

THE AESTH-ETHICS OF INTERRUPTION:

Maternal Subjectivity and Practices of Care as Aesthetic, Political and
Environmental Forces in the Creative Processes of Five Contemporary
Mother-Artists

Deirdre Mirjami Donoghue

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ISBN: 978-94-6416-827-3

Text: Deirdre Mirjami Donoghue
Layout: Marcel Borsten
Cover design: Marcel Borsten
Artwork on the cover: *Nobody Told Me About Her*, Kinke Kooi, 2015,
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Printing: Ridderprint, Alblasterdam

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Maternal Subjectivity and Practices of Care as Aesthetic, Political and Environmental Forces in the Creative Processes of Five Contemporary Mother-Artists

DE ESTH-ETHIEK VAN DE ONDERBREKING:

Maternale subjectiviteit en verzorgingspraktijken als esthetische, politieke en milieu krachten in de creatieve processen van vijf hedendaagse moeder-kunstenaars

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de
Universiteit Utrecht
op gezag van de
rector magnificus, prof. dr. H.R.B.M. Kummeling,
ingevolge het besluit van het college voor promoties
in het openbaar te verdedigen op

vrijdag 1 oktober 2021 des middags te 4:15 uur

door

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geboren op 12 juni 1971
te Pirkkala, Finland.

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Mother and I walk along a ridge left behind 10.000 years ago when the ice began melting over Finland. Suddenly she stops and stands still looking up at the top branches of a young pine, fifteen or so meters high. Speaking at once both to herself and to me she says: "The thing about being a mother is that every single decision you make, you always think at least twenty years ahead in order to calculate its consequences.

"Motherhood is a relational activity; entangled within spacetime matters; corporeal, embodied, temporal, discursive, materialised, political; more-than-human."
(Marie Lavelle, 2020, 2).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
ENGLISH ABSTRACT.....	5
NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING.....	7
PREFACE	9
INTRODUCTION	11
I. Lay of the Land.....	11
II. Research Questions.....	16
III. Theoretical Framework.....	18
III.I. Experience, Anecdote & Expanded Selves.....	19
III.II. From Mother Matter to Mattering Mothers.....	23
III.III. Ruddick's Maternal Thinking and Practice	26
III.IV. Maternal Interruptions	28
III.V. Producing Relations:	
From Relational Aesthetics toward Maternal Relational Aesth-Ethics	31
IV. Methodological Reflections	39
IV.I. Participatory Action Research	40
IV.II. Field Trips.....	42
IV.III. Data Collection:	
Semi-Structured Interviews and Ethical Considerations	43
IV.IV. Analytical Approaches.....	48
IV.V. Additional Note About My Co-Discussants	50
IV.VI. The Selection of Artists	50
CHAPTER 1:	
MY WORK IS NOT JUST ABOUT YOU, IT IS BECAUSE OF YOU:	
THE MATERNAL RELATIONAL AESTH-ETHICS OF WERONIKA ZIELINSKA,	
COURTNEY KESSEL AND SHARON STEWART	55
1.1. The Mother and The Artist	58
1.2. Maternal Interruptions and Hospitality as Acts of Ethical and Creative	
Responsiveness in the Work of Weronika Zielinska.....	61
1.3. Being One and Several in the Work of Courtney Kessel.....	72
1.4. Becoming Porous Through Acts of Listening and a Practice of Attunement	
in the Work of Sharon Stewart.....	77
1.5. Traversing Boundaries:	
Interruptions and Acts of Radical Maternal Hospitality	80
1.6. Concluding Remarks: Towards Microchimeric Bodies.....	83
CHAPTER 2:	
OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND THE DISSENTING FEMININE MATERNAL	
AESTH-ETHICS OF SHIRA RICHTER	85
2.1. Motherhood and The Politics of Human Reproduction in Israel.....	88
2.2. New Protagonists Rising from the Margins.....	93
2.3. The Feminine-Maternal Activist Gaze of Shira Richter	96

2.4.	‘Bird’s Eye’ / ‘Cut Mountain I’: Resisting Matricide.....	107
2.5.	‘Cut Mountain II’: The Exploitation and Appropriation of Natural Resources.....	117
2.6.	Interrupting (National) Narratives and The Curse of the Naked Woman.....	124
2.7.	Concluding Remarks	131

CHAPTER 3:

MATERNAL SUBJECTIVITY AND ‘CARRIANCE’ AS ECOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORCES IN THE ART AND CREATIVE PROCESS OF ARAHMAIANI.....	135
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3.1.	Caught Between Worlds: A Brief Overview of Arahmaiani, An Indonesian Muslim Woman and A Performance Artist.....	138
3.2.	Interrupted Maternal Experience and The Rising of a Feminine Maternal Subject.....	144
3.3.	Changing Aesthetics: Maternal Shocks of Becoming and Loss.....	152
3.4.	The Second Tremor: Mount Merapi and the Ecosophical Expansion of Arahmaiani’s Art Practice and Feminine-Maternal Subjectivity.....	160
3.5.	Third Pole: The Regeneration Project and Arahmaiani’s Environmental Activism	175
3.6.	Concluding Remarks	184

CONCLUSIONS.....	187
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WORKS CITED	192
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CURRICULUM VITAE	213
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank my children, Sami and Sofia, together with whom I have grown and shaped as a person. You have made me dive deeper into what it is to be human. Without you this dissertation would not exist.

I thank my husband Marcel for the attentive care given to our basecamp, enabling me to journey both outwards and inwards during the writing of this dissertation. Your continued support and encouragement, embellished with cups of fresh coffee and tea, delicious dinners, and your committed combat with the endless laundry pile and ongoing search for missing socks has kept me afloat. In addition to all the laughter and love that you have poured into our family throughout the years, I have learned a lot about mothering from you.

I thank my mother Pirkko for her always unwavering belief in me. You have modelled being a woman and a mother as a great, avant-garde adventure.

I thank my co-discussants, Weronika Zielinska, Courtney Kessel, Sharon Stewart, Shira Richter and Arahmaiani Feisal for their open heartedness in sharing their stories. You have made this dissertation possible.

I thank my supervisors Rosemarie Buikema and Kathrin Thiele for their continued trust and investment of time and care. I am deeply grateful for your fostering of my process and your continued encouragement. You have both been a source of inspiration in the ways that you model feminist research practices.

I am also indebted to Lisa Baraitser, whose support gave me courage to embark on this journey and whose research has been a continuous source of inspiration for me. Similarly, I am thankful to Bracha L. Ettinger, whose generosity in sharing thought and whose scholarly work has been indispensable to me when writing this dissertation.

I thank all my maternal sisters around the world, whose thought, work and solidarity has been a source of continued motivation to carry on, and whom each in some way have directly contributed to my process and well-being over the course of writing; I particularly want to thank, Irina Aristarkhova, Özge Açıkkol, Defne Ayas, Myrel Chernik, Paula Mc Closkey, Amy Dignam, Christa Donner, Kirsten Dufour, Rachel Epp Buller, Zoe Gingell, Dyana Gravina, Lise Haller Baggesen, Tina Kinsella, Jenny Klein, Irene Lusztig, Elena Marchevska, Susana Pedrosa, Irene Pérez, Barbara Philipp, Günes Savas, Lena Simic, Witta Tjan, Emily Underwood-Lee, Natalie Loveless, Andrea O'Reilly, Marlies Phielix, Seçil Yersel,

Mirjam Westen, and all the participants in the two Mothernists conferences; all the participants in 'The Maternal as an Attitude, Maternal Thinking and The Production of Time and Knowledge' reading group held at Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art and at Astrid Noacks Ateliers; all the participants in the m/other voices field trips and all the m/other voices column contributors.

I also thank Trude Oorschot, whose steadfast presence has been a source of calm when it came to organizational matters.

Lastly, I give my thanks to Jake, Charlie, Pip and the little Ficus plant whom have all kept me company in the otherwise solitary days of writing and thinking. Jake and Charlie, you have brought me for walks and made sure that I got enough breaks and fresh air during the dissertation process. You both have taught me the appreciation of a good stick and the joy of jumping into puddles of mud. Pip, you have reminded me of the importance of naps and taking time to enjoy life, even at times of pressing deadlines. Little Ficus, you have taught me to pay attention to the slow things and to care for the quiet things as you have sat beside me through the entire process of writing this dissertation.

I Thank You All.

ENGLISH ABSTRACT

Located at the intersection of contemporary art practice, theory and criticism, cultural analysis and feminist maternal theory, my dissertation engages with maternal interruptions, experience, subjectivity, practice and thinking as generative cultural, political and environmental forces in the artistic practices of five contemporary mother-artists.

My dissertation asks what kind of aesthetic, social and political relations, imaginaries and spaces are being produced and proposed by the creative processes of mother-artists turning to their maternal subjectivity of ‘severality’, that is of being more than ‘one’, as a foundational methodological attitude in their otherwise varied practices and geopolitical locations of cultural production.

By positioning both mothering and art-making as distinctive disciplines of social, cultural and political action, the theoretical intervention that I make in this dissertation is to think of mothering and art-making together as an interdisciplinary practice of social, cultural, political and environmental action and change. This intervention is threefold. Firstly, considering mothering and art making together as two distinct disciplines allows for the thinking and theorising of mothers as insightful research partners within the somewhat diverse but still exclusive field of contemporary arts practice. This strategic shift creates steps towards a more inclusive field of new knowledge production within the field of contemporary arts. Secondly, thinking (of) mothering as part of an interdisciplinary practice of cultural production allows us to examine and re-define, when necessary, the oppressive, discursive management of the figure of the ‘mother’ and the ‘maternal’ under hegemonic patriarchal structures by defining these terms through the practices of actual mothers themselves. This has the potential not only to move us toward a greater gender equity and open society, but also to allow for new and previously unseen knowledges and ways of doing to rise to the fore. Thirdly, and together with the theoretical lenses of new materialist, deep ecological and ecofeminist thought employed in this dissertation, my theoretical intervention unearths maternal subjectivity and practice as cultural, political and environmental forces of change.

The dissertation is divided into three chapters. Each of the chapters engages anew with the same set of research questions, each time approaching them through the coordinates of differing geopolitical locations and through differing embodied and situated maternal experiences. In Chapter 1, I explore the interdis-

ciplinary aesthetic and maternal practices of three white, western, contemporary mother-artists Weronika Zielinska, Courtney Kessel and Sharon Stewart, and I argue that their ‘maternal relational aesth-ethic’ practices give rise to a different kind of artistic subjectivity and aesthetic relationality than the individual artistic genius of modernity and the masculine ‘Relational Aesthetics’ dominating contemporary art. In Chapter 2, I examine the ‘artist’ visual arts practice of the Middle-Eastern, Israeli-American, Ashkenazi Jewish filmmaker and mother Shira Richter, and here I argue that Richter’s maternal experience and thinking enable a politically sharpened feminine-maternal aesth-ethic critique, interrupting and challenging the hegemonic institutional narratives on mothers, motherhood and the maternal in Israel. In Chapter 3, I examine the ecologically engaged, environmentally activist, artistic practice of the pioneering Indonesian performance artist Arahmaiani Feisal in relation to her disrupted maternal experience and subjectivity when her daughter was taken away from her shortly after birth. Here, I establish a link between maternal subjectivity of ‘severality’ and deep ecology’s expanded ‘ecological Self’, arguing for feminine maternal subjectivities and practices as environmental and ecological forces of contemporary cultural production.

NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

Dit proefschrift bevindt zich op het kruispunt van de hedendaagse kunstpraktijk, -theorie en -kritiek, de culturele analyse en de feministische maternale theorie. Het behandelt maternale onderbrekingen, ervaringen, subjectiviteit, praktijken en het maternale denken als generatieve culturele, politieke en milieukrachten binnen de artistieke praktijk van vijf hedendaagse moeder-kunstenaars.

Mijn proefschrift kijkt naar de verschillende soorten esthetische, sociale en politieke relaties, denkbeelden en ruimtes die worden geproduceerd en voorgesteld door de creatieve processen van moeder-kunstenaars die zich richten op hun maternale subjectiviteit van ‘meervoudigheid’, dat wil zeggen het meer zijn dan ‘één’, als een fundamentele methodologische houding in hun anders zo gevarieerde praktijken en geopolitieke locaties van culturele productie.

De theoretische interventie die ik in dit proefschrift toepas is om over moederschap en het maken van kunst samen na te denken als een interdisciplinaire praktijk van handeling en verandering op het vlak van zowel het sociale, culturele, politieke als milieu. Binnen deze interventie positioneer ik het moederschap en het maken van kunst als verschillende disciplines van sociaal, cultureel en politiek handelen. Dit is een drievoudige interventie. Ten eerste maakt het samen beschouwen van moederschap en het maken van kunst als twee verschillende disciplines het mogelijk om na te denken en te theoretiseren over moeders als inzichtelijke onderzoekspartners binnen het enigszins diverse maar toch nog steeds besloten domein van de hedendaagse kunstpraktijk. Deze strategische verschuiving zorgt voor stappen richting een inclusiever domein van nieuwe kennisproductie binnen het hedendaagse kunstveld. Ten tweede stelt het nadenken over moederschap als onderdeel van een interdisciplinaire praktijk van culturele productie ons in staat om het onderdrukkende, discursieve beheer van het figuur van de ‘moeder’ en het ‘maternale’ binnen hegemoniale patriarchale structuren te onderzoeken en, indien nodig, opnieuw te omschrijven door deze termen te definiëren naar aanleiding van de praktijken van daadwerkelijke moeders. Dit heeft niet enkel het potentieel om ons richting een grotere gendergelijkheid en open samenleving te bewegen, maar ook om nieuwe en voorheen ongeziene kennis en manieren van doen naar de voorgrond te brengen. Ten derde legt mijn theoretische interventie, samen met de theoretische lenzen van het nieuw-materialistisch, diepe ecologische en ecofeministisch denken die in dit proefschrift worden gebruikt, de maternale subjectiviteit en praktijk bloot

als krachten van verandering op het vlak van het culturele, politieke en milieu.

Het proefschrift is onderverdeeld in drie hoofdstukken. Elk van de hoofdstukken houdt zich bezig met dezelfde reeks onderzoeksvragen, waarbij deze telkens worden benaderd via de coördinaten van verschillende geopolitieke locaties en via verschillende belichaamde en gesitueerde moederschapservaringen. In hoofdstuk 1 onderzoek ik de interdisciplinaire esthetische en maternale praktijken van drie witte, westerse, hedendaagse moeder-kunstenaars: Weronika Zielinska, Courtney Kessel en Sharon Stewart, en ik beargumenteer dat hun ‘maternale relationele esth-ethische’ praktijken aanleiding geven tot een ander soort artistieke subjectiviteit en esthetische relationaliteit dan het individuele artistieke genie van de moderniteit en de mannelijke ‘relationele esthetiek’ die de hedendaagse kunst domineert. In hoofdstuk 2 onderzoek ik de ‘activistische’ beeldende kunstpraktijk van de Midden-Oosterse, Israëlish-Amerikaanse, Asjkenazisch Joodse filmmaker en moeder Shira Richter; hier beargumenteer ik dat Richters maternale ervaring en denken een politiek toegespitste vrouwelijke-maternale esth-ethieke kritiek mogelijk maakt, die de hegemoniale institutionele narratieven over moeders, moederschap en het maternale in Israël onderbreekt en uitdaagt. In hoofdstuk 3 onderzoek ik de ecologisch geëngageerde, milieuactivistische, artistieke praktijk van de baanbrekende Indonesische performancekunstenaar Arahmaiani Feisal in relatie tot haar verstoorde maternale ervaring en subjectiviteit, veroorzaakt doordat haar dochter kort na de geboorte bij haar werd weggehaald. Hier leg ik een verband tussen de maternale subjectiviteit van ‘meervoudigheid’ en het uitgebreide ‘ecologische zelf’ van de diepe ecologie, waarbij ik pleit voor vrouwelijke maternale subjectiviteiten en praktijken als milieu- en ecologische krachten binnen de hedendaagse culturele productie.

Preface

In the fall of 1994 two disruptive events took place. My experience of myself as a distinct and unified, individual Subject moving through the world became interrupted and undone. I was pregnant, and then: I, was not. Within a relatively short time-frame my understanding of myself transmuted from a single, indivisible 'I'-in-the-world' to a divisible assemblage of 'I-with-an-other' with-in the world. At the age of 22 and in a state of shock brought on by the circumstances as much as these two events, I was at the time unable to make sense of this experience, which so radically and viscerally shifted my sense of 'Self' from an indivisible and unified 'one' to an entity that was 'more-than-one'. It is here that I place the beginning of my own maternal journey. Then, in the spring of 1997, I gave birth to my first born and it was here, during the daily being-with and thinking-with this intimate unfolding other that I, like many mothers before and after me, began to actively question and think about notions of 'subjectivity', 'becoming', 'otherness' and 'hospitality' (to name just a few) and their political and ecological scope through the lens of my lived and embodied maternal experience and daily practice. These are all subjects that are also very current and prevalent in the interdisciplinary research practices of contemporary artists, scholars and cultural producers alike and to whom I have since then come to count myself in as an artist, performer and a researcher. Yet, despite these similarities between the intellectual and creative pursuits present both in the practices of many contemporary artists and scholars and the practices of many mothers, it has remained implicit and collectively understood that to speak with the voice of a mother and to theorize from the particular positionality that mothers as subjects and practitioners so often occupy in relation to these trending topics circulating within the contemporary art's many discursive events, is neither proper, desirable, nor done. In fact, within the field of contemporary art artist-mothers are expected to do something very particular and exact: to silence and erase their maternal experiences and subjectivities as potential sites of knowledge production and to simply: keep mum.

It has been this hegemonic cultural persistence to keep the mother silent as a Subject in the field of contemporary art that my insistence to question this status quo has arisen from. Furthermore it has been my own maternal experience including carrying and grieving, birthing and caring, giving space and holding space, emerging and becoming with, churning and forging with, resisting and strug-

gling with, unfolding and folding with, thinking and breathing with, sharing and co-emerging with the intimate and unknown others within me (during my pregnancies), and the dependent, vulnerable, demanding and at times monstrously needy and sticky intimate others living alongside and before me (post-partum) that has driven my desire to understand, map and theorize exactly how, and to what ends, maternal encounters and experiences impact the subjectivities and aesth-ethic (that is: at once both aesthetic and ethical) ‘worlding’ practices of mother-artists, continually responsible and accountable for the care and futures of their intimate others.

In this dissertation, by thinking psychosocially that is by “refusing a distinction between social and material practices and affective and psychic modalities, seeking always to articulate their mutual co-production” (Baraitser, 2009b, 9), I bring together contemporary visual and performance art practices with maternal strategies and practices of resistance, ethical responsiveness, political activism and deep ecological thinking. These matters, as queried and developed over a number of symposia, conferences, reading groups, field trips, in person interviews and ongoing dialogue with multiple international conversation partners throughout the course of this research are discussed and further developed across the following chapters. Each chapter engages with a different set of aesthetic and socio-political contexts. Furthermore, this dissertation is the sediment of a process that has spanned over several years. Whilst this research has germinated in the soil of my own maternal experience as a white, middle-class, Northern European woman, mother, performer and visual artist and whilst it has fertilised and fermented in the rich mulch of my co-discussant’s life stories, maternal experiences, insights and artistic practices, it has undoubtedly been my own mother’s non-sacrificial maternal attitude, her modelling of motherhood to me and my sister in her own particular and unconventional ways and her approach to mothering that has acted as the ecological horizon for this research, dissertation and thinking about the maternal as an aesth-ethic, political and ecological practice and force in forging new planetary futures. It is my hope that by engaging with the artistic practices and processes of mothers who make art without sacrificing their maternal subjectivities, this dissertation will in part help to open up intellectual, creative, discursive and material space in the field of contemporary art, and beyond, in which maternal subjectivities and practices of care can re-emerge as aesthetic, political and ecological attitudes and forces of doing and re-imaging the world we live in.

Introduction

I. Lay of The Land

In 1948, the English literary critic Cyril Connolly made his now infamous remark: “There is no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hallway.” (Connolly, 1948, 2008). Almost seventy years later this remark still resonates and is solidly re-instated by the words of two of the most influential women artists of today: “I would have been either 100 percent mother or 100 percent artist. I am not flaky and I don’t compromise... There are good artists that have children. They are called men.” (Emin in Alexander 2014). And: “In my opinion that’s [having children] the reason why women aren’t as successful as men in the art world... I had three abortions because I was certain that it [having children] would be a disaster for my work” (Abramovic in Neuendorf, 2016). These more recently made remarks of both Tracey Emin and Marina Abramovic, reveal to us how little has changed through the times when it comes to our culturally gendered norms about who should be holding the baby. More than that, these remarks show us how foreign the notion of such shared subjectivity, as exists between a mother and child, is in producing art and how little value and relevance is being given to maternal care work as a potentially meaningful and intellectually activity.

A quick look back to the beginnings of the Feminist Art Movement in the late 1960’s offers us a glimpse of how feminism’s uneasy relationship with motherhood may have partly helped to perpetuate modernity’s masculine myth of the artist as an individual genius. Take, for example, one of the leading figures of the feminist art movement, the artist and arts educator Judy Chicago whose copious feminist activism has included amongst others: co-founding the world’s first ‘Feminist Arts Program’ (FAP) at The California Institute of The Arts (1970-1992); co-founding the ‘Womanhouse’ project at CalArts (1972) and ‘The Women’s Building’ in Los Angeles (1973-1991), as well as co-organizing the two-year long feminist art program ‘Feminist Studio Workshop’ (FSW, 1973) in Los Angeles, besides authoring one of the world’s most well-known feminist art installation pieces: ‘The Dinner Party’, and who writes in her book ‘Institutional Time: Critique of Studio Art Education’ as follows:

[A]s I witnessed one woman artist after another curtailing or

giving up her career for motherhood, I was often glad that I had never felt an overwhelming desire to have a baby. In fact, apart from the short-lived nature of even the best conjugal relations, I abhorred the idea of having some other being inside my body and never understood how women could accept this without at least complaining. The idea of any creature feeding off my body while it lived in my womb then suckling milk from my breast repelled me. (Chicago, 2014:14).

Chicago's personal preference to not gestate nor to mother a child, and as described above, is just that: a personal choice that she had the privilege and right to choose, but it also speaks of an act of feminist resistance and rebellion against the institute of motherhood and the culturally dominant expectations of women to become mothers. As such, this was at once a personal choice as much as it was a political stance. In practical terms, her choice allowed her to "devote most of my waking hours to art... I wanted to nurture myself, not some other being". (Chicago, 2014, 14). As a political stance, however, it became to model and bear a very particular effect on how young women artists seeking to build careers as artists at the time were turned away from the alternative feminist art spaces of the 'Womanhouse' and the 'Feminist Studio Workshop' (FSW) if they also mothered children. Thus, although the feminist art movement, and as led by Chicago, supported a culture of equality between male and female artists and art educators, it is fair to say that the movement failed to support women who were also mothers as children were not welcome into the creative environments of neither 'Womanhouse' nor the 'Feminist Studio Workshop', and in this way leaving (aspiring) women artists with infants out of the feminist discourses of the feminist art movement, as well as the patriarchal institute of motherhood unchallenged. Suzanne Siegel, one of the members of the 'Feminist Studio Workshop' and 'Mother Art', an artist collective born in response to the 'FSW's' culture of dismissing mothers as serious artists, recalls dogs being allowed into the artist's studios at the 'FSW', but not children. She notes: "There was this immediate kind of negative response that ... [women] felt as mothers." (Siegel in an interview with Moravec, 1992). In contextualising this uneasy relationship between motherhood and the feminist art movement of the 1970's as arising from the predominantly white, second wave feminism of the 1960's and the 1970's, the art historian Rachel Epp Buller writes: "As white feminists threw

off the burdens of motherhood, many also dismissed the experiences of motherhood as a basis for serious art making. Some women hid the very existence of their children, facing ambivalence at best and rejection at worst, from the art world” (Epp Buller, 2012, 2).¹ Today, over 40 years later, this sentiment is loudly echoed in the words of one of the five contemporary mother-artists discussed in this dissertation who during one of our conversations about her experience as both a mother and an artist exclaimed: “It’s like we are bringing up our children in secret!” (Zielinska, 2013). In other words, the mother must remain invisible and silent.

Within such widely accepted, normative values and ideas afloat then within the contemporary art-world itself and in combination with today’s neoliberal market economy that values capital and competition more than care-work and the often invisible labours of mothers (mostly performed in the private spaces of the home, rather than public stage), many women artists feel unable to combine the having and the nurturing of children alongside a professional artistic practice. Precarious labour conditions and the resulting economic realities of artists, and other creative producers, (often forced to take on a multiple flexi-jobs) mixed with caring labour for dependant and vulnerable others, has not proven to be a compatible, nor a valued interdisciplinary union. And so, it is still often the case that when a woman artist becomes a mother, her possibilities for a serious participation in the art world cease. Although (to my knowledge) no systematic study has been carried out on the numbers regarding how many women artists have ceased to make art as a professional career after becoming mothers, my observations on the field as an artist, mother and researcher have all come to confirm this to predominantly still be the case.²

What this situation does is to contribute to a cultural climate where very

¹ Epp Bullers remark reminds us how mothers and motherhood quickly became the ‘others’ of second wave’s white feminism, but it also hints at the initial lack of intersectional discourse and the voices of women of colour in the shaping of the movement.

² With the rise of social media and the networking possibilities that social media such as Facebook and Twitter have enabled within the last decade, artist-mothers have been able to find, and connect with, each other building international networks based on mutual solidarity and desire to engage in both feminist mothering and art making. This emergence of social media has been crucial to the exponential rise of the visibility of mother-artists in the last decade, and it has helped to open up fast, collective sharing of information, and artistic opportunities for mother-artists by mother-artists themselves.

little art is being made through the maternal lenses and subjectivities of mothers whose daily practices in large parts consist of engendering, welcoming, persevering, enduring, holding, nurturing and caring for interrelated and dependent yet constantly changing and unfolding others, and whose such fore-mentioned daily practices inevitably come to produce distinct ways of collaborative thinking, being and relating to the world and its endless others. At the same time, however, the contemporary art-world and its institutions, particularly in the supported arts sector, are increasingly embracing, valuing and celebrating forms of interdisciplinary collaborations and artistic research as part of the economy of new knowledge production.³ In fact, from the 1960's onwards and with the dematerialisation of the art object and the rise of conceptual art, collaborative inquiries into forms of 'collectivity', 'participatory practices' and 'commoning' have become increasingly prevalent as both subject matters and as methodologies of cultural production amongst artists.⁴ More and more artists are now embedding their practices within the socio-political tapestries of world events, not only in their subject matter, but also in their formal choices and aesthetics.⁵ Research on the current trends in contemporary art discourse, in the field of cultural sociology, shows and ascertains the art historian Claire Bishop's findings of a 'Social Turn' (Bishop, 2006) as having taken place within contemporary art (Roose, Roose and Daenekindt, 2018, 18).⁶

³ The rising trend of understanding art as knowledge production ties in with a number of social and artistic shifts that took place in the 1960's and the 1970's. These include the dematerialization of the art object; the intellectualization of the field of contemporary art; the rise of research and text based art practices (Hlavajova, Winder and Choi, 2008). Institutions defining the art world around which the economy of contemporary art is built, include for example art schools, galleries, museums and funding agencies.

⁴ See for example: Allan Kaprow's 'Happenings'; Tino Sehgal's "constructed situations"; 'Casco Art Institute: Working for The Commons'.

⁵ For example, Ahmet Ögut's 'The Silent University' 2012-, Ni Haifeng's 'The Return of The Shreds' 2007, Dawn Weleski and Jon Rubin's 'Conflict Kitchen' 2010, Jeanne van Heeswijk's series 'Public Faculty' 2012- 2015.

⁶ The 'Social Turn' as coined by the art historian Claire Bishop in her essay 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents' (Bishop, 2006), refers to the "surge of artistic interest in collectivity, collaboration, and direct engagement with specific social constituencies" in which the "inter-subjective space created through these projects becomes the focus -and medium- of artistic investigation" (Bishop quoted in Roose, Roose and Daenekindt,

And although, it can be argued that “there have always been artists who have sought to create socially engaged and justice-oriented art” (Aristarkhova, 2020), in the last six decades contemporary art theory and art criticism have made a marked move toward ‘Dialogical-’ (Kester, 2012) and ‘Relational Aesthetics’ (Bourriaud, 2009), concerned and focused on issues of relationality and participation. Yet, despite of these tendencies towards collaborative and participatory artistic practices, social engagement and ‘Relational Aesthetics’, many of the art world’s institutional structures and values themselves are still dominantly organised in ways which reflect and support a very particular, endlessly mobile, individual subject: the solitary genius, the flâneur who “is always in full possession of his individuality” (Fournel in Shaya, 2004, 270). When art as cultural production dominantly stems from such singular, endlessly mobile subjectivities, there remains a particular gap, “a mother-shaped hole” (Haller-Baggesen, 2014), in the ‘collective’ cloth of who gets to produce this new knowledge, and the kinds of knowledge that is being (re)-produced in the field of contemporary art.

Albeit, the legacy of the modernist myth of the artist as a ‘solitary genius’ has increasingly been on the fade-out already before the millenium, the dominant cultural practices still favour the incessantly mobile subject. As the performance artist and scholar Natalie Loveless concludes: “As a body-based performance artist I am often, though not always, called upon to be mobile: to move my body from one location to another in a transnational circuit of cultural capital. This is not a circuit that easily accommodates children.” (Loveless, 2012). Or indeed, those living with children.

It is clear then, that the reconciliation of art and mothering is still very much an ongoing project and that the hospitable, inclusionary and participatory practices currently trending in contemporary art, are in fact most commonly still geared toward very particular, mobile and individual bodies and subjects. Yet, as long as we understand and value art as having an important and valuable role in effecting social change, and as a field of new knowledge production, as we have learned for example and amongst many others from Bennett (2005, 2012); Boal (2011); Buikema (2012, 2020); Cools and Gielen (2014), we must remain attentive to the normative ideologies and hegemonic cultural practices governing who can speak and participate, and in whose voice. Like ‘Rosalba Carriera’, one of the

2018, 18).

‘Guerilla Girls’ puts it: “While art may be transcendent, the art world should be subject to the same standards as anywhere else.” (Guerilla Girls, 1995) ⁷

This stubborn habit of excluding mothers as producers, of both material and non-material culture and as capable interdisciplinary practitioners, thinkers and participants in our contemporary art discourses is as archaic as it is foolish and preposterous, made all the more so by our troubled times in which matters of care, hospitality and sustainability are matters of planetary scale. In a world where we are currently experiencing a strong populist movement towards a cyclopean singular vision of Alt-right ideologies of division, intolerance and environmental exhaustion, this dissertation is a call for a fundamental move towards thinking with maternal bodies, minds, and practices of care in our re-imaginings of the ways in which we do and (re-) produce humanity within contemporary art and beyond

Thus, instead of considering the incessant demands of mothering as simply a series of endless obstacles for the making of ‘good art’, and as a labour of unbounded, free flowing love, this dissertation takes an affirmative turn towards maternal labour, -encounters, -practice and -thinking and explores these in relation to, and as a part of, the creative processes and methods of serious art making and as affective and intellectual practices of aesthetic ‘worlding’ (Haraway, 2016; Stewart, 2010, 2012).

II. Research Questions

Within such realities surrounding the culturally contradictory entanglement of the figure of the ‘mother’ and the ‘artist’, and as introduced above, the over-arching question that has guided my research process is: What is, in fact, really being produced by the artworks and artistic processes of women who both mother and make art? More precisely even: What kinds of aesthetic, social and political relations, imaginaries and spaces are being produced and proposed by the creative processes and artworks produced by mother-artists who embrace maternal interruptions and subjectivity of ‘severality’ (Baraitser, 2009a) as a foundational methodological

⁷ The ‘Guerrilla Girls’ are an anonymous group of feminist activist artists, active since 1985 and devoted to fighting sexism and racism in the arts by employing “facts, humor and outrageous visuals to expose gender and ethnic bias as well as corruption in politics, art, film and pop culture”(guerillagirls.com). The group’s members remain anonymous by wearing masks and using names of past women artists in order to keep the focus on the issues that they address, rather than inviting publicity on their personal identities. Rosalba Carriera (1673-1757) was a Venetian Rococo painter.

attitude in their otherwise varied practices of cultural production? And furthermore: How might this impact our common place understandings of what the maternal is and what it does?

I what follows, I will further elaborate this overarching, three-tiered question into more precise and explicit research questions which guide the chapters of this dissertation:

1. How do maternal interruptions, practices of care and shifts to one's subjectivity and sense of self come to inform, shape and affect the creative practices and modes of artistic production?

This question is repeated throughout all of the chapters and in each chapter I aim to answer this question anew by examining how the differently situated mothering practices and psychosocial maternal experiences co-exist, intersect and inform the artistic processes and practices of mother-artist as cultural producers and creators. As this question relies, for a big part, on the narrated accounts of mother-artists, a sub-question that arises here connects to the ways in which mother-artists narrate their artistic practices in relation to their maternal experiences within the social, cultural and institutional contexts that they are situated in. Alongside the first question, runs therefore the more politically orienteered question of:

2. What kind of ethical-, aesthetic-, and affective relations, imaginaries and spaces (both material and symbolic) are being generated as a result of these (maternal) shifts and interruptions to the artist's subjectivity and her changed sense of self?

Again, this question runs through each chapter, and in each chapter I aim to examine what the mother-artist's changed aesthetics enable, reveal and produce by analysing their artworks in their specific cultural, social and geopolitical contexts. The third and final question guiding the chapters of this dissertation asks ultimately:

3. How do the engendered relations, imaginaries and spaces interrupt and challenge the deep-seated Western, masculine, cultural narratives of both: the mother as a persona non grata in public life and the artist as an autonomous genius? And furthermore, in what ways do their maternal practices, thinking and attitudes interrupt, inform and re-imagine cultural production both within and beyond contemporary art?

In engaging with both empirical and philosophical questions on what kinds of worlds, both material and symbolic, are being produced and proposed from within the cracks and fissures between the traditionally conflicted pairing of the figures of the ‘mother’ and the ‘artist’, and the kinds of imaginaries currently rising up from such a pairing, this dissertation seeks to re-imagine feminine-maternal practices and thinking as generative modalities of doing within contemporary art, and beyond.⁸ As such these research questions draw attention to the embodied maternal experiences and practices as sites of knowledge production within contemporary art. Furthermore, they aim to create space for the query and critique of the deep-seated normative ideas alive within contemporary art and its institutions, which still too often and too quickly fail to include and accommodate subjects other than the individual, mobile and autonomous in their otherwise seemingly diverse, participatory and interdisciplinary knowledge production practices.

III. Theoretical Framework

Following in the footsteps of the art historian and cultural theorist Andrea Liss and the feminist philosopher Sarah Ruddick, I too walk and wonder with the question of “*what maternal concepts might introduce into political and philosophical*

⁸ The cases and accounts in this dissertation are limited and non-exhaustive, and represent only a fraction of women and women’s maternal experiences, practices and creative processes as thinkers and makers. For example, 4 of the 5 mother-artists in this dissertation are White, middle-class women living either in Western Europe, North America or the Middle-East. 1 out of the 5 women is of South-East-Asian and mixed origin. None of the 5 mother-artist’s sociocultural backgrounds and histories here are representative of the many and diverse Black-, African-American-, American-Indian- and Latina women’s maternal experiences. There is much more still to be said, explored, unearthed, as well as many more mothers listened to when mapping the imaginaries that the pairing of ‘mother’ and ‘artist’ brings to the surface. This point is also revisited under ‘The Selection of Artists’(IV.VI).

discussions” (Ruddick, 1994, 30, emphasis added). Attempting to answer such a question by engaging with the experiences and practices of actual mothers not only asks for qualitative research methods into discovering maternal concepts, their workings and agency as social, political and philosophical forces. It also asks for a feminist research practice that carefully considers the researcher’s own role, position and methods employed in both the gathering and interpreting the collected data. A project like this cannot be adequately approached by employing a framework that simply rests on the same old patriarchal ground as the house that Jack built in Newbery’s famous nursery rhyme (Newbery, 1753), just as little as it is a project that can be fully explored by only using ‘the master’s own tools’ (Lorde, 1984).⁹ Instead, it is a project that requires a feminist, maternal framework that both arises from and values the many different, embodied experiences, practices and thinking of its Subjects. In the discussion that follows, I foreground the epistemological basis, theoretical framework and the concepts that I think with in my analytical process in this dissertation. I have selected these particular frameworks and concepts in order to interrupt and challenge the traditional Western, anthropocentric, individualist and masculinist subjectivity as the only appropriate model for artistic production and to explore the maternal subjectivity of mother-artists as an alternative model for our sociocultural practices and production.¹⁰

III. I. Experience, Anecdote and Expansive Selves

Working with mother-artists and their maternal life stories alongside feminist philosophy and art theory, in this dissertation I first of all think through the complex relationship between anecdote and theory, engaging in what Jane Gallop has called the making of “theory in the flesh of practice” (Gallop, 2002: 164). An intrinsic part of making ‘anecdotal theory’ is the assignment of value and agency to the lived and embodied experiences of the research participants in order to allow for a richness of thinking to arise to the fore. As a means to practice a feminist politics of

⁹ ‘This is The House That Jack Built’ is a popular cumulative tale in which each new verse repeats all the previous verses before adding a new one. In common usage the saying “like a house that Jack built” often refers to a badly constructed structure.

¹⁰ Although whiteness is implicated within the canon of Western art history, in this dissertation it does not come to the fore as my focus here is not on processes of racialization.

location and difference, this approach strives for the relinquishing of universality, instead favouring the research's participant's own production of local and 'situated knowledges' (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1986), that not only recognize the embodied subject's social, cultural and political contexts as factors in the her partial and subjective view, but which also recognize the "primary locus of the body as the site from which one's partial perspective can be *enunciated*." (Hinton, 2014, emphasis hers). On the other hand, and as my engagement with the research material has revealed, a solely human-centred framework cannot adequately explain and analyse the findings arising from the research participant's artistic processes, practices and artworks. Instead, a common thread of environmental ethics has become evident and so I also employ here theory from within environmental philosophy, such as 'deep ecology' (Carson, 1962; Guattari, 2000; Naess, 1973; Plumwood, 1993; Seed et al., 1988) and ecological feminism (d'Eaubonne, 1974; Gaard, 2010; Warren, 2000) in my analytical process. The need for thinking with environmental ethics in this dissertation has risen from the situated practices of my co-discussants.

Neither 'deep ecology' nor 'ecofeminism' describe singular theories, but rather cover a broad range of thought (Booth, 2000). A common tenet within both, however, is the interest in forging a new conceptualisation of the self, a notion that goes to the very heart of this project. For example, within 'deep ecology' we find the concept of 'ecological self', a term first coined by Arne Naess (Naess, 1995), that refers to an expansive, transpersonal sense of self and that moves from the personal to the ecological. The 'ecological self' is awakened by an identification, an 'emotional resonance' or 'feeling with' other life forms (Seed, Macy, Fleming and Naess, 1988), thus creating an expanded concept of self where boundaries between self and other are dissolved. (Bragg, 1996).¹¹ Where 'deep ecology' speaks of an 'expanded self', 'ecofeminism', a term first introduced in Françoise d'Eaubonne's

¹¹ The 'ecological self' can be thought of as related to a constructionist view of the self, concerned with how "people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live" (Gergen, 1985, 266). In other words, within a constructionist view of self our knowledges of ourselves are created through and in relation to others and the changing social situations that we are embed in, thus reflecting an interdependent view of self, an approach often adapted within feminist social inquiry. To make a move then from a constructionist view of self towards an 'ecological self', "this interdependence simply needs to be extended from the relationship with 'others' (meaning certain human beings) to 'all life forms', ecosystems and the planet itself". (Bragg, 1996. p100).

book *'La Féminisme ou la Mort'* (1974) speaks of a 'relational self'. As a term, 'ecofeminism' harbours different feminist perspectives, approaches and efforts to understanding ecology. (e.g. liberal, Marxist, radical and socialist feminism.) Within these diverse feminist perspectives however, a unifying claim, after d'Eaubonne, is that oppression, domination, exploitation and colonization by the Western patriarchal society has directly caused irreversible environmental damage. (Warren, 2000; Griffin, 1978, Merchant, 1989; Daly, 1978) and that patriarchal structures use dualistic, hierarchical, binary oppositions to justify and reinforce their practices of dominance and exploitation. (Hobgood-Oster, 2012). Within the last decade 'modern ecofeminism', also referred to as 'feminist eco-criticism' (Gaard, 2010), has adapted a more post-humanist ethical stance that allow us "to forge ethical and political positions that can contend with numerous late twentieth / early twenty-first century realities in which 'human' and 'environment' can no longer be considered as separate. (Alaimo, 2011). Such ecofeminist, deep ecological understanding of ourselves as a part of an ecological whole, beyond anthropocentrism, is then at the heart of the ecofeminist approach that I have adapted within this study. It is a view that gives rise to an understanding of a self, which is not separated from everything else, such as for example the 'self' conceived by Enlightenment thought.¹²

What employing ecofeminist and deep ecological frameworks then generate in relation to our conceptualisations of ourselves, is the understanding that selves are constituted by their relations and as such they cannot be static things, but rather processes.¹³ Here, my theoretical framework also aligns with the current new

¹² From the pre-Socratic philosophers onwards until the early modern period, the dominant worldview about the universe was that nothing exists outside matter. There was only matter and forces that act on matter (which we now know as gravity; electromagnetism; nuclear forces; strong and weak interactions) and the processes that those forces bring about in matter. Human beings were understood as part of matter. Thoughts, ideas, memories and minds were understood as being given rise to by matter. In the Age of Enlightenment a split between matter and mind was brought forth by Rene Descartes as a response to preserve scientific way of thinking and measuring alongside the spiritual and ethical endeavours of Christianity. The unfortunate and harmful legacy of Cartesian thought to Western humanist traditions has been its persistent legacy of dualist thinking, which has caused harm to many, amongst which: women and 'nature'.

¹³ In the field of psychoanalysis we find the concept of 'matrixial trans-subjectivity' in the work of the feminist theorist Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, which conceptualizes subjectivity as encounter, a process of trans-subjective linking and becoming within the body-psyche of a female human being. In Ettinger's feminine matrixial theory we can observe a more

materialist orientation of post-humanities. For example, within post-humanities, we find the figuration of ‘diffraction’ (adapted from the quantum physical phenomenon of same name), which helps us to “illuminate the complexity of the always/already entangled processes of dis/continuous becomings that make up what we are used to calling ‘world’” (Thiele, 2014). What makes ‘diffraction’ such an interesting and important methodological tool for feminist and post-colonial theory, and the field of post-humanist knowledge production, is the fact that not only does ‘diffraction’ bring “the reality of entanglements to light, it is itself an entangled phenomenon” (Barad, 2007, 73). As such ‘diffraction’ as a thinking tool, a tool of analysis of our “socialnatural practices” (88) re-minds us, and keeps us mindful, of our own deep and performative entanglements with the world and phenomena as itself affecting difference. In other words, we always ‘matter’, as opposed to simply mirroring and reflecting the world around us. The strength of ‘diffraction’ over ‘reflexivity’ as a thinking tool allows for us to move away from representationalism and toward a deeper accountability of our socialnatural practices.

In viewing the contested matter of the ‘mother-artist’ through a feminist new materialist lens, my aim within this dissertation is to draw attention to the relevance of the maternal practices of mother-artists as having performative significance for their creative processes and as material-discursive practices of world making. In adapting a deep ecological framework in this dissertation has meant to adapt a critical stance towards the representation of others as a potentially oppressive practice. This includes my own position as a researcher, just as much as the representation of mothers by male artists depicting them as self-sacrificing saints, or the commonplace practice of viewing mother-artists through dualistic patriarchal lenses that fix mothers and mothering into a binary opposition with artistic creativity and -thinking. Furthermore, employing an ecofeminist, deep ecological and new materialist approach within my research practice has meant that a great amount of consideration and care have been placed on giving and making time for the relational processes of building and nurturing relationships with and amongst

ecological conceptualization of the self, more similar (even though limited to humans) to Naess’ conceptualization of ‘ecological Self’, than what has been allowed for in the traditional psychoanalytic theory of Freud and Lacan where the ‘self’ arises through splitting away from matter (the mother’s body) and towards culture, language, spirit and unembodied universal genius. I will elaborate further on the theoretical centrality of Ettinger’s ‘matrixial theory’ and her ‘matrixial trans-subjectivity’ in relation to my research in the following section ‘From Mother Matter to Mattering Mothers’ (III.II.).

the research participants within my projects focus on how maternal experience and concepts translate into artistic processes and what they might introduce into political and philosophical discussions within contemporary art and beyond. These considerations and processes will be made clear later on in the discussion about methodology under section IV., 'Methodological Reflections'.

