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Transitions

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TRANSITIONS

by

Krista Rose Frohling

B.A., Webster University, 2008

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
M.F.A.

Department of Mass Communications and Media Arts
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
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THESIS APPROVAL

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

M.F.A.

in the field of Mass Communication and Media Arts

Approved by:

Prof. Hong Zhou, Chair

Dr. Michele Leigh

Prof. Daniel Overturf

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
March 25, 2014

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Krista Rose Frohling, for the Masters of Fine Arts degree in Mass Communication and Media Arts, presented on March 25, 2014, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. (Do not use abbreviations.)

TITLE: TRANSITIONS

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Prof. Hong Zhou

Transitions developed after experiencing one of the largest transitions of my life from an autonomous being and business owner to a pregnant woman to a mother, all during my three year Masters of Fine Art program at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. The first section of the show follows my emotional progression throughout pregnancy, as well as physical form, highlighting inner conflict. An emotional conflict and progression is illustrated through the use of emotional landscapes on the exterior walls of the space. Each emotional landscape is created from 25 canvas prints that I photographed on my mobile devices. The interior walls showcase my growing pregnant torso and separated oversized heads. The second section of *Transitions* deals with the issues of motherhood, specifically the working mother. As a working mother and graduate student, I have had to spend a large amount of time away from my daughter, and because of this I have felt a large amount of guilt and sadness. To illustrate these feelings I created installations from empty rocking chairs and all of the milk storage bags that have been used to feed my daughter in my absence. These two sculptures bookend a 10 minute long projection of my drive home taken on my iPhone. Around the exterior walls of this space, images of my daughter sleeping, and personal affects of her room are shown on large 36"x24" digital inkjet prints.

DEDICATION

Lila Rose, you have complicated my existence beyond any fathomable means of understanding, more than any word or photograph can explain. If I was given the opportunity to choose, knowing what I know now, I would choose you, again and again.

Andy, thank you for the sacrifices you have made so I could pursue my dreams. They have not gone unnoticed.

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ARTISTIC STATEMENT

Transitions developed after experiencing one of the largest transitions of my life from an autonomous being and business owner to a pregnant woman to a mother, all during my three year Masters of Fine Art program at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. The first section of the show follows my emotional progression throughout pregnancy, as well as physical form, highlighting inner conflict. An emotional conflict and progression is illustrated through the use of emotional landscapes on the exterior walls of the space. Each emotional landscape is created from 25 canvas prints that I photographed on my mobile devices. The interior walls showcase my growing pregnant torso and separated oversized heads. The second section of *Transitions* deals with the issues of motherhood, specifically the working mother. As a working mother and graduate student, I have had to spend a large amount of time away from my daughter, and because of this I have felt a large amount of guilt and sadness. To illustrate these feelings I created installations from empty rocking chairs and all of the milk storage bags that have been used to feed my daughter in my absence. These two sculptures bookend a 10 minute long projection of my drive home taken on my iPhone. Around the exterior walls of this space, images of my daughter sleeping, and personal affects of her room are shown on large 36"x24" digital inkjet prints.

INTRODUCTION

It is 5:30am, I have not slept all night, and have been rocking a fussy baby 45 minutes of every hour since midnight. It's also my birthday. Currently, I am using my breast pump, prepping for the day, trying to desperately stay on top of my daughter's ever growing, daily milk needs. "Happy Birthday", indeed. I am exhausted and agitated. I have lost a sense of identity, self, and autonomy. My entire being, right now, seems to revolve around my daughter. I created her, should it not be my sole responsibility to be her primary caretaker, complete my graduate studies, work at my assistantship, and run my business? Should I be giving it all up to be at home with her during these delicate, precious months that I am painfully missing? At this point, I feel as if I have hit an all time low. I am finally realizing, I cannot do it all, for her sake and mine.

Adrienne Rich in her book, *Of Woman Born*, states she experienced similar situations of "Anger, weariness, demoralization. Sudden bouts of weeping. A sense of insufficiency to the moment and to eternity..." (30). A roller coaster of emotions envelop me throughout my waking day, a waking day that sometimes spans to 24 hours and beyond. Guilt about leaving my daughter to work, doubled with pushing through the exhaustion of a nearly unsustainable work schedule, has left me teetering in a constant state of emotional instability and restlessness.

There is no doubt that tending to the ever constant needs of a baby are relentless and all new mothers can likely relate. Pregnancy can be just as alienating and confusing. I wanted to reach beyond myself, and make sure I was not isolated in my feelings. To try and answer this question, I conducted online interviews, through social media, of approximately 20 other mothers.

