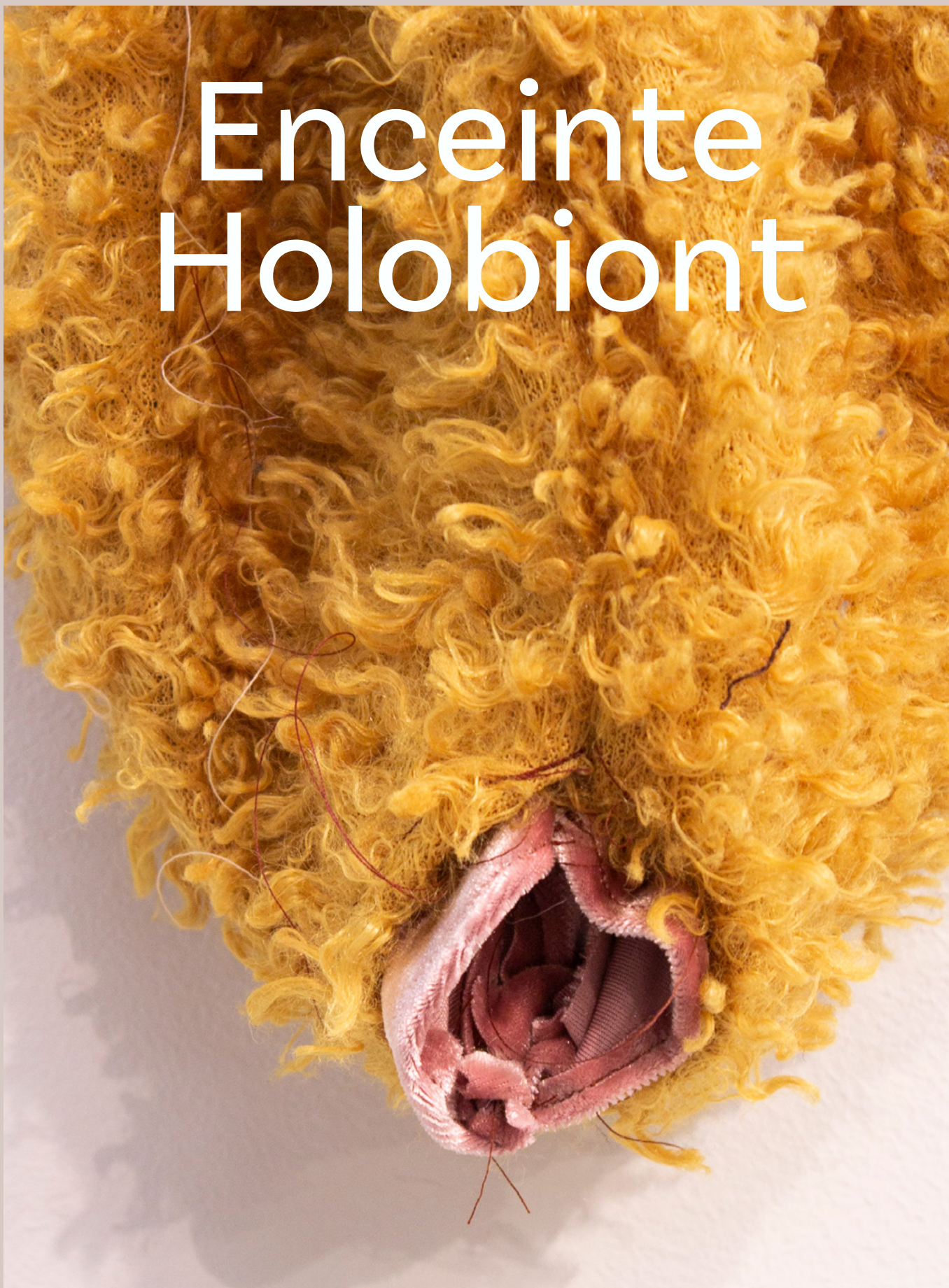


# Enceinte Holobiont



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# Enceinte Holobiont

by Olivia Perry

A thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
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# Abstract

This thesis document, *Enceinte Holobiont*, explores the positional, practical, and theoretical underpinnings of my recent sculptures *Composite Tension*. My thesis (both conceptual and visual) focuses on the model of the maternal body that speaks to the questions I raise through these sculptural forms. I propose three questions to engage the pregnant-birthing-maternal body. I ask how maternal bodies speak to (1) repetitive domestic labour, (2) the abject, as *enceinte* or space of 'other' within a patriarchal-capitalistic society, and (3) the idea of the collective *holobiont*. I use the terms *enceinte* and *holobiont* as metaphors for an undefinable messy body as it relates to the capitalistic ideal of an individualized body. My explorations through sculptural forms consist mainly of sewn and crocheted objects that include a personal archive from a documentation series of domestic labour. I reference historical and contemporary feminist artists to enter the discourse of re-writing the maternal body counter to patriarchal depictions of motherhood. My artistic research is both practical and theoretical. I engage multiple tensioned conversations that address and challenge the notion of self and other, as well as how the ethics of care functions within patriarchal systems. I use the maternal body, the *enceinte holobiont*, as a starting point.

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# Acknowledgments

This paper was written on unceded ancestral territories of the Coast Salish peoples, including the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tseil Waututh. I have lived in Vancouver, B.C. since 2010, and it is a privilege to have met my spouse as well as gestated, birthed, and nurtured my child on these lands.

I recognize the privilege to study at Emily Carr University and work alongside my peers. The encounters I have had with faculty throughout the MFA program are instrumental to who I am today as an artist. I want to especially thank my supervisors, Dr. Patricia Kelly and Ingrid Koenig, who fervently invest in me, not just as an artist, but as a person. I want to thank my professor Dr. Randy Lee Cutler and the Writing Centre Coordinator Heather Fitzgerald for their assistance with constructing this thesis document. I also want to extend my gratitude to my Internal Examiner Elizabeth Mackenzie and my External Examiner Marina Roy who pushed my artistic practice further, both theoretically and practically, as I transition out of the graduate program.

I owe a special thanks to my family, who have supported me through the program. I want to thank my dad Loys de Fleuriot, who has assisted me with editing this document. My aunt Louise de Fleuriot, and mother-in-law Terrie Hansen, who have helped look after my child Jude. My mom Sharon de Fleuriot, who has helped with childcare, cooking, and cleaning; and my spouse Bryce Perry, who has taken care of Jude and taken on the majority of the household duties so I can concentrate on my studies.

I owe my entire thesis project to Jude who has been my source of inspiration. I want to thank Jude for participating in collaborative gestures through daily rituals that are instrumental to my artistic practice.

Today Jude missed a feed. I expected my breasts to be engorged. I did not pump. They did not become full and sore. Is my body ready to let go? I mourn this time. This time of letting go, of moving on. This time of transition. I feel each day my son and I are becoming two separate people. I gave my body to grow him, to nurture him. I gave flesh and bone for his existence. He was a part of my entity, as one body. He was violently pushed out and cut from my being yet psychologically he remains a part of me. Still attached to me. Attached to my breast. My body still gives and nurtures.



