

# Invisible Spaces of Parenthood

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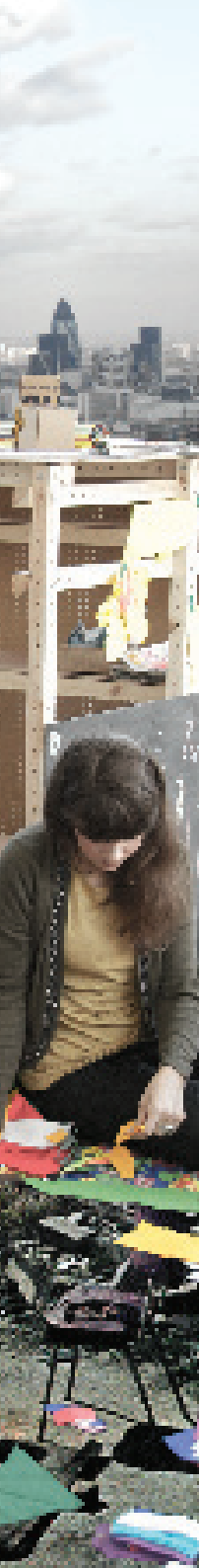
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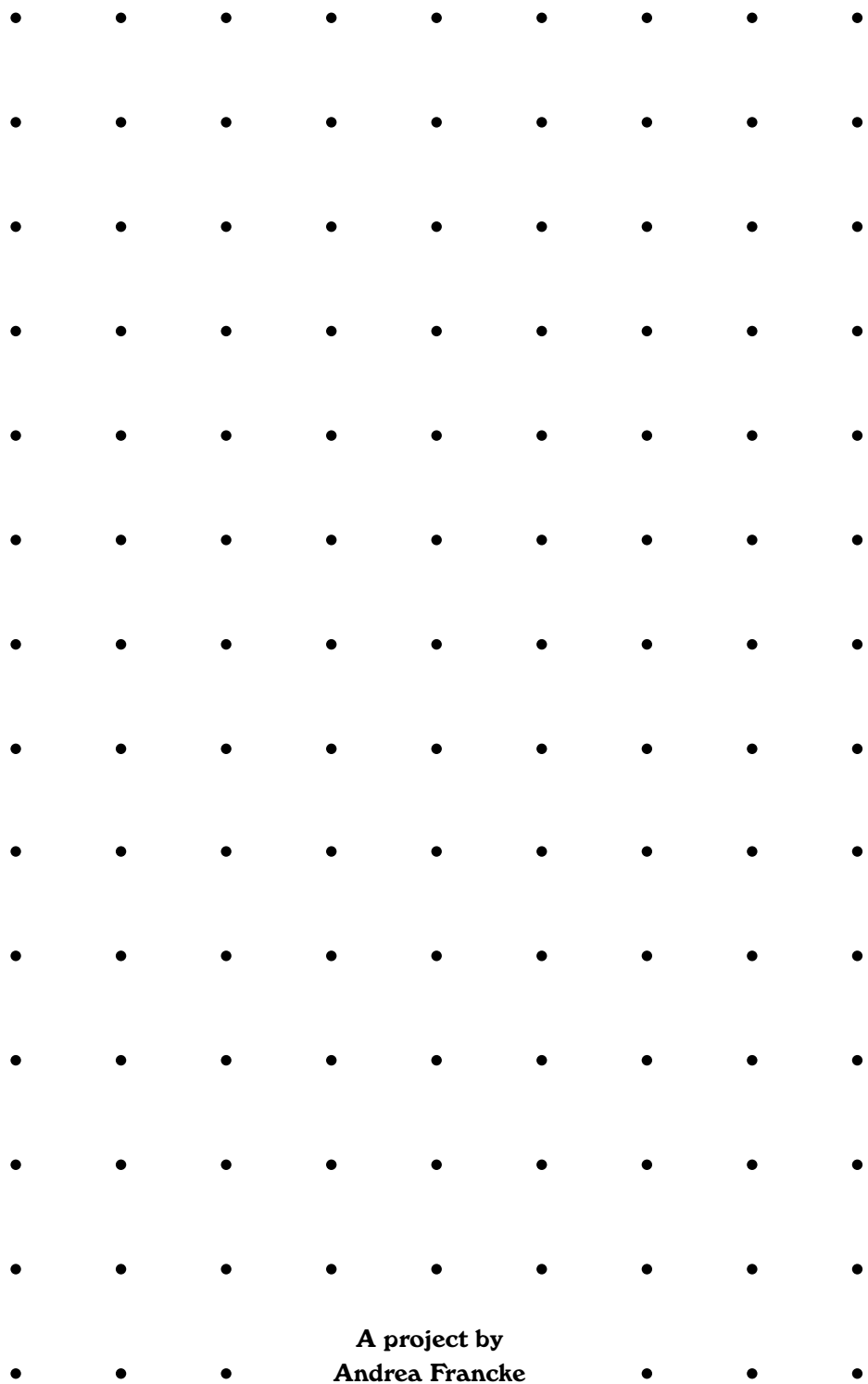
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## A Collection of

## Pragmatic Propositions

for a Better Future





**In 2011 The Showroom invited Andrea Francke to develop a new project within the framework of Communal Knowledge – a programme of artists’ commissions produced in collaboration with local groups, organisations and individuals within The Showroom’s neighbourhood.**

**Andrea was invited to expand on two projects that she had previously realised, both of which focused on childcare and its social invisibility. Her MA show at Chelsea College of Art and Design responded to the closing of the University of the Arts’ childcare facility by setting up a functioning crèche in her degree show. This became the site for a series of discussions about the politics of childcare, which were continued through a subsequent project realised in the context of the Arts Against Cuts occupation of Camberwell College in early 2011. At The Showroom this ongoing research fed into Invisible Spaces of Parenthood: A Collection of Pragmatic Propositions for a Better Future which continued to explore issues surrounding childcare in Britain, this time drawing the research out more specifically from The Showroom’s neighbourhood, Church street, which is one of the poorest wards in the country, where overcrowding and child poverty is amongst the worst in the UK.**

**Local research began through meetings and interviews with six different organisations in the area including The Portman Family Centre, Church Street Nursery, Room to Play, Luton Street Nursery, Abeona**

**A project by  
Andrea Francke**

Nursery and Gateway Primary School. These discussions revealed the many external political and social agendas that were impacting on childcare and families in the area, signalling that it is in this often-invisible space of local society that broader sociopolitical issues are most visible. What emerged was a clear picture of how public sector cuts to social provision, children's services, housing and changes to immigration law has been affecting mothers, workers, teachers and childcare providers in the area, uncovering inequality and urgency. Invisible Spaces of Parenthood activated a space for social critique, discussion and action, to propose alternative models and possibilities for a new ideology.

The project also looked at the broader picture, venturing beyond the local to address the experiences and challenges of parenting for artists, cultural workers and other precarious workers, including a series of discussions with artist parents – looking at the challenges and opportunities of combining parenting with artistic practice – and a workshop with J4DW (Justice for Domestic Workers) an organisation of domestic workers who work in private homes in the UK, many of whom have left their own children in their home countries in order to gain employment looking after the children of others.

This manual offers a platform for the research and work that has been produced so far to be visible and situated within a broader context, combining personal experience, local knowledge, political understanding and critical art practice.

## Introduction to the Project

Andrea Francke

Invisible Spaces of Parenthood is a very personal project. It came to be by my re-configuration in the world as a mother. When I decided to have a baby I just thought about the whole process as a very simple one. We would have an addition to the family and just figure it out as it went. I didn't plan to re-configure myself as an individual. Life would go on as normal, I had a plan, a career, an already established life that would obviously go on as usual with some small changes here and there. I guess every mother (and probably most fathers around) will already know things don't happen in that way.

*I assume part of it was the result of a naivety for which I take full responsibility. A baby is quite a demanding individual with no means to fend for themselves without help, this part was to be expected. But what shocked me the most was how hard it was to construct a support structure system that would allow me to follow my individual dreams. My mum was a single parent who worked and had an amazing career. I never questioned that choice when growing up. It was always clear for me that I could love my children and also have a life. That it didn't need to be a matter of choice, one could operate just as many men had done for generations.*

*Maybe it is good to make clear here that I'm not British. I was born in Peru and moved to Brazil after my*

*parents divorced to live with my mum and grandparents in Brazil. Coming from a middle class background I was used to see all the mums of my friends working. Most of us would be picked up at the school door by grandmothers or nannies. When I moved to London with my partner we decided we would try to figure out a new way to exist as a family. We were quite keen to put Oscar in a nursery and share the parental tasks as equally as possible. We still negotiate and re-evaluate every now and then but that seems to have worked well and I think it proves a point of how much men may be oppressed by a patriarchal system too. I'm pleased to say that our son doesn't seem to identify either of us as a primary carer.*

**My big shock came from when I was doing an MA in Fine Arts at the Chelsea College of Art and Design. Oscar started going to the nursery when he was 8 months old and, although I saw some raised eyebrows relating to his young age, we were very happy. However, UAL (University of the Arts London) decided to close the nursery while I was still studying. The parents organised a series of protests and tried to arrange meetings to come up with a different solution. Most parents participated as we had the increased pressure of waiting lists of more than six months for a replacement nursery place. Disappointedly, the administration wasn't moved. But that wasn't the shocking part. What really bothered me was that whenever I brought the subject up with the other students their reaction was that they didn't have children so they didn't care. Suddenly I was part of a different group called 'parents' and I couldn't make them see us. We were invisible and our struggles would remain invisible. For my MA show I set up a temporary utopic nursery space inside the college. The parents and the redundant nursery workers help me design, set up and run the space. I built all the furniture and toys using old manuals from the 1960s and 70s. There were no brands, it was all DIY. The toys worked in a very similar way to adventure playground sites. We had very simple starting points, children and parents would build toys that would then be re-appropriated by the next visitors. For a few days this was a meeting point for many different types**

**of people. Adults were allowed in the space even if they didn't have children, something that felt a bit strange for most of them. We had information available about the closure process of the nursery and there seemed to be nursery workers or parents present most of the days, they were eager to make their struggle visible in this different context. My favourite type of visitors were students showing their parents around who would quickly dismiss the space just to be pushed in and lectured by their parents (mostly their mums) on how a nursery was what allowed her to work while they were babies. Everybody is affected by parenthood and childcare issues whether they are aware or not. A few female teachers came and told us about the difference it had made to the number of female staff working at the university. We would only see the impact of the closure in many years to come, as we will with most of the cuts that are happening around us at the moment.**

**The project at The Showroom is a direct development from the Nursery at Chelsea College of Art and Design. When I started the commission we thought about doing something similar. A temporary nursery that would function during the holidays. Our first discussions with the nurseries in the Church Street area made us re-think the initial plans. The holiday period was already quite hard on them and taking away paying customers would increase the hard time they were already having because of the cuts. We decided to expand on the initial areas the project had covered in a more experimental way. We built a library around ideas of DIY, childcare, pedagogy and parenthood and invited artists and designers to send us instructions for things and methods that could be built by children and parents and that would challenge / improve / expand their ways of living. We programmed many events to discuss the issues around the project and tried to do these in an experimental way. We did a series of open workshops with artists who had submitted instructions, these workshops were open to the public and we also had local nurseries bringing children in to participate. The gallery space was set to resemble a workshop and the tools, instructions and books were available for visitors to do some building themselves. We had a great number of visitors and attendance to the**



events and all of the essays and general content for this manual has been build up from these contacts. All the contributors to the manual have participated in the project in more that one way and it feels like Invisible Spaces of Parenthood (ISP) has become more like an open research network structure than anything else.

There is a general feeling that motherhood is constantly in the spotlight. Supermodels and actresses having babies have taken over all the gossip and even fashion magazines. But these ways parenthood and childhood are discussed and flaunted around don't really relate to what I felt was going around me. When looking around with Emily Pethick, Director of The Showroom for text references to discuss at the first ISP event – Survival Strategies for Cultural Workers, we found it quite hard to find them, subsequently many of the e-mails that I've received through the project have been for requests for the project's reading list or bibliography.

I don't think we have necessarily solved any of the issues that we proposed and I'm not even sure we have made them as clear as they could be. But there is no doubt that many interesting connections and propositions have been made by the visitors and they have all become contributors in a way. I kept the name manual hoping that this will be another way to expand the research network and this is just a starting point to the future of ISP.

The manual is a collection of the many things that happened in ISP and the research that happened around it. It was also an opportunity to commission essays from some of the contributors or participants around issues that they were already working on and that related to project. Please let me know if you want to participate or add to the discussion. I will try my best to keep the platform open and available.

The ISP library was set up during the research period and was available during the exhibition (in)visibilities at The Showroom in the summer of 2012. It was built through a very personal perspective, they are all my own books, everything that I included was read and informed ISP at some point of the project. Another immense source of material was the Let's Re-make website ([www.letsremake.info](http://www.letsremake.info)) which hosts many PDFs from The Library of Radiant Optimism collection for

download. It is run by Bonnie Fortune and Brett Bloom who contributed with an essay about their experience being artists and parents ('Systems of Support for Families and Artists').

The ISP project also focused on research into the childcare providers around the Church Street area where The Showroom is located. The interviews that were recorded are transcribed here. They give a great introduction to how childcare functions, its social and economic role and the changes it is suffering from because of the economic cuts. These interviews were available as audio recordings as part of the ISP library during the research period and we received several requests to make them available. Cathy Palser, from The Portman Early Childhood Centre also participated in the Final Event and introduced us to the Woodcraft Folk and Richard Palser ( see text 'Woodcraft Folk').

All the instructions that we received for the project have been included in this manual. Many of the contributors ended up engaging with other parts of the project. Renzo Laporta sent some lovely instructions for toys made using plastic bottles and also put us in touch with Gianfranco Zavalloni who wrote the delightful 'Manifesto of Children's Natural Rights'.

Christian Nyampeta sent us an amazing instruction on climbing devices, gave a workshop on 'Non-Specific Measuring' and also contributed with 'Exuberance as a Tool for Domesticity' an essay around playfulness. Jackson Lam did all the graphic design for the show and gave the 'Sandwich Stories' workshop alongside Ross Bennett as Hato Press. Jackson is also the designer of this manual.

Blue Firth sent us a great instruction on how to build geometrical structures with chickpeas and toothpicks and ran 'A Fuzzy History of the British Imagination'. This was such a big success that her gigantic fuzzy felt board was donated to the Portman Centre. We are also involved in developing an arm of the project that will commission artists to develop toys for children inspired by the American company from the 1960s called 'Creative Playthings'.

Beto Shwafaty sent an instruction for cardboard furniture that was used in the Justice for Domestic

Workers workshop and gave the 'Productive Resistances – Gambiarras, Social Urgencies and Self-Expression' workshop. A bench developed with local nine year old Nabihah Rahman in that workshop became part of the Grand Domestic Revolution GOES ON exhibition at The Showroom. During the J4DW event we also built a cardboard table from an instruction by Alex Jones and a cardboard chair design I adapted from 'Nomadic Furniture'. To know more about the J4DW struggle please see the text 'Domestic Work in British Society'. I can only apologise for not having a better recording from our meeting to transcribe. There was probably one of the most generous groups of visitors that we had and hearing their parenting challenges was the most moving experience of the whole project. The last workshop was developed by Jillian Greenberg 'Cardboard Shape Toys' and it is also included as an instruction.

During the exhibition we hosted a series of events and tried to include them here as best as possible. The event 'Survival Strategies for Cultural Workers' was set up by Emily Pethick and myself and we plan to keep it going as a series of meetings at The Showroom. We wanted to create a space to discuss the different challenges and solutions to everyday life from the perspective of a cultural worker, specifically in relation to parenting.

The 'How to Support the Artists / Mother / Father?' discussion was chaired by Martina Mullaney from Enemies of Good Art and focused around the current strategies or lack of them by art institutions to include mothers and fathers in the art world. Other speakers included Bryony Kirby from Culture Baby and Kim Dhillon from Crib Notes. Alison Powell was a visitor and ended up contributing with 'How to: BE A WRITER (on parental leave)'. 'The Final Event' original idea was to cover all the different areas of the project. Speakers included Cathy Palser a teacher from Portman Centre, and Kathrin Böhm and DJ Simpson, artists and 'parents of the same children' as described by Kathrin at the event. Lamis Bayar has been a great supporter and partner to the project and it was a shame that she was unable to attend the event as planned. However her essay is included here 'Invisible Spaces: the Womb, the Cot, the Kitchen' and we plan to discuss the questions for the launch of

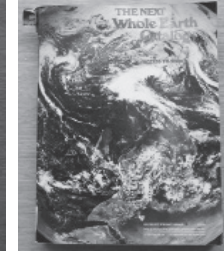
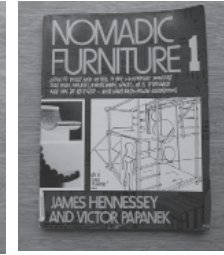
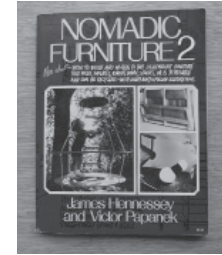
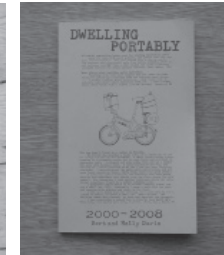
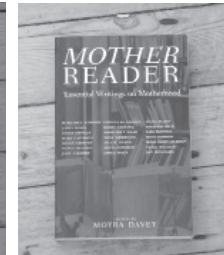
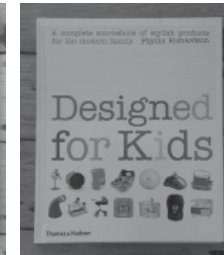
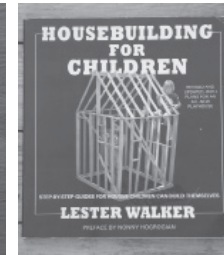
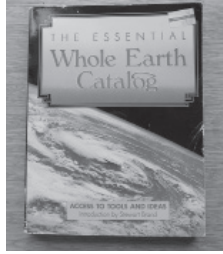
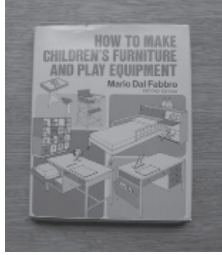
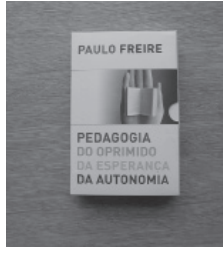
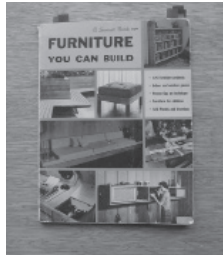
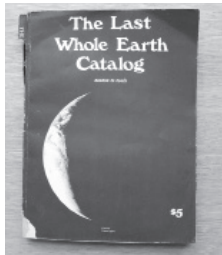
this manual. We also met Townley and Bradby which was also a perfect match, they have contributed with 'Instructions to Ourselves' in flashing speed and during the first school week of school! And lastly a contribution from Jenny Richards, 'Manual Research: A Few Thoughts' who dropped by The Showroom to discuss ISP and ended up being a life-saver with her insights on open-research, manuals as a feminist practice and the political implications of the project.

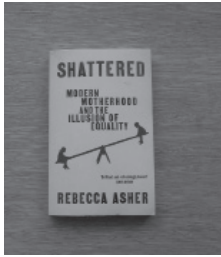
I would like to thank all the other contributors that I haven't mentioned here by name, and to extend that to all the visitors. I hope the manual becomes an inspiration for many utopic pragmatic solutions and discussions to come.

## The ISP Library

The library was set up to function as a research tool and reflects the interests of the project in education, utopic, parenthood and DIY among other topics.







## Interviews



**Abeona Nursery**  
Interview with Shah Miah  
12 March 2012

Andrea Francke

**Could you talk a bit about your background in economics and how it brought you to become a provisioner of childcare?**

Shah Miah

**I read economics at university, development economics as well as standard / classic economics. I was interested in development issues not only in this country but throughout the world: Asia, Latin America and different models of development. More specifically on how education played a major role in development in countries such as South Korea, Malaysia and to contrast that with Pakistan and Bangladesh. South Korea and Malaysia are up in the first world now within fifty years of independence and devastating wars. Pakistan and Bangladesh have actually been independent longer and have higher resources but human capital in education was so bad that now these countries are lagging behind. I come from Bangladesh myself so I'm aware of the educational failures of that nation. So I read economics and I know about the histories.**

**Obviously I had to make some money in this country so I started a restaurant which was Malaysian / Indonesian. I had three of them. I ran them for about three years and then decided I was going to go and do the thing that I really wanted to do, set up a nursery.**

I also worked with a member of parliament as a speech writer and would hear the Tories go on about how 'working class citizens would go on welfare and were useless, no matter how much resources you put in place they will always turn out to be criminals or non productive members of society' and my view was that this was not the case. My view is that give the resources that middle class children have to working class children and this would make all the difference. How people turn out - it's nurture as opposed to nature. Give them the same resources and you will have the same results. It's got nothing to do with the fact that the parent is a millionaire or a day labourer. I think most people can do most things given the opportunity and resources.

Andrea

Is there any specific interest for you in 'Early Years'.

Shah

The foundation is laid at the early years stage. What we try to do is actually lay the foundation for them to go into school without having to be scared, knowing how timetable works, knowing how to share toys, eating with other children, how to behave around adults, how to behave with other children of different nationalities, different ages. Essentially, we do the groundwork for them to at least have a chance to progress and develop their innate abilities.

Andrea

You seem to lead the nursery with a very social and political stance but you also want it to be fully sustainable. For it to make sense as a business.

Shah

I have rent, taxes and wages to pay. Somebody has to pay for this. Parents pay for this. All of my parents are fee payers. I don't get a single penny from the government. I haven't asked them for it. All the parents I have recruited are professionals - teachers, nurses, one mother has two jobs: one as a cleaner and as a community worker, she just finds the time and the money to send her child to a private nursery. We provide the best care they can get.

We cook fresh everyday. We have a very good chef. I don't have a freezer, no processed food is ever served. We have a fantastic local market on Church Street, great local butchers. We get our food every morning and cook it on the premises.

Andrea

And you actually manage to charge similar fees to the subsidised nurseries.

Shah

Yes. And we include everything, nappies and meals. And we don't have late collection fees because my view is that we provide a service and parents don't deliberately show up late to pick up their children. If somebody is ten minutes late is not necessarily always their fault. I don't want to hand them a bill for ten pounds after they had an awful day and an awful journey to come over and pick their children up. Other nurseries do but the thing is I don't have a mercenary attitude. Things have to be paid for but you don't have to have a hard-right type of capitalism, you can have a conscience one and make money as well. There is no contradiction.

There is a saying in capitalism: accumulate or die. But there comes a point when you can make that choice for yourself. Like Warren Buffet or Bill Gates, they give away two, three, four billion dollars a year, possibly more. The Bill Gates Foundation has probably given over 20 billion over the years. But I know a lot of other Americans who look down on these people. Who think that this is crazy. There are many views on capitalism and I don't think it is inherently evil, it can be regulated and people can regulate themselves.

Andrea

Let's talk about regulation. You are an independent nursery and you are the only independent one that I have interviewed for this project and that seems to give a different type of freedom in regard to making decisions and judgments. Last time we met you told me of a case in which the father was sick and the mother needed to find a job but she couldn't do it before getting childcare. So she was in a catch 22 and was having trouble getting help.



Shah

**I made a decision. This lady is looking for a job. She'll have a better chance if I care for her child. I gave her between four to six weeks and she did eventually get a job. Her child is still in my nursery and she pay me fees. We've got a payment plan for the first six weeks that she didn't pay. It's not a terrible altruistic thing to do, it is just normal decent human behaviour**

Andrea

**It's funny that this type of behaviour sometimes doesn't have space in the bigger organisations**

Shah

**It is difficult because if you are a big multi-national company you have share holders to pay. It's a personal thing and then who makes that decision? Can central management do that? If he does it for one what happens when another ten turn up? What if they don't find a job? It was a personal decision and if she hadn't found a job what could I do? You take a chance. At that point I could bear the cost and I was prepared to take the chance.**

Andrea

**And it's interesting because just before we were talking about how important early years are for children, but as well how important they are for parents.**

Shah

**Well, nowadays government is threatening to cut benefits if parents don't go to certain jobs and those jobs may not be right for that person. It is very important for parents to be able to have good quality, reliable childcare and fairly close-by. You don't want to be driving five miles. The transfer of technology. Money and power is shifting to the east and to a certain extent to the southern hemisphere: Brazil and Argentina, South Africa. If Britain and Western Europe don't act very carefully within a very short time, one generation, suddenly we won't know what hit us. We can't compete.**

Andrea

**I'm interested in inequality and I imagine that as childcare gets harder and more expensive, women will be forced to stay at home and look after the children. Will we have a generation of women who are better educated than men but when they get to their thirties they have to drop out of the market and get a part-time job.**

Shah

**Depends where you live. It's a matter of postcode lottery. Most of my clients are professionals. One of them is a Clinical Psychologist at the Royal Free. She had a baby quite late, in her late thirties early forties. Her husband is a diplomat, he can't help her looking after the baby. The baby is eight months old, she took a year off and now she is back to work. I don't think the baby will suffer emotionally because we are almost surrogate mothers. We genuinely love those children. We can't look at the children as costumers. I come in and I have eight puppy eyes going 'Hello'. And that's it, I'm on the ground playing with them. If you look at my staff they are like mothers. When the mothers come in you couldn't tell who the mother is and who the carer is. That was the idea, they come from home to home. From mum to aunt. We like to keep preparing different types of food, they've always got something new to discover, to taste. Lots of different resources. A lot of people say this is just a cage, a holding pen, these people don't know anything. This is a loving environment and an educational establishment.**

Andrea

**Was this family feeling something that you consciously went after? Against a professionalisation of the care industry?**

Shah

**It was a conscious decision on my part because I think there is no other way of doing this for me. What are you going to do? Would you say: I'm not going to hold this child I'm just going to let him cry, he is just playing up, I'm just going to stand here and watch. Like an automaton (sic) or a robot? You either go whole hearted 100% and give the love the child is giving you back or you just don't**

go into this industry. Go and become a trader on the stock exchange where you don't need a heart.

