

The Mothernists

5-7 June 2015

English

A three-day-long transatlantic conference, bringing together the work and thought of practicing international artists, art historians, educators, curators and writers on the topic of caring labour and cultural re-production. *The Mothernists* attempts to open up philosophical, political, aesthetic and social questions made visible through the co-existing practices of mothering and cultural re-production, bringing these into the diverse discourses that the participants professionally as artists, writers, philosophers, curators, historians and educators are part of.

Nederlands

Een driedaagse transatlantische conferentie, waarin het werk en denken van internationale kunstenaars, kunsthistorici, opvoeders, curatoren en schrijvers op het onderwerp van zorgwerk en culturele re-productie wordt samengebracht. *The Mothernists* tracht de filosofische, politieke, esthetische en sociale vraagstukken open te stellen die zichtbaar worden gemaakt door de co-existerende praktijken van moederschap en culturele re-productie. Daarmee komen deze vraagstukken in diverse discours waar de deelnemende professionals zoals kunstenaars, schrijvers, filosofen, curatoren, historici en opvoeders deel van uitmaken.

Speakers/ sprekers: Lise Haller Baggesen Ross (DK) / Dr. Rachel Epp Buller (USA) / Christa Donner (USA) / Andrea Francke (PE) / Renske Janssen (NL) / Courtney Kessel (USA) / Dr. Natalie S, Loveless (USA) / Irene Pérez (ES) / Shira Richter (IL) / Miriam Schaer (USA) / Esmé Valk (NL) / Mirjam Westen (NL)

Exhibiting artists / kunstenaars: Guy Ben-Ner (IL) / Andrea Francke (PE) / Ane Hjort Guttu (NO) / Lise Haller Baggesen Ross (DK) / Elżbieta Jabłońska (PL) / Courtney Kessel (USA) / Irene Pérez (ES) / Barbara Philipp (AT) / Adam Rzepecki (PL) / Vasiliki Sifostatoudaki (GR), amongst others.

Program

Friday 5th of June – PrintRoom

- 20:00 Book presentations by:
Motherism Lise Haller Baggesen Ross
Invisible Spaces of Parenthood Andrea Francke
Cultural ReProducers Zines Christa Donner

Saturday 6th of June – Leeszaal / Mijn Schoonmoeder Cafe / Upominki

- 11:00-17:00 Panel presentations and discussions at Leeszaal
14:30-17:00 Parallel activity: **Matroesjkas** by Barbara Philipp (AT)
- 11:00-11:10 **Welcome** Deirdre M. Donoghue
- 11:10-11:50 Panel I
“Whose Yo Mama?” Lise Haller Baggesen Ross
Re-imagining Cultural ReProduction Christa Donner
- 11:50-13:05 Panel II
Maternal Ecologies Natalie S. Loveless
Moments, Holes, and Stuff: Sourcing a Practice Through the Space of the Domestic Courtney Kessel
In this Together, Collaborating with our Children Irene Perez
To Move or Being Moved Esmé Valk
- 13:30-14:30 Lunch
- 14:30-15:25 Panel III
Representations of m/otherhood and Care: from Chains to Passion? Mirjam Westen
Staging the Spectacle Dr. Rachel Epp Buller
The Feminist Gap: What they Forgot to Fight for and Should from Today Renske Janssen
- 15:25-16:25 Panel IV
Biasing the Non-Maternal and Reverse Mothering Miriam Schaer
Our Enemies Realize Our Power Long Before We Do Shira Richter

17:00 End of presentations
18:00-19:00 Dinner at *Café M'n Schoonmoeder* *
Reservations required by June 3rd via
mothervoicesfoundation@gmail.com
20:00 Exhibition opening at Upominki

Sunday 7th of June – Leeszaal

11:00-12:30 **The Island Which Is Folded Like Dry Bread**
performance research by Vasiliki Sifostatoudaki (GR) part of
her ongoing research. Reservations required via June 6th via
mothervoicesfoundation@gmail.com, subject line 'Reading'
12:00-14:00 Round-table discussion for conference participants
Reservations required by June 6th / 24.00hrs via
mothervoicesfoundation@gmail.com

Presenters and Abstracts

Lise Haller Baggesen Ross (DK)

Lise Haller Baggesen (1969) left her native Denmark for the Netherlands in 1992 to study painting at the AKI and the Rijksakademie. In 2008 she relocated to Chicago with her family, where she completed her MA in Visual and Critical Studies at the SAIC 2013.

