

Moynagh Sullivan

### **“On Her Second Birthday” by Medbh McGuckian**

Medbh McGuckian’s beautiful poetry has many fine readers, but the presence of maternal jouissance in her earlier writing often produced accusations of wilful obscurity, or glowing critiques that nonetheless have circled around the averred unknowability of her work. Multiple vertices of being, with competing energies and impulses, produce a powerful affect that is commonly understood by critics as fostering impenetrability as an end in itself. Even many of her most admiring critics seem resigned that mystification, evasiveness, and converse currents are part of the poetry’s magic, but not its meaning. The poet-critic, Justin Quinn, who has himself advanced convincing arguments about the relevance of McGuckian’s work, has noted that, ‘two generations of critics have been baffled by her poetry and are uncertain of its subject on a simple denotative level’. (1) At least one reader who has resisted the temptation to mystify McGuckian’s poetry is the critic, Guinn Batten, who remains one of her most incisive commentators. Writing about McGuckian’s, “On her Second Birthday”, Batten reads the poem as written in the voice of the daughter and argues that it complicates the use of woman as a cipher for nation and spirit through a process of embodiment, when ‘figuration [...] becomes matter or body.’ (2) Choosing ‘On Her Second Birthday’, as a poem that literally ‘matters’, I take my cue from some of Batten’s more tantalizing observations and consider the possibility of a lyrical I in which voice proceeds from both mother and daughter in concord and contrapuntal cleavage at a time that Batten suggests seems to ‘precede bodily birth’. (3) Julia Kristeva’s proposal that ‘if pregnancy is a threshold between nature and culture, then maternity is a bridge between singularity and ethics’, (4) opens up the possibility of thinking through a dyadic prism about the co-being of mother and child in this poem as they share the mother’s body and the psychic horizon of poetry.

“On Her Second Birthday” is a poem about pregnancy and maternity, itself a nexus between body and word, between the illusory, unified speaking subject and the dispersal of intersubjectivity. It layers diachronies of emergence and differencing, interleaving plots of prenatal encounter, peri-natal separation, and linguistic subjectivization. It inscribes the mother’s / speaker’s relationship with her daughter during pregnancy (as one-yet-two), their physical separation at the daughter’s birth, and their psychic separation as the daughter emerges into language around the time of her second birthday. The opening lines of the poem set the scene for the reader’s slippage between the double perspective of child and mother: ‘In the beginning I was no more / Than a rising and falling mist / You could see though without seeing’. (5) The mother/speaker is the incubating/mediating/poetic frame who represents the world to, and negotiates the world for, the reader/child, and equally, the child/speaker begins life as a projection of the mother’s own dreams and is the mist through which the mother’s desire can be reached rather than seen for herself. The enunciatory line, ‘In the beginning I was no more’ echoes the opening of St John’s Gospel, ‘in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’. (6) Displacing a single point of linguistic incarnation, it establishes several beginnings along the double but different journeys into and away from two-ness and one and another. The words ‘no more’, act like a hinge describing the child’s death to aquatic life, the mother’s death to her previous self, while the enjambment, ‘no more / than’, swings the reader onto another psychic plane, representing the state of not being ‘more/than’ one before pregnancy for the mother; and ‘no more / than’ one for the newborn: ‘Seeking to be born / Carried off half / Of what I was able to say’.

Thinking of the double spaces and temporalities of mother and child may make legible an ethics of co-becoming, and move away from the single focus on the child within to a consideration of that child in relationship with a m/Other, an ethics of neighbourliness and border sharing, an imperative on an island of painful boundaries. To this end I read 'On Her Second Birthday', alongside the Israeli artist and analyst Bracha L Ettinger's theory of 'matrixial borderspace'. Ettinger's work attends to the possibility of pre-natal consciousness, but unlike theories that advance perception from the angle of the infans only, her writings and artwork elaborate a co-emergence of consciousness, and enlarge a trans-subjective realm that accounts for the mother as more than a hatching background. Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva have identified the radical under-reading and under-symbolization of the intra-uterine and pre-oedipal in western aesthetic and philosophical practices. In particular, Kristeva's theory of the semiotic suggestively provides for thinking about pre-oedipal logic, as does the work of a number of other writers and theorists, who can be seen in many ways to have been gesturing towards, or illuminating ideas of early sensory and somatic relating and identity. A number of different schools have variously attended to the possibilities of pre-natal life and peri-natal somatic trace, most notably feminist and object relations perspectives, and eclectic clinical practice routinely validates early pre-natal somatic experience. Whilst many of the theorizations of pre-natal consciousness offer intriguing possibilities for cultural application, in most the mother carrying the child is understood only as a physical container or hormonal, sonic, and emotional environment whose body variously assaults or nourishes the child. Such a theoretical construct involves an eradication of the mother's subjective presence, a banishment often replicated at the level of legislation concerning abortion, as is the case in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. (7)

