

15 Breastfeeding Mothers and Lovers: An Ebbing and Flowing Curriculum of the Fluid Embrace

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My 4-year-old son Otis is often a source of comic inspiration in my full yet depleted life as a mother/academic. One day, while I was breastfeeding his little brother Ian, he said, 'Mommy, did you know that one side is vanilla and the other is chocolate?' Vanilla and chocolate, hmm, who knew? Perhaps that is why my right breast was his favourite when he first suckled. His words have me drift back in time to the first week of his life when I recall the uneven swelling and painful moments of my newly lactating breasts. The right one responded to his angelic little mouth ready to suck the life juices out of me. My left resisted with inverted resolve. With careful massage, I convinced my nipple that it could withstand the vacuum-like seal as I breathed through tears that clouded my fixed gaze on the mantelpiece clock. Two minutes. I just had to make it through the timed interval of sado-masochistic-like foreplay before I would experience the inevitable bliss of 'let down.' My labour lasted *only* 48 hours, and I was as prepared as I could be for that glorious day when I first became a mother. I attended courses at the hospital, read books, and even devised a 'birthing plan.' No one prepared me for what I was about to experience in the minutes, hours, weeks, and months to come.

The lived curriculum of breastfeeding is very much hidden in Western communities until, of course, one is able to produce a child. From lactation consultations to singsong circles and mom-and-baby fitness classes, breasts, breastfeeding techniques, and breastfeeding as a way of mothering (e.g., La Leche League International, 2004) emerge everywhere. There is comfort in surrounding oneself with other sleep-deprived mothers who know what it is like to vacillate between tears of profound joy and rock-bottom frustration and fatigue, as we

compare hours of sleep and explosions of poop amid the spraying of milk. But what about the mother who ventures out of her cocoon of like-minded mothers and feeds her baby while writing an academic chapter, or does so during a meeting in an academic setting? Although much may be said about the political nature of such an act (e.g., Davidson & Langan, 2006) as 'breastfeeding [has become] a way to demonstrate women's power and importance' (Kendrowski & Lipscomb, 2008, p. 8), this inquiry acknowledges yet also delves deeply into the existential nature of the breastfeeding experience. Specifically, this inquiry questions what it is like to be in the symbiotic relation of mother and child in blissful moments of fluid embrace. It also explores what is it like to experience moments of mother-child disconnection, a complicating longing to be doing something else while breastfeeding, and what that says about the phenomenon of living life fully and freely as a mother and academic who experiences ebbing, surging, cresting, waning, and weaning experiences of flow.

In describing my experience of breastfeeding phenomenologically (van Manen, 1997) with motion-sensitivity (Lloyd & Smith, 2006a, 2006b), I aim to contribute to Miller's (1982) breaking of silence to which Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (2000) refer, 'the silence of women's experience, the splitting of women's lived worlds from the public discourse of education' (p. 381) and describe intimacies inherent in the various viscosities of self-other-world fluidity. For breastfeeding is more than a means to provide babies with vital sustenance. A relational reciprocity may surface, one that may shape the ways in which mother and child move in response and be with each other. It also provides a metaphorical model for exploring the multiplicities of relational consciousness, the surging and waning of motile expression, what Stern (1993, 2004) and Sheets-Johnstone (1999) describe as 'vitality affects' that are not only present within the mother-child dynamic, but any relation, such as marriage, friendship, and for those who choose academia, life in the classroom and beyond.

The 'logic' of my inquiry will be very much related to the various stages I experienced within my journey of breastfeeding, my painful beginnings to my eventual experience of 'flow.' It will also be framed around various registers of interrelational movement consciousness, which have emerged from recent phenomenological inquiries within interdisciplinary, movement education contexts (Lloyd & Smith, 2006a, 2006b, 2009, 2010, in press; Smith & Lloyd, 2006, 2007). I will thus reacquaint myself with the joys and tensions of breastfeeding with the

intention of becoming more viscerally in touch with others and the world. From superficial explanations of objective kinetic function to deep, moving experiences of primordial bliss, this inquiry will draw attention to the surges, swells, waning, and weaning experiences of living life as a breastfeeding mother, professor, lover, and friend within and beyond the fluid embrace.

A Kinetic Embrace: Mobilizing Objects of Desire

Moments after I bear down and give my last guttural push, Otis is received by Rose, the fourth doctor on call during my two-day labour, the only doctor with small enough hands to reach up and adjust his posterior position. He is placed on my chest, ear turned towards my heart. My eyes glisten, not from residual pain but fathomless joy. I am a mother. I have a son. He is no longer within me, stretching my torso with alien-like pokes from his elbows, fists, and feet. His delicate flesh rests on my bare chest, and for the first time, I offer him my breast. He takes me in and we christen our new relation, our way of being close, so much so that I don't want to let go, not ever. Not knowing that I should have brought an extra pillow to prop under my elbows, my arms bear Otis's 8.6 pounds of loveliness. The first few hours of holding my child were blessed. I was filled with overwhelming emotion but, later, my gestural love for my child becomes strained. Burning biceps, levator scapulae, scalene, and upper trapezius muscles remind me that I need to seek guidance from a lactation consultant not only from the exhaustion I experience in supporting my child but the agony I am also experiencing with bleeding, misshapen, swelling, and on occasion inverting nipples – an act of preservation perhaps.

