

Animatrix: Animating Female Experience

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the practice and context of animating female experience, specifically responding to the issue of postnatal depression. The interrelated hypothesis argues the definition of 'animatrix'; a term that can be used to identify a particular approach to practice that is distinctly woman-centred or woman-created. In doing so, I address unfavourable conditions in the animation industry, both historically and continuing, that discourage an authentic female voice. This study takes an exploratory self-reflective practice approach wherein I examine my own and others' experiences and responses to mental health issues surrounding childbirth. I correlate these to associated themes of the representation of adult women, social constructs and expectations of women as mothers, concepts of taboo and abjection, along with ideas of embodiment, memory, and fragmented storytelling. Coupled with this, I scrutinise practical and structural techniques used in animating; in particular, hand-drawn animation as opposed to the use of two-dimensional, cut-out, or rigged animating techniques or sculptural or digital three-dimensional model styles. This extends to incorporating haptic and tactile aspects of a drawing-based practice, integrated with theories of flow, to develop iterative digital screen-based artworks that can be displayed in multi-modal environments. Through a critical review of my multidisciplinary practice surrounding the field of animation, I identify key criteria that may be used to designate the honorific of Animatrix to a practitioner or practical outcome. This designation and attendant criteria serve to provide a launching point for further critical discussion from academics, practitioners, and the industry about the representation and contribution of women in animation.

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed)
Andi Spark

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INTRODUCTION

This doctorate comprises animation-based artworks on a number of themes, including physicality, motherhood, and postpartum depression. An exhibition held in July 2014 at Crane Arts Center, Philadelphia, brought together a substantial body of work that encompassed the studio practice at the heart of this doctorate. The artworks were developed over eight years and had been exhibited in their component parts in various places, among them Wroclaw and regional Poland (2011); Gympie and regional Queensland galleries (2011 and 2013); Brisbane (2013); and Zagreb, Croatia (2014).¹ This exegesis provides a context for their production, explores how they relate to their field, and examines my own position as an artist animator.

In this research, I posit the notion of the ‘animatrix’ as a female animator with agency. The term is not to be considered as a diminished or belittled version of ‘animator’ in the way that ‘actress’ went into disfavour in post-feminist parlance because it singled out female performers as something other than ‘actor’. It can rather be considered in the same way that people think of aviatrix, executrix, or dominatrix: an agent of power, attentive yet independently spirited; a prevailing force of strong feminine agency; startling but not scary—and definitely not scared.

I use an animated story based on post-natal depression (PND) as one example to assert this concept of animatrix, concentrating primarily on creative animated production, rather than theoretical or psychological constructs. I relate my professional practice to other animation practitioners and correlate each aspect of this creative project to themes, processes, and roles or mantles that contribute to my hypothesis that supports the idea of an animatrix.

Etymology: Ani / Matrix Anima / trix

Exploring the etymology of animatrix, the third-century Latin form is defined as “she who quickens or animates” (Lewis and Short 1879). The roots of the modern usage of the word include ‘anima’ and ‘matrix’. Again, the Latin root of anima refers to the “breath, vital force, soul, spirit, and vitalism” (*Dictionary.com* n.d) in the feminine form, as opposed to the masculine ‘animus’. The anima is “the inner personality that is turned toward the unconscious of the individual” (*Dictionary.com* n.d) as opposed to

¹ See Appendix vi for a full list.

the super ego or persona. The suffix ‘-trix’ is used for forming feminine agent nouns, such as ‘obstetrix’ (referring to midwives of the Middle Ages prior to male medical intrusion in the birthing process), although now commonly used to correspond to masculine manifestations of words. The online *Oxford Dictionary* (2015) accepts both ‘-trices’ or ‘-trixes’ as plural forms. In this exegesis, I use ‘-trices’ in this context. Matrix, in anatomical terms, is from the Latin for the “formative part”, and “a substance, situation or environment that constitutes the place or point from which something else originates, takes form, develops, or is enclosed” (*Dictionary.com* n.d). Matrix references the womb, and at the same time, the intercellular substances of tissue. In Middle English coinage, the matrix referred to a female animal kept for breeding.

The combination of terms elucidates the idea of the animatrix: the feminine construct of breathing life and soul into an original object or form—more specifically, the animated form—and the core that holds it together. Additional exposition of the term used in defining a female animation practitioner includes concepts of physicality, materiality, and texture, both physical and metaphorical. It also suggests that animation is as inherently associated with the feminine as the masculine, regardless of how marginalised women are in the animation field (see Appendix i).

There is only a singular reference to ‘animatrix’ in the Harper’s *Latin Dictionary* (Lewis and Short 1879). Despite its appropriate contemporary meaning, the term is no longer listed in any modern dictionary. There is scant published reference to the word used in relation to female animators (Guedel 2003), with only a connection via the *Animatrix* (2003) film series that was developed as an animated allusion to the Wachowski Brothers’ 1999 *The Matrix* movie. While working in large animation studios, I had a few female colleagues, and we would refer to ourselves as animatrices, a plural form of animatrix, to differentiate ourselves within our overtly male-dominated profession. This term remains in use in vernacular parlance, but it has yet to become formally defined and used in industry or academia. To date, an essay by Maria Lorenzo Hernandez (2010) is the only recorded academic reference using this term, and I expand on her observations in my research. Throughout this exegesis, I use the form ‘-trix’ rather than ‘-trice’ (unless pluralised as noted above), and in this way attempt to encompass the term as both a noun that denotes the practitioner and the practice/outcome itself.

Through exploring this research topic and exposing its contextual factors, I propose a theoretical construct that defines and exemplifies the animatrix, so as to make a contribution to contemporary discourse on animation theory and practice. In doing so, I draw upon my own studio practice over the past thirty years and contemplate what factors contribute to donning the mantle of ‘animatrix’ for myself and my work: material, embodied, self-reflexive, and humorous. In approaching this research, I have asked the following questions: What constitutes the meaning of ‘animating’ and how does a female animator define herself professionally? What might woman-centred animation look like? What does a female animator make in a ‘best-case scenario’? What might animation look like that expresses *my* persona of woman, artist, mother, educator, mentor, and ultimately animatrix? In turn, the following questions were formed: What is an Animatrix? How can we identify the roles, processes and themes that may be considered or defined as animatrix-based? Why is it important to quantify and clarify a specific animatrix identity? And why now? These are some of the ideas I will explore below before providing a thesis outline.

Why Animatrix?

To construct a framework for defining the animatrix, I establish a number of distinguishing features that characterise selected animated media projects and associated social and industrial factors that contribute to a contemporary situation that (I believe) warrants attention. One primary factor is the adversity that women animators face, which I outline in the essay, “Seeking the Animatrix”, published in the inaugural issue of *Render* (Appendix i). In this essay, I highlight the contributing circumstances that prevent women from advancing their careers in the animation field, including long-standing misogynist attitudes in industry structures and processes, bias in education institutions, the lack of role models both on and behind screen, lower female representation in festival screenings and subsequent distribution channels, and a lack of consistent funding sources. In this exegesis, I also pinpoint how an animatrix may address the subject of adversity through portraying stories and visual treatments in different or alternate ways to a male animator approach.

The starting point of my animatrix concept was a response to animation theorist and historian Paul Wells’s idea of a ‘feminine aesthetic’ that he proposes in his book *Understanding Animation* (Wells 1998, 198). Wells defines key criteria in considering

films made by females: women are represented as subject rather than object whereby women are the focus of the film, and not “merely erotic spectacles or of marginal narrational interest”; language and dialogue are minimal, with ideas and story expressed in purely visual terms; and “radical texts” or unconventional narratives that challenge linear orthodoxy are presented (1998, 200). He also notes that a variety of forms and techniques are used, including many tactile and hybrid methods, requiring greater engagement from the artist/craftsperson animator and the viewing audience (Wells 1998, 199). Wells continues:

The feminine aesthetic seeks to reveal a woman’s relationship to her own body; her interaction with men and other women; her perception of her private and public role; her social and political identity within the domestic and professional space, as determined by law; and also, the relationship between female sexuality, desire, and creativity. (Wells 1998, 200)

While Wells’s notion is appropriate in identifying many female-driven animated films, it is limited in scope in that it categorises only a certain type of film/animation and a limited example of certain types of female animators while grouping all females into the ‘feminine’ category, which does not accurately represent the work that all women create. Wells asserts that the feminine aesthetic is located “intrinsically outside the commercial arena” (1998, 199), thereby diminishing its importance across the industrial animation landscape, and tacitly promoting a continued misogynist attitude. I argue that it is also problematic to use the term ‘feminine’, which references girlishness, softness and delicacy, and evokes potentially negative connotations of unmanly weakness and being wimpy. Therefore, I urge theorists and practitioners to adopt the stronger and encompassing term animatrix, as it affords enough breadth of definition and appropriate ambiguity to provoke further discussion in recognising and developing a vigorous female presence in the animation field, in both independent and commercial production. Popularising the term as a label of agency draws attention to women working in the mainstream or commercial animation industries and assists in identifying attributes that can be considered animatrix-driven, offering an alternate perspective to the current male-focused “representations of women; masculine codes of composition and narrational construction; and personal, social and political agendas concerning men” (Wells 1998, 199). Potentially, a new term may be coined as an ‘animatrixian aesthetic’.

Although not necessarily better or worse than the male animator, the animatrix provides a different voice to them, as well as a different physical, psychological, practical, and technical approach to animating. When referring to story meetings for

the Disney/Pixar feature film *Brave* (2012), director Brenda Chapman notes that “when she tried to explain the female attitude of the characters, the men (all men) just did not get it. It wasn't in their framework. Not their language. The nuance didn't register” (quoted in Sperling 2011). This comment exemplifies the disparity between a male-centred and female-centred understanding. Chapman continues, “It's not that they're wrong. It's just that there's a difference” (Sperling 2011). And this difference has barely been recognised—yet.

Essentially, the term animatrix may allow for some ambiguity or duality in embracing a production sensibility that is primarily female, yet could be implemented by any gender. In this, it may be hoped that the disparity and inequality I identify in my “Seeking the Animatrix” essay will be phenomena of the past. What I am seeking through my research is the recognition of a strong, powerful woman-influenced voice that will further permeate the currently male-dominated animation field.

Exegesis Outline

Chapter 1 of this exegesis delineates the historical, industrial, practical, and theoretical relationships of my animation-related studio work in the context of selected contemporary animation practitioners (including Joanna Quinn, Michèle Cournoyer, Vera Neubauer, and Sarah Watt) and the background context for the subject matter of this studio project. The tone of this exegesis will be poly-vocal, employing both auto-ethnographic autobiographical language in recounting specific personal experiences, and a more formal language mode in discussing contextual references. I outline how my thesis re-examines Wells's criteria for the ‘feminine aesthetic’ through creating a project that combines these criteria with key aspects of commercial industrial animation design developed across my early career in mainstream industry. This exegesis is concerned with content, themes and aesthetics in animation, whereas my “Seeking the Animatrix” (Appendix i) essay focused on issues of women's position and representation in the animation industry. The aim of this chapter is to promote an advanced discussion of women's engagement with the animated form.

In Chapter 2 of this exegesis, I describe the various visual elements and animated sequences of my studio work in order to articulate the connections between the themes, processes, and techniques explored in relation to an animatrix hypothesis. In this exegesis, I consider the animatrix as a subset of nominally female-produced

animation. The defining factors that I elaborate point to a kind of artist manifesto that emerges through my own work, which also prove useful in defining others works. My extended definition of an animatrix-driven project embraces 'third-wave' feminist insights of female agency, whereby the drivers of the story are considered 'characters' first and 'gendered' second.² Wells articulates the orthodoxy of character design where cartoon females are designed in relation to the primary representation of the male: "Male characters [are] defined by what they are and how they behave; female characters are understood by what they look like and through a vocabulary of stereotypical mannerisms" (Wells 1998, 204). Animatrix-designed characters have a primary focus on the mind or characteristic intellect, but are unafraid to draw attention to the corporeal and their physicality or sensuousness. This includes articulation of taboo subjects, particularly challenging perceptions of the body and how it is regarded, of psychology and attitudes towards normality, and sociological constructs such as how women 'should behave', posing a stance against inequality or exposing and disputing conditions of adversity. The animatrix approach allows for nuance or subtlety, encouraging the viewer to engage intellectually with the work. However, noting the previous criteria, boldness and a strident voice characterise the politics of the personal. Story structures and writing processes may emerge in fragments, delving into memory and finding truth in the idiom of witness, with narrative development posited on character development over gag or action-induced plot. Yet, this does not preclude visually vigorous action, particularly to portray female characters as physically energetically active. Artistic techniques vary. Whereas in the examples cited by Wells from almost twenty years ago show female-created works that tended towards the hand-made and drawn or hybrid techniques, advanced equipment and software are more readily accessible to the current generation. Contemporary animatrix works embrace digital and technical innovation, which, until recently, was commonly considered 'male' territory. Tom Sito's book *Moving Innovation; A History of Computer Animation* (MIT, 2013) notes the major pioneering period between 1975 and 1983 citing names of numerous key contributors including Ed Catmull, John Lasseter, Charles Csuri and Jim Clarke, following Ivan Sutherland's innovative "Sketchpad" software developed in the mid-1960s. Overwhelmingly, the memorable names in digital invention and innovation in the animation field are male. (Sito 2013) However, whereas the orthodox male approach fetishises technology in terms of techniques and effects and physical

² 'Third-wave feminism' also references ethnic diversity, and as such is embraced within this hypothesis; however, an extended and complex discussion of feminist politics is outside the scope of this exegesis.

efficiencies, the animatrix retains a core grounding in tactility and sensation, evoking an emotional response in the viewer exemplified through the use of textural treatments and echoing the physicality of the sketched image.

Another critical aspect towards defining the animatrix considers embracing multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary practice. Animation has traditionally been confined to screenings in cinema environments or television. Other works are designed for gallery space exhibition, including screening on monitors, via projection, and associated still image or installation works more readily concomitant with an art gallery setting. These environments are dubbed the 'black box', corresponding to the darkened space of the cinema, and the 'white cube', pertaining to the white walls of the high art gallery (Uroskie 2014). More recently, animated content is made for small screen mobile devices and digital monitors. I dub this digital space the 'grey screen' to differentiate the way we view and respond to content viewed in this way. The animatrix may work across all of these modes of distribution, potentially creating works that can be displayed in multiple modes, or multiple related works that can be displayed in different spaces. One of the main factors confining a truly borderless practice remains the structural restraints of the black box / white cube model whereby screen media works are divided along the lines of content. The restrictive divergence is apportioned as either a storytelling and narrative trope or an experiential or experimental aesthetic object. The main obstructive element lies in the existing architecture of display spaces: the black box cinema space has fixed rectangular screens and seating arrangements, while the white cube centres on illuminating static works within a rectilinear context. Video installation works have their own luminosity and do not need museum lighting' as such. Cinematic works require undivided attention—and comfortable seating for over an hour—which the gallery is not set up to provide. However, those limiting archetypes of the physical venue, cultural expectations, aesthetic approaches and technical feasibility are rapidly changing with the advanced qualities of video, digital production, and projection, and Internet and mobile technologies. With this in mind, I also identify the concept of 'flow', which refers to a concentrated state of focus on a specific task or activity that potentially elicits heightened creativity and innovation. Although originally described to "illuminate the phenomenology of optimal experience" for a person undertaking any activity (Namakura and Csikszentmihályi 2001, 105), flow appears critically important in the artistic process, and more so prevalent in contemporary small screen (i.e., grey screen) engagement.

In the Conclusion, I review the elements of the definition or criteria of the term animatrix and how one may identify works in this paradigm. While these criteria largely refer to the processes and products of the animatrix approach, it is also important to embrace the term in relation to the roles and functions that women undertake in an industrial workplace. When the gender balance becomes more equitable in mainstream commercial studios, with female practitioners in senior roles as designers and directors, the mantle of Animatrix can elicit a vision of capacity, responsibility, influence, and power. This concluding section offers thoughts towards how this term might be developed, discussed, and disseminated in the animation field, capitalising on the recent groundswell of support that is drawing attention to gender disparity in the international film industry.³

³ For example, the adoption of the 'Bechdel Test' by Screen Queensland for script assessment as part of the recent 'Gender Matters' initiative (Karlovsy 2016).

CHAPTER 1: Context, Approach and Rationale

This chapter begins by defining the art of animation, as well as introducing my work experience in this field. It identifies some of the differences between mainstream animation studios and the work of those who are operating in the ‘animatrix’ mode, with a major difference being the aspect of ‘physicality’. I discuss the work of several influential animatrices before turning to the subject matter that my studio research responds to: postnatal depression (PND). I define this condition before going on to relate my own experience of it. Following this, I introduce the visual outcomes of this research, the *Coming Through* series, by describing and detailing some of my processes and choices made for the production of the work. This chapter serves to provide deeper understanding of the field in order to identify the roles, processes and themes that may be considered or defined as animatrix-based, and contributes to addressing the question of what constitutes the meaning of ‘animating’ and how a female animator defines herself professionally.

1.1 CONTEXT

1.1.1 Affordances of Animation

Animation is a way of visualising the invisible. It is regarded as an effective communication tool, being able to provide complicated information in a short amount of time. As Wells (1998) notes, animation uses many narrative strategies; for example, condensation and ellipsis (compressed or edited continuity); synecdoche (a small image or idea that represents the whole or more complex picture); symbolism or metaphor (recognisable signs); sound and choreography (movement, pattern and rhythm); and penetration (ability to ‘see inside’ and depict inner workings). As it is not reliant on linguistic comprehension or ability, animation can have narratives that are neither linear nor rational. It also proves effective in communicating information to audiences through associative recognition of appealing characters that represent “every person” (Wells 1998, 122). In her introduction to *Animating the Unconscious: Desire, Sexuality and Animation*, Jayne Pilling echoes Wells’s list of affordances:

Animation can make a unique contribution to the exploration and expression of states of mind, unconscious impulses, sexuality and sensory experience. Unrestricted by the dictates of photographic realism and traditional narrative, animation can make such experience palpable via visual imagination, metaphor, metamorphosis and highly creative use of sound. (Pilling 2012, 12)

Animation is useful in showing elements of psychological vulnerability; as Wells comments, “animation has become a vehicle by which inarticulable emotions and experiences may be expressed” (1998, 184). It can also portray issues that cannot be shown as real life images, whether elements of stories or testimony too painful or impossible to photograph or real life events that haven't been caught on film and are incapable of adequately being recreated in live action. The quality of penetration is an important aspect of animated biographies, autobiographies, and documentaries; in particular, those that focus on mental states of mind. Referencing artist Paul Klee’s famous quote, “Art is not to reproduce what we can already see, but to make visible what we cannot” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 48), I qualify the term ‘animation’ in this thesis as an artist’s tool that communicates ideas.

