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# **The Blurring Effect: An Exploration of Maternal Instinct and Ambivalence**

**By Sarah Henderson**

**Master by Research**

**17<sup>th</sup> April 2018**

‘no woman has ever told the whole truth of her life’<sup>1</sup>

Isadora Du

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<sup>1</sup> Isadora Duncan quoted in Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *My Life* (New York: Liveright Publishers, 1955) p.3.

For my children,  
Nicholas, Alexander, Hugh and Lucy,  
without whom this would not have been possible.

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## Foreword

This thesis focuses on woman's lived experience of pregnancy, birth and onset of motherhood in relation to maternal instinct and maternal ambivalence. This is not to presume, however, that non-birth mothers and women, who, for whatever reason, are childless, should be excluded from this discourse. It is woman's *capacity* to give birth and create new life which is the only prerequisite. Equally, I do not assume that all women will concur, empathize or relate to my conclusions. I expect many childbearing mothers will argue vehemently against the experiences of which I speak, simply because, ultimately, all women are individuals. But, what this study argues is that there exists a shared lived experience, of which my chosen novelists and feminist theorists write, exposing a pattern of commonality concerning a blurring of autonomy between mother and child which, from the point of view of the mother, results in a disruption to sense of self.

Furthermore, upon first reading, it may appear that this research is hindering female progress. On the contrary, the intention is to gain a far greater insight and understanding of this elusive and woefully underwritten aspect of motherhood. It is necessary to release the term 'maternal instinct' from its spurious foundations, remove the layers of half-truths that surround it, and rebuild a paradigm that more accurately represents the westernized woman living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a result, what I reveal in this study may seem unpalatable but in the words of Gloria Steinem, "The truth will set you free but first it will piss you off".

## Introduction

When I first became a mother in the early 1990's I was intrigued and perplexed why some of my friends successfully returned to work and raised a family while others, like myself, attempted to juggle work and home life and failed. As much as I craved to pursue my own sense of purpose in the form of a career – for raising a family gave a mother no status in society at all and I wanted to be recognized for achieving something – whatever that ‘something’ was, it was not to be. When out to dinner I dreaded the question “so, what do you do?” because I knew, as soon as I responded with my apologist answer that “I was *just* a mother”, I would either be patronized with the reassurance of what an important role it is or the recipient’s eyes would glaze over and all interest would be lost in asking any more questions. It has taken until now, with four relatively grown up children, to calm that inner sense of denied self-fulfillment and just reflect upon the fact that for me, when the children were young, home is where I instinctively felt I *ought* to be even if it wasn’t where I always wanted to be on given days. That is my story. Every woman is different and I believe it is imperative that she follows her own pathway, finding what is best for her and her family.

Indebted to Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) for providing the inspiration for this thesis, twenty years on, I find myself re-visiting this question of motherhood. It was not until I re-read this novel recently that what had previously been stirring on the periphery of my consciousness was finally realized. It awoke within me, a then unvoiced and completely unstructured inquisitiveness into motherhood and its impact on woman’s autonomy. That is to say, how it affects woman’s ability to make choices, most



notably concerning their position in the work place. The protagonist in the novel, Helen Graham, is a role model for contemporary mothering. An anachronistic figurehead so ahead of her time, she is a self-sufficient, essentially single mother, having abandoned the marital home, working as an artist to support herself and her son in order to protect him from his profligate alcoholic father. I am not advocating that we should all be single mothers! But what this novel highlights, regardless of the labyrinthine male narrative framework, which raises concerns about its reliability, is Helen's struggle to do what is best for the child to the detriment of her own happiness. She makes decisions that were considered way beyond her gender in 19<sup>th</sup> century society. Most significantly, it is her battle for autonomy, not just from her husband but involving her child, which ignited my interest.

### **Preliminary Research**

My initial intention was to pursue a line of enquiry as to how maternal instinct has been portrayed within the novel since Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* in 1848 to the present, comparing it with feminist theory and exploring the discrepancies, if any, and remarking on the shift in thinking during this period with a particular emphasis on today. What became evident, however, is that on the subject of maternal instinct there is a plethora of gaps and silences in both feminist and novel writing, resulting in unacceptable chronological lapses, therefore rendering my research unreliable. My two greatest stumbling blocks were a lack of formal definitions for the term 'maternal instinct' and a dearth of writing generally positioning the mother as the subject rather than the object. Therefore, I had to abandon my intention to demonstrate a provenance revealing

that maternal instinct has been present throughout this time frame, that is 1848 to the present day.<sup>1</sup>

So, accepting that any definition or foundation for the existence of maternal instinct is unreliable and having explored 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist discourse on the subject, I shifted the focus of my research to the contemporary novel. It was, after all, my intention to gain an understanding of 21<sup>st</sup> century motherhood and its relationship with autonomy and therefore it was important that my chosen novelists reflected this. Frustratingly, as is so often the case within the novel, the subject of motherhood tends to skirt around the root cause of maternal ambivalence, which I will be arguing is maternal instinct, and focuses on the former.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the mother figure in many of these novels exhibits formulaic patterns of ambivalent behaviour, which is left unexplored and too often attributed to being a bad mother. For example, in *The Hours* (1999) by Michael Cunningham, Laura Brown is a post-war American housewife in 1949 Los Angeles, struggling to come to terms with being a mother. Her feeling of isolation is palpable, as is her unutterable boredom. She makes attempts to 'keep herself by gaining entry into a parallel world'<sup>3</sup> reading Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. But Cunningham chooses not to explore this internal conflict

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) provides an insight in what is to become more evident with the uprising of the feminist movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Chopin places motherhood centre stage with her protagonist, Edith Pontellier, who exhibits ambivalence towards motherhood, a rarity in 19<sup>th</sup> century writing.

<sup>2</sup> I considered using these following texts because all of them address the question of maternal ambivalence. However, I chose not to use them in the main body of this thesis because I felt their tacit association with maternal instinct was possibly too elusive and too difficult to draw out. However, I hope, having read this thesis it is possible to cast a different perspective and re-consider why it is these texts engage with ambivalence. *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) by Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927) by Virginia Woolf, *Revolutionary Road* (1961) by Richard Yates, *The Hours* (1999) by Michael Cunningham, *I Don't Know How She Does it* (2002) by Allison Pearson, *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2005) by Lionel Shriver, *Making Babies* (2005) by Anne Enright, I also looked at P D James', *The Children of Men* (1992) who explores the dystopian concept of human extinction due to universal female infertility. The women in the novel use dolls as surrogate babies to appease 'frustrated maternal desire' (p39). In relation to this, I also explored the area of childless women and found, as Chapter Three will explore, that although some women do choose not to have children, a vast majority do not choose to be childless but have had this situation imposed upon them. Indeed, Hilary Mantel's memoir *Giving Up the Ghost* (2003) is an outpouring of grief for the child she never had. Although I do not have the capacity in my thesis to explore this trajectory of motherhood, why these two texts are important is that it reinforces the hypothesis that maternal desire exists within woman regardless of whether motherhood is realized or not. Hence, why I am keen for any boundaries in narratives between child-bearing mothers, non birth mothers and childless women to remain fluid.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Cunningham, *The Hours* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), p. 37.

between self and world any further than a woman who can only act, rather than assume, the part of mother and housewife. In Lionel Shriver's 2005 novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, the mother protagonist Eva blames her bad mothering for the fact that her son is a sociopath. The narrative implies that Eva has no maternal instinct. But, the timing of her pregnancy with her son was not of her choosing and the timing of her pregnancy with her daughter was entirely of her volition. Her relationship and bonding process with her daughter proves to be a wholly different experience. But these polarizing experiences of motherhood go relatively unexplored as the emphasis is on Eva's relationship with her son. The consequences of pregnancy, which is not of the mother's choosing, will be addressed in Chapter Two of this thesis.

From the research I have undertaken, I am of the firm opinion that there is a 'bond' or attachment between mother and child which is of ontological standing but can be easily masked or disrupted by any number of exterior circumstances, such as familial upbringing and history, alongside social and economic forces and, perhaps most importantly, whether becoming a mother at all was of a woman's choosing. Indeed, my intention is to find a way out of the impasse between sociology and science and analyse women and their lived experience of motherhood from a philosophical perspective. In order to achieve this my research has (unintentionally) crossed a number of disciplines but most significantly philosophy, science, sociology<sup>4</sup> and psychoanalysis<sup>5</sup> because it is within these subjects that an existing discourse on maternal instinct could be found. But what also became evident is that maternal instinct as a subject is

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<sup>4</sup> Sociologist Alice Rossi, 'A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting', *Daedalus*, Vol. 106, No. 2, The Family (Spring 1977) pp. 1-31. and anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mother Nature: Natural Selection & The Female of the Species* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1999) in particular.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999) was my introduction into psychoanalysis in relation to mothering as her work is ubiquitously cited within the writings of feminist discourse.

woefully underwritten and thought about. On the whole, if I did locate it within a text, despite its absence in the dictionary, it was only ever considered as a foregone conclusion. Most noticeably, it appears that women have blithely accepted maternal instinct for what it is and although some dismiss it as myth, never once have I found an explanation for or analysis of what they actually understand it to be. Therefore, my hand was somewhat forced to seek it out within disciplines I had not really intended investigating, such as ethology, a subject to which we will return in relation to John Bowlby's Attachment Theory in Chapter Three. In hindsight, this blurring of disciplines comes as no surprise as the subject matter of maternal instinct itself concerns a blurring of the subject and object, refusing to be confined to a binary discourse.

Crucially, what is lacking within female discourse on motherhood is whether there is a connection between two salient narratives which are running concurrently with one another, but are failing to overlap. The first chronicles women's experience of separation anxiety between themselves and their child.<sup>6</sup> The second comprises research on why it is that a high percentage of those women who are in top positions are childless.<sup>7</sup> There is a common thread running through both of these narratives which is that if woman's autonomy is disrupted, the likelihood is that it will have a direct impact on how or if they pursue their career, regardless of co-parenting or any childcare assistance that is

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapters Two and Three of thesis for examples from Cusk *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, Moss, *Night Waking*.

<sup>7</sup> Judy Wajcman found that two thirds of female managers in the UK do not have children, compared with a third of their male colleagues. Source: Wajcman, 'The Domestic Basis for the Managerial Career', *The Sociological Review*. 617 and Rosemary Crompton uses British census data to show that 59% of female managers do not have children in contrast to 29% of male managers. Source: Crompton, 'Women's Employment and the Middle Class', in T. Butler and M. Savage eds., *Social Change and the Middle Class* (London: UCL Press, 1995) in Hewlett, *Hungerbaby* (London: Atlantic Books, 2002), p. 20.

available to them.<sup>8</sup> Yet, this seemingly obvious connection has heretofore been overlooked.

Indeed, regardless of gender, balancing a career and raising a family is tough but society seems to think that co-parenting, a fairer division of household chores (at the moment women still assume a far higher percentage of chores than men: 80% housework, 75% childcare, 95% of eldercare),<sup>9</sup> equal pay in the work place and paternity leave will provide women with more opportunity to return to work after becoming a mother. Sheryl Sandberg acknowledges, 'it is time for us to face the fact that our revolution has stalled'<sup>10</sup> and ascribes commonplace co-parenting as the panacea for a mother's emancipation from the lack of fulfillment that can be associated with full time child rearing and domesticity. This is also the view held amongst theorists such as the psychoanalyst and sociologist Nancy Chodorow, the philosopher Elisabeth Badinter and feminist author Anne Roiphe, all of whom I will discuss in this study. What I argue is that this preoccupation with creating an androgynous society is somewhat misguided in relation to motherhood. Indeed, the literary texts which I have chosen reveal that this solution is an over simplification.

I will argue that this 'stalling,' as Sandberg describes it, is also precipitated by a mother's internal conflict with herself, which cannot necessarily be resolved through external measures such as co-parenting. This area of motherhood will be explored in Chapter Three in relation to the protagonist Anna Bennett in Sarah

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<sup>8</sup> On 16<sup>th</sup> March 2016, journalist Bauke Schram reported in the *International Business Times* that only 6% of FTSE 100 companies have a female CEO. (<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/international-womens-day-2016-six-women-smashing-glass-ceiling-uks-top-firms-1548219> [accessed 16.3.2016]). I advocate further research needs to be undertaken to understand this dynamic, questioning whether maternal intersubjectivity can be identified as a contributor to these statistics. Hewlett argues that research reveals that only 11% of young British women choose to remain childless and in the US somewhere between a third and a half of all professional women are forced to 'sacrifice' children. The use of the word sacrifice is intentional : her research reveals that women who were building a career in their twenties and thirties squeezed out the possibility of finding a partner or having children. Sylvia Ann Hewitt, *babyhunger: The New Battle for Motherhood*, (London: Atlantic, 2002), p.21.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid p.15.

<sup>10</sup> Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In, Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, (London: Random House, 2013), p.7.

Moss' novel *Night Waking* (2011). In so doing, I hope to initiate a dialogue revealing a connection between these statistics and a crisis in identity that the onset of motherhood may initiate. That is to say, this study reveals that some mothers, as we shall discuss in Chapter Two, experience an existential crisis concerning their autonomy, provoking ambivalence but also an anxiety concerning separation from their infant.

For example, American feminist writer and mother Jane Lazarre describes this sensation in her 1977 autobiography *The Mother Knot*: '[as] only in a passing moment – as I watched him sleeping or intruded suddenly into one of his rare solitary games – did I see him as a separate person, neatly distinct from myself'.<sup>11</sup> I use Rachel Cusk's memoir *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* (2008) to explore the concept of intersubjectivity. She identifies a web of complex issues concerning early motherhood which is wholly preoccupied with experiencing an inherent sense of self and otherness, far removed from any external influences. Indeed, through the act of writing, Moss and Cusk describe a bonding process between mother and child, revealing an unlearned nexus belonging to the 'unthought' or pre-predicative dimension of experience. These writers make clear that what lies within the 'unthought' is a sense of blurring, a liminal status caught between self and otherness; neither a fully formed original self nor a crystallized mother figure but 'something' unobtainable in between. That said, this blurring within the 'unthought' cannot be considered in purely ontological terms because it is contaminated by and overlaps with social influences. As Nancy Chodorow argues in *The Reproduction of Mothering*: 'we must always raise as problematic any feature of social structure, even if – and perhaps especially

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<sup>11</sup> Jane Lazarre, *The Mother Knot*, (USA: Duke University Press, 1997) pp. 99-100.

because – it seems universal.<sup>12</sup> What this thesis demonstrates is that it strikes me as an impossible task to find within motherhood a universal ‘natural’ state when the course of history has prevented women from participating in its documentation. Therefore, as I will expand upon in an historical retrospective in Chapter One, what can be deemed natural has been culturally disfigured; as Beauvoir argues ‘[woman] has no past, no history, no religion of their own’.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, I am not professing any universal truth towards the term maternal instinct, but the intention here is to unravel shared patterns of behaviour amongst my chosen novelists and theorists alike. French philosopher and novelist, Elisabeth Badinter concedes that

at the very least the maternal instinct must be considered malleable, able to be shaped and molded and modified and perhaps even subject to sudden disappearances, retreats into civilisation’s shadows.<sup>14</sup>

It is this essence of the unobtainable upon which I intend to focus. I will make reference to this quotation from Badinter throughout the thesis because it aptly reflects the elusiveness of the subject in hand.

## **Chapter One – Defining Maternal Instinct and Maternal Ambivalence**

So, what do we actually *mean* when we use the term ‘maternal instinct’? On the surface, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Helen exhibits signs of maternal instinct in its universal form as we perceive it; by that I mean an inherent ability to nurture and care for her child. More importantly, however, it exposes a myriad of complexities that accompany motherhood, which have so often been overlooked. The text led me to question whether maternal instinct is not only

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<sup>12</sup> Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, (CA: University of California 1999), p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1982), p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Elisabeth Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood An Historical Overview of the Maternal Instinct*, (London: Souvenir Press, 1981), p. xxi.

underestimated but, indeed, wholly misunderstood. As a result, this 19<sup>th</sup> century novel prompted me to pursue a number of different trajectories, all of which concern maternal instinct to a greater or lesser extent, but which have resulted in my focus resting on re-visiting the question of its [non]existence and its relationship with maternal ambivalence. It has led me to believe that not only do the two co-exist and are inter-dependent but that maternal instinct needs re-defining. What I intend to question is how it is possible to dismiss maternal instinct as myth when, historically speaking, it has only ever been defined by male authority through disciplines such as religion, philosophy and literature; and yet it is (allegedly) uniquely experienced by women.

The writing by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* focuses on 'otherness' brought about by the physiology of woman, Elisabeth Badinter's argument is based on the patriarchal construct, whilst Nancy Chodorow concentrates on the concept of learned behaviour that women acquire from their own mothers. As a result, all three feminist writers have categorically concluded that maternal instinct does not exist.<sup>15</sup> Since then only an exiguous amount has been written on this subject. However, in dismissing maternal instinct as non-existent, they have ignored or at the very least overlooked the consideration that although it may not exist in the guise in which it has been documented, this does not mean that it does not exist at all. In the words of American feminist author

Anne Roiphe:

I remain a mother linked – or is it chained – by a thousand thoughts to her children. It is clear to me that feminism, despite its vast accomplishments, has not cured me of motherhood.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p.526. Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood An Historical Overview of the Maternal Instinct*, p. 316, Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, pp.14-15. It is also worth noting that Beauvoir is unable to discuss motherhood from a point of lived experience whereas both Badinter and Chodorow were mothers themselves.

<sup>16</sup> Anne Roiphe, *A Mother's Eye: Motherhood and Feminism*, (London: Virago, 1997) p.ix.



But, in the process of dismissing maternal instinct as little more than myth, there has been an oversight towards a discourse existing within the confines of female writing, revealing a visceral bond between mother and child borne out of their co-existence within their shared embodiment during the period of gestation. It is *this* attachment or bond, the instinctive need for physical closeness, providing a far more accurate depiction of what is meant by the term 'maternal instinct', which I intend to explore.

But firstly, it is necessary to consider maternal instinct from an historical perspective in order to understand this compound within its context. Chapter One will focus on the manner in which maternal instinct has been explored in writing, its (lack of) definition, its perceived non-existence amongst feminist theory and the consequences of all of this for 21<sup>st</sup> century feminist discourse. Contemporary philosopher Elisabeth Badinter proves to be the most prominent spokesperson on the subject of maternal instinct. Thus, a number of her texts, most notably *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct* (1981), act as a legitimate point of departure. Badinter forms her opinions using Simone de Beauvoir's theories in *The Second Sex* (1949), arguing, in line with Beauvoir, that the maternal instinct is mythological in status and is a mere patriarchal construct. Furthermore, Badinter draws upon the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the 18<sup>th</sup> century thinker whose work on social reform includes the text *Émile* (1762), which is widely considered the most significant work on education since Plato's *The Republic*. Therefore, I shall consider these three texts, amongst others, with a particular focus on the family and the paradigms within it. Although Badinter's conclusions are problematic, as her research excludes the

voice of the mother, she provides a powerful argument as to why it is that maternal instinct is founded on myth, thus providing a solid platform from which to venture both philosophically and sociologically, in an attempt to then contextualize maternal instinct within the confines of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Therefore, having considered maternal instinct, Chapter One will shift its focus onto maternal ambivalence and its relationship with maternal instinct. Firstly, it is necessary to consider what is meant by the term maternal ambivalence and how it may manifest itself. Contemporary psychotherapist Rozsika Parker provides a bold re-reading of maternal ambivalence in her text *Torn in Two* (1995), stating that the co-existence of love and hate can stimulate and sharpen a mother's awareness of herself in relation to the child. She includes new readings of Melanie Klein, D W Winnicott and John Bowlby, but, contrary to conventional psychoanalysis, her emphasis concerns itself with the mother's perspective. Alongside Parker, I intend to consider the work of Sarah LaChance Adams, a philosopher who approaches this subject as 'a feminist phenomenologist'<sup>17</sup> drawing upon Simone de Beauvoir, Iris Marion Young and acknowledging the influence of the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. LaChance Adams' focus is on an ethics of ambivalence; her text *Mad Mothers, Bad Mothers, & What a "Good" Mother Would Do* (2014) cites ambivalence as fluctuating according to the mother's ethical relationship between motherhood and autonomy. She argues that clashes between mother and child frequently 'rupture within the woman herself between her competing desires to nurture and to be independent'<sup>18</sup> but believes that ethical theory should be able to encompass the

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<sup>17</sup> Sarah LaChance Adams, *Mad Mothers, Bad Mothers, and What a "Good" Mother Would Do: the ethics of ambivalence* (USA: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid* p.6.

ambiguity of this relationship. Indeed, she argues that it is ambivalence which makes them ethical which I argue is too reductive. In Chapter Three, I illustrate that ambivalence cannot just be considered as an ethical component but is in fact also an ontological reaction to maternal intersubjectivity. In addition, LaChance Adams explores infanticide, arguing that upon deeper examination one of the most distinctive features is that the mothers who commit this crime display a deep devotion toward their children. I intend to consider infanticide alongside the narrative concerning the subject in *Night Waking*.

## **Chapter Two – A Life’s Work on Becoming a Mother by Rachel Cusk**

It wasn’t until I read Rachel Cusk’s memoir *A Life’s Work on Becoming a Mother* (2001)<sup>19</sup> that I finally encountered a text concerning disruption of the self with which I could identify. It was the following paragraph that stopped me in my tracks, providing the essence to what so many female writers have tacitly referred but never openly articulated. This sense of ‘love and grief in a tug-of-war’<sup>20</sup> between a mother’s new found love for her baby and a loss of a former self is deftly described by Rachel Cusk in her memoir:

Birth is not merely that which divides women from men; it also divides women from themselves, so that a woman’s understanding of what it is to exist is profoundly changed. Another person has existed in her, and after their birth they live within the jurisdiction of her consciousness. When she is with them she is not herself; when she is without them she is not herself; and so it is as difficult to leave your children as it is to stay with them. To discover this is to feel that our life has become irretrievably mired in conflict, or caught in some mythic snare in which you will perpetually, vainly struggle.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> In the knowledge I was undertaking this research, I was recommended by an English Literature Professor to read this memoir by Rachel Cusk, particularly since at the time I thought I would be drawing upon Virginia Woolf’s novels *Mrs Dalloway* and *To The Lighthouse* to explore the theme of motherhood and Cusk’s style of writing has often been compared to that of Woolf. Indeed, her novel *Arlington Park* (2007) is a thinly veiled re-writing of *Mrs Dalloway*.

<sup>20</sup> Rachel Cusk, *A Life’s Work on Becoming a Mother*, (London: Fourth Estate, 2008), p.145

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid* p.13.

Upon further reading, I discovered that Cusk's description concerning identity was in dialogue with various feminist theorists, namely, Iris Marion Young and Jane Lymer alongside stalwarts of feminist writing, Adrienne Rich and Julia Kristeva. They all write of a doubling, splitting or blurring of subjectivity in relation to their baby.<sup>22</sup>

Iris Marion Young and Jane Lymer draw upon phenomenology, Maurice Merleau-Ponty in particular, in order to describe their experiences of pregnancy and childbirth. Phenomenology is a philosophy that describes the basic structures of human lived experience. As Taylor Carmon explains in the Foreword to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, Edmund Husserl describes it as a return 'to the things themselves',<sup>23</sup> by which he does not mean real concrete objects but rather the ideal (abstract) forms and contents of experience as we live them, *not* as we have learned to conceive and describe them according to the categories of science and received opinion. That is to say, the world presents itself as the world because it differs perceptually from myself when I move about in it. Merleau-Ponty uses the notion of intersubjectivity<sup>24</sup> to describe how we are an integral part of a world, a reality, which is at the same time distinct from us. So, simultaneously subjects and objects to others, we interrelate with and yet are separate from the world. Within their lived experience of pregnancy both Young and Lymer describe this sense of 'blurring'

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<sup>22</sup> Both Young and Lymer, who write extensively on their experience of becoming a mother, draw upon the work of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau Ponty to explore their experiences of pregnancy and childbirth and hence, this was my foray into the philosophy of phenomenology.

<sup>23</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (London and NY: Routledge, 2012), p. viii.

<sup>24</sup> I use the term 'intersubjectivity' to describe neither an autonomous nor a unified subject but something in between. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who is widely considered the founder of phenomenology, links intersubjectivity to overcoming 'transcendental solipsism'. He describes it as 'constantly functioning in wakeful life, we also function together, in the manifold ways of considering, together, valuing, planning, acting together. (the *Krisis*, 28, 109; VI III, in *The Husserl Dictionary*, ed. Dermot Moran, Joseph Cohen and Joseph D Cohen, Google Books), p.171. See Sarah Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*, p.44 and 140.

This interpretation should not be confused with the interpretation used within the field of psychoanalysis. Intersubjectivity has also become an important addition to psychoanalysis, emerging through the work of Jessica Benjamin and is used to consider how we experience otherness. (Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters* (London: Routledge, 2009) p. 29.

between subject and object, or self and other, bringing about a heightened sense of intersubjectivity, which I refer to from hereon in as *maternal* intersubjectivity and which I explore in greater detail in Chapter Two.

When I embarked upon this research, many references to motherhood were through the confines of psychoanalysis. Although some of it proved very informative in my bid to understand and deconstruct maternal instinct, psychoanalysis was also proving problematic.<sup>25</sup> Firstly, psychoanalysis has a tendency to objectify the mother; she is a vehicle for and constructed from the point of view of the child.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, in relation to maternal instinct the problem with psychoanalysis is its *belatedness*. By that I mean, the external forces attributed to an individual's characteristics mask any ontological perspective and because maternal instinct lies within the *pre-conscious* (rather than the *un-conscious*), that is the nexus of the unlearned, it therefore arrives or occurs beforehand. In other words, maternal instinct belongs to the realm of the pre-theoretic.

### **Chapter Three – *Night Waking* by Sarah Moss**

However, where psychoanalysis does bear extreme relevance is on the subject of maternal ambivalence and attachment theory. In Chapter Three, Sarah Moss' novel *Night Waking* (2011) deftly illustrates the 'love and grief in a tug-of-war'<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> In particular, Nancy Chodorow *The Reproduction of Mothering* (CA: University of California Press Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1999). Sara Ruddick, 'Thinking Mothers/Conceiving Birth', *Representations of Motherhood* eds Donna Bassin, Mararet Honey and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 29-45. Ruddick led me to Iris Marion Young's work.