In the meantime, her work evolved from a traditional painting practice toward a hybrid practice including curating, writing and installation work. She exhibits internationally and her writing has appeared in *Bad at Sports*, *New City*, and *Third Rail Quarterly*. Her first book “*Motherism*” was co-published by Green Lantern Press and Poor Farm Press in 2014.

Motherism

At the intersection of feminism, science fiction, and disco, *Motherism* aims to locate the mother-shaped hole in contemporary art discourse. If the proverbial Mother is perhaps perceived as a *persona non grata* in the art world, because her nurturing nature is at odds with the hyperbolic ideal of the singular artistic genius, *Motherism* amplifies her presence, channeling her energy, complexity, and sublime creative potential in a series of intimate and critical reflections. The resulting collection of letters — dedicated with love from one mother to her dear daughter, sister, mother, and reader — fuse biography, music, art, and history into an auto-theoretical testimony that recalls and redefines the future imperfect.

For Notes & Questions:

Christa Donner (USA)

Christa Donner is an internationally exhibited artist, writer, and curator. In 2012 Donner initiated Cultural ReProducers, a creative platform supporting cultural workers who are also working it out as parents, and in 2014 curated the exhibition Division of Labor with Thea Liberty Nichols for Glass Curtain Gallery, examining the intersection of contemporary art and family life. More information: www.culturalreproducers.org and www.christadonner.com

Reimagining Cultural Re-Production

The art world doesn't know what to do with mothers, or anyone actively engaged in parenting. Many artists find themselves isolated from the art community once they have children, a condition that continues to have a profound impact on the artistic, curatorial, and critical perspectives included in the discourse of contemporary art.

Cultural ReProducers is an ongoing creative platform initiated in 2012 in collaboration with an evolving group of artists, critics, and curators raising young children. As a community Cultural ReProducers explore the intersection of artmaking and family life through a diverse range of projects that include an online resource, a childcare-supported art event series, a speculative certification program, and a risographed zine of experiments in artist-parenthood. These activities propose new models for institutional support while building networks of exchange, visibility, and dialogue to realize our collective needs and desires.

For Notes & Questions:

Natalie S. Loveless (USA)

Natalie Loveless is an artist, curator, writer and teacher. Her wall-drawing installations, performance actions, video works and curatorial projects have been presented internationally in festivals, galleries and artist-run centers in North America, South America, Europe and Asia. Recent work explores feminist embodiment and material entanglement in the everyday, and she is currently in her fourth year of living motherhood as art. Originally from Montreal, Quebec, Loveless lives and works in Edmonton, where she teaches contemporary art and theory at the University of Alberta.

Maternal Ecologies

Maternal Ecologies uses the frame of performance to recast the daily practices of early motherhood. For 3 years I reflected on, inhabited, and researched my experience of early maternal life through the FLUXUS-inspired format of the instruction piece. Year 1, Action A Day (Maternal Prescriptions) was performed for 84 consecutive days. Year 2, Action A Day (Inhabiting Firsts) was performed for 210 consecutive days. Year 3, Action A Day (Gone/There) was performed for 84 consecutive days. The project ended when my son turned 3. This talk will describe the project practically and theoretically.

For Notes & Questions:

Courtney Kessel (USA)

Courtney Kessel will explore three seemingly disparate ideas: moments, holes, and stuff as the framework for her artistic practice. Kessel's practice mines the common experiences of motherhood and embraces and exploits the repetition, accumulation, maintenance, and mundane tasks of everyday life. Kessel will frame her current work and research, which makes motherhood visible within the gallery, as an act of protest.

Moments, Holes, and Stuff: Sourcing a Practice Through the Space of the Domestic

Courtney Kessel will explore three seemingly disparate ideas: moments, holes, and stuff as the framework for her artistic practice. Kessel's practice mines the common experiences of motherhood and embraces and exploits the repetition, accumulation, maintenance, and mundane tasks of everyday life. Kessel will frame her current work and research, which makes motherhood visible within the gallery, as an act of protest.

