does have within them is an autobiography, and that they might even suffer from not telling it' (Phillips in Barthes, 2010: v).

[17] Claudia Benthien (2002) suggests: 'It is through the skin that a newborn learns where she begins and ends, where the boundaries of the self are. Here she learns her first feelings of pleasure and displeasure' (2002: 7).

Writing thickly: the notebooks

Stephen Pace tells us that 'The autoethnographer does not privilege traditional analysis and generalisation' (2012: 3) and it would seem that research which concerns itself with making and the self, such as this, occupies this territory, where it might find meanings at the boundaries, edges, salvages and margins of traditional thinking. This paradigm is familiar to textile practice-based research (Dormor, 2012; Lee, 2012); beyond this, textile thinking as a research methodology in its own right is promoted by researchers in other fields – for example, Katie Collins's discussion of textile metaphors and their relationship with academic writing (Collins, 2016). My own work with the students and staff of The Florence Nightingale Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery and Palliative Care at King's College, London, occupies similar ground.[18]

To scrutinise, in the manner of looking closely, necessitates a degree of separation, of subject from object, and also within the structure of the object itself. This means maintaining an optimum distance so that a field under examination is 'in focus' and teasing apart of things so that we might see individual structures and discern particular elements. Such teasing is careful and supported by knowledge of structures and systems.[19] In this there are parallels with the mode of looking required by medical and nursing practitioners, and requires the skills to understand what one sees and how this connects with other structures, both proximate and distant. For example, a weakness in a limb may be a consequence of underlying problems in the brain, as too the inability to control one's bladder. This sort of looking does not always involve a dissecting, undoing or surgical intervention. Understanding and resolution can frequently be achieved without breaching the body's boundaries, for it is possible to keep one's distance and see things for what they are. In textile practice, close looking facilitates knowledge of techniques, such as those used in garment construction, or appreciation of finer details, the weave structure of a particular cloth, for example.

Undoing is beyond looking closely; it involves physical intervention, taking things apart with hands, tools or both. In textile practice, we use terms such as unpicking, unravelling, ripping out. These gestures require a level of proximity that often involves a disruption of surface, which leaves a trace in the form of a cut or wound. In medicine, to go beneath the surface

[18] Some of the outcomes of this work, an award made jointly by the Crafts Council and the Cultural Institute at King's College, London and supported by the Helen Hamlyn Trust, are discussed in the final chapter.

[19] For example, in knitting I know that a garment will unravel most effectively from the cast-off and not the cast-on edge.

may require surgical loupes or even a microscope to improve the quality of 'observing closely', possibly imaging, such as computed tomography (CT scans); in medicine, it has long been possible to see beyond our natural vanishing point. Physical intervention requires separation: a knife cutting through dermal layers and muscle fascia to access a putrefying appendix, or scissors cleaving shirt sleeve from shoulder. This level of undoing involves a degree of risk, including the possibility that the intervention will not resolve the problem, that it might even prove detrimental, and rarely, very rarely, catastrophic. Some things we can learn to live with, even accommodate – a jumper with too long sleeves, which must always be rolled, glasses worn to correct a squint, or a corset worn to support a hernia.[20]

Scissors are not usually necessary in the undoing of knit; more often, we speak of unravelling, frogging or, as I discovered from Irish knitters,[21] ripping out. These interventions happen at the level of structure and involve destruction; for knitting is surface *and* thing; and an unravelled jumper is no longer a jumper. It is past. We have travelled some distance from the surgical barbarism of old, but some techniques, such as skin debridement for the treatment of necrotising fasciitis, bear the traces of earlier times and, more than this, it is the relief of pain, through the practice of modern anaesthesia, that makes such bodily invasions possible (Snow, 2008). Pain then is circumvented through absence, and I am good at making myself absent.

Some things left alone are not terminal; a stitch dropped in knitting will have long-term consequences for the appearance of the finished garment, but it is unlikely to threaten its overall integrity. Not everything needs to be fixed.

[20] Rhian Solomon is one such artist/designer/maker working in this field. Her cross-disciplinary research has explored knowledge transfer between pattern cutting for fashion and plastic surgery. http://rhiansolomon.co.uk

[21] I discovered the term 'ripping out' when I contributed to the *Knitting Map* project, a celebration of Cork's year as 'City of Culture' in the spring of 2005. http://www.rte.ie/archives/2015/0824/723181-cork-knitters-make-giant-textile-record/

Diary, 3 June 2014

Somewhere along the way I have dropped a stitch. When once there were 12 on my needles, now there are 11. I look back along the rows, try to find it, but I can't see it, which means I can't pick it up, grow it back onto the needle. I must take more care, keep an eye on things.

Returning to Adorno, it is likely that the sort of close scrutiny discussed here – a combination of proximate distance, delving deeply and radical intervention – is what he might advocate in a thorough 'working on the past'. In truth, it is also an exercise likely to disrupt before it detangles. Beyond this, it carries with it the possibility that, like Walter Benjamin turning out the pocket of his socks, reaching in has the effect of emptying out, of erasing everything.[22] In her essay *Against Interpretation*, Susan Sontag cautions against the sort of close scrutiny that seeks to interpret and find meaning in art, arguing, not unlike Benjamin, that the aura or magic of a thing is its essence.[23] 'To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world – in order to set up a shadow world of "meanings."' (Sontag, 2009: 7). I do not seek to tame *Bloodline,* rather to expand from it so that *it* and *its* products – both tangible and intangible – might be seen in a wider field, a field in which the author is present and the processes and outcomes appear as if tied with me, plied with me. It is far from my intention to create an art that is 'manageable, comfortable' (Sontag, 2009: 8) and I hold on to the belief that 'real art has the capacity to make us nervous' (Ibid).

Hand-knitting occupies marginal territory in arts practice: a space that Jo Turney claims has been the 'domain of women' (Turney, 2009: 216) and consequently 'distanced from serious aesthetic and academic consideration' (Ibid: 218). Rozsika Parker successfully demonstrated that embroidery was inculcated with the feminine (Parker, 1984) and much of her thesis is equally applicable to knitting. The association of knitting, and here I mean hand-knitting, with the domestic sphere is entrenched in the popular imagination as homely, feminine and non-academic. For knitting's referent is the maternal. This is witnessed in everything from television adverts, to the packaging of consumer goods, television programmes and film.[24]

The association between textiles and magical thinking reaches down to us through

[22] Walter Benjamin describes how the moment of reaching in and drawing out – of a sock's pocket – brought him to an understanding that 'form and content, veil and what is veiled, are the same. It led me to draw truth from works of literature as warily as the child's hand retrieved the sock from "the pocket."' (Benjamin, 2006: 96 – 97)

[23] Although they speak from different positions – Benjamin arguing against reproduction and Sontag against interpretation – both have a concern for the truth of the 'real' of the work of art, for a celebration of aura over deconstruction.

[24] The films Warhorse (2011) and Testament of Youth (2014) are two such examples, the first tying knit to the maternal, and the second as a pursuit beneath academic concern. In 2015, the television company *ITV* ran a 'Christmas Ad Break' in which five companies, including Amazon UK and British Gas, featured in a series of short animations in which the sets and characters were hand knitted. The campaign emphasised the warmth, cosiness and idiosyncratic nature of hand knitting.
https://www.dandad.org/awards/professional/2016/film-advertising-crafts/25514/itv-knitted-ad-break/

antiquity; stories shared in classrooms and at bedsides, in cartoons and films. A miller's daughter forced to spin straw into gold by the boastfulness of a feckless father; Elisa, who knits shirts from stinging nettles so that her swan brothers might return to human form; and Sleeping Beauty, mesmerised by a spindle. Then, in the ancient tales of mythology: Theseus, rescued from the terrors of the labyrinth by Ariadne's gift of a ball of thread; patient Penelope, condemned to endless reweaving so that she might stay loyal to Odysseus.[25] The Three Fates or Moirai, sisters who spin, draw out and cut the thread that binds us to the world of the living: Clotho, who spins the life force; Lachesis, the allotter; and Atropos, with her appalling shears.

My interest in knitting has arisen from the possibility of what knitting might be, what it might offer as a language in itself. These thoughts have developed through reflection on my own practice and that of others. What strikes me particularly is the capacity for knitting to raise so many issues, to be other than self-referential. This enables a schema that sees knitting as conceptual conduit, which facilitates an untethering of knit from craft. My main contention is that knitting is a language and that this 'language' extends beyond what Turney claims as its 'symbolic meaning' (Turney, 2012: 218), Instead, I propose that knitting has the capacity to defy symbolic meaning, that it might, psychoanalytically speaking, exist in the pre-Oedipal[26] and that, in its practice and outcomes, it bears continuing association with a time and locale beyond or outside language and is particularly affective because of this.

I position knitting as essentially 'different'; possessing a culture less in sway to what Derrida has termed the phallogocentric (Derrida, 1978: 20). Early in her discussion, Turney writes: 'To see knitting as a culture, with its own language, practices and so on is to empower knitting from the ties of other disciplines' (Turney, 2009: 4) and this is the tipping point. To recognise knitting's difference and uniqueness is to embrace and celebrate its 'otherness', to enable knitting, to liberate it from a culture that works to diminish it, to embrace its

[25] Penelope is often claimed to have woven a burial shroud for her father-in-law, Laertes. However, Wayland Barber offers a convincing argument that it was in fact a funeral cloth depicting his life. A shroud would have been very simply woven and finished in a few days. A funeral cloth, draped over the coffin, would be more intricate and thus more convincing in terms of the delay she manufactures. (Wayland Barber: 1995, 154)

[26] In the context of this research, the pre-Oedipal refers to Julia Kristeva's concept of the semiotic *chora*, a preverbal state where the infant is 'connected to and oriented towards the mother (not yet differentiated from her' (Söderäck, 2010: 1). For Kristeva, the semiotic *chora* is not beyond order, but is a position 'in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between real and symbolic.' (Kristeva, 2002: 36)

position at the margins of language (or text) – for we make new meaning at the margins, when we work through or out of unfamiliar languages.

And so, whilst this is not a political treatise, it does bear witness to feminism and speaks from a place that might be interpreted as feminist. For my ambition is to dwell in the in-between state of experience, to valorise the place of feeling and affect above and beyond that of the language in its defining and shaping register. Whilst I must write, have to write, my words, until they are printed, exist in the neither/nor space of my screen. In this, for these moments at least, they are mutable. My practice is similarly mutable: soft, pliant and pliable.

To own myself is also to claim myself within this text. It is autoethnographic, it comes from me, bears witness to my life story and to those with whom I am connected – both forwards and backwards. It is by turns messy and smooth, troubling and elusive. Crafted in the hope that it is emotive, it issues from me. *Cherish,* a series of qualitative interviews with self-selecting subjects, supports my claim that knitting as both process and material object – particularly hand-knitting – is evocative. Some discoveries were anticipated, others came 'out of the blue', emerging in the process of the research and, in the manner of grounded theory, have enabled new paths of thinking and investigation.

So there is something about knitting that draws me in, gathers me to its site and becomes part of this storytelling. Partly this is reflection, a looking back to the past through different eyes and recognising, with the wisdom of an older mind, that knitting is special, it is 'magic' (Pajaczkowska, 2007: 140). Knitting has its own language, in the zeros and ones of its binary alphabet, and its own tools – few that they are – but it is a language capable of the most fantastic and delicate manipulation, for those with the right degree of fluency. And I am far from fluent, more the competent holiday knitter, with faint hope of becoming the translator. Like the tourist who gets the wrong meal after a 'careful' translation of the menu, my knitting can disappoint and yet I am persistent, revisiting again and again. Like Wayland Barber's decision to learn to weave (1995), I choose to knit to understand *it,* to look at it closely, to know of the magic behind something that

> mysteriously transforms a single yarn into a pliable soft surface by means of the bringing together and separating of two sticks […] to manufacture a protective wrapper of magical powers. And this is done by means of two magic wands: a string of wool and clever hands – simply wrapping the wool around a needle and pulling one loop over. How did anyone, ever, think of doing this? It is so clever and so simple.
> (Pajaczkowska, 2007: 142–3)

Throughout my research I have often been overwhelmed by the skills of knitters both within and outside the scope of this research. Their achievements constantly bewitch, and include those of my supervisor, Freddie Robins, Amy Twigger Holroyd's inventive application of hacking to the body of knit and her very perfect execution, Julie Arkell's delicate lacework and Theresa's stunning Fair Isle.[27] In comparison, I am a faltering and not particularly skilled knitter, but I wanted to be like them, to be 'good enough' and counted into their number, their gang. Instead, I have become knitting's *bricoleur*; I am in awe of this simple thing and have sought to be part of what I think of as 'my knitting team' – yet, alongside their achievements, mine remain at times clumsy and naïve. Most of these knitters have knitted since they were small children and have developed skills over a lifetime; I have barely begun.

My knitting heritage is one of watching and wearing, having shown little interest in it as making as a child or younger woman. Watching a grandmother knit by hand and a mother who favoured a knitting machine. Neither of my knitting matriarchs produced particularly accomplished knits. My mum in the habit of producing jumpers that were a little too skinny, too menacing at the neck, my nan prone to occasional lapses in tension that gave way to abundance, except in her last project, an acrylic/wool mix jumper knitted for me. Mum rarely took up knitting needles and so I was spared the gap that can so often appear between expectation and outcome. But there was one thing, a wistfully remembered orange mohair tank top she knitted for me, both beautiful and fashionable, but fleeting. It would be undone by the greedy habit of the family hamster who drew it through the bars of his cage where it was turned into nest mulch. It is lost forever, for there are no photographs. Both garments persisting as continuing bonds and 'evocative objects' – even if one only in memory – each acting as 'a marker of relationship and emotional connection' (Turkle, 2011: 5) and both continue to make claims upon me.

[27] Theresa is one of the knitters in *Cherish*.

Knitting exists as a discrete subset within the wider language of textiles, which itself occupies the ground of the tactile, proximate and relational (Pajaczkowska, 2005). The processes and products of knitting are the physical manifestations of its grammar, the translation of the code into something that can be seen, articulated, shared and worn. More than this, knitting is properly plastic; it can be done, undone and redone. This is also true of weave, where weft might be separated from warp, but where the whole process is much more painstaking and laborious, while this ease of undoing – of unravelling – is impossible in felting, where the fibres, coached into intimacy, are forever matted and bound one to the other in a relationship that defies separation and offers no room for breathing 'a supple solid product that proceeds altogether differently, as an anti fabric. It implies no separation of threads, no intertwining, only an entanglement of fibers' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2014: 553). Knitting's loops enable holes, room to breathe, room to give and yet still retain the capacity to cling.

All these practices are subsets of language that need to be understood, interpreted and applied, for language 'brings things into existence' (Fink, 2012: 25). And it is the performance of knitting – the actual process of casting on, looping, slipping – that materialises this language of zeros and ones, makes this language real.

The knitting of this wobbly, imperfect red line is a potentiate language, a reflective/reflexive process, a kind of 'thinking through practice', but it is also the manifestation of a continuing bond between mother and daughter, a knitted thing, a gift from one to the other and a sign of relatedness.

Tethered as if a satellite: she stands at the threshold,
the site of the neither here nor there, both with and without.

Chapter Three:

On Bloodlines

Diary, 10 April 2013

Travelling home on the train and I look down at my left forearm, at the veins and arteries that cross above my wrist, how blue they are. Not at all red, not like we would expect blood to be. I text my son, asking him why this should be, please explain the phenomenon of blue blood. He replies …

All blood is red, it looks blue because it needs light to shine on it, it's the way our eyes work that make it red.

The anthropologist Tim Ingold explains that the Romans used stemmata to link the portraits of their ancestors (Ingold, 2007: 105). Wavy lines of red ribbon rippling along their walls, connecting one with another, as *Bloodline* extends between us – attaches itself to the needles of two women sitting in profile as if for a portrait, as if they might be Whistler's twin mothers – might be Stemma – a wavy, twisting ribbon growing between the two of us, a maternal/filial Stemma. Bloodlines typically speak of hierarchies that favour the male line and flow from the ancestor.

Such schemata are evolutionary and characterised by descent (Deleuze & Guattari, 2014: 9). A bloodline of this type, which sees the male progeny holding sway over the female, is a manifestation of patriarchy, which the feminist writer Adrienne Rich describes as:

> the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological,
> political system in which men – by force, direct pressure,
> or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs,
> etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine
> what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the
> female is everywhere subsumed under the male. (Rich, 1995: 57)

And this returns me to this *Bloodline,* which we might be tempted to describe as a matrilineal. This line of consanguinity (of blood relation), a mother and her daughter, a daughter and her mother, and on the surface – as we see it – an absence of hierarchy. They sit on the same plane, neither one above the other. Instead, a line of equivalence is suggested between the two, made clearer, at least in the beginning, in their mirrored gestures and identical chairs. A matrilineal equivalence where the absent father floats outside, for the daughter, the one who instigated this thing, has not been lucky with fathers. Even so, the absentees still have a presence for, as Rich reminds us, 'the power of the fathers […] permeates everything' (Ibid: 57). I was given my father's surname, then my stepfather's and then, eight years into marriage, took my husband's. Rebecca Solnit describes a complete erasure of the feminine in the family tree of an Indian girlfriend, generations of women absented: 'She discovered that she herself did not exist, but her brothers did […] There were no grandmothers' (Solnit, 2014: 64). How we disappear and how, almost 30 years after Adrienne Rich proclaimed that patriarchy is not a 'fact of nature' (Rich, 995: 57), we move in similar circles.

Rich describes matrilineal societies as those in which 'kinship is traced and property transmitted through the mother's line' (1995: 58) but continues by explaining that such societies are still held in sway to the patrilineal and are ultimately 'different ways of channelling position and property to the male' (Ibid). Rich leads us to Robert Briffault's work to define a matriarchal society as:

> one in which female creative power is pervasive and women have organic authority, rather than one in which the woman establishes and maintains domination and control over the man, as the man over the woman in patriarchy. (Rich, 1995: 59–60)

Most discussions of lineage, Rich's included, are founded on the logic of inheritance, which ultimately concerns the transfer of capital from parent – be it mother or father – to child. This presumes inheritance to be tangible, an object or thing that more often has capital value, or at least exchange value, within the family. The transfer of knowledge – particularly knowledge gained in the hands-on practice of a skill – appears to sit outside this schema. This returns me to Rich's idea of 'creative power' and where this might sit in the context of this discussion. Not all capital is tangible; the ability to bring things into being is a source of potential power within a system where 'knowledge is power'. We can argue, according to Rich's paradigm, that these practices are performed, shared and enjoyed under an all-pervasive patriarchy, but their essence is female. This is especially the case with knitting, as older women teach the younger to knit in a 'women's legacy passed down through the ladder of generations' (Edelman in Hood, 2013: 50), 'in an act of familial familiarity' (Turney, 2009: 9). All this suggests that knitting sits outside, even if only nominally, that which Rich named 'The Kingdom of the Fathers' (Rich, 1995).

Ingold defines two categories of line, the thread and trace – where a trace may be additive or reductive, a line drawn onto the surface of paper or a line scratched into an etching plate (Ingold, 2007: 2). *Bloodline* occupies interesting territory within this taxonomy, for it is clearly not a trace, being more a thread. It is independent of the surface and leaves no literal mark; nevertheless, in the joining together of loops, it forms its own surface, emphasising that 'Threads may be transformed into traces and traces into threads' (Ingold, 2007: 52). In this way, knitting – indeed, any other practice that involves making something tangible from thread – has the capacity to transform thread into a surface onto which other threads, through such acts as Swiss darning, may be thus inscribed.

The idea that *Bloodline* might perform as a rhizome is relevant to this discussion. Deleuze and Guattari define the rhizome as 'an acentered, nonhierarchical, non-signifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2014: 22). Embodying within it an equivalence that is non-hierarchical and outside the phallic order, *Bloodline* is clearly a line with the possibility of 'multiple entryways' (Ibid. 12) – my daughter or sister might join – but we cannot be 'a-parallel' (Chauvin in Ibid: 9) since we remain always in relation, its very naming confirming this. In terms of Ingold's classification, *Bloodline* is both line and trace, falling into both schema. It is an interesting 'neither/nor' that might suggest being outside language, but we are not outside knowledge. In our knitting, we are not entirely free of the 'tree logic' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2014: 11) that characterises stemmata and is confirmed by Rich.

And I notice other things when I knit with her. How she is our housekeeper. No sooner is the knitting out of the bag than she is unwinding each bundle, working out which end is hers – easy when mine is always a stitch short of the dozen – and there she is untwisting the twist that always happens as we work our way along the rows, even though I tell her there's no need, for it will only return. And at the end, taking control again, winding up, packing away. And there I am, tethered to her, as if her satellite.

Textile is the language of the tactile, proximate and relational. We know it to be associated with the feminine sphere and to occupy a liminal state. (Pajaczkowska, 2005) All textile practices have unique languages of making. Weave has picks, warps, wefts and passes. Embroidery its myriad stitches, pattern cutting its blocks, templates, dots and crosses. All are subsets of language that need to be understood, interpreted and applied, for language, as Bruce Fink claims, 'brings things into existence' (Fink, 2012: 25).

Diary, 12 August 2016

Our periods of knitting are often preceded by anxiety. These usually resolve once we start, but I have a terrible churning in my stomach. I imagined we would move apart and occupy separate spaces as the work continued. Whenever this happens, there is always some point at which we drift back together. Mostly, our knitting ends up bundled between us, like a comfort blanket. I wrote for Gdansk that the knitting enabled us to talk in the manner of a difficult conversation with a teenager best had whilst driving, sideways talking. And sometimes this is so. She talks about my brother differently, more relaxed, where I always want to cry, the lump coming back to my throat. We both take our time settling into the process, talking of anything and nothing, yet we always return to remembering, though often differently, which disappoints her. She said it made her sad that I can't remember singing in the kitchen. And afterwards, I thought I could have said I remembered, that might have been kinder. And whilst I am the one who instigates the knitting episode, my sense of being 'with' her and 'in' that moment is usually brought to an end by her, for she decides when we are done. The last time left me with a sense of not quite arriving at the point I had imagined – though I have no idea what I had been hoping for, not really a thing, perhaps more of her.[28]

[28] This brought me to thinking of my mum as transformational object. Christopher Bollas describes the infant's relationship with the mother as one of process rather than object, and writes that 'In adult life […] to seek the transformational object is to recollect an early object experience […] to remember […] a relationship which was identified with cumulative transformational experiences of the self.' (Bollas, 1979: 17) My return to her has something of this quality, but this does not explain why an adult daughter is too lost for words to speak of her needs.

Umbilical cords connect mother to infant by a perfect seaming with the placenta and start to develop in the fifth week of pregnancy (Marshall & Raynor, 2014: 106), two arteries and one vein wrapped in jelly and contained by a surface of amnion (Ibid: 107), but they are the palest of blues, twisted by the moves of the growing foetus and turned violet at the edges, never red, like ours. This one, this *Bloodline* is blood red, and grows beyond safety, long enough to strangle the unsuspecting child; it carries with it the red mark of danger.

And I think about this red line we have made, are making. Of its bloodiness, how I am tethered to her whenever we knit, a grown woman tied to her mother. How this tether exists as an empathic connection, a continuing bond of suffering shared and understood. Some things are beyond words, but not beyond making.

Soft moment that filled her eyes. The back garden she loved, her grandparents and a maternal aunt. An unknown and distant horizon. They took her to Cornwall, without her mother.

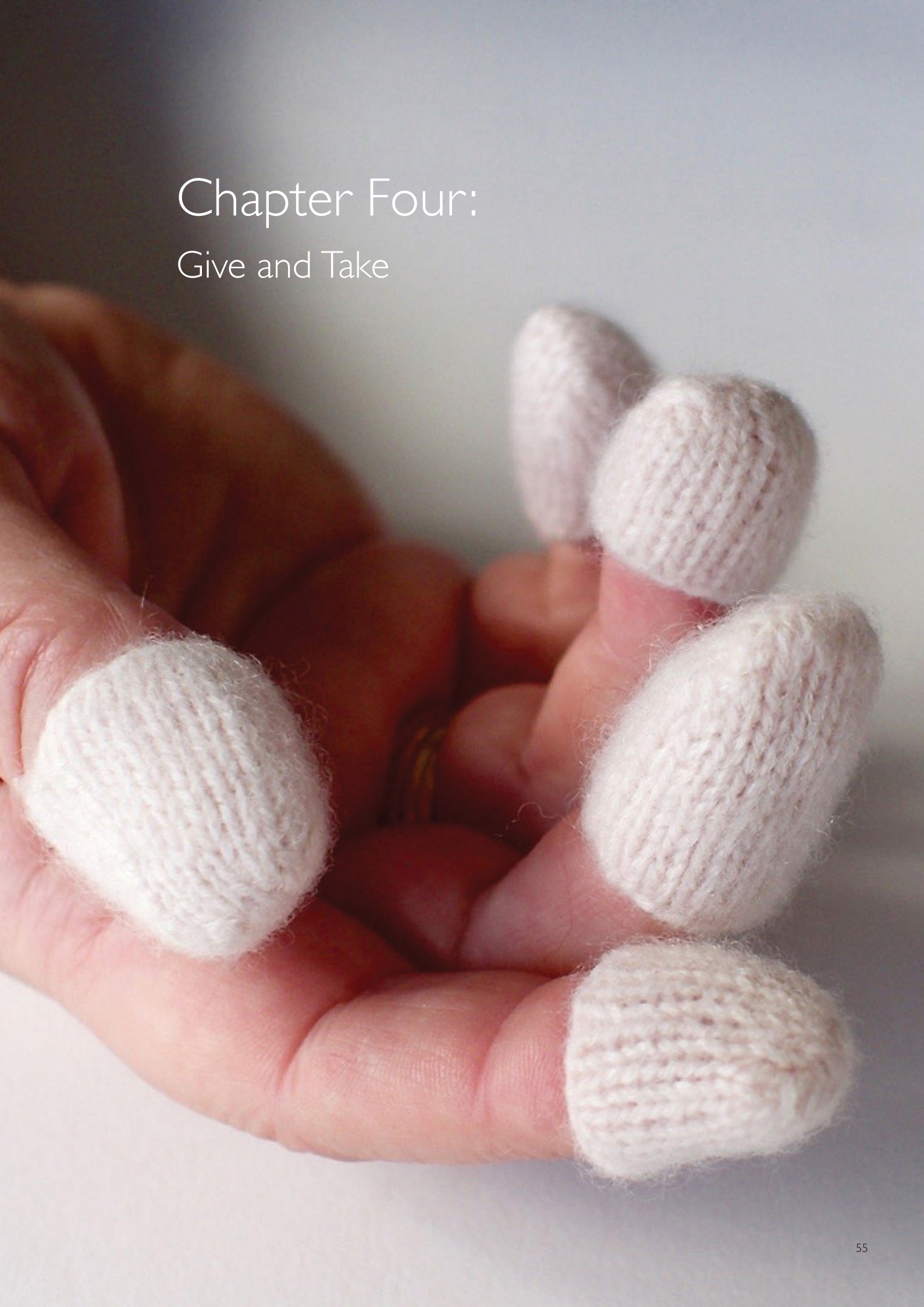
Diary, 13 February 2016

It's just the two of us here, two of us knitting, but often I sense that I am in the middle. Halfway. This halfway is a reflection of being both daughter to my mother and mother to my own daughter. But it is also about being halfway through, more even. I am neither one thing nor the other. Not yet my mum, but a long way from being my daughter. I am becoming something, but it's hard to know what.

Words at the end of my cashmere fingertips

Chapter Four:

Give and Take



I grow to think of the knitting process as one of 'give and take'. Two hands, two needles, the systematic manipulation of yarn around needle tips, just the right amount of tension, a balance of 'give and take'. A strand of yarn pulled towards the body, the hands, fingers and needles; give and take. A stitch momentarily singular at the time of its making and then slipped into the body of the knit, consumed. Eventually a finished garment, cast off, given to another or, more rarely, kept by the maker.

I nod enthusiastically as Mary Beaudry asks rhetorically: 'Could scissors have much of anything to do with, for example, the construction of identity or with gender?' (Beaudry, 2007: 131) and thus begins my thinking of the potential of scissors to undo ties, cut cloth, hair, flesh and both literal and metaphorical bonds, to separate. And when I read Joseph Brodsky's words of the 'trimming of the self' (Brodsky, 1986: 9) my thoughts turn to those big scissors, those with the silver blades and black handles. The ones I sometimes hold up in lectures as a provocative display of potential violence: *with these I might cut you, indeed anyone, to bits.*

I don't think I am trimming in the way Joseph Brodsky intended, carefully sculpting my edges as a child might trace the edge of a line, quietly shaping myself as much as language – Brodsky's position – trims me, cuts me to size, the right size. I am working differently. I shift between the delicate manoeuvres required to safely trim hair wisps gathering across a child's ears, to the pressure necessary for secateurs to cut through suckers at the base of a rose tree. Truthfully, I am not that good with scissors, but good enough. I don't know the secrets of how to cut a straight line without drawing one first, or how to cut on a curve. But I do know how to get scissors to function. I know that some are better for one job than another, that they must be offered bow end first and that you must never run with them in hand.