Today a child was crying for three hours. He cried so much he made himself vomit. We thought it was strange, we took him down to the local Doctor, called his mother, he's got a tummy bug that has been going around. We were concerned, we can pick up on things like a mother can because we know him and we care for him. For me is like being a father for seventeen children even though I have none of my own.

Andrea

Going back to the equality thing. Something that I find quite refreshing is that you are a man. It is not that common to find men in nurseries. I wish it was more common.

Shah

I'm not that hands on, I own the premises, I recruit the staff, I recruit the customers, I don't do any of the nappy changes! I'm more like the nursery pacifier or dummy. When the children are playing up and someone neutral has to come over, that's me. I play with them for a few minutes and back to the normal routine.

It is unusual, but I am a rather unusual person and I have changed careers a few times: I worked for Amnesty International, Greenpeace for a few years and then suddenly went into catering. I did that for ten years and then to the nursery. I'm quite confident in my ability to do things. I did my research, prepared and it helps to have money behind you. You can buy expertise. I really enjoy it. It didn't turn out to be like I imagined it would. I thought it was going to be a lot easier. A lot less hours and I would hardly be there. I do a minimum of 12 hrs a day. I wake up at 6am arrive at 7am some children come at 7:30, I put the heating on, do a quick risk analysis. Long story short the nursery closes at 6pm. Then I have to do all the paperwork, daily records, upload it so parents that haven't come can access it on the cloud. That's another forty minutes. Then I've to do accounts, washing up. Then it is 8:30pm, I'll go to a restaurant have something to eat, come home, sleep and then all over again. I do that six days a week. Although the nursery is not open on

Saturday, I hold English, Maths and Science classes for children 11 to 15 years old in the same space. We clear everything up and have twenty students from ethnic minority backgrounds, some are from Somalia, Kurdistan, North Africa. Their parents can't really help them because their first language is not English. I've been doing that for the last four months and the teachers from their schools have written to us to thank us. They have seen a great improvement. Again, yes it's about making money but is not a mercenary attitude. I've got three teachers and I restricted the number to 21 students. They get four hours. An hour for Maths, an hour for English, an hour for Science and the last hour is more flexible. The ratio is one teacher for seven students over four hours. You can sit down, talk to them, analyse it, find out what their problems are, give them exercises that will help them understand. If the child is still struggling take him and give him one to one for ten or twenty minutes or even for an hour. Get their confidence up. When their confidence is up you just see them running. I still make money out of it. These children pay me five pounds an hour. Is not a huge amount of money but it is enough. Downstairs at the Bengali Society they've got two teachers, sixty students and it's free. But I don't believe these children are learning anything. They are just coming in wasting their time, playing around. Usually we have to go and ask the teacher to keep them quiet because they are disturbing my students upstairs. My point is that is better for that child to play for two hours than waste their time doing nothing. That's why the parents send them to me. It is quality and I want to sleep at night. I want to have on my conscience that I gave somebody a decent service.

Andrea

This area is full of immigrants

Shah

We are a reservoir. Surrounding us are three of the richest areas in the entire country, St. John's Wood, Maida Vale, Marble Arch and Regent's Park. All around us are millionaire properties but here most people are on benefits. Some of my clients claim some type of child credits but the majority are fee payers. The English, Math

and Science classes, about 95% come from families whose main income is from benefits. My parents weren't that wealthy, my dad was an engineer, we never really relied on benefits. I used to go to the local school, where King Solomon is now, and I'm back to my roots. I think I should give a little back. I'm not an angel or whatever, it is a business. But it is a business with a conscience and a heart.

Andrea

Is there something you would like to share with a bigger audience that is not used to thinking about childcare.

Shah

Yes, we should abolish OFSTED. Use that money in childcare. We only need a couple of inspectors for the country.

Andrea

It's interesting because looking compared to what was happened in the 1970s in relation to self-organised childcare I think OFSTED has played a big role in redefining what childcare is now.

Shah

That would be impossible now because structures have changed. In the 70s most people would go to their family members in their street or few blocks away. Even strangers would discipline kids. Everybody new where the society boundaries were. Now you don't. Not necessarily a bad thing but family structures change and even if you have a mother and a father, they are probably at work. People who are sixty-five or seventy they still have to work. They haven't got time to look at their grandchildren. The kind of things we do at our nursery would have been done by family members. If you live in the South of England, in London, if the two parents don't work you won't be able to pay a mortgage. So you need people like us. We haven't grown up in a vacuum, it is supply and demand. The utopia of children being cared by other family members is unattainable now. You would need to re-organise society in a different manner. What we can do is improve what we have and leave space for curve ball

ideas, left-side ideas, not just prescribed things that are dictated by academics who live in their own particular ivory tower and their own bubbles.

Andrea

Because the project is about stimulating people to have left-side ideas on children and childcare would you have anything to expand on that?

Shah

Yes. In one of the books you showed me there is a kid that actually has a saw in his hand. If you took a picture of that child today and I was in it, I would be arrested by OFSTED. The Health and Safety rules have their reasons and you have to follow but if I tried to do something like that the insurance would be unbelievable, and OFSTED will not allow you to do such a thing. It's about the boxes they need to tick. It's not about the children it's about the paperwork.

**Linda Miller, Childminder**  
Interviewed at Room2play  
12 March 2012

Andrea Francke

**The first thing is, I had never heard of childminders before I moved to the UK. It is quite a different way of organising childcare. Could you explain a little bit how the childminder setting works?**

Linda Miller

**My name is Linda Miller and I am an Ofsted State Registered childminder. I am self-employed and I work in the Westminster, Marylebone and Western area of London. To become a childminder, you have to go on 'An Introduction to Child Minding' course, which lasts a few weeks. Then it's written down if you still want to be one.**

**You literally turn your home into a nursery. You are registered with Ofsted. You are inspected regularly by Ofsted and your place of business, i.e. your home, has to be of a certain standard and safety, to be able to have children there. Of course everyone living in the home, your partner, children and, of course, yourself, need to have a CRB check. You need to have basic childcare skills, which you develop during the course or your experience with children. I myself am a grandmother of two and mother of two. I've worked with children virtually most of my life as a babysitter and I was an unpaid babysitter for my grandchildren. I think I am very good at my job.**

**At the moment I have one full-time child who is bilingual. I have another part-time child who is bilingual,**

**English being the second language. I have an NVQ3 in Children's Care, Learning and Development, a BTEC in Children's Care, Learning and Development, Paediatric First Aid, Level II in Hygiene...**

Andrea

**That is quite a high level of...**

Linda

**Yes. I have, what else? I still do lots of training. At least every couple of months I do a training course. I have done an ECAT training course, which lasted about 18 months; completed all of the training in that and, of course, self-protection. I am a member of the NCME and it just goes on and on and on.**

Andrea

**Are there childminders that work with small children but also bigger children that are in school, pick them up after school and things like?**

Linda

**After school childcare? Some childminders do that. It depends. Some like myself do not have any school-aged children; my children have grown up but some people who do childcare have their own young children so it is convenient for them to pick up from the same school as their own children.**

Andrea

**Room2play has a mixture of childminders and mothers?**

Linda

**Childminders will use places like this, the drop-ins. Childminders, mothers, nannies, grandmothers bring under school-aged children here on a regular basis. I come to Flossy's on Mondays (it runs Monday and Fridays). The kids love it. They find it quite busy because everybody enjoys coming. It's a community thing. On a Wednesday I go to Portman Children's Centre. As childminders, we are obliged to go to these places so that we can be monitored as well as the children. They like to track the children's**

learning and development and they can do this when they are with childminders.

Andrea

Is the visit to the Portman Centre a more formal thing that you have to?

Linda

It is very informal but it is used to determine that we are aware of the development of the child's physical, emotional, literature ... everything that the child needs for its basic skills in life. We can help to make it an easier transition from say, their early years, which is under 5, to school age.

As you can see, this child looks upon me as a grandmother, she just loves me, and I just love my girl. She is just adorable. I hope I have helped in her development. She is a wonderful child, she learns quickly, she is walking now, and she has learned a few words in English. Obviously she speaks her own language at home but she will learn English with me and the other children. My part-time child speaks Portuguese. I have only had her for a few weeks unfortunately she is leaving now. They are moving, just when things were starting to get really nice and comfortable between us. It takes time to build a relationship, the attachment relationship between the minder and the child – the trust. It's tough when it's broken and I hope she ... she is a lovely child as well, so hopefully she will go on to someone who will develop her skills.

Andrea

How is this area feeling the cuts?

Linda

Resources are trimming but the basic needs that we need are still there, but things that we would like more of, they have gone. At the children's centres for example, we were able to use their resources, these aren't there anymore. Simple things like making play-dough, we have to do that ourselves now. We have to buy the things to make the play-dough whereas before they would supply the flour and the oil and the salt and butter. Little things like that

that don't really cost much and yet there are no resources. The play equipment isn't there. It's not renewed when it is damaged or broken or worn out, it's gone. We have had to make do with what we have now which is an effect of this.

Andrea

As a childminder, you take care of children in your house but you also really need this structure that the council provides such as the drop-in centres and...

Linda

We do. The children have to develop skills and you cannot learn everything at home. They have to come to these places. They love it! Look, just look around you. They are interacting, they are conversing – their social skills, emotional skills, their whole development. A lot of the things we do here, they wouldn't do at home because there isn't the company of other children to interact with.

## **Room2play**

Interview with Floss

12 March 2012

Andrea Francke

**What is Room2Play?**

Floss

**We open two mornings a week 10:00 to 12:00. It's for the mums, carers or anybody that looks after children to come in. The children play, the mums meet each other and just have a chat. It gets them out of the flats as well. Some of them live in flats that are overcrowded and they haven't got much room for these children to play.**

Andrea

**On my last time here, you told me your job organising Room2Play started as a paid position but now is voluntary.**

Floss

**Yes, I do it voluntarily but we are still part of the members of the pre-school learning alliance. We use their storerooms and things like that**

Andrea

**Who pays for the rent of the space?**

Floss:

**We don't pay any rent at the moment. We are using the residents' association free hours for the community**

**centre. They gave it to us to use otherwise we couldn't afford the rent.**

Andrea

**How long has Room2Play been here?**



Floss

**We had to move when they demolished this building, so we were over at the Four Feathers Youth Club for a couple of years. We've been back here for 5 years.**

Andrea

**It used to be here until they demolished it?**

Floss

**They demolished the old hall. Then they made a new one and started charging us rent. They gave it to a private organisation to run. The residents used to run the hall before.**

Andrea

**There are a lot of activities that run here – I know there is a seniors group, do they have to pay rent as well?**

Floss

**No, it is part of the residents' association. Residents get six free hours from the council to use the hall for different activities because we complained that we couldn't afford to rent it. They built a hall and then nobody could afford to use it!**

Andrea  
**Do you live here on the estate?**

Floss  
**Yeah, I live on the estate yes.**

Andrea  
**Are most of the people on the drop-in from the estate as well?**

Floss  
**Yes. Most of them are from the Church Street area. We have got some from Marylebone, we get quite a few from different areas as well.**

Andrea  
**One of the things parents have told me that they like about the space is how informal it is. Sometimes children's centres can be a bit daunting.**

Floss  
**Like I said, a lot of our mums are living in overcrowded accommodation. They do not want to come and do structured play. Here they can sit and just relax and meet other mums. It is for everybody, its for the children but also for mums to meet other mums especially if they have just moved into the area. Some of our families have got four children in one bedroom so the children can't even have a bike. At least they can play with the bikes and the equipment here.**

Andrea  
**Are there not a lot of parks in this area?**

Floss  
**Yes there is a lot of parks but sometimes when you go to the park you don't really meet anybody, you just go on your own. This is like a bit of socialisation for the mums and the children. Of course we have got a lot of childminders and they do help.**

Andrea  
**At least you can have community, a small community centre for their own children.**

Floss  
**Yes.**

Andrea  
**Last time there was a mum nursing here who said this was really important because she felt it was really difficult to go back into the world after becoming a mum. One moment you are in your flat with your baby and then what? This was her first step to...**

Floss  
**Yes, to come back out, yes. That is what happened to me. I come from a one mum family as well. I didn't know anybody. A Social Worker was here running the drop-in at that time. I came out and then I thought to further fill time for me I could help. Now I have been doing it voluntary.**

Andrea  
**It was a kind of a personal thing for you. You started coming to a drop-in and then...**

Floss  
**Yes, because I knew what it was like to be on your own in an area...**

Andrea  
**Could you talk a bit about the families? You have parents and you also have childminders...**

Floss  
**Yes. We have grandparents come as well. We don't get a lot of fathers; we have the odd few fathers come.**

Andrea  
**They are mostly women, even the childminders?**

Floss  
**The childminders are mostly women.**



Andrea

**About the grandparents. I am curious if there has been any change caused by the recession and cuts. Are people starting to leave their children with their grandparents more?**

Floss

**Yes, but sometimes around this area it doesn't work because they are not really living near their parents. You have got a nice community but not everybody lives with their family in the same area. My sisters live outside of London they look after their grandchildren now. There is not so much of that here. Quite a few of them come from other countries and their grandparents live in other countries.**

Andrea

**Is there something about childcare that you think is important to be shared? There are so many things about childcare I find really interesting: equality, it's effect on children, the community and...**

Floss

**I think it should be made a lot cheaper. We have got quite a few nurseries, as you know, around the estate. On the estate we have got one and around the area we have got quite a few.**

**It used to be quite good because the kids had a lot of things that mums could go to. But slowly the funding has gone.**

**Now the nurseries and their play groups are part of the Westminster Pre-School. They have all gone independent and have to find their own funding. We don't need a lot of funding to run. Then, because children have left, they have to find much of the funding and then of course they have to put the prices up. Where there was cheap childcare for a few hours, it's going to go. Also the Westminster Pre-School, they used to give parents jobs. Most of them are open only ten to one or like twelve until three, so the jobs were given to the people who had smaller children.**

Andrea

**The council was creating jobs that were compatible with family life.**

Floss

**Yes, the Westminster Pre-School, but now they have gone. Most of the nurseries, like private nurseries, they are only interested in employing people who are actually trained.**

Andrea

**Have you seen an increase in mothers who have to leave jobs because of childcare?**

Floss

**Yes, there are quite a few, it is hard. The childminders, a lot of them are expensive but it's because they have got things to pay out for .**

Andrea

**The final thing is that we are going to have this invitation for designers and artists to contribute to the project with instructions. Things and methods that people can use to improve themselves and to improve their lives. For example, take the problem in this area of small flats, maybe things could be foldable or collapsible so that they become big or small for storage.**

**Do you have any ideas or anything that you feel is missing, that you think, 'Oh I would like somebody to invent something that would solve this problem' or...?**

Floss

**Not really because we have got a lot of things. I can't think of any toys at all. Not at the moment probably.**

Andrea

**If you have any suggestions, let me know.**

Floss

**Yes, I will let you know, yes.**

## **Church Street Nursery**

Interviewed with Gaynor Wheeler (excerpts)

19 March 2012

Andrea Francke

**Could you give us an overview of the type of work you do here and what type of families this is geared towards?**

Gaynor Wheeler

**We have a mixture of children that would do extended daycare. So they're doing a morning session with a lunch.**

**The sort of parents and families we get is a mixture. We've got a section of parents that are working parents, which is often our longer children. We've got loads of parents that are studying and extending their skills for the workforce. A number of parents that predominantly access the service for the three and four-year-old funding, which is the free care from the government. We've got children that have come from the two-year-old pilot, and some of those parents are either studying or doing part-time work, some are doing mid-day, are supervisors, or working in schools that only have access for 15 hours. That's about primarily it.**

**So it's very varied the sort of families that we're catering for. It's not just one, sort of specific sort of family at the moment.**

Andrea

**You mentioned that there is something quite specific in your intake in relation to the free hours. That other**

**nurseries don't usually allow parents who only use their free access provision.**

Gaynor

**The majority of our children, which is the bulk, are coming for the free access completely. So they don't pay any drop off fees, and the literally come for the 15 hours, free funded hours. That's three and four-year-olds, 15 hours funded. We've also got 15 children that access the pilot for two-year-olds, free funded as well. That does make the bulk of the children that do attend this setting. That's purely because most of those children come from the diversity of this local community, which is an area of deprivation.**

Andrea

**So how do you see importance for these parents to have this 15 hours of free care?**

Gaynor

**I think it's not only about what is important for the parents, is actually mostly about what is important for the children. The government's philosophy is that every child should have access to nursery education. As we know, and studies will show, it's paramount that children get this early education before they go to school. It puts the stepping stones in place and makes that transition from here to school much more easier, as well as if they go into a section and they follow the same curriculum as we're following. Studies show the amount that children that go to nurseries come into leaps and bounds in school in later life as opposed to children that aren't accessing our agencies. It's much more beneficial to children.**

Andrea

**One thing that I found was interesting is that the nursery was already a kind of point of information for the community, I was wondering if that had intensified since the Church Street's One Stop Shop closure.**

Gaynor

**Hasn't intensified, I think, for parents outside the nursery. For parents inside the nursery, it's part of the philosophy,**

the parents will come to us and ask us information, or ask us where to go and we will naturally sign post. Obviously, we also get information come through from the authority, which gives us posters and things to put up, and information to give to parents. We're a natural sign post in area anyway, for the parents that we serve. Because we develop quite good relationships with parents, that becomes a lot easier as well. It's easier to come talk to us regarding a lot of things. Or if we notice something, we might suggest somebody that they should go see or sign post someone specific. So for us in the nursery, it's, I think, remained about the same.

The impact on the Church Street, I'm not sure exactly how to the one stop has effected everybody. I think people have expressed that it was quite difficult. That it was where people go for help. I think if you've got a teens setting or a children's centre, I think they have that in the hub already. So I think parents feel a little less threatened because they do come to us for sign posting. If we don't know, we're always happy to find out for people and then get back to people.

Andrea

It's kind of interesting, the nurseries, they fulfill all these different functions, so you're helping the children because you're giving them an education start. Then you're helping the parents to study or to work. Then you're helping...

Gaynor

You end up ... it's more than just one job. You're everything. You might identify things that you suggest that they go to the GP. Obviously, we're picking up early intervention with children's developments. So we would sign post where they need to go for that. You know, if we can see a parent that's distressed or depressed, obviously we talk to that parent, we try to unpick it and then sign post where they need to go, where you might start putting things into place, all for the benefit of the whole family. So you're not just looking at taking a child in and playing, educating the child, and sending them home again. It's a much, much bigger, bigger picture. I think, as things are going on in the moment in the economic climate we're going in, you know, the thought process is now the health

visitors just won't be doing the three year old checks, and they want us to do that. So that job's evolving the whole time. I think it's in some cases it's good because we know the children really, really well. But again, it's another job added to the job we already do. So it just grows and grows and grows. I don't think people realize how many strings and strands there are to the positions that we hold in the bigger world. In terms of recognition in the government world. I don't see it. Because, again, it's still the lowest paid job in the sector.

Andrea

I think it's kind of interesting how all this work is invisible for people that are not parents or they don't have children. There is still a discussion around: 'Why should nurseries be subsidised? Or why should we care about nurseries? We're not parents.' I think they don't realise the importance and the difference a nursery makes in a community.

Gaynor

It's not just about the children. It's about the whole community and the whole area in the bigger picture. It's not just a place to put children, which is obviously our primal work. It keeps many people going on to other systems. If you're a parent that comes to us to say, post prenatal depression, or depressed, we build a rapport and get you to work with us, and to work with other professionals, it might lead to a lesser bigger picture in the long run. As opposed to what that would look like if parents stayed at home and got worse. And then avoid it becoming a bigger issue for the health service, for example.

Andrea

Other thing that I'm quite interested in is equality. I was wondering how many fathers bring their children here.

Gaynor

We have lots. It's funny that you're the second person that's mentioned that. We had our fundraiser pop around on Friday to give me something. She was astounded, 'You have so many dads that come.' We have a lot of

fathers that come with the mothers. We have a lot of fathers that come by themselves, and drop off and pick up their children. We have lots of dads that will come and volunteer and grandparents that will come and volunteer and do activities with the children. So we're quite fortunate in the male world that we actually see quite a lot of men and have a lot of interactions with the dads that we've got. I don't know if that means they're not working, but...

Andrea

I think this is the third place that I've asked and they all have told me the same thing. It seems like it's quite different from other regions of London.

Gaynor

Well, it's funny because I worked for a pre-school, about six years ago, and we did a big project on fathers and fathers in nursery. Statistics showed, at that point, I don't know what it looks like now, that there were more fathers involved because of the economic climate, the change in cultures in families. Often the female were the major earner, or the higher earner. The roles had reversed, there were more men now caring for their children singly than there were women. It could be reversed roles or break-up of relationships and all sorts. It was a very, very high number.

However, if you look to cross settings, the number was still small. In our pre-school the number was very small. So the question at that point, when and where we were doing the research was: 'Where are the fathers?'. Because they weren't showing themselves as much as the statistics would suggest. So that was quite an interesting thing. We were doing a big thing about looking at: 'Do men feel threatened to going into an all-women environment?' and obviously, you talk to dads very differently than you talk to mums. The language that you would use is very different. Or if you design a poster, if you want to involve males, you design it in a very different way than you would design it for a female. So we were looking at lots and lots of studies to do those sorts of things.

Here, we are very fortunate. We do have quite a lot of fathers come and bring their children and we built very good relationships with a lot of fathers. Recently, a grandfather come in and did a pound cake activity. We've had another father, who was a chef, come in and do some cooking with the children. They seemed quite happy to stay all day and be involved. I think we're very fortunate.

Andrea

In terms of employees, or people that care for the children?

Gaynor

All female. It's very much a female world. There's still very little men in childcare. That goes back to the fact that the pay's too low. The government, at one stage, were looking at the pay structure to involve more men, which is annoying because it's not raising the pay because of the quality of the staff and what we do.

You'll find more men in secondary schools than you will anywhere else. It starts to come through in primary schools, you'll see men there. It's still not a high number, but as you go into secondary schools, you'll see a lot of male teachers, more than female teachers. I don't know if it's because the children or if the pay is better. It's definitely a pay thing in here, for us.

Andrea

It is also because how much mums seem to be pushed to embrace childcare as a career by the government? I've been talking to a few nursery assistants, and quite a few of them were parents that trained while their children were small.

Gaynor

Yes, a lot of our parents are studying childcare courses. I would question a lot of it. I'm not saying they don't have an interest. I just don't know if it's completely their vested interest or it's a reflection of the way that the government's now sort of pushing ... because all of this change in benefits and how much they get, and how long they can have it for, all of it is changing. It's about pushing people back into work. Now to push a female back into

work, often they're pushed to childcare because you can work around your child's hours. The other factor I've thought about around here, it's very much Arabic, and within that culture female always care for the children. We get lots of students but they don't realise the impact of what the job involves. Often it's: 'I like children. I like to work with children.' They think it's a quite cosy environment. It's not.

It's a very heavy environment, which is very paper based. It's very language based, and that obviously impacts on people that have English secondary language. I don't think people realize what the job really involves.

Andrea

So do you get a lot of people that start and then give up?

Gaynor

We have a few.

I'm not sure, if you look at the quantity of people that study childcare what's happened. When I did mine you had to do an entrance test to get into college. You had to have certain exams from school. It was two-year full-time course. One week in college, one week in placement. As now, through the MVQ route, it's six or so many hours you have to do in placement. It's direct assessment, which is good to an extent, but I think it's undervalued some of the work that we do here because it's a borderline of the qualifications. When you start saying, 'Write me a report on this one. Write me a report on that. Do the observations. Now tell me where the check...' It's a whole new ball game.

Andrea

I think a lot of people think about child care like: 'It's just a place where you go and you drop children and you...'

Gaynor

If you're not involved in it and it goes back to what you said, 'If you haven't got children.' People go, 'Well, you know, they just play with children all day.' Which would be nice, if that's all we did, was play with children. When you have to say why you're doing it and what you're doing it, where you're taking it. What does it need? What does

it mean? How can you prove it? Where have you got the evidence to show that? There's a more bigger picture than just playing with a child. So you can't just play. You've got to cover all of those strands, and also have to cover all of that as well as all the guidance that we have to follow and comply with. It's much, much more bigger than people think. I think so. It still got that sort of focus out there in the bigger world, you know, 'That's not a real job.' (Laughter) 'It's what you do when you're a mother.'

Andrea

(Laughter) A lot of people still push for: 'you have a child, just stay at home and take care of the child'. And doesn't recognize the impact that childcare has on the children. For example, I think there are a lot of statistics that show that early years is best way to increase social mobility.

Gaynor

Definitely. If you're a stay at home mum and you could access lots of different settings and droppings then that's great. If you're not ... or even if you're a stay at home mum, it's quite good for the child's development, interactions, social skills, and also for yourself. It can be a very isolated world out there, especially if you haven't got deep pockets that you can go and do and be where you want to be. It can be a very isolated world, being a mother. You can end up just sitting indoors. So it's good for yourself as well as your child to keep you going and keep you active and keep you involved and be part of the bigger picture.

