

REPRESENTING MATERNITY IN PHILOSOPHY

BY

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ABSTRACT: REPRESENTING MATERNITY IN PHILOSOPHY

Few living philosophers would conjecture that women cannot be philosophers; however, the classical notion that those who “generate life” cannot “create ideas” continues to inform philosophical notions of maternity. It is unfair to require exclusion on the basis of sex; however, the inconvenient possibility is that Aristotle’s notion of maternity promotes skepticism, not about the political status of women, but about the merits of political “equality” as an over-arching, regulative ideal which applies to all relationships. As Arendt notes, while the opposition of two worlds so long associated with the feminine and the masculine risks consolidating sexist ideologies, the possibly greater risk occurs when philosophers personalize metaphysics. Arendt sidesteps some of these thornier issues propagated by Aristotle’s notion of “maternity” by replacing “maternity” with “natality.” “Natality” gestures towards the infant’s promise to be unpredictable; in doing so, the concept highlights how infants complicate our attempts to extrapolate identity from biological circumstance. Like Arendt, Klein uses the context of reproductive biology to highlight the manner in which ambiguity permeates memory and identity but, unlike Arendt, encourages her readers to analogize from maternity rather than natality. By widening the scope of her lens of analysis to include maternity, Klein destabilizes the philosophical habit of regarding birth from the point of view of *he who is born but does not bear*. Kristeva’s “subject in process” is this same trajectory fully realized. Destabilizing the boundary between the creation of ideas and the generation of life permits philosophy to return to its conceptual progenitors, the physical and the metaphysical, with the legitimate hope of reproducing a most fertile offspring: s/he who generates life *and* creates ideas.

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INTRODUCTION

NEGATING BIRTH AND THE ORIGINS OF PHILOSOPHY

Introducing the Problematic

In modern philosophy, the predominant philosophical prejudice is that “mothering” prevents “philosophizing.” Recall Kant or Nietzsche who, like Aristotle, assume that mothers who create ideas are either inhuman or hermaphroditic. Plato strongly opposes such transparently contingent, politically pernicious sexual prejudice. He terms sexual equality a pragmatic issue and suggests that, once women are freed from the demands of earthly necessity she, like any man, is fully capable of creating ideas and, once she is so free, twice the number of people are available to serve the needs of the State. Plato’s political views on sexual equality are remarkable because they are progressive, but they are also remarkable because they are premised on the repudiation of the maternity. Plato’s dialogue the *Theatetus* articulates the determining metaphysical opposition between mothering and philosophizing, not only for his own work, but for generations of philosophers to follow. The perplexing deduction is that, philosophically speaking, sexual equality and sexual inequality both appear to be premised on the opposition of the generation of life to the creation of ideas; in other words, both egalitarian and in-egalitarian political regimes appear to be premised on the repudiation of maternity.

Plato conceptualizes the concrete, political objective of sexual equality by challenging the widely accepted belief that mothers share a bond with their children that is incommensurate to the bond she shares with citizens or strangers. Plato likens the mother-child bond to a lure which traps women in to ‘earthly necessity.’ On the basis of this perceived trap, Plato demonstrates little hesitation in recommending that infants be removed from their mothers at birth. In his mind, removing children from their mothers at birth is neither a crime, nor a moral wrong it is the requisite for a harmonious state. Plato locates the source of conflict in the state

inside earthly immanence. Earthly immanence threatens to disrupt Plato's harmonious state in more ways than one; earthly immanence requires that humans labour to satiate their appetites, but it also requires that humans negotiate the temptations of physical pleasures. In Plato's view, these pleasures are the dual temptress and wardens of the smooth functioning of the state. Without the demands made by earthly necessity, humans would cease to exist and so too would his state. The ambiguity proper to earthly immanence seems to embody it self in women and the children they produce. Women and children are the future of the state, but, in their very existence, they threaten to create conflict between their suitors and their partners. Rather than prohibit sexual reproduction or allowing the standard conventions of monogamy and marriage to dictate its parameters, Plato proposes that women be held "in common" to all men and the state. The children produced from these same couplings are themselves held in common to all men and the state. Plato regulates earthly immanence by regulating women and children.

While fending off opposition and protest on the one hand, Plato must tend to an equally menacing ontological threat on the other: the mother-child "bond." The "bond" is intangible but threatens to be more impervious than the sinewy cord it replaces. The very act of speaking of the bond poses a serious threat to the sexual-equality agenda he favors. The bond is invisible, but tangible, private, but publicly acknowledged, unwritten, but requires deciphering. The perceived bond between a mother and her child is profoundly ambiguous. Plato is resolute. In speaking of the bond and the necessity of severing it he rarely, if ever, demonstrates ambivalence; instead, he proceeds with hubris.

In the utopist treaty the *Republic*, Plato prescribes transitioning the custody of guardian children to the State at birth in the following manner:

They will provide for their nurture, and will bring the mothers to the fold when they are full of milk, taking the greatest possible care that no mother recognizes her own child; and other wet-nurses may be engaged if more are required. Care will also be taken that the process of suckling shall not be protracted too long; and the mothers will have no getting up at night or other trouble, but will hand over this sort of thing to the nurses and attendants. . .¹

Plato insists that, once the umbilical cord is cut, infants should be transferred to their guardians. If a mother stays too long with her infant, the broken “cord” morphs into a “bond” whose strength matches that of the sinewy artery which used to form the physical, uterine link between mother and child. Plato regards time as his worst enemy. The more the bond is allowed to develop, the more likely mother is to be dragged into the depths of earthly necessity. Once she is dragged to these depths, her ability to create genuine ideas is irrevocably impaired; however, Plato does not consider all children to be a threat to all mothers; instead, he only regards a mother’s *own* child to be a threat to her potential human freedom. Instead, Plato recommends that infants be removed from their mothers just long enough that they cannot tell their own from another. Once a mother is no longer to distinguish her child from another, she is still a mother and thus still able to transfer her maternal attitude and behaviors to other children. Once the mother is able to regard every child as if it were her own, Plato considers her ready to return to servicing the state. The liberated woman continues to be a “mother,” never to her own child, but to every child as if it were her own. In this process, the labour of earthly necessity associated with rearing children is neatly parceled off to those who demonstrate little, if no ability, for creating ideas.

Plato’s utopist state requires that mothers mother every child as if it were her own because his utopia requires the full prohibition of private ownership, including the private ownership of children or mating pairs.² Plato predicts that preventing the private ownership of mating pairs and infants will limit sexual competition and a potent source of conflict. Ultimately, when the conventions of monogamous sex are dissolved and women are liberated from the sexual differences which prevented their full participation in society, men and women will differ only in

¹ Plato, *The Republic*, Book V, pages 222-224.

² Ibid, see especially pages 452-457

their in/ability to generate life. Once difference is diminished to its bare parts, Plato imagines the state will resemble an instrument from which a sound will resonate akin to the harmony produced by the variations established in harmony. He terms this diminished, harmonious difference between the sexes a “close and universal proximity.”³ Plato is one of the first philosophers to imagine sexual equality. His import to contemporary, progressive political policy should not be overlooked; however, his narrow notion of political equality requires that mothers renounce their child, embrace every child as if it their own, mandatory polygamy and promiscuity, and servitude to the state.

Aristotle does not object to Plato’s utopist vision on the basis that it augments or diminishes the wrongful oppression and exploitation of women or children; rather, Aristotle predicts that state-sanctioned promiscuity, polygamy and adoption will generate more rather than less conflict. The adoption of children is only of interest to Aristotle to the extent that it sometimes better serves children. Unlike Plato, Aristotle believes that adoption no more changes the bond between a mother and her child than if they had they been in close proximity. Further to his point, Aristotle adds that adopting a child no more removes a mother of her full obligations than sole guardianship.

The difference between a good mother and others is not whether or not she adopts her child, but whether or not she adopts her child’s interests as her own.⁴ Aristotle describes this virtuous mother in how

they love them and do not seek to be loved in return (if they cannot have both), but seem to be satisfied if they see them prospering; and they themselves love their children even if these owing to their ignorance give them nothing of a mother’s due⁵

³ *Republic*, 157

⁴ See Aristotle’s discussion of adoption in the *Laws* and the *Nichomean Ethics*, Book VII in which he claims that adoption helps to strengthen and deepen our love for others in community, all the while insisting that it must emanate first from the family.

⁵ *Ibid*, 161

The claim that mothers “give without wanting in return” becomes a key premise for Aristotle. According to Aristotle, mothers should neither expect something in return *from* their children nor should mothers expect something in return *for* their child; instead, she is meant to remain grateful for the experience of mothering itself; without it, he considers her neither human nor animal. Aristotle’s rendering of the family mirrors conservative, modern notions of private property, the family, and the state. As Oliver notes in *Subjectivities without Subjects*, while Aristotle’s rendering of the “happy family” continues to hold persuasive power, the reality is that, when women are confined to space of the domestic by social cultural norms and economic and political realities, the ideal rendering is but a screen to an oppressive, exploitative, and morally wrong social reality but it does not necessarily follow that her liberation from the space of the domestic is emancipation realized

Plato prescribes adoption to benefit the state and the consequence is sexual equality. Aristotle prescribes adoption to benefit the state and the consequence is sexual inequality. In their respective notions of private and public property, mothers are deemed providers rather than proprietors. In Plato’s utopia, women who mother must make accommodations to re-secure her status as an equal, but these concessions require mandatory adoption, sexual promiscuity, and servitude to the State. In Aristotle’s state, women who mother must choose to mother and renounce her political equality or choose to mother and renounce her humanity. Mother’s gift of giving life, thrust on her by the conventions of the social and the determination of the biological, throws her into a sea of servitude more determining than indentured slavery and expels her outside the catchments of citizenship and firmly into the confines of domesticity. For Aristotle and Plato, maternity renders women “unequal.”

The Birth of Modernity and Modern Birth

Despite early modernity’s increasingly inclusive notions of political equality, it was not always the case that modern notions of political equality included women and or women who

mothered. Women who mothered outside the conventions of paternal-sanctioned law bore a misfortune second only to their children. As Kant notes, the bastard child

is thus born beyond the pale or constitutional protection of the Law. Such a child is introduced, as it were, like prohibited goods, into the Commonwealth, as it has no legal right to existence in this way, its destruction might also be ignored; nor can the shame of the mother when her unmarried confinement is known, be removed by any legal ordinance.⁶

When Kant describes the situation of women and children under the domain of law, he reveals that if her child fails to meet the standards of the law, her child is deemed indistinguishable from defective livestock. Her political powers to contest such a determination are non-existent. Her infant is protected by nothing less and nothing more than the contingencies of conventions determined entirely by the opposite sex. Despite her or her infant's possible potential personhood, the fact that she partakes in the "generation of life" trumps any claims to ethical autonomy, citizenship, or genius. Kant concludes that women who mother are subject *to* the law rather than subjects *of* the law. His analysis of the situation is descriptive rather than prescriptive and yet, like many of his contemporaries, the duty to separate the *is* from the *ought* is neglected in the case of women. As I maintain in my chapter on Kant, he makes no secret of his unenlightened prejudices towards those who mother.

In contemporary times, the trend continues. Disproportionately high rates of poverty amongst women-headed households, both in the West and abroad, are testimony to our collective failure to actualize full sexual equality. From the point of view of the poor, some might argue that even the most basic human rights have not yet been realized.⁷ The moral imperative is to devote resources and imagination towards advancing a notion of "maternity" beyond one which requires mothers to renounce either her maternity or her equality. In this regard, Plato's notion of political

⁶ *the Philosophy of Right*, "The Right of Punishing and of Pardoning" 169

⁷ See the government of Canada's 2007 report of *Human Trafficking and Slavery*, <http://gvnet.com/humantrafficking/Canada.htm>

equality can seem preferable to Aristotle's because it requires full sexual equality and permits and fosters the political advancement of women; however, Plato maintains that women should be afforded the opportunity for equality *despite* her ability to generate life. The repudiation of the generation of life remains a corner stone of sexual equality policy. Plato's prescription for overcoming maternity exacts a high cost including: sexual servitude to men, full obedience to the state and the state regulated, mandatory adoption of all children.

Women Reading the Ancients

Arguments intended to demonstrate a natural inequality between the sexes are easily refuted by living mothers, past and present, who have regularly demonstrated their ability to create genuine ideas. Since ancient times, mothers have served as political participants, organizers, and leaders, contributed to the formal and informal process of law, created works of genius, and exemplified ethical virtue time and again. The force of empirical fact outweighs any un-founded and out-dated notions of sex-inequality. The case for sexual equality is emboldened even further if the role of Plato in the history of philosophy is acknowledged. As has already been discussed, Plato imagines sexual equality without needing to be persuaded by empirical fact. The influence of Plato in the history of philosophy is indisputable. It can be assumed that any modern philosopher contemplating sexual equality unfamiliar with the empirical situation in which mothers create ideas is at least familiar with Plato's argument for sexual equality. Therefore, it can be assumed that any living, Western philosopher who does not support sexual equality has chosen to take this position, not because he lacks good reason or empirical examples, but for some other reason.

The general assumption regarding the incommensurability between motherhood and sexual, political equality is analogous to the general assumption held by modernity regarding earthly immanence and human freedom described by Arendt in the *Human Condition*. As Arendt makes evident, "maternity" is an integral component of earthly immanence and, like its

component, maternity is overcome at the peril of humanity. She suggests that humanity fares better when it affirms, rather than negates, the distinction between two worlds. Her insight is shared by a series of contemporary thinkers, including Klein and Kristeva, who write after the birth of modern times and its attendant forms of evil and cruelty. Their shared concern is that “political equality” masquerades a hateful, violent, distrust of the ambiguity which lies at the heart of the juncture between earthly immanence and human freedom and that this same hateful, violent distrust is akin to fascism itself. The consensus in this group is that the task is to imagine a notion of the political freedom which is not premised on the value of full equality.

Arendt leads the way. In *the Human Condition*, she claims that the Platonic, modern ideal of sexual equality fails to affirm the manner in which earthly immanence permeates identity.⁸ Arendt maintains that Plato’s notion of maternal identity in which women are required to hand over her nascent infant to another and commence work is politically possible, plausible and even preferable to a situation in which women’s destiny is determined by earthly immanence; however, she does not agree that sexual equality will be accomplished by repudiating earthly immanence. Repudiating earthly immanence fails to acknowledge the context of labour, work and action which springs from a community of others living and thinking in tandem with the demands of the earth. Arendt postulates that our identity springs from the context in which each one of us was once an infant affirming earthly necessity in its wants and needs while transcending these same demands in its promise to be unpredictable. The give and take of getting and wanting and transcending determining needs is the essence not of humans, but of humanity. Humanity is, at its core, communal. For Arendt, “we” are not an entity which is formed or regulated by a state; rather, “we” are the outcome of the community of others who receive infants. Accordingly, Plato’s notion of sexual equality imagines a communalist utopia without also imagining the

⁸ *The Human Condition*, pages 46-57. See especially her sections on Plato and the *viva* contemplate and her counter-concept of *vita active*, what she claims to be the true essence of human freedom.

reality of community. Arendt warns that we deny the truth of interdependence and community at our peril.

Arendt reverses Plato's narrative account of birth as an increasing distance from the womb of generation and likens our first birth to a template upon which our second birth is made possible. Any changes to the conventions surrounding maternity will require more than a simple command from the top down: remove infant from mother! Maternity is a vehicle tied to a trop with a cord. If Arendt is to be believed, we break this cord at the demise of those persons, communities and the state which appear and disappear in the immanence of Mother Earth. Arendt develops her argument while simultaneously remaining prescient and prudent about the risks of being misinterpreted by her feminist critics. Arendt is sentient to and anticipates many of the likely challenges to her notion of political freedom. She is well aware that feminists will oppose a notion of equality that precludes the possibility of sexual equality. The reasons for her position and my own reasons for defending her position on sexual equality will be developed at length in this dissertation, especially in chapter three. For now, rather than focus on her pre-emptive strikes against such criticism, it is just as prudent to highlight her pre-active creative conceptualization which is intended to speak to the concerns expressed by her critics, namely that human freedom would preclude women from identifying as women or mothers in the political domain.

Arendt postulates the concept of "natality" over the concept of "maternity."⁹ "Maternity" has the benefit of associating identity with embodied inter-relatedness, but it tends to trigger associations of the conservative rendering of required domestic service and political sex-inequality. "Natality" associates identity with embodied inter-relatedness and tends to trigger associations of our infantile exposure and dependency on others, and our nameless and unpredictable future. Arendt can conceptualize a notion of feminine identity which touches on the scene of birth but, by emphasizing the natal rather than the maternal, she accentuates that mothers,

⁹ *The Human Condition*, 9 Note Arendt's affirmation of Augustine's *City of God* which she interprets as: "the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt {...} only because the newcomer is capable of acting."

like all others, are born and thus unpredictable, free and singular. Mothers generate life and create ideas. Nothing should preclude mothers, or any others, from being fully human and thus enjoying the task of labouring the earth, the demands and rewards of work, and the promise of political freedom.

When Arendt turns her attention to the maternal situation specifically, she reminds us that in the past and in the present and more than likely in the future, reproduction is highly politicized because States depend on predictable demographics for their economies. Arendt explains the propensity for constructing essentialist notions of maternity, not in terms of the history of philosophy, but in terms of the function of maternity in the production of families and states. From within this context, she challenges us to imagine “mothers” as distinct from their social and cultural function as reproducers of life. She concludes that the promise of equality for mothers will not be contemporaneous with the introduction of accessible birth control. (Forced abortion and sterilization *and* forced maternity are both devices used by repressive states). Mothers are subject to the social and legal mores which surround the production of human life, but they are also the subjects who speak and act in a domain in which the social and legal mores which surround the production of human life are constituted. The ethical, social and political demands which come with the birth of an infant are not resolved by “technology” but by a spectrum of discourses and practices which directly involve women, mothers and others. Arendt sets the state for a political imagination in which mothers and all others are agents. The catch, perhaps predictably, is that her agency will be premised on her repudiating her own maternity. Arendt makes negating the identity conferred by earthly immanence a prerequisite to human freedom.

Arendt, like Plato, insists that women who wish to enter the domain of political freedom leave their maternal identities behind. If there is an alternative, neither Klein, nor Kristeva, nor Arendt make mention. Instead, Klein claims that the repudiation of maternity is as old as culture itself. In her estimation, the task is not to overcome the repudiation of maternity;

rather, the task is to be more honest about the role of repudiation in the formation of identity. The crucial distinction is not whether or not the repudiation of maternity is required for the formation of identity; instead, the crucial distinction is in how repudiation is accomplished. When repudiation is real, a tragic human history is the inevitable outcome. Klein invites us to explore and understand and develop any insight into the real repudiation of real women. Without such an undertaking, the result is predictable: more violence against women. By willingly risking such an undertaking into that fine line between violence/criminality and creativity/intelligence, we willingly risk to alter the course of history, and with it, a world in which those who generate life will be encouraged to create ideas. The unlikely revelation will be that women are not mothers. Those who believe otherwise have not quite grasped the insight which lies behind the juncture we have until now termed “generation” and “creation.” The insight is an invitation to explore a “universal” philosophy should not refuse. If Klein and Kristeva are to be believed, we are all of us mothers.

Amongst Klein’s psychoanalytic contemporaries, the consensus is that violence against women can only be understood by deconstructing the symbolic which favors the repudiation of maternity. In this symbolic, “mothers” tend to be deemed a non-entity or a threat to philosophical notions of unity, non-contradiction and autonomy while simultaneously rendering her a trope for philosophical notions of everything philosophy is *not* including the body and sexuality generally speaking. Deconstructing the symbol of the mother in discourses which privilege a masculine ontology makes evident that “mothers” are so often made to stand in as a living symbol that she is regularly confused for the symbol itself. To the extent that philosophy is complicit in the process of confusing mothers for the symbol she is thought to embody, philosophy is complicit in violence against women in all of its complexity, especially the experience of ambivalence and its pair, the metaphysical phenomenon, ambiguity.

Philosophy is right to worry that our existence is founded on tenuous ground. Ambiguity does and should inspire ambivalence. Ambiguity is the potential home of moral

uncertainty and indifference. If there is anything certain about our origin it is the indeterminable quality which pervades identity but, as Klein suggests, the problem is not with ambiguity but with the fear and distrust of ambiguity. Klein's relative comfort level with ambiguity and ambivalence allows her to travel in previously unexplored spaces of thinking and living. Despite her sometimes offensive method and manners, she helps evolve philosophical discourse in a direction it was incapable of doing on its own. Klein is able to navigate this course by analogizing metaphysics to sexuality.

Klein analogizes metaphysical encounters with identity and maternity to the encounters she negotiates with children and their attempt to understand "sexuality." In her experience, censorship of "sexuality" leads to forms of stupidity and destruction while a controlled dispensing of truth about sexuality leads to forms of autonomy and creativity. When the western cannon of philosophy, which names Plato and Aristotle as its forefathers and Kant and as its progenitors, repudiates maternity the unintended consequence is not the love of wisdom, but unintended thoughtlessness and destruction. Klein urges us to interpret philosophy's representation of birth in a different lens. Klein accomplishes this task by taking child's play seriously.

Child's play is important for children and for adults because, according to Klein, what the child understands in a way that adults might not is that his self-understanding is inextricably linked to how he interprets his (sexual) origin. Child's play is the uncensored, narrated, dialogue with the story of our exiting earthly immanence and our entrance into human freedom. It happens that Klein is most interested in how a child understands the event of his parents conceiving him; however, the interest is equally applicable to the manner in which we understand our philosophical origins. According to Klein, what our parents did and do "behind closed doors" is a euphemism for the desire to know what cannot be seen or known or had. The less capable we are of contending with "sexual" insecurities, the more likely we are to develop into a psychotic. Klein equates psychosis with the inability to think and the inability to think the inability to cope with ambiguity. The more at ease we are with this space of ambiguity and

ambivalence the more likely we are to be able to think. The more likely we are able to think, the more likely we are to imagine “mothers” in a manner that captures the complexities inherent to the relationship of the generation of life to the creation of ideas.

Klein’s analysis leads her to conclude that all of us, long before we had a say in the matter, longed for and hated our mothers. Mothers stand before their infants as omnipotent beings. Their bodies determine our survival, our happiness and, eventually, our possible escape. The knowledge of how it is that we got what we want and got away lays buried in us like a dead secret. In order to become a fully thinking and thoughtful adult we have to learn how to satisfy our desires while simultaneously suppressing our desires. The process of negotiating our wanting and getting and not wanting and not getting requires a symbolic. A symbolic allows us to become somewhat autonomous in the sense that it permits us adults to find a way of destroying the body birthed us in our dependent, deaf and dumb and blind, infancy while satisfying a cannibalistic appetite for life itself. As Klein notes, when this process backfires, the creative interpretation of the journey towards autonomy is all too literal. In its literal version, it is violent, hateful and stupid. In its creative version, the transition from infancy into adulthood requires converting, displacing and creating mother’s body in a loving, intelligent, but not always happy manner. I venture to claim that this symbolic is, in some sense, metaphysical.

The difference between negating and translating the symbolic is the difference which amounts to everything. The very possibility of knowing, loving, and creating depends on this difference. As Klein claims, “symbolism comes to be the foundation of all fantasy and sublimation but, more than that, it is the basis of the subject’s relation to the outside world and to reality in general.”¹⁰ She adds that the recuperation and resolution in the symbolic is the trial upon which “the degree of success with which the subject passes through this phase will depend on the extent to which he can subsequently acquire an external world corresponding to reality.”¹¹ When

¹⁰ *Love, Guilt and Reparation*, 210

¹¹ *Love, Guilt and Reparation*, 221

Klein brings to light the work of the “symbol,” she brings to light the relevance of her psychoanalytic work to the philosophical impasse on maternity, generation and creation. For this same reason, my project culminates in Klein’s anticipation of Kristeva.

Restating the Problematic; Confusing Repudiation for Censorship

When I began this project, I did not anticipate the consistency with which the canonical writers of Western philosophy would insist that the generation of life is antithetical to the creation of ideas. The following chapters are my attempt to reveal the stakes of repudiating maternity and to gesture towards a productive juncture for re-thinking meta-physically about maternity and the attitudes and dispositions we call “mothering.” The ability to imagine beyond the physical and to garner meaning from this journey is the essence of philosophy. If in fact maternity is a physical experience, there is then as much as now no self-intuitive reason why philosophers should not think metaphysically about mothers and this includes mothers themselves. The work of psychoanalysis makes clear the risks of dissociating the generation of life from the creation of ideas. In the present, the memory of our mothers and its import to the feminist(s) project(s) include the experience of mothering.

It is a historical contingency that mother’s bodies, and thus women, have been confused with the maternal function. It is, perhaps, an equally contingent historical feature that the maternal function has for so long been confused for something besides that which is infused with ethical, political and philosophical relevance. We all are oppressed, violated, and denigrated as a direct result of how we imagine, represent and understand our relation to our mothers. Within the confines of the discourse of philosophy, there is an imperative to imagine the future which includes the creation of life proceeding from she who also generates life.

In a genius all her own, Kristeva illuminates the paradoxes which lie at the heart of thinking through maternity and the memory of mother which lies in all of us. Her shared hope is

that a commitment to understanding the journey of child's play and its corollaries the symbolic and identity will allow entry into previously explored terrain. Her relevance to my own efforts to deconstruct philosophy's concepts of generation and creation rests squarely on her evolving concept of the "maternal" which complicates essentialist notions of sex and gender and rigid, dysfunctional distinctions between generation and creation. I conclude my dissertation by suggesting that Kristeva advances a philosophically sound and robust notion of identity that is premised on the recognition rather than the *ensorship* of the repudiation of the maternal.

CHAPTER I

ARISTOTLE'S MOTHER: FAILED AND BOTCHED MALE OR THE EXEMPLAR OF VIRTUE?

Abstract: Aristotle has long been accused of justifying his sexually in-egalitarian politics on the basis of his seemingly sexist biology and metaphysics. The assumption is that Aristotle's biology and metaphysics promotes a world view in which the feminine is associated with all things inferior and the masculine with all things superior; however, Aristotle does not map his politics onto his biology and metaphysics with the careful deliberation and political agenda he is so often accused. In fact, in many cases Aristotle's sexist notions are intuited more than they are reasoned. In those cases in which Aristotle consciously upholds a world view in which women are not equal to men, what Plato terms "close and universal proximity," Aristotle reasons that women cannot and should not be equal to men because, so long as they become the mothers they ought to be, they should adopt the needs of others as their own; because they adopt the needs of others as their own, they are not equal to others. Aristotle's "mothers" count as less than/more than one. On the surface, Plato's sexually egalitarian society appears more just but, on deeper analysis, the cost of this same justice can seem high, if not unjust to the extent that it requires sexual promiscuity and mandatory adoption in service of the State. Arendt and Kristeva argue that Aristotle's notion of maternity, rather than consolidate misogynist discourses and practices, actually helps problematizes and radicalize an even more hateful, violent and ignorant ideological practice: sexual equality!

“Failed and Botched Males”; Confusing Bios for an Ethos of Vice

A number of contemporary feminists contend that Aristotle’s philosophy is prejudiced against women who mother.¹² Aristotle’s stipulation that females are “failed and botched males” is the most frequently referenced evidence of his apparently sexist philosophy.¹³ This same literature assumes that Aristotle equates “failed and botched males” with “females,” the “female principle,” “mothers” and “women.” The assumption continues that Aristotle renders mothers synonymous to the female principle, ‘an excessive materiality without form which lacks the male principle’s formative, regulating, ideational power’ and that, on this same basis, Aristotle requires her exclusion on the basis of the generative function she seems to embody.

Minorities of his readers disagree; they argue that Aristotle’s philosophy goes beyond colloquial representations of women as mothers and does more to trouble than it does to consolidate colloquial representations of the female and male principle. They note that Aristotle’s rendering of the female principle accentuates the manner in which the female principle is rendered an *actively* passive principle rather than as a merely passive principle opposed to the male active principle.¹⁴ They urge us to distinguish his ethics and biology from his politics and

¹²See Lynda Lange, “Woman is Not a Rational Animal,” and Elizabeth Spelman’s “Whose Who In the Polis,” and Susan Okin Moller’s “*Women in Western Political Thought*” in *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle*.

¹³See Christine Battersby’s “Introduction” in *Gender and Genius* and *The Phenomenal Woman*, John Protevi, “Given Time Given Life,” *Man and World*, Vol. 42, 1997 and Kelly Oliver who claims that for Aristotle what the male contributes to generation is the form and efficient cause, while the female contributes the material: (Aristotle 1984, 729.a.10). The male principle contributes the soul while the female principle contributes the less perfect body (738.b.25). On this account, the maternal body provides merely the fertile soil within which the male seed implants and grows. The female principle is passive while the male principle is active” (FV, 16).

¹⁴See John Protevi’s “Given Time and The Gift of Life” *Man and World*, 30: 65E82, 1997. For commentary on generation and the mother in the work of Derrida see Geoff Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, 204, 208 and Drusilla Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction and the Law* 89, 92 and *The Philosophy of the Limit* 75, 79

turn our attention to Aristotle's reluctant admittance of the male's principle dependence on the female principle's "imperfection" to sustain the creation of life.

In either instance, the assumption is that Aristotle's biological description of "failed and botched males" serves, intentionally or unintentionally, as a foundation for his political and ethical writings. While the majority conclude that Aristotle's apparent conflation of the male and female principles with men and women are the basis of his misogynist politics, and the minority of feminists conclude that Aristotle's rendering of the male and female principle illuminates a reticent but possibly revolutionary ethic, both interpretations assume that Aristotle's rendering of the female and male generative force fits squarely on (intended or unintended) political and ethical prescriptions. As Deslauriers demonstrates, while the phrase "failed and botched males" has long been associated with the position that "sex differences not only explain but justify differences in political power between men and women, "this assumption is unwarranted because Aristotle regularly "*assumes rather than argues for that claim.*"¹⁵

To the novice reader, the eagerness with which Aristotle's sympathetic and antipathetic readers attach so much significance to the catch-phrase "failed and botched males" is perplexing only because of its relative obscurity in the overall text. The phrase appears only once in *On the Generation of Animals* and, even after several close readings, was hard to locate. Its phrase is barely visible in its context: a lengthy, animated text which, on surface, appears noticeably reticent on the topic of ethics or politics. After several close readings, the only explicitly evaluative claim I could find resembled a medical prescription more than it did an ethical or political one. The passage recommends that, in order to facilitate pregnancy, privileged human females should, at least temporarily, opt for the lifestyle of animals and servants over the sedentary life of luxury to which they are accustomed because

¹⁵ "Sex and Essence in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and *Biology*," 140, [my emphasis]

a difference is also found between man and the other animals in respect of gestation, for animals are in better bodily condition most of the time, whereas in most women gestation is attended with discomfort. Their way of life is partly responsible for this, for being sedentary they are full of more residual matter; among nations where the women live a laborious life gestation is not equally conspicuous and those who are accustomed to work bear children easily both there and elsewhere; for work consumes the residual matter, but those who are sedentary have a great deal of it in them because not only is there no monthly discharge during pregnancy but also they do no work; therefore their travail is painful. But work exercises them so that they can hold their breath, upon which depends the ease or difficulty of child-birth. These circumstances then, as we have said, contribute to cause the difference between women and the other animals in this state.¹⁶

Not only are Aristotle's medical prescriptions in agreement with contemporary, reliable medical studies in obstetrics and gynecology, they are striking for their resolute commitment to empirical studies rather than social norms and customs. Aristotle makes no effort to soften the tone of his prescriptions nor does his conviction that women, no matter what their social-status, are animals like any others. Given his commitment to empirical science, we are hard pressed to claim that either his tone or his prescription is sexist or overly normative. However, this does not mean that the charges of sexism against the banner "failed and botched males" are unwarranted. There are several reasons why Aristotle's biological work might provoke his contemporary readers to charge him with sexism. These charges are best understood by placing them in the larger context of his indisputably chauvinistic writings in the *Politics*.

In *The Politics*, Aristotle regularly assumes that men are suited for membership in the political domain and women for membership in the private domain. The fact that women are relegated to the private domain because she gestates, births, and nurses young life is a fact of social, cultural and political norms and values and, if Aristotle understands this contingency, it is not apparent. Claiming that women are not suited for political thought and action because she has been refused membership in the political domain is unfair, uninformed, and contrary to reason. It need only be mentioned that, despite the tendency to exclude men from the domain of the private and women from the domain of the public, men and women, past and present, have demonstrated

¹⁶ *On the Generation of Animals*, Book 4, 6

sufficient competence and incompetence in the work associated with private and public life. When a person or group who directly benefits from either men or women's exclusion prescribes their exclusion, suspicions of conflict of interest are well warranted. A crucial distinction must be made between claiming that mothering is antithetical to demands of political thought and action, claiming that women should mother, and claiming that women who mother should be prevented from doing politics.

There are no true or fair grounds for relegating women to the private domain; however, it is less clear if there are true or fair grounds for objecting to relegating the labour of mothering to the private domain. Philosophers and others have long agreed that the relationship of a mother to her child is, at minimum, significantly dissimilar to the relationship she has to others. The dispositions and duties proper to her relationship to her child are, on many levels, significantly different, and even sometimes incompatible to the dispositions and duties associated with economic or civic life; to treat her child as a contracting agent or a competitor, would not only cause harm and suffering for the child, it would likely be an indicator of a mother's psychosis. The problem is when the relevant features of her unique relationship to her child are used to premise her exclusion from political life; women, like any others, can adopt multiple roles in multiple domains. Aristotle rarely, if ever, acknowledges this possibility, despite the fact that it must have been a reality of the times. He makes no distinction between the uniqueness of the maternal relation and his reasons for excluding this unique relationship from political equality, and hence, human freedom. The burden lies on Aristotle's advocates to make a tenable distinction.

In the case of Arendt and Kristeva, the risks associated with confusing and conflating the dispositions and behaviors proper to one domain with another is accomplished by giving historical reference. It is the contention of Arendt, Kristeva, and even Klein, that there is something "fascistic" about confusing one domain with the other. They believe that Aristotle anticipates something of this concern in his critique of Plato's utopia, long before the reality of modern fascism. (It is unfortunate that he confused the women who mother with the notion of

maternity; but it is our possible fortune to unpack this error). Aristotle's imagines a scenario in which the generation of life, and by extension, embodied experience, informs and permeates ideation, and by extension judgment, genius and wisdom, and again, by extension, family, social and political life. For this same reason, Aristotle once more deserves our sustained attention.

Aristotle pioneers an imaginary topography of a dynamic of "private" and "public" which will ultimately augment, rather than diminish a philosophy which imagines women as mothers *and* agents in the political domain. For the likes of Arendt, Cavarero and Kristeva, our relation to our mothers is a metaphor that we will never fully comprehend, but which informs our identity in a profound sense. To imagine mothers and the people who they also happen to be in complex, nuanced renderings is to imagine a more complex, nuanced, and hence, intelligent and evolving notion of identity. From the beginning, mothers are the interface between our existence and our total flourishing. Our dependence on "mother" for life is, as they claim, the template for the possibility of speech and action. Our first birth permits our second birth as "citizens." Protecting the first relation between dependent and care giver from the demands of the political thought and action and distinguishing it from the relation between equal citizens which is constituted by speech and action in the network of social relation is crucial to protecting a tenable notion of political freedom and action. The "political" -that space of contestation and realization of something essentially human-is best served not by including or excluding the relation between dependent and care giver, but by allowing it to appear as a difference which is a dynamic distinction rather than a dichotomy.

By refusing to oppose human freedom with earthly immanence, Aristotle's philosophy abstains from hard and fast dichotomies and intertwines the social, political relationship with embodied, affective experience. As Kristeva describes, Aristotle is "that other philosopher of the 'modes of life' (bio) and "one of the most coherent and least contradictory of the great thinkers" because he is the first to think of an "authority' based not upon the notion of social domination,

but rather upon that of a “nature’ made of “differences.””¹⁷ At best, Aristotle’s rendering of earthly immanence and maternity does not require a severing from our mother’s body, nor does it require that mothers mother their own children.¹⁸ Instead, it allows for the possibility of imagining our first birth as the onset of ourselves as earthly beginnings in an embrace which, ideally, accompanies us as another self towards the possibility of becoming human and free. For Aristotle, it is from within, and not against, the event of generation that we develop into beings who can bear ourselves into the space of thought and action.

The constant challenge will be to imagine a dynamic of first and second birth which does not require mothers to thrust her infant into the space of appearance and remain behind. In Aristotle’s estimation, once a woman gives birth, she chooses to be a mother and remain behind, or, she chooses to be no one at all, neither human nor animal. In contradistinction, Plato imagines the possibility of women entering the domain of the public but only by shedding their role as mothers. Plato figures women in “close and universal proximity” to men once they have been stripped of the inclination to mother what they generate.¹⁹ In this scenario, women are “in common” not *to* every man.²⁰ The feminist literature which targets Aristotle’s phrase “females are failed and botched males” not only misrepresents *On the Generation of Animals*, it overshadows Aristotle’s nuanced rendering of the relation between our first relation to mother in the private domain and our second relation to others in the political domain. In summary, it is wrong to claim

¹⁷Hannah Arendt, 26

¹⁸Aristotle writes, “Some mothers give their children away to be brought up by others, and though they know them and feel affection for them they do not seek to receive affection in return, if they cannot have it both ways. It seems to be sufficient to them to see their children prosper and to feel affection for them, even if the children do not render their mother her due, because they do not know her. Since then, friendship consists in giving rather than in receiving affection, and since we praise those who love their friends, the giving of affection seems to constitute the proper virtue of friends.” *Nicomachean Ethics*, 219.

¹⁹Plato writes, “once the very best and choicest couplings have generated superior offspring, the offspring will be taken away. Every means possible will be used to prevent mothers from recognizing their children and children their parents.” (460c). *Republic*

²⁰Plato writes, “That all these women shall be wives in common for all these men. That none of them shall live as individuals with any of the men. That children in turn shall belong to all of them. That no parent shall know its own child, no child its own parent,” (457 d), *Republic*

that Aristotle harbors hatred towards what gestates, labours, and nurses infant life. Aristotle imagines a space of earthly dependence, inequality and unconditional love which is distinct from the space of political freedom. If we are able to distinguish women from the mothers they become, there is much more to be salvaged than if we require that women renounce the mothers they once were.

Hot-house Politics: The Flower Pot Theory of Reproduction

My interpretation is in the minority. Aristotle's rendering of the female principle and its proximity to his rendering of maternity is overly problematic for most of his feminist-critics. (His women readers who resolutely do *not* identify as feminists are quite sympathetic to his rendering of generation, the female and the maternal). The over-riding concern seems to hinge on the phrase "failed and botched males" in *On the Generation of Animals*. One of the more out-spoken thinkers on this matter is Battersby. She claims Aristotle considers *women*

...failed and botched males who, through lack of heat during conception and the subsequent period of fetal growth, failed to develop their full potential as members of that species. Thus, although *women* are human (and thus have the minimal characteristics, or essence, of a human), they are also lacking: they are not its end or final cause.'²¹

Oliver comes to a similar conclusion. She writes that Aristotle provides

... one of the first known theories of epigenesis of the embryo. He maintained that the embryo developed [. . .] as a result of the combination of male and female principles: [. . .] The male principle contributes the soul while the female principle contributes the less perfect body (738.b.25). The male element creates the individual or person within the maternal body. On this account, the maternal body provides merely the fertile soil within which the male seed implants and grows. The female principle is passive while the male principle is active.²²

Battersby and Oliver term Aristotle's theory the "flower pot theory" of sexual reproduction. For both Battersby and Oliver, Aristotle's concept equates women with unformed

²¹See Battersby's introduction to *Gender and Genius*, 29, and Kelly Oliver's introduction to *Subjectivities without Subjects; Abject Fathers and Desiring Mothers*.

