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Postmaternal, Postwork and the Maternal Death Drive

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Abstract

The term ‘postmaternal’ has recently emerged as a way to articulate the effects of neoliberalism on the public devaluing of caring labour [Stephens, Julie. 2011. *Confronting Postmaternal Thinking: Feminism, Memory, and Care*. New York: Columbia University Press]. This term suggests a valorisation of values associated with care and mothering that have traditionally been gendered and rely on a heterosexist matrix for their intelligibility. Marxist feminist writers during the 1970s struggled with the question of the particular form of care that reproduction entails, and this feminist archive has been recently extended to a discussion of ‘post-work’ [Weeks, Kathi. 2011. *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke], in which calls for the valuing of unpaid work as a viable form of labour have been reanimated. In this article I examine the relation between these two analytic categories – ‘postmaternal’ and ‘postwork’. Both categories require that we re-think some of the most trenchant issues in feminist thought – the sexual division of labour, the place of ‘reproduction’ in psychic and social life, and the possibilities for a new feminist commons.

Introduction

Over the last few years I have written a series of ‘maternal anecdotes’, short, not-quite-stories about odd and resistant experiences prompted by motherhood, which I have ‘over-mined’, we could say, for theoretical insights, by paying a huge amount of attention to what were otherwise rather mundane incidents in the everyday life of a particular mother. This overmining was a strategic practice, an attempt to generate theory out of an autoethnography that took my own experience of the dislodgements and estrangements of motherhood as a starting point for an investigation into what we might really mean by a ‘maternal subject’. I wanted to see what kind of theory could be generated out of a deliberate and profound attention paid to the maternal-ordinary. I was aiming at an intervention into an entrenched set of debates and questions in feminist, psychoanalytic and queer theory concerning the figure of the mother in both social and psychic life; whether ‘the mother’ constituted an analytic category in the way that ‘woman’ once did; how to conceptualise the putative, if now precarious relations between femininity and maternity;¹ and what happens to the category of the maternal, and experiences of motherhood, when theories are underpinned by an implicit repudiation of reproduction, care, vulnerability and dependency (see, in particular, Edelman 2004). I did not, however, want to substitute this repudiation with a version of maternalism – an assertion, as Julie Stephen’s puts in *Confronting Postmaternal Thinking* (2011) of the public and social importance of motherhood, and the nurture and care of children as a model for the public good. Instead I worked away at a theory of maternal ethics that could step aside from figurations of maternal care as either vital necessity, or a form of female masochism, by trying to account for what I called ‘maternal alterity’ (Baraitser 2009). My interest was in whether maternal encounters (encounters between those who identify as ‘mothers’, and those whom we come to name and claim as our ‘children’) could hold open the potential for a radical form of ethics running counter to capitalist modes of productivity, temporality and exchange, without this form of ethics necessarily re-suturing femininity to an ethic of care. I drew not only on Levinas’ trenchant account of the subjective productiveness of

an encounter with otherness (1998), but on Badiou's account of love that 'treats' the condition that there are two radically 'disjunct' positions of experience that cannot know one another (2000), as well as a long history of feminist metaphysics that has argued in different ways for the 'not-one'.ⁱⁱ I was concerned with thinking maternal ethics as an encounter a mother may have with an irreducible otherness in the figure of the child, who remains resistant to the effects of that encounter, and therefore may call forth what we could then, with more surety, name as a 'maternal subject'. Maternal alterity also meant listening out for the 'call' of many other 'others', signalling both the multiple histories of collective practices of childcare, and in a more materialist vein, our relations with non-human others involved in the complex processes of maternal labour. This concerned paying attention to the ethicality of 'stuff', as in Heidegger's (1962) notion of 'Zeug'; 'things' and their thingness, as Bennett (2010) would have it, 'tool-beings', to use Harman's (2007, 171–205) evocative Heideggerian term, and the inanimate 'dumb' materiality that Lacan (1992) links with the Real of the maternal body, but is, of course, far from dumb. So I wrote about the ethics of encounters between mothers and baby clothes, blankets, quilts, bottles, teats, milk powder, sterilisers, breast pumps, feeding spoons and bowls, juice bottles and bibs, pacifiers, mobiles, rattles, nappies, wipes, changing mats, creams, powders, cribs, cots, baskets, baby monitors, prams, buggies, carry cots, slings, back packs, car seats and, as O'Rourke (2011) has put it 'so ever infinitely on'.

While I was doing this work, something strange happened; something I should, of course, have foreseen, should have been mindful of right from the start. My children ... grew up. My oldest child is now seventeen, and looking out into the world, his back to the small group of us who have born, carried, cajoled, taught, and supported him, still occasionally inclined towards us when he needs to be, and recently turning in an ironic way when he leaves the house, to wave, a half-joke reminder that one day soon, when I'm not looking, he will just turn the corner at the end of the street, and simply walk away. I neither dread nor savour it. He will continue to be someone I think of as 'my child' after he is gone, as I will continue to inhabit lives other than the one named 'mother', just as I will go on mothering other children. He will continue to be 'my child' should I have the profound misfortune to outlive him. But he is leaving. I am 'postmaternal'.

