TROUBLING MATERNITY: MOTHERING, AGENCY, AND ETHICS IN WOMEN'S WRITING IN GERMAN OF THE 1970s AND 1980s

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INTRODUCTION

MOTHERING, WRITING, AND PERFORMATIVITY

Motherhood, an historically contingent body of cultural practices and discourses which acts to construct women's experience of mothering — itself complex, shifting, and always mediated — represents a minefield for feminists. As Marianne Hirsch convincingly argues, feminist attitudes towards mothering have often been characterized by 'avoidance and discomfort', for four reasons. The first is that maternity has been viewed by some feminists exclusively as a patriarchal construct, and therefore as something to be fled. The second reason identified by Hirsch is a feminist anxiety regarding the loss of control perhaps inevitably involved in mothering, the third, a widespread unwillingness amongst feminists to deal with the issue of corporeality. A fourth reason is found in feminism's complicated relationship to power (1989, 165–67). In this examination, I develop the idea of a 'maternal performativity', a project which involves a consideration of all of the issues mentioned above, and which also entails an engagement with the now familiar 'essentialism versus constructivism' question.[1]

This is a question which has been productively negotiated by Judith Butler, whose notion of performativity is central to this enquiry. Butler's work, I contend, opens the way to a theory of maternal agency which would go beyond current feminist thinking on the matter; we shall see how in this introduction. Maternal agency is a key issue, since, as numerous feminists have pointed out, the mother in Western culture has traditionally been conceived as a blank screen, a passive instrument. To show that mothers *do something* is, then, already to stir up productive trouble; to suggest that this doing might be both valuable and subversive is even more troubling. The performative maternal agency which will be developed here has as a crucial element a maternal ethics involving embodiment, relationality, and discursive challenge, as will shortly be outlined. As the title of this book suggests, then, I want performatively to demonstrate the links between maternity, agency, and ethics. This enterprise is a feminist one.

Feminism is understood here as a heterogeneous body of discourses and a set of political and everyday practices which have to do with the power relations between women and men, which feminists assume are faulty and aim to correct. Rethinking maternity is, as has already been hinted, vital to this enterprise, mothering involving as it does the central feminist issues of power and agency.

Feminist thinking about maternity has indeed proliferated wildly in the past three decades. Despite opposition within the male-dominated academy (see O'Reilly 1999, 10), such thinking has been developed and refined in manifold ways, so that it offers the only viable way of looking at maternity within an academic frame. Maternity is now taken by feminists not simply as a biological given, but as an idea, an institution, and a set of behaviours. Feminists have long been aware of the constructed, contingent nature of gender; this awareness informs current debates about mothering. It also underlies this exploration of maternal subjectivities in 1970s and 1980s novels in German, as the distinction between 'motherhood' and 'mothering', and the reference to 'performativity', have already indicated.

Such literary depictions are, of course, themselves the products of particular contexts, to put it rather simplistically.[2] This examination includes Austrian, West German, Swiss, and East German texts. In doing so, it is vulnerable to criticism on the grounds that it simplifies and distorts individual writers' responses to their particular societies. In defence, I would point to the fact that feminism has been 'simultaneously national and transnational' (Bammer 1991, 65). To read novels in German through the prism of (mainly American) feminist thought, as I do here, is a (performative) gesture of faith in this transnationalism. I would also, in my defence, problematize the notion of 'individual writers' simply 'reacting to' their societies — but this argument will be developed later.

At the same time, I do not wish simply to overlook differences between the countries involved, nor to ignore the social changes that have occurred between the time of these texts' production and the present. While I draw largely on very recent thinking regarding maternity, I do so in the belief that it can uncover and illuminate what has previously been overlooked in these texts. In addition, my approach is informed by the awareness that what is known as 'theory' is itself partial and contingent (DiQuinzio 1999, 1). For example, it is only relatively recently, with the advent of widely available birth control, combined with women's increased financial independence from men, that we in the West[3] have been able to theorize maternity as a choice. That is to say, I am not privileging theory, positing it as truth. Rather, it is viewed here as a form of discourse which might cast light upon other discourses, as this examination itself will hopefully do. The texts discussed anticipate, enhance, and challenge more recent thinking about maternity. They thus form a significant contribution to this thinking.

As a poststructuralist feminist literary critic hoping to escape rigid disciplinary boundaries,[4] I am nonetheless constrained by lack of time, space, and knowledge in my delineation of the social contexts in which these texts were produced. While I support and laud the work of feminist political scientists, legal scholars, and historians, my project is to engage with texts, an enterprise which, as will later be argued, is an ethical one. And although this investigation deals primarily with literature, it is of course participating in a wider, interdisciplinary debate,

one which could, as Butler suggests, have radical implications for the operations of the academy: 'The point is not to stay marginal, but to participate in whatever network of marginal zones is spawned from other disciplinary centers and which, together, constitute a multiple displacement of those authorities' (1990, xi).

It is enough to state that the texts examined here were produced at a time of social change with significant implications for mothering. Family structures have shifted significantly in West Germany since the 1950s. In the 1950s it was generally expected that a woman should marry, have children, and devote her life to her family and home. In the 1980s, marriage was entered into later in life, was less geared towards children, and not necessarily viewed as important. Increased educational opportunities for women, and their subsequent entry into the workplace in large numbers, contributed significantly to such changes (Kolinsky 1989, chapter three). Similar changes occurred in both Austria and Switzerland, although these countries have been slower to effect reform as far as women's rights are concerned (Fiddler 1997, 243; Flitner 1997, 309). Women's continued responsibility for childcare, combined with their new roles in the workplace, has led to the phenomenon of the double burden throughout Western Europe; entry into the public sphere is still problematic for women. In the GDR, education and employment were open to women, but while this measure was intended to ensure women's emancipation, it led to their being overburdened (Kaufmann 1997, 171; Weedon 1999, 18–19).

This sketchy synopsis makes clear that questions of public and private agency are crucial to an examination of mothering. A central focus of feminist theory has indeed been a critical exposure of the political implications of the separation of the public and private spheres. This separation has been challenged by feminism, which itself constitutes 'an international [. . .] public sphere of sorts' (Bammer 1991, 65), although we must be wary of homogenizing it, and alive to specific contexts. The West German women's movement originated in the context of the New Left and the activism of the students' movement of the late 1960s. West German feminism dissociated itself from the Left very early on in order to assert specifically female concerns such as abortion, a major issue (Bammer 1991, 64). It was, above all, concerned to make public that which was commonly considered private, for example, the division of labour within the home, and power relations between women and men. Such concerns were also voiced by Austrian and Swiss feminists, although the relative conservatism of Austria and Switzerland has meant that change with regard to gender roles has been slower in these countries (Fiddler 1997, 244; Flitner 1997, 310). The GDR, on the other hand, had no autonomous women's movement (Kaufmann 1997, 170; Bammer 1991, 65). But, as will be argued, it is nevertheless valid to include GDR writers in discussions of what might constitute 'women's writing'.