²²*Subjectivities Without Subjects; Abject Fathers and Desiring Mothers* 135

matter and passivity and equates men with formative ideas and activity. This interpretation relies on a series of assumptions which are extraneous to *On the Generation of Animals*. I am not suggesting that interpretation, of any text, should be restricted to the front and back cover. I am not suggesting that such an interpretation would be possible, as modern hermeneutics and deconstruction makes clear. Instead, my point is intended to be far simpler and more narrow- although I concede that it risks being too narrow. My argument is that, in *On the Generation of Animals*, does not equate men and women with the male and female principle. In fact, there is not one instance in *On the Generation of Animals* in which Aristotle interchanges the terms male and female with men and women. I quote at length, but the notion is rather simple. Aristotle writes:

Male and female differ in their essence by each having a separate ability or faculty, and anatomically by certain parts; essentially the male is that which is able to generate in another, as said above; the female is that which is able to generate in itself and out of which comes into being the offspring previously existing in the parent. And since they are differentiated by an ability or faculty and by their function, and since instruments or organs are needed for all functioning, and since the bodily parts are the instruments or organs to serve the faculties, it follows that certain parts must exist for union of parents and production of offspring. And these must differ from each other, so that consequently the male will differ from the female. (For even though we speak of the animal as a whole as male or female, yet really it is not male or female in virtue of the whole of itself, but only in virtue of a certain faculty and a certain part- just as with the part used for sight or locomotion- which part is also plain to sense-perception.)²³

Aristotle's description of male and female is striking for its succinct, distilled, and nearly mechanical rendering of sex identity. It is only later and in other texts that Aristotle broadens and deepens his rendering to include human sexuality and gendered identity. But, from within the narrow confines of this text, I am hard pressed to identify a sexist tone. While science is a discourse amongst others and there is no disputing that science can be sexist, there is good science and bad science. There is a general consensus that good science works hard to minimize metaphorical ambiguity with the aim of capturing the clearest, most reliable patterns and

²³*On the Generation of Animals* . Book 2, 179

predictions about the natural world. In this sense, I find it all the more remarkable that a thinker writing long before the advent of the dawn of the current authority of scientific discourse could give an account of male and female sex identity that is so current and cogent.

Aristotle's aim is to distinguish, amongst a broad range of species, the features which determine sexual reproduction to be possible. He concludes that the male sex has one set of reproductive organs and the female sex has another. In most species, if not all species, sexual *reproduction* (as opposed to asexual reproduction) occurs when male and females use their sexual organs to communicate genetic information. A successful communication yields an offspring which is made of equal parts of its ancestors. Typically, this offspring develops in the female's body (with the seahorse and perhaps other animals being an exception to the rule). Typically, if this offspring is a mammal, and in some cases, a bird a reptile or an insect, it will be nurtured by its mother until it is ready for an independent existence. If the flower pot theory is somehow sexist, Battersby and Oliver's are reticent about their knowledge of another non-sexist and scientifically accurate account. The more accurate interpretation seems to be that the hidden accusation behind naming this account the "flower pot theory" relies on the assumption that there is something anti-feminist in claiming that mother's bodies are passively acting matter.

This equation can seem anti-feminist if it is assumed that passively acting matter is being equated to the person who is a woman and mother. However agreeable it may or may not be, *On the Generation of Animals* Aristotle abstains from any such equation. Instead, while he claims that her reproductive organs render her possibly capable of generating life, he does not claim that generating life renders females mothers. As I will demonstrate in a moment, Aristotle's description of mothering and childbirth is anything but guaranteed by the reproductive function she performs. Instead, in *On the Generation of Animals* Aristotle recommends that human mothers are best served if they adopt a passive attitude toward gestating and bearing life. By this he means that giving birth requires women to relinquish their control and allow the event to unfold: staying relaxed and calm is a practice that is advocated by birth technicians all over the

world, again, because it is in strong agreement with empirical evidence. Aristotle claims that, if humans are inclined to be the humans they are, and less inclined to be the animals they also are, they are more likely to feel pain and less likely to complete a successful birth. He must make such a suggestion because humans are not naturally animal-like. As such, women who mother are neither likely to behave like the animals they also are, and even less likely to behave like the matter that determines their sex identity. For Aristotle, only those women who take on the exception burden of ethical mothering life are, in Aristotle's estimation, possibly human; unfortunately, the tendency is still to assume that Aristotle did not appreciate the difference between getting pregnant, giving birth, and being a mother.

Failed and Botched Males; Confusing Bios for an Ethos of Virtue

In Protevi's "Given Time and The Gift of Life," he fashions a meta-ethic from within the framework of Aristotle's *On the Generation of Animals* and *the Metaphysics*.²⁴ First, he attempts to demonstrate that the impossible *ideal* is implicit in generation as "the paternal-filial passage recaptured in the spermatic motions of the father."²⁵ He claims that this *ideal* cannot be willed because if females only produced the likeness of males, then there would be no more females, and thus, no more males. Protevi concludes that Aristotle's "female principle" is a reluctant admittance of her necessary imperfection, which is also her random, but guaranteed prevalence over the male's otherwise superior spermatic principle. This apparent ideal, which contains its own necessary counter ideal, is, in Protevi's analysis, not only the possibility of generation, but proper to a meta-ethic of life itself. The mother's (superior) inferior matter sustains the circumference of the circle is evidence to Protevi of some deeper testimony to an ethic implicit in paternity and maternity, an indeterminate place where, on Protevi's rendering, the generation of

²⁴ SEE ALSO *TIME AND EXTERIORITY: ARISTOTLE, HEIDEGGER, DERRIDA, VOLUME 632*, 187

life could not be distinguished from an ethic of a passive giving of life. Protevi claims that because “life is preserved in the paternal-filial passage through the medium of matter of mother” *On the Generation of Animals* requires a “normative operation.”²⁶ Ultimately, Protevi’s poetic license causes him to get lost in the true poesies of Aristotle’s work. Aristotle does not collapse generation with giving or generation with love. Rather, Aristotle will claim-though neither in *the Metaphysics* or *On the Generation of Animals* that birth prepares the way for a possibly virtuous way of living our familial and political lives.

For Aristotle, the animal generates life, but only the human mother can love the life she generates. She does not give life. Life is generated. If she is a virtuous mother, she gives the gift of sustaining life, and, eventually, she gives the gift of no longer sustaining life, but thought and action requires the sustaining of life. Human mothers, once pregnant, can treat their bodies with respect or not but there is nothing they can do about the fact that life flourishes when it is nourishes, and perishes when it is starved. Only human mothers can “give” the continuation of life. Even this is partly out of her control because only human mothers could *not give* life. Human mothers are rational when she gives and receives: she does so because she has regulated her appetites and desires, she does so because she has cultivated habits and virtues or vices and she does so mindful of the scope of her social and political relation and obligations. When mother gives, she gives as a self regulating, social person with a memory of the experience of giving and receiving and gaining and losing. When she generates life, she does so because her physical body has ovaries and breasts, because a man has penetrated her with sperm, and because she has eaten, slept, and gestated, succumbed to contractions, and survived labour. For Aristotle, she is not a mother until she embraces these physical events and loves and cares for her offspring. When Protevi claims that *On the Generation of Animals* requires “the affirmation of excessive demands of justice,” without first establishing adequate grounds for reading it as a normative, rather than a

²⁶“Given Time and the Gift of Life” 62, 70

biological text, he fails to make way for distinguishing merely animal life from human life. Without seeming to be trite, we are left to wonder if his reading of *On the Generation of Animals* would, on his own conditions, require a “normative operation” for the actions of a goat or a goldfish.²⁷

Battersby disagrees. She notes that it is ironic that some feminists “assert that there can be no essence of a female” because they “are unwittingly repeating the Aristotelian doctrine that links essence to some one defining property of a species that is common to all members of that species, but that cannot be found in females” and make “femaleness as a deformation a conceptual necessity.”²⁸ But Protevi is not arguing that femaleness as a deformation is a conceptual necessity, rather, he is arguing that deformation is a conceptual necessity in a metaphysic that includes perfection. Both miss the more important weakness which relies on the assumption that Aristotle’s biological, metaphysical, political and ethical writings share some essential form and content which permits his readers to make positive or negative inferences about men and women, and fathers and mothers. Aristotle’s ethical and political works are highly focused on the economy of the gift, but *On the Generation of Animals* is a relief from the philosophical obsession with the social, normative and political domain proper to humanity.

On the Generation of Animals is full of pages on the hypozoma, the viviparous and the oviparous, polydactylous quadrupeds, she-asses and catamenia, superfluous matter, seminal residue and hair that goes on growing after death.²⁹ If there is a normative claim to be found, and I’m only able to find one, it has to be Aristotle’s plain-spoken discouragement of the tendency for sedentary practices during pregnancy. He encourages her to be more like the other animals and working women. Aristotle places human generators alongside other animals. Aristotle reflects on

²⁷ “Give Time, Given Life,” 62, 79

²⁸ *Gender and Genius; Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*, 28-29, 49

²⁹ *On the Generation of Animals* Book 8, 125

the biological in an attempt to understand the possible logic dynamic of opposing forces which is the generation of life. On this basis, Kristeva gives Aristotle the title of “that other philosopher of the “modes of life’ (bio) and “one of the most coherent and least contradictory of the great thinkers” because he is the first to think of an “authority’ based not upon the notion of social domination, but rather upon that of a “nature’ made of “differences’.”³⁰ The thought of “nature made of differences’ will be an important trope for our departure into the works of Arendt and Klein. This nature made of differences is the thought of hylomorphism.

Hylomorphism and Hypervigilance

Hylomorphism is the thought of forming matter and enmattering form. Hylomorphism describes both the generative coupling analogous to sexual reproduction and the creative process analogous to artistic production. Aristotle likens the offspring of the male and female to the marriage of an idea in the soul of the artisan branded and molded in media.³¹ In natural production, the form is found in the parents where “the begetter is the same in kind as the begotten, not one in number but one in form for man begets man.”³² Aristotle is not claiming that the father’s identity fully determines the child’s identity. Aristotle’s claim is narrow. Aristotle is claiming that the coupling of man and woman produces a human offspring. In both instances, the form preexists both; in both instances, the form is the outcome of dynamic process involving opposition; thus, in both instances, reproduction is not achieved through simple repetition, but through a complex marriage of repetition and difference. Every child conceived by two humans will be human, but some children will resemble their mother, others their father and others their aunt or an uncle. The child is a composite of his or her genetic inheritance just as the work of art

³⁰*Hannah Arendt*, 26

³¹*Metaphysics* 1032

³²*Ibid*, 1033

is a marriage of ideas and medium.³³ Hylomorphism describes the process of forming compounds by describing the formation of matter and the enmattering of form. In claiming that an essence is sustained during the process of marrying sameness with difference, Aristotle is demarcating a limit point between a legitimate production and a monstrosity. A similar debate circulates in the scientific community as it delineates the boundaries between normal and abnormal weather patterns, safe and unsafe levels of pollutants, or the genetic mutation. Aristotle's claim is not that man, or the male principle, creates humans, but that humans generate humans and not pigs or cows or flies. When and if one entity creates a wholly other entity, it is generally a cause of discussion and, in most cases, a cause of concern. For Aristotle, the form is not only what brings the compound into being; instead, the form is what determines the name of the compound. As has been argued since, matter without form would be unintelligible, form without matter non-existent.

The "form" is not a proper name. Proper names are the jurisdiction of families and states and cultures and community and thus firmly outside the parameters of *On the Generation of Animals*. Aristotle's sole but crucial claim is that what is produced is a house or a man and not bricks or flesh. Despite the relative neutral and generally intuitive strengths of Aristotle's metaphysics, feminist thinkers tend to be critical of "hylomorphism." The concern is that feminine is opposed to masculine; masculinity is aligned with form, active power, and maleness, and femininity with matter, passive (possibly passive activity) and femaleness; last, this ontology mirrors the ideology which legitimates sexual inequality, oppression and violence against women then, as now. Once these premises are accepted, hylomorphism seems like a guilty ally that renders maleness and femaleness unequal partners in Aristotle's metaphysics.

Lynda Lange adopts this position in "Woman Is Not a Rational Animal," when she claims that Aristotle's theory of sex difference is implicated in every piece of Aristotle's

³³ibid, 1033

metaphysical jargon. She concludes that “it is not at all clear that it [Aristotle's theory of sex difference] can simply be cut away without any reflection on the status of the rest of the philosophy.”³⁴ Elizabeth Spelman seconds Lange’s position by claiming that Aristotle’s politicized metaphysics is reflected in his theory of soul, which, in turn, is used to justify the subordination of women in the *Politics*. Susan Okin likewise agrees and claims that Aristotle's functionalist theory of form was devised by Aristotle to legitimate the political status quo in Athens, especially slavery and the inequality of women. If these scholars are right, then Aristotle's theories are intrinsically sexist and have little if any potential value for feminists beyond the project of learning about the ways in which the philosophical tradition has devalued women. Once again, the assumption is that Aristotle “flower pot theory of reproduction” renders women’s bodies, like women themselves, nothing but the vessel for man’s formative seed. The consensus amongst these critics is that hylomorphism is the conceptual framework that underlies most of Aristotle’s metaphysics and physics which privileges maleness in the biological, metaphysical, political and ethical domain. This would be a cogent argument if it was not for one logical outcome.

If Aristotle's gender associations were intrinsic to his concepts of matter (female) and form (male), and every composite substance is a complex of matter and form, then each substance would be a hermaphrodite. Whatever plausibility gender associations with matter and form might have with regard to animals is lost entirely when we consider artifacts like shoes and beds. More bizarre still, if Aristotle’s politics was founded on his metaphysics and physics, it could hardly found the chauvinistic aristocracy proper to *the Politics*. In fact, it might be a world that better resembles our contemporary, post-modern, cosmos. If intrinsic gender associations with matter and form are incompatible with Aristotle's theory of hylomorphism, and extrinsic gender associations are compatible with that theory, then we must opt for the consistent interpretation.

³⁴See Lynda Lange, “Woman is Not a Rational Animal,” *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle* and Susan Okin Moller’s *Women in Western Political Thought*.

Mothering is a Mother's Virtue

For Aristotle, the animal is female when her womb gestates eggs and her breasts produce milk. The animal is male mammal when he has neither a womb nor breasts that produce milk. For Aristotle, her ability to gestate, birth and nurse young life is a necessary, but not sufficient, criteria for being a “mother” in the fullest sense. The true mother must contend with the female principle and the miraculous and mundane experience of being the one who “generates life” but she must also do so in a manner that only a human is able. The hylomorphic is relevant to her thinking, acting person because it hinges on what it is to know, what it is to make decisions in the context of the social and political, and what it is to love wisdom and kin. The hylomorphic is also relevant to her because she will birth, nurse, and in most cases, nurture her infant. To the extent that women gestates, births, and nurses life, she is immanent to the pulse of generative life and the active-passivity typified by our earthly existence. The experience of pregnancy, labour and early infancy augments many women’s sensitivity to their material bodies-if only by making her feel nauseous, tired, cranky or sensitive. It is impossible to describe the process of generating life as non-physical experience, just as it is impossible to describe mothering as a purely biological process. “Mothering” is the absolute conjunction of biological and human. Aristotle does not assume that a woman’s experience of generating life renders her a “mother.” Instead, Aristotle maintains that “mothering” is a virtue in the sense that it is something which she must choose to do. A woman aborts her fetus, and ceases to be a “mother,” a woman miscarries, and ceases to be a “mother,” a woman gestates life, but cannot love her offspring, and ceases to be a “mother.” Becoming a mother resists oversimplified biological determinism but becoming a mother also resists an oversimplified rendering of choice.

A woman who becomes a mother evolves into an identity. This identity is ripe with the ambivalence and contradictions proper to undergoing a physical event that, in itself, demands an ethical decision. Without relying on restricted or narrow notions of rationality, Aristotle is able to articulate a tenable distinction between humans and d others animals. Aristotle articulates an ethic

in which the physical experiences associated with generating life must be managed with a self awareness that keeps us on a steady course in the midst of the inclinations of the ‘here and now.’ For Aristotle, being ethical requires the capacity to moderate and overcome our earthly instincts and inclinations, but it also requires tapping into these same resources when the situation demands. The human is differently animal because it can envision multiple courses of action and choose the one that is or is not in accord with a concept of the good. It is for this reason that ethics is concerned with the praiseworthy (virtue) or the blameworthy (vice). It is also for this reason that humans, unlike other animals, can generate life while also choosing to embrace, or not, the demands of parenting. Aristotle considers the human who generates life but who chooses not to parent inhuman; he also considers the human who generates life but who chooses not to parent ‘in-animal.’ The human who failed to accept that his thoughts and actions were more than animal and less than perfectly rational is, in Aristotle’s estimation, inhuman.

For Aristotle, all persons have the power to think and act. The power to think and act is dictated by the constantly shifting parameters formed by the amalgamation of character, experience, and context. Our power is not ‘thing’ which we reach in and access like a weapon or a tool; our power is the effect of well established “habits.” In turn, our habits help establish the power we need to cultivate dispositions for thinking and acting in one way rather than another. In every instance, our community of mentors and others bear a strong influence on our habit of thinking and acting in one way rather than another. The virtuous person is never simply “virtuous,” the virtuous person strives, develops, and alternately fails and succeeds to demonstrate virtue in the context of his character, community and situation. His success and failure hinges on his ability to develop a passive potentiality; his success and failure does not refer directly to his choices or overt behaviors, but to our decision to adopt an attitude towards the unknown and the unpredictable. This ability to adapt is what Aristotle terms an “inter alia.”³⁵

³⁵ See Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, especially sections 1046, 1047 and 1048

“Inter alia” is the result of someone learning how to suffer “pathos.”³⁶ For Aristotle, virtue (and vice) is the outcome of cultivated potentialities.

Aristotle stipulates a notion of *maternal virtue* that is commensurate, but not equivalent to, his more general notion of virtue. In his rendering, the woman who becomes a mother sits at a crossroads. The woman who mothers can behave like an animal and permit mere instinct to dictate her choices and behaviors. The woman who mothers can also behave as if she is not a mother at all. In either case, Aristotle deems her to be governed by vice rather than virtue. In both cases, she exemplifies an extreme so intense that she falls outside the spectrum of human. The mother who affirms the permeation of animal and who integrates this same instinct into the cultural norms and values of her community and politic is a woman who will be most likely to bring her infant from the world of earthly necessity into the world of human freedom. Her infant is most likely to survive physically and survive and flourish in all that is meta-physical. In this sense, Aristotle’s notion of maternal identity affirms a concept of a self that cannot be separated from its various attachments including the physical and the meta-physical. In this regard, Aristotle affirms that women are capable of the kind of reasoning required for virtue. Contrary to what might be expected by feminist-minded readers, Aristotle frequently suggests that women’s unique intimacy with the complexity of navigating the demands of earthly necessity and its other, human ideation, culture and community, are uniquely situated to experience, and thus master the judgment required for virtue—a value he rates quite highly, if not most high. The catch is that her unique ability is also, in Aristotle’s rendering, her black-card from the world of political equality and all that it entails. The sting is that the same virtues are, in Aristotle’s ideal world, taught by mothers to their sons and daughters.

³⁶ Ibid, 1046, 1047 and 1048

Mothers Mother; the Politics and Pedagogy of Choice

In diachronic terms, our first relation is to our mother. The first relation is our first appearance in the world in which we will become, in habit and action, an ethical person. Our first relationship to mother is our first entrance into a world in which we are developing beings in the context of the web of relationship that is regulated by an economy of giving and receiving. Aristotle stipulates that virtuous mothers take on the work of preparing us for this world, or passes us on to someone who will, by unconditionally loving what might otherwise be praised or condoned, all the while steering us in the right direction.³⁷ Our virtuous mother introduces us into the cold hard world of calculative competition and self interest by educating us about how to protect ourselves without succumbing to the same self interest. The virtuous mother does so by loving us the way that, if we are lucky, another citizen may eventually love us. Every friendship we might have will, according to Aristotle, be an imperfect simulation of this first experience of being love like another self without regard for return. Most of our friendships will dissolve under the friction of utility or pleasure.³⁸ Our only -rare and unlikely- return to the experience of our first relation will be if we become excellent citizens and stumble across another who is most excellent.

According to Aristotle, our mothers prepare us for a relationship which is only possible, but altogether rare, in the sphere of the political. If one becomes one of two good men alike in excellence and virtue, he will know what it is to give without regard for return. Two men alike in virtue can only give like a mother gives to her child require if they are free of the demands of necessity. The friendship, unlike the mother-child relation, cannot be forced by utility, pleasure, or necessity. A friendship between political-equals borders on perfect, but its imperfection is its perfection. The mother loves her child without regard for utility or pleasure in the context of necessity despite necessity and because she is a mother. The two men who love without regard

³⁷ See Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* especially sections Book 8, section 8, 153.

³⁸ See *Nicomachean Ethics*, especially Book 8 sections 3-5.

for return once extricated from necessity. Necessity ruins the perfect friendship and forms the basis of the mother-infant relation. Mothers love perfectly from within imperfection.

A mother's love is anomalous one more time. While the perfect friendship can stand the test of time: it is impossibly impervious to unpredictability, crisis, and temptations for vice, it does require proximity and duration. Aristotle claims that the mother is, if need be, willing to offer her child to another family, never to see him again, if it seems right.³⁹ The perfect friend could will no such action. Like the infant, the virtuous man must appear as a "who" to his friend: the mother loves her child on first sight, but she knows nothing about his past or his future. He appears as a "who" as quality without quantity. The man of perfect friendship must appear as an infant to his friend and as mother to himself: his friend must solicit in him his motherly instincts. He must love his friend like himself, as an infant, who is really a mother. The mother's love of her infant is perfectly imperfect.

The appearance of the infant awakens a sense of responsibility to sustain and nourish life in a manner that is antithetical to the calculations of giving and receiving proper to relationships between citizens, strangers or friends. The virtuous mother loves her infant's life as it were another self. To love an infant requires a momentary, though sustained momentary, suspension of any pretense at political freedom. This not wanting political freedom, and wanting it for the other at any cost, is, for Aristotle a woman's transition into maternity. It is her second birth. The second birth into the "ethical" is not reserved for women; rather, "mother" is a metaphor and an exemplar of Aristotle's notion of perfect virtue. Most of us never achieve anything more than imperfect friendship; all of us who have been loved by a virtuous mother know the experience. For Aristotle, a man is born a second time when he learns to love like his mother. Two men of high rank can only know this most perfect love, the love a mother feels for her child in the bellies of necessity, by loving the other unconditionally. But he, unlike the mother, can only do it under the most sustained, manufactured and concentrated conditions. Giving and doing because we love another

³⁹ See *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 8, 291

who is equally cultivated and accomplished prepares us to be passively-actively receptive for true and free thought and action; however, there is one other way to do so but it is non-reciprocal. One must become a parent to know the virtue of imperfect perfection.

Aristotle does not speak about paternal ethics as much as he does maternal ethics, at least not explicitly, unless of course we remember that the *Nichomean Ethics* is a book by Aristotle, the father, to his son, on how to understand their relationship, and how their interdependent-dynamic is the core of all other relationships, especially relationships which will, as any virtuous father hopes, lead to a life of happiness rather than despair for his son. The human, male or female, who did not respond to the demand made by his child, would be neither ethical nor free. He could not make his appearance into the political. In this sense, Aristotle affirms the intersection of infancy, what breaths and cries but does not speak and our second birth as the development of breath into speech. Breath does not precede voice, it intertwines with voice. The parents nurture their infant and bring them from breath into speech. The parent's language straddles the realm of breath and the realm of speech delivering it one more time from earthly immanence into human freedom. Without her accompaniment, we are dumb and deaf to ourselves and the world. Aristotle affirms the interconnection.

Aristotle's notion of birth suggests that we are born into a web of relationships of inequality and equality, and perfection and imperfection. These same relationships are governed by economies of debt and obligation. Those who are fortunate enough to be born into relationships dictated by norms and values of fairness and kindness will develop the expectation that they will be nourished and loved and encouraged to leave the homestead they were born into. Those less fortunate will likely expect that it should have been otherwise. We rightly expect relationships to be governed by equilibrium of give and take; we are "political." We become who we are in the context of this political context. We become who we are, which is not equivalent to anyone, in the context of this political context. This development is intensely libertarian and eminently social.

We become who we are in the context of this relationship of giving and taking, wanting and having, needing and getting. We become who we are, but cannot know who we are, our daemon, except from the stories told about us by others. In fact, we seem to understand from an early age that we cannot know who we are without the narration told to us by others. We feel the lack and desire one another's narration to know who we are. Our thoughts and action may likely spring from our desire to enact a story that will be told to us by others about who we are. What is unique to me cannot be known to me in each individual "remains hidden" to "the person himself" and does not "appear so clearly and unmistakably as it does to others. The ambiguity which pervades identity, and the lack that it entails, becomes of crucial import for Arendt, Klein and Cavarero. They use this trajectory to unravel the constative tone of Philosophy, a discourse they liken to the tragic myth of Oedipus. The story of our birth will not only unravel philosophy, but also their psychoanalytic reading of Oedipus.

Neither our First nor Our Second; Birth is Not Philosophical

The *Ethics* is a text of social, moral and political calculations that in every way privileges men of good, virtuous birth with a desire for excellence. It is also a text which highlights the the co-constitution of the public and the private and thereby illuminating the incompleteness of both spheres taken in isolation. It is a text which helps lay the foundation for the dynamic of first and second birth as a reinitiating of a new beginning as the shadowing of the self by the start it was never present for. It is an appeal for a political life in which the originality of each individual is guaranteed through a "web of human relationships" consisting of memory and narrative destined for others.⁴⁰ Aristotle not only opens the way to illuminating birth as revealing our fragile uniqueness, he illuminates birth as the revelation of our interdependence on others for knowing this fragile uniqueness. Our memory of having been born is concealed to us, but not to those who

⁴⁰ I owe this insight, in no uncertain way, to comments made about this chapter by Gregg Horowitz.

witness our birth. We know who we are by appealing to others to tell us our story. Our first appearance is also the intertwining our second appearance. Our first appearance is the pre-political and pre-historical condition of history, the story without beginning and end.”⁴¹

Our memory is not only incomplete, it is necessarily unreliable because it is narrated to us by others and yet stubbornly insists on appearing to us as if it originated in ourselves. Even the most self reflective thinker who understands this mirage appears to himself as the person whose life story originates in himself. Our own origin, our first appearance, is an analogy for history itself: it is what can only be seen by others who they cannot see themselves except through the narration of others. Our desire for history is our desire to know our origin, the very knowledge that is impossible to us except through others who themselves depend on us for self knowledge. Our “daemon,” the distinct identity we leave behind in speech and action, is not only unknowable to ourselves, it is unpredictable.

We are our beginnings. We cannot predict the thoughts and actions of ourselves or others. The unpredictability inherent in being human is also the affirmation of our selves as beings who are their beginnings. History is the culmination and fragmentation of the unpredictable footprint of thought and action. The possibility of this affirmation of beings who are their beginnings and who know themselves through the narrative work of others is political freedom. Aristotle’s appeal for a political life in which the originality of each individual is guaranteed through human relationships consisting of narrative memory affirms a concept of a self that cannot be separated from its social, political relationships or its sensory, amorous identifications. The fact of our unpredictability and inter-connection is an affirmation, not a conflation, of our first relation as infants to mothers. Mothers are the beings who bring us from the world of needs and wants into the world of social relation and possible political freedom. Aristotle’s rendering of mother’s

⁴¹Arendt writes, “that every individual life between birth and death can eventually be told as a story with beginning and end is the prepolitical and prehistorical condition of history, the great story without beginning and end” *The Human Condition*, 184.

tenuous ontological status and permanent habitat in that space in-between generation and creation is inherently ambiguous; it is so ambiguous that even those of us reading his works in the present day with a mind to real, concrete feminist political concerns should take pause. Is it right to think that “mothers” should be made political?

Aristotle deems “mothers” incapable of making an entrance into the political domain for several reasons. First, “mothers” do not make a “public” appearance because she remains hidden even to us and yet, we are aware that to know who we are, which is part of our preparation for entrance into the space of thought and action, we are aware of our lack of this knowledge and our dependence on her for making this possible entrance which affirms what is affirmed in birth: we are the beings who are our beginnings. This revelation cannot be an appeal for “mothers” exclusion from political life, but it can be used to affirm political life as the development of the first relation. Aristotle’s notion of maternity is a foray into identity in which life is coextensive with thought and a selfhood that cannot be separated from attachments. For Aristotle, mothers cannot be stripped of their desire to mother without a terrible violence: the violence of total disappearance. He suggests that women who choose to not mother their children are not really humans or animals; perhaps he is not being evaluative, but descriptive, as when we diagnose women with post-partum depression. Based on what women have to tell us about this experience, his description seems accurate. No matter the singularity with which these women experience the depression associated with becoming a mother, the common experience is the failure to feel a bond with the infant.

The unfair political consequence is that Aristotle both describes and prescribes her condition to be determining. Aristotle’s mother, with all of her virtue, can only make an appearance in the *Nichomean Ethics* as wives who bear their husband’s offspring. They appear under his proper name and maintain their name only in their virtuous and fertile relation. She becomes pregnant and cares for life out of duty as a cause of her situation. The parent child relationship (upon which the state itself depends) is necessarily imperfect and unequal. If she has

no children, she has no marriage. If she has no marriage, or husband, she has no name. The husband and wife have come together to create and sustain life-this is their pleasure and their utility-but should they fail to reproduce, like any imperfect friendship, it too will perish. The husband requires his wife. The wife requires her husband. And the two of them require children. It is only to her child that she feels this perfect, though imperfect friendship. Aristotle claims that a mother would rather die than see her child perish. It is a claim that borders on a double truth. The child is a self who is more important than she is to herself; her child is her life, both in fact, and as an ethical ideal.⁴²

Aristotle is both prescribing and describing her situation; without her child, a mother has no station-her social connection as an adult woman, unless of independent wealth-is her status as wife and mother. This child is a self who is more important than she is to herself; her child is, quite literally, her identity.⁴³ It is this considering the other another self which two male citizens strive to simulate, but so rarely manage. For Aristotle, it is to imagine a near impossible freedom. Despite this, we can also see that, for Aristotle, a mother's proximity to the pulse of birth as multiple and varied implications to the thought of private and public life. What brings life from the earth, and creates life from what she generates, renders her a great inclination "to seek and to nurture, in the context of her attachments, that which permits the flourishing of what is unique in her rather than that which, in these attachments, restrains and suppresses her pleasure."⁴⁴ There is, even in our current political situation, a strong case to be made for a "mother's" virtue. The task becomes imagining a case in which her virtue could bear a universal application, and never limited to women alone.

⁴²*Nicomachean Ethics*, 239.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 237

⁴⁴*Is there a Feminine Genius? 1-5*

Who is counting? She who is Highest/Lowest, More than/Less than One

Aristotle imagines what it would mean for two men to love another as a mother loves her child. He deduces that the love two men feel for one another can only simulate the love of a mother for her infant. The mother loves her child as “another self.” She gestates, bears and nurses the life of “another self,” another self who will, if he is a boy, be necessarily superior to her in rank. When she loves this other as another self, she is less than one. But this lack is also her perfect virtue. She is what acts by being what is acted upon, what blunts by cutting, what cools by heat, she is what causes the moving or efficient cause to itself receive, what pushes on the pushing, and crushed in crushing. “Sometimes,” writes Aristotle, she is “is altogether more acted upon than is the thing on which it acts, so that what is heating or cooling something else is itself cooled or heated; sometimes having produced no effect, sometimes less than it has itself received.”⁴⁵ (Her love is what separates her from being a slave). In her loving the other as another self, she births them once again. She gives life, and movement in the fullest sense, to what only knows how to be born and to move. She gives breath to life. It is an ideal that only two active rational men, with their slightly less intimate connection to earth necessity, can simulate in speech: their unique, embodied and relational freedom

Aristotle claims that mothers are capable of greater virtue than men. Mothers are, for Aristotle, the ideal of excess in an ethics which prescribes the median between excesses. Only mothers are selfless enough to give without want of return, and to give what is most precious to them, their children, to others if it seemed necessary. Men who risk loving others as another self are, in most cases, fools. In impossibly rare circumstances, two men could love without regard for return, as do men of perfect virtue who accidentally stumble across another equally perfect, but even then their friendship is threatened by the desire born from necessity. Mothers, unlike two male citizens of equal rank who randomly encounter one another in the open space of the political,

⁴⁵*On the Generation of Animals*, Book 3, Chapter 5. 18

by definition, love without regard for return from within the very bowels of necessity: reproducing life, and nurturing this same progeny in the domestic domain, without any hopes or claims on political freedom or privilege.

Aristotle's rendering of ethics as the intertwining of the embodied, emotive appetitive and the rationality that sustains, regulates and envisions is in most cases reflective of the ideal that many feminists want to have registered in philosophical conversations. The fact that women have tended to most fully experience the weight of living together in contexts of inequality, and subject to the rhythms and demands of necessity and our earth bound existence seems, in some philosophical conversations, to be forgotten. But while Aristotle's philosophy makes a strong ally for contemporary feminist thinkers wary of the modern, autonomous, rational ego, it is equally suspect for its ability to affirm, if not sometimes champion, those very inequalities and oppressions and exploitations which feminist thinkers want and need to challenge: the elitism of the privileged white, educated, male citizen is sustained equally well by the modernist myth of rational autonomy as it is by the ancient Greek metaphysic.

For Kristeva, it is Aristotle's affirmation of a self that cannot be separated from its various attachments "political, psychical, sensory, amorous, or literary" that not only renders him a forerunner to a metaphysic which affirms the interconnection between self and others, nature and culture it is a forerunner to a metaphysic at its limits. Kristeva claims that when metaphysics takes on the task of conceptualizing "mother," not by repudiating her, but by attempting to affirm her, it tends to cause a crisis in metaphysics. A metaphysics which can imagine the identity which "to seek and to nurture, in the context of her attachments, which permits the flourishing of what is unique in her rather than that which, in these attachments, restrains and suppresses her pleasure while constantly rebelling against all kinds of fetters, constraints, prisons, camps, and other concentrations of the social that reduce her to a condition of banality," is metaphysics as we no longer know it.

Aristotle's Foreshadow: Maternity as Metaphysics in Crisis

For Klein and Kristeva, the discourse of maternity is not only a discourse which accentuates the manner in which generation and creation imbricate one another, the discourse of maternity is a discourse in crisis. Maternity is essentially problematic for any notion of an autonomous, rational unified identity. Mother's body is the same body which refused to accept the iron law of inside and outside. Long before we had a say in the matter, we longed for and hated her omnipotence grip on us which conferred on us the heights of pleasure and which, and, at the very same time, threatened our possible existence as a separate individual. This is represented by Aristotle in the form of an identity of a person who is capable of embracing the impossible ideal: she loves perfectly, despite the fact of her inevitably imperfect relationship bound by necessity, who loves her child the way to male, equal, free citizens can only strive to simulate, is a person who might be worth emulating.

For Arendt, it will become more evident why "carnal birth" becomes central to engaging the complexities inherent in the identity of the "maternal," especially the maternal body.

Arendt renders our first birth analogous, but distinct from, our second birth. In both cases, we are born from something that must be, for us, a sublime non-entity. We are born from an eternal recurrence. We become human by mediating this entity which is us, but from which we must distinguish ourselves. If we try to be her, we never become anyone. If we never try anything at all, and simply fall back into her, we rote in her embrace. Only by distinguishing ourselves from our beginnings by mimicking our first entrance, do we become fully human. In both cases, to be born is to be born from the same unknowable that first bore us. The agent is its actor and its sufferer, but nobody is its author. Thus, for Arendt the dynamic of birth as earthly immanence and human freedom rests in every way on our relation to mother and mother earth. For the feminist reader, this seeming conflation of women who mother and Mother Earth is typically where resistance begins.

There is a legitimate wariness about associating women with mothers. If women are made to seem like mothers, then it begins to seem as if subjects become subjects by *distinguishing* themselves from *her*. In other words, it begins to seem as if women are themselves not subjects, but something from which subjects are born, a first, and possibly a second time. If we recall Aristotle's rendering of mothers as those beings who enable, but never themselves become, political agents, and, at the very same time recall the legacy which this rendering was used to establish the grounds for preventing women from political thought and action, we can see why so many contemporary feminists are resistant to associating women with mothering. Given that these same representations of mothers in all of their multiple and varied forms have lent themselves to various political ideologies which oppress women, especially in her role as reproducer of life, then most feminists agree that this conflation of women and mothers needs-at minimum-unpacking-at most-dismantling.

Contemporary feminists are legitimately suspicious of theories that affirm what appears like a mind and matter dualism (like earthly immanence and human freedom) because this same dualism is so often appended to prejudiced political ideologies; instead, Arendt maintains the ambiguous complexities which Aristotle first develops. Arendt, like the postmodernist, is generally suspicious of any claim to a unitary and substantial model of a self that presupposes a self-conscious ego who translates into words the reality of the "I." Unlike the postmodernist, she is suspicious of the claim that we are only the production of a text that can neither appear nor be authored. For Arendt, the self who has no "status whatsoever outside language," is a self determined, in this case not by his earthly immanence, but by a community of others. Arendt cannot accept that "texts" could manage even the illusion of coherence and unity. From within her critique of modernity, Arendt will claim that, by virtue of having been born, what is neither given to us by others nor fashioned in our own likeness, is neither possibly augmented nor diminished by others. Our possible human freedom is ours by virtue of having been born. The "who" which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others remains hidden from the person

himself, not as the consequence of culmination of words and movements, but as speech and action which reveals his “wholeness.” His wholeness is what prevents the possibility of his being determined by others. He is given form by others, but his same self, by virtue of his birth, is the promise that he will transform his form. He is unpredictably human. And his birth is his first testimony of this human freedom.

As I will demonstrate, Arendt goes even one step further and she does so by maintaining her connection with Aristotle. She portrays the scene of birth as a dynamic which includes mothers in their earthly immanence and their human freedom. Our own beginning commences from a being who is already underway. For Arendt and Aristotle, mothers are present for this revelation which is the revelation of the untrustworthiness of memory, and the revelation of the need to narrate someone’s beginnings. Spectators respond to the need in actors to be narrated and completed. They do so in a relation of universal exposed naked unity. Mothers exist in relation to an infant who is not yet acting or speaking. She knows herself, by analogy, to be both the being that bears an infant and as a being who was once an infant in her beginning. Mothers witness the same birth that her infant cannot be present for. She narrates his beginning in the same fragile memory proper to anyone else’s, and she, like all others, is not pure absence. Her infants’ memory of her is tenuous, but she, like others, most often rises to the occasion to tell him his story –however well or badly she may fare. In most instances, she is not a spectator in the sense that others are spectators because she is present for the birth of her charge who is also her infant. Aristotle, unlike few philosophers before or since, tells the story of mother’s story telling in a most mature, attentive manner. He tells the story as a virtuous father to his son Nicomachea.

