Motherhood, mobility and materiality:

Material entanglements, journey-making and the process of 'becoming mother'

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Abstract

This paper is about the entanglements or mutually affecting engagements with the material world that occur in the course of trying to becoming mobile with a small baby. Drawing on 37 interviews with 20 families in East London, we analyse the relationships between discourses of parenting and the material practices of journey--making. Contributing to conceptual work on the new materialism (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008; Braidotti, 2002; Coole and Frost, 2010) and mobility studies (Cresswell 2010; Urry, 2000; Ziegler & Schwanen, 2011) we advance the concept of mother-baby assemblages as a way to understand mobile motherhood, and consider the emotional and affective dimensions of parenting in public that emerge through journey-making. We demonstrate that the transition to motherhood occurs in part through entanglements with the more than human in the course of becoming mobile (including matter, affects, policies and built form). Consequently we argue that approaching motherhood from the perspective of material entanglements advances geographical scholarship by deepening our understanding of mobility as a relational practice.

Keywords: mothering, parenting practice, mobility, embodiment, materiality, new materialism

Introduction

"Jesus Christ…you can't prepare for it, can you, childbirth" (Laura, 2011)

The transition to motherhood typically marks a profound change to one's sense of self and ways of engaging with the world (Bailey, 1999; Miller, 2005). For many, the experience of new motherhood is a shockingly affecting one. This paper is about the practices that constitute the shock of new motherhood, focusing on the entanglements or mutually affecting engagements with the material world that occur in the course of trying to become mobile with a small baby.

Our central argument is that motherhood is an accomplishment realised in part through encounters with the more than human. Through an analysis of how engagements with the material world that occur in the course of journey-making shape mothers' understanding of themselves, we deepen both our understanding of mobility as a relational practice, as well as our understanding of motherhood. In addition to advancing scholarship in mobilities and feminist/family geography, our paper makes a conceptual contribution to the discipline as a whole by highlighting the utility of conceptual work from the new materialism as a means of better-appreciating the role of relations with the non-human in theorising subjectivity. We suggest that the focus on human- non-human entanglements in the constitution of subjectivity as promoted by the new materialism advances scholarship in and beyond Geography by enabling conceptualisations of subjectivity which are richer and more complete. Over the last two decades the spaces and practices of parenting have begun to attract more attention from Geographers (Aitken, 1998 & 2000; Dowling, 2000; Dyck, 1990; Holloway, 1998; Luzia, 2010; Madge and O'Connor, 2005; McDowell et al 2006; Pain, 2006). Within this, early parenthood specifically or what we call the transition to parenthood (roughly from birth to age one) has received attention in terms of work focusing on lesbian couples (Luzia, 2010); the role of the internet in processes of identity-construction for new mothers (Longhurst, 2013; Madge and O'Connor, 2005); the ways parenting relates to class, community, citizenship and gender (Aitken, 1998; 2000; McDowell et al, 2006); and how parenting intersects with discourses about risk (Holloway, 1998; McDowell et al, 2006; Talbot, 2013; Pain, 2006).

Our exploration extends existing work through an analysis of the relations between discourses of parenting (and mothering in particular) and the material practices of journey-

making for new mothers. As such this work both builds on scholarship on the politics of im/mobility (Cresswell, 2010) and responds to calls to apply a mobilities perspective to the study of families (Holdsworth, 2013). Our analysis rests on a robust empirical base of 37 interviews with 20 families in two ethnically and socio-economically diverse neighbourhoods in East London, focusing on experiences of mobility after the birth of a first child. Responding to Creswell's provocation to attend to the affective dimensions of journey-making (Cresswell, 2010; Thrift, 2004), we have noticed a trend in recent geography scholarship to focus on mobility's joyful, liberating, and wellbeing-producing aspects (Latham and McCormack, 2004; Milligan, 2003; Ronander, 2010; Ziegler and Schwanen, 2011). In contrast, we were struck by the extent to which the journeys we encountered were marked instead by slowness, discomfort, premeditation, and feelings of exhaustion (if not dread); thus building on the conceptual work of Adey, 2006; Bissell, 2009; Holdsworth, 2013; and Hubbard and Lilley, 2004. Given that most people become parents at some point in their lives[1], we propose that these more arduous forms of mobility warrant our critical attention for the ways they shape ideas about subjectivity and identity.

Our exploration is divided into five parts. After laying out our conceptual framework we outline the empirical basis of the study. This is followed by an analysis of the creation of mother-baby assemblages; what happens when mother-baby assemblages become mobile; and finally, the transpersonal intensities and that emerge from parenting in public in the course of journey making.

Conceptual Framework

Our conceptual framework draws on theoretical work across the related fields of the new materialism (Coole and Frost, 2010), feminist materialism (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008; Braidotti, 2002) and assemblage theory (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 1983, 2004) to analyse the linkages between materiality, mobility and subjectivity. We are interested in how these bodies of work forefront relationality and help bring discourse-based ways of understanding the world into communication with more materially and affectively-based ways.

Influenced by the work of Deleuze and Guattari, the new materialism and feminist materialism approach both matter and embodied subjects as simultaneously engaged in on-going processes of transformation whilst at the same time being situated within extant categories of social, biological, technological and other forms of classification that can be very

slow to change. Informed by post-humanist philosophy, the new materialism seeks to de-centre the human subject as the sole or primary ontological concern, instead widening the aperture to focus on the different ways that living and non-living matter inter-relate and affect one another.

