

During summer 2022, we organised a day-long public event, entitled *Feeding Futures*, at Whitworth Gallery, Manchester. Parents arrived with toddlers in buggies and tiny babies strapped to their chests, joining social workers, artists, midwives, breastfeeding counsellors and other people with a curiosity about or passion for infant feeding. Through talks and creative activities and over a picnic in the park, we discussed experiences and attitudes towards pregnancy, parenting and human milk, and considered what a feeding future should look like.

This zine is a souvenir of the day. It includes contributions by the four presenters: cultural historian Dr Joanna Wolfarth; founder of the Diversity in Infant Feeding project Louise Oliver; performance artist Krissi Musiol and design researcher Sally Sutherland, alongside links to videos of their talks and performances, participants' comments and some creative outcomes of the day.

Feeding Futures was the first in, what we hope will become, a series of artworks and events about infant feeding and public space. We welcome all enquiries, details of other initiatives and opportunities to collaborate with people from diverse disciplines and backgrounds who share our mission to create a more supportive and positive culture around infant feeding in all its forms.

info@feedproject.art



Watch an overview of the day [here](#).





Where to begin when invited to talk about histories of feeding babies?

I sift through journal articles, notes on artworks, scraps of diary entries I jabbed into my phone during night feeds, pulling at threads to find a starting point. It's a tight weave of different cultural ideas and contradictions and entangled emotions ranging from joy and frustration, sadness and empowerment, and it is thickly textured. The density of contradictions is bewildering; breastfeeding is promoted, encouraged, celebrated, yet also censured, discouraged and taboo; bottle-feeding equally as confusing and exclusive expressing, donor-feeding, or shared nursing are often completely sidelined. Yet, the more I delve into the histories of infant feeding, the more I begin to understand how we got to where we are today.

Feeding my baby had left me changed, confused, sad, triumphant, elated, and sometimes angry.

I see more about how society is influenced by ideals of motherhood and ideas about female bodies, which shift over the decades and centuries. How these contradictions are expressed in art, philosophy, and literature. When I was invited to talk

about histories of infant feeding, I was overcome by how much I wanted to share. And by how impossible it is to convey so much in thirty minutes.

So, despite nothing but warmth and encouragement from the organisers, I was still nervous ahead of *Feeding Futures* in Manchester.

Fortunately, before the talk, I met with a close friend and confessed my worries. They nodded sympathetically and then reminded me that a talk – or even a book – should never be a neatly wrapped parcel. Instead, they said: think of it as an invitation, a series of prompts for further conversation, a chance for others to share their experiences, ideas, and hopes for better futures. It's okay to leave loose threads, they said.

So, I start with myself, a method not always appreciated in more traditional academic circles but one which can be fruitful and necessary.

Like so many other researchers and artists, I came to the topic of breastfeeding already enmeshed within it. Research and writing was a way for me to make sense of my own experiences.



Nourrisse de Monseig.^r le Duc de Bourgogne.

*Le Ciel nous fauorise en nous faisant present Petit fils de Louis, quatorzieme Regnant.
D'un Prince dont le nom remplit la terre et l'onde: Que l'on verra vn jour le plus grand Roy du Monde.*

A wet nurse breast feeding the Duke of Burgundy, grandson of Louis XIV.
Engraving.



A woman feeding her happy baby.
Colour stipple engraving by C. Martin after himself, 1778.

—
Wellcome Collection. Public Domain Mark

Sterling silver, ivory and glass nipple-shield.
The silver one is hallmarked with the maker's initials and
George III's head and has been dated to 1786-1821.

—
Wellcome Collection. Attribution 4.0
International (CC BY 4.0)



Nursing woman, ca. 2420–2389 B.C. or later, Old Kingdom, Egypt;
Probably from Memphite Region, Giza, Tomb of Nikauinpu, Limestone, paint
traces, The Met, New York, Purchase, Edward S. Harkness Gift, 1926

Feeding my baby had left me changed, confused, sad, triumphant, elated, and sometimes angry. Feeding our babies – whether that is with chest, breast, bottle, Supplementary Nursing System, donor milk, formula, or with an allonurse – is one of our main jobs as a new parent. No wonder it's emotive. It is also where body, identity, how we are perceived by the world, how we *think* we are being perceived by the world, and all our specific societal and cultural baggage come together, at what is perhaps one of our most vulnerable times in life.

