

Introduction: becoming maternal

WHEN I say I am writing a book about the maternal body I get responses that range from interest to incomprehension, from enthusiasm to disgust, and I feel myself getting embarrassed. I need to clear the ground: 'It's not about mothering or natural birth or celebrity pregnancy ...' I stammer, and stop. Do I sound sufficiently objective? I am too close, still feeling uncomfortable, and I change the subject. I want to think about what produces this embarrassment and whether it can tell me anything about maternal bodies and their visibility, or lack of it. What kinds of attachment are involved in looking at maternal bodies in the visual arts? Why do they cause me (and others) to blush? Is it, as Louise Bourgeois suggests, that 'to reveal oneself is always embarrassing' (in Bernadac and Obrist 2000: 313), or is this affect more specific, tied to what is unrepresented about maternal bodies in visual culture?

My own interest in the maternal was born with my pregnancy at the age of forty, which surprised, enchanted and terrified me in equal parts and led to a radical transformation in my own identity and embodiment. I begin with this personal account because this experience framed my writing and has led to a continuing preoccupation with maternal bodies in the visual arts. As an art historian, I am interested in the power of visual imagery to frame our understanding of maternal bodies and to affirm or to disrupt prevailing maternal ideals. Neither singular nor universal, the maternal body is a symbolic construct with enormous cultural resonance, systematically shaped and produced through competing discourses and practices, yet at the same time curiously unacknowledged in terms of its visual history. The maternal body has a paradoxical status as both natural and exceptional, a sanctioned yet highly circumscribed form of female embodiment; like the nude, it is 'both a powerful cultural idea and a bodily state, but one which is unstable and open to multiple meanings' (Barcan 2004: 8). Maternal bodies are lived and imagined in many ways, so what is their significance within the visual arts?

In 1920 the Scottish artist Cecile Walton painted *Romance*, a self-portrait set in a domestic interior that depicts her lying on a bed holding up her newborn son, while her elder son looks on and a midwife bathes her feet (plate 1).¹ She shows herself as a modern independent woman, hair caught up in a turban and naked apart from a towel

round her hips, in an unadorned room with striped bed sheets and an angular table. But the painting also recalls an early Renaissance birth scene in its clarity and precise iconographical detail, making reference to Christian themes of the fall, redemption, immaculate birth and cleansing. These are represented symbolically by a single apple on a plate, a bunch of violets in a glass, oil in a bottle and a jug of clear water, the latter signifying virginal purity in fifteenth-century painting. An unnatural glow from the lower left illuminates Walton's body and shines on the faces of the baby Edward, the anonymous uniformed nurse, and her older son Gavril, who stands in profile like an enraptured attendant angel on the right of the picture. Only the baby turns towards the viewer, while Walton's face remains unlit as she inspects the doll-like infant in its robe, staring at it closely with an impersonal and faintly hostile gaze, seemingly curious about this new being. Behind her head in a dark doorway stands a shadowy masculine figure or perhaps it is his garments, cutting a sharp vertical line between mother and child. The whole scene is caught in an arrested moment in which time appears to stop still, while a translucent bubble and fallen rosebud and petals on the floorboards symbolise a fragile transience.

Romance caused a great stir in the second Edinburgh Group exhibition in 1920, and a contemporary critic who reviewed it commented on the 'frank treatment of an intimate subject', noting its 'quaintly primitive manner, suggestive of some earlier painter's "Nativity"' (quoted in Fowle 2002: 10).² In depicting modern motherhood according to a familiar artistic tradition, Walton consciously alluded to earlier maternal imagery as well as to her own position as a woman, an artist and a mother. The combination of matter of fact modernity with traditional iconography manifests detachment from the prevailing cult of motherhood and, together with the picture's ambiguous title, suggests that Walton has an ambivalent, even sceptical, attitude to maternity. A further jarring note to modern eyes is the black golliwog that the older child clasps casually in his arms against glowing skin and sheets, an image at the margins that marks this domestic idyll as white.³ In some respects Walton typified the 'New Woman', a figure who had emerged in literature and art and had assumed a progressive image and dress style in the new century that was associated with sex reform and gender equality.⁴ Walton enjoyed relative sexual and social freedom within the Edinburgh Group of avant-garde artists, which she joined in 1912, and together with fellow painters Eric Robertson and Dorothy Johnston formed 'an almost inseparable trio' (Cooper 1986: 178). She married Robertson and had two sons before separating from him in 1923 to bring up the children on her own. In this context the title *Romance* takes on an ironic twist; her husband's presence lurks behind her head and his landscape painting hangs on the wall, but this 'family romance' is marked by the father's physical absence. Nor is it evident that her 'romance' is with the new baby whom she scrutinises so intently. Walton later reflected on motherhood: 'Maternal concern has a longer view than that of rumpling the hair of a lover; nor is it quite satisfied by the multiplication of the family, but demands a share in the exaltation of intelligence' (quoted in Addison 2005).⁵ Her own sharp intelligence is evident in her bitter comment on the role assigned to women

artists in her avant-garde circle: 'A girl who married onto their stage so to speak was expected to take her place in the drama. The script was put into her hand, perhaps Joyce's *Exiles*, perhaps *Sons and Lovers*. She was chosen. She was cast for a part. That she might have conceived of a play of her own was not considered' (quoted in Addison 2005). In 1926 Walton wrote an essay 'Atlanta in Caledonia' on women's role in the arts in Scotland, arguing that they should retain 'certain qualities and values of their own which play a subtle and peculiar part in our social life'. Women, she argued, should not surrender these 'in order to order to acquire those characteristics which are more peculiarly masculine', but be aware of their own 'intrinsic appeal of personality that has made women the equal of man' (quoted in Fowle 2002: 13).⁶ Walton's insistence on gender equality while recognising the 'peculiar part' played by women's experience was a central strand in feminism of the time, but her visual exploration of these qualities in a birth scene was quite unique.⁷