Ettinger's work, in contrast, provides for a fruitful organization of a doubly encoded imaginary and symbolic, the co-presence of mother and child so powerfully poeticized by Medbh McGuckian, whose writing from her earliest publications has centred not only on being a mother but also on daughterly relating, both to her own parents and to those who have parented her poetically. (8) Ettinger's idea of matrixial borderspace proposes a grammar of relating based upon the anamnesis of being gestated, gestating, and intra-uterine relating, which challenges the view that jouissance is extra-symbolic. For Ettinger, the 'matrixial womb stands for a psychic capacity for shareability created in the borderlinking to the female body - a capacity for differentiation-in-co-emergence that occurs in the courses of separation-in-jointness, where distance-in-proximity is continuously reattuned'. (9) She offers it as a response to the exhortation that we must find a new symbolic to accommodate the feminine long called for in post-structuralist and feminist writings, and to counter the view that pre-oedipal and prenatal experience cannot be symbolized. Briefly, matrixial logic proceeds from the psychic structures of our earliest relationships, as the emerging I pre-natally encounters a non-I, or m / Other, who is both part object, part subject as both landscape and animating presence of difference. Just as a child is being gestated, so too is a mother, for a woman is not a mother until made so by the child she helps into being. While mothers grow children, children likewise grow mothers. What Ettinger calls "transjects" are part objects and subjects prior to their full symbolization; they encounter each other on a shared plane of being, a stratum previous to the castrating cut of language. Equally, however, this transsubjective encounter is not limited to a foreclosed and inaccessible pre-history but also happens alongside the phallic logic of the symbolic order.

Matrixial logic, although it sounds similar to Kristeva's semiotic, does not disrupt or rupture the symbolic but rather is another stratum and operates in a sub-subjective and trans-subjective register. Ettinger's matrixial theory is not the equivalent of the womb as a creative

platonic cave, for this she associates with 'a denial (of the womb) that allows for secretive and buried appropriation of maternal gestation, begetting, and birth-giving in the service of father-son relations.' (10) Equally, Ettinger's theory does not seek to replace the phallus, but rather elaborates an ancillary field of desire:

The Matrix is not the opposite of the Phallus; it is rather a supplementary perspective. It grants a different meaning. It draws a different field of desire. The intrauterine feminine / prenatal encounter represents, and can serve as a model for, the matrixial stratum of subjectivisation in which partial subjects composed of co-emerging Is and non-Is simultaneously inhabit a shared borderspace. (11)

"On Her Second Birthday" can be read as structured by this different field of desire. The poem is included in McGuckian's *Marconi's Cottage*, a volume largely about pregnancy and childbirth, which plays with overlapping oceanic and radio waves throughout, suggesting partial subjects co-transmitting I and non-I sonically and somatically (McGuckian's cottage, once owned by Guglielmo Marconi, who pioneered radio-wave technology, is near the beach). Given such play, it seems that we can venture that "On her Second Birthday" is a borderspace in which holding and folding relationships are linked, and which can accommodate the doubleness of voice encoded in the multiplicity of the McGuckian I, and indeed, you. The lyric I of "On her Second Birthday" can be read as speaking from both these spaces and temporalities of becoming, in which agencies flood one another, so that the reader is partially viewing from the perspective of the child within, and partially from the mother without. The wave itself is a sound string along which connections can be made, and along which more than one voice can echo and call, allowing the rethinking of borders not as dividing lines but as processes and passages.