What might 'postmaternal' mean? In this article, I shall be departing from Julie Stephens' use of this term. Stephens' 'postmaternal' describes the manifestation of a generalised public anxiety about the values associated with maternal models of care, and the repudiation of the maternal in public and private(ised) life that she calls 'unmothering', particularly in discourses that operate in areas of the global north where neoliberal principles have dominated state interventions in the labour market (2011, 15, 132). Her argument is that the cultural ideals central to the workings of neoliberal institutions, work arrangements, and conceptualisations of the self, require a kind of 'forgetting' of the core dependencies of all human experience. This leads to a cultural hostility to what Richard Sennett calls the 'dignity of dependence' (Stephens 2011, 7). Without wanting to fully embrace a position of maternalism, even in its more recent neomaternalist evocations, Stephens nevertheless wants to 'confront' this repudiation of dependencies that she names as 'postmaternal thinking' through a practice of actively remembering feminism's own 'nurturing' mothers, returning us to the possibilities of making political claims based on universal needs for care, nurturance and the management of vulnerability.

My aim here is to open up the notion of the 'postmaternal' through bringing it into some kind of proximity with Weeks (2011) concept 'postwork'. 'Postwork' is a rather different attempt to respond to some of the same problematics that Stephens identifies in the ways work and care (or social reproduction) have become so separated from one another, and draws on 1970s Marxist feminist texts about wages for housework to reanimate a utopian demand for a postwork politics. In bringing these two terms into relation with one another I'm seeking to think with and against the postmaternal, by suggesting, with Weeks, that there is a strategic need for making certain demands in the name of both social reproduction and work, that go beyond the neomaterialism (albeit a feminist one) that underpins Stephen's analysis of the postmaternal discourses that surely do surround us. However, the thrust of my argument is that we also need to continue to prize open the implications of using mothering to signify the tripartite conjunction of care, nurture and the management of states of dependency when we make arguments about work and care in public life. Mothering may include practices of care and nurturance, but it also concerns the daily management and experience, for those who mother, of hatred, aggression, guilt, fear, frustration, violence and despair, that have some relation, even if a retroactive and indirect one, to early experiences of being mothered (Kraemer 1996; Lewis 2016; Parker 1995; Stone 2011). I aim, therefore, to track across psychoanalytic and social theory, trying to keep open the meanings of 'the maternal', not simply in order to de-gender or denaturalise care, but to remind ourselves of the implications of 'forgetting' that love and hate are always bound up with one another. If we think about the maternal as a principle or model in social and psychic life that speaks to this impossibility of love without hate, an impossibility that has the potential to mobilise guilt, gratitude, and reparative wishes (if we follow Melanie Klein's thinking about early object relations), then we might instigate a pathway from a social analysis of the 'unmothering' of society, to a more nuanced understanding of both motherhood, and broader ideas about the social good. Weeks seeks to address the problem of waged labour, and its implications for social reproduction by exploring the notion of a basic income for the common production of value. 'Postwork' undoes the relation between wage and labour through an analysis of social reproduction in neoliberal conditions, calling not just for the common production of value but for a basic income for the common reproduction of 'life' (Weeks 2011, 230). Weeks' appeal to sharing the responsibility for reproducing 'life' rather than value maintains a relation between work and reproduction that is neither maternalist, nor occludes the possibility of such labour emanating from a demand for a form of reparation, understood both in the sense of financial recompense and in the sense of 'repair'. This may provide us with a more radical model for rethinking a feminist maternalism that includes, but is not subsumed by, a politics of care. One element of my argument is that whilst the notion of sharing the reproduction of 'life' may serve us well as a figuration of the maternal that allows care to circulate as everybody's business, we need to make sure that such a project also entails an engagement with what works against life, the 'hostility to life', as Derrida (1995) puts it, or in Freud's terms, simply the death drive.

Secondly, my concerns here are with the temporality of the death drive in relation to maternal practice. Postwork calls on us to understand the temporal dimensions of the relationship between work, reproduction and care. Denaturalising the 8-hour day, or, for that matter, denaturalising the regime of 'total work' that is the outcome of the precarisation of labour, in order to open up unfettered time that is required for care, may be one element of a broader operation that seeks to reconfigure the privatisation and gendering of care. But maternal practice (as distinct from

maternal labour) is not simply synonymous with care. It entails a form of emotional labour in which this labour itself comes to matter to us, causing us to return again and again to the scene of love and hate. The 'again and again', I argue, might be understood as the temporality of a 'maternal death drive'; a repetitive return, not exactly to a state of nothingness, as Freud's death drive implies, but to a state in which we can tolerate the knowledge that we hate what we also love, and therefore that we may desire to repair the damage done to the loved object. Maternal time emerges from this account as the time it takes for the capacity for reparation to be established and maintained – the 17 years that it takes the mother–child pair in the anecdote above, to wave ambivalently both hello and goodbye to each other. A postwork notion of care requires not just the reorganisation of the social reproduction of 'life' but the time it takes to live out the complexities of caring relations, and the development of capacities that may enable the reparation of psychic life.