I am left with a puzzle. *Romance* represents the modern predicament of a woman as an artist and mother, and yet looks back to precedents in earlier art. It is a painting of an intimate experience of the maternal body that was rarely represented, but its very oddness provokes further enquiry. This is an iconic narrative scene: a Renaissance holy image is fused with a modern home birth set in a domestic space occupied by a mother, midwife and children, and troubled by a masculine presence. Walton depicts the moment of recognition when a new sense of her own maternal subjectivity is born as the baby become other to herself, 'an alterity, if you like, she can call her own' (Baraitser 2009: 156). It represents the complex space-time of the maternal as a moment between time suspended and time passing, in which Lisa Baraitser suggests the experience of motherhood evokes, 'a renewed temporal awareness where the present was elongated and past and future no longer felt so tangible' (Baraitser 2009: 154).⁸ Walton's *Romance* embodies the intertwining of maternal space and time, self and other, mother and artist, as well as of the secular and the religious, independence and confinement that characterise maternal imagery. It is this complex moment of the mother's encounter with the maternal that I want to explore further in this book.

Embodying the maternal

Motherhood has been the recurrent theme in western art traditions, personified in the figure of the Virgin Mary, but my interest is both narrower and more encompassing: an investigation of maternal embodiment as the process of becoming a maternal subject. Baraitser suggests 'the almost intractable difficulties with separating the maternal subject from the pregnant body', but this is precisely my starting point (Baraitser 2009: 15). I want to explore a relationship between the maternal and pregnant body that treats them as neither identical nor discontinuous. It seems necessary therefore to begin by making a distinction, analytically at least, between the pregnant and the post-partum body, because not every pregnant body becomes a maternal one or leads to birth. The realities of infertility, miscarriage, stillbirth and abortion require a separation to be

made between the state of pregnancy and that of motherhood. Maternal bodies may also not only be those of birth mothers: women (and some men) take on maternal identities through many forms of kinship and social mothering, adoption and surrogacy. Assisted reproductive technologies and embryo implantation have opened up a different potential for maternity that, like paternity, has become legally and biologically uncertain. The UK Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act defines a mother as: 'The woman who is carrying or has carried a child as a result of placing in her of an embryo or of sperm and eggs, and no other woman, is to be treated as the mother of the child' (HFEA 2008 Section 33).⁹ I use the term 'maternal' in a more inclusive way in this book, but at times I want to distinguish between pregnancy as a voluntary or involuntary embodied process that may or may not result in a birth, and wider cultural representations of social and prosthetic mothers of different sexualities, genders, ethnicities, ages and capacities. What kinds of representational practices bring some maternal bodies into visibility and disallow others? Can our encounter with such bodies in the visual arts tell us anything about the condition of becoming maternal?

Simultaneously one and two, intimate and public, hidden and on display, the maternal body occupies a site of multiple attachments and investments for the individual and for her wider community. As a process that occurs within a woman's body, pregnancy is structurally located in the personal and private sphere, but it is always also public property. Even total strangers feel able to comment on and touch her pregnant belly: 'Suddenly my body's not my own. Everyone's got a say in it – not a bad thing, I quite like it'.¹⁰ The maternal body is constructed as a site for regulation and control through medical practices and reproductive technologies, the welfare system, maternity law and safety legislation. It is subject to medical and legal constraint and social surveillance, as well as signified and signifying through cultural texts and discursive practices. The pregnant woman is also situated between various interests in her potential child by partners, family and friends.

In European visual traditions the maternal body is conceptualised as a container for the unborn child, either as the sacred vessel of divinity enshrined in the Christian maternal ideal or in the biomedical construction of the pregnant body as a receptacle for embryonic life. As knowledge shifted from a model of generation to one of reproduction, a religious understanding of birth was supplanted by a scientific one, and imagery drawn from imagination or nature replaced by morbid anatomical illustration. The maternal body came to be seen as a mechanism and the figuration of the monstrous maternal emerged as its uncanny double. This imagery was in turn displaced as the maternal womb was rendered transparent by new imaging technologies in the twentieth century. Maternal bodies have been continuously visible in these various guises and were produced in various modes and sites: in Christian icons of the Virgin; anatomical illustrations in Renaissance and Enlightenment science; monstrous imagery from early popular culture, and in works by artists across the centuries.

My aim in this book is to demonstrate the power of the visual in shaping our cultural imaginary of maternal bodies, as well as to explore ways in which particular

maternal paradigms have been disrupted and transformed. Tracking the historical interaction between maternal ideals and pregnant bodies offers a starting point from which to interrogate prevailing images of the maternal and its material and psychic embodiments.

But however the maternal may be viewed, 'we do not *just* blindly configure ourselves around our internal ideals, and nor are we purely held in the sway of external representations of idealized motherhood' (Baraitser 2009: 94). Disjunctions occur within maternal representation that expose those ideals and produce fissures in them; these can, in Judith Butler's terms, become 'an enabling disruption' to the norm. While Butler is uninterested in the maternal, her argument that norms both stabilise gendered identities and produce their opposites as 'unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies', is useful here (Butler 1993: xi). I seek to demonstrate that, while maternal ideals are sanctified and legitimated, some pregnant bodies remain indisciplined and pathologised, seen in need of cultural sanction and social intervention.

Maternal bodies continue to be reframed visually in early twenty-first-century culture. Once confined, pregnant women appear everywhere: flaunted in celebrity magazines, courted as consumers and consulted on the internet, but only some maternal bodies are accorded the privilege of representation in public space. It is young, white, able-bodied and heterosexual pregnant bodies that normally make it into visibility, except when marked as deviant in the form of teenage, addicted, disabled, multiple, post-menopausal or transgendered mothers. My interest in exploring the relationship between these framings and embodied maternal materialities is not to discover a hidden reality behind representation, but rather to investigate the practices by which the maternal *becomes embodied* in the visual. I look at images and concepts of maternal embodiment that are constituted in diverse historical, cultural and political formations: flesh that is imbued with sociality.