The image features four textile sculptures mounted on a white wall. In the top left, a small, folded white fabric piece is visible. To its right is a large, brown, textured, teardrop-shaped sculpture with a white, fibrous tail. Below this is a reddish-brown, teardrop-shaped sculpture with a dark, circular opening at its base and thin, dark threads hanging from it. In the bottom center, a yellowish, teardrop-shaped sculpture with a dark, circular opening at its base is visible. The word 'One' is centered in the upper half of the image, with a vertical line extending downwards from it.

One

The Shape of  
a Mother



**Fig 1** *Composite Tension*, four-part installation (*Corpus, Slew, Cleave* and *Tensile*); dimensions vary; fabric, yarn, thread, foam, wire, metal, ink, and paper; 2018-2019.

- 1 The term *holobiont* originates from biologist Lynn Margulis' research on symbiogenesis: how the relationships between symbionts evolve over time in the process of evolution (Teresi). Margulis' research speaks against bodies as separate contained entities (Teresi).

I see the *enceinte* as a container; a membrane; a transient place; an *elsewhere*. My soft sculptures, presented in the four-part installation, *Composite Tension* (*Corpus, Slew, Cleave* and *Tensile*) [fig. 1], are informed by my personal experience as a mother. The strong connection I have with my child and our repetitive daily routines is woven into the underlying narrative of the sculptural pieces. Through my sculptures, I use the idea of the pregnant body, as two beings within one body, to investigate a space of 'other' and the notion of individuality. There are no definitive boundaries between mother and child; their bodies and identities are intermingled both physically and psychologically. This investigation led me to the term *holobiont* which refers to the ecosystems inside a body, containing both human and nonhuman elements. *Holobiont* calls attention to multiple bodies within one body.<sup>1</sup> I use the term *holobiont* as a metaphor beyond its scientific definition. I present the concept of *holobiont* as not fully definable as it investigates the fluid borders of bodies; bodies that are shifting, changing and melding into one another.



- 2 Here, I refer to how the pregnant body is strange within patriarchy as it relates to how the male 'father' is not. Also, I speak to how capitalistic culture leaves childbirth and childcare out of any recognized system of labour value (I expand on the ethics of care in section Tensile Care (8)).
- 3 I will discuss this archive, *Documentation Series: Year Off*, in *Excessive Iteration* (4).

In this thesis, I raise three questions, which I explore through sculptural forms that engage the pregnant-birthing-maternal body [fig. 1]. I ask here how maternal bodies speak to: (1) repetitive domestic labour, (2) the abject or strange, as *enceinte* (the pregnant body that is outside but within a patriarchal-capitalistic society),<sup>2</sup> and (3) the possibilities for maternal bodies to speak to the idea of the collective *holobiont* (as undefinable messy bodies as it relates to the capitalistic ideal of individualized bodies).

I will discuss my most recent sculpture *Tensile* [fig. 13 and 14] at the end of this document in section Transitional Conversations (7). Also, I have added the section Tensile Care (8) in response to my MFA Thesis Defense.

Attending to my 'practice of returning' I have interjected fragments of personal reflections throughout this paper. These reflections are from notebooks produced during *Documentation Series: Year Off* (June-September 2018).<sup>3</sup> The fragments speak to my maternal body and my method of interruption outlined in *Unbounded Other* (2).

As I watch myself, I can see the stress and anxiety throughout my body. I am emotionally drained. All I want to do is go to my room, close the door, and climb into bed. I can see in Jude's face he is not feeling well.

I feel guilty if I am tired and have no energy to play with Jude. He is such an easy child, yet I am exhausted. How can I complain? I feel guilty that I don't sing to him or teach him specific actions. I need to be more interactive with Jude. I don't do enough.

I am relieved when Jude is sleeping. When he is sleeping, I miss him.

4 The artists I have chosen to include in this document are of European descent as their artistic practices (both materially and conceptually) are closely related to my recent sculptures. The artists I selected who speak to feminine craft are Luanne Martineau, Louise Bourgeois, and Magdalena Abakanowicz. I have researched artists of non-European descent and have added the sources to my Works Consulted.

5 See theorist Judith Butler's article, "Performative Act and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," where Butler addresses gender construction and performativity of gender stereotypes. The construction of identity is also undefinable as it is constantly shifting through time and space.

6 This archive will be discussed further in *Excessive Iteration* (4).

7 See art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson's book, *Fray: Art and Textile Politics*, for the political potential of 'craftivism' in the art world.

My sculptures, in *Composite Tension* (*Corpus, Slew, Cleave, and Tensile*), intend to speak to historical and contemporary feminist artists that bring feminine 'craft' into the realm of the art world.<sup>4</sup> I use the word 'feminine' in this document inclusively with respect to gender identity.<sup>5</sup> The personal archive *Documentation Series: Year Off*, in my sculptures, layers in my context as an artist and a mother.<sup>6</sup> This 'personal' context alludes to domestic labour, maternal ambivalence, and the inter-subjectivity between a mother and child. The repetitive forms of my sculptures signify an accumulation over time and speak to the reality of caring for a child—doing the same daily things repeatedly. I further tie my content to the specificity of feminine craft and domestic labour through my use of fabric, yarn, and thread.<sup>7</sup>

The strange quality of my sculptural forms explores the maternal body using Bulgarian-French feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva's descriptions of *enceinte* in her book *Desire In Language* and abjection in her book *Powers of Horror*. The term *enceinte* characterizes the condition of the pregnant body—a state of being within the Western culture but removed from it. I am directly critiquing how the pregnant body does not exist as fully human within patriarchal systems. The pregnant body is not one or two beings but a complex fusion of identities, an 'other', an *enceinte holobiont*. I use the 'object'

- 8 Here, I am referring to how the concept of *holobiont* makes a human body strange within capitalistic value systems as it devalues the body as an individual.
- 9 It is important to note the specificities of my position as I address my research and artistic practice. I speak from my experience as a white cis female in North America.
- 10 In *Meeting The Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, theorist Karen Barad coined the term *intra-action* to exemplify the constant shift of memory, subjectivity, and fluidity of materialization (Preface and Acknowledgements). Through *intra-action*, our bodies remain entangled with those around us, through time and space (Preface and Acknowledgements).
- 11 Here, I use 'nonhuman' to include specifically human symbionts but also all nonhuman bodies in a general sense.

in a similar sense relating to the pregnant/maternal body as 'other'; a body that is set apart within a capitalistic society, evoking a different form of labour unaccounted for in patriarchal systems. Relating to the concept of *holobiont*, Kristeva's description of abjection as something that disturbs order and makes strange is a starting point for my research and material explorations moving forward.<sup>8</sup> My artistic practice invests in the fertility of my own body and how gendered fluids contribute to my identity construction as a cis female and a mother.<sup>9</sup>

My use of *enceinte* and *holobiont* take the conversation away from my personal story to the collective maternal body. I turn to the 'other/s' in a more 'collective' sense to explore the mother-child bond as it relates to the entanglement of different entities.<sup>10</sup> The mass of individual forms within my sculptural installations speaks to the human condition as well as collective life on earth. The model of the mother and child interdependency, as seen in biologist Scott F. Gilbert's description of *holobiont* in his article "Holobiont by Birth" and sociologist Rebecca Scott Yoshizawa's use of theorist Karen Barad's term *intra-action* in her article "Fetal-Maternal Intra-action," speaks to bodies containing multiple bodies and possibilities of human and nonhuman relationships.<sup>11</sup>

The multiplicity of soft forms also calls to notions of care within the sculptural installation. Through my artistic practice, I investigate how the maternal body speaks to the ethics of care within an academic institution. I ask myself how I can subvert patriarchal-capitalistic systems through implications of care within my artwork.



