

The image features a vertical composition of text on a background of dense, abstract scribbles in shades of blue, yellow, and black. The text is arranged in a column and reads: LOVE is the DREAM of a day's deep breath, root COMMUNICATION. The words are in various fonts and sizes, with some appearing in all caps and others in lowercase. The background consists of overlapping, energetic strokes of color, creating a textured, layered effect behind the white text.

LOVE
is
the
DREAM
of
a
day's
deep breath,
root
COMMUNICATION

Feed is an arts-based research project that explores issues of babyfeeding, motherhood and public space.



Film stills from Helina Metaferia's *A Seat: Pulling up a Chair next to Joseph, in conversation with Nzinga, Rosa, Shirley, Solange*, 2017, single channel video (2:57), part of the larger photo, video, and relic installation.

The art museum is full of chairs.

Van Gogh's Chair (1888) — rustic, with a straight wooden back, straw seat and no armrests; empty, but for his pipe and tobacco resting at one corner — at the National Gallery in London has long been viewed as a surrogate self-portrait for the absent figure of the modest, reflective artist. At the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Joseph Kosuth, in *One and Three Chairs* (1965), presents us with a folding chair bracketed by a full-scale photograph of it and a dictionary definition for the word 'chair'. The modernist triptych elaborates the relationship between an object and its verbal and visual referents: the chair as container for conceptualism, but vacated, once again, of the body.

Recently, as part of an exhibition interrogating the absence of Black women artists in art historical narratives, museum collections and display, I installed Helina Metaferia's *A Seat: Pulling up a Chair next to Joseph, in conversation with Nzinga, Rosa, Shirley, Solange* (2017). The work simultaneously alludes to, complicates and exceeds Kosuth's by including a performance video of the artist interacting — wearily, joyously, determinedly, frustratedly, creatively — with the folding chair, alongside the definitive words of Shirley Chisholm, first African-American leader of the Democratic National Committee: 'If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.' Metaferia pushes the chair beyond the conceptual, the symbolic, insisting on the embodied and relational: in 1955, Rosa Parks (the 'Rosa' of the title), for example, refused to vacate a bus seat for a white passenger, catalysing the Montgomery bus boycott that became a cornerstone of the civil rights movement in the United States. Chairs are a matter of power, of access, of belonging, of bodies.

The art museum is full of chairs.

But there is nowhere to sit.

Chairs, through their absence or presence, their design and orientation, orchestrate our movement and direct our attention, indicate how our bodies are to be arranged in space and in relation to others. The sleek, minimalist benches that traditionally attend museum spaces (if there is seating at all) have no armrests, no back support. We are held to attention (and must hold ourselves upright) for short periods of fully frontal contemplation. Comfort is an afterthought, a distraction, even.



Once you denaturalise the idea of a chair — recognising it as what artist and educator Gina Siepel calls a ‘social sculpture’ [1] — you start to notice the ways in which we’re subliminally told how to ‘be’ or belong (or not) in different spaces through the seats we’re offered (or not): the classroom chair, the office chair, the lounge. For the longest time, I’ve taken up residence on the floor in front of artworks; a somatic reorientation that I’ve found opens up new observations, affects and perspectives. At least half the time, I’ll be asked to move by a slightly perplexed docent, as if my act of sitting presents a direct, if ambiguous, affront to the sanctity of the space.

In 2021, in connection with the Sir Frank Bowling retrospective at the Arnolfini art gallery in Bristol, I attended a day-long series of somatic-centered programming called ‘How do you feel?’ — I was delighted to find myself surrounded by beanbags, folding chairs and movable benches for variously sitting, slouching, reclining or perching around the galleries. Together with participants, the facilitators mused on the radical possibilities of rest and comfort in public space, especially from an inclusion and accessibility perspective. And together, through guided engagement with artworks based on embodied prompts, we came to a new fullness of aesthetic observation, experience and affect flowing from this reorientation; breaking free of established codes of gallery conduct. [2] A year later, I returned to see the Paula Rego exhibition: they’ve kept the beanbags. And they’re very popular.

Of course, despite a long tradition of venerating the Madonna Lactans, there is also a long and overt history of museums exiling or sanctioning breastfeeding parents in public gallery spaces. [3] The inclusive design of a baby-feeding seat for museums and other public spaces, then, is a distinctly radical proposition. It stakes a claim for care, for carers and for caretaking. It not only considers the embodied experience, needs and comfort of the caregiver — making space for arms to rest, for feet to plant, for bottles to nestle, for books and toys and bags to stow away — but also asserts their legitimacy; their right to take up space.

