

DEMETER PRESS

author interview with
PETRA BUESKENS



WE SPOKE WITH DEMETER AUTHOR **PETRA BUESKENS** ABOUT HER NEW BOOK, ***MOTHERING AND PSYCHOANALYSIS: CLINICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL AND FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES***, MOTHERING THERAPISTS AND ADRIENNE RICH.

To order Mothering and Psychoanalysis visit www.demeterpress.org where all books are available for a limited time at 50% off and with free mailing for orders over \$60. #motherhoodisNOTaliability

DP: WHY WAS IT IMPORTANT TO PRODUCE A BOOK ON MOTHERING AND PSYCHOANALYSIS? WHY NOW?

PB: This book speaks to three different literatures - psychoanalysis (and psychotherapy more broadly), sociology and motherhood studies. I am ensconced in each of these worlds at a scholarly and professional level and hadn't seen an edited collection covering these three bases for some time. On the other hand, new and exciting work in the field (I'm thinking of Lisa Baraitser's and Alison Stone's work and essays published in *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*) have emerged that speak to all three literatures and hadn't yet received critical commentary in book form. Of course, I also love the subject matter and wanted to write a book that incorporated all three disciplines!

DP: AS A PSYCHOTHERAPIST, WHAT ARE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH THE GENDERED "THERAPY CULTURE"?

PB: When I ventured out to set up my own practice I found it difficult to generate an adequate patient load, found GP's would not refer clients and struggled to find a language for the kind of therapy I wanted to practice, which was long-term and relational yet also shaped by the history of ideas and a feminist politics

There is very little theoretical depth in more recent articulations of what therapy is or what our intellectual genealogy is (sure, in psychoanalysis they have this however it is one lineage and doesn't generally incorporate the insights and expansions of social theory and feminist theory). In a nutshell, my experience was one of limits and what I was wanting was to incorporate a more dimensional perspective and, of course, to have a thriving private practice! I am happy to say that five years in, and through the assistance of several wonderful colleagues, and a growing confidence, this has improved for me. Nonetheless, it is an ongoing problem as Lori Gottlieb's expose "What Brand is your Therapist?" in the *New York Times* clearly shows.

DP: YOU DISCUSS THERAPY AS A FORM OF MOTHERING. WHY IS THIS AN IMPORTANT CONCEPT?

PB: When I began working as a therapist I was struck by the parallels in the kind of emotional labour involved between therapy and mothering: empathy, containment of another's feelings, being (among other things) a "secure base", listening, basic and ongoing care, consistency and so on. I also noticed that most therapists were women and had a particular affinity for helping others and were drawn to this profession precisely so they could be helpful. I guess the other side of this, for me, is my rejection of the medical model as an adequate means of describing the emergence of psychopathology or indeed for treating it let alone preventing it - a domain where psychotherapy really comes into its own. The current hegemonic medical model is one paradigm among several and so foregrounding what copious research now shows: that it is in fact the relationship between therapist and client that heals was central in my argument that therapy is a form of mothering.

DP: WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE FEMINIST MOTHERHOOD BOOK, OR BOOKS THAT YOU RECOMMEND?

PB: My favourite feminist motherhood book is Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*. Not only did she define the terrain, she gave us a language to critique the institution of motherhood while honouring our deep passion for mothering. Mothering is a vocation and, for most women, their children remain the central life task and love of their lives. Rich captured this beautifully while also making it a legitimate topic for scholarly enquiry. I also love, although it is somewhat dated now, Susan Maushart's *The Mask of Motherhood*. In somewhat racier prose Maushart again offers us a fearsome critique of the structural discrimination suffered by mothers while placing at the forefront our passion for our children and the calling of motherhood.