III. II. From Mother Matter to Mattering Mothers

A term requiring some further clarification here is the seemingly simple and common term of 'mother', a word that most of us - by being "of a woman born" (Rich, 1995), - have a direct and intimate relationship with. Beyond its most common meaning as a female parent, however, an etymological account of her as a generative space quickly offers us ways to understand the figure of the 'mother' differently, making it also possible for us to re-think with her, or as Andrea Liss puts it: "to think (m)otherwise" (Liss, 2009). Thus, whilst in this dissertation the term 'mother' is used to refer to women in relation to their children and the pragmatic care work that they perform in relation to those they think of as their children, it is done with the understanding that to be a 'mother' is never static and that the experience of being a 'mother' is not the same for everybody, nor is it necessarily only reserved to women.

In addition to thinking the 'mother' through the situated, psychosocial experiences and daily practices of women in relation to their children and their sense of self, I think about the 'mother' here also in relation to material culture as I analyse what 'she' has come to generate and matter within the entangled material-discursive practices of mother-artists participating in this research. The etymological origin of 'matter' as substance of which any physical object consists or is composed of is a derivative of the Latin 'mater' meaning '*mother*' and '*matrix*' (Latin for '*womb*'). What the consideration of 'matter' in reference to its etymological roots of 'mater' ('mother') and 'matrix' ('mater' + Latin suffix '-trix', which forms feminine nouns of agency) enables us to do is to rethink the figure of the mother and the maternal as generative and mattering, feminine matrixial forces. And this matters. To quote the feminist theorist, science studies scholar and new materialist Donna Haraway: "It matters what matters we use to think other matters with." (Haraway, 2016,12).

The Israeli born psychoanalyst, artist and a mother Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger's theory of the 'matrixial borderspace' (Ettinger, 2006) does exactly that.

That is: it brings the feminine maternal body into psychoanalytic theory as an active feminine co-agent. Her ‘matrixial borderspace’ refers to a feminine sphere of time, space and mattering. More concretely even: the late intrauterine space-time of pregnancy, as an example on matrixial thinking and mattering in a world of differences, and as a way of mattering difference in the world.

Co-existing with Lacan’s symbolic order, Ettinger’s matrixial theory articulates a new ethical understanding and a supplementary ‘alternative’ to the traditional psychoanalytic formulation of the ‘self’ and ‘other’ relations by thinking our subject formation through the feminine maternal, *matrixial* spacetime of the intrauterine, pre-linguistic sphere preceding our entrance into language and Western dualist logic. Through the late intrauterine encounter between the becoming-mother and the becoming-child, Ettinger’s matrixial theory produces ‘trans-subjectivity’, an understanding of agency/subjectivity which differs from the traditional Western psychoanalytic theory of subject formation. In her own words: “In the matrixial stratum of subjectivization, *subjectivity is an encounter*.” (Ettinger 2006, 84, emphasis hers). This view contrasts the traditional psychoanalytic view in which human subjectivity arises through the child’s separation from the primary mother-child dyad and through his transition from this pre-symbolic fusion into symbolic social order. This ‘necessary’ separation, according to traditional psychoanalytic view, in order to become a healthy subject is enabled by the figure of the father who breaks the mother-child pairing, introducing the child into social life and language.¹⁴

The figure of the father as a civilizing force originates both in the Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic traditions. In Freud, this ‘paternal function’ of the father appears during the psychosexual stage of the ‘phallic stage’, a stage during which the child first becomes aware of her/his sexual difference and begins a process of negotiating this difference, which, if successful, resolves in the child’s identification with the same-sex parent.¹⁵ In Lacan the father is not an actual person,

¹⁴ Such traditional psychoanalytic view is not only produced by, but further reproduces, a gendered patriarchal symbolic order which is based on symbolic matricide and denial of female subjectivity. In short the subjectivity that has been brought forth by the traditional Western psychoanalytic tradition is a deeply gendered patriarchal subjectivity.

¹⁵ Freud proposes that psychological development in individuals is psychosexual in nature and takes place through 5 psychosexual stages (oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital), of which the ‘phallic stage’ takes place between the ages of 3 and 6.

but a signifier, a symbolic force of (paternal) ‘thirdness’ that interrupts the primary mother-child unit entering the child into a wider relation and engagement with the outside cultural sphere, language and society.¹⁶ In both cases, however, the figure of the father (whether real or as a signifier) functions as a gendered term of ‘thirdness’ to the primary mother-child dyad, re-mediating the mother-child relation and ushering the child into a (patriarchal) symbolic order. In the traditional psychoanalytic tradition then, healthy subject formation and the subject’s entrance into language and culture rests on a cultural matricide of sorts.¹⁷

Feminist theorists, such as Luce Irigaray (1974), Amber Jacobs (2004) and Alison Stone (2012), to name just a few, have addressed and critiqued a number of issues that such traditional, psychoanalytic views present to actual women in their structural upholding of traditional gender divisions of labor. In fact, at the cost of being excommunicated from the Lacanian school of thought, Luce Irigaray argued that a separate subject position for women does not exist in Western culture and that a woman can only become a subject if she assimilates to male subjectivity. (Irigaray, 1974). Irigaray, a student of Lacan, was expelled from École Freudienne de Paris after the publication of her second doctoral dissertation ‘The Speculum of the Other Woman’ in which she made this point. In the words of Jessica Elbert Mayock, “the theoretical structures of psychoanalysis have excluded the female subject by placing her outside of the Symbolic” (Mayock, 2014). And I agree. These structures have excluded the female subject. Furthermore, they have been erected on matricide, and it is here that Ettinger’s ‘matrixial theory’ gifts us with

¹⁶ Within psychoanalytic theory it is possible to distinguish different kinds of figures of ‘thirdness’ (Coelho, 2016). In his paper ‘The origins and destinies of the idea of ‘thirdness’ in contemporary psychoanalysis’, Coelho distinguishes between 10 different psychoanalytical concepts of the ‘third’ (Coelho, 2016, 1107). The paternal function of the figure of the father as a term of ‘thirdness’ is discussed, for example, in “Conceptualizing the Paternal Function: Maleness, Masculinity, or Thirdness?” in *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 49.4 (2013): 559-585, where Nick Davies and Gill Eagle present four different, interrelated dimensions of paternal function in relation to ‘thirdness’ as they appear in psychoanalytic literature. To summarise, in their paper the ‘thirdness’ of ‘paternal function’ appears as a ‘separating third’; as a ‘facilitator of mental structure and the capacity to think’; as a ‘facilitator of affect management’ and as a ‘provision of psychic safety’.

¹⁷ In fact, in Lacan, the absence / foreclosure of the symbolic father who mediates the relation between mother and child, is linked to psychosis.

a different ethical horizon. A proto-ethical horizon that arises from our originary, co-emergent, matrixial, trans-subjective and co-poetic linking and becoming with(in) each other with(in) the matrixial space-time and the body-psyche of a female human being.

In thinking about the figure of the mother and the maternal with Ettinger's theory and alongside the situated, psychosocial experiences and daily practices of actual mothers, in this dissertation I explore, to various degrees in the different chapters the relationship between the feminine maternal experience of trans-subjective linking during the (late) intra-uterine stage of becoming-mother / becoming-child. And I analyze how this trans-subjective linking affects and impacts the material-discursive (mattering) practices of contemporary mother-artists.

III. III. Ruddick's Maternal Thinking and Practice

A feminist pragmatist approach running parallel to the psychosocial; psychoanalytic; new materialist; and eco-philosophical approaches to mattering with 'mother' brings me to the foundational work of the feminist philosopher and pioneer of care ethics, Sarah Ruddick.¹⁸ In her influential work 'Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace' (1995), Ruddick takes a pragmatic feminist approach to looking at the work of embodied and situated mothers as an ongoing, committed, *daily practice* that through time, space and repetition comes to produce distinctive ways of thinking. Thinking with Ruddick in this dissertation has reminded me to stay rooted in the concrete and actual maternal practices of real, embodied mothers and their particular and situated material entanglements with the world, both as mothers and as artists. In other words, Ruddick has sharpened my focus as a researcher to what Jane Gallop has since referred to as doing "theory in the flesh of practice" and to avoid the making of "disembodied theory" (Gallop, 2002, 164). She has also sharpened my focus in thinking about (and with) the kinds of maternal thinking that the embodied maternal practices of the five mother-artists in this dissertation have produced. This has been important in order to more precisely examine how

¹⁸ Emerging in the 1990's, contemporary feminist pragmatism draws upon both feminist and pragmatist theory and practice with a focus on social change. In redressing dualism and emphasizing pluralism, lived experience and activism feminist pragmatists contribute, for example, to discussions about epistemology, social and political philosophy and ethics. For more see, for example: 'Contemporary Feminist Pragmatism' (Hamington and Bardwell-Jonesones, 2015).

exactly their maternal practices have come to inform and intersect with their artistic practices.

Recognizing that there are distinctive kinds of thinking (scientific, historical, psychoanalytic, religious, maternal and so on), and that distinctive kinds of thinking arise from distinctive kinds of practices within different kinds of disciplines, Ruddick makes the radical move to include and to think about mothering as a practice, referring to it as: “one discipline amongst others” (1995, 27). In so doing, she creates space for the consideration of the distinctive ways of thinking that are borne through the particular, repeated practice of mothers as: ‘maternal thinking’.¹⁹ Furthermore, and in her own words, thinking also “depends on the *community of participants* in which it arises and their truths are tested by shared criteria.” (1995, 15, emphasis mine). In other words: “concepts are defined by shared aims and by rules or means for achieving those aims.” (Ibid.) For mothers in general, according to Ruddick, the shared aims are to meet the demands of “preservation”, “growth” and “social acceptability” and thus the means required to meet these aims are that of “preservative love”, “nurturance” and “training” (1995, 17).

But, Ruddick also introduces another idea. Borrowing from the American pragmatist Charles Sanders Pierce, she writes that “we think when we are disturbed, and the aim of our thinking is to recover our equilibrium. If it is conflict and trouble that spur thought, then to describe a work to articulate its thinking means looking for its disturbances amongst its routines” (1995, 31).²⁰ Here thinking is presented not only as an activity arising from social human practices, but as a responsive activity arising at moments of disturbance and interruption. By emphasizing these two different accounts on how thinking comes about, that is: through social human practices based on shared aims and means, and through disturbances to these practices, Ruddick puts forth the idea that in order for us to understand the thinking produced by any particular practice and the labor that goes into perform-

¹⁹ By theorizing mothering as a ‘discipline’ and as a ‘practice’, Ruddick also enables what has traditionally been considered as women’s work to be thought of as everybody’s work, yet regardless of her framing of mothering as a practice that anybody can perform, she recognizes that “[a]ll mothering, whether done by men or women, depends on some particular woman’s labor” as after all: “all mothering depends on some woman’s birthgiving” (Ruddick, 1995: xiii, emphasis hers).

²⁰ Charles Sanders Pierce (1893-1914), often referred to as ‘the father of pragmatism’ was an American philosopher, logician and mathematician.

ing it, we should not only look to its routines, but to the disturbances in its routines.

Throughout this research I have aimed to pay close attention to both: the distinct practices that mothers perform and the diverse interruptions they experience. Applying this approach to the maternal practices of the five mother-artists in this dissertation has generated an understanding of their maternal thinking as producing creative and imaginative ways of responsiveness and responsibility. Responsiveness and responsibility that has then informed, intersected and shaped the artistic practices and modes of artistic production.

III. IV. Maternal Interruptions

Deriving from the Latin *inter* ('between') and *rumpere* ('to break'), 'interruption' refers to breaks in continuity; the pauses and intervals that perforate a particular continuous flow of action. "Like its close allies, disruption and eruption, interruption reveals the taken-for granted background of experience through its power to chop it up and to intervene". (Baraitser, 2009a. 69). While writing this thesis, I have been continuously interrupted in my daily research practice of writing, thinking, reflecting and analyzing and it has been as much through these moments of rupture, as well as through the continuous lines of thought in between these ruptures, that this dissertation has come into being. Working through the central lines of thought within this dissertation, I have again and again attempted to embrace the many appearances of interruption during the research process as potentially generative moments. In other words, as moments of pause that give rise to the unexpected and unplanned, be it a personal experience, a new line of philosophical questioning, or a re-adjusted analytical interpretation. In this way 'interruption' is not only one of the subject matters in this research, but is woven into the very research methodology itself. In employing interruptions in this way, both within my own research practice, as well as within the artistic practices of the research participants, has been a strategy for me to shift focus away from interruptions as solely disruptive forces and as moments of lost time and lost equilibrium. Instead, and as much as possible, the appearing interruptions have been put to serve as a diffracting tool, which time and time again has forced me as a researcher to pause, re-look, re-think and re-question the issues and phenomena at hand.²¹

²¹ In 'Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart', Parallax, 20:3, 168-187, 2014, Karen Barad gives account of 'diffraction' (from the Latin 'diffringere', meaning to break apart in pieces), an optical phenomena referring to light breaking up into different directions, as a tool for thinking about difference within feminist scholarship. My use of diffraction here

Such approach to interruptions as an integral part of my research methodology has also meant taking my daily practices as a mother, artist and researcher equally seriously, considering them as part of an interdisciplinary approach where each triangulated discipline at times comes to disrupt and inform the line of thought of the others. In other words: maternal practice of care and holding space for the unfolding of another has often quite abruptly and in mid-sentence disrupted the researcher's chain of thought; the artist's aesthetic working through with materials, phenomena and concepts has disrupted the researcher's analytical attention by pushing it to previously unseen and unquestioned corners of the research; the researcher's scientific framework has come undone under the maternal gaze and the demands of every-day life as a woman and a mother. Using interruptions as part of my methodology, it has been my intention to give each practice an equal stance within the research process, and to allow for each practice to potentially disrupt and inform each other, slowly weaving together a body of knowledge rising as much from the spaces of rupture in between the practices, as much as from the duration required to regain a new equilibrium.

In her foundational work 'Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption', the psychosocial theorist Lisa Baraitser examines maternal subjectivity as a set of ethical relations with the (post-birth) child and defines the maternal subject as a subject of constant interruption (Baraitser, 2009a). In looking at interruptions as the "appearance of difference that dislodges the Same from itself; difference understood as a breach in the fabric of the Same" (2009a, 69), Baraitser puts forth a formulation of 'interruption' as at once being both a destabilizing and a productive force and asks: "[W]hat might be produced for a mother by the endless interruptions by her child?" (Ibid.). In this dissertation I expand on Baraitser's question, applying it to the artistic processes of these five mother-artists as I ask: How do maternal interruptions and shifts to one's subjectivity and sense of Self come to

has functioned to trouble the very dichotomy of the object/subject, self/other logic of Western philosophy and psychoanalytic tradition, and helped me to look and think deeper about interruption and questions of: 'who and what in fact is interrupted?', 'who and what in fact interrupts?', 'who and what creates and authors?', 'who and what gives birth to whom?', 'and how do our agential and entangled, embodied and psychic, feminine-maternal intra-actions challenge the patriarchal dualist order, and engender new patterns and constellations of knowledge.'

inform, shape and affect artistic practices and modes of artistic production?; What kind of ethical-, aesthetic- and affective relations and spaces are being generated through the materiality of the particular maternal interruptions, shifts that the mother-artists in this study are subjected to?; How do the artistic processes of mother-artists, as born from within these ruptures, in turn interrupt the Western art historical conventions of the masculine, autonomous and mobile figure of the artist as genius, and challenge a number of contemporary, art institutional structures and discourses in contemporary art? ²² In short: in what ways do maternal experiences, practices and thinking, as performed by and defined from within the embodied practices of actual mothers, come to interrupt, affect and re-imagine cultural production in the field of aesthetics?

However, rather than limiting myself to the mundane daily interruptions inflicted upon the mother, directly caused by the child through her “incessant crying, incessant demands, incessant questioning, incessant interruption” (Baraitser, 2009a, 11), I include in my analysis a broader spectrum of maternal interruptions and temporalities. These include interruptions inflicted upon the mother by demands made on her by the institution of motherhood. In other words, the patriarchal and religious priorities and expectations assigned to motherhood as a sociocultural institution, dictating and defining the role and work of women as mothers, with the aim to control them.²³ For example, in Chapter 2, the Israeli filmmaker, mother and artist, Shira Richter’s sense of self as a continuous subject and as a citizen becomes slowly disrupted when she becomes a mother to twin boys, and the religious, patriarchal, nation-state conventions and expectations of Israeli motherhood start to unsettle her. In addition, Richter’s maternal practice of care is continuously being interrupted by ongoing war; armed conflicts; government and military propaganda;

²² The modern idea of the artist as genius began emerging in the Renaissance, when “[t]he rise of the artist, from craftsman to genius, from artisan to gentleman” (Wallace, 2013) began taking place. To read more on this see: Wallace, William E. “The Artist as Genius.” Bohn/A Companion to Renaissance and Baroque Art (2013): 149–167.

²³ My usage of the concept of ‘motherhood as an institution’ derives, besides from my own lived experience as a mother, from the work of Adrienne Rich who probably most famously differentiates between motherhood as ‘experience’ and ‘institution’. For Rich, motherhood as experience relates to the “potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that that potential – and all women- shall remain under male control” (Rich, 1995, 13, emphasis hers).

worry and activism to try to address these issues within her own family in the hope of raising feminist sons. In Chapter 3, in the case of the Indonesian performance artist Arahmaiani, the maternal interruption is the interrupted maternal experience itself which becomes inflicted upon her by the surrounding culture's religious and patriarchal norms of suppressing women's rights to mother outside of marriage, resulting in her daughter being taken away from her shortly after she gives birth.

Lastly and importantly, the maternal interruptions included and examined in this dissertation comprise the interruptions that mothers themselves engender and enact in their surrounding cultural, political and environmental narratives through their 'maternal relational aesth-ethic' practices.

III. V. Producing Relations: From Relational Aesthetics toward Maternal Relational Aesth-Ethics

A central concept that emerges from my research is 'maternal relational aesth-ethics'. This is a concept that I have coined to describe the kind of aesthetic relationality I have identified at work in the practices of a number of mother-artists, and that cannot be fitted within contemporary art's 'Relational Aesthetics'. In simple terms, 'maternal relational aesth-ethics' refers to the interdisciplinary weaving together of the aesthetic and the maternal practices of (some) contemporary mother-artists. This weaving together (of the aesthetic and the maternal) is, however, always already entangled with the mother's relationship with her child/children, her intimate other/s. A relationship based on continued responsiveness, care, nurture and preservative love which often times interrupts and diffracts with the artistic process of the mother, at once both singular and several. Thus, rather than working from the subject position of Modernity's individual autonomous subject, the mother-artist practicing 'maternal relational aesth-ethics' works from an embodied and psychosocial experience of maternal severality. In performing maternal care work alongside an artistic practice, in this way resisting sacrificing herself as a subject on a patriarchal altar of motherhood and instead turning to her subjective, maternal experience as a generative force for her artistic cultural production, the mother-artist begins to engage in a process of maternal, relational, aesth-ethic action. Together these actions -repeated over time- come to produce what I see as a 'maternal relational aesth-ethics'. As such 'maternal relational aesth-ethics' is to be understood as a distinct, ethico-aesthetic approach and methodology to art-making. And yet, as this methodology to artistic production also seems to engender distinctive

kinds of aesthetic spaces, relations and imaginaries, as well as highlight distinctive social, political and environmental aspects, it can also (to an extent) be understood as an aesthetic category produced as a result of the ‘maternal relational aesth-ethic’ approach. As both an approach and a category ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’, similarly to other socially engaged art practices, has a relation to artistic creation as a practice of affective world-making and cultural production. The five mother-artists discussed in this dissertation all relate to their creative processes as a part of a larger force field of cultural, social and political relations. In each of their ‘maternal relational aesth-ethic’ processes, as my chapters will bring to the fore, it is possible to discern a sensitivity towards the ethical implications their artworks produce and propose.

Two other aesthetic categories ring similar to ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’. The first one is the ‘Relational Aesthetics’, coined by Nicolas Bourriaud (Bourriaud, 2009). Although the two terms (‘relational aesthetics’ and ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’) bare a resemblance to each other, there are fundamental differences between the more masculinist version of ‘relationality’ as it appears in Bourriaud’s ‘Relational Aesthetics’ and as it is enacted in the feminine ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’ theorized by me in this dissertation. As such the ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’ put forth here by me is also a feminist maternal critique of contemporary art’s understanding and popular adoption of ‘Relational Art’ as an over simplistic measure of relationality and togetherness as produced by certain works of contemporary art. The other is Eti Wades’ ‘Maternalist Aesthetic Forms’ (Wade, 2015), which classifies a number of different formal elements that can be observed in the art made by a rising number of contemporary mother-artists. In what follows, I will first differentiate how the ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’ as exemplified by the practices of the five mother-artists discussed in this dissertation can be understood in relation to the similarly sounding term of ‘Relational Aesthetics’. Afterwards, I discuss Wade’s ‘Maternalist Aesthetic Forms’ in order to better convey an understanding of the difference proposed here by ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’.

In 1996, the French curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud first came up with the term ‘Relational Aesthetics’, in an exhibition catalogue accompanying the group show ‘Traffic’ held at the CAPC Musée d’Art Contemporain de Bordeaux.²⁴

²⁴ ‘Traffic’ was an art show curated by Nicolas Bourriaud at the CAPC Musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux in 1996. The exhibition featured the work of 29 contempo-
32

In his influential publication ‘Esthétique relationnelle’ that followed two years later, Bourriaud further developed his theory on what he saw as a tendency of relational modality in the art of the 1990’s. The artists that Bourriaud framed within ‘Relational Art’ comprised of an expansive selection of very different kinds of artists and artistic projects. For example, the Argentinian born Rirkit Tiravanija’s performances consisted of the artist cooking and serving vegetable Thai curry to the exhibition visitors and in this way offering social exchanges to the art work’s viewer/participants. The Cuban artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s installation ‘Untitled’ consisted of a mound of 175 lbs (79 kg) multi-coloured and individually wrapped hard candy poured in the gallery’s corner, which the exhibition’s visitors were encouraged to take and eat and in this way participate in the work’s intended commentary on impermanence as the mound slowly became depleted.²⁵ The Italian-American artist, Vanessa Beecroft’s ‘tableaux vivant’ performances employed -and still do to this day- mainly female models cast for the performances based on their physical resemblance with the artist.²⁶ Often performing in nude, or wearing little clothing and for long durations of time demanding high levels of physical endurance from the performers, Beecroft’s tableaux were highly produced and controlled performance events in which the models were installed by the artist in the gallery or museum, whilst the exhibition visitors moved around the ‘tableau’, engaging with each other as spectator / participants. For Bourriaud, what connected all of the twenty-nine

rary artists whose artworks Bourriaud was showcasing as ‘Relational Art’. Not all the artists themselves, however, identified nor were convinced with Bourriaud’s premise (Reckitt, 2011, 7).

²⁵ ‘Untitled’, also called ‘Portrait of Ross in L.A’ was named after Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s partner Ross Laycock battling with AIDS. The art works total weight of 175 lbs (79kg) of hardboiled candy was a metaphor for the ideal weight of Ross Laycock, who died in 1991 of an AIDS related illness. Gonzalez-Torres’s instructions for the art works curators and gallery workers stipulated that the mound of candy should be continuously replenished back to its original -and Ross’s ideal- weight of 175 lbs.

²⁶ Tableau Vivant, or ‘Living Picture’, is a style of artistic expression originating in the late 17th century. Oxford Dictionaries defines it as “A group of models or motionless figures representing a scene from a story or from history; a tableau vivant.” <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/tableau>

artists and their very different kinds of works to 'Relational Aesthetics' had to do with the ways in which all of the works aimed to produce and elicit new social relations amongst the viewers, creating communities that came together around and because of the artwork. In his own words:

Their works involve methods of social exchanges, interactivity with the viewer within the aesthetic experience being offered to him / her, and the various communication processes, in their tangible dimension as tools serving to link individuals and human groups together. (Bourriaud, 2009, 43).

Put simply: 'Relational Art' refers to artworks produced by an (individual) artist, that have been designed to activate social relations amongst its viewers.

Prescribing to Louis Althusser's idea that art does not reflect society, but that it produces it (Althusser, 1971), Bourriaud defines his 'Relational Aesthetics' as: "... a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space." (Bourriaud, 2009, 113.) While appealing, this definition remains rather vague and therefore simplistic and socially and politically exclusionary in its relative ease of flattening "the whole of human relations and their social context" into seemingly one, stable category. In fact, the taxonomy that 'Relational Aesthetics' proposes here leaves little space for cultural, racial and sexual differences, and as such it very quickly falls into the trap of imposing a Western, masculinist and colonial framework over artworks created by artists from a diversity of backgrounds. In the words of the feminist curator Helena Reckitt: "Relational aesthetics presents the artists as a universal figure, unmarked by sex, race or class" (Reckitt, 2013, 131-156).

Another criticism about the relationality presented in 'Relational Aesthetics' comes from the art historian Claire Bishop. In her article 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', Bishop asks: "If relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom and why?" (Bishop, 2004, 65.) To this I would also add the question: "Who is the one producing these relations?". Although Bourriaud sees in his 'Relational Aesthetics' an aesthetic model based on democratic and egalitarian models of engagement, Bishop's question in one single swoop exposes bare issues of

relational art's societal role and accountability, which Bourriaud's definition masks under its neutralizing view of all viewer/ participants as somehow intrinsically egalitarian. This results in an aesthetic theory of form in which the "*quality* of the relationships" is never examined or even called into question". (Bishop 2004, 65, emphasis hers). This point has been also presented by others. For example, Canadian artist, curator and writer Kathleen Ritter's feminist critique has pointed out that the relations that Bourriaud's 'Relational Aesthetics' focuses on are largely those of conviviality amongst its viewer/ participants. Using as her example Tiravanija's art work 'Pad Thai', Ritter writes:

It strikes me as extremely odd that the negative impact of the work [classified as Relational Aesthetics] is never discussed, given that Tiravanija left the remnants of the meals to rot in the gallery over the duration of the exhibition to eventually be cleaned up by the gallery staff. (Ritter in Reckitt, 2013, 131-156).

Indeed, this is a good example of how the relations produced by 'relational art' do not, in general, include the labour and relations that take place on the backstage of contemporary art, namely during its production and maintenance. As such the relationality that 'Relational Aesthetics' proposes remains somewhat shallow. To avoid universalist vagueness in my dissertation the 'maternal relational aesth-ethics' that I suggest to see in the practices of the contemporary mother-artists participating in this research sharply differ from contemporary art's 'Relational Aesthetics'. They differ in their inclusion of the relational processes and entanglements of art making as integral to their thinking, practice and production of relationality and aesthetics. Whereas the 'Relational Aesthetics' of contemporary art has been largely focused on producing conviviality amongst its spectator/ participants, 'maternal relational aesth-ethics', as emerging from the artistic processes of the five mother-artists in this dissertation, emerges as a feminist maternal attitude, methodology and category of artistic cultural production and critique. At times, also convivial.

To summarise, the main identifying markers contouring the differences between Bourriaud's 'Relational Aesthetics' and the 'maternal relational aesth-ethics' that I propose in this dissertation are the following:

i. artistic subjectivity

Whereas in ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’ the (mother-)artist embraces a feminine maternal subjectivity of being at once singular and several, that is: an ecologically expansive understanding of the Self as both a site of artistic creation and as part of her methodology of aesthetic production, in Bourriauds ‘Relational Aesthetics’ traditional artistic subjectivity does not itself become challenged. Instead all of his examples of ‘Relational Aesthetics’ depict traditional artistic subjectivity of the individual creative genius, the mobile roaming flâneur who “is always in full possession of his individuality”.²⁷ According to Bourriaud, ‘Relational Aesthetics’ takes as its “point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private sphere”. Here the notion of subjectivity seems vague, yet all encompassing. As Claire Bishop puts it, the notion of subjectivity here seems too comfortably to blanket all human relations under an “immanent togetherness”. (Bishop 2004, 67). But how could any gesture, aesthetic or otherwise, possibly depart from the social contexts of all of human relations? Artistic gestures are, after all, made by breathing and fleshy, embodied and situated people, each one belonging to a complex constellation of time and space.

ii. relationality

Both ‘Relational Aesthetics’ and ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’ highlight ‘relationality’ as an inherent element of the artworks that they refer to. However, each of them considers ‘relationality’ in very different terms. In ‘Relational Aesthetics’, ‘relationality’ refers to the various ways specific art works elicit open-ended social connections amongst their viewers and whom, in different ways, become participant/performers in the art work and the social connections that the works elicit. In ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’, ‘relationality’ refers to the ongoing, creative interlocation of trans-subjective and co-emergent (maternal) relations between the artist-mother, her child/ren, the surrounding environment and other contributors to the (co-)creation of the artwork. In other words, whilst ‘Relational Aesthetics’ aims to produce social relations amongst its viewer’s in the publicly staged moments of exhibition / consumption, ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’ produces art work through a creative process where consideration for ethical responsiveness and

²⁷ Victor Fournel, *Ce qu’on voit dans les rues de Paris*, (Paris, 1867), p. 270. See Shaya 2004.

trans-subjective relationality is part of the very method of the work's production process.

iii. authorship

A final difference that can be drawn out between 'Relational Art' and 'maternal relational aesth-ethics' lies in how they both relate to 'authorship'. Within 'Relational Aesthetics' the artist produces a work, which then becomes consumed in the social setting of an exhibition where convivial relations are set into motion. While the work of art depends on a communal audience participation in order to become activated, the artist him or herself is clearly considered as the sole author behind the aesthetic experience on offer. In contrast, in 'maternal relational aesth-ethics', 'authorship' belongs to no 'one', but arises from severality, an expansive understanding of the self. In the words of Courtney Kessel to her daughter Chloé: "My work is not just about you, it is because of you" (Kessel, 2015). Authorship is shared and trans-subjective, as much as it is a value directly not sought.

I will now take a moment to discuss how 'maternal relational aesth-ethics' differs also from Eti Wade's 'New Maternalist Aesthetic Forms', which she develops in her paper, 'Maternal Art Practices: In Support of New Maternalist Aesthetic Forms' (Wade, 2015). Here, Wade identifies five maternal aesthetic forms as re-occurring in the practices of contemporary artist-mothers. She names these as follows: 'Maternalist Materiality', 'Maternal Refraction', 'Intersubjective Maternalist Trace', 'Politicized Maternal Multiplicity' and 'Performance and the Raw Every-Day'.²⁸ The first category of 'Maternalist Materiality' accounts for works whose primary material is the maternal body, or as Wade describes it: "the embodied dimension of maternal subjectivity" (Wade, 2015). Artworks Wade identifies as belonging to this category include works that use materials exclusively derived from the maternal body, such as breastmilk for example. Her second category: 'Maternalist Refraction' accounts for pictorial representations of children seen

²⁸ A note of clarification: Wade's title 'Maternal Art Practices: In Support of New Maternalist Aesthetic Forms' (Wade 2015) is not a reference the cultural theory of New Materialism, as is done for example by Natalie Loveless' in her publication 'New Maternalisms: Redux' (Loveless, 2018) where Loveless merges the concepts of the maternal with contemporary feminist materialism. Instead Wade's 'new maternalist aesthetic forms' should be read as a proposal for a new aesthetic categorization of maternal art.

through the mother's eyes and in this way reflecting the maternal subjectivity of the maker, and capturing her gaze. The category of 'Intersubjective Maternalist Trace' describes artworks where the creative gestures of early childhood mark-making become incorporated into the artist-mother's creative process, and where the final artwork is created in a responsive, creative dialogue between artist-mother and her child. The fourth category of 'Politicized Maternal Multiplicity' describes events, gatherings, cultural platforms and networks organized by artist-mothers in order to fight maternal and artistic isolation, and to offer support and solidarity as a means for continued artistic practice (Ibid.).²⁹ Lastly, Wade's fifth category 'Performance and the Raw Every-Day' consists of artworks that use the every-day maternal experiences, objects and events of the artists-mother as material for performance-based artworks and processes (Ibid.).

In my experience as a mother-artist-researcher and in my analysis of Wade's theoretical work, her above described categories often coincide (besides with the artist's medium) with where the artist happens to be in regards to her own maternal journey. In other words, whether the artist is mothering an infant, a young toddler, a pre-adolescent, a child in puberty, a young adult or a grown-up 'child'. As each developmental stage and relationship has its particular challenges, whilst also traversing through complex layers of normative psychosocial organisation of culture, it is not unusual that mothers with similarly aged children often deal with similar pressures and interests. For example, it is not uncommon for a young mother-artist to be drawn to the suddenly new and available aesthetic material of her own (and other's) maternal bodies and to create art that Wade identifies as 'Maternalist Materiality'.³⁰ Similarly, it is not uncommon for artist-mothers of pre-school children to gravitate towards the activism inherent in 'Politicized Maternal Multiplicity', setting-up and participating in shared networks and platforms and working environments to function as strategies against maternal and artistic isolation.³¹ This is where we can differentiate between Wades 'New Maternalist Aesthetic Forms' and 'maternal relational aesth-ethics'. Whereas Wade's maternal aesthetics iden-

²⁹ The 'multiplicity' that Wade refers to here is thus different from the 'severality' of 'maternal relational aesth-ethics'.

³⁰ See for example: Jess Dobkin's performance piece 'Lactation Station Breast Milk Bar'.

³¹ See for example: Cultural Re-Producers, Desperate Artwives, Procreate Project, Mother House Studios and the m/other voices foundation for Art, Research, Theory, Community Involvement and Dialogue.

tifies and categorises different types of “maternalist aesthetic forms” as a way to “allow[s] us to consider in detail about the particularities of maternal subjectivity” (Wade, 2015, 13), ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’ starts from the social and cultural particularities of the mother-artist. I aim to work outwards from here in a way that allows for us to consider how maternal subjectivities of expansive several-ity come to re-imagine the domains of cultural, social and political ecologies both within, as much as beyond, the field of contemporary art. Whereas Wade’s ‘New Maternalist Aesthetic Forms’ references reflections and representations of maternal subjectivity, -experience and -activism, ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’ approaches maternal subjectivity as a diffracting tool and a force of worlding.

IV. Methodological Reflections

The methodological design of my research in this dissertation comprises of interdisciplinary and mixed methods. With it I aim to analyse how women’s maternal experiences, and daily practices of care, have informed and affected their subjectivity, artistic processes and the kinds of social, political and ecological imaginaries and spaces generated as a result of this crosspollination between their maternal and artistic practices. To this end, the chapters of this dissertation follow different threads in their data collection and analysis, which each other come to produce new knowledge about maternal practices and subjectivities as aesthetic, political and ecological forces of world making. These analytical threads consist of inquiry into the maternal experiences, artistic processes, artworks and surrounding cultural discourses that the participating mother-artists are embed in and a part of.

Besides the audio taped interviews, verbatim transcripts, and on-going correspondences, the collected data for this dissertation consists also of artworks and their documentation. In order to analyse the qualitative data collected through interviews, and the selected artworks, an inductive ‘bottom-up’ approach has been used here to analyse research findings. This process has entailed moving from the collection of data towards the making of detailed observations and towards more abstract generalisations, ideas and concepts. (*Neuman, 2003*). The processes of both data collection and its analysis have thus been circular and simultaneous, and they accompanying the theory has been both developed and validated by the data. (*Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011.*) Data has been collected through various means throughout my research process. I conducted participatory action research in the form of reading group and field trips; I set up a foundation and website for the

collection of anecdotal stories published as short columns; I had semi-structured interviews with all analysed mother-artists; and I curated and organized two international conferences bringing together mother-artists and mother-scholars and their scholarly and artistic research and work.³² In the following sections, I will further explicate my methodological framework/design for the research.

IV. I. Participatory Action Research

In order to gain insight into and to start engaging with the artistic processes and creative strategies of contemporary mother-artists, beyond my own personal and limited experiences as a white Northern European mother and an artist, my initial step was to send out a call to other mother-artists based in The Netherlands. This call was an invitation to take part in a participatory action research group (PAR) within the framework of an artistic research project I was invited to carry out at 'Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art' in The Netherlands.³³ The initial call framed the participatory action research meetings in terms of a reading group where a selection of texts from within continental philosophy and the more limited available maternal theory were being read and reflected upon together and alongside the participant's own lived and embodied maternal experiences as mothers and artists. The call for participants was circulated through my own professional networks, those of the art institution and via word of mouth, although as it soon turned out it was not as straight forward as one might think to identify women artists who also mother. The words of one of the participants reflects well the initial difficulty in finding participants:

[I] saw this artist recently... we know each other for a long time

³² Participatory action research, reading groups and field trips were conducted in collaboration with Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art in The Netherlands (2013-2014) and the Astrid Noacks Ateliers in Denmark (2013-2014). These activities resulted in the setting up of the m/other voices foundation for art, research, theory and community involvement in October 2014. The two transnational conferences: 'The Mothernists' and 'The Mothernists II: Who Cares for The 1st Century?' were organized in June 2015 (The Netherlands) and in October 2017 (Denmark).

³³ The artistic research project was entitled 'The Maternal as an Attitude: Maternal Thinking and The Production of Time and Knowledge', Witte De With Centre for Contemporary Arts (2013-2014). As of fall 2020, the name of the institution has been changed to 'Kunstinstituut Melly' in a move to dissociate the institute from the colonial references of its previous name.

from exhibition openings and other art events but now she had a small child with her and I had my son with me and we were both like: ‘Are you a mom as welll?!’ (laughs) “We live in the same city, we work in the same community, but we never knew that we are both also mothers. You can’t show that part of your life, you can’t bring your kids with you to openings etc... You either organize a babysitter or you don’t go. It’s like we bring-up our children in secret! (Zielinska, 2013).

This initial call for collective research gained international visibility and the community of participants rapidly grew to include actively participating mother-artists from around the globe through means allowed by social media and the world wide web.³⁴ A parallel research group was set up in Copenhagen, where it was initiated and run by the Astrid Noacks Ateliers (ANA) and another one in Istanbul, where it was organised and run by the artists collective Oda Projesi.³⁵ The different groups would share their discussions with each other informally and once in the format of a symposium held at ANA. Although these initial participatory action research conversations were not recorded, they came to serve as a rich and fertile compost for the initiation of conversation, building common vocabulary as well as snowballing networks of mutual support and solidarity amongst the participants. A quote from one of the participants at ‘Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art’ captures the initial energy, enthusiasm and eagerness felt amongst the participants: “I mean, we have never had these discussions before!” (anonymous, 2013).

However, as the participatory action research meetings were held inside an international art institution, and although they were held in a semi-formal, intimate and friendly setting with coffee and cake, there was no escaping from the fact that the institutional setting, seemed to be hindering the participants from speaking freely about their experiences as mothers within the contemporary art world. It also became obvious that there was a need to discuss more topics that what the conversational reading group format allowed for. Additionally, due to institutional

³⁴ These voices were accommodated by the setting up of ‘The m/o/ther voices project’ Facebook page, which today has over 800 mother-artist followers from around the world.

³⁵ An artist collaborative founded by the three women artists Özge Acikkol, Günes Savas and Secil Yersel, based in Istanbul, Turkey.

limitations, the meetings had to take place in the evening hours, which clearly were not always easy for the participants as mothers to adapt to. Hence, my next step was to set up what simply became called as ‘m/other voices field trips’ in order to facilitate deeper and different kinds of conversations about the participants personal, oftentimes sensitive, personal experiences as mothers and as artists outside the institutional setting.

IV. II. Field Trips

Whereas during the initial PAR meetings the focus had been on reading theory through the lens of embodied maternal experience, during the ‘field trips’ the research focus was now on practice over theory. In other words, the focus was now on reflecting on the participants’ artistic practices through the prism of maternal vs. artistic labour. To my knowledge the m/other voices field trips are the first of their kind to systematically map and initiate space for serious discussion about the relations of maternal experiences and the arts, in The Netherlands. The sessions were advertised via the website of the ‘m/other voices foundation’, ‘Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art’, and via a word of mouth.

As ‘Field Trips’, these PAR-sessions were designed to fit into the lives of the participants’ daily schedules as mothers, and to accommodate group discussion on the topics that the participants themselves personally felt to be urgent as mother-artists. For example, the group sessions were always held between the morning hours of 10am, (after school aged children had been brought to school) and 2pm, allowing time for the participants to return to collect their children from school when necessary. The research participants were also welcome to attend with their infants and children when necessary, or simply so preferred. The sessions were semi-formal and held out on the ‘field’, which meant that each time a different mother-artist would invite the group to her place of art-working, be it an art studio, private home, laundromat, library or another location that formed a part of her specific everyday geo-choreography as a mother-artist. Each time one mother-artist would present her artistic practice to the group, whilst giving focus to a number of aspects, such as the following: a) how do the two different practices (of mothering and art making) co-exist in her daily life; b) how does she perform and negotiate these two identities, and how do these practices inform each other; c) what are the social and economic conditions in which the mother-artist performs these roles, as well as; d) how has her maternal experience, practice and thinking have affected

her methodologies or artistic production, if at all. This focus was loosely introduced to the participants by questions prepared by me, and shared with everybody, in advance, although during the meetings themselves conversations were encouraged to travel to matters that seemed most urgent to the presenting mother-artist herself. Due to the nature of the generally intimate and personal spaces in which these sessions were held, each session could accommodate between 7 -15 participants at a time. In total, there have been 15 sessions with a consistent core group of over 34 regular participants and additional visiting artists from abroad. The 'field trips' were largely recorded in scientifically unconventional ways. Although photographs documenting the sessions, together with some audio-visual recordings exist, records of these largely consciousness raising, participatory action research trips into the 'field' exist as oral records committed to collective memory of the participants as well as artistic responses, such as for example a performance or an installation made by mother-artists themselves.

IV. III. Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews and Ethical Considerations

The data for this dissertation is collected from audio recorded interviews, their verbatim transcripts, on-going correspondence with my co-discussants, conversations over a number of symposia and conferences, artworks and their documentation. The interviews conducted have been interactive, open-ended, semi-structured and in-depth in their methods, consisting of multiple and interpretative questions divided under the four main categories of: artistic practice before becoming a mother; artistic practice during pregnancy; artistic practice postpartum and; maternal experience and practices of care.

The qualitative method of 'semi-structured' or 'semi-formal' interviews is a type of interviewing method often used to both unearth and explore topics relevant to the interviewees, which the researcher otherwise might overlook (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 115), or indeed, not even be aware of. Following on from my initial method of participatory action research, the method of 'semi-structured' interviews has enabled me to perform a detailed and in-depth engagement with the lives and experiences of my co-discussants. Here, feminist methods and considerations regarding interviewing, as formulated for example by Hesse-Biber (2007), Oakley (1981) and De Vault (1990), are brought together with the data gathering techniques of 'listening to' and 'observing' my co-discussants.

In interviewing and conversing with my co-discussants, I have employed the method of reflective listening (Rogers, 1951; Fisher, 1981) which is a communication strategy derived from the therapeutic practice of person-centered therapy.³⁶ Although reflective listening is most often employed in therapeutic settings as a mode of listening, I have used it here as a method of both being with and listening to my discussants. Markers of this method can be placed under two headings: ‘listener orientation’ and ‘listener reflection’ (Fischer, 1981). Techniques that I have employed here include amongst others: listening more than talking; acknowledging and focusing on both what is being said and how it is being said (for example; choice of words, tone of voice and body language); developing a sense (over a number of interview/ discussion moments) of my interviewee’s frames of reference, whilst attempting to avoid responding from my own frames of reference; responding with acceptance and empathy (for example by nodding and saying things like: ‘I hear you’ and ‘that is a lot to handle’); and at times restating, in order to clarify, my interviewees statements. I have also attempted to reduce distractions by making certain that telephones were turned off, that refreshments were at hand, that the recording equipment was ready and functioning, that the temperature and light in the space were as comfortable as possible.

