The Imperceptible Beingness of M/Otherhood in Academia

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We come together and yet are apart. We experience motherhood and mothering in different ways. We are other and are constantly becoming m/other as we write with each other. We are biological mother, we are donor mother and we are other mother. We write as, for and from our academic selves; we write as, for and from our m/other selves. We work with thinkable categories as they disappear, collaboratively linked to a natural web of human, and more than, human agents.

It is a sort of mannerist approach to motherhood in academia or *Thousand Plateaus of Becoming*. Mannerism and mannerist style,

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also known as Late Renaissance (1520–1590), featured the distortion of the human figure, the distortion of perspectives, and utilised flat black backgrounds to give a full contrast of contours. Mannerism was influenced by sculpture, and sculptural forms, experimenting with dimensions. Further, mannerism put emphasis on atmospheric effects and the use of space and atmospheric effects. Last but not least: Mannerists utilised painted frames to blend in with the background.[1] We draw on our multiple dimensions of motherhood, of m/otherhood, to provide 'painted frames' for our entanglements with/in academia … not so much to 'blend in', but to open up to multiplicities and possibilities of being/becoming other.

Inspired by Mannerist concepts, and thinking with Deleuze and Guattari, we paint ourselves *grey on grey*, as a (non)symbol of reflexivity: Deleuze and Guattari (2004) write:

> To become imperceptible oneself, to have dismantled love in order to become capable of loving. To have dismantled one's self in order finally to be alone and meet the true double at the other end of the line. A clandestine passenger on a motionless voyage. To become like everybody else; but this, precisely, is a becoming only for one who knows how to be nobody, to no longer be anybody. To paint oneself gray on gray. (p. 218)

We paint ourselves *grey on grey* possibilising becomings in which ongoing processes are imperceptible but vitalist parts of ontological change in/on own academic practices. Motherhood being thought and reflected upon according to its multiple dimensions. The three of us writing nature–culture differences together.

To spark our work, and after growing painting m/other, we start with Patricia Piccinini's art exhibition *Curious affection* (2018) at Queensland Art Gallery: Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), in Brisbane, Australia. Her exhibition was enhanced by a collection of books on process-philosophy by, amongst others, Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) and Felix Guattari (1930–1992). Processes seen as zero-point in action, only graspable in hindsight hence, always unpredictable. Knowing *how to be nobody, to no longer be anybody … to become capable of loving … and yet*

knowing the unpredictable, imperceptible vitalness of how to be no/body, to no longer be any/body. And still, with/in all our body/ness, to be and become capable of loving, m/othering in all its multiplicity. And, in this way can we (dare we?) be any/body/all body/no/body … loving our own academic being/ becoming?

In this chapter, we work in/with our togetherness and multiplicities in academia and our diversity and multiplicities in m/otherness to paint/write towards ethical-political possibilities of being/becoming m/ other and being/becoming academic.

Growing Painting M/Other

From diffractive and polycritical perspectives, we write as three. We write as two. We write as one. We write from and for ourselves. We write from, for and away from our academic workplaces, and our constantly becoming academic places/spaces. We write non-algorithmic fractured stories through slowly becoming other/becoming all. Painting m/other, painting grey, so as to prevent the dialectic from slipping into our work, where forgiveness and affection, and in many ways vulnerability can reside. We ask: What becomes possible for academia if multiple re-conceptualisations of motherhood can de-hierarchize taken-for-granted structures and notions about what and who is important in academia, in teaching, in learning, in mothering? We ask how importance is produced/articulated in/for our present and our future being as academic, teacher, learner, m/other, human-being? Asking *how to be nobody, to no longer be anybody… to become capable of loving…*

