

Artistic Doctoral Project

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HYBRID NARRATIVES:

DENISE HAUSER



*Approaching Maternal Experience
through Collecting, Writing, and Doubling
in the Development of Mixed Media Film*

DENISE HAUSER *PhD Candidate*

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This reflection was written by Denise Hauser as a part of the doctoral project in artistic research *Hybrid Narratives: Approaching Maternal Experience through Collecting, Writing, and Doubling in the Development of Mixed Media Film*.

Graphic design:
Nonspace

Main supervisor:
Nina Grünfeld

Co- supervisors:
Birgitta Hosea
Asbjørn Tiller

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ABSTRACT

Motherhood in cinema is often a side plot – this PhD project in Artistic Research seeks to challenge that. Through collecting, writing, and “doubling” as methods, it explores the maternal experiences of three filmmakers and how these complex realities can take shape in a hybrid film blending fiction, documentary, live action, and animation.

The research addresses a gap in representation, where female doppelgängers and alter-egos are rarely linked to motherhood, despite its deeply transformative nature – an obvious foundation for doubling. In filmic narratives, female doubles are often cast as antagonists or disruptions rather than reflections of a mother’s evolving self. The lens post-birth shifts to the child’s development and perspective, leaving the mother’s transformation – her shifting identity and sense of self – largely unexplored.

This project takes a different approach, using interviews, video recordings, animated investigations, and personal reflections to explore the challenges of balancing motherhood and filmmaking. By aligning maternal experience with cinematic doubling, it highlights the multifaceted roles women navigate in both fields.

The research also engages with filmmakers and artists who challenge conventional portrayals of motherhood. Though caregiving perspectives appear in short-form animation, hybrid long-form representations are still rare. Influences include literary works exploring motherhood, identity, and doubling, such as *Matrescence* by Lucy Jones and *August Blue* by Deborah Levy.

Rather than aiming for a traditional completed film, the outcome prioritizes the process. It includes a synopsis and excerpts from the evolving script *Make Her See*, alongside documentary footage, interviews, animation tests, and live-action experiments. Incorporating doppelgängers and animated alter-egos, the project blends realism and surrealism to examine a woman’s vulnerabilities and resilience as she redefines herself.

This artistic research expands the representation of motherhood in mixed media film, connects the maternal experience to cinematic doubling, and opens new possibilities for nuanced maternal narratives.

ABSTRACT

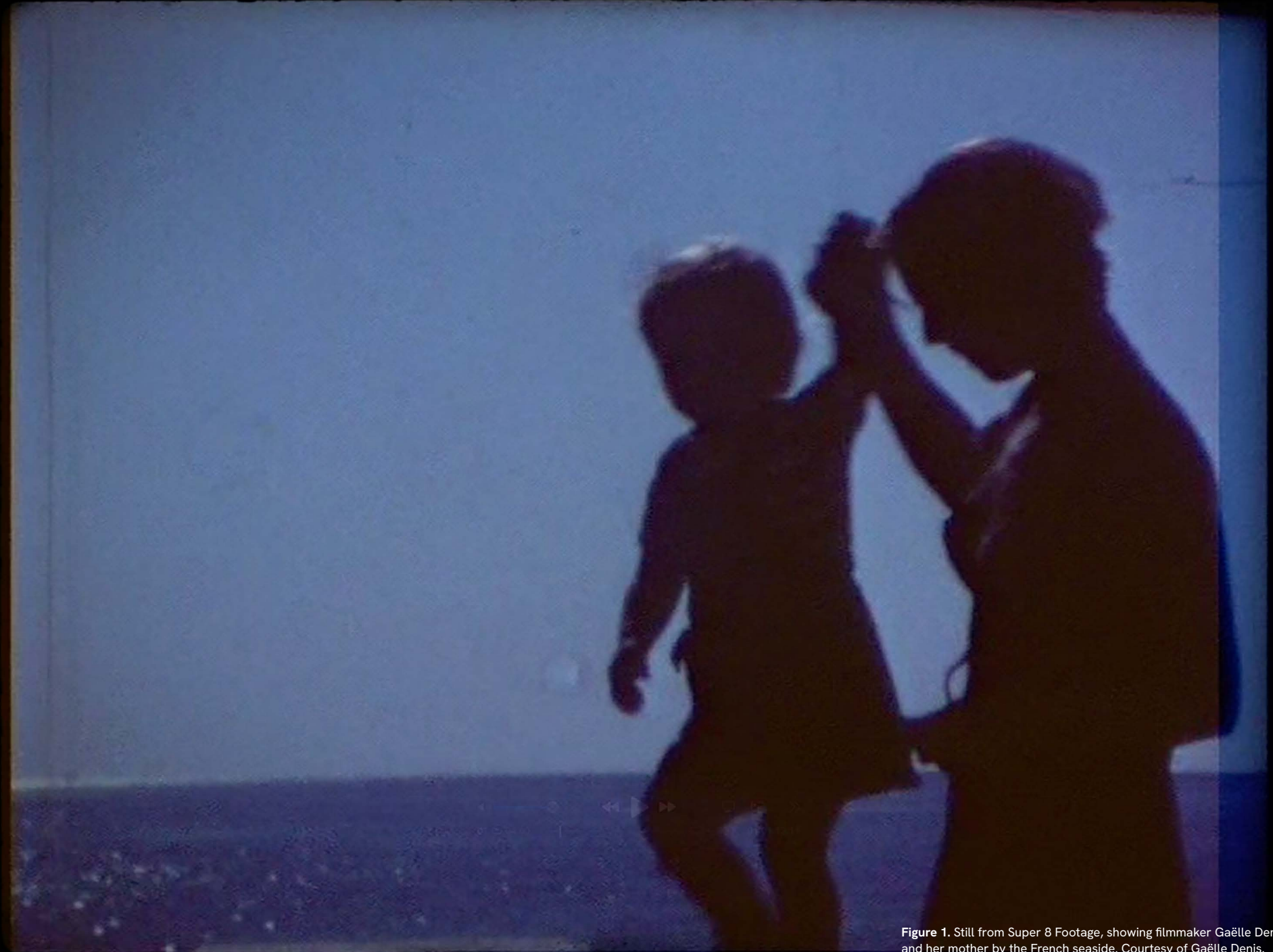


Figure 1. Still from Super 8 Footage, showing filmmaker Gaëlle Denis and her mother by the French seaside. Courtesy of Gaëlle Denis.

READING GUIDE

Thoughts, language, and form of writing are deeply interconnected. This reflection is therefore not a conventional academic thesis, but the work of a filmmaker engaged in a PhD in Artistic Research – an inquiry shaped by creative practice, experimentation, and lived experience. Writing here becomes a mode of thinking: a space for gathering and shaping fragmented thoughts, and for contextualizing my work within a broader PhD landscape.

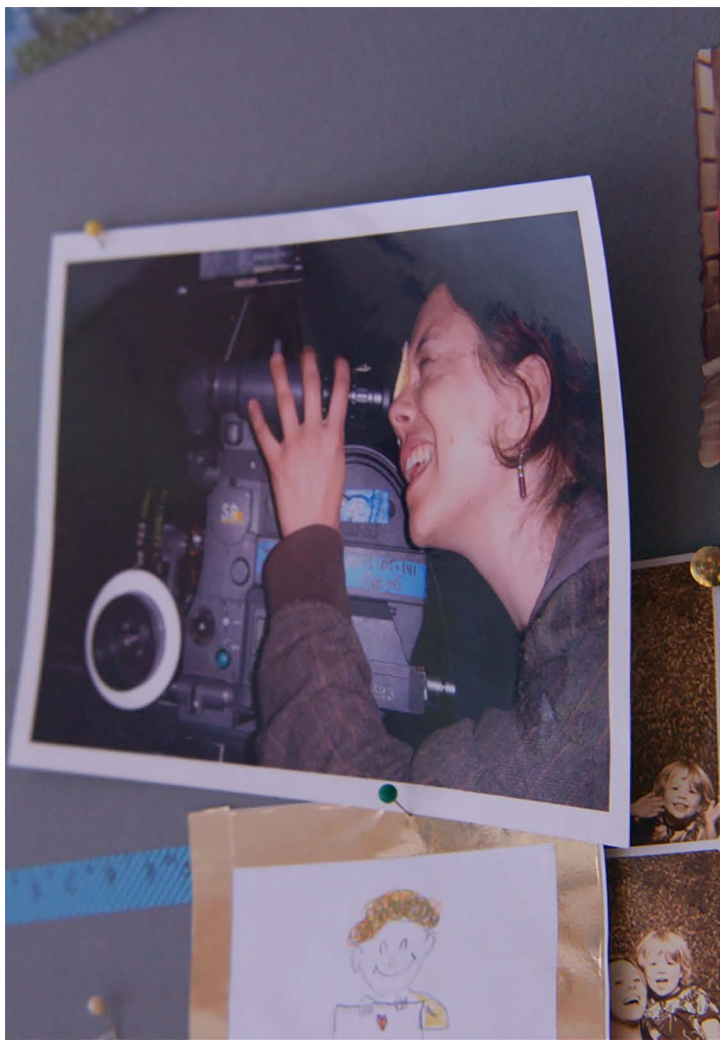
What began as a broad focus on “female experience” evolved into a more nuanced exploration of the intersection between motherhood and filmmaking. A guiding question throughout this project has been: How can motherhood and the practice of filmmaking successfully coexist? Conversations with female filmmakers suggest that reconciling self-doubt and guilt requires both an external framework for making films and an internal ability to enter and exit the creative “bubble,” akin to a state of flow. Flow became a theme explored in literature and interviews, used as a method in the creative process itself, and eventually thematically anchored in the script.

My core method throughout the project unfolds in three stages, and begins with COLLECTING – interviews with female filmmakers, visual documentation, and personal experience as a filmmaking mother. WRITING opens a space to weave collected material into the hybrid script *Make Her See*, and, as part of the reflection, it makes room for dialogue with existing texts and artworks. Shifting between structured and diaristic styles, I wrote from both rational and intuitive perspectives, mirroring the dual voices of the fictive characters Mara and Nora in the script. The two *Road Trip Reflections*, which interrupt the formal text, best reflect my initial idea of autoethnography – blending geographic movement with the filmmakers’ and my own stories, alongside reflections on literature and art. The concept of DOUBLING – represented not only through dual writing styles, but more prominently through doppelgängers and alter egos – was used to explore how maternity shifts identity and to express the internal tension between creative freedom and caregiving roles.

These three strands structure the reflections in this document and correspond to artistic materials presented in the linked Research Catalogue exposition pages *Collecting*, *Writing*, and *Doubling*. A synopsis and script excerpts are included in

the appendix of this reflection. The full script is available upon request. The animatic, which incorporates animated alter egos of the filmmakers and the fictional protagonist, as well as a test with the actress portraying Mara and her double Nora, is found under *Doubling*. This section also includes a double-screen video loop based on a scene in the script. *Collecting* gathers edited documentary footage, a drawing and sound piece accompanied by a personal note, photos, quotes, and interview guides.

Presenting the PhD outcomes in this layered manner – through written reflection and linked audiovisual material on the Research Catalogue exposition – aims to illuminate the complexities of maternal identity and challenge simplified portrayals of motherhood in film.



MAKE HER SEE
by Denise Hauser



Figure 2. Image composition showing part of a documentary still image from Gaëlle Denis's home, a photograph of the script's title page *Make Her See*, and a still from the animatic. D. Hauser.

POSITIONING STATEMENT

BETWEEN PRIVILEGE AND PRECARITY

In a country celebrated for gender equality, being a filmmaker while mothering remains structurally and culturally challenging. I write from the position of a Swiss-born filmmaker living and working in Norway - a context often described as supportive, with accessible childcare and free healthcare. In 2021, I began a three-year PhD stipend in Artistic Research at NTNU, a privileged position, and benefited from a supportive partner and in-laws. My children were no longer infants, allowing increasing freedom to travel to seminars, forums, and professional events. From the outside, this context may appear relatively secure for combining motherhood and filmmaking.

Yet, this apparent stability reveals deeper complexity. My perspective spans two systems - Switzerland and Norway - illustrating how invisible barriers persist for mothers in film. Artists rarely live solely from their art; caregiving amplifies financial and emotional pressures. In Switzerland, high healthcare and childcare costs, limited support networks, and the difficulty of re-entering the professional field after becoming a mother constrained my opportunities. In 2018, I moved to Norway seeking the supportive “village” that could sustain both professional engagement and attentive parenting.

Even in Norway, challenges remained. On arrival, I did not qualify for paid maternity leave and stayed home unpaid until my daughter was over a year old. The following years brought temporary and part-time positions, long commutes, and the challenge of co-founding a production company I could not fully sustain, and navigating COVID-19 disruptions. In 2021, when I began the PhD, financial stability improved, but internal challenges intensified. As the first PhD fellow in Artistic Research at NTNU’s Department of Art and Media Studies, I navigated academic structures, the film industry, and caregiving simultaneously. Recurring health issues added further fragility.

Filmmaking, like parenting, depends on interdependence. When my producer took parental leave, I assumed many of her responsibilities - organising budgets, schedules, and carrying out two documentary shoots independently. Managing this alongside a full-time PhD, caring for my own children, and navigating unstable health revealed the compounding pressures

when care responsibilities intersect with precarious production structures.

Even within relative privilege – access to networks, education, institutional support, and some family help – the tension between motherhood and creative work persists. My positionality reflects this duality: I navigate structural barriers while benefiting from supports that many lack. Following Donna Haraway’s notion of situated knowledge¹, this awareness frames the research critically, acknowledging that insights are partial, embodied, and relational rather than universal.

In 2025, Norwegian film is celebrated as a “Gullalder,” a golden age, yet beneath this optimism, analysis by Nordisk Film & TV Fond reveals a more complex reality: a 40% drop in industry jobs and a 30% decline in active professionals compared to 2022, with 24% holding secondary jobs outside the industry and 59% considering leaving.² Within this landscape, discussing motherhood may appear indulgent, yet it is precisely here that it becomes urgent. Parenthood intensifies the precarity already defining artistic labour, revealing how care remains an unacknowledged fault line in debates on sustainability and equity.

Despite supportive systems, one tension is constant: the internal negotiation between mothering and creative work. Anne O’Brien describes this as the “subjectivity load,”³ the ongoing emotional and cognitive work required to reconcile these identities in industries still measuring commitment by availability. This invisible negotiation – between care and creation, fragmentation and flow – runs through my practice and the doubled figures in my script. It is both a thematic concern and a lived condition of artistic labour.

MY TRAJECTORY AS A FILMMAKER

My filmmaking journey began in 2004, at Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design in London, where I studied Graphic Design and Illustration. Early on, I shifted toward animation, driven by curiosity to bring my illustrations to life through sound and movement. This self-driven exploration led me to experiment with various techniques: frame-by-frame animation using digital tools like Flash and Paint, stop-motion with miniature sets, and compositing live-action footage with animated elements. Central Saint Martins encouraged interdisciplinary approaches, allowing me to move freely between media and techniques – which became central to my creative process.

A significant influence during this time was filmmaker Gaëlle Denis, who became my first animation teacher at Central St. Martins. Her success as an RCA graduate and BAFTA winner for *Fish Never Sleep*⁴ inspired me to pursue a Master of Arts in Animation at the Royal College of Art. Despite initial financial challenges, I secured funding through Swiss grants, RCA bursaries, and refunded undergraduate fees, allowing me to attend without debt.

At RCA, my graduation film *Copy City*⁵ – a mixed-media piece combining live-action, stop-motion, and digital animation explored the theme of duality. In the script, which I later used as voice-over, I juxtaposed a world of the living with a world of the dead – a story I loosely remembered from a photography project during my foundation year at the University of the Arts Zurich. A female protagonist performed repetitive, mundane actions, with live-action footage printed frame by frame, digitally or manually animated, and copied using an old-school copier. The completed film was nominated for a Conran award at RCA, screened at over

- 1 Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no.3 (1988): 582-583.
- 2 Nordisk Film & TV Fond, “Navigating Nordic Film Employment: Time for a Temperature Check,” April 22, 2025, <https://nordiskfilmogtvfond.com/news/stories/navigating-nordic-film-employment-time-for-a-temperature-check>.
- 3 Anne O’Brien, “The Subjectivity Load: Negotiating the Internalization of ‘Mother’ and ‘Creative Worker’ Identities in Creative Industries,” *Gender, Work & Organization* 32, no. 1 (2025): 396-384, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13157>.
- 4 *Fish Never Sleep*, directed by Gaëlle Denis (2002; UK: Royal College of Art), DVD.
- 5 *Copy City*, directed by Denise Hauser (2008; UK: Royal College of Art), DVD.



Figure 3. Still from short film *Wanda*.
D. Hauser.

60 international festivals, and won several awards, establishing my foundation in hybrid filmmaking.

After moving to Trondheim in 2008, I faced the challenge of adapting to a smaller film industry with limited animation infrastructure. I began teaching motion graphics at Høyskolen Kristiania while directing commercials and making funded mixed-media short films such as *Return to Sender*⁶ and *Wanda*⁷. They further developed my hybrid style, blending hand-built miniature worlds with live action characters or digitally animated 2-D characters.

In 2011, my work caught the attention of New York-based production company Hornet Inc., who began representing me as a director. Between 2012 and 2015, I was based in New York, commuting between Brooklyn and Manhattan, directing both live-action and animated commercial projects for various production companies and clients, including the Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

Wanda, which I began developing in 2011, became in 2018/19, one of the two most screened animated Norwegian short films. This led to meeting animation filmmaker Anita Killi. Our films were featured together in *Norsk Kort: Wanda & Stille*⁸, at Cinemateket Oslo, highlighting our shared approach

to non-dialogue storytelling and our interest in exploring the complex emotions of children. The screening was followed by a panel discussion on how artistic animated films can convey children's experiences of violence and bullying. The short explores childhood trauma and inner conflict, focusing on growing up in a dysfunctional family with an alcoholic parent and facing bullying at school. With no one to turn to, Wanda creates three imaginary friends – alter egos that reflect different sides of herself.

In 2023, I ventured into live-action with *Losing Nobody*⁹, a short fiction film centered on miscarriage. This marked my first fully live-action narrative, broadening my exploration of storytelling techniques beyond animation and mixed media. The film was screened at Cannes Short Film Corner, among other festivals, and was later acquired by the Norwegian Film Institute for the Norwegian library short film streaming platform Filmbib.

WHAT LED ME TO PURSUE THIS PHD?

In 2014, I fell through the portal of motherhood, which reshaped both my personal and professional life. Returning from New York to Zurich, my home town in 2015, and later Trondheim, I began reflecting on how motherhood affected my creative work. While it offers many joys and sources of inspiration, it also brings significant tensions – especially for those who are both mothers and artists. My experiences, I realized, were shared by other filmmaking mothers but rarely addressed directly in film.

In her memoir *Changing*, Liv Ullman vividly captures this tension:

Try telling a child that Mamma is working when the child can see with its own eyes that she is just sitting there

⁶ *Return to Sender*, directed by Denise Hauser (2012; Norway: Helmet Films & Visual Effects/NFI), DVD.

⁷ *Wanda*, directed by Denise Hauser (2018; Norway: Klipp og Lim), streaming video. <https://denisehauser.com/work/wanda/>.

⁸ Denise Hauser, Anita Killi, "Wanda & Stille" (Screening/Panel Discussion, Norsk Kort, Cinemateket Oslo, 2019) <https://www.cinemateket.no/filmer/wanda-stille>.

⁹ *Losing Nobody*, directed by Denise Hauser (2023; Norway: Tagline and Helmet Films & Visual Effects, 2023), streaming video. <https://filmbib.no/permalib/filmbib/9nNGehnb7k3G>.

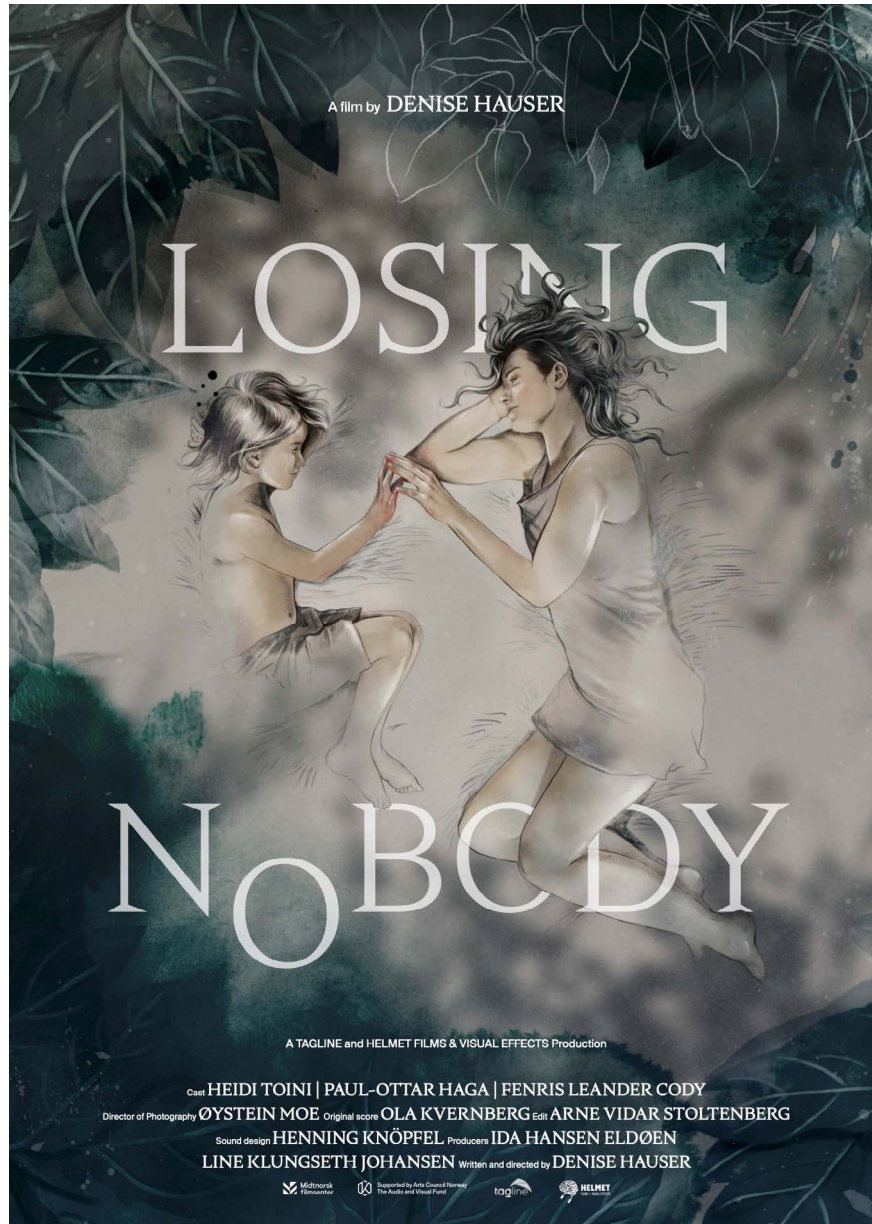


Figure 4. Poster for short film *Losing Nobody*. D. Hauser.

*writing... I dare not have music on when I am in the basement, writing, lest upstairs they think I am just sitting there loafing. I feel that to be respected I must produce pancakes and home-baked bread and have neat, tidy rooms.*¹⁰

Ullmann's reflection highlights the emotional conflict of needing to "be elsewhere" to feel valid as both a mother and an artist, juxtaposing the image of the "selfish artist" with the "caring mother."

Virginia Woolf addressed a related struggle decades earlier in *A Room of One's Own*¹¹, asserting that women need financial independence and personal space to create. While Woolf's thesis centers on external barriers – money and privacy – Ullmann's experience shows that even with these, internalized pressures can still inhibit creativity, especially for mothers who constantly negotiate their roles.

Ursula K. Le Guin carved out a space for herself within motherhood by keeping mothering and writing in separate spheres of thought. She refused to choose between creation and procreation. For her, a writer did not necessarily need a room of her own or the goodwill of a partner. What she needed was a pencil, paper, and the knowledge that she alone was in charge of that pencil and responsible for what it wrote on the paper. In other words, she was free.¹²

If female writers have long debated the challenge of carving out a room of their own alongside motherhood, how much more demanding is filmmaking – an art form that requires not only mental and physical space but also the logistical and financial resources for production? Unlike writing, which can be done in solitude, filmmaking depends on funding for cast, crew, and post-production. Here, the concept of a "room of one's own" extends far beyond personal space, encompassing a broader framework of resources and support.

This PhD project is driven by the need to navigate these competing demands – to create a framework where both artistic practice and motherhood can coexist without compromising

¹⁰ Liv Ullmann, *Changing* (Bantam, 1978), 36-37.

¹¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Penguin Books, 2004).

¹² Julie Phillips, *The Baby on the Fire Escape: Creativity, Motherhood, and the Mind-Baby Problem* (Norton Paperback, 2022), 147-148.

either. My research explores, among other things, how to achieve a state of flow amidst these tensions, balancing the personal and professional, the internal and external. While this intersection has been previously explored, my approach integrates my lived experience as a filmmaker and mother within the specific socio-cultural context of Artistic Research in Film in Norway. Additionally, it incorporates insights from filmmakers Anita Killi and Gaëlle Denis, offering a more nuanced and situated perspective to this ongoing dialogue.

HOW THE PHD SHAPED MY PRACTICE

Interdisciplinarity has always been at the heart of my practice. My PhD project in Artistic Research continues this trajectory through *Make Her See*, a hybrid film in development that merges fiction and documentary, integrating interviews, documentary footage, and animated sequences. This project deepens my exploration of doubling linked to motherhood, positioning my work within artistic research and hybrid narrative filmmaking.

Traditional filmmaking constraints and funding processes can restrict the creative freedom essential to hybrid filmmaking. Sustaining a self-directed hybrid filmmaking practice becomes challenging when reliant on industry funding. Projects may stall or alter due to financial limitations, with progress dictated by resources rather than creative vision. While external producers are often necessary, they can create tension between artistic goals and industry demands. Navigating these challenges has shaped my practice.

Except for my RCA graduation project, my later films were developed within industry frameworks, requiring a balance between artistic ambition and commercial feasibility. The framework of the PhD allowed me to examine these tensions, offering a space to explore hybrid forms outside the constraints of market-driven production cycles. Throughout the past three years, I have been given a vital space to reorient my practice toward creative autonomy. Free from immediate commercial pressures, I have been able to focus on developing artistic methods that favor processes over outcomes.

While my PhD began with a focus on visual exploration, it gradually evolved into an extensive writing practice alongside visual development. The script became a tool to organize thoughts and explore visual ideas, including animation and mixed media scenes, and how they might fit into a longer structure. The screenplay - though not production-ready - has become the major artistic output of this PhD and can be accessed upon request. Furthermore, in the appendix of this reflection, I have selected a few scenes that best reflect my research questions and experiments. Focusing increasingly on writing as opposed to film production - where bigger budgets and external collaborators are required - allowed me to cultivate a more independent artistic and reflexive practice. Writing demanded only my commitment to a daily practice, free from the need for external collaborators.

Simultaneously, I benefited from a supportive framework that included mentorship from my PhD supervisors, seminars, and Artistic Research Forums through the Norwegian Artistic Research School, as well as external learning opportunities - such as a retreat at Metochi in Lesbos, Greece, with mentors and colleagues from the industry. In addition, the Midnordic Visual Lab - an initiative by Midtnorsk Filmsenter (Norway) and Film Västernorrland (Sweden) - offered mentorship from dramaturg Kirsten Bonnén Rask and a collaborative environment with female writers and filmmakers from the region.

Still, my attempt to break entirely free from industry frameworks has not been possible. Developing audiovisual output has during the first half of the PhD required considerable time and energy securing funding and has involved collaboration with an external producer and other contributors. Hence, my project remains informed by my experience as a film director operating within the film industry rather than as a fine artist working independently. As such, I acknowledge that the standards I have set for myself are shaped by the demands of the film industry.

At the onset of the PhD, my objectives included adopting a more reflexive working mode, experimenting with form, and transitioning to a more self-sustaining practice. This shift allowed me to gradually claim greater ownership of the process, from early editing of documentary footage to the development of animated segments, and most significantly through the scriptwriting.

These goals reflect my evolution from commercially driven work toward a more reflective, artistically grounded approach. I acknowledge that this self-sustained practice has been possible mainly due to NTNU's financial support, a salary and dedicated office space. Maintaining this independence beyond the PhD might not be possible, and will require adapting to new frameworks.

methodological: it situates the work within relational, temporal, and ethical frameworks where motherhood and filmmaking coexist as inseparable from artistic creation.

CONTRIBUTION AND FRAMING

This project addresses a knowledge gap at the intersection of mixed media, artist portraiture, and maternal experience, particularly within the Norwegian Artistic Research context and film production. While various aspects have been addressed internationally, few combine these specific parameters. The project foregrounds maternal voices in film and draws attention to systemic barriers that persist in balancing creative work with caregiving.

Situating the project within feminist theory, including Haraway's *Situated knowledges*¹³, highlights how care, collaboration, and interrupted workflows shape both process and outcome. Collaboration is both ethical and practical. Contributions from the portrayed filmmakers, costume designer, and others are not challenges to authorship but expressions of it. As in care, creation is relational: filmmaking, like maternal experience, demonstrates that art and identity are collective. The fragmentary, iterative, and exploratory nature of the project, developed under caregiving and resource constraints, demonstrates that artistic productivity cannot be measured solely by polish or output, but also by sustaining multiple creative processes while navigating structural and personal constraints.

These reflections inform the exploration of maternal experience, hybridity, and the circular method of Collecting - Writing - Doubling that structures the hybrid film script. In sum, my positionality is both privileged and precarious. The project emerges from a specific location - marked by education, networks, and relational support - but also by exhaustion, the structural invisibility of caregiving labour, and ongoing pressures to "keep up." Recognizing these conditions is not self-justification but

13 Haraway, "Situated Knowledges."

Figure 5: Still from *Anita Killi Edit No. 1*, showing an outdoor drying rack at her home in Dovre. D. Hauser.

Either I'm working, or I'm preparing to work.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

*I feel embarrassed when I say feminism and people do not think revolution in service of every living thing. I think I will spend my life trying to rectify this.*¹⁴

This excerpt from Lola Olufemi's beautiful exploration in *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise* – blurring the lines between what is and what could be – intertwines fragmentary reflections in prose and poetry. Her words are mirrored in the book's playful design, reinforcing the importance of resisting a single, fixed narrative. Instead, she encourages an understanding shaped by multiple perspectives, including class, gender, background, and ethnicity.

Cultural references influence mothering styles, a topic which I will explore further in the chapter *Writing*. A universal female experience, as my initial project title might have implied, does not exist – just as there is no singular maternal experience. Motherhood takes many forms.

The animated short film *Threads*¹⁵, directed by Norwegian animator Torill Kove, explores the maternal bond symbolically. A thread appears as a mother carries and cares for her adopted daughter, illustrating how their connection deepens over time. As the child grows – learning to walk, play, and gain independence – the thread stretches but never breaks, even during periods of separation. Eventually, as an adult, the daughter forms a maternal bond of her own and returns the thread to her mother, who keeps it in her heart, symbolizing their enduring connection.

Another example that broadens the scope of maternal representation is the animated short *Two One Two*¹⁶ by Shira Avni. The film explores neurodivergent parenting and employs doubling in shifting shapes and animated alter-egos. I will delve deeper into this in the chapter *Doubling*.

Yet, within the diversity of maternal experiences, there are also shared aspects – common threads that have the potential to connect mothers and create communities of support. The

¹⁴ Lola Olufemi, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise* (Hajar Press, 2021), 13.

¹⁵ *Threads* (Norwegian: *Tråder*), directed by Torill Kove (2017; Norway: Mikrofilm and National Film Board of Canada), streaming video: <https://www.nfb.ca/film/threads/>.

¹⁶ *Two One Two*, directed by Shira Avni (2023; Canada: National Film board of Canada), private viewing link.

collected mini-biographies in *The Baby on The Fire Escape* by Julie Phillips, portray mothers and artists who have since the early 1960's nurtured their creative careers alongside their children's development. From Alice Neel to Audre Lorde to Angela Carter to Ursula K- Le Guin, they all developed their methods to do so. While Neel and Lessing used their maternal experiences as material in their works, others, such as Le Guin, stubbornly kept them in separate spheres, escaping into science fiction and enjoying the fictional lives of her male protagonists. For a long time, Le Guin did not know how to write about her maternal experience. She did not see how a mother could be a hero. Only once her children had left home, she became interested in intertwining the narratives of mother and writer.¹⁷

A film that broadens the representation of diverse maternal experiences while emphasizing the importance of cultural communities of support is Alanis Obamsawin's *Mother of Many Children*¹⁸. This documentary weaves together observational footage, narration, and historical context to present motherhood from a communal and cultural perspective unique to Indigenous women. It highlights the strength and wisdom of Indigenous mothers, grandmothers, and daughters from various First Nations communities in Canada, offering their perspectives on family, culture, and identity.

At the onset of the PhD, I aimed to collect the stories of different female filmmakers to find out how they were able to juggle their different roles alongside filmmaking. The filmmakers I selected should be women I had looked up to for a while, and whose paths had crossed with mine. I aimed to find out how they managed and what I could learn from them. This approach does not sound like a linear plan, but more like a nonlinear process: Collecting experiences, drawing parallels, seeing differences, attempting to understand how we all navigated our challenges of balancing art with care roles, and also trying to create a community.

Setting out on my journey, I collected anything that seemed interesting focusing on female experience in general, but subconsciously being more and more drawn towards the overlapping realms of motherhood and filmmaking. I collected and sorted material, creating different groups through writing interview guides, selecting and combining interview excerpts,

deciding whether to include film footage, and choosing which material to explore further. I gathered experiences through personal notation in my *Road Trip Reflections* and fictional writing in the script. Over time, the material accumulated and developed into something new. When I finally presented it to my supervisors in my last PhD year, they helped me realize what my collection was truly about.

I did not choose the portrayed filmmakers at random but was already closely connected to them as our paths as filmmakers and women had crossed, situating my experiences and artistic practice within our shared professional and maternal contexts. I would have liked to gather many more diverse maternal experiences. However, no matter how diligently I tried to include diverse viewpoints and perspectives of filmmakers, the story would ultimately be situated and narrated from my standpoint. This is unless I opened avenues for direct artistic collaboration with the participants. Furthermore, as part of this PhD, I had to limit my selection in favor of focus. I preferred going more in-depth with a few, select experiences.