Working across fields of philosophy, political theory and women's studies, these bodies of scholarship are concerned with the forms of relationality which develop between matter, discourse, affect and politics in a way that "insist(s) on the meaning, force, and value of materiality" (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008: 10). Drawing on a long tradition of feminist scholarship, this work is also centrally concerned with embodiment and embodied experience --as Coole and Frost put it: "corporeality (is)…crucial for a materialist theory of politics or agency" (Coole and Frost, 2010:2). After Braidotti, the new materialism has advanced a conceptualisation of subjectivity understood as "embodied, embedded, assembled of agentic sub-materials within; and through encounters with the material and more-than-human world" (Braidotti, 2002: 62). After this work, we recognise subjects as being in a state of constant (though sometimes gradual) change, as both cultural contexts and bodily compositions shift over time.

Concepts from the new materialism have begun to circulate within Geography over the last ten years (Braun, 2015; Latham and McCormack 2004; Lorimer, 2008; Simpson, 2013; Whatmore, 2006). Fuelled by a broader interest in the Anthropocene, this work has sought to explore the agentic properties of matter and the more than human especially through scholarship on nature-cultures (Braun, 2015; Lorimer, 2008; Whatmore, 2006) and the ways urban form acts upon the wider urban environments of which it is a constituative part (Latham and McCormack 2004; Simpson, 2013). We are excited by these interventions for what they reveal about the importance of non-human actors and actants in shaping our world, and for helping to bring forth more expansive and less human-centric understandings of agency. At the same time, we suggest that this body of philosophy holds utility for geographic scholarship beyond what has currently being exploited. In addition to the ways the new materialism has been engaged to date, this body of theory also constitutes a fruitful and as-yet unutilised resource as a means of conceptualising subjectivity. We extend existing work by showing how the new materialism can be mobilised to generate an understanding of maternal subjectivity as produced through engagements with the more than human. Building on this point, we suggest this body of theory has the potential to provide a fresh and more

dynamic way to engage with questions of subjectivity more broadly, and in so doing re-invigorate an area of the discipline which has grown relatively quiet in recent years.

After Braidotti, we posit the transition to motherhood as a kind of metamorphosis, a stage in an on-going process of identity-making. We argue that this shift occurs in part through relations with the material world on the one hand; and discourses about (good and bad) parenting on the other. Following Karan Barad, we approach subjectivity as produced through engagements (or intra-actions) with material and social worlds in which neither subjects nor the environments they encounter are ontologically prior (Barad, 2008: 132-135) as well as through –in this case-- powerfully affective engagements with one particular being - one's new baby. After Braidotti, we understand motherhood as a case of: "the actualization of the immanent encounter between subjects, entities, and forces which are apt mutually to affect and exchange parts with one another" (Braidotti, 2002: 68), in other words, as the result of continuous comings-together of humans, non-humans and other forces. We balance our concern for subjectivity with an equal concern for more-than-human (in this case material) agency. We approach the "mothering subject" as shifting, relational, and changeable, and stress that we understand the practice of mothering as highly variable across time, space and culture, as well as by factors of socio-economic class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other factors.

In focusing on the relational dimensions of mothering, we draw on both the concept of transpersonal intensities (Anderson, 2009), which we take to mean the work emotions do in connecting people and creating a certain mood or feeling in a space; and that of assemblages. We employ the concept of assemblage to mean parts jointed together that both act on each other and work together to do something (Gill-Peterson, 2013). Drawing on the work of Karen Barad, we employ the concept of assemblages as a means of attending to the "...ongoing flow of agency through which 'part' of the world makes itself… intelligible to another 'part' of the world" (Barad, 2008: 135). After Deleuze and Guattari we employ the concept of assemblage as a means to speak about how things (or more typically parts of things) come together in a "machenic relation" to one another (Ibid). Deleuze and Guattari Illustrate the concept of the assemblage in their work through examples of wasp-orchid assemblages which achieve plant pollination (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 293), baby –breast assemblages which achieve breastfeeding (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983: 50-51 in Hickey-Moody, 2013: 274-275), and horse-rider assemblages which achieve warriors (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 398-399). We

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find the assemblage a useful way to put the new materialism's call to de-centre the human subject into practice, by shifting focus to the ways in which constituent parts within an assemblage plays an active role in completing a task. In this investigation we draw on the idea of the assemblage as a way to show how mothers come together with babies, prams/slings, public transport systems, policies and publics to achieve mobility; and in turn as a means of mapping some of the diffuse agencies at play in those processes. Employing a new materialist approach, we focus on the entanglements which connect bodies and artefacts within such assemblages (or in Karen Barad's parlance, "phenomena"), with the understanding that the practices connecting bodies and artefacts play a central role in creating the meanings these "things" come to have.

In addition to advancing work on subjectivity (and maternal subjectivity in particular) through an engagement with the new materialism and assemblage theory, we also seek to make an intervention in the mobilities literature. In line with Cresswell (2010) another goal of the paper is to develop an understanding of mobility that can inform theorisations of gendered social identities such as motherhood. We argue that mobility is an area though which women come to know themselves as mothers. It is through being mobile that mothers: learn how to use particular objects to hone their parenting skills; introduce their children to new experiences; test out their emerging and evolving identities, and come to know their new "parented" body. As Cresswell (2010) states, "getting from A to B can be very different depending on how the body moves. Any consideration of mobility has to include the kinds of things people do when they move in various ways." (Cresswell, 2010:20). We seek to highlight how the materiality associated with travel "pushes back" on subjects to shape experiences of mobility and identity construction. In line with the new mobilities turn, we theorise mothers' (often limited and fraught) mobility as produced through the coming together of emerging identities, bodies, competencies, objects and landscapes; thus highlighting the highly relational nature of mobility.