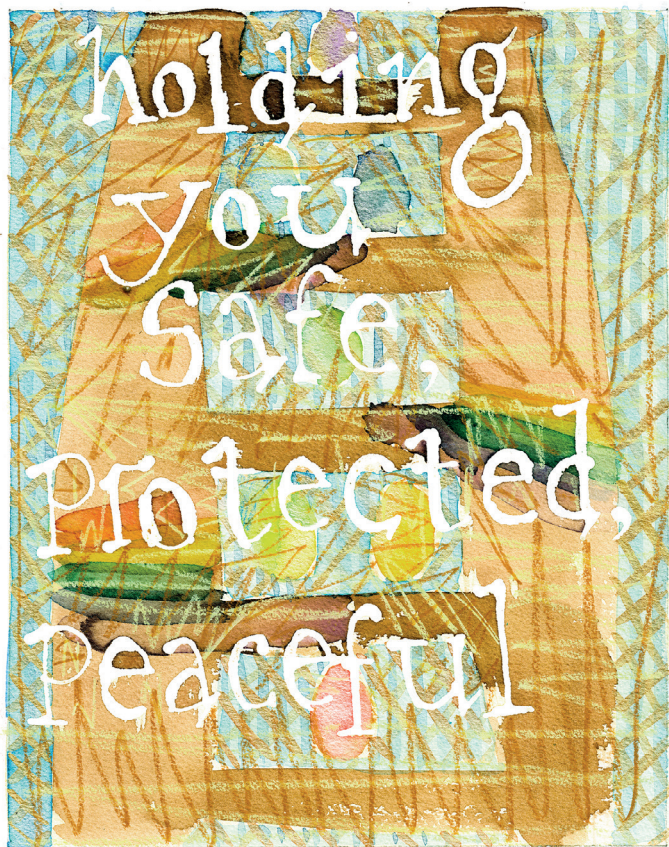
And while the chair can be easily integrated anywhere in a museum, such that you can experience the works around you from your seat, it is also in and of itself

a curated series of multi-sensory artworks, provocations and pathways: Jade Montserrat’s drawing, the audio pieces by Nicola Singh, Magda Stawarska-Beavan and Krissi Musiol embedded in the wingback design, this little zine. *Feed* fundamentally replaces exile with immersion: settle in, sit back, take your time, take up space, take care.

[1] From a conversation with Gina Siepel, 31 December 2021. See Siepel’s website: <https://www.ginasiepel.com> Her 2022 sculpture *Chair Study: Becoming*, was included in the exhibition ‘Becoming Trees’ at Concord Center for the Visual Arts, Massachusetts, in 2022.

[2] The event was co-organised and facilitated by artist and curator Gaylene Gould, founder and creative director of The Space to Come (a collaborative lab that tests ways to build a new world for compassionately connected citizens), and dance theatre practitioner Raquel Meseguer, founder of the Unchartered Collective (which creates theatrical encounters exploring the lived experience of invisible disability). Saturday 14 August 2021. <https://arnolfini.org.uk/whatson/howdoyoufeel>

[3] See, for example, the 2017 case of a breastfeeding mother told to “cover up” at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, while ironically surrounded by representations of naked women in sculpture *and* during National Breastfeeding week (<https://tinyurl.com/czyvpvnpf>) or the breastfeeding mother asked to leave the galleries in the Picasso Museum in Málaga in 2016 (<https://tinyurl.com/2nyxaf4j>).



Where have you breastfed your baby?

Responses to an online design survey to help inform the development of the feeding chair.

On a bench

In a café

On a windowsill

In a lift foyer

On a train

On a wall

On the floor

Stood up holding them

Stood with them in the pram

On steps at the beach front

In the toilet

Standing up

Anywhere available

Once in M&S whilst my husband tried on shoes

On a rock

In a window display as it was the only chair I could find

Walking around with baby in a carrier

On some grass

A bed in a bed shop

At work meetings

On the bus

On a seat watching a video work in a gallery

Literally walking around holding him to my boob

Queuing in Lidl

A conversation about public breastfeeding

Elaine Speight (curator) and
Gill Thomson (Professor in
Perinatal Health, University of
Central Lancashire)



ES — I've been thinking about ideas of comfort and discomfort in relation to motherhood. And when I was looking at your research, I was thinking about how the type of shame you talk about, which relates to feeding a baby in public, can only really happen in a social context, because it's a reaction to other people's disapproval and discomfort, both real and imagined. [1]

GT — Yes, shame's a fundamentally social emotion.

ES — What struck me was the fact that, amongst the women that you interviewed, shame was experienced by those who bottle fed their babies in public as well as those who breastfed, because they felt that they would be judged for their method of feeding.

GT — Yes, it's fundamentally about motherhood, how exposing it is, and how mothers are always being judged and criticised. We collected lots of data and it was never with the intention to look at shame. The data came from lots of interviews connected to different studies associated with infant feeding, such as women's experiences of peer support and general infant feeding. I was having a conversation with one of my co-authors, Renée Flacking, about the fact that we'd heard similar stories from women, and we discussed how shame was present irrespective of how women feed their babies. At that time, I knew very little about shame and the women didn't always name it. But there was something about the self, something very internalised about how women feel about themselves — that they can consider themselves to be an unfit or bad mother, because of how they choose to feed their baby.

