

Motherhood in post-1968 European Women's Writing: Cross-Cultural and Interdisciplinary Dialogues

Abstracts

Keynote Sessions

Ana Luísa Amaral (Poet/Comparative Literature, Porto): Last Will and Testament: Potatoes and Poetry

Departing from my poem 'Last Will and Testament' (1990), I will discuss the relationship between parenthood, as a source of both pleasure and anguish, and poetic creativity, and how that relationship is more strained if the poet is a woman and a mother. I will also discuss the problematic of sexual difference that surrounds the reception of the poems. Along my presentation, I will use other poems of mine in order to address the mother/daughter relation, seen as a kind of female lineage, crossing it with the issues of freedom, autonomy, (self-)respect and love.

Christine Battersby (Philosophy, Warwick): Natality, Materiality, Maternity: The Sublime and the Grotesque in Contemporary Sculpture

Whereas scenes of the nativity and mother–infant bondings tend to be idealised and portrayed in terms of the beautiful, the more physical aspects of birth are not generally aligned with the sublime and are, instead, more likely to be read as grotesque. In recent years there has been a multiplicity of sculptures and other artworks by well-known male artists dealing with the subjects of pregnancy and birth. What is striking in the critical and popular reception of these works is the use of the term 'grotesque' to describe the viewing experience. This term is used even in the most favourable reviews, and in this talk I will explore the art-historical and philosophical background that helps explain this response. Sculptures by Ron Mueck, Damien Hirst, Keith Edmier, Daniel Edwards and Marc Quinn will be considered as I explore the complexities of contemporary portrayals of pregnancy, foetal development and birth.

Gayle Letherby (Sociology, Plymouth): 'To Be or Not To Be' (A Mother): Thinking About Mothers and Others through Literature and Social Science

In this paper I take a critical auto/biographical approach in order to explore aspects of my professional and personal identity with reference to (non/other)maternal status and experience. I am a feminist sociologist with a history of research and writing in the area of reproductive and (non/other)parental identity. Amongst other things I have undertaken research in the areas of 'infertility' and 'involuntary childlessness'; teenage pregnancy and young parenthood; experiences of pregnancy and early motherhood for women with long term health conditions; identity issues for women with polycystic ovary syndrome and on various aspects of perinatal loss. Thus, I have researched and written about mothers, nonmothers and other-mothers. In addition I have always been fascinated by issues of method, methodology and epistemology and have publications about feminist and auto/biographical approaches, about the relationship between the self and other within research and writing and about the process and product/knowing and doing relationship.

In my talk I reflect on my experience of working and writing auto/biographically for consumption both within the academy and outside of it. My personal identities as nonmother and as daughter (recently 'orphaned') are as significant here as my professional identities as teacher, researcher and mentor. Similarly, myself as reader (of academic work and of fiction) is as relevant as myself as writer. Including some examples of my own and others academic and fictional writings on (non/other)maternal status, identity and experience I aim to demonstrate the value of all my activities for a better understanding of the experience of women who mother or not in a variety of social and material circumstances. (NB: I write various words in single quotation marks to highlight both the problems of definition and the lack to adequate words to describe some statuses and experiences).

Parallel Sessions 1, Thursday 24 October

Session 1a) Maternal Subjectivities and Becomings

Katarina Carlshamre (French, Stockholm): The Use of Non-mothers in the Reinvention of Mothering: Examples from Two Recent Swedish Mother-Narrative Novels

For many women, the transition to motherhood is experienced as a time of deep and radical destabilization, where the old clear-cut subjectivity is lost. This inner disruption does not only threaten to drive the mother into an alienated position of patriarchal motherhood, but it also, as Lisa Baraister (2008) points out, carries the potential for a new kind of subjectivity and for the exploration of new ways to be a mother. In my presentation I will give examples of how the endeavor to create oneself anew as a maternal subject is represented in two recent Swedish mother-narrative novels (*Bitterfittan*, 2007, and *I en familj finns inga fiender*, 2009). I will show how the mothers' relation to their own mothers influences their mothering position and how their struggle to find a new maternal position goes via an identification with non-mother characters. I suggest that this process acts both as an operation of differentiation from, and as a reconciliation with, the protagonist-narrator's own mother, and that the non-mother functions as a vehicle in the young mother's attempt to find a different way to exist as a mother.

Alice Podkolinski (Comparative Literature, University College London): Becomings and Goings: Mapping Public and Maternal Spaces in Doris Lessing's *Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five*

In Doris Lessing's *Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* (1980) borders are crossed; whether spatial, geographical or embodied, borders are repeatedly, and often painfully, crossed by the protagonist of Lessing's fiction, Al•Ith. These crossings catalyse the explicit 'becoming' of the subject. Following the work of Deleuze and Braidotti, I will map this 'becoming' through the protagonist's travels between zones, communities, and subjectivities. My mapping of the protagonist's movements not only allows me to explore the complexities of nomadic subjectivity, but also to interrogate the positively liberating potential of such a subjectivity, viewing the positive and negative aspects of change and movement not as sentimental emotions, but as varying liberatory degrees of transformation and development. My paper uses this position to address the treatment of Al•Ith as a procreative space; the borders of her external and internal space are repeatedly crossed through the child she is forced to bear and give up. By mapping this transgression of maternal space and borders, I will interrogate contemporary issues concerning woman's maternal capacity currently challenged by our advanced capitalist society; I will examine both the critical implications of the space we occupy, and how the space in us is occupied. My paper will itself travel across terrains of philosophy, critical theory and literature, to explore the critical potential of a nomadic understanding of subjectivity.

Emily Blewitt (English, Cardiff): From the Scaffold: Labouring Mothers in Contemporary Women's Writing

This paper takes Polly Clark's poem, 'Beheaded' (2009), as its opening moment. Clark's poem presents childbirth as an execution. Labour is something which happens to her speaker rather than an action in which she fully participates, and it is punishment for a transgression which is never revealed. It does, however, cause the speaker to be celebrated by 'the people', and resembles an anaesthetised birth in that the speaker is both conscious and 'removed'. By balancing its subject precariously between past and present, birth and death, and passivity and agency, 'Beheaded' encapsulates the anxieties expressed by contemporary British women writers who represent birth as both transformative and destructive for the maternal subject. Clark positions her labouring speaker at the scaffold. The punishment this maternal subject incurs results ultimately in her death.

Such positioning seems far removed from the considerable medical advances in the management of childbirth seen during the past century – advances which have reduced maternal and infant mortality rates, and have searched for reliable and effective pain relief for women. However, some of these methods also have rendered women unconscious, passive, and unable to remember their labours. By uncovering how medical discourse has diagnosed, examined, obscured and exposed birth, and by foregrounding its interrelationship with literary discourse, this paper will explore treatments of the labouring writer and her 'beheading' by post-1968 women novelists. Contextualising its discussion in relation to Mary Shelley's 'birth myth' *Frankenstein* (1818), it will move on to examine contemporary representations of birth in Margaret Drabble's *The Millstone* (1965), Elizabeth Baines's *The Birth Machine* (1983), A.S. Byatt's *Still Life* (1985), Jenny Diski's *Like Mother* (1988), and Joanna Kavenna's *The Birth of Love* (2010). It will argue that women writers construct representations of birth from a 'scaffold' comprised of cross-cultural dialogues between literary, medical and feminist discourse, and that by so doing they invite readings which both dismember and reassemble the maternal subject.

Session 1b) Alternative Mothering: Nonbiological and Childless Mothers

Alison Rice (French, Notre Dame): Childless Mothers: Personal Perspectives from Francophone Women Writers

In strikingly personal texts, a variety of contemporary Francophone women writers evoke their imagined offspring. The first-person narrator of *'Musulman' Roman* [*'Muslim' Novel*] by Algerian-born Zahia Rahmani employs the conditional past tense in an exploration of what would have been the fate of the child she never had. In an epistolary text titled *À l'enfant que je n'aurai pas* [*To the Child I Will Not Have*], Vietnamese-native Linda Lê uses the familiar 'tu' form to directly address the child she knows she will never be a mother to. Lê brings her letter to a powerful conclusion when she tells this unborn child that he is closer to her than ever, that he *regenerates her*, that he is gifted with life. This final affirmation comes amidst another assertion, that this letter is destined not only for her child but also other women who have opted not to 'conform to the laws of nature' (65). In *Inassouvies, nos vies* [*Unfulfilled, our lives*], Fatou Diome from Senegal shows that deciding not to have children is often not a respected option in France. The protagonist Betty testifies to the fact that 'well-intentioned people remind her that her biological clock' is about to tick its last (77). While the publications by Rahmani and Lê grapple with the unrealized possibility of giving birth to an actual son or daughter, the novel by Fatou Diome focuses on the waning potential of a younger woman to become pregnant. The three texts combine to formulate the provocative suggestion that even if these women writers are childless, they are nonetheless mothers.

Pamela Fox (English, Georgetown): The 'Telling Part': Mirrors, Mothers and Markings in Jackie Kay's Autobiographical Writing

Although acclaimed Black Scottish writer Jackie Kay only published a formal memoir several years ago, all of her work—be it poetry, fiction, screenplays, or children's books—registers her shifting understanding of her own particular lived 'difference,' what she calls 'a sense of being outside with being inside Scotland' (Gish 180): born to a Nigerian father and white Highlands mother; adopted by white Scottish radical working-class parents; a lesbian; and a mother herself. Attracting attention from multiple scholarly fields—Black diaspora studies; queer studies; adoption studies—her prodigious body of writing explores a host of concerns while remaining preoccupied with a persistent question: how transracial adoption 'marks' her fluid subjectivity yet also serves as a model of postmodern identity formation writ large. Focusing on Kay's earliest and latest autobiographical texts, *The Adoption Papers* (1991) and *Red Dust Road* (2010), this paper, as part of a larger project, begins deciphering her contribution to larger feminist conversations about the complex stakes in transracial adoption. Kay's writing sympathetically invokes yet ultimately challenges narratives that deem adoption—especially in its transracial form—a permanently traumatic loss of biological and cultural origins producing a splintered self that needs to be made 'whole.' In doing so, I argue, her work also challenges both dominant and some feminist representations of motherhood that increasingly refetishize 'biological' motherhood as 'real' motherhood, often via the exploding market in reproductive technologies, and thus often recenter largely white women's racial and class privileges, even as other feminist work also importantly argues for poor women of color's right to 'mother.' As a feminist 'participant critic' in the transnational adoption world, I'm attempting to unpack these intricate relations of class, race, sexuality, and geopolitics, and here, I'm claiming that these two experimental texts should be seen as landmark works not only in adoption literature but in the theory and literature of motherhood itself, contesting a curious yet persistent divide between the two.

