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September 11, 2025

# Reading Space

Motherhood(s)

**SPRING** Performing  
Arts Festival

# Welcome to this evening's Reading Space!

In this booklet, you will find a selection of texts chosen especially for this occasion: chapters, journalistic articles, blog posts, essays, poems, and letters. Each of them engages with the theme of motherhood(s), relating both to the exhibition Good Mom/Bad Mom at the Centraal Museum Utrecht and to the artists and artworks presented at Centraal Laa x SPRING. We attempted to select a variety of texts that show insight into different approaches to and experiences with motherhood. From biological to chosen families, from happy moms to those who are happy not to be one. The sole purpose is to read together about the topic, and to share our thoughts if we feel like it.

In this reading space you also find some published books, that we selected in conversation with Book store Savannah Bay. Together with them, we organize yearly Reading Groups during SPRING Festival. Upcoming festival takes place from 14-23 May. Sign up for our newsletter to stay informed!





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1.

# MOTHERNISM, MANIFEST

At the intersection of feminism, science fiction, and disco, MOTHERNISM aims to locate the mother-shaped hole in contemporary art discourse, therefore:

MOTHERNISM is not solely an ethical or political position, but also an aesthetic position.

MOTHERNISM aims to make mothers and mothering visible, audible, and palpable, outside but particularly inside of the visual arts.

MOTHERNISM aims to examine and challenge the perceived schism between the maternal and the artistic.

MOTHERNISTS strive for the highest degree of excellency, bearing in mind that the parameters of “quality” are not universal, but local.

MOTHERNISM is co-laboring with the forces.

MOTHERNISM is an orgy of organization.

MOTHERNISM is re-studio,  
re-modern, re-constructivist,  
and re-feminist.

MOTHERNISTS play in the expanded field between criticality and generosity.

MOTHERNISM begins to breathe while being drawn out.  
All mothers being equal, not all mothers are alike nor are all

MOTHERNISTS alike.

MOTHERNISTS get their daily  
food groups covered: eye candy, soul food, UMAMI.

UNITED ARTISTS  
MOTHERNIST MANIFEST  
ILLUMINISMS

2.

## This Is What a Mothernist Looks Like: A Feminist Ethics of Care

The question remains: in practical terms, what does it mean to be a Mothernist? One answer: to be a Mothernist is to have the inner capacity to care for someone, or something else, and to fight for those who cannot yet fight for themselves. For the artist who coined the term “Mothernism”, Lise Haller Baggesen, it is the next logical progression of feminism: the twenty-first-century wave.

As writer and cultural critic Roxane Gay argues in her book *Bad Feminist*, many kinds of people have been at worst excluded from, and at best forgotten by, twentieth-century feminism (including women of colour, queer, and transgender women). Yet, Gay writes, “feminism’s failings do not mean we should eschew feminism entirely.... We should disavow the failures of feminism without disavowing its many successes and how far we have come.”

If feminism’s weakness is that it is too abstract, too loaded with decades of politicization, and filled with too many generations trying to reshape it on their own terms, Mothernism’s power is that, in accessing motherhood, it is truly a universal language. As feminist poet Adrienne Rich reminds us, “All human life on this planet is born of woman” (11), and every living being is connected to someone who cared enough to help people come into existence and to continue to exist beyond their vulnerabilities. Rich makes the point that “physical motherhood is merely one dimension of our being” (284) and that “in the original

matriarchal clan all females, of whatever age, were called ‘mothers’— even little girls. Motherhood was a social rather than a physical function”. Care and compassion are, theoretically, the ethical foundations for most major world religions and philosophies, yet in practice are so rarely implemented.

Mothernism proposes this “radical” shift in perspective: care for this world and the people in it, as if they were your children. Place yourself in a mother’s shoes. Ask: how can I help this grow? Is there space for mothering here? Is this safe for growth, conversation, or existence? Beyond its seductive aesthetics, Baggesen’s primary interest in Mothernism stems from its inclusivity: biological and nonbiological mamas alike can be Mothernists, and are welcomed as such. Rich offers up alternate terms to the nonbiological mother such as the “unchilded” woman or, in the positive, “spirit-sister”. Mothernism is a philosophy open to all, as it spans race, gender, creed, and class. Biological motherhood is not a requirement; indeed, for Mothernism’s ideals to be effective, nonbiological mothers are a key component of this paradigm shift equation. Without naming this theory precisely, Mothernism makes the case that mothers, fathers, and their children alike—institutions and governments, even—should live with an ethics of care.

- By Julia V. Hendrickson

3.