At the beginning of *The Faraway Nearby*, Rebecca Solnit asks: 'What's your story?' (Solnit, 2013: 3) and reaches out to me, her reader. In storytelling she explains that 'Sometimes the key arrives long before the lock' (Ibid: 4) as the map of the journey might arrive long before the journey itself, or the tool that might enable the cutting arrives ahead of the realisation that cutting can be done, *is being done*.

Stories have characters, narratives and plots, all of which are vulnerable to editing or erasure. It's not that difficult to cut someone out of your narrative … sometimes they save you the trouble by absenting themselves – as did my father – neither seen nor heard for close on five decades.

Dear Louise,

I have censored myself. What should be here, is no longer, quite simply, some things are better left unsaid. Instead, I offer you cashmere fingertips and your own words, because I cannot find my own: 'Forgive and forget, they say […] I do not forgive nor forget […] I do not want to talk about the past, I want to talk about the future.' [29] *I am trying, hard. But in the end, it seems that some people are just better at taking.*

And when I think about her? Well, how to think of her, my mum? The woman whose first child would mean a young and not entirely welcomed marriage, whose same first child would not survive his birth. The woman whose first husband, my father, would leave her two years later to care alone for two small children. The woman who lost four of her six children, the woman who would nurse her own mother in her final illness and the same woman whose son went out to meet friends one night and never came home.

> It is hard to write about my mother. Whatever I do write, it is my story I am telling, my version of the past. If she were to tell her own story other landscapes would be revealed.[30] (Rich, 1995: 221)

There are other people's lives within these pages, lives I have storied for the benefit of my research; of this I am often aware. And what of the fathers, in my work? Here, as with Winnicott's work, 'Fathers tend to turn up […] in brackets or parentheses' (Phillips, 2007: 6).

[29] Louise Bourgeois, diary entry Sunday 27 January 1980 (Bernadac & Obrist 2005, 130)

[30] I came across Rich's words after I had written of my difficulty – and anxiety – on writing about my mother; her words have sustained me throughout this investigation.

Matriarch knitter, she who both gives and takes, Elsie Holland. Born in 1919 and mother to five children – three girls and two boys – grandmother to ten. A grafter and a shop steward who worked in a steel mill during the war until a girder slipped free of its moorings, breaking her back. Elsie Holland, who listened to cassette tapes recorded from the radio and fought in the street for her children's dignity, quick-tongued and easily riled when her cubs were threatened. Her whole life lived in the same town in which her grandson would meet his early death. Elsie Holland, dedicated smoker, wrestling fan, accomplished amateur gardener and sometime knitter. Elsie Holland, grandmother spider whose webs would unravel after her death, leaving a family without a centre. Elsie Holland who went to prison for stealing a ball of yarn, and much more besides.

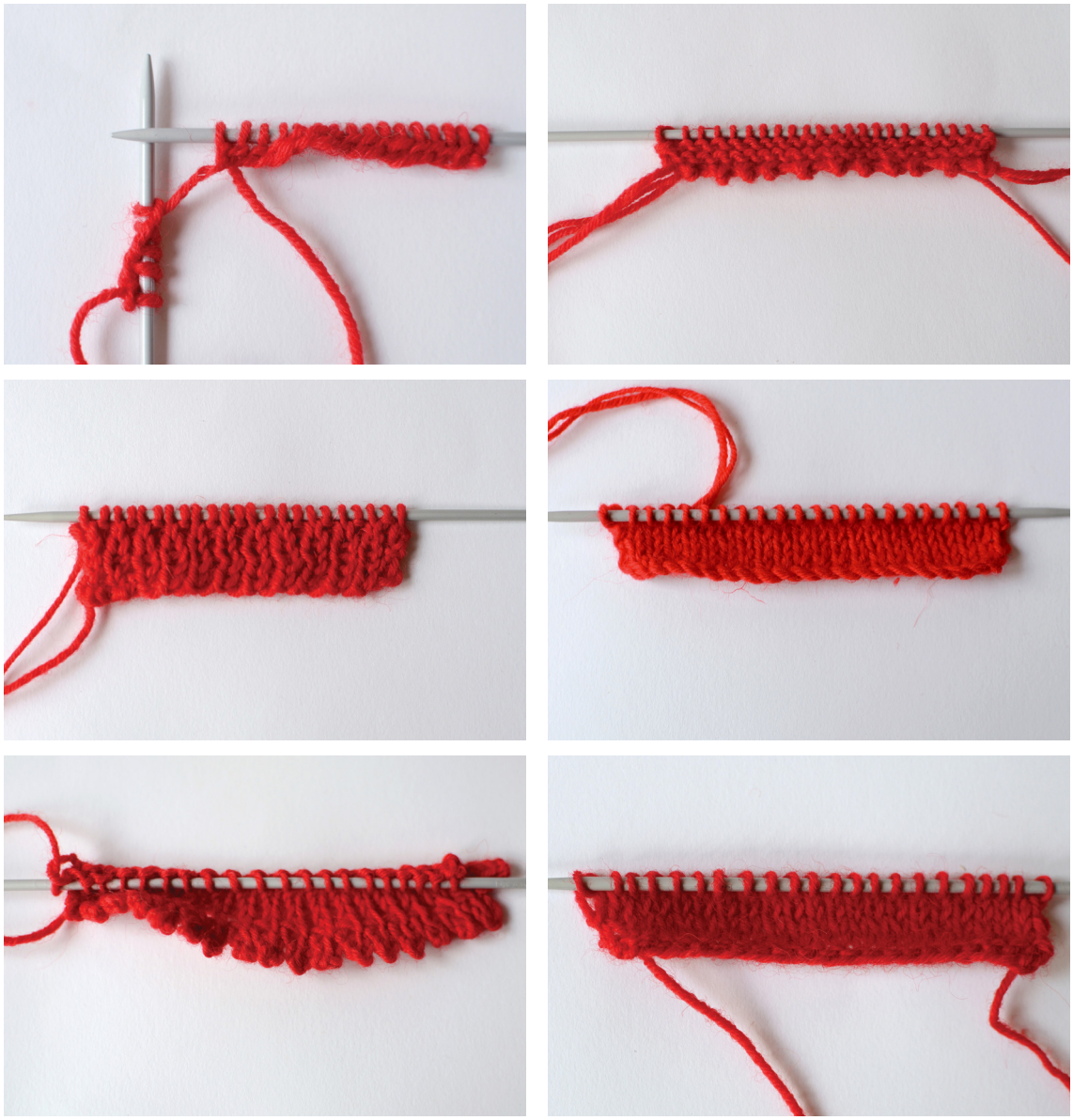
As a child I understood knitting to be alchemical. A grandmother who would knit Aran jumpers whilst watching the wrestling: needles at her bidding, yarn looping, cables forming, stitches never dropped, a round never missed as she shouted encouragement to Giant Haystacks. I would look at her patterns, photographs of perfect jumpers, perfect children and turn the page to discover lines of hieroglyph, all lost in translation.[31] It seems odd that I never learnt to knit from her and that I missed out on knitting's ladder (Edelman in Hood, 2013: 50). I was unconcerned by this lack until, in my fourth decade, I stumbled across knitting, or rather fell back into it. The landing was both soft and hard; I needed to find my way with this new language. Nan long gone and mother too far away, I turned to the knitting shop and the internet. I, the mother who failed to knit for her own babies, would learn to knit.

And so, 'Mrs Mac', owner of the local knitting shop, becomes my teacher. More stumbling, my 'cast on' a long lacy looping that grew bigger with a row of knit, my yarn wrapping needle the wrong way. Then the pattern, always returning to the key, like a student of a foreign tongue I could not trust myself to utter a few words without constant reference both to it and its translation; too often I understood neither. Trying to remember how to 'do it' from some dim fireside wrestling match was impossible, like reaching back to childhood French classes. An interpreter was needed and this was to be YouTube, constant companion in my quest to learn Channel Island cast on, cable, P2tog, ssk. I am far from fluent, a competent holiday knitter, with no hope of being the translator.

[31] Similar stories of thwarted attempts to knit in childhood are featured in Ann Hood's *Knitting Yarns* and include Marianne Leone, whose reluctance to knit grew from a sense of never being able to match the performance of her mother or her Aunt Ellie (Hood, 2014: 160–1).

Casting on marks the beginning of every knitted journey. This begins with tethering the yarn – and thus oneself – to a post. This is the foundation, the first loops from which the rest will grow; every hand-knit begins in this way. There are many methods for casting on: single or wrap cast on, long tail, cable, knit, rib cable, German twisted or Norwegian, frilled or picot, crochet, Channel Island and most probably others besides.

She made her own way; a slip-knot, slid it onto the needle and then, with a twisting trickery invented out of necessity, made small loops of the yarn with her left hand and slid these alongside the first knot. She always enjoyed this bit, but never understood what happened with the first row, the long length of yarn that would appear between the stitches on the left needle and the right-hand knitting needle as she worked. No matter how tight she pulled the yarn in that first cast-on row, this great gap always appeared, lengthening with each new stitch made, somehow taunting her for not doing the job properly, and then, at the very end of that first row, it was gone, 'as if by magic'.



So many ways to begin a journey

Early on, not long after many false beginnings, a strange compulsion overtakes me. I am not obsessed with knitting, it rarely occupies my thoughts in a desirous way, but I do want to knit, a lot. I begin to knit for others, for the babies and grandchildren of other women. Baby boots, for I have drifted, in the manner of a knitting flâneur, into pairs, twins, doubles. Paired hands, paired needles, paired feet.[32] At the beginning, before I settle, any yarn will do and almost any baby, as I knit for children I am unlikely to see. And I weigh the products of my labour, as if they were freshly born, as indeed they are, cast off from my needles.

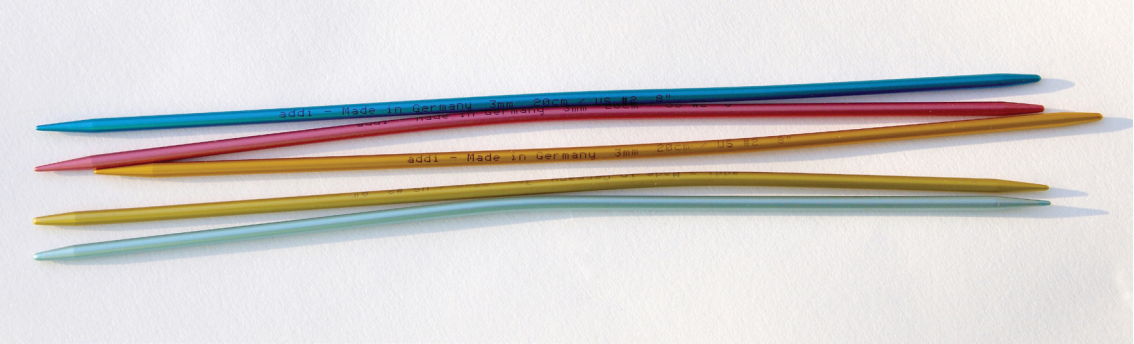
I knit a stockpile; six pairs are finished before the first baby arrives. They are wrapped in tissue and stored in boxes and I keep knitting. Anna Freud might have something to say about this hoarding, the neglected child grown into an adult who 'has strong defences against aggression' (Anna Freud, 1967: 14) and cannot let things go, and so clings.

These Red Boots, these pixie shoes. She imagines the feet that might fill them, how warm they might be wrapped in the tenderness of her making.

[32] Deleuze and Guattari bring knitting into weaving when they write: 'In Knitting […] the needles produce a striated space; one of them plays the role of the warp, the other of the woof, but by turns.' (2014: 553) I enjoy this interpretation, particularly for its emphasis on transfer and movement, but it does run the risk of eliding the essence of knitting as a thing for itself.

This work of pairing brings me to cleave, one of Freud's antithetical words, words that simultaneously denote 'at once a thing and its opposite' (Freud, 1910: 156). Freud contrasts cleave with the German *kleben.* In English, cleave means to split, and we are familiar with the cleavage of breasts and the cleaver wielded by a butcher.[33] The equivalent word in German is *kleben*, to stick or glue. To function effectively, knitting needles, like the scissors of Brodsky's trimming, must meet and part. Bodies must also cleave, for we are unable to stand permanent fusion.[34] My knitting needles brush up against each other in the manner of a kiss on the cheek, their 'sticking' is over in a flash, but the products of their union can hang around for years.

My needles – my favourite set of aluminium double-ended pins – wear the evidence of my body and the repetitive working of my hands in their altered form. In turn, my fingers, in the callouses formed at my skin, wear them. Through mutual adaptation,[35] we have 'incorporated each other' (Merleau Ponty, 1962: 166). Needles wear the physical trace of the knitter, worn into curves from years of kissing.



Kissed, but not quite to death

Loes Veenstra has been knitting since 1955. She knits jumpers, never following a pattern and never gifting them to another, some 556 jumpers. Veenstra's knitting is for knitting itself, what it produces is a consequence of her intuition and instinct: 'It is just that my hands cannot be still […] The main reason I knit is to forget about my worries' (Veenstra in Dove, 2013).

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[34] See my essay 'Folds, Scissors, and Cleavage in Giovanni Battista Moroni's Il Tagliapanni' in Millar & Kettle (eds.), *The Erotic Cloth* for a more detailed discussion of scissors and cleaving.

[35] Ellen Sampson's research on attachment and incorporation in relation to footwear encouraged this observation (Sampson, 2016).

Veenstra's drive to knit resonates with Sigmund Freud's 'Compulsion to Repeat' (1909) which is activated through the emergence of repressed thinking in 'contemporary experience' (Freud, 1961: 12). This unconscious act of repetition is marked by the habitual return to the site of trauma – in an attempt to gain control; 'like an un-laid ghost, it cannot rest until the mystery has been solved and the spell broken' (Freud, 1909: 123).[36]

The main character in the Finnish animation *The Last Knit* (2005) works with similar enthusiasm, knitting up her long hair when her yarn supply is exhausted. This erasure of distance, for knitting usually requires that the finished objects be capable of some alterity (Chapman, 2005: 74), is an extreme example of Merleau Ponty's thoughts on incorporation. A woman so compelled to knit that she risks 'tying herself up in knots'.

Differently, *Knit Again*, here both name and imperative, is the main protagonist in the film *Wool 100%* and knits for her life in an emotionally and physically exhausting cycle of the construction and deconstruction of the perfect red sweater. For Freud, art and making constituted acts of sublimation – a process where the ego holds in check the potentially harmful effects of the drives and instincts by directing these energies into other, less harmful, processes. Freud associated sublimation with evolving maturity: 'sublimation is a vicissitude which has been forced upon the instincts entirely by civilization' (Freud, 1930: 97). *Knit Again's* behaviour seems to describe a failure of sublimation, for her anguish spills everywhere and she is drenched in affect. Her self-destructive path seems more akin to the inward-turning masochism of the death drive, described by Freud as one of two governing drives, the other being *Eros* or the life instinct. Freud held that all human beings sought homeostasis: 'The dominating tendency of mental life […] is the effort to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension' (Freud, 1920: 49–50). The destructive capacity of the death drive describes an attempt to revert to an inorganic state, the ultimate annulment of all tension (Ibid: 48). *Knit Again's* frenzied knitting might be described in terms of both death drive and 'Compulsion to Repeat'; it certainly appears as a manifestation of inner turmoil.

[36] Veenstra's story of a traumatic childhood lived through the Dutch Hunger Winter and German occupation of Rotterdam during the second world war (Veenstra in Meindertsma, 2012) might support this, but this is somewhat speculative.

Diary, April 27 2015

Mum told me that she would knit to keep her hands busy so that she might stop smoking. It worked. My nan was particularly gifted, able to knit and smoke simultaneously.

Joanne Turney looks to Kristeva to unravel the enigma of compulsive knitting. Turney reminds us that the rhythm of knitting, its 'rocking motion and repetition […] provokes a state of introversion, of oblivion and escape' (Turney, 2009: 123) where

> the body disappears and the psyche regresses to a state of nothingness where, as Kristeva might intimate, 'meaning collapses'. Knitting and the compulsion to knit, therefore, might embrace the abject in two ways: firstly through the attraction to the formless, the incomprehensible (the state of knitting) and secondly through the outpouring of the internal (the knitted object). One might suggest that the compulsion to knit is a response to inner turmoil, to release or vomit feelings of that which is unspeakable and threatens to harm through a creative outlet.

Loes Veenstra has company in seeking knitting's amnesia. Ann Hood learned to knit when mourning the sudden death of her five-year old daughter (Hood, 2014). Like Veenstra, she was unconcerned with what she might knit, developing a habit of making dishcloths and gifting them to bewildered friends (Ibid: 101). Two women compelled to knit, both seeking if not 'the collapse of meaning' (Kristeva, 1982: 2) then perhaps a moment where symbolic meaning is held in abeyance, where they might be lulled into forgetfulness. Perhaps this is Kristeva's *Chora,* 'which is analogous only to a vocal or kinetic rhythm' (Kristeva, 2002: 36), the kiss and click of knitting. This is not a state without meaning (Kristeva's abject) for it is 'ordered' by the symbolic (Ibid) yet constitutes a state where the two might meet – like knitting needles – and activate what I think of as knitting's poiesis, not necessarily the 'vomit' of the unspeakable, but perhaps that which is beyond or outside signification, corporeal and felt rather than known. A kinder way of looking at the products of compulsive knitting might be to think of them as poetic objects revelling in the dialectical tension, described by Kristeva, between the phenotext of the symbolic (structure) and the genotext of the semiotic (process) (Oliver, 2002: 25). In this, knitting's language and tools figure as the symbolic, and knitting itself – the looping, wrapping and slipping of hands and fingers – as process.

Diary, 24 November 2016

I filmed myself knitting yesterday and realise how little I move. My eyes are downcast and how pinched and anxious my fingers seem, hardly moving. Not a relaxed knitter … if anything, I look like I'm winding up a bobbin or repeatedly jabbing at something. I don't know what I expected. Knitting fingers are not very expansive, not least mine.

So, quiet knitter, why do you knit at all? This is worth exploring, for, as Rosenberg writes, 'It behoves us […] to reflect not only on what we make, and how we are with what we make […] but also, and perhaps more importantly, both why we make and the way we make' (2013: 1). Here, it is useful to return to Winnicott and, more particularly, to his theory of transitional objects and transitional phenomena (Winnicott, 1953). Winnicott describes the newborn as existing in a space where, in its first few weeks, all its needs are met – the mother is totally committed in her adaptation – and it lives under the illusion of 'oneness' with the mother. Over time, the child finds something else, a soft thing – 'a bundle of wool or the corner of a blanket' (Ibid: 91) – which comes to function as the first 'me and not-me' object, and marks the emergence of self as subject. This object functions as an intermediary or bridge between the infant's internal and external world and is 'a defence against anxiety' (Ibid) that can persist into childhood and beyond; indeed, Winnicott tells us that it may reappear 'at a later stage when deprivation threatens' (Ibid).

Winnicott's thinking on transitional phenomena extends to the incorporation of a third spatial dimension, the intermediate area, which sits between inner and outer reality and 'exists as a resting-place' (Ibid: 90). For Winnicott, this intermediate area extends beyond childhood and into adult life:

> the task of reality acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience which is not challenged. This intermediate area is in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is 'lost' in play. (Ibid: 96)

Loved and Mutilated: 20 years as transitional object and bed sharer [37]

This third dimension is permission to play as an adult, to be lost in knitting as a child might be lost in their drawing or daydreaming. It is a place where we might 'make' it possible to live in two worlds. Freddie Robins reaches back to Winnicott when she writes '[my] work sits between me and my internal world, and the physical world around me, like some form of comfort or rather discomfort blanket' (2016: 2).

[37] This 'Pooh Bear' was brought to me by a nursing student at King's College. I taught her darning techniques and she returned to me over the weeks to check on progress. 'Loved and Mutilated' refers to one of the qualities of Winnicott attributed to the transitional object (Winnicott, 1953: 91).

Freud's 'Pleasure Principle' (1920) describes a drive towards homeostasis through the discharge of tension. Knitting is both different and the same, for it also relies on tension. Some will knit too tightly and others too loosely, the balance between holding on and letting go somehow elusive. Most knitters, over time, will come to an understanding of 'give and take' but some will find their knitting always comes up short.

On giving: Marcel Mauss (2002) tells us that, just as there is no such thing as a free lunch, there are also no free gifts, that gifts are given with the expectation of some sort of return and that they have a consolidating function, contributing to social cohesion. Mauss described the circular nature of kula exchange where the gift has agency and carries within it something of the giver; this 'imposes obligation' and means that the 'thing received is not inactive' (Mauss, 2002: 15).

I would like to challenge Mauss with a different configuration of the gift, one that concerns itself with kindness and does not carry with it the obligation of debt. It also marks a return to Adorno, who claims that 'Real giving […] is going out of one's way, thinking of the other as a subject' (Adorno, 2005: 42). Kindness has the effect of bringing us into the world:

> genuine kindness makes us unobliging, less susceptible to moral coercion from within and without […] once we allow it as a pleasure it makes us more porous, less insulated and separated from others. (Phillips, 2009: 53)

Gift giving also has the effect of extending the body into the world, it 'keeps open the passage between inner and outer life' (Dilnot, 1993: 55). And when we give to others outside our immediate circle – as I do with the knitted baby boots – we extend kindness and form new sympathetic attachments (Phillips & Taylor, 2009: 97).

Diary, 4 September 2013

I have spent too long on a diet of words. When I return to knitting, I feel so clumsy, as if I have tiny toothpicks at the ends of my fingers. In trying to M1 stitch, I manage to pull the whole lot off the needle.

Jean-François Millet, French, 1814–75; *The Knitting Lesson*, 1869; oil on canvas; 101.23 x 83.2 cm; Saint Louis Art Museum, Museum Purchase (106:1939) with kind permission.

Teaching is such an act of kindness, for it relies on a willingness to share and has the effect of joining us with others. And I am about to run before I can walk, for I am teaching Malena to knit. She is nine and the daughter of a friend and she looks like Millet's young knitter – in fact, so like her that I caught my breath. Millet's young girl, whose knitting carries the marks of making and remaking in the peaks and troughs of yarn memory collected on her lap and whose gaze is for her knitting alone.

We sit in a café, squished together on a leather sofa. She is very excited, telling me how important it is for her and that she wants to knit her Dad a scarf for Christmas. We order tea and cake and settle to our task. Learning to knit from another is 'an intense, one to one experience of learning' (Brooks, 2010: 35) which normally involves physical

closeness.[38] A leaning in of both teacher and pupil, which might involve the brushing together of hands and shoulders where bodies meet, and extend to the pupil sitting in the lap of the teacher, being held and taught simultaneously.

I have old wooden knitting needles for her to borrow, given to me by my friend Muriel, who taught me to weave. In this I make some attempt, unconscious at the time, to memorialise this first experience for her (Brooks, 2010: 35), a transference of sorts.[39] With chunky yarn I have already knitted up the first few rows, sensing it is important for Malena to know success early on, and have decided to teach her in the continental manner, where the yarn to be knitted is held in the left hand. I reach around her and hold her in what I am coming to think of as 'the knitter's embrace', my arms encircling and my hands resting on hers. The Welsh have a particular word for a close embrace such as this, cwtch. In English it translates as cuddle or hug, but in Welsh it also signifies a small, contained space that is associated with warmth; huddled together, we have made our own corner (Bachelard, 1994: 91). Knitting has the capacity to make things, relationships and space.

We knit differently to how I knit with mum. Where we faced each other – at least in the beginning – we were less intimate in the ways that our bodies touched than I am here, with Malena.

Early on I realise the teaching needs to be broken down into smaller chunks, for 'a manual knack can only be learnt slowly' (Mauss, 1935: 71). Handling two needles and a ball of yarn and simultaneously manipulating fingers is too much for Malena, yet she protests when I help too keenly. I realise she needs distance and I have become too proximate. We develop a pattern of coaching and following. Our tea cools and the cakes remain untouched. There are ten stitches to each row and she knits three rows, managing the errors by holding them at some distance from herself, reassuring herself that mistakes are fine, they make it look hand-made rather than factory-made: 'Why must there always be factories?' I suspect her of wanting to be 'with me' or 'like me', that she mirrors me in her imitation (Ibid: 73) but also defends herself from failure. But it's not long before she

[38] Knitting tutorials abound on YouTube and other internet websites. Amy Twigger Holroyd (2013) has demonstrated the knitting community's engagement with them in her research.

[39] I am guided by my own lack, that which I did not enjoy; my transference is my attempt to furnish Malena with things I missed.

becomes frustrated by the yarn tangling at her fingers and her slow progress, not long before her shoulders slump and we turn to the tea and cake.

Bloodline is an act of kindness, a gift from a daughter to her mother, so that they might be together; share each other's company. It is also an act of exclusion, for her and me alone. I am conscious that my sister and daughter sit outside, at the margins. I have kept my mother for myself.

To knit for another is an act of risk, as well as love. The risk that the gift is unwelcomed, even ridiculed (Turney, 2012). In a seminar where we talk of care and Winnicott, a student shares his story. As a young teenager, Tim's object of desire was a Bristol City football jumper. He thought of very little else, it would mark him as a committed supporter and 'one of the gang'. Yet his family struggled financially and he knew his chances of having one were very slim. His mum had other plans and, not wishing him to go without, knitted him a Bristol City replica jumper from red and white yarn with fancy trimming at the cuffs and neck. Tim was deeply troubled by this gift and recalled the conflict it stirred within him. An emblem of his mother's love, her time, her skill and yet it marked him as an outsider and revealed to all the financial state of his family; for Tim to wear it revealed his family's shame and invited ridicule from his friends, while not to wear it risked hurting his mother. The jumper long gone, he emails me a drawing. Against a brilliant red background, Tim in outline, the memory of a young boy stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Sometimes she could be so infantile, cock a snook.

Chapter Five:

False Noses and the outward appearance of being 'just fine'

> Thumb-sucking appears already in early infancy and may continue into maturity, or even persist all through life […] Sensual sucking involves a complete absorption of the attention and leads either to sleep or even to a motor reaction in the nature of orgasm. (Freud, 1905: 96)

She had never – to her knowledge at least – been a thumb sucker, but she observed her increasing capacity to self-soothe, fingers and thumb cupped at her nose, collecting her exhaled breath to warm the chilled flesh. Thumb suckers might seek to replace the absent mother, to soothe their anxiety in slipping thumb into mouth and making a transitional object of themselves.[40] She did not believe this applied to her, and yet, as she lay with head on pillow and fingers curled around her cold nose, she acknowledged that her behaviour might appear infantile to anyone who came across her and was mindful of this. She must not be seen to be soothing herself, taken for a 'pleasure sucker' (Lindner in Gillis, 1996: 57) for that way lay shame.

She crocheted the first nose warmer; a colourful, self-striping yarn worked in the round and with tapes so that it might tie at the back of the head. It did the job, her nose was no longer cold, but she did look like a clown. She kept it hidden in the bedside table, her clown's nose.

In his essay 'Time and False Noses', Edmund Leach associates the wearing of false noses – and my nose is such a nose – with the ordering of time. Leach suggests that dressing up (or down) helps us make sense of time, since it divides the vast expanse of time into distinct periods (Leach, 1955/1961: 184) Leach contrasts the wearing of false noses, or fancy dress, with etiquette dressing, such as the attire worn for graduation ceremonies, and describes three types of ritual behaviour: formality, masquerade and role reversal (Ibid: 185). I am not elevating my status with this ludicrous nose, nor am I practising role reversal, but sense that I engage in something like a masquerade when I wear it, becoming someone other than my usual self. And I have made a reflexive turn.

In his discussion of the carnivalesque, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) draws on the sixteenth-century physician Laurent Joubert who declared that 'the size and potency of the genital organs can be inferred from the dimensions and form of the nose' (Joubert in

[40] In his essay 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena', D.W. Winnicott associated the practice of sucking fist, fingers and thumbs with 'stimulation of the oral erotogenic zone', thus staying close to Freud, yet distancing himself in his description of 'quiet union', suggesting thumb sucking as a means of bridging the gap between mother and child (1953: 89).

Bakhtin, 1984:316).[41] Not unsurprisingly, given this context, Bakhtin confirms the pre-eminence of the nose in its grotesque form in the carnival, where it 'always symbolizes the phallus' (Ibid: 316). It does not escape my attention that my noses have evolved from their humble beginnings into knitted prosthetics that bear some equivalence to Bakhtin's thinking, and that I have amplified this in their naming. So, in my carnival, I 'cock a snook'.[42]

He gives the appearance of giving in, or giving way.