I stay home a lot. It's easier to be at home when I breastfeed Jude and when Jude takes a nap. The only voices Jude hears throughout the day is his own voice and my voice when I talk to him.

The relationship between mother and son. Our interactions, our dependency on one another. I eat with him. I watch him. He watches me. I think about the societal ideals of a domestic environment. The kitchen, the family meal. I continue to judge myself for not succeeding in those ideals. The kitchen counters are cluttered, the recycling bin is overflowing. I know all the spots I have not cleaned. I sit and eat with my child. I let Jude hold my hand and play with my fingers. The space between us engaged. He looks at me and makes a noise expecting a response. I talk to him, reassure him, and tell him that I love him.





Two

Unbounded  
Other



- 12 I am referring to a traditional art studio with lots of space and proper ventilation.
- 13 The placenta was a separate entity, yet it was a form of both our bodies—it was something of me but not of me and of my child but not of my child. I see the placenta as a physical space between the mother and child during pregnancy.
- 14 I draw from philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas for the idea of the turn to 'other' that precipitates participation. I take up this 'turn' to alterity as the filling of space between other and me and thus giving dignity and respect to the 'other/s' outside myself (*Existence and Existents*).

My method is a 'practice of returning' as my maternal body is called to attend to the needs beyond my own—the needs of my child. A practice of returning acknowledges the constant interruptions caused by my relationship to another. In response to these interruptions, I have developed a method of material making that allows me to return to my work again and again. My process of making is a fragmented production of repetitive objects; of piece work. This brings me into the realm of feminine craft as I work with small soft light materials. A practice of returning attends to the need for my body and my artistic practice to be flexible as they transition from an institutional space to a domestic space.

Previously, my methodology addressed the human body, the space between bodies, and how, through our bodies, we communicate with and perceive others. My practice predominantly was painting and large-scale installation work that required my body to be present in the studio to create artwork.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the art I made could not easily be moved from one space to another, further restricting my material making. My new identity as a maternal body has significantly shifted how I conduct my research and material production, though the practice is still centred on the space between bodies.

The inter-subjectivity between my child and me informs my methodology. I determine my approach to research and methods by the tenuous boundary between our two identities. When my child was in my womb, we were of one body connected through the placenta.<sup>13</sup> This sharing of identity, as a pregnant female holding two identities within one body, continues beyond the physical separation between mother and child. The space between mother and child influences me, as also how it can inform the tensioned relationships between other bodies/entities.<sup>14</sup>

The performative gestures of motherhood are a generative space for artistic production. A practice of returning, and the pressure of existing in two spaces, institutional and domestic, translates into energy for constant repetitive production.

**My postpartum body. My body is forever changed.**

**I put Jude back down on the floor, and he gives a small complaint. I can hear the tumble dryer buzzer go off as I wipe up the food on the kitchen floor.**



**Three**

**Nearly All**

- 15 It is important to note when I say “year off” it speaks to capitalistic notions of labour production.

I became pregnant during the first year of graduate studies and gave birth to my child Jude on August 10, 2017. I noticed a disparity in production efficiency and volume of artwork between the first and second semesters of my first year. I feel I had a relatively easy gestational period, but I still suffered from fatigue, lack of motivation, depression, insomnia, and body pain. This bodily reality affected my capability to produce enough artwork for the MFA requirements and led to my decision to take a year off.<sup>15</sup> I also knew the realities of taking care of a newborn child and my desire to breastfeed would increase my fatigue and impede my motivation to produce creatively.

The demands of the little human growing in my body and birthed from my body consumed me during my year off. Sleep deprivation, anxiety, guilt, and the realities of breastfeeding assaulted my postnatal body and psychological mindset. My daily repetitive labour and constant monitoring of my son fed into an obsessive behaviour towards care and routine. My reflections on my actions as a mother have also highlighted my awareness of the intense bond between mother and child. They deepened and humanized me at times toward aggressive maternal protectiveness, and through the grief and delight I experienced as my child gained independence.

When I found out I was pregnant, the reality that my body would physically labour to grow, birth, and nurse a child was difficult to comprehend. Once my son Jude was born, my body needed to be near him to breastfeed. Looking back, I can identify my strong maternal desire to be with my baby and to provide for him personally. I still want Jude to need me. I hold this tension or desire to always be with my child but also to have the autonomy to work uninterrupted, making my maternal experience to be very generative for my artistic practice.



16 The word ‘earthside’ is commonly used when referring to childbirth once a baby is outside the mother’s womb.

17 Though this reflection in my relationship with this institutional space is essential in that it relates to my practice in this study and thus calls for further discussion, such discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. I do address the implications of care within my work in section Tensile Care (8).

18 I will discuss this research further in Excessive Iteration (4).

My maternal experience also brought into view a tensioned relationship between the academic institution and me. My pregnant/maternal body no longer fitted into an institutional environment. I became something ‘other’; my identity shifted from an ‘individual’ body to something else, an *enceinte*. My pregnant body, for me, was alien and strange; I was what I had always been, myself, but I was something I had never been before. My womb contained a body that did not exist ‘earthside’—my womb, my body, was an *elsewhere*.<sup>16</sup> My body as ‘other’ was unable to achieve academic excellence according to the standard set for all students. Did this distance make me feel excluded in my maternal identity? How could my artistic practice engage this space between the artist’s situation and the academy’s set practices?<sup>17</sup>

These reflections led me to start excessively recording our ‘mother-child’ daily routines in a domestic environment. As I was still looking after Jude fulltime during the MFA Summer Independent Study from May-August 2018, I was not able to create artwork in the studio as I had done all my life. In response to my life circumstances, I decided to use my daily actions as artistic research leading into my second year of the MFA program. I titled this research: *Documentation Series: Year Off*.<sup>18</sup>

*Documentation Series: Year Off* is crucial to my recent sculptural forms, *Composite Tension*. It productively informs my current artistic practice through the use of repetition and analyzing the space between embodiments (in this case the relationship between my son and me).

I have, therefore, included the documentation in this paper.

