

*Re-Assembling Motherhood(s) invites the reader to learn about and from Maternal Fantasies' feminist research and collective artistic practice on motherhood(s), care work, and representation in the arts.*

Composed of seven interdisciplinary artists / mothers and ten children, *Maternal Fantasies* takes the social invisibility of the maternal experience as a point of departure to produce films, images, and performances of fantastical visibility. Through personal writing exercises and collective performance scores, they align themselves with ancestral figures of feminist discourses and artmaking, in order to establish new vocabularies and narratives around the maternal for future generations. As both a handbook and an archive of feminist artmaking, this publication (re-)assembles maternal experiences, reflective essays, autobiographical writing, instructional scores, visual artworks, and a manifesto for a caring economy.

MATERNAL FANTASIES

Re-Assembling Motherhood(s)  
On Radical Care and Collective Art as Feminist Practices

# RE-ASSEMBLING MOTHERHOOD(S): ON RADICAL CARE AND COLLECTIVE ART AS FEMINIST PRACTICES

MATERNAL FANTASIES

Edited by  
Sascia Bailer  
Magdalena Kallenberger  
Maicyra Leão Teles e Silva



ONO  
MA  
TO  
PEE  
216

ONOMATOPEE 216

# **Re-Assembling Motherhood(s): On Radical Care and Collective Art as Feminist Practices**

**MATERNAL FANTASIES**

**Edited by** Sascia Bailer  
Magdalena Kallenberger  
Maicyra Leão Teles e Silva

- 08** ARTIST STATEMENT  
**Maternal Fantasies**
- 10** INTRODUCTION  
**Re-Assembling Motherhood(s): On Radical Care and Collective Art as Feminist Practices**  
by Magdalena Kallenberger and Maicyra Leão
- 20** ARTWORK  
**Wattenmeer [Wadden Sea]**
- 22** COLLECTIVE WRITING  
**The Choir Assembly**
- 26** ARTWORK  
**Tell Me How to Disappear**
- 28** ESSAY  
**Building Intimacy Across Difference: Collective Writing, Reading, & Listening**  
by Magdalena Kallenberger
- 42** COLLECTIVE WRITING  
**Inscribing Our Practice: Rotational Writing on Care**
- 71** ARTWORK  
**Love and Labor. Intimacy and Isolation. Care and Survival.**

- 73** ESSAY  
**Maternal Fantasies: Collective Art Production as a Tool for Radical Self-Care**  
by Magdalena Kallenberger
- 88** TOOL  
**Asking Questions**
- 89** ARTWORK  
**Suspended Time**  
with Introduction by Isabell Spengler
- 104** TOOL  
**Performative Exercises**
- Traveling Drawing** by Mikala Hyldig Dal
- Collective Voice** by Maicyra Leão
- Circling Story** by Hanne Klaas and Aino El Solh
- Inheriting a Text and Digesting it as a Group**  
by Isabell Spengler
- 112** ARTWORK  
**Like So Many...**
- 114** TOOL  
**Staging Body Extensions**
- 124** ESSAY  
**Core and Margins: Porous Tools of Feminist Collectivity**  
by Maicyra Leão
- 136** TOOL  
**Sketching Body Extensions**
- 138** ESSAY  
**Art Babies Money: Replacing Capital with Care as the Foundation for a Planetary Economy**  
by Mikala Hyldig Dal
- 152** ARTWORK  
**Wreckage**
- 154** COLLECTIVE WRITING  
**The Ancestors' Assembly**
- 156** TOOL  
**Staging Feminist Ancestors**
- 162** COLLECTIVE WRITING  
**Gratitude as Practice: Thanking Each Other**
- 173** ARTWORK  
**Medusa Character**
- 175** Acknowledgements
- 179** Imprint

# MATERNAL FANTASIES

## Artist Statement

We live in compromised times in which the allegory of an uncompromised self is isolationist, privileged, and dangerous. We assume that motherhood is not a private condition and that the self is not a generic, philosophical self, but a situated self, engaged in complex sets of relations. Mothering is not exclusive to a physical and fixed category or identity, but instead represents dedicated time, attention, nurturance, protection, and an interrupted state of mind, which gives rise to a distinctive discipline of thoughts (Ruddick, 1989). In relation to art, our research process is directly affected by everyday, private narratives, site interference, and eco-queer-communitarian-feminist discourses.