[41] Interestingly, Alison Stewart points out the widely held belief, also from the sixteenth century, of the inverse relationship between the size of the penis and a man's intelligence (Stewart, 1995: 346).

[42] 'Cock a snook' derives from showing contempt for another, usually involving a gesture where the thumb touches one's nose and the fingers are spread out. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/snook

Wearing a mask of any sort might be considered 'out of time', or at least out of the ordinary; it is certainly outside convention and suggests a desire to be hidden or to adopt a different persona. A mask is a disguise, but it also makes distance – literal and metaphoric – between oneself and the 'other' and is not always associated with revelry: the masked attacker who conceals their identity, the mask of the Venetian plague doctor, the prosthetic nose of the pre-penicillin-era syphilis patient, whose nasal cartilage was particularly vulnerable to collapse, and the mask of surgical medicine; each, in their own way, signifying distance over proximity, concealment over exposure.

Both Joan Riviere and Luce Irigaray explore the idea of the masquerade in the performance of femininity. Riviere describes how women adopt a 'mask of womanliness' as a means of dissimulating masculinity; that women feign feminine behaviour to 'avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men' and that, ultimately, authentic womanliness is a masquerade (Riviere 1929: 38). Irigaray has pointed out that the masquerade is what women do in order to participate in man's desire, but at the cost of giving up their own (Irigaray, 1985: 133).

The women taking part in the antenatal classes pioneered by the obstetrician and active childbirth proponent, Grantly Dick-Read,[43] adopt a very particular disguise. This is one of modesty, of protecting their identities.

[43] The obstetrician Grantly Dick-Read (1890–1959) was an early proponent of active childbirth. His book *Revelations of Childbirth*, first published in 1947 and since revised as *Childbirth without Fear*, is still in print. Dick-Read was the first President of the National Childbirth Trust.

Maternity Bandits I

Women in their underwear, women who might include my mother in their number, lying on their backs wearing pointed bras and oversized knickers pulled up to cover their swollen bellies, plenty more room for growth. Bended knees parted and flopped to the sides, like pregnant frogs. Six of them in white bra and pants, two – in their mismatched sets – have let the side down; what were they thinking?

Maternity Bandits II

Here they are again, in a horse-shoe shape, sitting upright, bottoms on their feet and knees parted. When I first saw this I thought they might be levitating. The one at the back, the apex of the group, seems to encourage her classmates into floating. I think she's the ringleader. The one front right is almost smiling, but not quite. But it must be hard not to laugh when dressed like this, pregnant and wearing the mask of Zorro: these maternity bandits.

I made my own version of the Dick-Read masks; it was altogether less amusing; knitted from black yarn and incorporating a nose. I felted it to achieve a stiffer finish, so that it might hold its own. And, in a perfect reflexive turn, it led me somewhere not entirely unexpected. The dressing-up box of childhood, of hiding and concealing, of being other than myself, of being dressed up by my mother as a child.

The Black Crow: and she tied a knot in its end,
so that she might always remember to be a good mother

Diary, 7 October 2013

I'm not sure what I should do with this mask. The back isn't finished and I doubt it will ever be. It has an unnerving quality. I'm not sure if it reveals more of me than it hides. Perhaps because I took the first photos in the shower room and was undressed, they have made me think of shame and what I have to disguise.

I am Red Riding Hood. I am no more than three years old, wearing a fake fur-trimmed cape of crushed red velvet. Like nearly all of my clothes, this was made by my mum and the photograph was entered into a baby competition, where it (and I) came nowhere, returned to my mum with a note: 'it does not show enough of the child'. It would be the only fancy dress of its kind, for my memory of similar outfits is that they were all about my flesh and my emerging womanliness. At 15 I was a 'Greek Goddess' on the school's float in the town's carnival parade. I wore little more than a white bedsheet, draped and fastened by Mum and a laurel wreath in my hair. I remember an unseasonably cool and windy day, my continuous attempts to keep the edges of the sheet together at the point where they threatened to undo my dignity, and the persistent, unwanted attention of an English teacher. Perhaps, at 15, this was forgivable, for I was hardly a child. Of another, I am less sure.

Red Riding Hood and the terrible classroom prophecy

We are in the cloakroom of our primary school and surrounded by children dressed as Dolls-in-Boxes and Daleks, for this is the fancy-dress competition of the school fete, circa 1972. Alongside me is my brother who leans on a crutch and is heavily bandaged in the manner of 'Clunk Click', a comic response to the popular public information film with its tagline 'clunk click, every trip'. On my head is an arrangement of plastic fruit; my legs and midriff exposed by the daring frills of a skirt and skimpy top, my face made up, my feet swamped by my mother's slingback shoes and my posture slightly stooped, my attempt to disguise my emerging breasts. I am hoping I might shrink myself enough to pass unnoticed. Faint hope, for I am dressed in the garb of the 'Brazilian Bombshell' that was Carmen Miranda (1909–55), a woman famed for dancing, singing and extravagant dressing (Shaw, 2015). I am no more than 11 years old. I knew nothing of Carmen Miranda, neither did my peers, and yet I am acutely aware that what I wear is 'not me'. There I am, dressed in a nostalgically staged pseudo-erotic revisiting of lost times, little different to the young girls dressed for contemporary American pageants. There is a stage across which we must each travel in character. I have no idea what Carmen Miranda should do, but I know that the wolf whistle that peels out from the back of the hall adds to my discomfort. Here I am styled for a very particular gaze, not one to which a young girl ought to be exposed, least of all by her mother. Barthes reminds us that the photograph has the capacity for inauthenticity in its insistence that we transform ourselves into something other than me: 'I constitute myself in the process of "posing," I instantaneously make another body for myself' (Barthes, 1980: 10). And I am caught up in this posing, a young girl wearing the mask of womanhood. Annette Kuhn shares my pain:

> What, then, of the daughter's story: the daughter put on display, exhibited to the public gaze in a quest for rewards from strangers […] What if the daughter was not entirely comfortable with such identities, with being the site of another's investments, the vehicle of another's fantasies? (Kuhn, 2002:69)

What if she had preferred to stay hidden, wearing only herself? Kuhn describes the sort of mother who 'gave herself away to everyone or someone and tried to get herself back from a daughter' (Solnit, 2013: 20). I am trying to be kinder.

There are few family albums in my family; instead, photographs are scattered indiscriminately throughout the house. In drawers, in a writing bureau, slipped between books on shelves, in envelopes alongside old bills and receipts. Such is my family's apparent disregard for their history, as if the whole thing has been thrown to the wind

and allowed to settle where it falls. Like riffling through the left-behind garments of the dead, all without order and always the anxiety that I will not find what I am looking for: Carmen Miranda, Clunk Click and Red Riding Hood all accidentally discarded in someone's attempt to restore order to all these hiding places. In another context, Roland Barthes writes: 'In order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes' (Barthes, 1980: 53) and I fear this may be my only way of seeing them. I am about to set out on a journey of memory work, 'a route to a critical consciousness that embraces the heart as well as the intellect, one that resonates, in feeling and thinking ways, across the individual and the collective, the personal and the political' (Kuhn, 2002: 9).

At my nan's house, my oneiric home,[44] the family album was a Winston Churchill biscuit tin. An informal gathering of family, friends and strangers, held together in some convivial attempt at nesting[45] and stored in the heavy oak sideboard in her best room, the room used only for Christmas, large family gatherings and the laying out of bodies – in turn, my grandfather and her. A room spanning the depth of the house, metal-framed windows at both ends, and heated by a single gas fire. One of my greatest pleasures was to open the lid of this mercurial tin of secrets, to imagine who had been to war, what had happened to their clothes, their dresses and their shoes.

My grandmother and mother were and are the custodians of the family portraits for, as Seabrook tells us, 'narratives nearly always fall within the competence of women' (1991: 172) and neither seems to have taken the role particularly seriously, or so I think. In my 'delving into the past' (Kuhn, 2002: 3) I worry I will be forced into sifting, a too physical engagement with the dead, for I have grown to think of old photographs and their turned-up friable edges as aged skin. I am prone to finding this same skin particularly abject, for 'a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see' (Barthes, 1980: 6).[46] In

[44] Gaston Bachelard describes the oneiric house as 'the dream house' to which we return in moments of reverie. For me, it is significant that Bachelard claims it as 'the environment in which the protective beings live' (Bachelard, 1994: 7).

[45] Jeremy Seabrook describes the habit of storing family photographs in old boxes 'still smelling of their original contents' (Seabrook, 1991: 172) as particularly common: 'The collections were often jumbled up, invaded by the occasional presence of strangers' (Ibid).

[46] See Cadava and Cortes-Roca (2006) for a more detailed discussion of Barthes's 'Barthemes' (2006: 5), and the destabilisation of photography as a frontier between image and subject that supports the idea that 'a photograph is always invisible', enabling us to pass through it and move directly to the referent. Specifically, Cadava and Cortes-Roca reference Elissa Marder's use of the term 'umbilical cord' (Ibid: 27) to describe this phenomenon, suggesting a connection to the maternal body.

both collections, the possibility of creating a narrative, a linear one at least, is impossible, but the capacity for 'making it up' is boundless.

We talk about my interest in the photographs on the telephone, especially my eagerness to find the three from my childhood that matter most. But Mum always stalls at the looking for 'delving' is something that unsettles her, particularly at night. She thinks she knows where they are, should be able to find them. She will look tomorrow, but she doesn't and I travel to her so that I might look myself.

And now, even the tins have been discarded. In their place, two drawers stuffed with decades of photographs and layered in the manner of a badly shuffled deck of cards. I lift each drawer from its housing, place one on top of the other and both atop the blue chaise longue in Mum's best room. This is my mum's habit of collecting; she enjoys this disorder, the pleasure of dipping into this sea and pulling out sea-glass memories and imaginings. She wants moments, not histories, not the full story.

In all my shuffling and sifting, I find only one of the three photographs: Red Riding Hood, the black-and-white version.[47] Of the fancy dress parade there is only one. My brother stands alone in a classroom, not the cloakroom, and in some dreadful prophecy his head is bandaged in an all too real and different invocation of Barthes's assertion that 'The photograph is violent' (Barthes, 1980: 91) and its prick is knife deep, *Blood Red*. And Carmen Miranda? She is nowhere to be seen. The other one, my mum holding my brother in the way Roland Barthes is held by his, is only to be found beneath the shut lids of my eyes.[48] And through all of this sifting I wear another mask, one of composure, the same one I wore in the beginning; it is just enough to hold me together.

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[47] An unconscious reference to the filmic, which has been deliberately retained.

[48] In fairness to my mum, it is quite possible that I have mislaid this particular photograph. I see it in so many places, but none of them real.

Dear Louise,

Long ago, way ahead of any of this, you said: 'Anytime you are presented with a problem, you dig. You dig in your mind. We all dig for the truth.'[49] *Louise, I have had enough of digging. It requires a strength that eludes me, for now. Here, you can have the spade, I'll watch.*

'All masks are props for pretending' (Maushart, 2000: 1). On Mother's Day 2014, Freddie Robins tweeted on the social network site Twitter. Her tweets were remarkable for their challenge to accepted Mother's Day sentiment: 'Happy Mother's Day all you bad mothers' and 'Happy Mother's Day all you mad mothers'. In these tweets, Robins articulates what ordinarily remains hidden, the idea of maternal ambivalence, which the psychoanalytic psychotherapist and writer Rozsika Parker defines as: 'the experience shared variously by all mothers in which loving and hating feelings for their children exist side by side' (Parker, 2005: 1).

In *Bad Mother*, bent and mismatched knitting needles are rammed into the shoulder end of a machine-knitted peach-coloured prosthetic forearm, which is filled brimful with solidified expanding foam of the type used by builders to stop gaps. This combination of the soft – the knitted yarn – and the soft made hard – the expandable foam – is worthy of elaboration. There are obvious parallels between the maternal and the phallic here, not least because of the flesh-coloured yarn made rigid by a material that, until activated by pressure and contact with air, is ordinarily liquid gas, is itself flaccid. This same foam is also aesthetically unloved, a close-to-repulsive material that defies the usual instinct to touch. Yet, here it is, forced into a close relationship with the softness of knitted fibre that performs here as skin. This Bad Mother is bad on the inside too. I cannot see the result of this forced proximity, but I guess it to be messy, that there might be a point where looping yarn and expanding foam meet in an unhappy union that is matted and incapable of separation. And there is violence too in the cutting and shoving:

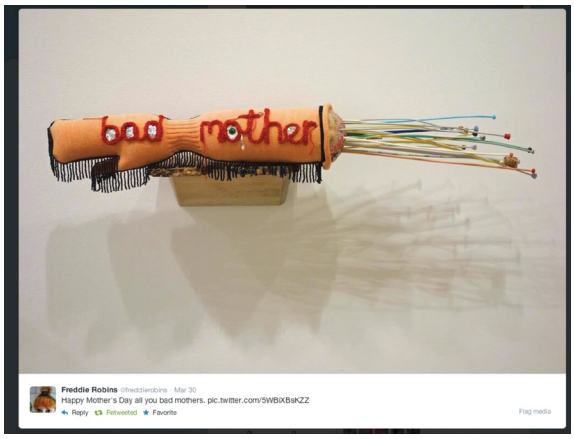
> I have filled an industrially knitted body with builder's expanding foam, severed an arm from it using a bread-knife, pushed a bunch of broken and bent knitting needles into the end of the arm, voodoo style, and embellished it with red lurex tubular knitting spelling out the words BAD MOTHER. (Robins, 2016: 4)

[49] Louise Bourgeois in Bernadac & Obrist, 2005: 187.

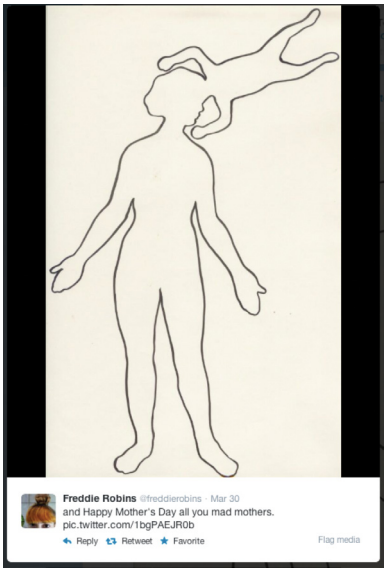
Dressed to party or rodeo, this mother, with her absence of fingers – no chance of a reassuring caress – and spade-like hand, is out for herself. In *Mad Mother*, the subject of the second tweet, Robins suggests motherhood as a malign growth, a child permanently attached and 'always on one's mind' with the mother's open arms marking a gesture of compliance, even defeat. Neither is capable of liberation and both are doomed to live life

in each other's heads – madness indeed. In her articulation of the bad/mad mother, Robins reaches back in a provocation to Winnicott's 'good enough mother', she who

> starts off with an almost complete adaptation to her infant's needs, and as time proceeds she adapts less and less completely, gradually, according to the infant's growing ability to deal with her failure. (Winnicott, 1953: 94)



Bad Mother: Rodeo Mother



Mad Mother: Always On My Mind

Yet these are not evocations of 'good enough', nor a display of the mother who gradually fails in her adaptation to support the child's emerging independence (Ibid) but the slip of the socially acceptable mask of motherhood and its 'assemblage of fronts – mostly brave, serene and all knowing – that we use to disguise the chaos and complexity of our lived experience' (Maushart, 2000: 2). An outing of maternal ambivalence that Robins acknowledges as a reflection of her experience (Robins, 2016: 3) and which makes visible what is more usually hidden from sight. Hannah Arendt distinguished between the private and public spheres as 'the distinction between things that should be shown and things that should be hidden' (Arendt, 1998: 72). In these works, and others, Robins offers a double outing of what ought to remain hidden from sight, the domestic – signified by knitting (whose referent is always the home) – and maternal ambivalence itself.

Linda Sandino has drawn parallels between Robins's work and Freud's 'joke-work' (Sandino, 2005: 1) in which jokes are a conscious expression of what ought to be repressed or remain 'hidden'. If Robins's work exists as a slip of the mask of motherhood or 'a comedy that deflects suffering by turning trauma into pleasure' (Nixon, 1995: 85) what then of my masks, my very literal references to hiding and the hidden? The black felted one, with its hidden eyes and phallic nose tied in an aide memoire to be 'a good enough mother' operates on a darker plane, suggesting that 'the repressed will always return, and more often than not in some infinitely more ugly guise' (Kuhn, 2002: 7). I cannot see the humour in mine.

Dear Louise,

It started as a joke, but seems to have backfired. I slip it over my head and the felted knit instantly picks at my flesh and makes marbles of my eyes. There are no holes for my nostrils and I am forced into the mouth-breathing of an animal. My vision is restricted, I can see only straight ahead, mostly the turned-up end of the carnival nose, the knotted phallus. Tunnel vision. Louise, shouldn't a mother have eyes in the back of her head?

For Arlie Russell Hochschild, emotional labour requires 'one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (Hochschild, 2012: 7). Much of Hochschild's work relates to the workforce – the waitress who remains composed with a difficult customer – but it is possible to see how

this thinking transfers to everyday life. This was my strategy 'In the Beginning' when I feigned being fine to avoid distressing my mother. I did it with my children when they were small, disguised my authentic self with one that was more akin to what might become a mother. Emotional labour of this kind is not transformative, more a transitory happening, a temporary disguise worn and removed as one might a false nose, not quite the mask.

More psychologically transformative is Winnicott's idea of the 'False Self'. Winnicott's work reminds us that from the very beginning we live in a state of relatedness, most particularly in our early attachment and dependence on the mother. For Winnicott, the good enough mother adapts to the child's gestures of spontaneous impulse, gestures that demonstrate the existence of a potential 'true self' that is independent of her. Through adaptation, the 'good enough mother' enables the child's move to independence. In contrast, the 'not good enough mother' fails to meet the infant's gesture and instead substitutes her own, which is given meaning by the compliance of the infant (Winnicott, 1960b: 146). In this the child loses sense of his true self, and the false self becomes so established that it performs as the self even when the child is disentangled from the mother. In health, the false self performs a socialising role that has parallels with Russell Hochschild's emotional labour; in organising a 'polite and mannered social attitude' (Winnicott, 1960b: 143) but at its most extreme the false self 'sets up as real' (Ibid).

As a small child I was prone to dragging towels from radiators, to burrow beneath them for short naps. It is a habit that lingers, for sleep is always my default, a coping through absence; I sleep, have slept, a lot. Sleep persists as a means of avoiding emotional and physical pain. Both sleep and pain close us down, bring us within ourselves.

> Hearing and touch are of objects outside the boundaries of the body, as desire is desire of x, fear is fear of y, hunger is hunger of z; but pain is not 'of' or 'for' anything – it is itself alone. (Scarry, 1985: 162)

Anaesthesia is another form of sleep, an absence from pain in which someone takes responsibility for your every breath, in common parlance 'puts you to sleep'. Rebecca Solnit shares her experience of anaesthesia: 'There was a continuity that was my breath since birth, and the anaesthesiologist cut that, tied a knot in it, put me on monitors and respirators, then started a new thread' (Solnit, 2013: 134–5). To be anaesthetised means to be without pain. Sleep operates similarly, on both the physical and psychological body.

I slide between mattress, sheet and duvet, lie under a cover of darkness with sound-reducing plugs in my ears and a mask over my eyes, I absent myself from sensation so that I might be 'of nothing' and I sleep 'The Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care' (Shakespeare in Braunmuller, 1997: 145).[50] My husband is an anaesthetist, a doctor who works to minimise pain; I married someone with the key to absence, the absolute of distance.

Am I the child of a 'dead mother', a mother 'still alive, but emotionally unavailable to the child owing to sudden depression caused by a severe loss' (Lussier, 1999: 149)? I think not; the evidence – photographs, tales and memories, all those hand-made clothes – does not support this. Instead, my recollection is of a vigorous and energetic mother, driven to compensate for paternal absence. Was I the dead mother? So distant in her sleeping and depressive episodes that I was lost to my children; much more painful to contemplate, for therein lies the wellbeing of my own children. But it is sometimes easy to find myself in the 'dead mother', or a much paler version of Winnicott's 'good enough mother', too easy to understand why I hated the feel of those masks on my flesh, the sting of their flesh, the memory of living under a blanket, of being 'just fine'.

It is this one that brings me to less than 'just fine'.
Rex, the most handsome and loyal of family dogs
with the boy who would barely grow into a man.

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[50] From Macbeth Act 2, Scene 2, lines 38-43. The quote continues,
'The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast.'
I find in these few lines written centuries ago, the perfect justification for sleeping, that it knits up unravelled edges, restores us to wholeness, is the 'balm of hurt minds.'

His Jacket: like a toddler, she always fears its wandering.

Chapter Six:

Not a mark on his body, or so they said

A series of thumbnail photographs, 12 in all, discovered on idle search for a birth certificate and a bullish explorer's thirst for more. The dreary brick suburban streets of her youth, unremarkable post-war semis punctuated by an Edwardian terrace lucky to have survived the bombing. Swathes of tarmac, a thin scattering of cars and then, well, orange and white cones echoing the curve of a bend, as if set up for a race, but there are no runners and no one to be seen. She guesses this to be the spot where he fell.

She studies these thumbnails as if through the eyes of a social geographer. A miserable place: blot on a landscape, working-class suburb, pub on the corner – now most likely gone – a good place to gather, to see off an old friend. An alley between two houses, a glass door with a nylon net curtain tied with a bow at its middle, as if finishing off a dress, yes, someone fancies herself in there. She would surely curl up and die if returned to live here. It's like their patch, but not quite, he had a life she didn't know, his pub, not hers. Still, it's familiar enough, in a depressing way. But it's the hardness that cuts through all of this and into her, cuts through to her marrow. No grass, soil or soft landing to cushion a fall, his fall. She imagines his crumple. How her beautiful, strong, funny and kind brother collapsed. How the six-foot-two beanpole came to earth. Knees buckling like a felled tree, shoulders slumping forwards, the flesh of his face bruising the tarmac and its loose surface skidding beneath him. His last breath taken, last thought passed, all lost in the rush to his head and the slump to the floor. Nothing dramatic, just earth shattering.

And the one thumbnail altogether singular in its difference, a poorly lit image and bouncing light, two rigid parallel lines cutting diagonally from bottom left to top right, not bending like the yarn they knit into *Bloodline,* these lines are straight, *dead* straight. A close up, the partial fragments of two wholes (I wrote holes, a Freudian slip that speaks the truth of what was left behind) but I have learned enough from crime shows and murder mysteries to complete these metonyms. The top one, round and circled with orange and white stripes, looks like the cones marking the spot, as if they might have been bought together at a corner shop, as a matching set. A loop of black nylon, its ends meeting in a knot, it's too big for a knitting needle, most probably for his hand. Yes, his hand. His hand slipped into the loop so that he might have greater purchase, or perhaps he'd kept it hanging on the back of a door, like a walking cane. Wildcard guesses because this world is as unfamiliar to me as the inside of a prison. Funny, but with those stripes, well, it might pass for a ski pole. And below, perhaps only two fingers' width away, a silver strip runs parallel, markings faintly visible along its edge, a steel ruler. Like the rulers I sometimes use

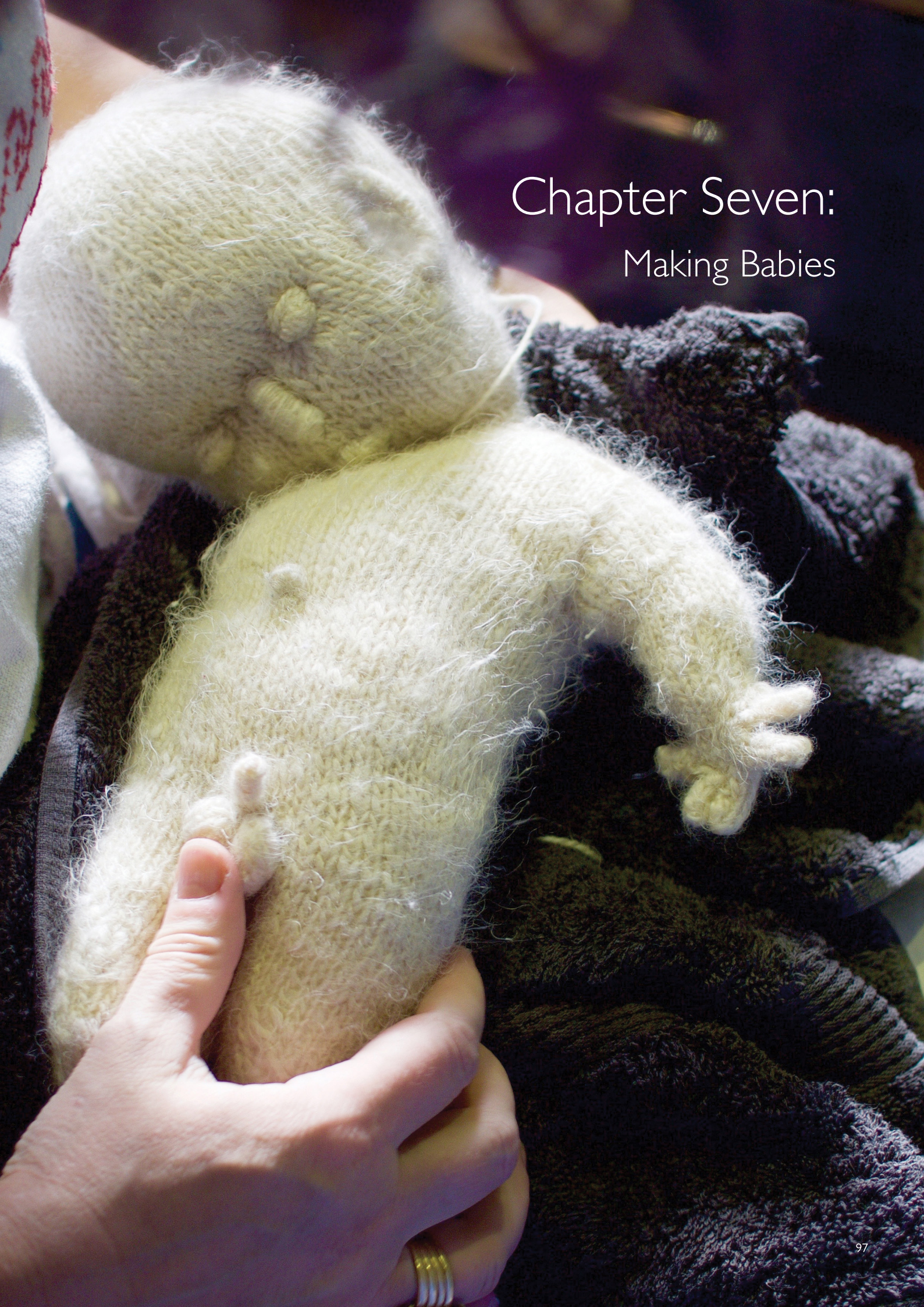
in my studio, but not this one. This is forensic, its role here to suggest scale. There was not a mark on his body, or so they said, just the purple blush of blood pooled beneath the skin of his face, like a bruise, the contained spill of a subarachnoid haemorrhage. But my eyes, peeled in scrutiny, spot a small brown stain to the bottom edge of a white stripe. Dried blood.

His name, not unfamiliar, but the first time seen on a screen, a man who kept a 'home-made wooden cosh' in the back of his car, just in case. Made in a warm kitchen, in front of a fire, in his bedroom? Whittled away as if carving a spoon? Where does one make a wooden cosh, what is the right place to fashion such a thing, did anyone ask? At home she makes cakes, beds, fires. Who makes a wooden cosh? Home-made hangs heavy in her head, made as if with sensitivity or tenderness, in the manner of a gift. Not properly home-made, not a cake, not like her knitting, not in the manner of Adorno's gifting, for she doubts he knew the warmth of a 'good enough' home. Perhaps he wrapped the tape around its width – like binding a limb, swaddling a child – spacing it evenly, smoothly, some evidence of skill, turning and returning, but no, not tenderness. She will not allow him tenderness. His making has the care of refining the edge of a sawn-off shotgun.

She fainted when the hearse drew up at the house, a perfect mirroring of his last moment. Her mother fainted as she left the church and was lifted from the ground by her brother and carried to a waiting car.[51]

[51] This chapter is partly inspired by my response to Carolyn Ellis's 'There are Survivors': Telling a Story of Sudden Death (1993) My annotated response to Ellis's text is included in the appendix.

She washed him in the sink, smoothed his skin, laid him on her lap
and towelled him dry. She looks at the image, their *Strange Pietà.*



Chapter Seven:
Making Babies

Dear Louise,

There you are … on the wall, behind my loom with two of your babies. Bold as brass, with Fillette tucked under your arm in one, and in the other, you with the red glass baby. I'd never thought of Fillette as a baby, until now. Your boy as a plaster and latex prick and you with your thumb and fingers at his neck, resting at the edge of his retracted foreskin, a smile on your face and a glint in your eyes – how you enjoyed 'comfort from holding and rocking' him.[52] *And then, all your other babies: Woven Child (2002), the astronaut baby of Umbilical Cord (2002), skipping rope cord reaching from your umbilicus to his. Louise, where does a mother end?*

Frida, Louise and Fillette

[52] Louise Bourgeois in Nixon, 2005: 80.