As a practice, listening has functioned here as more than just a data collection method. In fact, in my desire to enact feminist research practices that model the logic of the feminine maternal, matrixial relationality of connecting, sharing and listening to and with the other, the practice of listening has borne here an important role akin to that in decolonial critique where it is used as a strategy to “listening to what has been silenced” (Vázquez, Interview with Zoë Dankert, Soapbox Journal 1.1, 2019) and that which has been “relegated to oblivion” (Vázquez, 2012).³⁷ In creating space and time for the listening to and with my co-discussants, and their stories, has functioned to validate their lived experience as women and

³⁶ Person-centered therapy, also referred to as ‘client-centered therapy’ was developed by the American psychologist Carl Rogers, in counselling theory. (Rogers, 1951).

³⁷ Expanding on listening as a strategy in decolonial critique, Vázquez describes it as “relating to the outside of your epistemic and aesthetic framework so that all your categories, your systems of thought, your senses become located, become humbled and open to real interactions and a growing with other worlds”. (Vázquez, Interview with Zoë Dankert, 07.02.2019). For discussion on listening as a decolonial practice, see for example the work of the Canadian (Carcross/ Tagish First Nation) curator, writer and researcher Candace Hopkins.

mothers. It also has, in an oblique way, come to validate my own personal experience as a woman and a mother continuously having to negotiate Modernity's masculine legacies.

Whilst the lived experiences of my discussants are themselves embodied and situated within different social, cultural and political contexts, their narrative retellings of their life experiences to me is inevitably also influenced by our common coordinates as women, mothers and artists. Whilst this has helped me as a researcher in the creation of trust and openness in our conversations during the interviews, it has also made me continuously question my own role, physical presence and body language as a researcher / discussant / witness to the stories I was being told. In order to both keep my own interference to a minimum during the interviews and to allow for rich and thick descriptions to come to the fore, I chose for a 'semi-structured' interview style, with only a few guiding questions that centred around the axis of their artistic practices and maternal experiences. The three main questions being: How have your maternal experiences affected your artistic practice and process? Has your artistic practice and process changed in any way since becoming a mother? How would you describe this change and your practice before and after? None of the participants needed further prompting for sharing their personal experiences and this helped me to remain in a position of an empathic listener/witness to their stories with minimum steering required from my part.

Additional concerns taken into account when setting up the interviews included duration and space. In fact, all of the interviews took place at spaces reflecting some aspects of the interviewees daily working spaces and routines. For example, one of the interviewees whose artistic practice since becoming a mother has evolved into opening a non-profit, public art space inside her family home, invited me to her home on two occasions in the evenings after her children had gone to bed, thus accommodating her daily schedule of both art working and care working. Here, I travelled to her home, at a time chosen by her and helped out by making tea and clearing out the dishes before commencing with the interview as she was not yet finished with the housework. One interview took place over a three-day road trip through Israeli territories which form the backdrop and socio-political context to the interviewee's activist work as both a mother and an artist. Another interview was held over several meetings at different spaces including an Airbnb apartment in Copenhagen and an exhibition opening a few days later at an art museum in Antwerp, reflecting the interviewees nomadic lifestyle as an international-

ly exhibiting artist. Others included Skype conversations, email correspondences, studio and home visits, reflecting the global, transnational and often transitory world of contemporary art professionals. The interviews also had very different durations. Some took three days to unfold over intermittent periods of talking and listening, voice and silence. Some were told faster in stolen moments between the constant demands of travel and being 'online' and 'available' when working in a precarious field such as the arts. Most interviews took place over a couple of hours, divided where necessary over a few separate sessions. In each case, however, the interviews were continued for as long as it took for the mother-artists to tell their stories in ways that they felt comfortable with.

Trying to level out dynamics of power between myself and my interviewees, in order to achieve as non-hierarchical relations as possible, has been of central concern for me when designing my interviews and several steps have been taken into account in order for me and the participating mother-artists to relate to each other, as much as possible, as co-discussants. This desire for a more 'participatory model' of interviewing (Cotterill, 1992) is driven by feminist epistemological concerns and need to avoid traditional, masculine interviewing practices which would objectify my interviewees. We can here turn for example to the work of the British, feminist sociologist Ann Oakley who in the 1980's already highlighted a number of methodological problems for feminist researches that arise from employing traditional interviewing practices. As advocated by Oakley, I have invested in this dissertation "my own personal identity in the relationships" between me and my co-discussants. (Oakley, 1981, 41). First of all, my own position as a mother-artist has been known to my interviewees. As a mother-artist interviewing mother-artists, mutual trust and rapport has been established through the unspoken and mutually taken-for-granted understandings -and feelings of solidarity- that the two points of identification ('mother' and 'artist') inherently bring up. Particularly my position as a 'mother' has worked to establish trust and rapport with my co-discussants through the implicit understanding of shared common experiences that the work of mothering oftentimes gives rise to. This trust has often allowed for deeply intimate and personal stories of maternal experience to rise to the fore.

Throughout my interviewing process I have worked for staying aware of the fact that although my co-discussants all related to me as an insider, I nevertheless was the one asking questions and the one who would (at a later stage) be

interpreting and analyzing their answers.³⁸ In an attempt to address this imbalance, I would always make time to also answer their questions to me, but always returning the conversation back to them and their personal experience. In some cases, this technique was taken even further. When I for example interviewed the performance practitioner, scholar and mother of four Lena Simic, the interview was conducted as a two-way interview in which each one of us in turn took on the role of the interviewer and each one of us participated in the others research as an interviewee. If nothing else, this gesture allowed me to reciprocate her trust by being an interviewee myself.

Lastly, I also ensured that all of the research participants interviewed have been informed in advance about the research, its purpose, aims and the thematic focus areas of the interview questions, and all participants have given their consent by signing a consent sheet. Regarding further ethical considerations, I want to be as clear with the reader, as I have been with my participants: These interviews have not been conducted anonymously but are done under each participants' own name as obscuring identities would not only be counter-productive in a research project on mother-artists aiming to both validate and give visibility to their creative practices and processes, but it would also be impossible as the artworks analysed within this research are generally already located within the public sphere. My co-discussants have not only been informed and aware of this, but have also been

³⁸ The African-American Black feminist sociologist, Patricia Hill Collins has introduced the notion of the 'outsider within', a concept arising from the lived experience of many African-American Black women spending (often) their entire lifetimes working within and for White families, and who in the process become like family members whilst at the same time remaining to hold different social (racial and class) status and thus not in fact fully belonging on the 'inside'. Drawing on this social fact of many African-American women's experience, Hill Collins has articulated this internalized experience of being an 'outsider within' in terms of a very particular standpoint of one's marginality, which can produce "distinctive analyses of race, class and gender" (Collins, S15, 1986). In referring to myself as an 'insider' here, I acknowledge that not only do I identify with my co-discussants as women and mothers with whom I share a number of foundational experiences, including instances of gendered oppression, but that they also have identified with me as such; an 'insider'. On the other hand, in referring to myself as an 'insider' here also designates an 'outside' (or degrees of outsideness) to this shared 'inside' experience. The 'outside' here then being the space of the academy, which is the institutional context of my research. As a doctoral student I also, to an extent, belong 'inside' this community. However, this is a community in which the mother historically and traditionally is an 'outsider'. Thus, as a mother-researcher I am at once both 'inside' and 'outside'. Here Patricia Hill Collin's notion of the 'outsider within' is helpful in thinking with what such a double positionality and a marginalized standpoint can generate and implicate for scholarly research.

supportive of this decision.

IV. IV. Analytical Approaches

Next to the collected empirical data, the analytical process employed within this study weaves together narrative-, cultural-, discourse- and critical and visual semiotic methodological approaches. First of all, narrative analysis, referring to a number of analytical methods used to interpret texts and visual data that have a storied form (Figgou and Pavlopoulos, 2015) is often used by feminist scholars in the aim to highlight traditionally silenced voices (Chase, 2005; Reinhartz, 1992). In this dissertation, narrative analysis is employed when focusing on the lived, first hand experiences of the research participants as narrated to me by themselves and in their own words. The main focus of analysis here is on the stories the women tell about their experiences as mothers and as artists, in addition to ‘how’ they tell their stories and how their (storied) experiences have shaped their subjectivities, artistic processes and aesthetic concerns. Furthermore, each story is also considered in relation to the social, cultural and political contexts of the storyteller. Following on from how maternal experiences and practices of care have affected the subjectivities and the creative processes of artistic creation amongst the mother-artist participating in this study, my analytical focus then moves onto the artworks produced as a result of the changed creative processes and practices.

The visual artworks that this dissertation focuses on are analyzed by performing critical and visual semiotic analysis (Barrett, 2000; Barthes, 1977; Burgin 1982), on their formal elements, such as medium, matter and form, as well as their context, intention, meaning and affect. This has allowed me to read the artworks as semiotic texts of meaning making and as such, as symbolic acts. Attention here is being given to the connoted symbolic and imaginary spaces and meanings, that the artworks both matter and propose. The approach of semiotic analysis, as applied here, derives from the approach of the French literary theorist, critic and semiotician Roland Barthes who developed his system of semiotics in relation to photographic images as a system of signs. (Barthes, 1977, 1999). A method generally applied in media and communication studies to read and analyze a variety of texts, such as adverts, films and other visual images. For Barthes, and similarly to Barrett and Burgin, images are visual signs and messages that circulate within an economy of aesthetic and ideological factors. They are vehicles of culture, ideology and myth. In the words of Victor Burgin, “the intelligibility of the photograph

is no simple thing; photographs are *texts* inscribed in terms of what we may call ‘photographic discourse’, but this discourse, like any other, is the site of a complex ‘intertextuality’, an overlapping series of previous texts ‘taken for granted’ at a particular cultural and historical conjuncture”. (Burgin, 1982, 144, emphasis his). In order then to study these signs as messages within society, Barthes analyzed them in relation to what he calls the *denoted* message and the *connoted* message. The denoted message corresponding to “the immediate meaning relating to what is represented in the image”, whilst the connoted message corresponds “to the symbolic or ideological meaning, or range of possible meanings, of an image inscribed by cultural codes”. (Aiello, 2020, 370). To concretize this analytical approach here a little further. In Chapter 2, when I apply a visual semiotic analytical approach to Shira Richter’s work, I first read the visual ‘signifiers’ present in the photographic images of the mother-artist Shira Richter. I then analyze the denoted message alongside the sociocultural and the geopolitical contexts of her particular, situated, maternal experience as a woman and a mother who makes signs that both unmask and dissent the hegemonic cultural narratives and myths of motherhood in her native land, to arrive at my maternal, eco-feminist interpretation of the connoted message of her artwork. Or, in Chapter 1, a close visual analysis of the imagery produced by Courtney Kessel’s re-enactment of her and her daughter Chloé’s bodies moving together and apart in the video triptych ‘Sharing Space’ has helped me to identify the connoted symbolic relations that she as an artist considers expressive of her maternal experience and subjectivity. In addition, a close visual analysis in Chapter 1 has also functioned as a further research creation tool in the sense that it pointed me towards thinking about the discourse of hospitality, particularly as it has appeared and been discussed within many of the contemporary art’s discursive events, through the feminine maternal experience and practice of mother-artist.

All artistic practices of the mother-artists participating in this study are considered as apparatuses and strategies of material-discursive practices enacting social, cultural, political and ecological change. Here the approaches of both cultural- and discourse analysis have facilitated the reading of the collected data on a larger societal scale and in so doing allowed for a deeper understanding of how maternal attitudes and perspectives disturb and interrupt the dominant and stubborn patriarchal narratives.

IV.V. Additional Note About My Co-Discussants

My co-discussants throughout this research include mother-artists from different backgrounds, generations, nationalities, ethnicities and religious groups. Common to all, however, is that they are all mothers and artist actively working within the transnational, contemporary field of visual and performance arts.

In-depth interview data from semi-structured interviews has been collected from 5 mother-artists and includes artists originally from Poland, Israel, Indonesia and The United States. Anecdotal stories about how mothering and art making co-exist in one's life (in the form of short columns archived and published on the m/other voices website) have been collected from 16 mother-artists, including participants originally from Israel, The United States, Canada, England, Turkey, Macedonia, Spain and The Netherlands. The participatory action research (PAR) 'field trips' to mother-artists working spaces have included 15 presenting mother-artists living in, sometimes visiting, The Netherlands. These meetings have comprised in total of 34 individual co-discussants. The two 'Mothernists' conferences in 2015 and 2017 have accommodated personal stories, artworks, scholarly research and collective critical discussion focused on the axis of maternal experience and artistic practice from 57 presenters and additional audience members.³⁹ The initial consciousness raising, participatory action research (PAR) reading groups at Witte de With consisted of approximately 20 active participant / co-discussants. In addition, since the spring 2013, I have carried out ongoing correspondence with mother-artists from around the globe (India, South-Africa, America, Middle-East, Europe) whom have contacted me either via email or the m/othervoices foundation in relation to their personal experiences regarding mothering, motherhood and working in the field of arts.

IV.VI. The Selection of Artists:

During the PAR meetings, personal interviews, correspondences and the many other conversations conducted at various conferences, symposia, art events and

³⁹ The Mothernists (2015) was co-organized together with PrintRoom, LeesZaal West and Upominki in Rotterdam and was financially supported by the Gemeente Rotterdam. The Mothernists II: Who Cares for the 21st Century? was co-organized together with The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Art, Astrid Noacks Ateliers, m/other voices foundation and Lise Haller-Baggesen Ross. It was financially supported by Centrum Beeldende Kunst Rotterdam (NL), Statens Kunsthjelp (DK), Astrid Noacks Ateliers (DK), Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts (DK), Mothernism (USA), m/other voices foundation (NL).

online platforms throughout the course of my research, a particular kind of image of the maternal, and of maternal art, begun to emerge from the lived, embodied and situated experiences, daily practices, thinking and urgencies of the contemporary mother-artists that I was engaging with. The five artists whose artworks and artistic processes I discuss in the chapters of this dissertation do each, in their different ways, exemplify aspects of the kind of maternal attitude and approach to art making that I began to see as rising to the fore during my research. These aspects include, first of all, an affirmative turning towards their maternal (material and mat-tering) condition and subjectivity of severality as generative in their artistic practices of cultural production. What this turning towards has then enabled is the sublimation of their maternal severality into their art making. Their works are not about their children, nor are their works about themselves as women-who-mother, rather their works unfold as affirmative feminist and feminine maternal cultural critique performed through the lens of maternal severality. As such these artists may not at first sight seem as what one might think of as ‘mother-artists’ in the common place sense that their maternity is not directly on display and reflected in their art works. Instead, each of their processes in some way demonstrates a maternal attitude that has been in-formed by their feminine maternal entanglements and encounters of both: having been given birth and having given birth “within the body-psyche of a female human being” (Ettinger, Lecture, 25.09.2012). Longing then for this proto-ethical, maternal, ‘matrixial’, ‘co-emergent’, ‘co-poetic’ and ‘trans-subjective’ relational balance within a gendered Western culture in which they have been excluded as Subjects through symbolic and cultural matricide and the elevation of the individual White masculine subject as the only Subject, these five artists, as I see it, are each performing proto-ethical maternal politics of trans-subjective co-poesis in their creative, artistic processes and practices and which I have then, in the course of my research, come to call ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’. In short, the ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’ that I have identified these five contemporary mother-artist’s creative processes and practices to exemplify, each show facets of how their feminine-maternal experience has informed and co-instituted their subjectivity and entered into culture and politics through their aesth-ethic practices.

In her lecture ‘Maternal Subjectivity and the Matrixial Subject’, given at the European Graduate School in September 2012, Ettinger describes the relation between aesthetics and ethics as a “spiral movement from art into culture, and again from art into culture” by a “subject aware of trans-subjectivity”. For her, it

is here that “a possible move from aesthetic to ethics begins.” In fact, Ettinger describes art as “*point of birth within a pregnant space-time of co-emergence* in what we can call feel-thinking, see-knowing, feel-knowing with ideas, feel-knowing *with materials and with others.*” (Ettinger, Lecture, 25.09.2012, emphasis mine). So too in the works of these five contemporary artists: a spiral movement from art into culture, and again from art into culture becomes enacted through the entangled artistic processes of the (embodied and situated) mother-artists aware of, and embracing, their maternal severality and trans-subjectivity.

In Chapter 1, this aesth-ethic ‘spiral movement’ can be seen taking place in the artistic practices of Zielinska, Kessel and Stewart, three mother-artist who exemplify a number of Western contemporary mother-artists working within the cultural contexts of contemporary art spaces such as the white cube space of an art gallery, the black box of a theatre, or a dance studio. What differentiates these three artists from each other are their artistic backgrounds and mediums. Zielinska’s art practice, since becoming a mother and moving away from painting is best described as located between a curatorial and a collaborative artistic practice. Kessel, on the other hand, works with sculpture, performance, video and sound, most commonly collaborating with her daughter Chloé. Stewart’s practice consists of listening to and with the world, collecting sounds that traverse across different categories and divides such as ‘nature’ / ‘culture’ and composing sound works with recorded audio, creating soundscapes which are then further interacted with by the dancer/performers Stewart collaborates with. In Chapter 2, Richter’s artistic practice moves us away from the overarching sociopolitical context of the previous three mother-artists as her maternal story and artistic practice unfold in the Middle-East. Although Richter’s visual work has often been exhibited in art-spaces such as galleries and film theatres, her artistic practice is harder to pin down as she also disseminates her work through the World Wide Web and performance lectures addressed to varied kinds of audiences. Whereas the practices of Zielinska, Kessel and Stewart each in different way query hospitality, Richter’s maternal relational aesth-ethic practice introduces us to a more acutely political and activist feminine-maternal cultural critique of women’s oppression, appropriation, enforcement as reproducers, and their cultural and symbolic matricide. In Chapter 3, the pioneering art practice of the Indonesian performance artist Arahmaiani unfolds mainly on the international stage of South East Asian contemporary art and in remote areas of the Tibetan Plateau. In Arahmaiani’s creative practice the aesth-eth-

ic 'spiral movement' of her maternal relational aesth-ethic action is seen taking place as an ecologically and environmentally expansive force. Although each of these artists' maternal narratives reveal similarities between their experiences of an expansive subjectivity and severality and a social, cultural, political and environmental awakening of sorts their stories cannot be conflated into one. Neither do their stories exhaust all that there is to be said on the matter of the mother as a generative force of cultural production and -critique. I can only hope that their stories and practices of maternal relational aesth-ethics will both renew and broaden our thinking and understandings of the figure of the mother and the maternal as modalities of thinking and doing in our compromised times.

Chapter 1

My Work Is Not Just About You, It Is Because of You: The Maternal Relational Aesth-Ethics of Weronika Zielinska, Courtney Kessel and Sharon Stewart

“The boundaries that delimit individual entities are permeable, not fixed, which means that organisms and their various environments—social, cultural, and political as well as physical—are constituted by their mutual influence and impact on each other ... Bodies do not stop at their edges of their skins and are not contained neatly and sharply within them”

(Sullivan, 2001).

“My work is not just about you.
It is because of you”

(Kessel, 2015).

In this chapter, I explore the interdisciplinary, aesthetic- and maternal practices of three White, Western, contemporary mother-artists working within the cultural and economic contexts of art gallery, -museum, dance- and theatre spaces, and show how their affirmative and creative aesthetic responsiveness to daily feminine maternal interruptions has given rise to a different kind of artistic subjectivity and aesthetic relationality than the modernity's persistent legacy of the individual artistic genius and the contemporary art's masculine brand of 'Relational Aesthetics'.

My analysis here is two-fold. Firstly, I analyze how the creative, responsive and affirmative entanglement of these two sets of practices (the aesthetic and the maternal) inform each other, together generating a very particular methodological attitude to artmaking and cultural production. Secondly, I analyze what this approach, which I have formulated as 'maternal relational aesth-ethics', engenders in relation to thinking about artistic subjectivity, 'Relational Aesthetics', the production of art in today's world and thinking about the maternal as a cultural force. By focusing on moments of daily and mundane, yet continuous and repeated micro-interruptions inflicted upon these three mother-artist's sense of self as continuous subjects by the needs of their intimate and vulnerable others, namely their children, I examine how their acts of responsiveness, care, nurture and preservative love as mothers diffracts with their artistic processes affecting what is produced. In other words, what kind of patterns of difference might their approach, departing from an embodied and psychosocial sense of oneself at once as both singular and several, and continuously accounting for the other, affect and produce in and for the social and cultural field? Instead of continuing to work from the subject position of modernity's atomistic, individual autonomous subject, these three mother-artists all work and respond from an embodied and psychosocial experience of maternal severality. In other words, they are at once both singular and several. In welcoming and allowing space for and in incorporating their maternal care work with their artistic process, they welcome both the logic and the doing of their 'maternal practice' (Ruddick, 1995) to 'intra-act' (Barad, 2007) with their artistic practice. This is when, as I see it, these mother-artists begin to engage in a process of 'maternal relational aesth-ethic' action. As I have already iterated in the Introduction of this dissertation, together then these actions, repeated over time engender a 'maternal relational aesth-ethics', which can be understood as both an approach and an attitude i.e. a methodology, to artmaking, as well as an aesthetic category.

In the first part of this chapter, I trace out some of the historical differences

between the figures of the ‘mother’ and the ‘artist’ and show how these perceived differences have come to shape and construct our cultural understandings of these two figures and their respective roles and ways of being in the society. From here I move on to map a number of artworks and creative processes of Zielinska, Kessel and Stewart, all (mainly) working within the economy of gallery- and studio based art, in order to answer the following two, interrelated research questions: ‘How do maternal practices of care and interruptions and shifts to these mother-artist’s subjectivity and sense of self come to inform, shape and affect their creative practices and modes of artistic production?’ and ‘What kind of ethical-, aesthetic-, and affective relations, imaginaries and spaces (both material and symbolic) are generated as a result (of these maternal shifts and interruptions to their artistic subjectivity and changed sense of self)? In the last part of this chapter, I engage further with the aesth-ethic relation between interruption and hospitality as engendered by the artistic processes and practices of Zielinska, Kessel and Stewart.

Focusing on how (and in what ways) the maternal practices and thinking of these mother-artists come to matter in the aesthetic field of cultural production through the diverse creative strategies, processes and practices that they adapt along the way I seek to answer my research questions and open up discussion about the pre-existing and commonplace cultural understandings about what the maternal is and what it can do when not silenced by art institutional structures and traditions.

My methods in this case study comprise of semi-structured interviews and correspondences with my co-discussants, reflective listening and narrative, visual-, cultural and discourse analysis. Narrative analysis has been employed here when working with data from the accumulated interview transcripts. The semi-structured interviews, together with reflective listening and narrative analysis are, first of all, employed in order to map the subjective maternal experience of each of the three mother-artists. Secondly, they are employed to chart their artistic practices and to identify the changes in their creative process after they have become mothers. My findings are further analysed together and side by side in order to understand how each of the mother-artists subjective maternal experience and practice has informed and affected their artistic process and practice. Visual analysis is employed when working with the video art of Courtney Kessel, while cultural and discourse analysis is employed as further analytical tools in setting the artistic and maternal practices of all three mother-artists in dialogue with the discourses of artistic-, and maternal subjectivity as different kinds of forces of cultural production. Interviews

with Zielinska and Stewart were conducted at their homes and at times specified by them. With Kessel my correspondence has taken place over in-person conversations, email, and skype.

1.1 The Mother and The Artist

To start with, the psychosocial theorist Lisa Baraitser examines maternal subjectivity as a set of ethical relations with the (post-birth) child, defining the maternal subject as a subject of constant interruption. (Baraitser, 2009a). In looking at interruptions as the “appearance of difference that dislodges the Same from itself; difference understood as a breach in the fabric of the Same” (2009a, 69), her formulation of ‘interruption’ is at once both a destabilizing and a productive force. Through this ongoing interpolation in which the child’s needs appear and rupture the mother’s sense of self as a continuous subject, the mother is repeatedly invited to witness and respond to the needs of the child as an inter-related and vulnerable other and, I would add, also *with* this other. It is in this way (through the constant and both destabilising and productive interruptions) that Baraitser understands the maternal subject always at once both singular and several, and that I, in this dissertation, come to think about the mother and her daily maternal care work as a diffractive force, that is, as a re-distributive force to her previous artistic process and aesthetic thinking.

Thinking then through Baraitser’s formulation of the ‘maternal subject’ in relation to the creative processes of a number of artists who also mother, I argue that the ‘maternal subject’ as articulated by Baraitser is an extremely valuable model for aesthetic (and with that for sociocultural and political) world-making because it stands in such a complete contrast to modernity’s legacy of the individual autonomous subject and the figure of the artist as a sole genius, a ‘flâneur’ who in the words of Victor Fournel “...is always in full possession of his individuality..” (Fournel, 1867, 270; Shaya, 2004, 41-44), and because such an articulation opens up affirmative alternatives to the perpetuation of the selfsame, made all the more pertinent by the troubled times we live in. Furthermore, I argue that when imagined as an interface of “co-poietic transformational potentiality” (Ettinger, 2005, 703), Baraitser’s formulation of the ‘maternal subject’ is all the more pertinent and useful at a time when we are forced to imagine new ways of being in and with the world.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ The term ‘Co-poiesis’ comes from the Latin prefix ‘co-’ meaning ‘together’, ‘mutually’,
58

Contrarily, aligned with the Enlightenment's individual autonomous man and defined by his activity of idle strolling and passionate spectating, the flâneur, modernity's emblematic figure of the mobile, autonomous, individual artistic genius, as put forth by Charles Baudelaire in his 1863 essay 'The Painter of Modern Life', moves through the city at his own leisure and pleasure. At once an artist, a man of the world and a 'man of the crowd' whose artistic genius and curiosity is "nothing more nor less than childhood recovered at will", the flâneur sees the world in a constant state of newness, inspired and intoxicated by it as if sensorially convulsing from the form and colour that he observes around him. He is an artistic genius, a solitary "man-child", yet who unlike a child, is a man of genius with "sound nerves" (Baudelaire in Mayne ed. 1964, p. 9, 8.). It has been through historical entanglements of the figure of the 'flâneur', the Renaissance artist as an 'individual creator genius' and the Enlightenment's further advocacy of the free, equal and autonomous individual "as an isolated entity separated from its own environment, living as self-sufficient being" (Soares 2018, 11) that have engendered Modernity's legacy of what has come to constitute proper artistic subjectivity and creativity in Western thought. This is a legacy that Baudelaire's flâneur, even today, so well encapsulates when it comes to the practice of artistic production today.

Although more recent articulations have challenged the coupling of the flâneur as an artist and a spectator (Wrigley, 2016), having instead repositioned flâneurie as an embodied sensory experience (Boutin, 2012 and Murail, 2017), it has been through writers such as Victor Fournel (1867), Charles Baudelaire (1863), Walter Benjamin (1999) and Susan Sontag (1979), amongst others, that the figure of the flâneur has been firmly shaped into our cultural consciousness as the embodiment of Modernity and as a parallel of the modern artist. And although it can be said, and as I have pointed out in the Introduction to this dissertation, that the age-old-myth of the artist as a solitary genius has been on the fade-out since already before the millenium, the dominant cultural practices and art institutional structures still favour the incessantly independent mobile subject. In the words of

'jointly' and the Ancient Greek '*poïesis*', meaning 'to make'. Having been influenced by the work of the Chilean scientists Humbert R. Maturana and Francesco J. Varela's work on 'autopoiesis' (Maturana and Varela, 1980), Bracha L. Ettinger writes about 'co-poiesis' as an aesthetical and ethical creative potentiality enabled in the trans-subjective weaving between partial subjects, through a process she calls 'borderlinking' and 'metramorphic weaving'. (Ettinger, 2005, 703-713.)

the artist and scholar Natalie Loveless: “As a body-based performance artist I am often, though not always, called upon to be mobile: to move my body from one location to another in a transnational circuit of cultural capital. This is not a circuit that easily accommodates children.” (Loveless, 2012).

And so, a brief comparison of the figures of the ‘mother’ and the ‘flâneur’ quickly draws out two entirely different modes of being and operating. Where the figure of the flâneur is always “in full possession of his individuality” (Fournel, 1867, 270; Shaya, 2004, 41-44), the figure of the mother is “both singular and multiple simultaneously” (Baraitser, 2009a, 45). Whereas the figure of the flâneur in Baudelaire’s ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ (1863), Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Arcades Project’ (1999) and Susan Sontag’s essay compilation ‘On Photography’ (1979) emphasizes the predominance of sight, vision, the glass eye of the camera and a certain kind of voyeurism, the figure of the mother in scholarly maternal literature, such as for example Lisa Baraitser (2009a) and Bracha L. Ettinger (2006) emphasizes other sensory fields of knowing and relating to the world. Where the flâneur in Fournel, Baudelaire, Benjamin and Sontag is a detached, disengaged spectator, the figure of the mother on the other hand, and as articulated by both Baraitser (2009a) and Ettinger (1992, 2004, 2005, 2006) is always a co-participant. She exists in a relationality where the distance between subject / object is lived differently, diffractively and in severality. And whereas the figure of the flâneur and the act of flânerie (from French ‘to lounge’ and ‘to saunter’, from old Norse ‘to wander aimlessly’) refers to idle and leisurely strolling, the figure of the mother could barely be further removed from this stand-point of the flâneur. Thus distinctive and particular, the mother and the flâneur observe and see, think and move through space and time in different ways. The mother diffracting, responding, co-creating, the flâneur reflecting, representing and possessing with his gaze as he moves through space. What makes the investigation of this difference between the figures of the ‘mother’ and the ‘flâneur’ as agential modes of cultural production (in other words creative forces in the production of art and culture) so opportune and urgent then is that today, like never before, we live in a thick web of complexity and complicity whether we are consciously aware of it or not. In other words, we are entwined and entangled with the world in multiple and complex ways, “even when we cannot track or directly perceive this entanglement” (Shotwell 2016, 8). It is this deep entanglement and complicity that “preclude[s] the neat distinctions between subject and object, knower and known” (Bunz, Kaiser, Thiele, 2017, 8) which the persistent

figure of the artist as modelled after Modernity's figure of the 'flâneur' keeps (re) producing. As such, art institutional systems dominantly structured towards supporting practices of individual, independent and endlessly freely mobile subjects raise the question about the need to have alternative and supplementary modes of cultural production for both the complex and compromised times we live in and for the simple and fundamental principle of social justice and inclusion. The 'maternal relational aesth-ethics' as theorised in this dissertation being just one.

I will now turn to look at three very different artistic processes by three, white, Western contemporary mother-artist working within the contexts of art gallery and museum, dance and theatre spaces whose artistic processes exemplify how maternal interruptions and subjectivities of severality (of being at once both singular and several) can produce new and creative aesth-ethic practices of social and cultural responsiveness, attunement and non-sacrificial hospitality as a result.

1.2. Maternal Interruptions and Hospitality as Acts of Ethical and Creative Responsiveness in the Work of Weronika Zielinska.

In analysing the art practice of Weronika Zielinska, a Polish conceptual artist and a mother-of-two living in The Netherlands, I focus on how the practice of mothering and art-making co-exist and interweave with each other in her creative process as an artist, and show how her daily maternal practice diffracts and re-emerges as an aesth-ethic force within her art practice and together with her artistic process. Zielinska's story is exemplary of how radically the aesthetic practices of artists become touched and transformed alongside mothering. In other words, alongside a committed practice of caring for intimate and interrelated, vulnerable other/s.

Prior to becoming a mother, Zielinska studied classic fine art techniques at the Constantin Brancusi National High School for Fine Arts, Szczecin, Poland (1998-2003), followed by a Bachelor's degree program in Fine Arts at The Willem de Kooning Academy Rotterdam, (2005 -2009). Her medium was oil painting and her work largely consisted of figurative paintings inspired by visual details lifted out from media images and found photographic footage. (Fig.1). In describing her process, she tells me:

I would always... basically paint from pictures [photographs] that
I made myself or that I found from somewhere in newspapers
and ... at the same time, I would also always combine them in

installations and refer to this sort of image creation (Zielinska, Personal interview, November 2017, Rotterdam).



Fig 1. Weronika Zielinska, 'Untitled', oil on canvas, 50cmx50cm, 2009. Copyright courtesy of artist

While finishing her bachelor's program, Zielinska became pregnant with her first child, Bruno. As the pregnancy advanced and her body transformed and expanded, it began to affect the physicality of how she worked. This, in turn, gave way to several small transformative incidents and responsive ethical actions through which Zielinska's artistic process and eventually her art practice as a whole began shifting away from figurative painting and towards to a very different kind of, socially and politically engaged, aesthetic practice. For example, she now began wearing a large mask to protect the unborn baby from the chemical fumes in the paints. (Fig. 2). During one of our interviews, Zielinska remarks:

I never had an object [a mask] like this! I was never thinking

about this [before]. I mean, I really liked the smell [of the oil paints] also... But I had to get used to it [the mask] and it was fine. It was something different and I knew why I was doing it. (Zielinska, Personal interview, November 2017, Rotterdam).

She also wasn't able to stand up as long in front of the canvas anymore as she had been doing before. Out of necessity, Zielinska began adapting her working practices, shifts, which lead her to new insights and critical questions about the art she made. A third body of knowledge was forming into being between her, the canvas, and the space of the artwork.



Fig.2. Weronika Zielinska at 7 months pregnant. August, 2009. Copyright courtesy of artist.

Painting inside her apartment the canvases were filling up space, yet hiring a studio wasn't financially an option. A new order had to be found between art, storage, baby paraphernalia and everyday life. The canvases suddenly seemed cumbersome in size and their rigid object sense and Zielinska began questioning her production of these sizable objects. It quickly became clear to her that having paints and chemical fumes in the house once the baby would arrive was not an

option and yet because of financial constraints, she would either have to keep producing art from within her home, or not at all. Twelve-months post-partum, her art-working space had shrunk to consist of simply a desk in her apartment. (fig. 3).



Fig.3. Zielinska's art-working space, 2011. In the background, a painting by her entitled 'Untitled' (2010). On the foreground, Bruno can be seen on the laptop's screen. Copyright courtesy of artist.

Studying the above image, it strikes as a curious detail how the image plain of the painting above Zielinska's desk is fading out. This is markedly different from her previous work. The physical borders of the frame containing the artwork are now mimicking the surrounding walls more than acting as an envelope to an enclosed autonomous world. As if there is a desire for the artwork to seep out and over the painting's boundary and become embedded into the tapestry of the every-

day. This is the last painting Zielinska made (up to date) and it was made at home soon after Bruno was born.⁴¹

In trying to balance her daily post-partum life as a young and engaged mother with her need to also make and think with art and to inquire and engage with the world through artistic research and expression, Zielinska is confronted with the material and economic conditions of her situation. She cannot afford child-care or a studio, but neither can she leave her child alone. To continue her painting practice at home is not only expensive, it could compromise her son's health. Her artistic practice, thinking and sense of self now being constantly interrupted by concerns for the health and care for her baby, her low financial resources and the constant tending to her child's various needs. Yet instead of doing nothing, she makes do. After Bruno's birth, in order to be close to and to care for her infant son while at the same time trying to maintain an artistic practice, Zielinska moves, what by now has effectively become a 'desk-studio', into a vacant room in the middle of the family's apartment where her hope is to create a space that could accommodate both of their (Bruno and her) needs. She describes the room, and her thought process, to me in detail and with careful attention:

It was an odd room right in the middle of our home that we never used. I had always felt really uncomfortable in it, but now [after Bruno's birth] I began exploring the space and possibilities what to do with it... I tried making installation[s]. I brought all the stuff that I needed, but I just couldn't paint there. I also didn't feel like I was doing the right thing, so I started to wonder what is the meaning of this space? How can we turn it into something that I am also happy about? If we don't use it for our purpose as family, [if] I cannot use it for my purpose as being an individual artist, maybe I can share it with others? (Zielinska, Personal interview, November 2017, Rotterdam).

⁴¹ A similarly strong, although visually almost opposite aesthetic gesture takes place in Chapter 3, where we encounter a painting by Arahmaiani soon after having given birth to her daughter who is stolen away from her. In both cases, we can observe a strong aesthetic gesture marking a change from the artist's previous pre-natal aesthetic style.

Serendipitously, around this time Zielinska encountered a photograph documenting Marcel Broodthaers' work 'The Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles' (Broodthaers, 1968), a semi-fictional institution that Broodthaers had initially opened up in his own apartment with himself taking on the role of the museum director.⁴² One of the photographic images from Broodthaers' work struck Zielinska in its uncanny resemblance of the "odd room" that she was now working from and her creative impulse was to reconstruct what she saw in the photograph. Re-enacting Broodthaers' installation in her apartment and photographing the result, Zielinska called the image 'After Broodthaers'. (Fig. 4.).



Fig. 4. Weronika Zielinska, 'After Broodthaers', digital print, 2010. Copyright courtesy of artist.

⁴² Marcel Broodthaers, poet, film-maker, artist (1924-1976) often worked with found objects and used whatever was at hand for his raw materials. He is associated with spread of both installation art, as well as 'institutional critique' in which interrelationships between art-works, the artist, and the museum are a focus.

This aesthetic gesture turned out to be, yet another, relevant incidence in the transformation of her creative process and thinking. She tells me: “What I saw in that picture when I found it... I saw *my* house there. I saw *the room* there that I had in my house. [Broodthaers] had this room in [his] house and he called it a *museum* and then he invited other artists and called it a museum.” (Zielinska, Personal interview, emphasis hers, November 2017).

Shortly after, in January 2011, Zielinska herself opened up the “odd room” in the family’s home as a workspace for other artists and called it the ‘Guestroom Project’ (2011), inviting artists to come and work within the private space of the family home for periods of up to 2 weeks at a time. (fig. 5, 6.).⁴³ Artists were invited to take a break from their regular working space and come work on something new, either by themselves or together with Zielinska. They could not sleep over, or use other spaces of the home, but received their own key and could come and go freely from early morning to late evening, sometimes staying over to have dinner with the family. At the end of each working period the domestic space was opened up further in order to allow for a small audience of around 20 people each time to enter the family’s home. In this way each project period was concluded with a public moment. The events had different formats depending on what best suited the particular artist’s project. “Sometimes they were exhibition openings with beer and snacks, sometimes more like round-table situations or performance events.” (Zielinska, Personal interview, November 2017). The audience always consisted of guests invited by the resident artist, as well as by Zielinska, and the events were via invitation only. Thus the audience members were at once visiting a private home and bearing witness to the domestic narratives of the family, while at the same time participating in a public event as the guests of the artist hosting them; together with whom they were all the guests of Zielinska and her family, who in turn themselves were also at once both the guests and the hosts. This creative stretching and questioning of the contours of the concept of hospitality that the ‘Guestroom Project’ plays with has been a recognizable element in Zielinska’s art practice ever since she became a mother and began engaging in a simultaneous practice of care for her son, alongside making and thinking with art. Through her affirmative attitude and approach to both her daily and continuous

⁴³ During the eight-month-long art project Zielinska and her family became to host in total six different artists in their home. Participating artists: Dico Kruijsse, Esmé Valk, Ghislain Amar, Joshua Thies, Paula Salas and Sarah Pink.

maternal care work and her daily ongoing artistic practice, these two practices now not only co-existing, but actively and materially affecting each other. As a result of this cross-pollination, Zielinska's choice of materials, subject matter and that which matters became radically transformed, moving her from oil on canvas and the making of objects towards a new type of aesthetic practice producing new social relations.



Fig. 5 'Guestroom Project'. Resident artist Esmé Valk in the kitchen preparing for her performance 'This Place Would Be Perfect if Only It Had an Ocean View'. Zielinska's husband Mark Klein sitting outside on the balcony, while her son Bruno is playing on the foreground, April, 2011. Copyright courtesy of artist.



Fig. 6. 'Guestroom Project'. Audience members on the fore and back ground. Bruno and Mark Klein leaning against their kitchen door looking at the strangers in their house, May, 2011. Copyright courtesy of artist.

After an eight-month-long project period, the ‘Guestroom Project’ was brought to a close and Zielinska decided to move the working space out of the family home. She rented a small shop turning it into a non-profit art space called ‘Upominki’ (2011-ongoing), a name which in her native Polish means ‘small gifts’ and is often given to small shops selling bric-a-brac. (fig 7.) However, instead of selling knick-knacks ‘Upominki’ functioned a little bit like an art lab. experimenting with hospitality as a form of alternative economic exchange. Whereas in the ‘Guestroom Project’ hospitality had been set-up, lived and explored largely as a one directional movement, with ‘Upominki’, Zielinska now aspired to experiment with hospitality as a two-way movement of somewhat reciprocal, but not strictly even, exchange. She describes her thinking:

I developed a certain model, through which I would claim shared responsibility and stated interest. [F]rom the beginning I would rather keep it [Upominki] like... not so much for myself, but more... try to call it that it is belonging to more people than only me... to get rid of this idea of what is mine and what is not mine and what is yours. (Zielinska, Personal interview, November 2017, Rotterdam).

Zielinska fitted the space with simple living utilities, it had a separate studio and an exhibition space with large shop front windows connecting the activities inside with the local residents in the neighbourhood, who were always welcomed in to interact with the space. The model was to offer free working space to artists in the form of one-month-long artist residencies, and exhibition space for showing their art works. In exchange for using the space to develop art projects and exhibiting art work, artists would contribute back to ‘Upominki’s’ upkeep in different ways. This could include making a small contribution by selling a piece of their art in ‘Upominki’s’ virtual web-shop; organizing events and donating earnings from these to the daily running and upkeep of the space; or by donating working hours to Upominki in the form of for example painting a wall, fixing a leaking tap or performing other daily maintenance jobs. “[I]nstead of me giving someone the space [I would be] receiving something for the space... whatever...money... or functional objects... or hours of labour.” (Zielinska, Personal interview, November 2017). I will not analyse here the conceptual working model behind ‘Upominki’, but simply

use it as another example to demonstrate creative shifts in Zielinska's art practice in relation to her maternal practice.

Through tracing Zielinska's art practice before, during and after becoming a mother, it is possible to assert a number of things: Firstly, that there are clear connections between her maternal practice and her aesthetic choices. Secondly that the creative, responsive and affirmative entanglement of these two sets of practices (the aesthetic and the maternal) have together generated a new creative approach and a methodological attitude to artmaking as research and as cultural production. Thirdly, although the various public moments of the participatory 'Guestroom Project' may not in themselves seem to differ from Bourriaud's convivial 'Relational Aesthetics' they are, however, produced from within a different logic than is offered by the artistic subject position of the modernity's autonomous, independent and individual artist genius. Albeit some of the visiting artists themselves may be representative of the modernity's autonomous, mobile, individual artist, the very setting of the 'Guestroom Project' in which they are invited to work by Zielinska unsettles and blurs this kind of art historical identity. Lastly, we can conclude that it is specifically Zielinska's maternal practice and -thinking which engender the creative inquiry of hospitality in 'Guestroom Project', and it is in this way that her maternal practice and -thinking emerge as a cultural and political force. What begun as small acts of ethical and creative responsiveness towards her intimate and dependent other, her infant son, through time grew into an over decade long artistic practice queering the notion of hospitality and social relations.



Fig. 7. 'Upominki'. On the foreground 'Steps Twice', a functional art work by the French artist Ghislain Amar created and donated to 'Upominki' in May 2013. Copyright courtesy of artist.



Fig. 8. 'Upominki & Artists4Artist', a collaboration with a local resident and singer Yuli Minguel, to exploring the possibilities and impossibilities of cultural entrepreneurship and profit-driven thinking. Copyright courtesy of artist.