In this spirit, using animation to tell a quasi-documentary style story has many benefits, as evidenced by Orly Yadin and Sylvie Bringas’s animated short film *Silence* (1998), which tells the story of a young holocaust survivor. In an essay published from the 2003 “Holocaust and the Moving Image” conference and subsequent book of the same name (2005), Yadin lists several key points that demonstrate how animation can facilitate authentic communication, and particularly its compatibility with the documentary format. She writes, “Animation can be the most honest form of filmmaking ... [This honesty] lies in the fact that the filmmaker is completely upfront about his or her intervention with the subject” (2005, 169). With animation, it is obvious that the images are constructed, and therefore “if we believe the film to be true it is because we believe the intention was true” (Yadin 2005, 169). As she continues, “Animation is less exploitative of its subjects” than live-action films because “there is no danger of being uncomfortably voyeuristic”; moreover, she argues, using animation is “a gesture of respect towards [sensitive] subjects” (Yadin 2005, 169). Importantly, “Animation can take the viewer to locations unreachable through conventional photography ... [it] is very useful for saying a lot in very few frames, and saying it ambiguously enough for the audience to bring its own interpretation and experience to the screen ... [Therefore] animated characters can seem more real than actors” (Yadin 2005, 170). As Yadin observes, when we accept that we are entering an animated world, “we tend to suspend disbelief, and the animation acquires a verisimilitude that drama-documentaries hardly ever achieve” (2005, 170).

1.1.2 Approaches to Animation

Recently, there has been a renaissance in the animated documentary form (Adams 2009). Annabelle Honess Roe (2009) identifies three distinct forms of animated documentary: mimetic, non-mimetic, and expressive. Mimetic animated documentaries rely on a form of imitation or substitution of what might be understood as 'real', which may include using the subjects recorded voice, or rotoscoped image, such as Dennis Tupicoff's *His Mother's Voice* (1997). Non-mimetic refers to works not based on reality and particularly imagined images and may include reconstructed or re-staged vignettes. Evocative or expressive forms more often include non-referential responses to thoughts or feelings or non-concrete concepts. Works that interrogate ideas of mental health issues seem to fall into the category of non-mimetic or expressive form through their attempts to depict non-tangible ideas. Animated documentaries could be classified as 'reflexive' in the sense that the viewer is aware of the fabricated nature of the image as a function of the text, relying on "artistic re-enactment" and "imaginative rendering" (del Gaudio 1997, 190). Bill Nichols considers the Reflexive mode of documentary concerned with the exploration of what is 'real' and the speculative recreating of potential realities, which may arrive at a theoretical rather than an irrefutable truth. Reflexive mode prompts the viewer to a "heightened consciousness of his or her relation to the text and to the text's problematic relation to that which it represents" (Nichols 1991, 60). Nichols also identifies the Performative mode, which affords a more subjective or autobiographical take on the text with a personal interpretation of the 'truth'. Both modes highlight the 'hand of the animator', making the audience aware of the constructed nature of what they are viewing. On the other hand, the expository mode is that more often considered 'documentary', in that it portrays constructed arguments, usually with an authoritative voice and accompanying images of tangible things that appear to portray the truth. This approach forms an indexical connection between image and text that creates a sense of believability and authority. Visualising the invisible, or representing internal states of mind, proves problematic in terms of this kind of indexical expectation of documentary because it does not show tangibly 'real' images; however, digital technology provides a challenge to supposed indexical representation in non-animated video-based documentary which moves the question of authenticity from 'belief' to 'trust'. (Brinch and Iversen 2001) Like Yadin, I argue that animation is an ideal medium to for intensely personal documentaries. In referring to narrative forms of animation, a key factor in following story is the suspension of disbelief that Yadin refers to, in that the world-building is so thorough

that the audience can accept improbable or purely fantastical environments or actions as plausible. In the case of biographical or documentary approaches, clearly articulated visual and textual crafting of convincing voices is analogous to a sense of trust. As Wells notes,

...exploiting the fine line between the plausibly 'real' and the overtly 'surreal'
... exposes the falsehood of objectivity which enables animators to address and illustrate the subjective—this may extend from dream-states, to aspects of the unconscious, to clearly articulated individual perspectives. (Wells 1997, 41)

The depiction of an inner state of mind is predicated on illustrating acts of memory and perceived cultural knowledge; therefore, epistemological certainties cease to exist (Wells 1997). The challenge for the animator/documentary filmmaker is creating a plausible document that successfully manages the delicate balance between an imagined narrative and the arbitrariness of 'reporting' the experiential. Creating works that elicit a sense of authenticity is achieved in a variety of ways—in terms of visual treatment, narrative and structural angle, personal and particular environmental situations, or conditions that are conducive to production. In "Seeking the Animatrix" (Appendix i), I refer to the work of notable Australian animatrices, among them Sarah Watt, Ann Shenfield, and Lee Whitmore, and discuss their attitudes and approaches to their work, paying particular attention to their individual crafted practice. As my direct peers, colleagues, and oft-times collaborators, their influence on my work has been far-reaching. With a distinctively personal focus, each of their films offers an authentic insight into the thoughts and circumstances of woman-centred stories that in turn inspired me to persist with my own projects.

1.1.3 Professional Practice and Studio Experience

One reference point in the overarching context of the animatrix is physicality. In Chapter Two, I expand on this concept. Physicality might translate to perceiving events through the senses (aural, visual, tactile) as opposed to the mind (intellectual, structural) or the approach to the concrete creation of the work, whether through the story or visual design. In considering physicality, the focus is on the animatrix as artist/performer. In this sense, their goal is not necessarily on rigid adherence to a story/script structure or homogenous character model sheets, nor the success or coherence of the overall production, but rather a real engagement with practice and process. This approach is diametrically opposed to conventional commercial animation practice, especially the process-based methodology of script and dialogue

or character-driven shorts that are highly controlled, with systematic production structures that are deemed successful by historic broadcast standards and therefore approved for production. This is not to say that the physical approach is flimsy or undisciplined; rather, it makes use of deliberation and investigative processes within the framework of the production stage. As Pilling observes, “As with most independents, choice of technique and working methods seem to be dictated by both personality and skills bias ... a recurring motif is the pleasure of tactility, and the need to allow for an organised process” (2007, 85).

Unlike my current animatrix work, my early professional experience at commercial studios (e.g., Walt Disney Television Animation, Mickey Duck Animation) focused on homogeneity and control. In a number of ways, this methodology was essential for delivering a coherent product created by a crew of between ten and one hundred artists. As outlined in Appendix i, commercial studio work adheres to a quota system; every week, the animator must produce a certain amount of ‘footage’ counted either in seconds or frames of the length of each finished scene (although sometimes, the quota is per drawing, per image, or per background painting). As in television commercial (i.e., advertising) work, schedules are constructed to meet strict broadcast deadlines. Each task in the production pipeline is broken down and allocated to different departments, with the flow of work requiring a precise system to ensure that the project can be achieved in the proposed timeframe. Every piece of work is checked and often double-checked, and it is essential that every artist conforms to the explicit design and uniformity of the ordained production design. The predetermined design vernacular of every shape, form, line, colour, texture, and timing, pacing, and style of animating ensures that the integrity and readability across the entire production is maintained. It is part of the commercial animation artist’s skill and expertise to be able to keep characters and their performance ‘on-model’ (Winder and Dowlatabadi 2011, 229–32).

This aspect of ‘physicality’ best encapsulates the schism between the ‘industry’ and the ‘indie’—hegemony versus personal artistry. When working in a large-scale studio structure style, it is undoubtedly essential to remain efficient and meet specific financial targets while also giving clear and unambiguous direction to many hundreds of artists in the pipeline who are often in multiple locations. For smaller feature film and series productions developed in singular studios, and particularly auteur single-artist productions, this level of controlled homogeneity is less necessary. In fact, allowing for arbitrary and accidental discoveries through the physically creative

process is an essential component of interpreting animatrix works. One consideration in my practice is how best to combine this organic approach into a mainstream framework. Another consideration is how to extend the definition of animatrix to incorporate women working in the mainstream animation industry, which would seem at odds with the previously described industrial strictures. Is it possible to define an animatrix as both organic and structured?

In considering this question, I examine the working processes used in drawn-style⁴ animation. For some practitioners, the practice of sketching is the core appeal of their work. The process of forming the artefact (the process of making multiple drawings that subsequently creates a moving image sequence) is also part of the end product. In his doctoral dissertation, painter Miles Hall considers this an essential part of the artist engaging with their mark-making medium, stating

For the artist, this means the encounter between herself (and her own subjectivity) and the specific potentiality of her chosen medium, resulting in an object of encounter—the art object. Following this, there is an important secondary encounter; the encounter between this art-object and the spectator ... also being an envelopment of potential. (Hall 2010, 50)

For the spectator (audience), the perceptible sketch offers verisimilitude; a verification of authenticity that the work is created by a real human hand, and not mechanically (or digitally, or even magically) produced. The physical-emotional engagement of the artist translates to the emotional engagement of the viewer. French-Canadian animatrix Cournoyer is renowned for her expressive painterly black ink drawn artwork in films such as *Le Chapeau/The Hat* (1999), *Accordion* (2004), and *Robes of War* (2008). She talks about her mark-making action as being intrinsically entwined with the subject matter: “To achieve greater emotional intensity, there is a process that is like an exclusive relationship between myself, paper and ink, and the characters. That’s how I get to the drawn line” (Cournoyer quoted in Roy 2006, 56). Creating lines or marks that epitomise thought processes is another key aspect in delineating the animatrix.

In the pre-digital years, animators would roughly sketch out the character’s movements, roughly planning out the timing and flow of the shot with a light blue pencil. (Every drawing required a new sheet of paper, and a shot of approximately ten seconds would require 120 sheets of paper.) The animator would then re-work

⁴ This is commonly called ‘traditional’ or ‘2D animation’; however, I specifically refer to animated images that are primarily drawn with pencil or brush or stylus, for example, rather than ‘Flash’ or cut-out style animation.

these sketches in graphite pencil, creating the clean outline that would then be inbetweened⁵ and sent to the Xerox⁶ department for copying onto clear cels before being hand painted. The light blue linework was used because it is non-photoreproducible in the Xeroxing procedure, so only the black finished outline would transfer to the cel. However, depending on the animation artist's style and how heavy the original blue pencil work was, sometimes there would appear a trace of the under-sketch, creating a kind of shimmer or ghostly shadowing across the movement of the characters. Disney's *The Jungle Book* (1967) and *Robin Hood* (1973) are the more well-known historic examples of this effect in commercial feature films. More recently, the French-produced *The Triplets of Belleville* (2003) and *Ernest & Celestine* (2012) mimic this treatment. Ryan Woodward's seminal short film *Thought of You* (2010) draws attention to and enhances the under-sketch in a visual treatment that contributes to the language of the story of the highs and lows of a relationship. The sketch-like quality reflects the transitory or transitioning elements of the characters, when they are in limbo or in 'becoming'. Although created completely digitally, Glenn Keane's *Duet* (2014) emphasises his signature 'sketched' look. This work is considered exceptional in the way that Keane melded the aesthetic sensibilities of the drawn image that he is well-known for as a Disney animator (e.g. his work on *Little Mermaid* 1989) into an interactive work for small screen. What is notable here is the aesthetic of the loose, expressive, and casually erratic drawn line effect that is translated via digital treatments, which then offers enough of the efficiencies and specifics of a systematic production line to be feasible as a practical, commercially viable process.

Although the sketch-trace is considered an undesirable aspect in the pursuit of a replicable, clear, and crisp flat colour 'toon aesthetic, these many cited cases evidence how it adds to the appeal of the animation. It seems that through the constant jitter and shimmer of the multiple and sequential frames of linework, the characters have more life to them, adding a frisson of anima or energy to their action. Furthermore, the blue pencil sketch often captures a sense of flow—the original intensity of the relationship between artist and medium—which affords a sense of personality and excitement that is not adequately translated in the clean-up stage (often done by a different department, and necessitating that characters also be put 'on-model' and therefore not the original artist's drawings). Because the drawings are

⁵ 'Inbetweening' refers to the process of creating drawings that link movement between one main ('key') pose and the next.

⁶ 'Xerox' was a company name; however, colloquially, it refers to the photocopying process.

subsequently re-transcribed through four more departments, the original charm is reduced or compromised. The ideal situation for the animatrix is to have a combination of creative freedom while utilising suitable efficiencies for optimum productiveness.

1.1.4 Further Influences and Confluences

Along with previously quoted influences, one of my strongest inspirations has been the work of Signe Baumane, a New York-based animatrix of Latvian origin. While Baumane exhibits a distinctive visual style, her work evidences an undoubtable tone of the commercial techniques used in larger-scale studio productions, such as cel-style 2D animating, similar to the kind of industry systems I experienced in my own career and outlined above. In this sense, my own practice and approach resonate strongly with her techniques. Her early series *Five Fucking Fables* (2002) followed by *Teat Beat of Sex* (2007–8) are uncompromising exposés of how women think about sex. More recently, she almost single-handedly completed a feature-length film, *Rocks in My Pockets* (2015) that illustrates five generations of women from her family afflicted by mental illness. As she notes in a comment in a recent interview about her work, “I think about sex every 9 seconds.... And every 12 seconds, I think about killing myself” (Margolis 2015). Considering these two sentiments, the connection with my own projects is palpable. Baumane combines a number of different techniques in her work; however, her oeuvre is primarily drawn animation, and her character designs have a distinctively autobiographical tone, despite also being constructed of a confluence of idioms. She also relies heavily on symbol and metaphor in her work, including a winsome and seductive ‘depression monster’, and a wide variety of everyday objects that are transformed into items redolent of transgression, such as a briefcase representing a penis, flowers resembling vaginas, lizards morphing into tongues, vacuum cleaners sucking thoughts, and bodies in metastatic flux. Visual metaphors intrinsic to animation are further discussed in Chapter 2, where I identify similar metaphors and symbols that I have used so far in my *Coming Through* series, while mapping the themes of the vignettes in relation to identified PND symptoms.

1.1.5 Defining PND

To articulate the framework, constitution, and organisation of my studio project, it is necessary to understand the context and defining terms of PND. *Coming Through* (2015) is structured as a series of vignettes that track one woman's experience through PND. Although the series can potentially be viewed in a linear way, each episode corresponds to a 'symptom' or experience/event of the illness, which can happen in any order—often not cumulative and often repeated, with varying intensity over varying timeframes. Furthermore, many of these symptoms may not happen to some people at all (Buist et al. 2005). It is unsurprising that a clear understanding of this illness has been difficult to reach. However, clinical and psychological research into this condition over the past twenty years, particularly that led by the late Prof Sherryl Pope and a team of researchers from the Women and Infants Research Foundation at the King Edward Memorial Hospital in Western Australia, has clarified a list of identifiable symptoms (Pope et al. 2000). These are categorised into three non-hierarchical areas: feelings, actions, and thoughts. They are listed below.

Feelings:

- having a very low mood
- feeling inadequate and a failure as a mother
- having a sense of hopelessness about the future
- feeling exhausted, empty, sad, tearful
- feeling guilty, ashamed or worthless
- experiencing anxiety or panic
- experiencing fear for and of the baby
- experiencing fear of being alone or going out

Actions:

- a lack of interest or pleasure in usual activities (including sex)
- insomnia or excessive sleep, nightmares
- appetite changes (not eating or over-eating)
- decreased energy and motivation
- withdrawal from social contact
- not looking after personal hygiene
- inability to cope with daily routines

Thoughts:

- being unable to think clearly or make decisions
- experiencing a lack of concentration and/or poor memory
- thinking ideas about suicide
- thinking about running away from everything
- worrying about partner leaving
- worrying about harm or death occurring to partner or baby (Pope et al. 2000)

The websites of the Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia (PaNDa) organisation and the Black Dog Institute list simplified versions of the above list, while beyondblue has a comprehensive list of information and links to resources, including online self-help blogs, like Just Speak Up. The Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS),

which was developed in 1987 to survey a range of emotional responses in women over the previous seven days (Cox, Holden, and Sagovsky 1987), is customarily given to women attending Maternal & Child Health service clinics in Australia. It is important to differentiate PND from what is termed the 'baby blues', characterised by irritability, moodiness, crying, and a sense of being overwhelmed. The baby blues appear to be related to hormonal surges that usually occur a few days post-birth and subsequently dissipate quickly (beyondblue). For most women, the shock of realising their newfound status is a complete surprise. As Wendy LeBlanc relates in *Naked Motherhood*, "Never again will she be a non-mother; never again will she be without responsibility for another human being; never again will she be the carefree person she was only nine months ago" (LeBlanc 1999, 161). Diagnosed perinatal depression can occur within weeks or sometimes months after giving birth. It may not affect a woman until she weans her baby or until her second or third child is born. As LeBlanc observes,

Postnatal depression does not normally strike suddenly on any particular day but takes hold insidiously in such a way that its presence may never be recognised or acknowledged by the mother, her spouse, the clinic sister or even her medical practitioner. Instead, her sense of wellbeing is steadily eaten away day by day until it seems to the mother, and everyone around her, that this is her 'normal self'. The longer the depression goes undiagnosed, the harder it becomes for a woman to admit that all is not well in her world. (LeBlanc 1999, 162)

PND can last from several weeks to months or even years, with up to 50 percent of women either diagnosed late or still reporting symptoms after twelve months. Furthermore, "Recovery has the sense of being two steps forward, one step backwards" (LeBlanc 1999, 162). The prevalence of PND is cited at around one in seven women, or approximately 15 percent of births. It occurs across social, cultural, and economic boundaries, and symptoms are universally comparable. However, it has been established that lower socio-economic status combined with limited maternal support are contributing factors to higher percentages (Buist and Bilszta 2006). LeBlanc refers to the NSW Women's Consultative Committee report "If Motherhood Is Bliss, Why Do I Feel So Awful?" (1999, 166), which argues that there are some factors that predispose a woman to PND, which include the following:

Stressful life events during pregnancy or the postnatal period, e.g. moving house, financial problems, death of someone close, caring for three or more children;
Lack of confiding relationship—particularly with partner or own mother;
Unresolved past grief, e.g. miscarriage, abortion, adoption, stillbirth, or the loss of a parent as a child (particularly mother)
High levels of intervention during childbirth with low levels of explanation;
Low levels of social support after childbirth;

Lack of information about the possibility of stress and anxiety after the birth;
A difficult or handicapped baby; and
Medically, there is a link between women who experience severe
premenstrual tension (PMT) and then suffer PND in that they appear to be
more susceptible to hormonal changes
(NSW Women's Consultative Committee 1999, 20–21)

Many people's understanding of PND is limited to a vision of a sad dishevelled woman constantly crying and unable to care for her baby. In fact, many women successfully mask these kinds of symptoms from external view, preferring to hide the fact that anything may be wrong. In their report for *The beyondblue National Postnatal Depression Program Prevention and Early Intervention 2001–2005*, Justin Bilszta and Anne Buist highlighted some of the stigmas associated with depression, noting that even when identified, women are often reluctant to accept a clinical diagnosis that labels them as 'depressed' (Buist and Bilszta 2006, 49). Following with an essay in the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Bilszta (2009) cites studies identifying some of the varied reasons behind this attitude. Poor recognition of symptoms is a major factor. In the overwhelming experience of coping with a newborn, it is difficult to differentiate what might be 'normal'. This can be linked to problems of uncaring and unknowledgeable health professionals, and unsupportive partners and families. On a personal level, the stigma and fear of the perceived ramifications of being identified as mentally ill, plus heightened feelings of failure or of never recovering, can lead to downplaying of symptoms. Many attribute feelings of distress to psychosocial issues, such as loss of freedom, financial pressures, and housing issues (Whitton et al. 1996; Tam et al. 2002; Ugarriza 2002; Carter et al. 2005; Bilszta 2009).