Originally a BBC Radio3 broadcast that Kay envisioned 'a kind of novel in poems' (Gish 178), *The Adoption Papers* narrates the story of her own adoption and eventual search for her birth parents from three intertwined points of view: adoptive mother; imagined birth mother; and birth daughter/adoptee as both child and adult. I am particularly interested in the poems' suggestive analogy between bodily markings of racial difference and the adoptive mother's spoken revelation of her daughter's adopted identity: the so-called 'telling part' (Chapter 6 title). Drawing on but also complicating Karla F.C. Holloway's theory of black women functioning for each other as 'mirrored contemplations' of the racialized gendered self, along with Sandra Patton's more ethnographic approach to the literal and emblematic 'birth marks' of transracial adoption, I read this text's varied 'mirror' tropes surrounding the adoptee's marked body against its catalogue of official documents—the secretive network of adoption 'papers'—to uncover Kay's simultaneous longing for and destabilization of 'natural' claims to motherhood. *Red Dust Road*, charting Kay's more recent journeys to Nigeria to find her birth father, both conjures and recalibrates *The Adoption Papers* not only through its collage structure

interspersing memories, even prior scenarios, of her known birth and adoptive mothers within the larger prose narrative but also in its strategic redeployment of mirror imagery. This work equally demystifies the often privileged status of birth 'ties' while also insisting on the very necessity of launching this particular search, seeking moments of "recognition" rather than totalizing identification with her Nigerian heritage. In both texts, Kay challenges the category of 'realness'--motherhood; black womanhood; Scottishness--without eradicating it altogether.

Orly Corem (Clinical Psychology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem): Maternal Identity in Raising (Non-Biological) Mothers in Israeli Lesbian Families

'I love David (Sharon's non-biological son) from my heart, but I love Maya (Sharon's biological daughter) from the stomach' ('Tina'). The Israeli same-sex families' community is young, and emerged dramatically in the last ten years, partly as a consequence of the Israeli policy of encouraging the birth of (Jewish) children. However, the raising (non-biological) lesbian mother in Israel is facing personal and cultural challenges in forming her identity and asserting her presence. Qualitative analysis of twenty-four in-depth interviews were held to explore the phenomenological experience of these mothers and to explore their identities, their subjective experiences and the narratives they choose facing the cultural and introverted messages regarding motherhood and their selves. My own experience and an auto-ethnographic reflection, as a (one raising and one biological) mother to my two daughters, is intertwined in this narratives as well. This research reveals how Israeli lesbian mothers construct a complex maternal identity, combining synergic natural and nurture narratives. In their narratives, the mothers employ different personal and cultural backgrounds, drawing from lesbian, feminist, Jewish, and Israeli identities; National history (e.g. Holocaust), social and political activism, queer theory, and biographical narrative, all intertwined together. On one hand the raising (non-biological) lesbian mother challenges the institution of their 'biological destiny' by creating a parental role without the biological and genetic rhetoric embedded in it. However, the research shows that lesbians in Israel feel the same pressure to become biological mothers as Israeli heterosexual women and they embrace a 'natural' narrative in the decision to become pregnant; they use biological/non biological metaphors when describing their parental experiences.

The research indicates quite clearly that non-biological mothers in Israel see themselves as full participants in the upbringing of their partner's children, through construction of 'spiritual birth' of their non-biological child. The daily routine of care taking their children had diminished most of their former fears regarding their parental position. However, these mothers experience a dissonance between inwardly feeling like 'true mothers', as opposed to discouraging and oppressing responses of their maternal identity from their family of origin and work colleagues. Sometimes the mothers are even confronted by diminishing phrases from their non-biological child, such as 'step-mother' or even 'untrue mother'. In certain cases, such as after separating from their female-partner, some women do explicitly express feeling differently connected to their biological child, using physical idioms (e.g.: 'I know him from inside'). The mothers struggle to balance between two (and more) conflicting narratives, while forming their identity as raising mother. Beside the questions arising for lesbian families, the research also highlight general issues of maternal identity and subjective experience in light of cultural influence.

Session 1c) Motherhood as Resistance in a Reality of War

Tamar Hager (Education and Gender Studies, Tel Hai): Creating a Maternal Voice: Writing Autobiography as a Feminist Site of Resistance

How can I employ my writing as a political tool to tackle my conflicting experiences as a writer, a mother, a college teacher, and a feminist activist? How can words combine the routine exhausting work and pleasures of motherhood to Naomi and Shira, my daughters; my struggles against injustice done to the Arab minority in my country, torn by unrelenting conflict; and the need to turn my back on all these obligations, efforts and deeds in order to write? This paper attempts to answer these challenging (aggravating) questions by examining my writing as a site for cultural and political struggle and negotiation with these allegedly contradictory social roles.

In the first part of the paper I examine the normative expectation of mothers to identify with the maternal role and to exclude parts of their existence as human subjects and social agents. Consequently, any political feminist activism, mainly activism which involves resistance and thus social and political hazards as well as an extended amount of work outside home, may be considered a threat to maternal work. But whereas one could argue that activism is, in fact, a social and communal extension of the parental role, writing is over and over again perceived as a neglect of motherly duties, and thus, in opposition to the institution of motherhood. Well known women writers have often been childless, leading to the

formulation that woman can either write or they can have children.

Following the work of European feminist literary scholars as Elaine Showalter, Liz Stanley and others, I introduce feminist autobiography as a literary form which has enabled me as mother-writer-activist to negotiate with this either/or theory and to create a space where social, cultural, political, and psychological conflicts and contradictions can intermingle, creating an alternative maternal subjectivity and voice.

Miri Rozmarin (Women's and Gender Studies, Tel-Aviv): Too Close to See: Witnessing Silence and Maternal Subjectivity

When living in a militaristic society, motherhood is a site of conflicting demands. In this paper I suggest that this conflict is part of the conditions, which prevent mothers from living their motherhood as an aspect of their subjectivity. I specify three types of vulnerability that shape the conditions, as well as the experiences of mothers. By reading the biblical story of Lot's wife, I then show how the maternal silence which marks the inability of many mothers to take the position of the accountable subject, can be an ethical form of witnessing. Moreover, this ethical stand can serve as a basis for a different lineage between mothers and daughters.

Parallel Sessions 2, Friday 25 October

Session 2a) Epigenetics and New Perspectives of Inheritance

Clare Hanson (English, Southampton): Reconfiguring Inheritance: *Red Dust Road* as a Post-Genomic Text

'Red Dust Road is really about what makes us what we are, nature, nurture. I think of myself as being made from a mixture of porridge and myth! I think that if I were making a family tree, it would have my adoptive parents on it and their parents too, and it would be more complicated and intricate than the straightforward biological blood line.' (Jackie Kay, bookgroup.info interview)

This paper will argue that Jackie Kay's acclaimed memoir *Red Dust Road* (2010) is a text which engages profoundly with the genetic imaginary and at the same time pushes at the limits of its explanatory power. The text is structured around Kay's quest to find her birth parents and draws strongly on the metaphors and narratives, in other words, the literary ways of knowing, that have been closely entwined with the understanding of biological inheritance over the last hundred years. In opposition to the tropes of blood, genes and the Darwinian tree of life, the text invokes the concept of cultural inheritance which has frequently been mobilised to challenge genetic determinism, particularly in the context of non-normative family structures (Butler 2005, Haraway 1996). So far, so familiar: we are used to this dichotomy between genes and environment, nature and nurture. Yet the memoir strikes out into new territory, literally and metaphorically, as Kay explores the landscapes in which her birth parents grew up and reflects on the physical and emotional environments that have shaped her identity and that of her adoptive brother. In this respect *Red Dust Road* resonates with the insights currently emerging from epigenetic science, which has shown that human beings are not the result of a genetic template which is fixed before birth, but are mobile and dynamic works in process, interacting continuously with their environment. Epigenetic research has also shown how the biosocial environment gets under the skin and is written on the body, to borrow a phrase from Jeanette Winterson. Kay's text not only chimes with this understanding but, in detailing the subjective experiences and imaginative investments of adoptive and biological families, illuminates the profound cultural implications of moving beyond the genetic imaginary.

Gabriele Griffin (Women's Studies, York): Identity Matters: Donor Offspring's Narratives of Self and their Implications for Epigenetic Debates

Narratives of origin are critical to one's sense of identity as stories ranging from Greek myths such as that of Oedipus to adopted children's desire to trace their biological families testify. Different cultures require diverse degrees of particularity and frequency when it comes to accounting for one's origin, and as Cavarrero (2000) and Butler (2005) indicate, certain normativities apply to the kinds of accounts one is expected to provide. Against these normativities, changes in family formations and kinship relations have required new ways of articulating the self, particularly from those whose narratives do not fit with conventional stories of origin. Thus over the past thirty years or so, we have seen increasing numbers of what are known as 'donor offspring' come of age and articulate their sense of self in relation to the specificities of their stories of origin.

This paper examines auto/biographical accounts of self by 'donor offspring', published online on blogs and websites of

donor offspring associations, in order to analyse the intersection of origin, identity, and narrative convention in relation to notions of genetic inheritance. It argues that donor offspring face particular challenges when asked to tell their story of origin as there is as yet little by way of convention to support that telling. The conventions that do exist and are reproduced, all point to particular ways of understanding the possibilities of one's genetic 'inheritance' that are radically at odds with the insights that developments in epigenetics provide regarding the relationship between nature and nurture (Fox Keller 2010; New York Academy of Science 2010). These conventions are underpinned by agendas, of those who on the relevant websites for instance, that seek to influence debates on reproductive technologies based on particular views of genetic inheritance. The paper will argue that a detailed understanding of the meaning of genetic inheritance as it emerges in donor offspring narratives is necessary in order to produce meaningful and productive interventions in epigenetic debates which need to mediate the gap between epigenetic knowledge and donor offspring's articulated perceptions of genetic inheritance.

Ruth Cain (Law, Kent): Risk, Choice and the Toxic Womb: 'Obesogenic' Maternal Behaviour and the Rhetoric of the New Degeneration

In an era of increasing emphasis on personal responsibility the 'obesity epidemic', officialised in global health warnings, threatens to swamp the West in the dire consequences of its citizens' overindulgence and poor choices. With childhood obesity identified as a particular threat, maternal feeding behaviour from conception onwards has come under scrutiny for its obesogenic potential. Epigenetic research now suggests that the mother's poor diet and excessive intake of calories can permanently damage not only the fetus itself but the genetic coding it carries, thus creating a gothic narrative of looming degeneration which performs complex cultural and social functions. While mothers have always been associated with the weakening and poisoning of children and the national body, the new narrative of degenerative uterine toxicity focuses attention on maternal individual choice as productive of a 'bio-underclass' and thus diverts attention from the many structural and socioeconomic associations of obesity with poverty and particularly inequality. As government and child protection agencies in the UK and US attempt to discipline parents through surveillance and prosecution, the determinants of obesity as a 'disease' of 'overindulgence' in consumer cultures founded on 'indulgence' are too easily avoided by political and scientific focus on the abject body of the obesogenic 'underclass' mother.