Objects of Desire within the Kinetic Embrace

Now that Otis's lips regularly form a seal around my nipple, my bodily way of being in the world is forever changed. A walk down the street remains just that, a walk. No longer able to run, jump, and soar my way through life, my shift from a perky size 'A' is weighed down to a monstrous 'E,' the largest size made available in Motherhood Maternity™ stores. Although my friend from the gym jokingly comments that I have 'porn star' boobs, not for any other reason than personal comfort and perhaps instinct, I have purposefully removed them from the relational dance within my marital embrace as they are filled with

newfound purpose. My desire to remove my breasts from sexual foreplay fits with the way most cultures experience the breast as only '13 out of 190 cultures report male manipulation of female breasts as a precursor or accompaniment of sexual intercourse' (Kendrowski & Lipscomb, 2008, p. 23). But however removed the experience of offering the protrusion of my nipple into the moistened mouth of my newborn infant is from my personal experience of sexual bliss,¹ the breast, more specifically the enlarged, lactating breast exemplifies an object of desire in Western culture (Bartlett, 2005). Freud latches on to such tendencies, as he proclaims that the state of being 'filled up with mother's milk [becomes] a blissful satisfaction that will be a standard for all required love to come' (translator's preface to Freud, 2003, p. x). Accordingly, the breast forms the nub of psychoanalytical object-relations theory, and the drive for both Eros and life, since Freud contends that 'hunger and love make the world go round' (1958, p. 68), thereby problematizing the act of breastfeeding for many women who reportedly choose not to breastfeed because of 'self-conscious' and 'prudish' feelings (Sloan, Sneddon, Stewart, & Iwaniec, 2006, p. 289).

As an alternative to discounting the breast as an object of hunger and desire or succumbing to feelings of prudish restraint, Bartlett (2005) invites us to reconsider 'what we understand as sexual' (p. 68). She delves beneath object-subject discourse and reinscribes breastfeeding 'as an embodied experience which involves intense physical exchanges: skin touching, hands stroking, holding and playing, bodies sharing, hormones pulsing, as well as an emotional relation of intimacy, care often passionate engagements' (p. 68). Bartlett also explains that 'breastfeeding is understood and experienced – made meaningful – through a number of intersecting discourses which are filtered through each woman's embodiment as it is lived and subjectivity as it forms her ongoing sense of self' (p. 69).

And so, I return to my lived experience as a newly lactating mother to make sense of my new feelings of embodiment associated with a trickling drip of colostrum that opens my relational existence in the world beyond the surface of my flesh. But is what I am feeling truly embodied? Perhaps the visceral awareness now coursing within and through me bursts the 'embodiment' bubble, a term that carries the notion of being 'packaged,' as it 'fails to do justice to animate form; it fails to recognize the primacy of movement and its dynamic tactile-kinesthetic-kinetic correlates' (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999, pp. 359–360). The fluid embrace, however painful as I acquaint myself with a new

way of being visceral in the world, thus reminds me that I, my breast, is so much more than an object for my child and something to be objectified by the gaze of others since my viscosity flows from and through me and connects a false divide between what may be considered internal and external (Shusterman, 2008a).

Mobilizing the Kinetic Embrace with Medical and Mechanical Milk

I have been breastfeeding for 2 weeks now, and I take my lactation consultant's advice to walk around topless to help my nipples recover (*thank God for blinds*). Feelings of comfort begin to emerge. The group of breastfeeding mothers I met one week prior to giving birth, mothers associated with a Toronto chapter of La Leche League, were right. *It does get better*. Had I not heard that unanimous verdict that was the only commonality among the various tips and suggestions each of the 14 women had to offer, I think I would have given up. They provided me with enough hope to persevere. My eyes no longer look towards the mantelpiece clock as I blink away 2 minutes of tears; they attend to Otis, my sweet Otis, as he coos, squirms, and on occasion, cries. He never leaves my side, we are attached, and my breasts fill and empty in response to his desire to suckle. I feel that I have finally gotten a handle on mothering, so to speak, and a fragile confidence is beginning to surface until . . . my parents visit.

'When I breastfed you and your brothers, I gave you 5 minutes per side once every 4 hours,' my mother says with concern. My Dad, a medical doctor who 'delivered' babies for more than 25 years during his ongoing practice, chimes in,

'Babies haven't changed since you were born. You should listen to your mother. You turned out okay. We worry about how tired you are. I used to give mom a break and give you all a bottle of formula at least once per day. You look so tired. . . Once every 4 hours is enough.' My mother adds, 'Yes Rebecca, once every 4 hours is enough to form a bond.'

I am thankful that my mother breastfed me and shared her story of not only forming a bond through the act of breastfeeding but also learning how she found a way to manage her depleting energy. I can imagine how difficult it must have been for my parents to see their daughter, a former fitness champion and professional dancer with endless motile exuberance, struggle for the first time in her life to stay

awake. Meg Daley Olmert (2009) explains that the demands on new mothers are extraordinary: 'Their bodies manage to produce thousands of extra calories per day to keep themselves and their babies alive' (p. 26). She continues by saying, 'Above all, despite their overwhelming new responsibility they must relax both body and mind so that their love and milk will flow' (p. 27). Biologically speaking, the more one breastfeeds, the more one will experience the flow of oxytocin, a hormone found within breast milk that quiets 'the sympathetic nerves and inhibit[s] the production of stress hormones, [hence nature's] antistress strategy that minimizes wear and tear on a mother's body' (p. 27). And as far as forming a bond is concerned, it 'is from oxytocin-rich mothers that we have learned so much about the chemistry that makes us the kind of mammal that can form deep and long-lasting emotional attachments to our babies, our friends, our mates, our pets, even our planet' (p. 26).