We reject the reproduction of social structures, which exclude children from most public dynamics and surrender mothers into domestic isolation suffocated by underpaid and/or unpaid care work. As artists, researchers, and mothers, our economic and political survival demands a recognition of our domestic labor and the context in which we produce creative/intellectual labor (work which is often also poorly compensated).

**MATERNAL FANTASIES is composed of Aino El Solh, Hanne Klaas, Isabell Spengler, Lena Chen, Magdalena Kallenberger, Maicyra Leão, and Mikala Hyldig Dal.**

Who cares for whom and what are the consequences? How can we re-think time, care and re/production through the maternal – the inescapable troubles of interdependent existences (Puig de La Bellacasa, 2012)? How can art exist as a site for thinking of the maternal as a participatory practice, an affective enmeshment, and a situated political prompt - in order to promote new modes of thinking-with (Haraway, 1988)?

On our explorative journey, we consider the maternal as a still-unknown artistic territory, a daring experiment without disciplinary ties, but with close links to relational body/voice practices, performative exercises, and children's games. Therefore, our collective production – which requires the distribution of artistic responsibilities as well as domestic and emotional labor – functions simultaneously as a site of social experimentation and political performative practice.

### References

Haraway, D. (1988) Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3., pp. 575-599.

Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2012). "Nothing Comes without its World": Thinking with Care. *The Sociological Review*, 60(2), pp. 197–216.

Ruddick, S (1989). *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*. Boston: Beacon Press.

# Re-Assembling Motherhood(s): On Radical Care and Collective Art as Feminist Practices

by Magdalena Kallenberger and Maicyra Leão

Care and art are widely considered to be labors of love – and yet despite being crucial to the health and spirit of society, they are absurdly undercompensated. The paradox of care work and artistic labor is that because the work is indeed often done out of love, there is a presumption that it does not necessitate payment. In Silvia Federici’s *Wages Against Housework*, a treatise on the appropriation of reproductive labor for capitalist production, she puts it succinctly, “[t]hey say it is love. We say it is unwaged work.” Similarly, artists are poorly compensated for having chosen a “passion” as a profession and subjected to precarious labor conditions, gig work, and free internships. Hito Steyerl speculates that “[a]part from domestic and care work – art is the industry with the most unpaid labour around ... kept afloat by the sheer dynamism of loads and loads of hardworking women.” Meanwhile, in the art world, childcare is rarely considered a budget item, the most prestigious residencies explicitly forbid children, and artists even try to hide the fact that they are mothers for fear of being taken less seriously.

This context prompted the 2018 formation of Maternal Fantasies, a feminist collective of artists, who are mothers, daughters, and caregivers. Now in 2021, our critique of motherhood(s), care work, and representation in the arts has become even more urgent and visible due the ongoing COVID-19 crisis which has acutely magnified existing social injustices.

During these three years, Maternal Fantasies has produced collective artworks in the field of photography, film, video, performance, and installation, which have been screened and exhibited nationally and internationally. We have also published texts, given lectures, and hosted intergenerational workshops for the public on various occasions.

This publication materializes this cycle of work and was produced during the challenging course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through documentation, reflective essays, and autobiographical writings, it brings together the tools used to produce our artworks and build our relationship to each other as a collective. It details, reflects upon, and documents the methods and strategies that we have organically developed to ground our practice and research in frameworks for immersive modes of critique.

In order to form an international and interdisciplinary collective consisting of diverse personas with differing temperaments, talents, and capacities, Maternal Fantasies has developed a rotational format as a working method. Teams take turns in conceptualizing, organizing, leading, and administering the different group projects. During our immersive residencies and studio sessions, we distribute and rotate the individual tasks, which may include conceptual development, directing, performance, pre- and post-production, marketing, grant-writing, and administration, as well as cooking, cleaning, and childcare.

The representation of children in artistic work also comes with serious ethical considerations. Incorporating our own children into our work has been a constant process of negotiation, which has sometimes led to the decision to omit certain pieces from public view or to – in one instance with an older child – compensate them for participation in a performance. Along with discussing issues such as consent and authorship, we must constantly balance our roles as artists invested in creating provocative work with our duty as parents acting in the best interest of our children (and the children of others). We must negotiate these ethical questions with the under-

standing that how these works are viewed – and how the children view themselves in these works – will likely change over time. As we all grow older, these artistic and decision-making processes may evolve to reflect the children’s increasing autonomy over how and whether they participate in the collective.

