

Friday 31/10/14 E is 11 and a half weeks old. Tonight is the first night I've gone out by myself. Until recently B was doing night feeds on Friday and Saturday night to help my husband on some sleep. But now E is sleeping through, we've switched to an arrangement where I have some "time off" each week to go and do something on my own, or catch up with friends, go out in the evening. I run into half a dozen good friends and old collaborators at a local art opening- feels a bit like a school reunion. Some of them are very warm and excited to see me, have lots of questions about how everything is going. Others look at me blankly, they are surprised to see me, but they can't remember why. They don't ask about E. One friend, who I have always considered a good friend, looks askance when I arrive - she knows she hasn't made much effort, but also knows she is not going to. It's slightly embarrassing for both of us. For the first time ever, I feel regretful that I have spent so much of the last ten years with these people, who I suddenly feel I don't really know anything about me. Saturday 6/12/14 This morning was my "time off". Expressed a bottle of milk for B to feed E in my absence. In my rosy, naive pre-baby days, I thought the bungalow would be the perfect place to move my studio- it's self-contained, furnished, temperature controlled, literally in my mother's backyard. I thought it would be totally conducive to day-long studio sessions with baby in tow - work, feed, pop her down for a nap, work some more. If mum was home, she might want to partake in some light childcare, even. The first time I attempted this, I arrived to an empty house, with a screaming baby about to hit fever pitch. I had to assemble the pram, put the baby in it, lug it down to the backyard, take the baby back out again, go back to the car, grab the baby seat, back down to the bungalow, back up to the car, nappy bag, camera etc etc Like that riddle about crossing the river with the fox, hen and bag of corn.

The order here was key, and the baby had to come each way. I got inside and collapsed onto the couch, breastfed her for the next hour. Mum came home, and I went upstairs to say hello and let her fuss over the baby. By the time we'd finished our catch up, 2 hours had passed, no studio time logged. Needless to say, it wasn't worked out the way I hoped. I find myself thinking of my poor abandoned corner in the bungalow - wondering if its time to bring the mess of it should persist with the studio model. Part of me thinks it's important to maintain that separate space, knows that past experiments with home studio have never worked out for me, who requires discipline to be physically enforced, as I have no natural reserves left to draw upon. Monday 8/12/14 Breastfeeding was really getting me down until recently. I felt trapped by it, by being pinned to the ground for 40 min every 2 hours. I felt frustrated, I couldn't get as much done as I normally would, I couldn't just push things through like I always have. Lately I have started to appreciate the imperative to stop. I rarely spend time doing nothing - but that breastfeeding is doing nothing - but I actually enjoy the quiet and stillness of it now, where I used to find it intensely frustrating. Monday 15/12/14 PC meeting tonight. I have already telegraphed that I may struggle to get there, but I'm now in knots over it. E had her 4 month shots today and it was much worse (for me) than last time. At 6 weeks they can barely see a foot in front of them and the anguish only lasts as long as the brief physical pain. But this time she's much more alert and aware of the world around her. She looked genuinely horrified that I would bring her to this place and subject her to this torture. She got over the needle pain pretty quickly, but was out of sorts for the rest of the day. So, I never really even tried to get a babysitter to cover the gap between when I'd have to leave for the meeting and when B would get home, but I felt compelled to lie that I couldn't arrange it.

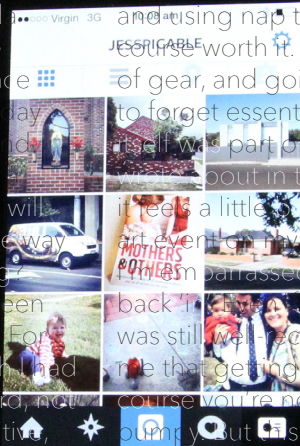


Apart from the palaver of having to express enough milk for the evening, or use up my frozen store (which I will need for upcoming date night, Christmas parties et al) I just could not leave her. It's so obvious and so beyond question that I could not leave her, and yet I had a running argument in my head: "don't make excuses, it's weak, this is important - suck it up and do whatever it takes to make it happen". Giving myself a hard time. Part of me was frustrated that they would even expect me to come at all - 6pm on a weeknight - pretty obvious none of them has kids. But then again, I'm only one person: they can't be expected to structure their whole programming committee around what suits me. But it does mean that any women who are in the committee who are thinking of having children, or already do, will find themselves in this position - turning themselves inside out at times to participate, or just deciding it's impossible and excluding themselves. And it's not like I get paid to do it - it's voluntary. However, you are not supposed to think of it in these terms. Monday 29/12/14 First Christmas has come and passed. We all survived. E is going through a scratchy patch and I'm so glad B is here at home for a few weeks until his new job starts. It is exhausting and full time with both hands on deck. Perversely gratified to see him struggle with it (even though he has always appreciated what I'm doing in theory, I think he truly understands it now). I have been thinking about this new model of working. It strikes me that what I have to do is leave a trail of crumbs for myself. When I have the chance to work on something, or when ideas hit me - I need to act immediately - write it down somewhere (preferably somewhere on the cloud) that I can access later easily, from anywhere. These loose threads need to hang until such time as I can draw them together into something more solid. Short of having a live-in maid, I'm not sure how else it can be done.