Consistently, the other mothers told me, "No one wants to hear this, no one asks." It is taboo to be vocal about your fears of pregnancy. Once a woman becomes pregnant, she is supposed to

“glow” and is expected to be unconditionally happy, but from my experience, nothing could be further from the truth. Pregnancy is a time when a woman’s entire silhouette changes into a wholly unrecognizable form. In a culture that puts an overwhelming amount of emphasis on the female figure, it can be shattering to watch your body expand uncontrollably. The sensation of autonomy quickly dissolves as every action seems to impact the development of the unborn child. Pregnant women are forbidden to drink wine, eat soft cheese, and bean sprouts. While pregnant you cannot ride a bike, lest you fall off and hurt the baby. Women are told to not overexert yourself, but do not sit around and gain too much weight. The “perfect” amount of weight each month should be reached. Gain too much and you are gorging yourself, and using pregnancy as an excuse to “let yourself go”. Gain too little weight, and you are viewed as not caring for your baby, but rather concerned with your figure. Finally, pregnant women are told they must take the correct pre-natal vitamins with DHA and Luteine, even if they are the same vitamins that make them ghastly ill. I found myself petrified to have another life dependent upon me. I was unsure of my shortcomings, for which I was convinced, were many. It was in this mindset that *Transitions* developed.

Prior to my pregnancy and the evolution of *Transitions* my intended thesis work was developing around the concept of the unconscious, surrealism, and dreams. My final project did not stray completely away from the concept of unconscious. The emotional landscapes that represent the emotive aspect of pregnancy have a very hyper-realistic and surreal aesthetic. Each emotional landscape gives voice and conscious acknowledgement to the unconsciousness and uncontrollable emotions that I experienced during pregnancy. While grappling with my new body and role in life, I was simultaneously half way through my MFA graduate program, which

lead to the change in my final thesis project. *Transitions* does not begin at my pregnancy, but at the beginning of my graduate studies. While I attend school in Carbondale, I live in St. Louis and commute. From St. Louis to Carbondale it is 230 miles, roundtrip. For the last two and half years (a total of three years by the time I graduate with my MFA) I have been making that trip three to four days a week. *Transitions* uses the images that I have been capturing, during my stomach churning commute, to represent the emotional turmoil I felt during pregnancy. My two labors have met in a symphony of color and emotion to speak about a battle that women face while transitioning from autonomy to student to pregnancy to mother. I am attempting to shine a light on the conflicting roles I assume as an artist, student, and mother; a cacophony of responsibilities that are not unique, but often taken for granted. The combination of my two labors elevated every hardship that would individually have taken root with each endeavor and magnified it's potency. *Transitions* uses my story and struggle of to raise questions about women's roles and the way society interacts with motherhood and maternity.

CHAPTER 1

THE CONCEPT: INFLUENCES, INSTALLATION CONCEPT

Influences

In 2004 at The Rochester Contemporary, Myrel Chernick organized the show *Maternal Metaphors: Artists/Mothers/Artwork*. *Maternal Metaphors* encompassed a variety of visual arts including painting, photography, and installation/sculpture. The artists in *Maternal Metaphors* spoke about maternity and motherhood, specifically through the eyes of an artist. In response to this show Chernick wrote, “I am continually encountering young women who are grappling with the issues raised by the work in this show; it is a cycle that repeats itself, with each generation of new mothers. For these and other multiple reasons, the work remains relevant and timely, as the continuing sense of isolation and frustration felt by these women, particularly in the field of visual art, needs to be addressed and confronted.” (3) Ten years after *Maternal Metaphors* made its debut, *Transitions*, and the issues of maternity and motherhood it addresses, continues to be relevant. As long as women are still making the tumultuous transition into motherhood, *Transitions*, and like-minded works, will be relevant. Addressing the silent struggles and unmet need of solidarity from society both *Maternal Metaphors* and *Transitions* gives voice to a historically, silent population.

Artist as mother, academic as mother, both are seemingly contradictory terms. Choosing to work outside of the home, especially given my particular set of commuting circumstances, has been an excruciating decision, filled daily with tears and a sense of regret and guilt. At the same time, it has filled me with a sense of freedom and accomplishment. Little research, historically, has been done on the topic of mothers as artists and academics. According to Samira Kawash in

New Directions in Motherhood Studies, "... the voices of mothers have effectively been silenced in academe (including those domains of academe that profess allegiance to feminist values)..." but goes on to say the topic has, "... recently emerged as a significant theme in in writings on motherhood." (976 Kawash) The problem of silent and silenced mothers is slowly being rectified; however, the United States still exists as one of the last of the "modernized" countries that do not offer paid maternity leave.

Personally, I was afraid to disclose my own pregnancy to the university, lest I not be offered an assistantship for the upcoming school year. Taking time off from my schooling was completely out of the question. I have even feared the legitimacy of my entire project, due to its subject matter, motherhood and maternity. At one point I was even told to, "consider the larger picture" in relation to my work, insinuating that the struggles I face today will one day be looked upon as trivial. I suppose, in some small way, that is correct. However, I will now and forever be a mother, and carry the label and stereotypes that accompany the title of mother. Therefore, *Transitions* still remains relevant and pertinent. The fears, reservations, and personal concerns accelerated the urgency with which *Transitions* was executed, due to the personal relationship I had with the subject matter. *Transitions* tackles the emotions within the roles of maternity and early motherhood, specifically the working mother and mother as artist. I strove to expose the complicated existence that mothers navigate within, often encompassed with fear, anxiety, love, and a lack of recognized autonomy.