CHAPTER II

ARENDR: MOTHER IS NOT A POLITICAL ANIMAL

Abstract: Arendt is critical of Plato's dynamic in which death arcs towards the eternal and birth toward the ephemeral but lauds the dynamic itself. She, like Plato, appreciates just how potent is the double meaning of "birth" and agrees that the generation of life lends itself to imagining the creation of ideas. While her feminist contemporaries worry that the opposition of two worlds so long associated with the feminine and the masculine consolidates sexist ideologies, she chides them for personalizing metaphysics and opts instead to describe birth as a dynamic which negates, rather than affirms, identities rooted in the body. Like Plato and unlike many of her feminist critics, she only permits women membership in the political on the condition that they strip themselves of their sexed-identities. In the end, Arendt moves out from Plato's shadow by emphasizing our total dependence on earthly immanence. The result is a notion of identity defined less by immutability and more by its ever-changing community of others interrupted by its own members, who, by virtue of being born, promise to be unpredictable. From beginning to end, Arendt configures birth as a political relationship which destabilizes maternity.

Who and What; the Two Domains and the Three Activities

There is no disputing that Arendt was an intellectual German Jew living in exile in New York, and yet she was none of these things. Understanding how both assertions can be true requires understanding Arendt's unique contribution to the political critique of modernity. Her notion of identity, her model of community, and her rendering of the political are all premised on

the assumption that people should not be confused for the things they come to be. It is her resolute conviction that we are only able to distinguish between our freedom, our “who,” and our servitude, our “what,” by maintaining a distinction between “earthly immanence” and “human freedom.” Arendt is so persistent about maintaining the distinction that Bonnie Honig describes it as an “anxious repetition.”⁴⁶

The distinction is highly problematic to a number of venerable feminists for multiple and varied reasons. Primary amongst these concerns is the historical fact that groups of persons have long been associated with earthly immanence and others with human freedom; those associated with the former have been exploited and oppressed on the presumption that those who seem to embody earthly immanence more than they do human freedom, for example, women, Africans, and Jews, are said to hold a stronger affinity to earthly immanence’s other, human freedom have naturalized and legitimated their rule on the basis of their seeming transcendence over the earth (and earth-bound people). Arendt does not proceed because she is unaware of this historical fact.

Arendt’s knowledge of the feminist reading of the history of philosophy and political philosophy is apparent. She is prescient to Beauvoirs’s rendering of immanence in *the Second Sex* in which she conjures the image of an Algerian mother in a small dark tent tending to the demands of domestic necessity while the men eat, sleep and exit to travel the planes of vast open spaces of light, the violence of war, and the political economy of commerce. Arendt understands that these Algerian women bear the burden of multiple kinds of ‘earthly immanence,’ Colonial, gendered, and the bare weight of the earth itself. She takes witness to the masculine transcendence of earthly immanence by colonial and indigenous men, premised on the negating

⁴⁶ Honig claims that Arendt distinction of freedom vs. necessity is complicit with the invidious division between male vs. female, active vs. passive, power vs. violence, action vs. behaviour, light vs. dark, with such persistence that it could be called an “anxious repetition” in which each distinction is heaped upon one another in an effort to resist the erosion of the distinction. See, “Toward and Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Arendt*, 144.

of *her* person⁴⁷. Nevertheless, Arendt insists on the distinction—so much so that her readers can easily begin to understand Honig’s choice of the word “anxious.”

Arendt maintains the distinction between earthly immanence and human freedom in spite of the over-determined likelihood of its controversy amongst feminists. She insists on the distinction on the premise that it attenuates, rather than secures identity-based oppression and prejudice. She reminds us to look at a larger picture in which modern man’s anxiety and malaise is augmented, rather than diminished, as he strives to triumph over the earth by severing himself from its demands. Arendt cannot imagine a happy ending for the earth-bound mortal who desires to overcome earthly immanence. Rather than fear mother earth, she, like Bataille, feels that she is embracing all that is and cannot be otherwise and, in so doing, reverses the metaphysical, existential hierarchy of immanence over transcendence. Sovereignty is no longer won by conquering the earth, but by willingly labouring its demands and its subsequent rewards of satiated appetite, desire for birth and renewal, a lucid dream life, and of course, a fearless stance towards death.⁴⁸ She recovers from the experience contending that earthly immanence is not a trap for women or anyone except those who fear and resent its almightiness: we moderns.

Arendt suggests that much of modern man’s suffering stems directly from his allergy to “birth.” “Birth” is our beginning and end in earth. When modern man conceives life in a test tube, he is refusing this same beginning and ending. He desires to exchange the gift of life for something “he made himself.”⁴⁹ Arendt notes that, as soon as he refuses this gendered, earth bound, immanently almighty gift of life, he finds himself thrown into a restricted economy of lack. When he offers a satellite to the sublime heavens, he, the terrestrial bound creator watches as it hovers; the higher his machines fly, the more he suffers from vertigo. When he returns to earth, and efficiently creates life with his own hands, the more he fears the revelation of his own origin. Arendt contends that, by demolishing the gates that kept the mysteries of earthly

⁴⁷ *The Second Sex*, “Data: The Destiny of Biology,” 3-14

⁴⁸ *Visions of Excess*, 53

⁴⁹ *the Human Condition*, 1

immanence in check, modern man is left to drown in an appetite for what cannot be satiated. Modern man breaks free of the limit between earthly immanence and human freedom and his two worlds collapse into singular nightmare: lonely, insatiable meaninglessness.

To illustrate her alternative notion of freedom, Arendt describes the ancient Hebrews, who, by labouring the earth, experienced bliss and satiation that only physical, laborious exhaustion affords. This same satiation allowed them to welcome the gift of life which allows humans to overcome their anxiety. Soothed by the eternal, lulling cycles of mother earth's generation and corruption, the ancient Hebrews did not fear death but understood its inevitable place in their lifecycle. This in turn allowed them to understand what can be formed and what must be conformed to, the courage to conform to nature and inform the world of the public: the world of speech and action which is the essence of human freedom, the highest principle. For the very same reasons, the Hebrews experienced life differently than the Ancients who, in Aristotle's account, measured their freedom according to the distance they maintained from the demands of earthly immanence.⁵⁰ By assuming that earthly necessity forced persons into imperfect relations of want and need and thus prevented them from entering the domain of political thought and action, the Ancients failed to see that earthly immanence as the opportunity, rather than the barrier, to human freedom.

Arendt suggests that, when we measure freedom in terms of our distance from the earth, we are all the more likely to measure humans, and human freedom, in quantifiable units. By keeping a distance from mother earth, it is easier to fool ourselves that she can be had, tamed, and controlled; by keeping a distance from mother earth, it is easier to make this same mistake with ourselves; we confuse the "who" for the "what." If we instead dive into the heart of earthly immanence, we are soon forced to relinquish our hold, our ego, our need to control life itself. The surprising discovery for the modern is that, once he makes the plunge, the very freedom he so longed for is all of a sudden his to have. Arendt concludes that those who live a life of perfect

⁵⁰ This distinction is often overlooked in thinkers lauding Aristotle's philosophy of bios.

immanence are indistinguishable from the animals, and those who live a life at a remove from earthly immanence are delusional; only those who enter and depart from their earthly immanence by labouring, and then fashioning a world, experience genuine human freedom. Arendt refuses to let go of the distinction between earthly immanence and human freedom, not because she is ignorant to feminist concerns, but, rather, because she is convinced that the distinction protects a viable notion of human freedom.

Only One of the Three Activities is Action

Arendt stipulates a tripartite of human activity which maintains a dynamic relation between earthly immanence and human freedom; these three activities are labour, work and action. Labour is our most immanent mediation with the earth. It is analogous to the biological processes of living organisms following the cycle of life in which *animal laborans* produces non-durables necessary to keep the human organism alive.⁵¹ It is the “activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labour.”⁵² By labouring the earth, we leave no trace of ourselves, but sustain a life which is identical to earthly life. In sustaining our life with our own hands, we experience the exhaustion, satiation, and abundance that only the earth can bestow. These affective experiences tend to yield an acceptance of birth and death. In fact, labour is indifferent to our birth and death. Laboring activity continues before “we” arrive, in the activity of labouring an infant, and after “we” are gone in the activity of death and dying. In this sense, man requires labour, but labour does not require man.

Only work, writes Arendt, “corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not imbedded in, and whose mortality is not compensated by, the species’ ever-recurring life

⁵¹ the *Human Condition*, 176

⁵² *Ibid*, 177

cycle.”⁵³ Unlike labour, work interrupts the cyclic process of the life world which are required to establish the borders of continuity that allow us to create the semblance of worldliness. Arendt’s distinction between labor and work is informed by Locke’s notion of “the labor of our body and the work of our hands.” This distinction is common in European languages; the Greeks distinguish between *ponein* and *ergazesthai*, the French between *travailler* and *ouvrier*, and the Germans between *arbeiten* and *verken*.⁵⁴ But while work affords us the continuity and stability to permit the creation of human freedom, in all too many cases, the temptation is to sustain this continuity and stability at the cost of human freedom. According to Arendt, this is the case in Platonic and Marxist utopic societies. When earthly immanence is overcome, and the activity of labour is diminished, life tends to be experienced as an exhausted, flattening trajectory without end or satiation. Such an activity is akin to labour without the arrival of an infant; this infant appears more like a still birth or a person who has become a thing than it does the promise of a future which cannot be predicted. Thus, Arendt concludes that the overcoming of labour is modernity’s singular tragedy.

Only by both affirmation labour and work is action possible. Without labouring the earth, we never satisfy our bodily appetites. Without work, we are worldless, without labour, we are anxious insomniacs, and without action, we are never more than a brutish animal. Together labor, work, and action are the fundamental activities of human life and form the *vita activa*. However, for Arendt only action is the *differentia specifica* of human beings which distinguishes us from animals (who are similar to us insofar as they need to labor to sustain and reproduce) and the life of the gods (with whom we share, intermittently, the activity of contemplation). In this respect, the categories of labor and work are counterpoints to the category of action; they differentiate and highlight the place of action within the order of the *vita activa*. The adult who knows the activity of action is born a first time to his mother in earthly immanence and a second time to a world of

⁵³ *Ibid*, 8, 9

⁵⁴ *the Human Condition*, “Work,” 40

others in the throws of human freedom; this is “natality; the adult who never knows the activity of action is destined to a life of the “infantile.”

The Natal and the Infantile: Where birth must lie and how

Arendt’s most scintillating contribution to philosophy is her concept of “natality.” Natality is our universal condition of having been born an infant in a world of others who have also been born. Because we are born, Arendt wonders, we have “*initium*,” because we are born, we are newcomers and beginners; because we are born, we take initiative and are prompted into action.⁵⁵ The fact that we are prompted to that unpredictable activity that secures neither our survival nor our wish for continuity, but, instead, is performed without concern for either, is the “central category of political thought”⁵⁶. Political thought is the possibility of acting freely and acting freely is “ontologically rooted” in the “fact of natality”⁵⁷ Action, our human freedom, is the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, and corresponds to *the human condition* of plurality. Plurality, she stipulates, is the fact that men, not Man, live and work alongside one another. Returning to the beginning of the circle once again, she reminds us that human freedom is premised on birth, our earthly immanence.

It can come as a surprise that Arendt renders our first birth in such unremarkable terms. Our first, carnal, earthly birth—the very essence of which Arendt will use as a conceptual device to think her way out of an apparently fascistic metaphysic. The metaphor of birth appears in her work in uninspired, colloquial imagery. She writes very little of it and, unlike her counterpart Aristotle, rarely with empirical curiosity or savvy. For Arendt, the most important feature of our first birth is that it is almost indistinguishable from the total cycle of life itself. Arendt focuses almost entirely the infant’s experience and expressions during birth. The sounds he makes, which she claims express his common biological existence and cannot, are of interest to her. The fact of

⁵⁵ *The Human Condition*, 177

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 9

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 177

his naked, namelessness is also of interest. In the end, the facts and features of his birth which seem to make him indistinguishable from any other, coupled with the fact of his totally unpredictable person, is all that matters. His arrival is the promise of a future which cannot be predicted. This double meaning is what Arendt terms the “actualization of the human condition of natality.”⁵⁸

The infant’s first appearance is her affirmation of herself as the being who is her beginning. From the very depths of earthly necessity, the infant is born without history and impervious to a determinable future. She appears as a nameless, total, unique unity. She is her beginning. Her appearance promises that the world will never again be the same: it cannot know what she might say or do. Her possible actions lie in her like a diamond that cannot be mined without her spontaneous offering. Her actions appear “in the guise of the miracle” as what cannot be expected.⁵⁹

As adults, we affirm ourselves as the infants we once were when we take initiative and are prompted into action. With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world. Arendt likens this insertion to a second birth. In our second birth, we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance. Our second birth is antithetical to earthly immanence in the sense that it is not forced upon us by necessity, like labour, and it is not prompted by utility, like work. It may be “stimulated by the presence of others whose company we may wish to join, but it is never conditioned by them; its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative.”⁶⁰ The revelation which is the first birth perishes when birth is “overcome.”

⁵⁸ *The Human Condition*, 179

⁵⁹ *The Human Condition*, 179

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 177

There are several ways in which we could imagine that the revelation which is our first birth could be lost. Arendt does not devote much time or attention to the manner in which the revelation is lost, except to say that this occurs when life “is created in a test tube.” The risk is that we misinterpret her argument for an argument against culture, or an argument which too rigidly reifies an opposition between nature and culture. Instead, her argument and concepts are more nuanced. In fact, without appreciating the double meaning of “birth,” everything about Arendt’s world view is misinformed. Thus, the problem with “creating life in a test tube” is not that some humans work hard to preserve life, rather, it is that they work too hard to preserve a value which seems inherent to life itself. Arendt’s consistent train of thought is to argue that life itself has no value. The value of life, at least for humans, is that it promises something more than just life. When man creates “life in a test tube,” he risks being unable to witness the miracle of conception, birth, and the infant because this miracle is not in these actions or entities themselves, but in what they promise.

Arendt continues in her own words that modern man’s tragic error is to assume that life, and not labour, is the creator of all values. Modern man glorifies a sheer dynamism of life process which excludes even the minimum initiative present in those activities which, like labouring and begetting, are urged upon man by necessity.⁶¹ He folds himself into mother earth and revels in the experience of her pure functioning. He confuses her limits for his own and fails to see that the skin of her sovereign body engulfs him. In confusing her powers of generation and corruption for his own, he places the burden of her demands on his solitary, mortal self, and prevents himself access to her abundance. Thus, neither the enormous increase in fertility nor the socialization of the process which substitutes individuals for subjects can eliminate the cruel privacy from the experience of labour.

⁶¹ *The Human Condition*, 117

As Arendt determines, “animal labourans” is imprisoned in the privacy of his body and trapped by his own needs which cannot be shared. Arendt warns that these individuals form a society which, dazzled by the abundance of its growing fertility and caught in the smooth functioning of a never ending process, is no longer able to recognize the futility of a life which “does not fix or realize itself in any permanent subject which endures after its labour is past”⁶² With the unleashing of earthly immanence into the realm of the public, the life process, once checked by household, absorbs and suffocates the political domain. Without a division between the space of retreat and the space of appearance, everything becomes a “family” matter and every event an opportunity to satisfy an insatiable appetite. The glorification of the life process is modern man’s metamorphosis from a “who” into a “what.” This transformation is what Arendt names the transformation from the “natal” into the “infantile.”

Arendt appreciates that we cannot return to the lost time of the Hebrews. Instead, she gestures towards modern man’s exit from his labyrinthine suffering by repeatedly naming his emergence from the maelstrom of earthly immanence and insertion into the matrix of human freedom a “second birth.” In doing so, Arendt intimates that the same labouring contractions that forced him from his dreamless sleep into the world of consciousness mirror his possible entrance into the world of human freedom. Although his ego recoils at the thought, she insists that he can only overcome his biological determinism by understanding what is alternately intimate and incommensurate between earthly immanence and human freedom. Modern man’s exasperation with action is symptomatic to his allergy to the earth. While it has always been a great temptation for men of action no less than for men of thought to find a substitute for action in the hope that the realm of human affairs may escape the haphazardness and moral irresponsibility inherent in a plurality of agents, Arendt predicts that the more he refutes his earthly existence, the more he is trapped by this same exasperation. His fear of death renders him identical to those servants who

⁶² *Ibid*, 135

preferred servitude in the master's house with "fine conditions" over the same harsh and unpredictable labour conditions which could give us what we really want: the experience of human freedom.

Arendt's critics argue that she naturalizes the arbitrary and conventional norms which inform feminine identity and confuse women for mothers. They further that she does little to distance itself from renderings of earthly immanence and human freedom which are part and privy of the western, metaphysical tradition of producing sexist ontologies which equate earthly generation with femininity and ideational creation with masculinity and, last, and most worrisome of all, Arendt flat-out prohibits those who identify or who are identified as "women" from protesting their pain, suffering and oppression on the basis of "sex" because sex is said to be a feature of the "earthly necessity."

Arendt's Feminist Critics, her Critique of Feminism

There are legitimate concerns about associating women with mothers. If women are made to seem like mothers, then subjects become subjects by *distinguishing* themselves from *her*; in other words, women are themselves not subjects, but something from which subjects are born *from*. We can recall Aristotle's rendering of mothers as beings who enable, but never themselves become, political agents. Given that representations of mothers in their multiple and varied forms have lent themselves to various political ideologies which oppress women, especially in her role as the generator of life, the conflation of women and mothers needs-at minimum-unpacking-and, in some cases total dismantling.

As McLaren describes in *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity*, feminists have taken mainstream, traditional philosophy to task for embracing the mind/body dualism and for associating women with the body and men with the mind.⁶³ Early feminist work, such as the work of anthropologists Mary Douglas, Sherry Ortner, and Michelle Rosaldo, make a compelling case

⁶³ *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity*, 81-82

that women have been associated with the body, nature and emotion and that these terms have been opposed to mind, culture, and reason, which are associated with men and that the former have been systematically devalued. While some feminists have focus on the body as a source of knowledge, a site of resistance, and a locus of subjectivity, the risk is always that this leads to a reversal and return of the trend of devaluing the body while sustaining the dualism of mind/body. In simple, the exulting of what once was exiled still prevents her entrance into the domain of action. The most pressing question for feminist readers of Arendt is, does Arendt's rendering of first and second birth secure or attenuate the conflation of women with mothering? As her critics take her to task for maintaining the distinction between human freedom and earthly immanence, it must be remembered that Arendt believes that it is the lack of the distinction, rather than not, that ossifies the prejudices and ideologies which inform sexism.

Introducing Honig, Zerilli, Moore

Honig, Zerilli, and Moore direct their critique of Arendt's toward her rigid distinction between earthly immanence and human freedom. Honig claims the distinction is an historically invidious division held apart by nothing more than by heaping one on to the other to resist the erosion of the distinction altogether. If Honig is right, Arendt's construction is not only unsound, it is insidious; if in fact Arendt prevents people from voicing dissent on the basis of their embodied, earthly, oppression, the distinction and prohibition compound their oppression. Honig suggests that, in Arendt's scenario, women are identified with the labour of generating life, and, on this same basis, are not permitted to voice dissent on the basis of being a woman. If this is in fact the case, then Arendt's notion of "human freedom" is not only anti-political, it is complicit in a most pernicious form of oppression.

Zerilli's critique is akin to Derrida's warning on the use of "prohibitions" in metaphysics. In "The Arendtian Body," Zerilli claims that Arendt's distinction disguises the high stakes in a casually prohibitive vernacular. She quotes Arendt who claims that to "pretend to be something

I'm not, that would be kind of insane" because "there is such a thing as a basic gratitude for everything that is as it is; for what has been given and was not, could not, be made; for things that are physei and not nomo."⁶⁴ When Arendt warns that blurring the distinction between private and public will replace both realms with the "amorphous and unbounded creature," she resorts to nothing less than old fashioned fable telling. Zerilli concedes that Arendt actually advances the conversation in feminism because she does not treat gender as the primary category for thinking the human body. In the end though, Arendt aggravates old wounds by providing an account of the subjects' "terror of embodiment and loss of symbolic mastery."⁶⁵ She concludes that Arendt's prohibition actually confirms, secures and attenuates the symbolic order that "barely conceals the sexually indefinable Chora which the very notion of two sexes, each in its proper place."⁶⁶

Moore's reading is the most nuanced of the three.⁶⁷ She allows that Honig and Zerilli could be right and that the distinction between earthly immanence and human freedom is too rigid, contrived, and barely succeeds to disguise the ambiguity that lies at the heart of earthly immanence and human freedom. However, she concludes that their readings overlook a crucial, determining feature of Arendt's conceptual imaginary: her concept of natality. "Natality" accepts the ambiguity inherent in earthly immanence and human freedom by relying on the double meaning implicit in "birth." Our first birth is characterized by everything we associate with the earth: blood, pain, sub-conscious struggle and revelation, affect, and yet our first birth also points towards our second birth and all that we associate with the possibility of meaning, and shared meaning. Our second birth is not limited to the here and now of necessity. Our second birth both consolidates and negates necessity.

For Honig and Zerilli, the mere association of earth with women is over-determined. Moore decides to break from this group and aligns herself with Arendt's efforts to put bracket the

⁶⁴ "The Arendtian Body," 171

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 174

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 172

⁶⁷ *Hannah Arendt's Philosophy of Natality*, 42

association of earth with women to focus instead on “birth” as a metaphor which bridges two worlds and two modes of being. It is with some irony that, in doing so, Moore, like Arendt, opens the possibility for returning to concepts such as maternity, motherhood, and even infancy and natality, with a fresh outlook. As Moore correctly understands, Arendt’s central thesis grounds itself on the distinction of earthly immanence and human freedom because, by returning to the thought of “birth,” we are better able to see the larger framework in which earthly immanence intertwines with human freedom, and by extension, beginnings.

Honig and the Post-Modern

In “Toward an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity,” Honig claims that Arendt’s repetitive distinction between earthly immanence and human freedom compounds the already ossified ideological configuration which positions women in the grips of the earthly, private domain of necessity and secures men’s possible candidacy for human, political freedom.⁶⁸ Honig charges that Arendt’s opposition of the political and the private maintains the existent equation of the feminine realm of earthly immanence and the masculine realm of human freedom. As such, Honig contends that Arendt’s distinction augments the prejudice that mothers as best suited for labouring, nursing, and tending to the very young and the very old, and ill suited for participating as equals amongst equals in the domain of human freedom. When Arendt utilizes the opposition of earthly immanence and human freedom to structure her treatise on *The Human Condition* and describes the sphere of human freedom without explicit mention of her feminist adherence, this only consolidates Honig’s suspicion. When Arendt renders the distinction between earthly immanence and human freedom an “apriori determination,” she seems to give the final evidence that her paradigm promotes political sexual

⁶⁸ “Toward and Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity,” 48

inequality.⁶⁹ When Arendt explicitly excludes the desperate and disenfranchised from protesting their living conditions by identifying on this same basis, Arendt is confirmed as, amongst other things, an anti-feminist. Finally, when Arendt recommends that we bear a certain “gratitude for what is and cannot be otherwise,” she merely salts the wound.

For Honig, Arendt’s “notorious rigid public/private distinction” is part and privy to the prohibiting of the politicization of issues of social justice and gender.⁷⁰ Honig parallels Arendt’s distinction alongside Aristotle’s in which he insists that women and slaves are more affected by the earth, more effective laborers, and, on this same basis, ineffective political participants. The overall effect seems to be to protect the *sui generis* character of her politics and the purity of her public realm by prohibiting the politicization of issues of social justice and gender. Ultimately, Honig dismisses Arendt’s determination as a rhetorical device and denies its value as an insight into *The Human Condition*. She concludes by suggesting that Arendt deserves our attention not as a theorist of gender, nor as a woman, but as “a theorist of an agonistic and performative politics which resists any apriori determination that is beyond augmentation and amendment,” for what she “does include in her vision of politics, and also because (not in spite) of what she excludes from it.”⁷¹ From this basis, Honig prescribes a reading of Arendt’s work that grounds itself in the agonistic and performative impulse while resisting any determination of the public-private distinction that is “beyond augmentation and amendment.”⁷²

In place of the determination between earthly immanence and human freedom, Honig prescribes a metaphor which distinguishes between kinds of spaces. Honig begins this process by defenestrating the terms of the exclusion of the “labouring body” from the public domain while

⁶⁹ *Feminist Interpretations of Arendt*, 136

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 136

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 136

⁷² *Ibid*, 136

extracting what she perceives to be the essence of “the agonistic and performative impulse.”⁷³ She defends her move by claiming that no distinction, not even Arendt’s sacred distinction between the public and private, is “beyond augmentation and amendment.”⁷⁴ Honig determines her project successful for contesting, “per formatively and agonistically,” Arendt’s exclusion of the body from the realm of politics.⁷⁵

Honig re-fashions Arendt’s concepts of earthly immanence and the body into a metaphor for the “master signifier of necessity, irresistibility, immutability, and the determination of pure process.”⁷⁶ Honig determines that Arendt’s conception of the body prevents politicizing the body, and thus prevents the same possibilities which might secure the possibility of human freedom. This is of special concern if, as Honig claims, the same people likely to suffer from the confiscation of the fruits of their labours are also those people likely to be silenced when they voice dissent about their unique experience of physical oppression, then any further silencing of their dissent compounds their oppression. When Honig determines that Arendt’s notion of the body subverts political freedom, Honig also determines only one other option: Arendt’s vision of ideal of human freedom must allow us to contest exploitation and oppression on the basis of representations of the body.

Honig deems that, only by agonistically contesting the “body,” can we “episodically produce new identities in which newness becomes the beginning of a new story, started-though unwittingly-by acting women and men to be enacted further, to be augmented and spurred on by their posterity.”⁷⁷ Honig warns that too much reliance on this metaphysical dualism of earthly immanence and human freedom robs people of very future they need to experience the exhilaration of creating anew. Arendt counters that, anyone, no matter how down trodden, who

⁷³ Ibid, 137

⁷⁴ Ibid, 138

⁷⁵ Ibid, 137

⁷⁶ “Toward and Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity,” 150.

⁷⁷ *Human Condition*, 149

drags the needs of their body onto the stage of human freedom foul the same airs which might have allowed them a taste of freedom. Arendt writes,

The most powerful necessity of which we are aware in self-introspection is the life process which permeates our bodies and keeps them in a constant state of a change whose movements are automatic, independent of our own activities, and irresistible i.e., of an over-whelming urgency. The less we are doing ourselves, the less active we are, the more forcefully will this biological process assert itself, impose its inherent necessity upon us, and overawe us with the fateful automatism of sheer happening that underlies all human history.⁷⁸

For Arendt, our choice is limited to negating or affirming earthly immanence; this includes our sexed, earthly immanence. The substance of our choice determines our possible freedom or slavery but, in either case, we must make the choice from within the bounds of earthly immanence. In terms of our sexed earthly immanence, we will have to live with, negotiate, and transcend the determinations and possibilities opened to us by virtue of, in the most general terms, either being the being who becomes pregnant, or not. We can repudiate this earthly existence in two ways: we can deny its grip on ourselves, and thus render our freedom an evanescent ideal, or we can drag its grip on us into the realm of freedom, and usurp the space speech and action with grunts and moans common to the animals, and charts and graphs common to the bureaucratic behaviourist.

Arendt maintains that the choice is made from within the context of our embodied existence. Our bodies, like the body of the earth itself, move in same endless cyclical repetition of generation and corruption which is life. We are born into a world in which we can become human or inhuman by embracing the limitlessness of the earth which has no regard for our beginning or end. Labouring the earth is a burden, not only for the oppressed, but for anyone, but it is the only means for knowing the fecundity which can provide us with the willingness to risk loving freedom more than our own individual wants and needs. Arendt considers this to be neither an elitist nor a radical egalitarian position; she considers it to be the fact of our human condition. For

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 179

Arendt, any conflation of the earthly and identity is bound to set us in a trap which prevents genuine political thought and action. According to Arendt, when the earth is dragged out of its proper domain and forced into the realm of the “political,” when the fact of becoming possibly pregnant or not becomes the basis of political action, women (and men and so on and so forth), actually fail to see the inherent double meaning inherent in our earth-bound, immanence. My biological existence can be tabulated and calculated, but it cannot be distinguished from any others.

Arendt is actually partially sympathetic to Honig’s post-modern critique. Like the postmodernist, Arendt is suspicious of models of the self that presupposes a self conscious ego who translates into words the reality of the “I.” However, Honig’s vision of “who-ness” as the narrative actions sediment into a story and myth observed by others would be unpalatable to Arendt. While she agrees that “texts” cannot maintain the mere illusion of coherence and unity, Honig’s notion of arbitrary conventions of community is unable to explain why we are not merely fragmented, discontinuous, indistinct infants. Honig’s attack on classical semiology is founded on the assumption that the uniqueness of self is nothing but the ideological construction of patriarchal autobiographical constructions. It leaves her with little leverage against appeals to ethical or political standards; she is even less able to conceive of humans or infants as some “thing” fashioned by others. In Honig’s rendering of the infant, nothing is sacred about the infant. He is animal flesh and his fate is determined by others. Honig ends up claiming that infants (and possibly others) are no more than an inhuman- human construction.

Arendt anticipates modernity’s post modern moment when neither the earth nor humans could manage to explain why our humanity is inalienable. From within her critique of modernity, Arendt claims that, by virtue of having been born, what is neither given to us by others nor fashioned in our own likeness, is immutable, impervious, and inalienable. Our human freedom is ours by virtue of having been born. The ‘who’ which appears to others remains hidden from the person himself, not as the consequence of culmination of words and movements, but as speech

and action which reveals his wholeness. His wholeness is what prevents the possibility of his being determined by others. He is given form by others, but his same self, by virtue of his birth, is the promise that he will transform his form; he is unpredictably human; his birth is his first testimony of this human freedom.

Arendt speaks to Honig's concerns about sexual inequality. Her argument is simple. In fact, it is when it is made overly complex that it appears problematic, but Arendt works hard to maintain a simple, working distinction. Her argument is that both men and women's fate is sealed in their earth bound existence. Their fate is a sexed fate. They are born as men or women. Men and women must labour the earth from which they were born. Men and women, by virtue of their sex, must differently labour the earth. This is true of the hermaphrodite whom Arendt does not mention, but would be implied in a work so familiar with Classical mythology and philosophy. The hermaphrodite, the mother, and the man's possible tragedy or sovereignty rest equally on what "is and cannot be otherwise"-their bodies and the earth they inhabit.

The preoccupation with the distinction between earthly immanence and human freedom, which for Arendt precludes identifying on the basis of sexed, biological determinations, is more Honig's preoccupation than Arendt's. For Arendt, the distinction between earthly immanence and human freedom is of interest, not in relation to sexual inequality, but for its intimacy between the earth and freedom. Arendt cannot conceive of a world in which freedom is possible without first addressing the issue of our earthly immanence. From Arendt's point of view, to identify women who mother as "mothers" in the realm of the political is to doubly rob her of the opportunity to insert herself, and, more, to tear an opening for her infant's eventual insertion into the realm of human freedom. Thus, just as Aristotle suggests, it is only by tending to the necessities of life that we can contemplate the activities of thinking, speaking and acting which constitute political freedom. Like Honig, Zerilli remains unconvinced; Arendt's distinction between earthly immanence and human freedom remains problematic.

Zerilli and the Psychoanalytic Critique

In “The Arendtian Body,” Zerilli claims that Arendt disguises the high stakes of the distinction in a casually prohibitive vernacular. She quotes Arendt’s claims that to “pretend to be something I’m not, that would be kind of insane” because “there is such a thing as a basic gratitude for everything that is as it is; for what has been given and was not, could not, be made; for things that are physei and not nomo.”⁷⁹ Zerilli suggest that these rhetorical features are prominent and assume 1) that a female subject’s dis-identification with women is a hysterical, psychic trauma and 2) that stable subjectivity requires absolute clarity about sex and gender. On this same basis, Zerilli likens the Arendtian body to the Freud’s “taboo”: the uncanny, dangerous, forbidden, and sacred that operates “in a compulsive fashion that rejects conscious motives.”⁸⁰ By protecting the seemingly impenetrable border between earthly immanence and human freedom in terms that she claims are beyond dispute or argument,” Zerilli determines that Arendt makes a futile attempt to protect the distinction. When Arendt appeals to Genesis: “we know only male and female created he them,” Zerilli claims that Arendt barely conceals her dogmatic tendencies. Why, asks Zerilli, forbid something that is impossible? In the Arendtian staging of terror, Zerilli says we witness Arendt’s frantic attempt to secure the body in its place, and the violence, injustice, and futility of that effort.⁸¹ Zerilli recommends that Arendt’s sympathizers steer clear of the cultural association of the cyclical life process and the feminine body. If Zerilli is right, any association that does not expressly criticise the exclusion of women and slaves from the free space of the polis expresses nostalgia. It is, at best, ‘curious’ that Arendt “never makes this central feature of *the Human Condition* an integral part of her political analysis.”⁸²

⁷⁹ *Feminist Interpretations of Arendt*, 171

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 171

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 175

⁸² *Ibid*, 174

There is some irony in charging Arendt with threatening and prohibiting modes of thinking. Zerilli's discursive tone exceeds the conventional standards of reasoning and debate. Her critique rests entirely on the assumption that –when we prohibit thoughts and actions–then our own thoughts and actions must themselves be erroneous; however, nothing about the manner in which we communicate an idea prevents it from being true or right, despite how unpleasant or pleasant it may sound to our ear. By failing to do more than illuminate some of the rhetorical devices upon which Arendt relies, Zerilli obfuscates the more important question which is: is the distinction between earthly immanence and human freedom practically and theoretically sound and prudent?

Arendt warns that we should not drag what “is and cannot be otherwise” into the realm of the political. She claims that by identifying with what has already been determined by “earthly immanence,” we limit, if not halt, the possibility of being unpredictable. Arendt predicts that when humans drag one world into the other and the boundary between the two worlds is not maintained, the likely outcome is a humanity driven into action by wants and needs rather than a desire for genuine freedom. She suggests that it is only by letting go of the socio-cultural establishment of identity determined by biology that humans can hope to become a political thinking and acting being, i.e., free.⁸³ Zerilli continues to disagree, but, like Honig, deems there to be an essential undertone in Arendt's writing worth salvaging. Zerilli is willing to accept the Arendtian body if it is neutered; once the embodied earthly immanence is rendered neutral and neutered, Zerilli concedes that Arendt has a gift for making salient the sheer terror associated with the body.

Zerilli contends that because Arendt does not focus solely on the maternal body's relationship to the cyclic life process, and thus most often treats the body as essentially genderless, Arendt brings both women and men's bodies into question by reminding us that they too are entangled in the process beyond subjectivity. Thus, it is Arendt's more frequent tendency toward

⁸³ *Feminist Interpretations of Arendt*, 175

“gender blindness” (and not her infrequent gender stereotyping) allows her to transcend the tendency to “symbolize the labouring and generative body in clear, unchanging, and all too familiar gendered terms.”⁸⁴ Despite some casual remarks made here and there, Zerilli determines that Arendt does not treat gender as the primary category for thinking the human body but does more by providing an account of the subjects’ “terror of embodiment and loss of symbolic mastery.”⁸⁵ Zerilli concludes that Arendt “confirms and contests, secures and attenuates the symbolic order that barely conceals the sexually indefinable Chora which the very notion of two sexes, each in its proper place.”⁸⁶ In Zerilli’s eagerness to make neutral and neutered the Arendtian body, she overlooks a central feature of the Arendtian body: the event of birth.

For Arendt, we are sexed earthly beings capable of human freedom because we are *born*. Arendt’s distinction between earthly immanence and human freedom is inseparable from her dynamic of first and second birth. Zerilli makes no mention of the import of birth. As is the tendency, when Arendt’s critics overlook the crucial import of her concept of “natality” which relies entirely on the double meaning of birth, her work seems dogmatic and two dimensional. In such cases, there is nothing to do but salvage what appears like a more politically radical meaning in notions like the “body” or “contestation.” When “natality” is prioritized as the central, informative concept that it is, these efforts are unnecessary and, most likely, the concerns and harsh criticisms unwarranted. Moore’s greatest contribution to the evolving conversation of Arendt’s contribution to philosophy is the manner in which she brings “natality” back into the spotlight.

⁸⁴ *Human Condition*, 174

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 174

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 174

Moore: Remembering Birth

More careful readers of *The Human Condition* appreciate that the distinction between earthly immanence and human freedom is possibly rigid or possibly fluid depending on the stance of its central actor and spectator: the human. As Bowen Moore suggests in *Hannah Arendt's Philosophy of Natality*, the human maintains a rigid distinction when he severs himself from the earth and a fluid distinction by maintaining his connection to the earth.⁸⁷ The human affirms himself as the being who is his beginning by labouring the earth. Humans affirm their first birth as labour in their second birth as speech and action because both are determined by the unpredictability of its outcome, the irreversibility of the process, and the anonymity of its authors.

Arendt names sovereignty as the relishing in the risk of embracing the earth's force and the anonymity of human action. The human actor affirms himself as "infantile" by using words to express wants and needs and movements to achieve determinate ends. The human actor affirms himself as "natal" when he refutes his *mere* biological existence by speaking and acting unlike any other human present, past or future. Moore quotes Arendt's mantra in which, with word and deed, humans

... insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance. This insertion is not forced upon us by necessity, like labour, and it is not prompted by utility, like work. It may be stimulated by the presence of others whose company we may wish to join, but it is never conditioned by them; its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative⁸⁸

Arendt's central thesis which grounds itself in the distinction of earthly immanence and human freedom claims that, to understand ourselves as beings who are both immanent to the earth and potentially free, insists that there can be no original identification of an adult with his earthly origin. Only by returning to the thought of birth can we fully appreciate that our beginnings, the

⁸⁷ Qtd. in *Hannah Arendt's Philosophy of Natality from the Origins of Totalitarianism*, 479

⁸⁸ *The Human Condition*, 177

complex intertwining of earth, mother, and labour is what allows us to be those beginnings without determination or termination. Carnal birth is the revelation of political freedom because political freedom, like earthly immanence, cannot be determined in advance.

By accentuating the essential role of the concept of birth to Arendt's philosophy, Moore demonstrates that the distinction between earthly immanence and human freedom is possibly "rigid," in the sense that Honig describes, or possibly "fluid," in the sense that Arendt describes, depending on the figure who inhabits this conceptual landscape. But while for Honig and Zerilli the mere association of mother earth and mother was over determined, for Moore the task is less about undoing the association of mother earth and mother, and more about the revelation which is birth. For Arendt, it is only by returning to the thought of birth that we can do more than engage in superficial debates about concepts of women, earth and the political reality of sexism.

"The Blood is in the Soil"; Birth and the Political

Arendt speaks of fascism which fixes identity in origin: the site of birth determines its infant's destiny. As a counterpoint to the fascist appropriation of the metaphor of birth, Arendt reminds us of the double-meanings of the Latin root "nasci," to be born, and the Greek origin, "physis," to grow out of, to appear by itself.⁸⁹ Birth is "natural" for Arendt in the sense that it is, on one level, one of our most intimate mediations with the cycle of generation and corruption which is life, and on another, the arrival of a being we cannot know beforehand. We await the arrival of an infant differently than we await the rain, or the sun, because we are waiting for what cannot be predicted. Like the infant, for Arendt, "mothers" are natural in the sense that mothering requires tending to her infant's appetites just as much as it requires welcoming his unpredictable nature. Arendt does not claim that mothers have an instinct which steer and determine her method of mothering; instead, like Aristotle, Arendt suggests that her embrace is "virtuous" because it

⁸⁹ *The Human Condition*, 49

could be otherwise; the fact that it is a uniquely embodied choice heightens the stakes, but not the odds. Birth promises nothing save everything and anything.