Literature has been important in the creation and maintenance of a feminist public sphere (Felski 1989, 167). In West Germany, feminist writing was a direct

result of the reemergence of a feminist political culture after 1968 and 'Frauenliteratur' developed as a feminist concept in the course of 1970s (Weedon 1991, 83). Sigrid Weigel dates the beginning of contemporary West German women's literature at 1975, and she stresses the political significance of such writing. According to her, we must understand such texts in the context of an entire movement including both production and reception (Weigel 1984, 55). 'Frauenliteratur',[5] then, is not to be wrenched away from the context of its production. This view reflects the broader feminist attempt to demonstrate that no cultural product is value-free, and to expose the ideological colouring of an apparently fixed and sacred canon. This canon is partial; for example, the production of literature by women has traditionally been hampered by a male-dominated artistic establishment. Silvia Bovenschen points out that art has been primarily produced by men. Men have organized and dominated the public sphere that controls it, and have defined the standards by which it is judged (1979, 88). A significant idea in early feminist literary criticism is thus the notion of breaking the silence, of challenging the 'blatant lack of adequate literary portrayals of women's lives' (Weigel 1984, 54), and 'das traditionelle Verschweigen der Realität des täglichen Lebens der Frauen' (Beck and Martin 1980, 136).[6] Such gap-filling has also been carried out by women writers in Austria and Switzerland, and in the GDR. With regard to the latter, the term 'women's writing' is problematic, since the label is linked to the women's movements in Western Europe and the United States (Kaufmann 1997, 169–70). But there does exist a body of writings from the GDR which deal with specifically female concerns, and in particular with women's dual role as worker and mother/wife (Hanke 1984).

Thus, GDR writers of the 1970s and 80s were also concerned to examine women's roles and identities, and a consideration of the nature of women's writing is relevant with regard to them.[7] Questioning traditional gender roles and attempting to fashion new ones are key features of such writing in the 1970s and 80s (Möhrmann 1981, 341). One critic writes of a 'Prozeß der Identitätssuche' which inspired the writing of a large body of autobiographical and first-person narratives by West German women at that time (Swiatlowski 1982, 108). The importance of personal experience in West German women's writing can in part be attributed to the impact of Verena Stefan's highly subjective, lyrical work of 1975, *Häutungen*, and to the spread of women's 'Selbsterfahrungsgruppen' in Germany (Schmidt 1988, 461). The resulting autobiographical and first-person narratives were intended to be both specific and representative, addressing the concerns of the average woman and thereby suggesting the existence of a female community. As Rita Felski puts it, 'feminist literature addresses a potential "we"' (1989, 121). This idea of a female community with shared experiences and concerns suggests the existence of a fixed and graspable female self, a peculiarly feminine kind of subjectivity, an idea to which West German feminism in particular has been drawn (Felski 1989, 26). Sara Lennox notes the influence of the French feminists Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Monique Wittig on West German ideas of a specifically feminine subjectivity (1981, 63). French feminists — to offer a crude summary — posit a feminine realm outside of the 'Symbolic Order', the dominant, phallocentric culture which is governed by the Law of the Father. Female subjectivity is thus viewed as perhaps necessarily marginal and other, though it may also be free, fluid, and joyful.

However, this notion of a female essence, which 'Frauenliteratur' reflected and upheld, became increasingly shaky in such writing from the late 1970s onwards. One examination of West German women's writing between 1968 and 1980 reveals that 'the ideal of an autonomous, undivided subject, like that of a direct, authentic mode of speech, became increasingly questionable' (Rapisarda 1997, 90). The fetishization of personal experience was called into question, and the notion of a female self, which could assert itself in opposition to the dominant culture, was problematized. Lennox offers an example of critical doubt about such a notion; in her view, the weakness of much recent German feminist writing derives from its misguided belief in the idea of a fixed female subjectivity. The view that a 'pristine woman exists underneath female socialization' is, Lennox writes, simplistic and damaging, for it ignores the constructed and complex nature of subjectivity (1981, 64).

This view is redolent of the poststructuralist position which states that subjectivity is 'precarious, contradictory and in process' (Weedon 1987, 33). Whereas humanist discourse presupposes the existence of a human essence, poststructuralism argues that the self is open to change. Chris Weedon develops a feminist poststructuralism, opposing the views of some feminists who find the anti-humanism of poststructuralism problematic. She argues that the poststructuralist decentering of the subject can be beneficial to feminism, since it opens up subjectivity to change, revealing it to be the product of the culture in which the individual lives. In particular, subjectivity is the product of language, which for Weedon is a central player in the production of meaning of a particular society. She draws on Michel Foucault's notion of 'discursive fields' which, she explains, 'consist of competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes' (Weedon 1987, 35). Viewed in this light, feminist literary texts constitute a discursive field which challenges the dominant, anti-feminist discourses of the society in which they emerge.

Thus, I take the view that literary language is a type of historically and socially produced discourse, an idea which stands in opposition to earlier feminist arguments, such as that of Christa Reinig. In 1976, Reinig wrote: 'Die Formen und Formeln der Dichtersprache sind nicht geschaffen, daß ein weibliches Ich sich darin artikulieren kann' (1976, 119), and she proposed a specifically feminine language as necessary to combat this exclusion. The idea that conventional

discourse is inevitably masculinist is also to be found in Bovenschen's essay of 1976, 'Gibt es eine weibliche Ästhetik?', in which the author argues that women do not have a language of their own, a language adequately equipped to express their concerns: 'die Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten der Empfindungen, Denkvorgänge etc., die so aufdringlich zur Verfügung stehen — Sprachen, Formen, Bilder — , sind meistens nicht originär unsere, sind oft nicht selbstgewählt' (1979, 91). In fiction, Stefan's *Häutungen* contains a preface in which the author attacks the language of patriarchy (1975, 3–4). Stefan's text attempts to fashion a new language which will describe uniquely female experiences.

This notion of a specifically feminine language is reminiscent of the French feminist idea of an 'écriture féminine' developed by such theorists as Irigaray, Cixous, Wittig, and Julia Kristeva. This idea is based on Lacan's appropriation of Freud, in particular on the idea of the 'Symbolic Order' as governed by the phallus, and on Derridian deconstruction. According to Derrida, Western thought is built on sets of binary oppositions, such as man/woman, active/passive, whereby the 'male' term always occupies the privileged position. French feminists have sought to undermine and disrupt this phallocentric order, in particular by positing a feminine discourse outside of or before it (Jones 1985, 85). However, this notion of a feminine language has been challenged in recent years. Apart from the vagueness of the idea — 'écriture féminine' has been variously defined as hysterical, fluid, and musical — it often relies on images of the female body. This fact has led to accusations of biologistic thinking. As well as that, the idea can lead to an ahistorical conception of culture as monolithic and impregnable, a position which poststructuralists would be quick to denounce. Weigel understands feminist texts not as examples of 'originäre weibliche Ausdrucksformen', but rather as 'Bewegungsversuche innerhalb der männlichen Kultur' and as 'Befreiungsschritte daraus' (1988, 87), a view which comes close to the poststructuralist theory of sets of discourses competing for dominance within a given society. As Weedon argues: 'We need to look at fictional form as an historically discursive construct effective in different ways in different contexts' (1987, 172).