SHARED EXPERIENCE VERSUS PRESUMED SHARED IDENTITY

Like Gaëlle Denis shared in an early interview, I did not see myself as a feminist until after becoming a mother. This shift happened gradually, as I learned to navigate my career alongside raising one, then two children. Motherhood brought a heightened awareness of the challenges in sustaining an artistic practice while caregiving. For me, identifying as a feminist came to mean a deeper sense of responsibility and care – not only for my own family, but for addressing inequality more broadly.

Killi, Denis, and I were all mothers and filmmakers, however, the decision to make this project or to include them had not been based on pure empathy or the presumption that I knew

¹⁷ Phillips, *The Baby on The Fire Escape*, 122-123.

¹⁸ *Mother of Many Children*, directed by Alanis Obamsawin (1977; Canada; Don Hopkins, Douglas McDonald/ National Film Board of Canada), streaming video: https://www.nfb.ca/film/mother_of_many_children/.

how they felt, or that we had a shared identity – but on our paths having crossed, our intricate knowing of discomfort and a desire for change.

Clare Hemmings describes reflexive politicization as a way to seek solidarity not through shared identity or assumed feelings but through the desire for transformation born from discomfort and against the odds.¹⁹

I saw discomfort reflected in the way that Gaëlle Denis gradually left the commercial filmmaking arena and returned to her artistic roots after becoming a mother. During Covid, she began drawing and creating zines in which she expressed her discomforts through her illustrated alter ego. Later, after losing funding for her feature films, she returned to painting, reconnecting with her artistic roots. Anita Killi raised four children while slowly making films but faced challenges after cancer chemotherapy affected her focus. Transforming her cowshed into an animation studio and opening her farm to international filmmakers allowed her to care for others while reinventing her artistic practice and hoping to build a creative community. I came to understand that I was looking for transformation out of an inner discomfort too. A sense of having lost part of my artistic identity after becoming a mother and moving countries multiple times.

In *Die Erschöpfung der Frauen* (*The Exhaustion of Women*), Franziska Schutzbach examines exhaustion from multiple perspectives, tracing its roots to societal structures rather than individual circumstances. She argues that the growing exhaustion among women cannot be solved personally, as it emerges from broader systems that affect everyone. Schutzbach stresses the need to understand exhaustion as a shared condition, one that becomes transformative when made visible, because it connects us and forms relationships. Only within these relationships, she suggests, can societal structures begin to change. Ultimately, the exhaustion of women is not merely a “women’s issue” but a symptom of a destructive economic system that treats care and relationships as exploitable resources, undermining the very foundations it relies on.²⁰

As part of my PhD reflection, the notion of shared experience is particularly important. Through making lived knowledge visible, we can foster the connections necessary to challenge

and change the structures that perpetuate inequality.

While filming the doppelgänger tests in Trondheim with actress Nasrin Khusrawi, we discussed her personal experiences of growing up in two cultures – Norwegian and Iranian. Khusrawi reflected on balancing motherhood with her acting career in Oslo while raising a toddler. She found strong resonance in the project’s intersecting themes of motherhood and artistry – a shared experience.

Irene Lusztig, a hybrid filmmaker who has explored maternal themes in *The Motherhood Archives* (2013)²¹ as well as in *Yours in Sisterhood* (2018)²², where she reimagines letters sent to Ms. magazine in the 1970s, created a kind of conversation across generations about women’s experiences, including motherhood. Though not solely focused on motherhood, her mixed media approach (including documentary reenactments and personal narrative) examines the complexities of identity and care through a feminist lens.

But, more than sisterhood, I’ve actually done a lot of thinking, writing, and speaking about feminism in the context of motherhood: while I’ve always been a feminist, the experience of becoming a mother and making creative work about maternity definitely put a lot of my ideas about feminism into sharp focus. So, in thinking about this project as a kind of next step after a long period of creative work that centers maternal subjects, I’ve often framed this project as a move from thinking about embodied maternity to thinking about broader, less biologically determined ways of thinking about an ethics of maternal care.²³

19 Clare Hemmings, “Affective Solidarity: Feminist reflexivity and political transformation,” *Feminist Theory* 13, nr. 2 (2012): 147–161, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700112442643>.

20 Franziska Schutzbach, *Die Erschöpfung der Frauen* (Droemer Verlag, 2021), 269.

21 *The Motherhood Archives*, directed by Irene Lusztig (2013; United States: Women Make Movies), streaming video. <https://docuseek2.com/wm-moarch>.

22 *Yours in Sisterhood*, directed by Irene Lusztig, (2018; United States: Women Make Movies), streaming video. <https://docuseek2.com/wm-yousis>

23 Irene Lusztig, “Interview with Irene Lusztig, director of *Yours in Sisterhood*,” Interview by Shewonda Leger, *Agnès Films*, August 31, 2018, <https://agnesfilms.com/interviews/interview-with-irene-lusztig-of-yours-in-sisterhood/>.

Looking at my project through a critical lens, foregrounding the maternal as embodied maternity is by no means an all-encompassing act – in fact, it can be exclusionary. As Lusztig points out, care roles extend beyond biological motherhood, a perspective echoed by several of my references, including Orla Mc Hardy, who argues that care is not limited to human relationships but extends to our artistic practice itself.

In animation, for instance, immense time and effort are dedicated to nurturing a film to create the illusion of movement. This idea resonates with me every time I reread an excerpt from my interview with Gaëlle Denis – a quote I printed out and pinned to my office wall:

*They are your babies, right? You look after them... every frame, every sound, you know. It's a controlled world.*²⁴

Balancing an artistic practice with caregiving – whether for children, elderly parents, or both, as seen in the footage and interviews with Gaëlle Denis – requires creative strategies. This is a key aim of my project: To explore ways of thinking with and alongside one another's experiences and artistic practices, fostering a sense of community.

ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR ARTISTIC RESEARCH

One of the key challenges in navigating the ethical dimensions of this artistic research project was the absence of specific ethical guidelines for artistic research at NTNU. As a result, I followed NTNU's general research ethics²⁵ while aligning primarily with ethical guidelines relevant to documentary filmmaking in Norway such as Code of Ethics of the Norwegian Press²⁶ and NESH²⁷. This was necessary, as the foundation of my PhD project involves documentary materials such as interviews and archival footage, requiring consent from external contributors and collaboration with a local film producer.

At a national level, the development of ethical guidelines for Artistic Research is currently underway, though these have not yet been finalised or published.²⁸ These emerging guidelines

differ from those issued by NESH or the press's Code of Ethics. In artistic practices – particularly in film – participants are often regarded as co-creators, not informants, which contrasts with conventional research ethics.

This distinction became especially clear when I attempted to register my project as recommended by NTNU with NSD (Norwegian Centre for Research Data) at the start of my PhD. Despite goodwill, it was difficult for NTNU's research support to assist me, as they were not familiar with managing interviews and documentary materials in the context of artistic research. Their framework treated interviews as qualitative data, whereas in film, interviews form part of the creative and narrative process. This artistic use demands a different approach to ethics – one that respects both creative freedom of the filmmaker and participant collaboration/boundaries.

RESPECTING BOUNDARIES

In the process of materializing my own and others' experiences, I have been confronted with several ethical challenges that needed careful consideration. These primarily revolved around finding a balance between nurturing my creative vision and respecting the boundaries of those involved.

Creating the project, collecting material, conducting interviews, and filming involved addressing challenges and conflicts, and where necessary drawing a line. Through script revisions and editing material – essentially deciding what to leave in, what to fictionalize, and what to leave out – this line was drawn, aiming to strike a balance between artistic vision and respecting the boundaries of involved collaborators.

24 Gaëlle Denis, "Interview One with Gaëlle Denis," Interview by Denise Hauser, November, 2021.

25 NTNU, "Ethics at NTNU," 2025, accessed June 7, 2025, <https://i.ntnu.no/wiki/-/wiki/English/Ethics+at+NTNU>

26 Press Councils EU, "Code of Ethics of the Norwegian Press," 2025, Updated June 7, 2025, https://www.presscouncils.eu/codes/40_no/.

27 National Research Ethics Committees, "Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities," 2022, updated 2024, <https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/social-sciences-and-humanities/guidelines-for-research-ethics-in-the-social-sciences-and-the-humanities/>.

28 Research Catalogue, "Artistic Research Ethics – A mini-guide," 2023, accessed on June 7 2025, <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1395892/2009051#tool-3348557>.

Ethical concerns extended to the filmmakers involved in the project. For example, one filmmaker initially granted permission for me to use her stories in a fictionalized manner. However, she later withdrew her consent due to the project's impact on her well-being. I had to respect her decision, even if it initially was difficult to let go of the idea.

I later on experienced how it was to be in a vulnerable position, when, without my prior consent, a work-in-progress script was shared in an unsuitable context. This led to me losing trust and discontinuing the work relationship. The experience highlights the challenges of navigating a project at the intersection of artistic research and industry-based film development – two different modes of operating with different goals.

At the onset of the project, contracts were made between an external producer, involved filmmakers, other collaborators and myself. I strived to maintain an open and inclusive working style throughout the entirety of the project's development. Edited material was shared twice with both filmmakers, and a work-in-progress script version was shared during the mid-stage of the PhD. We made further agreements for collaboration as well as agreements to use excerpts of filmmaker's films as part of the result. Each collaborator and participant has signed an agreement that the work may be published as part of my PhD. All contributors have been credited in my exposition on the Research Catalogue.

ETHICAL REFLECTIONS ON AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

I have worked with ways that use autobiographical material as relevant qualitative data – both in the written reflection and in the artistic exploration – particularly to bring personal perspective into broader discussions around my themes. This process required me to navigate personal boundaries, including those involving family. That very complexity of being at times both the researcher and the research subject led me to create a fictional main character and narrative, allowing distance from real-life events and offering space to deviate creatively. This gave rise to what Bill Nichols might describe as a “documentary of wish-fulfillment.”

Nichols distinguishes all films between *documentaries of wish-fulfillment* and *documentaries of social representation*.²⁹

Both tell stories, but the former – such as the parts involving Mara and Nora in my project – are called fictions and give expression to wishes and dreams, nightmares and dreads. The latter – like the documentary accounts of filmmakers Killi and Denis – are non-fictions, documentaries of social representation. These have been shaped by my choices as filmmaker and artistic researcher during the project's development. My deliberate artistic decision to animate parts of the recorded interviews with the filmmakers adds further layers to the discussion around ethics of representation. I elaborate on this in the chapter *Doubling*, which explores artistic processes related to doppelgangers and alter egos.

Within the autoethnographic approach, a key ethical challenge arose from engaging with the fragility of memory, the subjectivity of representation, and the responsibility involved in narrating personal and familial histories.

Annette Kuhn, in *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, explores the intersections of memory work and ethics in storytelling – raising questions around whose voices are heard, and how personal narratives are constructed and shared.

Kuhn's understanding of memory as a shifting perspective in the present rather than a fixed record of the past³⁰ resonates deeply with my project. This perspective relates directly to the film's title, *Make Her See*, and to my own need to revisit past moments (my own and others') to better understand the present and even imagine possible futures. Remembering and narrating lived experience is subjective; it may not reflect how things felt at the time, and it certainly won't represent a universal truth. Memory is shaped by the current position of the rememberer. It is a narrative act, not a factual one.

In Nichols's ethical terms³¹, I have continuously reflected on what I did with the people involved, with myself as the filmmaker, and with the audience – although to a lesser extent, since this is a research project rather than a film production.

29 Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Indiana University press, 2001), 1-2.

30 Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (Verso, 2002), 128.

31 Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 18-19.

Beyond representation, informed consent, and solidarity through a desire for transformation, this project requires reflection on a final ethical dimension: authorship itself, particularly in a collaborative practice where multiple voices and contributions shape the work.

AUTHORSHIP, COLLABORATION, AND ARTISTIC CONTRIBUTION

As I gathered material for this project – interviews, documentary and archive footage, costume designs, animation tests – I found myself working with and through the creative contributions of others. Some of the most visually striking material in this artistic research project was not created solely by me: the documentary footage captures the filmmakers in their own studios, the reversible cloak emerged from collaboration with costume designer Mari Melilot, the animatic involved a small animation team. These contributions are woven throughout the script, the edits, and the reflection itself.

This raises an important question: where does my authorship lie? Filmmaking has always been a collaborative art. This project extends that principle deliberately, weaving together my own practice with contributions from other filmmakers, designers, and collaborators. Yet these works are not presented as standalone pieces but integrated within my script, edits, and research framework as part of a broader methodology.

My aim was never to replicate or appropriate their finished works but to engage with their processes. The excerpts from Killi's and Denis's films demonstrate their approaches to animation and storytelling, informing the development of certain script scenes, the animatic, and my reflections on care that extend beyond maternal responsibilities. Their work functions as both inspiration and interlocutor – material I respond to, learn from, and build upon.

The conditions of creation matter here. The film excerpts by Killi and Denis were fully funded productions, created with professional crews and extended timelines. My research material, by contrast, embraces the unfinished and exploratory – produced under the constraints of caregiving, limited funding, and

interrupted working rhythms. This contrast does not indicate a disparity in artistic agency but highlights different modes and contexts of creation. Process-based artistic research operates differently than commercial film production, valuing experimentation and reflection alongside polish.

Collaboration, in this sense, is not external to artistic contribution but intrinsic to it. Producers, designers, crew members, and performers all shape a film's final form, just as a sculptor might work with natural materials or a performance artist with an existing landscape. The presence of others' work does not diminish directorial agency. My role as director-researcher has been to gather, curate, integrate, and shape these contributions into a coherent investigation. The hybrid script draws together real voices and fictional scenarios. The animatic translates the filmmaker's styles through my own practice. The documentary edits select and frame moments from their working lives. In each case, I make choices about what to include, how to juxtapose, what meanings to draw out.

My project models a form of authorship that is explicitly relational. It acknowledges that making art – especially as a mother, especially under constraint – involves interdependence. My artistic contribution lies not in creating every element myself but in directing how these elements come together, in shaping the questions they address, and in making visible the conditions that shape creative production. In balancing ambition, ethical responsibility, and realistic constraints, this approach demonstrates how process, collaboration, and the maternal context of work can be acknowledged as central to artistic contribution rather than obstacles to overcome.

Unfolding the Research Path

Figure 6: Still from *Gaëlle Denis Edit No. 2*, showing her draw at her home in London. D. Hauser.

Given the transformative nature of this project, I will briefly trace its development from initial conception to its current form. Rather than provide exhaustive detail I focus here on how the project evolved and the pivotal moments that shaped its direction.

When I applied to the PhD program at NTNU in June 2021, the project was titled *Materializing female subjectivity through the evocative use of space in mixed media moving image*. By its conclusion in 2025, it had evolved into *Hybrid Narratives: Approaching Maternal Experience through Collecting, Writing, and Doubling in the Development of Mixed Media Film*. This transformation was neither planned nor linear. It emerged through practice, reflection, and a series of turning points that redirected the project's trajectory.

My initial focus was broad: female experience more generally, with evocative space and subjectivity as key conceptual anchors. My early research questions centered on experimenting with experimenting with mixed media to evoke female subjective states, creating bridges between the filmmakers' visual worlds and my own, and exploring how "space and feminism" could situate filmmakers in relation to one another and to a wider context.

I envisioned a short mixed media documentary about three female filmmakers, combining animation and live action to dramatize their artistic journeys and visualize their subjective experiences. The aim was to bridge their artistic methods with my own while exploring how space could carry meaning. Animation seemed particularly suited to visualizing internal states, drawing on Annabelle Honess Roe's scholarly work on animation in documentaries³² and Aylish Wood's writing on expressive space³³. Autoethnographic approaches would help situate my own experiences. Interviews would illuminate the lived conditions of women navigating filmmaking careers. When one participant withdrew due to a conflicting film shoot, the project naturally tightened its focus around the remaining ones. The initial outcome was envisioned as a completed short documentary.

By the end of the project the focus had shifted from female experience broadly to the intersection of motherhood and filmmaking: maternal identity and its impact on filmmaking practice

specifically. Instead of three documentary subjects, the project now followed two filmmakers (Anita Killi and Gaëlle Denis), whose experiences intertwined with a fictional protagonist, Mara, and her doppelgänger Nora.

The three methods that structure the final project – collecting, writing, and doubling – emerged organically rather than being predetermined. Collecting encompassed interviews, visual documentation, and my own experience as a filmmaking mother. Writing opened space to weave this material into the script *Make Her See*, and to enter dialogue with existing texts and artworks. Doubling – through doppelgängers and alter egos – allowed me to explore how maternity shifts identity and expresses the tensions between caregiving roles and artistic practice.

The project's conceptual anchors shifted as well, from space and subjectivity toward flow, doubling and maternal transformation. Its format also evolved – from a short documentary with a fixed end product to a process-focused approach generating a feature-length script and various audiovisual materials, including an animatic and documentary edits. The emphasis moved from producing a polished film to documenting a research-led artistic process.

FOUR KEY TURNING POINTS THAT SHAPED THIS TRANSFORMATION

Early in my project, I began interviewing and filming the two filmmakers Anita Killi and Gaëlle Denis. An initial thematic edit combining interviews, footage, film excerpts, and archival material already hinted at themes that would become central: The tension between caring for family and nurturing one's artistic practice as a female filmmaker.

As I searched for ways to include my own perspective as a female filmmaker navigating multiple roles, I increasingly

32 Annabelle Honess Roe, *Animated Documentary* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). eTextbook edition, VitalSource.

33 Aylish Wood, "Re-Animating Space," *Animation* 1, nr. 2 (2006): 133-152, DOI:10.1177/1746847706068896.

described the project as a hybrid between documentary and fiction. My meta-level presence would exist on a fictional plane, interrupting and complicating the story I was telling of the other filmmakers.

TURNING POINT ONE

A pivotal moment came when a funding deadline collided with COVID sweeping through our home. During the long recovery, I reflected on the concept of flow – particularly in relation to drawing. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi³⁴ describes flow as a state of complete absorption in an activity, where creativity thrives, and self-consciousness fades. Curious, I turned to Edward Slingerland's *Trying Not to Try*³⁵, which connects flow to the Chinese concept of Wu-Wei, or "Trying not to Try". I began to see this as a method adaptable to my circumstances.

Writing funding applications, relying on multiple collaborators, and negotiating with gatekeepers pulled me out of my flow and left me disconnected from the creative process. Reclaiming creative autonomy felt essential. Exploring flow became a way of thinking about balance, presence, and the realities of working as an artist-mother. I interviewed women across artistic fields to understand how they entered or lost flow. These insights fed into my exploration of conflicting yet complimentary forces in my characters and inspired the earliest versions of the script's fictional protagonist, Mara and her once-antagonistic doppelgänger Nora.

TURNING POINT TWO

In agreement with my producer, I began writing a longer script that wove together the filmmaker's stories with the fictional narrative of Mara and Nora. This was supported by external funding secured in spring 2022 and allowed me to explore the interplay between existing interviews, documentary material and emerging fictional scenes.

TURNING POINT THREE

Understanding how the portrayed filmmakers use form, and how this might influence my own practice, remained central to the project. In the animatic created with a small animation team, I drew on voice recordings of Killi and Denis discussing the juggling of filmmaking with maternal responsibilities, bridging their artistic methods with Mara's fictional world.

Practical constraints shaped my decisions. Unable to spend extended periods animating in Dovre due to caregiving responsibilities in Trondheim, I turned to digital animation instead of analogue stop-motion. I collaborated with an animator to free time for scriptwriting and for preparing another audiovisual test. Deeply connected to my role as a mother, these decisions shaped both the form and direction of the project. At the same time, I worked on developing Mara and Nora's characters, exploring how doubling could be staged in a live-action scene with one actress performing both roles. These two audiovisual experiments explored doubling in different ways. While not polished final results, they served as artistic investigations within the project's budget constraints.

As I proceeded, I questioned how much subjectivity I could ethically represent, especially when drawing from the filmmaker's personal experiences. Their subjective realities, I felt, could only be fully expressed through their own artistic methods, suggesting a co-creative process.

Roe's writing helped frame my reflections: animation's rich aesthetic qualities bring out the specificity of an autobiographer's past, not through photographic realism but through expressivity. This is where animation's evocative power lies – offering insights into subjective reality within personal and collective history.³⁶

Yet I felt ambivalent about the term "subjective" itself and removed it from the project title before my midway evaluation.

Gradually, I let go of the idea of including a third filmmaker

Figure 7: Illustrated self-portrait in sun-chair no 1. D. Hauser.



34 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (Harper & Row, 1990), 15.

35 Edward Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try* (Canongate Books, 2015), 168-169.

36 Roe, *Animated Documentary*, chap. 4. "Animation and the Representation of the Real," eTextbook edition.

and instead doubled some of my own (fictionalized) experiences, portrayed by an actress who would also have her own doppelgänger. In parallel, the voices of Killi and Denis took shape through animated alter egos that reflected their artistic methods. This approach opened more space for experimentation and integration within the script.

In late 2023, we filmed new footage and recorded additional interviews with the filmmakers. While documenting their achievements, I also asked whether their projects had been postponed, diverted, or challenged.

Drawing from my second-year presentation at the Norwegian Artistic Research Autumn Forum 2023, I drafted my first Research Catalogue exposition. It's three-layer structure explored how the interviewed filmmakers materialize female experiences in their work, how this informed my audiovisual experiments, and how both layers shaped early ideas for animation within the developing script.

A new research thread, The Role of the Double, emerged, leading to a separate Research Catalogue page tracing Mara and Nora's evolving dynamics and reflecting on dual character representation.

Although the themes of collecting, writing, and doubling were already deeply anchored in my research, they had not yet been articulated in the project's title or abstract.

Editing the new footage helped me explore how the filmmaker's stories might intertwine with the fictional narrative, adding perspective to Mara and Nora's journeys. During this phase, writing became increasingly compelling. The script began to feel like a vessel for my collected material – a space where reflections and emerging ideas could meet. This focus seemed more meaningful than refining visual form in consecutive audiovisual experiments, which would also have required additional funding. Gradually, the intersection of motherhood and filmmaking emerged as the strongest thread across all materials.

TURNING POINT FOUR

The fourth turning point arrived in the second half of 2024, when reading and writing reflections intensified. Key references sharpened the project's direction. One important discovery was Lucy Fischer's paper, "Two-Faced Women: The 'Double' in Women's Melodrama of the 1940s,"³⁷ which critiques male-dominated literature on doppelgängers for overlooking how the female body offers a natural foundation for doubling through pregnancy and birth. Lucy Jones's *Matrescence: On the Metamorphosis of Pregnancy, Childbirth and Motherhood*, introduced a term for the physical and psychological transformation into motherhood – a process far exceeding childbirth – and offered a crucial link to maternal doubling as a shifting identity.³⁸

Together, these references pointed toward a potential contribution: exploring the intersection of motherhood and filmmaking through the lens of doubling. These shifts reflect the non-linear nature of artistic research. What began as an exploration of female experience through the evocative use of space evolved into an examination of maternal identity through three interconnected methods. This transformation was shaped by artistic exploration, engagement with research and literature, conversations with supervisors and peers, and the reflections that emerged from artistic practice itself. The following section presents the new title, research questions, aims, and objectives that crystallized from this evolution.

37 Lucy Fischer, "Two-Faced Women: The 'Double' in Women's Melodrama of the 1940s," *Cinema Journal* 23, no. 1, (1983), <https://doi.org/10.2307/1225070>.

38 Lucy Jones, *Matrescence: On the Metamorphosis of Pregnancy, Childbirth and Motherhood* (Penguin Books, 2024), 309.

New Title, Questions, Aims, and Objectives

Figure 8: Photograph of Gaëlle Denis at the Barbican Estate, London. D. Hauser

The new project title *Hybrid Narratives: Materializing Maternal Experience through Collecting, Writing, and Doubling in the Development of Mixed Media Film* reflects the evolution from a general focus on “female experience” to a more refined interest in the nuanced intersection of motherhood and filmmaking. I updated the project abstract and formulated new research questions to assess my engagement with the topic and identify new directions for exploration, helping clarify my potential contribution to artistic research in film. These objectives shaped my artistic methods, which are detailed in the Method chapter.

Research Question: How can the intersection of motherhood and filmmaking be explored in mixed media film?

Aim: To develop mixed media experiments that investigate how the maternal experience of filmmakers can be represented in a hybrid film blending documentary, fiction, live action, and animation.

Objectives: Through these investigations, the artistic research project will:

- **Collect** documentary footage, interviews, and personal reflections to ground the film’s development in real maternal experience.
- Explore **screenwriting** to facilitate a generative dialogue between documentary footage, interviews, fictional narrative, and theoretical insights.
- Explore “**doubling**” by incorporating live-action dop-pelgänger and animated alter egos to examine how maternity shifts identity.

Sub-questions, which the written reflection will aim to answer:

- What is the connection between motherhood and doubling in film?
- What do animation and the mix of techniques contribute to this exploration?
- How can I create a bridge between the artistic methods of the portrayed filmmakers and my working process?

I focus on my artistic methods of ‘Collecting’, ‘Writing’, and ‘Doubling’, supported by the artistic work developed during my PhD and presented in the Research Catalogue exposition.

In the following sections of this reflection, I aim to answer these questions with regard to:

- How have these questions been explored?
- What has resulted from these explorations?
- What is my potential unique contribution to artistic research in this field – conceptually, methodologically, and artistically?

ROAD TRIP 1 *The Snowstorm*

Figure 9: Photograph No. 1 from the series *Roadtrip One*, showing a landscape seen through a car windshield. D. Hauser.

Figure 10: Photograph No. 2 from the series *Roadtrip One*, showing a snow-covered landscape seen through a car windshield. D. Hauser.



Following the car's navigation system, we are headed south from Trondheim across the Dovre mountains towards Lillehammer where we will be participating in the PhD course *Artistic Development in Film and Related Audiovisual Art Forms* at INN and the Norwegian Film School. The GPS line guides us towards *Dovrefell*, a mountain range in south-central Norway composed mainly of layered metamorphic rock. Occasionally, I zoom in on the screen to discover the names of the small villages we pass, wondering about the

lives of the people who reside here. My driver is easy to converse with and we quickly find topics of mutual interest.

Before long, the unfolding journey begins to mirror Mia Engberg's doctoral project, *Darkness as Material*³⁹, which we have explored in preparation for the course. Enclosed in the vehicle, we move slowly through towering snow walls on either side, illuminated by the car's headlights. Snowflakes swirl around us, creating a dark blue atmosphere. The line on the navigation system is no longer reliable. We depend on the poles with reflectors to show us the way, emerging one by one as we cautiously proceed.

To lighten the mood, I comment on our situation, comparing the experience to undertaking a PhD in artistic

research. My driver laughs heartily, and the deeper we get into the snowstorm, the more we laugh together.

Following a line is both a commitment and a social investment, shaping not only our movement through space and time but also our perspectives and world-views. As we follow a path, we become committed to where it leads and what it reveals. Commitment is not just a conscious decision; it emerges from action itself – once we are in motion, we are already invested.⁴⁰

My colleague and I are committed to the same line leading us through a snowstorm in the Dovre mountains to Lillehammer, to a course we have committed to as part of our PhD journeys. We follow directions, but if we get caught in the snow, or get off path, we won't get there, and it will be too late to turn back.

Following in the footsteps of her role model Marguerite Duras, Engberg copied her letter reading while recording the voice-over for her film. Similarly, in my PhD project, I have traced the artistic methods of the two filmmakers I portray, seeking a deeper understanding of their practice. For instance, I followed Gaëlle Denis' pen work in her graphic narratives *My Hairy Fat Lazy Lonely First Lockdown*⁴¹ and *In and Out*⁴² part of the collective zine *The Lockdown Lowdown* as I attempted to absorb her tacit knowledge and incorporate it into my work – an animated alter ego of the filmmaker herself.

In contrast to our road trip, I see my artistic practice as a non-linear, sometimes even chaotic journey. I do not follow a pre-conceived path; instead, I create a path behind

39 Mia Engberg, "Darkness as Material," (PhD thesis in Artistic Research, Stockholm University of the Arts, 2023) <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/2343268/2343266>.

40 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), 16-17.

41 Gaëlle Denis, "My Hairy Fat Lazy Lonely First Lockdown," *The Lockdown Lowdown: Graphic Narratives for Viral Times* 1. (2020): 24-28.

42 Gaëlle Denis, "In and Out," *The Lockdown Lowdown: Graphic Narratives for Viral Times* 2. (2021): 2-7.

Figure 11: Photograph No. 3 from the series *Roadtrip One*, showing a snow-covered landscape seen through a car windshield during a storm. D. Hauser.

me through the decisions and commitments I make. With each choice and action, I commit and become directed toward something. I create the line as I move forward, intertwining it with the course of my life, constantly morphing and adapting.

In her article *Ørnetoden*, Elisabeth Brun elaborates, that when she developed her PhD project in artistic research, the process was different as it was practice-based, thinking critically and conceptually through the camera as part of her practice. The method came before the question. Her artistic practice generated theoretical experiments, developed her research question, and resulted in new analytical and creative methods, which again influenced her work with the camera.⁴³

Like Brun, I embarked on my artistic research journey driven by intuition, letting my filmmaking practice shape my approach. My methods are developing organically, following a non-linear path with shifts in pace. At times, I pause and re-navigate my course.

As we drive deeper into the blue, the snowstorm thickens, and for a moment, I fear we might vanish into the white nothingness. Perhaps, we won't make it over the mountain.

Engberg's doctoral project began from a place of

darkness and uncertainty, leading her to create a film structure that ensured a final product, even if it consisted only of her voiceover with limited visuals.

Through the windshield, amidst the swirling snowflakes, I discern a dark shape approaching. I jolt, fearing it might be an elk, but my companion laughs and assures me it is just a tree. We laugh together, inside the small car sheltering us from the vast, unpredictable nature outside.

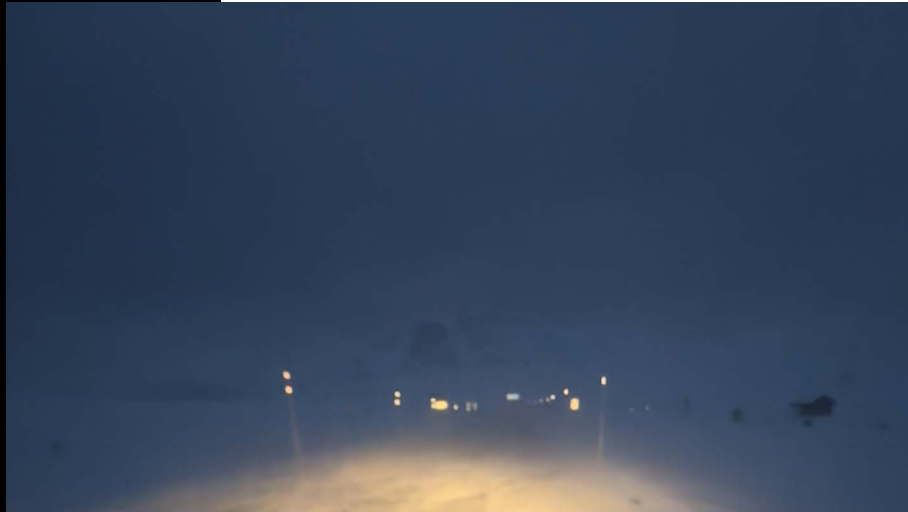
My driver mentions that she packed a snow shovel, blankets, and other essentials in the trunk, just in case of an emergency. As I glance at her fashionable jacket, embroidered with colorful threads, I imagine her as a tiny, vibrant dot, shoveling snow high in the cold mountains, engulfed by a snowstorm. "I have a good down jacket in the back of the car," she reassures me and adds, "Always prepared for a proper girl road trip with all the risks and perils involved."

We laugh.

Engberg has developed structures to produce her films independently, avoiding what she refers to as "the machine" of the film industry. She does not explain why she uses this term. Scientifically, a machine is defined as a device that applies force or changes the strength of a force to perform a task, typically to achieve a high mechanical advantage and reduce effort. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a machine is a piece of equipment with several moving parts that uses power to do a specific type of work. These definitions emphasize force, mechanical advantage, and power, reminiscent of hunting with an arrow.

In the context of the film industry, I interpret "machine" as representing speed, efficiency, and a linear approach from script to production. It suggests a focus on producing a heroic narrative rather than a process-oriented one – a carrier bag that holds and nurtures the creative seeds. From my perspective, straddling the film industry and a PhD in Artistic Research, I see how the machine can prioritize the final product – a film – over the artistic process.

43 Elisabeth Brun, "Ørnetoden," *Norsk Medietidskrift* 28, nr. 1 (2021): 1-5, <https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN.0805-9535-2021-01-05>.



Knowledge of and from the margins is considered more accurate and rigorous not because certain subjects have a naturally more truthful disposition, but because of the conditions of existence that provide differential access to power and authority. Marginal subjects produce different, more reliable, knowledge because of conditions of inequality that mean they (have to) know dominant frames of legitimation to survive or thrive and generate local knowledges for the same reason.⁴⁴

In a film industry where trust and long-standing relationships are vital, my unconventional path – without formal film education in Norway – left me with fewer opportunities to build national networks. Although I had received national support for my earlier projects, returning from New York and Zurich as a new mother made re-entry difficult. Gaps in my screening track record affected my eligibility for funding. Motherhood deepened my sense of marginality, especially without a support network of likeminded women or access to paid maternity leave. I had to adapt quickly to unfamiliar parenting norms, another language, and the cultural codes shaping Norwegian filmmaking. These overlapping transitions placed me at the margins – both in family life and in creative practice.

Yet from this very marginality, a different kind of knowledge may have emerged – one that foregrounds process over product. My research follows a three-layered method – collecting, writing, and doubling – that embraces fragments, fluidity, and contradiction, resisting linear production in favour of a process shaped by lived experience.

Seen in this light, marginality is not a limitation but a constructive position – one that opens alternative ways of making, rooted in slowness, care, and attentiveness to complexity. These insights shape my practice and may resonate with others navigating similarly non-linear paths through creative and caregiving roles.

As we cross the Dovre mountains, habitat to wild reindeer, elk, and polar foxes, I reflect on filmmaker Anita Killi, who resides nearby, removed from the film industry



Figure 12: Still from *Anita Killi Edit No.1*, showing the landscape at Dovre in fog. D Hauser.

machinery. She understood early on that staying true to her artistic vision meant working independently of the commercial industry. After studying animation in Volda and briefly working at a commercial studio in Oslo, she moved to Dovre in the late '90s. Inheriting a family farm used for milk production, she took on the role of both milk supplier and founder of her animation studio, Trollfilm. Balancing these roles, each of her films, unfolded over extended production periods. For instance, a decade separated her last two short films, *Angry Man*⁴⁵ and *Mother Didn't Know*⁴⁶, a slowness attributed not only to the meticulous demands of her artistic method but also to personal challenges such as raising children, battling cancer, and undergoing chemotherapy, and navigating a breakup with the father of her children. In 2023, she finally transformed the old cow stables into a studio for artist residencies and animation filmmaking – a dream she had nurtured since she was seventeen.