<sup>26</sup> Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* (London: Routledge, 2009), argues that 'just as maternal subjectivity is on the cusp of being articulated within the psychoanalytic literature, the mother appears to slip back into some manifestation of her traditional object-position as container, mirror, receptacle, p. 5. Roszika Parker, *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence* (London: Virago, 1995) acknowledges that 'not only does psychoanalytic theory militate against mothers getting a 'fair hearing', but clinical practice leads to an understandable tendency to form an allegiance with the child in the patient against the patient's mother' (p.13). I provide further evidence of my claim that psychoanalysis has a tendency to objectify the mother in Chapter Three.

<sup>27</sup> Rachel Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p.145.

that Cusk speaks of. The inner turmoil of Cusk is reflected in the outer sense of personal crisis witnessed through Moss' protagonist, Anna Bennett. This contemporary novel depicts a 21<sup>st</sup> century academic and mother in conflict with herself, who is attempting to find a way through the impasse between motherhood and self-fulfillment by galvanizing the public and private machinations of motherhood. Moss inverts Cusk's use of interpolation of the literary text by punctuating the beginning of each chapter with a theoretical aphorism from a recognized 20<sup>th</sup> century child psychologist. In so doing, it creates a dialogue between the aphorism and the main body of the text, exposing the pitfalls of theoretical discourse in relation to actual lived experience.

Moss provides a visceral narrative surrounding the question of guilt and its relationship with motherhood. Her protagonist exhibits an intrinsic sense of conflict in an attempt to choose between the unremarkable realm of full-time motherhood and the stimulating parallel world of academia. This demonstration of maternal ambivalence by Anna Bennett enables Moss to engage with the work of John Bowlby and Anna Freud, amongst others, and weave her findings into the narrative. First and foremost, this novel is an historical exploration into attachment theory and considers how it intersects and disrupts the ability to mother and the pursuit of a life of autonomy. Despite her general dislike of motherhood and frustration at the stalling of her own career, Anna Bennett seeks to comprehend the depths to which a mother and child are inter-related, concluding that 'it is unnatural to go away from your own children. It hurts'.<sup>28</sup> With this in mind, I intend to demonstrate how Anna Bennett's maternal ambivalence is, at least in part, a consequence of maternal instinct.

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<sup>28</sup> Sarah Moss, *Night Waking* (London: Granta Books, 2011), p.353.

## **Conclusion**

Indeed, woman's autonomy and her decision making process can be altered by the onset of motherhood, revealing that maternal instinct is far from non-existent; merely, its manifestation differs from its more widely recognized spectral twin. So, rather than considering maternal instinct as a welcomed accompaniment to motherhood as the fairy tales would have you believe, its presence not only poses a threat to the sense of self but it makes the separation between mother and child problematic, which results in feelings of maternal ambivalence. Indeed, Rachel Cusk's *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* and Sarah Moss' *Night Waking* both make it emphatically clear that their mothering does not involve anything intuitive. On the contrary, as I will illustrate, they both write of the mothering process as confusing and complex and feel unsuited to the job. The onset of motherhood instills in them both a *need* to be physically close to their baby and, equally, both speak of an anxiety that emerges if they are separated for any length of time, which can lead to resentment. These sensations compromise woman's autonomy and a direct consequence of this loss of identity manifests as maternal ambivalence. After all, ambivalence, by its very definition of dualist emotion, is in dialogue with the concept of the pregnant/mother subject as 'decentered, split, or doubled',<sup>29</sup> an idea which has been explored by Julia Kristeva and phenomenologists Iris Marion Young and Sara Heinämaa. Indeed, as Kristeva explains in her essay 'Women's Time', since the 'split subject' stemming from the German word *Spaltung*, means both 'splitting' and

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<sup>29</sup> Iris Marion Young, 'Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation', *On Female Body Experience* (OUP, Oxford, 2005) p.46.

'cleavage',<sup>30</sup> this divided notion is, by its very name, located within the female body. But, rather than use the word 'split' to describe a mother's subjectivity, I argue that the word 'blur' is a more accurate representation.

As a result, what a uniquely female discourse highlights, as the subsequent chapters will prove, is that it positions maternal instinct far closer to maternal ambivalence than any intrinsic intuition. As both of my primary texts – *Night Waking* and *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* – reveal, motherhood proves difficult to reconcile with a sense of self. That is to say, there is evidence within these texts that, particularly in early motherhood, an implicit bond exists between mother and child, thereby heightening a sense of intersubjectivity. This in turn creates an existential crisis for the mother as she attempts to negotiate between spatial proximity and autonomy.

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<sup>30</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time' in *The Kristeva Reader* ed. Toril Moi p.213.



## Chapter One

### An Overview of Maternal Instinct and Maternal Ambivalence

#### Introduction

In this study I argue that for the mother, maternal instinct arises out of the physical dependency of intersubjective embodiment between herself and the baby, which results in her being neither object nor subject but something in between. This in turn challenges the assumption that subjectivity is, at all times, singular and as a result of this, the very notion of self becomes rooted in ambivalence. Simone de Beauvoir, Elisabeth Badinter and, most recently, Sarah LaChance Adams consider instinct and ambivalence in binary terms, concluding that because maternal ambivalence exists, maternal instinct cannot. But I question why it must be assumed that they are unable to co-exist. If we consider maternal instinct in terms of a disruption of self, something must *occur* as a result of it. Indeed, I respond by arguing that my interpretation of maternal instinct – the sense of self, vacillating between autonomy and intersubjectivity<sup>31</sup> – must by its very *nature* be grounded in ambivalence.

I argue that the way in which motherhood has been historically interpreted forced the hand of 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist thinking into dismissing maternal instinct as cultural myth. Beauvoir blames the focus laid upon woman's physiology and, accordingly, Badinter is emphatic in her text that women must rid themselves of a mythical feminine nature in order to create a sense of androgyny, which, she maintains, will help resolve the current lack of equality. But equally, 21<sup>st</sup> century experiential discourse on motherhood is also indicating that to deny maternal instinct existing in any manifestation is

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<sup>31</sup> See p. 3 of Introduction for explanation of intersubjectivity.

erroneous. So, rather than considering maternal instinct in binary terms as either existing/not existing, it is necessary to re-consider it in more organic terms. What I am attempting to do is find some middle ground – some in-betweenness. However, it does require redefining in order for it to align itself more accurately with lived experience. For example, Adrienne Rich writes in *Of Woman Born* (1976) that

institutionalized motherhood demands of women maternal “instinct” rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self.<sup>32</sup>

I am arguing that it is necessary to consider maternal instinct, selflessness and relation to others *alongside* intelligence, self-realization and creation of self.

Quoting Badinter, LaChance Adams, in her 2014 text *Mad Mothers, Bad Mothers & What a “Good” Mother Would Do: The Ethics of Ambivalence*, disputes the existence of maternal instinct because of the many forms maternal indifference has taken throughout the course of history. Indeed, Badinter’s text *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View on the Maternal Instinct* (1981) predetermines this same line of argument and it is this text that we turn to first, acting as a nexus for exploring maternal instinct from the point of contextualizing this compound within historical terms. It seems she is the only female philosopher of today who has made the subject of maternal instinct the focus of her writing. The purpose of her historical retrospective in this text, in line with Beauvoir before her, is to make attempts to prove that the concept of maternal instinct ‘has been too varied throughout history to merit the term ‘instinct’; that it is instead, a socially conditioned ‘sentiment’.<sup>33</sup> However, I argue that despite its historical inaccuracies maternal instinct does exist. Its universal

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<sup>32</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*, (London: W W Norton & Co Ltd, 1995) p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical overview of the Maternal Instinct*, p. x.

representation interprets maternal instinct as an intrinsic intuition pre-disposed to caring. But, drawing upon the writing of Rachel Cusk and Sarah Moss, alongside theorists Iris Marion Young, Jane Lymer and Julia Kristeva on their experiences of motherhood, I argue that the metaphysical consequences of shared embodiment between mother and child interferes with a mother's ability to make sense of her own subjectivity, the baby being an extension of herself and yet separate, making an attachment both physically and metaphysically unprecedented. This is maternal instinct.

Thereafter, the second section of this chapter will concern itself with maternal ambivalence and its relationship with instinct. I argue that there is evidence in the texts by Cusk and Moss to suggest that maternal ambivalence is a reaction to the loss of autonomy they experience upon becoming a mother. Intersecting LaChance Adams' text and Rozsika Parker's psychoanalytical approach in *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence* with Moss, Cusk, Young and Lymer, I wish to consider maternal ambivalence and its response to the status of intersubjectivity, namely maternal instinct.

## **Section One**

### **1. Maternal Instinct**

It is my intention that this research may provoke a more accurate line of questioning of what is meant by 'maternal instinct'. In a paper entitled 'Reframing Pregnant Embodiment' Imogen Tyler captures the lack of knowledge surrounding pregnancy, describing her own pregnant embodiment remaining, within philosophical discourse, curiously unmapped, unthought and perhaps

unthinkable.<sup>34</sup> The dearth of writing on motherhood from an experiential point of view, however, may be attributed to women's desire to transcend culturally constructed gender barriers and write from a point of being human rather than specifically female. Indeed, writing about women's position within society may merely serve to reinforce it. But I have concluded that the distinct lack of writing on the subject of maternal instinct may have less to do with its controversial nature and be more aligned with a general inability to translate the experience into language. As Kristeva asserts, 'the pregnant subject straddles the spheres of language and instinct.'<sup>35</sup> So, if maternal instinct is located within the pre-conscious it makes translation into a coherent syntax unobtainable. By that I mean, language requires processing and decoding for translation into words to occur; language is therefore *belated*. Instinct, on the other hand, occurs within pre-reflective experience therefore causing a schism between sensing the phenomena and the ability to articulate it. Indeed, the word 'instinct' originates from 'instinguere': meaning *in-* 'towards' and *stinguere* meaning 'to prick'. If one considers the instance between the prick of a sting and the fleeting interlude before the onset of pain seeps into the consciousness, it is this void of momentary suspension of mindful sensation which is analogous to maternal instinct. A consequence of course is that its presence can go undetected, unacknowledged or recognized in any sort of cognitive form. Therefore, in Chapter Two, with the aid of Cusk's narrative in *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, this thesis attempts to explore the 'unthinkable' realm of maternal instinct.

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<sup>34</sup> Imogen Tyler, 'Reframing pregnant embodiment' in *Transformations: Thinking through Feminism*, ed. by S. Ahmed, J. Kilby, C. Lury, M. McNeil and B. Skeggs, (London: Routledge, 2000) p.290 cited in Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters The Ethics of Interruption*, (Routledge, London, 2009). p. 123.

<sup>35</sup> Iris Marion Young, 'Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation' in *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (Oxford: OUP, 2005) p. 53.

So, before we start, in light of its elusive nature, it may be helpful to visualize through art that which words cannot say. This sculpture below by the Mexican artist, Lizette Aguilar, which is called 'Maternity at a Distance', illustrates the 'blurring effect', the status of maternal intersubjectivity whereby the mother and her children are a continuum of each other – there is no beginning or end: the two are indistinct and yet separate:

**'Maternity at a Distance' by Lizette Aguilar (2007)**



As the title of the sculpture suggests, this triad can only ever be viewed 'at a distance', that is from the outside, preventing any veritable understanding of what occurs on the inside. This objectification of 'maternity at a distance' reinforces the divide between the private world of maternity and the public perception of it. Lisa Baraitser queries maternal embodiment by challenging the masculine principles of individuality, non-contradiction and singular temporality that are disturbed by the maternal and asks whether there is 'something worth

charting of the materialist-maternal feminine, something of what it is like to be “tied” to a child through more than emotional bonds.’<sup>36</sup> Baraitser argues that the psychologist D W Winnicott reminded us that there was no such thing as an infant. Quoting him, she highlights that ‘a mother and baby cannot be thought of in isolation from one another, but are both essential components of a relational dyad’.<sup>37</sup> Baraitser is clarifying the meaning of this ‘relational dyad’ by highlighting that no amount of physical severing of ties in the form of the umbilical cord will prevent this bond from continuing in metaphysical terms. The tangible closeness which mother and baby experience during gestation has ongoing repercussions for this relationship.

### 1.i Definition of maternal instinct

With the aid of this visual display of maternal instinct, let us consider what is really meant by this term. Just like its subject matter, any formal definition for maternal instinct proves elusive. Although evidence of the compound first appeared in written vernacularized English as early as 1747,<sup>38</sup> and within English Fiction from 1829,<sup>39</sup> it is not acknowledged in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase, Saying and Quotation* or *The Concise Oxford Thesaurus*, *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase & Fable* which I searched starting with its first publications in 1887.<sup>40</sup> Of course it must be taken into account that these reference books may not pick up on archival or non-published work but, nevertheless, although they indicate acknowledgement of the term maternal

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<sup>36</sup> Baraitser, p. 124.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid p.125.

<sup>38</sup> The term ‘maternal instinct’ can be found on p12 of a translation of *The Mother-tongue: Or, Methodical Instruction in the Mother-tongue in Schools and Families* by Gregoire Girard (originally Jean Baptiste Melchior Gaspard Balthazar), (J W Parker: London, 1747). <https://books.google.com/ngrams>. [accessed 7.11.14]

<sup>39</sup> Lady Morgan, *The Book of Boudoir*, (Brussels: Du Jardin-Sailly Brothers, 1829) p.242 <https://books.google.com/ngrams> [accessed 7.11.14].

<sup>40</sup> The first publication of *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase & Fable* was in 1870.

instinct within the English language, without any formal definition of the compound and no sense of its origin, it is difficult to arrive at any authentic meaning. Synonyms for the adjective 'maternal' include '*her maternal instincts*', but the term itself is not defined. The definition of maternal is **motherly**, protective, caring, nurturing, loving, devoted, affectionate, fond, warm, tender, gentle, kind, kindly, comforting.<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, what has arisen in place of any unequivocal definition is a tacit understanding of its meaning. Indeed, Badinter writes a compelling narrative, in *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View on the Maternal Instinct*, regarding the anomalies rooted within maternal instinct. As I mentioned in the Introduction, Badinter concedes that there is a possibility maternal instinct exists but if it does, it is in a constant state of flux, therefore differing completely from its universally accepted definition, that of intuition and a predisposed ability for caring. Thus, it will appear erratic because its manifestation is wholly dependent upon how an individual intersects with social and cultural influences, and, furthermore, whether she perceives it as a threat to her autonomy. Therefore, the very nature of maternal instinct ensures that its definition will prove elusive.

One of the earliest texts written by a woman acknowledging the term maternal instinct was an autobiography written in 1829 called *The Book of Boudoir* by Lady Morgan. As the title suggests, this book was never intended to grace reception rooms but must remain within the secret confines of a woman's chamber. Within the autobiography, Lady Morgan provides a narrative on maternal instinct, which corroborates this notion that its manifestation will alter

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<sup>41</sup> *Concise Oxford Thesaurus*, ed., Sarah Hawker and Maurice Waite (Oxford: OUP, 2007) p. 525.

according to the individual, as well as dismissing any possibility that women are pre-disposed to mothering. She remarks:

The more or less powerful instinct of maternity is an affair of temperament, nurtured or modified by other instincts or passions, and by circumstances favourable or unfavourable to its existence [...] it is not the instinct, or feeling, but the judgment that directs it, which is laudable. Maternity is no abstraction; and when people say, "such a one is injudicious, or feeble, or shallow, but she is a good mother", they talk nonsense. That which the woman is, the mother will be; and her personal qualities will direct and govern her *maternal instinct*, as her taste will influence her appetite. If she be prejudiced and ignorant, the *good mother* will mismanage her children.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, Lady Morgan is maligning the universal interpretation of maternal instinct. But the covert manner in which she writes this memoir reinforces the principal concern of its long, fluctuating periods of inconsistencies and silences during the recording of its history. As Baraitser argues, 'theoretically speaking [the mother] remains a shadowy figure who seems to disappear from the many discourses that explicitly try to account for her.'<sup>43</sup> Indeed, as I have mentioned in the Introduction, during the undertaking of this research, what has become evident is the extent to which there is a lack of historical female writing on the subject of motherhood. As psychoanalyst Helen Deutsch rightly observes 'mothers don't write, they are written'<sup>44</sup>. Cusk laments in *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* that 'when [she] became a mother, nothing had been written about it at all'.<sup>45</sup> Historically speaking, motherhood is written by so many who lack experiential understanding. Furthermore, Cusk writes this memoir whilst she is pregnant with her second child, as the ability to express herself on the subject of becoming a mother eluded her after the first few months of giving birth to her eldest child. She realized it needed to be captured before it 'could get

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<sup>42</sup> Lady Morgan, *The Book of Boudoir*, p. 242.

<sup>43</sup> Baraitser, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Writing and Motherhood' (eds Garner, Kahane and Sprengnether), (NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 356.

<sup>45</sup> Cusk, p. 10.



away again',<sup>46</sup> fully aware that these emotions are ephemeral, quickly forgotten unless documented at the point of experience. Conversely, although Badinter fails to include the voice of the mother in her texts on maternal instinct, what she does provide is an historical account of maternal instinct, which reveals how it has been contextualized and interpreted within religious and philosophical discourse over the centuries. Therefore, I have included a brief section on its historical origins, first and foremost to make a disparity between what has evolved from myth and what must be considered far nearer to the truth.

## 2. An Historical Retrospective of the Maternal Instinct

### 2.i) Plato

Alongside Beauvoir, feminist writers including Adrienne Rich, Luce Irigaray and Sara Heinämaa<sup>47</sup> make reference to Plato's writing on family and women, particularly in his works *The Republic* (c. 375 BC) and *Symposium* (c. 385-370 BC). Plato avoids defining woman in the binary terms of passivity versus man's activity. On the contrary, he heralds a sense of equality between the sexes. Rather, his guiding principle of equality between the sexes is this sense of 'complementing'<sup>48</sup> each other. Despite his acknowledgement that women are the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid p. 9.

<sup>47</sup> Beauvoir makes several references to Plato in *The Second Sex*, two of which highlight firstly, his proposal of giving girls a liberal education. Secondly, she uses the Platonic myth, which I quote directly from Plato on page 28 of this thesis, which discusses humans comprising of three sexes, *The Second Sex* pp. 37, 122. Adrienne Rich makes reference to Plato in relation to birth control in *Of Woman Born* (NY: Norton, 1995) p. 266. Luce Irigaray devotes an entire chapter to book VII sections 514-517a of *Republic* in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (NY: Cornell, 1985), pp. 243- 364) in which she uses Plato's myth of the cave as a metaphor for the womb. In her re-reading of *The Second Sex*, Sara Heinämaa cites *Symposium* in relation to Beauvoir's view being a continuation of Plato with the inherent belief that there is a need for ignorance or lack of knowledge as an essential, indispensable element of philosophy. Furthermore, Heinämaa refers to Platonic ideology in reference to the work of Edmund Husserl and Simone de Beauvoir in *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), pp. xiv, 8, 39, 83-84 and 130.

<sup>48</sup> Plato, *Symposium* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1983), p. 87.

‘weaker sex’,<sup>49</sup> he is making this comparison purely in terms of their physical strength.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, he argues that

there is [therefore] no administrative occupation which is peculiar to woman as woman or man as man; natural capacities are similarly distributed in each sex, and it is natural for women to take part in all occupations as well as men.<sup>51</sup>

Plato clarifies this position drawing upon a conversation between Aristophanes and Socrates in *Symposium*, to explain that humans were originally comprised of three sexes, that of male, female and hermaphrodite, but Zeus, as a punishment for their pride, ‘cut each of them in two’.<sup>52</sup> As a consequence the innate love human beings have for one another is an endeavour to return to their ancient state ‘by attempting to weld two beings into one and to heal the wounds which humanity suffered’.<sup>53</sup> Even if we interpret this explanation in metaphoric terms, Plato’s principle of equality between the sexes is this sense of ‘complementing’ each other. But, through the course of history, rhetoric from leading philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau distorts this paradigm, turning women into being a complement of man.

In addition to stating the need for equality within society, Plato also makes clear that each woman is an individual and must be treated as such, requiring the same education as her male counterpart, sharing the same intellectual and physical training ‘in accordance with nature’,<sup>54</sup> but acknowledging that equality and sexual difference can be harmonious. Indeed, Socrates ascribes women’s position within society by questioning whether the difference in sex

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<sup>49</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, (London: Penguin, 2007) p. 167.

<sup>50</sup> Indeed, 20<sup>th</sup> Century sociologist Alice S Rossi concurs that evolutionary division of labour is a direct result of physical differences.

<sup>51</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, p. 165.

<sup>52</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, p. 60.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid* p. 62.

<sup>54</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, p. 166.

in itself, [is] a proper basis for differentiation of occupation and social function, and answers that it is not. The only difference between men and woman is one of physical function – one begets, the other bears children.<sup>55</sup>

But by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Beauvoir highlights, society had re-defined the couple as *opposing* one another, describing it as a

fundamental unity with its two halves riveted together, and the cleavage of society along the line of sex is impossible. Here is to be found the basic trait of woman. She is the Other in a totality of which the two opponents are necessary to one another.<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, Plato's vision of a perfect society set out in *The Republic* becomes disfigured as early as the writings of Aristotle who claims that 'the female is a female by virtue of a certain *lack* of qualities [...] we should be regarding the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness',<sup>57</sup> and therefore he argues that authority of the male is a natural phenomena and divine in right. As Badinter highlights, these Aristotelian themes would become underlying principles of Christian theology. Indeed, she argues that the categories in which men think of the world are established 'from their point of view, as absolute',<sup>58</sup> documenting history as a lack of equality between the sexes reified by

apostles and theologians [who] are responsible for obfuscating, to the point of betraying, Christ's words [...] Christ's message was clear: Husband and wife are equal and share the same rights and the same duties with respect to their children.<sup>59</sup>

Too often throughout the course of history, woman and maternity are considered in terms of Eve's guilt, which, in Felicity Dunworth's words 'is evident in the tragedy that to be born is to have to die. Thus death is inscribed in the condition of motherhood itself'.<sup>60</sup> This seems far removed from Plato's explanation of motherhood in which he maintains that procreation is the object

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<sup>55</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, p. 157.

<sup>56</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid* p. 16.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid* p. 286.

<sup>59</sup> Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical overview of the Maternal Instinct*, p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> Felicity Dunworth, *Mothers and Meaning on the Early Modern English Stage*, (Manchester: MUP, 2010) p. 10.

of love because 'it is the nearest thing to perpetuity and immortality that a mortal being can attain'.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, Adrienne Rich claims that the threat of power due to having the biological ability to give birth produces a dichotomous paradigm: woman was either a hailed goddess or a man's fear of being 'controlled and overwhelmed by women'.<sup>62</sup> As a result, the sense of power attributed to women for their ability to create life is shrouded by a lack of historical appropriation, and in its place it is more readily portrayed as 'the bestial act of childbirth and re-enactment of the punishment of Eve'.<sup>63</sup> But, as Badinter highlights, St Thomas' (d. 72AD) definition of woman as the 'imperfect man'<sup>64</sup> proves that any sense of equality was already being disfigured long before the creation of Eve. Indeed, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, St Augustine sustains the image of women as being naturally evil through his writings *Songe de Verger*, describing women as 'a beast who is neither steady nor stable, full of hatred, nourishing madness [...] she is the source of all contentions, quarrels and inequities'.<sup>65</sup> These representations of woman not only resonate with the sexes in Genesis, which Simone de Beauvoir will draw upon in *The Second Sex*, but as Dunworth argues, throughout the course of history the representation of motherhood is too often portrayed in binary terms, oscillating between the evil of Eve to the divine status of the Virgin Mary.

## 2.ii) Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

Within the confines of intellectualizing the maternal, Jean-Jacques Rousseau is regarded as Plato's successor. Robert Wokler describes Rousseau's text *Emile*

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<sup>61</sup> Plato, *Symposium* p. 87.

<sup>62</sup> Rich, p. 13.

<sup>63</sup> Dunworth, p. 10.

<sup>64</sup> Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical overview of the Maternal Instinct*, p. 16.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

[as] the most significant work on education after Plato's *The Republic*'.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Rousseau goes as far as to say that 'Plato's reflections [on education] deserve to be better developed by a writer worthy of following such a master'!<sup>67</sup> It is no coincidence therefore that Badinter devotes an entire chapter to Rousseau in *The Myth of Motherhood* outlining his social reforms on child care, education, family and maternal responsibility. Rousseau wrote *The Social Contract* in 1762, which focused on politics, and his publication of *Emile* in the same year, 'launched the modern family – the family founded on mother love'.<sup>68</sup> However, as Badinter highlights, Rousseau based Sophie, the companion to Emile in the eponymous novel, on the appearance of the sexes in Genesis and all its prejudices, in order to create what he believed to be the "feminine nature", and as a result Sophie came to represent woman as 'framed for the delight and pleasure of man'.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, woman became defined by man and child and could only be considered in relative terms, epitomized by his creation of Sophie as 'the "complement" of man, [as] an essentially relative creature: 'she is what man is not, and forms with him the whole of humanity, while remaining under his command.'<sup>70</sup> Indeed, with *Emile* Rousseau is creating a political programme, which reinforces rather than reduces difference, by advocating entirely different forms of education for Emile and Sophie. Rousseau argues that he is sanctioning this political programme on the grounds of natural law in which the two sexes essentially perform contrasting functions in that a woman's function 'is entirely dependent on

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<sup>66</sup> Robert Wokler, *Rousseau* (Oxford: OUP, 1996) p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Timothy O'Hagan, *Rousseau* (London: Routledge, 2003) p. 181.

<sup>68</sup> Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical overview of the Maternal Instinct* p. 30.

<sup>69</sup> Rousseau, *Emile* (London: David Campbell Publishers, 1992), p. 693 cited in *The Myth of Motherhood* pp. 208-209.

<sup>70</sup> Rousseau, *Emile*, p. 294.

maternity'.<sup>71</sup> However, Rousseau's character Sophie presents a distorted version of 'innate love',<sup>72</sup> of which Aristophanes speaks in Plato's *Symposium*. Rather than man and woman complementing each other, as Plato's writing explores in *The Republic*, this depiction of woman's position in society distances itself ever further from this image and is replaced by the assumption that woman is the passive partner created for the pleasure of man. Moreover, Timothy O'Hagan highlights in *Rousseau*, although Plato's imperative concerning women's education was unusual in the ancient world, Rousseau distorts Plato's interpretation of the difference between the sexes by creating an unremitting doctrine concerning the maternal and her centrality within the family, which bares little or no resemblance to the society Plato writes of in *The Republic*.<sup>73</sup>

Indeed, O'Hagan argues that Rousseau is preoccupied with the opposition between convention and nature. He believes that the body is the point of intersection between the natural and the social aspects of the human being. By drawing upon conclusions referring to nature, he maintains that the father's rule over the family is based on natural feelings rather than any political authority. But, at times, Rousseau's writing on the subject of men and women appear to contradict one another. On the one hand, he argues that woman's natural equality with man must therefore make them socially equal too, but on the other hand he refuses to expand upon this hypothesis.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, as O'Hagan highlights, this results in his discourse being in direct contrast to Plato.