Session 2b) Maternal Taboos and Transgressions

Julie Rodgers (French, Maynooth): Maternal Counternarratives in Contemporary Women's Writing in French

This paper will argue that in response to increasing pressures on women to perform as perfect mothers (as identified by Badinter 2010), a series of maternal counternarratives (recounted in the first person by the mother herself) has begun to emerge in contemporary women's writing in French (post 1990) whose transgressive accounts of mothering pose a direct threat to and aim to undo normative discourses of motherhood. The scope of these maternal counternarratives ranges from: feelings of repulsion at being pregnant and disgust with the physical changes brought on by pregnancy; over-mothering, emotionally suffocating the child, exerting excessive control over the child's life; ambivalent mothering, both repelled by and drawn towards the child; incompetent mothering, not meeting the child's basic needs; outright rejection of motherhood, aborting or refusing children; mothers who abuse their children, psychologically or physically or both; and, finally, at the extreme end of the scale, infanticide. This paper will focus not only on what is happening in these maternal counternarratives but also why this 'backlash' is taking place. Furthermore, it will examine the extent to which maternal counternarratives can be considered a step towards 'feminist mothering' (O' Reilly, 2008), that is, a form of mothering that is empowering to women. Authors whose work will be referenced in this paper include: Abécassis (2008); Azoulai (2002); Brisac (1996); Chen (2008); Despentès (1999); Kramer (2009); Nobécourt (2002); Olmi (2001); Pingéot (2007); Sautière (2008).

Antonija Primorac (English, Split): 'I gave you your life; I can take it away': Unveiling Motherhood Taboos in the Novels of Slavenka Drakulić

In her most recent novel *Optužena* (2012) [*The Accused*], Slavenka Drakulić continues her exploration of the taboo aspects of motherhood begun in her then-controversial study of a daughter's erotic obsession with her promiscuous mother in *Marble Skin* (*Mramorna koža*, 1989; trans. 1994). A later novel *As If I am Not There* (*Kao da me nema*, 1999; also translated as *S. A Novel About the Balkans* in 2000) gives voice to the repressed story of women victims of rape-as-war-crime in Bosnia, focusing on an individual's attempt to reconstruct her self-identity and desire. Examining yet

another taboo subject, the emotional trauma and physical abuse of unwanted daughters by their own mothers, in her latest novel Drakulić carefully anatomizes a history of hate and abuse through three generations of women that ultimately leads to matricide. Combining the voices of two narrators – the restrained voice of the omniscient narrator that documents the abuse perpetrated by the mother and the grandmother, and the voice of the Accused, the daughter who refuses to speak in her own defense, protecting her mother’s secret madness, violence and obsession even after killing her – Drakulić dissects the taboos of unwanted pregnancy, maternal abuse and their tragic consequences. Arguing that the resonance of Slavenka Drakulić’s provocative fiction, at home and abroad, derives from her multifaceted public persona - as a feminist icon of 1980s Yugoslavia, an expatriate Croatian author famous for her critique of war and nationalism, and an internationally recognized journalist and commentator - this paper seeks to address the following questions: what is the role of Drakulić’s fiction in opening up public debates on taboo aspects of motherhood in Croatia? Can we also detect in these novels a complicity with sensationalist approaches to women’s sexuality in the media? Does Drakulić’s representation of motherhood taboos reflect specific national/regional/local ideologies and socio-political contexts, or do they have a wider, transnational resonance?

Jean Anderson (French, Victoria-Wellington): ‘The impossible crime?’ Incest, Mothers, Sons and MILFs

The majority of recent women’s writings about incest (eg. Despentès, Angot) could be read as revenge or affirmation literature, in which the abused woman tears away the veil of silence that has concealed the father-daughter relationship and in so doing asserts a degree of power. In such a scenario, the mother’s role is often reduced to that of a shadowy background figure, unknowing, or knowing but unhelpful. Indeed, the mother’s roles as sexual companion to the father, and/or maternal carer, are negated: the sexualisation of the (immature) female body is accompanied by a desexualisation of the mature maternal figure.

As Fabienne Guiliani has pointed out, instances of female-led rape or mother-son incest have left, historically speaking, almost no trace. Citing physiological reasons encoded in French law until 1992, as well as deeply-anchored notions of the maternal, Giuliani describes this as ‘the impossible crime’. In Freud’s eyes, mother-son incest was a universal taboo – although his analysis did not fully explore the possibility of mother-led incest. Arguably, these same notions of gender roles are still widely held: the maternal body remains strongly linked to (paradoxical) notions of vulnerability and nurture. At the same time, however, the internet reveals to anyone who cares to venture into its web hundreds of thousands of images of sexualised older female bodies, not only of mothers (MILFs) but of grandmothers (granny porn). Women appear to be willing partners in such couplings, and there are signs of the phenomenon in attenuated form in everyday culture (notably via the figure of the cougar and her toy-boy). Marrit Ingman traces the increasing emergence of the MILF to the 1999 film *American Pie*, but points out that it builds on *The Graduate* (1967). Within the French context the classic representation is Colette’s Chéri: however the older woman is not a mother, nor is Chéri her son, other than symbolically.

Whatever the origins of the increasing visibility in popular culture of the sexualised mother or grandmother, a number of questions need to be explored, amongst them the question of ‘authorship’, which we might extend here in the context of internet porn, to include willing participation (something that is difficult to measure due to the performance aspect of such ‘texts’). Psychologists and criminologists are increasingly interested in the phenomenon in real life. Literary representations – which are rare – still tend to be male-authored. A small number of women writers are tackling the subject, although somewhat indirectly, but narratives with a female focalisation are few and far between. We might hypothesise that the interplay of power relations in the depiction of mother-son incest is a difficult one: how might a female author represent a female-abuser focalised narrative, when incest is traditionally associated with male power and the maternal body is essentialised into a nurturing, sexually passive role?

Session 2c) Motherhood, the Law and the State

Jenny McKay (Independent scholar): Mother Figures and the GDR in the Novels of Julia Franck

Women’s writing in German has long explored what it means to be a mother. Often, these explorations have been intimately wedded not just to the changing role of women in German society, but also to reflections on the traumas of German history, to Nazism, division, and, more recently, life under Socialism in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). One author to examine motherhood against this broader cultural and historical backdrop is Julia Franck (b. 1970, East Berlin). Franck’s novel *Die Mittagsfrau* (2007) (published in English in 2009 as *The Blind Side of the Heart*) won the most prestigious of Germany’s literary prizes for a story that combines an examination of a woman’s abandonment of

her child with a vivid depiction of life for women in Germany in the early twentieth century.

Whilst Franck in *Die Mittagsfrau* only briefly marries her commentary on motherhood with a portrayal of life in the former GDR, this dynamic takes on a more central role in her most recent novel *Rücken an Rücken* (2011) [*Back to Back*]. In *Rücken an Rücken*, totalitarian aspects of life in the GDR – State violence, artistic censorship, and restriction of movement, for example – frame the novel's often extreme representations of maternal ambivalence and cruelty. In this paper, I thus examine how questions of motherhood are mediated by Franck's engagement with the GDR and its legacy for contemporary Germany. Specifically, I ask to what extent these mediations create a platform for thinking about motherhood that has application in disciplines beyond German literature. I contextualise this discussion by drawing upon the novels and essays of Franck, upon data as to the role and status of the mother in the former GDR and in today's Germany, as well as upon insights from contemporary motherhood studies.

Nicola Corkin (Politics & International Relations, Aston): 'Lord Justice, May I Introduce My Mother'

What does it mean, constitutionally, to be a mother? The role of the mother within society is not only influenced by the social perceptions but also by the legal and political perceptions surrounding and defining the position. This paper looks at the change in the role of the mother from the perspective of constitutional courts by combining data drawn from content analysis and interviews. In employing a sociological institutionalist framework the paper tries to answer the question: 'What is it to be a mother?' if a constitutional court in Europe asks the question. Detailed concentration will be paid to the jurisdictions of Germany, Austria, Albania and Italy as their constitutional court framework is comparable whilst their starting points and cultural perceptions on the role of mothers differ widely. The most interesting aspects of the constitutional court perceptions of motherhood lies, as the paper finds, in the commonalities of the legal perception more than in the expected differences among the countries. A convergence between the constitutional perceptions and the adherent legal rights and duties is shown to develop in the sample group of countries as well as in the wider area of Europe.

Anna Smajdor (Ethics, East Anglia): Motherhood and the State

Reproductive rights and responsibilities are often assumed to flow inexorably from fixed biological facts: the woman who gives birth is a child's mother; children have exactly two biological parents, one of each sex. But when we can split parenthood into the genetic and the gestational, which is 'really' the biological parent? As new technologies develop, these questions proliferate. The World Health Organisation describes reproductive cloning as 'the replication of human individuals' and 'contrary to human dignity'. Yet the philosopher John Harris argues that reproductive cloning is a plausible exercise of the right to reproduce. In the new reproductive era, one person's reproduction is another person's replication.

When the very definition of 'parent' and 'reproduction' are open to dispute, the state is obliged to take a stance. Reproduction becomes a question of political, social and ethical negotiation, rather than of biological fact. Currently in the UK, explicit state interest in reproduction is limited to a quasi medical concern for the benefit of mothers and babies. Hence, for example, the pressure on women to reproduce earlier in life. Yet women are increasingly showing that their values do not map neatly onto this medical model. Women are willing to trade medical benefits for other kinds of advantages in their reproductive decisions. And increasingly, technology offers them the opportunity to do so. Yet through media and medical publications, as well as through political and regulatory mechanisms, women are exhorted to make choices that harmonise with the medical, political, economic or ethical preoccupations of those in power. The next few years offer a crucial opportunity to think about reproductive justice, to define what we mean by reproduction, and to formulate a framework within which to negotiate and balance state and individual interests in reproduction.

Session 2d) Motherhood and Contexts of War

Maria-José Blanco (Spanish, Kings College London): Motherhood at War: The Impossibility of the 'Good-Enough Mother'

This paper will focus on three novels written by three Spanish writers: *The Time of the Doves* (1962) by Mercè Rodoreda, *Stone in a Landslide* (1985) by Maria Barbal and *The Sleeping Voice* (2002) by Dulce Chacón and the impossibility of being a good mother during times of conflict. These three novels portray working class women who had never had an easy life but who suffered even more during the Spanish civil war (1936-39) and the post war years. These women had to suffer fear and hunger, some lost their children during the conflict, some suffered imprisonment, some were executed. I

will be analyzing these novels looking at the mother-child relationships in the novels and the idea of the good-enough mother developed by D.W. Winnicott. Following the development in Spanish literature of the portraying the everyday life of citizens during the Spanish civil war, Spanish women writers started writing about the everyday life of women in Spain during the years before, during and after the civil war. Women were in many cases left on their own while men went to fight at the front, the lack of food and the fear to be made prisoner or killed formed part of their everyday life, working class women suffered specially.