44 Hemmings, "Affective Solidarity," 155.

45 *Angry Man*, directed by Anita Killi (2009; Norway: Trollfilm), online video, private viewing link shared by the filmmaker.

46 *Mother Didn't Know*, directed by Anita Killi (2021; Norway: Trollfilm), online video, private viewing link shared by the filmmaker.

Figure 13: Still from *Gaëlle Denis Edit No. 1*, showing her look over the Barbican Estate, London. D. Hauser.



In contrast, Gaëlle Denis – now based at the Barbican estate in central London – swiftly integrated into the industry. Following her animation studies at the Royal College of Art, culminating in a BAFTA win for her

graduation film *Fish Never Sleep*⁴⁷, she thrived as one of the few female directors in animation production companies like Passion Pictures and Stink, directing projects for major clients worldwide. In conversation with Denis, I learned that her departure from the commercial industry happened naturally as she matured, drawn to stories that reflected her identity as a woman, mother, and artist. However, transitioning from commercials and short films to feature filmmaking proved challenging. Her unconventional artistic background, French origins, and shifting political landscapes – Brexit and the impact of COVID-19 on the UK film industry – posed significant obstacles. Balancing caregiving for her son and her mother, who battles dementia, led her to reassess her career. In doing so, she reconsidered a path she had long and quietly desired but previously set aside.

In May 2023, the conditions for my project's development shifted when my producer went on maternity leave. Her experience of new motherhood disrupted our plans, preventing us from completing funding applications. Motherhood introduced economic and emotional costs that the system does not account for. Ironically, the

birth of a child disrupted both my producer's and my life, highlighting my dependence on her to secure funding. Now, alongside my roles as director, filmmaker, artistic researcher, project manager, and mother, I am also taking on the role of producer to meet my PhD deadline.

Placing personal experience in a political context, Norwegian film producer Elisabeth Kvithyll wrote an opinion piece for the Norwegian online film and TV magazine *Rushprint*⁴⁸ ahead of International Women's Day 2023. She debated whether the Norwegian film industry is open to filmmakers who become mothers. Unfortunately, this topic is usually discussed behind the scenes, among women, rather than being confronted openly. Kvithyll highlights that in Norway, over the past 15 years, there has been an emphasis on supporting young and upcoming female filmmakers, but when it comes to ensuring that these established talents can return to and remain in the industry after having children, there is little support.

I argue that the challenge lies not only in the mother role but in a general care role that seems to fall predominantly on women. This is particularly the case in a woman's mid-life when she might be balancing care roles for young children and elderly parents, as filmmaker Gaëlle Denis' story illustrates. Another area where women often find themselves in care roles is in the workplace. Franziska Schutzbach claims that women in professional environments often take responsibility for interpersonal relationships, ensuring that others feel good, valued, important, and interesting. In short, they perform emotional labour. At the same time, this type of work is an unnoticed source of exhaustion.⁴⁹

A recent article by Margaretha Järvinen and Nanna Mik-Meyer titled *Giving and Receiving: Gendered Service*

47 *Fish Never Sleep*, dir. Denis.

48 Elisabeth Kvithyll, "Er filmbransjen åpen for filmskapere som blir mødre?" *Rushprint*, (7 March 2023); <https://rushprint.no/2024/03/er-filmbransjen-åpen-for-filmskapere-som-blir-mødre/>.

49 Schutzbach, *Die Erschöpfung der Frauen*, 210-211.

*Work in Academia*⁵⁰ investigates the mechanisms behind the gender-unequal distribution of academic service. The article highlights that men are more successful in pursuing individual interests against service demands, and how this depends on their relational work and organizational role expectations, reducing women's prospects of 'saying no'.

What happens when women refuse to choose between caregiving and their artistic practice? Art requires not just financial resources and "A Room of One's Own" but also care, steadfast dedication, time, and energy. Orla Mc Hardy explores this intersection of motherhood, caregiving, and art – particularly in animation – in her practice-as-research project: *Maintenance Animation is a drag: it takes all the ****ing time**.

Animation and motherhood are parallel acts. There are striking overlaps between animation practices and the maternal time of maintenance and caregiving: repetitive acts and gestures, interruption, incremental and elongated time, the embodied experience of slow mundane practices, the durational drag of staying alongside something or someone. The pooled time of caregiving and maintenance, and the pooled time of animation production have a lot in common.⁵¹

As we progress, the windshield offers limited visibility, prompting the fleeting thought of stopping, but I quickly dismiss it; we would be snowed in before long. My companion keeps us safe as we navigate the mountain pass toward Lillehammer where, eventually, enveloped in the darkness of the cinema, we will experience Engberg's thesis film, *Secrets of the Sun*⁵², where darkness and the black frame serve as tools to manipulate time. Gradually, the landscape comes into focus. We descend the winding mountain road, still following the line on the GPS. The car picks up speed. No longer searching for the guiding poles, our hysterical laughter fades. My driver turns on music.

As Darla Crispin suggests, art can teach valuable lessons about life's reliance on process over outcome whereby our existence is marked by constant flux – a

cyclical journey with varying trajectories, whether upward or downward.⁵³



Figure 14: Photograph No. 4 from the series *Roadtrip One*, showing a snow-covered landscape seen through a car windshield during a storm. D. Hauser.

- 50 Margaretha Järvinen, Nanna Mik-Meyer, "Giving and receiving: Gendered service work in academia," *Current Sociology* 0, nr. 0 (2024): 1, doi: 10.1177/0011392123122475.
- 51 Orla Mc Hardy, "(Maintenance) Animation is a Drag: It takes all the ***** time*," *International Journal of Film and Media Arts* 6, No. 3 (December 2021): Special Issue Ecstatic Truth V, The Age of the Absurd – Documentary animation practices that reimagine our world. 85-95. Doi: '0.24140/ijfma.v6.n3.06
- 52 *Secrets of the Sun*, directed by Mia Engberg (2023; Sweden: Tobias Janson), <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/2343268/2343273>
- 53 Darla Crispin, "Artistic Research as a Process of Unfolding", *Norwegian Academy of Music*, 3 (2019). <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/503395/503396>.

METHOD: COLLECTING, WRITING, AND DOUBLING

Four months after our stormy journey across the Dovre mountains, we have returned to Lillehammer for the second cycle of the PhD course. It is spring and a warm 25 degrees. This time, we arrive each from different directions, disrupting our project processes in favour of two days to follow our line of commitment towards completing the coursework. The fellows have invited Elisabeth Brun to present her completed PhD project titled: *Moving Image Topography - film as environment for thinking*. During her presentation, she elaborates on her own method making as part of her artistic process.

Ørnetoden, translating to Eagle Method is what Brun calls her approach to method development. She often begins her projects from an intuitive hunch which she follows and gradually circles in on the question via theoretical inquiries and creative practice, like an eagle approaches its prey. As she points out, it is about the creative way of recognizing patterns, seeing connections, possibilities and potential, and the explorations that are needed to get where one aims to get.⁵⁴

During the closing plenary discussion, some fellows share the notion of the term “method” feeling somewhat contrived, which might stem from the fact that many Norwegian PhD fellows in artistic research with a focus on film have a practical background in the film industry. Hence, when we speak of our artistic practice, we do not speak about methods but about processes and artistic development. In the industry context, we do not often get the chance to reflect on our patterns though they might govern parts of our days. Rhythms in our artistic processes can often only be traced back after work has been produced, when the film is completed.

In contrast, reflecting on “Why we do what we do while creating our work” is central to doing artistic research. What can be gained from becoming aware of our own patterns, movements, repetition and cycles?

My focus in this project has long been on the artistic result. Midway through, however, I had assembled enough material and conducted enough audiovisual experiments to step back and consider how to make the unfolding of my artistic process

54 Brun, “Ørnetoden,” 1.

DOVRE

visible to others. There was a clear movement between three different modes of working. The way I worked became my method.

Darla Crispin looks at the three different definitions of reflecting whereby the first one is an expansion of knowledge in the same sense as when a folded object is highly compact, and when unfolded occupies a greater space than before. The second definition is 'to expose' which implies the bringing out into open sight something that is already present, albeit veiled. The third, definition is 'to reveal gradually' by written or spoken word - as though it exists in its entirety ahead of time.⁵⁵

In my project, collecting, writing, and doubling evolved as artistic process steps in the endeavour to materialize the inter-section of maternal experience and filmmaking.

In the following sections, I examine each method in turn: how collecting grounded the research in lived experience, how writing created space for synthesis and dialogue, and how doubling became both method and theme.

Conducting interviews with filmmakers and artists was a deliberate methodological choice from the outset. Likewise, tracing the artistic methods of the filmmakers I portrayed within the animatic became a way for me to understand them more deeply and to create a bridge between our worlds. Writing in a more personal, diaristic style allowed me to intertwine lived experience with reflections on process and contextualisation. Analysis, structuring, and evaluation as part of the interview, editing and script writing processes became integral methodological tools.

Through the processes of collecting, writing, and doubling, the maternal emerged - where methods, storytelling, and artistic investigations converged, bringing the material together in its most focused form.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS METHOD

I hesitated for a long time to include thoughts on my use of autoethnography in this reflection. Making the method officially part of my project felt somewhat contrived. The pressure to do it "correctly" risked stifling my artistic impulses and

disrupting the flow of my writing. Perhaps, to legitimately claim autoethnography as a method, one must engage with it deeply: read extensively, study examples, and learn its forms from the ground up.

At the start of my PhD, I read a few articles on autoethnography - some exploring its use within animation - as well as the first Norwegian book on the method, *Hva er autoetnografi?*⁵⁶

I imagined applying the method primarily to the interviews with the filmmakers, using my own experiences as a lens to frame theirs. Eventually, an autoethnographic approach quietly emerged in my reflexive writing, particularly in the *Road Trip Reflections*. Rather than studying how to do autoethnography, I lived it through expressive, embodied writing, collecting and integrating fragments of my own and others' experiences.

According to Short et al. (2023, p.2), "A text can wander, twist and turn, changing direction unexpectedly. It might jump from one thought, feeling, memory or experience - up or down, backwards, forwards or sideways - to another."⁵⁷

Much like this description, my writing wandered. I leapt from the physical intensity of the snowstorm to reflections on something I had read, remembered, or seen - linking seemingly unrelated realms: an artwork, a quote from one of the filmmakers, a past event. In doing so, I expanded the narrative space and opened new meaning, mirroring what I was also doing in the audiovisual material.

Short et al. (2013) describe Autoethnography as a method that begins with personal description and connects self-biography with culture, while Grant (2010) claims that "experiences shift over time - so do the ways we represent them".⁵⁸

The snowstorm was intense and exhilarating in the moment. Yet remembering it, writing it down, and connecting it to other materials gave it a different kind of charge. It made me see things differently. The linearity of the road trip offered both

55 Darla Crispin, "Artistic Research as a Process of Unfolding," *Research Catalogue* (2019): <https://doi.org/10.22501/nmh-ar.503395>.

56 Karlsson, Klevan, Soggiu, Sælør, Villje, *Hva er autoetnografi?* (Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2021).

57 Karlsson et al., *Hva er autoetnografi?* 47, quoting Short et al.

58 Karlsson et al., *Hva er autoetnografi?* 47, quoting Short et al.

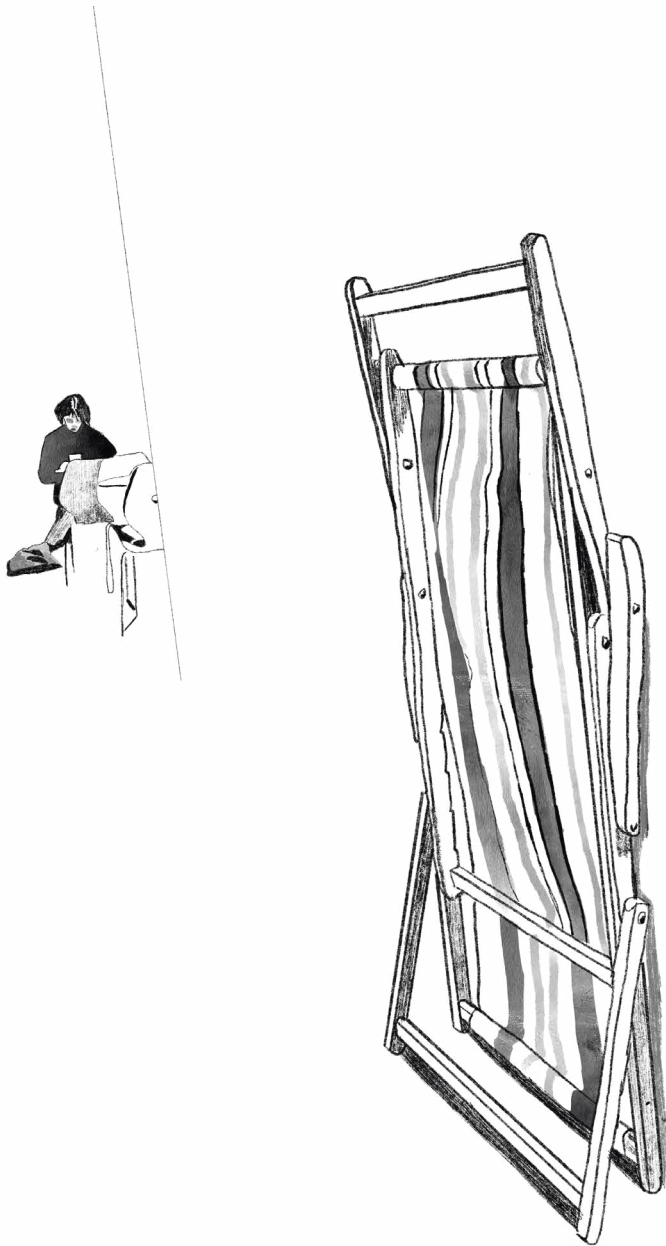


Figure 15: Illustrated self-portrait in sun-chair no 2. D. Hauser.

contrast and connection to the more fragmented materials. The boundaries between truth and fiction blurred, just as they do throughout the script itself.

Reading *Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject*⁵⁹ I understood that collecting experiences (my own and others') was a way to situate personal insights within a broader cultural context. But collecting alone was not enough. To make sense of these experiences, I had write them. And in reflecting on them, I mirrored others' voices within my own. Autoethnography has partially shaped my three-layered methodological process. On the Research Catalogue exposition pages corresponding to each chapter (Collecting, Writing, and Doubling), you will find the three layers containing audiovisual process works and documentation.

59 Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner, "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject," in *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Sage Publications, 2000), 733-768.

COLLECTING

Figure 16: Still from
Gaëlle Denis Edit
No. 2, showing a pin
wall with photos and
notes in her home
studio. D. Hauser.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Figure 17: Still from *Anita Killi Edit No. 2*, showing her in the empty cow stables before the studio conversion. D. Hauser.

This chapter describes and discusses the themes that have emerged from the collections presented on the same-titled exposition page, as well as how processes of evaluation, analysis, and structuring have shaped the work.

THE PROCESS OF COLLECTING



How do we collect when we collect? Is there a system or method for gathering and making sense of materials that align with the themes we seek? In *Å skape fortellinger*⁶⁰ (Creating Stories), Merete Morken Andersen explores the creative process of crafting narratives – what stories are about, how to write them, and why shaping experiences, thoughts, and ideas into stories is so powerful. My PhD journey has intersected with Morken Andersen's work and her as a mentor twice. First, in 2022, when I took part in the workshop *Finn din fortellerstemme* (Find your narrative voice), where she was one of three mentors. Organized by the local film centers in Southern, Eastern, and Central Norway, the workshop took place at Metochi, a cloister in Lesbos, Greece. We met again in



May 2023 when I participated in her writing course at another cloister, this time in Tuscany.

The formation of stories, particularly those rooted in personal and collective experience, has been central to my creative process. In this artistic research project, the development of *Make Her See* could not begin until I had collected and evaluated a significant amount of material.

When the Danish filmmaker Lea Glob began her process of collecting footage, for what turned out to become her groundbreaking documentary *Apolonia*, *Apolonia*⁶¹, which addresses themes of motherhood along with broader aspects of womanhood, art and identity, she did not yet know what her film would turn into. The aspect of time to let several life stories unfold played a significant factor in the creation of the film, as Glob documented a young painter Apolonia Sokol who early on declares, "No family, no babies, art and creation," focusing solely on her career. Over 13 years, Glob follows the young artist, who despite not having children, continually struggles for acceptance in the male-dominated art world. Simultaneously, Glob becomes a mother during the film's production and nearly dies after childbirth, adding a deeply personal layer to the narrative. Gradually, the director found ways to seamlessly integrate herself into the film – casually filming herself in a mirror or using her voice to comment on Apolonia's story. During the later stages of the film, particularly after Glob becomes a mother, she decided to be more visible in front of the camera, subtly intertwining artistic ambition and motherhood without making motherhood its central theme.

A key difference in our approaches is that Glob, as a trained documentary filmmaker, shoots most of her material herself. This aspect, along with the fact that she did not have children for the biggest part of this documentary development, gave her the freedom to grab a camera and head to Paris, capturing intimate moments where Apolonia may even forget the camera is there. While I admire this approach, operating a camera

⁶⁰ Merete Morken Andersen, *Å skape fortellinger: Den lille skriveboka* (Aschehoug, 2022).

⁶¹ *Apolonia*, *Apolonia*, directed by Lea Glob (2022; Denmark: Danish Documentary Production), streaming video. <https://tv.vg.no/dokumentar/apolonia-apolonia?id=271612>

has never been my focus, shaping how I navigated my project. Instead, I worked with different DOPs near the shoot location, with less control over the outcome. While the aspect of time, plays a crucial role in the development of Glob's film, this was something I had less of during this three-year PhD project in Artistic Research. Furthermore, as a mother of two young children, travel required careful planning, and I was never away for more than maximum one week at a time.

Morken Andersen's model of the writing process⁶², separates the creative journey into five roles: the dancer, the collector, the creator, the organizer, and the analyst. These figures, or "muses" work both individually and collaboratively at different stages. She emphasizes that the art lies in knowing when to invite a new muse into the process.

In my own practice of moving between collecting, writing, and doubling, I had to do precisely that – sharpen my awareness of when to shift to another phase. There was no predefined path or manual; I navigated the material intuitively, sensing when to move forward, test an idea, or return to collecting and reflecting. Gathering literature and references was part of this process, as was recalling experiences stored in my mental archive – an act that itself required writing.

In documentary filmmaking, the DOP, like a collector, gathers material, while the editor acts as an organiser or analyst – both essential for shaping a coherent story. At times, I edited the footage myself, both due to funding constraints as well as due to being deeply immersed in the project, able to see connections and potential directions.

Morken Andersen describes the collector as an observer who absorbs everything – what is seen, heard, smelled, or recognized. The collector fills the bag with material that can become something else. It is through the collector's perspective that raw reality transforms into creative potential, waiting to be shaped into new stories.⁶³

When director and filmmaker Sarah Polley crafted her remarkable hybrid documentary *Stories We Tell*⁶⁴, she approached it as a collector – not just of material, but more importantly, of different perspectives on her late mother's hidden past. Polley's mother had passed away when she was only 11, leaving behind unanswered questions. Rather than allowing a

journalist to expose a long-held family secret – the revelation that her biological father was not the one who had raised her – Polley chose to take control of her narrative and tell the story in her own words. Through interviews with relatives, she watched the story take on a life of its own, mutating and shifting as it was retold from different viewpoints. This process fascinated her, ultimately shaping the film's core theme: the human need to tell stories, to understand them and to have them heard.⁶⁵

The film is relevant to my research not only for its portrayal of a complex maternal figure but also for its skillful integration of archival footage, Super 8 re-enactments, and multiple perspectives. Through interviews with family members and personal writings from her father, biological father, and eventually herself, Polley pieces together her mother's story. Her investigation leads to the revelation of her biological father, reshaping her understanding of her mother and forging an unexpected new relationship. As the layers unfold, the viewer experiences the journey alongside Polley, making for a dynamic and emotionally rich storytelling experience.

My collected material, including interviews and footage with filmmakers, ultimately transformed into something new. Its function shifted to providing perspective on Mara's story. The material was repurposed in different ways – at times, I filmed the filmmakers during interviews, but later chose to represent them through animated alter egos, allowing for a more layered interpretation and letting the form add to the filmic language and narrative. One such example is the doctor's office scene, included in the appendix, where fictional Mara, her double Nora, documentary footage of Killi, and the animated alter egos of both filmmakers Denis and Killi coexist in the same space – a physical setting that also reflects Mara's overwhelmed mental state, crowded with information, thoughts, and the mental load.

According to Morken Andersen, working with the collector takes time – a drawback if one is in a rush to get the story told.

62 Morken Andersen, *Å skape fortellinger*, 169.

63 Morken Andersen, *Å skape fortellinger*, 181.

64 *Stories We Tell*, directed by Sarah Polley (2012; Canada: National Film Board of Canada), streaming video. <https://www.filmweb.no/streamingguide/film/36453>.

65 Sarah Polley, "Stories We Tell: A post by Sarah Polley," *NFB Blog*. August/29/2012. <https://blog.nfb.ca/blog/2012/08/29/stories-we-tell-a-post-by-sarah-polley/>.

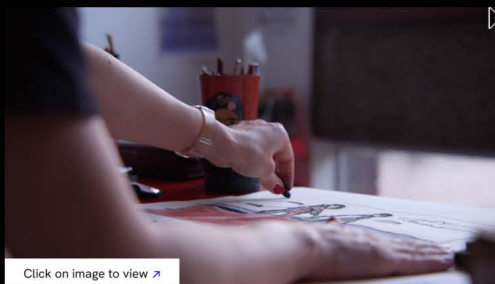
Figure 18: Screenshot No.1 from *Research Catalogue Exposition – Collecting Page*. D. Hauser.



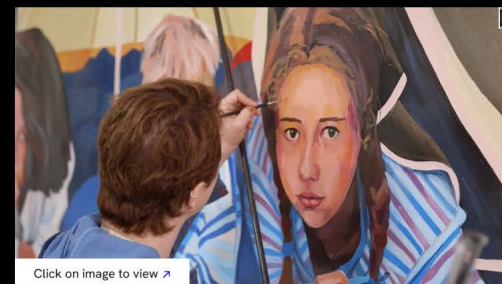
DOCUMENTARY EDITS: GAËLLE DENIS



Introduction to filmmaker Gaëlle Denis including an excerpt from her short *City Paradise*. Material used in scenes 7, 10, 12, and 88 of the script.

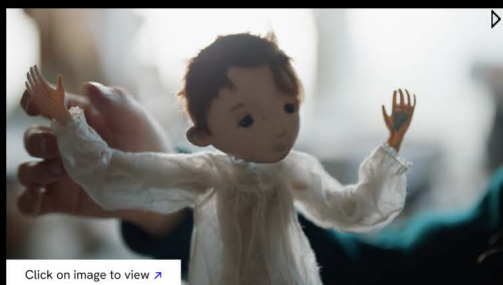


Featuring Gaëlle Denis drawing in her home studio at the Barbican Estate, London (November 2021). Material used in scenes 51, 52, and 53.



Featuring Gaëlle Denis painting in her East London studio (October 2023). Material used in scene 72.

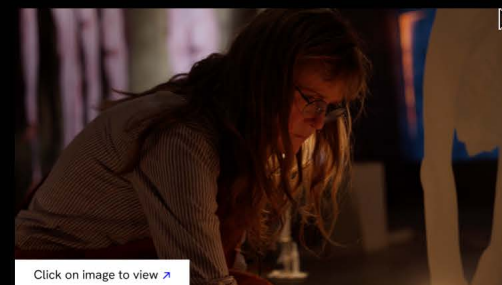
DOCUMENTARY EDITS: ANITA KILLI



Introduction to filmmaker Gaëlle Denis. Material used in scenes 7, 9, and 50 of the script.



Featuring Anita Killi in the cowstables before the studio conversion, and an excerpt from her short *Mother Didn't Know*. Material used in scenes 33, 34, and 35.



Featuring Anita Killi at the opening of the converted studio and an exhibition with various artists and filmmakers. Material included in scenes 74 and 88.

Figure 19: Still No. 1 from *Animatic*, showing an animated alter ego of Gaëlle Denis in a colorful watercolor beach setting. D. Hauser.



nuts, berries, fruits, grains, and adding some protein in form of bugs, fish, birds and rabbits. In fact, they had so much time, that maybe the restless ones without care duties for a baby or maintenance duties decided to hunt mammoths. They'd return with their prey in tow, and a story to tell.⁶⁷

It is hard to tell a really gripping tale of how I wrested a wild-oat seed from its husk, and then another, and then another, and then another, and then I scratched my gnat bites and Ool said something funny, and we went to the creek and got a drink and watched newts for a while, and then I found another patch of oats... No, it does not compare, it cannot compete with how I thrust my spear deep into the titanic hairy flank while Oob, impaled on one huge sweeping tusk, writhed screaming, and blood spouted everywhere in crimson torrents, and Boob was crushed jelly when the mammoth fell on him as I shot my unerring arrow straight through eye to brain.⁶⁸

The collector isn't particularly effective, nor does he/she work in a specific order, or a linear way.⁶⁶

Speaking of being effective, Ursula K. Le Guin writes in her essay *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, that the average prehistoric person could make a living in about a fifteen-hour work week – gathering seeds, roots, sprouts, shoots, leaves,

She highlights that this story not only has a hero, but it also has action and before you know it all the others on the wild oat patch have all been pressed into service in the tale of the hero. But it isn't their story. It is his.

Le Guin's reflection, prompts me to question whether I have through the process of crafting the script pressed the filmmakers Killi's and Denis's stories into service of fictional character Mara's tale of the heroine, attempting to tell a linear story. On second thought, the process of arriving at the fictional narrative was far from linear, straightforward or efficient, nor do I portray Mara as a heroine. Drawing from Morken Andersen's model, I spent significant time collecting, examining, evaluating, and analysing material with and from the filmmakers before writing the fictional elements. A process, which included editing filmed material according to themes, and transcribing, printing out and cutting up interviews, as well as combining the material with personal reflections.

In *Make Her See*, one key relationship among elements is conflict. However, I aim to avoid reducing the narrative solely to conflict. Instead, I strive to explore what is happening, what people do, and how their stories interconnect with each other and their surroundings.

Le Guin, in her essay, critiques the dominance of conflict in narratives and expresses her preference for the novel, where she could include people rather than merely a hero. She reflects on writing science fiction, describing her carrier bag was full of tiny things and intricately woven nets – knots to untangle to reveal what lay inside. It held beginnings without ends, losses, transformations, and transitions. Less conflict, fewer triumphs, fewer delusions. A space full of failed missions.⁶⁹

While developing the script, I often felt, like Le Guin, that I was carrying something heavy and shifting – my own carrier bag, constantly reshaping itself. At times, it took the form of a rough edit, black gaps separating loosely structured footage. Other times, it was a purple folder filled with printed and highlighted

⁶⁶ Morken Andersen, *Å skape fortelling*, 182.

⁶⁷ Ursula K. Le Guin. *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (Ignota, 2019), 25-27.

⁶⁸ Le Guin, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, 27.

⁶⁹ Le Guin, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, 35-36.

transcripts from conversations with Killi and Denis, material I was trying to place in perspective against my own experiences. And sometimes, the carrier bag was simply my mind, churning, whether I was off work trying to be present with my family. My bag was of life stories brimming with beginnings without ends. Stories of loss – interrupted film careers, the passing of loved ones, lost pregnancies, declining health. Stories of transformation. And it dismantled the illusion that balancing motherhood and filmmaking was simply a matter of willpower.

Le Guin goes on to redefine the container as the hero: the thing that holds gathered things. In this PhD project in Artistic Research, certain carrier bags served as heroes: the external hard drive, a MacBook Pro, a voice recorder, cameras. My brain, body and eventually, the exposition on the Research Catalogue; the permanent home of my Artistic Research Project. These containers hold experience, interview guides, documentary edits, an animatic, a screen test with the lead actress, two video loops, and excerpts from the film script. Artistic research itself becomes the home for the “other story”, a possibility for new stories.

Le Guin describes “home” as “another, larger kind of pouch or bag, a container for people.”⁷⁰ I find this notion deeply interesting. In *Make Her See*, most scenes are set in the home: In Mara’s home studio, where she navigates her creative process outside traditional industry frameworks – finding ways to create without the usual support systems and with very limited resources; in the domestic space, where stories of maintenance, care and artistic expression unfold; and in the homes and studios that the filmmakers Killi and Denis occupy.

The home also takes center stage in Chantal Akerman’s *No Home Movie*⁷¹ and Su Friedrich’s *I Cannot Tell You How I Feel*⁷², two intimate documentaries that explore the role reversal as daughters become caregivers for their aging mothers. Through observational footage and deeply personal narratives – woven together with conversations, voiceovers, and text – both films capture the emotional complexities of daughters assuming caregiving roles as their mothers face their final days or their move into institutional care.

As my own project developed, I found thematic parallels while collecting (filming and editing) the footage of Gaëlle Denis,



Figure 20: Photograph of DOP Bronwen Parker Rhodes filming Gaëlle Denis at her East London painting studio. D. Hauser.

whom we documented as she intertwined her evolving artistic journey with her mother’s story. Taking on the role of caregiver for her mother, who has Alzheimer’s, Denis along with her sister navigates the emotional and logistical challenges the transition from home in Brittany to a care facility in Paris.

Make Her See, is not a hero’s story or a tale of triumph where Mara, the director successfully balances motherhood with filmmaking and completes her documentary that screens at festivals, garners large audiences, and wins awards. Instead, it is a tale of living – a story that makes space for those whose experiences are rarely celebrated as heroic.

COLLECTING AS A METHOD?

This project began long before its official start. For over a decade, I gathered life experiences shaped my understanding of motherhood, filmmaking, and relocation. The vessel for this collected material was not only my mind but also my body – both serving as repositories of lived experience.

From the outset of the PhD, I was aware that interviews and footage with filmmakers would form the project’s foundation and that I needed to gather material before writing a potential

⁷⁰ Le Guin, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, 32.

⁷¹ *No Home Movie*, directed by Chantal Akerman (2015; France: Chantal Akerman, Patrick Quinet, Serge Zeitoun), streaming video. <https://mubi.com/en/no/films/no-home-movie>.

⁷² *I Cannot Tell You How I Feel*, directed by Su Friedrich (2018; New York: Su Friedrich), streaming video. <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/icannottell>.

script. However, I did not initially define this process as “collecting”. Over time, gathering expanded to include interviews with female artists on their experiences of flow, recordings of my children, Super 8 footage, archival materials, and excerpts from the filmmaker’s own films.

I can reconstruct the project’s development by examining project folders, containers in their own rights, organised by year and category. The structured collection process began months before my PhD when the project received external funding from Central Norwegian Film Centre. With a small crew, we filmed and interviewed filmmaker Anita Killi at her home and workspace in Dovre. I soon realised that the material lacked focus. Recognizing the need for more precise interview questions, I later conducted a second round of conversations with her – this time without a camera crew.

In autumn 2021, I wrote interview guides for the two filmmakers, which are included on the Research Catalogue page *Collecting*. While I believed I had a clear idea of what I sought, I simultaneously did not. By November and December 2021, I had returned with voice recordings, which I transcribed, analysed by marking the texts according to themes and relevance, and cut them into sections. I laid out and arranged excerpts to create a dialogue between the two filmmakers. This hands-on approach continued into the first editing phase in early 2022, where I structured material thematically around Artistic Work, Relationships, Being There, Care Work, and Time. Although the topics were present, refining the project’s thematic focus remained an ongoing process. The edit was punctuated with black gaps containing interview excerpts and subtitles as placeholders for potential future material.

While this early edit is not included in my presented collection on the Research Catalogue, much of its material is now more effectively integrated into the script *Make Her See*. However, as part of the collection, I have selected two edits showcasing Killi’s and Denis’ film clips alongside their voice-overs. These excerpts remain relevant both to the script and as insight into their creative practices.

In February 2022, coinciding with a funding deadline at Central Norwegian Film Centre, I fell ill with Covid, forcing a pause that unexpectedly sparked my interest in the concept

of flow. I became acutely aware of interruptions – particularly those created by caring for small children – and began recording my children’s play and conversations, considering how these sounds might juxtapose and interrupt my film.

During my time-out, I also began collecting interviews with female artists on their experiences of flow. These recordings later shaped the script, with transcribed excerpts woven into key scenes. In the final script version, interview excerpts appear in two garden scenes: one early in the script, and another at the end where an interviewee’s voice accompanies the family’s clumsy movements across the lawn. Both scenes are included in the appendix. This side-step in my research also deepened Mara’s character development and her evolving relationship with Nora.

Beginning of 2023, while working on an earlier feature length script draft in which I attempted to combine the fictional world with the filmmaker’s interviews and documentary elements, I explored some of the collected material through converting it into animated scenes.

The animatic which incorporates excerpts of the filmmaker’s interviews with archive footage from Killi and an animated (rotoscoped) alter-ego of the fictional protagonist Mara, already hinted at the project’s core – how maternal identity shapes filmmaking practice.

In the animatic, Mara’s search for flow through drawing brings filmmakers Killi and Denis to life as animated alter-egos engaging in a conversation about motherhood and filmmaking. This scene remains in the final script due to its thematic accuracy and its contribution to some of my research questions – specifically, how to bridge the artistic methods of the portrayed filmmakers with my own approach.

Collecting, as a method of gathering perspectives for the fictional world, required continuous re-evaluation. Material was laid out – whether in editing software, or as printed and cut-out paper scraps, or as drawings as part of storyboard – analysed, and reconfigured in new ways. As the script evolved, collected material was removed, replaced, or adapted.

By autumn 2023, further external funding, secured based on the animatic, a screentest with the lead actress, and an early script draft, allowed for continued development. Due to challenges

tied to the producer's timeline and my own PhD deadline, I decided to proceed independently for some time, compelled to follow the filmmaker's stories further. This led me back to London and Dovre in late 2023 for additional interviews and footage. The interview guides for the two filmmakers can be found in the Research Catalogue exposition, under the page *Collecting*, as downloadable PDFs.