Arendt's insistence on mother's earthly immanence is still suspicious to many feminists. Feminist critics such as Kittay fears that blindness de-politicizing sexual inequality in a world structured by an inequality of "chronological unfairness," is more apt to consolidate than it is to dissolve this same inequality.⁹⁰ Arendt does not relent: she insists that any human who confuses the product of their labour as their own fails to recognize that the earth is more than he can know, have or be. Arendt refuses women who identify as "mothers" entrance into the space of the political because she is convinced that women who do so are unable to accept their earthly immanence as a higher principle, and who, in the very same breath, fail to accept that they can only gain an "enlarged understanding" by postulating a subjectivity which appreciates the equalizing force of the earth.

Against Arendt's Wishes: Making Maternity Political

Kittay begins her book *Love's Labour* by remembering that, as a child, her mother would wait for the family to begin eating then justify her own eating by claiming "I too am some mother's child." The claim puzzles Kittay both as a child and as an adult. Kittay's "childish" desire that food should be eaten is Kittay's adult goal. Kittay's mother's phrase "I too am some mother's child" propels the project of accomplishing the goal that all those who need to eat-adults, dependents, and those who care for dependents. Kittay's emphasis is on the needs of "mother" or dependent workers. The risk is not only that dependency workers receive not enough support and thus abandon their work and their charge, but that dependency workers receive not enough support and become dependent on their status as dependency workers inspiring an ambivalence in the charge themselves. In both cases it seems reasonable to claim that support diminishes

⁹⁰ *Love's Labour*, "Introduction" 1-5

ambivalence. Ambivalence, stipulates Kittay, is what only the mother experiences in seeing those she is nourishing thrive while she herself must postpone satiating her hunger.

Kittay argues against the norm in which justice is 1) symmetrical, 2) non-historical and 3) contractual. She claims that concepts of justice which presuppose a symmetrical, non-historical and contractual relation and ignore that all of us are in some relation of dependence and inequality throughout the course of our life; added to this is the fact that many of the decisions that govern our lives are not in fact “contractual”-especially when we are dependent..⁹¹ She counters by claiming that 1) we are all of us in relations of dependence (inequality) throughout the course of our life, 2) that we are always historically situated, and 3) that many of the decisions that govern our lives are not in fact contractual-especially when we are dependent. Rather than try to erase or diminish these differences, she claims we need to construct of model of justice that takes these facts of life seriously. This includes a universal subjectivity which affirms, rather than negates, the terms of our universal dependence on a “m/other.”

For Arendt, a model of justice that began on the premise that we are all some mother’s child, a model which emerged from our inequality and abstract obligation, makes the modern error of collapsing the political with the biological. For Arendt, a judgment’s claim to validity extends only to those persons whose perspectives were taken into account in a process of “enlarging” one’s mentality. According to Arendt, the judging agent “always reflects upon others

⁹¹ Kittay cites Rawls work from within this tradition and claims that in striving to prevent arbitrary contingencies (for example, prevailing property distributions) from affecting the justice of political and social institutions. A contract is non-historical the more those party to it abstract from knowledge of circumstances (actual or hypothetical) that would advantage or disadvantage people who occupy certain positions. [. . .]. But while Rawls’ “original position” is non-historical since contractors are placed behind a complete ‘veil of ignorance’ regarding their particular situations, so none can take advantage of their social circumstances, natural talents, nor particular conceptions of the good or prevailing historical conditions, by situating his parties symmetrically, Rawls claims that he makes them strictly equals and carries to the limit the ideal of equality behind democratic contractualism. Rawls argues that the conception of justice that would be agreed to in the original position is neither utilitarian nor perfectionist, but a Kantian account: justice as fairness. [. . .] Just laws and institutions constitute their common good. In complying with and acting for the sake of these principles and institutions, citizens are morally autonomous, for they act on and from a law they give to themselves, out of their rational and moral powers.”

and their taste, taking their possible judgments into account.”⁹² Enlarged mentality requires the person judging to put herself in the situation of another so as to take into account the thoughts of others.”⁹³ We are able to put ourselves in the situation of another because we are the beings who once appeared without a name, a past or determined future.

Arendt conceives of our second birth as the negation of the determined familial, identifiable relation and the affirmation of the indeterminate, web like connection as relation to others and the earth. Action and thought directed toward an indeterminate future cannot be contained. The urge to contain humans in the community of biological necessity engulfs it in a collective identity in which it would be impossible to appropriate an enlarged standing. By dragging our bodily needs into the realm of human action renders our words and deeds the indistinguishable cry of the infantile. We can only protect what is most precious, human freedom, by protecting this realm. Once we do so, the possibility of preventing someone from their entitled necessities or rightful obligations would not be impossible: but it would be contestable. Without the possibility of contesting every injustice anew, every injustice is possible

It is for this same reason that Arendt can explain why the infant is not merely reducible to a product of labour or work; it is, perhaps, for this same reason that only Arendt can explain why mothers and their infants are capable of action. Whether a mother regards her infant as another self or the “product” of her labour, the mother who calls her child her own regards him as a “what” rather than a “who.” In doing so, a mother not only denies his “who-ness,” so too does she negate her “who-ness.” Any pretence of ownership renders herself and her infant a “what” rather than a “who.” Conversely, the mother who responds to the needs and wants of her infant because he is exposed to the world prepares him for his possible insertion into the world of human freedom. For better and for worse, the orphan’s destiny is not set in biology. The total vulnerability of the infant to the world is, in Arendt’s framework, demands that all persons

⁹² *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 67

⁹³ *Ibid*, 42

respond to his needs, not only his mother because he is a human, and not because he is an infant who does or should belong to some mother. By virtue of having been born, he, not we, announces his human freedom.

Confronting the Radical

Adrianna Cavarero, a native of Italy and member of the communist opposition movement, and Arendt a Jewish woman fleeing for her life and intellectual autonomy to New York, share a personal, familiar experience of the well-known etymological derivation “the blood is in the soil.” Their single determination is to undo the tie which links a conceptual imaginary between the bond of blood and earth which draws the singular into its bloodstream and engulfs it in a collective identity as soon as, or even before, it is born. Both have a personal, familiar desire to wrestle birth from the clutches of fascism. By using birth rather than death to set the scene, Arendt confronts totalitarian propaganda, modern sagas and post modern narratives: she affirms unity, uniqueness, and totality without determining the content of this wholeness; she affirms the tenuous nature of the connection of community without affirming humans as the sum of their thoughts and actions. Cavarero follows suit.

As Kristeva so brilliantly remarks, Arendt’s rendering of the scene of birth will—in an unprecedented and unpredictable fashion—open up the anarchistic and conservative figure of the human who is unique, unified, and total (contrary to postmodernism).⁹⁴ Against the “melancholic tribe” (from Plato to Kant to Heidegger) and against the anonymity of the crowd, and the multitude of anonymous individuals melts, Arendt makes

⁹⁴ Kristeva, “Is there a Feminine Genius?” 5 Note: this same trajectory is developed at length in Kristeva’s lengthy trilogy on feminine genius which I will reference extensively in my chapter devoted to Kristeva.

an appeal for a political life in which the originality of each individual is guaranteed through (the creation of) a ‘web of human relationships’ consisting of memory and narrative destined for others. This realization of the who of the individual in the web of attachments that unite particular individuals is a distinctive feature of Arendtian political thought, at one and the same time intensely libertarian and eminently social and therefore to which, paradoxically, both the most eccentric anarchists and the most conservative spirits can subscribe. It is the conviction, as ontological as it is existential, that what is unique in each individual remains hidden to ‘the person himself’ and does not ‘appear so clearly and unmistakably [as it does] to others’⁹⁵

Arendt’s eccentric anarchism-her politics without party-and her conservative spirit-her insistence of the collective writing of life history-is what allows her to stipulate a notion of community in opposition to the “national community” framework adopted by fascism. Only Arendt’s anarchistic conservatism allows the setting of birth to be the “appearing-with proves to be necessary to the existent precisely in its uniqueness or in its distinction” rather than a site for securing identity in origin.

Arendt writes against totalitarianism, but also post-modern feminism. In Arendt’s vision of the political, our earthly origins negate the possibility of determining identity, either by family, location or text. Arendt’s socially interdependent beings can strip themselves of any particular relation through speech and action. Our willingness to risk this exposure is nourished by a willing submission to the earth’s mighty cycles in which life is essentially indistinguishable from death. In the case of feminist postmodernism, it is generally suspicious of any claim to a unitary and substantial model of a self that finds coherent affirmation in his self narration because it presupposes a self conscious ego who translates into words the reality of the “I” which precedes and is independent of the text. It is likewise suspicious of claims about the mother’s earthly, determined connection to her infant. The anti-metaphysical horizon of post structuralism denies the “self any status whatsoever outside language” and postulates a text which provides some semblance of coherence and unity.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 6

Post-modernist discourses of maternity are generally suspicious of norms and values which prescribe selfless action on behalf of mothers to their children, especially when such sacrifice is directly against their social, political or economic best interests. And yet, to limit ourselves to suspicion would be a reactive limitation to representing the mother-infant relation as anything but ideological. It limits us to imagining everyone is an orphan and/or a bastard with little but a contractual right to be cared for in something besides an institutional framework, or some facsimile. In stark contrast, Arendt is able to imagine a mother- infant relation that affirms the web-like connection, the earthly connection, and --most important--the possibility of this same infant's mother herself appearing as a "who" and not just as a "what." Arendt imagines the violence done to the underlying revelation of birth, sex difference, difference, ambiguity, which drives, rather than prevents, narrative identity, political thought and action, creativity. Arendt imagines that the generation of life enables, rather than prevents, the creation of ideas. The question remains: does Arendt, like her nemesis Plato, configure a notion of human freedom which requires a repudiation of maternity?

Cavarero's work bridges Arendt's preoccupation with the Ancients, modern fascism and metaphors of birth. Like Arendt, she deconstructs western metaphysics to deconstruct fascism, not because metaphysics is inherently fascist, but because she believes that the germ of fascism's possibility and its possible undoing are manifest in metaphysics's exegesis of origin and identity. For example, both Arendt and Cavarero tend to be labeled "feminist" but, like Arendt, Cavarero does not self-identify as a feminist. For both thinkers, the term "feminist" is over-determined to become a restrictive political platform based on an identity rooted in the body. Such 'markers' cause Cavarero to worry and be wary of the ability of fascism to insert itself into anti-fascism discourses and practices. In this sense, her analysis is politically relevant to feminists and non-feminists alike.

Cavarero uses "birth" to counter-pose fascism to anti-fascism. Fascism begins with the premise that we are born into an identity rooted in the place where earthly immanence meets the

human domain of speech and action; fascism collapses the determinate with what should be indeterminate. Deleuze names this picture of thought the “arboreal” because, rather than acknowledge the unpredictable inherent in the earthy, everything is understood and interpreted as if it branched out from one unified and uniform trunk: every branching out is classified by where it came from, instead of where it is going to. From within the arborescence of fascism, Cavarero unearths the rhizomatic inherent in birth: instead of interpreting birth as an event which determines identity, Cavarero assures us that, with every birth comes the promise of the unpredictable. Nothing about an infant’s mother, or socio-historical-political context, tells us “who” this infant will become. Birth is rhizomatic: it scrambles, confuses, and disguises ‘origin.’

The tragedy of the philosopher is that has for too-long been occupied by someone who has too long been unaware of the need to solicit the story which can only be solicited from others. The hero’s tragic fate is not his latent love of his mother nor is it his latent desire to kill his father; rather, the hero’s tragic fate is his latent, unrealized desire to know *his* story. Without this desire, he fails to go forth and seek others; had he wanted, had he known, he would have asked, and, had he asked, he would not live in a world without others. The philosopher is not only lonely, he is *angry*; he seems to know that his desire is waning and that, without it, he cannot know what it is to live with others, and to know from whom he came. Perhaps it is his loneliness that causes him to regard the revelation which is others with suspicion and distrust. His lonely anger culminates in violence, the same violence that Klein terms the “stupidity of psychosis.” The philosopher turns his head to see behind him, but, instead of seeing, he is left blind: a mono-mega empty origin of form without contour, a cavern black and empty, threatens to engulf him and repudiate this he must. Cavarero observes this scene of a man who, in his ignorance and distrust of the revelation of his origin, turns into a monster. The midwives too observe as their unborn stumbles in the underwater-cave, not knowing which way is up or down, with some pity, but all along, with a sense of inevitability. As Arendt warned, Cavarero concedes: our first birth is the possibility of our second birth.

In her recounting of the theatres of appearance and spaces of disappearance where she warns of the perils of misappropriating labour, obfuscating of work, or ducking action, Cavarero is sometimes too much the spectator and not enough the subject of her own contributions. Her narrative voice resonates with the meta-tone of a thinker who sees from the top down, depersonalizing the story of the triumph of the “what” over the “who.” In the rare instances in *Relating Narratives* in which Cavarero steps down from on high, she quickly extracts herself from the analysis; even in her chapter on biography in which she speaks of women’s frequent desire to read stories of individuals rather than totalizing narratives, Cavarero opts to be the narrator rather than the actor.

Our Life is a Stage

If Cavarero has a tendency towards an anxious repetition, it is for demonstrating the impossibility of shedding the ambiguity inherent in birth. She repeats many times that, we desire to know our story, not because of a general sense of lack, but by witnessing the birth of another.⁹⁶ By witnessing the birth of another, she claims that we understand by analogy that we, like the infant, are exposed to an earthly immanence mitigated only by a theatre of performers and spectators who shelter us from the dark night of nothingness. For Cavarero, our exposure is our existence in the double sense which cannot be separated: our exposure as earthly beings is also our existence as possibly human. From birth, we are all showing who she or he is to others. As Cavarero stipulates, our sheer “there-ness” relates to the context in which we appear; the primacy of appearance constitutes the fundamental corporeal aspect of identity.⁹⁷ Birth has an “ontological” as well as phenomenological bearing. Birth is the root of origin, but this origin’s “roots” are irreparably rhizomatic. In the entanglement which is the correlation of being seen and seeing, speaking and listening, asking and giving, community which is the manifestation of what

⁹⁶ In this sense, her work footnotes Klein’s parallel between our ignorance of metaphysics, our ignorance of sexual origin, and fascism.

⁹⁷ *Relating Narratives; Story Telling and Selfhood*, 21

Cavarero's names "the cosmic feast of reciprocity." We are, she writes, "the naked reality of our originary physical appearance."⁹⁸ This is the double (and multiple) meaning of what it is to be 'born.'

When we are born, we are named. As Cavarero echoes from Benjamin, our name is not an "onomastic originary" which confers our uniqueness; instead, "the names that parents give a child do not correspond-in a metaphysical rather than etymological sense-to any knowledge, for they name newborn children."⁹⁹ He can not be known to himself, except through others who narrate the beginning for which he was not present. Our first experience is a memory which is prohibited to us. This prohibition is the gap in memory which spurs us to solicit our whole story from others. The fact of our being and having a name and a story is, of course, a story within a story-and one which Cavarero increasingly distances her self from.

Cavarero is insistent: as the text unfolds, we are repeatedly reminded of the underlying unpredictable quality of every memory, every certainty. We are told that we know who we are, and who we are in others, only as a state recognized "too late." We are always after the fact, and then not even. Who we are and where we came from stubbornly refuses to secure the indeterminable and unpredictable anonymity of origin. Again, this ambiguous uncertainty does not apply only to our identity, or the story of identity, but even the most mundane of facts. Facts, however amicably or combatively or sophisticatedly narrated, still carry a narrative string that will furl. In each instance, we are reminded of the impossibility of asking for a more solid, fixed ground upon which to think and believe with the arrival of the infant. As the ambiguity and interdependence of our identity becomes increasingly apparent, Cavarero's own narrative becomes increasingly un-self reflective and all the more constative.

Like an all too familiar puppet-master, we are told a story of an infant who turns to their audience to know who they are, and the cycle of identity, community, and knowing commences

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 21-22

⁹⁹ Qtd in *Relating Narratives; Story Telling and Selfhood*, 49

one more time. The revelation of birth reveals that those to whom we turn to know ourselves also only know who they are through others. It is by witnessing the birth of another that I appreciate the tenuous nature of my own memory, and thus, by analogy, I know that the memory of those who were present to my own birth comes to them in the same fragile, convincing illusion. The fact of birth makes the pretence of knowing one's self dogmatic.

Cavarero accentuates the “epon” of birth: it promises all that metaphysics had wanted it to: an illumination of origin and identity, but dashes any hope of fixing or securing this illumination. Like the experience of waking from a dream, we can almost touch and feel the experience, but in reaching for it, we are prescient to its illusive quality. Birth is ephemeral, but constitutive. In summary, reviving the double meaning of birth makes salient the manner in which our life is affectively real, earthly and grounded, but only because of the nearly evanescent narrative communities which establish, and de-establish, our memory, our identity, and our belonging which we, by virtue of being born, require to know who we are and who we are required, by virtue of having been born, to disrupt. Our life is a stage. But am I, as Plato once suggested, born into a world of other-mothers who cannot tell me from any other? And what of that mother who philosophy distrusted for so long-where does she make her appearance?

Enter Oedipus

When Oedipus the philosopher stands before the riddle of the Sphinx, he attempts to answer her question ‘who are you?’ by answering with a general response. On this same basis, Cavarero determines a correspondence between Oedipal and Platonic discourse. In the case of Oedipus, the “riddle flows from the cruelty of a god, from malevolence towards men.”¹⁰⁰ Either

¹⁰⁰ *Relating Narratives; Storytelling and Selfhood*, 8

Oedipus or the Sphinx must die; either he will be devoured by a monster, or she will be cast into the abyss. The one who reveals the secret is saved, but risks living with the monstrous knowledge. In the case of the philosopher, he attempts to avoid the riddle and shift the problem on the “definition.” But, claims Cavarero, the curse lies not in the riddle but in having to answer the riddle.

When the philosopher tries to be free of the sphinx by answering, “I am Man,” he does her work for her. The philosophers extinguishes his self: his answer is at once “masculine and neuter,” a hybrid created by thought; invisible and intangible, yet “declaring itself to be the only thing “sayable” in true discourse. The philosophical (and modern tragedy) relies on its “noetic” status, and leaves behind no life story. The philosophers’ response, claims Cavarero, is the “very form of philosophy.”¹⁰¹ Philosophy determines the correct approach in advance and in each instance and, as a result, its epistemic form does not change: the definition is answered by the universal. Not only does this philosopher perish, so too does his trace. The philosophers’ response “man” applies to everyone and to no one and thus “disincarnates” itself from the living singularity of each one. When Oedipus the philosopher answers the question, the outcome is similarly tragic.

The monster’s cruel game is to show Oedipus facing the Sphinx in the act of solving the riddle: he does not speak but points towards himself. At the time he tries to know himself, he recognizes himself in the definition of man. It is a deadly interaction between universal man and concrete uniqueness. In the sentence “I Man,” the “I” dies and yet, at least in the case of Oedipus, the story is known by all except Oedipus himself. His ignorance of his birth leads him to the fatal crossroads of murdering a stranger and parricide, and a legitimate marriage and an act of incest. The mask of the duplicity is the mask of his birth. His tragic ending is the beginning of his revelation that he requires others to know who he is. Like Oedipus, our story is incomplete and

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 9

generates a need for others. It is a story which both discovers and creates the relation of self with the world in which it can appear with others, knowing itself only in that appearance or display. Ultimately, we cannot distinguish the “I” who narrates from the self who is narrated.

Jocasta: Mother Avatar

Cavarero shares Oedipus’s anxiety when it comes to answering the question. She is insistent, persistent, and relentless in her archaeological uncovering of his story, his pain, his destiny, but, if we were to turn the tables and place our narrator Cavarero before the Sphinx the enigma would be: “who is your mother?” She well understands his story, its depths and traps, its ironies and its desires, and, by the end of *Relating Narratives*, while we know all too well why Oedipus confuses his mother, Jocasta for his wife, but we know almost nothing of Cavarero, the mother, her mother, “mother.” Her answers lead us to conclude that she, like all of us, must *recollect* birth. Oedipus could answer the question: “what is a mother?” quite easily. He, like the philosopher, would describe the universal qualities shared by mothers: they conceive, gestate, and often nurse and rear their young. At the end of his life, he might have added that we cannot know her except through others; but, neither she nor he can tell us *who* our ‘mother’ is. But, as Cavarero so often remarks, because he failed to know her except as a universal definition, in this case not of “man” but of “mother,” he is secured a tragic fate. And yet, what does Cavarero reveal of her own anxiety when she speaks of Oedipus’s anxiety?

Her anxiety borders somewhat on poetry. The seasons of her existence, this existence and not another, where has it come from? ¹⁰²Cavarero leaves it here, like that, and like others, our “mother” is offered to us in the form of universals. Is this simply because, for Cavarero, ‘mother’ is the universal we cannot know? Is mother, for her, what coincides with what it is to want to know, the metaphor for what is potential rather than actual, and not simply a conscious act of

¹⁰² *Relating Narratives; Story Telling and Selfhood*, 11

remembering? Is mother 'not'? It certainly seems to be the case-that, ultimately, 'mother' is made an empty universal, an ever elusive "cause" which we know through its effect, the birth of her infant. Ultimately, Cavarero's account tells us who mothers are by telling about her infant; if indeed Cavarero's habit is the point of view of the adult recollecting his birth, is she not committing the same error which she accused Oedipus and Plato of making?

The Gift of Life?

Recall in *Chapter 1* that Protevi defended Aristotle's notion of the maternal on the basis that the notion implied an ethic of the gift of life. Cavarero's rendering of the mother's role in the appearance of the infant is strikingly similar. She deduces that the infant necessitates a reflection on names such as Donato and Benedetta because "whoever is born and abandoned by the mother is still an existent offered by her as a gift [donata/dono] to the world and blessed [benedetta] by it."¹⁰³ Like Arendt, she suggests that we are all orphans because we have all been abandoned by some mother. This is true in the sense that, "the perceptible truth of each existence" is "made more acute by the immediate loss of one's proper origin." The mother is the "who" from which the 'from' is already missing. Mother is already absent in the giving of her gift. And thus, for the same reason that we are infants, we also have a "name." Naming is always given, a gift (le don). The gift of life necessitates a gift-in-return. But is mother really only a nodular point in the economy of the gift?

Mothers know themselves, by analogy, to be she who was once an infant, but mothers also know that she is present for birth differently than others. Not all mothers, but many mothers, witness the birth of their infants differently than does a stranger and not simply as a mother, but as his/her mother. She awaits his story with a readiness to do more than narrate his unpredictable evolving in community; she most often awaits his arrival with the intention of tending to his needs, his wants, as well as his dreams and his nightmares and everything in between. Many

¹⁰³ *Relating Narratives*, 45

mothers receive their baby waiting for the story to begin-differently. Her story is double: she is not a spectator in the sense that others are spectators. She is and is not the body to which he will search, explore, and create in the vessel of the symbol. Not all mothers, but most mothers, are sentient to this evolution and relate to him differently for this reason. In chapters 4 and 5, Klein and Kristeva will develop the relevance of this difference. But, for now, we can note that Cavarero does not, will not, and perhaps cannot imagine birth from the point of view of anyone but he who recollects birth. Kant more than most seem to understand that this seeming impasse is philosophical.

CHAPTER III

KANT ON ORDINARY, IRRATIONAL WOMEN AND THE SUBLIMITY OF IRIS

Abstract: Kant overthrows the reigning idealisms and empiricisms and crowns the human subject sovereign. He makes clear that this new kingship is a mixed blessing: forging one's way through temptation and moral dilemma without the comfort of an external authority is taxing and sometimes vertiginous, but there is no alternative. The "creative centre of the knowable world" must make himself against the material world according to his pure will. With an absent-minded massage on the scars left where the chains of material determinism once burdened him, the genius strives on-not by imitating, nor by obeying pre-established rules, but by giving the law to nature. With brilliant stealth, Kant makes nature dependent on man. Highly prescient to the risks associated with this bold move, Kant lays down the law of reason with absolute force; everything will be referred back to her omnipotent majesty for approval. There is only one problem. While the master of the enlightenment permits an unprecedented patronage in ethics, politics, philosophy and the arts, he does not permit this patronage to women.

One Antinomy Leads to Another

When Kant unleashes the force of the antinomy, neither dogmatic theology nor empiricist determinism absorbs the shock. With unparalleled force, Kant strips the subject down to a distilled machinery of senses which supply data to an imagination which synthesizes with rules supplied by the understanding. An analysis of the aftermath reveals a lone-subject hovering on the edge of a vertiginous precipice, his stature framed by the sublime heights of the celestial spheres. This newly denuded subject is raw and exposed but uniquely capable of shedding the

earth's suffocating embrace and those supercilious imperatives from above. Kant is the reticent artificer of the "creative center of the knowable world."¹⁰⁴

For those left to tend to the afterbirth, a putrid whiff averts their attention from the newborn creation and tinges their tender hearts with a mournful melancholy. In an absent-minded salute to Plato, Kant withdraws from the sodden terrain of the nativity with barely an acknowledgment to those whose destiny it is to generate life. The evidence is indisputable: Kant's pedagogic energies are reserved for subjects who are born but never bear. As he writes in the *Anthropology*,

Nature was concerned about the preservation of the embryo and implanted fear into the woman's character, a fear of physical injury and a timidity towards similar dangers. On the basis of this weakness, the woman legitimately asks for masculine protection.¹⁰⁵

Kant acknowledges that some women are the exception to the rule, but adds that they "may as well have a beard."¹⁰⁶ These sentiments are echoed in his *Observations on the Beautiful and the Sublime* in which he determines women's intuitions to be governed by sense rather than reason.

Kant not only assumes that nature prevents women from creating genuine ideas, he suggests that nature's influence over women is so profound that it is able to infect men through women. Nature, claims Kant, can with "gaping throat, drink the whole kingdom of moral beings like a drop of water."¹⁰⁷ Thus, in Kant's ontology, the moral man is tempted by nature, but can resist her lure. When reason dictates that he ought to succumb to temptation, when for example he must will the continuation of the species, he is to succumb begrudgingly. Some of Kant's readers deduce that for Kant, willingly succumbing to sexual temptation with no intent of procreating is more morally wrong than suicide; suicide has the remaining dignity of being a solitary drowning

¹⁰⁴Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman*, 62

¹⁰⁵ *the Anthropology*, qtd. in Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman*, 62

¹⁰⁶ "A woman who has a head full of Greek, like Mm. Dacier, or carries on fundamental controversies about mechanics, like the Marquise de Châtelet, might as well even have a beard, for perhaps that would express more obviously the men of profundity for which she strives," qtd in Robin May Scott, "Feminist Rationality Debates."

rather than a willful self-obliteration in a “petit mort.”¹⁰⁷ Regardless of how far we push this interpretation, it is clear that Kant renders nature the unreliable, self serving dictator of prejudice, emotion, and passion and women her servant. Nature is rendered the dual temptress and warden who beckons man to return to what he, by virtue of being a rational animal, must return to. Kant is adamant that it can and should be no other way.

Moral man is only moral when and if he refuses temptation. Moral man is both an *imperfectly* biological and an *imperfectly* rational being. He is both subject and not subject to the laws of reason and nature. On this same precipice lies the foundation of his freedom. Moral man is capable of knowing that he is not determined by nature but compelled by an imperative. The imperative conflicts with the purely determinate laws of nature which are meant to govern over nature and compel him to live as if his actions were in accord with what has laws and formal unity, nature, but not of determinate nature itself. To be free, he must conceive of the possibility of being free from external determinates. In the stormy seas of immanent animality, man can hold onto the realm of the universal. Once he takes hold of the universal, or more accurately, once he allows it to take hold of him, he can channel every current of the stormy seas of his animality to propel himself into the open spaces of morality and autonomy and creativity. In Kant’s eyes, women are too natural to be like nature.

Man Made Nature

Kant claims that the cognizing, moral man knows it is impossible to know if he originates in the all powerfulness of his reason or if he emanates from some other unknown; however, the good man knows that he cannot know. Otherwise said, the moral man knows the (sublime) limits of cognition. The man knows that the “infinity of possibilities that entice and beckon the transcendental imagination,” cannot be known by finite, imperfectly rational man. Those who know that they cannot know revere her invulnerable majesty, bow to her voice and understand her

¹⁰⁷ *Phenomenal Woman*, 70

commandments; conversely, those who claim to have known what cannot be known, are, according to Kant, “liars and boasters.”¹⁰⁸ For Kant, the moral man appreciates that “reality is something hard, something which resists reason and value, something which is recalcitrant to form.”¹⁰⁹ Men appreciate that form must be imposed on the world of matter because the understanding is the source of all knowing.

Despite her majesty’s sovereignty, Kant insists that she is dependent on the subject. Kant is not suggesting that man can overcome nature, rather, he is claiming that man, and not nature, transforms nature into something that has shape, meaning, consequence. Nature itself has no value. Anticipating our likely anxiety of the unbearable weightlessness of such a revelation, Kant reassures us that this man-made reality is just as heavy, real, and potentially wounding as ever. He adds that, while it might appear that this “phenomenal “world” risks crumbling in the grips of contingency, it remains, nevertheless the only world we know and sometimes all too real. Those of us who know this world to be one of distinction and clarity have, as Korsgaard describes, “won” this experience. For this reason, she describes Kant’s contribution to epistemology as modernism realized.

Korsgaard explains that, in Kant’s world view, reality is something hard, resists reason and value, and is recalcitrant to form. The Kantian subject feels at a distance from nature because nature is what the subject knows himself by knowing he is *not* nature; similarly, modern man constructs a phenomenal world and knows himself by knowing he is *not* this world. (The more familiar way of explaining this is to say that, for Kant, the subject knows with senses supplying the data we synthesize (intuitions) under rules (categories) supplied by the understanding (reason)). Kant anticipates the likely outcome to be that we can never know if God or some other omnipotent entity constitutes the “creative center of the knowable world,” but there will never

¹⁰⁸ Qtd. in *the Phenomenal Woman from the Beautiful and the Sublime*, 69

¹⁰⁹ *the Sources of Normativity*, 45

any longer be any disputing our role in this creative endeavor. In fact, for Kant the history of philosophy could be read as a case history of the subject's struggle to accept that he, and not Nature or God, is the "creative centre of the knowable world." Korsgaard describes this awareness as a "materialism" that no longer puzzles over why the world, "being good, is yet not good."¹¹⁰

The Antinomy

Kant's account of man emerging as an autonomous subjectivity comes at a unique juncture in the history of philosophy; in fact, Kant's genius comes in the manner he approaches this same juncture. Rather than accepting what had long seemed like a straightforward conflict between reason and sensibility, Kant offers that this is in fact an insight into cognition as such. Kant terms the irreconcilable conflict between reason and sensibility the "antinomy." In the first stages, humans attempted to shed themselves of the shackles of the earth by taking refuge in the celestial sphere of rationalism; they are soon trapped in a boundless infinity when they are forced to claim that all knowledge is intuited in innate ideas which correlate with essential forms. Kant stipulates that "rationalism" was forced to prescribe acting and thinking in accordance with the same ideas whose unshakeable, omniscient, omnipresent legitimate existence it must presuppose; no empirical experience could confirm the existence of what must remain, ultimately, essentially, formal.

Kant identifies a turning point, when, in an attempt to return to the solid ground of earthly certainty, philosophy went full circle only to get stuck in the dead end of empiricism which must base any and every inference on past, empirical experiences. It limits its scope to predicting cognitive possibilities and moral certainties based on past experiences of the empirical. In a final attempt to escape, the empiricist takes refuge in a rationalist domain it long shunned. Ultimately, it must make any inferences on the basis of a "cause" that can never be made "empirical." More

¹¹⁰ *the Sources of Normativity*, 46

problematic still, the empiricist must postulate that everything has a “cause,” including what cannot have a cause, namely freedom. In simple, rationalism must postulate that everything has an origin but extend indefinitely and empiricism must postulate that everything has a termination but be broken into infinitely divisible parts.

Kant resolves the antinomy by not resolving it. In other words, Kant concludes that the laws and unity of the world must be supplied, not by God (rationalism) or Nature (empiricism), but by the understanding. The understanding knows itself in constructing a phenomenal world and knows itself in knowing its self to not be this same phenomenal world. To state otherwise, cognition will never be made evident in an unmediated and wholly-founded expression or experience. Cognition, by definition, always lacks. In more technical terms, Kant postulates that the world we know must be supplied by senses that are synthesized (intuitions) under rules (categories) supplied by the understanding (reason); this same phenomenal world must be the production of the temporal sequence which brings objects into an ordered whole and makes them knowable.¹¹¹ In simple, the phenomenal world *is* the world. By pushing the antinomy to its limits, Kant does not resolve it; instead, he generates a sustained revelation on cognition’s desire for the ultimate, unconditioned termination and extension.

While for other philosophers, the choice between rationalism and empiricism appeared like the only choice, for Kant, the antinomy delivers an imperative to accept that, not only is no final reconciliation possible, but that cognition is born from the matrix of this non-reconciliation. The fact that there is no hope of reconciliation is our signal to part company with an external authority and an invitation to begin a new sojourn as an autonomous subject. The impossibility of reconciling the tension between the demand for earthly intimacy and the demand to be at a distance from “nature” generates the creativity proper to the human subject. The tension between nature’s pull and culture’s push is the tension proper to being a rational animal. To grasp the phenomenon of this tension is not only to understand the beginning of the moral feeling; it is to

¹¹¹ From notes and lectures by Bernstein and Horowitz’s on Kant’s ontology.

understand the very process of being a creative subject. In a sense, our burden and our blessing is that we must come to terms with our desire for it to be otherwise. When we accept that there is no grand signified such as Nature or God “out there” who will determine our thoughts and actions, we accept our freedom; this freedom is our cognition.

As Horowitz captures in *Sustaining Loss*, the “blandishments” of nature threaten to return in culture, but the illusion must *threaten*. Nature can only threaten to return because it is the return of a lost world we never knew. In fact, Nature cannot return simply because it never was, it cannot return because it never could have been. The cognizing, moral, autonomous subject *is* the process which is identical to the attempt to reconcile the tension which cannot be reconciled. This tension is the production of subjectivity and the “artefact” its product. Our yearning for a loss which cannot be recovered is a loss which lures us toward beauty. Horowitz describes beauty as

nature’s obscene yet unapproachable afterlife. Beauty is the loss of a world that cannot be recovered. The cognizing, moral autonomous subject mourns this lost nature, but the illusion still has a claim on him. He knows that neither Nature nor God will return to give him the nourishing solidity or secure certainty that would oblate the burdensome freedom which is his and his alone. The need to create is the inevitable burden of freedom proper to subjectivity.¹¹²

The experience of yearning for something that *cannot be* is a yearning that is proper to being human. The experience of wanting and needing to create is similarly proper to being human. The question becomes, does this need to create, generated from a yearning for a return to a lost time of nature, relate back to Kant’s other antinomy, that which places our moral man at the devotional ground of our ideal of Isis and at the homestead of our disdained real woman? A number of Kant’s feminist critics answer “yes.”

¹¹²*Sustaining Loss; Art and Mournful Life*, 36

Introducing the Feminist Critique: Apologies, Inconsistencies, and Antiquities

Kant accomplishes a radical overhaul of determinism. His rendering of the autonomous subject, and all that this entails, is unparalleled. And yet, while he answers the toughest questions with the most rigorous of methods, he allows his prejudice towards women to run deep and undisturbed. Despite his obvious familiarity with the works of Plato and despite his commitment to the dictates of reason and equality before the law, Kant pays little attention to fact or argument. He assumes that 1) either a woman does not mother, and so is not a real woman, or she mothers and so embodies the following natural properties 2) she lures moral men into sin 3) she transmogrifies, cognitively, in response to the developing needs of her foetus and 4) she allows nature to inform her thoughts and actions relevant to the mothering of her infant from childhood to adulthood. In short, women who do not mother are not women and women who mother are irrational. In Kant's efforts to salvage an autonomous subject from the antinomy of reason and empiricism, he produces an antinomy of his own: the antinomy of sublime Isis and irrational woman. Kant requires that his masculine subject repudiate the feminine in ordinary women, but revere her majesty in the form of the mothers of all mothers. These contradictions are the subject of much feminist scholarship.

In the following sections, I engage feminist critiques of Kant's representations of women. The first type I term "apologetic." The apologetic response acknowledges Kant's sexist remarks about ordinary women, but dismisses them as relative to the customs and cultures in which he was imbedded. The second type I term "inconsistencies." The inconsistencies response acknowledges his sexist colloquialisms but prefers to undertake an archeological dig of his ontology; after careful inspection, they deduce that there is no solid ground for claiming that his ontology is sexist, and, on this same basis, Kant has no good reason for his prejudice against women. The last response I term "universalism." It attempts to find an explanation for Kant's apparent sexism by identifying a deeper insecurity about the integrity of his ontology. I conclude by arguing that Kant had no alternative than to conceive of the subject by also conceiving of the

repudiation of the maternal. As I will argue in the following chapter on Klein, Kant was not wrong to repudiate the maternal; rather, his error was to attempt to conceal this repudiation. Enlightenment, it will turn out, has everything to do with repudiating the ‘generation of life.’

As Robin May Schott argues, contemporary readers of Kant need to determine to what extent historical context is relevant to his representations of women. Placing his philosophy in historical context encourages readers to identify his sexism as indicative of the prevailing attitudes of his day; placing his philosophy in historical context might also determine just how much these same attitudes sully his enlightenment philosophy. On this same line of reasoning, Brown and Sedgwick’s claim that we are obligated to forgive Kant’s sexist remarks; they encourage us to focus instead on his positive contributions to the equality movement which stem, in no contingent manner, from his enlightenment philosophy. Brown and Sedgwick urge us to accept that Kant’s denial of citizenship and equality to women is simply part and privy of an antiquated anthropology. They argue that the principle of charity dictates that we assume that, had Kant’s prejudices against women been proven to be the product of determinate, social historical forces, he would have had to recognize that women were being wrongfully denied the opportunity to exercise their rational faculties. Clearly women can generate life and create genuine ideas. They conclude by recommending that we, his readers, dismiss his sexist comments as glib remarks indicative of the then prevailing, but now untenable, anthropological Enlightenment ideology. Once it is determined that his glib remarks are accidents of the tongue originating in common prejudice, they deduce that while he might have been ideologically misled or empirically mistaken, his moral groundwork remains safely intact.¹¹³

Neither Brown nor Sedgwick concede that Kant’s hyper-vigilant distrust of common sense prejudice should have steered him away from the lofty certainties which only reason can afford. Given the import Kant places on thinking and acting in an autonomous manner, it seems

¹¹³*Feminist Interpretations of Kant*, 146

unfair to grant him amnesty on this same basis. Instead, it must be deduced that Kant's words are his own. Whatever he might argue and believe, he does so for a reason; whenever he argues and believes without reason, he does so in error. (They also fail to mention that Kant did in fact have knowledge of an alternative to gender inequality; no doubt he knew the works of Plato intimately; no doubt was familiar with Aristotle's disputes with Plato on the topic of gender equality). Instead, it is reasonable to assume that anything Kant thought fit to publish, he thought fit to claim; this applies equally to his views on women. Neither his mundane experiences nor his anthropological musings are to blame for causing him to believe that those who generate life, women, cannot create genuine ideas.