In this sense, women's association with passivity is indeed problematic. In an essay from *The Newly Born Woman* (1996), Hélène Cixous addresses the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid p. 181.

<sup>72</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, p. 62.

<sup>73</sup> O'Hagan, p. 180.

<sup>74</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *First Discourse* (1751), cited in *Rousseau* by O'Hagan, p. 180.

abiding issue of confining and limiting woman to binary explanations. She argues that thought has always worked through opposition and all oppositions are couples, the most salient of all being man/woman. Indeed, Cixous states that sexual difference is treated through opposition, coupling it with activity/passivity and, within philosophical discourse, it is women who are always associated with the latter. Cixous maintains that one argument for women being represented as passive is, as Adrienne Rich affirms, their eternal threat and as a result they must remain 'in the shadow. In the shadow he throws on her; the shadow she is'.<sup>75</sup> Beauvoir's arguments are also grounded in terms of polarizing gender rather than complementing them; they must oppose each other in order to exist. That is to say, she highlights Hegel's theory that the subject can only be posed if it is opposed. Therefore, the state of 'Otherness' is a creation of the subject and by its very nature is a 'category of human thought'. If we recall Plato and his consideration of two halves complementing each other, desiring what one lacks, it situates the question of sexual difference a long way from the androgynous society hailed as the 21<sup>st</sup> century's answer to gender equality.

### 2.iii) The Universal Mother

But this ideology that women had a 'natural' ability to mother shackles her to a life without ambition and little education, being denied any equal rights in the work place or in the home. For many women, this obligation to be first and foremost a mother was inevitably an ideology they 'did their best to imitate'.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays' in *The Newly Born Woman* (London: I B Tauris 7 Co Ltd, 1986) p. 67.

<sup>76</sup> Badinter, p. 221.

As O'Hagan argues, Rousseau's theorizing results in a physical dependence that would be transformed into a moral *duty*. Indeed, Badinter argues, it is Rousseau's 'back to nature' philosophy that may be the most 'common origin of mutual unhappiness and, later, neuroses of many children and their mothers',<sup>77</sup> and it is this very subject which captures the attention of 20<sup>th</sup> century psychoanalysis. Badinter makes clear that one hundred and fifty years before Freud, Rousseau defined the masochistic component as 'specifically female: She will do all this because she wants to, not out of moral obligation'.<sup>78</sup> It is to the 'tender, anxious mother'<sup>79</sup> to whom he appeals to undertake a child's early education, as they have the 'milk to feed the child'.<sup>80</sup> A consequence of Rousseauian theory was an intensity afforded to childhood never seen before, where hygiene, diet and a return to breastfeeding were the salient issues of this reform. As philosopher Virginia Held highlights, this makes a farce of the notion that Rousseau put forward that 'no man should surrender his freedom'<sup>81</sup> by qualifying that women 'must be trained from childhood to serve and to submit to man'.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, Held concludes that, for Rousseau, if the essence of being fully human was to be free from submission to the will of another, women were therefore denied the essential condition of being fully human. But paradoxically, as Badinter highlights, the voice of nature is actually silenced by Rousseau's theorizing as his argument relies exclusively on moral argument, resulting in no mention of instinct in his work.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid p. 221.

<sup>78</sup> Rousseau, as cited in Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical Overview of the Maternal Instinct*, Ibid, p. 212.

<sup>79</sup> Rousseau, p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid p. 5.

<sup>81</sup> Virginia Held, *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society and Politics*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993) p. 199.

<sup>82</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract; Emile*, trans. B Foxley (New York: Dutton, 1911)., cited in Held, p.199.



In *Mothers and Meaning on the Early Modern English Stage* (2010), Dunworth argues that from before Augustine to after Freud, 'assumptions are revealed which routinely dehistoricise and universalize motherhood as instinctive and natural'.<sup>83</sup> She argues that these qualities associated with motherhood have come to be understood as universal *because* of the paradigms upon which they have been conceptualized. If we look to the playwrights for clarity, this representation of the institutionalized mother is duly reinforced by the dramatized mother on stage, who is created through a 'consistent set of ideas informed by fixed notions of what a mother should be [...] suggest[ing] a link between an understanding of good motherhood and what is "natural"'.<sup>84</sup> Beauvoir redresses this representation of woman, arguing that throughout history women have always been subordinate to men and stresses that this is not a result of something that '*occurred*'.<sup>85</sup> Quite the opposite in fact, it is woman's lack of history, the absence of 'the contingent or incidental nature of historical facts'<sup>86</sup> which makes otherness absolute. The historical and literary culture to which she belongs are

the songs and legends with which [Beauvoir] is lulled to sleep, [which] are one long exaltation of man. It was men who built up Greece, the Roman Empire, France, and all other nations, [...] who invented the tools for its exploitation, who have governed it, who have filled it with sculptures, paintings, works of literature'.<sup>87</sup>

Cusk goes as far as to say that 'nothing' has been written on the subject of motherhood at all. As psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow argues, there are almost no comparative studies of humans because 'of most researchers' assumptions

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<sup>83</sup> Felicity Dunworth, *Mothers and Meaning on the Early Modern English Stage*, (Manchester: MUP, 2010) p. 2.

<sup>84</sup> Dunworth, p. 4.

<sup>85</sup> Beauvoir, p. 18.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid* p. 19.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid* p. 315.

that women's maternal behavior is natural'<sup>88</sup> and therefore there is no need for research to be carried out on this subject. According to Badinter, in *The Myth of Motherhood*:

mother love has been discussed as a kind of instinct for so long that a 'maternal instinct' has come to seem rooted in woman's very nature, regardless of the time and place she lived.<sup>89</sup>

Badinter is influenced by Beauvoir's theory that women are not enslaved by their feminine nature nor bound by a biology that 'forces us into particular domestic roles and motherly functions',<sup>90</sup> but that a 'maternal instinct' is a concept created by male authority and imposed upon women. Indeed, Badinter's declaration that a maternal instinct does not exist is a continuum of Beauvoir's selfsame proclamation in *The Second Sex*. In Book Two, Beauvoir provides real life examples of a number of women and their experiences of motherhood which 'all show that no maternal instinct exists'.<sup>91</sup> Beauvoir maintains that a mother's attitude is dependent on her 'total situation and her reaction to it'.<sup>92</sup> This observation cannot be disputed; maternal instinct undoubtedly intersects with social and cultural influences. Any hope of identifying it can only be retrieved from exposure to women's own experiences of it; history has for the most part ignored this fact and hence its unstable foundations make way for half-truths.

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<sup>88</sup> Chodorow, p. 27.

<sup>89</sup> Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical overview of the Maternal Instinct*, p. xx.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid p. 152.

<sup>91</sup> Beauvoir, p 526.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid p. 526.

### 3. The Argument from Nature

#### 3.i) Breastfeeding and its Relationship with Motherhood

Probably the most powerful and certainly the most vocal argument surrounding biological imperatives, is that of breastfeeding, which shows little or no sign of abating even in modern day society. It is virtually impossible to ignore the historical significance that has been accorded to breastfeeding in relation to good mothering. Rousseau argued that a mother's affection for her baby was conditional to upholding a regular need to discharge her milk through the baby suckling and as a result this habit created a bond between mother and baby. And indeed, the correlation Rousseau highlighted between good mothering and breastfeeding remains as resolute today as it became in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, as Badinter points out, 'if the production of milk is stopped, what happens to mother love'?<sup>93</sup> But long before Rousseau, even as early as Plutarch (46-120AD), Badinter makes clear that maternal nursing was seen as a law of nature which, for a moralist such as Rousseau, implied a divine law in which God should not be disobeyed.

Indeed, the crux of Badinter's argument in *The Myth of Motherhood* is founded upon breastfeeding statistics. In 1780 Lieutenant Lenoir of the Paris police documented that only 1,000 of the 21,000 babies born each year in Paris were being breast-fed by their mothers. The children of the privileged few families were being breast-fed by live-in wet nurses; the remainder were 'taken from their mothers'<sup>94</sup> and sent to wet nurses outside Paris. Badinter argues that if a maternal instinct existed, the social trend to employ wet nurses would be far less common. However, I argue that these statistics are too reductive. Firstly,

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<sup>93</sup> Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical overview of the Maternal Instinct*, p. 136.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xix.

Badinter is underestimating the power of cultural determinism. That is to say, if the majority of women are using the services of wet nurses, then this will have a profound effect on social behaviour. Secondly, Badinter provides no evidence from these mothers; their 'voice' is not documented. It is not possible to ascertain whether their decision not to breastfeed was a consequence of social and cultural coercion rather than a decision made of their volition. In her book, *Mother Nature: Natural Selection & The Female of the Species*, anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy is wary of Badinter's 1780 Parisian breastfeeding statistics. Blaffer Hrdy advises that it was often the men who intervened between mother and child and organized the wet nurse. Indeed, many mothers had no choice in the matter as they had to continue working, and breastfeeding a child was not a luxury she could consider.<sup>95</sup> In a historical context, women are just as likely to experience a sense of guilt for choosing to breastfeed as women of today who choose not to.

However, from an evolutionary perspective, breastfeeding was central to a baby's survival. As socio-biologist, Alice Rossi clarifies, 'a crying infant stimulates the secretion of oxytocin in the mother, which triggers uterine contractions and nipple erection preparatory to nursing'.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, Rossi argues that this cluster of characteristics suggest the presence of unlearned responses. Furthermore, she provides evidence of a study undertaken which focuses on the importance of early contact with the baby in connection with levels of maternal responsiveness. However, as Rossi clarifies this is not to argue that there is no learned component. Most important for this research and its relationship with

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<sup>95</sup> Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mother Nature: Natural Selection & The Female of the Species*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999) p. 352.

<sup>96</sup> Alice S Rossi, 'A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting', *Daedalus*, Vol. 106, No. 2, The Family (Spring 1977) p. 6.

the question of breastfeeding is Rossi's acknowledgement that, contrary to Rousseau, these examples are 'just one aspect of learning how to relate to the infant'.<sup>97</sup> As I stated in my Introduction, when considering maternal instinct, although my focus is on the child bearing mother, it is essential that the boundaries are extended to include those women who are not yet mothers, non-birth mothers, women who cannot breastfeed and also those women who just simply choose not to. Badinter argues in her 2006 text *Dead End Feminism*, although Beauvoir stopped short of defining woman through motherhood, what she did achieve was to put biology in its 'rightful place',<sup>98</sup> that is, second.

As Badinter laments in her most recent work *The Conflict* (2010), 21<sup>st</sup> century motherhood has seen a return to naturalism through ecology, economic downturn and a (re)call to breastfeeding. She argues that by the 1970's nursing had largely been abandoned in favour of bottle feeding. Having been liberated by contraception, abortion rights and powdered milk in the last century, Badinter claims women are experiencing a period of regression whilst simultaneously striving for equality within the work place. In terms of regression concerning motherhood, she argues that there is a call for a return to 'good old Mother Nature',<sup>99</sup> maintaining that ecology has precipitated a submission to the laws of nature. As a result, women are being coerced back to the home through ties such as breastfeeding. This pressure to do so is fueled by groups such as La Leche League, which originated in the USA but is now a global organization, promoting the importance of breastfeeding for a child's development and to deepen the bond between mother and child. Furthermore, La Leche League encourage

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid p. 27.

<sup>98</sup> Badinter, *Dead End Feminism*, (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2007) p. 22.

<sup>99</sup> Badinter, *The Conflict*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011) p. 4.

mothers to breastfeed beyond the first three months of a child's life. The result of groups such as these is that it can lead women to believe that they are failures or not 'good enough'<sup>100</sup> mothers if they do not choose to breastfeed or if they do so for a short period of time. So, as Badinter questions in *The Conflict*: 'How can one put an end to the inequalities of salaries and of roles if from the start woman is assigned an instinct that predisposes her to stay at home?'<sup>101</sup>

### 3.ii) The Family Paradigm

Furthermore, Badinter makes reference in both *The Myth of Motherhood* and *The Conflict* to Alice Rossi's work on the concept of the existing family paradigm. Rossi executes a study on communal living as an alternative model to the nuclear family because her research acknowledges that the latter has a tendency to 'oppress its members'.<sup>102</sup> Rossi concludes that although there is evidence to suggest that the family may hinder female progress, studies undertaken on communal living that involve the sharing of children have revealed that this arrangement creates emotional difficulties for many parents, 'particularly the mothers of children [for] very rarely did a mother allow a male communal member to invoke sanctions with her children'.<sup>103</sup> So for mothers, although communal living may enable equality, it is problematic too as it leads to a sense of disconnection from their children. The result of Rossi's research corroborates the attachment to their children of which both Cusk and Moss write and which we shall consider in Chapter Two and Three of this thesis.

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<sup>100</sup> A term associated with child psychologist D W Winnicott and his work on motherhood.

<sup>101</sup> Badinter, *The Conflict*, p. 103,

<sup>102</sup> Rossi, p. 1.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid* p. 15.

## Section Two

### 4. Maternal Ambivalence

Thus, the attachment between mother and child is fundamental to understanding maternal ambivalence. Generally speaking, maternal ambivalence is a less complex subject because its existence is unequivocal. In Chapter Three we explore maternal ambivalence alongside *Night Waking*, a novel which deftly illustrates how a mother's reaction to situations are wholly dependent on her sense of being at that given moment. LaChance Adams highlights it would be incomplete to consider maternal ambivalence as purely an emotional reaction, aligning it with Martin Heidegger's concept of *Befindlichkeit*, which can be translated as mood, but more literally means "how you find yourself in the world".<sup>104</sup> That is to say, how you find yourself extends beyond the internal state and focuses on external forces such as your relationship to people, events and facts. So, for example, as Sara Ruddick argues in her essay 'Thinking Mothers/Conceiving Birth', a mother's emotion can vary within the course of a day and this will depend on the 'behaviour of her children, the space, time, and services available to her, and myriad other desires and frustrations'.<sup>105</sup> In more binary terms, Adrienne Rich quotes from her journal from November 1960 describing ambivalence as 'the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves and blissful gratification'.<sup>106</sup> For Cusk and Moss, as we shall explore in Chapters Two and Three respectively, the emotion they feel for their children at any given time is predicated on re-aligning

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<sup>104</sup> Sarah LaChance Adams, *Mad Mothers, Bad Mothers & What a "Good" Mother Would Do: The Ethics of Ambivalence* (NY and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2014) p. 35.

<sup>105</sup> Sara Ruddick, 'Thinking Mothers/Conceiving Birth' in *Representations of Motherhood* eds. Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan (NY: Yale, 1994) p. 34.

<sup>106</sup> Rich, p. 21.

themselves with this uninvited attachment they have with their children, making neither separation nor togetherness wholly satisfactory.

Parker explains that maternal ambivalence is a concept employed by psychoanalysis to describe contradictory impulses and emotions towards the same person but not '*mixed feelings*'<sup>107</sup> as the word can often imply but at the same time making clear that, as Klein highlighted, ambivalence is not static: the oscillation between love and hate is constant. But rather than considering these feelings as one or the other, Cusk in *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* and Moss' *Night Waking* describe their ambivalence in much more mixed or *blurred* terms. Their feelings of love and hate appear to overlap. Indeed, for both writers their vacillation between love and hate is aimed at their own equivocal position concerning their children. It is an unparalleled existential (as well as social) feeling of needing to be close to their children. This sensation is overwhelming, appearing to transcend their volition as they impose this status of closeness upon themselves. For example, Cusk describes time alone, away from motherhood and reunited with her former self:

my reunion with freedom, so longed for, was panicked and unsatisfactory, and not only because my daughter exerted on me so strong a magnetism from her rug down below that I would emerge from my study every few minutes to sit on the stairs and listen for signs of distress. There was something brutal in our separation.<sup>108</sup>

And indeed, Moss, through her protagonist Anna Bennett, also exhibits signs of vented ambivalence toward motherhood. She resents the bond between herself and her children to the extent that this becomes her sole focus, not only within the body of her research as an academic writer on attachment theory, but spilling over into her own lived experience. She explores the bond between

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<sup>107</sup> Rozsika Parker, *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence* (London: Virago, 1995) p. 5.

<sup>108</sup> Cusk, p. 157.



herself and her children. This blurring of love and hate is captured in the same paragraph when Anna argues that

it is unnatural to go away from your own children. It hurts. [...] Why do I imagine that paid employment is the road to fulfillment? Because I know that motherhood is not, that's why.<sup>109</sup>

This extract from *Night Waking* is succinctly highlighting two factors which can be attributed to maternal ambivalence. The first is a visceral and involuntary disruption of self brought about by giving birth to (an)other. The second is woman's pursuit of autonomy versus motherhood. Indeed, as LaChance Adams claims, this clash between mother and child 'frequently acts as a rupture within the woman herself between her competing desires to nurture and to be independent'.<sup>110</sup> In response to this, in Chapter Three, rather than limit this subject in terms of love and hate, I intend to explore maternal ambivalence as it presents itself in this more blurred inter-dependent organic state.

In addition to this, LaChance Adams argues that it is assumed that maternal ambivalence is first and foremost an atypical problem to overcome. Indeed, Parker claims it is not ambivalence itself, which is the problem, but the way in which a mother deals with the anxiety and guilt it provokes. She maintains that the 'suffering of ambivalence'<sup>111</sup> can promote thought and in so doing, this thinking about the baby/child 'is arguably the single most important aspect of mothering'.<sup>112</sup> So, mothers need to 'achieve' ambivalence in relation to their children. Indeed, Parker states that maternal ambivalence is a positive feeling for the relationship between mother and child and she quotes from research carried out in Australia, highlighting that every time mothers in the group came

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<sup>109</sup> Moss, p. 353.

<sup>110</sup> LaChance Adams, p. 6.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

into contact with guilt over deep ambivalent feelings they began to demonstrate new initiatives and resourcefulness to overcome them. It appears that the co-existence of love and hate for the baby paradoxically protects the baby from the mother's despair and forces them to find solutions. However, this presents a *conscious* decision to alter one's attitude towards mothering, which is put in place as a result of ambivalence. That is to say, it is a strategy that the mother knowingly undertakes to ensure the safety of her child. Resolving the feeling of ambivalence is a considered decision and may not always be acted upon. Therefore, we are identifying two types of maternal ambivalence. One is a conscious decision which will be orchestrated through a mother's own ethical standing. The other, as we identified in the previous section, is unconscious and situated within a mother's maternal instinct.

#### 4.i) Maternal Ambivalence in relation to intersubjectivity

So, I am dividing maternal ambivalence into two sections. Firstly, and most importantly for this study, the focus will be on the concept of 'the rupture within the woman herself'.<sup>113</sup> That is to say, let us consider maternal ambivalence from a point of disruption of self, brought about by a sense of blurring of subjectivities between mother and child and the consequent impact this has on woman's autonomy. Considering this alongside the work of LaChance Adams will lay a foundation for Chapter Two, when we consider maternal instinct in relation to Cusk's memoir, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*. Secondly, the attention will be turned to ambivalence in relation to ethics. LaChance Adams's abiding

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<sup>113</sup> LaChance Adams, p. 6.

argument is that a mother's ethical orientation will influence the way in which she mothers.

So, in order to gain an understanding of this inter-connection between self and other, that is mother and child, I have taken a phenomenological approach guided by LaChance Adams. Her work draws upon the writings of Simone de Beauvoir and Iris Marion Young, who in turn have based their arguments on the work of philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). These writings we shall return to in Chapter Two when considering maternal instinct alongside Cusk's memoir. But in relation to ambivalence, using Merleau-Ponty's work, LaChance Adams focuses her attention on attaining a status of singular subjectivity for the mother. She attempts to achieve this using Merleau-Ponty's notion of dehiscence or rupture of the *flesh*. Merleau-Ponty argues that each person experiences a pre-reflective coherence between themselves, the world and others. He considers all things of the world to be of one *sensible* flesh, 'that the presence of the world is precisely the presence of its flesh to my flesh, that I "am of the world" and that I am not it'.<sup>114</sup> Flesh is sensible because it can be perceived by the senses, smelled, touched, seen and so on and it is also capable of perception through use of the nose, ears, brain etc, but they are also 'apertures upon a world of which they are also part'.<sup>115</sup> By that he means that in order for a being to perceive, it is the flesh of the world that enables him to do so: being cannot exist in itself. Also inherent in the flesh is a gap, or *écart*,<sup>116</sup> a dehiscence

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<sup>114</sup> Merleau Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1987) p. 127.

<sup>115</sup> LaChance Adams, p.118.

<sup>116</sup> Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible*, describes *écart* as not 'to reach oneself, it is on the contrary to escape oneself, to be ignorant of oneself, the self in question is by divergence (*d'écart*).' p. 249.

LaChance Adams describes the term *écart* is used by Merleau-Ponty to describe how reversibility between oneself and the world cannot be fully realized. They eclipse at the moment of realization. That is to say, reversibility never achieves complete or harmonious unity. There will always be a slight difference (*écart*) between two bodies which prevent them ever being completely unified, p. 110.

between the sentient and the sensed, between self and others which provides a necessary separation. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty states that 'this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world *reflects* it', as it '*encroaches*' upon my world, 'overlapping' but not totally reversible.<sup>117</sup> Rather, he describes it as an in-betweenness (*Einfühlung*) of perceiving-perceived. LaChance Adams describes it as, '[w]e are of the same flesh, suffused with one another, even while we remain distinct'.<sup>118</sup> As she explains, without this divergence between self and other, the world would lack the objectivity endowed by this intersubjectivity.

But, to take LaChance Adams' argument one stage further, for the purpose of this study, I want to focus on this in-betweenness, the *écart*, and argue that, in isolation, maternity is an exception to Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh. Whereas Merleau-Ponty, according to Irigaray, assumes a gender neutral body 'unmarked by race, class or sexuality',<sup>119</sup> I argue that it is essential that we distinguish between the physiological imperatives of different genders when we are considering maternity in relation to intersubjectivity and thinking about Merleau-Ponty's dehiscence of flesh. Indeed, Luce Irigaray critiques Merleau-Ponty's lack of sexual difference arguing that

fecundation is not mutual; we do not diverge from a common flesh. The child comes from the mother's flesh, and this indicates the source of all difference – sexual difference.<sup>120</sup>

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So, if we apply *écart* to the mother/baby dyad it presents this sense of oneness that Cusk, Lymer, Young and Kristeva speak of and yet they can never be completely unified. As the chapter on Cusk will attest to, this relationship between subject and object that Merleau-Ponty outlines is fundamental to understanding the lack of autonomy a mother may experience during pregnancy, childbirth and early motherhood. It is possible to also ascribe *écart* to the state of alterity experienced by mothers. In this instance however, LaChance, is considering the consequence of *écart* occurring between mothers.

<sup>117</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 248.

<sup>118</sup> LaChance Adams, p. 120.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid* p. 125.

<sup>120</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'The Invisible of the Flesh: A Reading of Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 'The Intertwining-the Chiasm'. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Tr. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C Gill (Cornell University Press, USA, 1993) p. 151-185. cited in LaChance Adams p. 124.

Therefore, the common flesh is actualized between mother and foetus and the *écart* or gap between perceiving and the perceived becomes less defined creating a heightened sense of intersubjective blurring. The question is how the mother perceives herself in this instance, for her subjectivity is compromised to a greater extent than Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of intersubjective relations. As LaChance Adams highlights, 'mothers often feel as though their own desires are directed against themselves when they are in opposition to their child's needs and wishes'.<sup>121</sup> Hence, from the mother's point of view, pregnancy, childbirth and early childhood are grounded in ambivalence.

Furthermore, as Parker highlights, promoting a healthy state of maternal ambivalence poses a problem because our culture allows for flexibility in all things other than mothering. Indeed, she maintains that Western society provides no rituals so a mother must rely on mirroring other mothers. Rather than it being reassuring, this process of mirroring can leave mothers feeling insecure, competitive and unhappy. Indeed, if one considers the mirror stage described by Lacan,<sup>122</sup> nuances to this process occur if considered in Merleau-Ponty's terms. That is to say, as Helen Fielding argues in 'Envisioning the Other: Lacan and Merleau-Ponty on Subjectivity', this dehiscence or *écart* between people parallels the *écart* between different senses.<sup>123</sup> So, for example, the *écart*, which Merleau-Ponty describes between touching and touched,<sup>124</sup> creates a blurring between subject and object. But if otherness brings about a sense of alienation and familiarity simultaneously, which Merleau-Ponty claims that it

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid p. 36.

<sup>122</sup> a process in the pre-Oedipal stage, in which the human subject's ego is constituted through a process of identification with images: the image of the self as other (mirror image). See , eds S N Garner, C Kahane and M Sprengnether, *The (M)other Tongue* (Cornell University Press, London, 1985) p. 218.

<sup>123</sup> LaChance Adams, p. 129.

<sup>124</sup> A more extensive explanation will be provided in the next chapter.

will, for a mother to mirror another mother can only result in a sense of ambivalence.

Furthermore, Debra Bergoffen argues that there is a unidirectional causality between the pregnant mind and body. That is to say ‘that the pregnant body’s generosity inclines the mother herself toward generosity’.<sup>125</sup> However, LaChance Adams is skeptical of this point of view, echoing Beauvoir’s observations concerning the mother’s reaction to her pregnancy and citing Caroline Lundquist’s research concerning unwanted pregnancies, which will be considered further in Chapter Two. Lundquist states that in denied pregnancies ‘normal symptoms’ of pregnancy such as morning sickness and weight gain are suppressed or reduced, which suggests that the mother must consciously acknowledge the pregnancy in order for it to take its typical course.<sup>126</sup> So, maternal munificence, both physically and mentally, may well manifest when the mother’s reaction to her situation is a positive one. But what is of real interest here is that Lundquist’s work implies a reciprocal cognition between mother and baby in utero. This theory of reciprocity by Lundquist feeds directly into Jane Lymer’s dialectical phenomena in her doctoral thesis, which I explore further in Chapter Two.

#### 4.ii) Maternal ambivalence in relation to ethics

So, having considered ambivalence via maternal intersubjectivity, it remains necessary to explore external forces in order to highlight how easily a mother’s experience of intersubjectivity can be so readily masked, disrupted or

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<sup>125</sup> Debra Bergoffen, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities* (Albany, NY, 1997) cited in LaChance Adams, *Mad Mothers, Bad Mothers & What A “Good” Mother Would Do* p. 168.