If you go back to the pre war and during the war and after the war when communities were slightly different lots of mothers were at home. That's when things like mother and toddler clubs were formed. They were derived out of a group of parents that didn't have anywhere to access for their children and couldn't afford, say, nursery care or the nurseries weren't as advanced as many as there is now. So they formed things like parent and mother and baby toddler clubs. They might have been just run in a home or run in a church. It was somewhere where their children could come together and mix and integrate and play and learn, as well as parents could come together and integrate and feed on each other and

so forth and support and help each other and plan or whatever. Those places were often derived out of things and they were often run by unqualified people and they didn't need their registrations like we do in the nursery. So that's how a lot of those started out parents needs. I think women have changed. Haven't we? We want careers now.

Andrea

**So when you're talking about the impact of the cuts directly, is this impacting the families you serve? Do people from this area have had to give up childcare?**

Gaynor

**Before all the cuts come in and we lost our own grant, we didn't do fee paying parents. Well we lost our grant of £140,000 so now we've got to find that money somewhere else.**

**We had to go to fee-paying parents for sustainability and survival of ourselves. We've tried to keep our fees to a minimum and we've also tried to keep the number of children we need to support that to a minimum so that we do still support a lot of parents that are in area of deprivation. It's about survival of the fittest, isn't it? There's camps all over. I do think for some families childcare has got to be the first that gets cut, surely, because it's the most expensive thing that you're paying for, for you to work. If your job's gone, you might as well cut that. Parents are now looking to try to do things jointly, aren't they? It's better to do part-time than full-time jobs, which keep both of you employed but more money. You're sharing the childcare between you. So it's things like that I think we need to look at and families obviously as well.**

Events

### **Survival Strategies for Cultural Workers**

An informal open session for cultural workers to meet and exchange on the challenges they face, and strategies they have developed, in order to deal with the specificities of labour in the arts and cultural sector. In particular in relation to, but not limited to, parenting.

7 July 2012

**Starting quotes from Mother Reader,  
edited by Moyra Davies.**

Alice Walker

**A writer because of, not in spite of, her children.**

Susan Rubin Suleiman

**Mothers don't write. They are written.**

Margaret Mead

**Having a baby teaches you a great deal about mothers,  
however much you already may know about babies.**

Alicia Ostriken

**If the woman artist has been trained to believe that the activities of motherhood are trivial ... irrelevant to the great themes of literature, she should untrain herself.**

Paulina

**How do you negotiate your identity as a worker and as a parent? There are moments when you try to do both of them and you are in conflict but then is interesting how people create those boundaries because they have to be flexible, specially when you are working from home.**

Emily Pethick

**I found being on maternity leave really hard because I had previously based my whole identity on my working life.**

Emily Pethick

**You often bring your work into your home life but it's rare to bring your home life into work.**

The Survival Strategies will continue and are open to the public. To receive updates please send an e-mail to [info@theshowroom.org](mailto:info@theshowroom.org).



**How to Support the Artist / Mother / Father? Co-chaired by Martina Mullaney, Enemies of Good Art**

A discussion about the possible solutions for motherhood and fatherhood's inclusion in the art world. Speakers include Bryony Kirby from Culture Baby and Kim Dhillon from Crib Notes

21 July 2012

**Selected excerpts from a transcription of the discussion:**

Andrea Francke

**The event today is to describe different ways institutions try to support the artist mother or father, how mothers and fathers survive inside the art-world. Martina Mullaney will act as the Chair.**

Kim Dhillon

**I'm Kim Dhillon. I have an eight week old baby and a two and a half year old daughter. I'm not an artist, I'm a writer and an editor and I'm doing a Ph.D at the Royal College of Art at the moment, although right now I'm on maternity leave. I used to work as an assistant curator, organising exhibitions and talks on contemporary art, and I take care of both my children full time. So it's a bit of a juggle! I started this series of talks called 'Crib Notes' at The Whitechapel (art gallery), and it's a series of talks that opens out from the exhibitions and it's aimed at parents and carers of babies or toddlers, or people with babies or toddlers in tow. Basically it's a pretty simple and straightforward project. It speaks for itself. It's hosted at the Whitechapel and the talks start at 10am, an hour before the main gallery opens, and they are open to any parent, carer or child-minder. Typically there was an admission fee of £3 or £5 and for this they would get a curator's tour of the exhibition followed by a discussion**

**afterwards. Buggies or slings or whatever you need to get your baby around are welcome in the gallery space. There are additional staff on hand to help get the buggies around the space. On the tour, noise from the babies and toddlers is expected and that is not a problem. Toddlers are allowed to have dry snacks – there was an issue when some people brought wet snacks that jeopardised the art! (Laughter) The tours normally last 45 minutes, there can also be discussion about any element of the tour, the artwork or the artist. It can all carry on up in a studio room at the top of the gallery, but equally if more informal conversations start happening between the parents and carers they make that space available too. They also lay on tea and coffee and snacks and crayons for the kids. The talks and exhibitions included Alice Neil, John Stezaker, Thomas Struth, Walid Raad and they are usually lead by Whitechapel's curators, both of whom have young kids themselves. Occasionally the tours are lead by assistant curators. So that in a nutshell is what we are. A key thing about it is that it's not a toddler group; it's not a group for the children to get into art. It's a group for the parents to have access to the gallery space.**

**Andrea asked me what the inspiration for the project was and I came up with the idea from my own daughter because when I had her, I felt like my world had shrunk a little and I felt restricted from the things I used to do and would so easily take for granted. It was harder for me to travel around London with a baby in tow. I lived in Hackney and so the Whitechapel was my local gallery. Socially I'd feel a bit self-conscious when I was going around the Tate for example and she would start crying. I'd feel bad that I was disrupting everyone else's quiet and religious art viewing experience! Obviously that is my own issue, because I don't care when other peoples babies cry in a gallery, but my perception is that other people do care. Anyway, my hours were limited and geographically I was limited so this was something that I thought I would like to go to, and it didn't exist and I thought other people might want it as well. The other thing that inspired it was that I had gone from working part time and writing freelance and studying to being at home, at home with a baby and I felt like I needed a project. Not that a baby is not a project! I wanted**

something else to work on, to focus a bit of my energy on. I wanted a balance in my life and I wanted to be able to recognise myself. It was something for me to do professionally that was manageable and also something that I wanted to go to. I had been going to the Rio Cinema in Dalston; they do 'parent and baby' screenings. If you have a baby less than one you can go and watch a normal film with swear words and things in it at matinee times, and if the babies cried it wasn't a big deal. I thought - if it works for a movie then why wouldn't it work for an art tour? It would be the same sort of audience and the same idea or principle.

I approached the Whitechapel because it was the closest gallery to where I was living and Karen Brown, who is the Head of Education at the time, was really receptive to the idea. I think her own little boy was almost two at the time. She actually seemed surprised that she hadn't come up with the idea herself! It seemed so obvious that there was this audience and this gap in the market that were looking to increase their access, and it was something that she herself would have attended had she been on maternity. She had been to baby screenings in Greenwich and loved them. So that was it - we just took it from there. It was so cheap because there was no additional funding needing seeing as the tours were given by the curators of the gallery. There was a bit of extra invigilation needed but it was manageable. I had a chat with them when my daughter was three months old and we started the first in the series when she was seven months old. I think from the Whitechapel's perspective it highlighted a group of people or audience that had been overlooked. I think they actually do something similar at the Whitney called 'Stroller Tours'. The uptake has been really good from the start. It's still running, it's part of the Whitechapel programme now so I don't have that much to do with any more. They credited me with the idea and then went about co-ordinating it internally. It was really a matter of me saying 'Hey - look at this group. Look at how to work with this audience'. It's become part of the fabric of their institution and their public programme. It almost always sells out. It fun, albeit a little bit hectic at times, but people really enjoy the talks and getting away from their routine or toddler groups. As I said, there

is an admission charge and that is to cover invigilation costs. Ideally it would be free, as people on maternity leave don't tend to have much in the way of expendable income. It did occur to me before coming here for this talk that having the tours and talks an hour before the gallery opens reinforces this problem of marginalisation. Are we keeping the kids invisible in the gallery by whisking them upstairs before it opens - before the normal people come in (laughters). I mean, that is a bit negative, but there are logistical reasons and 10am is quite a good time of day if you have little ones to get out. That period before lunch is when people with babies are most likely to be out and about. I suppose you have to pick one of two avenues. You might want to make a statement about visibility, but that might make some people attending feel alienated. Maybe they don't want their kids to be screaming in a public gallery space. That would be a good thing to discuss. The turnover of the audience is quite high with people returning to work at around nine months and the kids seem to outgrow the event - within a few months they hit a wall in terms of their attention span and willingness to be dragged around a tour. Until they are 18 months they seem happy to be carried around. I've since moved to Camberwell and now I'm thinking of starting it up again at South London Gallery.

Nikki O'Rourke

My name is Nikki O'Rourke and I work for an organisation called Culture Baby which was founded a couple of years ago by a woman called Lucy Charkin and the principle I think is very similar to that of Crib Notes. Lucy found that after attending an exhibition at the Royal Academy with a toddler and getting dirty looks from everybody - well, she was pretty much asked to leave and she felt very excluded and embittered. Yes, she had a child, but art was very much part of her life, and for us to try and find a way for people who didn't want to leave their cultural life behind them, to still be a part of it, seemed crucial. What we do is put on events in London galleries which are for parents of babies and toddlers and the format is that we meet at around 10.30am and we have a lecture in a room, sometimes in a room in the gallery, and the lecture is aimed at quite a high intellectual standard

as fits the audience that we have. Mothers – and I say mothers because it is almost always women that we have in attendance – tend to be well educated and already quite engaged culturally. So the lecture is aimed at them, rather than something like *The Magic Carpet* at the National Gallery where there is colouring for the children and things like that. We also feel that it is very important that the children are engaged with what is happening as well, so have a variety of toys and activities which are integrated with whatever the exhibition is that we have gone to see. For example, with Damien Hirst, which we went to see in June, we always have a pack or little bag. We had butterfly cut outs which the children could stick on sheets of paper that were framed. We had pompoms that reflected some of the colours, we had other toys which were related. For the Freud exhibition, which was obviously figurative, we had hand-held mirrors for the children so they could think about images of people. The idea is that the children are engaged with the art so that the mothers can be with them but engage with what the lecturer is saying and not have to worry that their child is happy and content because the child will be stimulated. And, particularly for the older children, they will be able to take the packs home and later the parents and that child can do some of the activities at home, and they can talk about what they have seen. It can be an on-going thing. The philosophy is grounded on keeping parents engagement, but also to create a space where the parents and children are learning together by seeing things through each other's eyes. I often think that having a child allows you to see or engage with an artwork in a very different way. That's another thing that we want to encourage.

Louise  
Is it free?

Nikki  
No – it's not free, but we do have some free events called salons, which are monthly. Similar to this actually. A group of women will come, it's hosted at somebody's house, and somebody will be invited to come and speak or show a film they have produced or will perform some music.

Unfortunately, until we reach a point where the museums are willing to collaborate with us, we have to hire a space for us to use and we have to pay for the resources.

Audience Member

Before I went on maternity leave with my son I presumed I would be spending the entire year going around galleries with my son – hahaha! I went to the Royal Academy and the access issue began with actually getting there with public transport. That was something that was pulled into focus for me because I hadn't had any difficulties before. Even just getting the tube – there is no lift.

Martina

There is a cultural shift – a paradigm shift that need to take place so that in ten years time we won't be sitting here feeling isolated and frustrated, marginalised and discriminated against because we have children. 93% of women in the UK still take on the burden of primary childcare. Whether we live in this elite, culturally enlightened art-bubble or not, we are still part of that statistic. We may have partners that work part-time who may be artists or who are freelance, but from the women I have spoken to over the last year, a lot of them are unhappy and frustrated because they don't feel sufficiently supported either by the state or by what is taking place at home in their relationships. That is an area of discussion that we could leave for another day; the whole domestic question.

When my son was three months old I was wandering around an installation at the Whitechapel Gallery thinking – am I ever going to make work again? How am I going to make work? How am I going to afford childcare? All the worries that one feels, especially with a first baby. This wonderful installation, where sixteen chairs were installed around a table got me thinking, wouldn't it be wonderful if sixteen women sat around this table breastfeeding as a political statement, with our babies attached to our breasts, just talking about how the hell we are going to do this? I am sure I can't be the only woman feeling like this, so I organised the first meeting (*Enemies of Good Art*) on 17 July 2009 when my daughter was seven months old, and for that

meeting, twenty women turned up, some with babies, some without. We had a follow up meeting the following March and forty-five people attended. The first meeting was really an experiment to see who would come. We've had babies at all our events. In the second meeting it occurred to me that there is something that needs to be talked about here. What I think needs to shift is that there is a divide culturally between those who have children and those who don't. I'm concerned about the art world because I am part of it and you have to pick your fight. In discussions that I had with people before I was a parent, the topic of whether you had a child or not rarely came up as an artist. What happens to the artist with children? Well, the artist with children doesn't talk about their children, and so therefore when it comes to a public lecture series on this subject I'm all for it. It feels like there are things happening in London where people are taking the attitude that if these resources don't exist, we will make them exist. Unfortunately you can only reach a certain demographic because you have to charge for it.

There are systems in place. There are public lecture series happening all over London on any given day of the week. Somehow we don't feel we can go to them with small children. There are no crèche facilities. There are very few crèche facilities left in art schools for example. People I have spoken to said there were crèches everywhere in the 1970s. It was a cultural norm. Why isn't that the case any more? Who has a crèche? Ikea have a crèche. The Scottish Parliament has a crèche. You can drop your baby off at the Scottish Assembly from four months old. It's not just for staff – it's like that for anybody who wants to visit and see how the whole thing works. We are starting a campaign to get a crèche at Tate Modern. They have a huge staff body, many of whom must have children. Why wouldn't a large institution like that support artists in their fundamental right to practice as well as be educated and stimulated? There are lots of ways and models for functional crèches and I don't believe that they should only be for children from two years upwards – it should be from six months up. We should demand it as artists. If you want to go, with your child, and be stimulated, and Culture Baby and things like that are great, but you might just want to head out and see a show and be able

to concentrate on the work. There is nowhere in London facilitating that. You have to arrange childcare outside the gallery. I personally could not afford to pay someone to look after my daughter while I go and see an exhibition. I can only afford to have someone look after her if I am being paid to be somewhere, working. It's difficult to ask someone to do you that sort of favour because you want to go and see an exhibition. The last public meeting that we had at the Southbank Centre, there was a woman there who had arranged childcare with a friend for her kids so she could come to the meeting. When her friend found out that the meeting was the reason she was looking after the children she said no. Somebody will look after your kids if your child has broken an arm. In terms of reciprocal childcare arrangements, if money is an issue, people will help you out if you need something like go and get your shopping. Oh I'm just sounding out lots of my thoughts on this! That's because I think it's systemic. I think it is a feminist issue that is culturally embedded, and we can talk about feminist issues all we want and the arrangements we are making for possible futures, and the issues that we are having for our worlds becoming much smaller once we have children. We as artists, of any kind, we have a fundamental right as women, with children, to practice as artists and participate in culture. I don't support the idea of parents with babies visiting galleries outside of ordinary opening hours because that hides us away. I think politically, we should demand to be seen and that it becomes part of the norm that we are not divided and that we don't have to make apologies.

Kim

It's not something that occurred to me, but I'm reflecting on it just now. I just went to the Whitechapel and this is the way they suggested doing it. I think it was down to staffing and the extra invigilators and health and safety concerns. I just thought, fine, 10am works for me. Logistically, it's useful, but politically speaking perhaps it is detrimental. On the crèche note, I completely agree. At the Royal College of Art, having done an undergraduate course in Canada where it is normal to have crèches at universities, I would see people using them and think, if I got pregnant I could make use of them too. As I started

my PHD at the RCA when I was 7 months pregnant, I just assumed there would be systems and an infrastructure in place to enable me to continue to study. I went and had a meeting with Student Services, and they looked at me like I was from a completely different planet. When I found out there was no crèche I think my jaw hit the floor. The only thing they could offer me was a parking space in the alley so I would have easier access from the car! I thought, I guess I'm on my own here!

Martina  
But you're not!

Kim  
Well this is the interesting thing. I had my daughter at the start of Christmas break, and well – being a research student is easier than if you are doing an MA. You don't have course to attend, you are sort of on your own, but you do have seminars you need to attend. I would just take her with me and breast-feed her. She was quite an easy baby. Or I would bring my mother-in-law and she would take my daughter to Hyde Park. Sort of like my own one-man crèche. There is a community of parents, mainly mothers, who are trying to get something going at the RCA. One woman, Jessica Jenkins, who was doing a Ph.D in the History of Design, was really proactive in trying to get a crèche established because she had a three year old. She ended up giving up the battle. She put a lot of energy into setting up some kind of network with other people doing Ph.D's as well as research students who had young kids, because she felt that we were dealing with systemic discrimination against women. It is more commonly women who are looking after their children and if they are experiencing barriers to studying because of childcare, the institution needs to do something to stop that. The problem is that you are so busy trying to keep your head above water studying as well as looking after your kid that it is hard to find the energy to fight that fight. By the time you do have the time and energy, your kids are probably in some kind of childcare or educational institution themselves, so it's almost as if it's no longer your battle. I think it's a cyclical stepping by the wayside.

Martina  
Well I have made the Tate crèche my personal battle, and my daughter is three and a half now, and by the time it comes off, if it ever does, I won't need it – but I don't care! I met a woman at the V&A recently, in her twenties, and we just started to talk and found out we were both artists and we were talking about our practices and she was saying – I'm in my twenties, I know I want to have children and I don't know how I'm going to do this. This young woman said to me – well the reason I'm thinking of her is also because when you are involved in higher education at Masters level, there is never a point where anyone talks to you about whether or not you might want to try and fit a baby in.



Kim  
Fertility and professional practice is not something that seems to be covered!(Laughter)

Martina  
It isn't! So somehow you have to assume the male model of practice, which is – get your head down! Get on with it! And if you don't do that, you are perceived as being not so serious about it because you have decided to have a baby. And if you get to 35 – when is it going to happen, if it doesn't happen now? So this young woman – she said to me she would be much less frightened to have a baby if she knew that there was a crèche available to her. It does make it seem like a more manageable prospect. It means you are being supported by these institutions.  
Can you imagine if your daughter was enthusing

about going to the Tate because she wants to hang out in this amazing crèche?! And then you can go and see something! We did an action at the Tate where about twenty of us – twenty mothers and twenty kids – and this was a crèche Tate action. We got scuppered. They found out we were coming, and they pretended it was their own event. When we arrived they said – good morning, where would you like to build your crèche? And we said – The Rothko Room! A young woman who worked for the Tate – well, she nearly hit the floor. Now the Rothko Room is perfect, because it only has one exit and it is also beautiful. You can put one or two women on the door and that will contain the kids. A few of us would take that role on while the rest of us could go off and see some art. They said – You can have the Turbine Hall. To which I replied – We have four or five toddlers here who are liable to run in four or five different directions at any given time. It is not a possibility. So they gave us the space just beside the Starr Auditorium, we were very visible. Half of us stayed with the children and half of us went off to look at some art, and when they came back the looks on their faces! They just looked like they had been pleased senseless! They had 45 minutes to go and look at what they wanted. Some of them even had a coffee! And then came back and collected their kids. It was just amazing. But it was a battle to even demonstrate that this was a possibility! The next question was – in the new development in the Tate, couldn't we ask for them to make a space where we could do this formally? And I thought – no! We don't want that! We don't want some Big Society, build-our-own-crèche bullshit! We want a crèche facilitated by professionals. We could certainly make some sort of contribution to that through something like a membership scheme, but it is all perfectly possible.

We also demand state support for flexible childcare arrangements for self-employed artists and cultural workers, to change the art world's view of what it means to be an artist and have children. We demand a return of public crèche facilities within larger art institutions. Public lectures, artists talks and other intellectually orientated events hosted in art institutions should be child friendly and advertised as such as a means to end the discrimination against artists with

children. We will achieve that in many different ways and every effort that we make is important. We would not be gathering in this way if we did not feel there was some serious element of discrimination. We take on the political element also. I would like to invite you all to describe why you are in attendance today just now.

Our meetings at The Chisenhale and the Tate modern for example saw up to eighty people gather. At the Tate Turbine Hall we had over fifty people come with their kids. It was all documented and on our website. Yes – the cacophony of kids playing and people talking is something, but it didn't stop us from doing what we wanted to do. We all know that children can be a distraction and there are times when you want to be with them and engage with things together and there are times when you don't. When there is no real space for either scenario we have to take it upon ourselves to create them. I don't want to dominate the discussion with the idea of a crèche, but it does make art accessible

Andrea Francke

And it makes motherhood visible, which was something that really bothered me. When I was pregnant (my son is four now) I had this fear – I was looking around and I felt like no other artists were mothers as well. I was thinking – I can't do this. It's impossible. But over these last few years I have met a lot of women who have children and are continuing their careers as artists, but that is hidden for the most part. If you are an artist and a mother, you don't mention you are a mother you try and keep it separate. The fact that the colleges are closing their nurseries – well, that just makes us more and more invisible. When I was campaigning to keep the University of the Arts' nursery open and talked to other students about it, they didn't seem to care. What they don't realise is that it affects them even if they don't have children; they have a lot of female teachers who would not be able to be teachers if they didn't provide a nursery. Everyone is affected, but for them it was disconnected as a concern.

Abbey

It's part of the whole backlash against feminism. I find that with my female students and post-graduate students



**that they don't want to talk about feminism or feminist theory because they feel it's something they don't want to get into and it's something they don't want to be marked by. It's such an uphill struggle!**

Martina

**Yes. It is the case if these issues are acknowledged in these institutions in that way, then something will have to be done about it. Often we don't do something about it until our backs are against the wall, and I am guilty of that.**

Abbey

**Yes – things are made plain to you like never before. You feel the gender divide, and even the gender divide in your own relationship.**

Martina

**I would have always called myself a feminist, but I never really actively contributed to the cause until I went to university.**

Abbey

**Especially with having a girl as well, you start to think about what things will be like for her at your age.**

Martina

**I think the next campaign for Enemies of Good Art should be concerned with women who have their babies in their mid-twenties. To convince women to have their babies in their mid-twenties! 35 is an odd time to be getting started! Your biological clock is screaming at you at 35, the decision is pressured. Maureen Paley gallery has said publicly, at the RCA Professional Practice series of seminars, if you don't hit it and make your name by 30, forget it. A lot of people come out of art school in their late twenties, give yourself a few years to get going. When are you supposed to have children? If you are serious, you don't and you continue with your career. But a lot of artists want to have children. For those that do not want to have children, that's a different thing. If you do want to have children, well that is a completely ridiculous thing to say. You can't control how successful you are, but 26 I**

**think is the optimum age because you can have your baby and by the time they go off to school you can go off and do another degree. You are young enough to hit that 40 career milestone.**

**It is a visibility thing. We need to make visible crèches and such like to mothers and rather than having special times mothers can visit the gallery before normal opening hours we need young women to see there are facilities that they could use, that it is doable and that there are women managing this situation.**

Andrea

**I have a lot of friends now who are 35/36 and they are making that decision – whether to have children or not. They would like to have children, they would like to have a career as an artist, and they don't see how those things can combine. I think if you were in your twenties and you could see women combining those things and having space and support and being valued they would feel that they can do it.**

Louise

**And where did your name come from?**

Martina

**When I was pregnant, an older friend of mine, who is not an artist, we were having lunch one day and she quoted Sarah Connelly? – there is no more solemn enemy of art than the pram in the hall. The pram and the hall has stuck with me, and I thought about it a lot when I was pregnant. I just couldn't get this line out of my head. After my child was born I googled it to see exactly where it came from, and it's an old Etonian who is proffering this idea that any distraction at all is distracting from your true genius.**

Nikki

**Or the female mother genius! My background is working for Sotheby's as a specialist before, and the specialists I worked with who were the most successful did not have children. The head of Impressionists, head of Contemporary, I could go on – all of them lead a life that did not involve families. One of them did have children, but she was so wealthy that she farmed out all of the**



aspects of her life to paid help, so her work was still wholly her career. It is tragic that there is no way of combining the two. That was why I had to resign in the end, because the possibility of part-time was unthinkable. I have found a lot of the discussion depressing as I had thought that being an artist you would have the flexibility, you could work from home – I had thought that was a career that you could base around parenthood.

Jessica

**But you're not only time-poor; you're poor. (Laughter)** Some people have told me that the reason they have left childcare schemes is that they found them to be judgemental. They have been met with the opinion that women should be at home – should work from home. And I thought – well you can't pay any more attention to your child if you are working from home.