The research got picked up by the press and I did lots of media interviews. And reading the comments that people wrote in

Mothers are always being judged and criticised.

response to the newspaper articles revealed really polarised public opinions, with the same things coming up again and again, particularly in relation to breastfeeding.

You had people saying things like, 'Stay at home love if you want to get your breasts out. We don't want to see it'. Or 'why are you making such a big deal about this? Women should breastfeed'.

Shame was there in the narrative of the research. It was never meant to be. We didn't set out to look for shame. But it was already there



Lactation pod for breastfeeding and pumping at the Milwaukee General Mitchell International Airport, USA.

How do we normalise the mess of feeding babies, the mess of motherhood?

A good mother is somebody who breastfeeds discreetly and it's hidden. Or if they can't manage this, then they should stay at home.

in what women told us about how they experienced baby feeding outside of the home, or how women were made to feel when they decided to formula feed.

We have pockets of formula feeding cultures in the North West of England and one of the interviews that springs to mind was with a woman who would express breastmilk and feed it to her baby in a bottle when she was in public or in front of friends, because she was afraid of feeling shame. She was embarrassed to say, 'Actually I breastfeed', because that would have been outside of the norm and she felt that she would have been judged by her peers within that environment, in the same way that someone bottle feeding might be judged within a breastfeeding culture.

ES — It's as if different methods of baby feeding are somehow deviant in public, depending on the social and cultural environment that you're in. For example, I never really had a problem breastfeeding my children in public when they were very little. However, I did feel uncomfortable doing it when they were toddlers and preferred not to, even though I would breastfeed them at home, because I'm aware that it is an unusual thing to do and it's often ridiculed or frowned upon. I would feel uncomfortable because I would be imagining other people's negative reactions. I think it's interesting how some of the women you spoke to altered their behaviour and methods of feeding so that they wouldn't stand out within their social environments.

GT — It relates to Erving Goffman's work on stigma.

[2] How we try to present ourselves as somebody else to fit in and avoid feelings of shame and being stigmatised.

ES — Yes, because your research made me think about how women perform the idea of a good mother in public through the way that they feed their baby.

GT — Definitely. In terms of breastfeeding women, there was often a perception that they shouldn't be visible or exposed, particularly if they were still struggling or learning to breastfeed. There was a perception that, if they mastered it, that would be ok, because they would be able to do it discreetly and people wouldn't be able to tell that they were breastfeeding. So, if you can hide it and make it something that it's not, then that's ok. But you know what it's like, the baby is pulling off the breast and your nipple's exposed and the milk's all over the place....

ES — It can be very messy!

GT — And the thought of that can be horrifying for women because people would see them, would see their breasts, which are sexualised objects, and they felt they'd be judged.

Sometimes the judgement is perceived, but often it's real and women have to put up with the tutting and the comments. There was one woman we spoke to whose father-in-law asked her to leave the house if she was breastfeeding because, 'We don't want to see that!' So, who are the breasts there for? Obviously not for women or babies. And they're not for nutrition and feeding. They're something othered.

Women perform the idea of a good mother in public through the way that they feed their baby.

And a good mother is somebody who breastfeeds discreetly and it's hidden.

Or if they can't manage this, then they should stay at home.

ES — And this notion of the good mother connects with other things that your research touches on around the idea of mothering in general, and breastfeeding in particular, as something that should come naturally. One of the starting points for the *Feed* project was thinking about Richard Sennett's description of breastfeeding as the first cooperative act in a human's life. Obviously, he's assuming that all humans are breastfed. However, he talks about how the baby has to work with the mother, snuggling in etc., and how the mother has to respond to these non-verbal cues for breastfeeding to occur. However, breastfeeding, in my experience, has never felt particularly cooperative and as my babies got older it sometimes felt quite one-sided; as if they were taking something from me, even if I wasn't always that keen to provide it. And, of course, sometimes it doesn't work.

GT — Renée Flacking has done some wonderful work around breastfeeding as a reciprocal act. That's what it is, you learn to breastfeed together. But women often aren't prepared for breastfeeding because we don't discuss the realities. And if we do discuss the negatives, people worry that it's going to put women off. In public, women are encouraged to move out to very uncomfortable spaces to breastfeed. There's been a big move to have breastfeeding friendly areas. But this sometimes feels like lip service. You get people pushing back and asking, 'Why this area? Why not that area? Just let me breastfeed where I like.'

ES — Yes, I'm interested in how the design of spaces affects how people feel about feeding their babies, by bottle or breast, and is there a way that we can re-think public space, both outdoors and within buildings such as libraries and museums to support them?

The *Feed* chair was a way to think about some of these issues. As a chair, it's a self-contained space, but where you put it will obviously affect how comfortable the sitter feels. When we were designing it, we sent out an online survey to get some practical advice about what people might require in such a chair. There was a question about how much privacy it should provide, and I was surprised by the polarity of responses. On the one hand, you had people saying, 'I feel a bit exposed when breastfeeding in public, so I'd like it to feel intimate', and on the other there were people who actually got angry about the fact that we were doing this project because they felt that we were 'othering breastfeeding women' by suggesting that they couldn't just do it anywhere, which of course we aren't. But I think it shows just what an emotive subject it is.

