

Discursive Matrixes of Motherhood

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Cultivating Decency and Emotion
in Finnish and French Mother-Talk

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Helsinki 2006

Research Reports No. 249
Department of Sociology
University of Helsinki

Layout Anssi Sinnemäki / Tamara Press

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ISSN 0438-9948

ISBN 952-10-3593-5 (paperback)

Helsinki University Printing House, Helsinki 2006

Abstract

Discursive Matrixes of Motherhood examines women's discourse on their experiences of new motherhood in Finland and France. It sets out from two culturally prevalent turns of speech observed in different social forums: in conversations amongst mothers with tertiary education and in the print media. The pool of data includes: 30 interviews, 8 autobiographically inspired novels and 80 items from women's magazines. With instruments loaned from the toolbox of rhetorical analysis, the recurrence of certain expressions or *clichés* is analyzed with regard to the national, cultural, biographical, political and daily contexts and settings in which the speaking subjects are immersed.

Staying at home is such a short and special time, the first expression under scrutiny, caught the sociological eye because of its salience in Finland and because it appeared as contradictory with a core characteristic of the Finnish context: long family leave. The *cliché* was found to function as a discursive micro-mechanism which swept mothers' 'complaints' under the proverbial carpet. Proper emotions and decency in mother-talk thereby appear as collective achievements. An opposite phenomenon – that of the scaling up of rewards procured by children – was also discerned in the data. Indeed, the French catchphrase *Profiter de mon enfant* ['making the most of my child'/'enjoying my child'] is interpreted as a crystallization of a hedonist ethos of motherhood in everyday language. Secondly, the recurrence of this utterance is analyzed in the light of a requisite located in child-rearing expert literature: that of pleasure that women *should* take in mothering.

Hence, one of the rules found to structure the discursive matrixes of motherhood is the laudability and audibility of enjoyment and conversely the discretion and discouragement of 'complaints'. The cultivation of decent matches between certain categories of emotions and certain categories of individuals also appears as a characteristic of discursive matrixes. One of the methodological findings relates to the fact that such matches may be constituted as sociological objects through the identification of recurrent discursive crystallizations in a

given culture. Ideal matches may crystallize in turns of speech and mismatches can be managed through *clichés*. Becoming a mother entails an immersion in such a particular economy of speech.

Key words: mothers, motherhood, transition to parenthood, family, emotions, morality, bonds, rhetorical analysis, discourse analysis, media analysis, France, Finland, comparative sociology

Acknowledgements

Written in English by a Finn in France, *Matrixes* has fed upon the social and intellectual umbilical cords provided by my two *alma mater*: the University of Helsinki and the University of Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines. Sustenance during the research project was provided namely by the *The Family in Transition* project (2003-2005), directed by Riitta Jallinoja and financed by the Finnish Academy of Science¹; and funding was prolonged by a grant from the University of Helsinki (2006). I am therefore indebted to these two institutions.

Discussions and comments were provided by all project members along the way. My special gratitude for stimulating conversations on sociological *cuisine* and for their collegial care in Helsinki goes to Riitta Jallinoja (co-supervisor of this dissertation), Kaisa Ketokivi, Jaana Maksimainen and Anna-Maija Castrén. Mianna Meskus also commented an early version of the dissertation. Riitta's sociological nose and counselling prompted me, on several occasions, to pursue relevant trails of enquiry which surfaced in my analysis. *Kiitos*.

Invaluable support was also provided by my second supervisor (and very first supporter): Jacqueline Heinen. Her corrections, tolerance of eclectic combinations and encouragements over the years – not to mention the daily bread that I found in teaching and research positions at the Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines in the *Gender and Local Management of Change in Seven European Countries* and the *Egalité des Chances*-projects directed by Jacqueline – got me through the first years of this adventure. Working and publishing together constituted my primary socialization to the world of sociology-as-profession. *Merci*.

Occasional financing, permanent logistical help and day-to-day collegial support were also provided by members of the Laboratoire Printemps (Professions, institutions, temporalités, ESA 8085, CNRS) and its director, Didier Dumazière, at the Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines. Sharing

¹ For a presentation of the project, see <<http://www.valt.helsinki.fi/sosio/Perhmuuros/english/>>

experiences and survival tips informally and formally with doctoral students in Paris and Helsinki also lent buoyancy to this task.

I also express my gratitude towards Anne Cova and Jaana Vuori, pre-examiners of the dissertation, for their accomplishments in a time-crunch; and for cordially doing me the added honour of becoming my examiners for the viva. My acknowledgements also go to Anssi Sinnemäki, who did the layout for the dissertation and the Department of Sociology of the University of Helsinki, for including the work in its publication series.

Last but not least, I thank all the mothers and fathers, the Paris and the Helsinki area dwellers, for the gift of their time, which they took to discuss with the researcher their experiences of becoming parents at this rush-hour of their lives.

Heini Martiskainen de Koenigswarter

Béon, November 15th 2006

Matrix • noun [pl. *matrices* or *matrixes*]

A situation or surrounding substance within which something else originates, develops, or is contained. The womb. *Computer science*. The network of intersections between input and output leads in a computer, functioning as an encoder or decoder. ORIGIN: Middle English *matrice*, from Old French, from Late Latin *mâtrîx*, *mâtrîc-*, from Latin, *breeding-animal*, from *mâter*, *mâtr-*, *mother*.

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Introduction

Voicing the unvoiced: writing is this project. Mid-way between voicing and not voicing, there is the cliché, which enounces, despite wear, an element of truth. The baby makes me yield to a form of camaraderie with platitudes; renders me curious about them, gets me to turn them over like stones to see underneath, questing truths.

I listen to the rumour of the hospital, the nursery nurses, other mothers, my own education, the phrasing of magazines, the background noise of psychology: my maternal fibre. That what is called *instinct* made of sayings and proverbs, testimony and advice: ancestral prattling.

[Marie Darrieussecq, *Le bébé*, 2002: 16, original emphasis]¹

Discursive Matrixes refers to the discursive paths on which women are likely to tread when talking about their experiences of new motherhood in two cultural contexts: Finland and France. Mothers may, for example, turn to institutionalized lines of speech which overflow and spill onto and through mothers' soliloquies, dialogues, expert texts and bestsellers. Those who have strayed from conventional talk – or proper expressions of emotion – may be proposed more legitimate paths of expression. Events such as these illuminate existing cultural boundaries of decency, discursive and non discursive filters, through which discourse is funnelled. They also suggest silences or structural absences which I attempt to conjure from the sociological hat.

Accessing experiences of women as they become mothers, I argue, entails an analysis of these filters themselves. Such a position is suggested by Tina Miller's conclusion to her work, *Making Sense of Motherhood*. In the latter, the sociologist reflects on the narratives of new mothers she analyzed in these terms:

one of the threads that runs across the chapters of this book relates to what can and cannot be said about mothering and motherhood. There is some irony, then, that what I have attempted to do is capture women's accounts of transition, through a focus on narratives, in the knowledge that only particular versions of experiences will, or indeed apparently can be voiced. [Miller 2005: 154]

¹ All interview excerpts and those from printed media have been translated from Finnish and French into English. Existing English translations were preferred when sociological works were referred to, whenever they were extant and available to the researcher. However, some quotes from sociological works have been translated. They are not mentioned apart; see References, in which the title figures in the original language.

One sociologist who has suggested an analogous window or theoretical projector on experience is Dorothy Smith. The Canadian trained by Goffman and influenced by Schutz, describes her ‘business’ as the exploration of ‘*the ongoing socially ordered matrices differentiating experience and extended social relations immanent in the everyday*’ [Smith 1987: 141], thus questioning the social organization of experience; the determinations and social relations which generate it².

In *Discursive Matrixes of Motherhood*, language – and culture – are thus constituted as ‘middle spaces’ or ‘clearings’ of experience; conceived of as constituting fields of intelligibility (see e.g. Quéré 1994: 13, 23, 29–30³) and audibility. As such, I am also concerned by closure, exclusion (and silence) inherent in their boundaries (see e.g. Foucault 1971: 10–21; Butler 1993: 8)⁴. Hubert Dreyfus crystallizes this idea when he writes:

Put generally, the shared practices into which we are socialized provide a background understanding of what counts as things, what counts as human beings and what it makes sense to do, on the basis of which we can direct our actions towards particular things and people. Thus the understanding of being creates what Heidegger calls a clearing [*Lichtung*]. Heidegger calls the unnoticed way that the clearing both limits and opens up what can show up and what can be done, its ‘unobtrusive governance [*Waltens*].’ [...] In general, many of Foucault’s difficult remarks concerning power make sense if we take him to be getting at a social clearing with an emphasis on the way the everyday practices of individuals and groups are coordinated so as to produce, perpetuate, and delimit what people can think, do and be. [Dreyfus 2004]⁵

That which I believe constitutes the contribution of this piece of research to this debate – one in which the issue of social order occupies a central place –, lies in a delimited but multifarious empirical and theoretical enquiry into the everyday practices of cultivating certain emotional repertoires and boundaries of decency

² For Smith: ‘*This is to constitute the everyday world as problematic, where the everyday world is taken to be various and differentiated matrices of experience – the place from within which the consciousness of the knower begins, the location of her null point*’ [Smith 1987: 88].

³ See Grossberg for a discussion, and a critique, of such a view of culture [1997: 19–22]. Indeed, he also wishes to articulate this type of view to other angles of inquiry, including ‘*the structures and technologies of modern power*’ [ibid.20] and ‘*radically different kinds of vectors of determination – including material, affective, libidinal, semiotic, semantic, and so on*’ [ibid.: 22]. For more on this point, see section 1.3 below.

⁴ See also Bourdieu on social categories of perception as ‘*principles of vision and division*’ [1994: 24]. He argued that the imposition of a ‘dominant language’ produced class divisions *inside* a particular culture [e.g. 1994: 24, 116].

⁵ http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~hdreyfus/html/paper_being.html On Heidegger’s notion of background practices, and hermeneutics as ‘*the interpretation of the interpretation embodied in everyday practices*’, (as well as his influence on Garfinkel, Geertz, and Foucault), see Dreyfus & Rabinow 2002: xv–xix.

in mother-talk. In a sense then, this dissertation is about the power and pleasure wielded in maternal ‘sayings and proverbs’; in ‘testimony and advice’ found in interviews, novels, essays, blog notes, policy reports and articles in popular women’s magazines on motherhood.

In the chapters *It’s such a short and special time* and *Profiter de mon enfant*, respectively dedicated to the Finnish and French cases, I delve into some ingredients of an array of ready-made interpretative repertoires or available stocks of *prêt-à-parler*, which individuals are bound to have recourse to in a given culture when speaking about motherhood. Indeed, despite the plethora and polyphony of discourses to which the ‘clearing’ of late modernity is prone to – as new ideas are superposed upon dwindling or re-kindled traditional ones – some lines of thought, cultivated by the mass media and supported by experts as they may be, are, as Orwell put it, ‘more equal than others’⁶.

Such socially engineered and powered highways of thought guide and constitute us, not least because they snugly fit institutional infrastructure. In other words, the production, distribution and consumption of certain types of discourses (on motherhood for example) are powered by links to state-sponsored life politics and apparatuses (parental leave for example). Their reiteration, citational practice, or performativity produces certain types of objects, subjects and bodies [Butler 1993]; motherhood, mothering and mothers of a certain kind.

Such a framework does not entail espousing a determinist view, but recognizing *a minima*, that differentiated degrees of availability and legitimacy of discourse favour certain types of occurrences, linked as they are to wider social and cultural processes and embedded as they may be in social apparatus. Individualization – defined as the loosening of norms and the increased array of ideas and social practices amongst which individuals are called upon reflexively to ‘choose’ – can thereby be seen as taking the form of *bricolages* [de Certeau 1990: xxxix], constrained *and* actively produced by individuals as combinations of them come about in social interactions.

Hence, the discursive matrix is also about probability: that of certain elements to actualize or not to actualize. Hegemonic representations occupy its centre. Tucked away in its margins are rarer, less consensual lines of speech, detached from the moorings of institutional apparatuses. They may consequently constitute less tenable, riskier or more costly lines for individuals to voice. Costs may also arise from the non-observation of rules of discourse as

⁶ In *Animal Farm*, a satire of the Russian revolution, Orwell [1945/2004] uses this phrase to depict the hypocrisy of powerful and privileged elite proclaiming the absolute equality of citizens. Analogically, I use this quotation to convey the disingenuousness of the rhetoric of choice.

they are actively maintained. As Goffman might have put it, matrixes seem to have their ‘*superintendents, commandants, wardens, and abbots*’ [Goffman 1991: 115].

The intrigue of the dissertation is tripartite. Part I, *Setting the Scene*, firstly appraises (in chapter 1, *The Power of Categories*) the challenge of doing sociology with the discourses available to us and presents the strategies of sociologists in the face of this problem (including my own lexical choices). Chapter 2, *Data and Methods*, presents the *corpora* and toolboxes mobilized for the research. The strategy of using discursive minutiae as a springboard for sociological analysis is also reflected upon. Finally, the last chapter of Part I, *Contexts of Motherhood*, endeavours to render the national, cultural, biographical, political and daily contexts and settings in which the speaking subjects entering the scene in Part II are immersed.

In Part II, *Intensive Mothering and the Decency of Speech*, each of the chapters of the analysis starts from an institutionalized line of speech: a particular crystallized expression found in interviews, literature and/or the media. The first one, chapter 4, *Staying at home is such a short and special time*, caught the sociological eye because of its salience in the Finnish interview data and because it struck me as contradictory with one of the core characteristics of the contemporary Finnish institution of motherhood: long family leave. This finding was a crucial turning point for the research process and the dissertation can be regarded as an exploration of this enigma.

A major finding of the analysis stems from the examination of the immediate rhetorical contexts in which the saying occurs. It pinpoints a paradox that child-centred societies are prone to, namely the immense social value of wanted children and the increasing exigencies related to their care. Hence, mothers may need to persuade themselves – or be persuaded by others – that the constraints associated with childcare (particularly round-the-clock care during family leave) are only temporary: ‘*short*’. Different ways of interpreting this phenomenon are explored.

I also ask why voicing paradoxical experiences about children and mothering appears perilous and may be tempered during interactions, looking at ‘*what gets “done” to emotions*’ [S. Williams 2001: 67], which may be tinkered by others. Does framing the motherhood mandate as temporary constitute a cookie cutter solution to a disruptive life event, or perhaps to a larger maternal dilemma, i.e. ‘*is it possible to be both a mother and an autonomous individual?*’ [Allen 2005: 1]?

If I endeavour to throw light upon discursive mechanisms which also serve to sweep mothers’ complaints under the proverbial carpet, an opposite phenom-

enon – that of the scaling up of rewards procured by children – was also discerned in the pool of data. The French phrase *'profiter de mon enfant'* [‘making the most of my child’/‘enjoying my child’] is interpreted as a crystallization in everyday language of a hedonist ethos of motherhood. The workings of such a *zeitgeist* are examined at different stages of transition and related to the contemporary exigencies of the mother role.

In fine, one of the axes or rules found to structure the discursive matrixes of motherhood is the laudability and audibility of enjoyment and conversely the discretion and discouragement of ‘complaints’. From this point of view, the discursive matrix appears as a continuum, or space, in which our movements are limited: at one end lie audible matters about which speaking is socially rewarded (maternal pleasures) while the other is occupied by silent issues (maternal anger, frustration, or feelings of entrapment). Articulating a potentially disruptive life-event [Martiskainen 1998a: 66–69] and the constraints of a social role in such a matrix may be difficult. Indeed, becoming a mother entails an immersion in a particular ecology of speech; this experience is described by Marie Darrieussecq in the quote at the beginning of the chapter.

Discursive Matrixes does not claim to be a comparative study in the classical sense of the term. Rather, the laudability and audibility of enjoyment and conversely the discretion and discouragement of ‘complaints’ are present in both Finland and France. Each country, however, embodies a particular tendency. A hedonist crystallization was salient in the French interviews. Temporizing cues as a type of linguistic produce destined to cultivate proper maternal emotions particularly emerged from the Finnish interview data. In my *Conclusions*, however, I will take a step further and set forth the hypothesis that this variation in terms of the salience of elementary grammars which pre-exist individuals – and which they seize to different degrees in diverse cultural contexts – [Lamont & Thévenot 2000: 1–10] points to variations in national ethos of mothering.

Methodologically speaking, a singular feature of this piece of research is its focus, essentially, on two utterances recurring in a pool of varied, relatively vast, textual data. In an interview of one to three hours, this probably represents a few seconds or so; in sixty hours of transcribed tapes, a few minutes perhaps. Such an empirical closure on a single stylized minute piece of local knowledge – and a waste of data – is balanced (I hope) by the multiplicity of theoretical projectors cast upon these details of Finnish and French mother-talk.

Multiple lenses and the diversity of materials collected characterize the study. Indeed, retrospectively, my global research strategy consisted in placing my bets on several plausible, complementary, and *in fine* resolutely eclectic, sociologi-

cal explanations pertaining to each of the discursive paths that proved to be salient respectively in the French and Finnish contexts, and which guided the investigation. Hence, admitting a somewhat opportunistic use of various methodological and theoretical toolboxes may be due. Concepts from different authors are often deployed to serve the immediate goals of the analysis and adapted to the challenges represented by the data as new results were unravelled along the way. Fitting use of a particular concept and obtained results with the rest of the theory was not a primary concern, provided that the tool proved to be heuristic. The theoretical matrix consists of a spectrum of new angles on motherhood as a social phenomenon, and is therefore a heterogeneous one.

Hence, in a quest for sociological explanations for the observed discretion on thorny issues about contemporary mother-care arising from the data (chapters 4 & 5), I consider, in particular, ones pertaining to rules of interaction, rapid social change, and causalities of an anthropological kind. That is, the cultivation of decency is envisaged as proceeding serially: from a desire to maintain a Goffmanian ‘face’ in interactions with ‘colleagues’ (or as resulting from blunders in their identification); from cross-generational misunderstandings due to shifts in fashions of child-rearing; and as expressing the rules of a Bourdieusian game of disinterested action in which the ‘price’ of motherhood can publicly only be euphemized.

Cues for the utilization of such theoretical frameworks are grounded in the characteristics of the object of enquiry. Reported speech occurring amongst mothers (in the case of the expression ‘*it’s such a short time*’) pushed me towards an exploration of the dynamics of face-to-face interactions between generations or peers. The presence of argumentation led me to rummage through the toolboxes of discourse and rhetorical analysis. Concluding to the presence of a euphemism, reminded me of certain writings by Pierre Bourdieu. Recurrence of talk on enjoyment called for the exploration of hedonism as a contemporary *zeitgeist* at different phases of transition to motherhood, including pregnancy, and so on. Worse: I relate such phenomena to characteristics of national contexts such as the duration of parental leave.

Thematically speaking, recurrent transversal themes which run across the chapters of this piece of research are: the social construction of childhood and afferent norms, gender asymmetry, and the achievement and management of proper/improper emotions by self or others. Having confessed my misdeeds, I will quote Goffman in his introduction to the collection of essays compiled in *Asylums*, in which he notes that some repetition in the issues studied is involved. As he puts it:

Each paper approaches the central issue from a different vantage point, each introduction drawing upon a different source in sociology and having little relation to the other papers. [...] I plead the state of our discipline. I think that at present, if sociological concepts are to be treated with affection, each must be traced back to where it best applies, followed from there wherever it seems to lead, and pressed to disclose the rest of its family. Better, perhaps, different coats to clothe the children well than a single splendid tent in which they all shiver.

[Goffman 1991: 11]

In Part III, discourse on time, daily routines, and parental pleasures is looked at to examine the subjective encounter of contemporary individuals with the mother role in French and Finnish texts. In the French typology, mothers' reactions to the cultivation of decency by others are explored in three contemporary, autobiographically inspired, novels. They also illustrate three existential stances towards new motherhood. Adapting to the exigencies of the Finnish temporary homemaking contract and its 'daily' sequence is also analyzed through accounts extracted from the media.

For the researcher, the rules, conditions, and national specificities of mother-talk were a progressive discovery. This insight rose from the data, triggered by the discovery of the expression '*staying at home is such a short time*'. My interest was particularly aroused by the ontological contrast between its reiteration and the Finnish context of long family leaves. Another spark for the analysis was given by the problem of translating rhetoric minutiae from one language to another, with data in two different languages and research written up in a third one.

Particularly the expression *Profiter de mon enfant* ['making the most of my child'/'enjoying my child'] appeared a tricky and multifarious turn of speech to translate. The categorization of the different activities or experiences linked to motherhood as 'profiter' and as 'short', or discursively encapsulated as an encounter with the 'daily', provoked the researcher's curiosity for the activity of categorization, including that of sociological categorizations necessarily operating – implicitly or explicitly – in the research process. A reflection on this point will be developed in the following chapter.

PART ONE
|
SETTING THE SCENE

1 The power of categories (the sociological clearing)

Michel de Certeau, building upon Wittgenstein, has pinpointed the conditions of feasibility of philosophical and sociological writing as follows: inexorably caught in the webs of language, we can only struggle with its boundaries [de Certeau 1990: 26, 30; see also Denzin 2001:149].

The culprit constraining us to such an endless task has sometimes been designated under the umbrella concept of ‘categorization’, understood here as an ongoing organization of an infinitely complex and dispersed reality by the means of concepts (principles of selection of certain objects amidst a potentially infinite universe of objects), categories (as ‘classes’ of things, events, beings and phenomena), and words (or denominations)¹. Concepts, categories, clusters of categories, and words may therefore be understood as constituting formal conditions of thought and of the organization of knowledge (technical elements which structure systems of thought in a given society)²; as signs which come to represent reality or labels encoding it; but also, as constitutive of phenomena (e.g. see Quéré 1994: 17, 20 drawing upon Cassirer 1977; Bourdieu 1996 in the section below³).

Generating possibilities for thought and action, concepts and categories can also be seen as mediating a closure of reality. The ‘clearing’ thus created [Dreyfus 2004, referring to Heidegger; see also Quéré 1994: 13, 23, 29–30] is therefore indissociable from exclusion – of that which is rejected as unintelligible (see e.g. Butler 1993: 8; Potter 1996: 15–16). And principles of selection/exclusion and maintenance of reality are linked to power. Categorization should

¹ In the paragraph, I have adapted ideas from Quéré’s article on different approaches of categorization [1994].

² Foucault can be regarded as one of the authors who expanded an interest in categories (and their clusters) to discursive formations and apparatus. In between the ‘category’ and ‘discourse’, Jokinen, Juhila & Suoninen evoke unities of analysis such as ‘narratives’, ‘local knowledge’ and ‘frames’. The category is thus one of the smallest events of language use in discourse analysis [Jokinen, Juhila & Suoninen 2002: 69; see also Vuori 2001: 83]. It would seem that an interest in ‘categories’ has somewhat waned; Rod Watson [1994] argues for example that the interest demonstrated by Sacks towards categories in conversation analysis has been buried prematurely.

³ Referring to Cassirer É. (1977). *Substance et fonction*. Paris: Minuit.

therefore be also apprehended as a regulated process of instituting social realities and generating their practical accomplishment [Quéré 1994: 20].

The following section tracks down a selection of strategies deployed by sociologists in their endeavour to outwit such discursive matrixes.

1.1 DOING SOCIOLOGY: NATURAL, OFFICIAL AND THEORETICAL CATEGORIES

Straightforwardly for our purposes, Howard Becker calls categorization a 'plague' for sociologists: '*The social scientist's problem, simply, is what to call the things we study*' [1999]. If we give credit to his remark, then lexical choice should be considered as a central aspect of research strategy.

The sociological categorizing of phenomena is a delicate affair, namely because social universes are saturated by terminologies for the persons, events and objects involved in them, prior to any sociological involvement. The methodological stakes of categorizing are also linked to the textual politics of research, Becker argues:

If we choose to name what we study with words the people involved already use, we acquire, with the words, the attitudes and perspectives the words imply. [...] Those perspectives invariably take much for granted, making assumptions about what might better be treated, social scientifically, as problematic. [...] What things are called almost always reflects relations of power. People in power call things what they want to and others have to adjust to that, perhaps using their own words in private, but accepting in public what they cannot escape.

[Becker 1999]

Two exigencies seem to be put forward by Becker, namely: the necessity of circumspection *vis-à-vis* commonsense or 'natural categories' and *vis-à-vis* institutional schemata or 'official categories', both liable to colonize sociological work. An issue which is not raised here is the sociologist's intellectual commerce with existing 'theoretical categories', which also format the field of enquiry. Sociological authorship, in this sense, is always and already a collective enterprise (e.g. de Certeau 1990: 72). Each book, author and field of knowledge is '*caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences*' [Foucault 2005: 25]⁴.

⁴ As Smith puts it, the sociologist is also 'inside the Whale' [1987: 142]. Luhmann was dissatisfied with the state of sociology because the discipline '*remains dependent on working with the data that it produces itself, and, where theory is concerned, on working with the classical authors that it has itself produced*' [Luhmann, N. (1995). *Social systems*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. (page 11) quoted by Viskovatoff 1999].

The three terms in quotation marks above – natural, official and theoretical categories – were coined by Didier Demazière and Claude Dubar. As implied above, natural or lay categories pop up in everyday interactions. It is this type of linguistic produce which figures in interviews or everyday conversations. Official categories constitute normative codifications typically used by administrations. They tend to constitute pre-structured cognitive schemata that trickle into lay talk (e.g. ‘psych’ terminology at work in healthcare, family policy, and the media, is also commonly referred to by laypersons)⁵. A third type of category is also distinguished by the authors: theoretical categories, i.e. concepts elaborated by the sociologist [Demazière & Dubar 1997: 80].

It follows that the researcher is called upon to make a working-decision concerning the status of each of these ‘categories of categories’. For Demazière & Dubar, empirical research, inasmuch as discourse is effectively taken into account, ideally consists of an attentive analysis of natural categories and a passage towards theoretical ones, via a distance taken from official categories⁶.

Banishing categories

Pierre Bourdieu provides us with an interesting illustration of the above sociological endeavour and of the textual politics of research. Characteristic of his writings on kinship, marriage and the family is the manner in which Bourdieu eschews the category ‘family’. The rationale of this option appears in an article originally published in 1993: ‘On The Family as a Realized Category’ [1996].

‘Family’ is qualified as a ‘watchword’, a ‘well-founded illusion’ or a realized ‘fiction’ [1996: 21, 25] and regarded by the author as invested in bodily form through the mediation of categories ‘*because they make the consensus on the existence and the meanings of things, the common sense, the doxa accepted by all as self-evident*’ [Bourdieu 1996: 21, original emphasis]⁷. Nevertheless, after shooting off from so radical an ethnomethodological stance – ‘*In the social world, words make things*’ [ibid: 20] – Bourdieu proceeds to enlarge this

⁵ Hence, post-partum depression for example may be commonly explained as resulting from the necessity of ‘coming to terms’ with one’s childhood.

⁶ Bourdieu has been one of the most virulent critiques of official categories and their effect on ‘mental structures’ (he has sometimes referred to this as the ‘State in the head’) – and of the social divides reproduced through the imposition of (one) ‘legitimate culture’ in the French school system (e.g. 1996: 24; 1994: 114–116).

⁷ Common sense representations, according to ‘some ethnomethodologists’ include that of the ‘family’ as: a valorised configuration of relationships; a reality transcending its members and a separate social universe of privacy and gratuitousness, associated to an enduring locus: the home [Bourdieu 1996: 20].

perspective⁸. This is accomplished, firstly, by incorporating the notion of practice in his theory. ‘Family’ and afferent emotional bonds, he purports, are also produced through daily, ritual, practical and symbolic labour of its members, particularly that of women. Concrete maintenance work, therefore, works hand in hand with performative effects of naming [ibid: 24]⁹. Moreover, (often state sponsored) rites of institution:

aim to constitute the family by constituting it as a united, integrated entity which is therefore stable, constant, indifferent to the fluctuations of individual feelings. And these inaugural acts of creation (imposition of a family name, marriage, etc.) have their logical extension in the countless acts of reaffirmation and reinforcement that aim to produce, in a kind of continuous creation, the *obliged affections* and *affective obligations* of family feeling [conjugal love, paternal and maternal love, filial love, brotherly and sisterly love etc.]

[Bourdieu 1996: 22, original emphasis]¹⁰

Viewed through Bourdieu’s lens, maternity leave comes into sight as an inaugural rite instituting mothers as primary carers to effectuate the practical and symbolic work of mothering.

Another departure from the ethnomethodological stance occurs in the article, when Bourdieu raises the question of other extant mechanisms contributing to the genesis, maintenance and creation of content for the category ‘family’. Bourdieu’s point is that ‘this principle of social construction is *itself* socially constructed’ [ibid: 20–21, emphasis added], namely through institutional labour. Indeed, the sociologist also views the ‘family’ as ‘*produced and reproduced with the guarantee of the state*’ by statisticians, demographers, social workers, soci-

⁸ See also Quéré’s analysis of the same article by Bourdieu [Quéré 1994: 30–33].

⁹ See DeVault on the daily production of family as a gendered process [1994: 54]. Such an idea also bears interesting resemblances with post-structuralist feminist perspectives of doing or performing gender such as Butler’s [e.g. 1993, 1999]; the work of Goffman [1959] and Garfinkel [2004: 116–185]. In Bourdieu’s article, ‘performance’ and practice are articulated in terms of the circular process of interiorization and exteriorization of social structure through the workings of the habitus (of which the article constitutes a concrete illustration: Reed-Danahay 2005: 114). Because primary socialization has a prominent place in this theory, Bourdieu counters the ethnomethodological emphasis on ‘on the spot’ construction of social reality. Indeed, Bourdieu resumes his critique of the ethnomethodological stance as follows: ‘*Ethnomethodological critique leaves unanswered the questions of the genesis of the social categories of construction of social reality, the acquisition of the durable dispositions that constitute the habitus. Similarly, it fails to address the question of the social conditions of possibility both of this process of acquisition and of the family as a realized category*’ [Bourdieu 1996: 26 fn 4, original emphasis].

¹⁰ On emotions in Bourdieu’s work, namely a ‘softening stance’, in his late work, *Masculine Domination*, see Reed-Danahay [2005: 118–121], who writes: ‘*Bourdieu’s arguments can be seen as being on the verge of new understandings of collectivity and social relationships based not solely on struggle and domination but also on a form of communitas*’. [ibid: 121, original emphasis].

ologists and judges; through performances of official recording; in social and housing policy, etc. [Bourdieu 1996: 25].

This process of reproduction of ‘family’ simultaneously as a lay, official and theoretical category is depicted by Bourdieu in the quote below:

In a kind of circle, the native category, having become a scientific category for demographers, sociologists and especially social workers who, like official statisticians, are invested with the capacity to work on reality, to make reality, helps to give real existence to that category.

[Bourdieu 1996: 25]

As DeVault puts it, leaning upon Gubrium and Holstein [1990]:

People hear and talk about families; they learn what families are supposed to be, and they work at forming families and experiencing them as they believe they should.

[DeVault 1994: 15¹¹]

Hence, not only does Bourdieu underline the insufficiency of an approach exclusively in terms of a horizontal, consensual, discursive production of the family through interactions in everyday life. *In fine*, he drafts a theory of a heterogeneous matrix of representations and practice: of a discursive *and* ritual/practical *and* political production of ‘the family’¹².

Frame breaking

Besides avoidance, another option which enables researchers to shake off commonsense emanating from lay talk, or to counter the implications of expert *verdicta dicta*, is the ‘surprise effect’. The latter can be depicted as the making of lexical choices which destabilize the assumptions that words carry in their wake.

A first example of tactics of this sort is constituted by Pierre Bourdieu’s use of the term ‘marriage strategies’¹³. Indeed, through this expression, the sociolo-

¹¹ Gubrium J. & J. Holstein [1990]. *What is Family?* Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.

¹² ‘Thus the family as an objective social category [a structuring structure] is the basis of the family as a subjective social category [a structured structure], a mental category which is the matrix of countless representations and actions [e.g. marriages] which help to reproduce the objective social category. The circle is that of reproduction of the social order’ [Bourdieu 1996: 21].

¹³ ‘Strategies’ applied to marriage designate the interactions and ‘games’ between families, kin – or individuals – who, more or less implicitly, negotiate partnering by taking into account the different types of capitals possessed by the partners and the rules of the field, which may sometimes be strategically combined in ingenious ways. The objective of such manoeuvres is to maintain or increase the capitals possessed by the kinship entity.

gist not only breaks with an approach of a structuralist type, but also effectuates the coupling of the semantic universe of love and gratuitousness spontaneously associated to ‘marriage’ with one opposed in character: that of warfare and economic calculation, implied by the term ‘strategy’ [Bourdieu 1976].

Erving Goffman, whose works Bourdieu edited in France, is considered by some as a master in this genre¹⁴. Indeed, alongside an ‘unerring eye’ [Elias 1998b: 168] and the *finesse* of empirical descriptions – qualified as ‘*a prose whose precision is as close to that of numbers as conceptual language can be*’ by Berger [1986: xii] – Howard Becker, Thomas Scheff and Bennett Berger have underlined another quality inherent in his writing: the originality of his vocabulary. Berger evokes Goffman’s prolificacy in contributing to new phrases to sociological language, designated as ‘*insights-become-concepts*’ [ibid: xiii]. For Howard Becker, Goffman’s linguistic strategy lies in the ‘*considerable disparity between the social reality he is talking about and the way he talks about it*’ [Becker 1999]. In Scheff’s terms: ‘*he invented a panoply of new words and usages in a frontal attack on the assumptive world of modern societies*’ [2005].

Indeed, ‘On the Characteristics of Total Institutions’, one out of the four essays published in Goffman’s *Asylums* in 1961, serves as an exemplary illustration for Becker’s argument. In this text, a mental hospital is defined in an ‘antiseptic’ mode as a kind of ‘establishment’ or ‘institution’ amongst others: a home, an office, a factory, a school or a hospital. Merchant ships, boarding schools, monasteries, army barracks, for example, fall in the same category or kind as the asylum: ‘total institutions’¹⁵. Robert Castel, in his French presentation of *Asylums*, speaks of the theoretical displacement effectuated by Goffman who, in a work concerned by the internment of the ‘alienated’, seems decided to ignore the reason of their isolation and malady in order to ‘*treat the institution of the hospital like any social establishment specialized in the guarding of humans*’ [1968: 8]. According to Becker, in *Asylums* Goffman: ‘*might just as well be describing an ant hill or a bee hive as a common form of social institution*’ [1999]¹⁶.

Through recourse to dedramatization and generalized abstraction, negative connotations linked to mental hospitals are thus tamed in *Asylums* by creating

¹⁴ Winkin evokes Bourdieu’s editorial efforts in the collection ‘Sens commun’ at Editions de Minuit and his contribution to the fact that Goffman’s work has been translated more abundantly in French than that of any other American sociologist [1988: 7].

¹⁵ For a definition of total institutions, see chapter 5 and note infra.

¹⁶ In a sense, through his categorization strategy, he ‘dehumanizes’ an institution, which he precisely reveals as such: one which has the power to ‘*strip a person of everything he or she was*’ [Berger 1986: xvi]. His use of theatrical metaphors (e.g. in the *Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* [actor, role, line, performance, back-stage, etc.]) also countered common sense ideas of an ‘authentic’ self.

affinities with other types of institutions or ‘establishments’. New disturbing connotations are also concocted. Indeed, other examples of semantic displacement or destabilization, which help to disperse the constellation of affects, assumptions and moral judgments linked to the sociological object of the mental hospital are: the designation of patients as ‘inmates’ (throughout the book), – or still, Goffman’s description of staff as effectuating ‘people work’ or ‘tinkering-service’ on ‘human materials’ (e.g. 1991: 73–74, 283–300).

This virtuoso in (often ephemeral) category creation has been criticized, however, for the lazy explanation of his concepts (e.g. Scheff 2005; Winkin 1998: 47–48). Evoking ‘Goffman’s endless development of new concepts and systems of classification, Scheff suggests that his main force was possibly a capacity for deconstruction: ‘Goffman’s main purpose was preliminary to science, to demolish ruling tropes [metaphors] in order to make room for scientific method’ [2005: 5, 6].

Yet another interesting exemplar of language games in the social sciences, played in parallel with full recognition of their power and extended knowledge of their archaeology and genealogy, is to be found in Michel Foucault. In *Le Vocabulaire de Foucault*, Judith Revel [2002: 3] detects three types of categorization strategies in his works: a usage of inherited philosophical concepts; the reconversion of scientific terms by investing them with new meanings; and the creation of novel terminology, occasionally imported from everyday talk¹⁷.

Foucault’s interest does not lie in everyday understandings of actors (natural categories). He was mainly concerned by ‘serious speech acts’ [Dreyfus and Rabinow 2002: xiii, 47], that is, expert discourse (official categories) and the disciplinary categories of the human sciences (theoretical categories), which structure the possibilities and impossibilities of thought – and their links to power in a society traversed by an ‘increasing organization of everything’ [ibid: xxii]. In his studies on discourse and discursive formations *per se* (e.g. 2005 (1969)); on their articulation with non-discursive practices of government, such as the ‘art of distributions’ and other disciplinary technologies of living matter (e.g. 1991)¹⁸; or

¹⁷ Foucault ironically wrote on his creation of novel terminologies: ‘You have precipitated a whole series of notions [...] you have spoken of formations, positivities, knowledge, discursive practices: a whole panoply of terms whose uniqueness and marvelous powers you were proud to point out at every step’ [2005: 219–220].

¹⁸ For a synthesis on the relationship between discourse and non-discursive practices in Foucault’s work, see Dreyfus and Rabinow [2002: e.g. xx–xxi] and Revel [2002: 22–25]. For Revel, Foucault conceives of discursive formations alternatively as supporting practices or engendering them. In his later work, he shifts his emphasis from the notion of episteme (discourse as a closed system) to that of apparatus (a heterogeneous *ensemble*, including discourses, practices, institutions and tactics, e.g. his ‘*dispositif*’ or apparatus of sexuality).

on the discursive constitution of subjects exploring their selves accordingly to the ‘truths’ of an epoch [1984a] – the ‘masked philosopher’ challenged the trope of the a-historical subject.

Worlds apart; Erving Goffman focusing on interaction and the ‘*coercive power over actors*’ of situations [Arminen 2005: 11] and Michel Foucault, absorbed by the impact of forces beyond the frame of the situation, both nevertheless seem driven by a fascination for the issues of social order (a major preoccupation, in passing, for Pierre Bourdieu also (e.g. 2002: 11)); the balance of power and self-work. In their frontal attacks on dominant conceptions of the Western ‘normal’ subject – and its Other, the ‘mentally ill’ – the one and the other appear as ‘*trope clearer(s)*’ or ‘*giant killer(s)*’ [Scheff 2005: 6], as ‘*rule-breaker(s)*’ or ‘*frame-breaker(s)*’ [Berger 1986: xvii]; as a philosopher or a sociologist with ‘*a bad-boy*’ temperament [ibid.]¹⁹.

Another common denominator lies in their twin-track method of braiding a dizzying array of microscopic plethora and original minutiae with a panoramic view of social practices, a technique which they share with Norbert Elias (see also Pierre Bourdieu’s study of the Kabyle house (1980)). Thus for Clifford Geertz, Foucault’s art ‘*supports sweeping summary with eccentric detail*’ [Geertz 1978, quoted by Dreyfus and Rabinow 2002: xiv²⁰]. Thomas Scheff, in turn, evokes Goffman’s competence in constructing a grounded theory by ‘*lint combing*’ for particulars [2005: 7]. As such, they encouraged the researcher to alternate ‘parts and wholes’ in the analytic procedure [Scheff 1997; 2005], in associating the ‘lint combing’ of *corpora* with theoretical effort and in intertwining discursive and non-discursive effects .

The power of categories has also been identified as a strategic nexus in feminist scholarship (see examples in Braidotti 1994: 8; Haraway 1991: 86; Smith 1987:68)²¹. Casting theoretical projectors on women’s activities of ‘unpaid work’ and ‘care’ for example, has meant bursting the bubbles of extant frameworks of mainstream thought and theory and those governing the worlds of welfare capitalism²² – as well as searching for a ‘conceptual home’ [Smith: 1987: 68] for women’s activities. This piece of research displays affinities with such feminist endeavours.

¹⁹ These are terms employed by both authors *with regard to* Erving Goffman.

²⁰ The quote is from a review by Geertz in *The New York Review of Books* [26.1.1978].

²¹ Braidotti calls for ‘*positive renaming, for opening up new possibilities for life and thought*’ [Braidotti 1994: 8].

²² For an overview of conceptualizations of care and unpaid work, see e.g. Letablier 2001; F. Williams 2001. In his epilogue to *Les Trois mondes de l’Etat-Providence*, Esping-Andersen notes that the most pertinent critique of his welfare typology has come from feminist quarters [1999: 277].

Beyond the scope of individual tactics *vis-à-vis* categorization, Demazière and Dubar underline the varying degree of importance granted to natural, official and theoretical categories by different bodies of sociological work. In the sixties, they underscore, at one end of a sociological continuum, structuralism reified theoretical categories [1997: 75], positing as it did, a ‘*universality and eternity of logical categories which govern “the unconscious activity of the mind”*’ [Bourdieu 1980: 69]²³, in an attempt to ‘*dispense with both meaning and the subject by finding objective laws which govern all human activity*’ [Dreyfus and Rabinow 2002: xv].

At the other end of the sociological continuum, this vertical ‘God’s eye-view’ [Denzin 2001: 3] found its adversary in the ethnomethodological perspective of the lay sociologist (e.g. Garfinkel 2004: 75). Inclined towards a horizontal view of the distribution of knowledge, Garfinkel views society as an ‘*ongoing accomplishment of the concerted activities of daily life*’ [2004: vii]. His analysis focuses on the mobilizing of a repertoire of commonsense practices and knowledge in a process of coordinated communication, description and meaning-giving, through which actors, *in fine*, give form to [particular] common universes²⁴. Actors’ everyday actions, particularly discursive activities, are studied in their local context of linguistic production [Lallement 2000: 216].

Natural categories are thus placed in the fulcrum of this type of research. So, while the structuralist ‘*extracts documents from their historical context and eliminates the operations of the speaker*’ [de Certeau 1990: 38], ethnomethodology denies the pertinence of replacing context-specific, indexical categories, which arise in interaction, by theoretical ones²⁵. This implies a strong postulate: actions (at least those which are not exterior to us) are reportable, describable and analyzable through language [Lallement 2000: 219]²⁶.

Ever since the debunking of ‘big’ Marxist or structuralist theories of the sixties and seventies and the rehabilitation of the actor, Demazière and Dubar note,

²³ Bourdieu criticises structural anthropology for bypassing the interplay between logical categories and the division of labour [1980: 69, 70]. Of course, the oscillation between different postures in the course of a sociological career (or possibly inside a text) is also a patent phenomenon. Bourdieu himself, and Foucault, were categorized as ‘structuralists’ by peers at one point of their careers. Even Goffman has been designated as such for his stance in the first chapters of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* [1959] by Scheff [2005].

²⁴ ‘*Ethnomethodological studies analyze everyday activities as members’ methods for making those same activities visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes, i.e. “accountable”*’ [Garfinkel 2004: vii]. Hence, ‘ethno’ implies that members dispose of a reservoir of commonsense knowledge of society and ‘method’ suggests a practical type of reasoning of a sociological type [Lallement 2000: 216].

²⁵ De Certeau quotes Wittgenstein: ‘*Don’t ask for the meaning, ask for the use*’ [ibid: 313].

²⁶ Goffman [1986: 11] and Lefebvre [2005: 20] subscribe to this point of view.

the status given to lay discourse in empirical research varies – and is not always explicated. A common type of treatment of subjects’ discourse for example, – located somewhere in between the two aforementioned stances –, consists of a purely *illustrative* use of the interview corpus [1997: 16–24]. In this type of work, subjects’ discourse is a research topic, but the interpretative grid of the sociologist tends to be more or less unilaterally superposed upon lay interpretations. This boils down to subordinating natural categories to theoretical ones.

This perspective described by Demazière and Dubar resembles that which Dreyfus and Rabinow refer to as ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ [2002: xix]. Garfinkel and Sacks called such a stance ‘ironical’ [Demazière and Dubar 1997: 75; Garfinkel 2004: viii]; while Dorothy Smith describes a similar attitude as a ‘puppet’ approach [Smith 1987: 112].

According to Demazière and Dubar, the structuralist, ethnomethodological or illustrative postures are not totally satisfactory, as all neglect a confrontation of several types of categorizations [Demazière and Dubar 1997: 81]. I have tried to make this principle mine. Indeed, such a contention is not incompatible with post-structuralist perspectives according to which individuals can be understood as ‘*nodal points at the intersection of the array of culturally available discourses*’ [Layder 1997: 239]²⁷.

My interest in categorization stemmed from my stumbling upon minute discursive produce: words, categories, or their recurrent combinations. Besides a close reading of my corpus in terms of natural categories and clusters of them that pop up in mother-talk in different social settings and contexts, one of my sociological tasks has been relating them to each other; to official discourses (chapters 4, 5 & 6); and possibly to sociological ones (e.g. chapter 5). In a sense then, the whole work can be regarded as an account of an ongoing engendering of the category ‘motherhood’ in contemporaneity (on this category see section 1.3).

Discourses available in a culture, however, may be unequally produced by and adaptable for the purposes of different categories of members. The following section seeks to examine the idea of a *gendered* ‘clearing’ of culture.

²⁷ This, however, does not mean bypassing other social domains implicated in the build-up of subjects. Indeed, Layder [1997: vii], likewise authors cited above, e.g. Grossberg and Foucault and Hacking, see below, argues for taking into account heterogeneous vectors of causality.

1.2 GENDERED CATEGORIES

Dorothy Smith, a major figure of standpoint feminism²⁸, conceives of capitalism and its ideology of separate spheres as a particular textual organization, thus integrating language in her vision of power relations [Smith 1987: 16–17; van der Post 2005: 21]. In an early but influential essay, ‘A Peculiar Eclipsing’, Smith argued that in a society mediated by texts, the categories through which we understand our worlds are not generally representative, relevant, or adequate to express many of the typical experiences which life as a woman in our societies induces [1987: 18].

Lopsided official monuments of discourse may ‘*have arisen inadvertently as a concomitant of women’s location in the world*’ [their under-representation in public arenas] [ibid.: 25]. Official categories are therefore what Smith would call an ‘extralocal’ produce, which tends to be disjoint from the local, everyday activities of women. But Smith also envisaged the exclusion of women from the general ‘clearing’ of culture as produced through social disapproval, active repression, – and various institutional processes [ibid.]²⁹.

As general a contention does not sit easily in contemporaneousness: the exponential increase in texts produced by women; the rise of feminisms as public and political discourse; a progressive incorporation of gender studies in academia and the consequent formation of sub-disciplines and hierarchies; the presence of gender equality on the agenda of various polities; while issues such as ‘reconciling’ work and family life or violence against women are negotiated in institutional contexts³⁰.

²⁸ Standpoint feminism designates a body of works but authors thus labeled do not, however, always identify with their colleagues (e.g. Hartsock 1998: 227, 245). Nancy Hartsock, Dorothy Smith, Sandra Harding, Patricia Hill Collins, Hilary Rose and Donna Haraway have been designated as such. On gynocentric feminism and standpoint epistemologies see e.g. Anttonen 1997: 26–27; 32–49; 110–111, 116; 207; Ho & Schrader 2004. Anttonen also charts the influence of gynocentric and standpoint feminism on the paradigms of care and citizenship. For a short synthesis of feminist science critique see e.g. van der Post 2004: 13–18.

²⁹ Hence, as fields of human activity are annexed by rationality, our grids of perception are modelled: ‘*A mode of ruling has become dominant that involves a continual transcription of the local and particular actualities of our lives into abstracted and generalized forms. It is an extralocal mode of ruling. Its characteristic modes of consciousness are objectified and impersonal; its relations are governed by organizational logics and exigencies [...] vested in and mediated by texts and documents, and constituted externally to particular individuals and their personal and familial relationships*’ [Smith 1987: 3, original emphasis].

³⁰ These are issues recognized by Smith, who nevertheless also underscores the lameness of feminism in institutional life, the partial legitimacy of gender studies in academia, and the often paradoxical effects of the accommodation of issues salient in women’s lives to legal, professional and administrative *niches* [1987: 220].

Indeed, Ho and Schraner have underscored the paradoxical perception of standpoint epistemologies by young academics: while its claim of situated knowledge has been '*widely accepted, to a point where it has become common sense in much social science scholarship*', it is liable to be considered a quaint relic of feminism's less sophisticated past [2004: 8, 13]. Nevertheless, research consistently records the persistence of what Dorothy Smith calls a 'line of fault, an *'actual or potential disjuncture between experience and the forms in which experience is socially expressed*' [1987: 50]³¹.

For example, in her empirical work, *Feeding the Family*, Marjorie DeVault records '*a lack of fit between women's experiences and the forms of thought available for understanding experience*' [DeVault 1994: 5]. An illustration of this point is the dichotomised categorization of life as 'work' and 'leisure'; it simply does not correspond to mothers' experiences (see also Smith 1987: 68; Hartsock 1998: 115). DeVault has effectuated a sensitive approach of the incompletely acknowledged aspects of women's everyday work in the home: the skills, efforts and the reflexive coordination and interaction work involved in *feeding the family* – an activity subordinated to the schedules and subtle pressures of pleasing others. And what they paradoxically tend to produce in their actual forms of organization in contemporary society: highly valued human connections at the price of gender inequality.

DeVault writes: '*We lack an adequate language for the work of everyday caring and sociability*', of which the workful character goes often unrecognized even by those doing it because it evades articulate consciousness [1994: 228]. For the author, this implied adopting a research strategy focused upon the difficulties of expression of her interviewees: on the gaps and contradictions in accounts; '*noticing and bringing to speech that which is not easily said*' [DeVault 1994: 229]. Her work also suggests that not only repertoires of speech about 'doing family' in the manner in which the women she interviewed actually 'did it' were lacking, but that public discourse said something else:

Fully representing the work of 'feeding the family' then, requires a kind of double vision: it means seeing the activity itself, and also the way the activity is constructed in public discourse.

[DeVault 1994: 230]³²

³¹ More radically still, researchers have posited that gendered activities and life worlds have unequally crystallized in discourse *per se* and remain invisible if envisaged through androcentric frameworks of thought prevailing in society at large (e.g. see Rich 1997: 11, 15; Hartsock 1998: 124, 243; DeVault 1994: 5–6, 11, 227–230; Jokinen 1997: 12, 17; Paperman 2006: 282; see also Anttonen 1997: 32, 42–43, 46).

³² In Demazière's & Dubar's terms, a co-examination of natural and official categories pertain-

The necessity, for DeVault, to reconstitute the ‘puzzle’ of her interviewees’ activities was partly a result of the intrinsically lower visibility of the mental processes and interpersonal competences mobilized by women; of the degree of interiorization of multifarious routines by her interviewees; but also, crucially, of a difficulty of explicitation which also hinged upon the fact that the mother was *‘the only one who needs to understand’* [DeVault 1994: 72]. This constitutes a profound message about the status of an individual in the community. Indeed, importantly, Marjorie DeVault argues that *‘taken-for-granted, largely unarticulated understandings of family stand in the way of equity’* [ibid: 236], suggesting that commonsensical ongoing achievement of ordinary daily life is a power issue (see my citation of Henri Lefebvre at the beginning of the subchapter ‘The daily matrix’).

An illuminating anecdote in which analogous mechanisms to those described by Dorothy Smith can be seen to be at work is recounted by Kergoat et al. [1992]. The events took place in the late 1980s in the cabinet of the French minister of Health. A collaborator confronted with an organization of nurses, which broke from the line of the official labour unions of hospitals demanding better working conditions and improved standards of care, recounts why, from his point of view, the nurses did not succeed in their endeavour.

It was incredible, the girls of the coordination, they would all tell you details of their everyday life! They were moving, they touched you, but how can you negotiate with a snapshot of daily life?

[Kergoat et al. 1992: 102 fn 7]

As regards one of the nurses, she declared:

We realized that quality of care was not their preoccupation. For them, it just has to function, without taking the human into account. They don’t know what a hospital is about: our life.

[Kergoat et al. 1992: 98]

Pascale Molinier has proposed an interpretation of this scene. During this interview, an instrumental point of view was passed off and the nurses’ action was reduced to ‘feminine pathos’. The relegation of emotions to the sphere of sub-

taining to women’s activities would be heuristic. However, Paperman writes that a radical shifting of one’s viewpoint is necessary before women’s experiences of care can be heard: *“Even the possibility of hearing what women are saying in interviews otherwise than as confirming ideas rooted in gender stereotypes, necessitates doubting the self-evident character of a moral viewpoint [of an ‘ethic of justice’] which exhibits a remarkable discontinuity with certain ‘ordinary’ experiences”* [Paperman 2006: 282]. DeVault, however, also underlines the vexed character of representing women’s experiences. As researchers write on silences, they *‘begin to talk and write beyond them’* [1994: 227].

jectivity, Molinier suggests, is a mechanism through which women's daily experiences with dependent others are excluded from 'serious business' [Molinier 2003: 134]. Nurses did not have an articulated discourse powerful enough to influence the French government's policy. Feminist research on care, however, has progressively achieved the status of an acceptable modality of discourse in the political arena. Letablier, for example, has noted that 'care' is now an established category in the official terminology of the European Union [Letablier 2001: 20]³³.

From her own experience, DeVault therefore incites researchers to establish 'a clear and honest assessment of both the value of care and its darker side' [1994: 4]. This dissertation also partakes in such an endeavour by delving into categorizations pertaining to mother-experience and mothering.

1.3 A GENEALOGY OF CATEGORIES: 'MATRIX' & 'MOTHERHOOD'

Pursing such a line of thought, in the sections below, two of the categories which compose the title of this research – 'matrix' & 'motherhood' – are placed under sociological scrutiny. The aim of these two sections is not an essentially historical or descriptive one. Rather, by explicating my lexical strategies (an undertaking towards which Howards Becker exhorted us above), I will in parallel take a step further in mapping the theoretical framework of the dissertation.

'Matrix'

Matrix • noun [pl. *matrices* or *matrixes*]

A situation or surrounding substance within which something else originates, develops, or is contained. The womb. *Computer science*. The network of intersections between input and output leads in a computer, functioning as an encoder or decoder. ORIGIN: Middle English *matrice*, from Old French, from Late Latin *mâtrîx*, *mâtrîc-*, from Latin, *breeding-animal*, from *mâter*, *mâtr-*, *mother*.³⁴

Although *Discursive Matrixes of Motherhood* is principally concerned with the study of the discursive paths and rules of mother-talk, in chapter 3 *Contexts of*

³³ On the concept of care, see also Hobson et al. 2002; Paperman & Laugier 2006.

³⁴ Extracted from The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition. 2000. <<http://www.bartleby.com/61/35/M0153500.html>>

Motherhood, I will also refer to a ‘policy matrix’ and a ‘daily matrix’. They point to virtual social programmes of gendered parenting objectified in parental leave policy which actualize by dint of the sequence of daily life. Indeed, because of its etymological links to ‘womb’, to ‘mother’ and a problematic of reproduction [Butler 1993: 31], as well to the idea of a network of connections (generated by appropriation of the term by computer science), the category ‘matrix’ appeared to me – not only as a pun – but as an appropriate lexical strategy for designating the reciprocal workings of heterogeneous, ongoing social activities involved in the build-up of (maternal) subjects and the social production the experience of ‘motherhood’ (see below)³⁵.

Below, I propose to consider four authors having made use of the term in their sociological, historical or philosophical works: Norbert Elias, Nancy Fraser, Ian Hacking, and Judith Butler. The first illustration of the sociological use of the notion is provided by Norbert Elias, who, as far as I know, did not make consistent use of the category in his work. When explaining his choice of title for *The Court Society*, Elias insists on the centrality of the court in Western European societies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a societal matrix influencing innumerable dimensions of social life. He also establishes an analogy between the court and the contemporary city:

Within every social field there are representative and less representative, central and less central organs. The town, for example, and above all the large city, is one of the most representative organs of our own society. In our social field it represents the matrix with by far the most far-reaching influence; even the inhabitants of country districts cannot escape its effects however hard they try. The most influential human types in our society either come from the city or at least have received its stamp. In this sense, therefore, urban people are representative of our society.

[Elias 1998a: 14]

³⁵ Another umbrella term considered for characterizing the object of research was ‘socialization’. Socialization, primary or secondary, also implies different types of continuous processes, plural instances and variable results of socialization. Parents, kin, friends, child minders, schools, states, media, partners, peers, colleagues, social workers, political or religious associations, etc. are agents and instances which distil norms, values, models – influence practices – and set material conditions for lives. They affect human materials synchronically and diachronically, by appealing to consciousness or not. Socializing instances are more or less invested by moral or emotional authority; and processes are more or less constraining and direct [Darmon 2006: 108–111]. Hence, the organization of space and diverse institutions as apparatus for transforming individuals [Foucault 1991; Goffman 1991]; body techniques [Mauss 2004: 365–386; Wacquant 2002]; language through the interiorisation of categories [Quéré 1994] or cultural texts [Geertz 1973: 10]; life events, turning points or epiphanies [Denzin 1989: 33, 70–71]; voluntary individual undertakings of transformation [Garfinkel 2004: 116–185], can all be regarded as mechanisms of socialization; as mediating the constitution of individual dispositions. However, the term ‘matrix’ seemed more prone to designate specific combinations of such factors or processes in two cultures.

Elias's passage can therefore be read as suggesting the imprint of representative forms of social life on subjectivities; a certain type of subject always originates from a particular social formation, which is its matrix³⁶.

In Ian Hacking's critique of social constructivist scholarly practice, the term 'matrix' appears as a pivotal notion, which is reflected upon *per se*. Hacking proposes a version of social constructionism as building, or assembling from heterogeneous parts. So, if he accords with the fact that categories or 'ideas', – which are in the fulcrum of social constructionist works, e.g. when the social construction of 'motherhood', 'genius' or 'anorexia' are referred to –, are principles which mould social phenomena *per se*, Hacking also insists on the fact that categories are being moulded in a matrix of very different types of elements: spatial, practical, institutional, etc. (see Bourdieu above). This is a perspective, he argues, of which social scientists immersed in constructivism may not have taken full stock (on the notion of matrix as used by this author, see 2003: 10–14, 30–31, 34, 112, 127). He writes:

Ideas do not exist in a vacuum. They inhabit a social setting. Let us call that the *matrix* within which an idea, a concept or kind, is formed.

[Hacking 2003: 10, original emphasis]³⁷

Hacking does not seem to suggest that scholars do not 'realize' that the cultural phenomena are embedded in different planes of reality articulated to each other but rather, that such groundings and connections may too often be taken for granted and therefore, remain theoretically and empirically unexploited. Indeed, in *The Social Construction of What?* Hacking notes that social construction theses are hard to nail down precisely because, implicitly:

If someone talks about the social construction of genius or anorexia, they are likely to be talking about the idea, the individuals falling under the idea, the interaction between the idea and the people, and the manifold of social practices and institutions that these interactions involve: the matrix in short.

[Hacking 2003: 34]

³⁶ On Foucault's understanding of pastoral power, Frédéric Gros writes: '*The State is precisely the matrix of individualization*' [2006: 544] as it '*manages populations and identifies individuals*' through policy [ibid: 543].

³⁷ To illustrate his point, he chooses the category 'woman refugee': '*The matrix in which the idea of the woman refugee is formed is a complex of institutions, advocates, newspaper articles, lawyers, court decisions, immigration proceedings [...] Conversely, ideas about women refugees make a difference to the material environment [...] Sheer matter, even the color of the paint on the walls, can gradually replace optimistic hope by a feeling of impersonal grinding oppression. This discussion about ideas and classification takes for granted the obvious, namely that they work only in a matrix.*' [Hacking 2003: 10–11]

This idea of an interaction between heterogeneous elements, here between discursive regimes and practices, is also articulated in Nancy Fraser's work through recourse to the term 'matrix':

Like Thomas Kuhn, Foucault assumes the existence of a plurality of incommensurable discursive regimes that succeeded one another historically. He also assumes that each of these regimes is supported by its own correlated matrix of practices. Each includes its own distinctive objects of inquiry; its own criteria of well-formedness for statements admitted for candidacy for truth and falsity; its own procedures for generating, storing, and arranging data; its own institutional sanctions and matrices.

[Fraser 2004: 20]

I will take the apparition of the notion of 'sanction' here to introduce the next author, Judith Butler. In her work, normative fictions, exclusions and social sanctions, as well as atypical or non-conforming social 'products' of a particular matrix – that of a matrix which tends to produce (normative) heterosexuality – are central.

Hence, Judith Butler has also mobilized the notion of matrix for her theoretical ends. One of her well-known concepts is the heterosexual matrix in which all subjects originate, although exit may be struggled towards. As Jon Simons puts it:

Gendered subjectification is citation of an ideal of coherence between biological sex, social or cultural gender, and sexual desire and orientation, which is encoded in what Butler calls the heterosexual matrix [...] it is not always easy to maintain the coherence of the matrix: desire often takes its own course; personality sits uneasily with anatomy.

[Simons 1996: 198, drawing upon Butler 1999]³⁸

Butler's theorization also endeavours to account for the excluded; those who are not 'cleared' by the matrix: bodies, genders and sexualities, or socially improper combinations of them, and which come across as unintelligible or abject [1993].

As in Hacking's work, the idea of the articulation of heterogeneous processes and elements inside a matrix is present. Judith Butler's heterosexual matrix, however, is strongly traversed by power relations and conveys a dynamic vision of the ongoing formation of subjectivities in her matrix, which appears as one of a probabilistic type:

And to say that there is a matrix of gender relations that institutes and sustains the subject is not to claim that there is a singular matrix that acts in a singular and deter-

³⁸ Simons is drawing upon Butler 1999 (o.e. 1990): 23. After *Gender Trouble*, Butler has tended to replace the term 'matrix' by that of 'hegemony' (see e.g. 1993: xii).

ministic way to produce a subject as its effect. That is to re-install the ‘matrix’ in the subject-position within grammatical formulation which itself needs to be rethought. Indeed, the propositional form ‘Discourse constructs the subject’ retains the subject-position of the grammatical formulation even as it reverses the place of subject and discourse. Construction must mean more than such a simple reversal of terms.

[Butler 1993: 8–9]³⁹

Hence, the semantic wake of the term, linked not only to my subject matter, but also to the inherently dynamic character and formative power which the term suggests in these different works, settled my lexical choice for ‘matrix’.

‘Motherhood’

Finnish researcher Satu Katvala notes that the category ‘motherhood’ only appeared in the Finnish language in the nineteenth century [2001:15]⁴⁰. This phenomenon is interpreted by the researcher as characteristic of the creation of the cult of domesticity in which the mother role was central.

Research effectuated in several French dictionaries similarly suggests that the term ‘motherhood’ only came into common use in the nineteenth century in French everyday language. Hence, the *Dictionnaire de L’Académie française*, 1st Edition [1694: 45]⁴¹; the *Dictionnaire de L’Académie française*, 4th Edition [1762: 106]; Jean-François Féraud: *Dictionnaire critique de la langue française* [1787–1788: B618b]; and the *Dictionnaire de L’Académie française*, 5th Edition [1798: 79] all mention that until the nineteenth century, the French term ‘maternité’ [motherhood] was only used to designate the maternity of the Virgin Mary⁴². The first

³⁹ Jon Simons, inspired by Judith Butler’s use of the term, builds what she calls a ‘maternal matrix’ articulating a certain number of elements which combine to produce ‘motherhood’ as we know it. ‘*The subject position and identity of mothering depends on a series of coherences among: (1) female anatomy; (2) desire to bear children; (3) preference for reproduction in secure heterosexual setting; (4) propensity and ability to rear children; (5) caring orientation to others; (6) predilection for domestic issues; (7) prioritization of children*’ [1996: 199]. Her depiction resembles somewhat the interconnected processes leading to motherhood ‘outcomes’ described by Carol Smart in her ‘Deconstructing motherhood’ [1996].

⁴⁰ Referring to Rapola, M. (1960). *Sanojemme ensiesiintymisiä Agricolasta Yrjö Koskiseen*. Valikoima. Tietolipas 22. Helsinki: SKS [page 81].

⁴¹ The references were extracted from the ATILF website [The Project for American and French Research on the Treasury of the French Language (ARTFL), a cooperative enterprise of Analyse et Traitement Informatique de la Langue Française (ATILF) of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), the Division of the Humanities, the Division of the Social Sciences, and Electronic Text Services (ETS) of the University of Chicago] <<http://portail.atilf.fr/dictionnaires/>>. See also Delassus 1995:43.

⁴² For example, in *Dictionnaire de L’Académie française*, 1st Edition [1694: 45]: ‘*Maternité. s. f. L’Etat, la qualité de mère. On ne le dit guère que de la Vierge*’ (from ATILF, see footnote above). Nota bene: in English ‘maternity’ and ‘motherhood’ are two distinct categories, while in the Finnish and French languages, only one word exists to designate the same phenomenon: ‘äitiys’ and ‘maternité’.

occurrence of the term ‘maternity’ in common language as applied to ‘profane’ mothers was found in the *Dictionnaire de L’Académie française*, 6th Edition [1832–5: 2:177]. In this opus, one may read:

Maternité. s. f. L’état, la qualité de mère. *La maternité a ses plaisirs et ses peines.*

Maternity. n. f. Condition, status of mother. *Motherhood has its pleasures and woes.*

It would thus seem that the stage was set for maternal experience to be managed in-between the two discourses: one on pleasures and the other on woes.

Katvala’s association of the emergence of the category ‘motherhood’ to a particularly intensive period of development of social interventions in families can be paralleled with an observation made on the appearance of the category ‘sexuality’ in nineteenth century France by Michel Foucault. Indeed, in the first lines of his second volume of *Histoire de la sexualité, L’Usage des plaisirs* [1984], Foucault expresses his desire to pause and reflect on the ‘so daily and so recent’ notion of ‘sexuality’ and to:

dissociate myself from it, bypass its familiar evidence, analyse the theoretical and practical context to which it is associated. Even the term ‘sexuality’ appeared late, in the beginning of the 19th century. It is a fact that should neither be under-estimated nor over-interpreted. It points to something other than a reworking of vocabulary; but it evidently does not signal the sudden emergence of that which it relates to. The use of the word was established in relation to other phenomena: the development of domains of diverse knowledge [which cover biological mechanisms of reproduction as well as individual or social variants of behaviour]; the implementation of a set of rules and norms, traditional in part, partly novel, which rest upon religious, legal, pedagogical, medical institutions; changes also in the way that individuals are brought to attribute meaning and value to their conduct, to their duties, to their pleasures, to their feelings and sensations, to their dreams. In sum, it concerned looking at the manner in which in Western societies, an ‘experience’ had been constituted, so that individuals have had to recognize themselves as subjects of a ‘sexuality’, which opens up on very diverse fields of knowledge and which is articulated upon a system of rules and constraints. The project was then a history of sexuality as an experience, – if one understands by experience the correlation in a culture, between domains of knowledge, types of normativity and forms of subjectivity.

[Foucault 1984: 9–10]⁴³

Following Foucault, ‘sex’ and ‘motherhood’ can indeed both be considered as socially constructed fictitious complexes, which group together ‘*in an artificial unity*,

⁴³ In a similar vein, Foucault speaks of his method thus: ‘*Let’s suppose that madness does not exist [...] What kind of a history can we make, then, of these different events, of these different practices, which, apparently, organize themselves into that something we suppose is madness?*’ [2004: 5].

anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations and pleasures' [1978: 154; 1976: 204]. Such complexes are also targets of biopolitics⁴⁴ (including parental leave) – and objects of technologies of the self (see chapter 7).

Associating 'motherhood' to 'experience' and its links to knowledge, norms, and forms of subjectivity, seems doubly pertinent. Firstly, the experience of maternity, likewise that of sexuality, has indeed become an increasingly explored issue in psychology, psychoanalysis – and now sociology⁴⁵. Ilpo Helén has argued from within a Foucauldian framework that the experience of motherhood has been the object of scrutiny concomitantly with an enterprise of normalization and furthering of the adjustment of women to this role by specialized (essentially psycho-medical) institutions.

Healthcare centre practitioners and marital guidance manuals emphasized the experiential quality of motherhood. Motherhood for a woman did not any longer solely mean the reproductive and birthing potential but was also psychic, that is, experiences, images, and personality development in relation to one's own body, husband and children. The mentality of the mother-body did not mean only mastering emotionality during menstruation and feminine transports but active psychic adjustment to one's own femininity. As she developed into a normal individual with a balanced personality, the woman learnt to succumb to sexual intercourse and enjoy it physically and experientially. Becoming a wife was a prerequisite so that a female individual accept becoming a mother and desire it. This was the core of the woman's adjustment to her sex. It actualized as the female subject moulded her relationship to herself and to her own life through self-development and self-discipline.

[Helén 1997: 333]

A second motive which renders the category 'experience' topical for sociological exploration is that, as it will be argued in *Profiter de mon enfant*, qualifying motherhood as a (desirable) 'experience' is a common representation, present in contemporary Western societies, of transition to motherhood.

⁴⁴ By this term Foucault refers to a fundamental change in mechanisms of power in Western civilization. He posits that power no longer exerts itself essentially as a right to 'take' (including the right to take lives), but rather, as a power fostering life and organizing it [e.g. 1976: 177–179]. Biopolitics is '*the endeavour, begun in the eighteenth century, to rationalize the problems presented to governmental practice by the phenomena characteristic of a group of living human beings constituted as a population: health, sanitation, birth rate, longevity, race...*' [2000b: 73]. Government is understood in a '*broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour. Government of children, government of souls and consciences, government of a household, of a state, or of oneself.*' [2000a: 81]. Care of individuals is a new function of the State through the 'police': '*the true object of the police becomes [...] to take care of the population. It wields its power over living beings as living beings, and its politics, therefore has to be a biopolitics*' [Foucault 1988b: 160].

⁴⁵ See e.g. Arendell's review of a decade of research on mothering [1999: 1]

2 Data and methods

The pool of data collected in the framework of this research consisted of: a dozen of autobiographically inspired novels (of which 8 served as a primary corpus), 70 taped interviews of Finnish and French mothers and fathers (of which 30 interviews of mothers with higher education were analyzed)¹; 800 pages of parliamentary debates on reforms of maternity, paternity and parental leaves in Finland since 1969 (which have not been analyzed here); as well as innumerable clippings from the print media and the Internet.

The chapter will consecutively present: a brief history of the research plan and the process of sociological reasoning which lead to the final selection of materials (2.1 The research process); a reflection on the pertinence of constituting ‘details’ as sociological objects, of which discursive minutiae and *clichés* are examined in particular (2.2 Lint combing for comparative details); as well as a description of the collection and of the analysis of the interview, literary, and media materials (2.3 Materials).

2.1 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The aforementioned *corpora* were initially destined for a cross-national comparison of gendered accounts of transition to parenthood occurring in two different national contexts². The aim of the project then was to situate the experience of first-time mothers and fathers in the cultures they arise in by taking into account the material and ideological possibilities – and impossibilities – that individuals face during this process. The transition to parenthood was conceptualized as an

¹ The 70 tape-recorded interviews collected in 2003–2005 include: 41 Interviews in Finland and 29 in France. In addition, 15 interviews with mothers had been taped between 1998 and 2002, of which two were in Finland. They served as an exploratory sample for this study. 68 in all were integrally transcribed. Amongst the 70 recently collected interviews, 23 were Finnish mothers and 18 were French mothers.

² Under the working title ‘Becoming Mothers and Fathers in Finland and France’, financed by a grant of the Finnish Academy of Science in the framework of the project *Family in Transition*, directed by Riitta Jallinoja.

encounter of the contemporary individual with a gendered role and as a secondary socialization process³. Variation in the social construction of the mother- and father-roles at an institutional level – namely, in terms of implicit definitions of parental roles embedded in maternity, paternity, parental, and care leave policies – was to be related to individual experiences in Finland and France.

Indeed, viewed from the aforementioned perspective, quite striking differences were observed in the caring cultures of the two countries chosen for the comparison. Hence, amongst nationals of European Welfare states, Finnish mothers are amongst those who stay at home with their infants for the longest time at each birth, before returning to work. On the contrary, French first-time mothers, given the high rate of labour market participation conjointly with short paid maternity leave provision, figure amongst those who stay at home for the shortest period of time. This ontological contrast accounts for the choice of the two countries.

Ultimately however, this piece of research came to focus solely on *mother's* accounts of transition to parenthood in a perspective somewhat different than that envisaged in the original research plan⁴. Indeed, my intention was initially to approach the interview material through a thematic analysis of parental experiences at different stages of transition: pregnancy, childbirth, maternity leave and return to work.

Connecting issues

Previous research experience, and a lush corpus of interviews collected in France in 1998 from which two monographs of women's stories of the intimate experience of life changes occasioned by the birth of the first child were drawn [see Martiskainen 1998a, b] – urged me, firstly to pursue the endeavour of researching women's experiences, and secondly to try to anchor subjective, reflexive and emotional stories of becoming mothers to larger settings and contexts in order to pursue my analytical work in terms of gender and/or class, and/or culture. The idea of a comparative study including mothers and fathers came about.

Interview data was hence accorded *ex-ante* precedence over other types of materials; novels and media data were envisaged essentially as secondary materials for complementing the analysis⁵. Inasmuch as my work came to focus

³ For a synthesis of different approaches to socialization, see Darmon 2006.

⁴ I hope soon to be able to write 'Matrixes of fatherhood'.

⁵ I thank Riitta Jallinoja for inviting me to access her immense reservoir of media material – as well as my parents Airi & Eero, who regularly scouted for clippings on motherhood and fatherhood in the print media during the research process.

on crystallized expressions in mother-talk, however, the printed textual corpus gained in importance as research progressed: firstly, for gleaning new occurrences, and secondly, in order to establish the representativity of the catchwords (or *clichés*)⁶ in mother-talk (or in talk about mothers), which are in the fulcrum of the analysis.

Of the two catchphrases ‘*it’s such a short time*’ and ‘*profiter de mon enfant*’, which came to respectively guide the investigation of the Finnish and the French cases, the first fell into my lap from the interview data. Having identified ‘*it’s such a short time*’, and analyzed it, I was incited to search for the presence of an eventual crystallization in the French interviews⁷. Well and truly, it was there. 42 occurrences of the verb ‘*profiter*’ [enjoy, benefit or profit from] implicitly or explicitly associated to ‘*mon enfant*’ [my child] or time spent with the child⁸ were localized by the means of the ‘research’ function of the *Word*-programme in the pool of transcriptions. Two other sociological enquiries on French families, which observe but do not explore the uses of the phrase, provided supplementary evidence of its salience and significance as a turn of speech in mother-talk.

In the meanwhile, a similar phenomenon was observed in Finnish media materials and in the novels and accounts collected by the researcher. Firstly, there was a significant variation amongst the interviews of mothers that I collected. In the latter, the contrast between ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ interviews triggered my sociological curiosity. Certain mothers explicated their sensations and memories relative to transition to motherhood in depth – including eventually troublesome ones – while others proved to be notably less talkative subjects. Now, if this is liable to occur in any terrain on all topics as people are more or less articulate⁹, my working hypothesis was, nevertheless, that I was faced with contrasting degrees of ‘openness’ or ‘covertness’ of speech. Hence, while one mother disposed of a steadily flowing narrative, in another encounter, a strong reserve was

⁶ A catchword is ‘*a word or expression that is used repeatedly and conveniently to represent or characterize a person, group, idea, or point of view*’ [Merriem-Webster Online Dictionary] <<http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=catchphrase>> while ‘*cliché*’ is 1 ‘*a hackneyed or overused phrase or opinion*. 2 *a very predictable or unoriginal thing or person* [...] Compact Oxford English disctionary online <http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oad/cliche?view=uk>

⁷ This incitement proceeded from the sociological flair of Riitta Jallinoja, to whom I hereby raise my hat.

⁸ Supplementary rare occurrences were also localized in which ‘*profiter*’ was associated to the couple or in which the child was seen to enjoy [profiter] its parents or grand-parents.

⁹ This may be due to varying degrees of trust established between the researcher and the interviewee; shared or differing social characteristics (sex, cultural and social proximity); personal sympathy; moods of the one and the other, etc.

sensed by the researcher.

Secondly, since 2001, a phenomenon of ‘disclosure’ of unsettling personal experiences at transition or accounts of new motherhood as ‘crisis’ surfaced in the media setting of popular women’s magazines or novels in Finland. The concomitance of these two observations (in the interviews and the media) pointed to a disjunction in-between open/covert speech. This similarity further convinced the researcher of the pertinence of investigating the cultivating of decency in mother-talk.

The term ‘decency’ was inspired by the book *Moderni säädyllyisyys. Aviosuhteen vapaudet ja sidokset* [Modern decency. The bonds and freedoms of the the marital relationship, 1997], in which Riitta Jallionja studies Finns’ ideas of morality on the basis of magazine interviews, and examines how the modern and the traditional intertwine in terms of freedom and commitment; daring and decency. For the sociologist, decency as a form of morality relates to the fact that people do not talk directly about marital troubles, particularly infidelity, as long as the marriage holds together. After divorce, however, accusations and counter-accusations are set free. Decency, inherited from the Victorian era, is interestingly integrated into a liberalised society. Aspects relating to sexuality for example are still kept hidden and belong to the sphere of decent/indecent talk. Their open discussion is not desirable, except in the yellow press, which deliberately tests the boundaries of decency. Talk about motherhood also cultivates decency, not only in the media, but in quotidian face-to-face interactions, which are under scrutiny in chapter 4.

A scene encountered during the fieldwork is engraved in my memory. Its’ setting is a Finnish kitchen, in the midst of an interview. The participant-mother converses with a ‘colleague’¹⁰ who comes to pass. While one (pregnant) is sitting at a kitchen table, and the other unpacking groceries, a strip of conversation about daily life comes about. My tape-recorder is on. The conversation conveys fluency; appropriate questions are followed by enthusiastic response, relayed occasionally by empathetic comments springing from common experience.