Martina

**Well, our practice is such that you should be able to work from home, you should be able to dip in and out of things and have the career that you want to have but clearly the situation is not as simple as that. There are some awful statistics – I can't give you the figure – but significantly more women – go to art schools in London than men, but significantly more women will end up working – well, if you look at the staff at the Lisson gallery, they are almost all women but if you look at the roster of artists they represent, well, out of 35 names I was confident that at least 27 were men and there were a few names I couldn't**

**be sure of. Look at any of the galleries – apart from Frith Street who are very supportive of women artists. The discrepancies are huge. Look at the statistics in terms of the plinth at Trafalgar Square and also the Turner Prize. Now, the Turner Prize is not as bad as other equivalent art prizes.**

**In terms of literature, we have done a series of talks on the endemic problems for female writers. You should hear the writer Bidisha talk on this. She is scathing about the fact that when she worked for the Guardian, equivalent piles of books would come in by men and by women and it was always the men's books that got the reviews. And then you start to notice as you look through the papers that, actually, all these books are written by men. And the statistics in relation to filmmakers are equally bad. I was in our local DVD shop on Broadway Market, and I was scanning through the shelves. It's one of those lovely trendy DVD shops where it's all listed by director, and it's all men!**

Martina

**So how do we infiltrate that to come up with solutions for a better future? Do you think Andrea that this discussion is in any way supporting your activities here?**

Andrea

**I think so. For me it is a matter of trying to understand the problems at different scales, and then negotiate between them. I think the visibility thing is a big thing because it's personal. I guess I've experienced that thing of working my way up in a job and looking at the people at the top and thinking – oh God, they don't have children.**

Martina

**The other thing we haven't talked about – and I have to bring up the issue because I find myself in this position at the moment – is the single mother. The single mother artist, and how do we support her, and how can she cope on her own, in a city like this? I mean, I have presented this discussion as coming from a very personal experience and I have talked about my own difficulties financially as well as domestically right down to housing, and I've talked about this on Resonance FM as well, because I'm**

not ashamed of it in any way and I know that I am not the only woman going through this. I have spent a lot of time even just talking about the whole housing issue. I know there are a lot of facets to what we are talking about, how we support each other, what campaigns we should start or how do we make the climate better. I mean, I'm alright now because my girl is at nursery and I've got that sorted, and I have work now so I can afford to take care of us, but there was a period when I had neither. My friend has just come back from Canada because she wants to be in the middle of the art world, where she studied, and she is trying now to get housing without having to end up in a homeless hostel. And people do end up in hostels, with sex workers and crack addicts and people straight out of prison, with a 9-month-old baby. I think there is something interesting in the fact that the changing economic climate has been felt much more acutely by women than by men. There has been a lot of discussion about the fact that the increase in fees to go to college will change the art scene because the working class will not be able to go to college, but no one is talking about how that might affect the proportion of women that become artists. With all the ways in which women are already excluded, it feels as if we are going backwards instead of forwards!

We are going backwards. There are more women out of work now because of the cuts than there have been in 25 years, because women can't afford to pay childcare and continue to work. An employee at the Whitechapel, at the education seminar - she won't mind me saying this - she was working at the Whitechapel and she was paying for childcare. She came to me and said - you know, this is such a good thing you are doing, and she told me that when she was doing that, she had £300 left at the end of the month. But if she didn't do that she would have had to give up her career. These are similar reasons why you gave up your post also.

Martina

We pay the highest rates for childcare than anywhere else in the world. This was on the BBC news. It has to be state supported. Our childcare has to be state supported. The state supported childcare that we get at the moment - for those who might be young enough to want to have

children and thinking about it as a possibility - and I'm trying not to come across as someone who thinks it's all doom and gloom because it's not. I had an argument with a woman at the nursery. She said, you get fifteen hours of free childcare from the state each week. I turned up at this nursery and thought this is wonderful. fifteen hours - two days. So I can work those two days and not have to spend any money on childcare. She said - no. Wait until you hear this for insanity. Those fifteen hours are spread over five days so you can get three free hours a day. The rest you have to pay for. Some nurseries will let you take the fifteen hours over two days but you have to commit to at least another paid day or two to take that up.

Abbey

Is that the way it works everywhere then?

Martina

No - the State run nurseries, you'll get three hours on each of the 5 days. There are private nurseries that are charities who fundraise in order to keep the costs down. I get the fifteen free hours but I do have to pay for the extra hours, which is fine, but I thought I could get in two days, which my friends thought you could do and then ended up with a £700 bill, thinking where the hell did this come from? And the thing is that you get fifteen on a full time place, but on a part-time place you only get the relative proportion of that. If this doesn't feel like a conspiracy on a grand level, please tell me. I mean, am I being paranoid?!

Jessica

Well what about the state registered playgroups that are for children from the age of two - no one seems to know about those. They do still exist. I've got my son into one and it's three hours a day over five days for £25 a week.

Martina

What do you do with three hours in the morning? I mean you can get your laundry done, but in terms of your career...

Jessica

**Well, it means that I could maybe have two hours a day where I can do something. That's not ideal in the slightest, but the fact that people don't know about this is confusing. It only seems to be communicated by work of mouth.**

Sarah Jane

**Is that Sure Start?**

Jessica

**I'm not sure whether it is or not. I'll find out.**

Martina

**Oh I do love Sure Start playgroups.. I remember sitting at one where there were about fifteen women all lined up along the edge, watching our kids play in the middle – and I thought, why are there fifteen women sitting there bored out of their trees? And you can't bring a drink – you can't even bring a coffee with you because you aren't allowed a soft drink.**

Jessica

**I've had a really busy six months art-wise, with residencies and art fairs and the like, and I feel like I'm doing a good job of juggling everything, even though I'm exhausted. There is a conference I want to go to in October. I've just realised that she will have to come with me. I thought - is that insane to take a 6-week-old baby? But actually that is probably the best time to take them. When I say that I have a young baby – and it's Engage that I have been working for – and they said to me – do you know, this has never come up before. Which is surprising considering a large proportion of the conference population is female. They said – ohhhh, em, that should be fine?**

Jessica

**So I think I might just do it anyway as a challenge!**

Martina

**You must do it! And document it!**

Louise

**Martina, do you think that – well, working with Andrea and going to the nurseries, meeting teachers and parents it's been really interesting for me.**

Martina

**As a woman without children?**

Louise

**Yes – because we (The Showroom) are working in this neighbourhood specifically, we are learning about what is happening and how new government cuts are affecting this community and how that is felt so immediately through families, and through problems with housing. This has been really interesting for me to re-situate these political concerns through families and the domestic. Hearing you today and thinking of these things in terms of feminism – well of course I am a feminist and I would say that The Showroom is a feminist gallery, so I was wondering if you thought that ideas around being a mother are no longer so embedded within feminism and that is problematic? When you talk about public transport, I'd never even thought – I mean of course I knew it was probably hard to get buggies on buses, but I didn't think of it in terms of it being this constructed space that is essentially misogynist.**

Martina

**And if you talk to women who were active during second wave feminism they say that the one thing that feminism forgot in the second wave was the mother. It's no coincidence that we are talking about it now. When you look at it, what feminism has got to do, the feminist movement – and I have no problem with talking in terms of the feminist movement or using the word feminist and feminism – because we have to continue. The work is not done. I think second wave feminism achieved wonderful milestones, but the battle is not over by any stretch of the imagination. I think the current wave – whether we are in third or fourth depending on who you are talking to – we have to work on the next set of issues and motherhood is far and away on top of that pile.**

Louise

**Yes – though motherhood you really see the male dominance of the public realm or public transport or provision. Of course you feel that without being a mother too, but if it is through motherhood that is most strongly felt then it is definitely the case that it is an important feminist battle.**

Martina

**It is a feminist battle and not only in terms of art and culture.**

### **Final discussion**

A final event will explore some of the issues raised by Invisible Spaces of Parenthood. With Cathy Palser, Kathrin Böhm and DJ Simpson.  
28 July 2012

### **Excerpts from a transcription of the discussion:**

Cathy Palser

**For me, one of the joys of being a nursery school as opposed to a school for over fives is that the national curriculum is not part of our day, and we can do whatever we like with the children as long as it's advancing their skills and their learning. For us that means lots and lots of practical building and experiential learning. Rather than telling a child some information, we let that child find that information, and they don't have to sit to do that. They might chose to sit to do that, but they might choose to do that running round and round and round! We have free flow to the outside space, we have access to the workshop and woodwork tools, we have open access to any resource that we own so if a child wants to get it out, they get it out. They don't have to ask for it. It's not up higher powers. They can just get anything they want to work with. That's important to us because that's how a young child, or how I feel young children learn. I think that's really vital. I think the children need time to learn something rather than being told – 'for an hour you're going to learn this' and then move on to something else. Our kids can come in and build something on the woodwork bench and they can do that every day, all day, until they're finished. It could take a month or it could take them two days.**

Andrea, you were saying that making was part of the different strands of your thinking. I think that it is a really integral strand because we see the children building things as part of their education; we see the skills that the parents have being passed onto us and passed onto the children. It is part of the children's education – not just them learning to sew, but learning from other people, people who already do it, and watching other people doing it doing it themselves. So for us the experience of production, the experience of making something which is about the doing, is really really important. So the big difference between us and the children making something at school is that the children here are experimenting. Whereas in school, as children get older they tend to be told what to do. That is because of the National Curriculum – the sense that they must produce this item to this pattern, whereas with our children - they can start off building an airplane thinking it's going to be a certain size and end up with something enormous with no wings! They have the freedom to experiment and all the time in the world to do that. The parents come in too and do that, and that's part of the social sharing of knowledge that I think is really important to young children and to the community. Our setting is just a part of the community. It's not like we welcome them in, shut the door and this is what the children do all day and then other people – adults – go off and do something else. What we do in our setting is what we would like to see done across the whole community. So when a group of parents come in and get their knitting needles out, the children will sit with them and produce – well – this – which is just a big knot. (Laughter)

They are only three! But they have a great time doing it. And the parents are chatting and the kids are chatting, and that's a model that I think should be happening elsewhere in society. You know, parents cooking, kids watching. I think it's much more acceptable with cooking. Cooking is a skill that is passed on, cooking is a skill that people are proud of, cooking is a skill where people will make something that is not the same as what other people would make and be proud and happy to show it. And yet, other sides of what people make – or used to make in the past – those skills are hidden. We

have parents that come from communities where they're carpenters. They come from places where you build your own house, they come from places where you grow your own crops, they come from places where you keep your own chickens. They don't share any of that because there is no place for them to do it. Those skills are dying off in the immigrant sections of this community. We had some chicks. We had some chicks in an incubator, they hatched. The number of parents that came in and said. Well, one member of staff said 'When I was a child my mother bought me a chick every Easter and I would wait for it to grow and feed it and then I would eat it.' (Laughter) But you know, that information, unless there had been a chicken – oh, you know, there aren't many chicks out there on Church Street! There is no hatching going on at all in these estates off Church Street, and that information about how people did things is just completely lost really. So we are trying to get some of that going. We've had chicks, we've had knitting, we've had sewing, we've made a huge wooden thing – it's about 10 feet tall. The kids say it's a robot. It's got a piece of my old central heating boiler in it's midst (Laughter) – but we had parents coming in and building that with the kids.

I think the government is obsessed with reading, writing and arithmetic. They want children to go back to sitting in rows and reading, writing and arithmetic, but actually those three R's were originally reading, wroughting and arithmetic – making things, and that was as important and given as much value as reading and writing.

Audience

Can you say that word again?

Cathy

Wroughting. It's spelled w-r-o-u-g-h-t-i-n-g. And making things was part of learning. It's partly gone because economically – well, we don't make things any more. There aren't coopers making barrels, we don't make things with our hands in the same way, but the skills involved in making things. It's not so much that it is a necessity, but we need the thinking and problem solving. The experience of making things is more than just how

**to fit two pieces of wood together. It's more than that. It's about problem solving and being creative. And that is missing when you take wroughting out of education. What you often get in education is people being told things, rather than people learning things through their own experiences.**

Audience Member

**You've got a masters degree in Death and Dying from Winchester University, could you tell us some more about that?**



Cathy

**I could easily link that to DIY! It wasn't taken in relation to kids but in terms of relating that to society and in terms of the way children deal with death it is fascinating. I do seriously think that when we talk about DIY one of the things is that we've become really removed from what would be normal parts of life and death. We no longer, in English culture, wash the bodies of the dead. We no longer have anything to do with it. We pay someone else. And that, in a way, is related in that sense to DIY. The families on Church Street that are from other cultures. If you are Egyptian, you buy the fabric for your mother's shroud, you make your mother's shroud, you wash your mother. They find it really bizarre that we just call somebody! (Laughter) Someone's going to do this! I think that does relate to that DIY issue, that we are victims of capitalism for all sorts of things. We have become extracted from the real business of living.**

Andrea Francke

**That's interesting because one of the questions Lamis (Lamis Bayar couldn't come so she sent her presentation and that has been converted to an essay in this publication) had was about children's invisibility. Are children invisible because we are handing them to other people to raise and educate? As a society do we want to get involved with the problem or do we want to create structures that can deal with it for us?**

Kathrin Böhm

**It's a double interesting situation for me. I'm an artist and I've never talked about being an artist and a mother in public. And I've never been on a panel with DJ Simpson before. We are parents of the same children (laughters). He is an artist also and we are normally not invited together as artists. It's quite funny.**

DJ Simpson

**And we don't talk about it too much. I'm very curious about what you have to say. (laughters)**

Kathrin

**I'm a member of a group called Public Works (artists and architects) and we use the words play and urban toy a lot and experience and public space. When we do a project we don't think about specific age groups or community groups. We just think of a public which is made from different groups and we don't have specific pedagogics or methods for each of them. A lot of our work is about making public space a space you have to experience, again through making in it rather than just taking it as a volume you move through or buy a coffee in. So a lot of our work is about a public space where you are actually part of the production of that space either through making or sometimes consuming.**

Andrea

**Has your work been affected by having children?**

Kathrin

**There are four of us in Public Works and we all have children. Because we are a collective we could**



compensate for each other breaks. Projects and practice wasn't really disrupted. I think you (DJ Simpson) had a different experience being a single artist.

Andrea

**Did the type of things you do changed?**

Kathrin

**I think a lot of things I've been doing anyway suited young children very well anyway. Maybe I should challenge myself a bit more. (Laughs)**

Kathrin

**There is a point where the personal becomes political and it's political to demand full equality. It was very clear from us that we would both take time off completely. And we both started at the same time 50/50. And then sexism becomes clear because as a woman it is completely clear that you take maternity leave, which you (DJ) never had. People just assumed you would take every single exhibition offer on their terms. So sometimes it was even harder for him as a commercial artist plus as a man to say – 'No, I'm taking time off' and this has to shift.**

Kathrin

**I'm quite proud that the sharing worked. And often as artists and couples it doesn't, because there are all these assumptions, there are a lot of insecurities in our situation. There is no guaranteed income which increases the pressure but it's fine.**

DJ

**If one of us decided to become the main bread winner and one the main carer...**

Kathrin

**I think it's quite political and it relates to the division of labour and outsourcing. I'm someone who like to do most things myself which isn't necessarily the most efficient. To keep the children home to a great extent, to smoulder your own chicken, to be quite aware of how process have to be handled and to be involved in all of these handlings. But it also makes us quite inefficient because it would**

**probably be more efficient if one of us got a full time job and earned lots of money.**

Lawrence Bradey

**I'm an artist and I work in collaboration with my wife and I also have a job that earns money. My practice is about 75% e-mail based and a lot of that can be done from home so I think that has actually made me a worse parent! Because normally I'm at home with children but I'm also trying to get things done or reply...**

DJ

**There is a cliché when you are in the playground on a saturday and you see all the dads on their phones!**

Andrea

**But I think there is such a big pressure, I don't know if it is the UK or London, to be a good parent it's not enough that you take your children to the playground but then everybody is looking at you and are offended that you are checking your e-mails. I mean you are there and it's such a stressful public relation. Where I grew up my mum would open the door and there was the countryside, and she would say. 'Go, come back for dinner.' I just feel like here, as a parent you are being judged the whole time.**

Lawrence

**...Respecting your children's competences and that you don't need to be there all the time. They may not be able to cross the road by themselves but being there at the park with them may be enough.**

Kathrin

**At Christiania (community in Denmark) they don't have a school. They decided everything communally and they could never agree on any pedagogies. But they have this sign hanging up. 'We are learning by doing' and you learn things with your children just by doing them together. Which I think is quite different than to feel constantly under pressure to do something with the children. I do things and sometimes the children join in.**



Kathrin

**There are situations where I find myself working on a commission that is being curated or managed by people without children. Then there is a real conflict. If you work in public commissioning or public galleries a lot of the staff are still quite young and don't have children, or if they are older, there are actually a lot of child-free curators. And they expect you to come for two weeks to work non-stop. And to actually claim this need, I only have three days a week and if I really over stretch it it may come to four days and a half. It's quite frustrating that the structure of pay in the arts is filtrated by this idea that you can put all of your time into making your art.**

**Workshops**

The workshops for Invisible Spaces of Parenthood were developed by some of the contributors from the open call for instructions. They were open to the public and we also had some of the nurseries dropping by.

**Workshop: Non-Specific Measuring – Christian Nyampeta, Wednesday 4 July, 1–5pm**  
During the workshop tools for deviant measuring will be made. These appropriative instruments could indicate the size of a cloud, the psychogeography of an air flight, or the distance between two ideas.

**Workshop: Sandwich Stories – Hato Press, Wednesday 18 July, 1–5pm**  
A recipe book for kids, by kids, with fun in mind.

**Workshop: A Fuzzy History of the British Imagination – Blue Firth, Friday 20 July, 1–5pm**  
Discover various constructions of the British imagination through fuzzy felt.

**Workshop with Justice for Domestic Workers, Sunday 22 July**  
Closed Event

**Workshop: Productive Resistances – Gambiarras, Social Urgencies and Self-Expression – Beto Shwafaty, Wednesday 25 July, 1–5pm**  
'Gambiarra' is a Brazilian term commonly used in popular culture to describe self-constructed solutions for daily needs (from 'stealing' electric energy to the making of useful devices from scratch).

**Workshop: Cardboard Shape Toys – Jillian Greenberg, Friday 27 July, 1–5pm**  
Cardboard is light, durable and everywhere. You can bend, rip, peel, twist, poke, stack, cut, paint, glue and staple it.

The Showroom workshop area during the (in)visible exhibition





Members of J4DW making a chair



Workshop with members of J4DW



Productive Resistances by Beto Shwafaty



Sandwich Stories by Hato Press

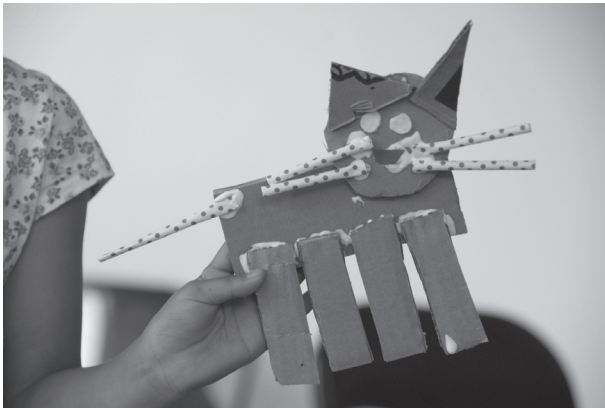




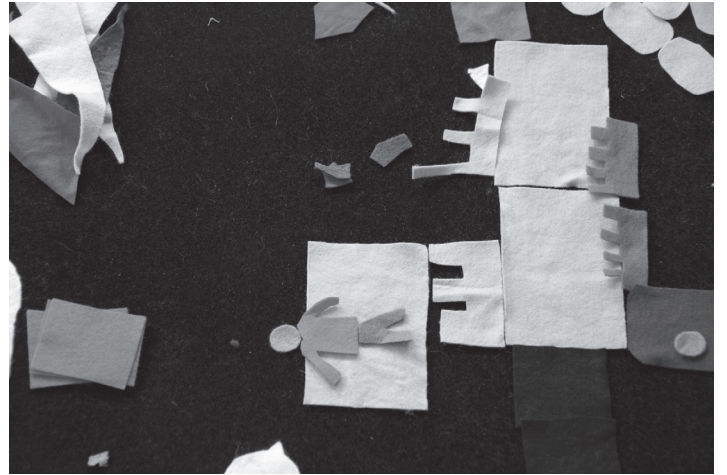
Cardboard Shaped Toys by Jillian Greenberg



Toys made by children at the workshop



A Fuzzy History of the British Imagination by Blue Firth





## A Response from Portman Early Childhood Centre

The benefits of The Showroom project to us were evident in the children's direct experience of the activities, which allowed them to stretch their understandings and experiences and ideas ... for example one child was just amazed that when he came to the sandwich making he could make his own unguided and uninterfered with choice about how to make his sandwich, and as a consequence made the weirdest ... to adult eyes ... sandwich and ate it with relish!

Unfettered choice, and with it the opportunity for real exploration and imagination, is rare for children and it reminded us at the Nursery that this is something that we need to continue to keep in our minds when we plan activities. The children had the opportunity to engage imaginatively with the materials during the activities ... one of the children at the nonstandard measuring workshop described the device he made as 'it's a car robot with wings and windows and it can move', and insisted on finding it to take home at the end of the day. It was a simple cardboard and tape construction.

The activities and the exhibition and the ideas behind it were a real reminder that basic materials can be used in a million ways and using them allows children to be creative, rather than being constricted by purpose built toys. The workshops also meant that the children experienced a gallery space, some for the first time. For those that had been to gallery before, this was definitely

a different experience for them than visits elsewhere; in other galleries they are usually seen as dangerous interlopers, at The Showroom they were allowed to explore and engage, and I hope they'll carry that with them when they experience galleries in the future, and that as staff we can help to keep that in their minds.

Staff at Portman hadn't been to The Showroom before, actually we didn't know where it was before the project, and many staff hadn't experienced small galleries before this project. I think the project alerted them, and the centre as a whole, to the possibilities of a gallery space, and art in general, belonging to everyone and being part of the community rather than to the artist and the art world. It has definitely made us want to continue to keep up with The Showroom and the projects there, and made the children feel that the gallery is part of their world.

And we are going to do some giant fuzzy felt in the nursery, and we are planning on doing some more big making with basic resources at the setting, and to make some furniture, and I have collected some of the activity pages that were at the gallery for us to try here ... all ideas inspired by the project, so the project's work will continue at Portman now that it has moved on from the gallery.

**How to: BE A WRITER (on parental leave)**

Alison Powell

with assistance and distraction from Hannah Hall

**Disclaimer: This was written entirely next to, around, over, despite, and because of a small child, who was three months old when the text was begun and four and a half months old when it was finished. Your results may vary.**

Step 1: Begin.

**'To begin, begin' (the Tao)**

**Before beginning, wait for baby to nap. Once baby is asleep, check the news, respond to correspondence, uncrease paper or launch software. Write a sentence. Erase.**

**Baby stirs.**

**Pick up baby.**

**Tend to baby.**

**Put baby down.**

**End beginning.**

Step 2: Begin, again.

**Think of a story.**

**Adult lives are cyclical. Time to file the tax return, again. Another summer, gone. Baby lives are relentlessly linear. Very young people quite obviously develop and progress. They enforce narrative, even when we adults insist on the arbitrariness of narrative, on the fragmentary notion of story.**

**Babies enforce narrative on our work. In shortened time scales, we demand progress. I rush to finish this sentence as I hear my daughter stirring, anticipating**



something new from her even as I demand something more, perhaps even more than I can give, from myself.

Step 3: Ruminare.

**You are walking, or I am walking. Perhaps it is raining, or very hot, or noisy, or an undistinguished day distinguished only by you (or me) walking through it with a baby in a carriage. You are invisible in this action, unless you happen to be a man, in which case you are visible only by virtue of your manliness, and only for a moment.**

**Think. Think of all the ideas of your project, in no order, in rhythm with your steps. Think of writing the words you most want to use to tell your story. Imagine the pleasure of putting them together. This is the portion of work that is always invisible to creators. We think that work begins as we sit down to write or walk into the studio. In fact, we are working always, folding and refolding thoughts. Naomi Stadlen writes, in her book *What Mothers Do*, that part of mothers' (sic: parent's) work is to be infinitely distractible. Hence, parents escape into imagination and reverie. Stadlen implies that this reverie is a consequence of distractible existence, and merely a phenomenon in itself. But for the creative parent, the writer-parent, the artist-parent, this reverie is lifeblood. In it we exist again as our singular selves, with our creativity freed to circulate towards the project we crave.**

Step 4: Hope

**Return home from the walk. Empty the dishwasher. Put some clothes in the laundry. Change the baby. Make a sandwich. Eat 3 bites of the sandwich. Pick up the baby. Think. Imagine writing. Imagine making. Sing a baby song, see a baby smile. Put the baby down, eat the sandwich. Hope.**

Step 5A: Snip

**Baby sleeps. Or sits on lap, or feeds quietly. Snip. Write a sentence. Make a sketch. Capture an idea stewed at walking pace and in reverie.**

Step 5B: Do Nothing

**The creative producer, who used to be called an artist or writer, before neoliberalism reduced the world to the**

**individual and the tasks that they might enact to fuel the system of supply/demand/discipline, is tallying her outputs. She is thinking of how to describe them to the grant agency or the hiring committee. Parental leave, she has heard, should be no excuse for a lag in production.**

**The baby grows. There is always nap time. There are always the snips of time for drawing or writing. There is always the temptation to work, to feel connected to the cyclical narrative of project design, creation, delivery.**

**So do nothing. Sit. Look out the window. Forget baby, forget project, forget work, forget progress. In capitalist theory, labour time is only valuable when it is used to create surplus value: Marx writes: 'We should not say that one man's hour is worth another man's hour, but rather that one man during an hour is worth just as much as another man during an hour.' In that hour, the men must be making something that can be exchanged for something else. In this reckoning, baby raising time is no time at all. Creative time is no time at all. Since nothing you are doing is measurable by neoliberal metrics, do nothing.**

Step 6: Do anything

**Forget Marx. What did he know? He had seven children and only 3 grew up. Can we assume that he did not worry about how to balance dialectical materialism with diapers? In any case, Marxist feminists encourage us to do anything, to think of our labour of production and reproduction as valuable. Silvia Federici's feminism angrily confronts the way that patriarchy categorises women as 'workers, domestic workers, baby-making wonders' (Power, 2009), and the way that some autonomous Marxist thinkers focus on the affect of labour, tinting some work with female qualities without considering the meaning of feminism. Affective labour refers to the labour of caring, the emotional work that smooths interactions, facilitates flow. There is no reason why this labour is female, but it has been cast as such. Nina Power thinks that most work gets this 'feminised' cast, except perhaps artwork. 'The female artist has an implicit double-job to undertake, if she is willing – to rethinking [sic] production and reproduction in such a way that the material and the immaterial, the personal and the objective ... The**

work of the female artist is to go beyond 'work' as we currently understand it – the double-burden of which has characterised the lives of women for a very long time – to use artistic practice.'

