

POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL ZRC SAZU

Rebecca Fine Rose

TENSING MATERNAL TIME

[Napetosti materinskega časa]

Doctoral Dissertation

Ljubljana, 2023

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To my parents, Sara and Joseph Fine, *z"l*, for teaching me how to listen,
To my husband, Joshua Rose, for listening to me with unwavering support and love,
and
With a mother's love to Rachael, Herschel, Maimon, Elise, and Raphael,
Who continue to surprise me with the
Delightful possibilities of becoming a mother

Declaration of Authorship

I, Rebecca Fine Rose, under full moral and legal responsibility, declare that this study is a product of my own research (during the period from Fall 2018 to Fall 2023) under the supervision of Professor Jelica Šumič Riha. To the best of my knowledge my doctoral dissertation contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

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Rebecca Fine Rose

Tensing Maternal Time

[*Napetosti materinskega časa*]

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Doctoral Program: Comparative Study of Ideas and Cultures

Module: The Transformation of Modern Thought - Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, Culture

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Summary:

My dissertation argues that the complex temporality of the maternal experience constitutes an affective tension within the maternal voice which accounts for the ethical singularity of the maternal figure. In support of this thesis, I explore the ‘double’ register of competing temporalities which resonate within the maternal voice; I argue that the unpredictable experience of disruptive temporality tangentially coupled with an impossible promise of temporal continuity creates an affective tension within the maternal experience which elicits a creative, improvisational, and singularly moral responsiveness. With the help of Vladimir Jankelevitch’s discussion of the oscillation of time between “the interval and the instant,” I attempt to think the transformative relation between the continuity of inherited generational temporality, which I articulate in terms of Edmund Husserl’s internal time consciousness, and the temporal disruption of subjectivity which Emmanuel Levinas presents as the necessary condition for ethical consciousness, the paradigm of which is the maternal figure.

While spatial descriptions of the maternal provide obvious metaphors for the experience of pregnancy and giving birth, temporal descriptions of endurance and disruption have the advantage that they evoke the ethical tension of *becoming* a mother to another, without relying on the visual trope of the withdrawal, replacement, or disappearance of the mother. Not only does the temporal description reflect the intergenerational relations of continuity between the mother and a child, it likewise marks the disruptions and everyday lived events of separation belonging to the maternal experience. I argue that because competing forms of temporality belong to the temporal experience of the mother, the tension between these senses of temporality creates unforeseeable ethically demanding situations. Accordingly, by explicating the temporal complexity of the maternal voice, I hope to articulate the ethical weight that the maternal voice bears. By challenging the ancient philosophical privilege afforded to the stable, the certain, and the eternal, and by redirecting us or “converting” us to think the “newness” of deformed time, my dissertation shows that the singularity of the maternal lived experience of time provides us with a compelling alternative pathway to think “newness” and “innovation” within time itself.

I argue that philosophy’s historical challenge of giving conceptual determination to existence is a direct consequence of philosophy’s desire to grasp what is eternal in time and to conceive of time

within a teleological framework. According to this view, what comes to exist, that is, what is born in time, must have its law, reason or cause of existence elsewhere, that is, outside of time. Because the movement of time is traditionally understood as the realization of a pre-existing possibility outside of time, temporal existence is seen as an inadequate incarnation of a pre-existing possibility. Alternatively, I contend that the category of the *possible* be conceived as the becoming of temporal existence which contains more reality and therefore weighs more heavily than the *actual*, as is conceded by teleological thinking. We are thus challenged to “rethink” the newness of possibility, that is, the power or agency of *becoming* belonging to maternal experience, and the weight of the maternal voice.

My philosophical intervention in the field of women and children’s Holocaust testimony further advances a theory of maternal experience which grows out of a phenomenological analysis of the temporal tension and moral paradoxicality of the maternal experience and which defends the maternal as a signature “event” of ethical action and agency. In so doing, I highlight the active resistance, tensed courage, and empathetic relations of each of the survivors whom I interviewed for this study. My intervention additionally initiates a discussion of the singularity of mothers – and more specifically, those who acted *like mothers* - without reducing mothers to agents of a patriarchal system. Rather than seeing mothers primarily as care givers for the family unit, tribe, or state, I defend a view of the maternal which vindicates the singularity of the maternal by highlighting the ethical tension and resulting ethical dilemmas produced by the conflicting pull of an inclination to empathy and the courageous call to action as experienced by those who acted like mothers. I show that this transformative tension, which characterizes the maternal experience, is reflected in the heroic agency and improvisational talent of mothers and those who acted like mothers during the Holocaust. I focus on the heroic actions of those who acted *like mothers* in an effort to defend an account of maternal virtue, where the mother is figured as moving between empathy and courage, constantly recreating herself, therein “becoming a mother to another.” My thesis therefore supports an alternative account of the maternal, that is, a new account of maternal ethics which enables us to speak about mothers, without relying on stereotypical maternal tropes or minimizing the heroic actions of mothers, and to which I attribute the singularity of the maternal temporal experience.

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

Napetosti materinskega časa

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Doktorski program: Primerjalni študij idej in kultur

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Povzetek

V disertaciji trdim, da moramo kompleksno časovnost materinske izkušnje razumeti kot afektivno napetost v materinskem glasu, ki pojasnjuje etično singularnost materinske vloge. V podporo tej tezi raziskujem materinski glas kot register dveh časovnosti, ki med seboj tekmujeta. Trdim, da nepredvidljiva izkušnja disruptivne časovnosti, ki je hkrati povezana z nemogočo obljubo časovne kontinuitete, ustvarja afektivno napetost v materinski izkušnji. Ta sproži ustvarjalno, improvizacijsko in singularno moralno odzivnost. S pomočjo razprave Vladimirja Jankeleviča o nihanju časa med »intervalom in trenutkom« poskušam misliti transformativni odnos med kontinuiteto podedovane generacijske časovnosti, ki jo artikuliram v smislu notranje poenotene časovne zavesti Edmunda Husserla, in diahrono časovne disrupcije subjektivnosti, ki jo Emmanuel Levinas razume kot nujni pogoj za etično zavest, katere paradigma je materinska vloga.