Dear Louise,

I have been making babies too. Knitting them. Ruby Red asked me: 'Why are you knitting a baby?' I don't know, I replied. And then, weeks later, drifting off to sleep, I understood. I am knitting babies because they are in my dreams, have been since this started. Babies I carried in my arms, babies who moved to sitting and walking moments after they emerged, vernix-slicked, from between my legs, the audacious one who walked out of the delivery room, not even a backward glance. Babies moving inside me, the baby I soothed, the one I fed, the baby who soiled itself and I smelt his shit in my dream. The babies I forgot, the one I left on a train. It was all very odd, almost every night, similar dreams. Nostalgic longing? Perhaps. I dreamt these babies into being. I listened to my sleeping self and took up my needles. Louise, did I say that where once there were three, now there are none?

The first one, red baby: no pattern, I would make it up as I went along and, like my mothering, I would knit as if by instinct. And knit in one piece, knit it from head to toe on double-pointed needles, the head would emerge as if in birth and the rest of the body would assuredly follow. For as Kame Sam proclaimed: 'when you knit, a baby arrives' (*Wool 100%*).

A head adapted from the pattern for a knitted Christmas bauble. Tiny fontanelle formed from the cast-on edge and joined circle, thread left dangling, vestigial trace of bauble and its beginning. A short neck, which feels impossibly narrow, barely able to support a baby's head. Then the shoulders, and not too many rounds before I realise they are too big and will only get bigger, damn the elasticity of knitting; large shoulders do not augur well for either baby or mother; too wide to move into the birth canal, they cause obstruction, delay and emergency intervention.[53] Off the needles, ripped back, reattached. Smaller shoulders this time. If only it were as easy to adjust a baby to size. Then everything onto pins, stitches shared between back, front and arms. Knit the arms, yes, knit the arms, long tubes, little fists and tiny fingers, moving quickly. Pick up those retained stitches – echoes of retained placenta from my own body, backwards and forwards to hospital, daughter in pram, and I am wearing the wrong clothes for breast feeding, the blue white of an engorged breast exposed from the unbuttoned front edge of my dress

[53] The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (2012) guidelines on the management of shoulder dystocia include recommendations on instrumental deliveries that involve a risk of potential damage to both mother and baby.

and devoured by the squalling fledgling – then the body, narrow back, tiny bottom, rounded tummy. Scrotum, for this is a boy, how could he be anything else?

The yarn, well, it was quite rough really and thick, unlike a baby's skin, not soft. I am not sure about this baby any more; maybe it was a mistake? The problem with babies is that you have to look after them. You need to help them grow and they are very needy, so demanding.

I am finishing off the red baby, tidying him. I peel back the toes, which are too long, and re-stuff the head, so that it is full of nylon and not cotton wool and might take up acid dye. I am not sure about the white stuffing showing through. My stitches ought to be smaller so you can't see what's going on inside his head. Something occurs to me about making it presentable for the world, like I am finishing off my child so that it meets with everyone else's approval, as if I might spit on a hankie and wipe his cheek. I am aware of a need for it to appear hand-made, as if I have laboured, tended carefully with my hands, but I do not wish it to look amateur, which it does. My efforts disappoint me; I am not good at making babies.

Diary, 13 October 2015

I think I have arthritis in the first joint of the middle finger of my right hand. It is not unbearably painful, but pretty constant and has the quality of heat, an expansion beneath my flesh. Perhaps I have brought this upon myself; the anxiety I have around making. If my fingers don't function, the work cannot be brought into being and I avoid failure. Fingers are like midwives, the facilitators of my particular kind of making; when they protest like this, they refuse to facilitate the birth. The pain serves as a reminder of their 'fingerness' – what they do and how much they do, how I use this finger to type, balance a cup, hold a spoon, stroke flesh. How my fingers feel to me. Have I ignored this particular finger? Taken it for granted? Now, with its constant pricking, I can barely forget it. I think of this finger and imagine some huge, red throbbing thing, a disgruntled puppet at the end of a string. I can try to ignore it and drawing distracts it, but the kind of knitting with which I am currently occupied – making small circles of five loops, indeed knitting fingers – seems to prod its ribs. I feel I have found the 'pain' of knitting.

How odd it might look to be finishing off a knitted baby on the train. I keep its body inside the cloth bag, foot and toes poking out as I tend to them. I am not sure if what I feel is shame, but it is embarrassment.

I photograph red baby as he sits on the pull-down table. Lay him on my lap and briefly lift his head to my left breast. He has no mouth and so cannot latch on; it is also knitted, but I feed it nevertheless, nourish it from the knitted cloth that covers my left breast, the preferred one. And then I think: what if I took him everywhere, make him my 'bosom buddy'? 'That woman with the knitted baby on the train, did you see her? Poor thing.'

Moro Reflex, a baby in constant fear of being dropped.

The next one starts out cream and, when this yarn is exhausted, I introduce pink cashmere. I have managed to dress this boy in stockings. For the work-in-progress show at the Royal College of Art, he hangs on a mood board in a bubble wrap caul, no amniotic fluid, nothing in which to swim, nothing to hold him in place or contain him. It makes for an inadequate first home. I ought to be ashamed of myself. For Winnicott, 'The main thing is the physical holding' (1960a: 595) which he describes as

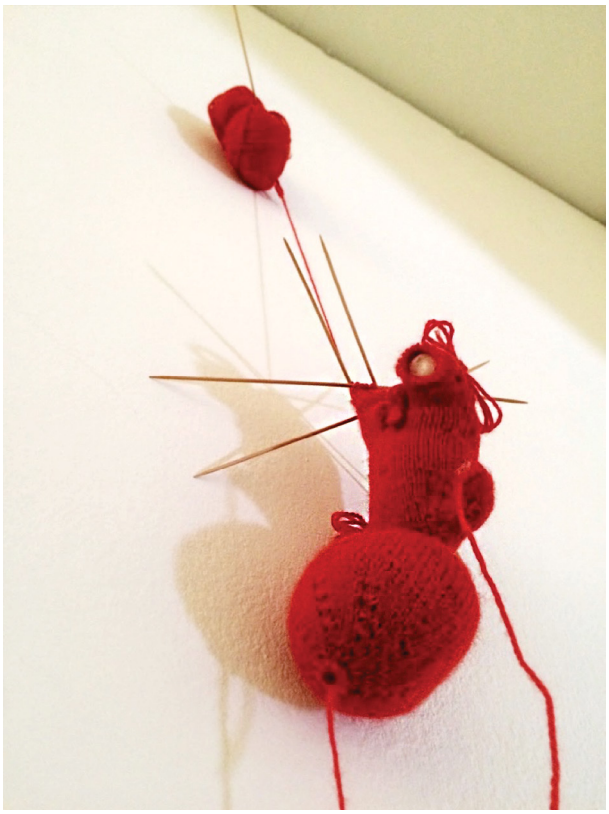
> a form of loving. It is perhaps the only way a mother can show the infant her love of it. There are those who can hold an infant and those who cannot; the latter quickly produce in the infant a sense of insecurity. (Ibid: 592)

Winnicott's holding begins *in utero* at the point of conception (Ibid: 594) and is characterised by maternal empathy, reliability, physical holding, meeting physiological needs and protecting the child from 'physiological insult', such as falling (Ibid: 592). This phenomenon extends beyond the maternal space to incorporate what he describes as 'the total environment' (Ibid: 590) and into the professional therapeutic setting, which Adam Phillips interprets as 'a holding environment analogous to maternal care' (Phillips, 2007: 11).[54]

Wilfred Bion describes the phenomenon of containing as the mother's ability to 'hold her baby's anxiety and her own' (Waddell, 2002: 33). In moments of heightened anxiety, a containing mother 'gently talks, rocks, strokes, feeds, reflects, until her baby, basking in the calm of trustful intimacy, begins to recover' (Ibid). This is the mother who gives tenderness, time and patience; she contains her infant's distress, modifies it and returns it to them in a relationship Bion called 'container-contained' (Shuttleworth, 2002: 27). In this place of reverie (Bion, 1962) and through 'a process of mirroring' (Waddell, 2002: 37) the mother enables the infant to develop an inner strength that will extend into adulthood, which is based on 'emotional authenticity' (Ibid: 42). The Winnicottian equivalent, brought about through good enough holding, is an infant who demonstrates 'continuity of being' (Winnicott, 1960a: 595), a child who can make her own way in the world.

[54] Winnicott believed that a mother must herself enjoy 'good-enough maternal care' if she is to succeed in holding. 'It should be noted that mothers who have it in them to provide good enough care can be enabled to do better by being cared for themselves in a way that acknowledges the essential nature of their task. Mothers who do not have it in them to provide good enough care cannot be made good enough by mere instruction' (Winnicott, 1960a: 594).

In sum, both of my babies, the cream one with pink stockings who is about to set off on his own secret journey, and the red one left dangling from a thread in the stairwell, are neither well held nor well contained, both laid open to lifelong damage by the vagaries of inadequate mothering. I meant to go back to the red one, to tidy him up; instead, I gave in to ambivalence and left him to it. Then I took the train and headed west, barely holding either in mind.[55]



She left him dangling by a thread

Having failed in one thing, I fail in another, fail to keep my eyes – maternal gaze – on the pink-legged child and he is lost. At first, I am unconcerned, reasoning that 'As long as he's being cared for … I was never really sure about that one.' Bargaining with myself, as will James over his lost jumper,[56] demonstrating to all that I am far from the 'good enough

[55] Waddell uses the term 'kept in mind' (2002: 38) to describe thinking of someone in their absence; this might describe the care taken in making a meal or a bed for someone, and embodies within it an anticipation of their return.

[56] James's experience of losing a much-loved jumper initiated my case study *Cherish*, his story is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

mother'. But then guilt arrives and I am hunting, in the postmodern sense. Sending emails, tweeting. Scrolling through my Twitter account, I am momentarily nonplussed; who knitted a baby like mine? Did Freddie Robins steal my baby? Then Julian lifts him into the air, swings him by the arms, playtime. He has been to the park without me. Later, he is returned, minus amniotic sac and first adventures already under his belt. He has already wandered out of our place.

In loco parentis…better parents than I.

Tucked into my bag, between laptop and notebook – a crude adaptation of Winnicott's holding – he joins me on a trip to the Victoria & Albert Museum. There's a security guard at the entrance. I place my open bag on the desk in front of him. He reaches in and with the end of his pen pushes my baby aside, without comment. I guess a lot of women come here with babies in their bags. Older women, like me.

Later, much later, it crosses my mind that, since this baby is also my work, how I have cared for it has also been found lacking. My distancing has performed in the manner of a mask, a protective layer. After all, I cannot fail if all is lost. This ought to settle with me, but does not. Instead, I swim and think about how wateriness is my second nature. Its cool rush at my skin, the dense thud made when I bump against the slippy white tiles when jumping in, locker key instinctively tucked under right side of my costume. It is my turn to be held and supported by another body, one of water, its giant weight beneath me. Feet to the wall, push away from the side, I am both launched and suspended. Running lines up and down the pool, a gentle paced looping from east to west of breaststroke and crawl, a line without trace, for the water instantly fills the void made by my body. I slip through, like a sewing needle gently nudging apart warp and weft, passing between and drawing thread behind me, as if yarn following a needle, fish-like in my slippery smoothness. Only in water do I pass without trace, without a care. Bad Mother.

I have looped again, for knitting in its toing and froing is both reflective and structurally reflexive; the loops and turns of knitting mean that yarn is turned back upon itself, bridging distance in the manner of a fold. It also has enviable plasticity, capable of being ripped out and reknit ad infinitum. A fruitless searching for the right colour, the right skin feel for the yarn for the next baby – because I must make a perfect skin, perfectly soft – leads me to the conclusion that I need to spin my own yarn. I find myself going backward in order to go forward.

I open the plastic and pull out the tiny amount of cashmere, the softest (and most expensive) of all fleeces. I hold it to my face; clean smell, the exact skin feel, as light as breath. A wooden drop spindle, a handful of combed cashmere and my hands – this is enough.[57]

Guided by another midwife, YouTube, I take my first faltering steps in a new language, drafting the fleece and parking the spindle. This requires teasing fibre from fibre, thinning and spreading, opening space to air. The result is nearer to spider web than candy floss and the lightest drift of summer rests on my work top; when I exhale, it trembles.

[57] I note my shift from Bad Mother to Good Mother in my decision to work with cashmere, the most sensuous and opulent of all yarns. My behaviour suggests an attempt to 'make things better', something I observed in my mum's mothering and also my own, a physical manifestation of empathy.

The primer. This is pre-spun yarn that catches the spider web in its grip, drawing cloud towards the beginnings of thread. It is two-ply, two threads already twisted together, and is taken from a ball of yarn lying next to me. I double this, so that the length turns back on itself, and hold both ends between finger and thumb of my left hand. A loop, two lengths and two ends. In a gesture performed instinctively, the forefinger and thumb of my right hand slip between the two threads, slide within and along their length and come to rest at the curve that marks the moment of the yarn's fold, its turning back on itself. I turn both finger and thumb 180° clockwise, bring thumb and fingertip together, a loop of yarn appears around each and both are slipped onto my forefinger. I have tied a knot to my finger, a yarn reminder. This loop is easily transferred to the shaft of the spindle. I trace the two ends up and over the edge of the whorl, wind them around the cup screw and thus yarn and spindle are suspended mid-air by my left hand. I grip the shaft with my right hand and turn this clockwise with some momentum. This energy transfers from hand into wood and yarn, the two ends of which turn into each other; are forced into proximity and twisted across and around one another, an easy union that quickly extends along the length, ending abruptly at the pinch of my fingers. Now this is the trick, holding this tension and joining the fleece into the twist. I park the spindle under my left armpit, the twisted yarn held taut in front of me by my left hand. I drape the carefully drafted cashmere, teased into a narrow length, across the twist and wrap it a couple of turns – hard enough as it floats free of every anchor. I let the trail of cloud rest across the back of my hand, completely weightless. I return the spindle to its vertical position and make two turns. This catches the edges of the fluff cloud and brings the tension tight up against my thumb and forefinger. I park the spindle under my armpit, hold the yarn taut and place right forefinger and thumb. Now my left-hand thumb and forefinger move a few centimetres along the gathered cloud and connect together, the thinnest trace between them. I release the right pinch and the twist travels to meet the left-hand finger and thumb.

Magic, and yet I resist typing 'so perfect'. I repeat this gesture three or four times until the length of twisted yarn extends beyond my reach. I realise that with more skill I can work beyond this, but this feels enough for now. I untangle the yarn from the hook and wrap two thirds of it around the spindle shaft, trace the remaining third up over the whorl and attach to the hook and repeat the whole process. The first attempt produces thick yarn, this gradually thins and, as the bundle of new twist gathers at the shaft, I become quite adept in knowing how to thin the draft before it is pulled into the twist. It also becomes

clear, through 'doing', that I need to park the spindle under my right armpit and not the left if I am going to manage this confidently.[58]

After a while, I am able to see the tension of the twist extending towards the waiting fleece before I have released it. Visceral, like an umbilical cord or artery, the neural streak in a foetus. This is unanticipated: a visible consuming energy, one that is spent in drawing in fibres, creating new yarn. It is also the most perfect of horizontal lines, held there under its own tension and that of my fingers. If I reach to touch it, all is gone. I quickly understand that, when I cannot see this 'pulse', the twist is done and I must wrap the yarn and spin again. This is a lesson in the mutuality of the senses. Although I am working with my hands and my skill is primarily developed in and through them, my vision is implicated; they work together in a 'knowing through feeling and seeing'.

Yarn Lollipop, the first cashmere spin

[58] This is an event of tacit knowledge, first described by Michael Polanyi (1891–1976). This is knowledge achieved through personal know-how and contrasts with explicit knowledge, which can be expressed through language. Polanyi claimed, 'we can know more than we can tell' (Polanyi, [1966] 2009: 4).

There are two types of spun yarn, that which is known as a worsted, where the fibres to be spun are teased out and lie alongside each other – like train tracks or lanes of a motorway – aligned but not mixed. In their spin they twist around each other like electric filament, in proximity but maintaining some decorum; neat, smooth, composed, proper and capable of being undone, teased apart. And then there is a hand-knit or woollen spin, a very different creature. The wild head of the child 'pulled through the hedge backwards', fibres gathered together, lying every which way, intermingled, body upon body and absolutely promiscuous. These, unlike the fibres that will become a worsted yarn, are sticky, messed up and messy. In their stickiness they take in and consume other things. Worsted is smooth, refined; it slips through fingers and other fibres easily. It leaves little trace and takes little with it, just passing through. Differently, the knitted spin, that teased out bundle of the gathered together, sticks to everything, bounces at the sides, smears itself against walls; it is the pathologist's dream because it gives itself up everywhere. I am worsted in ambition only.

Swimming laps is like yarning, the name I have given to the process whereby freshly spun yarn is wrapped around a frame and immersed in warm, soapy water. This evens out some of the wirier twists of uneven spinning and sets the twist. Beginning and end are secured with knots, and lengths of thread are looped together and tied by eights, a looping thread that courses from front to back. Looping eights prevent yarn from tangling; they hold chaos in abeyance. This is the first stage in finishing off. It requires a steady rhythm and tension, but is not complicated and becomes meditative – 'up and over, down and over'.

In my drifting, for swimming enables the drifted imaginings of flow state,[59] there is a thread attached to my right heel. I swim from one end of the pool to the other, a trail of yarn catching – on a screw hook perhaps – as I reach each end. Like yarning, swimming is not difficult, requiring only a certain rhythm and pace. I am yarning, wrapping myself around the pool. Meanwhile, the third baby, spun from white blue-faced Leicester, and with eyes, ears and a mouth, a proper fully rounded thing, sleeps on.

[59] Flow state is 'a kind of integrated attention that serves to direct a person's psychic energy toward realizing his or her goals'. Flow state describes a merging of 'action and awareness' and a coherence in performance (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981: 186–7).

This cashmere yarn will make the new babies, but first I will make something for myself, something to repair my thinned and sensitive skin – mittens so that I might stroke myself. Even this requires that I knit, unravel, reknit, unravel and ply the yarn. Much time passes before one mitten is finished. But it is finished, and I am not good at finishing; there are so many unfinished things because finishing, well, doesn't it mean an end? Not yet the fully fledged existentialist, endings make me nervous.

Tenderness of Making: for herself, she made mittens, never gloves.

Kari Steihaug has collected an archive of unfinished knitted objects, some 150; each is photographed against graph paper, returning it to the moment of its conception, and then returned to 'those who wish to have them back' (Steihaug, 2011). Steihaug describes her book, page after page of the wished for, planned for and ultimately cast aside, as 'a tribute to incompleteness, that which is found amidst fragments and remnants, amidst the unclear and unresolved facets of life' (Ibid).

Rachael Matthews and Celia Pym[60] initiated a project for unfinished knit objects, which they named UFOs.[61] Matthews's shop, Prick Your Finger, became a depository for the unfinished projects, which were often delivered by mail or donated by hand. Knitters were invited to adopt UFOs and bring them to completion. In February 2014, I met with Rachael and Celia at the shop to discuss the project and I was struck by how they had taken on the role of adoptive parents. Like the twin sisters Ume Sam and Kame Sam in *Wool 100%,* Rachael and Celia talk of 'taking them on', for 'where else is it going to go?' Rachael describes them as 'naughty', that their difficulties led them here, 'to their last chance'. As we talk, Rachael sifts through a large black bin bag stuffed full of UFOs; she fishes out each in turn, displaying them for me with the enthusiasm of a proud parent sharing photographs of their toddler.

Steihaug's work brings the phenomenon of the unfinished to light. Matthews and Pym's approach is one of adoption and resolution – except that I have so far failed to deliver my side of this bargain – in which fresh hands might bring the unruly toddler into line. Both projects confirm that I am not alone in my habit of leaving things 'half done'. If it is important to think about why we make things (Rosenberg, 2013: 1) then it also right to think about why we fail to complete them. In the context of knitting, it is worth returning to Winnicott. Having established knitting as a practice associated with the transitional space,[62] then the products of this space, the knitted objects themselves, might function in the manner of transitional objects, whose fate is to be 'loved and mutilated', but also 'to be gradually allowed to be decathected' (Winnicott, 1953: 91). In short, whilst they remain 'incomplete', their casting aside is more a reflection that they have served their time than a consequence of their refusal to step into line.

[60] In the context of my research, Pym's concern with the restoration of our second skins – jumpers, socks, cardigans - informed my thinking for the 'Patching Up' project with student nurses at King's College. Beyond this, our discussions helped enable and develop my thinking on repair and ultimately the potentially restorative capacity of my work. That Pym was shortlisted for the Women's Hour Craft Prize in 2017, meant that darning - a domestic and domesticated process – gained a gallery presence.

[61] Between 2007 and 2016, Rachael Matthews ran the yarn shop/art space 'Prick Your Finger' in London's Bethnal Green. She shared the UFO project with Celia Pym. I adopted Colonel Mustard's 'Hot Date', which, at the time of writing, remains unfinished. An archive of the projects is available at http://ufoadministration.blogspot.co.uk

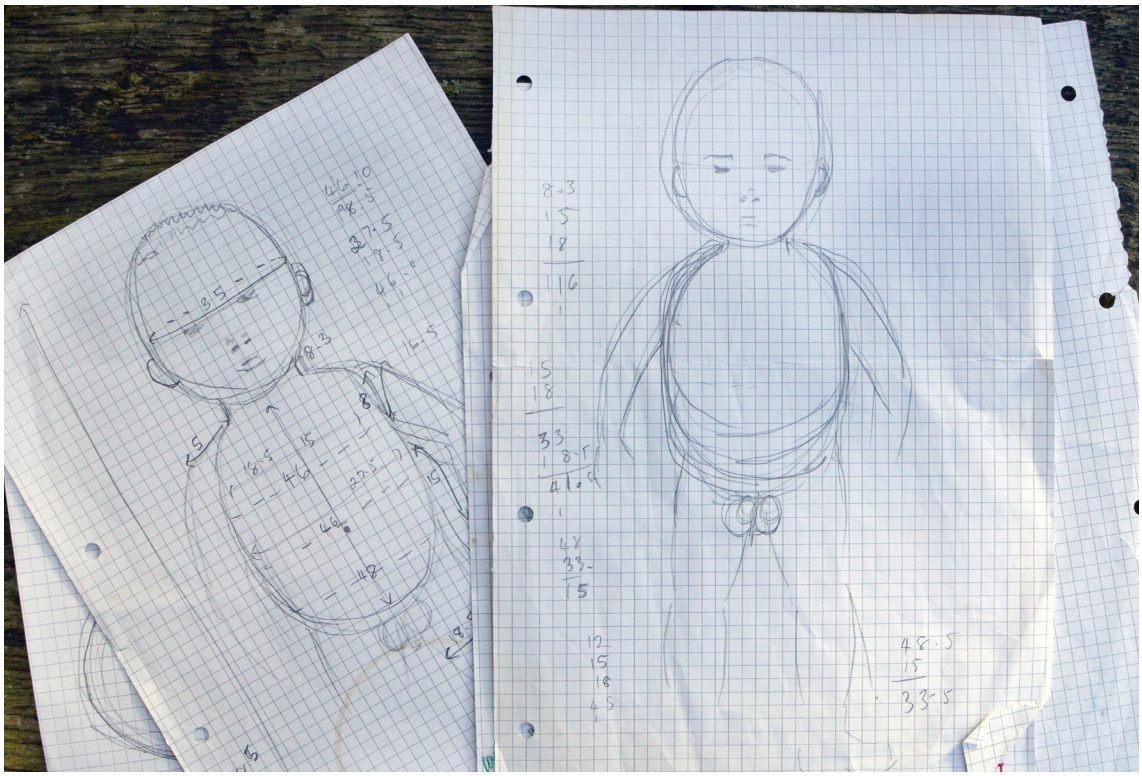
[62] Winnicott describes the term 'wool-gathering', and knitting is such a process, to mean 'inhabiting the transitional or intermediate area' (Winnicott, 1953: 90).

Diary, 8 January 2016

Knitting the small, red cashmere baby – the last of the shop-bought yarn – I become aware of the tension between my instinct, which is to knit this baby by feeling my way through it, and the logic of following a pattern. I have never been good at following instructions, hardly ever reading them, often blundering my way through.

Perhaps it is best that I draw up my own instructions, since I am so unwilling or unable to follow anyone else's. The thing about having a pattern, however much resisted, is that it saves time and affords boundaries. Being without boundaries is very problematic, it gets me nowhere.

We talk about practising when we 'try for a baby' and, having practised on three, I plan the fourth. I chase medical and midwifery texts for dimensions and draft a scaled version of the average newborn boy, but how to make all the pieces fit together so that they might make a baby? And then I turn to Rose, who will be the midwife[63] and the final baby is conceived.



This one would be just like a real baby, perfect.

Dear Kate,[64]

Remember how you said, 'you need to make your own skin, knit yourself a skin'?

Well, I think I have, just not that big, a baby's skin, but it might still be mine.

But what does it mean to have a skin?

[63] Rose Sinclair, fellow researcher and knitter at Goldsmiths, who helps me conceive the fourth baby by sharing her knowledge on pattern adaptation.

[64] Conversation with my friend Kate Just, Australian/American artist and knitter.

In a corollary of Winnicott and Bion's thinking on holding and containing, Claudia Benthien explains that

> For the newborn (as well as the unborn), the skin is the most important organ of communication and contact. It is through the skin that the newborn learns where she beings and ends, where the boundaries of her self are. (Benthien, 2002: 7)

For Winnicott, the skin performs in the manner of a 'limiting membrane' at the boundary of 'me' and 'not-me'. In this configuration, skin functions less as a site of sensual pleasure than as agent for a developing bodily schema, of an inside and outside that correlates with his hypotheses on inner and outer realities (Winnicott, 1960a: 590). In Bion's logic of containment, the infant develops 'a "psychic" skin to hold his emotional self together' (Waddell, 2002: 47).

Didier Anzieu reminds us that 'membrane derives from words meaning "skin" and "mother", language clearly conveying the pre-conscious notion that the mother's is the first skin' (Anzieu, 1989: 13). Anzieu imagines 'a skin common to both mother and child, an interface which has the mother on one side and the child on the other [...] this common skin ensures direct communication between the two partners, reciprocal empathy and an adhesive identification' (Ibid: 62–3). Anzieu's concept of the Skin Ego derives from the interaction of external and internal psychic envelopes. The external envelope is the maternal environment, beneath which lies the baby's own surface, or 'inner envelope' (Ibid: 62). The space between the two is an area of transmission of messages, which enables the emergence of the ego; 'to be an Ego is to feel one has the capacity to send out signals that are received by others' (Ibid). Within this logic, the ability of the external envelope to facilitate and support the inner envelope – through sensitive expansion and contraction – which carries traces of both Bion and Winnicott – is vital. Anzieu describes the inner envelope as being 'smooth' and continuous', with the outer layer 'a mesh structure' and describes material inversions of the structures as having pathological consequences – a child's ego might be suffocated by an all too clingy outer envelope (Ibid) or a clinging mother.

And I turn to Bracha Ettinger, whose concept of *carriance* incorporates the possibility of an inescapable maternal. *Carriance* is an extension of Ettinger's matrixial – which is itself formulated on the idea of the archaic maternal, matrix deriving from the Latin 'womb' or

'source' and carrying within it an 'impossibility of not-sharing' (Ettinger, 2006a: 147–8). Ettinger is less concerned with the space/place configuration that characterises the container, with its correspondent containing, and more with its potential for sharing, for a co-emergence (Ibid: 219). *Carriance* is universal; it is born of the experience of being carried, both within and outside the maternal body (Vanraes, 2017: 30)[65] and is a joint endeavour in which the maternal is not abjected;[66] instead, the mother is configured as a significant 'non-I' in a 'shared effective web' (Ibid: 31). In her emphasis on embodiment, Ettinger marks a shift from the mind-body dualism of Descartes, towards a dynamic of inter-relationship that is itself constituted on movement in time and space: 'I am thence I was carried – I carry therefore I am' (Ettinger in Vanraes, 2017: 30). Where holding might imply stasis, *carriance* with its emphasis on caring and carrying is dynamic and seemingly without end. And whilst it embodies the potential for empathy and compassion, Ettinger's concept suggests the impossibility of escape.

I approach Ettinger's writing as if set on unravelling a particularly tortured ball of yarn. I turn it over and over in my hands, rubbing fingertips against surface, trying to find a way in, the tail of thread, the clew,[67] the point at which I might begin to *unravel this torment*. And when I have it here, in my hands, it continues ad infinitum. In carriance, I fear there is no end, always with and never without. I am either lost in its labyrinthine turns, or (s)mothered.