It is important to acknowledge my constructed worldview as a cis female of European descent. I was born in South Africa and moved to Ontario, Canada when I was five years old. The community I grew up in was very conservative toward the gender roles of cis female and cis male people. Generally, males were considered the head of the household in nuclear families involving cis male and cis female parents. Females were expected to be the primary parent to take care of the children and domestic duties each day. My current community is still predominantly conservative, so I encounter these societal expectations/pressures of my sex and gender daily.

As a cis female, I have encountered imposed limitations of my sex and gender throughout my life. When I was pregnant, I observed a further estrangement of my body in terms of how people treated me. As a pregnant body, I was neither male nor female; I was something other. I was expected to exist elsewhere as my body was no longer definable in capitalistic systems. Even after childbirth, I am still treated differently than before pregnancy. My identity is quickly reduced to being a mother and the expectations of who a mother should be. In saying this, I recognize that once I became a pregnant/maternal body I was forever changed. It is difficult to define where my body begins and ends in relation to my child. Our beings will always be entangled together as we grow, change, evolve over time. Even though my body and identity have changed, I challenge the societal limitations and expectations placed on my female maternal body. I have found my voice through my artistic practice.

As I watch myself continue to load the dishwasher, I look at my body. I can see myself aware of the camera, of being recorded. It makes me uncomfortable. I do not recognize my body anymore. Jude still watches me waving his arms. I hear myself sigh. I know at that moment I forgot I was being recorded.

It was only ten months ago my life became filled with the constant needs of my child. The daily routines of breastfeeding, changing diapers, sleeping, playing. A day will go by, and I ask myself what did I do today? What did I accomplish?





**Four**

**Excessive  
Iteration**

Through the personal archive, *Documentation Series: Year Off*, and the sculptural forms in *Composite Tension* (*Corpus*, *Slew*, *Cleave* and *Tensile*), I address repetitive rituals involving the maternal body as it relates tensionally to the mother-child relationship. The archive speaks to repetition as it includes repetitive routines of domestic labour. It resonates with the concept of re-writing the maternal body within a patriarchal society. This archive of repetitive actions is present within my sculpture *Corpus* [fig. 3 and 4]. Also, repetitive gestures are evident through the multiplicity of forms seen in *Composite Tension* (*Corpus*, *Slew*, *Cleave*, and *Tensile*), which also speaks to domestic labour through the materials used.

I feel like I am objectifying myself as I  
watch the daily videos. Dissatisfied with  
what I see. I watch my son reach up and  
touch my face while he nurses.

The sink is full of dishes. Jude babbles,  
shakes his head, and slaps the floor.



19 These handwritten observations and reflections are interjected throughout this paper.

The personal archive, *Documentation Series: Year Off*, documented my maternal body in relation to my child Jude. *Documentation Series: Year Off* is a compilation of data collection consisting of: 1) downloaded webcam videos from a baby cam in Jude's room; 2) videos from a DSLR camera of mother-child in the kitchen and main bedroom; 3) my use of notebooks to track the labour of what I was doing for Jude as a further self-surveillance or self-criticism;<sup>19</sup> 4) a record of my daily fertility using charts and fertility test strips. The archive is a record of repetitive daily actions or rituals. It speaks to maternal care, maternal ambivalence, the inter-subjectivity between my son and me, and the fertility of my maternal body. These topics enter the conversation of re-writing the maternal body within a patriarchal society.

In my year off I did the same thing every day, but it would subtly change over a prolonged period. *Documentation Series: Year Off* only records the last four months of that year. The videos capture a time of transition as I prepared to return to school and gradually wean Jude off of breast milk. The weaning process did not change the order of labour every day. The less time I nursed Jude meant I spent more time making Jude solid food. The documentation shows how our movement changed over time. From June to July, Jude was not yet crawling so he was more reliant on me to move him from one place to the next. When he learned to crawl, I had to use my body differently to protect him from harmful objects.

The baby cam has a motion sensor and records whenever there is movement in Jude's room. This movement involves my child Jude, my spouse Bryce, and me. The webcam has an app that can be accessed on a mobile device to either view a live stream or to see or download recordings from the past 24 hours. The kitchen videos would generally start with Jude on the kitchen floor playing with toys while I did the dishes, cooked, and cleaned. Then I would put Jude in his highchair

20 At the start of the academic year, I was unsure of how to use the archive. I struggled with the limitations of my own domestic space and difficult questions about not having Jude's permission to use the footage. This led me first to present my notebooks in a muslin bag handsewn closed. The presentation showed care for the handwritten pages which I later shredded and incorporated into my sculpture *Corpus* [fig. 3 and 4].

and give him food. The main bedroom recordings would show Jude and me while I sorted clothes, folded them, and put them away. The videos reveal the struggle to do domestic labour and care for my child. Jude required more attention and protection as he gained more independence.

I re-watched all the video documentation from June to September to record details in two small black leather notebooks as a form of self-surveillance of my role as a mother. I would write about my actions analyzing what worked and what I would change. I did this over and over again tweaking my actions in response to the previous day's recording.

Another aspect of *Year Off* is the daily recording of my fertility, which is ongoing. I survey my vaginal mucus and urine to determine when I am fertile. I include the fertility observations as a part of *Year Off* as it involves my own bodily presence and the function of my body to grow, nurture and provide for my child (and the potentiality of future children). These recordings involve charts outlining my fertility. I use codes and colour specific stickers for vaginal mucus observations and fertility test strips that use urine to test different hormone levels (HCG, LH, and PdG). The charts show the most likely fertile mucus observation each day.

This process used to determine when I am fertile is laborious. The constant monitoring of my body every day can be tedious especially when avoiding pregnancy. To learn when I am fertile requires many months of discipline and repetitive observations, as well as meticulously recording those observations.

The compilation of data in *Documentation Series: Year Off* is crucial to my research moving forward.<sup>20</sup> It reveals my body as the archive.

**Fig 2** Figure 2 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed is Rachel Epp Buller, *The Food Landscape*; dimensions vary; food screenprints hand bound into 10 accordion-fold books; 2007-2008. <https://balance.ddtr.net/the-food-landscape/>.

**21** Here, fertility and menstruation speak to the elevation of the pregnant body preventing biologically female bodies from existing except in a state of the potential to be pregnant. This also affects females who are barren or childless. I speak from my own life experience as a cis female of European descent in North America.

**22** The content of *Documentation Series: Year Off* calls up references to artist Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*, 1973-79, where she meticulously recorded daily activities involving her son. She uses both objects and typed data to respond to different developmental stages until he turned six years old (9).

**23** Artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles also spoke to domestic labour in her work *Private Performances of Personal Maintenance as Art*, 1970 (Phillips 43).

**24** Using my mobile phone as a method of obsessive monitoring is another element of contemporary parenting. From August 2017–February 2018, I used an app on my phone to record Jude's routines involving eating, sleeping, and diaper changes. Currently, I have an app where I can see Jude's routines recorded by Jude's daycare. I am still obsessively collecting Jude's daily routines even when I am not with him.