And so I question my parents' advice to schedule my newly forming fluid relation with my child 'once every 4 hours,' not only in relation to stress management but also in relation to the primordial nature of forming and experiencing a bond. To give context to what timing an act of fluid and loving interconnectivity might be like, Bartlett (2005) invites us to consider what scheduling the sexual act in relation to a fixed number of minutes would do to 'coital frigidity.' Just imagine the absurdity: '*Honey, it's time,*' as clothes drop to the floor. No time 'fore' play. Penetration, intense gyration with one purpose in mind – male satisfaction, ejaculation as the primary goal. – soft gentle caresses and licks dismissed, not prioritized for waves of female pleasure ebb and flow within the nuances of a lived moment, not intervals that are timed by a ticking clock. Similarly, the time it takes for an infant to satiate his hunger varies considerably. I return for a third visit to the lactation department of Women's College Hospital in an effort to stabilize my wavering confidence and learn that it is normal to have a baby suckle for an indeterminate amount of time. My jovial consultant with an Australian accent explains,

Some babies guzzle as if they are eating fast food and finish in 5 minutes or less, while others like to savour a gourmet delight.

My way of mothering, feeding 'on cue,' or what my mother describes as 'on demand,' stands in contrast to my British heritage, just as 'English society women started scheduling their feeding regime in

order to combine motherhood and social responsibilities [as early as] 1750 AD' (Jansen, Weerth, & Riksen-Walraven, 2008, p. 514). Breast-feeding, thus, shifted from a way of being fluidly connected with one's child to an objective act of providing nutrition, so much so that this Victorian time period was marked by the emergence of infant formula. Schwab (1996) explains, 'Infant formula was first created in Victorian Europe, yet the state of mind from which it emerged was the mechanistic philosophy of the 17th century, with its belief that the body, like all of nature, is a machine, fixed in specific patterns of behavior – a clock or a factory, rationally designed and managed by the Great Engineer in the sky' (p. 480).

Although much can be said about the life-saving potential that formula provides for mothers who, for a number of reasons, cannot or choose not to breastfeed (DiGirolamo, Thompson, Martorell, Fein, & Grummer-Strawn, 2005; Sloan et al., 2006), we may question the practice of scheduling bottle and breastfeeding by the objective measure of time. In fact, we may question living life at large by the hands of a mechanical clock, the icon of the scientific age and the tendency of 'coloniz[ing] the natural rhythms of the day, the month, the year' (Schwab, 1996, p. 480). When one thinks back to some of the most memorable moments one experiences in life, what some may describe as 'peak' experiences, there is a tendency to completely lose oneself in the moment, and time takes on an existential, living quality. Time shifts from sequential clock, or 'chronos' time, to 'kairos' time (Stern, 2004; van Manen, 1997), where moments of significance seem to either speed up, slow down, or feel suspended (Stern, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Feeding and caring for an infant through experiential time, thus, shifts the emphasis from an objective measure to a motile responsiveness, one that, at times, regulates into a predictable pattern, but at others, shifts towards moments that may be described as 'cluster' feeding patterns where the child stimulates more milk production through prolonged sucking at a mother's breast. Through such interactions, breast milk becomes 'something more vital, a living, constantly changing and responsive substance, homeostatically regulated' (Schwab, 1996, p. 488), and thus, a fluid relation emerges.

An Aesthetic Embrace: Forming a Flowing Relation

As I continue to breastfeed, my comfort in experiencing life beyond the hands of a ticking clock not only begins to grow, my tactile way of

being with my child takes on a new quality. I am beginning to perfect the 'cross-cradle hold,' a position where my baby's full spine, from head to bottom is supported by my forearm that is resting upon my new wrap-around breastfeeding pillow. I take my lactation consultant's advice and cease to pump and support my lactating breast with my free hand, a technique I learned from reading my *Dr Jack Newman's Guide to Breastfeeding* book. In response to watching Otis's pattern of sucking and swallowing, my consultant assures me that I have enough milk and do not need to coax it out. Instead, she suggests that I learn to relax my hand, my arm, and the whole carriage of my upper body as she gently massages my bare shoulders and encourages Martin, my husband, to do the same. Instead of pumping the breast, she explains that I simply need to draw the baby's bottom towards my torso, as the relative positioning of a baby acts like a rudder for intensity. I watch in amazement as the closer I draw Otis in, his pace and depth of suckling increase. For the first time, an act that felt utterly painful and awkward is taking on an aesthetic quality.

Aesthetics, a school of thought traditionally associated with appreciating beauty in art and nature (Menke, 2008; Carlson & Berleant, 2004), may also apply to the art of everyday living (Shusterman, 2008b). I open my La Leche League International (2004) text entitled, *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding*, and read about the various ways in which I may hold and position both my baby and myself. From the nuances of cultivating an effective and comfortable latch, a gesture initiated by gentle stroking of my nipple on his nose and upper lip to encourage an open-mouth like yawn, wide enough to 'take a large portion of [my] areola into his mouth along with the nipple' (p. 48), to the multiple positions I am in the process of refining, this new, fluid embrace has an emerging aesthetic quality. If something is not quite right I writhe in pain and shove my finger between my nipple and his lip to break the seal or Otis cries out in frustration. In some way he is my biggest but also my most honest critic. Babies do not feign comfort. Hearing him joyfully suck and swallow my milk, especially after so many weeks of trepidation, is a small miracle in and of itself. And so I return to Shusterman's (2000) notion of aesthetic experience, one that he defines as being 'essentially valuable and enjoyable; [. . .] vividly felt and subjectively savored, affectively absorbing [to the extent where we] focus [. . .] our attention on its immediate presence and [it] thus stand[s] out from ordinary flow of routine experience' (p. 17). I am assured that yes, breastfeeding as an act in and of itself and also as