Mother: Yes. I’m feeling quite all right! But it’s tough getting used to staying at home with the kid again. It is such an overpowering activity that I’m quite [laugh] washed-out! I’ve tried being on the sofa, but the [the child] is running around the house. And wants my company all the time [...] it’s used to bustling all day long in the day care centre. It’s hard.

¹⁰ On my use of the term ‘colleague’, see chapter 4.

Colleague: Yeah. It's hard. It's tiring. I still remember when I went with [her own child] to sit on the floor of the room or laid down hoping that it would play alone beside me [...] I hardly had the strength to sit down even.

Mother: We went to Helsinki this morning so then the nap wasn't sort of enough either. Then [the child] is bad-tempered all day and. I'm tired on that sitting-room floor with [the child] climbing all over me. You know, it can't go around me but passes here [over her belly]. That feels terrible all the time [...] [takes a breath] So. But I think it'll be all right.

The glances, words, tones, and contents of this strip of kitchen table conversation contrasted so strongly with the talk triggered a few minutes before by my interviewing, that I become acutely aware of the limits of my data to unearth the multiple facets of maternal experiences¹¹ – and of the importance of supplementary materials. The interview data of this part of the research-project is thus basically made of tape-recorded-sitting-room-mother-talk and not kitchen table local knowledge (despite the fact that the physical setting of the interviews was actually often the kitchen, particularly in Finland)¹².

However, my own experiences of kitchen table conversations have influenced some of the questions posed during the encounters with parents. Reciprocally, my family status seemed to interest parents, who nearly always asked if I had children myself – and often enquired about my peregrinations in each of the countries as a cultural hybrid: a French-Finn.

It's such a short and special time (chapter 4) is primarily built upon the integrally transcribed interviews of 15 Finnish mothers of infants or toddlers with tertiary education and three novels. Localized in 5 out of 15 interviews – and, consequently, on a hit-and-miss basis in a novel, two essays by parents, a social policy document, two academic dissertations (of which one quotes a parenting manual) and two magazine articles – I considered that an adequate variety of indicators had been collected in order to conclude on the topicality of the phenomenon in Finland.

¹¹ I thereby realized that I was contributing to produce the 'motherhood' of others in a particular way (just as the 'colleague' contributed to the production of motherhood in another). On this occasion, I also realized how 'significant others' mothers were for each other, although this is not my perspective in chapter 4.

¹² My own kitchen table motherhood experiences posed a dilemma. They are 'authentic' materials, stripped of some of the masks and buffers that are inevitable in the asymmetric positions of interviewer and interviewee, and which I could have used to comfort research results. However, as they were not collected with the consent of the persons concerned, nor tape-recorded, I have not mobilized them (consciously at least) in the writing process. An ethnographic account of women's kitchen motherhood conversations is however an exhilarating perspective.

Inasmuch as the collocation ‘*it’s such a short time*’ (eventually associated to an injunction to ‘enjoy’) quasi-systematically represents an occurrence of reported speech, the analysis was set upon the rails of investigating this issue through a few principles loaned from the toolboxes of discourse and rhetorical analysis. The procedure was extremely simple. After having identified the euphemism, I explored the transcribed corpus with the ‘search’ function of the *Word*-programme for the adjective ‘short’. Were scrutinized: a) the context in which the phrase occurs, i.e. the rhetorical context inside the account, as well as the setting in which the mothers reported that the speech act had taken place; b) the identity and status of the participants involved in the face-to-face interaction in which the *cliché* was worded; and c) that which people were doing when they voiced the catchphrase¹³.

Chapter 5, *Profiter de mon enfant* [Enjoying my child] is based on 15 transcribed interviews of French mothers with similar educational attainment. I also refer to three sociological texts, of which two pinpoint the recurrence of the expression in French mother-talk. An illustration in a dictionary was also taken to be an indicator of the topicality of the expression in France. The technique of analysis is the same as that described for chapter 4. Above all, it consisted of a scrupulous observation of each and every immediate rhetoric context in which the collocation occurs.

In *Profiter de mon enfant*, the analysis distinguishes uses of the expression in different life stages. Hence, when an occurrence in which it designated pregnancy was observed, I seized this occasion to focus in a sub-chapter on this stage of transition (which is not envisaged elsewhere in the study). It appeared as particularly impregnated by a hedonist ethos in France. However, because I consider the phenomenon also to exist in Finland, I evoke in the chapter, some Finnish research results.

Because of the nature of the discursive phenomenon under study, the relatively small samples of interviewees were not of similar consequence as they would have been, had I opted for a transversal thematic analysis. Moreover, the discursive cristallizations were also seized in diverser texts.

Chapter 7, *Maternal Techniques of Self*, focuses exclusively upon materials from the print media. Three French autobiographically inspired novels, an essay, and an interview of a couple, are analyzed in order to throw light upon the process of adjusting to motherhood. This type of material is particularly suited for

¹³ On the importance of context see e.g. Jokinen 2002a: 40. On rhetorical analysis see e.g. Potter 1996: 106–108; Jokinen 2002a: 46–47; Jokinen 2002b: 127–157; Jokinen & Juhila 2002: 77–81; Vuori 2001: 98–102; 2004.

this enterprise. Firstly, the novel or autobiographical text represents a setting in which difficult mother-experiences may be related. Secondly, they are therefore particularly interesting materials for the study of the reflexive management of feelings, desires, thoughts, and drives – ‘*any mouvement of the soul*’ as Foucault would put it – of mother-subjects. Such *movements* are less plausible in interviews or kitchen-table conversations (see below section ‘Novels’).

2.2 LINT COMBING FOR COMPARATIVE DETAILS

The most crucial finding for the analysis was the identification of the discursive crystallizations which structured the analysis. Indeed, it was only after the initial discovery of the saying ‘*it’s such a short time*’ – the *cliché* in the fulcrum of the analysis –, that the data was lint combed anew for particulars and new materials in the print-media read on a look-out for temporizing discourse.

Details as sociological objects

Of course such particulars are not only to be found in language. Janet Carsten, for example, evokes Bourdieu’s analysis of the microcosm of the Kabyle house in 1950s Algeria [1980]. In his work, the ethnologist insightfully demonstrated how gender hierarchy was inscribed in space – and how negotiating it, silently but powerfully socialized its inhabitants to the social distinctions which it represented.

As Carsten puts it:

One important lesson to be learned from the house, then, is the significance of seemingly random and trivial observations (which a student on one of my courses once unflatteringly referred to as the ‘anthropology of brushing your teeth’). While what goes on in houses may appear all too familiar, there is no doubt of the important messages that these everyday activities convey.

[Carsten 2004: 49]

In the sociology of the ‘everyday’, trifles of ordinary life in daily interactions, experiences, and emotions, have been tackled through diverse theoretical frameworks – and represented a starting-point of enquiry for explicating the unofficial or unacknowledged aspects of the quotidian, namely those implicit in non-verbal or verbal quotidian interactions (e.g. Garfinkel 2004, Goffman 1959, 1972). Feminist scholars have pinpointed women’s quotidian activities as a programmatic topic of research and a necessary locus of sociological theoriza-

tion, and have also argued that research on the experiential facets of concrete daily *praxis* of particular social groups constitute a privileged standpoint for unearthing knowledge on societies, although they are often ‘invisibilized’ (e.g. standpoint theorists such as Hartsock 1998 and Smith 1987).

To varying degrees, researchers ‘*having gripped daily life in their conceptual pliers*’, [Lefebvre 2005: 3], have also identified the ‘daily’ as a heuristic nexus for research on the interplay between different domains of life: e.g. the ‘daily’ as the locus of reconciling family and work [Salmi 2004] or as a crossing point of ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ social processes [Elias 1973]. Exploring quotidian minutiae has thus also served as a starting-point for generating micro-macro links [Elias 1973; Bourdieu 1980: 441–461]. Hence, Elias discards the use of the ‘everyday’ as a *terminus technicus* referring to a field of enquiry, as it often ‘*tacitly includes the idea that there are peculiarities of everyday life which are different to those of other areas of social life and may even be opposed to them*’ [1998b: 169], arguing that his study of the structure of the houses of court aristocrats in *The Court Society* [1974], for example, attested of the contrary:

If the way that people reside together is understood as an aspect of their everyday life, it emerged here with particular clarity that the structure of the everyday life is not a more-or-less autonomous structure in its own right, but is an integral component of the structure of the social stratum and, since the stratum cannot be considered in isolation, of the power structure of the society as a whole.

[Elias 1998b: 169]

Elias, through the exploration of historically specific civilizing codes (those regulating mealtimes, the blowing of noses, going to bed or the performance of bodily functions) in *The Civilizing Process* [1973], also braided an approach of experiential dimensions of social life and standards of emotions management (referred to as ‘personality structure’) alongside an exploration of structural changes, such as an increasingly centralized organization of the state, augmenting social differentiation, and longer chains of social interdependence.

His twin-track method is not without analogies to Foucault’s understanding of ‘*the body as the place in which the most minute and local social practices are linked up with the large scale organization of power*’ [Dreyfus and Rabinow 2002: xxii; see Foucault 1991]. Or Dorothy Smith’s project of departing from embodied activities to explicate the puzzle of the extralocal, institutional, processes which contribute to an ongoing ordering of the everyday world – and which often lie beyond the perception of subjects [1987: 92]¹⁴.

¹⁴ For an alternative review of the sociology and philosophy of the daily, see Salmi 2004.

The following section considers the particularities of discursive minutiae.

Discursive minutiae & 'clichés'

...we must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected to it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes.

[Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 2005: 31]

Sharon Hays, after unearthing the core characteristics of an ideology of intensive mothering from three bestselling childcare manuals, explores the presence of the latter in her interview data. She writes:

As you listen to these mothers, it may seem at times that they are simply speaking in *clichés*, trite truisms, and all too well-worn phrases. But *clichés* and truisms should not be underestimated or discounted – they often highlight highly recurring cultural themes.

[Hays 1996: 98]

However, she does not explore her data from such a methodological angle. Moreover, it appears that well-worn phrases may not only highlight recurring cultural themes, but are liable to crystallize major contradictions, for which generic solutions are needed.

Indeed, the power of *clichés* has been in the fulcrum of the work of North-American artist Jenny Holzer, whose primary medium is language. Her well-known series of works, *Truisms*, is inspired by social and critical theory. In it, Holzer used one-liners, which are mock-*clichés* or parodies of '*the Great Ideas of the Western World in a nutshell*', to express her '*feelings about society and culture known*' [Waldman 1989: 10, 11]. Using consumerist, bland language, and black humor, Jenny Holzer's aphorisms – such as '*Money creates taste*' or '*Abuse of power comes as no surprise*' – are destined for repetition and to be widely shared with an audience: they have namely been printed on posters pasted in public spaces in New York, on billboards, t-shirts or diffused on electronic sideboards (e.g. on Times Square in 1982).

In the *Truisms*-series, Holzer positions herself as 'Everyman' and as an artist, while highlighting extant tensions between originality and anonymity. She uses a laconic tone and outspokenness applied to deep social contradictions [ibid]. In so doing, Jenny Holzer underlines at least one of the the social uses of *clichés* or euphemisms, which emerged from the data. Indeed, '*it's such a short time*' seems inhabited by a somewhat similar tension as that depicted in the American

artists' works: one between a laconic platitude and a contradictory social situation; between a commonplace device and a core issue in our society.

In the case we are dealing with however, the *clichés* are mobilized by a certain group of persons: mothers. Norman Denzin evokes the fact that every social group develops its own idiolect of special language and rules of assemblages of words [2001: 91]¹⁵. Therefore:

Because each group is a distinct language community, the researcher must begin by learning the language that is spoken.

[Denzin 2001: 91]

Fairclough proposes a three-dimensional conception of the multifarious notion 'discourse' (on the different senses in which it has been used in human and social sciences see e.g. Fairclough 2004: 3). This author conceives of discourse as language use, parole or performance, combining different analytical traditions:

...the tradition of close textual and linguistic analysis within linguistics, the macrosociological tradition of analysing social practice in relation to social structures, and the interpretivist or microsociological tradition of seeing social practice as something which people actively produce and make sense of on the basis of shared commonsense procedures.

[Fairclough 2004: 72]

The data here will be examined from each viewpoint, even if emphasis is imbalanced. My analysis, for example, does not much delve on linguistic aspects although I am concerned with – or at least the analysis departs from – small linguistic units, which are traditionally the subject-matter of linguistic analysis. Rather, I am interested in the way in which bits and pieces of everyday discourse may serve as indicators of crystallized ethos, structure social practice, and how they are involved in the production and maintenance of decent motherhood, emotions, and expressions of the latter.

Firstly, in linguistic terms, the analysis unearths collocations in mother-talk. Although different definitions of the term exist, a fair consensus seems to prevail on the fact that a collocation is a phrase whose constituents frequently co-occur and combine with each other¹⁶. Patterns of association and ordering of certain words in them appear to have a somewhat greater probability than average to appear together. Significantly, in another context, the same combination of words may take a different meaning. Hence, meaning arises from their social

¹⁵ Referring to Barthes, R. (1967). *Elements of Semiology*. New York: Hill & Wang.

¹⁶ See for example: Sinclair, J. (1991). *Corpus, concordance, collocation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

environment. Mother-talk would probably deserve to be explored from this angle: as a repertory of its own, with new meanings, interesting new collocations arising from a specialized lifeworld, logic, and rules governing action¹⁷.

Three collocations were found in the *Discursive matrix*. A systematic examination of rhetorical contexts revealed that *It's a short time* (in chapter 4) – or its variant, *It's not a lifetime* (in chapter 7) – appeared as speech acts intended to act upon the parent's state of mind: to transform it. Because mothers are explicitly or implicitly impatient, frustrated, sad, angry or bored, the *time* that they are liable to experience such sensations is discursively cut to decent proportions. This type of social intervention became an indicator of the requisites of the mother-role.

Hence, examined from the point of view of '*ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life*' [Garfinkel 2004: 11], '*it's such a short time*' and '*it's not a lifetime*' can therefore be apprehended as repairs or tinkering pertaining to a disruption of social order (see e.g. Parker 1989: 113). The disruption of order is that of an ethos of happy, loving, motherhood. The leeway granted to open speech on enjoyment was greater, as indicated by the study of the statement '*profiter de mon enfant*'. The latter was related to a larger cultural whole: that of a hedonist ethos of motherhood, and a more generalized quest of utopia of our societies: happiness.

For Judith Revel, discourse in Foucault's oeuvre generally designates:

an ensemble of statements which may belong to different fields, but which nevertheless obey to common rules of functioning

[Revel 2002: 22]¹⁸

Rules of discourse are not only linguistic or formal; they reproduce a particular type of organization of reality and historically determined divides inherent in the latter (such as the divide between reason/madness). One of the rules found to structure the maternal 'episteme' was that of pleasure/suffering or happiness/unhappiness (see section 1.3 A Genealogy of categories: 'matrix' & 'motherhood', chapters 4 & 6, and *Conclusions*). Discursive apparatus in the works of Foucault are now seen as supporting, now as engendering practices¹⁹. In my

¹⁷ I thank linguist Silja Huttunen for these remarks and informations. It would seem that such a phenomenon has been observed in specialized communities with common experiences isolated to some degree from their environment: in the media, finance (stock exchange), or computing.

¹⁸ For other definitions of discourse in Foucault's work, see e.g. Vuori 2001: 81–82; on the notion of discursive formation see e.g. Helén 1997: 357; Vuori 2001: 83–84.

¹⁹ Hence, from the start, Revel notes, Foucault's interest was double: towards rules and regularities, on the one hand; towards the transformation of identifications, classifications and the conditions of emergence of discursive apparatus on the other. Indeed, discourse can be seen as supporting practices or engendering them [2002: 23].

case, I have suggested the existence of the moorings of such discourse in practice and policy. Hence, the expression ‘*it’s such a short time*’ is directly related to the duration of Finnish maternity leaves.

Discourse is thus considered as constituting *one* of the planes on which mother-beings, mothering and motherhood are socially constructed (see also Vuori 2003). In this sense, the type of constructivist framework applied could be qualified as ‘ontological constructivism’ [Juhila 2002: 162–163; see also Vuori 2001: 372²⁰]. In the latter, the topic of research is not reduced to discourse, even if it is a primary one. Other non-discursive domains, for example the articulation and effects of policy devices and bodily apprenticeships are evoked²¹. The boundaries of singular speech acts or texts can therefore be crossed by relating language use to the characteristics of social relationships and larger social structures. Alasuutari, for example, has underlined that cultural studies are characterized by openness to diverse techniques of sociological investigation; pragmatic and strategic *bricolages* destined to unearth in-depth knowledge of the phenomena under scrutiny [1999: 25].

Another dimension which could be identified in the study is the articulation of micro and macro data. In his ‘research map’, Derek Layder [1993: 8, 71–106] distinguished between four research elements relating to four specific types of research *foci*:

<i>Research element</i>	<i>Research focus</i>
– Self	Biographical experience and social involvements
– Situated activity	Dynamics of the face-to-face interaction
– Setting	Immediate social environment of social activity (E.g. family, factory)
– Context	Macro social forms (class, gender, ethnic relations)

In *Discursive Matrixes of Motherhood. Cultivating Decency and Emotion in Finnish and French mother-talk*, expressions of biographical experience are studied through their achievement or failure in face-to-face interactions (namely

²⁰ Potter criticizes Critical Discourse Analysis for focussing on stretches of discourse while drawing ‘*on their own (often implicit) understanding of the ‘actual’ reality to ground their analyses*’ [Potter 1996: 192]. I have endeavoured to explicit in chapter 3 the contexts in which the speaking subjects evoked here are embedded.

²¹ What Juhila calls epistemic constructivism on the other hand refuses to take a stand on the status of a reality outside of language and the meanings emerging from this type of analysis are generally only related to other texts or speech [ibid.].

in-between generations and peers). But mother-talk is also scrutinized in other types of settings, for example the print-media (interviews of parents or novels, which are not only two different arenas mediated by different actors [journalists, editors], but also different genres). Gender-relations-as-practice, explicated in the *section* 'The daily matrix', form the nocturnal background of maternity in some of the chapters (4, 5 & 7) and appear somewhat more explicitly in chapter 5.

A larger societal context in this piece of research is culture's 'clearing'. Light upon the latter is shed by deploying various devices: comparison of policy, (conceived of as embedded in and actively molding mothering culture); by seizing a focussed phenomenon such as breastfeeding; by recourse to quantitative data (European comparative statistics or international opinion polls). They are used, not only to set the stage of a larger Western context of child-rearing culture, but also the national scenes (chapter 3) – while also being mobilized for consolidating interpretations rising from the textual data (such as possible variation pertaining to social constructs of childhood in Finland and France in chapter 6 *Profiter de mon enfant*).

2.3 MATERIALS

The three types of materials and their specific uses are detailed below: interviews (sampling, recruitment, interviewing, and preliminary analysis), novels and articles in women's magazines.

The interview sample

The population chosen for the interviews, women with university level education combining employment and the mothering of young children, have been often regarded as a group propelling major social change [Gatrell 2005: 3, 5] – as one at the vanguard of transforming gender attitudes, the division of labour – and beyond²². International comparisons in the West have established that, more than any other socioeconomic group of women, this population has more con-

²² 33 percent of Finns had benefited from tertiary education against 24 percent in France. <<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/32/26/33710913.xls>> In both countries, the ratio of presence of women to men in higher education has been shifting in favour of women: in Finland 62 percent of university graduates are women. In France, five out of ten young women of the 1989 cohort of 'bacheliers' gained access to university-level education, while the corresponding proportion for young men was four out of five [Ministry of education... 2006].

tinuous employment records [Hantrais 1990: x]. The second characteristic of this group in regard to family formation is the tendency to postpone the birth of the first child (for Finland, see e.g. Ketokivi 2002; for France, see Donati & Samuel 2001:9).

Delayed childbearing has been linked to greater opportunity costs of motherhood for this group – and brought well-qualified women’s lives under public scrutiny. It has been highlighted, for example, that this pattern ‘*might mean the inability to conceive, which is too high a price to pay for a successful career*’ [Gatrell 2005: 3; see also Donati & Samuel 2001; 8] – and that postponing family formation may eventually lead to regrets [Gatrell 2005: 3]²³.

According to Van de Kaa, the question that contemporary Western women (and men) ask themselves before founding a family is typically formulated in these terms:

Will my personal life and my relation with my partner be enriched if I interrupt contraception and use the possibility of which I dispose to have a first child (or another child) now?

[Van de Kaa 2004: 64]

Such questioning occurs in a paradoxical context:

on the one hand, the desire for children seems never to have been as strong, [and] on the other, the number of children procreated each year has never been as low
[Donati 2000: 3, quoting Rollet 1991; see also Donati 2003: 44]

Indeed, international polls, such as the FFS [Fertility and Family Survey²⁴] establish that generally the proportion of women who do not wish or plan to have a child in Europe is very marginal: 1–7 percent [Léridon 2003: 29]. However, in contemporaneousness, certain material, social and psychological conditions are conceived of necessary before family formation [LeVoyer 2003: 40]. Kaisa Ketokivi’s [2002] qualitative research focussing on Finnish university-educated young men and women established that parenthood was associated with both great expectations and demands, which led to its postponement. Thus contemporary child-rearing standards and understandings of childhood can be understood to delay, if not to raise barriers, to accession to motherhood.

²³ Gatrell makes this comment about the US, but similar discourse was also come-across in the French and Finnish media during the research process.

²⁴ They have been conducted in selected Member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe [UNECE] in the 1990s, financed by the United Nations.

Choosing a group with *a priori* relatively homogenous practices in terms of articulating mothering and work (although Finnish and French policy does determine varying periods of time out of the labour market for family leave), was thought to favour the possibility for isolating cross-cultural differences in child-rearing and attitudes towards mothering (see also Windebank 1999: 7)²⁵. Interviewing women from heterogeneous socioeconomic groups in the two countries, and comparing their accounts cross-nationally, would have, it was posited, complicated the task. A supplementary advantage for such a choice was the fact that the researcher already disposed of a corpus of interviews on the accounts of transition to motherhood of thirteen university educated mothers in Paris [Martiskainen 1998a, b]. It was finally not put to use here.

As fathers were included in the original research plan, the projected sample became: married or cohabiting heterosexual couples in which the mother held a French ‘baccalauréat’ or Finnish ‘matriculation examination’ diploma and a university degree (or had completed an equivalent tertiary education). Recruitment targeted couples living in the Paris or Helsinki regions with a first biological child of less than three years of age, the mother having resumed employment²⁶.

Now this sample may seem a highly normative and biased one in terms of sexual orientation, class and race. Gatrell has underlined how key academic studies on motherhood have tended to focus on highly qualified, well-off partners or ‘career couples’ (e.g. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995). I have explicated the reasons of my choice above.

Focussing on heterosexual couples is related to my concern with gender equality and thus on relations between men and women. From this point of view, the choice of women with a fair provision of, or abundant cultural capital also seemed pertinent, as the latter are generally reputed to dispose of better means for negotiating men’s participation in family work (although one should be cautious about this, e.g. see Takala’s 2002 results in chapter 3). Therefore, this group has often been regarded as the one most prone to social change in gender relationships.

²⁵ Tuula Gordon presents an example of another type of sampling strategy. She interviewed 50 Finnish and British mothers who defined themselves as feminist, taking this feature as a pivot and endeavoured to include as many different types of social origins as possible amongst her interviewees [1991].

²⁶ Nevertheless, some interviews with mothers with a different educational background were effectuated in the beginning of the research process. I also started interviewing partners in mixed marriages (4 cases). I was particularly interested in Finns married to a French partner, but this trail of investigation was finally abandoned; partners simply did not see their practices or family arrangements as influenced by cultural factors. Variation in the final sample was slight: some mothers held a tertiary occupational degree (nurses); two were on maternity leave after having resumed work after the first birth, either expecting or having given birth to a second child, etc.

Criticism towards white feminist perspectives, often focussing on white women, has come from black feminist quarters, underscoring the racial and class biases of white, *bourgeois* feminist scholarship, but also the treatment of gender issues in relation to motherhood [Hooks 1984: 133; Hill Collins 1994: 47]. Hence, Patricia Hill Collins, in ‘Shifting the Centre: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood’, notes that for women of colour, mothering tends to be seen as work for the family and not as benefitting the man in particular. In African-American families for example, Hill Collins contends:

The locus of the conflict lies outside the household, as women and men engage and maintain family life in the face of forces that undermine family integrity.

[Hill Collins 1994: 47]

In this study, all but one respondent was white. The section below explicates the recruitment of the participants of the study²⁷.

Recruitment

The Finnish case

- 1 *Recruitment by a health care centre.* The first attempt of recruitment in the beginning of the year 2003 concerned a public health care centre situated in a Helsinki suburb, Espoo.²⁸ It was preferred a priori in the initial research design as it was liable to favour variety in the sample and to provide a reinforced guarantee of anonymity for the interviewees. During consultations, midwives and nurses distributed leaflets explaining the purpose of the research: the personal experience of becoming a mother or a father. Volunteers inscribed their telephone number on it. Recruits were then contacted by telephone and interviewed in May 2003. Only six interviewees were recruited in this fashion. The personnel did not have an explanation for the lack of volunteers. The presence of a ‘referent’, in Finland for recruiting subjects for interviews focussing on one’s intimate experience of becoming a parent was deemed necessary.
- 2 *Internet discussion board.* A unique attempt to recruit interviewees through a discussion board of a daily newspaper was not only unproductive, but triggered a discussion tainted with aggressive responses to the researcher’s demand (from a male respondent). This channel was abandoned.
- 3 *Recruitment from private and professional networks.* The same leaflet introducing the aims of the study was also used for recruiting parents through private and pro-

²⁷ Because of the homogeneity of the sample in terms of socioeconomic status, number and age of children and marital status, it was not deemed necessary to ‘name’ or explicate other characteristics of the parents quoted in the study.

²⁸ Nearly all parents, whatever their social origin, consult in a public health care centre in Finland. In France, the PMI [Protection maternelle et infantile], as they are called, typically reaches urban working class and migrant populations, who do not consult with a paediatrician. Therefore a parallel recruitment was not envisaged in France.

fessional networks, or parents were told that my theme of study was their ‘experience of becoming a mother or father’. Interviews took place in 2003–2004. One participant told me that she would not have said all she said to me, if I had not been recommended to her by someone she knew well. This remark is consistent with the difficulty of finding participants through anonymous channels on the topic.

- 4 *Snowball sampling*. Most fathers (whose accounts are not analyzed) were in this case as they were recruited through their partners, although some fathers declined²⁹.

The French case

- 1 *Internet discussion board*. Over half of the participants were recruited through a discussion board for mothers: <<http://www.magrossesse.com>>. An interview was then solicited with their partners. Interviews took place in 2004.
- 2 *Snowballing* was also practiced, namely through mothers from the discussion board.
- 3 *Private or professional networks*. Some interviewees came through this channel. One such member was to ‘introduce’ the researcher to a group of mothers on the Internet.

Semi-structured interviews

Although I considered it preferable that interviewees tell me their ‘stories’ of transition to motherhood, experience demonstrated that this was not how most research encounters worked. As one mother told me:

When I was walking here, I thought about what you were going to ask and what I was going to answer. These issues are so very. Well maybe someone who has older children has somehow processed them a lot and spoken about them, but for me, they are still sort of... fresh and... I have to reflect while I speak so... whatever that means [laughter]. I haven’t rummaged through all that yet [laughter].

As participants (with a few exceptions) were new mothers with an infant or a toddler, this meant that on the one side, memories were ‘fresh’, and on the other, that for some parents, the interview may have been one of the first occasions on which they reflected upon the topic intensively and were, indeed, requested to assess their experience of the process of becoming a mother.

The interview guide was largely elaborated on the basis of French pilot study of 1997–1998 and which had yielded rich data. Ideally, it was destined to get

²⁹ It may have occurred to some interviewees that the researcher was liable to have access to intimate knowledge about their partners as several couples were interviewed. When evoking the decision to have a child, one Finnish interviewee (of whom the partner had been interviewed first) said: ‘Well, there were loads of heated discussions on the subject [of having a child] before the opposite party matured [laughter] [...] because I was conscious of the fact that he was liable not to be passionately attached to the idea, and I do think that it’s such an important domain if we were planning a common existence on the long run [...] The subject would pop up regularly but what I ignore is a) why and b) when the opposite party’s vision changed. You know better than I do!’ [laughter].

the narrative going and to assist the researcher if it came to a stand still, but as mentioned above this is not generally the modality in which interviewees engaged. Participants were also asked to fill a questionnaire on the lengths of family leaves taken by self and partner, childcare arrangements, working hours (of which over-time), use of free-time etc.

In general, the semi-directive interviews started off with the question: 'Before marital life, did motherhood/fatherhood seem an evident occurrence in your later life?' or 'Had you thought about having children in the years that preceded marital life?' The cues then concerned different sequences of transition to motherhood: the emergence of the project of the child in the couple, pregnancy, childbirth, maternity leave, return to work, and a personal evaluation of their experience retrospectively.

Strong emotions were present in some of the encounters, including tears. Demazière and Dubar mention the '*fonction maïeutique*' which the sociological interview is liable to have [1997: 104]³⁰. A majority of mothers also expressed their interest in reading my dissertation when it would be finished³¹.

Preliminary analyses

Before the discovery of the two discursive crystallizations, different techniques of analysis were experimented with. In *Analyser les entretiens biographiques*, Demazière and Dubar distinguish several types of postures frequently encountered in sociological analysis. The illustrative posture presents passages of interviews to demonstrate a certain point. In the restitutive posture the interviews are considered to 'speak for themselves' (e.g. Bourdieu's *La Misère du monde* [1993]) [Demazière & Dubar 1997: 103].

The two authors preconize a third way: an inductive analysis of the categorisation through which social worlds are constituted and the 'condensation' of each interview, represented by the scheme representing the social world of the subject and the architecture of its social categorisation. Inspired by their book, the first approach adopted was that of building up a condensed case analysis of each interview.

³⁰ That is, the sociologist may 'birth' the narrative. See Figs in chapter 4. A resembling remark on the therapeutic character of interviews on childbirth has been made by Marander-Eklund, a Finnish folklorist having collected women's narratives of childbirth [2000].

³¹ Other types of 'exchanges' were also practised. One father for example, asked me to send him French advertisements that he was interested in.

Case analysis of interviews proceeds from the hypothesis that every singularity is relevant to cognitive processes or life stories [Blanchet & Gotman 1992: 96–97]. Hence, while thematic analysis erases the particularities of discourse in order to examine the presence of particular themes in different interviews, it also destroys the cognitive and emotional structure of narration. Case analysis however may resemble thematic analysis, when the themes are examined in each interview: the thematic analysis becomes vertical, instead of being horizontal. In our case, my themes were sequences in time.

Each of the Finnish interviews of mothers, and part of the French interviews, was thus synthetized and organized in function of different sequences of transition. The objective was to study variation in the experiences of the Finns and the French at different stages of transition to motherhood. Experience of maternity leave was of central interest here, given the national differences. Hence, beginning from the totality of the interview, I progressively deleted speech on themes which did not interest me, i.e. (intuitively) irrelevant themes. The goal was to ‘condense’ each account in some 4–5 pages of text. Events and facts necessary for the comprehension of each story were preserved, put in chronological order, the main objective being the identification of a certain number of phrases, conserved in their original wording, and in which the experience of a particular event or stage seemed to ‘crystallize’. The document obtained resembles a short-story, articulated in five pre-determined sequences of the process of transition: Sequence 1) Life before birth; Sequence 2) Pregnancy, childbirth and the maternity ward; Sequence 3) Maternity leave; Sequence 4) Back to work; Sequence 5) Reflexive motherhood/fatherhood.

The method turned out to be very time-consuming; it meant considering and deciding on the conservation or the deletion of each sentence in each interview. This required *grosso modo* a week per interview for transcription and ‘condensation’. Because vertical ‘condensations’ were so costly in terms of time, they were effectuated only for the interviews of the Finnish mothers. It was at this point that I stumbled upon the phrase ‘*it’s such a short time*’³². In a sense, then

³² Other techniques of analysis were also explored. A thematic analysis with a CAQDAS or Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Systems [Modalisa] was applied to the condensation of each interview. An analysis in terms of discursive repertoires mobilized by mothers when accounting for their decision to have a child was also commenced inspired by the work of the Finnish discourse analyst Eero Suoninen’s case study of a housewife’s interview [Suoninen 1993]. Suoninen defines the notion of repertoire as a relatively coherent domain of speech which forms a signifying or a terminological system [1993: 111–112]. Repertoires can be identified through the observation of similar metaphors or ways of speech. In the narrative of the mother he studies, Suoninen identified six different repertoires articulated to each other: the familiar, individualist, fateful, romantic, realist and humanist repertoires, which constituted the ‘multiple voices’ of a single individual. His method seems particularly adapted for researching contradictions present

the catchphrase resulted from an ‘*unmotivated exploration of the data*’ [Peräkylä 2004] – or at least an ‘unintentional’ one.

Novels

The novel was found to be the ideal matching piece for interviews as it constitutes a particular social arena in which the underside of motherhood and expressions of improper maternal emotions *have* been overtly explored³³. Challenges to decency in this social setting, by putting forth iconoclast ‘momoirs’ even appears as characteristic of the early 2000s, particularly in Finland. The Finnish corpus consists of five novels, of which four are narratives of transition to motherhood of highly-educated women (the sample chosen for the research). The fifth one [Katajavuori 2005] portrays a period of care leave taken by a mother-of-two. The corpus comprised the following titles:

- Cia Kiiskinen. *Äitiyspakkaus*. [The Maternity Package]. Helsinki: WSOY [2001]
Anna-Leena Härkönen. *Heikosti positiivinen*. [Feebly positive]. Helsinki: Otava [2001]
Katri Tapola. *Näiden seinien sisällä me emme näy*. [Inside These Walls We Are Invisible]. Helsinki: Tammi [2002]
Riina Katajavuori. *Lahjat*. [The Gifts]. Helsinki: Tammi [2005 (o.e. 2004)]
Pauliina Susi. *Ruuhkavuosi*. [The Hectic Year]. Helsinki: Tammi [2005]

Kiiskinen’s book, *Äitiyspakkaus*. [The Maternity Package], written in the form of a diary of her first year of new motherhood (likewise that of French author Darrieussecq [2002]), was marketed in Finland as:

a wretched and poetic portrayal *of the daily*, of the child, which make the mother sway from one extreme emotional state to another, awaken rage and envy, as well as a euphoric creative storm [...] Writing for this woman is a way to survive, to see through the fog, to flee, and to remember.

[Kiiskinen 2001: inside jacket, my emphasis]³⁴

in an individual’s discourse. Hence, the same mother, on which Suoninen focuses, depicts her life: as a familistic role (which demands that children’s needs come first); as a duty ‘which she has learnt to enjoy’; as a ‘prison-like madhouse’; as ‘fate’, etc.

³³ Reactions to such an enterprise of publicly exposing some of the ‘undersides’ of motherhood are varied (including reactions of some of the participants of the study). Some have been critical of what they consider to be an ‘over-exposition’ of its problematic sides (see also Mothers go public in chapter 4).

³⁴ See chapter 7, in which the encounter of contemporary Finnish women with motherhood was liable to be categorized as an encounter with ‘the daily’.

Anna-Leena Härkönen's *Heikosti positiivinen* was qualified by a critique as 'hitting the heart of a modern taboo' [Kotimaa, reproduced in Härkönen 2001: back cover]. Published the same year, these two narratives were two lay *ouvertures* which pushed thorny issues into the public sphere. Both books also attracted considerable media attention. All mothers, from whom I enquired if they had read the books, had heard of them, and several respondents had read them.

The publication of these first two works was followed by a somewhat less mediated novel, Katri Tapola's *Näiden seinien sisällä me emme näy*. [Inside These Walls We Are Invisible] in 2002, qualified as:

A discreet and humoristic depiction of the beauty of *succumbing* and of the frightfulness of *the daily*; the indispensable acceptance of being outside of the world, and finally, of a new return.

[Tapola 2002: back cover, my emphasis]

The latter was followed by two books. Pauliina Susi's novel *Ruuhkavuosi*. [The Hectic Year]:

...an entertaining and lively story of the collision between the objectives set for herself by a modern woman and *daily* realism.

[Susi 2005: back cover, my emphasis]

Lahjat, [The Gifts] by Riina Katajavuori is depicted by the author as a portrayal of the times. In an interview, the author relates having wished to:

...demonstrate that the full-time mother's life, those *daily* things, were not too little and insignificant.

[Vierula 2005]

Although all of the five abovementioned novels figure in the dissertation, they do so to different degrees. The three books of which the greatest use was made came finally to be: Katri Tapola. *Näiden seinien sisällä me emme näy*. [Inside These Walls We Are Invisible]. [2002], Riina Katajavuori. *Lahjat* [The Gifts] [2005 (o.e. 2004)] and Pauliina Susi. *Ruuhkavuosi*. [The Hectic Year] [2005]. Indeed, the corpus of novels and a collection of essays [Hiilamo, K. 2003a] were reread in the light of the discovery of the Finnish catchword, on which chapter 4 focuses. All three novels touch upon the issue of cross-generational relationships.

The first two Finnish novels (which, finally, were less exploited in the study) were identified by their visibility as best-sellers. Others, published during the research [2003–2005], were regularly scouted for in bookstores. The Finnish

configuration also prompted me to look for corresponding works on the French literary scene.

The three principal French novels, allegedly inspired by the lives of their authors, and on which chapter 7 is largely built are:

Marie Darrieussecq. *Le bébé* [The Baby]. Paris: POL [2002]

Nathalie Azoulai. *Mère agitée* [Jittery Mother]. Paris: Seuil [2002]

Eliette Abécassis. *Un heureux événement* [A Happy Event]. Paris, Albin Michel [2005]

The French novels were put to a somewhat different type of use. Firstly, they were explored in the light of the Finnish findings and temporizing talk. Indeed, all three contain versions of it. They were also used for a typology of three different types of existential attitudes adopted towards transition to motherhood and mothering (chapter 7), which emerged from these texts.

Indeed, novels constitute invaluable sociological materials for investigating the experience of women in terms of ‘qualia’ [Lodge 2003: 8–15], or the immediate phenomenological sensations associated with maternity leave and everyday life with children, which appear in these texts as depicted with exceptional precision – one most probably unattainable through interview data. ‘Qualia’ designate the specific nature of our subjective experience of the world, of which one example is the smell of ground coffee; it has a distinctive phenomenological character which we all have experienced, but which seems to be difficult to describe. Stream-of-consciousness literary narratives in the first person often convey such experiences by verbalizing the nonverbal [ibid.].

Instead of attempting a match and effectuating a similar analysis of the Finnish novels, in the same chapter, *Maternal techniques of self*, I chose to make use of a Finnish essay³⁵ and an interview of a Finnish couple in a popular women’s magazine to explore the issue of the encounter of parents with the ‘daily’. Indeed, as in the quotes pertaining to the Finnish novels above, new motherhood was regularly categorized, in Finnish interviews, – and especially in magazines – as a confrontation with ‘routines’. The section below describes the data set of articles from popular Finnish magazines and my use of it.

³⁵ The essay was published in a book which is a collection of autobiographical writings on parenthood, written by Finnish *public personae* and scholars [K. Hiilamo 2003a (ed.)]. Other essays in the book have also been occasionally quoted. English novels, from which excerpts are drawn are, Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours* [2002], quoted in the beginning of chapter 7, and Betsy Howie’s [2002] *Callie’s Tally. An Accounting of Baby’s First Year (or What my Daughter Owes me)* in chapter 5.

Women's magazines

One may note that the quotes from magazines in the dissertation are almost all from Finnish ones. Indeed, like the novels, interviews of mothers in the Finnish media have a distinctive quality compared to those observed in French media materials. Firstly, women's experiences of motherhood are a popular topic (see also Kurjenpuu 2000: 118)³⁶. 'Recently, public personalities have been thinking about their personal experiences of motherhood', a journalist notes in *Anna*-magazine [9.10.2001]. Secondly, several articles were found to discuss mothering and motherhood in highly reflexive, and sometimes, critical terms. In 2003, an interviewed media personality and new mother even remarks:

I have been wondering why pleasure is so seldom associated to talk about motherhood; it's always toughness that is emphasized.

[*Anna*, n° 1, 2.1.2003: 31]

A Finnish mother interviewed for the research, from whom I enquired if she had read about other women's experiences relates her interest towards them in these terms:

Mother: [I have read] several [laughter]. Have a look at our bookshelf! First of all, the one by Anna-Leena Härkönen, *Heikosti Positiivinen*, then Cia Kiiskinen's *Äitiyspakkaus*. They are probably the two last ones. [...] You have the *Anna*-magazine series going on at the moment, celebrity-mothers talk about motherhood, an excellent series, once a month. Joanna Järnefelt was actually the last one who spoke, and I'm extremely interested particularly in the type of stuff where another mother tells about her own experience.

Researcher: Could you tell me why?

Mother: Well, it's probably due to the fact that, what I am experiencing is like being on a sort of journey to motherhood, and it's somewhere so deep inside here that. It's such a strong feeling this being a mother. So it's so very interesting to read and share experiences. And come across things like: 'hey I do that, sort of, too!' or 'I think that way in this matter!' And 'you could see things that way too'.

³⁶ The magazine *Anna*, for example, had a series, 'Minä, äiti' [I, mother] consecrated to the topic once a month during the year 2003. Kurjenpuu reports a similar series in *MeNaiset* at the turn of the century [Kurjenpuu 2000: 118]. In contrast, Tuula Gordon noted how 'feminist mothers' she interviewed at the end of the 1980s suffered from balancing work and care, but also from powerlessness to bring their difficulties into the public sphere [1990]. Hence, after a breakthrough of the marital relationship as an increasingly popular subject in women's magazines in the 1970s [Jallinoja 1997: 90, 108], it would seem that motherhood has made now made its way into magazines in Finland.

Hence, novels and media materials may be considered as elements of a new type of dialogic dynamic and production of contemporary ‘motherhood’ as an ‘experience’ with mediated peers (see also chapter 4 ‘Mothers go public’)³⁷.

In French magazines, mothers’ testimonies tend to focus on their experiences of *pregnancy* and rarely cross the barrier of specialized magazines such as the French editions of the magazine *Parents*, or hyper-specialized media such as *Neuf mois* [Nine months]. Eeva Luhtakallio’s comparison of gender representations in Finnish and French women’s magazines confirms this diagnosis [2003]. From her study of the covers of four French and four Finnish widely read magazines for the years 1955, 1975 and 1995, she concludes that families were typically portrayed out of a ‘daily’ context in France. Representations of mothers in French magazines struck the sociologist as glamorous. Luhtakallio also reports the French interest for pregnancy. In parallel, this author found that while heterosexual relationships were typically represented as reflexive, seriously discussed projects, in Finnish magazines, French portrayals focussed on romance and great emotions [2003: 74–80, 132].

Therefore, a focussed analysis of French articles relating to pregnancy was effectuated for chapter 6. Three numbers of a specialized magazine, *Neuf mois* published during the research process were accessed randomly: February 2004, n° 39; September 2004, n° 45; February 2005, n° 49. Articles contained in the magazines were classified according to the types of enunciators and content-type [see section Perfect pregnancy].

The Finnish materials, some 80 pieces, have two different origins. Firstly, the corpus was built-up from the data-bank of Riitta Jallinoja at Helsinki University. A specialist in the media, she has systematically collected a corpus of women’s magazines – and I am indebted to her invite to rummage through her material for the years 1999–2004. Articles for the time-span 2005–2006 were scouted for regularly by the researcher and volunteers in Finland.

Quotes from these data-sets of articles from Finnish women’s magazines have not been systematically analyzed *per se*, but were utilized mainly in chapters 4 & 7 to glean occurrences, to consolidate the analysis and to liven it in an attempt to do sociology ‘in Technicolor’ [Wacquant 2001]. Media materials were also used to illustrate diverse background phenomena relating to the analysis: its’ larger contexts, which will be the subject matter of the next chapter.

³⁷ Compare with Helén’s passage on the institutional production of the ‘experience of motherhood’ in the section 1.3 A Genealogy of categories: ‘matrix’ & ‘motherhood’.

3 Contexts of motherhood

This chapter presents different types of contexts or settings in which mothers and fathers are immersed at the birth of the child. Firstly, ‘Coping with great expectations: the biographical context’ synthesizes research literature on the topic of transition to parenthood from different parts of the world. It will I hope, vividly conjure some of the issues and emotions which new parents are liable to be called upon to handle or be dealt with by others. In effect, they are issues which inhabit the maternal accounts – extracted from the pool of interviews, books and articles – on which the empirical analysis will be based.

The second sub-chapter deals with the fashions of contemporary child-rearing and a global Western trend: intensive mothering [Hays 1996]. A particular practice, breastfeeding, was chosen to illustrate the historical variation of child-rearing practice, and in order to highlight some of the national specificities of the two countries concerned. Thirdly, ‘The daily matrix’ consists of a comparison of European time use data. It portrays the material quotidian, with which parents become acquainted in the process of becoming a parent.

‘The national context of welfare states: Finland and France’ throws light upon national welfare culture and parental leave policy. It also presents a brief glance at trends in maternal employment in a comparative perspective. Links between the latter – contemporary child-rearing ideologies, and the development of national family leave legislation (maternity, paternity, parental and care leaves) – are also established.

All these dimensions are present in the accounts of experience present in this book. Hence, ‘Contexts of Motherhood’ is also destined to render feasible the establishing of empirical links or points of contact between different levels of social reality: self, situated activity, settings, and larger social and historical contexts [Layder 1993: 8]. Indeed, in conclusion, I will attempt an illustration of the articulation of such matrixes: the policy matrix and the daily matrix – and their conjoint workings in the moulding of gendered parenthoods.

3.1 COPING WITH GREAT EXPECTATIONS: THE BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

With my sub-title, *Cultivating Decency and Emotions in Finnish and French mother-talk*, I refer to an ongoing accomplishing of proper expressions of maternal emotions. Consequently, it is also implied that there may be problematic emotions to handle. This section plunges head first into the aforementioned issues through a reading of extant literature on transition to parenthood.

I will namely argue that, amongst mothers, the group of primiparae, first-time mothers, are particularly exposed to feelings of shame when expressing their negative emotions, due to the specificity of the biographical context associated with the transition to motherhood, loosely defined here as the first months and years after childbirth. Indeed, the overall change in lifestyle and role restructuration inherent in this life situation renders them particularly prone to strong contradictions. One pertains to a strong demand for the sharing of common experiences, knowledge and know-how – and a parallel vulnerability to critique. Another concerns the misfit between expectations and experiences.

As individuals go about developing skills and constructing their newly acquired identities, they travel across uncertain ground and are particularly exposed in terms of self-esteem and shame. Heritage and Sefi have illustrated how difficult it may be for new mothers to request advice from professionals. Applying conversation analysis to interactions observed between British mothers and health-visitors, they demonstrate how overt acknowledgement of any limitation in their competence as a care-giver is delicate for new mothers for fear of adverse judgements [Heritage and Sefi 1995: 372–373]¹.

Rogan et al. [1997] also emphasize mothers' sensitivity and vulnerability to advice. The women that they studied often regarded advice on breastfeeding and weaning practises as comments on their mothering abilities. But susceptibility is not limited to institutional settings; it may also prevail amongst 'colleagues'. On this topic, another British author Kate Figs declares her own feelings:

The mother who is still feeling her way and pretending to manage as she grapples with the logistics of going back to work, the demands of mothering and the sleepless nights, can find the apparent self-confidence of women who appear to know how to do it deeply distressing, I know I certainly did.

[Figs 1998: 205]

¹ In the article, the studied interaction takes places between a mother and an institutional actor. However, the vulnerability that new mothers are liable to experience may also be extended to other types of situations, of which informal face-to-face interaction amongst peers is one (see chapter 4).

North-American essayist Andrea Buchanan relates how she finally left her feelings of incompetence unexpressed, assured as she was by others that mothering infants was *'not that hard'*:

I waited for that mythical maternal instinct to kick in, waited for someone – a mother, my mother, any mother – to acknowledge that yes, really, everything does feel different and new and difficult, but that's okay. But nothing kicked in aside from sleep deprivation, fear and self-doubt, and what I heard was that newborns are easy, that mothering, at the beginning at least, is not that hard. So I suffered my culture shock in silence [...] I silently wondered why I couldn't cope as easily with that transition as I had with the changes in my pre-natal life.

[Buchanan 2003: xiii]

Novelty in a context of relative paucity of anticipatory socialization to practical care of children [Niemelä 1979: 161, 171; Niemelä 1991: 114; Barclay et al. 1997: 720, 726²; Martiskainen 1998a; Miller 2005: 89] and of relevant, realistic information on childbirth and the different life changes that it brings about in the lives of women – sometimes qualified as a 'conspiracy of silence' [Romito 1990: 134; Figes 1998: 2, 207; Miller 2005: 90] – tends to reinforce such dynamics³.

In the contemporary Western regime of fertility, new mothers are liable to effectuate their transition without intimates to accompany them [and to confide in] in the same life stage; and establishing trustful relationships amongst new colleagues may take time. Rapid change in child-rearing culture between generations can render conceptions of mothering incompatible⁴, and – as testified by the data, – more experienced colleagues may be reluctant to share their confidences with novices.

Miller reports a double mechanism of 'cautious silence' around maternity amongst the women participating in her UK study. Firstly, some women with children were worried about 'saying the wrong thing' to first-time expectant

² I am using data from research in other countries when I consider that it seems to apply to the Finnish and/or French context.

³ Romito uses the term to designate the social avoidance of discourse on the pain at childbirth, while Figes seems to refer to the aftermath of motherhood. Indeed, a number of journalistic works or essays since Figes' book, marketed as *'the first thoroughly honest book to chart the changes that motherhood brings'* [1998: back cover], have denounced the lack of realistic portrayals of the experiences of mothers. The term 'conspiracy' [Figes] or 'conjurament of silence' [Romito] is liable to convey the idea of the social disingenuousness surrounding the consequences of motherhood as 'intentional'. The thesis of 'collective amnesia' of mothers with older children (encountered twice in the Finnish case; see chapter 4 and Figes cited below), on the other hand, constitutes a somewhat more 'pacifying' hypothesis for explaining the relative silence maintained amongst women on the difficult or painful aspects of birthing and early infant care.

⁴ On support from own mothers and other mothers see also Barclay et al. 1997.

mothers. Secondly, the latter were liable to prefer expert sources of information, vested with cultural authority – collegial narratives were prone to being considered as too ‘subjective’ to be reliable, or even ‘unhelpful’ [2005: 70].

Figes evokes a configuration of yet diverse motivations for *not* sharing predicaments, a ‘web of shame’ [Brown 2004: 20]:

My closest friends were still childless and therefore unable to understand my predicament. New acquaintances with babies roughly the same age were too competitive and guarded to confide in. My family had brought up children in a different era [...] And the books I read were of little use [...] The turmoil of new motherhood is still a taboo subject. We talk more openly about pregnancy and the fact that childbirth hurts, but nobody mentions the aftermath. It is almost as if there is a conspiracy of silence surrounding the transition to motherhood. Friends who are a stage further are reluctant to mention it in case it should put you off, and those with older children forget what it was like to live through the fog of those early weeks and months.

[Figes 1998: 2]

In sum, many mothers may well be prone to believe that they are exceptions. ‘*I though it was just me*’ portrays ‘*the very nature of shame*’ [Brown 2004: 23; see also Guéritault 2004: 10, 25].

Another strong tension at transition may be constituted by the collision between the concrete realities and experiences of mothering with the expectations prior to confinement of individuals and couples; this is the sense of the expression ‘*the shock of the aftermath*’ used by Figes or Buchanan’s ‘*mother shock*’ [2003: xi, xiv, 53–93]; see also Oakley 1980:1; Gatrell 2005: 102; Barclay et al. 1997: 725. The ‘burden’ of romantic discourses on motherhood may contribute to the probability of such a clash. As Mary Evans, notes (here, *à propos* romantic love and concrete partnerships):

The West (in the form of its produced and everyday culture) endorses and validates romance, and yet cannot recognize that the encouragement of this set of feelings places a terrible burden of expectation on its participants.

[Evans 2003: 18]

Barclay et al., in an Australian study of 55 new mothers, report that new mothers frequently evoked sensations of loss in terms of time and, more fundamentally, in terms of a loss of control over one’s own life [1997: 724] – a leitmotiv which has appeared on several occasions in the data of this study also. They write:

Whilst the act of giving birth determines motherhood in the biological sense, our research shows that in the emotional and personal sense ‘becoming a mother’ takes

some time. 'Realizing' the impact of the child on their lives comes as a shock to mothers. The magnitude of the change they experience and the need to resolve the birth makes it difficult. Women feel 'unready' and are not prepared for the experiences of 'becoming a mother'

[Barclay et al 1997: 725–726]

Great expectations *a priori* may be namely associated to the couple's relationship. Indeed, while parenthood is commonly represented as a climax in a marital career in the sense of a relational accomplishment-, research results point to frequent strains in marital relationships at transition to parenthood (e.g. Romito 1990: 48; Cowan & Cowan 1992; Belsky and Kelly 1994; Hakulinen 1998: 11, 16⁵; Walzer 1998: 4–5, 101–127; Kellerhals, Widmer, Levy 2004: 126–127; Evans 2003: 111; Paaajanen 2005: 52–53)⁶.

Such consistently reported strain has been imputed to the contrast between '*starry-eyed pictures of intimate couples with cuddly babies and the stark reality of juggling the competing needs of growing children and adults*' [Cowan and Cowan 1992: 3, see also Barclay et al. 1997: 721], as well as increased differentiation or conflict in gender roles, as babies may trip partners back to a traditional division of labour (e.g. Romito 1990: 49; Sanchez & Thompson 1997; Hakulinen 1997: 16, 62–63; Walzer 1998: 101–127).

In *Love. An Unromantic discussion*, Mary Evans highlights childbirth as a potentially problematic event in contemporary partnerships, because it does not sit easily with dominant constructions of what marriage is about:

In the social world of the contemporary West, children are increasingly born into a culture which defines the primary purpose of heterosexual partnerships as sexual satisfaction [...]. The consequences of the birth of children to this form of relationships are often – as numerous people and much social evidence will testify – unhappy, since the relationship cannot sustain the translation of a relationship which

⁵ Hakulinen, in a quantitative study of 85 Finnish mothers and 79 fathers, reports that parents globally assessed their families as 'well-functioning'. However: '*the findings probably give a more positive view of family functioning than is the true situation. There is reason to suspect that those expectant parents with dysfunctional [sic] relationships dropped out in the first stage of the study*' [1997: 59].

⁶ Romito [1990: 48] synthesizes numerous essentially quantitative studies, as do MacDermid et al. [1990]. The latter, however, in a longitudinal comparison between parents and nonparents, report a decline in feelings of marital satisfaction in both groups. Therefore, they argue, normative changes of parenthood may often be confounded with those resulting from marriage *per se*. In their meta-analysis of nearly 100 studies on the subject reaching back as far as the 1950s, Twenge, Campbell and Foster [2003], however, found that parents globally report lower marital satisfaction compared to nonparents. Dissatisfaction was strongest amongst mothers with infants. Negative effects increased with the number of children and wealth. Young parents were also more negatively affected by transition. Moreover, the authors also report a rise of dissatisfaction over the last decades.

is primarily erotic into a relationship which has to be organized around the needs of dependent others.

[Evans 2003: 111]

French authors Détrez & Simon [2006: 249]⁷, also point to the contradiction between an emphasis on the intensiveness and gratification of conjugal sexuality and the routinous character of daily life for contemporary couples – a ‘daily’ which ‘really’ enters the family at the birth of the first child (see also Jallinoja 2000: 89, 107).

Jaana Vuori [2001] has demonstrated the presence of two contradictory discourses in Finnish expert texts: one is the discourse of shared parenting. The second one is the discourse of exclusive mothering⁸. Many parents, before having a child, may therefore have taken for granted that the discourse on shared parenting, which they adhered to, would actualize in their couples. This expectation is however contradicted by practice and statistics on the macro level [see the section ‘The daily matrix’]. Parenthood *ex-ante* as an abstraction, and parental praxis *ex-post* actualizing in a web of structural constraints, may seem very far one from another, particularly to mothers whom, in the immense majority of cases –, and aided in this by maternity, parental and care leave –, endorse the main responsibility for childcare – and alongside it, housework.

Merja Korhonen, in a Finnish study of women having had their children in the late 1980s and early 1990s, relates that the women she interviewed had looked forward to and expected another type of participation from the fathers of their children than they had managed to achieve [1996: 20]⁹. Walzer summarizes two landmark studies [that of Cowan & Cowan 1992 and of Belsky and Kelly 1994, based on several hundreds of interviews] in the following manner:

According to this research, women and men who create and care for a baby become increasingly unlike one another and differentiated in their work and parenting arrangements, despite their intentions

[Walzer 1998: 4].

Hence, several research results have pointed to men and women perceiving differentiated degrees of change brought about by the birth of the child [of which Cooper Harriman 1986]¹⁰. In a recent questionnaire, for Finnish women in their

⁷ Détrez & Simon draw on Guionnet, C. & É. Neveu (2005). *Féminins/Masculins*. Paris: A. Colin (page 94).

⁸ In Vuori’s study, the idea of exclusive mothering nevertheless often broke through from under the surface of an apparently gender neutral discourse of shared parenting (e.g. 2001: 148, 154).

⁹ On middle-aged women’s assessments of motherhood in France see Pugeault-Cicchelli [2005].

¹⁰ Cooper Harriman found that women reported higher levels of stress. Paajanen [2005] also found differences in age groups (in her study, age being strongly correlated to employment status).

thirties, the ‘drawbacks’ of parenthood were essentially: ‘finding time to care for the marital relationship’ (70.4 percent); the fact that ‘childcare is much more trying than I could imagine’ (43.2 percent); a deterioration of the couple’s economical situation (41.8 percent); constant tiredness due to a lack of sleep (42.6 percent) [Paaajanen 2005: 90].

According to Cowan & Cowan’s longitudinal ten year study in the United States during the 1980’s partners were also liable to conceal their confusion about the misfit between expectations and experiences one from another:

few husbands or wives know how to tell anyone, especially each other, that they feel disappointed or frightened. ‘This is supposed to be the best time of our lives; what’s the matter with me?’
[Cowan & Cowan 1992: 3]¹¹.

While on the inside jacket of Belsky’s and Kelly’s opus [1994] one reads:

Many of the three million couples who become parents each year find themselves riding a roller coaster of elation, despair, and bafflement. They approached parenthood with high hopes and soaring dreams, but six months or a year after the child’s birth they find themselves wondering: ‘What’s happened to us?’

A Finnish psychologist and marital therapist portrays the ‘surprise’ brought about by ‘daily life’ with young children in an article with the title: ‘When daddy gets fed up with daily life’.

Men nowadays are used to a kind of quality life [...] Many are surprised that family life is so trying, flooding with repetitious routines and duties. The crisis may also advent when the mother goes back to work [after family leaves] and the housework has to be reallocated [...] Life on the side of the mother tired by the baby is boring. [Meidän Perhe 3.3.2005: 53].

Riitta Jallinoja [2000: 103–112] has also depicted the birth of a child as a turning point for couples. She portrays the family as formed by a succession of sequences, of which romances are one kind. Romance lights up between partners. However, ‘thirds’ such as work – or a child – commonly come to colonize the common territory of the couple. A child represents a ‘finishing touch’ of sorts

¹¹ Similarly Finnish Pastor Kirsi Hiilamo, in an account of her motherhood experience, depicts herself and her partner as ‘frightened by the contradiction between ideals and reality’ at the birth of their first child [2003b: 57]. Moreover, Hiilamo considers that this contradiction is a generalized one [ibid: 8]. See also Finnish Cia Kiiskinen’s portrayal of early motherhood as an illusory ‘balancing act between ideal efforts and dreams’ [2003: 84]. For MacDermain et al. on the contrary: ‘Popular stereotypes evoke images of tired, stressed husbands and wives bickering with each other as they struggle to cope with the demands of the new baby’ [1990: 475].

which undoes romance – a turning point, at which the couple is called upon to rebuild it's foundations on something else.

A 'romance' may also light up between mother and child (see 'Snapshots of mother-child romance', in chapter 4). Such stories have gained precedence in the media. The mother-child 'romance' may become a rival of the partners' romance, Jallinoja remarks. But it may also represent one of the promises which maternity does not always fully deliver – at least at first sight.

Transition¹² to motherhood may therefore be all but smooth. Becoming a mother may represent a turning-point in many women's lives, (e.g. McMahon 1995; Martiskainen 1998; Korhonen 1996: 19) – particularly in those of educated middle-class mothers. Adrienne Rich, in her seminal work, *Of Woman Born. Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, wrote, departing from her own experience in the 1970s:

Throughout pregnancy and nursing, women are urged to relax, to mime the serenity of madonnas. No one mentions the psychic crisis of bearing the first child, the excitement of long buried feeling about one's mother, the sense of confused power and powerlessness, of being taken over on the one hand and touching new physical and psychic potentialities on the other, a heightened sensibility which can be exhilarating, bewildering, exhausting. No one mentions the strangeness of attraction – which can be as single-minded and overwhelming as the early days of a love affair – to a being so tiny, so dependent, so folded-in to itself – which is, and yet is not, part of oneself.

[Rich 1997 (1976): 36]

A propos, Ann Oakley states, in 1980, that becoming a mother 'is a crisis, a point of no return' [1980:1]. Barclay et al. [1994: 727] quote Rubin¹³ :

...from the onset of labour to the destination, child bearing requires an exchange of a known self in a known world to an unknown self in an unknown world.

3.2 EXTENDED CONTEXT: FASHIONS IN CHILDCARE

On the whole it cannot be doubted that America has entered upon the century of the child' wrote social historian Calhoun [...] What historian Calhoun failed to explain was that the child was becoming the 'centre of life' only for women

[Ehrenreich & English 2005: 202]

¹² My use of the term transition to motherhood simply designates the process of becoming a mother. For a summary of preceding uses see Hakulinen [1998: 14–16]. For a critique of the category see Kerry Daly [1992: 103].

¹³ Rubin R. (1984). *Maternal Identity and the Maternal Experience*. New York: Springer (page 52).

One of the important elements in the ‘unknown world’ of new parenthood evoked by Rubin above for increasing proportions of Western women – not only raised in families of smaller size, but whose primary socialization did not, most probably, essentially focus on mothering – is that of child-rearing practice. After sketching the general outlines of historical and cultural developments in Western models of motherhood, as in the section above, I will set the scene of the conventions of intensive mothering [Hays 1996] from the perspective of parents – and in terms of emotions management.

Historical perspective

Ehrenreich & English depict child raising in agrarian societies, not as ‘*something one did, so much as it was something that happened*’ [2005: 211, original emphasis]. ‘*The mother-child relationship had been shaped by the round of daily tasks*’ [ibid.; see Vuori 2001: 21; and chapter 4 below]. A first notable shift occurred at the turn of the twentieth century as an expert-guided regime ‘*industrialized child-rearing*’ was established. Its matrix – in the sense that Elias deployed the term (see chapter 1) – was the factory [ibid: 220]. Key words for child-rearing in the first half of the century were regularity, discipline, and efficiency (see ‘Fashions of breastfeeding’ below).

The rationalization of child-rearing, embedded in the rise of medicine and psychology and afferent theories, practices and institutions¹⁴, however, has also been concomitant with an enchantment of childhood. Carol Smart encapsulates this development in the following terms:

Initially they [the rules defining a good mother] covered mainly physical matters of diet, warmth, immediate environment, and physical development. Later these calibrations were extended to include the immense realm of the psychological care and nurture of the child. Thus the good mother was no longer simply the one who fed and cleansed properly, she could be inadequate if she failed to love *properly* and to express this love in a correct *fashion*.¹⁵

[Smart 1996: 46, original emphasis]

A boom in marital guidance and popular child-rearing manuals furthered such a societal enterprise; one of adapting and enhancing the individual’s capacities towards a ‘normal’, ‘satisfactory’ and ‘happy’ sexual and family life. The ‘happy

¹⁴ For a synthesis of the rise of such institutions in Finland see e.g. Vuori 2001: 18–29.

¹⁵ Smart notes that: ‘*In the late-twentieth century, even middle- and upper-class mothers can fail since the addition of psychological and emotional criteria has broadened and deepened the areas of scrutiny*’ [1996: 47].

family project' became understood as a requisite for reproduction [Helén 1997: 330]¹⁶. Mother and child were the key figures of such a family – and its major concern the fashioning of the child's personality [ibid: 333].

Indeed, a host of scholars has pointed to the great moral and sentimental value bestowed upon young children in Western societies [Zelizer 1994; Ehrenreich & English 2005: 201–207], intertwined to rising standards and exigencies of their care during the twentieth century [Dally 1982: 56–123; Smart 1996: 46; Hays 1996; Sohn 1996: 91, 443, 445; Knibiehler 1997; Théry 2001: 259; Ehrenreich & English 2005: 208–215]. Powered by a psychosocial discursive formation of motherhood [Vuori 2001: 19], they also result from the deployment of political technologies of support, control and guidance of populations [Hélén 1997: 332]. According to some commentators, the demands upon parents by society continue to inflate [Furedi 2002; Warner 2005].

The 1950s, or the 'golden age of the housewife', has been documented as a turning-point in Western understandings of parent-child relations, when concerns of hygiene, discipline and family size gave way to a focus on more informal parent-child interactions, relationships, and emotional equilibrium. According to Irène Théry, as the male breadwinner/full-time homemaker model was democratized and extended from the *bourgeoisie* to working-class families, an unprecedented specialization of wives in child-rearing also took place (e.g. Théry 2001: 259; on the US see also Coontz 2005: 42)¹⁷. It was also linked to a new type of segregation of mothers and children in social space [Dally 1982: 9–10]¹⁸.

Stephanie Coontz, who has conducted research on the underside of 1950s families in the United States, has underscored how this decade has become an icon for Western nostalgics [2005: 40–48]¹⁹. However, that which is often taken

¹⁶ 'Happiness meant the objective normalcy of family founding and housework, procreation, and education, as well as that of balanced emotional relationships, but also individually experienced, 'personally lived' desire, love and joy of family life' [Helén 1997: 330].

¹⁷ *Bourgeois* mothers, however, were most often supported by domesticity [ibid.]

¹⁸ Dally, a psychiatrist, writes from the perspective of the Britain of the 1980s: 'During the twentieth century, for the first time in history, the majority of women have had, increasingly, to bring up their children virtually alone. Their husbands are away at work all day and hardly see the children except at week-ends. They have no domestic help. There is little or no community life or life on the street. They are likely to have little or no everyday contact with their own families [...] Mothers have no respite in the early years except, for some, the presence of a husband at night and during the week-ends (not always helpful), and perhaps a play-group for a few hours a week. What is particularly fascinating is the way in which society in general and mothers in particular have reacted to these changes' [Dally 1982: 9].

¹⁹ The 1950s appear as a decade of surefire methods for raising children and less complicated choices; one of secure neighbourhoods in which community life flourished. While many were excluded from such a way of life, however, the 1950s contrasted with the violence and penuries of war-time; provided a stable economic environment, in which an optimistic outlook and confidence in a better future were patent [Coontz 2005].

today as the measure of the 'traditional model' of the Western family was in fact a short-lived exception and *experiment* of a new type of post-war family. The supposed new family dynamics were namely explored through sitcoms: '*simultaneously advertisements, etiquette manuals, and how-to lessons for a new way of organizing marriage and child raising*' [ibid: 44] portraying:

...harmonious families, in which fathers know best, mothers are never bored or irritated and teenagers rush to the dinner table every night, eager to get the latest does of parental wisdom.

[Coontz 2005: 45]

Aided by economic growth, access to consumer goods, and enhanced possibilities for more harmonious marital relations than their own parents, contributed to the fact that many '*families found it possible to put together a good imitation of this way of living*' [ibid].

In the 1960s and 1970s, the legalization and diffusion of contraceptive technologies; the quest for and progressive integration of women in wage-work; in parallel with mutations in family law; revealed the resistance of such a closure of women by women in marriage and motherhood. During these decades and into the 1980s, 'the woman question' and the renegotiation of the gender contract eclipsed 'the child question', which would come to the fore in the 1990s in a novel fashion.

An invisible permanence

In 1996, Sharon Hays' *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* came as a timely contribution to examine how contemporary generations of wage-earning women mother. Her book filled a gap: that left by the concentration of the social and sociological gaze on women's labour market activities and unprecedented emancipation. Indeed, the sociologist countered the implicit understanding that working mothers were mothering less or were downsizing their commitment to children.

She scrutinizes the contemporary 'ideology of intensive mothering', which crystallized in Dr. Spock's 1946 bestselling manual and which, Sharon Hays argues, has persisted as a dominant model to date. Spock emphasized the primacy of the mother as a care-giver; the crucial role of maternal affection in the child's development; the necessary comprehension, anticipation and knowledge of the child's needs; and permissiveness in child-rearing. A valorising view of children was also associated to a portrait of mothering as an eminently pleasur-

able activity. Although prolix on step-to-step practical advice, his message to mothers was: ‘*trust yourself*’ and ‘*enjoy*’ [Hays 1996: 48].

Extending her analysis to Penelope Leach and Terry Brazelton, Hays contends that such prescriptions have been accentuated. Eminently child-centeredness expert visions depict the infant as guiding the process of parenting, as ‘*every baby knows what is needed*’ [Hays 1996: 59, quoting child-rearing guru Brazelton] and parents should ‘*follow the child’s lead*’ [ibid., quoting Spock]. The social order of the quotidian routine has been turned upside down, compared to agrarian societies or ‘*industrialized child-rearing*’: it is not ‘*shaped by the round of daily tasks*’ of the mother [Ehrenreich & English 2005: 211], but the mother’s ‘*day-to-day job is, above all, to respond to the child’s needs and wants*’ [ibid: 57]. Hence, not only the requirement of full-time care of children and secondly, mothers’ sole responsibility for them, constituted a contradiction maximized in our Western societies [Dally 1982: 123, referring to Bernard 1972²⁰] – but the rising standards of childcare is a remarkable feature in regard to the generalization of dual-earner families.

Such a development raises several questions. How far can conventions and demands associated to the ‘priceless’ child [Zelizer 1994] be reconciled with the exigencies on the job in the context of a ‘stalled revolution’ [Tigerstedt 1996: 263] of a division of labor between the sexes?²¹ The growing emphasis on fatherhood; the discursive integration of men into child-rearing-talk under the umbrella terms of ‘parent’ and ‘parenting’; as well as the emergence of fatherhood has a social problem and object of policy [Eräranta 2005: 19] has not yet provided a solution for this situation. And what are the consequences or tensions of such child-rearing ideals inside families who apply them? This is an issue tackled below.

Managing parent-child interaction

In her 2003 edition of the *Managed Heart*, (originally published in 1983), Hochschild comments upon the insights provided by subsequent research in the field of the sociology of emotions in these terms:

Studies [that have been published since the first edition of her work] suggest a vital link between larger social contradictions and private efforts to manage feeling. Per-

²⁰ Bernard, J. (1972). *The Future of Marriage*. New York: World Publishing (page 10).

²¹ One such solution may be temporary homemaking: see section ‘The policy matrix of parental leaves’.

haps it is not simply emotion which has a signal function for us, as I have argued in this book, but emotion management itself. For acts of extreme emotion management can alert us to contradictions in the wider society which create strains. Where are these contradictions? At work, at home, and increasingly I believe within the realm 'in between' home and work

[Hochschild 2003: 203]

In the aforementioned study of the emotional labour involved in jobs like those of flight attendants, Hochschild has noted that '*celebrants and critics alike have not inspected at close hand or with a social-psychological eye what it is that "people jobs" actually require of workers*' [Hochschild 2003: 10, original emphasis]²². According to my interpretation, this applies to mothering, and to the understandings that non-parents, many fathers, and elder generations of parents may have of it (see chapter 4 on intergenerational relations amongst mothers). Managing the socially valued and 'demanding clients' that children have become by setting aside one's negative emotions – or their public display – may today be as challenging an endeavour as facing irate passengers on Delta Airlines²³.

It is amusing to note that a passenger-as-child analogy appears in Hochschild's work, when she describes how the taboo sentiment of anger was supposed to be managed during flights by personnel. In training, a recruit was told: 'Basically, the passengers are just like children. They need attention' [Hochschild 2003: 110]. The latter comments:

To think of unruly passengers as 'just like children' is to widen tolerance of them. If their needs are like those of a child, those needs are supposed to come first. The worker's right to anger is correspondingly reduced; as an adult he must work to inhabit and suppress anger at children

[Hochschild 2003: 111]

But families also have feeling rules, as Hochschild writes in the *Managed Heart*:

The family is often considered a 'relief zone' away from the pressures of work, a place where one is free to be oneself. It may indeed be a refuge from the emo-

²² Hochschild's study of 'commercialized' emotion management in order to heed to those of others, required in service jobs, *The Managed Heart* was first published in 1983. I refer to the 2003 edition here.

²³ Dally, in a psychiatrist's terms, counters the belief that child-rearing geared by psychological expertise has been unilaterally a development towards better parenting: '*increasing complication and sophistication of society lead to increasingly complicated and subtle ways of failing children*' [Dally 1982: 59]. For example, when parents adopt a therapeutic view, she contends, this is a sophisticated way of distancing a child, and not becoming closer to the latter [ibid.]. As hostile feelings are inherent in human relationships, she contends, we assist '*fewer physical manifestations of feelings and [...] an increase in theories about what to do and what not to do*' [ibid. 63] – i.e. more powerful modes of emotional control.

tion work required on the job, but it quietly imposes emotional obligations of its own. Of these, perhaps the feeling obligations of parent for child are the clearest. Here, if nowhere else, we say love is ‘natural’ [...] In fact, however, we do seem to need conventions here – not because parental love is unnatural but because it is so important to security and sometimes so difficult to sustain [Hochschild 2003: 69].

In the work cited above, however, Hochschild considers ‘emotional labor’ on the job as potentially more constraining/alienating than ‘emotion work’ in the private sphere. Private negotiations in families are seen as more flexible than directives in company manuals: ‘*ritually sealed and almost inescapable*’ [2003: 19]. This sort of generalization occurs when the author speaks about generic ‘family’ or ‘private’ ties – consequently omitting the specificities of relations between parents and children, i.e. of descent (on the rules of descent and contemporary models of mothering see chapter 5)²⁴.

Indeed, parenting is a highly expert-regulated domain, and, it could be argued, more ‘inescapable’ than an unsatisfactory job, particularly for mothers (see chapter 5). Hochschild’s ulterior thesis of ‘home becoming work and work becoming home’ [2001] recognizes, however, the tensions also existing inside the home. In fact, this author maintains that an increasing number of parents may be fleeing the time-bind, the tyrannies of taylorized work in the home and uncooperative toddlers, while succumbing to the lure of socially valorised occupations (see the discussion on this point in the section consecrated to parental time-use).

An issue which Hochschild does not delve upon, however, are the consequences of intensive parenting – or that fact that the feeling rules governing relationships between parents and children are, to a large extent, informed by child-rearing culture, manuals – and, I will argue further, by the codification of intimate relationships as love [Luhmann 1998]²⁵.

Sharon Hays defines the core characteristics of the ideal of the labour-intensive, time-consuming, emotionally absorbing, and financially costly, mothering regime which implies:

²⁴ See also [ibid: 85, my emphasis]: ‘*In private life we are free to question the going rate of exchange and free to negotiate a new one. If we are not satisfied, we can leave; many friendships and marriages die of inequality*’.

²⁵ S. Williams notes that Hochschild has been criticized for bypassing the millennial nature of emotion management and the fact that developing proper practice and emotion has always been a public affair [2001: 69].

...giving all one's love, being constantly attentive to another persons needs, trying to understand all their desires, and for many, consistently reasoning with a little person whose logic may differ from one's own

[Hays 1996: 120, original emphasis]²⁶

Hays, who interviewed women from different social backgrounds contends that the credo of intensive mothering has been internalized by most American mothers, although middle-class women have been in the vanguard of adopting it [Hays 1996: 98]²⁷. As mothers of young children have increasingly invested the labour market *and* endeavoured to go about the task of child-rearing intensively, Hays remarks, '*the cultural contradictions of motherhood have been deepened rather than resolved*' [ibid: 151]²⁸. Indeed, she argues that scholars assuming that women's access to relatively high-status and well remunerated jobs, the less intensive child-rearing becomes, are wrong²⁹. Her data indicates just the opposite [ibid: 160; see also section 3.3 The daily matrix].

Quite similarly, psychiatrist Ann Dally, in her *Inventing Motherhood. The Consequences of an Ideal* had reflected, more than a decade earlier, on the fascinating fact that in the middle of the twentieth century, following interpretations of John Bowlby's work on institutionalization, women 'unprotestingly if not willingly', [Dally 1982: 9–10] took up exclusive mothering, which represented fundamental changes in child-rearing dogma [ibid: 9–10, 88]. This occurred:

...as though they were not changes at all but rather as though they were part of the discovery that children need the continuous and exclusive presence of their moth-

²⁶ Frank Furedi has denounced the extreme exigencies of parenting on demand: he pictures American 'parents' as becoming twenty-hour-a-day servants, chauffeurs, teachers, therapists and entertainers for their progeny. Contemporary parenting is also sometimes represented as an 'ordeal' [Furedi 2002: 75–92]. It is interesting to note that analyses such as that of Furedi or Hays go against the grain of the conclusions drawn by such sociologists as Hochschild [2001] and of the dominant discourse on the diminished time of parents and children, which has been an object of public debate in Finland [Jallinoja 2006].

²⁷ Hays found that fathers did not subscribe to all the exigencies of intensive child-rearing.

