

1. **This is a speech on motherhood in de kunsten**

Hi,  
I am Line.

I read and tell stories.

I care deeply  
about the stories  
we live in.  
I am not talking about  
stories as works of fiction  
but stories as part of our  
tracts of thought and feeling  
stories that shape our sense of  
normativity  
- that allow us to imagine  
in a flicker  
a good mother,  
a healthy family,  
responsible behavior,  
work,  
a true artist.

I believe there is work to be done  
in understanding which narratives  
shape us, and how,  
to not take them for granted or as natural  
and to continually inform them  
with our lived experience  
and the lived experience  
of others whom we can learn to listen to.

2. **Mothering / Een oeder moedert**

Have I told you I have children?

Well, I don't have them, actually  
nobody *has* children  
but  
2 critters have grown in my body  
and I am in  
this social relationship  
where I take care of them  
on a daily basis.

This means,  
I am often cast as a mother.

More and more  
I am growing uneasy  
accepting this word  
as if it were part of my identity.

In particular in this context  
where we are invited  
to look at and think about  
the circumstances of our work  
I find motherhood  
confusing.

and I think I am not alone in this  
I see traces of this thought  
in the brackets around the (m)  
of motherhood  
turning it into otherhood  
– in fact I recognize a lot of my struggles  
in preparing for today  
already in the title of this event  
which also shifts language –

en dat doe ik ook  
en ik vraag mij af waarom  
ik in het Engels ben begonnen  
en denk dat er een antwoord ligt  
enerzijds  
in mijn werk- en denkomstandigheden  
die meestal niet Nederlandstalig zijn  
en dus ben ik het gewoon  
over moederschap en feminisme  
te denken in het Engels  
als lingua franca  
maar anderzijds  
geeft het Engels mij  
als performer  
ook een zekere buffer  
en gewicht  
als ik hierover spreek  
Mijn toon verandert  
Mijn houding verandert  
- en hoewel ik het belangrijk vind  
mijn moedertaal te erkennen  
en daar uiteindelijk ook in te werken  
- en hoewel ik erken  
dat het Engels  
geopolitiek  
een problematisch gewicht heeft

aanvaard ik momenteel  
toch de ondersteuning  
die ik in deze materie ervaar  
in het Engels.

Voor nu.

Daarbij komt  
dat zaken soms  
erg moeilijk worden  
in vertaling  
Zo is de speling  
Motherhood/otherhood  
toch fundamenteel anders  
dan moederschap/oederschap  
al heb ik, denk ik,  
minder problemen  
met het erkennen van mijzelf  
als oeder  
dan als mother of als other.

To be cast as a mother  
means that  
all the love and nurturing  
a specific child needs  
is collapsed into you  
as a person.  
You are made responsible  
for its happiness  
and flourishing  
while the conditions  
to make this happen  
are often  
lamentable  
and even with all conditions  
in place  
it is a lonely path  
that does not lead to redemption  
not for those cast as mothers  
nor for their children,  
nor for the people who are excluded  
from motherhood  
but do a lot of the work  
of actual mothering.

That being said  
I do acknowledge  
and embrace

that I mother  
as a verb  
and practice  
dat ik moeder in de praktijk  
and it does alter  
*my position* in society.

3. **On Aberration and deviation from the norm  
- where to locate Motherhood**

So  
two kids have me  
as their primary caretaker  
And now I tell you  
that the oldest of these children  
has a disability.  
This tells you  
nothing  
about this child,  
who is a bountiful critter,  
but it tells you something  
about  
*her position* in society.  
Having a disability  
she navigates a world  
that is not designed for her  
but rather treats her as an aberration.

En ik heb het over een kind  
dat ik graag zie  
in de intense dagelijkse praktijk  
die graag zien is  
dat is mijn kind  
en dan heb ik het niet  
over "mijn" als eigendom of nalatenschap  
maar "mijn" als nabijheid en vervlochtenheid

To love her  
in practice  
means understanding  
that her life and her bodymind  
are intrinsically valuable  
The handicap,  
though often projected onto her  
and leading to her exclusion  
leading to stress in her body  
– last year  
at the age of five

she nearly ate her winter coat,  
*maar vriendje toch!* –  
is a problem located  
in society, and the pathways  
and structures  
it has built as normal  
and functional.