Installation Concept

Transitions, has been broken into two parts. First, maternity, the inverted Lacanian mirror-stage reflected in an experience of losing recognition oneself through a short nine month period of time. Second, early motherhood, and the conflicted feelings of isolation, guilt of

working outside the home, and resolution of a new role in life. Therefore, *Transitions* is composed of two separate gallery rooms and a connecting “lobby” in the center. The lobby of *Transitions* serves to link the two rooms of the installation together. (see figure 1) It was essential to divide the work into individual rooms, to illustrate the break between pregnancy and motherhood and highlight the transition between states. The center wall breaking the two rooms apart, in it’s most literal state, is a physical replacement and symbol for labor and delivery, and all 14 hours of excruciating pain that lead to my entrance into motherhood. Just as this transitional state of my life felt completely disparate, so to must the gallery space show the separation of complex emotions and life roles.

The Maternity side of *Transitions*, is broken down into two main elements, the interior walls and exterior walls. The interior walls showcase the changing and altered, physical pregnant

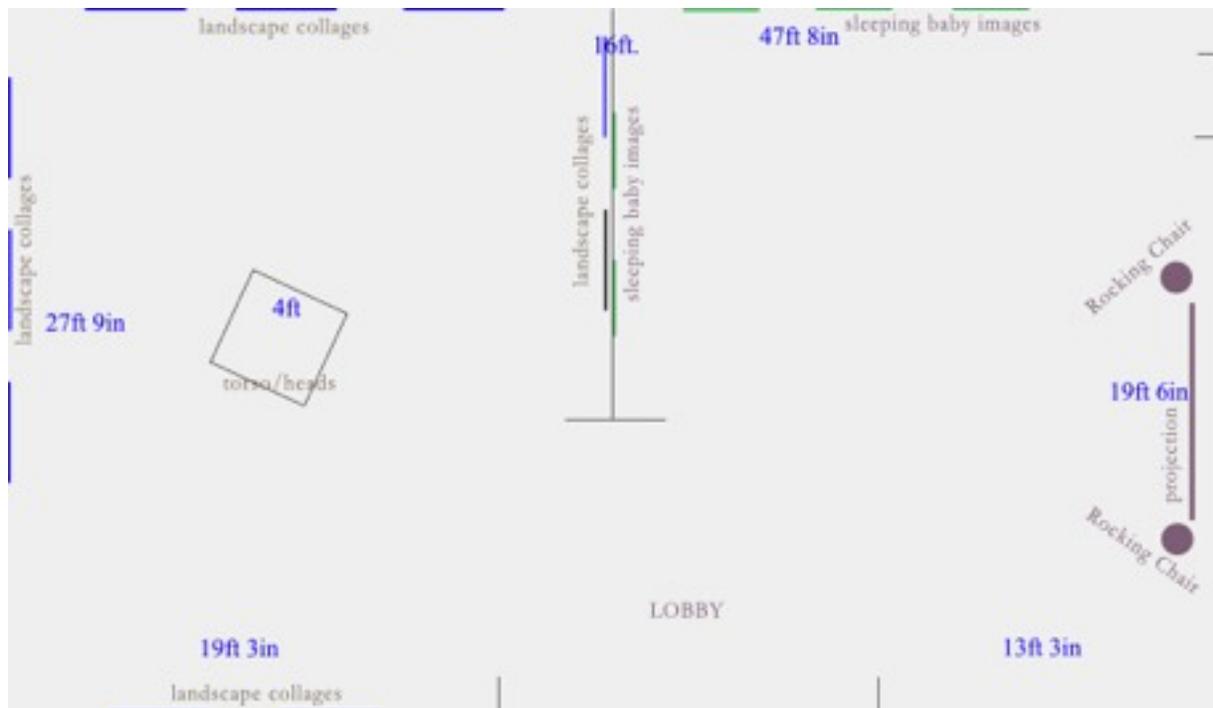


Figure 1 Installation Concept

form. The exterior gallery walls address the emotional space of pregnancy. This half of the installation takes the viewer through the physical and emotion journey that is pregnancy.

Alternate to the Maternity room is Motherhood. This half of the installation is also broken into two main elements. The first half of the Maternity space is an installation of two rocking chairs, covered with used breast milk storage bags, bookending a projection of my commute at night during a storm. This section symbolizes the lost time with my daughter. Each empty storage bag is symbolic of time away from my daughter. I have saved every milk bag my daughter has emptied while I was away working. The empty rocking chairs serve as a reminder of the physical absence of mother. Surrounding the installation are larger than life prints of my daughter and her room at night. Small sketches of her belongings, and her sleeping form show exactly what I saw at night peeking into my daughter's room after I came home.