an act of responsiveness to coos, reaches, and murmurs (as a full-throttle cry is somewhat of a nightmare to soothe), may fall within the realm of the aesthetic. Perhaps it is this quality that is now emanating from my mother-infant interactions is helping my parents accept my seemingly unorthodox way of feeding my child and the frequent glasses of water I consume. The stress I initially absorbed in relation to their concern for scientific frequency and function of milk production now rolls off my back as I embrace a 'science of sensuous knowledge' (Menke, 2008, p. 60). Aesthetics, as introduced by Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* from 1750 (Menke, 2008), thus takes a new hold on my consciousness. I continue to experiment with new holds and positions, the 'football,' the 'side-lying,' and to my amazement, the 'side-lying switch.' Much like the change of position may bring a new sense of excitement within a marital embrace, an experimental phenomenon that led to the cracking of my IKEA bed frame that we were unfortunately not able to replace, but I digress, the refinement of a new breastfeeding position may be regarded as beautiful, a new art form. In accordance with Shusterman's (2008b) contention that 'sexual experience can be aesthetic,' that we can experience sexual union beyond 'unimaginative, thoughtlessly mechanical and insensitive copulation' (p. 93), we can become imaginative in breastfeeding, beyond the confines of my home.

At first I try to copy other mothers in my mom-and-baby fitness class and begin to feed Otis within a tentlike cocoon of a flannel baby blanket draped from my shoulder. I quickly learn that the blanket-shield will have no part of our fluid embrace. He wants to be close. More than mouth on nipple, his hands and feet kick the blanket until he can fully take me in. I don't force the act of covering up and find a way for him to latch with utmost discretion. Perhaps it was the challenge of mastering the unclipping of a sports bra and offering him my breast in an effective manner during fitness classes that softened future possible anxieties of lifting loose-fitting tops and lowering bras designed for easy access. I soon became a 'pro' and fed Otis anywhere and everywhere, his doctor's office, restaurants so that my husband and I could continue to enjoy fancy meals together, the park which enabled me to organize a walking group with my new mom-and-baby-fitness friends, parties, the hair salon, the spa, church, and on planes, as I often travelled to present fitness education workshops in places such as New York, Miami, Chicago, and Florida. *If only my marital embrace was as adventurous . . . Hmmm . . . perhaps that is a good thing.*

As Shusterman (2008b) approaches the aesthetics of sex by 'valuing it for its own sake rather than its role in producing children' (p. 92), I too, experience the full appreciation of relaxing and being close with Otis and the sensations such proximity holds.

A Kinaesthetic Embrace: Vital Mergings of Flowing Flesh

Breastfeeding is in some sense a testimony to vitalism, and to women's power.

– Schwab, 'Mechanical Milk'

There is something so intimate in the gesture of a mother reaching towards her baby, gathering him close, nose to nipple. The scent of her flesh lets him know it is time to open, time to form a seal and 'educere' or draw out his vital sustenance, a milky dream of protein, water, and oxytocin. Figuratively and fluidly speaking, he sucks his way into existence and in so doing transforms a mother's existence and way of being in the world. Beyond an appreciation for the aesthetic nature of such a transformation, where breastfeeding may thus be understood beyond the scientific principles of 'mechanism,' measured quantities, and the nutritional value of breast milk, as such, we may also consider attuning towards the kinaesthetic sensations of experiencing life in fluid relation. Vitalism, the counter-movement of mechanism (Schwab, 1996), embraces the presence of life, an ontology that is perfectly represented in experiencing an ebbing, flowing relation not only between mother and child but with what Abram (1996) so eloquently describes as the more-than-human world.

Breasts, my breasts, have thus shifted from soft, perky protuberances my husband once described as perfect handfuls, to enlarged, engorged, spraying, depleting, and refilling modalities that move in response to the nutritional and nurturing needs of my little one. No longer identified by and through my bodily surface, I have become a perpetual moving tide of 'interpenetrating waves [. . .] movements of an unspeakable love. A love that makes it possible for flesh to drop away' (Conrad, 2007, p. 322).

The flesh of my breast, my child, my world dissolves in the bliss of a fluid embrace. Such intertwining delves beneath Merleau-Ponty's (1968) object-subject, perceiver-perceived, two-sided leaves of living 'flesh,' a chiasm predominantly understood in relation to what is

'visible' and what is not with respect to bodily surface. More than an aesthetic experience of form in the various ways I now am able to hold my child and the appreciation such a vision holds, I delve beneath the surface of our intertwining flesh. The presence of vitality surges and swells within me and is freely expressed as my love flows forth.