Love, guilt and reparation

If we frame the question in another way, what else might the postmaternal signify other than a public expression of anxiety about what Stephen's assigns as the maternal values of care, nurture and dependency? In *Love, Guilt and Reparation* (1998, 306–343), Melanie Klein tells us that anxiety about maternal care, nurture and our dependency on the maternal body in very early life – the relationship, that is, with a feeding-object of some kind, that could be loosely termed 'breast' – is a result of both the frustrations of that breast (its capacities to feed but also to withhold or disappear at whim), and what the infant does with the hatred and aggressive feelings stirred up by those experiences of frustration which rebound on the infant in the form of terrifying persecutory fantasies of being attacked by the breast itself. Klein's conceptual infant swings in and out of mental or psychic states that she calls 'sadistic', full of envious rage and aggressive raids on the maternal body, in an attempt to manage the treacherous initial experiences of psychical and physical survival. Where Freud saw the drive as a mental representation of instinctual wishes or urges, Klein moves us closer to a more thing-like internal world permeated less with representations and more with dynamic aggressive phantasies of biting, hacking at, and tearing the mother and her breasts into bits, and attempts to destroy her body and everything it might, in phantasy, contain (1998, 308). Libido, of you like, gives way to aggression in Klein's thinking, so that the defences themselves are violent in their redoubling on the infant in the form of persecutory anxiety – splitting the world and the self into good and bad to keep them separate; experiences of self and objects as powerless or omnipotent with nothing in between; greed for good things which are swallowed up but constantly vulnerable to contamination by the bad; projection of unacceptable parts of the self into the other whom one then tries to control. One's own greed and aggressiveness, in other words, becomes itself threatening in Klein's account of the inner world of infants, and these experiences, along with the maternal object that evokes them, have to be split off from conscious thought. Coupled with this are feelings of relief from these painful states of 'hunger, hate, tension and fear' (Klein 1998, 307) through a temporary feeling of security that comes with gratification of both our early self-preservative needs, and what Klein calls 'sensual desires' (307). These 'good' experiences form the basis for what we could think of as love. It is only as the infant moves towards a tolerance of knowing that good and bad 'things', and experiences, are bound up in the same person (that is, both (m)other and self) that guilt arises as an awareness that we have tried to destroy what we also love. Whilst this can overwhelm the infant with depressive anxiety that also needs to be warded off, there is a chance that this guilt can be borne and that a temporary state of

ambivalence can be achieved that includes the desire to make good the damage done. Care and nurturance emerges, in other words, out of the capacity to tolerate the proximity of love and hate towards the mother, not the other way around. To use the term maternal to simply signify care, nurturance and dependency effectively splits off this whole dynamic psychic terrain.

I argue that the 'postmaternal', then, could be used to raise wider psychosocial issues than those encapsulated by the unmothering of society, if unmothering is predominantly thought about as the public repudiation of nurturance, care and dependency. Perhaps postmaternal thinking, as a psychosocial phenomenon, is a way of signalling the proximity of love and hate towards maternal figures that continues to inhabit and animate life 'post' our early experiences of being mothered, and itself forms part of our mothering practices and attitudes towards our children, and towards 'the mother' as a public figuration? If we read the postmaternal through the anecdote above, perhaps we are always dealing with a precarious psychic attachment to motherhood itself, played out at both individual and collective levels, suggesting that we constantly inhabit maternal and postmaternal subject positions simultaneously, as ambivalence is achieved, breaks down, and has to be shorn up again. Or maybe we are never really postmaternal, whether or not we have borne and raised children, in all the multiple ways that we might bear and raise children, and with all the multiple singularities in the call to a 'we', who may be implicated in this form of relational labour.

What comes after the maternal?

These questions about what might work against life or generativity within the very experience of reproduction for both mothers and those whom they mother, suggests we may also need to ask what kind of labour the term 'post' does, in relation to the maternal, that may alert us to the particular temporalities of motherhood. Motherhood, from one perspective, appears to involve a kind of retroactive gathering up of maternal experience, in all its ambivalence, in the name of a futurity that is not one's own. Perhaps more precisely, however, motherhood seems to offer a form of living in the elongated suspended time of staying alongside another's erratic, unprincipled and unpredictable growth and change whilst managing one's own experiences of love and hate as they veer in and out of relation to one another. The function of the prefix 'post' has been much discussed in relation to other attempts to temporalise critical frameworks in the sense of a gesture towards moving past, or transcending some earlier 'exclusivity of insight', (Appiah 1991, 342) as well as a refusal or struggle to transcend traumatic, yet resistant aspects of cultural and critical formations: postfeminism, postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, posthumanism, post-theory, to name a few (Cohen, Colebrook, and Hillis Miller 2012). In the early 1990s Kwame Anthony Appiah described postmodernism, for instance, as an attempt at retheorising the multiple differences that reflect the underlying dynamic culture of modernity, in order, as he put it, 'to clear oneself a space', a space for critical thinking and reflection about what gets sidelined, requisitioned, commodified and silenced in dominant discourses and practices of an era. He saw the 'post' in postcolonialism, especially in its literary forms, as signalling both the refusal and impossibility of clearing that space in any simple way, the 'post' signifying a desire to move beyond and a simultaneous acknowledgement of how the past makes us who we are and cannot be easily transcended (Appiah 1991, 346). One of the lessons of the postcolony, he claims, is that we are all already contaminated by one another, both temporally and spatially, making the distinction between colonialism and postcolonialism unstable.