1.3. Being One and Several in the Work of Courtney Kessel

The second artist whose artistic process I engage with here is the American Courtney Kessel; a mother, artist, academic and an arts administrator living and working in Athens, Ohio. Through the mediums of sculpture, performance, video and sound, Kessel, similarly to Zielinska, is also interested in the blurring of lines between the domestic and the public spheres and encounters. Through what she herself calls “performing invisibility” Kessel’s work attempts to show and make visible that “which is usually not seen because it takes place at home and without an audience. This is my practice. I don’t have time to go to studio; my studio has been largely at home and in makeshift spaces.” (Kessel in *m/othervoices*, 2015). Balancing her roles as a mother, gallery director and an internationally exhibiting artist have come to shape Kessel’s art practice in very particular ways. Besides working from home, or where ever she and her daughter Chloé are, has brought about a heightened artistic focus on (her) maternal life and materiality of the ‘every-day’ as artistic material. Chloé has become an active collaborator, sometimes through her presence, sometimes through her absence. As Kessel herself says: “The point is that, that very specific experience of being a mother, while different for everyone, is still all about another person! No matter when or where we go, that other is always a part of our lives.” (Kessel, interview with Christina La Master, 2015).

‘Sharing Space’ (2012), a video installation consisting of three short scenes (30”; 1’45”; 20”) is just one of many examples of Kessel’s maternal co-existence with Chloé finding aesthetic form through a simple daily act and its subsequent re-enactment on video. As with most of Kessel’s works, ‘Sharing Space’ originated in a simple encounter between mother and daughter: “We were at a restaurant and she got cold. So sitting on my lap, she struck her arms in the cardigan that I was wearing. We re-performed this action in front of the camera.” (Kessel, ‘The Eternal Maternal’, 2015). The resulting video triptych frames Kessel within the white cube aesthetics of an art gallery and shows her seated on a chair, facing the camera. Chloé, also facing the camera, sits on Kessel’s lap. For two minutes, divided into three scenes of moving image, we witness Chloé slipping, pushing, and gliding in and out of the clothes that Kessel wears. Sometimes the two figures transform into a two-headed hybrid creature; other times, they move apart into two perfectly complete, separate beings. Wrapped inside the cloth’s elasticity, their two bodies are enveloped by a common sack of cloth-skin and appear as a one-bodied, chimeric beast - at once singular and several. (Fig. 9, 10, 11).



Fig. 9, 10 and 11. 'Sharing Space', screenshots of a video still. Copyright courtesy of artist.

In this work, 'Sharing Space', the interaction between the two bodies makes the maternal experience and condition of severality tangible and visible. The maternal body here is not only Kessel's physical body but also the space and intensity of interaction between these two porous agents. Through the playful, creative, and repeated activity of becoming at once multiple, singular and several, Kessel's work locates the maternal body as a site for the possibility of a more porous notion of subjectivity and maternal interaction is conceived as 'intra-action' (Barad, 2007). There is a transformation of form, not by bending into the rules of one or the other but by welcoming new space, materiality and temporality - not a loss of identity but a hospitable emergence of maternal space made visible through an aesth-ethic practice that embraces interruptions to the (notion of) self.

Another scene in 'Sharing Space' shows Kessel and Chloé swaddled together in a shirt that covers their upper bodies like a thin, stretchy membrane. Moving their arms, held together by the shirt's long sleeves, they adjust their bodies to fit together inside the supple cloth. As they awkwardly move their joined together bodies across the screen, it briefly becomes hard to say whether the girl is carrying the woman on her back or the woman is growing out of the girl's back; whether the girl is an appendix hanging down from the woman's front; or whether this polymorphous form is one creature with four legs and two heads. (fig.12, 13).



Fig. 12. 'Sharing Space', a screenshot of a video still. Copyright courtesy of artist.

Still another scene depicting their conjoined bodies reveals the fleeting gesture of an almost kiss (Fig. 13). Here, their faces almost caress each other, and their lips nearly touch, enacting complete trust and openness. The momentary image evokes Luce Irigaray's feminist theorizing of the lips as giving way to both bodily and psychic openness and co-creation:

The kiss allows an exchange to take place without demarcations. It becomes impossible to distinguish whose fluid is which, or where it comes from. This means that it is very different from the concepts of ownership and property. There can be no mastery if the kiss is to remain one of mutual openness and vulnerability rather than domination of one by the other. (Irigaray quoted in Canters and Jantzen, 2005, 108).

Then breaking away from their playful, bodily interaction, the mother's gaze meets that of the viewer for the briefest of moments. Simultaneously, her body continues to respond to and accommodate itself to the physical sensations created by the pressures and tensions performed by the child's body touching against hers, corps-à-corps. The twenty-second long scene seems to be over almost as soon as it begins.



Fig. 13. 'Sharing Space', a screenshot of a video still. Copyright courtesy of artist.

In her becoming Chloé's mother, Kessel adjusted both the interrupted social organization of her everyday life to accommodate the new born infant and her interrupted creative practice to accommodate life and art-making's new rhythms, patterns and spaces. This deep interrelationality, together with her responsive and affirmative, non-sacrificial acts of creative hospitality and entanglement with her intimate and dependent other, has ever since been the generative, performative and political motor and attitude in her artistic practice and work.

Tracing Kessel's creative process behind the video triptych 'Sharing Space', it becomes possible to assert a number of things. Firstly, a kind of a double move between her maternal practice and her artistic inquiry and process becomes clear: On one hand Kessel is doing artistic inquiry on her own maternal experience and condition of severality. On the other hand, she is doing maternal research through the means of artistic methods. Thus both disciplines, that of art making and mothering, now inform each other. Instead of simply reflecting on her maternal life and showing this to us through fixed, photographic representations, she uses the medium of video to record and make visible the process of how both practices and disciplines in fact co-create together. Thus, besides simply informing each other, both practices and disciplines are diffractively set in motion here as dynamic forces of cultural production. Secondly, and within the discourse of contemporary art's institutional structures, and particularly within the discourse of art as new knowledge production, Kessel's specific and interdisciplinary (maternal aesth-ethic) process interrupts and challenges modernity's legacy of the autonomous, individual artist as still the most dominant cultural (knowledge) producer. Thirdly, and in terms of relationality as it has been conceived in contemporary art's 'Relational Aesthetics', Kessel's interdisciplinary, maternal and aesthetic practice presents us with a different kind of 'relationality'. One which is not staged and choreographed by an individual artist for *her* or *his* audience to enact and perform in, but which is a constantly morphing, responsive relationality based on co-creative intra-action, which in turn both challenges the very foundations of creative artistic subjectivity located within the individual atomistic genius and queries our understanding of ourselves as being both one and several.

1.4. Becoming Porous Through Acts of Listening and a Practice of Attunement in the Work of Sharon Stewart.

My third example comes from the world of sound. The American-born Sharon Stewart is a Netherlands based composer, sound artist, music pedagogue, certified Deep Listening® teacher, a poet and a mother.⁴⁴ In her creative practice, she explores acts of listening and embodied responsiveness as creative strategies for making art. Stewart primarily collects her sound material by making field recordings, which she develops for a specific context in a framework of collaborative artistic design. In her creative process, Stewart places no hierarchical divisions or aesthetic value judgements between the different social and cultural spheres of the sonic material/s that she collects, but it is possible to identify certain reoccurring elements in her creative methodology of collecting and assembling materials. These elements include a particular opening up or softening of one's edges in which the various sonic interruptions and 'interpenetrations' (a word that Stewart often uses when talking about her collaborative, creative process) are welcomed as integral to the creative process. Another element is the act of listening, a porous becoming or becoming porous in an encounter's shared space. Finally, there is the element of attunement, the giving of form to the singular encounter-event.

For example, for the performance piece 'Alice in 'Audiotenland' (2012), a collaboration with the Dutch dance collective CCCompass (Creative Collective Compass), Stewart recorded sounds from the city of Arnhem, assembling the collected sonic elements according to various themes descriptive of their sonic qualities (splashes 'n bubbles / glass 'n chimes / tick's 'n rips / rolling things) and then working them into four short compositions for the dancers. Electronic manipulation and unfamiliar juxtapositions of the collected sound bites - inside/outside, intimate/distant, animal/machine- make these pieces into humorous sonic fantasy worlds through which the Audioot, a magical creature who creates and controls sonic worlds, leads Alice. In this non-linear and continually interrelational creative collaborative process, Stewart was responding to the performers narrative and durational frameworks by adding temporal elements and atmospheres through the layering of sounds and through "working with silence to leave space for the voice of the dance and the imagination of the audience" (Stewart, interview with Jez

⁴⁴ The spelling of Deep Listening® used here refers to the specific deep listening practice as pioneered by the American composer Pauline Oliveros, and in order to differentiate it from other deep listening practices.

Riley French, 2017).

These acts of ‘opening up’ and ‘softening one’s edges’, ‘listening’, and ‘attunement’ are grounded in Stewart’s practice of Deep Listening®, a set of exercises developed by American composer, performer, author and academic Pauline Oliveros (1932-2016), which consist of “bodywork, sonic meditations, interactive performance, listening to the sounds of daily life, nature, one’s own thoughts, imagination and dreams, and listening to listening itself.” (DeepListening.org). Oliveros designed these exercises “to inspire both trained and untrained musicians to practice the art of listening and responding to environmental conditions in solo and ensemble situations” and to explore “the difference between the involuntary nature of hearing and the voluntary selective nature – exclusive and inclusive – of listening.” (Ibid.) Strikingly, however, Stewart’s practice as a mother already incorporated many characteristics of Deep Listening® before she came to know about Oliveros’s exercises. As a trained pianist, Stewart had developed a discipline of listening up to a point, but the birth of her children prompted her to adapt her listening strategies to connect and communicate with her sons, who had very different ways of being in and with the world. During an interview with Stewart, she recounts:

My primary level of relationship with my children was through touch. Because my firstborn was not always appreciative of physical touch and closeness I needed to shift to understand his language. My younger son was much more open and available to touch and made it easier for me to connect with him nonverbally. To create that basis of harmony, or simply ‘being-with’ was harder for me to experience with my older son. (Stewart, Personal correspondence, March 2016).

Thus in order to create a connection for connecting or “simply ‘being-with’” her first born, Stewart’s practice of listening as a trained pianist had to evolve and expand. Here her maternal practice helped to hone a new kind of sensitivity to listening. Another account of Stewart’s early mothering experience depicts how her maternal practice of listening to her infant sons began transforming into a co-creative force based on acts of listening and affirmatively responding to the other. She writes:

During my mothering, I became fascinated by the non-verbal information that was provided by my child: the excitement in breath and heartbeat that proceeded feeding or communicative engagement; the endless possibilities of creating sounds with the lips, tongue, throat, hands and feet; the way my children would respond to melody and the incredible drive I felt to turn daily interactions into song and dance for them. (Stewart in m/other-voices, Field Trip #10, 2015).

In these shared spaces of intimate encounters Stewart was actively opening her ‘self’ to her intimate yet unknown other, her son, through acts of listening. With each sonic wave produced by her child’s flesh and bone body, transmitted through air and interpenetrating her body as vibrations through her eardrums the perceived clear cut edges of her body ‘softening’ and becoming porous because of and in the presence of the other. And it was through this daily maternal practice of listening that Stewart’s aesthetic practice as a composer was now also developing and transforming.

In thinking with this entanglement of Stewart’s creative process as a composer together with her maternal experience, practice and thinking, the following emerges. Firstly, and as with Zielinska and Kessel, a clear connection between the two practices (maternal and aesthetic) becomes established. Secondly, it becomes clear that Stewart’s maternal practice has creatively informed and affected her creative process as a composer. Thirdly, and in relation to contemporary art’s most well-known formulation of relationality, as proposed by Bourriaud’s ‘Relational Aesthetics’, the relationality that Stewart’s aesthetic process as a mother who makes art explores, challenges the very notion of modernity’s individual, atomistic subjectivity that the figure of the autonomous, mobile, artist genius reproduces. Although, our fundamental relationality and interconnectedness as humans with each other and the world is at the very heart of Stewart’s aesthetic process, her art practice does not fit in contemporary art’s category of ‘relational aesthetics’ as rather than producing convivial, marketable and consumable ‘relational aesthetics’ from the position of the individual, atomistic artist, the creative entanglement of her aesthetic and maternal practices, through acts of listening, produces relational artistic subjectivity.

When looking at the works and practices of Zielinska, Kessel and Stew-

art together and along an axis of maternal and artistic labour, a similarity in their creative processes becomes visible. In each of the three above case studies, a series of rather mundane, ongoing daily maternal interruptions have caused the artist to re-adjust and modify her creative process, and in each case the artist has demonstrated a turning toward these interruptions, engaging with them as a generative, rather than simply a disruptive force. Rather than attempting to reduce or eradicate the tension born in moments of alterity and difference, they have all faced it by approaching it as a relation. And although each of their practices are very different, there are commonalities. These are welcoming interruption as a generative force, a mutually affirmative attunement with the ‘other’ and a practice of radical hospitality.

1.5. Traversing Boundaries: Interruptions and Acts of Radical Maternal Hospitality

In their creative processes Zielinska, Kessel and Stewart have all welcomed interruption through performing acts of hospitality as part of a creative, caring and generative relationality with an ‘other’ without attempting to reduce difference and otherness. Each of them has chosen to face and experience the creative tension and challenge posed to them when traversing the boundaries between ‘Self’ and ‘Other’, stitching between their own frames of reference and temporalities and the terra incognita of the ‘Other’ in a continuous practice of porosity.⁴⁵ As such, what each of their creative processes and aesthetic practices seem to be making visible is an (aesth-) ethics of relationality and care (Gilligan, 1982; Fisher and Tronto, 1990) in which human interdependency and accountability play a central part. In a Levinasian sense of the ‘face-to-face’ encounter, one can say that it is the appearance of interruption in these artist’s aesthetic processes that acts as the call, the invitation, into an ethical relation with the ‘other’.⁴⁶ That it is in this ‘facing’ of the “appearance of difference” (Baraitser, 2009a, 69) that an aesth-ethic relationality is brought forth within their creative processes.

However, it is impossible to think about interruptions without also consid-

⁴⁵ Although, and as demonstrated by my research and as put forth in this dissertation, the notion of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ as distinctly separate entities that such reading requires, does not fully seem to account for the feminist, maternal perspectives of those who mother.

⁴⁶ For Emmanuel Levinas’s it is the ‘face-to-face’ relation which calls humans into an ethical relationship of responsibility for each other. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Duquesne University Press, 1969.

ering hospitality. “Is not hospitality an interruption of the self?” (1999, 51) asks Jacques Derrida, introducing an understanding of hospitality as an interruption and a deconstruction of the ‘at-home’, “a breach in the fabric of the Same” as Baraitser (2009a, 69) puts it. For both Derrida and Baraitser, interruptions carry creative potential. However, in Derrida’s reading of hospitality this seems to be more of a disruptive force to be managed by laying out rules and conditions - which ultimately function to reduce otherness - and asserting an imbalance of power, agency and vulnerability to the relations between the parties. Alternatively, Derrida’s brand of ‘unconditional’ or ‘absolute hospitality’ molds hospitality as an altruistic and self-sacrificial force where the one offering hospitality gives up all control of his ‘home’, country or nation, only to arrive at an aporic deadlock, for one cannot give what one does not have.⁴⁷

When considering hospitality in relation to the creative aesthetic processes of Zielinska, Kessel and Stewart, the Derridean model of ‘conditional’ and ‘absolute’ hospitality as arranged around a paradigm of ‘conditional tolerance’ / ‘self-sacrifice’, simply does not offer a usable model.⁴⁸ As I have aimed to show through the above three case studies, there is a type of hospitality at work in each of their creative processes that simply cannot be understood through this ‘conditional tolerance’ / ‘self-sacrifice’ paradigm. Rather, hospitality in each of their artistic practices has formed and taken place through situated and embodied, radical, maternal acts of welcoming interruption and a mutually affirmative practice of

⁴⁷ ‘Aporia’, from the Greek ‘*aporos*’ (a- ‘without’ + poros- ‘passage’) meaning ‘impassable’, refers to an irresolvable internal contradiction or logical disjunction in a text, argument, or theory. In his writings, the deconstructionist Jacques Derrida explains ‘aporia’ as a situation in which the elements that make a thing possible are also the very same ones that make it impossible. Thus for Derrida the concept of ‘hospitality’ is an aporia, a logical fallacy and a contradiction in terms.

⁴⁸ It could be argued of course that Derrida (1999, 2000, 2005) arrives at these two types of hospitality precisely because he is deconstructing a masculine version of hospitality. It could also be argued that his work of deconstruction in itself already contributes to the dismantling of the pre-existing, dominant masculinist ways in which we think about our being in the world and our relations to others. In Derrida’s own words: “[t]he figure of the philosopher is, for me, always a masculine figure. This is one of the reasons I undertook the deconstruction of philosophy. All the deconstruction of phallogocentrism is the deconstruction of what one calls philosophy, which since its inception, has always been linked to a paternal figure.” (‘Derrida’, a documentary directed by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman, Jane Doe Films, 2002.) However, whereas Derrida’s skilful and important work of deconstruction does create space/s for new thought, the limit of deconstruction is of course that it does not in itself offer an alternative (feminine or other) models on which to hold onto.

care. In seeking then for a theoretical framework that can both untangle and better support a concept of hospitality in relation to the maternal, we can turn to Irina Aristarkhova's figuration of hospitality as matrixial and maternal acts (Aristarkhova, 2012). Asserting a need to re-configure the Western conventions of 'hospitality', such as we have inherited from Immanuel Kant (1795), Emmanuel Levinas (1969, 1998) and Derrida (1999, 2000, 2005), Aristarkhova writes:

Levinas and Derrida structure their discourse on hospitality on femininity / Woman, her openness, her ability to expect and welcome unconditionally. However just as intentionality and mutual agency are integral elements of their structure of hospitality as they progress, this cycle, although starting with the feminine/ woman and being born with her, does not include feminine agency. The maternal, confused with and metaphorically replaced by the feminine, gives matter to hospitality, makes it possible, produces its interiority and exteriority, but has no empirical place or role in hospitality. (Aristarkhova, 2012, 43).

Opposing the structure of femininity / Woman as appropriated by Levinas and Derrida as an inherent characteristic of hospitality, Aristarkhova highlights the cost of such a configuration to actual, empirical women and calls for a reconfiguration of hospitality as "acts of hospitality" instead (2012, 43). Connecting maternal agency and hospitality, Aristarkhova assigns hospitality (back) to the maternal; opposes feminine "one way and essential giving as passive and involuntary" (2012, 45) and; designates agency to "so-called empirical women" (2012, 45). Instead, her approach to hospitality allows for an understanding of the maternal as a conscious and active practice of welcoming the 'other', rather than seeing it as a hollow and passive container for some essential feminine quality that just cannot stop giving, or as a naïve and fixed physiological state of being. It is through this model of hospitality, as proposed and reframed by Aristarkhova as 'maternal acts of hospitality', that we may also better read, contextualize, and understand the artistic processes and the mutually supportive and affirmative aesthetic, social and political relations produced and proposed by the interdisciplinary, aesthetic- and maternal practices of Zielinska, Kessel and Stewart. And that we can start to see the figure of the mother as a Cultural Producer.

1.6. Concluding Remarks:

In this chapter, I have examined the artistic processes of three White, Western, contemporary mother-artists working within the cultural and economic contexts of art gallery, -museum, dance- and theatre spaces. I have demonstrated how the interdisciplinary weaving together of their aesthetic and maternal practices have engendered a different kind of artistic subjectivity than the traditional autonomous artistic genius, and shown how this shift in artistic subjectivity has in turn engendered a different mode, a 'maternal relational aesth-ethic' approach to art making, fundamentally different from the 'Relational Aesthetics' dominating contemporary art. The two questions that have led my inquiry are: 'How do maternal practices of care and interruptions and shifts to these mother-artist's subjectivity and sense of self come to inform, shape and affect their creative practices and modes of artistic production?' and 'What kind of ethical-, aesthetic-, and affective relations, imaginaries and spaces (both material and symbolic) are generated as a result (of these maternal shifts and interruptions to their artistic subjectivity and changed sense of self)?'

My starting point in thinking about 'maternal practice', and as laid out in the Introduction to this dissertation, has been Sarah Ruddick's pragmatist political philosophy about mothering as "one discipline amongst others" (Ruddick, 1995, 27). In thinking about the figure of the mother I have employed Lisa Baraitser's psychosocial theory of the 'maternal subject' as a subject of constant interruption. That is to say the mother's sense of herself as a continuous subject is repeatedly being ruptured by her child's needs, forging a mother's sense of herself as simultaneously both singular and several.

In my theoretical framing of this chapter, I have contrasted Baraitser's formulation of maternal subjectivity of severality with the solitary figure of the flâneur (Fournel, 1867; Baudelaire, 1863; Benjamin 1999; Sontag 1979), Modernity's gold standard of the individual, autonomous artistic genius, in order to differentiate between these two modes of being and relating in and with the world. From there, I then discussed the three case-studies of Zielinska, Kessel and Stewart in relation to how their creative aesthetic processes have been transformed through their embodied and situated maternal practices of care and maternal subjectivity of severality. In the last part of this chapter, I focused once more on the relationship between interruption and hospitality as I see them at work in the artistic processes and practices of Zielinska, Kessel and Stewart, concluding that what their maternal

relational aesth-ethic approaches to art-making engenders is a relational aesthetics in which the art work does not simply produce a number of convivial interactions amongst its viewers, but in which our fundamental relationality and shared several-ity and vulnerability becomes accounted for in the (co)-creation of new, aesth-ethic relations with our intimate and unknown others through maternal acts of hospitality. In the words of Kessel: “My work is not just about you, it is because of you”. These mother-artists’ works are not just about their children. Their works and their creative processes are because of their children.

In 2015 Zielinska gave birth to a daughter Lilly. She is running ‘Upominki’ again from her own home and regularly hosts community driven art events and displays collaborative, often activist, works on Upominki’s large street-view windows. Sometimes Bruno and Lilly wonder in and out of these events. Sometimes they join in as active participants and collaborators.

Since 2020, Kessel is working towards a PhD as a scholar/artist in an Interdisciplinary Arts Program at the Ohio University. She continues to work with her maternal experience, condition and materiality in her artistic practice, and has expanded her art working space by building a studio in the garden. Chloé is in her teens.

Today, Stewart’s son’s Joshua and Aidan are respectively 18 and 15 years of age. She practices as a Deep Listening® teacher and is an Associate Editor of the Journal of Sonic Studies and an independent researcher for the Professorship Theory in the Arts at ArtEZ University of the Arts. In addition, Stewart supports her neighborhood’s children with sustainability ideas and projects, and is a member of Extinction Rebellion. She is also learning to forage and to practice the Sociocratic circle method of governance based on equality and consent within groups.

Chapter 2

Occupied Territories and the Dissenting Feminine Maternal Aesth-Ethics of Shira Richter

I'm Writing Now

I'm writing now instead of doing the dishes
Instead of wiping the dust
Instead of separating the summer clothes from winter
and the clothes that are small on them from the clothes that are big for them
Instead of putting the small clothes in a bag to give friends,
Or putting the others back in the closet.
Instead of going to buy vegetables, because we're all out,
Instead of driving to the repair lab to pick up the video.
Instead of changing the light bulb in the kitchen.
Instead of washing the pee soaked mattress cover,
Instead of going to the health maintenance organization
To get my reimbursement for the appointment with Dr. Netter,
Instead of going to Yam, who is crying behind the door.
I'm writing now instead of sorting out my status at The National Insurance Institute
Instead of arranging for an American passport for Romi and Yam.
I'm writing now.
(Richter, 2013)

In this chapter I explore the art-working practice of the Israeli filmmaker, artist and mother Shira Richter -who from the very beginning of her creative career has dealt with topics relating to women's voice and labor- as a psycho-poetic, aesthetic maternal articulation and a strategy to both coping with every-day life when living in an atmosphere and a geopolitical landscape of war, violence, and their constant threat, and as an act of political activism, or 'artivism'.⁴⁹ I analyse her images 'Cut Mountain I' and 'Cut Mountain II' as both: portraits and landscapes, and I carefully read them in relation to her private, maternal experience; the sociocultural and political context of Zionism and traditional Judaism, as well as the imagery of Avi Holtzman's Israeli war landscapes and Peter Goin's open-pit copper mines in North America. The questions that I am engaging with in this chapter are the following: what kind of aesth-ethic and affective relations and imaginaries are being generated as a result of the artist's interrupted -and changed- (maternal) subjectivity, and how do the engendered aesth-ethic relations and imaginaries in turn interrupt and challenge deep-seated patriarchal cultural narratives?

Whereas in the previous chapter I have explored a number of feminine-maternal experiences in relation to how they have come to interrupt and inform the autonomous artistic subjectivity and creative processes of three contemporary Western mother-artists, in this chapter my exploration takes place in a different cultural landscape, that of the Middle-East. Furthermore, my focus now also shifts onto the socially and culturally disruptive force enacted by Richter's feminine-maternal aesth-ethics, which interrupt and work to reveal the dominant myth of motherhood in Israel as just that, a myth, causing the Israeli national broadcast authority's (unsuccessful) attempt to censor Richter's photographic imagery on their live television news program.

In the first part of this chapter, I contextualize motherhood and the politics of human reproduction in the sociocultural and political context of Richter's native

⁴⁹ With 'psycho-poetic' I mean the imaginative poetic expression of Richter's own personal and subjective psychological experience and knowledge (about mothering).

In 'Artivism', portmanteau for 'Art' and 'Activism' "the beautiful and the useful overlap" writes the English activist John Jordan (Jordan, 2016). "It comes into being when creativity and resistance collapse into each other. It's what happens when our political actions become as beautiful as poems and as effective as a perfectly designed tool... By breathing the spirit of art onto direct action, we can come up with irresistible forms of resistance" (Ibid.).

Israel and in relation to the hegemonic (secular and religious) Jewish identity.⁵⁰ I also look at a number of cultural maternal roles publicly available and permitted for women within the pro-natalist nation state of Israel. I then move to situate Richter as a mother and an artist in the complex sociocultural tapestry of contemporary Israel, before carrying out a detailed visual analysis of two of her artworks and performing a cultural discourse analysis on a live television transcript, which illustrates the censoring of Richter's maternal imagery. I conclude this chapter by demonstrating how Richter's feminine-maternal aesth-ethics, informed by her own maternal experience, disrupts and challenges the hegemonic cultural narrative of motherhood in contemporary Israel by making visible the real life experience of an actual mother (her own), and by visually referencing this experience with the logic of the violent appropriation, occupation and assimilation of the contested Israeli/Palestine territories.

A visual semiotic analysis, first of all, serves here as a tool to closely read and examine the different visual elements and their relation to each other; in other word's it is used to read the visual language of signifiers and signified/s in Richter's photographic images 'Cut Mountain I' and 'Cut Mountain II'.⁵¹ Secondly, visual semiotic analysis has aided me in setting these two works by Richter in a dialogue with each other and also with the (lack of) discourse of maternity and maternal roles in relation to democratic processes and citizenship in Israel. Thirdly, a detailed visual semiotic analysis has enacted as a tool to think about Richter's maternal landscapes in relation to the history of landscape as a mode of looking and producing space in the West. This methodical process has further informed my analytical and interpretative processes of reading the artist's intent and the art work's meaning within the context of the Israeli/ Palestine conflict. I undertake this analysis through the theoretical frames of ecofeminism, new materialist and maternal theory.

Next to the visual semiotic approach I take in my reading of Richter's

⁵⁰ Richter emigrated to Israel from North America with her family at the age of seven in 1972. Today, she identifies herself as an Israeli American, although Israel has become her home.

⁵¹ 'Cut Mountain I' was originally entitled by Richter as 'Bird's Eye'. However, the work is now more often publicly referred to as 'Cut Mountain I'. For the sake of clarity and being true to Richter's original title, from here on both titles will appear next to each other when I refer to this artwork.

work, the method of discourse analysis also serves as a means in this chapter to test my research findings regarding Richter's feminine maternal aesth-ethics as a force of political activism. With it I aim to understand how exactly - and to what effect - Richter's maternal aesth-ethics in 'Bird's Eye' / 'Cut Mountain I' and 'Cut Mountain II' both disturb and interrupt the hegemonic narrative of the role of mothers within the Israeli nation state.

During my personal interviews with Richter, minimizing 'outside' distractions was possible to a degree for as long as we were in her small studio on the rooftop of her house in Herzliya, North of Tel Aviv. However, during the moments of listening to Richter in the Mitzpe Ramon desert as she spoke about her psychological, mental and bodily transformation into a young, secular, Israeli mother of twin boys, and how this transformation came to interrupt and affect her aesthetic practice as a visual cultural producer, the 'outside' distractions gained an emotional and uncanny, factually supportive role as Richter was disrupted several times by the Israeli Air Force planes flying over our heads, repeatedly erasing her words with their loud noise as she spoke.

2.1 Motherhood and The Politics of Human Reproduction in Israel

Motherhood, matters of fertility and human reproduction transverse a multitude of intersecting personal, local, social, national and multi-national contexts and relations of power. Women's personal reproductive experiences, world-over, take place on a stage of national and global politics where a multitude of protagonists and "intersecting interests of states and other powerful institutions such as multinational and national corporations, international development agencies, Western medicine and religious groups... construct the contexts within which local reproductive relations are played out". (Ginsburg and Rapp, 1991.) Not only is the personal political, as the infamous sixties feminist motto goes, but the political becomes deeply personal when it comes down to women's reproductive experiences.

In Israel, well-known as a pro-natalist country, motherhood has held significant symbolic value and "a place of honor in the public discourse from pre-state period to present day". (Donath, 2015b, 348). Today, the biblical commandment "Be Fruitful and Multiply" (Genesis: 1:28) sounds loudly next to the memory of Holocaust and the regions countless wars and conflicts.⁵² One reason for the

⁵² Since its establishment in 1948, the State of Israel and the Israel Defense Army (IDF), have participated in numerous wars and military operations. Some of the most notable

elevation of motherhood in the social sphere can be found in the laws of Orthodox Judaism, which dictate that Jewishness can only be passed down through the matrilineal lineage, e.g. through the mother. However, whilst Jewishness, in traditional Judaism, is passed down through the mother, it is the father's name that is used to describe sons and daughters in the Torah, e.g., "Dinah, daughter of Jacob". (Bowker, 1997, 121, 131). By making the mother the one through whom Jewishness is passed on assures that all children a woman gives birth to are counted as Jews, thus increasing the number of 'God's chosen people'. It is nevertheless the father who in his name 'retains' ownership of all new citizens.

One way to pitch motherhood to women and to achieve their reproductive co-operation is, and has been, by cultural myth-making and other social incentives. Enter the Judeo Christian iconography of the 'holy mother', the mother who sacrifices herself for the good of all mankind, thus sanctifying motherhood and in so doing validating motherhood as a very specific social status and symbol. A product of Zionism and economic socialism the narrative of the sacrificial 'holy mother' mother is the ideal, altruistic and sanctified prototype of the 'good mother' appropriated worldwide. It is deeply embedded cultural imagery like this, and the symbolic cultural value assigned to it (through religious rites and government policies) that have helped to create Israel's social climate in which "most Jewish women's reproductive abilities are exploited by the state to advance a nationalist plan, and their wombs are perceived as a 'national womb' to be recruited for the greater Jewish good" (Donath, 2015b).

The notion of a 'national womb' however, is by no means unique to Israel. Women's role as reproducers has always been important to nationalist's and other projects and women have been encouraged, and coerced, to reproduce for the

operations include: Israel's War of Independence (1947-1949); The Suez Crisis (1956); The Six Day War (1967); The War of Attrition (1968-1970); The Yom-Kippur War (1973); The Lebanon War: Operation Peace for Galilee (1982); South Lebanon Conflict (1982-2000); The Arab-Israeli War (1984); The First Intifada (1987-1993); The Gulf War (1991); The Second Intifada (2000-2005); The Second Lebanon War (2006). Each war and armed conflict opening up a minefield of large numbers of additional armed operations, strikes and 'incidents' such as for example the 'Gaza Strip Operations' (2011, 2012, 2014) and the 'Golan clashes' (2012-present).

Genesis: 1.28 New International version: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

national good world-over.⁵³ For example, in 2004, during his May budget speech, the Australian prime minister Peter Costello made international headlines when he urged Australians to “go home and do your patriotic duty tonight.” Costello’s vision of “one for your husband, one for your wife and one for your country” was aimed at a very specific demography, namely Christian, heterosexual couples, rather than all Australians. (Kevin, 2009); A light-hearted television ad campaign in 2014 by ‘Spies Travel’, a Danish travel agency, offered ovulation discounts to couples with the tagline “Do it for Denmark”, whilst echoing the well-known Edwardian England’s sex-educational advice to young wives on unwanted spousal relations: “Close your eyes and think of England” the saying chimes. In other words: think of the economic good that procreation guarantees; In 2007, the Soviet government declared September the 12th as a ‘National Day of Conception’, giving couples time off from work to procreate in the hope of bringing up the national birth rate.⁵⁴ Women giving birth nine months later on the 12th of June (Russian’s National Day) in the region of Ulyanovsk receive money and gifts such as cars and refrigerators for “giving birth to a patriot”. (The Guardian 12.07.2007); Similarly, in Nagorno Karabakh, a landlocked region in Southern Caucasus, the government has been administering a ‘birth-encouragement program’ since 2008 in order to repopulate the territory after the displacement of tens of thousands of ethnic Armenians during the 1988-1994 war. This program consists of substantial and with each child increasing amounts of financial handouts to heterosexual couples when they wed and again at the birth of each child and up to four children. (New York Times, MacDonald, 2011; Taylor-Lind, 2012); And in the communist Romania of Nicolae Ceausescu (1967-1989), the union between “demographic concerns and nationalist politics turned women’s bodies into instruments to be used in the service of the state”. (Kligman in Ginsburgh and Rapp 1995, 234). Abortion was first banned under Decree 770 (October 1969), then criminalised.

⁵³ Women’s reproductive capacities have also been regulated and controlled in other ways, as shown for example by literature on forced sterilizations of indigenous populations such as the Roma (Holt 2005, Curran 2014); Native American Indians (Gurr 2011; Torpy 2000); African American and Latina women in the USA. (Davies 1981; Novak et al, 2018)

⁵⁴ For critical discussion on what economic good for women themselves might actually entail, see for example the seminal work of the feminist political economist, public policy scholar, environmentalist and founder of feminist economics Marilyn Waring’s seminal work ‘If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics’ (1988); ‘Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and What Women Are Worth, (1999) and ‘Counting on Marilyn Waring: New Advances in Feminist Economics’ (eds.) Bjørnhalt and Mc Kay (2013).

In speaking from the intersection of cultural and political geographies, the geographer Robert J. Kaiser has written: “Homelands do not come ready-made, but rather are the outcomes of the ‘national construction of social space’” (Kaiser in Albanese 2007, 829). The above, national reproductive practices certainly affirm this, as does the 1949 speech by Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben Gurion, in which he addressed the nation-state’s first government on what women’s role in the army should be, declaring that: “Women have a special mission as mothers. There is no greater mission in life..”. (Quoted in Fuchs 1987).⁵⁵

Through the dominantly pro-natalist public narratives of the Israeli nation-state it becomes clear that motherhood for Jewish women is at once both: “a private experience and public resource” (Bloomfield, 2009, 228). To be a Jewish mother is, to a certain degree, to align ones “physical experience with the collective national needs.” (Ibid.). To be a good Jewish mother is to enjoy, value and find worthiness in one’s mothering work as a labour of love and as a religious and a nationalist duty to both God and the Israeli society. Despite the high symbolic value given to maternal labor, the actual day-to-day mother-work is not economically valued and mothers are left to care for their children and house without any economic rewards. At the same time, however, women’s private and national efforts to become mothers are being financially encouraged and supported by the Israeli state. In fact, the government gives free IVF treatments to women up to 45 years of age up to two first children. Not only do statistics show that reproductive rates in the West are at their highest in Israel where the average number of children per mother is 3.1, whilst in most OECD countries total fertility rates are at 1,7 children per mother, Israel has also risen to the status of a global superpower when it comes to assisted reproduction technologies, attracting medical tourists from the world over with its high-tech facilities and advertisements such as: “Need IVF? Want to Visit Israel? Combine the two with us. World Class IVF

⁵⁵ Esther Fuchs, a feminist biblical scholar, has interpreted Ben Gurion’s 1949 speech as part of a party political attempt to bring together both: those who hold traditional, Jewish views of a woman’s role and responsibility as being located in (natural) motherhood, and those holding more modern, democratic, egalitarian and secular Zionist expectations that she be “a loyal citizen with public responsibilities” (Fuchs, 1987, 30), thus having an equal position with men in the Israel Defense Forces. According to Fuchs, by calling motherhood as women’s “special mission”, Ben Gurion both reinstated the traditional values of women as mothers, whilst at the same time positioning motherhood as a civil mission. (Fuchs, 1987).

treatment during your visit to Israel.” (website, IVF Clinic, Haifa, 4.7. 2020) ⁵⁶

It is public and socially normative attitudes like the above that continue shaping a culture which leaves little space for the voices of individual women who feel differently. When I ask the Israeli-American, heterosexual, middle-class, Ashkenazi woman, mother, film-maker, artist and peace activist Shira Richter living in Israel about the public opinion on women who opt out of motherhood, her response is quick and short: “Traitors” (Richter, personal letter/correspondence 24.04.2019). She then explains to me that when a Jewish woman voluntarily chooses not to have (more) children, she is considered as turning her back on the collective good, being selfish and evading her responsibility. Similarly, bearing children but not sending them to the army means that “you are forcing [other people’s] sons to fight for you.” In other words, when one person does not send their child to the army, or chooses not to reproduce children, it means that “other people’s children have to do the (dirty) work”.⁵⁷ Again, you are a “traitor.” (Richter, personal correspondence 24.04.2019). In her ground breaking research on Jewish women regretting their motherhood, the Israeli sociologist Orna Donath’s (2015ab, 2017) anonymous interviewees from various sociocultural and religious backgrounds, ranging from atheists and secular to various religious denominations and other hybrid religious identities, reveal similar personal experiences and cultural understandings when it comes to the public perception of women who are not mothers, not to mention regret their motherhood. Some of the standard reactions towards women who do not wish to be mothers, according to Donath’s research, include comments such as: “You are a woman. You have to have children!”, “You are so cold and heartless!”, “Go and look for a psychologist!” (Donath, 2017, 7). One of her interviewees tells: “I am being pressured... to have a third child!... Everybody tells me that I must have at least three children for Shabbat dinners and due to the [Jewish-Palestine] conflict in Israel.” (Donath, 2017, 9). Women’s desires to not conform to the available models of motherhood and their negative reproductive experiences have had little say in the patriarchal politics of

⁵⁶ OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) statistics on reproductive rates in the West are taken from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/sp.dyn.tfrt.in>.

The IVF clinic advertisement is from the website of the private Elisha Hospital, Haifa: <https://ivf.co.il>

⁵⁷ National military service in Israel is mandatory to all Jewish people over the age of 18. Exceptions may be made based on religious, physiological or psychological grounds.

human reproduction in Israel.

2.2 New Protagonists Rising from the Margins

Since the 1980's, the figure of the mother in Israel has experienced cultural shifts that have seen her rise from the domain of the home into the centre stage of public discourse. Here too, conflict and war have been one of the main protagonists as they have been employed to push the nationalist agenda. Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, also called as 'Operation Peace for Galilee', marked a turning point in Israel's public discourse regarding its military activity when journalists and parents of soldiers "began to question the judgement of military leaders and to take critical stance towards their son's military service." (Olmert, 2016, 363) Although public criticism had been voiced in the past, e.g after both the 1970's 'War of Attrition' and the 'Yom Kippur War' in 1973, never before had criticism been voiced during a war. (Ibid.) A new climate in the Israeli press was on the rise. Growing casualties and the military's misinformation about its clear goals in Lebanon, under the defence minister Ariel Sharon, accounted for the press to start disassociating itself from the government's war effort. As the parents of soldiers begun speaking out, the voices of mothers begun entering the public discourse on "military and political decision making" (Olmert. 364).

One of the first public voices was that of Raya Harnik's, the mother of Gonyi Harnik, a commander of the Golani Brigade.⁵⁸ When Gonyi, Raya's second eldest son, was killed on the second day of the 1982 Lebanon War, Raya, instead of accepting the culturally normative politically passive role of a bereaved mother, rose to defy it and repositioned herself as a new kind of a soldier's mother. Instead of accepting her lot as just another sacrificial and bereaved mother, she publicly questioned the military's actions during 'Operation for Peace in Galilee' and fought to have the inscription on her son's gravestone changed from "Fell in Operation for Peace in Galilee Campaign" to "Fell during the battle on the Beaufort in the Lebanon war" (Lurie cited in Olmert 2016, 364). Raya Harnik's political activism as a mother helped to move the Israeli Jewish mother from the margins to the centre stage, making space to a new kind of mother in the Israeli cultural consciousness.

⁵⁸ The 'Golani Brigade', one of the most highly decorated infantry units of the Israel Defence Force (IDF), is a regional command in charge of Israeli's northern border with Lebanon and Syria.

Fifteen years later a tragic helicopter disaster in 1997, involving two Israeli helicopters transporting soldiers over the border to southern Lebanon and causing the death of 73 Israeli soldiers, propelled forth the birth of the anti-war movement ‘Arba Imahot’, Hebrew for ‘Four Mothers’.⁵⁹ Initiated by four Israeli mothers: Rachel Ben-Dor, Ronit Nahmias, Yaffa Arbel and Miri Sela, all mothers of combat soldiers, the group rapidly grew to include men as well as non-parents of both sexes. The group’s goal was to bring an end to Israel’s military presence in Lebanon and it was through their activism that the public opinion began to change, eventually causing Israel to withdraw its military out of Lebanon in 2006. Where Raya Har-nik’s maternal political activism had interrupted the vernacular of war by erasing the words “fell for peace” from her son’s gravestone, the ‘Four Mothers’ interrupted the status quo by talking about their concern for all the fighting children, instead of territories. In embracing the culturally gendered characteristics of ‘care’ and ‘nurturance’ traditionally associated with mothers caring for their own child/-ren in the private sphere of the home, and by deliberately diverting these same characteristics towards the care and concern of all children, the ‘Four Mothers’ “drew legitimacy from their identity as mothers”. (Olmert, 364). Although, since the early 1980’s many new vocal and visible women’s peace movements have formed in Israel, such as for example: ‘Women in Black’; ‘Women Against the Occupation’ and ‘Women for Political Prisoners’ to name just a few, it was the ‘Four Mothers’ whose modelling and “playing to gender-appropriate expectations in the public sphere legitimize[d] the infiltration of a female perspective to national discourse traditionally perceived male issues of war and security”. (Lemish and Barzel, 2000, 147).

Albeit, Richter’s maternal activist perspective and visual work play against ‘gender-appropriate’ expectations, it is to the ‘genre’ of this new kind of protagonist: a peace activist Jewish Israeli mother who emerges in the 1990’s, having been enabled by the ‘Four Mothers’ movement, that the feminist maternal aesth-ethics of Shira Richter can be located in. In her maternal activist practice, Richter ceaselessly researches, records and makes visible the multiple, historically complex, layered and loaded tensions of what it is like to be a secular Jewish woman and a feminist

⁵⁹ Four mothers, ‘arba imahot’ (*arba* = four, *imahot* = mother) is a reference to the four mothers in the Torah: Sarah, Leah, Rachel and Rebecca, also called as ‘The Matriarch’s’. In ‘Four Mothers: The Womb In The Public Sphere’, Lemish and Barzel (2000) link the groups success to their ability to appropriate biblical imagery and thus appeal to a larger community of Israelis.

mother in Israel; a society in which the traditional gendered roles between men and women are daily reinforced by the right wing Zionist government and its institutions, and where women's lived and embodied experiences of pregnancy, labour, mother-work and motherhood are effectively concealed from public discourse. She describes her mothering experience under these conditions as follows:

There is an exhaustion to being a mother [in Israel]; of protecting your children while feeling powerless in front of the society. I am constantly trying to build sandbags between the patriarchy and my home only to realise that it is already inside my house when I see the boys playing war games on the computer. It is impossible to be a mother; to raise human beings who will have a good life. (Richter personal conversation, May 2019, Amsterdam).-

To complicate things (feminist mothering) even more, both the military and the government commonly appropriate a normative language that masks their war efforts behind a rhetoric of care and protection. For example: "We will protect our children and will not allow anyone to harm them.... we are prepared and ready for any scenario in order to protect our civilians" reads a July 2014 Facebook post addressed to the Israeli nation by the then president Shimon Peres during the Gaza War. (Peres, 10.07.2014). Richter comments: "In my society when you say you are protecting... you throw missiles on another family" and 'safe space' is the name for a bomb shelter. (Richter, personal interview, February 2018. Tel Aviv).