Here in our, and through our, individual and collective writing, we are storying experiences of motherhood to story our experiences of academia. Through this storying, we pick-up and weave threads of forgiveness and affection as a threshold to possible re-conceptualizations of academia. In forgiveness, there is a vulnerable stillness embracing connectedness, enabling possibilities of thinking otherwise, hence the concept of m/othering. We work with our own experiences of vulnerability/vulnerable stillness as we speak of m/otherhood and academia. The stories that we write come from, and through, our *being* in these

experiences—experiences inside and outside motherhood/mothering; experiences with being/not being mother, being 'other'. And to be clear, we speak of 'othering' not as a means of exclusion, but as a means of celebrating difference, as a connectedness with multiple possibilities— possibilities that take us to places, spaces and experiences beyond normative expectations. We are:

m/othering slow;
m/othering solitude;
m/othering surrender;
m/othering critique;
m/othering authenticity;
m/othering sustainability;
m/othering peace;
m/othering growth;
m/othering force;
m/othering substance;
m/othering hierarchies;
m/othering resources;
m/othering regulations;
m/othering representations;
m/othering life…

We m/other-story grief and pain, deep anxieties even and joy. We m/other-story academic hyper-performances and staging resistance. We m/other-story becoming human through motherhood, leaving behind the life of robots; sparking curiosity.

We m/other-story not being a mother, and prejudice in modern organisations, experiencing motherhood outside the norm. The value of motherhood and not. We m/other-story new sustainable pedagogies that might emerge from the imperceptible beingness of motherhood and/with/in all-ness. We m/other-story third-, fourth- and material fifth-wave feminism and womanhood, fifth-wave motherhood…

We m/other-story feelings of not belonging anymore to the workplace community that had been 'home' for many years before (and after, and while) becoming m/other. Such feelings grew stronger when

the benefit of unpaid leave to be home with own child was used. We m/other-story teaching small children that is seemingly positioned as less important that teaching students at higher levels. We m/other-story motherhood challenging schooling, opening to unschooling of children.

We story-m/other our—sometimes individual and sometimes mutual—experiences as examples through which to think, and to reflect, and to write on. We m/other-story motherhood as a driving force for teaching mathematics and technology to small children. It is m/other-storied as a force being reborn after becoming m/other, having always been there, however, without real opportunities to be realised within the professional life lived earlier.

Ultimately, we m/other-story the experience of academic workplace structures that give little visibility to the thematic of motherhood and limit, for many, accessible avenues for deep thinking and trans-curricular collaboration and innovation across organisations. Our stories share experiences of such limitations leading to almost daily deliberations about, on the one hand, quitting the job to gain the balance needed to function well, on the other hand, knowing that it would imply disclaiming any right to make a difference at all; and yet a third option of doing/being academic as other—other possibilities, as with our experiences of m/otherness accepted.

Our writings in forgiving m/otherness, to be clear, speak of analogies between possible themes of motherhood and possible themes of academia. It is about valuing the necessity of difference—difference which can enable collaboration and connectedness, and which can, at once, sustain the person in the act/art of mothering … in the act/art of academia. It is about connectedness and, through such connectedness, we suggest there is a necessity for forgiveness; and with such forgiveness, embedded in connectedness, there is required an openness to vulnerability. We write about and as m/otherhood beings and academic beings, about and from inside/outside positions. And in this writing, we speak of and from new ways of mothering and fifth-wave feminism… and more …

As a writing collaborative, we shared our stories of motherhood/ing and academia. Then we listened to each other, wrote our thoughts and read slowly each other's words. As we read/re-read, wrote/re-wrote, shared back, and waited with, and in our thinking, reflecting and

sharing of these reflections—what flowed from this process of writing was our experiences of forces and energies expressed through notions of 'breaking out', 'breaking away', 'stepping off', 'stepping out', 'stepping in' … and, in multiple ways, engaging and challenging the boundaries of motherhood and boundaries of academia. We took up these notions as themes of connectedness and vulnerability as we wrote and spoke to each other, and as the text of our chapter developed. Our writing through these engagements has enabled us to think differently about our individual, and yet connected, engagements with academia and the vulnerable nature of these engagements.