The psychoanalyst Esther Bick describes the 'infant's first psychological need as one of being held together physically and describes how this gives rise within the baby to a sense of having a skin' (Shuttleworth, 2002: 31). This phenomenon is dependent on the infant introjecting (taking within themselves on a psychic level) an external object that is 'experienced as capable of fulfilling this function' (Bick, 1987: 484). As with Winnicott and Bion, this external object is the mother, for whilst it might be one of many objects – Bick suggests 'a light, a voice, a smell, or other sensual object' as possibilities – 'The optimal

[65] In her discussion of the third time-space of maternal shock, Ettinger extends the possibility of *carriance* to incorporate situations beyond the birth mother: 'In the long time-space of motherhood that spreads between birthing (or the arrival of the infant)' (Ettinger, 2016: 285). This resonates with Winnicott's possibility of significant others as the 'good-enough mother' (Winnicott, 1953)

[66] In psychoanalysis, the process of individuation, of the emergence of the self, is predicated on abjecting the maternal body – in effect, severing the bond with the mother.

[67] Clew is the archaic meaning of thread or clue, and offers a way out of the labyrinth. To be 'clueless' is to be forever lost.

object is the nipple in the mouth together with the holding and talking and familiar smelling mother' (Ibid). In its bounding and binding, Bick's skin involves both pressure and cohesion and, in my thinking, is more active at the level of skin than Bion's containing, having equivalence with Winnicott's holding. For Bick, the psychic modelling function of skin is also valorised at the expense of sensual pleasure. Bick argues that 'Disturbance in the primal skin function can lead to a development of a "second-skin" formation' (Bick, 1968: 484) suggesting, as does Bion, that incomplete integration risks inauthenticity, and I am returned to thinking of masks, of being other than one's real self. Conversely, the philosopher Giorgio Agamben offers an interpretation of masks that is less concerned with what they might hide and more with how they enable us to exist in the social world. It offers some comfort, for Agamben observes that persona derives etymologically from 'mask', and 'it is through the mask that the individual acquires a role and social identity' (Agamben, 2011: 46). Agamben's mask is more forgiving, acknowledging that it helps us to situate ourselves in the world, to be recognised.[68]

'Autobiographical skins are flushed with shame' (Prosser, 2001: 58)[69] and my flesh, my skin, is flushed with the beetroot stain of my disclosures, tales of inadequacies, desires and trauma that ought, by common decency, to remain hidden. Pennina Barnett observes the connection between shame and proximity, of needing to be 'close up' to see it: 'Shame makes us want to look away, to hide from that proximity' (Barnett, 2008: 205). I hide the object of my shame, the woman who covertly knits babies on trains, who carries a knitted baby in her handbag, the woman with secrets she will never share, for 'Shame is associated with the desires and other aspects of self that are not allowed access to shared discourse' (Mollon, 2008: 24).[70] I keep my shame under wraps, to spare others' blushes and yet, paradoxically, I point to it over and over again, I repeat myself in the manner of someone who, like *Knit Again,* fails to master the trauma. I wear the mask and yet point to

[68] It is worth mentioning here the difference between Agamben and my earlier discussion of Irigaray and Riviere and the masquerade of the feminine. Agamben's concern is different, he does not account for the role of gender in his discussion, as do they. In truth, the mask I wear in the context of my research is closer to that of Agamben's, it enables me to situate myself in the world, to acquire a certain role – of artist, maker, researcher, mother.

[69] Prosser's intention is to explore shame in relation to the psoriatic skin of Dennis Potter's Singing Detective, but this is widened to include Anzieu's thinking on the skin as ego, as a means of holding the self together.

[70] The psychoanalyst and author Phil Mollon observes the link between the German word for shame, *die Schamme*, and the body – *die Schamhaare* for pubic hair and *die Schamlippen* for labia. This has the consequence of tying shame to the body, specifically to female sexuality (Mollon, 2008: 25).

what it fails to hide. I borrow from Barthes:[71] *'Larvatus Prodeo:* I advance pointing to my mask' (Barthes, 2002: 42–3).

My babies, these uncontained, poorly held and unbound infants, notwithstanding the efforts I have made to fabricate their perfect flesh, are psychically without skin; their best chance of survival is to be nestled together, container within container within container, as nesting dolls, like Bourgeois's *Seven in Bed.*[72] I have also, in a return to Anzieu, performed the exact inversion of that which he cautions against – I have knitted them each an inner 'mesh' envelope that has too much give and take, 'that turns out to have holes in it, to be porous (colander Skin Ego)' (Anzieu, 1989: 62). I am a hopeless mother.

The last baby's flesh is cashmere. It is the softest of creatures, though far from the prettiest. Mostly, I am drawn to the smaller of the final two, the last but one, the one with the appearance of arriving ahead of his time, my Tom Thumb baby. Wrapped in a blanket on my lap, held at my shoulder as I pace the room hunting down an elusive book, all the time holding him as if Winnicott were watching. He is so soothed, so held together by my care, that there is no need for Bion's containing. I reach for the top of his head, stroking it with the back of my hand; downy soft, I have made myself a fiction. I am at risk of falling in:

> The toy is the physical embodiment of the fiction: it is a device for fantasy, a point of beginning for narrative. The toy opens an interior world, lending itself to fantasy and privacy in a way that the abstract space, the playground, of social play does not. (Stewart, 1993: 56)

Dear Louise,

I find it hard to think of this baby as a toy, as perfectly formed and as peach-soft as he is. Held here, blanket-wrapped, tucked between my abdomen and the edge of my desk, held safe: pure thing, flawless. Not a mark upon him. I envy women with brothers. It seems they have outer layers, woolly jumpers, second skins; my skin feels less protected.

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[71] Barthes uses *Larvatus Prodeo* in a different context, desire. It also works in the context I describe and for this reason I adopt it here. 'I want you to know that I don't want to show my feelings: that is the message that I address to the other. *Larvatus Prodeo*: I advance pointing to my mask: I set a mask upon my passion, but with a discreet (and wily) finger I designate this mask' (Barthes, 2002: 42–3).

[72] Judy Shuttleworth describes the extended environment of maternal/infant care as one of multiple containers, which emphasises the transferability of Bion's approach (Shuttleworth, 2002: 30).

Diary, 5 January 2018

My night-time walking habit has taken on a new dimension – tonight Tom Thumb accompanied me. A cold night that wrapped us in layers, him at my chest and held in place by the poppers of my coat. Not a long walk but enough to realise the extra warmth he brings to my body, curled as he is as my children once were, that I dipped my head to 'check on him', stroked him and found myself humming – sweet return to the chora – and that I must not get hit by a car. There are worse things than arriving in hospital wearing dirty knickers, perhaps with a knitted baby strapped to your chest.

This is the final baby and I wish to cherish this ending, but first something else must happen. Its neck is too narrow and too long and must be shortened; to do this, I must cut off his head. I have marked the point of cutting, stitched through the loops of knitting so that the cut halves will not unravel, even in this violence; I have care in mind. Even so, there is a sense that my play has darkened at the edges.

I have become attached to these brothers, both physically – their making has necessitated the close and prolonged proximity of the hand-made – and, dare I say it, emotionally. They have taken on aspects of Winnicott's transitional object, soft and with the potential to comfort at times of anxiety, and now they will bear the marks of being 'affectionately cuddled as well as excitedly loved and mutilated' (Winnicott, 1953: 91).

'Keep chopping!' She cried.

And my daughter helps document this mutilation. Later, I play back the recording and there she is, urging me to 'keep chopping', as if I might be beheading a resented sibling. This brings me to Melanie Klein.

Melanie Klein pioneered object-relations theory (Likierman, 2001: 1). Within this, Klein describes a theory of positions. The paranoid-schizoid position relates to the young infant, and describes a position in which 'people and events are experienced in very extreme terms, either as unrealistically wonderful (good) or as unrealistically terrible (bad)' (Waddell, 2002: 6). This position is characterised by the infant's primary narcissism and utter dependence (Ibid: 29) in which the mother is experienced as part object, via the nourishing breast, and becomes the baby's 'first object of love and hate' (Klein, 1975: 306). When all goes well, and its needs are met, the infant phantasises[73] feelings of love for the mother. But when its needs are not met, 'hatred and aggressive feelings are aroused and he becomes dominated by the impulses to destroy the very person who is the object of his desires' (Ibid: 306–7). And so the mother is experienced as both the 'good' and 'bad' breast, a precursor to the 'constant *interaction* of love and hate', which Klein describes as persisting throughout life (Ibid: 306).

This is followed by the depressive position, which features a growing appreciation and love for the mother as a whole person (Ibid: 311). In this position, the infant develops a sense of guilt for the pain it has caused and seeks to make amends through reparation. This drive towards 'making good' develops out of a growing sense of identifying with the other, of experiencing empathy, and is visible from a young age (Ibid). Klein describes it as 'a most important element in human relationships' (Ibid).

My tenderness (of making) and violence (of cutting) perform the role of Melanie Klein's infant in relation to the good and bad breast, but it is Klein's thinking on reparation that resonates most deeply. I had thought these brothers to be for me, made with the ambition to soothe my grief – for mourning is a call to work (Freud, 1917: 245) – but I grow to understand them as being for my mother. My own motherhood has facilitated a shift towards Klein's second position, the depressive, where I see my mum for herself and

[73] I have chosen to use Margaret Waddell's definition of phantasy here, I have found it to be the most comprehensive and accessible: 'Phantasy, with a "ph", is a term used in psychoanalytic writing to describe the content of the continuous inner, unconscious mental life of a person. Fantasy, with an "f", denotes the term for everyday, conscious imaginative life' (Waddell, 2002: 27).

She loses them in fragments.
The cheek on which she would stroke him to sleep,
the toes she tickled. Soft flesh, gone.

not just for me, where I make good those things that have brought her pain. In the end, they are both brothers and sons:

> In making sacrifices for somebody we love and in identifying ourselves with the loved person, we play the part of a good parent, and behave towards this person as we felt at times the parent did to us – or as we wanted them to do. At the same time we also play the part of the good child towards his parents, which we wished to do in the past and are now acting out in the present. (Klein, 1975: 312)

His head is returned to his body. He is washed in a sink, as small children so often are, and dried with a towel laid across my knees.[74]

First Born, first bath: and she gave up the soft place
for the plastic sides of a washing up bowl,
an all together different container.

[74] Bathing the new born: the soaping, rinsing and towelling off of skin has some equivalence with Kristeva's account of 'a mapping of the clean and proper' body of the child (Kristeva in Carson, 1999: 123); it marks the elision of the maternal interior, and an advent of the self as subject. A baby's first bath is a universal ritual, often documented in the family album. Recent clinical practice supports delayed cord clamping and also washing of the newborn. Delayed clamping has clinical benefits for the infant, particularly improved haemoglobin concentrations and iron reserves, at no detriment to the mother (McDonald et al, 2013). Student midwives report delayed bathing of the newborn, with an increasing preference for 'top and tail' cleansing in the first days after birth. Both practices suggest a move towards a less clean cut separation and a more prolonged connection with the maternal interior.

Then another abyss opens between this body and the body that was inside it: the abyss that separates mother and child. (Kristeva, 1985: 145)

[75] I have borrowed the title for this chapter from Rebecca Solnit who reminds us that in 'the creation stories of the Hopi, Pueblo, Navajo, Choctaw and Cherokee peoples, Spider Grandmother is the principle creator of the universe.' (Solnit, 2014: 74) and that 'Spiderwebs are images of the nonlinear, of the many directions in which something might go.' (Ibid) In this, Solnit locates the grandmother at the epicenter, a creator of being, which is my experience of a woman whose 'meshwork' (Ingold, 2011: 93) persists both in the fabrication of this knitted web and also her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Chapter Eight:

The Relic of the Grandmother Spider[75]

Here's an old friend. Hardly worn in many years.
Knitted whilst she was dying. It's too small for her
now but she thinks she might wear it again.

Huw appeared at the top of the stairs wearing a jumper. This jumper, my nan's last act of making in the weeks leading up to her death from lung cancer, was knitted for me. Consequently, it has always been freighted with a rather curious weight – both loved and sorrowed – a true manifestation of what Elizabeth Wilson has described as empty clothing's capacity for 'congealed' memory, for here is a memorial to a lost maker and a lost self, a testament to the 'absence of the body, and the evanescence of life' (Wilson, 2003: 1). And yet, worn by my husband, with his chest hair cresting its v-shaped neckline, it takes on a new and comical quality. I have never seen it on someone else. He found it at the back of the wardrobe and thought to try it on for fit, too small for either of us. The work of my Grandmother Spider.

Strange Marriage: hairy chest and the spider's web.

That it has survived intact for so long is explained by its composition, moths having no appetite for acrylic yarn. It was also born of a time less concerned with 'natural' fibres; popular because it was easy to care for, could survive the tumbles and turns of a washing machine, and did not insist on the gentle attention of hand-washing.

Even on the younger me it had a strange and unwelcome fit. Sleeves meeting too tightly at the body, pressing into flesh and forcing me into a tugging performance which is visible in the strained and lengthened loops at the armpits. Too often aware of it wearing me in the way Umberto Eco described his too tight jeans as wearing him. (Eco in Entwistle, 2007: 93) It wasn't some empty thing to which I gave form or meaning – 'things do not exist without being full of people' (Latour, 2000: 10) – more that it made itself known to me, upon me, in a lived moment of 'there are neither subjects nor objects' (Ibid). It wore me in the manner of a hug outstaying its welcome. Had she lived, I might have addressed this problem, asked if she might alter the fit. In the event, her death meant it quickly became a 'problematic item' (Twigger Holroyd, 2013: 168), a jumper that rarely made a public appearance and claimed its place in my wardrobe as an inactive garment, once worn but now withdrawn from circulation (Woodward, 2007: 45) – out of time and out of place. And I never did return to it, it was not much of a 'defence against anxiety' (Winnicott, 1953: 91).

I am not alone in holding onto such things. George, Tim and Rob bear witness to similar attachments, all three holding onto jumpers neither worn nor wearable.[76] Tim with his special drawer for the three jumpers that belonged to his dad, each carefully folded and stored side by side in a perfect mirroring of the three brothers in the photograph he shares. Rob with the beautiful Aran jumper too warm and too heavy but welcomed because 'it helps him feel connected to a woman he loved'. And George with the jumper knitted by his mum over the Christmas of his second year at university. George who caresses the sleeves as if they might be arms as we talk. George who recognises his mother's need to knit it for him as much as his need to hang onto it well beyond its 'use-time' (Viney, 2015). George who describes a thoroughly practical relationship with his jumper during his time as a student, wearing it most of the winter in a freezing cold house; only now, separated by time and distance – and his mother's very real absence – does he

[76] George, Tim and Rob all contributed to *Cherish*.

respond to it as an evocative object. George, who speaks to Bill Brown[77] when he tells me: 'it's … something else now … I mean I don't wear it as a jumper, it's erm, it's just … I can't work out what it is.' George and the 'thingness' of his jumper: 'that hover[s] over the threshold between nameable and unnameable, the figurable and unfigurable, the identifiable and unidentifiable' (Brown, 2001: 5).

All of us holding onto things beyond their use, objects of waste time – in as much as they are out of time – but not quite of the wasteland; instead, we are caught up in narrating new meanings, re-storying them in a way that might 'locate, reconstitute and explain what a particular object is, was or yet might be' (Viney, 2015: 5). Whilst both might have passed through practical use, it is clear that they still have a use. George, again: 'It's something that means something to me and it's not going because I am not prepared to part with it … it's still too rich.'

Unworn but not unloved, the 'thingness' of his jumper.

And now that *Elsie* has reappeared she is no longer inert (Viney, 2015: 1) and seems to follow me around, quietly insisting on my attention. Frankly, she was much easier to deal with hidden from sight. Now she possesses what Dóra Pétursdóttir has named 'pestering materiality [for it] encourages, or even forces, a nearness with things that is radically

[77] Bill Brown remarks that we encounter the thingness of things when they cease to function – in this case, George's unworn jumper becomes a thing when he no longer wears it and has no sense of what to do with it (Brown, 2001: 4).

different from our conventional user-driven engagement with them' (Pétursdóttir, 2016: 381). Useless, but still capable of affect; otherwise, it would be gone, for I never do wear it, not once in the last 30 years.

And when I try to wear it, haul it over my head – haul because it does feel more like a dead weight, like a full to the brim fishing net – it seems she has an even tighter grip of me than in the past. This is the strangest of knitting, holding without give, no stretch and no room for the older me. The Welsh have a word for itchy wool, 'picky',[78] and this is particularly so. It is not a pleasure to wear and picks at me in two ways, at my flesh and in my mind. Wearing it, I am reminded that I am no longer the 16-year-old for whom it was made; we are both less pliable. Because it is so dense, it performs more like felt than a knit and brings to mind Fink's description of the real as a 'sort of unrent, undifferentiated fabric woven in such a way as to be full everywhere, there being no space between the threads that are its "stuff" (Fink, 2012: 24). I am caught as if in a spider's web, held here by its 'stickiness and tensile strength' (Ingold, 2011: 93). It is smothering.

Old wool loses something; I have noticed this in all the jumpers, socks and cardigans brought to me in my research. The stiffness of Dai's 60-year-old socks, as brittle as a bone-dry bath towel. And George's shapeless jumper; they toughen up, like thickened skins, or are punctured with holes, having given succour to moths. Either way, they always appear as nostalgic sites of loss and longing, signposts to the past loaded with the impossibility of a satisfying return (Boym, 2002).

[78] From the Welsh, 'pigo', to sting, prick or pick.

Dai's Socks, and he was sad to find they had been nibbled by mice.

Like all the other 'cherished' things, *Elsie* is weighed and measured and I respond to my own questions, put myself into the shoes of my informants.[79] And I bring pencil to paper in another act of intimacy that is as much about observing closely as wanting to see how it was made, how she made it. And this drawing seems to give it another life; it is also dizzying and potentially overwhelming: 'It's like a mesh, it could be a string bag, there's a really extraordinary sense of depth, like I am looking into a cloud, a pale blue background.'[80] Only later would I read James's writing on optical vertigo: 'both we and the external universe appear to be in a whirl. When clouds float by the moon, it is as if both clouds and moon and we ourselves shared in the motion' (James, 1905: 284). I see that one loop connects with another, how the yarn snakes from right to left and then left to right, that yarn rarely meets yarn in complete proximity and that, with time, I come to anticipate her next move, the turn that will make the next loop.

[79] I use the term 'informants' here to stay close to the ethnographic nature of the *Cherish* case study.

[80] These are transcribed notes made from the recording of my commentary whilst drawing.

Tenderness plied with scrutiny.

Drawing is an act of extreme concentration, of tenderness plied with scrutiny, not that far away from the gaze of the maternal. Tenderness in that I seek to produce something that honours the original – and thus a return to the idea of authenticity – scrutiny in that I must observe with something approaching a forensic eye. And it does seem as if something clinical might be at play. The main body held within an embroidery hoop, enlarged by a magnifying glass, illuminated by a desk lamp; and all the time me recording my thoughts onto my phone. I am working in the manner of a pathologist, not unlike Freud's archaeologist/analyst, drawing 'inferences from fragments' (Freud, 1937: 259). And in all this right up closeness I recognise that *Elsie* becomes even more 'thing' than jumper, reminding me that objects are 'often less clear […] the closer you look' (Brown, 2001: 6). It is dizzying, but it is not without pleasure. This close looking feels akin to a gift of time; I have not spent this long with her in many years.

Do I love this jumper? I certainly feel a sense of 'obligation and responsibility' (Miller, 2002: 343) and am moved by it (Pétursdóttir, 2016: 367) but I am only truly affected by it when I consider undoing it, when I explore the possibility of undoing her making. Ideas of what I might do, how I might undo it, come and go but they are never fully formed and whenever I project myself forward – to a moment when the undoing is complete – I feel, within my body, something that approaches an emptiness, something lost, an ending. As unlovely as it might be – matted, too tight, itchy – all things that confirm its failure as something I might continue to wear, I stall at the point of intervention, at the moment of its undoing, walk away and enable distance. Now I have given it the time for which it seems to insist, something unfolds within me, I do not want to undo it, and I do not want that ending.

And yet the drawing is not enough. Now she is returned to consciousness, I would like to reconstitute *Elsie*, to consider her future in terms of Viney's 'yet might be', perhaps even wear her again. Another train journey, this time London to Leeds and a meeting with Amy Twigger Holroyd,[81] who becomes both case study and midwife, perhaps even surgeon, for we are set to talk about how to restructure *Elsie*, how we might reanimate her, bring her back to life.

We meet in the café of Leeds's public library. I sit across from Amy (upon whom I have already bestowed the title of absolute knit expert) and take *Elsie* from the cloth bag in which she is wrapped. In a flash I realise she is unwashed; what will Amy make of this not particularly accomplished object, is it 'good enough' to have brought to this party? I am so conscious of her failings, discoloured and brittle flesh, acrylic mix, nothing fancy, just plain knitting and garter stitch. And she is soiled, the brown storage marks I had spotted weeks earlier still at her neck. I lay her out, smooth her across the table in the library café, of all places, my barely literate nan in a library.

But Amy is kind, benevolent. Her gaze skates across its surface and her fingers separate the hem; her hands slip inside and return me to thoughts of bodies. 'Oh, I wouldn't hack into this,' she tells me, 'the yarn is quite fancy.' And I am relieved she takes responsibility for not using the scissors.

[81] Amy Twigger Holroyd is a designer/maker whose own research explores reconstituting knitwear in a series of processes of remaking. The one of most interest here is 'stitch hacking', which involves disrupting the body of knit at the level of individual stitch.

We discuss how reknitting needs to be sympathetic to the original object and how it should address the problems with the original. It cannot easily become a cardigan because of the shape of the neckline. For me, shifting it into a cardigan would be too far from its original 'thingness'. Amy suggests garter stitch, again to match the body, but of a smaller gauge, and that the yarn should be close to the body colour. I would like to use yarn I have spun; perhaps the blue-faced Leicester? And godet[82] panels at the sides to add width.

On the train home I find myself thinking with the jumper in mind. Tracing its edges inside within as much as feeling it at my flesh. As my inner eye travels its edges, I realise that her sewn stitches, the ones that had so 'pricked' me, will still be there at the seaming of shoulder and sleeve, where she has joined the two.

I work with tweezers and scalpel, teasing apart, trying to find the route or path of the yarn as it laces through the loops that hold the sides together, bringing the pieces to a whole. This may have been easier with younger eyes and before it had felted from wearing and washing. In this state, it is too much old flesh, fibrous rather than sinuous, brittle rather than pliable. At some points the yarn is so matted that once singular threads are now fussed. To follow the yarn at these points relies on judgement and intuition, teasing out fibres as if I might be teasing out someone's story; it all takes longer than anticipated. Slow work; long moments trying to see where one loop ends and another begins. An illuminated magnifying glass is brought into action but offers little help; neither of us is quite up to the task.

I am forced into a bluntness that sits uncomfortably with the reverence I had planned. It is as if I have taken up a hammer to crack an egg. At these points I put down my tools – just as I take off my glasses when wanting to see more closely – and reach in with my hands, but they are too much, too big for the task, like spades. I am 'all thumbs', clumsily tugging at threads and all the time aware that too much force might go beyond splitting and into breaking. In my hushed studio I hear threads tear as I pull, lachrymose tears. And when I tug I notice how differently I feel in myself, anxious, restless. Somehow, this jumper has become a body.

[82] A godet is a triangular piece of fabric inserted into a dress or skirt to make it flare or to give it volume.

It is the unpicking of her stitches that really move her,
for Elsie was not known for her sewing.

When we alter a garment we enter into a dialogue of negotiation (Twigger Holroyd, 2013: 128) which is as much concerned with our skills as with the qualities of the garment and what it will permit. Gibson calls this affordance (Gibson, 1979). My magical thinking involved returning the jumper to its original, fluffed up, freshly made state, but the passage of time, combined with boundaries I have set – that I cannot cut – limits the possibilities. This dialogue of negotiation is already compromised.

Openness is important to the process of remaking, and is as much literal as ideological (Twigger Holroyd, 2017: 123). In her research, Twigger Holroyd identifies damage as synonymous with openness, or the potential to reconfigure or reconstruct.[83] Differently, whole garments were often perceived as closed and more resistant to intervention (Ibid: 128). Where Brown describes the broken thing as baffling – 'We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us' (Brown, 2001: 4) – Twigger Holroyd suggests it as potentiate, more so than the whole thing that in Viney's thinking sits in the wasteland outside its use-time. I am not yet sure where *Elsie* sits in all of this.

[83] In this context, the unfinished objects of Matthews and Pym's UFO project might be described as explicitly open (98).

And so the seams are unpicked and the whole thing opened out; less a container now and more a specimen awaiting the pins that might hold it in place, more of a 'thing' than it ever was. The godets begin with loops at the edges and I start to knit. And I am counting, counting individual stitches and not rows. Counting in my head, never out loud, counting silently. Perhaps the numbers are all piled up, somewhere. As I count, the numbers peel off the needles, adding themselves to a pile in my head. Counting performs as settling in, becoming familiar. Counting with knitting returns me to Kristeva's *Chora* and its 'vocal or kinetic rhythm' (Kristeva, 2002: 36).

I have little appetite for this new thing, now that I have spent hours reconstituting it. So little, that I am unable to wear it long enough to photograph it. Like an all too tight outer envelope (Anzieu, 1989: 62), it clings. And like George's jumper, it is 'out of place'. Its rejuvenation requires something altogether more drastic than I am prepared to deliver. Instead, I have put it into some liminal state, the twilight sleep of the near dead, neither one thing nor the other, and being nowhere is a hard place to be. I am still reluctant to take scissors to it, to cut into its flesh. Emma Shercliff wrote that the snipping of her scissors marked a beginning (Shercliff, 2014) and, like both Copjec (2012) and Pajaczkowska (2007) in their writing, Shercliff associates cutting or separation with emergence, with making anew.[84] But there is still too much violence involved in cutting into her fabricated flesh. Yet it is a useless thing, no longer a jumper that I might wear, instead a weighty burden. It has failed me in its knittedness, for it clings rather than holds – to both past and me – and is neither holding space nor nest.

I block this augmented garment, because blocking,[85] like ironing a crumpled dress, carries the promise of restoring order. This is a partial success, at least in that it looks less absurd. But it still has the appearance of a thing forced into a shape it resists. I leave it on a chair at the end of the bed. Sitting here, at the pillow end, I look down and realise that the right arm has drifted onto the bed and appears to reach out to me, pestering.

When I write, the real writing of pen upon paper and not this writing of fingers on keyboard, I make lines that have the appearance of lace, where my cursive text is an extending slender thread of liquid blooming from pen nib which, in drying, pales from dark to light. Knitting, differently, uses up lines – more accurately, thread. Where writing gives,

[84] See my essay 'Folds, Scissors, and Cleavage in Giovanni Battista Moroni's Il Tagliapanni' in Millar & Kettle (eds.), *The Erotic Cloth* for a more in-depth exploration of cutting.

[85] Blocking describes the process of dampening and pinning out a finished garment so that it is held in place and shrinks to form – all rather like the etymological display of a butterfly.

knitting – in its yarn repeatedly wrapped around needles and wound into mesh[86] – consumes, swallows up. Spooling out versus a spooling in, give and take. And yet both acts depend upon horizontal linear construction: writing's top to bottom and knitting's bottom to top. In each, the emerging line grows out of the one that precedes it, and without the foundation of what went before; both risk a loss of meaning, of unravelling.

Interventions are possible in both, the scribbled notes of the annotated text, the stitch hacking of Twigger Holroyd's practice. Both are acts of tmesis, of cutting into language, and knitting is a language – of zeros and ones, of knits and purls, a language with its own syntax and grammar, a language brought into being through the manipulation of needles, threads and knitter's hands.

> Tmesis is a seam or flaw resulting from a simple principle of functionality: it does not occur at the level of the structure of languages but only at the moment of their consumption; the author cannot predict tmesis: he cannot choose to write *what will not be read* (Barthes, 1975: 11)

… and what might also be erased. Tmesis describes absence – the drifting/skimming of reading reported by Barthes – and also interjection: of cutting in and cutting out.[87] Hacking into knit, in the manner of disturbing individual stitches – are they not in themselves letters or pixels? – is an act of tmesis. The hacker's work begins with the snip of a single stitch, which marks a break in the swallowed-up, knitted-up yarn that passed through the knitter's fingers. The knit hacker breaks into the body of a text, disrupts flow, shifts purls into knits, knits into purls,[88] edits out the twisting of cables, interjects; answers back.

[86] I am struck here by the poiesis of wound as a mark in and on the body and as the past tense of wind. I experienced a moment of minor or illuminative epiphany (Denzin, 2001) in this moment of writing, as if the reason for not cutting was the fact of wounding flesh.

