



As such, nursing intensifies the exposure that a breastfed person already experiences — as the bearer of body parts at once idealised and criticised, sexualised and sanitised, hypervisible and hidden, an inescapable part of one’s body but also wholly an object of other people’s desire. The ways in which breasts are policed has everything to do with how we live daily in our bodies. As Iris Marion Young puts it: “if the chest is a center of a person’s being-in-the-world, her mode of being surely differs depending on whether her chest is open to touch, moving in the world, or confined and bordered”.^[5]

As sunlight retreats, leaves acquire black spots, fungal rots. Trees inhale their sap in a long breath. Drawing fluid, withdrawing fluid.

Nursing in urban spaces remains culturally transgressive, even while it is a care-giving necessity and not a choice for many people. It repurposes street furniture and spills unwelcome liquids; it renders bodily and architectural boundaries insecure. The city cannot be unchanged by the encounter; its elements “take on a new function when the body as flesh and fluid occupies, seeps and leaks into public and semi-public spaces”.^[6]

Public feeding is also scandalous because it refuses to hide the work of daily care, of hourly nourishing, mostly banished to the private sphere (forgetting that “everything you do in private is political”).^[7] It exhibits, brashly, not only the effort but the exhaustion, the training and repetition, and the skill required to meet the unpredictable demands of an infant.

Berries are turning. Time drops to the floor like acorns. Green and hard and hopeful.

In taking up space and time in service of a non-commodified sustenance and even pleasure, bodyfeeding upsets the illusion of ceaseless production and consumption on which capitalism depends. Conditioned and cooperative, messy and magic, what we do with our bodies makes a difference.

^[1] Walter Benjamin, *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, 1939

^[2] Paul B Preciado, *Can the Monster Speak?*, 2021

^[3] Leslie Kern, *Feminist City*, 2019

^[4] Vanessa Mathews, *Reconfiguring the breastfeeding body in urban public spaces*, 2019

^[5] Iris Marion Young, *Breasted Experience: The Look and the Feeling*, 1992

^[6] Vanessa Mathews, *Reconfiguring the breastfeeding body in urban public spaces*, 2019

^[7] Johanna Hedva, *Sick Woman Theory*, 2020

**A response to Stephanie Black-Daniels’
Position & Attachment, 2022.**

Rowan Lear

Breast To Put

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Hold me?

Place me on your chest or snug to buttock in a back pocket or even tuck me up a sleeve. Fold tight, clutch close, keep warm. We’re going for a walk.

Years ago, my walk to and from school was interrupted with small but sudden violence. The incandescent traffic lights where I waited to cross had been replaced with LED versions, brighter and more efficient. The new speed and quality of light exacted an entirely different feeling in my body. Despite being consistent in design and colour, the new lights ‘snapped’ me to attention in a way that made the previous ones appear languorous, humane by comparison. With no fanfare, soft was replaced by hard.

Transition to a new lighting regime is just one example of how technologies of the street “subject the human sensorium to a complex kind of training”.^[1] For we know in our bodies that cities do not flow, they convulse. They stop and start, jump and shudder. We are surprised, shocked, clumsy — bruised by the obstacles that hit us. As soon as a gait is established, a route marked, feet pacing a drill on wet tarmac, there’s interruption and there’s instruction. We halt. We wait. We go.

A familiar crick in the neck, hunched back, eyes low. Stiff when straightening. Front loaded belly. Grey sky, heavy and wet, a pregnant air.

But there isn’t really a ‘we’. Architecture and infrastructure do not govern bodies equally. The experience of gender, for example, alters our capacity to move and respond, rendering us more or less vulnerable to external shocks. During transition and in the early days of being coded as a man on the street, Paul B Preciado “learned to look directly ahead and slightly up rather than looking sideways or down, to look other men in the eye, without turning away and without smiling”.^[2] In public space, gender presentation informs how you look and how you are looked at, how you move and how you are moved. This feedback loop between posture and reception is the training that lowers my gaze and hunches my back, it is a discipline written deep into my sinews, before I even take a step outside.

A trundling trolley. Solid. Obstinate. Reliable. One careful hand at the helm, one gaze into the distance. Loose hairs, lively, caught by an invisible air.

Our urban spaces tend to be developed for the maintenance of particular kinds of bodies. As a result,

if you are a fortunate combination of white, bourgeois, young, able-bodied, cisgendered or male, the chances are that you will move through streets with an ease that is alien to others. From public transport to accessible seating, journeys tend to be more complicated, lengthy and expensive for those who are caring, worse if you are forced to travel out of your neighbourhood for basic services, groceries and healthcare. The outcome is not simply social and economic disparity for women, disabled people and working class folks. The result is a battery of exposure and exhaustion, a tension held taut in ligaments and tendons, etched into nerve fibres and immune responses. Was your city built for your body?

A bolted assembly, a barrier, a steel blockade. Legs swing. A dog burrows underneath, emerging soiled. Others turn back, look for alternative passage.

The first time I moved around a city with a child in tow was a revelation. Everything about street surfaces I had overlooked before as an able-bodied and child-free pedestrian — widths of pavements, lengths of crossings, high curbs, holes and cracks, blind entrances and unpredictable road users — promptly became problems needing solved. A route I would effortlessly tramp with headphones on and my mind in the clouds, became an obstacle course of intense scrutiny. Every sense organ was newly alert to threats and subtle changes in colour, texture, sound and atmosphere. Leslie Kern observed on becoming a new parent, “the city was a physical force I had to constantly struggle against”.^[3]

Travelling in public with a baby who is feeding from your body requires additional problem solving. A carer scans the environment for a place to stop at sharp notice if necessary, and something to sit, lean on or stand against. In addition, the “practice of urban breastfeeding is wrapped up with power and visibility”.^[4]

Chestfeeders experience multiple and incongruous layers of exposure. The disciplining gaze of medical observation encourages new parents to nurse through the intensive assessment and evaluation of their lactation, technique and performance. ‘Breast is best’ is a state-sponsored mandate not matched by appropriate public infrastructure. And the social acceptance of human milk in public remains contested and a source of anxiety and apprehension, even if protected by law.

Steep slope, slabs like cracked faces. A relentless trade in diesel fumes. No place for purchase here. No place for pause.