Kant nearly always explains his reasons for any thought or action; however, this is not the case when it comes to his sexist views about women. Given that his sexist views cannot be reduced to mere common sense prejudice, we must search for another explanation. A number of his critics have focused on the parallels between his concepts of women and Nature. Their reasoning is as follows: if Kant determines that nature is a force of life and surmises that women are determined by this same force, then he must be assuming that women's weakness, physical and cognitive, can be explained by her intimacy with nature; however, Kant resolutely denies that physical experiences can determine human thought or action. Kant's argument for the subject's autonomous relationship to nature is explicit, and even adamant on the point that the subject can rise above or sink below his affective context, but neither pain nor pleasure can determine any specific consequences in the subject. If pain or pleasure had a determining force, then freedom would be Mother Earth's cruel charade, an apparition, and a hoax. If we assumed that pain and pleasure could determine our thoughts and actions, we would have to concede that, on one extreme, victims of torture, and on the other extreme, invites to a sinfully pleasurable orgy would

be less capable of being rational. Kant's insistent point is that all rational beings are capable of being rational *despite* temptation or inclination.¹¹⁴

Kant's argument for the sovereignty of reason is substantiated in a rare series of examples in which Kant refers to a man who is tempted by his passions to commit adultery and another who is tempted to end his miserable life. Both men are consumed by their passions of pain and pleasure but both men, by virtue of their humanity, are able to let reason rule sovereign over inclination. In Kant's unreserved opinion, their triumph is concurrent with their becoming singular, precious instances of rationally moral men. If we assumed that Kant was suggesting even a weak correlation between pain, pleasure, and rational autonomy we would have to assume that the rational man's ability to be moral was interconnected in some way to his ability to feel. Kant makes certain to distinguish moral feeling as the *negative* of feeling.¹¹⁵ On this same line of reasoning, Kant refutes a possible correlation between morality and positive feeling by reminding us of the benevolent who loses his feelings of sympathy and ceases to do what is right and good;¹¹⁶ according to Kant, this man is no longer a moral man, not because he ceases to do the work of benevolence, but because he allows his loss of feeling to determine his thoughts and actions. Only once this same benevolent is motivated to do what is right and good --despite his lack of sympathy-- will Kant allow us to call him a true moral *agent*; the man who is moral despite the circumstances is an instance of obedience to unconditioned moral reason. If pain and pleasure determined us to be moral or immoral beings then mothers would be equally, and sometimes more likely of being enduring examples of moral subjects. Kant sees no reason to dismiss such an absurdity. Why then would the physical experience of gestation, labour, and nursing render a woman incapable of creating genuine ideas?

¹¹⁴ *The Metaphysics of Morals*, see 'the man who has suicide in mind' (also translated as the man who contemplates murdering himself), pages 421-4

¹¹⁵ *The Critique of Practical Reason*, 58. See also pages 71, 115

¹¹⁶ *Metaphysics of Morals*, 449-551, 552

There should be no reason for claiming that there is a quantitatively significant difference between the pain experienced during gestation, labour and nursing and the pain and pleasure experienced during the preparation, fighting, or recovering from battle. Kant has no reservations about expressing his reverence for the battle-worn general who, from his stage of mud and blood, inwardly glows with a near sublime light.¹¹⁷ And yet, the received opinion in much of the feminist literature is that, given the long association of the body with the feminine, there is good reason to dig more deeply. Kant has yet to give us a good reason for excluding women on the basis that she becomes pregnant or gives birth. A more likely for Kant's distrust and demotion of the body and its full gamete of wants, desires, and capacities is a feature of the "body" Battersby terms its ability to "speak back."

Battersby argues that Kant's ambivalence toward paradigmatic shifts in science were deeply connected to his discomfort with women's bodies and their person; she suggests that Kant tends toward a sexist philosophy, not because he does not like or respect women per say, but because women remind him of his philosophical impotence to conceive of matter as anything except inanimate and wanting for unity. This would explain why Kant insists, even after the scientific paradigmatic shift in our understanding of change across species, to conceive of a subject in relation to matter as "mort" rather than "morphing."¹¹⁸ Following this line of reasoning, Kant's prejudice against (pregnant) women is interpreted as evidence of his deeper discomfort with the possibility that matter might generate itself. If Nature generates itself, then Kant's concept of cognition, morality and freedom is unstable and untenable. If the subject understands by imposing formal unity on the world of matter and this same matter "speaks back," Kant's subject's autonomy is put into question.¹¹⁹ Battersby's reading might help explain Kant's discomfort with theories of evolution, but it does not explain Kant's prejudice against women;

¹¹⁷ *Metaphysics of Morals*, 343-350. Kant does not object to actions which promote pain or physical suffering; instead, if such actions spring from a moral disposition they are valued accordingly.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 55

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 56

rather, it explains his prejudice towards generating bodies. Battersby's reading depends on the reader assuming a causal connection between Kant's metaphysics of matter and his prejudice against women. Until the causal connection is established, it cannot be proven. If the issue for Kant were merely that matter generates itself, then Kant, presumably, would show some discomfort with to anyone with a body, man or woman. Kant's possible discomfort with the possibility that man's body evolves does not translate into a prejudice against men.

Boundas argues that the tension in Kant's philosophy is indicative of neither a misinformed sexism nor an antiquated scientific world view; instead, he argues that it results from Kant's well intentioned attempt to articulate a theory of rationality that would establish a consensual harmony among mental faculties for the sake of a harmonious republic of ends. In doing so, Kant stumbles across sexual difference and, given the trouble it threatens to cause, squashes it with the intention of protecting the autonomous subject. Boundas suggests that the tension that lurks in Kant's philosophy is much less about a prejudice towards women or men and much more about the inevitable limitations of a philosophy that struggles to affirm a radical universalism. Boundas identifies a tension that culminates along the fault line that divides it into two subtexts, one of which culminates in ideas without adequate intuitions to fill them (ideas of speculative reason), and the other of which ends with an intuition lacking an adequate idea or concept (the aesthetic instance of the sublime). Given Kant's ambition to offer a system of universal reason, Boundas suggests that the tension remains intolerable. Boundas describes the tension as "traumatic" and as an "unclaimable" fecundity sired by the thought of universality.¹²⁰

Ultimately, Boundas postulates that Kant's prejudice against ordinary women and reverence for the ideal woman is indicative of a tension proper to his struggle to wrestle -not with sexual difference- but with difference as such. On this reading, the assumption is that our greatest insight into Kant's philosophy comes not by ruminating over minor sexist remarks made here and

¹²⁰“An Ontology of Intensities.” *This is a web document and contains no page number

there, or by deconstructing his antiquated scientific world view; instead, our greatest insights into Kant's work are thought to come by pushing his philosophy to its internal limits. The argument is sound, but ultimately misguided when it dismisses the important role that sex difference plays in Kant's philosophy. Kant is highly preoccupied with the relationship between the "creative centre of the knowable world" and his other; for example, in Kant's letter to Schiller. In this same letter, Kant is insistent on the import of a deep reverence for "Isis" and the formation of the autonomous subject. For Kant, the attitude of reverence for the mother of all mothers is crucial import to understanding autonomous, creative subjectivity; it remains possible that the attitude of ambivalent distrust of ordinary women is just as important, and possibly relevant to the reverence for her apparent 'other'.¹²¹

Universalism Revisited: Why Ambivalence Matters

The arguments for apology, inconsistency, antiquity, and universalism fail to reach below the surface-tension proper to Kant's ambivalence towards "generation." The genius of reaching below the surface comes in allowing, rather than preventing, the tremors of the "traumatic tension" to register long enough to glimpse a possible interconnectedness between Kant's ontology and his glib remarks about ordinary women. Such a reading does not necessitate a digression into an analysis of its author or its subject; instead, such a reading invites us to maintain a seriously playful openness to the possibility that Kant's glib remarks are not merely accidents of the tongue (which he thought fit to publish), but, are rather an expression of a deeper discomfort with which he was wrestling. A wide-ranging group of theorists informed by the school of psychoanalysis suggests that this discomfort is nearly universal and proper to being human and warn against any desire to squash and silence such a tension. In fact, they will suggest that enlightenment is just as much about sound judgment, coherent cognition, and artistic

¹²¹“A Genuine Difference Philosophy,” (this is not in circulation so it has no page number)

creativity as it is ambivalence and anxiety. For the likes of Klein and Kristeva, Kant's willing recounting of his experience of ambivalence towards the generation of life, and those who seem to embody its essence, is very much in keeping with the enlightenment Kant helped initiate.

To understand why Kant is unable to regard women as the "creative centre of the knowable world," we can entertain that Kant's genius registers as readily in what he does say as much as what he does not say. Working to "solve" the problem of difference in Kant's work is to make it harder to engage the themes of difference, gender and origin as they intertwine with both Kant's glib remarks and his metaphysics.¹²² Perhaps I and others are too invested in this impasse because it is our tangible claim to a possible connection between Kant's casually sexist remarks and his metaphysics. But, without this assumption, I am unable to understand why Kant's "free and moral man" reveres and fears the sublime Iris while being incapable of relating to ordinary women.

Genus, Genius: Feminists' Ambivalence

Kant's calculated assault on dogmatic theology and empiricist determinism open the doors for the unprecedented latitude for creative genius but, the prohibition against likening the creative process to anything but a symbolic appropriation of the generation of life runs deep. For Kant, women ought to and do generate life rather than create something which is "like" life—although, apparently, every life, all life, is only ever "like" life. Kant is meticulous in his application of the metaphor. Moral agents, geniuses, and the autonomous rational agent are only ever *like* women; real women gestate, birth or mother and midwife but are themselves never actually women. For example, in Kant's rendering of the artistic coupling of a master and his genius-tutor, a proximity to the generation of life is grazed but never grasped. The artist and his

¹²²This last point will be argued at length in my last chapter on Kristeva, subjectivity and matricide.

mentor are anything-anything-but the mother birthing life. They must come as close as possible to being in direct communion with nature, without ever touching her, knowing her, being her. Her sublimity tears the edges of the beautiful.

This rendering of women as simulating nature is generally ill-received by contemporary feminists. Moira Gatens argues that “the dichotomies that dominate philosophical thinking are not sexually neutral but are deeply implicated in the politics of sexual difference. It is this realization that constitutes the ‘quantum leap’ in feminist theorizing.”¹²³ Alison Ainley agrees. She claims that feminist philosophy rests on the belief that

the construction of philosophical images is of particular interest from the feminist perspective when it affects the way that the body is “imagined” into theoretical disciplines and reproduced in specific ways, which also has consequences for the way that moral systems are constructed and subsequently impinge upon the subjects to whom they are addressed.¹²⁴

Klinger adds that, in the context of aesthetic philosophy, the way in which the ideas of the beautiful and the sublime are conceived and how they are contrasted with each other is analogous to the polarizations of “form and matter, mind and body, reason and emotion, public and private, having and being, activity and passivity, transcendence and immanence. The common denominator of these and other binary opposition lies in the dualism of culture and nature which in “traditional Western thought imply the dualism of gender.”¹²⁵ Klinger argues that, in Kant’s writing, “nature and otherness are often linked explicitly and implicitly with symbolic representations of the feminine and maternal, but not always as simply passive. [They appear as] idealized material form, at once intimate and indeterminate, brimming with purposive life yet

¹²³“Levinas and Kant; Maternal Morality and Illegitimate Offspring,” 193

¹²⁴ “Concepts of the Sublime and Beautiful in Kant and Lyotard,” 204

¹²⁵ “Levinas and Kant; Maternal Morality and Illegitimate Offspring, 193

plastic enough to put up resistance to the subject's own ends.¹²⁶ In short, they render real women a screen for man's imagining.

Irigaray contends that, in Kantian aesthetics, the impression is that the "creative centre of the knowable world," creates him-self against woman as m/other. The Kantian subject creates him-self through her, and at the cost of her coming into existence. In this reading, "fear and awe of an all powerful nature forbid man to touch his/the mother and reward his courage in resisting her attractions by granting him the right to judge himself independent."¹²⁷ It is in this same picture that the specter of Nature is constantly threatening to come to life inside the subject. This nature is in the subject as "both mother, as ground and principle of creation; and matter, as sensible." She is what sustains him, but what he must refuse to sustain himself. For Ainley, this signals the symbolic figure of the mother as the unknowable origin and thus determines the repudiation of the mother as a precondition for the moral.¹²⁸

It is true, Kant's rendering of the master and disciple relationship of creativity mimics the pregnant, labouring, and nursing mother, but –interestingly- does not describe the master and disciple productive relationship in terms of sterility or deferral. Instead, as Horowitz so perspicuously reads, Kant renders this relationship in terms of a master who has occupied the place of genius himself, but moves away to make room for the next generation. He does not teach by instructing, or even by showing the rule of art, but by himself producing the rule of art which is in turn negated by the nascent genius. The repudiation is not one sided, but instead nearly rhizomatic in its unfolding. It seems fair then to suggest that for Kant, creativity is not merely a relationship of repudiation-if this is repudiation at all. And neither is Kant's model of

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 208

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 193

¹²⁸ Chodorow determines that the mother-child relationship is marked by closeness while the father child relationship is marked more by separateness. She determines that the mother and daughter's closeness is a desire born out a dependency that holds them together and gives their relation wholeness, but also threatens to envelope and suffocate them.

mentor/mentee a simply model of production of a product down the “midwife-mother-child” assembly line; instead, it is clear that his notion of mastery is reciprocal and unpredictable; Kant’s notion of the unpredictability in creativity parallels Arendt’s notion of natality as the ‘being who is its beginning.’ Kant moves closer to a comfort with the origin of creation, but is ultimately troubled by creativity as indeed we all are in some way

The Birthing of New Identities

As Kant describes, a master’s art cannot be couched in formula and serve as a percept.¹²⁹ There is no copying or aping. Each genius must labour his own mournful loss of nature. With every creation, each new artistic genius buries the last. The ravaging of nature renders the artistic mentor a fatherly midwife to a most adjuratory, heterological, amerceable creator. The inability of the master to teach makes the scene of artistic instruction into a theatre of the master’s nakedness before his own mastery: Only if our stipulation of “repudiation” could allow for a nuanced sense in which the “repudiated” speaks back, could this be called “repudiation.” Instead, Kant’s master cannot properly master his own mastery. As Horowitz describes, the embarrassing powerlessness of the master is, however, simply another name for the master’s genius.

Horowitz suggests that Kant’s notion of the genius’s mastery makes clear that it cannot be grasped in a formula and that it is a cognitively groundless achievement. It is the master’s ability to hover here that makes him at once both worthy of siring the next generation and impotent to do so. Looking forward to the generation of students, the master is a father actively pursuing his posterity, but looking backward to his attainment of the warrant of mastery, he is a akin to a midwife passively birthing the work of nature in the subject. As Horowitz describes, where paternity used to be, there is, traumatically, unclaimable fecundity instead. Artistic

¹²⁹*Sustaining Loss; Art and Mournful Life*, 48

education is the scene of the unmasking of the mastery of genius.¹³⁰ The master reveals what lies at the heart of creativity: the symbol.

Kant's notion of the symbol as the non-reconciliation of nature and culture is also a rendering of the creative undertaking of the symbol; rather than determine the non-reconciliation as lack, the non-reconciliation of nature and culture is rendered the creative production of the symbolic. The production of the symbolic is the creative, artistic production without determination or finitude. Its own inadequacy to reconcile nature and culture generates itself.¹³¹ The creating human subject creates and recreates by virtue of being a subject who cannot reconcile the tension between nature and culture. On Kant's terms, the subject who attempted to reconcile by resigning herself to rule-following, either the rule of nature or the rule of reason, could not properly be said to be a subject. Her labour is the labour of remaking the world of mechanism as a world that need not be the realm of inhuman necessity. The inadequacy we experience as we undertake this effort is the sometimes vertiginous experience of freedom. The experience of freedom is the experience of an illusion of nature unbound by cultural constrictions. There is no genius that is not giving the rule to art; and, nor is there any genius in the destruction or aimless or senseless production. It is only in the grips of the tension of the non-reconciliation that the subject touches the surface of freedom: the symbol.¹³²

The experience of the beautiful and sublime differ significantly; perhaps it is in the experience of the sublime that our more persistent feminist-misgivings might be warranted. Kant describes the experience of the sublime by describing the man who knows it is impossible to know if he originates in the all powerfulness of his reason or if he emanates from some other unknown, but a good man knows that he cannot know. Otherwise said, the moral man knows the (sublime) limits of cognition. For his feminist readers, this sublime limit of cognition is far less

¹³⁰ *Sustaining Loss*, 49

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 45

¹³² *Ibid*, 44

“unknown” than Kant suggests. In Ainley’s interpretation, the sublimity of Isis, or woman’s generating body, reminds men of the objective validity and the sanctity of the moral law but it reminds him in its consuming threat. Ainley speculates that the fear is that he was once a woman.¹³³ The thought that he was once his mother’s body is too much for Kant’s cognizing, autonomous moral subject. What for Kant is the “infinity of possibilities that entice and beckon the transcendental imagination,” is, for others, simply his mother. Although far from simple, on this first register she is not nearly as distant and unknowable as Kant seems to need her to be. Kant’s rendering of cognition, morality and freedom is bound up with representation of what is in opposition to the maternal, birthing, lactating body.

If Kant’s metaphysics develops from the point of view of an individual identity that cannot give birth, his hopes of universality do seem to be in vain. In this case, the issue is less that there is something disagreeable with a philosophy like Kant’s that seems to mimic the philosophical practice of opposing nature and culture, and women and men and conflating women with nature and men with culture. Instead, the issue is that Kant’s philosophy must posit the repudiation of maternity as the origin of autonomy. Perhaps more serious for a philosopher, a model of cognition that wants to claim universal validity, but cannot account for the fact that a person could “normally, at least potentially, become two,” ie., become pregnant, is non-representative.¹³⁴ Kant’s hopes for universality are contradictory and thus, perhaps, impotent to sire the next generation, in more ways than one.

Battersby suggests that Kant’s ‘person’ is based on “ideals of autonomy and closure” and “remain inimical to any form of embodiment” while the transcendental subject “exists only in relation to bodies.”¹³⁵ In either instance, Kant’s model of spatiality is inadequate to deal with a self

¹³³ Irigaray argues that the male subject must be capable of relinquishing its self-identical relation with nature (mother) and drive itself out of its “placid feminine enclosure” so that it can reorganize its self as moral subject.

¹³⁴ *Phenomenal Woman*, 60

¹³⁵ *Gender and Genius*, 61

that contains a self within it. His rendering of spatiality-bodies that supply the data to the imagination is a body of inert matter. His self confronts itself against a changeless, infinite substance which it also requires to know itself. Without such objects of thought the “I” would not be able to distinguish itself from “not I.” Without “positing bodies in space as permanent reference points against which change would be measured,” the persistence of the self through time could not be secured.¹³⁶ If in fact the problem is that Kant’s rendering of the relation of mind to matter is conceived of as a relationship to something dead and incapable of birthing or “morphing” into new identities, then Kant’s concept of person and the account of the transcendental subject are sexed, but neither concepts are able to contain birth within the horizons of nature that is formed “top down” by the transcendental imagination.¹³⁷

Battersby and Boundas claim that Kant sets the standards for the same limitation because of the demands made by his Copernican revolution. But Kant is hardly unaware of the problem. In a letter to Schiller, Kant relates the experience of looking out over a sublime landscape of sexual difference. He claims that his imagination cannot fathom it.¹³⁸ He dismisses the possibility that primal matter is also self-forming matter and begins to entertain that nature may be more like crystals than solids but, he writes,

mother earth (like a large animal, as it were) emerge from her state of chaos, and maker her lap promptly give birth initially to creatures of a less purposive form, with these then giving birth to others that become better adapted to their place of origin due to their relations to one another until in the end this womb itself, reified, ossified, and fancied itself to bearing definite species that would no longer degenerate, so that the diversity remained as it had turned out when the fertile formative force ceased to operate (3rd critique, teleological).

Kant struggles with this tension until the end of his career. In 1796, “On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy” he makes some strides by distancing himself from the Neo-

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 69

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 69

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 72

Platonists priority of ease, passivity, inspiration, and moves towards an Aristotelian notion of struggle and labour. Battersby describes that, during the Romantic period this notion of labour is favored and metaphors from the plant and insect kingdom abound. In this same rendering, the genius passively-though not effortlessly- labours nature and great men struggle to drive harder because of unconscious forces within him and work is the outcome. And yet, unlike many of his Romantic counterparts, Kant abstains from adopting the “previously despised” metaphors of being impregnated and giving birth.¹³⁹ His description of production is one of wrestling against rather than intertwining with Mother Nature. Kant emphasizes the genius as the source of the law and law-giver. As Korsgaard suggests, Kant makes nature dependent on man. The subject reveres Natures’ might, but he does not emulate her; instead, he negates her: he is not her, but forms her, to become himself. This, now, is repudiation.

Kant continues to ponder, and even agonize, over Isis-and sexual difference. In response to the same series of Kant’s letters, Schiller, a year after Kant wrote *the Critique of Judgment*, relates of the wisdom passed to Moses by the Egyptians: Only those who had Joa-Jehova (the one) could enter the temple of Serapis: they were called beholders and were said to discover the truth which was the passage from darkness to light, and could see this truth in sensuous images.¹⁴⁰ For Schiller, nature and its creator collapse into one. They are first Isis, female, and then Joa, male. In a poem entitled “The Veiled Image of Isis”, Schiller describes a man who refuses the warnings and heads in. Kant reserves the capacity to intuit the unknowable-but not unthinkable-to the nominal. Schiller does not deny males the capacity to see what it behind the veil-only that there are no men brave enough to see and survive; such men either never manage or never desires to do so. For Schiller, this would be to return to what we cannot return to - when nature was itself or God was meaning. Instead, there is a traumatic, unclaimable fecundity: creativity.

¹³⁹ *Gender and Genius*, 63

¹⁴⁰ *The Economy of Respect*, 100

Kaufman reads Kant's notion of the subject and his reverence for Isis as a fear of castration. She suggests that the prohibition against lifting the veil of Isis, 'of pretending to know what he cannot know', is really a prohibition against lifting the veil which reveals the lack of the penis. She claims that it is typical of misogyny and warped sexuality and the Enlightenment attitude towards real women. While real women are no longer allowed to be actively-desiring sexual beings, their once insatiable appetite for sex is contained within hard limits, while she lays weak, seductively and morbidly charming. She suggests that for Kant, unlike Burke and Wollstonecraft for whom the sublime is analogous to the father, the sublime is analogous to the mother.¹⁴¹As Kaufman determines, for Kant, she, not he, is the undisclosed and undiscoverable "infinity of possibilities that entice and beckon the transcendental imagination that fashions Nature as an inexhaustible whole."

In the end, Kant dismisses it all as blasphemous and goes about putting things back in their proper place. He posits change as the transferal of energy from one closed, homogenous object to another. While his nature is fated to give birth to races and species incapable of change, he claims this is better than taking seriously an idea which would prevent us from knowing the proper origin or the destination of alteration. His ultimate worry is that man and animal would recognize one another in a dark unconscious. So long as he can maintain that Nature is ordered and unified, then reason continues to be capable of making its own rules. But if nature does not behave, then a body that births itself is a problem. For some thinkers, Kant's admission of this limitation is a failure. For others still, his failure and his blindness is, as it is for all of us, the beginning of our deeper insights into subjectivity. Enter, Melanie Klein.

¹⁴¹*Letter to Schiller*, 100

CHAPTER IV

KLEIN ON THE ETHICS OF STUPIDITY, MATRICIDE AND GENIUS

Abstract: In a genius all her own, Klein contradicts Socrates' assertion that those who "generate life cannot create ideas." Rather than claim that generation of life is opposed to the creation of ideas, she presents the following paradoxical premises: 1) "mother" is the matter out of which every memory is made but impervious to the grasp of consciousness 2) the memory of mother is the cause of ambiguity, anxiety, and ambivalence *and* the matter out of which enlightenment is garnered and 3) adults garner enlightenment by engaging in the erratic detours of *child's play*. Despite wide-spread opposition to her paradoxical premises, she persists. Her hope is true and simple: to discover the antidote to fascism. She wagers nearly everything on the hunch that the answer is to be found in the children she mothers, teaches and analyzes; in them, she believes she is able to bear witness to the origins of the patterns of hatred and destruction typical of fascism; in these same children and their possible flourishing, she believes she guards the secret to unravelling the fascistic-patterns of hatred, destruction, and above all, stupidity. By observing children at play, Klein, an ironic counterpart to Socrates the midwife, renews our hopes in the possibility of a being born in the vehicle of the symbolic, the "genuine idea." Perhaps we should not be surprised that the reward for our willingness to accompany her on her erratic journey of a lifetime of analyzing melancholia and criminality resembles the philosopher's reward for the life devoted to wisdom: neither wealth, accomplishment, nor even happiness await us; instead, at the end of the sojourn which is the passage from generation to creation, our hope is humble but true: nothing more and nothing less than creative, receptive calm at the juncture where creation once more returns to generation: death.

Mothers in the Middle: Matricide and Fascism/Creativity

In her undertaking of a psycho-analysis of fascism, Klein is sceptical of Freud's account which explains destructive-ignorance in terms of repression and pleasure; instead, she asks "under what conditions are destructive thoughts and behaviours akin to symbolization?" For Klein, the conditions are quite precise: the death drive, our desire to have and consume and destroy, is not only the primary agent of our distress, it is also the mechanism by which we come to symbolize. Thus, while her analytic preoccupation with child's play may seem sheltered from the realities of political fascism, for her, child's play is the pure matrix of symbol-formation. Her obsession with the genus of symbolization in children presents some of the most thoughtful challenges to the dominant intellectualist discourses of her day.

Klein's years of analysis lead her to conclude that the imprint of our nascent beginnings is anything but indeterminate; instead, she likens our early years to a high-stakes card game rigged by mother herself. "Mother" refers to both mother the 'person' and mother the evanescent, but nevertheless absolutely real, symbolic of desire and love on one side, and repulsion and hatred on the other. Mothers embody our ambivalent feelings about wanting and not having and loving that which we want and cannot have. Because "mother" is --quite literally-- the possibility of our corporeal existence and the possibility of evolving into something beyond mere corporeal existence, mothers can seem omnipotent; but this is hardly the case. Instead, while it is true that Klein sees no alternative than to describe our mothers as omnipresent, she does not assume that they must also be omnipotent. In fact, as Kristeva many times suggests, much the opposite is true.

Klein observes a strong correlation between cultures which portray women as all-powerful and cultures who are misogynist and gynophobic. In reality, in most times and places, then as now, the recipients of oppression and violence are more likely to rely on passive resistance, in whatever form, for survival of spirit and person. Only the hunted are forced to act like prey; women who mother are no exception. Klein's genius was to link the discourses and

practices of violence against women in her families and communities with the larger cloud of fascism looming over Europe. We contemporaries are its ambivalent progeny.

Klein does not dispute that matricide is integral to the development of our subjectivity; rather, her somewhat usual premise is that matricide can be done well or it can be done badly. Our bloody, messy mud of wanting and not having, loving and wanting to destroy, all take place on the body of our “mothers.” The music of her voice and the gestures which typify her embrace tempt us, but they must also threaten us; without some measure of fear, the child is miscarried. While the child struggles with the guilt of imagining crimes far worse than those perpetrated by the military commander, he must nevertheless *imagine* overcoming her omnipotence. Every child must eventually leave his mother; without this effort imagined, he is much more likely to enact real violence against real people on the stage of war or criminality. If he is able to imagine without enacting the exit from his first birth, his second birth will unfold in the playful, creative, and of course sometimes tormented, experience of love. Like Socrates, Klein nuances the repudiation. Socrates’ error was not to assume that some create ideas and some do not, it was to assume that those who generate life cannot create ideas. As Klein observes, boys and girls identify with she who generates life; instead, the difference is in how girls must imagine identifying with the being she must also separate from; Klein, more than most, bears witness to the insanity of this separation. Socrates error was to assume that the generation of life is opposed to the creation of ideas. Klein’s experience as a mother and analyst tells her that, the mere opposition of creation to generation is not enough; without something more than just simple repudiation, never will a genuine idea be born.

Detonating Fascism, Accreting Sexuality: The Birth of Psychoanalysis

With a wary wisdom, Klein accepts that our only hope of liberation is by venturing down the royal road marked “mental illness.”¹⁴² Rather than relegate madness to the realm of pathology, she insists that it must be thought, written, spoken, in essence, *created*. The child who does not know how to create (his mental illness) is our baby fascist in arms. On this same line of reasoning, her contemporary, Husserl, urges us to accept our mixed feelings about the crisis which is fascism. Like Klein, he predicts that we are better to actively grieve and celebrate its paradoxes, because, by accepting the ambiguities inherent in this historical juncture, we are better able to come to terms with its evil and its possibilities; the crisis gives precedent for an unprecedented evil, but it also gives permission for a science which, without the usual censorship of propriety and recompense, was able to make tracks in previously unexplored terrains of human frailty, error, and irrationality.¹⁴³

As Kristeva explains in her book *Melanie Klein*, the sojourn of the modern subject and its Cartesian cogito had to be unsealed. In order for a paradigm shift to occur, there had to be a crisis in the hierarchy of the Church and the authority of Enlightenment culture. In order to accept that sex is neither a vice nor a sin, but a truth in the “essence of man,” there had to be a crisis in the foundations of Europe itself.¹⁴⁴ The alternative seemed certain: to stay, and not know, and cause culture to suffocate in its own ruins leading to its own unparalleled social-psychological malaise, despair, and isolation.¹⁴⁵ For thinkers such as Klein, the imperative to explore the unknown seemed just as certain: the promise of an unprecedented, unpredictable future deserving of the name “second birth.”

When Freud engages the shame surrounding sexuality, far from discovering an irreducible chaos as many had predicted, the unconscious is discovered to have a logic all its own.

¹⁴³ I owe any insight into Husserl’s trajectory on crisis and fascism to J. Jackson.

¹⁴⁴ See Kristeva’s “Introduction” to *Klein*.

¹⁴⁵ Kristeva’s narrative account of the crisis bears a strong resemblance to Hegel’s rendering of the “birth time” in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*.

By responding to it, rather than for it, Freud pioneers the psychoanalytic era. The crisis in authority and legitimacy becomes instrumental to accepting that sexuality is an object of study rather than an object of guilt. Klein is highly sympathetic to Freud's quest and his faith in his findings. She agrees that sexuality confuses and confounds the boundaries between the dualisms that have so long kept man a stranger to himself. As Freud stipulates, sexuality is an

energy as well as meaning and biology and as a form of communication with the Other, which does not transform the essence of man into something biological, which it has been accused of doing, but immediately incorporates animality into culture. We are able to symbolize and sublimate because we are endowed with a sexuality that inevitably fosters something that metaphysics considered to be a dualism: body and mind, drive and language.¹⁴⁶

Not only does Freud refuse to accept these dyads as duelling opponents, he renders the dynamic termed "sexuality" something that holds us in check: our competing desires of love and hate are the crossroads of the "genetic and the subjective," "weightiness and grace," "generation and creation."¹⁴⁷ In the end, despite every intention of showing loyalty to Freud, Klein's analytic experiences cause her to disagree with him in a fundamental way.

While Freud contends that the unconscious is structured by desire and repression (as it might well seem in the adult), Klein focused on the newborn's pain, his splitting process, and his early capacity for sublimation.¹⁴⁸ In Klein, the other is always already there; the newborn's drives are always already directed toward the object of the breast of the mother. The breast is his first object and the template for every other object, but the breast is not itself a breast, it is the template for the object. "The breast" is the site upon which we introject and project and the site of making inside and outside, loving and hating, wanting and having, and wanting to destroy and wanting not to want. Thus, if Klein is correct, the infant well knows the highs and lows of the dramas of the bond between the object and the ego. Kristeva likens this drama to a horror and a Bosch

¹⁴⁶ *Melanie Klein*, 8.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 9

¹⁴⁸ *Melanie Klein*, 12

painting. Deleuze likens to a “theatre of terror.”¹⁴⁹ Klein likens the drama to a process to enlightenment reminiscent of the 19thC politic-historical enlightenment of genius and creativity on one side, and historical and political violence on the other. Klein emphasizes that the entire drama is a ‘play’ and ‘playful.’

For Klein, play is serious. She suggests that almost all of the process of development of a child occur through play. When Little Richard plays games with Churchill and England and Hitler and Germany, she intimates that while his game is, on the one hand, about history, it is also a game of his story; the child’s place, his identity, and his destiny, censorship, are, if Klein’s hypothesis is right, about sex. Once it is clear to the child that Klein has no intention of censoring his game, his game can go where he really wants it to. His questions are less likely to be about the omnipotent authority and more likely to be about “sex” because sex is the child’s understanding of *metaphysics* --with the important addition that “metaphysics” is no longer metaphysics.

Klein: All Women are Sex Symbols

With her unparalleled tolerance for the anaerobic depths of nightmare creations and daytime symptoms, Klein moors her anchor in infancy and permanently alters the map of psychoanalysis. With her signature vulgar manner, she charts the infant’s transition from its mother’s bloody, pushing and heaving lap to the site of the perpetual and relentless struggle to create. Her conclusion is certain: sex is metaphysics. Klein nuances Freud’s sense of “sexuality” by translating any absences of sharp distinction into a dynamic symbolic/asymbolic only to transform both back into an amalgamated notion of the ‘symbol.’ The child is the symbol’s site of production. Klein claims that symbolism is not only the foundation of all phantasy and sublimation but, more than that, it is the basis of the subject’s relation to the outside world and to reality in general. When a child is unable to symbolize, it is unable to think; on this basis, Klein equates psychosis with the inability to think and the inability to think with censorship of

¹⁴⁹ *the Logic of Sense, 117*

knowledge about sex. The manner in which we symbolize, or fail to symbolize, is our fate, as persons, but also as a people.

The tenuous balance between intelligence and ignorance, love and hate, and destruction and creativity, lies, for Klein, in the lap of mother; however, this is not to say that mothers determine anything, and neither is it to assume mothers would be able to determine such a fate in which they could not even steer the course of their own lives from within the cultural context of misogyny. Instead, as some have accused, of raising the import of the role of the mother over the role of the father, and thus instantiating a cult of heteronormativity, Klein is the first to determine that our ability to think has everything to do with *matricide*. The tragic irony, all too real to Klein, is that women are the real victims of the symbolic gone wrong. The memory out of which every memory is made, “mother,” is also frequently the victim, real and symbolic, of the repudiation of this same memory. She is omnipresent and omnipotent in a culture that is sexually prejudiced, oppressive, and highly exploitative. Women navigate their young children through a process of thinking and loving and separating, only to place them in a culture that harbours a hatred for the maternal.

Klein traces the origin of madness back to the patterns back to an early imbalanced giving, showing, and telling of the story of the first kill. She warns that too much and too little knowledge of sex is pathological; censoring or not censoring enough our desire to know our carnal origin impairs our ability to know “reality.” Klein predicts that the more a parent can keep pace with his child’s quest for knowledge about sex-in all of its esoteric and mundane dimensions- the more likely the child is to develop a constitutional balance that will allow him to be an autonomous adult. The less capable a parent is of contending with his own sexual insecurities, the less capable he is of responding with clarity, coherence and candour, the more likely their child is to develop a psychosis; at some point, the child’s knowledge does not dare rebel and never attempts to draw its own inferences. His sense of reality has to wage with the innate tendency to repress. His awakening sense of origin, identity, and destiny are his awakening,

in a rude sense, to what his parents do together which he is generally not permitted to see or participate. To flatten this awareness into brutish terms is to miscarry him; by attempting to understand sex, he is attempting to understand what can never be fully understood: it must be grasped in the midway of a symbol.

The child who is educated by open-minded, tolerant parents will find that his memory has an affective, dissonant resonance in his adult, conscious life. According to Klein, “remembering” requires converting, displacing and creating of mother’s body in the vehicle of the symbolic. His origin and his infancy are unknowable except as an evanescent analogy whose content he must deduce from witnessing other events of sex or birth or by himself experiencing sex or birth. His “memory” of his origin and infancy comes to him like shadowy afterthought in his gestures, turns of speech and effective disposition. His memory is delivered to him in the vehicle of a narrative spun by others (whose own self knowledge is similarly evanescent). At the same time that he realizes that he needs others, he also realises that he was born into a world that necessarily excluded him, and excludes him, and it is this same world that he wants for himself. He is born “other.” In almost every instance, this balance is regulated first and foremost by “mother.” Mother’s bear us a first time, but she also bears us a second time. If she gets it wrong, only the analyst, his other mother, can save him.¹⁵⁰

In Klein’s narrative account, the newly born infant suffers from the beginning. He is at an impenetrable distance from what he wants most: to survive, to eat, to sleep, to rest in peace. From the beginning, he cannot have what he wants, but he must want to want in order to live and, eventually, to live past his earth-bound existence. The newborn’s conflicted desires to have and to not-have promise to deliver him from his first birth to his second birth. Without this conflict, he risks perishing. In this sense, mother is omnipotent: we must want and not want her. In order to fully separate from her, he must also forget what we had to do to her to become who he is. His latent guilt guarantees that he never fully forgets. There seems to be no other way: in Klein’s

¹⁵⁰ Klein frequently likens therapy to the maternal relation with important caveats.

account, mother's body is not something we can simply repudiate, overcome, and forget. We are required to separate from the same body which refuses to accept the iron law of inside and outside, and this includes her ability to enter into our memory long after the fight seems to be over. Thus, our feelings are, by definition, ambivalent. The maternal is a discourse that calls a crisis in identity, especially for any one who insists upon nothing but a stable, unified, and unique identity for themselves or from others.

The Time that Never Existed

The experience of time manifest in Freud's hysteric, *globusm*, is contested and nuanced by Klein. If Klein is right, this time never existed. Time is always punctuated by the "other," the breast that receives us immediately following birth. However, the first time is nevertheless a time from which we cannot be extricated without consequence. If, at an early age we are prevented from easing into the experience of the breast-time to a highly articulated time of past, present and future, most of us end up experiencing the world as hostile to our desires. Because our experience of time is also our understanding of causation, if a child is forced into knowing too much or too little too soon or too late, he experiences a world that seems not only hostile, but foreign; this child does not know where he is, what time it is, or who he is. To those already inhabiting a world punctuated by clocks and calendars, it will appear as if this child is stupid and anxious. He does not know the season, the time of day, or where he is. His demands and wants seem repetitive, compulsive even. In short, timing is everything.

It should come as no surprise that Klein is accused of going too far, and too deep. She appears to charge the most nascent and infantile of humans with the gravest of crimes.¹⁵¹ Klein has a rebuttal on hand: those who deny otherwise, "immediately whip up his cultural tendencies against his ingenuousness" and "spin veils of secrecy around matters sexual" create the

¹⁵¹*Melanie Klein*, 38

“foundation of [their] own destruction.”¹⁵² Those who use culture and deception to prohibit and prevent the natural development of infancy into adulthood are, in Klein’s estimation, largely responsible for fascism. For her fascism is the intolerance to creativity. Klein wants most for her children to escape the omnipotent hold of mothers, and those others who threaten to prevent their creative exit. A child at ease with his sexuality is a child likely most likely to be autonomous--literally, self-naming and self-creating; a child prevented from enlightened tutelage is easy prey for those with an appetite for nascent, developing egos.

It must be noted that Klein is not proposing answers, solutions, or resolutions to this conflict. Instead, for Klein, there is, in some tragic way, no alternative to our experience of ambivalence and anxiety. Putting a more positive spin on this inevitability, she reminds us that our madness, our sadness, and our bad habits are all, in some sense, good material for creativity. The child can make it to the other side once he can achieve a symbolic grasp of his desires for return. The competing desires force children to repress into operation by dissociation: it forces him to symbolize. The irony, perhaps only for the human reflecting on being human, is that his ability to love is also his ability to accept his hate. He must grieve the victim of his own murder. He must accept that reality is governed by these profoundly irrationally truths. Thinking will require the work of accepting and understanding this profound unthinking. If he gets lost in the world of seeming consistencies, love is opposed to hate, I am guilty and hateful towards the person I must kill, and, last that reality is rational, than, he will never accept be at home in all that “is not black and white,” thinking. Without this ability, his journey to the end of night, his mortality, will be most insufferable. In this sense, “reality” begins, not with an age, but, triggered by the loss of a real, loved object.