Regarding transport geography, Cresswell argues that researchers "…have developed ways of telling us about the fact of movement, how often it happens, at what speeds, and where. Recently, they have also informed us about who moves and how identity might make a difference" (2010:19). Such accounts position movement as an outcome rather than a process or accomplishment. They tell us little about how forms of mobility coalesce or disintegrate. Cresswell goes on to state that at any given historical moment there are constellations of

movement, meaning and practice that make sense together (2010:18). We would argue that this is not quite accurate in that these constellations do not just make sense, rather they are made sense *of*: an accomplishment that requires no small amount of labour. Indeed the character and ultimately tendency toward mobility or immobility is shaped through the doing of parenting in particular circumstances with particular equipment and competencies.

A final point we wish to make in this work is that mobility is a key area in which family is enacted (even if the actual experiences of journey-making for new mothers are often less than ideal). As Holdsworth (2013) has pointed out, there appears to be a dominant assumption that the excessive mobility of the modern Western family is "anti-family". The assumption seems to be that families should be largely immobile: with short family commutes to work and schools and an extended family close at hand. This geographical imaginary of family harks back to a Heideggerian and sedentarist notion that attachment is something that occurs when dwelling in place, rather than on the move (Urry, 2000:133; Cresswell 2006). Contra this image, much mobilities scholarship has shown that attachment can take place both in and through mobility (Cresswell 2006; Edensor 2006; Holdsworth 2013; Spinney 2006, 2010). Holdsworth (2013) in particular has clearly shown that family members often find novel ways to "construct connectedness" despite increasing geographical distances (2013:3). Distance, she argues, "does not necessarily reduce the social and emotional significance of bonds between people, but can maintain these" (Holdsworth, 2013:4). In this paper then we seek to contribute to an understanding of how "bonds between people are created, transformed and retained through movement and mobility" (ibid). Herein we illustrate the ways mobility and immobility can be both complementary and antagonistic to the construction of parental identities and understandings of family.

The study

Our analysis is based on 37 interviews with 20 families collected for a research project on parenting and mobility in three inner-city East London neighbourhoods (Hackney, Islington and Newham) in 2011-2012 funded by the Royal Geographical Society and the University of East London. All three boroughs are characterised by a high degree of ethnic and socio-economic diversity and transient populations with Newham the most diverse and transient and Islington the least.

Participants were recruited through two strategies. In the first, participants were solicited through a facebook site of expectant (mainly white middle class) parents participating in ante-natal classes offered by a parenting charity. With the generous help of midwives based at hospitals in each of the study sites we then recruited more ethnically and socio-economically diverse households through NHS-sponsored, free ante-natal classes [2]. All participants were first-time parents, living in a mix of owned and rented accommodation and aged between 26 and 38. This diversity allowed us to capture a wide range of different kinds of mobilities, with some participants taking frequent and/or very distant journeys, and others taking relatively few; as well as engagement with a range of different modes of travel (including walking, bus, train, tube, bicycle, car, air and virtual).

In a few instances both parents were interviewed, but in most cases it was mothers who took part in the research. Two waves of fieldwork were conducted: the first between May and July 2011 approximately three months prior to the due date of the child, and the second between January and April 2012 approximately six - eight months after the birth of the child. Three households dropped out of the second phase of fieldwork. Our approach of doing successive rounds of interviewing is based on our understanding of the creation of mothering subjectivities as a process that occurs over time. Through a longitudinal research design, shifts in mobility practices and their relationship to emergent identities and practices of motherhood could best be captured. Indeed there were significant differences not only in the extent of networks but perhaps more notably in the experiences of being mobile.

Interviews were approached as a "conversation with a purpose" (Burgess 1984: 102) focusing on themes of: domestic imaginaries; social networks; parenting expectations/practices/norms; materialities of parenting; access and built environment; transnational norms; experiences of mobility; and environmental values. Participants were asked to describe the places they go, people they see and things they do in a normal week. For the majority of participants this worked well with some commenting that having to think in such a way literally gave the interview its narrative as an emerging network linking both physical and social worlds (see also Chakraborty 2009; Wridt 2010). Interviews, which lasted between 1-2 hours, were digitally recorded, transcribed, and then coded and analysed. All responses have been anonymised.

We are aware that these data speak to experiences of parental mobility in just one city: and, moreover, a city that has both unusually extensive systems of public transportation and in

which car ownership is very expensive and on the decline. [3] While this limits the generalizability of our work in some ways, we assert that given that existing literature focuses on either suburban or car-based forms of parenting journeys (Dowling, 2000; Luzia, 2010), a consideration of less auto-dependent forms of parental mobilities both fills an empirical gap and also fulfils an important political objective of highlighting the intersections between lifestage and more sustainable forms of mobility. As well, because of London's role as a key destination for immigration, though the research was conducted "in just one place" our sample is extremely international in character, with 65% of our respondents hailing from nations other than the UK.   As such our data reflect a range of views regarding parenting, journey-making and mobility (albeit in a particularly cosmopolitan setting).

We approach this study with the view that the knowledge herein has been produced collaboratively between researchers and research subjects, with ourselves as researchers playing an active role in the knowledge production process. Moreover, the knowledges reflected here are shaped by the fact that both authors are currently parents of young children ourselves and one of us has lived in London. As such, we collectively have a wealth of lived-practice and everyday experiences of parenting in the South of England of our own through which to make sense of what was recounted to us by participants.   Our own experiences as parents of young children influenced how interviews unfolded and sometimes elicited powerful memories of our own struggles in becoming parents. This diffractive orientation shaped our reactions to the data and ultimately the sense we made of what participants told us.