This phase extended beyond audiovisual material and interviews to encompass personal reflections and observations. In my *Road Trip Writings*, I found a space to weave together life experiences, reflections on motherhood, literature, physical places, and project themes. This approach expanded my thinking and allowed me to experience flow while writing. A source of inspiration has been Wim Wender's "Once"⁷³, which I rediscovered years after buying the book in a small Manhattan bookstore. In it, Wenders combines photographs, often taken while location scouting, with poetic reflections. The book offers a glimpse into his personal experiences and perspectives, while capturing the beauty of everyday moments.

WHAT TO LEAVE IN AND WHAT TO TAKE OUT

To sharpen the focus of my Research Catalogue exposition, I chose to include less material than what I effectively have gathered in these years, or what appears in the script. For example, I omitted recordings with my children, original interview transcripts with the filmmakers, and early flow recordings. However, elements from these materials that aligned with the research core and themes have been integrated into the script, alongside documentary edits and photographs.

As I explored "female experience" in filmmaking, various themes emerged. Some later proved unnecessary for the script's final focus but remain valuable, touching on ideas I may revisit in future projects. Through careful evaluation, structuring, and analysis, I refined the project's focus, uncovering new questions, insights, and directions for exploration.

While developing *Make Her See*, I identified a shared theme – the maternal – as a lens through which to examine

multiple perspectives. I did so by writing interview guides, transcribing and editing interviews and footage, and crafting animation and mixed-media scenes.

The material, such as documentary edits, reveals additional emerging themes. Killi's story revolves around building her long-dreamed-of studio, her battle with cancer and challenges post treatment, and her longing for community. Denis' story focuses on her transition from commercial filmmaking to the arts, shaped by her experiences as a French filmmaker in post-Brexit London and the impact of her childhood in Brittany, particularly her mother's illness. While both narratives explore personal and professional struggles, they do not directly intersect with the core theme of *Make Her See*.

There is a connection between Killi's cancer and Denis' experience growing up with a sick mother, but I chose not to focus on illness, especially since Killi's daughter, Maja Arnekleiv, had already explored this theme in her animated film *Mum's Hair*⁷⁴. Her pixilated short is partially included in the third video embedded in Killi's section of the exposition page titled "Collecting".

In a conversation with Kirsten Bonnén Rask (January 2025), we discussed how collected material not part of *Make Her See* might shape a different project. Bonnén Rask suggested a guiding question: *Where does inspiration come from, and what does it cost to turn inspiration into art?* This approach would shift the focus beyond female experiences alone.

The question, where inspiration comes from can be partially answered based on various interviews from 2021 to 2023 with the two filmmakers. For Denis, inspiration is deeply tied to her nomadic upbringing, and the absence of a traditional mother figure due to her mother's illness. Her resulting self-reliance and resilience is reflected in her artistic career, as she continuously adapts and redefines herself. Her recurring focus on aquatic themes or locations based by the sea is rooted in her childhood summers by the sea in Brittany.

⁷³ Wim Wenders, *Once* (Schirmer/Mosel, 2010).

⁷⁴ *Mum's Hair*, directed by Maja Arnekleiv (2018; Norway: Trollfilm), streaming video. <https://dafilms.com/film/10537-mum-s-hair>



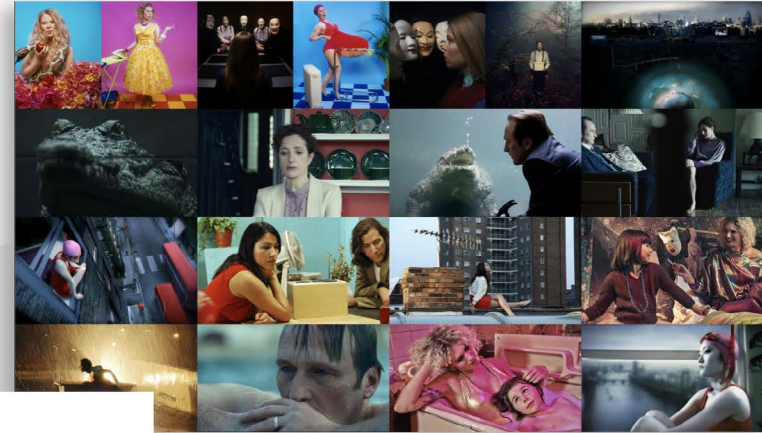
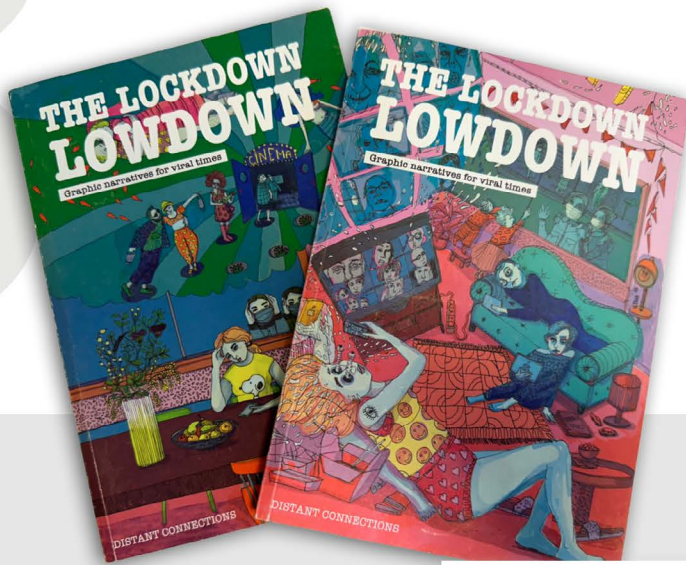
Killi's inspirations seem to partially stem from her mother's influence and childhood experiences, particularly being privy to secrets she perhaps shouldn't have heard. This co-shaped her desire to tell animated stories that help children process difficult topics. Her cinematic inspirations include epic lyrical films and Russian animator Yuri Norstein. Hence, a possible answer to "Where does inspiration come from?", could be childhood and our roots.

The second part of the question - What does it cost to turn inspiration into art? - is reflected in the filmmaker's journeys. For Killi, the cost is evident: her studio-building process, a shared dream with her father, became all-consuming, affecting her health and raising questions about personal sacrifice in partnerships. This echoes *Make Her See's* exploration of balancing art and life, though the theme is already addressed in Mara's fictional story. For Denis, the cost remains uncertain. Creating is not a choice for her - it is essential. She pursues whatever medium enables her flow state. Whether her current project, based on her mother's declining health and indirectly confronting mortality, will impact their relationship is unknown.

While these stories are rich and compelling, they ultimately diverge from *Make Her See's* central focus on the intersection of motherhood and filmmaking. This thread appears in the collected material but remains generative for future work rather than integral to the maternal doubling inquiry at the heart of this project. The collecting method revealed multiple potential directions; choosing which threads to follow required deliberate focus.

Figure 21: Still from *Anita Killi edit No. 3*, showing her during an interview in her old animation studio in Dovre. D. Hauser.

Figure 22: Screenshot No. 2
from Research Catalogue
Exposition – Collecting Page.
D. Hauser.



COLLECTED MATERIAL:
Gaëlle Denis

*"They are like your babies, you know,
you take care of them, every frame,
every sound... it's a controlled world."*

*Excerpt from first interview by Denise Hauser
with Gaëlle Denis, London, November 2021.*





Figure 23: Still from *Anita Killi Edit No. 3*, showing her in the gallery at the studio opening in Dovre, November 2023. D. Hauser.

WHAT COLLECTING REVEALED

Parts of the collected material – documentary edits, flow interviews with female artists, archive footage from the filmmakers and transcribed conversations with them – are woven into the hybrid film script *Make Her See* or form the basis for the animatic, which is then included and distributed across several script scenes. This material brings perspective into the fictional story.

An intriguing outcome of collecting, for me as a filmmaker, is the idea of having a collection to return to. It can later be recombined to create new meanings, offering opportunities for further exploration and new creations.

One thread that could evolve further is the footage and interviews with Killi and Denis. Their stories may eventually form the basis of a short documentary focused on the origins of artistic inspiration and the cost of transforming life into art. Another thread that fascinates me as a potential direction for further research is the collection around the concept of Flow – drawing from literature, interviews and my own reflections. Exploring what induces flow could help foster more intuitive

ways of working and challenge rigid, outcome-driven industry norms. A future project could expand this by including a more diverse range of interviews and hands-on artistic investigations such as drawing, audiovisual loops, and writing experiments.

Ultimately, the collection extends beyond what is currently being presented in this PhD project. The script, which incorporates parts of the collection, may continue to evolve beyond the PhD in ways that could incorporate more, or less of the material. These collected fragments are seeds stored in a carrier bag, waiting to grow – echoing Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* and Merete Morken Andersen's view of the writing process. They hold potential not yet realized in the current form, ready to take shape when the time is right.

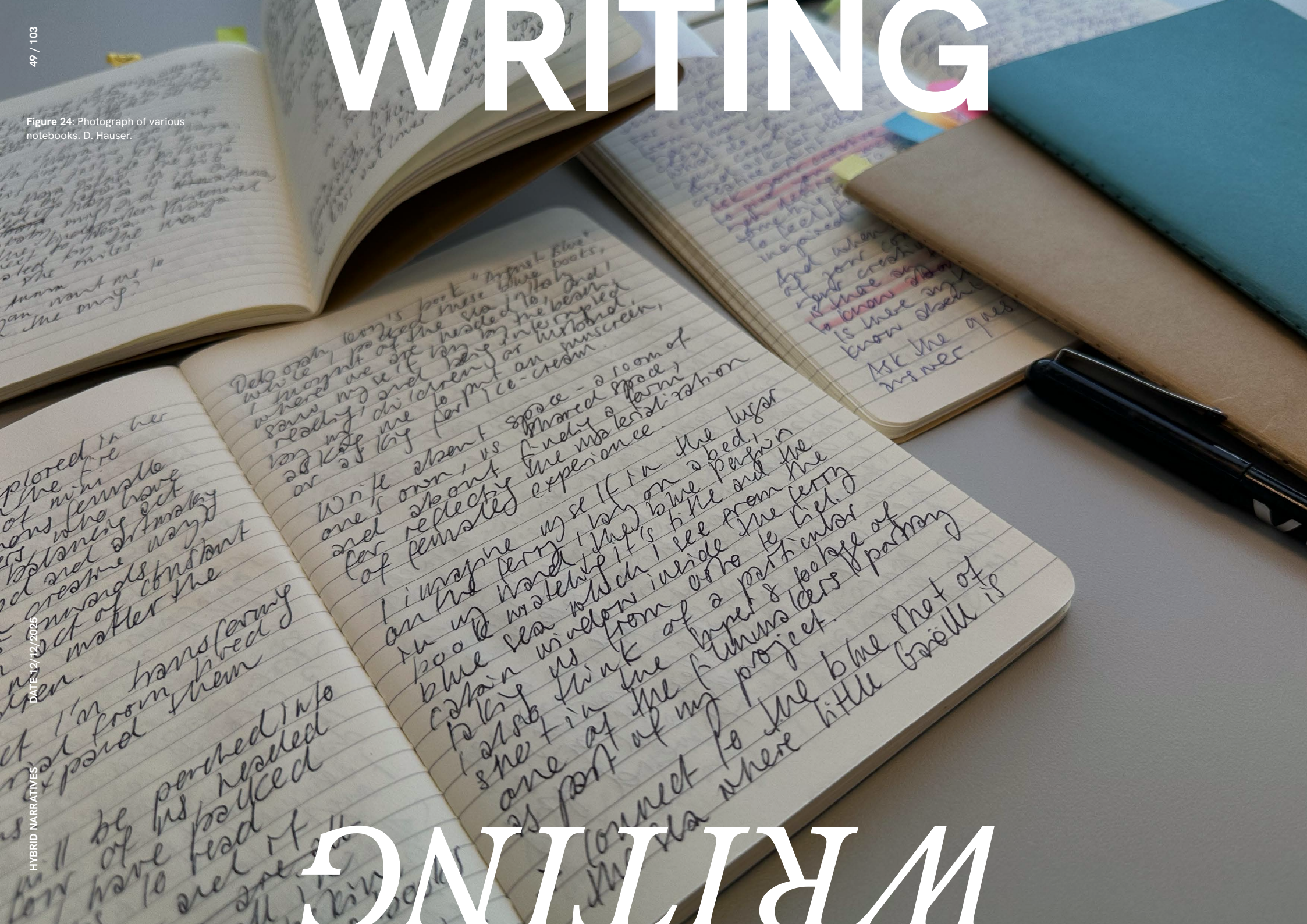
Yet for all its generative potential, collecting alone could not provide a framework for synthesis. The interviews and footage existed as disconnected pieces. I had gathered voices of Killi and Denis, archive and documentary material showing fragments of their lives, documentation of my own interrupted creative process. But these materials needed a structure that could hold them together, allow them to speak to each other, and create space for my own experience without centering it at the expense of theirs.

The collection had shown me what was there – the patterns, the tensions, the absences. But I needed a method that could help me understand what it all meant, that could metabolize these real experiences into something both specific and resonant. This realization pointed toward writing: not writing about the material, but writing with it. This approach would allow the voices of Killi and Denis, the theories I was reading, and my own maternal experience to shape a hybrid script where documentary and fiction could coexist.

With the collection as foundation, I turned to writing as the next phase of inquiry: a space where fragmented material could begin to find form, where fictional and documentary elements could intermingle, and where the tensions I had observed in the filmmakers' lives might be explored through constructed narrative.

Figure 24: Photograph of various notebooks. D. Hauser.

WRITING



DAILY

Writing has been both a method for reflection and a tool for artistic development in my filmmaking practice. This chapter, along with the corresponding Research Catalogue page, gathers material exploring my research questions through writing. It includes this reflection, the film's synopsis and script excerpts as appendices, and the full script, available upon request.

Susan Rubin Suleiman, in her essay *Writing and Motherhood*, explores the relationship between the two and identifies two major thematic clusters at the heart of this connection: opposition and integration, motherhood as obstacle or source of conflict and motherhood as link, as a source of connection to work and world. She sees the oppositional themes guilt versus love, mother's creative self-versus child's needs, isolation versus commitment.⁷⁵

Writing mothers have since about 1962 found ways to do their work and were recognised for it: Doris Lessing won the Nobel Prize; Ursula K. Le Guin was awarded the National Book Medal, America's highest literary honour. Alice Walker won a Pulitzer and sold millions; Audre Lorde opened a conversation around intersectionality. Angela Carter was acknowledged as one of the defining literary voices of twentieth-century Britain, and Susan Sontag as one of the great English Language critics. Alice Neal saw her art accepted into the canon.

Julie Phillips tries in her group biography *The Baby on the Fire Escape*, to trace the course of that change, to find out what mothering plus creativity looks like, not just in the first few years, but as part of a life story. What does it mean to create, not alone in "A room of one's own", but in a shared space? What kinds of work have come out of that space? What is the shape of a creative mother's life? She made room for more than one set of experiences, and for multiple points of view. Parenting affects, and is affected by, each person's circumstances, and is affected too by race, resources, sexuality, family relationships, (dis)ability.

Phillips argues that the essence of motherhood is transformation. In her journey looking for mother heroes, she discovered that they had been in women's stories all along and that their subjectivity was in their losing and finding of themselves throughout their life.

So, in a spirit of rebellion, a refusal of erasure, a smack to young Oedipus who failed to recognize his mother, I have tried to look at the crises of self, the moments when their maternal or creative understanding of themselves falls apart, when they get lost in the woods and come out – if they do come out – with new insight, and with themselves changed.⁷⁶

It was this kind of space of transformation through the converging realms of motherhood, care, and creativity that interested me in my project. Similar to Phillips, I had begun my work with a curiosity to investigate the lives of extraordinary women – not writers, but filmmakers – who have lived through a series of transformations: motherhood, caregiving, illness. Women who had lost and rediscovered themselves through the process of change. Like Phillips, I hoped to view my own experiences through new eyes – hence the film title *Make Her See*.

But how would I explore these transformations? What methods could hold the complexity I was encountering?

WHAT I EXPLORED THROUGH SCREENWRITING AND HOW THIS CONTRIBUTES TO THE WIDER FIELD

From the beginning of the PhD, I knew my project would not start with a script. The topic I wanted to explore was too layered and complex to be contained by conventional writing structures. The PhD offered a space to assemble different research threads and materials, to collect footage, interviews, and reflections, and to slowly let a script emerge from within them. Initially, I had not expected my research to result in a feature-length screenplay as the major artistic output; this emerged gradually as I became increasingly aware of how deeply I had internalised the output-driven mindset of the film industry, which values constant productivity over reflective exploration.

75 Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Writing and Motherhood," in *Mother Reader: Essential Writings on Motherhood*, ed. Moyra Davey (Seven Stories Press, 1979), 119.

76 Phillips, *The Baby on the Fire Escape*, 17.



As a director, I had been used to treating the script merely as a blueprint for production. But through this project, I began to understand and foreground screenwriting differently: as an artistic and research practice in its own right. According to Craig Batty and Dallas J Baker⁷⁷, screenwriting in academia offers exactly that, a research and artistic practice that is not dependent on production. They also point to opportunities for non-screenwriting practitioners to use the screenplay as a site for knowledge discovery and dissemination, evoking ideas and theories through sensations, experiences, and affective engagement. In my case, the script became precisely such a site: a space to explore my visuality and to materialise concepts emerging from my processes of making.

This gave me the freedom to write in a way that reflected the film's themes structurally and to tell my story in a manner that mirrored the interruptions (and flows) of motherhood itself. The rhythm of interruption that characterises maternal experience became central to the script's very fabric. As Lisa Baraitser describes, the maternal subject emerges through interruption⁷⁸. The script's construction through collecting, writing, doubling, and autoethnographic reflection performs the very thing it describes: fragmentation and maternal subjectivity shaped by constant interruption. It enacts what it represents, not only through its story but through the way it is written and structured. In this sense, the screenplay becomes both a representational and performative artefact, a form that embodies my research rather than simply describing it. The individual audiovisual works produced along the way function as complementary process outputs, materialising the script's evolving foundation and offering insight into its development.

A secondary motivation for writing had been to move away from others' perception of me as an animator, a label I have never identified with. I am not interested in the technical act of animating, of bringing inanimate objects to life. This became clear during my MA in Animation, when I began incorporating live action into my work, seeking instead a more experimental and fluid form that allowed different visual ideas to coexist within one film. In retrospect, this shift marked an early expression of what my PhD now formalises: a hybrid practice positioned between disciplines, where methods from different

media intersect to question established hierarchies between language and visual form.

In *Make Her See*, I aimed to tell a story that could hold this experimental visual language without losing its emotional coherence. I am more interested in storytelling than in animation itself, seeing animation as one among several expressive forms, closely linked to traditional art practices such as drawing, painting, and sculpture.

Just as the script's fabrication embodies its themes, the animated scenes within it anticipate a mode of production grounded in slowness, attention to detail, and sustained engagement, what Mc Hardy⁷⁹ describes as a form of care. In this way, both the process of writing and the envisioned filmic form reflect the ethics of care inherent in motherhood.

Because of this intertwining between form, process, and subject matter, the idea that someone else could write the script for me is inconceivable, at least at the foundational stage of the PhD. The work grows directly out of my lived experience and artistic language, positioning the act of writing itself as a research method. The very fabric of the script performs maternal subjectivity, not as a universal category, but as a situated one⁸⁰, emerging from my specific perspective and lived conditions. In this way, the screenplay embodies my research: it is both the method and the outcome, both the inquiry and its articulation.

Throughout my career, I have worked individually and experimentally, a tendency that stems from my path into filmmaking through illustration and animation. Coming from that background, where dialogue is not essential and meaning can emerge through movement, rhythm, and sound, I have always viewed each image as a composition, a world in itself. I have

77 Craig Batty and Dallas J. Baker, "Screenwriting as a Mode of Research, and the Screenplay as a Research Artefact," in *Screen Production Research: Creative Practice as a Mode of Enquiry*, ed. Craig Batty and Susan Kerrigan (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 67-83.

78 Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* (Routledge, 2009), 56.

79 Mc Hardy, "(Maintenance) Animation is a Drag: It takes all the ***** time*," 85-89.

80 Haraway, "Situated Knowledges."

never seen the screenplay as a rigid blueprint, but rather as a flexible, living form. I am interested in how visual expression and story inform one another, not only once a script is finished, but through the very act of its making.

During the PhD, my screenwriting practice has embraced both composition and improvisation. The audiovisual works developed along the way are intertwined with the screenplay, shaping its visual treatments and deepening my exploration of motherhood, filmmaking, and related concepts such as flow, interruption, maternal subjectivity, and matrescence. The script has become a vessel for all these elements, a form that gathers, holds, and carries meaning rather than driving it toward closure. In this sense, the screenplay becomes a methodological form in itself: a container for embodied knowledge, situated experience, and artistic inquiry.

The script engages deeply with maternal experience, doubling, and the inner split between creative and caregiving selves. Through the figures of Mara and Nora, the writing experiments with how internal dialogue and embodied contradiction can be externalised cinematically, not only through character, but through shifts in tone, space, and medium. I developed ways of writing that translate psychological and emotional complexity into visual and structural terms.

By integrating autoethnographic writing, real interviews, and performative elements, my script expands the notion of “screenwriting” itself. It demonstrates that scripts can function as hybrid research artefacts - part conceptual framework, part artistic experiment - reflecting both process and thought. Writing becomes a generative, exploratory practice rather than a purely instrumental step toward a finished film, reclaiming the screenplay as a space of knowledge production and inquiry.

WRITING AS METHOD AND FORM

For me, writing, like sketching, sits alongside the evocative language of animation and the analytical process of editing. I circle an idea, moving closer with each pass. Writing lets me dismantle and reassemble experience, making sense of it in ways that feel immediate, fluid, and instinctive.

While storyboarding is time-consuming, writing a scene provides a more immediate sense of its place within the larger narrative. A few words can reshape an entire scene, whereas redrawing a storyboard is far more laborious. Writing, for me, is the first step in exploring and materializing ideas. Words leave space for the reader to construct their own mental images, while a storyboard fixes the visual interpretation more concretely. When the purpose and rhythm of a scene are clarified through writing, it can still be translated into a visual form, as I did by creating a storyboard for the animatic in this PhD project.

While writing a feature-length script felt like a natural step forward, it was also a practical necessity. Writing may be the most compatible aspect of film production within motherhood, as it requires minimal resources, no immediate collaborators, and can be done flexibly, anywhere, even within the framework of a PhD in Artistic Research.

In filmmaking, writing is often the first link in a chain reaction, yet also the place where gatekeepers often hold the power to halt progress before a film is made. Achieving flow through writing is essential, particularly given the multiple layers of translation I navigate as a foreign filmmaker not yet fluent in Norwegian and as a visual filmmaker striving to gain autonomy over my process.

Filmmakers must first articulate ideas through project descriptions, director’s statements, and scripts. In artistic research, written reflection serves as the bridge between thought and audiovisual experimentation. To understand how my collected material – documentary, fiction, and animation – could form a cohesive structure, I needed to write a script. A longer format was necessary to hold both the stories of real filmmakers and the fictional protagonist who threads them together through her own creative exploration.

Writing the script allowed me to navigate the interplay between collected material and fiction. My background in animation and mixed-media filmmaking let me integrate these elements into the script intuitively, in ways that a purely screenwriting-focused approach might not. This ability helps me translate thoughts and experience with drawing, animation, and mixed-media processes into words, and later back into visuals, should a storyboard be needed. Writing from a visual perspective allows me to explore

and structure visual ideas alongside collected material. This understanding of screenwriting as method – as both flexible and situated – became especially significant given my relationship to language itself.

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE

There is an inherent relationship and power dynamic between drawing and writing. An imperfect drawing is often more easily forgiven, while an imperfect script is harder to accept. Why? Perhaps because words, with their structure and precision, are expected to convey certainty, whereas images invite interpretation and ambiguity.

Translating between languages, as I've experienced while writing scripts in Norwegian for film funding, is fraught with complexity. Cultural references, humor, and sentence structures do not seamlessly transfer.

Being Swiss and raising my family in Central Norway, I find myself reflecting on the role of language. Since moving from Switzerland to London in 2001, English has become my adopted mother tongue, though my native language is German. While I primarily write in English, I am also learning Norwegian, and can speak it, though I still search for words at times. At home, we navigate a trilingual environment, speaking Norwegian, Swiss German, and English. This constant interplay of languages deepens my fascination with the connection between language and thought. I often wonder – do I think in English or German? Do I dream in words at all, or are dreams purely visual?

Considering my roots, paired with my visual background in animation, the process of film development can sometimes feel like being “severed from a limb necessary for artistic survival.” The act of translation imposes limitations on my creative expression and shifts my priorities. When moving between a mother tongue and a foreign language, something essential can be lost – cultural nuances and existential meanings don't always find equivalents. Writing in Norwegian presents this challenge, where the loss of intuitive cultural resonance complicates the process.

In *On the Way to Language*⁸¹, particularly in his essay titled “The Nature of Language”, Martin Heidegger argues that language is not just a tool but a way we reveal and experience being. Each language shapes how its speakers inhabit the world, making translation a transformative act. He acknowledges that what is lost in translation is more than accuracy; it is the unique way each language shapes thought.

As my animatic made clear, visual language is deeply personal. Tacit knowledge can't be replicated easily. Visual language, like a mother tongue, is intimate, and translating between visual and verbal forms changes the essence of what is expressed.

In my creative process – shifting between languages, visual and verbal modes of expression – I aim to find new possibilities. I do not strive to stick to a linear production model, from script to screen, but to use writing to find a balance between the visual and the written. The script is further a way of situating visual ideas inside a bigger narrative, to explore structure, contrast and relate different experiences.

REFERENCES FOR MOTHERHOOD

As in translation of language transforming meaning, where sometimes subtle cultural layers are lost while revealing new possibilities, mothering styles are also deeply connected to cultural references.

Egyptian poet and literary scholar Iman Mersal turned to literature to navigate her feelings of maternal loneliness. She discovered that these feelings are common, shared by many. In *How to Mend: Motherhood and Its Ghosts* she wanted to challenge the idealized image of motherhood imposed by religion, society, and family. She explores the two narratives of motherhood: the dominant one, where society glorifies mothers as symbols of unconditional love and happiness, and the marginal narrative – reflected in literature, domestic crime reports, and other forms of expression – where voices struggle with conflict and stress in their experiences of motherhood.

81 Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language* (HarperOne, 2023), 57-110.

What of the experience of motherhood away from home, when you yourself are absent from your “motherland”? Does this make you freer when playing the role of mother, or does it leave you more lost than ever?⁸²

Mersal’s poignant question shifts my thoughts to the time after we had moved from my hometown in Switzerland to Norway. I often felt as if I were regressing – learning parenting methods that felt foreign to me. I was introduced to practices that seemed unimaginable back in New York or in Zurich. I learned to leave my baby in the pram outdoors for naps, even in sub-zero temperatures and quickly understood that in Norway, the phrase “There’s no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing” rings true. I found myself navigating an unfamiliar parenting style, striving to adapt and do everything correctly according to local customs. In doing so, I became acutely aware of the references from my own childhood that were slowly slipping away.

Perhaps I am drifting off topic, but this experience leaves me wondering: How much did my desire to conform as a foreigner influence my artistic practice as a filmmaker? Did I find myself adapting in other areas of my life, including my artistic practice? For instance, did writing a script in Norwegian to meet the expectations of Norwegian funding institutions disconnect me from my creative flow, severing the connection between my writing and my thinking?

MORE SHOWING, LESS TELLING

Norwegian actress and director Cecilie Mosli read an earlier version of my script and saw its core as a story about a woman exhausted by the rules, she believes she must follow. The more she obeys – or feels guilty for not doing so – the worse it gets. To Mosli, the script captured the female struggle: the tension between caregiving and career, the need for a room of one’s own. While she recognised its themes, she found the dialogue overwhelming and suggested ‘playing with less telling and more showing’.

In a new script draft, I further explored Mara and Nora’s dynamic, with Nora embodying the non-verbal, intuitive side – spontaneous, flowing, and akin to right-brain thinking – while Mara struggles to control her. I structured a subtle shift where Nora gradually quiets as Mara begins to understand her language. They start collaborating on Mara’s film, focusing on the visual and artistic process. Nora guides Mara through gestures rather than words.

At Kunsthall (scene 14, included in the appendix), Nora communicates through video loops, using body language instead of speech. Eventually, she fades or merges with Mara in another scene placed at a market while Mara buys a set of clinking bangles like Nora’s – a reminder of her enduring presence. The market may serve as a subconscious portal, inspired by Levy’s *August Blue*⁸³, where a set of mechanical toy horses – like Mara’s bangles – connect Elsa to her double.

I reflect on Levy’s *August Blue*, where Elsa’s double merges into music through the piano – Elsa’s means of expression – acting as a conduit between them. This leads me to consider whether Mara’s documentary on the two filmmakers could serve a similar role, bridging her maternal split. Shifting focus from direct dialogue between Mara and Nora to the art itself – visually embodied through her double, and the filmmaker’s animated alter-egos – could make artistic practice the evolving bridge between them, expressed through creation rather than words. These insights remain crucial for the script’s development beyond the PhD.

82 Iman Mersal, *How to Mend: Motherhood and Its Ghosts* (Sternberg Press, 2018), 23. Personal communication with author, July 30, 2025.

83 Levy, *August Blue*, 1-8.

PROJECT MAKE HER SEEPAGE 7 /

Female voices in background: No, you can't manage to be a mother and write and be on set and work.
(Gaëlle bouncing her baby trying to calm him down.)



Gaëlle turns her head towards the female voices in the back.
Gaëlle: "Yeah, but you have someone who can look after your kid, ..."



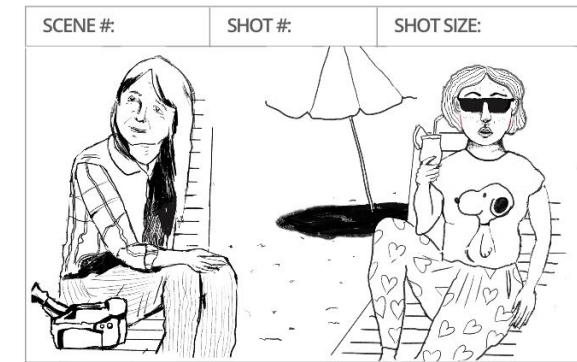
Gaëlle cont: Which is your mother, your aunt, your sister.
(A pair of hands reach out for the baby)



Gaëlle cont: But you have family because it's so expensive here.
(She hands over the baby)



Gaëlle cont: All the money I made directing commercials went into childcare. So, all my savings. <laughs>
(Crew behind her disappear.)
(She reaches for her drink)



Gaëlle: So, that's why I didn't buy a house or anything like that.
(Voice of child crying, sound of waves, gradually ending the beach, and the two women.)



Figure 26: Still from *Double Screen Video Loop*, showing live-action doppelgänger Nora in a wintry landscape. D. Hauser .

WHAT QUESTIONS DOES THE WRITING PROCESS ANSWER

Beyond the broader reflections on how writing has helped surface new questions or insights throughout my PhD, there are specific research questions that were explored directly through the screenwriting process. In the following sections which correspond with the script scenes in the appendix, I focus on scenes that, in my view, most effectively engage with these questions, aims, and objectives (as outlined in the section “New Research Questions”).

In *Make Her See*, the script, I have attempted to capture the overlap of maternal and artistic life, through mixed media filmmaking. Fictional character Mara’s journey revolves around the maternal split, or matrescence – her transformation from artist and filmmaker to mother, losing part of herself and reshaping her identity. Her experience is framed through the perspectives of filmmakers Anita Killi and Gaëlle Denis, whose own challenges unfold in Mara’s evolving documentary.

The script integrates transcribed interviews, documentary edits, and audiovisual material, including footage and interviews with Killi and Denis, an animatic based on these conversations, and archive footage. Some of this material can be found on the Research Catalogue exposition pages Collecting and Doubling.



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A SPACE FOR THE UNLIKEABLE FEMALE CHARACTER

Mersal reflects on her mothering experience away from home, quoting Adrienne Rich, who observed that poetry was where she could exist outside of motherhood, where she could be herself.⁸⁴

I questioned, whether I, too, needed to create a space in my script that existed outside the confines of motherhood - a space solely for Mara - stitching together a narrative that focused on her art, not her child. In trying to create that, I may have made her unlikeable: too self-absorbed, too focused on her film, not caring enough about her family. Or perhaps she is too preoccupied with her flaws, leaving little room for warmth or humor that could make her more relatable. Her fixation on illness might feel overwhelming - an escape that overshadows her creative journey.

Leda and Lydia, protagonists in *The Lost Daughter*⁸⁵ and *Tár*⁸⁶, are two recent fictional characters who challenge conventional expectations of women by prioritizing their careers in ways that may render them unlikeable to some. Leda leaves her daughters to pursue an academic career - a choice widely seen as socially unacceptable - while Lydia,

⁸⁴ Mersal, *How to Mend*, 36.

⁸⁵ *The Lost Daughter*, directed by Maggie Gyllenhaal (2021; USA: Endeavor Content, Faliro House, Pie Films, Samuel Marshall Productions), streaming video, <https://play.tv2.no/film/the-lost-daughter-1765305.html>.

⁸⁶ *Tár*, directed by Todd Field (2020; USA: Todd Field, Scott Lambert, Alexandra Milchan), film.



Figure 27: Still No. 1 from *Actor Test*, showing doppelgänger Nora in the closet. D. Hauser.

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a successful conductor, abuses her position to manipulate younger women in a ruthless pursuit of success. Though Lydia's ambition may be understandable as one of few women in a male-dominated field, Leda's abandonment is more taboo, despite the film offering emotional insight into her actions. I was captivated by Lydia, drawn in by the film's striking cinematography, but felt a deeper connection to Leda, particularly as she reflected on her past with growing remorse during her encounter with the young mother Nina. In reality, mothers are not meant to leave their children – this remains a powerful social taboo – and I wonder how many viewers truly related to her. Both women defy societal norms through behaviours that remain largely unaccepted for women, yet are often seen or tolerated by men.

In *Real Estate*⁸⁷, Deborah Levy reflects on Ingmar Bergman's portrayal of a deeply flawed male character in his film *Through a Glass Darkly*. This character, whom Levy describes as a lonesome, self-involved writer, is simultaneously foolish and profound, kind and cruel, embodying all the messy contradictions of being human. Levy admires how Bergman allows him to exist with all his flaws, creating a character who is both fascinating and, surprisingly, likeable.