Accessible information has escalated significantly in the past five years, with websites now offering video-based testimonials from various sufferers and further links to forums and other information sites. Some of the testimonials have come from high-profile members of the media, who are considered 'brave' and revolutionary in identifying with the illness and voicing their problems. In an interview following the publication of her autobiographical book, prominent Australian newsreader Jessica Rowe talked about the PND she experienced after the birth of her second daughter, stating that "It ... shocked her that she felt so ashamed of admitting it, of not coping" ("Jessica Rowe: Television News Presenter" n.d.). More famously, American actor Brooke Shields published *Down Came the Rain* (2005), which outlined her struggle with PND, and recently, via popular media outlets like women's magazines and blogs, other contemporary Hollywood stars have identified themselves struggling with

the illness, including actors Gwyneth Paltrow and Courtney Cox, along with other high-profile professional women. This helps to bridge awareness of the problem; however, connecting emotionally to sufferers requires a range of strategies.

There is little consideration that men may also suffer from PND, and certainly pre-existing episodes of depression combined with extreme stressors in family life contribute to this. This brings up potential issues and larger arguments regarding the roles of women, of men, and of families in our society along with attitudes to parenting. However, for the scope of this project, the focus here remains on women, drawing attention to PND, and a creative female-centered response to personal and familial experience of the illness. The intention of this project is to offer a potentially therapeutic rejoinder via the appeal of recognition for those women who are currently or who have experienced PND, and as an 'open letter' to those approaching motherhood. It is now recognised that a component on "adjustment to parenthood" in antenatal counselling and preparation can significantly reduce the likelihood of postnatal stress or depression (NSW Women's Consultative Committee 1999, 6).

Based on my experience with PND and my own understanding of the affordances of animation, coupled with my extensive experience in both mainstream and independent animation industry production structures, I endeavoured to find a way to bring this issue to light in an effective and appealing way. Before discussing the visual outcomes of this research, it is necessary to explain the personal context of this investigation. This following sub-section outlines an open narrative of my entirely subjective experience.

1.2 APPROACH

I had to dismantle (t)his inhibiting critical power over me before I could tell the story. But telling the story was the only way to do the dismantling.
(Bechdel 2006)

1.2.1. In Deep...

I discovered PND over twenty years ago. I can pinpoint almost the exact date and time it hit me. It was around 7am on a cold, overcast day. I was sitting on the couch in my lounge feeding my three-week-old daughter while my extremely active twenty-month-old son played nearby. My baby was an easy one—chubby, gurgling, engaged with her surroundings and contented with life—although she fed a lot. Every two hours, at least. I was tired. I was sore from the birth. In fact, I could barely sit

comfortably due to extremely large and painful haemorrhoids that had appeared following a surprisingly fast three-hour natural labour that produced this ten-pound baby. Although brushed off as an unfortunate side effect of birthing, the haemorrhoids complicated my situation considerably. And I also underplayed the severity of the problem. On this cold morning, my husband wandered into the lounge, holding a steaming hot cup of coffee, after having a solid night's sleep and a leisurely wake up. On seeing that we all appeared calm and comfortable, he announced to me "I'm going to take a nice long shit."

And that's when I lost mine.

I completely flipped.

On the surface, my screaming tantrum was of the "it's alright for you" flavour; I noted that I had been severely constipated for the past few months, and suffering from the fear and pain endured thanks to said piles. Coupled with the sleeplessness that had been ongoing for over two years, the lack of even a ten-minute window to even get to the toilet by myself, let alone enjoy a leisurely cup of coffee, I had reached breaking point. I unleashed a terrifying, shrieking dragon woman who had been residing just under the veneer of my happy-go-lucky, good-natured, cope-with-everything persona. This outburst signalled the beginning of a twelve-month period where I had to face some very uncomfortable truths about myself and my personal situation as well as about the status of women and the realities of women in the workplace. In particular, this experience drew attention to my career as an animator.

All of those things had a similar status: peripatetic, fractured, unfocused, and uncertain. As a freelance animation industry worker, you are only as good as your last job—the only way to continue working in the industry is through colleagues' recommendations. There was a sense of loyalty to the crew, but also a fierce intolerance to lazy and indiscreet co-workers. Today, a sassy showreel might get an animator freelance work, which is often remotely produced from the privacy of their own home, but politeness and collegial decorum remains paramount—as well as a good sense of humour. At the time, however, one risked being forgotten or sidelined permanently after being absent from the workplace (or moreover, marketplace) for too long. That's how it felt.

I've always enjoyed a good metaphoric pun. It's a well-versed homily that having a baby is like a bomb going off in your life. Adding PND is like incendiary secondary and tertiary blasts, creating subterranean earthquakes in your being, sending off shockwave tsunamis of wreckage and tears. Twenty years ago, PND was still only

mentioned in hushed circles; part of the ‘mental illness = inherent weakness’ paradigm, or even ‘inherited weakness’, whereby generations in the same family seemed to be afflicted. At the time, depression was only glanced over in pre-natal classes, with a sentence or two on ‘feeling blue’ and ‘out of sorts’. There was a tone of not needing to ‘scare new mothers’. In the pre-Internet days, information about the problem was hard to find: some desultory photocopied sheets were available in maternal and child health clinics, with a phone number for the volunteer counselling service, and a dated and depressing video infodoc at the library. General practitioners’ diagnoses customarily sent you on a path to medication, and counsellors or psychiatrists were prohibitively expensive. In the scant information I came across, there was a list of potential contributing ‘symptoms’ that may predispose someone to PND, but none of them seemed to relate to me—at least, that’s what I thought. Like many women operating in a masculine work environment, I was also an expert at masking all my problems and negative emotions. Despite a fractured childhood home coupled with a physical disability, I was also an expert at independent living and Getting On With It.

But after my outburst, I started crying and didn’t stop for six months. It was akin to mourning. Suddenly, regardless of how loved and cherished and wanted my children were, I was grieving the loss of everything that was my Self. I cried for no reason at all and every reason possible. And I also felt completely blank. Nothing. Vacant. It was obvious that this couldn’t be happening to me! My queen-of-denial-crossed-with-Pollyanna persona had worked so well for so long, yet suddenly everything was stripped bare, and I was forced to face a period of rebuilding my Self—frame by frame.

The animator’s parlance is apt for this process of rebuilding. Animation deals with bringing things to life, with characters that typically reflect clichéd personas. Like mothering, the industry is also peripatetic and unpredictable, with demanding fickle clients/audience and inhumane deadline expectations. Animators are required to have a broad understanding of human psychologies, physiologies, and peccadilloes, while maintaining focus on the minutiae of character, performance, story, and mechanics of production. The industry is also highly competitive, with wages tied to piecework rates. Twenty years ago, there was no maternity, sick or holiday leave, or any consideration of parenting responsibilities when it came to delivering to target. As a parent of one child, I could manage my freelance commitments while rocking the

baby to sleep in a makeshift cradle under my desk. As a parent of two under the age of two, I became a mother with a capital M.

1.2.2 Marginal

Although I had spent much of my career until having children as a journeyman animation worker, ascending from lowly cel-painter to key animator, I really wanted to direct; to craft a film or an advertisement or a project with my own inimitable creativity and imagination. However, not only was I hampered by my own humility and insecurity (common to most creatives), but also by the subtle but pervasive gender bias in the industry. This gender bias is only now being discussed in media (Silverstein 2014; “Gender Matters National Hub”) and my experiences are reflected in comments made about women in the industry who would not succeed until they “grew a penis” (Spark 2015; see Appendix i). Many of the projects I worked on perpetuated the gender stereotypes of the gentle secondary character female with no agency. I also never made much of a fuss, nor had the confidence to be stridently feminist at the time, preferring to quietly hone my skills and craft and make my way forward in the field. Although having taken a very different career approach, independent Czech-British animator and creator of more than thirty films, Vera Neubauer’s comment resonates with me: she says she “deliberately avoided taking up feminist positions, which carry a serious risk of misinterpreting the issues that may be problematic [in autobiographic films]” (quoted in Felperin 2012).

One other important distinction of my persona is bilateral sensorineural degenerative deafness, diagnosed post-puberty and with no apparent cause, apart from purported congenital grounds. Essentially, this means that from around the age of sixteen, I started to gradually lose high-frequency hearing in both ears for no obvious reason. This had an undeniable effect on my self-confidence, particularly having been an exceptionally musical child; yet, I was determined to not let this disability hamper my vocation. I discuss this predicament in more detail in Chapter 2.

At this time, I also felt marginalised and excluded from the ‘indie grant-getters club’. Despite having worked on a number of independent grant-funded short films with female directors, my experience and approach to the work was more target- and goal-oriented than them due to my commercial background. My approach did not synch well with an unstructured, inefficient, and often uneconomic production system.

Moreover, these directors (whom I would consider animatrices) had the ability to be passionate and focused on a singular idea over a period of up to two years, whereas I had become accustomed to turning over projects and ideas every few weeks or months. And truthfully, I felt I had nothing to say.

Animation evokes nuances of comic timing and visual hilarity, although many of the projects I admire made by other female directors have an unmistakable seriousness about them (e.g., Alison de Vere's *The Black Dog* 1987; Michèle Cournoyer's *Le Chapeau* 1999; Suzan Pitt's *Asparagus* 1979) as well as an overtly feminist tone. Prior to my PND, my natural instinct, particularly in masking my deafness, was to be the clown, and make jokes or cynical witty asides, preferring to find truths in the comedy of situations. As Maria Hernandez notes in her article on female animators, "...this subversive power of laughter is also a specific contribution that distinguishes the female viewpoint" (Hernandez 2010, 80). It appeared I did not take much seriously, despite hidden undercurrents of earnest contemplation coupled with anxious insecurity. How would I find my voice? How could I reconcile my satirical, slapstick persona with the gravity and intensity of much that bothered me? Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel *Persepolis* (2004) and the subsequent animated film of the same name (2007) were inspirational for me, particularly the quasi-autobiographical nature of the story and the fact that the work was many years in the making. Hernandez writes about independent animation created by women, and comments on the *Persepolis* film:

Despite Satrapi's personal involvement with the story, the passing of time has helped her to reach a historical perspective, a reflection opposed to anger—the seed of extremism and fanaticism. Instead of being solemn and tragic, she wanted to appeal to all audiences through her own experiences, irony and a sense of play... Thus, humour became a key weapon for exposing the absurdity of everyday situation... (Hernandez 2010, 80)

I formed the idea for my doctoral research project well before the widespread Internet meme phenomenon, and the double entendre humour of the linguistic and visual conflation. Contemporary comical slice-of-life strips, such as "Cyanide and Happiness" (2004–) with its nihilistic social commentary, Allie Brosh's episodes in depression at *Hyperbole and a Half* (2009–13) and Nick Seluk's *The Awkward Yeti* (2011–), are closest to the kind of self-referential humour that I felt suited this subject matter. The required ingredients were humour and poignancy.

1.2.3 Galvanising

As it happened, my episode of maternal and personal unravelling became the matrix for the next phase of my career. From this point, something else originated, took form, and developed. Following this period, I was appointed in more senior roles in productions I worked on: lead trainer for a large-scale children's television series, and subsequently Assistant Production Designer and Animation Director on the same series, managing a crew of more than one hundred artists. Later, I worked as Animation Director for a high-profile television feature (*The Ways of the Birds* 2000) working alongside women who inspired me (Fiona Eagger, Sarah Watt), which subsequently led to an offer to teach at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), then the most highly regarded animation school in the country. And so on from there. It seems like a big leap between working as a jobbing animator to directing crews of people. Perhaps this complicated period of PND gave me some insight into my strengths, and helped me develop palpable coping and management skills as well as confidence and direction.

When I was going through PND, the information presented about it did not relate to me at all. I wanted to add something to the dialogue that spoke to women like me: educated, professional, artistic, normally full of humour, engaged, and passionate about life and with the ability to see beyond the immediate issue. Something that was both reflexive and self-referential. Something that pricked the festering sore of my threatening descent into temporary madness. It's taken over twenty years and a convoluted journey across the landscape of animation theory, form, education and practice to discover through this project, what it really means to be an animatrix. Undertaking this doctorate has sharpened my focus not only on my own personal and professional career, triggering a renaissance in my passion for creative production, but it has also highlighted the need for further and deeper investigation into many of the issues raised in terms of defining and subsequently giving prominent attention to animatrices in Australia.

1.3 RATIONALE

1.3.1 Project Outline

I developed the *Coming Through* project by directly responding to my own experiences as well as anecdotal evidence of others' experiences, and through reviewing the list of recognised PND symptoms that have been identified through clinical practice evidence. The methodology included auto-ethnographic (Orbe and

Boylorn 2014) and grounded theory research (Buchanan and Bryman 2011) along with information analysis combined with action-based practice (Pink 2012). It also considered elements of documentary, and pondered notions of authenticity and truth within the fictionalised genre of animation. A focus on gathering information and data on specific mental states via clinical practice evidence affords an element of authenticity and epistemological truth, unclouded by sentiment or cultural bias; however, my intention for this project is to highlight the deeply personal lived experience of people encountering this illness. This methodology is common to expressive documentary treatments, used in both collateral therapy (Carlisle, Henderson, and Hanlon 2009) and narrative/informational contexts. A striking example of animators working with mental health patients in therapeutic and creative ways are Swiss filmmakers Nag and Gisele Ansoerge's twenty-year project (1962–81), where they gathered stories and testimony from psychiatric patients at the Cery Hospital Psychiatric Clinic of the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, from which they created film vignettes (for example, "The Poet and the Unicorn" 1963, "Seven Nights of Siberia" 1967). As a filmmaker, Ansoerge was deeply affected by the exposure to the patients, which also translated into highly engaging audience encounters. He states,

The way in which the patients analyzed things and made judgments allowed me to learn to know myself better. I discovered a world profoundly human, which had to work with very great suffering, the intensity of which is hard to imagine....These films should not arouse compassion, but rather an interest and a sense of active conscience in the face of the mystery of mental illness. (Ansoerge 1998, 38)

In this same way, I draw attention to a general audience's consciousness about PND, and re-examine my own notions of maternal mental health and wellbeing in the framework of identifying as an animatrix.

The 'story' of PND is complex and multifarious; each affected woman experiences different symptoms in different ways. Thus, I endeavoured to accommodate this complexity in my approach to developing the project. My aim is that the work is multi-faceted and affords a space for a variety of voices. Therefore, the project is designed as a series of animated vignettes, each responding to one or more of the identified symptoms, such as feeling inadequate or worthless as a mother, being exhausted, empty, sad, tearful, or being unable to think clearly or make decisions. Some of these overlap or involve nuances and subtleties; for example 'empty, sad, and tearful' may evoke images of crying, but this symptom also correlates to 'not being able to cry'. The differences between being 'sad' and 'empty' can also be

interpreted in varying ways. The vignettes or episodes are intended to work as a memory jog, providing a moment of recognition in either the visual or thematic content. Although aimed at an ideal audience of postnatal mothers, it is not intended to provide a therapeutic function, rather offering an engaging entertainment; however with further development and engagement with health professionals and organisations, this may become possible. Humour is another essential factor in this project. Rather than a verbal gag or pun, the kind of humour here operates on the shock of an unexpected visual twist or an ironic juxtaposition of elements. Many of the vignettes are inconclusive; they do not rely on a punchline, climax, or denouement. Some aspects of the humour rely on popular culture references, such as the 'used-car salesman' characterisation; however, these are in almost universal contemporary use so as to be recognisable across most modern cultures and age groups. Rather than focus on a political or overtly didactic approach, I am more concerned with the idea of communal connection in a similar way to Neubauer's films. Felperin states,

In contrast to the worthy agit-prop of some feminist animators, Neubauer's films refuse to preach and seem to prefer to problematise through abstraction and personalise through the use of autobiography that declines to claim for itself any universal application, while still inviting the viewer's identification (Felperin 2012, 71)

The project is constructed to also contribute to an entertaining, information-based website where the vignettes can be accessed individually or reviewed as a whole. Currently, the works are displayed under "Clips" on a temporary website (*Andi Spark* 2015) with a page assigned for each of the vignettes. The vignettes can also be accessed in random order, in much the same way that experiencing the illness does not necessarily occur in any particular order. Also, as noted, not all symptoms present in all people, so this might be searchable to enable viewers to find an episode that particularly relates to them. I have also created an assembled edit of a number of vignettes that can be viewed in the form of a short film. In Chapter 2, I elaborate on my approach to fragmentation and script.

