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### Editorial

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## EDITORIAL

# MAMSIE Editorial

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Welcome to the ninth volume of *Studies in the Maternal*. This open issue draws together a diverse range of disciplines including anthropology, sociology, media studies, and photography. Although the issue was not organised around a specific theme, the contributions are each concerned with ideological and imaginative engagements with representations of motherhood. Several articles address the pervasiveness of intensive parenting ideologies, and the disjunction between prescriptive and impossible ideals of motherhood and the embodied reality of mothering. Our reviews examine how works of art and film challenge these ideals; and the theoretical pieces suggest diverse ways in which the symbolic category of motherhood might be expanded to better include a kind of maternal imaginary.

Several articles in this edition address motherhood intergenerationally. Therese Anving's *Struggling to make ends meet: Lone mothers and intergenerational support in Sweden* provides a qualitative study into the practices and tensions of intergenerational parenting in Sweden. Anving invites us to look into how seemingly straightforward practical support becomes emotionally complex when offered by grandmothers to their daughters. Many of the participants in Anving's study navigate the gap between their ideals of how intergenerational support might be delivered, and the reality of it in practise. Jill Armstrong's article *Higher Stakes: Generational Differences in mothers' and daughters' feelings about combining motherhood with a career*, investigates the changes in attitude towards work and childrearing between mothers and daughters in professional careers. By examining the problem of women and work intergenerationally, Armstrong reveals a shift in attitudes of professional women in second and third wave feminist periods. Armstrong finds that despite having admiration for their own mothers' full-time careers, a new generation of mothers

favour working part-time in order to achieve the 'best of both worlds'. Armstrong identifies this shift as a consequence of the perpetuation of an intensive parenting ideology, in which mothers are increasingly encouraged to spend tremendous energy and time managing the minutiae of their children's development. A new generation of mothers may be discouraged from working full-time because they are under pressure to experience mothering as a public act that is open for judgement, due to the constant influence of new technologies and social media.

Media representations of intergenerational mothering form the focus of Rebecca Feasey's article *Good, Bad or Just Good Enough: Representations of Motherhood and the Maternal Role on the Small Screen*. Feasey examines online reactions to the new American situation comedy *Mom*, which represents the lives of three generations of women navigating a cycle of teenage pregnancy and addiction. By engaging with the world of online reviews, Feasey points to the way in which media representations of mothering become situated in debates about what constitutes 'good enough' mothering, and what forms of mothering are deemed appropriate for primetime television. Like Armstrong, Feasey identifies (fictional) motherhood as constantly open to online judgement, with the show and its protagonists attracting both vicious criticism and substantial praise specifically because of its unusual subject matter.

Alice Lowe's new film *Prevenge* takes tropes about intensive and inadequate mothering to absurd and comically violent extremes, according to Harriet Cooper's review. Cooper highlights how far Lowe's film literalises the 'baby knows best' mantra, used to question and undermine the protagonist's own judgements regarding her pregnancy, to murderous consequences. Lowe's comedy-slasher movie represents a challenge to a series of pervasive stereotypes surrounding the behaviour of pregnant women in the public sphere.

If the experience of mothering is increasingly influenced, judged, and constructed in public and online spaces, what happens to women's self-perception when motherhood is desired but not achieved? This question motivates Lois Tonkin's article *'A sense of myself as a mother': An exploration of maternal fantasies in the experience of 'circumstantial childlessness'*. Tonkin provides a compelling account of what happens

when a circumstantially childless woman continues the lives of her fantasy children in her imagination. Tonkin highlights that circumstantial childlessness does not necessarily lead to the subject no longer having a 'sense of [her]self as mother'. Written with subtlety and nuance, Tonkin's article engages with Bracha Ettinger's concept of trans-subjectivity to suggest that maternal fantasies might be understood as archaic embodied experiences, which are already-present as a dimension of a woman's subjectivity before (if ever) she reaches biological motherhood.

Bracha Ettinger's work also forms the theoretical focus of two very different investigations into representations of the maternal in articles by Sheila Cavanagh and Carine Plancke. Cavanagh addresses Ettinger's reading of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Also drawing on Lacan, Butler, and Kristeva's analyses of the play, she suggests that it is not only death that is at stake in Antigone's rebellion but the realm of the Feminine itself. Cavanagh uses the Ettingerian concept of matrixial border-linking to suggest that Antigone makes a claim for the recognition of an expanded familial web, which includes the maternal position of Jocasta. Plancke, on the other hand, addresses the presence of the matrixial in a non-Western society, the rural Punu society in Congo-Brazzaville. Plancke's ethnographic study focuses on the symbolic imagining of the intra-uterine in Punu society, through the idiom of waterspirit beings. Accessed rhythmically through song and dance rituals, the waterspirits are understood in Punu cosmology as allowing subjects to access their own originary, intra-uterine existence. By focussing on rhythm, song, and dance, Plancke expands Ettinger's claim that visual arts are the primary means of access to the matrixial borderspace. In the rituals observed in this study, it is the embodied practise of song and dance which allows participants to enter the imaginal realm of the intra-uterine.

Imaginatively entering and representing versions of the maternal is thus a concern that runs through this edition. In our Visual Work section, Andrea Liss offers some reflections on a little-known photograph by Diane Arbus, entitled '*Self-Portrait, Pregnant*'. Liss suggests that Arbus uncannily prefigures feminist interest in embodied knowledge, by creating a photograph of herself as unabashedly pregnant. By positioning herself in this self-portrait as simultaneously mother, artist, other, and

lover, Arbus allows for an imaginative interplay between the body as knowledgeable, maternal, and erotic. Liss's analysis reminds us that the maternal body and embodied maternal practice (however judged, constricted or theorised it may be,) can also always be the site for multiplicity and subversion. Finally, it is this multiplicity that Miriam Schaer identifies in her review of *Reconciling Art and Mothering*, by Rachel Epp Buller. The artists whose works Schaer draws out in her review challenge stereotypes of mothering from every angle, often returning to the image or performance of the maternal body itself. Schaer praises the honesty and intimacy of Buller's book, suggesting that it is through intimacy that artistic interventions remain relevant and allow viewers the opportunity for self-reflection.

Multiplicity might well be a byword for this issue of *Studies in the Maternal*. If the articles and reviews talk to each other, it is by offering perspectives on the maternal along differing disciplinary and thematic lines. Nevertheless, reflecting along this difference may well be productive, and lead to questions that go beyond disciplinary constraints. What might it mean to expand the category of the 'intergenerational' to include fantasy children? Where might the connection be between an intimate self-portrait from 1945, and a 2017 pregnant film-maker's representation of gestation as rage-fuelled murder? Is it at all possible to navigate within a single field the embodied experiences of the maternal in Sweden, the USA, and rural Congo-Brazzaville?

We don't offer answers to these questions in this issue. Rather, we hope that resonances between the differing forms of content will emerge for each reader, in relation to their own field of inquiry or practise. And, we hope that readers will contribute to the ongoing discussions of the *Studies in the Maternal* community through our social media, blog, or future issues.

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