'The Stop' and Catherine Clement's work on 'syncope' she helps us to recognise within mothering a proliferation of the kind of experience from which 'newness' can emerge. In Chapter 5, *Maternal Stuff*, Baraitser switches her focus to spatiality. Here, we are invited to think of the encumbered maternal body, weighed down with bottles, bags and buggies, yet connected through these objects to the wider environment and the ethical imaginations of those others who design curbs, teats and toys. Object relations are revisited audaciously through Latour's actor-network theory, Heidegger's 'tool-being' and Elaine Scarry's idea of the ethical object. The result is a vision of the mother as enriched by her burden, brought into 'a new kinetic experience' in which she 'experiences her own viscosity' and 'internal sentience ... through an encounter with objects, be they artefacts, the tool being of motherhood or the mundane street furniture she stumbles on' (p. 150).

There is something defiantly feminist about this book. Baraitser is attentive to the mother as a subject in her own right, determined to keep her in view, convinced that she is involved in something creative and exciting. Her maternal subject is not determined by ideas of lack or intergenerational desire, but is a much more creative creature; desirous, distracted and made anew by the intense and incessant experience of mothering. The version of the maternal that Baraitser promotes is phenomenological, and she encourages us to glimpse insight, foregrounding immediacy, with meaning established retro-actively.

Maternal Encounters is an exciting book and I hope that it finds a broad audience: it is feminist theory at its best, intense, and resonating with lived experience. It certainly makes an important contribution to the developing interdisciplinary field of maternal studies and it deserves to make waves in several disciplines. Reading the book as a mother was also a touching experience, inciting me to re-imagine my maternal practices outside of familiar feminist frameworks of drudgery and dysfunction, discovering the artist-mother-revolutionary just waiting to be noticed.

Rachel Thomson

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On having an own child: reproductive technologies and the cultural construction of childhood

Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, Karnac, London, 2008, 199pp., ISBN 978-1-85575-5451, £19.99pb

This fascinating book asks perhaps the most significant question for feminist studies of reproduction (but one that, strangely, as the author points out, has not received much critical attention): why do people want 'an own child'?

Although a question that many women have struggled with, this is one that usually only receives a clichéd answer: instinct, biology, lifelong desire, feminine identity, a need to love and nurture. Risky territory for feminists to engage with critically perhaps, but also, as literary theorist Lesnik-Oberstein shows us, rich ground for an analysis of what it is to be human, to desire, and to live as gendered beings in contemporary wealthy societies.

On Having an Own Child explores the most common explanations of the desire for 'own' children, asking how and why reproductive technologies have come to be understood as providing such children, despite the multiple ways in which they trouble older understandings of 'natural' kinship connections (simply, mother + father = baby). As many feminists have pointed out, having a child using reproductive technologies (and social technologies such as surrogacy) involves many people and non-human entities in producing a child: clinicians, donors (gamete and/or embryo), scientists, surrogate mothers, petri dishes and sperm-sorting machines, for example. And yet those involved in such processes (parents, children and the 'others') have developed multiple ways to retain an idea of 'own-ness': a sense that the child 'really' belongs to one or two parents and can thus satisfy the desire that supposedly led to the original engagement with the technologies in question.

The explanations of the desire for an own child that Lesnik-Oberstein examines span the psychological and psychoanalytic, the sociological and anthropological, and the biological (specifically genetic explanations). She analyses the claims made in a diversity of academic and popular literatures and, using psychoanalytic methods (inspired particularly by the work of Jacqueline Rose), provides a critical reading of them. Significantly, she also brings her expertise in the area of childhood studies into play, engaging with literature on the figure of the child, internationally and locally adopted children, and contemporary forms of the commodification of childhood. Her book attempts to provide an account of the intense desire for an 'own child' experienced by many people without concluding either that such a desire is innate or biological or that it is simply cultural, social or historical (and therefore 'secondary, derivative, and mutable simply by choice') (182). Psychoanalysis helps here by providing a conceptual framework that conceives 'the unconscious and meaning as neither fully internal nor fully external, as neither fully determined nor entirely voluntary' (183). Lesnik-Oberstein's aim, then, is not to resolve the desire for 'own' children, but rather to come to a more complex understanding of it.

This is a convincing and timely intervention in the field of social and cultural studies of reproduction and reproductive technologies, which, Lesnik-Oberstein shows, tend to either place excessive weight on the social production of a desire for children, or naturalise such desires by figuring them as pre-existing. However, in focussing on the 'own child' and reproductive technologies, Lesnik-Oberstein's text runs the risk of equating 'own-ness' with preceding, biological connection

(despite her complex troubling of these terms) rather than something made through providing care or psychological engagement (a connection potentially made through adoption, for example). Such an equation begs precisely the question that concerns Lesnik-Oberstein: what is it about parent-child relations that makes them so compelling for so many people? Distinguishing between a more general desire for a child (or to be a parent) and the desire for an 'own child' is difficult, and is an endeavour that Lesnik-Oberstein struggles with throughout this book. There is, arguably, much that is shared by those who attempt to have children through reproductive technologies and those who adopt for example, when it comes to the psychological basis of a desire to be a parent, but also much that separates them in terms of the kinds of experiences constituting their pathways to parenting and, most significantly perhaps, the 'kinds' of children they may end up parenting. I would have welcomed more discussion of these similarities and differences.

On Having an Own Child is a very welcome contribution to the field of feminist studies of reproduction. Bringing together the previously distinct fields of childhood studies and studies in reproduction, its detailed and careful engagements with existing literatures constitute a substantial intervention in academic debate in this area. It also provides an excellent model of using psychoanalysis to analyse both academic and social fields: although this is a profoundly theoretical book, it avoids the use of technical language, providing very close readings of a broad range of texts to elaborate its argument. Speaking to a topic of such profound interest to many women and to many kinds of feminism, it is sure to stimulate much interest.

Celia Roberts

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domestic goddesses: maternity, globalization and middle-class identity in contemporary India

Henrike Donner, Ashgate Urban Anthropology series, Hampshire, 2008, 215pp., ISBN 978-0-7546-4942-7, £55.00 (hardback)

This book is an important work of ethnographic research into how middle-class women in India understand and experience transformations of family life affected by India's liberalization policies, socio-economic changes and the neo-liberal ideologies reproduced in the urban setting. The author conducted her fieldwork in Calcutta between 1995 and 2005, focusing on marriage, kinship and intimate relationships as a complicated set of practices that are inevitably raced, gendered and classed. Through a series of interviews, Donner gives voice