In the first iteration of what I intend to be a long-term and larger-scale project, the works exhibited at Crane Arts (2014) were collated and screened in looping sequences on very small screens (iPad minis) displayed concurrently. As I discuss further in Chapter 2, I envisage that one defining aspect of animatrix works may be transmedia objects, in that they can be effectively displayed across a variety of distribution modes, for example, from small-screen mobile devices to gallery-based projections. I also propose that this project is interactive in the way that it encourages

further stories to be potentially collated from viewers and readers who may contribute another anecdote of an event or situation that is a variant descriptor of a particular symptom. These can be translated into illustrations or animations. In the long term, for example, there may be five or six (or more) different ways of showing the concept of 'appetite change' or 'extreme lethargy'. These can then be added to the site. Further to this doctorate, I propose to explore sponsorship and research funding to fully realise these plans.

It is imperative that each episode is short, as women suffering through this condition have very little available time, and most of it is in short bursts. They also have a considerably lower cognitive load due to the demands of multi-tasking in caring for a baby. Using simple sketch-like images adds to the sense of immediacy, and of a story being told by 'everywoman' and stories shared between friends and told in the 'now'. Again, this channels Neubauer's approach of using a strong graphic style "which gives a sense of swift and urgent execution, does not fetishise technical perfection" (Felperin 2012, 70). Essential to this stylistic treatment is the consideration that these micro-stories or vignettes are a small part of a larger, more comprehensive, voice that will encompass multiple viewpoints from various women, even from individuals with multiple ways of recounting their experiences. As Felperin continues,

...Neubauer's films attempt to tell stories through montages of striking images and fragmentary scenes which refuse to pull the wool of linearity over the spectator's eyes. Instead, the time of her narratives is fractured, the 'plots' cut up and reassembled on the editing table, evoking the feeling of stories half-remembered, narrated by someone perhaps with... digressive tendencies...., or perhaps with unreliable memory, or perhaps just someone trying to say not 'this and then this' but everything at once. (Felperin 2012, 70)

The sketch drawings in *Coming Through* are easy to read, being uncluttered and with an almost naïf/naïve quality that does not require sophisticated renderings of perspective or depth of field. In his book *Understanding Comics*, artist and theorist Scott McCloud argues that the abstracted cartoon image emphasises specific details, and that by "stripping down an image to its essential 'meaning', an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't" (1994, 30). Similarly, the character design and visual vernacular mimics a simplified cartoon style. Honess Roe (2013, 110) emphasises the way that we perceive words and images differently, and that our understanding of visual language pre-dates our formal education in verbal and textual language, whereby images can reach the emotions before they are cognitively understood. This is a deliberate contrast to most other works in this genre

(i.e., information or communication videos about maternal health issues) that use live-action testimonials. In this way, a cartoonified character can potentially appeal to a greater demographic, in that engaging the audience is not restricted to their personal identification with the actor or persona on screen (e.g., race, status, age), which prevents them from “making judgements based on appearance” (Honesty Roe 2013, 114). Honesty Roe argues that “non-indexical media may be the most vibrant and evocative way of remembering the past” and, as I also argue, can evoke an internal feeling of recognition. Through the ability of the animated character to transform or transmogrify, possibilities for self-identification are enhanced. In this project, I use a lead character based on a rough caricature that represents myself.

The embodied self as cartoon character becomes one step removed from the real me, but also from the real viewer. Although the character may appear as a heteronormative non-dysmorphic white female, she is intended to represent the pantheon of various bodies and selves. The caricature displays as a simplified female form, echoing McClouds’ construct of ‘stripping down... to essential meaning’ in the same way we understand the Male/Female symbols denoting public toilets. In this way, metamorphosis is also an essential tool to quickly represent various body states, locations, positions and mental images (Wells 1998, 69). Likewise, as noted in section 1.1.4, the use of signs and symbols is essential to rapid recognition in a short space of screen time. Many symbols can effectively take the place of dialogue or voice-over, which is an important consideration. The episodes are designed to be watched quickly and quietly (so as not to disturb a sleeping baby) and intended to be available across cultures and language barriers. Visual communication tools including physical cues (postures and gestures), facial expressions (and eye movement), and the staging and spatial relationship between figures convey a more universal meaning than dialogue (Pease 1981) Despite this intention, there are also some episodes that incorporate text on screen as speech bubbles or thought bubbles as a short-cut to amplify the performance acting of the characters. In this way, instead of needing more screen time to fully act out the way the character may be thinking, the text can contribute to an explanation. On a personal note, my deafness brings a reliance on subtitles and screen text; therefore, my own works maintain this dependence.

1.3.2 The Process (Between Two Worlds)

My working process straddles the two worlds of studio-based communicative structures and an independently based intuitive model. Informed by many years of professional practice, my default approach references the pre-production and planning required for large-scale productions. However, for this project, I needed to allow for spontaneous changes and unintentional additions or 'happy accidents' in the execution, particularly because of the intimacy of the ideas and story.

I commenced articulating my ideas with single image sketches as a kind of cartoon or comic picture, much like a snapshot of the core of the emotional and physical sense that I recalled from the period of depression. These initial sketches formed keystone conceptual design images for the project and stimulated the animation process. Julie Roy from the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) notes a similar modus operandi in Cournoyers's filmmaking approach:

This importance accorded to the raw material of the unconscious is expressed in her process. She animates the initial fragment, then a second, a third, and so on. These fragments are then stuck on the wall in her studio. A storyboard gradually develops. (Roy 2012, 38)

In an interview in 2001 with the NFB, which provided support for the creation of her works, Cournoyer herself talks about the development of her work: "I never knew what was going to happen. I was communicating with my unconscious, the demons, angels and everything else inside me. I was in a state of need. It was utterly compulsive" (Roy 2012, 38). Following my concept sketches, I created thumbnails to flesh out the action or scenario for each scene. In fact, many of the shots do not require a lot of 'animating', as the essence of the emotion can be read from a simple single image. The more I created, the stronger was my recollection of the frantic feelings I had experienced. At the time of creating this work, there was no sense of a linear narrative story, just fragments of memory and raw feelings. As Cournoyer reflects in her interview essay with animation critic, biographer, and director of the Ottawa Animation Festival, Chris Robinson, "It [i.e., the process] became more and more liberating, I worked in a primitive, direct communication with my devils and found the story in the execution" (Robinson 2005, 95). Pierre Hebert, a contemporary of Cournoyer and fellow Canadian, also reflects on the intensity of emotion Cournoyer expresses in her work: "I realised that she's seeking a kind of welling up of material, where she gives expression to something that is beyond her control" (quoted in Roy 2012, 32). In the same way, channelling my past emotions was a way to re-visit the raw intensity of the illness.

My first raw early concept sketches include many 'crying' images—overflowing tanks of water, volcanoes of tears, drowning—as well as graphical pop culture references, such as a snakes-and-ladders board representing losing the plot and the idea of taking one step forward and then fifteen steps back; a 'Used Baby Yard', replete with 'snake-oil salesman' type character to trade in babies who cannot be adequately looked after; and stereotypical supermarket sales banners and signs changing to threatening slogans of devouring babies (Folder 2a Appendix iii "Original Story Sketches"). From these, I created six exhibitable concept design images (Folder 3a "Concept Art – *Tedium Vitae* collection") that could be exhibited together and function as an aesthetic whole. These were collected under the single title of *Tedium Vitae* ('tired of life') as part of a group exhibition of members of the Queensland College of Art faculty and the Polish Art Academy entitled *Shared Vision... Wspólna Wizja* in Wrocław, Poland.⁷ The finished works served as a signpost to the way I envisioned the project would look, as well as the tone and treatment of the story, using visual and textual puns in the titles, such as "Tears for No Reason", "Rain Hat", "Dodgy City", "The Desolator", "Nutcass", and "Tedium Vitae". Displaying these in a gallery ('white box') environment also signposted a cross-disciplinary focus of how I might define myself as an animatrix and served as a bridge between the 'gallery artist' and the 'screen artist'.

1.3.3 The 'Script' (Fragmentation and Snippets)

Most animation productions, including short films, are predicated on a finished script. This is the format recognised by organisations that fund projects, although visual treatment, including character design and concept art, is also fundamental to understanding the range and scope of any project. Animators, and particularly animatrices, work with a stronger visual scripting technique (over a script or text-based process), usually through concept art development and subsequent storyboarding. In this case, the initial visual images are clearly the touchstones for the story; however, the story did not play out in a sequential manner, but emerged in fragments. My quest was to form these snippets of vision and memory into some kind of cohesive scenario.

⁷ The exhibition opened in November 2011 and toured to nine other galleries, including those at Łódź, Warsaw, Lublin, and Sanok.

Similarly, Cournoyer's artistry lies in the relationships between the scenarios: "It is in the process of taking these fragments, each of which has its own meaning, and linking them together so that an emotion, a guiding line, maybe even a narrative, emerges" (Roy 2012, 38). This approach is risky because it does not conform to the expected three-act story formula. It presupposes that the visuals may be strong enough to get the idea across. It also enhances the sense of the project being a collection of disparate ideas loosely strung together by a connecting theme or style, similar to an anthology of cartoons. One of the most influential and inspirational films that triggered my memory of this 'fragment' approach was Marjut Rimminen's *I'm Not a Feminist, But...* (1986), which is an animated interpretation of drawings from a book of the same name by illustrator Christine Roche. The drawing style is varied and the vignettes do not follow a strictly narrative pattern, although there are linking elements through some of the character scenarios and the soundtrack, which includes a selection of song motifs. As curator Ruth Lingford (n.d.) notes, "They are mostly not laugh-out-loud funny, but Rimminen gives the film an entertaining pace and a lightness of touch".

Accordingly, the vignettes in *Coming Through* vary in style of humour; some elicit a wry chortle, and others a surprised laugh. In discussing comics and graphic novels, theorist Elisabeth El Rafeie states that "psychoanalytic approaches to humour propose that jokes can function as a welcome release from the constant need to repress our socially unacceptable desires" (El Rafeie 2012, 70). Likewise, I uphold that using humour in this context, particularly in discussing contentious subjects like feminism, gender disparity, disability and mental illness, offers comic relief for the audience who may be identifying with similar socially unacceptable thoughts or feelings.

1.3.4 The Visual Vernacular (And What Is Humanly Possible)

Obvious influences to my visual style come from the cartoon and comic genres. Using flat and bold 'toon-style colouring is also prevalent. The subject matter in these pieces is dark and disturbing, dealing with taboo topics like thoughts of suicide, and confronting ideologies and orthodoxies about the body and psyche. Using bright colours undermines the gravity of these themes yet deliberately draws attention to the impact of our surprise once we realise the content. Bright colours make us think about cheery and positive children's books and television series formats, with their

quintessential happy endings or resolutions to problems. (Boyatzis & Varghese 1994) However, in this series, there is no resolution or happy ending, only a sense of 'travelling through'. The animated scenes also play out like this; for example, beginning with an innocuously cheery image of a smiling blinking chubby baby's face, which unexpectedly erupts to cover the screen with vomit and diarrhoea, reminds us that there is no permanency in the 'happy' moments, but only continual change and challenges.

Determining the optimum approach to delivering this project involved a process of trial and error, and reflective feedback loop methodology (Schön 1983). The early concept design sketches (Project Folder 3a) display a full colour palette within the range of the 'flat' vernacular with small elements of detail and highlights cognisant with early cel-style animation production. I developed one of these designs into a prototype test to determine time efficiencies and evaluate animation processes in a (then unfamiliar to me) software called TVpaint. *Blue* is a one-minute looping cycle based on the concept art image *Tedium Vitae* (see Project Folder 3a fig. 5 and Folder 4b Blue.mov). *Blue* was first screened as part of *The Reel Deal* showcase exhibition at Crane Arts Center in October 2013. In this piece, a blue-coloured, yeti-like monster drags a rope attached to something behind him. It is an old-fashioned trolley inscribed with the Latin phrase 'tedium vitae'. Standing stiffly and being dragged along is our heroine, bearing a tight grimace. It is as if her feet are bolted to the tray and she is powerless to get off, relentlessly being dragged along through life by the trudging 'depression'. The pace is bleak, as is the dusty deserted background scenario, with cold winds swirling dead autumn leaves across the scene. And yet 'Blue', the monster, is brightly coloured turquoise and designed almost like an overstuffed teddy-bear with a sweetly determined countenance. Because he is wearing antique goggles with side blinkers, much like those that racehorses wear, an ironic visual spin is posited that even the 'horse' cannot deviate from the oppressively constant track.

Animating this shot took many weeks. First, I needed to get the basic walk cycle working at an appropriate pace. Second, I had to add variations to the monster's gait to give the semblance of endless trudging. Third, I had to find a simplified way to colour the creature, based on the 'fur' detail in the concept image. This proved difficult. To make this look seamless required that each fur-stroke be followed through in a correspondingly slightly altered position in the next drawing. There are approximately three hundred fur-strokes in each drawing, and over fifty different

drawings in this cycle. Cutting down on the fur-strokes makes it possible to create a practical semblance to the original design, although any depth, shadowing, or highlighting is then compromised. Due to a very tight deadline to complete this in time for the *Reel Deal* exhibition, I only completed one simple cycle without being able to add any animating details to the figure on the trolley (drag and follow-through in her hair and fabric), nor add the atmospheric treatment of the wind and leaves. The realities of compositing all the layers also requires lengthy amounts of time due to the precise adjustments and volume of frames in the piece.⁸

There are a number of options to accelerate this process; for example, radically simplifying the visual look, reducing the amount of 'acting' and animation required from each character, and rationalising the detail in each scene. To enable the kind of detail I had originally envisaged, I would have needed a large crew and a significant amount of time to complete the project. Other technical approaches to animation, such as 2D rigged puppet style approach or a 3D CGI modelled character, would supposedly enable more opportunity for feature textures through the use of programmed processes and algorithms inbuilt in the software; however, there are equally prohibitive technical and time-restraints in setting these up. These approaches are more suited to ongoing large-scale productions, such as feature films or television series, whereby an economy-of-scale justifies the long pre-production phase.

My final decision to create the animated vignette pieces as simple linework sketches is twofold. On one hand is efficiency; the videos are created, disseminated, and also easily read quickly. On the other is physicality (as noted in section 1.1.3), which incorporates the desire for connection with my personal mark-making process.

1.3.5 Other Possibilities (Digital Comic)

⁸ To put the time requirements in perspective, in my professional industry experience, it would normally take one week to sketch out around five seconds of one animating character, another week to clean up and correct the drawings, another week to ink and paint the images, another week to add the 'special effects' details (the highlights on the fur, etc.), an additional week for the atmospheric effect details (dust and leaves, etc.), and then at least a week to compile all the layers together. Accordingly, this would mean that producing one minute of finished full-colour, full-figure animation would take approximately eighty weeks if I was to do all the tasks myself. In a commercial environment, doing 2D drawn, full-colour, full-character animation for a thirty-second television advertisement with a studio crew of about a dozen would often take nearly three months.

In keeping with my desire to develop a multi-disciplinary approach to my work I also contemplated creating a digital comic where the shots within a 'scene' are set up as panels, with one significant shot containing interactive options with animated movement either as a punch line or to enhance the poignancy of the emotion of the scene. Digital comics or animated graphic novels are now a way to display sequential narratives, with one of the first widely publicised works being Ryan Woodward's *Bottom of the Ninth* (2012). This is set out using the page/panel vernacular of traditional comics and developed from an original idea using his distinctive flowing animation styling made famous in his short film, *Thought of You* (2010). Despite some fanfare on release of *Bottom of the Ninth*, Woodward has not yet released further episodes of this independent unfunded project. Conversely, *The Art of Pho* (2012) comprises eight episodes adapted from an existing successful graphic novel by Julian Hanshaw originally published in 2010. Created by Dutch company Submarine Channel, the structure is a clearer cross between a narrative animated film and an interactive multimedia project that uses the language and grammar of comic panels and visual 'speech' (via talk bubbles and text on screen). I created some rough draft layouts for comic graphics that would incorporate moving images and 'cut' scenes for *Coming Through* (Appendix Folder 2a v "Interactive Comic Sketches"); however, on reviewing another set of software required to be able to publish the project as an interactive graphic comic, the necessary scope and timeframe were again too large for the terms of reference for this doctorate at the time. As this doctoral development stage is now complete, I intend to further investigate the most effective way to publish this material, potentially creating multiple publishable transmedia versions, including a collated sequence in 'short film' format for cinema or television style broadcast, as interstitials or micro-clips for cinema/television screen or on the web, and as an interactive style application for tablet or other mobile devices.

1.3.6 Using Signs and Symbols

As noted in section 1.1.5, much of the early literature and even contemporary audiovisual information about the issue of PND and aspects of care and support are not only extremely dry, but often quite depressing themselves. Many of the video pieces take a documentary form, including first-person interviews and reflective anecdotes. Although these work in one sense, when watching videos, I invariably experienced a lack of connection with the person appearing on screen. Some of this

was due to ethno-sociographic factors (i.e., the woman was of a different age, had a different economic status, or possessed different cultural attitudes from me), but I also found the format very boring. Likewise, reading through long testimonials of other people's experiences becomes tedious and repetitive. I wanted to balance this by using the affordances of animation, such as penetration, metamorphosis, synecdoche, and other visual or symbolic cues (Wells 1998) so as to be able to get *inside* the mind, beyond the corporeal, and be able to show undiluted thoughts.

One seminal reference in this regard is a series of short animated films collectively titled *Animated Minds* (2010), curated and directed by former clinical psychologist Dr Andy Glynne of Mosaic Films UK and produced for Teachers TV with funded support from the Wellcome Trust. Each film addresses an aspect of mental illness, and is written and mostly narrated by a person describing their perceptions. The subjects include: psychosis, schizophrenia, obsessive compulsive disorder, Asperger's syndrome, and self-harm. They have now produced an animated documentary series of five films by five different directors titled *Animated Minds: Stories of Post Natal Depression*, using "real testimony from people who have experienced different forms of mental illness" (Mosaic 2105); however, this is not yet publicly released.