Maternal subjects: speaking, writing and making

Nor, in pregnancy, did I experience the embryo as decisively internal ... but rather, as something inside and out of me, yet becoming hourly and daily more separate, on its way to becoming separate from me and of-itself. In early pregnancy the stirring of the fetus felt like ghostly tremors of my own body, later like movements of a being imprisoned in me; but both sensations were *my* sensations, contributing to my own sense of physical and psychic space.

(Rich 1986: 63)

Adrienne Rich's nuanced description of her own pregnancy suggests a complexity of experience, but the language of pregnancy, like that of birth, is usually full of metaphor and euphemism. In English women 'fall pregnant', they have a 'bun in the oven', are 'knocked up', 'up the duff' and 'expectant' mothers await their 'confinement'.¹¹ In

Margaret Atwood's story 'Giving Birth', the protagonist muses on the inadequacy of the terms 'giving birth' and 'delivery': who 'gives' and 'who' is delivered? Atwood's point is that there are no words for such indescribable events in women's bodies: 'Thus language, muttering in its archaic tongues of something, yet one more thing, that needs to be re-named' (Atwood 1998: 225).¹² Rich's classic text *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976) was the first major feminist analysis of motherhood, and yet she too struggled to give words to the embodied experience of becoming maternal as, 'something inside and out of me'. In a study of women's writing on childbirth in the twentieth century, Tess Cosslett identifies opposing medical and natural birth ideologies that shaped women's experience of maternity and marginalised earlier women's oral traditions, which came to be seen as 'unstructured, ghoulish horror stories' (Cosslett 1994: 4). But, if individual women came to be seen as either passive actors or active agents in a tussle between obligation and autonomy, 'the body itself, the physical conditions of maternity, challenges all our cultural scripts, and resists a unifying definition' (Cosslett 1994: 5). Women's voices speaking about their own maternal experiences emerged strongly in fiction and life-writing at the end of the last century and have now become clamorous, thanks in part to the internet, which raises the question of whose stories are told and how. No longer silenced or absent, women's maternal voices are multiple and fragmented according to Della Pollock, who defines her own account of childbirth narratives as 'a *partial* account of a partial performative culture' (D. Pollock 1999: 22). It is beyond the scope of this book to engage with the material lives of pregnant and maternal women; others have given powerful accounts of these experiences.¹³ My focus is different. I argue that, while maternal and pregnant bodies have been powerfully shaped by visual culture, practices by women artists offer a means of re-imagining maternal bodies in ways that value them differently, but that this is not an easy process, nor are precedents readily to hand. As Elizabeth MacKenzie writes: 'Much of the work I produce represents the ambivalence I experience in relation to ideas and images of what I am *supposed* to be ... I want to be a good artist. I want to be a good mother, but how I function in these roles rarely matches the cultural narratives and expectations I encounter' (MacKenzie 2012: unpaginated).

For many women who practice art, become pregnant and give birth, often the most powerful and transforming experience of their lives is still routinely dismissed by critics, curators and tutors as sentimental or irrelevant to contemporary art practice. This can produce a split between their artistic and maternal selves in practical and psychological terms: 'There is a conflict between my identity as a mother and my identity as an artist, both in the fight for time and space in which to work and in the powerful feelings of guilt that arise' (Clare Jarrett in Lincolnshire County Council 1993: 27). Women as mothers are discouraged from putting their art before their children; women as artists are inhibited from including maternal experience within their work. A small number of art exhibitions in the UK and USA have been devoted to themes of motherhood and fertility; however, it remains a tricky subject in the art world. When the artist-curator Helen Knowles approached galleries to show the

exhibition *Birth Rites* she commented, ‘what we’re finding is that there is still a lot of fear around the subject matter’ (quoted in Moorhead 2008: 17).¹⁴ Visual artists have explored maternal embodiment through a range of strategies in recent art practice, and these provide specific case studies as a counterpoint to historical analysis in this book. Taking as my starting point representations of maternal and birthing bodies mainly but not exclusively made by women artists, I propose that these offer a site of reconfiguration. Emphasising the heterogeneity and specificity of maternally embodied artworks, I also argue that becoming maternal is often represented as an *unfamiliar* rather than as a natural state from the perspective of maternal subjects. Many of these artists depict pregnancy and motherhood as a discontinuity that ruptures their feminine identities and renders these strange. Such alternative visual genealogies show how it is possible to trouble the maternal ideal and reveal what it works so strenuously to deny: the agency and potential power of women as maternal subjects.

Each chapter in the book is framed around readings of particular artworks that open up maternal embodiment as a space for investigation. At its heart is a crucial question: what does it mean to employ art as a means of thinking through, rather than just thinking about the maternal? My method of working performs repetitions and returns to key artworks, for example, Marc Quinn’s portrait of Alison Lapper, which acts as a fulcrum for thinking about maternal space in Chapter 1.¹⁵ Works of art are the bases from which I begin to explore conceptual analogies and draw out historical and thematic connections. To return repeatedly to certain works produces readings that are open and layered rather than finite and closed, subject to transformation in a continuing embodied and critical encounter with the work, the artist, and other writers. Art practices speak to and engage with theories in many ways in a form of ‘thinking through touching and making’ as Marina Warner puts it (Warner 2004: 11). One theme of this book is that art practices can also anticipate the slower working out of theory, for example, Bobby Baker’s staged domestic performances materially prefigured Butler’s theory of drag, while Alice Neel’s paintings of pregnant women can be seen as precursors to Iris Marion Walker’s phenomenological account of pregnant embodiment. Art offers carnal knowledge: an embodied and psychic understanding of how representational practices interact with experiences of the maternal body. As Marsha Meskimmon succinctly puts it, ‘the *work* of art is the work of embodiment, of bringing us to our senses in cognition’ (Meskimmon 2003a: 5). Nor is thinking merely after the event; as I fumble for words to describe something seen and experienced I re-enact a partial embodied encounter with the work itself. Meanings emerge in the practice of writing; thinking through art is a knowing encounter that itself can make a difference.