## NON UNIVERSAL DRAG VALUES

Hi, I am Taka Taka and the following lines are my transcription of the Drag Mothering values and tools that have been directly taught to me by Jennifer Hopelezz or indirectly, by experiencing Jenny transmitting them to my siblings and learning from the relationships within the House of Hopelezz. These tools are generated in the local context of Amsterdam and they are founding stones for me as the drag mother for the Drag King House of Løstbois.

### BASICS

Curiosity, acceptance, empathy, patience, listening, transparency (among us), honesty. Empowering their urgency / desire / need / affinity.

Eliminate my expectations.

Trust and doubt your drag mother.

End of violence - creation of joy.

A house is not a homogenous dance company, it's forever but nothing lasts forever.

A tent for two people is also a house.

Laughter as a mode of resistance.

Every house can have multiple mothers.

The more houses the better.

Every drag local community is entirely different from the other.

Do not compare but actively try to understand them.

Every drag performer is doing drag for different reasons.

Drag has been written on the streets before written in the books.

Queer is not a look neither a clear identity but rather a subjective, lived experience in constant transformation.

Entitlement is for the real queens.

Drag is breaking gendered rules, it's not making new ones.

Pay your dues to the community - don't expect only to get paid.

### FOR FREEDOM

Intersections have no red lights or stop signs.

We are not heroes; it is sad we need to fight for our rights.

Make fun of the morals of your freedom.

DRAGXICITY = drag toxicity from other people or drag queens in the scene is a construct of insecurity, just ignore it.

Becoming ourselves by not assimilating.

A drag producer who wants to change your drag character is not producing you but is killing your character.

Define your relationship with your community personally.

Accept every subjectivity as a complete-incomplete.

Love the mean siblings and maybe a year later, they will not be mean anymore.

Soft is stronger.

Be humble.

Freedom is not a candy store; it's based on how much you resist the restrictions placed on you.

Depending on the country, politicians tend to want a drag queen next to them. The question is what do you want from them?

## FOR QUEER ENTERTAINMENT

Don't set yourself or others on fire (literally).

All make up and wigs from the cheapest to the most expensive look good on you and they can catch fire easily.

Sun glasses on stage block gaze exchange.

The gaze of a queer audience is a healing gaze.

The gaze of heteronormative audience can be de-humanizing, be prepared.

Camp is not an aesthetic style but a sub-cultural heritage.

Pop-star was never the goal.

If you want to become famous and rich, most likely you have chosen the wrong path. In-famous is sometimes more effective than famous.

Queer non-conforming entertainment is a visual language made from and for queer people. Welcome biographical elements and mix them with fiction for social commentary beyond commentary; bio fictional drag.

Be approachable to everybody from your queer audience.

Lip-sync and dancing ain't the only format of drag expression.

Public messages for your community can create adverse effects, the tone of addressing them is equally important to the message.

Know "her-story".

Showtime is rehearsal time and the best time to try something new.

Drag singers who cannot hear their own voice when singing live usually come out as cacophonous.

That is charisma, not a disadvantage.

Just don't take yourself too seriously on stage, it makes you look silly.

(Almost) never give critical feedback when a sibling has just finished performing.

Making a show in six minutes is equally relevant to working on one for six months. Clubs are not Broadway.

Address your audience in the eyes.

Always be sure to have a light on you while performing, even if it is a torch light.

Birthday cakes on stage should always fall on the floor before the sibling blows the candles. If you do not like your show feel free to stop the music and walk away with charm or run away.

Do not try to save the show. Welcome all of its randomness.

Help your siblings when you finish your show.

Queer public is more important for yourself and more important than yourself.

Bartenders and garderobe workers are the DNA of the party, respect them.

Aim to create queer aesthetics based on urgent subjects of your community.

Make-up is not a quality of excellence but a skill that might help.

More than 40 minutes of make-up is a waste of time.

What you want to say with your drag is equally important to what you look like.

Be calm and respectful to others backstage.

Take your wig off on stage once per while; it's good for your drag ego.

If your show offends your queer public (not their morals) be sincere, discuss it and apologise. Keep the drama on stage.

If a producer approaches you for a project about visibility and inclusion, examine their motives and strategies closely.

Shy people are great performers too. Allow time to develop.

## FOR THE HOUSE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

To solve a communication problem between sisters is not the goal, it is rather a chance to find out how to talk about it.

Each one is a complete character with their own set of aesthetics and needs.

Queer co-existence is learned every day.

Your siblings are your mentors.

Do not be jealous of your new siblings, actively support them

and share all of your skills with them.  
Our differences in our subjectivities is our strength.  
A group always has a black sheep, do not slaughter it but paint it all pink together.  
Treat your kids and siblings better than you expected to be treated by them.  
Ask your kids how they arrived at their drag, instead of where they are going with it.  
Being all-together instead of your own, makes it easier to hit the streets in drag.  
Somebody who is new to drag should be equally respected to somebody who is a drag royalty.  
You do get along differently with every family member.