CHAPTER 2

MATERNITY: THE PHYSICAL FORM, EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPES

The Physical Form

The subject of maternity, motherhood, and children historically is established from the vantage point of looking at the mother, as Mary Kelly states, "...nothing that gave a voice to the woman..." (Chernick, Klein 22) The onlooker was given a unique perspective, as voyeur, to an intimate and fetishized relationship of mother and child. The religious and historical representation of "madonna and child" is an easily recognized trope. Artists such as Mary Cassatt and Käthe Kollwitz, while branching from the religious undertones associated with the image of mother and child, still turn the spectatorship towards the mother, and highlight an "ideal". This ideal relationship can be traced back to Rousseau's *Emile* in 1762. Rousseau, "...advanced the cause of the mother as the baby's natural nurse. It took a generation, but Rousseau's ideas gained popularity among upper-class French women, inaugurating a phenomenon alternately termed 'cult of true womanhood' or 'the cult of motherhood' ..." (15 Buettner) The concept of womanhood tied to the idea of motherhood began to take root in western culture during this time. *Transitions*, similarly to Mary Kelly's *Postpartum Document*, and other artists involved in "Maternal Metaphors", such as Ellen McMahon's *Suckled*, breaks the wall of voyeuristic spectatorship and allows the viewer an experiential, yet still optical relationship with the work and existence of maternity and motherhood. *Transitions* draws the audience to see more than just the "ideal" mother and child. The emotional maelstrom of motherhood and maternity is addressed, as well as a challenge to the culturally accepted interactions with the maternal form.

The interior walls of *Transitions* showcases my growing pregnant form put on display. The pregnant body is often viewed as an appalling thing. Maternity clothing is built to hide and slenderize the growing, swollen belly, and minimize the mother's growing thighs. Historically, women were hidden away during their pregnancy and only allowed admittance back into society when the baby was born, and the mother was deemed "presentable" once again. My torso images are forcing the viewer to see the pregnant shape and form in a raw and unhindered fashion. The audience is forced to view the pregnant body, exposed for what society has made her, objectified and fractional. Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema*, suggests that there is an inherent primordial desire for pleasurable looking at another person as an object, specifically women and the female form. *Transitions*' physical form presentation breaks the visual pleasure of the viewer and steals the voyeuristic tendencies that formed within the work of artists such as Cassatt. The dislodged heads show an unflattering and real profile of a woman, specifically a pregnant woman. She is tired, scared, and in pain. Even in the images where the head is smiling, there is an underlying grimace of exhaustion. Within the torso images, the body is shown for exactly what it is in a raw and un-edited form. Cut off from the rest of the body, the torso photographs showcase a broken and dislodged existence a woman has with her pregnant body.

Through no shortage of personal experience, perfect strangers see a pregnant body as an invitation to make public comment on the woman's size and shape. The general public feels free to even physically touch the mother, as if her body was not her own, but a public spectacle for all to partake. The public interaction with a pregnant woman's body only serves to further alienate the woman from her own physical form. During pregnancy, a woman can feel that even her own body has betrayed her. Sherry B. Ortner in her essay, *Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?*,

points out that, "... many major areas and processes of the woman's body serve no apparent function for the health and stability of the individual woman; on the contrary, as they perform their specific organic functions, they are often sources of discomfort, pain and danger." (13)

Many of these functions that cause such discomfort and danger to the female form happen during pregnancy and while raising a child. "In pregnancy, many of the woman's vitamin and mineral resources are channelled into nourishing the fetus, depleting her own strength and energies, and finally, childbirth itself is painful and dangerous." (13 Ortner) During pregnancy, a woman is completely alienated from her own body. Every aspect of her being revolves around caring for the unborn child. In pregnancy, my body was not my own. Culture and nature both told me so.

The torso images are a cut, abstracted shapes, reminiscent of the female form's usage in advertising and surrealism; a cut up, objectified, commodified reproduction of culture. (see figure 2) In these images I am no longer a full human being, but rather a torso, an incubator for another human life. These images are challenging the viewer to see and address the public



Figure 2 Physical Pregnant Form

spectacle that is pregnancy, the lack of personal boundaries, and perceived public property of my body. Large prints scream for the viewers' attention and notice, while above the bodies is a dislodged, disconnected, oversized head illustrating the disconnect between body and mind, recognition and understanding, and personal ownership of body and form. Rich states, "I had learned my body was not under my control." (28) in response to the experience of being a woman, specifically a pregnant woman. Not only is the female body controlled by a set of laws and historical precedence of disrespect by a male-centric medical practice, but she also has to endure the complete transformation of her reflection in the mirror. As a result she must cope with an altered interaction with her everyday life, in order to fulfill what society sees as her duty and role as a woman. Adrienne Rich elegantly states "It was as Mother that woman was fearsome; it is in maternity that she must be transfigured and enslaved" (68)