The idea of "A Room of One's Own" is both liberating and oppressive in this regard. Yes, women need a room of one's own, but in the sense that we need to take ourselves seriously as artists. If it's just about having the physical space to meditate on one's practice, it will always pit us against ourselves. For people to who want to have children it is unworkable - founded on patriarchal realities, desires and freedoms. The room of our own has to be internalised, in our own minds - a place we can go to, get to, get away to, wherever we are. We have to carry it in us, fight for it, make room for this 'room' wherever we go and whatever else we are doing in our lives. We need to not measure ourselves against the reigning, masculine models of art production, debate and presentation. We have to create new ones that work for us. Our idea of 'masterpiece' has to be scaled down, atomised, distributed. Hell, maybe I'm kidding myself that there's any great art in me to begin with. Friday 30/1/15 It's been nearly 8 weeks since I've worked in my studio. the last 6 weeks have been sucked into a vortex of sleep, settling, night feeds, exhaustion, frustration and constant problem solving. Im so glad B was around during that time, but what had initially looked like a lovely long break together when I sorely needed one, turned out to be a really challenging time with E- vaccinations rolled into a sleep regression which rolled into a "Wonder Week". The couple of odd days it occurred to me that maybe I could get over to the studio were easily diverted by my competing wish to spend some down time at home with my family. So. But here I am, 8 weeks later, picking up those crumbs. My sister has generously offered her own Friday afternoon, which she has traditionally used for her writing, to allow mum to mind E instead of G, so that I can spend time in the studio.



I have no words for how grateful I am to her and mum for valuing what I do in this way. It's incredible. I must safeguard this handful of hours each week- not let them get eroded by distraction, because they are both golden, and on loan. Saturday 7/2/2015 PC meeting today in Glen Iris. It was an epic effort to express enough milk to cover the whole meeting, including over an hour to get there and back, and I had to leave early. It would be so much easier if E would take a bottle of formula every now and then, but I'm also aware it's a slippery slope with supply and demand, and despite my ongoing reticence about breastfeeding, goddamn it, I've come this far! Thursday 4/6/2015 The situation with OzCo funding plays on my mind. I have alternately ranted on facebook, and skated past it in a breezy kind of denial. I have dreamed up two projects that will be very expensive, and I've had to pretend that I have some way of paying for them, otherwise, what's the point in dreaming? Arts Vic was plundered last year, and now that OzCo has been gutted, the likelihood of me getting a project grant is slim. For the first time I regret my petulant anti-institutionalism. I wish I had bothered to put in applications, get a few runs on the board, not be so...awkward about it all. Putting aside the chaotic, punitive, backward-thinking nature of this as government policy, forget for a moment that it potentially means complete annihilation of the mid-rungs of the visual art sector (that are really the lower, mid and upper-mid, because there is no where else to go, once you get there), and take alone what it means for women. If you cannot get some kind of grant to offset the enormous in-kind costs you invest in your work, let alone the cash you plough into it on a regular basis, how on earth can you justify continuing to do it when you now have a child? How can you not only take time, but also more money away from your family? Must keep working, as we tumble over the edge of the waterfall...



Monday 13/7/15 Hectic week - somehow dobbed myself in to do one last performance with AHC before she moves back to Taiwan. I know it's not the end of our collaboration, but I had it in my bones to perform with her again, and it will be a while before B, E and I get over to Taiwan to visit (but we will! we will! - whether on holiday, or for an artist residency?) Meant all last week I was driving back and forth between Coburg and Eltham and using nap time to edit photos and cut video. It was of course worth it. Worth the waking at 3am running through lists of gear, and going over the set up in my mind (I still managed to forget essential cables each time I drove out there.) The day I realised it was part of an ongoing series - of which the event that I wrote about in the first entry of this diary was part - which makes it feel a little like I've come full circle. That first outing to an art event in my own I felt so alienated, exposed, and although I'm embarrassed about it now, I felt bitter. This week I've felt back in it. It probably wasn't my best ever effort, our work was still unreceived, and I'm back in the saddle. It occurred to me that getting back to art is a bit like getting back to work - of course you're not firing on all engines, of course it's going to be a bump, but this is my job. Not my paid job, but it's my job as a human being to make art. That's how I think of it anyway. So I've got to go back to work, and miss my baby, and feel a bit guilty, and go through the motions a bit at first, and eventually I will feel more present and more immersed and engaged again. But at the same time, maybe not ever the way I used to, because I will always have a child, will no longer be the child in my own life. And that's just how it is now.