It makes it accessible to Jude as his provider, protector, and nurturer. It makes visible the movement of my body in domestic space as a labourer and references it as a breeding body.<sup>21</sup> *Documentation Series: Year Off* is an attempt to rewrite my body by engaging with self through surveillance. I participate here a 'language of transition' in the private-public, self-other space to enter the realm of production that allows for the private to become public.

Feminist art historian and artist Rachel Epp Buller, in her piece *The Food Landscape*, records her daughter's food intake during the process of weaning her off breast milk ("Expressing the End" 205) [fig. 2]. Epp Buller presented this data collection through a series of food charts hand bound into booklets.<sup>22</sup> Epp Buller recognizes the obsessiveness involved in this action as a "repetitive ritual" that "played out through... [her] mothering" (205).<sup>23</sup> Her description of rituals speaks to the "obsessive-compulsive tendencies" of daily routines when taking care of a child (205). In Western society, there is a lot of information given to parents concerning how to parent. Even before babies are born, the rules for the child's safety are highly restrictive. This constant monitoring of actions, of rituals, feeds into the excessive recording of those actions. This caused me to constantly compare what I was doing to what I ought to be doing. Thus, my compulsive need to constantly record Jude's daily routines fed into my anxiety of being a 'good' mother. As Epp Buller reflects on her food charts: "...I read the food prints at times as a critical commentary on my mothering: how did I let her go for four days with no greens? What kind of mother cannot put together a daily balanced diet?" (206). These questions are all too familiar with my everyday life.<sup>24</sup>

Rachel Epp Buller's project, *The Food Landscape*, identifies the collaborative element of the food charts. As she states: "[t]he mother's



**Fig 3** *Corpus*; 35 x 35 in.; fabric, thread, yarn, wire, metal, paper, and ink; 2018-2019.

identity may be subsumed, temporarily, by the nursing collaboration, a new identity to which they both contribute” (206). Similarly, my archive, *Documentation Series: Year Off*, involves the space between Jude and me and how our relationship evolved through our daily actions. Its emphasis on personal data relates to Rachel Epp Buller’s practice addressing the space between the maternal body and the body of a child. My current practice engages with the discourse of mothering, repetitive daily rituals/routines, maternal ambivalence, and the mother-child bond. In *Corpus* (installation also discussed below) [fig. 3 and 4], I shred some of the personal data from *Documentation Series: Year Off* to include in the work. I recognize the act of shredding the notebooks moves away from the domestic realm into daily corporate routines of shredding documents. Shredding my notebooks portrays a distanced act of destruction—the shredding machine cut up the pages instead of my hands. The distancing from my body in relation to the personal archive calls attention to the implications of presenting the shredded paper as apart of my sculpture *Corpus* [fig. 3 and 4].





**Fig 4** *Corpus*; (detail); fabric, thread, yarn, wire, metal, paper, and ink; 2018-2019.

- 25** See philosopher Silvia Federici's book, *Caliban and the Witch*, for an analysis of the contributions of male and female labour in the rise of Capitalism.

Through the act of shredding the handwritten pages of the notebooks, the content is no longer intact adding another layer to maternal ambivalence and the struggle to present highly personalized or private information. As outlined by French feminist philosophers and literary critics Helene Cixous and Catherine Clement in *The Newly Born Woman*, I enter here into the discourse of rewriting the maternal body through the use of my voice and perspective (92). I do so by showing the specificity of the maternal experience that runs counter to certain patriarchal portrayals of motherhood, as described by Rachel Epp Buller, the perfect, chaste, self-sacrificial mother ("Introduction" 1). The content of my archive, *Documentation Series: Year Off*, reveals my personal struggle with my maternal body existing in a predominantly patriarchal capitalistic society. My body, through pregnancy and breastfeeding, was temporarily excluded from capitalistic ideals of an able-bodied labourer.<sup>25</sup>

26 Sewing fabric and crocheting yarn calls attention to the repetition of domestic labour.

Through maternal ambivalence and subjectivity, another perspective emerges. In *Feminist Art and the Maternal*, art historian and cultural theorist Andrea Liss' emphasis on the importance of the maternal gaze, "to reimagine culture from another gaze," (21) allows for the specificity of the maternal to be present in the art world. Maternal ambivalence and personal subjectivity are starting points to redefine the patriarchal construct of maternal.

As Rachel Epp Buller has done through her artistic practice, I speak to the maternal gaze, subjectivity, and ambivalence, and the inter-subjectivity between mother and child. My charts and notebooks reveal my maternal ambivalence. For example, my struggle with continually being tied to my child through breastfeeding as well as the strong desire to be with my child at all times. This personal content heavily informs my material choices (mainly soft materials<sup>26</sup>) and the imagery I use, though at times abstract or ambiguous. These visual and material strategies speak to my maternal body existing in two states, an artist and a mother.



I sigh a lot. I tend to clench my jaw or hold my breath here or there when I am thinking. I can be silent for hours, lost in thought. Jude watches me and cries out then smacks his lips. He knows its lunch time. Jude feeds himself with his left hand and looks around the kitchen as he chews. I look at him while I eat. I push his food back to the centre of the tray so he can easily pick it up. Jude babbles to me and I smile, I cannot help myself.



**Fig 5** *Cleave*; dimensions vary; fabric and thread; 2018.

**27** I discuss my recent sculpture *Tensile* in section *Transitional Conversations* (7).

In *Composite Tension*, I use my archive and soft materials to speak to repetition, domestic labour, maternal ambivalence, and the mother-child relationship. Here, I discuss the formal parameters of *Composite Tension* (*Corpus*, *Slew*, and *Cleave*) and how I incorporate my personal narrative within the sculptures through repetition.<sup>27</sup>

The most recent installation, *Cleave* [fig. 5, 6, and 7] had over 150 'pouches' or 'sacs' pinned to the wall with varying spaces between them. Entering into my second year of the MFA program, I started creating repetitive objects using fabric and yarn. The pouches made during this time have a wide range of neutral colours (pinks, creams, whites, greys, browns, greens, blues, purples, beiges, yellows). I used the combination of texture here to make the forms strange. Through combining different textures, the viewer feels repulsed and attracted by the forms. I placed smaller sacs inside larger ones creating a dialogue with the shapes, textures, and colours.



**Fig 6** Cleave (detail); fabric and thread; 2018.



As I repetitively made the forms over and over again a collection of them materialized. They clustered together on the wall as a mass, yet unique from one another (I did not use a pattern to make them). For the installation, I did not evenly space the pouches, as I wanted them to look like living organisms to add to the ambiguous nature of the sculptural objects.