Levy excels at creating female characters who are both controversial and likeable, precisely because of their vulnerability and their painful awareness of their own flaws, which makes them deeply endearing. Yet, even she faced gatekeepers when dreaming of turning her writing into a film. She raises a critical point:

"So then, what did the executives want their female characters to be like? I should have asked that question, but I already knew the answer. They had to be likeable."⁸⁸

Unlike Bergman's male lead, who can embrace his flaws without losing the audience's sympathy, female characters often don't get the same leeway. This double standard is something Levy encountered when pitching her ideas to film executives. They questioned whether audiences could like a female character who, like Bergman's male protagonist, pursues her vocation ruthlessly, indulges her desires, and neglects her family. Such behavior in a male character might be seen as complex or even admirable; in a female character, it is often viewed as problematic.

Levy's reflections highlight the challenge of creating a female protagonist who is as authentic and multifaceted as her male counterparts, without being dismissed as unlikeable.

Beyond the PhD, my goal is to create a female protagonist who, like Levy's vision, is unapologetically herself – flawed, profound, and paradoxical – without being overly concerned with her likeability. Yet, as the writer and director, I bear the responsibility of ensuring she is compelling, even in her unlikeability.

⁸⁷ Deborah Levy, *Real Estate* (Penguin Book, 2002), 74-76.

⁸⁸ Levy, *Real Estate*, 79.



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SCENE 50 – THE MENTAL LOAD

Though not yet materialized as an audiovisual experiment, this scene significantly engages with my research question: How can the intersection of motherhood and filmmaking be explored in mixed media film?

Mara is at the doctor's office, where her GP tries to understand what brought her there. While they discuss her exhaustion, Mara also expresses her mental load – sorting, making sense of, and assembling material for her project on top of housework and caregiving. This burden is visually echoed through symbolic objects: laundry piles from home appear, baking powder on the floor hints at a birthday cake yet to be baked, and Nora – her doppelgänger, seated on an ironing board – balances a laptop showing footage of Anita Killi.

The scene conveys both mental and physical clutter, reinforcing the need to clear space to focus. Killi's voice-over and documentary footage of her loading objects into a cart at Dovre support this theme. At the back of the room, a framed textile artwork with a gaping hole recalls the holes in Mara's child's wool underwear.

To expand the perspective, Mara's conversation with the doctor is intercut with animated alter-egos of Killi and Denis, who appear in the mirror and talk about making mental space for work and how filmmaking fits with motherhood. A toddler's footsteps and laughter outside the doctor's office further disrupt the conversation. The scene ends with the doctor's reminder that no job is more important than being a mother.

My approach integrates documentary footage, interviews with Killi and Denis, and personal reflections to develop a scene blending collected material with fiction. My process incorporates doubling, featuring Nora as a live-action doppelgänger and animated alter-egos of Killi and Denis, reflecting the layered identities of mothers who make films.

While financial constraints prevented a full audiovisual test, existing materials – documentary footage of Killi, her voice-over, and my animatic experiment – offer a foundation for imagining the result.

Next to the main question, this writing experiment also addresses the sub-question "How can I create a bridge

between the artistic methods of the portrayed filmmakers and my own working processes?" – particularly when linking it with the animatic as a reference for the animated alter egos of Killi and Denis in this scene.

The scene also addresses key sub-questions: First, animation expands the live-action space, mixing techniques and pairing real voices with animated alter-egos that reflect the filmmakers' artistic styles and identities. Second, re-representing Killi and Denis through animation creates a bridge between their artistic methods and my own process, as explored in my animatic reflections. The hybrid format allows for dynamic interactions between separately recorded voices, generating new meaning. Third, mixed media filmmaking itself becomes the container where all three characters – Killi, Denis, and an animated Nora – coexist, visually embodying the dialogue between motherhood and artistic practice.

SCENES 54, 55, 56 – BETWEEN WORLDS

With the support of her doppelgänger Nora, Mara becomes fully immersed in her filmmaking process. The creative world she is constructing – including the two filmmakers featured in her documentary and the visual universe surrounding them – begins to take over her life, demanding more mental and physical space. This idea is explored through two scenes, with the animatic woven into both.

Mara remains in her pyjamas all day, too consumed by her work to bother getting dressed. As she sketches on a large sheet of paper, inspired by Killi's voice, the paper expands, overtaking the entire live-action space. The living room and kitchen are transformed, with furniture wrapped in paper and outlined in black brushstrokes. This visual style references Gaëlle Denis' black-and-white Zine comics while extending their aesthetic into a three-dimensional world, creating a bridge between Denis' illustrated universe and Mara's tangible reality. To emphasize how Mara's creative work overtakes her physical space even further, I envision one of the room's walls moving closer, shrinking the area. This visual setup also transitions

seamlessly into the animatic, which is based on interviews with the filmmakers and features their animated alter egos. It combines Denis' Zine-inspired style with Killi's cut-out technique, further connecting Mara's world to the filmmaker's artistic approaches.

These scenes explore the tension between motherhood and creativity, in which Mara prioritizes her work over her family, leaving her partner to care for their daughter and manage household chores. Petter briefly pulls her out of her creative trance, but she quickly drifts back into her animated universe, where she herself becomes an animated character. This depiction takes inspiration from the original script version while introducing a new layer of duality: Mara's real-life struggles and her animated persona's seamless integration into the creative process in a literal character transformation.

The filmmaker's perspectives also reflect this duality. Killi's animated alter ego reflects on archive footage of a moment when she prioritized her work over her child. Her voice reveals how her perspective on that decision might have shifted over time, capturing the complexity of such choices. Her crudely animated body – considering it is a first sketch, an animatic – and her movements, express remorse. Similarly, Denis highlights the practical and emotional challenges of balancing family and work, emphasizing the necessity of external support – a theme reflected in Petter's care for Maya while Mara remains absorbed in her artistic trance.

The live-action and animated worlds converge even further when a three-dimensional version of Denis's zine character appears – a live-action woman in a purple pyjama with painted on stripes and a papier-mâché head, outlined in black. Even the coffee in Mara's machine transforms into black paint, symbolising how creativity fuels her life as much as coffee fuels her mornings. This surreal blending of Mara's physical and animated worlds emphasizes the interplay between reality and imagination.

When Petter interrupts Mara a second time to ask about stirring the soup, it is revealed that Mara has neglected it entirely – the soup has turned into a drawn version, bubbling with black outlines. This moment highlights Mara's detachment from her family as she remains absorbed in her creative world.

These scenes exemplify how the intersection of motherhood and filmmaking can be explored in the development of mixed media film. The process incorporated the collecting of interviews with the filmmakers, collecting of archive footage, writing and intertwining the collected material with Mara's fictional world and creating new ideas for visual worlds, and lastly the doubling of Mara with her animated alter ego, conversing with the animated alter-egos in the beach world (the existing animatic).

Doubling – through the animated alter egos of Mara and the filmmakers – serves as a key narrative device. The scenes embody the experience of “failing” to balance motherhood with filmmaking, as interruptions from family highlight the difficulty of sustaining presence in both worlds.

Animation becomes a functional and thematic bridge, connecting the filmmaker's artistic universes to Mara's live-action world. Simultaneously, it underscores the growing divide between Mara's filmmaking reality and her family, who remain firmly in the tangible, three-dimensional space. The contrast between these worlds emphasizes the challenge of moving between them and the cost of failing to do so effectively.

Mara's inability to balance her roles mirror's Killi's reflections, creating a shared discourse on the sacrifices and complexities of combining filmmaking with motherhood.

ON WRITING AND FLOW

Flow has become central to this project, but why is it relevant to my research question and screenwriting process?

The qualities I sought in my screenwriting emerged while writing scene three, included in the appendix, where expectant parents at an antenatal class play pretend. I approached the scene as an experiment, giving the characters some objects (baby dolls and diapers) to play with.

I kept it light by letting the expectant parents act like curious children and by removing the pressure of including the scene in the final script.

Slingerland offers a helpful metaphor for flow: envision the mind as a mirror, reflecting the present moment without storing



Figure 28: Still No. 2 from *Animatic*, showing a black-and-white rotoscoped version of fictional character Mara. D. Hauser.

the past or anticipating the future.⁸⁹

I experienced this empty and receptive mode, while solving Kirsten Bonnén Rask's assignment as part of a writing course through Midnordic Visual Lab. I came up with the antenatal class to get to know the characters better. Writing freely, without trying to fit the scene into the script, resulted in more flow and less control. I later decided to include the scene in the new script version rather than exclude it. Not only that, but revolving scenes built on this experiment.

Later, I encountered *The Inner game of Tennis* by W. Timothy Gallwey, where he (a tennis coach) helps a student to focus on the present, rather than technicalities, allowing improvements to happen naturally. Like Gallwey, Bonnén Rask encouraged us to focus on the process, allowing writing to flow organically.

When the mind is free of any thought or judgment, it is still and acts like a mirror. Then and only then can we know things as they are.⁹⁰

Gallwey also describes the inner game between the left (Player One) and right (Player Two) hemispheres of the brain. In line with this thinking, a participant in the Midnordic Visual Lab writing course had reflected around whether my two characters Mara and Nora might be personifications of the left and the righthand brain hemisphere. The lefthand being the orderly one, following the rules, and the righthand, the free one, that flows and knows intuitively.

I began reading Gallwey's book through *Make Her See* glasses, turning Player One into Mara, and Player Two into Nora. When Gallwey wrote about the Tennis Match, I thought of my script writing process and my two brain sides. I realized that during much of my PhD, the left hemisphere dominated, structuring and editing the material, while the right hemisphere struggled to achieve flow. This was further complicated by writing earlier script drafts in Norwegian, a language that I am not yet entirely fluent in.

⁸⁹ Slingerland, *Trying not to Try*, 158.

⁹⁰ Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Tennis*, 48-48.

Zhuangzi's notion that human beings, burdened with consciousness and language, need to disengage from cold cognition to harmonize with the natural world resonates here.⁹¹ After working on Bonnén Rasks assignment and reading more on flow, I understood that Mara and Nora also symbolize a balance between structured thought and creative spontaneity.

Rather than letting the left brain dominate, I began allowing the right brain to create mental images, letting characters, objects, and energies develop freely. Gallwey's concept of Self One (the critical, controlling side) and Self Two (the free, intuitive side) parallels the relationship between a parent and child. A loving parent allows the child to make mistakes, trusting that growth happens naturally. In my process, I let Self Two explore, trusting in its natural intelligence and capabilities. Gallwey's words on Self Two resonate deeply:

Each Self 2 is endowed by birth, regardless of where that birth took place, with an instinct to fulfill its nature. It wants to enjoy, to learn, to understand, appreciate, go for it, rest, be healthy, survive, be free to be what it is, express itself, and make its unique contribution. Self 2's needs come with a gentle but constant urging. A certain feeling of contentment attends a person whenever he or she is acting in sync with this self. The fundamental issue is what kind of priority are we giving the demands of Self 2 in relation to all the external pressures? It is obvious that every individual must ask and answer this question for himself or herself.⁹²

For Mara, the goal is not to complete the film but to embrace the process, let go of external expectations, and learn to speak Nora's language. This shift will ultimately let her manage her illness and the relationship with her family.

Though imperfect and featuring at times unlikeable characters, the full script submitted with this PhD constitutes the project's major artistic output. It is not a production-ready work, but an exploration of the research questions through screenwriting and it is intended for further development beyond the PhD.

WHAT WRITING REVEALED

Establishing an independent writing practice – made possible through the PhD stipend – enabled a generative dialogue between documentary material, fictional narrative, live action, animation, and theoretical insights.

Through the scriptwriting process, I created a performative space where filmmaker's maternal experiences could be explored not only as content but as method. By approaching the screenplay as both process and site of inquiry, I explored how writing could embody the themes it represented such as fragmentation, flow, interruption, and maternal subjectivity. Through collecting, writing, doubling, and autoethnographic reflection, the script became a space enacting the lived realities of care and creativity. It does not merely depict maternal experience but materialises it through rhythm, structure, and construction.

The script allowed me to experiment with how internal splits – between caregiving and creative selves – could be externalised through character (Mara and Nora, the filmmakers and their animated alter egos), tone, space, and medium. Screenwriting became the method through which I could hold the tension between documentary voices (Killi and Denis) and fictional narrative, between my own experience and others', and between the fragmentary and cohesive. By integrating real interviews, and performative elements, the script expanded what "screenwriting" can encompass within artistic research. It functions as a hybrid research artefact – part conceptual framework, part artistic experiment, reflecting both process and thought. Writing became a generative, exploratory practice rather than a purely instrumental step toward a finished film.

The script's construction, moving between live-action scenes with Mara, documentary footage and interviews with Killi and Denis, and animated sequences – performs the maternal experience it explores. The rhythm itself embodies interruption: scenes shift between different temporalities and media, mirroring how maternal time operates. This was not merely a stylistic

⁹¹ Slingerland, *Trying not to Try*, 163.

⁹² Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Tennis*, 185.

choice but a methodological one, demonstrating how form and content can align within artistic research.

I did not aim to create a glorified picture of motherhood, but one of struggle and conflict. By attempting to create an existence for Mara outside of motherhood – one constructed by creative obsession – I may have rendered her unlikeable, something more easily forgiven in male leads but still rare for female protagonists. This uncomfortable territory allowed me to explore the maternal split without resolution, to sit with the messiness rather than tidying it into something comfortable. The script's willingness to hold contradiction, and to refuse easy answers, became one of its most significant outcomes.

Yet writing also revealed its own limitations. While it provided structure and synthesis, allowing collected materials to find coherence, it could not fully embody the visual and temporal complexity I wanted to explore. It could describe Mara's internal split, give voice to her struggles, structure the interweaving of documentary and fiction – but it could not *show* the maternal transformation in the way that audiovisual experimentation could.

This realization pointed me toward another phase of inquiry: doubling. If writing had allowed me to structure the maternal split, doubling would let me visualise it – externalising the internal through bodies, drawn figures, and moving images. The script had created the container; now I needed to explore what happens when those splits are made visible, when maternal subjectivity is performed not just through words but through presence and form.

I turned to audiovisual investigations – experimenting with live-action doppelgängers and animated alter egos. Through these experiments, I would attempt to embody what writing could only describe: the fragmentation and multiplicity of maternal experience, the simultaneity of being one person and many, and the visual representation of internal divisions that shape creative practice alongside caregiving.

DOUBLING

DOUBLING

Figure 29: Still No. 3 from *Animatic*, showing a coloured rotoscoped version of Mara and animated alter ego of Gaëlle Denis in the background. D. Hauser.



Just like the layers “Collecting” and “Writing,” the concept - or artistic method - of “Doubling” emerged organically from my artistic process.

As Darla Crispin articulates in her essay *Artistic Research as a Process of Unfolding*, the act of unfolding in artistic research suggests that knowledge is intimately tied to us – within our everyday experience yet concealed, requiring careful unwrapping to be fully grasped: “within reach and already an intimate part of our everyday experience, yet somehow enigmatic and wrapped in upon itself until skilfully opened out to our direct gaze.”⁹³

Crispin’s notion of unfolding reflects my own process of unraveling the layered presence of Mara and her doppelgänger Nora, who, although always present, necessitated a gradual and deliberate unveiling to fully understand their role in this project.

When writers and artists describe their experience of mothering, they often use the word “divided”. Louise Erdrich muses that parent’s “live and work with a divided consciousness” that is uncomfortably close to self-erasure.” Rachel Cusk describes being torn away from a conversation to console a crying baby as being “split in two... Like a divided stream, earlier they were distinguishable: They tumble forwards, each with its separate life.”⁹⁴

My own everyday experience as a mother and filmmaker, living this kind of dividedness must have propelled me to write a double for Mara. In the developing script, Nora appears as a physical double to show Mara that there is no point in fighting against her artistic nature to comply with social norms and be a responsible mother. Nora has the function to guide Mara “to the engine room” with the aim to accommodate for both creative work and family life.

However, before delving into detail of their character development, I’d like to elaborate on what “Doubling”, in context of this project in Artistic Research means.

Initially, I considered the film’s live-action protagonist Mara’s physical look-alike, Nora, to be a doppelgänger. However, she could also be classified as an alter ego, since she represents a side of Mara not visible to others. At the current

stage of the project’s development, the boundaries between these concepts are blurred – making “double” the most fitting term to describe her. In contrast, the animated versions of filmmakers Denis and Killi are clearly alter egos, as their expressive visual styles reflect the filmmakers’ own artistic methods, emphasizing their artistic identities – for example, Denis’s comic-style alter ego, inspired by her own zine illustrations.

The doppelgänger in literature and film, directly translating to “double walker” is a look-alike or double of a person, often carrying eerie or supernatural connotation⁹⁵.

Alter egos on the other hand, translating to “second I”, are often used to explore identity, duality and transformation where the characters navigate different aspects of themselves, hide vulnerabilities or gain power⁹⁶.

I am referring here to the cultural significance of various films in relation to the concept of the doppelgänger, rather than offering my own critical interpretation.

The concept of the doppelgänger has a rich and evolving history, with some of its earliest expressions found in silent horror films, particularly in the German Expressionist movement such as *The Student of Prague*⁹⁷ and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*⁹⁸.

Later on, in the form of psychological thrillers, filmmakers used the doppelgänger to explore identity, paranoia, and moral conflict with examples such as *The Double Life of Véronique*⁹⁹ and *Vertigo*¹⁰⁰.

Between the 1970’s to 1990’s, the doppelgänger motif resurged in horror and psychological dramas, often reflecting

93 Crispin, “Artistic Research as a Process of Unfolding.”

94 Phillips, *The Baby on the Fire Escape*, 8.

95 Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. “doppelgänger,” accessed 10 June, 2025, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/doppelgänger>.

96 Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. “alter ego,” accessed 10 June, 2025, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alterego>.

97 *The Student of Prague*, directed by Hans Heinz Ewers (1913; Germany: Paul Wegener).

98 *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, directed by Robert Wiene (1920; Germany: Decla-Film).

99 *The Double Life of Véronique*, directed by Krzysztof Kieslowski (1991; France, Poland, Norway: Leonardo De La Fuente, Sidéral Productions, Studio Tor, Le Studio Canal+, Norsk Film).

100 *Vertigo*, Alfred Hitchcock (1958; USA: Paramount Pictures).

societal anxieties. *Persona*¹⁰¹ (though more aligning with the concept of the alter ego), and *Dead Ringers*¹⁰² are examples.

Films in the 2000s to present such as *Enemy*¹⁰³ and *Us*¹⁰⁴ use doppelgängers to explore themes of societal critique, personal identity, and existential dread.

William Kentridge's mixed media moving image works *Drawings for Projection*¹⁰⁵ explore doubles through characters like Soho Eckstein and Felix Teitlebaum. However, I consider these more as alter egos than doppelgängers, since the work lacks eerie or supernatural elements and focuses on shifts in identity tied to Kentridge's memory and history.

A recent Norwegian addition is the debut feature comedy-drama *Thomas vs. Thomas*¹⁰⁶, which uses the concept of parallel realities to explore family and life choices. The film highlights character duality through elegant editing and use of body doubles, with actor Arthur Berning portraying multiple versions of the same character. This makes it a strong live-action example for the alter ego concept.

In the Norwegian Artistic Research context in film, Trygve Allister Diesen¹⁰⁷ used a video essay format in which he interviewed himself, embodying both his roles as artistic researcher and a film director. This self-doubling highlights alternative modes of artistic reflection.

While the concept of the double is widely explored in film, it remains to be noted, that none of the above filmic examples are directed by a woman and the protagonists are prominently male. There are few examples of such films featuring women in all key roles. Due to the nature of my project, I am inherently more interested in the perspective of female directors portraying female doppelgängers and alter egos.

The Norwegian short film *The Tyrant*¹⁰⁸ plays with duality and fits well with the alter ego concept. It explores power, loneliness, and the search for connection. Written by Kristin Jess Rodin, who also stars in it, and directed by Eirik Svensson, it is a useful example I will study more closely in connection with my actor test portraying Mara and Nora.

Another recent film exploring duality, *The Substance*¹⁰⁹, directed by Coralie Fargeat and starring Demi Moore and Margaret Qualley, blends psychological horror with themes of identity and physical transformation as the protagonist grapples

with confronting a younger version of herself. The story unravels the darker sides of ambition and reinvention, introducing a fictional alter ego (potentially shadow-self) due to its focus on transformation (body horror) and shifting appearances.

Works that do center on female doubles, rarely center motherhood. Instead, they often focus on psychological crises rather than the identity transformation and role balancing inherent in becoming a mother. When films do get close to aligning motherhood with doubling, the narratives are frequently told from the child's perspective rather than the mother's such as in the feature film *Petite Maman*¹¹⁰ by Céline Sciamma. Nelly meets her mother, Marion, as a young girl and the two young girls become mirrors of each other, creating a visual and emotional doubling. Through this magical encounter, the film examines intergenerational bonds and the shared experiences between mothers and daughters.

This research introduces maternal doubling paired with a mixed media form, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of motherhood and the tensions between creative and caregiving roles – ultimately aiming to bridge the gap between motherhood and the concept of the double in mixed media film.

101 *Persona*, directed by Ingmar Bergman (1966; Sweden; Ingmar Bergman, AB Svensk Filmindustri).

102 *Dead Ringers*, David Cronenberg (1987; USA: David Cronenberg, Norman Snider, Morgan Creek Productions, Telefilm Canada, Mantle Clinic).

103 *Enemy*, directed by Dennis Villeneuve (2013; Spain and Canada; Niv Fichman, M.A. Faura).

104 *Us*, directed by Jordan Peele (2019; USA: Jason Blum, Ian Cooper, Sean McKittrick, Jordan Peele).

105 William Kentridge, *Drawings for Projections*, 1989-2020. <https://www.kentridge.studio/william-kentridge-projects/drawings-for-projection/> accessed on 10 June, 2025.

106 *Thomas vs. Thomas: A Sensational Theory Regarding an Insignificant Life in the Multiverse*, directed by Jakob Rørvik (Maipo Film/Nordisk Film Norge, 2022), streaming video, TV2, <https://play.tv2.no/film/thomas-mot-thomas-1818305.html>.

107 Trygve Allister Diesen, "Being the Director – Maintaining your vision while swimming < with sharks" (2010). <https://rushprint.no/2012/07/svommer-med-haier-video-essay-del-2/>.

108 *The Tyrant*, directed by Eirik Svensson (2024; Norway: Gary Cranner), streaming video, NRK, <https://tv.nrk.no/program/KOIF75004424>.

109 *The Substance*, by Coralie Fargeat (2023; USA: Working Title Films), film.

110 *Petite Maman*, directed by Céline Sciamma (2021; France: Bénédicte Couvreur), streaming video, Apple tv, <https://tv.apple.com/nz/movie/petite-maman/umc.cmc.w7odntmjtnfz17f3g5g2bzwu>.

Figure 30: Illustrated self-portrait in sun-chair no 3. D. Hauser.



DOUBLING AND ITS CONNECTION TO MATRESCENCE

An important discovery relating to doubling was Lucy Fischer's paper *Two-Faced Women: The "Double" in Women's Melodrama of the 1940s*.¹¹¹

Fischer examines a triptych of World War II-era films directed by men – *Cobra Woman*¹¹², *Dark Mirror*¹¹³, and *A Stolen Life*¹¹⁴ – which belong to the women's melodrama genre and feature female identical twins portrayed by the same actress. Fischer explores the significant differences between male and female doppelgänger narratives, reflecting patriarchal assumptions about women. She moves beyond traditional literary and psychological criticism, incorporating feminist thought to analyse these female doppelgänger tales.

She notes that, despite differences in plot and character, the three films share structural similarities. In each, one twin is good, the other evil, and they compete for the affection of an eligible man, with this rivalry forming the drama's core. The films all culminate in a symbolic exchange of identities, leading to the death of one sister.

While male and female doppelgänger narratives from that period share themes, such as the catastrophic impact of a love triangle, male doppelgängers tend to avoid rivalry and often appear in comedies, which lends a lighter tone to their stories. In contrast, the female twins in Fischer's study are depicted as rivals, often with deadly consequences.

Fischer's analysis delves into why films featuring female twins differ so dramatically from those centered on male doppelgängers and what these differences reveal about broader societal expectations of women. She explores how the "good" sisters in these films embody traits deemed traditionally feminine – passivity, warmth, and sweetness – while the "bad" sisters challenge these norms with qualities like intelligence, competitiveness, and sexual assertiveness. Fischer argues that these

¹¹¹ Fischer, "Two-Faced Women," 1983.

¹¹² *Cobra Woman*, directed by Robert Siodmak (1944; USA: Universal Pictures).

¹¹³ *Dark Mirror*, directed by Robert Siodmak (1946; USA: Universal Pictures).

¹¹⁴ *A Stolen Life*, directed by Curtis Bernhardt (1946; USA: Warner Bros).



Figure 31: Still No. 2 from *Actor Test*, showing Mara rest on the floor with her doppelgänger Nora in the background. D. Hauser.

narratives are not merely battles between good and evil, but rather represent internal conflicts between culturally constructed ideas of femininity and masculinity within the female psyche.

Further on in her article, she suggests that the fascination with the female double during the period she investigates may reflect broader social anxieties, particularly regarding women's roles during the war years when they were required to work in traditionally "unfeminine" jobs. The figure of the opposing twins symbolizes the divided expectations placed on women – to be both competent in the workforce and remain attractive for their men's return.

Towards the end of her paper, Fischer explores the concept of "Doubling and Motherhood," examining how the female body uniquely embodies the phenomenon of doubling through pregnancy. She critiques male-dominated literature on doppelgängers for neglecting this aspect, instead forcing female alter-egos into a false dichotomy of "masculine" and "feminine" forces. This, she argues, contributes to a broader cultural repression of the mother's role, erasing the true complexity of women's relationship with doubling.¹¹⁵

Reading this paper, and looking back at earlier mentioned filmic references that incorporate doubling made me realise

that the maternal double is territory less navigated in traditional cinematic narratives – a thread that could strengthen my project in terms of expanding existing knowledge around maternal doubling in mixed media filmmaking.

When a new child arrives, it's as if two strangers have moved into your house. The first is the child. The second is yourself as a mother... The women Philips documents all felt cleaved in two.¹¹⁶

This quote by Hillary Kelly suggests that doubling extends beyond birth into the ongoing experience of motherhood, where the mother navigates multiple, shifting roles as her child grows. Motherhood, becomes an act of continuous transformation.

In *How to Mend: Motherhood and Its Ghosts*, Iman Mersal also touches on the profound fracture that childbirth introduces into a woman's life:

"... a split that forever changes us, shaping our identity and the way we move through the world. Birth may be a threshold to a new journey, but it also forces us to confront and heal those cracks within ourselves."¹¹⁷

Her reflection reminded me that this journey is not just about the child, but about giving birth to a new version of oneself. Attempting to capture the tension between my protagonist's maternal responsibilities and her creative ambitions, I visually and thematically explored the maternal split, by way of the double in screenwriting. The first act of my script aims to dramatize this profound transformation, through Mara, who gradually splits into two versions of herself after the birth of her daughter.

Speaking of myself, becoming a mother changed me. I saw the world differently, and the way I made decisions shifted. Yet, I remained a filmmaker, with responsibilities to my family

¹¹⁵ Fischer, "Two-Faced Women," 40.

¹¹⁶ Hillary Kelly, in Phillip's *The Baby on the Fire Escape*, 00.

¹¹⁷ Mersal, *How to Mend*, 38.

Figure 32: Still No. 4 from *Animatic*, showing Gaëlle Denis with her newborn shadowing a star director surrounded by film crew. D. Hauser.

and new boundaries emerging where none had existed before. I navigated this evolving identity, constantly adapting alongside my growing children.

In *Matrescence – On the Metamorphosis of Pregnancy, Childbirth and Motherhood*, Lucy Jones, describes her discovery of the term “matrescence”, coined by anthropologists, and describing the process of becoming a mother. Apparently, Matrescence had been underexplored in the medical community while research had focused more on the baby’s development instead of the woman’s story.¹¹⁸

In her research journey, Jones unbelievably discovers, that half a century after the first book on matrescence had been published, the psychological and physiological significance of becoming a mother; how it affects the brain, the endocrine system, cognition, immunity, the psyche, the microbiome, the sense of self was still barely recognised.

I found one of the most interesting parallels to my own research in the chapter *Care work and creativity in late-stage capitalism*, where Jones poignantly describes, her experience of returning to work after her daughter turned nine months old and her maternity pay stopped.¹¹⁹ She elaborates on her feelings of needing to be downstairs with her family instead of upstairs in the writing room, even though her partner was home taking care of their child. While attempting to work, she kept thinking she should be washing the baby’s clothes, or preparing his food.

Jones’ dual sense of guilt – caught between the demands of caregiving and the pursuit of her artistic practice – echoes Liv Ullmann’s own struggle, quoted in this reflection’s positioning statement. The maternal guilt articulated by both Jones and Ullmann resonates with my own experiences: I remember being at home with a family downed by Covid, isolating myself in the office to meet a looming funding deadline, while my four-year-old kept peeking through the narrow gap in the door, wondering what I was doing.

I connect these shared feelings of maternal guilt and the struggles to focus with the necessity of mastering flow state.

118 Jones, *Matrescence*, 11.
119 Jones, *Matrescence*, 236.



Le Guin, who found a way to write within the demands of motherhood, must have excelled at entering this state of deep focus. This persistent maternal guilt creates a fundamental barrier to achieving flow state. To enter flow – that state of complete absorption essential to creative work – requires precisely what maternal guilt denies: the capacity to be fully present in one activity without the intrusive sense that one should be elsewhere, doing something else. The divided consciousness that Jones, Ullmann, and I describe is the opposite of flow. It is the inability to be wholly anywhere.

Jones further explains that in matrescence, she began to question how much of herself she should devote to her children and how much to her work. It became a moral dilemma, centered on whether it was right to continue pursuing her professional dreams outside of economic necessity.¹²⁰

A film that takes up exactly these questions, challenging the idealized image of motherhood – embodying marginal maternal experience – is Maggie Gyllenhaal’s directing debut *The Lost Daughter*¹²¹. The feature-length fiction explores the darker, often unspoken aspects of motherhood, following Leda, a middle-aged professor whose tranquil Greek seaside holiday is disrupted by Nina, a young mother, and her daughter. This encounter forces Leda to confront her own past struggles with motherhood, ambition, and identity. She struggled to combine her academic ambitions with family life, eventually abandoning her daughters. The narrative explores the tension between caregiving and personal fulfilment. The connection between the two women creates a mirroring effect, with Leda projecting her internal conflicts onto Nina, blurring the lines between past and present selves. In that sense, the film subtly plays with a form of doubling, as in Leda seeing a younger version of herself in Nina.

In *Matrescence*, Jones describes how her generation of women, including mine, was conditioned to believe that their purpose was to learn, excel, and achieve, all with the goal of securing a good job and salary. Her accomplishments were measured by the exams she passed, the job she landed, and the paycheck she earned. Raised in a culture of competition, she felt constant pressure to improve and optimize, turning her body into something almost mechanical, trained to follow the rhythms of the workweek. She had to earn money. When

meeting people, she would ask. “What do you do?” meaning, “What do you do for work?” Then, she fell through the portal of motherhood, her core drives – to work, to earn, to self-actualize – felt misplaced, even immoral, as soon as the baby was born. Why had she gone to school and university? Why had she been told she could do anything? Why the pretense that she could live her life like a man, or that being a woman meant anything beyond maternal duties once she had a child?

Nine months after falling through my own portal of motherhood, we had moved from New York – where “What do you do?” was often the first question I heard at rooftop parties and other social gatherings – to Zurich. Not long after sending our toddler to kindergarten, I sat at a café opposite a producer from one of Zurich’s prominent animation production companies. When mentioning I was looking for commercial directing jobs, he casually asked: “Why don’t you become a stay-at-home mum? The thought had not even occurred to me. Like Jones, the world I had grown up in and been formed by, the person I had become clashed with this image. Was I now expected to be satisfied by constant, total caregiving and isolation? I reasoned that the producer’s question said more about him than about me, yet simultaneously felt immense pressure to maintain a place in the professional world.

Jones describes these feelings as harmful, distorting symptoms of an economic system driven entirely by growth – one that requires bodies to become machines of earning and accumulation.¹²²

In a key script scene set in Mara’s car (included in the appendix), Nora both literally and figuratively, takes the back seat. As Mara prepares to return to work after a year of maternity leave, Nora appears in the rearview mirror, questioning her readiness to leave the baby bubble. While Nora urges her to finish her documentary, Mara feels pressured to take a job for financial stability, even if it’s unrelated to her career path.

¹²⁰ Jones, *Matrescence*, 242.

¹²¹ *The Lost Daughter*, dir. Gyllenhaal.

¹²² Jones, *Matrescence*, 238.

The script delivered as part of this PhD, does not yet fully capture both sides of the dual feelings described here: the pressure to maintain a professional role and the moral question of pursuing work beyond financial need for self-actualisation. Mara could show more of her desire to be with her child earlier on in the script, or take more joy in it. The question, “How much work is enough?” could be more foregrounded.

I would like to briefly elaborate on the choice of a mixed-media-approach – combining animation and live action – in relation to maternal doubling.

Jone’s full book title links *matrescence* to an ongoing process of transformation, a metamorphosis that extends beyond pregnancy and childbirth into years of motherhood. In the script *Make Her See*, Mara’s journey essentially embodies her experience of matrescence – the metamorphosis into motherhood.

Metamorphosis is also a fundamental concept in animation, some would even argue the constituent core of it, where gradual alterations between frames create the illusion of movement and transformation. Unlike live action, animation allows a space or character to shift fluidly before the viewer’s eyes – a background can morph into another, or a simple line can evolve frame by frame, creating movement and perspective shifts. Live action, by contrast, cannot depict metamorphosis with the same fluidity; achieving a similar effect would rely on mechanical constructions, editing, lighting, or time-lapse techniques.

According to Paul Wells, metamorphosis in animation offers a highly economical way to sustain continuity, while also enhancing the film’s visual language by emphasizing the fluid, abstract phase that bridges the fixed states of images before and after a transition. It legitimizes the connection of seemingly unrelated elements – lines, objects, and forms – by forging original visual relationships. In doing so, metamorphosis disrupts classical storytelling conventions, resisting linear logic and opening up unexpected spatial and temporal trajectories that enable alternative modes of narrative construction.¹²³

This raises the question: what might an artistic exploration of animated metamorphosis reveal about the abstract stage of matrescence – the in-between state separating Mara’s former identity as a filmmaker from her evolving roles as a mother still

striving to create? This inquiry could extend beyond the scope of the PhD, through a deeper (potential non-verbal) investigation of the animated alter egos, and particularly an animated Nora (Mara’s alter ego). Such an exploration would consider how the animated world interacts with, shapes, or disrupts Mara’s live-action reality.