Our practice investigates the relations between artistic production and the very notion of caring for others. With regard to the diversity and multiplicity of our group, sharing our ways of working and caring together became an act of interference with dominant modes of social reproduction. What does it mean to organize and participate in an art residency with seven adults and ten children? How do we engage children in the act of creating artworks collaboratively? How do we publicly display work produced in intimate environments depicting (our) children? How do we challenge stereotypical images of mother and child through the collective? How do we negotiate time between our maternal duties (imposed by society, others, or ourselves), our artistic profession, and the demands and challenges of working collectively? This publication does not aim to provide answers to such complex matters, but rather invites the readers to join our search for tentative answers and artistic responses.

In this sense, this publication functions as a handbook outlining our collective working process to make it transparent and accessible for people outside of the collective. At the same time, this publication is an artist book assembling various art projects by *Maternal Fantasies* while bringing together individual voices to describe our journey through distinct moments of shared time and collectivity: from site-specific residencies to studio working sessions to online gatherings as a response to the current pandemic restrictions.

In order to re-learn collectivity and communal care, we follow Joan Tronto’s guidance in recognizing that “care requires that we see the world from someone/something else’s perspective” (Letters to Joan, 2020, p. 44). At the same time, that does not assure that we will know how “that other person’s boots feel, how our legs would feel in those differently worn heels, what we have been through there” (Tronto, 2020, p. 44). Being with each other while sharing stories and getting to know each other is not like joining a fun, pink fantasy fairytale

adventure, a thrill ride through an undiscovered pristine maternal country. Rather, the territory where our different experiences intersect shows traces of embedded structural and institutional discrimination, physical and psychological violence, inarticulate horror, exhaustion and despair, alongside moments of joy, individual and collective celebration, bubbling giggles of laughter, music, dance, play, and pleasure.

All these traces are closely intertwined and carved out by the people before us, our feminist ancestors, our biological family, and our kin. As a collective in collaboration with our kids, we edit the generational storyline by adding, rewrite, overwriting, and deleting altogether. In our practice, we tackle real stories, experiences, and consequences that deeply affect our social reality, including experiences of migration, single motherhood, and social welfare. Our individual and collective contributions included in this publication are not streamlined wonders of artistic reflection nor do they attempt to lead to certain conclusions. The collective writing contributions remain as raw materials that maintain the freshness and life of our existence together while affirming our multifaceted collective reality. Even though we often express empathy toward each other, we cannot pretend to know how that other person feels. Being with each other and “staying with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016, p. 1) as a collective is a constant process of negotiation, revision, and critique.

Sometimes, this process involves taking two steps forward and one step back, making and remaking, modeling and remodeling, and evaluating and reevaluating our collective processes and working structure. So far, this osmotic working structure has allowed us to evolve and to face and challenge both the neoliberal narrative of self-sufficient, healthy, productive, and happy citizens, as well as the myth of the autonomous male artist genius. This collective structure has enabled us to distribute tasks and duties and to develop projects on a larger scale, while simultaneously nourishing the growth of our interpersonal relationships over time. By now, we better understand each other’s personalities and temperaments and we enjoy drawing strength, empowerment, and energy from the process of “leaning on and towards” (Butler, 2014, p. 33) each other.

It is this patient process of building a collective practice and communal form that we explore within this publication. The title reflects this processual and negotiative approach. *Re-assembling Motherhood(s)* was the original title – thanks to the contribution of a former member, the theorist and writer Sandra Moskova - but over time, it had been erased, forgotten, and replaced by other suggested titles. Already in the first abstract for this publication in 2019, Moskova proposed:

*“Within interactions between bodies, objects and spaces, mothers and children, we re-re-re-assemble and turn fantasies into painful experiences, narratives into questions, body dimensions into fields of interaction. And it is exactly here, that the relationship between the subject and the discourse shapes expression, creating its own language: re-assembling (Latour, 2005) the language of motherhood(s).”*

Initially, we were reluctant to associate ourselves and our theoretical and artistic practice with such a much discussed concept. Bruno Latour was not part of our self-assembled cosmos of feminist references. Nevertheless, assemblage and collage are our working methods, and at the same time, a feminist tool and strategy.

After collecting the contributions for this publication, our spiraling journey brought us back to this first title. We decided to re-appropriate it and to fuse and merge it with our working methods and collective art practice, which often uses the tool of collage. By “re-assembling motherhood(s),” we invent and formulate a new vocabulary through the fantastical situations created in our still and moving images, thought experiments, group readings, and writing sessions. At this point, we invite you, reader, to build and re-assemble your own thoughts, understandings, and positionings while you dive into this publication.