For Notes & Questions:

Irene Pérez (ES)

Irene Pérez is an artist who has been investigating memory, identity, home and housing. Born and raised in Spain, she studied Art History before relocating to the US, where she pursued two art degrees in photography and studio art. While she was still a student at the University of Illinois at Chicago, she began organizing ambitious exhibitions and projects, serving on the curatorial team for artXposium and co-founding the *Second Bedroom Project Space* with fellow artist Christopher John Smith in addition to making and exhibiting her own work. After returning to an economically and socially devastated Spain at the end of 2009, and giving birth to her daughter in 2010, her explorations and artistic production have been taking a turn towards social constructions, feminism and education. In her two upcoming solo shows she will present on one hand works and activities that deconstruct ideas related to isolation and community, and on the other hand works that explore the two directional learning processes that occur between a child and a mother.

In This Together: Collaborating with our Children

What is an artistic collaboration? What does it mean for artists to collaborate with their children? What are the outcomes of collaboration? How can we and do we collaborate with our children? These are some of the questions this talk will address in hopes of opening a conversation about our experiences and the many possibilities that exist.

For Notes & Questions:

Esmé Valk (NL)

Esmé Valk is an artist working multidisciplinary across media, ranging from installations, films, texts to performative events. Since 2007 she's been working with and researching social choreography; a term she understands as connecting social processes and movement in a spatial environment. She's young to motherhood and has recently taken a deep dive into 'RIE' parenting (Recourses for Infant Educators). Valk exhibits internationally. She's one of the founding members of artist initiative ADA; area for debate and art. In 2012/13 she was a participant at the Jan van Eyck Academy. She received her MA in Fine Art from the Piet Zwart Institute (2008) and her BA in Fashion Design from AKI ArtEZ Academy for Art & Design in Enschede (2000). For her installation *Showcasing Today's Essentials* she was awarded the International Contemporary Art Prize Diputació de Castelló 2011.

To Move or Being Moved

Movement is a central notion within my artistic practice. I'm often asked if I dance myself. Other than the occasional dancing as a fun pastime activity I engage with dance by studying everyday movement. This has my interest because it is my belief that in movement we can observe how the culture in which one is born and the individual collide. What is taught, what is learned, what is authentic or what is innate? I'm interested in the relationship between the collective and individual body, in autonomy and agency of a person. How does it move and is it being moved by the surrounding it is in.

As a visual artist I've been paying particular attention to the aesthetic conditions where movement takes place; the stage. I'm most attracted to 'open stages', that to me means a place that occupies a double role where something is presented whilst also allowing everyday movement and play to insert its trace. I think of 'open stages' as places where inanimate objects are involved in a kind of dance with the users.

As a mother I now get to observe first hand the growing of an individual, who is my son, and to witness his autonomy and agency. I've noticed that in my care for him I might have the best intentions, but despite it all hinder his development by imposing my ideas. One of my favourite wisdoms from Magda Gerber, the founder of RIE (Recourses for Infant Educators) is: "Be careful what you teach, it might interfere with what they are learning." Her work continues on the research and practice of pediatrician Emmi Pikler, whose ideas on infant and toddler care resonate with me (and already have greatly impacted my daily interactions with my son) as they offer practical ways to instill independence, self-confidence and a strong sense of self within the child.

In the presentation I will focus on fostering agency, how to 'help your child move', creating an open play environment and on becoming a quiet observer and how these ideas relate to my artistic research. In addition there will also be the option to engage in an infant lead movement class.

For Notes & Questions:

Mirjam Westen (NL)

Mirjam Westen is a curator, critic and editor in the field of contemporary art, gender and global art. Her essays and reviews have been published in journals, art magazines and catalogues. She recently curated *Prospects & Concepts* with work by young artists (2015 at Van Nelle, Rotterdam) and the international group show *Threads. Textile in Art & Design* (2014 Museum Arnhem). She curated and edited the exhibition catalogues *Female Power. Matriarchy and spirituality* (Arnhem 2013), *rebelle. Art & Feminism 1969-2009*. (Arnhem 2010) and was co-editor of *A chacun sa grace. Femmes Artistes en Belgique et aux Pays-Bas 1500-1950* (Antwerp 1999-Arnhem 2000).