Arriving at the specific angle of doubling – the maternal split – was not a linear process. The idea behind the double originally emerged from my growing interest in flow theory and the power dynamics of hot and cold cognition – shifting between rational thinking and uninhibited creativity. This tension led me to explore ways to materialise these conflicting yet complementary forces in the two characters, whereby Mara’s doppelgänger Nora, in form of a twin sister, took on a more antagonistic role of the critic.

As the project evolved, the role of the double altered slightly from developing hot and cold cognition in the double to developing the maternal split in the double.

JOURNEYING TOWARD MARA & NORA

Before Mara & Nora manifested as physical characters, the project went through an arduous process of development, of evaluation, trial and error regarding how my own perspectives would be represented. To trace their origins, I need to return to the project’s beginning and provide a brief account of how they emerged.

From the outset, my aim was to explore the hopes, dreams, and fears of three filmmakers, asking questions that had preoccupied me for years – how do they balance their roles as partners, mothers, and directors? I saw myself as part of the film on a meta-level, with my own experiences inevitably seeping into the documentary. I envisioned my workspace being continuously disrupted, potentially preventing me from making the film I had first imagined. Yet, I questioned how my presence would take shape – would I be in front of or behind the camera?

123 Paul Wells, *Understanding Animation* (Routledge London and New York, 1998), 69.

The first shoot with Anita Killi made me realise how uncomfortable I felt on screen. I had never been comfortable in front of the camera which was unlikely to change over the course of this project. Sharing the frame risked limiting creative possibilities in post-production, especially in how footage and interviews might later intertwine. At such an early stage, it felt important not to interfere physically with Killi's story as I was getting to know her. There was also the concern that being present on screen could restrict how each filmmaker might be represented later.

At the Norwegian Artistic Research Autumn Forum in Trondheim (September 2021), I envisioned representing myself through sound – remaining off-screen while disruptive voice recordings and background noises, such as my children asking for attention or phone calls interrupting the footage, would signal my presence as the director. I was inspired by Ollie Magee's animated short *Nod. Wink. Horse*¹²⁴, which played with depth and obscurity in a two-dimensional space using a multi-plane animation table. By partially concealing characters and actions while relying on suggestive sounds, the film invited the audience to complete the images in their minds.

By February 2022, in a project description for a funding application to Central Norwegian Film Centre, I considered taking a more experimental approach, disrupting the documentary frame through visuals and sound. I considered techniques such as moving collages inspired by Anita Killi's cut-out technique, using animation and mixed media to transform and destroy the image. I also played with the idea of running out of time, reflecting on maintenance and care – acts central to both motherhood and animation production, aligning with Orla Mc Hardy's reflections on artistic practice as a form of care.

My goal was to create an abstract representation of the work-life overlap that often defines life with small children. The characters Mara and Nora emerged, shaped by my reflections on drawing and flow. At first, this seemed unrelated to my PhD, but after reading literature on the concept of flow, I began seeing connections.

An approach to materialising some of my journey as the film's director, mother, and filmmaker was to fictionalise certain experiences, bringing them to life through an actress – intertwining these fictional elements with documentary footage and

interviews I had already gathered. While initially intended to keep the project in short film form, I suspected it might evolve into a longer format.

I also contemplated animating Anita Killi and Gaëlle Denis, focusing on their creative flow – how they maintain it despite external obstacles such as funding struggles or illness. To further explore flow, I conducted interviews with female artists. A new round of interviews with both filmmakers focused on their experiences of flow and interruption. The interview guides can be found on the 'Collecting' page of the exposition.

DOUBLING INVESTIGATION, NO 1: ACTOR TEST



Looking back at the live-action test where actress Nasrin Khusrawi played against herself based on an early script draft, what stands out is the lack of real interaction between the characters. Despite using split screen and editing to place them in the same space, the scene felt flat – the two figures did not seem to connect. I had not given the actress enough room, physically or creatively, to explore both roles dynamically. Reasons may have been time pressure and budget constraints, since the shoot was funded by industry sources and aimed to produce high quality material for further funding applications. The actress had no scene partner – she acted opposite empty space, imagining the other version of herself. This lack of interaction limited her performance.

As part of a mentorship programme arranged through Central Norway Film Center in Autumn 2023, I briefly discussed my work-in-progress with director Eirik Svensson. At the time, he was in post-production with his short, *The Tyrant*¹²⁵, which uses, even though indirectly, doubling as a cinematic tool.

Some of the questions that came up were: "How will we be able to distinguish the two characters from each other apart from different costumes, styling and make-up?" and "How can I

124 *Nod. Wink. Horse*, directed by Ollie Magee (2021; UK: Royal College of Art), streaming video. <https://vimeo.com/groups/31548/videos/504712827>.

125 *The Tyrant*, dir. Svensson.

Figure 33: Still No. 3 from *Actor Test*, showing Mara rest on the floor. D. Hauser.

create a more dynamic and believable dialogue between them?” He proposed minimizing distinctions between Mara’s inner world, outer reality, and artistic vision – keeping it ambiguous whether the two women are separate people of one and the same. At the time, I had not yet seen that the goal was not for one to dominate the other, but for them to work together – blending Mara’s care for film with her care for her family.

The screen test revealed a key insight: instead of forcing both actors into the same space, I should have embraced their differences more playfully. Tying the test too closely to the early script limited its potential. A looser approach – filming informal improvisations on my phone, investing instead in a second “invisible” actor, and focusing on physical performance and overlapping dialogue – might have led to a more expressive, believable interaction.

In our April 2023 application to Central Norwegian Film Centre, we proposed using the funding for an actor workshop to develop these aspects. We planned for experimentation in a studio, and furthermore exploring ways of merging fictional characters with documentary elements. Though the application was successful, the workshop never took place – partly due to my producer’s maternity leave and my subsequent decision to

prioritize the PhD deadline and focus on shooting more documentary footage.

More than a year after my conversation with Eirik Svensson, I watched his completed film to see how he used doubling as a cinematic tool in his short. The protagonist leads us through a story of heartbreak – turning out to be her own as the story unfolds across multiple formats: it begins with archive footage of political tyrants on an old-fashioned TV screen, where they’re asked if they’ve ever had their hearts broken. It continues with a screenplay, written and read aloud by the tyrant herself, followed by her participation in a TV show, where she brings an audience member on stage to perform scenes from her script. Finally, we witness the tyrant’s completed film – a love story ending in heartbreak. At the end, the tyrant appears, instructing the protagonist, Frida, her not-look-alike “alter-ego”, on how to convince her ex to stay. Through her film, based on her own story, the Tyrant tries to understand what she could have done differently to keep her great love.

Doubling occurs in how Svensson and co-writer Kristin Jess Rodin mirror the protagonist’s real-life story with the one she has imagined and turned into her film. Art becomes her way of making sense of her own experience. Doubling is reinforced in the ending, where the tyrant steps into her own film, instructing her protagonist, her younger self, how to act.

I see parallels between Svensson’s project and mine in how he has dealt with the meta level, as well as his observation of how humans try to process their experiences such as grief through artmaking. Unlike *The Tyrant*¹²⁶, Mara does not create a film about herself in *Make Her See*, but she uses the documentary she creates, and the dialogue with the two portraited filmmakers to bring perspective to her own experiences as she navigates motherhood with filmmaking. The script I wrote is not my own life story, but it indirectly reflects some of my challenges and experiences as part of the fictional elements.

Mara is not trying to re-create her own story as the tyrant does. She goes through the transformative process of matrescence, being split into two, a “before” version represented



126 *The Tyrant*, dir. Svensson.

through Nora, haunting the “after” version represented through Mara. At the beginning of the film, Mara is convinced that being able to balance filmmaking with motherhood is just a matter of will. Along the way, she transforms through her new role as a mother, while simultaneously discovering through the documentary material, that the filmmakers she thought had everything under control, don’t. The focus shifts from trying to portray “successful role models” to finding out how these women navigate their roles.

What does align to some extent with Svensson’s short, is, that eventually, Mara’s family life and her filmmaking world merge. The lines between her reality and her creativity blur. Something, which is also explored in Svensson’s film, but with different visual approaches. He uses a TV show as a stage to read out scenes from the script that flow into excerpts from the finished film and back to the Tyrant in her beautiful palace. I use a traditional home, juxtaposed with documentary footage and interviews of the filmmakers as well as animated documentary and set design. My protagonist is in the messy process of making her film, the material is not perfect, her film is unfinished, and workflow often interrupted – reflective of her maternal identity.

ANIMATED ALTER EGOS

In animation, a doppelgänger is typically referred to as an alter ego, mirror image, shadow self, or double. These terms convey the idea of a character that mirrors or contrasts with the protagonist, often representing another side of their identity, hidden desires, or internal conflicts.

A notable example where the alter-ego manifests as a representation of internal struggles, is *Coraline*¹²⁷, where the protagonist, Coraline encounters a parallel world where her “Other Mother” is a twisted version of her real mother representing an idealized yet sinister double, that reflects Coraline’s longing for attention and the darker side of maternal control. The animated film explores mother-child dynamics, contrasting the nurturing yet flawed real mother with the superficially perfect yet manipulative Other Mother. The story is told from the child’s perspective, as opposed to the mother’s perspective

in my project. In my search for animated works exploring doubling from a maternal perspective, I discovered *Two One Two*¹²⁸ by Canadian artist-filmmaker Shira Avni. She generously shared a viewing link, allowing me to experience her vibrant, experimental short, which blends clay-on-glass animation with personal archives to depict motherhood and neurodivergent parenting. Through shifting shapes, the film symbolises the evolving mother-child bond, as the mother carries the child from womb to back across abstract cityscapes. Alternating between the mother’s and child’s drawings, it captures their connection and the child’s development, offering a dual perspective. Avni portrays the joys and struggles of balancing work, caregiving, and an overwhelmed autistic sensory system, with shapeshifting, double headed figures subtly conveying themes of doubling and shifting identities.

As visualised in Avni’s short, animation’s transformative visual nature allows for a more fluid, and exaggerated manifestation of alter egos than in live action. Animated doppelgängers are often represented not as literal doubles but through dual roles, such as celestial versus human beings, where characters shift shape or appear in different visual forms. I explored the latter approach in my animated short *Wanda*¹²⁹, where the protagonist’s three imaginary friends, each with distinct traits and personalities, reflect different, otherwise hidden sides of the protagonist.

A long-format example regarding dual (human/celestial) roles is *Sita Sings the Blues*¹³⁰, directed by Nina Paley. This independent, animated film reimagines the Ramayana, blending the story of Sita with the director’s personal narrative of heart-break. Though the film is not explicitly about motherhood, Sita’s dual roles as a goddess and human figure present a doubling of identity tied to feminine expectations and roles. By juxtaposing the story of Sita who accompanies Lord Rama on a 14-year exile in the forest, with her own break up story, the director

127 *Coraline*, directed by Henry Selik (2009; USA: Laika Studios), streaming video, Apple TV.

128 *Two One Two*, dir. Avni.

129 *Wanda*, dir. Hauser.

130 *Sita Sings the Blues*, directed by Nina Paley (2008; USA: Nina Paley), streaming video, website, <https://www.sitasingingtheblues.com/watch.html>.

meshes the two characters – turning Sita indirectly into an alter ego of Nina. Visually, the film separates two distinct worlds. The celestial world, filled with dancing and singing beings, combines existing, cut-out and animated characters with newly created, geometric cut-out figures, animated with digital technique generated in Flash. The director's personal break-up story – set in San Francisco, then India, and ending in Brooklyn – is told in a different style, using simple, digitally hand-drawn characters. Additionally, three shadow puppet characters, voiced by actors, narrate the story. However, they seem to be unsure if their version is accurate. They also question Sita's devotion to Rama – why would she love someone who treats her so poorly? Was it a mistake, or was it unconditional love?

In live-action, alter egos are often conveyed through performance and narrative shifts, whereas animation offers a more immediate and expressive psychological impact through metamorphosis, colour shifts, and surreal settings.

Before detailing my exploration of animated alter egos in the animatic, I will provide brief insights into the filmmaker's artistic ambitions, visual styles, techniques, and thematic focus.

THE FILMMAKER'S FILMS AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS

From the outset, I posed the question: How can I create a bridge between the artistic methods of the portrayed filmmakers and my own approach? This later evolved into a broader inquiry: What can animation and the mixing of techniques contribute to the fictional world? To explore these questions, I immersed myself in the filmmaker's working processes, stories, motivations, artistic methods, and thematic concerns. My aim was to portray them in a way that resonated with their artistic values while remaining true to my own creative approach.

Throughout the project, I gained valuable insights into how Killi and Denis each navigated motherhood alongside their artistic practices. Some of their experiences are woven into the script and embodied in the animatic.

Killi, has managed a dairy farm in Dovre, Norway, alongside her ex partner – the father of their four children – while



simultaneously raising their children and creating animated short films from her own studio, Trollfilm. Denis, on the other hand, is raising a son in central London while balancing the exploration of her artistic roots with the transition from commercial and short film directing to helming her first feature film.

According to an interview I held with Killi in November 2021, her main focus as a filmmaker is to bring difficult topics for a young audience out on the screen. In her opinion, there are a lot of great and expertly done animations around, however, the content is often too futile. She is excited about epic/lyrical films that sometimes move slowly but at the same time beautifully and give space to let the audience think for themselves. Killi has primarily worked with film for children which also inspire the adults. Children are vulnerable and are easily affected and that's why filmmakers have a big responsibility as conveyors, messengers and educators. Quality film for children is sadly often of lesser priority than artistic films for adults which is of abundance.

Killi works with cut-out animation on a multiplane table which is a traditional, analogue animation technique whereby one moves the paper characters in tiny increments and takes pictures of each new position – 24 pictures to create one second of animation. Two-dimensional paper cut out puppets and background elements are layered on multiple glass plates

Figure 34: Still from *Anita Killi Edit No.1*, showing the cut-out title for "Mother Didn't Know" in Killi's studio at Dovre. D Hauser.

with a distance in between. This creates an illusion of depth, further enhanced through parallax of the background, through lighting choices in each scene and through the shadows that are created that way.

*The Hedge of Thorns*¹³¹, one of Killi's earlier films, unfortunately, remains sadly relevant today. Inspired by her father's family history on the farm – where mothers and children were hiding in a food cellar during war time – the story follows Florian and Malene, two best friends whose days playing by the creek are abruptly cut short when war forces them onto opposing sides, making their friendship forbidden. The film showcases Killi's signature cut-out animation, with visible pen strokes and outlined cut-out rabbit characters in place of humans. Widely acclaimed, it has been screened at over 60 festivals and has won multiple awards.

Building on her previous work, Killi further developed her signature style and animation technique in *Angry Man*¹³² drawing inspiration from Gro Dahle's and Svein Nyhus' illustrated children's book for its story and character design. Throughout several interviews, Killi has emphasised her focus on balancing dark themes with tactile, light character and environment designs that resonate with younger audiences. While her design approach remained consistent with her earlier films, Killi incorporated additional textures and materials beyond paper in this short, subtly adding more depth to the images. Killi's most successful film, *Angry Man* screened at over 100 international festivals, garnering her multiple awards in 2010 such as best Animated film and the audience award at Clermont Ferrand International Short Film Festival, and the Jury's Special Award and the UNICEF award at Annecy International Animation Film Festival. Today the film is widely used in educational programs aimed at preventing and detecting domestic violence and supporting victims.

In 2020, Killi completed a new short film, *Mother Didn't Know*¹³³. In one of our conversations, she revealed that the film's title stems from a deeply personal experience: she never told her mother about her cancer diagnosis, who died without ever knowing. Technically, this film marks a departure from her previous work, featuring 2½ D characters that appear more three-dimensional than those in her earlier films, and even more elaborate scenes. The film feels more cinematic, featuring



realistic-looking hair, textiles, materials, and sophisticated lighting. The expressive pencil or brush strokes are fewer, and the character animation is meticulously smooth. In an interview part of my PhD research (Nov 2023), Killi expressed a desire to return to her original artistic methods. She felt that the new, sleek characters lacked the roughness and authenticity of charcoal and pen, which she believed were better suited to contrast the difficult topics her films address.

Gaëlle Denis's short film *City Paradise*¹³⁴ embodies her distinctive style, characterized by quirky narratives, recurring aquatic themes, expressive use of colour, and a penchant for experimental forms. The mixed media short marks a departure from her earlier fully animated works, such as the BAFTA-winning *Fish Never Sleep*¹³⁵. It integrates animated elements with live action, reflecting Denis's shift towards live-action

Figure 35: Selection of film stills from *Angry Man* and *Mother Didn't Know*. Courtesy of Anita Killi.

131 *The Hedge of Thorns*, directed by Anita Killi (2001; Norway: Trollfilm), streaming video. <https://vimeo.com/685802529>.

132 *Angry Man*, dir. Killi.

133 *Mother Didn't Know*, dir. Killi.

134 *City Paradise*, dir. Denis.

135 *Fish Never Sleep*, dir. Denis.



Figure 36: Selection of film stills from *City Paradise*, *After the Rain*, *Crocodile*, *Rhapsody in Blueberry*, *The Girl from The Estuary*. Courtesy of Gaëlle Denis.

filmmaking. In an early interview, Denis expressed a desire to allocate her time to pursuits beyond the demanding production process of animation. The lead character is Tomoko, a young Japanese woman who arrives in London and discovers a hidden underground city that transforms her life. The film features minimal dialogue, with characters' voices sped up and distorted to accentuate Tomoko's sense of isolation as a newcomer in a foreign city. The film explores the coexistence of two worlds within the same space: the bustling city of London and its secret, magical underworld.

Denis further developed her live action and actor directing skills in short films such as *After the Rain*¹³⁶ and as a director in the commercial sector and in 2014, she directed the live-action short *Crocodile*¹³⁷, which was written by Robin French and funded by the British Film Institute. It premiered at Cannes Critics Weeks where it won Canal+ Prize Best Short. The aquatic theme and the swimming pool are featured again, with the function of being a transmitter between reality and imagination/dream as Simon, a school principal and father grapples with the tragic loss of his teenage daughter.

Even though we had had several conversation and interviews surrounding Denis' themes and inspirations, it hadn't occurred to me to ask her about maternal topics in her films until very late in my PhD. In an email, we briefly conversed around two specific newer projects.

Through our interviews, I was aware of Denis' traumatic miscarriages but hadn't connected them with her live action short *Rhapsody in Blueberry*¹³⁸. Despite its mystical and slightly dark atmosphere, created through dreamlike settings and masked characters, the short feels overall cheerful. Its vibrant, surreal production design – including an exaggerated pregnant belly supported by a structure – and joyful voice-over portray Rhapsody navigating her inner world as a strong, multifaceted woman who is neither heard nor seen for who she is.

Denis' well developed feature film, *The Girl from the Estuary*, which unfortunately never went into production, confronts the emotional gaps left by a mother who is both present and absent. Misfit Morgaine, a young girl, struggles to fit in. When things get tough, she takes refuge in her over-active imagination. At its heart, Morgane's journey is about forced independence as she navigates emotional neglect and the absence of her father with a resilience that is both inspiring and heartbreaking. Her fascination with the estuary – a space of constant flux, neither land nor sea – mirrors her inner struggle to reconcile loss, longing and identity. Like *City Paradise*, the film plays with the concept of juxtaposing reality with fantasy.

In both works, Denis continues using a series of approaches reminiscent of her older works, such as the application and juxtaposition of expressive colours, the creation of strong, dream-like scenes through visual storytelling combined with sound design and her fondness of aquatic themes and the French seaside. Denis confided, that while these works aren't explicitly about motherhood, the maternal informs them in ways that are deeply personal and political, examining the weight of

¹³⁶ *After the Rain*, directed by Gaëlle Denis (2006; UK: Passion Pictures), streaming video. <http://gaelledenis.com/project/afre-the-rain/>

¹³⁷ *Crocodile*, directed by Gaëlle Denis (2014; UK: Ohna Falby / BFI), private video link.

¹³⁸ *Rhapsody in Blueberry*, directed by Gaëlle Denis (2017; France: La Voie Lactée), private video link.

Figure 37: Still No. 5 from *Animatic*, showing the animated alter egos of Mara, Gaëlle, and Anita engaged in conversation at a beach.

care, the cost of absence, and the ways women – daughters, sisters – are left to fill impossible voids.

Lastly, I want to highlight Denis' drawings for the graphic novel *The Lockdown Lowdown issue one*¹³⁹ and two¹⁴⁰, as they are relevant to the animatic. Between 2020 and 2022, she returned to drawing, creating a series of comics reflecting on her experience during the COVID pandemic. Using pen on paper, she later scanned and digitally coloured the drawings. Staying true to her expressive filmic style, she illustrated an alter ego of herself, using bold colours and surreal imagery to depict her world – oscillating between the confines of her home at the Barbican Estate and a dystopian, overgrown London cityscape.

DOUBLING INVESTIGATION NO 2: ANIMATIC



My notation on the need for more flow eventually evolved into a fictionalised version with an actress, forming the basis of the animatic presented on the Research Catalogue exposition. In the animatic, a drawn beach world unfolds through the actions of a rotoscoped version of the lead actress Nasrin Khusrawi,



who unites with the two animated alter egos of filmmakers Killi and Denis.

A key motivation for incorporating animated alter egos in my project was the potential of visual representation and the expressive qualities of animation and mixed media. This approach felt particularly relevant because the two filmmakers portrayed – like myself – are visual artists with a background in animation. Their animated alter egos serve as extensions of their artistic identity and expressive language.

Another reason was my desire to create an imaginary space where all three filmmakers could come together – away from their caregiving responsibilities – to relax and reflect on their shared experience: navigating filmmaking alongside raising children. Placing them in a completely new environment allowed me to visually connect animation to the concept of flow. Drawing, as a key source of flow and the foundation of animation, becomes a means of world-building, where one drawn line placed next to another, forms an entire universe.

During specific interviews with the filmmakers, I chose to work without a DOP or camera in the room. This approach allowed for a more intimate setting when discussing personal topics, and I hoped it would help the filmmakers open more quickly. As a result, I only had voice recordings of these conversations. The absence of footage gave me greater freedom to interpret their experiences visually and became an additional reason to create animated alter egos.

Unlike Killi, who had archive footage of her baby daughter crawling around her animation studio as she worked, Denis had no such material – no footage or photos documenting her experience as a new mother on set. At the time, she was in London with her newborn, shadowing star director Mike Newell. This absence of filmic documentation called for alternative methods. Her stories about facing a film crew that questioned her decision to be on set instead of staying home to breastfeed could be powerfully portrayed in her own expressive, colourful style, inspired by her drawings from the 'London Lockdown Lowdown'¹⁴¹ zine series.

¹³⁹ Denis, "My Hairy Fat Lazy Lonely First Lockdown," 24-28.

¹⁴⁰ Denis, "In and Out," 2-7.

¹⁴¹ Distant Connections Collective, *The Lockdown Lowdown*, vols. 1 and 2

A filmic reference, when it comes to visualising the irrepresentable, namely, an unborn, yet growing baby is the Norwegian fictional feature film *Ninjababy*¹⁴², directed by Yngvild Sve Flikke. The film follows 23-year-old comic artist Rakel's ambivalence toward motherhood after an unplanned pregnancy. Blending live action with animation, it brings Rakel's drawn Ninja Baby character to life, adding a playful yet profound layer to her internal conflict.

This mix of techniques resonates with my research, particularly in how the animated character becomes a self-reflexive conversation partner as the protagonist processes her evolving identity. The animated alter ego baby stands in as a humoristic representation of the real, yet invisible baby and Rachel's fears surrounding its birth.

In the context of my animatic, the animated alter egos embody an older version of both Killi and Denis, reflecting on their early experiences of motherhood. These figures illustrate the women's dual roles as artists and mothers – the maternal split between nurturing their creative work and caring for their children.

Killi's animated alter ego watches archival footage of her live-action self as she briefly hugs her daughter before waving goodbye to return to animating. While she felt no remorse in the moment, looking back years later stirred unexpected emotions. Through animation, paired with her real voice, her older self reflects on this experience. It raises the question: To continue making films, must mothers suppress certain maternal emotions?

My initial motivation for creating a rotoscoped alter ego for Mara in this scene, was to begin with not rooted in the concept of maternal doubling but rather in the idea of flow – where drawing acts as a catalyst for immersion. Mara, as a drawn version of herself, creates the universe stroke by stroke, visually uniting herself with the two animated filmmakers Denis and Killi.

HOW CAN I CREATE A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE ARTISTIC METHODS OF THE PORTRAITED FILMMAKERS AND MY OWN WORKING PROCESSES?

The animatic largely answers this research sub-question by visually exploring how I and the portrayed filmmakers materialized female experience.

Practical constraints, especially motherhood, influenced my choices of methods. Unable to animate analogue in Dovre for weeks, I opted for digital cut-out animation and collaborated with an animator to focus on several areas of interest. These decisions shaped both the experiment's form and the project's direction.

At the time, I selected these interview excerpts and incorporated archive footage of Anita Killi with her baby daughter, because I was drawn to the overlapping themes of motherhood and filmmaking due to their complexity. Additionally experimenting with the filmmakers' styles and methods helped position my project within the artistic field by engaging with existing practices.

The fictional character Mara, inspired by my reflections on the need for more flow, brings together various elements in a space she has created in her imagination:

- An animated version of herself, created through rotoscoping live-action footage of the main actress.
- An animated alter ego of the filmmaker Gaëlle Denis whose character design is based on her comics.
- A digitally cut-out animated character inspired by the filmmaker Anita Killi's animation method.

The two characters combine animated visuals with first-person spoken testimony in which the filmmakers recount their personal experience discussing the challenges of balancing motherhood with filmmaking.

¹⁴² *Ninjababy*, directed by Yngvild Sve Flikke (2021; Norway: Motlys), streaming video. <https://play.tv2.no/film/ninjababy-1682168.html>.

As I developed this scene collaboratively with a small animation team, I became acutely aware of the distinctions between how we materialised the filmmaker's experiences versus how they did. Anita Killi's work is primarily analogue, except for the use of stop-motion capturing software Dragonframe. She animates her characters exclusively on a multiplane table, by hand – moving the character's limbs in small increments and taking pictures. In contrast, our Anita character is created, assembled, and animated entirely digitally in After Effects. Any pencil-like strokes are digital representations of pencil strokes created in the software ProCreate. Recreating the physicality of materials and textures in Killi's 2 ½D characters in digital software proved challenging, particularly when merging the expressive artistic styles of two very different artists and subjects.

Throughout her career, Denis has worked with both, animation as well as live action and a mix of both. A signature in all her work is the use of strong colours and emphasise on production design. The visual universes she creates are part of her storytelling. While working on her character in the animatic, it became clear that spending time researching how she utilises colour in her works was essential. The outlines of her character had to be adjusted multiple times, and I created several colour drafts for the backgrounds.

Through the process of choosing between digital and analogue tools, exploring movement, applying pen pressure, I gained valuable insights into the portrayed filmmaker's artistic processes and values. Their tacit knowledge, acquired through years of personal involvement and practical application cannot be easily re-created or learned just by reading a text about their work. There is a dialogue between what the filmmakers represent, their intentions while creating the representations, and the characteristics of the medium in which they create the representation. Interestingly, in our pursuit of authenticity in representing the filmmakers, it felt like we were moving further away from their essence. One of the reasons for this, might be our choice for digital production tools and processes over analogue ones.

I am still not fully satisfied with the portrayal of the filmmaker's – particularly Killi. In the future, I might develop a second iteration that stays truer to her original cut-out style and feels less naïve.

A challenge I faced creating this experiment was the variation in audio recordings between the filmmakers. Denis' voice was recorded in her home, where natural echo was present, while Killi's recording, done in her studio, was much clearer. This discrepancy made it difficult to seamlessly unify their voices and presence within the same universe. During the sound design phase, Denis' voice required slight adjustments to blend more evenly, though a subtle echo was retained to preserve the authenticity of her original voice in this animatic. With limited budget for fully realised sound design, I had to prioritise. As a result, the chorus of background voices from the film crew questioning Denis is represented by a single voice in this animatic, and I was unable to hold a casting session.

The result remains a raw experiment, based on an early script draft and a corresponding storyboard. In the submitted script, this experiment is still present, but distributed across two scenes, 54 and 55 (in the appendix).

Stylistically, the beginning of the animatic serves as a visual reference for scene 56 in the script (in the appendix), where Mara's living room – wrapped in paper, with every piece of furniture and object outlined in black – visually echoes the drawn beach universe from the animatic. However, this time, a 3D effect is created through shadows by filming the scene in live action.

As Mara shifts between her live-action self, seated on the sofa and conversing with her partner, and mentally drifting back to the other filmmakers – her artistic world – she could transform from live action to her animated alter ego, as visualised in the animatic.

This transformation highlights Mara's shifting identity between her roles in the living room with her family, and her escape into the artistic world, where she joins the animated filmmakers Killi and Denis in the drawn beach universe.

This visual representation of Mara – shifting between maternal responsibility and artistic practise – needs further reflection, particularly in terms of doubling. Instead of relying on Nora as her live-action double, Mara could be represented in another form – an alter ego shaped by her own mixed media filmmaking practice, in line with the expressive styles used for Killi and Denis.

To conclude my reflection on this specific experiment, I reflect on how animation and mixed media contribute to my

Figure 38: Character design for Gaëlle Denis's animated alter ego in the animatic.



investigation of doubling and the intersection of filmmaking and motherhood. By blending live action and animation, I create a more dynamic way to collect and assemble materials, forming meaning through contrast and new combinations. Merging separate interview recordings into a shared visual space sparks fresh discussions, while giving the filmmakers' voices expressive animated bodies provides a tangible representation of their artistic methods. At the same time, I recognise the need to visually embody the filmmaker's artistic styles to highlight their identities more clearly. Animation, juxtaposed with live action, helps express the internal divide between motherhood and filmmaking, reinforcing the shifting of nature from maternal to artistic identity.

This raises a key question: Should Mara's doppelgänger take the form of an animated alter ego rather than a live-action double? Exploring this further could deepen the portrayal of maternal identity as a continuous transformation – particularly when considering metamorphosis as a key concept in animation.

HOW THE ANIMATIC FINDINGS SHAPED THE NOTION OF DOUBLING IN THE SCRIPT

Developing the first few script scenes and editing early interviews with Denis and Killi revealed a recurring theme: the

entanglement of motherhood and filmmaking. The question surfaced: could these three filmmakers – Mara, Denis, and Killi – meet in a shared creative space? The animatic became the point where these threads converged, a hybrid space in which documentary, fiction, and animation met, and where different expressive worlds began to speak to one another.

Reflecting on this process, I realised that the notion of doubling extended beyond the fictional characters. Each filmmaker developed an animated alter ego, functioning as a reflective counterpart. These figures became extensions of each filmmaker's creative method – parallel selves through which artistic identity and maternal experience could be reconsidered. The affordances of animation – its ability to merge the visible with the imagined, to bridge temporal and spatial gaps – became an important tool for shaping scenes in the script. The medium allowed me to explore realities difficult to capture through live action, such as creative paralysis or the mental divisiveness of being in multiple places at once. In one scene, black ink animation on paper becomes a metaphor for loss – not a literal depiction, but a rhythmic, material embodiment of it.

Anabelle Honess Roe describes animation's documentary potential through three representational strategies: mimetic substitution, non-mimetic substitution, and evocation.¹⁴³ My animatic process combined these strategies. The drawn beach functioned as a substitution for moments that could not be filmed, while the interplay of animation and documentary created an emotionally resonant continuity. Crucially, the animated doubles were voiced with the filmmakers' original recordings; the sound retained documentary's indexicality, while the image operated as a non-mimetic visual substitute.

In Roe's terms, this is less simple evocation than a synthesis of substitution and paratextual authentication, allowing the animation to extend and refract the documentary material without erasing its factual anchor.

My work also aligns with Ruth Lingford's understanding of animation as "a language to say things I wanted/needed to say,"¹⁴⁴ as well as Paul Wells' theorization of metamorphosis as

¹⁴³ Roe, *Animated Documentary*, 22-26.

¹⁴⁴ Ruth Lingford, interview by Marisa Lai, FEMEX Film Archive, accessed October 30, 2025, <https://sites.google.com/ucsc.edu/femexfilmarchive/filmmaker-index/ruth-lingford>.

central to animation's capacity to visualize transformation.¹⁴⁵ Like Lingford, I understand animation as a medium of embodied thought – a form that constructs meaning through gesture, rhythm, and metaphor. In dialogue with Wells, my use of animation explores transformation as a conceptual and formal device, enabling the depiction of dualities, shifting roles, and transitional states inherent to matrescence and artistic identity. The animated bodies, paired with original documentary recordings, become hybrid substitutes that mediate between lived reality and imaginative reconstruction.

This approach positions doubling as both a thematic concern and a methodological tool, allowing multiple selves, temporalities, and modes of seeing to coexist within the hybrid script. Animation becomes a method of inquiry rather than mere illustration, offering a framework for expressing aspects of maternal experience, relational multiplicity, and hybrid identity that live action alone cannot render. In this sense, the animated alter egos operate as expressive extensions of creative practice.

The findings from the animatic informed the development of the script by encouraging a writing approach in which scenes could shift between perspectives – fictional and documentary – without hierarchy. This layering became a structural principle in the screenplay. Doubling operates not only through the characters of Mara and Nora but also through formal shifts in tone and medium: live action and animation, documentation and invention.

The animatic revealed animation's ability to hold multiple realities at once and helped define the structural role of doubling within the script: the coexistence of two selves, two temporalities, and two forms of vision. The animatic did not invent this idea, but gave it material form, showing how animated figures can embody the dialectic between the visible and the imagined, the self and its reflection, the mother and the artist.

These insights reframed the role of animation in my process from a representational tool to a mode of thinking. Withing this theoretical frame, animation emerges as a feminist and epistemic tool: it affords metamorphic, spatial, and temporal flexibility; foregrounds relational dynamics; and offers a medium through which maternal experience can be articulated in ways unavailable to realist cinema. This flexibility justifies the inclusion of animated alter egos and imagined sequences, enabling

the hybrid cinematic form central to my project. The animated sequences stage relations between realities and ways of seeing. The animatic became a form of research in itself: a laboratory for exploring how doubling could function not only as theme but as method – a way to think through multiplicity, relationality, and transformation within hybrid filmmaking.