²⁸ According to Hays, the more powerful the logic of the rationalized market became, so did its ideological opposition: intensive mothering. Zelizer has insisted how the social value of children has represented a bulwark against the market [1994]. For more on this point, see chapter 5.

²⁹ '*Mothers do send their kids to day care, but they also expend much time and energy, (and if they can afford it, a good deal of material resource) to assure that their children get the best in child-care services – and even then many still worry about the time they spend away. While many mothers do emphasize quality time, one might also point out the sense of guilt regarding unfulfilled obligations that this notion implies and the sense of emotional commitment and moral obligation that is hidden just beneath its surface*' [Hays 1996: 161]. Moreover, the author points out that well-paid, highly qualified women '*actually use methods that are slightly more labor-intensive*' although they also '*mark their class status through child-rearing techniques*' and maximize and use their time as efficiently as possible.

ers and that anything which separates mother and child is destructive and psychologically damaging to the child

[Dally 1982: 9]³⁰

Works such as *Paranoid P-parenting* by Frank Furedi [2003] and *Perfect Madness* by Judith Warner [2005] point to the yet strengthening hold of this ideology during the 1990's. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim [1995: 117–118] also evoke 'parenting mania', which they consider to particularly concern urban, middle-class, mothers. All, of course, do not succumb to purist versions of this socially and historically specific definition of parenting, sometimes designated as 'overparenting' or 'hyper-intensive parenting', and criticized as leading to inflation in parental expectations, emotional loads and exhaustion.

However, alongside the discourse emphasizing the importance of mother-care, Western mothers have also been warned – or accused – of overprotecting or overindulging their children (embodied by the stereotype of the 'fussing' mother)³¹. As Evelyn Nakano Glenn notes, motherhood ideologies are liable to embrace strong contradictions: '*Mothers are romanticized as life-giving, self-sacrificing, and forgiving, and demonized as smothering, overly involved, and destructive*' [1994: 11; see also Knibiehler 2000: 75–76; Hays 1996: 47–48; Ehrenreich & English 2005].

Implicitly, then, experts are needed in order to 'negotiate the tortuous road between neglect/rejection and overprotection/overindulgence' [Hays 1996: 48]. Another paradoxical feature in expert-talk pinpointed by Hays is, that – alike Dr Spock whose most famous piece of advice ran '*Trust yourself*' – expert advice often combines this injunction with detailed advice about daily doings with children (on this 'double-bind' see also Mehl 2003: 35–55 who underlines this feature in the discourse of child-rearing expert Françoise Dolto and other mediated experts; Vuori 2001: 147). In this sense, discourse on over-parenting is not a novelty. However, its examination from the *parents' point of view* – and as the result of cultural child-rearing fashions – is a more recent enterprise³².

³⁰ For Dally, Bowlby's views (although he was writing about homeless children) '*were widely interpreted to mean that it was essential that ordinary mothers everywhere should stay with their young children all the time [...] The wide spread ideas about the dangers of separating mother and child even for short periods, the way in which it was taken up in official circles and used for political and commercial convenience, and also the way in which it was taken up by the mothers of the time makes it one of the most interesting phenomena of the mid-twentieth century*' [ibid: 88].

³¹ 'Fuss' is a condescending – and gendered – expression, often denoting ridicule associated to mothering: this is attested by the fact that in a French–English dictionary, the verb fuss is illustrated by the phrase: "*stop fussing, Mum! I'll be OK!*" [Robert Collins Senior 2003].

³² On the emergence of the idea of mother-love as potentially dangerous for children in psychological theory, see e.g. Allen [2005: 187–190]. The salience of this type of discourse seems to be culturally variable. In France, blaming over-protective mothers still occurs in the public sphere

If child-centred mothering has strengthened its foothold during the last decades in both countries of the study, it seems more salient in Finland than in France (see below and chapter *Profiter de mon enfant*). In Finland, reputed as a child-friendly Nordic Welfare-state, the spectacular prolongation of family leaves over the last decades can be taken as one indicator of such child-centred dynamics (see section 3.4 ‘The policy matrix’). In both countries, the trend towards long breastfeeding is another.

Breastfeeding provides a heuristic sociological object for demonstrating the synchronic and diachronic variations in child-rearing practices. A brief comparison of French and Finnish practices and attitudes is provided below.

Fashions of breast-feeding in Finland and France

Currently, breast-feeding on demand is framed as a ‘child-centred’ practice in the West. A brief historical look, however, provides evidence of varying conceptions of ‘good practice’ during the twentieth century in time and place. Hence, Truby King, English child-rearing guru at the turn of the 20th century, established that babies were to be fed at rigidly regular 4-hour intervals: mothers were to await the stroke of the clock, and by no means to feed at night. Infants ‘*had to learn to sleep at the proper times and not be allowed to manipulate and dominate their mothers by their demands*’ [Dally 1982: 81]. Maternal indulgence on schedules was seen to induce weakness of character, vice and criminality [Allen 2005: 190].

This dogma held a hegemonic position in many public health systems during the first half of the twentieth century³³. A Finnish mother whose children were born as late as the 1970’s relates:

Advice on child-rearing was strict. For example, the intervals of breast feeding and feeding had to be 4 hours and you were not supposed to take the child in your arms very often.

[9 *kuukautta* n° 1, March–May 2004: 43]

(e.g. Aldo Naouri et al. 2005, *Les meres juives*). Such discourse would appear quite anachronistic in the contemporary Finnish climate; as would discourse on the ‘tyranny’ of small children in society: a repertoire present in France in the 2000’s. Indeed, French public debates on parenthood have, to a large extent, been debates on authority and social order [Martin 2004: 45–48]. In the Finnish case, a remarkable feature of public discussions on the family has been the tendency to frame children as the *victims* in the face of a winner-take-all society and parents long working hours [Jallinoja 2004; 2006].

³³ Hays identifies the beginning of permissive child-rearing in the 1930s in North America [1996: 45].

Similar advice could still be administered in French clinics in the beginning of the 1990s³⁴. Such schemes, therefore, constitute powerful social norms regulating the access of infants and mothers to each other, a dogma progressively effaced by Dr. Spock and his successors.

Currently, winds are blowing in the opposite direction: from ‘industrialized child-rearing’ [Ehrenreich & English 2005: 220], we are witnessing a shift to highly individualized child-rearing – if not ‘boutique’ care (see Zelizer 2005)³⁵. Indeed, on the forefront of this tendency, twenty-first century ‘attachment parenting’ tends to abolish frontiers between mother and child. Prolonged breast-feeding at demand – with its eventual corollary of ‘co-sleeping’ and baby-slings or wraps – ‘*keep you in direct contact with your baby for constant bonding*’³⁶, as an advertisement puts it.

By European standards, contemporary breast-feeding practises are subject to important cultural variation. ‘Only’ 50 percent of French infants are breast-fed at birth, which constitutes one of the lowest figures for Europe [Sandre-Pereira 2005: 92, 95; Gojard 1998: 55]. In France, the public health system has yet maintained a rather neutral stance towards this practice, despite international campaigns and increasing institutional pressure towards breast-feeding as a norm from the World Health Organization. Hence, in the majority of French hospitals, mothers are asked if they wish to breast – *or* bottle-feed³⁷.

Feeding practices are also class sensitive. According to Gojard, breast-feeding is more common in France amongst college educated women [1998: 58]. Lactation periods are brief, correlated as they are to the duration of maternity leaves. This backcloth certainly contributes to the fact that prolonged breast-

³⁴ A recommendation received by the author in France in 1992 along with comments from elder women on the fact that responding automatically to an infants crying was liable to render my baby too demanding to ‘manage’.

³⁵ Zelizer evokes highly personalized hotels and ‘boutique’ hospitals as an emergent form of socially highly valued care accessible to high status individuals [2005: 192].

³⁶ Mothers interested in attachment parenting may quest on the Internet for attachment parenting accessories and advice and do not hesitate to cross frontiers in this endeavour. Similarly, one North-American attachment parenting site, for example, was found to market a Finnish wrap or ‘äiskä poncho’ <<http://www.mayawrap.com/>>

³⁷ In fact, attitudes towards breast-feeding have varied in French history. Mercenary wet nurses were common before World War I: in 1914, a third of Parisian infants were sent to mercenary wet nurses. On earlier periods, see e.g. Badinter 1980: 56–67, who considers that this custom became widespread in urban France amongst families of all statuses in the 18th century. According to a police report, 19 000 out of the 21 000 infants born in Paris in the year 1780 were sent out of the town to mercenary wet nurses [ibid: 57]. However, this has not always been the case. In the pronatalist 1920s and 1930s, Françoise Thébaud reports that breastfeeding in French hospitals was an ‘obligation’ [1986: 279]. Recently, Elisabeth Badinter [2004] has criticized the interdiction of advertising for milk-powder in French hospitals in the beginning of the 2000’s as a renewed form of pressure.

feeding was experienced by French university educated mothers in the study as a resistance towards dominant norms (this appeared, to some extent, in Finnish interviews). These mothers would often describe themselves as seeking for information on the topic on the Internet pages of such organisms as the WHO, World Health Organization or grassroots organizations, e.g. the *Leche League*. Hence, extant global pro-breast-feeding campaigns do not transit in France by the traditional institutional circuit of the public health care system. Such mothers mentioned the paucity of information and advice on breast-feeding from nurses or their MD's. Eliette Abécassis' writes:

Breast-feeding is such an extraordinary experience in our technological society that it requires a thorough documentary research [...] It's taboo knowledge, not found in books, for matters of decency, and which is delivered parsimoniously from a breast-feeding mother to *another*'

[Abécassis 2005: 102–103]

The father may also be understood as having his say on breast-feeding in France, as bottle-feeding may be envisaged as a 'father-friendly' alternative, which allows for greater relational proximity with their infants³⁸ – or as 'couple-friendly' as lactation may be construed as hindering the re-establishment of sexual relations. Novelist Eliette Abécassis, for example portrays the reticence of the partner and mother-in-law towards her breast-feeding [2005: 107]. Hence, in 2003, M. Rufo, a well-known French specialist of children, advised mothers to wean their infants at the age of 3 months because:

breasts are toys for daddy and mummy, he [the baby] has his [toy] car' [...] A breast that feeds is not a sexualized breast. When a mummy starts to have sexual relations again, she cannot breast-feed and have her breast caressed'

[*Express* 9.10.2003]

This declaration provoked protestations from pro-breast-feeding organizations and on Internet discussion boards.

In Finland, on the contrary, breast-feeding is not framed as a 'choice', but is considered, in the absence of physical factors, by midwives and mothers alike, as a self-evident response to a child's needs (one interviewee mentioned the abundant 'propaganda' on the issue in a Helsinki hospital). During the first five

³⁸ Friends, doctors or colleagues are frequently presented as baffled by mothers who prolong breast-feeding in France. For a column of 'best-of' of remarks from friends, family, paediatricians and colleagues on this topic see e.g.: <<http://forum.magicmaman.com/magic03ans/allaitement-biberon-nourrisson/best-remarques-medecins-famille-collegues-sujet-3662828-2.htm>> (processed on 12.10.2005).

or six months of an infant's life it tends to constitute a non-negotiable issue³⁹. However, long periods of breast-feeding (for example of 12–18 months) may provoke comments from elder matrons in Finnish health-care, as testified by one participant in the research. The association of breast-feeding and 'good mothering' has become correlated to a degree that mothers with insufficient lactation or having difficulties in breast-feeding mentioned feelings of guilt.

A propos, an interesting anecdote on the mechanisms of social control pertaining to feeding practises occurred during the research process. A Finnish celebrity photographed with her infant and a [milk] bottle became the object of public curiosity (did the bottle contain her own milk or was she feeding her baby with a substitute?) – and indignation. Her testimony was published in a Finnish daily newspaper, alongside the testimonies of other public figures, which all denounced guilt-inducing in the Finnish context (of which an MP who had some years earlier breast-fed her child in Parliament) [*Ilta-Sanomat* 5.–6.3.2005: 24]. On this occasion, I was solicited to comment upon this social phenomenon, which seems specific to the Finnish national context. Public opinion also influenced a recent change in the contents of the National Insurance Institution's maternity-package, distributed to Finnish families at the birth of each child⁴⁰. Because the presence of a baby's travel bottle destined for water was deemed 'anti-breastfeeding', it was removed from the pack [*Kelan Sanomat* 1/2006].

Amongst the flip-sides of hyper intensive parenting for parents figures a diminished legitimacy and control of individual boundaries affecting the sense of psychological integrity of carers and couples [McMahon 1995: 219]. Invested children devour quantities of parental time and patience and it is not surprising therefore, to find contemporary parents declaring that 'full-time care is tougher than office work'. Precisely, it is timely to set the scene of parental activities in terms of daily time-use, an issue tackled in the following section: The daily matrix.

³⁹ In Finland breast-feeding mothers may also belong to virtual communities. Undoubtedly, Internet discussion boards, have since the last few years, constituted a turning-point in childcare advice dynamics. Surfing on discussion boards to glean impressions and child-rearing experiences may favour new combinations of discourses and practices. However, an inverse phenomenon is also likely to occur. Hence, the discussion boards of breast-feeding mothers were qualified by one interviewed father as having a 'fanatic' tonality. The Internet as a support of social control amongst peers has also been pinpointed by Härkönen, who refers to this media as having become a 'Big Mother' (see chapter 4).

⁴⁰ Finnish maternity assistance, created in 1937, was originally and still is most often delivered in kind, and is called the 'maternity package' [Wrede 2001]. Hence Finnish babies born the same year tend to have similar outfits and accessories.

3.3 THE DAILY MATRIX

Daily life is confined to what it is; it dispenses with any horizon, any resonance; it congratulates itself on its limits and encloses itself in them [...] Dull realism, which is vulgar and produces vulgarity, stifles even the sighs of the oppressed creature: dreams, appeals to what is different and other, the protests of those – women, children, deviants – who represent irreducible lived experience in daily life, demanding something ‘different’. The extraordinary that pierces through the ordinary, the extra-quotidian that tends to break-up daily life [‘passions’, demands that take up the form of prohibitions and curses, interjections and exclamations, abuse and insults] – this vulgarity rejects, denying its existence, ridiculing it, reducing it to the extent of destroying it.

[Henri Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life* 2005: 73]

Norbert Elias’ [1998b] and Henri Lefebvre’ [2005] works suggest that the daily is a site of social order with its critiques, its custodians and its nostalgics. The aforementioned French philosopher drops a hint about one dramaturgical site and its protagonists potentially implicated in discursive struggles about the daily: mothers and fathers. Immersed in quotidian sequences which vary qualitatively and quantitatively, the latter are also often in asymmetric positions for negotiating change.

Although defining and measuring parental time are complex issues [de Singly 1996b; Budig & Folbre 2004: 51]⁴¹, a 1999 national survey of 1000 households in France reports that once added up, the different parental activities and times distinguished by the researchers in two-parent-families with children under 18 years of age represent an total time of 39 hours and 18 minutes of parental time per week, that is, the equivalent of a full-time job [Barrère-Maurisson, Rivier & Marchand [2000: 1, 5]⁴². Quite similar a result is recorded in an analysis of a Canadian survey of 10 749 households by Rapoport & Le Bourdais: parental time per week in families with children under 15 years of age amounted on average to 35 hours and 28 minutes [2001: 589]⁴³.

⁴¹ Most classic time use studies were not designed to account for the specific characteristics of care, for example: simultaneous activities, being available or on ‘call’ for children, the intensity and number of participants, etc. [Budig & Folbre 2004: 51].

⁴² The survey distinguishes parental time spent on a) parental sociability, b) domestic parental time (e.g. supervising meals, dressing, bathing children), c) parental ‘taxi’ activities (e.g. accompanying children to school, health care or free time activities), and d) parental school-related activities in households with at least one child under 18 years of age [Barrère-Maurisson, Rivier & Marchand 2000: 2, 4]. Other types of time measured in this survey were: market working time, domestic time (housework chores), physiological time (sleeping, eating, personal hygiene) and personal time [Barrère-Maurisson, Rivier, Minni 2001: 2–3].

⁴³ Although partially based on estimates, Sanchez & Thompson’s analysis also suggests that for women, the transition to parenthood is associated, ‘with an increase in housework and the ex-

As quantified by the French Groupe Division Familiale du Travail – MATISSE-survey, total parental time amounts to an average duration of 19 hours and 37 minutes *per individual* per week [Barrère-Maurisson, Rivier & Marchand 2000:1, 5]. In practice – when gender is taken into account – the parental time of French mothers living in couples added up to an average of 25 hours and 16 minutes per week (13 h 39 minutes for fathers) [Barrère-Maurisson, Rivier, Minni 2001: 2]⁴⁴. Transition to motherhood in terms of parental time thereby translates to shouldering at least the equivalent of an additional part-time job for mothers.

Particularly parents devoting time and energy to infants and toddlers can be considered as being at the ‘rush hour’ or ‘time crunch’ of their lives. The latter do not figure apart in the MATISSE-study, but have been distinguished by Rapoport and Le Bourdais in Canada: mothers with a child under 2 years of age spent 82 percent more time in average compared to those with parents with children in the age group 5–12 years [2001: 593]⁴⁵. The landslide in daily time allocation is occasioned essentially by the birth of the first child (see e.g. Degenne, Lebeaux, Marry 2002: 91).

The daily life of mothers is also heavily accrued by the supplement of housework induced by the presence of a child. French mothers living in couples in the MATISSE-survey effectuated 36 hours 11 minutes of domestic work per week, while the corresponding figure for women living in couples without children was 24 h 14. Inversely, men’s domestic work at transition to fatherhood may actually diminish. Hence, while the group of French child-free men living in a couple effectuated 13 hours 21 minutes of housework per week, fathers with one or more children only totalized 12 hours 41 minutes on such tasks (see tables in Barrère-Maurisson, Rivier, Minni 2001: 2)⁴⁶.

According to harmonized European time use, the gender gap in housework is proportionally identical in both countries concerned by the research: in France

pansion of one full-time week’s worth of time in childcare’ in the U.S. [1997: 763]. According to the authors, who compared heterosexual couples’ time use according to their family status in-between 1987–1988 and 1992–1994, American ‘child-free wives and husbands work about 8.5 hours a day in their various labors, whereas mothers [of young children] work 14-hour days and fathers work 11-hour days’ [1997: 763].

⁴⁴ In one-parent families average individual parental time added up to 20 hours and 42 minutes [ibid.].

⁴⁵ The younger children are, the greater the gap between mothers and fathers. Total parental time in families with one child aged 0–2 years may even be more important than total parental time in the presence of one child aged 0–2 years and another age more than 4 years. However, the presence of two children under 4 years of age occasions a very high increase in maternal time [2001: 594–595].

⁴⁶ Nota bene: the MATISSE survey is not longitudinal.

as well as in Finland, women shoulder two thirds of all household work [*How Europeans Spend Their Time, Everyday Life of Men and Women 1998–2000*, 2004:45]⁴⁷. So, if fathers tend to spend more time with their young children than preceding generations did, rise in European men's contribution to housework has been more limited. This means that when women's labour market participation is taken into account, compared to their partners, women generally remain worse off in terms of their total work load [Brousse 2000; Barrère-Maurisson, Rivier & Marchand 2000:7; Bitman 2004:226; Ruuskanen 2006: 36].

Scrutinized through the lens of time use data, the male advantage in terms of total working time (including paid work and housework) – which on average, is half an hour per day in Europe [Ruuskanen 2006:36] – can be seen as procuring men a gender bonus in terms of their quality of life [Thiers-Vidal 2002]. Nibbled in small daily doses, fathers' 'time-profits' may be difficult to visibilize on a day-to-day basis for parents – and thus hinder renegotiation. Nevertheless, 'half-an-hours' do add up. And there is no reason to think that this accumulated asymmetry will not have adverse effects on the relationship between the sexes over time.

Critics have also relativized the rise in men's participation in childcare mentioned above. It has, firstly, been underscored that fathers' parental time consists essentially of shared activities with the mother (e.g. Rapoport & le Bourdais 2001: 595). Father-time is also qualitative different and tends to be characterized by play, listening, cuddling or leisure with children rather than servicing children or educational activities [de Singly: 1996b: 212]. Such differences also figure in the interview data.

Secondly, the persistent gender gap in time spent on childcare can also be maintained by the fact that, despite their entry on the labour market, mothers may '*resist reductions in time devoted to activities with children*' [Budig & Folbre 2004: 52], namely by cutting down on housework [Bittman 2004: 226] or by increasing time spent with children during week-ends [O'Brien & Jones 1999, see below]. Indeed, as the importance of direct communication and intense face-to-face interactions with children augments [de Singly 1996b: 215; Bittman 2004: 227] – an exigency propelled by the Western contemporary child-rearing culture –, mothers, wage-earners or not, may be consecrating more time

⁴⁷ *How Europeans Spend Their Time, Everyday Life of Men and Women 1998–2000* includes ten countries: Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Individuals completed a diary during one weekday and one weekend day during one year. However, the French data portrays the activities of a representative population during one *week-day* only.

to children than preceding generations did [Rapoport & Le Bourdais 2001: 586; Smeeding & Marchand 2004: 26; Budig & Folbre 2004⁴⁸].

The findings of a British small scale study of the weekly time-use of 620 schoolchildren (aged thirteen to sixteen) and their families, by O'Brien and Jones in 1994, are consistent with the aforementioned results from North-American research. Indeed, O'Brien and Jones found that children spent more time with their parents in dual-earner families than those with a traditional division of labour: a male bread-winner and a full-time homemaker. Families in which mothers worked part-time were the most child-oriented family in terms of time-use. In this type of families, children also expressed a slightly higher level of satisfaction than those of dual full-time earners. The difference in time spent with children between dual earner families and male breadwinner families was generated during week-ends: working parents then consecrated more time to their children [O'Brien & Jones 1999, as referred to by Giddens 2001: 402]⁴⁹.

Sharon Hays' work on the intensive child-rearing ideology, which developed in the United States amongst middle-class women, already, suggested such an evolution [1996: 151]. Indeed, these mothers developed attitudes and practices, a priori contradictory with their high propensity to work outside of the home. Consequently – arguing against the grain of moral panics about children bereft of parental time (e.g. on media debates on this subject see Jallinoja 2004; 2006); the exaltation of the involvement of 'new fathers' in the media; and lay theories on mothers' considerably downsizing childcare because of wage work – Bittman purports that fathers' contribution to care may not have increased substantially:

Men have increased their time spent in childcare but not at a faster rate than women. The accumulated findings of numerous studies, using a variety of methods, show that 25 years of exhortations and demands have not substantially increased the contribution made by men to the total unpaid work performed.

[Bittman 2004: 227–228]

If time use studies provide a heuristic window on the world of family work, nevertheless, they are insufficient to take full stock of inequities, inasmuch as

⁴⁸ Rapoport & Le Bourdais refer to e.g. Bianchi, S. (2000). Maternal employment and time with children: Dramatic change or surprising continuity. *Demography*, 37: 401–414. Bianchi found little change in maternal time consecrated to children in North America. Smeeding & Marchand refer to e.g. Gauthier, A., T.M. Smeeding & F. Furstenberg. (2003). Do we invest less time in children? Trends in parental time in selected industrialized countries since the 1970s, unpublished manuscript, Centre for Policy Research, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University. The latter found the same trend in three other countries.

⁴⁹ Combined parental time measured on a full week ranged from 68 hours to 75 hours and 20 minutes in these family types. O'Brien M. & D. Jones (1999). Children, Parental Employment and Educational Attainment: an English Case Study. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 23.

they mask invisible dimensions of parental activities, of which the ‘mental burden’ of responsibility for children and for juggling family responsibilities which befalls women [Haicault 1984; see also Knibiehler 2000: 116; Takala 2002:1; McMahon 1995: 268]. In Gillis’ words: ‘*Mothers are always mentally at home in ways that fathers are not*’ [Gillis 1997: 177]. The greater proportion of time allocated to unpaid family activities by women compared to men, even in the hypothesis that their total workload be equal – engenders asymmetry between heterosexual partners because: ‘*market labour activity provides far greater economic, power and status rewards than does domestic labour*’ [Bryson, Bittman & Donath 2000: 125].

Gendered dailies in Finland and France

According to *How Europeans Spend Their Time*, French women enjoy the least amount of free time amongst the ten nationalities participating in the study [2004: 7]. Time pressure is liable to be particularly strong for French mothers with young children: they effectuate larger amounts of paid work than their Finnish counterparts – while only 55 percent of French fathers with a child aged 0–6 years reported having done any childcare on a week-day [Ruuskanen 2006: 37, 39, 43].

The following table compares average time (in hours) spent on childcare activities in dual-earner heterosexual couples with children (based on data from *How Europeans Spend Their Time... 2004: 66, 68*):

Table 1. *Time spent on childcare in dual-earner couples in France and Finland*

	Child aged up to 6		Youngest child aged 7–17	
	France	Finland	France	Finland
Women	1:41	2:02	0:25	0:17
Men	0:37	1:01	0:09	0:09

An interesting finding is that, amongst the countries included in the Eurostat study, while Finns were amongst those who spent the most time with preschoolers, they also spent the least time with school-aged children (a drop also visible in Bryson, Bittman & Donath 2000; Bittman 2004). Indeed, although parental time decreases with the age of children in all European countries, the Finnish model of childhood is characterized by a particularly strong contrast in-

between intensive care provided for preschoolers – particularly toddlers – while school-aged children are construed as quite autonomous. This result also concurs with that of a Eurobarometer opinion poll, according to which only 10 percent of Finns spent their free time principally in familial activities. Comparatively, in France, this proportion was 23 percent [2000: 116–117]. As comes to the company one would choose if one had more free time, French nationals were above European average to opt for one's family, while only 2 percent of Finns did. '*Finnish citizens were not very inclined to spend their free time in family activities*' [ibid: 121]⁵⁰.

National research results however depict a somewhat different picture. When asked '*How important do you consider being able to spend free-time with your family?*' – 42 percent of Finnish men and 50 percent of women in 1991 found this 'very important'. In 2002 these proportions has risen considerably: 64 percent for men and 78 percent for women. This may be read as an indicator of the rise of familistic attitudes in Finland (see Jallinoja 2006; forthcoming 2006: 1). The figures also mask the practices of Finns with small children – and historical developments. Indeed, for Bittman, despite frequent moral panics in the media, parents are devoting more time than ever to primary face-to-face interaction with children, conforming in this to contemporary child-rearing culture encouraging intense interactions with one's progeny [2004: 227–228]. And there is no reason to think that the rise in familistic attitudes does not affect practice.

Takala [2002] found variance in the time use of different *family types* in Finland. Fathers' total workload was larger than mothers' only in male-breadwinner families (by one hour)⁵¹. In other families, the mother's was heavier: 20 minutes per day in the modified nuclear family (often with a sequential pattern of female employment); 63 minutes amongst dual-earners; 75 minutes for female breadwinners. Significantly, a higher educational level and mother's earnings did not lighten her domestic workload. Men spent longer hours in paid work in all family types: *In contrast, the more the mother earned the heavier was her total workload but there were no differences between time used for paid work*

⁵⁰ Nevertheless other researchers, namely anthropologists, have maintained that '*compared to many other nationals, the Finnish spend a lot of their time in the home*' [Korvela 2003: 6]. Two possible explanations for the contradiction between Korvela's assertion and the picture conveyed by the Eurobarometer poll could be that a Finnish characteristic of family-life is the desynchronization of members time use in terms of, either desynchronization of time slots spent in the home and/or the compartmentalization of individual activities in different spaces inside the home despite co-presence.

⁵¹ Barrère-Maurisson, Rivier & Minni also found that French women in male-breadwinner couples was the only family type in which women benefitted from more personal time than men [2001: 5].

[...] *a surprise*. [Takala 2002: 13]. I read this as indicating the difficulty for women to escape their domestic managerial role. Also:

Whereas women were more likely to manage their work so that they could carry out their planning responsibilities for family time, men were more likely to see their work as primary and to fit into the family schedule when they fulfilled those responsibilities.

[Daly 2001: 247, quoted by Takala 2002: 13]

It also testifies of the difficulty for women wishing to negotiate their participation in different spheres of life in a non reciprocal 'moral economy'. Indeed, as homemakers or bread-winners, women seem rarely entitled to the family services to which men's paid work (and the status of children in contemporary Western society) entitles them [DeVault 1994: 143]⁵².

Evolving attitudes, stubborn practices

Only 11.7 percent of Finns and 17.9 percent of French respondents in 2002, agreed with the statement: '*A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and the family*' [Family and Changing Family Roles, ISSP 2004: 17]. Some five years earlier, one out of four nationals in both countries had agreed with the contention that '*A husband's job is to earn the money and a wife's job is to look after the home*', posed by the European continuous tracking survey of 1997 [1998: 9]⁵³.

In spite of the progression of largely egalitarian attitudes in opinion polls, as indicated above, '*behaviour [still] tells another story*' [Bittman 2004: 226]. Sanchez & Thompson, for example, found in their North American study, that at the birth of a child, attitudes towards gender issues did not or did little to directly moderate parenthood effects towards a more traditional division of labour [1997: 758, 766]⁵⁴. Sociologists have been intrigued by the fact that in qualitative studies these inequities tend to be belittled in face-to-face interactions with researchers (see e.g. Hays 1996: 101–107, 165; de Singly 1996b; Katvala 2001: 31⁵⁵). Hays states: '*not one of the mothers I talked to understood her child-rearing efforts as*

⁵² See also Gerhard & Weckwert 2002: 37; Anderson 1997.

⁵³ Only 13 percent of Danes and 15 percent of Swedes agreed with such a statement in 1997 [ibid.].

⁵⁴ A body of cross-sectional research has however reported the influence of gender attitudes [ibid: 766].

⁵⁵ Katvala namely mentions a Swedish study on maternal ethnotheories according to which parenthood was narrated in terms of equality, even if it departed from reality: Welles-Nyström. 1996. Scenes from a Marriage. Equality ideology in Swedish family policy, maternal ethnotheories and practice in Harkness and Super [eds.] *Parents' Cultural Belief Systems*. New York: Guilford: 192–214.

an unjust burden or a task imposed on her by others more powerful than herself [Hays 1996: 165]. Several trails of explanation have been developed. An assortment of interpretations of this state-of-facts is resumed below.

In her interpretation of the ISSP 2002, *Family and Changing Family Roles*-survey, according to which French women do not much often than men consider that family arrangements hinder their participation in work life [2003: 8], Clothilde Lemarchant suggests side by side several mechanisms which are susceptible to account for this result. The first is denial. She also evokes such factors as: women's anticipation of the exigencies of 'reconciling'⁵⁶ work and family life, which leads them to occupy different jobs than men (namely, in terms of responsibilities and working hours); the pride that women may take in coping with the reconciliation of their family and work lives; and the symbolic benefits from which mothers in French firms benefit, for example comparatively to stigmatized 'spinster executives' [2003: 9].

Sanchez & Thompson recall other explanatory hypotheses in international sociological literature [1997: 765–766]. For example, it has been suggested that women juggle work and family life by necessity *and* preference [Spain & Bianchi 1996]⁵⁷. Public discourses, which tend to valorize men's accrued participation in childcare, may also delegitimize or discourage claims to equity as women are liable to be depicted as making a 'big deal' out of their load of family work (e.g. Hochschild 1989)⁵⁸. Multiple social determinations, which contribute to gender asymmetry independently of individual conduct and result in 'hidden power' in marriage, may induce an impression '*that unfair outcomes inevitably arise out of seemingly fair consensual processes of choice*' [Komter 1989]⁵⁹. An accrued economic dependency of women associated to transition to motherhood, it has also been purported, dampen sparks of discord⁶⁰.

Sharon Hays also examines the forms that downplaying gender inequities took in her interview data of American mothers. The most common legitimization of the lesser implication of fathers in childcare focussed on their different

⁵⁶ There term of 'reconciling' has been debated amongst scholars and in policy circles, as it has become to be univocally associated to women (see e.g. Hantrais 2000; Ross 1998; Junter-Loiseau 1999).

⁵⁷ Sanchez & Thompson refer to: Spain D. & S. Bianchi (1996). *Balancing Act: Motherhood, Marriage, and Employment Amongst American Women*. New York: Russel and Sage.

⁵⁸ Sanchez & Thompson refer to: Hochschild A. (1989). *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. New York: Penguin.

⁵⁹ Sanchez & Thompson refer to Komter, A. (1989). Hidden power in Marriage. *Gender & Society* 3: 187–216.

⁶⁰ One might add to this, that women may have difficulty in expressing their willingness to care less for children, as their *enjoyment* of children is a criteria for assessing the 'quality' of mothering [see further chapters].

approach to child-rearing, i.e. the fact that they had not interiorized an intensive child-rearing ideology. Because of a sense that many men do not help out their partners, she also suggests, some mothers may be genuinely grateful for the help that they *do* provide, albeit unequally [1996: 101–107].

In France, François de Singly has adopted another line of interpretation. Referring to an opinion poll, the aforementioned author concludes that women are not just burying their resentment: men and women simply do not evaluate their relationships primarily in terms of equality [de Singly 1996b: 212–213]. Relations between men and women are multidimensional; intimacy may mask forms of domination *and* may found mutual recognition and support. On the basis of their experience and knowledge, subjects elaborate lay theories of equality and marital justice which may not coincide with that of the researcher's frameworks [de Singly 2002: 228].

In a somewhat similar vein, in his work *Injustices*, Dubet notes that only inequalities which are commonly held to be unjust count; there are inequalities which are thought to be 'natural' and morally just [2006]. Gendered definitions of parental roles contribute to such understandings. Wage-work, for example, still plays an important part in the definition of a 'good' father. Asymmetrically, children dispose of a greater claim on maternal time in the sense that availability is a fundamental ingredient of the social construction of the mother-role [Hays 1996; de Singly 1996b: 171; Katvala 2001: 50–51; Gosset 2004: 11; Gustafson 2005: 1; Nousiainen 2004: 10].⁶¹

Quite a contrary stand to that adopted by de Singly is taken by Michael Bittman, who suggests that gender equality [defined in terms of shared family work] is an increasingly important social value interiorized by actors. The fact that women '*usually found it difficult to raise these issues without, at the same time, raising the spectre of termination of the relationship*' [2004: 227] can be considered as an indicator of the salience of equality-as-principle – and of the serious troubles lack of sharing may induce. Reasoning on the basis of a qualitative Australian study, Bittman argues that the disjunction between the value of equity and inequity recorded in practices is managed through 'pseudo-mutuality', i.e. by the denial of nonmutuality in family services provided to each other. The hypothesis of egalitarian demands and disagreements being neutralized in the face of their threat to marital stability has also been evoked [Sanchez & Thompson 1997: 751; Hays 1996: 107]. Indeed, partners may not only wish

⁶¹ Typical men's activities such as repairs are still commonly accepted as individual activities [de Singly 1996b: 212–213] during which they are not understood to be available for children.

to paint each other in positive ways to outsiders by love, loyalty and for ‘keeping face’, but eventual tensions inside the marital unit, whatever their motive, are liable only be revealed upon divorce (see Jallinoja 1997: 216; Smart & Neale 1999: 50; de Singly 1996b). These insights indicate that the stakes of managing the ‘daily’, and the changing of quotidian routines at parenthood are high.

The dissertation will provide other clues on how maternal decency is cultivated in Finland and France, and maternal complaints swept under the proverbial carpet, but before entering the fulcrum of the analysis of interview data, the following sub-chapter examines the role of the State in each of the Welfare states included in this piece of research, providing a brief historical, demographic and policy comparison of Finland and France.

3.4 THE NATIONAL CONTEXT OF TWO WELFARE STATES: FINLAND AND FRANCE

*Framing motherhood, citizenship and care*⁶²

Finland and France form an interesting pair. They were respectively the first – and one of the last – European nation-states in which women gained their political rights. Finnish women have been eligible to vote since 1906. Political rights for women in France came only after World War II, in 1944, and their political representation in Parliament is low to date – in fact, it is close to that of Finnish women in 1907⁶³.

Access to maternity leave rights in the two countries, however, took quite an opposite route. In Finland, a late-comer in the Nordic cluster of Welfare states, they were only implemented in 1964; while the creation of maternity-leave (in 1909 and 1913) and insurance (1928) occurred during the first half of the twentieth century in France (for a history, see Cova 1997). Women contributed to the building of the early Welfare state. In Finland, where ‘*even maids could vote*’ [Hentilä 1989], women were official actors in this process. In France, first-wave feminists or maternalists, were to officiously influence the legislation from behind the scenes (for France see Cova 1997; for a comparison see Martiskainen de Koenigswarter 2004).

⁶² The title is one I chose with J. Heinen for a comparative article on childcare policy and the care leaves in Finland and France. Some of the elements are drawn from this article published in *Social Politics* in 2001.

⁶³ For a synthesis of the current situation and a brief history in Finland, see Holli et al. (2004). For a synthesis on France, see Heinen, J. & M Lieber. (eds.). (2004). On women’s citizenship in a comparative perspective, see Lister et al. [forthcoming: 2007].

In contemporaneity, Finland and France are characterised by quite similar demographic, family formation, and labour force participation profiles –, albeit their traditional classification as representatives of the ‘social-democratic’ [Esping Andersen 1990] Nordic Protestant [Siaroff 1994] regime in the Finnish case, *versus* the ‘conservative’ continental Catholic model in France⁶⁴. Both adhere to the pan-European model of family life: a couple and two children (37 percent of families in Finland; 39 percent in France). The total fertility rate is high in France – 1.89 (a figure which is regularly touted in the French daily press, as the nation now stands second in ‘fertility rankings’, just after Ireland). For Finland, the rate is at 1.72 level, and hence, above OECD average (1.60)⁶⁵. Educational attainment of women is above EU-15 level: for example, 90.4 of 22 years olds in Finland have achieved at least an upper secondary education; the corresponding proportion is 82.8 in France [European Commission 2003: 30].

Employment rates for women in 2003 were 56.7 percent in France, 65.7 percent in Finland, while unemployment for women was in-between 9–10 percent in both countries⁶⁶. It could thus be argued that State policies for reconciling work and family life have been quite successful in the two Welfare states. For Esping-Andersen, as of today, France and Finland belong to the restricted group of nations that are ‘*meaningfully committed to a de-familialization of servicing burdens*’ [2000: 55]. Hantrais & Letablier also place both countries in the same model, characterised by a strong commitment of the State to family well-being, extended social rights, and generous parental leaves [1996: 126–129]⁶⁷.

⁶⁴ The differing importance of the roles played by municipalities and the universal character of a number of entitlements in Finland *versus* labor force participation as a basis for eligibility for most benefits in France, have led other authors to classify the countries as belonging to still different types of Welfare state clusters: e.g. the ‘public service model’ in the case Finland and the ‘family policy model’ for France [Anttonen & Sipilä 1994].

⁶⁵ See for example ‘Selection of OECD indicators: how does Finland Compare ?’ <<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/35/6/34555570.xls>>

⁶⁶ OECD [ibid.] & European Commission [2003: 7]. The employment gender gap, that is the difference of employment rates of men and women, is notably lower in Finland (3.8) than in France (12.8) [ibid.: 46]. While full-time work has long characterized women’s labour participation in Finland and in France, part-time work has developed in the latter during the 1990s. The increase in casual contracts has risen in both countries, particularly for Finnish women with university-level educational attainment.

⁶⁷ For Hantrais & Letablier, this category is based on the ‘juxtaposition of family and employment with state support,’ and it includes Finland, France, Denmark, and Sweden. The two authors distinguish between the purpose of such juxtapositions: ‘as an equality objective’ (the Nordic Welfare states) and ‘as a family support mechanism’ (France and Belgium). Hence, family policy and policies for ‘reconciling’ work and family in these two states were historically constructed on somewhat different ideological foundations. Gender equality and individualized rights characterize the Finnish case, while strong familistic and natalist tendencies (although the goal of gender equality has been present) have been constitutive of French family policy (see e.g. Martiskainen de Koenigswarter 2001).

Indeed, the provision of publicly funded quality childcare is on a par in the two countries. Rates of public provision for children under three years of age were: 24 percent for France [Ministry of the Family 2003: 132] and 25 percent for Finland [*Babies and Bosses* 2005: 105]⁶⁸. Moreover, paid care leave schemes are the most generous ones amongst European Welfare states, although some national specificities will be pinpointed below.

A singularity of Finnish childhood policy lies in the subjective right to a place in municipal day-care; it became effective for children under three in 1990, and was expanded to include all pre-schoolers in 1996. France on the other hand takes pride in its exceptional rate of state provision for children between three and six years old – 99 percent (and 35 percent of two- to three-year-olds [Bachelard 2000]) – free of charge in the French public school system. *Ipsa facto*, French *école maternelle* (even though it is not socially constructed as ‘care’ but rather as ‘education’) represents, in practice, a subjective right for care outside of the home for this age group – and a norm⁶⁹. Comparatively, the 62 percent provision of centre-based care for three- to seven-year-olds in Finland [*Babies and Bosses* 2005: 106] seems low.

On the other hand, the scope of publicly supported child-care centres for children under three is wider in Finland, 15 percent of children between one to two years old [Takala 2000: 49], versus 9 percent in France [Ministry of the Family 2003: 108]. Registered day-carers are the most common form of care outside of the home: 18 percent of children under three in both countries [Takala 2000: 49; Ruault & Daniel 2003: 6]⁷⁰. The Finnish government supports a more varied array of care options, including that provided by private kindergartens. In France, an important reserve of care is produced through unpaid inter-generational solidarity, as grandparents serve as the principal caretakers for approximately 4 percent of children under three [Blanpain 2005: 6]⁷¹. In addi-

⁶⁸ Rates vary inside this group. They are respectively: 1 % for children under age 12 months; 28 % for children aged 12–24 months; 44 % children aged 24–36 months [*Babies & Bosses* 2005: 105].

⁶⁹ Clawson & Gerstel, in their comparison of Europe and North-America, have underlined how childcare systems vary in their emphasis on education [e.g. France] and a more playful view of childhood (e.g. Denmark), and how all the French enroll their children in the ‘*école maternelle*’ because they believe that it is best for the children [2005: 275, 276]. In Finland and France obligatory school-age is different: 7 and 6 years respectively.

⁷⁰ On forms of day care in Finland see also Tuori & Silius 2001: 13.

⁷¹ In groups with a low income level this form of child care is common in France. Hence, if only children under three who are *not* cared for by the mother are taken into account (i.e. approximately 40 percent of children in this age group), amongst the latter, 20 percent are being taken care of by the grand-mother when parents quality of life is situated in the two lower quartiles [Blanpain 2005: 6]. Some studies have reported figures as high as one third of children [Dufour, Hatchuel & Loisel 1998: 24].

tion, nearly twenty percent of French preschoolers attend a private *écoles maternelles* or nonofficial child-minding service, neither of which is subsidized. In both countries, the state provides a private home care allowance, but only a small proportion of privileged children (one percent) have parents who can afford to use it to hire an in-home caregiver by adding their own funds.

Nevertheless, in both countries, the most salient form of care for children under three is the mother.

The policy matrix of parental leaves

The preceding analysis eclipses a deep-rooted difference. Indeed, the comparison of another dimension of policy, the legislation concerning family leaves (particularly maternity, paternity, and parental leave at childbirth), shows quite striking variance in the social construction of mothering, fathering and childhood in these two countries⁷². The aforementioned variance crystallizes in cross-national differences in the definitions of the age at which children are eligible for day care in Finland and France. It is common for a French baby to be entrusted to day care outside of the home at the age of 2½ months, whereas a small Finn is rarely less than 12 months old at this stage of his life. Initially, it was this contrast that spurred the researcher's interest in a comparative endeavour. Indeed, parental practices appear as largely determined by the national legislation on maternity, parental, and care leaves, which create national 'clearings' for mothering and fathering. Thresholds may well become naturalized, acquire a certain autonomy, and become potential vehicles for hidden agendas of appropriate ways to mother.

One may ask, particularly in the Finnish case, if the progressive prolongation by ricochets of maternity leave in Finland between 1974 and 1984 from three to eleven months, as well as the implementation of care leaves and allowance between 1985 and 1990 (until a child is aged three) have not engendered a strong normative model of temporary homemaking for mothers. Although created in the name of increased parental 'choice', they may have thus in fact contributed to reifying children's 'needs'⁷³. Hence, the Finnish mothers and fathers

⁷² A certain number of articles in sociological journals and books have been written on the comparison of parental leave policies in Finland and France in the view of preparing the Policy Matrix [Heinen & Martiskainen de Koenigswarter 2001; Martiskainen de Koenigswarter 2001, 2004, (forthcoming: 2007)].

⁷³ Hence, although the largest proportion of maternity leaves is not mandatory (they are 'rights') turning down these 'rights' may not present itself as a moral option for mothers. Nancy Fraser has underlined how 'needs-talk' and 'rights-talk' are two major repertoires of political discourse in late capitalism and that their articulation is not always unproblematic [2004].

interviewed for the research were, without an exception, astounded when current French maternity-leave practice was evoked by the researcher. An illustration:

That seems wild! First of all I wouldn't entrust my child into [outside] care at that stage, and secondly, I don't think I would have been capable of returning to work at that stage, even if I was boasting about our finding the rhythms [with the baby] so quickly. When you think about that load of fatigue, and on the otherhand, your devoting yourself to motherhood, I... wouldn't agree to do that.

French mothers' attitudes towards Finnish policy were in general admirative. However, it was not rare that the highly educated women participating in the research mentioned having been satisfied or happy to return to their jobs after a three-month leave [see also Martiskainen 1998a]:

Well, [Finnish maternity leave] has becoming aspects to it, but to be very honest, I knew I would have to start working in three months time, so I was somewhat used to the idea, but I wasn't unhappy to return to work. I think that, for the second child, it will be a bit different, because it would be an occasion to spend more time with the first one, so eventually, – it's true that for a second child I would wish for a longer maternity leave –, but that would be, I think, to be able to *enjoy* [profiter] the two of them together in fact⁷⁴.

Family leaves⁷⁵ have been developed in most Western nation-states [Morgan 2006]. However, their comparison reveals important disparities in their duration and in the benefits associated to them. For Math & Meilland, such variation highlights differences in political regulation, gender representations, and in the sexual division of labour in these societies [2004]. Parental demand and labour policies [Morgan 2006] – as well as 'the reason of State' [Foucault 2004] are articulated in this form of government; rhetoric of 'choice', natalist objectives, labour 'activation' policies, (or will to decrease unemployment), have criss-crossed on the political echequier of these two-countries, when care leave legislation has been elaborated.

⁷⁴ The fact that this mother mentions longer leaves at the birth of the second child can be related to a distinctive feature of French family policy: until 2004 mothers were only eligible for care leave benefits from the second birth onwards. It illustrates how parental leaves create conventions (see also Takala on the normative power of paternity leaves 2003).

⁷⁵ 'Family leaves' is an umbrella term which designates maternity, paternity, parental leaves and child care leaves. The distinction between parental leaves and care leaves does not exist in many national contexts. Comparison is therefore difficult if one is not profoundly acquainted with national legislation and customs.

The cultural ‘clearings’ of parental trajectories at transition

Now, to return to the perspective of mothers and fathers, parental leave policies create specific national contexts, institutionalized trajectories, and particular temporalities at a particular point of the life cycle, which has been conceptualized as a period of family *transition*, affecting their choices and experiences in Finland and France. Two typified sociological family portraits at the birth of the first child⁷⁶, which combine legislative facts in vigour for the parents included in the study, comparative macro-level data and elements from the interview-data, illustrate this point:

Marianne – a new French mother’s typified trajectory

In France, where 90 percent of women become mothers at one point of their life cycle, Marianne, 28 years, had pre-constructed maternity as an evident event of her life (see e.g. Martiskainen 1998a). Her partner took the two week-paternity leave he was entitled to during Marianne’s 16-week maternity leave: 10 weeks after birth with total compensation of loss of income and job-protection⁷⁷. Both prolonged this short period with some paid annual leave. Then Marianne went back to her job⁷⁸. Unpaid care leave was hardly an alternative for the family: they were not eligible for home care allowance (HCA)⁷⁹, and the French family policy does not compensate for the cost of the first child (that of the third child being over compensated).

⁷⁶ Marianne and Aino are not particular mothers from the interview sample but typified illustrations. To briefly summarize patterns of family formation in the two countries: for the generation of women born in 1955, 14% in France and 18% in Finland did not marry; average age at marriage was 22.9 years in France and 24.3 in Finland. A notable difference is, that while only 8% of women of this generation in France did not bear a child, the proportion was 18% in Finland. The birth of the first child occurred at an average age of 24.7 years in France and 25.2 in Finland. In Finland, approximately 35% of marriages contracted in 1970 has ended up in divorce (29% in France). The age of women at first birth has been rising: the average age in 1999 was 28.7 in France and 27.4 in Finland. [Statistiques sociales... 2002: 104, 105, 93, 92, 108, 92].

⁷⁷ The daily allowance compensated for lost revenue up to a ceiling of 2.589 euros monthly revenue in 2006.

⁷⁸ Pailhé & Solaz have demonstrated that the labour market participation of French women varies very little after the birth of the first child. In their study based on women born in-between 1955–1985, 30 percent of French women were not participating in the labour market *before* the birth of the first child. This proportion rose to 38 percent 12 months after birth [2006: 1].

⁷⁹ Very briefly, the home care benefit, initially named APE or ‘allocation parentale d’éducation’ in France was created for particular categories of parents, who chose to take time out of the labour market on a full-time or a part-time basis until their child is three years old. Eligibility depends on parity (the number of children) and the beneficiaries’ previous employment record. Initially implemented exclusively for families at the birth of the third child (1985), parents of two children, however, became eligible in 1994. In 2004, a reduced formula became available for parents at the birth of the first child for a shorter period than other types of families, i.e. 6 months. On this occasion, the APE-benefit (496 euros in 2003 for a full-time carer) was included in the framework of the PAJE, ‘prestation d’accueil des jeunes enfants’ (or childcare benefit, which replaces all the other previously extant benefits) and is now called CLCA or ‘complément de libre choix d’activité’. As the interviewees in this study were parents of one infant or toddler, and were interviewed in 2004–2005, most children were born before the extension of the eligibility of HCA for mothers with one child. On Finnish HCA, see Anttonen 2003.

One of the particularities of the French legislation is the discrepancy in the amount of maternity leave that different categories of women are entitled to. Indeed, the duration of family leave provided for by the state increases at the birth of each child. Thus mothers of three children or more are eligible for a 26 weeks maternity leave, instead of 16 weeks. French family policy, impregnated with demographic incentive treats unequally: mothers according to the number of children they bare; siblings (the first child being particularly disadvantaged), and different family forms (the couple with one child being the less favourable option).

The juxtaposition of high labor participation rates and short maternity leave may contribute to the fact that French mothers with one child, (who were are not eligible for home care allowance before 2004, and are currently eligible for six months only), may figure among the European women who spend the shortest time at home at childbirth, particularly that of the first child. This was the profile of the French mothers having participated in the study.

Aino – a new Finnish mother’s typified trajectory

In Finland, where 85 percent of women become mothers at one point of their life cycle, Aino (28 years), considered maternity leave as a welcome pause in her career. She claims the 263 working days provided for by the State at a means-tested, average rate, of 66 percent compensation of previous salary and job protection. Aino benefits from a 105-working day⁸⁰ ‘maternity leave’ (17.5 weeks) during which her partner claims his 18 days of ‘paternity leave’⁸¹, and then from 158 days (26 weeks) of ‘parental leave at birth’, of which her partner did not claim any share – only approximately 5 percent of fathers do [Salmi, Lammi-Taskula 1999; see also Takala 2003, 2006].

Hence, it is generally expected that women take the whole of these leaves. Had Aino not claimed the totality of the ‘parental leave’, municipal day care centre services would probably have not been available. In practice, however, mothers of her generation tend to extend this period by at least a few months of care-leave (with HCA), demonstrating their will to stay with their child even longer than is permitted by the ‘maternity’ and ‘parental’ leave legislations⁸².

Indeed, ‘*Staying at home is such a short and special time*’ is an often heard Finnish catchphrase to characterize this life stage, and the *leitmotiv* from which chapter 4 will set out.

⁸⁰ ‘Working days’ in Finland are all week-days, excepting Sunday (hence one week = 6 days).

⁸¹ Leave for fathers in Finland was progressively implemented from 1978 onwards. Take-up has been risen: two-thirds of fathers took paternity leave in 2000 [PEVA II, STM: 28, 2001: 34]. Parental leave was introduced in 1985 (even if fathers had already obtained the right to use the last 24 days of maternity leave in 1980). The reform of paternity leave in 2001–2002 implemented an optional ‘daddy-month’: if the father claims the last two weeks of ‘parental leave at birth’, he is entitled to two supplementary weeks of paternity leave. Only 2 % of fathers claimed any part of parental leave in 2000 [STM 2001: 28, p. 38]. Take up rose after the 2002 reform gradually: 7.1 % of fathers took-up the aforementioned bonus leave in 2004 [Takala 2006: 62].

⁸² However, one Finnish mother interviewed expressed the culpability aroused by colleagues who did not understand her ‘turning down’ the possibility of care leave and HCA after the ‘parental leave’ period.

Two different institutional responses to transition at the birth of the first child emerge. In Finland, the comparatively long socialization of the child inside the home – a particularly intensive mothering regime in this sense – has been accompanied by a political tentative to incite and ‘reform’ men as fathers and husbands through paternity leaves [Martiskainen de Koenigswarter 2001; forthcoming: 2007], even if quotas, contrarily to its other Nordic neighbours have not been implemented (although a step has been taken in this direction with the reform of paternity leave in 2001–2002)⁸³.

In France, the mother is rapidly relayed by day care at the birth of the first child: a regime that could be qualified as a somewhat more ‘extended regime’ of mothering – at least in terms of the ‘art of distributions’ [Foucault 1991] of infants in space⁸⁴. Explicit norms of marital support and fathering at transition to parenthood have long been absent from the French policy clearing. Indeed, the father has long been a ‘significant absent’ of French policy and the creation of a two-week paternity leave in France by Ségolène Royal, Minister of Family and Childhood, only took place in 2002 (only a three-day leave existed until then). On this occasion, Finland was quoted in the French newspapers as a forerunner [*Le Monde* 10/11.06.2001]⁸⁵. Crossing gender and nationality, it appears that in terms of family leaves at birth (excluding HCA) Finnish fathers have been provided with more leaves since 1980, than are French mothers currently⁸⁶.

In regard to the developments of the last decade, a major corollary of the restructuring of childcare in Finland and France within the context of rising neoliberalism and economic crisis of the 1990s has been the reinforcement (in Finland) or reemergence (in France) of a model of *temporary homemak-*

⁸³ For a discursive analysis of the repertoires prevalent in the public sphere in Finland and France as a parallel reform of paternity leave took place in these two countries in 2001–2002, see Martiskainen de Koenigswarter [forthcoming]. The results point to a progressive constitution of a European discursive space. Two logics of reform, more or less prevalent in the two countries of comparison, are unearthed. Firstly, that of ‘reforming’ paternal practices, with strong links to discourse on gender equality. The second logic is ‘protecting’ fatherhood, which is perceived as fragile and eroded by divorce.

⁸⁴ Moreover, French parents entrust frequently their children for care to grand-parents or may leave for holidays without their children – a fact that is socially less acceptable in Finland. However, despite such characteristics, it is difficult to univocally qualify France as an ‘extended’ regime of motherhood (on the notion of extended mothering see Rotkirch 2000a: 115–120), as an intensive child-rearing ideology is also salient. Indeed, Hays [1996] notes that the latter developed primarily amongst wage-earning women.

⁸⁵ Indeed, the initial policy aim of paternity leave in Finland was to enable the father to support the woman in her mothering; the development of his relation to the child is an argument developed later on [Salmi, Lammi-Taskula 1999]. On the framing of paternity leave in Finland see also Rantalaiho [2003].

⁸⁶ 1980, Finnish fathers were already eligible for 100 days during ‘maternity leave’, before the distinction between maternity leave and parental leave was implemented.

ing⁸⁷. Both states, departing in this from their European neighbours began offering a child home-care allowance (HCA) for parents of children under three years of age (on the French context of this policy development, see Jenson and Sineau 1998; on Finland see Anttonen 2003). As a result, the rise in female labor force participation, which has long been an indicator of gender equality and modernity has slowed down – or been inverted for some categories of mothers. This trend is examined in the sections below. Thereby, as argued by Anne Cova, in her study of the creation of maternity insurance in France, the development of maternity policies appears as a two-faced phenomenon:

Particular reforms of great importance have been conquered for women, such as the material possibility of reconciling wage-work and domestic work, but on the long term, the rights obtained can have occasioned prejudices by their tendency to reduce [women's] integration into the labour market.

[Cova 1997: 411]

To illustrate this point, the historian refers to a debate on the prolongation of the (16-week maternity leave), which took place in the France of the mid-1990s. Simone Veil, whose name is indissociable of the French abortion law of 1976, opposed such an initiative by referring to the reticence of employers it would induce in the country [ibid.]⁸⁸.

Such an argument is noticeable from the Finnish perspective. Indeed, maternity leave in Finland evolved, in less than two decades, from 54 working days in 1964 (statute 5/1966) to 258 days in 1981 (statute 841/1980). In 1985, this period was to be broken up into two categories: 'maternity leave' (actually 105 working days) and 'parental leave at birth' (actually 158 days), which may be shared by the mother and the father (statute 32/1985), – concomitantly with the development of care leave. However, in the everyday talk of Finns, 'parental leave at birth' is often simply designated as 'maternity leave'.

It is interesting to note that a trend towards temporary homemaking has also been recorded in a Western nation-state with no existent national maternity leave scheme: the United States (e.g. Laisney 2004: 4, see below). Moreover, the latter appears as an emergent phenomenon amongst highly educated mothers, who,

⁸⁷ Indeed, French sociologists tend to present temporary homemaking as a historically outdated model which has been replaced by that of an uninterrupted labour market participation of women.

⁸⁸ Such an argument was also voiced in the very first Finnish Parliamentary debate on the issue in the beginning of the century. It was then defended by *bourgeois* feminist quarters (see e.g. Laisi 1987; Martiskainen de Koenigswarter 2004: 60).

in principle, benefit from enhanced chances of labour market insertion. In parallel, a number of authors in the field of cultural or media studies have advanced the hypothesis of the emergence of a 'neotraditionalist model' of motherhood (e.g. Johnston & Swanson 2003). A neofamilist 'come-back' in public debates has also been signalled (for Finland, see Jallinoja 2004; 2006). The following section will therefore examine the thesis of a neotraditionalist trend of mothering today in Finland, France and the United States.

Does the neotraditionalist thesis apply to Finland and France?

Examining the emergence of a neotraditionalist trend and its amplitude implies a comparison with dominant Western family models⁸⁹ of the previous decades. The mid 1990s – early 2000s are contrasted with the period situated in-between the 1970s – early 1990s, during which urban dwellers in different welfare states increasingly delegated the childcare of preschoolers outside of the home to public or private structures, albeit at varying paces and ages. An accrued permissiveness towards mothers seeking personal fulfilment outside the family, namely through 'rewarding' employment, was concomitant with rising social support for the ideals of shared parenting and the financial autonomy of both partners. Such a democratization of families occurred in parallel with shifts in educational models.

The indicator chosen here for considering the degree of normalization of the dual earner family model is the employment rate of mothers with a youngest child aged less than 6 years⁹⁰. If the latter was equal or superior to 50 percent in 1990, the normalization of the model is considered as effective. Table 2 indicates that, in effect, this was the case in social democratic Finland, conservative France and the liberal regime of the United States. All three were post-traditional in this sense⁹¹. The entry of women on the labour market in Finland and France was characterized by full-time jobs.

⁸⁹ The term 'model' designates a widespread ideal and a normalized practice in heterosexual couples, but does not exclude the more or less visible co-existence of alternative family arrangements.

⁹⁰ This indicator was chosen because of the availability of harmonized comparative data for the two periods.

⁹¹ Meanwhile, most of the welfare states in Esping-Andersen's 'liberal' and 'conservative' clusters were characterized by lower levels of employment for this group in 1990. However, in the US, approximately a quarter of women occupy part time jobs; this situation has been stable since the 1970s. See US Department of Labour: <http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-tables16.pdf> In France, the development of part-time work is a 'recent episode' in the history of women's employment [Maruani 2000: 9].

Secondly, examining the thesis of a traditionalist come-back requires a glance at what is held to be the traditional configuration, before the normalization of the Western dual-earner model and the continuity of female wage-work. Schematically, it is that of a Parsonian nuclear family with a male bread-winner and a full-time housewife:

With the development of the male breadwinner model and its structural embodiment in most welfare states after the Second World War, a family care regime was institutionalized which enabled (and at the same time envisioned) women to care for children, the aged and the handicapped at home

[Leitner 2003: 355]

In this model, mothers were expected to quit paid employment at the birth of the first child (or at marriage), a pattern which typically induced a life-long economic, social, and psychological dependency. The economically dissymmetric family was also concomitant with a more authoritarian approach to children⁹².

Amongst the three countries, the hold of the male-breadwinner/female carer model was the weakest in Finland. The fact that this model did not really gain as strong a hold in the country after the Second World War, as it did elsewhere in the Western world, has been explained by the extremely rapid shift from an agrarian to a wage-work society: women transited from one sector to another [Haavio-Mannila 1968: 171]. Hence, in Finland, a majority of urban mothers having given birth to their first child in 1960s were already in the workforce during the first year of their child's life [Jallinoja 1983: 235]. However, social attitudes towards this practice were contrasted, and not only viewed in terms of female emancipation. Finnish sociologist Elina Haavio-Mannila, wrote in the late 1960s: '*The mother's wage-work is generally considered as a form of maternal exploitation*' [1968: 185].

However, comparatively to France and the United States, the Finnish wage-earning model, which crystallized in the early 80s had a specificity: that of long paid maternity leaves which rose from 72 working days in 1971 to 258 days in 1981. Rissanen has baptized this model as the 'temporary homemaking contract' of the Finnish wage-earner [2000: 80]. In the meantime, French maternity leaves have stayed at 96 working days, of which 60 after birth for the first two children, and the United States still has no national policy of paid maternity leave to date. Table 2 presents the evolution of Employment rate of mothers with youngest child aged under 6 years in 1990 and 2002⁹³.

⁹² In between these two models of the dual earner couple and of the male breadwinner/female homemaker models, configurations of sequential employment without state support and part-time employment of mothers were common in many welfare states.

⁹³ Source: OECD (2005) <<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/35/6/34555570.xls>> *How does Finland compare?*

Table 2. *Employment rates of mothers with young children*

	1990	2002
United States	54	59,5
France	61,3	64,7
Finland	64,3	49,4
OECD	48,5	59,2

During the considered period, the predominant trend of rising labour force participation of mothers of pre-schoolers was inverted in Finland. The employment rate for this category of the population is now equivalent to that of Ireland (51, 8 percent) – reputed as a bastion of traditionalism in Europe – or Greece (49 percent). Such a drop is the largest in all of OECD member states for which information is available⁹⁴.

For mothers with a child under age three, the employment rate for Finnish mothers is still lower: 32 percent, according to OECD statistics [Haataja 2005: 30]. However, this figure does not include Finnish mothers on care leaves, i.e. mothers having ‘opted-out’ with job security (although all beneficiaries of HCA do *not* benefit from job security). This is one of the reasons which leads Anita Haataja, in her 2005 report to the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, to state that cross-national differences in parental leave legislation have led to a situation, in which international comparisons of the employment rates of mothers of young children has become nearly impossible⁹⁵.

Indeed, if the employment rates of Finnish mothers are actually amongst the lowest in OECD countries for those with children in preschool age, they are also amongst the highest after entry into the school system; those for Finnish mothers with children aged 6–14 are were at 85 percent level, according to the same statistics [Haataja 2005: 30]. Thus, viewed through the lens of this indicator, the neofamilist/neotraditionalist hypothesis seems valid for the Finnish case in the

⁹⁴ In fact, except in Japan, Sweden and Finland rates have risen.

⁹⁵ For example in Sweden mothers may take 14 months of parental leave and be included in labour force participation rates; in Austria up until three years. This may be the reason why Finnish statistics on mother’s employment (contrarily to the French equivalents) have not been available in Eurostat publications such as *Statistiques sociales européennes...* [2002: 62] or in *Indicators for Monitoring the 2003 Employment Guidelines* [2003: 49]. This lacunae has been underlined in policy documents, e.g. in *Rapport sur l’Examen de la mise en oeuvre par les États membres [...] du programme d’action de Pékin* [2000]. On the elaboration of statistics on mothers employment and labour force participation in Finland, see also Haataja & Nurmi [2000: 2–3, 30–38].

sense of temporary homemaking, of which take-up and length has accrued in Finland in the last decades. The rise of familistic attitudes has also been reported by researchers [Jallinoja 2006; Jallinoja forthcoming 2006:1].

In France and the United States⁹⁶, a slow rise of mothers' employment rates has occurred. In the French case, however, if the portion of mothers *eligible* for home-care allowance is examined (indeed, in 1994–2004 only mothers of two or more children qualified), a fall in French mothers' employment rates also becomes visible. The labour force participation of mothers with two children of which the youngest child is under 3 years of age, i.e. the profile type of mothers who qualify for HCA, fell from 65,1 percent to 54,7 percent between 1995 and 2000 in France [Gadrey 2001: 227; Afsa & Buffeteau 2005 :114]⁹⁷.

In the United States, a downward trend in the labour force participation rate for mothers with children under age 18 appeared in 2000. The participation of mothers with children under age 12 months declines since 1998 (52.9 percent in 2004). Most of the over-the-year decline in the labour force participation rate of mothers in 2004 occurred among mothers with children under 6 (to 61.8 percent). As a result, the percentage of male-breadwinner families amongst married couples has risen by three percentage points between the years 1997–2004. The neotraditionalist trend is slight but consistent at least for mothers with children aged less than 12 months.

Nevertheless, politicians under EU pressure have lately begun to take stock of difficulties women are facing on the labour market in both countries. On this occasion, parental and care leave policies have fallen under scrutiny. Haataja establishes that the situation of mothers on the Finnish labour market has deteriorated since the 1980s⁹⁸. Despite structural changes on the labour market, 'reconciling' policies have hence played a part in this regression. With subtlety, Haataja notes that government programmes have not explicated if the aim is actually to further an equal 'drive' for wage-work and care amongst mothers and fathers:

⁹⁶ *Monthly Labor Review Online*. 05/2004; <<http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2004/05/lmir.htm>> and 07/2005 <<http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2005/07/lmir.htm>>; *Employment characteristics of families in 2004* <<ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/news.release/History/famee.06092005.news>>

⁹⁷ From 175 000 in 1994, the number of beneficiaries has risen in France to 536 000 in the early 2000s. 99 percent are women. Beneficiaries are characterized by a relatively low level of cultural capital and a disproportionate number of mothers were involved in temporary contract work, unemployed, or living in rural zones where access to care was limited (e.g. Afsa 1996). Moreover, French women tend to take HCA for long periods of time. They have not, like Finnish women with tertiary education, taken short periods of HCA to prolong maternity leave, even if they are eligible.

⁹⁸ According to Haataja, the most dramatic changes concern lone mothers and women with lower educational attainment. However, casual contracts have also come to concern an increasing proportion of highly educated mothers in Finland.

In effect, if aims are different for mothers and fathers, we can hold the results as corresponding to the aims. If instead the objectives have been the same for men and women, for mothers and fathers, then results have moved away from aims.

[Haataja 2005: 114]

During the same year, a French policy document also evokes a growing consensus on the negative impact of care leaves on women's labour market integration in the country⁹⁹.

Conclusion – Articulating the policy and the daily matrix

Above, the material, spatial, cultural, political, historical and daily scenes of the research were set. In conclusion, I attempt to throw light upon the workings of three matrixes: namely, the matrix of daily life, the policy matrix, and the discursive matrix at a particular temporal intersection: during maternity leave.

'Daily life', it is argued, is an irreducible matrix of motherhood. It imposes itself as a particularly acute and forcible reality to someone placed as the sole, or primary, meeter of dependent children's 'needs' for significant periods of time. By the dint of the reproduction of the sequence of daily life, it can be sociologically speaking apprehended as a veritable maternalizing machine¹⁰⁰. In other words, daily life – 'arki' [Finnish] or 'le quotidien' [French] – designates an adult socialization process which rubs together beings; molding roles, bodies and souls.

The workings of embodied apprenticeships are an issue tackled by Loïc Wacquant. In the prologue to his work on prizefighting, *Corps et Ame. Carnets ethnographiques d'un apprenti boxeur* [Body and Soul. Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer], Wacquant speaks of his research as decrypting:

a gymnastic, perceptual, emotional and mental work of conversion, on the basis of an implicit and mimetic pedagogic, which, patiently, redefines, one by one, all the parameters of the existence of a boxer.

[Wacquant 2002: 11]¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ See e.g. Rapport n° 2609 de la Commission des affaires culturelles, familiales et sociales [2005]. The impact on women's retirement benefits in the face of long periods of care leave in a temporary homemaking regime has also been taken up in EU policy reflection (see e.g. *Gender Equality in Pensions and Time Use...* [2006]).

¹⁰⁰ The metaphor 'maternalizing machine' was inspired by Wacquant. He spatially brackets a locus of embodied apprenticeship, the gym, designated as a '*miniature civilizing and masculinizing machine*' [2005: 445].

¹⁰¹ '*becoming a boxer is the appropriation by progressive impregnation of a set of mechanisms and mental schemes which are so narrowly imbricated that they efface the distinction between physical and spiritual, that which pertains to athletic capacities and that which stems from moral*

Pugilists entering the gym, and mothers 'staying at home' at the birth of the baby to heed to the 'daily', can somewhat analogously both be apprehended as engaged in a field and discipline¹⁰², which redefine, '*one by one, all the parameters of the existence*'.

If we are to believe Michel Foucault: '*In the first instance, discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space*' [1991: 141]. Political technologies of spatial bracketing are indeed relevant for the study of entry into the matrix of daily life. My working hypothesis has been that maternity leave, a form of temporal and spatial government, constitutes a capital sequence – and instance – of a process, during which contemporary women come to perform [Goffman 1959: 15–76; e.g 77–105, 207; Garfinkel 2004: 134, 165, 176; Butler 1993: 1–3, 1999: xiv–xv] motherhood and 'maternal thinking' [Ruddick 1982].

This insight stemmed from the interview and media data. I became increasingly interested by the fact that, particularly in Finnish women's accounts, the category 'daily' appeared as a cultural resource for subsuming experiences of mothering small children; for telling and encapsulating the life changes brought about by the birth of a child. Despite its apparently innocuous connotation – that of referring to 'ordinary life' – in fact, paradoxically, the encounter with the 'daily' in new mothers' interviews often designated a sudden, 'extra-ordinary' and eventually dramatic, departure from previous existence. The experience, categorization, and logic of practice of switching quotidian settings from wage-earning and stepping into the 'daily' sequence with the baby; being processed by and processing it, thereby became the phenomena tackled in the analysis (see also chapters 4 & 7).

So did the political strings attached to this form of social 'passing' [Garfinkel 2004: 137]¹⁰³. Indeed, maternity leave, a unique period in an individu-

aptitudes and willpower'. [Wacquant 2002: 20] [...] *A living gearing of the body and soul, which defies the frontier between reason and passion, action and representation, individual and collective*' [ibid.] He refers to Mauss and the '*physico-psychico-sociological assemblage of a series of acts [...] more or less habitual and more or less ancient in the individual's life and in the history of society, which are operated by and for social authority*' [ibid.].

¹⁰² Definitions of the word 'discipline' are: '*a field of study*', '*a system of rules of conduct or method of practice*', '*training to improve strength or self-control*', '*control gained by enforcing obedience or order*' and '*the act of punishing*' [see <http://www.onelook.com/> & <http://www.m-w.com/>] In the next paragraph, I purposefully entertain a semantic slippage from 'discipline' defined as a field of study, training, and self-control to 'discipline' as social control and exclusion exerted through spatial technologies of power.

¹⁰³ The term designates the '*transfers of persons from one status to another*' in his case study of Agnes, a transsexual. All societies exert control during status transfers, that from one sex to another being particularly restrictive. Agnes' '*active attempts to comply with a legitimate order of sex roles*' placed her in a situation of permanent potential crisis and stress. '*The work of achieving and making secure her rights to live as a normal, natural female while having continuously to provide for the possibility of detection and ruin carried on within the socially structured con-*

al's life as it may be, also constitutes a normative sequence of the Western life cycle for women active on the labor market – and a policy instrument creating the daily framework of early experiences of families with infants. Viewed from a wide angle, family leave policy, maternity, paternity, parental or care leaves, constitute a form of social engineering which distributes individuals in certain places for given periods of time to do particular things. This '*art of distributions*' [Foucault 1991: 141] can be seen as mediating a culturally specific, gendered, probability structure which actualizes in the lives of French and Finnish parents.

Indeed, gendered policy frameworks propose plain stitches for one and purr for the other, placing men and women as parents in different 'everydays'. These closely-knit set of policies for mothers, and the wide mesh of measures intended for fathers (when they exist), set in motion a systematic body of daily acts and routines, of which the social gravity impacts in expected and unexpected; intended and unintended ways. In sum, intensive periods of full-time care for children are envisaged as a crossroads or synapse in which practices, discourses and policies of a particular apparatus come to connect in and impact on individual lives.

To illustrate the articulation of discourse and state sponsored life politics, I envisage a highly improbable case in Finland (and which constitutes a highly *probable* case in France): that of new parents seeking to entrust an infant aged 4-months to registered day care (and hence wishing to partly or totally to forego their rights to maternity, paternity and parental leave). Such personages would not only be stepping into a discursive struggle on the topic of the child's interest in a wide range of social settings; but their request would be extremely difficult or impossible for a Finnish municipal day care coordinator to fulfil.

Indeed, although access to registered and publicly funded day care is a subjective right in Finland for each and every child, it is built upon the assumption that all parents (in practice, mothers) take the whole of leave for which partial compensation for lost revenue is provided by the state. Accordingly, day care is only organized for groups of toddlers aged 10-months upwards. Parents may therefore *in principle* embark against the grain on such trails of thought, discourse and act, thereby stepping out of the policy and discursive matrixes, but

ditions, I call Agnes' 'passing'. [Garfinkel 2004: 137]. One may suppose that not only negative but also positive enforcement mechanisms are in place on such occasions. An interesting point here is that, during the 1990's, parenthood has become a type of 'passing', and social role, increasingly objected to social control [see for example Sabine Rivier's comparative study of Germany and France (2002)]. Indeed, Rivier underlines a shift from a control of marriage to parental relationships (e.g. *ibid*: 3).

the probability of such an event is very low in the face of material constraints – and discursive recall mechanisms of which some are illustrated in the following chapters¹⁰⁴. It is from such a locus that the mothers in the next chapter are to be seen and heard.

¹⁰⁴ This hypothesis was tested by the researcher in 2001 during a telephone call to a municipal day care coordinator in the Helsinki region. I presented myself as a mother with a 5-month old baby requesting a place in day-care [i.e. wishing to forego my right to parental leave at birth]. The response was that a) admission in a day care centre was impossible b) a child minder was not recommended, except if I was faced with compulsory deadlines in my studies, for example, *or on the recommendation of child protection authorities in the interest of the child*. In the face of such difficulties and risk of stigmatisation, parents who would nevertheless stand up to such a definition of the interests of the child in Finland would most probably then resort to a costly, private, non-subsided [and possibly to a non registered solution of care] – if they are able to find one and / or afford it, in the Finnish context. On the ethical issues raised by this type of participant observation and enquiry in sociology, see e.g. Akhlaq Ahmed [2005: 28–30]. In *Getting a job in Finland*, a study of the modalities through which immigrants gain access to the labour market, Ahmed presented himself as an applicant to various job advertisements, thus foregoing the informed consent of the research subjects. He considered that his method was: necessary for obtaining direct information; that he was not infringing on the private life of the employers; that recruitment is a public practice; that he protected the employer's identities; and that the latter were not enticed to deviate from the normal recruitment procedures [ibid: 29–30].

PART TWO

||

**INTENSIVE MOTHERING AND
THE DECENCY OF SPEECH**

4 ‘Staying at home is a short and special time’ – The case of Finland

Coordinating work and motherhood by making temporary retreats from the labour market is part of the Finnish wage-earner model that crystallized in the 1980’s. This ‘temporary housewife’s contract’ [Rissanen 2000: 80] is enabled by the state, which provides a total leave of 11 months at childbirth at an average compensation rate of 66 percent of salary¹. Although fathers are eligible for the last 7 months, only an infinite minority take any portion of it. During the 1990’s, the homemaking phase was still lengthened as home care leave and allowance were implemented. Parents are eligible until the child is 3 years of age, and a near 80 percent of contemporary Finnish mothers seize the benefit. Care-leave periods range from a few months – this is the tendency amongst mothers with university-level training for example – to a few years. All in all, the situation of contemporary primiparous mothers is hence potentially quite different from that which the previous generation experienced. The interviewed parents’ own mothers were often ‘only’ entitled to a short (in regard to today’s Finnish standards) 3-month maternity leave.

This section critically examines the dominant representations of maternity leave today as they appear in everyday conversations in Finland by the means of tools loaned from discourse and rhetorical analysis [Jokinen 2002a: 40; Potter 1996: 106–108; Jokinen 2002a: 46–47 ; Jokinen 2002b: 127–157; Jokinen & Juhila 2002: 77–81; Vuori 2001: 98–102; 2004]². The sociological eye is posed on a euphemism that caught the researcher’s attention in everyday talk.

¹ During family leave, a temporary replacement is usually found for the employee and the job is guaranteed for the parent until their return (on policy, see chapter 3).