Owen Heathcote (French, Bradford): Mothers, Daughters and War: Jeanne Hyvrard and Chantal Chawaf

Although it might be assumed that motherhood and feminism are allies, not all women hold to that view. As Antoinette Fouque writes in *Généalogie Féminologie III*: 'Je n'ai jamais fait l'apologie de la maternité. [...] Cette sacralisation de 'la mère' renforce le patriarcat' (Paris: des femmes, 2012, pp. 41, 55). In addition, some other women writers give a highly ambivalent vision of their mothers. In a number of her books, Jeanne Hyvrard shows her mother to have been vicious and violent, particularly in *Les Prunes de Cythère* (Paris: Minuit, 1975) and even in her most recent text, *On attend Robert*, the picture is scarcely less negative, with her mother varying between rigid impenetrability and unwanted, invasive 'affection': 'Maman [...] tient tout le monde à distance et même moi qu'elle tripote sans arrêt.' (Paris: Indigo, p. 79). For different reasons, too, Chantal Chawaf's portrayal of the mother figure is also ambivalent, if only because in *Je suis née* (des femmes, 1998) her adoptive mother emerges as such quite late in her life and 'her' daughter spends too many of her mature years trying, fruitlessly, to unearth the identity of her actual, biological mother.

There are, however, two further dimensions to these negative or ambivalent portrayals of the mother in Hyvrard's *On attend Robert* and in Chawaf's *Je suis née*. The first is that both texts are set against a background of war, with the family in *On attend Robert* waiting – futilely as it turns out – for the return home of Robert, an uncle serving in the war – and with the daughter of *Je suis née* combing war records since she was rescued from her dead mother's body during the Blitz. Although this background of violence and suspense is clearly a source of actual or potential trauma for both (adoptive) mothers and daughters, in both cases the daughters seem to emerge strengthened and more autonomous than they might have been otherwise. In both Hyvrard and Chawaf the negativity attached to the mother figure combined with the violence of war and the suspense of waiting seems to lead to stronger, more self-aware and more self-assertive younger women. Out of the violent maternities of both mothers and war comes a new generation of self-aware, creative daughters.

This paper will take the examples of the later texts of Hyvrard and Chawaf to see to look at the relation between the representation of mothers and war, particularly World War II, and see to what extent what may now be seen as feminism derives from a rejection of the mother figure in favour of independent daughters. To what extent and in what ways does the daughter necessarily emerge from the violence of the mother coupled with the violence of war? And to what extent is waiting after birth more productive than the waiting for birth?

Jane Chelliah (Independent scholar): The Lived Experiences of Tamil Mothers Displaced due to the Sri Lanka War

This paper will examine the displacement experiences of Tamil mothers to the UK from Sri Lanka because of the civil war. My intention is to raise awareness and give a platform to the voices of these Tamil women who were victims of an intra-country war. I will detail their lives as war victims and, consequently, as refugees. How did they protect their children, how did they cope with the deaths of their children even, loss of work, loss of community and social structure? How do they practise mothering now in a country where the language spoken, English, is not their mother tongue? How do they advocate and negotiate the British structures of education and health on behalf of their children? What are their hopes and dreams for their children and how do they keep the thread of their motherland and ethnicity going between them and their children in a country where the culture is vastly different from Sri Lanka? The purpose of this paper will be to present the war experiences of women both as direct victims and as survivors.

Parallel Sessions 3, Friday 25 October

Session 3a) Pregnancy, Labour and Birth

Valerie Worth-Stylianou (French, Trinity, Oxford): The Collective Memory and the Appropriation of Birthing Tales from Earlier Centuries

In this paper I propose to examine some ways in which contemporary French writing draws on collective perceptions of pregnancy and birth in earlier centuries. Using as my starting point Marie Darrieussecq's question and statement at the start of the collection *Naissances* (2005), 'Mais comment faisait-on autrefois? J'ai lu quelquefois qu'on [...]', I shall ask how our collective memory of the physical and emotional process of birth has been constituted, and why it continues to fascinate (and sometimes haunt) modern authors. On the one hand, the experiences of twenty-first century mothers are radically different from those of their forebears: Darrieussecq, for example, points to the obvious changes brought about by scans during pregnancy and modern surgical procedures. A contemporary mother 'knows' her child before its birth, and can be almost confident of a safe delivery. Yet, on the other hand, my detailed study of several hundred sixteenth- and seventeenth-century birthing tales (see www.birthingtales.org), in both medical and fictional accounts, allows me to identify surprising continuities in the pregnant or parturient woman's perception of her experiences. This paper will concentrate in particular on the power of the imagination as seen through the distortion of the perception of time during birth, and the widespread maternal fear of bearing a child resembling an animal.

Susannah Sweetman (Nursing and Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin): Birth Fear and the Subjugation of Women's Strength: Towards a Broader Conceptualisation of Femininity in Birth

This paper is an exploration of the ways in which pregnant and birthing women are represented in medical and sociological discourses around Birth Fear. This involves a questioning of the meanings of such representations for the construction of maternal identity in the contemporary era, and a consideration of the ways in which pregnancy and birth pose a challenge to feminine 'bodily timidity' (Young, 1990).

Women's fears about childbirth are increasingly viewed as an identifiable psychological disorder, tokophobia (Hofberg and Brockington, 2000; Hofberg and Ward, 2003), categorised and discussed in terms of symptoms and treatment (Mander, 2007). In this paper, the implications of naming and pathologising women's birth fear are considered, with the suggestion that there are symbolic and political meanings embedded within women's experiences of Birth Fear that have their roots in the culture of risk that dominates maternity care. It is argued that such a culture inevitably produces a specific feminine construct in which particular elements of pregnancy and birth, such as dependence on medical experts, and the need for anaesthesia are exaggerated, and others such as women's strength and ability in birth, and the expression of pain are subverted. It is argued that underpinning the phenomenon of Birth Fear is a fear of transgressing rigid boundaries of chauvinised feminine consciousness (Bartky, 1990), and the association of feminine empowerment with unacceptable 'otherness'.

Understanding Birth Fear as symbolic of feminine consciousness enables a new consideration of women's strength as an acceptable dimension of femininity in birth. Drawing on the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, I argue that the identification of an emancipatory alternative for pregnant and birthing women is predicated on the deconstruction of modes of consciousness that arise from sustained oppression. Such action facilitates a reconstruction of femininity in pregnancy and birth that moves beyond its current oppressive boundaries, and integrates aspects of these experiences that are currently experienced as transgressions and violations of rational order. This new understanding has its roots in the development of new, mutually respectful relationships that undertake to listen to women and foster empowerment in pregnancy and birth.

Alison Assiter (Philosophy, West of England): Ontology, Freedom and the Body That Can Birth

Luce Irigaray is located by Rachel Jones, in a recent book as a philosopher of Becoming, as a process philosopher, as opposed to one of static Being. Yet this only tells half the story. Importantly, Jones points out that Irigaray set out to situate her critique of western metaphysics at its founding moment in the work of Plato. Fundamentally, Jones claims, Irigaray challenges a key presupposition of much western philosophy - its hylomorphism - its imposition of active Form on disorganized and sometimes inert matter, itself, in turn, implicitly identified with the female. Western culture, Irigaray

writes, quoted by Jones, has ‘significantly displaced the significance of our maternal origins’. The paper has two aims. Initially, rather than defending this very grand claim of Irigaray’s. I would like rather, to offer a reading of some elements of Kant’s thought that is informed by her perspective. Secondly, I will consider how one might use Irigaray’s outlook to re-think a difficulty that arises for Kant in relation to his view of freedom. Finally, I will suggest that Kierkegaard can overcome this difficulty in Kant’s thought – the problem of how it is possible freely to do wrong. The reading I will offer of Kierkegaard is informed by his relation to Schelling. The paper will suggest that a theory of the political needs to be fore-grounded by a notion of freedom.

In the course of the argument I will refer to a section of Kant’s third *Critique* that is usually disregarded in the commentaries although it is also recognised that this section of the *Critique* does, in a significant sense, prefigure Darwin. Kant talks, here, about genera of animals sharing a common schema; about their having been produced according to a common archetype. He suggests that the species of animals is ‘produced by a common original mother’. (304) He writes ‘he can make mother earth (like a large animal as it were) emerge from her state of chaos, and make her lap promptly give birth initially to creatures of a less purposive form, with these then giving birth to others that became better adapted to their place of origin and to their relations to one another, until in the end this womb itself rigidified, ossified, and confined itself to bearing definite species that would no longer degenerate, so that the diversity remained as it had turned out when that fertile formative force ceased to operate.’ (ibid)

Kant himself argues against the value of this image. But I would like, through a reading of Kierkegaard’s (or the pseudonym Haufniensis’) *Concept of Anxiety* (CA, 1980), to rethink the Irigarayan notion of the ‘sensible transcendental’. This would be a form of the transcendental that arises directly from matter and that the notion of the birthing body can provide. It would have its own capacities and powers to generate another from within itself. Specifically, however, I would like to suggest that it is these powers and capacities that are fundamental, rather than the substance or the entity that ‘possesses’ the capacities. I will draw on this notion to present Kierkegaard or Haufniensis’ response to Kant on the freedom to do wrong.

Session 3b) Motherhood in Television and Theatre

Georgina Ellen O’Brien Hill (English, Chester): ‘Laughter is the Best Medicine’: The Mother in Pain in *One Born Every Minute*

This paper explores the representation of mothers in pain in the media through an examination of the popular television series *One Born Every Minute* (OBEM). Mothers have long been the focus of scrutiny in popular culture, from the middle-class ‘yummy mummy’, to the working or ‘career’ mother and the ‘teen Mom’. Feminists currently working in the field, including Rosalind Gill (2007), Angela McRobbie (2009), Sarah Projansky (2007), Lisa Baraitser (2009) and Imogen Tyler (2011), have explored this cultural fascination. Furthermore, grassroots feminists are fiercely debating the experience of mothers, with activists such as Sheila Kitzinger (2012) leading discussion surrounding the ‘natural childbirth movement’, ‘birth crisis’, ‘medicalised labour’ and pharmacological pain relief. Situating *OBEM* within this critical context, this paper suggests that the programme makes a spectacle of the mother in pain as her baby is delivered, and that despite claims of impartiality, in fact places great emphasis on ‘natural’ birth, supporting the Royal College of Midwives’ position that a ‘normal’ birth (birth without medical intervention of any kind) is always best for mother and child. *OBEM* is marketed as offering a balanced insight into the ‘realities of birth’ with an emphasis on ‘information’ and ‘education’. The climax of each programme is the birth itself, and there is a focus throughout on how the mother is perceived to be coping (or failing to cope) with the pain of labour. Those births that are drug-free are presented as ‘naturally’ best for the baby and those that require medical intervention and/or pain relief are presented as ‘unnatural’ or potentially dangerous. Finally, those mothers who require pain relief are presented as ‘failing’ to cope with physical pain; as one mother ‘screams’ for an epidural, another simply declares that ‘laughter is the best medicine’.