Throughout the 1990's, the cultural evolution of the figure of the mother in Israel has experienced shifts that have seen her rise from the margins and move towards the centre stage of public discourse as a protagonist. Yet, as shown by research on Israeli mothers who regret their motherhood (Donath, 2015ab) and also confirmed by my own interviews with Israeli activist-mothers, the dominantly expected role for women, supported and purported by the Zionist nation-state and its right-wing politics is still the one that assumes and expects women to lay their wombs at the service of the nation and remain in the margins.⁶⁰ It is therefore fair

⁶⁰ In February 2019, while visiting Israel to interview Shira Richter and Bracha L. Ettinger, I also met with and interviewed Rela Mazali an Israeli writer, feminist peace activist, mother, independent researcher and one of the leading figures of Israel's peace movement. Mazali is a co-founder of 'New Profile', a group challenging the militarization of Israel society and

to say that the publicly permitted models for Israeli Jewish mothers are still dominantly arranged around a paradigm of the good and sacrificial mother who feeds the nation-state with her own flesh. Any deviation from, or disruption of this narrative becomes considered as dissident behaviour. In such a cultural discourse/ climate, the womb is still treated as a public space and the mother's body as an occupied territory.

2. 3 The Feminine-Maternal Artist Gaze of Shira Richter

Having born twin boys, Shira Richter, a secular, middle-class, Israeli-American, Ashkenazi Jewish woman seems like the exemplary Jewish mother. Yet with the same token she is perhaps an even bigger traitor, a doubly deviant Jewish woman, because her creative practice, time after time, questions the status quo regarding women's, and particularly mother's, position and treatment in her society's economic and democratic processes. "If women are the ones doing most of the educating during the most influential years of a person, then why don't we [women] have more influence [in public life]?", she asks referring to the malleability of children in their formative, early childhood years. In answer to her own question she then continues: "We don't because... [p]atriarchy is a thought system, which inhabits both women and men" (Richter in mothervoices.org, 2016).

Richter's hypophora distinguishes between the influence women have as carers for the society's young and the influence they still often lack as participants in civic life and public policy making, and points to the patriarchal thought system as a kind of a filter that manages what enters public life. Her remarks suggest that the thinking and situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) of women do not pass this filter unchecked and that consequently this produces a situation in which, in order to have any meaningful public influence within the patriarchal thought system,

opposing the occupation, and the founder of 'Gun Free Kitchen Tables', a gun disarmament and gun control project. She has also published essays, academic articles, short stories on gender equality, children's rights and peace education. In 2005 Mazali was also nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize as part of the '1000 PeaceWomen' project. Another activist mother that I had the pleasure to meet and engage with during my visit is Mindy Levy, a homebirth midwife and a midwifery educator living and working in Israel for over three decades. Levy's activist work includes the co-founding of 'Midwives of Peace', a group of Israeli and Palestine midwives working together to ensure safe and joyous birth experiences for women surrounded by armed conflict. Levy has Master's degree in Women's Studies from Lesley University, Cambridge MA and her research interest and scholarly work has been largely on trauma and its effect on women's maternity experiences.

women and men alike, must first align with the dominant thought system of patriarchy itself. Furthermore, the imagery of “inhabitation” that Richter evokes here strikes me as noteworthy as it echoes the themes of ‘occupation’, ‘appropriation’ and ‘assimilation’ (as in: to incorporate or absorb as one’s own’), three themes that I have identified as re-occurring in my interview transcripts with Richter, which also re-emerge in her artistic imagery as I will show in my analysis of her artwork later on in this chapter.

Born in 1965 on an army base in Richmond Virginia, USA, Richter’s life has always been colored by military presence. In fact, every memory and event in Richter’s re-telling of her life events during our interviews and email correspondence is punctuated by a specific war or a distinct conflict. Whether she is telling about her family’s history, her art-education, her maternal experiences, or her artistic practice, war and conflict are always present as a backdrop against which every-day life events unfold:

A year after immigrating to Israel the Yom Kippur war broke out ... The Gulf War interrupted our studies... Missiles were fired on Tel Aviv from Iraq.... We left Tel Aviv to the north because of the missiles... I’ll never forget the title of one article in the paper: ‘What’s Worse: Mother or a Missile?’ because people left Tel Aviv to [go] stay with [their] family members. (Richter, personal interview, February 2018. Mitzpe Ramon).

At the age of seven, Richter immigrated to Israel with her family: a father who served as a medic in Vietnam; a concert violinist mother and two younger brothers. After completing high-school and the compulsory twenty-six-month-long military service with ‘Nachal’, a pioneer combatant youth unit affiliated with the scouts, she travelled to New York to study painting and drawing at the Parson’s School of Design.⁶¹ A few years later and home-sick, Richter returned to Israel in 1985 to continue her studies at the ‘Bezalel Academy of Art and Design’ in Jerusalem, where her focus was on graphic design. It was here, as she began combining image and text, that her love for storytelling became clear to her and in 1991 Rich-

⁶¹ ‘Nachal’ (a Hebrew acronym for ‘Noar Halutzi Lohem’: Fighting Pioneer Youth) is a military cadre unique to Israel, combining military service in a combat unit with civilian service. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/nachal-infantry-brigade>

ter graduated from 'The Camera Obscura School of Art' in Tel Aviv, having studied film directing, screen-writing and acting. To this day, Richter's activist art-working practice comprises of the formal elements of text, image, duration and narrative, elements which she now most often brings together in the form of visual performance lectures. In fact, from the time of becoming a mother in 2002, the format of visual performance lectures has been a prominent form of Richter's artistic practice.

Here again, it is of central importance to identify and understand the reasons behind the changes in Richter's artistic practice (moving from film making to photography and visual performance lectures) and the simultaneous sharpening of her critical focus, now more precisely applied on the experience and institution of motherhood that occurred when she herself became a mother. The maternal reality behind these creative changes and effecting the scaling back of her artistic expression can be traced as follows: Richter's twin boys were born as she was completing her first feature length documentary film 'Two States of Mind' (2002). At birth, one of the twins had a 'clubfoot', a physical challenge affecting both of his feet. Caring for a baby with clubfoot and in need of a lot of extra care and hospital appointments in addition to caring for twins took a lot of time and energy. On top of this, Richter's partner's work took him travelling around the world for approximately one third of the year leaving Richter if not a single mother, single mothering. In discussing the transition from film making to photography and eventually to visual performance lectures, a process which unfolded alongside the early years of her maternal labor and practice, Richter tells:

Film practice was out of the question and I started just taking photos... and then I actually moved to doing [photography] exhibitions, which for me was just like film dissected... Since I had little time for doing my [art] practice, it was like: a frame, then another frame, and then another frame. Each frame kept representing a story and a scene. (Richter, recorded voice message, 12.02.2021).

Exhibiting her photographs, Richter discovered that "one of the most interesting and important things for me during the exhibitions was basically meeting as many people there as possible and talking about the issues [brought up by the

photographs]” (Richter, recorded voice message, 12.02.2021). This element of discussion and dialogue was another formal aspect that soon came to find creative form through her visual performance lectures, alongside the photographic images framing the stories and scenes. Although, Richter still wanted to get back to making films her changed (with motherhood) interests seemed to work against her:

I kept trying to get back to film... Writing proposals, and I didn't get any 'yes's' because my subject matter was so unpopular... you know... mothering. Even women didn't give me the money. (Richter, recorded voice message, 12.02.2021).

Richter's further reflection on her personal experience also refers to intersectional factors, such as class and gender, as steering the art market's values, trends and fashions as components in the changing aesthetics of her visual art practice as a mother-artist.⁶² In yet another voice recording to me she says:

If there is no market for the art, then you can't sell it... and in order for there to be a market for this kind of art, people need to understand the value, and people understand the value by understanding the subject... most art collectors you know are very very rich and usually male, or even if they are female they don't connect to... you know... usually, if they are female and they have lots of money, they have no idea what we [mother-artists struggling with lack of time and resources] are talking about, usually... (Richter, recorded voice message, 12.02. 2021).

Her words echo an experience that is common amongst many of the mother-artists participating in this research. Namely the necessity to create, build and educate one's own audience. Richter does this through her visual performance lectures, a creative strategy which allows her to address more varied audiences than solely

⁶² I would like to add here that although Richter's above quote mainly highlights issues related to class and gender, further intersectional factors such race, ethnicity and religion are certainly implicated in the broader discussion, and especially in the Israeli/Palestine context.

contemporary art audiences and art collectors.⁶³ Other mother-artists have done this by creating alliances of solidarity (networks, platforms, exhibitions, symposia) with each other and by becoming each other's audiences.⁶⁴

From the very beginning of her creative career, Richter has dealt with topics relating to women's voice and labor. For example, in her award winning feature length documentary 'Two States of Mind' (2002), which was in production prior to her becoming a mother, she focuses on the role of women and women's voices regarding the Israeli/ Palestine conflict and the United Nations Resolution 1325.⁶⁵ In 'INVISIBLE / INVALUABLES' (2011), a photography, light- and video installation, made when her children were 10 years of age, she directs her maternal gaze onto the value and invisibility of the work and points of views of mothers.⁶⁶ In

⁶³ Since circa 2009, Richter has also been using Facebook as an activist platform, in order to reach new audiences and to engage with different discussions within Israel and beyond, alongside travelling around the world performing her visual performance lectures, drawing and making photographic images. In addition, her multi-disciplinary career has also included writing and directing for both television and the screen; directing news, documentaries and drama.

⁶⁴ During the one-day symposium held at the end of the 'Mother House' project, an experimental project facilitating collectively shared studio space for mother-artists and their children, the central question put to the invited speakers consisting of visual artist, actors, writers, curators, scholars and publishers was in fact: 'Have We Become Our Own Audience?'. The 'Mother House' was a collaboration between Procreate Project and Desperate Artwives. (5.9.2016 – 9.10.2016, IKLECTIK Art Lab, London).

⁶⁵ 'Two States of Mind' won the Audience Award, Berlin Jewish Film Festival (2002); Audience Award, Feminale: International Women's Film Festival, Cologne, (2002) and was coined by the press at the time as the "Thelma and Louise of the Middle East". The documentary has been broadcast by several TV stations worldwide and it opened the Israeli film festival in India in 2007.

The 'United Nations Resolution 1325' (passed on the 31st of October, 2000) is a landmark resolution as it "reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security" (UN Women). In addition, the resolution calls on all parties to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse in situations of armed conflict. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/docs/2000/10/un-security-council-resolution-1325>

⁶⁶ 'INVISIBLE / INVALUABLES' became developed into a co-authored book chapter: 'If Mothers Counted: Status Symbols for The Invisible Art of Mothering' (Richter and

‘Hot Potato Called Mama’ (2014), a visual performance lecture created at the time her children were 13, and whose title is a reference to the ongoing sociocultural difficulties of talking about mothers outside of their assigned context of the home, her focus is fully and unapologetically on the figure of the mother as a Subject and the cultural and economic treatment and erasure of the mother as a Subject. In fact, through my interviews and ongoing correspondence with Richter, it has become clear to me that it is the normalized and thus to a certain extent invisible everyday cultural practices of maternal erasure that lie, like an open wound, at the heart of much of her activist practice. These normalized, social, cultural and symbolic practices of maternal erasure then become the subject matter of her visual performance lectures, in which her focus and creative energy, most often, is directed towards the everyday care-working practices of mothers and the unacknowledged value of maternal practice and thinking within cultural, political and economic contexts. It is important to note here that, whilst Richter champions the care-working practices and mothering abilities of all bodies, she also distinctly acknowledges the embodied biological specificities and processes of the feminine maternal body as fundamentally informative for the experience, thinking, practices and Subjectivities of those who mother.⁶⁷ Thus, when Richter talks about the erasure of the figure of the mother, she not only means the cultural, symbolic, and economic un-acknowledgement of mother-work, (disproportionally left to women, albeit other bodies can just as well perform this labor too), she means the cultural, political and symbolic erasure of the prowess of the feminine maternal body as a generative space and thus also a site of cultural and political thought. During my interview with Richter in the Mitzpe Ramon, she says:

It doesn’t matter who you are. [Whether] you become a mother or you don’t. We all have entered this world through a feminine body. We have been dependent on a feminine body. We have mixed and mashed in a feminine body. That’s the central power of a feminine body, biological feminine body... [T]hat is taken away from us [biological mothers] by making it much small-

Scheffan Katzav) in ‘Counting on Marilyn Waring: New Advances in Feminist Economics’ (Bjørnholt and McKay 2014).

⁶⁷ In fact, this is a stance adapted by all of the mother-artists participating in this research.

er than it is and by disregarding the conditions we need... Not giving us what we need, not supporting, not listening to what we need. Erasing us, silencing us. It's still been done... this erasure. (Richter, personal interview, February 2018, Mitzpe Ramon).

When during another interview with Richter, I asked her about her personal experiences regarding how forms of maternal erasure have manifested in her personal life, or others around her, she offered me a number of examples varying from popular culture to midwifery and ancient Greek myth. Her first example, recognizable to many (Western) mothers, describes a series of vivid scenes in which she is watching animation films together with her small children, realizing that the figure of the mother seemed to always either die at the very start of the film, be already dead, or simply: not exist at all.⁶⁸ In fact, the phenomena Richter is describing here is a well-used device in Western storytelling, widely known as “the dead mother plot” (Dever, 1998) and which, in the words of the author and illustrator Sarah Boxer “is a fixture of fiction so deeply woven into our storytelling fabric that it seems impossible to unravel” (Boxer in *The Atlantic*, 2014). In other words, the ‘dead mother plot’ has become a normalised narrative device to help propel forward the stories we tell in Western culture.⁶⁹

As another example of cultural erasure, in my interview with her, Richter also refers to a public discussion that took place in the USA around December 2014 and involved the ‘Midwife Alliance North America’ (MANA) and their use of gender inclusive language in their official ‘Core Competencies’ document in which the word ‘woman’ was erased and replaced with “pregnant individual” and “birthing parent”. In response to the use of language in the ‘Core Competencies’ document, and thus solely within the context of midwifery, an open letter to address a number of problematics in this otherwise “commendable attempt at inclusivity” was signed by (mainly) North American birth workers and activists and was published on the

⁶⁸ Think of, for example, Walt Disney’s ‘Bambi’ (1942); ‘Snow White’ (1937) and ‘Cinderella’ (1950); Disney/ Pixar’s ‘Finding Nemo’ (2003), or Lucasfilms saga about Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia from ‘Star Wars’ (1977-2019).

⁶⁹ For more on the reoccurring trope of the absent mother and how scholars have approached it ranging from folktales to literature, to film and television productions, see for example: ‘The Absent Mother in Cultural Imagination: Missing, Presumed Dead (ed. Berit Åström), 2017., Marina Warner’s: ‘From the Beast to The Blonde: On Fairytales and Their Tellers’ (1996), and Sarah Boxer ‘Why Are All The Cartoon Mothers Dead? (2014).

internet pages of ‘Woman Centered Midwifery’.⁷⁰ It was and remains the stance of the signees, Richter being one of them, that erasing the word ‘woman’ from the language of midwives would in fact, effectively play into the hands of patriarchal systems of oppression.

Richter’s third example, during my interview, resonates with the Belgian-born, French feminist philosopher, psychoanalyst and cultural theorist Luce Irigaray’s thinking that the “whole of our [Western] society and culture, ... at a primal level, ... function[s] on the basis of matricide’ (Irigaray, 1991, 76). Her third example refers also to the deep rootedness of the relative ease with which the cultural erasure and matricide of mothers as Subjects takes place today. In short, in her third example Richter is referring to the origin story of Athena, Greek goddess of wisdom, war, civilization and law, when during one of our conversations she says: “This erasure has always been there. It was happening already in Ancient Greece. I mean, Athena was born from Zeus’ head!” (Richter, personal correspondence, 02.06.2020, emphasis hers).

Indeed, Athena did spring forth from the head of her father Zeus after he had swallowed her mother Metis, unbeknownst to Zeus already pregnant with Athena.⁷¹ In this way, Athena’s origin story, instead of simply being about her birth and spectacular entrance into culture through her father’s forehead, conceals behind it another story, namely that of the matricide and erasure of her mother Metis (Jacobs, 2004).⁷² The matricide of Metis, rather straightforwardly sacrifices the mother as Subject (and as a culturally generative space) in order to produce and uphold

⁷⁰ MANA’s ‘Core Competencies’ is a document that establishes the essential knowledge, clinical skills and critical thinking necessary for entry level autonomous midwives in North America. An open letter to MANA, signed by mainly North American birth workers and activist can be found at the website of ‘Women Centered Midwifery’, a group of gender critical midwives “standing in support of females, fully acknowledging their unique experiences, capacities and vulnerabilities” and resisting “the cultural, legal, and medical erasure of biological females and their lived reality”.

⁷¹ Being afraid of a prophecy according to which the Titan Metis would bear his children of whom one would overthrow him, Zeus, after first copulating with her, tricked Metis to shapeshift into a fly and swallowed her in order to avoid being overthrown by any potential fruit of her womb.

⁷² For more on the notion of matricide, see for example: Luce Irigaray’s ‘The Bodily Encounter With Mother’ (1991); Julia Kristeva’s ‘Black Sun’ (1989) and Amber Jacobs’, ‘On Matricide: Myth, Psychoanalysis and the Law of The Mother’ (2007).

a certain kind of social order based on a phallogentric symbolic order.⁷³ Thus, the mother is banished, excluded and erased “from culture and from the Symbolic Order” (Hirsch, 1989, 30).

The matricide of Metis of course is not where the story simply ends. Instead, the ripple effect of this matricidal event now brings forth another social transgression, namely the rupturing of any possibility of intergenerational knowledge transfer between Metis the mother as Subject and Athena, her child. Put differently: Athena didn’t know her mother. She didn’t know her story; her origins; her thoughts; her acts; her skills; her passions, nor her end when she was swiftly swallowed by Zeus, who simply and literally, to borrow a term from Amber Jacobs, “incorporated” Metis into his own body. (Jacobs, 2004, 25) In other words, Athena’s mother, like that of Bambi, Snow White and Princess Leia’s, only existed as a partially necessary biological vessel and a storytelling trope for the propelling forth of Athena’s story (which incidentally then is perhaps more of a ‘his’-story than hers, as all possibility of maternal transmission and genealogy has been stripped away by Zeus).

The feminist theorist Amber Jacobs has written in depth about the notion of cultural and symbolic matricide in relation to the mother-daughter relation. (Jacobs, 2007, 148-156). She has also criticized psychoanalysis for being complicit in the reproduction of a model that “relegates the mother to the realm of the imaginary” (Jacobs, 2004, 19) and has argued that “the mother must be able to be theorized as a sexed subject whose relation to filiation and generational transmission is given expression inside the symbolic economy” (Ibid.). In her reading of the Oresteia myth alongside the origin story of Athena, Jacobs shows us how the logic of Metis’s erasure returns and becomes symbolically re-produced and re-enacted by Athena herself. ⁷⁴ Jacob writes:

⁷³ This phallogentric symbolic order has been upheld, for example, by traditional Western psychoanalytic theory, and it is precisely this centrality (of phallogentric symbolic order) that Ettingers’ ‘Matrixial theory’ challenges, offering us a different, non- matricidal, non-sacrificial account of subjectivity.

⁷⁴ In Aeschylus’ Oresteia, king Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia in order to please the goddess Artemis, whom he has offended. Years later, when Agamemnon returns home from the war of Troy, his wife Queen Clytemnestra, the mother of Iphigenia, has him killed in revenge for their daughter Iphigenia’s murder. Years later Orestes, son of both Clytemnestra and Agamemnon kills his mother to revenge his father’s murder. Orestes then flees to Athens, pleading Athena the goddess of law for help. In a court of law, Athena has the final vote on Orestes’ fate and uses this to save his life, thus siding with Orestes’ actions

Metis vanishes without a trace so that not even her daughter will ever know of the maternal body from which she originally sprang. Through Zeus' incorporation of Metis, Athena is born a so-called 'motherless' daughter. In the *Oresteia*, Athena becomes the precious proof that the father is the prime author of identity. She will represent this logic and will devote her work to endorsing and institutionalizing it as law in her court of 'justice', as dramatized in the *Oresteia*. Unaware of the story of her own mother, Athena will condemn Clytemnestra and declare that the mother will not be mourned. Eradicating Metis via incorporation functions to sustain the parthenogenetic fantasy on which Zeus and Athena's order is based. (Jacobs, 2004, 25).

Very similarly to Richter, who employs the imagery of "inhabitation" (as in: to incorporate or absorb as one's own') when speaking about the pervasiveness of patriarchy, Jacobs employs the imagery of "incorporation" when speaking about how Zeus erased Metis. It is precisely such forms of cultural and symbolical erasure that sacrifice the mother as Subject as presented above, that Richter the mother and artist is resisting through her activist, maternal aesthetics. I will return to this theme of erasure once more as we arrive at my analysis of Richter's photo series 'Mother, Daughter and The Holy Spirit'. But first, when, interviewing Richter about her artistic process and choice of subject matter, she says: "[I] talk about... my identity as artist. When I became pregnant, then I was curious to look for images that resembled [my situation as a mother]" (Richter, personal interview, 13.02.2018). Eager then to find and explore visual imagery representing mothers and motherhood, Richter like many artist-mothers before and after her, turned her maternal gaze onto one of the most famous and visible mothers, Mary the virgin mother. "I was thirsty for artistic mother images to identify with and she [Mary] is, after all, the most popular human mother in Western Art History, albeit a bit alienating because of her conception methods" (Richter, column in m/othervoices.org, 2016). However, instead of settling for Mary as passive, as she is mostly depicted, "commissioned and painted by men" (Ibid.), Richter's reading of Mary's mothering practice re-presents us with a far from passive Mary:

over those of Clytemnestra.

I really like the Cana story. The Cana wedding story... is beautiful, because it shows how a mother's mind works... [W]hat she [Mary] does there is like... it's obvious. [W]e all, as mothers, want our children to succeed in life. We want to.... make them independent. Mary has this weird son, right? [I]n the Cana wedding she is doing politics. [S]he's the one who says to him, "Come on, let's do it now." She starts elbowing him in the scene and he's like, "No mom, not now." She [Mary] understands there is political... there's a social kind of thing there where he can probably shine there." She's orchestrating the whole miracle. She's creating the set. (Richter, personal interview, February, 2018. Herzeliya).⁷⁵

Richter's reading of Mary's role in the Cana wedding miracle, resurrects an active, more complex, relatable and realistically resonant Mary in alignment with women's actual lived experiences and acts of caring and nurturing for an intimate other than is generally afforded to them and as has been demonstrated for example by the responses of those mothers and research participants to whom I have related Richter's analogy.

Throughout her entire career, Richter has been a very vocal activist regarding bringing women's voices into the political arena of democratic processes and yet it has been the series of her large scale photographic images about her own maternal experience of becoming a mother, or the "secrets of the transition

⁷⁵ "On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him." (John 2:1-11, New International Version)

into motherhood” (Richter, 2017), entitled as ‘The Mother, Daughter and Holy Spirit’ that has received the strongest of reactions from the Israeli audiences and media. This project, made over a twelve-month period after the birth of her twin-boys Romy and Yam in 2002, is a visual investigation of Richter’s own bodily and psycho-social transformation and experience of generating, protecting and caring for new life in a culture where these notions have been co-opted by the right-wing government and its nationalist narrative. In this body of work, Richter’s aesthetic working through of her own maternal transformation as a secular Jewish woman/mother has produced and enabled a new discursive space in a society where the cultural hegemony traditionally offers women very narrow moulds of publicly acceptable roles.

In what follows, I analyse two images: ‘Bird’s Eye’ / ‘Cut Mountain I’ and ‘Cut Mountain II’ from Richter’s ‘The Mother, Daughter and Holy Spirit’ -series of large photographic prints made over 12-month period (2002-2003). These two images, as I see them, work towards making maternal appropriation and erasure visible in Israel in order to dissent and disrupt their ongoing, intergenerational perpetuation. These two images also feature as the front and back covers of her publication ‘The Mother, Daughter and Holy Spirit’ (Richter, 2006), and as such they form the material, visual and ideological encasing for the rest of Richter’s work in this photographic series.

2. 4. ‘Bird’s Eye’ / ‘Cut Mountain I’: Resisting Matricide

In ‘Bird’s Eye’ / ‘Cut Mountain I’ (2002/2003), an aerial view of a desert opens up before our eyes. (Fig. 1.) The ground, far below, is framed as a classical, rectangular-shaped landscape photograph. The terrain captured is of a mountainous desert in the ombré hues of yellow and orange cadmium, burnt amber and raw sienna reminiscent of the scorched sand of the Negev Desert, in the contested territories of southern Israel / Palestine. It is difficult to estimate the altitude from which the photograph has been taken from, however, the mind makes a quick estimation of the distance being somewhat similar to looking at the earth’s surface from a plane in mid-flight across middle-east.

Something about this image is jarring. The entire picture plane of the aerial view has an even light spread across it; a somewhat dull and soft matt sheen, as if the photograph had been made on an overcast day. Somewhere in the mind is a knowing based on a quick empirical calculation, which considers the size of the

desert terrain captured within the frame, that something here is not quite what it seems at first glance. For one, in an overview of any such large area of earth's surface, one should be seeing more contrast between light and shadow. Light, where the sun reflects off a random shiny rock face, or off the roof of a car, or the window of a house. Shadows, where the clouds hang above the ground, or where mountain tops obscure the sun's rays from falling on the slopes and in the valleys. Most of the elevated mountain ridges are composed into the middle and to the lower part of the frame. Darker lines cut and curve across the desert's mountainous rock face as if kneading the ground into strange and whimsical geological formations that then spread out into different directions. At the top left corner, it is possible to see the end, or the beginning, of a deep canyon.

Moving across the photograph's top edge, the earth's surface changes into a smooth plain, across which, white and red, scar-like waves of erosion are visible. In the top right corner, the desert gives into rhythmic lines of fine alternating ridges and rifts. Something about this desert image is not quite right.



Fig. 1. Richter, Shira. 'Cut Mountain I' / 'Bird's Eye', 100cm x 65 cm, from the series 'The Mother, Daughter and Holy Spirit', (2002-2003). Copyright courtesy of artist.

A formal similarity to the desert landscapes of another Israeli photographer, Avi Holtzman, whose political landscapes of the Israeli desert and the occupied territories in his photobook 'The War Trilogy' (Holtzman, 1997) "show us the consequences of militarism, violence, and the destruction of the environment." (Gierstberg, 1997), soon rises to mind. (Fig. 2, 3, 4).



Fig. 2. Holtzman, Avi. 'Antitank Ditches, Pre-Ranged Artillery Target Area' Frontier, 1992 in *The War Trilogy: Photographs of Avi Holtzman*. 1997. Copyright courtesy of artist.



Fig. 3. Holtzman, Avi. 'Army Patrol Roads and Shadowed Hills' Modes of War, 1994 in The War Trilogy: Photographs of Avi Holtzman, 1997. Copyright courtesy of artist.



Fig. 4. Holtzman, Avi. 'Barbed Wire and Combat Trenches, Frontier Stronghold', Frontier, 1992, in The War Trilogy: Photographs of Avi Holtzman, 1997. Copyright courtesy of artist.

Holtzman's desert landscapes, although depicted from a different angle than Richter's 'Bird's Eye / Cut Mountain I', are carefully composed visual constructions that slowly reveal themselves to the viewer through a prolonged act of looking. With 'Birds Eye' / 'Cut Mountain I', Richter too is asking us to take time to look. To move our eyes over the landscape and to allow for the contours to register on the retina and the image to slowly sink into our minds. It feels as if the body knows before the mind catches on what any geologist would probably have been able to tell at first sight: This is no landscape of the Negev Desert. This is a landscape of human skin. Skin, that is rolled and folded and squeezed and pushed together, forming valley-like crevices and smooth round summits of ancient mountain tops. Looking again at the image before me, juxtaposed with the publication's title: 'The Mother, Daughter and Holy Spirit', the image now gains more complexity. No longer is the image merely a landscape. It is a self-portrait of Richter's own post-natal maternal body scarred from carrying and birthing her twin-sons, both of which, and when the time comes, will inevitably be recruited into the Israeli military in order to replenish the conflict fought on and over holy land, with new flesh. And yet Richter, like Holtzman, employs the traditional, Western art-historical format of the 'landscape' as her mode of portraying the topography of her maternal body. It is through this appropriation of landscape photography and its history as a mode of looking that my reading of Richter's image becomes further informed. A new tension between the series' title 'The Mother, Daughter and Holy Spirit' and Richter's aesthetic choice to emulate the desert and to employ the formal tradition of landscape photography, inseparable from its history as a mode of looking where the viewer's gaze can be understood as "a way of orienting oneself, defining a territory, and thus taking possession of it." (Gierstberg, 1997), now begins to tie the image's meaning closely and inescapably to the biblical notion of 'holy land' and the land's history as a site of conflict and war. But why is Richter depicting her maternal body at once both a landscape and a self-portrait? In search for answers, I look to my research materials, noticing an interview transcript with Sarah Arnd Linder (2017), in which Richter is relating back to the birth of her sons:

When I was at hospital to transfer twin babies from my insides to the outside world, a realization, which became a focal point of my life and work, hit me: Here we are a culture that pretends it

values life, but judging by how birthing women are treated, it's not valuing the work women do to produce and sustain this life. The opposite. New mothers are treated quite badly... Once the baby is born, you are on your own. The hypocrisy felt like betrayal. (Richter in 'Political is Personal', 2017).

Richter's retelling of her experience of birthing her sons, first of all, tells us of a moment of "realization", a rupture in her pre-natal worldview of the social, cultural and political landscapes that she had been a part of. Her account also reveals the deep personal significance of this moment of rupture and "realization" as influential. In fact, it became a "focal point", which now propelled her to search for new (maternal) ways of orientating herself in the world. To re-define *her* 'territory', *her* own feminine maternal psychophysiological boundaries after the event of "transfer[ring] twin babies from my insides to the outside world" (Ibid.). In short, in giving birth to her sons, Richter too is given something, namely a whole new point of view through which to view the existing cultural and political landscapes and relations around her.⁷⁶ Her words signpost a path for further exploration, and in order for me to better understand the personal significance that her experience of giving birth and mothering twin boys in Israel in the first 12-months post-partum has imprinted on her, I follow this direction in my subsequent interviews with Richter.

Through my interviews, it becomes clear that the feeling of "betrayal" Richter is voicing as having experienced as a new mother is in fact bound to her upbringing in a cultural and political climate of continuous war and conflict and where strong communal bonds of belonging are being cultivated through mandatory enlistment of both men and women into the army.⁷⁷ In Richter's own words:

⁷⁶ It is a common experience amongst women to experience such a political awakening as they become mothers, and as shown by the many activist projects, initiatives and endeavors undertaken by mothers as citizens, artists, theorists etc.. and regarding a variety of topics ranging from conflict resolution to climate change.

⁷⁷ Both men and women, with some religious, psychological and physical exceptions, are required to serve in the Israeli army. Although 90% of combat assignments are now open to women, approximately 7% of women in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) serve in combat positions today. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/history-of-women-in-idf-combat-units> 6.6.2019. Women typically serve 24 months, whilst men serve a minimum of 32 months in the army.

“The pain of betrayal that I had as a mother from society... it’s connected a lot to the culture of war in Israel” (Richter, personal interview, 2018). She elaborates that in a society where every person over 18 years of age is conscribed to between 2 and 2.5 years of mandatory military service, the army quickly becomes normalized and considered as family, and military operations as operations of ‘care’ and ‘protection’ for and of the people. Having herself completed the compulsory military service with the ‘Nachal’, between the ages of 18 and 20, Richter too had experienced this false sense of familial unity and support that the army offers to its personnel. She says:

When men go out to war [in Israel] and the public discovers that they have been sent out to war with the wrong equipment, with old equipment, ripped equipment... there’s a huge outcry that they’re sent without the right equipment, without the right commanders... without all the stuff they need in order to be soldiers and to be protected and to keep in life. I was thinking, here we are, we send women into the battle, and having a child is battle. It’s a battle of life and death, okay? This is war battle for life and death, having a child is a battle of life and death. Women also, once they go [into labor], we are thinking about all the women who have gone before us who have died. We are fearing death, we are fearing death of the child inside of us, we are fearing our death, we are connecting to our ancestors. All this life and death stuff, and it’s like oh’ we are just running into pink balloons and stuff. I really wanted... I thought that the respect we afford these soldiers [in Israel], I wanted that respect [as a mother]. [Instead, in labor] I was sent into battle... without the right equipment, without the right knowledge, without the right information, without the right... That’s where I felt betrayed. (Richter, personal interview, February 2018, Mitzpe Ramon).

Richter’s story paints a picture of a maternal impasse, where you are damned if you do and damned if you don’t. In other words, if a woman chooses not to conform to the idealized patriarchal role of motherhood she is seen as a traitor to the

system and the collective good. If, however, she does, she soon finds herself alone in her duty, betrayed by the phallogocentric symbolic order and its patriarchal values. In fact, Richter repeatedly returns to the military as an example of a well-oiled patriarchal support system that takes care of its own when comparing how men and women, particularly mothers, are treated and supported in their respective roles of the two great national duties of ‘protecting’ the holy land and ‘reproducing’ God’s chosen people. She elaborates:

[T]he army is a great example for me, because it’s like always in front of my eyes how it [support] is done [there]. [In the army] you are sent [in battle] with a unit. [Y]ou are sent then with a bigger unit around [your] unit, and another unit... You are never sent alone. [Y]ou are not supposed to do this hard thing alone. Here, [child birth] not only are you sent alone, but the people who are supposed to protect you are lying to you by not telling you [about what is about to happen]. You are not prepared for anything and they pretend to prepare you... That’s where I felt especially betrayed by not only my mother, but by our mothers [collectively] (Richter, personal interview, February 2018, Mitzpe Ramon).

Richter’s account of her maternal experience of becoming a mother speaks of two different kinds of betrayal: The first one can be best described as a betrayal by the institutions in power as they, through Richter’s eyes, structurally fail to support mothers in their complex, psychologically and physiologically demanding and publicly invisible roles as ‘carers’ for both their children and men, whilst at the same time spinning public narratives on the sanctity of motherhood as both a religious and national duty. The second betrayal, speaks of the silence of women. The silence of mothers who do not speak up, who do not tell, who do not share their stories of isolation; of exhaustion, of physical pain; their fear of death, be it their own, their infants or the death of their soldier-children and soldier-men, but who instead carry their lot in silence. In her correspondence with me, Richter writes: “Everywhere I look, I’m in a jail of men.... It’s either men, or occupied women” (Richter, personal correspondence 24.4.2019).

Indeed, analyzing over 7-hours-worth of interview transcripts, alongside

Richter's visual imagery from her first 12-months of mothering (post-partum), reveals a maternal experience notably different from the promised glory of Israel's founding father Ben Gurion's infamous 1949-speech to Israeli women. Furthermore, according to Richter, if and when mothers do talk about their struggles and pain related to mothering in her native Israel they very quickly risk being invested with the label and stigma of Post-Partum Depression. (PPD). In the light of my correspondence with her, Richter seems to be framing PPD largely in relation to the erasure of mothers as subjects, when she says: "[d]isregarding the conditions we [mothers] need... not giving us what we need, not supporting, not listening to what we need... [the dominant culture is] erasing us." (Richter, personal interview, 2018, Mitzpe Ramon). Rooting PPD in the symbolic erasure of mothers as subjects, and the erasure of women's actual embodied needs as birthers and cares, PPD becomes framed as a social and cultural betrayal of women, its stigmatization just another technology of oppression.

In this light then, whilst the generative and reproductive ability of women as birth givers is a highly sought-after natural resource, the experiences and thoughts of actual mothers as persons and citizens, are not. In other words, whilst the nation-state narratives, religious scriptures and the history of art have greatly invested in the image of the figure of the mother as 'holy', 'blessed' and 'sanctified', and whilst the Israeli nation-state has greatly invested in her womb, appropriating it for both symbolic and economic value, the actual real-life lived struggles of mothers are entirely their own. In the words of the influential feminist poet and scholar Adrienne Rich, who has distinguished between 'motherhood as institution' and 'motherhood as experience', the patriarchal culture "has created images of the archetypal Mother, which reinforce the conservatism of motherhood and convert it to an energy for the renewal of male power" (Rich, 1978 of woman born). Unquestioned and unchallenged these patriarchal images, as adapted by both men and women alike, becoming the very fuel for the oppressive mechanism of keeping actual women in check. Richter's response to this realization as an artist, or more precisely, as a mother-artist, is captured in her recounting to me:

After they [her twin sons] were born, I looked at my body and it was awful... I looked at my mid body, which was a wreck. I thought my body would go back to itself, so I didn't want to look at it.. [but] I'm an artist who likes to look at what I'm not sup-

posed to look at... Then suddenly, slowly, I saw in it from something ugly, I sifted to seeing these terrains... I saw the desert, I saw the earth from above, I saw what I see from airplanes... and suddenly this body, this wrecked body, this body that nobody was respecting around me, nobody was respecting what was happening... and suddenly this terrain became territory, the territory that we should be fighting for. We should be fighting for life the way we pretend to say... (Richter, personal interview, February, 2018, Mitzpe Ramon).

The gap between the image of what a mother looks like (holy, blessed and sanctified) and her (Richter's) actual embodied experience of "a wrecked body", of not being respected and not being heard, acts as yet another political awakening, and a call to action. Over several months Richter would photograph her body when she was having quick baths between caring for the twins: "to heal my body after birth". (Richter, personal interview, February 2018, Mitzpe Ramon). The process of photographing her post-partum maternal body quickly developing into an ongoing practice of intertwined, care-work, self-care and aesthetic thinking, -making and -mattering for Richter. Slowly, over the period of twelve months, this practice then grew into the photographic series of 'The Mother, Daughter and Holy Spirit'. At times, Richter's creative practice would interrupt and give pause to the demanding, endless and lonely care-work for her twins, at times the demanding, ongoing and necessary care-work for her twins would pause her artistic creation. Like her experience of birthing her sons had come to interrupt her previous worldview about the surrounding culture and its norms, the continuous interruptions to both her artistic practice and mothering practice now acted to further "reveal[s] the taken-for granted background of experience through its power to chop it up and to intervene" (Baraitser, 2009a, 69), and with that, dislodge new personal insights and maternal relational aesth-ethics.

In returning to the question of 'Why Richter is depicting her post-partum maternal body at once both a landscape and a self-portrait?' I argue, through my analysis of Richter's image, that this is so because the image in fact addresses two different but interconnected issues and discussions. On the one hand, Richter is addressing the complex, intersectional discourse of colonial, exploitative logic and history of her native lands. On the other, she is addressing her personal lived

experience as a woman and a mother bound to this history. In other words, Richter is doing feminist maternal theory by examining and trying to understand her own personal experience as a woman and a mother against the culturally dominant landscapes that she dwells in. Put differently: on the one hand Richter is equating between the incorporated and occupied territories and the feminine maternal body, or in the words of Adrienne Rich: “The woman’s body is the terrain on which patriarchy is erected” (Rich, 1995, 55) and on the other hand, Richter is performing resistance to her own cultural erasure by making her maternal body and experience visible. And with that, she is performing resistance to the cultural matricide of all mothers living in patriarchy. Furthermore, Richter’s aesthetic working with (and through) her own subjective and material maternal experiences has enabled her to articulate her own maternal experience to herself, but also to produce new knowledge about maternal experience in Israel (and beyond), and in this way contribute to the contemporary discourse of motherhood in Israel, (and beyond). I will now move to examine the second part of Richter’s diptych, which further supports my analysis of her photographic work as visual, feminine maternal critique of the oppression and exploitation of natural resources.

2. 5. ‘Cut Mountain II’: The Exploitation and Appropriation of Natural Resources

If I move now to the second image, entitled ‘Cut Mountain II’ (Fig. 5), here we see the depiction of layers of soft folds of Richter’s post-partum skin, in similar hues as the color palette of ‘Birds Eye / ‘Cut Mountain I’. Like ‘Bird’s Eye’/ ‘Cut Mountain I’, ‘Cut Mountain II’ is an image of Richter’s spent, post-partum maternal body after carrying and birthing twins, but it also seems to be about the deep-rootedness of the historical, political and economic appropriation and exploitation of other natural resources, as I will show. As such the aesthetics of ‘Cut Mountain II’ point us towards eco-feminist concerns, while continuing to comment and criticize the religious and capitalist, ultra-orthodox and right-wing narratives of Richter’s native Israel.⁷⁸

Viewing the image, there is a clear visual similarity between the lines sprawling across both images. However, when looking at ‘Cut Mountain II’ it

⁷⁸ Within the diverse feminist perspectives, a unifying claim after Francois d’Eaubonne’s ‘Le Féminisme ou la Mort (1974), is that oppression, domination, exploitation and colonization by the Western patriarchal society has directly caused irreversible environmental damage (Warren, 2000; Griffin, 2016; Merchant, 1980; Daly, 1978).

is instantly clear, to me, that this is a close-up rather than an aerial landscape of earth's surface. Although this image visually references the desert feel depicted in 'Birds Eye / 'Cut Mountain I', the intention here has not been to convey a sense of a desert landscape as much as a sense of something else. Without readily revealing the subject of representation, the image asks for further engagement with it. Each of the folds here, separated by darker cleavage-like creases, travel across the image plane in slightly arched lines. They are not as mountainous as in 'Birds Eye / 'Cut Mountain I'. In fact, they appear here rather flat as if pressed against a sheet of glass. Viewing the image more or less vertically before me and next to 'Bird's Eye' / 'Cut Mountain I', which is how Richter installs this work in exhibition settings, the folds of skin appear as if stacked upon each other, resembling layers of earth cut through with a shovel to reveal a multitude of soil-profiles, those layered horizons of organic matter formed over the course of thousands of years. This image is not about establishing an over-arching 'Bird's Eye' -view of a particular landscape. It is a more detailed close-up of spent maternal skin displayed as layers of earth in geological foliation.⁷⁹ It is precisely this material layering of the tissue of her maternal body that now becomes central to my reading of Richter's work through the maternal, new materialist and eco-feminist lenses of this dissertation.

⁷⁹ 'Foliation' is a geological term referring to the repetitive layering in metamorphic rocks. Marshak, Stephen, *Essentials of Geology*, W. W. Norton 3rd Ed, 2009.



Fig.5. Richter, Shira. 'Cut Mountain II', 100cm x 65 cm, from the series 'The Mother, Daughter and Holy Spirit', (2002-2003). Copyright courtesy of artist.

When I visited Richter in Israel to interview her, we drove along a desert highway now and again passing isolated Bedouin camps on our way to the Negev desert when Richter, who is driving, points out at a cut-open rock face in the landscape and says:

See the layers of the earth? It makes me think of how deep everything [conflicts] here [in Israel] goes. Things go deep, it's like these layers of earth are all the different generations one after the other. Seeing these different layers [in the rock] remind me of the generational complexity. (Richter, personal conversation, February 2018, Negev).

Indeed, soil profiles like cultures develop over time. Each soil profile telling a story about life in that very place at a particular time. But what is the story that Richter as a mother-artist is trying to articulate through these references to landscapes of 'cut mountains' and 'soil-profiles'? In other words, some very par-

ticular kinds of human-nature relations. Furthermore, what exactly does Richter's maternal aesthetics, referencing maternal bodies with 'cut mountains' and 'soil profiles' unearth about (her) maternal experience and subjectivity? How should we read these parallels between a spent and exhausted mother's body and the imagery of cut mountains that Richter's maternal aesth-ethics present us with? What, if anything at all, can Richter's images tell us about maternal points of view, and how, if at all, can we use this imagery as a map to think with through our troubled human-nature relations?