DOUBLING INVESTIGATION, NO 3: DOUBLE-SCREEN VIDEO LOOP

The idea of a second live-action test with the actress never left me. I wanted to explore her evocative, potentially non-verbal side – giving her space to improvise and see how she might embody two versions of herself.

In late 2024, I drafted a new scene contrasting Mara's maternal bubble with her re-entry into the public sphere, exploring the juxtaposition of private and public identities through live-action doubling. I envisioned Kunsthall Trondheim as the setting, with the art world as a backdrop. Here, Nora would emerge, meeting Mara, the newly minted mother, through a double-screen video installation.

Inspired by my readings on doubles in animation I initially envisioned Nora as a goddess-like figure in this scene. While I had hoped to create an animated celestial being, time and budget constraints led me to work with the actress instead. By transforming her through styling or costume, I saw an opportunity to let her interact with her physical doppelgänger, Mara, directly through the screen.

A reversible cloak-like gown was designed in collaboration with Mari Melilot. After our initial briefing, an unexpected synchronicity emerged – its inner design mirrored the cover of Lucy Jones's *Matrescence*¹⁴⁶, which I had encountered around the same time. Though unplanned, I later wondered if unspoken thoughts had been transmitted between us. The concept of metamorphosis, which I may have mentioned, could have influenced



¹⁴⁵ Wells, *Understanding Animation*, 69.

¹⁴⁶ Jones, *Matrescence*, cover.

Figure 39: Photograph from the shoot for the *Double-Screen Video Loop*, showing Nasrin Khusrawi in costume by Mari Melilot. Photo: D. Hauser.

the designer's choice to incorporate the same overlapping circular shapes as on the book's cover.

The connection to transformation and disguise recalls Cindy Sherman, who, as a child, found escape in dressing up – an impulse she later channelled into photographic self-portraits. In *Untitled Film Stills*¹⁴⁷, she embodies various female archetypes, career girl, bombshell, fashion victim, schoolgirl. Working with only her own body, she blurs the line between subject and creator. Her work probes the performative nature of gender and the construction of female identity through shifting roles. Doubling is a recurring strategy in photography and video art, offering a way to explore fragmented or layered identities. Lorna Simpson's *Corridor*¹⁴⁸ and Shirin Neshat's *Fervor*¹⁴⁹ and *Rapture*¹⁵⁰ use two-channel formats to present dual narratives, often without dialogue. Instead, meaning unfolds through movement, soundscapes, and spatial arrangement. Though none of these artworks centre on maternal experience, they reflect on the roles women perform – public and private, imposed and chosen – using doubling to question fixed identities. Neshat's installation mirrors her own cultural duality, using parallel screens to stage internal and external conflicts shaped by gender, desire, and displacement.¹⁵¹



While writing the scene featuring my double-loop installation in *Make Her See*, I considered not only the cameras placement and Nora's movement within the loops but also Mara's placement in Kunsthall, the positioning of both video loops, and how sound would shift between them. In scene 14 (in the appendix), Mara talks on the phone with her producer while descending the stairs at Kunsthall. She moves among laundry pile sculptures scattered on the floor, slightly distracted, until she notices a resemblance between herself and Nora in the double-screen installation. However, she does not realize that her alter ego is trying to communicate with her. As Nora moves between the projections – one projected onto the wall, the other on a smaller monitor – her partner enters, trying to keep their crawling baby from touching the laundry pile sculptures. Mara's attention shifts from the screens to her ongoing conflict with the producer. Eventually, she turns her back on the loops and heads upstairs, meeting her partner and child on the way out.

Though the double-screen loop does not include mixed media or animation, it extends beyond the video itself into Kunsthall, serving simultaneously as an alter ego manifested through art while extending into a film location.

The script scene is meant to merge Mara's domestic life with her filmmaking world. Instead of presenting it as a filmed scene in a cinema setting, I envisioned a live performance with the actress portraying Mara at Kunsthall, with the double-screen loop installed. I wanted the PhD committee to decide where to place their attention – on the screens, the actress, or the father and baby. Incorporating a real infant would add unpredictability, part of my goal of stepping outside of my comfort zone, letting go of control to embrace imperfection – an approach I felt reflected the reality of maternal experience.

147 Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Stills*, 1977-1980.

148 Lorna Simpson, *Corridor* (2003), Two-channel video installation, Artist's Website, <https://lsimpsonstudio.com/films/corridor-2003>, accessed June 8th, 2025.

149 Shirin Neshat, *Fervor* (2000), Two-channel video (black and white, sound), YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1F4PdmhydZA>, accessed June 8th, 2025.

150 Shirin Neshat, *Rapture*, (1999), Two-channel black-and-white video, sound (projection), YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_H-LdPER6I, accessed June 8th, 2025.

151 Sam Johnson, "The Art of the Female Alter Ego," *AnOther Publishing Ltd.*, January 12, 2016, <https://www.anothermag.com/art-photography/8198/second-self-the-art-of-the-female-alter-ego>.

Ultimately, I decided against presenting the installation as a live event with actors and a baby at Kunsthall. To simplify the presentation of my PhD outcomes, I instead focused on the project's core elements, favouring control over chaos, a choice encouraged by my supervisors.

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WHAT DOUBLING REVEALED

An important insight came from combining artistic investigations on doppelgängers and alter egos with written reflections and new references such as Jones' *Matrescence* and Fischer's paper on female doubles in 1940s melodrama. I noticed a missing link: the ability to grow, carry, and birth a child was rarely the reason behind female doppelgängers. Once again, motherhood was left out. This gap, together with the overlooked experience of matrescence – focused on the mother's transformation, not the child's – became a compelling area to explore. These two ideas became central to the script and an important artistic investigation. Translating them into a hybrid film that blends documentary and fiction could offer a meaningful contribution to artistic research.

The decision to explore these themes through mixed media filmmaking and a non-linear process reflects the experience of matrescence. The "maternal split" can be visually portrayed through doubling – using both live-action doppelgängers and animated alter egos of the filmmakers.

The sub-question I explored in this layer was: how do animation and mixed media contribute to my investigation of doubling and the intersection of filmmaking and motherhood? Through the animatic process, I discovered that blending live action and animation allowed me to combine materials more dynamically, creating meaning through contrast. Merging separate interviews into a shared animated space sparked fresh discussions, while giving the filmmakers voices expressive animated bodies provided tangible representation of their artistic methods. The animatic revealed that animation, juxtaposed with live action, could express the internal divide between motherhood and filmmaking, reinforcing the shifting nature from maternal to artistic identity.

By creating animated alter egos for the portrayed filmmakers, I found a way to visually embody their artistic styles and highlight their identities more clearly, while simultaneously exploring the coexistence of multiple realities and temporalities within the hybrid script.

A new question that arose towards the end of this layer's exploration was: Should Mara's doppelgänger take the form of an animated alter ego rather than a live-action double? Exploring this further could deepen the portrayal of maternal identity as a continuous transformation – particularly when considering metamorphosis as a fundamental concept in animation.

Having moved through collecting, writing, and doubling – each phase revealing its insights while pointing toward what still needed to be explored – I reached a point where I needed to step back. The work had generated methods, materials, and investigations. But what did it all add up to? What contribution had this journey produced for the field of artistic research and for the representation of maternal experience in mixed media film? These questions would require stepping back from the process to reflect on its outcomes.

ROAD TRIP 2 *The Boat*

Figure 40: Photograph No. 1 from the series *Roadtrip Two*, showing human shadow figures on blue carpet. D. Hauser.

I am glancing at a small, white paper rectangle pinned onto the wall at my NTNU office. Printed in black ink is an excerpt from Orla Mc Hardy's article *Maintenance Animation is a drag: It takes all the ***** time**.

“When I think of animation and motherhood together what happens? Disjuncture and overlaps. Some words and phrases that come to mind are: absolutely nothing, a blank page ...”¹⁵²

On paper, the words continue, but my thoughts drift. Tomorrow, the four of us will pile into the car, heading south. I've packed a selection of books to read whenever I find a moment, all with blue covers – along with a matching blue Moleskine notebook. The color aligns perfectly with the first title I plan to read: *August Blue* by Deborah Levy¹⁵³. As I gathered these books, I imagined the Italian sea where we are headed, already picturing myself on the beach, reading, with occasional interruptions from my children pulling me back into the present. I see myself too, lying on the bed in our ferry cabin, holding the blue Penguin book that mirrors both its title and the color of the sea outside, visible through the round cabin window as we sail from Oslo to Kiel. My train of thought drifts further – to a particular shot from the Super 8 footage I received from the archive: Gaëlle Denis as a toddler, carefully balancing on a low wall, the blue expanse of the Atlantic stretching behind her, sky and sea blending over Brittany. Her mother, walks in step beside her, a gentle hand steadying her arm.

As I type on my keyboard, the phone rings. After a brief conversation with my husband, I hang up, collect my belongings, lock the office, and head home to finalize preparations for our three-week holiday.

At home, I find myself in a liminal space. The sound of my children laughing and squealing as they play chess fills the air, while I hurriedly open my laptop to jot down a few last notes. The table around me is cluttered with clothes, passports, shampoo, a stack of blue books, a marker, a nail file, and a half-eaten nectarine.

Amidst the children's joyful noises and odd sounds, I am torn between two worlds: half of me is already on the ferry, drifting into holiday mode, gazing at the blue sea from the cabin window while reading *August Blue* in July; the other half remains at home, frantically taking notes in a blue notebook before resuming the tasks of washing, folding, and packing clothes.

Eager to reconnect with Deborah Levy nearly two decades after our initial meeting in London, I found myself unable to resist opening the cover of *August Blue* and diving into the first few chapters before our departure for Germany. Levy was an AHRB fellow teaching writing in the Animation department at the Royal College of Art during my master's studies from 2006 to 2008. My recollection of her is somewhat blurred, but I remember her strong presence and her admonishment for not reading enough. She had us adapt the Brothers Grimm's *Little Red Riding Hood* into our own stories. At the time, this exercise seemed distant from my artistic practice in the dark basement



Figure 41: Photograph No. 2 from the series *Roadtrip Two*, showing the silhouettes of two children in a ferry boat against the blue sea. D. Hauser.

152 Mc Hardy, “(Maintenance) Animation is a Drag: It takes all the ***** time*,” 89.

153 Deborah Levy, *August Blue* (Penguin Books, 2023).

of RCA at South Kensington, where I was immersed in experimenting with copied and printed out still frames of live action footage under the rostrum camera. My animation was a visual exploration of a short story I had written about two parallel worlds: the world of the living and the world of the dead.

My second encounter with Levy has been far more engaging. Her writing captivates me, and I find myself reading beyond my initial plan. It feels as if I am Little Red Riding Hood and Levy is the wolf, drawing me into her blue universe to devour me. Weeks later, I will immerse myself in her 'Living Autobiography' trilogy, including *Real Estate*, where, to my surprise, she describes herself as Little Red Riding Hood:

I was finding a way through the forest (wearing silver platform boots) to meet the wolf. Who or what is the wolf? Perhaps the wolf is the whole point of writing. To walk towards danger, to strike on something that might just open its mouth and roar and tip the writer over the edge was part of the adventure of language. Anyone who thinks deeply, freely and seriously will move nearer to life and death and everything else we pass on the way.¹⁵⁴

Perhaps, the wolf is also the whole point of reading.

As we settle into our cabin on the ferry for the next 20-hour journey, each of us retreats into our own world: the children are absorbed in a film, my husband is engrossed in a book on the fold-out bed to the left, and I am lost in the pages of *August Blue* on the fold-out bed to the right. On the wall above his bed, a framed reproduction of a painting catches my eye. It depicts two young men on a sailing boat navigating the blue, wavy sea, passing an island where seagulls are perched. The painting's tranquil scene is punctuated by the subtle glow of our cabin's reading lamps reflecting off the glass. The cabin, measuring about 4 by 5 meters, holds no porthole offering a view of the sea as I had imagined. Instead, a round mirror occupies the space where the window should be, reflecting my own



gaze back at me. This reflection evokes the theme of doubling in *August Blue*, underscoring the novel's exploration of identity and self-perception.

In her novel, Levy introduces Elsa, a 34-year-old concert pianist who, during a performance of Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2 at the Golden Hall in Vienna, abruptly leaves the stage. She then relocates to Athens to teach piano lessons. While at a market, Elsa encounters a woman who is wearing a coat like her own. This woman is purchasing a couple of mechanical toy horses that Elsa inexplicably desires for herself. Elsa perceives this enigmatic figure as her double, and when the woman accidentally drops her trilby hat, Elsa picks it up and places it on her head, sealing their connection. Elsa's interactions with this imagined double unfold in a unique conversational style throughout the novel. The dialogue between them often begins with the double's probing questions, as in the exchange:

Figure 42: Photograph No. 3 from the series *Roadtrip Two*, showing a framed painting of a sailboat with two sailors passing an island with seagulls perched on it. D. Hauser.

Maybe you should.
 Maybe I should do what?
 Only laugh and smile if you mean it.
 The woman who had bought the horses had come through again. Sometimes she wanted to wipe the smile off my face.¹⁵⁵

As I read, I find myself silently chuckling between the lines. Elsa, like many of Levy's characters, is full of imperfections, yet she is endearing in her self-awareness and vulnerability. Levy's blend of humor and introspection invites readers to explore the complexities of identity, the blurred lines between reality and imagination, and the ways in which our doubles – real or imagined – shape our understanding of ourselves.

The kids argue over whether to stay seated near the door with access to the charger or move the iPad to the bed, their voices pulling me momentarily from Elsa's world. Earlier, I had tried to rest, lying with my head in my husband's arm crook, sharing one of the small beds. Just as I was about to drift off, he nudged me, pointing up to the ceiling with excitement. He had discovered the hidden fold-out beds, realizing that we each had our own space for the night after all.

The balance between solitude and companionship is delicate. Like Elsa, and like myself on this ferry, we are all navigating our way through the overlapping worlds of imagination, memory, and reality.

After dinner, I considered buying a blue, glittery hairband for my daughter – blue being her favorite color – but we left the shop empty-handed. Our steps tapped over the blue-tinted carpets, patterned with wave-like shapes, as we made our way back to the cabin. Now, she sits in front of the mirror, coloring in the book she packed. With 80% of my data consumed, I'm forced to turn off my phone. Lying on one of the fold-out beds, I have switched from typing notes on my phone to handwriting in my blue Moleskine notebook. My husband and son are up on the ferry deck. They have been there for some time. I wonder when they will return, imagining they might have fallen overboard, disappearing into the

blue waves while we remain here, the boat growing more restless as it faces the open sea and the waves crash against it. "Det rumler litt i magen," she says. I ask why, and she replies that the boat's motion is making her feel queasy. Perhaps the boys went on deck to find some space. My ballpoint pen runs out of blue ink, so I switch to black, but soon that too runs dry, leaving me to write in green.

The chapter I'm reading delves into the theme of doubling. Elsa enters an apartment in Paris, and just as she punches in the door code on her phone, a message flashes on the screen: "DOOR CALLING." Someone is attempting to enter her apartment in London at the very moment she is entering the one in Paris – a curious instance of doubling. The second doubling occurs when Elsa takes a bath and notices ants running along the rim of the bathtub, just as they do in her London apartment. It is as if the ants have found portals connecting both of her worlds. Levy captures Elsa's complex emotions in a lively passage:

And what about my double, who perhaps was not physically identical? To speak to her. To think about her was to speak to someone known, inside myself, someone who was slightly mysterious to me, someone who was listening very attentively.

The barman filled up my glass. There was still no one in the bar except the man.
 And her.¹⁵⁶

Just like the ants who have found a portal connecting both of Elsa's worlds, *August Blue* serves as a portal into my own project, prompting me to reflect on my use of the double, which remains somewhat elusive. I briefly consider my protagonist Mara and her double, Nora. Like Elsa's double, Nora seems to listen attentively. She is both mysterious and familiar to me, and over the past two years, I've come to know her better. Nora is physically identical to Mara.

155 Levy, *August Blue*, 80.

156 Levy, *August Blue*, 97.



Figure 43: Photograph No. 4 from the series *Roadtrip Two*, showing the sea pass by the ferry boat window. D. Hauser.

In the script, I've tried to present her as Mara's twin sister, subtly suggesting that she exists only in Mara's mind – a persistent voice urging Mara to recognize another version of herself. Unlike in *August Blue*, where the double's presence is more abstract, the two women in my film engage in literal conversations. Nora is an embodied figure.

I close *August Blue* with a thud and inform my husband that my stomach is rumbling, echoing our daughter's words from earlier. He's watching a black-and-white documentary about Trondheim during World War II. As I glance at the screen, where two men in the woods wear headphones, my daughter exclaims, "Pappa, I no longer want to wear headphones." I return to Levy's world, which describes a scene - and here, my green ink is nearly exhausted, forcing me to switch to the last remaining color in my ballpoint pen - where Elsa finally meets her double again in Paris, this time with a big cigar between her lips. Levy encapsulates the moment in a poignant line:

Her hands were entirely free, no bags, she carried nothing than herself down Boulevard Sain-Germain.¹⁵⁷

Don't we always carry something with us? As if bearing the weight of ourselves wasn't enough. I briefly recall my small, light, purple wrapped copy of Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. I am thinking particularly of Donna Haraway's introduction, in which she recounts three stories about carrier bags – Mochila – gifted to her during her research travels.

To carry, to wear, any of these bags is to enter into the knotting of capacities to respond, to become-with each other in the untold stories we need.¹⁵⁸

Becoming with one another through the untold stories we seek – Perhaps, this is what I am pursuing as I gather interviews and footage of the filmmakers and mothers I portray, attempting to weave their fragmented stories into the narrative of a fictional character. These collected tales find their place in my carrier bag where the threads of motherhood and artistry evolve, double, and ultimately intertwine, knotting together our shared narrative.

"Why does it feel as if we're drowning?", my daughter interrupts my train of thoughts. I explain that it's because we are on a boat. "And why does it make those humming sounds?" I remain silent and slip back into Elsa's world.

As we continued our journey south, leaving the ferry behind and settling back into the car, I found myself pleasantly surprised. Contrary to my expectations, the kids did not interrupt me while I immersed myself in *August Blue*, occasionally glancing at the nearly blue Ligurian and Tyrrhenian Seas. My time was not interrupted, because I did not finish the book nor did I get to the others I had brought along. Instead, the road trip itself became an interruption – diverting my thoughts from the themes of doubling and the PhD in Artistic Research. I made room for a slower pace, embracing the rhythms

157 Levy, *August Blue*, 111.

158 Donna Haraway, preface to *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, by Ursula K. Le Guin, 12.

of Tuscany, the warmth, the food, and the presence of my family.

I eventually finished reading *August Blue* in August, back in Norway. Once again, I found myself stepping into the role of Little Red Riding Hood. Elsa finally comes to realize that she does not truly know what her double looks like. Despite her efforts to gaze at and chase this figure, she lacks a clear visual memory of her face. Her double seems to be more of a voice inside her – a manifestation of the parts of herself she has yet to fully understand.

My intent in reading Levy's work was not to analyze how she created a double, but to study her use of language. Yet unexpectedly, this led me to reflect on her use of the double. Levy powerfully captures the experience of constant transformation – leaving behind who we were while being pursued by past selves, evolving into someone new and not yet fully understood. This idea of being chased by an alternative self during ongoing change resonates with my own journey of adaptation.

It feels as if I had to re-encounter her – not in person, but through her art: her doubles and alter egos she has created since I graduated from RCA.

Outcomes and Contributions



Figure 44: Still from *Gaëlle Denis Edit No. 3*, showing her painting an oil self-portrait of her younger self in her East London studio, October 2023. D. Hauser.

WHAT THE WORK IS AND WHAT THE WORK DOES

At the start of my final PhD year, I was asked why I chose Cinemateket Trondheim to present my artistic results when I did not have a completed film. For most people in the film industry, artistic results mean a completed film. However, as I came to understand during this PhD, the production is not the research itself.

Barbara Bolt, a practising Australian artist, professor in contemporary arts and culture, and art theorist, distinguishes between what the work *is* and what the work *does*:

Whilst the terms are often used interchangeably, the artwork is not the same thing as the work of art. In this context, the artwork can be defined as the production – the novel, poem, screenplay, performance, painting, film, installation, drawing or event that has emerged in and through practice – it is what is published or exhibited or performed. The work of art is the work that the artwork does; it is the movement in concepts, understanding, methodologies, material practice, affect and sensorial experience that arises in and through the vehicle of art and the artwork. The work that art does is its performative quality. This can relate to the process of making the artwork and the effects for the artists and for the field, and/or to the effects that the artwork may generate in the world.¹⁵⁹

In artistic research, the outcome encompasses not only the production but also the artistic processes, methods developed, and questions explored through practice.

Defining the context of the research project requires careful consideration of what already exists nationally and internationally. In my case, the film industry forms part of this field. I have created short films that have screened at international animation and film festivals, establishing my practice within cinematic contexts.

During the five Artistic Research Forums organized by the Norwegian Artistic Research School, PhD fellows working within filmmaking were, whenever possible, placed in cinemas or large

auditoriums with high-quality screens and sound, reflecting the context of their work regardless of whether the material was a completed film or process documentation.

The cinema further contextualizes my project. Presenting work focused on motherhood and filmmaking at Cinemateket Trondheim made these often-sidelined subjects visible within and beyond academia, situating the project in dialogue with film culture and an audience.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FILM INDUSTRY AND GENDER EQUITY

Addressing Structural Barriers for Filmmaking Parents

While conversations around care and art have gained visibility internationally through initiatives such as Visarte Switzerland's Kunst und Kind (Art and Child) programme¹⁶⁰ and the Kunstnernes Mamma Kollektiv¹⁶¹, the specific challenges faced by filmmaking mothers remain largely unaddressed within film practice and policy. As Norwegian film producer Elisabeth Kvithyll has argued¹⁶², even within Norway's relatively supportive childcare infrastructure, women often struggle to maintain careers in filmmaking after becoming parents. Support programmes exist for emerging talent, but they rarely address how proven filmmakers can remain active after gaps caused by parental leave or extended caregiving. My project responds by situating the maternal as a structuring principle for hybrid filmmaking, highlighting how caregiving, with its interruptions, demands, and embodied rhythms, shapes not only what is represented on screen but also how a film is developed. The fragmentary, exploratory way of working that shaped this project reflects both the complexity of maternal experience and the reality of balancing professional and caregiving responsibilities.

¹⁵⁹ Barbara Bolt, "Beyond Solipsism in Artistic Research: The Art Work and The Work of Art," in *Material Inventions: Applying Creative Arts Research*, ed. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 29-30.

¹⁶⁰ Visarte Schweiz, "Kunst und Kind," accessed December 10 2025, <https://visarte.ch/de/dienstleistungen/kunst-und-kind/>.

¹⁶¹ Kunstnernes Mamma Kollektiv, accessed December 10, 2025, <https://k-m-k.no>.

¹⁶² Kvithyll, "Er filmbransjen åpen for filmskapere som blir mødre?"

Making Structural Barriers Visible

This project also contributes to ongoing debates about equity and sustainability in the film industry by documenting the challenges faced by filmmaking parents and showing how these conditions affect careers and artistic outcomes. It makes visible that talent loss among women is often not due to a lack of skill or ambition, but to structural and cultural barriers that make caregiving incompatible with dominant industry expectations. Highlighting this gap can spark conversations with institutions and production companies about the need for flexible development timelines, inclusive production schedules, and targeted support schemes for filmmakers with caregiving responsibilities. Concrete measures might include support programmes for mothers returning to filmmaking post-maternity leave, scheduling industry events within daycare hours, and designing residencies and seminars that accommodate children.

Questioning Neoliberal Production Models

The project indirectly questions neoliberal tendencies in contemporary film production, particularly the prioritisation of efficiency, measurable output, and linear delivery schedules. By making visible a filmmaking process shaped by caregiving interruptions, health challenges, and embodied temporalities, it argues for alternative production models that value care, unpredictability, and the cyclical nature of artistic development. Maternal rhythms, often deemed incompatible with industrial expectations, suggest more humane approaches to collaboration, time management, and the measurement of artistic value.

Collaboration and Care: “It Takes a Village”

It takes a village to raise a child and it takes a village to make a film. Filmmaking, like parenting, is inherently collaborative. Throughout my PhD, this interdependence has been visible both practically and artistically. Producers, mentors, crew members, collaborators, and family all contributed to the conditions that allowed the project to develop.

These dynamics are mirrored within the script, which foregrounds familial and caregiving structures through Mara’s partner, kindergarten personnel, and her mother-in-law. Multiple relationships and responsibilities intersect to sustain

both life and creative work, reflecting the relational networks that make filmmaking and parenting possible. By incorporating these networks, the project gestures toward alternative models of filmmaking while also exposing the tensions that arise when families are expected to shoulder care in place of production structures – a burden that can strain households and, in some cases, contribute to artist families fracturing.

Prevailing measures of productivity in filmmaking privilege speed, polished results, and quantifiable output. They often undervalue the labour of holding space, conceptual integration, and process-based direction. By foregrounding the maternal, this project shows how vulnerability, illness, and caregiving can disrupt industrial expectations while producing artistic insight.

The hybrid script itself carries these interruptions and functions as the connective tissue binding all collaborative strands into a research outcome.

My project demonstrates that artistic value cannot be measured solely by productivity or market success. It argues for systems that support sustainable, inclusive, and socially meaningful creative work – systems that respect both artistic freedom and the lived realities of caregiving artists.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO ARTISTIC RESEARCH IN FILM

Bridging Motherhood and Cinematic Doubling

Through practice-based investigation and theoretical engagement, I have identified a gap in how film connects doubling and motherhood. While pregnancy and birth quite literally double the self, female doppelgängers and alter egos in film are rarely linked to maternal experience. As explored through my engagement with film scholarship and filmic examples, female doubles typically signify psychological pathology, competition, identity theft, or threat. When maternal figures do appear in doubling narratives, the focus almost solely shifts to the child’s perspective rather than the mother’s.

The mother’s own experience of being doubled through pregnancy, split through caregiving demands, and transformed through Matrescence remains cinematically underexplored. This

absence is particularly striking given that doubling offers such an apt visual language for maternal transformation. The fundamental identity shift of becoming a mother involves a splitting of the self into “before” and “after” versions that must somehow coexist. This is not a disorder but a lived reality, an ordinary, if difficult, experience of being both continuous and divided through motherhood.

By foregrounding matrescence and connecting it explicitly to the cinematic tradition of doppelgängers and alter egos, I reframe doubling as an appropriate, formal strategy for maternal narratives. The “before” and “after” selves, the pull between artistic identity and caregiving role, and the feeling of being both one person and many find their visual expression through doubling, in ways that single-perspective realism cannot contain.

This conceptual linking creates possibilities for future work. It suggests that the long cinematic history of doubles, shadows, and split selves might be reconsidered through a maternal lens, revealing themes that have been present but overlooked. It suggests that filmmakers exploring maternal experience might draw more explicitly on doubling as a formal strategy.

A Three-Layered Method for Hybrid Filmmaking

I have developed a three-layered method – collecting, writing, doubling – that moves fluidly between documentary and fiction, between text and image, between analytical and embodied modes of knowing.

This method mirrors the hybrid subject it investigates. Just as maternal identity involves constantly shifting between roles and modes of being, the research method involved shifting between gathering material, synthesizing through writing, and investigating through visual practice.

Crucially, these phases were not linear but circular. Collecting revealed what writing needed to explore, writing opened paths for what visual investigation needed to embody, and visual investigation exposed gaps in the collection and in the modes of representation, leading to new questions.

The method challenges conventional approaches in several ways. First, it values process alongside product, allowing for iterative development, returning to earlier phases with new insights, revising questions as understanding deepens.

The three-layered approach also reflects a pragmatic response to the constraints of motherhood itself. Collecting could happen in fragments. Writing required only time and commitment. Visual investigations involved collaboration and required re-evaluation methods. This flexibility of working across different modes depending on circumstance, may be valuable for artistic researchers balancing caregiving and creative practice.

The Script as Performative Space

Throughout the PhD, I came to see the script not as a blueprint for production but as a space for exploration – a gathering place for fragments such as interviews, drawings, recorded conversations, and moving images, where documentary and fiction could meet without one having to serve the other. This aligns with approaches to performative screenwriting, where writing itself functions as a form of research.

The script does not merely depict maternal experience but performs it. Drawing on feminist scholarship, I understand motherhood not just as a theme but as a way of working: fragmented, interrupted, relational. The script’s structure enacts an ethics of interruption, where the maternal becomes both subject matter and method.

By approaching the screenplay as both process and site of inquiry, I explored how writing could embody the themes it represented. Through the figures of Mara and Nora, the script explores how internal dialogue and embodied contradiction can be externalized cinematically through character, tone, space, and medium. The script demonstrates how writing can hold complex, fragmented realities shaped by caregiving and creative practice. It shows how multiplicity itself becomes a form of artistic knowledge generated through making.

The artistic research also demonstrates how personal experience can inform inquiry without the work becoming purely autobiographical. By creating fictional characters (Mara and Nora) who metabolize aspects of my experience alongside material collected from other filmmaking mothers, the project maintains critical distance while remaining grounded in lived reality.

Mixed Media Approach for Maternal Representation

A mother exists simultaneously as a person with continuous identity and history, part of a community sharing similar experiences, and as someone with an internal, imaginative, creative life. Through developing the animatic, I discovered how mixed media form itself can embody this multiplicity in ways that single-medium approaches cannot. The script moves between live-action realism (Mara's domestic scenes), documentary footage (Killi and Denis's testimonies), and animation (alter egos and imagined spaces), creating a formal structure where each mode corresponds to a different register of maternal experience. This is not merely stylistic variety but a formal argument: maternal identity cannot be captured in a single mode or medium because it is itself multiple, shifting, hybrid.

The animatic revealed how doubling operates not only through character (Mara and Nora) but through formal shifts between documentation and invention, live action and animation. By combining animated alter egos with the filmmaker's original voice recordings, I synthesized documentary indexicality with non-mimetic visual representation, where animation extends and refracts documentary material without erasing its factual anchor. Animation's inherent constructedness acknowledges my subjective position, refusing the false objectivity of documentary realism while maintaining connection to real experiences.

I used animated alter egos for the filmmakers for several purposes: to express their artistic identities through visual style rather than explanation, to open an imaginary space where the three of us could meet, and to translate their practices through my own, creating dialogue between distinct yet connected approaches.

Crucially, recreating the filmmaker's artistic methods through digital tools revealed the tacit knowledge embedded in their practices. I learned that understanding another artist's process requires engagement beyond textual analysis.

The animatic also showed me animation's capacity to hold multiple realities simultaneously: the coexistence of two selves, two temporalities, and two forms of vision. This reframed animation in my practice from a representational tool to a mode of thinking - a way of articulating maternal

experience that offers metamorphic, spatial, and temporal flexibility unavailable to realist cinema.

Using animation not as embellishment but as a method for representing identity, community, and transformation suggests formal possibilities for other mixed media works engaging with multiplicity or the intersection of personal and collective experience.

Artistic Outcomes: Script, Audiovisual Material, Documentation

While this PhD has prioritized process-based inquiry, it has also generated tangible artistic outcomes existing in the Research Catalogue exposition.

The script *Make Her See* (excerpts in appendix, and full script available upon request) is a hybrid narrative that explores maternal doubling across feature-length format. Though not production-ready, it offers a template for how maternal narratives might be constructed using mixed media approaches.

The documentary edits of Killi and Denis capture intimate moments of their working processes, revealing the challenges and diversions involved in making their films. These edits preserve testimony that might otherwise remain private, offering material for understanding how filmmaker-mothers navigate their dual identities.

The actor test revealed limitations in my approach to live-action doubling. The lack of a physical scene partner restricted dynamic interaction between the two versions of the character. It demonstrates that more playful, improvisational methods might generate more believable interactions. While the test did not achieve its intended result, it clarified methodological questions about embodying doubling through performance, informing how future iterations might approach the challenge differently.

The animatic became a space where I could embody the filmmakers' artistic identities through animated alter egos while creating a shared imaginary space beyond their caregiving responsibilities. By translating Killi's cut-out aesthetic and Denis' expressive color palette into digital animation and placing these alongside a rotoscoped version of Mara, the animatic revealed how doubling operates not only through character but through formal shifts between documentation and invention, live

action and animation. It answers the central research question – how can the intersection of motherhood and filmmaking be explored in mixed media film – while establishing a formal approach for other scenes in *Make Her See* and potentially inspiring future maternal narratives in hybrid form.

The double-screen video loop, created for gallery installation as part of an eventual film shoot, explores how doubling might exist across different formats and scales simultaneously. The work investigates how Mara's alter ego might manifest through an art installation rather than traditional narrative cinema.

These works, alongside interview transcripts and photographic documentation in the Research Catalogue exposition, create an archive gathered over three years of conversations and through my own practice. Collectively, these outcomes represent not a finished film but a constellation of materials and methods that could be developed further, particularly given that the subject matter itself – maternal identity – is characterized by ongoing transformation rather than resolution.

Expanding Representation in Mixed Media Film

This project contributes to the growing field of artistic research in film by demonstrating how under-represented experiences can be brought to the center of inquiry through practice-based methods.

Motherhood remains marginalized in cinema, often functioning as backstory, or side plot. When mothers do appear as central characters, they are frequently idealized as the selfless caregiver or pathologized as neglectful or monstrous. The complexity of maternal experience, the simultaneous love and ambivalence, the creative ambition alongside caregiving devotion, the transformation of identity that leaves women neither entirely who they were nor fully who they are becoming, rarely receives nuanced attention.

Centering maternal experience in my filmmaking practice, has allowed me to explore how the personal and the political unfold through artistic methods while remaining critically aware.

Moreover, by focusing specifically on filmmaker-mothers rather than mothers in general, the project addresses a double marginalization. Women in the film industry face well-documented barriers, and mothers face additional constraints

as caregiving responsibilities compete with professional demands. The research makes visible struggles that are often kept private – the guilt, the exhaustion, the financial pressure, the identity dissolution and reformation – contributing to a more honest conversation about what combining these roles actually entails.

The decision to work with mixed media film specifically expands representational possibilities. While short-form animation and documentary have engaged with caregiving and maternal perspectives, hybrid long-form representations that combine documentary, fiction, live-action, and animation around maternal themes remain rare. This project suggests that such hybrid forms may be particularly suited to maternal narratives precisely because they can hold contradiction and multiplicity without forcing resolution.