<sup>126</sup> Caroline Lundquist, ‘Being torn: Toward a Phenomenology of Unwanted Pregnancy’, *Hypatia* 23.3 (2008) pp 136-155 in LaChance Adams, p.169.

overshadowed. LaChance Adams highlights Beauvoir's consideration of social and material conditions of our ethical relations. Beauvoir argues that 'a person's ethical standing is indicated by how she negotiates the *ambiguity*<sup>127</sup> between her independence and her responsibility to others'.<sup>128</sup> She maintains that a mother's attitude is defined by her situation and the way she accepts it. Citing an extract from Cusk's autobiography, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, Baraitser corroborates LaChance Adams' commonly felt experience of having to choose between one's own needs and that of the child, which in turn creates an ethical dilemma between being a mother and being herself:

To succeed in being one means to fail at being the other. The break between mother and self was less clean than I had imagined [...] I never feel myself to have progressed beyond this division. I merely learn to legislate for two states, and to secure the border between them.<sup>129</sup>

Indeed, LaChance Adams goes as far to say that because of the valid conflicts that exist between the interests of a mother and that of the child, these tensions inherent to mothering provide an instructive case for the more general subject of care ethics. She views the dependence of others on our selves as 'simultaneously psychologically threatening and necessary for our full humanity', describing children as the 'primal parasite',<sup>130</sup> making this dynamic undeniably visible.

## **Conclusion**

This Chapter considers maternal instinct within its historical context and attempts to 'de-naturalise the natural attitude' in relation to motherhood.<sup>131</sup>

What has become clear is the universal imperatives surrounding the term

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<sup>127</sup> my emphasis

<sup>128</sup> Sarah LaChance Adams, p.11.

<sup>129</sup> Extract from Rachel Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, (Fourth Estate, London, 2001) p.57 cited by Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* (Routledge, Sussex, 2009) p. 50,

<sup>130</sup> LaChance Adams, p.10.

<sup>131</sup> Gail Weiss, 'Can We De-Naturalize the Natural Attitude?', The George Washington University, 2016, p. 1.

'maternal instinct' are unreliable. The purpose of including Plato and Jean-Jacques Rousseau with regard to maternal instinct is, firstly, because their writings are considered two of the most seminal works concerning family. Secondly, and most relevantly for this study, it highlights how Plato's concept of society, where men and women are considered equal, is distorted by Rousseau despite the fact that he founded his theories upon Plato's *The Republic*.

Maternal instinct is this irreconcilable sensation of attachment to (an)other whilst recognizing the loss of singular subjectivity, the result of which is ambivalence, suggesting that motherhood is rooted in conflict. By its very 'nature', therefore, this inherent ambivalence releases motherhood from the confines of having a pre-disposition to caring and nurturing. Nevertheless, the maternal instinct and how it may manifest (if at all) is wholly reliant on how it intersects with cultural and social forces. As I will explore in the next Chapter on Cusk's text *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, Iris Marion Young and Jane Lymer draw upon the work of Merleau-Ponty to clarify their position on experiential intersubjectivity between mother and child. Cusk herself writes about motherhood in such a way as to provide a springboard for re-defining maternal instinct, collapsing the binaries of its (non)existence and enabling it to be considered in terms of a blurred intersubjectivity, highlighting the impact this has on a mother's autonomy.



## Chapter Two

### Rachel Cusk: The Blurring Effect

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter I revised the definition of maternal instinct and explored maternal ambivalence, linking and highlighting the relationship between the two. In this chapter, I discuss them as co-joined terms, blurring their boundaries to illustrate a correlation between the two. In so doing, it more accurately depicts the experience of maternal intersubjectivity that Rachel Cusk describes in her autobiography *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* (2001) and which is echoed and corroborated by Iris Marion Young, Adrienne Rich, Julia Kristeva and Jane Lymer. Cusk writes a persuasive narrative persistently questioning and challenging whether what is deemed 'natural' is in fact natural. The experience of (an)other growing inside her body and giving birth to it, has profound consequences on her own sense of being. The literal experience of going from one to two persons and the separation anxiety and confusion she feels thereafter is, I argue, fundamental to understanding motherhood. Cusk is preoccupied with the literal blurring from one unit into two during childbirth and the impact this has on the sense of self; her feeling of being neither one self nor two, describing it as 'I know neither what it is to be myself nor to be a mother'.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, this sensation of feeling separated or alienated from herself and the world around her acts as a point of departure from which to explore Cusk's text.

As I argued in Chapter One, there is no legitimate foundation to which we can refer in order to ascertain whether cultural influences may be of greater or lesser influence on motherhood than woman's pre-destined biological ability to

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<sup>132</sup>Rachel Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008) p. 61.

bear children. The status of motherhood is wholly reliant on the individual and how her being in the world engages with social, cultural and demographic influences. It reinforces Beauvoir's testament to motherhood that the 'mother's attitude depends on her total situation and her reaction to it [...] and this will be highly variable'.<sup>133</sup> As Cusk's text illustrates, her experiences of motherhood originate deep within her sense of being, and this manifestation would suggest that it derives from the ontological as well as any cultural domain. Unlike most mothers who just 'get on with it', Cusk painstakingly documents and explores each and every stage in the phenomena of becoming a mother, a blurring of self and not-self. It is this process of reflection which, I argue, reveals a connection between mother and child that simply cannot be experienced by men. This is not to say that men are not able to make as good a parent as the mother. What I am stating is that the physical connection between mother and child makes the relationship more complex and visceral, particularly for the mother, as it is bound up with her own identity. For example, in Rachel Cusk's account of her separation from her partner in her 2012 memoir *Aftermath: On Marriage and Separation*, the discussion of custody of the children is raised. Despite her partner being the main child carer, she describes her maternalism as primitive; 'the children belong to me',<sup>134</sup> articulates Cusk. This sense of ownership transcends notions of caring or material value, and instead is a result of them being a physical extension of her self. That is, they were once a part of her: 'a person now exists who is me, but who is not confined to my body. She appears to be some sort of colony'.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, initially Cusk *dismisses* the feelings she is

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<sup>133</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* p. 526.

<sup>134</sup> Cusk, *Aftermath: On Marriage and Separation* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2012) p. 19.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid* p. 101.

experiencing with her new born child as 'innate'<sup>136</sup> but then questions if it is not innateness: 'how could I pretend to be what I already was'?<sup>137</sup> Hence I chose Cusk's text to explore maternal intersubjectivity because she deftly distinguishes between inner and outer forces as far as it is possible to do so. Her narrative resonates with Moss in that she too consciously attempts to separate her own instinctive behaviour from that of learned behaviour. However, Moss focuses on the realm of motherhood and the prescriptive practices that accompany it, most significantly the day-to-day caring for children. Conversely, Cusk purposefully distances all other human existence from the narrative, so that the focal point is, at all times, just herself and her baby, a 'composite creature'.<sup>138</sup> She explains in her introduction how she literally brackets through 'omission'<sup>139</sup> the people with whom she lives and the other relationships surrounding the relationship with her child. Thus, she amplifies the distinction between unlearned patterns of behaviour with behaviour that becomes corrupted, thereby illustrating the power of cultural forces and its potential for overriding unlearned behaviour patterns. Indeed, in 21<sup>st</sup> century Western society, women are bombarded with conflicting portrayals of what a mother *ought* to be. Within her text, Cusk situates herself as the centerpiece and writes an existential narrative on her experience of becoming a mother. She positively and purposefully eschews social norms associated with pregnancy and motherhood, instead writing her own experience whilst running a parallel narrative on what she *ought* to be doing or feeling, according to parenting manuals, National Childbirth Trust (NCT), breast feeding clinics, Government literature on pregnancy and, lastly, a

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<sup>136</sup> Cusk, *Aftermath: On Marriage and Separation* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012) p. 19.

<sup>137</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* p. 18.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid* p. 99.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid* p. 10.

parent and baby music group. Cusk consciously discriminates between the two, highlighting that ambivalence towards motherhood is not included in the more official narratives. She offers a distinction between the body as it is lived in sensations, perceptions and emotions and the body as it is thematized through social construction.

Therefore, this Chapter is divided into two sections. The first section will consider maternal intersubjectivity from a point of unlearned behaviour which will illustrate the relationship between instinct and ambivalence between mother and baby, attempting to exclude all outside forces. The second section will identify how motherhood can become counter-intuitive, coerced into 'undoing' unlearned behaviour and pursuing a more political agenda. So, for Section One, I draw upon the accounts of intersubjectivity set out in Iris Marion Young's essay 'Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation'<sup>140</sup> and Jane Lymer's 2010 doctoral thesis 'The Phenomenology of the Maternal-Foetal Bond' because their descriptions, although nuanced, best replicate those set out by Cusk. By chronicling their conclusions alongside Cusk's experience of pregnancy and childbirth, I demonstrate how a blurring occurs between subject (mother) and object (baby). Both Young and Lymer adopt various approaches using French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of intersubjectivity. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty uses the term intersubjectivity to describe how being in the world is neither completely subjective nor completely objective; both perceiving and perceived *by* others, the embodied subject is neither completely separate from the world full of other embodied subjects and neither completely united with that world; rather, intersubjectivity is something 'in-between'

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<sup>140</sup> Iris Marion Young, 'Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation', *On Female Body Experience "Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays"* (Oxford: OUP, 2005) pp. 46-61.

subjectivity and objectivity. Although for Merleau-Ponty this status of inbetweenness is ungendered, I argue that the intensity of this blurring is significantly heightened during pregnancy and early motherhood. In this instance, experiences of subject and object overlapping create greater uncertainty as to where the subject ends and the object begins, and this sensation *is* maternal instinct. Indeed, what defines this sensation as maternal instinct, distancing itself from ungendered explanations of intersubjectivity, is that its very process crosses the boundaries of perception into a physical reality in the shape of childbirth. Furthermore, as set out in Chapter One, I argue that this ontological standing of being subject and object simultaneously exposes itself to the world as maternal ambivalence. That is to say, maternal ambivalence is a consequence of maternal instinct.

Section Two will focus upon the split between subject and world. The reason for this is to highlight the power of external forces towards prescriptive notions of what motherhood should entail. Indeed, Cusk takes herself outside the preconceived perceptions of motherhood and explores ‘the strangeness’<sup>141</sup> in becoming a mother. She extends this sense of being ‘outside’ motherhood from a literal as well as figurative standpoint. Cusk rarely connects with the ‘outside’ world in this text, choosing instead to focus on her sense of self in relation to her baby, but when she does engage with the world around her, she describes it as a ‘curious feeling that I no longer exist in synchronicity with time, but at a certain delay, like someone on the end of a transatlantic phone call’.<sup>142</sup> Cusk’s analysis concerning self and world will be considered alongside Kate Kilpatrick’s unpublished 2015 conference paper ‘A Phenomenology of the Pregnant Body:

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<sup>141</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* p. 5.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid* pp. 216-217.

The Anxiety of Expectation'. Before I embark on Section One, it is necessary to explore the form that Cusk adopts to convey her memoir and, secondly, to consider why it is that the first edition of the text received such a vitriolic response.

i) The Intertwining of Genres

The use of form in Cusk's text is similar to that which is adopted by other female cohorts<sup>143</sup> and she chooses the autobiography to convey her message. Cusk explores the lack of synchronicity with herself and the world by avoiding a chronological format, choosing instead to interweave chapter and theme so that rather than having coherent chapters from birth to a year old, the chapters focus on themes that shape and mould her journey of self discovery in relation to motherhood. Thus, certain themes, such as self and world resonate throughout the text dropping in and out of the narrative. Indeed, Cusk intertwines her autobiographical writing and extracts from a selection of prose and poetry, serving to bring clarity to her own story through the use of allegory. For example, Cusk explores the consequence of sleep deprivation and how this plays tricks on the psyche. In *Moss*, we will see the physical manifestations that can prevail from sleep deprivation, but Cusk explores how a lack of sleep during the first year of her daughter's life blurs the boundaries between night and day, reality and perception. She compares her experience to that of the protagonist in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, who, like Cusk, learns to navigate her way through sleepless nights. Choosing *Jane Eyre*, a novel which straddles both the Realism and Romantic genres, is a considered decision for Cusk as not only does this

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<sup>143</sup> I refer to them by name and in more detail on pp. 60-61.

gothic novel refuse to be confined to one genre but Jane is often described as an imp or 'spirit'<sup>144</sup> implying that she is not of this world. Moreover, as Cusk highlights, for Jane Eyre, the dark represents a place where truth is revealed; it is a time when Helen Burns and other young girls die of starvation or when mad secret wives prowl the corridors.

The question this hybrid piece of writing precipitates is whether it can be considered as part of the realm of autobiography if it borrows from vicarious sources such as the novel. It appears that the writing refuses to be confined by genre, just as maternal instinct refuses to be confined by a name or an action. Cusk is in fact deliberately subverting the genre of autobiography in the same way that she is subverting the realm of motherhood, by exposing the duplicity in her head, which is reflected through her mixing of genre and form. Cusk's work can be read not only as a phenomenological enquiry but is also a tacit nod to modernist texts. As Bourne-Taylor and Mildenberg argue in *Phenomenology, Modernism and Beyond* (2010) argue:

both modernism and phenomenology steadfastly crystallize the same preoccupations concerning subjectivity; dislodging it from the hegemony of rationalism, realism and objectivity, they speak a crisis of values and scientific foundations that lead to a reappraisal of the self.<sup>145</sup>

Cusk's writing has often been compared to that of Virginia Woolf.<sup>146</sup> Her novel, *Arlington Park* (2006) is a thinly veiled modern day re-writing of *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). James Lasdun writes: 'like Woolf, Cusk stakes everything on her ability to make a kind of stately, classical art out of the frictions and details of ordinary

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<sup>144</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London: Penguin, 1994) p. 203.

<sup>145</sup> *Phenomenology, Modernism and Beyond*, eds Carole Bourne-Taylor and Ariane Mildenberg (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2010) p. 5.

<sup>146</sup> Miranda Purves, 'Rachel Cusk on her new novel, The Bradshaw Variations', *Elle Magazine* (14 April 2010) <http://www.elle.com/culture/books/interviews/a11067/book-release> (accessed 23 May 2015) and Danielle Price, 'Mother Luck: A Review of A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother and The Lucky Ones', *Literary Mama* (February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2005) <http://www.literarymama.com/reviews/archives/2005/02> (accessed 23 May 2015).

life'.<sup>147</sup> In the Introduction to Virginia Woolf's essays in *Moments of Being*, which was first published in 1976 long after Woolf's death in 1941, Jeanne Shulkind describes the link between autobiography and fiction as 'when the physical, social self is transcended and the individual consciousness becomes an undifferentiated part of the greater whole'.<sup>148</sup> Woolf, in her essay 'A Sketch from the Past', contemplates what the entry-point for an autobiography should be. A voracious reader and advocate of the autobiography, she questions whether the structure should follow the chronology of life or, akin to her own and Cusk's autobiographical writing, 'the involuntary, arbitrary action of memory?'<sup>149</sup>

So, Cusk's use of modernist tools, alongside feminist theory, is an attempt to dislodge phallogentrism in relation to the history of the mother in order to explore subjectivity from the aspect of lived experience. Cusk chooses to focus on aspects of her life 'as a canvas upon which my theme, which is motherhood, may conveniently be illustrated'.<sup>150</sup> Moreover, in line with modernist thinking, large sections of the text consist of interior monologue and various chapters commence *in medias res*. This experimentation with form aptly reflects Cusk's impression that 'nothing'<sup>151</sup> had been written about motherhood at all. She attempts to write on this topic afresh and questions concerning agency come to the fore when discussing women's autobiography. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue in their Introduction to *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, 'how does a woman autobiographer negotiate a discursive terrain – autobiography – that

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<sup>147</sup> James Lasdun, *The Guardian* (16 September 2006) cited on back cover of Cusk, *Arlington Park* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006) and in an interview with Rachel Cusk by *Elle Magazine*, journalist Miranda Purves writes that people often compare Rachel Cusk to Virginia Woolf, 'to me, you have a similar desire to use language as a thing in itself', 'Rachel Cusk on her new Novel, *The Bradshaw Variations*', 14 April 2010, <http://www.elle.com/culture/books/interviews/a11067/book-release-a-life-s-work-on-becoming-a-mother-by-rachel-cusk/> [accessed 23 May 2015]

<sup>148</sup> Jeanne Shulkind, *Moments of Being* essays by Virginia Woolf (London: Grafton, 1989) p. 18.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid* p. xiii.

<sup>150</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, p. 11.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid* p. 10.



has been until recently a primarily masculine domain?'<sup>152</sup> Therefore, mapping out a women's narrative within a masculine framework requires experimentation. Cusk's narrative framework has fluid boundaries, leaning on extracts from her favourite childhood novels, which act as metaphors to extrapolate meaning into the sensations of self that she is experiencing. Her inclusion of these novels may be out of nostalgia for her former self or it could be that it is a lack of language afforded to women's experience which has led her to use extracts from literature in her autobiography. For the reader, it gives the impression that language itself is a barrier, as far as describing maternal experience is concerned, and therefore the borrowing of stories is necessary in order to crystallize understanding. But the texts she draws upon are very specific and her inclusion of them, as Cusk herself argues, illustrate the particular transformation of sensibility that is a consequence of motherhood. Analogy, with its transformative powers, paradoxically serves this purpose. Françoise Lionnet argues that as women are historically silenced subjects, the autobiography enables them to create "braided" texts of many voices that speak their cultural locations dialogically.<sup>153</sup> It is for this very reason that Cusk's text is a hybrid but the confessional autobiography enables her to navigate and to capture the experience of being a maternal body, enabling the experience to 'speak' for itself.

Moreover, the need to express oneself through use of anecdotal material appears to be ubiquitous when women are writing on the subject of motherhood.

Simone de Beauvoir, Iris Marion Young, Adrienne Rich, Betty Friedan, Jane

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<sup>152</sup> Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds), *Women, Autobiography, Theory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998) p. 23.

<sup>153</sup> Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (1989) cited in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds), *Women, Autobiography, Theory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998) p. 12.

Lazarre<sup>154</sup> and Anne Roiphe<sup>155</sup> all resort to stories of themselves and sometimes of others. Similarly, as Sarah Heinämaa highlights, Beauvoir's use of a great number of texts by various female authors enables her to question the neutrality of the descriptions offered by her fellow, predominantly male, philosophers. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir includes extracts from novels by Virginia Woolf, Helen Deutsch, Sophie Tolstoy, George Sand, Colette and Madame de Stael in order to reinforce and shed light upon her own convictions. Moreover, Cixous argues that there is an intrinsic connection between the philosophical and the literary, in that philosophy conveys meaning and literature is under the command of it. But, the form that Cusk adopts, this intertwining of genres, liberates her writing from the threshold of philosophical discourse which has gone before, and enables her to consider motherhood anew. Understanding the power of history, so often re-told in story format, Cixous uses the analogy of the fairy tale refrain *Once upon a time* and the associations made within these stories of the female protagonist being put to sleep and awoken by princes. She uses this metaphor to argue woman's place within society, that '[m]ost women who have awakened remember having slept'<sup>156</sup> and this is the case with Cusk: she writes anew but without forgetting the framework in which motherhood is contained by society.

But at the same time, it is necessary to consider whether Cusk's experimental form undermines or enhances an authentic representation of her experience, but then again, perhaps this is not her prime objective. The power of Cusk's carefully crafted piece, an artifice woven from many different sources and strands, is the immediacy of chronicling the sensation of becoming a mother.

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<sup>154</sup> Jane Lazarre, *The Mother Knot* (London: Duke University Press, 1997). Originally published in 1976.

<sup>155</sup> Anne Roiphe, *A Mother's Eye: Motherhood and Feminism* (London: Virago Press, 1997).

<sup>156</sup> Helene Cixous, 'Sorties', *The Newly Born Woman* (London: I B Tauris & Co, 1996) p. 66.

While she may have made many edits to the final text, the instinctiveness of her experience is not lost in the artistic embellishment and her experience of pregnancy and motherhood are valorized in the works of Young, Lymer, Rich and Kristeva.

ii) 'I was only being honest' – A Voice of Dissent

This use of form caused a backlash amongst female readers after the first edition of *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* was released in 2001. The 2008 edition, which I refer to in this study, included an additional introduction, outlining her justification for writing against 'natural' motherhood. Cusk felt the need to justify her reasons for writing this book in response to the vitriol she received when it was first published, 'and most of these critics were women'.<sup>157</sup> It would appear that for a woman to voice ambivalence towards motherhood is to defy the laws of nature and to render her 'unnatural'. Cusk describes her ambivalence towards motherhood as a culmination of 'love and grief [which] have me in a tug-o-war'<sup>158</sup> and the feeling of a sense of loss of her former self which dissolves when she looks down at her daughter and 'a contrary wind of love gusts over [her]'.<sup>159</sup> Cusk takes great pains to counteract her ambivalence with descriptions of overwhelming love for her child and her separation anxiety, reaffirming Kilpatrick's argument that this stems from the conflict a woman has with society in deciding what is the 'right' way to mother. But this voice of anxiety is interpreted by Cusk's critics as an unnatural dislike and inability to mother, restricting their focus to her more negative meditations on adjusting to

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<sup>157</sup> Rachel Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, , p. 4.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid p. 145.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid p. 144.

motherhood. For example, it initiated a dialogue on the Mumsnet forum website for mothers chastising her for being 'so self-conscious and over-wrought it makes you want to pour a jug of water over her', 'living on a moral high ground', 'unhinged', 'hostile', 'judgmental', 'self-indulgent'<sup>160</sup> and 'confining her daughter to the kitchen like an animal'.<sup>161</sup> Cusk responds to this criticism stating 'I remain uneasy in the public places of motherhood – the school gate, the coffee circuit – where the skies can unexpectedly open and judgment rain down on one's head'.<sup>162</sup> In her 2008 Introduction, she defends her text claiming that the experience of parenthood is the 'primary disjuncture' between self and others and that her book was written for the person who values self discovery over institutional representation.

Cusk admits she was not prepared for the criticisms of the book, which were predominantly about her mothering rather than her writing skills; as Cusk herself says, 'I was cited everywhere as having said the unsayable'.<sup>163</sup> Still, journalist and author Lynn Barber argues that some women will be very grateful to Cusk for articulating their own worst feelings. Barber describes *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* as probably the most powerful book on motherhood ever written.<sup>164</sup> In an article by Rachel Cusk defending *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* in *The Guardian* in March 2008 aptly entitled 'I was only being honest', she argues that there is a contemporary crisis of feminism. Highlighting the holes in feminist discourse concerning motherhood merely serves to emphasize that a career is the only measure of parity between genders. Moreover, Cusk reinforces

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid pp. 1-3.

<sup>161</sup> Rachel Cusk, 'I was only being honest', *The Guardian* (21 March 2008) <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/mar/21/biography.women>. (accessed 23 May 2015).

<sup>162</sup> Rachel Cusk on the hostile reaction to *A Life's Work* 25 March 2008, [http://www.mumsnet.com/talk/in\\_the\\_news/501274-rachel\\_cusk](http://www.mumsnet.com/talk/in_the_news/501274-rachel_cusk), (accessed 23 May 2015).

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Lynn Barber, 'The Interview: Rachel Cusk', *The Observer* (August 30<sup>th</sup> 2009) <http://lexisnexis.com.chain.kent.ac.uk/nexis> (accessed 7 April 2014).

the fact that motherhood, as it is lived, is personal, private and individual and as a result 'deeply undervalued'.<sup>165</sup> It is difficult to fully comprehend what the underlying fear amongst women is if the sanctity of motherhood is weakened by the voice of maternal ambivalence. I can only conclude, therefore, that if pregnancy is considered to be rooted in ontology, its historical narrative has ensured that for women to voice motherhood in ambivalent terms would be digressing from what is deemed 'natural'. The consequence of this therefore is reluctance for women to voice any discord towards it.

Furthermore, for many of her critics, Cusk's approach to her writing overshadows her strive for the authentic, as their preoccupation is with her solipsism, a mode associated with Woolf's work, which, one could argue, is essential in the pursuit of honesty. *The Sunday Times* journalist Camilla Long describes Cusk's text of 'self-absorption and fearlessness as an excoriating account of pregnancy and motherhood.'<sup>166</sup> However, Kristeva provides a more measured interpretation of narcissistic tendencies in writing, when she argues that in fact, when faced with social norms, 'literature reveals a certain knowledge and sometimes the truth itself about an otherwise repressed, nocturnal, secret and unconscious universe'<sup>167</sup> I argue that this is what Cusk has achieved.

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<sup>165</sup> Cusk, para. 12.

<sup>166</sup> Camilla Long, 'On *Aftermath* by Rachel Cusk', *The Sunday Times* (4 March 2012) <http://www.theominivore.com/camilla-long-on-aftermath-by-rachel-cusk/> (accessed 25 April 2015)..

<sup>167</sup> Kristeva, 'Women's Time', *The Kristeva Reader*, (ed) Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) p. 206.

## Section One

### 1.i) Motherbaby

Cusk describes mother and baby immediately after giving birth as motherbaby, a 'composite creature'<sup>168</sup> which in itself is an entirely sustainable unit. What Cusk is describing is maternal intersubjectivity. Moreover, Cusk describes this embodiment of motherbaby, comprising of neither one nor two but something in between, as a 'hope of returning us back to wholeness', resonating with Plato's *Symposium* concerning humans originally comprising of male, female and hermaphrodite until Zeus split them in two, a theme I explored in Chapter One.<sup>169</sup> Cusk's narrative on the bodily experience of blurring deflects onto the sense of being stripped of self, suspended in a liminal status, being neither the person she used to be nor the person she is on the way to becoming. Indeed, as I elucidated previously, for Cusk ownership of her children is a pre-requisite of motherhood; they 'belong'<sup>170</sup> to her. Mother and baby create their own reality, which is distinct and separate from the world around them and they subsist in close physical proximity. As far as Cusk is concerned, if these bodies are not united through feeding for any length of time, it brings about 'a sort of elemental anxiety for her'<sup>171</sup>. So, despite her dislike of breastfeeding (for a while, she pursues a line of enquiry in order to 'cure' her of this 'unnatural' sentiment), she recognizes that for her, breastfeeding is the link between the two of them; she literally 'waters her with love'.<sup>172</sup> Because of her uncertainty about their mutual distinctiveness, she contemplates how strange it must seem to a baby to be showered with love by day and put in a dark room on their own at night. She

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<sup>168</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, p. 99.