It is structured in four sections - *Artworks, Tools, Collective Writings, Essays* - in which collective and individual contributions are embedded to reveal different layers of our artistic and scholarly practices. The essays, for instance, are articulations of individual authors who are members of the collective, and thus, represent individual points of views.

The content is not expected to be read in a linear way. Allow yourself to make leaps and pauses, take a break, digest, and return to thinking further with us, our work, and methods.

At the beginning and at the end of the publication, you will find two short texts which are part of the Collective Writing section. Both texts are part of a homework assignment in which *Maternal Fantasies* interweaves material. In *The Choir Assembly*, we fuse the personal trajectories of our members while in *The Ancestors' Assembly*, we extracted text material from biographies of feminist writers and artists whom we discovered in our research and group readings. We used these extracts as raw material for our text collage to build a choir of our self-chosen feminist ancestors.

The working process of our collective writings are introduced and compiled in *Building Intimacy Across Difference: Collective Writing, Reading, & Listening* by Magdalena Kallenberger. This text outlines the various writing exercises and situates our artistic practice within the communal space of reading and listening.

*Inscribing Our Practice: Rotational Writing on Care* is a longer collective text contribution merging different poetic voices with everyday observations. These texts were produced in several circles of individual writing during homework assignments in winter 2021. The texts are joined by images displaying our creative process, which include backstage moments along with stills from our upcoming film.

The double pages displaying images of our visual artworks dissect the chapters. We chose to interweave text and images as a way to affirm the power that lies between both dimensions. In order of appearance, the reader will find images from:

- *Landpartie Series – Wattenmeer, Tell Me How to Disappear, and Wreckage* – produced during art residencies in 2018 and 2019
- A still of the online performance *Love and Labor. Intimacy and Isolation. Care and Survival.*, which took place in 2020 as part of the 4th edition of the New Alphabet School on *#Caring*,



co-organized by Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Soft Agency, and M.1. Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung

- A sequence of film stills from our forthcoming film *Suspended Time*, introduced by Isabell Spengler and illustrated through subtitles from the film scenes
- *Like So Many...*, a photo-text installation we produced for our first exhibition in 2018 at Alpha Nova Gallery, Berlin
- A film still from our current work in progress which depicts the assembled *Medusa Character*, a fictional figure which incorporates elements from the *Choir* and *Ancestors' Assemblies*

After the collective writings, you will find the essay *Maternal Fantasies: Collective Art Production as a Tool for Radical Self-Care* by Magdalena Kallenberger. This essay reflects on the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures, which has interrupted our collective working process since March 2020. The essay details artistic strategies that we have developed in order to counter and overcome the state of social distancing and physical isolation. Hereby, the essay focuses on the working process of *Love and Labor. Intimacy and Isolation. Care and Survival*, in which collective art production becomes a method for realizing a radical practice of care.

Ironically, the scores we propose in this publication demand touch, proximity, and being physically together. They are based on performative exercises that we hosted during our working sessions in winter 2020. The instruction manuals were compiled and illustrated by the individual hosts of the exercises during the gap between two waves of pandemic lockdown. Please feel free to appropriate, adapt, and experiment with them.

Another layer of the publication opens up with Maicyra Leão's essay, *Core and Margins: Porous Tools of Feminist Collectivity*, which explores the subtle ambivalences of the collective form, draws historical connections to other feminist collectives of artists and mothers, and presents strategies and tools of our artistic practice.

Throughout our collective working process, the invention of new visual vocabularies became more and more important. Therefore, the tools section grew from visual fragments and text materials (asking questions) to theatrical props (body extensions and masks) that we conceptualized and designed.

The body extensions were the first DIY tools and theatrical props that we manufactured in collaboration with our children. Early on, they became an integral component in *Maternal Fantasies'* aesthetic language through their colorful presence. In this publication, they are presented through sketches by Mikala Hyldig Dal and photographs by Hanne Klaas and Magdalena Kallenberger, which reveal their porous materiality through the scratches and scars left by their use in our production process.

In a similar manner, we show a selection of *Staging Ancestors Masks*. The masks were produced collectively and show black and white images of the faces of our self-chosen female ancestors. Used in various scenes of our collective art production, they expand our discourse from the personal mother-child relationship to an intergenerational dialogue that includes our ancestors and kin. Klaas and Kallenberger have restaged these masks for this publication in a fine art studio in order to make their materiality tangible and accessible as a device.