GT — It's also interesting what people class as public space. Years ago, we did some research in Blackpool, which generally has a strong formula feeding culture. We asked people about public breastfeeding and the issues they faced, and again they felt shameful. But we asked them where they did it and it turned out that some people were doing it in the car. Doing it in the car and calling it public breastfeeding! There was one woman I interviewed whose partner wouldn't allow her to breastfeed anywhere, not even in front of a window in their front room because it overlooked a park. She had to shut the curtains. Here we see it's linked with the appropriation of women's bodies.

Women are told that it doesn't hurt when you breastfeed. It bloody does sometimes!

ES — Yes, and there's been a lot of talk recently, in the wake of the horrific murders of Sabina Nessa and Sarah Everard about women feeling frightened or uncomfortable in public spaces.

But it is generally around women walking by themselves and not necessarily with children, although there have also been some horrible stories in the news about men photographing breastfeeding women. So, I'm interested in how conversations about women's *right to the city* [3] can also include experiences of feeding and looking after children. How can we design public spaces which accommodate acts of care?

GT — For a start, there needs to be stronger messages that you can feed your baby however and wherever you like. But it's also about comfort. If you're going to sit on a park bench it's not necessarily going to be a pleasant experience. Your arm might hurt, your back might hurt, it's going to be hard on your bum. There's work being done to develop booths and screens, but again that makes it a private, hidden act. You hear it all the time, 'I don't see other women breastfeeding, so I don't feel comfortable doing it'. The fact that you don't see it perpetuates the abnormality of breastfeeding. It's societal. Of course, you can put up signs telling women 'You can



A man stands at a 'uritrottoir' public urinal in 2018, on the Saint-Louis island in Paris, France. Photo by Pierre Barlier

How can we design public spaces which accommodate acts of care?

Women often aren't prepared for breastfeeding because we don't discuss the realities.

feed anywhere', but then that can feel patronising. You can have lovely signage, you can have lovely artwork to support breast or bottle feeding, saying, 'Wherever we are, we can care for our babies', but really there needs to be societal change.

ES — I think it says a lot that there is no provision for this very basic human act within our social environments. For example, I came across an article a few years ago about the problem of men peeing in shop doorways in Paris. The city authorities tried to discourage this by installing what they call 'uritrottoirs', which are basically open-air urinals, across the city. Rather than trying to make these urinals discreet, they're very visible objects. They're bright red, include a planter on the top and a sign overhead with an image of a man peeing. They're also located in prominent places, such as overlooking the River Seine. Bearing in mind that this is a country with one of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the world, I find it interesting that the practice of men urinating in public is accommodated in such a visible way. That's not to say that everyone was happy with these things, apparently many people weren't, but I think it shows something about how women's needs continue to be marginalised within public space.

GT — It's like how some men walk around with their top off as soon as there's a bit of sun! There's this idea of modesty, which only applies to women. Modesty and purity, the serene Madonna and Child. But baby feeding isn't like that. There was a social media campaign a few years ago, aimed at very young mums, which said that 'you're a star if you breastfeed', but you wonder if that just makes people feel marginalised who don't. They'd think, 'I don't breastfeed, so I'm not a star, I'm a bad person because I don't do that.'

ES — And you're rarefying it as well, making it into this special thing rather than something which, when you're doing it, feels very everyday. It's boring, it can be hard work but, just like bottle feeding, it's part of life with a baby.

GT — Yeah, like when women are told that it doesn't hurt when you breastfeed. It bloody does sometimes! By my third you could have set my nipples on fire and I wouldn't have noticed! But at first it was agony. We need to talk about the realities.

ES — Yes, there's this idea that babies just latch on and that's that. But even bottle feeding's messy. Babies are sick. You can walk through Manchester City Centre on a Sunday morning and it stinks of piss because people (usually men) have been urinating in doorways, but there's a particular anxiety around breastmilk. I remember a news

article about a woman who was asked not to breastfeed in a swimming pool because it was ‘unhygienic’. How do we normalise the mess of feeding babies, the mess of motherhood?

GT — Because that’s the reality.

ES — Yeah, and public spaces need to accommodate this mess. We need different types of spaces. I remember breastfeeding my daughter at a table seat on a train and feeling very exposed because everyone is so close together and I was a bit full, so I was also worried about the baby coming off and milk squirting everywhere!

GT — It’s like when your baby’s sick. If seats were more wipeable, you’d feel more confident about being able to clean it up, and it wouldn’t become an issue.

We need to move on from the attitudes that make women feel judged and which exclude them from public places. We just need to let people feed their babies.