A final point to address before turning to the analysis is our choice of the term "mothering". Our analysis is situated within a history of feminist scholarship on women's particular challenges with mobility which takes in: spatial confinement and isolation over the life course (Bowlby, 1990); the impact of childcare responsibilities (including the school-run) on labour-market participation and career progression (TUC, 2013; Schwanen, Kwan and Ren, 2008); and scholarship on womens' presence in and use of public space (Spain, 2001; Wilson, 1992). We recognise the important physical and emotional work that fathers do, and after Aitken (2000), Dermott (2008) and Doucet (2006) and recognise that fathering is different from mothering, and cannot be distilled down into mothering. At present, however, structural factors of much-longer maternity leave relative to paternity leave[4] combined with cultural norms which continue to posit childcare as "women's work" mean that the care of young

children continues to be done principally by mothers in the contemporary UK. In our study it was mothers who were both doing the overwhelming majority of the journeying with their child, and crucially, it was they who had the time and inclination to be interviewed post-birth. [5] These were the factors which led us to frame our discussion around mothering.

Mothers and babies assembled

"All the stuff you have with babies.. the amount of stuff is shocking" (Laura, 2011)

Prams and/or slings, nappies, wipes, muslins, pacifiers, onesies/vests. Bottles, breast pump(s), formula. Teething gel, nappy rash-creme, baby shoes-socks-hats-mittens. Toys! Snacks, play mats. Tiny blankets, mattresses, fitted sheets, teddies, mobiles, night-lights. For most the transition to parenthood involves becoming awash in a significantly new material landscape. As the consumption literature has argued, decisions about what to buy for one's baby are bound up with the production of maternal identities (Clarke, 2004) while the act of provisioning has been posited as an expression of love (Miller, 1998). We seek to build on analyses which focus on shopping to think on how particular objects become interwoven with parenting practice and identity in the context of daily use. Our guiding questions are: What are the relations between the different bodies and materials that mothers assemble in order to make journeys; how and why do certain assemblages stabilise (and destabilise); what are the relations between these assemblages and discourses of parenting; and: how do encounters with the material world feed into first-time mothers' (evolving) understandings of themselves?

Prams[6] (also called baby carriages or buggies), can be understood as a "kinship object" (Carsten, 2004) of early motherhood in the UK, both for how they suggest a particular kind of kin-relationship and for their standing as an almost definitional artefact to the practice of early motherhood.[7] Following a Science and Technology Studies (STS) approach (Layne et al, 2010), prams can be seen to reflect and reproduce such values as the benefit of fresh air for babies and the benefit of walking as mode of transport. They anticipate an able-bodied pram-pusher, and destinations (including kin and friendship networks) within walking-distance (whether or not this is the case).

For the moment however we would like to bracket a longer discussion of the politics of pram-design in order to consider some of the different ways that prams, babies and mothers come together to create assemblages. Parenting assemblages form between a wide range of human

and non-human entities from grandparents, other parents, health visitors and paedetricians to night-lights, teddies, nappies, change mats, baby ibuprofen (*et cetera*). Due to space limitations we focus here on what is arguably the key element of mobile mother-baby assemblages: the pram or baby buggy, and attend to the different kinds of agencies and forces that mother-baby-pram assemblages activate.

The profusion of stuff that typically goes along with early parenting makes a problem for mothers and fathers in terms of mobility. Prams partially solve this problem, providing a means to carry not only a baby (or babies), but also a selection of baby-detritus (pacifier, nappies, wipes, change-mat, sun hat, rain gear, change of clothes, bottle, possibly small toys, snacks). Prams relate to discourses about parenting by enabling mothers and fathers to "be prepared", to bring materials for a range of different eventualities. For example as one participant noted of the contents of her pram: "there's a lot of 'in-case' stuff in there" (Clara), hinting at the way prams can help satisfy new mothers' desire to appear competent to themselves and others (Miller, 2005: 62). Similarly, prospective parents such as Mary were told by close relatives that without a pram "…you'll find it very difficult" (Mary).

While the mothers in our study appreciated the ability to carry baby-gear (in addition to baby) that prams afforded, they also expressed ambivalence about the kinds of assemblages that resulted. As one participant noted: "whenever I go out with the pram I do feel a bit like I'm twice the size, and I'm a lot more aware of how annoying that must be for people" (Clara). Or, as another respondent put it:

> It's like when you go backpacking and you have a big bag, and you end up filling
> it no matter what size it is… I've got all kinds of crap in there. So yeah, that's
> another reason I don't really like taking the pushchair, because I feel like I'm a
> bag lady, well, like Bubbles in 'The Wire', you know. He's got these trolleys just
> full of random stuff (Mary).

These passages suggest some of the anxieties about what prams "do" to mothers' bodies, in terms of extending them in ways many participants did not like (or worried others did not like). For some participants, the bigness and unwieldiness of their "prammed"-bodies created a mother-baby assemblage that was felt as cumbersome to the point of being ridiculous.

In addition to anxiety about how prams can extend the parenting-body, participants expressed awareness (and often unease) about the ways prams positioned them in relation to others. As one responded put it: "I didn't want to be there with the sort of buggy and 'sorry

I am a mum', you know what I mean" (Emma), signalling concern about mother-baby assemblages being perceived as a nuisance. To others, such assemblages not only marked maternal identity but threatened to subsume "other-than-parent" aspects of the self. As one participant put it: "If you go around with a buggy you are a mum: no one sees you as you" (Rosa). We suggest that comments such as these highlight the co-constitutive nature of human/non-human relations that develop in early motherhood. In the swirling together of "mum" and "pram", this respondent suggests how her identity as a mum became fixed by her (physical) relation to the pram, by "going around with it".

Prams also came up in our discussions as a way of mediating a baby's behaviour and especially as a means to induce sleep, which was noted as both good for the child as well as giving the mother a moment to relax. Consider the following: "you know that you can push her somewhere, then you might go to the café, and…instead of having to sit there with a baby sleeping on you, she can sleep over there, and you can have a coffee" (Mary). Here, the prams' ability to "take the baby off you", to enable a short break from the physical and emotional demands of caring for a young baby was noted and appreciated; echoing the point that David Bissell has made that for encumbered urban subjects "relaxation .. is the invitation to momentarily relinquish (their) prostheses" (Bissell, 2009: 182). This respondent went on to comment: "she must feel comfortable in there, because sometimes if she's feeling grumpy, if I just put her in there she'll just go to sleep, which is amazing, because she never does that in her cot, or anywhere else" (Mary). Together these comments suggest some of the ways participants in our study used prams strategically to mediate their baby's mood and somatic state (in the case of babies who sleep well in prams), sometimes finding in them unexpected affordances.