Richter's diptych employs a number of concepts such as 'mountains that are cut', 'landscapes' (a word which always denotes the presence and centrality of a human eye) and 'profiles of soil and earth'. All notions that rise from histories of complex human behavior centered around occupation and ownership, exploitation (to the point of depletion) of natural resources for economic gain, and the erasure of the rights of susceptible others. In order to engage further with Richter's imagery, I return to the history of landscape as a mode of looking and as a practice of politics, a way to construct geographical space, as we have learned for example from Edwards Said (1978, 2000), whilst reading her work alongside another landscape photographer depicting such human-nature relations as the words 'cut mountains' and 'soil profiles' tell us about. I do so, because any language, be it words or visual art, does not exist alone in a cultural and political vacuum, but instead depends, relies and builds on itself in relation to pre-existing signs and symbols in its meaning making mission. Similarly, artistic practices and mediums do not exist in a vacuum and as Richter's medium here after all is landscape photography, it would be naïve to not examine her visual language also alongside that of other visual work to which it inevitably connects to.

Since the early seventies, the American landscape photographer Peter Goin's prolific body of photographic work has investigated human ideas about, and related to, nature and the effects of human action on nature and landscapes. For example, in 'Tracing the Line' (1987), Goin-investigated the boundary line of the Mexican-American border and its relationship to the landscape; in 'Nuclear Landscapes' (1991), he surveyed the human altered landscapes of abandoned nuclear test-sites in America and the South Pacific; 'Arid Waters' (1992), was a collaborative photo project looking at water as a social issue; and 'Stopping Time' (1992) dealt with the notion of an "ideal landscape", which the historian Elizabeth Raymond framed as a study about how we as humans perceive landscape and what

our perceptions might mean for the future. (Raymond in Goin, 1992); ‘Humanature’ (1996) addressed the longstanding entwinement of human activities and natural processes, proposing ‘humanature’ as a more realistic concept to think about the world we live in, instead of remaining to hold onto the traditional and dualist nature/culture dichotomy.

A section in Goin’s publication ‘Humanature’ is dedicated to the domesticated and scarred landscapes of American open-pit mines. One of his large format images depicts a tailings plateau near Miami, Arizona; another shows a tailings basin at the same Arizona mine. A third one is of an abandoned, overgrown residential area built by a mining company on the hills of Apache Gulch, Arizona. Then an image of the Clifton-Morenci Pit (Fig. 6), one of the largest open-pit mines in North America and which bears a visual resemblance to Richter’s ‘Cut Mountain II’ and its title referencing chopped up mountains.



Fig. 6. Peter Goin, ‘Clifton-Morenci Pit’, in *Humanature*, University of Texas Press. 1996. Copyright courtesy of artist.

Were you to cover up (an approximately) four-fifths, from bottom up, of this image, what you would see is a landscape of mountain tops, speckled with trees, rising against a more or less clear blue sky as they recede into distance. Looking at the entire big picture, however, what you see is a carved-up mountain range, cut-up into numerous terraces pervading deep into the soil and layers of rock, in the isolated Chase Creek Canyon system in Arizona. These layers of earth, like the layered folds of skin in Richter's photograph, are resting on top of each other revealing cross-cuts of time and place.

The tonal range of erosion in the image as caused by the practice of open-pit mining is similar to the desert scapes of both Richter and Holtzman. Furthermore, the terraced layers of the open earth in this image bear a visual resemblance to the layers of Richter's post-partum body in 'Cut Mountain II'. However, the similarities between Richter's work and Goin's 'Clifton- Morenci Pit' are not just skin deep. In fact, they share more common ground than is perhaps at first visible. More specifically, they both address the domination, domestication and exploitation of natural resources.⁸⁰

To be clear, as a method of extracting goods such as minerals and rock, open pit-mining refers to the method of cutting open, or exploding, earth and forming large layered terraces on top of each other for the purpose of accessing rock deposits for their commercial and economic value. Typically, open-pit mines are enlarged until the natural mineral resources in the area are exhausted, or the mining process itself no longer is of economic value.⁸¹ The mine is then closed and the mining company moves on. However, the environmental impacts linger on, including erosion; formation of sink-holes; loss of biodiversity and the contamination of groundwater by chemicals used in the mining process.⁸² In addition, like re-productive labour, mining is often considered to be "of national interest" and "of public utility" (Vittor, 2014) even though many indigenous cultures have lost their livelihoods of growing crops, fishing and raising cattle due to open-pit mining practices,

⁸⁰ One can of course question the notion of 'naturalness' of human reproduction, which takes place in numerous ways and under numerous circumstances and includes for example: various kinds of assisted reproductive technologies.

⁸¹ <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/geology/chapter/reading-open-pit-mining/>

⁸² In 'Environmental impact assessment of open pit mining in Iran', Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227332044_Environmental_impact_assessment_of_open_pit_mining_in_Iran [accessed Jun 16 2019]

for example, because their water sources have become contaminated by chemicals used in the extraction process polluting the entire ecological system.⁸³ As such, open-pit mining practices raise questions of: ‘whose national interests?’ and ‘whose public utility?’ Both questions of power pivoting on the dualist and gendered logic of nature/culture. And this, I argue, is precisely what Richter’s visual language addresses through her particular and situated feminine maternal lens by making a number of underlying visual and conceptual connections between: the exploitation and appropriation of natural resources and generative spaces for the utility and interest of patriarchal power structures and neoliberal capitalism. A sentiment, which is partly echoed by Goin in ‘Humanature’:

The air we breathe is an industrial composite. Rainfall is a human product. Rivers and lakes are elements within a water-management system. Forests are manufactured and harvested like soybeans and corn. Animals are controlled, bred, and genetically designed. Insects are raised in massive numbers, then irradiated and released. Rocks are made ‘natural’ by spraying cement onto wire forms and adding the right colors. Plants and trees are made from plastic. Beaches are reconstructed. Everywhere I look, nature is an illusion. (Goin, 1996, 22).

Goins accurate and indisputable description of ‘nature’ paints an image, where the entanglements of human action (based on capitalist ideology) and the processes and elements of the natural world have become enmeshed with each other. His images are helpful for the visual analysis of Richter’s photographs ‘Cut Mountain I’ & ‘Cut Mountain II’, however, his summary: “Everywhere I look, nature is an illusion” strikes me as something that Richter, and all other mother-artist-activists participating in this research, would quite likely disagree with. For to call nature an illusion is to forget about the lived lives of actual women who carry new life in-utero, several months at a time, often year after year without a break, while performing hard physical labor and living in poverty. Because to call ‘nature’ an illusion,

⁸³ To name just a few areas and people who have become affected by ecological consequences caused by open pit mining include for example: the indigenous people of the Brazilian Amazon; the indigenous people of Tewa Pueblo tribe in New Mexico; the local communities in the Nigerian Delta and the First Nations indigenous people in Canada.

is to forget and erase the lived lives and experiences of women who birth new life, regardless whether it is their desire to do so or not, often in lamentable and devastating circumstances and much too often dying in childbirth, regardless of where on the globe they may be living. And, lastly, to call nature an illusion is to deny the mother as Subject and to re-commit her, together with her feminine-maternal power and potentiality into the realm of illusions and fantasy. From a feminist, feminine-maternal point of view then, perhaps the problem with both: the 'nature/culture' dichotomy, as well as the alternative concept of 'humanature', lies in the fact that both allow very little space for the 'mother'. In fact, neither of them allow space for the recognition of difference necessary for challenging social practices that oppress. The nature/culture dichotomy, deriving from the Western dualist logic of divisive separations such as self/other, subject/ object, does it by erasing the mother as subject and thus she is inevitably reduced to an object. The enmeshment of 'Humanature' however, does it by lumping, simplistically, 'human' and 'nature' together, again without accounting for the endless differences involved. What makes Richter's complex imagery so powerful then is its unconditional refusal to erase the mother as Subject from our views and discussions. Her work is not simply an artistic record of her maternal experience. It is, in fact, a chorography of space, place and time, speaking of the interconnected human-human and human-nature relations of our times.⁸⁴ And as such the aesthetics of Richter are highly political, as much as they are deeply personal and located in her maternal experience. I will now look at how disturbing the maternal relational aesth-ethics of Richter in fact is to the production and maintenance of the culturally dominant myth of mothers and motherhood in Israel.

2.6. Interrupting (National) Narratives and The Curse of the Naked Woman

To understand how challenging and interruptive Richter's visual language referencing a mother's scarred body with the holy land and the occupied territories is to the

⁸⁴ 'Chorography' (From ancient Greek: *Khôros*, meaning 'space'; 'region'; 'territory'; 'locality' and *Graphein* meaning 'to write') refers to both the art of mapping and/or describing a place, as well as to the description itself. I use the term here to describe what Shanks refers to as a form of deep-mapping of place: "[A]ttempts to record and represent the grain and patina of place through juxtapositions and interpenetrations of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the factual and the fictional, the discursive and the sensual, the conflation of oral testimony, anthology, memoir, biography, natural history and everything you might ever want to say about a place." (Pearson and Shanks 2001: 64–65).

pro-natalist narratives of the Israeli nation-state, in a final step in this chapter, I turn to look at an incident of censorship that took place concerning Richter's political, maternal imagery on the nation's airways in April 2011.

Appearing as a guest on 'Erev Hadash' ('The New Evening'), a popular current affairs show on the Israel Broadcasting Authority's main television channel 'Haarutz Ha-Rishon' (Channel 1), produced by the Israeli Educational Television and presented by the well-known Israeli journalist, author and television host Dan Margalit, Richter was being interviewed on her artistic work and participation in an art exhibition entitled 'i-mahoot', dealing with Post-Partum Depression.⁸⁵ The following excerpts are taken from an interview, broadcast live from a television studio in Tel Aviv. The conversation took place between Richter, Nurit Tal Tenne (the exhibition's curator), Margalit and Tali Lipkin-Shahak, Margalit's female co-anchor.⁸⁶

The interview begins by Margalit addressing the exhibition's curator Nurit Tal Tanne: "Why did you choose, of all subjects available, Post-Partum Depression?" (Margalit, Erev Hadash). His question revealing a sense of incredulity towards the exhibition's topic as an actual subject matter. In speaking from her personal experience as a woman and a young mother in Israel, Tel Tanne responds:

Why did I choose this subject? I am an art curator and I experienced post-partum depression about two years ago... I was very interested to see if there were materials on the subject. First of all, for myself to help me out of the distress, and to share with others... I discovered there is taboo and silence [around this topic]. It's not talked about, there is a lot of shame, it's concealed.... I felt very lonely in my experience... Gradually when I felt [that] I have more strength and am returning to myself [from the depression], I decided that I have to use the tools of art... My curatorial tools as a curator and come out with an exhibition on this subject.

⁸⁵ The Hebrew word '*imahoot*' means 'motherhood' and derives from the root word '*ima*' ('mother').

At the same time the Hebrew word '*mahoot*' also means 'essence' and the Hebrew '*i*' refers to both 'island', as well as the negating prefix 'non-'. As such the exhibition's title '*i-mahoot*' can be read in multiple ways, for example: 'motherhood' ('*imahoot*'), but also as: 'an island of essence', or simply: 'non-essence' ('*i-mahoot*').

⁸⁶ The translation into English from Hebrew is Richter's own.

(Tel Tanne, Erev Hadash).

Tel Tanne's response reflects my previous findings that although the institution of motherhood in Israel is of national interest, the experiences of actual mothers are entirely their own. As such women's difficult maternal experiences are easily concealed and managed as isolated stories and accounts. To speak about one's experiences of motherhood, both as an institution and experience when they go against the grain of the dominant narratives, takes bravery and conscious effort, as Tel Tanne's account also shows.

During the interview, television viewers are shown images of the artworks on view at the exhibition. There is a black and white photograph of a naked woman sitting on a bed and looking at a child standing in front of her. The woman's eyes appear as black holes as she blankly stares at the child. There is a series of drawings depicting a woman's body in a number of fetal positions; a close up of a young woman's face looking at a human skull lying next to her, and a photo-shopped collage of manufactured doll's heads portraying mothers, with images of real human babies next to them. In a reference to the images being screened, Margalit notes: "From what we see, there are really tough works [in this exhibition]... Difficult works..." (Margalit, Erev Hadash). He then looks to Richter and asks her: "What did you bring to the exhibition?" (Margalit, Erev Hadash). Richter responds: "I contributed from my project 'The Mother Daughter and Holy Spirit', which are photographs of" (Richter, Erev Hadash). At this point Richter pauses and can be seen searching with her eyes for the images of her work to appear on the screen, so as to directly talk about them as they show up. This is when Lipkin-Shahat, Margalit's female co-anchor intercepts: "We won't see them. Too difficult to look at." Addressing Richter directly, she then says: "I tell you this now. Don't look for them on the screen.... they are extremely... turns out, not easy to digest..." (Lipkin-Shahat, Erev Hadash).

In fact, every single image from Richter's photographic work in 'The Mother, Daughter and Holy Spirit' series has been censored, deemed too disturbing to show on the national television's daily current affairs program, a program which at the same time has no problem what so ever in broadcasting footage of soldiers, conflict and live war as part of its daily news items. Or, as Tal Tenne remarks later on during the interview: "We can look at soldiers being killed and crimes, but to see a woman's body after birth, you can't see it? Because it's frightening? Because

it's shocking? Because this is the truth?" (Tal Tenne, Erev Hadash).

To whom exactly, these images "turn out" to be difficult to digest is not elaborated further by Lipkin-Shahat. And although it is of course impossible to know for certain who ultimately made the decision to censor Richter's photographic images of her post-partum maternal body, the fact that the producers of a national current affairs program went ahead with it, is telling about the power of the pervasive social, cultural and political climate in the nation, where broadcasting until 2017 was largely funded by private television licenses.⁸⁷

As Margalit then fends off having had anything to do with the decision to censor Richter's images, and suggests that perhaps he personally would not have made that judgement call had he seen the images, Richter quickly offers to rectify the situation. Producing a copy of her publication 'The Mother, Daughter and Holy Spirit', which she has managed to bring with her into the studio, she opens it up and turns it towards the cameras. For approximately six-seconds the entire screen is filled with 'Gift', a close-up of soft and loose post-partum belly pulled up tightly into multiple pouches of skin, with blue and red gift-wrapping lint cutting uncomfortably deep and tight into the worn maternal skin. The imbalance of power, in the studio, slips and shifts temporarily. At another moment, telling of the dominant and persistent dogmas surrounding the image of motherhood in Israel, Margalit directs the conversation to the exhibitions title 'i-mahoot', which he points out denotes both 'motherhood', as well as 'island of essence'. At once the television screens in the studio are flooded by picturesque and soothing imagery of an ocean and soft waves rolling onto the shore, conveniently replacing the images of motherhood as depicted by the mother-artist participating in the exhibition.

This television interview, and its careful analysis, demonstrate to us in practice how Richter's maternal imagery, and her clear and unapologetic position as a mother who refuses to be erased and censored, challenges, interrupts and manages the national pro-nationalist public narratives of 'motherhood' in Israel. In fact, it is possible to identify three moments of interruption and performative political

⁸⁷ 'Chanel 1' was run by the 'Israeli Broadcasting Authority' (IBA), Israel's state broadcasting organization until 2017, when it was dismantled and placed by the 'Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation' (IPBS). Whilst IBA was largely funded by private television licensing, IPBS today is controlled financially and editorially by the state, for which it has also been criticized by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). Although, I do not investigate further the relationship between censorship and funding in Israeli media, it is credible to say that there is a relationship between funding, editorial control and public views.

articulation as enacted by Richter here. The first one is the artwork itself and its visual language through which the aesthetic conventions of landscape photography and Richter's perspective of lived maternal experience come together in ways that address, challenge and interrupt existing practices of domination and exploitation of natural resources. The second moment of interruption takes place when the work collides with the normative attitudes of the national broadcasting authority and becomes considered too challenging and interruptive to the dominant ideas about motherhood, causing it to be censored and ironically in that moment making visible the un-crossable lines of socially and culturally accepted behavior. The third moment of interruption happens with Richter's performative action of producing her 'smuggled in' publication live on national television and showing motherhood through the lens of an actual mother.

The above events of censorship help me to once more stress my initial claim at the start of this chapter that women's lived and embodied experiences of pregnancy, labour, mothering and motherhood, although a national resource, are to be kept concealed from public discourse in Israel, and that Israeli motherhood is still dominantly arranged around a paradigm of a more abstract idea of a good, sacrificial mother as opposed to mothers being persons and citizens who feel, think and matter. In this way mothers are detained and kept from public life, and motherhood is erased and reduced to a vessel or a "wrap", as Lipkin-Shahat describes the maternal body in *Erev Hadash*, for life in which then great things can happen. But, we might want to ask: why this insistence to keep the mother out of public life, and to manage and reduce her in these ways? Two psychoanalytic perspectives help to shed some light here.

From a psychosocial perspective, Lisa Baraitser gives us something to hold onto here as she writes: "At its simplest, we could say that what mothers make public are the ways we are collectively and affectively tied to one another... it is this primordial dependency that must be defensively covered at all costs, along with the mother...", in order for the subject to emerge. (Baraitser, 2009, 9). And from a psychosexual perspective Eva Hayward, for example, writes and speaks about sexuality as a libidinal force managed in and through discourse. For Hayward the very structure of discourse is always a practice of discursive management of sexuality (Hayward, workshop at Utrecht University, 11.10.2019).⁸⁸ In thinking then

⁸⁸ During the one-day workshop 'The Animal, Captivity, Sexuality', hosted by and in collaboration with Terra Critica and ICON Institute for Cultural Inquiry, Utrecht University

about Richter's work, and the discursive figurations of the mother as she appears in myth, our collective consciousness and in everyday life and politics in Israel and beyond and alongside these two different psychoanalytic perspectives, a question arises: Might these cultural figurations of the mother be pointing towards a technology of libidinal management, of both sexuality and thanathophobia?⁸⁹ Or, in other words, could the discursive cultural practices that construct and stage the mother in different roles, be it as a personification of nature; an evil step-mother; or the gold standard of the self-sacrificing 'holy mother', whilst keeping actual mothers out of the public realm, be in fact discursive technologies at work to manage our libidinal energies relating to our primal fear of death, primordial dependency and helplessness in front of nature? To put it very simply: If mothers can generate and give us life, perhaps they can take it away, too.

For Freud, and similarly to Hayward, technology is a way to subject 'nature' to human will (Freud, 1930, 77). In this psychoanalytic light then, one can certainly view myths and nation state narratives, such as those in Israel, which construct and spell out the available roles for mothers, as discursive technologies of management. More precisely: discursive management of both the libidinal energies of the mother as Subject, and our primal fear and impotence in front of death. This primal fear of death and our absolute impotence in front of this indisputable fact of life is well captured in the living tradition of 'the curse of the naked woman', an active form of protest in the Nigerian Delta, and a method used successfully for example in the 1929 Nigerian women's uprising against the British colonial rule imposing higher taxes on the citizens of Nigeria. The threat of the curse was very publicly mobilized again in 2002 when the women in Nigeria's oil-rich delta began protesting against the big oil corporations Chevron and Shell in a fight against environmental and cultural ruin. The women's last resort being: the threat of getting naked in public. "It is a taboo in our land for mothers to say they go naked. It is taboo. That means every means of protest has failed" speaks a male interviewee in Candace Shermerhorn's feature length documentary "The Naked Option: A Last Resort" (2011). "Whether you are a white man or black man, if a woman strips na-

(11.10.2019), Eva Hayward spoke about sexuality as a 'drive', a libidinal force of wanting and desire, rather than as an identity or representation of one's sex and sexual desires. This is also the way that I employ the term here.

⁸⁹ In psychoanalysis, libido refers to the psychic and emotional energy associated with instinctual and biological drives. In Jungian psychology, 'psychic energy'. Libidinal management then being the management of this psychic energy.

ked for you and you don't agree, you are finished", says another. "That man would consider himself as almost dead. It is like handing the person over to the demons" says a third. The interviewees seem to be describing a metaphorical act of birth-in-reverse: a scene where one is being forced to confront the limits of one's life, by seeing the place from where one has come from. "Anybody, any woman, any man, when they commit offense; if we [women] don't agree with what they do, [if] you are no good. We invite the elder women to get naked, we sing several songs for you. Then we just leave you... we go." (Lucky Ogodo of Amukpe in *Naked Option*). In other words, instead of welcoming a new human into the society, this is a scene of the reverse: an expulsion out of the society played out through the very display of elderly women (read as mother's) bodies.

The women in the Nigerian Delta, as shown in Shermerhorn's documentary, are able to use the discursive tool of the 'curse of the naked woman' to their advantage. They are able to conjure and take hold of the myth, embody it and use it in a way that makes them visible as both singular and embodied women and mothers, as well as more abstractly, metaphorically and metonymically as sites of generation, of life and death, of Eros and Thanatos. What Richter is doing with her photographic images here is similar. Her maternal aesthetics conjure, then take hold of, the oppressive religious and Zionist nation-state myths that work to naturalize the ideology of the mother as virginal, holy and self-sacrificial birther and caregiver of the life of others and juxtaposes it with the imagery of her Real maternal body after giving birth to twin boys, shattering the airbrushed image of the mother as produced and discursively managed by the church and the state. In showing images of a maternal body, unrecognizable as such when viewed through the prevalent lens of the mother myth, globally perfected by its glossy commercialization in and by various media, Richter interrupts the dominant narrative of motherhood as the most rewarding status for a woman in Israel. And it is precisely this rupture of the dominant myth and its management here by the national television's evening news program 'Erev Hadash' by Richter's dissident imagery and her subsequent management of the television news medium after it censors her work that then short circuits the system, leaving us with less loaded and unthreatening images of ocean waves. But this imagery of a maternal body, stretched and spent, is also doing something else. It works to remind us of our human mortality bound up with the natural laws of impermanence and decay. Only in Richter's photographs this link with mortality is made visible by showing us the mother's body. In other words,

Richter is working here with the archetypal image of the mother as a life giver, but in showing us the new mother (herself) with spent and stretched ‘hag’-like skin rather than as the virginal (airbrushed and unattainable) maiden she taps into an archaic anxiety about the mother’s life-giving powers containing within them also the power to annihilate and destruct. On one hand Richter’s imagery interrupts the dominant narrative of motherhood in Israel, on the other it interrupts the myth of the mother as a self-sacrificial (and thus easy to manage) giver of life, instead presenting her as a subject with needs and desires and her own stories to tell. Like the women in the Nigerian Delta, Richter is successfully employing the myth of ‘the curse of the naked mother’ to interrupt and dissent the status quo regarding the limited roles available for women as mothers, and the largely oppressive institute of motherhood in Israel. But, and as shown earlier on in this chapter, Richter’s maternal relational aesth-ethics also convey another message: an eco-feminist critique of the political and economic appropriation and exploitation of natural resources in general. Her maternal experience of pregnancy, giving birth and her continued practice of nurturing life as a new mother in Israel has brought about a political awakening and a sense of political and aesth-ethic relationality with all life, starting with her twins and other mothers making do in the occupied territories.

The aesthetic qualities of Richter’s work, seduce the viewer as if sideways into the culturally dissident content of her work.⁹⁰ Once in, the content then begins to reveal and work itself on us. By the time we know it, it is too late; we have been cursed by the naked mother. By getting naked and showing her real maternal body, Richter’s work is at once a public curse of the machinery that mediates and manages women’s oppression; a psycho-poetic aesthetic maternal strategy to cope with the reality of war, violence and oppression and an invitation to discuss, and to re-imagine together.

2.7. Concluding Remarks:

In this chapter, I have explored the maternal aesth-ethic imagery of the Israeli artist, mother, filmmaker and activist Shira Richter. I have explored the aesth-ethic and affective relations and imaginaries produced and proposed as a result of Richter’s maternal subjectivity and shown how the engendered aesth-ethic relations and imaginaries have in turn interrupted and challenged some of the deep-seated

⁹⁰ Freud calls these kind of softening and disguising aesthetic effects of formal technique as ‘bribes’, which allow the viewer momentarily to overcome his/ her repulsions and anxieties.

patriarchal cultural narratives in her native Israel.

In the first part of this chapter I have contextualized motherhood and the politics of human reproduction in the sociocultural and political context of Richter's native Israel and looked at a number of maternal roles publicly available and permitted for women, situating Richter as a mother and an artist in the complex sociocultural tapestry of contemporary Israel.

In the second part of this chapter I have engaged with Richter's photographic work 'Cut Mountain I' and 'Cut Mountain II'. Here, my methods of narrative, visual semiotic and discourse analysis have helped to identify two eco-feminist concerns as arising from Richter's maternal imagery. These are: the biological and cultural exploitation and appropriation of women's bodies and mothers as reproducers, carer's and nurtures; and the erasure of mothers as Subjects, thinkers, and makers of culture beyond their biological reproductive role.

As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, the project of eco-feminism brings together ecology and women's emancipation. The common strand being both of their (women and ecology) exploitation for labour and the production of capital. Material Eco-feminists like Ariel Salleh (1997, 2017), for example, critique all exploitative relations of production where focus is on the relation of labour and capital, and instead they introduce more universally encompassing relations of re-production between labour and nature. Furthermore, 'materialist ecofeminism', often also referred to as 'social' and/or 'Marxist eco-feminism', advocates for the "liberation of women through overturning economic and social hierarchies that turn all aspects of life into a market society that today even invades the womb" (Merchant, 2005, 193-221). Whilst the visual language of Richter has arisen from her examination of her own subjective maternal experience, by visually referencing her own post-partum maternal body with a landscape of the occupied territories and by naming the images as 'Cut Mountain', her imagery begins to speak of a larger political and economic exploitation of women as mothers, the appropriation and exploitation of natural resources, and the erasure of the figure of the mother as a Subject and citizen. As taken up in the first part of this chapter, women's reproductive experiences take place on a stage of national global politics where a multitude of protagonists and "intersecting interests of states and other powerful institutions such as multinational and national corporations "are being played out (Ginsburg and Rapp, 1991). Within such a global context, Richter's feminine-maternal aesth-ethics emerge as a political force of cultural critique and

dissent against the exploitation of women's bodies, their reproductive abilities and the ecological exhaustion of natural resources for the benefit of patriarchal power structures and neoliberal capitalism, as much as it appears as a (feminine-maternal) call for a global, socio-economic and ecological need to value and care for our spaces of generation.

In the last part of this chapter I have turned to look at how Richter's maternal imagery referencing a mother's scarred body with the holy land and the occupied territories has literally caused an interruption in the national, broadcasted management of the pro-natalist national narratives, and have offered two resonating psychoanalytic perspectives on why the act of showing the Real mother's body holds such power.

By bringing together her visual art practice and her maternal experience and practice as a heterosexual, Israeli-American, middle-class, secular Ashkenazi Jewish woman and a mother, Richter's photographs are in part a visual record of her own maternal experience and her process of trying to make sense of it. At the same time, however, her photographs provoke and challenge the hegemonic cultural norms attached to the role and duty of women as mothers, and raises ecofeminist concerns by making visible connections between women and the politically heated topics of: contested territories (represented as bodies of land); ownership of land and women's bodies; appropriation and exploitation of land and women's bodies; oppression and erasure of people, and women's bodies and land. In so doing, Richter's maternal aesth-ethics not only disrupts the normative use of language (in Israel) that masks war as 'protection' and 'care', but presents a feminine-maternal perspective that disrupts the abstract, sterile and non-embodied, religious, cultural and nationalist's ideas storying a mother whose duty is to reproduce and self-sacrifice for 'common' good. Richter's 'mother' will not sacrifice herself. Instead, she affirms herself as a subject and as an active part-ner of the world, whilst insisting on being in a relationship of care and responsibility with it.

In January 2020, Richter's twin-sons turned 18 and became drafted to the Israeli Defence Force. Yam has been stationed at the border of Gaza, one of the most dangerous and volatile posts. He will receive combat training. Romy, will be carrying out his compulsory military service with the Israeli Air Force. Richter is occupied by how to keep her sons alive. She is also writing now.

Chapter 3

Maternal Subjectivity and ‘Carriance’ as Ecological and Environmental Forces in The Art and Creative Process of Arahmaiani

“Ecological thinking... requires a kind of a vision across boundaries. The epidermis of the skin is ecologically like a pond surface or a forest soil, not a shell so much as delicate interpenetration.... We must affirm that the world is a being, a part of our own body. “

Paul Shepard, ‘Ecology and Man’ in *Subversive Science*, 1969, 2.

“Nature and other beings are an integral part of the self... the I is not standing alone, surveying its surroundings as an object to hold power over.“

Arahmaiani, “Reflections of a Nomad Dreamer”, a letter to Sonam Rinpoche, 2011.

As shown in the previous chapters, maternal practices, thinking and attitudes inform and re-imagine cultural production in the aesthetic field of contemporary art. Through a practice of ethical and creative responsiveness to various maternal interruptions, the artist-mothers in this study have all adapted their artistic processes to accommodate the needs of their children without sacrificing their own creative needs. Over a repeated process of weaving between aesthetic and ethical concerns, in other words continually moving back and forth between their aesthetic and ethical caring practices, these artist-mothers have each, to various degrees, reconfigured the destabilizing forces of maternal interruptions as generative spaces. As my analysis of the works and artistic processes of Zielinska, Kessel and Stewart in Chapter 1 shows, such artistic processes do not necessarily produce politically engaged art, although the creative processes behind them can certainly be considered as ethico-political in their affirmative approach to relationality and encountering difference. However, and as shown by the maternal relational aesth-ethics of Richter in Chapter 2, such an artistic process is both well suited and located to producing politically engaged art.

In Chapter 1 I have explored a number of aesth-ethic consequences or emergences that Lisa Baraitser's analysis of the "maternal subject as a subject of constant interruption" bears for the artistic processes and practices of artist-mothers. From there I have focused in Chapter 2 on how maternal experience and subjectivity affect political awakening for the mother interrupting and challenging the political status quo. In this chapter now, I will explore several aesth-ethic emergences spurred on when the experience of interruption happens to be the very disruption of the maternal experience itself. In other words, whereas the previous chapters have engaged with how maternal practices of working with and through daily interruptions - as prompted by living alongside dependent others- have influenced the artistic processes and practices of three Western contemporary artist-mothers (Kessel, Stewart, Zielinska), and how maternal experience has influenced and produced political awareness, thinking and aesthetics that in turn interrupt the dominant public narratives about motherhood and mothers in Israel (Richter), this chapter examines the relationship between the ecologically engaged artistic practice of the pioneering Indonesian performance artist Arahmaiani in relation to her maternal subjectivity and her interrupted maternal experience, when her newborn daughter was taken away from her against her wishes.

As a critical voice of Western commercial and cultural Imperialism, global

industrialization and the oppression of people in the margins, particularly women, Arahmaiani's art is often discussed through feminist and postcolonial lenses. (Dirgantoro, 2017, Dimitrakaki, 2016, Stanger, 2017). Within this chapter, however, I depart from a complementary understanding of Arahmaiani's artistic practice as an affirmative ethico-aesthetic engagement with her maternal-feminine subjectivity of matrixial (Ettinger, 2005) and deep ecological (Naess, 1973) interconnectedness. Thus, in what follows, I analyse the ecologically engaged, environmentally activist artistic practice of Arahmaiani, through deep ecological, ecofeminist, and maternal lenses, alongside her interrupted maternal experience and subjectivity. I do so in order to establish a link between maternal subjectivity as an expanded understanding of the self and to show how Arahmaiani's art fits within the deep ecological understanding of an expanded ecological Self. I focus on a variety of Arahmaiani's artworks from different times in her life and also pay attention to the processes of creation behind them, thereby mapping connections between her environmentally activist artistic practice and her artistic subjectivity as a mother and an artist which forgoes the model of the Western, atomistic, autonomous individual and instead proposes a model of an ecologically expansive Self. By exploring the relationship between the materiality of Arahmaiani's maternal encounters and experience/s, in as much as their social and political relations - imaginaries and spaces that her artworks produce and propose -, I argue that her ecologically focused artistic process and artworks evolve from a maternal awareness of an expanded Self that she experienced in pregnancy, and through her specific disrupted maternal experience. In my analysis I claim that Arahmaiani's ecologically conscious artistic practice and performance aesthetics of 'social sculpture' are a formal aesthetic means to produce feminine-maternal cultural spaces that (at least in part) rises from her interrupted maternal experience. The concept of social sculpture that Arahmaiani most often now uses in her work was developed by the German artist Joseph Beyus (1921-1986) in the 1960's. It centered around the idea of an artist as a 'social sculptor' who creates structures in society using language, thoughts, actions, and objects as her/ his tools and medium. 'Social sculpture', in other words, can include any human activity striving to structure and shape society or the environment. Thus, the maternal relational aesth-ethics of Arahmaiani, as examined in this chapter, reveal to us an aesthetic link between how maternal practice and thinking can emerge as political, ecological and environmental forces in the production of culture and cultural space.

After my reading of Arahmaiani's art practice through a maternal lens, in the final part of this chapter, I will also discuss the ecosophical model of 'deep ecology' (Naess, 1973) and its major contribution to environmental thinking by its conceptualization of subjectivity as an ecologically expanded, field-like self-awareness, or 'ecological Self', and examine its convergence with feminine-maternal subjectivity as an expanded Self. It is this conceptualisation of the self that is of central interest here in relation to thinking through artistic subjectivity as it informs and affects artistic process and creation. The question that guides me in this discussion is: how does such a shift in the conceptualisation of the self, which moves from the autonomous individual genius towards a more expanded, interdependent ecological self, affect the cultural, social and political relations, spaces and imaginaries engendered? What, if anything, can we learn and gain from these relations, spaces and imaginaries as engendered by Arahmaiani's maternal relational aesth-ethic practice? In considering maternal matrixial subjectivity in relation to deep ecology's notion of the expanded ecological Self, this chapter concludes by locating maternal practice and subjectivity as environmental and ecological forces to be reckoned with.

Alongside Arahmaiani's artworks, their documentation in exhibition catalogues, newspaper and journal articles, as well as scholarly literature on Indonesian Art and Arahmaiani's performance practice, this chapter is largely based on a number of semi-formal personal interviews, a type of interviewing method, often used to both unearth and explore topics relevant to the interviewees, which the researcher otherwise might overlook (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 115), or indeed, not even be aware of. In addition to these interviews, I have engaged in an open ended conversation, similar in style to the initial semi-structured interviews, in order to clarify details surrounding events, and to facilitate a deeper reading of data gathered.

3.1. Caught Between Worlds: A Brief Overview of Arahmaiani, An Indonesian Muslim Woman and A Performance Artist

Considered one of the most iconic Indonesian female artists of today and a leading pioneer of Indonesian performance art, "the superheroine of the Indonesian contemporary art" (Morelli, 2016), Arahmaiani's artistic practice, combined with her outspoken and critical commentary on social, political and cultural issues have in the past caused her to be jailed and black-listed by the authoritarian Suharto military regime referred to as the 'New Order' (1966-1998); to receive death threats for

her artworks, and to flee Indonesia.⁹¹ Throughout her politically committed artistic career, spanning by now over forty years, Arahmaiani's artwork has been exhibited in dozens of countries, several international art biennials and internationally relevant landmark exhibitions.⁹² Her work can be found in the art collections of internationally renowned museums.⁹³ In addition to her activist art practice and creative collaborative projects in both Asia and elsewhere, she is, since 2013, also a visiting scholar at the University of Passau in the Department of Southeast Asian Studies. She is a public intellectual in Indonesia and has published essays, opinion pieces and poetry in both Indonesian and English.

Born as Arahmayani Feisal in Bandung, Indonesia in 1961, Arahmaiani grew up with a father who was a moderate Islamic scholar and a mother of Javanese Hindu-Buddhist extraction with Animist traditions and heritage.⁹⁴ Self-identi-

⁹¹ Arahmaiani was arrested for the first time as an art student and was jailed for a month in 1983 after a street performance criticising the Suharto dictatorship. She was offered freedom against becoming an informant for the regime, which she refused, and was eventually released on the condition of signing a document stating that she is mentally ill and agreeing to not do any public activities or exhibitions in Indonesia. After her arrest in 1983, Arahmaiani left Indonesia to Sydney, Australia. She eventually returned to Indonesia, but left again in 1994 to Perth where she had more freedom to practice her art and develop her thinking. In 1993/1994, prior to leaving for Perth, Arahmaiani received death threats from a hardliner Islamist group for her art installation 'Etalase' and her painting 'Lingga-Yoni' during a solo show in Jakarta. "To drink my blood was halal" (Arahmaiani, personal correspondence, April 2020).

⁹² In addition to numerous international solo and group shows, Arahmaiani's work has participated in several international art biennials including the 50th Venice Biennale, Italy (2003); Biennale of the Moving Image, Geneva (2003); Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil (2002); Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (2002); Performance Biennale, Israel in 2001; Biennale de Lyon, France (2000); Werkleitz Biennale, Germany in 2000; Havana Biennale, Cuba (1997); Asia-Pacific Triennial, Brisbane, Australia (1996); Yogyakarta Biennale, Indonesia (1994). Internationally relevant landmark exhibitions include 'Traditions/Tensions' at the Asia Society, New York (1996); 'Global Feminisms' at the Brooklyn Museum (2007); 'Suspended Histories' at the Museum Van Loon, Amsterdam (2013-2014); 'Women in Between: Asian Women Artists' 1984-2012 the Mie Perfectural At Museum, Tsu, Japan (2013).

⁹³ Arahmaiani's art work can be found in the collections of The Brooklyn Museum, New York. Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara (MACAN) Jakarta; Asia Society, New York and; Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.

⁹⁴ Arriving from India to Indonesia in the 2nd century, Buddhism is today one of the six officially recognized religions alongside Islam, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and Confucianism. By the end of the 16th century, Islam had surpassed both Hinduism and Buddhism

fyng as a Muslim woman, Arahmaiani has effectively been influenced and affected by each of these traditions, although it seems fair to say that her father's religious beliefs and role as a religious leader within the community as a 'Kyai', at least publicly, dominated other cultural practices within the family.⁹⁵ In an email she mentions: "Though my father was a soft kind of person, he still had strong position as a man and religious leader " (Arahmaiani, email correspondence 22.01.2020). The experience of growing up in a space of such cultural diversity and multiplicity within her immediate family, has played a substantial role in propagating an artistic vision that often highlights, unsettles, or at the very least, poses questions about cultural, religious and political status quo, wherever she finds herself. For example, in an interview with Silas and Stathacos (2014) on their collaborative web platform, 'MOMMY', celebrating women artists, Arahmaiani tells:

I used to have a column in the largest newspaper in central Java. For four years I worked as a columnist and I often brought up critical issues about the practice of Islamic culture and sometimes I would get some sort of comment or questions: "Why are you always criticizing Islam?" But I have my own opinion and I wanted to make some sort of contribution, because I come from a Muslim family as well, although in my mother's family they are more like Hindu and Buddhist and Animist, they are not really Muslim in practice, so I have this mixed background in myself. I studied and made investigations into the Buddhist past about Lama Atisha or Jowo Atisha. Lama Atisha had a strong connection to Indonesia because he used to come and study under

as the main religion in both Java and Sumatra. With the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century, Christianity entered the mix. According to the 2010 census of the populations then 242,5 million, 87% declared themselves as Muslim; 0,75% as Buddhist; 9,78% as Christian; 1,69% Hindu and 0.56% as practicing another faith. <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/indonesia-population/> Accessed 20.01.2020.

⁹⁵ A 'Kyai' also 'kiai', is the Indonesian name, of Javanese origin, for an expert in Islam.

Having declared her position as both a muslim woman and an objective observer of Islam, Arahmaiani has consequently been "accused of spying for the West, and at the same time encountered suspicion that she is involved in terrorist networks." Kent, 'Entanglement: Individual and Participatory Art Practice in Indonesia', (2016, 175).

Lama Serlingpa or Darmakirti in Indonesia, I am talking about one thousand years ago, right? And that was my last essay before they fired me as a columnist from that newspaper.⁹⁶ (Arahmaiani in Silas and Stathacos, 2014).

The above quote by Arahmaiani captures well the central tenets of her politically activist art practice through which she so often seeks to instigate dialogue between different communities: “I have met and worked with various marginal communities in various countries. From village communities in the Bantul district and the slopes of Merapi, to communities in Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, China, and Aborigines in Australia.” (Arahmaiani, letter to Sonamrinchen 2011). It also articulates her desire to position herself in these dialogues specifically as a Muslim woman, whilst at the same time testing, muddling and complicating that very role: “I long for the practice of faith that places women on a respected place that is equal to their male partners. Do not discriminate against women anymore; do not place them as merely servants and objects of pleasure” (Ibid.). Furthermore, the above introduces us to her deep interest and engagement with Tibetan Buddhism and the Buddhist history of Indonesia, through which she has come to develop her thinking about mothering and the maternal as a more philosophical attitude towards others, rather than a solely biological relation and process. In a conversation we had, Arahmaiani explains:

[in Tibetan Buddhism] someone can become a mother without having to go into this biological... you know... sort of process. Like for example I have this son Lobsangnima [in the Lab monastery]. The Tibetan believe that... even his [Lobsangnima's] biological parents believe that.... I have in the past a connection with him, like a mother and a child. (Arahmaiani, personal interview, October 2017, Copenhagen).

⁹⁶From 2006 to 2011, Arahmaiani worked as a columnist for ‘Suara Merdeka’ (Independent Voice). Although she had received critical comments about her political views in the past, it was her inquiry into the Buddhist past and heritage of Indonesia that eventually got her fired after threats were sent to her, the paper’s editor and the owner of the paper by Muslim hardliners.

Arahmaiani is referring here to the Tibetan Buddhist philosophical concepts of: ‘rebirth’ (from the Sanskrit *punarbhava* meaning “re-becoming” or “becoming again”) and ‘karma’ meaning ‘action’ and the concept denoting the causality of all intentional actions. Within Tibetan Buddhist philosophy of ethics and metaphysical investigation, ‘karma’ and ‘rebirth’ are both part of worldview in which we are all connected to each other. In fact, this idea is behind one of the most important Buddhist practices towards enlightenment and is called ‘The Seven Point Cause and Effect Instruction’, of which, the very first instructional point is: “Recognizing all sentient beings as one’s mother”. Thus, Luzonima recognizes Arahmaiani as his mother and she accepts this role, recognizing him in return as her son. Another aspect that Arahmaiani observed within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, and that has come to affect and expand her personal frames of thinking about motherhood and the maternal, can be seen reflected in the following:

[W]orking with the monks.... I noticed something interesting there. [I]n this monastery they are only men. Physically, they are men... right? But in their kind of practice and... discipline, I noticed that they have to also have the role of the woman. Even the *mother!* Because there are small children there... little little monks.. So the older monks have to become mother. (Arahmaiani, personal interview, October 2017, Copenhagen, emphasis hers).

These last two observations made by Arahmaiani and relayed to me, not only reveal instances of a very different kind of value and belief system than what is traditionally common in Western patriarchal societies. They also reveal her personal desire towards other frames of understanding and living her own (interrupted) maternal experience, subjectivity and loss.

From the start of her career, Arahmaiani’s practice has been marked by a strong desire to question and fight discrimination in all of its forms. This has often landed her at the receiving end of national censorship, causing her to being black-listed and labelled (and thus dismissed and managed) as a ‘difficult’ and an ‘angry feminist’ artist. It has also made her a target of violent threats from both the Suharto military regime and a number of local Muslim hardliners. “Since my early artist career, say starting in early eighties, [I] was called like that [difficult, angry, fem-

inist] by my friends and also people active in the contemporary art scene” (Arahmaiani, email correspondence 22.01.2020). According to the Indonesian, feminist art historian Wulan Dirigantoro (2017) however, the employment of such monikers (‘difficult and ‘angry feminist’) has been used as a wider strategy to trouble and complicate the careers of Indonesian female artists holding strong, left-leaning views and who address issues such as gender and social injustice. Although the “label of an angry feminist artist is not uncommon throughout the global artworld” (Dirigantoro, 2017, 18) in Indonesia the label of ‘feminism’ has an added association with unnatural, debauchorous and unwomanly political activism as associated by political design with the Gerwani (Indonesian Women’s Movement) during the September 1965 coup attempt, in which the Gerwani was implicated by the New Order as having participated in violent and savage acts. For more, see Wulan Dirigantoro (2017) and Saskia Wieringa (2002).