[87] Tmesis via Latin from Greek, literally a cutting, from *temnein* – to cut.

[88] Transforming stitches from purl into knit and vice versa is achieved by taking the top of the loop of a stitch to the front or the back of the knitting; this requires some delicacy of movement.

This knitting is Elsie's only surviving text, there is no writing, not a single note.[89] Knitters often 'have a horror of cutting knitting' (Twigger Holroyd, 2013: 202) and I do of this, a cut that metaphorically translates into the severing of a bond. My reconfiguration, which appears as literal annotation at the margins of her knitted pages, is clumsy, too much of me and too little of her. There is a gap in my expectation, what I had hoped for; an elegant and sensitive intervention eludes me. These large drafts of text, my writing in the margins, which runs at right angles to hers, have failed.

Wearing Elsie at Lake Garda, Italy, March 1979.

[89] For years I held onto a single note. A few lines written on a scrap of paper accompanying a £5 note, a thank you for looking after her house while she was away. At some point it slipped my grip and is now lost to me.

Diary, September 18 2016

I am trying to resuscitate a corpse that is too
long dead. Someone should have called time ages ago,
but then I am the only one who can do that.

It is not that I am caught up in thinking of her knitting for me, knitting for me on her death bed, which I thought might be my preoccupation, but 'caught up' in not knowing what to do, for having such limited 'affordances' (Gibson, 1979) brings a stasis that is physically and emotionally frustrating. Unravelling – another possibility – is also an erasure I cannot bear, at least for now. And so it is my own text that is undone; my ham-fisted restoration that is edited out. It is so much easier to undo my work than hers.

And so, whilst I recognise the jumper's alterity,[90](Chapman, 2005: 74) – it is in and of itself to the extent that it resists me – we are also entangled things. It carries with it an indexical relationship with its maker and the work of her hands:

> If all physical contact calls to mind the act that establishes it (in an indexical relationship), every act calls forth as well, and imperatively, the proper name of the actor: he who left some of his blood on this linen sheet. (Didi Hubermann, 1984: 68)

And it is this index, this trace of her hands that brings me to an end. Brings me to understanding that for now I can do no more than open her out, pin her to the walls as if a butterfly, and observe that in so doing – in giving myself the critical distance to enable this – I have made an icon, that the sleeves and body make the sign of a cross; more accurately, the mark of affection that so often appears as the end of a letter: a kiss.

[90] Jonathan Chapman suggests that an object with a high degree of alterity, that is 'both autonomous and is in possession of its own free will' (Chapman, 2005: 74) fosters a particularly strong connection between subject and object (Ibid). *Elsie*, a jumper I named, a jumper I have described as flesh, might be such a thing.

Chapter Nine:

Lost Boys and Lost Jumpers

A photograph of a young boy held in his mother's arms, their heads fused and his long legs dangling. Neither is smiling and drops that might be tears or spilt milk fall, as if from the child's face: 'An anxious little boy clinging somewhat fearfully to his mother' (Perloff, 1997: 32). This is Roland Barthes and his mother, Henriette, part of the 'author's treat' (Barthes, 2010) at the beginning of a tale of words where photographs appear after the fact, unpaginated, as if icing on the cake.[91] Interwar Bayonne, overgrown garden hedge to her left and overgrown boy in her arms. His hands resting on her shoulders, her hands meeting at the back of his thighs, her left palm against the soft corduroy of his shorts, her hips leaning in to bear his weight. Young Roland wears a dark hand-knitted jumper, polished leather sandals and knee-length socks, all signs of a cared-for child, but I cannot help noticing that Henriette looks less than happy to carry such an overgrown baby.[92]

And then there is 'Mary', given to me by my Catholic godmother, also Mary. I was bewitched as a child by the blue halo that shone around her, its gilded rim long worn away by my stroking. I was even more eager to know if there was something behind baby Jesus, or was he so attached to his mother to be one and the same thing, fused. And so, with a teaspoon and much persistence, I brought an end to their clinging. I remember my disappointment in discovering nothing more than the smoothness of sheered plastic. I imagine that the side of Roland's head is as flat as this, erased of features by his attachment to his mother. Held too closely and for too long, conjoined. Like a too tight jumper with no give, clinging. All this in a photograph Barthes himself names *The Demand for Love* (Barthes, 2010).

[91] Carol Mavor reminds us that Barthes's attachment to his mother continues beyond childhood, 'Barthes adheres to his Maman, just as the referent adheres to the photograph.' (Mavor, 2007: 143)

[92] And this boy will soon be lost to me. Unable to secure permission for publication, he will 'disappear' from this text when it enters the digital repository, to be replaced by the note, 'A young boy, Roland Barthes, held in the arms of his mother, Henriette.'

A young boy, Roland Barthes, held in the arms of his mother, Henriette.

The Demand for Love works both ways.

And there he is, restored to his mother's arms in an amateur repair carried out years ahead of the vogue for visible mending; these two boys never at risk of wandering off, of becoming lost.

What of mothers who resist letting go, who hold on for a moment too long, for mothers also find separation difficult, since it means losing 'their relationship to a baby who completely adores them' (Waddell, 2002: 69). A baby who gives them pleasure (Parker, 2005: 31).

Dear Louise,
My son is home and the house feels full again, as if there is a reason to keep this nest. 'You are afraid of losing them; you are afraid of being abandoned [...] It diminishes, but it does not stop'[93] *all these things. Already, and he is here, still here; I wonder how it will be when he leaves, which I know must happen.*

The mother who holds on too long risks losing more than her dignity, she risks transforming herself into the 'monstrously possessive mother' (Kokoli, 2016: 57), the smothering mother who '(re)produces dangerous psychopaths rather than healthy independent adults' (Ibid). How to reach a balance, to be with and without, to nurture without smothering, which through fear – a return to the past – is my nature. He comes and goes and, like Freud's grandson with his cotton reel,[94] I find a way of managing his absence. I knit up a scheme, become crafty, a gift of string with strings attached that carries with it the trace of young Ernst's cotton reel mastery. To knit for him necessitates his return – so that I might check the fit – and, of course, the promise that he might wear whatever I knit. He colludes in my ambition, joins me at the knitting shop, chooses the yarn and the pattern and I am happy. Alison Laurie describes the hand-made jumper as 'typically thick, elastic, and clingy: it suggests that the woman who is making it wants to surround its recipient and enclose him' (Laurie, 2014: 183). I suspect myself of stepping into her shoes.

[93] Louise Bourgeois in Barnadac & Obrist, 2005: 25.

[94] Sigmund Freud observed his grandson playing a game involving the throwing and return of a cotton reel attached to a piece of string. He would call 'fort' (gone) as he threw it out of his cot and 'da' (there) as he pulled it back. Freud concluded that this was the boy's attempt to master the anxiety over the intermittent disappearance of his mother: 'he compensated himself for this […] by himself staging the disappearance of the objects within his research' (Freud, [1920] 1961: 9).

'Is that the jumper that your mum made?' asks the news reporter and Jeremy Corbyn – future leader of the British labour party - opens his brown corduroy jacket to reveal a slightly crumpled beige coloured crew necked hand knit, 'Yes it is […] it's very comfortable and perfect for this kind of weather.' Jeremy Corbyn sporting a jumper knitted by his mum. A practical thing that keeps him warm as he hops 'in and out of buildings all day long.' [95] A British politician proudly displaying a sign of home and, ultimately, his mother.

It helps to know that other mothers have knitted jumpers for their sons, crafted a pliable carapace for their boy, to know that I am not alone in my ambition to hold and contain, even if I understand the need to *give* as a jumper must also give. Tim with his knitted Bristol City jersey; stuck between a rock and a hard place, he and the jersey long having parted ways. George and the 'thingness' of his jumper, who, with time, seems to recognise his mother's original desire: 'now, you just feel, it was […] infantilising actually'. Rob with his beautiful Aran jumper, and then my husband, Huw. When we met, he possessed a wardrobe of jumpers knitted for him by his mum. Highly individual garments that spoke of their collaboration, he usually sketched their design. Knitted up, they would be parcelled off to him at university. Packages of care that persisted long after his declaration that 'I won't be home until Christmas.' Jumpers that enabled mothering at a distance, apron strings stretched between Swansea and Southampton. The knitting came to an end when we became a couple. His mother understood when to stop, how to give.

Kate Just shares Geoff's story, Geoff whose mother knitted for him as his father slept in front of the television:

> It was like she was enveloping me in her desire, maybe in that period it was her stifled desire but it was pretty powerful between the two of us. (Geoff in Just, 2006: 4)

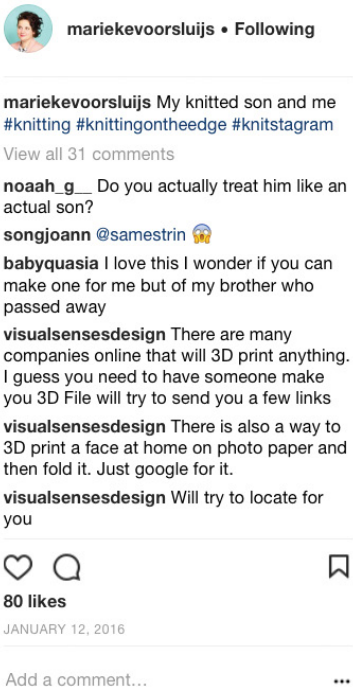
Alison Stone has argued that maternal feeling has been studied largely from the perspective of its impact on daughters and rarely on mothers themselves (Stone, 2012). The desire of mothers in relation to their sons is perhaps even less well explored, since it bears too close a parallel with the original Oedipal myth, implying a very particular

[95] These comments are taken from a Newsnight interview with Jeremy Corbyn, an interview in which Corbyn draws a parallel with practical dressing and the authenticity of political service. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZsYvkTw4Rg.

transgression: a narcissistic and clinging maternal figure who is reluctant to give up her son.[96]

Marieke Voorsluijs, a self-proclaimed knit hysteric and yarn junkie,[97] drew widespread media interest when she knitted a life-size knitted substitute for her teenage son: 'We used to cuddle all the time, but those days are becoming scarce […]

> We laugh a lot about the stretching gap between his needs and mine. Him needing more of his own space and my covert needs to keep on smothering him with maternal love […] So we started to fantasize how we could visualize this puberty gap. So I suggested to make [sic] a cuddly version of him! (Voorsluijs in McCluskey, 2016)



Like Marieke, I am a mother who risks holding on for too long, *it is not only jumpers that cling.*

[96] In psychoanalysis, this pattern of behavior is termed the Jocasta complex (Jocasta being the mother of Oedipus) and describes a woman overwhelmed by maternal narcissism, a mother who is 'incapable of putting her child's needs ahead of her own.' (Butterfield, 2012: 155) My response, my resistance: It is all too easy to pathologise the maternal.

[97] Voorsluijs's Instagram profile https://www.instagram.com/mariekevoorsluijs/

Because this 'cuddly version' functions more as a second skin, covering her son from top to toe, worn in the manner of an extra layer of clothing and emphasising the idea that 'things do not exist without being full of people' (Latour, 2000: 10), it will take on a different meaning without his body to give it form; to return to the earlier discussion on skin, it will become an empty shell. Without him, the cuddly version performs in the manner of Linus's comfort blanket,[98] a very particular transitional object, itself framed by loss – of the mother – and here twice framed since here is a garment, a knitted thing, out of which he will (quickly) grow. It is a concrete reminder that mothers find separation painful: 'It is a joy, but also a struggle, to allow children to grow up and to move on' (Waddell, 2002: 66). Like Freddie Robins before her, Marieke Voorsluijs offers up a joke, this one disguising the pain of maternal separation, of the imminent 'empty nest'.

The first lost boy, or perhaps I should say the first boy who had lost something, something precious – how to begin to unravel this tale? James Shaw lost his jumper. His 'Lost Jumper' poster appeared across the South Kensington campus of the Royal College of Art during the autumn term of 2012, an act of serendipity, at least for me.[99]

Here it is – well, I first wrote 'her it is', a Freudian slip of sorts, which might speak more of what James has really lost. James, you look so smart in Mum's jumper, knitting-pattern smart, but the jumper is you … for where is your head? You seem to want to remain anonymous, but removing your head makes me think you feel this loss more than think it. All those capitals, what should I think of them? It struck me when I read LOST JUMPER, I was reading 'lost child', 'lost cat' or 'something I should have been looking after, but took my eyes off for a moment and it was gone'.

[98] Linus is a male child character in Charles Schulz's *Peanuts* cartoons. Linus is very attached to his transitional object, his comfort blanket.

[99] Posters for two separate jumpers lost by students appeared during this period; the second jumper was not hand-made and for this reason was excluded from my research.

LOST JUMPER: James's Jumper and the shadow of (another) MUM.

James's jumper is very precious, in fact, super-important. He tell us it was hand-knitted and spun – this is indeed special. This jumper took time, it is embodied with the maker's time, maker's love and is not easily given; in this it 'imports the past into the present, contracts into a single intuition many moments of duration' (Bergson, 2004: 80). What is that? It was knitted and spun by MUM? Not my mum, but 'MUM'. A collective mother who knits for all of us, a reminder that knitting comes ultimately from the mother and home. This tug, an appeal to all of us; after all, we should know what went into this; didn't this – or something like it – happen for us once too? A pull on our heart strings, or his apron strings, perhaps.

If 'the role of the transitional objects was to both join *and* separate the subject from the object at one and the same time' (Attfield, 2000: 125), what happens when the object itself is lost and with it the connection between subject and object – in this case, the bond between mother and son? For James, the loss is a reminder that the fate of the transitional object 'is to be gradually allowed to be decathected […] It loses meaning'[100] (Winnicott, 1953: 91). More than this, according to Anna Freud, it speaks of his relationship with the original object, his mum. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's work on the unconscious, and so-called Freudian slips, Anna Freud describes loss as 'the unconscious desire to discard something which consciously we wish to retain' (1967: 9). Anna Freud explains that objects can be cathected narcissistically, in which case they are taken into the body, or as human love objects, where they are cathected with object libido (Ibid: 10). In this constellation, changes in the degree of cathexis vary 'according to the vicissitudes of our attitude to our own body on the one hand and to the objects in the external world on the other hand' (Ibid). With changes in cathexis come changes in libido energy.

Sue described how the news of the death of her first girlfriend instinctively led her to the clothes she wore on their first date, a story that illustrates cathexis/decathexis in action. In her distress, Sue dressed in the garments and then tore them from her body; the remaining shreds were later transformed into a painting: 'It moved with me, hanging on wall after wall for years. It's not with me now, I don't know where it is.'[101]

In Freudian terms, Sue transfers her libido energy, her anger and frustration at the loss of her girlfriend, onto her clothing, tearing them and her apart. Their second iteration, as art object, is decathected when it loses meaning for her, expressed in Sue's 'I don't know where it is.' James, in a more unconscious decathexis, becomes abstracted, his object libido momentarily elsewhere (Anna Freud, 1967: 12).

James is troubled and frustrated by his loss. His emphasis on MUM and her role in the jumper's creation emphasises 'its subjective value [to] an important love object (the giver of it)' (Anna Freud, 1967: 13). James describes deprivation in our discussions: 'I feel bad

[100] Loss of meaning does not necessarily result in physical loss. Winnicott describes it as occurring when 'the transitional phenomena have become diffused, have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between "inner psychic reality" and "the external world"' (Winnicott, 1953: 91). Or, quite simply, when the object has served its purpose.

[101] Sue is a former student of mine who shares an interest in our emotional relationship with clothing. She gave her permission for me to include her story.

about it', 'I just hope it's not being used as a rag to wipe the floor […] that whoever has it knows what it is.' He looks in the same places over and over again – and sends emails: 'LOST JUMPER HAND KNITTED AND SPUN BY MUM.'[102]

James never found his jumper. On 29 January 2013 he wrote to tell me he had 'finally lost hope', but would be happy to extend its life in my research and included a series of portraits in which he sports his lost jumper, marking an end to his searching and the beginnings of acceptance. Some weeks later, James received another jumper from his mother, this one a trinity of making – spun, dyed and knitted by her.[103]

In the context of Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse* (2002), Carol Mavor writes of 'familiar cardigans of love, which give like a mother, even when it hurts or, perhaps, especially because it does hurt.' (Mavor, 2007: 154) and I like to think my knitting performs in this way: containing, comforting and stretching. Knitted objects might speak of love and yet they also 'signify possessiveness, control and domination' (Turney, 2012: 303). Knowing this and more, I am about to repeat the exact same work as my mother-in-law, a different jumper but a similar pattern of behaviour.

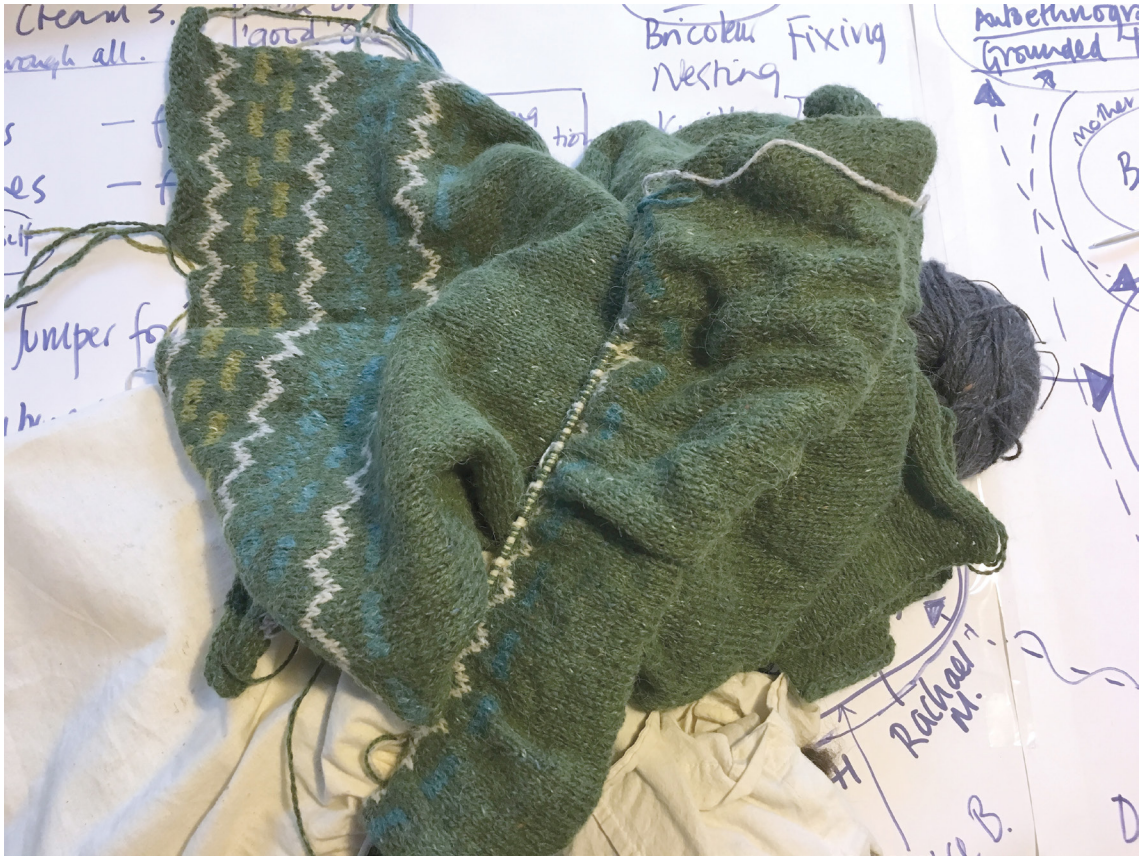
Dear Louise,

I dreamt of my grandmother. She teased out the end of a ball of red yarn and reached towards me: 'This is red thread,' she said, 'but you can play with it any way you want.'

But he will not have a red jumper. Instead he chooses the pattern and also the colours. We visit a knitting shop together; I leave with a bag full of moss green with a Fair Isle yoke of blue, gold and brown yarn. This task takes me two years to complete and by the time it is finished it is no longer moss green but grey and brown and I fear I have become all of the things against which Turney cautioned.

[102] Email communication from James to RCA students and staff, 15 October 2012.

[103] James's tale resonates with me personally. My brother's jackets, passed to me after his death, are both gift and burden. To wear one away from home is to be forever on the alert, for they perform as toddlers; I simply cannot let them out of my sight. They are my continuing bond with him and the possibility that they might be lost is close to unbearable.



Not quite up to scratch, the abandoned one.

Along the way, in fact not long after I had finished the back and was half way through the front – in truth, half way through the second front – I grew to dislike the moss green jumper, a lot. Though the process was rewarding – particularly the WhatsApp messages we exchanged charting its progress – the colours were too much of my school uniform, the pattern was not mine and neither was the yarn. It began to feel inauthentic, a copy of some original that had nothing to do with me.[104] Spinning – 'The gesture [that] turns the cloudy mass of fiber into lines with which the world can be tied together' (Solnit, 2014: 131) – drew me back to an origin of two meanings: to make his jumper from beginning to end (as close as I might without rearing a sheep) and to produce an object that might have embodied within it the uniqueness described by Walter Benjamin when he writes of an object's authenticity as 'the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced.' (Benjamin, 1999: 215)

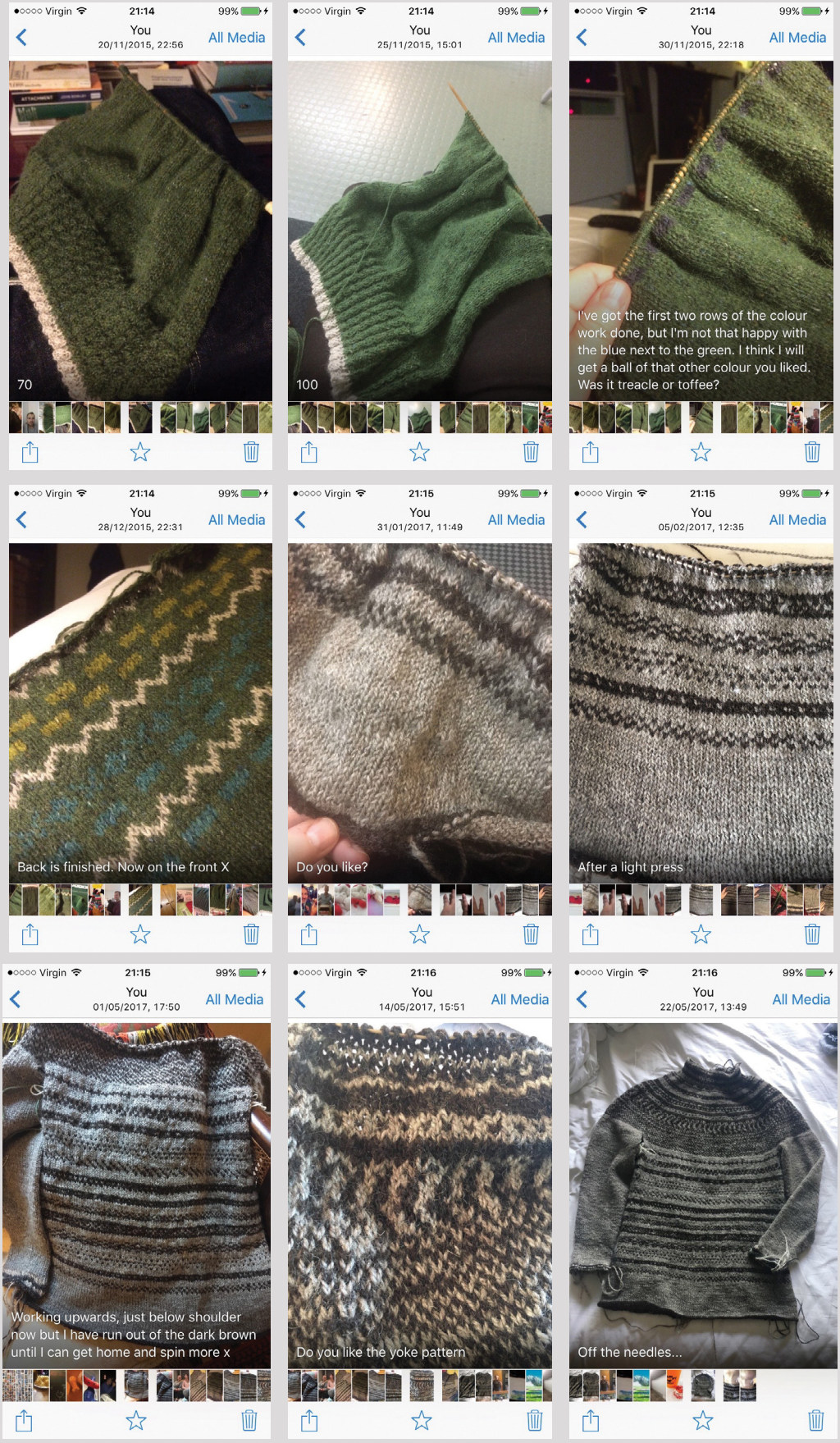
The first pattern performed in the manner of a blueprint and supported my emerging confidence as a maker, a midwife to the final piece. It also facilitated the loop backwards, the reflexive turn to the origin – me as designer and maker – and the hand-spun yarn. It was in the making of the first that the second became necessary.[105]

I outwit my mother-in-law in this move towards the origin but fall short of the virtue demonstrated by James's mum. In this I make my claim as a 'good enough', but not quite perfect, mother.

This second iteration is made of yarn spun from grey and brown Shetland fleece with a trim of Norwegian Spael at the cuffs – spun from a small clump he scavenged in Norway – and a hem of Welsh Black Mountain. The pattern is an adaptation of Elizabeth Zimmerman's seamless sweater (2008: 64), but the patterning will be mine.

[104] I am aware of the narcissistic turn here, that a jumper intended for my son – the pattern and yarn chosen by him – is rejected through my narcissism … I should be ashamed of myself.

[105] Reproductions have their place. This is clear in Benjamin's hypothesis, where he states that the 'technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach of the original itself' (Benjamin, 1999: 214).



To and fro, the making of a modern jumper.

Again, I learn as I move through the making. The first discovery, and not the last, is that I should have spun all the yarn before I started to knit. That I did not means it derives from the fleece of several sheep, rather than two or three, and produces a gradation of tone. Yet, in my thinking, for knitting in 'the rhythmic repetition […] allows the knitter's mind to roam freely across the landscapes of thought' (Pajaczkowska, 2007: 143), it becomes possible to imagine him as enjoying the protection of a whole flock of sheep.

The making of a golden fleece

My son is a grown man, but I have come to call this the 'Jumper for a Boy', infantilising both it and him. This is my – not entirely unconscious – attempt to keep him close, to tie him to my 'apron strings'. For threads are like this, they act metaphorically and literally to hold things, and people, together. Henri Bergson described the nervous system as 'an enormous number of threads which stretch from the periphery to the centre, and from the centre to the periphery' (Bergson in Ansell Pearson et al, 2002: 103). I am not sure which of us marks the centre, but I am very clear of the connective role threads play in this making.

String Boy, one of Winnicott's child patients, must have understood the connective function of thread when he tied string between chairs and tables and, more audaciously, to a cushion placed atop a fireplace (Winnicott, 1984: 154). Here was a boy spider spinning his own safety net, figuratively tying himself to his mother. String Boy looks to contain his own anxiety, to hold himself together.

Yarn, another version of thread or string, is not in itself stretchy.[106] Tied between points, as was String Boy's way, it has little give and is also prone to breaking. How then to make of it a container – a jumper or sweater – so that it might be brought over a head and worn with ease?[107] It is the binding of yarn around needles, its looping, that produces the 'give and take' we all recognise, that enables a knitted garment to follow the body's form through expansion and contraction. I find myself in the habit of knitting my son a container, not of string – for there is no pleasure in that, for either of us – but of wool. A jumper container stuffed with wishful thinking.

J.K. Rowling's wishful thinking extends to the knitting of a jumper for the orphaned Harry by Mrs Weasley in the first of the Harry Potter books, *The Philosopher's Stone*. Harry's jumper with its 'H', just like Ron's 'R' – in fact, we are told that his jumper is better than everyone else's – marks him with equivalence; he is one of the Weasleys, brought into the fold by Mrs Weasley's making. Her son Ron's declaration that 'Oh no' […] 'she's made you a Weasley jumper' (Rowling, 2014: 217) and his exasperation at his mother's compulsive maternal gesture – after all, she knits one for them every Christmas – is pretty clear too.[108]

Mrs Weasley's tender gesture marks an end to Harry's orphaned status and makes him one of hers; it is a material manifestation of maternal tenderness, of 'thinking of him', as I do of my son when I knit for him.[109]

[106] Some fabricated yarns do have stretch, elastic for example, but this is unusual for handspun yarns, which is my interest here. It is also possible to spin too much tension into a yarn, causing it to twist and buckle, to turn on itself.