² Rhetorical analysis focuses particularly on how certain versions of reality are made convincing and how the commitment of the public [auditors, readers or participants in a discussion] to a worldview is obtained [Jokinen 2002b: 126]. It may be used alone or as an ally of other types of approaches; sociologist Jaana Vuori, for example, combines rhetorical analysis with sociologically oriented discourse analysis and critical linguistics [2004]. To the three questions formulated above, Vuori adds: ‘*How does the text carry possibilities for social relationships, connections and differences, concord and dispute? How does it invite [one] to act?*’ [ibid: 93]. Vuori contends that analysis which bypasses three central concepts of rhetorical analysis, the ethos, pathos and logos, cannot be qualified rhetorical analysis. This is obviously my case; I do not pretend to the status of a ‘pure’ rhetorical analysis, but rather was inspired by some of its principles.

In an attempt to interpret the signification and the recurrence of the catchphrase three aspects are examined: first, the contexts in which the phrase occurs, second, the relationship between the enunciator and the public, and lastly, what people are doing when they use the expression, are delved into. Connections between the analyzed texts (either reported mother-speech or items extracted from novels and magazine articles) are established³. I will also endeavour to anchor discourse in larger social contexts.

4.1 MATERNAL EXPERIENCE IN A NUTSHELL?

From a commonsensical point of view, maternity leave represents a social right provided by the welfare state for wage-earning mothers. The 10-month post-partum leave provided by the Finnish state is frequently represented in everyday discourse as an opportunity for a ‘break’ from professional life. ‘*Staying at home is a short and special period of time*’ has become a Finnish catchphrase⁴. The exact phrasing of the byword as transcribed above is extracted from a study on care leave, in which it is presented as a typical remark that Finnish women make on temporary homemaking [Korpinen 1997: 74, 79]⁵. Variants of the expression were also heard on several occasions by the researcher before the actual field work commenced and happen to appear in every third Finnish interview.

Taken at face value, the saying may be interpreted as referring to the rewards of maternity or care leave, the experience of relating to infants or toddlers as special beings in everyday life, and perhaps as the expression of nostalgia, anticipated or experienced, of a life stage that passes rapidly. New motherhood may indeed have come to have been represented as a romance of sorts.

Snapshots of mother-child romance

In romantic love, the person we love and feel united with is unique and irreplaceable; furthermore, ‘*love is the most important thing in the world, to which all other*

³ Such connections between texts have been designated as ‘intertextuality’ [Vuori 2001: 90–93; 2004: 115].

⁴ However, in the absence of a comparable historical study it is difficult to date the emergence of this turn of speech or make assertions on its eventually variable salience at different epochs.

⁵ In Finnish: *Kotona oleminen on lyhyt ja erikoislaatuinen aika* [Korpinen 1997: 74], translated in the English summary of the study as: *Staying at home is a short and special period of time* [ibid: 79].

considerations, particularly material ones, should be sacrificed', writes Eva Illouz [1997: 2]⁶. Hence defined, albeit traditionally reserved for heterosexual attraction and relationships, traits of romantic narratives can also be found in mothers' accounts [McMahon 1995: 150–151, 158–159, 267–268]. So if strong emotional response to children is not a new phenomenon, however, it has not *'always and everywhere been understood as "love"'* [Hays 1996: 14]. Nor has love always been honoured or assigned a particular role in the establishment of social bonds or framed as a crucial pursuit of existence [Luhmann 1998: 20, 26].

Historians pinpoint the Age of Enlightenment as the spring board for an expanding idealisation of mother-love, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau as one of its minstrels (e.g. Knibiehler 2000: 63–65). Quoting a parturient in 1787, John Gillis wishes to illustrate a type of discourse, which was to become the standard during the Victorian era: *'When I looked in my boy's face [...] I understood the full force of Voltaire's declaration: 'Le chef d'oeuvre d'amour est le coeur d'une mère'* [1997: 169]⁷. For Niklas Luhmann, love is a code of communication, a model of conduct that can be *'acted out and which one had in full view before embarking on the search of love'* [ibid: 20]. As La Rochefoucauld put it: *'There are people who would never have been in love if they hadn't ever heard talk about love'* [as cited by Le Breton 1998: 104; see also Luhmann 1998: 9].

One of the most familiar metaphors in Western romantic portrayals is love depicted as an all consuming force in the scene of the first encounter [Illouz 1991: 235]; 'passion' is something we are subjected to, beyond explanation, magic, miraculous and unalterable [ibid; Luhmann 1998: 26]. Mother-child romance may also follow such a cultural script (on sexual scripts, see Bozon & Giami 1999; on maternal scripts see Miller 2005). Traced down in interviews of French mothers [Martiskainen 1998a: 61–62], such a scenario also figures in a testimony in the specialized Finnish magazine *9 kuukautta* [Nine months]⁸. Relating her birth-experience, a new mother declares: *'I have never fallen in love at first sight, but now I experienced that wonder too'* [9 kuukautta N° 1, March–May 2004: 78]. *'Mother-love is the greatest of loves'*, states another new mother in a Finnish women's magazine [Eeva, 3.3.2006]⁹. Excessiveness is another theme of 'passion' as totalizing love:

⁶ Illouz quotes Stone L. (1977). *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (the page reference is not provided by the author).

⁷ Or: *'The masterpiece of love is a mother's heart'*.

⁸ On the use of the term 'testimony' in French sociology see Reed-Danahay [2005], particularly on the use of the term made by Bourdieu.

⁹ See Martiskainen 1998a: love between mother and child was liable to be described by mothers as more permanent and forgiving than that with the partner.

It makes everything that has to do with the beloved, every trifling appear relevant [...] The totality of the beloved's inner experience and activities demand continuous observation and assessment.

[Luhmann 1998: 68]

The recrudescence of idyllic representations of mother-infant relations has been pinpointed by the French historian Knibiehler:

the success of such images reveals a kind of nostalgia: one for a slow and serene life, in which the young mother becomes absorbed, at will, in the sweet euphoria of the 'dyad' [...] She loses herself in the contemplation of the tiny being, on the look out for its smallest reaction

[Knibiehler 1997: 289–290]

It appears then, that the early relationship of mother and child has thus become informed by a 'symbiotic symbol', a form of intimacy, in which 'interpersonal interpretation', receptivity and support to the world of another individual is maximal (on 'interpersonal interpretation' in intimate relationships see Luhmann 1998: 13, 17, 27). Knibiehler evokes contemporary mothers' descriptions of the sensual pleasures and emotions that an infant's dependency and progress procure as an experience which has increasingly become sought-after. Accounts of this type seem to have flourished in the French media during the 1980s, simultaneously with the discovery of the astonishing competences of the newborn. In a nutshell: new motherhood depicted as a honeymoon seems to have met with great success during the last decades in the West¹⁰.

Riitta Jallinoja illustrates such a narrative in a Finnish women's magazine published in 1996. In the story, a Finnish singer relates how she 'succumbed' to maternity: carried away as she was by the new relationship, the baby came to fill her whole life. After totally dedicating herself to the newcomer, the mother progressively, however, came to conclude that she also wished for something more. From a romance, the relation evolved towards something else [2000: 107–112]¹¹. And

¹⁰ Judith Walzer gives ontological credit to the existence of a specific postpartum 'honeymoon' period referring to Miller and Sollie, who allegedly report such findings [Miller, B. & D. Sollie Normal Stresses During the Transition to Parenthood. *Family Relations* 29: 459–465]. Walzer declared that she wished to avoid such accounts: this is why she chose parents whose child was one year old [Walzer 1998: 10–11].

¹¹ In Riitta Jallinoja's Finnish study of family events in the print media in the first half of the 1990s, childbirth was a recurrent motive of publicity. In fact, it was the only occasion on which children were brought to the forefront of media attention, as the focus of public attention was typically on marital relationships [1997: 129–130]. Jallinoja found that maternity was discussed in paradoxical terms in these Finnish articles. While illustrations were idyllic, and if in the interviews, maternity leave was initially envisaged as something desirable, it became, at a certain point synonymous of being tied down; was depicted as exhausting or limitative. Such assessments were nevertheless parallel to mothers also evoking how they 'enjoyed their child' [1997: 176–177].

this something else is designated as the ‘daily’ [Jallinoja 2000: 89, 107]. So, interestingly, it would seem that accounts of mother-child romance are not immune to idea of ‘*time and routines as enemies of romance*’, another discursive commonplace in the Western discourse on love [Illouz 1991: 235]. Indeed, after analysis, the signification of the byword appears somewhat different from the spontaneous, ‘romantic’ interpretation proposed above.

Managing contradiction

The investigation reveals the existence of a phenomenon of social disingenuousness. Disingenuousness designates the gap between the official and the officious, between components of social reality that are overtly exposed and those on which we often close our eyes, covert issues. In his work on abortion, Boltanski for example asserts the relevance of disingenuousness, ‘*la mauvaise foi*’ (bad faith) as central in the anthropological works of Pierre Bourdieu, and as an object for social theory. Defined as a form of tacit knowledge, a locus between the official and the officious, Boltanski is particularly interested in the mechanisms of avoidance and arrangements of social contradictions that disingenuousness is always associated to [Boltanski 2004: 15–16, 313].

Indeed, an examination of the various contexts in which the saying occurs establishes that in all cases, ‘*Staying at home is such a short time*’ or ‘*it is such a short time*’ are circumlocutions that function to downplay the restrictions babies or toddlers are liable to impose on adults’ lives, the ‘trouble’ or ‘bother’ that they may represent. Hence, it seems to propose a solution to a social contradiction characteristic of child-centred, individualistic, societies: children are extremely valued, ‘priceless’ beings [Zelizer 1994]¹², but whose dependency limits the personal autonomy of adults. The solution to this contradiction is considering that children are binding and/or troublesome for a short while only.

The enunciator in the interview data is always found to be a mother: either the mother herself [excerpts a, b, e], or more experienced mothers [c, d, g], i.e. mothers with older children, the mothers’ own mother, or the mother-in-law. The expression therefore always rises from mother-experience. Some of the inter-

¹² In *Pricing the Priceless Child*, Zelizer [1994] traces the social construction of the economically ‘worthless’ but emotionally ‘priceless’ child between 1870 and 1930 in the United States through an examination of the changing attitudes towards the death of a child as a measure of the sacralization of child life; the history of child labour legislation which transformed the ‘useful’ child to an economically ‘useless’ one; and the fascinating interaction between the ‘price’ of children and their sentimental value in children’s insurance, compensation for wrongful death and the adoption and sale of children. Her consequent work, *The Purchase of Intimacy* similarly provides interesting insights on the intermingling of economy and relationships.

viewees identify with the expression to some extent or another [a, b, c, e], while others question its operational, performative value [d, f, g].

People do various things when using the byword. The argument may, for example, be harnessed by the mothers having participated in the study for inciting one's partner to have another child [a] or for exhorting (other) parents of small children against divorce [b]. The idea that the limitations that very small children impose on adults' lives should not refrain families from having more children or from struggling to towards a perennial martial relationship are rather traditional, familistic, values.

[a] Specially childhood, you know the toddler phase, it's terribly short, I'm conscious of it already. Two years have just flown by. It's such a short time in a lifetime. That's what I said to my husband: 'come one, let's have the second one, it's such a short time when they are helpless, when you have to take care of them the whole time and they are troublesome'. So you hardly realize yourself how time just flies.

[b] [With the generalization of divorce] we tend to forget what the function of the family is: providing the child with solid foundations and a stepping stone into the world, and that parents' needs can be put aside. Then again it is such a short time, the childhood of a child, so [parents should remember the fact]¹³.

Diluting the Finnish temporary housewife's contract

In most cases, '*Such a short time*' tapped to serve as a reminder for mothers of young children of the fact that the baby or toddler-phase does not last for ever and, hence, that their state of temporary homemaker is reversible: it does have an end to it. Reversibility is a characteristic of individualisation insofar that values may be adopted and refuted by individuals in different sequences of their lives¹⁴.

On several occasions, of which [c, d], the byword is addressed to the mother by older women, colleagues, or family members, to console, calm or coax an impatient younger mother who may be finding the toddler phase long and diffi-

¹³ A similar leitmotif appears in an article published in a Finnish daily newspaper, in which a female Finnish television presenter declares that it is a pity that partners who bicker with each other over sharing childcare and domestic work do not realize that '*childhood is a unique sort of time and passes so very quickly*' [Iltalehti, Viihde 16.10.2004: A34].

¹⁴ For example, although socialized to certain family values, we may refute them once adult. Reversibility also permits electivity in relationships, notes François de Singly [2003]. Boltanski uses the term in another sense. Even if an individual is valued differently or judged negatively in one of the specific social worlds he or she is associated with on a daily basis [for example the workplace, the home, a political meeting, a concert, etc.], these assessments must be reversible, so that some sort of consideration in one social universe or another is provided for each person [Boltanski 2004: 83–84]. Here, the assurance of reversibility could be interpreted as being a promise of the reversibility of the subject's place in a given universe by asserting the possibility of return to other types of universes.

cult. The concern of the young mother is bypassed, evacuated, by the expression: might the mother find time long for the moment, she is assured that she is bound to (re)consider it as quite short, retrospectively.

[c] They do have a cost, these children [laugh], however adorable they are. And for women more than for men, everywhere. That is why I would have wished to have two kids at a faster pace. You think that all the hassle you have to bear with one, the absences from work and all, you could bear with two. To get back faster to a more 'normal' phase. But the old ladies would say: 'Oh come on, it's such a short time, it's not worth worrying about', and they're probably right¹⁵.

[d] I had a few friends in the same situation and they were very empathetic. But from those who had older children, you'd hear things like: 'oh, they grow up quick', so that wasn't very helpful to me somehow [laugh], you know: 'enjoy yourself, it's such a short time'. My mother and mother-in-law, sort of, seemed to be saying: 'yes, we understand, you're having quite a tough time'. But it's not customary to talk about it. It's kind of a... fact of life.

Diluting the temporary housewife's contract by recourse to emphasis on its temporary character resembles a finding by Billig et al. in their work *Ideological Dilemmas* [1988].

This type of temporizing rhetoric, they report, may be mobilized by individuals who are confronted with another analogical life event: illness. Indeed, both maternity leave and sickness alter the individual's possibilities to participate in social life¹⁶. Malady is often framed by patients, these authors contend, as a temporary disorder, despite its eventual gravity or more or less chronic consequences. Billig et al. qualify this tendency as a strategy to keep illness a small part of life: '*an understandable attempt to keep things in perspective, to cope with a stressful episode by maintaining a consistent attitude of overall good health in spite of an exceptional symptom*' [Billig et al. 1988: 88].

Likewise, in one Finnish account, the interviewee describes the byword as representing her personal maternity leave everyday philosophy. The narrative pictures the mother *in situ* evoking the phrase to herself – '*you have to remember*'... – in order to project herself in an after-life with lesser constraint, and as to contain her discouragement during maternity leave.

¹⁵ Excerpt [a] and [c] evoke a strategy which seems to be mobilized by contemporary Western mothers in order to manage their working and family lives: that of keeping intervals between births relatively brief as to *shorten* the period during which the care of young children is particularly constraining for families and their working lives.

¹⁶ Another analogical life event would be unemployment. In the project of a new preface to *Being Mentally Ill* Scheff [undated document] mentions temporizing as a reaction of normalization towards deviance, others being labelling, denial, rationalization or ignoring <<http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/scheff/45.html>> processed on 10.05.2006.

[e] ‘You will get some more freedom later, but the baby-phase, you have to remember that it’s a short time now. If I have the courage to get through it, – it is so important for the baby, it may be the most important time of their lives, – and just concentrate on the baby...’ – that’s how I conceive the beginning [of maternity leave].

The necessity of this existential attitude is linked in her discourse to the child’s ‘needs’ and the constraints associated to them (as is also the case in other excerpts). Referring to the latter induces a switching of subjects from ‘you *have to remember*’ (as if the injunction was pronounced from a locus exterior to the mother) to ‘I *have the courage*’ (to act accordingly to the injunction) and from ‘babies’ (‘*their lives*’ referring to ‘universal’ babies’ needs) to the ‘baby’ (the concrete baby for whom ‘*it is so important*’)¹⁷. Hence, a new counterpart of the temporary housewife’s contract enters the discursive stage: the baby.

However, as testified in [c, d], new mothers do not always themselves brandish the logic of a ‘short time’ as a master solution to the constraints of baby-care: it may be proposed to them. Billig et al. provide an interesting insight in this regard, namely, by showing how illness can alternatively be framed as a constraint or an opportunity according to one’s position as an insider or an outsider:

From the standpoint of health, a day off work, ill, can seem quite appealing. From the standpoint of illness, that very freedom from social obligations can be transformed into a constraint.

[Billig et al. 1988: 90]

Hence maternity leave, from the standpoint of a person who is *not* recovering from childbirth and called upon to care for an infant, may be projected as a ‘break’ from professional life, an opportunity (see Soikkeli on such representations in Finland amongst pregnant women 2000) – a conception which may shift *in situ*¹⁸.

¹⁷ Lawler has underlined that: ‘Euroamerican understandings of children are dominated by a fundamental contradiction: all children are the same – they pass through the same development ‘milestones’, they exhibit the same fundamental characteristics, they have the same ‘needs’. At the same time children are held to be unique. The ‘uniqueness’ of children is a manifestation of the uniqueness and individuality which Western selves are supposed to exhibit. As Jenks (1996: 122) notes, heterogeneous children are brought together – ‘enmeshed in [a] forced commonality’ into a homogenous category ‘the child’ [2000: 40].

¹⁸ In a Finnish essay on motherhood, a narrator relates how she considered home care as the best alternative for the child, but neither she nor her partner stayed at home. Still, she evokes the logic of a short time as a reasonable demand upon parents : ‘The heart says that the place for the child is at home with its own parents, but still, neither of us wanted to, could, was able to stay home for a longer period. I am sure that, afterwards, a few years at home do not feel like a sacrifice; still my patience was not sufficient’ [Kämppi 2003: 178].

When proffered from the outside, this type of logic therefore potentially shifts to a denegation of women's actual experience, or may be experienced as such by the mother. This is particularly the case when it is carried to an extreme: when the injunction implies that the mother be – not merely patient, – but moreover be *enjoying* herself (i.e. having the 'special' time evoked in Korpinen's quote). The catchphrase then functions as a reminder of sorts of a near hedonist ethos of motherhood. I will propose an interpretation of the more profound significance of this point in the following chapters.

Three accounts in the Finnish data testify of such pressures: [d, f and g hereunder]. These incidents occur in a particular context: when a mother on maternity leave opens herself to others on the subject of her difficult experiences. In quote [d] above, the interviewee recognizes that the 'toughness' of the baby phase is avoided in social interactions: *'it's not customary to talk about it. It's kind of a... fact of life'*. From the point of view of rhetorical analysis, a factual construction seems to be taking place. Facts are extreme rhetorical forms that obscure the socially constructed nature of things and quieten alternative options. This type of rhetoric is particularly used in politics, when a social problem is presented as unavoidable. The agency of individuals and their responsibility are put aside, things just 'happen' to people, and agency is limited to the acceptance of a fact (see for example Potter 1996; Jokinen & Juhila 2002: 78–81; Jokinen 2002b: 129, 140–141).

Paradoxically then, maternity leave seems to have become categorized in Finland as being quite the opposite of what it has become: a longer period than previously¹⁹. The expression functions as a euphemism, substituting an agreeable or inoffensive expression (time flies with small children) for one that could offend or suggest something unpleasant (small children may be 'troublesome'). It appears as a reminder, projecting the receiver of the message into the future, an imaginary, easier, after-life. The solution to a mother's (in one excerpt to a father's) possible impatience is remembering the fact and... waiting for the phase to be over. Alternative solutions to exclusive mother care and temporary homemaking are not called for in these excerpts. Therefore, it is implied that the origin of the misfit between 'reality' and the mothers' sensations (she may actually be finding the time long but maternity leave is, in fact, 'short') potentially lies within the latter. What seems to be required is a change in the mother's existential attitude or practices.

¹⁹ Arja Jokinen mentions quantification as a rhetoric device by numbers or description [2002b : 146–148]. In this case it is duration/time which is being rhetorically delimited by portraying an experience of time which the public is bound to have retrospectively.

Indeed, the knowledge of institutions – here, the institution of temporary homemaking and exclusive mother-care conceived as a response to a child’s ‘needs’ during the first year(s) of life – is pre-theoretical, commonsensical knowledge about the social world, considered as exterior to the individual and to which they are bound. Deviant behaviour therefore appears as deviation from ‘reality’ [Berger & Luckmann 1996: 76–84]²⁰. Such a discursive mechanism may function to maintain a certain institutional order, especially in cases in which a problem can only be solved by creating what would be considered a greater problem still, for example, in Finland, the care of a ‘too’ young child outside of the home²¹.

Adapting to such a ‘state of facts’ or ‘reality’ may require learning to ‘think differently’. Eeva Jokinen mentions such a ‘conversion’ in her analysis of articles in a Finnish parenting magazine. A celebrity mother, who acknowledges the constraints of childcare, evokes her existential solution in the following terms:

When it feels heavy, you should remember that motherhood is not facilitated in this country, which is all but child-centred – or by the Finnish climate. Seven months a year it’s one cold, bleak, tunnel of dressing the children and undressing and maladies. It’s a fact that you have to take into consideration, and give yourself the permission to be tired. But still, I cannot stand defeatism, an attitude of ‘this is what it’s like, and always will be’. I have learned to think alternatively.’

[Jokinen 1997: 125, quoting an article in the magazine *Kaksplus* (1988)]

As comes to the second part of the expression in which temporary homemaking is qualified as ‘*special*’: if hedonist maternity becomes a norm in the sense that mothers *should* enjoy themselves, then calls to order or sanctions may be associated to deviant attitudes. The byword potentially functions to silence maternal dissatisfaction or ambiguity, while ignoring the material and social conditions to which it is associated.

²⁰ ‘According to Berger and Luckmann, the experience of the world as other is constituted for each of us in social settings. The two authors began by examining what they called “everyday reality”, which is constituted by both social relations and material objects. They moved at once to what they said is the prototypical case of social interaction, ‘the face-to-face’ situation, from which all other cases are, they held, derivative’ [Hacking 2002: 24–25]. Hence, here the mother’s claim or assessment of the ‘reality’ of the situation is undermined during the face-to-face interaction.

²¹ Alternative options could be that a distressed mother be replaced by her partner at the child’s side [a statistically highly improbable solution] or that parents entrust the child for day care – options that theoretically constitute solutions for ‘too’ long family leaves. As it was, the mother in excerpt [d] prolonged her parental leave period with home care allowance, because she considered that this was in the interest of the child.

Calling for fusion

The injunction to ‘enjoy’ can also be seen as a recall mechanism of the romantic-hedonist ethos of motherhood. Such a call is made in the following passage. It combines an individualist stance (claiming the right to difference) with a normative conception of an existential posture to which women are invited to yield:

There is no one right model of a mother. You can be as successful in motherhood as a fashion-conscious, individualistic person full of temperament, or as a traditional, soft, Moomin-mother type, perfumed by home-made bread. It’s about succumbing, not to an adversary, but to your beloved one.

[Jokinen 1997: 125, quoting an article from the magazine *Kaksplus* (1988)]

The thematic of romantic ‘succumbing’ may be taken up by experts, for example in this declaration of an ‘infant-family psychologist’ on Finnish television, whom enjoined three expectant mothers to ‘*let the baby sweep you off your feet*’!²²

In an autobiographical essay by a father, published in a collection of texts on parenthood written by Finnish public personae, the thematic of succumbing is explicitly associated to the idea of Finnish family leaves ‘as a short time’:

We did not realize that life is composed of periods; it would have been easier to succumb, if we had realized that children were little for a short time. I, myself, I worked more than was necessary, out of a pure fear of letting go. My wife tired herself out in vain: she spent sleepless nights at work, used each second for her creative work, did not rest, and did not succumb to being calmly with the child for that year or so, when the child tied her down.

[Kiiskinen 2003: 101, emphasis added]

Pascale Molinier reminds us succumbing as a posture is an archetypical one in the Western construction of romance *au féminin*. For a woman, ‘falling in love’ is, above all, an act of succumbing and abandon:

the romantic woman, in order to become a woman, is understood as having nothing else to do but to let a man make love to her. In that abandon, she is woman. Or rather: from the moment the woman abandons herself, the man ‘makes’ her a woman, reveals herself to her’.

[Molinier 2003: 40]

And John Gillis declares: ‘*Until the moment of giving birth, a woman’s femininity had only been potential; afterward, she were a true woman*’ [1997: 169], also

²² Mirja Sarkkinen in YLE-TV1 programme: ‘Muuttujat’ on the 3.3.2005 <<http://www.yle.fi/muuttujat/index.php/muuttujat/19/>> [processed on 25.11.2005].

quoting a Victorian novel, in which the infant is described as taking possession of the mother's heart, as the *'doors of her heart were thrown open'* [1997: 169].

In the contemporary thematic of maternal succumbing, it is the baby, and not heterosexual love, which represents the relationship in the face of which women are enjoined to abandon themselves. Sanna Heikkilä, in her study of a post-World War II popular Finnish magazine *Kotiliesi* ['The Hearth'] in 1949 establishes an interesting link between enjoining mothers to relinquish possession of themselves and the denial of one's negative feelings. In one article scrutinized by Heikkilä, mothers who were experiencing sensations of entrapment were a) enjoined to remember that their 'function' was different to that of men [a rational repertory of argument] and b) instructed to reinterpret their sensations:

being tied down is the most blissful of states, freedom was so often an aimless fumbling and a melancholy quest. Committing to the home can be regarded as very restful, when you don't have to think, 'to which of the multiple possibilities I should hurry tonight'.

[Heikkilä 1998: 341]

In fact, 'romance' may also conceal a more normative idea still, the prerequisite of mother-child 'symbiosis', familiar from psychological theories:

The mother becoming more sensitive during pregnancy has a natural purpose, as in a sensitive state of mind the mother senses things in her child, which she would not otherwise see, and is able to succumb to symbiosis.

[Jokinen 1997: 128, quoting an article from the magazine *Kaksplus* (1989)]

The women who are the most sensitive to depression are those who live extensively through their work. They find it more difficult than other mothers to succumb to symbiosis with the baby, which is a prerequisite of 'regression' with the child.

[Jokinen 1997: 129, quoting an article from the magazine *Kaksplus* (1989)]

Symbiosis provides an interesting solution to an eventual conflict between a mother's and a child's needs, validated through *'[social] scientific discourse'* (on romantic emotions and their validation by the latter in the Western 'truth regime', see Illouz 1991: 33). In this notion, it is as if the two were dissolved into one temporary non-problematic entity – a hybrid of sorts. In the excerpts above, symbiosis appears, now as an exception to individualism dictated by nature, now as an existential state to be achieved. Surrendering oneself to maternity may also be presented as a consequence of late childbearing (women may have 'held back' their desire; suffered from infertility; 'lived for themselves' long enough to 'want something else'). This last mentioned logic seems implicit in an editorial published in the French magazine *Parents* [April 2005: 5]:

In France we have babies. More than elsewhere. In Europe we rank number one on the hit-parade of fertility [...] Not bad! We get down to it quite late [at the age of thirty almost], but we consecrate ourselves totally to it. Body, heart and soul.

[*Parents*, April 2005: 5]

It is as if women's attitudes – delaying childbirth, having fewer children but still more than their European counterparts – were legitimated by the extent of their investment, once they 'get down to it'. The theme of such a project of total abandon by an 'elder mother' also appears in a Finnish article under the title 'Sinking into motherhood was enjoyable':

An issue which has not been enormously discussed is that mothers still want that strong experience of motherhood, to commit full throttle, when they have the possibility. Especially we elder mothers, for who this can be the first and last time [...] For long periods of time, I was as though absent, sunk into motherhood. Nearly to the extent that I didn't even exist outside of motherhood. It was a fine experience – similar to that, as a child, of plunging into a book or a movie. It was terrible and lovely and frightening and sometimes sad and happy. From time to time, I would surface and look around myself a bit: 'oh, this is what it is like here'. [...] I will never forget that fundamental experience, that sinking.

[*Anna*, n° 14, 3.04.2003]

Interestingly enough, although this mother considers that the desire of 'that strong experience of motherhood' is not a frequently discussed issue in Finland; she also represents it as something which women may desire. Hence, I would argue that this desire – before the experience even takes place – appears nonetheless as one which can only arise from previously actualizing narratives of the pleasures of sinking or succumbing. The tonality of the same interview shifts somewhat further on, when the mother evokes that which she had 'gained' and 'lost also' with the child: the systematic patterning of her life and the strong limits which condition her agency. The metaphor of absorption, or of being submerged by maternity, is evoked in somewhat alternative – blander – terms by the novelist Katri Tapola:

The woman is absorbed in a world full of lists, schedules and demands, and full of an undefined dissatisfaction [...] When the woman is engulfed in servicing the child, she becomes invisible, she is not just 'herself' anymore, but in a profound way 'someone else'. She subordinates herself to the use of another. She is constantly on alert, hurried even when the child is sleeping, when nothing is going on.

[*Anna*, n° 44, 31.10.2002]

While an interviewee described new motherhood in these terms:

What kind of process is motherhood? Well, from the abominable chaos of the beginning [laugh] you get to survive [laugh] fighting with the taste of blood still in your mouth. Yeah. It's something. Well, it is taking off for something really big as a total amateur. The beginning is like groping around in the dark, and you have to learn to take control of things and I think that the chaos of the beginning was quite... [laughter]. But somehow the fact that you do find the resources in yourself and despite everything you do discover the capacity to cope and all the valuable things it brings. Well I have the feeling that it's something still taking place. There are new sides to it all the time. But for the moment I feel more secure and assured. I think we've done OK, after a tough start. I've grown personally and been capable of taking total responsibility for someone else. And that is a new situation too. In a way I'm surprised that it has gone as well as it has, I was totally inexperienced, after all. Personal growth, learning, that's what it is, with the emotional experience.

4.2 THE INTERGENERATIONAL GAP: OF CATTLE FEEDERS AND FEMME-FATALES

Maternity leave in Finland is a long period, comparatively to France at least, during which an individual's lifestyle is turned upside down, previous social networks at the work place and dominant timeframes cease to exist, and during which mothers are expected to place their own needs after those of their (sometimes very demanding) offspring. Feelings of distress, and willingness to change the situation could well be considered legitimate – but this is not always the case. Hence, if in her content analysis of a Finnish parenting magazine, Jokinen observes a 'therapeutic turn' in the mid 1980's – during which fatigue and depression become acceptable topics of discussion [Jokinen 1997: 125] – it does not always seem to actualize in everyday interactions²³.

Not only the misunderstanding that women may encounter, but the curbing of their expressions of concern for themselves and their changed lives indicates that something deep and significant is at stake. This stake is often referred to as

²³ Jokinen refers to 1985 as a turning point: a breaking of a dam holding back discourse on mothers' fatigue and depression in the magazine *Kaksplus* [1997: 112–136]. However the researcher also mentions a normalizing backlash at the end of the decade: a renewed tendency to 'fix' women into their places and an idealization of 'the mother' [Ibid.] Hence, some fifteen years later a Finnish television programme, 'Inhimillinen tekijä' [The human factor], consecrated to post-partum depression in 1999 [20.07.1999], claimed that it was a persisting 'taboo' in Finnish society <<http://www.yle.fi/inhimillinentekija/juttu.php?tunnus=237>> [processed on 25.11.2005]. In interactions of the type studied here mothers are not invited to dissert freely on their difficulties in encounters (as in a therapeutic encounter) – but rather enjoined to practise self-help. Hänninen & Timonen suggest the co-existence of a social obligation of secrecy on worries and depression and institutions destined for their expression, one of which is therapy [2004: 217–224]. The trend which consists of public expressions of suffering and traumatism outside of the therapeutic consultation in the print media and television and afferent, expert-guided 'public introspection', has been studied in France by Mehl [2003].

children's 'needs'. It is around this issue and that of women that Finnish experts, the state, and previous generations of mothers formed an alliance to build a women's welfare state. These constitute the cornerstone of the Finnish temporary housewife's contract and of the optimistic legacy of mothers of the sixties to their daughters, experimenting with it today²⁴. The section is therefore consecrated to the dynamics of intergenerational relationships amongst women. While the primary empirical data above consisted of interviews – although media data was deployed to contextualize mother-talk and lend credence to interpretation – a new type of material is resorted to below, i.e. contemporary novels on motherhood.

One may note that the byword '*it's such a short time*' lacks a subject; neither children nor women, the subjects of what is being qualified, of what is going on during the short/long time, are explicitly mentioned. The objectification of issues and the implicit nature of subjects is a central feature of power in discourse according to Fairclough [Jokinen 2002b: 141]²⁵. The exercise of power in the two cases [c, d; see also below f, g] seems to be directly linked to the persons of older women – women who are speaking from experience, and represent in a certain sense, authorities on motherhood.

The previous generation of mothers [the mothers and mother-in-laws present in the accounts] gave birth to their daughters in the late 1960's or in the 1970's, when maternity leave was short in comparison with today. Are we in the presence of differing vantage points on time – (does mothering small children ineluctably appear retrospectively, on the long run, as a small episode of one's life)?²⁶ Is one generation superposing their own cognitive instruments from their

²⁴ Allen speaks of the 'life-plan' elaborated by feminists of the 1960's, which included: 'a briefly interrupted career, institutional child-care, an egalitarian division of parental labor, nonsexist methods of child-rearing, and the perspective of a 'post-parental' phase' [2005: 208]. However, she concludes that such a complex strategy did not solve the maternal dilemma, but heightened it: 'For in the absence of social support, it could be realized by only the most energetic and privileged of women, and sometimes not even by them' [Ibid].

²⁵ Arja Jokinen refers to Fairclough, N. [1989] *Language and Power*. London & New York: Longman.

²⁶ I thank Carol Smart for this remark. Merja Korhonen distinguishes the recalling of memories of feelings associated to life events in biographies and the assessment of the part they played in the totality of the biography [1996: 13], referring to Vilkkio A. (1995) Lukijaelämää in E. Haavio-Mannila et al. (eds.) *Kerro vain totuus. Elämäkertatutkimuksen omaelämäkerrallisuus*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus (page 160). It is interesting to note that she obtained quite a contradictory assessment on the period of the life cycle during which women have small children from the same population of women. In her 1993 questionnaire [administered before a qualitative interview with the same women], middle-aged mothers would often qualify this life stage as the 'best times' In interviews, she obtained a contrary result: their children's toddlerhood was depicted as the most trying times of their lives [1996: 20–21]. Some women then also spoke of the new matrix of possibilities opening up for them, as children were growing up. Other women, on the contrary harboured doubts on their capacity to 'start something new'.

memories on a sequence of the life cycle in a context of social change? Are today's mothers' mothers' indirectly expressing their regrets of having spent too short a time with their small children at the time (see Jallinoja 2000: 122, 126, 131, 221–223)?²⁷ It is interesting to note that this type of regret has been explicitly voiced by their husbands on the subject of fatherhood²⁸. Do elder women incite younger women to respect a taboo that was imposed on them? Or did their experiences fit their expectations better? Does the eventual expression of dissatisfaction of their daughters, while they benefit from more generous social rights, seem indecent?²⁹

Generational impasses in Finnish novels

The aforementioned logic appears in *Ruuhkavuosi* [The Hectic Year], a Finnish novel by Pauliina Susi [2005], focusing on the experience of maternity leave. In an imaginary conversation, a new mother, Minna, compares the conditions in which she mothers with that of [somewhat mythical], heroic, ancestors, explicitly linking this issue to the indecency of complaints:

What are you contemporary women complaining about? You have long maternity leaves and men who assist labour. Not in our times. You didn't complain then, even if you didn't have any long maternity leaves, any pain killers, any baby alarms, any washing machines. We'd wash the baby's clothes in a basin, with cold water. We'd fetch water from a hole in the ice... [Susi 2005: 82] [...] What are you howling about here, Minna? Keep yourself going. Think of something to do. When I was your age, there were no maternity leaves, no care leave benefits, no television, no electricity. Children were born and taken care of while working in the fields, feeding twenty head of cattle.

[Susi 2005: 201]³⁰

²⁷ See also published testimonies such as K. Hiilamo 2003b: 58–59, who refers to Jallinoja.

²⁸ See for example Korhonen 1996: 23; H. Hiilamo 2003: 78–79, 81.

²⁹ These mothers are the generation which built the 'Women's Welfare state' [Anttonen et al. 1994].

³⁰ Significantly, the character of the novel does not envisage that these women might be depicted by their daughters in the following manner: '*She cared for her cows and abandoned her children*' – allegedly a quote by a daughter brought up on a Finnish farm in the 1950's [Apo 1999: 19]. Several researchers have reported that the image of strong and hardworking mother is still vivid amongst contemporary Finns [Määttänen 1993; Korhonen 1996; see also Julkunen 1994: 182]. In *Feminist Mothers*, Tuula Gordon [1990] has contended that Finnish motherhood is typically framed as work and responsibility. Moreover, Korhonen found that women born in 1949 often described their mothers as emotionally distant carers, submerged in farm work as they were. Therefore, she argues women's memories do not correspond to the mother myth [ibid.]. See also Satu Katvala's chapter 'Stories on absent mothers' in her PhD. thesis '*Where is mother?*' on the beliefs of three generations of Finns on motherhood [2001: 50–61] In a French study on maternity in 1920–1930, Françoise Thébaud also evokes the interviews of elder women, particularly rural women evoking hard work until delivery [1986: 254].

Depressed or not, Minna, a daughter in a society of affluence and heir of such progress seems to lack an objective mobile of woe, leastways a credible one, *vis-à-vis* her elders. In the novel, the character also interprets her partner's attitude as denial of her right to complain. Isn't she on maternity *leave* while he is at *work*?³¹

I don't have the right to complain. That's what Harri let's me understand, even if he doesn't say it. I *am* on maternity leave aren't I, while he is working, day in and day out [...] Happily we see so little of each other. Happily, I don't have time to complain to him as much as I would like to. He doesn't deserve it [...]. I'd be ashamed to call in him in the middle of his day at work and complain.

[Susi 2005: 139]³²

Nine months after having recorded her projects for the 'hectic' year [a Master's thesis and a career, building house and having a baby], Minna records three new goals in her agenda: 'Stop crying'; 'Stop complaining'; 'Stop feeling sorry for yourself' [Susi 2005: 184].

Finnish Psychiatrist Leena Väisänen has written, that when she took up the subject of her depression with her own mother (born in 1913), the latter wondered:

In the old times mothers did not suffer or at least did not speak about depression. – Women have just had to be able and to cope; there have been wars and all sorts of hardships. Maybe the shame linked to not coping or tiredness has its roots in history³³.

Lahjat [The Gifts] by Riina Katajavuori [2004] is another contemporary novel in which the comparison of maternal experience between generations is tackled

³¹ A significant symbolic shift in the Finnish legislation took place when 'äitiysloma' (literally maternity leave, although, interestingly enough, 'loma' also means vacation or holiday) was re-baptized 'äitiysvapaa' (of which the nearest English equivalent I found is maternity permission, 'vapaa' also meaning free).

³² In a Finnish essay by a father, the latter expresses the misunderstanding which builds between himself and his wife: 'When I came home I was more and more often faced with a cross wife, who demanded attention and wanted to talk, even if I yearned for silence. I did not understand how demanding it is to be with the child alone, without adult contacts. What was she actually complaining about? I did not understand that she didn't have the courage to take care of the house, even if she was at home full-time. It was hard to digest when yourself you were at work all the day' [J. Kiiskinen 2003: 103].

³³ <<http://metku.net/~pesu/artikkelit/depis1.html>> [processed on 25.11.2005]. Määttänen [1993] has studied seven written biographies of mothers: five were born in 1910–1930 and two in 1950. She particularly focuses on the mother-daughter and mother-mother-in-law relationships through them. For these all the women, continuous care for others and adapting to their needs are constant features in the biographies. Want and exhaustion were frequent for most of them, and relinquishing one's dreams common. Despite this, the narrators consider their lives as rich and rewarding. The women often identified with their own mothers.

by the author³⁴. The novel provides an imagery which contrasts strongly with that mobilized in the passage by Susi above. This is due firstly to the setting of her narrative, which is an urban and bourgeois one. Secondly, the author compares today's mothers with that of the generation immediately preceding them. From the daughters' retrospective standpoint, motherhood in the sixties appears as an unproblematic and a less central aspect of existence. Having children did not seem to decentre their lifestyle; young parents are depicted going about their social lives as they did before their children's birth. Also, these parents now seem more self-assured than their contemporary counterparts:

Everything was crystal clear, she was a child of the sixties generation, wasn't she, and in the sixties it wasn't fashionable to be a mother, at least in certain circles. Of course everyone had children, but it wasn't the same thing. One had children rapidly or they just appeared. Then you'd drink Algerian red wine, study, buy cheap sausage, talk about revolution in a terraced house. [...] Inflation paid the housing loans. They were absolutely credible, the sixties generation. They lived without compulsive irony³⁵. Children thought they were beautiful and infallible, their parents were.

[Katajavuori 2005: 34]

In the following scene, Tuulia, the narrator, on care leave after an 'awakening' to developmental psychology (i.e. adhering to the belief that it is in the children's best interest to be cared for at home until they are 3-years old) and her friend Gloria are depicted during a conversation about their own mothers. Their talk is punctuated by motherly motions: *'taking the children to the bathroom without toilet paper for wee, pooh, something to drink. Putting the cap back on the baby's head, over and over and over again. Picking up a pacifier coated with sand, wiping it, putting it in the pocket'* [Katajavuori 2005: 24]. However, if Gloria and Tuulia picture their own mothers performing equivalent, attentive, gestures [*'mothers read out loud to them [...] would put back fallen straps on their children's shoulders, while the children swept by'*] – the latter are also admiringly depicted as having been something else:

³⁴ In an interview in the magazine *Kodin Kuvalehti* [n° 19, 7.10.2004] Riina Katajavuori declares that her novel was intended for contemporary mothers of young children and their mothers. In a net interview, the author also evokes the motive of a short time: *'In the book, Tuulia is finally content with her choice to care for the child at home. The first child was one year old when it went to day care, but as comes to the second child, Tuulia realizes that the child grows up very fast, and that three years is not a such an unreasonable time'* <<http://plaza.fi/ellit/lapsia-vanhempia/lapsetkasvatus/riina-katajavuori-ja-hiekkalaatikkofeminismi>>

³⁵ For Pascale Molinier irony as auto-derision is a defence against the vulnerability, suffering and doubt which women may encounter in their care work. Doubt is a corollary of the social invisibility, or the low visibility, of women's care work [2003: 242–243].

And during all this time they'd chat, [...] remembering their mothers, *femmes-fatales*, their tall fathers, recounting memories. How mother's back muscles moved impressively as she rode a bike. How they would bounce on the bike behind her. How mother leaned on the pillar in her low waist pants, looking at the lake, clean enough to drink from. Mothers didn't fuss, they were stylish and calm as if they had been born to the role. Children's books were strewed all over the peer, which mothers read out loud to them wearing large rimmed glasses. Someone was drinking beer, philosophising, but mothers would put back fallen straps on their children's shoulders, while the children swept by. Their mothers had been all that, without knowing how young parents were then, how old they were now.

[Katajavuori 2005: 24]

Coping mothers, overwhelmed daughters

Neither vision, be it in the icon of heroic ancestors acquainted with the hardships of an agrarian society or that of nonchalant *femmes-fatales* clad in low waist pants of the carefree sixties, presents intensive childcare as constituting an overwhelming pivot of women's lives. Women had children '*while working in the fields, feeding twenty head of cattle*'; or, alternatively, took good care of their looks, continued to socialize, '*drink Algerian wine* and '*talk about revolution*'. Contemporary Finnish motherhood with pain-killers, baby-alarms, washing machines and long maternity leaves, in contrast, appears as an all-encompassing life-style, a situational puzzle everyday renewed, ridden with reflexivity and uncertainty:

She pretended that she could cope [...] even if she didn't have any prerequisites [...] any predispositions of a good homemaker. She ardently wanted to be a good stay-at-home mother. At least a good enough mother as the concept went] [...] Tuulia and Gloria pretended to know their job, parenthood. Every day they searched for rhythm, routines, the right emphasis on an interdiction, instruction, command, love.

[Katajavuori 2005: 24]

Traces of such practical reasoning were also found in British and French works. A British mother interviewed by Steph Lawler also points to novel reflexive requirements linked to contemporary motherhood, when she declares that: '*we suffer more than the other generations did. I mean mothers just used to get on with it*' [2000: 143]. French psychologist Violaine Guéritault cites a French mother saying: '*Being a mother always seemed so simple for my own mother*' [2004: 22].

Hence, more or less explicitly, and to varying degrees, both *Lahjat* and *Ruuhkavuosi* touch upon a breach in the social conditions in which two genera-

tions of women cared and care for their children – and a hiatus in (apparently ‘coping’) mothers’ and (apparently overwhelmed) daughters’ experiences. Interviewed in a Finnish magazine, Katajavuori reflects upon the changing social context and its effects upon women in these terms:

Thirty–forty years ago a family did not need to be rich and it still could hire help. Nowadays society and women themselves demand too much of mothers. You have to cope on your own in everything, at work and in the home, in motherhood and marital life.

[*Kodin Kuvalehti*, n° 19, 7.10.2004]³⁶

Together with the interview excerpts, both Katajavuori’s and Susi’s novels point to possible misunderstandings or communicational impasses that may arise from social change between generations or cohorts of mothers³⁷. The incident narrated below (from *Lahjat*) pictures a tentative management of this gap by an elder woman. It is patterned, once again, by the familiar leitmotiv of toddlerhood as a ‘short time’.

But soon everything will be easier, won’t it, said Tuulia’s mother. The baby-phase will be over; you will not have to carry them about before long.

Tuulia quietened. That was not the point; the point was not resolving a problem, of positive thinking, of cheering up. This was not a difficult circumstance to be get rid of as soon as possible. She did not want this to be over quickly. These were the best times.

[Katajavuori 2005: 69]

The passage suggests that Tuulia’s mother’s *verbatim* constitutes a response to a difficulty or a ‘complaint’ expressed by her daughter³⁸. Significantly, the logic of the baby-phase as temporary (‘*over... before long*’) does not satisfy Tuulia. What I interpret as the dilemma she experiences remains intact: the ‘best times’ seemingly demand so much of her. This impasse quietens the narrator.

³⁶ Although it is not explicated, the gap Katajavuori refers to in terms of ‘help’ here is class specific: it is one which holds particularly for two generations of university educated young parents in Finland. Vuori also mentions diminishing domestic help during this period in Finland [2001: 25]. See the resembling quote from *9 kuukautta* infra, in which ‘help’ is not envisaged.

³⁷ Although it may be less abrupt than that described by French historian Yvonne Knibiehler, who highlights the generational gap between young mothers of the 1960s and 1970s and their own mothers [2000: 112].

³⁸ The passage constitutes the first lines of a chapter – the reader thus does not have ‘access’ to the immediate context of the interaction, and the lines which possibly preceded the exchange.

Intergenerational complicity

A passage in Katri Tapola's novel, *Näiden seinien sisällä emme näy* [Inside these Walls We Are Invisible] [2002] describes the resentment of a new full-time mother towards her husband. He is not helping her out enough, and is blamed by narrator for the negative transformations she perceives in herself. The latter are also mirrored as a failure to attain the model set by her mother. During care leave, an irremediable breach has formed between the daily universe of Ellen, Tapola's character, and that of her partner. Ellen seeks refuge in her relationship with her own mother:

Ellen threw the carrots she had sliced in the kettle and tried to remember when she had last been able to make herself comfortable, but could not even remember what feeling comfortable was really like [...] and all this was linked to her husband in the last instance. If Tapani had taken care of the house, Ellen wouldn't need to cater as she catered now [...] At the very beginning, just when she became a mother, she had coped much better. Maybe it was the hormones, Ellen now thought; maybe hormones had rendered her tame and enterprising. Then in the beginning she had given all she had, forgotten herself and had surely been a good mother and a wife deserving love. [...] She had naturally only wanted to demonstrate her competence as a mother and wife, and because Tapani had seemed contented with his family life, she had served him joyously. She had been like her mother, almost perfect in her own opinion [...] Now all she was, was tired, bored,³⁹ and nagging, just the kind of woman that is jeered at in comic strips, and whom, on the top of it, makes fun of herself. Just the type her mother could never have been like. Ellen was strained by the fact that she did not fit the model which she would have liked to follow. [...] Happily mum would come over to care for the child the next day, Ellen was thinking. [...] Thank God, Ellen went on to herself, a sensible adult is coming over tomorrow, a human being who basically resembled her the most: a human being who would from one glance grasped how things were and how they ought to taken care of. In time, her husband had proven to be so tryingly different. Tapani was, on a fundamental level, different from her and her mother, incomprehensible, as only a man can be. Mum and she, they formed a sequence of their own in the chain of mothers, and moreover drew their children with them in it. Soon they would form a common front and maybe then Tapani would then apprehend his place better. Because, Ellen thought, there were things in life, which simply were, were given; possible only in one sole way. And those were mothers' issues.

[Tapola 2002: 46–49]

Hence, while Ellen seems to think that she is not up to the 'standards' of her own mother, namely in terms of contentment, she nevertheless considers the latter as the person *par excellence* capable of offering her relief and reciprocity at home –

³⁹ Lefebvre has written: '*boredom does not exist for sociologists as a social fact. They are wrong!*' [2005: 74].

at least in terms of the standards which Ellen values and strives to uphold⁴⁰.

Reference to the performances and hardships endured by preceding generations by contemporary mothers are therefore liable to have diverse functions and effects. Memories of their own ‘coping’ mothers may be guilt-inducing, inasmuch as elders are generally considered as having mothered in more disadvantaged social conditions. Nevertheless, the imaginary of heroic ancestors may also be mobilized as a technique to ‘keep on going’, as in the excerpt below. It is the interview of a Finnish author in a popular Finnish women’s magazine:

I have just been thinking that if grandma coped in those times, I will cope. Motherhood is training for the Special Forces. You have to adapt to extraordinary circumstances. See the walls closing on you a few centimetres per day. You have to cope with extremely scarce sleep and to be continuously ready to act, react to the smallest snap of a twig [...] If you mean to go out of that door you have to have military discipline. And on the top of that you should be a warm person [...] If I was obliged to fetch water 30 kilometres away, or duck bullets in the streets, I would not have the time to think about family dynamics.

[*Anna*, 18.08.2005: 12]

Interestingly enough, the interviewee evokes the hardships of wartime endured by her grandmother, while simultaneously mobilizing a military metaphor to describe the requirements of all-attentive contemporary mothering: she is ‘at war’ with the overwhelming minutiae and the exigencies of constant attention to small children, characteristic of contemporary fashions of childcare [Dally 1982: 56–123; Hays 1996; Knibiehler 1997; Théry 2001: 259; Furedi 2002; Ehrenreich & English 2005: 208–215; Warner 2005]. On the other hand, yesterday’s hard work in a context of war is contrasted with the unrelenting physical and psychic energy which the responsibility of the care of precious children and a therapeutic approach to family relationships demands of contemporary mothers⁴¹. However,

⁴⁰ Korhonen, following Nenola, has qualified these standards as a ‘women’s culture’, i.e. the exigencies and norms relative to cleanliness, decorating, cookery, care of clothing and childcare transmitted between generations and by the media. According to Nenola, some women resign from such high standards, while others perpetuate them despite the tensions which may be engendered by maintaining them alongside with full-time paid work [Korhonen 1996: 17–18, referring to Nenola Aili. 1986. *Miessydäminen nainen. Naisnäkökulmia kulttuuriin*. Helsinki: SKS]. Therapist Daniel Stern, in *The Motherhood Constellation* considers that interaction with more experienced mothers are a major ‘matrix of support’, that contemporary mothers seek, but do not always find [Stern 1997].

⁴¹ Judith Warner, in her book on the existential queasiness of contemporary middle-class and professional mothers, writes: ‘*moms didn’t feel entitled to complain. By any objective measure, they had easy lives – kids in good schools, houses in good neighbourhoods, dependable husbands whose incomes allowed them to mostly choose what they wanted to do with their time. Most had Mommy Track jobs – part time work, a big cut in ambition and salary. But they didn’t mind that [...] What they couldn’t make peace with was the feeling that somehow, more globally, they were living Mommy Track lives*’ [2005: 5].

the irony which is once again present in the excerpt, somehow contributes to the plight of today's intensive mothering as 'objectively' less trying than the responsibilities and conditions that befell elder generations.

Commonsense representations of the life of feminine ascendants and inter-generational comparisons thus serve as tools to keep a grip on a particular life situation, that of transition to motherhood – a 'technique of the self' of sorts (see chapter 7). Michel Foucault asks:

Now, what do we need to keep our control in the face of the events that may take place? We need 'discourses': *logoi*, understood as true discourses and rational discourses. Lucretius speaks of the *veridica dicta* that enable us to thwart our fears and not allow ourselves to be disheartened by what we believe to be misfortunes. The equipment we need in order to confront the future consists of true discourses; they are what enable us to face reality

[Foucault 2000c: 99]

A collective amnesia?

However, the techniques which are proposed by their *entourage* to young mothers today – such as the injunction to *enjoy* and relinquish themselves to maternity albeit 'for a short time' – may turn out to be ineffective or have perverse effects, as in the quote which follows. A mother encountered during the research, also confronted with the injunction to *enjoy* maternity leave, reflects on elder women's attitudes, as well as those of women with older children, in the following terms:

[f] My mother-in-law and my own mother, neither of them understood at all, why I found it so hard. They didn't understand what I meant when I said it was as if I didn't exist anymore. Neither did friends [...] they had had children when they were younger. Memory is selective. They did not remember what it was like. They didn't remember precisely what it is like! [...] So they all had a totally different attitude: that it was the most precious thing in life [...] Even if I have always thought that that this is fine. This is a choice. This is a happy event. The child is perfect. – I didn't realize the price you have to pay. [...] The worst was the guilt about not enjoying. At one point, I remember I told [my husband] that I would slap the next person who dared to tell me to enjoy myself now: 'I'll slap them! I'll slap them!' That it was totally incommensurate. That there was bloody hell nothing to enjoy. [...] I don't believe I will forget what this was like. And I've tried to take care of that by writing it all down. But, my own mother, that generation, they had so different expectations. Their life was more modest, I mean probably socially so much less active and. And it was more of a self-evidence. Things got done easier. Even if some were, too, I am sure they were, depressed and there was some revolt and all. But there was maybe less of it, and you had to curb it. I mean, because at the time, it was an uncondi-

tional taboo. Now I would say that my generation of women is not ready to be silent about it anymore. But it will take time before kind of... we find a balance. Before you can mention that it's not just 'fun and games'.

The mother above evokes another interesting sociological phenomenon, oblivion (*They did not remember what it was like*)⁴². In her work on written autobiographical expressions of Finnish mothers, Eeva Jokinen [1997] also brings forward a lay interpretation, that of a 'collective amnesia' about the constraints and difficulties of mothering very young children, prevailing amongst mothers from different cohorts. When presenting the headway of her research project, this researcher relates her own experience as a mother and her impetus to work on the theme, in these terms:

[g] Between dissertations I became a mother myself, actually two times [or does one become a mother only once?] On the other hand, I didn't feel myself comfortable 'at home' at all, but fled to work whenever it was possible [...] While at home with two children, I decided to keep a detailed journal of my life. It felt like otherwise I would come to forget; in fact, what I felt like was that mothers of small children suffered from collective amnesia, as soon as their children had grown up a little. When I attempted to complain or to beg for some empathy, for the tired mother who experienced her own insufficiency that I was, the *mothers of somewhat older children would belittle my experience and would say that it would last only some years[!], that I should enjoy myself now, and not complain*. As I lacked other alternatives, I wrote it all down

[Jokinen 1997: 9–10, emphasis added]

This denial of contemporary mothers' difficulties – of their suffering⁴³ as opposed to the joy women are supposed to be experiencing with their new babies – also appears in an anonymous essay, which bears the title 'The memoirs of a depressed mother'. The testimony reads:

I felt dead inside. The suggestion that I enjoy my child because she would be small such a short time, in the midst of my interior inferno, made by innocent outsiders, still makes me smile. Depression did not take away my sense of humor, even if joy was gone.

[Anonymous in Kalavainen 2005: 51]⁴⁴

⁴² Interestingly enough, this remark makes a contrary claim: new motherhood is 'always' difficult. Therefore, likewise the women voicing the catchword [or those referring to 'collective amnesia'] often persons do not seem to envisage the possibility of radical variation in women's experiences.

⁴³ Suffering has been defined by as a lack of words and the break down and disappearing of agency [Tuomaala 2004: 147 referring to MacNelly Kearns, C. (2002). *Suffering in Theory*. In Gibbs, Robert & Elliot Wolfson (eds.). *Suffering Religion*. London: Routledge (page 58).

⁴⁴ I thank Anna-Maija Castrén for her encouragements and for providing me with this specific piece of material.

The last taboo

Boltanski has designated abortion as a phenomenon on which societies ‘close their eyes’ [2004: 317] – as is the case for other contradictory social practices. Contradictions may also be treated as fortuitous incidents, anecdotal and isolated. Their actual importance may then be revealed when examined as a series. This has long been, and to some extent still is, the case with abortion, or post-partum depression: non-specialists are often surprised to ‘discover’ the amplitude of such phenomena, when faced with figures⁴⁵.

Hence, if during interactions, it is suggested that a mother’s feelings are unusual or deviant, the latter may not reiterate their tentative to share them. The collective character of the phenomenon is demised or may be displaced to another arena, as in Eeva Jokinen’s case: ‘*As I lacked other alternatives, I wrote it all down*’ (*nota bene*: this is also the case of the mother in quote [f], see also the following chapters). *Ipsa facto*, Eeva Jokinen chose to examine mothers’ diaries and written autobiographical accounts in her research on mothers’ fatigue – the topic of her academic dissertation, from which the quote above was selected.

One possible explanation of the avoidance of the issue of maternal distress or dissatisfaction – be it by euphemizing, isolating, ‘factual’ construction, or imposing one’s view from the standpoint of an authority – resides in the fact that, as suggested earlier, the euphemism also functions to avoid the collision between children perceived as lovable and ‘troublesome’: a major social contradiction in societies supposed to be child-centered. But why is admitting the fact that caring for small children may be ‘troublesome’ (particularly when one is caring for them 24 hours a day, which is often the case for mothers on maternity leave or care leave) perilous, and liable to be socially downplayed?

It may be that qualifying their care – and by extension children themselves – as ‘bothersome’ leads to a semantic shift of children as potentially ‘unlovable’ creatures, and therefore, by extension, with what Georges Snyders argues is one of the rare, last taboos that subsist in our societies, as emancipated as they may represent themselves: that parents love their children unconditionally always and under all circumstances. Snyders and Elias write:

⁴⁵ In France the visibility of ‘post-partum depression has been low in the media. One indicator of this was observed during the study: a Parisian interviewee, herself a doctor, largely underestimated the proportion of women affected officially (during the interview she checked the French figures in a medical publication which indicated that 15–20% women were officially affected in France). In Finland, the topic has been more salient, for example in the arena of family magazines. A Finnish doctoral dissertation in medicine mentions the figure of 10–15 % of women affected by the phenomenon and claims that ‘*depressed mothers are poorly recognized in health care*’ in Finland [Hiltunen 2003: 17, 21]. A similar contention has been made by Brady 1999: 251.

You can well declare that you do not love your partner, that you are more or less living separately and with another or even others, but go ahead and say that you do not love your children, how scandalous!

[Snyders 1980: 9]⁴⁶

Today a legend has become established which makes it look as parental love and affection for their children is something more or less natural, and beyond that, an always stable, permanent and life-long feeling.

[Elias 1998c: 195]

And the ‘scandal’ may seem even greater in a society of affluence and choice: with contraception, partners assisting labor, analgesics, long maternity leaves, baby alarms, washing machines – and possibly a career. To wit: as a number of ‘objective’ problems which women previously faced have been solved, from the point of view of the latter, complaints may not make sense. Susi’s passage testifies of such an internalized line of thought. Indeed, in her article ‘The ingredients of motherhood’, sociologist Jaana Vuori reports the presence of such discourse in the Finnish media, after the publication of Anna-Leena Härkönen’s novel *Heikosti Positiivinen* [Feebly Positive] [2001] [Vuori 2003: 62 and section Mothers go public, below].

‘The care of babies was sort of basic’

In an article ‘Four generations of motherhood’, relating the experiences of women having birthed in the 1930’s–1940’s, 1950’s, 1970’s and the 2000’s, a contemporary mother of a toddler declares:

When you think about what life was like for my grand-parents in the same situation, you can only wonder how they coped. *As everything else is fine*, the contemporary mother has to work on the couples’ relationship and think about how to combine family and working lives’.

[9 *kuukautta*, n^o 1, March–May 2004: 43, my emphasis]⁴⁷

⁴⁶ In a recent article, ‘Disgusting babies’, published in the Finnish women’s magazine *Trendi* [March 2005], a journalist pretends to reveal the existence of a new category of the population – ‘baby haters’ – amongst young Finnish women. A young woman is quoted saying: ‘*Why should we like children? They only represent negative things to me: screaming, vomiting, and drooling*’. The constructed phenomenon is qualified as ‘strange’ and ‘taboo’. Hence childhood appears as one of the most moral, normative issues in Western societies. Ian Hacking makes a similar proposal when he writes ‘*Child abuse reminds us of a curious fact about the present state of our civilisation. We are supposed to be overwhelmed by relativism. It is said that there are no more stable values. Nonsense. Try speaking out in favour of child abuse [...] Child abuse and illiteracy are absolute (bad) values. Our society is not nearly as relativistic as is made out*’ [2003:141].

⁴⁷ Similarly, French psychologist Violaine Guéritault cites a French mother saying: ‘*Being a mother always seemed so simple for my own mother*’ [2004: 22].

Obviously then, despite the immense achievements in women's citizenship, reproductive choice and living conditions, today's adult daughters may harbor *other* types of motives for complaints (eventually alongside conventional, persistent ones): relating to reflexive relational work (also mentioned by Katajajuori, and the excerpt in *Anna*-magazine). Indeed, not only are we in the presence of a new generation – with qualifications, expectations and exigencies about their lives of their own – but also, I will contend, raising children has become a somewhat more complex and exigent endeavor.

To illustrate this point, it is interesting to quote the grand-mother whose life was referred to above by her grand-daughter in the magazine *9 kuukautta*. Although the former refers to caring for three children as full-time work; remembers washing bottles and diapers by hand and to insists on the impossibility, for a woman, to claim 'time of their own'⁴⁸ – she also happens to mention a qualitative difference in childcare:

the care of babies was sort of basic, which meant that you saw to children being fed and clean. It never crossed your mind that you should think of any stimulating activity.

[*9 kuukautta*, n° 1, March–May 2004: 43]

As comes to the great-grand-mother, who reared her children in the 1930's and 1940's while running a general store, she recalls swaddled babies in woven baskets, and their absent father at war, and found that: '*Children were cared for in the back room of the shop conveniently alongside work*' [*9 kuukautta*, n° 1, March–May 2004: 42]. The quote above is a remainder of the fact that combining work obligations and family life is not as novel an issue as it may seem, although paid work is now more often effectuated outside of the home. And an interpretation of women's difficulties mainly in terms of combining work and family, i.e. in terms of the persistence of andocentric organization of workplaces and asymmetric gender relations, though pertinent, overlooks another factor of the equation of the maternal dilemma. Alongside women's access to individuation, the requirement of individualized care *of children* has also risen. Indeed, in the home, child-rearing fashions have undergone rapid social change, as Sharon Hays points out in her work on the ideology of intensive mothering:

⁴⁸ The full quote is: '*When contemporary mothers*' [say they] *miss having some 'time of their own', I can only note that a turn of speech like that did not even exist in my youth. It would have been considered as very strange if I had gone off from home for an evening walk on my own without a specific destination or purpose*' ...

The idea that correct child-rearing requires not only large quantities of money but also professional-level skills and copious amounts of physical, moral, mental, and emotional energy on the part of the mother is a relatively recent historical phenomenon

[Hays 1996: 4]

Although implicitly present in the statements of previous generations of women reproduced above (childcare was ‘*basic*’, babies were ‘*swaddled*’ while the mother went about her work), this aspect is rarely rationalized in younger women’s accounts. Firstly, the contemporary mothering régime appears as a profoundly interiorized feature, a ‘fact’. The clues pertaining to the rising exigencies of childcare are to be found in the expression of contradictory emotions in mothers accounts (see the paragraph below). It is hardly surprising that in a context of rapid social change and its differentiated facets in various social *milieux*, women may experience difficulty in articulating this state of affairs— and that new mothers may lack an attentive ear for the lived consequences of intensive mothering from elder generations⁴⁹.

Indeed, when constraints – such as [excerpt a] *you have to take care of them the whole time and they are troublesome*; [b] the limits imposed by young children on marital relations; [c] *the hassle you have to bear... the absences from work and all*; [d] a longing for *freedom*; [g] fatigue, feelings of *insufficiency* or discomfort ‘*at home*’ – were expressed, the rhetorical device ‘*it’s such a short time*’ dissolved subjects and experiences in a generic ‘*it*’. It was not quantitatively much. Perhaps ‘*it*’ should even have been enjoyable.

A new problem with no name?

It tempting to ask: has such a conjuncture engendered a new ‘*problem that has no name*’ [Friedan 1963 / 2001] for contemporary highly educated working

⁴⁹ When evoking inter-generational relations amongst women, Nicole-Claude Mathieu writes: old women cannot imagine another technique than teaching young ones what they believe is ‘their’ personal method of adapting and which is presented to them, on the top of it, as constituting their value or their *womanly* courage’ [Mathieu 1991: 188, original emphasis]. This author distinguishes between a ‘solidarity of women in survival’, which may consist in support for adapting to a given social situation from ‘feminist solidarity’, which would consist in support for questioning social order [ibid.]. Mathieu examines rhetorical strategies in ‘malestream’ anthropological writing, which tend to de-dramatize women’s subordinated positions. An incisive passage is consecrated to the belittling of women’s complaints and melancholic rituals, of which the factual basis may be denied by ethnologists [1991: 185–186]. Denial may also operate through the insistence on the fact that women *also* have some influence and autonomy inside families – a strategy which according to Mathieu, ‘*comes down to being surprised that the oppressed are still alive and kicking*’. Quarrelling amongst women and elder women’s responsibility in the subjection of their daughters and daughters-in-law can also be emphasized on the expense of men’s prerogatives of control [ibid. 189–190].

women in the context of a Finnish temporary homemaking contract?⁵⁰ Let me recall the first lines of the seminal book by the aforementioned author, *The Feminine Mystique*, which pulled the trigger of Second Wave feminism amongst American college educated women. Betty Friedan writes:

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night – she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question – ‘Is this all?’

[Friedan 1963 / 2001: 15]

Undeniably, Friedan is speaking from another societal context, that of the white, educated, middle-class woman in the United States at the turn of the 1950’s and 1960’s. It has sometimes been referred to as the ‘golden age’ of the Parsonian nuclear family and institution of the housewife. Significantly, the latter never became a dominant way of life in Finland. In the beginning of the sixties, approximately 50 percent of Finnish mothers with children were in the workforce; the corresponding proportion was 67 percent in 1975. During this brief historical span, Finnish women were on the forefront of continuous labor market participation, interrupting their careers after childbirth, – of which the birth of the adult daughters interviewed in the study – for very brief periods.

Hence, state sponsored as temporary homemaking may be, staying at home for 10, 12 or 18 months at the birth of each child as a norm is a relatively novel life situation for college educated women in the country, compared to their mothers. If in 1978, 73 percent of mothers with children under six years of age were participating in the labor market [Hiilamo 2002: 77], the *employment rate*⁵¹ for mothers with the youngest child under six years of age in Finland was 64 percent in 1990 – and dropped to 49 percent in 2002 [OECD 2005]. This change is concomitant to the prolongation of the Finnish temporary homemaking contract (see chapter 3, section ‘Does the neo-traditionalist thesis apply to Finland and France?’).

⁵⁰ This is also a term used by Guéritault to designate maternal stress: ‘*the problem of maternal stress, is for the time-being ‘a problem without a name’, despite its prevalence and its impact, sometimes experienced in loneliness, in isolation, even distress when stress results in depression*’ [2004: 25].

⁵¹ See OCDE social indicators for 2005: <<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/35/6/34555570.xls>> *Nota bene*: Labor participation rates and employment rates are not directly comparable because the latter exclude the unemployed [see also ‘The policy matrix’].

In terms of a mothering regime, of fashions and beliefs and practices related to child-rearing, such a fast-paced shift is fascinating. From a few months of full-time attention from their mothers, infants' 'needs' of intensive, individualized, nurture have now come to be framed in years. Some authors have related this development to that of a neotraditionalist model of mothering (e.g. Johnston & Swanson 2003; see also chapter 3, *Contexts of motherhood*).

In another time, place, and social location, Ann Dally evokes a *somewhat* analogical historical turning point in models of mothering. Her example is one of a rapid – if somewhat more radical – cultural shift in mothering practices. It took place amongst the British upper- and upper-middle class in the mid 1950's. These women, whose own childhood had been formatted by the institution of the English nurse, were then sensitized to attachment theories and full-time childcare for their own children:

When governments and experts actually told a mother with such memories that continuous mother love was essential to mental health, she tended to believe them, even though neither she nor anyone she knew had experienced it. And when it was by statements such as John Bowlby's that 'the mother-love which a child needs is so easily provided within the family', it seemed the obvious thing to do. Once she was actually caught up in the business of child-rearing as a 24 hours a day, seven days a week occupation, she was likely to deal with this by idealizing it still more. For by that time she had discovered that rearing children was not easy at all, that machines could only help with washing and cleaning, not with unrelenting exposure to babies and children, continual interruptions or the constant necessity for watchfulness and attention. The only thing for many mothers to do at that stage was to idealize still further or have a nervous break-down.

[Dally 1982: 102]

Stretching excerpts from Helsinki in the 2000's; to the sixties' 'desperate housewives' and to the British upper-class of the fifties – and back – may seem cavalier. Although I do take the consequences of suggesting similarities in the experiences of these Western mothers practicing full-time childcare [be its horizon a lifetime or care leave] in terms of shared frustrations – or dilemmas: that of the social construction of the mother role and the wish to be an autonomous individual – my intention is not to suggest that these terms capture the gut, or resume, their stories. Rather, the relevant issue is that, in these accounts, elder women and new mothers; American, British and Finnish mothers; mothers of the 1950's, 1960's and 2000's all seemed embedded in a similar discursive matrix.

4.3 THE COLLEGIAL MANAGEMENT OF EMOTIONS

In most of the scenes depicted so far, the protagonists cultivating maternal decency were older women having mothered in different historical/cultural contexts. Emotional management, however, also seems to be practised by one's near contemporaries, or 'perfect mothers' (e.g. see Jokinen's excerpt referring to mothers with *older* children)⁵². Indeed, in this sub-chapter, the focus glides to the analysis of face-to-face interactions amongst peers – and a process I have called the collegial management of maternal emotions.

Although chapter 4 is dedicated to the the case of Finland, some of the quotations which figure below were drawn from the French pool of data, (namely an excerpt from Nathalie Azoulai's novel *The Jittery Mother* [2002] and an interview of a French father in *Elle*-magazine). Indeed –, as suggested in my conclusion above –, I posit from here onwards that we are dealing with a larger social phenomenon. Supplementary evidence will be provided in chapters 6 & 7. Also, a focus on the management of mother-talk by colleagues is principally wedded here to the exploration of the second leitmotiv present in Korpinen's quote: enjoyment – and not time (although the two elements of the collocation were linked⁵³). As I shift my enquiry from cross-generational vertical interactions of discursive avoidance to more horizontal ones, my theoretical lens is also displaced. Two bodies of work will be called upon: the sociology of emotions and the writings of interactionnists.

Indeed, the examination of lines pertaining to proper emotions appears as heuristic for the unearthing of the semiotic constraints of maternity and, by extension, of a number of hidden assumptions pertaining to the mother-role. In so doing, this sub-chapter proceeds to unearth yet complementary sociological explanations, liable to be articulated to those suggested above. The latter are related to some of the emotions which I interpret as being latent in the communicational impasses portrayed in the previous sub-chapters and which 'had no name'. One such emotion is shame – of which the intimate links to coyness are explored.

⁵² An indicator of such dynamics is, for example, the fact, that when writing this dissertation, the researcher was contacted on two occasions by Finnish journalists writing on the topic of 'mother-blaming' amongst new mothers (although I had not written on the subject before) [see *Vauva* [Baby-magazine] 2006, n°8: 32–34; *Ilta-Sanomat* [or Evening News, a popular daily] 5.–6.3.2005: 24–25].

⁵³ On the existence of temporizing talk in France, see chapter 7.

Emotion rules

As demonstrated in Goffman's work on the minor traffic-rules of face-to-face interaction, we should not underestimate the power of micro patterns of apparently trivial small rules, transgressions and punishments [Goffman 1959, 1972]. When imposed by others, euphemizing or temporizing testifies towards an avoidance of negative feelings, setting limits on the emotional possibilities of those concerned. A certain category of emotions is subdued or rendered voiceless.

Clifford Geertz has qualified the public character of feelings as 'cultural artifacts':

the development, maintenance and dissolution of 'moods', 'attitudes', 'sentiments', and so on – which are 'feelings' in the sense of states or conditions, not sensations or motives – constitute no more a basically private activity in human beings than does directive 'thinking'.

[Geertz 1973 / 2000: 81]

Bateson's, *Naven* in 1936 defined ethos as a '*culturally organized system of emotions*' (as cited by Le Breton 1998: 104⁵⁴). While Luhmann states that: '*we love and suffer according to cultural imperatives*' [1998: 4]. In their studies of burial rituals, Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss already underlined how '*society exerts on its members moral pressure so that they harmonize their sentiments with the situation*' [Durkheim 1991 (1912): 667]; societies induce an '*obligatory expression of sentiments*', in their form, duration, oral and physical expressions, in function of situations and audiences [Mauss 1968–1969 (1921), as cited by Le Breton 1998: 105⁵⁵]. The latter thematic has haunted Bourdieu's work⁵⁶ and Hochschild's reflection on emotion management or technologies [see e.g. Hochschild 2003: 85].

For Hochschild, '*Since feeling is a form of pre-action, a script or a moral stance toward it is one of cultures most powerful tools for directing action*' [Hochschild 2003: 56]. Le Breton also underscores how understanding emotions entails undoing the wreath of a collective moral order [1998: 104]. Scripts are feeling rules that may be recognized by introspection: we assess our feelings, or

⁵⁴ Bateson G. (1986). *La Cérémonie du Naven*. Paris: Biblio Essais.

⁵⁵ Mauss M. (1968–1969 / 1912) Expression obligatoire des sentiments. *Essais de sociologie*. Paris : Minuit.

⁵⁶ This interest appears for example in the Bourdieu's reflection on *amor fati* [see chapters 5 & 7]. For assessments of Bourdieu's interest in and handling of emotions see Reed-Danahay's 'Habitus and Emotion' [2005: 99–128]; for a synthesis of critiques by anthropologists see Carsten 2004: 24.

are assessed by others, and sanctions may be issued by ourselves or them [Hochschild 2003: 57]. Feeling rules are also related to roles and social hierarchy:

Because the distribution of power and authority is unequal in some of the relations in private life, the managing acts can also be unequal. The myriad momentary acts of management compose part of what we summarize in the terms *relation* and *role*. Like the tiny dots of a Seurat painting, the microacts of emotion management compose, through repetition and change over time, a movement of form.

[Hochschild 2003:19, original emphasis]

Hence, our roles and relations to others are partly constituted by the feelings we [and others] think are owed and are owing [Hochschild 2003: 56]. The mother-role – besides the requisite of physical availability (time) and altruist morality (the gift of which the price should not be explicated; see chapter 5) – is also constituted by emotion rules: spontaneous display of love to the child and of personal enjoyment on the one hand, and the management of negative feelings, patience and self-control, on the other⁵⁷.

Sanna Heikkilä [1998], who has studied the popular Finnish magazine *Kotiliesi* in 1947, has underscored, how from hygiene and basic health care, post World War II motherhood ideals increasingly stressed attentiveness to children; the emotional climate of the home and new exigencies in terms of emotional requirements *vis-à-vis* mothers. A ‘real’ mother was patient, never angry, – or bored. And if recognizing one’s ambivalent feelings as a parent may be recommended by contemporary experts, Heikkilä found in 1947 explicit pressures towards their negation [ibid: 341]⁵⁸. These feeling rules were managed by mothers themselves – and enforced in interactions (see chapter 7, where French variants of temporizing cues appear in mother-talk)⁵⁹.

Colleagues

Nathalie Azoulai’s French novel, *La mere agitée*, [The Jittery Mother], portrays a busy mother-of-two. In a section entitled ‘La mère parfaite’ [The perfect

⁵⁷ Hochschild mentions collegial regulation of anger amongst flight attendants. The latter were told to go to team-mates that were liable to calm them down and not towards people that were susceptible to further rile them up. The company regarded this sort of situation as one that they should regulate [2003: 116].

⁵⁸ On the myth of the ideal mother and the necessity of emancipation from it by recognizing one’s negative feelings Heikkilä also refers to Niemelä, P. 1985, *Vauva on tulossa – elämä muuttuu*. Helsinki: Otava (pages 156, 159).