<sup>169</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, p. 109.

<sup>170</sup> Cusk, *Aftermath: On Marriage and Separation*, p. 19.

<sup>171</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, p. 109.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid* p. 141.

remarks that she is physically ‘plagued’<sup>173</sup> by their separation at night. So, this experience of blurring intersubjectivity between Cusk and her baby brings about, in tangible terms, Merleau-Ponty’s definition of intersubjectivity.

### 1.i) Intersubjectivity in Pregnancy

On the question of intersubjectivity, Maurice Merleau-Ponty compares the relation between self and other to a pregnancy. Although this reference to pregnancy acts as a metaphor, as Lisa Guenther points out, Merleau-Ponty writes in a way that ‘it seems we are all mothers regardless of sexual difference’,<sup>174</sup> his description of the other resembles Cusk’s own experience of intersubjectivity. He describes the other as ‘reproduced from me [...] a replica of myself [...] a wondering double’.<sup>175</sup> Guenther reinforces Merleau-Ponty’s desire to compare pregnancy and intersubjectivity by drawing upon an extract from his essay ‘Dialogue and the Perception of Other’:

To the infinity that was me something else still adds itself; a sprout shoots forth, I grow; I give birth, this other is made from my flesh and blood and yet is no longer me. How is that possible? How can the cogito emigrate beyond me, since it is me?<sup>176</sup>

Bearing in mind that his focus is to discern how emotion is an intersubjective phenomenon that is communicated through bodily engagement, here Merleau-Ponty attempts to distinguish between our selves in the subjective sense and the ways in which we appear to others objectively. However, Merleau-Ponty’s metaphor of pregnancy and the blending or blurring of the flesh resembles Cusk’s actual experience of pregnancy and childbirth. For example, Cusk

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid p. 188.

<sup>174</sup> Lisa Guenther, ‘Merleau-Ponty and the Sense of Sexual Difference’ (Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities, 16:2, pp. 19-33). p. 20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2011.591583> (accessed 9 June 2014).

<sup>175</sup> Ibid p. 21.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid p. 21.

describes her difficulty in distinguishing the baby as a separate unit exclaiming that 'I am apparently her mother'.<sup>177</sup> This pre-reflective ontological lack of distinction or the co-existence of subject and object, to which both Merleau-Ponty and Cusk refer, constitutes that of maternal instinct.

#### 1.ii) Dialectical Relationship between Mother and Baby

Moreover, Jane Lymer, in her 2010 doctoral thesis 'The Phenomenology of the Maternal-Foetal Bond' makes the bold statement that this point of 'blending' or 'blurring' between mother and baby commences in utero.<sup>178</sup> Although she does not discuss this blurring in terms of maternal instinct, I would argue that her interpretation of the bonding process between mother and baby is that of maternal instinct. Drawn from her own experience, Lymer argues that there is a dialectical relationship between mother and foetus and as a result, the bonding process begins in gestation within which transference of emotions can take place through the body schema. For Merleau-Ponty, the body schema is the manner in which humans can move knowledgeably, effectively and efficiently in the world without being reflectively aware of doing so. Lymer argues that there is a dialectic corporeal engagement, which has a developmental capacity in how it impacts upon the fetal body schema, which is not a biological unfolding but transpires through the individual foetus's experiential engagement within the maternal body schema. Therefore, she maintains that for mother and baby post-birth they are

*enacting* of a bond that is already highly developed or already experiencing difficulty. When a mother and infant come together at birth, they are continuing a process or taking the next step in a relationship that already

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<sup>177</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* p. 61.

<sup>178</sup> Jane Lymer, 'The Phenomenology of the Maternal-Foetal Bond' (Wollongong: University of Wollongong, 2010) p. 42.



has a history.<sup>179</sup>

If this is the case, then Lymer's observations merely serve to underwrite my own argument which focuses on the bonding process post-birth.

### 1.iii) Intersubjectivity – Splitting or Blurring?

In her essay 'Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation', Iris Marion Young also implies that there is a retrospective relationship in utero between mother and foetus by claiming that 'the split subject appears in the eroticism of pregnancy, in which the woman can experience an innocent narcissism fed by recollection of her repressed experience of her own mother's body'.<sup>180</sup> But her use of the word 'split' suggests a severing has taken place. I concur with Lymer that the subjective experience of pregnancy being one of maternal 'splitting' erroneously suggests a division or fracture to something that is already present or unified. Rather, Lymer argues, it is an 'emergence of an other through a process that requires a maternal subjective *extension* into new experiential realm and, quite literally, a new existence.'<sup>181</sup> Therefore, maternal subjectivity, as experienced during pregnancy, can be better understood not as a split, but as an overlapping, which in turn suggests a cross over of experiential subjectivity between the two but equally implies that it can never be possible to fully experience the situation of an other. Young reflects on her own pregnancy as,

feel[ing] a little tickle, a little gurgle in my belly. It is my feeling, my insides, and it feels somewhat like a gas bubble, but it is not; it is different, in another place, belonging to another, another that is nevertheless inside my body.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid p. 304.

<sup>180</sup> Iris Marion Young, 'Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation', *On Female Body Experience*, (Oxford: OUP, 2005) p. 47.

<sup>181</sup> Lymer, 'The Phenomenology of the Maternal-Foetal Bond', p. 160.

<sup>182</sup> Young, p. 49.

But Young's argument is problematic because she critiques Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of bodily existence by challenging his 'implicit assumptions of a unified subject', which, according to her, 'preserve[s] a distinction between subject and object' because he 'assume[s] the subject as a unity'.<sup>183</sup> In contrast to this, Young suggests that it is possible to experience the body as both subject and object but with the ability to distinguish between the two *except* in pregnancy when Young describes the two as indistinguishable. Ironically, however, Young seems to misrepresent Merleau-Ponty's notion of the 'unified subject' which implies a unified subject-object structure. For Merleau-Ponty the subjective and the objective aspects of lived experience are *always already* inseparable, meaning that there is always an overlapping or blending of subject and object in that the subject is at once a perceiving subject in the world and an object perceived *by* others. He describes the flesh of the world as follows: 'my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is a perceived), and moreover [...] this flesh of my body is shared by the world'.<sup>184</sup> Merleau-Ponty goes on to describe this inability to separate the 'inside' and the 'outside' by using as an example the hand which can both touch and be touched:

How does it happen that I give to my hands, in particular, that degree, that rate, and that direction of movement that are capable of making me feel the textures of the sleek and the rough? Between the exploration and what it will teach me, between my movements and what I touch, there must exist some relationship by principle, some kinship, according to which they are not only, like the pseudopods of the amoeba, vague and ephemeral deformations of the corporeal space, but the initiation to and the opening upon a tactile world. This can happen only if my hand, tangible, for my other hand, for example if it takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid pp. 47-48.

<sup>184</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968) p. 248.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid p. 133.

Working back from this, it seems to me that Young's emphasis on the splitting of the subject in pregnancy is actually more akin to a blurring. Young describes pregnancy as 'challenging the boundaries of my body experience by rendering fluid the boundary between what is within, herself, and what is outside, separate.'<sup>186</sup> Moreover, what is important here is that Young recognizes that her body is acting as both object and subject, recounting the birthing process as an 'extreme suspension of the bodily distinction between inner and outer'.<sup>187</sup> In *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: intertwining embodiment and alterity* (2004), Jack Reynolds quotes Merleau-Ponty by describing 'man as a knot of relations' when referring to the relationship of subject and object, in which he argues that to gain an understanding of the subject and avoid knowing nothing of the object, we must attain an understanding of 'the paradox of the transcendence in immanence':<sup>188</sup> 'inside and outside are inseparable' writes Merleau-Ponty, 'The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself'.<sup>189</sup> Childbirth therefore, is an actualization of intersubjectivity; it assumes a visual presence in the form of two beings co-joined by a cord, a cord that is eventually knotted when the two beings become physically, but not necessarily metaphysically, separated. Hence, this physical manifestation creates close ties with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology on the interdependence and 'mutual encroachment' of objects onto subjects.<sup>190</sup> So, if we consider Adrienne Rich's experience of pregnancy alongside this thinking, she argues that for women, they are attuned to both

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<sup>186</sup> Young, p. 49.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid p. 50.

<sup>188</sup> Jack Reynolds, *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: intertwining embodiment and alterity*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004) p. 24.

<sup>189</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962). p. 407.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid p. 27.

'inner' and 'outer' because for them 'the two are continuous, not polar'.<sup>191</sup> She indicates that the child that she carries for nine months can be defined neither as 'me' nor as 'not-me' and uses the word 'blurring'<sup>192</sup> to describe the boundary between body and body. Cusk reinforces this understanding of blurring, describing it as becoming 'briefly, both child and parent, both individual and other, and it was this rare and fleeting exposure of the psyche that I sought to capture in *A Life's Work*'.<sup>193</sup>

Moreover, the mind and body lose separateness too. As Cusk explains, 'in pregnancy, the life of the body and the life of the mind abandon the effort of distinctness and become *fatally* and historically intertwined [...] motherhood promises from its first page to be a longer and more difficult volume',<sup>194</sup> which reveals in Cusk a conspicuous move away from Cartesian thinking towards a more indistinct wholeness. Indeed, as Beauvoir argues, the bond in the individual that connects the physiological and the psychic life 'is the deepest enigma implied in the condition of being human, and this enigma is presented in its most disturbing form in woman'.<sup>195</sup> She questions that even women might find themselves 'quite indefinable'<sup>196</sup> because in this domain there is no truth and I would argue that this description is particularly relevant to the status of motherhood. Whether indeed women can be defined or explained is open to doubt by the very nature of this unfamiliarity and strangeness of self. But the inability to impose objective meaning upon this experience of maternal instinct does not exclude it from existing. Cusk's use of the word 'fatally' when referring

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<sup>191</sup> Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 64.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid* p. 63.

<sup>193</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, p. 5.

<sup>194</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, (my emphasis) p. 21.

<sup>195</sup> Beauvoir, p. 286.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid* p. 287.

to a lack of distinctness between herself and her baby implies that for her the onset of pregnancy is to suggest the death of self as she knows it. As Cusk laments, 'to succeed in one means to fail at being the other [...] I never feel myself to have progressed beyond this division. I merely learn to legislate two states and to secure the border between them.'<sup>197</sup> So, although the intensity of intersubjectivity dissipates with time as the baby matures, any sense of plenitude of the former self fails to return. Instead, it seems that reconciliation between former and new self take place. In *Symposium*, Diotima explains to Socrates that when we use the word recollection it suggests that knowledge has departed from us: 'forgetting is the departure of knowledge, and recollection, by implanting a new impression in the place of that which is lost, preserves it, and gives it a spurious appearance of interrupted identity'.<sup>198</sup> This description proposed by Diotima of identity, suspended and then resumed, but in an altered state, chimes with Cusk's description of a valediction to her former self.

Cusk's use of the term 'becoming a mother' in the title of her autobiography suggests that she is still in the process of doing so. Building upon Merleau-Ponty's notion that man is 'not a natural species: he is a historical idea',<sup>199</sup> Beauvoir argues that woman is not a 'completed reality, but rather a becoming'.<sup>200</sup> If we consider this concept alongside pregnancy, I question whether it is ever possible for women to 'become' if they are in a constant state of becoming something else. Cusk is at pains to emphasise that this suspension of bodily distinction between mother and baby is temporary, but at the same time she finds the length of time of the physical process, which detaches her from

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<sup>197</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, p. 63.

<sup>198</sup> Plato, *Symposium* p. 89.

<sup>199</sup> Beauvoir, p. 66.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid* p. 66.

herself, disconcerting. Yet, this process is presenting itself, ever increasingly, as reality. Rather than returning to her former self, Cusk realizes that each stage of the child's dependence on her is a 'new and permanent reality':<sup>201</sup>

I cohabit uneasily with myself, with the person I was before. I look at this person's clothes, her things. I go through her memories, like an imposter, prurient and faintly scandalized.<sup>202</sup>

Cusk describes this sensation as having 'no subjectivity'<sup>203</sup> and indeed, if one considers embodiment to include the carrying of somebody else inside oneself, who is therefore separate and yet, at the same time, part of that body, this must result in an experience that transcends a finite sense of self.

1.iv) What is woman if she is not a wife, a mother, a daughter?

Nevertheless, Cusk confesses in her original introduction to *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* that,

if at any point in my life I had been able to find out what the future held, I would always have wanted to know whether or not I would have children [...] this was the question whose mystery I found most compelling.<sup>204</sup>

She borrows a quotation from Edith Wharton's 1905 novel *The House of Mirth* in order to ask the question 'of what a woman is if she is not a wife, a mother, a daughter'?<sup>205</sup> Cusk turns this question on its head and asks what is a woman if she is a mother; and what a mother in fact is. She draws upon Edith Wharton's novel to meditate on the corollary of events which occurred to her own sense of self on becoming a mother. In reference to Wharton's text, what is implicit in Cusk's interpretation of it is that for woman a sense of completeness can only

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid p. 214.

<sup>202</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* p. 103.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid p. 103.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid p. 7.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid p. 51.

come about once she becomes a mother. The orphaned Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* relies on her beauty to navigate her way through life but with no sense of belonging which a family can provide. Her life is short-lived, ending in a boarding house, penniless and alone. The childless protagonist dies cradling another woman's baby and experiences a sense of contentment and tranquility that had eluded her during her lifetime. Cusk's analysis of this scene argues that it is not just symbolic of 'Lily's exclusion from the human life-cycle [...] it is also the vision of her squandered femininity.'<sup>206</sup> But Cusk implies that becoming a mother is more than just a desire for completeness. She aligns herself with Kristeva's sentiments that in fact motherhood is 'indispensable to their discovery, not of plenitude, but of the complexity of the female experience'.<sup>207</sup> The working girl whose baby it is that Lily is cradling seems to the protagonist to have 'reached the central truth of existence.'<sup>208</sup>

Cusk's text reinforces that this state of flux concerning identity, becoming heightened and at its pinnacle during and immediately after childbirth. Contrary to Beauvoir's interpretation of defectiveness, the sensation of being in a constant state of 'becoming' when self and being in the world are in flux must be considered as a positive, dynamic and progressive experience, continuing the process of female immanence inherent within transcendence. Indeed, Cusk describes it as a realization that in fact parenthood is a means by which 'the self's limits are broken open and an entrance found to a greater landscape'.<sup>209</sup> It is necessary to liberate the perceptions of motherhood and make some sort of attempts at considering woman's ability to give life as an underlying strength. As

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid p. 55.

<sup>207</sup> Julia Kristeva, p. 205.

<sup>208</sup> Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* Cusk, cited in *A Life's Work on Becoming*, p. 53.

<sup>209</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming A Mother*, p. 147.

Beauvoir corroborates, 'if woman seems to be the inessential which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change.'<sup>210</sup> Moreover, as much as Beauvoir's sense of otherness may well be considered just a 'fundamental category of human thought',<sup>211</sup> the same cannot be considered for pregnancy when one body becomes two. Indeed, Cusk reveals that it is consciousness itself that is unseated and undermined by the process of reproduction and therefore any attempts to retain her self are futile. She maintains that having a baby creates a 'rival consciousness', which ensures that her bond of duty 'holds her in an enfeebling tith'.<sup>212</sup> This description of the self, this tith to which she refers on more than one occasion, suggests that it has been imposed on her, that it precedes volition and belongs to the unthought or pre-predicative dimension of experience. Although reflection of an experience can never be the same as the lived experience itself, there is enough evidence here to associate this state of ambivalence to the experience of a blurring between subject and object.

#### 1.v) Separation

The subject of separation is one that preoccupies Cusk and Moss. What becomes evident is that, for the mother, even when the physical separation of mother and child have taken place, maternal intersubjectivity transcends the physical boundaries of childbirth. Its manifestation is located in maternal ambivalence but this hangover of blurring of the subject and the object is a continuation of maternal instinct. Therefore, even after motherbaby makes way for mother and baby, when Cusk can identify her daughter from herself, she continues to

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<sup>210</sup> Beauvoir, p. 19.

<sup>211</sup> Beauvoir, p. 17.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid p. 139.



experience separation anxiety between herself and her daughter, particularly during their first year together, and this is a consequence of maternal instinct.

Cusk explores separation through two novels, *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett and *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert. As mentioned in Chapter One, Elisabeth Badinter founded her argument for there being no maternal instinct on statistics from Paris in 1780, revealing that only 1,000 out of 21,000 babies born each year were being breast-fed by their mothers as the majority were sent outside of Paris to wet-nurses. Similarly, Cusk highlights the consequences of early separation between mother and baby by illustrating Emma Bovary's decision to send her baby daughter to live with a wet nurse outside the town for the first few months of her baby's life. Cusk implies that this decision prevents any hope of a bond being secured between Emma and baby Berthe. The text implies that Berthe's downfall in life is a result of a lack of maternal love given to her. However, Cusk maintains that at a year old, their daughter has 'arrived to claim herself, to take herself from us, and this separateness marks the end of one kind of love and the beginning of another',<sup>213</sup> but the difference here is that their daughter has done this severing on her own terms rather than having her parents impose it upon her. The importance of a mother's ability to let go of her child, and the consequences if she does not, is a subject to which we shall return in the next Chapter.

But what Cusk is alluding to is the fact that their daughter needed the lack of separation in her first year in order to negotiate her autonomy thereafter. As Cusk demonstrates, Mary Lennox in *A Secret Garden*, having been unloved as a young child, finds salvation in regenerating a garden, thereby learning to love,

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid p. 97.

despite having been uprooted and replanted. Cusk describes the painful process of separation, commencing with the cessation of breastfeeding as a sense of loss, a physical conflation between mother and baby, which has been disconnected. Every time she leaves her baby she recounts: 'the world bears the taint of my leaving, so that abandonment must now be subtracted from the sum of whatever I choose to do'.<sup>214</sup> Cusk considers separation as 'brutal' and the much longed for moments of freedom from motherhood prove to be 'panicked and wholly unsatisfactory'.<sup>215</sup> She relates a time soon after her daughter's birth when she attempts to go to a concert one evening which, rather than attending the concert hall, results instead in visiting numerous phone boxes in the West End due to a 'mounting sense of wrong doing, as if I had stolen something [and] fall[ing] upon the nearest telephone as if it were an oxygen mask'.<sup>216</sup> Her need to call and check on her daughter overrides any desire to be part of a social event, describing those around her as ignorant of the 'strife-torn region in which I now live: they are as remote from it as if it lay on the other side of the world'.<sup>217</sup>

A further realization dawns upon her that childcare is not the simple solution she presumed it would be. In a bid to be reconciled with her former life, feeling 'stuck' like a wall upon which her daughter grows like a vine.<sup>218</sup> Cusk expresses the need to re-train her daughter onto something else so that she can absent herself from time to time. But attempts to find a part-time nanny gives birth to a whole new range of sensibilities, such as guilt, loss and anxiety. The person Cusk has in mind for the job

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid p. 93.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid p. 157.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid p. 92.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid p. 92.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid p. 149.

had no earthly existence, but sort of materialized on my doorstep each morning, took the baby reassuringly from my arms, wiped away my tears and said things like, *you just go off and enjoy yourself, we'll have a lovely time here, won't we?* She was the projection of my conflicted self.<sup>219</sup>

Moreover, those hours which Cusk has to herself prove 'damaged and second hand' describing the inability 'to fit my world into a space carved, as it seemed to me, from my daughter's own flesh'.<sup>220</sup> Indeed, for Cusk, in the early stages of motherhood, it becomes increasingly obvious that physical separation from her daughter is profoundly difficult, describing this attempted intervention between mother and daughter 'as a gulf I had put between us'.<sup>221</sup> After several failed attempts at hiring nannies, Cusk resigns herself to the fact that 'I wasn't ready, it seemed, to let her love somebody else'.<sup>222</sup>

## **Section Two**

### 2.i) Self and World

Although Cusk does provide relatively detailed descriptions of the three nannies she hires, the purpose for doing so is to highlight the conflict she senses in relation to the world around her. Cusk's withdrawal into 'civilization's shadows'<sup>223</sup> fosters a phenomenological approach as she 'brackets'<sup>224</sup> herself from the world around her, in order to be able to see clearly what her experience really is in order to relate it better to objective notions. Thus, Cusk is not denying interaction with the outside world which would lead to a mind/world split: on

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid p. 153.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid p. 163.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid p.163.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid p. 163.

<sup>223</sup> Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood*, p.xxi.

<sup>224</sup> As I have stated in Chapter One, the term 'bracketing' is the act of *epoché*, a phenomenological procedure in which 'the preconceptions and theoretical notions ruling our daily world of fact are never left behind but are temporarily withheld [...] the practice of 'bracketing', then, does not reject the real world, leaving the subject alienated and isolated; rather, it brings to light the condition that underlies experience and makes it possible.' (Carole Bourne-Taylor and Ariane Mildenberg eds, *Phenomenology, Modernism and Beyond* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2010) pp. 5 and 12.

the contrary, she remains as much in the world as she ever was, but the difference is that she has shifted the focus from preconceived ideas onto her own lived experience of her consciousness and world. Maurice Natanson explains, in phenomenological terms this crucial shift that *epoché* accommodates: '[s]he reflects selectively on what [s]he had hitherto simply lived, though both the reflecting and the living continue, side by side, in the life of consciousness.'<sup>225</sup> And indeed Cusk's narrative discloses that she feels at odds with everyone and everything with whom she comes into contact. There is a lack of understanding between Cusk's sense of being in the world and the anticipation of expectation from the world to her, which is, I argue, the result of ontological experience of intersubjectivity at work: it is at odds with the more prescriptive world in which we live. Cusk alludes to this discrepancy between what a woman is experiencing in pregnancy and childbirth and what the world *thinks* she is experiencing. She (un)intentionally withdraws herself from society because of her own sense of alienation from it. Despite choosing to synchronize her writing at the same moment of experiencing motherhood, the world around her is in no way synchronized with her experience of becoming a mother. Indeed, the text is unequivocal about her lack of fit in the world and at its most pronounced in a chapter entitled 'Don't forget to Scream', referring to the last line of the nursery rhyme 'Row, row, row the boat' but also alluding to how Cusk feels inside when she attends a music group in her local village hall. Her narrative creates a distance between herself and the other attendees, describing them as 'species', choosing to sit on her own rather than engage with the other mothers. But she does draw some comfort from this music group as she watches her daughter

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<sup>225</sup> Maurice Natanson, *Edmund Husserl: Philosopher of Infinite Tasks* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). p. 57.

interact with the group whilst singing. Cusk is 'clutch[ing] [her] daughter's warm little body', remarking that 'she and the world forgot their quarrel and convened to assure me that I could protect her, enclose her, look after her'.<sup>226</sup>

Moreover, Cusk's inclusion in her memoir of extracts from *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* further serve to illustrate that self and world cannot be reconciled. As Cusk highlights, it seems fitting to use two 19<sup>th</sup> century novels as they serve to reinforce the power of historical narrative and its ability to separate itself from the truth. The extract from Tolstoy's *War and Peace* focuses on a description of the heroine, Natasha, now that she is an established mother:

She had grown stouter and broader, so that it was difficult to recognize the slim, lively Natasha of former days in this robust motherly woman [...] now her face and body were often all that one saw, and her soul was not visible at all.<sup>227</sup>

Natasha's concealed soul has been separated, retreating into 'civilization's shadows'<sup>228</sup> after becoming a mother and Cusk is visibly empathetic as she is also experiencing life as a lost soul with regard to motherhood. Thus she situates these extracts from Tolstoy alongside her own meditations on corporeality and intersubjectivity on learning of her own pregnancy. This withdrawal of the soul, which Natasha exhibits and Cusk consciously undertakes, is due to this void and discrepancy between their experience of self and its transcendence from empiricist notions of motherhood which, as we have already discussed, is mythologized through historical narrative. As Cusk highlights, this description of Natasha is written at the end of *War and Peace* (1869); Tolstoy does not write a volume concerning Natasha as a mother but instead chooses to write *Anna Karenina* (1877), which highlights the consequences of female transgression. Cusk asserts 'motherhood is a career in conformity from which no amount of

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<sup>226</sup> Cusk, p. 178.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid pp. 20-21.

<sup>228</sup> Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood*, p.xxi.

subterfuge can liberate the soul without violence; and pregnancy is its boot-camp'.<sup>229</sup> She highlights that in today's society, these didactic 19<sup>th</sup> century novels have the ability to confine as well as liberate, acting as a conspirator to uphold societal norms as well as subvert them. Through these literary examples from Tolstoy, she highlights the discrepancy between voiced social norms and unvoiced subjective experience.

Indeed, when Cusk chooses to share her experiences of engagement with the world 'outside' in relation to motherhood, it is usually to critique it. Her first foray into contact with the world concerning her pregnancy describes her experience with the sonographer who undertakes the first pregnancy scan. 'Come on, the sonographer urges the creature harshly, let's see you move [...] I feel I should be protecting it from its torments of this sort but I say *nothing*'.<sup>230</sup> This harbinger of silence towards medical intervention, which Cusk also extends to a variety of institutions associated with child rearing, is representative of women's reluctance to voice their dissent. As Caroline Lindquist argues, contemporary discourse on pregnancy continues to silence women who are unable to describe their experience in unambiguously positive terms.<sup>231</sup> So, I argue that women choose to disengage their own subjectivity and remain silent from culture's discourse on pregnancy. In its place, like Cusk, they 'become a cocoon'<sup>232</sup> and their sense of belonging in the world, akin to Natasha from *War and Peace*, is *nothing* more than a physical presence.

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<sup>229</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, p. 21.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid p. 30.

<sup>231</sup> Caroline Lindquist, 'Being torn: Toward a Phenomenology of Unwanted Pregnancy', *Hypatia* 23 (3), 136-55 in Kate Kilpatrick's paper 'A Phenomenology of the Pregnant Body: The Anxiety of Expectation', p. 7. (27 March 2015) [http://pages.uoregon.edu/uophil/files/Caroline\\_Lundquist\\_Writing\\_Sample.pdf](http://pages.uoregon.edu/uophil/files/Caroline_Lundquist_Writing_Sample.pdf). (accessed 24 April 2015)

<sup>232</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* p. 29.

