



CALIBRATION MUM: I PREFER NOT TO

Elisa Jule Braun

3.–26.9.2025

Video, 35 min, 2023 · Print on aluminium Dibond, 2024/25 · Multimedia objects, 2025 · Music: Moritz Stumm · Seating design: Studio Alexine Sammut · Motion Control: Pepe

Feet in neon-yellow sneakers twist at impossible angles, the torso tipping forward as if filled with sand. Clenched hands reach into the air. A head droops from a neck stretched far too long. Resting on the chest, it rolls from left to right and spins around its own axis. If it keeps spinning like this, the head might simply unscrew itself from its host body and disappear for good.

Gradually, the body reassembles. Off-screen, we hear the sound of a zipper—zzzzt—and the somewhat awkward avatar of a young white woman with brown hair is calibrated—but not quite.

For *Calibration Mum: I Prefer Not To*, Elisa Jule Braun wore a motion-capture suit while caring for her eleven-month-old son. She used the suit to document everyday activities—breastfeeding, changing diapers, and rocking him to sleep.

The glitches described above occur when putting the suit on or taking it off: Braun's digital avatar twists and writhes, collapses into a bag of bones, or projects its ghostly image into the digital void. In these moments, certain points of the suit, which are meant to be fixed precisely to particular joints and body-parts, in order to capture their motions in three dimensions, are floating in free space - and "she"—this is how Elisa Jule Braun refers to her digital double, in the third person— is not yet calibrated.

In the following scenes we see *Calibration Mum*, alone or multiplied, in minimalist virtual environments: In a cube tiled entirely in white, a row of seemingly endless *Calibration Mums* change invisible babies. In a glaring desert, the mothers sway in mid-air with crooked smiles on their faces. (Braun jokingly calls the playground the "final boss" of childcare.) Everything around the mothers is stripped away, even the baby—the supposed center and reason for all the actions shown here.

Moritz Stumm's pulsating soundtrack is built from recordings Braun made while wearing the suit. It points to the connections between industrial contexts, modern assembly-line production, and the musical genres that arose from these modes of labor.

Motion-capture technology itself also traces back to industrialization in the early 20th century. Initially, it served to optimize workflow. At the time, workers were reduced purely to their movements for such studies.¹ A similar abstraction could be seen in Braun's avatar-mothers—with their repetitive actions performed in sterile spaces. But all though the aesthetic refers to assembly-line production, Braun reclaims motion-capture for other ends: She documents her own body in motion, creating a self-portrait of sorts, and thereby undermines the objectification and mechanisation of the female body.

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C The splitting into many mums makes other things visible. Firstly, all the other (mothers) who perform care work every day and who are still left alone far too much. Secondly, it makes visible the sheer number of individual operations and tasks motherhood demands every single day. Seemingly so many that one might need to double, even triple oneself, simply to cope.

In this sense, *Calibration Mum* also reflects on estrangement from one's own body, externalized into a digital double. The work reminds me of a few recent series, films, and games in which characters clone or divide themselves—allowing them to take on dirty, dangerous jobs no one else wants to do, or to perform multiple activities in parallel. Or in other cases the self outside of work and the self at work are split apart into two consciousnesses (strange how alien the plural feels here).

Through *Calibration Mum*, Braun gained the ability to care for her child and make art simultaneously. The conflict between maternal duties and artistic practice was no longer absolute. But does this film production really kill two birds with one stone, or does it double the workload? *Calibration Mum*, described by Braun as an “experimental documentary,” deals with this splitting into different personae (artist, mother...) that so often collide in daily life. The work situates itself directly in this zone of indeterminacy, probing the ambivalence within care itself. The avatar's repetitive movements stand, on the one hand, for labor. On the other, nothing truly repeats in the daily encounter with the child, and there is aesthetic, performative potential in it. *Calibration Mum* develops an aesthetic reminiscent of Yvonne Rainer's incorporation of everyday gestures. Braun calls it an “aesthetics of the everyday.” In dialogue with late-1960s feminist discourse, which shaped Rainer as well, the work insists: the personal is political, but also aesthetic.

At the end of the film, the avatar once again crumples onto itself. Watching her, I feel my body sinking into the same heap, like phantom limbs collapsing. I imagine my body fragmenting: my hands clenching into fists, one knee buckling inward, my torso falling to the side. Although the avatar expresses the overexertion and distortion of the maternal body, I enjoy its performance. I enjoy the body horror, the glitches, the monstrosity. The pleasure of becoming dysfunctional. Not: What is the body? But instead: What can it be? Out of ambivalence and constraint, *Calibration Mum* generates new worlds, new forms of perception.

This focus on the sensory apparatus—touch, sight—continues in the other works in the exhibition. *Acute Mum Hand* depicts a twisted hand—the hand as the tool par excellence, through which the history of labor can be read. In this sense, for the artist the hand does not stand for artistic creation but for stress-related complaints. Nor is it formed into a culturally coded, recognizable sign; rather, it reaches out into public space.

Other body fragments are scattered across the room: on smaller screens two eyes wink at us. After the birth of her child, Braun discovered that her eyes suddenly blinked asynchronously, out of sync. A symptom of exhaustion. *Tired Blink Device* is the title of the work: the gaze is tired, the eyelids at half-mast. As a mother, one is always somehow awake, but also always somehow fucked. And yet, despite all this tiredness, the eyes also look back and blink at the visitors: And what about you?

— Andrea Popelka, August 2025
translated by Babette Semmer

¹ The regulation of workplace movements has a long and varied history. In the 1910s, Lillian and Frank B. Gilbreth paved the way for the development of motion capture. For one study, they attached small lightbulbs to a worker's hand and took long-exposure photographs as she performed her tasks. The resulting images—such as one published in their study on motion efficiency—trace intricate lines of light. The worker herself appears only faintly behind these hovering trajectories. This technique led to the development of the “*chronocyclegraph*”, a device designed to optimize repetitive tasks. As Gregory Chamayou observes, this marked a shift in which movement itself became more important than the people moving.