So whatever you are doing, it is work, but it is also art. Your child is art, your raising of it contains the opportunity for your most artful intervention in the universe. But the child is also anti-art, absorbing bodily and emotional attention that could be attuned to the turn of a phrase, the interpretation of a concept, the drawing of a scene. Art-making is the declaration that you exist as a subject, and not as the object of someone else's art. Does it make a difference that you are one kind of productive subject as a parent and another

Step 7: Bake a cake? Wash the floor?

You are living every moment as artful, and yet you find yourself in the kitchen instead of the studio. Knitting, sewing, baking and other domestic activities are traditionally 'women's work' – not much valued under patriarchy - but they are also, fundamentally, creative work. We can distinguish them from the other, endlessly repetitive tasks of housekeeping and childrearing, the diaper-changing, laundering, tidying and cleaning that constitute perhaps UN-productive maintenance work. The work of domestic creativity is now considered an aesthetic and artistic practice in its own right: witness the work of Fritz Haeg, who re-imagines domesticity and domestic artistry by self-consciously queering it, and self-consciously attaching this artful work to place and context. Claiming to engage with the locality and the seasons, Haeg's work re-valorises the domestic arts. But we have to ask the question (at least this question, in this moment, with the baby wiggling on the lap between the typing fingers) about whether this artistry re-valorises traditional 'women's work' or whether it only becomes valuable because it has been taken from the home to the gallery, and from the everyday to the sublime.

Traditionally, crafts and arts were a way of making necessary 'women's' work pleasant and aesthetic. The rise of 'home economics' as a form of scientific management of home-based work solidified the gendered aspect of this work, but also suggested that these activities could be

studied and made scientific. In the decades that followed, second wave feminism invited women to embrace other kinds of work outside the home, and increased prosperity reduced the economic necessity for home canning, rug-making, knitting and sewing.

Now, craft and DIY reappear as political acts, reclaiming the personal and communal in a neoliberal capitalist system that has separated effort, affect and creativity from production. This communal aspect has historical roots in activities such as quilting bees and knitting groups, but has flourished online too, through community sites like Ravelry.com and the hundreds of recipe sharing sites that proliferate on the internet. Craft slides in to art, and craft appears as well in a reinvigorated space for DIY practice that also includes new forms of craft commerce, like Etsy.com and social media marketing for individual crafters. Craft is commerce, and craft is collective. Millions of people learn once again that everyday making has a beauty to it, and that everyday making is something done together, as a community and culture.

Within these exchanges on making and practice are also the unofficial exchanges of tacit knowledge that helps the banal bits of everyday life proceed (or indeed, the artful act of childrearing). What do other people do in order to work? As a parent, you recognise the importance of these tiny pieces of knowledge, and as an artist you recognise the silent, often immeasurable influence of the collective, of the longer, larger conversation about ideas of which they form a part. But you have to ask: does the banal, quotidian exchange about washing powder have the same force as the exchange about theory? The critique of most recent practice?

Step 8: Do what can be done.

You have been for a walk. You have changed the baby. You have read the philosophers. You have examined your subjectivity. You have considered the broader consequences of your work. Now you will try to put on the radio, pick up the cup of tea, put the baby on your lap or under the table or on the play mat in the studio, and do whatever it is that can be done. Your attention is not perfect. Your production is slower, you feel, than it

was without the tiny person squirming in the corner or calling from the next room. You are divided. But you are also more than your practice, more than your parenting. You are – that is, I am – more than one kind of subject. I knit together more than one kind of knowing. I have more than one kind of attention. I am a different kind of creator than I was before. And in the knowledge of this, I will do what can be done.

Step 9: Read.

**Fritz Haeg**, *Domestic Integrities* (2012). <http://www.fritzhaeg.com/domestic-integrities/main.html>

**Karl Marx**, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, (Progress Publishers, 1955), accessed 23 August 2011, [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/).

**Nina Power**, *One-Dimensional Woman* (2009). **Zer0 Books**.

**Naomi Stadlen**, *What Mothers Do* (2004). **Piatkus Publishers: London**.

Alison Powell is a writer and scholar. She is a Lecturer in the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics where she studies media futures and 'critical making', and from whom she received paid parental leave, which she used to write this article.

Hannah Hall lives in South London. She likes baths, trees, and singing.

**Domestic work in British Society**

J4DW

Looking back 18 years ago, I didn't even know if I made the right decision, all I know is that I had to find a way out, to keep my children alive in the hope of the chance to have a better living and future. As a mother I couldn't bear to see my children crying of hunger and with nothing to eat. I couldn't bear to see them sleeping on the floor and to see them in pain with no medicine. I couldn't bear the drips of rain inside the house which was made of cardboard and wood and which we called home. And most of all I couldn't bear the pain of not knowing what kind of future awaited my children.

The long journey of migrant domestic workers (MDW) to the UK is not something we planned or we wanted, as no mother would ever leave her children to care for another's children, or leave our own household to care for another's household. The economic poverty of domestic workers, who are mostly women, had built a bridge between the labour shortage in our own country and the labour demand for domestic work in first world countries while at the same time providing a temporary solution to family needs. Sending countries become dependent on remittances of migrant workers as a one-off solution to their unemployment crisis. Migrant workers find themselves trapped when temporary migration becomes permanent. Many MDW end in vulnerable and exploitative situations with no rights and / or protection.

In the UK, under the old overseas domestic worker visa, MDW had basic employment rights, including the right to change employer, to settlement and to family reunion. As a mother I longed to be like a normal mother which means that I could both work to provide a decent living for my children while looking after them myself. Having experienced and suffered from different forms of abuse and exploitation as a domestic worker, the basic rights in the UK gave me a new life and also enabled me to help and serve my fellow domestic workers. I do this mainly as the co-ordinator of Justice for Domestic Workers (J4DW), a campaign organisation of migrant domestic workers of all nationalities. J4DW with the support of individuals and Unite the Union fights for the welfare and rights of all migrant domestic workers.

J4DW at workshop at The Showroom



The right to family reunion gave me hope to have my children by my side but this wasn't easy. I had to fight for a year through the court for my children to join me. I was able to do this with the help of expert solicitor, Chris Randall, who has been helping us not just on immigration matters but also with our campaign. My employer also helped and some concerned individuals, too many to mention. I won the case and now have my children with me. They are now 22, 20 and 19 years old but for me they

are always my babies. Even people would tell me, 'they are not children anymore!' Perhaps of course they don't really understand our awful painful separation of 17 long years, but for me I am just beginning to be a normal mother who can now personally attend to them when they are sick, when they need help in their homework or need me at their school. I can cook for them and enjoy being together with them. One of the campaign slogans of J4DW is this, 'we care for families but we love and need our own families too'. This was because in 2011 the Government proposed to abolish all rights of migrant domestic workers while at the same time justifying this to the world for not supporting the ILO Convention 189, because they said MDW in the UK are best protected, with the same rights as any other workers.

On April 6, 2012 the UK Government removed the basic rights of migrant domestic workers including the single most important protection – the right to change employer. Migrant domestic workers entering the UK from the 6th April 2012 will now be under the new system of overseas domestic worker visa (ODWV). They can only stay for 6 months. This effectively removes all the rights and protections of the ODWV and makes them even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. They will suffer in silence and endure long working hours without rest and pay. One fellow J4DW who was raped by her male employer was then threatened that he would accuse her of harming his child she was looking after, a child she loved like her own. Some women domestic workers bear scars on their faces due to hot beverages thrown at them and scars on their arms from irons being thrown at them. Many of our sisters were given utility rooms, bathrooms or boiler rooms as their sleeping quarters and with few hours sleep. It is not new to hear of workers subsisting with left over or out of date food and a glass of water as their entire day's meal. The changes to the system will exacerbate this even more. The workers will be even more afraid to speak up for fear of their safety and losing their jobs. They will be criminalised and sent home if they leave their abusive employers. And if they don't leave the country after six months they will become undocumented and be forced to live and work clandestinely. There will inevitably be an increase of undocumented workers in

the UK. This returns us to a system of slavery, this is a scandal happening on British soil and in this modern age. In 1997/98 following a ten year long campaign by Kalayaan with the support of the T&GWU now Unite and other organisations, the then new Labour Government introduced the Domestic Worker Visa recognising the need to protect migrant domestic workers. That ODWV recognised domestic workers as workers. They could challenge employers in Employment Tribunal Courts. Unfortunately this did not extend to domestic workers in diplomat households, who still suffer many forms of abuse without any protection or rights, because of diplomatic immunity.

**Domestic work is the beginning of everything. Domestic workers enable others to do well in their jobs because domestic workers look after their children, the elderly and the household. And yet, domestic work is often undervalued and unimportant. It does not always fit in, but in fact, domestic work is central to our lives and is in the heart of our economy and of society.**

J4DW campaigns for the restoration of the old overseas domestic worker visa, specifically the right to change employer, to in-country extensions of the domestic worker visa, to family reunion and to settlement following 5 years lawful continuous work in the UK. Also for all of these rights to apply to domestic workers in diplomatic households. J4DW is also campaigning for the ratification and implementation of the ILO C189 - decent work for domestic workers.

[www.j4dw.org](http://www.j4dw.org)

**Woodcraft Folk**  
Richard Palser



Who are these folk?

**The Woodcraft Folk is a national organisation, run largely by unpaid adult volunteers, that runs activities for children and young people. Like the much better known and much larger Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, its membership groups are chiefly to be found in urban areas, whilst a major part of its activities centre on camping and hiking in the countryside. Also like the Scouts and Girl Guides, it has a long history which dates back to the 1920s, and many of its adult leaders choose to volunteer their time because of their own experiences as children in these organisations. Another similarity is that the Woodcraft Folk has its own internal culture, embodied in values, ceremonies and rituals, which may seem anachronistic to adults and 'naff' to young people outside the organisation.**



Yet despite these similarities, the Woodcraft Folk has maintained its independence from these other organisations, and insisted that it is unique in offering an educational approach that fosters progressive social change – an objective summed up in its slogan ‘Education for Social Change’. This article will attempt to briefly sketch the main elements of this educational approach as the author understands them.

Finding a different ‘space’

From its inception, the Folk (as members often refer to themselves) has been an urban movement. Its basic unit of organisation always was, and remains, weekly evening ‘group’ meetings held in any venue available that was large enough for playing games, holding discussions, and handicrafts. Each group night catered for a different age group – now called Elfins, Pioneers, and Venturers – and were co-educational in that they had a mixed membership of boys and girls. However, it was not the school hall, church hall, or the hall above a Co-operative shop, that was the primary space for the Folk’s educational work. Rather it was the rural camp site that offered the Folk an opportunity to create a very different type of space for young people.

Woodcraft Folk camp



For the Folk, the camp site offered the opportunity for young people to experience a very different type of community to that which they experienced in the city. Firstly, in sharing the tasks of running and maintaining the camp (cooking, washing up, pitching tents etc) they could experience a more

co-operative way of living. From the youngest child to the oldest adult, everyone was expected to make a contribution to peeling the potatoes or serving the breakfast through mixed age group ‘clans’ that would rotate around the different tasks. Secondly, in contrast to the increasing ‘commodification’ of leisure in the city, all the camp participants would collectively create their own entertainment. Preparing the evening camp fire would require collecting and chopping the wood, lifting the turf to create a fireplace, and learning about how to construct a fire that can be easily lit and burn through the night. Handicrafts would be used to create costumes for a ‘wide game’ played in the woods, for decorating the entrance to the camp site, or for decorating the marquee. Nature trails would be laid by older children for the younger ones to follow. Thirdly, everyone would have a say in how the camp and its programme was organised, through regular ‘circle’ meetings of all campers, thereby educating young people in an active democracy.

The politics of utopia

The politics behind this approach I would call ‘utopian socialist’, as they are similar to the approach taken by the early British socialist Robert Owen. Owen believed that people were shaped by their environment, and consequently by changing the environment you could shape people’s characters. Place people in a co-operative environment, and the self-centred competition that characterises urban capitalist society would wither away as the advantages of co-operativism became plain to all. For Owen this meant establishing self-sufficient ‘model’ communities that would grow in number and size to the point where their practical and moral superiority would overwhelm and replace the surrounding capitalist society. Whilst the Woodcraft camp was, in contrast to the model villages and communities of Robert Owen, a short lived and fleeting affair, it was believed that children’s experience of this rural utopia would stay with them, encourage in them a critical view of urban capitalist society, and that they as adults would contribute to bring about progressive social change in society as a whole. Thus for many of the adult leaders and supporters of the Folk in the 1920s and 30s, the educational role of

the Folk could play an important role in reinforcing and renewing the activists of the labour movement, and it won support from many of the regional retail Co-operative societies through their education sub-committees, and the Women's Guilds of the Co-operative movement. It therefore gained support and recognition in the inner city areas, where these organisations were strongest, and its members were often working class children who were not so easily reached by its main rivals. For others in the labour movement, however, it represented a diversion from the task of organising adults for social change through political and union action – and so it never gained the financial and political support from the labour movement nationally that its major rivals received from other sources.

The contradictions within this educational policy  
The main contradiction in this educational policy, one that has continually resurfaced through the Folk's near 100 years of existence, was always that the education of children and youth in a critical approach to their everyday urban life relied upon removing those young people from that urban space for relatively short periods of time.

The first problem arising from this was that for the woodcraft camp to run along the co-operative lines envisaged by its leaders, the weekly group nights had to be used to train and prepare young people for that experience. By the post-war period, the Folk had established an educational programme for use at both group evenings and camps contained in a book called the Woodcraft Way. It consisted of a series of 'tests' which not only provided children (and new leaders) with skills useful for camping, but also explained the ethos of co-operativism as an essential part of the camp. On completion of each test a child was awarded a badge which they could wear on their green Woodcraft shirt - thus it became known as 'badge work'.

The Woodcraft Way addressed itself directly to the child and they were intended to use it as a manual of practical tests through which they could move at their own individual pace. Completing the tests was not seen as a competitive activity as many of the tests could only be carried out as part of a larger group or in the context of

the co-operative camp. The badge was seen as a symbol of individual achievement rather than as a source of comparison with others, so only one could be worn on the shirt at any one time. This was in effect the Folk's national curriculum, starting with camping and outdoor skills (crafts of the woods). However, it also sought to draw out the lessons of the co-operative camping experience by culminating in awareness as a 'Citizen' and 'World Citizen', and aiming to produce young people with the 'physical, mental and social fitness for world service'.

Ceremonies were another essential ingredient of this approach, and served to remind both adults and children of how they were working together for 'a great cause and great idea'. Basil Rawson, the chief author of the Woodcraft Way, wrote: 'Much preferred to the parade and orders way of doing things, it is the Folk tradition to mark some of our actions in the group meeting and at camp, by special Ceremonies ... it is in our ceremonies that we have another opportunity of expressing our ideas and the innermost truths of our Woodcraft Life.' Ceremony and ritual in fact constituted the glue that enabled these islands of socialist cooperation to function with a degree of democracy and efficiency that could so easily be undermined by the competitive attitudes children (and adults) brought with them from the cities. It also helped render the participants more conscious of the difference between that community and the mainstream of society – indeed it celebrated that difference.

To illustrate this use of ceremony I will mention one small example here. Children and adults were encouraged to adopt a 'Folk name' to be used whilst at Woodcraft activities. The naming ceremony was described by one adult member in this way: 'The child's 'civilised' name was written on a piece of birch bark and thrown on the Council Fire after which he was given a chosen name... The ceremony was designed to impress the child with the idea that he was no longer a slave of 'Mannon' or 'the great God grind' but a rebel and one pledged to work for peace and friendship'. Their Folk name would be something of the woods – Badger say, or Little Otter. According to Mary Davis, who has written the only comprehensive history of the Folk, there were two apparently different justifications for the use of Folk



names. One was that it heightened camp democracy by avoiding children having to address adults as Sir or Miss at a time when first names were not used in the mainstream. The other was that it 'emphasised the break from everyday life and helped us assume another identity'. Both were true.

The resulting tensions over the Folk's identity  
Thus there has always been a tension at the heart of the Folk's educational policy - that its ability to create short term socialist communities in which children 'learnt by doing' was only possible through ceremonies and rituals which, in drawing a line against the influences of everyday life, served to emphasise their isolation and separateness from everyday life. To those outside the Folk, this has tended to create an image of, at best, cliquishness, and even crankiness. As each new generation of young people has faced new influences – from Hollywood's cinema, through pop music and now the internet - the Folk has struggled to come to terms with making its traditions and ceremonies relevant and meaningful to a new generation, and any attempts to modify or update those ceremonies and traditions always caused tension between 'modernisers' and 'traditionalists'. As I have documented elsewhere, these tensions became particularly acute when, in the 1980s, the teenagers of the late 1960s youth radicalisation came back into the Folk as parents – and sought to reshape the Folk after their own image. Another tension at the heart of the Folk's policy of 'Education for Social Change' has been the extent to which the Folk should take the next logical step and actively facilitate or even lead their young members in political protest to bring about that social change. The Folk has consequently always swung between limiting itself to purely educational activity amongst young people, focused purely on group meetings and the camp community, and facilitating the political action of young people where their growing self-confidence leads them to wish to participate in protests on the streets of the urban centres.

From its young leaders being active supporters of the General Strike in 1926, through the raising of milk tokens for Republican Spain in the 1930s, marching with

the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the 1960s, and raising medical aid for Vietnam in the 1970s, to participating in anti-racist festivals and gay rights marches in the 1980s and protests against education cuts in the 21st century – groups of young Woodcraft members have found their leaders willing to endorse their views and facilitate their safe participation in social protest. As an organisation, however, it has found itself having to walk a tightrope: on one side its critics condemning it for 'indoctrination' and 'communist sympathies'; and on the other giving voice to the concerns of its young members on the issues they constantly face in their everyday urban lives.

Despite these tensions, and disagreements that flare up around them within the Folk from time to time, what holds the Folk together is the belief that by providing an alternative space for exploration of a community which they themselves have a part in creating, young people will be better equipped to grapple with the problems in the urban spaces that they inhabit for most of their lives.

Rich Palser grew up in a family of active Woodcraft Folk members, including his grandmother, parents and children. He is the author of 'Learn by Doing, Teach by Being: The Children of 1968 and the Woodcraft Folk' which was published in the journal 'Socialist History' (No 26) in 2004. The views expressed in the above article are entirely his own interpretation of the history of the Folk, and do not represent an official statement of the Woodcraft Folk. For a fuller, more comprehensive history of the Woodcraft Folk see Mary Davis, 'Fashioning a New World: A History of the Woodcraft Folk', published by Holyoake Books in 2000.

## Invisible Spaces: the Womb, the Cot, the Kitchen

Lamis Bayar

Superstudio: 'Continuous Monument: Greetings from the Empire State Building', 1969. © Superstudio



Now, I don't have children. As such, I happen to very conveniently represent the section of the human population you take issue with, Andrea. So I would like to open by apologising to all parents on behalf of all non-parents who've sneered, whinged and sniped in cafés, theatres, galleries and on planes. We are a truly despicable lot.

Penance made and childlessness notwithstanding, I have always been mindful of the existence of children in space, hence in urban space. Call it a near-phobia in fact. I've always had this panicked fear of treading on a

little toe as a child scuttled about absorbed in carefree play. A neurotic quirk it may be but it puts into stark perspective the fact that we should all be thinking about children, or that somewhere there at the back of our minds allowances should be made for their existence. However, we don't notice them – until they become a source of annoyance that is, when they are loud or if their ever-expanding prams get in the way. As architects and designers, we don't really notice children either until we are building a school under some new-fangled government scheme, or ensuring there is a room somewhere deep down the bowels of a shopping mall's bowels for mothers to breastfeed away from the ever-sensitive, easily unsettled male gaze.

And yet, we really ought to take notice, if only for demographical reasons. The UK is currently seeing a soar in birth rates. In London, these were 20% higher in 2010 than in 2002. An additional 100,000 London-based primary school places are needed by 2015. 450,000 across the UK. Will we pay more attention when there is more of 'them'?

The Womb: why is childhood invisible

**Andrea, you've doughtily set out to study 'the invisibility of childcare and parenthood structures from non-parents'. What are the underlying socio-political barriers to visibility that you have identified thus far?**

Is it possible at this stage to posit that parenthood is invisible because women are? Whether we like to admit it or not it is very much still 'women and children' and, in a way, the invisibility of children and parenthood goes to the continued invisibility of women. From here on, it is the usual feminist rant. However, it might be important to acknowledge that parenthood's invisibility is an indicator of something else.

Or, does parenthood elude society-at-large because we are still struggling to grapple with the very notion of childhood? Could we contend that beyond the invisibility of parenthood structures lies the invisibility of childhood as a whole? Are children culturally imbued with an aura such that few have felt able to investigate childhood as a field of practice proper, thus limiting our concepts of childhood to two polarised views: nostalgia-dappled cherubim on the one hand, and, to quote the

Daily Mail, ' [this] terrifying generation of murderous, morally-blank wolf-children, fatherless, undisciplined...' (the eminent publication goes on at some length) on the other? This very duality brings to mind your quoting of Andrea Mubi Brighenti: 'The effects of Visibility swing between an empowering pole (visibility as recognition) and a disempowering pole (visibility as control)', It seems to me that what makes children – and thus parents – invisible (or perhaps more to the point unfathomable) is that they pertain to both poles. They are both hyper-visible (the reverence-rousing, cooing sanctity of childhood) and controlled (watched constantly, endlessly legislated upon from the Children's Act and Health and Safety regulations, to Asbos).

The Cot: the shrinking spaces of childhood

Parenthood is rendered invisible because we don't expect to see it: children are no longer taxonomised as part of public space. Requiring strict control, children who inhabit our contemporary western social construct belong in the home strictly. Even when allowed to venture out, we still perceive them to be in a domestic bubble symbolised by their 'parent or guardian'. This is because they are deprived of agency.

It is interesting that as the timespan culturally defined as 'childhood' kept extending, the 'space of childhood' was shrunk dramatically. Children don't really get to play outside anymore. Thomas Traherne was, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the first English Utopian to think of the world through the eyes of children. He describes his relation to the urban environment as follows:

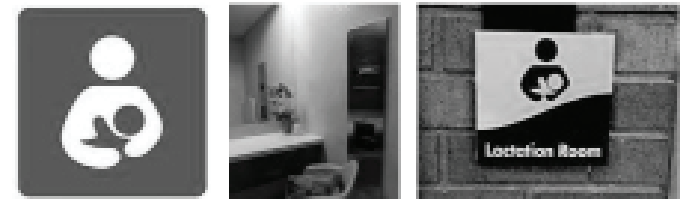
When I was a child [...] the city seemed to stand in Eden or to be built in heaven. The streets were mine, the temple was mine, the people were mine [...] The skies were mine and so were the sun and moon and stars, all the world was mine.

In contrast, 21<sup>st</sup> century commentators, chief amongst whom is Helen Penn, have described contemporary childhood as suffering from a diminished freedom in space where the specialist provision of fenced-off spaces of play has come at the expense of the creation of an age-inclusive public space.

One way to understand how children (and their parents) were rendered invisible from the public realm (as opposed to that having always been the case) is to think of how they are currently being pushed out of the newest of public spaces, namely virtual spaces. Children of the 80s and 90s will vouch for the absolute freedom we had in perusing the internet. I think we all also have direct experience of the agility with which children take to the virtual be it networks, games or indeed educational tools. But what happened as soon as an awareness built up of children roaming unsupervised in cyberspace, creating things of their own? A plethora of child locks and age restrictions popped up within the space of a couple of years fuelled by porn-addiction and violent gaming controversies. To this day, the BBC iPlayer refuses to believe that I am over 16. Again, children have been written out, confined to their bedrooms and to the liminal space of the television screen – for the passive inculcation of a love of relentless consumerism is no threat to young minds... In the physical realm, rather than gaming and pornography, it was child abduction, drug peddling and those terrifying hard surfaces.

Is Invisible Spaces of Parenthood's call to empower children to make a strategy to re-endow them with an agency they have been deprived of? Can making become the tool to negate this intentness to fence-off children, to portray them as 'vulnerable, accident prone and in need of protection' to quote Penn. Out of the TV room and into the workshop?

'Breastfeeding Rooms'  
© Lannis Bayer



I'd like to briefly focus on breastfeeding as one of the most obvious, most entrenched instances of society, very consciously, very heavy-handedly editing parenthood out of public space. Alexandra Jönsson's 2011 Human Breast Milk Declaration, devised with Katie Bracher reads as follows:

Human breast milk should not be consumed in public. In case of emergency it is highly recommended to use lavatory facilities and ensure the highest level of discretion. The female breast, particularly the nipple, and milk, should not be disclosed in public. Deviating from these guidelines can create strong reactions of revolt and disgust in witnesses to this assault, and the risk of verbal or non-verbal condemnation is high.