⁵⁹ For an analysis of emotion management in the media, particularly women’s feelings of love, see Illouz [1991], Management occurred namely by inciting women to ‘re-label’ their emotions [1991: 243].

mother], Azoulai illustrates how overt insistence on enjoyment and covertness on difficulties form two symmetrical, and typical traits of a cultural ideal. While mothers may nourish their relationships with shared experiences amongst peers (of which ‘*complaints*’), they may also engage in ‘*rivalry*’. In this case, the symbolic harvest of a face-to-face interaction is liable to be reaped by one who respects the dramaturgical performance that does not indulge in complaints, playing up ideal values, an ethos of hedonist motherhood, to which the ‘*pleasure of being a mother*’ is central:

They don’t kiss each other on the cheek, they’re not friends, just mothers both of them, a type of relation that she discovered and of which she ignored all before. A relation nourished by common experiences, shared complaints – often superficial – and also of rivalry. Except that this comparison is always to her disadvantage as the other is a perfect mother. Not someone she would dream of being, but someone she imagines one dreams of having. A mother that is available, organized, crafty, whose children are the exact confirmation of her expectations [...] In the face of her, she lacks the beauty, energy, authority, discipline, and, *above all, the pleasure of being a mother. The other never speaks of her fatigue, her lassitude; she never hears her sigh or expressing her exasperation*

[Azoulai 2002: 83–84, emphasis added]⁶⁰

This type of relationships between mothers that Azoulai’s character – and other women in our research – discovered after having a child, presents features observed in the relations between colleagues, which have namely interested Goffman and Hughes:

Colleagues may be defined as persons who present the same routine to the same kind of audience [...] Colleagues as it is said, share a community of fate. In having to put on the same kind of performance, they come to know each other’s difficulties and points of view; whatever their tongues they come to speak the same social language [...] The front that is maintained before others need not be maintained among themselves

[Goffman 1959: 160]

This, according to Hughes, functions to take the burden from one’s shoulders and serves as a defence: a modality of emotional management⁶¹. Indeed, mothers share intimate knowledge about the daily routines of life with children and the difficulties inherent in them and therefore, *a priori* also form a category prone to mutual confidences. The pertinence of the metaphor of collegial rela-

⁶⁰ Authority and discipline mentioned in Azoulai’s list appear as French traits of valued parenting know-how and are seldom mentioned in Finnish accounts, see chapter 6 *Profiter de mon enfant*.

⁶¹ Goffman [1959: 160] referring to Hughes E. & H. Hughes [1952]. *Where People Meet*. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press.

tions as applicable to parents coping with similar life situations appears in an interview of a French father in the magazine *Elle* (here among divorced men):

At the park, I have the knack of identifying *colleagues*. The way they watch the kids, one eye on the swing and the other on the look out for a text message from the woman in their lives at the moment. And their little ones always have something a little askew: a nose that needs blowing, a coat with its buttons open, shoelaces undone, hands full of chocolate! Do women know that there is a secret society of Sunday fathers? We lend each other DVD's and advice: for example, to counter those telephone calls during the week that give you stomach pains when children only reply by yes or by no, the solution is posing closed questions. Don't ask 'How's school?' but 'What did you do in gym this morning?'

[*Elle*, 9.05.2005, n° 3097: 146, emphasis added]

Such confidences rest upon two assumptions: that the colleague will not misunderstand, and that confidences will not be repeated to uninitiated ears [Hughes & Hughes 1952: 168–169, see footnote above]. A prerequisite of this kind of trust is the correct identification of colleagues; the *finesse* required is illustrated in the excerpt above. A process of reciprocal ratification [Goffman: 1972: 34], during which individuals observe each others gestures and do, or do not, accredit each other as legitimate participants of a conversation may then take place in a certain expressive order [Goffman: 1972: 9, 21].

Correct identification of a colleague is vital for preserving one's face: indeed, a parent expressing his/her difficulties to a misunderstanding colleague, or worse, to a non-colleague, may end up, not only in a silent impasse, but with a chink in her/his symbolic armour. Shielded by a '*secret society*' of parents with similar chinks, the divorced fathers of this scene can discuss difficult aspects of their relationships with children that made them emotionally vulnerable without loss of face– and risking shame [Goffman 1972: 5–8; 1959: 210–212]⁶². The latter writes:

Felt lack of judgmental support from the encounter may take him aback, confuse him, and momentarily incapacitate him as an interactant. His manners and bearing may falter, collapse, crumble. He may become embarrassed and chagrined; he may become shamefaced.

[Goffman 1972: 8]

According to Scheff [2001]: Goffman '*argued that embarrassment had univer-*

⁶² Face can be defined as '*the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact*'. A line is a '*a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself*' [Goffman 1972: 5].

sal, pancultural importance in social interaction' and considers that this idea underlies his work on impression management. Simon Williams makes a similar assessment and reads the aforementioned author's *oeuvre* as a taxonomy of 'the various ways in which selves become 'disorganized'' [2001: 65]. Hence shame may result from loosing face or prevent communication on shameful issues.

Shameful silences

Scheff has contended that shame is a master emotion virtually present in all human contact. Its presence provides a clue for approaching the moral values of a given society, and the relation between individuals engaged in an interaction:

Shame is crucial in social interaction because it ties together the individual and the social aspects of human activity as part and whole. As an emotion within individuals it plays a crucial part in consciousness of feeling and morality.

[Scheff 1997: 12–13]⁶³

Barbalet expresses a similar contention: shame is an example of a sentiment that is based on the relationship between the self and the social world and shifts in social norms influence such feelings [Barbalet 2001: 120–125; on micro-macro links and shame see also Elias 1973⁶⁴]. For Bourdieu, shame is equivalent to a loss of honour; and comparatively to guilt, is experienced in front of others [2005: 77]. Indeed, Scheff has underlined that the presence of shame signals a threat to a social bond and implies 'reactions to rejection or feelings of failure or inadequacy' [2000]⁶⁵.

Shame is also a correlate of idealization: '*The more idealization, the more shame, and the more shame, the more idealization*' [Scheff 1997: 154]. Follow-

⁶³ For Scheff, the most intense shame is generated by contexts in which one is expecting affection, but gets instead rejection [1997: 154–169, 153, 158–159]. Brown has similarly argued that: '*The second, and I believe greatest shame paradox exposes the real power of shame: what makes us feel the most isolated is really what we all have in common – the need to feel affirmed and accepted and to know that we are not alone*' [2004: 18–19].

⁶⁴ For Norbert Elias, feelings of shame and delicacy play a decisive part in the civilization process and the pacification of social relationships through self-control [1998c: 199, 200; 1973: 183]. Scheff notes that if in his masterwork, *The Civilizing Process* (o.e. 1939), '*the threshold for shame is [...] the central thread of the entire work [...] Elias offered no definition of shame in either book, seeming to assume that the reader would understand the concept of shame in the same way that he did*' [Scheff 2001].

⁶⁵ But Scheff, following Lynd also points out that when shame is mutual and overcome, it may strengthen a relationship: '*The very fact that shame is an isolating experience also means that if one can find ways of sharing and communicating it this communication can bring about particular closeness with other persons*' [Scheff 2000 referring to Lynd, Helen (1961). *On Shame and the Search for Identity*. New York: Science Editions.]

ing Scheff's logic then, the icon of the perfect mother *per se* constitutes an indicator of a strong potential for feelings of shame. One of the idealized facets of the mother-role concerns mothers' experiences of care. Indeed in Azoulay's account, the ideal mother possesses extrinsic competences, such as being crafty and organized, but above all, she displays appropriate feelings: 'pleasure' and not 'exasperation'. An internal system of reference is grafted upon traditional exigencies of practical care.

Anthony Giddens has contended that guilt has transmuted to shame in late modernity, precisely because of the shift from external moral demands to internal, reflexive systems of reference of which the locus is the self [Giddens 1992: 153]. Brown [2004: 31] also distinguishes the two emotions in an analogous manner: while guilt is linked to a deed we have committed, feelings of shame imply that the problem is intrinsic to the person⁶⁶. It is precisely personal feelings that are regulated during interactions with colleagues. I would, however, contend that both prevail and nourish each other (see also Kelhä 2005: 209; Nousiainen 2004: 154): mothers' responsibility of regulating their practices in terms of time may engender guilt, while the lack of idealized sentiments may engender shame.

Indeed, Marjorie DeVault relates mothers' feelings of guilt to a most often solitary regulation of plans, wishes, standards (housework is 'never done' – '*part of the work of the houseworker is to determine just what is required and how much they do*')

Those who do housework are neither bosses nor workers, but actors organizing their own efforts in concert with the projects of others, guided by the demands and preferences of others, by a concept of family life, and by the limits of material possibility [...] Ambiguity in the definition of housework tasks also leaves much room for women to doubt their own performance of the work [...] Such ambiguity leaves people prey to anxieties about doing enough and gives rise to undertones of guilt in their talk

[DeVault 1994: 130–133]

Kate Figs, a journalist and author, contends in her British essay *Life After Birth. What Even Your Friends Won't Tell You About Motherhood*, that idealization may lead to silence and covertness on (shameful) issues and that such a situation has become chronic in an era of a cultural emphasis on the joys of early motherhood. In other words, she seems to imply that collegial relationships – which may serve to take the burden from one's shoulders – are not functioning well, and that women feel isolated in their shame:

⁶⁶ In Brown's interviews, women themselves distinguished guilt as doing something bad, making a flawed decision or having a bad thought, while shame was defined as *being* bad and flawed.

When women lack confidence as mothers or feel depressed they often find it hard to find somebody to confide in. It is now so difficult to admit to problems to family, partners and friends, that I was aware as I conducted interviews for this book that I was often acting as an unpaid therapist. I have had hundreds of intimate and draining conversations with new mothers about the trauma of childbirth, the shock of the aftermath, their feelings of being unable to cope and the immense impact of the baby on their entire emotional, psychological and marital state of being because they were unable to talk about these experiences honestly anywhere else

[Figs 1998: 204]

Figs does not mention guilt-inducing between mothers as a mechanism for engendering guilt/shame. The issue is tackled in a Finnish column published in a popular women's magazine by Anna-Leena Härkönen, Finnish writer, actor – and author of an iconoclastic, and assumedly largely autobiographical, novel on maternity.

ANNA-LEENA HÄRKÖNEN'S BIG MOTHERS [*Anna*. n° 37, 2004]

The setting of Härkönen's article is an evening spent with friends. After dinner, the ladies and gentlemen cluster. Ladies discuss marital relations and motherhood. The conversation 'typically' slips into a discussion on good mothering, and all the women present admit experiencing guilt to one extent or another.

Internet forums may currently be one of the most guilt-provoking instruments in Finnish society, Anna-Leena Härkönen contends. Sharing experiences and advice seems useful, however, neo-conservatist, fanatic 'Big Mothers' also lurk on the Web⁶⁷. 'Big Mothers' are the incarnation the 'Good Mother', insisting on the absolute priority of the children's needs and interests over that of mothers'. Small children should only be cared for in the home; mothers should not wear high heels [as they may fall with the baby in their arms]; wear make-up [if they are to cuddle or have skin contact with the child]; neither should they impose travel on their kids. '*Are we back in the 50s?*' the author asks⁶⁸.

Such injunctions are potentially harmful, Härkönen writes, as each and every woman's motherhood is an extremely sensitive issue and they catalyse a plague of guilt. With her female friends, she prepares for an anonymous 'net-battle' with 'Big Mothers' – which, in her article, does not finally take place⁶⁹.

⁶⁷ This was also the opinion of an interviewed father of my own study.

⁶⁸ See also Anttonen 2003.

⁶⁹ Riitta Jallinoja has noted that there has been a paucity of contestation of recent neofamilistic writings in the Finnish daily press [2006].

Gendered shame

Shame and fear of social opprobrium may be attached to different issues for mothers and fathers. To illustrate this point, linked to the gendered mandates of intensive parenting, I will have recourse to the *Elle*-excerpt quoted above. In the story, the characteristic which enables the interviewed father to identify a colleague (a 'lone' father) is the presence of less perfectly attired or untidy children. Hence, a debonair attitude or 'coolness' about the appearance and doings of children becomes a trait of men's parenting. Mothers, it is conversely implied, are more concerned about such details. What is potentially a shameful issue then for these fathers – and consequently to be shielded from non-colleagues –, is the difficulty or lack of *relational know-how* in maintaining closeness and a continuous conversation with their children during the week⁷⁰.

Hence, where unkempt children may appear potentially as an amusing feature, a marker of frank camaraderie, – or even of intimacy of fathers with their progeny –, for women, it is liable to constitute an inverse indicator. Mothers may be judged in the light of their concrete practices of care such as the maintenance of their child's hygiene and clothing – and, it has been suggested – according to the degree of enjoyment they display when with their children (see e.g. Sohn 1996: 274, 298)⁷¹. In short, a father's relationship with children is constructed as somewhat more 'abstract' or playful in its content (see e.g. chapter 5). And if time spent together tends to be increasingly emphasized as a criterion of a good parent – practical acts of care, or quantity of presence, do not seem as constitutive dimensions of the father-child bond as is the case for the mother-child relationship⁷².

Marjorie DeVault has shown how family work is valuable in women's eyes because they are responding to the needs of the people for whom they *care*; acts of practical love and care are constitutive of women's family bonds. The reverse

⁷⁰ Interestingly enough Johnston & Swanson [2003: 28] found in their analysis of representations of motherhood in contemporary American magazines, that representations of employed mothers concerned the topic of relational maintenance more often than those of stay-at-home mothers. They argue that this '*perpetuates the myth that employment jeopardizes family relationships*' [ibid.: 31].

⁷¹ In France, in between the two World Wars, the meals, clothes and hygiene provided by the mother for her children become the measure of a good mother. Clean clothing, more visible still than bodily cleanness also becomes a proof of the mother's love [Sohn 1996: 274, 298].

⁷² This 'need of proof' of mother-love through concrete care, and the lesser salience of such a 'need' in father-child relationships, can viewed as an echo of its understanding as a 'symbolic' function in psychoanalytic theory (see e.g. Neyrand 2000: 6). However, concrete acts of care, I argue, are often invisibilized by the contemporary emphasis on family 'relationships'. On a critique of the pure relationship, and the consequences of this vision on the gender order, see Jamieson 1999 & S. Williams 2001, discussed in chapter 5.

side of the coin of such a vision of women's family bonds is, as Marjorie DeVault [1991] has noted, that family work has been constructed as so expressive of women's sentiments – an extension of their attachment – that it is difficult for women not to do (the lion's share of) it, as they may risk the charge of 'not caring' (see also McMahon 1995: 221).

DeVault's insight may therefore also apply when mothers express their irritation, fatigue, dissatisfaction, or their will to do less, or to be less intensively with their children. It may symbolically be equated to a denial of one's love⁷³. And implying that one is not enjoying, albeit temporarily, the emotionally 'priceless' and 'sacred' child [Zelizer 1994], seems to be equated with a sacrilege⁷⁴.

Semi-covert communication

Dynamics of shame – and those of the face-saving game (see also chapter 7, the analysis of Abecassis novel *Un heureux événement*) – may lead mothers to engage in mutual pretence. Some accounts suggest another modality of communication: that of contradictory experiences is being discussed in a semi-covert manner: this is implied by Azoulai, who speaks of '*superficial*' complaints shared by mothers. Or, as American Peskowitz puts it, '*Women talk about it, but they don't really talk about it*' [2005: 1, original emphasis]⁷⁵.

When requesting collegial empathy, mothers may also run into the proverbial management of emotions embodied in the Finnish expression '*it's such a short time*'. Indeed, if collegial understanding may be hoped for, a *faux-pas*, a social blunder, may occur, which triggers the enactment of temporizing discourse – or injunctions to 'enjoy'. Expressing negative feelings can therefore be seen as a risk: of provoked feelings of inadequacy, shame and social distance

⁷³ See Bourdieu's remark on the importance of giving *signs* of altruist activity in the chapter 5 and Snyders on the taboo of parental dislike, be it temporary, above.

⁷⁴ The type of interaction between mothers at different stages of transition that emerges from the French and Finnish data resembles a mechanism of social control associated to a 'negative ritual'. The latter function to regulate attitudes of believers towards sacred beings, from which they should not depart, and to control the access to the sacred. Described by Durkheim, 'negative rituals' involve some degree of pain and suffering endured in order to prove oneself worthy of membership in a cult, of which retreats, silence, abnegation, renunciation, endurance and detachment from the self – and hazing from the corporations. They may be reinforced by blame and public reprobation. [Durkheim 1991: 510–550].

⁷⁵ Peskowitz evokes the shame and feelings of personal failure associated to the difficulty of reconciling work and family in North-America: '*Women talk about it, but they don't really talk about it*' [...] *We love our kids, but by and large, we mothers are not entirely happy with the available arrangements for work and parenting. We feel very isolated and alone in all this, sure that the imbalance is a personal failure, not even sure of the words to use to describe the problem*' [Peskowitz 2005: 1, original emphasis]

which mothers take when they confide in each other. Apparently, this risk diminishes when mothers have children of the same age. Goffman has written:

Whatever it is that generates the human want for social contact and for companionship, the effect seems to take two forms: a need for an audience before which to try out one's vaunted selves, and a need for teammates with whom to enter into collusive intimacies and backstage relaxation.

[Goffman 1959: 206]

Thus, the author encapsulates the alternating in-between want of 'correct' and valorising role performance, on the one hand, and 'communication out of character' or 'backstage' confidences amongst colleagues – which points to multiple versions of reality.

Mothers go public

Mothers may also encounter understanding and solidarity from their own mothers, intimates, or in informal or formal peer groups. Tapola's novel [2002] depicts cross-generational solidarity Finnish women; while Katajavuori also portrays meaningful interactions in mothers' 'sand-box society'. Indeed, French and Finnish accounts also mention the complicity, understanding and solidarity amongst mothers who share a community of fate, initiated as they may be in playgrounds, peer groups of Maternity Counselling centres or NGO's (in Finland); on the threshold of childcare centres or kindergartens (in France); or in 'virtual communities' on the Internet, which also provide important instances of socialization and support in both countries (see also chapter section Novels in sub-chapter 2.3).

Beside the Internet, another type of sharing of experiences (and eventually shame) – one that occurs between individual mothers and public personae – may also come to pass. One of the most notorious mothers having gone public on the dark sides of contemporary motherhood is Adrienne Rich. *Of Woman Born. Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, first published in 1976, is a pioneering work of gynocentric feminism⁷⁶. Rich wrote: '*the words are being spoken now, are being written down; the taboos are being broken, the masks of motherhood are cracking through.*' [Rich 1997: 24–25]⁷⁷, underscoring the personal difficulty of such an enterprise in these terms:

⁷⁶ On gynocentric feminism and standpoint epistemologies see Anttonen 1997: 26–27; 32–49; 110–111, 116; 207.

⁷⁷ See also Conclusions.

For a long time, I avoided this journey back to the years of pregnancy, childbearing, and the dependent lives of my children, because it meant going back to pain and anger that I would have preferred to think of as long since resolved and put away [...] I could not begin to think of writing a book on motherhood until I began to feel strong enough, and unambivalent enough in my love for my children, so that I could dare to return to a ground which seemed to me most painful, incomprehensible, and ambiguous I had ever travelled, a ground hedged by taboos, mined with false-namings

[Rich 1997: 15]

So counter-narratives to motherhood as ‘ultimate fulfilment’ do exist, and more importantly still, are gaining an increased visibility in the public sphere in France and Finland. Marie Darrieussecq [2002], Nathalie Azoulay [2002], and Eliette Abécassis [2005] are exemplary of this trend in the French case [the three novels are analyzed in chapter 7]. In Finland, some public personae of which politician Kirsi Piha, pastor Kirsi Hiilamo [2003b] and authors Anna-Liisa Härkönen [2001], Cia Kiiskinen [2001; 2003], Pauliina Susi [2005] or Katri Tapola [2002] have also come forward with iconoclastic accounts of their experiences of transition in literary texts or women’s magazines (see also Vuori 2003: 62).

The turn of the 2000s has been quite exceptional in this sense. The best-selling, autobiographically inspired narratives by Kiiskinen and Härkönen put forth depression during transition to maternity. The strong public reactions to some of the ‘revelations’ made in the human interest press by the one of the Finns mentioned above in (Kirsi Piha in 2001), is evoked retrospectively in a Finnish women’s magazine:

When the now two year-old Siiri was three months, Kirsi wrote a column, in which she was outspoken about the heavy sides of motherhood. The taboo should not have been broken.

[*Anna*, n° 24, 13.06.2003]

The strong reactions to which the passage refers to above, points to a phenomenon, which in Goffmanian terms, could be designated as the stigmatization of such ‘colleagues’ as ‘renegades’ or ‘turn-coats’ [1959: 164; see also chapters 2 & 7]. Likewise the reactions of my Finnish interviewees talking about books, they are indicators of sensitivity of the topic and an ongoing social co-ordering of maternal decency. Sociologist Jaana Vuori also notes the tense public reactions which followed the publication of Härkönen’s novel, *Heikosti Positiivinen* [Feebly Positive] in 2001 in Finland, in which the latter evokes miscarriage, depression and the incapacity to care her for her newborn. Indeed, significantly, she notes that many journalists and other participants in the public discussion

which followed in the Finnish media considered that the novelist was making an undue fuss, namely because: *'mothers have endured a much heavier load'* in previous times including several deliveries and lousy housing conditions [Vuori 2003: 63].

It is interesting to note that mothers may also reflexively position themselves in a continuum of culturally available narratives⁷⁸. This argument is illustrated in a Finnish account, which is characterized, on the whole, by a positive and rather serene tonality – and which interestingly enough, is positioned by the interviewee as a 'counter-narrative of counter-narratives', namely that by Härkönen [2001]. This mother situates her experience in-between those public accounts, which she considers as dramatizing the difficulties of new mothers, and those which she considers as disingenuously idealized ones.

[Motherhood] has not been shock-treatment. It has corresponded to the understanding that I had of it beforehand: what it is like actually to stay [at home] with a small child and what it means for the couple. I'm quite well read, enough to have become acquainted with magazines as well as books, what has been written in on the subject. [...] Härkönen was probably overtly negative. [...] When the child was still an infant, well, I do have to admit to a dominant impression of the first months as one of incredible tiredness [...] I did declare several times, jokingly, that I could return to my job, but I didn't sort of mean it really seriously. Rather like a jest, you know, 'that the least you can say is that this is real work'. That, 'at work, you could at least go to the loo in peace'. I do contend that mothers, who maintain that they didn't have any difficult moments while staying at home, are lying. I mean if you stay 9 to 12 months at home, you're bound to have some. I would argue therefore, that you do feel at times as if you're going around the bend, but happily, those moments pass.

In an article in a Finnish women's magazine, 'Why is motherhood such a difficult role for the modern woman', a mothers is interviewed on the aforementioned topic. A catcher reads:

Bearing a child does not seem to be a univocally happy event for the modern woman. The positive emotions linked to motherhood seem to be only found through depression and bewilderment.

[Anna, 9.10.2001]

⁷⁸ These books and the reactions they have provoked bring forward the issue of the multiplicity of women's experiences: the role of the 'objective' variation in 'subjective' experiences as an explanatory factor contributing to temporizing rhetoric, already suggested by the existence of a generational gap. However, ample evidence has been provided, of the venue of the child, firstly, as constituting a stressful biographical transition for many women [see section 3.1], – and secondly, of extant discursive mechanisms of avoidance amongst peers – as to consider this explanation sufficient. Moreover, variation in women's global assessments of transition does not exclude experiences of episodic difficulties, which colleagues should, in sum, be able to 'recognize'.

Proof of the ‘problematic’ nature of contemporary motherhood is set forth by the journalist by referring to Piha, Kiiskinen, and Härkönen. The wording of the passage could also be read as implying that bearing a child *was* a univocally happy event for women for preceding generations. One of the interviewees confesses that her first reaction to the aforementioned testimonies (qualified as ‘*mother crisis*’ stories), was irritation. She used to think:

do we always have to complain about everything [...] I was liable to say ‘this is your part, this is part of motherhood at this stage’.

[Anna, 9.10.2001]

However, the interviewed mother also admits to having changed her mind. And relates her own ‘mother crisis’, which she reflects upon as having stemmed from various factors, of which: a misfit between her expectations and the pressures of the outside world; her own perfectionism; and work-a-holism; the isolation of mothers and children in contemporary society; boredom; and the heaviness of managing quotidian chaos. The journalist comments: ‘*adjusting to motherhood has been a long process for Ms X*’. The interviewed mother also relates how she overcame her difficulties:

According to my interpretation, the most painful thing is that women have not received the support they need from their husbands. [...] My rescue was a wise and strong partner.

[Anna, 9.10.2001]

French novels have also begun to extend the boundaries of feminine decency on the topic of mothering. The most ruthless denunciation of prevailing ‘mother-myths’ in contemporary French literature has come from Éliette Abécassis’ *Un heureux événement* [*A Happy Event*] published in 2005, [see chapters 2 & 7]. Nevertheless, this trend has not been extended to women’s magazines. Such an assessment is implicit in a French commentator’s statement who synthesises Abécassis’ message followingly: ‘*How terrible, but it isn’t what magazines promised me at all!*’ [Chollet 2006] [for a comparison of representations of motherhood in Finnish and French magazines, see also Luhtakallio 2003: 74–80 and chapter 2]. Hence, celebrities may have, in a sense, become ‘colleagues’ for their public, with who they are liable to share a similar fate. Public figures may therefore seem ‘like us after all’ – or even colleagues *par excellence*, as their stories become public goods [see e.g. Jallinoja 1997: 74–77].

* * *

It was established in this chapter, that women's contradictory experiences of mothering were liable to be swept under the proverbial carpet through recourse to euphemization or temporizing. In Finland, this occurred through the enunciation of the phrase '*it's such a short and special time*'. Indeed, a typical pattern of interaction which emerged from the data in such cases was the following:

- 1° a new mother expresses complaints
- 2° a more experienced mother voices the injunction to remember that maternity leave or childhood pass quickly.

Several trails of interpretation of this phenomenon were explored: the contradiction – in a child-centred society – between the rising exigencies of care and the dependency of small children; the rapid social change in fashions of child-rearing liable to hinder mutual, cross-generational understanding; the centrality of proper emotions for correct performances of the mother-role; and shame as a vector of self-censure. Indeed, the production of decency and the management of emotions by elders, colleagues and selves pointed to the moral dimensions of sentiments and time. The issue of a communicational impasse, and that of pacifying thorny facets of contemporary experiences of mothers, when the latter are expressed, will now be studied from an anthropological perspective.

5 Motherhood and the economics of symbolic goods

Chapter 5 prolongs the sociological exploration of the enigma uncovered in the Finnish case, namely that of the euphemization of the constraints which motherhood may engender. Two intriguing details – two clues from the excerpts in the previous chapter – provided the researcher with another avenue for exploring the social engineering of decency in mother-talk. This avenue lays in an explanation of an anthropological kind, that is, in the rules and stakes of a *game* and a particular field that parents, and mothers *par excellence*, enter at transition to parenthood. Contrary to the other chapters of the research, the analysis presented here is somewhat more detached from the moorings of empirical data. The latter will, however, surface anew in conclusion.

5.1 A GAME OF DISINTERESTED ACTION

The name of the game is disinterested action. Its rules are those of games that may be qualified as falling under the jurisdiction of the economics of symbolic goods¹. Indeed, the filial and maternal universe is one of the social worlds in which the search for personal profit is discouraged and altruism the norm. Pierre Bourdieu writes on this subject: “*there exist social universes in which the search*

¹ Such economies are described by Bourdieu to be ‘of a precapitalist type’. In them, operations of exchange are mainly implicit; economic acts are transfigured into symbolic acts; and thus create social links and symbolic capital [1998: 104] (on capital, see further on in the chapter). He writes: ‘*The constitution of the economy as an economy, which took place progressively in European societies [...] corresponds to the emergence of a field, of a playing field, site of a new type of game, whose principle is the law of material interest. At its core a universe is established in which the law of the exchange of exact equivalents becomes the explicit rule and can be expressed publicly [...] extracting itself from that entire network of social relations of more or less enchanted dependence. At the end of this process, through an effect of reversal, the domestic economy became the exception. Max Weber says somewhere that the passage is from societies in which economic affairs are conceived according to the model of kinship relations to societies where kinship relations themselves are conceived according to the model of economic relations*’ [Bourdieu 1998: 104–105].

for strictly economic profit can be discouraged by explicit norms or tacit injunctions” [Bourdieu 1998: 86]². Disinterested action has been the basis of such phenomena as the aristocratic code of honour, which according to Bourdieu, were founded on the collective denegation of interest. Another example mentioned by the author is the world of art – and, traditionally, the family [1998: 88; 1996: 20]:

It is a world in which the ordinary laws of the economy are suspended, a place of trusting and giving – as opposed to the market and its exchanges of equivalent values – or, to use Aristotle’s term, *philia*, a word that is often translated as ‘friendship’ but which in fact designates the refusal to calculate; a place where interest, in the narrow sense of the pursuit of equivalence in exchanges, is suspended.

[Bourdieu 1996: 20]

One of the rules inherent in the economy of symbolic exchanges is that gifts are reciprocal but must seem gratuitous (the interval between acts of giving, for example, functions to blur this fact). This calls for collective self-deception. Another property of this kind of economy is the taboo of explication of, *par excellence*, the price, which would annihilate the exchange. The exchange of gifts as a paradigm for the economy of symbolic goods may be opposed to the give-and-take of economic economy as its subject is not a calculating one, but an agent predisposed to enter, unintentionally and without calculating, into a game of exchange. This is why the agent ignores or denies his interest [Bourdieu 1998: 98; 1994: 177–182]. In this type of economy, personal interest is implicit and if it comes to be enunciated, it is through *euphemisms*, a language of denegation. Euphemisms render possible the expression of the unsayable, that is, the give-and-take always implicit in a gift [ibid: 182].

Now on two occasions, the ‘goods’ and the ‘price’ of the exchange (i.e. that which the mother provides for the child and the consequences of this action for herself) were explicitly mentioned in our interviews in chapter 4, namely when the expression ‘*it’s such a short time*’ referred to the needs of the small child [excerpts b and e in the previous chapter] and to the price or cost of the exchange for the mother [c, d, e, f, chapter 4]. Two accounts explicitly mention the term ‘cost’ [c, f, chapter 4]. The euphemism (or temporizing rhetoric) implies that the cost for the mother is limited (in duration), and that the rewards may be harvested later: the mother will have more autonomous, enjoyable, rewarding, chil-

² He also speaks of ‘*an economy of symbolic goods based on the collective repression of interest*’ [Bourdieu 1998: 86; see also ibid. 120–122 for a summary of the characteristics of symbolic economies].

dren and more personal autonomy, as well as the social consideration for the altruism displayed, their correct performance of the mother-role. Last but not least, she will benefit from the transfiguration of her gift of practical care and attention into durable affection. The mother will then forget the cost³.

Mothers as pillars of philia

According to Bourdieu, the most important thing is the formal respect of the game, affirming one's spiritual point of view. He claims that society does not expect perfection, but signs that one is endeavouring to achieve it:

The group requires that formalities be observed, that one honour the humanity of others by asserting one's own humanity, by affirming one's 'point of spiritualist honour'. There is no society that does not render homage to those who render homage to it in seeming to refuse the law of selfish interest. What is required is not that one do absolutely everything one should, but rather that one at least give indications of trying to do so. Social agents are not expected to be perfectly in order, but rather to observe order, to give visible signs that, if they can, they will respect the rules [...] Practical euphemisms are a kind of homage rendered to social order and to the value that social order exalts

[Bourdieu 1998: 98]

It seems that the allusion to the contamination of maternal *philia* by the logic of exchange or give-and-take – that has become more or less socially accepted for marital bonds – must be avoided. The game of disinterested action is a form that still demands to be respected, so that gratitude may be transfigured into (pure) love:

In order for the intergenerational exchanges to continue despite everything, the logic of debt as recognition must also intervene and a feeling of obligation or gratitude must be constituted. Relations between generations are one of the sites par excellence of the transfiguration of recognition of debt into recognition, filial devotion, love.

[Bourdieu 1998: 109]⁴

³ Despite the fact that Bourdieu designates the family and intergenerational relationships as universes/fields to which the rules of the economy of symbolic goods apply, he also contends that: '*Symbolic acts always assume acts of knowledge and recognition, cognitive acts on the part of their recipients. For a symbolic exchange to function, the two parties must have identical categories of perception and appreciation*' [1998: 100]. The mother-child relationship is of course profoundly asymmetrical. It may be argued however, that children are socialized progressively to the categories of perception and appreciation as they grow up. Indeed, the parent-child 'exchange' is a long-term one.

⁴ Definitions of 'love', however, are not anthropologically invariant. Luhmann, for example, suggests that the traditional demand on love was that '*that it function solely as a form of social solidarity*' [1998: 19]. In contemporaneity, for this author, love means immersing oneself

Viviana Zelizer's *The Purchase of Intimacy* [2005] tackles the mingling of economic economy and intimate care. It is argued that, although the former is commonly conceived of as 'contaminating' the latter, in ordinary practice and legal doctrine alike, combinations of economic transactions and intimacy are accepted, – and even encouraged. Her fine-grained empirical analysis of court cases demonstrates that, in fact, moral controversies essentially concern improper and '*proper matching of the relationship, transaction and medium*' [Zelizer 2005: 161]. It would seem, however, that the mother-child relationship is subject to particularly tight boundaries in which transactions are difficult to envisage.

Mothers may thereby be engaged in, committed to, – and firmly oriented towards – preserving a type of relationship, 'a treasured social institution', which has come to symbolize one of the last bastions of altruism [e.g. McMahon 1995: 276; DiQuinzio 1999:vii; Hays 1996: 172–177]. Hence, for Sharon Hays, realistically or not, the mother-child relationship still symbolizes an opposition to impersonal, contractual relations, founded on competition and the search for individual gain [Hays 1996: 18]. Obviously, if society's ambivalence towards the conduct of *homo economicus* crystallizes in the relationship between mother and child, then the discursive management of such an endeavour may also be a public affair; examples will be provided in the conclusion of the chapter. (This issue also arises in the form of neofamilism in public debates; see e.g. Jallinonja 2006; Stacey 1996)⁵.

Indeed, playing a game of disinterested action may have become more difficult an enterprise, as market logic has extended its grips⁶. Bellah et al. have designated such colonization as creating a 'utilitarian individualism' [1996: 33]. In the latter, based upon the premise of choice, relationships are framed as contractual and are to be evaluated '*in terms of the costs and benefits one exacts from them*' [Illouz 1991: 237].

In *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, Sharon Hays notes that:

'*in the intimate partner's individuality*' on an elective basis [ibid: 47; see also below]. For this author, the '*need for a personal individuality and the capacity for stylizing oneself and others as unique can presumably not be adequately explained simply in terms of anthropological constants*' [1998: 14]. However, one could argue that individualization still has to be articulated to such constants, particularly the rules of descent, an issue which will also be explored hereunder.

⁵ On moral panics about the impact of changes in 'the family' on economic and political structures – as '*ruining our economy, our democracy and so on*' – see also Foucault [2000d: 261]

⁶ Hays writes: '*And just as Weber, Marx and Tönnies suggested that the ethos of impersonal, self-interested, competitive relations would eventually penetrate all spheres of life, so too have contemporary scholars more recently argued that this ethos is increasingly invading what once appeared as the last institutional holdout – the family*' [1996: 153].

The same society that disseminates an ideology urging mothers to give unselfishly of their time, money and love on behalf of sacred children simultaneously valorizes a set of ideas that runs directly counter to it, one emphasizing impersonal relations between isolated individuals efficiently pursuing their personal profit.

[Hays 1996: 97]

Juggling work and family lives apparently requires of women not only practical quotidian exploits but one of managing two contradictory ethos in two fields of action [see Hays 1996: 152]⁷. A Finnish mother in a magazine interview bearing the title ‘Mothering was a door out of self-sufficiency’ declares:

Modern women have to struggle continuously with the contradiction that motherhood does not seem to fit into this world.

[*Anna*, n° 20, 15.5.2003]

The model of the mother-child bond also contrasts with that prevailing between partners, which seems to have been less immune to market analogies. This issue is tackled below.

5.2 THE CONTEMPORARY CODIFICATION OF MATERNAL *PHILIA*

The model of mother-love described by Hays above resembles one that Illouz calls an idealist model of the organic bond: enduring, purely affective and gratuitous, with no ifs or buts. It is a model based on the acceptance of social or economic ‘waste’ for the sake of the bond; one which does not aim to guarantee interest or equity. This type of solidarity relates to an economy of the gift. Such a framework has been (and is still, in part) present in models of heterosexual intimate relationships [Illouz 1991: 237–239]⁸. A depiction of a moment of pure gratuitousness between an infant and mother appears in Riina Katajavuori’s novel *Lahjat* [The Gifts]:

⁷ In Bourdieu’s terms, the entry in the game of disinterested action of motherhood may even require a ‘conversion’, as entry in a new game (or reconversion) may be experienced as a ‘conversion’ [1998: 79].

⁸ Théry suggests that the ideology of the incommensurable difference between men and women which was reinforced circa 1800 and legitimated by biology was associated to an idea of the complementarity of the sexes. In such a framework, the heterosexual couple formed a unit in which ‘the unity of the human kind’ took form. A requisite of such a unity of two – on which the organicist representation of the couple was based – was a unique director: the male [2001: 256–257]. Already contested by feminists in the nineteenth century, the vision of unity began to lose weight with romantic love entering marriage; marriage became a dialogue instead of a soliloquy. Complementarity was seriously contested in the 1960s, alongside the traditional gendered division of labour.

Nobody's touch had ever been so disinterested, so unintentional, as independent as that of a small child. The suckling examined her like a blind person, pressed, caressed, let its hand linger on her skin, felt its changing terrains. Did not take anything, did not wait, did not demand [...] The touch between mother and child was lacking that lead-heavy ballast, which persecuted the relationship between an adult man and woman.

[Katajavuori 2005: 31]

In parallel, the logic of market exchange increasingly colonizes couple relationships with demands of equity, exchange, and fruitful transaction: they become increasingly contractual bonds. As the partnership becomes something to be 'worked hard' at, it is also prone to semantic spill-overs of gains or loss. For Illouz:

The problem of the modern synthesis of love and marriage is to merge two incompatible discursive fields, two models of social relationships (one based on intensity and one based on continuity) and two incompatible rationalities (one of instant gratification, one of long term investment)⁹.

[Illouz 1991: 239]

As John Gillis notes, today, '*Marriage is disposable, fatherhood may be serial, but motherhood is for ever*' [1997: 177; see also Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 107]. In this sense, filial relationships or relationships of descent appear as 'pure' relationships in quite an inverse sense to that used by Giddens. His model resembles the contractual one described by Illouz¹⁰. According to Giddens, '*relationships exist solely for whatever rewards the relationship can deliver*' [1991: 6] and are '*continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfaction for each individual to stay within it*' [1992: 58]. The logic of interest is explicit in this definition of contemporary relations, including marital relationships. The adjective 'pure' in Giddens's definition also refers to the fact that external criteria have become dissolved: a relationship is entered for its own sake (see also Durkheim below). In such relationships, trust is mobilised through a process of mutual disclosure [Giddens 1991: 6; 1992: 58;]¹¹.

⁹ These two logics are also present in the data, in the sense that long term investment seems to require recall mechanisms during the potentially most demanding sequences (i.e. when children are particularly dependent) in the form of temporizing talk. *Profiter* (see chapter 7) on the other hand, seems to refer to short term gratification.

¹⁰ For a critique of Giddens' notion as applied to parent-child relations, see also Rotkirch 2000b.

¹¹ The vision of motherhood as an ever lasting commitment ['the motherhood for ever'] has however, has been contested by F. de Singly, who has suggested that parent-child relationships can be paralleled to elective, pure, reversible relationships, when children become adults [de Singly 2003:57].

So if the relationship between mother and child has not been framed in contractual terms, nevertheless, (and this point will also be further reflected upon in chapter 6, *Profiter de mon enfant*), certain components of romantic love, previously reserved for adult relationships, have effectively penetrated the cultural model of mother-child relationships. This appears namely from a reading of Niklas Luhmann's *Love as Passion. The Codification of Intimacy*.¹²

Codes of passion and romance in mother-child relationships

Indeed, the generative principle of intimate relationships, which are characterized by a high extent of 'interpersonal interpenetration', Luhmann argues, is that all personal territories – the '*unique attributes of each person, or ultimately all their characteristics become significant*' to another individual or alter ego [1998: 13, 158]. Such relationships function to cultivate individuality and are based on communicative rules or codes:

...which prescribe that in certain social situations one must be receptive in principle to everything about another person, must refrain from showing indifference towards what the other finds of great personal relevance and in turn must leave no question unanswered, even if and especially when this centres on matters of personal nature

[Luhmann 1998: 13]

This type of relationship has a striking fit with the contemporary ideal of mother-child relationships today as described by scholars such as Hays [1996], in which love is framed as constant attention to the child and as knowing the child's personality. Temporary homemaking may also be seen as instrumental in achieving such intensive bonds – if not 'total' relationships [Rotkirch 2000b: 192]. However, contrary to relationships between adults, to which this cultural codification and model was initially applied, mother-child relationships are profoundly asymmetric [see *ibid.*: 187]. And this asymmetric character of the gift of [inter]personal penetration of the lifeworld of the child by the mother appears as a basic procedure through which the individuality of the child is built.

Providing understanding, attention, availability; being constantly tuned to the child, developing knowledge of the child's interests and tastes, etc. may not only be

¹² Sohn, who has studied the figure of the 'bad mother' in French court cases in the beginning of the twentieth century notes that mothers were rarely judged in terms of any affective function. It is circa 1930, that she observes (in the legal treatment of parenthood) a new category: 'affective carence' [1996: 91, 443]. This shift from duty to love also occurs with an emphasis on the joys of parenthood and 'happiness' [*ibid.*: 445].

a relational attitude and everyday practice difficult to reconcile with the exigencies and temporalities of the labour market. In a web of non-reciprocal relationships (see below), the demands of intensive parenting may ultimately induce practices in which mothers – temporarily or on a more enduring basis – renounce or considerably downsize some of the basic attributes we attach to the modern individual.

Indeed, Goffman [1991:17–18] and Coser [1974: 2–3]¹³ have argued that a basic characteristic of modern individuality is the segmental engagement of the individual in different spheres of life and institutions; an affiliation to different groups in different roles, with a plurality of participants, authorities, and activities. Consequently, in principle, no particular institution ‘*makes exclusive demands on commitments*’ of the individual [Coser *ibid*]. In *Asylums*, Goffman depicts how total institutions break down the barriers which ordinarily separate ‘*sleep, play and work*’ in a single institution [1991: 17]; imposing a standardized daily round of life; inducing a constant lack of privacy; and stripping individuals of their identity kit [1991: 29–30]. Coser adapts this idea by distinguishing total institutions from greedy institutions. The latter, rather than being characterized by material barriers, tend to isolate individuals by erecting symbolical ones. Greedy institutions rely on voluntary compliance [1974: 6], but they still:

...seek exclusive and undivided loyalty and they attempt to reduce the claims of competing roles and status positions on those they wish to encompass within their boundaries. These demands on the person are omnivorous.

[Coser 1974: 4]

One such greedy institution Coser examines is that of the housewife because demands of availability exerted by family upon women tend to be continuous [*ibid*: 89–100].

Hence, care leave (or long maternity or parental leave) could be apprehended as a greedy institution *inside* the institution of contemporary motherhood. They imply that contemporary women forsake their multifaceted involvements in different social sub-systems to concentrate on the individual child. In a sense then, such a practice represents a ‘gift’ of the mother’s individuality to the child, albeit temporarily¹⁴. And although temporary homemaking, I have argued, is

¹³ Coser draws on Simmel, G. (1955). *Conflict and the Web of Group-Affiliations*. New York: The Free Press. See also Luhmann 1998: 15.

¹⁴ Hartsock sees maternity as inducing particular types of sense-data including bodily boundary challenges due to pregnancy, childbirth and lactation. Experiences of care, of supporting the development of dependent beings and of deep unity engendered by the ‘*many-leveled and changing connections*’ associated to the daily practice of children [1998: 115–116] are also seen as implicating particular forms of consciousness. However, the social organization of maternity and care ‘*in a world structured by others*’ is considered as potentially destructive in the form of a ‘*female pathology of loss of self in service of others*’ [*ibid*: 241,123; see also Rich 1997: 13].

likely to be represented as ‘succumbing’ to an exceptionally profound relationship, it also tends to be defined in contemporary child-rearing *doxa* as a major condition for the development, balance, and enhancement of the child’s personality and individuality.

Indeed, from physical nurture and education [on the model of the ‘sustaining mother’ and the ‘educational mother’, see Knibiehler 2001¹⁵], the mother-role has evolved towards a definition in which the crucial activity of women is to nurture a balanced individuality or ‘personality’: ‘*mothering the self*’ of the child [Lawler 2000]. The ultimate gift of the contemporary ‘perfect mother’ may be the transfer of her individual autonomy understood in economic, bodily, and social terms, to enhancing the child’s individuality through ultra-personalized care and a relationship of ‘interpersonal interpenetration’¹⁶. In effect, this is the function which Luhmann attributes to the codification of passion and romantic love as modalities of personal relationships: individualization¹⁷.

Luhmann and the function of romantic love: individualization

Contemporary moral panics about the family, stemming from the idea that we are living in an essentially impersonal mass society are induced by a narrow framework of thought in which society is essentially viewed as an economic system [see e.g. Luhmann 1998: 12]. If we reverse the perspective and view society as a system of relationships, and compare contemporary society to more traditional social formations, contemporary Western civilization appears as:

¹⁵ For Knibiehler, Western culture has successively valorized mothering as a function of sustenance, of education, of affection, before construing it as a patriotic duty. As motherhood is construed as based on desire today, it tends to be disqualified as narcissistic [2001]. Héritier notes the pertinence of her typology, while suggesting that these different ingredients in the social construction of motherhood may have been present in all times; it is their salience which has been permuted [Héritier 2001: iv].

¹⁶ Few sociologists would defend the idea of a totally autonomous self; ‘autonomy’, however, remains a strong ideal in contemporary Western societies. For Castel, autonomy was linked to property and has been democratized through the creation of ‘social property’ and protection by the welfare state [forthcoming 2007]. Carsten, however, notes that scholarship leaning upon philosophy, jurisprudence and theology tends to emphasize the notion of a ‘*legally defined entity, the bounded individual with rights over property and person, as the dominant Western construct*’ obscuring ‘*relationality as an aspect of personhood*’. Studying kinship upsets such assumptions, as some relations are ‘*also capable of overcoming the boundedness of particular bodies and persons*’ [2004: 107].

¹⁷ By combining love as elective romance with the principle of solidarity in the construct of the mother-child relationship, the latter emerges as a *locus* of social utopia. Indeed, ‘happiness’ and ‘solidarity’, according to Luhmann, constituted two major principles through which social cohesion – or at least *hope* of unity in stratified societies – was communicatively maintained in the 17th–19th centuries. In modernity, ‘freedom’ [or autonomy] and ‘equality’ [of chances, of life conditions] have become master categories for envisaging a good individualized society [1997]. Motherhood seems particularly problematic as regards the two ideals cited above.

...having become more elaborate in two ways: it affords more opportunities both for impersonal and for more intensive relationships

[Luhmann 1998: 12]

Arguing against the grain, the author thus contends that the possibility of communication with a broad spectrum of individuals – the extension and enhancement of the capacity for impersonal relationships – has developed *concomitantly* with the intensification of selected, personal relations in increasingly differentiated societies¹⁸.

While in extensive impersonal relationships, we navigate aided by a relatively simple set of attributes concerning the identity of the actors in question (e.g. occupational attributes), in intimate relationships, all personal territories, attributes and experiences of the other become significant¹⁹. As people are no longer firmly anchored to a single social sub-system, individuals, by the combination of their different social attributes, perceive themselves as increasingly unique (see also Coser and Goffman above). However, as their social surroundings also become '*more complex and impenetrable*', a need for a close, intimate, shared, and understandable, universe is spurred amongst members of such societies [Luhmann 1998: 16].

Luhmann underscores that we need both types of relationships. Alter ego, the beloved, has the role of supporting personal universes. The link between individualism and the need for a shared close world is solved by a medium of communication which takes the form of friendship or love [ibid: 17]. A closed world, however, is difficult to reconcile with individual development. The difference between a close world (only personally valid experiences) and a remote, universally accepted, world is necessary to reassure us in the face of the complexity and immense possibilities of life and the flow of information we receive.

For Luhmann, love thus functions as a semantic device which furthers individualization. The codification of love as passion, circa 1650, '*helped to advance and assert the process of differentiation*' and progressively became an apparatus open for ever larger categories of people [1998: 31, 158]. And its function has remained the same, be it in the codification of Romantic love – or that of the

¹⁸ On theories of social differentiation see Schimank [2001]: '*In structural terms, it refers to the fact that a unit of analysis, such as a society, consists of a number of distinct parts. These parts may be of the same kind, such as families as the basic components of tribal societies. Or the parts may be different, such as the sub-systems – economy, politics, mass-media etc. – making up modern society. As a process, social differentiation is the dynamic which brings about and changes a given structure of differentiation*'.

¹⁹ For Luhmann communication has become easier even if no personal knowledge is in play. We master the skills necessary to communicate with 'categories' of beings encountered and identified as a 'saleswoman', a 'policeman', etc. [ibid.: 13].

therapeutic relationship. In sum, in Luhmann's theory of individualization, the couple has the function of an identity-building unit (for similar theorizations see also Berger & Kellner 1988; de Singly 1991). François de Singly extends the function of identity-building to parent-child relationships as well [1996a]. Importantly, such a codification of bonds has led to their categorization as 'relations' or 'relationships' [see e.g. Smith 1987]. According to Jaana Maksimainen, the categorization of partnerships as 'relationships' flourished in Finland in the 1990s [forthcoming 2007].

Jamieson has expressed an interesting critique of the notion of pure relationships (which is inextricably intertwined with an essentially 'relational' view of the family). Such a dominant vision of human relationships, this author contends, depreciates acts of practical love and care to the expense of valorisation of a '*constant dynamic of mutual exploration of each other's selves*' put forward by authors such as Giddens [Jamieson 1999: 477]²⁰. Lynn Jamieson thereby brings forth another vision of bonds, anchored in women's everyday activities in families [see also Smart & Neale 1999: 12; for a synthesis of critiques see S. Williams 2001: 94–96]. This point is crucial to understanding the non-reciprocal features of family relationships, which this chapter will now touch on. Indeed, the valorization of the cognitive discoveries related to children's development and the enhancement of emotional bonds between parents and children (their codification as 'love' or 'relationships'), it could be argued, contributes to the 'invisibilization' and devalorization of women's family work.

'Relationships' versus care

An example of this type of mechanism figures in *Family Fragments* by Carol Smart and Bren Neale. The aforementioned researchers found that fathers²¹:

...tended to develop rather different relationships with their children because they spent less time with them and inevitably took less day-to-day responsibility for them.

[Smart & Neale 1999: 47]

Apparently, parents did not, however, always measure relationships in these terms themselves. Indeed, Smart & Neale record the firm belief held by all the

²⁰ On the cultural avoidance of envisaging economy and intimacy as deeply imbricated planes of social life, see Zelizer [2005]. On the critique of the separation of the public and private spheres, see e.g. Phillips 2000.

²¹ Smart & Neale mainly interviewed heterosexual couples in which mothers were generally engaged in full-time mothering or part-time paid work.

parents they interviewed that there was no difference between a ‘good’ mother and a ‘good’ father. The requirement was a high-quality *relationship* with the child, defined in terms of love, ‘being there’ and providing them security [Smart & Neale 1999: 48].

Mothers’ accounts, more than fathers’, however, focussed on the physical work (e.g. feeding, bathing) and emotional care provided for children (e.g. anticipating needs or monitoring the child’s moods). So when it came down to specifics, fathers and mothers did operate on different modes [1999: 48–49]. Hence, Smart and Neal seem to agree with Backett’s findings [1987]²² in that: ‘*fathers did not have to do equal amounts of caring in order to be regarded as good fathers*’ [Smart & Neale 1999: 47].

The interview data concurs on this point with such results. Despite long family leave typically taken by mothers, the father’s ‘relationship’ with the child was typically *not* depicted as qualitatively different to that of the mother in mothers’ accounts. Even women who considered full-time home care as crucial for the child during the first year of the latter’s life (and had stayed at home for a consequent period), were liable to voice visions, which (implicitly) denied intensive parenting as engendering a privileged ‘relationship’ with the toddler. This issue was explored in a Finnish interview with a mother who had been on care leave until her child was 1 ½ years old.

Researcher: What about the fact that you have been present more with the child, would you say that that your relationship to the child is different somehow?

Mother: I don’t actually know. Surely not [...] [The child] is somehow more sentimental towards me, maybe. But I think that I am too towards him, compared to his father. Even if he is [sentimental with the child], but in a different way, already because he’s a man, I suppose. [...] Maybe he cuddles and kisses me more easily than he does his father. So, sometimes, when I say, ‘go on, give daddy a kiss!’, he sort of goes ‘no I won’t’ [...] Even if daddy is glad to have a kiss, but somehow he senses how we are with him. But I still wouldn’t say that I am closer to [the child].

In relationship-talk, parent-child relations thus potentially become understood on an abstract mode in which concrete *practice* of the child (everyday care, service, presence and attention) does not ‘really count’ – is under-evaluated or misrecognized. The widespread idea according to which mother and father are ‘as important’ for the child’s psychological development [even if the father is

²² They refer to Backett, K. (1987). *Mothers and Fathers*. London: Macmillan and Backett K. (1987). The Negotiation of Fatherhood. In Lewis, C. & O’Brien, M. (eds). *Reassessing Fatherhood*. London: Sage.

not actually concretely involved or to a much lesser degree] is a gift [or credit] which contemporary child-rearing dogma, and women, give to the father [sometimes fictitiously].

Indeed, significantly, Smart & Neale pinpoint the shifts in mothers' views during the couples' life cycle. Divorce, and the eventuality of joint custody, constituted an event prone to revealing the gendered asymmetry of parenting arrangements – and its links with the qualities of a 'good parent'. Indeed, from the mother's point of view; she was suddenly:

expected to relinquish this feeling of responsibility to someone who [usually] had not actually shared it during the relationship and who might be viewed as fairly inept at the physical care work, let alone the emotional caring

[Smart & Neale 1999: 50]

Conversely:

...where fathers have 'imagined' that they had been equally responsible during marriage, they became resentful of mothers who would not accept this account *at the point of divorce*.

[ibid., original emphasis]

To use Dorothy Smith's terminology, mothers ceased to conceal, refused to mediate and to accommodate an 'extralocally' defined relational mode (categorized in terms of the abstract importance of 'relations' between fathers and children, whatever their degree of daily involvement)²³; and the very fact that everyday concrete acts of attention, maintenance and care were cast outside of the 'clearing' of the contemporary family [on the notion of 'clearing' see *Introduction*]²⁴.

So far, the analysis has unearthed different types of logics which combine in understandings of the mother-child tie. Firstly, that of an organic bond providing lasting solidarity. The second logic is that of a hedonist-romantic love bond [spontaneous, 'elective' and pleasurable]²⁵ – and its codification as an intensive

²³ Indeed, Smart & Neale describe fathers' relationships with their children as typically '*one step removed from their children and their relationship was sustained via their relationship with the mother*' [1999: 47].

²⁴ In *The Purchase of Intimacy*, Zelizer [2005] demonstrates a similar point. Private interactions are blends of economic transactions and intimacy, but their prevalence may only be exposed to the eyes of others, or individuals themselves, during crises (for example in a divorce settlement).

²⁵ In partnerships, the actualization of 'electivity' is strongly conditioned by cultural capital [e.g. Bozon & Héran 1987]. Electivity in the love of mother and child can only function as freedom of choice *to become a mother* (to have a child or not) – *but not* as freedom to love the child or not. Therefore, all children have to become lovable (or 'Apollonian', see chapter 6). Indeed, for Luhmann, love as a medium of communication functions '*to secure an adequate degree of probability for the reception of improbable expectations*' [Luhmann 1998: 55]. The contradiction between spontaneity and electivity and ties of descent will be underlined further on in the chapter.

relationship, characterized by a high degree of interpersonal interpenetration à la Luhmann²⁶. It was suggested that the cultural salience and dominance of ‘relation-talk’ related to such a codification potentially invisibilized the embeddedness of bonds in day-to-day to presence, care, and attention and their workful character²⁷. As DeVault [1994] has argued, this type of invisibility not only produces valued sociability and connection, but also generates inequity. Moreover, the aforementioned integration of codes of ‘love’, with their semantic trail of spontaneity and electivity, may not be unproblematic with rules of descent which also govern family practice. One such contradiction between the semantic wake of elective love and ligatures of kinship is studied below.

Rules for love

Generally speaking, according to anthropologist Maurice Godelier, kinship has often been somewhat too straightforwardly described as characterized by an ‘ethic of generosity’ or by ‘rules of prescriptive altruism’ [or ‘amity’]²⁸. Passion, power and material interests, which also traverse families and fragment the sentiments and obligations which should reign amongst kin, have often been marginalized or insufficiently dealt with by ethnologists [Godelier 2004: 99 fn 1].

Long before the era of individualism, legal and material reinforcement were required for solidarity amongst kin to be maintained. As an example of such bulwarks erected to avoid scission amongst kin, Godelier evokes the fact that, in Western and Eastern agrarian societies, the sale of land by individuals was prohibited during several centuries in order to uphold unity [ibid: 135]²⁹. Now, ties amongst families in wage-earning societies are no longer essentially cemented by obligations and strategies pertaining to the function of conservation (or increase) of the vital form of economic capital represented by land in agrarian societies, to which Godelier refers above. In 1892, Émile Durkheim already describes the shift, largely determined by profound economic evolutions, which led to the adoption of the principles governing the ‘relational family’ as opposed to a patrimonial one:

²⁶ Intensive ties, it was suggested, may also be regarded as requiring relational work [on relation-work and its’ therapeutic implications, see Illouz 1991: 238; Bourdieu 2002: 149; Luhmann 1998: 39; Maksimainen (forthcoming: 2007)]

²⁷ See also Vuori, who, from her analysis of a Finnish parenting manual, found that fathers were more liable to be depicted in relational activities rather than responsible and involved in concrete care [2001:155].

²⁸ Two notions put forward respectively by anthropologists Hiatt and Fortes. Fortes, M. (1969) *Kinship and Social Order*. London: Routledge (page 110) & Hiatt, L. (1965) *Kinship and Conflict: A Study of an Aboriginal Community in Northern Arnhem Land*. Canberra: Australian National University.

²⁹ Laws regulating divorce and shared custody can be regarded as a contemporary example of the legal reinforcement of a certain family unity.

We are attached to our family only because we are attached to the persons of our father, our mother, our wife [sic], our children. Things were quite different in the past when, on the contrary, bonds which derived from things took precedence over those which stemmed from individuals, when the entire family organization served above all the objective of maintaining domestic goods in the family, and when any personal consideration appeared secondary compared to that one.

[Durkheim 1975: 43]³⁰

However, the fact that Westerners tend to make sense of family ties essentially in terms of sentimental attachment does not always concord with the prevailing characteristics or rules of kinship³¹. This is particularly the case for parenthood. Indeed, the elective principle of contemporary marriage (viewed as resulting from an individual choice based on individual compatibility and the sentiment of love) is not contradictory with the rules of marriage inscribed in family legislation or the civil code, due to the existence of a possibility of reversibility, i.e. divorce. But the parent-child relationship – which is also increasingly framed as a necessarily profound sentimental tie (insofar as affection is implicitly understood as spontaneous and elective, something which cannot be ‘forced’) – is not fully compatible with a basic characteristic of descent systems³².

For Maurice Godelier, the specificity of human groupings which are instituted by descent rules lies in the fact that they are socially imposed on individuals as particularly binding ties, *whether we like it or not*:

A reality that contemporary society does not ignore, but whose constraints are not fully recognized: if bonds of descent are not chosen, they are not obligatorily affectionate, personal, protecting. A good dose of indifference, constraint and domination may enter them.

[Journet 2005: 36]³³

³⁰ The excerpt is from Durkheim’s 1982 lecture ‘La famille conjugale’. Bourdieu considered that Marx in *Ébauche d’une critique de l’économie politique* had expressed a similar idea, stating that the first-born son ‘belonged to the land’ [de Singly 1991: 11 referring to Bourdieu 1980: 249].

³¹ For Bourdieu, when ‘things’ (property or economic capital) were a priority and marriages arranged by kin, individual sentiments were, however, likely to fit the system, because individuals were motivated by the ‘love of their own social destiny’ or ‘amor fati’ (see chapter 7), although in some ‘pathological’ cases unpractical sentiments had to be repressed by kin [1980: 269]. Illouz has underlined how the idea of ‘interest-free’ love as the basis of coupling is still paradoxical in the face of social homogamy [1991: 239] (essentially in terms of cultural capital).

³² Of course the shift in the stakes of transmission from economic capital to essentially immaterial capital (cultural capital) – the accrued importance given to the education of children and the exigency of relations of ‘interpersonal penetration’ – may favour the achievement of compatibility in terms of character, tastes and habitus, and hence also emotional closeness. On the other hand, the socialization of children in school and amongst peers, possibly from other *milieux*, and through the media, present parents with new challenges in terms of mutual recognition with their children.

³³ Quote extracted from an article based on an interview with Godelier about his book [2004] *Métamorphoses de la parenté*. On the obligatory character of descent, Godelier quotes Fortes (see note above) and 2004: 134].

Rules of descent do not lie in biological facts of reproduction leading to ‘automatic’ emotional connections of love between certain individuals, which such custom would be mandated to ‘translate’. The construction of adequately affectionate relationships may vary from one society to another. Descent and kinship rules are inextricably intertwined with political and religious imaginaries, and are traversed by power relations [Godelier 2004: 99].

This contradiction between the increasing contractuality of bonds of marriage and the permanence of bonds of descent particularly *for women*³⁴ is often bypassed when scholars speak of ‘family’ or ‘families’³⁵. Hence, a host of influential authors have underlined that in the process of modernization, the balance of ‘I’ and ‘us’ has shifted in contemporary ‘families’ (e.g. de Singly 1991: 89). For example, one may read:

...transformations of domestic space, the socialization of work and of a considerable part of education, the reduction of quotidian constraints and the determining transformation of manners have engendered a veritable mutation. Half a century ago, the family had priority over the individual [...] the relationship between family and the individual has been turned upside down. Today, *except for motherhood*, family is nothing else except the momentary reunion of individuals which compose it; each individual lives its own private life and expects that it be valorized by an informal family [...] family is from now on judged in function of the contribution that it brings to individual private lives.

[Prost 1999: 80–81, my emphasis]³⁶

As I read it, in this passage, the author touches upon – and then bypasses – a crucial point. Is it possible to speak of an individualized family when this boils down to making the relationship of mothers and children an exception – and *ipso facto* excluding it from the definition of the (modern) ‘family’? Indeed, if ‘*the relationship between family and the individual has been turned upside down*’ and the satisfaction of each party is a priority *vis-à-vis* the whole of the family – as in ‘pure’ relationships – for all individuals *except for motherhood* (a term which I interpret as referring to mothers and children), the statement only becomes applicable for families constituted by couples without dependent children, or to male adult members of (heterosexual) families: i.e. the father.

³⁴ Indicators of difference in terms of the permanence of parent-child bonds between the sexes are: the custody and living arrangements of divorced couples and the proportion of divorced fathers with little or no contact with their children after separation or divorce; see also Gillis above.

³⁵ See also my critique of Hochschild’s use of the term ‘family’ in chapter 4.

³⁶ The words ‘except for motherhood’ could also be translated ‘except for maternity’, and alternatively read as referring to the ‘short time’ during which children are particularly dependent; a leitmotiv analyzed in chapter 4.

Such a malestream theorization of family can be seen as a ‘peculiar eclipsing’ [Smith 1987, see ‘The Gendered clearing’] of mother-child bonds in contemporary social theory. The passage above suggests two problems. Firstly, that of the social invisibility of the specificity of the bonds of motherhood as they are constructed to date in the sociological ‘clearing’ in contemporaneity (subsumed under the term ‘family relationships’). Secondly, it points to the asymmetrical position of mothers and fathers in families, which I will argue, engenders a ‘cost’ for women in the game of disinterested action of parenthood.

5.3 THE PRICE OF MOTHERHOOD

Obligatory bonds with dependent beings do not sit well with contemporary core Western values of autonomy, choice, and individual responsibility for self. And a normative role, which tends to standardize women’s lives or to reduce options and multiplicity of engagements, clearly contradicts the ideal of *uniqueness*. Yet, the aforementioned values are widely considered as appropriate principles for representing selves and governing trajectories in terms of economic success or satisfaction (and sometimes survival). Author Cia Kiiskinen writes in *Äitiyspakkaus [The Maternity Package]*, two weeks after the birth of her child:

We have been bonded together from beginning to end, by force and violently, despite our will, and tighter than now, when there is space between us. This is my life’s work. I would like to comprehend it more deeply as a gift.

[Kiiskinen 2001: 15]

This in-built strain present in relations of descent may particularly be felt when such obligations are unequally distributed amongst individuals, generally in terms of gender (but also in terms of race and class; see e.g. Dorlin 2006). And if care always incorporates a gift dimension, its social recognition is linked to the degree of men’s involvement in it [Heinen 2006].

In the meanwhile, with the individualization of social rights, both sexes are supposed to be equally capable of minding for themselves and their social rights through labour market provision – at least potentially on a long term basis:

The social and political construction of motherhood is set within a framework in which the social rights of citizenship clearly express a preference for formal employment over informal care, and thus, for men's activity patterns over women's. [Leira 1999: 115]³⁷

Also, the tension between dependent children perceived (as an abstraction) as 'lovable' and (in practice often) as 'troublesome', which emerged in the previous chapter, may have been exacerbated by the exclusion of 'sacred' children [Zelizer 1994] from the sphere of economic economy and utility. On the other hand, the enchantment of infancy and toddlerhood (as small children have now been moulded into attractive occupants for inhabiting the 'enchanted island' [Bourdieu 2002: 149] of parental love) and their anchoring in a sphere of gratuitousness, could also be interpreted as an effect of a transition from a patrimonial to a wage-work society.

In a complex salary-based society, the socialization of competent members and transmission of cultural capital is a longer process [Elias 1998c: 200]. Parents are understood to harbour the child's potential self (balance, capacities of autonomy, learning and adaptability), which highly individualized attention is understood to enhance. But this prolonged dependency of children – and signs of reluctance towards entrusting young children to outside care during the first years of the life of the child³⁸, in Finland, particularly – poses problems for adults who are supposed to increasingly mind for themselves. Yvonne Knibiehler has noted that:

The problem of Western societies, subordinated to the laws of the market, is to say what value they recognize in this very particular type of production: children. [Knibiehler 2000: 12]

³⁷ On the long-term drawbacks of contemporary homemaking, see e.g. *Gender Equality in Pensions and Time Use...* One may read: 'As a rule of thumb, if a full-time worker interrupts her (sic) career for a 5-year period, she will forego 1.5–2 percentage points per annum in potential lifetime earnings. This massive loss would, however, decline to only 0.5 percent per year if the same woman were to remain employed on a part-time basis for the same 5 years (Esping-Andersen et al. 2002, 78–80). [...] Due to childcare interruptions and earlier exit from the labour market, women's working-careers will, on average, be eight years shorter than men's if the labour force participation rates of the genders remain at the current level in the EU 15 countries. [2006: 15–16]. And: 'In many countries women who have stayed outside the labour market the greatest part of their working age because of childcare or care of elderly relatives and house-keeping can lose their pension safety net almost completely in divorce' [ibid: 20]. Other undesirable consequences of temporary homemaking are namely its effect on the gendered division of labour, horizontal and vertical labour market segregation; see e.g. Annual Report on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men [2003].

³⁸ Hence, for example, a Finnish interviewee insisted on the fact that she stayed at home to care for her child since she deemed that caretaking in a day-care centre would not be personalized or individualized enough.

She thus sets the cat amongst the pigeons by evoking the problem that ‘has no name’, namely the price of motherhood in contemporary society.

Cost management

In the light of these considerations, I will replace the initial phrasing – quoted in the very first paragraph of chapter 4 *It’s such a short and special time* (a quote from Korpinen’s 1997 study) – in its immediate rhetoric context:

The use of child home care allowance has been criticized, because some think that it makes it harder for women to participate in the labour market. The fear for women’s working places seems justified. However, it should be remembered that ‘*Staying at home is a short and special period of time*’, as one interviewed mother said. The future labour market seems to be more and more varied and unstable. Compared with these changes, taking care of children at home does not seem to be a major threat for women. [Korpinen 1997: 74, 79, emphasis added].

In this excerpt of a study published by the National Insurance Fund, the price that women may pay for their gift of caring is explained in terms of its impact on women’s labor market participation: ‘*The use of child home care allowance [...] makes it harder for women to participate in the labor market*’. Curiously enough, in the following sentence, the author then lays out the byword in the very mode it is enunciated in the interviews, as an injunction not to forget: “*It should be remembered that ‘Staying at home is a short and special period of time’.*” The particular interviewee’s remark is interpreted as referring to women’s ‘*special*’, rewarding experience. In the last sentence, it is as if the author had adjusted the goods and the price, a bargain seems to be concluded, in which women exchange their subjective ‘*special*’ experience versus relative risk³⁹.

³⁹ An individualist repertory seems to be salient in this statement, as the mother is the sole beneficiary and subject of care leave. Mothers’ options are implicitly framed as rational choices motivated by interests; the importance of social ties and the moral dimension of systems of values do not appear [see Duncan & Irwin 2004]. Care leave is not taken above all in the interest of the child, staying at home does not appear as hard work, and women are not (seriously) compromising their possibilities of advancement in working life. Neoclassical approaches in terms of individual ‘choice’ set aside, ‘*questions concerning the origins of individual preferences, the initial distribution of assets, and the institutional rules*’ [Folbre 2004: 8]. However, as Folbre notes, the costs and benefits of ‘altruistic’ choices are often unpredictable. Long term consequences and cumulative effects are difficult to envision in an unstable environment. Esping-Andersen, evoking the ‘information failure’ of risk assessment, writes: ‘*expert or not, the error margin in the calculus of social life is huge*’ [2000: 39]. Hence, if one, two, or three years of care leave for each child becomes a norm, what will the impact of having several children be? [see also Vuori 2001: 164]. Will the ‘cost’ of such decisions be assessed as acceptable *ex-post* in terms of retirement benefits and/or in the case of divorce (see footnote above on the objective drawbacks of time out in the labour market).

In the Bourdieusian language of capital, the researcher depicts a conversion, in which women's human and economic capitals are traded off for a short-term hedonist 'experiential capital' of sorts: happiness [see Illouz's evocation of the contemporary demand for instant gratification provided by love (1991: 239)]. 'Experiential capital' is a term of my invention, inspired by Bourdieu's notion of capital [e.g. Bourdieu 1986; 1994: 20–22]: economic capital (e.g. financially measurable wealth generated by the individual or inherited), cultural capital (essentially obtained through education and often referred to as human capital), and social capital (or social networks). The author also mentions symbolic capital such as prestige, honour, reputation or authority [1994: 116–123]. Capital is accumulated, exchanged or converted according to rules specific to a social space or field [e.g. Bourdieu 1979: 137–138; 145–157]⁴⁰. Examples of conversion would be, for example, that of human capital into financial capital on the labour market; or body capital (beauty) which may compensate for lesser cultural capital on the marriage market, etc.

Attempts to frame mothering in terms of other types of capital have been made, namely in terms of human capital (it has been argued, for example, that mothers develop such skills as coping simultaneously with multiple tasks, while homemaking, and that this may be useful on the job). 'Experiential capital', on the other hand, seems difficult to convert, consumed as it is 'on the spot'⁴¹. It would even seem logical that women effectuate financial sacrifices for the sake of 'pleasure' gained (as a matter of fact, care leave allowances do *not* compensate for lost salary). Therefore, in such a hedonist framework, it may seem inconceivable that women's health capital (physical and mental health) could be negatively affected by motherhood (I will return to this point below).

'Experiential capital' fits in snugly with a definition that economists may give to altruism. Nancy Folbre has underscored how, for the latter, 'altruism' is a term habitually applied to instances:

...in which someone derives satisfaction from another's well-being [...] Individuals may sacrifice some income or leisure for themselves, but are fully compensated by the good feelings they enjoy [...] altruists are simply expressing a different kind of selfishness.

[Folbre 2004: 14]⁴².

⁴⁰ For a summary of this notion, see also Castrén, who has compared the relationship between social networks and other types of capital in Helsinki and St. Petersburg [2001: 42–54].

⁴¹ 'Experiential capital' (or 'existential capital') stemming from positive experiences, in this sense, is however somewhat contradictory with the notion of capital as an accumulated resource.

⁴² Bentham launched the category of 'utilitarianism', a principle according to which: '*are just the actions, norms, laws contributing to maximizing the happiness of as great a number of individu-*

In this type of reasoning, altruism becomes a form of selfishness. Curiously, such an ideal is not far from one of the most disenchanting sociologists, Pierre Bourdieu's, depiction of the enchanted isle of love, which is based on the '*happiness of giving happiness*' [2002: 150]. Or Luhmann's contention that romantic love is one's '*own happiness in the other's happiness*' [Luhmann 1998: 137]; see also chapter 6 *Profiter de mon enfant*⁴³.

Barter on the topic of the costs of women's life choices may also be practised by family experts. This is illustrated by the following quote, extracted from a parenting manual by the Finnish sociologist Jaana Vuori. Once again, discourse on time is a pivotal feature in the rhetoric negotiation of the consequences of temporary homemaking:

The time during which the baby really needs its mother intensively is in any case very short, about two, three, years. It is a very small portion of the mother's life; during that time the mother surely does not have the time to get damaged, even if she does concentrate only on the care of the baby and the home. It is undeniably true that the mother of an infant is doing useful work.

[Vuori 2001: 162]⁴⁴

This somewhat cavalier statement conveys a less romantic vision of maternal experience than the individualist repertory mobilized by Korpinen. Full-time care is not framed as a altruist-hedonist experience, but as a response to children's 'needs' – defined by the expert himself – and as '*work*'. In her *Perheen vastaisku* [*The Family Strikes Back*], Riitta Jallinoja has emphasized the role of time in the construction of 'good parenthood' in the Finnish media in the early 2000s. Emphasis on 'just being together', the sociologist found, recalled on the

als as possible, concerned with optimizing the positive difference between pleasures and woes, between profit and cost' [Bawin-Legros 1996: 94]. It is linked to the idea of a possible concord between individual interest and general good and that of the rationality of actors [ibid.]. Hence the statement '*Staying at home is a short and special period of time*' can also be interpreted as solving the '*difference between pleasures and woes, between profit and cost*' in terms of time. In the euphemism, contradictory experiences, hard work, and eventual sacrifice are 'negotiated in advance'.

⁴³ First a prerequisite for marriage, 'romance' and happiness now seems to be a codification applied to relationships with one's progeny. One motive of 'happiness in the happiness of the other', often present in the media and parental discourse, is the continual marvelling of the growth of the child and the unconditional love of the child for the carer. Elective romantic, reciprocal, disinterested love is an 'experiential' economy. The precondition of this kind of thinking, however, is that the child be constructed as 'Apollonian', innocent and good [see *Profiter de mon enfant*].

⁴⁴ This quote is from *Vanhempainkoulu 1* [Parenting school], a series published by Mannerheim lastensuojeluliitto, intended for Finnish maternity care centres. Vuori also examines a statement in the same manual on mothers who do *not* opt for care leave and in which it is stated that the child is not 'harmed' if the mother returns to work. However, the discursive struggle inside the text finally tips the balance in favour of the temporary homemaker [ibid: 165].

one hand romantic images previously applied to the romantic heterosexual couple (e.g. in Illouz 1997: 83–95), although romance had been replaced by family. On the other hand, a rational repertory of speech was salient in the writings in Finnish daily newspapers that she studied: daily time together was above all considered as instrumental for the well-being of children [Jallinoja 2006: 126–130].

Hence, the romantic spirit of modern child-parent relationships co-exists with a work ethic. This trend appears salient in Finland. Eva Illouz has described a similar combination at work in contemporary media discourses on love, in what she designates as the ‘work-model’. Despite depictions of love as an intense force liable to clutch one at first sight or on the magic of love, one also: ‘works’ at a ‘successful’ relationship, ‘builds it’, ‘lays out its foundations’ [1991: 236]⁴⁵.

In the equation evoked by expert quoted by Jaana Vuori above, the benefits of workful mother-care seem to lie in a gain of symbolic capital: the social recognition for a mother’s altruistic, moral, and useful deed – and zero ‘damage’⁴⁶ (this vision is contested by authors such as Guéricault; see below). In Nancy Folbre’s language, altruistic choices are also envisaged in terms of their positive externalities or spill-over effects which tend to benefit society at large: children, family, kin, and community members as well as taxpayers [2004: 14–16].

As regards personal ‘damage’, this issue has been tackled by psychologist Violaine Guéritault [2004] in *La Fatigue émotionnelle et physique des mères. Le burn-out maternel*. Based on interviews with French and American mothers, Guéritault contends that chronic stress and maternal burn-out are common in Western societies. The economy of motherhood is identified, by this author, as one of considerable cost in terms of women’s health capital. Even if all her respondents spoke of the joys of having children, most also admitted to tiredness and to the painfulness of the lack of time and the weight of constraints associated to their role. The author also contends the latter often experienced their stress in silence and solitude because such experiences, for a mother, are shameful and unspeakable [Guéritault 2004: 10, 13].

⁴⁵ In the work model, effort replaces the magic start, commitment the overwhelming force of passion, relativity the absoluteness of love, and conscious monitoring the spontaneous outburst of passion [Illouz 1991: 236].

⁴⁶ The fragility of such a rationale, however, shines through infinite linguistic markers. Firstly, stay-at-home mothers are referred to as concentrating ‘only on the care of the home and the baby’. ‘Only’ appears here as a devaluating slip of the tongue. Secondly, the reassuring syllepsis, or intended as such, ‘It is an undeniable truth that the mother of an infant is doing useful work’ paradoxically hints at the perseverance of misrecognition of mother-work in Finnish society.