"On Her Second Birthday" is a poem that acts like a Winnicottian transitional object, not just for the daughter to whom it is dedicated, but also for the mother and reader who are simultaneously placed in the position of mother and child. At the level of object relationality, it tells the story of the mother and daughter separating into intersubjectivity, of the mother separating herself from her collapse into the primary object, into her own voice, back into poetry, and into another relationship with her daughter through the gift of a transformational or transitional poem. As well as mediating the world for the child, the poem also mediates the world, both creatively and psychically, for the mother. After the birth of her first child, McGuckian suffered debilitating post-natal depression, during which time she physically regressed to such an infantile state that she had to be fed by her husband. Writing poetry was one of the ways in which she returned to her adult self. (12) Although this poem was composed long after this specific experience (the poem is dedicated to McGuckian's fourth child and only daughter), it can be read as carrying with it the traces of this deeply imprinting experience. Psychoanalysis tells us that a mother is made vulnerable like a newborn with each birth in order that she can open herself to receive and love a new child. This profound openness can return a mother to the defencelessness and rawness of being newborn herself. Indeed, while psychoanalysis in practice (especially object-relations theory) honours this journey for the mother, there are few, as feminists have long noted, cultural rites or symbolizations to publicly encode and facilitate this aspect of maternal experience. As a result, post-natal depression remains high in the western world and a story usually told in secret and with shame. (13) Mother and daughter both must 'fall apart' in order to 'explain the shape of the world'.

The 'wind like a soul', that 'Carried off half / of what I was able to say', animates the 'rising and falling mist', the rise and fall of the belly as the mother inhales and exhales, causing the pregnant stomach to rise and fall, psychically differentiating the mother and infans within. Just as the maternal body becomes uncanny for the child, the poem becomes uncanny for the reader, as a distance between the self-confirming reader and the incubating space of a lyric poem is opened up into a matrixial zone that disorders our centrality in this drama of becoming by insisting on the co-presence of the mother / speaker. The child's / reader's homely place (heimlich) becomes unhomely (unheimlich) as our / its holding environment animates itself beyond our meaning for it. In parallel, the rising and falling can be read as referring to the contracting belly in the journey of physical separation: 'A slight tremor betrays / The imperfection of the union / In its first surface', as well as being the first tremor of breath of the newly born child. In this unheimlich manoeuvre the wind becomes 'the air / Of a dream', the dream itself is a trope McGuckian often uses to introduce a pre-natal landscape. Here, air suggests not just breath, but music, the sonic reverberations of the mother's voice echoing through the amniotic waves, and the child's first cry. Ettinger speculates that the first moment of pre-natal difference is instantiated by the mother's voice, which 'in the matrixial resonance camera obscura' effects synaesthetic demarcation as 'the acoustic is entwined with touch, the touch with movement'. (14) We can read the poem as a 'matrixial resonance camera obscura', with sound and sight interlinked, as well as reverberating the sounds and sights of two beings sharing a borderspace.

The intertwining of sensation in the poem and the interplay between darkness and light, in which 'the air / Of a dream', becomes a 'field in which I ripened / From an unmoving, continually nascent / Light into pure light', and in which the speaker follows a 'shadow', powerfully intimates what Ettinger describes as a later intrauterine scene of encounter. In this, 'the fluctuations of lightness and darkness accompany a touching-in-separating movement with the shadowy, palpable world of visible and invisible, pre-subject and pre-object intersect and imprint poetic archaic traces in a web which is plural several from the outset, and this process involves imprinting of, and being imprinted by a pre-other, the archaic, non-I-m / Other'. (15) The process of imprinting and being imprinted by is explored in the lines:

But I flow outwards till I am something  
Belonging to it and flower again  
More perfectly everywhere present in it.  
It believes in me,  
It cannot do without me,  
I know its name:  
One day it will pass my mind into its body.