**I find it interesting because it happens during the very early stages of parenthood, but also because it has generated a new architectural function: the so-called Nursing Room (also referred to as the B-Fing Room and the Lactation Facility). And, a new internet review genre, where gushingly grateful mums photograph and rate these facilities. Do you think the brash disavowal of breastfeeding is actually not so much a misconceived notion of public decency as a way to make childhood invisible? Or is it the other way round?**

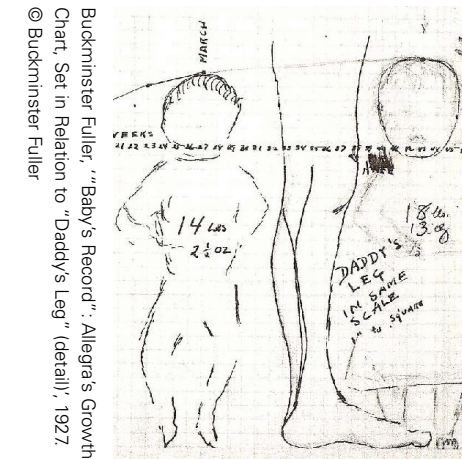
Out of the Kitchen, Take to the Streets!

Divorcing childhood from domesticity

**Perhaps what struck me as one of the most interesting aspects of your approach to the Invisible Spaces of Parenthood project is that you've effectively divorced childhood and child rearing from domesticity like it was the most natural thing in the world when it is in fact a deeply countercultural, even iconoclastic gesture. You have extirpated the discourse on childhood from the womb-the cot-the kitchen, and placed it firmly (back) within the public realm. A bewilderingly unselfconscious take on Hanisch's 'the personal is the political'. This is the first and most drastic step towards countervailing the shrinking of the spaces of childhood – just as enabling their 'access to tools' is the first step towards reaffirming their agency. Where does the divorcing of childhood and domesticity in your discourse emanate from, and how do you see this strand developing? Do you think the endemic divisions between private and public shouldn't be so much challenged as exacerbated?**

**So rather than making relationships within domestic space more equitable, rather than mobilising them into a commons, you simply transcend them. Still looking at the domestic realm as a set of power relations,**

**typically considered to be gender-coalesced, how do you think the introduction of an age power-parameter (an adult / child power relationship) could shape the current feminist discourse? What happens when children are no longer domesticated – as in domesticated cattle?**



Buckminster Fuller, "Baby's Record": Allegor's Growth Chart, Set in Relation to "Daddy's Leg" (detail), 1927  
© Buckminster Fuller

**This line of enquiry, a new taxonomy, is particularly intriguing in view of the re-emerging discourse on domesticity as practice, and your personal involvement with The Grand Domestic Revolution GOES ON. Where do you stand on Domesticity?**

## Instructions to Ourselves

Townley and Bradby

1. For a few minutes step aside from your routine parental duties and hold your attention on the children; observe whatever they happen to be doing, or saying, or making.
2. Discretely record your observations, limiting yourself to a single A6 record card.
3. Repeat the process on subsequent days.
4. As the children become familiar with your observational practice, it will become at times invisible to them and at times the centre of their attention.
5. Can the field of observation now be widened? Are you and the other adults in the house to be recorded too? Should certain exchanges remain off-limits? The growing collection of A6 record cards becomes like an open diary, a partisan record of intense moments within the family.
6. The children begin to have a view on what should be recorded. They want to direct the gaze. They re-stage a game they are pleased with so you can draw it and write down their words.
7. What are the connections between the domestic patterns you have observed and your artistic practice?

10-30 Sun 9 Oct Girls Bedroom

066

I'm outside, <sup>in the corridor</sup> and overhear this:

H: Do you want to wear this? Do you want to save me? ... Save me and wear this? Save me from a gun? ... Do you love me?

M: Yeah, I do, but

H: <sup>L</sup>Do you want to save me?

M: Yeah, but

H: <sup>L</sup>All the baddies have gone from outside the house but I'll still die in the night.

M: —

H: Still, Martha; still, still, still... If you want me to stay alive you've still got to wear the wig. Either you wear the wig,

or I die tonight. Do you want me to die?

M: I want you to die.

H: Is it cos you don't love me? I love you.

M: I don't want to be with you because I want to be on my own.

At this point I went in. I wanted to interrupt Hope's the emotional pressure H was putting on M. I didn't say I'd been listening.

Once I joined the conversation, M repeated that she didn't want to wear the wig, she didn't want to play with H, she wanted to be on her own. After a few minutes H flipped into a more caring mode saying she was going to play quietly in the room & she wouldn't disturb M. Then they both asked me to leave.



## **Systems of Support for Families and Artists**

Bonnie Fortune and Brett Bloom

We are both artists. Our daughter, Ada, was born in December of 2011. Only recently, have we figured out a system that allows us each to have time alone to think about our creative work.

A creative practice demands uninterrupted time to think. A parent's attention is constantly shifting between what the baby needs – right now! – and planning for the future, the immediate, as well as the long term. We strive to create an embodied art practice that makes no distinction between our daily and 'professional' lives. We do not want to pretend that child rearing is not something that is a huge part of who we are as artists and people. We are looking for ways to have creative balance in family and in work.

Our experience so far is of a 'professional' art world that is biased against people with children. In talking with other artist parents, we share stories about the difficulties of being creative and a parent. For example, we know a single mother who is an artist. She says her desire to do both – raise children and be an artist – is often met with suspicion, derision, or confusion. In some cases, she has been told that she is a less serious artist because of being a mother. In other situations, there is a skewed labor division between the two caregivers, with one parent taking on the larger share of domestic tasks, while the other parent works at his or her art career.

We recently took our daughter with us to a

conference on collective art practice (a 'collective encuentro'), with artists who work in groups. We want a contiguous relationship between our art making and our lives so it was an obvious thing for us to bring Ada along. Many of the conference attendees were also politically active and involved in socially engaged art practices. The conference was organised with the idea of building stronger networks of support for artists who work in groups and collectives. Though this mode of art making has gained significant legitimacy in the recent era, it is still perceived as an exception to the rule rather than the norm.

We arrived at the conference prepared to engage in solidarity work for forming support systems within the art world along with our daughter. At first, Ada's presence was met with discomfort and mild annoyance. Though we spent a large portion of our time on discussions to make sure that everyone was on the same page about supporting equality regardless of race sexuality or gender, and many attendees were parents of older children—the presence of a young child was not met with much solidarity.

During the gathering we took a trip to visit the Bread & Puppet Theatre, an organisation that for over 40 years has been making political puppet performances on issues of social justice, in Vermont and around the world. We attended a multi-hour puppet pageant – a magical experience set against the backdrop of rolling fields, forest, and the Green Mountains. Over 500 people attended and they ranged in age from a few months old to those well into their 80s. There seemed to be an understanding amongst the attendees of the gathering that there would be a multitude of voices both young and old in the audience. The experience was expansive, inclusive, and engaged in a way that our small gathering of politically left art groups was not, even though we ostensibly shared politics with the Bread and Puppet performers. When we returned to the conference, our next group discussion was way more relaxed and accepting of Ada's presence.

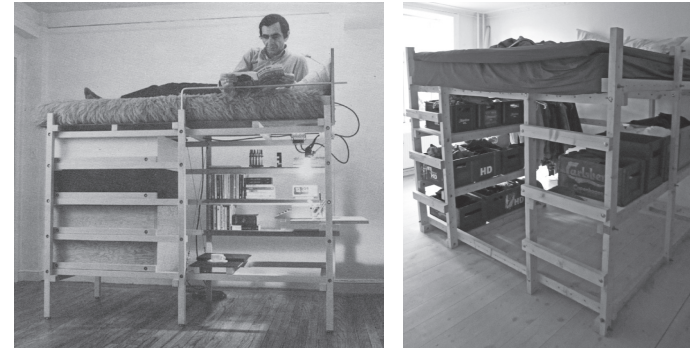
As part of connecting with allies in the arts, we spend a lot of time at Trampolinhuset (Trampoline House) here in Copenhagen. It is a user-driven cultural centre for people seeking asylum in Denmark and their allies. Artists, curators, and activists initially started the centre in a local gallery space. An initiative that could only come from an interdisciplinary arts process, activists alone tend to focus on confrontational campaigns that energise their base. The people behind Trampolinhuset quickly realised the implications of their work and that it had to continue well beyond a single exhibition. They now have a large space and an annual budget, serving hundreds of people who come to Copenhagen from open detention camps around Denmark.

Included in the layout of Trampolinhuset is a space set aside just for children. Tone Nielsen, one of the Trampoline House founders, pointed out that social justice movements include children in everything they do. If they didn't, they would lose a large number of their supporters, organisers, and activists. The children's space is a visible sign of support for parents to get involved and to feel immediately welcomed. Learning from and creating hybrid models between the arts and activism, or other areas, is inspiring to us.

Developing systems of support for yourself and your family is part of surviving as a parent. We have tried to develop our own nurturing systems for both professional practice and family. These are systems that provide care for both parent and child. We take inspiration where we find it, like with the age inclusive, Bread and Puppet experience. We try to create a stimulating environment by making or modifying toys. We participate in local food communities. We are serious about living out our creativity and politics on a daily basis.

An important part of our family support system is the family bed. Our bed is built after the designs of Ken Isaacs, the radical and visionary architect who in the 1970s developed plans for what he called Living Structures. Isaac's Living Structures were designed for small spaces, made from readily available materials, and built up on a system of squares. He dubbed his design 'the Matrix system.' The Matrix was made from standard wooden struts, readily available at hardware stores. Holes are

drilled into the struts every 5 inches, for easy modification (it is easy to adapt to the metric system). You could start with a small structure for a bed and desk, and could expand the system outwards to accommodate more spaces as needed just by bolting the struts in a different configuration.



Our first Living Structure was a tall cube: a bed on top of an office space, clothing rack, and storage bins. We lived in a single-room apartment and maximising our living space was a priority. Climbing into bed at night felt like climbing into a secret fort. We made a lofted bed for Ada, joined to our own so it was easy to reach her while she was tiny. A secret fort was great for growing a baby and nestling in with a newborn during the winter months, but now it's summer and our baby can move. Our lives require a different Living Structure. So, we undid the initial matrix and lowered the bed. Now we have a modified matrix system that better suits the needs of our family.





**We brought Ada's bed down to the floor in the tradition of Maria Montessori, whose educational model encourages free movement and self-determination in children. The Montessori / Living Structure floor bed (we are sure it is the first of its kind) allows Ada to move in and out of her own volition. Her bed is next to our modified matrix bed-now much lower, but still providing storage underneath.**



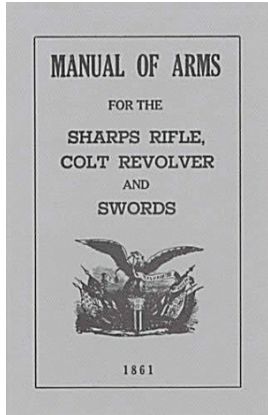
**As Ada grows, we will build other structures to accommodate the needs and desires of our family. Maybe a bed that more resembles our own—raised off the floor with storage and hiding places beneath, or a bookshelf fort system, with a built in light, for tucking in and reading. We will build towers to climb with platforms for playing and imagining many worlds. We will eventually help her to build her own structures as she gains the motor and conceptual skills necessary to accomplish this. We will teach her how to prepare the wood and to use a drill. We will take her to source wood from dumpsters and piles outside of apartment buildings, construction salvage warehouses, or make trips to local hardware stores.**

**The two of us pull a tremendous amount of strength and comfort from having the skills to create the systems that make the daily world we inhabit more our own and less that of the dominant culture. We look to many sources from books to other artists, to friends and family and to the natural world, to develop systems of support to nurture both our family and our art practice.**

**We hope that modelling resourceful behaviour will help to prepare Ada, and give her the confidence to see herself as more in control of her world. Our goal is to integrate Ada, and children in general into the things we do as artists. This feels like a more honest way to develop our work, rather than focusing on the machinations of surrounding professionalism.**

## Manual Research: A Few Thoughts

Jenny Richards

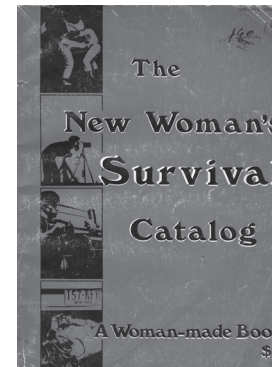


Manual (adj,) from the latin manualis means of, or relating to the hand, of human strength and operation: Manual (n) refers to a handbook or reader, a tool of instruction.

The instruction manual can be traced back to soldiers' handbooks called the Manual of Arms. These books, widely published during the American Civil War contained detailed instructions and illustrations not only concerning the correct use of weaponry but in the precise movement of the body. Its purpose was to train a strict and uniform performance from its reader, so that the soldiers would move together in a synchronised chorus line when advancing on the enemy. In its early appearance the manual is a patriarchal authoritative form, which takes obedience and precision as preliminary expectations. Yet how has the manual evolved since? Can we say the manual still fits within its initial draft as a functional tool of submission, to achieve dutiful compliance from its readers? Whilst today's equivalent might narrowly situate

the manual as an authorial, educative device directed at the technically ignorant user. Other contexts have seen the manual reinvented, morphed and mutated as different adoptions have encouraged it to take shape as an un-authored, multi-voiced tool, mobilising forms of imaginative activity that do not adhere to a strict code of conduct.

The 1960s and 70s experimentations expanded and subverted the conventional manual to cultivate the form as a collective political tool. One example is The New Women's Survival Catalog produced in 1973 by a collective of sex women who over five months travelled over 12,000 miles to research, meet, discuss, document, and write about the thriving and diverse feminist practices across the US. The Catalog covered areas such as self-defense, medical care, education, art, marriage & divorce and within each area detailed attention was given to the different feminist battles that were being driven on the ground. Contact details of women's publishing works and support groups expanded this manual to act as more than a form of documentation, rather it became a resource which was to be used and developed by its readers.



The feminist repurposing of the patriarchal tool unmoors the traditional meaning of the manual breaking it out of its predetermined role and function. The manual is inverted to develop as a polymorphous device to help women gain control of their lives, distinct from the earlier implement which served to control and restrain actions. Through this example the manual is repositioned as an apparatus of the self help movement facilitating the

dispersion of alternative ways of living and working, in order to raise consciousness and inspire further activity. The Catalog took shape through the practices that it drew from, and served to persist the collective working it sought to investigate. Whilst before, the manual might have aimed for homogeneity, here the manual is diversified to accommodate multiple voices and ideas. It shifts to become a tool that confronts institutionalised structures as well encouraging practices to shape an alternative women's culture based around a whole new set of values and desires.

Following another trajectory of the manual we might think of the transformations of manuals within the context of the contemporary workplace. There is often a designated shelf for a collection of (largely unused) manuals for the different software programmes, health and safety procedures and trouble shooting scenarios. Or the blue ring binders which collate, assess and make sure standards are adhered to and actions logged. However, whilst manuals were a customary adjunct to a newly bought commodity, now material manuals are in decline. In 2001 Mac opened their first 'Genius Bar' – an innovation that marked the withdrawal of their printed technical manuals. The Genius Bar is where designated 'Mac Genius' provide expert advice on your branded Mac project. To access support for your product you must wait and book an appointment and spend the majority of your day at a 'bar' while your ipad or laptop is fixed by the technical elite. Other technical products purchased today, require you to go online and (sometimes pay) for the appropriate manual if confused by its operations. The removal of the manual suggests the intensified economic management of methods of knowledge sharing and the potential of the manual as a tool for information distribution. Apple claim that as their products are developed to be operated intuitively a user manual is not necessary, yet how often is it that you have wandered through lists of online forums questioning how to regain control of the keyboard? In parallel to the survival catalog these forums are multi voiced and knowledge is accumulated from the experience of an array of users, where solutions often emerge from trial and error mistakes. Unlike the redundant manual in the

storage cupboard that quickly becomes out dated, these online mutations are continually active inviting threads of dialogue between its users.

One recent expression of an online manual is the downloadable *Surviving Internships: A Counter Guide to Free Labour in the Arts* developed by the UK based **Carrot Workers' Collective (CWC)**. This guide provides survival tools for those working in the creative sector, addressing current issues of exploitation that endures through the systematic acceptance and promotion of free labour in the arts. Focusing on the rise of unpaid internships the guide offers support, experience and statistics on the rights of workers and the creative sector's relationship to shifts within the greater economy. Other useful tools include, methods of reading contracts, maps to chart working patterns and strategies to address the struggles in the workplace. The CWC identify the guide as a form of research that has connected together critical thought with practical doing, which through a 'collective process of self education' distributes alternatives to some of the current circuits of exploitation.



When discussing the different mutations of the manual with Andrea, she cites its potential for reinvention within the proliferation of counter manuals in the 1960 & 1970s, which accompanied the utopic DIY cultural experiments for alternative ways of living and working. Examples like *The New Women's Survival Catalog* were employed as a departure point for a mode of questioning which provoked imaginations for ways to construct a

better future. Contrary to the functional application of today's Ikea manual, these counter manuals support a critical process rather than a defined outcome; a process that facilitates the destabilising of standardised procedures and accepted formulas. Within this book, the manual might be seen as a catalyst to amplify interest and a community around issues concerning the politics of parenting and childcare. The variety of texts and conversations gathered here will be continually added to as a new edition is published each year, allowing the manual to grow with the project and its collaborators. Whilst under the umbrella of the manual, an open ended mode of research is cultivated that is extended through this publication and the indeterminate conversations that might consequently evolve.

If we return to the etymology of the word manual (derived from the Latin *manualis* = hand) it reminds us that the term inherently connotes a range of qualities that entwine communication with human action. In light of this and its different re-appropriations – we might identify the manual as a form of research: a critical yet hands on practice which continually questions and rethinks stable norms and expectations. A type of physical research, that offers collective alternatives to current processes of subordination. It is an approach that remodels and expands the manual to become unbound and reflective, facilitating research that does not categorise or compartmentalise its structure, content or readers.

Links

[letsremake.info](http://letsremake.info)

[carrotworkers.wordpress.com/counter-internship-guide](http://carrotworkers.wordpress.com/counter-internship-guide)

## Exuberance as a Tool for Domesticity

Christian Nyampeta

Introduction

Extensive studies have been conducted around the benefits play brings to education, well being and self-fulfilment. Marshall McLuhan noted that 'our time presents unique opportunity for learning by means of humour; a perceptive or incisive joke can be more meaningful than platitudes lying between two covers'<sup>1</sup>.

And yet, acts that are characterised by a playfulness that is non-specific are shunned as hedonistic. Such ludic actions are perceived as disruptive and degenerative. This document timidly suggests that this caution might be partly imputable to the non-objective nature of these such activities. Arguably, the ambivalence of the preference to inchoate objectives places the practitioner into a societal margin. What tactics could extend this expansive practice without yielding to expertise and specificity? What could such an extension add to the everyday experience of domestic self-production?

Tentatively, we will address these issues by briefly exploring the global and local conditions that inform the domestic experience. Following this summary, we will investigate subjectively the rhetorics of play. Subsequently I will visit practices that carry a potential for re-configuring ludic acts into a convivial and possibly domestic everyday. Finally, I will propound provisional acts that could develop and expand contexts of domestic reflectivity.

## Industriality

Today, many products defy the established disciplinary categories of art, fashion and design. We participate in a global exchange of images so vast that it is impossible to locate the point where art stops and design begins. Advertised products can be seen as one part story, one part physical experience, one part image and one part material. Clearly, the scope of making for production has broadened to include not only physical products, but the stories, lifestyles and experiences they embody<sup>2</sup>. This introductory description found on webpage of the 3D Design Department of Cranbrook University encapsulates Bernard Stiegler's notion of the hyper-industrial. In his essay 'Suffocated Desire, Or How The Cultural Industry Destroys The Individual: Contribution to a Theory of Mass Consumption', Stiegler describes synchronicity as the result of the 'hyper-industrial capitalism that has developed its techniques to the point where millions of people are connected every day simultaneously to the same television, radio, or play console programmes'<sup>3</sup>. Such a state of hyper-production is paradoxical to modernist 'myths' of the post-industrial society and that of the autonomous, individual consumer. 'According to the first 'myth' Western countries were supposed to enter a post-industrial phase where the continued mechanisation of production and the growing part of services in the national income would leave citizens with more leisure time'. According to Johan Russow in his translator's introduction to the above mentioned Stiegler's essay, 'this prediction did not take into account of a key development in Western countries after World War II, namely the attempt to not only control the means of production (industrial capitalism), but also and simultaneously the patterns of consumption – what Stiegler refers to as hyper-industrial capitalism. A media conglomerate that produces, markets, and broadcasts its own content is a good example of a hyper-industrial company'<sup>4</sup>.

## The Black Box

Moving away from such stratospheric affairs, we could descend into the living room by means of a paradox. Productivity and display cohabit with a phenomenon we could refer to as the black box<sup>5</sup>. This paradox is at

the juncture of an elusive transparency, an enchanting technology that enables the control of networked elements, whilst at the same time, such box negates local, internal and individual alteration. This mystical box could be incarnated by a thermostat, a remote control, a phone, the double-glazed window, or the banality of a heated floor. These objects are products crafted by savants and venerable engineers, whom we could understand as the contemporary druids, and whose totality is equally prevalent in the open plan architectures and also within the cosmetics of purity, that is if we associate hygiene with exposure, visibility and exhibition (at least for the sake of the argument). In order to sustain such a networked operation, industriality demands efficiency and infallible productivity. On his turn, the subject must perform, and for this the subject must mimic the behaviour of an infallibly predictable product.

## The Politics of Industriality

And such global predictability that denies subjectivities is activated by industrial coercion, a movement that is far from being a choice, as elucidates Michel Foucault during his Lectures at the Collège de France. It is instead like a game, Foucault maintains. It requires rules so that it can be played at all<sup>6</sup>. And of course governments can not stifle this play, because as Tim Parsons points out, the form of the government actually follows the modes of production. In his article titled 'In Search of the Politics of Design' published in the course catalogue of the MA Industrial Design at Central Saint Martins in 2008, Parsons maintains that 'the key differentiator between the three main political systems, Communism, Socialism and Capitalism, is who controls the means of production and how it is operated'<sup>7</sup>. Governments are thus charged with establishing the regulatory environment of contract law, trades description rules, laws against fraud and theft, the whole panoply of the 'rule of law' without which there would simply be no market<sup>8</sup>. Felix Stalder in his essay 'Fight of Transparency' understands globalisation as a process of standardisation. For Stalder, a standard constitutes the particular way in which a group of people is interconnected in a network. It is the shared norm or practice that enables network members to gain

access to one another, facilitating their cooperation. For networked cooperation to subsist, an operative, coercive transparency is essential. For Stalder, the implementation of this transparency is no longer through violence primarily but rather through the establishment of particular standards capable of unleashing these dynamics. Stalder gives the example of hygiene inspection certificates that are displayed at the kebab shop locally, whilst on a global level, the publicly traded company will have to be listed in a standardised statistical reporting of entire national economies<sup>9</sup>.

#### Marginality of Aimlessness

The topic of global industrialism is understandably a theme that would need a far more extended study than what I can achieve on these pages. Departing from the above diagrammatic overview, I will thus contend myself with derivative matters that affect my domestic everyday. For instance, what are the implications of such local and global dynamics to the singular subject, and in particular to a subject within a marginality, such as a playful individual? For the marginality of such a figure should be underlined. As posited in the introduction, a number of studies indicate the advantages of play on self-fulfilment. And yet ludic actions are perceived instead as provocative (think of Provo in Amsterdam). Prior to developing the argument of the marginality, the following paragraph attempts a selective overview of activities of play relevant to our detective excursion into private and domestic practices that could converge with the criticality of communal constructions.

#### The Rhetorics of Play

How should we understand the play at work on these pages? As defined by Friedrich Schiller, play is 'the only occasion upon which man realises his complete humanity, by giving full 'play' to both sides of his twofold nature, namely thinking and feeling'<sup>10</sup>. Is play then a space of self-realisation? Brian Sutton-Smith categorised play in what he called rhetorics, in his book 'Ambiguity of Play'. Sutton-Smith's classifications are: Progress, Fate, Power, Identity, Imaginary, Self and Frivolity<sup>11</sup>. 'Progress' can be seen as a formative element of play. Games emphasising

on 'Progress' encapsulate the aspirations of a definite ideology. Through role play which usually makes use of socially defined toys and games, participants are parenthetically taught to become obedient members of their community.

Games with or against an abstract entity involve 'Fate'. It is seen as an interaction with an irrational force; whereby a magical hand can intervene. Superstition and mysticism occur in these games, in which the outcome is usually irreversible.

Games implying 'Power' are those competitive ideas of play, such as sports. Winners and losers are distinctly defined within a clearly beginning and an end; the good and the bad are marked through well elaborated rules.

Games and plays concerned with 'Identity' are those defined as communal events, national ceremonies and festivals. These games serve as 'social glues'; confining the participants in a their communities or patriotism.

'Imaginary' games are prevalent in contemporary contexts: to vicariously inhabit a virtual 'second life' or to identify oneself with and adopting a celebrity's identity.

Creativity and self-development activities are key elements in games of the 'Self'; activities that are self-contained and regulating.

'Frivolity', on the other hand, encourages satire and lampooning and subversive counter-culture through interventions and interactions such as carnival.