Working as a senior curator of contemporary art in the Museum Arnhem (NL), she has curated besides thematic exhibitions, numerous solo presentations from 1991 to the present day, amongst others, Esiri Erheriene-Essi (2014), Alicia Framis (2013), Berni Searle (2011), Heidi Sincuba (2011), Regina Galindo (2007), Lida Abdul (2006), Emily Jacir (2003), Kara Walker (2002) and Tania Mouraud (1994). In addition to her curatorial and writing activities, she gives lectures. She is member of AICA, the International Association of Curators of Contemporary Art (IKT) and Arttable. Mirjam Westen is based in the Netherlands.

Representations of m/otherhood and Care: From Chains to Passion?

In my presentation I will explore several representations of m/otherhood and care by women artists in the 20th and 21st century. In navigating this topic, I will highlight many works by women artists from different periods. I will emphasize the interweaving of the different modes of representation and their different (cultural, feminist and political) contexts. There is a wide variety of representational strategies regarding m/otherhood; from Madonna Caritas to Mutter Courage; from a denial of maternal body to a celebration of maternal body and passion; from a 'motherhood in chains' to an enriching life time experience; from negation of motherhood to a discourse on the complexity of motherhood; from giving birth in a gallery to making cheese out of mother milk. Regardless their strategic positions, many women artists have challenged and affronted with their work the dominant existing ideologies about m/otherhood and care.

For Notes & Questions:

Dr. Rachel Epp Buller (USA)

Dr. Rachel Epp Buller is a feminist art historian, printmaker, and mother of three, whose art and scholarship often speak to these intersections. She lectures, curates, and publishes widely on maternal issues in contemporary art, including her recent book, *Reconciling Art and Mothering* (Ashgate). Her passion for increasing the viability and visibility of mothering in art frequently manifests itself in collaborative projects. She is a regional coordinator for The Feminist Art Project, board member of the National Women's Caucus for Art, Fulbright recipient, and Associate Professor of Visual Arts and Design at Bethel College (US).

Staging a Spectacle: Lactivist Art Intervention in the United States

This paper addresses the ways in which several contemporary North American artist-parents position themselves and their work as agents of cultural change around the topic of breastfeeding. Their socially engaged works challenge the increasing social divisions, particularly in the United States, around the breastfeeding body. By employing collaboration, intervening in institutional spaces as well as moving outside of them, and creating works that actively oppose societal treatment of the breastfeeding body, these artists raise critical questions and alter public and private spaces in ways that make visible and challenge one of the many taboos still surrounding motherhood.

In a larger project-in-progress, I tie the recent groundswell of maternal activism among artists to the polarization of motherhood in the United States. Popular magazines and newspapers increasingly pit mothers against one another; more and more, maternal choices, and the maternal body itself, are positioned in U.S. media and culture as points of contention. On a weekly basis, national headlines report instances of discrimination and censorship of that most contentious of maternal bodies, the lactating body.

The artist-activists I address in this paper use creative means to challenge the censorship of the breastfeeding body. Jill Miller uses humor to disarm the viewer and engage with American cultural constrictions around motherhood in her video and performance pieces. Miller's extended performance / public art piece, *The Milk Truck* (2011-2013), sent an emergency rescue vehicle to the aid of breastfeeding mothers who encountered resistance in public, hyperbolizing the definition of spectacle and defusing tense situations through humor. Jess Dobkin's performance, *The Lactation Station Breastmilk Bar*, performed between 2006 and 2012, staged gallery events akin to wine tastings. Dobkin's "breastmilk tastings" encouraged participants to embrace and discuss social discomfort around lactation and the maternal body. Most recently, Chicago photographer Ashlee Wells Jackson initiated the *4th Trimester Bodies Project* (2013-), in which she travels the world to photograph postpartum bodies. Conceived initially to bring both visibility and healing to the wide range of maternal bodies and experiences, Jackson's project quickly turned activist in nature, particularly in her on-going battles with U.S.-based social media sites that regularly delete her accounts and her photographs of breastfeeding mothers and children.