Other types of ‘costs’ are the gender gap in pay, foregone lifetime earnings, and risk of poverty at old age [see e.g. Harkness & Waldfogel 1999; Meulders & Gustafsson 2004: 30–33; Ruuskanen 2006: 16]. On a macro level, this is correlated to the fact that while women devote 24 percent of their time to [altruistic] unpaid work, the corresponding proportion for men is 11 percent [Barrère-Maurisson, Rivier, Minni 2001: 1].

Contemporary families and the gift paradigm

Bernadette Bawin-Legros has attempted a reading of the dynamics of contemporary families in terms of the anthropological paradigm of the gift [1996: 107–121]. If she underscores the difficulty of transposing Mauss’s and Lévi-Strauss’s work on contemporary family life, she however obtains an interesting result. Indeed, she concludes that the flux of giving in contemporary families is asymmetrical (it tends to flow from ascendants towards descendants) – and is non reciprocal. In such an ‘open cycle’ of gift relations, parents are not entitled to demand anything of their children except that, when adults, they, in turn, also become ‘good parents’. If this be so, what would the consequences of such a development be for the social control that previous generations exert on their adult children-become-parents? While in her demonstration Bawin-Legros clearly notes that women have become the primary donators and pivotal figures in families, she does not, however, proceed to examine the consequences of this asymmetrical position for women.

Le Monde privé des ouvriers, an ethnological piece of research on working-class family life in Northern France, tackles the issue. Olivier Schwartz approaches women’s experiences of full-time mothering in large families through the paradigm of reciprocity of care in relationships. Given that immediate returns could not be expected from young children, he contends, nor from partners in a milieu in which the division of labour is extremely gendered, mothers were liable to become rapidly implicated in family relationships without reciprocity⁴⁷. In this light, motherhood, although a valued destiny in this community of miners, also appeared to the sociologist as a ‘perilous and difficult’ gift relationship. Such imbalance, according to Olivier Schwartz’s interpretation, engendered feelings of exhaustion, powerlessness, dispossession and depression, often expressed by the women he met. In such a configuration, at least episodically:

⁴⁷ See also de Certeau who underlined the difficulty of complex exchanges in contemporary society, as the basic unit is the individual [1990: 47].

The mother is not able, anymore, to produce the symbolic resources – knowledge, affects – necessary to enable her to support and regenerate her relationship to the child

[Schwartz 2002: 255]⁴⁸

In their (necessary) quest to also become receivers, mothers of young children often turned towards their own mothers. For many, Schwartz contends, the mother-daughter relationship constituted the unique location in which the former might request protection and be given care by others⁴⁹. Tapola's novel, examined in chapter 4, could be read in this light. However, as demonstrated above, this intergenerational outlet may not function in this ideal manner for many contemporary women⁵⁰.

Marjorie DeVault has also reflected upon the issue of reciprocity, reflecting upon Kari Wareness' distinction [1984] between 'caregiving' and 'personal service'; personal service is non reciprocal and is done for someone in a superior position. She writes:

Much [though not all] of the work of feeding the family involves serving family members who are capable of feeding themselves or sharing in the work. Thus, it is, at least in part, the kind of work that Wareness calls 'personal service' In the family, the intermingling of the [potentially mutual] care fundamental to group life with personal service work produces much of women's characteristic ambivalence towards household work. Caring as skilled and significant work can be a source of pride and identity; caring as a personal service can draw women into self-sacrifice and resentment. Between these two poles- between the work of sustenance and service – 'feeding a family' is also a project of bringing people together, of constructing sociability and companionable comfort, of attending to particular tastes and desires. It is part of what produces a household group with shared history, attention to the worth of unique individuals, the humour and celebration of sociability.

[DeVault 1994: 240–241]⁵¹

⁴⁸ Bawin-Legros also refers to Gotman & Masso, who have contended that as the small child has little to give in return to its mother, the realization of the gift of the mother may occur and be accentuated at her death in our societies (Gotman & Masson. (1991). *L'un transmet, l'autre hérite. Économie et Prévision*, n° 100–101. Paris: Ministry of Economy: 207–230.) Bawin-Legros considers that a Copernican revolution has occurred in the position of women: instead of being considered as objects of exchange (as in Lévi-Strauss' theory of exogamy), they have today become the central figure of exchange and donation inside families. On family relations analyzed through the gift paradigm, see also the critique by Hays [1996: 152–161].

⁴⁹ Mothers' fatigue leads them to cycles of gift-making and rejection with their children: to immense generosity and to loud reproaches, the distribution of slaps, and sending the children out of sight. Schwartz' interviewees would frequently qualify themselves as 'nervous' or 'mean' with the kids.

⁵⁰ Korhonen [1996], however, mentions women's relationships with elder children as having become more reciprocal and as often the most valued aspect of their lives. Above all, women's need for reciprocity in care is not socially legitimate or recognized.

⁵¹ DeVault refers to: Waerness, K. (1984). *The Rationality of Caring. Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 5: 185–211.

Positioning oneself as a creditor in the game may be all the more a perilous endeavour now that maternity tends to be framed as a choice⁵². As Coderre puts it: motherhood as a choice and project allows women to become... perfectly responsible [Coderre 1982: 187], quoting Nietzsche: ‘*They tell us we are free in order to tell us we are responsible*’. One Finnish mother recounted how she came to doubt her own responsibility and ‘readiness’:

I felt like – some [mothers] were so happy and smiling when you saw them pushing their prams in the street – that I felt somewhat sort of: ‘am I too spoilt and snug because I feel this way?’ Yes. That: ‘wasn’t I *ready* because I’m complaining here and shouldn’t I just be happy as the baby is here?’

The new liberty of women to engage in adult love relationships – and/or parenthood – and, therefore, to ‘give’ and enter a game of disinterested action, is also embedded in a larger configuration of gendered meanings. In *L’énigme de la femme active. Egoïsme, sexe et compassion*, Pascale Molinier argues that women’s ‘giving’ is biased from the outset, as valued womanhood in the West continues to be constructed precisely as ‘giving’. And why should a woman wish to resist heterosexual or mother love? ‘Giving’ is inconceivable in terms of constraints, or else it loses its value. The author evokes the stigma attached to those who cannot achieve the effacement of the price of motherhood in these terms:

Altruism is supposed to be a natural quality of the feminine psyche: women have the mission of never letting renouncement appear as a ‘sacrifice’. The failure of this feminine program is the bitter wife, the shrew, the hysteric.

[Molinier 2003: 40]

This dismayed portrait resembles that of the ‘tired, bored, and nagging’ woman, jeered at in comic strips, which Tapola’s Ellen feared that she was becoming, or that of the women Schwartz encountered, who accused and labelled themselves as being ‘nervous’ or ‘mean’ too often with their children. Indeed, that which Molinier does not mention above (focussing as she is on heterosexual romance), is that women may risk, when verbalizing their discontent (or demanding from others, including their partner), being thought of as mothers not loving enough.

Motherhood as a social phenomenon is therefore embedded in a mixed economy – symbolic, economical and political – which includes not only marital and intergenerational relations, but also the State. Experts are implicated in the negotiations on the price of motherhood as testified by the two excerpts

⁵² I thank Mianna Meskus for this remark.

above. Hence, beyond the management of individual ‘complaints’ related to mothering in interactions amongst peers and amongst generations, the idea of a ‘short time’ –, which is the focus of the empirical analysis in the previous chapter –, is also harnessed on other social planes to defend the institution of temporary homemaking and the lack of reciprocity in this particular game of disinterested action. Korpinen uses the catchword ‘*it’s such a short and special time*’ to dispel ‘*fear*’ about women’s labour market situation; Vuori’s expert, on the hand, strategically ridicules contentions on the ‘*damage*’ of care leave (presumably in terms of ‘experimental capital’), while insisting on the ‘*very small portion of the mother’s life*’ which leave may require.

Temporizing [the postponement of a mother’s own projects] or sweeping her *mal-être* under the proverbial carpet appears as a normalizing operation. Johnston & Swanson have underlined how several feminist authors have pointed to a myth:

A good mother is a happy mother; an unhappy mother is a failed mother. This myth attributes the responsibility for the conditions of motherhood to the individual not the system.

[Johnston & Swanson 2003: 23]

To wit, discourse on time can be envisaged as contributing to the rhetorical management of the ‘price’ of temporary homemaking in a complex cultural context in which the rules of descent, individualistic values, and contemporary understandings of family ‘relations’ are inextricably intertwined and may contradict each other. It was observed, in the Finnish case, in mother’s soliloquies; voiced during informal interactions with close friends or peers; recorded in a researcher’s published testimony; and located in expert texts.

*The Purchase of Intimacy*⁵³

A similar logic was found in the French case. Psychoanalyst, Sylviane Giam-pino [2000], also mentions the existence of temporizing discourse in France (for examples, see chapter 7), which she interprets as a lay version of social

⁵³ *The Purchase of Intimacy* is the title of a work by Viviana Zelizer [2005]. Here, I refer to the ‘cost of care’, a dimension of ‘social care’, as defined by Mary Daly and Jane Lewis [2000], who identify three key dimensions of care: ‘*care as labour, whether paid, unpaid, formal or informal; care as part of a normative framework of obligations and responsibilities; and care as an activity that carries financial and emotional costs*’ [F. Williams 2001: 469, referring to Daly & Lewis (2000). The Social Concept of Care and the Analysis of Contemporary Welfare States. *British Journal of Sociology* 52(2): 281–298].

pressure towards homemaking. Psychologists or paediatricians, Giampino writes, may distil pressure on wage-earning mothers when lapsing into discourse on the undesirable consequences of ‘parental absence’ on children, be it in their writings or clinical practice (for example, when a child’s disturbed sleep is interpreted as a symptom of the mother’s work during the day). But the French family version – that of older generations of mothers – is typically the following:

You know, my daughter, a child grows up quickly. You will have the time later, when they aren’t at home anymore, to do what you wish to do.

[Giampino 2000: 223]

Giampino ironically underscores the disingenuousness of such mathematics:

Let’s proceed to a little calculation: the average age for the first child is 26 for women; as young people tend to live longer at home with their parents, a woman will retrieve the freedom of agency at about 50 years of age. She just has the time to steer clear of a depression that will inevitably follow the departure or the marriage of the youngest, to say that she has given them all she has, and to regret that they do not realize it.

[Giampino 2000: 223]⁵⁴

The mother giving ‘all she has’ to children – and the fact that children may not ‘realize’ the extent of her gift, is linked to the rules of a symbolic economy of exchange: ‘*a world in which the ordinary laws of the economy are suspended, a place of trusting and giving – as opposed to the market and its exchanges of equivalent values*’ [Bourdieu 1996: 20, as quoted above]. In such a socially constructed universe, or field of disinterested action, the price of a gift is not to be explained. A mother’s management of the ‘price of motherhood’ is therefore liable to occur in secret ledgers⁵⁵. Such a process is illustrated in a text which explicitly tackles the ‘price of motherhood’ – and women’s bad faith about this issue. It is a humorous one: Betsy Howie’s *Callie’s Tally. An Accounting of Baby’s First Year {or What my Daughter Owes me}* [2002]. In the book, a mother decides to bill her baby, Callie, for the monetary costs engendered by the newcomer. Hence, the ‘concept’ of the book is to explicitly contravene the rules enounced by Bourdieu above.

⁵⁴ Of course, women have also been warned against not investing too extensively in children, as they may then risk the ‘empty nest’ syndrome.

⁵⁵ Or in exclamations such as ‘after all that I’ve done for you!’ which may be uttered by parents to children. And which may be countered by the logic that the child did not ‘choose’ to be born (including by children themselves).

The rules of combining economic transfers and intimate relationships have been approached by Viviana Zelizer [2005]. Zelizer evokes the commonplace idea of separate spheres – hostile worlds, in which economy (particularly monetary transfers) and intimacy are understood to morally contaminate each other. Rationality in the sentimental sphere, in short, is understood to destroy solidarity and the ‘sacredness’ of family [Zelizer 2005: 20–26]⁵⁶. In *The Purchase of Intimacy*, however, she demonstrates that private interactions are blends of economic transactions and intimacy, although their prevalence may only be exposed to the eyes of others, or individuals themselves, during crises (for example in a divorce settlement) – although individuals and legislation may be bound by different rules when articulating the two. *Callie’s Tally*, however, also evokes ‘costs’ other than purely economic ones which the process of becoming a mother is liable to occasion. Once again, disingenuousness surrounding the consequences of pregnancy, childbirth and the care of young children is a theme that surfaces in the text.

CALLIE’S TALLY

My daughter was born one week ago today. It was really, really hard. Without a question it was the scariest thing I have ever experienced. I feel that perhaps it has come down to me to blow the lid off this situation. Ever since I got pregnant, it seems to me that other women – who have themselves been pregnant, who have themselves always spoken so highly of that ‘magical time’ – once I was pregnant – in the club, as it were – began to whisper, slowly at first and then with more regularity. They hated being pregnant they told me. More and more of them would talk to me when no one was looking – they couldn’t wait for it to end, they would say. They quietly mumbled their war stories, shutting up when the young girls passed. They admitted horrible things about their feelings towards the alien within.

And now, now that I have faced the ultimate terror and given birth to this child – forced a bowling ball through the eye of a needle – now those same women in response to the horror story I tell them, they are saying things like, ‘Yeah, you never know how much to tell someone’.

WHAT?

They knew! They had known this all along and they kept it to themselves. I’m telling you, this is some kind of twisted Darwinistic attempt at keeping the species on an ever upward march – keep those babies coming!

‘For God’s sake’ screams the Genome, ‘don’t tell the women – they will

⁵⁶ Zelizer [2005] evokes another paradigm which also serves to avoid an account of intimacy and economy as intertwined, which she calls the ‘nothing but’ line of argument: intimacy may also be understood by some in terms of ‘nothing but economic rationality’ (individuals are rational seekers of advantages even in their family lives), ‘nothing but culture’ (individual acts are dictated by cultural scripts) or ‘nothing but politics’ (individuals are understood in terms of relations of exploitation).

never breed again!’ And the women – they obligingly step to that DNA drum, keeping their mouths shut waiting for the next sucker to walk to the plank.

‘Oh but you’ll forget all of it.’

‘Oh, but it’s so worth it!’

‘Oh, but look at what you get.’

That is not the point! The lying must stop and I am here to do it. Pregnancy absolutely sucks. And labor and delivery sucks even more.

I did not have a good time.

And, yet, now I just weep. She is truly beautiful.

[Howie 2002: 51–52]

The narrator, an actress, who has ‘micromanaged’ her existence until the birth of her baby, is dismayed, *a posteriori*, by her inability to have anticipated the changes that it would bring in its wake.

So this is it? It all boils down to this? I breast-feed in order to give my beloved girl all the advantages and in return, the whole of the rest of my life is cashed in? [...]

What was I thinking anyway? I’ve been micromanaging my life for years. How did I not even consider what life would be like when I got home with this little bitty baby?

[Howie 2002: 67]

So, it appears, that I am being transformed by the tiniest of people. You have wrecked me, destroyed my perfect frank glibness. And you threaten to rob me of my desire to care about a number of things – work, play, money. And so what is the billable cost of that? [...]

How do I charge you stealing my want to do anything but stare at you? [...]

Perhaps I will return to my senses by late spring and understand that this is a fair and equitable deal.

[Howie 2002: 53]

* * *

Focusing on silence, complaints, impasses, collegial management, and on structural pressures towards denial of the dark sides of care – its costs for women, which are inextricably linked to the inequity of the organization of care and its articulation to citizenship – as has been the case in this chapter, does not mean that mother-talk lacks turns of speech to evoke the pleasures children procure women, albeit not exempt of ambiguity – precisely because of norm of voicing them (see chapter 4). Coincidentally, enjoying children in the French language is often conveyed by the verb ‘to profit from’ [*profiter*] This issue will also be examined. Chapter 6, *Profiter de mon enfant*, departs from another crystallized expression in mother-talk: one that French mothers frequently employ themselves to designate those ‘special’ motherhood experiences, evoked in the Finnish phrase ‘*It’s such a short and special time*’ and on which I did not dwell here.

6 ‘*Profiter de mon enfant*’ [Enjoying my child] – The case of France

The discursive economy of motherhood – what conventionally should and should not be said about one’s experience of mothering and children– is one of the threads running through the preceding chapters. It was found that during interactions with others, new mothers’ complaints were liable to be swept under the proverbial carpet. Some were, in parallel, enjoined patronizingly, or rather, ‘matronizingly’, to ‘enjoy themselves’. A prescribed hedonism of sorts emerged from the data.

Departing from this insight, the chapter will explore the existence of such an ethos in France. As in chapter 4, it is through the prism of a particular figure of speech (here, relative to enjoyment and voiced by mothers themselves), and the examination of rhetorical contexts, that the analysis will be undertaken. Indeed, the French language encloses a particular expression, ‘*profiter de mon enfant*’, which may *a priori* be translated as ‘enjoying being with my child’ or ‘making the most of my child’.

6.1 THE CATEGORY PROFITER

The verb *profiter*, in the interview data, is also used to designate some of the sequences of transition to motherhood that were anticipated or experienced as pleasurable: for example, pregnancy, after-birth or contemplating the child’s development. Such figures of speech were found in thirteen out of the sixteen Parisian interviews of mothers. Comments, by two French sociologists of the family, on the recurrence of the expression *profiter de mon enfant* were also encountered. This conjunction of indicators: firstly, the existence of a specific figure of speech to evoke the pleasures of parenthood, and secondly, its salience in contemporary France, engaged the researcher’s interest.

Analysis of rhetorical contexts indicates that the uses of the verb *profiter* constitute a continuum ranging from the appreciation of intense moments of pleasure to a ‘formulaic’ use. In the latter case, the expression *profiter de mon*

enfant appears, metaphorically speaking, as a discursive footpath which French mothers tread upon quasi automatically when speaking about their children – a French *formule de politesse* or *prêt-à-parler*. This phenomenon is interpreted in the light of a contemporary hedonist ethos of parenthood and its discursive economy.

In everyday French language, the verb *profiter* (followed by the preposition *de*) is used to convey enjoyment, as for example in the sentence *j'ai bien profité de ces vacances* [I really enjoyed these holidays]. Another type of current use signifies taking advantage of an occasion, event, or moment, which is to be seized: *ils profitèrent de l'absence de l'enseignant pour bavarder* [they took advantage of the teacher's absence to chat]. The two meanings – enjoyment and opportunism – often go hand in hand, as in the injunction: *profitez de la vie!* [make the most of life!] ¹.

PROFITEZ DE LA VIE: CARPE DIEM

The antinomy between *Profitez de la vie!* [Make the most of life!] and another French saying, *C'est la vie!* [Such is life!] is noteworthy. The strong opportunist and hedonist connotation of the former contrasts with the fatalism implied by the latter. *C'est la vie!* is probably quite a familiar piece of folk wisdom to many of our contemporaries around the Western world. It seems, however, to have lost ground in contemporary France.

One way to look at the relative fade-out of *C'est la vie* and the concomitant proliferation of *Profiter de la vie*-talk, is to regard them as paradigmatic of a shift from an ethos of duty and self-denial prevailing in Western societies during the first half of the twentieth century, to the prevalence of an individualist, hedonist world outlook [Yankelovitch 1981]. The topicality of the saying *Profitez de la vie* appears in a 38-page special report, "Jouer de la vie" [Enjoying life], published in the popular French magazine *Psychologies*. The article starts out by stating: "It's so evident that we forget it most of the time: life, our life, is now. And, except if contrary evidence be provided, we only have one. So how to really enjoy it? [*en profiter vraiment ?*] [*Psychologies*, July–August 2005, n° 243: 136] The objective of the report is to provide expert 'operating instructions', which consist in adopting the right attitude: "This life project, which wishes to transform routine into an adventure and the most banal instants into real experiences, is one that motivates us here, at *Psychologies*. This quest did deserve a special report!" [*Psychologies*, July–August 2005, n° 243: 136]. While the readers of *Elle* magazine are told that 'we are all talented for happiness, but everyone has particular efforts to make' [*Elle*, 13.09.2004, quoted by Détrez & Simon 2006: 246].

¹ For a complete definition, see the ATILF [Analyse et Traitement Informatique de la Langue Française – Computer Processing and Analysis of the French Language] site <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/Dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/affart.exe?19;s=217262550;?b=0>>

Similarly, in another inquiry (by French-speaking Canadian author J. Languirand), *profiter de la vie* appears synonymous with being more attentive to the minuscule details of life (a sunrise, the texture of the leaves on a tree); to human relations (for example, to children); or to ethical commitments². In short, the expression *Profiter de la vie* is an avatar of *carpe diem* [seize the day], a quotation from Horace's Ode I–XI inciting to enjoy the present and the pleasures of everyday life and a classic theme of epicurean philosophy. A minimalist hedonism of sorts³, far from the radical experiences and utopias of the 1960s and 1970s, or the extravagancies of frenetic consumerism, seems to emerge as one strand of discourse in the polyphony of late modernity.

Does the promotion of 'routine' into an 'adventure' constitute an existential solution to a remarkable liberation from traditional normative frameworks engendering reflexivity and a plurality of life choices while, in parallel, severe constraints related to economic uncertainty become endemic; to an increase in individual responsibility in a 'world of hazards and risks that are both messy and insidious' [Adam & Van Loon 2000: 7]? For Henri Lefebvre, daily life may have become regarded as the unique site in which individuals may now regard their action as potentially efficient: "'subjects', now represent themselves to themselves in accordance with everyday practice, not ideologies (which do not disappear for all that). In fact, today everyone banks on everyday life [...] it seems to them to be the privileged site, the only site (and in this they are mistaken), in which they can be effective' [2005: 103]. For this author, the critique of everyday life during May 1968 was encapsulated in France by the catchword 'changer la vie' (Change life!) [Lefebvre 2005: 6, 77, 107]. Originally subversive, according to this atypical Marxist, it was to be 'taken up' by advertising and political parties. After discursive treatment – which touted, trivialized, debased and defused it, according to this author – [*changer la vie*] was blunted and flattened into 'quality of life' [ibid.]

As regards the domain of intimacy, Philippe Lavergne finds traces of *carpe-diem*-discourse in the French texts of Ronsard, Collette, Corneille, Baudelaire and Queneau (i.e. between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries) associated to a specific rhetorical context: that of masculine persuasion of young women to succumb to the pleasures of love. He demonstrates that *carpe diem*-discourse in these literary pieces serves as an injunction to consume *amour passion* before the ravages of old age set in and by warning the beloved against eventual regrets⁴.

Interestingly enough, this quadruple association of a domain of intimacy, of time that passes by, of enjoyment – and of possible regrets – echoes the commonsense expressions *it's a short time / it's not a lifetime*, applied to

² Languirand, J. (1997). *Profiter de la vie*. [Chronicle published in *Guide Ressources*, vol. 13, n° 2 and <<http://radio-canada.ca/par4/gr/gr1302.htm>> accessed on 28.6.2005].

³ Mehl considers *Psychologies* as the most emblematic support for hedonism [2003: 22–23]. Lipovetsky [1994: 150–171] criticizes colleagues of having overlooked the emergence of a post-materialist hedonism of which the pivots are a quest for a quality of life and not a quantity of material goods; *feeling* not standing. A similar shift in emphasis from quality to quantity is underlined by Yankelovitch 1981, Campbell 1989 and Lefebvre [2005: 25].

⁴ <<http://www.site-magister.com/grouptxt.htm>> accessed on 10.8.2005.

children and motherhood, analyzed in the preceding chapters (as well as the quote associating time, small children and parental regrets, reproduced above). In an era of *carpe-diem* sexuality and prolonged youth, is this philosophy harnessed to encourage the ‘consumption’ of the pleasures of parenthood and its ‘adventurous routines’, after the hedonist experiments of the ‘adventurous adventures’ of youth?⁵

But refocusing on the ‘essential’ also appears as a somewhat more traditional remedy proposed for mothers. Françoise Thébaud quotes a French doctor in the first decades of the 1900s exhorting future mothers of the grand bourgeoisie to abandon socializing at the threshold of maternity in order to occupy themselves with proper aesthetic and domestic minutiae: ‘*At home, the woman must give and must find other more profound joys and more complete ones which will favourably substitute for all these false distractions*’ [1986: 135].

In French mother-talk, the verb *profiter* is commonly associated with children. This gives the expression *profiter de mon enfant*, of which ‘enjoying being with my child’ or ‘making the most of my child’ are literal translations. An indicator of the salience of this figure of speech appears in a contemporary French–English dictionary. Amidst the different illustrations of the uses of the verb *profiter*, figures a phrase in which it is – precisely – associated to children. It reads: *Je n’ai pas assez profité de mes enfants [quand ils étaient petits]* [I wasn’t able to enjoy being with my children as much as I would have liked (when they were small)] [*Robert Collins Senior Dictionnaire français–anglais – anglais–français* 2003: 801].

Other indicators of the recurrence of the expression *profiter de mes enfants* in French mother-talk are comments, by two sociologists of the family, on the abundance of occurrences in their own data. In Gosset’s analysis of the decisions and experiences related to care leave by French mothers, for example, the expression figures in several excerpts of interviews reproduced by the researcher [Gosset 2004: 76–89]⁶. One particular motive for taking care leave evoked by mothers and identified by this author is the expression of regrets. *A propos*, Gosset states⁷:

⁵ Minimalist hedonism could in this sense be a hedonism of ‘maturity’ in which the expectations of the seemingly omnipotent contemporary individual [Maksimainen 2007 forthcoming] have been trimmed. On the re-enchantment of the family [Jallinoja 2000: 223–224; 232; 2006].

⁶ Gosset focuses on women with lower levels of education than in our research (which is the dominant profile of home care allowance [HCA] beneficiaries in France). The reason why mothers declare that they were not able to ‘enjoy’ their first child is linked to the fact that – until recently – parents were not eligible for HCA and the time for the first child in France (see section 3).

⁷ As in the following excerpts and quotes, the English translation of the verb *profiter* figures in italics.

Far from only giving in to guilt-engendering pressure, the women regret not having “*been able to enjoy being enough*” with their first child [‘*profité*’ de leur enfant] [Gosset 2004: 77, emphasis added]⁸

François de Singly, in a piece of research on the cost of marriage for women in terms of social and cultural capital in France, also briefly mentions the existence of the expression to illustrate the fact that children cannot only be represented as constituting a burden for women, and that looking at the costs of marriage, [the cost of motherhood in fact], should be articulated to looking at its rewards.

Therefore, the expression ‘*I want to be able to enjoy being with my child enough*’ [je veux pouvoir profiter de mon enfant] is recurrent in mothers’ conversation. Once again, as for the choice of schooling, it is not evident that this solely conveys disguised assignation and constraints

[de Singly 2002: 227, emphasis added]⁹

Hence, the two researchers interpret the phrase *profiter de mon enfant* as referring to the lived charms of motherhood as opposed to its burdens – while, nonetheless, carefully implying that guilt and constraints may mingle with desire in mothers’ life choices. Neither author, however, studies the use of the expression *per se*, an analysis undertaken here¹⁰.

As in preceding chapters, discourse will be examined through a comparison of the immediate rhetorical contexts and linked to larger ones, an endeavour that

⁸ In an article of the French magazine *Parents* [April 2006: 84] ‘Mères au foyer: une pause bonheur’ [Full-time mothers: a happy break], the second motivation [after financial incentives] mentioned for taking parental leave by mothers is: ‘*the desire not to miss out on this childhood which passes so quickly*’. ‘Not missing out’ [on time that passes so quickly] appears as the antonym of ‘*profiter*’ [seizing the occasion, making the most of a particular moment]. In a scientific article, Méda, Wierinck & Simon, also report that the primary motivation for taking care leave amongst the women in their research was the desire to enjoy their child ‘*profiter de son enfant*’. It was mentioned by 93 percent of respondents [2003: 3]. As their study was based on a questionnaire, I assume that the collocation was proposed by the researchers themselves.

⁹ The expression ‘*profiter*’ also appears in a testimony in Guéritault’s book: ‘*At the birth of my elder son, I chose not to work for one year in order to make the most of the first year. It was a fabulous experience but also very trying: I often had the impression that my life did not belong to me anymore. All my time, all my energy was spent in my mother role and my life seemed dictated by Nicolas’ rhythm. Even if I was experiencing the most intense moments emotionally and from an affective point of view, I also discovered that they were the most exhausting and bewildering of my existence. [...] The global result was very positive, but I wished to return to professional life outside of the home more than ever. For me, it was an issue of personal balance*’. [2004: 19]. It would thus seem that women then enjoy motherhood ‘**but**’... The introduction of a modality, after the expression of enjoyment becomes the condition of enunciating more problematic aspects linked to the social construction of their role and responsibilities.

¹⁰ Their phrasing also seems to imply that both consider necessary to counter what they may perceive as a dominant point of view conveyed by previous sociological work on motherhood: that of mothering framed essentially as a gender-specific assignation to care – a ‘burden’. The dialectics of framing motherhood in terms of the dichotomy burden/pleasure, including in sociology, is an interesting phenomenon.

Scheff has worded in these terms:

Using transcripts or verbatim texts as data, one interprets the meaning of the smallest *parts* [words and gestures] of expressions within the context of the ever greater *wholes* within which they occur: sentences, paragraphs, the whole dialogue, the whole relationship, the whole culture and social structure.

[Scheff 1997: 16]¹¹

In this particular case, everyday micro verbatim on enjoyment will be interpreted in the light of a larger cultural context and frameworks of Western thought by ‘*increasing the grain size of objects of discussion; shifting as it were, the social microscope to a social telescope*’ [Erickson 2004: 16]¹². The ‘telescopic’ angle of late modernity, here, will be that of a quest of self-fulfilment in Western culture, a world outlook which profoundly influences the way we interpret our experiences of life, including family life. An interview corpus, excerpts from a French Internet forum, media material and preceding scholarship will be put to use in order to illustrate the development and the contemporary workings of the hedonist ethos of motherhood.

6.2 CULTURE THAT MATTERS: THE LANDSCAPE OF PLEASURABLE MOTHERHOOD

It has been argued that a shift from an ethic of self-denial to a hedonist ethos of self-fulfilment; from an ideal of “*bettering oneself*” by *acquiring education, money, possessions, recognition and status*’ [Yankelovitch 1981: xvi] to a sensitivity to an individual’s ‘inner needs’ and emotions, has taken place in the general world outlook of our Western contemporaries [Yankelovitch 1981: 59; Campbell 1989: 69]¹³. Such a shift has also been regarded as having infused into the sphere of intimate relationships (e.g. Giddens 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 81–82, 93, 99¹⁴) – and parenthood (see Oeschle & Zoll 1992; Beck

¹¹ See also Scheff 1997: 26–37, 189.

¹² A reconciliation of micro and macro level discourse has also been approached through the notion of meta-narrative (see chapter 7).

¹³ *It is as if tens of millions of people had decided simultaneously to conduct risky experiments in living, using the materials that lay at hand – their own lives* [Yankelovitch 1981: 3].

¹⁴ However, the authors also strongly emphasize the *Normal Chaos of Love* and difficulties inherent in the ‘swamp’ of happiness, of sustaining romantic love and negotiating family rules and work in an individualized era [Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 98–99] – and the difficulty of the decision of childbearing. Indeed, although the child may represent an ‘anchor’, the sole enduring intimate relationship in individuals’ lives [ibid: 73, 108], parenting is also a domain associated to an increasing responsibility [ibid.: 108–112]. Their emphasis on the centrality of parenthood for self-fulfilment therefore differs from Giddens’ view [1992], focussed on the love relationship between adults (e.g. Smart and Neale 1999; Rotkirch 2000b: 187–189; Gatrell 2005: 39–40).

& Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 72–77, 105–108; McMahon 1995: 150–158, 264–267¹⁵; de Singly 1996: 187; Soikkeli 2000: 1, 4–13, 89–95; Neyrand 2000: 311)¹⁶.

Although prolonged youth is *par excellence* a life stage associated to hedonist self-actualization in the West [Jallinoja 1991: 213–214] – and if the prospect of becoming a mother may seem, from the perspective of this particular life stage, as ‘*a tremendous step, a total change in lifestyle, a fearful responsibility, an impossible expense, a frightening emotional commitment*’ [Dally 1982: 19; see also Ketokivi 2002] – the social value of children in the West is at a pinnacle [Zelizer 1994]. As part of the individualization process, in which personal fulfilment has become a legitimate goal and family a desirable life option, motherhood has come to be understood as a fulfilling emotional and sensory experience. Indeed, when framed as a choice, even rather traditional lifestyles may become regarded as modern [Jallinoja 1991: 213; Anderson 1997; Johnston & Swanson 2003]¹⁷.

HEDONIST PARENTHOOD IN COMPARATIVE OPINION POLLS

A Eurobarometer survey from 1980 records that ‘*two thirds of Europeans agreed that parenthood is the ultimate fulfilment of men and women*’ [*Europeans and their Children* 1980: 62, 100]¹⁸. France (followed by Luxemburg, Italy and Belgium) demonstrated the highest scores on this item. In all, 78 percent of the French agreed with the statement [ibid: 80] thus expressing their ‘*passion for the child*’ [Gavarini 2001]. Some twenty years later, the *ISSP Family and Changing Gender Roles* study, posed the question somewhat differently. When solicited to manifest their agreement with the contention ‘*watching children grow up is life’s greatest joy*’, 81.4 percent of Finns agreed. Scores were again higher amongst French: 90 supported this statement. Moreover, Finns had the highest score of disagreement on this item amongst 35 nations [2004: 40–41]¹⁹.

¹⁵ All of these authors do not directly reason in terms of the category of ‘self-fulfilment’. McMahon for example, reasons in terms of the key themes present in mothers’ narratives, which were those of romantic love, i.e. the symbolic power of love, the transformation of character, *finding our true selves*, love as a moral test in which we discover our true selves, etc.

¹⁶ Yankelovitch makes somewhat contradictory statements about children. For example, he writes: ‘*tens of millions of women no longer regard having babies as self-fulfilling. Large-scale and deliberate childlessness is a new experience for our society*’ [1981: xiv]. He then presents the case of a man whose greatest satisfaction with life is children [1981: 75], contending that strongly committed seekers of self-fulfilment may more easily negotiate between their own needs and that of children than between their own needs and that of the partner: ‘*I’ll sacrifice for the kids but not for her [or him]*’ [1981: 77].

¹⁷ On the dynamics of rationality, hedonism and family formation, see Jallinoja 1991: 212–214.

¹⁸ The group the most divided on the subject were European women with higher education [ibid: 64].

¹⁹ However, only 29 percent of the French agreed (and 44.8 percent disagreed) with the contention that ‘*people who have never had kids lead empty lives*’, while the score for Finns was high: 55 percent agreed (and only 22.3 disagreed) [ibid: 42–43].

It is posited in this chapter that sedimentation of a hedonist ethos of self-fulfilment is observed in discursive practice in France amongst parents of toddlers. Indeed, if social change is constituted to a significant extent by changes in language as existing activities are ‘reworded’ [Fairclough 2004: 6], it possible to regard the crystallisation of a particular expression of enjoyment – here, French expressions with the verb *profiter* applied to children and different phases of parenthood – as paradigmatic of this shift in the construction of the experience of parenthood. From motherhood framed as an ‘evident’ or ‘natural’ feature of a woman’s life, a ‘duty’, a ‘sacrifice’, it has come to be considered a happy life event – ‘*un heureux événement*’²⁰ (see Thébaud 1986: 136, 139; Kaplan 1992: 194; Nätkin 1997: 224–229; Knibiehler 1997; Allen 2005: 240).

Hedonism as a norm

The hedonist ethos is not only a philosophy, but may be regarded as a faith, a programme for individual and social development for our contemporaries. Our achievements in terms of wealth, public recognition – or parenthood – are held valuable to the extent that they make us happy. In other words, success has come to be measured with the yardstick of psychological happiness [Moskowitz 2001: 1–2]. The aforementioned author writes:

Rich or poor, black or white, male or female, straight or gay, we share a belief that feelings are sacred and salvation lies in self-esteem, that happiness is the ultimate goal and psychological healing the means.

[Moskowitz 2001: 1]

In the case of parenthood, a corollary of such a *zeitgeist* is the goal of rendering one’s child[ren] happy; parenthood requires an ‘altruist hedonism’ of sorts; [it implies that: ‘*women enjoy their children by caring for them themselves, and the children enjoy their mother because she cares for them*’, as Gosset puts it [Gosset 2004: 144]²¹. Scholars have indeed argued that during the twentieth century, Western childhood has become a period of the life-course characterized by the obligation to be happy [James et al. 2002: 62; see also Campbell 1989: 224]. For Sharon Hays:

²⁰ The euphemism ‘un heureux événement’ [‘a happy event’], designates childbirth. Eliette Abecassis chose the euphemism as the provoking title of her novel. *Un heureux événement* [2005], which was presented by the editor as a work ‘which breaks the taboos on motherhood’ (see chapter 7).

²¹ See Chodorow on psychological theories in which ‘*gratification of the infant serves the same psychological purpose as self-gratification*’ [1978: 85–86].

Happiness seems to be a code word for the sense of security, continuity, trust, and love that the mother-child relationship engenders.

[Hays 1996: 68]

Therefore, ‘happiness’ co-exists with more traditional values as a desirable objective of child-rearing [Campbell 1989: 221]²². In the view of the foregoing, not only raising a good citizen (see e.g. Hays 1996: 29; Nätkin 1997: 183–187; Lawler 2000: 2, 34–35, 5, Kemppainen 2001: 163²³) or the physical safety of the child [Furedi 2002: v, 21–43; Zelizer 1994: 27–55²⁴], but the risk of bringing up an unhappy individual (lacking psychological ‘balance’, ‘security’, ‘autonomy’ or ‘self-esteem’, be it as an adult) is an invisible menace that colonizes many a mother’s head²⁵. The first lines of a special report in a French magazine, entitled “Is it possible to be good parents?”, establishes an explicit link between parental anxiety and its goal, child-happiness:

Never has the injunction to be good parents been as strong as today. How does one arm one’s child for the future *and give him/her all the chances to be happy?* How to represent authority, respect his/her personality, render him/her autonomous, be close? How to share roles between the father and the mother? And in case of divorce?

[*Psychologies*, September 2000, n° 189: 66, emphasis added]²⁶

In late modernity, ‘*it is mothers who apparently have to bear most of the responsibility for the production of the ‘good self’’* [Lawler 2000: 2]. But the psychological welfare of children has also become a collective enterprise [Moskowitz

²² However Campbell distinguishes between patterns of child-rearing and outcomes: a romantic hedonist personality is not always the product of a ‘hedonistic’ ethic of immediate gratification. He also suggests that ‘puritan’ rationalist and hedonist ‘romantic’ traits may be more or less construed as appropriate at different life stages [1989: 221–223; see also Jallinoja 1991: 213–215].

²³ In Kemppainen’s study of three generations in 85 Finnish families, she found a decreasing emphasis on work and obedience, and more permissiveness, guiding, rewarding, and listening to the child’s opinion [2001: 162].

²⁴ Zelizer depicts the emergence of concern for physical safety and of increasing supervision and domestication of children in North America in the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century, accomplished by a dramatic reorganization of child space and time. She argues that the revolution in child-mourning and campaigns for child safety are less significant as measures of ‘*an improvement in mother-love, than as dramatic indicators of a broader cultural transformation of children’s value*’ [Zelizer 1994: 32].

²⁵ Lawler asked the mothers she interviewed in her British study what would make them feel that they had failed as a mother. She quotes one response: ‘*If they [the children] were obviously unhappy*’ [2000: 71]. She contends that the mother’s immense responsibility for producing enhanced selves exposes them to blame [ibid. 71–74].

²⁶ The three last interrogations resume the contradictory exigencies that contemporary parents are called upon to negotiate: nurture and authority; autonomy and intimacy; sharing and the persistence of specific sex roles; the need of both ‘parents’ and the increasing rate of divorce.

2001: 3]²⁷. Particularly early childhood experiences are perceived by child psychologists as decisive for an individual's development, possibly to a point where 'negative childhood experience constitutes a life sentence' [Furedi 2002: 50]. Perceiving the child's fate as ultimately lying in its mother's hands, or more precisely in the mothers' *heart* – in the quality of the mother-child bond, i.e. in her pleasurable love, as is the case in attachment theories –, is a powerful strand in developmental discourse, a major instance of rationalization of family relationships.

Since love has become: 'what psychologists – and the hard-to-pinpoint voice of popular culture – now assume children ought to feel from their mothers regularly, if not continuously [Malamoud Smith 2003: 169–170], Furedi argues, it has been transformed into a skill. Often, love is understood as giving an unrestrained attention to the child – an ideal of parenting 'on demand', which may contribute to parental experiences of time-pressure and anxiety about a child's development [Furedi 2002: 79–80].

Indeed, contemporary mothering is deeply embedded in conceptualizations of the category 'child' and children's 'needs' (see, amongst others: Mathieu 1991: 65, 69; Phoenix and Woollet 1991: 2, 13; Everingham 1994: 49; Nätkin 1997: 150; Lawler 2000: 16, 35, 48, 124–167; Neyrand 2000: 6, 304; Vuori 2001: 33–35; Mehl 2003: 84; Vuori 2005: 45–46). And, in the West, "*needs talk*" carries enormous authority' [Lawler 2000: 126]. The influential works of Donald Winnicott, the pioneer of public advice-giving to parents in his wartime broadcasts [Mehl: 2003: 29], and who coined the concept of the 'good-enough mother' (or ordinarily devoted mother) as a means of explaining the mother's role in child development, have been signalled out as one such powerful device. Although often understood as suggesting a modest level of adequacy attainable by almost anyone (or at least as tempering the dictate of a 'good' or 'perfect' mother), Lawler's reading of the British paediatrician and psychoanalyst's writings is iconoclastic. In fact, this sociologist considers the standards set by Winnicott for mothers as exacting [Lawler 2000: 48–51].

According to Winnicott, for the child to emerge from a state of infantile 'chaos' to the formation of a secure sense of self and other, the mother must manage a baby physically, 'hold' its emotions and introduce the world to the

²⁷ A community of fear [Beck 2001: 90] centering on this topic manifests itself in the recurrent upsurges of debates on parents' time-allocation (this has been the case in Finland, see Jallinoja 2006) or divorce (e.g. see Stacey 1996) and their impact on children. Narratives of 'decline in family values' in France, on the contrary, have particularly been centred on the decline of parental authority and associated to a discourse of public order [Martin 2004: 45] – rather than fear of a decline in children's psychological well-being.

baby²⁸. This work of mothering is not sufficient however, but must also be an expression of maternal love. Moreover, the mother *must enjoy herself*. Hedonism thus partakes in the *cultivation* of maternal emotions.

The mother's pleasure has to be there, or the whole procedure is dead, useless and mechanical.

[Winnicott 1964: 27 quoted by Lawler 2000: 48–49]²⁹

Bassin, Honey and Kaplan, in their introduction to *Representations of Motherhood*, likewise quote D.W. Winnicott when evoking the idealized image of a Western self-sacrificing mother – without needs of her own –, yet fulfilled by childcare: “This is the mother who ‘loves to let herself be the baby’s whole world’ [Winnicott 1973: 83]”. [Bassin, Honey, Kaplan 1994: 3³⁰; for an alternative reading of Winnicott to that of these authors (or Lawler), see First 1994; Vuori 2001: 39³¹]. Child development, parental love and self-fulfilment also form a ‘trio’ in Harriet Marshall’s analysis of Anglo-Saxon child-rearing manuals, as in this excerpt from best-selling Dr. Spock:

Of course parents don’t have children because they want to be martyrs, or at least they shouldn’t. They have them because they *love* children. Taking care of their children, seeing them grow and *develop* into fine people, gives most parents – despite the hard work – their *greatest satisfaction* in life’.

[Marshall 1991: 70 quoting Spock 1998, emphasis added]³²

Ann Dally, a psychiatrist, pinpoints Bowlby’s writings, namely his 1951 report on homeless children, as the medium *par excellence* through which ‘the official idealization’ of the mother-child relationship took place in Britain. Bowlby,

²⁸ ‘For Winnicott, good-enough mothering brings the child from a state of infantile chaos or ‘un-integration’ to the formation of a coherent ego, with a secure sense of self and other [...] If the mother fails in any of these processes, the child will not develop a ‘real self’, but will, instead, construct for itself a compliant ‘false self’. Children with ‘false selves’ are likely, argues Winnicott, to become either overly conformist or delinquent’. [Lawler 2000: 48–49].

²⁹ Winnicott, D. *The Child, the Family and the Outside World*. Harmondsworth: Penguin [1964 edition].

³⁰ Winnicott, D. *The Child, the Family and the Outside World*. Harmondsworth: Penguin [1973 edition].

³¹ In her article ‘Mothering, Hate and Winnicott’ [1994], Elsa First departs from the contention that some (presumably feminist) writers presume have counted Winnicott amongst the ‘idealizers’ of motherhood; a view that she endeavours to counter. Vuori has supported this stance [2001: 39]. However, one must distinguish, firstly, the lay interpretations of Winnicott from those of scholars, particularly feminist critiques, and secondly, recognize the variety of texts by Winnicott. First, for example, does not analyze Winnicott’s radio talks.

³² Spock B. [1988]. *Dr Spock’s Baby and Childcare*, 40th anniversary edition. London: Allen. In Dally’s analysis of the history of child-rearing advice, however, Spock appears as an expert who does *not* idealize child-rearing [Dally 1982: 83].

a proponent of continuous care, also stressed the necessity of enjoyment:

The child needs to feel he is an object of pleasure and pride to his mother; the mother needs to feel an expansion of her own personality in the personality of the child.... The provision of mothering cannot be considered in terms of hours per day but only on terms of the *enjoyment* of each other's company [...] Such *enjoyment* and close indication of feeling is only possible for either party if the relationship is continuous [...] The provision of constant attention day and night, seven days a week and 365 in the year, is possible only for a woman who derives *profound satisfaction* from seeing her child grow from babyhood, to become an independent man or woman, and knows that it is her care which has made this possible.

[Dally 1982: 99–100, quoting Bowlby, emphasis added³³]

The influence of such writings in the post-war era was immense. In Finland, Nätkin [1997: 150] also mentions maternal enjoyment as an ingredient of the 'good mother' portrayed in Finnish professional magazines in the middle of the twentieth century.

The link established by Winnicott and Bowlby between child-development, love and maternal pleasure in the passage above is fascinating. It appears as a creed according to which 'salvation' lies embedded in maternal enjoyment³⁴. Since the latter appears an indicator of the former, feelings of pleasure – and their expression – may acquire an imperative character. The data supports such a view. Indeed, the chapter will also endeavour to illustrate how this double-bind (between the attractiveness of mother-child relationships framed in terms of love and happiness as a moral *imperative*) affects the boundaries of the discursive economy of contemporary motherhood, an emerging issue in the preceding chapters.

Analysis of expressions of enjoyment using the verb *profiter* will therefore serve, firstly, as a 'pretext' for the exploration of certain aspects of the paradoxical hedonist ethos of contemporary motherhood: its emergence and workings

³³ Dally quotes Bowlby's report commissioned by the World Health Organization entitled *Maternal Care and Mental Health* [1951]. Nevertheless, Dally admits that the idealization of the mother-child bond also occurred because of the way the report was used: certain aspects were taken out of context and blown up [Dally: 97–98]. Hence, if Bowlby emphasizes the importance of a continuous relationship and mother-love, which he depicts as crucial for mental well-being as are '*vitamins and protein for physical health*', his writings have been misinterpreted as signifying that love is the *only* important element in child-rearing [Ibid.: 98]. Dally, however, also notes that if Bowlby brushes aside the issue of individual variation amongst mothers who lived with their children (i.e. the type of mothering which suited and was suitable for different women) as themes which did not concern the report on *homeless children* – an argument which may seem understandable in that specific context – he also lost sight of this issue in his ulterior writings [Ibid.: 99]. Dally is clearly reserved about Winnicott and seems to consider that he contributed to the reification of children's 'needs' [1982: 82, 84, 87, 173, 191].

³⁴ Paternal conduct may also be assessed in terms of the norm of enjoyment. In his analysis of *Psychologies* magazine in France, Mehl quotes an expert: '*If the child does not feel the pleasure of the father in his company, there is a risk he will create a situation of failure at school*' [2003: 245].

during transition to motherhood. Secondly, it provides a grip to apprehend ‘*the genre conventions concerning what should be said explicitly and what should be kept tacit or avoided entirely, and the politeness conventions for saying things appropriately*’ which are part of the global ecology within which talk takes place’ [Erickson 2004: 107].

Profiter, in fact, is liable to appear in a continuum of discursive contexts ranging from those pertaining to some of the ‘magic moments’ that our culture associates to parenthood (pregnancy, a toddler’s first steps) to a formulaic, conventional, or even paradoxical use. The analysis will therefore proceed, firstly, according to the sequence of transition designated (pregnancy, childbirth or the toddler-stage) and secondly, to the fit between meaning and use.

The first type of utilisation of phrases with the verb *profiter* in the pool of data has been translated as ‘*savouring the child*’ or ‘*making the most of the child*’ (or of a particular sequence of parenthood). Here, the immediate rhetorical contexts designate a certain number of core experiences of parenthood as described by mothers. In several cases, the intensity of personal investment or significance of a particular event or phase of transition is underlined by terms such as ‘maximum’, ‘plenty’, ‘a lot’, ‘every moment’. Pregnancy is one of them. The analysis of pregnancy in the section below is somewhat more detailed, relative to the other stages of transition: it emerges, in the French interview data, as a particularly valued and hedonist life stage; moreover, the following section is the only part of the research in which it is delved upon.

6.3 PERFECT PREGNANCY

Pregnancy figures amongst the desired experiences of motherhood. One French mother encountered during the research, for example, insists on having savoured all the delights and every single moment of pregnancy. The serial use of the verb *profiter*, associated to multiple emphases (*maximum; each and every moment and instant*), illustrates the forcefulness that a hedonist outlook may take.

[a] I told myself that it would not last a long time, so you have to be able to *enjoy it to a maximum* and really from the beginning until the end, very well, I experienced it very well, *I made the most of all the phases* of pregnancy, of all the time I had... I really had the time to settle down and *to make the most of each and every moment and instant*... with my partner’s support who experienced it very well also, he *made the most of each step*.

Such attitudes contrast with historian Françoise Thébaud's findings. On the basis of her analysis of the experiences of women who gave birth in France in the 1920s and 1930s, she writes '*Few women – it would seem – envisage making pregnancy into a special period of their lives*' [1986: 249]. Rather, for the majority of her interviewees, pregnancies had represented '*an ordinary period endowed with some supplementary inconveniences*' [ibid: 254]³⁵.

Rationalized, but hedonist pregnancy

Amongst the transformations contributing to our contemporaries espousing a hedonist *zeitgeist*, the diminishing damaging consequences of pregnancy and childbirth (pain, lasting health problems, not to mention maternal and infant mortality rates [e.g. see Gillis 1997: 160]), along with the fact that children are most often desired and rarer, certainly account for pregnancy being construed as a benign and positive stage of the life-course by parents. Logically, such developments have contributed to dispelling the fear, which may have been associated to them at earlier epochs. For example, in Finland, seven out of the eight women born at the beginning of the twentieth century interviewed by Laukkarinen declared that they had feared becoming pregnant all their lives [Laukkarinen 1993: 75–7³⁶]. Nonetheless, the link between pregnancy and hedonism goes well beyond medical and scientific progress or physiological factors.

As things stand, a first illustration of this point can be seen in the complexity of cultural representations and points of view *about* the physical consequences of pregnancy and childbirth in risk culture [Beck 2001]. Ethnologist Hilikka Helsti has remarked, for example, that with the rarefaction of infant and maternal mortality, such hazards have come to be considered as a greater catastrophe still [Helsti 2000: 403]. Medical progress due to fertility treatments and attitudes towards childlessness have also followed opposite directions: while infertility in France, in the sense of childless women, is twice as low amongst the generation of women born in the 1950s (10%), compared to those born in the 1900s (20%) [Desplanques 2003: 21–22], childlessness or

³⁵ Thébaud, however, located some literary materials which recorded pleasurable bodily sensations of pregnancy in France at the beginning of the century [ibid.: 253]. Gillis evokes seventeenth and eighteenth century attitudes towards pregnancy in Western culture in these terms: '*pregnancy was something that happened to her rather than a condition she was entirely responsible for*' [1997: 160].

³⁶ Referred to by Jokinen [1997]: Laukkarinen, S. (1993). *Kyllä naisella on se raskauden pelko*. Tutkielma raskauden reproduktion kontrollista. Master's Dissertation. Department of Social Policy, University of Jyväskylä.

simply a delayed pregnancy are less tolerated by impatient prospective parents [Leridon 2003: 26, 32]³⁷.

It has also been argued that pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period have paradoxically been pathologized as they have increasingly become objects of medicalized intervention (e.g. Jacques 2000); but social activists have also struggled to reframe childbirth as a 'natural' event and to empower mothers during labour (e.g. Romito 1990: 128–129). Pregnancy, as other life events, moreover, now lends itself to a colonial invasion of antenatal risk calculation and expert monitoring. The upshot of technologies such as antenatal screening and amniocentesis around the foetus engender new types of anxieties and parental responsibilities (see e.g. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 113–117, 119–121), potentially even creating novel 'fateful moments' [Giddens 1991: 107–143] during pregnancy³⁸.

As regards the bodily impacts of pregnancy and childbirth on women, while knowledge on the subject abounds, there is also evidence that, in a regime of wholesale hospitalization, prospective parents may actually often under-represent the physiological impacts of labour [see e.g. Miller 2005: 76, 90–97, and below]. Figes quotes a London Director of Midwifery on the subject:

The modern portrayal of birth is that everyone who goes into pregnancy will come out unscathed... The media and the health professionals are a lot to blame. Women expect to come out the same as they went in and we can't match their expectations [Figes 1998: 11–12]

In sum, rationalization, technical innovation and institutionalization of pregnancy and birth have led to complex and paradoxical developments, inextricably linked to and filtered by cultural expectations.

The new legitimacy of hedonism

Amongst the important cultural shifts in terms of women's attitudes towards their pregnant selves is the legitimacy of attention to self, qualified by certain scholars as a form of 'narcissism'. Historian Yvonne Knibiehler, for example, considers that in France, this phenomenon emerges in the mid 1950s, concomi-

³⁷ Hence, if 15% of women questioned in France in 1978 considered that they did not get pregnant fast enough, the proportion was 25 percent in 1988. Only a few months of waiting after contraception had been ceased led to such attitudes [Leridon 2003: 32].

³⁸ 'Fateful moments' are consequential crossroads in an individual's life. Interestingly enough, in his list of 'fateful moments' Giddens [1991: 113] includes the decision to get married or to separate (or hearing the result of a medical test) – but not the decision to have a child.

tantly with the publication of Laurence Pernoud's bestseller *J'attends un enfant [I Am Expecting a Child]* (1956). Pernoud, neither a doctor nor a midwife, inaugurates a new genre of mothering literature: mothers' writings for mothers³⁹. In her book, Knibiehler writes:

Feminine narcissism is laid out without complexes, legitimized by the baby-boom, and most probably also by ante-natal classes. Pregnancy is no longer a taboo, even if clothes still must dissimulate it.

[Knibiehler 1997: 73]

In her longitudinal study of ten primiparous Finns, Soikkeli notes that the strong and unique bodily sensations of pregnancy were represented as a desirable experience and the transformations of body were observed attentively and with great interest [Soikkeli 2000: 39]. Pregnancy also represented a period of particular attention paid to self in British middle-class accounts: expectant mothers reported treating themselves more carefully and thoughtfully than ever before [Bailey 1999: 349]. Lucy Bailey suggests that amongst her sample, pregnancy had been promoted to an *art* rather than merely as a condition with the emergence of such specialized practices as ante-natal yoga or swimming, along with institutionalized regimes of diet, drink and lifestyle [Bailey 1999: 343]. This researcher has also underscored the quest for knowledge on the 'new world' that expectant mothers are on the verge of entering⁴⁰. Essayist Andrea Buchanan provides a vivid humorous account of this quest:

When I became pregnant, I scoured the Web for information. I read about women trying to have babies; women who battled infertility; women who were three months' pregnant; six months' pregnant; nine months' pregnant; women who miscarried early; women who delivered late; women who loved being pregnant; women who hated it. I tested the Chinese Conception Calendar to predict my baby's gender; I looked through the endless selections of baby names; I comparison-shopped for strollers. I signed-up for e-mail newsletters detailing the rapid, invisible development of my in-utero guest. I posted on discussion boards and argued over parenting techniques with other women who were not yet mothers [...] In short, I tried to do all the research I could and know everything there was to know about my biggest project to date; having a baby.

[Buchanan 2003: x]

³⁹ It is anecdotal that a retired French researcher in psychology met during the research process considered Pernoud's book a 'catastrophe'. It engendered, he contends, a standard in regard of which women mirrored their lives, potentially inducing guilt; he recalled listening to women of his generation (including his own wife) discussing their experiences in the light of Pernoud's.

⁴⁰ Mothers were, in a certain sense '*stimulated to devote the time and energy necessary to generate increased mastery of the circumstances*' [Giddens 1991: 143]. Information consulted by the women in this research was both formal and informal: child-rearing manuals, specialized magazines and web pages, alongside Internet discussion boards.

Significant and generalized gazes

The ‘new world’ which Bailey’s interviewees were anticipating was frequently described during pregnancy:

...in rosy terms, as a place where people were very ‘nice’ to them about their pregnancies, men were ‘chivalrous’, and they found that they could relate to other women in place of the social barriers which had filled their world before.

[Bailey 1999: 346]

As indicated in the quote above, expectations and experiences are also constructed through day-to-day interactions. The mother who was quoted at the beginning of this section, for example, refers to her husband’s gaze on her pregnant body in the following terms:

[b] When he saw my belly grow, he melted, was so... so attentive. We experienced it [pregnancy] as very intimate [...] we were very close in fact during that period. [...] I didn’t get comments on my morphological changes. [Smile]. On the contrary, he had a very, how to say it, very um, very curious gaze on all that, he thought it was really beautiful to see his wife um. So that’s it. So in fact I had that gaze, I felt beautiful – oh well, beautiful.

But compliments on women’s appearance during pregnancy may also be made by the *entourage*:

[c] People around you are so, so, considerate. They always paid attention to me, I always had friends... there, all of a sudden it was really [...] [A pregnant woman] is something!

[d] I had a super pregnancy. I practically had no negative effects: I didn’t have nausea; I was a bit tired the first 3 months. But on the whole, I was fit. And a lot of people even told me that they thought I was very –. I was really on form and in high spirits.

Although the interviewee in [d] interrupts her phrase, my counterfactual interpretation is that a lot of people told her she was ‘beautiful’. (Credence to this interpretation is lent by the fact that the participant in the excerpt [b] also expresses embarrassment, when making what could be viewed as an ‘immodest’ statement, conveyed by her ‘um’ and ‘oh well, beautiful...’).

The perceived ‘beauty’ of pregnancy can be interpreted as an indicator of its social value today. Indeed, as pregnancy began to show, Bailey’s interviewees also found that other people, including strangers, treated them differently. While some of her participants evoked an impression of becoming ‘public

property'⁴¹ (see also Buchanan 2003: 82–83, Gatrell 2005: 104), as they were commented upon or sometimes patted by strangers, others remarked on the way that people in buses or a crowded room, for example, would stand back exaggeratedly to let them pass. Such behaviour enhanced expectant mothers' feelings of being 'special' and gave them the impression of having gained an additional cultural value [Bailey 1999: 340–341].

Similar observations were also found in a contemporary French magazine, *Neuf mois Magazine* [Nine Months]⁴². When asked about their "best memory" of pregnancy, two mothers relate:

- [e] Simply being pregnant! People are so considerate with a pregnant woman. You get smiles, doors are opened for you and even the surliest ones melt
[f] And people are so nice, they hold the door for you, you don't have to queue at the supermarket...

[*Neuf mois*, n° 45 September 2004]

Excerpts [c–f] illustrate how, in parallel, public attitudes towards pregnant women and their uses of public space have both undergone significant change. The first transformation concerns the visibility of pregnant bodies. Knibiehler's remark, above, on the 'dissimulation' of women's protuberant wombs in the mid 1950s, for example, contrasts strongly with the development of contemporary styles in clothing which, on the contrary, tend to enhance bellies by underlining their contours or uncover them⁴³. Considered on a longer time-scale, the transformation of public attitudes towards pregnancy is more striking still.

French historian Jacques Gelis has noted that in a foregone regime of fertility, the:

...simultaneous and permanent presence of pregnancy was an essential element of the human landscape in the past centuries. The community was perpetually pregnant with itself.

[Gelís quoted by Gillis 1997: 161]

⁴¹ This is also an experience reported by novelist Cusk 2001: 289; see also Gatrell 2005: 56–57. Cusk speaks of the 'population of her privacy' as '*the baby's meaning for other people, the world's sense of ownership stating its claim*' [ibid: 34–35, cited by Gatrell 2005: 57]. In Finland, such an experience is mentioned in the magazine *9 kuukautta* [9 Months] n° 1, March–May 2004: 3.

⁴² See also the quote of a mother interviewed in Britain by Steph Lawler, critiquing the images of women who '*blossomed with this pregnancy and floated... into this glorious experience*' [2000: 141].

⁴³ During the research process (more precisely, the summer of 2005), my attention was caught in France on several occasions by expectant mothers wearing low waist trousers and mini shirts which bared half of their bellies.

However, nineteenth century customs, Gillis notes, began to lean towards to an exclusion of women from public places and their ‘confinement’ in the quality of quintessential bearers of life – and erotic objects [ibid: 166–167]. Between the two World Wars, Françoise Thébaud writes that in French expert texts:

... ‘the body of the pregnant woman is described as mutilated and unsightly’ [...] The growing belly is ugly, indecent; it must be concealed under ‘ample and warm’ clothes, which with low heels constitute the toilette of the future mother, a neutral toilette, a negation of the woman who should only think of the baby [...] a body for which pleasure was forbidden’.

[Thébaud 1986: 133–134]

In agrarian Finland, Helsti has shown how pregnancy and birth were considered impure and hidden for fear of the ‘evil eye’, as a ‘reproduction-taboo’ still prevailed at the turn of the twentieth century. Talk on these topics, considered as shameful, was only progressively liberated [Helsti 2000: 24, 63–94]⁴⁴. Far from a ‘taboo’ or the reign of discretion then, what we witness today is a proliferation and valorisation of pregnancy in public space, notably in the media (for France see also Détrez and Simon 2006: 241; Luhtakallio 2003: 77, 79).

Eliette Abécassis’ character in the novel *Un heureux événement* reflects on this transformation humorously:

Happily, there is Demi Moore. Women will never thank this American actress enough for what she did for them. She went as far as Simone de Beauvoir in women’s liberation. She liberated them from the shame of pregnancy. The belly has become an accessory. After the cover of *Vanity Fair*, nothing was the same again. Demi Moore posed naked, pregnant with her eight-month appendice and the title: ‘More Demi Moore’. We wanted to believe in the liberation. So, a pregnant woman was beautiful then. By the magic of communication, it was possible to show and even gracious.

[Abécassis 2005: 41]

The mediated gaze and mothers’ experiences

Eeva Jokinen, for example, has documented how, compared to the 1970s, articles on pregnancy and labour augmented significantly during the 1980s in a

⁴⁴ Helsti reports a crystallized narrative of ‘taboo-breakers’. It consists of stories of women birthing alone in the midst of their daily chores, placing the baby on the side of the field, and continuing their work. These women did not undergo the traditional purification rituals and the heroines were exempted from any social sanction. The narrative can be interpreted as functioning to break the traditional taboos, free women from the shame associated with this life event – and for work. Indeed, the crumbling of the taboo was concomitant with an economic transformation, as Finnish peasants shifted their activities towards cattle, a feminine activity [2000: 82–94].

Finnish family magazine, *Kaksplus* [Twoplus] – to the point of specializing on these life-stage stages and toddlerhood. In the French case, an analogous development has led to a massive exposal of this life-event, as discourses on and images of pregnancy abound in the media. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the French press specializing in human interest stories and gossip columns increasingly luxuriated in images of celebrities' sexy, expectant bellies.

Christine Détrez and Anne Simon scrutinize mediated representations of women's corporality and highlight how trendy the themes of pregnancy and babies have become in French women's magazines in the mid 2000s. Motherhood portrayed as the 'greatest role' in the lives of actresses or top models constitutes a new type of familistic *cliché* [Détrez & Simon 2006: 241]. Glossy, hyper-specialized magazines on pregnancy such as *Neuf mois* [Nine months]⁴⁵ have also contributed to the proliferation of hedonist representations and discourses on pregnancy consumed by our contemporaries. Accordingly, two of the three issues of this magazine examined for the research display the following hedonist-narcissist inscription on their cover: '9 happy months... you, your body, your baby'.

The importance and interest in women's sensations and feelings, characteristic of hedonism, appears in *Neuf mois*. Each month, several columns are dedicated to lay testimony. In the 'Snapshots of the month' section, women respond to questions such as: 'How do you experience pregnancy?'; 'Tell me about your first ultrasound scan' and 'What particular momentous memories do you have [about pregnancy]?' [*Neuf mois*; n° 45 September 2004; n° 49 February 2005]. "As months pass by" is a column in which a mother narrates her trajectory from pregnancy to labour [*Neuf mois*, n° 39 February 2004; n° 45 September 2004]. Another regular section is "My pregnancy, my experience" – composed of a mix of lay testimony and expert commentaries⁴⁶.

In Finland, Jokinen also points to a parallel move towards emphasis on experience in *Kaksplus*, including articles on less pleasurable experiences: fatigue or post-partum depression [Jokinen 1997: 112–135]. She qualifies the year 1985

⁴⁵ The apparition of a niche for specialized magazines focussing on pregnancy is an international phenomenon. *Neuf mois* appeared in France around 2001; in Finland, a similarly named magazine *9 kuukautta* also exists.

⁴⁶ I thank Héléne Gronier for providing me three issues of *Neuf mois* accessed randomly. Four types of articles were differentiated: lay testimony ('experience-talk'); expert-talk on health and relationships; testimony and expert discourse as a 'mix' (on health, relationships and experiences); journalists' texts (practical advice, consumption). Fathers' testimonies also constitute a regular column each month. 'Narcissism' seems to co-exist beside a rational, risk-culture repertory e.g. articles on nutrition or toxic substances. Mehl notes how mixing testimony and expert talk has become a major modality of 'psych'-intervention in the media [2003: 19, 213].

as representing a ‘therapeutic turn’: different kinds of maternal feelings acquire a new legitimacy [ibid.: 125]⁴⁷. During the same decade (the 1980s) author Sinikka Nopola discerns the rise of representations of maternity as an exotic journey and a quest for experience in Finland:

One of the objectives of tourism/conscious mother-trips is romantic, the encounter with “the authentic self”. One would like to return, at a least a little, as a “new person”. Someone expecting a first child hears that “motherhood will transform you”. Women cultivating their intelligence hope to recover their instincts once again.

[Nopola 1991: 71]

Similarly, Ann Kaplan, in her study on the representations of middle-class motherhood in Anglo-Saxon popular culture, also identifies the mid 1980s as a turning-point: motherhood then becomes represented as a self-fulfilling experience in the media [1992: 194]. Somewhat later, in her late 1990s’ UK sample of expectant mothers, Bailey reports having found accounts which emphasize pregnancy and motherhood as ‘fun’, an ‘experience’, an exciting new chapter in life⁴⁸. Like Nopola, Bailey establishes an analogy between the attitudes of the women and tourists as incessant seekers of new experiences [Bailey 1999: 346–347].

The evolution of representations of pregnancy echoes the statements made by scholars on the development of a Western hedonist outlook, which first seems to have informed marriage [Illouz 1997: 46–47], and now reproduction. Contrasting eighteenth-century understandings of romantic love and desire as unsafe bases for marriage with the romantic ideal exalted by the media industry, Eva Illouz writes:

By the 1930s, ads and movies were suggesting that marriage should fulfill not only its traditional requirement of providing a framework for the reproduction of the species but also those of intense passion, fun and excitement.

[Illouz 1997: 46]

Pregnancy in the Western world has thus been progressively (half a century later) also constructed as an expressive, sensuous, stimulating experience – as a means to pleasure. The desire to experience pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and the physical intimacy with a child are presumably strong motivations to bear children today [Soikkeli 2000: 39]. But in the French interview data, pregnancy is also often constructed as a longed-for experience for the emotions and physical sensations it is reputed to procure and desired *per se*:

⁴⁷ Jokinen also observes the beginning of celebrity-mother stories.

⁴⁸ For an alternative assessment see Tincknell 2005: 73.

- [g] There was something physical which had more to do with being pregnant in fact, without me thinking – it’s quite silly isn’t it – but without me thinking that I’m pregnant so [that means] I’m going to have a baby. It was more like, um, “*I’ll enjoy pregnancy*”, and we’ll see what happens afterwards.
- [h] [Having a child represented] um, an accomplishment, er, the construction of a couple’ relationship too... and I think I wanted to be pregnant, I wanted to know, to experience it, I wanted to feel it.
- [i] I was very confident about pregnancy and less about managing everyday life actually: about a child that grows up, becomes a pre-adolescent, a teen, etc. But the idea of being pregnant, it was already a desire, really.
- [j] Once I felt ready [to have a child], I got the impression of [experiencing] a need, oh well, a need. Having experienced the desire physically, [I had the desire] of experiencing pregnancy.
- [k] I always thought that a pregnant woman was something beautiful, I mean it was something mysterious so evidently I wanted to know how it felt.

Anticipation and experience

One of the factors feeding the contemporary fascination for pregnancy may be that the latter is paradigmatic of anticipation, a key element of modern hedonism, according to Colin Campbell. For this author, modern ‘autonomous imaginative hedonism’ consists in the manipulation of stimuli and symbols for procuring the strong meat of emotions. Imaginative though it may be, hedonistic day-dreaming typically mixes the pleasures of fantasy with those of reality: unknown, but plausible, experiences are therefore particularly sought after [Campbell 1989: 77. 82–86].

As regards pregnancy, its intrinsic quality as a time-slot, a hiatus for expectations of all kinds suits such dynamics particularly well. Once the decision to cease contraception has been taken; and once the risk of *not* being able to conceive has been dispelled⁴⁹, the baby and parenthood ‘are there’ for nine months of potential day-dreaming, and not yet there in terms of concrete constraints of infant care. And the virtual possibilities of imagining the newcomer are endless. During this period, cultural products such as *Neuf Mois* as a medium of anticipation may acquire a particular significance for primiparous women. The dynamics of hedonistic day-dreaming are evoked by this interviewed mother:

⁴⁹ Risk consciousness/anxiety of *not* being able to conceive is more salient in the Finnish interviews. It is probable that this pertains to a greater salience of public debates on childlessness in Finland than in France and is probably correlated to the relatively high rate of childless women in Finland.

[l] [Pregnancy] was really a, a smooth, serene, tranquil period. Particularly maternity leave, during which I had nothing else to do but gaze at my belly [Laughter]. It was really nice. So. And then projects, day-dreaming, um, you envision the child, I mean you don't see it, but you feel it, and you start thinking about what it will be like, what will happen when it will be there. So everything, only good things, really.

It follows that if novelty, expectation and longing are intrinsic to modern desire, creating our perfected vision of coming events, however, considerably accrues the chances of an endemic misfit between expectations and experience [Campbell 1989: 86]. Evidence that this also applies to pregnancy was found during the research, although not in the interview corpus (for Finland see also Soikkeli 2000: 39): the misfit between expectations and experience forms the topic of an Internet discussion involving thirteen expectant French mothers⁵⁰. It was launched by the testimony reproduced below:

[m]I'm fed up of reading all over the place that it's fantastic being pregnant [...] for all those who do not experience it that way it becomes very frustrating. And that's my case in fact [...] But nobody had told me about the inconveniencies of pregnancy. Of course I knew what everyone knows, because you see it on TV or you read about it in the press: the nausea, the backaches, the difficulties that may arise in the couple [...] But in the end all these small bothers of pregnancy seemed quite harmless in the face of the state of grace procured by pregnancy! [...] my disillusion was great from the start [...] I started feeling guilty [...] and disappointed at not attaining the "nirvana" of pregnancy. Today [...] I don't feel guilty anymore because I know that I love my baby. I think we should not hesitate telling expectant mothers that being pregnant is *a priori* fantastic but that they have the right not to enjoy being pregnant, and that doesn't make them bad mothers.

Three weeks later, the initiator of the debate received twelve responses validating her contention and expressing similar feelings, from which the following excerpts are drawn:

[n] I really agree [...] I do think it's a pity to idealize pregnancy

[o] I expected a lot of positive things from pregnancy, I imagined to myself that it would be super, that I would be fulfilled and happy, and in fact I feel guilty because it's not at all the case!

[p] I used to believe all the women who told me that it was so extraordinary to be pregnant, that they envied me.

[q] You can't imagine how relieved I was [to read your message]. I feel exactly the same, this absence of "extreme happiness" so vaunted by expectant mothers.

⁵⁰ Contrary to the women whose testimonies are published in *Neuf Mois*, which has a manifest middle-class target of highly educated women, I do not have an indicator of the discussion participants' educational level.

[r] I'm happy to read this message [...] It's exactly what I feel.

[s] You have the right to claim your state of dissatisfaction at being pregnant and that will not make you a bad mother⁵¹.

It appears from these testimonies that if some of the inconveniences of pregnancy are notorious, greater still are the expected rewards, referred to above as a 'state of grace', 'nirvana' [m], fulfilment [o] or 'extreme happiness' [q]. Anxiety inherent in risk-culture appears, in this case, to have been overpowered by a hedonist repertory⁵² as a dominant discourse. Also, the normative dimension of maternal pleasure is clearly worded: the expectant women deem necessary to argue, against the grain, for "*the right not to enjoy being pregnant*" and "*the right to claim their state of dissatisfaction*". Explicit links between feelings of enjoyment, love for the child and correct performance of the mother role, suggested by my analysis, are hence established by the participants themselves. They claim their morality, despite their negative experiences and complaints voiced – spontaneously associated with being a 'bad mother' – in a narrative struggle with their mother-identities (see e.g. Miller 2005: 105).

The need to speak in defence of oneself, the often confessional mode of exposition, along with the professed feelings of relief, all constitute indicators of the great moral stakes of the hedonist ethos – and of feelings of shame. Again, a parallel can be established with the ideology of hedonist parenthood and the effects of the expansion of an ideal of heterosexual romantic love. Illouz has highlighted that concomitantly with the development of the latter, pain, difficulties and obstacles '*that had long been seen as necessary and unavoidable features of love became not only unacceptable but importantly, unintelligible*' [1997: 47].

Relief over the intelligible character of 'non-enjoyment' is brought by the realization that one's experience is shared by peers. Brené Brown has defined shame as the 'feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging' [Brown 2004: 15]. It signals a threat to one's social bonds, and by definition, is something that we do not want to talk

⁵¹ The discussion took place between March 15th and April 6th 2005. Excerpt [m]: <www.neufmoisetplus.com/recit/temoin/magali-1.htm> and for excerpts [from n to s]: <www.neufmoisetplus.com/recit/temoin/PM-magali.htm> [both processed on 26.07.2005].

⁵² A psychotherapist interviewed in *Neuf mois* also contends that the media diffuse an image of a constantly happy pregnant woman in France. [*Neuf mois*, n° 49, February 2005: 45]. The misfit between expectations and experience does not only concern pregnancy, but has also been shown to be present in accounts of later phases of transition [Niemelä 1979; Nopola 1991; Martiskainen 1998a; Miller 2005: 89–137; Dally 1982: 17–18].

about [ibid: 14, 18–19]⁵³. Hence, the discursive economy of motherhood – what conventionally should and should not be said about mothering – surfaces repeatedly from the data. To some extent, this was also found to apply to the next stage of transition: childbirth.

Glimpsing fetuses and immortalizing joy

Childbirth was not generally described as a hedonist experience by the mothers in our study. Narratives of labour may, indeed, starkly contrast with those of pregnancy – and with expectations, as attested by qualitative research (e.g. Gatrell 2005: 107 in the UK)⁵⁴. Béatrice Jacques has highlighted the strong tension between the colonization of this life event by risk-thinking and the desire of the birth experience by mothers [2000:36].

However, it seems that hedonism has also been infused somewhat into our representations of the life event which is labour. Pascale Romito, for example, in France, has pointed to the existence of an ‘ideology of painless childbirth’⁵⁵, construed as a fascinating, creative and pleasurable experience, an intimate ‘celebration’ which fathers are invited to share. Such a vision is, however, associated with another type of risk: that of ‘non-enjoyment’ potentially becoming assimilated to ‘failure’ [Romito 1990: 129, 134].

As a matter of fact, Romito found important readjustments in women’s opinions on labour after confinement [Romito 1990: 130–131]. They had not been adequately informed about childbirth, she contends, and mothers themselves hesitated to share difficult experiences on labour with expectant women [Romito

⁵³ According to the ‘ideology of essential motherhood’ [a term used by DiQuinzio 1999: xiii], womanhood is inextricably bound to motherhood. Therefore, one’s value as a woman is often evaluated through the type of mother one is, or through the relations that women have to the maternal role [Brown 2004: 152]. The idea that perfection can be attained and be effortless [Brown 2004: 148–154] is also a cultural trait which contributes to reinforcing an ethos according to which mothers should ‘cope’. The English definition of ‘to cope’ is ‘*to contend quietly, to grapple successfully*’. Silence on, or even devaluation of one’s efforts, are part of the ideal of the good mother according to Graham [1982]; see also Romito [1990: 188–189].

⁵⁴ Accounts of childbirth and its physiological consequences as more difficult and painful than expected were found amongst Finnish and French parents participating in the research. Childbirth and pregnancy were not however themes systematically evoked in the interviews.