I completed a content analysis of the original *Animated Minds* films and discovered many symbolic elements commonly used in portraying mental states. This paper was presented at the Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association (ASPERA) 2011 conference in Western Australia on the theme of documentary. My presentation, "Visualising the Invisible: Inside the Mind with Animated Documentary" focused on the type of animated documentary that uses evocation, whereby animation is not used to recreate real events, but instead to create a representation of what a person feels in these situations, and how they interpret the world. Examples include *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), which is director Ari Folman's interpretation of his generation of Israeli's collective experience of war, and *It's Like That* (2005), which highlights the plight of young refugee children in mandatory detention centres. The quality of 'penetration', enabling the illustrated moving image to represent what cannot be physically seen, is an important aspect of defining animated documentaries, and specifically animations that approach the issue of mental health.

The commonly used 'penetrative' elements used in the *Animated Minds* series of films are as follows: multiple layered images; deconstructed images; flickering/sped-

up images; repetitive images; disconnected metamorphoses; being alone in a wide space/room/corner; images of falling, drowning, crouching (holding head); lying on a bed; being held or dangled on a hook or hanger; uncontrolled movement; hole in body / penetration beneath skin; symbols and diagrams; and words in text.

I also use many of these symbols in my work, and in the following chapter I outline the connections and relevance of these symbols. Chapter 2 focuses on the major themes and content of my creative practice over the period of this doctorate and explains the extended practice uncovered during the development of *Coming Through*, which exemplifies the broad definition of the Animatrix. In developing original creative responses to the experience of PND, my work contributes to the body of knowledge in this field, both from a social service viewpoint and as an expressive model for cross-disciplinary visual and screen arts practice associated with the animation medium. On review of the 'mixed-methods' methodology used throughout this research, I also endeavour to contribute a framework for approaching visual art based research in the humanities or social health fields. The studio component is essentially practice-based, contributing my own work to the field of knowledge, which developed from a heuristic approach evolving from deep immersion and engagement with the subject matter and developing a response using tacit knowledge and intuition. This also would be considered auto-ethnographic in the way I tell my own story, however it also crosses into the area of narrative enquiry in terms of 're-storying' by using anecdotes and interpretations of others' similar experiences of PND. An action research methodology also contributes a key factor in this approach through a systematic feedback loop on analysis of the practice based work in connection with an analysis of medical and scientific data or knowledge – in this case, tracking the content of my animated vignettes to the recognised and acknowledged list of symptoms of PND. Action research also includes the reflective feedback loop embodied in the critical reflection and iterative production across the many exhibitions of my work throughout this candidature.

I also incorporated a phenomenological methodology; not only through the subjective, experiential, self-descriptive content, but also through the way I approached the actual animating process utilising concepts of flow and risk, which I describe in detail in Chapter 2. (Barrett, Bolt 2010) (Biggs, Karlsson 2010) (Denscombe 2010) This exegetical component of my research includes practice-led methodologies, wherein I discuss the nature of artistic practice and include content analysis, process analysis and discourse analysis surrounding other key practitioners

works whilst considering my own practice as a case study to exemplify my hypothesis of the animatrix.

CHAPTER 2: Theme, Response, and Interpretation

This chapter details the themes, concepts, and the related cultural contexts that have been explored and addressed in the studio practice of this doctorate. These include bodily representation and how the body is defined as an entity; how body image affects mental health; and the relationships between the body and the mind. Social constructs and expectations of mothering are examined, along with stereotypical depictions of women. Challenging what is considered taboo and looking at theories of female abjection are also explored in this work. Finally, I review ideas about physicality and sensory experience as transferred through artist practice to viewer encounter.

Throughout this chapter, I discuss the techniques and artistic treatments used in creating each element of the studio outputs, which include physical objects shown in gallery environments, along with screen-based digital works ranging from mini-screen display to building-scale projection. I consider some boundaries to multi-disciplinary practice and how it is possible to integrate various works within the framework of the animatrix. Some reference to sociological and psychological constructs is made; however, a detailed analysis of these fields of research is outside the scope of this doctorate. As noted in Chapter 1, the methodological approach to this studio project is designed as an ongoing undertaking, with iterative practice at its core. Because I describe each element of my studio practice for this doctorate, the chronological development of the overall work moves between gallery and screen mode, with each piece inspiring and informing the next. The main components of the *Coming Through* series are presented here according to the themes addressed and to be viewed accordingly (see Project Folder 4c). I have also created a compilation of key sequences that can be viewed as a semblance of a short film (Project Folder 4a).

2.1 REGARDING THE BODY

2.1.1 Bodily Representation

The *Coming Through* project is centred on a graphical representation of myself. While not my actual or current self, the heroine may be a past self, or, more so, a figurative interpretation of what I might think of as myself at the time of creation. At the same time, the character is not me at all, but a confluence of personas: the 'Princess Sparkle' figure who represents the archetypal young woman of vibrancy,

hope, and potential. The cartoonish figure of the outer ego performative 'self' is made up of the "sociocultural aspects of embodiment", which integrate to create a meaningful construct; as Elisabeth El Rafaie notes, "Our bodies do not constitute a prediscursive material reality; rather, they are constructed on the basis of social and cultural assumptions about class, gender, sex, race, ethnicity, age, health and beauty" (72). The bodily transformations and shifting expressions of the heroine represent her inner identity more than any realist figurative representation could, with the persona-character serving as a symbolic rhetorical trope that adds a secondary layer of meaning to the self-portrait. The character suffers many setbacks, with temporary fragmentations of 'self', but the cartoon trope of regenerative healing ensures that she starts again as normal in the next scene in the same way that most cartoon characters do (e.g., Wile E. Coyote, Tom from *Tom and Jerry*, and Elmer Fudd regenerate after repeatedly suffering injuries and near annihilation in episodes) ("Healing Factor" n.d.).

In animation and also comics, repeated drawing of the self provides an engagement with body and body image. El Rafaie (2012, 51) refers to this process of "engaging with one's own identity through multiple self-portraits as 'pictorial embodiment'". Through this repetitive pictorial embodiment, the animatrix attempts to track the nuances of truth in her own person. Continuously drawing the same character who represents the self makes the artist aware of subtle shifts and changes, and often dramatic mutations or transmogrifications that may be subconsciously present. As Hernandez observes, "Self-referencing in films made by animatrices is the result of their creative independence, their wish for self-realisation and the cultivation of multiple, fragmentary, intimate perspective" (2010, 88). Viewing the self while depicting the self and defining which elements are and are not the self creates a multi-phasic feedback loop to the point where the animatrix's extraneous perception of self becomes fused with their perception of others, whereby the multiple images become an amalgamation of truth and fiction. Hillary Chute terms this "an expanded idiom of witness; a manner of testifying that sets a visual language in motion with and against the verbal in order to embody individual and collective experience, to put contingent selves and histories into form" (2010, 3). The *Coming Through* series, like many animatrix projects and animated documentary projects, traverses the divide between personal truth and memory and collective memory and truths in a quasi-biographical narrative form. As previously noted, similarly to Ari Folman's development of *Waltz with Bashir*, I thought it was essential to evoke the multiplicity of female experiences with PND and aim to do so through collecting numerous

testimonies of other women with PND. This aided in reconstructing my own memory. Hernandez considers this a specific principle of the animatrix, particularly in relation to intuitive or reflexive films: “This way, women’s accumulating views on an animated, varied and unsteady reality offer a democratic model for filmmaking, one that stimulates critical judgement and self-knowledge” (2010). In using the cartoonish graphical representation of my body, I interrogate the territory of self-reflection on the one hand and social constructs of representing women on the other.

2.1.2 Body as Entity

9 Months in 1 Minute

The female body is an entity in flux. Transition, transformation, and metamorphosis characterise the physicality of womanhood, whether through shifting hormonal change, menstruation, or, most dramatically, pregnancy and birth. The first sequence of *Coming Through*, “9 Months in 1 Minute” (Folder 4c, 02), commences with euphoric hopefulness, depicting the main character as she contemplates her reflection in a mirror. Although we are not sure what the situation may be, it becomes clear as she holds up a plastic stick showing parallel blue lines that she has just discovered that she is pregnant. In that moment, she is curious yet apprehensive, questioning her sense of being, and the potentiality of what is to come: “Am I excited? And scared? Is this what I want? Am I capable of being a mother? Should I be a mother? What exactly IS a mother? Who exactly am I? This is fantastic! This is frightening! This is brilliant! This is unnerving!” Her self-reflection in the mirror serves as a potent visual metaphor for duality and ambiguity. Psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan ([1949]1977) recognised ‘the Mirror Stage’ in infants from six to eighteen months of age, believing that the formation of self that we experience while looking in a mirror is part of our drive to make sense of our world. El Rifaie extends this theory in terms of autobiography, stating “We can perceive our bodily reflection in the mirror as an integrated and whole ‘me’ as opposed to the ‘inner self which is fractured, volatile and constantly threatens to dissolve completely” (El Rifaie 2012, 65). She refers to Laura Cumming’s 2009 book of essays on self-portraits and our shifting sense of how we relate to our identity:

Everyone’s mirror is the site of repeated stand-offs between hope and disappointment, confidence and frank incredulity, between yesterday when things were looking up and the cold light of today. This unsteadiness is not just a function of the mirror, of course, for it occurs within ourselves. But the mirror becomes a metaphor for this appalling mutability, its slipperiness

reflecting our inability quite to grasp, or even clearly see, our ever-shifting selves. (El Rafaie 2012, 66)

In this scene, it is not only the mental self that the character contemplates, but the phenomenal physical changes she is about to endure. At this point, she is secretly excited. As she feels her not-yet-swollen-belly, she spontaneously breaks into a merry pirouette, mimicking the Disneyesque cartoon musical trope of inexplicably spontaneously breaking into song. As the scene continues, and the character discards her clothes off screen, she becomes more and more enamoured with her outrageously fecund pregnant belly and breasts, prancing and twirling in a mixture of minx and beast, to the point where she spirals out of control in an ungainly whirl, tripping and squelching out the baby in a moment of surprise and delight. The visual humour references the scenes of the dancing hippos in Disney's *Fantasia* (1944) and the slapstick comedy of an uninhibited Elmer Fudd dancing in Warner Brothers' "Merrie Melodies" cartoon *What's Opera Doc?* (Jones 1957). As a metaphor for the unpredictability of the childbirth process following the long period of varying emotional and physical adjustments during pregnancy, the sequence also draws attention to the issue of a woman's ownership of her body. During pregnancy, many women comment on the sense that her body is no longer her own—largely due to the fact of another being growing inside it, but also the invasive aspect of myriad tests and checks and medical procedures, along with anecdotal stories of strangers touching women's bellies. In this way, pregnancy heralds a state of no longer being in control of her own body as a singular entity, but becoming a belonging of society, governed by male-centred laws and disciplines. American academic Molly Wiatt Cummins comments on Michel Foucault's panoptic discipline ([1977] 1995) as a model of social control, equating this to how pregnant women are considered, stating,

The pregnant woman's body was already involved in reproducing, in making a body that would be disciplined through various discourses in life, just as the pregnant woman herself was disciplined by various discourses. Yet, even in that making, the pregnant woman was further disciplined as strangers touched her belly. (Cummins 2014, 2)

In this sequence, my intention is to show how the character owns her body. Through her 'undisciplined' nakedness and wanton dancing, coupled with the sense of sheer joy in the physical bodily changes, her performance counters the panoptic discipline imposed and subsequently expected in the way a woman should behave. In the dramatic slapstick finale birthing the baby, the mirror metaphor is once again used—this time, looking at the baby as the most compelling reflection of self. At this point,

the heroine again shows ambiguity in her actions, at first attempting to joyously bounce the baby in the air, then looking quizzically into the baby's face, and finally looking directly at the viewer as a further metaphoric mirror. The viewer is also herself, and herself the viewer.

2.1.3 Body Image

Couch Potato Beanpole

Encountering PND, eating disorders, and accompanying perceptions of body dysmorphia may affect women in different ways, ranging from overeating to under-eating and affecting self-esteem and energy levels. The 'Body' almost becomes disassociated with the mind or sense of self, particularly after the preceding gestational period, wherein, as noted above, the woman's body is primarily regarded as a vessel of incubation. I recall feeling that my body was no longer my own, in the way it was poked and prodded both internally and externally, and also being alarmed at the extreme physiological change from being very slim to very plump in such a short space of time. It felt as if another creature now inhabited or engulfed my body that I had no control over. Constant bombardment about body image from popular media exacerbates this distress. El Rafeie discusses this in relation to autobiographical comics and social discourses of 'normality' and 'abnormality' and discipline and self-control whereby "the Western consumer culture has deliberately fostered a particular attitude toward the body that encourages individuals to monitor themselves constantly for bodily imperfections and to adopt responsibility for combating any signs of disease, deterioration, or decay" (2012, 84). Post-birth, despite the unanticipated change in physique, it is deigned the woman's duty to regain 'perfection'. In this circumstance, perfection is not an individualised ideal relevant to the woman's former physiology, but an overarching archetype or paragon of the 'perfect woman'. Anything less than this chimera of perfection is described with a qualifier. El Rafeie comments,

Put simply, there is no such thing as "the" body or even "the" body image. Instead, whenever we are referring to an individual's body, that body is always responded to in a particularised fashion, that is, a woman's body, a Latina's body, a mother's body, a daughter's body, a friend's body, an attractive body, an ageing body, a Jewish body. Moreover those images of the body are not discrete but form a series of overlapping identities whereby one or more aspects of that body appear to be especially salient at any given point in time. (2012, 86)

Rejecting a singular notion of beauty, El Rafeie's argument is that women's identity is plasmatic, whereby variant forms of physicality can be embraced. Quoting Gail Weiss, she reasons that "far from leading a fractured identity, this multiplicity of body images is what allows us to adapt in a constructive, flexible way to the many different situations we encounter in our everyday lives" (quoted in El Rafeie 2012, 86). In the same way that our heroine opposes the social discipline of confinement through her bodily exposure in the opening scene, in this "Couch Potato Beanpole" scene, the character vehemently contests the popular media clamour regarding the perfect post-baby body.

"Couch Potato Beanpole" (see Project Folder 4c, 11) shows the duality of the struggle to deal with positive and negative attitudes towards the body during PND. In this scene, our heroine reclines lethargically on the couch. Out of nowhere, a monster doppelgänger arises, metamorphosing her into a bloated, ravenous being, insatiably guzzling boxes and blocks of chocolate. The coffee table fills with magazines shouting images of dramatic weight-loss stories and attaining 'bikini bodies'. She furiously tears them up, the pieces floating down like snow as she now sits despondently. The scene changes back to her lying on the couch. This time, she withers away, to leave only a grimacing skeleton, while surrounding her head, like concussion stars, are motifs of cream cakes, roast dinners, hamburgers, and various other desirable 'comfort foods', all of which she is inexplicably incapable of eating. Despite being incensed about external (societal) expectations of bodily image, it becomes clear that she has no control over what is happening with her body, nor her mind.

2.1.4 Body & Mind

Circuit Broken

Grappling with the somatic self can mostly be rationalised through political logic and self-determination, but controlling one's mental capabilities during PND proves difficult. While it may be possible to keep functioning on a physical level—performing the perfunctory tasks of feeding, washing, changing the baby and attending to daily chores—most aspects of liveliness, passion, and libido fail at this time. El Rafeie considers psychoanalysts' interpretation of how our mind and body connect, remarking that

the relationship between the body and the mind has always been a central concern of psychoanalytic theory, both in terms of how the libido shapes our

motivations and behaviours and how the psyche relates to the physical processes of the brain. (El Rafaie 2012, 65)

However, during depressive states, there is a distinct disconnect between the two. “Circuit Broken” depicts an almost literal interpretation of this disconnected relationship, with the bodily functions represented via an old-fashioned switchboard, referencing a robotic operating system that has no mind of its own, only what is computational. The switches point to ‘on’ for legs/arms, voice, bodily functions, and blinking as examples of the performatively physical, and ‘off’ for Life, Love & Libido. Our heroine staggers obliviously through the scene past her partner character (who offers a bunch of heart-shaped balloons as a metaphor for reaching out to her), rejecting any engagement. As according to the psychoanalytic theory mentioned above, if there is no libido, there is no motivation for life.

The shape-shifting aspect of a woman’s body is crucial in the way she can perform her identity. As Elizabeth Grosz writes in her introduction to *Volatile Bodies*,

Bodies are not inert; they function interactively and productively. They act and react. They generate what is new, surprising, unpredictable... It is this ability of bodies to always extend the frameworks which attempt to contain them, to seep beyond their domains of control... (1994, xi)

This plasmatic aspect extends to the mind; in fact, it is instrumental in the way a woman adapts and reconstructs her concept of self through the childbirth process and subsequent mothering. Grosz echoes a feminist construct whereby the mind and body are intimately entwined, contrary to the binary divide quoted in phallogocentric theory (1994, xiv). In the situation of PND, the schism between mind and body becomes pronounced, causing a breakdown in a woman’s capabilities to actualise herself. In this circumstance, her psyche may further disintegrate under the weight of social expectations of her actualising role as a mother. The following section deliberates on the constructs and expectations of mothering, and how women as mothers are represented.

2.2. SUBVERTING EXPECTATIONS

Motherhood imposes both social and personal expectations on women. Once again, the duality in expectations revolves around her bodily self-image (how good she looks post-birth), her performative image (how well she looks after the baby), her emotional image (how much she loves the baby) and her role as a mother (how well she maintains her position in society). Her personal self-image may often be at odds

with what she presents, and in the case of PND, the intensity of her internal dialogue can engulf her rational thoughts. Motherhood triggers a keen contemplation on the status and roles of women, contemplating the shift between independent single maiden or spinster status and the degenerating image of the aged crone. What may make a woman 'worthy' at different ages in her life is predicated on perceptions of fecundity coupled with notions of outward care for others. In this sequence of animations, I interrogate various attitudes of attempting (and supposedly failing) to be the 'perfect mother' along with the way women are represented within the framework of the myth of Circe and the goddess Hecate ("Hecate" n.d.), which symbolise a universal experience of femaleness. In ancient cultures, Hecate⁹ represented the original holy trinity, holding sway over heaven, earth, and the underworld as maiden, matron, and crone accordingly. I equate these to the 'Babe', signifying the ideal of young womanhood through perceived innocence, ingenuousness, and unfettered sexiness; the 'Broad', relating to birth, motherhood, and adapted identity; and the 'Biddy', being the sage repository of knowledge, wrinkles, and dismissal. On reviewing the representation of adult women in animated television programs, I refer to them as "witches, bitches and housewives" in cartoon parlance (Spark 2008; Spark 2011). Later in this chapter, I detail an adjunct studio project created for gallery exhibition, entitled *Hecate's Sisters* and expand further on the concept of the triumvirate stages of womanhood. But first, I address some of the expectations of women, and made of women, in the animated sequences.