My prenatal expectations were simple: before I knew that I wanted to be a mother, I knew I'd be a breastfeeding mother. And I sort of pictured it as 'natural', 'best', 'easy', and 'free'. The realities were startling; I hadn't understood that while lactation is highly visible in some contexts, there is much that remains concealed. I was unprepared for how much breastfeeding would mean to me deep in my core, or that it didn't come easy for me and my baby and that what I perceived

I hadn't understood that while lactation is highly visible in some contexts, there is much that remains concealed.

as my failure would lead me to the edges of somewhere very dark.

As my baby latched, the images of breastfeeding I'd encountered as an art

historian would flash through my head. The divine mother-figures – such as Isis or Yashoda – who nurse gods and kings. The sculptures that appear to be of 'ordinary' people nursing babies, such as those from the Indus Valley or the Old Kingdom of Egypt, which are all over 4,000 years old. The countless cultural fragments which demonstrate that across time and place, lactation was held in high regard. And then, of course, there are the maternal images which laced my childhood: The Virgin Mary nursing Jesus. Doughy baby flesh and opaline breasts.

But during these painful dawn feeds, I had forgotten that representations of breastfeeding can tell us how practices of breastfeeding and motherhood change over time and place. [1] How we can trace the ways that ideals of 'the good mother' are constructed and reconstructed in material culture. I had forgotten how these ideas can still contribute to parents' feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and even grief. [2]

What was also invisible to me was that nothing happens in a vacuum; our choices – when we are lucky enough to have them – are shaped by circumstance, culture, society, demographics, physiology... But postpartum? It was all too easy to forget that. Even with a supportive community around us, we struggled. To be brief: when my baby was four weeks old we were sent to A&E by our health visitor because of weight loss. In hindsight, we were lucky that it was an issue with feeding rather than anything more

serious. It was something easily resolved with formula top-ups, regime feeding, and an industrial breast pump.

But it all left me broken, lonely and bewildered, trying to make sense of my desire to breastfeed along with the contradictory values our society places on breastfeeding, especially when it intersected with other parts of my being: my work, my body, my relationships, my sexuality. I was without a language to process those emotions or a framework with which to make sense of them. So I went to the archives, trying to find something material to tether myself to. One of the first things I found were Victorian nipple shields made from ivory, wood, glass or wax, each quietly urging me to feel a little more kindly towards the slippery silicone nipple shields that I so loathed. Each reminding me that some women centuries ago were mitigating against painful latches. Suddenly, I felt a tug of connection, not only with my contemporary peers, but with those who came before me. I thought about our differences and our sameness.

Then came another thread: the bottles. First it was Neolithic feeding vessels, small enough to sit comfortably in an infant's sticky grip and some shaped in zoomorphic shapes that make them look like toys. Fragments of these vessels bear traces of ruminant animal milk, from cows, sheep, or goats. [3] While hygiene would make these far from ideal for smaller babies – who would have undoubtedly been breastfed – these vessels were more likely used during weaning. They may have allowed parents to wean infants earlier, lessening the gap between births. As humans began to abandon the nomadic life and settle in farming communities higher birth rates were more favourable.

Milk on a canvas is acceptable, metaphorical milk is okay. Divine lactating bodies can create galaxies, but actual bodies – female and nonbinary bodies – are just a bit too messy and unruly.

These were another reminder to myself that what happens at a social, economic level can impact us all. It is not enough to simply tell parents to breastfeed without giving them adequate support.