In this "transfigured and enslaved" state of pregnancy, Jane Gallop and Dick Blau produced a series of photographs that Gallop used in her essay *Observations of A Mother*. In these images Gallop discusses her experience being photographed as both a pregnant woman and a new mother. She states her pregnant body was on display, "... like a farmer's relation to her prized produce." (238 Gallop) Gallop associates the silent, photographed mother in Roland Barthes *Camera Lucida* as a magical and silent individual that we, as an audience, have elevated to a pedestal in her silence and status as Mother. *Transitions* picks up on Gallop's next statement about the mother speaking of her own photographic, "...pleasure in being taken for that magical object called Mother is to display an unsightly narcissism, a narcissism which may be inevitable when the photographed mother speaks." (238) The narcissism that Gallop speaks of can also transform into a lack of "love" for your own form when you find yourself on display in a public,

photographed form. This complicated self-association of my own image is reflected in the lack of linear and cohesive hanging of the bodies. The torso images are hung linear based on time, however, they are not progressing all in the same direction, as a display of proud growth, but rather facing backwards and forwards intermittently, illustrating unease and discomfort with the changing form and representative images of my changing form.

With my changing form, I slowly began to lose recognition of my own body in the mirror. In the Lacanian psychoanalysis, Lacan claims the child gains recognition of themselves as an autonomous individual, separate from the mother during the mirror stage. The child develops a narcissistic recognition of their own reflection and begins a life-long love affair, or develops the “ego”. Maternity could be argued as an inverted Lacanian mirror stage. If a child begins to see a division during the mirror stage between them-self and the mother, then, during pregnancy, is it not fair to say that the mother begins to blur the boundary between herself and the child physiologically and psychologically. A physical state, so drastically altered as that of the pregnant woman, lends itself to a lack of recognition. Pregnancy is the daily rediscovery of yourself, your body, and your physical and psychological limitations. The skin stretches and leaves permanent marks. The hips, thighs, and buttocks expand to support the weight of a growing fetus. The mother’s health, and body are completely transformed and sacrificed to support the fetus. A woman begins to disassociate her body as her own, and more as a vessel.

Emotional Landscape

Upon entering the gallery housing *Transitions*, the audience finds them self immersed in a landscape of imagery. The external walls of the gallery feature ten fifty inch square blocks of landscape imagery from in and around Southern Illinois. When viewed as a whole, the images

take on a meaning beyond a superficial, borderline kitschy experience. How do you represent the world you cannot see, the intangible aspects of life that artists, since the beginning of the 20th century, have been struggling to represent? My answer, perhaps heuristically, in *Transitions*, is through pictorial collages of emotion. The landscape images that comprise the blocks of emotion were taken throughout the course of a year and a half during my commute from St. Louis to Carbondale, and back again. A sometimes seemingly fruitless labor, repetitive action, an action of motion, momentum, and ceaseless fatigue, the act of driving towards an end goal runs parallel to the impression I had of pregnancy; and therefore, an appropriate representation of the emotional tumult I experienced during maternity.

Each block of landscapes has unique characteristics. One block of images is black and white, another features yellow tinged harvest scenes. Each of these collages, I argue, are representative of emotions. Modern artists since the early 20th century have been grappling with the concept of emotions and how to create a truthful representation. Matisse took on emotions through the use of color. “Matisse more than anyone else has used color for its emotional effect. As he said, ‘The chief aim of color should be to serve expression as well as possible.’” (34 Sweet) Before Matisse reached maturity in his work, he studied with Divisionists painter, Paul Signac. (32 Sweet) Through the guidance of Signac, and with the techniques provided to him through Divisionism, Matisse explored color, and how color, when used in tandem with other colors, together could be emotive. *Transitions* borrows Matisse’s exploration of color through the themed collages on the external gallery walls. For example, Landscape Collage #1 utilizes blue, gray, deep maroons, and dark greens side by side to create a patchwork of emotive meaning. The dark, forlorn colors, help show a hesitation and fear that I felt during the early stages of my



Figure 3 Landscape Collage #1



Figure 4 Landscape Collage #2

pregnancy. (see figure 3) Landscape Collage #2 is entirely void of color. (see figure 4) This is a strong statement about the blank, disbelief that consumed my life. My daughter was an aleatory life event, albeit, simultaneously positive. In spite of the richness she would eventually provide my life, the knowledge of her inevitable arrival was daunting. The content of this block has repetitive elements, as well as mixed and confused content messages. These images were carefully chosen to help evoke a sense of confusion, blank terror, and anticipation.