This does not mean, however, that we have agreed on everything that we respectively wrote. We see that mixing different texts and different views is a literary tool to expand views, to open possibility-thinking and include each of our readers, individually, in the collaborative authoring process. Deleuze writes:

> There is no subject of desire, any more than there is an object. There is no subject of enunciation. Fluxes are the only objectivity of desire itself. Desire is the system of a-signifying signs with which fluxes of the unconscious are produced in a social field. There is no blossoming of desire, wherever it happens- in an unremarkable family or a local school- which does not call established structures into question. Desire is revolutionary because it always wants more connections and assemblages. (Deleuze, in Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, pp. 78–79)

Our/Story/ing and Ethics of Affirmation

Anne:

Last summer/winter Louise and I attended Patricia Piccinini's art exhibition '*Curious affection*' (2018) at Queensland Art Gallery: Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), in Brisbane, Australia, www.qagoma.qld.au. We went through room after room with monstrous creatures and imaginary beings and/of hybrid otherness 'blur(ring) distinctions between normal and pathological, self and other' (Braidotti, 2018, p. 37), and other-than-human at the same time: *Big Mother* (2005),

The Bond (2016), *Kindred* (2018)… 'They embody ontological impropriety'. They cause thought disturbances of 'simultaneous wonder and fear, admiration and disgust' (Braidotti, 2018, p. 37). Through her artwork, Piccinini enacts other/self insights with 'a combination of critique and creativity. (She) challenges us to review our preconceived ideas and socially enforced relationships with the otherwise embodied' (Braidotti, 2018, p. 37).

Piccinini not only challenges traditional ideals of normality. She also challenges our habits of '*difference as pejoration*' (Braidotti, 2018, p. 38) (Fig. 1).

Her images of monstrous maternal females mobilise anxieties about origin and reproduction, and deep-seated misogyny is also at play in the concept of the monstrous maternal body—the powerful mother figure as both breeder and potential killer. In an expanding 'high-tech possession of the maternal - the maternal powers of reproduction having been integrated into corporate-owned, technology-based, bio-genetic and pharmaceutical production systems dismantling the mother-child continuum, separating the baby, the foetus, the embryo, from the pregnant female body' (Braidotti, 2018, p. 44). Piccinini re-attaches the baby to the m/other's body and restores bonds of kinship, care and tenderness. Not as a nostalgic going back, or a staying put within frames of anxiety, but as a 'recasting of subjectivities as ways of actualizing positive scenarios that lie in store in the transformations we are currently experiencing'; nurturing 'a culture of affirmation and joy' (Braidotti, 2018, p. 46).

I think of my mother and me, mymotherme. Growing painting mymotherme, breeder killer mymotherme; painting *grey on grey*. Mannerist distortion of human figures and perspectives, full contrast of contours, experimenting with dimensions. I paint her small to paint me big. Space makes me small, mymotherme. We blend in together apart *to love and joy*. She taught me indirectly. I dream I do. It is hard. Oscar Wilde writes:

> There is no mode of action, no form of emotion that we do not share with the lower animals. It is only by language that we rise above them, or above each other — by language, which is the parent, and not the child, of thought. … No, …, don't talk about action. It is a blind thing,

Fig. 1   Patricia Piccinini (2008), *Embryo*, Private photo

dependent on external influences, and moved by an impulse of whose nature it is unconscious. It is a thing incomplete in its essence, because limited by accident, and ignorant of its direction, being always at variance with its aim. Its basis is the lack of imagination. It is the last resource of those who know not how to dream. (Guy, 2007, pp. 146–147)

This chapter is about writing warmth, joy, force, science and love on paper. A science oriented towards processes, extra-linguistic signs and materiality. An interpretative model of science in which subjectivity is/as machinic action. It is a scientific model in which nature and culture are integrated, and science is produced through axiological beliefs in and inclusion of- and with values. Syntheses are seen as wor(l)ding minds, embodied and embrained cognitions. Non-representation is/as scientific model, and that the Self and the Other is intra-interdependent parts of/in/with each other. It is a scientific model of the logics of the included-not excluded middle, inter-intra-related variations between points or lines. A science of relational ethics and hope. Or as Rosi Braidotti (2013) writes: '*We need to become the sorts of subjects who actively desire to reinvent subjectivity as a set of mutant values and to draw our pleasure from that, not from the perpetuation of familiar regimes*' (p. 93).