Elizabeth Lindley (French, Wolfson, Cambridge): Staging Motherhood in Loss and Exile: Maternal Figures in Hélène Cixous’s Theatre

The act of writing, for Hélène Cixous, offers women the freedom to articulate their true individuality. When writing theatre, the author’s early intentions challenged voyeuristic traditions to free female subjects from masculine structures. In her more recent plays, however, Cixous’s writings undergo the essential condition of motherhood. Adjusting to the birth of artistic creation and its eventual loss to the public world, a maternal Cixous relinquishes dominant control and permits her theatrical art a voice through the transformation of her actors. My paper will elaborate, in the first instance, how the

theatrical event of maternal characters struggling with the loss of a child is the result of the writing event that happens to the author. As the process of writing theatre becomes an essential aspect of the play, Cixous develops from a private performance of maternal creation to publicly staging her experiences of motherhood.

In my analysis, which draws on Cixous's plays *Voile noire, voile blanche*, *On ne part pas, on ne revient pas* and *L'Histoire (qu'on ne connaîtra jamais)*, I also articulate the evolving aesthetics of her theatre: an eternal dramatic space beyond the restrictions of time, of societal structures and of western theatre. Cixous's maternal figures are themselves writers, floundering with loss and exile in a theatrical space devoid of accepted frames of reference. With each endeavour in vein to reclaim their lost child, the characters mirror Cixous's own failed efforts to manipulate the creation of her dramatic writings. The child must be allowed to evolve into a myriad of possibilities. As my analysis will demonstrate, Cixous stages figures of motherhood struggling with loss and displacement while echoing her own experiences of writing, thus confirming an impressive journey toward new forms of theatre.

Session 3c) Motherhood and Death

Aureliana Di Rollo (Italian/Linguistics, Monash): Beyond Archetypes: Motherhood, Death and the Mother-Daughter Relationship in Michela Murgia's *Accabadora*

In *Accabadora* (2009) [*The Last Mother*], Michela Murgia explores the maternal role to its extreme limits in which it performs a balancing act between mythical archetypes and new family paradigms. The novel hinges on a female character who combines the acts of life-giving and death-bearing as two equally acceptable and accepted maternal functions. The *accabadora* is the 'last mother', that is, she is the woman who carries out the social function of killing those who need or want to put an end to their life. Simultaneously, the same character is also a loving, benevolent mother of an adopted daughter. The presence of an adoptive mother-child relationship serves to point out the importance of social, non-biological aspects of motherhood in the novel. This unusual combination of motherhood and death is framed in a mother-daughter plot which is quite unconventional for many reasons. Among others, the daughter commits matricide. Both the death-bringing mother and the matricidal daughter elicit parallels with archetypal realities and mythological sources. Drawing from ancient Greek myth, psychoanalysis, feminist thought and literary theory I discuss the implications of combining the opposite functions of life-giving and death-bearing into the maternal role. I also analyse how this complexity affects the mother-daughter relationship in its literary representation.

Victoria Browne (Social Sciences, Oxford Brookes/IGRS): Maternal Subjectivity and Prenatal Death: Perspectives from Feminist Philosophy

Death before birth upsets our established categories and the usual or expected order of things. Despite its common occurrence, there is a high level of uncertainty and uncomfortableness surrounding prenatal death, which in turn means that the mother of a child that dies before birth herself has an uncertain status. It would seem that philosophers would have a lot to say about prenatal death, given that people affected by prenatal death are so often compelled into contemplation around some of the most pressing philosophical questions concerning the nature and meaning of life and death, and our relationships with others. It is, however, a seriously neglected phenomenon within philosophy, even in feminist philosophy where natality, maternity and maternal subjectivity are central concerns. This neglect is arguably due not only to the emphasis placed within feminist philosophies of natality and maternity upon generativity and life, but also because of a fear that 'if one were to acknowledge that there was something of value lost, something worth grieving in a miscarriage', one would add fuel to the fire of anti-abortion activists and arguments (Layne 1997: 59). To begin to try and break this 'feminist silence', my paper will consider ways we might think philosophically about prenatal death and maternal subjectivity, drawing particularly upon Alison Stone's relational concept of death, (which she draws from Adriana Cavarero's work on natality and relationality), and also upon feminist writing on abortion in which relationality emerges as a key concept, especially the work of Margaret Little. My suggestion is that the framework of relationality or relational ontology enables us to develop ways of thinking philosophically about prenatal death which are consistent with a pro-choice politics, and further, which do not entail any commitment to universalizing claims about the subjective experience of pregnancy loss (i.e. about 'what it is like' to lose a pregnancy). As such, we can begin to move beyond the notion of pregnancy termination and pregnancy loss, or abortion and miscarriage, as polar opposite phenomena, and also towards a feminist philosophy of natality and maternity which can register the significance of prenatal death and the variety of ways that it can shape or impact upon maternal subjectivities.

Jutta Fortin (French, Vienna): Camille Laurens: The Repetition of the Child's Death and the 'Dead Mother'

The female narrator of Camille Laurens's brief text, *Jules et Camille*, states: 'At any rate, I have always made everything just as my mother.' This is true for the death of the author's (and most of her female protagonists') son at his birth, recounted in the autobiographical *Philippe*. In fact, as the reader learns from small fragments of Camille Laurens's fictional and non-fictional works, her mother lost a baby girl when Camille Laurens herself was only a year old. No-one, however, talked about this traumatising event, which thus became a family secret. In the proposed paper, I will study the importance of the repeated loss.

I shall argue that in Camille Laurens's works, the traumatism related to her child's death at birth at once hides and reveals (both in the sense of 'discover' and in the photographic sense of 'render visible a latent image') another trauma: namely the one provoked by her own mysterious abandonment as a small child by her mother, following

the mother's silent mourning of her new baby. In the small girl's view or psychic reality, her loving mother suddenly changed into a quasi-inanimate figure: a 'dead mother', to borrow André Green's terms. The painful and uncanny repetition of the child's death at birth triggers the author's interest in the theme of repetition in more general terms, as well as her interest in motherhood. Her perspective is double, since she positions her female protagonists both as mothers (of her dead baby son, of her daughter, of a lover) and as children. Various things which happened to the mother, or which the mother did, indeed repeat themselves in the daughters' lives. I shall examine whether the female subject suffering from the 'dead mother' complex is herself a 'dead mother' in Camille Laurens's writings. With reference to specific (literary or cinemato-graphic) intertexts of her novels, I shall show that motherhood is certainly profoundly ambivalent for her. Since the author constantly uses the imagery of motherhood to refer to separation, loss or death, her oeuvre often seems to be a 'negative' of it.

Parallel sessions 4, Friday 25 October

Session 4a) Motherhood and Disability

Sara Ryan (Primary Health Care, Oxford): Changing Mothering Spaces and a Forced Journey into Autoethnography

As the mother of a learning disabled child, I positioned myself, for years as a 'mother researcher' and my experiences of mothering our son, LB, has shaped and influenced my research interests. The space of the mother-researcher felt comfortable, overlapping with other mothering spaces, including among others, the family and social media. My sociological imagination was originally inspired by the work of Erving Goffman. Goffman's body of work includes classic texts on interactions in public spaces, and the intensely private space of the asylum. In the former, Goffman brilliantly makes visible the rules that govern our actions in public places, and the way in which collective action works to remove or reduce transgressions. His work on asylums, or 'total institutions', demonstrates how what appears to be irrational or insane behaviour, is rational within the context of incarceration.

When LB grew into a regular rule-breacher and was subsequently diagnosed with autism, my doctoral research focused on the experiences of taking learning disabled children out in public, and what this reveals about social rules, expectations and the responsibility of mothers to control their 'charges' in public places. Earlier this year, aged 18, LB was sectioned and lived in a treatment and assessment unit for some months. The space of mothering transformed as what it means to mother a child who is locked away is difficult to make sense of. Again, Goffman was the key figure whose work I turned to, as I gained access into the confines of the total institution.

In the past few months, a catastrophic event has led me to autoethnography; a methodological approach I was previously (and to some extent remain) largely ambivalent about. In an attempt to make some sense of the incomprehensible, here I use a multi-media presentation to reflect on this forced journey. And the mothering spaces I now inhabit.

Brian Sudlow (French, Aston): 'Freaks!': Hurler Syndrome and Other Disabilities in Claire Daudin's *Le Sourire* (2009) [*The Smile*]

Claire Daudin's novella *Le Sourire* draws a sympathetic picture of Gilles, a child born with the genetic disease Hurler's Syndrome. In spite of his disfiguring and crippling condition, Gilles's mother shows him exemplary love and care throughout his short life, and up to his death at the end of the story. Through this prosaic albeit touching narrative, however, the reader's perceptions of disease and disability are constantly challenged. Gilles's very presence seems to draw out extraordinary pathological reactions among able-bodied relatives or family friends, in scenes which leave the reader wondering who exactly the 'disabled' one is. On the other hand, Gilles's presence enables or empowers other apparently 'disabled' characters in ways that challenge dismissive assumptions about their supposed 'disabilities'. While Daudin wishes her story to be a constat rather than a postulat, her commitment to avoiding all sermonizing turns her novella into a powerful statement about the indignity which ideology and fear can impose on the disabled, and the freedom - exemplified in this case by Gilles's mother - which discarding such ideology and fear can procure.

Harriet Clarke (Social Policy, Birmingham): Gender and Disabled Parents: Reflecting on Social Policy Understandings of Disabled Mothers' Experiences

Disabled parents have challenged the partial visibility of disabled people as parents through published accounts of experience (based on personal accounts and research). Disabled parents' organisations also have an important role in

providing information and support to parents and professionals, and so help to increase the visibility of disabled mothers' and fathers' experiences. Whilst some social researchers and writers have sought to explicitly explore disability and motherhood, the experiences of disabled mothers and mothers whose children's fathers have an impairment or health concern require further consideration. Disabled mothers' experiences are overrepresented within publications from social research with disabled mothers and fathers, however this is often obscured by reference to parenting. This paper reflects on disability and parenting research in order to map out how policy and practice concerns impact on the research conducted and to demonstrate why a more focused gendered analysis of disabled parents' experiences is required.

Session 4b) Mothers and Daughters/Mothers and Sons

Claire Williams (Portuguese, St Peter's, Oxford): Educating Rita: Ana Luísa Amaral's Poems to her Daughter

A number of Ana Luísa Amaral's poems deal with a mother's observations of her daughter growing up, as well as a mother's feelings of responsibility and fears. Using recipes, warnings and intertextual allusions, these poems explore the notion of female genealogy, legacy and complicity between the generations, from the mother's point of view. This paper will analyse the mother-daughter relationship described by Amaral and the life-lessons encoded within her poems. It will also discuss the mother figure who narrates the responsibilities and fears of motherhood.

Simona Cutcan (French, Maynooth): The Mother/Son Bond in Agota Kristof's Trilogy

This paper examines the representation of mother figures from the perspective of sons in the Trilogy of the Swiss-Hungarian author Agota Kristof. The trilogy is composed of *The Notebook*, *The Proof* and *The Third Lie* and was written in French between 1986 and 1991. The complex narrative revolves around twin brothers Lucas and Claus, who write about the loss of their family during the war and about their separate lives, with no possibility of reunion. Although the texts do not centre on mother figures, they are a recurring motif. Feminist literary criticism written on the relationship between mothers and sons has been generally scant and much of it has been written from the perspective of mothers. Critics have focused much more on mother-daughter relationships, neglecting their sons, 'giving them up' to patriarchy, as Andrea O'Reilly (2001) notes in her introduction to *Mothers and Sons, Feminism, Masculinity and the Struggle to Raise Our Sons*.