The basis of *Transitions* is built on the foundations of the emotional tumult of pregnancy, specifically as I experienced. The landscape collage blocks were taken on my personal iPhone and edited using *Instagram*. Historically, I have personally had a complicated relationship with my camera phone. To me, camera phone's degradation of images and ease of use democratizes photography in a way, that encourages the dilution of my own craft and the respect of technical ability. However, I cannot think of any other medium that could more accurately reflect the immediacy of the emotional responses I was experiencing than a camera phone photograph. Camera phones are quick, immediate, and effortless as well as portable, which was essential to the success of my project. All of the images in the landscape collages needed to reflect a sense of imperfection, immediacy, and motion that could only be achieved naturally through a camera phone. Where a DSLR camera offers the photographer the option of making conscious decisions and defined focus, a camera phone steals the possibility of total control. The photographer merely edits a larger scene into a photograph. The camera phone makes the aesthetic decisions of exposure and focus without the hand of the photographer, thus the photographer's complete autonomous control is relinquished.

Professional photographers and artists have been drawn to the immediacy and spontaneity of the iPhone. Landscape photographer, Robert-Paul Jansen, uses both a professional SLR camera as well as his iPhone to capture his, “single-frame fairytales”. (Jansen) Jansen’s whimsical iPhone captured landscapes offer a stillness and serenity that is equal in quality to the images captured on his SLR. “Paul is a firm believer that beauty can be found anywhere, you just have to be open to see it.” (Jansen) Portrait photographer, Jim Darling, has also adopted the iPhone for some of his personal art work. Darling’s style, while still prevalent in the iPhoneography, takes on a more candid and responsive tone. The immediacy of the iPhone camera, in both of these photographers, lends itself to capturing a spontaneity a freedom that comes from having a camera in your back pocket.

The Abstract Expressionists embraced the automatic and subconscious creation of art it, “... translate(s) private feelings and emotions directly onto the material field of the canvas without the mediation of any figurative content.” (Foster, Krauss, Bois, Buchloh 348) The landscape collages are comprised in micro material of figurative content, the aggregate summation of all parts remains commensurate with the goals of the Abstract Expressionists, working as a total unit to express the more conflicted emotive elements of maternity. Abstract Expressionists married the concept of relinquishing conscious thought and interaction with the canvas in order to let the viewer into “... the inner sanctum of his feelings; his art is bound to reveal his very own self as the kernel of his originality.” (Foster, Krauss, Bois, Buchloh 350) In order to capture the immediacy and removal of control needed to relinquish conscious decision making, all of the images that comprise the landscape collages were taken from a moving car on a mobile device. The transience possible with a mobile device lends itself to enveloping

impromptu, emotive pictorials throughout all four seasons. Where the Abstract Expressionists employed paint and canvas, I have chosen to express my “kernel of originality” with a simplified camera and lens and removal of complete control.

After photographing the scenes, I would then run them through the social media app, *Instagram*. Using *Instagram* relinquished the creative control that I, as a practiced and trained photographer, would normally have over post-production of digitally created images. *Instagram* would compress and “dirty” up the images with a set of algorithms outside of my control. The filters available through *Instagram* allow me certain creative control over the final outlook of the images, but not the unlimited resources that would traditionally be made available to the professional photographer. The availability and demanded immediacy of creating images while moving, on a transient device, allows for a lack of control, but a more accurate representational mode of communication of emotion. Chester states, “... *Instagram* lower(s) the image’s semiotic modality, so that it is read less as a naturalistic photographic image, and becomes something more than real.” (13) The “more than real” I strive for is emotive and intangible.

During the creation of *Transitions*, at the risk of building a wholly narcissistic, belly-button gazing work, I interviewed and spoke with other new mothers about their experiences of maternity and motherhood. It seems my assumptions were not entirely off base, with this knowledge I felt free to move forward with my investigations of maternity and motherhood, verifiably, on target. After completing the interviews with other mothers, I obtained permission to anonymously include their words in the show. Scattered throughout the collage groupings, I included some of the words that stood out. Words such as, “At the same time I was feeling all of this anxiety and regret, I did feel a sense of excitement.”, “I lost my sense of identity.”, and “The

most confusing time of my life.” helped to tell my story, through the voices of other mothers who experienced both similar and different, but still mixed emotions of maternity. It is other mothers who have inspired urgency and forward motion within my own work. All of the women I spoke with stood in quiet, unspoken solidarity with each other, but were afraid to say out loud what they were experiencing. As one mother so poignantly stated, “I feel like TV and movies have created this idealistic version of what those experiences are supposed to be like, and it can be scary when your own story deviates from that image. I don't think it would be so scary if we had a realistic idea of pregnancy to begin with, so I think sharing these individual experiences is really valuable.” Another mother stated, “I really appreciated having the opportunity to speak about this. It's like no one really wants to hear about the hard parts of having kids, and so I have never told anyone this. I can only hope my story helps someone else.” There is no culturally acceptable outlet for women to discuss their struggles with maternity, and the media has pushed the idealized image of maternity into the mainstream. This has served only to make women who do not measure up to the extreme expectations, (lets be honest, almost everyone) feel like they have somehow failed, and should be ashamed.