Similarly, writing about maternity must be viewed as rooted in the context of its emergence and operation. In chapter five, I deal more extensively with the question of maternity and creativity; here, I wish only to clarify my approach by giving a brief overview of previous book-length studies of mothering in (non-German) literature. In *Bearing the Word* (1986), Margaret Homans examines nineteenth-century English fiction by women through the lens of Lacanian and French feminist thought. She asserts: 'We could locate in virtually all of the founding texts of our culture a version of the myth [. . .] that the death or absence of the mother sorrowfully but fortunately makes possible the construction of language and of culture' (Homans 1986, 2), and she reads Lacan's view of language as a retelling of this myth. Drawing on the psychoanalytic work of

Nancy Chodorow, who stresses mother–daughter attachment, and on Kristeva's idea of the 'semiotic', a form of preverbal communication which has its origins in the maternal body, Homans argues for the existence of a mother–daughter language which exists, in suppressed form, within the Symbolic, and which is manifested in the texts she examines in various instances of 'bearing the word' (1986, 29–31). Homans is careful to state that she does not wish to perpetuate the marginalization of women, their confinement to the 'semiotic', only to recover women's historical experience of such marginalization (1986, 29). I like this assertion, but worry that Homans's adoption of a Lacanian framework does in fact lend this perspective credence and foreclose the possibility of maternal agency.

In her 1989 *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, Marianne Hirsch offers a critical reading of such psychoanalytic theories which silence the mother, while remaining, albeit ambivalently, within a psychoanalytic framework herself (1989, 11). She deploys psychoanalysis to read women's writing in English, French, and German dating from the nineteenth century to the late twentieth century, charting in these texts a development from maternal silence to postmodernist notions of mothering as complex and changing. Such notions are, she argues, not accommodated by feminist psychoanalysis, and she calls for an integration of this discourse with other ones. Hirsch's critique is invaluable, and I hope that here I can productively perform such an integration as she demands.

In *Women Writing Childbirth* (1994), Tess Cosslett takes a poststructuralist approach akin to my own. In this study of recent fiction in English by women writers, Cosslett writes of mothers' 'negotiation' with prevailing ideologies. Whilst wishing to affirm women's voices, she feels bound also to show how these voices have been culturally constructed by prevailing discourses and cultural practices (Cosslett 1994, 3).[8] Cosslett aims to trace the workings of two opposing 'official' discourses, that of the medical experts, and that of proponents of natural childbirth, and she claims: 'There is also a third, marginalized, unofficial popular discourse whose echoes can be heard in women's accounts: the old wives' tale' (1994, 4). Cosslett thereby presents maternal fictions as types of discourse which operate within specific contexts, by which they are informed, but against which they can react. My approach is similar, but it defines writers' 'reactions' in terms of performativity, as we will see. A similar awareness of ideological contexts informs E. Ann Kaplan's 1992 study of maternity and melodrama in film. Kaplan's central premiss is that 'women [. . .] can function only within the linguistic, semiotic constraints of their historical moment'. She consequently distinguishes between complicit and resisting melodramas, between those that yield to such 'constraints', and those that react against them (Kaplan 1992, 12, 16).

The most recent book-length study of mothering in literature of which I am aware is Elaine Tuttle Hansen's *Mother Without Child* (1997). Hansen sets her

readings of British and American contemporary fiction in the context of feminist debates on mothering and of what she terms 'the material crises of contemporary maternal practice' (1997, 27), to offer compelling readings of literary texts. However, her summing up of feminist thinking about mothering can be extended, as we will shortly see.

We have already noted some of the issues which were of concern to German-speaking feminists in the 1970s and 1980s: the public/private divide, female education and employment, and control over one's body. With regard to the GDR, where abortion was freely available (Weedon 1988, xv), and where women were encouraged to work, these issues of course existed, but they were viewed differently. Mothering, then, is always shaped by and shapes the context in which it takes place. Any writer dealing with the issue is of necessity in dialogue with the ideologies of maternity with which she is confronted. Such ideologies may of course be contradictory. For mothering is a complex and many-sided phenomenon, as the numerous and varied feminist responses to it suggest.

The German-speaking countries have produced little in the way of important thinking about mothering. The most significant theories of maternity in the past few decades have emerged from France and the United States. Hansen notes that feminist thinking about maternity since the early 1960s is often presented as 'a drama in three acts' (1997, 5). The first act is defined as involving 'repudiation' of motherhood and mothering, with such early second wave feminists as Simone de Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millett, and Betty Friedan being cited as exemplars. The second act is characterized by 'recuperation', by attempts to reclaim and revise maternity. Such attempts began in the mid-1970s, and were carried out by feminists as diverse as Adrienne Rich, Nancy Chodorow, Dorothy Dinnerstein, and Sara Ruddick in America; Mary O'Brien and Juliet Mitchell in Great Britain; and Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva in France. The third act, which is still ongoing, is concerned to extend and challenge earlier thought. According to Hansen, it is increasingly characterized by a sense of impasse, explained thus:

> Feminists have demanded and gained new attention for the previously ignored problems of motherhood, but they have not arrived at consensus about how to redefine the concept or adjust the system. Many (but by no means all) women wish to refuse motherhood on the old terms without abandoning either the heavy responsibilities or the intense pleasures of bearing and raising children. The fear that no one will take care of our children if we don't makes it difficult to go forward, even as it seems impossible to go willingly back (1997, 6).

Hansen challenges the neatness of this schema, pointing out, for example, that the writings of the 'first act' are more subtle and ambivalent than has been noted (1997, 5). And while she agrees up to a point that feminists are currently confronting an impasse, she suggests that an analysis of marginal maternal

identities, particularly as depicted in fiction, may yield challenging and fruitful results (Hansen 1997, 10).

The schema noted above is useful in highlighting key trends in feminist thinking about maternity, but we must indeed be wary of glossing over differences between feminists, and of telling stories which result only in an impasse. I propose a different narrative, one which recounts the shift from essentialist accounts of mothering, to a more liberating poststructuralist awareness of maternal subjectivities as complex, shifting, and in process. This overview is in no way all-encompassing; it is intended, rather, to highlight those aspects of thinking about maternity which will provide reference points in future chapters.

Views of maternity as a uniformly and inevitably negative experience, such as those found in the 'first act', can be described as resting upon essentialism. Beauvoir and Firestone view biology as inherently oppressive for all women, thereby ignoring differences between women, as well as the complex interaction between corporeality, psychology, and culture (Beauvoir 1997; Firestone 1979). Maternity is presented by these feminists as a fixed and static role, not as a state involving change and exchange. While a feminist like Friedan is aware of femininity as a constructed entity ('the feminine mystique'), she does little to address 'the maternal mystique'. She does not propose a new view of maternity, but rather escape from the domestic realm by means of education and employment (Friedan 1992). In all of these accounts, maternity cannot be revised; it must be sidestepped.[9] Of course, views of maternity as inevitably and wholly *positive* could also be described as essentialist. The point here is to be aware of how the experience of mothering is constructed in ways that can be understood as either 'positive' or 'negative'.