Louise:
Working with, and from, Piccinini's portrayal in *Curious Affection* (QAGOMA, 2018) of what it can be to be monstrously m/other, and Braidotti's (2018) articulation of 'an ethic of affirmation' at work through posthuman love, I/we can tell stories of my beingness in not belonging, but always living with experiences of connection. I hence tell stories of motherhood, or just stories of being other and 'othered' in the experiences/spaces of mothering. With my professional/academic career as an early childhood educator and as an early childhood teacher educator and researcher, where mothering is at once revered and dismissed, and my social, cultural, familial life experiences where motherhood is an expectation not an exception—how can I not write from and through a discourse of (not) mothering/motherhood. I sit outside the spaces of motherhood and yet have listened to/experienced stories of motherhood and mothering all my life. The stories I can tell come from and through

working/walking outside the boundaries of motherhood, I am storying through difference from the norm and, at times, from social, cultural and, even, familial exclusion. My storying comes from stepping into the margins of motherhood spaces, never able to cross the final border but looking into the spaces, the socially/culturally dominant spaces; always already experiencing an 'othering', but as an informed 'other'. Until now, for me the concept of 'othering' has always had negative connotations—embedded in the notion of 'different-therefore-not-valued'. Now—plugging into Piccinini's *Curious Affection*—I appreciate with new vision, the vulnerable strength of different/other, of other mother, of m/other.

My story of motherhood: I have spent a lifetime being 'not-a-mother but mothering'. My experiences of motherhood—first, 'not-yet'; and, 'not-now'; and then, when I was finally ready for motherhood, the refrain became 'it just isn't happening' and so it was 'not-this-time'; and 'not-this-time'—over and over with each unsuccessful IVF cycle; and finally, with sad acceptance and in my own time, it was 'not-ever'; well not in the culturally contextualised way of 'being mother and experiencing motherhood'. It was then that I worked to build and accept new ways of mothering in my life. On reflection now, I find myself wondering—did this/does this—enable for me the possibility of thinking otherwise when it comes to my experience of and engagement with academia—as teacher/researcher/writer?

In many cultural contexts, the concept of motherhood and the art/act of mothering has always been a collective/collaborative experience. And yet, I perceive that in most western/modern cultures there has emerged expectations that mothers separate themselves and engage in silo-ed tasks of raising children. And where 'out-sourced' help is engaged the political argument is that this enables the mother (or primary parent) to return to the workforce—to her/his 'real' job—and so, to participate as a productive member of the economic society. Is this individualisation of motherhood linked to the recent proliferation of 'self-help' materials—books/courses/websites—focused on *doing* mothering well/properly? Can this be presented as a commodification of *motherhood* within a neoliberal world view that privileges individual achievements and productivity? And rather than being a means of *support* to those engaged in the act/art of motherhood/mothering can such

commodification of motherhood/mothering be seen as a means of social control? Can we resist compliance with normative expectations of what it means to be a good/proper mother and to do mothering as other and in other ways—through engagements in mothering as a collective undertaking? And in the same way can we resist normative expectations of what it means to be a good/proper academic, to be academically other, through similar collective undertakings in our work as academics (by this I/we mean more than just joint project work)—such modes of collective operations involve opening self to vulnerability that is a mirror of authentic collaboration.