⁵⁵ Romito relates that earlier during the twentieth century, women wounding great suffering at labour may have been blamed for being too ‘soft’ (or insufficiently prepared), an attitude which she also assimilates to an ‘ideology of painless birth’. She refers to the work of Jaubert, M.J. (1979). *Les bateleurs du mal joli*. Paris: Baland and Jaubert M.J. (1982). *Ces hommes qui nous accouchent*. Paris: Stock. On women’s experiences of childbirth and midwives’ attitudes in the France of the 1920s and 1930s, see also Thébaud: ‘*At the times, it was taken for granted that childbirth is an ordeal*’ [1986: 269; see also 256–285]. Hence, as for pregnancy, the hedonist shift now seems to colonize all phases of transition.

1990: 133–134]. In the UK, Tina Miller similarly reports an overriding sense that birth had not been what women had thought it to be; experts, family and friends had failed to represent it adequately [Miller 2005: 89–111].

In her novel, for example, Eliette Abécassis's character starts questioning her awareness of idealized images of motherhood precisely during the event of childbirth, as the pains submerge the character:

How did my mother do it? Why didn't she tell me anything? Why didn't anybody explain anything to me?

[Abécassis 2005: 60]

Hence, from a post-natal perspective, it was not childbirth but rather after-delivery that was liable to be described as a 'magic moment'⁵⁶ of parenthood by women (see also Martiskainen 1998a). In the following account, the discovery of the infant together with the father is represented as an invaluable moment that this mother would have liked to immortalize, because she thought that she was not able to *make the most of it* [*profiter assez*] on the spot.

[t] I would have liked, in fact, there to be a camera to film in the delivery room. Because it's so, yeah, so intense that I am sure that I was not *able to make the most of it*. And, er, I would have liked to see us, to see us three, reunited as a family [again, on film].

Family photographs, slides, films and videos are modern techniques of safeguarding important and happy family events and memories: weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, small children. They actualize and celebrate the family as an entity⁵⁷. Neither Finnish nor French parents, however, ever mentioned having actually filmed birth. Taped ultrasound scans, however, do function to 'immortalize' the foetus and pregnancy, and are henceforth part of French birth-culture. This technology, sometimes interpreted as an intrusion of medicalization into women's bodies and their intimate relationship with the foetus (e.g. Morel 2005: 304⁵⁸), is represented in *Neuf mois* as one of the potential experiential climaxes of pregnancy, as parents contemplate their progeny for the first time. Parents also often tape the scans as a souvenir.

Hence the father of a toddler in a newspaper article headed "Young fathers 'father'" relates his experience:

⁵⁶ After-birth was described by the Parisian mothers in the pilot study in terms such as 'unimaginable', 'extraordinary', 'a miracle' or 'magical' [Martiskainen 1998a: 56–59]; see also Giampino [2000: 104].

⁵⁷ On photographs and representation of family cohesion, see also Jallinoja 2000: 206–207.

⁵⁸ Morel drawing upon Cesbron, P. & Y. Knibiehler (2004). *La Naissance en Occident*. Paris. Albin Michel.

Olivier, 34, a father of two children (3 and 6 months) did not wait until the birth of his elder daughter to feel like a father. He particularly remembers the ‘shock’ of the first ultrasound scan [...] Like many young fathers today, he did not miss a consultation in the doctor’s office. ‘We did everything together; I was there all the time, for me, it’s natural.’

[*La Croix*, 5.4.2006]

I am convinced that I have an important role from now on. It’s inconceivable for me to wait for it [pregnancy] to pass and do nothing [...] A child is conceived together from the beginning. I’m still gliding at 10,000 [meters], I can’t fully realize what’s happening to us, but I know one thing: I’m happy, and we will go on having this child the two of us, savouring each instant, every transformation in my wife’s body, every tiny sign of the little one to come. Welcome to you, whom I don’t know yet, but whom we are expecting

[Internet forum *jeunepapa.com*]⁵⁹

Medical technology has thereby become a medium for sharing the delights of pregnancy between partners, in a novel manner. In this sense, the medical function of screening is hence partially ‘hijacked’ by expectant parents. French specialists have in fact expressed their concern over the exploitation of 3D and 4D foetal imagery or ‘foetus clips’, now sold increasingly to expectant parents, as a form of voyeurism liable to eclipse the (morally legitimate) medical function of such imagery [*Neuf Mois*, n° 45, September 2004, p. 31–33]. The medical establishment hence endeavours to serve as a bulwark against the consumption ethos of hedonist parenthood.

New parental practices are also liable to perturb the expectations of elder professionals. In a recent interview, a French paediatrician and author of several guides for parents, wishes to ‘sound the alarm’. He relates that not only is it nowadays common for couples to come to consultations together, but moreover, it is most often the father who undresses the child:

‘I have nothing against the fact that the father undresses the child’ [...] ‘But I have the impression that we are witnessing an attempt to reverse roles, in which we may note, both are uneasy. It is illusory that the father substitute for the mother,’ the paediatrician warns us. ‘I hear some mothers say: I want him to experience the same thing as me, but it’s not possible,’ he continues. ‘During pregnancy, the father must stay outside, as a protector of the child and mother. And, in the beginning of the child’s life, the father is not supposed to play the role of a second mother, while continuing to work.’

[*La Croix* 5.4.2006]⁶⁰

⁵⁹ <<http://www.jeunepapa.com/debat.php?op=showcontent&id=5>> processed on 5.4.2006

⁶⁰ A very similar remark was made by a Finnish maternity health centre supervisor during an interview with the researcher and Riitta Jallinoja in 2003. She remarked on the fact that when fathers were committed to their baby, and came to consult, the investment was such that they tended to take over traditionally maternal functions to a degree which she felt was unbalanced. Finding the ‘appropriate’ degree of investment seemed problematic for this older woman.

Hedonist altruism and ‘natural’ surveillance

In the light of the French interview corpus, an excerpt from a Web discussion board and a digest of media material, the salience of a hedonist ethos of first-time pregnancy emerges from the analysis. Nonetheless, in the case of pregnancy, hedonism (sometimes designated as ‘narcissism’) acquires a strong legitimacy, as attention to self is also attention to the child. *A propos*, E. Beck-Gernsheim has written: ‘*The ideal mother-to-be orients herself completely on her growing child, and is recommended to alter her life accordingly*’ [1995: 115]. The analysis here suggests a somewhat subtle picture. Self-fulfilment may take on meanings of self-improvement [Yankelovitch 1981: 85; Jallinoja 1991: 77]; and attention to self and baby (or to the ‘hybrid’ self) – including that by experts – may be experienced on a ‘narcissist’ mode. In this sense, the *zeitgeist* of pregnancy is that of a hybrid of altruism and hedonism, of control and expressivity, a ‘natural process’ under medical surveillance.

Although some evidence of similar tendencies in Finland has been reported [Soikkeli 2000], in this research, the salience of hedonist discourse on pregnancy particularly characterizes the French case: Finnish mothers encountered during the research neither recalled similar expectations about pregnancy, nor mentioned this life stage as a motivation to bear children. One way to interpret this difference is in terms of a repertory of discourse present in both national contexts, but in varying proportions – a theoretical framework suggested by Lamont and Thévenot as heuristic for comparative cultural sociology [Lamont & Thévenot 2000: 1–10]. As ‘elementary grammars that pre-exist individuals, although they are transformed and made salient by individuals’ [ibid.: 5–6], such repertories were not systematically declined by all French mothers.

Keeping this theoretical insight in mind, the analysis below will depart once again from the Ariadne’s thread of this chapter: phrases with the verb *profiter*, applied to other stages of first-time motherhood. In fact, it will ricochet directly to everyday life after maternity leave: its ‘magic moments’ and routines. Hence the weeks of transition following childbirth, of which accounts often, as was the case for labour, constitute an *appoggiatura*, a discordant note – or a frank *decrescendo* – after the hedonist anticipation of pregnancy, are temporarily omitted (see section 3.1, Coping with great expectations: the biographical context).

6.4 MAGIC MOMENTS AND EVERYDAY ROUTINES

Witnessing the milestones of the child's development constitutes one of the 'special' experiences of parenthood. The first times a baby or a toddler smiles, sits, walks, speaks or eats with a spoon constitute privileged moments that parents do not wish to bypass (see also Bourguignon 1987; Martiskainen 1998a) or fret about missing out on:

[u] When he left for two weeks, he asked me four times a day on the phone, "has she changed a lot?" [laughter], "has she changed a lot?" I mean, I nearly sent him the photo of a two year-old! [laughter]... It's me in fact, who gets to *savour it*... Me, I'm glad to be there, you see, 'cause if she had been him, she would have been doing some of this stuff!'

[v] I did *savour her* [laughter], I did *savour her plenty*. I didn't get the impression that I had missed out on her developmental stages while working... So, finally, I get the impression that, compared to other mothers who work five days a week, and who have one hour, or two hours per day, to be with [their children], at least I saw her in the afternoons, as I'd get up early, I didn't sleep a lot in order to *savour her*. So, I saw her every afternoon and then on all my days off, I'd keep her with me, so in fact I saw a lot of her, and I don't have the impression that I missed out on any of her development, any of the stages.

In the account below, it is not a developmental stage that is designated by the opportunist and hedonist connoted verb *profiter*. This new mother expresses her desire to focus exclusively on her daughter as a unique individual during a certain lapse of time⁶¹.

[w] They're all going: "what about the second one?"... My partner wants more children, because he says that he doesn't want her to be, er, a nasty, spoilt only daughter... I don't have a clue about that for the moment; above all, I want to take care of her, to *savour her to the maximum*.

Maximizing pleasure, 'making the most of it', the urgency of seizing and 'savouring' the sensations and emotions of parenthood – be it pregnancy, after-birth

⁶¹ This idea of an intensive concentration on one individual relationship with a child is very different from the standpoint of another interviewee, who considered that she might take longer maternity leave at the birth of her next child because she could *make the most* of two children, simultaneously: "I think it's different for a second child, it's probably different, because it's an opportunity to take time with the first one, so, eventually, it's true that maybe for a second child I'll want to take longer maternity leave, but I think that it would also be to make the most of the two in fact." It is as if an individualist and a familialist (or quality and quantity logics) confronted each other. The point of view emphasising the utility of longer family leave in the last excerpt corresponds well with the French representation of care leave. Indeed, until 2004, only mothers of two children were entitled to them.

or a toddler's first steps – echo the writings of contemporary scholars. Colin Campbell distinguishes traditional hedonism involving a concern with 'pleasures' (eating, drinking, sexual intercourse, socializing, singing, dancing or playing games, for example) from modern hedonism, concerned by polymorphous 'pleasure' and quality:

In the latter, the primary object is *to squeeze as much of the quality of pleasure as one can from all those sensations which one actually experiences* during the course of the process of living. All acts are potential 'pleasures' from this perspective, if only they can be approached or undertaken *in the right manner*; the hedonistic index here is the extent to which one is actually able to extract the fundamental pleasure which exists in life itself

[Campbell 1989: 69, my emphasis]

The contemporary French semiotics of *profiter* described in the beginning of this chapter (opportunism associated to enjoyment) and *carpe diem*-discourse coincide well with this definition. Indeed, Campbell underlines that enjoyment may require a certain ability or skill ('*if only they can be approached or undertaken in the right manner*')⁶². It was suggested, in the preceding chapters that this kind of assumption was present when new mothers expressing their difficulties were exhorted by others to 'enjoy themselves'. Likewise, Soikkeli reports in her Finnish study that mothers formulated the idea, or were told by others, that one *should* enjoy pregnancy [2000: 42–44]. Last but not least, the pervasive requisite that a 'good-enough mother' *must* enjoy mothering could be interpreted in the light of such an axiom.

That maternal enjoyment tends to be taken for granted also contributes to the diverse modalities of use of the expression *profiter de mon enfant*: at times designating some of the 'magic' moments or 'quality time' with the child and at others, appearing as a formal discursive routine. Progressively, then, the analysis of rhetorical contexts will endeavour to show how paradoxical elements appear concomitantly with vocalised joy. In a sense, the section below can be seen as constituting a turning-point in the plot of the chapter: from the peak 'tourist' experiences on the journey to motherhood, pregnancy, after birth and witnessing the milestones of child development, the sociological microscope is focussed on routines – its joys and frustrations.

⁶² Mehl cites the chief editor of *Psychologies* promoting the magazine in the name of approaches which enhance daily well-being, and about which he aims to inform his readers [2003: 225].

Savouring quality time

‘Squeezing’ quality out of experience also applies to time spent with the family. In the following excerpts, the expression *profiter de mon enfant* is used to designate everyday ‘quality time’ between parent and child. Achieving ‘quality time’, however, implies effort: not allocating this free time to housework, rest or other activities; the support of relatives or paid help may even be deemed necessary to allow parents to *savour the good times*.

Although, in some excerpts, the subject of *profiter* is the mother, the main recipient of ‘quality time’ is the child. The rewards of parenthood may indeed often operate bi-directionally. A mother in Gosset’s study expresses the idea by saying: [it’s] ‘*us enjoying being there and them enjoying us also*’ [Gosset 2004: 89]⁶³. However, the blurring of the boundaries between beneficiaries of ‘quality time’, together with the evocation of the difficulties, (feelings of guilt or insufficiency, the management of competing priorities in the home, the lack of alternatives) both attenuate the strong hedonist connotation of the verb *profiter*, characteristic of the passages quoted in the previous sections.

[x] It’s difficult because I feel, I don’t feel guilty about working, but still, I’d like to have more time for my daughter sometimes...that is, get some time for her and then *make the most of* that time with her. But I also think that it’s not because I’d have more time with her that I’d automatically *savour it more* then, qualitatively is what I meant... It’s not just: well I’m with her all day, but in fact I don’t take time to be with her, I’m doing something else, cleaning the house and stuff. When I have time for her, I’m with her, so that’s what I tell myself.

[y] All week you work and, um, you don’t *really savour*, well, I don’t [get] to – *enjoy being with my* [child] *enough*. Well, I get to *enjoy being with* my husband more, because we do have evenings together – it was really the week-ends, um, just thinking that you’ll have to do a day of cleaning, ironing, with [the child] in my arms, claiming, um, claiming my attention, and he’s not really happy when I’m doing my day’s cleaning, ironing, it’s not really interesting for him; he expects something else from me. It’s true, it liberated me [to have paid help] and I think about weekends more serenely.

The interviewee in quotes [y, z], with a demanding career and long working hours, evokes some of the conditions which can help to reconcile children’s *and* parents’ ‘quality time’: the sharing of household tasks which frees a parent for intensive attention to the child – and help in childcare, which frees one from the intensive demands of children.

⁶³ In my corpus, babies were also qualified as enjoying [*profiter*] parents, grand-parents – and being in a day-care centre.

[z] [My partner] went to his parents' place though, so it's true that if he wants to get some rest, he can hand the [child] over to his own mother. So it's true there are other people around to take care of [the child], and it's true that he's realizing all there is to be done, even if you're not preparing the meals, doing the shopping, so it's-, he's *savouring the good times*.

According to the psychoanalyst Sylvie Giampino, the idea that the quality of time spent with children takes precedence over quantity, salient in the 1970s and 80s, may have served to lessen the guilt of mothers (a logic appealed to in excerpt x), but is losing ground in contemporary France. For this author, the notion lost its 'calming virtue' when the contents of 'quality time' came to be defined. A 'quality-time-mother' was in fact construed as a compensating mother, able to 'cope' with being totally available when at home and making this time pleasurable (an enterprise which may turn out to be difficult, as suggested in excerpt y and aa). Giampino writes:

The ideology of availability evokes the image of a smiling mother, attentive, who plays with her children after coming home from work, closely monitors their development, takes charge of their leisure, cooks them appropriate and appetizing meals. The mother does not get angry, does not impose constraints or frustrations on them. The ideology of attention supports the idea that the ordinary mother retrieves a kind of state of bliss once her work is over, her ideal mother visage. Without fatigue, material constraints, without personal needs, without tensions.

[Giampino 2000: 204]⁶⁴

Parents, however, do not automatically retrieve a state of grace once out of their workplaces. Reciprocally, children may not be willing to cooperate during the time that they are home; bathing a tantrum-throwing toddler may put the faith of any wage-earning parent in 'quality time' on trial. The following mother conveys something of the *malaise* that may arise from such a paradoxical 'ideology of availability', using the verb *profiter*.

[aa] on weekends, I care more for her *a priori* [than the father], and especially as on weekends she's glued to me, as if she wanted to compensate. I can't move from one room to another without her sticking to me so I *can enjoy being with my child* quite a lot on week-end.

⁶⁴ According to Giampino, this ideology implies not only the total availability of the wage-earning mother to her children after work and paying them attention, but also procuring them *pleasure*. This may generate impossible demands from children that undermine educational objectives [ibid.].

Gosset, in her French study, sees mother-guilt as stemming from a particular social construct of the child:

The actual tendency legitimates children's feelings as a primal truth, inviting parents to bend to a child's demands. If the child complains, it is because he really has reasons to do so, and it's an imperative to remedy its suffering. A most recommendable principle, if only it wasn't that the child is, by nature, a creator of needs. Response to one desire immediately engenders a new one. But that is something that most parents ignore.

[Gosset 2004: 77]⁶⁵

This contention is an interesting one. In Chris Jenk's terms, it expresses a societal tension between an Apollonian child and a Dionysian child, two dominant ways to speak about children in contemporary Western thought [Jenks 1999: 70–80].

The model of the Apollonian child is that of one born good and morally unflawed. Jenks writes:

Such infants are angelic, innocent and untainted by the world which they have recently entered. They have a natural goodness and clarity of vision that we might 'idolize' or even 'worship' as the source of all that is best in human nature [...]

[Jenks 1999: 73]

Defined in this way, the Apollonian child deserves nurturance, special treatment and care, a fostering of its uniqueness and individuality from adults; consequently if the child does not 'turn out right', or is damaged, the parents or a corrupt society are to blame [Jenks 1999: 93; Lawler 2000: 38]⁶⁶. Sharon Hays mentions three central elements in modern child-rearing advice, which are to:

...understand each child as an individual, to be attentive to the child's needs and wants, and to follow rather than force a child's development

[Hays 1996: 46]

It is also on such pathways of thought that mothers and fathers may consider

⁶⁵ In making this statement, Gosset refers to Giampino 2000: 97; see also Gosset page 89.

⁶⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau is often identified as the forefather of the codification of the child as an innocent, 'noble' and sacred being – and of contemporary child-rearing principles. He namely 'argued that child-rearing practices should follow from the development of the child's inner nature' [Hays 1996: 25–26; 31]. The French philosopher also drew the attention of cultivated contemporaries to the importance of mother-child relationships [Knibiehler 2000: 64]. His ideas, however, were to germinate slowly in Western Europe. Although they do not use the terms Apollonian and Dionysian child, Dally [1982: 86–103] and Hays [1996: 45] also depict a corresponding shift in Western child-rearing fashions instituted by psychoanalysis.

parenting in terms of ‘personal growth’ – an idea somewhat more salient in the Finnish interviews of the study (a point which will be returned to consequently)⁶⁷.

The Dionysian child, on the contrary, is wild and inhabited by unrealistic desires. It needs distant and strict moral guidance, even physical direction. Socializing the child consists of ‘breaking’ a subject for its ‘own good’. Indeed, child or children, according to this vision:

...enter the world as a wilful material force, they are impish and harbour a potential evil. This primal force will be mobilized if, in any part, the adult world should allow them to stray away from the appropriate path that the blueprint of human culture has provided for them. [...] [The Dionysian child] loves pleasure, it celebrates self-gratification and it is wholly demanding in relation to any object, or indeed subject, that prevents its satiation

[Jenks 1999: 71]

Competitive and incompatible as these two representations may be, they still often cohabit in late modernity⁶⁸. While the Apollonian child seems to have become the dominant ‘public’ way for regarding the child, and informs child-centred pedagogy and expert models of childhood, its Dionysian counterpart, however, Jenks suggests, is still alive and kicking, namely in the works of Freud [ibid. 72; see also Lawler 2000: 32]⁶⁹.

Lawler [2000: 30–33] draws our attention to the importance of the question of desire and fantasy, a terrain occupied by psychoanalysis, for our understanding of contemporary mothering. She pinpoints that, from the contemporary Euro-American perspective:

What is useful, and even subversive, about the Freudian and Lacanian accounts is the designation of infantile desires as insatiable, as incapable of fulfilment. The mother *cannot* provide the love that the infant desires

[Lawler 2000: 32]⁷⁰

⁶⁷ On the idea, purported by some psychologists and psychoanalysts, that ‘children produce their parents’ in the French media, see Mehl 2003: 64. This feature also resembles the idea that love of the idealized other is associated to the ‘growth of personality’ or ‘rebirth’ [Luhmann 1998: 167, 168].

⁶⁸ Both models colonize political visions of moral order and, Lawler seems to suggest, may be class specific (e.g. see Lawler 2000: 38–39, 40–43). The Dionysian child, as the ‘other’ of the Apollonian child, may also be race specific. Indeed, calls for a restoration of ‘authority’ in France, for example, have been essentially directed towards ‘uncivil’ youths of the Parisian suburbs.

⁶⁹ Hays relates how Freudian visions of the Dionysian child were tamed: a child’s sexual ‘drives’, for example, came to be understood as benign [1996: 46].

⁷⁰ Psychoanalysis also provides an ‘emplotment’ of our lives, due to the importance that is attributed to early childhood experiences. [Lawler 2000: 31].

Now, Lawler holds that in non-Kleinian object-relation theories, in contrast with Freudian and Lacanian accounts, the child's desires are framed as *realistic*, i.e. susceptible to be satisfied through 'good enough mothering', so that the child's desires become identified with 'needs' [Lawler 2000: 31; see also Chodorow & Contratto 1982: 195⁷¹]. This may contribute to Lawler qualifying the standards Winnicott sets for mothers as '*an absorption with the child to an extent which approaches insanity*' [Lawler 2000: 49]⁷².

While in France, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic clinical practice has enjoyed a position of institutional authority, in Britain, clinicians such as Winnicott, Bowlby and Klein and object-relation theories which focus on the mother-child dyad, have been more influent. This consideration as such suggests that the salience of Apollonian and Dionysian repertoires may vary cross-nationally according to the prominence of different schools of psychoanalytical thought and different clinical practices.

The contention formulated by Gosset above, (who refers to a French psychoanalyst), for example, can in this light be considered as an indicator of enduring Dionysian/Freudian visions of childhood in the France in the early 2000s⁷³. Similarly, this influence may contribute to explain why, in the land of Rousseau, child-centred pedagogy has never achieved, in the public educational system, the status which it enjoys in North America or the Nordic countries, for example. It also helps to understand such practices as spanking a toddler, absent from the accounts of Finnish parents participating in the research⁷⁴.

⁷¹ Chodorow and Contratto find a striking continuity between psychologically oriented feminist writings of the late 1970s and early 1980s and culture at large: '*these writings suggest that not only mothers can be perfect but also that the child's needs [...] are necessarily legitimate and must be met. Such an implication persists in the most subtle and sophisticated feminist accounts*' [1982: 195].

⁷² Another critique she addresses to this British psychoanalyst is that he makes the process of becoming an 'ordinarily devoted mother' sound easy: '*If a child can play with a doll, you can be an ordinarily devoted mother*' [1964: 16] [Lawler 2000: 49 quoting Winnicott op. cit.].

⁷³ Indeed, children's needs are a 'hot area' in Nordic public discussions and it seems to me that Gosset's contention would seem atypical in a Finnish academic text.

⁷⁴ According to the *Europeans and Violence Against Children* Eurobarometer, 35.3 percent of the French found that violence against children was very common in their country, while only 6.2 percent of the Finnish did. When asked if physical punishment by parents or other relatives constituted a form of violence against children, the French also had the highest 'no' score: 48.6 percent, while only 30.7 of Finns and 9.1 percent of Swedes considered that it was not a form of violence [1999: 5, 23]. These results concur with the interview data.

DIONYSIAN WHIMS AND APOLLONIAN NEEDS

In a 2006 radio broadcast, contemporary French child-rearing guru and paediatrician, Edwige Antier, denounced traditional attitudes harboured by older generations in France, and qualified French culture as ‘mean’ with babies. She was particularly referring to typical advice given by grandparents to young parents faced with a baby’s crying: letting the infant cry.

Antier underscored an interesting phenomenon: that of the French categorizing babies’ or a toddler’s demands as ‘caprices’ [whims], which parents are to resist⁷⁵. ‘Whims’, I would argue, are the demands of a Dionysian child, while ‘needs’ are those of the Apollonian child⁷⁶.

A rare supporter of an Apollonian a vision of childhood in the French media, Edwige Antier has also been a proponent of long breast-feeding, temporary homemaking, and anti-authoritarian attitudes towards infants.

Furthermore, it is interesting to consider the hypothesis that Freudian visions of the child amongst a certain enlightened, intellectual French elite influenced by psychoanalysis may paradoxically concord with the traditional Catholic vision of the Dionysian child –, still prevailing in some bourgeois *milieus* – and, more generally, amongst elder generations. Hence, as implied by Stephanie Gosset, this vision is the subject of an intra-national division. While as an expert herself, she may contend that ‘the’ child is Dionysian [Freudian], she recognizes simultaneously that the French mothers having taken care leave in her research held another type of view, somewhat more attuned to the British Apollonian view of things.

On this point, my analysis concurs, in part, with hers⁷⁷: in mother-talk, often, ‘*it so happens that what the infant needs to have, the mother wants to give*’ [Lawler 2000: 49]. Maternal presence figures among these ‘needs’.

Being there

Another modality still of the phrase *profiter de mon enfant*, when examined in the light of rhetorical context, is associated to the idea that the mother is endeavouring to be present for her child, to meet the child’s needs. In excerpts [ab–ad], for example, the expression of enjoyment is immediately associated to the assertion that the mother does not take the child to the childminder as often as she could. In short, mothers often convey the idea that they seize every opportunity to be with their child.

⁷⁵ 24.05.2006, *Enfances* on radio France Inter.

⁷⁶ Delaisi de Parseval & Lallemand also mention the use of the term but suggest that this framework of thought has considerably dwindled in France since the 1970s [1998: 11].

⁷⁷ Amongst highly educated French mothers, Apollonian beliefs are gaining a stronger hold and women testified to this in the interviews.

Maternal availability is one of the central features of the construction of the contemporary mother role [Hays 1996; de Singly 1996: 171; Katvala 2001: 50–51; Gosset 2004: 11]. For Giampino, the Western mother's guilt is linked to 'absence', be it her physical absence because of her job, or the lack of mental availability due to the mental burden of work after hours or housework⁷⁸. Hence, if guilt is not explicitly mentioned in the excerpts from interviews below, the notion of duty and the necessity to legitimate one's conduct is strongly present.

[ab] Last week, I worked office hours every day, so, well, [the child] went there [to the childminder's] every day. Now, depending on my schedule, it always depends on my schedule in fact – I mean I also chose this job because *I can enjoy being with my child*, to see him during the day, during the week etc., to be able to do stuff with him – so I don't take him to the childminder's, well, not systematically. Sometimes, I only entrust him to her for a few hours or so, so that I can take a nap or something.

[ac] So it depends, when I have periods during which I don't work, well, I'll take my time more, *to enjoy being with my child*. For example, recently I had a very, very busy month... [so the month after] on certain mornings, I, er, I clearly sensed that she missed Mummy [laugh] and Daddy and the house etc. So, on some mornings, I'd take her [as late as] 11:30 or 12:00 to the childminder.

[ad] On the days I was on duty, we'd see little of each other [with her partner], but as I have a lot of time off in compensation, I finally found enough time *to enjoy being with them*. And on my days off, I took care of my daughter; I did not take her to the childminder, except if I had stuff to get done, formalities.

In the following passages, the expression *profiter* is employed by mothers in the research who were not able to work at all, or as much as they might wish to. The opportunist sense of the expression is strongly present, but paradoxically, in the sense of a lost opportunity to work. In some of the excerpts, the expression of enjoyment is evoked to counter the distress that is also conveyed.

[ae] So I told myself, "There were are, I'll never find work pregnant, *so I want to make the most of it, I'll enjoy my maternity leave, I'll stop working, so I'll make the most of it.*" So what did I want to say?

[af] [My maternity leave was quite short but] I was laid off this summer and now *I make the most of it*, I make up for the past... and if I don't work for the moment, well, [I] also *enjoy [my child]*.

[ag] More than 10 hours, I don't know many people who are able to work for more than 10 hours per day. So it's difficult to find childcare for more than 10 hours a day and um... it's true that it's a bit of a problem as regards the organization of the day and because I must leave late [for work] and return home early [from work]. At

⁷⁸ Full-time mothers in France, on the other hand, experience guilt because they may lack patience; doubt that they may be over-mothering their children; because they consider that they should help their partners to cope financially; or *vis-à-vis* their parents who invested in their human capital, and of which the 'profit rate' is undermined by mothering. [Giampino 2000: 19].

the same time, *I get to enjoy being with my child* and my employer is cool [laugh] – happily enough... and I don't take a break every 5 minutes, either.

The following quote is a message posted on a Web discussion board:

[ah] I'll phone my employer tomorrow to tell him that I agree [to quit my job] 1) I'll be able to care for my little ones 2) I hardly lose any money if I stay at home and *I can enjoy being with my children* 3) I needn't take all that crap from those hypocrites 4) all in all, I'm fed up of fighting with everybody and everything and finally I surrender 5) I don't have to work weekends and on bank holidays? OK so now I'm going berserk is there a doctor in the room?⁷⁹

My intention here, in underlining the existence of paradoxical rhetorical contexts and uses of the verb *profiter*, is not to argue that these mothers do not enjoy their child's company – the analysis endeavours to focus on discourse on experience rather than experience *per se*. Rather, I note that as hedonist 'savouring' becomes an altruistic gesture; an effort; a norm – or a 'fatality' because the mother is deprived of work – the what and how of that which is being communicated become increasingly disjoint. The following excerpt is paradigmatic of this fact.

'Profiter de mon enfant': a French 'formule de politesse'?

In one of the interviews of Parisian mothers, the expression *profiter* appears as a rhetorical ornament, a *formule de politesse* of sorts addressed to the 'sacred' child. Numerous precautions are taken by this mother to signify that a child can also hinder adults' desires, be cumbersome, (i.e. that parents do not always appreciate the company of the child). Significantly, the passage begins with: *I don't know how to say this*, followed by *It's not that...* [interrupted sentence]⁸⁰. Two other circumlocutions are then deployed to assert that the mother *couldn't live without* the child *anymore for sure*, and that the couple is *glad to enjoy* him. Only then does she proceed to express the idea that the couple also craves for two-some time.

The *formule de politesse* asserts that if the parents do not at all times and invariably enjoy the company of the child, someone else will.

⁷⁹ <http://forum.aufeminin.com> (processed in March 2005)

⁸⁰ A counterfactual variant of this phrase, as Scheff [1997: 27–28] would put it could be: *It's not that* [we don't love our child].

[ai] I don't know how to say this. It's not that. I couldn't live without [the child] anymore, for sure, now that he's here, but it's true for example that we're glad when he's off to sleep in the evenings and we're just the two of us, because we've spent time with him, *we're glad to enjoy him*, but we're also glad to be just the two of us... it's true that our long mornings in bed don't exist anymore... but, well, then we find compromises, say, 'oh well, look, you're going to go to grandmother's, that way granny will be able to *enjoy you*, that way Mummy and Daddy can be a twosome, do things they can't do with you'.

Two overlapping interpretations of this message full of delicacy arise. Firstly, the rhetorical precautions employed by this mother may be destined to counter any negative interpretation by the researcher, as if admitting the constraints imposed by the toddler might lead to my understanding that the parents do not somehow love their child. As suggested by the preceding analysis, this may be deemed necessary as maternal love and enjoyment are two sides of the same coin (as the latter has become an 'objective' indicator of the former).

Secondly, they may function to overcome the contradiction between the emotionally 'priceless' child [Zelizer 1994] and the 'troublesome' toddler, evoked in the preceding chapters: between their Apollonian *and* Dionysian child.

One practical solution to this dilemma was proposed to the above mother by colleagues:

[ah] I have a friend who always told me: "It's true, it's very tough, you love them," she told me, "*you'll tell your son, 'you're troublesome but we love you', that's what it's like*", but it is true that's it not so easy that, er, 'day-to-day living' is not so rosy.

Civilizing the Dionysian child and parent

In his essay, *The Civilizing of Parents*, Norbert Elias has written a passage evoking the encounter between a mother and her young child in contemporary Western culture – a child, who, for Elias, is visibly a Dionysian one – in these terms:

Today, it can happen that the mother experiences a sort of shock – a baby shock – when she finds herself confronted with the untamed animalism of her young child. Only the child's relative smallness and relative weakness conceals the intensity of infants' greed and the strength of their desire from parents. The fact that children have quite strong instinctual needs, prefigurative forms of sexuality, was only brought to adult consciousness in the twentieth century through Freud's discoveries. For many, this has remained an unwelcome message to the present day.

[Elias 1998c: 193]

This encounter, Elias suggests, may have been particularly difficult in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Because sexuality was then placed behind the social scenes, the author suggests that the reserve which adults had to impose on themselves may have led to the understanding that children were the only group somehow free from the 'sin' of sexuality: '*innocent as angels*' [1998: 193]. He thus suggests a trail of explanation for the emergence of Jenks' Apollonian child. As children generally did not live up to these expectations, progeny was under intense scrutiny for potentially deviant acts. For Elias, this contradiction between the innocent angel (i.e. the Apollonian child) and the Dionysian child's (inevitable) manifestations of sexuality, may explain the harshness of discipline towards children during this period [Elias 1998c: 193–194].

Traditional notions of authority are now crumbling. For Norbert Elias, changes in relationships between parents and children are inseparable from changes in relations between citizens and the state.

The structure of the family, the socially given relationship between man, woman and child, changes in connection with, and corresponding to, the larger society it is part of

[Elias 1998c: 207]

A 'civilizing of parents' has also occurred through an increased surveillance of parents by the state – and on a self-imposed basis [Elias 1998c: 207]. Informalization and self-control thereby create a paradox:

That the informalization of the parent-child relationship and the loosening of traditional taboos in inter-generational relations goes hand in hand with the tightening of taboos against violence in relations between parents and children, and demands – perhaps even forces – a higher degree of self-control on both sides, is one of the many examples of the complexity of the civilizing movement in our time.

[Elias 1998c: 207]

Elias' essay does not account for the contemporary idealization of children, which Laurence Gavarini has named *la passion de l'enfant* [2001]. The idealization of mother-love, however, I have argued in this chapter, is an important generating principle of the discursive matrix of motherhood. This piece of the puzzle is tackled at its roots in the conclusion below.

Conclusion – Profiter as passion

An analysis of rhetorical contexts in this chapter demonstrates that the use of an identical figure of speech ranges from the designation of some of the 'magic

moments' of parenthood to a formulaic use. In the latter case, *profiter de mon enfant* functions as a euphemism. It does not substitute for an inoffensive expression to designate the ambiguous realities of everyday life with very young children as the euphemism *It's a short time* does, – rather, it implies that spending time with one's child is invariably a joy.

In conclusion, I will attempt to read such a codification of mother-child relationships through the prism provided by Niklas Luhmann in *Love as Passion. The Codification of Intimacy* (see also sub-chapter 5.2 The contemporary codification of maternal *philia*). Luhmann notes that taking up *intensive* personal relationships (in his case intimate relationships between adults):

...is only possible if one has cultural traditions, literary texts, convincingly evocative linguistic patterns and situational images – in short, if one can fall back on time-worn structures of semantics.

[Luhmann 1998: 39]

On the other hand, Luhmann suggests that the necessity of cultural schemata as a resource and guide to experience, or as a symbolic code for communicating effectively in particular kinds of relationships – particularly when scripts become stylized to an extreme –, may be at odds with sincerity, authenticity, spontaneity and transparency (also understood as pillars of intimate relationships).

The menace of incommunicability may indeed threaten personal relations, characterized by a high degree of 'interpersonal penetration' of two individual life worlds. By this concept, Luhmann theorizes intimacy as constituted by relationships in which the whole personality of another individual becomes significant for another [ibid: 13]. He writes:

... One can characterize intimacy by saying that in it, the [selective] inner experience of the partner, not just his actions, becomes relevant for the actions of the other person.

[Luhmann 1998: 158]

In other words, intimacy as a system of communication is also about rules:

... which prescribe that in certain social situations one must be receptive in principle to everything about another person, must refrain from showing indifference towards what the other finds of great personal relevance and in turn must leave no question unanswered, even if and especially when this centres on matters of a personal nature.

[Luhmann 1998: 13–14]

Various *topoi* in French and German culture were used to describe such a relational model. During French Classicism, it was commonly claimed that:

...nothing was trifling in love, emphasized that fulfilling one's duties was incompatible with love, and that it was not enough to do all that was demanded of one, but rather one had to anticipate the other's wishes.

[Luhmann 1998: 158]

For German Idealism:

'Making the other's relation to the world one's own meant enjoying it with him'

[Ibid.]

Luhmann's description of the codification of intimate heterosexual adult relationships –, his emphasis on their communicative, intensive, receptive, and anticipative character – is largely relevant for thinking contemporary parent-child relationships, particularly that of the mother and child. Indeed, it has been argued that parents are devoting more time than ever to primary face-to-face interaction with their offspring, conforming in this to contemporary child-rearing culture which encourages more *'direct, and intense interaction with children'* [Bittman 2004: 226–227]. 'Intense' is also the term that Sharon Hays utilizes to characterize contemporary modes of relating – as does Luhmann for adult love 1998: 13 – and practices that middle-class mothers were the first to adopt. The latter include: demonstrating the importance of the child for the parent; procuring happiness; being attentive; listening to the child; knowledge of the child's intimate interests and desires; being attuned to the child's needs and extending one's understanding of the child as an individual. [Hays 1996: 110–113].

Precisely, for Luhmann, the crystallized semantics of love –, since the mid-seventeenth century as love took the form of *amour passion* –, *'helped advance and assert the process of differentiation'* and individualization through processes of reciprocal intensive identity building in a context of increased social differentiation and mobility [1998: 158]. Like other authors, he argues that, as opportunities [and obligations] of engaging in an array of impersonal relationships are extended in a complex society, the construction, stylization, maintenance and affirmation of personal identities become the function of close relationships (see also Berger & Kellner 1988; de Singly 1996a). Mothers are now *mothering the self* of the child [Lawler 2000].

Anna Rotkirch has taken Hay's cue even further, purporting that parent-child bonds are liable to be invested, not only as an 'intense' relationship, but by an ideal of a 'total' relationship, as an alternative to negotiated and contractual

models of ‘pure relationships’ [Giddens 1992], – as well as an antidote to the ‘daily experience of fragmentation’ in contemporaneity [2000b: 189, 192].

Importantly, however, the type of intense child-rearing depicted by Hays, Dally, Furedi, Warner, etc., has been sentimentally moored and explicitly designated as ‘love’. Such a categorization may go unnoticed today (an indicator of the naturalization of this way of thinking about family relationships). However, in order to alert us to its historical specificity, Hays writes:

Many American mothers [and fathers] would argue that their child-rearing ideas and practices flow from the love they ‘naturally’ feel for their children. And it is true that one can find fairly consistent evidence that parents have always and everywhere experienced a strong emotional response to their young. But that emotional response has not always and everywhere been understood as ‘love’, and it has led to widely varied practises in the history of American society and in cultures around the globe. The ideology of intensive mothering is a very specific and highly elaborate set of ideas that goes well beyond any simple emotional response to children.

[Hays 1996: 14]

It seems reasonable, therefore, to argue that key features of the codification of adult intimacy and love have been imported and become central also in relations of descent (see chapter 5).

* * *

When reading Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, I was struck by a passage in which the writer depicts an analogous communicational knot between lovers, – one suggested by Luhmann – and which seems to inhabit the actualization of the code of mother-love.

This namely occurred while reading a scene in which the nineteenth-century French novelist depicts Emma Bovary as she reproaches her lover for not thinking about her enough. In order to convince Rodolphe of her true love, Emma has recourse to a repertory of romantic superlatives. But for Rodolphe, his mistress’s exaltation represents but the ‘*eternal monotony of passion, with its unchanging formulas, its stereotyped expressions*’. Because the social script of the scene (see e.g. Bozon & Giami 1999; Hochschild 2003: 56; Miller 2005) is too predictable, and has already been performed by other lovers to him, Rodolphe is incapable of defining the nature of Emma’s sentiments under the *clichés* she voices.

But while Emma’s lover is inclined to think that ‘*exaggerated turns of speech conceal mediocre affections*’, Flaubert counters his character’s assessment by stating that the stalest of metaphors may abound with the most intense of emotions:

...as if the fullness of the soul might not sometimes overflow in the emptiest of metaphors, since no one, ever, can give the exact measurements of his needs, nor of his conceptions, nor of his sufferings, and the human word is like a cracked cauldron upon which we beat out melodies fit for making bears dance when we are trying to move the stars to pity.

[Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, 1983: 224 (1856)]⁸¹

In this scene, Gustave Flaubert evokes two types of communicational impasses. Firstly, he seems to refer to intrinsic difficulties of translating complex human experiences into language. Secondly, he can be read as pointing to an excessive codification of discourse on love, which seems to have disempowered (male) passion; as expressing the idea that romantic love – ‘*has been taken prisoner by discourse*’ [Illouz 1998: 161, citing Ignatieff 1988]⁸².

Inasmuch as we accept the premise that mother-child relations are also social matters which are culturally codified or scripted – I have argued in this direction above –, *Profiter de mon enfant*, can be read in a similar light. Mothers can be viewed as (occasionally) having been ‘*taken prisoners*’ of discourse on mother-love. As regards the communicational impasses observed in chapter 4, instead of considering any in-built communicational obstacles inherent in language, the analysis in *The Discursive Matrix* has focussed upon the socially constituted boundaries of speech *about mothering* as they actualize in activities amongst peers, kin, or in internal conversations⁸³.

Importantly, talk about mothering, which arises in particular social conditions (specific, material, social, cultural and familial contexts of child-rearing), is often interpreted as talk about mother-child relationships (assessed in terms of proper emotions). It is thus de-contextualized. The object of interaction becomes the cultivation or social maintenance of an ‘extralocal’ [Smith 1987: 25] construct and matrix of experience: the relational model of ‘motherhood’ coded as ‘love’ and ‘enjoyment’.

Indeed, in *It’s Such a Short and Special Time*’ [chapter 4], it appeared that when the script of happy mothering is not respected – in depictions of paradoxical

⁸¹ The English translation of the quote was found at <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/23093.html>

⁸² Illouz cites Ignatieff, M. (1988) Love’s Progress. *Times Literary Supplement*. April: 15–21. *Madame Bovary* has been seen as the narrative *par excellence* of the illusionary power of love-ideology: as the story of a [female] character crossing the frontier between Romanesque fiction as portrayed in novels – and reality – and the tragic consequences of such an act for a woman in the nineteenth century [Illouz 1998: 162].

⁸³ Of course, when Luhmann refers to communicational impasses, he is speaking of those between two adult lovers, while here I am not speaking of impasses between the two protagonists which are mother and child.

cal or negative maternal experiences, for example –, euphemizing and temporizing were liable to actualize in the guise of discursive impediments or solutions for containing improper emotions in the boundaries of the code and decency. Hedonist-romantic relational scripts of mothering thereby appear as eminently moral schemata kept in shape during social interactions. Such order is achieved between dynamics of incitement for performing proper speech acts of mother-love; of exclusion; and public assistance: the cultivating and tinkering of maternal emotions during interactions, which also contributes to the social accomplishment of decency in mother-talk.

PART THREE

III

**CULTIVATING DECENCY
AND EMOTION**

7 Maternal techniques of self: settling in the matrix

‘Well’, she says, after the car has disappeared. Her son watches her adoringly, expectantly. She is the animating principle, the life of the house. Its rooms are sometimes larger than they should be; they sometimes, suddenly, contain things he’s never seen before. He watches her, and waits.

‘Well, now’, she says.

Here, then, is the daily transition. With her husband present, she is more nervous but less afraid. She knows how to act. Alone with Richie, she sometimes feels unmoored – he is so entirely, persuasively himself. He wants what he wants so avidly. He cries mysteriously, makes undecipherable demands, courts her, pleads her, ignores her. He seems, almost always, to be waiting to see what she will do next. She knows, or at least suspects, that other mothers must maintain a body of rules and, more to the point, an *ongoing mother-self* to guide them in negotiating the days spent alone with a child. When her husband is here, she can manage it. She can see him seeing her, and she knows almost instinctively how to treat the boy kindly and firmly, with an affectionate maternal offhandedness that seems effortless. Alone with the child, though, she loses direction. She can’t always remember how a mother would act.

[...]

She say’s to Richie, ‘Guess what we are going to do today? We are going to make a cake for your father’s birthday. Oh, what a big job in front of us’

[...]

Laura watches him through the meandering vine of cigarette smoke. She will not go upstairs, and return to her book. She will remain. She will do what is required, and more.

[...]

She sighs. She gently touches his hair.

‘Now then’, she says. ‘Are you ready to do another one?’

He nods with such guileless, unguarded enthusiasm that her throat constricts in a spasm of love. It seems suddenly very easy to bake a cake, to raise a child. She loves her son purely, as mothers do – she does not resent him, does not wish to leave. She loves her husband, she is glad to be married. It seems possible [it does not seem impossible] that *she’s slipped across an invisible line, the line that has always separated her from what she would prefer to feel, who she would prefer to be*. It does not seem impossible that she has undergone a subtle but profound transformation, here in this kitchen, at this most ordinary of moments: She has caught up with herself. *She has*

worked so hard, so long, in such good faith, and now she's gotten the knack of living happily, as herself, the way a child learns at a particular moment to balance a two-wheel bicycle. It seems that she will be fine. She will not lose hope. She will not mourn her lost possibilities, her unexplored talents [what if she has no talents after all?]. She will remain devoted to her son, her husband, her home and duties, all her gifts. She will want this second child.

[Michael Cunningham. *{The} Hours* 2002: 47–79, emphasis added]¹

7.1 FOUCAULT AND TECHNOLOGIES OF THE SELF

In this chapter, maternal decency defined as ‘*the quality of conforming to standards of propriety and morality*’ and respectability [see also Jallinoja 1997: 208–214]² is delved upon not only in terms of proper conduct in acts or speech and the management of overtness and covertness – but in terms of cultivating positive existential postures and emotions and struggling with negative ones – as subjective achievement. Such processes of government of self are examined as recourse by mothers to types of *logoi*, or discourses, which have been identified as available in Western contemporaneousness for dealing with the life event of transition to motherhood [chapters 4 & 7].

In Western culture, the psychosocial formation of discourse [Vuori 2001] has chiefly constructed the mother-role from the point of view of the development of the child. Another dominant focus-point has been ‘reconciling’ work and family life as ‘choice’. Vuori has highlighted the paucity of images of the mother: ‘*the mother can be either the enthousiastic homemaker or the working mother*’ [ibid. 371]. Both discursive ‘clearings’ have implicated experts and policy makers, even if somewhat more complex lay experiences and accounts of maternal identity are popping up in the public sphere. The latter are examined here in part through the lense of that which mothers ‘*do of their selves*’ [Foucault 1994: 213] when they encounter the social gendered parental role at transition to parenthood – a fairly unexplored topic.

Steph Lawler has tackled the issue in *Mothering the Self*. She evokes the ‘*cramped spaces*’³ in which mothers are placed, faced as they are with common-

¹ The novel was selected as Best Book of 1998 by *The New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Publishers Weekly* and won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1999. *The Hours* was also to become a box-office success a few years later. Meryl Streep, Julianne Moore, and Nicole Kidman were united by Stephen Daldry, the director of *Billy Elliot*. Both films appear as an exploration of individual struggles with the historically specific social boundaries of gender in the construction of personal identities, male or female, straight or gay.

² <<http://www.onelook.com/?w=decency&ls=a>>

³ A term which she borrows from Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of Freedom. Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (page 280).

sense and commonplace understandings of motherhood [2000: 168–169]. As meeter’s of children’s ‘needs’, she insightfully argues, mothers are left with only with ‘desires’ to manage [ibid.149–167].

Adrienne Rich describes the effect of becoming a mother in such a framework of thought in these terms:

Most of the literature of infant care and psychology has assumed that the process toward individuation is essentially the *child’s* drama, played out against and with the parent or parents who are, for better or worse, givens. Nothing could have prepared me for the realization that I *was* a mother, one of these givens, when I knew I was still in a state of uncreation myself.

[Adrienne Rich 1997: 36]

Walkerdine and Lucy have put this somewhat more blandly:

Nobody within a discourse of meeting needs talks about the mother; what effect being ‘constantly available’ has on her. No one talks about how she must constantly struggle to maintain the rich environment of which she is guardian or how much hidden effort is made; while the child is enjoying ‘liberation’ and autonomy, this to some extent depends on the mother’s oppression.

[Walkerdine & Lucy 1989: 106 (original emphasis), quoted by Lawler 2000: 149]⁴

So if in the contemporary ‘regime of the self’ the values of identity, choice, autonomy and self-realization have become increasingly significant in our shaping of the self [Rose 1999: xxiv; Lawler 2000: 24], one of the *loci* in which such a project may turn out to be the most problematic is motherhood [Lawler 2000: 158]⁵. This issue is a thread which runs through the chapter. To this end, the inspiration for the analysis came from Michel Foucault’s toolbox.

Circa 1980, Michel Foucault reframes his work *ex-post*, declaring that the object of his *oeuvre* has been the subject and not power – and thus ‘complicates the study of governmentalities through the exploration of the care of the self’ [Gros 2006: 512, original emphasis]. From the viewpoint of such an intellec-

⁴ Walkerdine, V. & H. Lucy [1989] *Democracy in the kitchen: Regulating Mothers and Socialising Daughters*. London: Virago.

⁵ Feminist critique of the notion of ‘autonomy’ has indeed underscored the inherent gendered bias of such a notion. Carol Gilligan has formulated this problematic in terms of a dilemma between an ethic of justice and an ethic of care [1993]. The morality of autonomy and achievement has been typically masculine. That of care and a morality of connection and responsibility towards others have characterized women’s world views and socialization. The question for women, according to Gilligan then becomes: How do we take responsibilities for the care of others without abandoning or relinquishing oneself? A solution she proposes is reflexivity: care of oneself and for others [1993: 128–150]. Such a reflection, however, would deserve to be enriched by a discussion on reciprocity. Mother’s caring capacities are related to the care that she receives or fails to receive.

tual matrix, his works have tackled: ‘*the emergence of the subject from social practices of division*’ [in his books on madness and the prison]; ‘*the emergence of the subject in theoretical projections*’ [through the study of the disciplinary discursive formations of the sciences of man]; ‘*and finally, with the ‘new formula’ of History of Sexuality, ‘the emergence of the subject in practices of the self*’ [ibid; see also Martin et al. 1988: 3].

In the latter, rather than being viewed as constituted by techniques of domination or power [normalization, classification, identification, etc.]; or discursive techniques in serious speech acts of knowledge – the subject is scrutinized as constituted by means of techniques of the self [Gros 2006: 512].

In a text bearing the title ‘Technologies of Self’ [1988], Michel Foucault recalls his project when he set out to study the history of sexuality. His sole concern was not the permission or the prohibition of acts, but also the feelings, desires, thoughts, the drives, ‘*any mouvement of the soul*’ for which individuals were compelled to scrutinize themselves as subjects of their ‘sexuality’. Acts and deeds of sex, were indeed, encircled by rules of modesty, decency, secrecy, while subjects were incited to tell the truth. For the author, ‘*The association of prohibition and strong incitations to speak is a constant feature of our culture*’. [Foucault 1988a: 16–17].

Indeed, the Finnish and French discursive matrixes also appear as inhabited by such paradoxal injunctions: a generalized therapeutic ethos on the one hand (e.g. Mehl 2003), and a social engineering or informal cultivating of decency in mother-talk on the other. According to Foucault, hermeneutics of the subject have been ‘*diffused across Western culture through numerous channels*’, as Greek techné of self-governemnt or care of the self, or as introspection in Christian confessional practices and psychoanalysis for example. By such practices of the self he refers to:

the procedures, which no doubt exist in every civilization, offered and prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge
[Foucault 1994: 213, quoted by Gros 2006: 513]

Foucault thus bunks – or relativizes – reflexivity as a modern good. The philosopher, however, is not only interested in the scrutiny of the self, but also the modes of forming, training, and modifying human materials, so that individuals acquire skills and *attitudes* required for self-stylizing. Amongst the latter are:

technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and a way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.

[Foucault 1988a: 18]⁶

The passage quoted in the opening of the chapter –, Cunningham’s extraordinarily sensitive scene of the internal management of emotions and decency by Laura Brown in 1949 in a broiling American suburb during the ‘golden age of the housewife’ – can be read in this light. In it, Laura evokes her quest for an ‘*ongoing mother-self*’; her will to be content in her roles of wife and mother; her wish to love her son unambiguously; her unexploited potentialities. She wonders if she has not caught up with the self she is supposed to have. Caught in the webs of a historically and socially specific matrix in which alternative identities were not available, this inmate of a total or greedy institution of sorts [Goffman 1991; Coser 1974], she decides to ‘unbecome a mother’ [Gustafson 2005] – and finally abandons her family. On the verge of suicide, her act is one of caring for herself.

For Foucault ‘care of the self’ was to uphold a relationship of self to self, so that the latter became the principle which governed the subject’s relationship to the world and so that the demands of others were kept in *appropriate limits and forms* [Gros 2006: 538–539].

The function of the practice of the self was above all the accurate definition of the degrees, modalities, duration and circumstances of the activity one was induced to devote to others [...] we should then conceive of the culture of the self less as a choice opposed to political, civic, economic and familial activity, than as a way of keeping this activity within what are thought to be the appropriate limits and forms.

[Foucault quoted by Gros 2006: 538 and 539]⁷

In another time and place, the chapter explores accounts of ‘settling’ into maternity and shouldering the requisites of a gendered parental role and the government of self during maternity leave: at a time when maternal bodies are placed by mechanisms of social engineering ‘of the art of distributions’ [Foucault 1991: 141]⁸ in the home and a full-time family ‘daily’. Their scene is that

⁶ See also section 1.3

⁷ Gros is quoting manuscripts by Michel Foucault. Foucault evokes the example of the father who was not able to care for his sick daughter anymore because he did not care enough for himself [Foucault 2006: 197–198].

⁸ Women have also been considered as allies of biopolitics [Simons 1996]. In his new preface, Donzelot mentions reproaches from feminist quarters to his contention in *La Police des familles* that women benefited from social intervention in family affairs and gained a new status in the 19th century and early 20th century [2005].

of the biographical context of transition to motherhood, evoked in Part I.

I will propose a typology of different existential attitudes adopted, proposed, or achieved by contemporary, highly educated mothers in France and in Finland, and which are present in the public sphere: in novels or media material.

The French case consists of an analysis of three French novels depicting the experiences of mothers. For the Finnish case, the data consists of one essay and an article in a popular family-magazine. Significantly, all combine ingredients of the the discursive matrix analyzed in previous chapters: finding happiness and talk on time. Hence, I will now endeavour to apprehend mothers phenomenological experiences in the light of the knowledge unearthed on the matrix.

7.2 THE FRENCH TYPOLOGY

The French material centres on three contemporary literary narratives depicting mothers with infants or young children: Marie Darrieussecq's autobiographical *Le bébé* [The Baby] [2002]; Nathalie Azoulay's *Mere agitée* [2002] [Jittery Mother], and *Un heureux événement* [A Happy Event] by Eliette Abécassis [2005], allegedly inspired by their own lives.

They testify of the presence of temporizing discourse in France. Rich in evocative details of sound, sight and context, these literary excerpts also constitute valuable descriptions of mothers' inner lives. The experience of women in terms of 'qualia' [Lodge 2003: 8–15], or the immediate phenomenological sensations associated to maternity leave and everyday life with children, appear in these texts as depicted with exceptional precision – one most probably unattainable through interview materials⁹. Novels are therefore particularly interesting materials for the study of the reflexive management of feelings, desires, thoughts, drives – '*any mouvement of the soul*' as Foucault would put it – of mother-subjects.

Marie Darrieussecq's impressionist writing in *Le bébé* [The Baby], published in 2002, consists of the phenomenological sensations and thoughts of a new mother recorded during the specific period of maternity leave. Darrieussecq, a well-known young French novelist, poses a subtle, bemused and critical out-

⁹ 'Qualia' designate the specific nature of the minute sensations which constitute our subjective experiences of the world; stream-of-consciousness literary narratives in the first person often convey such experiences by verbalizing the nonverbal [ibid.]. See also Garreta & Girel on the notion of 'pure experience' in William James' works, particularly in *Essais d'empirisme radical* [1987] as designating an immediate flux, which is then 'cribbled' with adjectives – i.e. is categorized [2005: 14].

look on her times, the regard of others on mothers and babies and the proliferation of discourses of which they are the subjects. *Le bébé* was also produced in the theatre, played by French singer and actress Lio, and thereby received media attention in 2004¹⁰.

The novel by Eliette Abécassis, *Un heureux événement* [A Happy Event], – a best-seller in the autumn 2005 literary season – is also a narrative of new maternity and the life changes induced by the first year of the child's life. Its specificity lies in the heavy handed portrait of maternity as a disruptive life-event sketched by the author. The third text examined hereunder, *Mère agitée* [Jittery Mother] by author and script-writer Nathalie Azoulay, depicts the inner life of a busy upper-middle-class mother-of-two: her joys, constraints and existential interrogations¹¹.

Ipsa facto, all three portray the standpoint of mothers with university level education, the sample chosen for the interview analysis. The novels are also allegedly autobiographically inspired – and hence fit the research design well.

Despite their stylistic differences, the narratives evoke, in one way or another, the algorithm of the 'short time' and the mechanisms of avoidance that counter the expression of the ambiguous emotions often associated to looking after young children. They also provide three narratives of self government, and eventually of adjustment to, or resistance of, the exigencies of the mother-role.

Maternity as succumbing

In the French autobiographical stream-of-consciousness-narrative (see e.g. Lodge 2003: 35, 51)¹², *Le bébé*, Marie Darrieussecq describes the myriads of sensations and thoughts that occur to a new mother during maternity leave. She

¹⁰ *Le bébé* has also received international recognition and has also been translated or adapted in nine countries: Germany, Denmark, Spain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden.

¹¹ From this point of view, Azoulay's novel, therefore, does not depict exactly the same sequence of the life span as the works by Abécassis and Darrieussecq [the birth of the first child, maternity leave and the first year of the child's life]. Azoulay is also the least widely read of the three. One indicator of the success of each novel is their rank on sales lists [here, those of Internet bookstore Amazon.com in November 2005, shortly after the publication of Abécassis' book]: Abécassis n° 75 of French sales; Darrieussecq n° 2131 & n° 2450 (for the 2002 & 2003 editions); Azoulay n° 19.395 and n° 46.472 (2002 and 2003 editions). <<http://www.amazon.fr/exec/obidos/tg/browse/-405320/171-1528807-8039425>>.

¹² David Lodge has analyzed the development of this contemporary literary genre: stream-of-consciousness novels, claiming that the novel is 'arguably man's most successful effort to describe the experience of individual human beings moving through space and time' [Lodge 2003: 10]. Thomas Scheff [1997] has also emphasized the importance of micro details found in the finest novels to illuminate the connections between peoples' intimate lives and the macrodynamics of culture and structure.

eloquently condenses the unexpected phenomenological sensations of an undivided intimacy between infant and mother, of which wonder, irritation and the infernal rhythm and haziness of the hours, when the mother's life is tuned to that of her infant – also present in lay accounts of maternity leave by Finnish and French women. The schism between the inner life of the young mother and expectations of her entourage in the early months of transition is also depicted in the text.

[a] Strange days of the beginning, about which I had heard little about; maybe because what is being woven there is an exclusive intimacy, the bond, the asphyxiation, the dizziness – divided into about six, neither day nor night, one or two hours for breast-feeding, the diaper, getting him to sleep, one or two hours for sleep, and on we go again

[Darrieusecq 2002: 12]

On this canvas of impressionist souvenirs of maternity leave, qualified as an '*experience of reciprocation and disruption*' – of repeated acts performed in response to her infant's demands which irrupt in her life – the novel's character hears an injunction familiar from the Finnish interviews. In the following passage, the contrast between the dazed state of the mother and her supposed ability to '*enjoy*' this state of affairs appears as somewhat absurd.

[b] Breastfeeding him, bottle-feeding him, getting him to sleep: labels that I stick on that stagnation of milk and impressions, in the fatigue of nights with little sleep. '*Enjoy yourself*' I heard. '*It's such a short time*'.

[Darrieusecq 2002: 98, emphasis added]

Darrieusecq, however, finds it impossible to effectuate the leap in faith required and to comply with the admonition to enjoy herself, before she acknowledges that what she is experiencing will '*not last a lifetime*'. It is only once that the young mother has been reassured of a possible return to autonomy and agency in order to – '*to think again, to write, to live with others*' – that she is liberated from '*despair*', and can abandon herself to the specific mode of existence implied by maternity leave.

[c] I ceased to despair when I understood that *this time would be short, that it would not last a lifetime*. I ceased to despair when we found a day care centre; they would take him in October. Time was reorganized around this date: when I would rejoin the outside world. Then I stepped down into the milky bath, paddling, floating, inebriated by the baby, because later I would start to think again, to write, to live with others

[Darrieusecq 2002: 12, emphasis added].

The idea of maternity leave as *short* is worded, in the excerpts above, both by an outsider's voice [b] and in an interior monologue [c]. As in the Finnish case, these discursive microacts intervene in contexts in which difficulties related to the constraints of childcare are present.

The quality of the text resides not only in the detailed 'qualia' of maternity-after-confinement that Marie Darrieussecq voices, but also in the process she describes. As the temporary character, the reversibility of her early maternal condition, becomes tangible for the mother [*'we found a day care centre; they would take him in October'*], the new mother is delivered from her sensations of 'asphyxiation', 'stagnation' and 'despair', transfigured into 'paddling, floating, inebriated by the baby'¹³ – she can succumb to maternity.

The perspective of return to autonomy hence brings about a consented attitude towards the temporary centring of the mother's life exclusively around her child – and the ability to enjoy¹⁴. This reversal in posture and causation is signified in the passage by the conjunctions 'when', 'then' and 'because'.

Hence, if the euphemism '*staying at home is such a short and special time*' calls for a change in the existential attitude of the mothers expressing dissatisfaction or anguish, as suggested by the analysis of the Finnish case, then Marie Darrieussecq's prose above appears as an illustration of the type of conversion that is wished for [see chapter 4]. In other words, the narrator portrays two different stances in her attitude to temporizing rhetoric. In excerpt [b], the injunction, voiced by an outsider during the chaos of the very first months, appears as absurd – while in excerpt [c] the new mother adopts this logic herself in an internal conversation.

Darrieussecq also establishes her own typology of other mothers in the same life life situation, and their attitudes which she qualifies as 'adapting', 'resisting', 'tasting' and 'sinking'.

¹³ In another passage, Darrieussecq presents a slightly different variant of the same sequence of events: '*It takes two to three months for a nursling to become the baby: the time to find day-care, to return to work, to heal the body, to turn oneself once again towards the world, to be joyful once again. At that point, the baby bursts out in laughter for the first time*' [Darrieussecq 2002: 86]. Here, the ability to '*be joyful once again*' seems closely associated with return to work – and the infant's new faculty of seduction. The dawning of the gaiety of the child, just as the mother takes leave from maternity leave, also suggests nostalgia. This turning point is humorously pictured in another part of the narrative, framed in terms of the rewards of motherhood that come to sweeten the previously unbearable weight of a '*tunnel of weeks*' of early maternity: '*It's when you can't bear it anymore that he starts to smile, at the far end of a tunnel of weeks, milk, burp, weewee, poopoo. He smiles just in time, to seduce us, so that we keep him*' [Darrieussecq 2002: 27–28]. See also Buchanan, who mentions the point where the baby is becoming more interactive, smiling, cooing and laughing and mothers becoming more confident with their mothering skills [2003: xvii].

¹⁴ The term consented is not the antonym of 'refractory' here, but rather constitutes an existential solution to an *unexpected* experience (see excerpt [a]), as if this imposed the necessity to reappropriate the events experienced.

[d] The father of the baby had returned to work. I understood him. I woke up, went back to sleep back again, it was daytime, night time, nobody warned me that it would be so boring – or I hadn't believed them. However, for the first time, boredom was superposed on joy: those two extremes curiously ceased to be antinomic [...] I continue to work. How many friends mentally sterilized by an exclusively feminine 'maternity leave'; alone faced with an unknown creature, slowed down and diminished by bottles-diapers and only wishing to recover the outside world, work and men? The 'Baby-blues' is the despair of adults bogged down in a nurlings rhythm, having to confront alone such a reduction of thought. Some adapt (themselves), resist, swim downstream on the current and still desire – sometimes tasting this strange fusion, this melting of their selves. Others sink straight to the bottom with their childhood wounds ajar: it's another kind of affliction, of a different nature.

[Darrieussecq 2002: 98–100]

Resisting a 'greedy institution': maternity as disruption

As opposed to coping with maternal constraints temporarily by succumbing, Eliette Abécassis' *Un heureux événement* [A Happy Event] depicts transition to motherhood as an enduring ontological shock¹⁵. The latter could be depicted as that of an encounter with a total institution.

Eliette Abécassis relates the first year of motherhood in the life Barbara, a young philosopher. As the title intimates by a hint ('*un heureux événement*' is a quaint French euphemism designating birth¹⁶), the author, a graduate in philosophy herself, tells a story of the dark sides of new maternity. Marketed as a personal, violent, sincere and *shameless* novel breaking the taboos of maternity, the book rode high on two French best-seller lists on autumn 2005¹⁷. This may be considered as an indicator *per se* of its topicality – and a standing social demand on the issue in France.

¹⁵ The term 'ontological shock' is used by Christian Baudelot [2002] to evoke how Ernaux, in an article ['Bourdieu, le chagrin', *Le Monde*, January 2002], relates the '*choc ontologique*' which her acquaintance with Bourdieu's texts, *Les Héritiers* and *La Reproduction*, had triggered. According to Ernaux, it led to the transformation of her vision of the social world and her place in it. Reading *Le deuxième sexe* by Simone de Beauvoir had had a similar effect upon her. Ernaux depicts the shock as a painful one: it implied the consciousness of relations of domination. But it was also salutary, as it broke her solitude: personal suffering and feelings of indignity, inferiority and shame could then be grasped as objective effects of numerous mechanisms of domination concerning millions of other individuals. It supplied arms for critique and protection.

¹⁶ The euphemism appears in a letter by Victor Hugo in 1823: '*Je suis heureux, cher papa, de reposer tes idées sur des sujets moins tristes en t'entretenant aujourd'hui de l'heureux événement, qui doit amener un autre également heureux pour nous, ton retour. Ma bien-aimée Adèle accouche dans cinq semaines environ*'. [Hugo 1896: 371]. Another amusing old French euphemism is: 'Être dans une position intéressante' [to be in an interesting position], which prudishly designated pregnancy, and which resembles the English 'in a delicate condition' [Gillis 1997: 166]. Gillis also mentions the English euphemisms 'in the family way' and 'expecting' [ibid.].

¹⁷ <http://www.albin-michel.fr/pages/news/recherche/resultat_fiche.php?code_article=88936&page=livre>

In this tale of crisis, the discrepancy between the ideals that the narrator harboured before birth – and actual outcomes of founding a family – is a recurrent theme. The ontological shock of transition to motherhood is resumed somewhat humorously in the following scene: Abécassis' pictures her narrator, Barbara during a visit to a peer group of breast-feeding mothers. The character seizes this occasion to confide in the latter; hoping to find *'attentive ears'*. The new mother's outburst of feelings of bewilderment and anger, however, occasions social opprobrium:

[e] – Now, would you like to share your experience with us?

– My experience... Since I have a baby, I don't have any marital life anymore, I don't sleep anymore, I don't wash my hair anymore, I don't read anymore, I don't see friends anymore. I became a mother, so be it. But I didn't know that a mother was only a mother. I ignored you had to abdicate from all the other roles, that must renounce sexuality, seduction, work, sport, your body, your spirit. I ignored you had to renounce life. That is what I announced in substance.

All the gazes converged on me as if I was a murderer, or worse: an unfit mother. I sensed that I should have not developed this set of themes but I couldn't help myself. I felt lonely since I had given birth and was happy to find attentive ears.

[Eliette Abécassis 2005: 114, emphasis added]

In Ervin Goffman's terms Barbara could be described as being 'out of face', as the new mother is participating *'in a contact without having a ready line of the kind participants in such situations are expected to take'* [Goffman 1972: 8] – or, alternatively, in 'wrong face', since Barbara brings about information about herself, which is difficult to integrate into the expressive fabric of the occasion: that of a reunion of committed breastfeeding mothers¹⁸. In his article 'On Face-work', Goffman writes:

A person's performance of face-work, extended by his tacit agreement to help others perform theirs, represents his willingness to abide by the ground rules of interaction. Here is the hallmark of his socialisation as an interactant. If he and the others were not socialized in this way, interaction in most societies and most situations would be a much more hazardous thing for feelings and faces [...] It is no wonder that trouble is caused by a person who cannot be relied upon to play the face-saving game.

[Goffman 1972: 31]¹⁹

¹⁸ In Goffman's terms, Barbara entered a social circle in which she was given a certain face to maintain and which she was held responsible for, either out of duty for herself [what Goffman calls an expressive order based on pride]; in the name of a larger circle [an expressive order based on honor] – or because of postural norms concerning the handling of one's body and emotions, for example [an expressive order based on dignity] [ibid.: 9–10].

¹⁹ In 'Alienation from Interaction', Goffman writes: *'we must see that a readiness to become over-involved is a form of tyranny practised by children, prima donnas, and lords of all kinds, who momentarily put their own feelings above the moral rules that ought to have made society safe for interaction'* [1972: 123].

Abécassis, therefore, pictures her character as indulging in the violation of ground rules of interaction by not being a reliable player of the face-saving game. Barbara's *gaffe* is also linked to her breaking the appropriate tone set for such a social occasion (e.g. she is not in therapy, or a consciousness raising feminist group, in which individuals are called upon to share difficult experiences).

Moreover, the narrator's making a bad show of herself seems to be interpreted by the proponents of the scene as a bad show for the group. Indeed, if face is an '*image of self delineated in terms of social attributes*', it is liable to be an image that may be shared by others [Goffman 1972: 5]. Disruption in role performance '*faux pas*' or '*scenes*' threaten the reality sponsored by the performers [Goffman 1959: 212].

Abécassis' narrator breaks the cell of approved role attributes of a good mother, who enjoys her role – threatening her face – and potentially that of others. The retaliation of this act, as described by Abécassis, is non-verbal – '*gazes*' – but powerful. Indeed, '*Approved attributes and their relation to face makes every man his own jailer; this is a fundamental constraint even though each man may like his cell*' [Goffman 1972: 10]. It may then be that ground rules are easier to contravene when out of the reach of direct sanctions: in literature, for example²⁰.

The incident also illustrates how the rules of the discursive matrix of motherhood intersect with more general rules of interaction. One of them pertains to the conditions in which appropriate involvement may be expected from the participants of an interaction. For Goffman they are the following:

Thus, as Adam Smith argued in the *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, the individual must phrase his own concerns and feelings and interests in such a way as to make these maximally usable by others as a source of appropriate involvement; and this major obligation of the individual qua interactant is balanced by his right to expect that others present will make some effort to stir up their sympathies and place them at his command. These two tendencies, that of the speaker to scale down his expressions and that of the listeners to scale up their interests, each in the light of the other's capacities and demands, form the bridge that people build to one another, allowing them to meet for a moment of talk in a communion of reciprocally sustained involvement. It is this spark, not the more obvious kinds of love, that lights up the world.

[Goffman, 1972: 116–117]

Is the implication of such rules of give-and-take that scaling up one's expressions by shattering taboos for example (instead of scaling down one's expressions) may engender the scaling down of the auditors concern (instead of a scal-

²⁰ Writing is in a sense a 'silent' expression, although it may be made public.

ing up)? This type of mechanism seems to occur in temporizing interactions when women's 'complaints' are downplayed.

One of the powerful 'taboos' or 'myths' which Abécassis wishes to demolish is marital life after birth. Indeed, the end of romance is a dominant theme in *Un heureux événement*. The venue of a child is represented as the marker of the end of love, of a lifestyle – of 'life'. In the following passage, the narrator compares her story with that depicted in another French best-seller, Cohen's *La Belle du Seigneur*:

[f] In fact the end of love is different. Everything's concealed from us, we're told nothing. We are shown bare bottomed cherubs in little pink outfits playing with toilet-paper rolls. We're made to believe that it's all marvellous [...] It is in the reach of all to have a child, and yet, few parents now the truth, it's the end of life.

[Abécassis 2005: 16–17]

The issue of the consequences of motherhood for the character's life is tackled in a dialogue between Barbara and a mother of ten children (!). Her interlocutor endeavours to reassure the new mother of a return to 'normal', 'ultimately' – an argument, which resembles temporizing rhetoric. This proposition is violently rejected by Barbara:

[g]– But [breast-feeding] is exhausting, isn't it?

– Yes it's exhausting [...] It's difficult, really... *But ultimately, everything gets back to normal...* you'll see!

Back to normal, but to what normal? The normal of those who divorce six months after having a child, or the normal of those who have another one trying to repair the damage? The normal of those who divorce after seven years of marriage and three children, or the normal of those who have three children and end up divorcing when the kids have grown up? The normal of those who have two children and stay together even if they don't love each other anymore because they don't have the courage to separate, or the normal of those who have children and are unhappy together, and both have a mistresses or lovers? Or then the normal of those who are unhappy in their families, and who manage to be very preoccupied by their work and to travel a maximum to see them the least possible? All kinds of configurations exist. But a couple in love with children, on the long term, I didn't know any. Not one.

[Abécassis 2005: 121–122, emphasis added]

As her relationship with her partner reaches a crisis, Barbara takes a taxi to her sisters' home, where she discovers that Katia, a mother of two elder children, is also experiencing marital hardship. The ancient rivalry between sisters, however, surfaces and Barbara's bitterness triggers a confession from Katia:

[h] – It's true Barbara. I've always had you pay for my own problems, without ever helping you or protecting you as I should have... For example I could have warned you.

– About what?

– About what it is like to have a child. Me, for example, do you think that it has always been rosy? It's tough for everyone.

– If you want my opinion, you accept too much. You look like someone who has confined herself in her duties.

– It's true, motherhood is a duty, my sister said. I have a husband, two children, a beautiful apartment, and I feel like dropping everything and leaving, is it possible to say that?

– No... In fact it is. You have to admit it to yourself and say it. I think you have to have that courage.

[Abécassis 2005: 176]

Un heureux événement once illustrates the dynamics of the discursive matrix in terms of the pervasiveness of a hedonist ideology of motherhood on the one hand and a curtain of silence on women's paradoxical experiences on the other – nonetheless, it also constitutes a living proof that mothers may go public with success.

The two aforementioned phenomena can be considered as two sides of the same coin: subdued feelings are correlated to a hunger of sharing them. Such a paradox may be particularly acute in the biographical context in which Darrieussecq's and Abécassis' new mothers are portrayed. These narratives can be read as an exercise of women's subjectivity around such questions: as pertains to promises and outcomes; bonds and freedom; costs and rewards at transition to motherhood. Such dilemmas are not, however, solely bottled into the early months of life after-birth. Nathalie Azoulay illustrates their workings in a later phase of a mothers' life – and their tentative management by temporization²¹.

Hanging on: motherhood as restlessness

The idea of time that passes as constituting the promise of a new life for the mother, implicit in temporizing discourse, also appears in Nathalie Azoulay's *Mère agitée*. In the first monologue reproduced below, overwhelmed by the demands and energy of her two young children, the character calls forth this idea: firstly in order to reassure her guilty self [she finds her children tiring, which might mean that they are unhappy] and secondly, in order to envisage an ulterior life of lesser constraint.

²¹ See DiQuinzio, who has criticized early feminist accounts as portraying maternity as 'an obstacle to, greater than the exercise of, women's subjectivity' [1999: 67].

Simultaneously, however, an interrogation nags at the edge of the character's mind. Azoulai quite ironically evokes *another* French adage: 'Small child, small worry, big child, big worry' – which overtly contradicts the logic of the alleviation of her responsibilities in time.

[i] Her children are young, demand constant attention, plenty of physical energy, and all the others are the same. That's what she tells herself to avoid thinking that her children are more tiring, that is, more unhappy, than others. *It's their age and it'll pass. When they will be bigger, she'll get more rest, more time for herself; will recover the autonomy* of her movements. 'Small child, small worry, big child, big worry': that's the saying that she never really comprehended very well, because her worries seem enormous and often get the best of her.

[Azoulai 2002: 68, emphasis added]

The 'Jittery mother' is not alone to call forth temporizing logic. It is called to her attention '*on every tone, over and over, every day or nearly*', particularly when she is exasperated with her children [j]. When others draw forth the logic of time that passes, it is not to promise her relief, but to incite her to enjoy herself – while it lasts²². But the mother cannot listen: '*She simply cannot imagine such a horrible and terrifying time when her children will not be able to demonstrate their love, missing and abandonment*'. Excerpts [j, k] depict the often overwhelming exigencies of caring for two small children as an impasse.

[j] *It's common; she hears it said every day or nearly.* When the children clump on her, cling to her somewhat weary body; when her nerves are uptight and bear with such difficulty their shocks, their inordinate gestures, brutal, she only wants to leave them standing there, in order to appropriate space differently, without them. *She is told, on every tone, that she must make the most of it, that, very quickly, they will withdraw, move towards other bodies, embrace other shoulders that their adolescence is for tomorrow.* She is told that *over and over*, but she, she doesn't hear. She simply cannot imagine such a horrible and terrifying time when her children will not be able to demonstrate their love, missing and abandonment

[Azoulai 2002: 192, emphasis added]

Two interesting supplementary features of temporizing discourse emerge from the French data: the elasticity of what is designated as a 'short time', and the implicit menace of regrets. The elasticity of the notion of a 'short time' appears when the two excerpts are compared. In Darrieussecq's narrative, it refers to the period of maternity leave, experienced as a total sensory immersion in mater-

²² Presumably, as in the Finnish excerpts, 'others' are older mothers speaking from their experience.

nity, and after which the young intellectual serenely envisages a return to a normal existence: *'it would not last a lifetime'*.