ES — Yes, although what’s been interesting with this project is, even when you’re making something as basic as a chair, once you start thinking about it, it becomes quite complicated. What angle should the back rest be at? How high should the armrests be? You want to make

it inviting and comfortable, but it also needs to be cleanable. Lots of people we surveyed mentioned the worry of getting milk on things (whether formula or breastmilk) and making a mess.

GT — And then feeling embarrassed about having to walk off and leave it.

ES — I think this is part of the issue with pumping in public as well. I’ve heard people say that they’ve had to do that in toilets because it isn’t acceptable to see a woman pumping milk at her desk or sitting on a train. There’s a squeamishness around it.

GT — I use an example from an American advert in my work around shame, where there’s a woman with a double pump, and she’s gorgeous, all her hair and make-up’s done. She looks like a supermodel and she’s at a desk typing whilst expressing. There’s something so wrong with that picture! But expressing again is not normalised and women do feel deviant doing it in public.

ES — I think people would be more shocked to see a woman expressing in public than to see someone breastfeeding. Seeing a woman, not with her breasts exposed, but sitting on a park

bench eating her lunch, with a tube coming out of her top and milk going into a bottle. I’ve never seen that and there’s obviously a reason why. There’s a perception about breastmilk where it is somehow deviant out of the context of the home.

GT — One of my colleagues came back from maternity leave whilst she was expressing and I think she found that fairly horrific, having to go to a crappy room somewhere to do it. Some people want that privacy, because you need to relax and think about the baby, you don’t always want to be in a busy place. But there’s that sense of disconnection. And sometimes you feel like you’re rushing it, because you can only spare half an hour, and it’s rushed and tense, in which case it isn’t going to work. It’s better to be in a nice space, where you can sit and relax and let it come.

ES — So there’s something about time as well. Spending time in a space. There’s always been a stigma around women loitering in public spaces. But when you’re feeding a baby, you often need to sit there for a long time.

GT — Yes, you might be in a café with a breastfeeding friendly sticker on the window, but they don’t want you to be there for ages. And you end up buying three brews and a cake when all you really want is a glass of water! We just need to make places more friendly for feeding a baby. We need to move on from the attitudes that make women feel judged and which exclude them from public places. We just need to let people feed their babies.

[1] Thomson G, Ebisch-Burton K, Flacking R (2014) ‘Shame if you do, shame if you don’t: Women’s experiences of infant feeding’ In *Maternal and Child Nutrition*, 11 (1), pp. 33-46 Available at: <http://clok.uclan.ac.uk/12089/>

[2] Erving Goffman was an American sociologist. His 1963 book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* describes stigma as the shame that individuals feel when they do not meet accepted forms of behaviour or appearance, and the ways in which people may conceal parts of their identity to avoid the judgment of others.

[3] *Right to the city* is an idea which was first proposed in the 1960s by French philosopher, Henri Lefevre. It refers to the collective right of people to inhabit, shape and govern their own public spaces and places.

Responses to an online design survey to help inform the development of the feeding chair.

'It's very difficult to provide a specific space without suggesting that women shouldn't feed wherever they like.'

'A feeding chair should be about the mother, for the mother, and never designed to hide her away or encourage discretion when feeding.'

'Most places don't have specifically made chairs for feeding a baby on and I often found myself sitting on hard plastic, armless upright chairs in most 'baby feeding' rooms, which made it difficult to support the baby's weight and feed them at the same time. Also, these are often in the same room as/in close proximity to a toilet. I find this off-putting and a little gross, even when it is a cubicle within a toilet block. Hand dryers going off and toilets flushing loudly also startle babies and put them off feeding.'

'I felt like an alien when I was trying (and failing) to breastfeed in public. Give mother and baby a safe space to feed.'

'The level of visibility that somebody is happy with depends where they are on their breastfeeding journey. I struggled when I first started and wanted some degree of privacy, but I would feed my second child anywhere.'

'I love that this is a chair, not a space. We should be working towards normalising breastfeeding anywhere and everywhere, not shutting mothers away so that they can't be seen.'

'I have had mixed experiences and felt judged both for breastfeeding and bottle feeding in public. Sometimes it may have been paranoia, but other times I actually heard people commenting and was regularly stared at. For someone who wanted to solely breastfeed but had to use bottles as well for health reasons, I had a lot of guilt around not exclusively breastfeeding and was proud about it when I was able to, so became less concerned about that than bottle feeding. Privacy isn't my number one concern about breastfeeding in public. Having an actual chair to sit in, especially in the early days, was an issue.'

'I find I am more self-conscious of breastfeeding in public now my child's a toddler.'

'The truth is that you can feed your baby anywhere and in all sorts of chairs. The main issue is public perception. I was kicked out of a cafe once for feeding a very small baby even though I had a large scarf draped over boob and baby – and had also turned to face the wall. I had to leave an almost full coffee, with a crying angry baby, looking for the nearest toilet cubicle to feed him whilst having a little angry cry myself.'

