



Research

Maternal Dynamics: A New Ethical Paradigm

Rose Rebecca Fine¹

- ¹ ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana, Slovenia
- ² Correspondence: rebeccafrose@gmail.com

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Abstract:

This work develops an original conceptualisation of maternal ethics in relation to philosophical discussions of the temporality of the ethical act. Marked by the tension between continuity and disruption, maternal experience provides a model for ethical creativity and action. This unique temporal tension reflects a moral responsiveness that advocates a novel understanding of maternal ethics centered on empathy and courage. The work combines analyses of Husserl, Levinas, Jankelevitch and Cavell with readings of testimonies of Second World War survivors which I collected in Slovenia.

Keywords: Maternal; Ethics; Temporality; Phenomenology; Second World War; Testimony

1. Introduction

This work argues that the complex temporality of the maternal experience constitutes an affective tension within the maternal voice which accounts for the ethical singularity of the maternal figure. In support of this thesis, we explore the 'double' register of competing temporalities which resonate within the maternal voice; we argue that the unpredictable experience of disruptive temporality tangentially coupled with an impossible promise of temporal continuity creates an affective tension within the maternal experience which elicits a creative, improvisational, and singularly moral responsiveness. We show that the enigmatic and paradoxical relation between a maternal compassionate empathy and an austere maternal ethics of obligation produces a temporally lived tension which manifests paradigmatically as a temporally tensed attentive inclination of the maternal. We further show that maternal singularity not only exceeds essentialist stereotypes, but that the maternal should be more properly understood in terms of an improvisational responsiveness, temporally tensed between an empathetic ethics of care and an austere ethics of obligation. With the help of Vladimir Jankelevitch's discussion of the oscillation of time between "the interval and the instant," we attempt to think the tangential yet transformative relation between the continuity of inherited generational temporality, which we articulate in terms of Edmund Husserl's internal time consciousness (¹) and the temporal disruption of subjectivity which Emmanuel Levinas² presents as the necessary condition for ethical consciousness, the paradigm of which is the maternal figure.

For Jankelevitch, both the consciousness of temporal continuity and the instantaneous moral act of conscience are connected by an imperceptible thread of the "je ne sais quoi ou le presque rien" of "the instant." Jankelevitch's unique development of his understanding of "the instant" allows him to pivot from a metaphysical discussion of the consciousness of the irreversibility of time to an elaboration of one's conscience which appears and disappears throughout one's life. According to Jankelevitch's theory of virtue, ethics cannot be a contemplative affair based on pre-given categories; rather virtue is created through the act, the doing, the instant, and intuition; hence, morality cannot be prescribed. Instead, the ethical demands to be continually created and re-created through an improvisational spontaneity and capture of the "presque rien" which is lived affectively as moral virtue, that is, as moral resistance, courage, fidelity and empathy. Jankelevitch writes of "how the pure Act is beyond the fission of being and non-being,"³ of "the primordial primacy of the Doing that is pure of any being,"⁴ and of the "making-be of that is more and better than being."⁵ Accordingly, we suggest that Jankelevitch's account of virtues, as performatively and passionately lived acts, provides us with a new framework or "blueprint" within which we might explore the compelling nature of maternal empathy and courage. By amplifying the resonance, resiliency, and audacity of maternal voicing, this work hopes to articulate a new way to think the "tensed time" of the maternal experience and to pave a new way to listen to the exigency of the maternal voice.

Building on Husserl's description of the continuity of time and Levinas's account of the diachronous "rupture of time" as theoretic alternatives of the maternal temporal experience, we rely on Jankelevitch's theory of the "instant and the interval" as well as his theory of virtues in order to formulate a new account of maternal ethics. We propose that the oscillating relationship between empathy and courage captures the most significant insights from both Husserl's and Levinas's discussion of temporality, while supporting a new theory of maternal ethics which resists either reducing the maternal to a figure of

¹ Husserl, Edmund. *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893–1917)*. Springer Science & Business Media, 2012.

² Levinas, Emmanuel. *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*. Northwestern University Press, 1995.

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³ Jankelevitch, Vladimir. *Philosophie première*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris : 1953, p. 184.

⁴ Ibid., 187.

⁵ Ibid, 259.

martyrdom or to one of consolation, but which rather promotes the maternal as a paradigm of empathetic courageous action and attunement.