**Fig 7** *Cleave (detail); fabric and thread; 2018.*

*Corpus* [fig. 3 and 4], has 5-7-foot muslin tubes (referencing the height of adult human bodies), stuffed with bound yarn (thick roving yarn in white, green, and blue), suspended and sitting on top of the shredded paper with paper coming out of the tubes. The thick yarn strands inside the tubes are bound with wire so the tubes can retain their form. For this sculpture, I made about 12 tubes imagining them suspended and clustered. The colours of the yarn, once inside the muslin tubes, are faintly visible. As I worked on each tube, I piled them on top of one another. Once completed, I picked the pile up and was intrigued by the form created by this gesture. For the most recent installation of *Corpus*, I decided to present the sculpture with this gesture and use a metal stand to take the place of my arms. The figure-like form is the height of a small child evoking a bodily response to the sculpture (this will be discussed further in the next section).



**Fig 8** *Slew*; dimensions vary; fabric, yarn, and thread; 2018-2019.

The third piece I showed was *Slew* [fig. 8 and 9]. For this piece, I started making elongated pouches and stuffing them with the crochet chains. In September 2018, I made crocheted cords and repeated this process until I started a crochet chain while transiting home. I had a bag attached to my jacket with a ball of yarn in it so I could continuously crochet while I walked/transited. This action made a very long thin cord as I commuted for an hour to Jude's daycare. I understand 'crochet' as a time-based medium and one that records the journey between the two embodiments of the art institution and mothering.

One of the elongated pouch explorations was a cream muslin exterior and wine coloured velvety yarn crochet chain stuffed inside. To make the yarn more visible, I scratched the surface of the muslin with a sewing seam ripper. I scraped the outer surface to transition the reference toward various organic forms. I was intrigued by how strange and ambiguous the 'pod' was while still referencing fecundity and potential decay. I started repeating this particular form over and over until I made over two hundred pods. The installation of *Slew* presents the pods piled on the floor in close relation to the sacs on the wall. I extend this relationship to the other forms of the installation so they could perform a dialogue through the proximity of the sculptures.





**Fig 9** *Slew* (detail); fabric, yarn, and thread; 2018-2019.

The loose threads and hand-stitched forms in *Composite Tension* call attention to the process of making these objects. I intend each object not to be concluded at the end of the process of making, but to reference their imperfect and ‘ongoing’ state. The handmade aspects and defectiveness of the forms take them away from being a commodity. This transition from commodification allows the objects to have a value on their own and helps to animate their potentiality by bringing them to life. The use of textile references clothing, garments, or shelters that protect something within—like an enclosure, an *enceinte*, a method of containment.

My day is filled with menial tasks. As I watch myself walk from here to there, I reflect on the use of my body. My female body. How I fit into the stereotype of a stay at home mother. I feel guilty about how much I enjoy staying home and looking after my son. I get angry when people assume that I am a stay at home mom and then I get frustrated that their assumption is correct.

My body, the one who carried, birthed and nursed my baby diligently for months. My body, given in service, to every need of my child! I feel as if I have lost myself, yet I cannot be separate. Our bodies are connected.

Jude reaches for something he can't touch. He keeps looking at it. My back is to him while I put dishes into the dishwasher. Jude complains and looks at me. He cannot crawl. I appear to ignore him finishing my task at hand. He continues to complain and I continue to clean.





**Five**

**Monstrous  
Remnants**

- 28 See philosopher Silvia Federici's book, *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women*, for how the female body relates to social control (2).

The strange appearance of the sculptures in *Composite Tension* speaks to the maternal body as abject or alien. The abject, strange, or alien 'appearance', of *Composite Tension* ties into feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva's description of the womb (*enceinte*) as being outside (or 'elsewhere') but within a capitalistic culture (*Desire In Language* 240). In *Powers of Horror*, she further links the idea of abjection to anthropologist Mary Douglas' metaphor of the body as a societal system (69). Linking the orifices of the body to margins in society allows for a comparison between the spaces that break the boundary of the body, and those that threaten the structure of a system (69). I see the maternal body existing in these margins of society. The maternal body threatens capitalistic systems as it exists as 'other' outside of capitalistic labour production.

The pregnant/maternal body is a messy body where nothing is contained. Through poking and prodding during medical examinations, breast leaking with colostrum months before the baby is born, and the bloody show as the pregnant body prepares to give birth. The pregnant body is a vessel for containment, yet it exudes and spills out. The messiness extends to how the pregnant/maternal body exists as apart of another and is undefinable. Just as the concept of *holobiont* makes the notion of the body strange and no longer definable in capitalistic ideals of individuality.

I link Kristeva's term *enceinte* and the messy pregnant body to the abject quality of my sculptures as something 'other', as *holobionts*. Kristeva's description of abjection as a threat to the body, boundaries, or order, also informs the sculptures presented in *Composite Tension* [fig. 1]. I am invested in my sculptures' marginal states. Each sculpture has evidence of leakage, pushing, or spewing out. They all have an opening of some kind. The openings could be seen as thresholds or marginal spaces.



**Fig 10** Figure 10 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed is Luanne Martineau, *Dangler*; dimensions vary; wool, felt, silk, and organza; 2008. <http://www.trepanierbaer.com/legacy/uploads/newsreleases/news128.pdf>.

**29** I reference here the Roman sculpture *Laocoon and His Sons* that depicts the 'group' being attacked by serpents (Loh 396).

The strange or alien quality of my sculptures evokes a reaction to the abject or 'other' – what is seen as outside, excluded, or hidden from culture, speaking to what is marginalized. When in close proximity to the work, the viewer's bodily reaction is one of repulsion and attraction. The desire to touch the materials is juxtaposed with the abjection or repulsion caused by the imagery.

For example, in *Corpus*, the visceral quality of cords calls to 'writhing innards' or the body under threat.<sup>29</sup> The loose threads of *Cleave*, accentuated by the shadows of the forms, add to the creepy, alien quality of the sacs as well as the combination of colours and textures chosen. In *Slew*, each pod's shredded outer membrane allows for multiple strange associations. The imagery in *Composite Tension*, causes the viewer to be aware of the human condition. The physical bodily reality of human existence, of birth, life, and death. This bodily awareness adds to the abjection (and possible anxiety) that the sculptures present.

Artist Luanne Martineau speaks to feminine craft, the body, and the abject in her soft-felted sculptures. Martineau uses both abstraction and representation in her sculptures, in particular, her piece *Dangler*, made in 2008 [fig. 10]. The sculpture looks as if a female body has been pulled apart with "breasts, bowels, orifices, flaps of skin and other weird protuberances hang[ing] suspended between floor and ceiling" (Laurence 98). By "blurring the boundaries of the body," Martineau challenges historically depicted portrayals of the female body through abjection (98). Similarly, in my sculptures, *Composite Tension*, I use the formal elements of fabric and yarn (typically seen as materials used for feminine craft/domestic labour) to portray the female body as abject. For example, in *Cleave* female genitalia is referenced. Here, I use different fabrics, materials, and craft-based techniques to blur the boundary between the body and other associations of strange, alien, or other forms.