I can't stop looking at an image of a nursing Mary sitting for her portrait, which is being sketched by Saint Luke. Here she is looking proud, capable and strong. But to me this image is a metaphor for how new parents also feel under scrutiny, watched, judged. Our potential power squashed under patriarchal dominance. It is a scene which encapsulates the discomforts we can feel when feeding our babies, which is connected to broader issues of reproductive rights, freedom to move freely in public without fear of violence, the scrutiny that female and nonbinary bodies are subject too, always told we are lacking or flawed. It reminds me that

...we need to stitch ourselves together into communities. under patriarchy, we will always struggle for full liberation in feeding our babies however we want to feed our babies. Our galaxy is named the Milky Way. According to Greek myth, the stars formed from droplets of divine milk from

Hera's lactating breasts. When my baby was small I visited the Dulwich Picture Gallery and stood in front of a painting by Peter Paul Reubens of the Roman goddess Venus squirting milk from her breast into the mouth of a young Cupid, while Mars wearily looks on. I bought a postcard of it, shortly after I'd breastfed in the gallery café. I never experienced any obvious overt hassle when I breastfed in public, but on this occasion I'm sure I saw a wrinkle of discomfort pass over the faces of the table sat beside us, as I subtly pulled my blouse to one side and my baby, an expert by that point, latched without fuss.

Had they seen this painting I wondered? Milk on a canvas is acceptable, metaphorical milk is okay. Divine lactating bodies can create galaxies, but actual bodies – female and nonbinary bodies – are just a bit too messy and unruly. Possibly also a potential contagion. The Ancient Greeks bear some responsibility for the long histories of bodily taboo in the West.

Slowly, these threads of initial research allowed me to start stitching myself into something bigger. It made me think we need to stitch ourselves together into communities. I keep thinking we are so often missing out on something so much bigger and more empowering – regardless of how we feed our babies – finding ourselves caught between binary and contradictory messages about breasts and about milk and mothering.

We deserve the space to talk through these fragments of history, to share experiences when we feel comfortable doing so, to accept others and ourselves when we do differently. To sit with contradictions. We have been deterred from doing so for so long.

Feeding Futures provided one such space. In Manchester, in conversations with parents, lactation specialists, activists, artists, many more threads were added to my own personal tapestry. Together, we might change the fabric on which we feed.

[1] For example, see Jutta Gisela Sperling, *Medieval and Renaissance Lactations Images, Rhetorics, Practices* (Routledge, 2013).

[2] Amy Brown, *Why Breastfeeding Grief and Trauma Matter* (Pinter & Martin, 2019).

[3] Dunne, J., K. Rebay-Salisbury, R. B. Salisbury, A. Frisch, C. Walton-Doyle, and R. P. Evershed, 'Milk of Ruminants in Ceramic Baby Bottles from Prehistoric Child Graves', *Nature*, 574.7777 (2019), 246–48.



Watch Joanna's talk online [here](#).



Image credit: Tianna J Williams Photography

Diversity in infant feeding

Louise Oliver

Diversity in Infant Feeding is a project that developed organically after breastfeeding counsellor Louise Oliver noticed the distinct lack of representation in infant feeding imagery. Initially, the project focused on the need for breastfeeding images involving families from ethnic backgrounds, but after launching on social media, people began to reach out and speak about how they were not represented either. This saw the project grow beyond capturing diverse families feeding their babies, resulting in a new aim to secure images that represented a broad scope of feeding, from direct breastfeeding and chestfeeding to expressing, tube feeding and more!

The impact of capturing and sharing pictures depicting the diversity of families and the many ways in which they feed their babies has been far-reaching. Diversity in Infant Feeding ignited conversations that influenced major organisations, breastfeeding charities, NHS Trusts, and feeding support across the UK to reassess the imagery they use on their websites, in publications, and in training and support materials.

Although some have been able to generate more inclusive images themselves, it quickly became clear that there was a need for a resource that provides a wide range of pictures to increase levels of representation more easily. Diversity in Infant Feeding plans to become that resource and is currently developing a bank of images in the hope that one day the true breadth and depth of how babies are fed is represented equitably.

Share your own images via the website:
diversityinfeeding.org/form

If you are interested in supporting the project please email:
info@diversityinfeeding.org



Watch Louise talking about the project [here](#).

1 - 3:
Capture Photography

4 - 5:
Tianna J Williams
Photography

6 & 7:
Public donations









4



5

7



6



Participants thoughts and feedback

What brought you here?