#### Carnavalesque

As you perhaps have noticed, the above rhetorics operate prescriptively. Indeed, despite the propensity to study play, unbodied play is still shunned by societal structures, perhaps as the former cultivates the absence of measurable outcomes. Could we locate further amorphous activities that are nevertheless constructive? Such practices would appear paradoxical, without however, being foreclosed and contradictory. For instance, Sutton-Smith's rhetoric of frivolity, upon encountering the Bakhtian carnivalesque, becomes a potent mode of self-expression. According to Antony Downey, Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of the carnivalesque is 'an



integrated form of action that usurps hierarchies, taken in conjunction with his reading of the dialogic as a series of agonistic as opposed to dialectic events'. For Downey, we find in this carnivalesque 'the pluralistic underpinnings of collaborative art practices'<sup>12</sup>. Even if such carnivalesque events merely vent society's frustrations, Bakhtin believed that they not only liberated the human spirit, but eventually led to profound social change.

As outlined by Tom Sobchack in his paper appearing in 1996's winter edition of the *Journal of Popular Film and Television*: 'It [carnavalesque] aims at social change by uncovering the truth about the emperor's new clothes: the difference between king and peasant is arbitrary, relative, and merely an accepted convention. Needless to say that such conventions of difference are enforced with a variety of powerful means, from public opinion to actual weapons, which often make the egalitarian urge at the core of the carnival nothing more than an idle daydream. Nevertheless every representation produced by the carnival spirit shows traces of the utopian ideal of a democratic society that lies at the heart of the urge to ridicule authority, even when literally no chance of unseating such authority exists'<sup>13</sup>. Sobchack further clarifies this innate social aspiration of carnival with the illustration from visual cultures: 'The British comedies of the late 1940s and 50s are perfect examples of this conundrum. They display a deep-seated antagonism toward authority, but finally relinquish in the final reel any advocacy for sweeping change, keenly aware of the weight of traditional social norms'<sup>14</sup>. This 'happy ending' has been put forward as a critique to the 'carnavalesque', alongside the temporality within which this activity is confined. The argument being that carnival is tolerated and implicitly controlled, and therefore these festivities only reinforce the institutional powers and its existing structures. Furthermore, the carnival's inherent frivolities could be perceived as inappropriate traits when exhibited during stern circumstances.

Exuberance

And yet, Kay Redfield Jamison advocates in her book 'Exuberance, The Passion for Life' that prominent historic figures whose pathological optimism and inquisitively

eccentric minds contributed greatly in the positive achievements during highly demanding situations. Redfield Jamison stresses the progressive benefits of this overlooked positive force<sup>15</sup>.

A more sacrilegious act would consist in disrupting work; in doing nothing. Some of the most reputable individuals to be found in encyclopaedias have also encouraged a balanced countenance of work and the total abstention from action.

Conscious Inactivity

Freddie Yauner wrote an essay entitled 'The Importance of Being Idle' whilst completing his MA Design Interaction at the Royal College of Art in 2008. Having little to add to his formulations, I will be idle on my turn and construct the following elaborations following Yauner's dissertation. Yauner sets out to demonstrate the timeliness and the historicity of idleness as an essential tool for productivity. 'In the current climate of overwork and corporate creativity', Yauner writes, 'with increasing emphasis on extrinsic motivation, idleness is essential to idea development, problem solving and general creativity'. Yauner notes that although the English Dictionary defines idleness as 'laziness and inaction', and 'avoiding work or employment', the creator of the dictionary, Dr Samuel Johnson, happens to be 'the first editor of the lesser known publication 'The idler' from 1758–1760'; a magazine exclusively dedicated to the practice of the idleness<sup>16</sup>. Dr Johnson can hardly be accused of being a laziness. He was, however, well known to stay in bed till the noonday sun, practicing thus a 'conscious inaction'. 'When he did finally sit down to work, Yauner pursues, he could happily write an essay in half an hour as he rushed to be in time for the post'<sup>17</sup>. Jerome K. Jerome's 'Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow' instructs that 'it is impossible to enjoy idling thoroughly unless one has plenty of work to do. There is no fun in doing nothing when you have nothing to do. Wasting time is merely an occupation then, an exhausting one. Idleness, like kisses, to be sweet must be stolen'<sup>18</sup>. If we equate the ludic with a conscious inactivity, we could read ludic acts as intense forms of productivity characterised by participative thought and retreat, an essential part of creative endeavours. Yauner mentions

contemporaries of Jerome who contributed to his magazine: Arthur Conan Doyle, George Bernard Shaw, and Rudyard Kipling.

In contrast to the paradigm of overwork, Tom Hodgkinson, the manager of the current *Idler* affairs, points out that the 'characteristic of the idler's work is that it looks suspiciously like play'<sup>19</sup>. Hodgkinson defines idleness as 'an area of inquiry rather than an agenda', providing an amusing reflection on the nuisance caused by an idler in his surroundings. An idler, understood as a thinker, is a malcontent. For Hodgkinson, 'a thinker is not a welcome addition to most social situations', since they tend to get in the way<sup>20</sup>.

The Ludic as the Fool

A less banal reading of this marginality could be extracted from Roland Barthes's lectures<sup>21</sup>. For Barthes, it is the fool who could be persecuted within such aimlessness.

Since the norm is the community, with its demands for gregariousness, the visibility, the standardisation, the networks, the laboratory, the hygiene, the ludic is pathological. The ludic is a fool who remains pure from all powers, from all polarities, in a tense condition that is neither for nor against the power. The ludic is somnolent, neither master nor slave, remaining outside instead. And yet such exteriority is untenable, as it would elude control and surveillance. Hence the social tension caused by the ludic, the fool, the marginal.

Hunter-gatherers?

By way of a recreation, let us indulge in a projective sociability of ethnographical proportions: the distant hunter-gatherers, with Marshal Sahlins as our guide. The suggestion is that unskilled labour is impossible except under industrialism<sup>22</sup>. According to Sahlins, social groups whose mode of life depends directly on agrarian, foraging and hunting activities exhibit a consciousness which reflects self-determination and personal fulfilment<sup>23</sup>. Sahlins conducted a field research on contemporary hunter-gatherers; which he published in his article entitled 'The Original Affluent Society'. These hunter-gatherers appeared to work a lot less than in the Western Society. Their work seemed hard to distinguish from what we

regard as play. Sahlins concluded that not only hunters and gatherers work less than the current Western society, but also 'rather than a continuous travail, the food quest is intermittent, leisure abundant, and there is a greater amount of sleep in the daytime per capita per year than in any other condition of society'. They worked four hours a day, assuming they were 'working' at all. Their 'labour' as it appears to us, is skilled labour which exercised their physical and intellectual capacities.

Industrial Antecedents

A little contrast to my somewhat fatalist position vis-à-vis industrialism wouldn't be importune. Mass produced systems and objects which endorse the principles of conscious inactivity and creative physicality have been produced, even if such categories are not abundant. (This scarcity should not come as a surprise considering the mercantile and functionalist nature of these disciplines). The output of the Italian avant-garde of the late 1960 and early 1970s is exemplary. Ugo La Pietra, an Italian artist, architect and designer developed outstanding critical and interrogative work concerned with the notion of counter-architecture. As a member of 'Global Tools' and editor of 'IN' from 1973 onward, he took part in various manifestations whereby his prolific and trans-disciplinary work was exhibited. La Pietra questioned the ownership of the urban landscapes while revealing the complex reality using simple means interventional methods<sup>24</sup>.

'Kar-A-Sutra', a concept car by Mario Bellini was conceived in 1972 for the then French automobile manufacturer Citroen. Although the car remained a prototype, the concept of a mobile human space encapsulated in this 'space wagon' which differed from a caravan became commercialised and it still is topical today. It goes without saying that the radical features (or the absence thereof) of the car – a formless but space – had to give way to more practical solutions required by contemporary car markets. I hesitated to mention Enzo Mari's *Autoprogettazione*: it is the resolved DIY archetype and arguably non-industrial. And yet, the project's strategic methods of dissemination, namely through industrial channels of communication, bring *Autoprogettazione* back into the circuit of the hyper-

industrial. A frivolous exemplification is perhaps Bruno Munari's 'Abitacolo'? More recently we could note Droog / Kessel Kramer's 'Do Create', Although the outset of this series is a marketing stunt thriving on decorative intervention, the theatrical aspect within the living space is secretly applaudable.

#### Summary

Having attempted to localise a domestic practice that responds to global mechanisms, the manoeuvre consisted in investigating, albeit diagrammatically, the vertical structures that command and regulate the productivity of the everyday. We departed from the paradox of transparency. Subsequently, I have formulated the problematic of marginality that such local and global networks impose upon specific subjects seeking non-descriptive pleasure. The ensuing marginality demanded us to investigate summarily the phenomenon of play, with the aim to situate an operative tactic for our marginal figure. During this excursion, we have advanced frivolity, the carnivalesque and exuberance as candidate veins through which our ludic could operate. A few issues have arose, preventing us to reach a conclusive proposal of singular tactics toward a paradoxical operative non-specificity. The urgency for such a speculative space could be articulated by alluding to a provocation of categories. According to Pieter van Bogaert, 'the SS's insistent process of naming forms part of what Didi-Huberman refers to as a 'machinery of 'disimagination''<sup>25</sup>...

#### (Re)solutions?

Ironically, a considerable sleeplessness has become actualised in order to complete this journeying. The financial realities and the demands for subsistence silence such non-specific endeavours. In other words, in times this austere, the aristocratic aspirations of my frivolous exercise are detectable. However, my confession does not discourage Bernard Stiegler, who saw us off at the departure of this airing, to stipulate that the contemporary Medusas of communicative capitalism are a legion. The resulting vigilance of this awareness is exhausting. But perhaps this is the actual assembly of conjectural practices: in convalescent acts of self-

making, self-care such as DIY? If approached with a tact that restores, regains and recuperates, such seemingly non-objective tactics could transform labours into sustained acquisition of self-knowledge as taught by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi who outlines the development of an evolving and absorptive disposition toward the otherwise mechanised undertaking and actions. Csikszentmihalyi advocates involvement in an activity for its own sake, an engagement that differs from expertise. According to Csikszentmihalyi, the challenge of this concentration would enable the subject to achieve an optimally harmonious outlook<sup>26</sup>. This horizontal flow could become a delicacy that compels to inhabit a space far less teleological; somewhere propositional, fragile and sapient. In less mythological terms we could imagine prosaic and incremental acts set in an everyday scenario that cumulatively extend and open up preventive definitions.

Summarily, the contemporary paradigm is defined by the ethos of industriality, production, materiality, efficiency, 24/7 infallibility etc. By contrast, inhabiting such domestic invisibilities could activate transformative (un) productivity: a panoramic pleasure that eludes arrogance. The defiant aspect of the ludic is precisely what could offer an opening.

#### Notes

1. Marshall McLuhan & Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is The Message*, London: Penguin, (1967)
2. <http://www.cranbrookart.edu/Pages/3D.html> (Last accessed April 2009)
3. Bernard Stiegler, *Suffocated Desire, Or How The Cultural Industry Destroys The Individual: Contribution To A Theory Of Mass Consumption*, Trans. Johann Rossouw, *Parrhesia* Nr. 13, 2011, pp. 52–61
4. Bernard Stiegler, *Suffocated Desire*, op. Cit., pp. 52–53
5. Possibly I encountered this notion through Dr Stephen Hayward at the MA Industrial Design course at Central Saint Martins in London between 2007 and 2009
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8. Sean Cubitt, *Art, Technology and Policy in the Twenty-First Century*, *Third Text*, Volume 23, Issue 5, p. 573
9. Felix Stalder, *Fight of Transparency*, *Open*, Volume 22, NAI Publisher: Rotterdam (2010)

10. **Bob Black**, *The Abolition of Work*, *Vague Nr. 20: Televisionaries*, London, 1988
11. **Brian Sutton-Smith**, *The ambiguity of Play*, London: **Harvard University Press**, 1997
12. **Anthony Downey**, *An Ethics of Engagement: Collaborative Art Practices and the Return of the Ethnographer*, *Third Text*, 2009, 23:5, pp. 593–603
13. **Tom Sobchack**, *Bakhtin's 'Carnavalesque' in 1950s British Comedy Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Winter '96, Vol. 23; pp. 179–85
14. *Ibid.*
15. **Kay Redfield Jamison**, *Exuberance: the Passion for Life*, London: **Knopf**, 2004
16. **Freddie Yauner**, *The Importance Of Being Idle (MA Design Interaction Dissertation – RCA, London, 2008)*, [www.freddieyauner.co.uk/files/the-importance-of-being-idle.doc](http://www.freddieyauner.co.uk/files/the-importance-of-being-idle.doc) (Accessed 20 February 2009)
17. *Ibid.*
18. **Jerome K. Jerome**, *The Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*, London: **Snow books Ltd**, 2004, pg.10
19. **Tom Hodgkinson**, *Letters From The Editor*, <http://idler.co.uk/notes/letter-from-the-editor-2/> (Accessed 24 January 2009)
20. *Ibid.*
21. **Roland Barthes**, *'Comment vivre ensemble: simulation sur quelques espaces romanesques, Séance du 23 mars 1977, Marginalité*, Paris: **Seuil**, 2002, p. 133
22. **Bob Black**, *The Abolition of Work*, *Vague Nr. 20: Televisionaries*, London, 1988
23. **Marshall Sahlins**, *The Original Affluent Society*: <http://www.primitivism.com/original-affluent.htm> (Accessed 20 January 2009)
24. **Ugo La Pietra**, *introducciones / introductions Gustavo Gili*: Barcelona, 1991
25. **Pieter van Bogaert**, *On the outside: Exteriority as Condition for Resistance*, *Afterall*, no. 23, Spring 2010
26. **Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**, *Flow: the Psychology of Happiness*, **Rider**, London, 1992

## Instructions

These are some of the instructions collected by Invisible Spaces of Parenthood, they are selected for reproduction here due to their legibility at this size. A complete and full-size version of the instructions can be downloaded at [www.andreafrancke.me.uk](http://www.andreafrancke.me.uk)

### Silhouette Chairs / Cut & Glue

1. Choose a chair you need or would like to have 2. Draw its silhouette over a thick sheet of corrugated cardboard. Make sure the 'design' is strong in its junctions 3. Cut-out the silhouette (with care, don't cut yourself!) 4. Replicate the step 3 as many time as necessary to have enough parts to do the final length of the chair 5. Attach all the silhouettes, in order to compose the chair 6. Wait until the glue dries, and then it is finished. You can use it.

Steps		
1 & 2	3 & 4	5 & 6
		





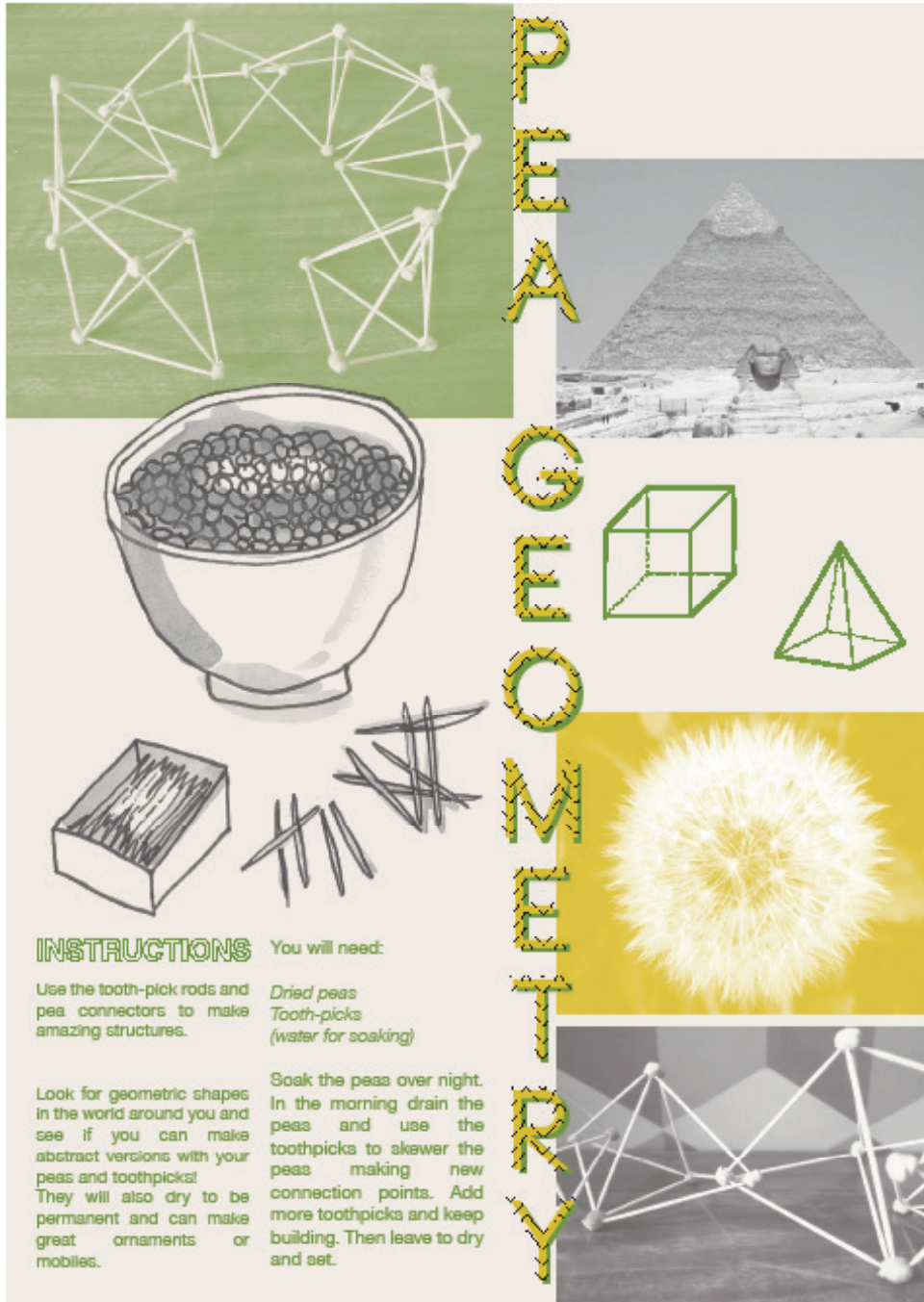






Images above are mere illustrations on the possibilities of the technique, that is already wide spread and developed in (for) many situations.





**INSTRUCTIONS**

Use the tooth-pick rods and pea connectors to make amazing structures.

Look for geometric shapes in the world around you and see if you can make abstract versions with your peas and toothpicks! They will also dry to be permanent and can make great ornaments or mobiles.

You will need:

*Dried peas  
Tooth-picks  
(water for soaking)*

Soak the peas over night. In the morning drain the peas and use the toothpicks to skewer the peas making new connection points. Add more toothpicks and keep building. Then leave to dry and set.

**Clare's play-dough recipe**

This is the recipe my mother used when my brothers and I were small.

- o 2 cups of flour
- o 1 cup of salt
- o 2 cups water
- o 2 tablespoons cooking oil
- o 2 teaspoons of cream of tartar
- o food colouring or poster paint (add as needed)

Put all the ingredients into a pan and stir it continuously over a medium heat.

It will eventually turn into a thick ball - when this happens it's ready.

Let it cool and store in an airtight container.

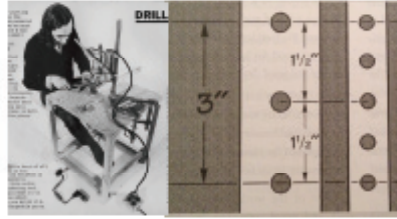


## How to build with Grid Beam

A fast, easy, and affordable system for constructing almost anything

with the authorization of the authors:  
Neil Jurgensen, Richard Jurgensen and Vilma Kappel

Grid beams is a new way of assembling things that allows for  
re-use and re-configuration.  
It uses modular 2x2 beams with tri-joints.



The beams are easy to make. We used 2" by 2" beams and drilled the holes with a drill bit and (quite helpful for the amount of lumber you have to make). The holes are made through the wide beam at a distance of 1/2" (the real width of the 2" by 2") from the edge. At the beginning making so many holes may seem like a waste of time, but that is where it allows you to re-use and re-configure your project as needed.



Tri-joints are the best way to  
connect the beams.

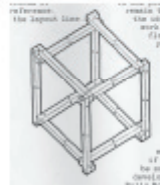


You can use the grid-beam system to create  
furniture, toys, rooms and even vehicles. Check  
their website for inspiration:  
<https://www.gridbeams.com/>

and the best part is that most of the things you  
purchase to create holes to be able to reproduce a  
project.



Kim Innes' "How to build your own living structures" was the main inspiration for the Grid Beam  
system. It is also the source for the furniture that lives in the ESP workshop.



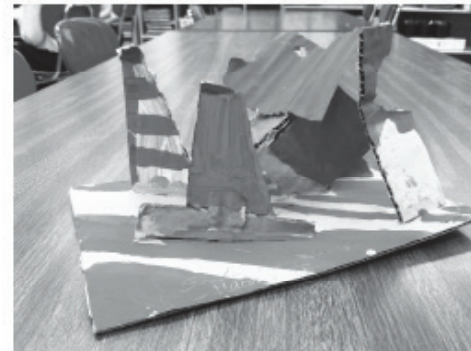
We used the basic 24" and 48" beams from Kim Innes  
to build the livable spaces of Personal  
Workshop.

**Cardboard** is light, durable and everywhere.

You can bend, rip, peel, twist, poke, stack, cut,  
paint, glue and staple it.

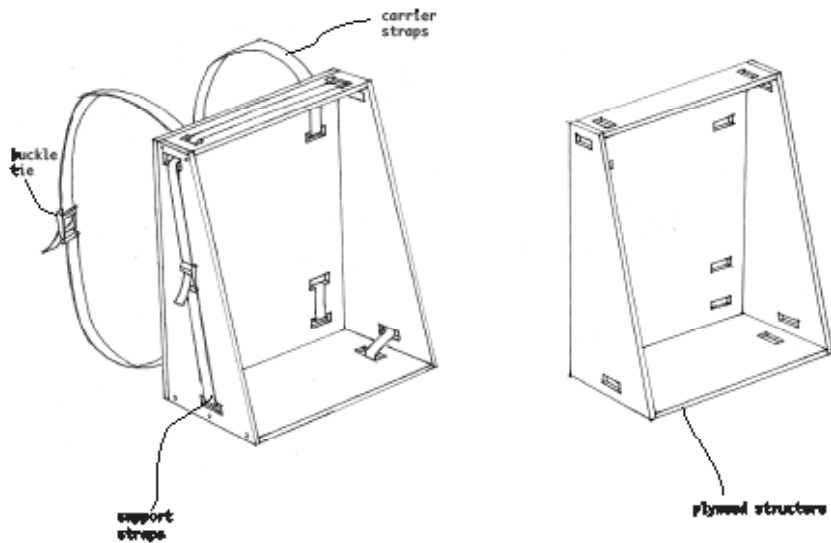
To make a construction out of cardboard:

1. Deconstruct a cardboard box and cut it into shapes using a scissor or guillotine.
2. Experiment with the ways in which you can arrange the shapes to make people, animals, aliens, robots, airplanes, cars or anything else they can think of.  
AND/OR  
Experiment with ways that you can change cardboard with your hands to make a 3 dimensional construction. Older children can use scissors.
3. Demonstrate overlapping shapes and using sticky white glue. Just a dot, not a lot of glue and hold it down while counting to ten in your head. You can also staple shapes together.
4. Begin!
5. When dry you can paint it, color it, glue other items to it, add a stick for a puppet



## Extensions

Christian Myampeta



Tools Per Component/Qty

Tools Per Component/Qty

## Material

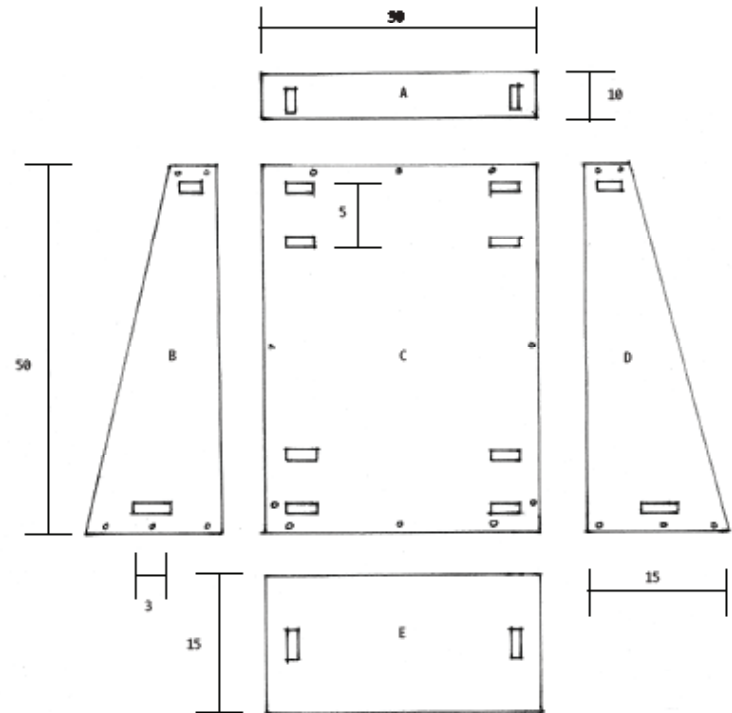
9 mm plywood  
3 x con buckle tie 4mm  
20 x wooden screw 4 x 16 mm

## Optional canvas cover

(1x) 30 x 60 wood Canvas  
(± 8x) wooden screws with rings 4 x 8 mm  
(1x) 300 x 25 mm nylon strap  
(2x) 150 x 25 mm nylon strap

Dimensions in cm  
Scale: 1/5

Components  
A: 8,1 x 20,2  
B: 8,1 x 20,2 x 50  
C: 30 x 50  
D: 8,1 x 20,2  
E: 14,1 x 20,2



## Job list

- 1) cut components A, B, C, D, E to the right sizes (considering the sheet thickness)
- 2) Cut out (30mm) or drill the slots for the nylon straps
- 3) Drill the holes for the screws (drill bit of 3mm is recommended for 4mm screws)
- 4) assemble the plywood structure
- 5) Mount the supportive strap using a con buckle tie
- 6) Mount the carrier straps using 2 separate con buckle ties

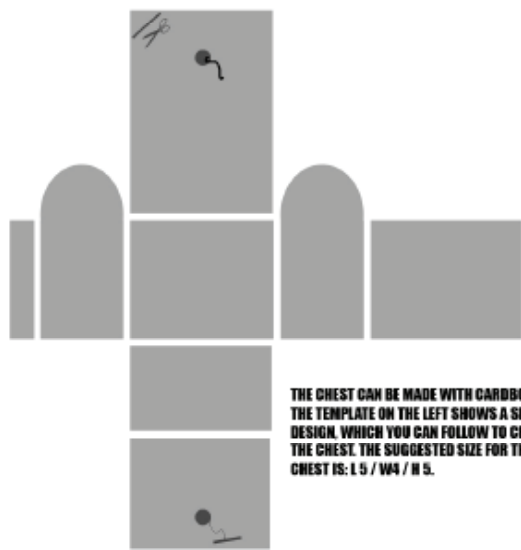
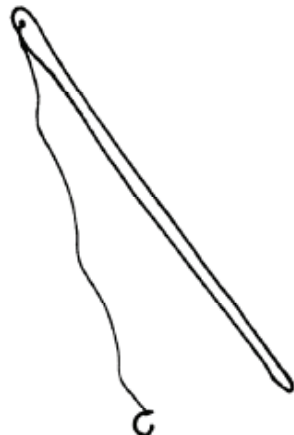
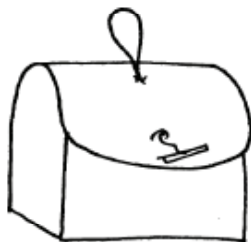
## FISHING EXCHANGE CHEST

MY FAVORITE GAME WHEN I WAS A CHILD WAS THE CHEST FISHING GAME, WHICH WAS MADE UP BY MY GRANDMA ANGELITA. GRANDMA WOULD PUT A COUPLE OF 'PESETAS', (SPANISH CURRENCY AT THE MOMENT), IN A SMALL CHEST, WHICH WAS CALLED THE SECRET CHEST. AFTER THAT WE WOULD WORK TOGETHER IN THE MAKING OF A FISHING ROD, WALK TO THE PARK AND THROW THE CHEST TO THE POND.