A different way of seeing and thinking produces particular understandings of the world and of us as subjects and objects within it: ‘The image is ... the result of an act of perception and construction which frames a world and the embodied beings within that world’ (Featherstone and Wernick 1995: 4). Ways of seeing can be individual, arbitrary, idiosyncratic, ideological, institutional or collective, and are constructed

rather than natural, but are always in some way embodied. The relation between bodies that are materially present and those that are perceived and constructed in representation is crucial in this respect. Visual analysis involves thinking about the role of art and other visual media in generating modes of perception in a complex mix of discourses and sensory visual images. Cultural meanings and representations are crucial to 'body politics' and visual practices not only change perceptions of bodies, they can reshape the body itself and open it to new knowledge. One example is the history of anatomical illustration, which played a formative role in understanding the maternal body; another recent one is the use of imaging technologies in embryo implantation that shape our perception of foetal life. Representations have their own materialities that matter: making an image is a material and an interpretative act that is framed within traditions of making and viewing. An image gains currency through the ways in which it is viewed and through the embodied practices, discourses and rituals that surround it. This is nothing new, as Michael Baxandall showed in the case of fifteenth-century Florentine painting; it is a dynamic and historically situated process. Piero della Francesca's *Madonna del Parto* is not only a sacred image of the pregnant Virgin, but is situated within a system for calculating volume used by his contemporaries and materialised in the form of fresco painting. The visual arts can offer knowledge of the complicated relationship between social ideas and individually embodied experiences in material practices of making and viewing. I am using the term 'visual arts' descriptively here to encompass a wide range of practices including traditional forms of painting, photography, sculpture and illustration, as well as time-based new media, performance and installation art.¹⁶ 'Maternal art' refers more specifically to practices by artists that seek to represent maternal identity and experience. As imaginative practices of making bodies in space, such artworks can give form to the unutterable, reveal ambivalence and contradiction, and create new figurations of the maternal.

Thinking through the maternal

What constitutes motherhood is a contested territory, a contest in which the combatants are not confined to mothers and children.

(Lewis 2005: 132)

There has been deep ambivalence within feminism towards the maternal body, which is at times marginal and at others central to the debate about gendered norms and female experience. The problems, pleasures and penalties of motherhood have been explored and conceptualised as a source both of affirmation and conflict for women, and feminist writers have argued for and against motherhood as an institution. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and Shulamith Firestone (1971) forcefully claimed that freeing women from their biological reproductive roles was crucial to their liberation. For others, including Adrienne Rich (1976), Nancy Chodorow (1978) and Mary O'Brien

(1983) the maternal offered a means of articulating and validating women's identities, albeit still framed by patriarchal norms. Second wave feminist interest in the maternal focused initially on the condition of motherhood, notably in Adrienne Rich's pivotal text. In her new introduction to the 1986 edition *Of Woman Born*, Rich noted critical reactions to her innovative approach: 'personal testimony mingled with research, and theory which derived from both' (Rich 1986: unpaginated). But Rich's methodology has become central to current feminist writing on the maternal, as exemplified in Baraitser's use of anecdote as the ground for theorising. Since the late 1980s, representations of maternal bodies, and pregnant embodiment and foetal imagery have become the subject of critical feminist investigation across diverse fields of literature, art, film, science and cultural studies. Feminist studies have addressed issues ranging from the representation of maternal bodies in scientific and medical imagery to the status of foetal personhood within abortion politics; to queer parenting, and the increased visibility of celebrity pregnancy.¹⁷ Specific studies of the maternal in art, cinema and photography have focused on periods, genres and individual artists, and have helped to define the scope of my own project.¹⁸ First person narratives have joined critical and ethnographic analysis that built on earlier feminist sociological and health studies of maternity to investigate women's diverse experiences of fertility and infertility in the contexts of race and ethnicity, disability, class and sexuality.¹⁹ Maternal studies now represent a sustained intervention within the politics of reproduction and its representation and a thriving area of academic investigation; they have emerged as a key site of interdisciplinary research and policy making, and lobbying and activist networks, all of which extend and contest maternal knowledge.²⁰

Current maternal writing is informed by theories that draw broadly on the areas of psychoanalysis, phenomenology and performative theory for an account of embodied maternal subjectivity. A theoretical turn towards the importance of affect and renewed interest in a haptic understanding of touch over the last decade also opened the way for more embodied critical practices of maternal art.²¹ These offer ways of thinking about maternal bodies that acknowledge both the power of social constructs *and* the materiality of maternal embodiment. Michelle Boulous Walker suggests that the maternal operates as a site of 'radical silence' in traditions of philosophy and psychoanalysis, concluding that 'it is important politically, aesthetically and ethically for women to adopt the maternal, despite the considerable risks of doing so' (Boulous Walker 1998: 4). Those risks have already been taken by maternal artists, and a particular confluence of two key strands of twentieth-century thought and practice, feminism and psychoanalysis, have shadowed and directly intervened in art making. Relations between feminism, psychoanalysis and the maternal have been close but not always harmonious, and sometimes even antithetical.²² These troubled relationships are exemplified in maternal art practices by women who have engaged with, and at times been hostile to, feminism and psychoanalytic theory. While artists working in the early part of the twentieth century did not necessarily read Freud's writings, his ideas began to percolate into artistic practice and spread across Europe and North

America in the 1920s and 1930s.²³ The work of Melanie Klein and her followers on the infant-maternal relation became influential in the post-war period, not least on Louise Bourgeois' maternal works, but it was Lacanian and post-Lacanian theory that assumed dominance in the 1970s and 1980s, influencing a body of radical feminist work in art and film, most notably by Mary Kelly and Laura Mulvey.²⁴ Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* crucially shifted focus towards the psychic development of the maternal subject, who in previous psychoanalytic models was rendered as phallic, lacking, or in a state of abjection.²⁵ The work of Jessica Benjamin and others on maternal intersubjectivity and Rozsika Parker's writing on maternal ambivalence have further expanded the focus of psychoanalytic accounts. As the artist and psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger describes in her theory of the matrixial, this is an 'enlarged subjectivity' where 'a meeting occurs between the co-emerging *I* and the unknown *non-I*' (Ettinger 1993b: 12). From these diverse perspectives, maternal subjectivity is an incomplete project because it is always in the process of becoming in relation to a changing other, the child.