¹⁵²“Love, Guilt, and Reparation” and “On Weaning,” 290-305

The Truth: Desire Entails Grief

To accompany a loved one to their death is to stand on the brink of one world overlooking another. The experience causes most of us to stop in time, unable to speak or think as we once did. The affective experience of grief is unique to the person who has lost their love, but in every case, the loss forces transformation. The bereaved is altered by the loss of a loved one because, in losing his beloved, he is no longer who he was, and he has had little, if any say in the matter. At once, his inter-dependency and his alone-ness in the world are made more salient to him. The ‘facts’ of loss force him to confront –or to work hard to repress–that he cannot do more than accompany his loved one in their death, and they him. He must move into the world for, what may feel like the first time, on his own; for many, this new world of ‘grief’ it is a world punctuated by feelings of an over-active dream life, waking-dream life, confusion, a feeling of being broken and tired, intense feelings ranging from anger, sadness, and loneliness-and, perhaps, above all, a disorientated temporarily.

Loneliness in turn sparks, in many of us, a yearning for togetherness and reminds us of our vulnerability to this same other who he cannot have or be with. Despite its overall depressive temporality, grief causes the mind to move into overdrive making it seem as if the mind has a life of its own. If Freud is correct, this is typical of grief. The mind’s dreamtime infuses waking time with intrusive thoughts, flashes of memory and insights, and a restless searching and cataloguing, because it is processing a radically transformed reality. The mind has a mind of its own and it will do anything try to turn the corner and arrive in yesterday, if only to allow us to move more slowly into our new reality. This experience is, as Freud names it in *Mourning and Melancholia*, the work of “testing of reality.” The mind’s searching is steered towards reproducing the intangible substitute for the other, the ghost, presence, and significance in order to hypercathect the same object. Once this process reaches its dénouement (which is not a termination, but a merciful normalizing of our struggle with denial, anger, and resignation) detachment is accomplished and the verdict of reality is absolute. Klein’s stroke of genius is to parallel the experience of mourning

a beloved to the processes of the infantile mind. If Klein is right, every experience of grief is really an experience of our first and most affective experience of grief, our loss of mother's breast.

Klein's observations lead her to believe that every child goes through states of mind comparable to the grieving adult, or, more accurately, the grieving adult re-experiences patterns reminiscent of his earliest experience of loss (in most cases, of the breast). The breast is love, goodness, and security, but also, we might conjecture, breast-feeding is our early struggle with desire, hate, and fear. Weaning triggers a fear of losing other loved ones and objects at the same time it triggers a sense of guilt. Why does loss trigger guilt? For the infant, he can only surmise that his desire caused the loss of the loved object: she went away because I loved her. These mixed feelings trigger, from the very first months of an infant's life, sadistic impulses. The nascent infant wants nothing more than to devour his mother's breast having it by any means which sadism can suggest.

Klein likewise claims that, from the beginning, the mechanisms of introjection and projection are at work. Because the child's aggression is projected onto the same breast which it also desires, these imagos, phantastically distorted into the real object upon which they are based, become installed in what is experienced as outside in the world and inside the ego. It introjects the good and the bad, for which the breast is the prototype. Even very young children pass through anxiety situations and defend themselves against them.¹⁵³ The depressive position of the infant mind, a *melancholia statu nascendi*, is the result of coming to terms with the loss of mother's breast and all that it comes to mean for the infant. As they come closer and closer, the ego has recourse to splitting the objects into loved and hated objects.

The experience of ambivalence allows the child to gain more trust and belief and carry out increasing fantasies of restoration of the loved object. At the same time, the paranoid anxieties and defences set in. It is at this stage that the internal and external, loved and hated, real and imaginary object is unified. During this stage, the child grows increasingly near to reality.

¹⁵³ *Contributions to the Psychogenesis of Manic Depressive States*, 262

This continues until love and trust in the object is established. Ambivalence, a safeguard against one's hatred towards the terrifying object, is diminished. The child who cannot sufficiently trust his constructive feelings (deeply tied to his feelings of ambivalence rather than hatred), tends to resort to manic omnipotence: another mode of the denial of reality.

Denial tends to cause obsessive compulsive thoughts and actions (a vain attempt to restart the program and get it right), or, denial and desires for omnipotence. This method of defence against the dread of persecution is what Klein terms "scotomization," or the denial of psychic reality. The denial of psychic reality results in the limitation of the process of introjection and projection, and, by extension, a denial of external reality. During this time, any object which he attacked during his introjection and projection by splitting, hitting, ingesting and dejecting, in his work of symbolizing, are potential agents of retribution against him and his desires. Brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers are no exception. In Klein's experience, this depressive place is the source of the Oedipal situation and umbrellas to our relation to people in general. It is through this process that the child develops an inner world.

Corresponding to his actual experiences of external reality, but altered by his phantasies and impulses, the child develops a world. A child's fear of witches, magicians, and evil beasts is something of the same anxiety, but one that has already undergone modification. All these stages vary in degree, but move toward the inevitable process of denying and accepting his inevitable exile from mother's embrace. The to and fro of denial and acceptance are themselves born from the need to transition an infant from his dependence on mother while also avoiding deterioration or disintegration.

In Klein's view, the sufferings of later life are for the most part repetitions of these early ones. Every child in the first years of life goes through an immeasurable degree of suffering, all of which, in some manner, stem from the deeply unconscious knowledge that children grow in

the mother's womb¹⁵⁴ On this same basis, she pleads with us to permit the child to play in a completely uncensored manner, free of ethical and moral criticism. The connection between our childhood phantasies and our adult flourishing cannot be understated. She reminds us of how even the very young child fights his unsocial tendencies. This struggle is his struggle to love and be loved. Klein does not believe in the existence of a child in whom it is impossible to obtain this transference, or in whom the capacity for love cannot be brought out. As in the case of Klein's 'little criminal' who was apparently devoid of any capacity for love, he proved everyone wrong. The mother died in terrible circumstances from cancer, and while the daughter did not go near her, and it was he who looked after her as she lay dying while the family left her alone. When they returned to search for the boy, he could not be found: he had locked himself in the room with her.¹⁵⁵

The Ethics of the Opening and Closing of Doors

While Klein is accused of being unethical, she nevertheless stipulates a rigorous ethic all her own. Much of Klein's ethics deals directly with boundaries: the opening and closing of doors. As she frequently iterates, to open a door too soon and without the prompting of the child, is to expose him to more than he can accept as reality; to refuse to open a door into something he desires to know in a manner appropriate to his age is to prevent him his creative, autonomy and flourishing in love. For this reason, the analyst, the mother, anyone really, in dealing with children must, warns Klein, be hyper-vigilant in their safe guarding and timing of the opening and closing of doors. She warns that those adults willing to join the child in play, to stay alongside, at-one-with, both the child and the adult undergo a revelation hard to bear, but one likely to deliver one into a second birth. Those who tell too much or too little at the right of the wrong time

¹⁵⁵ *Criminal Tendencies in Normal Children*, 173

determine the child to be a stupid, violent, incapable being, or an intelligent, creative autonomous adult.

The door we open and close for the child is the door to the “parental bedroom.” The meaning of “parental bedroom” lies behind closed curtains, but allusions to “the bedroom” abound. Her readers “see” the bedroom as if watching someone through a mirror who is themselves watching the original scene -as in the case of a little girl named Grete who thrashes about in therapy after an event triggers the screen memory of her parents in coitus.¹⁵⁶ In Klein’s essay on the “Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse” the bedroom is the inside of the mother’s body and the internal workings of our unthinkable beginnings. But while Klein prohibits the child from the scene of the parental bedroom, its symbolic counterpart is a place she frequents (with an obsessive repetition Deleuze names compulsive) with her child patients.

The difference between the “real bedroom” and “the symbolic bedroom” which is said to establish “reality” in children is paramount to Klein’s analysis and her ethic. Klein insists that analysis should not take place in the home. Mothers should do their work of mothering in the “home,” (in the broad sense of community and house), and analysts in a designated therapeutic space with basic objects, like a sink with running water, and toys with few but essential details.¹⁵⁷ Keeping the doors open and closed, and properly marked, at the right time, in the right place, and in the right way, will in every way determine our success. Klein determines that the space of the home is too intimate to what he must know without knowing. The mother’s non-analytic stance protects the child from what he must know without knowing, while the analyst’s non-censoring stance enables him to imagine what he must in accept in order to break free from the symbol of his mother in order to love his real, actual, present mother and her person.

¹⁵⁶ “The School in Libidinal Development,” *Selected Works of Melanie Klein*

¹⁵⁷ *Melanie Klein*, 45

It is, Klein says, “clearly impossible for the mother to play to role of an object of desire while playing the role of the subject presumed to know the unconscious.”¹⁵⁸ And yet, according to Klein, something of “mother” must be kept alive in analysis; the analyst cannot do without “mother.” To make the journey she must assume a tandem maternal disposition and analytic therapeutic mode. To achieve the necessary transference, she has to be the analyst of her creation and bear a semblance to her creation’s (partial) object of desire, ‘mother.’ She has to maintain the symbolic at its most indiscernible threshold: the threshold between generation and creation. It is difficult and yet somehow fleetingly simple; it is a risky, but necessary accomplishment.

Mother Reborn

The tenuous balance between mothering and analysis disturbs her for her entire professional career; like someone foreign to northern summer climes, she scratches away at it with an absent-minded, anxious and relentless persistence. It irritates her that, in order to deliver a child from its first birth to its second, she must embody the object of desire which she must also help him to symbolize. She appreciates that this unique kind of transference sometimes feels too close to the quick and not symbolic enough to be good and ethical. In her personal life, the high cost of tumbling to the wrong side was self evident. Her daughter Melinda hated mother, privately and publicly, in a way that, perhaps especially for a mother who had already lost a child, must have been devastating. Klein continues to do her work in the shadow of her lost son and angry daughter.¹⁵⁹ In the Kleinian vertigo of analysis, the dialectical-dualism of generation and creation unravels in a crisis all its own.

For many reading Klein, it appears as if this crisis takes place with children, but Klein’s analysis of children, with herself as mother symbol, is about much more than children. Klein’s refusal to accept the imperative of respectful distance means that she dives into that place where

¹⁵⁸ For reflections on the parental bedroom see “*On Weaning*,” and “*Gerald*,” in *Selected Works*

¹⁵⁹ See “*Mother and Daughter*” in Kristeva’s *Melanie Klein* 202-205

both analyst and child are born and born once more from within the space of psychical, sexual return to origin. It is only by making this journey that Klein helps unpack that tangled mess which is the subjectivity of the subject who is both a generator and a creator. Klein allows a being who, throughout the life process including motherhood, is not only the object of her infant's evolving wants and needs, but a being who creates ideas, a being for whom the process of idea creation is meaningful, a being who is present to birth, and a being who ultimately has a unique and weighted sense of the significance of her birthing. A mother carries a buried knowledge that her infant's possible autonomy that will require that he kill 'her' so he can recreate her endlessly and be born again and again. For her daughter, she will have to 'kill' a 'her' who she also is. A mother is a mother and not a mother.

Klein attempts to do what no analyst had done before. By pushing her own psychoanalytic ethic to its limits she approaches a threshold between the tenuous limit of the theorist, the midwife, and the mother. It is Kristeva's estimation that, by so doing, Klein manages to name the unnameable trauma of the 'Other' and to name it with the child's words. It is Klein who reveals the need for projection at the source of the interpretation; by allowing the child in the analyst to be reborn, she created the possibility for the child in each of us to re-emerge. Klein's tragic, sometimes reckless sojourn introduces a new conception of the temporality of analysis as rebirth.¹⁶⁰ I add that Klein does more than this: she is also unique for being the germinal force behind a mode of theorizing subjectivity which will, in an unprecedented form, allow for theorizing a subjectivity who births and who is born: mother! Klein theorizes the being who generates life and the being who creates ideas-it is not always clear that even her most attentive, faithful readers and followers do the same.

Klein theorizes the woman (creator) who is also a mother (generator). Klein is capable of so doing because she theorizes the experience of birth, not from the point of view of an adult

¹⁶⁰*Melanie Klein, 502*

recollecting his origins, but from the ordeal of analysis and motherhood. Despite the philosopher's prohibition against confusing the metaphor of birth for a more carnal 'metaphor,' Klein obsesses over the significance of the non-carnal dimensions of carnal birth. Klein theorizes the space where "mothers" are the first earth, but never the indifferent cyclical motions of the effective we name "Mother Earth." Mothers, in contrast to mother earth, determine whether her infant's transition is triumphant and creative or disabling and deadening. With a most insistent repetition, Klein names mother the midwife of her own infant. By extension, she names mothers the midwives of thinkers generally, for who does not have a mother?

Klein does not allow mothers to take refuge in the guise of instinct or cultural prescriptions. Klein's radical ethics renders mothers the *agents* of our creation and our destruction. For Klein, those speaking beings whose bodies are our first earth determine whether our transition from first to second birth is triumphant and creative or disabling and damaging. For Klein, we come to life or perish in the hands of our mothers: if mothers are generous, loving, and tolerant, they most often manage to ease an infant's transition from their first birth into their second birth which is their transition into the articulated, temporal, linguistic, reflexive and dimension of creative being. From the very beginning, mother creates the life she generates. She is the infant's first engagement with history and culture. Her body is how we come to experience desire, and all that this entails. Her moods and gestures will determine whether or not we are at home in the space of all that is not "black and white," namely the contradictions, ambiguity, anxiety and ambivalence that enable the space of reflective thinking. Klein's moral stance prevents mothers from taking refuge in culture or instinct, while preventing us from imprisoning women in determinist natures or cultural prejudices. As contentious as it might be, Klein puts the breast back in mother's hand.

Klein's account of a mother's nursing and weaning can sound quite a lot like Aristotle's account of a mother's love. She, like Aristotle, describes a most virtuous mother. Klein insists that, when mothers calculate and deliver her milk like a commodity to a consumer, she renders

mothering a restricted economy of duty. Both Klein and Aristotle feel that, while the newborn may not understand very much, he understands this difference quite well. Instead, a well loved child learns to role with the inevitable poverty and traumas which peppers every life because he knows that while mother had both a 'good' and a "bad" breast, she remained his mother. With this experience, the child is not only prepared for a world that is alternately bountiful and impoverished, the child is prepared to love other women who are variously generous and reticent. The mother who never refuses her breast and the mother who always refuses her breast moulds her infant's psychosis. As Nussbaum agrees, tolerance for the child's appetites allows him to be likewise tolerant of his own appetites which are guaranteed to go unsatisfied.¹⁶¹ Tolerance of his wants, without servility to every want, allows a child to develop into an adult who can form social relations. The child who is at ease with his desires is an adult at ease with himself. The more he has had to contain and repress, the more his being contains itself, splits into pieces, plagues and limits him. In the end, Klein determines these mothers to be partially responsible for fascism.

Fascism is many things, but at core it is the hatred of "all that is not black and white." Mothers teach us how to see colour; she is our first lesson in all that is not "black and white," the seemingly opposed worlds of inside and outside, reason and unreason, self and other. Not only does Klein introduce an ethic and agency back into maternity, she imagines a "carnality" which is inherently problematic for Plato and his progeny. Plato's ontological, epistemological, and ethical faulty-structural integrity rests on his belief in two worlds: one in which he is the autonomous artisan and the other, that realm in which his immanent animality is master, he must fight to hold at bay. Klein's rendering of the mother plays against every manifestation of Plato's myth of the cave in which the mother is an interior of darkness, shadow, and sensibility. Klein's account of enlightenment contains no such sharp boundaries, and nor does it describe our suffering in quite the same way. In Klein's account, the mother is the original space of enlightenment as an

¹⁶¹ *Hiding from Humanity*, see 187-208.

articulate, intellectual and profoundly sentient being whose sound judgment, or lack of it, determines her child's destiny. Nursing and weaning is mother's midwifery.

The Body under Siege is not a Body without Organs

Deleuze shares many obsessions with Klein, not least of which is her obsession with philosophy and psycho-analytic concepts of sexuality, infancy and children, and Plato's metaphysics. In fact, Deleuze thinks that most thinkers really have no alternative than to obsess over these concepts. As we can recall, the crisis in 20thC European culture paved the way for unprecedented forms of evil which, in retrospect, can appear to have created a need for a new science which would explore the previously unexplored. Without the censorship of Enlightenment morality or the dogma of the Church, this science obsessed in the promise of uniting, healing, and unveiling the truth of things. The science of sex and metaphysics is what Deleuze terms a science of "intensities." In this sense, Deleuze is an ally to Klein's exit from the cave of Plato's rendering of generation and creation, and, ultimately, both are hyper-vigilant to the mines that lie at the road-side of this exit, he is almost angry about her conclusions about the infant, and, by extension, of the genus of love, genius, and creativity. But, ultimately, he reserves some of his harshest criticism for her work. Unlike some of her other critics, he is not squeamish about her object of study, nor even her methodology. Instead, he is nearly upset by the fact that while she ventured so close to the truth of things, ultimately she ruins it all by returning with a more saturated, repetitive, compulsion to interpret, interpret, interpret. At the very core of what could have been the unleashing of what is true and possible, and the remedy for fascism, she inserts the germ of fascism itself: lack.

He describes Klein's "theatre of terror" of the nursing infant as one in which he is the "stage, actor and drama at once."¹⁶² He studies her rendering and determines it to be a cliché of

¹⁶² *Love of Sense*, 187

the “Passion of the nursing infant.”¹⁶³ Deleuze, not one to shy away from the obscene, finds Klein’s rendering of the mother’s body split into a “good and bad object, emptied, slashed to pieces, broken into crumbs and alimentary morsels” not only horrifying, but unconvincing. He wonders why the good and bad breast are introjected in the same manner. He sees no reason to be so certain that the good object does not conceal a bad object, why one bit is always the persecutor of the other, and every piece bad to its core. Deleuze’s alternative theatre makes the back stage front. For Deleuze, if the choice is a theatre of lack, or a theatre of desire, the choice seems obvious. In Klein’s theatre of lack, there is little to look forward to save an understanding of the depressive position. She promises a good object which stands on high, but which cannot descend without changing its nature. If height, which disguises itself as depth, manifests both cruelty and love and protection, it is because all these manifest from its higher unity which, again, cannot be realized. The good object is by nature a lost object. It only shows itself as already lost. Its eminent unity it that it gives its love as what it gave before. It turns its face away, from on high, and offers its gifts as gifts already once offered.

Deleuze wonders, why, instead of bodies in pieces, can we not experience, and thus imagine, a “mother” who is not “mother” but a body without organs? In one case, we experience the constant feeling of never quite attaining, but always wanting. This same experience of want causes us to fear satiation. In the other case, we experience a constant feeling of neither needing or wanting, but always experiencing nevertheless. He likens this desire to a desire of the indefinite rather than a desire of the incomplete. Deleuze suggests the alternative: either the child does not leave the foldings of his or her future spinal cord, over which her parents fornicate (a reverse suicide), or she creates a fluid, glorious, and flamboyant body without organs and without parents.

Deleuze is also strongly critical of Klein’s evolution of language which assumes the child’s first approach to language to consist in grasping a model of the familial voice which

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 187

conveys tradition. Language affects the child as a bearer of a name and demands his insertion even before he begins to understand. Even when one does not know what the voice denotes, it is at once the object, the law of the loss, and the loss itself. It forbids without us knowing what it forbids. If we made the analogy from sex to metaphysics obvious, Deleuze suggests that Klein is really offering an analysis reminiscent of depressive Platonism: the Good is reached only as the object of a reminiscence, uncovered as essentially veiled, the One gives only what it does not have, since it is superior to what it gives, withdrawn into its height; and, as Plato said of the Idea, “it flees or it perishes” -the idea withdraws as the ego advances. Why, asks Deleuze, was a whole theatre installed where there were fields, workshops, factories, units of production?¹⁶⁴

A battle emerges between Klein and Deleuze over custody of the child. Both want the child to take them to the place where sexuality will illuminate the truth of things. Klein takes her child down the royal road only to return to mommy-daddy; Deleuze is convinced that mommy-daddy is but a stop on the road of big mountains, desert skies, animal-becomings and strangers. Klein waits with the child at the depths of the maternal body, but it is, says Deleuze, yet to discover the depth of her own body. The hiatus between one world and the other is best captured by Carroll with Alice in a pool of tears.¹⁶⁵ The lesson of the child to the adult claims Deleuze is the logic of sense. Its lesson is especially prescient to psychoanalysis, which he claims, must learn that before it can find truth in generative matter or engendered form, it must learn to map. Psychoanalysis, he says, cannot content itself with the designation of cases, the manifestation of histories, or the signification of complexes. Instead, it must be geographical before being historical.¹⁶⁶ Its truth of sexuality, desire, is not mythical, but a “machine, a synthesis of machines, a machinic arrangement of desiring machines.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ *Anti-Oedipus*, 298

¹⁶⁵ *Logic of Sensation*, 93

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 92

¹⁶⁷ *Anti-Oedipus*, 296

When Deleuze observes children at play, he does not believe that a parental unit lurks behind every narration of every arrangement of toys. Instead, he thinks that the child is simply attempting to make sense of the world they are merging into. Rather than beings obsessed with the mommy-daddy configuration, he sees machines at play with machines. If we remember little Hans who tinkers with his machines in *Anti-Oedipus*, Alice in the *Logic of Sense*, the artist child in *A Thousand Plateaus*, or the carnal metaphor of the child in *Proust and Signs*, there is no poverty of child tropes in his work. In every instance, he uses the child to show that the child shows us nothing. Deleuze is not claiming machines reproduce themselves, but neither do they only reproduce themselves through the intermediary of man.

Does any one say that red clover has no reproductive system because the bumble bee (and the bumble bee only) must aid and abet it before it can reproduce? No one. The bumble bee is part of the reproductive system of the clover. Each one of ourselves has sprung from minute nimalcules whose entity was entirely distinct from our own. These creatures are part of our eproductive system.¹⁶⁸

The subject is an effect. There is no difference between living and machine, vitalism and mechanism, but two states of machine, two states of living. For this same reason, he determines psychoanalytic account of the unconscious of representation a bankruptcy. Deleuze has a fresh way of understanding this process, one that steadfastly refuses to interpret. This applies to art, which, again, he likens to ‘children.’

Deleuze likens children to art, which, he claims attain a celestial state that no longer retains anything of the personal or rational. Art, he claims, say what children say. Art is in turn defined as an impersonal process in which the work is composed somewhat like a cairn, with stones carried in by different voyages and beings in becoming (rather than ghosts) [devenants plutôt que revenants] that may or may not depend on a single author. The production of art is the process of production. Children remind Deleuze of machines because they are essentially machinic: they are at home with the process of production.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 285

The Truth in Child's Play

Deleuze claims that children never stop talking about what they are doing or trying to do because a child's narration is "mapping." By talking, children explore milieus that become flattened and polarized for the adult inhabiting a metaphysical straight-jacket. In fact, as Deleuze notes, Freud and Klein understand how important maps are for children. There is no ignoring how often children are making maps; however, the mistake is to assume that something lies beneath the map which has significance beyond the mapping of intensities at hand. For example, the child is unable to imagine "parents" that function independently of an impersonal body. If Deleuze is right, a child's map refers to a milieu that is made up, not of parts (Freud), or fragmented parts (Klein), but of qualities, substances, powers and events. They imagine these parts and fragmented parts as constituted by fields and trajectories, but are unable to imagine the space in-between. Parents are themselves a milieu that children pass through.

Deleuze is not suggesting that parents play a small part in the development of the child; rather, he is claiming that parents occupy the position in this milieu of opening and closing of doors, guardians of thresholds, connectors and disconnectors of zones. The parents occupy a position in a world that is not derived from them, even with the infant, the parents are defined in relation to all else that is defined in relation. He writes,

there is never a moment when children are not already plunged into an actual milieu in which they are moving about, and in which the parents as persons simply play the roles of openers or closers of doors, guardians of thresholds, connectors or disconnectors of zones.¹⁶⁹

Deleuze claims the libido's business to haunt history and geography, to organize formations of worlds and constellations of universes. On this plane, he suggests that, rather than think of fascism as a politic, a history, or geography, or even as a psychology (Klein), we try to understand it, not by studying the persons and events of history any more than we do by analyzing the child at play. No one tells us more than the other about itself. Deleuze admits that

¹⁶⁹ Deleuze, "What Children Say."

Klein recognizes the network of mapping with a precocious acuity, but turns the map making on its side, rendering it as flat and yellowed as the old “photos of father-mother.”

Deleuze has no issue with the symbol, rather, it is that no one yet has been able to imagine the symbol without also having to imagine two worlds, father-mother. He offers the cartographer as our alternative. The psychoanalytic ventures into the depths of the unconscious to understand the import of “madness” to living, thinking and acting, but falls back into the very metaphysic it implies: it is a memorial, commemorative, or monumental conceptions that pertains only to subject and object. It knows no other way that to see the “pre-linguistic” child as inhabiting a depth from which the adult has risen and repressed. Maps, on the contrary, find themselves inserted in one another, horizon upon horizon. The unconscious is no longer something that deals with persons and objects, but with trajectories and becomings, a “subject in process.”

Deleuze anticipates a line of thought that Kristeva will borrow, but from Klein. For Deleuze, when Freud and Klein misunderstand the animals and people that populate children’s stories for sex, such as when Hans’s horse fallen on the street to a love-making scene of his parents, Deleuze interrupts by suggesting that Hans’s memory of the horse is really an attempt to understand animal forces, the big widdler, the heavy hauling, blinkers, biting, falling, being whipped. His horse narration is a map of forces and a science of intensities. This list of affects is itself an intensive map, a map that folds into other maps and profoundly alters the other map. The image is not only a trajectory, it too is a becoming. Children, and their maps, are in process.

He feels that, to arbitrarily draw a line between one and the other would be a map of its own kind, and one all too familiar to the philosopher and his critics. Thus, for Deleuze, the seemingly unfinished thought of the child is not something the analyst needs to fill in, but a gap that the analyst and others should listen to carefully. It is a full and complete “indefinite.” While for the analyst, the “child is being beaten,” must imply by someone, by some father or other, for

Deleuze, this lacks nothing: it is a determination of becoming. This indefinite project of mapping is creation, or art.

Rather than understand art as a personal process and a collective ideal of commemoration, a desire for a return to a lost time that can never return, Deleuze likens art to a voyage, not of law-breaking, or even law-making, but of foraging and venturing. He uses the work of Perrin as an example. Perrin clears out erratic blocks from the greenery that integrates them into the undergrowth and delivers them to the memory of the glacier that carried them there. Deleuze suggests that the artist does so, not in order to assign an origin to them, but to make their displacement something visible.¹⁵ One circles around a sculpture, the viewing axes that belong to it make us grasp the body, sometimes along its entire length, sometimes in an astonishing foreshortening, sometimes in two or more diverging directions: its position in the surrounding space is strictly dependent on these internal trajectories. It is here that Deleuze invokes Dionysus as the god of places of passage and things of forgetting. Creativity is figured as a creative forgetting of what cannot be fully remembered, memorialized, nor forgotten. I cannot help but think that Klein would approve. Would she agree that this process is, as Deleuze once termed it, “becoming woman?”

Becoming Woman, Becoming Alice, Becoming

Feminist engagements with Deleuze are most preoccupied with his concept of “becoming-woman.”² “Becoming-woman” embodies the instability and multiplicity socially and historically associated with women, especially a certain view of oppressed women in a patriarchal political, socio-economic culture. This is especially true if we consider the place affords to becoming, and, by extension, the strong link he makes between becoming and “becoming-woman.” He claims it is a necessary plateau in the act of “becoming.” “Becoming-woman” is a necessary plateau, a lift this movement into uncertainty, the affect yet to be seen. Acknowledging that “becoming-woman” is indeed sexist, Massumi explains that because the feminine and

women have traditionally embodied the instability repressed in patriarchal culture and the rigid components of masculine identity formation, Deleuze privileges “becoming-woman” as a better place from which to begin an innovative departure: “The feminine gender stereotype involves greater indeterminacy (‘fickle’) and movement (‘flighty’) and has been burdened by the patriarchal tradition with a disproportionate load of paradox (virgin/whore, mother/lover).”¹⁷⁰ The task, for Deleuze, but also for Klein, is to find a way out of the dualist metaphysics that implicates and infects, not only the ontology of the subject, but sexual difference.

Since women do not have an immediate or necessary access to “becoming-woman,” many feminists contend that “becoming-woman” is another manifestation of a complicated but familiar process of excluding women from representation while simultaneously formulating their exclusion as an image of representation’s undoing. Luce Irigaray and Alice Jardine argue that for all the innovation in Deleuzian thought, “becoming-woman” is a repetition of Western philosophy’s simultaneous construction and disavowal of the feminine: the same girl in a conceptually different dress. One might paraphrase both Irigaray’s and Jardine’s arguments with the following question: does “becoming-woman” risk repeating women’s historical invisibility in the name of literary and philosophical experiment, evacuating the category of woman, and celebrating her disappearance?

Ultimately, Deleuze’s notion of becoming-woman bears a strong affinity for Klein’s complicating of the mother/analyst divide, and, in turn, determinist, essentialist notions of the generation of life and mothers. Rosi Braidotti agrees. She claims that Deleuze’s emphasis on the “activity of thinking differently,” combined with his emphasis on “de-essentializ[ing] the body, sexuality, and sexual identity” can expand feminism’s “construction of new desiring subjects.”¹⁷¹ Becoming woman is a form of becoming such as in writing, one becomes-woman, becomes animal or vegetable, becomes molecule to the point of becoming-imperceptible.”

¹⁷⁰ Massumi, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, 86

¹⁷¹ Braidotti, 163

Similarly, while for Klein, the creative process of being a mother and accompanying any child in their act of play, imagining, and symbolizing, or what Deleuze terms “mapping” and “narrating,” suggests something of an ethical imperative at the heart of creativity. In “becoming-imperceptible,” the ego’s relation to language unhinges, making it open and permeable to collective utterances; the territory of identity dissolves into “we.” Virginia Woolf is one of two or three women writers cited in Deleuze’s work bridges the distance between writing and becoming-woman: “When Virginia Woolf was questioned about a specifically women’s writing, she was appalled at the idea of writing ‘as a woman.’ Rather, writing should produce a becoming-woman as atoms of womanhood capable of crossing and impregnating an entire social field”¹⁷² Deleuze refers to Woolf’s attention to the places and states where the borders between persons blur to non-existence. He notes that in, for example, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf uses “women” to imagine a facilitating passageway. He concludes that “the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities”¹⁷³ “Woman” is rendered a passage way, not unlike Klein imagines women in her work on the bedroom, the door, and the child. As Deleuze suggests, “becoming woman” is a form of “art”: anyone-as Klein would agree-can do it: children, artists, women, men, all move into the space of thinking, depersonalized, reflective, governed by a playful receptivity to the boundary, and lack of boundary, between generation and creation.

Becoming the Subject in Process

If, as Klein and her colleagues suggest, our early life forms a template for which our adult behaviour flows, then the manner in which our mother weans us from her earthly embrace determines the manner in which develop our flourish. She maintains that children who are at ease with the ambiguity, ambivalence, and anxiety which is the experience of being an infant born of a “mother,” are children who learn to think. Thinking, as Husserl describes, is that space in which

¹⁷² *Thousand Plateaus*, 276

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 249

all is not “black and white.” For some thinkers, Klein goes to far in suggesting that mother’s are 1) really the template which lies behind every thought and 2) that her thoughts and actions play such a determinate role in our development. If we accept that “mother” is not necessarily a term which must refer to “mother” proper, but instead, the full body which the infant knows first (by virtue of being born, in most cases, to a woman and then suckled by this same woman), it is acceptable to use the term “mother” simply to refer to the earthly immanence which we are born into, but which must separate and distinguish ourselves from.

Deleuze is less worried about the success of our separation, and more concerned with imagining a process by which we distinguish rather than separation per se. In both cases, there is a fecund opportunity: if every adult is really some version of his earlier self, with the vessel of the symbol and the navigator our analyst, learn to swim rather than sink in the murky spaces of the patterns of anxiety, ambiguity, and ambivalence. Klein goes even further, and it is here (despite herself and her decidedly non-intellectual mode) that she is most relevant to the philosopher. What we discover when we begin to swim in the dark underworld is more than an incestuous lust and murderous guilt and the role censorship plays in fascism and the inability to think or love. To best understand the genus of genius, violent destruction and its opposite creative thinking, she insists that we analyze its closest witness, the pre-linguistic child. In this child, lies the key to our second birth.

Both Deleuze and Klein use the “child” as a metaphor for a voyage of return to the formation of our identity, ontology, and, ultimately an ethic of creativity. Informed to no small extent by the crisis of the European sciences, and the birth of psycho-analysis, sexuality becomes a crucial concept for understanding the relationship of our affective, animal nature, and our selves as creative beings capable of a second birth. It is most interesting that, both thinkers tend to do this from the point of view of the child, or the adult recollecting his experience of the child. While Klein will return a strong sense of agency to the mother, and even complicate the boundaries between mother and analyst, she still tends towards the point of view and interests of the child.

Ultimately, while both make great strides on their journey out of Plato's cave and its determinist, essentialist notions of mothers as those who "generate life," but do not create ideas, they do not go so far as to give a sustained, explicit reflection on the subject-position of mother: the being who generates life and creates ideas. Until this is accomplished, any illusion of having exited the cave and the repudiation of sexual difference as the pre-condition for thinking philosophically is pure pretence. Thus, while Arendt, Klein, and others show a genius in thinking –obstinately and against the grain-of the moral majority and dominant discourse, it is Kristeva whose genius is most scintillating and revolutionary. Kristeva's notion of a subject in process, which is not limited to thinking woman's identity, finally moves into this long-neglected territory: the being who generates and creates, "mother."

The Anna Freudians criticized her for not paying attention to the real family and mother or the burgeoning external reality, limiting herself instead to the world of sadistic fantasies, or at best essentially negative ones. This view is not really accurate, for the child's psychic dynamic depends, as Klein believed, on the mother's inner world-which the child deems to be an external object! Klein proclaimed that we are all paranoid –schizophrenics. Even worse, she believed all forms of authority, parental authority in particular, generate inhibition and anxiety: we recall Fritz's atheist mother and believing father, who eventually allowed him to think for himself. Klein does not endorse any power, phallic, or mother phallic. She did not endorse a rival power. She did not believe in a father or a mother. On the contrary, she attempted to figure out how to get rid of this final henchman of power, this infantile pivot for tyranny.

The mother of an internal object is the double of the real mother. The doubling which engulfs the baby enables the world to avoid both judgment and verification through sense perception. The real mother is but the colored screen that is produced by our fantasy and projective identification. To learn to judge reality in a way that is not based on terror, we can certainly depend on the satisfying care of our mothers, who as luck would have it, are capable of doing so, but we are invited to depend on analysis so we might have a chance to work through our

fantasies of omnipotence, which in the end, is maternal omnipotence. Her single effort was to demystify power. By archeology, the remnants that lurk in us, we have a chance to deconstruct, through the help of some mothers distant enough and gratifying enough, to transference and interpretation. This all begins with “play.” It’s this same creativity that will bring me to my final chapter and my last attempt to fully unpack that Platonic prejudice that those who “generate life cannot create ideas.”

Playing with Children: Genius!

Kristeva seeks to understand why, as far as she can discern, the 21st century has produced women geniuses, including Klein. First, Kristeva determines two unlikely trajectories in Klein’s context which raise the stakes of her offering a novel understanding of psychoanalysis, a discourse which she considers to have been one of the most influential of the 20thC. Given the trajectory of Klein’s work, it is no accident that her work stands apart from her contemporaries because she, unlike *any* of her mentors, is a mother. Furthermore, Klein undertakes mothering and analysis in the throws of fascist Europe. By moving alongside her charge’s games, Klein experiences the war on an entirely different level than her contemporaries. The people in her midst destroy and create, dream and fear in epochs and worlds, which, for the children (and, as Kristeva intimates, like many of her soon-to-be contemporaries in London psychoanalytic circles), are slipped into without reference or reverence for the limits of strict reality. Thus, Klein’s relatively unschooled foray into the world of psychoanalysis, her much-noted bad habit of thinking out loud, and her playful assembling of the concepts and ideas of thinking psyche change everything, not only for psychoanalysis, but for the entire Christian-Platonic metaphysics which has so long formed the basis of Western, canonical thinking.

She alters the field of metaphysics by doing so as a mother/mother-analyst. Remember Socrates’ first premise regarding the creation of ideas: neither the philosopher nor the midwife of a philosophy is a mother. He, the philosopher and philosophical midwife, is *like* a mother or *like* a

midwife, but, unlike both, he creates ideas rather than birth infants. Klein's radical claim is that all ideas are rooted in this first birth: they are more than just "like" an infant and the mother who births this infant and birth itself, the connection between the idea of one and the idea of the other is osmotic. She bases her claim on her observations of children in which the defences, repressions and conversions between their memory of "generation" and the work of "creation" are less reified.

In Kristeva's estimation, Klein's findings render her a genius. Until the French revolution, few thinkers reflected on child's play. During the revolution, child play comes into focus. Kristeva mentions Montage's *Essays* in which he writes, "As indeed it must be noted that children's games are not games, and must be judged in children like the most serious actions".¹⁷⁴ Kant's fascination with Rousseau's *Emile* was so gripping that he disrupted his schedule and inserted pointed assertions about pedagogy and the development of the capacity to judge and think in the *Groundwork*. But it was not until the turn of the Century that child's play became a field of study, and thinkers such as Piaget and Kohlberg made their mark. What distinguishes Klein's analysis of play from her Enlightenment and psychological counterparts is that she is not interested in those instances when child's play approximates our adult standards of accuracy and correctness, such as when Plato teaches the fundamentals of geometry to a slave-boy, Klein is interested in the *playfulness* of play.

No matter how unconventional her methods, Kristeva insists that Klein's effort to understand child's play inside the semiotic of children permanently alters the terrain of thinking identity. Klein broadens the net of significance to include every gesture, verbal and non-verbal, every expression of anxiety and ease in voice and posture, and every movement and desire for movement from one room to another. By casting this net, Klein captures something of great importance, not only for children, but for the child in every adult. The work of identity formation draws from three dimensions because identity is fashioned from what is forever deep and wide: our first memory of mother's embrace.

¹⁷⁴ Qtd. in *Melanie Klein*, 50

Klein concludes that every child's early life is saturated by mourning, guilt, and longing. The work of identity is the operative work of desire. Every child's early life is a story unique to the child. Their story is written before them, but only they can act in the script which others will narrate. The degree of success is not determined by the rules of geometric accuracy or the victory of one commander over another in a mock-war, but with their ease with the story that is their own. Once they have begun to understand, and thus, once they have begun to feel guilt and shame, the story has already begun. Their only choice is to be at ease, or not, with the generation of life which is theirs. Their ease determines their ability for "creativity," the genus of thinking and living well. Aristotle is Klein's ally here in nearly every manner.