In Azoulai's chronicle, however, the horizon of a regained autonomy is somewhat more elusive: it is not maternity leave (which she refers to as *'the dark crossing of the first months'* [2002: 16]), nor the toddler-phase – nor is that of young school-children, the life-stage that her character is depicted in. It may be adolescence (with its *big worries*) – if not a lifetime?²³ The elusiveness and disingenuousness of discourse on the limits of maternal responsibility, implied by Azoulai and denounced by Abécassis, are also underlined by a French psychoanalyst, Sylvie Giampino, as well as American critics, (see hereafter).

Hence, if Nathalie Azoulai's mother seems to doubt of the efficiency of this type of logic to bring her immediate relief from her every day time-bind, she is also aware of its menace: children do grow up and do go away. The algorithm of a short time is susceptible of presenting impatient mothers with a unique and unwanted perspective: the loss of their children.

As in the Finnish case, it is a change in the attitude of the mother that is called for. Alternative options of sharing the load of care work – which often *'gets the best of her'* – are not envisaged. The excerpt below captures this double-bind, impossible for the mother alone to resolve: *'in short that they (her children) be there without being there while being there'*²⁴. Interestingly enough, it is this extreme solution (her children somehow *'disappearing'*) that is somewhat desperately envisaged by Azoulai's character – as if the participation of the father for example was judged an even less realistic option than the former²⁵.

[k] It is impossible for her to imagine the fugue of her baby, her adolescence crisis or her car accident. Those probabilities are excluded from her horizon. What she sees is, nights without sleep, days spent bending to pick up things a thousand times, the dinners that oblige her to clean the kitchen floor that she has already cleaned after lunch, the crying that gets the best of her. Then she looks on the side of mothers

²³ Figes writes: *'You cross a one-way bridge when you have your first child. You can look back to where you have been, but you can never go back there. This books describes the voyage across that bridge from pregnancy, labour and those early months and years until some sort of resolution is reached – acceptance with few regrets of life as it is now as a mother'* [Figes 1998: 6].

²⁴ I do not interpret this remark as an indicator of maternal *'ambivalence'*, a notion coined by psychologists, and often understood as an *'in-built'* characteristic of motherhood, rather than an *'in-built'* characteristic of caring for young children and as related to the quantity and the quality of the time spent in family work in a particular social context. Moreover, *'ambivalence'* seems to focus essentially on the shifts in *feelings towards the child* of the mother, ignoring the conflict between meanings and experience of routine tasks and relational aspects – immediate experiences and long term commitment which deserve to be acknowledged when explaining mothers' contradictory experiences.

²⁵ Miller writes: *'we need only to imagine the death of a child to confirm the profound, poignant and enduring dimensions of the relationship'* [Miller 2005: 145].

whose children have already grown and who have resumed their habits of young women, like going out to have a drink with friends, to the cinema in the middle of an afternoon, or on week-ends with their husband. She envies their time and tranquillity, but instantaneously changes her mind thinking that those women are older, less seductive in men's eyes [...] She also knows that the *children of those women do not hug their necks, and soon, will live far away from them*. What she would like is: her small children, riveted to her love, and her freedom intact, her youth, her independence; in short that they be there without being there while being there

[Azoulai 2002 : 68–69, emphasis added]

The perspective of possible regrets *a posteriori* also appears fleetingly in a French interview (the only passage of temporizing discourse in the French interview material: excerpt [1], below), in response to the researcher's question 'that famous mother-guilt do you feel it or...?' The response of the interviewee, strongly committed to her work, implies that it is not impossible that she experience remorse one day.

[1] Well now, I would prefer working a bit less, but on the other hand, I like what I'm doing, I'm quite autonomous in what I do, I mean it's rewarding. I think, well, [the child] is happy during the day-time, I mean the childminder takes good care of her, she is in the company of another child that she likes, and on the other hand, it's true that on week-ends, I try to do more stuff with her, because finally when you're there all day sometimes it doesn't automatically mean that you do a lot of things with [the child]. But it's true that I would like to spend more time with her, because *when you see them grow up, times passes by quickly in fact*. But well it's not very, very, very convenient for the moment *so, well, maybe I'll change my mind afterwards but...* I think that having an interesting job also provides rewards and... well that's it.

The triple association effectuated between guilt (a notion introduced by the researcher); work (a motive of guilt evoked spontaneously, though not surprisingly, by the mother); and temporizing discourse ('*time passes by quickly in fact*') provides an alternative version, a new permutation of 'the menace'. Mothers may also envisage being contrite in the future about past hedonist behaviour – here, professional investment and its long-term personal 'costs'.

This is precisely what the Jittery mother grapples with.

THE JITTERY MOTHER'S SECRET LEDGER

At her age, she still has childless friends. To those who can't have any, she doesn't say a word, she hardly mentions her own; but to those who aren't settled, she seeks to say something to convince them. Why? In order to share the experience with close friends? Maybe. To feel captured by a generalized flow of mothers thus transforming an individual decision into a necessity of sorts? Yes. Because she refuses to believe that things might be otherwise? Definitely. Officially, she invokes the feminine and maternity as its accomplishment— she's living proof. But, on the sly, she questions herself and,

patiently, draws up columns of the pros and the cons. On the one side, the dawn of love, the intense pleasures of discovery, the force of the gift, the meaning of life... On the other side, the fatigue, the constraints, the anguish, and the lack of time. As a result, she often ends up with nearly equal columns. She then reflects that she has given up in the face of family and social pressures; that she's a victim of ideology, that, otherwise, she wouldn't spend her time complaining; that it would be better she try not to convince the most refractory, that at least those ones are free, that she has no lessons to give. Although it does not stop her, year after year, from filling up those damn columns, in order to find the infallible argument one day. Or, more modestly, to establish that the column of the cons is substantially less consistent than the other? And, relieved, to break the news to the most refractory.

[Azoulai 2002: 106–107]

The *Jittery mother* seems to wonder whether she has received fair value in the transaction of becoming a mother. The entries recorded in the 'nearly equal' two columns of her maternal ledger read as follows: '*The dawn of love, the intense pleasures of discovery, the force of the gift, the meaning of life*' – versus – '*the fatigue, the constraints, the anguish, and the lack of time*': Publicly, however, she will not admit to this. On the contrary, she proffers an argumentum of motherhood as accomplishment inciting yet childless friends to bear children. Hence, the disjunction between the official character of the benefits of motherhood, and the officious character of its costs – the disingenuousness which seems to accompany reproductive issues is highlighted once again.

Reflecting on her mobiles of converting others and her bad faith, Azoulai's character links them to a need of reassurance on her own life politics. She alternatively constructs motherhood as an inevitable occurrence of 'femininity' (a creed which possesses the virtue of 'thus transforming an individual decision into a necessity of sorts') – and as an individual choice. Scholars have indeed underlined that contemporary motherhood '*has the dual character of being both a taken-for-granted part of being a woman and constructed as a choice*' [McMahon 1995: 53]²⁶.

Both of these ethoses – motherhood-as-destiny and motherhood-as-choice –, are however implicitly challenged by the childless: immune as they seem both to the 'necessity' and the lures of maternity. An uncomfortable hypothesis then dawns in the mother's mind: could it be that her 'choice' was heedless – or misinformed: '*She then reflects that she has given up in the face of family and social pressures; that she's a victim of ideology, that, otherwise, she wouldn't spend her time complaining*'?²⁷ The legitimacy of the character's endeavour then seems to crumble: '*it would be better she try not to*

²⁶ McMahon [1995: 53]. She bases her contention on Luker's analysis of the abortion wars: Luker K. (1984). *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

²⁷ Indeed, the algorithm of rational choice implies that parents reflect consciously on the costs and benefits of children. In the virtue of this allegedly informed choice, they are responsible for their decisions, must assume the consequences – and not complain. The notion of sacrifice is therefore difficult to justify (see quote by Swidler below; see also chapter 5). See also Esping-Andersen on 'information failure' in contemporary societies. To illustrate this point, he writes: '*Even if it is common knowledge that divorce is on the rise, young newly weds cannot be blamed if they believe in ever lasting marital bliss*' [1999: 39].

convince the most refractory, that at least those ones are free, that she has no lessons to give'. Nonetheless, this rationalization does not 'stop her, year after year, from filling up those damn columns, in order to find the infallible argument one day' – and its by-product, existential relief.

In this excerpt, the grammar of the costs and benefits of motherhood; the implicit status of the former and explicit status of the latter; are inextricably intertwined with the issue of reproductive choice (see also 5.3, The price of motherhood). The 'refractory' are presented with one-sided positive discourses on childbearing – while the dual consequences of maternity are reflected upon in silence. *La mère agitée* therefore depicts a grey economy of motherhood of which women are neither totally conscious *a priori*, nor dupes *a posteriori*.

Typologies for sharing experiences?

If succumbing, resisting or hanging on constitute technologies of self, so do the books themselves²⁸. As messages in a bottle, they may be seized by others. *Le bébé*, and *Un heureux événement* have become a medium for exchanging experiences, as on this mother's Web blog:

Oh yes, Darrieussecq's *Le bébé* was good! But if you want arguments not to have one, you have to read 'un heureux événement' by Eliette Abécassis. I came across a lot of stuff that is kept under the hat in magazines...

[A mother's blog, January 2006]²⁹

This is suggested in the following reader's commentaries on Eliette Abécassis' iconoclast narrative of maternity as a disruptive life-event: '*The book brings relief, at least someone reveals what you don't dare say or think*'. Another testimony reads as follows:

I wanted to express some of my sensations to my intimates, new emotions that I thought were not normal, when I was a young mother. Several times, I searched for words and tried not to be swallowed up by guilt. Two years went by and I come upon this novel. I devour it, I understand at last that I am not the only one, that I am normal after all, and that it is so difficult to be torn in between one's child and the love of freedom³⁰.

²⁸ Writing is a technique of self mentioned by Foucault (see e.g. Foucault 1988a: 257).

²⁹ <http://vanb.typepad.com/moviesansmoi/2006/01/et_vous_.html processed> on 13.09.2006. Readers-turned-critiques seem hence to be opening new ways of consuming literature.

³⁰ <http://www.amazon.fr/exec/obidos/ASIN/222616720X/qid=1129546341/sr=8-1/ref=pd_ka_0/171-1528807-8039425> accessed on 17.10.2005. One Finnish mother encountered during the research similarly mentioned Kirsi Piha's testimony [2003] as having brought her relief in the turmoil of transition, as her friends seemed to experience new motherhood in a very different manner. The cathartic function of parental testimonies is, indeed, mentioned as an objective of the volume of collected writings in which it figures [Hiilamo 2003: 8].

Goffman would most probably theoretically qualify these authors as collegial ‘renegades’, ‘traitors’ or ‘turncoats’. In the *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, he writes:

It is always possible for a disaffected colleague to turn renegade and sell out to the audience the secrets of the act that his onetime brethren are still performing. Every role has its defrocked priests to tell us what goes on in the monastery, and the press has always shown a lively interest in these confessions and exposés.

[Goffman 1959: 164].³¹

Indeed, accounts as ‘heretic’ as Abécassis novel, *Un heureux événement*, however, are liable to contradictory assessments. In an opposite register of speech, a (female) literary critic expresses her surprise to see how Abécassis’ character: ‘this ‘petite’ intellectual, this ‘feminine feminist’ can be as disoriented in the face of such a natural event [...] a reality test’ [Claire Julliard, *Le Nouvel Obs* n° 2134, 21.09.2005]³².

7.3 THE FINNISH CASE: EPIPHANY, ‘AMOR FATI’ OR MINIMALIST HEDONISM?

The Finnish materials are selected because parents in them depicted their encounter with the ‘daily’. Indeed, the ‘daily’ is a category which encapsulates the life changes brought about by a child in the accounts of Finnish mothers – and as Riitta Jallinoja has remarked, constitutes a discursive marker of the ‘end of romance’ [Jallinoja 2000: 89, 107; see also the section on novels in the chapter Data & Methods, in which recent novels of Finnish mothers depicting transition as a personal crisis are typically portrayed as an encounter with the ‘daily’]. Riina Katajavuori’s mother-character in *Lahjat* [The Gifts], sitting in her kitchen one night, for example, depicts herself as ‘besieged by the daily from all sides’ [2005: 30]. This is also the case in the magazine article below, depicting an exit from the ‘daily’.

³¹ He also writes, a propos confidences to non colleagues: ‘in a very limited sense, whenever any non-colleague is allowed to become a confidant, someone will have had to be a renegade’ [ibid.: 165]. This reflection is one way of understanding the ‘conspiracy of silence’ surrounding experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and mothering, especially their darker sides from the non initiated, a mechanism referred to in several excerpts in chapter 4 also.

³² <<http://www.nouvelobs.com/articles/p2134/a277840.html>> While another (male) critic qualifies the principal quality of the book as: ‘the evident (disarming?) sincerity of the book. A bit like *Céline Dion*’ [Baptiste Liger, *Lire*, September 2005]. The public ‘confessions’ of stars such as Julia Roberts on the surprising exigencies of the mother role have sometimes provoked contemptuous remarks.

Daily hell and achievement; the down-falls of 'maternal thinking'

In an article [Anna 23.2.2006: 12–15], 'It's a relief to return to work', a celebrity mother declares that she has been transformed to a 'shocking' extent by 18 months of full-time motherhood. Particularly, she recounts, the reduced perimeter of life brought about by the birth of her child surprised her. As nice as bustling with her son was, after a short time at home with her infant, she realized that she missed the intellectual challenge and the type of conversations she had at work. She found that she could not even exchange verbally enough with her husband, because they were bound to be interrupted by one 'need' or another expressed by the child. Moreover, one may read in the article:

'The self-esteem of every mother crumbles down with a child because what mothers do, in a way, is the work of the brain-dead, isn't it. The routines turn around in the same small circles; the same deeds repeat themselves from morning to night: outside, inside, eating, dressing. It is such a small circle that you can actually feel how certain synapses cease connecting. You begin asking yourself is you are still capable of the tasks all those hurried people, which you see rushing all over the place, effectuate. No wonder that many mothers are afraid of returning to work. After a long period at home you easily get this vague feeling, that people must see it on your face, how much stupider you have become' [...] Despite the extent of [Ms. X's] longing for challenges in her life and enthusiasming work, she has also noticed that the greatest feelings of achievement are to be found in the family perimeter. [...] 'Now I have understood that my greatest achievement is my child. When I look at [him] I feel that at least I have succeeded in something. [...] work is going to come up with piquant situations, but I do feel comfortable in situations of crisis. Maybe that is why I also like to spend time [with my child] [...] It was lovely to notice that I am my own self after all this and that I can still do go a good job full throttles [...] You should give the other [spouse] liberty from the family – or the family nightmare, as that is what it does feel life in the midst of 'daily life'. [...] I can't understand women who demand that their husband to be there all the time only because the other has to suffer as well. As if you yourself aren't capable of freeing yourself from the patterns of the quotidian. How could anybody have fun that way?'

The two following illustrations are dealt with utilizing somewhat different sociological techniques. In the first case, I propose three possible sociological explanations of one account of transforming the 'daily' into love. In the second one, I will return to the model of temporary homemaking, which is an emergent phenomenon of contemporary motherhood amongst highly educated women. Institutionalized in Finland through the policy matrix, it is an emergent model for the category of French mothers who have been studied here. Therefore, the chapter will conclude with a short ricochet to France, to demonstrate that a similar technique of the self, as in the Finnish case, may also be vehiculated in the French media.

*A personal reconciliation with the 'daily':
three sociological interpretations*

The excerpts reproduced below were drawn from an autobiographical account of maternal experience, published in a Finnish collection of essays on parenthood by public *personae*, scholars and professionals. The testimony sets off from the narrator's remembering her own assessment of everyday life a few years earlier: 'Daily life is endless 'having to'; routines exhaust you, are invisible doings'. The author then recounts, that she now 'most often thinks about daily life in other terms'. The narrative focuses on this turning-point in her maternal career: 'When did I myself learn to bear the grey crockery and daily life? At what point did the repetitive chores become the foundations of life and art?' The transformation in her attitude towards her daily life with children is related in the following terms:

One summer, while the children and my partner were going about their activities, further away, but still in sight, I was oiling an old wooden table, admiring, my senses overloaded, the progressive oiliness of the surface of the wood, its deepening tones and its odor of tar, I understood that daily togetherness and erotic pleasure weren't very different from each other. At the best, there is no frontier. Neither between the daily nor work or art, nor between food and love, nor the profane and the sacred. [...] That souvenir often returns, but the experience does not convert into words easily. It is difficult to write about it: of sliding and dissolving, the presence and experiencing the present moment, of a simultaneous experience of significance and insignificance, when you feel you are nearly sensing too much; when you feel your own trembling boundaries and something flowing through you. When you are united for a moment and still are alone. The feeling was fleeting, but it supports me.

The idea of *communitas* is also present in the following passages: it is symbolized by the family meal. In the excerpt, the spectrum of concrete daily activities is processed into emotions; as opportunities for experiencing intense sensations, togetherness and recognition:

That what I call love actualizes in the daily. It is time that people give to and sacrifice for each other. It is meals prepared together, eating, taking care of the compost, shared, festified daily, full of endless possibilities for play and joys of the senses. [...] All the moments together, especially during mealtimes, the simultaneous presence of all the family members, even laying the table, for the children mean security and caring feelings. They express their affection by participating and taking part in the conversation, I, by feeding my family and my cheerfulness. I rejoice about the daily chores, the charming spectrum of grayness, differently than before. I enjoy and am charmed by daily life, as long as we enjoy being together and during dinner speak about, in the same phrase, about macaroni-casserole, George W. Bush, and that which is right and wrong in life.

In the course of the essay, the subject's apprehension of the 'daily', initially depicted as representing the fetters of banal, repetitive, exhausting and endless duties, is transformed into that of everyday life viewed as a series of spontaneous, sensuous, and even festive acts inhabited by love and care, defined as everyday attention. Invisibility of tasks gives way to recognition by others (children '*express their affection by participating in the conversation*') and to a consciousness of the import of such activities: providing security and love. Thereby, everyday chores acquire a new meaning mediated by bodily sensations and emotions. One fleeting but momentous instant is depicted as the threshold of a new outlook on the 'daily' as usual limits of perception are surpassed and an experience of the daily as a 'totality' takes place. This occurs when the categorical trio *daily work / food / profane* is no longer perceived of as opposed to *love / art / the sacred*. Several sociological explanations of this phenomenon – of that which is 'going on' – are attempted, namely in terms 'deep' and 'surface' approaches.

Reconciling as epiphany

Firstly, the account of this mother could be considered as expressing an individual itinerary in time between two facets of maternal experience reported in preceding research on motherhood. In effect, a strong tension inhabits scholarship on the topic. For decades, emphasis has oscillated now on the constraints of care, now on its rewards. Patrice DiQuinzio evokes this fault line in feminist scholarship in the following terms:

some emphasize women's deep and abiding love for their children and/or their pleasures and sense of accomplishment in child-rearing, while others focus on the stifling confinement to home and family, the annoyances and frustrations of caring for children, the agonizing losses that mothering can entail, and the lack of control over the circumstances of their mothering that women may experience

[DiQuinzio 1999: ix]

In *Feeding the family*, Marjorie DeVault studies a particular practice of everyday maintenance, several times mentioned in the Finnish excerpt. Making meals, she contends, '*has increasingly become work aimed at maintaining the kind of group life we think of as constituting a family*' [1994: 39]. For women, mandated for processing food for the family – and thereby producing valuable connections and relationships –, this activity, it is argued, represents a potential a source of deep satisfaction, pride and significance. However, analogously to the results mentioned by DiQuinzio, it is also liable to be considered a tedious obligation

or synonymous of drudgery [ibid: 38, 54]. DeVault evokes the *'tangled experiences of work and love, power and deference, intimacy and self-deprivation'* [1994: 232]. The complex ways in which this activity compels *'women themselves into participation in prevailing relations of inequality'* [1994: 38–39] and, finally to experience non-reciprocity, thereby constitutes one of the dark sides of care.

One solution to such a dispute between these two types of constructions of motherhood, including in feminist research, has been to problematize motherhood through the notion of 'ambivalence' (see e.g. Vuori 1999: 182)³³. Another has been highlighting the cultural and social diversity of women's experiences. However, notions such as 'diversity' or the 'ambivalence' may be inadequate for the practical purposes of mothers' dilemmas in societies with a 'passion' for childhood [Gavarini 2001], caught between a long term, non-reciprocal, perspective of living out ordinary daily life, intensive servicing and responsibility for young children, (whose conduct may be less than the perfect) – and expectations of happiness that children should simultaneously procure and require³⁴.

The realist workings of the daily seem to contradict the ideal of love: the wish to find one's *'own happiness in the other's happiness'* [Luhmann 1998: 137, 140]. Spontaneity of emotions is difficult to reconcile with objective patterns of roles and social institutions [Illouz 1991: 239]; instant gratification seems incompatible with long term investment. Such contradictions also traverse the institution of marriage and romance [Illouz 1991: 240] [see also chapter 5]³⁵.

As in romantic love, or marriage, duration becomes a major issue [Luhmann 1998; Jallinoja 2000: 107]. In her analysis of the 'life cycle' of contemporary heterosexual relationships, Riitta Jallinoja quotes an interview in a Finnish magazine, in which a singer relates how romance did wane, underscoring that the period after that turning point in the relationship was designated as the 'daily'

³³ DiQuizio is referring to American scholarship on motherhood. Hence, the binary pleasure/displeasure as criteria for assessing women's experiences of mothering seems to structure the discursive matrix of motherhood to such an extent that it has become a major polarity in scholarly work as well.

³⁴ These constraints are all the more intensive in the contemporary intensive regime of child-rearing [Hays 1996]; particularly during the lapses of full-time mothering which may scripted in mothers' trajectories by parental leave [as is the case in Finland]; and all the more intense that parental roles remain stubbornly gendered. In the meantime, 'happiness' has also come to be invested with constraint as the child's and the mother's happiness are inextricably linked to each other *via* the requisite of individualized, mutually fulfilling, maternal love and attention for enhancing child development; 'happiness' is simultaneously framed as desirable and as a moral exigency.

³⁵ Moreover, routine contrasts with desire; subordination to the interests of others with the ideal of equality; and organic bonds are somewhat contradictory with the ideal of freedom and auto-determination (see also chapter 5).

[ibid.]. Bourdieu also speaks of the menaces constituted by the effects of routine and of the temptation of egoistic calculation [2002: 151]. While Luhmann evokes needs becoming exhausted and the relationship becoming habit [1998: 140]. One existential solution to such a technical problem is the search for transcending meaning in every quotidian act.

To summarize, it is possible to apprehend the itinerary depicted in the essay as an individual victory of a mother over the dark sides of care; the often invisible spectrum of activities despite the efforts required; their taken-for-grantedness or ambiguous recognition by others (and even self); and the ambivalent oscillation between the carcan of daily patterns and affection³⁶.

As the eloquently depicted shift of experiential perspective occurs, a novel significance of care and housework crystallizes in the narrator's life. In a sense, the essay can be regarded as describing an event that radically alters and shapes *'the meanings persons give to themselves and their life projects'*: an epiphany [Denzin 2001: 34; see also 1989: 33, 70–71]³⁷.

Reconciling as amor fati

An alternative sociological account of this story could be formulated in terms of practical reason; of preferences overdetermined by material and symbolic boundaries; or of *amor fati*: the love of one's social destiny. Consequently, what follows is and an exercise of a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' à la Bourdieu³⁸.

In the *Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu argued that agents *'become the accomplices of the processes that tend to make the probable a reality'* [1990a: 65] because they distinguish between what is accessible and not accessible, [*'what is and is not 'for us'*]. This is based on the dispositions of the habitus, which anticipate and adjust expectations as the 'universe of possibilities' changes³⁹

[Reed-Danahay 2005: 109]

³⁶ This ambiguity results from a parallel idealization and devalorization. DeVault evokes the schism between idealizing discourses on caring and the relative abstinence of men from this field, which can be interpreted as an indicator of the dubious social value of care. Heinen, while recognizing that care implies a gift dimension, also insists on the necessary social recognition of latter as a condition for men's accrued participation [2006].

³⁷ Authors have designated such biographical events as 'turning-points'. A Hartssockian reading could consider this experience as resulting from the immersion of women *'in the world of use – in concrete, many-qualified, changing material processes – [which] is more complete than [men's]. And if life itself consists of sensuous activity, the vantage point available to women on the basis of their contribution to subsistence represents an intensification and deepening of the materialist world view'* [Hartssock 1998: 114].

³⁸ 'Hermeneutics of suspicion' designates the research for deep meaning, but in which the grid of the researcher is superimposed on that of the subject [Dreyfus & Rabinow 2002: xix]

³⁹ For successive developments in relationship of the notions of habitus of field see Reed-Danahay 2005: 103–110.

In *Distinction*, Pierre Bourdieu names this phenomenon ‘the taste of necessity’, which ‘refers to the fit between dispositions of the habitus and the possibilities of existence for a person’ [ibid; Bourdieu 1979: 190]. The ‘taste of necessity’ or necessity as a ‘virtue’ is opposed by the author to ‘taste’, a bourgeois notion that implies a freedom to choose one’s lifestyle [Bourdieu 1979: 195 Reed-Danahay 2005: 111] – a freedom less accessible, or unattainable, for other social groups. Agents thus tend to cradle themselves in an ‘illusion of choice’, which the French sociologist also calls *amor fati*: the choice of destiny. Bourdieu writes:

An agent has what he likes because he likes what he has, that is, the properties actually given to him [sic] in the distributions and legitimately assigned to him [sic] in the classifications.

[Bourdieu 1984: 175, cited in Reed-Danahay 2005: 111⁴⁰]

From such a point of view, internalized dispositions, feelings, tastes, thoughts and bodily hexis acquired during primary socialization are inextricably intertwined with mechanisms of elimination (and misrecognition) of latent possibilities present in our lives.

A similar mechanism seems to be at work in an earlier opus [*Outline of a Theory of Practice*], when Bourdieu envisages the connection between emotions and ‘practical reason’, quoting a Kabyle girl on arranged marriage as ‘adhesion to the inevitable’, *amor fati*⁴¹:

A girl doesn’t know her husband beforehand [...] She loves him even before they marry, because she must; she has to love him, there is no other ‘door’.

[Bourdieu 1977: 233, fn 11, as cited in Reed-Danahay 2005: 110]

And if arranged marriages were outdated in twentieth century France, the author observes new mechanisms of ‘normal love’⁴² through which social homogamy actualizes on a local marriage market, which tend to lead men and

⁴⁰ See also Bourdieu 1979: 195 and fn 7. Bourdieu 1984 refers to the English translation of *La distinction* and Bourdieu 1979 to the original French text. In this dissertation I have occasionally quoted French authors *via* other scholars when I did not have access to the English translation in France.

⁴¹ In *Distinction*, *amor fati* is ‘illusion of choice’ and ‘choice of destiny’ [Reed-Danahay 2005: 111]. In *Masculine Domination*, *amor fati* is ‘love of social destiny’ [2002: 58] or ‘corporeal inclination to actualize a constituted identity [...] hence transformed into destiny’ [ibid.: 74–75]; ‘adhesion to the inevitable which induced many women, at least in ancient Kabylia or the Béarn of the old times, and without a doubt well beyond [...] to find amiable and to love the one that social destiny assigned them’ [...] or ‘accepted domination’ [ibid: 148].

⁴² The term ‘normal love’ is used by Pierre Bourdieu in an interview by C. Portevin & J-P. Pisanias [1998].

women to ‘*find amiable to love the one that social destiny destined them*’ [2002: 148]⁴³.

Thus in *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu notes that the most traditional forms of womanhood in contemporary Western societies (theoretically translated by this author into ‘submissive dispositions’) are found in social *milieux* in which objective dependency is the greatest, and in which marriage represents the primary fashion of obtaining a social position. This operation actualizes through an unconscious adjustment of dispositions to probabilities embedded in objective social structures. Thereby, socialized dispositions or ‘preferences’ tend to produce effects similar to that of rational calculation resulting from a competent understanding of where one’s interest and possibilities lie [Bourdieu 2002: 57–58]. According to this logic, when a woman’s economic independence increases [generally with her educational level], the ‘submissive dispositions’ are weaker and recourse to exit by divorce is more plausible. Hence, love is ‘*often in part amor fati, love of social destiny*’ [ibid.].

Although in *Masculine Domination*, the author once more draws out the term *amor fati* out of his sociologist’s hat [2002: 58, 74, 112, 148]⁴⁴, in the same book, Bourdieu was to distinguish practical emotions and ‘*love subordinated to the imperatives of not only biological but social reproduction*’ – or normal love – from ‘pure’, elective, bohemian, romantic love. So, if electivity is the (rare in a probabilistic sense) condition of pure love – as and because it eludes social determinations and probabilities – an ‘enchanted island’ inducing ‘*reversal of relations of domination*’ and a fatal rupture of social order –, it also appears in its principle as incompatible with parenthood.

Indeed, the mother-child relationship, albeit in late modernity, can hardly be regarded as a fundamentally elective one. Certainly, one may ‘choose’ parenthood as an abstraction (and motherhood is constructed as choice) – but significantly, this applies to the period anterior to the venue of the child. However, one cannot ‘choose’ the individual child one engenders nor the social conditions in which care for the child takes place⁴⁵. And mother-love does not often appear

⁴³ On the paths of socially sanctioned love in contemporary Western societies, see e.g. Vernier 1977; Bozon & Héran 1987.

⁴⁴ Namely, to mention an extreme form of *amor fati*: the love of the dominated for a dominant and his domination constituted by a socially instituted *libido* [2002: 112; see also ibid: 56], although Bourdieu recuses the explication of women’s domination by a reified penchant for masochism, often implicit in discourse on women’s ‘choice’, i.e. in contentions that ‘women are their [own] worst enemies’ [ibid: 62].

⁴⁵ This recalls Raymond Aron’s qualification of Weber’s understanding of action as situated and that of a socialized actor: ‘*To act is to be placed in a unique conjuncture which one has not wanted*’ [Fleury 2001: 18].

as an eminently optional sentiment in contemporary child-rearing *doxa*. It has been construed, and ‘scientifically’ ascertained, as a central cornerstone of child development (see also chapters 6 & 5).

Moreover, the correlate of electivity is reversibility, whereas, in the pantheon of contemporary Western intimate relationships, mother-child relationships are generally conceived of as the long-term, if not the life-long commitment of contemporary adult lives [Hochschild 1998: 14; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 107]. Hence, it might be argued, that for a contemporary ‘good’ mother, this combination of an unpredictable choice, of mandatory love and of long-lasting commitment, means that ‘*there is no other door*’.

Developing a ‘taste for necessity’ may also be regarded as reinforced by the ineluctable character of nurturing dependent children, ‘*necessary for maintaining the social world as we know it*’ in terms of physical sustenance, preservation and well-being of children; an activity ‘*critically important for group life*’ [DeVault 1994] – which befalls her as a woman. Sustaining the ‘*burden of the domestic ideal*’ [Tincknell 2005: 12]; concretely holding the family together; placing children’s needs above that one’s own; are still primarily the mothers’ job, regardless of other demands or tastes.

Multiple causalities: that of a gendered primary socialization; of lessons reinforced through the urgency and immediacy of children’s needs; of textual instructions given to mothers; of powerful cultural symbols; of norms encountered in interactions with others; and of ‘*the arts of distribution*’ of social policy, amongst other factors, join forces to create a compelling interiorized sense that caring for others is a mother’s duty [see also DeVault 1994: 119]. These complex webs setting, pushing and drawing women into the role of primary carer and into subordinating their own interests in often predictable but unseen ways are liable to constitute a fertile terrain for *amor fati*: the (individual) choice of one’s (socially probable) gendered destiny as a parent.

Reconciling pleasure and domesticity as discursive competence

A third reading of the text is to focus, not on ‘deep’ causality *per se*, but to view this testimony as a competent account articulating different types of discourses ‘in the air’ on the daily-as-parenthood in our societies. Constrained to show up with culturally available and intelligible significations of their activities, subjects’ discursive competence (see e.g. Suoninen 1993: 123) or cultural literacy can imply the prioritization of a socially valued discourse – and downscaling less acceptable ones.

Hence, in the course of narration, the expression of a less valorising form of assessing one's maternal activities (in terms of routines, repetition and 'having to'; a dull realism of sorts) makes room for a culturally more rewarding surface: that of sensuous fulfilment and meaningfulness. In a sense then, the triumph of a discourse of a neoromantic type represents a relatively predictable happy ending for public accounts of private life [Jallinoja 1997: 216–218]⁴⁶.

The following section examines yet another type of discursive surface or lines thrown to parents by mediated texts. I have named this surface a pragmatic, domestic, minimalist or ascetic hedonism or sorts.

Happiness as an attitude: of domestic hedonism

Discursive oscillations between the daily as routinised duty *versus* fulfilment, it was implied above, is a symptom of a forceful dream of the era: that of reconciling individual aspirations and the exigencies of life with dependent children. But tentative reconciliation of these drives may also be effectuated *inside* a particular discourse. A burgeoning genre of this kind is concerned with the 'capacity' of individuals to adopt an attitude which allows them to appreciate the minute daily pleasures of parenthood. An exemplar of this type of a technology of self is provided in the text hereunder⁴⁷.

Under the splash headline, 'Happiness is an attitude', the article relates the rather dramatic life choice of a couple: both partners gave up international careers and returned to Finland to found a family [*Meidän Perhe* [Our family], March 2006: 12–16]. The father: '*Our life was transformed completely. We could have continued our careers [...] But children seemed more important then. The shared ideal of privileging family over career ['Children come first, before everything else, for the time being.'] also included home-care for young children, which, in practice, was carried out by the mother:*

When the first child was born, I kept my promise easily, but with [the second one], the walls started closing in on me, so I returned to work half a year earlier than planned [...] I used to wonder why many mothers of small children claimed that their life was tough [...] but then came [the second child]... [The child] was perpetually dissatisfied.

⁴⁶ However, linguistic performance cannot be reduced solely to an issue of competence [de Certeau 1990: xxxviii].

⁴⁷ See also Chapter *Profiter de mon enfant*. Another feature of the account, which does not appear here, is that new motherhood was portrayed as an uncomfortable surprise and existential crisis. See also sub-chapter 3.1.

The text then shifts to its core section, consecrated to an expert-guided child-rearing programme that enables the parents to enjoy their own time. In short: keeping to a clear set of rules and schedule for the children. Own time *'keeps the parent's hold on life'* and the marital relationship. Near the end of the article, a narrative turn is occasioned by the journalist who confesses: *I had to ask, 'Was their life really plain sunshine?'*. Readers are then told that: *'Choking professional ambition in the interest of the family has occasioned a small crisis for both'*:

– I admit that I am waiting for the time when I will be able to target my professional ambitions and invest in my career. I have been thinking, for the last years, with the handbrake on [mother].

– On weak moments, I think: was this [all] that life was about [father].

Then:

The partners start to reflect on what happiness is. Both agree that it does not demand anything so extraordinary: the best things come in small packages. It sounds like they are happy expressly because of their attitude in life.

This leitmotif is taken up by the father: *There's our motto: happiness is an attitude*. Three catchers resume the daily philosophy of the couple:

'Our Motto in life with children is... happiness is an attitude';

'We have learnt from our children... to value the small delights of daily life';

'The best moments with our children are... meals together, activities together and daily life together'

In the media data, domestic hedonism appears to be a discursive move coming out into view in the late 1990s, early 2000s⁴⁸. Recasting parenthood as the revival of essential, albeit minute pleasures can be regarded as an arranged marriage of sorts between domesticity and a Western hedonist ethos. Happiness being the contemporary criteria of a good life [see e.g. Moskowitz 2001: 1–2; Campbell 1989, chapter 6], it thus becomes associated to the 'daily' through an advocated life style, an existential technique or technology of the self [Foucault 1984: 36–42], characterized by prizing a somewhat 'anti-modern' simplicity as authentic pleasure⁴⁹. *'Happiness as an attitude'* and *'valuing the small delights*

⁴⁸ This affirmation would however, deserve a more systematic exploration through the comparison of media materials from different epochs. Data in France has been collected on an occasional basis from 1995 onwards; the Finnish media data is from the 2000s. See Chapter 2 Data & Methods.

⁴⁹ See Illouz [1991: 236] on the combination of anti-modern values (spontaneity, authenticity, etc.) and hedonism on contemporary discourses on romantic love. On the paradox of hedonism and asceticism, see Campbell 1989.

of daily life' may also be apprehended as mediated recipes in which such beliefs figure as '*ingredients to keep love alive*', found in contemporary media discourses on romance and love [Illouz 1991: 236].

The leitmotiv of parenthood as procuring small daily pleasures can be regarded as a revival of a somewhat (but not completely) outdated gender representation in Western popular culture, in which 'feminine' responsiveness to the trifles of everyday life has constituted a ritualized theme. Indeed, in *Gender Advertisements* [1979]⁵⁰, Erving Goffman highlights such dramaturgic *clichés* in which women are portrayed as eminently capable of finding ultimate and definitive satisfaction in the immanent present – a quality also associated to children. Transports of delight procured by the consumption of foodstuffs, beverages or household appliances; joyful gleefulness when receiving a gift; or happiness provided by the contemplation of the results of housework, a shining table, a shimmering floor, the glitter of washed dishes or the whiteness of washed clothes, figure amongst stereotyped citations of femininity [Goffman 1988: 182].

Nevertheless, occurrences of pragmatic/domestic/ minimalist/ascetic hedonism informing men's discourse were also located in the corpus. One Finnish father participating in the research, for example, mentioned a singular moment smuggled from the quotidian, when he contemplated an icicle on care leave with his daughter. Sharing the daily life of the child at home enabled him to perceive a minute wonder through the child's eyes; a fleeting moment, which otherwise might have passed him by.

In this type of account, the child becomes the adults' guide towards an alternative perception of the surrounding world enabling the parent to recover the freshness of childhood – or eventually a guide to a transformation of self and the discovery of a new set of values (e.g. see Gavarini 2001: 21). This motif appears in the following account of a Finnish mother, in which the child appears as a bulwark against the folly of a life colonized by the rhythms of the labour market⁵¹:

I have started to understand the absurdity of this coming and going, doing and performing [...] If the child does not help us realize this, then who will?

[Finnish collection of essays on parenthood 2003: 69]

On a similar quasi confessional tone, the following father – evoking '*the restlessness which constantly gnaws at the guts of our contemporaries*' – also ex-

⁵⁰ I am referring to French translations of extracts of *Gender Advertisements* in Winkin 1998: 150–185.

⁵¹ See Zelizer 1994 on the role of the child as a bulwark against the market.

presses his wish and imperfect capacity to change his existential attitude. Once again, the ‘sacred’ child [Zelizer 1994] is represented as a potential support for such a transformation of self and the daily, which would imply ‘seizing the day’ and seeing the world through the children’s eyes.

As the horizon of meaning of life grows dusky, I don’t see that the most important of moments and the most important being – the child – is here and now [...] Quality time and development enhancing experiences, arranged with great effort and cost, are not what is the most important for the children. They enjoy daily moments with their parents, shared time. [...] If I only could integrate the fact that this moment and the small human being are sacred [...] Maybe then I could push the stroller on the way to the day-care centre more calmly and respond to the moment and throw myself into the endless questions of the children about the miracles they have seen and experienced? [...] I would be able to cope more cheerfully with the routines of the daily. Life would not be elsewhere but here. Mothers that I know hope for something similar.

[Finnish collection of essays on parenthood 2003: 138]⁵²

I read the appropriation of this type of discourse by (some Finnish) men as an indicator of the strengthening appeal of the ‘priceless’ or ‘sacred’ child in Western society [Zelizer 1994]. Seeing life through the child’s eyes seems to have become a resource for re-enchanting an increasingly disenchanting world and introducing an ‘ordinary extraordinary’ into the quotidian⁵³, although, significantly, this endeavour is not presented as effortless. The romantic spirit of modern child-parent relationships is articulated to a necessity to ‘work’ on relationships (e.g. see Illouz 1991: 236; see also chapter 5)⁵⁴.

As young children’s needs are emphasized and their interests tend to be elevated above that of adults [‘the children come first’], the latter gain a powerful charisma for becoming a pivot for guiding parental, particularly maternal, conduct during

⁵² One may also read: *I didn’t understand parenthood as a series of metamorphosis either, the child taught me that later [...] [The child] taught me to mix, day and night, a soup of desires, duties and goals and to flavour it with professional hopes, the joys and horrors of parenthood* [ibid.: 103].

⁵³ Fleury clarifies Max Weber’s use of the oft cited but semantically ambiguous term: ‘disenchantment of the world’. According to this author, for Weber, this phenomenon is due to the decreased power of religions to guide daily conduct and to unify experiences of the world. Weber indeed argued that only positive religion was capable of imposing an unconditional superiority of certain values or a certain ethic [*Essais sur la théorie de la science* (1965) Paris: Plon]. Fleury also notes that, for Weber, as religion becomes a subject of private consideration economy and politics substitute for ethics. ‘Disenchantment’ was not provoked by a pluralism of values resulting from rationalization *per se*; but as resulting from a particular type of rationalized rationalization, ‘intellectualization’ [Fleury 2001: 63–71]. On childhood as a locus of social utopia, see also Beck & Beck-Gernsheim [1995: 106] and Hacking [2003: 141].

⁵⁴ In the ‘work model’, effort replaces the magic start, commitment the overwhelming force of passion, relativity the absoluteness of love, and conscious monitoring the spontaneous outburst of passion [Illouz 1991: 236].

toddlerhood. This, I will argue, is one of the cultural stimuli behind a phenomenon designated as temporary homemaking [Rissanen 2000; Heinen & Martiskainen de Koenigswarter 2001; Mahon 2001; Morgan & Zippel 2002], neofamilism [Jallinoja 2006; Haataja 2006], or neotraditionalism [Johnston & Swanson 2003].

The following excerpt, this time located in a French parenting magazine, ties together the discursive motif of small pleasures and the valorisation of temporary homemaking:

Taking care of one's children isn't square. On the contrary it's gratifying, a source of pride. And of small pleasures. A way to refocus on what's essential. Quitting a job to be a full-time mother, hundred percent, is even becoming trendy, including in circles where women have super Wonder Woman jobs.

[*Parents*, April 2006: 5]

In this brief passage, becoming a '*full-time mother, hundred percent*' is qualified as an expression of the spirit of the times ['trendy']; as moral [refocusing on the 'essential'], pleasurable, and as source of social recognition ['source of pride'].

Worthy of notice is the fact, that in this French excerpt, staying at home is not labelled as 'housewifery', possibly a '*square*' category (see below). Meaningful homemaking is recast as care⁵⁵. A similar shift in categorization from 'housewife' to 'stay-at-home mother' seems to have occurred in Anglo-Saxon culture. One example is provided by the passage below from an article in the *New York Times* quoting a highly educated mother having resigned from the workplace to care for her small children:

I am not a housewife. Is there still any such thing? I am doing what is right for me at the moment, not necessarily what is right for me forever.

[*New York Times* 26.10.2003⁵⁶]

Indeed, Johnston & Swanson note that 'neotraditional' motherhood imagery: '*positions the children, rather than the father, as the raison d'être of the family*' [2003: 30]⁵⁷. Polemic best-seller author Judith Warner speaks of a similar shift

⁵⁵ This shift is also visible in sociological work. Hence, for example, in her *The Finnish Woman and Man*, sociologist Elina Haavio-Mannila categorizes women as 'wage-earners' or 'housewives' [1968: 172].

⁵⁶ Belkin, L. The Opt-out Revolution. *New York Times* 26.10.2003. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/26/magazine/26WOMEN.html?ei=5007&en=02f8d75eb63908e0&ex=1382500800&partner=USERLAND&pagewanted=all&position=>>

⁵⁷ Tinknell evokes the requirements of the immediate post-war 'companionate marriage': women were called upon to subordinate their own interests to their partners' hobbies or occupations [2005: 158]. In contemporary families, this subordination may well take place only for children. On the centrality of children and descent as anchoring the contemporary family and kin see also Théry 1998; Godelier 2004 and chapter 5.

in terms of a switch from the 'Feminine Mystique' in Friedan's time to a 'Mommy Mystique' [2005: 13]. French Irène Théry has also argued in this direction: it is the birth of the child – and not the couple's legal status which socially creates a 'family' [1998: 42]⁵⁸.

In the French excerpt reproduced above, at-home mothering is also presented as a departure from the 1980s mediated stereotype of the urban Superwoman 'having-it-all'-ideal, efficiently managing her corporate career and her family enterprise (on this media stereotype see Kaplan 1992: 188–189; Johnston & Swanson 2003: 21–22; Tincknell 2005: 38); or from that of the 'economic nurturer model', in which mother-love is framed as, in part, expressed through financial provision for an improved quality of life, additional goods, services and experiences for children, although the nurturer's career aspirations are typically compromised [Johnston & Swanson 2003: 24].

Indeed, the text evokes *refocusing* on 'essential' values: a formulation which suggests that previous cohorts of mothers, particularly mothers in favourable social positions, i.e. 'career-mothers', may have lost sight of something 'essential' at some point of recent history⁵⁹.

Conclusion: Towards a meta-narrative?

The narratives studied above can be read as an exercise of women's subjectivity around existential questions requiring particular practices of the self: as pertains to promises and outcomes; bonds and freedom; costs and rewards at transition to motherhood. Such dilemmas are not, however, solely bottled into the early months of life after-birth. Nathalie Azoulay illustrates their workings in a later phase of a mothers' life – and their tentative management by temporizing rhetoric⁶⁰.

In addition to the euphemism '*it's such a short time*', appearing in the Finnish case, other avatars of the expression were also identified in the French⁶¹ (and

⁵⁸ This, according to Théry, does not imply a devaluation of the couple, as only approximately 4 percent of mothers are neither married nor cohabiting at the birth of their child in France [or Finland], but the marital unit *and* children define the contemporary family. Another indicator of such a trend is the augmenting exigency that the parental couple must survive divorce.

⁵⁹ This indicates that the targeted reader of the article is not a mother with a high level of education, indeed the profile of home-care allowance beneficiaries in France is characterized by a lower educational level.

⁶⁰ See DiQuinzio, who has criticized early feminist accounts as portraying maternity as 'an obstacle to, greater than the exercise of, women's subjectivity' [1999: 67].

⁶¹ Namely the expressions: '*ça passe si vite* [it goes so fast]: '*ce temps-là serait court*' [that time would be short].

English) languages, of which ‘*it’s not a lifetime*’ / ‘*there’s a lifetime*’⁶² – as well as various formulations of the *cliché* that ‘children grow up fast’⁶³. The last-mentioned truism functions as a caution of sorts. Indeed, temporizing rhetoric may also function to imply that mothers who do not enjoy fully their children now may experience regrets later.

Interestingly enough, traces of temporizing discourse were also come across in contemporary writings in the United States. In *Talk of Love* [2003] American sociologist Ann Swidler interviews a mother who speaks of her commitment to her children in the following terms, associating the cost of having children and its limitation in time:

making priorities – what is important. I don’t want to sacrifice, because if I sacrifice I will be resentful [...] There are things that I would love to be doing, there will be time. It will surface. *There’s a lifetime*

[Swidler 2003: 150]

Swidler’s analysis concords with my observations:

the optimism that says ‘there’s a lifetime’ seems a way for this single mother to shore up her strength so she can continue to make the sacrifices she must make by denying the costs to herself [...] in a world where your only obligation is to do what you really want to do, to admit that one is sacrificing would be to invite the suggestion that one should simply stop and pursue what one really wants. People seem to fear that with nothing but their individual psychological commitments to back up their sacrifices, if they start counting the costs, they will bankrupt the system

[Swidler 2003: 150]⁶⁴

The remark of the author quoted above on the ‘*obligation is to do what you really want to do*’ underscores another difficulty inherent to maternal ‘complaints’. Reproduction framed as an initial ‘choice’ seemingly renders the costs of motherhood even more difficult to voice (see also Lawler 2000: 159–161; Ferrand 2005). The issue is mentioned in a remark on a North-American Internet blog of family scholars reflecting on motherhood:

⁶² In French such expressions were: ‘ne durerait pas toute la vie’ [it’s not a lifetime]. See also excerpt in English: ‘there’s a lifetime’ and the excerpt from Abécassis in which this idea is expressed through the term ‘ultimately’.

⁶³ In French this idea was formulated in the expressions: ‘c’est leur âge et ça passera’ [it’s their age and it’ll pass]; ‘très vite ils vont s’éloigner’ [very quickly, they will withdraw]; ‘bientôt ils vivront loin’ [soon, they will live far away]; ‘vous les voyez grandir, ça passe vite en fait’ [when you see them grow up, times passes by quickly].

⁶⁴ Swidler also writes: ‘For some respondents, denial of sacrifice requires a tenacious optimism. No one need sacrifice, because everything will work out for the best. But this optimism in turn rests on the solipsistic view that apparent obstacles originate within the self and can be dissolved by a change in attitude. [...] Thus the individual is free to choose, in an a world so benign that sacrifice is unnecessary for one with the right attitudes, as it is impossible for one who is only doing what he really wants to do’. [ibid: 150–151].

A colleague of mine once said that in the past, before reliable birth control, a woman could moan and complain and tear her hair out about her children and that other people would nod in commiseration. Now, if you dare complain now and then about the burden of motherhood the other person is thinking: ‘Hey, this was your choice to have them, what are you complaining about?’⁶⁵

Cécile Coderre [1982] and Yvonne Knibiehler and have also reflected on ‘choice’ as accruing the responsibility of mothers for their progeny [1997]; Michèle Ferrand [2005] has called this consequence the ‘boomerang effect’⁶⁶. Journalist and motherhood activist Stadtman Tucker holds that temporizing discourse is a typical feature of American mainstream literature on motherhood. Tragic-comic accounts are prone to proposing a unique alternative for women:

The common theme in mainstream writing about motherhood seems to be the ingenious ways mothers manage to survive the disastrous consequences of living with children. The tone is almost always good natured and humorous, and the deepest insights the writers have to offer usually have something to do with the observation that *children grow up very quickly*— so if a mother’s sense of self preservation is urging her to head for the hills post haste, she should just *relax and treasure* the madness and mayhem while it lasts.

[Stadtman Tucker 2003, emphasis added]

A similar rhetorical device is observed in the pool of data from Finland, France and the United States. Compared in rhetorical contexts, it is invariably linked to the constraints and difficulties related to caring for an infant or young child. Temporizing discourse operates at various levels of social reality: self (soliloquies), situated activity (in interactions amongst mothers) and context, or culture at large [Layder 1993: 8]⁶⁷.

Contemporary wage-earning mothers may evoke the logic of a limited time consecrated primarily for their children – and regard it as a significant technique of self, and answer, to the constraints that impact on their lives (see Darrieussecq’s *Le Bébé* above). In such cases, temporizing rhetoric may have a heuristic value; it is *logoi* putting into words an experience which enables mothers to adapt to their new lives.

⁶⁵ <<http://www.familyscholars.org>> posted on 3.3.2005 by E. Marquardt, processed on 28.4.2005.

⁶⁶ Norbert Elias has analogously argued that ‘blindly’ engendered children beheld less power on their parents, then desired ones do [1998c: 195].

⁶⁷ Layder defines self as the locus of biographical experience and social involvements; situated activity consists of the dynamics of face-to-face interactions; while context designates macro social forms. Scheff [1997] proposes to observe the events and micro discourses present in social interactions and to proceed, by comparison of cases, rhetorical, biographical and extended cultural contexts, to macro level explanation.

Women may endeavour to talk themselves into a type of emotional management that A.R. Hochschild names ‘deep acting’, which we practice when we try to feel what we sense we ought to feel or want to feel [Hochschild 2003: 43⁶⁸]. In this, they may meet with more or less success. Microacts of temporizing discourse are also performed during face-to-face interactions. When voicing their complex and contradictory experiences, women may inadvertently run into a lingual wall of a piece of folk wisdom. Pathos is countered by pragmatic ‘commonsense’ emanating from peers. The locus of emotion management occurs at another level: situated activity⁶⁹. Indeed emotions can thus be conceived of as *achieved* in a tension between ‘*depth and struggle, flux and contradiction*’ [Williams 2001: 104]: as a collective enterprise.

Temporizing rhetoric was thus also identified in larger social arenas. Traces of it were found in the public sphere: expert discourses [for the Finnish case see chapter 5] and literature. Moreover, as the American case suggests, it seems to have crystallized as a meta-narrative of motherhood, as a master script for the mother role. Hence, temporizing logic unfolds its institutionalized message in Chinese boxes: soliloquies, dialogues, expert texts and best-sellers. Historically, temporizing discourse can be considered as a contemporary expression of a particular conception of motherhood specific to the twentieth century. Its emergence has been depicted by Ann Taylor Allen [2005: 63–85]. The author resumes this conception in the following terms:

motherhood was now a phase in the life of the modern woman, who after a limited period of full-time mother-work could also aspire to other activities, including paid employment. [...] In the prewar period [before World War I] we see the first step toward the redefinition of maternity from a lifetime identity to a role.

[Allen 2005: 84]⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Hochschild opposes ‘deep acting’ to ‘surface acting’ that a professional comedian might mechanically practice, for example by raising his eyebrows to feign surprise, while not experiencing or trying to feel the portrayed sentiment [2003: 37–38, 42–55].

⁶⁹ Geertz has qualified commonsense as the virtually invisible components of our culture: it is what is self-evident – it’s ‘the way things go’, ‘the world is its authority’. Commonsense systems function as highly efficient problem solvers: ‘*The world is what the wide-awake, the uncomplicated person takes it to be. Sobriety, not subtlety, realism, not imagination, are the keys to wisdom; the really important facts of life lie scattered openly along its surface, not cunningly secreted in its depths. There is no need, indeed it is a fatal mistake, to deny, as poets, intellectuals, priests, and other professional complicators of the world so often do, the obviousness of the obvious*’ [Geertz C. (1983). *Local Knowledge*. New York: Basic Books, quoted by Scheff 1997: 223]

⁷⁰ Motherhood obligations as consuming a whole life at times when families were larger, births spaced throughout the life span, and life expectancy low, became redefined, in the wake of first wave feminism, as a limited commitment at the turn of twentieth century. Allen contends that such a radical redefinition of the maternal role has been overlooked in many recent historical accounts [Ibid: 63]. On the diminishing proportion of time consecrated by women to mothering during the life span, see also Castrén [2001: 58], who refers to Joan Aldous (1996) *Family Careers. Rethinking the Developmental Perspective*. London: Sage (page 58).

Does temporizing rhetoric, which frames the constraints of maternity as temporary constitute a master solution to the Western maternal dilemma – a response to the question: ‘*is it possible to be both a mother and an autonomous individual?*’ [Allen 2005: 1]?

In Finland, Eeva Jokinen writes:

The model of temporary homemaking is an ingenious invention for limiting the frontier state of motherhood to a certain period of time, although its length is regulated somewhat inconsistently, now by the ‘interest of the child’ from the standpoint of developmental psychology, now based on budgetary abundance or paucity of municipalities, now on the basis of labour policy.

[Jokinen 1997: 136]

This tension between the values of autonomy and the exigencies of care, which constitutes a meta-context transcending national frontiers in contemporary Western societies, I have suggested, finds a solution in temporizing discourse. Indeed, as testified in the section above, footprints of temporizing discourse may be also found on the other side of the Atlantic.

Sentiments and sensations such as asphyxiation, fatigue, despair, frustration, anger, regrets, fear and guilt, joy and love of bonds and hugs, can be managed through silent emotional work and practices of self – or with the guidance of others.

Conclusions

SCENE 1, IN A SUPERMARKET:

Ex-colleague: Lynette Scavo?

Lynette: [mumbles to herself] Crap. Natalie Klein! I don't believe it!

Ex-colleague: Lynette. How long has it been?

Lynette: Years. How are you? How's the firm?

Ex-colleague: Good. Everyone misses you.

Lynette: Yeah...

Ex-colleague: We all say if you hadn't quit, you'd be running the place right now.

Lynette: [pulling a face] Yeah, well... [baby starts to cry]

Ex-colleague: So how's domestic life? Don't you just love being a mom?

[VO: a narrator's voice] *And there it was. The question that Lynette always dreaded...*

Lynette: Well, to be honest...

[VO: a narrator's voice] *For those who asked it, only one answer was acceptable. So Lynette responded as she always did. She lied.*

Lynette: It's the best job I've ever had!

Desperate Housewives, Season 1, episode 1

SCENE 2, IN A SOCCER FIELD:

Lynette: I love my kids so much. I'm so sorry they have me as a mother.

Bree: Lynette, you are a great mother.

Lynette: No I'm not. I can't do it. I'm so tired of feeling like a failure. It's so humiliating.

Susan: No it's not! So you got addicted to your kids' ADD medication. You know it happens!

Bree: You got four kids, that's a lot of stress on you. You just need some help.

Lynette: That's what so humiliating. Other mums don't need help. Other mums make it look so easy. All I do is complain.

Susan: That's not true! When Julie was a baby I was out of my mind almost every day.

Bree: I used to get so upset when Andrew and Danielle were little that I used their nap-times to cry.

Lynette: [crying] Why didn't you tell me this?

Bree: Oh baby, nobody likes to admit that they can't handle the pressure.

Susan: I think that it's just that we think you know... it's easier to keep it all in.

Lynette: Oh we shouldn't! We should tell each other this stuff!

Susan: It helps, ha?

Lynette: Yeah. It really does.

Desperate Housewives, Season 1, episode 8

The problem which has no name eternally revisited?

Dismantling cultural narratives of ever-giving and fulfilled mothers has been an endeavour undertaken by cohorts of second-wave feminist discussants from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* [1949 (1976)] onwards – Friedan 1963 (2001), Delphy 1970 (2002), Rich 1976 (1997), Auvinen 1979, Oakley 1980, Badinter 1980, Dally 1982, Chodorow and Contratto 1992, Bassin, Honey, Mahrer & Kaplan 1994, Lawler 2000 – just to mention a heterogeneous few.

White middle-class academics have been joined by white middle-class writers. During the research process, for example, bestselling *Perfect Madness* [Warner 2005] and *How to Avoid the Mommy Trap* [Shields 2002] explicitly undertook to revisit the 'problem which has no name' identified by Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* [1963 (2001)]. Judith Warner explores the existential 'mess' of soul-draining perfectionism amongst upper-middle class American mothers in the absence of social – and (particularly in the American case) state support. Shields' 'Mommy trap' is conceived of as stemming from great expectations: namely, faith in the discourse of shared parenting prior to childbirth. Warner and Shields are not exceptions. For Frank Furedi, the child-rearing industry itself is littering the field with texts breaking the 'conspiracy of silence' [2002: 102]. So why in the last four decades, one could ask, has every generation of new mothers started the discussion from the ground up?

Desperate Housewives

Desperate Housewives, a standout hit of the 2004–2005 television seasons in America, Finland and France, did just that. The emotional engine behind its success, if we are to believe Media consultant Laurie Hutzler, is the 'Power of Truth': that which lies hidden just below the surface, where nothing is what it seems. Did a neo-Victorian game of hide-and-seek with decency, in sum, propel this success amongst our contemporaries? Another commentator imputes the remarkable popularity of the soap-opera's first season to an ironical stance adopted in *Desperate Housewives* towards contemporary motherhood, particularly the 'new-momism' of the 1990s and 2000s and its neofamilist culture requiring self-imposed female dependency [Tunnacliffe 2004]. In scenes 1 & 2, reproduced above, the two themes are intertwined: they are scenes of revelations of that which lies underneath [mothers'] *surfaces*. Lynette Scavo, the ex-executive-woman and temporary homemaker, embodies the problem which has no name dressed up for the era. Above all, in the first scene, the character displays a remarkable cognisance of the rules of contemporary decency by voicing a *cliché*.

In the second scene at the beginning of the chapter, Lynette's apparently shaky transition from a socially valorised occupation to full-time homemaking; her clueless husband; a mixture of love and hyper-intense ambitious mothering; and allusions to the character as possibly happier and more efficient in a boardroom, are narrative features which culminate in the breakdown of the mother of four. In the face of Lynette's disarray, her friends Bree and Susan, two mothers of adolescents, reveal their own difficult experiences in the same life stage. 'Why didn't you ever tell me?' Lynette asks. *The Evening Standard* proposes three answers: the prevailing 'conspiracy of silence'; the hidden costs of self-transformation required from contemporary professional women to adjust to the requisites of intensive child-rearing; and assertions that previous generations *did* cope [Feuchtwanger 2005].

To wit, the two scenes – and the medley of remarks by commentators – encapsulate issues examined in the research: overtness and covertness in mother-talk; rules that govern speech; cross-generational and collegial impasses of communication; the exigencies of becoming (a possibly radically) different kind of person; and the role of fictional or real-life celebrities as 'colleagues' for contemporary mothers of young children.

A North American website even proposes a video of the second scene exhorting mothers to catharsis and to 'vent their stress stories' on the video diary provided *ad hoc*. Lynette Scavo apparently crystallizes contemporary mother-troubles of highly educated women engaged in temporary homemaking (and most probably, beyond), to such an extent that she is on her way to becoming a therapeutic tool. Somewhat more cynically, one could remark that Lynette, Bree and Susan will also possibly function as a normalizing device, were we to consider that the trio solved the maternal dilemma by just talking about it for society as a whole.

Cramped matrixes & proper matches

Sociological and literary searchlights have highlighted other fogbound zones of the discursive matrixes of motherhood in which speakers may not often wander. In their studies of Finnish autobiographical accounts from the first decades of the twentieth century, for example, Nätkin and Helsti underscore the absence of mentions of illegal abortions [Nätkin 1997: 171; Helsti 2000: 37, 54] in a period during which a quarter to a third of pregnancies are thought to have been terminated. Hence, autobiographical accounts tend to respect the conventions and exclusions of the times [Nätkin 1997: 272]; they are also bound to larger

social narratives (see also conclusion of chapter 7; Lawler 2000:13; Somers 1994; Marander Eklund 2000; Miller 2005: 3, 8–9, 11; 18–23).

Thirty years later, in the France of the early 1960s, Annie Ernaux depicts a scene in which she seeks abortion during a medical consultation: the word is not pronounced once [2000: 60]. Paradoxically, she also purports that talk about the issue may not be so much easier for our contemporaries as the problem is now considered to have been ‘solved’ by legalized abortion [ibid.: 27]. Such a remark bears an interesting analogy with the arguments evoked in chapter 4 (related to the amelioration in material conditions of mothering) and which functioned to discount difficult experiences in contemporaneousness. Ernaux’s remark is also validated by empirical research in contemporary Finland. Salome Tuomaala finds that expressing suffering about abortion is likely to be considered improper. Framed as a ‘choice’, abortion is expected to produce *relief*, not suffering. Relief should not, however, be voiced too loudly in the name of decency. All in all, this leaves the experiencer with little to say [Tuomaala 2004: 140–141, 152, 155, 160].

To this, I would be tempted to add that the contemporary discursive matrix of motherhood predicates expressions of pain (and the right to complain) especially to those who unintentionally remain *without* progeny. Expressions of anger, fatigue, boredom, and constraints related to ‘priceless’ children may seem indecent (on the avoidance of such emotions, see also Katvala 2001: 24; Nousiainen 2004: 14; Heikkilä 1998: 341; Nopola 1991: 72; Romito 1997: 172), not only because they relate to invaluable ‘goods’ embodied by children, but also relationally *vis-à-vis* other social groups, as childlessness becomes increasingly framed as an obstacle to fulfilment, or as a catastrophe, in personal and societal life politics.

Hence, if lay mothers have tentatively started to go public on difficult experiences, this has occurred concomitantly with a continuing enchantment of childhood in contemporary Western societies. The latter may have engendered a rise in the moral standards of mother-talk since the 1960s and 1970s and augmented pressure on mothers. Carol Smart, for example, has pointed out that these two decades were a rare moment in the history of British motherhood in the sense of an unprecedented blurring of boundaries between proper and improper mothers. In the 1980s, she contends, a discursive closure seems to have taken place anew [1996: 53–56].

This closure seems to have operated through the increasing salience of the *leitmotiv* of pleasure and fulfilment in parenthood. Indeed, Kaplan, who charts the representations of the white middle-class mother in popular North Ameri-

can novels and films, reports that the icon of the fulfilled mother crystallizes in the media only in the mid-1980s. Although the 1970s–1990s are characterized by the end of totalizing narratives, Kaplan judges this shift between mothering construed as abnegation, duty and ineluctable hardship (prevalent in the early decades of the twentieth century; see also Thébaud 1986: 136, 139; Nätkin 1997: 224–229; Allen 2005: 240) to an activity regarded as in itself fulfilling, remarkable [Kaplan 1992: 194].

Pleasure in ‘motherhood’ can be regarded as a libratory conquest claimed by feminists. In France it was encapsulated in the 1970s’ catchphrase ‘*Un enfant si je veux, quand je veux*’ [‘A child if I wish, when I wish’], which accompanied the struggle for the development and legalization of oral contraceptives and abortion. Images of children and parenting moulded by experts also contribute to contemporary representations of the pleasurable experiences linked to parenthood and pertaining norms, which influence our contemporaries and which they responsibly and voluntarily strive to actualize [Eräranta 2005: 20]. But pleasure also appears as a requisite technique for constituting enhanced child-selves. Therefore, libratory claims and child-rearing *doxa* may, in an unintended manner, have combined to create a state of facts in which the only morally and culturally intelligible emotional and experiential match for the category ‘mother’ is happiness.

Indeed, as demonstrated above in the case of abortion, infertility, and motherhood, the cultivation of decent matches between certain categories of emotions or experiences and certain categories of individuals appears to be a characteristic of discursive matrixes (see also Somers 1994: 622–623). One of the methodological findings of this piece of research relates to the fact that such matches may be constituted as sociological objects through the identification of recurrent discursive crystallizations in a given culture. Ideal matches may crystallize in collocations and mismatches may be managed through *clichés*. One hypothesis is that the observed recurrence of given turns of speech or *prêt-à-parler* analyzed in the research pertains to the crucial importance of certain social ligatures (see chapter 5), which come to be strongly marked by such categorical associations: this is apparently the case of mother-child relationships.

Consequently, in the French case, the crystallization ‘*profiter de mon enfant*’ illustrates the workings of a perfect categorical match between persons and emotions (at least on the level of speech): mothers and children (always) *enjoy* each other. And if happiness is one of the legitimate existential quests of the era, children thereby become discursively and recurrently designated as a vital ingredient of such a quest.

In the Finnish case, the crystallization ‘*it’s such a short time*’ does not explicitly designate a match between sentiments and persons. Rather, it functions as a recall mechanism when a mismatch comes to occur in dialogue or a soliloquy; in speech or in thought. Temporizing rhetoric thus appears as a discursive tool for the collective achievement of decent matches; as useful for stalling unfitting talk; or for mitigating indecent combinations. Indeed, the euphemism was likely to be associated to the injunction to ‘enjoy’ maternity, a discursive prolongation which indicates the line of thought that is pursued in such speech acts.

Moreover, I have argued in chapter 7, the leitmotiv ‘*it’s such a short time*’ or its permutation ‘*it’s not a lifetime*’ constitute emplotments of a Western meta-narrative of motherhood. Such a narrative constitutes a possible solution for a core contemporary dilemma present in the ‘clearing’ of Western culture and which actualizes acutely in the lives of parents, particularly mothers, at transition to parenthood. It is the dilemma of the *Impossibility of Motherhood* [DiQuinzio 1999] in an individualist framework of (market oriented) thought. Values of individual autonomy, freedom, uniqueness, choice, and responsibility for self are contradictory with the vulnerability of all, the dependency of the young, the constraints associated to both, the immense responsibility which parents shoulder for ‘priceless’ children, and the rules of descent, at least for women.

It is primarily women who are still called upon to resolve this dilemma firmly anchored not only in the ‘clearing’ or ‘obscuring’ of our culture, but also in prevailing inequalities in the labour market, in politics, and in intimate relationships and which feed one upon the other. The maternal dilemma takes not only the form of ‘reconciling’ work, family, and citizenship – but that of a struggle towards a fair balance between care of self and care for others.

Helpful forums and unhelpful others

Although I pinpoint the cramped nature of discursive matrixes above, somewhat paradoxically, some defusing also seems to be taking place: since the 1990s, abortion [Détrez & Simon 2006: 143–152] and new motherhood stories as personal crises (managed at times through temporizing rhetoric) have come into view as *topoi* in the print media. Women’s magazines in Finland and novels in both countries also may be considered – alongside therapeutic settings or specialized peer groups – as socially designated emergent forums for dealing with delicate experiences and dilemmas (on such social forums see also Hänninen &

Timonen 2004: 217–224; Mehl 2003). My research suggests that the surge of interest in these narratives relates to the degree to which they crystallize experiences of the category of women focussed upon in the research (and beyond) at a specific life stage: that of transition to motherhood. Inversely, media story-worlds can also be regarded as matrixes of experience, filtering, organizing, and birthing personal narratives.

Some accounts, written or reported in interviews to the researcher, concern face-to-face interactions amongst mothers in which temporizing talk is performed. An interesting feature of these encounters is that newcomers to motherhood generally do not depict themselves as reacting verbally to old-timers sweeping their complaints under the proverbial carpet, at least not on the spot. The master claim of (only) temporary constraints weighing upon maternal selves seems to impose itself. Any eventual contestation of the helpfulness of temporizing occurs *in petto*: expressed to the partner, the researcher, or in writing.

The efficiency of recall mechanisms relating to decent matches can also be linked to the authority of the interlocutor. The eventual imposition of a contrary claim on the state of affairs of one mother by another; the fact that old-timers may discursively re-define ‘that which is going on’ in a newcomer’s life and the lack of trust or respect afforded to her experiences and judgements, indicate that the issue of status is present (see e.g. Hochschild 2003: 173, 193; Scheff 1997: 193). A constitutive criterion of hierarchy amongst mothers appears to be the age of their children, or their number: in other words, the mother’s ‘quantitative’ experience. Hence, one possible reading of temporizing interactions is that their rhetoricians, ‘matrons’ or ‘perfect mothers’, express their mastery of the life situation, while plaintiff novices admit to loss of control. In fact, the data suggests that voicing complaints is most permissible – and least risky – in the conversational arena of colleagues experiencing the very same life-stage. They, *ipso facto*, appear mandated to reciprocal socialization; in this respect the institutionalization of formal peer groups in maternity care centres or baby cafés in Finland is an interesting phenomenon.

Sharing one’s paradoxical experiences in the ‘moral minefield’ [Murphy 1999] of motherhood can create connected lives of new sorts, as sharing knowledge is an important aspect of intimacy [Zelizer 2005: 14–15]. But there may be many a slip from the lip to the cup; this is illustrated by the dynamics of collegial identification evoked in chapters 4 & 7.

To wit, between a leeway for ‘venting stress stories’ and a ‘conspiracy of silence’, the pool of contemporary French and Finnish data points to the social avoidance of contradictory experiences of maternity and empirically unearths

micro-mechanisms through which decency is achieved. Indeed, though the fact that mothers complain may be an open secret, the two faces of motherhood, sunny and cloudy, are not equally legitimate repertoires of expression. The hedonist ethos and pragmatist front are out-voicing feelings of sacrifice and overt enjoyment therefore appears a normative requisite of the mother role. The complex and contradictory experiences of mothers may not easily find outlets as they are objects of self- and assisted cultivation amongst mothers of differing statuses. Presentation of self at transition to motherhood may therefore be a delicate affair.

Indeed, cramped matrixes may contribute to individuals journeying to motherhood with unrealistic expectations, while performances of responsible mother-identities involve self-government of speech. Therefore, transition to motherhood may represent an event which, at least temporarily, challenges women's capacity to come to terms with a coherent narrative of self (see chapter 3 & 6; Miller 2005: 9–10, 89, 101; Lawler 2000: 158). Such a lack contrasts strongly with the belief in the omnipotence of the individual in life politics [Maksimainen forthcoming 2007], which may be particularly salient amongst women figures in this research: i.e. well-qualified women with tertiary education.

Of context and ethos

The socio-economic location of subjects, or class, constitutes but one contextual vector moulding discursive everyday cultures of new motherhood (on the foundational quality of context in cultural studies see e.g. Grossberg 1997: 255). *Contexts of Motherhood* set the scene from which mothers spoke and were heard in this research in terms of the biographical setting of transition to parenthood; of the Western fashion of intensive child-rearing; of gender viewed through the lens of time use; and of the national 'praxeological clearings' constituted by policy cultures. Although chapters 4 & 6 can be regarded as each illustrating one side of the same coin – i.e. the two basic rules of a common discursive matrix which consists in voicing enjoyment and subduing complaints – it is also possible to consider them as close readings of mother-talk occurring in two different motherscapes of cultural and practical plausibility.

Indeed, in *It's such a short and special time – The Finnish case* I emphasized the ontological contrast between long family leave and the leitmotiv of a short time. The relative novelty of the temporary homemaking contract as a biographical setting for highly educated women in Finland, where women's full-time labour force participation has a long history, was highlighted as a singular con-

textual feature. My explanation of the apparently greater recurrence of temporizing-rhetoric in different social arenas in Finland, compared to France, draws openly upon such a practical context. In a sense, this would mean that the frequency of matches and mismatches occurring between categories of individuals and categories of emotions, which are socially allotted to them, may vary when the ‘art of distributions’ in space of individuals is altered.

Chapter 6, *Profiter de son enfant*, sociologically looks at the issue of the hyper-salience of occurrences of perfect discursive matches (enjoyment in mother-child relationships) in France. The phenomenon is essentially examined as one moulded by a Western hedonist spirit of the times. I also evoke a strain of runaway romanticism in French mother-talk. The fact that it occurs in a context of continuous full-time wage-work of mothers endowed with a fair level of cultural capital deserves further reflection. Does it reflect a discursive ‘reconciling’ of long working hours and fairly brief ‘daily’ family lives?

What ever the case may be, national caring practices tend to be taken for granted by subjects in both cultural ‘clearings’. From this point of view, my findings concur with those of Jan Windebank. In her comparative study of the childcare strategies, practicalities, and justifications in Britain and France amongst 112 employed mothers, Windebank reports that British mothers, who take career breaks more often than their French counterparts, do not frame their practices as ‘decisions’. Temporary homemaking is ‘naturally’ based on a specific set of understandings of children’s needs and does not require explanations [Windebank 1999: 9]. In this regard, Brits resemble Finns, despite important differences in policy. Or rather, Finnish mothers are called upon to make a personal ‘decision’ on the *length* of state-sponsored time out: will they take three, two, or ‘only’ one year(s)?

Symmetrically, French women tend to find it ‘natural’ to entrust infants to outside care – and do not deem it necessary to justify their actions. And if a significant minority of mothers in Windebank’s research declared that, given a choice they would stay at home, importantly, this was because mothers wished to ‘enjoy’ their children more and not to ‘miss out’ on seeing them grow up. Moreover, feelings did not automatically lead to time out of the labour market, because of the degree of normalcy for mothers to work soon after childbirth [Windebank 1999:10].

Jan Windebank makes another interesting observation *à propos* French and British family culture by highlighting how, for women of both nationalities, it was important to collect elder children from *school*. This act constituted a strong symbol of mother-love in France and in Britain [Windebank 1999: 15]. Hence,

if British mothers took more time out of the labour market for their infants, French women made similar efforts to those of British mothers when it came down to fitting in their working schedules with children's school hours. This contrasts strongly with Finnish mothering culture, which is particularly intensive for *infants and toddlers*. Indeed, it was underscored in chapter 3, that Finnish mothers spent less time with school-aged children than their French colleagues.

My reading of this *ensemble* of results is that the Finnish ethos consists of a somewhat more instrumental strain of intensive child-centred mothering during early childhood, focussing on care. In this sense, the temporary homemaking contract, compared to the French case, appears as a '*short time*'. This conclusion concurs with Tuula Gordon's findings based on interviews with 50 British and Finnish 'feminist mothers'. The sociologist found that the English made more 'positive comments' on staying at home than Finns did, and that the accounts of the former were characterized by a more 'emotional' tone, while Finnish mothers emphasized maternal responsibility [1991: 139, 145].

The French ethos, on the other hand, seems characterized by the presence of an expressive strain of intensive mothering in which hedonist-romantic discursive elements gain more salience. Motherhood in France, is to a greater extent, thinkable as motherhood 'for self' in the years of early childhood. In such a model, time spent with children is distributed more equally upon one's progeny at different ages and the education of school-aged children is particularly valorised. The catchphrase of '*it's not a lifetime*' appears somewhat more fitting for the French case.

In conclusion, I hope to have made the case of the sociological interest of braiding an analysis of a discursive type with temporal aspects of social life (biographical and historical); with spatiality and with relationality, by attending to the gendered nature of bonds and to the 'conducting of conduct' of self and others in day-to-day conversations; through expertise and policy. This has meant drawing upon a variety of instruments from the 'categorical' and methodological toolboxes of various sociological currents. In short, I have defended the idea of a heterogeneous matrix in which the experience of 'motherhood' is moulded.

* * *

Lay and academic 'renegades' bringing unbecoming accounts of motherhood to the fore have their opponents in different forums. Hence, in the public sphere,

French philosopher Elisabeth Badinter claimed her surprise in 1980 *vis-à-vis* the strong reactions aroused by her *Mother Love: Myth and Reality* published the same year in France [Badinter 1980: I]. Some sixteen years later, Sharon Hays, in her Preface to *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, relates how emotional responses to her work were, whether appreciative or offended [Hays 1996: ix]. The trajectory of this piece of work in the French and Finnish discursive matrixes has just begun. I will follow its path with great interest.

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