For others however, dissatisfaction with prams led those assemblages to destabilize, and these mothers often used a sling either alongside or instead of a pram.[8] Some participants appreciated how slings could ease the burden of travelling on busses and trains, or allow them to extend the capacity of their mother-baby assemblage. For example, while some babies slept beautifully in their prams others would only sleep in a sling (or equivalent), leading to journeys in which a baby spent some of the time awake in a pram, and the rest asleep in a sling (with bags of grocery shopping often taking the baby's place in the pram).[9] Some participants preferred having their babies closer to their own bodies, especially in the context of a dense urban environment and when crossing busy roads. Others cast slings as a more

familiar-seeming form of mobility after the experience of pregnancy. As one respondent noted: "having her in the sling was basically just like she was still inside me", going on to add that " I was very used to being pregnant … I wasn't used to having a vehicle with me the whole time". (Emma)

And for some participants, slings appealed as means of simply reducing the complexity of their mother-baby assemblage. These mothers challenged the received list of things they "must" bring with them and ways they should relate to the detritus of early parenting.   As one participant put it: "I kind of just think, 'well, you know what, if I really need something, I'll work it out when I get there. I'll borrow something, I'll make something" (Clara). We would make two observations about this comment. First, it suggests the sheer physicality of the task of becoming mobile with a baby (by whatever means), and the desire of some new mothers to travel lighter, to scale back their engagements with the "things and stuff" of parenting.[10] And second, it suggests the role that engagements with the material world can play in decisions about "what kind of mother" people want to be. For some, parental competency is sought not by bringing along lots of stuff, but through a mixture of DIY craftiness and making do with less.

This section has examined the reasons why certain mother-baby assemblages stabilise (and destabilise). We have shown how these assemblages can create sometimes unexpected affordances, how material practice and parenting discourse can be woven together, and something of the role that engagements/entanglements with the material world play in processes of identity-making for new mothers. The next two sections consider what happens when mother-baby assemblages become mobile.

Mother-baby assemblages and the materiality of urban environments

 "A body is achieved, not by regarding what it is, but by understanding the movements or problems that animate it" Claire Colebrook, 2008: 54-55

This section and the next focus on the relations between mother-baby assemblages and the environments they both produce and are produced by, drawing on Spinney's notion of **"**embodied cultures of mobility" (Spinney, 2006: 713). Recalling Barad, we figure these encounters as mutually constitutive intra-actions in which neither part is ontologically prior. Building on our argument thus far that maternal subjectivities emerge out of encounters with parental "kinship objects" such as prams, in this section we argue that mother-baby relations

– and the assemblages they form- are structured through their intra-actions with the material contexts of build form. Let us begin by considering how particular kinds of material contexts structure the way mothers and babies relate to their prams.

Prams figured in our discussions about parenting mobilities as both an enabling and disabling force with weight, width and design (especially "fold-ability") all noted as important elements in decisions about how, where, and how much to travel. Although the consumption literature has focused on the role of prams as a status symbol (Clarke, 2004; Miller, 1997), respondents in our study spent a lot of time talking about the problems with their prams.

Given London's high rates of ridership on public transportation (and relatively low rates of car ownership), experiences of public transport were a particular focus in our study. Especially trying were two-pram limits on busses (which sometimes necessitated waiting for several busses in a row until one had space); fears about pram wheels getting stuck between train carriages and the platform; and of course stairs, which nearly every participant discussed as a problem. As one participant said of her parenting journeys: "Yeah, what an absolute nightmare. All the trains over ground are all steps, loads and loads of steps, masses of steps, and I've been carrying the pram up and down these steps like tons of times" (Laura).   Along similar lines, another participant led us through the difficulties of mobilising her mother-baby assemblage for longer, multi-modal journeys:

> getting on and off the train is a total nightmare … (the buggy) doesn't collapse
> that easily so if I have to put it down that's quite difficult when you have to hold
> a baby. What I have done before is that I have got a taxi from here with the car
> seat, but then you still have to carry everything at the station and I am trying to
> save money so the bus will be better. So you have to think about the logistics and
> even just getting out on the day I will have to go and sort the buggy out with the
> car seat with her and then come back up and take all the luggage down and yeah
> it's a pain to be honest (Mia)

For some, the ways prams intra-act with the rest of the urban environment led participants to organise their journeys in particular ways, such as by favouring tube stations with lifts, or shops with doors wide enough to accommodate prams.   Prams could also encourage new mobility patterns, such as for one participant who started frequenting a certain pub "because it's a good place to go with the pram" (Clara)[11].

As feminist geographers and planners have argued, most cities do no cater for children or their carers (Domosh and Seager, 2001; Walker and Cavanagh, 1999; Weisman, 1994). Neither babies (nor their carers) fit within the logics of Capitalism that are largely responsible for shaping built form (such as speed and efficiency). As a consequence, the needs of both babies and their carers are often ignored in the public realm, as Gibson-Graham have noted (Gibson-Graham (2006). The limited space for prams on busses and lack of lifts/elevators in tube and train stations illustrate how urban form is stratified for particular kinds of bodies and material-corporeal engagements, favouring those with the most immediate link to wage-labour. Stairs, narrow-doorways and the like become boundaries as they intra-act with prams, and reveal "the constitutive force of matter and materiality in the social and cultural sphere" (Taguchi, 2012: 270).   Such encounters highlight the extent to which built form anticipates bodies that are not only able-bodied (Imrie and Kumar 1998) but also individuated.