Those who mother  
spend time and energy  
in nurturing and loving others.  
This reduces our functionality  
as it seen under capitalism  
- which, even as artists  
even as oeders  
we function within.

Artistry  
in as far as it is built  
on a certain prestige  
some cultural capital accumulation  
and professionalization  
was not constructed  
for people  
who mother  
it has not been built  
to incorporate  
mundane practices of care.  
I think it is crucial  
to understand that Motherhood  
in as far as it is framed  
as a problem  
for our professionalism  
is not located  
in the use of our uterus,  
the leaking of our breasts,  
or in the presence of our children.  
Like disability  
it is a problem  
located in society  
and more specifically  
in what is deemed valuable  
under capitalism  
which is not life  
certainly not the life of all  
and it is not the work of love.

4. **On parenting and art  
and what the fuck do I mean**

## **the work of love**

To do a work of love  
is not the same  
as being romantically entangled  
with your work.

I have often heard people  
who work as artists  
express their relationship to their work  
in terms of motherhood  
or parenthood  
saying things like:  
my artwork is my child  
my play is my child  
this new book  
is like my child.

I am very skeptical of this.  
I think it takes  
the disturbing connotations  
of parenthood/motherhood  
and projects them onto  
an other form of work  
casting this work into the realm of sanctity  
As if making "true art" requires  
a dedication wherein you lose yourself  
a 24/7 kind of commitment  
and something beyond and above  
ordinary work.

It often also  
implies a sense of ownership  
that I believe to be  
unhealthy  
for fostering art  
as well as for nurturing children.  
This romantic projection  
also works to exclude  
many who parent children  
- when both art and children  
require full dedication  
they become mutually exclusive.

### **5. The next to last chapter dealing with money and meaning**

Now, a lot of art work  
like parenting

goes unpaid.  
The reason I brought up capitalism  
earlier  
is that, from where I stand  
it seems that most  
people who I know  
to mother  
and work as an artist  
work from a position  
of economic precarity.

A friend of mine  
who is a dancer  
and who mothers four children  
told me recently:

I had this realization  
that I am not going to be rich  
and that I am ok with it.

We raised our morning coffees  
to this realization  
while understanding that this has implications  
for our relative freedom.

Zowel  
het zorgen voor een kind  
als het maken van kunst  
hebben een zingevende lading.  
Dat is ook zo voor mij.  
Dat zorgt ervoor dat ik dat wil doen  
en wil blijven doen  
ook al weten we dat er  
geen rijkdom zal zijn  
en heel waarschijnlijk  
een erg beperkte bestaanszekerheid.  
Over the past five years  
I have studied  
I did odd jobs  
and the work I have built  
has grown slowly.  
I now feel confident  
that there is a sustainability  
to my practice  
even though  
I expect regular breaks  
to do odd jobs  
when money is low.

This trust arises  
not from any expectation  
that my career will  
skyrocket  
and the big fat art euros  
will fly into my kindjes hun boekentassen,  
but from creating a network  
of peers  
with whom I can share life  
and practice  
and even childcare.

I think for the first time  
in my life  
I do not feel fundamentally alone,  
and this is a great leap forward  
both for the quality and experience  
of my mothering  
and for the quality and experience  
of my artistic work.

## 6. **This is how I will end today**

Dat ik hier vandaag kan zijn  
is omdat er grootouders zijn  
die op de kinderen passen.  
In Vlaanderen  
is het deze week Krokusvakantie  
the grandparents have been mothering  
the two critters born from my womb  
since Monday.

Dat ik deze tekst met u kon delen  
is omdat ik kan bouwen op werk van anderen.  
Verschillende ideeën uit deze tekst  
zijn niet meer dan herformuleringen.  
Er zijn twee specifieke referenties die ik u voor vandaag nog wil meegeven  
Er is een essay met de titel: “m/other ourselves: a Black queer feminist genealogy for radical  
mothering” van Alexis Pauline Gumbs  
En er is Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism against Family, van Sophie Lewis.  
Allebei fundamenteel voor de gedachten die ik hier heb gedeeld  
en great fun!

Thank you for your attention  
Bedankt voor jullie aandacht.  
Ik kijk uit naar het vervolg van de dag.

Line Mertens  
februari 2024  
for *(m)otherhood in de kunsten* symposium,  
De Brakke Grond, Amsterdam

Meer werk luisteren of lezen?  
<https://soundcloud.com/tiny-demolitions>

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