Adrienne Rich's 1976 view of motherhood as 'experience' and 'institution' can thus be viewed as a breakthrough. Rich's *Of Woman Born* is a blend of academic discourse and autobiography; thus, it rests upon the assumption that 'the personal is political'. It highlights the maternal subject as complex, thoughtful, and in dialogue with current ideologies concerning maternity, with what Rich terms 'the institution' of motherhood. This institution is, in Rich's view, shaped by patriarchal conceptions of women. Rich's account does have its problems, which later feminist thought enables us to recognize. In particular, Rich's differentiation between 'experience' and 'institution', while ground-breaking, tends to obscure the complex interaction between subject and ideology, and it suggests a 'pristine' kind of maternity which lies beneath patriarchy's overlay (DiQuinzio 1999, 215; Jeremiah 2000a, 98; Jeremiah 2004). Such a view is common in radical feminist thought, which also relies upon the notion of 'patriarchy' as a monolithic entity, a view which Rich defends in her 1986 introduction to the text (1986, xv (my pagination)). While this idea does furnish Rich with a powerful conceptual tool, and while it may be regarded as a

useful strategy, it ignores the fragmentary, unfixed nature of institutions and ideologies. Such criticism may also be applied to much feminist psychoanalysis.

According to Hirsch, feminist psychoanalysis has failed to articulate maternal subjectivity adequately, a view which has already been mentioned (1989, 167). Chodorow's 1978 *Reproduction of Mothering*, an important contribution to feminist psychoanalysis, indeed tends towards essentialism. Chodorow's compelling fusion of psychology and sociology highlights the complex interaction between maternal subject and ideology. But despite Chodorow's awareness of the contingent nature of mothering and of the nuclear family, she ultimately presents the mother as originary, as outside of culture, thereby offering a thin account of politics (Doane and Hodges 1992, 38).[10] This is a concern which has also been voiced with regard to the French feminists, who are charged with consigning the mother to a realm outside of culture, rendering her silent and powerless (Daly and Reddy 1991b, 7). Such consignment does indeed have the effect of suggesting that the mother is essentially other, that maternal identity is defined by confinement and muteness.

While I share the concern of many feminists with regard to French feminist ideas concerning the maternal, Kristeva's 'Stabat Mater' (1977) is worth considering here. This essay weaves together personal observations and academic discourse. Kristeva's musings upon the function of the cult of the Virgin Mary, which she perceives as in decline, lead her to the insight that a new discourse on maternity must be created, one which acknowledges the ambivalence of mothering, and its physicality. Kristeva's assertion of personal experience, combined with her awareness of the need to 'listen, more carefully than ever, to what mothers are saying today' (1986, 179), make this essay particularly significant with regard to recent ideas concerning maternal experience and agency. Kristeva puts forth a community of mothers who are yet different from each other, and she calls for a particular type of ethics to be formed. This call will be considered in more detail later. An important point to remember at this stage is that it is not necessary to choose between a rejection of psychoanalytic theories of language and subjectivity and an acceptance of them; rather, 'it is possible [. . .] to use psychoanalytic theory within a historical framework' (Belsey and Moore 1989b, 15). I shall, then, draw upon the work of Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous where appropriate.

Having offered a persuasive critique of much feminist psychoanalysis, Hirsch cites positively the work of the philosopher Sara Ruddick. Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking* (1989) defines mothering as a kind of work, involving protection, nurturance, and training, which gives rise to a specific mode of cognition. Such thinking is characterized by what Ruddick terms 'attentive love' (1995, 119–23). Ruddick offers the most detailed description of mother–child interaction ever advanced in feminist theory, and thus she contributes significantly to the current and growing awareness of mothering as relational, as constituting a complex and

changing relationship, an idea which Hansen views as still in need of development (Hansen 1997, 5). Ruddick also highlights the varied and changing needs of children, an issue which has recently come to the fore in discussions of mothering (e.g. Featherstone 1997, 7–8). Ruddick's notion of mothering as relational is also to be found in the work of the psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin. Benjamin challenges traditional psychoanalytic paradigms, which place the mother in the position of object, and posits an 'intersubjective' view of child development (1990, 15–24). According to this view, the child develops within and through interaction with the mother, who must also be a desiring subject. The child seeks recognition, and that recognition must be given by someone who is herself an agent.

Both Ruddick and Benjamin, then, conceive the mother as active and relational, and both show an awareness of how mothering is shaped and defined by context. But this awareness is, in both cases, limited, as has been pointed out. Christine Everingham notes that Benjamin assumes that the mother instinctively 'knows' the needs of the child, thereby ignoring the interpretative aspect of caretaking, and suggesting an essentialist view of mothers as naturally caring (1994, 18–19). Everingham also argues that Ruddick should talk of 'maternal attitudes' rather than of 'maternal thinking', a term which implies homogeneity and fixity (1994, 32). Everingham, then, is concerned to show mothering as an activity which is contingent upon context. She also fruitfully seeks to redefine the notion of autonomy as a relational concept, as something that 'must be actively produced by another in a particular socio-cultural context' (Everingham 1994, 6). In addition, Everingham argues that the particular kind of mothering evoked by Ruddick needs to be theorized as an ethical ideal (1994, 32). This assertion is reminiscent of Kristeva's call for a 'herethics', for an ethical code based upon ideas of relationality and difference. We will look further at this idea a little later.

Everingham's view can be termed a poststructuralist one. Deconstructive methods are now an important feature of feminist examinations of maternity. It has fruitfully been argued that motherhood in Western culture has rested upon a number of binary oppositions, such as man/woman, culture/nature, labour/love (Glenn 1994, 13). Such oppositions have been challenged by feminists concerned to revise maternal subjectivity. My own examination participates in this challenge. It is thus influenced by deconstructive techniques, as well as by poststructuralist feminist ideas of the subject. Very recent thinking about maternity has drawn on the work of Butler, who conceives gender as a series of performative acts (Chandler 1998 and 1999); my own work intends to expand upon and develop this work, as already indicated. Viewed in the light of Butler's work, maternity is a practice, and maternal subjectivity is not fixed, but rather in process. One should indeed speak rather of 'maternal subjectivities', critiques of the essentialism of early second wave feminist thought having alerted us to the

differences amongst women (Spelman 1990). This idea has been central to postmodernist feminism, which insists upon difference and multiplicity (Fraser and Nicholson 1990, 34–35).

Before outlining more fully my notion of a maternal performativity, I will deal briefly with the questions of 'subjectivity' and 'experience'. I am influenced here by Andreas Huyssen in my understanding of the maternal subject. Huyssen argues that in denying the subject altogether, as it is wont to do, poststructuralism is jettisoning the chance of challenging 'the ideology of the subject (as white, male, and middle-class)' by developing different notions of subjectivity (1988, 213). The subject has not disappeared as an issue; it is, instead, now open to question, unfixed. Maternal subjectivity indeed lends itself to poststructuralist definitions of subjectivity as split and shifting; mothering involves division and change. Maternity also raises the questions of difference and multiplicity; not all women are mothers, and all mothers are in addition daughters (Hirsch 1989, 12).