The fluid embrace of breastfeeding thus affords a modality of exploring the 'symbiotic relation of mother and child [beneath the] gaze of misunderstanding' (Grumet, 1988, p. 97), a look that acknowledges the infant's 'all-inclusive identification that does not recognize her' (p. 97). As an alternative to seeking the 'discontinuity between herself and others' (p. 98), and the establishment of a sense of self through the lens of psychoanalysis, what if we turn towards the motions, gestures, and fluid ways in which we may enhance our sensibilities of interconnection? While Merleau-Ponty and Grumet were primarily drawn to explore perception through vision, what could be considered the most distancing of senses however 'palpable' as 'synaesthetic perception' affords (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), what might we learn from attending not only to the aesthetic qualities of the maternal embrace but also the kinaesthetic flow of gestural motions within such envelopment? Leder (1990) invites us to consider the felt sense of our 'viscerality, not visibility' (p. 206), a 'visceral invisibility that is never fully written within Merleau-Ponty's text' (p. 207). And in so doing, we may consider 'the hidden vitality that courses within' (p. 204) and the 'deeper magic [that] takes hold' (p. 203) beyond the sensorimotor expressive nature of Merleau-Ponty's 'I can,' the conscious apprehension of 'the surface body' (p. 203), and acknowledge our 'viscero-aesthesiological being' (p. 204).

I heard a baby cry in the hallway during my lecture at the university today, and a strange thing happened. More than 6 months have passed since I weaned my second baby, yet a throb of bodily remembrance surged deep within my flesh. When I teach, I am usually always in the moment, and my attention is purposefully directed to facilitating a flowing conversation within our four walls. Today, beyond where my eyes were looking, my breasts viscerally attended elsewhere in surging and ebbing waves of awareness that very much moved in accordance with the intensity and phraselike quality of the baby's cries of distress. For this reason, my cousin Vikki, a physician who returned to part-time work when her infants were 4 months old, felt the need to wean. The involuntary surging, swelling, and expression of milk from her breasts in a hospital setting was too much of a

distraction from the concentration she needed to do her job. Luckily, the university seldom echoes reverberating baby cries, and I was able to maintain my fluid relation until both Ian and Otis were 14 months old. What baffles me now, however, is that the feeling of fluid responsiveness still surges within. Although no milk was expressed, my fluid way of relating to babies emerged in a gestalt of remembered responsiveness. As much as I wanted to embrace my class and hear Stacy's story from her recent practicum,² a longing to pick up, rock, and sway the baby in our hallway took hold of my throbbing and engorging visceral consciousness.

The concept of Leder's (1990) 'viscero-aesthesiological being' in relation to the kinaesthetic sensations a breastfeeding mother experiences, thus, adds, even disrupts, the chiasm of conscious and unconscious awareness put forth. On the one hand, there is a conscious separation from our deepest motility that Leder describes within the realm of 'it can' in relation to acts such as digestion, where it is simply 'accomplished within me, without my intervention, guidance, or skill' (p. 203). Similarly, the production of milk and the fluid, *expressive* responsiveness to a baby's cry, any baby's cry, also falls beneath the Merleau-Pontian sensorimotor realm of the "I can" of the surface body' (p. 203). What is unique to the surging tide within a woman's breast is that such fluid responsiveness, however primordially mediated, enters into the realm of conscious apprehension. While digestion may happen deep beneath one's surface, the seeping out of milk or even the remembrance of milk preparing to spray forth becomes imminently conscious. And paired with the kinaesthetic awareness associated with the actual release of milk into the mouth of an infant is an emotional affordance of complete bliss:

One quiet evening as I nursed my daughter to sleep, I reflected on the term 'let down' and I began to wonder how this term came to be used in regard to breastfeeding. It usually means disappointment and hurt. The total opposite is what occurs when I nurse my infant daughter. The breastfeeding let-down was by then a very familiar feeling to me, yet it can't really be described. My daughter sucked and wriggled and sucked more to coax the milk out. After a few brief moments, I felt the fullness – almost an ache – my breasts seemed hard and ready to overflow. And then the change in her breathing as she began drinking in with long, slow gulps, eyes closed, in utter abandonment. I looked down at this small being who was cradled against my body. As I stroked her soft,

sweet skin, I felt the overwhelming release of love which to me, is what the let down truly is. (La Leche League International, 2004, p. 54)

More than a 'look' of love between infant and child, a gaze of reciprocity that matures by 6 weeks, the kinaesthetic sensations of let down draw us deeply towards waves of motile responsiveness. The release of love, a letting out of tension, therefore, somewhat coincides with Freud's theory of affect, a kernel concept where 'affect [may be conceived] as the build-up and fall-off of stimulation and tension' (Stern, 2002, p. 84). In contrast to Freud's extreme position, however, where 'the build-up side [of tension] was solely unpleasurable and the fall-off side purely pleasurable' (p. 84), Stern (1993) suggests that *all* categorical affects such as happiness, anger, and sadness have in-built surging and fading qualities. Affect may be thus understood as a temporal dynamic, a musical phrase of building and fading emotion, what Stern refers to as a 'vitality affect,' which represents the presence of dynamic life within the micro-experience of an emotion. While 'psychology has [largely] ignored temporal dynamics' (p. 13), the fading, accelerating, cresting, and swelling qualities of tension, phenomenologists such as Sheets-Johnstone (1999) have concluded that a vitality affect is always present in some shape and form. The gestures we associate with expression such as a smile, therefore, not only have a discernible temporal quality in and of themselves, they reverberate in a full-bodied way. An infant's smile, the gradual opening and upward turning of a baby's mouth releasing his latch from a nipple, for example, is also accompanied by a series of vitality affects communicated in the way his limbs reach out, his hands open and shut, as well as the tonal rise and fall of his soft, happy gurgles.