Contribution to Artistic Research

The project offers a case study in how process-based inquiry can generate knowledge through screenwriting as a primary mode of research. The script stands as the major artistic output, demonstrating how a screenplay can function as a site of investigation rather than just a pre-production tool. Beyond the script, the materials exist in various stages of development. Some could be refined further, while others point toward new investigations. This developmental quality is not a limitation but reflects the research approach: rather than working toward a predetermined endpoint, the project has followed questions as they emerged, allowing each phase to inform the next.

By centering under-represented subject matter (matrescence, maternal experience in filmmaking) and working with hybrid methods (collecting, writing, doubling), the project expands what artistic research in film might look like. It suggests that the field can make space for voices and experiences that commercial film industries may not prioritize, and that the knowledge generated through artistic investigation and inquiry has value even when it does not result in market-ready products.

This aligns with Henk Borgdorff's observation that artistic research "invites unfinished thinking" and seeks not to make explicit pre-existing knowledge but to provide "specific

articulation of the pre-reflective, non-conceptual content of art.”¹⁶³ The doubling experiments, for instance, did not set out to prove a hypothesis but to explore through making what could not be fully articulated in advance. The insights they generated – the limits of live-action doubling, animation’s affordances for representing transformation, how mixed media creates meaning through contrast – emerged through practice itself.

HOW NAVIGATING ACADEMIA AND INDUSTRY GENERATED NEW INSIGHTS

The tension between research and industry frameworks shaped at least half of my PhD journey. The balancing act of navigating academia and the film industry simultaneously has been described by former artistic research fellows at the Norwegian Film School in the article *Axes of Tension: Navigating craft, institution and industry as an art-researcher in film and new media*.¹⁶⁴ Building on Lipsyc, Jaller, and Howard’s perspectives, I offer my own experience of entering academia from the film industry, joining NTNU’s Department of Art and Media Studies – specifically Film and Video Production – as its first PhD fellow in artistic research. I approached the PhD with a filmmaker’s mindset, focused on production, outcomes, and industry expectations. I involved a producer, applied for funding, and aimed to create a high-level film. While this approach led to successful funding, I gradually realised that it did not fully support the goals of artistic research. The industry prioritises results: a finished product, audience reach, awards, and distribution, while favouring linear progress over the open-ended, inquiry-driven process that lies at the core of artistic research.

Shifting from a result-driven to a process-oriented mindset took time and came with discomfort. My collaboration with a producer eventually stalled, and ultimately ended. Pressed by time, I had no other choice than to continue alone. Rather than pushing through to deliver a complete film, I began to search for a more sustainable way to work, one aligned with the aims of my research and my life as a mother.

Disengaging from an industry-focused path, I shifted to a self-reflexive, self-sustained practice. I reduced my reliance on

collaborators, producers, and external funding, and instead invested in writing and low-budget working methods that offered greater autonomy. This turn towards process over product may have temporarily distanced me from the film industry, but it allowed me to reframe my practice on my own terms.

The idea of presenting raw, imperfect audiovisual material initially made me uneasy. It took time to accept that the process itself could generate and present valuable insights – perhaps even more so than a polished final work.

My most significant personal discovery has been this shift: from prioritising results to valuing process. Some of the most meaningful insights emerged not through filmmaking, but through self-reflexive practices: reading, writing, engaging with other artistic works. Zooming out and moving between the layers of my research revealed a story shaped as much by reflection and iteration as by the artwork itself..

LIMITATIONS, FUTURE DIRECTIONS, AND WHAT THIS RESEARCH OFFERS

This project in artistic research has focused on three filmmaker-mothers in specific socio-cultural contexts (Norway, UK/France, and my own Swiss-Norwegian position). The findings are situated rather than universal, offering one perspective on maternal experience in filmmaking shaped by access to resources, cultural norms around caregiving, and industry structures. Maternal experiences differ significantly across class, race, migration status, and family structure – dimensions I have not fully explored.

Working through this research, several questions arose that point toward future work: Should Mara’s double be animated rather than live-action? Giving Mara an animated alter ego might

163 Henk Borgdorff, “The Production of Artistic Knowledge in Artistic Research,” in *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, ed. Michael Biggs and Henrik Karlsson (Routledge, 2011), 44.

164 Nadja Lipsyc, Camilla Jaller, Frederick Howard, “Axes of Tension: Navigating craft, institution and industry as an art-researcher in film and new media,” *International Journal Film New Media* 5, nr. 2 (November 2020): 9-26, <https://hdl.handle.net/11250/3032824>.

more effectively represent the maternal split as transformation rather than conflict between two fixed identities. How might metamorphosis as an animation concept extend the representation of matrescence, showing continuous transformation rather than a before/after binary. What would a fully non-verbal, purely visual exploration of maternal doubling look like? The project has relied significantly on voice-over, interviews, and dialogue; a future investigation might explore how much can be conveyed through image, movement, and sound design alone.

What I hope this artistic research offers is not a definitive solution to how the intersection of motherhood and filmmaking can be represented in mixed media film, but rather a set of strategies for exploring the question through practice. The work establishes maternal doubling as a productive concept for visual exploration, develops a flexible method for hybrid filmmaking that can adapt to the constraints of caregiving, and demonstrates formal approaches for representing maternal experience through mixed media. I offer these contributions as starting points – as threads that others might pick up, extend, or challenge in their own practice and research, whether exploring maternal themes, doppelgängers and alter egos, or hybrid methods that blend documentary and fiction.

I have come to value a process-based approach that accommodates reflection alongside making. This has practical applications in teaching students to value development alongside product, and in pitching contexts where articulating process and contextualising work demonstrates rigorous artistic thinking. Yet the tension between process-based research and product-driven expectations creates practical challenges. Presenting process rather than polished product limits reach to festivals, distributors, and general audiences. Future work will need to navigate this by either developing the script toward production while maintaining the research insights generated here, or finding exhibition contexts (galleries, online platforms, forums) that accommodate process work alongside finished pieces. Should the project become a completed film, it would find its audience through festivals and cinema screenings. Though rooted in a specific theme, it's relevance extends beyond filmmaker-mothers. In a society driven by results, where many juggle caregiving with work and face growing exhaustion,

this film could resonate and spark reflection.

My reflections on unlikeable female characters mark a thread that others are exploring too. Together, we may create space for her. This is vital, when women artists who mother cannot afford to worry about being liked to survive creatively. As Phillipps wrote, hinting at the series of “small selfishnesses” needed to do creative work as described by Claire Dederer:

The second thing a creative mother must have, along with time, is self. She requires boundaries and the conviction that she has the right to make her art. She needs not to give away too many pieces of her being.¹⁶⁵

Eventually seeing a further developed character like Mara on screen, unidealized and emotionally conflicted, could offer others a mirror, revealing parts of themselves they have been taught to suppress to fit in. Mara's journey of losing herself in motherhood and discovering a new version of who she is speaks to a marginal mothering experience, and this may shape who feels drawn to the project. In *Make Her See*, none of the filmmaker-mothers are idealized. Mara, as she currently exists, might be viewed as unlikeable, perhaps precisely because she defies the comforting image of the nurturing mother. I am aware of the risk this presents. Yet his project is an honest inquiry shaped by artistic practice and lived experience, seeking new connections through unfinished thinking. While the film may still take shape in the industry, the work of art – what the art does – has been explored within these PhD years.

¹⁶⁵ Phillipps, *The Baby on the Fire Escape*, 274.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

SYNOPSIS – MAKE HER SEE

Mara, an Oslo-based filmmaker in her late thirties, is eagerly anticipating a new chapter in her life as she awaits the birth of her first child with her partner Petter. While preparing for motherhood and diligently working to complete her project – a documentary about the lives and careers of female filmmakers – she firmly believes that combining motherhood and filmmaking is simply a matter of determination.

But the birth of her daughter, Maya shatters her carefully constructed world. When the family relocates to Petter's birthplace, a small town in central Norway, to receive help with housework and childcare from her mother-in-law, Siv, Mara's challenges only intensify. Their lives soon spiral into chaos.

Amid this turmoil, Mara's enigmatic double, Nora appears, urging her to complete the documentary she started. Doubling her struggles, Mara's producer, Lisa, informs her that the documentary's funding has dried up. Facing financial pressure, Mara sends her daughter to kindergarten and takes a job at a local grocery store. However, her creative impulses and frequent naps in the storage room soon lead to her dismissal.

Siv introduces her to knitting, a practice Mara initially resists but eventually uses to overcome her creative doubt. Encouraged by Nora, Mara begins to explore the concept of flow by combining the stories of the women in her film with animated sequences of knitted bodybuilder choreographies. However, animation demands relentless time and patience – something she is short of while navigating new motherhood.

Physically and emotionally exhausted, Mara's internal and external worlds collide. Revisiting the footage and interviews she has gathered, she begins to realise that none of the women she portrays truly "have it all". Gradually, she learns to understand Nora's perspective, embracing imperfection and focusing on the process of creation over its outcomes.

As Mara becomes increasingly consumed by her project, the strain on her relationship with Petter escalates. While her mental energy is devoted to her work, Petter takes on more domestic responsibilities, including primary caregiving for their child. To top it all, Mara travels to Denmark to visit Siv, who has embarked on her own adventure to start a knitting business.

Resentment grows, and their partnership reaches a breaking point when Petter forces Mara to leave their home.

Caught between her film and her family, Mara confronts the critical question: can she balance her creative ambitions with the demands of home without losing the ones she loves?

MAKE HER SEE

Scene 50

'The Mental Load'

By Denise Hauser

Mara's GENERAL PRACTITIONER, a woman in her 50s, sits at her desk, filling out a form. On the wall hangs a decorative print which reads, "How are you feeling?" with the word "FINE" in oversized, bold letters.

She turns to Mara.

GP

So, do you feel fatigued a lot? Like, do you fall asleep during the day, or is it just a case of... needing to go to bed early?

Mara's eyes drift to the doctor's foot, which is in a cast.

MARA

Uh, I can sense my energy levels dropping throughout the day. I often need to lie down because my body feels completely worn out.

GP

Mm-hmmm.

The doctor nods in understanding.

Mara leans back, glancing around the room. She notices, almost imperceptibly at first, a few objects shifting in the corner of her vision – piles of laundry begin to appear, slowly spilling across the edges of the room. She blinks. The laundry grows, cluttering the space, and now the sofa she's sitting on is buried under clothes.

In the corner, an ironing board stands, and perched on top is Nora, as if she's always been there. She holds Mara's open laptop, showing footage of Anita Killi loading objects into a cart outside her house.

ANITA KILLI (V.O.)

(in Norwegian, subtitled)

Enten så jobber jeg, eller så forbereder jeg meg til å jobbe./ Either I'm working, or I'm preparing to work.

Mara looks at the laptop and Killi for a moment, then turns back to the doctor.

MARA

And I think about all my obligations, and everything I should be doing.

ANITA KILLI (O.S.)

Og da betyr det å rydde fordi jeg har det så fullt overalt. Og av og til så må jeg rydde for å fa plass i hodet./ And that means tidying up because I'm so overwhelmed with everything. Sometimes I have to clean to make space in my head.

GP

Yes.

MARA

Now, everything feels like a job to me. Even things like—

Mara looks down, suddenly noticing baking flour on the floor. Footsteps are tracked through it, and the soft trail leads to nowhere. She laughs a little.

MARA (CONT'D)

—baking a cake for my daughter's birthday or organizing everything in my head.

GP (O.S.)

Yes. So, all the efforts.

Mara pauses, distracted by the voice of Gaëlle Denis.

GAËLLE DENIS (OFF)

Being a mother feeds you as a filmmaker, if you manage to not be broken.

A toddler's SCREECHING voice and RUNNING FOOTSTEPS are heard outside the doctor's office door. Mara turns her head towards the sound. The voice overlaps with Gaëlle Denis' words.

GAËLLE DENIS (V.O.)

I have some friends who decided, I'm not gonna have a kid because it's not compatible with filmmaking. Or, I will wait to have a kid, until I've made my first film.

The GP shifts, impatiently waiting for Mara to continue.

GP

Yes?

Mara looks around the room. Near a pop-up wall used for undressing, a mirror catches her eye. An animated version of Gaëlle Denis playfully pops her head into the reflection, and beside her, animated Anita Killi and Nora.

GAËLLE DENIS
(speaking from mirror)
Ten years later, there's no kids,
there's no film.

Mara turns back to the doctor.

MARA (OFF)
You know, it's funny. My projects live
mostly in my head, even though they
involve actual art. But, being a
director is like, 90% thinking and 10%
explaining to others what's in your
head.

The doctor nods, scribbling notes.

GP
Yes. The mental load.

At the back of the room hangs a large piece of textile art - a
vibrant patchwork of fabrics, with loose threads dangling. In the
center of the rectangular frame, a sizable ripped-open hole
resembles a gaping mouth.

MARA
And then, there's home life. Like, does
my daughter have enough clothes?

Mara's eyes dart to the framed artwork, where the gaping hole
seems to shift—was that her imagination? Mara squints.

GP
You feel it physically, the bodily
exertion, but also the cognitive, mental
stress of it all.

MARA
Exactly! I mean, even if you're 100% on
sick leave, you're still a mother and a
wife. It's like trying to take a nap
while someone's vacuuming directly into
your ear.

GP
Yes. You are a mother.

MARA
I am a mother.

GP
Right, so... you never get a break.
(laughs)

MARA

Nope. It's a 24/7 job.

GP

Yes. It's the most important job you'll ever have, but also the most stressful.

MARA

Yeah.

GP

So, let's do a physical exam and check for vitamin deficiencies. First, we'll take your blood pressure.

MARA

(nods in agreement)

Mm-hmm.

MAKE HER SEE

Scenes 54 - 56

'Animatic'

By Denise Hauser

The space is alive with creative chaos. Sketches of the two filmmakers, some taped hastily, flutter from the walls. Colors explode across the room—unfinished paintings of palm trees and sunbeds scattered on the floor, walls draped in bright hues. Layers of art supplies—brushes, paint tubes, markers—create a messy mosaic on every surface.

At the desk, Mara sits, hunched over. Her hair is an untidy bun, her pajamas wrinkled from being worn all day. Dark circles weigh under her eyes, hinting at the late hour. She's engrossed in her work, coloring on her digital drawing tablet. The comic version of Gaëlle Denis takes shape—sunglasses on, a Snoopy T-shirt, and heart-covered pants. Gaëlle lounges in a sunbed, a drink held in one hand.

Mara presses play to watch her creation move.

GAËLLE DENIS (V.O.)
I used to love drawing...

On screen, Gaëlle's character moves in a jerky, awkward way as the frame rate lags.

GAËLLE DENIS
...and when I started to do animation, I
called it the prostitution of drawing.

The animation becomes smoother. Gaëlle's lips move in sync with the sound of her voice and her surroundings—a beach scene—gradually fills in with soft, watercolor-style colors.

GAËLLE DENIS (CONT'D)
You're thinking, how many drawings can I
do per day?

The beach around her comes to life, resembling the vibrant tones from the zine.

GAËLLE DENIS (CONT'D)
And then you do the coloring, and you
want it to be nice—watercolor shades and
things like that.

The scene becomes slightly exaggerated, with more color than necessary.

GAËLLE DENIS (CONT'D)
So the pleasure of drawing was gone. The
pleasure of painting was gone.

Suddenly, the animation stutters, frames dropping, until it freezes entirely.

GAËLLE DENIS (V.O.)

And I thought there is no way I'm
gonna do this for someone else. This
is my time.

Mara's phone and computer RING simultaneously—interrupting
Gaëlle's voice. The loud, sudden sound jars the stillness. It's
Lisa, on FaceTime. Mara jumps, startled, unsure for a moment.
Then, curiosity wins. She answers.

LISA (ON FACETIME)

Mara! I got your animation test. It's
brilliant.

MARA

What do you mean?

LISA

Your knitted female bodybuilder
animation. I love it!

Mara frowns, confused.

MARA

But...

A CLINK of bangles echoes in the room. Suddenly, Nora's hands
appear, covering Mara's mouth, silencing her.

Mara turns her head slightly. Nora stands there, her eyes wide,
shaking her head in silent warning. Mara, unsure, gently pulls
Nora's hands down.

MARA (CONT'D)

Yes, that test. Glad to hear you like
it.

Nora sighs in relief, stepping back, fading into the cluttered
shadows of the studio.

LISA

We HAVE to find more funding for you.
THIS is something really different. I
already have someone in mind...

MARA

Wait... you're back on board?

LISA

(flexing her arms)
Let's do this!

The UPBEAT SOUNDTRACK from earlier fills the room. Nora,
energized, begins to dance.

The studio floor transforms—the yellow hues from the paintings on the floor now stretch out, resembling a sandy beach. The walls around her seem to swell with the oceanic blues and swaying greens of palm trees. From behind two painted palm trees, animated versions of Anita Killi and Gaëlle Denis emerge. They join Nora, swaying to the music.

The joyful, surreal dance is interrupted by a KNOCK. The soundtrack stops abruptly. The room freezes in mid-motion—Nora, Anita, and Gaëlle caught in mid-action.

The door opens and Petter sticks his head in, holding Maya.

PETTER
Dinner's ready.

MARA
Now? What's the time?

PETTER
Time for a break.

Mara nods, speaking into the phone.

MARA
Lisa, I gotta go. But I'm so happy
you're on board again.

PETTER
(impatient)
Now!

MARA
Okay. Bye!

LISA (ON FACETIME)
Bye Mara! Call you to—

Mara hangs up before Lisa can finish. She stands, casting a last glance around her transformed studio, where Nora, Anita, and Gaëlle remain frozen mid-dance. Then, with a deep breath, she follows Petter and Maya out. The door closes behind her, where the music starts to play again.

Mara, still in her pajamas, sprawls over the coffee table, drawing flowing lines on a large sheet of paper that trails onto the floor. Her voice recorder rests atop the paper. She presses record. The lines extend across the floor, which has transformed into an off-white paper texture.

ANITA KILLI (O.S.)

Men problemet med dette er at det tar så lang tid. "Sinnemann" tok seks år. / But the problem with this is that it takes so much time. "Angry Man" took six years.

Exotic hand drawn plants sprout, and a large seashell emerges from the flowing lines.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. ANIMATED BEACH UNIVERSE - DAY

The animated alter ego of Anita Killi sits in a sun chair in an animated beach universe. The character is materialised in a digital cut-out style similar to Anita's own, though digitally rendered.

ANITA KILLI

Altså, jeg synes livet er for kort. Så, alle de som sier, jeg skal gjøre ting når barna blir store - Da har løpet livet fra en, rett og slett. / Well, I think life is too short. All those who say they'll do things when their kids grow up - by then, life has simply run away from them.

She lifts an old video camera from her lap, flipping out a small screen. Live-action archive footage plays.

ON THE CAMERA SCREEN:

Anita's baby daughter is in the basement with the animators, while Anita is setting up a multiplane table in her studio.

ANITA KILLI (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Da Maja, den eldste, skulle konfirmeres, så fikk jeg spilt av masse materialet som ble filmet opp gjennom og da var det spesielt noe som jeg reagerte på. Det var, ehm, Maja da hun akkurat lært seg å gå. Og, ehm, det var ikke jeg som på en måte var med henne men animatørene på filmsettet fordi jeg holdt på å bygge opp settet. / When Maja, the oldest, was going to be confirmed, I was played back a lot of the footage that had been filmed over the years, and there was something that really stood out to me.

(MORE)

ANITA KILLI (O.S.) (CONT'D)

It was, um, Maja just after she had learned to walk. And, um, it wasn't me who was with her, but the animators on the film set, because I was busy building the set.

Maja crawls up the stairs repeatedly, then across the floor, trying to reach her mother who is working in the studio. The animators gently pull her back.

ANITA KILLI (O.S.) (CONT'D)

- og hvor hun da gikk fra nede her i studio opp trappa og mot der hvor jeg jobbet. Gang på gang på gang. Og så hentet de henne ned. / - and then she would walk from down here in the studio, up the stairs, and towards where I was working. Over and over again. And then they'd bring her back down.

The footage shows Maja being supported by the animators as she waves "hi" to Anita.

ANITA KILLI (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Og av og til så kom jeg ut. / And sometimes I would come out.

Live-action Anita winks at the camera, saying goodbye, but little Maja clings to her.

ANITA KILLI (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Og da var det denne her klemmen og hvordan hun klamret seg litt til meg. / And then there was this hug and how she clung to me a little.

The animated alter-ego Anita character places the camera back on her lap.

ANITA KILLI (CONT'D)

Og så dyttet jeg henne forsiktig bort fordi jeg måtte fortsette å jobbe. / And then I gently pushed her away because I had to keep working.

Mara's animated alter ego is no longer on the sofa but in a sun chair like Anita's. She's wearing sunglasses and her cup of tea has been replaced by a drink, with palm trees swaying behind her on a sandy beach.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The door swings open. Petter enters, carrying a large laundry basket. Inside the basket, Maya gleams with excitement.

PETTER

Hi! We just finished a bunch of laundry.
Thought you were working?

Mara, now back on the sofa with her surroundings returned to normal, holds a drink in her hand.

MARA

(startled)

I am. Just thinking, conceptualizing.

PETTER

Drinking in the middle of the day? Is
that a new thing?

Petter places the laundry basket on the floor, then lifts Maya out. She immediately crawls toward Mara.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. ANIMATED BEACH UNIVERSE - DAY

Animated Mara sits in her sun chair at the beach, listening to animated Gaëlle Denis.

GAËLLE DENIS (OFF)

(gesturing with frustration)

From the point of view of a French
person living in London, ...

Gaëlle is on set, wearing a baby sling with her newborn son CRYING inside. She's surrounded by the FILM CREW as she shadows director MIKE NEWELL, who is shouting and pointing into the distance. His voice is barely audible over the baby's cries. The film crew turns their heads toward Gaëlle.

GAËLLE DENIS (CONT'D)

... when in London the childcare is
impossible. When the film industry is,
you know, you have to have another job
if you want to make a living. Erm,
writing and making films, at least at
the beginning. Erm, being a mother and
being a filmmaker is incompatible. It's
impossible.

The film crew stares at Gaëlle, then shout in unison.

FILM CREW

What are you thinking? You want to make films? You should be at home with your kid breastfeeding.

In the back, a few female voices chime in.

FEMALE VOICES

No, you can manage to be a mother and write and be on set and work.

The film crew glares angrily at the women's chorus. Gaëlle turns to the voices behind her.

GAËLLE DENIS

Yeah, but you have someone who can look after your kid, which is your mother, your aunt, your sister.

Gaëlle hands the baby to a pair of hands that reach out from the edge of the frame.

GAËLLE DENIS (CONT'D)

But you have family because it's so expensive here. Who is paying for your rent? Who is paying for all that?

Silence falls. The characters around Gaëlle fade away, leaving her seated in her sun chair at the beach. Anita sits beside her in her own chair, both quietly sipping their drinks.

GAËLLE DENIS (CONT'D)

All the money I made directing commercials went into childcare. So, all my savings.

(she laughs)

So, that's why I didn't buy a house or anything like that.

56

INT. MARA'S KITCHEN - DAY

56

The inside of Mara's kitchen cupboard is filled with colorful, unrelated objects – symbols of Gaëlle's past projects, rather than kitchen items.

GAËLLE DENIS (O.S.)

(muffled)

We are very fed up with asking for permission.

The cupboard door opens. A live-action hand, wearing a light blue glove outlined with black paint strokes, reaches in, searches for something, and then withdraws. The door closes quickly.

The hand opens another cupboard, revealing miniature representations of continents: the U.S. on the bottom shelf, Africa in the middle, and South America on top. Small props represent each place. Distinct soundtracks play for each region.

GAËLLE DENIS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I have been filming in the U.S., in
Europe, in Africa, in South America. I
have done a lot.

The cupboard shuts, silencing the sound abruptly. In its place, the sound of PAINT POURING from Mara's coffee machine fills the air. A live-action person, dressed in purple pajamas with painted-on stripes and wearing a large, three-dimensional light blue Gaëlle head adorned with black outlines and painted facial features, stands beside the coffee machine, speaking to Mara.

GAËLLE DENIS (CONT'D)
So, that's why the idea with my producer
to do something shorter and do it by
ourselves in the same way when I do
paintings.

The paint stops. Gaëlle picks up the cup and drinks it in one gulp. A lavalier mic is clipped to her pajama collar.

GAËLLE DENIS (CONT'D)
It's just me and the canvas and the
model.

Suddenly, Petter, live-action, bursts in, carrying Maya in one arm and two full shopping bags in the other, coriander poking out.

PETTER
(to Mara)
Did you stir the soup?

Mara, also drawn in the same style as Gaëlle, sits on the sofa in her pajamas. Her voice recorder placed on the coffee table.

MARA
Was I supposed to?

Live-action Petter scans the room. Everything is wrapped in off-white paper with black outlines: the sofa, the floor, even the kitchen. One of the walls, seems to have shifted closer to the kitchen, narrowing the space.

Petter rushes to the stove, lifts the lid of a pot of soup. Animated bubbles float up. He quickly closes it.

PETTER
Sometimes, I wonder why I even bother.
Who am I doing this for?

MAKE HER SEE

Scenes 15-16

'Nora'

By Denise Hauser

A crisp mid-September morning. Mara stands in the playground, watching Maya seated in a baby swing as ANNA (35), a staff member gently pushes the swing. It's Maya's first day. Maya GIGGLES, her laughter growing with each push.

Mara takes a few hesitant steps away from Maya and towards the gate, but then turns around once more.

Anna waves encouragingly.

ANNA
(cheerfully)
Bye-bye, Mommy!

Maya waves with glee.

Anna continues pushing the swing and Maya's giggles fill the air. Reluctantly, Mara walks to the gate, opens it, and steps through. From a distance, she watches Maya swing, still giggling. Apart from them, the playground is empty. Through the windows, Mara glimpses other children eating breakfast.

MARA (V.O.)
When I think of filmmaking and
motherhood together, what happens?
Disjuncture ... overlaps...

She checks that Maya's stroller is still in place with the others, then walks down the path to the parking lot.

MARA (V.O.)
... a blank page... repetition...
interrupted time... care...

Without the stroller, her hands feel awkward. She slips them into her jacket pockets, continuing down the quiet neighborhood.

MARA (V.O.)
... tears / tears... emergence...
touch... transitions.

Mara slows down, her breath becoming labored. At the car, her chest tightens. She fumbles for her keys, unlocks the car and collapses into the driver's seat. She leans back, trying to focus on her breathing, but the pressure only worsens.

SHUFFLING SOUNDS come from the back of the car, accompanied by the JINGLE of clinking bracelets.

NORA (OFF)
You're not dying.

Mara's eyes snap open. Gasping, she glances in the rearview mirror and sees the video loop figure from Kunsthallen. Mara's panic escalates, but she's paralyzed by pressure on her chest.

NORA (OFF) (CONT'D)
Relax. It's just a panic attack.
Fighting it will only make it worse.

NORA (38) sits in the back seat, calm. She looks remarkably like Mara, but with a wilder, more untamed energy. Her hair falls in loose, curly waves, framing her face. She wears oversized earrings and vibrant, colorful clothes. Bangles on her wrists JINGLE softly.

NORA (CONT'D)
(casually)
I get it. Moving to a new town,
leaving everything and everyone
behind... then trusting strangers with
your kid, all for a job you don't even
care about. It's not easy.

Mara grips the steering wheel tightly, her knuckles turning white, but says nothing.

NORA (CONT'D)
(unbothered)
And who knows if you still have it in
you—after all that time in the baby
bubble, away from the industry, away
from creating.

Mara slowly turns her head, frozen with fear, feeling trapped.

NORA (CONT'D)
And you might never find out either—
stacking shelves at REMA isn't the
dream, is it?

Mara's vision blurs.

MAKE HER SEE

Scene 14

'Kunsthall'

By Denise Hauser

Mara stands at the bottom of the stairs at Kunsthall's lower level, phone pressed to her ear, sunglasses still on.

She paces around a colorful sculpture made from a heap of dirty laundry, placed on the concrete floor in front of a large wall displaying a video loop. A MEDITATIVE SOUNDTRACK fills the space, and the concrete floor amplifies the sound of her FOOTSTEPS.

MARA

(into phone, exasperated)

Look, I know it's been a while. Things have been... insane since Maya was born.

Lisa's responds on the other end. Mara halts her pacing, her gaze drawn to the large video projection, where an enigmatic, goddess-like figure moves gracefully, accompanied by the soft jingle of bracelets.

MARA (CONT'D)

(sighs)

Oh... okay.

Petter enters, cradling Maya in his arms as he walks down the stairs. He settles between laundry sculptures scattered along the steps.

MARA (CONT'D)

(into phone, tense)

Of course I'm not okay with that... But there should be some...understanding. Life happens, you know?

At the bottom of the stairs, Mara listens to Lisa's words as she watches Maya reach for a laundry sculpture.

MARA (CONT'D)

(still on the phone)

Yes, I'm still here.

Petter quickly pulls Maya back just as she nearly touches the laundry art piece, prompting her to start CRYING.

As Lisa continues speaking on the other end, Mara absentmindedly pushes up her sunglasses. She notices the striking resemblance between herself and the projected goddess figure, whose subtle gestures and jingling bracelets seem to convey a wordless communication.

MARA (CONT'D)
(distantly)
I see... that's... a shame.

The figure appears to gesture toward Mara, as if urging her to respond differently to her producer. The sounds from the gallery speakers mingle with the jingling of the figure's bracelets.

MARA (CONT'D)
(distracted)
Well, Lisa, I don't know what to say. I haven't even found a kindergarten spot for Maya.

While Lisa responds, the projected figure points to the right. Mara glances over, spotting a TV screen where the figure reappears, beckoning Mara closer. She takes a couple of steps forward, stopping in front of the screen.

MARA (CONT'D)
(into phone)
I thought, you'd understand what it's like. We're in this together, aren't we?

On-screen, as Lisa speaks, the goddess shakes her head and crosses her hands over her neck, signaling death. The jingly sound from the bangles hangs in the air.

MARA (CONT'D)
(resigned)
I guess that's it, then... bye.

Mara hangs up, slips her phone into her pocket, shaking her head. She strides up the stairs, joining Petter, who is by the gallery entrance, putting Maya back into the stroller.

MARA (CONT'D)
(softly)
My project's dead.

Petter looks at her, confused.

MARA (CONT'D)
She can't find more financing.

PETTER
But, can't you talk to her? Figure out a solution?

Mara, halfway out, turns towards him.

MARA
There's a job opening at REMA 1000. I'll apply tomorrow.

PETTER
 (grinning)
 REMA 1000? The place where dreams go get
 stuck behind the dairy aisle?

MARA
 (sighing)
 This isn't Oslo, with film jobs on every
 corner. We're in our late thirties - I'm
 just being realistic.

PETTER
 (mocking)
 Realistic? You? Since when?

MARA
 How are we going to pay the mortgage?

She walks toward the exit, Petter trailing behind with the
 stroller, his face shadowed with concern.

PETTER
 What are you going to do there, at REMA?

MARA
 (quietly)
 Work. Earn money.

They exit in tense silence.

MAKE HER SEE

Scene 3

'Antenatal Class'

By Denise Hauser

MARA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
... slowing down, love...

Inside, she spots her partner, PETTER (36), waiting. He smiles warmly as she approaches. They share a gentle kiss. He shifts her coat aside, resting his hand lightly on her eight-month pregnant belly.

The room is filled with five pregnant couples, scattered around trying to fasten tiny diapers onto plastic baby dolls. Among them, Mara and Petter. The air hums with CHATTER, some nervous LAUGHTER, and the occasional SNAP of diaper tapes.

The couple next to Mara and Petter are diaper pros. Petter glances over at them and then, with a smirk on his face back at Mara.

PETTER
Finishing up like they've been
practising on Olympic diaper circuits.

They exchange grins as Mara realises she's put the diaper on backward. Petter snorts, trying not to laugh.

PETTER (CONT'D)
Well, that's one way to make sure she
poops her way to freedom.

He flips the baby around like it's a science experiment gone wrong.

PETTER (CONT'D)
Look-see? This little flap here is
supposed to be in the back. But hey,
if you're going for chaos...

Mara and Petter share a laugh as she removes the diaper. He takes over, trying to fasten it with the intense concentration of someone defusing a bomb, but the diaper still looks like it's holding on for dear life.

MARA
Yeah... I don't think that'll survive
a sneeze.

She nods toward the perfectly swaddled doll held by the couple next to them. They offer a supportive smile, but Petter just shrugs with a grin.

PETTER
We'll have thousands of practice
rounds.

The other couple chuckles as well, just as TINA (52), the course instructor, addresses the group.

TINA
Alright, everyone...

The room gradually quiets, except for Mara and Petter, who are still giggling at their baby doll's loose diaper. Tina glances toward the back, her patience wearing thin. She briefly claps her hands.

TINA (CONT'D)
Can the comedians at the back please
give the diapers a rest?

All eyes turn to Mara and Petter. Mara hurriedly places the baby doll on the table... only to misjudge the edge. The doll does a nosedive to the floor.

Petter stifles a laugh so hard that it comes out as a snort. Mara shoots him a playful glare, but she's struggling not to join in. Bending over to pick up the doll proves tricky with her big belly in the way.

PETTER
I've got this.

He scoops up the doll with exaggerated care and places it back on the table like he's handling an ancient relic.

TINA
(stern)
Thank you.

With the room now focused, Tina continues.

TINA (CONT'D)
Now, something you'll have a lot less
time for in the near future is each
other.

The room falls into an uncomfortable silence. Feet shuffle awkwardly. Petter reaches for Mara's hand.

TINA (CONT'D)
So, before your little ones arrive,
it's important to carve out some time
for just the two of you.

Tina pulls out her phone, scrolling dramatically.

TINA (CONT'D)
And with that in mind, I'd like to
play some music.

She taps play. A cheesy ROMANTIC BALLAD begins to echo through the room.

TINA (CONT'D)

Now, I'd like you all to hold hands,
and gaze lovingly into each other's
eyes.

The couples shift awkwardly but comply, reaching for each other's hands. Mara and Petter follow suit, but not without an amused glance.

TINA (CONT'D)

And gently sway to the rhythm of the
music. Remember why you fell in love.
Feel the connection.

Mara's belly poses a challenge. After a few awkward attempts, they find an embrace that works, sort of. They begin swaying, but it feels more like a clumsy shuffle.

PETTER

(whispering)

Do I look like a duck with my butt
sticking out like this?

Mara can't contain herself and bursts out laughing, which immediately sets off Petter. Their half-hearted attempts to dance look more like two people trying to avoid stepping on each other's feet.

MARA

(laughing)

If we don't stop, I swear my bladder's
going to explode!

Their laughter grows contagious, but the other couples are now eyeing them like they've wandered into the wrong class.