2.2.1. Madonna and Child

Not Quite What Was Expected

In this sequence, the fragile sketchy blue linework reappears as the character holds her baby, signifying her vulnerable uncertainty in contemplating what's next. Her facial expression deliberately mimics the beatific gaze of a classic 'Madonna and Child' painting as she imagines This Is What It's Supposed To Be Like. This transforms to a montage of photographs of famous Madonna and Child paintings flashing on screen, before it morphs back to her parroting pose. Despite a modern reality to the contrary, the concept of the serene, sublime, and rapturous Madonna as

⁹ Her power resided as an intermediary deity travelling between the worlds, and she was often portrayed standing guard over the crossroads. Many incarnations showed her in triple form, with three bodies and sometimes three heads. With three faces, she had the ability to see in three directions at once: the past, the present and the future.

the archetypal 'perfect mother' permeates our culture. Art historian and critic Kenneth Clark considers constructs of feminine beauty in the fifteenth-century works of Fra Lippo Lippi and Luca della Robbia, citing the still-pervasive Gothic tradition of idealised sensuality. He muses,

They are beautiful in a rather obvious and undemanding way, so that we hardly think of them as beautiful women at all, but as embodiments of maternal feelings and devotion. Calm, unpretentious, yet often saying the last word in sentiment and design, these Madonnas have influenced our concept of everyday beauty [and, I would argue, the image of motherhood] far more than is commonly realised. (Clark 1980, 15)

For many women, the semblance of peaceful maternal sentience in such images is the benchmark for being a 'good mother'. Using the deliberately divergent collage format in this scene from my work breaks the established simplified sketch style convention in the project and draws attention to this entrenched sociological construct. As El Rafaie notes in relation to comics that incorporate alternating styles and other visual devices such as photography or collage, visual cues can help to signify authenticity by drawing attention to these artistic forms rather than the regularised cartooning tropes (2012, 138). The rapidly flickering classical paintings in "Not Quite What Was Expected" (Project Folder 4c, 03) display almost in the way an old-fashioned film-projector works, creating an additional referential motif that straddles the territory between original historical artworks and digital reproductions via the technology of (filmic) image capture.

2.2.2. Ideals of Perfection

Where Is That Perfect Picture?

Continuing in this vein, the "Where Is That Perfect Picture?" (Project Folder 4c, 04) sequence draws attention to the idealised 1950s housewife of advertising parlance, with her perfectly shiny kitchen, perfectly cooked dinner, perfect husband, and perfect everything else. As Vanessa Martins Lamb observes,

In the United States of the 1950's the image of the "ideal" family was that of the successful husband, of the children running in the garden or watching the brand-new television set and, above all, of the wife cooking in her highly-equipped kitchen, doing the laundry in the most modern washing machine and cleaning the house with her extremely powerful vacuum cleaner while wearing high heels and pearls and with an intact hairstyle. (2011, 17)

This sequence opens up a discussion about seeking the 'perfect picture' and the realities of what actually exists for women with PND. The clip commences with the mother and baby swirling and morphing into blackness, the first indicator that the

mother has depression. A glowing image of her face flickers on screen, almost like the dying embers from a fire, as if someone might be blowing on them to reignite the flame. Instead, a blurry sliver of a 'window' appears in the blackness, as if one is peering through a letterbox slot, or through half-closed eyelids, and we scan around the scene, blinking at glimpses of numerous iconographic 'perfect '50s housewife' advertisements of the woman baking, serving dinner to her doting husband, smiling sweetly at children, while immaculately dressed and coiffed. In this scene, we have a moment to contemplate the 'modern' version of the Madonna and Child trope—another entrenched construct that women grapple with. Holt, referring to 1950s social conditioning, notes,

The creation of the "ideal woman" gave a clear picture to women of what they were supposed to emulate as their proper gender role in society. In effect, women began to construct their identities around this image, and may still continue to do so today. (Holt 2005)

Yet, there is an irony in this scene, in that the contemporary viewer knows that the 'perfect housewife' was a myth that, in fact, triggered the advent of feminism. As Lamb notes, this period was characterised by "its remarkable social and domestic esthetics [sic] and the duality between the eternal search for one 'perfect life' and the reality of these women, many of whom led a lonely and restricted life" (Lamb 2011, 1). The blackness and the hazy viewing slot-hole enhances the sense of loneliness and alienation in our heroine; it underscores that she's on the outside seeing what it 'should' be like, and is restricted from accessing 'happiness' or even a semblance of normality, let alone the vaunted 'perfection'.

(Not) As Seen on TV

False ideals of perfection are also perpetrated in the animated universe. Upon review of how adult women are represented on screen in long-running (between 1960s and 2000s) prime-time US-based television animation series (and therefore what is primarily seen on Australian television), I identified a correlation between the maiden/mother/crone archetypes and the characters portrayed in each series. However, adult females are overwhelmingly the 'mothers', with their main defining characteristic being that they are secondary characters, married to buffoons (yet lower in status than the husband and children), and perform support roles for all other characters (Lauzen, Dozier, and Horan 2008). On a few occasions, they might perform as the central focus of one of the dual plots explored in the show (e.g., Marge Simpson in Season 4, episode 2 "A Streetcar Named Marge" 1992), wherein

they portray self-awareness and a subversive irony about recognising their situation. However, at the end of these episodes, they remain committed to supporting the hegemony of the family structures, which always returns her to the 'housewife' position. Despite an increasingly educated and worldly audience, these simplistic stereotypes permeate commercial animation. Notable characters include Wilma Flintstone, and to some extent Betty Rubble (*The Flintstones* 1960–66), Jane Jetson (*The Jetsons* 1962–88), Marge Simpson (*The Simpsons* 1989–), and Peggy Hill (*King of the Hill* 1997–2010). Noticeably, the shows are all named for their husbands. Didi Pickles (1990–2003) and Grace Jones (*Li'l Elvis Jones & the Truckstoppers* 1997–) also fit the phlegmatic housewife archetype. There have been slight changes in designs and characterisations in post-2002 shows, particularly those created by Seth McFarland, including Lois Griffin (*Family Guy* 1999–), Francine Smith (*American Dad!* 2005–), and Donna Tubbs (*The Cleveland Show* 2009–13), which incorporated a semblance of careers, and far more nuanced relationships between the sexes, including divorced, remarried, and blended families,

In the scene set in the lounge, our heroine lies inert on the couch mesmerised by the flickering television. It is obvious that this is not a 'perfect housewife' scenario, as we see various shots around the house showing the chaos of overflowing baskets of washing, unwashed dishes, and piles of papers and detritus, while the television displays cartoon images of The Perfect Wife. This reflexive referencing of the perfect animated mother in an animated film that challenges notions of mothering and imperfection is a key element of the subtle humour I intended to achieve.

2.2.3 Depicting Unworthiness: Animals as Symbols

Mother with a Capital M, Trapped

The pressure of perfection leads to crushing feelings of inferiority exacerbated by the symptoms associated with PND, such as feeling inadequate and a failure as a mother; having a sense of hopelessness about the future; feeling guilty, ashamed or worthless; and fear for and of the baby. In this series of scenes, a range of internal thoughts are explored. In "Mother with a Capital M" (Project Folder 4c, 16), we see our heroine being branded with an old-fashioned hot iron, then snaking up her arm to show a classic "Mother" style tattoo as metaphors for being stuck with this forever. Scanning further up to show her face, a snake-like bandage wraps around her head as an indicator that something is wrong, although this is the only way to show that

she is 'sick'. The snake symbolism refers to the insidious nature of the illness in the way it can sneak up without warning, yet can be dangerously poisonous.

Another animal symbol is the caged wolf used in the "Trapped" scene, which is situated in a 'Garden of Babies', where every element is like an early-twentieth-century magic-realist fairy story illustration, with the flowers, trees, and garden beds all growing babies. Surrounded by hundreds of 'babies', the wolf-woman howls painfully as the scene 'floods' and we see her frantically waving while drowning. Again, these metaphors reference entrapment and being overwhelmed with her mothering expectations.

Thought Monkeys, Perfect Baby

For those experiencing PND, feelings of being stuck or imprisoned are coupled with a paradoxical sense of guilt at feeling this way. Believing that she is not perfect compounds the mother's impression that the baby is so perfect that she is not worthy of being their mother. 'Thought monkeys' is a colloquial term describing intruding and often morbid thoughts associated with depression. In the "Thought Monkeys" scene (Project Folder 4c, 20), the heroine imagines situations of the baby being violently hurt due to her own (supposed) neglect, suggesting that it might be best to send the baby to the 'Used Baby Yard', which is replete with a checked-suit, moustachioed, used-car-dealer character who deals with 'Good Sleepers' and 'Only One Owner' and 'Low Cry' babies for sale. This scene is reminiscent of a sequence in Sarah Watt's *Small Treasures* (1995) where the pregnant main character comments on her unsuitability of motherhood, imagining various disasters, like the baby electrocuting himself with a fork in a power socket due to her neglectful watch. Watt also make use of animals a symbols, most prominently in the birthing scene that depicts predatory owls and sharks as metaphoric portents for what is yet to come (the film is about a stillbirth).

Fears *for* the baby are also accompanied by fears *of* the baby, particularly in dealing with the unexpected physical aspects of vomiting and excreting. Yet, the unfettered love for the baby overrides all these thoughts, to an almost manic extent. Anecdotal comments from personal correspondence are visualised in this sequence, "I love that baby so much, I could lick the shit off her nappies" and "I love that baby so much I could chop him up and snort him." In the end of the "Perfect Baby" sequence (Project

Folder 4c, 18, 19), the image shows a 'reverse conception' in that the mother imagines a backwards time-lapse of the sperm swimming around the egg that say 'No' to the winning candidate based on the comment that "the baby should go back where it came from". This is not necessarily because the baby is unwanted, but because the mother feels unworthy of being the baby's mother. In this, as Ruth Lingford expresses in her review of Vera Neubauer's *The Decision* (1981), "the joys, angst and drudgery of motherhood are expressed in the raw" (Lingford n.d.).

2.2.4 Idealising Women

Masks

In light of these social and cultural expectations, there is a compulsion to cover up negative thoughts and displays of inadequacy, censoring what we show to the world and projecting effective masks. Mothers may feel the need to display that they are 'coping' in response to many colloquial comments made to women about their outward appearance, such as "You look hot", "You're as solid a rock", "You look a million dollars", and "You're a Wonderwoman." Despite ostensibly being positive affirmations, they almost put more pressure on the mother to conform to professional and pro-social expectations. I use mnemonic visual metaphors that translate linguistic metaphors, mostly those of emotions, into the form of an image. The animation visualises her counteracting thoughts to the comment; for example, with "You look Hot!", the woman becomes so 'hot' that she bursts into flames and melts in a messy heaps. Nikos Kontos (quoting Roman Jakobson's "Linguistics and Poetics") clarifies the way that visual metaphors work, explaining that "such 'intersemiotic translations' (Jakobson 1959, 261) imply a twofold iconicity, one in the linguistic code and one in the visual code, where the referential object of the non-metaphorical object is depicted" (Kontos 2009, 14). An example is "you look like a million dollars", with the woman's figure becoming constructed and papered over with dollar notes. Mimicking colloquial phrases and pop culture references are the cornerstone of the modern meme's effectiveness. These short sequences in "Masks" (Project Folder 4c, 21) operate in a similar way.

2.2.5 Characterising the Female

In creating the animations for the "Masks" sequence, I was conscious of the patriarchal construction of the female, and particularly how colloquial comments refer

to outward appearances of youth and vigour. Responding to the constructed idealisation of womanhood reminded me of how the elder woman is demonised, or left out of the picture.¹⁰ This prompted me to develop a multilayered artwork that ironically questions the representation of the three ages of woman, or female triumvirate.¹¹

To make the *Hecate's Sisters* works (Project Folder 6), I borrowed from the design vernacular of the South Asian Wayang Kulit puppet tradition. Developing these as puppets draws on the long tradition of live performance, animated storytelling and traditional craftsmanship from India, China, and Indonesia. The performance is considered 'animation' in the fact that the puppets have articulated appendages and use highly active and exaggerated movements. Wayang Kulit performances commemorate significant life events, many involving a female perspective, including births, marriages, and deaths. Performances are delivered in a community setting and often run overnight (Osnes 2010). The puppets are created by specialist craftspeople, and made of hide (buffalo or similar) and although there are archetypal characters (usually from epic stories like the *Mahabharata*), each is brilliantly hand-painted with individual personality. Despite this, the puppets are only seen by the audience in their silhouetted form; hence, the intricate filigree cut-out internal detailing that adds depth and dimension to the shape. The way these puppets are crafted and displayed is an obvious correlation to the simplified, two-dimensional characterisation of adult females in animation, yet close up or in a different light, the delicacy, detail, depth of colour and differentiation is visible, much like for real women.

In designing *Hecate's Sisters*, I paid keen attention to how the differentiated silhouette for each woman would be seen in shadow form, while also detailing the specific visual mnemonic for each figure. Focusing on the most defining facets that signify ageing, I made the breasts a central focus in the trio. In each woman, the vulva is also prominent, as a reminder of the primary function of the organ, and of perceived sexual deterioration with age. The aim is also to keep a resonance with the visual vernacular of the highly patterned South Asian design, resonating with the

¹⁰ "The malevolent stereotypical hag 'still haunts elder women today. If a man is old, ugly, and wise, he is a sage. If a woman is old, ugly, and wise, she is a saga—that is, a witch' (Walker, 1985: 122)" (Sempruch 2004, 118).

¹¹ This harks back to the myths of Circe, the Great Mother and the Witch as 'fantasmatic Other' (Sempruch 2004, 126).

individual details and patterns prevalent in Mehendi (henna-painted hands and feet) that are used in ceremonial celebrations.

The puppets were first displayed in an exhibition titled *Shadow of a Mouse* (RQAS 2013) that drew attention to animation-related works from faculty colleagues. Accompanying each puppet was a large-scale hand-inked drawing of each character, with bold black linework reminiscent of my cel-painting days in the 1980s (as discussed in Chapter 1). I observed that most viewers at the exhibition were drawn to the 'Biddy' character. The representation of the crone or witch lingered with a fascination for images of abjection and taboo, including semi-nakedness. Feminist author Estella Lauter discusses Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément's description of the crone as "the sorceress—the witch, the wise woman, destroyer and preserver of culture—is she not the midwife, the intermediary between life and death, the go-between whose occult yet necessary labors deliver souls and bodies across frightening boundaries?" (Cixous and Clément quoted in Lauter 1984, x) Lauter continues,

As a radical feminist identity, the 'witch' strategically represents both the historical abject figure subjected to torture and death, and a radical fantasy of renewal in the form of a female figure who desires (and articulates) a cultural transformation 'that has not happened yet' and also the one who already marks that transformation. (1984, x)

Lauter articulates the fascination with the witch as a threshold character, situated between mortal and non-mortal worlds, or more practically, as a conduit between woman and childbirth that deals with the abject—the blood and bodily fluids, the intrusion on protected spaces, and the shifting mental states between wellness and illness. Dealing with these taboo subjects is another key theme in delineating the animatrix.

2.3 TABOO

This section considers notions of taboo and abjection and how these become among the defining facets of an animatrix's work. In determining what is considered a taboo subject in this context, I refer to what is considered unmentionable in the Western culture social order, ranging from the physical (genital organs, bodily fluids, unexpected nakedness, disablement), through to the social (murder, crime, rape, abuse, torture) and on to aspects of the political (equality and equity, disempowerment, religious affiliation). In defining the abject in this context, I refer to

qualities that are considered extremely unpleasant, degrading, or objectionable. In an extended sense, abject could also be considered what is not-normal, disabled, or afflicted.

2.3.1 Female Abjection

Michele Cournoyer's most well-known work is *Le Chapeau (The Hat)* (1999), a broad brush stroke metaphoric ode to memory, femaleness, and sexual abuse. The film is almost surrealistic, relying on unexpected metamorphosis and the sardonic juxtaposition of images. It has a dreamlike quality, yet at the same time revels in black humour and biting social commentary about female vulnerability. As Julie Roy notes, *The Hat's* structure plays out like 'automatic writing'; it is "a penetrating meditation on women, their sexuality, fantasies, desires and anxieties. Her work speaks in a female voice, in turn strong, gentle vulnerable, rebellious..." (Roy 2012 30). The film could be considered grotesque in the way it tackles taboo issues of sexual assault and incest and in the presentation of images of the female vulva in a non-sexual way. Laura Mulvey's influential essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) drew attention to the notion of the male gaze. This prompted a new wave of film analysis, following which "film theory has been obsessed with the centrality of the female genitalia as the structuring absence around which the scopic regimes of cinema are constructed, either through voyeurism or the disavowing mechanism of fetishism" (Felperin 2012, 72). To blatantly make reference to female genitalia in a non-voyeuristic or non-fetishised way challenges the dominant male-viewer pleasure.