In the case of Arahmaiani, however, as well as her contemporary feminist-artist-and-mother Titarubi, it has been precisely their work’s criticality that has brought them this troublesome recognition. As Dirigantoro (18) notes, Arahmaiani’s reputation “as one of Indonesia’s leading feminist artists” coincided with the internationalization of Indonesian art in the 1990’s and so “much of her fame can be attributed to external factors, especially foreign scholars and curators”. In other words, Arahmaiani’s career and position as a leading Indonesian female artist, can thus, and at least partly, be said to be due to the international attention to her work rather than a national appreciation of her artistic vision, which has in the past boldly criticised Indonesia’s religious and other socio-political power structures and injustices. Thus, on one hand her art and activism have been both censored and denounced in Indonesia for presenting alternative histories and vantage points; on the other they have been acclaimed by the international art circuit for the very same reasons. Undoubtedly, the capriciousness of external validation of her artwork has only worked to strengthen her artistic vision and her maternal aesth-ethics: “For some people it is a little bit difficult where to place me because people like to categorise. But I am somewhere in between.... this is also my role in Indonesia itself, I am always in between Indonesians and Chinese, Indonesians and foreigners...” (Arahmaiani, interview with Hylands, 2013). This constant ‘in-betweenness’, of being in-between different cultures, traditions, religions, Western and Asian art-circuits, whilst continuously initiating dialogue is a marked characteristic of Arahmaiani’s practice as a maternal artist.

3. 2. Interrupted Maternal Experience and The Rising of a Feminine Maternal Subject

Arahmaiani studied art at the Faculty of Fine Art and Design at the Bandung Institute of Technology in Java (1979 - 1983), where the art education offered at the time was largely Western orientated, no doubt a legacy of over 300 years of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia: “Basically they follow the model of art school from the West. So you have this kind of approach of model drawing... and then painting.. and then a little bit of theory maybe... There is some kind of class that deals with... traditional kind of culture, but it’s very limited” (Arahmaini personal interview, October, 2017). Again she finds herself in-between different traditions and power structures. Although by now Indonesia is independent, “there is no escaping from the wounds and marks and the trauma of inferiority.” (Arahmaiani, letter to Sonamrinchen 2011). Thus, as an eighteen-year old Indonesian art student in Bandung, Arahmaiani’s medium is oil painting, but as the imported Western art materials are expensive, she begins to buy local materials, such as clay and coal, from the market. Considered as an act of rebelliousness by her teachers and causing her to fail a course, this simple act of pragmatism, suddenly opens up a window to the long term legacies of colonial power and its subversion through quiet and small daily acts, a worthy subject for further exploration, which is unfortunately too long to dive into within the scope of this chapter and dissertation. When in the interview I had with Arahmaiani, I asked her what she is painting thematically at this point during art school, she tells me:

Usually I’m like trying to do something with the object[s] that [are] in my surrounding[s]. Whatever it is, maybe windows or doors... [b]ut then... yeah... er... I also like to have the human there beside the object. The figure. [T]hen of course the body of the woman, because I can see that it is different... And then I got pregnant. (Arahmaini, personal interview, October 2017, Copenhagen).

At the age of nineteen, Arahmaiani finds herself pregnant but unwilling to marry her boyfriend. “I am young and pregnant and still have to go to school. And then I also realised that my boyfriend was not someone that I thought.” (Ibid.) Hav-

ing at first hoped to build a life as a single mother with the support of her family, she finds herself forced to marry so as to legitimise her child.

We sign the marriage paper and after that I ask for divorce...
I don't want to [be married] just for the legitimisation of the child... But then he was becoming really angry with me... and then there is the law at the time in my country if a couple... er... divorce..., under... em ... lawful marriage, then the man has more rights, also for the children. I cannot see my child for a long time.
(Arahmaiani, personal interview, October 2017, Copenhagen).

Married and divorced within a day, Arahmaiani carries on with her art education, her baby-in-utero and her preparations for the arrival of the child now expanding both the borders of her body and her thinking, whilst still oblivious to what is to come. It is also in this period of her life that she begins to write, at first poetry: "because there are a lot of things that I can't express. Especially after the tragedy of my daughter being taken away... I was like in shock you know... because of the regulation that the man has more rights" (Arahmaiani, personal interview, October 2017). Again, and just as with Richter in Chapter 2, we see a political awakening start take hold, and as brought on by shocks of maternity in a dominantly patriarchal culture.

The psychoanalyst Bracha L. Ettingers work on maternal matrixial subjectivity discusses 'shocks of maternity' as psychic events that the mother encounters in her becoming and being a mother. These events can include finding out one is pregnant, just as much as a loss of a pregnancy or a child. The root to these shocks is explained by Ettinger as follows:

Young mothers are fragilized by the force of a sudden unexpected love, by sudden and irremediable response-ability and responsibility, by the enormous trust directed toward them by the infant, by the shock, sorrow, and jouissance of their care-carry mode of compassion. Vulnerable, they are facing a new reality, realizing their deep transconnectedness to the vulnerable other.... Traumatized then, precisely then, new buds of subjectivity emerge in me.

(Ettinger, 2016, 283-284).

According to Ettinger, the weight of this “care-carry mode”, which introduces with it a primordial trust of the dependent other, is placed on mothers in a world that both lacks the language and space to account for such maternal experience and where being tied to a binary, masculine logic upholding that “trust already expects a betrayal” (Ettinger, 2016, 284) is what further causes and paves way for the sudden violent disturbance and pain of maternal estrangement and shock. This then is not dissimilar to my discussion on ‘hospitality’ in Chapter 1, where we encountered the problem of the scarcity and the urgent importance of feminine maternal frameworks to thinking about hospitality outside of the Derridean conditional tolerance vs. self-sacrificial paradigm which, as demonstrated in Chapter One, is not actually conducive, nor affirmative to actual women as mothers. Thus, I would like to emphasize that ‘maternal shocks’ as brought into language and psychoanalytic theory by Ettinger, are not per se an inherent characteristic of the feminine/maternal experience of maternal becoming. Rather, they are a characteristic of the feminine/maternal experience of maternal becoming within the pervasive, hegemonic, Western patriarchal culture that celebrates and values individuality, and where the fear of difference and otherness too quickly becomes understood, lived and managed in terms of the binary logic of: conditional tolerance / unconditional self-sacrifice.

For example, in Arahmaiani’s case, the shock to which she herself refers to is certainly in part caused by the fragilizing force of a “sudden and irremediable response-ability and responsibility” (Ettinger, 2016, 284). However, this shock is further compounded by the violent interruption/disruption of her maternal experience by the religious patriarchal law enforced by her father and her unborn child’s father.

Ettinger, gives us a hopeful way forward here by further theorising the maternal experience of this “care-carry mode” by introducing us to the concept of ‘Carriance’, which she theorizes as a symbol for the sublimation from the Real of maternal carrying, and as a resistance to Sacrifice⁹⁷ (Ettinger 2016, 284). It is this concept of ‘Carriance’ that facilitates my feminine-maternal reading of Arahmaiani’s artistic practice and my subsequent analysis of it as maternal (relational) aesth-ethics. Listening to Arahmaiani’s story, Ettinger’s ‘Carriance’ theory gains

⁹⁷ With ‘sacrifice’, Ettinger is referring to the sacrifice of the feminine.

flesh and bones:

From the beginning [of pregnancy] you realise: Oh I have this baby (gestures to her belly)... Oh I have to be careful not to endanger my baby... that's what we [mothers] have to do... *Caring and Protecting*.. until the delivery... and [after birth] the baby [is] growing... and becoming a child, that's what we have to do.... Although in my case, because she [the baby] was taken away... I projected that on *other* [people] because she's not there. But it is already in me the awareness. (Arahmaiani, personal interview, October 2017, Copenhagen, emphasis hers).

This change in her awareness and her maternal experience of “caring and protecting” as described by Arahmaiani are resonant of the feminist pragmatist philosopher Sarah Ruddick’s theory of maternal practice as a practice defined by the general aims of meeting the demands of ‘preservation’ and ‘growth’, as well as ‘social acceptability’ (Ruddick 1995,17). As such, Arahmaiani’s account about her maternal becoming reveals a pragmatic, yet ethical, approach to sharing space and life with an intimate and yet unknowable other.

But something else is happening here too. Analyzing her personal account shows us a number of things: 1.) In being aware of carrying a vulnerable ‘other’, Arahmaiani adapts a maternal practice of caring and protecting that ‘other’. 2.) Although her daughter is taken away shortly after her premature birth, the awareness of her as an intimately interconnected and relational other requiring care and protection remains in Arahmaiani’s psyche. 3.) This (maternal) awareness and practice is expanded through acts of caring and protecting now directed towards others. Thus, besides her pragmatic daily practice of “protecting and caring” for her unborn child, her words about an “awareness... that is already in me” point towards a psychic process, or encounter, through which she then sublimates her maternal carrying into ‘Carriance’, and which I argue functions for her as a creative, life affirming artistic strategy of negating and resisting sacrifice. In other words, through the very sublimation of her maternal carrying into ‘Carriance’, her corporeal maternal carrying in the Real can enter the public and the political sphere as creative, semiotic, aesth-ethic acts, through her changed artistic practice and process which now moves from painting still life into performance and social sculpture.

It is conducive for my analysis of Arahmaiani's work and practice to stay thinking through her maternal experience, besides with Ruddick, together with Ettinger's feminist psychoanalytic theory of the matrixial, a little longer. In 'Laius Complex and Shocks of Maternity: With Franz Kafka and Sylvia Plath' (2016), Ettinger writes about 'matrixial co-emergence': "In matrixial co-emergence the becoming-mother encounters and witnesses the vulnerability of a subject whose *being-toward-birth-with-in-another* is to be accounted for" (Ettinger, 2016, 282). This psychic process of 'co-emergence' taking place in the maternal carrying that Ettinger theorizes, is precisely what Arahmaiani seems to be referring to when she says "it is already in me the awareness". In other words, the awareness of the vulnerable other co-appears with-in her. Through sublimation (into Carriance) then, Arahmaiani's original co-emergence with her daughter as a vulnerable other, whose *towards-birth-with-in-another* is to be accounted for, becomes enacted by Arahmaiani as a com-passionate wit(h)nessing to the vulnerability and suffering of others, when she goes to live on the streets of Yogyakarta.⁹⁸

Arahmaiani's daughter Agni Malagina, as named by her father and maternal grandfather, is born three months premature and has to stay in an incubator in the hospital. Going to school and attending lectures and classes on and about art, Arahmaiani visits her daughter every day, until one day she is gone. Having her daughter taken away from her by the biological father's family, and despite pleading with her own parents to help her to get her daughter back, Arahmaiani feels deeply betrayed by her family and the Islamic law of her father. Being let down, she leaves her family home to go live on the streets of Yogyakarta. With her life in crisis, her art work becomes increasingly rebellious: "I don't follow the rules how the [art school] assignments have to be done", she tells me. The last painting that she paints before being kicked out of school is of an object and a figure placed next to each other. Then, she says, "I have an aesthetic sort of consideration... I put the paint like... [She makes a whoosh sound demonstrating paint flying through the air onto an imaginary canvas whilst her arm mimicks the movements] ...as if to blur.. or to make it... the picture.... gone.." (Arahmaiani personal interview, October 2017). (Fig.1). Within the art school's context, operating somewhere between Western art historical curriculum and the hybrid Indonesian

⁹⁸ Ettinger at times uses the spelling 'wit(h)nessing' in order to highlight the modality of being-feeling-perceiving with the other, so as to differentiate from 'witnessing' which is an entirely different modality of relating to the other and in which the other remains an object.

cultural traditions and ideas about proper femininity, these aesthetic gestures are being read as rebellious and destructive: “Why [do] you seem to be destroying your own painting?” a teacher asks her. (Arahmaiani, personal interview, October 2017). Yet, when read in the context of a young woman who had her new-born baby taken away from her, all the while the surrounding cultural practices and people around her condone it, this “aesthetic consideration” can become reframed and read quite differently: Not so much as a destruction of her painting but, rather as an expression of the culture of patriarchal violence against its others.



Fig. 1. Arahmaiani, ‘Untitled’, 1982, 100cm x 120cm. Copyright courtesy of artist.

At this point in her life, Arahmaiani, the young mother, woman and artist is as if in free fall. As a young mother she is failed by the surrounding institutions of: patriarchy, religion and the colonial legacy of Western Art History as being taught to her in her native Indonesia.

Somehow I felt like...I’m like more like [a] failed person... like the street people... They are people who are poor... who are frail... you know? Who are not successful in life, so they are like

dumbed on the street. In a way I [now] feel the same... I associated myself with them.... I was so disappointed... really sad and angry at the same time... so I decided that Ok... I don't belong in this society... I feel really... *hurt*. But also in a way... failed, because I don't know if this is like my mistake...or... whose mistake.. right? And.. er... then I sort of ... like... Ok, maybe I just go to another side of life... and probably... that's sort of my place. (Arahmaiani, personal interview, October 2017, Copenhagen, emphasis hers).

The next few years are dark and include depression, drinking and drug abuse, as well as rebelling against the establishment and authority figures, such as her parents, the art school system and the military regime, which eventually gets her arrested, jailed and kicked out of art school at the age of twenty-two.⁹⁹ A turning point, however, comes when she lives on the streets of Yogyakarta. She describes to me her experience amidst drug dealers, prostitutes, street sellers and Jesuits priests:

[w]hen I got there [to the streets]... life is so different from where I come from. I come from middle-class, right. So it's very different. Young women coming from villages with no educational background... and then living in very terrible situation[s] as prostitutes... so then I begin to think that maybe I can do something, you know?... for whoever... if not my daughter. When I think about me and my daughter... [my] instinct is... I will see her one day. I don't want to disappoint *her* by ... not being responsible of my own life. So I thought: No, I don't want my daughter to be unhappy when one day we meet. If possible, I want my daughter to be proud of myself. It's really like: What Can I *do*

⁹⁹ Arahmaiani's street performance 'Perayaan Kemerdekaan' (Independence Celebrations), performed together with two male friends and consisting of chalk drawings of military tanks and weapons, as well as poems drawn on the streets of Bandung is a direct criticism of the New Order and causes her to be arrested and then expelled from art school. Later on, Arahmaiani continues her art studies at the Paddington Art School in Sydney, Australia and the Academie voor Beeldende Kunst in Enschede, The Netherlands.

for my daughter?... Because I can't do anything! She's gone... I begin to become someone who care[s] about... [others].. Oh what about you?.... [and] what about you? It's like I'm the mother, and they're my children. (Arahmaiani personal interview, October 2017, Copenhagen emphasis hers).

In an Ettingerian psychoanalytic sense what we are seeing here is Arahmaiani, the young mother, whose experience with her intimate other has been interrupted/disrupted and denied, nevertheless allowing for a matrixial com-passion to inform her desire and actions. It is at this moment that (self-) Sacrifice becomes resisted through 'Carriance' and the interruption of Arahmaiani's maternal experience becomes negated. At once her maternal experience is both forever and never interrupted. Her daughter Agni not with her, yet always with her. In reflection on her artistic practice with different communities, both real and imagined, Arahmaiani says:

Everywhere basically [in my work with communities] I try to imagine the good sort of.... responsible mother. What this mother has to do? Then I just try to do it. Although my daughter is not there, but this is what I am supposed to be doing and my daughter is just an imagined community. (Arahmaiani personal interview, October 2017, Ghent).

It is precisely here, at the moment of sublimation, (her maternal carrying in the Real to 'Carriance') that Arahmaiani-the-mother finds symbolic relief; negates the sacrifice of herself as a subject and the imposed upon her interruption, and instead rises as a Subject informed by the feminine-maternal. In so doing, she intervenes in the fabric and economy of the patriarchal self-same and her artistic practice now becomes what I, in this dissertation, put forth as 'maternal (relational) aesth-ethics'. As Ettinger writes: "A radical dimension of subjectivity emerges with the arrival of real, imaginary and symbolic parentality (Ettinger 2016, 284). The personal *is* political.

3. 3. Changing Aesthetics: Maternal Shocks of Becoming and Loss

Arahmaiani's early work of painting objects and figures side by side as they existed in the immediate space around her is strikingly different when compared to her work after having had her daughter Agni Malagina (1979) and her 1st 'exile' to Australia (1983-1985), after which her medium begins to change towards performance.¹⁰⁰ Later on, she also begins to work with other mediums such as installation and video, but the directness of performance as a mode of communication is now starting to grow more attractive and urgent to her. At the same token, social and political activism are starting to become an inherent element in her artistic practice. For example, 'Accident' (1980); 'Newspaperman' (1981); and 'Independence Celebration' (1983) are all performance works that directly address and engage with societal issues, as well as being artworks created in the direct aftermath of her personal tragedy of having her daughter taken away from her.¹⁰¹

In terms of subject matter, Arahmaiani's work now starts to become more strongly focused on gender, sexuality, social justice issues and the critique of capitalism and mass consumerism. For example, in 'Lingga-Yoni' (1993/1994), which caused Arahmaiani's second exile to Australia, she addresses the power imbalance between genders; between the male and female energy within her Indonesian context, and sets this imbalance in dialogue with Islam and Hinduism by depicting the religious Hindu symbol of the feminine 'Yoni' above the phallic 'Lignam' against a background consisting of Arab, Malaysian and Hindu writing.¹⁰² (fig. 2). The art installation 'Etalase' (1994), Indonesian for a 'storefront', is an example of Arahmaiani's critique of religious attitudes and the culture of capitalism and mass consumerism in Java. The installation consists of a collection of cultural items: a copy

¹⁰⁰ 'Accident' (1980); 'Newspaperman', (1981); 'The Flower', (1982); 'Perayaan Kemerdekaan' (Independence Celebration), (1983).

¹⁰¹ The original Indonesian name of the performance 'Independence Day' is 'Perayaan Kemerdekaan'.

¹⁰² 'Yoni' is a feminine symbol of the Hindu goddess Shakti commonly considered as the personification of creative, sustaining and destructive energy synonymous with the Great Hindu Goddess 'Devi' and 'The Great Divine Mother'. The 'Lignam' is the masculine symbol of the Hindu god 'Shiva' who also is attributed with the creation, protection and the transformation of the universe. By bringing these two symbols of creation, sustenance, protection and destruction, or transformation, together, the work is a sort of a "cosmic copulation" (Arahmaiani, personal correspondence March 2020) between male and female energy in the world.

of the Quran; a religious icon; a coca cola bottle; a mirror; a fan; a drum; condoms and sand installed together inside a glass and wood museum display case. (fig. 3).



Fig. 2. 'Linnga-Yoni', Arahmaiani, 2013, 160cm x 140c. A remake of her original artwork 'Lingga-Yoni' 1993/1994. Copyright courtesy of artist.



Fig. 3. 'Etalase', 1994-2014. Copyright courtesy of artist.

Another characteristic that appears in Arahmaiani's artistic practice after losing her daughter, is the use of her own gendered body as an artistic medium and as a site to question the imbalance of societal ideals placed upon female bodies in order to survey, manage and control them. For example, in 'Offerings from A to Z' (1996), a series of performances inside a Buddhist temple in Thailand, Arahmaiani engages with the topic of prostitution in Asia and the duality that women in Asia face: "praised and respected for their fertility, and discriminated against for their menstruation by being prohibited access to the temples and holy sites" (Ahmady, 2014). In this particular performance, Arahmaiani lays her body down on a large stone slab used for cremating people inside the temple, her body surrounded by weapons and sheets stained with blood. (fig. 4) In 'His-story On My Body' (2000), (fig. 5) Arahmaiani uses her own body to emphasise "how authority manifests in the form of control over the body", the body thus becoming "a battlefield of political struggles and conflicts of interests" (Arahmaiani, 2005) which, in the accurate description of Wang Zineng (2008), also closely aligns with "the Foucauldian notion of the body as a corporeal object of surveillance" (Zineng, 2008).



Fig. 4. 'Offerings from A-Z', (1996) (Performance, Pa-daeng Crematorium, Chiang Mai, Thailand). Photographer Manit Sriwanichpoom, copyright courtesy of artist.



Fig. 5. 'His-story on My Body, 2000. Performance. Photographer Arai Sinichi, Copyright courtesy of artist.

Thus, in tracing Arahmaiani's artistic oeuvre, it becomes clear that the characteristic of using her own body as a citation, a stand-in, for other female bodies and their treatment in society, is a characteristic that begins to appear as an inherent element in her artistic work *after* the forceful disruption of her maternal experience. In a personal and previously unpublished text, perhaps best described in its status as an 'artist's statement', written in 1996, Arahmaiani herself writes:

In my opinion the situation we find ourselves in currently, is one of imbalance. With one opposite being oppressed/repressed by the other: feminine energy by masculine energy, spirit by matter, nature by culture, the "weak" by the "strong". The role of feminine energy has been underestimated, the feminine aspect is considered less important than the masculine - the god is on the throne and the goddess is in the cell... Civilization is in decline and the culture has become decadent. It is like someone who is sick and dying she needs to be healed. The system of the body and soul which is decayed has to be re-ordered. I believe that art as ritual has a healing capacity and that artist as healers will give valuable contributions to the future. (Arahmaiani, 'The Basis of My Thought is Concern with Balance Or The Conjunction Of The Opposites', unpublished artist's statement, 1993).

In examining Arahmaiani's above statement, it is impossible but to notice the interweaving of the autobiographical and the political. It is clear that as an artist, she has been able to reflect and process her maternal experience through and alongside an artistic practice, something which in turn has enabled her to give aesthetic form to her sublimation of her maternal carrying into 'Carriance'. In so doing she has enabled her maternal subjectivity to (re-)enter into the public sphere through (her) performative maternal aesth-ethic acts. She writes:

In my performance works I try to redefine these women's issues on the abstract level, and also to respond to those issues through creative actions... This is what most interests me in performance works, where one can functionalise several capacities and fac-

ulties within oneself in one momentum which then can open or usher one into a kind of ‘different consciousness’.... a type of consciousness that can penetrate borders which have been set to be permanent, and also the borders of one’s own thoughts and beliefs. (Arahmaiani, ‘Feminism in Islam: Performing Beyond Borders’, unpublished essay, 2005).

Arahmaiani’s artistic and intellectual endeavour of persistently working through issues of societal power imbalances between women and men, between the feminine and the masculine energy and the marginalisation of women in society gains new meaning when closely examined in relation to her personal, embodied and specific experience of maternal carrying and loss, as opposed to being ‘simply’ read within a larger body of feminist performance art in Indonesia. In fact, by reading Arahmaiani’s specific, personal, maternal experience alongside her artistic practice is precisely what can contribute to a deeper and more detailed cartography of Indonesian feminist performance practices. Engaging with artworks and artistic practices in relation to the multiple axis, or intersectional nodes, of personal maternal experience and situated knowledges of the women artists themselves, we can better map the feminist issues and concerns of actual women when analysing (Indonesian and other) performance art in more autobiographical detail.

In another section of the above quoted artist statement, Arahmaiani continues: “my art is not ‘retinal’, it’s objective is not to please the eyes. What’s of primary importance is the actual process of creation” (Arahmaiani, ‘The Basis of My Thought is Concern with Balance Or The Conjunction Of The Opposites’, unpublished artist’s statement, 1993). In other words, what she says here is: my art no longer is about simply representing matter and phenomena around me. It is about the *how*: the politics and ethics of creation. Politics and ethics of creation arising from her new awareness of her own feminine-maternal subjectivity.

Even when Arahmaiani does pick up painting again, for example and perhaps most clearly in what she refers to as ‘The Grey Paintings’ (2009-2013), her aesthetics and the very process of painting have changed. She no longer places the figure “beside the object”, but emerges it into the surrounding nature as part of a continuous equal plane (fig.6). “This is where the water comes in, by putting the figures in water they were literally put in[side] the landscape” (Arahmaiani, in interview with Tony Godfrey, March 2013). She is as painting in and with the nature,

rather than separated from it. Nature is not a backdrop but a part of both image and process. (fig. 7, 8).¹⁰³ When asked by the British art historian Tony Godfrey about the formal specificity of her Grey Paintings as diptychs, her response is:

Why should nature always be merely a background? My Buddhist approach says, ‘no... the human being should not just always be standing in front of the nature as if it was a backdrop or an object. This is not a good way to relate to nature - *we are part of nature not the master of it.* (Arahmaiani in interview with Tony Godfrey, March 2013, emphasis hers).

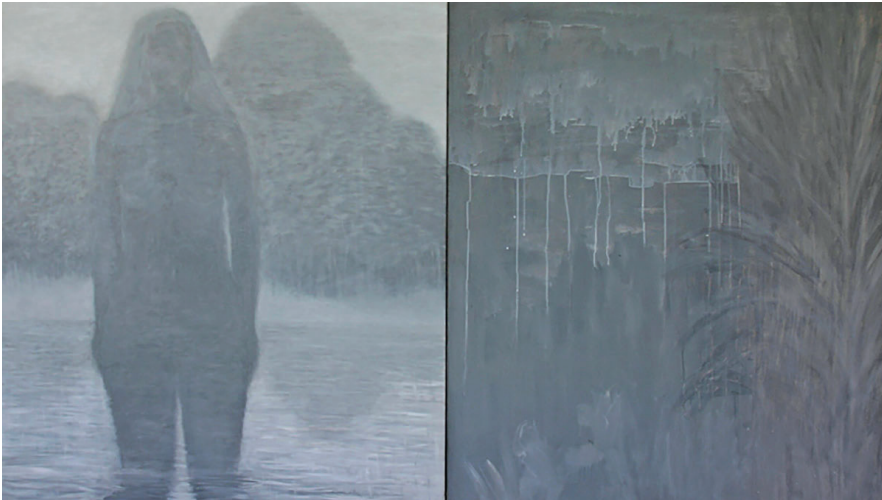


Fig. 6. ‘Confluence #1’, acrylic on canvas, Arahmaiani, (2010-2012), 140cm x 240 cm. Copyright courtesy of artist.

¹⁰³ Having had spent a childhood hiking in nature, Arahmaiani refers to the disappearance of nature in her life and work when she entered art school and its tectonic re-appearance into her life and artwork when Mount Merapi erupted in 2006. “At art school my work became room world. I spent all my time in the studio reading or writing. Nature disappeared from my life Then I woke up when the earthquake hit Jogja in 2006. In my district more than 4000 people died. (Arahmaiani in interview with Tony Godfrey, Creative Cowboy Films). The earthquake hitting Yogyakarta on the 27th of May in 2006, lasted about sixty seconds, causing damage to infrastructure, housing, cultural landmarks and businesses, and resulted in thousands of people reported injured and over 5.700 dead.



Fig. 7. 'Sri 2', acrylic on canvas, (2009- 2013), 140cm x 220 cm. Screenshot from 'Arahmaiani: Between The Mountain and The Sea', a Creative Cowboys Film production, 2016. Directed by Andrea and Peter Hylands.



Fig. 8. Screenshot from 'Arahmaiani: Between The Mountain and The Sea', a Creative Cowboys Film production, 2016. Directed by Andrea and Peter Hylands.

3.4. The Second Tremor: Mount Merapi and the Ecosophical Expansion of Arahmaiani's Art Practice and Feminine-Maternal Subjectivity

Whereas the shock of her disrupted maternal experience had pushed Arahmaiani towards a new kind of aesthetic practice in her choice of medium, subject matter and the overall artistic vision by awakening a new kind of Self-awareness, it was the tectonic aftershock followed by Mount Merapi's eruption in 2006 that pushed forward the expansion of her feminine-maternal Self-awareness and subjectivity onto a larger societal and ecological scale, as we come to see in the artistic process behind her 'Flag Project'.¹⁰⁴

On 27th of May in 2006, while Arahmaiani was in Bangkok, a 60 second-long earthquake shook Yogyakarta as Mount Merapi erupts. Within less than a minute, more than 5700 people are dead, thousands of people are injured and houses, infrastructures and businesses are destroyed in Yogyakarta.

[E]verything cuts off, I cannot call anybody, friends, anyone you know.... after a couple of days I went back, then it was like a big shock, yeah. Since that time on I have been working with the community in the area of earthquake recovery until today... I realized it is just not like helping when disaster is there you know, but we really have to build this new way and new awareness of sustainable way of living, right? (Arahmaiani, interview with Hylands, 2013).

The second part of the above quote details an extension towards a deeper ecological awareness and concern in Arahmaiani's thinking. Put differently: we should not wait until disaster is here, we should cultivate a new awareness that sustains us and that fundamentally includes the environment as part of us. The quote demonstrates a moment of ecological expansion in Arahmaiani's creative practice and thinking by shifting the focus of her artistic practice from thinking in terms of communities of people and from bridging cultures, traditions and beliefs towards embedding these 'bridging practices' within a larger context of environmental and ecological interconnectedness. It is also a moment in which her feminine-maternal

¹⁰⁴ Since the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake, Arahmaiani's artistic practice has steadily become more focused on local ecologies and environmental issues.

subjectivity and maternal ecology of care and nurture enmesh with environmental ethics and ecosophical thinking. This is a move towards an understanding of human life as part of a bigger web, or “mesh” (Morton, 2012) that forms and informs an ecological whole resonant of the “relational total field image”, which we find at the heart of Arne Naess’ ‘Deep Ecology’, the first ecological philosophy that we have in the West.¹⁰⁵

The term ‘Deep Ecology’ first emerged in the 1970’s Scandinavia in the writings of the Norwegian philosopher, deep ecologist, activist and mountaineer Arne Naess. His essay ‘The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary’ (1973), introduces us to the concept of ‘Deep Ecology’ by differentiating between ‘deep’ (a radical ecological worldview) and ‘shallow’ (a reformist ecological worldview) as two clearly different ecological approaches, environmental philosophies and movements based on fundamentally different beliefs, values, purposes and ethics of engagement with the environment.¹⁰⁶ Before diving into the deep with Naess, however, it is striking to note and remind ourselves about how young as a field, ecological philosophy, as well as environmental ethics and environmental criticism still are in comparison to most of the Modern Western

¹⁰⁵ Arne Naess is the founder of the deep ecological movement which today includes many thinkers and activists alike. At the heart of this movement is Naess’ own personal ecological philosophy, which he called ‘Ecosophy T’, the letter ‘T’ thought to be standing for Tvergastein, the name of the mountain on which Naess lived and wrote many of his books. It is important to note here that Naess considered ‘Ecosophy T’ as his personal philosophy and a contribution to the deep ecological movement and it is possible to see by reading deep ecological literature that Naess in fact encouraged people to think and develop their own eco-sofias in relation to their location and environment.

The postmodern environmental ethicist Timothy Morton’s “mesh” is an imaginary and unmeasurable interconnectedness between things, that functions as a conceptual tool to think with in his theorizing of what he calls ‘The Ecological Thought’, also the name of his book in which the concept of the “mesh” first appears (Morton, 2012).

In the ‘relational total field image’ organisms are conceived as “knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations” (Naess, 1973, 95).

¹⁰⁶ In short: Radical ecologist approach to environmental degradation believes that new ideological systems must replace Capitalism, whereas Reformist ecological approach tackles environmental degradation through the development of new technologies and green capitalism. Naess initially delivered ‘The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary’ at ‘The Third World Future Conference’ in Bucharest in 1972.

philosophical traditions.¹⁰⁷ Broadly speaking we can identify two moments in the Modern Western environmental history before arriving at the current era of the Anthropocene, a popular topic for much current scholarly research.¹⁰⁸ These moments are the ‘Modern Conservation Era’, beginning in the mid 19th century and running up all the way to the mid- to late- 20th century, and the ‘Environmental Era’ which followed the environmental awakening of the 1960’s. In terms of environmental criticism these moments have also been referred to as the 1st and the 2nd wave (Buell, 2005).¹⁰⁹

During the 1st wave of ecocriticism, non-fiction nature writing such as Henry David Thoreau’s ‘Walden’ (1854); Susan Fenimore Cooper’s ‘Rural Hours’ (1850) and Aldo Leopold’s ‘A Sandcounty Almanac’ (1949), for example, emerged as a literary genre. As people then, en-masse, begun to become aware of, and subsequently concerned by the degradation and depletion of nature as the consequence of global mass production in the wake of the industrial revolution, the conservation movement, also referred to as nature conservation began gaining momentum. A mix of love for the great outdoors and a concern for the depletion and degradation

¹⁰⁷ Ecological philosophy does not have a single meaning, but rather refers to conceptual frameworks in ecological and environmental science, combining these with ‘philosophy of ecology’; a subfield of philosophy concerned with the practice and application of ecology, its moral issues, and the intersectionality between the position of humans and other entities (Taylor, 2014).; Environmental Ethics being the discipline in philosophy that studies the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of, the environment and its non-human contents (Brennan, Andrea and Lo, Yeuk-Sze, 2016).; environmental criticism also called ecocriticism, being a field of literary study that considers the relationship that humans have to the environment. The term was first used in 1978 in William Rueckert’s article “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism”.

¹⁰⁸ A proposed geological epoch describing Earth’s most recent geologic time period as being human influenced. The term was initially coined by the American ecologist Eugene F. Stoermer in the early 1980’s and has been widely popularised by the Dutch, atmospheric chemist Paul. J. Crutzen in 2000.

¹⁰⁹ The wave metaphor as used by Lawrence Buell (2005) is by no means a clear cut division, although it does offer us some markers to hold onto when looking at the changing landscape of environmental criticism as a form of literary criticism. Since the millennium a third wave of ecocriticism has been forming in order to recognizes and transcends ethnic and national particularities. Some characteristics include the exploration of global concepts of place with neo-bioregionalist attachments to specific locales, and the production of neologisms such as ‘eco-cosmopolitanism’; ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’; ‘global soul’ and ‘translocality’. For more on this see Slovic, 2010.

of natural resources acted now as an impetus for the first measures in the preservation of wilderness. We also begin to see two different paths of environmental ethics: 'conservationist' and 'preservationist' starting to form now.

The 'conservationists' believed that nature should be conserved by using it sustainably so as to provide for and to benefit future generations. In the words often attributed to the American forester politician and 'father of conservation' Gifford Pinchot: "Conservation means the wise use of the earth and its resources for the lasting good of men". Whereas 'conservationists' saw nature in terms of it being a resource, (both raw materials or as a space for human recreational activity and enjoyment of beauty), 'preservationists' took environmental safeguarding onto another level, believing that nature should remain untouched, in other words preserved, because it has intrinsic value. Whilst different in their aims, both conservationist and preservationist shared the interest in thinking about human-nature relations.

The environmental impact of World War II (1939-1945) and The Vietnam War (1955-1975) continued to raise public awareness of the human impact on the environment and with the publication of Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' (1962) on the effects of pesticides on the environment, the second wave of environmental criticism began.¹¹⁰

Writing in the early seventies, following the environmental awakening of the sixties when the environmental awareness of people living in the industrial, postwar era became ignited by Carson's 'Silent Spring' (1962) and further inflamed by events such as the 1973 energy crisis; the 1969 Santa Barbara Oil Spill and the 1968 iconic 'Earthrise' photograph taken from Apollo 8's flight into the lunar orbit (inaugurating the international environmental movement), Naess' paper 'The Shallow and the Deep' was a radical philosophical response to the times, as well as an urgent call for a new kind of ecological thinking.¹¹¹ Faulting European and North

¹¹⁰ During World War II we saw an increased production and transportation of weapons aircrafts and other commodities and The Vietnam War saw the progression of warfare into chemical weapons.

The 2nd wave environmental criticism is concerned with timely and up-to-date environmental issues, whereas 1st wave non-fiction nature writing was concerned on the individual reflection and connection with nature.

¹¹¹ The 1973's energy crisis was caused by an oil embargo by Arab members of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) targeting nations supporting the Israeli Yom Kippur war. The result of the embargo caused oil prices to rise by 400 percent, shocking the growing poster-

American civilisations for their human-centred arrogance and instrumentalisation of non-human nature, Naess describes the reformist ecological paradigm, typical of mainstream environmentalism, as ‘shallow ecology’. An example of such ‘shallow’ ecological thinking would be, for example, to fight against “pollution and resource depletion” with the underlying objective of “the health and affluence of people in developed countries” (Naess 1973, 95). It is this elemental objective to preserve and conserve the natural environment for the benefit of humans, that bares open the anthropocentric orientation of the reformist or ‘shallow’ ecology. The Deep Ecology movement, on the other hand, takes as its premise that all living things have inherent value, and it is from this ecological understanding that it then instinctively follows that humans should live in ways that do not harm and adversely impact the environment and its ecosystems. Whereas shallow ecology is concerned with short term fixes in order to continue short-sighted practices of human progress and capitalist logic, deep ecology is concerned on the long-range ecological effects of our actions, challenging our very understanding of ourselves as ‘ecological Selves’. Thus, ‘shallow ecology’ is marked by its tendency to withhold bio-spherical egalitarianism in favour of what Naess calls the “man-in-environment image” and which The Deep Ecology movement fundamentally rejects in favour of a what it calls a “relational, total field image.” (1973, 95). In this holistic total field image, organisms are understood as

knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations. An intrinsic relation between two things A and B is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of A and

ity of the postwar era, and prompting interest in energy conservation and alternative energy sources, such as renewable energy, as well as nuclear energy and domestic fossil fuels.

The Santa Barbara Oil Spill (January/ February 1969) was the largest oil spill to date in The United States, causing large scale, immediate and dramatic environmental damage to bird and fish populations, marine mammals and other organisms. The oil spill brought about The Declaration of Environmental Rights (1969); Environmental Rights Day (1970); Earth Day (1970), as well as it prompted interdisciplinary Environmental Studies Major at the Santa Barbara University (1970).

The publishing of the ‘Earthrise’ (1968) offered the humankind at once a whole new world-view, as it was the first time that we saw the Earth in its finiteness, with all of our resources already here and limited.

B, so that without the relation, A and B are no longer the same things. The total-field model dissolves not only the man-in-environment concept, but every compact thing-in-milieu concept... (Naess, 1973, 95).

Based on the idea of ecological harmony and the fundamental belief that all living beings have intrinsic value, regardless of their instrumental use-value to humans, the central tenet of Naess's 'ecosophy' then is the self-realization of ourselves as part of nature. Clearly, Naess is not the first to advocate for a more balanced ecological existence in and with the world, as many indigenous and pre-industrialized cultures world-wide have and do practice ways of being that are based on more sustainable and bio-centric worldviews and understandings of our Selves in the world.¹¹² However, the framework of 'ecosophy' that Naess's work has bestowed on Western ecological thinking and environmental activism has greatly contributed to discussions about human-nature relations, as well as a variety of environmental activist work, movements and theory.¹¹³ Furthermore, what separates Naess' deep ecology from the previous preservationist environmental model of thinking are the core concepts of 'identification', 'Self-realization' and the 'ecological-Self' that are at the heart of his deep ecological thinking. 'Identification' with nature, being commonly accepted amongst deep ecological thinkers as "the path to Self-realization, the process by which one develops one's 'ecological Self'" (Diehm, 2007, 2). However, what this 'identification' within deep ecology is understood to entail, is of course crucial and clearly much depends on how and what we understand this process of identification to mean. For this reason, as a movement, deep ecology has garnered a number of feminist criticisms.¹¹⁴

¹¹² See for example the work of Eduardo Batalha Viveiros de Castro on Amerindian Ontologies. 2004. Pp. 463-484.

¹¹³ For environmentally activist projects rooted in the basic deep ecological principles, see the work of Joanna Macy, John Seed, Fleming and Naess in "Thinking Like A Mountain: Towards a Council of All Beings, New Society Publishers, Philadelphia, 1988, and in more general, see for example: 'Women and Life on Earth' (1979). For environmental academic movements influenced see for example 'ecofeminism' (Francois d'Eaubonne, 1974; Mary Daly 1978; Greta Gaard 2010; Susan Griffin 1980; Donna Haraway 1991; Carolyn Merchant 1980; Val Plumwood (1993); Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies (1993); Karen Warren 2000).

¹¹⁴ Neither 'deep ecology' nor 'ecofeminism' describe singular theories, but rather both

The ecofeminist Val Plumwood, for example, has criticized the deep ecology movement for not critiquing the inherent link between anthropocentrism and androcentrism.¹¹⁵ (Plumwood, 1991). Additionally, according to Plumwood, because the deep ecology movement has failed to “question the structures of rational egoism” (15) it in fact ends up promoting a model of the self that takes for granted egoism as its starting point (Diehm 2002, 27). In this way, for Plumwood, self-realization through the process of deep ecological identification becomes simply an exercise, or in her own words, an “extension of egoism” (Plumwood, 1991, 15). Certainly, Plumwood touches on an enormously important point here which cannot be side-stepped. Put differently: if identification with non-human nature helps us to develop an ecological-Self through a process in which we expand our existing sense of Self, then surely we must also ask what exactly is this sense of Self that becomes expanded? Is it simply a matter of recreating another male centered, anthropocentric, and possibly egoistic, conception of the Self?

As a solution to this problem of identification and expansion of the unchecked Self that she identifies in deep ecology, Plumwood has asserted that “an appropriate ethic of environmental activism is not that of identity or unity (or its reversal in difference), but that of solidarity - standing with the other in a supportive relationship in the political sense” (Plumwood, 2002, 202). This is an ethical stance that Naess himself would certainly stand for, not against. Since Naess’ own personal form of ecosophy (Ecosophy T) is in fact as much anchored in the realm of spirituality as it is in rationalism, it is not necessarily helpful to try to understand his thinking purely by applying the same (eco)feminist critique to his personal brand of ecosophy, as one might apply to the rationalist dualist thinking of most Western philosophy and environmental thinking assigning ‘nature’ as female and ‘culture’ as male, what Donna Haraway would call “antagonistic dualisms” (Har-

cover a broad range of thought. (Booth, 2000) A common tenet within both, however, is the interest in forging a new conceptualisation of the self.

¹¹⁵ Androcentrism being the evaluation of individuals and cultures based on male perspectives, standards, and values. The term refers to a male-centred worldview which does not necessarily present explicitly negative views of women and girls, but positions men and boys as representative of the human condition or experience and women and girls as diverging from the human condition. It is a complex, subtle, and often unacknowledged form of sexism, existing on a continuum which includes misogyny and patriarchal attitudes, but it is also informed by patriarchal cultures in which men are granted more power and influence, and thus the right to evaluate and interpret individuals and cultures. Hibbs C. (2014).

away, 1991). Instead, and to see an example of how Naess' deep ecological process of identification might work in practice, we should look at (for example) his publication "Thinking Like A Mountain: Towards a Council of All Beings" (Seed, Macy, Fleming and Naess, 1988) in which identification and intimacy with non-human entities is (at least attempted to be) enacted from non-dualist and non-gendered perspectives through the practice of specifically designed (meditative) exercises and (animistic) ritual within a workshop format called 'The Council of All Beings.' Furthermore, and in the context of this chapter, as Arahmaiani herself does not self-identify as a feminist, it seems as appropriate as helpful to use Naess' concepts of 'identification', 'Self-realization' and the 'ecological-Self' as a framework, to help thinking and imagining expanded notions of the Self that might move us beyond the antagonistic dualist thinking. In my correspondence with her, Arahmaiani writes to me the following:

[T]his term 'feminism' relates to modernity. To modern way of thinking and categorizing. While my concept [is] related to ancient [Hindu and Vajrayana Buddhist] philosophy, on [the] principle of balance of the oppositional power[s] in nature! The modern way is a binary oppositional system and though it seems similar in some way... it could also be different on other way of understanding. (Arahmaiani, personal correspondence 30.03.2020).

Granted, we cannot afford to ignore our sexed and gendered bodies and the multiple meanings and social realities that the hegemonic Western culture assigns to them.¹¹⁶ However, and as I hope to have shown in this chapter, in regards to Arahmaiani's embodied maternal experience, there are processes of identification that go beyond the gendered experience. In Naess' own words: "I have the word-Self-realization, which is not the realization of your ego, but the larger self with a ... maximum of identification with every other being" (Naess in interview

¹¹⁶ Here I do stand with eco-feminist thinkers such as Plumwood (1991, 1993) and Karen Warren (1987, 1988, 1990) for example who insist on focusing on the conceptual connections between the domination/s of women and nature, and with eco-feminists such as for example Ariel Shalleh (1984) who focus on gender, sexual difference and how female bodily experiences situate women differently in relation to nature (Warren, 2000).

with van Boeckel, 1995).¹¹⁷ Naess' concept of the 'ecological Self' refers to an expansive, transpersonal sense of self that moves our understanding of ourselves from anthropocentric to the ecological. It is awakened by an identification, an 'emotional resonance' or 'feeling with' other life forms (Seed, Macy, Fleming and Naess, 1988), in this way creating an expanded concept of a self, where boundaries between self and other are dissolved. (Bragg, 1996).¹¹⁸ It can be thought of as related to a social constructionist view of the self, concerned with how "people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including-themselves) in which they live" (Gergen, 1985, 266). In other words, within a social constructionist view of self our knowledges of ourselves are performatively created through and in relation to others and the changing social situations that we are embed in, thus reflecting an interdependent view of self, an approach often adapted within feminist social inquiry. To make a move then from a constructionist view of self, based on nature/culture division, towards an 'ecological self', "this interdependence simply needs to be extended from the relationship with 'others' (meaning certain human beings) to 'all life forms', ecosystems and the planet itself". (Bragg, 1996, 100). This is "an identification which goes beyond humanity to include the nonhuman world" (Devall and Sessions, 1985, 67). Or in the words of Joanna Macy: "[W]hen you see the world as lover, every being can become – if you have a clever, appreciative eye – an expression of that ongoing, erotic impulse" (Macy, 2007, 27).