I will analyse the texts applying Anne Whitehead's theory of trauma fiction and recent works in masculinity studies on psychological male development. First I will look at the way female characters are seen from the point of view of the male narrators, then at the depiction of the relationship between mother and son. The text makes implicit the narrative supremacy of the male voice, which could be interpreted as a traditional way to silence the mother. However, the absence of the mother's voice from the trilogy can also be read in the other direction, as showing a significant loss in the life of the protagonists. This loss is experienced as a trauma that determines the emotional development of the sons, and its traces can be seen in the stylistic particularities of the texts.

Mariangela Tartaglione (Gender Studies/Literature, Naples): Francesca Sanvitale's *Madre e figlia* [Mother and daughter] and Elena Ferrante's *L'amore molesto* [Troubling love]: the tragic unspeakable words about the mother-daughter bond

This paper aims at showing how the representation of the maternal – and, namely, of the inter-gender relationship between mother and daughter – constitutes a raw nerve, well rooted in women's autobiographical writing of the most feminist wave in Italy's history, immediately after 1968. In the first part, the paper investigates, from a theoretical point of view – which extends beyond literature to the fields of philosophy and psychoanalysis –, the reasons of the 'modern tragedy' of the mother/daughter bond in order to read and interpret the breaking points leading to a re-shaping of Italian women's imagery, in both the public and the private (auto-representational) dimension. In the second part, the paper focuses on the analysis of Francesca Sanvitale's and Elena Ferrante's narratives, which, through the construction of a daughterly discourse, represent the bond with the mothers as an unsolvable and exasperating tragic topos and, at the same time, as an irreplaceable vehicle of self-investigation and identity re-definition.

Session 4c) Motherhood, Writing and the Creative Life

Özlem Berk Albachten (Translation Studies, Boğaziçi): Creativity and Motherhood in Elif Shafak's *Black Milk*

The aim of this paper is to explore the struggle between creativity and motherhood using Elif Shafak's autobiographical novel *Black Milk: on Motherhood, Writing and the Harem Within* as a case study. The novel was written after the birth of

Shafak's first daughter in 2006 and based on her own personal experiences with postpartum depression leading to a yearlong bout of writer's block. Shafak examines her experiences about being a writer and becoming a mother against other famous women writers. The novel is worth analysing not only because it is based on the real-life experience of an urban and intellectual woman writer on motherhood in 21st century Turkey, but it also sheds light on different socio-cultural contexts (of motherhood) as the Turkish and English versions of the book differ considerably. The novel appeared first in Turkish in 2007 and the translated/rewritten version in English came out in 2011. This paper will analyse the literary techniques used in dealing with binarisms, such as creativity vs. marriage and motherhood, Eastern vs. Western cultures, maternal and domestic vs. vagabond and cosmopolitan. The paper will also argue Shafak's novel is among the first examples questioning motherhood and thus marks a turning point in the narratives of mothering in Turkish literature.

Melissa Gjellstad (Norwegian, North Dakota): Hard to Love: Mothers in Trude Marstein's Novels

Norwegian literature engaged in a dialogue about the changing state of the family in the early 1990s in Scandinavia by showcasing mothering and fathering in a host of novels at the brink of the millennium. As in the 1950s and the 1970s, family patterns again had fallen under fire from theoretical, political, and practical angles. Illusive images of 'the good mother' were heatedly discussed during this era, and they surfaced in many authors' works. Contemporary Norwegian author Trude Marstein, who debuted with her first book in the midst of this debate, carves out a space for literary representations of that shift. Her narratives repeatedly investigate the uncomfortable space of mothering and challenge readers' beliefs about who a parent is and what a parent does. Although this topic has been a red thread through many of her novels, this paper focuses primarily on the mothering plot within *Plutselig hører noen åpne en dør* [*Suddenly Hearing Someone Open a Door*] from 2000, which set the stage for her engagement with the topic. With a protagonist who is a graduate student and newly single mother, this novel pits motherhood and the intellectual life against each other as the protagonist seeks to find her own maternal voice in the balance of the everyday demands of writing, researching, and parenting.

Gillian Ni Cheallaigh (French, King's College London): 'The Maid Married with Death': Linda Lê's Antigonal Refusal of Motherhood

Linda Lê's novels have long been noted for their veneration of the paternal figure and their vilification of an autocratic and obscured mother. The father is presented as the key figure responsible for bringing the woman to literature, both reading and writing. In several more recent works, however, the focus shifts and the trope of maternity is presented as a pre-emptively refused condition, and ultimately maternity and the maternal are rejected and abjected in various ways by a series of femmes de lettres. This is done through the dominant Antigone intertext in both *In Memoriam* (2007) and *Cronos* (2010), in which the writing woman explicitly refuses motherhood offered by male lovers as the 'complétude d'une femme'. The method of this refusal is, problematically, suicide or a suicidal act of political defiance, and the female subject therefore appears to engage in a death-driven act of jouissance apparently necessitated by her position as a writer. More explicitly, and indeed more emphatically, in *À l'Enfant que je n'aurai pas* (Prix Renaudot Poche 2011) Lê's woman writer addresses a poignant epistolary homage to the son she vows never to have, and whose non-existence she celebrates as enabling her literary existence. Through this letter (another lettre morte for the author of the earlier novel of that title) the woman author appears to confront her non-mothering choice and accept it. Lê herself says of *À l'Enfant que je n'aurai pas* in a very recent interview, 'Là encore, je fais le deuil d'une partie de moi-même pour mieux ressusciter'. However we cannot escape the paradox of the woman creating the never-to-be-born son in the writing that his non-existence allowed to come into being – she has no son in order to write, and when she writes, she writes of this son. This queering lêian anti-maternity may be brought into dialogue with the current strand of French 'queer maternity' espoused by Élisabeth Badinter and Corinne Maier, and it is interesting to test the tensions between this 'feminist' queer anti-futurity against Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004).

Parallel Sessions 5, Saturday 26 October

Session 5a) Motherhood and Memory

Federica Kaufmann Clementi (Jewish Studies, South Carolina): Remember What Amalek Did to Her: Daughters Inscribing the (Forgotten) Mother into the Jewish Story

My specific contribution would be on the topic of the representations of the Jewish mothers in Jewish daughters' life-writings (including graphic memoirs) in Europe in the last 50 years. Allow me to give you a little bit of background on the book I recently finished on which my presentation would be partly based: the work is titled *Jewish Mother Delivered: Representations of the Mother-Daughter Story in Holocaust Memoirs* and it reconstructs and recasts, from the memories of women survivors and second-generation, the intricate psychic, physical and historical bond between mothers and daughters whose lives have been permanently altered by the impact of genocide. There is no lack of literature regarding the 'Jewish mother': the stereotype, the myth, the fiction. In my book, the Jewish mother is 'delivered' from the shackles of oppressive and limiting representations that have cast her either as an insupportable *kvetcher*, i.e. a chronic smothering overprotective complainer (the favorite staple of pungent humor, from Eastern Europe to West Hollywood), or as the epitome of female sainthood representing an idealized, and unrecoverable, past of 'paradisiacal homeliness' (*Yiddishkeit*). All of it, in large part, being the product of male imagination. It appears that mostly the Jewish mother in Jewish men's works remains portrayed either in stereotypical terms or not portrayed at all.

The inability or unwillingness of many Jewish men writers to include women as more complex characters on the stage of life has spilled over even into the way they often represent—or omit—women in the reconstructions of Holocaust memories. My research balances the record by showing how Holocaust memoirs by women have shifted the paradigm that has traditionally posited the war as a 'male story' and reinserted themselves and their mothers as subjects at the center of this apocalyptic historical experience. Many of the memoirs I examine were written after 1968. For the conference, I would like to offer an analysis of European women's Holocaust memory and post-memory (as Marianne Hirsch labeled the writing in search of a lost past by children of Holocaust survivors) and compare the modes of their memory-making with the way in which canonic male writers have represented (often 'forgetting' the mother) the Jewish family and its dynamics before, during and after the war in their works.

Katie Stone (German, Cambridge): History, Memory and Making Sense of Motherhood in Twenty- First-Century Germany: Tanja Dücker's *Himmelskörper* [*Celestial Bodies*] (2003)

Celestial Bodies is an important example of the centrality of the mother figure to attempts to come to terms with National Socialism in contemporary German literature. For the narrator of *Celestial Bodies*, deciphering and recording family history are exercises in re-assessing her relationship with her mother and making sense of her own impending motherhood. She had previously rejected motherhood as the sort of traditionally feminine behaviour that was incompatible with her desire for autonomy. The novel charts the narrator's abandonment of an essentialist view of motherhood as her understanding of history, and her place in it, matures. The strained mother-daughter relationships across three generations are explained with reference to each woman's experience of history, its impact on their identity and value-systems, and contemporary social pressures.

This paper will discuss the relationship between family memory and motherhood as types of historical 'performance' that rehearse and contest traditional gender norms and the cultural and family memory that enshrines them. Dücker depicts the parallels and intersections between rituals of story-telling within the family and rituals of mothering and constructing 'femininity'. Both re-enact the status quo and the discursive limits imposed on women. These limits, Dücker shows, have a tangible impact on the mother-child relationship. Her narrator explores possibilities for making sense of motherhood as a personal role, and not a social or historically-burdened onus. Motherhood and family, Dücker believes, should represent the 'future and adventure, and not tradition and the past'.

Nathalie Ségeral (Languages and Literatures of Europe and the Americas, University of Hawaii-Manoa): Memory, Postmemory and Motherhood in Linda Lê's *À l'enfant que je n'aurai pas* [*To the Child I'll Never Have*] and Cécile Wajsbrot's *Mémorial*

According to Marianne Hirsch and Adrienne Rich, all women participate in the concept of motherhood – the childless woman as much as the mother. The issue of the relationship between literary creation and childbirth, between authorship and motherhood, has been extensively studied (especially in Béatrice Didier's *L'Écriture-femme*); however, this paper proposes to explore a recent trend in French literature that has not yet been addressed: the reclaiming and re-appropriation, through literature, of a woman's desire for childlessness.

Cécile Wajsbrot is a French Jewish author of Polish origins and Linda Lê is a French writer of Vietnamese origins. Wajsbrot's autofiction entitled *Mémorial* (2005) and Lê's short autobiographical text entitled *A l'Enfant que je n'aurai pas* (2011) both contribute to redefining the notion of motherhood by questioning its very foundations and motivations, and by expressing the author's need to claim her choice of not becoming a mother – or, in Wajsbrot's terms, to remain descendant-free ('libre de toute descendance').