ME AND MY FRIENDS WOULD QUEUE FOR HOURS, TRYING TO CATCH THE SECRET TREASURE. THE BEST MOMENT WAS NOT THE COLLECTION OF THE TREASURE AFTER A SUCCESSFUL TRY, BUT BEING THE CHEST UNDER THE WATER AGAIN FOR ANOTHER CHANCE.

### MATERIALS:

SCISSORS  
CARDBOARD  
GLUE  
STRING  
METAL WIRE  
(PLASTIC HOOK)



THE CHEST CAN BE MADE WITH CARDBOARD. THE TEMPLATE ON THE LEFT SHOWS A SIMPLE DESIGN, WHICH YOU CAN FOLLOW TO CREATE THE CHEST. THE SUGGESTED SIZE FOR THE CHEST IS: L 5 / W 4 / H 3.

THE FISHING ROD CAN BE MADE WITH CARDBOARD, BY CUTTING STRAIGHT AND LONG PIECES AND GLUING THEM TOGETHER TO MAKE THE ROD STRONG. FOR THE HOOK YOU CAN USE ANY KIND OF WIRE, A PLASTIC CURTAIN HOOK MIGHT BE A GOOD IDEA.

## TELEPHONE BOX

THE SUGGESTED SIZES FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TELEPHONE BOX ARE:

A: L 20 / W 15 / H 10 CM

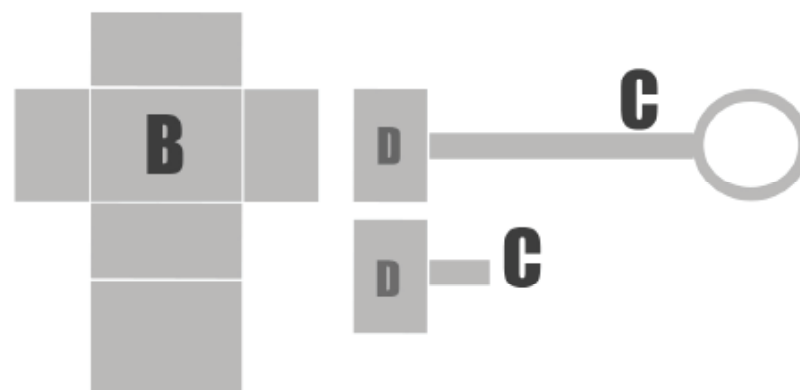
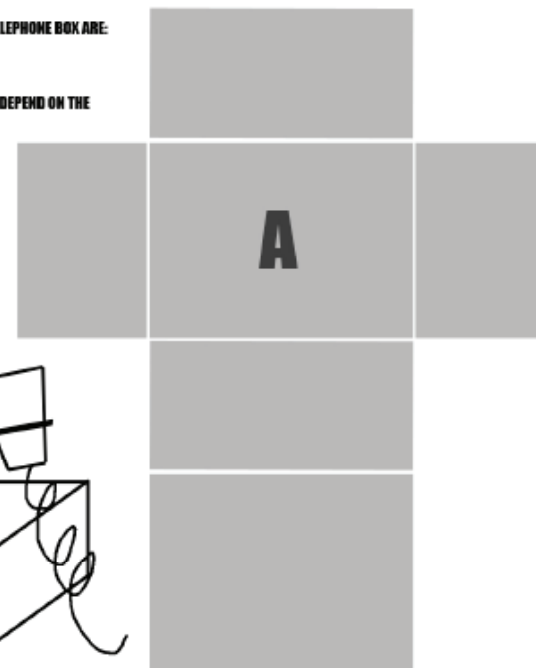
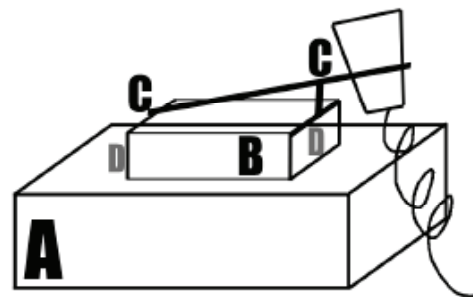
B: L 13 / W 8 / H 5 CM

C: BASE 5X8 CM (THE LENGTH OF THE REST OF THE PIECES DEPEND ON THE PLASTIC GLASS SIZE).

IT IS RECOMMENDED TO LEAVE A PLUS OF 2 CENTIMETRES IN SOME OF THE BOXES EDGES TO GLUE THE PARTS TOGETHER.

### MATERIALS:

SCISSORS  
CARDBOARD  
GLUE



# TELEPHONE

- 1 GET A PIECE OF STRING AND TWO EMPTY PLASTIC/CARDBOARD GLASSES
- 2 PUNCH A HOLE AT THE BOTTOM OF EACH GLASS, SMALL ENOUGH FOR STRING TO FIT THROUGH
- 3 PASS THE STRING THROUGH THE HOLE
- 4 TIE A KNOT IN THE END OF THE STRING
- 4 PLACE THE UNTIED END OF THE STRING THROUGH THE BOTTOM OF THE OTHER CAN OR CUP AND REPEAT PROCES



**MATERIALS:**  
SCISSORS  
STRING  
TWO PLASTIC OR CARDBOARD GLASSES/CUPS

# The Bottle Skipping Rope

- To make the toy you will:
- need two small clean plastic bottles
  - a rope
  - two plastic lids
  - insulating tape, scissors and a short screwdriver



<p>Make a hole in the middle of the lid's surface using the short screw driver (which is safer than the longer one)</p>		<p>Make the hole bigger using the scissors' blade. The hole must be big enough for the rope.</p>	
<p>Wrap the ends of the rope using the insulating tape. This will allow you to insert both of the ends of the rope into the lid's hole easily.</p>		<p>Insert the rope's end into the lid's hole, and tie a knot. By this way the rope will rest in its place properly.</p>	
<p>Tape and decorate with tape the bottle surface.</p>		<p>The last step is to link all parts together using the tape</p>	
<p>Place the knot inside the little bottle and tape the lid together with the bottle's edge.</p>		<p>Now you can test if the toy you made is a proper "tool to have fun" by playing the skipping rope game.</p>	
<p>If you would like to catch some more ideas about the accessible toys you can make</p>		<p>on your own, you can visit the <a href="http://www.loymakingactivities.com">www.loymakingactivities.com</a> website</p>	

So make the most of your bottle rubbish and be a good recycler!

ciao!  
By Renzo Laporta



## The Jumping Spider

To make the Jumping Spider you will need simple materials you can easily find around your house, like a clean soft plastic bottle, scissors, insulating tape, some stripes of ribbons.

Look for those bottle with a good elastic quality, a small bottle can work better than a big bottle. If the bottle is really elastic you can have a good jumping toy.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scissors</li> <li>- insulating tape</li> <li>- a soft clean plastic bottle</li> <li>- Ribbons</li> </ul>		<p>Cut the bottle half way through</p>	
<p>Place a stripe of tape close to the edge of the bottle. This will help you to know where you have to stop with the cutting of the legs</p>		<p>Take the bottom part of the bottle and make 8 "legs" using the scissors. "Legs" must be of the same size, possibly</p>	
<p>Fold the 8 legs</p>		<p>Test the bottle's flexibility. With the tip of your finger press down the "head" of the bottom bottle</p>	
<p>Fold the end of each leg, so you can make the "foot" for each leg".</p>			
<p>Finally, add decoration to characterize the jumping Spider, adding the eyes with black</p>	<p>And with tape. Adding the hair using the ribbons and so on...</p>		

If you would like to learn some more ideas about the accessible toymaking, look the [www.toymakingactivities.com](http://www.toymakingactivities.com) website

by Renzo Laporta

## Making Bilboquet

An easy way to make a toy by re-using a plastic bottle



### What you need:

- A piece of wrapping paper
- a page of newspaper
- A plastic bottle (1 or 1,5 litre) with its plastic lid
- 1 metre of string
- A pair scissors
- Coloured electrical tape or masking tape



1. Punch a hole in the bottle using the point of the scissors and then cut the bottle in half



2. Take the top half of the bottle (with the lid) and cover the cut edge of the bottle with the electrical tape or masking tape. This will cover any sharp edges



3. Fix the wrapping paper around the top half of the bottle and fix it into position with some electrical tape, along the edge of the bottle as shown above.



4. Cut the edge of the wrapping paper closest to the bottle top of the bottle. This produces a nice skirt effect.



5. Crumple a sheet of newspaper into a small ball

6. Wrap the string around the ball of newspaper and tie a strong knot. Remember! When you tie the knot, make sure that one of the ends of the string is left long as you will need this to attach the ball of newspaper to the bottle.



7. Wrap some electrical tape around the newspaper ball. So it becomes compact.

8. Remove the bottle top and place the end of the string inside the neck of the bottle. Now put the top back on and close it tightly. Now you are ready to play Bilboquet!

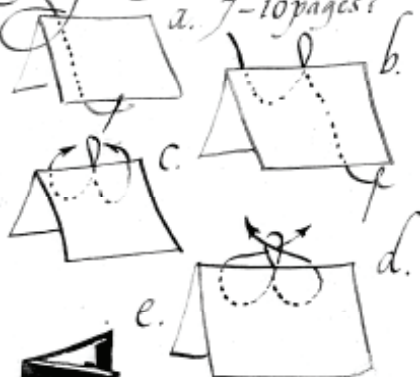
For safety reason, when uses scissors or the sharp knives it is important:

1. Punch in perpendicular way;
2. Keep the holding-hand far from the point of the scissors.

For further information contact Renzo Laporta: [info@toymakingactivities.com](mailto:info@toymakingactivities.com)

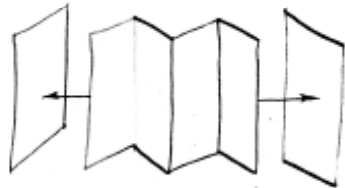
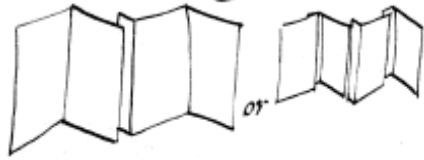
# Single Section Book

a. 7-10 pages?



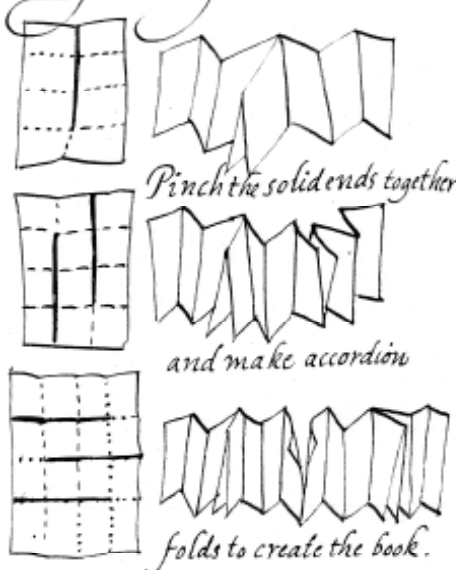
a. Put your Needle in at one point, b. Out and in again in the middle leaving a small loop. Then c. put again at a third point. d. Pull the ends through the loop in opposite directions. e. Pull tight and tie a knot.

# Accordion or flutter book



Single or double sheets are joined with a small overlap. Books that will stand have same-size covers. \*Ties can be pasted between cover and pages.

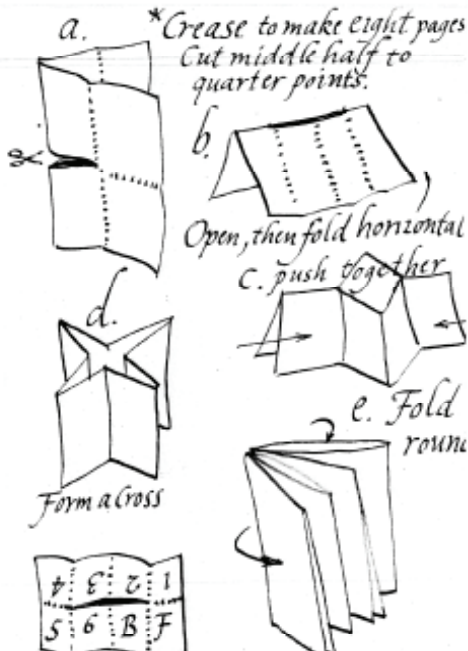
# Origami or Maze books



Pinch the solid ends together

and make accordion

folds to create the book.



a. \*Crease to make eight pages Cut middle half to quarter points.

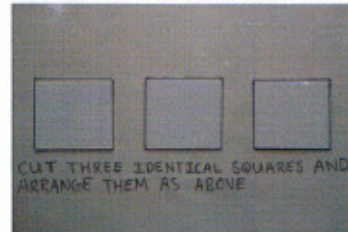
b. Open, then fold horizontal

c. push together

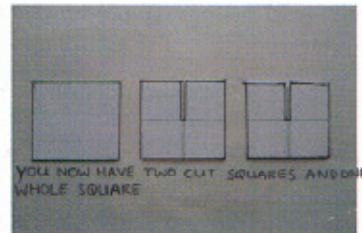
e. Fold round

4	E	C	1
5	6	B	F

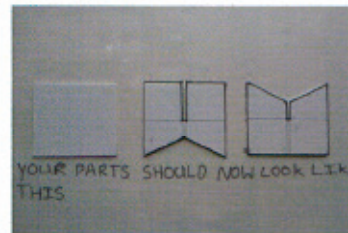
# A TABLE WITH NO NUMBERS A MODULAR RAISED SURFACE



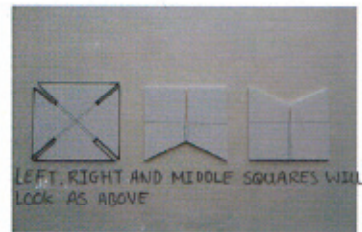
CUT THREE IDENTICAL SQUARES AND ARRANGE THEM AS ABOVE



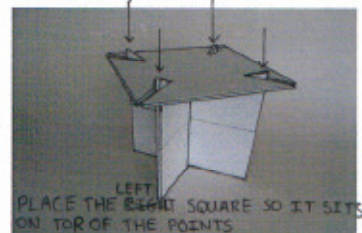
YOU NOW HAVE TWO CUT SQUARES AND ONE WHOLE SQUARE



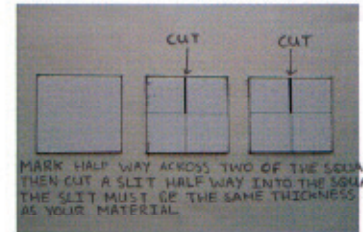
YOUR PARTS SHOULD NOW LOOK LIKE THIS



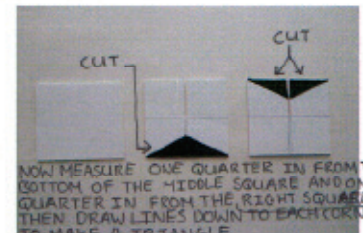
LEFT, RIGHT AND MIDDLE SQUARES WILL LOOK AS ABOVE



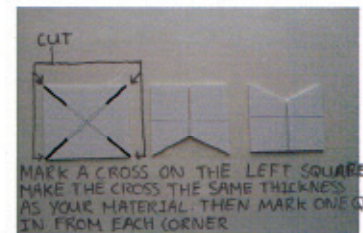
LEFT PLACE THE RIGHT SQUARE SO IT SITS ON TOP OF THE POINTS



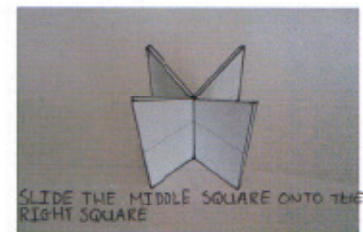
MARK HALF WAY ACROSS TWO OF THE SQUARES THEN CUT A SLIT HALF WAY INTO THE SQUARE THE SLIT MUST BE THE SAME THICKNESS AS YOUR MATERIAL



NOW MEASURE ONE QUARTER IN FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE MIDDLE SQUARE AND ONE QUARTER IN FROM THE RIGHT SQUARE TOP THEN DRAW LINES DOWN TO EACH CORNER TO MAKE A TRIANGLE



MARK A CROSS ON THE LEFT SQUARE MAKE THE CROSS THE SAME THICKNESS AS YOUR MATERIAL THEN MARK ONE QUARTER IN FROM EACH CORNER



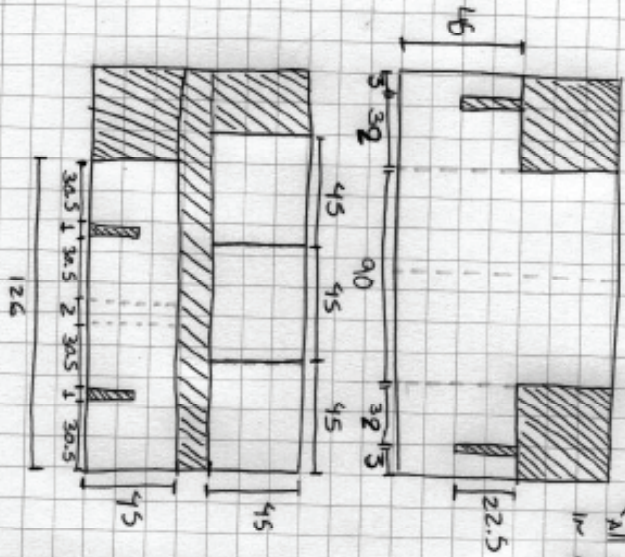
SLIDE THE MIDDLE SQUARE ONTO THE RIGHT SQUARE





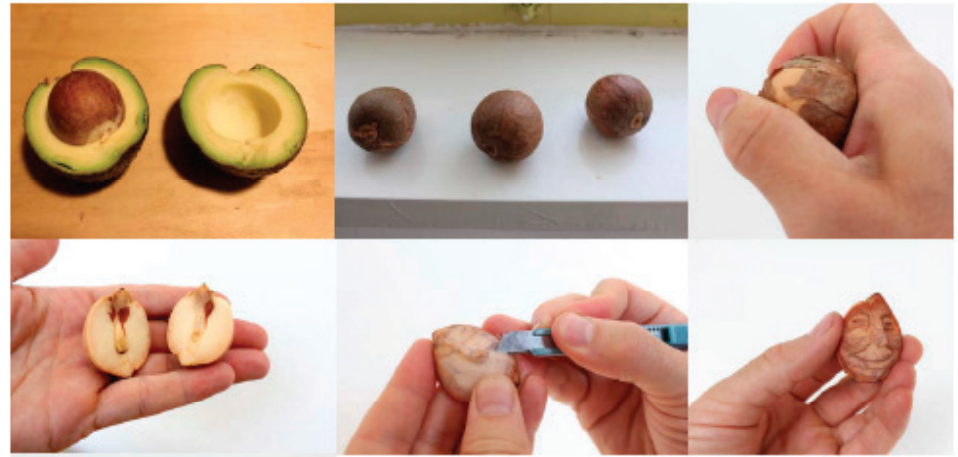
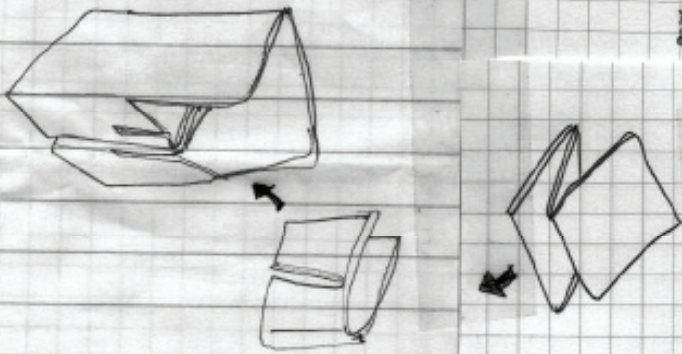
ADAPTED FROM "BODIPIC FURNITURE" JAMES HEWESSEY AND VIKOR POPAET

THE DRAWINGS ARE NOT ON SCALE



TWO SHEETS OF CARDSTOCK OR FLOT BOARDS (100x150)

ALL MEASURES ARE IN CM



Avocado Pit Head  
Toy/Buttons/Amulet/Citizens

Michael Edify



How to:

Eat an avocado (high in vitamin C), save the seed.

Leave the seed to dry out for several days (times vary according to weather), until the outer skin comes off easily and the seed splits naturally in two. Every seed yields two "heads."

Using a normal utility blade, or a scalpel for extra detail, carve the soft meat of the seed into desired shape. Leave the completed toy/button/amulet/citizen to dry out for a few days, and it will shrink and harden to a wood-like consistency.

The avocado pit head toy/button/amulet/citizen can be used in several ways, fairly self-evident from its name (oh, it is also useful as an incense holder).

Please note that if string is to be incorporated for its use as an amulet or button, the string should be pierced through the seed in its still-fresh state.

It has been observed that over time, if properly maintained, these figures develop cracks.

## Acknowledgments

To be continued by the reader...

I'm extremely grateful to all the contributors and visitors to the project. Special thanks to: Kaye Egerton who has been an important part of the project since the Nursery at Chelsea. To the lecturers, curators and artists who believed the subject was worthwhile and supported the project through the last two years: John Cussans, Dave Beech, Emily Pethick, Binna Choi, Maiko Tanaka, Holly Willats. To Louise Shelley who not only coordinated the project at The Showroom but also embraced all my crazy ideas and had to work many extra weekends because of the dismal number of events I optimistically decided to host. To Jamie George and Oier Iruretagoiena, without their help nothing would have been built. To Annette Krauss for being the living proof that motherhood and artistic practice can be successfully combined and for being a great partner in the (in)visibility show. To the childcare providers who were our partners in the project, Portman Family Centre, Church Street Nursery, Room2Play, Luton Street Nursery and Abeona Nursery. To Jackson Lam for doing an amazing job with the graphic design for the show and also being involved in the exhibition design and overall project. To Hato Press for being so generous with the printing and distribution of the manual. To Elena Francke, my mum, who managed to have a great career and raised two daughters to believe that they could do anything that they set their minds to. And finally the biggest thank you to Alex and Oscar for all their patience and for always having my back when needed.

# Invisible Spaces of Parenthood

A project by **Andrea Francke**  
Edited by **Andrea Francke, Louise Shelley and Eve Smith**  
Designed by **Jackson Lam (hato)**  
Photographs by **Mariona Otero**  
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Invisible Spaces of  
Parenthood: A Collection  
of Pragmatic Propositions  
for a Better Future **explores**  
**issues surrounding**  
**childcare in collaboration**  
**with local nurseries,**  
**childminders, children's**  
**centres and parent groups,**  
**and looks for new models**  
**and possibilities.**



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