Feminist thinkers have also sought various ways to conceptualise the maternal as a means of challenging the split between self and other and subject and object in western metaphysics. Feminist philosophers have seen the maternal body as a model for a different kind of embodiment of self from that of male philosophical traditions, which excluded the feminine.²⁶ For Hélène Cixous, the maternal offered the means of replacing the phallic economy of language; women come to a feminine practice of writing through the maternal body and milk; she asks: 'Can a mother write as a mother?' (Cixous 1990: 24). Luce Irigaray's attention to mother-daughter relationships sought to recast language and epistemology in a different maternal mode: 'We also need to find, rediscover, invent the words, the sentences that speak of the most ancient and most current relationship we know – the relationship to the mother's body, to our body – sentences that translate the bond between our body, her body, the body of our daughter' (Irigaray [1980] 1993a: 18–19). In Julia Kristeva's theory, the maternal is the site for the semiotic grounding of artistic creation, but from which the mother herself is excluded or else rendered abject. Maternal bodies appear emblematically in these writings as metaphorical and pre-figurative; their time is to come and their identity empirically unknowable. Feminist theorists of difference have thought through the maternal as a metaphoric space of 'movement, flux and undecidability' (Boulous Walker 1998: 135). In contrast, Anglo-American writers have tended to begin from a critical understanding of experience in developing new maternal models. Iris Marion Young's exploration of the specific modality of pregnancy made a critique of the philosophical paradigm of identity that was based on the individuated subject (Young 2005). Christine Battersby's 'fleshy metaphysics' offered a way of thinking how 'the self/other relationship needs to be re-worked from the perspective of birth – and thus in ways that never abstract from power inequalities, or from issues relating to embodied differences' (Battersby 1998: 3). Accordingly, a phenomenology of the maternal body and its potential for birth can provide a different ethics of self, and the maternal relation can open a different kind of connectivity with others. The possibility of co-existing

with(in) another offers a potential model for all human relationships, and from this particular embodied knowledge it is possible to achieve an ethics of responsibility to the other.²⁷ Adriana Cavarero's thinking about the maternal body as a place of origin not a void has provoked philosophical interest in the condition of being born rather than in death, replacing the concept of mortality with that of natality as the defining motive in the production of culture.²⁸ Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris cite performance works by artists that move audiences 'towards another way of *knowing* the maternal', which is neither universalised nor essential, and takes into view 'the local specificities of cultural, colonialist, psychic and social damage(s)' (Aston, Harris and Šimić 2006: 186–7). They remind us that maternal bodies are already lived in differences that are not only theoretical but material, involving the injuries of class and race, and opening up topologies grounded in specific embodied pains and pleasures.

These accounts of the maternal as intersubjective, inter-corporeal and materially situated have largely displaced an earlier sterile binary between essentialism and social construction that paralysed feminist debates about the maternal body. Ironically this debate has lingered in art, where representing the maternal was framed by critiques of essentialism. When Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock put together their definitive documentation of British feminist arts practice they identified a debate about essentialism then raging amongst feminist critics and artists. The authors of an essay 'Representation vs. Communication' argued that 'in celebrating what is essentially female we may be simply reinforcing oppressive definitions of women, e.g. women as always in their separate sphere, or women as defining their identities exclusively, and narcissistically, through their bodies' (Parker and Pollock 1987: 29).²⁹ But, far from defining their identity in these terms, many maternal artists seemed at odds with their bodies – becoming a mother was welcomed and yet feared as provoking a crisis in artistic autonomy. Artists who did use their maternal bodies found themselves navigating a tricky passage between celebration of all things relating to motherhood on one hand, and maternal disembodiment or abjection, on the other.³⁰

If maternal subjects are socially embedded and corporeal, have agency, and yet have lives in an ambivalent place between the biological and cultural, how then do maternal bodies materialise? Can we think of them as being both discursive in Donna Haraway's sense of 'material-semiotic practices through which objects of attention and knowing subjects are both constituted' (Haraway 1997: 218), and corporeal in the terms Vicky Kirby described as, 'all the oozings and pulsings that literally and figuratively make up the stuff of the body's extra-ordinary circuitry' (Kirby 1991: 97)?³¹ As Marsha Meskimmon writes about Christine Borland's work, '*Winter Garden* materializes concepts, makes ideas and multiplies variations of meaning as it enfolds "theory" with/ in "practice" in a vital corporeal exchange with bodies in the world' (Meskimmon 2003b: 442). This seems a good place to situate my own investigation into the diverse multiplicities of maternal bodies and their somatic and psychic attachments. If the maternal is a norm that women struggle to embody, Butler's concept of performativity seemed to offer a more productive model. In *Bodies That Matter* Butler poses a

central question: ‘Is there a way to link the materiality of the body to the performativity of gender?’ (Butler 1993: 1).³² For Butler, gender is neither pre-given nor socially learned, but produced through social, cultural, economic and kinaesthetic practices. She explains the process by which gendered bodily norms are sedimented in everyday life: ‘performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration’ (Butler 1999: xv). Three aspects of her ideas are particularly relevant to my thinking through maternal bodies and their representation: firstly the idea of performance as ritual, repetition and duration seems to fit the temporality of becoming maternal. Secondly, thinking about the performative body as produced within normative categories and institutions implies that it is open to cultural and political transformation and, thirdly, cultural and aesthetic practices can disrupt pervasive maternal norms through strategies of mimicry, parody and intervention. Butler’s theories have been widely taken up in relation to art and performance, but her own analysis stops short at the crucial moment when she confronts the maternal body itself. She asks ‘what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as “life”, lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving?’ (Butler 1993: 16). In this book I ask which *maternal* bodies matter: how are women enabled to become, or disallowed from being, maternal bodies in the visual arts? Rather than seeking a singular theoretical framework that encompasses them, I explore figurations of the maternal that don’t quite fit the norms.