**Fig 11** Figure 11 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed is Louise Bourgeois, *Spider (Cell)*; 175 x 262 x 204 in.; steel and mixed media; 1997. <https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/42/684>.

**30** Luce Irigaray relates Plato's allegory of the cave to a womb (as a prison) in the chapter "The 'Way Out' of the Cave," in *Speculum of The Other Woman* (278-283).

**31** I will not go into the idea of the mother as an authoritative figure over the child in this paper. See feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva's book, *Powers of Horror*, for how a "maternal authority" teaches and controls a child (71-72).

**32** By 'slippage' I mean the moments of 'product' failure. I refer here to the space between what the objects are and what they should be in terms of functionality. I see these 'spaces' as marginal states within the sculptural forms.

Artist Louise Bourgeois' artistic practice involves her 'personal' narrative, and a felt inadequacy in her roles as a wife and mother. Her work focuses on the maternal body and its relation to other bodies (Muller-Westermann 89). In one particular installation, *Spider (Cell)*, 1997, Bourgeois represents her view of the "maternal imago" as both protective and menacing (Nixon 274) [fig. 11]. The large spider that 'sits' on top of a metal cage is, according to Bourgeois, a maternal body – "a bodily presence that is both refuge and cell" (274).<sup>30</sup> *Spider (Cell)* depicts, for Bourgeois, both herself and her mother (274). She presents the maternal body as 'monster' that references abjection and repulsion – as something other or alien. The interwoven narrative in Bourgeois' artwork is informative when thinking through my sculptural work. It calls attention to my own maternal body as nurturer and protector.<sup>31</sup> I am interested in creating larger works that reference a 'monster' like form. I will briefly discuss this further in section Transitional Conversations (7).

I use abjection toward the maternal body to engage a constructive and critical discourse with artists and theorists. Also, I see abjection as a generative and productive way to discuss the realities of my own maternal ambivalence, obsessiveness, and protectiveness, and how a patriarchal society generally perceives maternal bodies as 'other'.

Referencing Luanne Martineau and Louise Bourgeois' artistic practices are useful for in thinking through my work. My sculptures navigate the subject matter of the maternal body, the *enceinte*, and the strange through ambiguous imagery and the moments of slippage (speaking to the marginal states of the sculptures and the sculptures as *holobiont* communities).<sup>32</sup> The 'spilled out' materials of soft containment inform this investigation.

As I watch the morning routine tears start to form in my eyes. In the video, I am sitting on the bed with Jude on my lap just after nursing him. How natural this time is together. Our interactions, our 'conversations.' The norm of our daily routine taken for granted.

When Jude cries, I can feel my whole body tense up with anxiety. My physical response lingers after his crying stops. I get overly anxious when Jude is tired, cranky, or when he refuses to eat or drink. I get anxious about my own abilities as a mother.

We start playing with our reflections in the mirror, waving and saying hello. Jude giggles which makes me laugh. I didn't know we were being recorded.





Six

Numerousness



33 Referring to the fluidity of materialization.

Through the language of the maternal, *Composite Tension* speaks to collective beings through the multiplicity of forms [fig. 1]. Through my sculptures, I explore how *enceinte* (a pregnant body as ‘other’) and *holobiont* (an undefinable messy body) address the entanglements between entities.

The inter-subjective relationship between mother and child alludes to other inter-species relationships, both human and nonhuman, complicating the notion of identity and individuality. In *Feminist Art and the Maternal*, art historian and cultural theorist Andrea Liss describes the mother-child relationship as interdependent (xix). The bond between mother and child involves the melding of their idea of self and other. In “Fetal-Maternal Intra-action: Politics of New Placental Biologies,” sociologist Rebecca Scott Yoshizawa introduces theorist Karen Barad’s concept of *intra-action*<sup>33</sup> within the dynamic between mother and child through theorizing the function of the placenta—the intertwining of the fetus, placenta, and mother both in the womb and outside the womb after cutting the umbilical cord (80). *Intra-action* can also apply to the term *holobiont* discussed in biologist Scott F. Gilbert’s article “Holobiont by Birth: Multilineage Individuals as the Concretion of Cooperative Processes” in the *Monsters* section of *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*. Gilbert challenges capitalistic notions of the individualized body calling attention to the reliance on other species (particularly bacteria) to survive (73). He explains further how the mother’s symbionts positively affect the growth of her child, as follows, “through her symbionts and through her milk, the mother is causing developmental changes in her infant even after its birth” (81). The mother-child connection and exchange involve not only human substance but also intricately entangled microorganisms between and with their bodies. This ‘entanglement’ directly relates to how the mother-child relationship blurs the boundaries between self and other. It calls to the physical and psychological entanglement of our beings through contact.

**Fig 12** Figure 12 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed is Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Abakans*; dimensions vary; sisal and wool weaving; 1968-1975. <http://www.abakanowicz.art.pl/abakans/-abakans.php.html>.

The mutual relationships within my sculptural installation inform my metaphorical use of the concept of *holobiont* and *intra-action*. These relationships blur the boundaries through the way I present the collective objects. The multiple components of these objects call into question their individualization or definitive boundaries. The three pieces, *Corpus*, *Slew*, and *Cleave* in *Composite Tension*, have elements of either piles or forms that are close together. Though the forms are soft and appear inviting, they also appear menacing. They become en masse a thing unto themselves. They ‘live’ inside each other as pockets with substance coming out of their openings. *Composite Tension* is made up of *holobionts* huddled together as a community of forms.

Artist Magdalena Abakanowicz deals with the collective, the mass, and the crowd, through her sculptural forms. She addresses the human condition through the multiplicity of forms calling to the individual in the collective (Abakanowicz 37). In *Abakans*, 1968-1975, Abakanowicz created a “forest” or “tribe” of large hollow forms made out of natural fibre (Rose 24) [fig. 12]. Their surfaces reference both human and natural elements—“[t]heir interiors, revealed through openings and apertures in the fabric, could suggest, ... wounds or orifices or the crevices of natural forms” (24). Abakanowicz’s sculptures allude to forms “spawning themselves” with ambiguous shapes clustered organically together, differing in size, related yet unique from one another (128). I am invested in clusterings of *holobiont* ‘families’—the space or lack of space between forms. The blurring of boundaries between bodies as Abakanowicz has done through the use of the mass of forms.

The mass and the collective interdependent relationships between beings, both human and nonhuman, speak to the concept of *intra-action* and *holobiont*—the recognition of the body not being an isolated entity. In *Composite Tension*, I explore the use of the mother-child relationship (as *holobiont* and beings formed through *intra-action*) to view the blurring of boundaries between bodies using the multiplicity of forms.

I yawn after nursing Jude while he rolls around on the bed reaching for anything to grab. I am exhausted most of the time. Watching Jude and I hang out together makes me grieve that these moments are short-lived. Soon I will be back to studying, and Jude will be at daycare. I believe that's why I have a need to document and record this time. I know it will end. Our relationship will change. He will be weaned and will no longer need me in the same way.