Similarly, Peter Osborne, in his key book, *The Politics of Time* (2011), worked through the semantic and conceptual difficulties of speaking about modernity and postmodernity as distinctive historical periods, highlighting this tension between a desire for transcendence and the inevitability of remaining attached to what came before. Despite 'modernity' specifically signalling a period of 'new time consciousness' that inaugurates a series of breaks or ruptures in the development of societies, he argued, this narrative presumes a homogenous continuum of historical time, 'across which comparative judgements about social development may be made in abstraction from all qualitative temporal differences' (Osborne 2011, 1). 'Modernity', Osborne explained, becomes fixed as a discrete historical period within its own temporal scheme, and left stranded in the past. If the 'modern', Osborne argued, in its primary sense, is simply that 'pertaining to the present and recent times', or 'originating in the current age or period', then 'postmodernity' is the name for a 'new' modernity, a kind of conceptual paradox that throws both terms into crisis. A similar tension is produced by the contested term postfeminism, gesturing in one sense to the backlash against second-wave feminism, and in another to a permanent internal critique within feminist discourses, in an attempt, again, to clear that space, to unsettle assumptions about what 'feminism' signifies, and therefore to claim itself as a site for feminist politics. Stephens, in proposing the term postmaternal, is as much concerned with turning back to prior feminist discourses, and to processes of memory and feminist forgetting, as she is with the deep cultural anxiety around public expressions of what she calls 'maternal values'. Part of her claim is that one of the dominant stories that as feminists we tell ourselves concerns feminist demands for autonomy that have resulted in an illusion of self-sufficiency fuelled by the feminisation of the workplace. This chimes with Angela McRobbie's notion of the 'postfeminist sexual contract' (2007) that invests in the figure of the young woman as a highly educated, genderless, independent and flexible skilled worker, which holds until the point that women become mothers, and it is then that they are left scrabbling around without the support of feminist theories that can help to unpack the contract itself, which often pits women against other women in an attempt to continue to hold together work and care. The postfeminist sexual contract is a form, then, of post-maternal thinking, in Stephen's use of the term, reinforcing narratives that paid work, and giving birth to the 'motherless self' are linked (Stephens 2011, 59). In addition, feminists' retelling of stories about their own mothers reveals, Stephen's claims, a cultural forgetting of the nurturing mother, as in the 'highly contradictory reworkings and responses to the second-wave feminist idea of women 'giving birth to themselves' (2011, 44). Stephens is concerned to track counter-narratives to these stories, listening out for forgotten or repressed versions of the nurturing mother in feminist her-stories that can help to recalibrate the dismissal of nurturance more generally as a force for good.

However, forgetting is a complicated process. Derrida reminds us, in *Archive Fever* (1995) that the feverishness of our desires to work against forgetting through processes of archiving are always being undone at a level that leaves no trace. We do not, in other words, simply forget our nurturing mothers in the practice of compiling feminist archives. Rather, we could say that we destroy the very trail of hatred and aggression that is aroused when we come into proximity with nurturance. We ward off the contamination of nurturance by hatred, through a destructive process of forgetting which itself leaves no trace. I read Stephen's 'post', therefore, less as the enactment of space clearing, and more in the sense of 'against', remaining in the binary relation of remembering and forgetting, rather than an attempt to understand and make visible the workings of the death drive in the feminist archive.

Working in the binary is not at all without value. The postmaternal thinking that Stephens seeks to confront is an amplification of old cultural ambivalences about nurture, care and dependency that do coalesce around the social representation of the mother, a form of thinking that works against ‘maternal thinking’, as Sara Ruddick first described it in *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (1989). In that founding text for maternal studies, Ruddick argued that maternal labour is a specific form of thinking, available to men and women equally, that can foster the growth, preservation, and socialisation of a child. The conjunction of ‘maternity’ with ‘thinking’ was, at the time, a deliberate move within the discipline of philosophy to disaggregate the insistence that thinking belonged to a masculine realm, and domestic labour proceeded from some instinctual impulse, somehow outside of the workings of the intellect. Ruddick drew attention to the judgments, metaphysical attitudes and values that mothers affirm, as the central practice of child raising. In replacing ‘labour’ for ‘thinking’ Ruddick was responding to a strain in Simone de Beauvoir’s writing, in which reproductive labour remains immanent, and the mundane and monotonous labour of turning infants into human beings is characterised as meaningless biology (Beauvoir 1948). Ruddick’s intervention was to therefore transform an earlier feminist rendition of motherhood and domestic labour as non-productive and unable to accrue value. By articulating the values themselves that are necessary for maternal practice to develop, she reaffirmed maternity whilst skirting the issue of essentialism. Maternity is not labour, but a discipline, a collective practice that develops in response to certain demands, and which is shaped by interests in preserving, reproducing, directing and understanding individual and group life. Maternity, for Ruddick, was only ever a social practice, available to men and women, and offered to a range of ‘others’ whom may or may not be our biological children. However, due to what she saw as the ongoing conditions of patriarchy that skew women’s relation to power and powerlessness, the development of maternal thinking in women remains particularly nuanced. Ruddick therefore located her own thinking as part of a shared feminist project to construct an image of maternal power that worked against the tendency for motherhood to be sentimentalised and devalued.

Stephens draws heavily on Ruddick for her account of a maternal thinking that stands against the ‘postmaternal thinking’ she identifies as growing out of the aggressive individualism of the ‘new capitalism’ (Stephens 2011, x). She is concerned with the figuration of mothering, and its dereliction in public life, as a way of speaking about dependency, vulnerability and the interconnectedness of lives more generally. The argument is partly under-pinned by Fraser and Gordon’s (1994) early genealogy published in *Signs* that charted the historical shift in discourses of dependency in the European pre- and post-industrial world and its impact on the then contemporary U.S. discourses of welfare dependency.ⁱⁱⁱ Using this genealogy Stephens shows how a social commitment to the ethics of care is historically and culturally bound, and is therefore open to political change. At the heart of post-maternal thinking, then, is the idea that under neoliberal conditions no form of dependency is immune from being experienced as ‘disgraceful and aberrant’. The maternal in a postmaternal regime is a failure of subjectivity. If self-sufficiency is paraded as moral virtue, and being dependent, or caring for someone who is dependent, is widely understood as infantilising, this, she argues, will produce pervasive cultural anxieties about mothering.