Medtem ko so prostorski opisi materinstva očitne metafore za izkušnjo nosečnosti in poroda, imajo časovni opisi vztrajnosti in motenj to prednost, da prikličejo etično napetost, ki nastane, ko *postajamo* mati svojemu otroku ali drugemu, ne da bi se pri tem zanašali na vizualni motiv umika, zamenjave ali izginotja matere. Časovni opis ne odraža samo medgeneracijskih odnosov kontinuitete med materjo in otrokom, ampak tudi motnje in vsakodnevne življenjske dogodke ločitve, ki so značilni za materinsko izkušnjo. Trdim, da ker sta obe obliki časovnosti, ki tekmujeta med seboj, prisotni v materinski izkušnji, napetost med temi občutki časovnosti ustvarja nepredvidljive etične dileme. Zato upam, da bom z razlago časovne kompleksnosti materinskega glasu artikulirala tudi njegovo etično globino. Moja disertacija preizprašuje starodavno filozofsko privilegiranje stabilnega, gotovega in večnega ter ga preusmerja ali »spreobrača« v smer mišljenja novosti v deformiranem času. S tem pokaže, da nam singularnost materinskega doživljanja časa ponuja prepričljivo alternativo za mišljenje novosti in inovacij v samem času.

Trdim, da je zgodovinski izziv filozofije, da pojmovno določi eksistenco, neposredna posledica njene želje, da bi razumela, kaj je v času večno, in da bi čas razumela v teleološkem okviru. V skladu s tem stališčem mora tisto, kar nastane, torej tisto, kar se rodi v času, imeti tudi svoj zakon, razlog ali vzrok za svoj obstoj drugje, torej zunaj časa. Ker je gibanje časa tradicionalno razumljeno kot uresničitev že prej obstoječe možnosti zunaj časa, je časovni obstoj razumljen kot neustrezno udejanjenje že obstoječe možnosti. Po drugi stani pa sama trdim, da lahko kategorijo *možnega* razumemo tudi kot postajanje časa, ki ima več resničnosti in zato večjo težo kot jo ima *dejansko* v teleološkem mišljenju. Tako smo postavljeni pred izziv, da »ponovno premislimo«

novost možnosti, tj. moč ali dejavnost *postajanja*, ki pripada materinski izkušnji, in težo materinskega glasu.

Moja filozofska raziskava nadaljuje svojo pot v okviru pričevanj žensk in otrok o holokavstu, pri čemer razširja teorijo materinske izkušnje, ki temelji na fenomenološki analizi časovne napetosti in moralne paradoksalnosti materinske izkušnje. S tem postavlja materinstvo kot ključni »dogodek« etičnega delovanja. Pri preživelih osebah, ki sem jih intervjuvala, izpostavljam aktivni odpor, napet pogum in odnose empatije. Moja intervencija dodatno odpira razpravo o edinstvenosti mater – ali tistih, ki so delovale kot matere –, ne da bi matere reducirala na akterke patriarhalnega sistema. Namesto da bi na matere gledala predvsem kot na skrbnice družinske enote, plemena ali države, me zanima pogled na materinstvo, ki zagovarja singularnost materinskega tako da izpostavljanja živeto napetost med nagnjenjem k empatiji in pogumnim uporništvom tistih, ki delujejo kot matere. Pokažem, da se transformacijska napetost, ki je značilna za materinsko časovno izkušnjo, odraža v junaškem delovanju in spretnosti v improvizaciji mater ter tistih, ki so delovale kot matere med holokavstom. Zagovarjam opis materinske vrline, po katerem je mati predstavljena kot nekdo, ki se giblje med empatijo in pogumom, se nenehno poustvarja in pri tem »postaja mati drugega«. Zato se osredotočam na junaška dejanja tistih, ki so delovale kot matere – varuške, »tuje« matere in otroke, ki so postali matere svojim lastnim materam. Moja disertacija torej prinaša alternativno razlago materinskega, novo razumevanje materinske etike, ki nam omogoča govoriti o materah brez stereotipnih materinskih vzorcev in brez zmanjševanja pomena materinskih junaških vzgibov, obenem pa poudarja singularnost materinske časovne izkušnje.

Med raziskovanjem etičnega imperativa izkušnje materinskega glasu, ki ga razberem iz pričevanj o holokavstu, v svoji disertaciji trdim, da se časovna izkušnja materinstva pojavlja kot tvegano, a obenem možno zatočišče za konkurenčne, a nepopravljive sile časovne kontinuitete in vzdržljivosti ter disrupcije in preloma. Tako materinski glas pritegne našo pozornost kot vir etične ustvarjalnosti, upora in etičnega delovanja. Negotovost in nepredvidljivost materinskega glasu prispevata k njegovi prepričljivosti. Materinski glas je vedno na robu, da bi se postavil v bran prihodnosti naslednje generacije, obenem pa nudi sočutje in empatijo v sedanjem podaljškem preteklosti. Izkušnja preloma v kombinaciji s skupno občutljivostjo trajanja pritegne našo pozornost in tvori tisto, za kar trdim, da je edinstvena značilnost materinskega, namreč zmožnost postati mati drugemu prek etike empatičnega poguma.