For Notes & Questions:

Renske Janssen (NL)

Renske Janssen (1975, lives and works in Amsterdam and Berlin) is a Dutch art and cultural historian, curator and critic. Amongst other, she worked as a curator for the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Witte de With CCA in Rotterdam, Kunstverein fuer die Rheinlande und Westfalen Düsseldorf and Artspeak Vancouver. Besides teaching at the Ateliers and other international universities and art schools she received a fellowship from the Mondriaan Fund (NL) for her ongoing research on the shifts between Esthetics and Ethics in Contemporary Art. Currently she contributes art criticism for artist's catalogues and occasionally frieze magazine, serves as a board member for MU art space in Eindhoven and operates as guest curator for among others Onomatopoe. Janssen is also curatorial fellow at The International Summer School at the Bauhaus Trade Union School Landmark, Bernau bei Berlin.

The Feminist Gap: What They Forgot to Fight for and Should From Today

When I was preparing myself to become someone's mother, I stumbled upon several innovating studies on the baby's brain development and the importance of his first year in life in which 85 % of his brain is shaped. A human being's first year seems to be the base for the rest of his life. Reading Sue Gerhardt's *Why Love Matters. How affection Shapes a Baby's Brain*, and neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's oeuvre of books on 'the becoming of self' and 'the feeling brain', raised my awareness on the sensitivity of a baby that became my son. The relationship between stress hormones of the mother and the immune system of the fetus, baby and children are mind-blowing. Both are extremely and closely linked. Gerhardt for example, speaks about the political implications of daycare, which is proven to have high-risk negative effects for a safe and healthy attachment for babies as they experience stress when the mother is not around. Damasio's message is to focus on the inner emotional world, to know thyself is to increasingly empathize with the other, and painfully shows our lack of knowledge of ourselves.

I chose to work less or not at all to be there for my son. I avoided stressful relationships. I chose not to bring our baby to daycare to give him a chance to attach to my partner and me with whom I shared the nursing (except breastfeeding that was me ;). I tried to be more aware of my own upbringing and avoid repeating what damaged me as a child. So far so good, but I should ask my son later how he felt himself. I therefore also document his early life with daily notes, pictures and moving images.

That is what I can do.

Then there is the Dutch system, the outside world when we leave our house.

I have no money so I need to earn it, despite my young child. I have to work two days a week otherwise we won't make it and I am out of sight as a freelancer in art. I need to go with the flow as much as possible.

In the Netherlands there is no such thing to support international and prestigious studies (Harvard, Oxford etc.) that without much doubt show it is better for a baby and young child to be close to loving caretakers. While in other European countries such as Sweden or Germany, there is a support system, paid leave for a year for both parents, the Netherlands is not a child friendly country at all. Young parents are forced to bring their babies to daycare after three months or sooner.

In my point of view, this typically Dutch situation is part of the 'feminist gap'. The feminists of the sixties and seventies made my life as a single person with a career easier in some ways, thank you, but what now I am a mother? It seems the women that fought for my position in the 2010s on the work floor were just too occupied freeing themselves from their own authorial upbringing and their professional position in society that they forgot to fight for their own children, for the needs of a baby to begin with. Maybe they didn't know, maybe they didn't learn to empathize with the other: the baby and child.

In any case what are we going to do in the Netherlands to change it? How can we organize ourselves as mothers, fathers and parents and create awareness? How can we make a child central in policymaking? Can the gap be filled with an artistic project?

Slowly voices do start to change....

For Notes & Questions:

Miriam Schaer (USA)

Miriam Schaer, a Brooklyn-based multimedia book artist, uses garments, to explore feminine, social, and spiritual issues. She's been in numerous exhibitions including the Museum of Art and Design in NY and her work is in many public collections including the Arthur Jaffe Artist Book Collection and the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture. Her work has received a NYFA Artists Fellowship, inclusion in the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center's Feminist Art Base at the Brooklyn Museum. She taught Art of the Book at Pratt Institute, and was a visiting artist a numerous institutions including Sarah Lawrence College, Marshall University, Colorado College among others. She is currently a Lecturer in the Interdisciplinary MFA Program in Book and Paper at Columbia College Chicago.

Biasing the Non-Maternal and Reverse Mothering

This presentation is about two extremes of the motherhood experience, and how one led me to the other. The first extreme is society's bias against the non-maternal. The second is what I call reverse mothering.