## QUEER SELF CARE

Drugs ain't going to treat your trauma.  
Uncontrollable drug use shortens your drag life, alcohol is also a drug.  
Drag is not a sprint, it is a marathon.  
If everybody in the house says you might have a behavioural problem related to drugs, it's the time we need to intervene and for you to take action.  
We learn queer self-love every day.  
Choose your battles in the streets wisely and always have a pair of sneakers with you. Avoid walking alone at night.  
Always ask if there is an available budget for a taxi.  
If a taxi driver does not accept you, don't report them personally but expose the policy of their company and demand active change.  
Be wary of some journalists, they might seem to care about you but they do like to racialize incidents of bullying.  
Every form of violence, including public shaming and bullying, has to be immediately reported to the authorities, not only on social media.  
Authorities can also be dangerously ignorant.

Forgive your blood line parents when necessary.  
Freaky is an excellent quality.  
Always be sweet to parents and kids on the street even when they seem to be afraid of you. Break the promise of bitchy drag especially in front of kids on the street.  
Still, "queer-read" the parents and put them in their place when necessary.  
  
Welcome the un-known you.

4.

## I am a mother and I regret it every day of my life. I hate being a mom

When I was pregnant 4 years ago, I couldn't have been more excited to have my daughter! But it was clear from the day one she was born though there was no bond. Of course I loved her from the second I saw her, but our first day together was the most disappointing day of my life. I did not get all those "feels" that everyone talks about or that instant love and bond that you are expected to feel.

Now, my daughter will be 4 in about two weeks. I still feel the same, if not worse, than the day she was born. And I hate myself every day for it. I hate that I feel this way and there's nothing I can do to change it. We don't have a connection. Not like how I expected to at least.

- Reddit blog entry, Anonymous

5.

## A mother from Beit Lahia, Gaza

(Published on April 14th, 2025)

March 21 marks both the beginning of spring and Mother's Day in Palestine. A day of celebration, of hope, but it is hard for us to think of hope now.

My 12-year-old son apologized to me because he could not buy me a present on Mother's Day. I hugged him and said that their survival – for now – is the most precious present that God has given me, I want nothing more.

I live in Beit Lahia. We are still sweeping the rubble, trying to restore our damaged house, to make it livable, more than a month after our return to the north. Everything here is a struggle: to be a mother during genocide is to fight, every minute, every second to maintain your family when nothing is available. Getting clean water is a battle; securing food is a battle; getting fresh vegetables or fruits is a dream, but I am a lucky mother because my children are still alive.

I look at my children and feel guilty because they have been denied their childhood, they were forced into the cruel world of adulthood, of war: no schools, no playgrounds, no daily walks by the sea. I hear bombs and wish I could wrap them with my own body, wish that my love, larger than the universe, could protect them, shelter them.

Half an hour before we were due to break our fast, on Mother's Day, in Ramadan, we saw that the Israeli military had ordered our area to "evacuate," but to where? We

are tired of displacement, of carrying an entire life on our shoulders and fleeing again, starting all over again; we are trying to rebuild the remnants of our lives: we were hoping to do that without fearing the non-stop bombs raining on us. Was that too much to ask?

I do not know if we will survive this round of bombardment, I do not know if the world will remember that one day people lived in a small place called Gaza, which had the most beautiful coastline in the world. Here lived people who wanted to live, they had so many dreams, they wanted to raise their children under normal circumstances but never got the chance to do so.

Note: The author's name has been withheld for security reasons.

- Testimony from Amnesty International Canada.

## 6. the mother

Abortions will not let you forget.  
You remember the children you got that you did not get,  
the damp small pulps with a little or with no hair,  
the singers and workers that never handled the air.  
You will never neglect or beat  
them, or silence or buy with a sweet.  
You will never wind up the sucking-thumb  
or scuttle off ghosts that come.  
You will never leave them, controlling your luscious sigh,  
return for a snack of them, with gobbling mother-eye.

I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim  
killed children.  
I have contracted. I have eased  
my dim dears at the breasts they could never suck.  
I have said, Sweets, if I sinned, if I seized  
your luck  
and your lives from your unfinished reach,  
if I stole your births and your names,  
your straight baby tears and your games,  
your stilted or lovely loves, your tumults, your marriages,  
aches, and your deaths,  
if I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths,  
believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate.  
Though why should I whine,  
whine that the crime was other than mine?—  
since anyhow you are dead.  
Or rather, or instead,  
you were never made.