- Feeding futures is my main focus in life, work and home.
- I am interested in the ideas and stigmas surrounding breastfeeding and feeding babies and people's experiences of this.
- I'm a newish mum who is very much enjoying breastfeeding and learning about how amazing it is.
- I'm an artist/mother with an interest in breastfeeding/art and thinking about the future of feeding.
- I came to learn about breastfeeding, connect with other mums, help to promote breastfeeding.
- I came to network with others, explore feeding as a topic.
- To enjoy a day of wonderful women and boobs!

What next?

- I am aware that I came to this event as a white, breastfeeding mother who works in the arts, this kind of environment feels very comfortable to me. I had really good conversations with other attendees who would have enjoyed more diversity in conversations. How can we attract a more diverse audience? Be that class, race or even, in this type of event, parents who aren't part of a 'typical' norm (I am from an LGBT+ family type).
- I would have loved to know a bit more about global differences/trends in breastfeeding.
- More opportunities for mums to get to know each other (network).
- Discussion about the reasons people don't breastfeed, complex reasons not just representation and formula adverts. Infant feeding, grief/loss/shame – acknowledging this.
- Think about how it's promoted to include parents in the local community and engage queer parents.
- Collaborative, co-production, big picture, dream events.
- Anything related to feeding, equality and inclusivity feminism.
- More speakers of colour, from different backgrounds.
- To explore infant feeding perspectives in new ways.
- Events making art together? Film making, fabric, something with sound/sensory sharing experience...
- Absolutely anything infant feeding, ending inequality, capturing participant voice, anything!

What did you think?

- I enjoyed the 'audience participation' of the watermelon walk as an 'inside' into the experience of carrying a child at full term.
- Louise Oliver's talk was useful for informing other peer support and diversity work that I do.
- It was great to hear all of the noises of the children and everyone just getting on with it all at the same time.
- Lovely to come to an in-person event with families, practitioners and children. Missed this for the last 3 years.
- I've met Louise before and enjoy her passion. Sally has made me look at my practice and the world it sits in differently. I carried a watermelon!
- All of it was food for thought.
- Louise Oliver's presentation on diversity in infant feeding: less about the binaries in breastfeeding, more about the common ground. Thank you, Louise, for the work you are doing.
- It was great having so many babies and toddlers around.
- I really enjoyed Joanna Wolfarth talk on the cultural history of breastfeeding. Krissi Mussiol's soundwalk was a fantastic way to reflect on pregnancy and a very moving experience.
- It was wonderful to see and hear children at this event.
- For a breastfeeding event, the chairs were not at all conducive to breast or bottle feeding. Chairs with arms would be better even if more comfortable ones can't be found.
- I enjoyed learning about historical representations... and the opportunity to have conversations about a better future for feeding our babies.
- I did enjoy the sound of children present, the sound of the day.
- Diversity in infant feeding... about darned time!







Carried

Krissi Musiol



Listen to the audio track for *Carried*, or watch the video [here](#).

Carried is a site-specific audio walk by performance artist Krissi Musiol, which invites you to remember being carried or to experience the notion of carrying someone.

Participants are invited to listen to a 10-minute narration, whilst carrying a watermelon representing the size of a 40-week foetus.

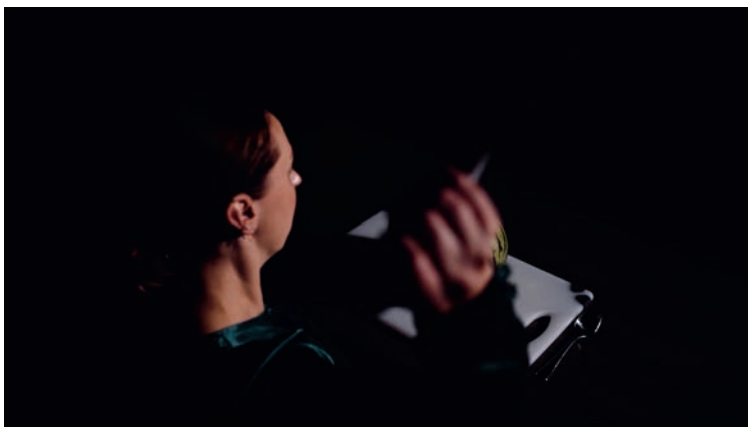
The artwork is a celebration of motherhood, which makes motherhood visible and maternal experiences heard.