Incongruous maternal bodies

From the outset of this project I was drawn to maternal bodies that seemed to be out of place, perhaps in response to my own anxieties about the maternal. The pregnant Virgin Mary, Helen Chadwick’s *Unnatural Selection* and Cindy Sherman’s prosthetic pregnancies are all maternal bodies that initially seemed to me incongruous, strange and impossible yet fascinating. This issue became central in discussing Marc Quinn’s sculpture *Alison Lapper Pregnant* and Lapper’s own self portraits that are the focus of Chapter 1. Here I examine the embodied shapes and contours of the maternal in relation to maternal and aesthetic norms in the context of national public space and the intimate space of pregnancy. *Alison Lapper Pregnant* marked the entry of an embodied maternal and dis/abled subject into the gendered and racialised site of Trafalgar Square.³³ I ask what this representation of an embodied other – female, pregnant and dis/abled – means within a national space that commemorates military heroism and was previously inhabited in sculptural terms by bodies of white men. What did it mean for a historically excluded body to enter into public visibility, and what kind of discourses and affects did it provoke? I draw on Lauren Berlant’s concept of the intimate public sphere to propose that this encounter with an embodied maternal subject in a national cultural site can begin to reframe somatic norms. Women’s experiences, like those of Lapper, in combining the career of artist with motherhood and their representations

of the maternal are the focus of Chapter 2. I locate maternal works made by Paula Modersohn-Becker and Käthe Kollwitz in the context of contemporary debates about creativity and procreativity, and racial and class politics in early twentieth-century Germany. In mid-century New York, Alice Neel sought to represent pregnancy and maternal embodiment through forms of social realism and expressionism that exposed urban poverty and racial exclusion. The intertwining of feminist politics and motherhood was also played out in competing practices and ideologies of making art in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. Second wave feminist artists engaged with experiences of pregnancy, maternal embodiment and childcare in relation to class and women's politics. In discussing works by Hackney Flashers, Mary Kelly and Catherine Elwes, I focus on the tensions between making maternal bodies visible and feminist critiques of their work.

In her essay, 'Stabat Mater' Julia Kristeva asked how the maternal can be represented within a secular European culture that no longer has a model of maternal power to replace that of the Virgin Mary. Helen Chadwick's *One Flesh* 1986 transforms the sacred 'Virginal Maternal' through carnal embodiment to reveal what the Christian ideal represses – the sexuality and agency of the maternal subject. In Chapter 3 I explore how different typologies of the Virgin were depicted through the figure of the pregnant Madonna in domestic divine imagery and in relationships amongst holy women. The image of Mary provided a prototype for secular representations of pregnancy in art and the gravid Madonna was linked to emerging anatomical representations of pregnancy. Feminist practices have re-imagined this masculine iconology from a maternal perspective while retaining their symbolic resonance. Chadwick's final works based on pre-embryonic imaging offer an incarnate spirituality in which conception, birth and death are intertwined. Anna Furse's installation *Glass Body* is the starting point for an investigation of the transparent womb and the visibility of maternal anatomy in Chapter 4, which explores aesthetic and affective, moral and medical dimensions of pregnant embodiment as it was represented in the art and science of human anatomy. The emergence of theories of maternal imagination in early modern Europe coincided with greater knowledge of processes of generation and with theological and scientific debates about the nature of conception. Visual technologies developed in Renaissance anatomy, Enlightenment obstetrics and modern foetal imaging linked maternal bodies with dissection, sexuality and spectacle. Maternal corpses were the source for scientific illustrations and models, from Leonardo's anatomical notebooks in the 1500s to William Hunter's obstetrical atlas in 1774. A new kind of endoscopic looking that developed through technologies of foetal and embryonic imaging in the twentieth century produced the spectacle of the womb without a maternal body. While exhibitions like Gunther von Hagens's *Body Worlds* reinstate the body, they recycle stereotypical images of gender. In contrast, Karen Ingham gives speech to a maternal subject whose voice had been erased in the past, but whose embodiment haunts the present.

Chapter 5 engages with theories of the monstrous maternal to explore how visual art practices can disrupt maternal ideals through differently represented bodies. By