Building on this, we argue that the forms of mediation between mother-baby assemblages and the material environments of which they are a constitutive part—such as masses of steps— mean that such assemblages do not elide with majoritarian forms of spatial practice. They do not move easily through space that is striated for production, and this is felt through bodily experience (Colebrook, 2008; Taguchi, 2012). Because of this, for many parents, a set of spatial practices which for many are "in the background" - the largely routinized work of journey-making—are instead a matter of considerable thought and planning.   Indeed, as in Bissell's work on prostheticised-passengers (Bissell, 2009), some of the participants in our study reported feeling an affinity between themselves and people with physical disabilities, in that both constitute a departure from normative or molar forms of urban embodiment. For some this sense was intensified by additional challenges to mobility from caesarean-sections or other bodily changes from giving birth, or pain (eg bad backs, bad shoulders, "dodgy knees") from baby-carrying, pram-hauling and/or sling-wearing.

Echoing the work of Luzia (2010), the difficulties encountered by going out led many of the mothers in our sample to simply spend more time at home. As one participant put it: "sometimes I do think 'oh, it would be nice to go to Hampstead Heath or da, da, da, or do this…', and I just think, God, I've not got the energy to just deal with a journey [laughter]..I just think it's too tiring" (Laura). One participant confided that she: "can't bear to go down to Tesco with the buggy" (Emma), while another likened getting out the door to a military operation (Esta). This view was echoed in the sentiment: "I guess it's why, like a lot of my

friends here don't really go out…much, because it's just a big production" (Mary). For some, intra-actions between parent-baby assemblages and the built environment led to patterns of **im**mobility, with trips outside the home reduced.

Yet of course, not all the mothers in our study responded to difficulties negotiating the built environment in the same way. While some reacted by limiting travel, others either took such challenges in their stride or simply claimed the space they needed to get around. For example as one respondent said of her experiences negotiating London's many tube stations without lifts: "I just do it, if no one is there to help I just drag the pram up.. it don't bother me" (Rachael). Similarly, Emma shared that prior to having a child she had "… noticed women with big buggies just marching down the road and people are just expected to scatter… and now I realise you have got to do that when you are taking a buggy around with you because nobody else gets out of the way for you otherwise, and you are constantly going 'sorry, sorry'". We suggest that these practices can be read as a form a resistance to normative or majoritarian forms engagements with the built environment (a parent dragging a pram up stairs by herself); as well as social mores around how embodied "rights" to urban space are played out on the ground (mums "marching" through the city).[12]

This section has focused on the consequences of the fact that urban environments are stratified for certain kinds of bodies and corporeo-material engagements for mothers and babies. We have suggested that it is in part through encounters with the materiality of built form (such as stairs and too-narrow doors) in the course of trying to become mobile with their babies that women come to know themselves as mothers (whether by shaping one's practice to avoid barriers or triumphing over them). Having considered what happens when mother-baby assemblages intra-act with the physical environment from the perspective of spatial practice, let us now turn to consider the emotional and affective aspects of these encounters.

Journey-making, mothering in public and transpersonal intensities

*If she's going to start crying I'm going to start panicking (*Tamanna)

Our last section explores experiences of mothering in public in the course of journey-making, focusing on the ways that bodies and non-human actants affect and are affected by one another. With Anderson (2009), Duff (2010), Stewart (2011), Buser (2013) and others, we support the notion that the emotional resonances or trans-personal "intensities", which form between bodies in a given space are a fundamental dimension of everyday experience. In line with this literature and

building on our analysis thus far, we take a new materialist approach to the production of affective environments, reading off Anderson who notes that "affective qualities emanate from the assembly of human bodies, discursive bodies, non-human bodies, and all the other bodies that make up everyday situations" (Anderson, 2009: 80). For the last section we unpick the emotions and transpersonal intensities that can emerge through the coming-together of mothers, babies, other passengers and the material environment within spaces of public transport. Anderson casts affective atmospheres as "a class of experience that occur *before* and *alongside* the formation of subjectivity" (Anderson, 2009: 78). In this spirit, we explore the role of such experiences in the processes by which new mothers come to understand themselves as such.

Journeying on public transit is to travel alongside strangers, often in tight, enclosed spaces. Such experiences can elicit feelings of fear, anxiety, foreboding, and sometimes pleasure. Experiences of public transport are moreover mediated by the built form of the transit system (the size and configuration of the seating, the size and placement of windows, stairs in stations and inside double-decker busses, the presence or absence of grab-bars, etc); the mood, hunger and energy-levels of both babies and their carers; as well as time of day, train scheduling, temperature and lighting within busses and train carriages. The rest of this section considers some of the transpersonal intensities travelling with young babies can generate. We consider three kinds of events: the screaming baby, the scenario of a baby vomiting on a train, and instances of babies engaging with strangers. We suggest that travelling with babies can be experienced as a space of judgement, whilst sometimes create openings to remake understandings about public space.

A common theme in narrations of travelling with babies is the feeling of anxiety, epitomised by the spectre of a screaming child in a confined space. This event, or, after Barad, phenomenon consists of a coming-together of the sound of screams, the materiality of tears, the hot, red face and tense body of the screaming child; the possible/probable anxiety of the baby's carer, and the trans-personal intensity of tension within the confined space itself. Not surprisingly, every participant who discussed such experiences noted the ability of these forces or intensities to generate anxiety. Participants recalled such events thus: "you know what it's like, they suddenly lose it and they are inconsolable and being stuck on a bus where you can't get off because there is traffic, you just feel yourself panicking" (Mia). While another participant noted: "I have taken her in the rush hour to West London to see my business partner a few weeks ago and I just left it a bit too late and got the train back about

six, six thirty and it was just horrific and she was screaming her head off and there was commuters and I thought this is vile … I am never doing this again" (Emma).