Feminist and cinema theorist Barbara Creed outlines the visual taboo elements in film, including images of blood, faeces, pus, and birthing; in fact, anything that crosses the boundaries of the body, or that which creates vulnerabilities in our own embodied being. Creed draws attention to feminist discourse around how women and childbirth are represented in art, quoting Margaret Miles, who

argues in her study of the grotesque that "the most concentrated sense of the grotesque" comes from the image of woman because of her associations with natural events such as sex and birth which are seen as "quintessentially grotesque". She points out that in Christian art, hell was often represented as a womb, "a lurid and rotting uterus" where sinners were perpetually tortured for their crimes. (Creed 1993, 43)

French-Bulgarian philosopher, critic and feminist Julia Kristeva (1982) also traces the representation of the birthing woman as 'unclean' back to the representation of impurity on the Bible; that the body must be unmarked to represent purity. The physical aspects of pregnancy correlate to the abject; the foreign body residing in the womb creating the distorted stretching tautness of the belly, as if to burst, reminiscent of the creature exploding from the womb in the film *Alien* (1983). Creed also posits:

The second reason why woman's maternal function is constructed as abject is equally horrifying. Her ability to give birth links her directly to the animal world and to the great cycle of birth, decay and death. Awareness of his links to nature reminds man of his mortality and of the facility of the symbolic order. (1993, 47)

Inference of the links to nature is also prominent in the mothering role in relation to the baby's bodily excretions. As previously noted in the animated sequences of "Perfect Baby", depicting images of the baby violently expunging vomit and faeces, and of the swimming sperm as bodily fluid, reminds the viewer of the intrinsic female connection with abjection. Even images alluding to supposed criminal activity of snorting illicit drugs can be considered abject in terms of social and political laws.

Illustrating the body and bodily capacity that draws attention to physicality and transformative production therefore mires a work in the realm of the female and, by inference, the abject. However, the abject female signifies mutable strength and the multivalent, polymorphous ability to transform and reproduce, which essentially indicates a powerful agency. By deduction, addressing concepts of abjection puts work in the animatrix category.

2.3.2 Wholesome

The short film *Wholesome* (2003/2013) was inspired following an artist residency at Calarts (California, USA) in 2003, and completed to complement this doctoral studio work. It arose from a conversation I had with an international graduate student about her feelings of inadequacy due to her poor English language skills. I considered my own deafness, and how it hampers a certain amount of communication, and how I also felt a sense of lacking despite my supposed high status as lecturer and mentor. It triggered a lot of questions: Is this what completely defines me—a physical attribute? A dysfunction in what is essentially just my 'earhole'? What other holes are fully functional? What else defines me—other parts of my body? My personality? My status? My occupation?

Wholesome (Project Folder 5) is short and raw and confronting, skirting the edges of the abject with blunt humour, shock value, and the use of text as part of the screen design to underscore the message of how we define ourselves by what we lack rather than what we possess. It draws attention to diminished functionality, posing the question “Does this make me the sum/some of my holes/wholes or the whole/hole of my somes/sums?” It echoes Cournoyer’s works in its visual treatment (using bold black India ink with brush and pen on paper) and thematic approach (metamorphosis and sardonic juxtaposition of images). By highlighting an issue, a problem, a flaw, it places ownership of the disability back to me and not for anyone else to take advantage of or denigrate. I was mindful of Roy’s comments “Cournoyer’s women courageously move towards a growing sense of awareness, sharing a desire for emancipation, for affirmation, and a decision to abandon victimhood” (Roy 2012, 30–31). The *Wholesome* film offers an uninhibited self-portrait, commenting on a variety of stereotypical elements of femaleness, including precepts of femininity (wearing red high-heeled shoes and red lipstick), of birthing (and abjection in showing the act of birth itself and the glimpse of vulva), of professional identity (“I’m an animator”), and confronting aspects of modesty (nakedness) and bodily functions (excretion) and what expectations we may have of womanliness, or being a ‘complete’ woman. As autobiography, it provides a succinct overview of the surface features of myself. El Rafaie also comments about female subjective identity, citing psychological research into defectiveness, stating,

Much contemporary autobiographical writing engages explicitly with the relationship between bodily identity and subjectivity. Particularly for women wishing to confront traditional cultural inscriptions of the female body, and people whose bodies have been radically changed through an accident or serious illness, corporality tends to feature centrally in their life stories (El Rafaie 2012, 51)

In this sense, encroaching deafness has shaped my life in many ways; however, it does not describe the whole of me. Like many women, childbirth and mothering are a manifest factor of my corporeal self, and the ensuing work of this research project focuses on that aspect of my corporeal and also my mental identity. Creating *Wholesome* was a cathartic point in confronting aspects of myself that might be considered abject.

2.3.3 Visual Techniques

In the light of issues outlined in Appendix i relating to the position of women in the animation industry, *Wholesome* highlights three factors that could hamper my career:

I do not have a penis, I have children ('high drag'), and I am deaf. Rather than solemnly meditating the negative aspects of this situation, the film almost torments the viewer to face these challenges themselves by "positioning the viewer as a captive voyeur" (Roy 2012, 31). Similar to the works by Cournoyer, there is a certain pleasure in viewing difficult subject matter that affords an "ambiguity and a sense of discomfort" (Roy 2012, 36). The ambiguity is heightened by the use of quick timing and metamorphosis that provide "the basis for powerfully effective ellipses that concertina different places, temporalities and levels of reality" (Roy 2012, 36). The piece works as a cartoon gag, similar to a four-panel strip comic in that the juxtaposed sight gags and the meaning of the words or phrases are asynchronous, allowing the viewer's brain to conflate the puns, thereby adding opportunity for an internal intellectual game. The use of text in this piece is multi-functional. The kinetic nature of the text enhances the understanding of the words—for example, where the word 'animator' animates across and off the screen—plus the varied placement of the words on screen provoke a playful interactive engagement by making the viewer's eyes follow the text-story as much as the visual-story. The visual appearance of the hand-lettered words in the speech balloons also suggests the irregularities of tone and pitch that are characteristic of the human voice (van Leeuwen 2006, 149). Using text in my work rather than voiceover bears obvious correlations to my own deafness and reliance on subtitles. Importantly, this work also exemplifies my own intrinsic design style that straddles the looseness of independent 'drawn' animation (the black linework was created entirely with ink and brush on paper) with digitally painted 'toon-style colouring, reminiscent of my early career in animation factories. It also uses exaggerated caricature, intended to prompt an immediate audience expectation of being amused, despite the underlying serious and somewhat shocking content. I expand more on the physical techniques I use in the following section on sketching and the concept of sensation in creative practice.

2.3.4 Memory, Mind & Body

Nobody Must Know, Nutcase

Wholesome marked a renewed focus on creating my own work, with my own schema, and a specific emphasis on creating female-centred projects that addressed aspects of motherhood in a humorous yet meaningful way. It also prompted me to resurrect the *Coming Through* project that I had conceived almost ten years prior to making the piece. According to philosopher John Locke's seventeenth-century

theories on personal identity, it is our memories, rather than bodily continuity, that connect the different parts of our lives (BBC Radio4 2015).

Memory and mind are intertwined, as are mind and body. An unhealthy or disfigured body is considered abject in the same way that a disturbed mind is a taboo subject. As noted in the Blizsta report for beyondblue quoted in Chapter 1, women are reluctant to disclose mental illness episodes for fear of being judged as unworthy or a failure, or a fear of never recovering. Despite recent campaigns to inform the general public about the facts of mental illness and PND, a stigma still prevails. Two sequences in *Coming Through* address the fears being labelled as crazy. In “Nobody Must Know”, we see our heroine being frustrated, angry, guilty, fearful, and having a tantrum because “you put the wrong cheese in my sandwich!” Her outburst is coupled with further guilt then fear of anyone knowing that she’s not coping, and refusing help. In “Nutcase”, (Project Folder 3a, fig.3) we see her standing in the middle of a long road, surrounded by Las Vegas–style neon signs all pointing to her, bearing words such as “Crazy”, “Loony”, and “Disturbed”, and a show bill style light box touting “Tonight Showing: ‘She’s Completely Bonkers’”. The character is immobile, transfixed, and somewhat shocked. As the camera pans through the signs and follows her walking down the road, we see the signs vanish in the distance. At this point in the potential linear story edit, she begins the journey towards recovery. It is as if by accepting and admitting and owning her illness that she gains dignity instead of derision.

My own work as an animatrix could be defined as having a combination of mind and body elements intertwined with memory, in that all three together are equally important. The determining slant is towards memory rather than just imagination. Whereas predominantly male-centred films are based on imagined and constructed stories, a woman-centred or animatrix film leans towards remembered and reconstructed stories. Other defining aspects in the mind-body-memory intersection are the physical techniques used in animating and image making along with the actual sense of physicality in creating these images. The following section discusses the concept of ‘sensation’ and the translation of feeling between artist and audience.

2.4 SENSATION

2.4.1 Physical and Emotional

Crying, Brimming & Sloshing, Peaking: Crashing: Falling

Visually combining the ideas of mind and body and memory warranted a different approach to the way I animated the main *Coming Through* sequences. Whereas the other scenes relied on physical or intellectual gags or semi-narrative vignettes to convey an idea and response about the subject, I wanted to explore how nonfigurative animated elements could be used to embody my own physical and emotional experience or state of mind when drawing and painting in a purely intuitive state. I needed to transfer my 'gut feeling' to the screen. I wondered if by creating animated images that were triggered by my own raw emotion (rather than rational or literal cognitive intellect), I could create a more powerfully emotive piece of work.

Film critic and theorist Donato Totaro (2002) has discussed Laura Marks's *Skin of the Film* (2000) that outlines various philosophers' ideas on film and cinema, including Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of 'sensation' and haptic vision or perception wherein "the eye can perceive texture without necessarily touching" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 298). Deleuze and Guattari's concepts refer to 'haptic' rather than 'tactile' to differentiate the sense organs, not to present them as binary opposites, but to "invite the assumption that the eye itself may fulfil a non-optical function" (1987, 299). Using this concept to develop sensory-inspired animation involves a confluence of the artist's physical action and haptic or tactile experience during creation coupled with how the viewer might perceive or receive the same sensation. Totaro explains Marks's theory that "filmmakers attempt to create memory-images out of the medium's sensorial limitations (sense, touch, taste)" (Totaro 2002). In creating a truly sensory experience, the object "is to move closer to the body: from memory-images, to memory-objects, to proximal sense memories. In many cases these hard to represent memories in themselves reflect a process of cultural blurring, loss, or longing..." (Totaro 2002). These concepts epitomised my feelings about expressing PND, and my coexisting desire to forge a purely sensory animated sequence using high-end digital tools.

Creating the works *Crying, Brimming & Sloshing*, and *Peaking: Crashing: Falling* allowed me to combine the tactile and visceral elements of textured real objects (e.g. the *Hecate's Sisters* puppets) with the ephemeral nature of digital images and motion

cinema. Significantly, the works are not limited to a cinematic screening, nor a static art gallery presentation, nor restrained to an informational or communicative paradigm of the mobile screen. While these works are considered 'projection installation', they can be displayed on small digital screens, ranging from desktop output size down to mobile phone screen. I consider these works at the intersection of what I have referred to as the three main contemporary display structures for moving image art: the black box (cinema); the white cube (gallery); and the grey screen (digital display). In the following section, I discuss approaches to creative practice, including the concept of flow and risk taking, as part of the process and context of constructing these works and reflect on their multiple formats for display.

2.4.2 Flow and Risk

Psychologists Jeanne Nakamura and Mihály Csikszentmihályi's early research proposed a concept of a highly focused mental state that they coined 'flow', whereby a person involved in completing a task would become fully immersed in their activity. They identify the following six factors as encompassing an experience of flow: intense and focused concentration on the present moment; a merging of action and awareness; a loss of reflective self-consciousness; a sense of personal control or agency over the situation or activity; a distortion of temporal experience, whereby one's subjective experience of time is altered; and experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding, also referred to as autotelic experience. They note that "these aspects can appear independently of each other, but only in combination do they constitute a so-called flow experience" (Nakamura and Csikszentmihályi 2001, 90).

Csikszentmihályi has been investigating the concept of engagement since the late 1970s, and subsequent psychology theorists and practitioners such as Owen Schaffer have expanded this for professional and corporate engagement activity. Schaffer (2013) has proposed seven flow conditions: knowing what to do; knowing how to do it; knowing how well you are doing it; knowing where to go (if navigation is involved); high perceived challenges; high perceived skills; and freedom from distractions. All of these appear to be a recipe for artistic production. However, before this stage of flow can be entered, artistic volition is required; the "aesthetic urge" that gives form to an expressive or intelligible material, a concept articulated by art historian and theorist Erwin Panofsky in the 1920s (Panofsky 1981). Artistic volition may well relate to Schaffer's first condition, 'knowing what to do'; however, it is also

important in this process that the artist may engage in an element of risk—of not knowing what to do, but potentially knowing how to do it. Philosophy writer Simon O’Sullivan discusses Deleuze and Guattari’s writings, noting that artistic risk affords the “exploration of new possibilities in material that precede premediated concept” (2006, 23). One could say that concept and form are created simultaneously through process; “Indeed, we might say that an effective practice, paradoxically, often relies on not knowing exactly in advance what effect the practice might have” (O’Sullivan 2006, 23).

British animatrix Joanna Quinn, renowned for her sketchy pencil-drawn works, such as *Girls Night Out* (1988) and *The Canterbury Tales* (1998), talks about a sensation of not being in control when she is in the flow state of her animation drawing practice, whereby she couples knowing what to do with risk. In an interview with Ian Massey, she says,

When I start a drawing I know what I intend to draw but I let the line take me in other directions and create forms that I hadn’t thought of, especially with the human figure. ... Suddenly I’ll see something dynamic and decide to strengthen the line a bit. This is why my drawings have so many lines on them, and why I don’t like rubbing them out. It shows my exploration of line, my enjoyment of mark-making. I often have the sensation of not being in control of my hand, that some other force is guiding me, which is probably a common sensation for artists who are totally at ease with a particular medium. (Quinn in Massey 2005, 117)

For animation artists such as myself who work in the drawn medium, the relationship they have with the physicality of making marks on paper or other media is essential to their practice. Roy observes “It is clear that an artist derives satisfaction from the actual execution of her art, in which she finds self-expression and fulfilment” (2012, 37). The visceral sensation that is translated on screen from the practice of drawing is a singular theme across Quinn’s works wherein she notes that without the evidence of the drawing itself, the work becomes “deadened” (Massey 2005).

Massey evaluates the effect of this technique on the audience, commenting that,

...There is always a particular energy. The screen is like a continuous drawing in flux, with traces of erasures and changes within the process left evident. And the surface shimmer created by those trace marks enlivens the whole screen; not just the figures, but the backgrounds and blank spaces as well.... whilst being drawn into an animated narrative, we’re also continually reminded that what we are looking at is drawing. The evidence of erasure and change serves as an underlying commentary on the physical nature and organic process of drawing. (2005, 117)

Quinn’s practice of showing evidence of the image in flux is also an important technique in the *Coming Through* animation sequences. As noted in section 1.3, I

use a roughly sketched blue pencil drawing as the foundation of feeling out the shape and movement, which maintains the frisson of energy in the animation. However, creating animation 'in situ' uses a slightly different sensibility, particularly as this form uses the 'straight-ahead' technique—creating the first frame, then progressively changing it to create the next frame, and so on.

South African artist William Kentridge, known for works such as *Felix in Exile* (1994) and *Automatic Writing* (2003), works in charcoal, creating a series of singular artworks that are animated by the technique of capturing incremental changes to the image through sketch and erasure. Repeatedly erasing and re-working the drawing creates a mental space wherein you can change the image as quickly as you can think. In this way, the transformative quality of the charcoal is more important as a way of thinking than its qualities as a medium. The animating process is prolonged and happens in real time, encompassing the time it takes to draw an image, walk to the camera, shoot two frames, walk back and alter the image, back to shoot two frames, and so on. Kentridge's process exemplifies the physicality of drawing animation and the intimate relationship for the artist of mind/body/memory. As Kentridge relates:

The films are made without a script or a storyboard.... I have to take it on trust what is there. All that you see at each moment is the present—in other words, the state of the drawing at that moment. And it's very much in the belief that in that physical walk between the drawing and the camera, in that physical process—it's not a mental process, it's a physical process—new images and ideas suggest themselves to go before that shot or after that shot and what that shot can develop into... The picture that is left is the last frame...not of the film, but of that shot. (Kentridge 2006)

Although different in tone and content, Kentridge's methodological approach in creating animated sequences reflects the same way I embarked on the emotionally driven *Crying* sequences described below. The real-time thinking process of creating each frame within an entire image, and each image situated within the scene and story, is also echoed in Sarah Watt's praxis. Her short animated films, created entirely with paint and cel, are similar in the physicality and tactility of her application of paint and the unexpected directions that emerge through incremental change. She made a feature of unintended or undesired artefacts, such as highlighting brushstrokes, texture, splashes and splatters, blobs and bleed, wrong lines and rubbing out lines. I use the term 'artefacts' in the sense that each composition is a physical object (the layers of painted cel on a painted background), and in the sense of including all the glitches and mistakes, similar to new media artists using digital

artefacts as a feature of their conceptual work. It is possibly these artefacts that create the strongest implication of sensation as an unanticipated reaction.

2.4.3 Physical & Visceral

Hall's doctoral thesis, previously mentioned, discusses viewer response to non-figurative work. He states that "Deleuze's logic of sensation gives precedence to what we could refer to as 'gut reaction', where meaning is *felt* throughout the body and its organs, rather than being 'understood' linguistically or through a lexis of signs" (2010, 51, original italics). This is echoed in Elizabeth Grosz's interpretation of Deleuzian theory where she explains that "Sensation requires no mediation or translation. It is not representation, sign, symbol, but force, energy, rhythm, resonance" (2008, 73).

Texturally rich abstract animation is a rarity amid the many thousands of films that compete in competition festivals each year. Experiencing the scratch and paint-on-film works of contemporary Canadian artist Steven Woloshen challenges cultural conventions and intertextuality of what constitutes animation. Artistic Director of the Melbourne International Animation Festival (MIAF), Malcolm Turner describes animatrix Neely Goniody's work with its "'feel' of an artist's touch on actual, physical film translating into pure textural experience of seeing paint and other substances given a kind of breath on the big screen" (2015, 14). Despite using 'clean' digital paint, I wanted to mimic that sense of 'breath', not just in a big-screen cinema environment, but also in a more immersive projection place that allows the audience time and physical space to repeatedly view the work of their own volition. The large-scale works are at once striking and beguiling, using vivid colours and repetitive patterning and varied timing that mimic physical and emotional exhortations like sobbing or having a rising panic attack. Potentially, this could create a kind of Stendhal Syndrome, a psychosomatic response involving "tachycardia, vertigo, fainting, confusion and even hallucinations" (Segen dictionary n.d.). The term is normally used when a person is exposed to large amounts of beautiful art in one place, or when overwhelmed by breathtaking natural beauty. Although not claiming this specific affectation, the works described below afford an opportunity for unmediated sensation.