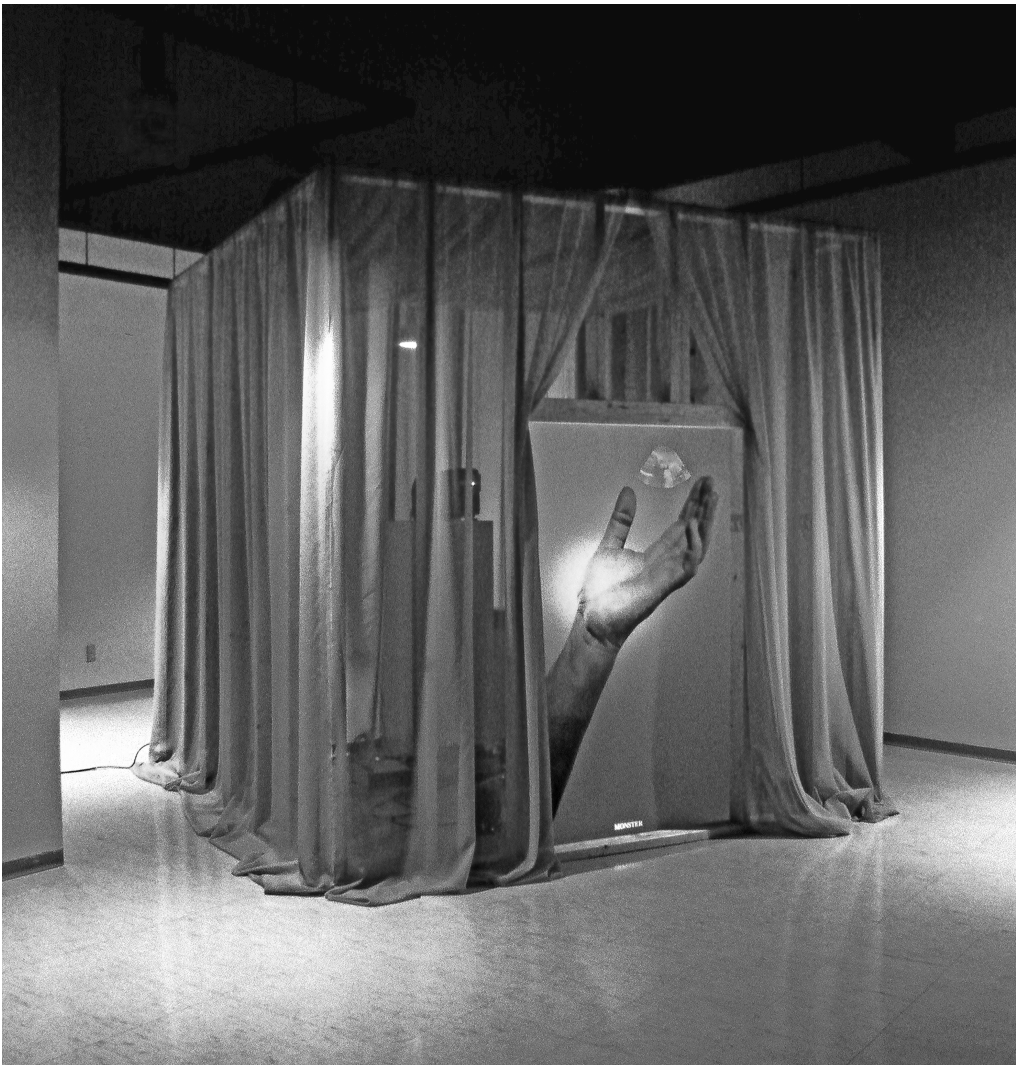
examining instances where maternal bodies are shown as unnatural or unstable, it is possible to deconstruct norms and reveal practices of regulation. I examine the identification of the maternal with the grotesque and abject body in examples of popular culture from historical cartoons to the modern press, reading these beside Bakhtin's grotesque and Kristeva's theory of abjection. Cindy Sherman's *Untitled* photographs, Paula Rego's paintings and Tracey Emin's etchings and drawings of abortion, Joanne Leonard's images of miscarriage and Catherine Bell's 'baby cakes' represent the continuing impossibility of motherhood for some women. In Chapter 5 I ask whether these monstrous or excluded bodies merely reinforce maternal abjection or can offer ways of queering maternal norms. Chapter 6 investigates maternal time in the context of debates about identity and autonomy, creativity and agency in relation to maternal subjectivity. Susan Hiller's photographic installation *Ten Months 1977–79* addressed the problem of becoming a maternal subject, a state of temporal embodiment in which she understood her psychic and somatic experience as split yet indivisible. I propose that maternal art can disrupt linear time by exploring different modalities and temporalities of maternal embodiment, as Bobby Baker does in her disturbing comedic performances. Such artworks question the 'natural' status of motherhood and, when read beside feminist theorist and practitioner Bracha Ettinger's account of the 'matrixial', they can offer new figurations of maternal time and space.

In 2003 Louise Bourgeois made an installation for the Freud Museum in Vienna on the subject of her own pregnancy and the birth of her son entitled *The Reticent Child*, one of many works about maternity that Bourgeois created in old age. At the age of ninety-six Bourgeois depicted pregnant and birthing figures as powerful agents of fertility, which marked her return to the maternal as a central theme. Why did Bourgeois take up the topic of birth in her nineties, and how does her work resonate with contemporary anxieties about ageing maternal bodies? Is the gallery now a safe space for women to represent sexuality and maternity, or are older women who break codes of fertility punished? In Chapter 7 I suggest that Bourgeois' late works can help to undo the taboo on ageing maternal bodies and illuminate the ambivalent responses they provoke in us.

Maternal bodies are currently under reconfiguration from within and without in ways that interrogate the status of nature, choice and human identity. Experimental reproductive technologies can transfer eggs between women's bodies, perform pre-genetic diagnosis on embryos, lengthen women's potential years of childbearing, and open up new potential for lesbian, gay and transsexual parenting, all of which produce new images of maternal and embryonic identity: 'We don't have pictures of families up here, we just have our textbook embryos' ('Kate' quoted in Franklin and Roberts 2006: 63). Feminist writing on cyborg embodiment, the post-human, new reproductive choices and cloning, and on the representation of these in literature, film and media, has begun to examine new figurations of the techno-maternal and the embryonic, and contemporary anxieties about reproduction and the maternal body.³⁴ But becoming maternal has always been uncertain, its tenses complex, and its outcomes unforeseen.

In Elizabeth MacKenzie's installation *Radiant Monster* 1996–98, the photograph of the artist's outstretched hand 'simultaneously grasps and relinquishes a phantom child (represented by a fetal ultrasound)' (MacKenzie 2010: unpaginated). The hand shown on a framed Mylar screen in the doorway of a curtained cubicle stands in for the maternal body, suspended in an uncertain relationship to the projected foetal image that it can never quite touch (see figure 0.1). This is an encounter with what may become a child on the threshold of becoming a maternal subject. It is uncertain in the sense that MacKenzie

Figure 0.1 Elizabeth MacKenzie *Radiant Monster*, 1996–98, mixed media: timber, fabric, photograph, audiovisual equipment, 244 × 244 × 244 cm.



describes ‘a continuum between the desire and the anxiety that the contemplation and the experience of maternity evokes’ (MacKenzie 2010: unpaginated).³⁵ Seven texts were projected in sequence below the image of the hand to capture this ambivalence: INVISIBLE-STRANGER-MINE / THIS-RADIANT-MONSTER / HER-DREADED-BELOVED / THAT-ENCHANTING-TYRANT / OUR-DANGEROUS-ANGEL / THESE-DAZZLING-FICTIONS / ADORABLE-DEMON-YOU. Like Walton’s *Romance*, MacKenzie’s installation carries traces of earlier maternal imagery: the translucent curtain evokes Piero della Francesca’s *Madonna del Parto* where a fur-lined pavilion enfolds the standing figure of the pregnant Virgin (see figure 3.2). In *Radiant Monster* the spatial relations are deliberately more ambiguous and its open-ended structure and meanings blur the boundaries between inner and outer – is this a cubicle, a home, a temple or a womb? As in the encounter with Walton’s *Romance*, I am struck by the juxtaposition of intimacy and distance, enticement and anxiety, the sacred and profane in the images and texts. The motifs of *Radiant Monster*, as well as the tactile pleasures and promises it evokes, make up a complexity of themes that resonate with my own encounters with maternal art through the chapters of this book.