Through Stern's theory of temporal affect, one that draws upon the felt sense of bodily tension, we may approach the experience of 'let down' through a visceral motile consciousness. More than a static feeling of bliss, a state that may be interchanged with Csikszentmihalyi's (1997, 2000) theory of flow that athletes, artists, and yes, even teachers or professors use to describe the phenomenon of a 'peak experience' or 'being in the zone,' a state where time takes on an existential quality and action merges with awareness, we may seep out of the Cartesian coordinates used to psychologically profile the phenomenon. Beyond the $X = Y$, upwardly expanding relationship of matching one's skill level with a corresponding challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, 2000), the act of breastfeeding, once mastered and refined through aesthetic

sensitivity, does not continue to climb in skilful, measures that can be graphed. The experience of flow or motile 'bliss' within a breastfeeding embrace comes and goes like an ebbing and flowing tide. It is not confined to a practised performance, the feeling of love not only climbs as a mother becomes more proficient at holding and feeding her child, the feeling of being close, of feeling a sense of fluid love is infinite, off the Cartesian chart, so to speak. The experience of flow within the fluid mother-child embrace thus draws one beneath the elemental intertwining of Merleau-Ponty's (1968) chiasm of flesh, beyond Leder's (1990) visceral addition he terms 'blood,' as in the 'flesh and blood' of the world, and into the temporal dynamics of expression (Stern, 2002) that connect Abram's (1996) 'rhythms of the more-than-human cosmos' (p. 187) to Conrad's (2007) description of 'consciously entering into the fluid system of [her] own bodily tissues' and entertain the possibility of a 'different order of existence [that so] emerges' (p. 4).

A Somaesthetic Embrace: A Reflective Ebb of Intertwining

A visceral, seamless connection to the world experienced within what Csikszentmihalyi (2000) profiles as flow is, therefore, possible. But, the phenomenon of feeling a blissful connection to a lived moment, what Stern (2004) describes as a musical phrase or arc that carries the expansiveness of the 'small momentary events that make up our worlds of experience' (p. xi), is not always present. As much as we are predisposed to experience sensations of ultimate connection to others and the world in flow, we humans also have the ability to disconnect from our actions of daily life and reflect. Shusterman's (2008b) concept of somaesthetics carries just that, a reflective consciousness that supersedes Merleau-Ponty's (1962) notion of a preconscious 'direct and primitive contact with the world' (p. v). Within the realm of somaesthetics, Shusterman (2008b) invites us to acknowledge the following senses, namely, the 'exteroceptive (relating to stimuli outside the body and felt on the skin), proprioceptive (initiated within the body and concerned with the orientation of body parts relative to one another and the orientation of the body in space), and visceral or interoceptive (deriving from internal organs and usually associated with pain)' (p. 2).

When one analyses one's relation to others and to the world through these modalities, there is a sense of separation from the bliss of 'going with the flow' of 'let down' and the overwhelming sense of joy and

love such an experience holds. I, for one, have disconnected from the immediacy of my direct experience and have been caught in moments of reflection, moments where I purposefully shifted my relational perception within and beyond the fluid embrace. With the help of a breastfeeding pillow and soothed state of my sleepy, suckling infant, for example, I have purposefully attended to reading journal articles, writing academic texts, watching television, or during moments of excruciating pain at the onset of breastfeeding, the hands of a ticking clock. The surges, swells, gushes, waning, and weaning experiences of milk within my breast, therefore, not only remind me of my ability to aesthetically (in reference to appreciating outer form) and kinaesthetically (in relation to proprioceptively feeling inner sensation) experience my viscosity but become aware of the ebbs and flows of consciousness in any relational existence between self, other, and our mostly fluid world.

Today, as I continue to breastfeed, the aesthetic and kinaesthetic qualities of the experience slowly begin to wane, and the experience of lactation no longer seems to stand out or apart from the ordinary. I no longer 'fully' soak in my child, his delicate little fingers, his tiny toes while I caress his soft fine hair in rhythmical strokes in time with the beat of his latest baby CD, a Jamaican remix of *London Bridges Falling Down*. My eyes drift beyond the pane of my two-bedroom apartment kitchen window and softly cloud over, as a perplexing feeling of discontent emerges. Much of my existence as of late may be described by the idiomatic expression of 'being a boob.' Etymology Online (2009) reveals that a 'boob,' a term that originated in 1909, is used to describe a stupid person and yes, the descriptor fits. I want my short-term memory back. I want to be able to start a sentence and have enough 'with-it-ness' to end it. A longing to be more than a lactating mother surges within. Memories of my former life as a doctoral student and part-time professor surface, as do my buried hopes and dreams of securing a tenure-track academic position.

A mix of guilt and anguish churn. How dare I think about a life beyond mothering? How dare I feel jealous of my husband's frequent correspondence on his handheld Blackberry™? Should I not be content with the fact that my baby is happy and healthy? Why are tears rolling down my face? Why do I feel that mothering is not enough? It was the epitome of my mother's existence. She was the mother of all mothers and continues to define herself through her love of babies, her fascination with sleeping and feeding routines, the ideal diaper

size and sleeper length, ways to tuck in a blanket, and story upon story of what she did for my brothers and me. I do not care about such things, but feel that I am supposed to. I feel caught in the cycle of what Grumet (1988) describes as 'maintenance, [an existence] repeated in daily chores required merely to sustain life, not to change it' (p. 24), and I know deep down, I need more. I am not my mother. I do not take pleasure in folding onesies into little squares, organized by size and colour. I have a large shelving unit with 'areas' for sleepers, pants, and socks. It works most of the time, until I seem to be forcing his chubby feet into the legs of a sleeper that just doesn't have enough stretch. My mother is flabbergasted: 'Rebecca, that suit is for a 3-month old! You need to put all of the smaller ones away and get organized!' I silently respond, 'Kill me now, seriously.'