This claim is, in both cases, complicated by the issues of memory and postmemory. Namely, Wajsbrot's parents survived the Holocaust while Lê's family experienced the Vietnam war before immigrating to France in the seventies. According to Marianne Hirsch, postmemory consists in the transgenerational transmission of trauma and occurs, most of the time, through the mother-daughter relationship, supposed to be characterized by more emotional closeness than the mother-son one. In Wajsbrot and Lê, the refusal of motherhood is accompanied by a rejection of the mother figure, which, as the texts unfold, amounts to a rejection of the weight of memory, of origins, and of the original trauma, whereby rejecting motherhood becomes a way of rejecting transmission. Thus, this paper will explore, in these two recently published texts, the literary tropes at stake in the process of re(en)gendering/re-creating memory through a rejection of motherhood.

Session 5b) Motherhood and Violence

Claudia Karagoz (Italian, Saint Louis): Motherhood and Violence in Contemporary Italian Women's Writing

This paper analyses the issue of motherhood and violence in two recent novels by Italian writers, Elena Ferrante's *The Lost Daughter* ([2006] 2008) and Cristina Comencini's *When the Night* ([2009] 2012), through the lens of Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero's notion of 'maternal inclination'. *The Lost Daughter* and *When the Night* differ from typical representations of mother-child bonds by Italian women authors insofar as they foreground maternal perspectives, portray maternal experiences rife with self-doubt and interpersonal conflict, and thematize maternal violence – both physical and psychological – towards daughters and sons, as well as other children. Rejecting traditional constructions of motherhood – the Virgin Mary versus Medea, spiritual versus destructive maternity – Cavarero aims at calling attention to the vulnerability of the infant, and to the dilemma mothers face: to give or refuse care.

The Lost Daughter and *When the Night* extend Cavarero's model by dramatizing mother-child dynamics in which

vulnerable mothers both give and refuse care. Therefore, these novels further highlight the complexity of the maternal experience, and destabilize normative constructions of maternity. Ultimately, this paper hopes to show how, by granting mothers a voice, and foregrounding violence as a potential, yet not definitive, outcome of ‘maternal inclination’, Ferrante’s and Comencini’s novels provide valuable insights to cross-disciplinary investigations of motherhood – particularly maternal mental health and violence.

Helena Forsås-Scott (Swedish, University College London): Motherhood, Violence and Narration in Kerstin Ekman’s *Blackwater* and *City of Light*

This paper explores motherhood and violence in relation to the very different types of narration in two novels by the Swedish writer Kerstin Ekman, *En stad av ljus* (1983) (*City of Light*, 2003), and *Händelser vid vatten* (1993) (*Blackwater*, 1996). The bleak urban landscape represented by the first-person narrator in the former novel does not have much in common with the forested north forming the setting of the thriller plot of the latter, but central to both plots are female characters who are also mothers. Both novels have been subjected to mythical readings and, indeed, interpreted with reference to the Great Mother. Foregrounding the prominence in both novels of motherhood and violence, this paper, drawing on postmodern perspectives on narratology along with theoretical material by among others Susan S. Lanser and Alison A. Case, instead focuses on the texts’ distinctive but hitherto neglected types of narration and their effects and implications. How does the first-person narration of *City of Light* with its emphatic metatextuality compare to the third-person narration of *Blackwater*, and what are the implications for the constructions of feminine subjectivity and, in particular, motherhood? How are motherhood and violence contextualised? How does the foregrounding of dirt, violence and death relate to the search for harmony and beauty that is also important in these novels? And what versions of motherhood - and, indeed, myths about motherhood - are constructed by the complex stories whose telling is problematised in these two novels?

Iris Brey (French, New York): An Incestuous Mother in Eva Ionesco’s Film *My Little Princess*

Eva Ionesco’s first feature film as a director, *My little princess*, was selected at *La Semaine de la Critique* during the Cannes festival in 2011. Based on her own life, the movie portrays a mother that holds dominion over her young daughter’s body that she photographs naked and whose erotic pictures know a great artistic and commercial success. *My little princess* reflects upon the erosion of sexual taboos in the context of mainstreamed internet pornography, and a revived feminist debate about ways of expressing maternal desire in a society unsure of how to police sexual desire, sexual abuse, rape and pedophilia.

I will examine how Eva Ionesco’s use of her own story, that became a well-known public controversy in the late seventies, and her need to fictionalize it, is creating a new cinematic genre, typical of this new generation of director (with Honoré, Desplechin and Lafosse), that I will call cinematic auto-fiction. By casting Isabelle Huppert for the part of the mother, Eva Ionesco is also creating a *mise en abîme* of the representation of the bad mother, since Huppert has been embodying the bad mother since 1999 in eight movies (notably *Ma mère* by Christophe Honoré, *Nue Propriété* by Joachim Lafosse, *Médée Miracle* by Tonino de Bernardi, *White Material* by Claire Denis). The numerous allusions to the director’s real filiation and the creation of a fictional cinematic monstrous mother through Isabelle Huppert is creating the effect of a *roman à clef*, in which the spectator has to decipher the codes of what is reality and what is fiction. By analyzing the depiction of the bad mother in this framework, this paper seeks to make a critical contribution both to gender and sexuality studies and to the film history of the present and the immediate past.

Session 5c) Narrative Strategies and Negotiations of Motherhood

Marie-Noëlle Huet (Literature, Québec-Montreal): Filling the Void: Motherhood and Writing in Christine Angot’s *Léonore, toujours* [*Léonore, always*] (1993) and Karine Reyssset’s *L’Inattendue* [*The Unexpected*] (2003)

In recent years, an increasing number of French women writers have used motherhood and maternity as an inspiration for books. If women were limited for a long time to their reproductive powers and their maternal function, most theorists of motherhood (Marianne Hirsch, Lori Saint-Martin, Ann E. Kaplan, Gill Rye among others) locate the emergence of the voice and subjectivity of mothers in literature around 1980. Since then, mother authors – ‘romancières’ as Nancy Huston defines them – and mother narrators write from their own perspective (and not only from the daughter’s standpoint), trying to conciliate the roles of mother, woman, lover, worker, sister, friend, etc. while exploring new ways of telling their story. In Karine Reyssset’s text, a long-awaited pregnancy lessens the feeling of loneliness and helps to heal

the wound caused by the death of the protagonist's young brother while in *Léonore, toujours*, becoming a mother helps to revisit the consequences of paternal incest. In this paper, I will analyze narrative strategies such as metatextuality, discursive fragmentation and ellipsis to show that both narrators see maternity as a way of healing their trauma and use language and writing to fill a void in representation.

Laura Lazzari (Italian, Franklin College): To Be a Mother at Any Cost in Contemporary Italian Society and Literature

I am interested in investigating some issues related to the impossibility of motherhood in Italian contemporary society and literature. Italy has one of the lowest birth rates in the world. Many women decide not to have children; others postpone their decision for financial reasons or to pursue their professional careers, and tend to become mothers at an older age than in the past, facing more problems related to their health and sometimes the impossibility to procreate. Deciding not to be a mother is a choice often questioned by society, since motherhood is still considered the social norm and is assumed to be both natural and desirable for every woman. Women who do not want children and women who cannot have children do not conform to this social rule and often need to justify and face their choices and destiny. The impossibility of motherhood, moreover, can lead to the attempt to become mothers at any cost; for instance, to Gemma's character in Margaret Mazzantini's *Come to the World*. In my paper, I will consider some theoretical issues in psychology related to motherhood (such as those studied by Silvia Vegetti Finzi in *Want a Child: New Maternity Between Nature and Science*) to focus on this quest for motherhood in Mazzantini's work, in Eleonora Mazzone's *The Defectives*, and in Lisa Corva's *Confessions of a Would-Be-Mother*, and investigate psychological issues related to motherhood in our contemporary society, where surrogate mothering and fertility treatments have become real and controversial options.

Gill Rye (CCWW-IMLR, University of London) : Who's the Mother? Surrogacy in France – Valérie Gans's *L'Enfant des nuages* [Child from the Clouds]

French President François Hollande may have introduced liberal legislation enabling same-sex marriage and adoption this year, but other French laws governing families are still highly conservative. This paper looks at the topic of surrogate motherhood, which is banned in France by regularly reviewed bio-ethical laws that are also concerned with reproductive technologies and stem-cell therapies – the last review was completed in 2011. Valérie Gans's novel was selected by the committee reviewing the bio-ethical laws as 'a work of reference'. While it is encouraging to see fiction writing playing a part in contemporary politico-ethical debates, and although the novel arguably sets up different sides of the debate around surrogacy, ultimately it seems to underpin the status quo with a conservative dénouement. This paper first presents the main aspects of the debate in France around surrogacy, and then goes on to analyse the narrative strategies used in the novel to engage with the topic and to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses as a discussion document and contemporary cultural reflection on surrogate motherhood.

Parallel Sessions 6, Saturday 26 October

Session 6a) Maternal Temporalities

Lisa Baraitser (Psychosocial Studies, Birkbeck): Time and Again: Repetition, Persistence and the Return of the Life Drive

This paper re-engages the figure of repetition as a way to understand maternal temporalities. Starting with early feminist debates about the relation between repetition and reproduction, we see attempts to uncouple the meaningless, repetitive and therefore futile securing of survival that is involved in maternal, domestic and 'female' labour, from the productive, inventive and generative sphere of 'work'. This distinction between repetitive labour and generative work is taken up by both Marxist and Socialist feminists through the 1970s in their debates about the relation between reproductive and domestic labour and capital. The struggle to recast repetitive domestic labour as work, work that might even demand a wage, gave way to subsequent discussions about the specificity of care, and an interest in maternal desire, ambivalence, and the paradoxes of maternal subjectivity. However, a central tension remains: if maternal time is understood as meaningless repetition (even when it is recast by Julia Kristeva, for instance, as generative cyclicity) it remains dangerously aligned with the death drive, an association that feminism has been keen to break with. If it is aligned with futurity, it is damned by association with 'chromonormativity' – the ways time is used to organize lives in restrictive normative timelines to generate maximum productivity. One way to treat this tension might be to draw on Deleuze's

understanding of repetition as itself the principle of difference which may allow an alternative reading of repetition as generative. However, an equally viable option might be to embrace the non-reproductive temporality of chronic or stuck time as itself a model of maternal time, here understood as the elongated temporality of waiting. Through an engagement with the poet Denise Riley's powerful work, *Time Lived, Without its Flow* (Riley, 2012), I argue for a rendition of maternal time that shares with queer time a dynamic chronicity, alive to the potentials of not moving on, whilst at the same time maintains its link with the ethical principle of one's own future being bound up with the future of another.

Gail Lewis (Psychosocial Studies, Birkbeck): Out of Time: Undesiring and Desiring Maternal Subjectivity

This paper engages the question of time and maternal subjectivity through the notion of 'choice' that was so central a concept to feminism in Europe and North America in post '68 politics. If choice was deemed both axiomatic to feminist demands and a real possibility when sex and reproduction were ideologically and technologically uncoupled, in terms of relations between black and white, and 'north' and 'south' feminists, it was a highly contested concept. This contestation turned on the issue of choice to be a mother along with choice not to be a mother as equally important but differentially weighted according to processes of racialisation, racist state practice and ethnic identifications. But what are the temporal reverberations of 'choice' in the experiential embodiment of maternal subjectivity foregone? In what ways is the (might have been maternal) subject 'here-and-now' a continuation of the (choosing not to be) subject 'there-and-then'?