Notes

- 1 Cecile Walton (1891–1956) came from a family of artists; her mother Helen gave up her career to bring up children and her stepfather E. A. Walton was one of the Glasgow Boys. She was encouraged to paint and illustrate as a career and trained at Edinburgh College of Art. See Burkhauser (1990) and Fowle (2002).
- 2 See Fowle (2002) on precedents in Scottish and European painting for the fusion of Madonna and modern motherhood.
- 3 Another pictorial reference is Manet’s *Olympia* 1863; a similar composition with a naked woman lying on a bed and a black maid in attendance.
- 4 The New Woman in the 1920s was also associated with lesbianism in the work of Romaine Brooks and Tamara de Lempicka. See Cooper (1986).
- 5 Cecile Walton (1950) ‘More Lives Than One’, unpublished memoir in the National Library of Scotland. For an account of Walton’s relationships with Johnston and Robertson, see Cooper (1986) and Addison (2005).
- 6 Cecile Walton (1926) ‘Atalanta in Caledonia’, ‘Book of the Edinburgh University Women’s Union’, Edinburgh.
- 7 Cosslett (1994) cites Vera Brittain’s *Honourable Estate* (1936) and Enid Bagnold’s *The Squire* (1938) as the first attempts to inscribe a woman’s experiences of pregnancy and childbirth into English fiction.
- 8 See also Duden (1993) and Mullin (2005).
- 9 The Act defines paternity as the donor of the sperm or social or other parent; parentage is restricted to two parents ‘in an enduring family relationship’, whether homosexual or heterosexual, thus reinforcing the nuclear family (HFEA 2008 Section 33). See Haran *et al.* (2007).
- 10 ‘Julia’ in conversation with the author (1 April 2009).
- 11 Other cultures and languages imply different understanding, for example, in Igbo idiom woman ‘carries herself’.
- 12 See also Pfeuffer-Kahn (1995) and Mazzoni (2002).

- 13 See maternal writing by Finger (1991), Cusk (2001), Wolf (2001) and Enright (2004).
- 14 *Birth Rites* was exhibited in the Glasgow Science Centre and Manchester Museum in 2008. Previous thematic exhibitions in the UK and USA on motherhood and fertility include: Judy Chicago's *Birth Project* 1980–85; *Mothers of Invention* 1989 curated by Jo Anne Isaak; *Reclaiming the Madonna: Artists as Mothers* 1993 curated by Susan Wilson; *Angels and Mechanics* 1996 curated by Deborah Law and Sandra Peaty, and *Maternal Metaphors: Artists/Mothers/Artwork* 2004 curated by Myrel Chernick.
- 15 See Jones (1999) on performative art history and criticism.
- 16 I use visual arts in preference to visual culture, which has become a contested disciplinary terrain that encompasses design, fashion, graphics, craft, media and cinema. See Cherry (2004).
- 17 See Petchesky (1987), Jordanova (1989), Franklin (1991), Hartouni (1992), Stafford (1993), Duden (1993), Phelan (1993), Stabile (1994), Balsamo (1996), Newman (1996) and Tyler (2001).
- 18 See Kaplan (1992), Betterton (1996, 2006), Mathews and Wexler (2000) and Liss (2009).
- 19 For example, see Phoenix, Woollett and Lloyd (1991), Collins (1994), Mamo (2007), Longhurst (2008), Ryan-Flood (2009) and Taylor (2009).
- 20 These include the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* (ARM) in Canada, and *Studies in the Maternal*, Mapping Maternal Subjectivities, Identities and Ethics (MaMSIE) in the UK, and the internet forum *Mumsnet*.
- 21 See Marks (2000), Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003), Probyn (2005) and Hemmings (2005).
- 22 See Baraitser, Pollock and Sigal (2009).
- 23 Freud and Breuer's *Studies in Hysteria* were published in English in 1909 and the London Psychoanalytic Society was set up in 1913.
- 24 Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's film *Riddles of the Sphinx* 1977, explored motherhood under patriarchy within a psychoanalytic frame.
- 25 See Kristeva (1982). Baraitser (2009) and Stone (2011) both give useful accounts of psychoanalytic theories of the maternal.
- 26 See Irigaray (1985), Boulous Walker (1998), Battersby (1998), Tyler (2000), Shildrick (2002), Young (2005), and Stone (2007).
- 27 According to Kristeva, a child's birth also 'extracts woman out of her oneness and gives her the possibility – but not the certainty – of reaching out to the other the ethical' (Kristeva 1986: 182).
- 28 See Cavarero (1990) and Jantzen (1998).
- 29 The authors were artists, film-makers and critics, Elizabeth Cowie, Claire Johnston, Cora Kaplan, Mary Kelly, Jacqueline Rose and Marie Yates (1981).
- 30 See Kelly (1983).
- 31 Kirby (1991) and Vasseleu (1991) are critical of Grosz's concept of social inscription as a metaphor for gendered embodiment.
- 32 In Foucault's terms a bodily norm is both regulatory and generative of knowledge; see Foucault (1978, 1979) and Butler (1991, 1993 and 1999).
- 33 I have adopted Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick's term 'dis/abled' to signal false categories between differently abled bodies (Price and Shildrick 1998).
- 34 See Haraway (1991), Creed (1993), Balsamo (1996), Bronfen (1998), Wolmark (1993), Hayles (1999), Graham (2002), Stacey (2010), Franklin (1991), Franklin and Roberts (2006) and Haran *et al.* (2007).
- 35 For MacKenzie's maternal works see (http://blogs.eciad.ca/elizabethmackenzie/?page_id=248).