However, if the ‘maternal’ in the postmaternal only signifies care, nurturance and the management of states of dependency, then despite the importance of the forms of remembering that Stephens calls for, we perform our own kind of forgetting of the long history in maternal studies that traces the relations between love and hate as they play out in relation to mothers, and within experiences of mothering. I’m referring here to a deep strand of ‘maternal thinking’, that includes de Beauvoir’s own complex and ambivalent accounts of mothering in *The Second Sex* ([1949] 1997), Rich’s (1976) work of making visible the impossible paradoxes of holding together contradictory feelings towards children under conditions of patriarchy, through to the work of Parker (1995), who draws out an account of mothering that focuses less on Klein’s description of infantile experiences of love and hatred towards early part-objects, and more on mothers’ own psychic development as mothers, that entails managing intense, and at times unmanageable ambivalence towards their children. This work was influential for a whole generation of feminist scholarship – literary, sociological, psychological – that took up maternal ambivalence as a crucial way to de-idealise motherhood, and drew attention to the anxieties and aggressions that it mobilises. This focus on ambivalence has found its way into the public sphere through the literary output of authors such as Rachel Cusk, the graphic novels of Alison Bechdel, and through the work of numerous visual artists who have been working at the interface of motherhood and creative practice in the last two decades (see e.g. Bechdel 2012; Cusk 2007; Liss 2013).

The tension between maternal and postmaternal thinking, then, revolves around how we understand ‘care’. The philosopher Adrianna Cavarero talks of the ‘inclined self’ and ‘maternal inclination’ as a kind of leaning out of the self, towards the other, in a relation of nonreciprocal dependency (Cavarero 2010, 195). Using the mother–child relation as a model, she understands care as a dilemma provoked by the utterly dependent other, in which the ‘mother’ chooses to give or receive care. We have seen how this choosing, from a Kleinian perspective, has, in part, its antecedents in the ways we have managed our aggression towards our internal objects and their relations, and the resultant guilt and desire to repair what we imagine we have damaged. In developments of Klein’s thought, care emerges out of the management not only of the dilemmas of love and hate, but a more basic nameless dread, that in its turn requires containment by another who can react without retaliation to the dread that temporarily comes to reside in them, through a process the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion (1984) calls ‘reverie’. This notion that care has something to do with the shared management of intolerable and destructive states of mind, coupled with our reliance on both the practices and good will of others, describes the contours of a psychosocial reading of the ethics of care. In the philosopher Joan Tronto’s early work with Berenice Fisher, she saw care as:

[...] a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web. (Fisher and Tronto 1990, 103)

For Tronto, caring reaches out beyond the limits of the relational self to include forms of action not limited to human action, not exclusively dyadic, but rather a broad spectrum of ongoing, culturally constrained practices and dispositions that have to do with maintaining, continuing or repairing the world. But from a psychosocial perspective, care has to also be understood through

its ties to guilt, destructiveness, and a core fear for survival, the survival both of ourselves and of others. Reparation, we could say, is the on-going shared management of these states. By shared, I mean to move away from the idea that we develop the capacity to care only out of a drive for the preservation of the ego, and for our own individual survival. As Butler (2014) has reminded us, in her engagement with Klein, destructiveness in a relational theory is not simply separated from love. Love or care are always already ambivalent, being experienced as distinct from destructiveness at the very point that we can recognise that the two have come together. In other words, if, in what Klein calls the depressive position, we can acknowledge we have in phantasy hated and destroyed what we love and depend on, then we might also be able to recognise that we might want to preserve, repair, and care for that very same thing. Klein writes ‘There is ... in the unconscious mind a tendency to give [the mother] up, which is counteracted by the urgent desire to keep her forever.’ As Butler puts it, individuality is never complete, and dependency never really overcome. It is only in the context of an ungoingly unresolved relation between love and destructiveness that Butler’s statement on dependency can be understood:

[...] it is a matter of recognizing that dependency fundamentally defines us: it is something I never quite outgrow, no matter how old and how individuated I may seem. And it isn’t that you and I are the same: rather, it is that we invariably lean towards and on each other, and it is impossible to think about either of us without the other. (Butler 2014)

In summary, whilst postmaternal thinking is a helpful way to articulate the dereliction of dependency, and the care it elicits, in the social sphere, mothering is a practice that is always already bound up with the particular psychic outcomes of dependency which include the urgent desire to retain and repudiate its source. Maternal care, from this perspective, is the name for the collective management of hate that emerges at the very point that we can recognise that love and hate can be directed towards the same (maternal) object.

Postwork

What I’ve described as the ‘psychosocial’ evokes a non-reduceable relation between psychic and social spheres, one defined by the ‘permeability, impingement, resonance, and phantasmatic excess’, as Butler puts it, of one sphere on the other (Butler 2015). I’m approaching ‘the maternal’ as a particularly tender site for these impingements, due to the ways that both psychic and social life emerge in and through relations to maternal practice, as I’ve described above. My discussion therefore seeks to keep open a question about how the maternal circulates in social form, and how the social forms the maternal takes are invested in, attached to, and transformed in psychic life. It is a discussion that moves between psychoanalysis, and social theories that can help us understand how the organisation of labour, time, care and reproduction have material effects that may congeal in the psychic labour of the mother, and how this psychic labour may in turn reorganise the relation between labour, time, care and reproduction.