Borrowing the definition of index from *Art Since 1900: Modernism Antimodernism Postmodernism* by Foster, Krauss, Bois, and Buchloh, an index, “...marks the trace of an event, can be the precipitate of a chance occurrence.” (157) Marcel Duchamp heavily utilized the concept of index within his work. *Three Standard Stoppages* uses the index of the string falling to the ground. The shape, or index of the event of the string falling, is then recorded on the new shape given to the yard sticks. With the working definition of index, as the residue, lasting impression, or remnants of some other, it could be argued that photography itself is an

index. A photograph is a record of light entering the camera or device, the light that is reflected back off of the scene in question, thus becoming an index or residue of the signified. Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, states, "... Photography is a kind of primitive theater, a kind of *Tableau Vivant*, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead." (32) This "living picture" or "*Tableau Vivant*" reflecting a dead, motionless scene that Roland Barthes explains, creates a scene that photography is the past, the gone, and the dead. A photograph is a scene that is no longer in the present and therefore a reflection, or residue of what once was, or proof- in some inaccurate way- of what was. Ultimately, it is the photographer's choice, the operator of the camera to decide where to point, frame, and crop the scene. Photography is an index of the subject matter it contains, an index based on the bias and state of the camera operator. A photograph serves as an index of a location in space and time. An index of the existence of a photographer within that given space, time, and location, because a camera requires an operator to work. This in mind, the external walls of photographs within the show *Transitions*, are each small signifiers of a signified element, me, the photographer. Barthes argues that a photograph is "contingent (and thereby outside of meaning), Photography cannot signify (aim at a generality) except by assuming a mask." (34) The quasi-tautological, landscape images of *Transitions* therefore do not represent the space, the place, and the time, for these are trivial matters, except they show emotion, movement through space (rather than being dependent on a specific location). Had these images been taken during a commute daily through Colorado or New York, they would still hold the same emotionally charged content, because the same photographer, the operator of the camera would make the emotionally charged decisions. Mary

Kelly's work *Post Partum*, utilizes objects and items from the early years of her son's life as a document of the transitional period she made into motherhood. These items serve as an index or residue of the existence of her son, her experiences, and the methodological means with which she records time and experience. Kelly's remnants of her son's life are an index.

Simone De Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex*, "The significance of pregnancy thus being ambiguous, it is natural that woman should assume an ambivalent attitude toward it: moreover her attitude changes with the various stages in fetal development." (497) Beauvoir covers the variety of differing responses to maternity. This cursory look over maternity ties back into Rich's statement that, "Slowly I came to understand the paradox contained in "my" experience of motherhood; that, although different from many other women's experiences it was not unique; and that only in shedding the illusion of my uniqueness could I hope, as a woman, to have any authentic life at all." (40) which is the stance that I hold in *Transitions*. I am taking a heuristic experience of maternity and motherhood and illustrating my unique position; however, no matter how unique or individual my experience with maternity and motherhood, it is not isolated. Maternity has a tendency towards isolation, when the woman is elevated to the status of near Goddess, and imposed upon with a set of "acceptable" emotions and responses. As a result of this phenomena, the reality of the struggle and real emotion is covered by rose colored spectacles. Women often feel unable or taboo if they speak out about experiencing anything beyond the "accepted" emotions and responses. *Transitions*, strives to pull a sense of reality and healing into a difficult and damaging topic of conversation for many women.

CHAPTER 3

MOTHERHOOD: SYMBOLS OF ABSENCE, THE SLEEPING BABY

I made a choice after having my daughter to continue with my education, and to continue working outside of my home. However, because of this decision, I have missed countless hours of physical contact with my daughter. I decided to continue breast feeding my daughter, in spite of our eight to fourteen hour a day separation. Due to this decision, I had to pump multiple times a day to keep up the milk supply. The process of pumping creates an additional time constraint in my day, adding to the already heightened conflicted passions. Myrel Chernick eloquently explains my new found role in the quote I use to open the paper. My new role as a mother has impacted my life in nearly every way. Time has become a precious commodity that I do not lightly part with, my relationship with my husband, family, and friends has drastically altered. If my spouse and I have an opportunity to communicate more than an obligatory, “good morning, has the baby been fed yet?” we can consider the interaction a success. More often than not, I leave before she is awake, and come home often after both my husband and my daughter are sleeping. Weekends offer little to no relief because I also run a photography business in St. Louis, that consumes most of the rare moments I am not working on school. Not only has my personal and social life been impacted, but my professional prospects have significantly diminished. “There is evidence that many American employers construct women as either mothers or workers, implicitly assuming that woman cannot value both equally.” (487 McQuillan, Greil, Shreffler, Tichenor) This tendency of the American workplace, will diminish my future job prospects upon the completion of my studies. The more tangible impacts of motherhood can be measured and studied; however, the intangible is more difficult to grasp. I

fight a less tangible battle of separation from my daughter daily. I made the decision to continue working; however, it only further complicates my roles in life, and divides my passions. The second section of *Transitions*, motherhood, highlights the isolation of early motherhood, guilt and weariness of separation, and anticipation of being reunited at the end of the day.