Yet why should temporality have a privileged methodological status for describing the maternal experience? While spacial descriptions of the maternal provide obvious metaphors for the experience of pregnancy and giving birth, temporal descriptions of endurance and disruption have the advantage that they evoke the ethical tension of becoming a mother to one's child or to another, without relying on the visual trope of the withdrawal, replacement, or disappearance of the mother. Not only does the temporal description reflect the ongoing, enduring, continuous relation of the mother to a child, it likewise marks disruptions and everyday events of separation belonging to the maternal experience. We argue that because competing forms of temporality belong to the temporal experience of the mother, the tension between these senses of temporality creates unforeseeable and ethically demanding situations. Accordingly, by explicating the temporal complexity of the maternal voice, we hope to articulate the ethical weight that the maternal voice bears. By challenging the ancient philosophical privilege afforded to the stable, the certain, and the eternal, and by redirecting us or "converting" us to think the "newness" of deformed time, this work shows that the singularity of the maternal lived experience of time provides us with a pathway to think "newness" and "innovation" within time itself.

Following Henri Bergson (2019), we argue that the traditional category of the possible represents a paradigm of a poorly posed philosophic problem with significant consequences: in the history of philosophy, the category of the possible is assumed to contain less ontic value than that of the actual or, in other words, we assume that possibility is necessarily lesser than its real counterpart. However, for Henri Bergson, the exact opposite is true; it is the possible that contains more ontic value than the actual. Accordingly, the possibility of knowledge only becomes real through an act of thought that projects it backwards: as such, the possible contains the real and the retrospective act of thinking that constitutes it (Bergson, 2019). Behind the illusion of the possibility of knowledge lies an error that threatens the very task of philosophy. Henri Bergson (2019) therefore advocates a new direction for philosophy, one where philosophy undertakes a conversion. The task of conversion which Bergson lays out requires philosophy to learn to turn its gaze away from the eternal; and in lieu of disregarding or disdaining the existential experience of time, philosophers would benefit by turning their attention toward movement, toward newness in the making, and finally should attempt to think time as becoming.

Philosophy's historical challenge of giving conceptual determination to existence is, according to Henri Bergson (2019), a direct consequence of its desire to grasp what is eternal in time and to conceive of time as finalistic. According to this view, what comes to exist, that is, what is born in time, must have its law, reason or cause of existence elsewhere, that is, outside of time. Because the movement of time is traditionally understood as the realization of a pre-existing possibility outside of time, temporal existence is seen as an inadequate incarnation of a pre-existing possibility, where the movement of time is understood as the realization of a pre-existing possibility. In contrast, Henri Bergson (2019) contends that the category of the possible be conceived as the becoming of temporal existence which contains more reality than the actual itself.

This is where our thinking of the maternal experience of time becomes critical. Rather than thinking the maternal category of possibility as "less than" or as "in service" to the patriarchal idea of the eternal, we propose that the maternal experience of time provides us with a paradigm for the power and agency of a new way to think the becoming of time. Time can no longer be thought of in terms of an external framework within which events unfold, but must instead be conceived as truly active and as a creative force. Consequently, we argue that becoming must be understood as a non-finalistic, non-teleologic conception of time, open to a non-determined, non-causal future, which moves between the alternative experiences of continuity and disruption. The conversion that Henri Bergson (1998) so hopes for is a conversion of philosophy from a teleological desire for eternity to an existential time. In alignment with Henri Bergson's (1998) proposal, we submit that the maternal experience of time provides us with a paradigmatic model for temporal becoming insofar as it captures the power, agency, and creativity of time – which is "invention or it is nothing at all." (Bergson, 1998).

Because time is active in and of itself, the being of time is nothing apart from its specifically active, creative power, that is, its own agency. Were we to follow conventional phallogocentric thought, which adheres to the idea of eternity and from which it follows that the possibility of things precedes its existence, our thinking would entail a denial of the reality of newness and, as such, a denial of time's creative force. However, by exploring the thinking which maintains that the category of possibility does not precede their existence, we avoid the trap set by the idea of the eternal; instead, we gain epistemic and experiential access to the newness of becoming and the invention of maternal creativity. In order to make a case for the process or "birth" of such a conversion, our research develops the notion of a maternal, cathartic, and transformative temporal tension which belongs to the maternal existential experience which I formulate as the impossible coupling of time as alternating between continuity and as disruption. Insofar as the maternal temporal experience provides us with a paradigm for a transformative experience, we argue for the powerful agency of a new maternal ethics, lived as alternatively empathetically creative and improvisationally courageous.