I therefore want to make what might appear to be a rather abrupt turn from Klein to a Marxist feminist analysis of social reproduction, through an engagement with Kathi Weeks’ argument in *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries*, in which ‘postwork’ emerges as a category around which certain utopian demands that relate to wage, labour and social reproduction can revolve. Weeks is concerned with the now almost total

privatisation of employment in countries of the global north, and the general acceptance of waged work as the primary mechanism for income distribution that remains ubiquitous and unchallenged.^{iv} Although she does not particularly dwell on the details of what the problem of work currently is, we can surmise that she is speaking to the almost total encroachment of time by work in post-Fordist conditions that has been noted by many scholars elsewhere (see e.g. Berardi 2011; Lübbe 2009; Sharma 2014; Southwood 2011; Virilio 1999; Wajcman 2014; Wright 2009). Part of the problem with subsuming time by work is the squeezing out any kind of unfettered time that might include time to be with others, including children, beyond what we can define as the ‘labour’ of care. Weeks uses the term ‘work’ to refer to ‘productive cooperation organised around, but not necessarily confined to, the privileged model of waged labour’ (Weeks 2011, 14). Wage labour, in her reading, is the central mechanism of capital’s production and leads to the privatisation of both work and family life. Taking up Marx’s assertion that waged work, for those without other options, is a system of forced labour, waged work becomes naturalised in capitalist conditions, coming to seem necessary and inevitable (7). Instead, waged work, Weeks argues, is a social convention and disciplinary apparatus rather than an economic necessity (8). It produces goods, services, income, capital and disciplined governable social and political subjects. It is also crucially the mechanism through which gender is enforced, performed, and endlessly recreated (9). Whilst a protestant work ethic continues to ideologically drive our relationships with work in post-industrial contexts, (and western feminism, Weeks argues, has its own tendencies to mystify and moralise about work, producing its own version of the work ethic), Weeks is interested in mining an alternative history, firstly a history of the refusal to work, and then of what she calls a postwork politics. This parallel history to the work ethic could take in nineteenth century working class ‘labourist’ versions of the work ethic that championed the worth and dignity of waged work (Weeks 2011, 59), through to a history of ‘bad subjects’ whose class consciousness was articulated through a deliberate avoidance of the ‘space, time and demands of wage labour’ (79). There were segments of the black working class, for instance, in postwar America, who visibly refused to be good proletarians, seeking meaning and pleasure in the times and spaces of nonwork (Kelley cited in Weeks 2011, 80). But most importantly Weeks focuses on the wages for housework movement in the early 1970s, a movement that coalesced around a number of Marxist and socialist feminist theory texts published in Italy, the U.K. and the U.S., that insisted that work, whether waged or unwaged domestic work, was not something women should aspire to, but something they should try to escape from, and by example, begin the process of abolishing the capitalist relations between work, wage and social reproduction. Much of Weeks’ energies in *The Problem with Work* (2011) are devoted to drawing out some specific implications of this aspect of the demands made by the wages for house- work movement, despite distancing herself from their core demand of payment for house- work itself. In doing so she argues for the contemporary necessity of a renewed demand for basic income and a demand for shorter hours to counter the work ethic that drives what Cederström and Fleming (2012) have described as ‘total work’.

The arguments that circulated in Marxist and Socialist feminist literatures in the period that Weeks is interested in, between 1972 and 1976, tended to either aim at equal access to waged work for women through an acceptance of the lesser value accorded to unwaged domestic labour, or aimed at revaluing unwaged forms of household-based labour including housework and caring work (Sandford 2011). Margaret Benston and Peggy Morton, for instance, framed the argument in terms of women working in the home for capital – either with the family being

understood as a production unit for house-work and child-rearing, or as an economic unit that maintained and reproduced labour power (Benston and Morton 1980; Cox and Federici 1976). If socially necessary labour time remained invisible, and yet propped up the capacity for male workers to generate waged labour, women remained the invisible class that capitalism exploited and relied on. According to Weeks, both strategies, however, failed to challenge the dominant legitimating discourse of work. Each drew on a version of the work ethic to claim essential dignity and special value of women's waged or unwaged labour.

Instead, the texts Weeks examines, particularly Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James' *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (1973) and Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici's *Counter-Planning from the Kitchen: Wages for Housework, A Perspective on Capital and the Left* (1976), argued that the problem lay in the ways the ideology of the family compensated for the failures of the living wage. The argument hinged on an analysis of the double-edged mechanism of the wage, that both facilitates accumulation of capital, but also keeps workers focused on fighting for more money, power and less work in order to fulfil their own autonomous needs and desires. This constant tussle over the wage obscures those involved in social reproduction, through pitting worker against capitalist without addressing the mechanism of everyone's oppression – the wage. The refusal of work was therefore as central to the wages for housework project as it was to the better-known autonomist tradition. Counter to its populist reception, Weeks draws out how the naming of domestic labour as work was not meant to valorise it, but was 'the first step towards refusing to do it' (Federici 1995 cited in Weeks 2011, 124). The demand was certainly for money, but for money that was precisely not to be exchanged for labour, either domestic or otherwise. The demand for money was to buy time – the time to do things for one's pleasure, especially to choose to be with others, including children; to eat as one pleased; to have sex outside of the confines of the heterosexual matrix; to 'live' beyond waged work and housework. In the words of Cox and Federici: 'For our aim is to be price-less, to price ourselves out of the market, for housework and factory work and office work to be 'uneconomic' (Cox and Federici 1976 cited in Weeks 2011, 132). Crucial to the wages for housework demands was the call for more unconstrained or undetermined time – time for sociality, intimacy and experimentation beyond the constraints of a heterosexist social matrix that was operationalised through the family.