Nancy Chodorow (1978), in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), explains through a psychoanalysis of biology and culture why, for so many reasons, it is me who mothers, just as my mother mothered me. It is not my husband, who spends his days at Chiropractic College and anticipated future in a clinic. More than a biological need for my child to be at my breast, Chodorow (1978) invites us to 'understand the mechanisms which produce [the sexual division of labor] in the first place' (p. 215) and consider the possibility of 'men and women parent[ing] equally' (p. 217). She suggests 'that infants require the whole parenting of warmth, contact, and reliable care, and not the specific feeding relationship itself' (p. 217). I pause to consider such a possibility and question how much longer will I continue to live life as a 'boob'? How much longer will my intelligence, alertness, and desire to do something with my Ph.D. get sucked away? Although my stroller walks on cold winter days are always filled with rays of sparkling sunshine, my dreams of an academic life are very much suspended at present through my breast, a sentiment echoed by Grumet (1988). She elaborates, 'The sucking infant drains her mother's swollen breasts of milk, reasserting the dominance of the child's time over the mother's as lactation and sleep as well respond to the duration and strength of the child's hunger and vigor' (p. 10).

I have been exclusively breastfeeding for 5 months now, and while I wouldn't describe my child's relation to me as one of dominance, I know that I am destined for so much more. A year and a half have passed since I graduated from my doctoral program and I worry that if I don't apply soon, I may miss my window of opportunity to secure an academic position. Perhaps it is luck or coincidence but within

2 weeks of following leads I am contacted by McGill University for an interview by their Kinesiology and Physical Education Department. My husband Martin, in full support, joins both Otis and me as we head to Montreal. For the first time in a long time, I contemplate a life of becoming a professor.

In order to assume the look of a professor, as clothing often 'reveal [s] a great deal about [one's] pedagogical beliefs' (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 580), I squeeze my breasts into a button-down shirt and step into my Holt Renfrew grey tweed suit, the suit I purchased for my graduation. I am amazed that I can do up the waist, as I am at least 15 pounds heavier, and laugh as I attempt to close my jacket button. 'Oh well, I guess I will have to leave it open,' I giggle to myself.

There is something to be said for 'looking the part,' as my identity as a mother was suspended on that crisp January day. I left my hotel room and walked to the McGill campus with a quiet confidence, a certainty that I can carry a conversation that does not revolve around diapers, baby poop, and a lack of sleep. I am greeted by approximately 12 professors and I take a significant liking to Joe Kincheloe, the invited external member of the hiring committee. We have a very enjoyable debate on the difference between 'essence' and 'essencing,' as well as 'lived' and 'living,' particularities that I introduce within my motion-sensitive phenomenological approach; so much so that by the end of my presentation, he invites me to write a chapter in his education research methods text (now published, see Lloyd & Smith, 2006a). I also meet Enrique Garcia Bengoechea, a person with whom I have stayed in touch, and one who has recently asked me to contribute to a book chapter in an international physical education text (Lloyd, Garcia Bengoechea, & Smith, 2010). And so, I met two 'kindreds,' two very special souls in what could have been a very stressful situation and was filled with renewed hope.

'I did it. . . I really did it, I think I got the job,' I tell my husband, who is pushing our sleeping Otis in the stroller. The details of the day cascade off my tongue as I float down the sidewalk and Martin smiles. For the first time in a long time, I am bursting at the seams in a different way. My husband sees how a turquoise fish hanging from a simple silver chain in a store window catches my eye and urges me to forget about our student budget and purchase it as way to remember this special day. We continue to walk in and out of shops, and although the January air is cold and brisk, the sunshine seeps into my every pore as we head back to our hotel. My life seems to be turning in a new direction

until . . . I experience a bursting swell of a different kind. Otis begins to stir and my button-down shirt no longer fits as it did earlier that day. My usual way of discretely merging with Otis is blocked by the tightness of the pressed and stretched cotton. Within the privacy of our hotel room I have to completely remove my shirt to unclip my bra. I offer Otis my breast and hold him close. 'Mommy had a big today, goodler,'³ I softly say as he nuzzles and guzzles. Our glorious night continues. We change before heading out to a celebratory dinner.

But wait . . . 'What have I done?' I sit up in our hotel bed in the middle of the night and begin to cry with remorse. 'What if I do get the job? Who will take care of Otis? How could I possibly think of leaving him?' Martin's hug calms the momentum I am generating in my back-and-forth pacing, and I pause to catch my breath between sobs. My thoughts drift to a future of dedicating my best energy and time to an institution, to others, and not my son, my baby Otis. I love Otis so very much that the thought of separating and living a life where there will be more absence than presence of his laughter, his curious nature, his moments of fear or fascination with the cat or the toilet will be lost to someone who doesn't care as much as I do is more than I can bear. I am not ready to leave him, not yet.

An Energetic Embrace: Renewing and Refining My Visceral Connection to the World

More than 3 years have passed since my interview at McGill. I am a mother of two boys, now weaned and aged 20 months and 4 years. I am also a tenure-rack professor bursting at the seams. I teach five classes, apply for two or more grants per annum, supervise students, promote equity on a formalized committee, look forward to chairing a national physical and health education conference in October 2010 as well as to organizing a symposium on health-related fitness pedagogy. I also trail run, do yoga, walk my dog, grocery shop, cook feasts for my family, make love to my husband, go out dancing with friends at least twice a year, and for the first time since I have had children, plan to take up snowboarding again this winter.