2. Original Contribution of Thesis

The maternal experience is likewise lived as a continual resistance to a series of lifelong separations that motherhood imposes on the female psyche and body and which is expressed as maternal mourning and lament, culminating in the inseparable linkage between laments and motherhood. Laments are above all about separation and the severing of ties between mothers and their children. The extreme contrast between the intuitive, wished-for inseparability of the mother-child relationship and the separation caused by death constitutes the epicenter and the gravitas of maternal lamentation. In the face of death, it is this subverted longing for life which accounts for the subversive tone associated with the female voice of lamenting and constitutes an ultimate expression of the continued resistance to the series of separations which defines motherhood. As Walter Benjamin suggests such expression is necessarily and "essentially intertwined with loss." "Deeply saturated with melancholy and loss, the lament thus functions both as an expression of loss and as a site for its recuperation." (Ferber,2013) The lamenting language of mourning, as expressed by mothers in mourning, reflects a singular tension between the continual experience of separation which mothers experience and that unforeseen encounter with the most radical form of separation, namely the death of one's child. As such, the maternal lament works against the experience of mourning as a voice of resistance to death. It functions paradoxically to disrupt the experience of mourning through the very act of mourning itself. As such, the maternal lament is a paradigm of a radically subversive force which like empathetic courage expresses itself as pneumatically creative, at the border between language and action, between life and death.

3. As Gershom Scholem discerningly describes lament:

"[T]here is one language whose infinity is deeper and different from all others (besides the language of God). For whereas every language is always a positive expression of a being, and its infinity resides in the two bordering lands of the revealed and the silenced, such that it actually stretches out over both realms, this language [of lament] is different from any other language in that it remains throughout on the border, exactly on the border between these two realms. This language reveals nothing, because the being that reveals itself in it has no content (and for that reason one can also say that it reveals everything) and conceals nothing, because its entire existence is based on a revolution of silence. It is not symbolic, but only points toward the symbol; it is not concrete, but annihilates the object. This language is lament." (Scholem,2014)

The lamenting invocations of mothers signal beyond themselves, beyond any verbal reference, exceeding the limits of ordinary language and are rather located at "the border...between... the revealed and the silenced." Lament, as a "language of the border," is situated between two spheres and exists in the tension between the "domesticating and the foreignizing" processes of language. (Ferber,2013) "Origin and border, as in birth in the sphere of life, converge in the sphere of language within lament. Birth and death, the fundamental symbolic poles of life, reappear in the internal structure of lamentation." (Scholem,2014) Retrospectively, the sense of the finality of death pushes the language

of laments backwards, to an unrealizable, inseparable phase that barely existed and was lost during life. The act of lamenting thus repeats and intensifies the tangential trajectory of the “presque rien” of moral resistance, courage and empathy. Yet in doing so, the object of lament, namely, mourning, is paradoxically destroyed through its performative expression. The language of lament is less a matter of melancholic withdrawal, than an attempt to productively confront the event of loss. As such the lamentation of maternal mourning provides us with an alternative window through which the power and agency of a new maternal ethics might be heard and voiced.

4. Original Contribution of Thesis

Philosophy has historically appropriated maternal tropes and metaphors in order to explain its generative and creative possibilities; this has repeatedly resulted in the exclusion or denigration of the embodied, material maternal experience from the philosophic register. Alternatively, recent feminist theory has striven to vindicate the experience and work of maternity while pillorying philosophical “co-opting” of the maternal metaphor. Rather than defending the maternal by engaging with philosophy through metaphorical or metonymical strategies, we argue that the singular temporal experience of becoming a mother provides us with the paradigm for a “new” philosophy which ideally oscillates between the “Je ne sais quoi” of intuition and the duration of discursive reasoning. As with the “organ-obstacle” relation which figures centrally in Jankelevitch’s thought, neither the instant of intuition nor the interval of discursive reasoning can be abandoned; both are needed to avoid the dilettantism of relativity or the inevitability of religious absolutism. Accordingly, we contend that the maternal experience sketches out the deformed movement of time and provides us with a road map to think the newness and creativity within time as becoming.