Klein's discovery of child's play begins, as Kristeva reminds us, with a simple intuition. At the start of analysis with a young girl, Rita, Klein realizes that the words and fixtures in the room are insufficient to allow the little girl to "speak" fully of the anxieties that prevent her from moving freely, loving with ease, and playing openly. Klein, like any mother, exits quickly only to return with some toys into the room, thus pioneering child-analysis. When the child is too anxious in the room, the analyst changes rooms and the analysis continues uninterrupted. Moving in and out of these spaces, and between speech and toys, Klein realizes that nothing is what it appears to be on the surface. Rita's drawings are not merely drawings: the paper itself, the room changes, the pen, all are integral components to the child's desire to express herself and repress what she already understands to be socially unacceptable. Almost intuitively, Klein also understands what has become a first commandment of analysis: let the patient indicate when they are ready, and how they are ready to begin communicating. Klein explains:

I should like to explain briefly why these toys afford such valuable assistance in the technique of play analysis. Their smallness, their number, and their great variety give the child the very wide range of representational play, while their very simplicity enables them to be put to the most varied uses. [. . .] The child's various play thoughts and the affects associated with them (which can partly be guessed at from the subject-matter of its games, and which are partly plainly expressed), are presented side by side and within a small space, so that we get a good survey of the general connections and dynamics of the mental processes [...]¹⁷⁵

Klein's radical methodology begins by studying children and taking her cue from children. As such, like any adult who gets down on the floor on all fours to play, she is brought into play.

Despite her occasionally clumsy pioneering ways, no one can dispute the manner in which Klein reveals the absolute importance of play and its ability to reveal revelatory and nearly sacred dimensions of what we now term "otherness" and "difference"-the underpinning of nearly every contemporary theory and discourse on ethics and identity in post-modernism. The suppression of play and the consequent human tendency for hatred and violence is reflected upon by Husserl, Proust, Bataille, Artaud, Blanchot, Foucault, Deleuze, Levinas, and Nancy, to name but a few. An ethics of playfulness operates like an imperative for a "generation" of thinkers to follow. The distinction between children's play and adult play diminishes the impotence of play squarely refuted, and the import of play to identity formation in a post-capitalist context prioritized. It is in this same spirit that Derrida *mis-en-joue* the idea of play and permanently alters the playing field of philosophy. The violence of deconstruction-a game bent neither on doing harm nor destroying, begins with play. Unlike their contemporary social-scientists such as Piaget and Kohlberg, their interest is not in the patterns and development of play, but the never ending desire for play. Play is gradually understood to be, not some attendant, irrelevant past time, but the very process of dialoguing with reality. The spatial-temporalizing of objects and their

¹⁷⁵ Qtd. in Melanie Klein, 49

functions is one and the same as the process of building and breaking, cleaning and dirtying, emptying and filling, entering and exiting. Play plays us, and we it. We are the basic units of play.

When Klein plays alongside children and parallels, equates, and differs with the things at hand, she relies on her own intuition just as much as theirs. She hovers in this space, long threatening and seemingly irrelevant to real thinkers and philosophers, and gives it priority. Her discovery is that every game, in some sense, is the *mis-en-jeu* of our alpha and our omega. Our struggle to be and to accept our not-being is fought on the “full earth” our mother’s body. Thus, it is not the case the “mother” has an essence. In fact, mother is she who has no essence-she is the being who both enables and threatens our very existence: the generation of life and the creation of ideas. Something of this spirit which underlies Kristeva’s highly evolved notion of the “subject-in-process,”-a subject who, in every way, is born and bears, who thinks-life, and is living-thinking.

CHAPTER V

KRISTEVA'S IMPERATIVE: GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR FEMININE SIDE

Abstract: Few thinkers more than Kristeva are as sensitized to the professional risks associated with postulating theories mistaken for sexualized-essentialism. In her home life, Julia is married to Philippe Sollers, the author of *Women*, a widely-circulated and highly ironic literary deconstruction of nearly every major discourse on sexualized-essentialism relevant to the French-intellectual imagination; the book's stream of consciousness is exhaustive, literally and figuratively speaking (it measures nearly 600 pages). In her public life, Kristevian concepts have dominated the same two decades in which feminists and non-feminists obsessed over sex-essentialism. Her concepts of "Chora," the symbolic and the semiotic, ambivalence and the abject, and the feminine and rebirth continue to trigger a heated *tête-à-tête* in France and beyond. Her most controversial and equally seminal contribution to these discourses is her insistence that the maternal body threatens, and should threaten, the patriarchal symbolic-order; in fact, her contributions to the most advanced discussions on semiology to her highly personal accounts of political activism, analysis, and co-parenting, all bear the same fascination with the manner in which the maternal body threatens the symbolic order. Kristeva's experiences and reflections have led her to believe that, when allow that the maternal body threatens the symbolic order, we allow ourselves to hear what is other. Kristeva makes no hard and fast distinction between this otherness and others; in fact, she considers the imperative to listen to others an ethic (and perhaps even an aesthetic) proper to the "subject in process." The subject in process is a subject who is at home with the unpredictability of otherness, and by extension, the other; it is here, like this, that he who creates ideas is, finally, permitted some intimacy with the generation of life.

An Ear for Listening to Motherhood, an Eye for Repudiating the Maternal

Kristeva is aware of how the patriarch uses and misuses “essence” and yet, after two decades of attacks from all fronts, she does not succumb to the pressure to reduce sexed-identity to the arbitrary and conventional parameters dictated by many of her adversaries. Kristeva spends more than a decade deconstructing the patriarchal propensity towards reducing women to essence and then splitting her into an impossible ideal (shadowed by a lamentable real). She spends more than two decades analyzing, treating and remedying this unhappy, impossible situation for women. In light of her academic and psychoanalytic work, Kristeva does not agree that the current situation of women is good reason to dismiss the possibility that women might have an “essence. She believes that women’s apparent affinity with the organic and her strong counter-transferal impulses are not merely habits springing from conventions indicative of a culture which despises women, but a possibly genuine affinity which springs from her embodied maternal identity.¹⁷⁶ She adds that these tendencies have a greater import and relevance to all of us, not only women, for the very simple reason that we are all born from women who mother. The maternal resonates in all of us thinking, living beings.

From the beginning, Kristeva explains the repudiation of the maternal, not in terms of a propensity for maternal-victimization, but in terms of hyper-reactivity to the perceived threat of the maternal body. Kristeva identifies the ongoing political struggle over women’s reproductive rights as testimony to the perceived stakes of controlling, regulating, and taming the perceived threat to the patriarchal symbolic. In order to understand why the maternal is perceived as a threat, Kristeva suggests that we analyze the high stakes the patriarch places on rational unity and the logic of non-contradiction. For the patriarchal symbolic order, the maternal body presents an apparent threat because it defies the standard logic of opposition of inside and outside, one and the other, thinking and feeling. Kristeva names the cause of the effect of the maternal body which

¹⁷⁶ Kristeva makes mention of woman’s affinity for the organic and her strong counter-transferal impulse in her trilogy on genius. See especially *Klein*, pages 150-151.

confounds distinctions and blurs boundaries “semiotic otherness.”¹⁷⁷ At this early point in Kristeva’s career, her more specific interest is with the methods used to cover over, displace and contain the perceived threat of semiotic otherness triggered by the maternal body.

Kristeva claims that Catholic discourses attempt to control the semiotic otherness of the maternal by circulating a myth of the virgin.¹⁷⁸ The myth of the virgin is a clear example of a feminine essence which “splits” women in two. By stipulating that women are either 1) the virgin (whore) who knows her pleasure in the child who is not hers to have or 2) the whore (virgin) who knows pleasure outside the sanctions of paternal law and marriage, the myth stipulates two options which is really one option. The myth of the virgin relegates women to the status of virgins and their “bastard” children to the status of legitimate entities by impregnating the “virgin,” not with the seeds of carnal pleasure, but with the “word” incarnate.¹⁷⁹ In this manner, the filial passage is regulated by the patriarch while simultaneously appearing to satisfy the need for primary identification with the mother. The phenomenal experience of this “mother” is described in, for example, Celine’s account of her ambivalent love for her grandmother in which she appears as a gruesome woman with two faces; Kristeva wonders if “the theme of the two faced mother perhaps the representation of the baleful power of women to bestow mortal life”?

The theme of the two-faced mother anticipates a larger theme in Kristeva’s work: the crucial distinction between the woman who is split in two (the myth of the virgin-whore) and the woman who is more than one (because she adopts the maternal function). In the former case, the woman’s destiny is to mother a child to whom she cannot be a mother; in the later case, woman is also a mother. Kristeva determines that, despite appearances to the contrary, Catholic discourses (as opposed to modern liberalism) prevent women from the experience of being a mother. While Catholic discourses and practises might appear to make maternity mandatory, Kristeva claims

¹⁷⁷ Reading Kristeva; *Unravelling the Double Bind*, 51

¹⁷⁸ See “Stabat Mater” in *Tales of Love* and “Motherhood According to Bellini” in *Desire in Language*; see also the “Bounded Text,” and “The Father, Love and Banishment,” and Oliver’s account in *Reading Kristeva*

¹⁷⁹ “Females who can wreck the Infinite,” in *Powers of Horror*, 157

that, in actuality, all efforts are made to prevent the child from really knowing and, by extension, loving the woman who is also their mother. The child born and bred on the myth of the virgin is a child who can neither hear nor comprehend that his mother's *jouissance* comes from elsewhere. The child born and bred on the myth of the virgin is a child who is unable to bear the unpredictability of the other.

In the myth of the virgin, the child, rather than be excluded, excludes the mother's *jouissance*.¹⁸⁰ The mother's *jouissance* is the mother's desire which refers to something which exceeds the existence of the child. The mother's *jouissance* is the mother's referent to her otherness. The child born and bred on the myth of the virgin is a child unable to integrate that its mother desires something else or someone else. Her existence beyond him remains for him a either a threat or an intolerable actuality. Any attempt she may make to speak in a manner that he can hear is likely to fall on deaf ears. The result is a child born who can never be re-born. He is a child unable to bridge from his earthly existence towards his human freedom: both are, in essence, unclaimable, unpredictable, unknowable.

Kristeva's experience as a clinician causes her to dread the future of a people unable to integrate the desire and suffering of others; conversely, her experience as a clinician causes her to place great hope on the child who accepts his mother's desire for other people and things other than he the child. On this same trajectory, Kristeva suggests that by permitting ourselves to bear witness to the desire and suffering of our mothers and others, something in all of us can be born and reborn. The subtle irony implicit in Kristeva's prescription for listening to our mothers and others is that our mother's desire is affirmed by adopting a maternal stance; however, the irony is not also prohibition against men adopting the maternal stance; instead, the irony appears as an irony only for those who cannot imagine a masculine maternal function. Kristeva has no trouble imagining a masculine maternal stance; in fact, she intimates that there is little alternative. If we recall the thematic developed extensively by Klein, we can accept that women are only ever a

¹⁸⁰ This "child" is akin to Arendt's "infantile" tendency in modernity.

symbol for the maternal. Mothers are not really women, and in some sense, all of us are and ought to be mothers. This can be understood as a claim about the origin of our identity, and its continual evolution, and it can also be understood as a moral claim. If mothers are those who adopt an ear for listening to others, then there is a strong case for adopting her ethic.

In this sense, each one of us is a subject-in-process who is always already negotiating the other within; like the maternal body, we are never completely the subjects of our own experience; and, like the maternal body, the experience of being the subject-in-process is not reserved for women, but available to anyone born and reborn, including the (masculine) autonomous unified subject. If we recall, as Kristeva does, Klein's observations of children at play, we recall that boys and girls re-enact this primary identification with the maternal body early in their lives and for a long time after. As Oliver suggests, Kristeva uses the maternal body with its "two-in-one, or other within, as a model for all subjective relations."¹⁸¹

Kristeva emphasizes the importance of the maternal stance to the development of subjectivity; in doing so, she challenges a prejudice in both Catholicism and psychoanalysis. Catholicism and psychoanalysis tend to portray the maternal function as a site of comfort, unity, and wholeness while maintaining that the child enters the social by virtue of the paternal function. Kristeva wonders why a child would venture from the maternal function, something safe and nourishing, if his only motivation were fear? Her more common-sensible suggestion is that the maternal function delivers none of the pure comfort and security Freud and others suggest; instead, like Klein, Kristeva suggests that, from the beginning, a child's experience with its mother is complicated. Children evolve in the midst of a stage always already complicated by the competing desires of having and not having, and wanting and not wanting their mother. From this same matrix, the loved and loving child learns to relate to their mothers as articulate, social beings who desire and suffer. At times such as loss or crisis, the memory of the maternal function tends to register with salience, but, for the most part, it becomes a background rather than a

¹⁸¹ *Kristeva and Feminism*, 13, 100

foreground for our relationship with an *other*. The child develops alongside and from within this evolving relationship between others as a subject in process inside the fold which is his mother/woman in process.

Cavarero anticipates that, by adopting an ear for the real story of motherhood, we no longer need virgins or goddesses to fill her place because we hear a real story of motherhood which cannot be confused for any other's story. Kristeva agrees, but adds the caveat that the stakes of renouncing the myth of the virgin are complicated, especially for women. When women renounce the psychic stability which comes with ready made gods, she is liberated from the task of renouncing what she is in to become who she might be, but she also risks losing the maternal thing altogether. For a woman at the crossroads, it can appear as if the choice is a choice limited between psychic stability and madness. Kristeva acknowledges that there is something inherently insane about standing at such a crossroads, but insists that the prospects are not nearly as grim as they might seem.

For the journey of the girl-child born into the discourses and practices implied by the myth of the virgin/whore, identifying as a woman is a masochistic identification. The ideology and practices which sustain the myth of the virgin require that girls renounce her desire and, by extension, her autonomy. Added to this, a girl's hope of seeing through the myth of the virgin is tenuous. In Kristeva's account, a girl's hope of seeing through the myth of the virgin is premised on her becoming a mother. Mothers can see through the myth because they know that their children are not gods. For the girl, her hope of seeing through the myth of the virgin is premised on a future contingent and remote and possibly undesirable or untenable to the girl. If the girl is lucky enough to be born to a mother who knows and is able to speak about her knowledge in a manner that allows her daughter to hear, then the girl-child is well positioned to understand that she is no god, and that suicide is not her only option. In listening to her mother's speech, she will learn about more than the truth of her status, she will be granted a relationship with the being who is a woman and a mother: she will be granted an opportunity to identify with a being she will

have to kill in order to become who she is, but at this point, she will already have a relationship with a woman who has had to do the same.

Kristeva, like Arendt, suggests that while women can –in theory– refuse to accept her sex (however pragmatic, or politically radical, or authentic) this refusing is in some sense an acknowledgement: to refuse her sex altogether is tantamount to madness or suicide if, for example, she refuses to accept the possibility that she might become pregnant after sex. In other words, her choice can appear as a choice between kinds of suicide. Instead, Kristeva offers that the choice is not between two avenues, but a choice about how to proceed on the journey unified by one feature: the maternal function. As a being who is born a girl and might later become a woman who mothers, she must lose her mother to become a mother. When a woman becomes a mother, she must lose her child to rediscover her mother. The journey is cyclical. As Kristeva explains, a woman’s choice is not to lose or not to lose her mother; rather, her choice is in how to grieve her loss with intelligent, loving, creativity. To refuse to grieve is, in most cases, to choose some version of destructive, violent stupidity. Her choice is, as Heidegger says of authentic Dasein, “own most.”

Kristeva’s vernacular could be mistaken for a conservative prescription requiring maternity, but it could also be described as an anarchical affirmation of the freedom of speech. When the speech of real mothers is allowed to resonate and problematize the myth of mothers, Kristeva believes that her daughter is born into a time and place in which the myth of the virgin no longer circulates and insinuates itself into her girlhood in quite the same manner. Masochism is not a predetermined destiny for girls, but imagining how it could be otherwise is yet to be determined. All that is known for certain is that a girl’s narrative will unsettle anything which came before it: it is, as Arendt predicted, unpredictable.

The Two Faces of Matricide

If the paternal-symbolic order is understood to be all that prescribes a logic of opposition, non-contradiction, and, in most cases, a hierarchy of value, and if the maternal function is understood to be what threatens this same logic, then ambivalence is the experience of the maternal function. Ambivalence is the experience of the in-between, of the contradiction, and of the scrambling of order. After many years of conducting analysis, Kristeva maintains that the experience of ambivalence plays an indisputable role in identity formation. Where others might predict that psychosis would onset with the dissolution of boundary and predictability, Kristeva claims a more reliable indicator with the inability to cope with the dissolution of boundary and predictability. She contends that, when repression dictates what can and what cannot be said by mothers or about mothers, then, typically, mothers are “split” and made abject. If Kristeva is right, the psychosis is intimately connected with violence against women. A being unfamiliar, uncomfortable or hostile towards what appears to threaten order is almost always someone who has confused women for the mothers they appear to embody; this includes women themselves; self-inflicted violence such as anorexia and bulimia are mirrored in the private and public violence against women; misogyny’s cousin is masochism; neither illness is a secret, and both spring from repression. Ours is a culture that has not learned to love women, and neither has it learned how to speak about its hatred. For the uninitiated, the complicit nod of the law enforcer or the indifference of the community is variably sickening and disheartening. For Klein and Kristeva, these attitudes are inevitable given the historical-cultural climate of matricide.

For Klein who was writing in the twilight of crisis of early 20th C Europe of fascism, man’s complicity with misogyny was best understood by unlocking the censorship which surrounds his first encounter with ambivalence: loving the same woman he had to separate from. For Kristeva who is writing in a post-modern light all its own, misogyny is just as real and prevalent, but the responsibility has changed somewhat. There is a responsibility not only to memorialize the undertaking of the psyche and its discoveries for men and women, there is a

responsibility to do so in a manner that explicitly cultivates intelligent, loving creativity for men and women. For example, her later work delves into the relatively unexplored notion of the paternal function and its likeness to the maternal function.¹⁸² Kristeva's contributions in this area establish her as a political agent: while she is sharply critical of any attempt to determine an identity-based platform around which women or any other might rally, she offers one of the most perspicacious critiques of violence against the "weaker sex."¹⁸³

As Reineke details in her book *Sacrificed Lives*, Kristeva explains violence against women by explaining what women represent to the aggressor: women represent that which one had to do violence to in order to separate. If separation was complicated or was initiated too soon, the child is more likely to suffer from psychosis. Kristeva, like Klein, likens psychosis with the inability to think. When a child matures into an adult, but separation is incomplete, violence is often directed at real bodies. Women's bodies are often the target of this kind of violence because, to the person who has not fully separated in the vehicle of the symbol, women's bodies appear as a semblance or identical to the body we had to do (imagined) violence to in order to separate. As adults trapped in infancy, we turn to women's bodies to "reinscribe, reflect on, and commit to memory the subject-creating forces of negativity that first secured them in the world."¹⁸⁴ Kristeva claims that just as a subject under siege may

deploy defensive strategies modeled on the initial bounding practices of an emergent subjectivity, so also may a community under threat engage in boundary building ventures based on those that first brought it into existence as a social order."¹⁸⁵

The creative/destructive footprint of violence against women seems to bear this claim quite well. Despite differences across and internal to cultures all around the world, women are targeted in remarkably similar ways. Whether it is the angry medical practice detailed by Gena

¹⁸² See *Subjectivity without Subjects, from Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers*, especially "Fatherhood and the Promise of Ethics."

¹⁸³ Like Arendt, Kristeva fears that politicizing identity risks turning the "who" into the "what."

¹⁸⁴ Qtd. in Reineke, *Sacrificed Lives; Kristeva on Women and Violence*, 45

¹⁸⁵ Ibid 45

Corea, or armies assaulting women on the battlefield or on the home front, or domestic violence in so called “peace times,” in most cases, it is her face, her breasts, her womb, and her reproductive organs are mutilated, controlled, covered over.¹⁸⁶ Woman’s body is attacked because woman’s body is confused as a literal symbol for the first body from which we had to separate. Like individuals, nations, communities, religions, who conceive of “negativity in terms of a hard-won, positioned awareness, placing it in service to representation” strike out against their “mother.”¹⁸⁷ “Mother” is made into a thing to be venerated in public, but despised in the domestic; she is made a thing to be excluded from political participation, but emblemized as a symbolic ideal. Mother is “split.”

Kristeva clarifies that there is nothing inevitable about violence against women; initially, the child does not see its mother’s sex as threatening; instead, the child’s first salient experience is that of ambivalence. Ambivalence is the experience of the transition space between those hard and fast boundaries dictated by the paternal order. The child must inhabit these transition spaces in order to separate. There is nothing inherently psychotic about his experience of these spaces; instead, it is the manner in which he is able to come to terms with this ambivalence that determines his fate. During this transition, the mother is not yet object and the child is not yet subject. The child cannot tell if the abject is itself or its other. The mother’s body is still too immediate and dwells in the child’s super ego. Similarly, the mother cannot tell whether this other in her is her or not. Mother and child are subjects in process and embody narcissism in crisis. While the mother and child both need and fear the lack of separation, inverse castration, if under the guidance of the ‘mother’ (the being who navigates the child from the maternal into the vehicle of the symbolic), the process maintains an optimum balance, the child becomes a creative,

¹⁸⁶ See Gena Chorea’s *Mother Machine; Reproductive Technologies*; for documentation on the parallel of violence against women during wartime concurrent to increases against violence in the domestic, the literature on rape and violence against women by allied and enemy soldiers before and during the Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis, see *the New York Times* on Iraq “Limbo for US women reporting Iraq Assaults, February 2007; see “Despite Army’s Assurance, Violence at Home,” November 2008; see “The Reach of War; Civil Rights; Shielding Women from A Renewal of Domestic Violence,” October 2004.

¹⁸⁷ *Reading Kristeva*, 59.

intelligent and loving adult. If this navigation goes too much off course, then psychosis (the inability to create) is inevitable.

Every child is a criminal, but no child is incapable of the transference of love; this applies just as easily to adults, but the consequences of adult psychosis are almost always incommensurate to those perpetrated by a child. As Reineke reminds us, this psychosis is not limited to individuals but can manifest itself in community and nations. In essence, the fate of nations is decided by mothers. (But we are all of us eventually mothers and this realization must come later). In this sense, mothers are responsible for matricide, but must also mother in the context of a culture where matricide is inherent and implied. This is not to say that mothers are responsible for creating a criminal class, rather, they are responsible for intervening in our inherent criminality. This intervention could be called love if love were understood to, not as an uncomplicated wholeness, but an open, receptivity to the violent struggle which we must engage in with in order to become creative.¹⁸⁸ The task for the midwife of the child's 'soul' is to find avenues for allowing the ambiguity proper to the relation of mother and infant to resonate; whether through touch and speech, or later, in art proper, the mother/midwife navigates her child to his second birth. Without these efforts, we are all of us likely to feel frustrated, violent and stupid. Caught in the grips of his psychosis, he experiences real others as abject; when his countrymen experience the other as abject . . . what is there left to say?

The Abject

The experience of the abject threatens to disturb identity, system, and order because it is that which does not respect borders. The abject is the affect of ambiguity. It is as Kristeva details, "a hatred that smiles," "a debtor that sells you up" "a friend who stabs you," but it is not a

¹⁸⁸ *Down, But Not Forsaken* follows the lives of children who are born into acute poverty but flourish. The authors discover that in each instance, the child had one mentor who gave unconditional support and motivation.

quality.¹⁸⁹ Abjection is above all ambiguity. It releases a hold, but does not cut off the subject from what threatens it. Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-oedipal mommy-baby relationship in the immemorial violence with what a body becomes separated from another body in order to be. As Kristeva summarizes, the abject “maintains that night in which the outline of the signified thing vanishes and where only the imponderable affect is carried out. It is founded on the abject separation of one body from another at birth. It is the laboured, but necessary, founding and prefiguring symbolic separation.”¹⁹⁰ The prototypical abject experience is birth.

For Kristeva, when Socrates makes birth the absolute boundary between generation and creation it is equally inevitable and most ironic. The child identifies not with one or the other, but with the murky in between. The child vacillates between identifying with the waste violently expelled from the mother’s body in order to avoid separation, but then hates the body because it cannot be free of it. The maternal body enrages because it carries us in its body and it enrages because it refuses our desire to return. For the male child, the abject is experienced as betrayal: how can he become a man when he was once a woman? How can he become a man and love a woman, the threatening hole represented by his mother?¹⁹¹ The male child must split his mother to become heterosexual man: he must render her abject and sublime. Making the mother abject allows him to separate from her and become autonomous to love another. If the mother remains abject, she never becomes an object of love which the masculine sexuality can take as an object of love. If she is only sublime, then the child will not separate from her. The boy child splits his mother, but what about the daughter?¹⁹²

For the daughter, separation will never be complete, and in most cases, force her to contend with masochism. If the daughter splits her mother, she splits herself. In hetero- discourse, she is required to abandon her mother for the love object which is her father. When the female

¹⁸⁹ *Sacrificed Lives*. 89.

¹⁹⁰ *The Powers of Horror*, 15-17.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid* 157, and Melanie Klein, 144

¹⁹² Melanie Klein, 57

makes her mother abject to reject her, she abject and rejects herself. If Kristeva is right, women usually end up lugging this corpse rather than getting rid of it-an over preoccupation with house and home serves as one very potent example of the insanity of this situation. The question becomes, why is choosing creativity (over a spectrum of more taxing, and less pleasurable experiences) so often the preference?

Matricide is only successful if the child can eroticise the loss by taking a substitute or by eroticising the other and finding substitutes. For this reason, Kristeva makes the unlikely suggestion that women do not marry their fathers, but their mothers, whether or not they marry men or women is not the point. (Klein and Kristeva more than once acknowledge the insanity of being a woman). Otherwise, women must commit matricide without also killing herself. Even then, it is only ever partial because she is the body she is killing. It is, says Kristeva, beyond remedy. She must find a way to eroticise without killing herself. Kristeva maintains that we must affirm women loving women. This is made all the difficult if we consider that most women find themselves, not only in a culture premised on matricide, they find themselves in a culture which prohibits the homo-erotic. Even with the many evolutions in law and mores, Kristeva contends that feminine sexuality is partly melancholy and depression fundamentally homosexual because of the prohibition against homo-eroticism. However, like the mother who knows her child is not a god, the daughter and the mother are both saved somewhat by “mother.” Kristeva claims that,

More persistent than philosophical doubt, gnaws, on account of its basic disbelief, at the symbolic’s almightiness. It bypasses perverse negation, and constitutes the basis of the social bond in its generality, in the sense of resembling others and eventually the species

Despite the omnipresence of the patriarchal symbolic and every attempt at censoring the truth of the maternal, mother’s flesh threatens the almightiness of the symbolic and the anonymous autonomous entity glorified as the “rational autonomous agent.” Mother gains access to what is off limits. She must wean, break up, and remain silent about it. She must “pass up” her child over to the Symbolic. But, claims Kristeva, she knows better. Daughters and mothers are

born again at the confines of this juncture of matricide, masochism, and the prevailing sovereignty of the “semiotic.” In this sense, it is true that Kristeva appears to mandate maternity, but we are now ready to hear that this maternity is not mandated to women, but to the subject in process. But even on this narrow, shallow spectrum of possibility, the daughter born to such a mother would have a much less traumatic development than the daughter born in the current regime of the cult of the virgin. Possibly, this daughter would not require a child of her own to understand and see through the myth of the virgin. In fact, to assume otherwise may be a myth of the virgin all its own.

The Middle Voice

Sons and daughters feature prominently in Kristeva’s work. At the end of the day, it is they who show us the way “back to mother.” They do so by doing what they do best: play. Like Klein’s ethic of analysis which emphasizes intuition, flow, listening, and mindful-playfulness, Kristeva’s adheres to an ethic of poetry and play. She, also the mother/analyst, enters into the dream-like space in which the connections between this world and a seeming other world are strong. Kristeva understands play to be subjected to primary processes (condensation and displacement) and the narrative account of play to be a verbal and non-verbal a semiotic. Like Klein, Kristeva predicts that this method of communicating promises a connection back to the beginning. The child’s efforts to name his trauma, which none of us can name, he, by virtue of his diachronic proximity, can conjure most poignantly. Play opens and broadens the domain of the in-between and makes apparent that the distinction between one side and the other.

Kristeva, like Nietzsche and Derrida, hold philosophy responsible for the repression of the middle voice. Kristeva adds that the challenge is to determine whether or not this middle voice is structured, and if so, how. Kristeva maintains that the repression silences more than just the unconscious.

Our philosophies of language, embodiments of the Idea, are nothing more than the thoughts of archivists, archeologists, and necrophilics. Fascinated by what remains of a process which is partly discursive, they substitute this fetish for what actually produced it [. . .] and persist in seeking the truth of language by formalizing utterances that hang in midair, and the truth of the subject by listening to the narrative of a sleeping body—a body in repose, withdrawn from its socio-historical imbrications, removed from direct experience.¹⁹³

Kristeva's most scathing critique to western metaphysics' dualism is her finding that thinking is not possible without living. The solution is not a simple organicism in which the "body" is brought back to life; neither does the solution consist in collapsing one entity into the other; such solutions risk fostering a "one dimensional" experience proper to the personage who haunts modernism. (This person is deconstructed by Marcuse whose modern subject is fraught with the lack in every dimension: loneliness, meaninglessness, despair). On this same basis, Kristeva is critical of structuralism and even a certain reading of Freudian psychoanalysis.

Kristeva maintains that, because these discourses eliminate the drives from the semiotic and imagine "the unconscious as a depository of laws and thus a discourse," the result is "structural operations dependent on the phenomenological reduction, just as they depend on what this reduction is able to make visible: symbolic functioning."^{194, 195} In essence, their trajectory is circular. Instead, Kristeva seeks to give an account of language which allows the middle voice to animate the space in a playful architectonic called "semanalysis."

Semanalysis "tears the veil of representation to find the material signifying process."¹⁹⁶ Tearing the veil reveals what Kristeva terms the "semiotic" heterogeneous elements of language. Tearing the veil does not reveal something more true and real than the veil, rather, it helps reify the relationship of two planes of signification: one, material rejection, and two, symbolic stability. "Tearing the veil" and allowing what lies behind the veil to come to the surface in dreams and

¹⁹³ "Revolutionary Language Rendered Speechless," 91

¹⁹⁴ *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 84; qtd. in *Reading Kristeva*, 94

¹⁹⁵ *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 103

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 68, 84, 103

poetry permits us to understand how drives enter language. Tearing the veil shows us that the unconscious is not only structured like language, but structured like what is heterogeneous to language. Language is a process of differing and distinction. The result, as is detailed in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, is that the speaking subject is herself heterogeneous.¹⁹⁷ Kristeva believes that by recovering what lies behind the veil of language, a revolution begins. When what was one appears as two can no longer be understood as a simple addition of one to the other, then the structure of language and the dualisms that have begun to crumble: nature, culture; self, other; inside, outside; political and personal, and so on. A mixing and circling at the roots of the unity that kept two worlds apart causes a revolution in one field and presupposes a revolution in the other. This oscillation produces a surface which Klein likens to silt, a barrier, and even the skin which forms on warm milk—the same “in-between,” or surface area that causes the experience of aversion, an experience that is paramount to her work on violence and creativity.

The subject who is born a second time in this matrix is Kristeva’s “subject-in-process.” The subject in process is the result of the heterogeneous process of the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic drive animates language in the sense that the semiotic produces and destroys language. The two require one another in what Kristeva likens to an *oscillating dialectic*. The bios of semiotic, the music of speech, and the socio of language interrupt each other, contain each other, and in essence, produce speech. Ultimately, the sounds that impregnate language trigger a memory so remote, and so distant, we only know how to recognize it by analogy: it points to a maternal music. Thus, while others are concerned over the repression of the middle voice, Kristeva is doubly concerned over the repression of the middle voice in the locus of sexual difference. It is here that she has the most to contribute, either as a foil or as a pioneer, to contemporary discussions of identity.

¹⁹⁷ *Revolution in Poetic Language*. 24, 108

The Alpha Hermaphrodite

Kristeva executes a rational deduction of Freud's own principles. In Freud's rendering of love, the identification that provides support for love seems to rest upon a strange object. Freud describes our first experience of love as an "enigmatic apprehending of a pattern to be imitated that has not yet undergone a libidinal cathexis."¹⁹⁸ (Kristeva wonders how Freud's rendering of love is any different from his rendering of madness)¹⁹⁹. The enigmatic, non-objectal identification of love which borders on madness is imagined by Freud as an oral assimilation, a being devoured. Kristeva asks the question: how could a primary experience of love-madness transition from its natal infancy into being? She sees no alternative except to offer that our first love could not develop without having been capable of transforming a thirst to devour into a deferred and displaced level of the psychic. One must take pleasure in chewing, swallowing, and nourishing one's self with *words*. In being able to receive his words, I become like him, but not him. Freud's account of first love, with its lack of object-cathexis, is unable to explain the origin of speech.

Freud lands himself in a bit of a quagmire and Kristeva believes he understands his quandary quite well. For Freud, first love must be directed towards a first *father*. He makes it clear that this father is a father in individual prehistory. The father who precedes individual prehistory appears before the awareness of sexual difference and is thus really "both parents." The identification with this father before prehistory is, claims Freud, "immediate," "direct," and "previous to any concentration of any object whatsoever."²⁰⁰ It is, claims Freud, only with secondary identification that the mother and father appear and reinforce the first identification. Freud ends up with serious problem: he describes love as both an all consuming, object-less desire and like language. If Kristeva is right, he is still unable to explain the origin of speech. For this very reason, Kristeva argues that Klein's view is more common sensible.

¹⁹⁸ *Melanie Klein* 98.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 98

²⁰⁰ Qtd in *Klein*, 141

Klein radically transforms the Freudian hypothesis of an original narcissism and postulates from the very beginning of a baby's psychic life as self capable of relationship with the object, albeit a partial relation to the breast. Recall that for Klein, our capacity to love comes from the experience of feeding at our mother's breast. The breast is what sates the child's hunger and thirst. It conveys the feeling of plentitude which Freud so often remarked upon. The breast is also the prototype for all subsequent experience of desire. The infant's feelings are directed toward the maternal object in her entirety: the breast does not, claim Klein, "simply represent a physical object."²⁰¹ Neither is the breast something of which the infant is conscious or unconscious; Klein translates this lack of sharp distinction into a mute distinction between symbolic and a-symbolic and then augments the domain of the symbolic. A/symbolism comes to be the foundation of all fantasy and sublimation. The breast explains how an infant can eventually desire speech rather than milk. By adopting Klein's theoretical stance, Kristeva extricates herself from charges of over-simplified organicism, but another concern lurks amongst her feminist and post-modern readers. If Kristeva is not suggesting that there is a primitive sexed identity, is she in fact suggesting that women have an affinity for the archaic? In other words, is Kristeva attempting to topple a certain brand of philosophy and psychoanalysis of dualism and lack, by re-instating an essentialist sexual identity and origin?

Our Affinity for the Archaic

Freud considers the first attachment to mother to be a lost archeology that is nearly inaccessible. He likens it to the Mino-Mycenean period of ancient Greece. Likening the first attachment to an idyllic, self sacrificing osmosis, Kristeva wonders if his notion of narcissism is not really an attempt to cover over a perceived emptiness that is intrinsic to the beginnings of the symbolic formation as it appears to Freud as a first separation between what is not yet Ego and not yet an Object. Does narcissism protect it, cause it to exist, and as such, insure it an elementary

²⁰¹ Qtd.in *Klein*, 142

separation? Without Freud's notion of narcissism, chaos would sweep away the possibility of distinction, trace, and symbolization and confuse every limit. But, as Freud well knows, every child, especially the young child, needs these limits. There is no "child" without them. The child needs limits not as a psychotic or an adult needs them, but in the "zero degree of the imagination." What preserves this emptiness? What causes the fleeting effect of enigmatic and creative non-sense? Kristeva claims that it is here where we must turn to notions of "identification."

For Freud, narcissism must be thoroughly and wholly a supplement. Freud describes it as a third realm supplementing the auto-eroticism of the mother-child dyad: As Kristeva cites,

The autoerotic drives, however, are there from the very first; so there must be something added to auto-eroticism—a new psychical action—in order to bring about narcissism. Accordingly, narcissism is endowed with an 'intra-symbolic' status dependent of a third party, but which precede the oedipal ego and prompt one to conceive of an archaic disposition of the paternal function, but precede the Name, the Symbolic, and even the mirror state.²⁰²

Freud suggests that it is not Eros, but narcissism, that dominates psychic life; as such, he also suggests that self-deception dominates psychic life. Our relationship to reality, already understood as a libidinal attachment and eventual cathexis, or "reality testing," is also self-deceptive. Illusion, neutralized and normalized, lies at the bottom of reality. The choice of love object fulfills our desire for love, if, and only if, that object relates to our narcissism. It can do so by narcissistic reward (Narcissus as subject) or narcissistic delegation (narcissus as other, for Freud, the woman). Even the Ego ideal, which insures our transference of desire to a true object of good and beauty determined by parental and societal codes, is a revelation of narcissism. Freud imposes an omnipotence of narcissism to such a saturation point that it reflects again in the object. The tenuous nature of Freud's rendering of the pre-Oedipal stage causes Kristeva to wonder if

²⁰² *Melanie Klein, 57, 137, 150*

something such as this could have really have a relation to the other? Could a mirror stage emerge out of nowhere?²⁰³

Freud's first stage in which mimetic play establishes psychic identities is a psychic play which Kristeva eloquently captures, "in the dizziness of rebounds, reveals itself as a screen over emptiness."²⁰⁴ We analyze the symptom as a screen through which one detects the workings of significance (the process of formation and de-formation of meaning and the subject). The arbitrariness of the Saussurian sign has placed us in front of a bar which registers its arbitrariness, and Lacan registers its gaping hole. Kristeva champions Klein the winner because only she is able to transform the Freudian hypothesis of an original, empty narcissism and postulates, from the very beginning of a baby's psychic life which contains a "self" capable of a "relationship with the object," albeit partial, before the child becomes capable of constructing an object-relation to the "total object," following the depressive position.

Klein breaks the habit of a self which must understand itself as simply not-mother. She continues that, by founding child psychoanalysis, Klein did not simply barter eroticism, which Freud had placed at the centre of psychic life, instead, "by focussing on the problems of childhood and in particular on child psychosis, Klein was the first to use psychoanalysis as an art of cultivating the capacity to think."²⁰⁵ Klein is able to move beyond biological destiny and the weight of family to the space where rebirth becomes possible—not only for those of us who create ideas, but for those of us who generate life. Klein offers a conception of rebirth which is differently premised on repudiation. Kristeva lingers, without following, closely behind. She does so by developing a tenable notion of maternal, desiring identity.

²⁰³ Klein 57, 73

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 57, 61

²⁰⁵ *Klein*, 57

Who do Women Really Want?

I began by introducing Kristeva as a thinker who, despite years of attacks from all fronts, maintains a steadfast belief in the manner in which organic experience informs psychic life. She is not alone and remarks that it has interested female thinkers from the beginning, such as Sokolnicka and Banaparte. She insists that women's interest in the organic, accompanied by their strong counter-transference impulse, is worthy of our attention. Kristeva's constant claim is that the maternal is, if anything, simple; it can be understood by understanding what it is not. Firstly, it is not, as so many have imagined, a place where the self is lost. As has already been witnessed from many perspectives, it is clear that the mother-infant embrace is neither a lost time, nor one coloured by idyllic or self-sacrificing osmosis. As she reports in her account of Freud's concept of love, such a notion is untenable. Instead, as her vigorous and sympathetic reading of Klein demonstrates, the maternal-organic is where identity is made, endlessly. Despite her many received criticisms, it is not obvious that she has attempted to determine a final concept which would embrace every resonance of the notion.

