ABSTRACT

Panel: From Sentiment to Sexuality: Revisiting the Maternal Body as Threat

Chair: Natalie Loveless, University of Alberta, Edmonton

This panel revisits the “threat” of the maternal body, both in practice and theory. Amongst other topics, papers will address the historical rejection of sentimentality by feminist artist mothers, the sexuality of the mother-child relationship, non-reproductive and non-heteronormative maternal bodies, and the changing perspectives on essentialism and the female/maternal body today.

Papers

Jess Dobkin, FADO Performance Art Center, Toronto

Motherf*cker

I will contribute a discussion of my recent performances including, The Lactation Station Breast Milk Bar, Being Green and Fee for Service as they challenge conventional presentations of maternity and motherhood. I will reflect on how my personal and professional life experience meets my performance practice, and how I confront and am confronted by real and imagined risk. I’m interested in things that are potently queer - where our publics and privates are blurred, where social and animal bodies connect, where transgressions are cherished and sweet.

Laura Allred Hurtado, MA Art History and Visual Culture, University of Utah

Conceptualizing Milk: The Semiotics of Canan Senol’s Fountain

In spring of 2007, a loud dripping sound echoed in the quiet galleries of Brooklyn Museum’s Sackler Center for Feminist Art. The source was Turkish artist Canan Senol’s Fountain (2000), a video where two engorged breasts swell at the nipple then dripping in syncopation. Rhythmically, the breasts move up and down filling the picture frame as the color flickers. Through a close visual analysis, my research positions this video in dialogue with Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain (1917) as an inversion of his infamous urinal, a gesture that codes the maternal breast as phallic and Duchamp’s Fountain, in comparison, as a feminine form. Further, my paper explores how Senol uses such an iconic reference to challenge masculine conventions that exist in the larger art historical discourse. Such framing, in contrast to theories that code the maternal body as abject and excessive, Senol’s Fountain frames such maternal excessiveness as endowed with power. Lastly, I explore the leaking maternal breast of Fountain, as a speaking one. I position the significance of the sound of dripping milk in relationship to Julia Kristeva’s linguistic theories as published in “Revolution in Poetic Language” and ultimately suggest that Senol’s Fountain seems to answer Kristeva’s call for more complex exploration of the maternal experience.

Christen Clifford, Independent Artist and Lecturer in Theatre and Performance, SUNY Purchase

BabyLove: Maternal Sexuality < Breeder Brained Fucktard

BabyLove examines maternal sexuality, the abject areas and eros that lie between a mother and infant son, and the praxis of performing the maternal body. How does one practice sex in everyday life, and how does that change when the body becomes maternal? Is the sexualization of the naturalized maternal body part of the pharmacopornographic industrial economy, and if so,
why is the sexualized mother still such a threat? Are we still trying to re-imagine the maternal body beyond being an agent of reproduction?

Clifford will perform a very short excerpt of BabyLove and discuss online responses and threats. "People like this woman should not be having fucking kids, and her son needs to be taken away from her. The fucked up part is that there are people in the comments fucking praising her for her "braveness" " (KidFree4Me) "Hilarious!" 4 STARS, Critic's Pick (Time Out New York) "You are one breeder brained fucktard." (Reader response) Starred Critic's Pick (New York Magazine) "Seriously, has anyone arrested this heifer yet?" (Reader Response) "Hilarious and uncensored!" (Flavorwire) http://christenclifford.tumblr.com @cd_clifford

Miriam Schaer, Lecturer, Columbia College Chicago

The Presence of Their Absence

The Presence of Their Absence explores the disparagement of childlessness and childless women by the maternal establishment, a reigning cultural norm in virtually every country and historical era. Non-maternity, whether chosen or imposed by circumstance, falls outside the biological ideal, usually to its disadvantage. Childless, or child-free, women throughout the world face a spectrum of cultural disdain that ranges from simple disrespect to explicit hostility.

Non-maternity as a normative standard represents an idea as controversial today as when it was suggested by Shulamith Firestone in 1970’s The Dialectic of Sex. “Women will not be fully emancipated,” she wrote, “until they are free from the demands of biology.” Then, she took emancipation’s tools to be concepts like artificial insemination and surrogacy, options that at the time were little better than science fiction.

Today, these and other alternative maternities are widespread. Yet, rather than release women from maternity’s grip, they have added new pressures to women in pursuit of biological childbearing, often at great cost in terms of health and finances. The maternal body is less a threat it turns out reality than the non-maternal one is to popular notions about motherhood.

Margaret Morgan, Independent Artist, Los Angeles

The Hole Where the Mother Isn’t: From Bambi’s mother to Olaf’s Frozen Nose

This paper addresses the avoidance of ‘mother’ in children’s animation. Even as their cinematic narrates employ increasingly multiple and diverse families, even as female roles are more complexly drawn, even when more films pass the Bechdel Test, much of the action only begins with the negation of the mother: her evil, her death, her tyranny: old women supplanted by young; moms dying at the outset; girl-power suppressed by a mother’s politesse: the protagonist’s growth only exists in that hole where the mother isn’t.

Of anti-maternal films, we ask how they might deconstruct themselves: When children’s film recoups hetero-normativity at the expense of the mother, we beg the question: What is the norm in hetero-normativity? The absenting of the woman in the narrative heart of conventional hetero-normative storyline suggests a homosocial or at least onanistic culture. Indeed a viewer may spend ninety minutes in a wild and weird ride through polyglot cultures full of cross-genderings, adoptions, interspecies blends, and electronic fairylands that are only resolved, in the very last moments of the narrative, into the Happily-Ever-After conventions of heterosexual normativity. This paper considers possible counter identifications during the narrative arc and the transferal of maternal value.

What of recent cinematic contributions to the child’s diet, such as Brave and Frozen, that seem overtly to redress these concerns? Are animated mothers and daughters getting on better these days? What about the mothers of sons? Wherein lies the mother’s return? How are these animated films received by critics?

Lastly, this paper considers how ‘mother’ has changed in the meta-arc of children’s movies: her biology, her identity, her humanity: Maybe she’s not so scary afterall.