## 2.ii) Social Intervention

Moreover, Cusk makes clear that this lack of belonging in the world is a product of social construction. Although this study focuses on the ontological rather than having any political agenda, it is worth considering the consequences of intervention in terms of how it may disrupt or mask maternal instinct with society's ever increasing interference with pregnancy and childbirth. As Young argues, 'pregnancy does not belong to the woman herself [...] she is [merely] the container'.<sup>233</sup> Indeed, Cusk describes society's grasp on her pregnancy like being 'tagged, as if electronically [...] my womanly movements are being closely monitored'.<sup>234</sup> Cusk satirizes the plethora of information leaflets she is handed on her first visit to the hospital ranging from 'diet, acupuncture, yoga, antenatal classes, parent craft classes, hypnotism and water birth [...] with the rules and regulations of pregnancy laid out in a volume entitled *Emma's Diary*.'<sup>235</sup> Cusk criticizes the senseless notion of homogenizing women's experience of pregnancy by quoting from *Emma's Diary*, the content of which is so evidently at odds with her own encounter. *Emma's Diary* is a powerful piece of propaganda, which tacitly shifts ownership or responsibility of the foetus from the mother onto the state. Indeed, Cusk tackles the literature on pregnancy by highlighting the many decisions that society makes for you and the fear it imbues if you transgress on issues such as diet, smoking, alcohol, drug free labour and a strong emphasis on the importance of breastfeeding. As Cusk mocks, if believing that pregnancy is the only time in a women's life when she is allowed to be fat, then she must think again, and proceeds to list a vast array of foods which the

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<sup>233</sup> Young, p. 46.

<sup>234</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, p. 31.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid* p. 30.

literature claims would not be the 'best bite [she] can give [her] baby'.<sup>236</sup> This naturally raises the question as to whom does the foetus belong? If the medical world chooses to treat the foetus and the mother as two separate patients, it is of no surprise that women retreat into themselves in order to maintain ownership of their pregnancy and make their own choices.<sup>237</sup>

### 2.iii) Childcare Manuals

In response to this literature, Cusk devotes an entire chapter to her own experience of childcare manuals. In their opening paragraphs, both Young and Cusk observe the objectification of the mother within childcare texts. Citing Kristeva, Young laments that there is no text 'concerned with the subject, the mother as the site of her proceedings'.<sup>238</sup> Rather, conversely, Cusk remarks that the more she reads, 'the more her daughter recedes from [her] and becomes an object whose use I must re-learn'.<sup>239</sup> Moreover, she reinforces the inauthenticity of these texts whereby the world as we know it vanishes and is replaced by another whose principles need to be learned. She describes this 'vanished world'<sup>240</sup> as the mother's own. Cusk argues that these texts treat you as if you are the first mother and this is the first book and anything that went before must be forgotten. Moreover, albeit with an air of acerbity, Cusk attempts to follow some of the advice given by Dr Spock's *Baby and Child Care*. At one point she purchases another manual named *Your Baby and Child* by Penelope Leach in the hope that it will help her re-engage with her daughter, as other texts have caused

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid p. 36.

<sup>237</sup> For further reading concerning pregnancy and medical and cultural intervention see Clare Hanson, *A Cultural History of Pregnancy, Medicine and Culture, 1750-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>238</sup> Kristeva, 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini', *Desire in Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) p. 237 in Iris Marion Young, 'Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation', *On Female Body Experience* p. 46.

<sup>239</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* p. 117.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid p. 117.



them to become disconcertingly separated! Cusk's encounter with childcare manuals comes to an abrupt end; she realizes the irony of the situation when catching her daughter sifting through her cloth books alone whilst she sits for hours reading childcare manuals. However, as Cusk laments in her Introduction to the 2008 edition, 'the childcare manual is the emblem of the new mother's psychic loneliness'.<sup>241</sup>

#### 2.iv) Choice

I argue that childcare manuals can exacerbate rather than appease any concerns new mothers may have. The array of literature on child rearing is both extensive and conflicting. Therefore, whichever childcare manual a mother may choose to follow, another will contradict it. One can conclude, therefore, that whichever approach a mother chooses to take, to certain sections of society, it will be the wrong one: choice in itself poses a problem. Indeed, as Kate Kilpatrick argues, even if women choose their pregnancy, they are choosing the unknown.

Kilpatrick maintains that there are many pregnant subjects who have had to live 'unchosen' consequences of their 'choices'. That is to say, if a woman's idea of identity is to mother successfully but the lived experience of pregnancy and childbirth prove to be anything but positive, it can precipitate a sense of failure and ambivalence.<sup>242</sup>

Drawing upon the work of Young and Caroline Lundquist, Kilpatrick argues in her paper on the phenomenology of pregnancy that women seem reluctant to express ambivalence in their pregnancies despite the fact that ambivalent feelings are an ordinary part of most pregnant women's experiences.

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid p. 5.

<sup>242</sup> Kilpatrick, p. 6.

As Cusk alludes to in her autobiography, the experience of pregnancy for many women is far removed from the Western ideology of pregnancy and therefore the need to split or peel oneself away becomes a necessity for the sake of sanctity of self. Intervention perhaps masks a more authentic female experience of motherhood within which maternal instinct and moreover a feminine nature disappears from society's gaze, as a woman's fear that her own experience does not match that of more prescriptive values is enough to secure a hidden 'individuality [from] the prey of outside forces'.<sup>243</sup> As Cusk highlights, what is striking about parenthood is that it is the male voice which is dissident. Cusk notes that it is rare for women to voice their anxiety or ambivalence about the lack of sleep or time to themselves that motherhood prevents them from having. But, as she argues, this does not mean that they do not *think* it. Moreover, Cusk considers whether the female sex contains a 'Darwinian stop upon our powers of expression, our ability to render the truth of this subject'.<sup>244</sup> As Cusk knows to her own detriment, to speak out of turn on the subject of motherhood is to ignore a female 'parturitional apartheid'.<sup>245</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Maternal instinct is borne out of a blurring effect that occurs between mother and baby, which I refer to as maternal intersubjectivity. The effect of this blurring produces a sense of ambiguity of self, manifesting in maternal ambivalence. Cusk provides the evidence to corroborate this theory through her descriptions of disruption of the self in regard to identity. Furthermore, she

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<sup>243</sup> Beauvoir, p. 64.

<sup>244</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, p. 136.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid* p. 136.

highlights a cleavage between the self and society, splitting the private and public, the former being hidden from society's gaze and the latter visible to the outside world. Thus, Cusk destabilizes and undermines the universal representation of motherhood.

## Chapter Three

### *Night Waking* – An exploration into de-naturalising the ‘natural’ attitude<sup>246</sup>

#### Introduction

In the previous Chapter, we explored the concept of intersubjectivity in relation to pregnancy and childbirth, arguing that its manifestation is a *literal* dehiscence of the flesh. Indeed, I argue that this physical rupturing of woman’s body elicits a *metaphysical* dehiscence of self. This experience of intersubjectivity, which is an overlapping or blurring between subject and object, has a profound effect on woman’s sense of autonomy. So, she is neither one nor two but must be resigned to something in between. Lisa Guenther describes this state of alterity as a ‘mutual fecundation of self and other, a divergence from one common flesh, such that neither I nor the other can be designated as first or second, active or passive.’<sup>247</sup>

Indeed, Anna Bennett, the protagonist mother in *Night Waking*, describes her nostalgia for the time when she and her younger son, Moth, were ‘new and not separate’,<sup>248</sup> echoing Cusk’s description of her sense of being a ‘composite creature.’<sup>249</sup> The use of the word ‘creature’ suggests something alien and unfamiliar, failing to abide by prescriptive binary gender structures.

Furthermore, in terms of intersubjectivity, this composite creature has been alienated from academic discourse; she falls in between motherhood and feminism, belonging to both and neither. But as I explored in the previous

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<sup>246</sup> Gail Weiss, ‘Can We De-Naturalize the Natural Attitude?’, title of paper given at one day Symposium on ‘Cross-Disciplinary Phenomenology: A Readiness for the Questionable’, June 2016

<sup>247</sup> Lisa Guenther, ‘Merleau Ponty and the Sense of Sexual Difference’, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 16.2, (2011) : pp. 19-33. p. 21.

<sup>248</sup> Sarah Moss, *Night Waking*, (London: Granta, 2011) p. 80.

<sup>249</sup> Rachel Cusk, *A Life’s Work on Becoming a Mother*, p. 99.

Chapter, Young, Lymer, Kristeva and Cusk prove an exception to this rule but only up to a point. Indeed, what remains in the shadows of their discourse is how this sense of intersubjectivity may affect their decision making process, particularly concerning their position in the workplace.

*Night Waking* provides an inroad to this area, chronicling a mother's pursuit to reconcile her former life as a historian with that of being a mother of two small boys. Indeed, *Night Waking* makes evident a corollary between maternal ambivalence and its intersection with maternal intersubjectivity. Anna Bennett, the protagonist, describes being 'obsessed'<sup>250</sup> with her children and her career. She wrestles with her own sense of self which is torn between a desire to 'restore a world that did not revolve around a baby's mouth'<sup>251</sup> and 'the cord, the filament, that joins me to Moth and Raphael [as] it is unnatural to go away from your own children. It hurts.'<sup>252</sup> Indeed, it is worth being reminded of this extract that I quoted in the Introduction in which Cusk describes this self-same conflict concerning motherhood:

Another person existed in her, and after their birth they live within her jurisdiction of her consciousness. When she is with them she is not herself, when she is without them she is not herself; and so it is as difficult to leave your children as it is to stay with them.

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So, there are three salient issues that *Night Waking* raises in relation to the question of maternal intersubjectivity and ambivalence. Firstly, Anna is the personification of maternal ambivalence, who desires nothing more than to return to work but speaks of an attachment to her children that is hindering this process. Indeed, Anna confesses she 'does not like motherhood'<sup>254</sup> but what sets

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<sup>250</sup> Moss, p. 153.

<sup>251</sup> *ibid* p. 327.

<sup>252</sup> *ibid* p. 353.

<sup>253</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, p. 13.

<sup>254</sup> Moss, p. 130.

this text apart from other novels is that it highlights that even a reluctant mother, desperate to return to a life of autonomy, is unable to metaphysically detach herself from her children. So, she is a paradox: the physical manifestation of ambivalence, trapped within this liminal status of intersubjectivity. I argue that this sense of ambivalence is due as much to this intrinsic attachment with her children as it is to socio-cultural practices. Indeed, this need to clarify between the interior and exterior worlds is intensified through the novel's geographical setting to the south of the Inner Hebrides. It reinforces and parodies the Rousseauian paradigm of an idealized, uncontaminated climate for raising children. That is to say, the Hebrides transports Anna away from cultural and social influences and deposits her in 'natural' surroundings. The fictitious island of Colsay is based on the island of Kilda, 'the island on the edge of the world'<sup>255</sup> and its topography provides a fertile backdrop for the protagonist to explore and experiment with her own sensibility concerning the nurturing of children, far removed from society's gaze.

And indeed, Anna confronts motherhood on her own terms, refusing to engage with social conditioning in relation to mothering but even this 'idyllic' location cannot protect her from a critical response from those few persons with whom she comes into contact. They *assume* she is not a good enough mother because she does not conform to society's interpretation of mothering, serving to highlight the problems mothers face if they do not default to prescriptive behaviour. Indeed, in a similar manner to Cusk, there lies a discrepancy between interior and exterior dialogues, the latter of which masks the conflict Anna is experiencing between how society expects her to mother and how this unsettles

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<sup>255</sup> Charles Maclean, *The Story of St Kilda*, 1972 p. 376 of *Night Waking*.

her attempts at mothering. There is a disparity between what she perceives as important strategies in raising children and those imposed by society. Indeed, Moss deftly identifies, explores and separates exterior forces, such as the impact of patriarchal rule, gender stereotyping, and psychoanalytic observations concerning familial influences, particularly concerning the mother/daughter dyad and 'letting go' of your children when they are older, from the 'stuff'<sup>256</sup> that is preoccupying Anna's consciousness. As I have previously stated, it is impossible to separate the ontological from the fabric of cultural and social forces. But through its narrative framework and its geographical setting *Night Waking* exaggerates the disparity between the more artificial layers of cultural influences, such as gender stereotyping, and that of Anna's sense of self. This is illustrated through a hyperbole of gender stereotyping and patriarchal rule, which resonate throughout the narrative framework.

Secondly, psychoanalysis, attachment theory in particular, is integral to the underlying themes in *Night Waking*. Indeed, each chapter is headed up by a pithy extract from psychoanalysts, John Bowlby (1907-1990) and Anna Freud (1895-1982) amongst others, enabling an exchange of discourse on the subject of attachment theory between these aphorisms and the main body of the text. Throughout the novel Anna reflects on her own feelings towards attachment with her children. This reflective discourse is enabled through synchronized narratives, exploring Anna's relationship she has established with her sons in relation to her neighbour, Judith Fairchild, and the relationship she has with her grown-up daughter. In addition, Moss interpolates this narrative with another

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<sup>256</sup> A term originated by Lisa Baraitser in her text *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption*, through an exploration of the relationship between maternity and stuff (such as nappies, comfort toys etc), she envisages the maternal subject as a subject of both *heightened sentience* and also of *viscosity* (that is a fluid's internal friction or resistance to flow), signifying the notion that the mother is a new embodied subjectivity beyond that of the pregnant or feeding body. pp.125 -126.

discourse between family versus institution as part of Anna's ongoing research for her book which concerns the relationship between 'the Romantic celebration of childhood and the simultaneous increase in the residential institutions for the young: boarding schools, orphanages, hospitals and prisons'.<sup>257</sup> Moss' use of interior monologue not only initiates a dialectic of whether the family or institution may better serve the needs of children, but it also creates a more general narrative on the 'natural' imperatives imposed upon motherhood, polarizing Anna's inner turmoil of frustration and resentment towards social forces from other characters who exhibit conformity towards them.

Hence the opening of the novel begins with an extract from Anna Freud's 1965 text *Normality and Pathology in Childhood*, within which she explains that an important corollary of the pleasure principle is the reality principle, a process whereby the individual must progress to the latter in order to guarantee socialization. The reality principle 'seeks to obtain pleasure but pleasure which is assured through taking account of reality even if it is pleasure postponed or diminished.'<sup>258</sup> Anna Freud makes clear that this advance in itself 'guarantees socialization'<sup>259</sup> and as a result this process is not reversible. According to this model, the unconscious mind is governed by the pleasure principle. This is the unruly part of the mind not governed by the constraints of reality but which is the nexus of free association and fantasy. Moss situates this extract on the pleasure and reality principle with the opening scene of the protagonist witnessing a flock of sea swans 'drifting as paper cut-outs against waves blurred

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<sup>257</sup> Moss, p. 9.

<sup>258</sup> Donald C Abel, *Freud on Instinct and Morality*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989) p. 6 - quotation from Sigmund Freud's *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* ed. and trans. by James Strachey, Vol 16 p. 357.

<sup>259</sup> Moss, p. 1.



by dusk', <sup>260</sup> making the connection between the pleasure principle with the natural landscape of the Inner Hebrides, countering the swans learned behaviour, demonstrating their transference to the reality principle. Furthermore, the swans are figurative of the study of goslings which helped form John Bowlby's ethological behaviour of attachment theory. This opening sets the scene for what is to become an exploration of the ontological versus learned behaviour, interweaving attachment theory as its seminal theme with the narrative framework. So, in line with Cusk, who interrupts her own prose with extracts from her favourite novels, Moss' form is fragmented, digressing from the normal pathway of novel writing with epithets from noteworthy psychoanalysts at the beginning of each chapter which serve as a commentary to subvert as well as substantiate the main body of her text. These extracts provide a point of departure for effectuating John Bowlby's attachment theory onto Anna and her children. Furthermore, these interruptions within the narrative serve to reflect the interruptions that Anna experiences during her own writing and, indeed, in turn, vicariously echoes the interruptions of this research by the demands of motherhood. In addition, *Night Waking* enables psychoanalysis to be considered from a point of object relations theory, which is the relationship between object and subject, and compared with the phenomenological interpretation of intersubjectivity set out in Chapters One and Two, thus identifying the nuances between the two theories.

Finally, what I intend to question in this chapter is how Anna's inner conflict affects her decision making process in relation to returning to work. The fundamental consideration that arises from Moss and Cusk's experiential writing

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid p. 1.

is whether maternal intersubjectivity, and its overlap with prescriptive practices, disrupts their behaviour towards the work place. Indeed, by analyzing Anna Bennett alongside statistical analysis provided by Sylvia Ann Hewitt and Elisabeth Badinter, what appears to remain undetected is a conduit between maternal intersubjectivity and women in the work place. I argue that there needs to be less emphasis on co-parenting being the absolute answer for women to return to the work place but instead, focus on the conflict mother's have with themselves concerning separation from their baby. So, I am not underestimating the impact of social coercion but merely pointing out that maternal intersubjectivity needs to be a consideration too. Indeed, Badinter's text *The Conflict* (2010) argues that Western society's recall to all that is 'natural' has caused child rearing to become a regressive force, tethering women to the home and family. Indeed, Jessica Benjamin writes that due to contemporary changing patterns in mothering, 'Western Culture is in the grip of a sentimental idealization of motherhood, dominated by a fantasy mother who is an 'all-giving, self contained haven'.<sup>261</sup> Moreover, *Babyhunger* (2002) by Sylvia Ann Hewitt provides anecdotal evidence to highlight the critical problems around women's decision to have children and on being a mother, in relation to the work place.

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<sup>261</sup> Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, feminism, and the problem of domination* (Virago: London 1990), p. 211 cited in Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters*, p. 93.

## Section One

### The Mother

#### 1.i) *Anna in Night Waking*

We witness Anna oscillate between a love for her children and her resolve that leads her to believe 'I cannot do this, motherhood. I should not have had children'.<sup>262</sup> She shuns 'mindless domesticity'<sup>263</sup> and 'disapprove[s]'<sup>264</sup> of cooking, which is amusingly reinforced by a variety of meals which Anna produces; the onion and chickpea casserole proving to mark the lowest ebb in her array of culinary attempts. But it is the portrayal of ennui, of the sheer boredom of mothering a two and a five year old, day-in, day-out, which this text deftly communicates such as,

[t]here were five hours and three minutes before I could take Moth for his bath, six hours and thirty-three minutes until Raphael could legitimately be denied any further conversational opportunities until morning.<sup>265</sup>

But these superficial failings, such as domestic skills, overshadow a deeply inherent attachment and love that Anna has for her children, which bear all the hallmarks of maternal intersubjectivity. But society is not privy to her interior monologue, revealing this deep-rooted love, and instead judge her on external appearance. Moreover, Anna's research into childhood and her preoccupation with parenting manuals highlight the power that prescriptive patterns of behaviour have over mothers. For women like Anna, who choose to challenge them, *Night Waking* highlights how isolating and corrosive motherhood can be. Anna is fully aware of what she 'ought' to be which is in constant conflict with the

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<sup>262</sup> Moss, p. 87.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid p. 95.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid p. 17.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid p. 103.

way in which she is capable of mothering. However, this outwardly rebellious approach to motherhood does not make Anna any less resilient to criticism from the people who surround her; on the contrary, her interior monologue reveals a lack of self-belief in her ability to mother. Her husband, Giles, has little time for what he perceives as Anna's neurosis and the irony is not lost on the reader when he accuses her of being over sensitive: 'you do tend to think people are judging you' juxtaposed with comments such as 'are you going to get that child to sleep?'<sup>266</sup> Indeed, with the exception of Judith Fairchild's adolescent daughter, Zoe, Anna's ability to mother is doubted by all those with whom she comes into contact.<sup>267</sup>

Moreover, as sociologist Mary Georgina Boulton states in her 1983 text *On being a Mother: A Study of Women with Pre-School Children*, a husband's view of her work as a mother was a central component in the meaning mothering had for women. For example, if it is the partner's belief that childcare ought to be more naturally enjoyable, this made maternal ambivalence more difficult to live with.<sup>268</sup> As Anna affirms,

parenthood is no longer merely a biological state; it has become an undertaking in which it is possible to fail [...] it seems that the relationship between the theory and practice of parenthood may be inverse.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid p. 98 and p. 126.

<sup>267</sup> For example, the Librarian questions whether her children will be 'alright' out of her sight while she looks for a book; the policeman who investigates the baby's skull (who refuses to call her Dr Bennett and insists on 'Mrs Cassingham') concludes that there will be no more need to trouble Anna, 'unless, of course, there should be any further concerns about the boys'.<sup>267</sup> Anna had left Raphael and Moth in the house whilst she found a broadband signal five minutes walk away, to which the police enquired, 'Mrs Cassingham, are you in the habit of leaving your children alone?'<sup>267</sup> Referring to Anna, the handyman on the island announces 'Id gi'e my wife the back of my hand if she treated ours the way you treat those little lads'.<sup>267</sup> Judith Fairchild's implied comments such as 'Good Lord, your children are still up' - 'routines slip when they are not at school'<sup>267</sup> is reference to their decision to home school the boys. Furthermore, through Anna's anecdotal recollection of their former life in Oxford, she recalls a colleague at the University asking her whether they have seen her in the college since she took 'all that maternity leave', recalling how in their day they had to choose between work and children '[a]nd if you chose to have children, you looked after them yourself. Better all around'.<sup>267</sup>

<sup>268</sup> M G Boulton cited in Roszika Parker, *Torn in Two*, p. 11.

<sup>269</sup> Moss, p. 120.

So, I argue that this is where *Night Waking* highlights how cultural forces overwhelm and subsume ontological behaviour. Furthermore, Anna's husband Giles is representative of society's conflicting definition of 'co-parenting'. At first glance, Giles seems an outmoded figure for a 21<sup>st</sup> century father, but his character enables Moss to access and engage in a dialogue on the complexity of history and the legacy this has left motherhood. At the beginning of the novel, Giles assumes his work takes precedence over Anna's because as a Research Fellow she 'get[s] paid whether [she] actually does any work or not. It's in [her] contract'.<sup>270</sup> Despite the fact that they both work full-time, Giles dutifully performs the role of hapless husband whose work precludes parenting duties. But during the course of the novel, he realizes that he too must learn to adapt to the responsibility of becoming a parent. Moreover, Giles' benign approach to parenting is a considered decision by Moss, for it highlights that, irrespective of the ubiquity of dual-career families, women spend nearly five times as long in sole charge of their infants as their partner.<sup>271</sup> Indeed, Anna is resentful towards her husband's attitude, and the sense of isolation she feels is reflected in the remoteness of the Hebridian landscape. As Badinter and Hewlett affirm, cultural forces still anticipate the mother as the prime carer of her children regardless of her employment status.

Anna's lack of desire towards maternal *duty* (by that I mean being tied to domestic life at home entertaining two young children) does not mean she loves her children any less: as I have already emphasized, maternal intersubjectivity is not to assume the mother will necessarily make a better parent than the father. On the contrary, her loss of autonomy complicates the relationship she has with

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<sup>270</sup> Moss, p. 3.

<sup>271</sup> Rozsika Parker, *Torn in Two*, p. 238.

her child and it may result, as Anna exhibits, in a sense of entrapment. Indeed, Anna exemplifies a mother “torn in two”,<sup>272</sup> that is split between caring for her children and pursuing her academic career. I argue that this is tied up with Anna’s intersubjective sense of self, which I define as maternal instinct. She has no desire to be a mother who is not in employment but something deep-rooted within herself is making it very difficult to leave her children and return to work: it is this sense of disquiet that is maternal intersubjectivity. As both Cusk and Moss have highlighted, the tie to their children remains in place long after the cord has been cut.

So, this narrative framework highlights a more inherent problem occurring irrespective of patriarchy’s influence on motherhood. As cultural forces still determine the mother as the prime carer, not only must she negotiate her decision-making process concerning the work place around social imperatives, but, more fundamentally, she must address the conflict of self. As we witness in *Night Waking*, Anna struggles to negotiate stay-at-home mothering whilst attempting to write a book in her capacity as an academic and historian, and reconciling the two often results in failure. This failure reinforces the conflict women face in attempting to do both. So, although a tacit quasi-Platonic dialogue debating between motherhood and returning to work vacillates throughout the novel, it is without resolution, suggesting that achieving equilibrium is unobtainable. This sense of incompleteness is important, as it is in line with my own argument, in that Moss is not offering a solution but merely cogitating the question of whether women “can have it all”. Furthermore, the novel’s relationship with maternal intersubjectivity is manifested in Anna’s

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<sup>272</sup> *Torn in Two* (1995) is the title of Rozsika Parker’s book on maternal ambivalence.

metaphysical attachment to her children, giving prominence to this genuine concern women may face when deciding to return to work. Indeed, all too often, the silent world of maternal intersubjectivity is overshadowed by cultural interference.

Ultimately, however, *Night Waking* could be viewed as a bildungsroman in which we witness Anna develop from a mother sapped of self-esteem and a lack of belief in an ability to mother, to a woman who, through thought, learns to accept that there is no linear answer to reconciling her career alongside motherhood. Indeed, whether Anna accepts a new academic position she is offered remains inconclusive. However, the penultimate paragraph of the novel witnesses her acceptance that she 'will never bake cookies or keep baby wipes in the glove compartment' while her elder son, Raphael, 'tugged at my mind, as if he were thinking of me, willing me home to him.'<sup>273</sup> This journey towards inconclusiveness is Anna's acceptance in understanding that there are no emphatic answers to anything about motherhood and that she must work out for herself what will ultimately result in a compromise.

#### 1.ii) History and Ideology

Indeed, Anna must navigate between the historical ideology on motherhood with that of her own sense of what she feels is right. In *Night Waking*, the focus of these exterior forces is on patriarchy, using the history of Colsay to identify its macro-impact. The micro-effects are illustrated through Anna, recounting an evening for example, just after her younger son had been born, in which she feels compelled to attend a dinner for fear of losing her Research Fellowship. The

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<sup>273</sup> Moss, p. 375, 374.

Principal has reprimanded her 'questionable'<sup>274</sup> commitment to the University, resulting in Anna's attempts to reconcile her work with her role as a mother. It is indeed a matter which appears of little interest to a male Principal. This dinner coincides at the exact time of day when she should be breastfeeding her baby. Inevitably, it results in her breastfeeding in the patriarchal corridors of Oxford University, a metaphor for otherness and its exclusion from the inner sanctuaries of government and power. Anna feels she must conceal her dual role from her superior, as if having a baby to care for is something for which she should be ashamed and as a result it must be shrouded in secrecy, exiling it from her workplace.