Time and postwork

There is clearly a way in which this now reads as deeply anachronistic in conditions in which it is our very capacities for pleasure beyond work that capital has had to evoke and invade, in order to re-inject 'life' into the 'dead-zone' of work in an attempt to keep labour 'living' (Cederström and Fleming 2012). As Cederström and Fleming have argued (2012, 10), capitalism draws in discourses of the social, the experimental, the aesthetic and the relational to motivate a generation of workers who already know that capitalism is fundamentally destructive to both society and nature. Hence the reflexive injunction to enjoy but also to 'rest', to take time off, to 'take care' of the self and the planet, to find a life-work 'balance', to 'spend' time, to find 'quality' in the dead time of perpetual work. 'Life' as many have noted, is capital, which squeezes the space of heterogeneity and the capacity to refuse total work. And yet, as Stephen Wright argues in his essay on 'time without qualities' we desperately need an analysis of 'public time' that moves us away from the individualised injunctions to spend 'quality time', and produces a more collective response to the 'crisis' of the present (Wright 2009). 'Might one not

think of public time', he asks 'as carving out breathing spots, intervals, transitory breaches in the very core of collective existence, time slots still unfettered by moral or political discipline?' (Wright 2009, 129). Here seamless time begins to show its cracks. If time now has various capitalised qualities, in other words, then what is a time without qualities, a time that is 'available', 'an undisciplined time, a public time whose ideological and moral density is tolerably low'? (Wright 2009, 130). These intervals would constitute the equivalent to the strange in-between spatial zones in cities – derelict sites, empty parking lots, those bedraggled non-spaces that Ian Sinclair is so fond of tracking on the edge of London (Sinclair 1997). Drawing on Jacques Rancière's insistence that the sphere of democracy is always under construction, an interval, that is, between legal and social identity, then that sphere is temporal, and the sort of public time Wright refers to as 'without qualities', unqualified and unquantified, is the very condition of the possibility of democracy, of a sharing of public life. In returning to the wages for house- work debates, we could say that Weeks gestures, though not explicitly, towards the need to rethink not just how to share out labour but how to share time; an issue, then, of generationality rather than intergenerationality, of lateral as well as vertical relations, and of the propping up of institutions and practices that make such relations viable. Although maternal time can feel relentlessly interrupted, especially for those with small children, and those who mother over elongated periods of their lives, devoid of these illusory breathing spots, Wright is drawing attention to transitory and momentary appearances of time without qualities that is by definition a public time.

From value to 'life'

At the end of *The Problem with Work*, Weeks' argument drives towards the notion of a basic income and a call for shorter working hours. Calls for basic income have circulated since the sixteenth century,^v and in the contemporary period arguments about uncoupling income from the wage system have been part of national debate since the 1960's in the U.S., and the 1980's in Northern Europe. The idea behind the basic income is that a universal basic payment is made for participation in the production of value, above and beyond what wages can measure and reward. Weeks' real innovation, however, which she mentions in the closing pages of the book, and therefore remains an intriguing opening rather than a fully worked through theory, is to rethink the common production of value, and substitute for value the common reproduction of life. The 'life' that Weeks substitutes for 'value' is the life alluded to in the colloquial phrase 'get a life'. She acknowledges that 'life' does not lie outside of biopower, and is neither exterior to work, nor captured by the notion of life that proliferates in vitalist philosophies that emerge from a Spinozist tradition of thought. Rather 'life' refers to the notion of striving for a 'full life' that is 'common to and shared with others without being the same as others' (Weeks 2011, 232). A 'full life' would include, but not be subsumed by reproduction or work. By considering life as a counterpoint to value, she suggests a political project that might frame the antiwork critiques and post- work imaginaries represented by demands for basic income and shorter hours:

Perhaps more important from the point of view of my argument, the collective effort to get a life can serve as a way both to contest the existing terms of the work society and to struggle to build something new. (Weeks 2011, 233)

Postwork, as an extension of the refusal of work, is then 'a utopianism that replaces social-ism as the horizon of revolutionary possibility and speculation'. The call is not for more conventional

‘family time’, or the time to care and nurture others, but for the denaturalisation of both the 8-hour day, and the privatisation and gendering of reproductive labour. Weeks notes the collective endeavour in getting a life – lives are relational, and cannot be acquired, possessed or held onto at the level of the individual: ‘A life [...] always exceeds what we have, and its getting is thus necessarily an incomplete process’ (Weeks 2011, 233). Postwork is a speculative horizon that resists closure or appropriation and remains committed to difference, futurity and excess.