Valuing 'other' ways to engage in motherhood and do mothering—a collective that involves more than just the biological mother… individualism and collective collaboration—provides a link between my experiences of m/othering and my professional life experience of academia: teaching, research, leadership and writing. Stepping away from individualism of academia—research, writing and stepping into the collective collaboration of such work requires/creates a level of vulnerability and opening self to the creative flow of trust. The experiences of trust that are involved in collective collaborative m/othering are, for me, akin to the flow of trust involved in collective collaborative academic work. Such experiences of vulnerability and trust are entangled with a willingness to be open to difference/other, and to be willing to work with, and within, difference rather than being driven by a desire to massage such difference into a universality inspired 'sameness'.

In many ways, my experience of academia, up until recently, has been largely what I would describe as 'competitive collaboration' and I believe this can be seen as reflective of the current contexts of the university sector (Thomas, 2019). Contexts are driven by corporative productivity; competition for market-share of student enrolments, publication outputs and research funds. Now, this may be a necessity for the contemporary university sector, but I no longer see it as a necessity for me as an academic. More on this to come later….

Bojana:
Becoming a mother at the age of forty was for me a source of enormous new energy to realise old dreams, step out of my established academic

life, reflect deeply over the educational system I have been a part of, connect with new inspiring people of different backgrounds, and come back again as an enriched person deeply determined to follow my own path to make a difference.

This has been a seven-year-long journey so far, the most interesting one I have ever undertaken. There have been steep hills on the way, but they have enabled me some spectacular new views.

'Would eight be too many?', I asked my mom as a child, referring to the number of grandchildren I was planning to give her. The fascination for small children, their joy, honesty, spontaneity, playfulness and curiosity, has not left me ever since. Before my motherhood dream finally became true, I have enjoyed deep and trusting relationships with children within my family and friendship circle. Their laughter, imagination, and creative attempts to explain the puzzling world around them have given me some of the most rewarding moments in life.

As a child, I could spend hours solving entertaining mathematical puzzles, and a small wind-up robot was the first toy I bought with my pocket money. The passion for mathematics, science and technology has shaped my childhood to a great extent and determined my career choice, although deeply in my heart I always wished to become an early childhood teacher.

In my new homeland Norway, there were few organised spare-time activities for children sharing my interests. For many years, I have had a desire to fill the hole, but it was not before I took time off from work to be with my son during his early childhood, that I started to realise that dream. My two passions finally got united in the countless hours of deep involvement in/with/in play with my boy, giving rise to techno-play[2] workshops.

Seeing the world through a child's eyes gives a whole new perspective to life. We become aware of all those thrilling details and beauties that surround us and realise how blind we are in our high-pace robot-like daily lives. Our knowledge comes short when the small investigator tries to make sense of the puzzling world around him, and we realise how constricted we are with cultural contexts and taken-for-granted notions. We have an urge to teach our children and shape their behaviour, but how often do we stop and listen carefully to what they are trying to tell

us, and learn from them? We teach them to respect us, but do we treat them with respect?

The insight I got through mothering, made me question the deeply rooted structures and notions of the entire educational system, and all my earlier efforts as a lecturer and educational leader. It enabled me to find the focus of my future work, where I believe I can contribute to make a difference.

Anne:

> Produce some unconscious, and it is not easy, it is not just anywhere, not with a slip of the tongue, a pun or even a dream. The unconscious is a substance to be manufactured, to get flowing – a social and political space to be conquered. (Gilles Deleuze in Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 78)

I was furious with my mother for years! I grew up with three elder brothers and a cute baby sister. I had ribbons in my hair from when I was born. In photos, they look like they were glued on. I looked like a little doll. I wore nice dresses. When I became a teenager, it changed. I changed. I cut my hair. I put on jeans and ugly working boots. I borrowed my father's flannel shirts. They were way too big for me and my brothers refused to say hello to me when we met in town. Oh, happy days! We discussed politics at every dinner table. This was in the late 1960s and 1970s. My mother loved these discussions and laughed when we made good points. She did not say much herself and let us children carry on. Still we always knew what she meant. She was very present, my mother.