This link to the mother's body as the shared borderspace becomes the structuring space of the poem and the generating nexus of the speaker and others. 'I am' and 'you are' are ontological assertions of the symbolic and the poem begins with 'I was', reversing the order of matrix and symbolic, situating the symbolic in the past. In the poem, 'I' and 'you', 'we' and 'our', are transmuted into 'it', into the matrix itself, a sphere preceding the imprinting of an illusory grammar of insistent individualism, a sphere which cannot do without the mother. In the third stanza, the reader is invited to 'atomize' syntax and sound when the rules of grammar are diffracted into phonemes. A dissonant interplay between eye rhyme and homonym breaks up the order of becoming in the symbolic, as the poem maps the foreclosure of 'we' in the cleaving logic of the symbolic constitution of the subject, 'I': 'whose atoms make us weary'

(we-are-y / we-are-I). The reader is simultaneously carried along the sonic string of border-linking as words ‘fall apart’ into particles of sound each with their gestalt, as we occupy a space alongside the law of the father and the chronology of past, present, and future in tensile derangement:

It seems as though  
To explain the shape of the world  
We must fall apart  
Throw ourselves upon the world,  
Slip away from ourselves  
Through the world’s inner road  
Whose atoms make us weary.

Even as the linguistic subject is created through the mother and child falling apart into language, the speaking subject simultaneously ‘falls apart’ in another direction as the etymological vocal plurality of the lyric I is revealed in the we-are-I. Equally lines fall apart into visually discrete phrases and we read not alone along the lyrical line, adhering to the rules of temporal unfolding in grammatical time but also by asymmetrically linking lines and phrases that are not syntactically contingent on another, upwards and across, transversely eyeing the poem. This eye-weaving is carried over in an allegory McGuckian used in an interview to describe her creative processes: ‘I just take an assortment of words [...] and I fuse them. It’s like embroidery’ (16) and this metaphor of filament is powerfully deployed by Ettinger’s own art, which invites the viewer to apprehend her work through ‘matrixial looking’, a practice which she enlarges on in ‘Weaving a Woman Artist With-in the Matrixial Encounter-Event’, and ‘Wit(h)nessing Trauma and the Matrixial Gaze: From Phantasm to Trauma, from Phallic Structure to Matrixial Sphere’. She contends that

[i]n the gaze, the phallic mechanism carves intersubjectivity together with a point of emergence into what is lack-to-being, so that the split of the eye from the gaze is constitutive of the subject while intersubjectivity must fall into pieces. In the matrix, the gaze carves trans-subjectivity in co-emerging entities in a rapport interwoven, between presence and lack-to-being, in severality. (17)

The phallic gaze looks along metrical lines into subjectivity, whereas matrixial looking takes us into a space of trans-subjectivity, which also has implications for the trans-subjective aesthetic interaction with other poems and texts. “On Her Second Birthday” touches an array of other poems and texts, including W. B. Yeats’s “The Second Coming”, Seamus Heaney’s “Bogland”, Sylvia Plath’s verse play, “Three Women”, and James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, as well as many of McGuckian’s own poems, as Batten has noted. (18) McGuckian embeds aspects of other narratives and lyrical instances and this ‘embroidery’ has been used to cast aspersions on the integrity of her work. (19) The poem moves filiation into filament and instead of the rivalrous activity of ancestral displacement, the poem can be recast as occurring not only on a timeline but also within a borderspace of ‘co-poeisis’, thus converting Harold Bloom’s famous understanding of poetic creativity, in which “only a poet challenges a poem’s poet and so only a poet makes a poet, [t]o the poet-in-a-poet, a poem is always the other man, the precursor, and so a poem is always a person, always the father of one’s second birth”. (20) In “On Her Second Birthday”, needlework obliquely arouses a connection with the most famous modern Irish foundational tale, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, specifically the ‘Penelope’ episode, with the lines, ‘gliding like a world, a tapestry / one looks at from the back’ (p.74). The tapestry educes Penelope’s unstitching and re-stitching of the back of

James Joyce's 'world', and could be said to symbolize the undoing of the suture in the symbolic and weaving it into a network of meanings that adds matrixial logic to the phallic structure of father and son filiation. The point of view of the oedipal son and father in *Ulysses* that casts Penelope / Molly in maternal stasis, like a teat on the bed, a source of constant succour, imprisoned by maternity and by projections of maternal jouissance onto her, through which intergenerational male identification is established, is itself complemented, not replaced by, but re-woven, from the 'back'. The speaker simultaneously 'follow[s] with her eye' and 'look[s] at from the back', plaiting the phallic gaze with matrixial looking. The reader is also invited to share on this register of twofold-vision, of reweaving the foundational fabric of our modern culture. The poem's doubled use of 'second' birth, its play on 'holding', 'falling', and 'centring', connects it with W. B. Yeats's 'The Second Coming' - a poem often read as foreshadowing the birth pangs of the (two) state(s). In 'The Second Coming' the centre cannot (my italics) hold' and 'things fall apart' into anarchy, while here, falling apart is revelatory and healing. Looking in two directions, in two different ways, continues 'along the world's inner road' as the poem unfolds, with the journey into separate physical life and into the symbolic interwoven with a contra-punctuated metamorphic (my emphasis) voyage.