[107] 'Ease' is a tailoring term used to describe the extra space between body and garment to enable movement. It is accounted for in the drawing up of patterns.

[108] This reminds me of Lasse, who contributed to *Cherish*. Lasse, a Swedish Finn, told me that his mum knitted him a new jumper for each year of his childhood. Lasse described his excited anticipation, his eagerness for her to finish it because he knew he would feel good in it and how he felt proud to wear a jumper knitted by his mum. Sadly, Lasse died in 2015.

[109] Little is made of the gifting of Mrs Weasley's jumpers in the film version of this book. In the film of the second book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002), the presence of magic self-knitting needles in the Weasley home implies that jumpers are knitted automatically and not by Mrs Weasley herself. This is not suggested in Rowling's writing.

All this turns within me as I knit my son's jumper, as I push the tip of a needle into the loop of a stitch and notice how easily the loop parts, accepts my invasion. How I make a new loop that is brought through this one, which destines the first to its soon-to-be sleeping place in the body of the cloth, no longer a singular active stitch, but now a brother to so many others, lost in the crowd. This yarn, already knitted and unravelled several times, is both giving and forgiving.

Good things grow out of kissing

Diary, 26 January 2017

I am starting to hate knitting. The recent two-ply spin, which pretty much took two whole days to spin, is finer than the first lot and has too much tension twisted into it. I ended up ripping out several rows and then stretching and washing the yarn in the hope that I might 'fluff' it up and remove some of the twist. This yarn feels so close to string, not at all soft and no comfort for either of us

I was tying knots in the yarn for the jumper, it's what I have always done and never given it much thought, but I have become aware of how many knots and tails there are and how the inside of the jumper bears witness to my home-styled apprenticeship – the early flaws in both my spinning and knitting. These trailing tails are not the only things I have noticed. If I look at the jumper, from the bottom rib to the yoke and collar, I realise that the early yarn has a more contained quality, closer to the long staple spin of a worsted yarn than the loftier, fluffier and stickier yarns associated with knitting. It is as if my hands and head were still working out the language, for it all looks and feels somewhat clipped and formal; as if I have held too tight a grip. Further up, where the pattern begins, there is a discernible shift; a very obvious looseness arrives in texture and appearance. This patterning – the colour work of Fair Isle knitting, where the 'off' yarn floats at the back of the knitting – requires combining several sheep, grey and black, in a dance of sorts. It marks the point where I started to take pleasure in the knitting, where I became more fluent in my practice.

When I have reached the end, joined in the arms, knitted up the yoke and the collar, I consider reknitting the early and imperfect beginning. But my son is incredulous. Unable to spot the fault, he asks that I please get on with finishing it. And so it remains, for now, and my thinking returns to knots and tails. As I progress towards the neck and the finish line, I have a newly developed interest in quality; I would like it to look less amateur, more professional, as if a 'proper knitter' had created it. Yet these knots, my attempt to bind together two lengths of yarn, have become too present.

'Heavens, a KNOT?' She risks a proper haunting.

Elizabeth Zimmerman, whose book has provided the template for this jumper, has something to say about joining yarn; and she is particularly emphatic about her dislike of knots:

> Do you tie your yarn? Heavens, a KNOT? […] one thing is certain – never knit a knot. No matter how careful you are to keep it on the wrong side, it usually pops through to the right side to haunt you. (Zimmermann, 1995: 43)

In Zimmerman's writing, knots appear tied to the idea of the unconscious. However well they are hidden (or repressed) on the wrong side (unconscious), they risk coming to the right side (consciousness), popping through 'to haunt you'. Beyond this, the inside of a knot is also hidden from view (Pajaczkowska, 2007: 150) and in the psychoanalytic paradigm, where the unseen is of greater consequence than the visible, it figures that it is better to have nothing to hide. And I risk a proper haunting, for the inside is peppered with giveaway bumps and paired tails of loose thread. This multitude of knots, hinting as it does at my desperate attempt to tie him with me, needs addressing.

Mine are formed from a simple reef knot. A few, particularly where the yarn is smoother, have already started to work loose, posing a threat to the jumper's integrity. Bad enough that a knot might work its way to the front, but a jumper that promises to unravel is too painful to contemplate.

From Zimmermann, she learns that an accomplished knitter will combine the two separate lengths of yarn in a single loop; side by side they are knitted together – this secures both without the need for a knot, and the loose tail ends are woven with a needle. Two thirds of the way up the jumper, she stops making knots and starts to knit like a professional.

The final row of knitting is the cast-off edge. It resembles a chain link fence or, more fancifully, a row of entwined hearts. To work this, two stitches are knitted and the first passed over the second, a process repeated until the end of the row. With the last stitch, the yarn is slipped through the stitch and pulled tight. It is almost done.

To smarten it up, the smoothness she recognises as finished, means weaving in the loose ends. This is the sort of care and attention that makes it presentable, a job well done. It is also the sort of detail in which she often fails, for she is not a good finisher, always holding

endings in abeyance. Each woven end is made to be long enough that when stretched to accommodate his head, shoulders and arms, it will not slip through the body of the knit. Loose ends of yarn are pushed through the eye of a darning needle and its blunt end teased under and over the loops of her knitting, taking care not to pass the needle to the front. Keep all the workings inside; the outside should wear the polish of perfection. She starts at the bottom edge of the front and works her way upwards in a move that mimics the pattern of the knitting, circling from bottom to top, retracing her steps. She thinks about the language of this process, weaving in, how securing loose ends borrows the language of another craft.

The threads closer to the bottom, the ones adjoined to a knot, require different treatment. She makes a guess. A half-knot is less likely to show than the two passes of a complete knot, and so she undoes the second pass of each knot, the one that offers security, reflexively turns the loosened yarn back on itself and weaves it into the loops of her knitting. She hopes this might be enough to hide them from sight. The collar, a few rows of rib that will rest at his neck, is folded and turned to the inside so that it forms a roll. She is quite taken with how this small act – the turning of an edge – brings a finished quality to the jumper, is satisfying.

She fancies that she might look like Hammershøi's wife,[110] caught in a moment of solitary contemplation, her body turned towards the arc of light that falls across the jumper resting in her lap. Her posture curved and fingers toiling at the woollen skin. Then, in the quietness of finishing, she experiences something so odd it seems beyond naming. In a place where there is one thing, the jumper, it feels as if there might be two. She cannot work out this oddness, and she does try. A proper woolly thinking that is simultaneously comforting and disarming, even magical. She might have slipped between two spaces, a jog in the wall, a gap for falling into. It is short-lived, barely a few breaths, but she feels it both within and without. In that brief moment, with the weight of him on her lap and the other one in her mind, she understands this jumper is for both of them: both boys.

Portrait of a young man in his jumper for a boy

[110] Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864 – 1916) was a Danish painter well known for portrait paintings of his wife who was usually depicted in silent contemplation, playing the piano, reading or sewing.

And she learns a new way of holding

Chapter Ten:

Helical Making

And then something arrives in the form of a gift, a thing that will mean I am caught in the act of turning myself into a container, a transformation that resembles less an involution – a narrowing down or shrinkage that is anticipated towards the end – as an expansion, a blossoming. A shift in my practice that brings the inside (me) into contact with the outside (the other). As with *Cherish*, this is an opportunity for generalising my autoethnographic position, extending it beyond the boundaries of my own world.

For Gottfried Semper, textiles exist as 'as a means of dividing the "home", the inner life from the outer life, as a formal construct of the spatial idea' (Semper, 2004: 248). Textiles will enable my transfer from this inner world, towards the construction of a different idea, perhaps even ideal.

In June 2016 I was selected as 'Maker in Residence' at the Florence Nightingale Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery at King's College, London. A Parallel Practices Award supported by the Crafts Council and King's Cultural Institute, a part-time post between October 2016 and March 2017.[111] I would work with students and staff to explore and develop parallels between nursing education and textile practice. I was the first artist/maker to work with the faculty in this way and, in hindsight, I did too much: three main projects when there might have been one, and several workshops. This is sometimes the case when there is no map to follow. I felt my way through those first few weeks; that I worked from a poorly lit corner desk in a room that looked out onto another building only added to my sense of being 'in the dark'. But this making through feeling, whilst anxiety provoking, is my way: 'Creation is always in the dark because you can only do the work of making by not quite knowing what you're doing' (Solnit, 2014: 185) and there were so many days when I did not know what I was doing, when I slept the sleep of an anxious parent.

I begin with shadowing – a particular description of closeness that wears a dark edge – intended to develop my understanding of how a nurse comes into being by following a professional and joining first-year nursing students in their initial block of clinical skills training. We are in the SalL (Simulation and Interactive Learning) Centre at Guy's

[111] Celia Pym had been an earlier recipient of this award and worked in the dissecting rooms of the department of anatomy at King's College School of Medicine. http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/parallel-practices/

Hospital[112] and led by Carol, the lead clinical skills tutor, who teaches us to take a blood pressure the 'old fashioned way', which means with a stethoscope, blood pressure cuff and a sphygmomanometer. Carol explains that working like this enables the skin-to-skin contact that is less available with digital testing. It requires simultaneous application of hearing, touch and sight: listening for sounds, touching skin and monitoring dials. It returns me to the moment of learning to spin, another foundation skill.

We are told that learning to do this 'properly' builds self-reliance, that we can take an accurate blood pressure anywhere in the world. And that skin-to-skin contact affords other knowledge only available through touch; how does the skin feel, is it cool, clammy, hot? All clues to health brought to knowledge through the collapsing of distance, touching another.

We are all beginners, some of us more 'fingers and thumbs' than others, we reach for the inner wrist, the soft flesh at the crease of the elbow. We feel for the gentle twitch of the heart's pulse beneath the fingertips and listen for the turbulence blood creates as it travels through the brachial artery.

Skin to skin and the gentle twitch of the heart's pulse

[112] The SalL (Simulation and Interactive Learning) Centre is a hi and low fidelity simulation centre using mannequins, artificial limbs and organs, and simulated scenarios to educate student nurses, midwives and medical students in clinical practice.

And then I am taking a blood pressure. Bringing the cuff together around the left upper arm. Looking for the brachial pulse with the fingers of my left hand, holding the stethoscope's diaphragm over this point. Putting the stethoscope's ends into my ears. Inflating the cuff with squeezes of the rubber bulb held in the palm of my right hand. Occluding the brachial artery. Stemming the flow of blood. Watching the dial of the sphygmomanometer. Listening for silence. Releasing air from the cuff with small turns of the bulb's valve. Listening for the turbulence of blood rushing – the two Korotkoff sounds that signify the diastolic and systolic pressures – the first when blood begins to flow, the second when it flows freely, after which there is no turbulence. I am listening for the last sound before the absence of sound. I am also looking at the finger on a dial, marking the point of the first and last sound.

I look around the room: concentrated faces; eyes pinned to dials and ears tuned in. A few broad smiles mark success, one student jumps back in her chair; it does feel a little like magic and I finish the day with a sense of achievement in acquiring a new skill that, realistically, I may never use again.

Afterwards, in a seminar room without a table and a carpeted floor, a reminder that I am the one out of place, I teach 40 students how to make a notebook, to fold papers, glue covers, stitch seams. For some, the notebooks become their reflective diaries for their first placements on hospital wards across London, their initiation into nursing. I am pleased to leave the carpet unscathed.

The first of the three main projects that will run throughout my residency begins shortly after I am competent in taking a blood pressure. 'Patching Up' references my intuitive early thoughts that we are both – nurse and artist/maker – engaged in acts of generation/regeneration and repair, of making good but not always perfect. Students are invited to bring along something they cherish that is broken or damaged and I help them to repair it. Whenever a project arrives for patching up, I carry out a process that has parallels with taking a patient history, something with which every nursing student is familiar; listening to the narrative, assessing the problem, measuring, weighing and noting down particular concerns and hopes, and I see everyone alone. These are visible repairs, which 'share the trace of a wound' (Cixous, 2005: xi).

Bethan brings a cardigan with an open seam running from armpit to wrist. She tells me she feels like the bubbly friend who gave it to her whenever she wears it, that it enables her to be, briefly, another.[113] Ellie brings her boyfriend's jumper, riddled with moth damage – some 22 holes; she wears it for comfort but would like to fix the holes, to sit in her room at the end of a shift, quietly stitching in the manner of Winnicott's 'resting-place' (1953: 90).[114] And then Amy arrives with her 'loved and mutilated' bear.[115]

Pooh Bear with his compacted stuffing, worn-down plush and worn-through patches, split seams at every turn and a face mauled by a dog. I lay 'Pooh' onto white tissue paper, bring the desk light closer, take up tweezers and small scissors and begin the task of undoing. And then I am touched by Amy's childish acts of repair, brought to a standstill by a school shirt sacrificed to shore up holes, her oversized stitches and loose threads; should I be erasing the traces of her younger self? This brings to mind the difference between restoration and conservation.[116] I cannot hope to restore Pooh to his original state – that time is long gone – my work is conservation, making him more durable, which was Amy's wish. So some of the stitches stay, and some are cut, removed from the cloth and placed in a small plastic bag. I settle to work on the abdomen,[117] teasing apart the stitches that run along the main vertical seam, removing the compacted stuffing and replacing it with new. Televisual displays of pathologists at work play in my mind – indeed, play out on the table top – a particularly macabre manifestation of Winnicott's play in the third dimension – I sense this is going to be a very satisfying journey. I am, nevertheless, glad that no one else is in the room to witness my fantasy imaginings, of watching the 'maker in residence' role-playing a surgeon.

My relationship with Pooh Bear and Amy extends beyond the length of the residency. There are return visits for more advice and more thread and occasionally, when Amy

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[113] This resembles my moment of mask wearing, and of dressing up, and Daniel Miller's Elia, who takes pleasure and pride in wearing clothes that previously belonged to friends and relatives. (Miller, 2008: 35)

[114] Other types of visible repair were carried out during the project. These included kinsugi, where gold pigments are mixed with resin to fix damaged ceramics.

[115] Pooh Bear is discussed on p64 in relation to the properties of the transitional object described by Winnicott.

[116] See S. Muñoz Viñas (2005), *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* for a discussion of the differences between restoration and conservation. Restoration implies some search for origin, conservation is an act of preservation concerned with maintenance.

[117] I realise my use of the word 'abdomen' has a medical inflection here. Initially unconscious, I have chosen to retain it.

attends lectures, he is left with me as if with a childminder. In these moments I work on his limbs, restoring his flesh, making him good. I worry about the face, even thinking that I might approach a plastic surgeon friend for guidance: 'How might I patch up the face of a teddy bear?' There is no need – some weeks later Amy emails a photograph; she has finished the task without me.

Pooh Reconstituted

Ian opens a large suitcase packed with jumpers and a colourful blanket – all hand-knitted by his mum who died recently and all of it moth-eaten. I weigh everything and record the damage as he sits alongside me chatting. As he leaves, he hands me an oval-shaped yellow box that looks like it might contain chocolates. Inside, small butterflies of twisted yarn and handwritten notes matched to projects so that he might repair the holes and snags; messages of instruction from maker to repairer – somehow, a responsibility has been passed onto me, and a web extended.

A dazzling Fair Isle pullover; I lift it from the desk and hold it aloft as if to bring it over my head, and turn towards the window. Peering inside for the tell-tale pinpricks of light, moth damage: right shoulder, sternum, abdomen and both flanks. I am caught up in repairing skins, outer shells, filling holes, shoring up. Absorbed in the act of containing – the leaking surface of Ian and Ellie's jumpers, the ruptures in Pooh Bear's flesh – and listening in the manner of a confidante, to stories of lost mothers and lost loves, and taking pleasure in this, my role as mender:

> We know that the warp and weft of life is continually inscribed with personal and interpersonal lacerations and restitchings, and that the forms of psychic suffering in many ways resemble fractures subsequently darned with more or less unsuccessful attempts at disharmonious self-soldering. (Vigo-Taglianti, 2015: 175)

Diary, 24 January 2018

Claire reached into her bag. Took out a tin. An old French tin. She had brought gifts. Would we like to choose one and perhaps we might fill it with red cloth, red thread, red wool? She opened the first to take out another, then a third and a fourth. Nestled as if Russian dolls, each a container and each carrying only the other.

The Little Tin of Resilience, a metal tin 14 x 10 x 4.5 with a slip lid. On the lid an illustration of a nightingale – a nod to Florence Nightingale after whom the faculty is named.[118] Tins not dissimilar, in form at least, to the 'Princess Mary' Christmas boxes gifted to the armed forces during the winter of 1914.[119] I write a short piece about resilience, what it means to be resilient, and ask the question: 'What does it mean for you?'[120]

Each tin is wrapped in tissue paper and, where possible, I deliver them by hand, making a gift of an empty container. Appointments are made for their return and then I wait. I can barely contain myself. I reach back to Daniel Miller's work in what follows, anticipating that objects might talk with and for their owners, for 'one can understand people through the medium of their things' (Miller, 2008: 300). Each return is accompanied by an interview. I ask the contributor to remove the lid from their tin and take out each object in turn; could they explain its significance in terms of their wellbeing and capacity for resilience? These interviews are recorded, with consent, and transcribed. They last from 15 to 90 minutes.

How to fit the signs of a well-lived life into a small tin? Break the rules – the first is returned, crammed full and with its own separate appendix, for this is the tin of a research student. The next is similarly packed, layered with photographs and keepsakes, and so it continues, the third tin's slightly buckled lid rammed down like an ambitiously packed suitcase. And then a nursing student returns a tin wrapped and tied with a ribbon. When I ask about the ribbon she tells me she wished to return it as a gift, because I had given her the gift of reflection. Inside, photographs of her family, a brother almost lost then found, a grandmother's trusted recipe, an origami flower, a train ticket to mark return visits to home, a paper napkin saved from her dad's funeral; all the marks of continuing bonds, a connected life.

[118] An art swap with an illustrator friend because I cannot draw, but I do the decal transfers, which is stressful enough.

[119] https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30082006

[120] See M. Traynor (2017) for a critical discussion of resilience in nursing, and J.K. Olick (2016) for a discussion of resilience and its association with trauma and memory. It is worth mentioning here that resilience is very current in nursing education and practice and regarded by some critics as part of the neo-liberal agenda to shift responsibility for the consequences of underfunding of the National Health Service (NHS) onto the workforce. I am conscious of this critique and saw the project as an opportunity for developing an understanding of what resilience means at the level of subjective experience rather than structural – which is the more common approach.

Claire's Little Tin of Resilience

A midwifery student in her first few weeks, and not far from the death of her mum, unpacks a gathering of inspiration, consolation and connection. A photograph of a baby about to be weighed, tickets for a concert, a shopping list of health, thank-you notes from friends, the label from a swimming costume – because swimming 'is really meditative for me' – and the cork from a bottle of Welsh whisky, a habit continued from sharing a dram with her mum. All this time I am listening, holding, reflecting, containing.

Bethan's Resilience

And then there are two tins, each remarkable in their difference from all of the others, one containing a small seashell: 'I'm low on resilience right now. So this exercise has been helpful for me to help redefine some draining aspects of my life, or readdress.' And in the other a line drawing of two ears and a mouth, a metaphor for an attachment to a friend who seems to perform as Bion's reflective mother: containing, processing and returning (Bion, 1962).

> And she's just – I think she's just very, very good at whenever things are […] difficult that we just talk and talk. Not an awful lot of her providing any solutions I don't think. […] Just being able to speak like that. And it just seems to have all sorted itself out and motivates me to go on as well.

A lecturer who describes her habit of containing and compartmentalisation; of creating her own limiting membrane (Winnicott, 1960a); earphones for walking, embroidery for relaxing and yet also reaches out to others: an address book for friends, wine for friendship, a smiling icon for laughter, a photograph of her dog. A tutor who makes a swimming-pool diorama of her tin, who tells me how much she enjoyed herself – 'It was really fun to do' – and expresses the significance of its lid: 'I like the fact that it's got a lid on it. I think that's, you know, it's important', as if the lid performs as some door to a third dimension, a protective and containing membrane keeping everything in place.

Twenty-one tins and interviews; twenty-one stories of attachment and connection, but mostly evidence of how we live with and without the other. How we make ourselves a skin that is in turns porous, in the manner of being vulnerable to the other (Phillips & Taylor, 2009), and smooth, like worsted yarn, touching little but ourselves. In turn, I have been the container, stretching, reaching towards, enabling.

Many weeks later I revisit these themes in separate sessions with student midwives and medical students as we form clay containers with our hands. Gathered around a table, a large body of clay at the centre – lifeless body awaiting our animation – a spray bottle of water, because clay is draining, it leaches moisture from the flesh, and aprons, for it is also messy. We each reach forwards, each breaking off a lump, warming it towards softness in our palms. I talk of holding and containing, of permission to play as adults and lead with my story but soon turn to them: 'What's your story?'

Without hesitation a medical student shares hers: a moment of being perfectly held as a small child when her distraught weeping was stemmed by her mother who took her into her arms and held her until she slept. How she woke, she believed several hours later, still in her embrace. She smiles: 'When you spoke about holding, it came straight back to me', as if carried both in memory and flesh, as if Ettinger's *Carriance*. This is the exception, for

the session mostly has the texture of containment, their physical gestures remarkably restrained, as if they might be holding themselves in place. They describe how their roles require them to hold themselves together (Bick, 1968) and how they must, in turn, make containers of themselves in the service of their patients (Bion, 1962). They anticipate the need to grow a thicker skin, of wearing the mask of emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012) and here, working with clay with this woman who talks about how it feels, how they feel, it seems so difficult for them to give into the idea of themselves being held. And by the end of this I too am worn through, drained by the anxiety of performance, of sharing myself, perhaps over-sharing. I leave for home with an image in my head of the broken bowl repaired with my faulty stitching. 'The same quality that extends her and that allows her to flow outwards to other people […] is also what makes her vulnerable' (Miller, 2008: 38).

The midwives are wholly different. From the same beginning they move into confession, their anxieties at holding babies for the first time, their fear of literally 'losing their grip'. And when I ask them to visually describe how a fully dilated cervix feels during a pelvic examination – another thing hidden from view – several form the most perfect spheres, explaining that there is nothing to feel but the baby's head and I am so touched by this. And they are similarly porous, reaching towards each other – often physically because they have a habit of reassuring each other through contact – and they can be lachrymose, leaky vessels.

Diary, 18 January 2018

The photos are back from Matt. Some have worked better than others – but what I notice is that it is still possible to see beneath the brother's flesh, and where this might once have bothered me – I might have taken up my darning needle, filled the gaps – now they make sense. Their skin is porous, as is mine, as is anyone's seeking to be a proper brother or sister.

Eight of us made a quilt, a patchwork quilt, seven women and one man: five midwifery students, one lecturer, the head of clinical education and me. A quilt, I hoped, would enable a proper 'no holds barred' engagement with intimacy, the lived out (and sometimes lived through) moments in our day-to-day lives, but also in the clinical setting.[121]

Patchwork quilting often relies on a process of recycling, of piecing together the worn, but outgrown garments of childhood. But we would work with our underwear, the garment most resonant with the 'corporality of its wearer' (Miller, 2008: 43) and the most hidden from view. It began with a show and tell – bring along an item of underwear and be prepared to talk about it. We would begin with the process of deconstruction, of undoing.

Jess, Journal Reflection

On the way here I was thinking about
unpicking[…]
and how it might feel, first to
reveal my knickers and then to take them apart
[…] I got to feel how soft the cotton
is, how I hadn't thought about what these knickers
feel like on my skin, and how
strange to be turning the fabric over and over
again in my hands.

Dilan with his 'boring boxers', Ellie with her 'functional' black pants and me with my brown lace Gossard knickers, a gift from my nan in my sixteenth and her final year, cut low on the legs and abdomen, small ribbon tied into a bow at their centre, classic 70s' styling. I have held onto them long after they served any practical purpose, a remnant of my smaller teenage self.

[121] Midwives work with women in both the antenatal and postnatal setting: in clinics, on hospital wards, in surgical theatres and delivery rooms.

Brown Lace Knickers, an odd gift from a grandmother.

They came apart in my hands, stiches peeling away from cloth more easily than I had anticipated, and yet the unravelled thread held tight to its memory; tenacious and calcified, as if twisted from wire. Laid out on the table, separate from the other constituent parts, the nylon gusset took on a forensic air. Stained – it seemed much more so here when separated, when made a thing of its own – and too much of me, at least too much to share. I slipped it into my pocket with the ease of an accomplished shoplifter, with the skill of someone following too closely in her grandmother's footsteps. I would wash this before I made it public. Jess is much more confident. Her well-worn, washed out, soft cotton knickers are truthful in a way I cannot be, for Jess insists that the stains must show.

These were thickly layered sessions,[122] full of personal reflection where participants easily drew parallels between our unpicking, piecing and stitching and their professional practice. This quality extended beyond the work at hand, the snipping, pinning and piecing, to include reflections on language and negotiating intimacy with women from various cultural backgrounds.[123]

[122] A reference to Geertz's description of 'writing thickly' in which the sessions often developed a sometimes unanticipated emotional depth, which included personal revelations.

[123] One such discussion focused on colloquial naming of female reproductive anatomy by patients in their care.

Disrupted Borders, the blending and mingling of openness.

This thick layering is reflected in the material construction of the quilt, where the fragments are not pieced together through seaming, a meeting of folded edges connected by stitched thread which is common in quilt making, but layered, often overlapping in a way that defies boundaries and borders and resonates with the abject of Kristeva's milk skin (Kristeva, 2002: 2) and Douglas's boundaries breached, dirt 'as matter out of place' (Douglas, 2002: 201). This 'crazy quilt' methodology means there is no recurrence of the single element of the block quilt, which 'frees uniquely rhythmic values' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2014: 554). Instead, a dizzying 'amorphous collection of juxtaposed pieces that can be joined together in an infinite number of ways' (Ibid) and which has the effect of putting me 'in a whirl' (James, 1905: 284). Beyond this and serving to emphasise disorder, the presence of raw and frayed edges suggests the potential for unravelling, itself a bodily

and psychic risk involved in enacting intimacy, but also of blending or mingling, where edge meets with edge and where different hierarchies and types of cloth – the sensuality of silk, the hygiene of cotton, the durability of acrylic, the hide and seek of lace – are transformed into a mish-mash of colour, texture and reflection, and are then stitched together in permanent fusion, a state in which everybody's body is joined with another. This fusing involves a flattening of hierarchies beyond the material. It means that the underwear of midwifery students is mixed with that of senior lecturers and that those of the male midwife are similarly distributed. We are each of us: here, there and everywhere. This reconstitution of eight different bodies into one occurs at a site whose most immediate referent is to another intimate space, the bed (Showalter in Hemmings, 2014: 160), and threatens to tip the whole thing into the obscene. I cannot help but conclude that together we have made great strides in defying the quilt's sociological construction as 'a moral artifact, an emblem of the deliberate ordering of women's lives' (Ibid: 161).

Catherine Dormor explores the connection between stitching and rhythm, using the term 'back and forth' to suggest 'a mutual exchange brought about by the action of needle and thread, suggesting openness and engagement between pieces' (Dormor, 2014: unpaginated). I wish to extend this idea to the exchanges that took place within the setting of this particular quilting bee, which I have already established as a site of 'openness'.[124] These are best reflected in observations from the participants' reflective journals:

> *I forgot how to start and end a stitch, so Angela started and ended the first line I sewed. Following that I was able to figure out how to do it.*[125]

> *We have had some lovely, open conversations about grief and emotional upset tonight […] I hope it helped everyone as much as me.*

> *I really needed today. After an emotionally intense study day […] to sit and unpick with everyone has helped me re-centre and process some of my emotion.*

[124] In this context, openness is reflected in the emerging environment, where we share our stories, and the deconstruction and opening out of the garments making them potential sites for change (Twigger Holroyd, 2017).

[125] Midwifery students learn to suture perineal tears on synthetic flesh in their second year of study; they do not stitch patients until they are qualified.

There is some sense here of the participants stitching themselves into the fabric of the cloth, of us each performing in the manner of needle and thread, for stitching 'joins and connects pieces and fragments together, to create new, expanded pieces: stitching is a form of meaning-making machine […] that champions differences and fragmented paths' (Ibid).

To finish a project requires a process of ending. In knitting, this is described as casting or binding off. Yarn passed through the final loop, drawn tight, closed off. In writing, perhaps a summary or conclusion, that requires reflection, looking back across pages and through chapters; drawing together themes towards a concluding sentence, an eventual endpoint marked by the final word and a full stop. Writing has parallels with knitting a garment – indeed, a text is described as having a body – it too must be crafted and narrowed towards its conclusion, its end. In *Jumper for a Boy*, these endpoints marked the entry and exit points of the body, his throat, his hips and his wrists. What a thought that I might make such a thing for the real lost boy, my brother.