2.4.4 Playful

Tears for No Reason, Crying

I remember doing a lot of crying when I had PND—crying in public places, crying in private, crying for no reason, crying in exasperation, crying with joy, crying in loss and pain, crying because I felt alone and bereft. I remember crying that was a beautiful release, and crying that left me feeling exhausted and wasted and worse than ever. I felt the anticipation of crying, with correspondent anxiety and heart-thumping nerves, and the crying that suddenly burst forth without warning. Some crying dribbled for hours on end, and some was a short sharp explosion. “Tears for No Reason” in the *Coming Through* series attempts to show the more literal exposition of all this crying, but my real aim was to visually portray what it really feels like during each different way of crying, including the different phases of intensity and different types of emotions experienced.

For “Crying”, I explored the option of creating without planning; starting from a pure playfulness with different tools ‘brushes’ and ‘papers’ in the (TVpaint) software¹². I investigated using colour as another proto-narrative tool; for example, red correlates to anxiety, blue to sadness, and a greenish hue to a sense of drowning. I also considered the changing emotional correlation to different hue and saturation—at first, the green appears peaceful and somewhat calming in its meandering path, until it becomes darker and denser, giving a sense of being overwhelmed)—plus colour combinations, either analogous or complementary in the orange and purple corresponding to waves of sobbing, at once both distressing and majestic. “Crying” (Project Folder 7a) was designed to be projected onto a whole white wall space, without borders, so the tears would appear to be falling from ceiling to floor, as if emerging from the wall itself. It was created as nine discrete pieces, each evoking different kinds of crying; from silently weeping, constant tears, bawling, to unexpected eruptions, waves of wailing, snivelling, squalling, to rivers of despair and violent sobbing. Each piece leads into the next through metamorphosis. On review, these were consolidated into seven sections, with titles reminiscent of the intensity: “Tears” (00:01:00), “Rain” (00:00:25), “Downpour” (00:00:25), “Spouting” (00:00:20), “Waves” (00:00:50), “Sloshing” (00:00:20), and “Flooding” (00:00:30) to make an

¹² I had been very familiar with the digital image making and animating environment since the mid-1990s, but the bitmap-based TVpaint v9 software was new to me at the time. It was one of the first animation-specific programs to afford mimicry of traditional paper, pencil, ink and paint tactility and it offered a seminal transition between my pre-digital working methods and contemporary efficient effective production modes.

edited four minutes to be screened in a looping continuous projected cycle. It was first exhibited at Gympie Regional Gallery in June 2013 as part of the *[d]Generate* exhibition, which encompassed the theme of work that is generative, self-generative, and degenerative in terms of a metaphor for breaking down (continually).

2. 4.5 Haptic and Immersive

Brimming & Sloshing

The success of the “Crying” experiment lent a stronger impetus to continue developing this approach. Through critical reflection, it seemed that this kind of work might have an even stronger impact than the cartoon-style vignettes of *Coming Through* in conveying the real feeling of anxiety and depression associated with PND illness that worked on the ‘gut reaction’ mentioned above, bypassing the merely figurative to focus on a purely emotive response. I continued to amend and refine this to become a new compilation. “Brimming & Sloshing” (2014) (Project Folder 7b) extended the crying metaphor. It refers to a line from Sylvia’s famous *The Bell Jar*: “I could feel the tears brimming and sloshing inside me like a glass that is unsteady and too full” ([1963] 2005). “Brimming & Sloshing” was made by recombining and re-sequencing artworks created for “Crying”, making greater use of layering, transparency, and texture to infer a more haptic visual effect. Running for approximately eight minutes allows for a semi-narrative to build up, referencing the title quote and creating a sense of mounting anxiety that leads to an explosion of tears of increasing intensity. Whereas “Crying” was exhibited in a ‘white box’ gallery space, marred by ambient lighting of the other exhibition pieces, “Brimming & Sloshing” was first screened in the hybrid Icebox at Crane Arts, Philadelphia. The Icebox utilises an enormous 137-foot reflective white wall in a darkened projection space, offering scope for the clarity of colour and detailed depth in the overlaid images to be appreciated. This work was also designed to be screened in an endless loop, set up to be viewed as a gallery-style video installation, whereby viewers could either view discretely in one sitting as an immersive activity within the scope of cinematic attention or view in a peripheral way, with semi-divided attention while viewing a variety of other works in the gallery environment.

Mark Nash (2009) considers the fluid boundaries of exhibition display for modern-day practitioners. He states that, “The moving image is now a key element of contemporary art practice and gallery and museum display.... The moving image has

provided a means for artists to develop a 'post-medium' practice, one that moves between media and is not restricted to a particular one" (Nash 2009, 141). One manifestation of this post-medium practice arises due to planned obsolescence of digital technology. The 'virtual window' occurs as displays and devices change dramatically in short spaces of time, and digitalisation has blurred boundaries between cinema, photography, videos, and art through the power of transmission (Friedberg 2006) Artists working across mediums re-purpose and re-configure works for various deliveries. The work is then archived in various modes, and as these modes become obsolete, they are re-archived with subtle (and often unsubtle) changes. Therefore, the work is not fixed, and never 'finished'; there is a fluidity and an ephemeral sense to the materiality of the work.

2.4.6 Transformation

We are unable to predict or determine what the character of an art encounter will be; consequently, a Deleuzian hypothesis maintains that the audience for whom the work is constructed cannot yet be known. Following the transformation of the "Crying" sequences to become "Brimming & Sloshing", my own encounter with sensory engagement in this particular production process continued. "Peaking", "Crashing", and "Falling" (2014) became an even tighter consolidation of the visual ideas I had explored in the previous experiments. These loops represent the three main phases in the cycle of living with depressive illness: the peaks of anxiety; the crashing feeling of not coping; and the descent into the black hole of despair and melancholy. A further phase is the numbness in between, depicted as a silent blackness in the gaps in the loops. It is a three-channel work designed to be projected semi-simultaneously, running in asynchronous loops determined by each component's differing lengths ("Peaking" 00:01:50, "Crashing" 00:00:50, "Falling" 00:02:20) (Project Folder 7c ii). It equates to the jumbled experience of a disordered mental state where you may be anxious and crying at the same time, or not coping and numb, or all three at once.

It was selected in international competition and screened on the media facade of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MSU) building as part of the 2014 Zagreb Animafest festival in Croatia. The media facade comprises the entire upper floor of the building, with three separate window walls forming the screen for rear-projected works. The sixteen selected animated works run all night as a public space installation. The screenings were silent yet mimicked elements of a cinematic experience due to the

darkness, coupled with the location of the MSU being opposite a popular public park (Project Folder 7c iii).

By becoming deeply engaged and immersed in the creative act (in 'flow'), I instinctively gauge the rhythms and pulses of the looping works, relying on an internal soundtrack predicated on memory, mind, and body. I wanted to add further to the asynchronous timing of the animation and create a polyphonic soundtrack that would work in the same overlapping way. Therefore, the viewer's encounter or reception of the work becomes different through every viewing, in that the loops will forever remain asynchronous and the screen in a permanent loop. The adapted *Peaking, Crashing, Falling* screened in a gallery installation environment for my major show in the Crane Gallery in July 2014, was shown in a specialised multi-screen room space as part of the *Reel Deal* Griffith Film School ten-year showcase exhibition in November 2014 (Project Folder 7c i).

2.5 CONGREGATION

Creating the multiple interconnecting aspects of this project was essential for me to explore the idea of animating female experience, and my hypothesis of defining the animatrix. Being able to combine various aspects of my creative practice, including analogue and digital drawn-style animating, sculptural or haptic object making, and experimental non-figurative digital animating for display across a range of media (traditional gallery, installation, outdoor projection, small screen, and cinematic scale projection), with each of these elements affording scope for interchangeable display modes, supports my position of identifying a term to use that best describes an artist working in this way. This approach to the project not only helps define what I do, but also how to define a 'story' that does not necessarily fit a neat single-minded approach. Devising these different works connected via associated themes (representing the body, social expectations, taboo and the abject, memory, and physical and emotional sensation) proved a fruitful inspiration to creativity. Developing my seemingly disparate practices while focusing on how best to communicate an idea, without being restricted to one medium or technique or mode of dissemination, allowed for a deeper understanding of the themes I was tackling, an opportunity for playfulness, and therefore a greater chance for transferring my own empathetic and experiential response to an audience. Circumstances that

enable a fluid and iterative approach, allowing for transformation and re-purposing are essential, yet at the same time, practical (timeframes, deadlines, external expectations) and aesthetic (techniques, equipment or software, communicative content) parameters help to corral and focus the work. The body of work created across the studio practice of this doctorate proved to be crucial in how I define myself as an animatrix, and offers a framework for further discussion of how a set of criteria may be developed whereby others may also don the animatrix mantle.

CONCLUSION

This project has endeavoured to unravel the way that woman-centred creative animated projects can be realised by exploring the practice of animating female experience; and further, to delineate a term that might best describe this approach. In doing so, many questions have arisen, which I posed in the introduction of this exegesis.

As detailed, I use the word ‘animatrix’ in various contexts: as a noun that describes a female animator as well as the practice/outcome itself; as a plural noun that describes a group of female animation practitioners (animatrices); as an adjective that describes a type of film or project or moving-image artwork and the qualities it possesses; and as an adverb that describes the act or action of animating—being an engagement with physicality (for example, using an ‘animatrix swoop of the brush’). Confusing as this may be, I ask the question, ‘How do we delimit and define what encompasses an animatrix?’ And, in introducing this concept, is there greater scope in the way that animation might be categorised or evaluated or described? Is the animatrix limited to independent-style production or can the concept be embraced in an industrial context? Can the term be gender free? It is necessary to keep the ambiguity of the word at this point, in terms of inviting and opening discussion within and between the academic, practice, and industry communities to facilitate a way forward towards refining the concept and definition.

Through exploring my practice, and contextualising it against the work of similar practitioners and projects, I have identified the key defining themes of the animatrix. Although not exhaustive, the use of the term might encompass these five principles:

- The body has agency, non-stereotyped by gendered tropes, and there is notable body–mind equity;
- Taboo subjects and social inequalities are challenged;
- Physicality, tactility, materiality, and elements of the ‘haptic’ are included in production styles and visual treatment;
- There is an appealing to the senses through non-verbal, non-linguistic, or non-dialogue driven ways; and
- Memory is referenced rather than mere narrative contrivance.

Inspiration for my own work is not limited to female-produced animation, and I concede that many animated works produced by men include key qualities of how I would describe an animatrix work, with a principle factor being the focus on a female lead character or characters; for example, Dennis Tupicoff’s *His Mother’s Voice*

(1994), Sylvain Chomet's *Triplets of Belleville* (2003), and Thom Moore's *Song of the Sea* (2014). Additionally, these principles do not exclude supposedly male-centred subject matters—for instance, war, violence, fighting, car chases, or rigorous sports—but delineate how these subjects may be treated within the thematic framework of an animatrix. It may be too much of a stretch to adopt the Animatrix mantle to include men, and potentially dilute the intention of identifying a distinctive lens to filter my own and other female experience. In this sense, clarifying the term remains ambiguous, and again, I posit this ambiguity in the hope to encourage further discussion.

Processes are also broadly categorised, and do not rely on specifics of software or technique or production design, but would include principles such as the following:

- A fragment structure, or allowing for non-traditional story and non-traditional outputs;
- Script/storyboard hybrid, with reliance on concept and image rather than dialogue/text, including high use of symbols and metaphor; and
- Evidence of flow, risk or experimentation.

In this regard, however, the practical roles as undertaken by an animatrix also include a strong sense of production structure, in that they would need to be:

- Conscious of the realities of production markets (i.e., not completely budget-free independent practitioners) and therefore include practitioners within a commercial realm;
- Transformative in allowing for multiple instances or iterations (i.e., many different aspects of a work, or many versions, or many in a series);
- Embracing, in recognising skillsets in all departments (not just limited to animating, but including creative compositing, creative editing and of course directing); and also
- Fluid, with options for cross-disciplinary practice across departments, with the opportunity for development via 'vertical slice' rather than horizontal timeline or hierarchical structure (i.e., creating an entire sequence from idea/sketch to finished 'full-colour' composited output).

To be defined as an animatrix work, an animated feature should include more than one element of criteria from the stipulated themes or processes or roles, and preferably all. As Nakamura and Csíkszentmihályi specify in defining a state of flow, where the characteristic aspects can appear independently of each other, but only in combination do they constitute a so-called "flow experience" (2001, 90), so would the

definition of an animatrix experience be exemplified by having every principle included.

The animatrix term would normally be used in the context of primarily character-driven works. Purely experimental non-figurative films fit a specific and different category, and although many of the above qualities also relate to this genre of animation, it is important to delimit the scope of this definition. Therefore, the term also can include women working in the mainstream or commercial industry. This highlights another important aspect in terms of the relationship and the blurring lines between 'commercial' and 'independent' aspects of the industry. In the changing technological environment, boundaries and restricted access to equipment and facilities to produce animation are becoming obsolete (due to lower real costs and easier purchase access), and studio structures are slowly accommodating a more even gender balance, as evidenced by recent data quoted in Appendix i. A deeper statistical and data-based enquiry into changing gender balance in the Australian animation industry is important to develop. This needs to further investigate and identify female experience in the contemporary field, as well as to document the evolving female experience in the industry following the proliferation of large-scale animation studio production houses since the late 1970s (for example, Hanna-Barbera, then Disney). This enquiry is outside the scope of this doctorate; however, it will be necessary to define the concept of the animatrix in the wider animation community and initiate prevalent use of the term. It must be clarified that in the current overarching male orthodoxy of the animation industry, it is imperative to identify female animating experience and female attitudes and approach to their work. In an imbalanced gendered field, it is also essential that this alternative approach infiltrates the mainstream commercial realms to counteract perceived inequities. This is not to diminish the actual work or product, which is why the term animatrix as a noun is necessary as a discriminator, rather than 'female animator' nor 'feminine aesthetic', which adjectivally belittle the practitioner. People prefer to be identified as an 'artist' first, rather than a 'female artist' or an 'aboriginal artist' or a 'deaf artist'. As Deleuze and Guattari note,

When Virginia Woolf was questioned about a specifically women's writing, she was appalled at the idea of writing "as a woman." Rather, writing should produce a becoming-woman as atoms of womanhood capable of crossing and impregnating an entire social field, and of contaminating men, of sweeping them up in that becoming. (1980, 298)

What is important here, echoed in the above Woolf quote, is that the animatrix engenders a notion of agency, and that her inherent ways of seeing and approaching animation practice can become integral to mainstream male-dominated animation production.

In summing up my own practice and contribution to knowledge through the process of delivering this doctorate, some key points emerge. Embracing multi-disciplinary works encourages expanded deliberation on how to understand and approach difficult or challenging themes or content such as the embodiment of postnatal depression. In this way, a deeper contemplation of associated issues can be explored (for example, the representation of women, or the physical sensations felt during anxiety attacks). Allowing for an intrinsically iterative process also affords deeper connection to the subject matter, and by extension, an opportunity for heightened engagement for the viewer. Similarly, developing works for multi-modal display (for example, gallery, small screen, and large-scale installations) stimulates advanced engagement for the artist in production techniques and aesthetic decision-making. Rather than creating works that are fixed or finished, as is common for most animated short film production, an ongoing process is encouraged, more akin to an artistic development of a body of work. In relation to the artist practice, incorporating a haptic or textural element also stimulates the personal interaction with the work, and by association, that gut feeling experienced by the artist may be transferred to the viewer. This explorative process inspires playfulness, which also prompts an inclination to humour. Throughout this practice, as I define my own aesthetic as an animatrix, through creating works that address the intricacies of the lived experience of the human body, I express an approach to being an animated woman that others might find relevant. In quantifying and qualifying my practice of animating female experience, I manifest the reality of the Animatrix.

APPENDICES

- i. "Seeking the Animatrix" essay
- ii. *Coming Through* exhibition catalogue
- iii. Original story sketches
- iv. Photographs from exhibitions
- v. Interactive comic sketches
- vi. Publication - List of exhibitions and conference presentations

STUDIO PROJECT FOLDERS on USB

1. Readme text
 - i. tech specs (file formats)
 - ii. folders – viewing instructions in exegesis
 - iii. website link
2. EXEGESIS
 - Animatrix_SPARK_s2568992_DVA.pdf
 - Animatrix_SPARK_s2568992_DVA.doc
 - a. APPENDICES
 - i. “Seeking the Animatrix” essay
 - ii. *Coming Through* exhibition catalogue
 - iii. Original story sketches
 - iv. Photographs from exhibitions
 - v. Interactive comic sketches
 - vi. Publications and List of exhibitions and conference presentations
3. COMING THROUGH – Concepts
 - a. Concept Art – ‘Taedium Vitae’ collection (desolator; dodgy-city; nutcase; rain-hat; taedium-vitae; tears-for-no-reason)
 - b. Drawing and Animating - 9months in 1minute (sequence 1 – 5)
 - c. Screenshots
4. COMING THROUGH – Animation
 - a. Edited compilation (no sound) (ComingThrough_compilation.mp4)
 - b. Tests – ‘Blue’ and Animatic
 - c. Individual clips (x 26)
5. WHOLESOME
 - a. “wholesome” (with sound)
6. HECATE’S SISTERS
 - a. Ink drawings
 - b. Puppets
7. CRYING
 - a. “Crying” (edited sequences) (crying_5.mov)
 - b. “Brimming & Sloshing” (brimming-sloshing.mp4)
 - c. “Peaking: Crashing: Falling”
 - i. edited compiled sequence (with sound) (PCF_all_1920_BLACK.mp4)
 - ii. individual sequences (with sound) (crashing_loop_1.mov; falling_loop_1.mov; peaking_loop_1.mov)
 - iii. in situ at MSU simulation clip (no sound) (PCF_zagreb-simulation.mp4)

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