Metamorphosis, as Ettinger theorizes it, acts as 'a passage-lane through which matrixial affects, events, materials and modes of becoming infiltrate the non-conscious margins of the Symbolic'. (21) 'The world's inner road 'is a metamorphic passage in which the matrix itself is brought into representation in all its psychic distinctiveness, as the mother / speaker also differentiates herself in relation to matrix, situating herself as a co-becoming subject in relation to her daughter and to this psychic structure. In the beginning the mother was mistaken for the matrix, echoing the cultural collapse of woman into womb, a process the poem acknowledges in the lines, 'the more it changed / the more it changed me into itself'. The poem also identifies the matrix, the originary psychic structure, as distinct from the mother speaker. When the mother-daughter / mother-matrix 'slip away from ourselves / through the world's inner road', the matrix becomes visible represented by the shadow of the pregnant belly: 'I followed with my eyes a shadow / floating from horizon to horizon / which I mistook for my own'. Here, the matrix and the mother carrying the matrix are both brought into representation: 'It grew greater while I grew less'. The shape of the bump, 'gliding like a world' (p.74), (the child's world) is both the shape of the speaker / mother's body, I ('My contours can still / Just be made out') and non-I (in the areas of fragrance / Of its power over me'). 'The lines 'I flow outwards till I am something / Belonging to it and flower again / More perfectly everywhere present in it' (p.75), dramatize the 'process of differentiating in borderspacing and borderlinking, of inscriptive exchange between / with-in several matrixial entities.' (22) In the lines, 'I ripened / from an unmoving, continually nascent / light into pure light', the enclosed, individuated subject of the symbolic is recast in a nexus of intertwined affects, in which alignments between agencies are continually reattuned.

McGuckian's imperative 'we must fall part' calls to mind what Kristeva describes as the disagreeable jouissance of maternity and what Ettinger explicates as the 'traumatic differentiating-injointness of the I with the archaic m / Other'. (23) She argues that through certain types of art we are connected to a wider plane of the trauma by becoming participatory wit(h)nesses. In such participation, we co-emerge from the event of looking / reading having been pleased and traumatized. Effectively Ettinger proposes that:

The phallic gaze excites us while threatening to annihilate us in its emergence on the screen, giving us the illusion of participation in mastery. The matrixial gaze thrills us while

fragmenting, multiplying, scattering and assembling the fragments together. It turns us into what we may call participatory witnesses to traumatic events, at the price of diffracting us. It threatens us with disintegration while allowing our participation in a drama wider than that of our individual selves. (24)

The many interpretations of McGuckian's work that attest to the reader's thrill (or terror) of being in a world that appears to be fragmenting, multiplying, scattering, and forming, suggest that McGuckian's readers can be described as participatory wit(h)nesses. The poem vacillates between *plaisir*, the unfolding into inter- and co-subjectivity of the mother and the child in language and form, and *jouissance*, the actions of which skirt the limits of the seemingly unknowable. The poem's *plaisir* is provided by the consolation of forms, the modes of poetic phrase and language we recognize as a type of ego affirmation. They act as, to rephrase Winnicott's term, a good enough poem-mother, making the world safe, negotiable, and comforting while its *jouissance*, which disports ego-boundaries, exceeds permissible 'meanings' and undermines the 'canons of culture'. (25) *Plaisir* obeys the law of homeostasis, whereas *jouissance* is, as Jacques Lacan contends, 'beyond the pleasure principle.' (26) *Plaisir* demands the mother's necessary psychic use as the primary object, as a formal device for the child, in which her subjective differences disappear, while *jouissance* represents the maternal dimension, which is considered by Lacanian psychoanalysis as outside the symbolic. However, if we think matrixially, this 'outside' does not signal an unrecoverable otherness, asymbolic wilderness, but an ethical borderspace of co-being. The art historian, Griselda Pollock, expanding on the ethical dimension of the matrixial, writes that 'the modernist criminal catastrophe, the Holocaust', was imaginable and was enacted by an 'extremity' of the castrative paradigm, which she argues, citing Homi Bhabha's germinal work, is responsible for 'racism, xenophobia, fascism'. (27) In contrast, Pollock contends that in matrixial logic, 'frontiers become creatively transgressive, and the limits become threshold and a non-fusional transmission becomes possible, such a catastrophe is unimaginable'. (28) A tendency to read through a castrative paradigm has conditioned cultural responses to the history of the border in Ireland, refracting interpretation through tropes of incision in the work many of Ireland's most famous poets, as a scar in Eavan Boland, as opened ground, as a slice in the land in Seamus Heaney, and as wounds in Michael Longley. Insisting on the matter of the mother alongside the cut, re-imagines the border as borderspace - a passage for linking, rather than a line for excluding, and carries with it the possibility of 'realign[ing] the imaginary fields that underpin our social and political relations'. (29)