Although much recent work has been done in the intersecting fields of feminist and psychoanalytic theory regarding the maternal, we approach the “question of the mother” through a phenomenological lens, focusing on the dimorphic temporality of the lived maternal experience which carries with it ethical as well as affective, lived repercussions. Instead of challenging normative gendered concepts of subjectivity⁶, we direct our attention to the qualitative transformation enacted in “becoming another’s mother.” And finally, rather than investigating subjectivity through a predominantly static lens, we broach the subject of the maternal voice through a temporal analysis of creative and critical vitality which we integrate with performative speech act theory and which I then use to amplify the voices of those who during World War Two recounted the experience of “becoming another’s mother.” In doing so, this work theorizes the maternal voice while avoiding essentialist tropes which rely on or imply normative categories as well as tropes of ambiguity attached to the maternal which effectively dissemble and disable the force of the maternal voice.

Yet, why specify “maternal time” rather than “parental time”? Cannot both parents experience temporality in the same “tensed” way? Why privilege the maternal over the parental? The distinguishing feature of the maternal experience of time is due to the inherited relationality that mothers bear between generations: the mother is both born from a mother and bears the future generation - whether biologically, through adoption, or as a “second mother.” And yet, the maternal is likewise the site of a radical non-self coincidence, in which the maternal subject finds itself temporally out-of-sync with itself and temporally disrupted. On account of such temporally lived incongruity, the maternal provides us with a singular lens through which we might envision the power of an intergenerational sense of possibility which is coupled with the inevitable disruptions and ruptures of temporal experience. As “doubled yet divided” the maternal experience reflects the paradoxicality of moral dilemma, choice, and action.

It does not follow that fathers or women who choose not to have children are excluded from the “maternal.” Quite to the contrary: we are all born from mothers, and, therefore, we each have the potential to carry over or translate the inherited temporal experience

⁶ I have in mind the disruptive interventions of space in Julia Kristeva’s pre-Oedipal Khora, the doubling found in Luce Irigaray’s work on sexuation, and Bracha Ettinger’s concept of the Matrix.

which we share with our mothers to the next generation. The point is not that the maternal is an exclusive category determined by a privileged access to a particular experience; rather, the point is that the maternal provides us with a model of relationality that deserves our attention. My research thus argues for a broad and inclusive understanding of maternal experience which is not biologically determined, yet which, nevertheless, resonates within the lived experience of the mother.

The originality of my contribution to this challenging field thus advances a theory of maternal experience which grows out of a phenomenological analysis of the inherent temporal tension and moral paradoxicality of the maternally tensed experience and which defends the maternal as a signature "event" of ethical action. This work likewise integrates the recorded testimonies of four Slovenian witnesses who survived through the war years - either as prisoners in concentration camps, as fighters, or as hidden children in Slovenia. Since the survivors whom I interviewed were children or adolescents during the war years, our research was able to bear witness to the unique and different ways that each experienced and enacted becoming a mother or becoming another's mother during this horrific period. In doing so, we highlight the resistance, courage, and empathy of each of these survivors and those who enabled their survival.

We believe the direction of our research is important because it initiates a discussion of the singularity of mothers - or those who acted like mothers - without reducing mothers to agents of a patriarchal system. Rather than seeing mothers primarily as care givers for the family unit, tribe, or State, we are interested in defending a view of the maternal which vindicates the singularity of the maternal by highlighting the lived tension between an empathetic inclination and courageous resistance of those who act like mothers. We show that this transformative tension, which characterizes the maternal phenomenological experience, is reflected in the heroic agency and improvisational talent of mothers and those who acted like mothers during the war. We focus on the heroic actions of those who acted like mothers - nannies, 'stranger' mothers, and children who became mothers to their own mothers, in an effort to defend an account of maternal virtue, where the mother is figured as moving between empathy and courage, constantly recreating herself, and therein "becoming a mother to another." This philosophical interrogation therefore supports an alternative account of the maternal, that is, a new account of maternal ethics which allows us to speak about mothers, without relying on stereotypical maternal tropes or minimizing the heroic paradigm of mothers, and to which we attribute the singularity of the maternal temporal experience.