'The importance of a breastfeeding chair is that it sends a signal that it is your right to feed your baby in a public space, not just to mothers but to the public at large. It takes up public space without the mother having to feel like she has to claim it, because it is already claimed by the chair and thus normalises the idea of breastfeeding in public even when not in use.'

*'Often, I have had to feed my baby in cafés or restaurants in full view of everyone around, which is fine as I formula fed both my children. However, there were some people who took offence to my child crying while I was warming their bottle. I once got into an argument with an older gentleman who called my child a 'noisy f***er' and said I should 'sit somewhere else' as my baby's noise was disruptive to him.'*

'I don't want to be hidden. I am proud of breastfeeding and want to be comfy.'

'Breastfeeding in public is to be encouraged so that it becomes normalised and helps women to access areas which they may not otherwise use if they didn't feel comfortable feeding. A bespoke feeding chair or designated feeding space removes the mother from the public space and others her.'

People's capacities for cooperation are far greater and more complex than institutions allow them to be.

Richard Sennett

I've always found it easier to be alone. There's a point in most conversations or group situations when I start to feel a strong urge to wrap it up and be on

my own again. As if I might turn back into a pumpkin, or at least a less sociable version of myself. But when I retreat to a private space, I become restless and yearn to be around others again. So, neither situation is entirely satisfying.

My mother boasts about how independent I was at a young age. I was rewarded for showing self-initiative at school and independent study suited me well at university. Whether I started off that way or not, I think I gradually learned to be self-reliant and that it was better, and easier, to achieve things on my own. It was only later, as an adult, that I realised that I could equally thrive through collaboration, and that being and working with others brought out other sides of my personality.

Richard Sennett talks about how in our societies (read: the Global North), dependency on others is seen as a sign of weakness or a failure of character. Our institutions promote autonomy and self-sufficiency, creating a myth that the autonomous individual is somehow free. [1] As a result, we cultivate the skills that make us stronger as individuals and neglect those that would make us good cooperators.

If I hadn't been encouraged to be independent might I have grown into a more cooperative person?

Maybe.

Sennett argues that mutual support is built into the genes of all social animals, and that they cooperate to accomplish what they can't do alone. Cooperation becomes a conscious activity at four or five months, as infants begin to respond to verbal cues from their mothers during breastfeeding, snuggling up and getting into the optimal position.

This teaches them to adapt their behaviour and to anticipate responses. Later, toddlers build towers and dens by working together, even when parents don't encourage it. At four or five years old they start to negotiate the rules of games.



It's interesting that Sennet sees breastfeeding as the starting point for cooperation, as it can be extremely difficult. The first few weeks with my son were frustrating and painful, and it took us a while to settle into it. Some mothers give it up because they find it too exhausting, or it simply doesn't work. It's hard on babies too, and all the effort can get in the way of bonding.

Still, I think breastfeeding is a good example of cooperation, precisely because it can be so challenging. As a first-time mother you are struggling with a new, sleep-deprived version of yourself, and a helpless hungry baby. You don't have language to fall back on and so you're forced to find new ways of communicating.

If breastfeeding doesn't work, then a syringe or a nipple shield or bottle must be negotiated. As parents you must keep learning, developing new skills. Part of that is letting go of expectations or ideals and facing the reality that it might not go the way you'd hoped. It's humbling. At its best, cooperation should be like that - it should push your boundaries and transform you through the process.

Sennett claims that early forms of cooperation lay foundations for the 'harder work' of cooperation in adult life, things like:

listening well
behaving tactfully
finding points of argument
managing disagreement
and avoiding frustration in difficult discussions

In our day-to-day lives there's no real incentive to develop these skills, and we avoid them because they can make us feel inadequate and awkward, among other things. Even if we are born with cooperative impulses, we aren't encouraged to practice and refine them.

This could explain why I feel limited in social situations. Through my encounters with more accomplished communicators, I've realised that I don't really know how to listen.

I mean not just going through the motions of conversation but *properly* listening so that a person feels truly heard.

In long or challenging meetings, I can become frustrated and negative, which makes it hard to empathise. My analytic skills are sharp, but they don't easily translate to group participation.

When I moved into a cohousing cooperative seven years ago, I was confronted with a very different, collective way of living and being. I became aware of methods of communication such as NVC (Nonviolent Communication) and consensus decision making. By using these we are attempting to overcome the inequalities and power dynamics that prevent healthy, productive exchanges. They aren't taught in schools or universities, maybe because they're seen as 'soft' or intrinsic. In fact, they take a long time to master and require a lot of patience and perseverance, like any complex skill.

Living in cohousing stretches you in ways that living alone doesn't.

Reaching consensus can take a long time, hearing so many views and positions, but I usually come out the other side with a better understanding of other people's needs, and how they're different from mine. Sometimes people change their minds through the process, or a better solution is found. Then it feels very satisfying and worth the effort.

While most of us learn to negotiate and empathise at a young age, it's tempting to stop challenging ourselves as adults, to opt out when we feel uncomfortable or threatened. It's not just potential conflict we're avoiding, but also having to deal with others, especially those we might disagree with.