One factor which can make situations like this so "vile" is distress about the crying child. Adding to this anxiety though is the anxiety about compromising the comfort of others passengers. As Sara Ahmed avers, this pressure to not disturb "public comfort", or the comfort of strangers (Ahmed, 2010: 584) can exert a powerful force on how comfortable or uncomfortable one feels in a given setting. In a related vein, expressions of anxiety or discomfort being in confined public spaces with a crying baby were sometimes interwoven with feeling judged (and coming up wanting) as parents through subtle, non-verbal messages. As one participant put it "I always get the eyes from people, that: 'Oh, my God, you are a parent with buggy, what are you thinking at this time of the day?'"(Eniko). In a similar vein another participant noted that: "in the early months of having a baby I felt…kind of at the mercies of people sort of judging you …on how good a job you are doing, and when you're on a train with a screaming child you know, and there is people sort of looking at you and whether they are parents or not kind of going: 'can you get your child under control'?" (Emma).

After Anderson, in these examples we see some of the ways that affects, temporalities, materialities, and discourses about what constitutes "good parenting" (and good mothering in particular) can come together to create intense feelings of discomfort for new mothers. This is based on the subtlest of cues from those around them in spaces of public transport. They suggest discourses about maternal competency as relating to the ability to control the actions of others (Miller, 2005) and question the "appropriateness" of babies (and caregiving more broadly) in certain places and times of day: all of which is sensed or intuited by new mothers, and experienced as transpersonal intensities. Whereas some scholarship has highlighted the role of transpersonal intensities in creating a sense of belonging in the city (eg Duff, 2010), these passages suggest how "the felt feelings of others" can also lead to feeling *out* of place.

A second kind of event which produced memorable transpersonal intensities was that of a baby being sick (vomiting) on a train. This scene was described to us thus: "That was a grim journey. She was, yeah, she was sick, and there were quite a few people watching me as I cleaned up the floor of the train, the scabby floor of the train, with my muslin square. Yuck! Sodden muslin square" (Mary). While not as common as the experience of a baby crying, this

event attracted our attention for what it suggests about the role of (agentic) matter in experiences of early parenting. It shows the power of a baby's vomit—stinky, sticky and viscous-- to act on the world around it -causing nearby passengers to shrink away. And it shows the capacity of the "scabby" train floor to repel this parent as she cleans up the sick.

The juxtaposition of the *muslin square*-- an object often used as a cuddle-object by babies in the UK—and the *scabby floor* of the train again speaks to the discomfort (for parents and strangers alike) from the unavoidable folding-in of (nominatively) intimate forms of bodily care into public spaces –such as for example breastfeeding and nappy-changing -- that travelling with young babies can require (Boyer, 2012).[13] At the same time this comment also suggests how parenting in public can create opportunities to challenge and reshape received ways of relating to public space, as cleaning/caring for the floor of a train with one's own materials from home suggests.

On the other hand, in addition to the uncomfortable episodes described above participants also spoke of positive experiences of public transport. For example some noted the capacity of babies to transform the anonymous spaces of train and bus carriages into convivial spaces. One participant told of her baby "making friends with everyone on the bus" (CK), while another noted that "it's quite fun if there are other children on the bus and they somehow… I don't know, they interact in their own way. It's quite funny" (Rosa). On this same theme a third participant observed:

> Participant: I'm not someone who likes talking to people on the Tube or anything, but it's really strange because people will all look at you and the baby, and she's really social when she's looking round, and so people start talking to you, so that's quite a nice aspect of the journey.
>
> Interviewer: right, so it's become social in a way that it never was, yeah?
>
> Participant: Yeah, definitely, yeah, because she forces it. I mean, if someone's reading their book she'll look at them until they give up and play with her, and it's nice, because you get everyone from old ladies to young teenage boys interacting with you. (Mary)[14]

These passages illustrate well how babies approach city life with a very different sense of sociability to that of adults, and show the potential for these alternatives sociabilities to create unexpected (and often positive) affective atmospheres.   Further, they show some of the ways mother-baby assemblages can destabilise received understandings about ways of

relating to others in public, in this case challenging the norm of non-interaction in spaces of public transport in the UK. Indeed each of the three events described in this section –crying, being sick, and socialising with strangers –marks a kind of break or line of flight from normative ways of being –and affective atmospheres-- in spaces of public transport. As these events have the power to create (sometimes extreme) discomfort to mothers and other passengers, they can also create moments of unexpected joy.

Finally, these vignettes echo a theme running through our discussions with new parents about their sense of being in the world as no-longer-individuated, but rather shaped in and through the needs of (both human and non-human) others, and in this sense different from more-mobile pre-parent versions of themselves. For example, some participants differentiated "parents" from "ordinary people", and others discussed the strangeness of "switching camps", of becoming one of the ones "in the way". To one participant, the disorientation of new parenthood was expressed thus:

> Going down the market was always a bit... I felt really... yeah it (the pram) was just too wide and yeah it goes back to my earlier point about those few first weeks where you have this stark transition between your old life and your new life. I was used to just bombing down the market (sic) and getting a few bits and bobs and feeling like everybody else there, and actually *in the first few weeks you are not like everybody there,* and you can't get in with the buggy and you can't use it properly and you are perhaps resisting some...I was resisting my earlier stage of motherhood" (Emma, emphasis added).