The maternal death drive

Although Weeks does not explicitly situate her notion of ‘postwork’ within contemporary discussions of the problem of time, I think postwork is political to the extent that it suggests we re-think the relations between time, work, reproduction and care. Challenging the infiltration of work into every experience of time, as well as denaturalising the privatisation and gendering of care suggests the possibility of a social sphere in which we can all have a more fluid and shared relation to both work and reproduction, one in which time can be less ‘qualified’ in Stephen Wright’s sense, by the time of labour, thought in both its productive and reproductive modes. However, as Stella Sandford has noted, discussions about social reproduction tend to occlude the specific emotional labour of motherhood that is not subsumed by the more general tasks of domestic work and social reproduction, and have to do with the ways that the product of this labour comes to matter to the one labouring, and is no longer a question of ‘indifference’ that is at the heart of Marx’ analysis of labour in *The Grundrisse* (Sandford 2011). After all, mothering does not always feel fluid, transferable, or ‘full’. It can leave us feeling drained and empty, angry and depressed, and full of anxiety, in ways that may be difficult to share out. And yet this mattering can mean that we go back for more, whether under paid or unpaid conditions, and may drive the ways we choose to make ourselves available to the ‘again and again’ that is required to ‘get a life’. I am naming the particular repetitions of this return to the ‘again and again’ of the site of mattering, the ‘maternal death drive’. Lives tend to unfurl, in other words, in relation to other lives, and that unfurling requires the time that it takes for love and hate to come to be understood as residing together, in the same other. It is an understanding that constantly breaks down and has to be re-established, repetitively, again and again in the context of maternal care. Both mother and child come back, again and again, to the scene of love and hate. I would agree that we can and should collectivise care; we can and should denaturalise the gendering of that care; and we can and should pay everyone a basic income for their part in that care. However, what we earlier called ‘maternal care’ is not synonymous with a generic concept of care, but the name for the collective or public management of hate that emerges at the point that we can recognise that love and hate can be directed towards the same (maternal) object. The maternal death drive is then the name for the repetitive time that it takes for the emergence of a desire to repair the damage we have done to the other whom at that moment we realise we also love. It requires that someone will go on attempting to manage their own emotional states in relation to the emotional storm that accompanies ‘getting a life’.

It is here that I think the potential in the notion of ‘reparation’ emerges. Holding onto Weeks’ utopian vision is vital if we are to move beyond the ongoing divisions and privatisations of work and reproduction. There should be ‘reparation’ for the common reproduction of life in the form of the basic income. But in addition, I would augment this vision with a call for the recognition of the time that it takes for the emergence of the capacity for reparation in psychic life, for love and hate to have some proximity to one another in an ongoing motion of veering towards and

away from one another that is the permanent reminder of their relation. Roszika Parker has argued for the recognition of holding together our love and hate for our children, and sees this as a developmental achievement for mothers that she thinks of as a maternal depressive position, separate from that established in our own infantile lives, and emerging through the specific experience of mothering (Parker 1995). What I am arguing for here is the recognition of a form of waiting time that is the condition for the establishment of reparation. If we return to the anecdote at the beginning of the article, there is the odd realisation that time has passed that can only be retroactively understood as having been the time of another's unfolding. This time cannot at the time be grasped as 'passing'. It is what allows that ambivalent gesture of the wave – a gesture that is both greeting and leaving. The wave symbolises the capacity for reparation – I have inevitably hurt what I also love, and I can bear it, and now it's time to go, which is also a form of return. The postmaternal, in this reading, is animated by the maternal death drive, the capacity to wait, to bear time.

Conclusion

The 'post' in the postcolonial is an activity of space clearing, as Appiah would have it, an impossible process of clearing a space for critical thinking about what is radically repressed in a particular cluster of discourses and practices. The impossibility is not just a function of the dispositif, but has to do with our spatial and temporal contamination of one another, so that clearing a space itself becomes simultaneously an imperative and a fantasy. I have attempted here the impossible task of clearing a space to think about what else the 'post-maternal' may signify beyond the 'unmothering' of the public sphere. Through an engagement with Klein, the postmaternal emerged as the contamination of love and hate in psychic life that could be seen across the shared field of mother-child relations. Its emergence requires the time that it takes to 'get a life', a repetitive return to the site of emotional contamination, and the mattering of emotional labour. Its outcome is the ambivalent wave, hello, goodbye, a gesture that suspends the movement of coming and going at the very point that the child disappears around the corner of his own childhood. I am, indeed, postmaternal.

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ⁱ Parker (2012) notes that where once paternity was the question and maternity the given, new forms of motherhood that are not tied to a female body are shifting this old certainty.

ⁱⁱ I am thinking here of the contributions of Luce Irigaray, Christine Battersby, Elizabeth Grosz, Adriana Cavarero and Bracha Ettinger.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fraser and Gordon showed how pre-industrial usages of the term in seventeenth-century Europe, for instance, carried no moral opprobrium, given that the majority of men and women in agrarian societies were wage labourers, serfs or slaves, making dependency the norm. What it did carry was a sense of inferiority, an indication of a place in the classed hierarchical ordering of such social groupings around landowners and their subordinates. The dependencies of women and children related more to their place on this social ladder, than on the gender or emotional dependency. It was only with the rise of industrial capital that a splitting of dependency into social, political and economic forms was affected. As dependency no longer referred simply to a social relation, it could also designate, for the first time, an individual character trait, producing a moral and psychological register, that we could say has persisted in contemporary discourses of the 'undeserving poor'. As wage labour became increasingly normative, it was those excluded from wage labour who came to personify dependency – the pauper, the 'colonial native' and 'slave' and the newly invented figure of 'the housewife' (316).

^{iv} Weeks is writing in the U.S. context, and her analysis is largely about work in post-industrial economies in the global north.

^v See www.basicincome.org/forahistoryofthebasicincome.