I went off to study. I did for a long time and I never returned home except for holiday visits. The time of discussions was over and replaced by more everyday chats. I had a son in 1990 and a daughter in 1994. On my daughter's first birthday, she received a huge gift from my mother. At that time, my father had died. The gift was the biggest most feminine looking blond doll I have ever seen. The one-year-old could not even carry or hold it.

I was furious with my mother for years! 'Why did you give her that doll? It is horrible, and she cannot play with it for years!' 'Well, I was

not sure you would ever give her a doll at all, so I had to make sure she at least has one'… She had crossed a line. I felt crushed and beaten. I saw her in a different light. I tried to talk, I even told her that my daughter already had two dolls, but it seemed that whatever I said it was just barked off. I was sad, hurt and kept as much distance as I could for years. My mother. I am a mother.

I am an educator. I have learned, and I know that my profession and bildung[3] are built on a paradox. It is the paradox between freedom and control, read discipline. I believe Wittgenstein (1997) even proposes the word dressage for what we need to build on substantially and education wise. It is difficult, it hurts. There are blind spots. It is violent, and gifts can be poisonous (Derrida, 1997). It is real and most of it unconscious.

I was furious with my mother for years! What gave her the right? How could she? I have lived with this feeling of being corrected for years and now I knew as both educator and mother, where at least some of it came from. But why? Did she know something that I did not? What were her experiences? What was her mother like etc. etc.? I guess I could go on asking? I could even ask if she loved me or not, but I know she did, and maybe that is why?

We produce not with a core from which we emerge, nor with the people who attach us to it, nor with images that we draw from it, nor with any structures of development or growth. We produce—'with the scrap of placenta which we have hidden, and which is always contemporary with us, as raw material to experiment with' (Deleuze, in Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 78) (Fig. 2).

What did she know from life, with life? What did she know from and with female life, from and with motherhood life bringing up these five boys and girls? What did she not? What became her productions, becoming me?

What do I know from and with my life? What do I know from and with female life, from and with motherhood life bringing up these two pearls of mine? What do I not?

What has become my productions, becoming them?

What do I know from and with academic life? What do I know from and with education? What not? What has become my productions, becoming you?

Fig. 2   Patricia Piccinini (2011), *The Welcome Guest*, Private photo

I was furious with my mother for years! I think she sensed what breaking doxa imply,—and costs it might have. I thank her for that.

I was furious with my mother for years! I think she sensed what her reality was,—and what it took. I thank her for that.

I was furious with my mother for years! I think she showed me the paradox of critique. I thank her for that.

I want m/other. It is monstrous. Did you know, that in 2016 BMW had to recall a lot of their new cars because male drivers did not want female voices on their GPS? http://www.abcnyheter.no/motor/2016/09/13/195242013/bmw-matte-tilbakekalle-biler-pagrunn-av-kvinnestemme.

Bojana:
Like most small children, my son is an active, curious and creative boy with a strong desire to discover the world around him. However, he insists to do that in his own way and resists any effort of being taught.

As I watched him grow, I became more and more aware that the conventional school wouldn't give him enough space to develop.

'Nobody asks me what I want to learn. If I finish a task before the others, I have to sit down and draw. The only time I can rest at school is during dictation - in the pause between two words'. These are the words of my seven-year-old boy expressing his frustration over the class-management principles practised in his school, feeling that he is being treated as an object, rather than a person with his own interests, thoughts and feelings.

I started to reflect on the entire educational system through which I have gone, and I question the notion of all children having to learn the same things, at the same time, at the same pace, in age-segregated groups. Is this the best way to educate my child? Should I take him out of school and let him continue to learn in a natural way? What impact would it have to our lives in the country where homeschooling, and, particularly, unschooling, is very rare and highly stigmatised? Would I have energy to take the responsibility for this important task and can I take the responsibility of not doing that? Or should we leave everything and move to a place where alternative schooling options are possible?