And when I write of helical making, I make a reflexive turn. As the storyteller, I yarn backwards, to the point of origin, 'In the Beginning', the moment when two women came together to knit two lines into one. Lines that would, through their knitting, become surface. What followed arrived as a surprise, an 'out of the blue' moment, in which something 'fuller and more manifold' (Sennett, 2009: 211) than she had anticipated came into being: their knitting has the habit of twisting into a spiral, of turning on itself, a life of its own. An illuminative moment (Denzin, 2001) that confirms who and what they are: two women knitting, each tied to the other by matrilineal mitochondria, wool gatherers drawing in the spun-out threads of two red spheres, like blood cells. A mother and daughter, daughter and mother, knitting a manifestation of the thing that connects us all, the twisting helix of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), the blueprint.

And in that 'face to face' encounter, another surprise arrived, a moment of intensity (O'Sullivan, 2001: 126) that threatened to unravel her. Thin-skinned, riddled with holes (Bick, 1968), she would have liked to run. Perversely, the only thing that kept her in place was to absent herself through pain: 'bite down hard on the inside of your mouth […] don't feel that, feel this'. Pain that meant she existed only for herself (Scarry, 1985), a discharge that returned her to a state of homeostasis (Freud, 1920), and restored her carapace: 'Hold yourself together.'

Trying to make sense of this moment took me on a journey without a map. A journey that was sometimes dark and where I was often both lost and at a loss; I did not always know what I was doing.[126] We know from Mary Douglas (2002) and Julia Kristeva (1982) that to be without boundary is troubling, it risks a proper undoing. Knitting, in both process and substance, gave me something to hold onto, even when it was the thing that troubled me most.

What I have discovered, deep in the marrow of what makes me, is that being affected is not contingent on the simple binary of proximity versus distance, because it is quite possible to be close up, in the thick of it, and feel nothing, simply wear a mask and engage in self-self interactions (Manning, 2009: 34). And here – in this moment – I understand why I felted that mask and those noses, for they needed to be smooth; to make the possibility of empathy, beyond the joke of them being masks, unachievable. There must be no space for intrusion.

The real explanation for feeling this way, of being affected, is brought about through the texture of a thing, of being porous over smooth, of being capable of give and take. For Melanie Klein, empathy requires that we step into another's shoes, while for Adam Phillips it is born of kindness for its own sake and of being vulnerable to the other. In all these things, 'Empathy means that you travel out of yourself a little and expand' (Solnit, 2014: 195). This attitude is essential, it brings us into relation with others and enables a sense of self, 'It is not intimacy that is established between subjects, but subjectivity that emerges through intimacy' (Lauer, 2016: 44).

I look back and wonder if I have hardly strayed from my starting point; perhaps it is more that I have caught myself in the act of performing loops, heading out on multiple circular journeys, knitting's loops for, even when I am not knitting, 'I'm still working with it as a single thread out of which emerges a surface, a fabric, a narrative […] a text' (Gschwandter, 2012: 409–10). So much of this travel has necessitated movement between two cities along the tensile steel of two other lines, the railway; this has been a journey of several pairings.

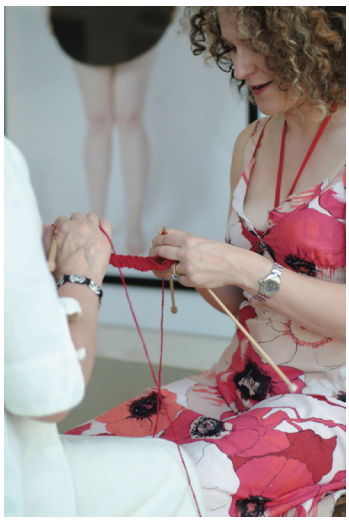
[126] I find support here in Winnicott, who once claimed 'If I knew what I was doing, it wouldn't be research' (Winnicott in Kuhn, 2013: 2).

I have arrived here through a deliberate act of returning textiles and cloth to the body through autobiography; through this, have come to understand that 'Nothing makes us more intelligible to ourselves' (Phillips, 2010: ix). This new knowledge extends beyond the self to encompass those things created in the space between self and other and ultimately the wider world. In and through this, like knitting itself, I have become practised in the art of 'give and take', understanding Kozloff when he wrote: 'an object that *gives in* is actually stronger than one that resists, because it also permits the opportunity to be oneself in a new way' (Kozloff, 1968: 233).

And in looping backwards, I realise some things remain unresolved. I have unravelled *Bloodline*, accounted for its affect and extended these findings – that knitting and the knitted object – have the capacity for empathy capable of transfer to other environments and situations, particularly in our understanding of what it is to be proximate and real. And there have been so many unanticipated discoveries; new threads that extend my practice in directions barely sensed at the beginning, in particular, an emerging career forged out of my thesis that knitting is the material of 'give and take'. My ambition to speak my truth has been only partially successful, my voice still caught at my throat, as if I might be practicing a new language. In all this, my making has been most concerned with repair and restoration, and rare acts of violence, as if this may have been what was needed here and now, I have yet to fully articulate the stickiness I had imagined, and this is my continuing challenge.

I have a sense of not wanting to let this go, as if it might be a comfort blanket, or I its smothering mother. Six years of tending to embryonic shoots, of weeding out, feeding, re-potting and pruning. For research is an act of nurturing, the thing and oneself, since – for me at least – both amount to the same. Yet, to let go is both necessary and unavoidable, for 'merging is dangerous, at least at the boundaries and definition of the self' (Solnit, 2014: 185). Instead, I must develop Cixous's art of 'Breaking. Cutting. Letting go […] for one must cut and trim to relaunch life. Nip the quick. Harm to help' (Cixous, 2005: 191). After all, a body can only carry so much. And yet I wonder 'Why tie up loose ends?' (Barnett, 1999: 187) when they might be woven into the next project. The knitter and historian Montse Stanley wrote that: 'Knitting is no more than a succession of yarn waves which have been made to interlock' (1993: 13). It is this and so much more.

Chronology of Work



Bloodline (2006 - ongoing)
Knitted Red Yarn, Knitting Needles,
Documented Performance and Artefact

Shrug 2012
Knit

Nose Warmer 2012
Crochet

Nose Warmers 2013
Hand knitting

The Struwwelpeters 2013
Hand knitting and felt

Old Crow (Black Mask) 2013
Hand knitting and felt

Cock a Snook 2013
Hand knitting and felt

The Failed Ones 2013
Hand knitted and accidentally felted gloves

The Ungifted 2013
Hand knitted and embroidered baby cardigan

The Mismatched 2013
Hand knitted gloves

The Misjudged 2013
Machine knitted bunting

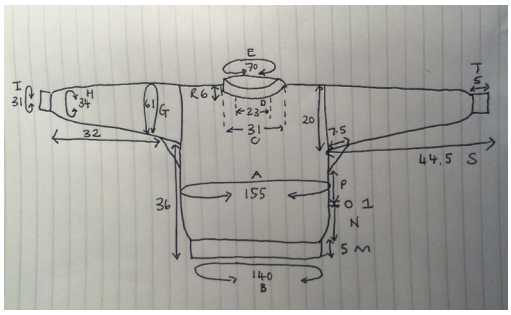
Gwen's Shoes 2013
Hand knitted baby boots

Red Shoes 2013
Knitted baby boots (on going)

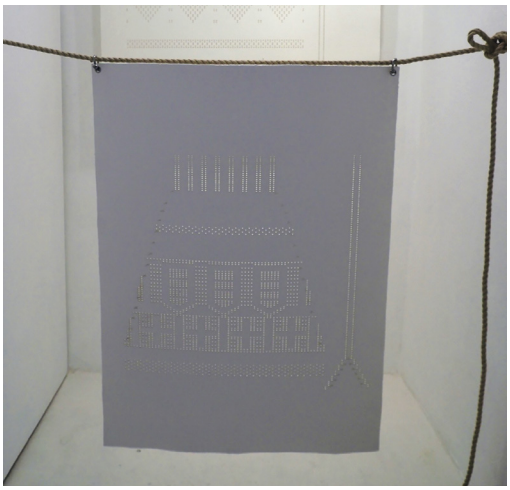
The Right Ones 2013
Hand knitted gloves

Jordan's 2014
Hand knitted gloves

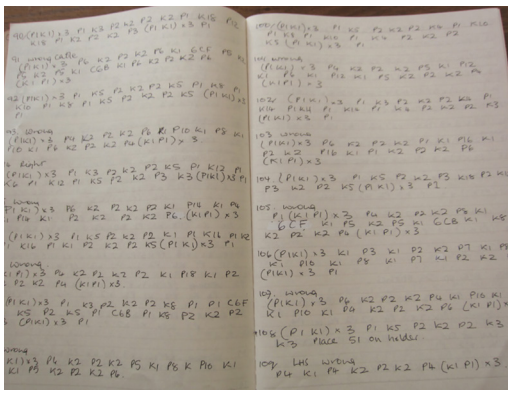
The Middle Finger 2014
Hand knitted gloves



Charting the Mission Gansey 2014



Mission Gansey 2014
Lazer Cut Hahnemühle Paper



'The Knitting Forecast' Hymn Sheet 2014

Still Waiting 2014

Brooder Knitted Nest Eggs 2014

The Paper Cuts 2014

Knitted Scissors 2014

Soft Scissors (Mother and Child) 2014

Bound 2015
Silver Scissors bound with red yarn

Silicone Corsage 2015
Silicon Knitting Needles

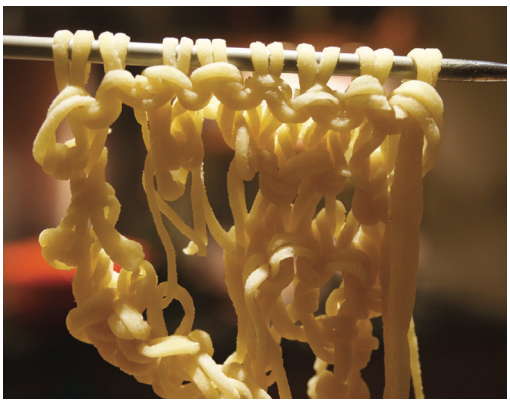
Flying Fucks 2015

The Stork 2015
Collagraph on Hahnemühle Paper

Mothers are Wolves 2015

Cloth Bodies 2015

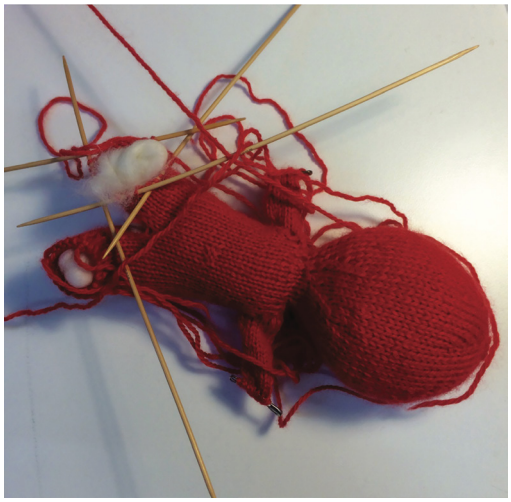
Red Baby (The Prototype) 2015



Knitting Pasta 2015
Home made, hand knitted fresh pasta

Jumper for a Boy I 2015

Drawing Elsie 2016



Red Baby 2016

Brother Love 2016

Cashmere Fingertips 2016

First Spin 2016
Cashmere spun on a drop spindle

The Mittens 2016
Hand Spun and Hand Knitted Cashmere

Tom Thumb 2016
Hand Spun and Hand Knitted Cashmere

The Wrangler Jacket 2016
Visibly Repaired Inherited Denim Jacket

The Spinning Document 2016

The Grandmother Spider 2016

The Last Born 2017

Patching Up 2017

The Little Tin of Resilience 2017

The Midwifery Quilting Bee 2017

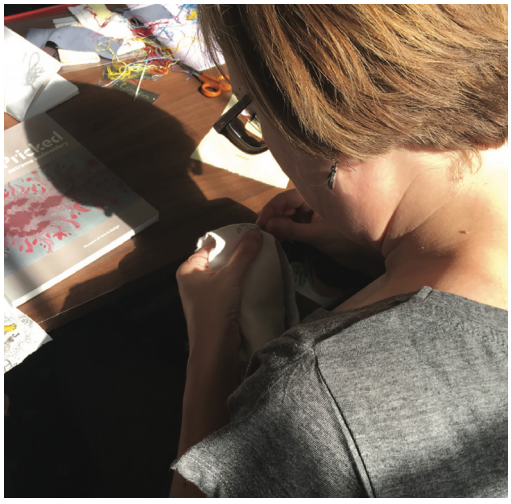
Knitting the phallus 2017

Knitted Uterus 2017

Toques 2017
(On going series)

Jumper for a Boy II 2017

Brewin Bear 2017
(On going series) Hand spun and hand knitted Shetland fleece



Stitched Diaries 2017
Reflective Practice Workshop with the Midwifery Lecturers of King's College

Bouncing Back 2017
Resilience Workshop with the Learning and Development team of the Crafts Council

Hooking Narratives 2017
(On going collaboration) Crocheted Yarn

Jumper for a Boy III 2017
Hand spun and hand knitted Shetland, Spael and Welsh Black Mountain Yarn

The Golden Remake 2017
(the re-imagined tanktop) Hand Spun and Turmeric dyed mohair

Holding: A Work in Process 2017
(on going) Instrument Repair of Ceramics using Student Nursing Uniform, Perineal Suturing Techniques and Ethicon sutures

Instrument Repair of Ceramics using Linen Bedsheet, Perineal Suturing Techniques and linen thread.

Intentionally Blank

Appendix: Annotating Ellis

Emphasising Place

We are similar, from the same place

The problematic of sensitivity

Marking her place in the family constellation

Me 1962

Him 1964

15 months between us

Establishing sibling relationship

We never fought like this

This could be Simon

That sick stomach-turning, shoulder tightening realisation that nothing will ever be the same

Bargaining

My bargain that he was still alive, but maybe a head injury, that I would look after him

I did not have an anchor

Still wanting him to be him

Bargaining

Soothing

Eating as soothing, restorative

Resignation

Clinging On

Magical thinking

I felt he stood opposite the house,
leaning against a wall.

And I lay on the backseat of a car.
I don't remember my mum

The sister

I have no brother

When did you last see your brother?

I don't have this either

The reporter who stuck his
foot in the door

Simon was in the Birmingham Post
and the Express & Star

Mum said a girl held his head in her lap

Yes

This happens all the time

I don't even remember where she was

I remember acting

Choking back tears, lump in my throat

I never went for that drink with him

Bending over, being animated

I can't remember what I did

I though he was watching us

I feel a distance when I read this

I can't remember food

An aftermath

Etiquette

I don't remember

Simon did not take anything with him

I did not see him

I remember this feeling, lived it out for years

Being rational

Convention v. nearness and familiarity

Wanting to know he was OK

Someone told me that Simon
would have been unconscious very quickly

Loss enabling proximity

Neither did I with the SIMON flowers

Mum fainted and was picked up
by her brother

I remember my dress. Dorothy Perkins.
Black lawn printed with cream flowers
and a pretty cream lace collar, a very
soft black mohair cardigan, both
more expensive that I'd usually have

I fainted

We drove past my brother's workplace
on his journey to the cemetery –
everyone stood outside

She still has a brother

I never thought anything like this

I think we had the family vicar,
what was his name?

I wanted to be with Simon's friends,
not mine

I remember

She is in touch with other's needs

I don't remember

Maternal collapse

Let go

Did she not keep anything?

Seems cross with her mother

Someone to … to take responsibility

Death makes this happen, vulnerable

Why didn't I open the curtain, look outside?

I always want to sleep

My position – narrator and author

Me as primary data

Yes

Who opened the front door to
let me in? Was it Helen, mum's friend?

*

Moving forwards, walking again

Aesthetic distance, allows for coping, I think

Why I am always thinking about
things and clothes and making

Me too, dropping out of law school

Royal College of Art
RESEARCHRCA

For further information
Supervisors: Freddie Robbins/Claire Pajaczkowska
freddie.robbins@rca.ac.uk
claire.pajaczkowska@rca.ac.uk

Angela Maddock, PhD Candidate: School of Material
Bloodline: An Experiment in Knit and Proximity
'Cherished' Case Study and Survey

Interview and Survey Consent Form

I *(please print)*.....have read the information on the research project *Bloodline: An Experiment in Knit and Proximity* which is to be conducted by *Angela Maddock* from the Royal College of Art, and all queries have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to voluntarily participate in this research and give my consent freely. I understand that the project will be conducted in accordance with the Information Sheet, a copy of which I have retained.

I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time, without penalty, and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.

I consent to:

- Complete a survey which will take approximately twenty minutes
- Give personal information as part of this survey.
- My photograph and photographs of my work being taken, stored and reproduced in Angela's thesis, written chapters in journals and also in presentations at conference.
- My responses to the survey and interview being included in Angela's work, this includes written thesis, conference papers and articles

I understand that all information gathered from the survey will be stored securely; my opinions will be accurately represented. Any images in which I can be clearly identified will be used in the public domain only with my consent and I understand that Angela will contact me for specific consent should this occur.

Print Name:.....

Signature.....

Date: .....

This project will be conducted in compliance with the Research Ethics Code of the Royal College of Art.

Royal College of Art
RESEARCHRCA

For further information
Supervisors: Freddie Robbins/Claire Pajaczkowska
freddie.robbins@rca.ac.uk
claire.pajaczkowska@rca.ac.uk

Angela Maddock, PhD Candidate: School of Material
Bloodline: An Experiment in Knit and Proximity
'Cherished' Case Study and Survey

Interview Information Sheet

Dear

I am Angela Maddock a research student in the School of Material. As part of my conducting a research project entitled *Bloodline: An Experiment in Knit and Proximity.* You are invited to take part in this research project, which explores attachment to knitting and the knitted object. You are invited to participate in this research.

If you consent to participate, this will involve:
- Completion of a survey, which will take approximately 20 minutes of your time
- Returning the survey to Angela at the time of your interview
- An interview, which will be recorded and used in the research.

Please note that if I use your name in any publication – including conference presentations, journal articles and thesis writing - I will seek your consent again before doing so. You can also choose to be anonymous.

Participation is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time and there will be no disadvantage if you decide not to participate. All information collected will be confidential. All information gathered from your interview will be stored securely.

If you have any concerns or would like to know the outcome of this project, please contact my supervisors Freddie Robbins or Claire Pajaczkowska at the above address.

Thank you for your interest and contribution,

Complaints Clause:
This project follows the guidelines laid out by the Research Ethics Code of the Royal College of Art.

If you should have any concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, or you have a complaint about the manner in which this research is conducted, it may be given to the researcher or, if an independent person is preferred, addressed to the Research Ethics Committee of the Royal College of Art at the above address.

Cherished

Knitter's Questionnaire

Knitter's Details

Name ……

Address ……

……

……

……

Email Address……..

Telephone numbers…….(Mobile)

…….(Home)

Please tick the box you feel best describes you as a knitter

Complete Beginner (my first project)	Some Experience (not my first project)	Experienced (many previous projects)	Expert (a confident and fluent knitter)

The Object

Please describe what you are knitting or have knitted

Who is this for? (What is your relationship with the recipient?)

Is this a gift?

What inspired you to knit this?

Knitting Environment

Who taught you to knit?

Where do you do your knitting?

Do you knit alone or in company?

What do you think about when you are knitting?

How do you feel when you are knitting? (Please describe physical and emotional feelings)

I would like to use your contribution in my research, is there anything you have told me in your interview or in this document that you would prefer me not to share as part of my research?

I would like to be ☐ **anonymous**

I am happy for my name to be used in this research ☐

Place of Interview

Time of Interview

Signature of contributor

Signature of Interviewer

Date of Interview

Material Facts (completed by Angela in the presence of the knitter)

Dimensions of Object *(include sketch)*

Weight of Object

Fibres used *(including small fibre sample if permitted)*

Tools used *(wooden, steel, bamboo, circular needles)*

Pattern followed

Any other remarks *(including adaptations to pattern, storage of knit in process)*

Thank you for contributing to my research.

Angela Maddock

Cherished

Recipient questionnaire

Name of Contributor: ……

Address……

……..

……..

……..

Email Address…….

Telephone numbers……(Mobile)

……(Home)

Please describe the appearance of your knitted object:

Do you know who knitted this? Yes/No

If yes, what is their relationship with you?

When did they knit it? (how old do you think it is?)

If this was not knitted for you, how did you come to own it?

If this is a garment, how often do you wear it? (please tick the most appropriate box)

Frequently (every week)	Regularly (once a month)	Rarely (once/twice a year)	Never

When did you last wear it?

Please describe where you keep it

How do you keep it clean?

What are your feelings about this object?

Cherish means to protect and care for lovingly, please indicate with a cross on the line below how much you cherish this item

0 10

Not at all Moderately Absolutely

Please could you tell me something else about your object For example, does it have any particular associations for you; does it have a 'story to tell'?

I would like to use your contribution in my research, is there anything you have told me in your interview or in this document that you would prefer me not to share as part of my research?

I would like to be anonymous

I am happy for my name to be used in ☐ **this research**

Place of Interview ☐

Time of Interview

Signature of contributor

Signature of Interviewer

Date of Interview

Cherish: Material Facts (completed by Angela)

Dimensions of Object *(include sketch)*

Weight of Object

Fibres used *(including small fibre sample if permitted)*

Any other remarks *(including remarks on damage and restoration, how the garment/object is stored or displayed)*

Thank you for contributing to my research project.

Angela Maddock

Angela Maddock

Curriculum Vitae

Holding: A Work in Progress

Instrument Repair of Ceramics using Student Nursing Uniform, Perineal Suturing Techniques and Ethicon sutures

angela.maddock@mac.com

http://www.angela-maddock.com

07765524729

Qualifications

MA Fine Art (Distinction) 2006, Swansea College of Art

BA Surface Pattern Design (First Class Honours) 2002, Swansea College of Art

Foundation Certificate in Art & Design (Distinction) 1999, Swansea College of Art

BA Modern European Studies (European History, Politics, Economics and German) 1986, Ealing College

Diploma in Counselling (Swansea University) 1996

Certificate in Counselling (Swansea University) 1994

Diploma in Marketing (Institute of Marketing) 1990

Certificate in Marketing (Institute of Marketing) 1989

Maker in Residence, Florence Nightingale School of Nursing, Midwifery and Palliative Care, King's College, London (current)
I contribute to programmes on undergraduate and post graduate adult nursing, child nursing, mental health nursing, palliative care and midwifery.

PhD Researcher at The Royal College of Art, London
Bloodline: An Experiment in Knit and Proximity. An autoethnographic and generalised study of affect and its manifestations via the process and products of knitting.

King's Artist, King's College, London
I design and deliver hands on making seminars across the University. This includes collaborations with the School of Medicine.

Visiting Tutor, School of Design, RCA
I deliver workshops on yarn production, which include familiarity with fleece and fibres, drop spindle and wheel spinning. I also contribute to studio tutorial delivery, working with students across the textile department.

Honorary Research Fellow, Swansea College of Art

2006 – 2017 Senior Lecturer in Contextual Studies and Programme Leader for MA Contemporary Dialogues: Textiles Pathway from 2011. Swansea College of Art (.5 Fractional)
Responsible for writing and delivery of contextual studies lectures and dissertation supervision of with undergraduates in Surface Pattern Design and Fine Art. Particularly interested in the integration of contextual studies with studio practice and introduced dissertation supervision and seminars in the studio setting. Areas of expertise include empathy and attachment, object relations, manifesting tacit knowledge, dress and dressing, feminism, the construction of material genders, 'putting writing into practice'. Contributed to pastoral care across the faculty. Managed a cross faculty dissertation programme for two years.

Contributed to lecture development and delivery, Group Critique and report writing supervision for Masters students from Textiles, Fine Art, Illustration and Photography pathways.

Recent Projects

Stitched Diaries hands on workshop with the Midwifery lecturing team at King's College, London, July 2017

Crafting Resilience a medal making workshop on resilience and self-efficacy with staff of the Crafts Council. July 2017

Hooking Narratives a hands on workshop utilising crochet, narrative and hermeneutics with academic staff – including medicine, physics, history and law - attending the 'Excellence in Teaching' Conference at King's College, London. 23 June 2017

Forthcoming

Processions 2018: A Celebration of the Centenary of The Representation of the People Act. I am the Craft Council selected maker for this project and will work with staff of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust to design and produce a banner for the celebratory procession on June 10, 2018.
http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/articles/processions/

Personal Agency, World Making and Refugees
I will lead a collaborative psychotherapeutic workshop on the theme of rebuilding home with refugee participants. This is part of King's College, London's Summer Programme that encourages

Quilt project with the Baobab Centre for Young Survivors in Exile In August 2018
https://baobabsurvivors.org

Publications

Maddock, A. (2018). 'Folds, Scissors, and Cleavage in Giovanni Battista Moroni's Il Tagliapanni'. In Millar, L. and Kettle, A. (eds). *The Erotic Cloth* (London: Bloomsbury), pp.25-36.

In Between: A Darker Thread commissioned catalogue essay for 'A Darker Thread', Oriel Myrddin, July-October 2017.

Re(a)d Knit: Body/Mother/Home in Knitting and Well-Being Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture (Berg), Volume 12, Issue 1, pp34-57.

Ainsley Hillard: Folds Selvedge Journal, Sep/Oct 2010 Issue 36 p. 90

Folds, commissioned catalogue essay, Mission Gallery, Swansea, 2010

On the Edge, commissioned catalogue essay, Mission Gallery, Swansea.

Conference Proceedings

Textile and Place Manchester College of Art and The Whitworth Art Gallery, April 2018

The Emotional Labour of Lines, Threads and Continuing Bonds for 'Fragile Memories', Sixth International Oral History Symposium, Helsinki, 24 – 26 November 2016.

Touching Things: Memory, Nostalgia and the Hand Knitted Garment for Memory, Melancholy and Nostalgia, 4th International Interdisciplinary Memory Conference, University of Gdansk, Poland, September 17-18th 2015.

Always in the Act of Becoming: Folds, Scissors and Cleavage in Giovanni Battista Moroni's Il Tagliapanni' The Erotic Cloth: Seduction and Fetishism UCA and MMU at The Artworkers' Guild, Queen Square, London, 20 March 2015.
Soft Stuff: Knitted Garments as Unique Object Ciphers Travelling Memories: Lives in Transition, Finnish Oral History Symposium, University of Helsinki, 27-28 November 2014.

Soft Stuff: Knitted Garments as Transitional Objects Psychosocial Connections: Practice, Policy and Research, 1st Annual Conference of the Association for Psychosocial Studies, UCLAN, Preston, 16-17 December 2014

Lost and Found: Narratives of the Hand Knitted Sweater The Lives of Objects, Wolfson College, University of Oxford, September 2013.

The Hand Knitted Jumper, Exemplar of Fashion's Agency Barthes, Benjamin and Fashion, University of Manchester, June 2013.

Re(a)d Knit: Body: Mother: Home for In The Loop, Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton, September 2012.

Public Lectures

'On Being Close Knit: Intimacy and Exclusivity in Group Portraiture' Public Lecture, The National Gallery, London, 18 April 2016

Exhibitions

Being Intimate A Collaborative Quilt with students and staff of The Florence Nightingale School of Nursing and Midwifery, selected for exhibition at the Festival of Quilts, Birmingham, August 2017

In the Making Somerset House, London. An exhibition of work and a seminar based on the outcomes of my Parallel Practices Award. June 2017

By a Thread, Group Show, Gawthorpe Textile Collection, Yorkshire. May – July 2016

Maker in Focus, Solo Show, Oriel Wrecsam, June – July 2016

Gathered Again Group Exhibition, Mission Gallery, 19 June – 2 August 2015

Mothers are Wolves… Mission Gallery, solo exhibition 12 May – 14 June 2015

Co-respondents, Mission Gallery, Swansea March 2014

Awards

Crafts Council Parallel Practices Award October 2016- April 2017 with The Florence Nightingale School of Nursing, Midwifery and Palliative Care at King's College London.

King's Artist, The Cultural Institute, King's College, London, from March 2017 to the present

Free Range Textile Award 2002

Elizabeth Jefferies Textile Scholarship 2002

Ted and Nina Archer Prize for Law and Social Sciences 1986

Final Statement

I live in Swansea and work there and also in London. I have worked in the voluntary and statutory sectors, as a counsellor in the NHS (particularly infertility and miscarriage), and also as a support worker with charities including the National Children's Home (now Action for Children). My interest in well-being and welfare developed in response to personal crisis following the murder of my brother, it influences both my practice and work choices. I am a mother of two.

Bibliography

Adorno, T.W. (2005 [1959]). 'The Meaning of Working Through the Past'. In Pickford, H.W. (ed.). *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 89-104.

Adorno, T.W. (2005). *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (London: Verso).

Agamben, G. (2011). *Nudities* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).

Ahmed, S. and Stacey, J. (eds) (2001). *Thinking through the Skin* (London: Routledge).

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