Poststructuralist notions of competing discourses and the idea of the subject as complex and in process are, then, crucial to this investigation. These concepts are linked; they take for granted the constructed nature of subjectivity and experience. It should be noted here that whilst experience is contingent, I view it as a valid and necessary category, a view shared by Hirsch. Hirsch highlights the dangers inherent in viewing the 'maternal' as merely a function or a metaphor, as is often the case in French feminist theory; this gesture, in her view, could lead to a glossing over of 'the stories that mothers are perhaps trying to tell' (1989, 174). This emphasis on 'experience' harks back to Rich, but it need not signal a return to a naive politics of experience (see Weedon 1987, 8). Whilst mothers' lived, historical experience must be acknowledged, its constructed, changeful, and complex nature needs also to be borne in mind.

The question of 'experience' and its 'construction' leads us back to the 'essentialism versus constructivism' debate which was mentioned in the opening paragraph, and towards the idea of performativity as outlined by Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and expanded in *Bodies that Matter* (1993). The idea that experience is separable from its construction is, I would suggest, a fallacy. But this is not to imply that 'experience' exists only through construction, a point supported by Butler's statement with regard to sex and discourse: 'to claim that sexual differences are indissociable from discursive demarcations is not the same as claiming that discourse "causes sexual difference"' (1993, 1). To adapt this formulation: to claim that maternal experience is constructed is not the same as claiming that construction causes maternal experience. The term 'construction' is problematic, in that it could be understood to denote a complete and closed process, and in that it may suggest the existence of a prediscursive subject, something I want to avoid doing. Butler's idea of 'performativity', 'the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names' (1993, 2) avoids this artificial fixing, and, crucially, it allows for the possibility of

interrupting and disrupting this discursive production to effect transformation. In what follows, I attempt to harness Butler's powerful ideas for an understanding of maternity as a form of performativity, referring as I do so to two recent articles by Mielle Chandler which also seek to deploy Butler in this respect.

Butler understands gender as 'a doing': 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (1990, 25). As already suggested, to understand maternity thus is to open up conceptual room for mothering as a practice – a notion which is already progressive, given traditional views of the mother as passive – which could involve transformation. Chandler takes up this idea, stating: 'It is my position that "mother" is best understood as a verb, as something one does'. Quoting Butler on gender, she goes on: 'To be a mother is to enact mothering' (1998, 273). Mothering behaviours, viewed in this light, contain the potential for a disruption of dominant discourses on maternity, which depend upon their enactment for validity and which, therefore, are vulnerable, open to change. To understand mothering thus is to make room for the idea of maternal agency. According to Butler, it is variation on the repetition of the practices that make up gender which constitutes 'agency'. By restaging the processes which cause the constitution and subjection of the 'I', one can 'work the mobilizing power of injury' (Butler 1993, 123). Thus, to vary the repetition of maternal practices is to exert maternal agency.

Such an understanding of mothering also poses a challenge to the idea of the mother as origin, a notion which was mentioned with regard to feminist psychoanalysis. Just as drag exposes 'the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original' (Butler 1990, 31), so the idea of mothers as performing maternity refutes the normative ideal of the naturally selfless mother, who is imagined as existing prior to culture. This view of maternity as a precultural, prediscursive entity is indeed explicitly challenged by Butler in her reading of the work of Kristeva. Kristeva takes on the Lacanian notion of 'the Symbolic' and develops the idea of 'the semiotic'[11] to argue that the latter is a dimension of language occasioned by the maternal body which acts as a subversive element within the Symbolic, in the form of poetic language. According to Butler, Kristeva 'describes the maternal body as bearing a set of meanings that are prior to culture itself', and thereby 'safeguards the notion of culture as a paternal structure and delimits maternity as an essentially precultural reality' (1990, 80).

In later chapters, we will consider the implications of Butler's thinking for notions of the maternal body, the mother–child dyad, the family, and maternal creativity. I aim ultimately to demonstrate that the notion of a performative maternal agency involves the rethinking not only of maternity, but also of such issues as corporeality, sexuality, and family. For now, however, I want to raise some problems.

The (Western) idea of mothering as a choice was mentioned earlier. My adoption of Butler (or, rather, my restaging of Butler's performance) raises the issue of voluntarism in an urgent way. Butler argues that agency is not to be conflated with voluntarism or individualism, and that agency in no way presumes a choosing subject; it is, she asserts, 'a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power' (1993, 15). The 'I', in her view, does not exist prior to discourse; gendering, for example, is conceived as the matrix through which the 'I' emerges (1993, 7). Viewed in this light, maternity constitutes the matrix through which the maternal 'I' emerges. But here the issue of voluntarism does come into play; this emergence of a maternal subject can be the consequence of decision-making on the part of the individual woman, that is, of a decision to become a mother. This is not to lapse into liberal assumptions concerning choice and individual freedom; it is simply to problematize performativity as a way of understanding mothering.

This notion of choice, of will, raises the question of ethics, I would argue. Chandler touches on this issue when she, like Benjamin, Ruddick, and Everingham, stresses the relationality involved in mothering practice; the acts performed by the mother are responses to the needs of another. And Chandler challenges the ideology of individualist freedom which perpetuates the devaluation of 'the blatantly encumbered: mothers' (1998, 272; see also Chandler 1999, 21).[12] She thereby raises the question of whether performativity as a notion can accommodate the issue of care. While the identities 'masculine'/'feminine', 'heterosexual'/'lesbian' might be refused as perpetuating heterosexist binarism, that of 'mother' is not so dispensable, surely, given the needs of a screaming child. While Butler argues that 'the possibilties of gender transformation are to be found [. . .] in the arbitrary relation between such acts [that make up gender], in the posssiblity of a failure to repeat, a de-formity' (1990, 141), the possibilities of maternal transformation do not generally admit of such a refusal, assuming that children should be cared for, and that caretakers feel bound 'to clean, to mop, to sweep, to keep out of reach, to keep safe, to keep warm, to feed, to take small objects out of mouths, to answer impossible questions' (Chandler 1998, 274). Chandler advocates 'refusing to refuse' as a solution, suggesting that mothers should 'embrace motherselfhoods and [. . .] demand social, economic and political respect for mothering practices' (1998, 284).

Chandler thus highlights usefully the limits of performativity as far as an understanding of mothering is concerned, a point I wish now to take up. Following Kristeva and Everingham, I would suggest that, if we are to develop a notion of maternal performativity, it must include the idea of mothering as a form of ethical behaviour, such as the 'should' and the 'feel bound to' in the above paragraph already suggest. This idea has not, in fact, received much attention in feminist thinking about maternity, perhaps because it seems risky to reinscribe mothers as the guardians of morality, angels of the house (see Soper 1989, 102). I appreciate this risk, but it seems imperative to me that we undertake the task, if a maternal agency is to be argued for convincingly. I will therefore consider Butler's work in the light of Irigaray's notion of an 'ethics of sexual difference' and Kristeva's idea of a 'herethics', to argue for a performative maternal ethics.