Most of us are too busy and distracted to give others our full attention, and we usually get away with it. Early parenthood changes that. Suddenly you have no choice but to give this tiny person your whole, undivided attention, day and night, and for some parents it can feel completely alien. I was horribly torn between the pleasure of being so close with my baby and a fear that I'd never be alone again. You are an inseparable unit, especially if you breastfeed, and for a lot of mothers this is a rude awakening. Self-sufficiency doesn't prepare you for motherhood.

Sometimes I wonder if people's squeamishness about breastfeeding in public is connected to this, almost as if it's a too overt reference to our innate interdependence or a painful reminder of what we've traded for an individualised existence. There's so much anxiety around connecting with others, a fear of the complexities of interaction.



The Care Collective talk about 'promiscuous care', which recognises that all people have the capacity to care, not just mothers and women, and that our lives are improved when we care and are cared for, and when we care together. [2] Instead we turn inward and claim we don't have time or energy to give to others. In the end, I think this leaves us feeling guilty and remorseful...

...That we could be doing more, connecting more, giving more of ourselves to others. We live in a society that doesn't recognise or reward caring and cooperative behaviour and traps people in work-buy cycles so that they can't stretch beyond their individual or household needs.

It leads to a lonely existence.

I also struggle to accept care from others. After I gave birth, we had ten days of homemade meals delivered to our door. I remember being overcome with gratitude toward my neighbours but also a sense of obligation to everyone who cooked for us. It took me ages to accept that for them, feeding us was enough. Perhaps because I didn't experience that kind of care previously.

There wasn't really a culture of giving in our house. We always met our own needs first. I think after a while it became an inconvenience to think about others. I still feel strangely 'put out' when I'm buying gifts; it feels like hard work rather than a gratifying thing to do. I feel guilty about that too, and sad that I'm having to learn how to care for others so late in my life.

Before joining a community, I lived on my own for nine years. I had a very part-time housemate, so not entirely alone. The flat was big and near the Uni, and rent was cheap. I lived by my own rules and decided when and how I wanted to be social.

I suffered there, too.

It was freezing in the winter months. My curtains would blow in the breeze, even with the windows shut. Hot baths and double socks were my most constant friends. By the time I left, the parts of me that needed other people and that wanted to be needed were deeply neglected. I think a lot of people live like this, in a state of denial about their loneliness because they have a social life that doesn't actually meet their needs. In hindsight, I know I would have benefited from more interruptions, inconveniences and messier interactions with people.

I grew up in the countryside with minimal contact with neighbours or community. Rural Ontario is vast and houses are very spread out, making it hard to form communities and impossible to get around without a car. We lived in an old farmhouse with overgrown fields and a derelict barn, and I remember feeling very lost in all that space. My siblings and I were mainly dependent on each other for social interaction.

I felt alone, even with my family.

I don't think I had enough variety of experience. There was too much pressure on us to entertain ourselves, and as the oldest sibling I recall a heavy feeling of having to make everything up from scratch. I didn't learn how to be with other children my own age, to negotiate and collaborate, to work together to achieve things. Thinking about it, I don't think we learned how to care for one another as a family, or how to work out our emotional needs together. Maybe that's too much to ask of the nuclear family, and we need community to teach us how to care.

Recently there's been a lot of talk about care. The authors of a book called *Radical Care* describe it as 'an affective connective tissue between an inner self and an outer world... a feeling with, rather than a feeling for, others'. [3] It's sad to think what happens when that tissue isn't allowed to grow...

... We effectively become a closed circuit, or a feedback loop, cut off from the world around us. We need people and community to grow this tissue, to learn the skills of caring and cooperation. At four years old, my son is comfortable asking for support and caring for others. He sometimes gets frustrated and overwhelmed by the multiple dynamics that he's a part of, but I can see how it's shaping him, giving him tools to make and maintain connections.

It probably wasn't possible for my parents to create these conditions for me. The Care Collective argue that it's increasingly hard to cultivate community ties in a culture that places profit over people, with shrinking resources and a political landscape that encourages us to focus on our individual selves. [4]

But you don't need to live in a housing cooperative to benefit from community. Perhaps what's needed is a revival of cooperative skills in our everyday lives? Tools and strategies to help us reverse our self-centred behaviours and challenge, or at least bypass, the systems that keep us apart.

What if we were all offered a kind of basic 'interaction training' as citizens?

Compassion and empathy are essential to healthy communication, yet most of us are stuck in a sort of blind reactive mode, not understanding our own needs or anyone else's. The world would be different if we simply learned to pause and reflect before reacting. Kate Soper talks about how the competitive (capitalist) mindset discourages sharing and co-owning. We are all so deeply entrenched in the cycles of individual ownership that it prevents us from helping others. Inequality makes this worse, as it undermines the mutual trust necessary for successful sharing and cooperation. [5]

A lot of people see sharing as a transaction, a sacrifice. They don't see how it could meet their own need to be generous or provide care.