Stella Sandford (Philosophy, Kingston): The Time of Maternal Labour

This paper will explore the relation between what we can call 'maternal labour' and aspects of the conception of the maternal subject in Lisa Baraitser's *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* (2009). If the specificity of maternal labour in relation to the classical Marxist conception of productive labour lies partly in the unquantifiable and existential aspects of the time of maternal labour (which is partly what has made it unthinkable for classical Marxism), how is this related to what Baraitser identifies as the interrupted temporality of maternal subjectivity or of maternal time as constitutively interrupted? Does this tie a particular form of labour to a particular form of subjectivity via temporality in a way that is unanticipated in classical Marxist theory?

Session 6b) Public and Private Narratives of Motherhood and Mothering

Denisa-Adriana Oprea (French, Bucharest): Between the Heroine Mother and the Absent Woman

In October 1966, the State Council of the Socialist Republic of Romania declared that abortion is prohibited by the law, as a crime against woman's health and against the natural growth of the country's population. A whole system of repression was set in place in order to prevent women having an abortion: from the monthly and humiliating controls in factories and public institutions to the absolute lack of medical contraception in the drugstores. Until the fall of the regime, in 1989, maternity ceased to be an intimate experience, but a mere process lived under the watchful eye of the party, often in fear and misery. In this context, it is rather surprising, but, on the other hand, understandable, that Romanian women writers of that period did not approach the subject of maternity. The most notable of them, Gabriela Adamesteanu, Dana Dumitriu or Maria-Luiza Cristescu, were more interested in exploring couple relations, which are often problematic, than motherhood. When the latter is represented, it is in a dark light, like in Gabriela Adamesteanu's *Drumul egal al fiecarei zile* [*The equal road of every day*], where the mother figure is marked by the everyday struggle for living, which makes her tough and bitter towards her daughter and herself. Despite this lack of reflection upon maternity within women's writing, the subject is widely reflected in *Femeia* [*The Woman*] monthly magazine, the official instrument of propaganda for communist women. Between 1966 and 1989, *Femeia* clearly reflects the evolution of the Party's program for women and also the evolution of woman's status. Three stages can be identified from this point of view: Between 1966 and 1973, the magazine remains surprisingly free, in the sense that, while encouraging motherhood, it does not become a mere vehicle of the official policy of the birth rate. Moreover, in this period, *Femeia* is quite cosmopolitan, reproducing fragments and paintings from French and Italian writers or painters, which represent motherhood in a frame of warmth, intimacy, security, eternity and universality. The pattern starts to change in 1973, when Nicolae Ceausescu declares that 'for a woman, the most honorable thing and the most important social mission is to give birth and to raise children. There is nothing more valuable for a woman than to be a mother, than to procreate and to ensure the continual development of our nation and of our country'. *Femeia* starts to lose gradually any cosmopolitan appearance, while the birth propaganda multiplies the number of Heroine Mothers and of life stories glorifying maternity. Still, the most evident change in *Femeia*'s policy and aesthetics is in the '80s, in the darkest period of the communist

regime. Now, The Heroine Mother clearly overshadows the Woman, who disappears behind the comrade – engaged in a multiple communist struggle: helping the country develop by participating, in the same measure as men, in all production activities; helping the country grow by producing as many children as possible; to protect the peace in the world and so on and so forth. The magazine is now made almost exclusively of so-called life stories, where, in a false realistic tone, women are talking about their happy lives as workers and as mothers of four or five; of so-called life stories of women who have had an abortion and who are now repenting; of documentaries presenting the day cares the Party opened in almost every big factory... From reproductions of Picasso and Modigliani, *Femeia* is now stuffed with images of an anonymous collective character, of women always dressed in white overalls and almost always presented in a group picture, proudly exhibiting their new-born child as a trophy, as their contribution to the country's welfare. Only one mother detaches herself from the group image and clearly dominates it: Elena Ceausescu, the Mother of the nation, whose pictures are widely present and suffocating.

By means of discourse analysis and social history, this paper explores the evolution of the motherhood under the communist regime, as reflected in the three stages of the *Femeia* magazine: cosmopolitanism (1966-1973), soft birth rate propaganda (1973-1982) and hard nationalist and birth rate propaganda (1983-1989)

Elizabeth Challinor (Anthropology, Minho): Cape Verdean Mothering: Practices, Meanings and Moralities

Recent anthropological studies have tended to focus more on the practice of mothering than on the institution of motherhood. The latter is often associated with the figure and hence identity of the biological or social mother whereas the former opens the way to examine a wide range of practices that may involve far more than one person, as is often the case in the Cape Verdean context which is also characterized by transnational mothering. A focus on practices and meanings elucidates the contextual contingency of what constitutes 'good' or 'bad' mothering which also sheds light upon how the institution of motherhood is reproduced in local moralities. Through an examination of Cape Verdean women's individual narratives of 'good' mothering, the paper offers a window into the complex relationship between motherhood, mothering and identity.

Irén Annus (English & American Studies/Gender Studies, Szeged): 'Money is best counted, women are best beaten': Contemporary Political Discourses on Motherhood in Hungary

One hundred and three thousand signatures collected in Hungary this September demanding the incorporation of domestic violence as a distinct offense in the new Criminal Code forced Parliament to consider putting the issue on the docket. Reflective of the importance of the matter, the discussion was originally scheduled for 3 a.m. – but because of opposition outrage, ended up being discussed as early as 9:30 p.m. The debate became quite heated when one of the seven MPs present from the ruling coalition stated: 'Maybe mothers should go back to mainly raising children, and maybe they should be primarily concerned about having not just one or two, but three, or rather four or five children in this society. Then we'd have a reason to respect each other more, and domestic violence wouldn't even come up.... [later] When every woman has had her own two or three, or even four children, then they can go find themselves and get emancipated.' The presentation proposes to map the public discourse that has emerged out of this debate on the role of women in Hungary, which, according to many, is limited solely to motherhood. The presentation reveals that the reductionist view that sees women's social significance in biological, essentialist terms poses numerous dangers. It has not only created a space for the strengthening of conservative, Christian conceptualizations in the public discourse, but also has made them part of everyone's reality in terms of the law, without effectively translating it into economic realities. Such discourse also seems to have capitalized on the negative cultural perception of feminism, conflating women's fight for equal rights with extreme feminism, domestic violence with improper motherhood, the struggle against violence with hatred of men, etc. These chains of interpretation ultimately result in the subversion of the social position of women, marginalizing them further and constituting them as yet another group of scapegoats upon which the current nationalist, conservative, heteronormative, patriarchal, masculine power structure can be expanded further, thus moving in the direction of the traditional gender relations captured in the old Hungarian saying in the title.

Session 6c) Representation and Subverting Stereotypes

Valerie Heffernan (German, Maynooth): Unfit Mothers? Teen Motherhood in Contemporary German-language Literature

Teen mothers are often stigmatised by society, assumed to be unfit mothers who are either unable or unwilling to give

their children the nurturing they need. They are often overlooked in theoretical literature on motherhood and tend also to be absent from literary depictions of motherhood and mothering. Reality TV shows such as *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom* – shows that have been broadcast in many European countries – have brought teen motherhood into mainstream culture, but in doing so, they have arguably served to further demonise and denigrate the teenage mother. This paper will look at two contemporary depictions of teen motherhood, Alina Bronsky's 2010 novel *Die schärfsten Gerichte der tatarischen Küche* [translated as *The Hottest Dishes of the Tartar Cuisine*] and Katrin Gerlof's 2009 novel *Alle Zeit* [*All Time*]. It will question the extent to which they reflect and/or depart from stereotypical images of teen mothers. By looking beyond image to focus on mothering practices, it will question whether these novels offer a way of reconceptualising teen motherhood.

Walter Geerts (Italian & Comparative Literature, Antwerp): Simona Vinci's Mothers and Non-Mothers

Motherhood is a key notion in Simona Vinci's fiction. Surprising is her radical re-interpretation of the notion, especially when taking into account the Italian context, where motherhood remains deeply involved with the Mediterranean 'magna mater' until today. Vinci's widely translated novels and short stories tear apart the 'papier mâché' model of maternity. Her creative work is dedicated to developing a typology of what Adorno would label 'damaged lives'. A new kind of 'mothers' – non mothers for that matter – emerges from her fictional characters. These new mothers have an ambiguous relationship with their female ancestors, often contradicting and disavowing their own mothers – 'killing' them, not even solely symbolically, as in *Brother and Sister* (2003) – but sometimes negotiating complex relationships of deference and agreement with their mythical archetypes, as is the case with some reincarnations in *Strada Provinciale Tre* (2007). Vinci's fictional renderings of today's world are ultimately reminiscent of ancient tragedy: absent mothers' roles – as in the author's inaugural and controversial *Dei Bambini non si sa niente* (1997) – are taken up by their own daughters in their new role of victims and proxy-mothers. More broadly speaking, motherhood does not seem to limit its effects to female individuals only and as such becomes a post- or supra-gendered category. In my talk I would like to elaborate on some of these aspects of Simona Vinci's 'deviant mothers'.

Susie Bainbrigge (French, Edinburgh): Motherhood and Mental Health in Lydia Salvayre's *La Compagnie des spectres* (2007) [*The Company of Ghosts*]

Motherhood and mental health, in French women's writing, has been explored in a number of key studies (see, for example, comparative studies by Rye, Dow, Fell *et al*). My presentation builds on this research by examining Lydia Salvayre's *La Compagnie des spectres* (2007) [*The Company of Ghosts*]. In Salvayre's work, we see how the transmission of trauma affects three generations of mothers and daughters. The mother as 'madwoman' takes centre stage in this linguistically bold text, which has its precursors in Cardinal, Ernaux, Redonnet, Duras and Beauvoir, amongst others. I will examine how the character Rose's capacity to mother is severely undermined and indeed, actively challenged, and investigate the possible meaning behind the gesture of ('deranged') solidarity that unites mother and daughter at the end. What are we to make of her lucidity amidst the madness? In my paper I will adopt an interdisciplinary approach by combining textual literary analysis with relevant theoretical frameworks from psychology, psychoanalysis, and trauma studies, in order to assess the contribution that this French text makes to debates about the presentation of madness and motherhood. The term 'transmission' can be read in various ways in the text, and this opens up possible readings not only of the transmission of trauma but also of knowledge, and heritage. In the paper I will consider how Salvayre's experimental use of language and form contributes to the transgressive power of the text, and to the possibility of expressing the 'inexpressible'. I will also assess the extent to which the text could be called a 'matrilinear' one, following in the footsteps of Beauvoir's 'Murielle' in *La Femme rompue*, or Redonnet's *Rose Mélie Rose*, for example.

21.10.13