Butler touches upon Irigarayan ethics, and sums up Irigaray's argument in *Éthique de la difference sexuelle* thus: '[Irigaray] argues that ethical relations ought to be based on relations of closeness, proximity, and intimacy that reconfigure conventional notions of reciprocity and respect'. This closeness is understood psychoanalytically as 'the uncertain separation of boundaries between maternal body and infant, relations that reemerge in language as the metonymic proximity of signs' (Butler 1993, 46; Irigaray 1984). Irigaray's linkage of language, corporeality, and ethics is suggestive, particularly when connected to her notion of 'mimicry' developed elsewhere. 'Mimicry' constitutes a form of feminine disruption to the phallogocentric order, whereby the eruption of the unfigurable, the prediscursive, serves a mocking function (Irigaray 1985b, 76). While we must indeed be wary of Irigaray's association of femininity with the unfigurable, as Butler warns,[13] I would like to retain three notions raised here — embodiment, relationality, and discursive challenge — as central to my conception of a maternal ethics.

These concepts are important features of Kristeva's essay of 1977, 'Stabat Mater', which will now be considered more deeply. Here, the maternal body is figured as a site of splitting and exchange: 'a mother is a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh' (1986, 178). Like Irigaray later, Kristeva suggests here that the infant's relationship to the maternal body is manifested and reproduced within 'the Symbolic', in the silent ways in which women connect (1986, 180–81). This 'semiotic' communication is described as an 'underwater, transverbal communication between bodies' (1986, 182). Like Chandler and DiQuinzio, Kristeva challenges the idea of individualism, of 'singularity': 'it is not natural, hence it is inhuman; the mania smitten with Oneness' (1986, 182). She links her idea of a relational subjectivity and expressivity both to the experience of birthgiving and to ethics, in the following reflection:

> Although it concerns every woman's body, the heterogeneity that cannot be subsumed in the signifier nevertheless explodes violently with pregnancy (the threshold of culture and nature) and the child's arrival (which extracts woman out of her oneness and gives her the possibility — but not the certainty — of reaching out to the other, the ethical) (1986, 182).

Maternity, then, opens up the possibility of an ethical form of exchange with others. This exchange involves an acceptance of differences, such as those to be found between the sexes (1986, 184). It also, Kristeva asserts, makes the thought of death bearable (1986, 185);[14] that is, it renders fragility tolerable by creating bonds of care and meaning.

My reference to Butler's critique of Kristeva has already indicated the problems with the latter's account of maternity. In 'Stabat Mater', the maternal is celebrated, but it is also viewed as somehow inadequate when measured against the power of the paternal law: 'only the law sets anything down', while maternity is, because outside of this law, 'demented *jouissance*' (1986, 175, 179). Women are invited only to 'contribute' to this law, which is thus apparently unchallengeable (1986, 185). The typographical division of the page lends weight to this reading: while it demonstrates the existence of the 'semiotic' within the 'Symbolic', it also suggests that the two are inevitably separate, with the law, of course, dominating.

In contrast, I would like to argue for a maternal ethics which is not based on the idea of the maternal as unfigurable, but which is, rather, performative, that is, capable of disrupting dominant notions not only of maternity itself, but also of power, agency, and ethics. I want firstly to follow through the idea of relationality as an ethical ideal with reference to Chandler's article of 1999. We will then turn to the question of embodiment, and finally to that of discursive challenge.

In her 1999 article, 'Queering Maternity', Chandler argues again that 'maternal [i.e. relational] forms of selfhood continue to be degraded, mocked and reviled', while 'monadic fraternity' remains as an ideal (1999, 21). Chandler draws interestingly on Chodorow's ideas concerning mother–infant attachment, reworking them in the light of Butler's queer theorizing, and she proposes the following as 'both invitations and appeals':

> 1. Engagements in maternal practices as, in a sense, 'queer': as both the same as and other than the other, as in-relation with and separate from. 2. Desubjugations of maternal forms of subjectivity through engagements in maternal relations regardless of one's categorical positionality. 3. Proliferations of maternal practices, forms of subjectivity, and ethics, into self-other relations of all kinds (1999, 31).

I find these suggestions extremely provocative and useful, but wish to express a small doubt concerning Chandler's arguments. Following Chodorow, Chandler suggests that the foundation for maternal qualities 'lies dormant in all of us who do not engage in maternal practices, ethics, relations and self-concepts' (1999, 30). The notion of an underlying maternity verges dangerously upon a kind of essentialism, or, at any rate, psychological determinism.

This issue leads us back to the idea of voluntarism, in a sense the opposite of such determinism. Butler's deployment of the psychoanalytic concept of 'identifications' offers suggestions as to how an ethics of care and responsibility might be theorized in terms that avoid simplistic forms both of voluntarism and of determinism. Butler argues that 'identifications are never fully and finally made' (1993, 105). She is referring to the law which prohibits homosexuality and enforces acceptable forms of desire, but her notion of 'identifications' allows us also to understand the maternal subject as engaged in a relational process

which is never quite complete but which demands reiteration, that is, as performatively mothering a child or children. This mothering involves what might be termed 'choice' or 'effort', what I would prefer to call 'ethical constraint', where that constraint is not to be understood as purely and simply constructed, but as constituted in and codified by discursive and material practices. This 'maternal ethics', then, is not fixed — changing ideas concerning 'good enough mothering' (Winnicott 1964) are enough to alert us to that — but rather contingent upon particular cultural contexts and their particular discursive operations.

Such an ethics would also have to be understood as a bodily one. But unlike Irigaray's and Kristeva's, this type of ethics relies not on the notion of a maternal body as origin, as existing 'before' the law, but rather as existing within and through discourses which it can disrupt. In particular, the performative practice of bodily care for an infant, mentioned by Chandler and by Kristeva, involves a challenge to the ideas of individuality identified by Chandler and DiQuinzio (1999, 11) as antithetical to the notion of maternal agency. This is not to suggest that ethical mothering stops when the child no longer needs bodily care; it is, rather, to focus on corporeality as the site where relations of care can and do take place between individual agents. Margrit Shildrick makes a similar point, with regard to medical ethics. She criticizes autonomy and rationality as bases for morality — these, she argues, have formed the lynchpins of the ethics of modernity — and she argues for a new emphasis on embodiment (Shildrick 1997, 115–20). Shildrick proposes 'a more fluid mutual responsibility and care as the distinguishing factors of human morality' (1997, 122), a suggestion which is redolent of Irigaray and which lends itself to a view of mothering as an ethical type of performativity.