Through these quotes we begin to get a sense of how transpersonal intensities which emanate through mother-baby assemblages relate to processes of subject formation. As Anderson avers, affective atmospheres function as a "shared ground from which subjective states and their attendant feelings and emotions emerge" (Anderson, 2009: 78). Through these vignettes, we get a sense for how the "felt-feelings of others" feed into processes by which new mothers come to understand themselves as such. Taken together, the experiences raised here suggest a view of early motherhood as a period of metamorphosis (after Braidotti), a process of becoming something, and someone, different. Motherhood, mothers and babies are often celebrated in our culture, and journeys with babies can sometimes elicit pleasure and joy. Yet our research suggests that the process of coming to know oneself as a mother can also entail feeling marked or "othered", in which one's difference (from one's former self

as well as from others) is perceived through affective experiences. Inextricably linked to this, the transition to motherhood involves care practices based on a range of different forms of emotional and physical labour. And while it is easy to think of caring for babies in positive terms[15], like palliative care, early parenting can also entail negative emotional and physical labour. The anxiety, pressure and frustrations that can accompany the transition to parenthood mark this process as simultaneously positive and negative. These intensities are articulated through encounters with the social and material world through practices of mobility. As we have argued, the difficulties that new mothers experience in travelling with young children can transform what could be a positive or at least neutral experience of care into a much more ambivalent one.

Conclusion

Through an engagement with the new materialism we have argued that maternal subjectivity emerges out of entanglements with the more than human. Our investigation advances scholarship in (and beyond) Geography in 3 key ways. **First**, we advance conceptual work by showing how attending to the role of the more than human has the potential to generate richer and more comprehensive understandings of subjectivity by enabling an expanded understanding of agency. In so doing, we hope to help reinvigorate an area of Geographic inquiry (ie the investigation of subjectivity and identity) which has arguably languished in recent years. **Second**, we advance understanding about the geographies of motherhood by showing how mothers and babies, prams and other actors and actants come together as assemblages, producing both mobility and maternal subjectivities. In turn we show some of the difficulties mother-baby assemblages encounter in the course of journey-making, from the physical to the logistical the affective. By attending to the transpersonal intensities produced through travelling with young babies, we show how subtle reactions from members of the public can create environments which are off-putting to new mothers and serve as a disincentive to journeying outside the home. And **third**, we advance the mobilities literature by responding to the call to attend to the affective and embodied aspects of day to day journey-making by developing an analysis of how experiences of journeying feed into the production of particular kinds of gender identities.

At a finer-grain of analysis our concept of mother-baby assemblages also highlights mobility's relational character, and have shown how mothers' practices of journey-making relate to

discourses of preparedness and risk-management in the UK whereby the success of mobility as a project is one of the ways in which mother's competency is gauged. And we have suggested that the mothering body is materially different from unencumbered bodies. In moving with ones' baby, mothers move further away from their previous selves and forms of mobility, and towards new and much more relational forms. Whilst mobility is typically positioned as a manifestation of independence, the accounts considered here highlight one of the many forms of mobility which do not fit this characterisation.

Finally, we suggest that this study can be seen as a first-cut in thinking about the role of "parenting in public" in wider processes of the production of space. While travelling with a baby can sometimes create anxiety for new mothers, it can also create unexpected affordances and/or lines of flight from majoritarian spatial practice. While a crying baby on a train may create tension, a smiley, outgoing one has the power to break down walls of anonymity and fill a train carriage with joy. Likewise, using a muslin from home to swab a train floor can be read as activating a similarly unexpected kind of care-relation with/for spaces of transport. These examples show the potential of parenting in public to "make space otherwise". We suggest that such an approach has the potential both to advance our understanding of care relations in the public realm (including with/for the more than human), as well as holding the potential for re-conceptualising the public sphere *as* a space of care in ways that bear further exploration.

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NOTES

[1] For example, over 80% of Americans become parents at some point in their lives. http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/charting02/introduction.htm#Who

[2] The final sample of 20 households was composed of 8 Afro-Carribean or Asian-descended non-British; 7 households of white-British; and 5 households of white non-British. Of the 20 households, 8 were in the top income quintile, 4 in the second, 3 in the third, 2 in the second and 3 in the lowest. Out of the 16 households where there were two partners both were heterosexual with 10 married and 6 co-habiting.

[3] Though this is not to say that public transport in London could not be improved, as this paper highlights.

[4] Women are entitled 52 weeks of maternity leave in the UK. Employed women are typically entitled 39 weeks of statutory maternity pay, which is 90% of one's wage for the first 6 weeks and £138 a week for the remaining 33 weeks.   The state currently offers 2-weeks paid paternity leave (in addition to maternity leave), and up to 26 weeks 'additional

paternity leave' if the mother or co-adopter returns to work. APL is remunerated at £138 a week.

[5] We also recognise that this work is also done by other familial and non-familial carers beyond the parent or parents (including foster parents, nursery nurses, grandparents, nannies, etc). While the journeys of these carers are also interesting they are beyond the scope of this paper.

[6] Prams are wheeled devices used for transporting a baby. Babies in prams may be either laying down, sitting up, or (more often) slouching somewhere in-between. Prams come in a range of different designs (and prices).

[7] See After Kinship for more on Kinship objects.

[8] Sings or baby "wearing" is also associated with attachment parenting, though almost no participants in our study identified with this movement. Attachment parenting is associated with keeping one's baby physically close to the parent's body much of the time (as through sling-wearing, co-sleeping and breastfeeding).

[9] Slings were also used in airplane journeys when hands were used to pull luggage.

[10] Yet on this note, respondents also spoke of the physical strain that sling could inflict, through reference to sore backs, "doggy" knees and the like: while assembling with prams can be unwieldy, slings can take a higher physical toll.

[11] Note that many pubs in Britain now serve coffee, tea and meals in addition to alcohol.

[12] …and specifically the expectation that "cumbersome" urban subjects give-way to the unencumbered. See Buser, 2013 for more on lines of flight from majoritarian spatial practice.

[13] See Valentine, 2008 for more on geographies of intimacy.