5. Tracing temporality between Husserl, Levinas, Cavell, and Jankelevitch

Our research argues that the experience of maternal temporality accounts not only for the improvisational and disruptive audacity as well as the empathetic affect of the maternal voice, but in doing so, challenges philosophic references to the maternal which either figure the maternal in absolutist terms or dismiss the maternal due to essentialist categories. Against phallogocentric voices which portray the maternal as a model of absolute sacrifice or as that which requires depassioning of its threatening sensibilities, we contend that these characterizations seek to castrate and exclude the maternal voice from the realm of the ethical, thereby, foreclosing its philosophical and ethical relevance. In response to the ethical-philosophical problems obtaining to the maternal voice, we work at the intersection of Edmund Husserl's (1962) account of internal time consciousness, Emmanuel Levinas's theory of diachronic disruption, Stanley Cavell's theory of passionate utterance, and Vladimir Jankelevitch's (1974) theory of the irreversibility of time, in order to develop an account of maternal temporality which subverts philosophic misrepresentations of the maternal voice. We argue that maternal temporality provides us with the necessary theoretical grounding to account for a compelling ethical theory based on a conception of alterity which welcomes the possibility of disruptive surprise, while refusing to be taken hostage to an immemorial past.

According to Levinas, it is on account of the indeterminacy of the future which is encountered through the diachronous experience of the other that we have a sense of what we owe, of our responsibility; whereas, for Edmund Husserl (1962), the analysis of internal time consciousness and duration is concerned with assuring continuity between the past,

the present, and the future. For Edmund Husserl (1962), the originary meaning of the present is determined by one's elapsed intentional lived experiences; because these experiences are retained in their original fluidity by present consciousness, they can for that reason be made present again at any moment in the form of a memory. For Edmund Husserl (1962), the past is a displaced present, pushed back from the center of one's present consciousness towards its horizon by the emergence of a new lived experience, while the future is constituted by and grows out of one's memory of past experiences. As such, the protentions of the future function in the inverse way to that of past retentions.

For Levinas, however, Edmund Husserl's (1962) conception of the continuity of internal time consciousness is unable to do justice to the radical ethical sense of alterity of the other person, which Levinas foregrounds in his analysis of temporality and which ultimately provides him with the foundation for an ethics of temporal interruption. By contrast, Husserl's conception of retention and rememorative representation consists in an effort to recuperate the past, by safeguarding the continuity of the flux of intentional consciousness. In order to establish the unity of intentional consciousness and, with that, a unified sense of experience, Husserl describes what he takes to be structures of consciousness which are enriched through a sense of "a thickness of time."

Although Edmund Husserl (1962) describes his phenomenology as the only systematic version of "transcendental idealism," (Husserl, 1962) we suggest that we understand Husserl's phenomenology as an experiential idealism, wherein all existent entities are in principle experientially accessible. We argue that for Husserl the interdependency of his descriptions of the structures of consciousness and time consciousness establishes the unity of a subject's sense of experience, upon which he bases his theory of empathy. Based on a close examination of Levinas's critique of Husserl's account of intersubjectivity, we then argue that Levinas's account of the alterity of ethics is a response to Husserl's desire to establish experiential access to the intersubjective world - rather than, as is commonly accepted, as a means of establishing epistemological access. Although Husserl strived to develop a phenomenology which would provide an absolute and ideal access to meaningful experience of the perceptual and sensual world, by relying on the unifying function of internal time consciousness, Husserl anticipated the shortcomings of his strictly phenomenological method with regard to intersubjective consciousness and later presented an argument for empathy based on an intermingling of imagination and consciousness.

Levinas devotes his career to responding to Husserl's earlier problematic by developing his own phenomenology of the time of the other which is interwoven with his description of both the feminine as well as the maternal. We argue that although the central role of diachronic temporality in Levinas's description of the ethical encounter is in direct response to limits arising from Husserl's unified subjective phenomenology (both in response to internal time consciousness as well as to intersubjective apperception), Levinas does not break entirely free from Husserl's influence. As Husserl strived for an absolute and ideal experiential access to the world and to others via a unified subjectivity, Levinas privileges the absolutely demanding ethical relation to which one is held hostage to the exclusion and negligence of alternative ethical relations such as empathy and love, which we contend are critical to an ethics of the maternal.