But that too, I am afraid,  
is faulty: oh, what shall I say, how is the truth to be said?  
You were born, you had a body, you died.  
It is just that you never giggled or planned or cried.

Believe me, I loved you all.  
Believe me, I knew you, though faintly, and I loved, I loved you  
All.

- A poem by Gwendolyn Brooks

## Lily Allen Just Responded To The Backlash She Faced After Admitting She “Can’t Remember” How Many Abortions She’s Had

Last week, Lily Allen revealed that she can’t remember how many abortions she’d had before getting an IUD, which is a form of contraception, at 23 years old.

Speaking to her best friend Miquita Oliver on their podcast, *Miss Me?*, Lily said: “I have an IUD now, I think I’m on my third, maybe fourth, and I just remember, before that was a complete disaster area. I was just... Yeah, I’d get pregnant all the time.”

And when Miquita expressed her surprise, Lily jokingly started singing to the tune of Frank Sinatra’s “My Way”: “Abortions, I’ve had a few, but then again, I can’t remember exactly how many.” She then burst into laughter, confirming: “I can’t remember, I think maybe, like... I want to say four or five.”

Miquita revealed that she’d also had “about five” abortions, saying: “The pattern would be: Unfortunately, get pregnant, like, not want to be, have an abortion, then while I was sedated in said abortion, they’d give me a coil.” She added that she “can’t quite remember” why she ended up getting the coil taken out each time.

One week earlier, Miquita had said on *Miss Me?* that she used to feel “embarrassed” to say that she’d had more than one abortion. Speaking to Lily, she said: “I have had a few abortions, and I think one of them was coming up to about three and a half months and that was really terrifying, I had no idea.” “I felt really embarrassed to even say that I had more than one abortion, why the fuck should I be ashamed? I have had a few,” she went on.

During this episode, Lily reiterated a point she was previously praised for making back in 2022, saying: “It actually irritates me, and I’ve said it before on the record. I’ve seen memes going around sometimes, on Instagram from pro-abortion accounts or whatever, whenever this conversation comes up and suddenly you start seeing people posting things about extraordinary reasons for having an abortion.”

“Like: ‘My aunt had a kid that had this disability,’ or whatever, ‘if she went full term it was going to kill her so we have to,’” she continued. “It’s like, shut up! Just: ‘I don’t want a fucking baby right now.’ Literally: ‘Don’t want a baby’ is enough reason.”

“One of the abortions I had, I hated the guy and had absolutely no interest in having his fucking child,” Miquita agreed. “I was like: ‘Absolutely not,’ and as you know, throughout my 20s and 30s, having a baby wasn’t really very important to me, and I’d have hated it if I didn’t have the option and the freedom to do what I needed to do for my own life.”

And the two women’s candid conversations about their personal experiences with abortions ended up being heavily criticized on social media, with the pair admitting that it had been a “hard” week on Thursday’s episode of *Miss Me?*. The conversation started with Lily reflecting on the fact that

she has refused to toe the line throughout her career, even though it often results in backlash. “There are times I sit there and I think: ‘Oh fuck, life would be so much easier if I just sort of played the game and was a good little girl that said the rights and didn’t piss people off,’” she began. “And it’s hard, you know? It’s really difficult swimming upstream in a fucking sea of hateful comments, it’s really stifling.”

“I remember being offered media training, and I just thought: ‘I don’t want that, I don’t want to be taught how to work within the confines of it, that’s not what I’m here to do,’” Lily added. “With the comments we’ve had in the wake of these abortion comments, it’s not really about the thing. Lots of people have abortions, so it’s not really [abortions] that people are sensationalizing; it’s about the audacity of expressing it.” (...)

Lily then revealed that “for every horrible comment” she and Miquita received for their abortion conversations, “countless women” have messaged to say it had “alleviated them of their guilt and their shame” around abortions. “It’s for all the millions of other women who have made a decision about their body,” Miquita agreed before joking: “And if you wanted to have a baby with some of the fucking assholes I didn’t want to have a baby with, that’s fine. That’s up to you; but I didn’t want to have a baby with them and start a family with them, and I made that choice for myself.”

“It’s about control,” Lily concluded. “It’s wanting to have control over our minds and our way of thinking, and the way that we feel and relate to ourselves. And that is actually... I can’t tolerate it.”

Lily, 40, is now mom to two daughters: 13-year-old Ethel, and 12-year-old Marnie, who she shares with her ex-husband, Sam Cooper. Miquita, now 41, is currently childfree, and has been open on the podcast about not being sure if she wants to have children in the future.

- Article by Stephanie Soteriou, BuzzFeed Staff

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