As Jude gains more independence, my anxiety grows. The reality that I have to let go more and more. I want him to need me. I am mourning our separation.

He startles me by banging a metal container on the floor. I open my eyes and then close them again.





**Seven**

**Transitional  
Conversations**





**Fig 13** *Tensile*; 35 x 28 x 28 in.; fabric, yarn, thread, foam, and wire; 2019.

My experience being in a pregnant body or moving within a pregnant body was a strange experience. I remember when I had my first ultrasound; ‘seeing’ Jude for the first time on a screen – his limbs were flailing about in response to the technician prodding my belly. Jude’s image on the screen showed his body as separate from my own, yet the image was of my womb as well. Jude’s body was enclosed within my body; our boundaries were merged as one body, an *enceinte holobiont*.

The imagery portrayed in *Composite Tension* is not familiar, yet it speaks to the body. I am interested in pushing this imagery further to emphasize the strange at a larger scale. By making the objects bigger, I want to play with bodily references of interior and exterior. I transition here from smaller objects referencing human organs, to larger objects that refer to large creatures unknown to us.



**Fig 14** *Tensile* (detail); fabric, yarn, thread, foam, and wire; 2019.

My recent sculpture, *Tensile* [fig. 13 and 14], moves away from multiple objects, though repetitive forms are still present inside the large pod. I plan on pushing this sculpture further through repetition by making similar forms again and again. Also, through repetitive mark making (stitching, drawing, rubbing) both inside and outside the large pod sculpture. *Tensile* has the potential to evolve and stretch into other associations. Its ambiguity calls to both threat and protection—this tension can be emphasized as I continue to obsessively repeat gestures using different materials to the point of nonsensical excess.

For the most recent installation of *Composite Tension*, I inserted sound pieces in *Tensile* and in one of the pouches apart of *Cleave*. The audio in *Cleave* was of my child's room while he slept throughout the night and the audio in *Tensile* was of my child nursing. The audio recordings used in my work relates to my archive *Documentation Series: Year Off*. I integrate the personal archive in my sculptures to complicate the deeply sentimental recordings—I seek to make them strange within the ambiguous otherly forms. The sound component was quiet and if heard encouraged the viewer to lean in toward the forms to listen.

Through a ‘practice of returning’, using small repetitive gestures of piece work, my artwork can be pushed further into a more integrated cohesive confusion. The different forms I create have potential for multiple installation strategies allowing for a blurring of boundaries between the forms—like a collage of material clusterings that spill out from one another. Incorporating the different elements together in one cohesive sculptural installation will allow them to be more in conversation with one another. My next explorations will involve working with paper. I want to distress the paper, through friction and mark making, until it becomes a skin or cloth-like texture. I will then sew the paper into sculptures combined with fabric pieces. Also, I want to further experiment with sound embedded into different parts of the installation. The sound component will be at different levels to allow for a more perceptual experience.

The spaces between embodiments of the installation call to the blurring of boundaries, the idea of the *holobiont*. I hope, through my sculptures presented in *Composite Tension* to exist alongside and in the continuing development of discernment and practice with the theorists and artists mentioned in this document. The multiple conversations occurring in my work allow for a generative space for dialogue—they speak to my maternal body in transitional relationship to the objects I create. I am interested in the moments of transition; the *enceinte*; a container, and ‘an *elsewhere*’.

Jude's body is an extension of my own. At times it's as if my heart is out of my body so vulnerable, unpredictable, and separate. The separation aches. It's terrifying. I cannot always control what happens to him.

Sometimes when Jude cries during the night, I turn the volume down and go back to sleep. I feel guilty when I wake up in the morning.





Eight

Tensile  
Care

In *Composite Tension*, there is an underlying element of care embodied through soft materials, the labour involved with making the objects, and the time spent with them as I transited back and forth between my home and studio. The sculptures in *Composite Tension* are more than just undefinable messy bodies—they are messy bodies with the potential to speak about care within an institution.

The maternal body as a messy body does not fit within patriarchal systems. I describe the maternal body as undefinable to allow for its re-articulation of function within society. This re-articulated function speaks to what we learn through maternal bodies about care, the human capacity for connectivity, nurturing, growth, and the tension within caregiving. Curator Natalie Loveless addresses the potential of maternal care as political in an interview with editor Leah Sandals, “8 Questions about Art, Motherhood and the Anthropocene” published online by *Canadian Art* ([canadianart.com](http://canadianart.com)). Loveless explains how anyone can inhabit the state of being maternal through “structures of collaboration and care” ([canadianart.com](http://canadianart.com)). These maternal qualities tend to exist outside of patriarchal-capitalistic institutions as there is a “lack of capacity” in professional settings for care and connection ([canadianart.com](http://canadianart.com)). Art historian and cultural theorist Andrea Liss expands on this, in her book *Feminist Art and the Maternal*, by addressing the tension in feminist parenting involving love, doubt, and frustration (151). This tension also includes the “loving and political acts” of everyday actions (xxi). As Liss states: “[r]econceiving the maternal as new bodies of feminist knowledge offers revolutionary ways for rethinking human relationships and creating new forms of maternal culture” (xxi). Here, nurturance and care challenge patriarchal systems.

Historian Julia Bryan-Wilson ties the body politic of everyday “bodily actions” to textile politics in her book *Fray: Art and Textile Politics* (33-

34 By 'other/s' I refer to both human and nonhuman entities.

34). Bryan-Wilson examines the implications of using textiles in creative ways of making and how textiles embody the everyday. As she states eloquently, “to give texture to politics, to refuse easy binaries, to acknowledge complication: textured as in uneven, but also, as... in tangibly worked and retaining some of the grain of that... [labour], whether smoother or snagged” (7). Bryan-Wilson captures the political potential of textiles through addressing preconceived cultural codes, labour, care, and the everyday. She calls to our tactile nature to want to touch softness. The intimate knowledge of our skin touching textiles can be used to subvert rigid patriarchal structures.

I explore the tensile quality of fabric within my sculptural forms. My body has lived with the objects I have created. I worked at home with piles of fabric and yarn pods on the floor. Jude has lived with these objects as well. He has picked them up one by one creating a new pile beside him. He has delicately pulled the crochet chains out of the sewn pod cases. He has leaned on and embraced the large pod sculpture, *Tensile*. He has snuggled up on a piece of fabric I laid out on the floor prepped to cut. He has gained an embodied knowledge through touching these soft sculptures. The softness, labour, and time, speak to care. These sculptures cared for my child as they existed in our home. As I placed them in the gallery space they remained as caring objects; they remained as soft squishy undefinable bodies; they remained as bodies that did not fit within the patriarchal setting that I placed them in. They are messy bodies; they are political bodies. I hope through my sculptural forms, in *Composite Tension*, to evoke conversations around the ethics of care—to reimagine maternal care as a creative-tensioned way of viewing the 'other/s' within a capitalist society.<sup>34</sup>

**The video ends with the room empty  
and the sound of the dishwasher in  
the background.**



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