In response to Husserl's highly theoretic description of the noetic conscious experience, Emmanuel Levinas presents a description of alterity as belonging to and originating with the absolutely other; although Emmanuel Levinas tries to distance himself from the theoretical unifying tendencies of Husserlian phenomenology, we argue that Emmanuel Levinas's differing accounts of alterity are plagued by the absolutist leanings of his Husserlian inheritance. For Emmanuel Levinas, alterity must radically interrupt the sense that I have of time belonging to myself in order to mark the experience of heterogeneity or the beginning of ethics. Rather than providing a single account of the relation between alterity and temporality, Emmanuel Levinas provides us with two somewhat conflicting accounts of the relation of temporal interruption. In Emmanuel Levinas's early works, Levinas highlights the embodied experience of the "face-to-face" relation according to which the feminine is excluded from the ethical relation and appears either as the external condition of possibility for the ethical or as that which erotically threatens the ethical (Levinas, 1969). While, in his later works, Levinas develops the notion of alterity as the radically absolute "alterity of the other within the same," which is personified by the maternal experience as

suffering and self-sacrificial, as one held hostage to the other upon the threat of death (Levinas, 1998). Although these accounts of alterity differ significantly, they both subscribe to an absolute separation of the self and the other and are meant to challenge Husserl's depiction of the return to the self by the self. Accordingly, Levinas's well known characterizations of alterity functions primarily to underscore the radicality of the disruption of the return of the self to itself. We show that although Levinas fails to recognize and address the theoretical tensions raised by his absolutist descriptions of alterity with regard to temporality for much of his career, he opens the door for a new way to think the temporal maternal experience in his account of the relation of "illeity" to the "third," wherein he maps out the possibility of openness to an indeterminate future.

In his later publications and in his interview with Bracha Ettinger, Levinas finally speaks to the possibility of a diachronous time of the future which not only informs a new and promising – if not late – insight to the maternal (Levinas, 1998). No longer framing the feminine maternal as a spatially external condition for possibility of ethical disruption of the present and the past, Levinas identifies the feminine as the temporally external "category of the future....It is the possibility of believing that there is a reality without me." For Levinas, the relationship to the Face of the Other "is already a grasp of a past and is already a contact with a future...In the future, there they are: my possibilities and my impossibilities.... And time is there: in what is possible, in what is no longer possible, and in the unforgettable." Accordingly, I show that while Levinas originally argues that the diachronous time of the other is that which provides the ethical disruption which destabilizes the return of the self, – at first situated from a distance within the face-to-face relation, and then from within the close proximity of the other within the self, we find in Levinas's writings the concept of illeity according to which an openness to the indeterminacy of the future is figured as constituting human responsibility.

Although Levinas and Jankelevitch develop what might appear to be refractory accounts of temporality, this work investigates the intersection between Levinas's and Jankelevitch's thought in order to articulate a new conception of the maternal which highlights an ethical audacity and intuition which we attribute to the maternal. We argue that insofar as the maternal voice is a site of a disrupted sense of temporality coupled with a generational experience of duration, the maternal voice constitutes a productive tension within a complex lived experience which manifests itself as an ethical awakening of courage, resistance, and empathy – all critical aspects to an ethic which exceeds both ontological as well as essentialist categories. Rather than personifying the maternal voice as a voice of vulnerability, victimization or of self-sacrifice, we argue that the maternal voice has a radical, yet underestimated potency and resiliency to effectively create new situations and to awaken compelling, passionate, and unforeseen realities.