Lastly, pragmatically speaking, the process of identification is an immensely powerful tool for causing people to feel implicated, affected and called upon to respond and act. Simply put, identification moves us as people into action. What kind of action generally determined by the kind of identifications that we make, and so here I would assert that it is very much our identification with (and as) Nature that matters. That it is precisely through our identification with Nature that we

¹¹⁷ In fact, Naess uses two different spellings for the word 'nature', depending on how and in what context he uses it. In case of his ecopsychical 'Self-realization' Naess uses a capital 'S', to differentiate from the 'self' as ego (with a lower case) and in a similar manner to that of Baruch Spinoza when he uses a capital 'N' with Nature to refer to a "vastly perfect, impersonal thing that includes everything that exists and that necessarily operates based on its own essence" (Angel, 2009, 29).

¹¹⁸ The idea of dissolving boundaries has been another point of contention for ecofeminists, in so far as it has been understood in the sense of not acknowledging difference between 'self' and 'other' and in so doing has been considered as not respecting otherness. See Plumwood, 1993, 178.

can matter more hopeful and just times.¹¹⁹ Identifications with Nature as something that, not only we are a part of, or ‘belong to’, a concept of “identification-as-belonging” (Diehm, 2007), but identifications with Nature as a part of us: an “identification-as-kinship” (Diehm, 2007), as well as identifications with Nature in which “we recognize something of ourselves in the other creature, or something of the other creature in ourselves” (Naess and Haukeland 2008, 114). This last one, and as Diehm points out, is not only about framing others as a part of our sense of self (identification-as-belonging), but also about realizing that others are enough like we are (identification-as-kinship and affinity) so as “to command the same sort of concern and respect that we have for ourselves” (Diehm, 2007, 14). In other words, we are not just part of Nature, Nature is part of us; we are not just organisms interconnected with Nature as something that is out *there*, outside of us, we are in fact riddled through and through with teeming bacteria and chimeric cells here and now; we do not only share some commonalities with Nature, we are of Nature as much as we are of Culture and when we identify with and feel implicated in our vulnerability as biophysical organisms, we act.¹²⁰

We can see a process of Naessian deep ecological identification taking

¹¹⁹ This is an opposite move from Timothy Morton whose clever strategic move is to deny nature all together as “an anthropocentrically scaled concept, designed for humans,” and as he quite artfully considers it “not strictly relevant to thinking about ecology.” He goes on further to state that to not deny nature “might even be, for various reasons, a bit of a disaster. The first way in which it’s a bit of a disaster is that it separates the human from the non-human world by sort of an arbitrary aesthetic screen”. (Morton in interview with Jiménez de Cisneros, 2016).

¹²⁰ The well-known post-humanist ecological thinker Timothy Morton’s strategic conceptual move has been to deny Nature altogether. (Morton, 2009). Yet I would like to assert here that whether we do or don’t identify with nature, our lives and actions nevertheless affect and are affected by the so called nature. Identification with it then seems like a potentially powerful means towards developing mutually supportive and affirmative ecologies. A current example demonstrating the power of feeling implicated, over a factual knowing, being the current Covid-19 pandemic which has at the time of writing this, caused schools, café’s, restaurants, gym’s, concert halls and football stadiums etc.. to close their doors for the unforeseeable future, and how under these new circumstances, one of people’s first reactions has been reflected in the micro bursts of mass hysteria to bulk-buy food and other items with long shelf-lives. It takes exactly a one-second-long glance down the local shop aisles to see yesterday’s fully stacked shelves of pasta and toilet paper glaring back at us empty to realise that people have *felt* implicated in their interconnectedness, interdependency and inter-vulnerability as organisms. And that because people are now *feeling* it, instead of just knowing it as a list of facts somewhere in our frontal lobes where cognition is housed, we now lo-and-behold, are moved into action in numbers that matter.

place in Arahmaiani's aesth-ethic practice of thinking and mattering at the time of Mount Merapi's eruption. In my correspondence with Arahmaiani, when asking her about whether and to what extent there is a relation between Mount Merapi's eruption, the earthquake that followed, and her practice, she gave the following answer: "Yes sure – the earthquake 'wak[es] me up' and I realized that we live on the so called earth. Earth is our home... So we have to seriously take care because our children will live on it and the future earth/home is in our hands!" (Arahmaiani, email correspondence 3.4.2020.) In short, Mount Merapi is Arahmaiani's 'Earthrise' moment. Her words and their sentiment are later also echoed in a letter to Sonam Rinchen after the Yushu earthquake in 2010:

Mankind and nature are not separate entities: nature is not an object to conquer and exploit. Nature is like the body that cannot be separated from the soul; both support and strengthen each other. The soul is not more important or nobler than the body and it can find liberation through the existence of the body by discovering and understanding all the facts in the universe, and then managing and working on them. So it is in the relationship between thoughts and the body, there should be unity of thought and action. Nature and other beings are an integral part of the self. So the I is not standing alone, surveying its surroundings as an object to hold power over. (Arahmaiani, personal letter to Sonam Rinchen, March 2011).

What is significant here for the discussion in this chapter, is Arahmaiani's turning away from the dualistic conception of nature/culture division and her move towards a Naessian deep-ecological relational total-field model, which "dissolves the man-in environment concept" (Naess, 1973, 95). We can observe a move away from the Cartesian mind-body dualism and an articulation towards what critical posthumanists scholars have coined as, 'New materialism', an -ism, which holds a view of an entangled, intra-connected relation between mind and body, psyche and soma. In fact, we can draw a parallel between Arahmaiani's words and those of the American feminist, new materialist theorist of 'agential realism' Karen Barad, who writes that "'We' are not outside observers of the world. Nor are we simply located at particular places *in* the world; rather, we are part *of* the world in its ongoing

170

intra-activity” (2003, p. 828).¹²¹ It is in this moment of time, space, matter and personal and professional history that the ‘Flag Project’, Arahmaiani’s participatory, community based and thus also to some extent site-specific, performance project is conceived.¹²²

I now return back to tracing convergences between Arahmaiani’s daily life and artistic practice. Having returned to Yogyakarta and seeing the destruction and dead bodies on the streets shocks Arahmaiani. She starts working with a community dealing with earthquake destruction. As an artistic response to the situation, she performs the first iteration of the ‘Flag Project’ at the community’s cemetery with the Arabic word ‘akal’ (mind) hand-stitched on to it. (Fig.9). The word ‘akal’ reflects the “important aspect in human potential and capability that we need to understand and use in a “good way”. What this “good way” means to Arahmaiani becomes clarified in her words about the mastery and exploitation of both each other (as people) and environment: “I have to seriously take care for the environment. I am part of nature and not the Master that can control and exploit it! It means also I should care about all the beings - with all kind of problems they have to deal with!” (Arahmaiani, email correspondence 3.4.2020). In Uly Swarz’s video work ‘Arahmaiani: The Flag Project’, (2019), Arahmaiani describes this new aesthetic departure as follows: “The objective of this project is how can we deal with our kind of problems in a creative way. It is community based, but of course it is understood that we have to also give space and respect to the individual community *but* in relation to community” (emphasis hers). It is here, as her environmental and ecological awareness begins to grow and as she begins to collaborate with different communities, that Arahmaiani’s art-working practice moves towards affirmative co-poetic ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’.

Since its inception the ‘Flag Project’ has grown into a collective process in which, within the project’s framework consisting of workshops, discussions and dialogue amongst the participants of each community, a particular keyword often arises which in some way reflects the community’s collective issues, hopes or de-

¹²¹ Amongst scholars who have contributed to the new materialist discourse on mind-body dualism are Rosi Braidotti (2017) and Elisabeth Grosz (1987, 1994).

¹²² The ‘Flag Project’ has been ongoing since the 2006 eruption of Mount Merapi, and has by now been performed, or “implemented” (Arahmaiani, 2012) in Indonesia, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Japan, Thailand, China and Germany. Today the project consists of thirty flags, made by thirty different communities.

sires. “The words represent core values that each group finds important and which they practice as individuals as well as a community” (Lyon, 2019). The words are always written in the community’s own language and become hand-stitched by local seamstresses in Yogyakarta onto large colourful flags symbolising diversity. The flags are then displayed in the public spaces of each community. After each iteration, the project grows by another community and another keyword (fig. 10, 11). For example, after working with a community in Passau, Germany the German words ‘mut’ (courage) and ‘herz’ (heart) were added in 2012 (Lyon, 2019). After working with the community of Tibetan monks from the Gelukpa tradition at the Lab monastery, the Tibetan words ‘om’ and ‘tashi delek’ became added to the project in 2010.¹²³ The growing archive of flags and words then travel around the world and are exhibited in various local public spaces as part of the ‘Flag Project’ performance, carried by members of each new community.¹²⁴

The fundamental desire for affirmative cross-cultural, inter-faith dialogue is still very much visible as a driving force in Arahmaiani’s creative practice here. Effectively at the heart of the ‘Flag Project’ is the empowerment of communities through creative, dialogue based on collective creativity. “Though [Flag Project] started with environmental concern, in practice it [i]s dealing with various issues: social, political, cultural – as well as gender [t]hat interconnect one to another” (Arahmaiani, email correspondence 3.4.2020). In addition to beginning with an ‘environmental awakening’ and the sudden expansion of her ‘self-awareness’ - through the seismic-scale interruption of daily life - towards a Naessian ‘ecological Self’, her artistic process here undergoes a shift towards a collective process that she herself calls an “open art system where the definition of art is expanded as wide as possible so that it might cover various things and have inter-disciplinary characteristics and be able to make breakthroughs within rigid discourses and established values.” (Arahmaiani, 2017). For the next four years after Mount Merapi’s eruption

¹²³ The Tibetan syllable ‘Om’, ‘Ohm’, ‘Aum’ referring to the sacred sound of the Universe and the Tibetan expression ‘Tashi delek’ commonly used as a greeting such as ‘Hello’, ‘Blessings’ and ‘Good Luck’, but also for example as: “May all auspicious signs come to this environment” (Jackson, 2004) from the Tibetan ‘tashi’ (auspicious) and ‘delek’ (fine, well).

¹²⁴ The communities Arahmaiani has worked with in the context of the ‘Flag Project’ up to now spread over Indonesia; Germany; Belgium; Australia; Japan; Singapore and China and include amongst others activists, artists, Indonesian labourers, Tibetan monks and lay-people and an Islamist boarding school in Yogyakarta.

and the Yogyakarta earthquake, Arahmaiani works consistently with different communities in disaster relief areas within the collective, maternal aesthetic framework of the ‘Flag Project’.



Fig. 9. ‘Flag Project’, Yogyakarta. 2010. A local boy carries the project’s first flag with the word ‘akal’ (‘mind’) hand-stitched onto it by local seamstresses. Copyright courtesy of artist.



Fig.10. 'Flag Project', 2019. Sydney. With community of artist and activists. Copyright courtesy of artist.



Fig.11. 'Flag Project', 2011. Pangukrejo community. Indonesia. Video footage Juschi Bannaski, copyright courtesy of artist.

In 2010, Arahmaiani is invited with her 'Flag Project' to take part in the group show: 'Indonesian Contemporary Art' at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Shanghai, when an earthquake in Yushu, a county in the Chinese Qinghai province and the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture west from Shanghai, takes place. Thousands of people are confirmed dead and injured, hundreds are missing and displaced. Arahmaiani feels compelled to help in any way that she can. As her artistic practice and process are now largely based on working together with communities and most often in disaster relief areas, she travels to Yushu. It is in Tibet, through her creative inquiry and collaboration with Buddhist monks on the Tibetan Plateau, that Arahmaiani's feminine-maternal relational aesth-ethics evolve to an environmental, ecological force and attitude.

3. 5. Third Pole: The Regeneration Project and Arahmaiani's Environmental Artivism

Located in the eastern part of the Tibetan Plateau, Yushu is the fourth largest city in the Chinese province of Qinghai, and the epicenter of the 2010 earthquake. Foreigners are not allowed entry into the region and Arahmaiani's Chinese assistant, Li Mu has to inform the airport officials that Arahmaiani is his wife in order for her to gain entry into the territory. In our email correspondence she writes: "Kham area is a very special area. It is the place where the Dalai Lama was born and also known as the 'future of China' as it is very rich in natural resources!! Those from inside can't go outside and those from outside can't go inside!!" (Arahmaiani, email correspondence 29.04.2020, emphasis hers). It quickly becomes clear to Arahmaiani that doing an art project in Yushu is not safe: "The problem for woman in that city during that time was the danger of being harassed by Chinese police and soldier[s]... [a]s they were all men and they come without their wife and they had to stay for a long time" (Arahmaiani, personal correspondence 3.4.2020). For her own safety, she is advised to travel to the remote village of Lab and its monastery out on the Tibetan Plateau. She has reflected her experience of arriving at the Lab' monastery in 'ArtAsiaPacific':

[s]tranded in a tiny remote village, situated around two and a half hours by car from Yushu, which historically was in the Kham region of Tibet but is now part of China's Qinghai Province, from where three of Asia's largest rivers—the Yangtze, the Mekong

and the Yellow River—flow through China and Southeast Asia. I was courteously met there by around 500 Buddhist monks, several Geshe (Tibetan Buddhist “professors”) and lamas. Although they seemed taken aback at first by the unexpected visit of a female Indonesian artist, uninvited and not working for anyone except myself, there was evidently a rapport between us, and since that day we have been collaborating. On my first visit I could not stay there overnight, as the rules prohibit women from doing so, but by my second visit I was invited to live in the monastery. (Arahmaiani, 2012).

The tightly policed access and entry into the Chinese occupied Tibetan autonomous area is reflective of just one of the many political complexities and challenges involved in the Hindu-Kushu-Himalaya mountain belts globally significant environmental study and protection. As the world’s highest and largest plateau, The Tibetan Plateau is often referred to, for its aesthetic qualities, as the ‘Roof of The World’ as well as the ‘Water Tower of Asia’ because of its ecological significance. Glaciologists, befittingly, refer to the region of the Tibetan Plateau and the Hindu-Kush-Himalaya mountain belt’s ice sheet as the earth’s ‘Third Pole’ as it contains the largest number of glaciers and snow after the Arctic and the Antarctic.

What makes this region unique and critically important in global terms is, in the words of Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson the founder of ‘Arctic Circle’, the fact that “together with the Arctic, the Himalayas are the only two ice covered areas in the world where states and people are co-existing with the ice” (Grímsson, 2019).¹²⁵ Whereas in the Arctic there are about 4 million people who are directly affected by the effects of global warming, such as the melting of ice and permafrost for example, the ‘Third Pole’ is the water source of 10 of the world’s largest rivers, including the “Ganges, Brahmaputra, Yellow, Mekong and Indus, whose flow supports at least 1,6 billion people directly – in drinking water, agriculture, hydropower and livelihoods – and many more indirectly” (Vince, 2019). In addition, and according

¹²⁵ ‘Arctic Circle’ is a network of international dialogue and cooperation on the future of the Arctic founded by Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, former president of Iceland; Alice Rogoff, former ‘Alaska Dispatch’ publisher; Kuupik Kleist, former premier of Greenland and partners. <http://www.arcticcircle.org>

to the 'Ecosystem Profile: Mountains of Southwest China' compiled by the critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund in 2000, the Tibetan Plateau's "unique combination of topographic complexity and favourable moisture conditions in the region supports enormous richness of biological diversity" making it a global hotspot in terms of global biodiversity.

Over the last decades, however, global warming has led to a "widespread shrinking of the cryosphere, with mass loss from ice sheets and glaciers." (IPCC, 2019) This has had both direct and indirect effects on the environment and its ecosystems also on the Tibetan Plateau, as the habitats and livelihoods of animals, plants and people have become affected. Although the melting of ice caps on the 'Third Pole' are due to the energy production based on fossil fuels elsewhere in the world, in the light of the area's global ecological significance all acts that foster and nurture ecological balance and fight land desertification locally in this area of high altitude are vital and of great significance.

This is the scene in which Arahmaiani's activist, environmentally and ecologically orienteered, co-laboration with the areas habitants: monks, lay-people, vegetation, bodies of water and river beds comes to blossom. In awe of the region's dramatic natural beauty, whilst simultaneously "sad and disappointed because there was garbage everywhere" (Arahmaiani, 2012), Arahmaiani interviews the monastery's head: Lama Kadhing Rinpoche; the monastery's Abbot Geshe Lharampa Sonam Lobsang and the monk Sonamrinchem with the help of Sonamdawa, an English teacher from the village's school acting as her translator.¹²⁶ Ensuing these conversations "concerning the teaching of Buddha about the natural environment, I mustered the courage to offer suggestions to address the challenges facing the environment around the monastery" (Ibid.).

When I ask Arahmaiani further about these conversations, particularly the existing Buddhist teachings regarding the "natural environment" she adds: "[t]here is no environmental teaching [in Buddhist philosophy] like modern scientific method." (Arahmaiani personal correspondence 16.04.2020). Reflecting back to her first

¹²⁶ A 'Geshe' or 'Geshema' is a Tibetan Buddhist Academic Degree for monks (geshe) and nuns (geshema) deriving from the Tibetan words: 'ge' meaning 'virtuous' and 'she' meaning 'knowledge'. There are altogether four different academic levels of Geshe: Lharam, Tsokram, Rigram and Lingse, consisting of the study of Buddhist philosophical texts. A Lama, from the Tibetan 'bla-ma' ('superior one' or 'heavy with qualities') is a title for a teacher of the concept of 'Dharma' in Tibetan Buddhism. The term Rinpoche 'precious one' is a honorary title given to teacher's, most often recognized as re-incarnations of past great teachers.

encounter with the monks, she writes to me: “When I came there for the first time, there is serious problem in explaining environmental problems as [this] explanation is scientific base[d] and they don’t get it!” (Arahmaiani, personal correspondence 15.04.2016). She continues: That’s why my task [there] is to reinterpret the teaching[s] in this [modern] context... especially within [the] environmental issue context” (Arahmaiani, personal correspondence 16.04.2020). And yet, it seems possible for us to speak of some kind of an ecological philosophy as existing in Buddhism and as demonstrated for example by the Buddhist practice of dedicating each meditation practice for the benefit of all sentient beings; or the Buddhist thought that all sentient beings, since our days as “primordial mush”, have (at least) once been our mothers and vice versa. In fact, in (Mahayana/Vajrayana) Buddhism and as often mentioned for example by the Dalai Lama, the seed of our compassion, is ‘mother’. Beyond traditional gendered bodies and biologically determined faiths, the figure of the ‘mother’ here seems to reflect the practice of generative care for one another in a process of ongoing ‘rebirths’ (Sanskrit *‘punar-bhava’* meaning “re-becoming” or “becoming again.”¹²⁷ It also becomes clear from my correspondence with her, that the responsibility Arahmaiani accepts and carries for the Plateau’s ecological well-being as someone who has managed to gain entry and avoid being interrogated by authorities, is very deep-seated and resolute. She writes: “I have a huge task to work with the Tibetan to save the Plateau from destruction, [b]esides protecting Tibetan and its culture from extinction!” (Arahmaiani, personal correspondence 16.04.2020, emphasis hers). A rich, cross-fertilizing exchange between the monks and Arahmaiani begins. She teaches the monks to understand the environmental problems and challenges effecting the region, helping them to build up practices to deal with these. Simultaneously she begins to study Buddhist philosophy in order to learn about her own Indonesian heritage, as well as to re-interpret these teachings in a modern context. As Arahmaiani develops her relationship with the Plateau and its local inter-species ecologies, the Buddhist philosophical attitudes and practices become enmeshed with her personal philosophy and her aesthetic practice and language visually, symbolically, philosophically, spiritually and ritually as we can see for example in her durational performance and installation piece ‘Memory of Nature’ and by utterances such as: “After hanging

¹²⁷ For literature presenting a variety of differing views on the relationship between Buddhism and ecology, see for example: Harris, 1991, 2000; Chaturman, 1999; Darlington, 1998; De Silva, 1999, to name just a few.

about with Buddhists monks my thinking on gender has changed. I no longer see men and women as opposites. Gender theory, gender anger is too linear for me at this moment... on this level of understanding... each has its function". (Arahmaiani, personal interview, October 2017, Copenhagen).¹²⁸

Arahmaiani's first suggestion to the monks is not that unlike a mother's request to her children. In short, she tells them to clean up all the rubbish after themselves. "I nearly reduced Sonamrinchen to tears from embarrassment. Of course this was not my intention, but I felt compelled to make that place clean, safe and comfortable" (Ibid.). Due to the revered position of monks in the eyes of the Tibetan, the monks, not that unlike children would to their mother: suggest in return that the villagers clean-up instead, but Arahmaiani persists with her initial request: "I had my own argument: the need to awaken individual consciousness and instil a sense of responsibility concerning the environment" (Arahmaiani, personal conversation, September 2012, Amsterdam). She tells me: "if the villagers see the monks pick up garbage, they will copy them" (Arahmaiani, personal conversation, September 2012, Amsterdam). On leaving the monastery at the end of her first visit, the monks are still debating amongst themselves what they should do about this most unusual request. It is culturally unheard of that monks should be collecting rubbish. Having already returned to Indonesia, Arahmaiani receives a text message from Sonamdawa: "It's Ok. We do it!" (Arahmaiani, personal conversation, September 2012, Amsterdam). (Fig. 12).

¹²⁸ Made out of wood, earth, seeds and vegetation, 'Memory of Nature' references the Buddhist Borobudur Temple in Central Java, built in the 9th century and whose design, when viewed from air, reveals itself as a mandala: a geometric configuration representing the universe and different Buddhist teachings. A mandala, Sanskrit for 'circle' is used as a tool to assist in meditation practice. During each exhibition with 'Memory of Nature' Arahmaiani rebuilds the installation to fit the space, then waters and cares for the mandala, inviting audience members to do so too. As the days go by the seeds begin to grow, giving new shape and color to the living mandala.



Fig. 12. Monks of the Lab monastery cleaning up rubbish. Photography Sonam-rinchen, 2010. Copyright courtesy of artist.

One year later the monastery, village and the surrounding creeks are free of garbage. A re-cycling program is implemented and the trees have begun to grow.¹²⁹ Further programs are discussed between Arahmaiani and the monks, including the use of cotton bags and re-usable water bottles instead of single-use plastics, as well as the cultivation of edible plants and the protection of rare plants and animals for the safeguarding of the area's biodiversity. All together, these collaborative creative acts, as performed by Lab's monks, villagers and let's not forget the participating and collaborating vegetation of trees and plants, form the 'Regeneration Project': Arahmaiani's environmentally activist and collaborative art project on collective acts of creativity, care and mutual nurture.



Fig. 13. A Lama conducting tree-planting ritual in Lab, 2014. Photo by Feri Latief. Copyright courtesy of artist.

¹²⁹ By 2013, two years after the initiation of the project, the monks have planted 70.000 trees suited to the high altitude of the plateau, including poplar and pine. By 2015 and after the monks and villagers have planted 230.000 poplar and pine trees, the Chinese government comes to approve and support the project, assigning a special troop of Chinese soldiers for the task. By 2016, and together with Tibetan locals, over one million trees have been planted on the Tibetan Plateau after Arahmaiani's first visit and her suggestions for the monks to tidy-up (2010).

Arahmaiani's pragmatic motivation behind the 'Regeneration Project' is spelled out in her essay 'My Second Life in Tibet' (Arahmaiani, 2012):

This region is crucial for global sustainability, yet 70 percent of the forests here have been felled and the glaciers and permafrost are melting extensively, causing floods and mudslides. If we believe that mutual dependency is a fact of life, that humans are a part of nature, we should bear the responsibility of conservation and sustainability, for future generations. (Arahmaiani, 2012).

However, her personal philosophical conviction leading this new environmental emphasis now on the rise in her aesthetic practice is made discernible in a letter that she writes to Sonamrinchem a year after her first visit to Tibet: "Nature and other beings are an integral part of the self... the I is not standing alone, surveying its surroundings as an object to hold power over" (Arahmaiani, personal letter to Sonam Rinchen, March 2011).

In viewing Arahmaiani's 'environmental activism' on the Tibetan Plateau with these words as my guide, and against the backdrop of her changing aesthetic practice in relation to her interrupted maternal experience, I recognize in the 'Regeneration Project' a kind of a return to the scene of her maternal shocks of becoming and loss; the feminine-maternal expansion of subjectivity into 'severality'; and her subsequent sublimation of maternal carrying in the Real into 'Carriance', as was discussed earlier on in this chapter. In this way, Arahmaiani's 'Regeneration Project' is more than an 'artist' endeavour of environmental re-generation. Like all of her creative work 'Regeneration Project' seems like a conversation with her expanding sense of self and responsibility as a human, woman, mother and an artist. So what else then might be re-generated here?

Deriving from the Latin 'regenerare', the English word 'regeneration' refers to the action or process of 'generating' and the action or process of 'being generated again'. In other words: to grow again after a loss or damage. In 'Regeneration Project', Arahmaiani's environmental collaboration with Buddhist monks on the Tibetan Plateau, the re-generation after damage is clearly and directly observable in the results of the intra- and interspecies collaborative acts as initiated by her. Furthermore, in addressing the regions local, environmental and ecological well-being, the project also contributes to urgent regenerative, environmentalist

efforts on a global scale. However, in order to understand the regenerative process in relation to Arahmaiani's personal maternal aesth-ethics, we need to ask what exactly is being re-generated for her here as a mother? In my attempt to answer this, I go back to the various maternal shocks and ruptures in Arahmaiani's story, re-visiting the various maternal experiences and interruptions as I have identified them through our correspondence and interviews.¹³⁰ I return to the maternal shock and trauma of her interrupted maternal experience when her daughter is taken away; a moment which I have previously in this chapter demonstrated as marking Arahmaiani's point of departure towards a maternal relational aesth-ethics. In this light, we can understand the sentiment: "Nature and other beings are an integral part of the self... the I is not standing alone, surveying its surroundings as an object to hold power over" as a moment of convergence in which Arahmaiani's feminine-maternal subjectivity as a psychologically and corporeally expanded 'Self' moves towards the ecologically expanded, field-like self-awareness of the Naessian 'ecological Self'. The words make tangible the very moment in which her maternal practices (both her corporeal maternal carrying and her symbolic 'Carriance') become realized on an environmental plane and are incorporated into her artistic subjectivity and practice. Her sense of self becomes reconstituted as an 'ecological-Self' and with that, her understanding of her maternity evolves into ecological action. The initial interruption and sacrifice of Arahmaiani's maternal experience in the Real once again negated and her maternal subjectivity symbolically restored and re-generated through an ecologically expanded 'Carriance.' To be very clear, it is not the disruption of Arahmaiani's maternal experience that has activated her maternal ecological aesth-ethics. It is her maternal carrying in the Real and its subsequent sublimation as 'Carriance' that has engendered her maternal ecological aesth-ethics. In other words, we may sacrifice a mother for the sake of perpetuat-

¹³⁰ There is the experience of a 'self' as a continuous autonomous individual (and by extension: as an autonomous, individual artist) and its disruption in pregnancy as her expanding corporeal and psychic awareness of an intimate other began growing inside of her. There is the experience of her feminine-maternal subjectivity of 'severality' (Baraitser, 2009; Ettinger, 1993; Pollock, 2008) being disturbed by the violent and traumatic experience of loss and social injustice (caused by sociocultural power imbalances between feminine and masculine energies) when her daughter Agni is taken away from her. There is the disruption of the continued process and practice of maternal becoming and co-emergence (Ettinger, 2016) through the mundane, daily, ongoing encounters between mother and child, as well as the banal daily interruptions of the mother by her child (and in return the mothers creative maternal acts of hospitality with her intimate other). In other words, a whole array of very different kinds of ruptures and interruptions are present in Arahmaiani's story.

ing the law of the father by (for example) taking her child away, but the psychic imprint and impact of her feminine-maternal carrying in the Real finds other ways to surface into the social-, cultural-, and political weave as I have hoped to show in this chapter with Ettinger's concept of 'Carriance' at work in Arahmaiani's maternal aesth-ethic practice.

3.6. Concluding Remarks

Through my reading and analysis of Arahmaiani's artistic practice and process alongside and in relation to her maternal experiences of becoming and loss; the psychoanalytic concepts of Ettinger's 'feminine-maternal subject' and 'Carriance' intersecting with the Naessian deep-ecological concept of the 'ecological Self', I have enabled new, aesthetic and maternal ecological understandings of Arahmaiani's artistic practice and contributed to the scholarly work on her art, which up to now has mainly focused on issues of gender and social injustices in Indonesia, whilst entirely side-stepping her maternal experience. By listening and allowing space and agency for Arahmaiani's maternal experiences and subjectivity within her art practice, I have traced her encounters of maternal becoming and loss; her maternal subjectivity of expansive 'severality'; her practice of aesth-ethic and symbolic 'carriance' to what I propose as a deep-ecological, deep-maternal self-realisation of an expansive ecological Subjectivity.

However, the initial question that I posed at the start of this chapter still remains unanswered. Has the shift in Arahmaiani's conceptualisation of a 'Self' -from the Western (art educational) idea of the autonomous individual genius towards a more expanded feminine-maternal subjectivity of 'severality' and Naessian ecosophical, interdependent 'ecological-Self' - truly affected the cultural, social and political relations, spaces and imaginaries engendered by Arahmaiani's artistic work and her maternal relational aesth-ethics? And if so, then how? Furthermore, what if anything, can we learn and gain from these relations, spaces and imaginaries enacted and engendered?

In order to answer this question, it is my conviction that we have to identify what these cultural, social and political relations, spaces and imaginaries actually are. In the (post-partum) 'Lingga-Yoni', the 'political space' that the artwork engendered in 1993 as it entered the public, cultural space of an art exhibition, was one which questioned the borders and openness of institutional religious dialogue within the culturally hybrid Indonesian society. Wanting to symbolically restore

balance between masculine and feminine energies in (Indonesian) society, Arahmaiani's 'Lingga-Yoni' indirectly unearthed a social-space of hostility, exile and censorship on further civic discussion on the matter, as Arahmaiani had to leave the country as a result of having created and publicly exhibited this work. By the same token (hostility, exile and censorship), 'Lingga-Yoni' also came to produce lasting cultural and political imaginary of restored, mutually supportive, hospitable balance between opposing forces. In the (post-partum) 'Flag Project', the social-, political- and cultural spaces, relations and imaginaries change depending on each specific community with whom Arahmaiani collaborates. In more general terms, however, these would always and in different ways evolve around the creation of affirmative collective and collaborative worlds and networks. Through its ecological multispecies activism on the permafrost of the Tibetan Plateau, the social-spaces produced by the 'Regeneration Project', in addition to the 'Flag Project', include clean commons, as well as social and political imaginaries depicting more hopeful futures in which environmental health supports local livelihoods and vice versa. Notably this project has also generated an environmental alliance across the political divide between the Chinese government and the Tibetan's living on the Plateau. Lastly, in the 'Memory of Nature', the cultural, social and political relations and imaginaries are enacted in a more abstract and poetic manner. However, the invited audience participation once again speaks to the importance of creative co-laboration; open discussion and hospitable co-existence.

It is now very clear that the shifts in Arahmaiani's conceptualisation of her 'self', and as initiated by her feminine-maternal encounters, have borne a significant role in her artistic practice and thinking from her choices of medium, process, intention and objectives and with these: the worlds that she worlds.

In 2003, Arahmaiani and her daughter Agni met each other for the first time after a 24-year- long separation. Since then they have been re-building their relationship and Agni, now an expert on Chinese classical literature and culture has assisted Arahmaiani in matters of Chinese culture and customs in the context of Arahmaiani's environmental activism in Tibet. Today, Agni works at the Buddhist Borobudur Temple in Yogyakarta, the same temple whose blueprint forms the living mandala in Arahmaiani's artwork 'The Memory of Nature'.

Conclusions

My dissertation has demonstrated maternal interruptions, subjectivity of severality and practices of care as insightful and generative social, political and ecological forces of contemporary cultural production. By foregrounding the maternal encounters of five contemporary mother-artists in relation to their artistic processes and practices, in this dissertation I have shown how their maternal practices of care have come to act as diffractive, that is re-distributive and creative, forces of affective, material, semiotic and discursive worlding practices.

Starting from the sentiment that although “not all mothers are alike” (Donoghue and Haller-Baggesen, 2019), maternal encounters, experience, practice and thinking can contribute to interdisciplinary knowledge production within humanities, arts and society when not hidden away, sacrificed and erased on the altars of patriarchal institutions erected on the rubble of symbolic matricide, epistemic violence against women and the Western masculinist ideal of exemplary personhood as autonomous individual subject. That is to say, maternal subjectivity of severality, alongside a daily practice of care and the relational thinking produced as a result can help to unearth both practical and theoretical insights and approaches for our inter- and intra-species relations and ways of being with the world that we all are a part of. It is this foundational sentiment that has been the guiding attitude throughout my dissertation, acting as a mobilizing force behind queering, critiquing, interrupting and re-theorizing some of the commonplace Western, cultural understandings and institutional ideologies of what the maternal condition and subjectivity is. Yet, although the psychosocial and physiological processes of becoming a mother and entering the institution of motherhood often act as a political awakening of sorts for women, it is not to say that all mothers experience and enact upon the social, political, ethical and ecological potentialities of the maternal. Nor is it to say that differently sexed and gendered bodies cannot and do not. It is to say, however, that traditionally women have had a front row seat as mothers to observe and think with the social, political and ethical potential of daily, continued and committed practices of care from a very particular standpoint of maternal severality and ecological expansiveness. It is also to say that there is a need to acknowledge situated maternal practices and thinking of women as sites of social, political and ecological knowledge production.

My first research question that I set out to answer in this dissertation was: ‘how do maternal interruptions, practices of care and shifts to one’s subjectivity and sense of self come to inform, shape and affect the creative practices and modes of artistic production?’ To answer this question, I looked at a number of maternal interruptions. These varied from mundane, daily maternal interruptions as experienced by three white, Western, contemporary mother-artists to the more politically oriented political awakening of a Middle Eastern, Israeli-American, Ashkenazi Jewish contemporary filmmaker and mother-artist, and finally to the very interrupted maternal experience of a contemporary Indonesian, Muslim woman and artist. With each of my five case-studies, I identified significant and fundamental changes in the artist’s creative processes of cultural production as a result of their turning toward their maternal subjectivity of severality as a mode of doing art. These included changes in their artistic mediums (Zielinska, Richter, Arahmaiani), methods (all of the mother-artists), subject matter (Zielinska, Kessel, Richter, Arahmaiani) and attitude to art’s societal role (all of the mother-artists), as well as changes in their socio-economic conditions (all of the mother-artists), and the material locations (all of the mother-artists) in which they practiced their art working. Each of these mother-artist’s artistic processes were interrupted, affected, informed and reshaped physically, mentally, materially, in terms of their artistic methods, medium and subject matter. Moreover, their changed artistic processes were now doing something different and new. In Chapter 1, the maternal relational aesth-ethic processes of Zielinska, Kessel and Stewart engendered a relational aesthetic different from the masculine ‘Relational Aesthetics’ dominating contemporary art. In Chapter 2, the maternal relational aesth-ethic process of Richter engendered social, political and cultural critique and dissent, and disrupted deep-seated patriarchal cultural narratives about mothers and motherhood in Israel. In Chapter 3, Arahmaiani’s maternal relational aesth-ethic process engendered an environmentally and ecologically orienteered practice of environmental re-generation and maternal ecological aesth-ethics.

This brings me to my second research question: ‘what kind of ethical-, aesthetic-, and affective relations, imaginaries and spaces (both material and symbolic) are being generated as a result of these (maternal) shifts and interruptions to the artist’s subjectivity and her changed sense of self?’ With each of the mother-artists figuring in this dissertation, it became evident that their altered creative processes now made visible an aesth-ethics of relationality and care, generating what I have in this

dissertation termed ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’, which is an ethico-aesthetic attitude, approach and methodology to art-making, in which the embodied and situated maternal practices of continued responsiveness, care, nurture and preservative love interrupt and diffract with the artistic process. Their particular ‘maternal relational aesth-ethics’ then engendering a number of expansive, co-creative, collective, collaborative and community building, activist, environmental and ecology focused, future-orientated, multi-species, responsive, affirmative, non-sacrificial and microchimeric, porous and interconnected relations, spaces and imaginaries. In Chapter One, the maternal relational aesth-ethic processes of Zielinska, Kessel and Stewart engendered a relational aesthetic different from the masculine ‘Relational Aesthetics’ dominating contemporary art. In Chapter Two, the maternal relational aesth-ethic process of Richter engendered social, political and cultural critique and dissent, and disrupted deep-seated patriarchal cultural narratives about mothers and motherhood in Israel. In Chapter Three, Arahmaiani’s maternal relational aesth-ethic process engendered an environmentally and ecologically orientated practice of environmental re-generation and maternal ecological aesth-ethics.

My third research question asked ‘how do the engendered relations, imaginaries and spaces in turn interrupt and challenge the deep-seated Western, masculine, cultural narratives of both: the mother as a *persona non grata* in public life and the artist as an autonomous genius? And furthermore, in what ways do these mother-artists maternal practices, thinking and attitudes interrupt, inform and re-imagine cultural production both within and beyond contemporary art? As I have shown in this dissertation, in each of the five case-studies, the mother-artists have given central place to their maternal thinking, practice and subjectivity of severality as a mode of doing in their artistic practices by integrating their daily maternal practices of care into their daily artistic processes. As such not only have they made themselves as mother-artists visible as cultural producers, but through their maternal relational aesth-ethic action they have also put the figure of the mother right to the centre field of contemporary art. The aesth-ethic relations, imaginaries and spaces engendered as a result have produced the mother as a social, political and environmental agent, interrupting longstanding and pervasive patriarchal socio-cultural systems of power where the mother, if not sacrificed, remains a *persona non grata* in public life. Similarly, in terms of modernity’s gold standard of the individual and autonomous genius artist “always in full possession of his individuality” (Fournel in Shaya, 2004, 270), the maternal relational aesth-ethic action and imaginaries

engendered by the five mother-artists in my dissertation have all worked against the notion of the artists as a sole genius. Instead, their processes and imaginaries model and evoke another, in my opinion a better suited, image of the artist for the compromised times we live in. That is the image of the Chimaera. To be more precise, the image of ‘fetomaternal microchimerism’.

Deriving its name from the ancient Greek *Chimaera*, the mythological, three-headed, fire breathing, hybrid she-monster with a lion’s head at the front, a goat in the middle and a dragon at the back, the term ‘microchimerism’ describes the common phenomenon of a number of genetically distinct cells passing from the fetus, through the placenta, into the maternal circulation (Bianchi et al. 1996). Within most human pregnancies fetal cells can be detected within the maternal circulation not only during pregnancy and shortly afterwards but up to several decades post-partum (Ibid.). In fact, fetal cells have been found to persist in the maternal circulation even in cases where the pregnancy was terminated at an early stage (Peterson et al. 2013) and it is not uncommon that fetal cells from previous pregnancies can be found in siblings born years apart through what is called ‘trans-maternal passage’ of cells (Drieselhuys and Goulmy, 2013). Thus, during pregnancy, not only maternal cells pass into the fetus, but also fetal cells pass into the maternal circulation and it is this two-way, nonlinear and non-reciprocal movement of living cells crossing back and forth through the placenta; from one entity to the other and becoming part of the ‘other’ that is called ‘fetal microchimerism’. As such this phenomenon destabilizes the dualist notion of there being two distinct entities separated by the placenta and instead opens up a possibility for a more porous notion of the self. It is in a similar way that the artistic processes of the-mother-artists in this dissertation destabilize and interrupt modernity’s notion of the artist as a sole individual genius, instead engendering an ecology of practices in which both the maternal and the aesthetic can co-exist and co-create together.

My research design in this dissertation has consisted of an inductive ‘bottom-up’ approach to thinking through the complex relationship between anecdote and theory. This has included a process of simultaneous and circular data collection and analysis, and has comprised of qualitative and interdisciplinary, mixed research methods, including participatory action research, semi-structured interviews and reflective listening, alongside narrative, visual, cultural and discourse analysis. This methodological design enabled me to firstly, assign value and agency to the lived and embodied experiences of my research participants. Secondly, it enabled

a richness of situated and extensive maternal experiences and thinking to rise to the fore, which otherwise would have remained hidden and silent. And finally, it enabled me to relinquish universality and instead favour my research participant's own production of local and situated knowledges. As a feminist researcher this has been important to me as a means to practice a feminist politics of location and difference. And this is particularly so as women and mothers are still far too often faced with a situation in which in order to actually "take their place in the Western public world, [they] have to present themselves as autonomous individuals, 'honorary men' (Mellor 2000, 113).

The original theoretical intervention that I have made in this dissertation is to think of mothering and art-making together as an interdisciplinary practice of social, cultural, political and environmental action and change. This intervention echoes my initial sentiment and belief in the importance of the contributions that mothers as practitioners and thinkers can make to our social and political lives and brings it into a dialogue with another foundational conviction that I as a researcher have held close to my heart throughout this research process. Art has societal power; it can enable us to see and critically query the worlds that we world in new, unexpected and innovative ways. Maternal engagements with care are sites of social, political and ecological knowledge production. Together these two simple beliefs have formed the path along which I have traversed in my aim to shed light on some of the ways that contemporary mother-artists challenge and interrupt the dominant hegemony of normative social, cultural, political narratives and traditions.

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Curriculum Vitae

Deirdre M. Donoghue was born in Pirkkala, Finland on June 12, 1971. She is a visual and performance artist; founding director of the international 'm/other voices foundation for art, research, theory, dialogue and community involvement' (2014); co-organizer of the two Mothernists conferences: 'The Mothernists' (2015) and 'The Mothernists 2: Who Cares for the 21st Century?' (2017); a mother and a birth doula based in The Netherlands. She holds a diploma in Dramatic Arts from The Commedia School in Copenhagen, Denmark, (1995); BA Hons Degree in Photography from the Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland (2003); Master's Degree in fine Arts from the Plymouth University, Plymouth, England, (2007); and a Postgraduate Diploma in Fine Arts from The Piet Zwart Institute in The Netherlands, (2007). In addition, she has studied European and American Film History at the Advanced Technology College in Dublin, Ireland. (1996-1997). In September 2016, she started her PhD trajectory at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry at Utrecht University under the supervision of Prof. dr. Rosemarie Buikema and dr. Kathrin Thiele. She has taught critical feminist perspectives for art students, worked as an external examiner and thesis reader for BA and MA -level students across Fine Art, Design and Visual Culture programs in both Finland and The Netherlands, 2017-2019. In her artistic practice she most often sets up social scenarios and specifically framed human encounters where multiple relations can be set into motion, through which the production of new knowledge systems via cross-disciplinary approach becomes mobilized. Her work has been exhibited internationally. Recent publications include: 'Entre Nous: Moments, Holes and Stuff' in Loveless, Natalie S. (ed.) *New Maternalisms Redux*; University of Alberta Department of Art and Design. (2018) and 'In Search of The Maternal: Towards Microchimeric Bodies and Maternal Relational Aesth-Ethics' in Epp Buller, Rachel and Reeves Charles (eds.) *Inappropriate Bodies: Art, Design and Maternity*; Demeter Press. (2018) and 'Conversation with my Mother' in *Motherhood and Creative Practice: Maternal Structures in Creative Work*. London: Routledge. (eds.), Elena Marchevska and Valerie Walkerdine. (2020).