To understand maternity as performativity is not to conceive of it purely in discursive terms, as I hope became clear through the earlier claim that maternal experience and its constructedness are indissoluble. I wish now to strengthen this claim by drawing upon Butler's conception of 'matter' and particularly upon her view that 'language and materiality are never fully identical nor fully different' (1993, 69). That is, the material practices of maternity, those actions performed by mothers which Ruddick and others have usefully pointed out, cannot constitute the ground on which a theory of maternity is constructed. Materiality, according to Butler, is itself constructed, and it cannot be separated from signifying practices, since 'language both is and refers to that which is material' (1993, 68). To argue for a maternal ethics involving 'discursive challenge', as I want to do, is not, therefore, to ignore 'the material'; it is, rather, to pave the way for a discursive (hopefully performative) reassessment of the material operations of motherhood and maternity.

We have thus arrived at the question of discursive challenge, which, as I hope I have shown, is linked to the issues of relationality and embodiment. I would

like now to deal with the idea of a maternal aesthetic. Performativity, I would argue, offers a way of understanding literary discourse which might extend recent notions of a maternal aesthetic, such as that developed by Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy. They put forward a postmodernist aesthetic as central to an understanding of maternal writing, asserting that 'since Oedipal narratives silence the voices of mothers, we must listen for maternal stories in postmodern plots where selfhood is constructed, or reconstructed, in more complex patterns' (1991b, 12). Daly and Reddy cite Benjamin as important for an understanding of such 'reconstructions' of maternal subjectivity as relational and in process. Such ideas have been linked to postmodernism by Patricia Waugh. Considering the question of a postmodern feminist literature, Waugh examines psychoanalytic accounts of subjectivity, to relate them to recent women's writing, much of which, according to her, has 'explored modes of relational identity' (1996, 339). I too draw upon psychoanalysis, and particularly upon Benjamin, but, like Hirsch, Daly, and Reddy, I am wary of relying upon an interpretative framework which has traditionally silenced mothers.

I myself argue for a performative and ethical maternal aesthetics. Aesthetic practice involves relationality, which I have already identified as an ethical practice, since it constitutes participation in a particular culture, as Butler notes: 'what is called agency can never be understood as a controlling or original authorship over [a] signifying chain' (1993, 219). Traditional ideas of authorial autonomy and authority having been discredited, the way is open for an idea of aesthetic performativity:

> Agency would then be the double-movement of being constituted in and by a signifier, where 'to be constituted' means 'to be compelled to cite or repeat or mime' the signifier itself. Enabled by the very signifier that depends for its continuation on the future of that citational chain, agency is the hiatus in iterability, the compulsion to install an identity through repetition, which requires the very contingency, the undetermined interval, that identity seeks insistently to foreclose (1993, 220).

Such a performativity can produce new 'identifications', I would suggest, so that it may be understood as a maternal, ethical act. This act involves among other things a challenge to traditional masculinist notions of knowledge production, which have rested on a conception of the self as contained and rational, and on a hierarchical subject/object distinction; reading and writing, as empathic acts, expose subjectivity as relational and meaning as dialogic (Jeremiah 2002b). These ideas will be developed further in the conclusion.

I am, it may seem obvious by now, not concerned with identifying the 'truth' about mothers' experiences. That I am not dealing with (explicitly) autobiographical works, and that I do not even deal with the question of autobiography,[15] points to my desire to avoid a conflation of writer with text, and to my agreement with Butler's idea of the untenability of authorial authority, which means that one cannot own one's work (1993, 242).

Committed to the ideas of difference and multiplicity as I am, I hope that this metanarrative will not gloss over or deny the variation in and between texts. I hope too that my use of theoretical treatments of maternity will not serve to undermine or deny the literariness[16] of the texts examined; at the same time, I would insist that, like all cultural products, the latter are constituted by and implicated in dominant ideological formations and therefore of political relevance. I have chosen to examine works by ten writers: Gisela Elsner, Margot Schroeder, Karin Struck (West Germany); Barbara Frischmuth, Elfriede Jelinek, Anna Mitgutsch, Andrea Wolfmayr (Austria); Maja Beutler and Erica Pedretti (Switzerland), and Irmtraud Morgner (GDR). These texts are in different ways and to different extents concerned with maternity, and they situate themselves very differently with regard to feminism. In the case of Morgner, particularly, it must be borne in mind that the author was writing in the context of the GDR. My aim is twofold: to offer new readings of literary texts, and, in doing so, to provide insights into how maternity might be adequately theorized by contemporary feminists, in particular by pointing the way towards a performative maternal agency.

I focus here on novels which feature mothers as central characters. While I do not pretend that my study is exhaustive,[17] it does constitute the most thorough examination of maternal subjectivities in literature in German to date. What has preceded it has dealt largely with daughters' perspectives on their mothers, like Helga W. Kraft and Barbara Kosta's 1983 article on Helga M. Novak, Jutta Heinrich, and Gabriele Wohmann, and Maria-Regina Kecht's 1989 article on Mitgutsch and Jelinek. Renate Dernedde's 1994 *Mutterschatten-Schattenmütter* is concerned mainly with recent texts narrated by daughters; Katharina Aulls's 1993 *Verbunden und gebunden* is also a study of mother–daughter relationships in recent literature. Three recent collections of articles testify to the growing interest in literary depictions of maternity: Helga Kraft and Elke Liebs's (1993); Renate Möhrmann's (1996), and Irmgard Roebling and Wolfram Mauser's (1996). As yet, however, there has been no book-length study dealing exclusively with the maternal perspective in literature in German.

This examination of maternal subjectivity is to be viewed in the context of the ongoing feminist project to understand and articulate maternity — a poststructuralist perspective. That is to say, as a critic I dare not claim an illusory authority, a claim against which Butler would warn, and my autonomy as a writing subject is definitely relational and situational; this book would not exist without the existence of earlier ones. Occupying as I do a particular subject position — as a white, Western woman who is not a mother,[18] a feminist etc. — I am both limited and enriched by this condition and can only write from it.

Structurally, this investigation effects a splitting of the notion of maternity into various aspects (which are, of course, interrelated), to be examined in five chapters. In chapter one, the questions of maternal agency and community are

considered. The second chapter deals with the issue of the maternal body, the third with the mother–child dyad. The fourth chapter is concerned with notions of family, and the final chapter examines maternity and creativity. Such a division, while artificial (but perhaps only to the extent that all discursive constructions are), brings out the complexity and diversity of maternal experience, and makes for greater ease in handling the dense theory to which it has given rise. It also enables us to trace what might loosely be termed a chronology of mothering. From the social context of the mother, the background to women's mothering, we move to the bodily experience of maternity, to pregnancy, birthgiving, and nursing. From the primary mother–child bond, we move to the construction and organization of this relationship within 'the family'. Finally we consider the mother as a writing subject operating within such constructions and organizations. In each chapter, I give a brief outline of feminist theoretical responses to the issues, identifying throughout challenges to the sets of binary oppositions mentioned before, and a shift from essentialism to poststructuralism, to develop in each case one aspect of the 'maternal performativity' outlined above. I deploy these findings in my readings of the texts, to argue that these works can be fruitfully viewed as highlighting the need for a maternal agency to be developed and enabled if the maternal position is to be rendered no longer abject,[19] but livable.