Following Bergson, Jankelevitch privileges intuition over discursive reason; according to Jankelevitch, through the process of concept formation, discursive reason parcels objects up and, therefore, fails to grasp objects as wholes. Whereas, intuition relies on spontaneous action which grasps reality as complete and whole. Accordingly, intuition occurs in what Jankelevitch refers to as an "instant." Because the instant of time is experienced intuitively as a creative experience, where one thing is going out of existence just as something new is brought into existence, Jankelevitch attributes to the instant of intuition an inherent generosity which falls outside of any category of discursive reason. The instant is likewise experienced as an irrevocable moment of moral resistance to the irreversibility of time: for Jankelevitch, it is the denial of the intuition of a past moment as "irrevocable" which prompts the "temporal illnesses" of resentment, regret, and remorse; whereas, the acceptance of the irreversibility of time is a pre-condition for the moral acts of courage, fidelity, and generosity. Hence, the irreversibility of time has the potential to act as both an "obstacle" as well as an "organ" for the vicissitudes of moral life. We therefore suggest that maternal intuition be understood as both reflecting an original site of creative empathy as well as a courageous resistance to the irreversibility of time. For Jankelevitch, humans are not essentially hybrids; nor are we static "beings." Rather, again following Bergson, Jankelevitch characterizes humanity as "essentially free" and, as such, as "becoming." As such, we find within our lived human experience an inherent resistance to the necessity of the irreversibility of time. Accordingly, we alternate between dimorphic experiences of time, between the "instant" and the "interval." As such, we suggest that maternal intuition

finds itself at a unique threshold of becoming, “pneumatically” recurring as a never-ending resistance to the irreversibility of time, all the while creating an irrevocable ethic of generosity and courage.]

6. Listening to Maternal Passions

I rely on Stanley Cavell’s extension of John Langshaw Austin’s theory (1975) of performative speech acts in order to develop an account of the improvisational passionate temporal register of the maternal voice. In contesting John Langshaw Austin’s performative (1975) speech act theory, Cavell develops an account of “passionate utterance” as a form of language which is positioned to reflect the non-redemptive yet responsive ideals of “moral perfectionism.” By foregrounding the significance of the perlocutionary effect of illocutionary speech acts, Cavell introduces a new category of speech act, namely, “passionate utterance.” According to Cavell, passionate utterance is a form of language through which acknowledgment of others both exposes my vulnerability as well as the state which I am willing to make for the promise of a relationship. “A performative utterance is an offer of participation in the order of the law. And perhaps we can say: A passionate utterance is an improvisation in the disorders of desire.” Cavell argues that Austin (1975), having made the revolutionary discovery that truth claims in language are bound up with how words perform, then gets caught up by convention when discussing what is done by words. In failing to account for the less predictable, unconventional aspects of language, Austin (1975) accordingly washes his hands of the expressive passionate aspects of speech. For Cavell, ignoring these aspects of language is to ignore the morally compelling dimension of perlocutionary language, namely, “passionate utterance.”

While Austin (1975) provides a framework which challenges the exclusivity appropriated to normative speaking/thinking, Cavell makes room for an alternative conceptualization of language and conversation which locates that which is most ethically compelling to the passionate yet fragile register belonging to what I identify as the “*Je ne sais quoi*” of the maternal voice. For Cavell, passionate utterance is a form of language which reveals a self moving between a self-conforming “attained self” and a self moving against itself toward an “unattained yet attainable self.” As “doubled and divided,” there is an inherent failure or absence obtaining to subjectivity, which for Cavell paradoxically provides an opening for moral responsibility. Similarly, Levinas’s account of the “saying” of “illeity” contributes to a moral language which aligns with Cavell’s non-theistic concept of “passionate utterance” and which informs his concept of “moral perfectionism.” For Levinas, illeity refers to the absent condition of an encounter with another; it is the very act of self-effacement, the act of undoing which indirectly account for responsibility.

As Cavell’s account of passionate utterance reveals a self – “doubled and divided,” moving between a self-conforming “attained self” and a self, moving itself toward an “unattained yet attainable self” in a movement of resistance and love, we defend the view that the successful outcome of passionate utterance requires an improvisational ability of talent which we argue is paradigmatic of maternal speech acts. Our research defends a broad notion of the perlocutionary, whose compass points to what Jankelevitch describes as the “*Je ne sais quoi*” of language. Accordingly, we show that the language form of passionate utterance resonates within Jankelevitch’s temporal account of moral action and further that it provides us with an account of the ethical force of the maternal voice. As the tension of the maternal temporal experience is registered in a voice which moves between an empathetic attunement and the courage of resistance, we contend that we listen to the maternal voice as a paradigm for the perlocutionary fluency and moral force of passionate utterance.