More of Our Story/ing and Politics of Multiplicity

Anne:
I am an academic and educator. For years I have worked against letting dichotomy into my work. Therefore, I always try to create breaks, tensions, strangeness and diversity with my writing. I twist words and grammar; I put in some jokes or stories that seem not to belong. You have already seen one about the female voice in the BMW. It belongs, but not and other, mymotherme…- and here is another break: Tax lists in Norway are published every year in national and local newspapers. The list for 2017 shows that men are getting richer, women poorer in our country—one of the richest in the world (Ødegaard, Rasmussen, & Bære, 2018). It is not surprising though: It is what

Thomas Piketty ([2014](#)) through his focus on structured wealth and income inequality in a worldwide economic perspective has documented, but here shown in a gender perspective. In academia, transdisciplinary work is prevented by structure and culture. Traditions, epistemic inequalities, going on and on https://www.forskningsradet.no/no/Nyheter/Norge_trenger_tverrfaglig_forskning_men_ny_studie_viser_at_struktur_og_kultur_star_i_veien/1254038916467/p1174467583739.

That is why I monstrously m/other—to think more… mymotherme through *affirmation and joy* becoming *nobody, to no longer be anybody*. I Try. Again Oscar Wilde writes:

> That is what the highest criticism really is, the record of one's own soul. It is more fascinating than history, as it is concerned simply with oneself. It is more delightful than philosophy, as its subject is concrete and not abstract, real and not vague. It is the only civilised form of autobiography, as it deals not with events, but with the thoughts of one's life; not with life's physical accidents of deed or circumstance, but with the spiritual moods and imaginative passions of the mind (…). The best that one can say of most modern creative art is that it is just a little less vulgar than reality, and so the critic, with his fine sense of distinction and sure instinct of delicate refinement, will prefer to look into the silver mirror or through the woven veil, and will turn his eyes away from the chaos and clamor of actual existence, though the mirror be tarnished and the veil be torn. His sole aim is to chronicle his own impressions. It is for him that pictures are painted, books written, and marble hewn into form. (Guy, 2007, pp. 154–155)

Bojana:
Taking the benefit of unpaid leave to get involved into m/othering was not socially accepted at my man-dominated academic workplace, and there was a high price to pay. Coming back to work, I felt that I no longer belonged to the workplace community that had been my 'home' for many years before. It was not easy to get acceptance for the new thoughts that have evolved through m/othering: Why should the university be involved in rethinking the education at lower levels? And how can the collaboration with early childhood teachers improve our teaching at university?

My recent decision to reduce my academic position to 50% was a trade-off between the need to slow-down and make space for a more human life, and retaining the possibility to make a difference in the areas of my academic interest. I hope it will enable me to establish the balance I need to feel well, to be a mother that I want to be, and pursue the academic work I believe in, with the required slowness and transdisciplinary collaborations.

Anne:

> Postulate 55. When the mind imagines its own weakness it necessarily sorrows. (Spinosa, 1996, *Ethics*, p. 99—part III)

Last autumn I changed jobs. I had to break away from a type of academic robot-like logics of linearity that did not allow me other. That is, I did other, but not without costs. A silence gradually surrounded me, made me insecure and sad. Made me institutionally invisible even though I think I almost academically hyper-performed. Always top three on publication lists, always 'yes, yes, yes' to colleagues and students, my bodymind eventually saying 'no, no, no'. It was tempting just to stop. Monstrously other…

> Postulate 53. When the mind considers itself and its power of acting, it rejoices, and does so the more, the more distinctly it imagines itself and its power of acting. (Spinosa, 1996, p. 99)

I work as hard now, but I academically stage my resistance with a vulnerability m/other. I thank her for that. I paradoxically voice my thoughts louder and clearer as I write my academic life. I try to philosophise, to lay bare connections between words and worlds, proposing a view of texts as expression and action, and of writing as an act of acknowledgement.