On the full spread *Tool of Asking Questions*, we examine the theoretical ethics of asking questions as a practice of care and demonstrate practically what we have learned and picked up from our children, who ask millions of questions every day. However, *Work/Work Out*, the example we used to illustrate this tool, displays questions asked by us adults, for adults, written in deep trance so that they sound loud and dissonant, echoing over and over again.

Mikala Hyldig Dal's essay *Art Babies Money: Replacing Capital With Care As The Foundation For A Planetary Economy* reiterates this tool, establishing a series of foundational questions embedded in a seemingly immutable social structure. She, however, insists on assuming care to be our communal foreground by formulating a manifesto for a care-based economy.

We close our publication with intimate letters, *Gratitude as Practice: Thanking Each Other*, which were part of our most recent collective writing exercise. They offer some insight into what we experienced with each other on a very personal scale during our collective journey and share the gratitude and empowerment we have received from each other as individuals and as a group.

In addition to what we share in this publication, we also invite you to discover our performative film experiments and our upcoming feature length film *Suspended Time* (2021), in which we propose new vocabularies and visual performative translations of the maternal experience. The aim of our artworks and films is to integrate intergenerational knowledge, connecting feminist ancestral discourses to our own stories and to the future narratives of our children. We welcome you to join us in researching, dreaming, and imagining possible futures in which care is the foundation of our collective and economic existence. We do hope you will enjoy this tour through our cosmos as we re-assemble motherhood(s) and feminist collective art practice. Thank you for being with us and following our journey.

## References

Butler, J. (2014, July). On Cruelty. *London Review of Books*, 36(14). Retrieved Jan 20, 2021, from <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v36/n14/judith-butler/on-cruelty>

Federici, S. (1975). *Wages against Housework*. Falling Wall Press.

Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.

Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor - Network - Theory*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Steyerl, Hito. (2010). Politics of art: Contemporary art and the transition to post-democracy. *e-flux journal*, 21. Retrieved May 21, 2021, from <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/21/67696/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy>.

Tronto, J. (2020, June). Letter from June 1, 2020. In Bailer, S., Karjevsky, G., & Talevi, R. (Eds.), *Letters to Joan*. New Alphabet School. Retrieved Jan 9, 2021, from [https://newalphabetschool.hkw.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Letters-to-Joan-CARING-edited-by\\_BAILER-KARJEVSKY-TALEVI.pdf](https://newalphabetschool.hkw.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Letters-to-Joan-CARING-edited-by_BAILER-KARJEVSKY-TALEVI.pdf)

# Imprint

## **Re-Assembling Motherhood(s):**

On Radical Care and Collective Art as Feminist Practices

**by Maternal Fantasies**

Maternal Fantasies are Lena Chen, Mikala Hyldig Dal, Magdalena Kallenberger, Hanne Klaas, Maicyra Leão, Aino El Solh, and Isabell Spengler.

With creative contributions from the group's children: Astro, Kayan, Liva, Morten, Nassib, Rasmus, Samuel, Sascha, Selma, and Wim.

**[www.maternalfantasies.net](http://www.maternalfantasies.net)**

### **Editors**

Sascia Bailer  
Magdalena Kallenberger  
Maicyra Teles Leão e Silva

### **Concept and Coordination**

Magdalena Kallenberger  
Maicyra Teles Leão e Silva

### **Developmental Editing**

Sascia Bailer

### **Copy Editing and Proofreading**

Lena Chen

### **Artwork, Illustrations, and Photographs**

Maternal Fantasies

### **Layout and Design**

dalek

**Onomatopee Project Number 216**

**ISBN 978-94-93148-57-4**

**Fonts**

PT Sans Pro, PT Serif Pro, PT Mono

**Paper**

Munken Lynx 120 g/m<sup>2</sup>

**Printed by**

BALTO print

**Print run**

800 (1st Edition 2021)

**Distributors**

Europe:

Vice Versa Art Books - Berlin

Antenne Books - London

North America:

D.A.P. / Distributed Art Publishers

**Published by**

Onomatopee

onomatopee.net

**Funded by**

**Frauenförderfonds**

Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

**ARTHUR BOSKAMP-STIFTUNG**  
**M.1 HOHENLOCKSTEDT**

The publication is part of the Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung's Advancement Award 2019/20

[www.m1-hohenlockstedt.de](http://www.m1-hohenlockstedt.de)

© for the texts: Maternal Fantasies and the authors

© for reproduced works: Maternal Fantasies and the artists

© for the graphic design: dalek

**All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopied, recorded or otherwise, without the prior written permission from the authors and the publisher.**