Thus, by working at the intersection of Austin’s performative speech act theory, Cavell’s account of passionate utterance, Levinas’s concept of illeity, and Husserl’s concept of motivational empathy, we present an account of the maternal voice which defies the conventional characterizations of the maternal as either essentially sentimental and forgiving or as ultimately vigilant and self-sacrificing and rather finds itself alternating between these two characterizations, that is, moving between empathy and courage. Accordingly, we suggest that the intersection between empathy and courage be identified as the “*virtue par excellence*” of the maternal. In support of this suggestion, I bear witness to the testimony of empathetically courageous young women, who in “becoming mothers,” resisted

the atrocities and horror of the war, all the while protecting and safeguarding their family's future.

7. Maternal Resonance: "Becoming Another's Mother" during the Second World War

In arguing that the lived tension between a phenomenological experience of temporal continuity tangentially coupled with an experience of unpredictable temporal disruption constitutes an affective tension which resonates within the maternal experience, I explore the ethical resistance and the exigency of decisions and actions made by mothers and those who acted like mothers of others - as reflected in maternal narratives of the Shoah. I show that such "mothers" recount similar experiences of affective tension resulting in creative improvisation and morally responsive resistance. Not only do the narratives of the war provide us with an historical testimony of the experiences of women who took on maternal roles, without necessarily being mothers themselves, these narratives moreover provide us with a critical educational model for ethical resistance and action. In order to support my analysis, I rely on personal interviews with children/adolescents who lived within the current day boundaries of Slovenia and who unpredictably and bravely acted as mothers to protect the lives of others.

During the Second World War, Slovenia found itself to be an 'in-between State,' which magnified the struggles of those living within its boundaries. Accordingly, I contend that the radical precarity of the Slovenian experience is reflected in the narratives of children survivors. In order to accomplish this, I interview, with the assistance of a translator, two living survivors of the concentration camp, a young boy saved by his nanny, and a young girl who was taken care of by a peasant mother. By amplifying the resonance and the audacity of the experience of those who acted like mothers during the horrors of the war, I articulate a new way to re-think the "tensed time" of the maternal experience. I propose that such a maternal ethics be conceived as being available not exclusively to biological or adoptive mothers. Rather, I suggest that such an ethics provides an educational model of resistance for all to combat the current rise in fascist sensibilities. In support of my articulation of the tensed time of maternal ethics, my research highlights the improvisational and intuitive timing of passionate maternal utterance and argues that the maternal voice calls upon a continual negotiation and temporal openness to an intuitive ethics of disruption while maintaining a promise of care.

7. Conclusion

In exploring the ethical exigency of the experience of the maternal voice as heard through wartime testimony, I contend that the temporal experience of the maternal emerges as a risky yet possible harbour for the competing yet irrecoverable forces, one of temporal continuity and endurance and one of disruption and rupture; as such, the maternal voice singularly commands our attention as a source for ethical creativity, resistance, and action. The precarity and unpredictability of the maternal voice contributes to its compelling quality; always on edge, the maternal stakes itself out to secure a future for the next generation, all the while providing compassion and empathy within the present extension of the past. The experience of rupture coupled with a shared sensibility of enduring temporality forces our attention and constitutes that which we argue is the uniquely compelling mark of the maternal, namely, the possibility of becoming a mother to another through an ethics of empathetic courage.

Accordingly, we propose that through maternal voicing, we might learn to unsay – or disrupt - that which has become dangerously and tacitly accepted. By listening to the voices of children who became mothers during war time, and by listening to the narratives of mothers who saved others' children, we hope to amplify the courage, generosity, audacity and resistance of these voices in an effort to articulate and nurture our common human sources of resistance, empathy, and courage.

Rather than honoring the memory of a person as a past memory intact as an identity, the testimony of the survivors which I have collected reveals a diachronic experience of time, which ruptures a conventional sense of memory, thereby, bearing witness to the vital possibilities of the next generation. Through the exigency of moral time, our research likewise honors the survivors of the concentration camp and the children victims of war who acted "as second mothers," fighting courageously for freedom, and generously risking

death to save the future lives of others. We argue that it is the unique tension between the irrevocable testimony of an immemorial past and a prophetic voice which finds itself as directed toward an unknowable future which informs the maternal testimonies of those who experienced firsthand the horrors of war. We further claim that it is the experience of temporal tension, as demonstrated through the courage and empathy of those who acted like mothers and as expressed by those who mourned and lamented the loss of their mothers, which elicits a powerful source of moral resistance and provides us with a critical antidote to the violence and debasement of the most vulnerable.

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