For these texts show maternal performativity to be a difficult ideal, and one which is, as Butler herself would agree, contingent upon context. While this examination deals with, and participates in, a cultural shift, from maternal silence to the articulation of maternal subjectivity, from women's confinement to the domestic realm to their participation in public life, it also exposes the problems and pitfalls inherent in this shift. While mothers in these works consistently try to break free of domestic entrapment, they usually fail. These texts thus suggest the difficulties faced by German-speaking mothers attempting to achieve agency at a time of social change. Maternal marginality is the rule in these texts, which often lapse into essentialism to proffer escape, consolation, or despairing resignation. Mothers here are either mentally or physically ill (Beutler, Elsner, Jelinek); magically other (Frischmuth, Morgner), or simply powerless and mute (Mitgutsch, Pedretti, Struck, Wolfmayr). It is only in Schroeder's text that a mother is shown as an agent in the public sphere, but even Schroeder highlights the difficulties involved in this agency. Either implicitly or explicitly, then, these works present maternity as a form of marginality.

But they also contain moments of challenge; indeed, the very depiction of marginality might be seen to constitute critique. For this reason, I changed my title from the rather depressing 'Marginal Maternity' to the more hopeful 'Troubling Maternity', where trouble is understood, as it is by Butler, as a source of subversion. That is, I am suggesting both that performative maternity is troubling to hegemonic practices, and that maternity as a construct can be

opened up and troubled by means of performative discursive challenges, the view that I came to in the course of my research. I argue, then, that these texts together constitute critique of, 'discursive challenge' to, maternity as a construct, and that they reveal the need for a performative maternal agency. I am, in short, performatively viewing these texts as performatively depicting maternity as (potentially) performative. That is my agenda as a critic, and, as Terry Eagleton points out, 'it is always better to be honest in these matters' (1983, 209).

1. In fact, this is a false, if fruitful, opposition (Fuss 1989, 1). Constructivism involves essentialism, since it assumes the existence of prediscursive subjects who are constructed from without. This assumption implies that human beings possess a nature which is fixed and knowable.
2. The word 'product' suggests something complete and final, and it also implies authorial authority and ownership, notions which will be discredited later in this introduction.
3. Margaret Jolly suggests usefully that Euro-American understandings of maternity need to be broadened and challenged by means of engagement with other cultures, a project regrettably beyond the scope of my enquiry (1998, 1).
4. See, on this point, Butler 1990, xi: 'The complexity of gender requires an interdisciplinary and postdisciplinary set of discourses in order to resist the domestication of gender studies or women studies within the academy and to radicalize the notion of feminist critique'. See also Belsey 1980, 144: 'criticism can no longer be isolated from other areas of knowledge'.
5. For views on the problematic nature of this term see Beck and Martin 1980, 135, Brügmann 1986, 133–34, and Weigel 1989, 19–23.
6. See, for example, Rich 1979.
7. As Chris Weedon also suggests (1988, xviii).
8. Compare Rachel Blau DuPlessis's view that woman 'negotiates difference and sameness, marginality and inclusion in a constant dialogue' (1985, 43).
9. Patrice DiQuinzio also argues that the issue of maternity is either belittled or avoided by such second wave feminists as Friedan, Firestone, and Mary Daly (1999, 63).
10. See also DiQuinzio's useful critique of Chodorow (1999, 177–79).
11. According to Lacan, the Symbolic is rendered possible by means of the repression of primary libidinal drives, including the child's dependence on the maternal body. The Symbolic is the structuring of all signification under the paternal law.
12. See here Patrice DiQuinzio's recent book, *The Impossibility of Motherhood: Feminism, Individualism, and the Problem of Mothering*. The author suggests that 'mothering is an important site at which the individualist ideological formation is elaborated and imposed, but it is also the site at which this ideological formation can be contested and reworked' (DiQuinzio 1999, xv).
13. Butler argues that 'to identify this metonymy with the repressed and insurgent feminine is to consolidate the place of the feminine in and as the irruptive chora, that which cannot be figured, but which is necessary for any figuration' (1993, 48).
14. A fascinating speculation, considering Beauvoir and Dinnerstein's negative views of the association of maternity with mortality (Beauvoir 1997, 197; Dinnerstein 1991, 155).
15. It is not that I reject biographical readings of text, just that I am not engaged here with such a task. I have already referred to the limitations of my investigation — legal and economic perspectives, for example, can only be fleetingly voiced by me, and the contemporary reception of the texts is also not discussed — and this is yet another gap in what is inevitably a gappy narrative (but see Butler 1993, 19, on partiality as an enabling constraint).
16. Whatever this means (see Eagleton, T. 1983, 1–16).
17. There is, for example, a group of texts which deal with the relationships between three generations of women: Behrens 1983, Bronnen 1982, Drewitz 1978, Mitgutsch 1987, Wolf 1994; these would merit separate treatment. There are also numerous novels in which daughter-narrators describe their mothers. Such novels and others will be referred to where appropriate.
18. Or 'childless', 'childfree', 'unchilded' — but all of these mean that I am defined in terms of lack (Rich 1977, 249).

19. A psychoanalytic term used by Butler to refer to 'those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zone of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status o the subject' (1993, 3).

CHAPTER ONE

MATERNITY, AGENCY, AND COMMUNITY

> I think it's a legend that half the population of the world is female; where on earth are they keeping them all? (Joanna Russ, *The Female Man*)

We have already encountered the idea that motherhood in Western culture rests upon a number of binary oppositions, such as male/female, mind/body, nature/culture, and public/private. It has been the task of poststructuralist feminist analysis to deconstruct these oppositions, revealing them to be constructs rather than givens. The categories public and private, for example, are to be viewed as contingent and shifting (Elshtain 1981, 4). In this chapter I am concerned with how the texts in question negotiate these categories. I argue that challenging the traditional public/private distinction is crucial to the project of developing the performative maternal agency which was outlined in the introduction, as the texts examined here performatively demonstrate. Where these oppositions are left unquestioned, the texts suggest, mothers are rendered abject and mute. They are also isolated; it appears that preserving traditional social arrangements forecloses the possibility of community, of multiple relationality, something which has been identified as vital to the notion of maternal agency.

My suggestion is not that we abolish the terms 'public' and 'private', only that we always locate them in context and scrutinize them for the agenda which they might be representing. We must begin, I contend, with a critical examination of the notion of 'tradition', as problematically deployed in the paragraph above. Central to the feminist attempt to redefine the public and the private has been the awareness that maternity is historically contingent (Badinter 1981; Glenn 1994, 3; Mitchell 1971, 100). To speak of 'traditional' parenting arrangements is to run the risk of obscuring such contingency. 'Tradition' is unfixed and changeable; social practices arise from and operate in particular contexts. For example, in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe and North America, the growth of industrialization, which brought with it a shift towards work outside the home, meant the creation of a new private sphere of domesticity (Badinter 1981, 145; Glenn 1994, 14; Janeway 1977, 195; Hirsch 1989, 14). The association of femininity with the private and the emotional is thus bound up with historical, economic, and political factors.