To suggest rethinking borderspace is not to dishonour what the border as the savagely disjunctive break has meant for many people on this island: a division that has brutally cleaved apart and separated families, friends, and loved ones in life and in death. It is rather to include this trauma in a larger field of continual partial re-alliance and re-relating, and to think adjacency, linking to and through the cut, rather than disposing of it, in a mirroring refusal to re-enact the disposal of the mother that occurs in the cut itself. In much the same way, McGuckian refuses to let her poems become radically separated and from her by bestowing a final meaning on them, as she famously playfully reviews her own explanations of her work, providing radically different referents for the same poem, reordering her relation to her creations as if they themselves were partial objects on a wider plane of matrixial becoming. (30) This matrixial re-vision is not the revisionism that is so wearily opposed to a nationalist politics in Irish critical cultures, but an offering of what Christopher Bollas describes as 'writing as engagement, not writing as riddance.' (31) In an Irish context, the hope of a writing that is not about 'riddance' is crucial. Not removing the mother is a first, seemingly small, but intensely important step. The first co-inhabitation provides us with a

template for continued co-habitation, and when we rid ourselves of the mother as a constitutive move in self-definition, we rid ourselves of the capacity for tolerating the neighbour who is different from us, whose bordering of our home makes that space unhomely. Judith Butler has argued, after Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel Levinas, that our ethical responsibility to the stranger, to the neighbour we do not choose, whose very presence gives each of us not only a border, but a neighborhood, must be our first step in seeking peace and unlearning the impulse to rid or remove. (32) McGuckian's 'imperfection of the union / in its first surface' (p.75), carries the possibility of knowing the in-joining demarcation in the imperfection of all unions. 'Surface', the geometrical state of two dimensions, the exterior boundary, the face of the earth - the title of another of McGuckian's collections, *The Face of The Earth* (2002) - also falls apart, into 'sur-face', as we are invited to turn and face that which is sur- / 'over and above' the child - the mother - and promises the prospect of the continuing imperfection of re-union. Through the castrative cut and the deletion of the mother, the political choices appear to be that of the nation-state cut out of the maternal/national body - an excision that excludes those who cannot be enclosed within ideas of national, racial, or religious purity, or that' of retroactively produced union, a colonial symbiosis that occludes the native differences of the m / Other, and the child before this union. The co-inhabitation of matrixial borderspace suggests a way beyond either empire or nation state. 'On Her Second Birthday', can be read as an 'inscriptive exchange between / with-in several matrixial entities': as its final lines intimate, 'I know its name: / One day it will pass my mind into its body' (p.75), an exchange that facilitates a move away from the rupturous resurrectionary re-naisance of modernism, nationalism, and colonialism, to a co-naisance of cultural and political bodies with all their native differences.