Krissi created a bespoke version of *Carried* for Whitworth Park, and iterations have also been presented in Preston Market Square (2021) and at the Maternal & Infant Nutrition and Nurture Unit (MAINN) Conference in Grange-over-Sands (2023). Krissi plans to develop the work to incorporate other experiences of pregnancy, carrying and care.





Watch Krissi's
performance,
Missed, [here](#).



This page & previous page: Skills from a durational video version of *Missed*, filmed by RT Productions, 2022.

During maternity leave with my first and only child, I began making a series of performances under the title *Maternal Matters*. Like all new parents, I found myself awake during the night, feeding and pacing and soothing my baby. I became interested in these durational acts of walking and carrying, their toll on the body and the labour required to feed a child. In the middle of the night, after several unsuccessful weeks breastfeeding, I would routinely be found mixing and shaking formula milk. How abruptly life had changed from the 2am kitchen parties: music blaring, sticky sweet alcohol, soft lighting. Now a new mixologist, on sterilised surfaces, working by the light of the fridge to quickly prepare the only cocktail on the menu.

I've enjoyed working with fruit throughout *Maternal Matters*. The stimulus was an app which charted the growth of my baby in the womb, growing from a poppy seed all the way to the size of a watermelon at 40 weeks gestation. I explored all these fruit for their texture and weight, the sound as they're cut into, their taste and smell: The watermelon with its weighty roundness, hiding surprisingly red flesh beneath its scaled protective skin. I experimented with dropping the watermelon and watched it bruise. I held on to it tight and protected it as best I could. But most importantly, I ate it, for what else is watermelon for if not to eat? I ate it over and over, to nourish myself. As a symbol of the 40-week foetus, I was devouring my baby back inside me, to where it is closest to me and safe. Strange, this seed which grows inside us, this body which consumes and expels, a reminder of the body in all its messy glory, which connects us back to our mothers, and their mothers before them.

Over lockdown I realised I wouldn't be able to have another child. I spent hours carving out watermelons, emptying their shells, the contents of them spilling across the kitchen table. I created a durational performance called *Missed* where I laboured through this repetitive carving action. The audience were invited to use the flesh to make a margarita. A kind of warped cocktail hour. Or perhaps this is the After Party. A communal space where the audience is nourished. A moment of joy and celebration. A moment to toast the mother's labour. A kind of ritual here I offer my 'flesh'. The empty watermelon skins pile up discarded and eaying. The eternal mother, the giver of life, the host, the nourisher, the bleeder, the empty womb.

Watermelon Margarita Recipe

Use a blender or cocktail shaker to mix:

25 ml Tequila

25 ml Cointreau

Juice from half a lime

Watermelon flesh & juice

A handful of ice.

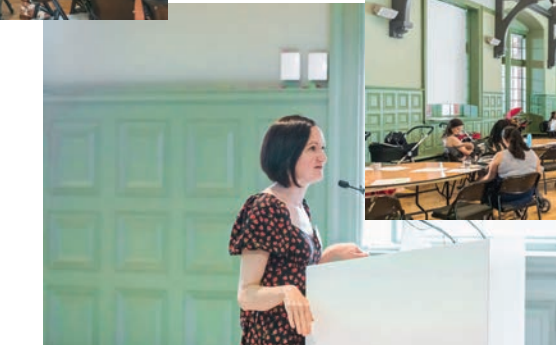
Run a lime wedge along the rim of a glass
and dip into the salt.

Garnish with lime, watermelon or mint.

For non-alcoholic cocktails:
watermelon, ice, lime, shake & serve!







[1] Marie Willis (2006)
'Ontological Designing', *Design
Philosophy Papers*, 4:2, 69-92



Watch Sally's talk [here](#).

Anne Marie Willis (2006) argues that “We design our world, while our world acts back on us and designs us.” [1] Attitudes to feeding, motherhood, parenting and intimate caring practices are embedded within the world around us. They manifest in objects, tools, devices, clothes, architecture, rituals, systems, education, paradigms and prejudices.

During *Feeding Futures*, I asked...

What could our future feeding worlds look like?

What would the messages be?

What are the new codes and practices of caring and feeding that we need to see in our futures?