By bias, I mean how the widespread hostility toward childless women became, for a time, part of my artistic practice. Childless, or childfree, women are disparaged and discriminated against in cultures around the world. Non-maternity, whether chosen or by circumstance, is nowhere considered normative, leaving childless women to face a spectrum of disdain.

By reverse mothering, I mean the situation many encounter as parents age beyond their ability to care for themselves, and must be cared for by others. These others are often us, their children; most often, the female children.

My own mother passed away recently after a decline marked by dementia. Caring for her led me to consider what it means to be a mother and to have a mother, while exploring my relationship with her as she faded before my eyes.

For Notes & Questions:

Shira Richter (IL)

Multi-inter-disciplinary Israeli-American award winning Artist-activist and filmmaker [Shira Richter](#) ARTicules the politics of motherhood in large-scale projects; Film, Photography, Text, and Visual-Performance-Lectures. Her projects intentionally act as an interface- or "multi-bridge" between academic knowledge, art, and contemporary activism. Her purpose is to help "topple the walls" and make each discipline aware of and accessible to the other in order to facilitate consciousness and integration. Independent researcher, speaker, and one of the initiators of "[Gender studies in the educational system](#)". Mother of twin boys, teaches at the School of Design of the College of Management Academic Studies.

Our Enemies Realize Our Power Long Before We Do

To be jealous is something we are mostly ashamed of. But my biggest lesson in mothering came long before I became a real mother. It came from a courage to love nakedly, which opened up the other side of love: fear of loss, in other words: Jealousy. The Hebrew word for Jealous is the same word for being Zealous. Being zealous means caring for our care. Or more accurately, caring passionately and proudly for our caring, taking our caring seriously. Taking my care seriously led me, through artistic investigation, to realize my loved ones are in peril because of the leaders and leadership of this area. In the lion world it is "known" that male lions, in their fight for supremacy, kill cubs of a rival lion. What is less known is how often lionesses fight this so called "natural" order. Being artist, feminist and care activist, in my outsider way of life I upset ("fight") the "natural order" of the country and area I live in. Understanding how our adversaries view us can teach us a lot about the vast scope of our power. A popular quote says "with great power comes great responsibility". Do we really realize the power of our power?

For Notes & Questions:

Andrea Francke (PE) (PrintRoom Friday 5 June)

Andrea Francke is an artist based in London. Some of her current projects include: The Piracy Project, a collaboration with Eva Weinmayr that explores authorship, copyright and publishing; Invisible Spaces of Parenthood, with Kim Dhillon, on the politics of motherhood and care labour; And she is currently working towards opening a pub with Eva Rowson and Ross Jardine as a way to enact their research on administering, hosting and nurturing in an everyday practice.

Invisible Spaces of Parenthood

The ISP Manual is part of [Invisible spaces of parenthood: A collection of pragmatic propositions for a better future](#), a Communal Knowledge project by Andrea Francke that explores issues surrounding childcare in collaboration with local nurseries, childminders, children's centres and parent groups, and looks for new models and possibilities. This included setting up an exhibition and a workshop space at The Showroom, summer 2012, for visitors to test out DIY designs for furniture and forms of play, some of which were gathered through an open call. The manual contains eight especially commissioned essays as well as interviews, event excerpts, discussions and documentation from the exhibition.

For Notes & Questions:

Venues

Leeszaal Rotterdam West
Rijnhoutplein 3, 3014TZ, Rotterdam
<http://www.leeszaalrotterdamwest.nl/>

PrintRoom
Schietbaanstraat 17, 3014ZV, Rotterdam
Contact person: Karin de Jong, info@printroom.org
<http://www.printroom.org>

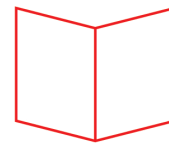
Mijn Schoonmoeder Cafe
Pieter de Hoochstraat 20a-b, 3024CS, Rotterdam

Upominki
Kapelstraat 32, 3024CH, Rotterdam
Contact person: Weronika Zielinska, info@upominki.nl
<http://www.upominki.nl>

Partners and Sponsors

The m/other voices foundation thanks the generous support of its partners and sponsors:

upominki



PrintRoom