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#### Notes

1. Justin Quinn, *The Cambridge Introduction to Irish Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.167.
2. Guirm Batten, 'Boland, McGuckian, Ni Chuilleanain and the Body of the Nation', in *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*, edited by Matthew Campbell (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.181.
3. Batten, p.181.
4. Kristeva, p. 297.
5. Medbh McGuckian, *Selected Poems* (Winston-Salem: Wake Forest University Press, 1997), p.74.
6. The Bible, John 1:1, St James's Version.
7. The famous split between Otto Rank and Freud along the lines of pre and peri-natal consciousness can be broadly described as continuing in psychoanalysis with a division between Lacanian Theory and Relational Theory. A number of theorists have in many different ways explored the possibility of pre and peri-natal consciousness; see Alessandra Piontelli, 'From Foetus to Child: An Observational and Psychoanalytical Study', in *New Library of Psychoanalysis*, 15 (London: Tavistock / Routledge, 1992). Such work has often been tied to a spiritual or archetypal framework as in the work of Frank Lake, see Stephen M. Maret, *The Prenatal Person: Frank Lake's Maternal-Fetal Distress Syndrome* (Boston: University Press of America, 1997). Stansilov Grof's interviews with victims of torture, concentration camp victims, and his LSD observational work in Czechoslovakia resulted in his designation of four archetypal stages of pre- and peri-natal experience corresponding to a spiritual cosmology. Like Lake, he discontinued his early work with LSD and developed Holotropic Breathwork as a means for regressing clients. See Stanislav Grof, *LSD*

- Psychotherapy: Exploring the Frontiers of the Hidden Mind* (Alameda, California: Hunter House, 1980); Stanislav and Christina Grof, *Beyond Death - The Gates of Consciousness* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1980); Stanislav Grof, *The Holotropic Mind* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993); Stanislav Grof, *Psychology of the Future: Lessons From Modern Consciousness Research* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000).
8. My thanks to Anne Mulhall and Noreen Giffney for bringing Ettinger's work to my attention.
  9. Bracha L. Ettinger, 'Weaving a Woman Artist With-in the Matrixial Encounter-Event', in *Theory, Culture, Society* (2004), 21.1, 69-94 (p. 76).
  10. Ettinger, 'Weaving', p.71.
  11. Bracha L. Ettinger, 'Metramorphic Borderlinks and Matrixial Borderspace', in *Rethinking Borders*, edited by John Welchman (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press. 1996), pp.125-6.
  12. See Medbh McGuckian and Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill. 'Comhra, with a Foreword and Afterword by Laura O'Connor', in *The Southern Review*, 31:3 (Summer 1995), 581-614.
  13. It is estimated that fifty percent of women suffer from mild postnatal depression while eighteen to twenty percent suffer a more severe form, Joan-Raphael Leff, 'Primary Maternal Persecution', paper delivered at M(O)ther Trouble Conference, Birkbeck College, University College London, 3 May, 2009.
  14. Ettinger, 'Weaving'. p.81.
  15. Ettinger, 'Weaving', p. 82.
  16. Rebecca E. Wilson, *Sleeping with Monsters: Conversations with Scottish and Irish Women Poets*, edited by Rebecca Wilson and Gillean Somerville-Arjat (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990), p.2.
  17. Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, 'Wit(h)nessing Trauma and the Matrixial Gaze: From Phantasm to Trauma, From Phallic Structure to Matrixial Sphere', in *Parallax*, 7:4 (2001), 5-65 (p.11).
  18. Batten, p.181.
  19. See Mallot for a discussion of the suspicions surrounding McGuckian's practice.
  20. Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.17.
  21. Ettinger, 'Weaving, p.77.
  22. Ettinger, 'Weaving', p.77.
  23. Ettinger, 'Weaving', p.99.
  24. Ettinger, 'Wit(h)nessing', p.111.
  25. Jane Gallop, *Thinking through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p.121.
  26. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton & Co, 1977), p. x.
  27. Pollack, 'Weaving' p.7.
  28. Griselda Pollock, 'Thinking the Feminine: Aesthetic Practice as Introduction to Bracha Ettinger and the Concepts of Matrix and Metramorphosis', in *Theory, Culture Society*, 21:1 (2004), 5-65 (p.23).
  29. Pollock, p. 7.
  30. See 'An Interview with Medbh McGuckian', conducted by Michaela Schrage-Fruh, in *Contemporary Literature*, XLVI.1 (2005), 1-17.
  31. Christopher Bollas introducing the critic Jacqueline Rose in *Edward Said, Freud and the Non-European* (London; New York: Verso, in association with The Freud Museum, 2003), p.60.
  32. Judith Butler, 'Thinking Israel / Palestine', paper given at the Graduate Theological Union, University of California, Berkeley, 6 May, 2009.