What happens when we do this together and we put this out into the public realm?

What do we see when we take up space with these thoughts and actions?

What if we begin to give form to alternative futures?

Inspired by the work of Annetta Pedretti who used everyday improvisations towards possibilities, participants responded to these questions and made flags. On the opposite page are images of a few of the many flags created at the event.

‘Feeding’ can mean to supply with material or power. Therefore, I am curious about how we can collectively feed the future with alternative ideas of what feeding futures we individually or collectively want or need.

Let us make more flags and share them everywhere.



Something so natural should not be so difficult

Public Shamed
Pain
Mental barriers
Conflicting advice
Intrusive
shunning
expectations
latch

headaches
suffing
frequent
bad
other

Stop
hard
AND
outward
let
down

Compassion
hard
work
let
down

Compassion
hard
work
let
down

Compassion
hard
work
let
down

Compassion
hard
work
let
down

Compassion
hard
work
let
down



STo
SHAME
Everybody
WELCOME

Would you like to sit down?

Why do I care?

How long will you breakfast for?

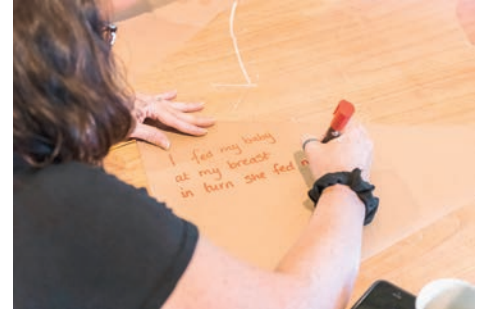
How long will I breast feed for?

Your son is too skinny.

Your daughter's BMI is too high.

Why don't I fit in this space anymore.

No I'm happy on the floor...



The first time you fed after I birthed you,
I thought about how absolutely strange
And yet totally natural it was
and that we were animals together.



"Diads
use a dummy"
"It
takes a village"
"Empowering"
"I sleep when
the baby sleeps"
"weight is an
arbitrary measurement"
"In a world full of
voices -
You do You!"

"great is enough"
"I shouldn't
hurt"
"I should..."
"Natural"
"Fed is best"
"Your business"
"Back to
birthweight"
"Your baby's
Your body. Your body."

* Difficult
Intimate
PAIN
Power
Beautiful
MY NIPPLES
Positions
MY BODY
TERRIFYING
JUDGMENTS
Bonding
Mother hood
Guilt
Time
FAILING
Choice
THOSE EYES
LOVE

Normalise
feeding children of any age!
milk is still beneficial at any
age

NO
MORE (FEEDING)
LIES

Breastfeeding
is
TRANSFORMATIVE



Support

Support antenatally + postnatally
Plan for breast-feeding
Provide support for women to
establish breast-feeding

"HE'S HUNGRY!"
"AGAIN?!"

I fed my baby -
at my breast
in turn she fed my soul.
She taught me how to love myself,
She helped me heal a wound.
I held her close and breathed her in
I gave her warmth and food...

Miss O'Connell





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.

incertainplaces.org
textbook.studio
corridor8.co.uk

Photos by Fiona Finchett
(unless otherwise credited).

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

Feed Contributors

Joanna Wolfarth is a cultural historian, lecturer and writer. Her first book, *MILK: An Intimate History of Breastfeeding* was published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in January 2023.

Sally Sutherland is a lecturer in design and an AHRC Design Star funded practice-based doctoral candidate at the University of Brighton. She is co-founder of the Radical Methodologies Research Group.

Louise Oliver is a breastfeeding counsellor, peer support trainer and doula. She is the founder of Diversity in Infant Feeding and a director of Early Nourishment CIC, a company that provides accessible services with the aim of improving families' physical and mental wellbeing.

Krissi Musiol is a contemporary performance maker, writer and performer. Her current project, *Maternal Matters*, is a collection of performance works exploring motherhood, the maternal body, labour (birth) and labour (work).



In
Certain
Places



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

COVER IMAGE: *A wet nurse breast feeding the Duke of Burgundy, grandson of Louis XIII*. Engraving. — Wellcome Collection. Public Domain Mark