Louise:
Three years ago, I chose to withdraw from employment in the university sector. As I have done many times before in my professional (and

personal) life, I worked to reinvent myself—that is, I recalibrated my *being* in the flow of my constantly becoming self. As I have written elsewhere (Thomas, 2019), I have stepped away from employment in a university context, but in no way do I see myself as stepping away from the work of academia. So why did I make this move? While working in the university sector I experienced positive working partnerships, I constantly matured as a thinker, writer, researcher—with significant support and challenge from colleagues. And I also, slowly but surely, felt myself losing my visibility as an academic—picking up on Anne's earlier reflection, I felt myself becoming academically invisible, while becoming very much (too much?) institutionally visible. I was providing institutional leadership and scholarship, I maintained a high publication output for my level and employment focus, and I had a long record of engagement in time-intensive grant applications. I was, at the same time, experiencing little opportunity for *my* academic voice to be heard. But I, at no point, felt a desire to stop—I just wanted 'other'. I had a strong (and vulnerable) sense of the possibility of this 'other'. I knew, at the time, that I had the strength and willingness to embrace the uncertain vulnerability needed to make the necessary move to be 'other' in my academic life—and for that I thank my experience of m/otherhood.

This Is Not an End

We are academics and researchers. M/othering challenges, not only our concepts of data and data production, but also offers us ways of asking how far the metaphors of 'information', 'knowledge', 'analysis' and even 'thinking' help us to characterise what we explore, the research and sciences we perform, let alone how we value subsequent research and knowledge productions. In m/otherness, there are different operating conceptions of knowledge from those inherent in subject-based learning. We ask, how then to decide what these are and how to assess and/or value such works? Seeking a critical assent to what is produced; we suggest that constructs and metaphors from philosophy and literary theory—for example poeticizing—a joke or two—may serve to add something more to traditional approaches to knowledge and knowledge

Fig. 3   Patricia Piccinini (2016), *The Bond*, Private photo

creation. Opening up new opportunities towards democratization of knowledge; multiplicities of knowledge, and knowledge creation, and a multi-vocal university. In spaces of petabytes and algorithms, we think of a science and research processes in need of moving beyond theory-based models and traditional scientific methods. Rather than limiting ourselves to information, knowledge, analysis and thinking, we speak of, and try to experiment with, the concepts of data philosophy, poetization and transdisciplinary speculations for transparency, sustainability and open government (Reinertsen, 2018; Thomas & Reinertsen, 2019)—our *curious affections…* our *slow scholarships…our m/otherness…* (Fig. 3).

Her hands seem to be thinking care. Othering care. Can hands think? She seems to wor(l)d a child.

M/othering a child. What is a child? What is a mother? What is other?

Not found in science, but produced in poetry?

There seems to be ghosts. M/othering ghosts. How to design research poetry growing other, playing towards a future?

In *Nietzsche and philosophy* (Deleuze, 2006), the child is presented to us as aeon (time), a force through which 'the double affirmation of becoming and the being of becoming' (p. 23) occurs.

As m/other, as academic, we place ourselves in the world as if that is the meaning of life itself, and drift along.

Every step I take remains in the body as a map in which I myself am the scale, with consistencies and smells, colours and noises, and the patterns that are formed gradually embrace more and more of the globe. Philosophy becoming techné and spoken by life. *m/othering in all its multiplicity becoming any/all/nobody… loving our academic being/ becoming…*

Notes

1. En.m.wikipedia.com, retrieved June 11.
2. These can be read about in A.B. Reinertsen (2018) in Springer International Publishing AG, part of Springer Nature 2018 A. Cutter-Mackenzie et al. (eds.), *Research Handbook on Childhoodnature*,

Springer International Handbooks of Education, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51949-4_22-1.

3. **Bildung** (German: [ˈbɪldʊŋ], *"education, formation,* etc.*"*) refers to the German tradition of self-cultivation (as related to the German for: creation, image, shape), wherein philosophy and education are linked in a manner that refers to a process of both personal and cultural maturation. Both Georg F.W. Hegel (1770–1831) and Wilhelm von Humbolt (1767–1835) wrote extensively on the theme as both existential and as lifelong processes of human development, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bildung, retrieved July 6, 2017.

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