Kristeva's notion of the work of identity formation is laden with anxiety and aggression and frustration rather than simple and true satiation and gratification. There is nothing simple about total dependence on a seemingly omnipresent, omnipotent, diffuse corporeal entity. Instead, omnipotence is feared by even the very nascent. Without this fear, we would never become, we would never symbolize, and we would never speak. Without fear, there would be catastrophe: there would be no self to speak of. Our first birth is neither a paradise nor hell, but a place which paves the way for thinking and living. Along this same trajectory, Kristeva stipulates that the maternal is not an "object" but "abject." The maternal is organic, and thus an object, in the sense that desiring, surviving beings want to consume it/her. She/it is abject in the sense that we must also know how to not want to consume her/it directly. We are ambivalent because she is our possible gratification, but by virtue of being more than merely a vast, bottomless source of satiation, she refuses us: from the beginning, we have a premonition of weaning. Thus, we feel

repulsion. Desire works this way. Identity must too. The nipple to mouth, mouth to mouth, skin to skin, and sounds and smells are bitter-sweet for mother and infant.

In every instance, Kristeva's notion of "maternal" troubles not only the distinctions between mind and body, but also self and other. The point of singular importance is that the maternal troubles this distinction for everyone because everyone is born of a mother. In this sense, there is nothing uniquely feminine about the maternal. Understanding this tenant requires understanding yet another dimension of what Kristeva frames in terms of mothers and their children. Kristeva begins with the basic premise of what Freud called "psychic bisexuality." Freud explains bisexuality in terms of the ambiguity that occurs in a woman's psychic development. Kristeva explains that a girl's tricky manoeuvrings through the ironies of her sexuality explain her propensity for an "uncanny mature psychic bisexuality," but also her propensity for hysteria, depression, and fragility.²⁰⁶ As Kristeva notes, when Klein answered Freud's question, "what do women want?" she answered not, what is woman's object of desire, but concluded that her desire is dominated by anxiety. Anxiety mounts when a woman must confront her maternity; the experience returns her to her archaic bond with her mother. She recalls her dependency on other women and her rivalry with her. She recalls sensory communication and its primary sublimation. Anxiety and eroticism are its paramours.

During the experience of identifying as a mother, the mother runs the risk of taking the role of the omnipotent matron who fulfils herself by exerting her power over her child. Alternatively, she might feel forever weakened by constantly experiencing vulnerability with respect to the other that she has delegated to the world: separate from her, impossible to master, her child and her love are taken from her and she risks being piteous. Of the two, the later is preferable because it is, at minimum, civilizing. As Kristeva remarks, it is at least a "tendency towards compassion toward the other that allows the drive to renounce its goal of separation and

²⁰⁶ *Melanie Klein* 98-101

to grant itself not another goal, but simply put, is a concern for revealing the other.”²⁰⁷ On this same basis, Kristeva, like Aristotle, concludes that motherhood forms the basis of the caring attitude that transforms the erotic-thanatonic drive that flings us towards others. At its best, this drive’s ultimate goal is to allow the other to live in peace.

For this reason, Kristeva suggests that motherhood is a “personnage conceptual” for an ethic of otherness. Motherhood forces woman to confront the object in a new manner: the child, her first arrival, is neither abject nor an object of desire. The child is not her “phallus,” a separate power, nor a remnant of the “mino-mycenean,” period of pure immanence. The child is capable of being the *first other*. The child is the first other, and the experience of motherhood is its requisite other. It is an interminable experience that is utterly lacking, and for that reason alone, utterly sublime.²⁰⁸ The child is a harbinger of an alterity that provides female narcissism a chance to abandon self and the mother, and to devote itself to the other, the same joys and sorrows of motherhood. Kristeva claims that the mother cannot tell whether her infant is an ‘other’ in her or is not her. Mother and child are neither strangers nor a fusion of selves. The distance between mother and infant is characterized more by its subtle, osmotic inter-flow than it is extremes of distance or immanence. Thus, those who tell the story of either infancy or maternity are overlooking (or, if Kristeva is correct, suppressing) the knowledge of the indeterminacy which characterizes the early mother-infant relation. They are not separated but no longer are they identical. Kristeva claims the psychoanalyst shares the maternal vocation. The analyst de-eroticizes his desire and anxiety so that he can think about them. The patient is the analyst’s “different.” As a constant exercise in alterity, psychoanalysis transforms eroticism into tenderness to the truth of the other. Freud spoke of benevolence. Klein spoke of the “sublimation that frees up intelligence and that formulates the logic of drives that allows access to thought.” Kristeva names this relation the “subject in process.”

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 114-121

²⁰⁸ *Melanie Klein* 114-121

Revolving Doors: Personal, Political and Poetic

It is clear that Kristeva is often accused of essentialism. As Oliver details in her work *Reading Kristeva*, Kristeva's association of the semiotic *Chora* with the feminine and the maternal risks appearing as though she reduces the feminine to the maternal.²⁰⁹ Donna Stanton and Nancy Fraser make this claim and Judith Butler and Ann Rosalind Jones argue that Kristeva makes maternity compulsory for women. Elizabeth Grosz argues that Kristeva's rendering of maternity as a biological process without a subject is an essentialist notion of maternity. Butler adds that, because Kristeva's notion is universal and homogenous, rather than heterogeneous and singular, she reifies maternity. As Oliver so presciently demonstrates, the mere existence of such multiple and contradictory readings of Kristeva's work could be read, by Kristeva herself, as symptomatic failures to engage the maternal for what "it is": a discourse that calls a crisis in identity, necessarily, and especially to stable, unified, identity. For this same reason, Ziarek describes Kristeva's notion of the maternal subject an "infolding of otherness," and Alison Ainley (who we can recall from the Kant chapter) calls it "motherhood as double." What is perhaps more remarkable about Kristeva's later works, especially in her trilogy on genius devoted to Arendt, Collette, and Klein, is the subtlety with which maternity eventually registers-in my estimation- in such a manner that any simple charges of "essentialism" seems hasty and reactionary.

Kristeva is equally interested in the individual persons who debate her work and how they understand their relation to one another as they undertake their critique. According to Kristeva, understanding this problematic is the starting point which enables us to understand the "conflict" between the condition of womankind as a whole and the self-realization of each individual woman.²¹⁰ In this respect, despite the multiple movements within feminism to distinguish women from mothers, Kristeva claims that feminists have not departed from the

²⁰⁹ Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva*, 48

²¹⁰ Julia Kristeva, "Is there A Feminine Genius," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. X, 494.

totalizing ambitions of the various liberation movements that arose out of Enlightenment philosophy. Instead, the feminist struggle moved first to the demand for political rights led by the suffragettes, second, to the affirmation of an ontological equality with men (as against the idea that women are equal but different), which led Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* to demonstrate the existence and predict the realization of a “fraternity” between men and women that goes beyond their particular natural differences to “the search for the difference between men and women which would explain a specific creativity particular to women in the sexual domain and more generally across the whole range of social practices from politics to writing.”²¹¹

At each of these stages, the liberation of all womankind has been the objective; rather than articulate the conditions necessary for the self realization of individual women, at each of these stages the result has hardened into an “inconsequential form of political activism that, ignorant of the uniqueness of individual subjects, believes that it can encompass all womankind, like all the proletariat or the entire Third World, within a set of demands that are as passionate as they are desperate.”²¹² Kristeva remarks that we know only too well the dead end to which these totalizing and totalitarian promises lead. Woman can appear on this stage as a brother woman as in the Socialist symbolic or as a father woman as in Liberal feminism but in every instance she is a woman in drag serving a master whose cruelty she has suffered for far too long. Both feminist Nationalism and Patriarchy are the natural outcomes of this symbolic struggle and, despite themselves, imply domination, hierarchy, superiority, exclusivity and exclusion, divisiveness and isolation, the silencing of others and the conquering of bodies and territories.

For these reasons, Kristeva contends that, despite the myth since the Enlightenment that nation-states maintain order and democratic equality, it is a most insidious myth. Instead, according to Kristeva, pre-determined unity tends to foster a narcissistic crisis which can reach

²¹¹Ibid, 495

²¹²*Is there a Feminine Genius*, 496

global proportions and puts all women, including women in feminist movements, at risk. (Political status and equality may have no bearing on the incidence of violence against women). Kristeva claims that the semiotic otherness implicit in maternity allows us to overcome the tendency of Western discourses, including some religious, scientific and even many feminist discourses, to cover, contain, and control difference and singularity.

The tragedy of woman consists in the conflict between the fundamental demands of each subject who posits herself as essential and the demands of a situation in terms of which she is inessential. Kristeva asks, how, in the feminine condition, can a human being arrive at fulfilment? To appeal to the genius of each individual is not to underestimate the weight of history. As Kristeva claims, geniuses such as Klein “faced up to history as much and as well as any others, with courage and a sense of realism” but to attempt to free the feminine condition, and more generally the human condition from the constraints of biology, society, and destiny by placing the emphasis on the importance of the conscious or unconscious initiative of the subject faced with the program dictated by these various determinisms.” How, through the feminine condition, can a woman fulfil her being, her individual potential in terms of freedom, which is the modern meaning of happiness?²¹³

²¹³ *Melanie Klein*, 207, 230

CONCLUSION:

(I) RECOGNIZE MOTHER

Getting Personal

The boundary demarcated by Plato between those who generate life and those who create ideas becomes, in my estimation, one of the most constitutive boundaries in the history of philosophy. This same boundary, often contested and redrawn, is intended to differentiate the philosophical from everything else. It is highly philosophical to demarcate such a boundary, and then, of course, to discuss the drawing of the boundary itself and, under this stipulation, this dissertation is an exercise in philosophy; however, a stricter stipulation of the term “philosophy” would not recognize my contributions as properly philosophical because I generate life. I am a mother. When I first began this project, I was innocent about how various lonesome and thrilling it could be to write about mothers, as a mother, from the margins of philosophy.²¹⁴ Each of the chapters in this dissertation is born from this emotionally charged dialectic of writing *in* the margins; I say *in* the margins because, as a mother, I could not fully inhabit one side of the imaginary boundary or the other. Mothers cannot separate themselves from what the philosophers term “the generation of life” or the “creation of ideas.” A mother who repudiates generation repudiates maternity and thus herself. Women, whether or not they become mothers, have to negotiate an ambivalent identity in the same entity which she must not-be to be. The more I reflect on this insanity, the more I begin to suspect that very few of us fully escape the insanity of repudiating maternity-not even the philosopher. I suspect that most of us only ever barely graze the surface of what it means to be a being from who the creation of ideas also proceeds.

²¹⁴ Since I began this project, an increased number of writings on maternity in philosophy were published including Cynthia Willet’s *Maternal Ethics and Other Slave Moralities*, Lisa Guether’s *The Gift of the Other*.

Generation and Creation Revisited

I selected texts on the basis of their containing any philosophical significance about motherhood or maternity (rather than, say, the feminine or sex-identity). I then proceeded to organize the works historically but soon discovered that their historical proximity in no way correlated to the likelihood of their having nuanced, or progressive notions of maternity and motherhood; instead, I identified a striking theme which was that all of the works I had chosen relied heavily on Plato thematic of the opposition of ‘the generation of life’ to the ‘creation of ideas.’ A second striking theme soon became apparent. Depending on the philosopher’s stance towards the ‘generation of life,’ a great deal could be predicted about what he would claim about the place of maternity and motherhood in the discourse and practice termed “philosophy.” I used this second theme to help develop two, intertwined streams of thought.

The first stream is devoted to those philosophers who include, and even privilege, the importance of the generation of life to the creation of ideas over and against those who deny its import altogether. In this category, I include Aristotle and Arendt because both challenge the assumption that those who partake in the event of birth are as deaf and dumb as the *infans* being born. Instead, they locate the mother’s relation to her infant as a relation fully saturated by earthly immanence and, for this same reason, permeated by a radical indeterminacy which defines what is proper to being human. Arendt creates a concept of natality which functions to gesture towards that which cannot be contained by anyone or any concept and thus embodies the thought of the political without ever being absorbed by the political. Aristotle exceeds Arendt’s rendering of this relation by describing how it permits an insight into infancy (or natality) but also a more specific, nuanced concept of maternity which attempts to highlight the uniqueness of the wholly non-political relation of mother to infant.

Kant and Kristeva bring us to the other side of the dualism by re-conceptualizing the events that lead from the seemingly “empirical” bloody entrance, manic scream and suckle for milk to the deliberate movements and articulate speech characteristic of adulthood. They accomplish such a conceptually laborious task by demonstrating that all that “is” is a “creation.” In other words, all that is is understood by analogy. This challenges any rigid demarcation between generation and creation because it makes apparent how even “generation” infiltrates “creation” at its core; however, Kant (much like Arendt and Cavareto and others) limits his reflections to the memory of being born rather than bearing a child. What Klein manages to do, ultimately in a kind of conceptual proximity to Aristotle, is to discern to what extent mothers too understand their birth, both of their infant and their own birth, by analogy. Birth “itself” is never really “itself,” because no matter who undergoes birth, creation is always already at play. This intuitively clear insight, for so long unarticulated by those writing in the shadows of Plato, is the first step in understanding that, for the subject, there is nothing aphasic, affective or simply empirical about ‘carnal birth.’ This is equally true for those who are born as it is for those who “bear.”

Aristotle should be regarded as a genius when it comes to developing this insight. While Aristotle reserves several texts for ruminations on the ‘physical’ and at times includes carnal birth under this rubric, he makes a distinction between carnal birth’s physicality and its other resonances. On one level, he suggests that humans are but one variation of the animal kingdom. With his still contemporary notion of ‘sex’, he suggests that humans, like all other animals, are comprised of the marriage of two forces, one masculine and one feminine; like all other animals, *most* individuals are comprised of a dominant masculine or feminine ‘force.’ In the case of sexual reproduction, the dominating force determines whether he inseminates or whether she undergoes gestation, labour, and lactation. The human is distinct from all the other animals because, not because he can equated with his sex, but because s/he undergoes the generation of life as an ethical being. When s/he generates life, s/he is given an opportunity to accept and receive this life

and or refuse it. Unlike the fish, the frog or the mule, to name but a few, the human cultivates vices or virtues in accordance with the manner in which s/he generates life. Like any other physical event, the human experiences carnal birth in a uniquely human manner. For Aristotle, the intersection of generation and creation is not to be understood in the infant, but in total context in which the mother, the closest agent to the physical event, bears her young. For Aristotle, carnal birth makes salient the uniquely human relationship to the intersection of life, family, community, and the ethical. It is only very recently that thinkers have been able to reserve their political apprehensions in order to openly receive and benefit from his rendering of an ethic of maternity.²¹⁵

As Kristeva says of Arendt, and by implication of Aristotle, a philosophy of life which begins with birth tends to be one that is at one and the same time intensely libertarian and eminently social. In the tradition of Aristotle, Arendt interprets carnal birth's significance for the human. For her, birth expresses the conviction, as ontological as it is existential, that what is unique in each individual "remains hidden" to "the person himself" and does not "appear so clearly and unmistakably [as it does] to others."²¹⁶ As Kristeva notes in her trilogy on genius, Arendt's eccentric anarchism-her politics without party-and her conservative spirit-her insistence of the collective writing of life history-is what allows her to rewrite the community of birth as exactly the opposite of the national community. Only Arendt's anarchistic conservatism allows the setting of birth to be the "appearing-with proves to be necessary to the existent precisely in its uniqueness or in its distinction" rather than a site for securing biological origin with human identity. In Arendt's vision of the political, our earthly origins negate the possibility of determining identity by family, location or text. Arendt describes humans as socially interdependent beings who can radically strip themselves of any particular relation through speech and action.

²¹⁵ In Kristeva's trilogy on genius, she several times mentions Aristotle's genius.

²¹⁶ Hannah Arendt, 5

In feminist circles, the affinity between Arendt and Aristotle inspires criticism. Arendt's reticence to stipulate anything more than a narrow, physical notion of sexual difference and her seemingly chauvinistic assumption that sexual politics is incompatible with political freedom is contentious to many feminists because it appears like an unstable position from which to launch critique and resistance against the oppression of women. Arendt is quite insistent that humans are born like any other natural entity is born but that being born has relevance to human freedom, not because it designates one's sexual identity, but because it designates much the opposite. In being born, humans promise to be unpredictable rather than predictable. The naked, nameless newborn is *infans* in the fullest sense. He does not yet speak to us, to himself, or to a set future. His birth is the promise to change the world, not to be a man or a woman. Arendt appreciates that we cannot know who we are until we have already become who they are, but as soon as we become who we are, we promise to undo it once more. Her notion of identity (including gendered-identity) is performative rather than constative. For her, our 'sex' is, as Aristotle determines, an organ of production.

Aristotle's notion of sex-difference is contentious because it requires women to mother against a criterion which measures her virtue a political ideal incompatible with real political thought and action. For Aristotle, woman is both immanent with the demands of earth, and thus an ill suited candidate for political participation or freedom, while, at the very same time, enabling her to love her infant more perfectly than two men of excellent virtue and equal rank. However, counter arguments which argue for woman's political equality tend to mirror Plato's rendering of women in the *Republic* in which women must renounce her maternity to achieve political equality. By arguing that women are capable of being political equals with men, "carnal birth" is still represented as something which must be overcome.

Plato renders women guardians “in-common” on at least four levels.²¹⁷ First, differences between men and women guardians are reduced to “natural differences”; women are deemed weaker because they bear children. Once it is clear that this is the only differences between men and women guardians, it is clear to Socrates that women should not nor could not be prevented from working alongside men in all of their ventures including war, politics and the adjudication of justice. Accordingly, women are required to study music, poetry, war and gymnastics. To the extent that women are suited for an education in the arts and sciences, women are regarded as having the same nature as men guardians. Based on this re-conceptualization of women’s nature, women are placed in common quarters with men guardians and exercise, eat and sleep in common quarters with men guardians. Women’s residual difference, their natural weakness and capacity to bear children, maintains them at the level of the “material.” They are made the common property of the men guardians. Socrates names this four multi-tiered “commonality” a “close and universal proximity.” Under the hand of Socrates, only two differences remain between men and women guardians. The differences are deemed natural, “sex differences”, and not cultural, “gender differences.”

According to Socrates, natural differences ought not to determine an individual’s sexual identity. All men and women are regarded as individuals, near identical in their natures, and as such, all men and women are regarded as individuals belonging to the same nature, ie., “family.” Women, by virtue of giving birth, are considered to only be different in so far as they are a material element. Women “in common” are stripped of many of the differences that made them analogous to “the material” elements. After Socrates redesigns woman to be “in common” and governed by reason, she remains the property of man. Presumably she remains the property of man because she is still regarded as ‘material’ and, as such, even for the progressively minded Plato, more similar to the “agricultural class” or the material and desire producing elements. Plato’s overall concern is that conflict is born from a competition of resources. Men fight for the

²¹⁷ *Republic*, Book V, 205-207

material which is woman. The business of holding women and children in common among the guardians is the business of regulating “the material elements” of the body of the state. Men, the embodiment of reason, are potentially threatened by women, the material desiring element.

Aristotle’s feminist critics adopt a Platonic standpoint when they argue that much of what is culturally associated with the physical process of generating life can be stripped away and that woman is significantly analogous to man. Woman is capable of being educated and prepared for political action, capable of being physically trained for sharing quarters with men and sometimes capable of participating in warfare or other activities that require physical participation. Although Aristotle never argues for the political subordination of women on the basis that she has a unique relationship to generating life, it is correct to argue that he assumes that women are ill suited for political membership and that she should embrace the virtues of mothering because she generates life. Any suspicions are warranted here but ultimately risk losing the opportunity to claim anything of significance about birth beyond a political point.

Aristotle’s Virtue is not a Vice

The risks associated with entertaining the possibility that something about mothering one’s offspring is antithetical to the political are often considered not worth taking. I disagree. Despite the risks, there is no good reason for trying to solve the problem of sexual political inequality by “overcoming” what is termed “carnal birth.” A world in which mothers and others understood generating life to be an event that must be surmounted (in most cases by relegating the associated tasks of tending to dependents to the oppressed) would not be a world living in. Birth and parenting is a moral event worthy of reflection, a worthy undertaking, and an event and an endeavor which can ameliorate, rather than hinder or hamper, the human experience. I am not assuming that this claim is analogous, let alone identical, to the claim or the assumption that women should mother, rather, I am arguing that woman should mother when it is warranted.

Woman’s capacity to gestate, labour, and nurse her young in no way determines her ill

suited for political participation. We have an excess number of empirical examples and well-tuned arguments to maintain this as more than a sound possibility. And yet, the fact remains that many women who mother do not participate in politics. Across the world, women are half the population but almost always less, and much too often, much less than half of the political apparatus which forms the policies and programs which guarantee sexual equality. Whether it be because she is outright prohibited from doing so, indoctrinated against it, or because physical and political circumstances prevent it, women with dependents almost always find it harder to participate in politics. If we include informal politics, in those spaces where women are excluded from the political infrastructure proper, she is often excluded from the informal process of politics too. Her contributions are many, but the reality is that, in many cases, the demands of care giving which typically include indeterminate and indefinite numbers of hours doing mundane work and often in a situation of some financial dependence is distinctly different from political action and antithetical to demonstrating, organizing and strategizing. Political action requires—at minimum—the liberty to think and act at some remove from the demands of necessity. In the most extreme of cases, political action might entail revolting against these same demands. But, for the mother, to revolt against the demands of necessity is, quite often, to say ‘no’ to her own charge; this is not analogous to revolting against an employer or state representative.

Without what Kittay terms the “labour of love,” none of use would be here now discussing its possible value. Without the experience of those relations which exceed those demarcated by contracts between citizens, many of us would find little reason for living. Those who return to the experience of “mothering” and “being mothered” will attest that something about this experience is profoundly distinct from the experience of political thought and action. Loving and caring for an infant are oftentimes experiences that we hold dear and consider to be our connection to a dimension of our humanity that brings us closer to understanding, self, other, history, humanity. The question becomes, how do we affirm these experiences without once more

relegating women (those whose bodies have, across time and place, so often destined them to tend to necessity), to the work of handmaiden of the family, the patriarch, the earth

Arendt suggests one possibility, but it, once more, precludes mothers from engaging in politics as mothers. Unlike Aristotle's critics, Arendt manages to make this argument without falling into a Platonic discourse. Instead, she argues that our carnal birth is essentially indistinguishable from labouring the earth. By including men and women as those who labour and who must labour the earth, she makes an argument for reflecting on our common beginnings as those who care for those beings who are their beginnings. Both man and woman must labour the earth, and both man and woman must do so, and only can do so by shedding their role as mere generators and consumers. In a sense, we must bring the revelation of "generating" or "birthing" into the political. In a sense, we can only do some by leaving something of it behind. We can only leave something of it behind (our selfish hungers and the work of tending to these appetites), if we tend to these demands. Once we have tended to these demands, (not by relegating them to others or mothers), can we create a space in which all persons can make an appearance which was afforded them at birth: this being is her beginning. Arendt articulates a thematic that opens a space for thinking of carnal birth without the typically over determined associations of women, earth, and necessity.

For those who champion Arendt's spirit of contestation, her insistence on the indubitable distinction appears antiquated and possibly complacent to systems of sexual inequality. Women have been associated with the body, nature and emotion; that these terms have been opposed to mind, culture, and reason, which are associated with men; and that the former have been systematically devalued. For these same critics, Arendt's assertion that women labour the earth to produce infants, and that this labouring relegates her (as mother) to the domain of necessity and earthly evidence fails to escape the traps of the historical association. For Arendt, there is no option. The only option is to think within the determination of earthly immanence and human freedom; this must include acknowledging that woman's labouring contractions are a process

proper to earthly immanence. To think otherwise is to determine a most tragic fate. Arendt writes against those discourses which deny our earthly immanence and instead writes within the human condition in the context of earthly immanence and human freedom. She does so from within the framework of existing colloquialisms and conservative prejudices, but, when she is done, these same prejudices are turned against themselves. She reconfigures these same prejudices by reconfiguring the scene of carnal birth.

Unlike the products of human hands which must be realized step by step, the fabrication thing itself has an existence that is not separate from the process through which it comes into being: “the seed contains and, in a certain sense, already is the tree, and the tree stops being if the process of growth through which it came into existence stops. [. . .].” Similarly, a mother births her infant into the earthly eternal recurrence. Her cries and spasms, like her infant’s, cannot be distinguished from any other’s cries or movements. She is his mother, simply his mother, and nothing else, but she is not only this intimacy with the earth. By virtue of being a human being, she is also someone who is her beginning. We cannot know if she will embrace or depose of her infant; in either case, he is her orphan. Her embrace is “virtuous” because it could be otherwise. Her infant’s tragic fate begins at birth. It promises nothing but to bring forth a pure beginning. He will be exposed but he is because he is exposed. His life and his freedom begin when her body expels him from his earthly immanence, which, for him, is her whole body. Her most gracious, bittersweet gift is milk.

Aristotle and Arendt’s philosophy includes generative life as an essential dimension of being human. Their thematic opens up a way of thinking that does not have to oppose generation with creation, but permits us to imagine a way of reflecting on the human condition in terms of nuance and distinction. For those philosophers who insist on a less rigid and self evident division between nature and culture, birth operates as a seemingly natural hinge between a distinction proper to being human and possibly free. The fact that philosophical man has confused his own limit of self knowledge with the limit of being born rather than bearing life is, if some critics are

correct, no accident. By understanding that the limitation of the adult recollecting his origins is really a limitation on his knowledge of self knowledge, in part because he had to forget the events that led to his freedom, we gain more insight into the stubborn dichotomy: men create ideas/women generate life.

Is Ambivalence Really Necessary?

For the feminist psychoanalyst, the philosopher's ambivalence towards birthing bodies is unsurprising. The philosopher's ambivalence is considered evidence of a premise central to feminist psychoanalysis. As Kristeva explains, the philosopher's ambivalence towards the female body is a result of the confusion between the female body and the symbolic function of the female body; "the female body is a favored site to which persons have turned throughout history to reproduce their origins" because "identities under threat tend to turn to that body to reinscribe, reflect on, and commit to memory subject-creating forces of negativity that first secured them in the world."²¹⁸ As Kristeva describes, the literal repudiation of the maternal body is symptomatic of "a subject under siege" who "may deploy defensive strategies modelled on the initial bounding-practices of emergent subjectivity."²¹⁹ When the subject is unable to re-create these conditions in the format of the symbolic, he suffers from what Klein terms "psychosis," literally the inability to think in the vehicle of the symbol. Socrates's claim that philosophical midwifery "attends to men and not women; and look after their souls when they are in labour, and not after their bodies" sounds 'psychotic.'

When Socrates claims that he tends to man's soul and not woman's body, his art of midwifery relegates woman's bodies to one side and men's to another, but the distance between the two is tenuous at best. Socrates intends the dual concepts of birth touch on the nodal point of singularity and liminal transformation, but, in their resonance, polarize like magnetic fields: their

²¹⁸ Martha Reineke, *Sacrificed Lives, Kristeva on Women and Violence*, 85

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 84

supposed differences are meant to mark difference itself: nature, woman and infant; freedom, man himself. The barren philosopher as midwife maintains this difference. The philosopher is born, and born again, but never again does he bear. Challenging the “dominant metaphysics of the west” includes challenging the picture that develops from the point of view of the point of view of an individual identity that cannot give birth. The tendency, even in post modern and contemporary thinking, is to trouble the distinction from the point of view of the adult recollecting his birth. It is this same disposition that shapes even Cavarero’s otherwise genius reflections on birth. To adopt this subject position, no matter what the analysis, consolidates the prejudice that creation is opposed to generation. To adopt this subject position is to assume that thinking is other than mothering when instead, if my analysis is prescient, the opposite seems to be true.

Cavarero claims that by making her self a spectator to another’s birth, the self can surprise herself by imagining, analogically, the event of her own birth; but, for Cavarero, it can only be by analogy. Thus, autobiographical memory always recounts a story that is incomplete from its beginning. She knows “sapore” with that familiar feeling that she is unique, even though she does not know who she is because she knows that she was born from someone.²²⁰ Birth reveals that none of us know who we are, except through others. Our most certain knowledge of self, the most persistent illusion, is also our connection others. As I have attempted to demonstrate, even Cavarero’s remarkable reading leads once more to assumption that birth is a memory for he who has been born. She makes this assumption because she regards birth from the point of view of the adult recollecting his origins. Why an adult recollecting their infancy could not know this infancy seems sufficiently intuitive, although not indisputable but it begs the more obvious question, why is that mothers cannot be said to witness the birth? Cavarero’s rereading the canon of philosophy and psychoanalysis from this point of view remains Philosophical, what she terms “Platonic and Oedipal.”

²²⁰ *Relating Narratives*, 40

“We” are Born in a Time of Crisis

It is only by returning to the memory of birth that we appreciate just how this return is not, nor could it be, a simple return. Husserl describes the attempt to return to this memory as a movement defined between failed and collapsed attempts and those attempts which have found and find new “roots” and make possible understanding the present. Frequently, as Klein and Kristeva note, this return is precipitated by a crisis of legitimacy. The crisis tends to force us to turn to the past to understand the present. This struggle takes us beyond the seemingly original Greek of Socrates’s configuring of carnal birth. Rather than a “mere succession of experiences linked by memory, . . . it is a culminative process of reciprocal interrelations and influences”²²¹ The mediation of the social, reciprocal, interrelation of influences is largely “covered over” or, forgotten but, frequently comes to surface during times of crisis. Freud names it “the recuperation of reality” and “reality testing” and most poignantly the “work of grieving.”

If we return to the thematic in the vessel of the adult recollecting his infancy, we return to the thematic that long ago determined that generation would be opposed to creation. Our mothers would appear as silent and dumb as the infant we once were. But, if “mother” becomes a life in memory absolutely interconnected to self knowing, understanding is recuperated. This is captured in Husserl’s “genetic reconstruction of the kinesthetic nature of the mother-child relationship conceived from the point of view of the child, but a child who understands that his “theoretical and practical egos are gradually made possible by the constitution of a bodily mine-ness which gradually arises from the infant’s affective, instinctually driven relationship with the mother.”²²² Rather than configure the mother as inarticulate, passive matter, Husserl describes the congruity which, by virtue of the infant’s sensing, subjective body, and the objective body of the mother, gives rise to the subject himself. The mother, in this depiction is the “first object,” but she is not

²²¹ *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*, 10

²²² *Ibid*, 45

an object in the sense that she is simply the matter which is shaped by an infant. As Jackson argues, Husserl's meticulous philosophy of reflection is embedded in a materiality which bears and exceeds it.²²³

For some, this revelation on the impossibility of making hard and fast distinctions between the subject and the object is as an opportunity to blur the distinction between mother and infant. For example, Nancy determines that the event of birth is the event that we cannot know until things have come to their end. Birth appears in translation or in premonitions, like the sounds behind a wall, but we can never really "see" birth.²²⁴ For this reason, Nancy describes birth as a "birth time." The change has to appear materially, with significance, but the passage itself is invisible. It is this same non-appearance that difference philosophers claim was suppressed. Accordingly, Nancy suggests that birth and beginnings come "clothed" with the traces of their "untruth." They arise without a name, without a structure, without a title. They arrive unable to speak or move. It is, at first, as frail as what has been dying. But its arrival is announced by a flash and a single stroke. In the free aerial element the subject differentiates itself from the materiality which nourished it. A tone, a voice, lets us know a thought is being born, or not. There are signs of birth. The task, thinks Nancy, is to allow the tremor register for it is here that thinking and living unfold. We cannot listen to or see or smell the birth time because it is not some thing to make sense of. Birth is not an idea or an accretion of sense. Birth is a verb. It is to be born. It is, claims Nancy, a simple thought. He writes

It is a question of what has no fruition, nor any fruit, whose consumption or consummation is impossible. Or rather, and more precisely, it is a question of what in the fruit makes the fruit: its coming, its birth in flower, always renewed. It is a question of the pre-venience of the flower in the fruit. There is no mysticism in this. It merely invites a simple thought, withdrawn and coming forth, careful, graceful, attentive: pre-venient. It is a question of preventing philosophies, of preventing appropriative thinking-it is a question of this jouissance, of this "grander" rejoicing . . ."

²²⁴ *Birth to Presence* 45

Nancy figures the mother and child as a matrix of a general alterity constitutive of the soul in general. In doing so, he writes in the well worn path of Plato, Hegel, and others we are know well familiar. He, like others, understands this matrix to be a nature split, not fertile, nor nurturing, but division by itself.¹⁰ The implication for Nancy is that the event of birth (thinking) crumbles the very distinction of mother and infant, generation and creation. Birth renders the distinction between mother and infant tenuous at best. At this point it matters not if I am referring to carnal birth or the birth of ideas. Once more, the distinction fails to matter. In all instances, maintaining some specificity to mothering and birth, philosophically speaking, becomes-it seems-a possible exercise in futility or a symptom of nostalgia. Where giving birth once determined her to be a woman and a non-philosopher, thinking birth now leads to the revelation of birth in thinking. There are no grounds for asserting the specificity of the mother, nor her exclusion. Is there a space left to legitimate that mothers would inhabit birth differently than would others?

Birth is neither carnal nor ideational, but what prevents thinking-living as a dualist representation of earth and ideas, immanence and transcendence. In this same space, maintaining a connection of mothers and birth would be arbitrary and conventional. Post-modern philosophy, a resistance to the fixed identity which seemed to serve the modernist, technological, and sometimes fascist agenda, and its attempts to secure identity in biology as destiny, is a startling conclusion to Plato's now ancient rendering of birth. It is startling because it ultimately leads to the same conclusion: mothers, or those who birthed us, are those beings who we cannot know, who themselves do not know what they are, nor what they do. Mothers once more appear in their absence upon which other identities and events are formed and established. Mothers remain a non-identity; mother's remains. . . .

“We” bear

Klein's unsettling genius comes in returning to the threshold which Kristeva determines to be a symbolic excess. Klein returns to the emergence of speech alongside the child, not as the

adult recovering an infantile memory, but in the polymorphous personage of the mother-analyst. Klein straddles that dangerous grey area between mother and analyst with an unparalleled audacity. While every philosopher before her claims to be the midwife of ideas, at a distance from the memory of carnal birth, Klein goes to its depths. It is here that weaning, rather than repudiation, becomes a central thematic. It is here that the tenuous divide between generating and creating is brought into play, rather than held apart or flattened into a totalizing homogeneity. It is here that we can develop a thematic of birth as an experience that intertwines the “maternal” and the “natal.” It is here that we can do what Aristotle did long ago and engage the distinctions of complexity of the earthly experience of generating life and distinguish it from the ethical experience of mothering life. It is here, and only here, that we can move beyond Aristotle’s crude assumption that this same mother is unfit for thinking. Perhaps, perhaps, she is unable to think philosophy, but as Kristeva remarks and Klein asserts, if she cannot, then none of us are able to be a creative, political, genius. The creation of ideas proceeds from s/he who generates life.

Klein, with a remarkably simple reversal, describes the mother as much more than a thing that lies rotting after birth. In Klein’s re-imagining of the scene of birth, she describes the first moments of the first relation as an allowing and disallowing of milk. The infant’s first cry is a cry for milk: milk is everything. Milk is what will nourish the child into existence, and intertwine his earthly existence with thinking and living. A mother’s thoughtful, loving, creative use of her breasts will birth her nascent into from his dependency on her into a controlled, idealized abundance and unconditional acceptance, into a space where prohibition and hatred are bearable because they are integrated with love. The child who can grow to accept that the good breast and the bad breast, pleasure and gratitude, and despair and hatred, and who can recognize both breasts in one mother, is the child who will move into the space time of creative thinking loving and living. The child who knows only an erratic abundance and/or censorship is a child whose entrance into language will be either instrumental or effusive, an illness Klein terms ‘psychotic’.

Weaning is a mother's greatest accomplishment. The mother births the infant once like a generator, and a second time as a creative mother of living, thinking and language.

Klein the mother-analyst recognizes a deeply intimate connection between psychosis and fascism. Klein undoes the limits on thinking by returning to this origin and truly allowing her patient to be born, one more time, from his beginnings: where he had to learn to love and hate his own mother. This is not midwifery. This is mothering. Those who assist become background noise. It is with mother that the subject is allowed to kill and create: to love and to think. Being the mother is much more than being a body which once was, or specter which haunts. Being a mother requires birthing our children again and again until finally, they can be born, not from our bodies, but from the world itself. Creative thinking and living begins with creative mothers, on the terrain of her generating body. Creation proceeds from a being who is also a mother.

Until Klein re-describes birth, even our political journalist and our feminist psychoanalyst are "philosophers," though radical philosophers because they think about thinking from its distance from carnal birth: that is, as an adult recollecting his infantile, nascent recollections which he cannot recollect. Until Klein comes along, we are all of us adults who were infants, and none of us mothers in the full sense. (Although Aristotle begins to think this duplicity, this intimate intertwining of generating, birthing, and ethics, but is unable to move beyond because of the assumption that generation prohibits genius, when in fact, generation and genius are absolutely interconnected). Until any of these thinkers appreciate the tenuous divide between being born and birthing, until the radical implication of the thought that cannot be thought, Philosophy rests in a kind of comfortable position. Only when birth is really unleashed does it tremble in the pores of every thought, only then, do we get what we might call the beginning of earthly immergence, connection, of thinking to non thinking, and thinking to living. Those who do, too often assume that where being born and birthing are, possibly, impossible to distinguish.

Creating becomes the releasing, killing and recreating, not of difference, but of difference in relation. This revelation is also a revelation as to why "women" cannot be "philosophers." If

philosophy is stipulated as the creation of true and noble ideas, then we understand that any thinking being who also generates life will likely find it impossible to create true and noble ideas because she is necessary ambivalent. She must identify with the same being which she must also “kill” in order to think and love. If we can say that this prevents her from pure and noble thinking, a conscious undisturbed, undivided, and unable to sever and repudiate with the same clean strike, then we will also say that her relation to the earth, and thinking, will always be “dirty.” Of course, this is no reason to resign ourselves.

Who repudiates maternity? Women who mother, women who identify with mother, anyone who identifies with mother, and if Klein and Kristeva are right, every one identifies with mother initially, we all repudiate maternity. We all must repudiate maternity and we all do it in the same unclean, irrational flailing of desperation. Ambivalence is laborious. Our knowledge of this exist sits with most of us with some discomfort. This discomfort manifests itself in every day speech and in the heights of philosophy. We were all once unable to distinguish ourselves from the mother we do not know and none of us can remember the experience fully, truly, actually. The revelation of being unable to know is what requires us to engage with others. We desire to engage with others because we desire to know and to know how it is that we do not know. This struggle is yearning and it is creation. We all of us had to distinguish ourselves from this same being who was once present for the time at which we were her. We each of us bear this relation differently. Our experience is differently narrative, differently historical.

None of the experience which we recollect as adults recollecting their infancy fully describes the experience of the mother who witnesses our arrival as infants. She witnesses differently than we do. She is, if not virtuous, at least ethical in the Aristotelian sense. If we grant that she too was once born, then she too was once her mother (as was her partner in reproduction) and they too repudiated this first relation. If she “mother” is different, it is merely in degree. As Aristotle suggests, mothers are agents –even and especially- as birthing agents. If we fail to do so, we can hardly say that this mother was merely an animal, and neither can we say that she was

fully human. Something is wrong, terribly wrong, when a mother does not engage in the event of birth as an ethical being. Mothers appreciate that she is not merely generating an infant, but also creating ideas and crating a being who creates ideas and generates life. Our offspring will affirm and negate us, our creation, themselves. Our mother's bodies will never simply be some passive earth which provided life. It is never so simple.

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