No longer sitting at home with the comfort of my breastfeeding pillow supporting the recline of Otis where I am able to soak in his miraculous features, his little fingers, his perfectly formed eyebrows, his little, and might I add, beautiful clusters of earwax that I delicately clear out as he reciprocally soaks in me, I attune to a 'let down' of a

different kind. Salty tears stream down my face when I pause to consider what it is like to disconnect from the ‘sensation of “eternity,” [. . .] something limitless, unbounded, something “oceanic”’ (Freud, 1958, p. 2), an existence and phenomenon, however primordial, questioned by Freud through his object-relations theory of ‘discontent.’ Living the life of an academic requires that, at times, I leave my children in the arms of someone else. While ebbs and flows of interconnectivity do exist in my relational connections to others, my students, my writing, and my colleagues, there are many moments where life seems to be passing me by, almost leaving me, as my bath of primordial bliss on occasion becomes an ocean where I struggle to stay afloat.

As much as I enjoy the many things I do, accepting the invitation to write this chapter has also evoked feelings of sadness, concern, and longing to form deeper, visceral connections, not only with my children but in everything I do. Recalling past moments of bliss within my prior life as a breastfeeding mother sends a reverberating memory of my former existence beneath the now-hardened surface of my flesh. My breasts no longer engorge as visceral, intersubjective reminders that it is time to reconnect with my loved ones. I am guilty of reverting back to Western time where ‘speed gets noticed [where] speed is the ultimate defence, the antidote to stopping and really [feeling] what we [are] doing’ (Whyte, 2002, pp.117–118). Ironically, the push I needed to write this chapter over the past month has prompted me to close my door for the first time while working in my office. No longer greeted by fluid waves of inquiring students and smiling colleagues, I have purposefully closed myself off in an effort to bear down and make just one more *deadline*. I am left questioning my *lifeline*,⁴ the importance of feeling joyfully connected to others and experiencing not only the peaks of Csikszentmihalyi’s (2000) flow when I return to snowboarding this winter, but a longing to renew an energetic, renewing, and revitalizing fluid embrace of the world:

A realm of gestural identifications is herby opened up – one that has deep ecological value – by this turn to the primary motions of what would normally be considered the affectivities of human relationality. A fully fleshed-out analysis of the embrace is needed. What is its Oedipal significance as indicated above? What human relations are engendered by an embrace that seemingly carries women’s affectivities for the ocean, the tides, water and its circulations? What is the emotional expressivity in the motions of the elemental flesh? For the moment, however, it will

have to suffice to indicate a promising direction of such an analysis. In this regard we need glance no further than the landscape and to those deep ecological renditions of landscape connection that highlight the primary motions of connection and identification, not just as metaphors, but as tangible, palpable ways of being in touch with the flesh [and blood] of the world. (Smith, 2006, p. 7)

I may conclude that the viscosity of my life as a breastfeeding mother is not all together weaned. Although milk no longer seeps and expresses out and bursts my imposed bubble of productivity, I know that the fluid ebbing and flowing tide of cosmic interconnectivity continues to surge within. Conrad (2007) reminds us that our 'bodies are mostly water, and yet [we] move about the Earth in this apparently solid way' (p. 8). From fluid steps that spontaneously tread on fresh-fallen snow in my evening dog walk to all encompassing gestures of love that care for my little one who wakes up in the middle of the night with a stomach ache, and a resolve to return to work with my door wide open, I know that I may become more attuned to experience the multiplicities of flow. This reflection on my experience as a breastfeeding mother has thus inspired me to reclaim what Irigaray (1992) describes as the 'full extent of my flow. Of my fluidity' (p. 45), a liquidity which Conrad (2007) asserts may be experienced as the 'movement of water on land' (p. 7), as I reawaken my sensitivities to existing within what Mazis (2002) describes as a flowing reciprocity within the world and return to the bliss of a fluid embrace. And so I leave you with the poetic text of Irigaray, who articulates the invisible, visceral sensations of an embrace, one that may be experienced within a mother's and lover's interconnection within a human and more-than-human world, one that I believe is also within our grasp:

Deeper, deeper than the greatest depth your daylight could imagine, once again I caress you. Luminous night, touched with a quickening whose denseness never appears in the light. Neither permanently fixed, nor shifting and fickle. Nothing solid survives, yet that thickness responding to its own rhythms is not nothing. Quickening in movements both expected and unexpected. Your space, your time are unable to grasp their regularity or contain their foldings and unfoldings. The force unleashed has an intensity which cannot anywhere be measured, nor contained. Can never be obliterated unless it is poured out in mortal ecstasy. (Irigaray, 1992, p. 13)

NOTES

- 1 Julia Kristeva (2001) describes the metaphorical connection between the breast and penis, explaining that 'the penis is thus assimilated into the mother's breast, and the vagina assumes the passive role of a sucking mouth' (p. 122).
- 2 Note that a pseudonym was used to protect the identity of my student.
- 3 Otis's first utterances sounded like, 'goodle, goodle, goodle,' hence, the affectionate nickname 'Goodler' emerged, one that carried over to our second-born son even though he never 'goodled' in the same way.
- 4 A term inspired by the poetics of Celeste Snowber (2011). She writes: 'Some of you just don't give me enough attention; you think your deadlines are more important. Well your deadlines are not lifelines. I am your lifeline, your lifeblood and I wait for you to come home and find release in just the sheer joy of being alive' (p. 12).

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