Furthermore, she corroborates this personal experience concerning patriarchal ideology with a broader argument using the island of Colsay. Historical narratives, two hundred years apart, collide when Anna and her son, Raphael, discover a baby's skull which is buried in their apple orchard; Anna aptly names the baby Eve. Alongside Anna's own thoughts concerning infanticide, this discovery distracts her from her own research and instead she focuses on the history of Colsay. Although the police are initially suspicious that it is Anna's baby, it transpires that the skull is of a 19<sup>th</sup> century baby whose Father was a relative of Giles. Hence, this illegitimate baby found by Anna had not been given a funeral or buried in the churchyard and was instead furtively buried in the back garden of the Cassingham home. This results in the narrative framework transporting us between contemporary society on Colsay and the island and its inhabitants in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It transpires that the Cassinghams have been owners of the island for three generations and it

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<sup>274</sup> Moss, p. 155.



becomes evident as the novel unravels that, due to their absence, the island had been mismanaged and the inhabitants mistreated by their estate manager. This resulted in abject poverty and misery for the islanders who lived there. As a consequence, between 1860 and 1880, eighty-five percent of the babies born on Colsay died, which is subsequently revealed as a consequence of tetanus. The damaging consequences for mothers and children of patriarchal law, such as having a child out of wedlock as a result of seduction by the ruling classes abusing their *droit de seigneur*, are highlighted in *Night Waking* by the underlying blurring and overlapping of the narrative framework. The interruption by patriarchy of the lives of the inhabitants results in death of humanity on Colsay. Indeed, the discovery of a baby's skull is symbolic of the complication in the severing of history from the legacy that it leaves behind, changing the course of Anna's research, leading her to conclude that,

colonial arrogance and native superstition have both been blamed for the practices that killed eighty-five per cent of babies born on Colsay between 1860-1880 before they were a fortnight old, and the fact that both readings are possible offers a sharp illustration of the impossibility of untangling history and ideology.<sup>275</sup>

Indeed, this intertwining of history and ideology between patriarchy and superstition replicate the aforesaid problem in Chapters One and Two, of severing motherhood from patriarchy in order to create a more experiential paradigm.

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<sup>275</sup> Moss, p. 370.

## Section Two

### Psychoanalysis

#### 2.i) Imprinting and Ethology

Moss not only illustrates the repercussions of patriarchal history for the modern day but also interweaves into the narrative historical psychoanalytical theory with particular emphasis on attachment theory. Both of these areas preoccupy Anna's thinking throughout the novel. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Giles is researching puffins on the island of Colsay, studying their behaviour to predict future movements. His study of puffins is not only recognition of the contribution ethology made to evolutionary genetic science, but it reveals that it is also the genesis of John Bowlby's ethological theory of attachment behaviour. The study of ethology was founded by Konrad Lorenz (1903-1989) in the 1950s, which is the study of animals, placing particular emphasis on instinctual behaviour.

Lorenz was famous for his studies on "imprinting" which was the process whereby goslings and ducklings follow and become attached to the first moving object they encounter after hatching. Indeed, Lorenz had ducklings imprinted on him.<sup>276</sup> But, as Maria Vicedo-Castello highlights in her 2005 doctoral thesis on maternal instinct, Lorenz's popularity in the United States has to be understood in the context of the widespread interest in maternal instincts and the heated debate about working women.

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<sup>276</sup> As Robert and Cynthia Shilkret highlight in their chapter on 'Attachment Theory' in *Inside Out and Outside In: Psychodynamic Clinical theory and Psychopathology in Contemporary Multicultural Contexts*, 4<sup>th</sup> eds. Berzoff, Melano Flanagan and Hertz (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) p. 197, Lorenz showed that early behaviour was a response to the particular speed (relatively slow) that the mother walked, not due to the mother's shape, her odour, other characteristics. Indeed, the picture of Lorenz walking slowly around his laboratory followed by a line of ducklings, who had been removed from their mother immediately after hatching and having imprinted on Lorenz instead, made him famous.

However, Bowlby applied Lorenz's concept of "imprinting" to the attachment of infant to mother.<sup>277</sup> He was interested in Lorenz's work because of his efforts to try and separate the instinctual from the learned. What ethological theory of attachment behaviour argues is that the mother-infant dyad is an instinctual relationship necessary for the survival of the species. Moreover, this concept of there being two kinds of behaviour, namely instinctive and learned, was to become the foundation for Behavioural Ecology. But within an historical context, science has played an important role in the debate surrounding the question of mothering. As Eckhard H Hess explains in his 1973 text *Imprinting: Early Experience and Developmental Psychobiology of Attachment*, before Darwin's time it is clear that instinct was purely a philosophical concept, but his theory of evolution put instinctive behaviour under the microscope.<sup>278</sup> For Charles Darwin, James Herbert and William James, the evolutionary framework of instincts provided evidence to maintain the difference between the sexes with regard to emotion, intelligence and volition.<sup>279</sup> But Professor John Krebs, Principal of Zoology at the University of Oxford, who worked alongside Professor Richard Dawkins on the 1976 evolutionary text, *The Selfish Gene*, explains on BBC Radio Four's 'In Our Time'<sup>280</sup>, that separating innate and learned behaviour proved a false dichotomy as no behaviour appears without any environmental experience or influence. So purely innate or purely learned become blurred. However, what Krebs does clarify is that some things are more dependent on environmental influence and some less but that innateness has no value any

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<sup>277</sup> Maria Margarita Vicedo-Castello, 'The Maternal Instinct: Mother Love and the Search for Human Nature', (Proquest, USA, 2006) p. 27.

<sup>278</sup> Eckhard Heinrich Hess, *Imprinting Early Experience and the Development Psychobiology of Attachment*, (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co, 1973) p. 3.

<sup>279</sup> Maria Margarita Vicedo-Castello, 'The Maternal Instinct: Mother Love and the Search for Human Nature', p. 3.

<sup>280</sup> Professor John Krebs, speaking on *In Our Time*, 'Behavioural Ecology', BBC Radio 4, aired 11<sup>th</sup> December 2014.

more. That is to say, genes may create a propensity to behave in a certain way but that propensity is not immutable or independent from any environmental experience. Everything depends on a mixture of genes and environment; the question that is now being asked is what is the relationship between genetic and environmental influence, which is what we are attempting to explore in this section. As a result, the question arises whether maternal instinct can be defined as a universal truth. What is clear is that if it does exist as a universal truth, maternal instinct will at best fluctuate and at worst be latent and appear non-existent, in accordance with an individual's relationship with society and culture.

## 2.ii) Attachment theory

But it is attachment theory, which is Bowlby's attempt to unify ethology with psychoanalysis, that really preoccupies *Night Waking*. It began and still is primarily a theory of development, recognizing the importance of early parenting experiences in the subsequent development of the child. As R. and C. Shilkret make clear, Bowlby proposed that all complex organisms, including humans, have an attachment system that is highly adaptive in that it keeps the young in close proximity to an older animal whom the young seek out in times of danger. However, in his capacity as a psychologist, Bowlby's research was with children raised in institutions, commentating upon their affectionless character and antisocial behaviour, which he related to earlier maternal deprivation and separation. Indeed, his research led to the decline in orphanages in favour of foster care placement. During World War II psychoanalysis was transformed as Anna Freud helped set up war nurseries and witnessed the consequences of separating children from their mothers, which proved more traumatic for the

child than separation from the father. Anna Freud went on to severely criticize the government for their failure to recognize the distress caused in evacuating children away from their mothers, and in line with Bowlby's work, her involvement with the war nurseries resulted in children being provided with additional support within the family, or foster family, rather than the institutional system. Reinforcing this underlying theme in *Night Waking* is Anna's use of the Wild Boy of Aveyron as a point of departure for her book.<sup>281</sup>

However, attachment theory focuses its attention on the consequences separation has for the child not the mother. As Suleiman argues, 'it is as if, for psychoanalysis, the only self worth worrying about in the mother-child relationship were that of the child'.<sup>282</sup> And *because* psychoanalysts write from the point of view of the child, Moss deliberately juxtaposes their research with a mother's experience towards separation from her children. It transpires that Anna displays traits of anxiety when she is separated from her child[ren] so that her research on 19<sup>th</sup> century childhood ensures the narrative concerning separation anxiety spills over from the book she is writing to her real life experiences as a mother.

But Moss' novel is an exploration of ontological candour into attachment theory from the point of Anna's own experience. She describes separation as feeling 'the cord, the filament, that joins me to Moth and Raphael, stretching, and thinning and thinning',<sup>283</sup> the physical severing of the umbilical cord as

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<sup>281</sup> The Wild Boy of Aveyron, was found sleeping rough in the woods around Aveyron, in the French Alps, in 1797. He was about twelve, had a deep scar ear to ear; and had no clothes or words. He became a popular figurehead for philosophical enquiry into a human being raised without society.

<sup>282</sup> Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Writing and Motherhood' cited in *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, eds. Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane and Madelon Sprengnether (London: Cornell University Press, 1985). p. 356.

<sup>283</sup> Moss, p. 352.

something, which 'should have hurt'.<sup>284</sup> And indeed, what is evident and distinguishes itself from psychoanalytic theory is that Anna dislikes being separated from her children for no other reason than that it feels 'unnatural'<sup>285</sup>. According to psychoanalysis, the mother's ability to attach herself to her child will be heavily dependent on her own experiences of her attachment to her mother or primary caregiver. As Parker affirms, there will exist a *reason*, such as guilt, echoes of abandonment, fear or bereavement, which will dictate the way a mother behaves towards separation. Psychoanalysis refuses to identify the individual as a singular subject; it is always burdened by experiences of others from early childhood. And indeed, from Anna's research on psychoanalysis, its rhetoric would lead her to believe that her own ability to mother has implications for future generations when she laments that 'failure at motherhood is for life and beyond, that everything that happens to my children and my children's children is my fault'.<sup>286</sup> One of the key components of Melanie Klein's (1882-1960) work was that maternal ambivalence was borne out of a re-experiencing of feelings a woman holds in relation to her own mother during childhood. But, as Parker argues, there needs to be some 'prising open of the relentlessly backwards movement of psychoanalytic theorizing of the development of maternity'.<sup>287</sup> Indeed, Parker *uncouples* maternal experience from the mother's own infantile experience thereby enabling us to consider the mother as autonomous. Adrienne Rich describes it as a matraphobia, which can

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid p. 140.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid, p 353.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid, p. 130.

<sup>287</sup> Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption*, p. 54.

be understood as a 'womanly splitting of the self in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage, to become individuated and free'.<sup>288</sup>

Indeed, Anna reveals that her own upbringing was less than happy, witnessing her mother substituting her self-fulfillment for that of her husband and daughter's. So, Moss does acknowledge a link between Anna and her own mother, highlighting the inherent nature of this relationship, but, likewise Anna's response is reactive; she uses her experience of being mothered to steer her own mothering in a different direction. And in line with Parker, what I am claiming is evident in *Night Waking* is that Anna's response to being separated from her children is due as much to her inherent maternal intersubjectivity as it is to any recollection of her own childhood. Although she acknowledges that the relationship with her mother was less than good, this conversation is not situated in the text near her own meditations on the experience of separation from her children. So, although, as Professor Krebbs argues, it is not possible to distinguish between what is of environmental influence and what is not<sup>289</sup>, I argue that mutations in attachment between mother and child will also depend on her own ontological standing. As Lisa Guenther argues:

To admit a gap between mothering as an ethical and political practice, and the mother as an ontological, biological, or social identity [... and] recogniz[ing] that it is possible to be *like* (or also *unlike*) a mother even while one "is" a mother, we recognize the difference between ontology and ethics, between being and the otherwise-than-being.<sup>290</sup>

### 2.iii) Object Relations Theory in relation to the Embodied Subject

There are numerous schools within psychoanalysis which analyse representations of the mother, such as drive theory, ego and self psychology, but

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<sup>288</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 236.

<sup>289</sup> Professor Krebbs speaking on *In our Time* on Radio 4 on the subject of Behavioural Ecology aired on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2014.

<sup>290</sup> Lisa Guenther, from *Devoir Être*, cited in Sarah LaChance Adams, *Mad Mothers, Bad Mothers & What a "Good" Mother Would Do: The Ethics of Ambivalence*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 88

the central tenets of object relations theory make it the most relevant when considering intersubjectivity, or at the very least, the relationship between object and subject. But it is worth mentioning that the tradition of Object Relations Theory in psychoanalytic theory and practice extends the function of external reality in structuring the internal world of the infant. As Laura Melano Flanagan explains in the 2016 text, *Inside Out and Outside In: Psychodynamic Clinical theory and Psychopathology*, object relations theory is

the belief that all people have within them an internal, often unconscious world of relationships that is different and in many ways more powerful and compelling than what is going on in their external world of interactions with “real” and present people [...] object relations thus refers not only to “real” relationships with others, but also the internal mental representations of others and to internal images of self as well.<sup>291</sup>

Further, Melano Flanagan states that object relations theory is a study of self and other, exploring ‘the process whereby people come to experience themselves as separate and independent from others, while at the same time needing profound attachment to others’.<sup>292</sup> It blurs the boundary between the material reality of the external world and most relevantly, for this research, it ‘fleshes out the relational aspect of the object’.<sup>293</sup> There is an overlapping of dialogue between Melano Flanagan’s definition of object relations theory with Moss’ distinction between interior and exterior worlds: what they present to the outside is not necessarily reflective of what is going on inside. But for Moss, and indeed Cusk, this is due more to market forces and less, as object relations theory suggests, to interference of the psyche. However, the fundamental difference between the phenomenological relationship between object and subject and that of object relation theories is that the latter distinguishes subject *from* object. It

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<sup>291</sup> Laura Melano Flanagan, ‘Object Relations Theory’ in *Inside Out and Outside In Psychodynamic Clinical Theory and Psychopathology in Contemporary Multicultural Contexts*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition eds. Joan Berzoff, Laura Melano Flanagan and Patricia Hertz (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016). p. 125.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid, p. 123.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid p. 125.



distinguishes between subject and object in very much dichotomous terms, where an overlapping between the two does not occur. Indeed, within psychoanalysis the mother is so often perceived as the 'object' in the child's developing internal world. Moreover, the language fostered by object relations' theories prevents mothers being seen as subjects in their own right. As Jessica Benjamin highlights, object relations theory often implies that the mother is someone who is submissive, accommodating, and a passive object, existing to meet the needs of others, and not a person who is recognized as having her own agency or desires.<sup>294</sup> Indeed, Baraitser affirms that

Just as maternal subjectivity is on the cusp of being articulated within psychoanalytic literature, the mother appears to slip back into some manifestation of her traditional object-position as container, mirror, receptacle for intolerable feelings, a body with bits attached, or with supposedly vital bits missing, an object to be repudiated, hated or feared, the one who bears destruction and abandonment and still remains intact, more recently an effective and reliable cortisol manager, but ultimately she who must to some degree be left, or more forcefully abjected or killed off, in order that 'the subject' (so often the child in psychoanalysis, gathered up retroactively by the child-now-adult through the process of analysis) can emerge unscathed.<sup>295</sup>

The nearest I got to detecting an acceptance in psychoanalysis of any sense of maternal intersubjectivity, resonating with descriptions by Cusk, Moss, Lymer and Young, is what is termed the Symbiotic Phase first postulated by American psychologist, Margaret Mahler (1897-1985). Although it is from the point of view of the child (between six weeks and ten months), Mahler describes the symbiotic phase as a 'time in life when caregiver and baby seemingly exist in one orbit.' In fact she describes the hallmark of symbiosis as 'omnipotent fusion with the representation of the mother and, in particular, the delusion of a common boundary between two physically separate individuals',<sup>296</sup> implying that this

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid p. 276. Extract from Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysts, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

<sup>295</sup> Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 5.

<sup>296</sup> M Mahler, F Pine and A Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant*, (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 450 cited in Laura Melano Flanagan, 'Object Relations Theory' in *Inside Out and Outside In: Psychodynamic Clinical Theory and Psychopathology in Contemporary Multicultural Contexts*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, p. 156.

shared experience is mutual. But, in object relations' terms, it is not 'real' but merely a 'delusion', whereas, the phenomenological interpretation of this sense of intersubjectivity is actualized and thus it aligns itself with the experiential writings of Moss and Cusk.

Furthermore, Melano Flanagan states that 'it is important to remember that the very concept of "self" is a social construct rooted in time, place and culture'.<sup>297</sup> This categorical stance is problematic, obscuring or denying that any ontological standing can exist within the structure of "self". Flanagan discusses the self in terms of it being a separate line of development that should ideally lead to a creative, loving and cohesive whole. In psychoanalytical terms therefore, the self is a construction being denied its own agency outside the boundaries of homogeneity, failing, as Guenther argues, to recognize the difference between ethics and ontology. And indeed if, as Melano Flanagan claims, "self" can only be considered as a social construct, it contradicts the writings of Cusk, Kristeva, Young, Lymer and Moss who discuss motherhood in more visceral terms. Moreover, in *Night Waking*, the combination of landscape and historical narrative in conjunction with Anna's interior monologue creates a hyperbole between what is 'real' and what is constructed, destabilising this psychoanalytical framework.

#### 2.iv) Letting go

So, using Anna and Judith Fairchild to illustrate, Moss charts attachment theory from early infancy through to adolescence. Judith Fairchild is juxtaposed with Anna as her foil, not least to highlight two polarized notions on the ideology of

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid p. 169.

motherhood, foreshadowing Anna's fear of what she might become if she stays at home to raise her children. A mother may indeed make the transition from worker to carer, but let us consider at what stage she is expected to withdraw into the shadows of a child's life. In the words of Helen Deutsch, the one permanent tragedy of motherhood is that children grow up.<sup>298</sup> Rousseau argues that as soon as the need ceases to exist, the natural bond between mother and child dissolves, but, as Badinter counter argues, if this is the case, what does that say about love? If it is possible for love not to exist or to cease to exist then love must, by its very nature, cease to be unconditional. In accordance with psychoanalysis, the cord or filament that ties mothers to their children should indeed become weakened as children mature and this is corroborated by Cusk whose memoir describes the need to write at the point of experience, 'before *it* could get away again', suggesting that there would be a need to rely on memory, the tie becoming more diluted as the infant grows up.<sup>299</sup>

At first glance, Judith appears to represent the somewhat outdated 20<sup>th</sup> century mother, emblematic of those women who 'sacrificed' their own lives for the sake of the family. Psychoanalytical theory relegates the mother figure as an agent or a construct by and for the child, a mere shell killed off when the child is no longer in need of her. For Moss, Judith is representative of the psychoanalytical empty shell, the shadow cast aside now that her daughter is no longer in need of mothering. Indeed, she is a distorted symbol of what Deutsch defines as the "feminine woman" which consists of three essential terms: passivity, masochism and narcissism. Using analogy, Sigmund Freud and

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<sup>298</sup> Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Writing and Motherhood' in *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, (London: Cornell University Press, 1985) p. 355.

<sup>299</sup> Cusk, p. 9. Italics – my emphasis.

Deutsch describe the passive character of female nature to 'the mobile and passive ovum in contrast to the actively mobile sperm'.<sup>300</sup> Badinter asserts that all stages of reproduction, that is, the sex act, birth and motherhood are all closely linked to suffering and that this theory of female masochism makes suffering a natural process for women. But Badinter accuses Deutsch of asserting the existence of a maternal instinct and defining the mother as "the Feminine Woman" whose equilibrium of narcissistic tendencies with masochistic capability enables her to tolerate suffering because it is (supposedly) counterbalanced by the "joys of motherhood".<sup>301</sup> Deutsch maintained that failure to accept the masochism associated with motherhood would result in those mothers experiencing a sense of guilt. Judith assumes the masochistic, submissive role that society demands which exposes her as an example of how passivity, masochism and narcissism fail in 'reality'. Positioning Judith, who has attempted to assume all the qualities of the feminine woman of which Deutsch speaks, alongside Anna, who deliberately refuses to accept any of them, is emphasizing that what may work in theory does not necessarily succeed in practice. On the contrary, Anna's relationship with her children is an authentic, uncomplicated love because she has not attempted to mother in any other way than she feels able to. But Judith's character serves to highlight the repercussions of a woman who chooses to play out the prescriptive mother that society so encourages. Indeed, Deutsch was initially less interested in women's psychology and more interested in 'inauthenticity, which she associated with those, like Judith, who display what she calls a phoney identity.

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<sup>300</sup> Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct*, p. 269.

<sup>301</sup> Badinter, p. 273.

This female masochism alongside narcissistic tendency is understood by Freud and Deutsch for the need to be loved: they perceived narcissism in a girl as a transference of love of self into the desire to be loved.<sup>302</sup> It led Deutsch to be interested in the effects on mothers of the conflict that arose between narcissistic self-love and motherly love of others. As Vicedo-Castello highlights, Deutsch acknowledges this sense of conflict for the ego, which prevails with the onset of motherhood, such as the effects of pregnancy versus freedom, beauty and motherliness versus eroticism and intellectual aspirations. These observations do indeed feed into the dialectic of self-fulfillment versus maternal duties that are debated throughout *Night Waking*. For some, as illustrated by Judith Fairchild, it results in women falsely seeking to inflate their self-esteem by fostering another personality. This question of women imitating rather than being good enough mothers is personified by Judith whose phoney identity as a stay at home mother is exposed through her tumultuous relationship with her anorexic adolescent daughter, the latter of whom has been starved of autonomy as Judith's ability to 'let her go' is thwarted, not because of her love for Zoe but because she feels she is *owed* her love in return. As the text reveals, this approach to mothering is not accompanied with a happy ever after outcome: Zoe repays her mother for all her dutiful work by 'hating [her]'.<sup>303</sup> Judith violates Deutsch's paradigm of 'a maternal willingness to sacrifice',<sup>304</sup> *believing* that she has provided the ideal upbringing for a child because, as a stay at home mother, she cooked, shopped, took her to piano lessons, painting and ice skating, made costumes and cakes, ran the PTA for eight years at school, listened to reading,

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<sup>302</sup> Badinter, p. 271.

<sup>303</sup> Moss, p. 332.

<sup>304</sup> Parker, p. 150.

helped with homework and drove them to university interviews, but at no stage does Judith Fairchild mention any sense of self-fulfillment or enjoyment in her role. Moreover, Moss situates an extract from Anna Freud at the beginning of Chapter Ten, 'The More Highly Organized Forms of Love', which opens with the entrance of Judith:

One important instinctual need, that for early attachment to the mother, remains as we know more or less unsatisfied: consequently it may become blunted, which means that the child after a while ceases to search for a mother substitute and fails to develop all the more highly organized forms of love which should be modelled on the first pattern.<sup>305</sup>

As Anna writes in her book, 'institutions constitute an attempt to ratify a brighter future, to achieve what individual households cannot encompass',<sup>306</sup> echoing Anna Freud's conclusions that 'some children did better in intelligently run institutions than in families'.<sup>307</sup> Both references are implicitly directed at Judith Fairchild. Moreover, whilst Anna listens to Judith deriding her own daughter for her lack of gratitude, she contemplates the work of Anna Freud who was keen to liberate adolescents from their parents and argued that 'sometimes the best thing mothers might do for [their] children is to stay away'.<sup>308</sup> Moreover, Judith acts as a warning to Anna that she must follow her own sense of self rather than the imperatives imposed upon her through cultural forces. As Deutsch asserts, a child will know if a mother is assuming a phoney love for them rather than one that is imbued with authenticity.

In fact, Cusk's title to her memoir is revealing in itself. *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother* does not suggest that it is a temporal domain that women enter which disappears when the child is no longer in need of mothering. This

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<sup>305</sup> Dorothy Burlingham and Anna Freud, *Infants Without Families: the Case for and Against Residential Nurseries*, p.22 cited in Moss' *Night Waking* p. 194.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid* p.9.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid* p. 330.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid* p. 333.

notion of 'becoming', indeed this transience concerning motherhood is a theme upon which Moss dwells in conjunction with psychoanalysis in *Night Waking*, deftly illustrating the difficulty of 'becoming' a mother and yet the realization that ties must be loosened in order for the child to be independent, despite the fact that a woman will always be a mother. Lisa Baraitser affirms motherhood is the lifelong process of 'being there to be left', who needs to remain partly in the shadows, in order to gradually but appropriately 'fail',<sup>309</sup> suggesting, paradoxically, that you have succeeded at motherhood but perhaps at the cost of your own self fulfillment. What this situation is tacitly highlighting is that for a mother, such as Anna, to follow her own pursuits, over and above mothering, may make 'letting go' of one's children less difficult. Anna can recognize that self-sacrifice is not a successful outcome for her family as her duel/dual in the novel illustrates. Finally, Moss is not dismissing psychoanalytic theory but challenging the concept that, if the "feminine woman" is removed from the assumptions or constrictions of patriarchy and instead resides in female experience, whether the naturally self-sacrificing, devoted mother figure truly exists. It is necessary to consider why it is that Moss feels the need to highlight the detrimental way external reality reinforces a mother's psychic reality. Parker argues that the psychic conflict generated by the dynamics of authority can lead to a failure to recognize the discrete individuality of the other, particularly in mothering.

### **Section Three**

#### **3.1) Infanticide**

And indeed, as I state in Chapter One, maternal ambivalence will also be dependent on a mother's sense of being at that given moment, or as Heidegger

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<sup>309</sup> Baraitser, p. 5.

describes it, how you find yourself in the world (*Befindlichkeit*). Moss situates extracts on infanticide from academic text alongside her protagonist's own meditations on the subject. Anna's desire to learn more about infanticide is prompted not only by her own private fantasies but also by the very real inference by the police that the baby's skull found in their garden is hers. These connections provide a foray into the subject of infanticide, which are substantiated through the theoretical discourse. Moreover, Anna's own preoccupation with infanticide may be heightened, perhaps unconsciously, by sharing with the reader, but not her husband, that she undertook an abortion soon after her second son was born, confessing that given her history it was not difficult to persuade two doctors that her mental health would be jeopardized by a third child. And according to Beauvoir, even abortion can give rise to ambiguous and ambivalent feeling: 'this intervention she demands is one she often rejects in her own heart. She is divided inside herself [...] there are many women who feel they have mutilated a part of themselves'.<sup>310</sup> So, rather than assume, as LaChance Adams states, that because ambivalence exists maternal instinct cannot, it needs to be reconsidered in terms of co-existence.

That said, the complexity surrounding ambivalence can so often be misconstrued. Chapter Four of *Night Waking* named 'Fearing to Handle a Knife' is headed up by an extract from a 2002 text, *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives of Child Murder*, which reads: 'She retained a great affection for the child, at the same time even identifying the instrument that she would use to destroy it, fearing to handle a knife even at mealtimes.'<sup>311</sup> Within the first paragraph of the Chapter, Anna reveals that when she was really tired during maternity leave, she

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<sup>310</sup> LaChance Adams, p. 171. Extract taken from *The Second Sex*, p. 531.