I guess generosity can be taxing, especially when you already feel emotionally drained. Being and working with other people requires more energy and commitment up front, whereas being alone gives the illusion of ease, of freedom...

... But we deprive ourselves when we hide away. If cooperation was a perfectly comfortable experience, it wouldn't challenge us in necessary ways.

Sharing, cooperation, intimacy – these are the channels through which we can meet our own emotional needs. Without them our cooperative tissues begin to weaken, disintegrate. We lose our connection with the world.

We must re-learn how to be uncomfortable with one another. To open ourselves up to inconvenience.

To choose not to be alone.

[1] Richard Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*. London; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012.

[2] The Care Collective (Andreas Chatzidakis, Jamie Hakim, Jo Littler, Catherine Rottenberg and Lynne Segal), *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence*. London; New York: Verso, 2020.

[3] Hi'iilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Tamara Kneese, 'Radical Care: Survival Strategies for Uncertain Times', *Social Text* 38:1, 2020.

[4] The Care Collective, 2020.

[5] Kate Soper, *Post Growth Living: For an Alternative Hedonism*. London; New York: Verso, 2020.

Audio artworks

The feeding chair has speakers in the headrest, so that you can choose to listen to audio artworks whilst feeding your baby.

Artists *Krissi Musiol, Nicola Singh* and *Magda Stawarska-Beavan* have created soundworks which respond to the *Feed* project's themes of public space, cooperation, parenthood and care.

You can also listen to the artworks by scanning the QR codes on your phone.



KRISSI MUSIOL

Notes on Nourishment in Motherhood

—

A collection of memories around food and nourishment taken from the first 1000 days of a first-time mother.

Listen to the artwork here.

feedproject.art/krissi-musiol



NICOLA SINGH

My Endless Love / I'm Eating In Clockwise
She Makes This Sound / But I'm Dancing
The Heat Rage / If I

—

Nicola Singh has made a series of six short audio works – improvised pieces, somewhere between poem and song.

Singh takes an expanded view of motherhood and the act of feeding. She explores images, scenes and feels connected to listening, embodied listening and the act of nourishment. The works are wandering, warm, soft, playful, tense, sticky, sweet and sinister in parts. She records the works by speaking and singing closely into her phone, to create an intense kind of intimacy and proximity with the listener.

Listen to the artworks here.

feedproject.art/nicola-singh



MAGDA STAWARSKA - BEAVAN

Ida

—

Magda Stawarska-Beavan's sound piece *Ida* uses fragments of Gertrude Stein's novel of the same name, focusing on the first part of the book in which the protagonist, *Ida*, is geographically restless; she constantly tries to rest as she moves from place to place.

*'She was saying, yes yes I like to be sitting.
Yes I like to be moving.'*

As the listener is presented only with snippets of the novel, which is already itself a modernist classic, there is an opportunity to project your own narrative, drift off, come into a stage of daydreaming.

The soundscape is composed of field recordings from Bologna, Pisa and La Spezia, recorded with binaural microphones whilst the artist wandered through the city, allowing the listener to share her experience of dreaming about the past and drifting into the future.

Listen to the artwork here.

feedproject.art/magda-stawarska-beavan



Photos by Fiona Finchett, featuring Meysa and Razan.



Feed has been developed by In Certain Places, an art-based research project at the University of Central Lancashire, in collaboration with Corridor8 and Textbook Studio.

The feeding chair was designed by *Elaine Speight, Vicky Carr* and *Aaron Smith*, and engineered and fabricated by M3 Industries.

incertainplaces.org
textbook.studio
m3industries.co.uk

Painted images throughout
Jade Montserrat

Feed Contributors

Amy Halliday
Curator, educator, writer
amyhalliday.com

Jade Montserrat
Artist
jademontserrat.com

Elaine Speight
Reader in Curatorial Practice & Place
(University of Central Lancashire)

Gill Thomson
Professor in Perinatal Health
(University of Central Lancashire)

Lara Eggleton
Art historian & Managing Editor at
Corridor8
corridor8.co.uk

Krissi Musiol
Artist
krissimusiol.com

Magda Stawarska-Beavan
Artist
magda-stawarska-beavan.com

Nicola Singh
Artist
nicolasingh.co.uk

feedproject.art
[@feed_futures](https://twitter.com/feed_futures)



In
Certain
Places



the Whitworth

Feed is an arts-based research project that explores the complex attitudes towards how we feed our babies, particularly when in public.

As part of the project, we created a chair in which parents and other carers can comfortably feed their babies in museums, galleries, libraries and other public venues. The chair was inspired by common experiences of baby feeding in indoor public spaces: having to choose between hiding away in a baby changing or feeding room or perching uncomfortably on a bench or ledge. It is a space for anyone to feed their baby in any way they choose: an invitation to take up space and to take your time.

This zine features essays and artworks developed for and in response to the chair, which explore issues of (dis)comfort, public space, cooperation and care.