Symbols of Absence

The central element of the motherhood section of *Transitions* is a ten minute looping video of the road, specifically the road I travel to and from my home in St. Louis, Missouri to Southern Illinois University Carbondale for classes. The doldrum of the road is extenuated by the dark, nighttime video, highlighted only by the occasional lightening flash and rattle of thunder. On viewing, the spectator is caught in a repetitive and droning experience that is isolating,



Figure 5 Rocking Chairs Installation from *Transitions*

lonely, and somehow sad. Bookended by two sculptures made of rocking chairs and empty, used breast milk storage bags, the overall impression is of loss, repetition, and sadness. (see figure 5)

Each storage bag included in the sculptures are very literal symbols of time away from my daughter. A repetitive action of filling and painstakingly labeling and storing away each bag, so that day's caretaker could feed my daughter breast milk. The act of providing nourishment, and watching my daughter grow through a resource I have made myself has provided me with innumerable sensations of pride. Maintaining such a vast supply proved to be tedious and painfully time-consuming. A similar task is highlighted in Zofia Burr's work *Maternal Exposure (don't forget the lunches)*, in 1999-2000. Burr's work showcases the repetitive action of physically nurturing a child, by creating rows of sculptures of lunch bags. The daily action of tending to the needs of a child can be daunting and tautological, as expressed through the images of Mary Kelly's *Primipara*. Similarly, *Transitions'* milk bags highlight the repetitive nature of pumping and caring for an infant.

The used milk bags and empty rocking chairs also highlight the absence of mother, while simultaneously working as an index of absence. A physical empty chair is a promulgation for the missing mother, while simultaneously stacked with used bags, the sculpture is a typification of the hours of missing time between mother and child. Absence and sorrow are further emphasized through the night-time driving projection. The projection offers a ghostly, semi-opaque visual of monotony. A medium sized projection of approximately 4' by 3' provides the viewer with a glimpse, but not wholly immersive view of the road. The effect is intentional to allow the viewer room for interpretation, and wandering, just as my mind wanders through emotions while speeding home to hold my daughter at the end of the day.

Sleeping Baby

Along the side walls of the second half of *Transitions*, are Mary Kelly, *Primapara* inspired images of my sleeping daughter, and her room at night. When I creep home, this is the scene I enter while I peek over her crib and investigate all of the small, loving details of her space that my husband and I built for her. (see figure 6) The crib, her cloths, the rug, and curtains all take on a sad and lonely effect when viewed with such longing and in silence. However, the viewer is given the impression, the baby is asleep, and she is not to be disturbed. The black and white images lining the walls have helped me work through the complicated emotions involved. In *Art as Therapy*, the authors argue that art, “is a therapeutic medium that can help guide, exhort and console its viewers, enabling them to become better versions of themselves” (5 Botton, Armstrong). It further states that art serves to fulfill a need just like any



Figure 6 Sleeping Baby from *Transitions*

other tool, “A knife is a response to our need, yet inability to cut... To discover the purpose of art, we must ask what kind of things we need to do with our minds and emotions, but have trouble with.” (5 Botton, Armstrong) These authors further argue that in sorrow, we have no dignity, because we feel “freakish” and alone. (26 Botton, Armstrong) By highlighting my personal struggles, and with the knowledge that I am not alone in this fight, I hope to open the doorway for others to see and experience solidarity.

Children are not isolated creatures that only effect the parent and a selective few friends and family members. Eventually, children grow up. The experiences and lives that children lead will help to shape them into adults interacting in the world. Therefore, it is ignorant to assume that the sadness and loss of one mother has no effect on the greater discourse of society. By understanding the dignity in sorrow, and standing in solidarity with working mothers both inside and outside of the home, society can offer more dignified solutions.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Transitions highlights a personal journey from an artist to an artist and mother. Caught off guard by the changes in my life, and confusing emotional state, *Transitions*, stands in solidarity with all women, not just mothers or mothers to be, and their struggle to break culturally stagnate expectations. I try to highlight the truth and reality behind the struggle of being viewed and viewing myself as autonomous human with personal goals, expectations, and livelihood, beyond the wellbeing of my daughter, and the guilt of reaching for such goals. Are we not, as mothers, supposed to sacrifice our own happiness and self for that of our children? That is what our western culture would lead us all to believe, creating an unbreakable cycle of guilt, loss, and immersion of complicated emotions. I love my daughter, and I would give anything to see her healthy and happy, however, to see that to fruition, I myself must become a self-actualized and self-reliant individual. Overcoming the emotional hurdles of this tumultuous transition in my life is the first step.

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