<sup>311</sup> Moss, p. 39



would exit the house so that 'the presence of witnesses means that Mummy is not afraid that she might succumb to the urge to use one of the black-handled Sabatier knives [...] to bring about a few minutes peace'.<sup>312</sup> In psychoanalytical terms, the reality principle is governing the pleasure principle, making attempts to suppress the fantastical desire in regard to murdering her children, but nevertheless blurring distinctions between perception and reality, conscious and unconscious thought, hovering ominously within the psyche. Indeed, we learn from Anna that there were moments in the first few weeks of her children's lives when 'I believed I would have been happy to see them die, to restore a world that did not revolve around the baby's mouth' and 'couldn't stay in the house any longer because I didn't trust myself not to hurt [the baby]'.<sup>313</sup> According to Parker and LaChance Adams, this emotional dislocation from her children is not only a common characteristic of maternal ambivalence but also, a common sentiment felt amongst mothers. But it is also important to distinguish the difference between the thought process and actualizing those thoughts. The latter rarely happens: as I discussed in Chapter One, LaChance Adams argues that these thought processes act as a safeguard to keep maternal behaviour in check. Moreover, in *Night Waking* Anna notes that those mothers who did suffocate their children resulted from an inability to feed them and a wish to desist from witnessing them starve to death. And the death of baby Eve bears all the hallmarks of infanticide, but Anna's research leads her to discover that it was a consequence of being an illegitimate child who died of tetanus that resulted in Eve being conspiratorially buried in the Cassingham garden. But as Anna's research on infanticide reveals, most babies are killed by fathers and child

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid p. 39 and p. 327.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid p. 158.

minders, despite the fact that mothers are more likely to be exposed to their children for longer periods of time and with less sleep.

### 3.ii) Night Waking

Sleep deprivation, as the title of the book indicates, has a significant effect on Anna's ability to mother. She contemplates what she would pawn for sleep: '[w]ould I, given the choice, have peace for Palestine or twelve hours in bed? Clean water for the children of Africa or a week off motherhood?'<sup>314</sup> And yet, disconcertingly, this aspect of motherhood is rarely touched upon by feminist theory. Indeed, neither Parker nor LaChance Adams voice or even allude to the consequences of the lack of sleep alongside maternal ambivalence and yet it is such a fundamental characteristic of early motherhood. There is one scene in particular, in which the text exposes the consequences of sleep deprivation. The one and only time Anna loses her temper with her two year old child who will not go to sleep, we witness her using physical force to push him back down in his cot,

I had one hand on his bottom and the other between his shoulders. He squirmed and I pressed down[...]"Moth, for fuck's sake go to sleep right now. If you don't go to sleep this minute, I'm going to kill myself. I'm going to take a knife and kill myself [...] I must not attack him. Must not touch him or I will put my hands round his neck and kill him. I cannot leave because I would never come back and I cannot stay because I am about to pick him up and ram his head into the wall until he stops making that intolerable noise.<sup>315</sup>

But it is Giles' incredulity that she would consider harming her children which is key to this scene, as it highlights his own excision of blame for Anna's behaviour. His night's sleep has remained uninterrupted, relying on Anna to get up to waking children. As Anna later attempts to justify her actions to her

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid p. 27.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid pp. 48-49.

unsympathetic husband, she confesses to having had less than five hours' sleep in the last three days. All she wanted to be able to do was to put her toddler Moth down for a lunchtime nap in order to have 'three fucking minutes to myself, I want to pee. I want to have a drink of water. I want to brush my hair. I used to give lectures and write my book', describing the impact of the switch from full time career to full time carer as 'losing her mind'.<sup>316</sup>

## **Section Four**

### 4.i) The Mother in the Work Place

From what has been said so far, it seems that cultural forces remain a significant burden for working mothers. But it is also necessary to take a step back and question whether these cultural forces are over-shadowing and masking another consideration about motherhood and the work place which are raised in the writings of Cusk and Moss.<sup>317</sup> Indeed, Moss explicitly situates Anna's contemplations about mothering alongside her deliberations about returning to work and thus demonstrating an inter-dependence between attachment of mother to child and how this may disrupt her decision making process in relation to the work place. Both Moss and Cusk are presenting traits of attachment that can only be understood in intrinsic terms, which leads us to question whether cultural forces are wholly to blame for statistics such as there are only seven female CEO's in the top FTSE 100 companies<sup>318</sup> and that women

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid pp. 49 and 51

<sup>317</sup> Although *Night Waking* is a novel, it can be no coincidence that Moss is herself an academic and wrote it having recently become a mother.

<sup>318</sup> Jennifer Rankin, 'Fewer women leading FTSE firms than men called John', *The Guardian*, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2015. ([www.theguardian.com/business/2015/mar/06/johns-dauids-and-ians-outnumber-female-chief-executives-in-ftse-100](http://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/mar/06/johns-dauids-and-ians-outnumber-female-chief-executives-in-ftse-100)) [accessed 6.10.15].

only hold 22% of management positions.<sup>319</sup> Indeed, I argue that more research needs to be focused on the link between maternal intersubjectivity and the effect it may have on decisions concerning the work place thereafter. As a point of departure, an open and honest dialogue amongst women *could* achieve a more coherent understanding of maternal intersubjectivity, in the hope that it releases female progress from its current faltering position of life/work balance.

Interviewing mothers not in full time employment alongside working mothers and listening to their stories may unveil shared patterns of thinking as well as portraying a more 'natural' representation of motherhood.

Furthermore, Anna's character gives access to the deconstruction of psychological processes she undertakes in her attempts to make a decision about balancing motherhood with the work place. Indeed, during the course of my research I have read a lot of literature on reasons why progress for women in the workplace has 'stalled'<sup>320</sup> or even, as Badinter claims, regressed. The overriding argument that Sandberg, Badinter, Chodorow, Roiphe, LaChance Adams and economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett advocate is the need for genuine co-parenting. As I demonstrated in Chapter One, Hewlett's statistics concerning equitable domestic and child care responsibilities make for salutary reading and the sharing of these duties between Anna and Giles in *Night Waking* corroborate these findings. Moreover, Hewlett, in line with Badinter, describes women of the 1970's as the "break through" generation, having successfully combated sex discrimination in the work place and championed equal rights. But Hewlett's research uncovers that what many of these women had successfully achieved in

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<sup>319</sup> Catalyst Perspective, "Breaking the Barriers: Women in Senior Management in the UK", Catalyst, New York, February 2001 cited in Sylvia Ann Hewlett, *Baby Hunger* (London: Atlantic, 2002), p. 129.

<sup>320</sup> Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In* p. 7.

the work place meant that they had had to make difficult “trade offs” in their private lives. Now on the brink of menopause, Hewlett observes that they ‘seemed haunted by what they were leaving behind forever. Letting go – of the possibility of having a child, was hugely difficult, and for some at least, fiercely painful.’<sup>321</sup> Furthermore, Hewlett conducted a national survey in the USA, in association with the National Parenting Association, entitled *High Achieving Women 2001* and on work-life balance it reveals that only 14% of the women chose to remain childless. As Hewlett explains, women who were interviewed for the survey ‘described how in their twenties and thirties the struggle to build a substantial career gradually squeezed out the possibility of finding a partner or bearing children’ despite the fact that ‘the vast majority yearn for children’<sup>322</sup> but only 16% of the women believed that they can ‘have it all’ in terms of career and family. Hewlett’s survey reveals that within the younger generation, 89% of high-achieving women believe that they will be able to get pregnant in their forties. Indeed, as I am writing this, there has been a dramatic response from female journalists in the national press after female gynaecologist, Professor Geeta Nargund, lead consultant for reproductive medicine at St George’s Hospital in London, made claims in a letter to the Education Secretary that women hoping to conceive should try for a baby before reaching the age of thirty to stop a ‘fertility time bomb’.<sup>323</sup> Since the sexual revolution of the 1960’s, particularly in the past twenty years or more, a feminist response to having ovaries and a uterus and being limited by her own nature is to ignore it until it suits her schedule. Although Professor Nargund’s comments elicit debate, one matter on

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<sup>321</sup> Sylvia Ann Hewlett, p. 14.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid p. 21.

<sup>323</sup> Article by Gregory Walton, *The Daily Telegraph*, Monday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2015, p. 4.

which her critics are unanimous is the uncompromising fact that women today, despite experiencing the most freedom in history, cannot override nature. Cusk acquiesces to this fact, quoting the first line of Adrienne Rich's text: 'All human life on the planet is born of woman.'<sup>324</sup> This fact cannot be overlooked, sidelined or in any way transcended: as Cusk laments, today's 'women have changed but their biological condition remains unaltered'.<sup>325</sup>

### **Conclusion**

*Night Waking* records an intimate journey of its protagonist Anna, both externally through the landscape of Colsay and internally through the art of interior monologue, witnessing her attempts to reconcile her former life as a full time academic with that of her role as a mother. Anna's literal distancing from society inverts Jean-Jacques Rousseau's claim that we can 'learn from the instinctive wisdom of toddlers'<sup>326</sup> before society corrupts them. Instead, rather than considering it from the child's perspective, *Night Waking* focuses on the mother who, far removed from society's gaze, can mother more instinctively. Although, it is now widely accepted that it is almost impossible to distinguish between learned and unlearned behaviour, Moss has written *Night Waking* in such a way that it highlights the external forces influencing learned behaviour that women must face on becoming a mother: for example, co-parenting, prescriptive behaviour, patriarchy, history vs ideology, geography and psychoanalytic theory. These forces may overshadow any ontological behaviour, such as the intersubjective attachment that Anna exhibits, but this does not mean that it does not exist.

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<sup>324</sup> Rich Adrienne, *Of Woman Born* (New York: Norton, 1986) p. 11.

<sup>325</sup> Rachel Cusk, p. 15.

<sup>326</sup> Moss, p. 9.

Furthermore, while theorists such as LaChance Adams, Parker and Flanagan persist in focusing their attention on how the mother's ambivalence affects the relationship with her child, I argue that both Cusk and Moss exhibit an ambivalence that is less focused towards the child and directed more at the intransigent position that motherhood has imposed upon them. Anna considers her ambivalence toward her own maternal sense of intersubjectivity from a point of autonomy, identifying her singular subjectivity. She illustrates that maternal instinct is not about a natural ability towards caring for her children but a complex, flawed and disruptive sensation. She unsettles prescriptive maternal behaviour, providing a glimpse of what is really going on underneath the façade of motherhood. She does not enjoy the physical and temporal processes of being a mother and the key to gaining a more authentic representation of motherhood is to grasp a better understanding of this paradox. In her case, the result is a woman torn between an intrinsic attachment to her children and a sense of entrapment that disrupts her decision making process with regard to her work. Indeed, the novel sheds a light on the fact that motherhood, unlike any other institution, is irreversible: it is not possible to take it back, leave, or escape from it. As Michael Cunningham deftly illustrates in *The Hours* (1999) through his character Laura Brown, even if you physically flee from your children, they remain within your consciousness, death proving the only respite. As Anne Roiphe describes motherhood: 'it is not a cultural artifact [...] it is a deep implant, a hook that snares us, a connection both treacherous and wondrous.'<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Anne Roiphe, *A Mother's Eye: Motherhood and Feminism*, (London: Virago, 1997) p. 67.

## Conclusion

The objective of this study was to modernize and shift the representation of motherhood so that it more accurately portrays what it is to mother in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. From the outset, the intention was to explore motherhood in relation to woman's autonomy and its relationship with maternal instinct. There were three main factors that I observed in the early stages of my research that were to lay the foundations for exploring this elusive term. Firstly, I had not anticipated that the term 'maternal instinct' lacks any formal definition, absenting from any referencing texts. Neither was I prepared for Beauvoir and Badinter to dismiss maternal instinct as non-existent. Furthermore, it proved challenging to find anything written about maternal instinct at all and when I did it was written with the presumption that the meaning was that of the precedent which is rooted in patriarchal narrative. A consequence of this for women's writing is the lack of language assigned to them. This influences their use of form when documenting their experiences. It invariably leads them to write anecdotally, intertwining fact with fiction, blurring the boundaries between the two, thereby mirroring maternal instinct itself, and creating an ambiguous and complex picture of motherhood.

But perhaps the most challenging aspect of writing about maternal instinct is that it lies within pre-reflective experience and is therefore pre-theoretic, thwarting the possibility of being theorized. The experience of maternal instinct slips through the confines of language into the unspeakable and indefinable. This is why there is no formal definition. So, to a certain extent this study is in itself a paradox in that it is making attempts to translate into language, occurrences and experiences that precede language. It has been a



constant challenge attempting to make clear in language something that occurs *before* it is translated into words. So in fact I have had to rely on the non-language in these texts, the subtext, exploring the symbolism found in the landscape, physical interaction between the protagonists and other characters in order to highlight their isolation and conflict. Furthermore, the illustration of maternal intersubjectivity, which I have borrowed from Young's phenomenological paradigm of subjectivity, can only be considered as a metaphor for woman's experience of maternity. As Kristeva claims:

Let us call 'maternal' the ambivalent principle that is bound to the species on the one hand, and on the other stems from an identity catastrophe that causes the Name to topple over into the unnameable that one imagines as femininity, non-language or body.<sup>328</sup>

So, the closest I could get to toppling an experience into language that derives from the non-language is the phenomenological practice of bracketing or the act of *epoché*, the procedure in which our preconceptions and theoretical notions ruling our daily world of fact are not left behind but are temporarily suspended, thereby shedding light on the condition that underlies experience and makes it possible.<sup>329</sup> In turn, this practice of bracketing provides the most accurate depiction of intersubjectivity which phenomenology describes as being neither a unified nor a separate subject but something in between. I refer to this sense of in-betweenness as 'the blurring effect' which best reflects the experiences of maternity and early motherhood of which my chosen writers speak. So, writing at the point of experience 'before it can get away again'<sup>330</sup> is crucial to capturing a mother's sense of being. Cusk is a rare exception, deconstructing and

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<sup>328</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Sabat Mater', *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 161-162.

<sup>329</sup> To explain the process of *epoché* I have summarized the longer version laid out in Chapter Two which was an extract from *Phenomenology, Modernism and Beyond*, eds Carole Bourne-Taylor and Ariane Mildenberg (Peter Lang AG, Bern, 2010) p.5

<sup>330</sup> Cusk, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, p. 9.

analyzing her (m)otherliness to such micro-levels. Moss equally mimics the art of bracketing by refusing to engage with certain prescriptive practices – whilst acknowledging that she is fully aware of their existence – and exploring motherhood on the basis of her own instinct.

Furthermore, it became clear early on that there are two narratives concerning maternal instinct. The first is more overt, presenting the prescriptive version of maternal instinct as woman's 'natural' disposition to mother, which Beauvoir and Badinter dismiss as predicated on patriarchal myth. As a result, Chapter One was dedicated to exploring maternal instinct through the course of history within the written word, revealing the vicissitudes of its past, *created* for the benefit of society rather than reflecting on the essence of being a mother. I charted the theories laid down by Plato and their distortion through the course of history, most evidently in the writings of Rousseau and upon which reform of family, motherhood and education were to become based. It became clear that it was fundamental to return to the grass roots of maternal instinct and re-consider anew what is 'natural' mothering. Indeed, Gail Weiss challenges the concept of our attitudes towards what is 'natural'. Using phenomenologist Edmund Husserl's own description regarding the natural attitude, she argues that it is not natural at all; rather, it is gradually acquired by an individual and these attitudes are themselves 'complex, dynamic constructions, evolving and transforming over time, across space and, most importantly, in response to specific, cultural and political encounters'.<sup>331</sup> This approach to considering what is 'natural' feeds directly into how maternal instinct and ambivalence need re-interpreting.

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<sup>331</sup> Gail Weiss, 'Can We De-Naturalize the Natural Attitude?', title of paper given at a Symposium on 'Cross-disciplinary Phenomenology: A Readiness for the Questionable', June 2016 pp. 1-2.

Because woefully little had been written by women on their experience of mothering, it seemed essential to turn the focus of attention onto texts by women who have empirical understanding of the subject. The more I read of woman's experience of becoming a mother, the more convinced I became there existed a second more masked and subversive narrative, portraying motherhood in intersubjective and ambivalent terms and it is this narrative that has been the focus of this thesis. My intention was to gain an understanding of the impact these sub-structures have on motherhood for 21<sup>st</sup> century women. In reference to the work place, if female progress is stalling as Sheryl Sandberg claims, the research I have carried out leads me to believe that the misrepresentation of motherhood must contribute to the root of the problem. Indeed, I argue it is the core that is rotten: motherhood has 'altered her values in deference to the opinion of others'.<sup>332</sup>

Using *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as my point of departure, my aim was to source novels that wrote experientially of a metaphysical bond similar to that which Brontë alludes to through her protagonist Helen and her son Arthur. What I discovered was that many novels circumnavigate but do not mention by name the lived experience of maternal instinct. For example, Mrs Ramsay in Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* engages with maternal ambivalence within her interior monologue, Laura Brown in Michael Cunningham's re-reading of *Mrs Dalloway*, *The Hours*, demonstrates the danger of cultural forces and its conflict with her sense of self and, Lionel Shriver's novel, *We Need to Talk about Kevin* highlights the problems that occur when the choice of having a baby is not of the mother's volition. But none of these novels, which are just a few of many that I

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<sup>332</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin, 2004) p. 86.

considered, had a discourse on maternal instinct that was sufficiently tangible. It was Rachel Cusk's memoir, *A Life's Work on Becoming a Mother*, and Iris Marion Young's essay 'Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation' that provided the initial breakthrough I needed. Using experience itself as the starting point for writing is what separates Cusk from other novelists.

As I explored in Chapter Two, although Rachel Cusk does not use the term 'intersubjectivity', she is [unintentionally] describing the experience of blurring between subject (mother) and object (baby), ceasing to be distinct from one another. Using the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to form the foundation of her argument, Young describes pregnancy as a split subjectivity that is 'decentered, myself in the mode of not being myself'<sup>333</sup>, which are conclusions she draws from her own experience of motherhood. I argued, however, that rather than using the word 'splitting', which suggests a severing between subject and object, 'blurring' more accurately reflects Merleau-Ponty's and indeed Young and Cusk's descriptions of intersubjectivity. Furthermore, I distinguished between phenomenological intersubjectivity, which discusses pregnancy in metaphorical terms, and my use of the term *maternal* intersubjectivity, which is a literal dehiscence of the flesh, distinguishing itself from other interpretations of intersubjectivity as this lived experience can only be realized in childbirth. In her doctoral thesis Jane Lymer extends Young's argument one stage further, charting her own experience, and relating it to Merleau Ponty and Young's work, of a dialectical relationship between foetus and mother. Drawing upon Cusk, Young, Lymer and Kristeva I concluded that maternal intersubjectivity disrupts the boundaries of what is a sense of self, extending it beyond physical

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<sup>333</sup> Young p. 49.

embodiment of the mother subject, blurring it with her baby/object. This blurring effect is maternal instinct which highlights a web of complexities for the mother concerning her autonomy and attachment to the baby. As a result, using the writing of Moss and LaChance Adams, I argued that this destabilizing of autonomy may lead to a sense of ambivalence.

Having read Beauvoir and Badinter first, my initial intention was to use feminist theory to highlight the conflicting message between what was being written about motherhood in novels in relation to theoretical text, but Young opened up a discourse on her own experience of pregnant embodiment which substantiated rather than undermined my argument concerning maternal instinct. Thereafter, a dialogue began taking shape between certain theorists and novelists concerning their experience of becoming a mother. Thus, if it weren't for Young, Kristeva and Rich, whose own writings corroborate Cusk's empirical intersubjective experience, it could be argued that using the form of a memoir results in a lack of authorial reliability.

In Chapter Three, Sarah Moss' *Night Waking* shifted the focus from looking inward, turning its attention on motherhood in relation to self, the exterior world and ambivalence. The more I read about maternal ambivalence, the clearer it became that although there is a resounding connection between ambivalence as a result of cultural forces, it is also evident that maternal ambivalence arises from maternal intersubjectivity. That is to say, despite their use of different form to convey their experience, Cusk, Moss, Lymer, Rich and Kristeva are one voice when they write about their own experiences of maternal intersubjectivity which make less opaque the boundaries between learned and unlearned behaviour. Because intersubjectivity will be disrupted by cultural

forces, it is very difficult to establish what is ontological behaviour. But with a backdrop of a remote island in the Hebrides, comprising of a skeletal society, Moss peels off the layers of prescriptive behaviour to reveal and distinguish what is learned and unlearned behaviour concerning motherhood. Indeed, Moss is endeavouring to 'de-naturalize the natural attitude'<sup>334</sup> focusing her attention on attachment theory from the perspective of Anna Bennett's academic research alongside her protagonist's own experience of attachment to her children. Using psychology as her framework, Moss explores attachment but rather than viewing it from the child's perspective, which psychoanalysis is inclined to do, Moss depicts attachment theory from the point of view of the mother. In so doing, Moss tacitly critiques prescriptive cultural forces, which regard the mother as the prime carer, and juxtaposes this with illustrations of metaphysical attachment between Anna and her two boys, accurately depicting the conflict a mother may experience within herself. As a result, it highlights that while there is a need for a collective responsibility for the lives of children, to assume co-parenting is the panacea for female progress is an oversimplification. There is a conflict going on within the mother that transcends external forces.

Moreover, in her essay 'Thinking Mothers/Conceiving Birth', Sara Ruddick explores the concept of separating birth givers from mothering. She argues that if they are seen as separate activities, men can no longer excuse themselves from childcare. Ruddick takes issue with the theory that because birth givers are females then mothering is a 'natural' female destiny. This distinction is important because although Cusk and Moss both illustrate how maternal intersubjectivity may affect how a mother copes with separation and unification

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<sup>334</sup> Gail Weiss, 'Can We De-Naturalize the Natural Attitude?', title of paper given at a Symposium on 'Cross-disciplinary Phenomenology: A Readiness for the Questionable', June 2016.

in the early stages of motherhood, it is by no means a foregone conclusion she is suited to the day-to-day care of the child. Indeed, Cusk and Anna Bennett are representative of women who make better mothers by recognizing their need to return to the work place, and Judith Fairchild would have been a better mother had she not adhered to prescriptive maternal practices that forced her to stay at home.

Finally, I want to argue that there is an important and unfinished discussion concerning the status of maternal intersubjectivity and what affect this has on a mother's decision making process concerning the work place. However, the challenge with this may lie with women themselves who could be reluctant to confess any intrinsic bond with their infant for fear, once again, of being relegated to the role of prime carer. As I have already stated, emphasis needs to be reinforced that experiencing maternal intersubjectivity does not necessarily make you a better parent, as both Moss and Cusk illustrate.<sup>335</sup> Rather, it may make separation more conflicting for the mother but not something that cannot be overcome. Instead of perceiving motherhood as an inconvenient interruption, a punctuation mark, which is situated *outside* the boundaries of female progress, I argue that it needs to be considered in a more inclusive, organic and positive manner. As Young highlights, pregnancy itself and this awareness of weight and materiality often produces a sense of power, solidity, and validity. Indeed, she shares an extract from the 1950 text *An Interesting Condition*, in which the author describes her sense of pregnancy as 'this bulk slows my walking and makes my gestures and my mind more stately. I suppose if I schooled myself to walk massively the rest of my life, I might always have

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<sup>335</sup> It is worth noting that Cusk makes a point in her memoir of highlighting that her husband is the main carer of their children whilst she is writing her book on motherhood!

massive thoughts'.<sup>336</sup> Moreover, Kristeva claims that maternity is indispensable to a woman's discovery of female experience but also that it is 'one of the most fervent divinizations of maternal power'.<sup>337</sup> Indeed, she acknowledges the fact that 'no matter how far science may progress, women will continue to be the mothers of humanity'.<sup>338</sup> It is this essence of mastery of woman's position as creators of humanity that needs re-considering, but this will not be possible without the assistance and honesty of women themselves. Ambivalence is rarely revealed in the public sphere for fear of retribution of being considered an unnatural or bad mother, just as Cusk herself was. By charting the course of history of maternal instinct through both fictional and theoretical literature, re-defining it according to the voice of the mother, the final objective of this study is to act as a point of departure for further investigation into what it means to be a mother both in the home and work place in 21<sup>st</sup> Century western civilization.

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<sup>336</sup> Ann Lewis, *An Interesting Condition* (New York: Doubleday, 1950) p. 83, cited by Iris Marion Young in 'Pregnant Embodiment' p. 53.

<sup>337</sup> Kristeva, 'Women's Time', *The Kristeva Reader*, p. 205.

<sup>338</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Hannah Arendt, Vol 1, 'Female Genius: Life, madness, words' (2001) in *Maternal Encounters* by Lisa Baraitser (Routledge, London, 2009) p. 27.



## Afterword

While writing this thesis, there was enough evidence to argue for an empirical re-defining rather than a complete re-naming of *maternal instinct*. However, the use of this term is an emotive one particularly within feminine discourse and although this research has made attempts to re-define the term, it was not the intention for it to distract from the experience of maternal intersubjectivity itself, referred to as 'the blurring effect'. Therefore, the reason for this Afterword is to stress the importance that a detachment is maintained between the historically negative connotations that surround the label 'maternal instinct' from the experiential process of the blurring effect which is discussed in this study.<sup>339</sup>

Furthermore, as recent scientific research has disclosed, which is included in this thesis, scientific progress argues that it is not possible to identify or separate what is nature and what is nurture.<sup>340</sup> As Mandy Bloomfield and Clare Hanson argue, genes are 'understood as located within a complex and dynamic regulatory system (the genome) which allows organisms to adapt to changing environments'.<sup>341</sup> Indeed, Evelyn Fox Keller clarifies, 'no longer is it nature versus nurture, but nature via nurture [...] nature depends on nurture to be realized.'<sup>342</sup> So, although attempts have been made to dissect the sum in parts that make up motherhood, the intention of this study was neither to dwell on what is biological and what is social and cultural but instead to lay emphasis on maternal instinct and ambivalence in terms of a coherent experiential whole of what it is to be a mother.

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<sup>339</sup> See Chapter One, Section One, p.21, of thesis for further clarification.

<sup>340</sup> See Introduction p.4 and Chapter 3 Section Two p.101 of this thesis for further clarification.

<sup>341</sup> Mandy Bloomfield and Clare Hanson, 'Beyond the gene: epigenetic science in twenty-first century culture', *Textual Practice*, 2015, Vol. 29, No. 3, pp.405-413.

<sup>342</sup> Evelyn Fox Keller, *The Mirage of A Space Between Nature and Nurture* (USA: Duke University Press, 2010) pp. 2-3.

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