Conceiving Pregnancy as Narrative(s):

Transgressive Maternities and Disability in American Reproductive Politics

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Rachel J. McWhorter

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"There are times when personal experience keeps us from reaching the mountain top and so we let it go because the weight of it is too heavy. And sometimes the mountain top is difficult to reach with all our resources, factual and confessional, so we are just there, collectively grasping, feeling the limitations of knowledge, longing together, yearning for a way to reach that highest point. Even this yearning is a way to know." – bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*

Prospective Immigrants Please Note
- Adrienne Rich

Either you will
go through this door
or you will not go through.

If you go through
there is always the risk
of remembering your name.

Things look at you doubly
and you must look back
and let them happen.

If you do not go through
it is possible
to live worthily

to maintain your attitudes
to hold your position
to die bravely

but much will blind you,
much will evade you,
at what cost who knows?

The door itself makes no promises.
It is only a door.

Abstract

"Conceptions of Pregnancy" explores narratives that articulate pregnancy beyond the bounds of "normative,"[1] American reproductive politics. By enlisting these narratives, and focusing on the narrative substance of pregnancy itself, I argue that pregnancy can be refigured as a significantly critical position by which to critique lingering ideas of the Enlightenment subject[2] and embodiment. This dissertation covers select literary texts from the antebellum era through the 21st century that encounter significant historical contexts and, in response, re-shape pregnancy and maternity toward this radical end: slave women and transgressive motherhood in the wake of the Civil War; the "gaps in people's lacks" or marginalized "pregnancies of the southern US, spanning the years of the Great Depression through the Civil Rights era, with the particular regional and national strain of eugenic classism and racism that directed women's reproductive choices; and the Second Wave and Third Wave feminists' intersections with Critical Disability Studies in the late 20th and early 21st centuries at the site of pregnancy.

My dissertation engages pregnancy as a potential space both to reconsider and to reclaim embodiments beyond the residual static, independent Enlightenment subject. In an American feminist context, pregnancy has long been associated with patriarchal culture's oppressive policies, which have limited women to their potential reproductive capabilities, to their presumed "nurturing" essence, and to the domestic sphere. Feminism(s) have worked significantly to divorce these restrictive connections from female subjecthoods, specifically enlisting the post-*Roe v. Wade* rhetoric of "choice." Nevertheless, this resistance has often resulted in pregnancy and maternity being largely abandoned as the detritus of a patriarchal, oppressive history. On the other hand, pregnancy in the mainstream remains largely outlined via medical and legal discourses – veiled by the common perception that such are "neutral" or objective texts – leaving it to be at once both a critically under-theorized, yet nonetheless highly policed, embodiment.

These sets of discourses—feminist theoretical inquiries and juridico-medical texts—may approach pregnancy from widely diverging perspectives. Nevertheless, I argue that they

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[1] I enlist the term "normative" problematically yet necessarily to evoke pregnancies that best align themselves with widespread American cultural narratives. (I would note that, much like the "Enlightenment subject" referenced and explored extensively in this dissertation, no one person neatly fits this role. Yet the further removal from it marks a subject suspiciously as "different.") I do so in tandem with "hegemonic pregnancies" – with the suggestion that what is normative (modeled as the dominant) is likewise maintained through institutions of power (the dominant hegemony). In an American context, with historical fluctuation, this has most largely meant: a biologically identified women of US citizenship, legally bound in heteronormative marriage, able-bodied, middle-class socio-economic background (and the financially basis to care "for herself" and future children), and likely (currently) some form of higher education.

[2] My use of the "Enlightenment subject" references its particular prevalence in construction of American identity. Ostensibly, he (sic) has been a white, heterosexual, able-bodied male, of or risen to middle-class socio-economic standing. While this will be more fully explored in Chapter 1, this construction in brief further relies on several humanist tenets: the static, stabile self (where rationality reins in the "unruly" body, as in the mind-body split); independent and self-sustaining (relying on rationality, this typically extends to financial well-being); and largely in control of one's own life and choices via his will (of the Horatio Alger, rags-to-riches, bootstraps mentality).

ultimately risk a similar outcome: they replicate the narrow notion of "normative" pregnancy without considering it beyond this restrictive legacy. Likewise, they do so at substantial cost to the diverse American women who have been systematically denied access to this "normative" pregnancy ideal. And finally, they restrict the potential reconsideration of pregnancy, as one of fluid and multiple subject positions, which provides transgressive potential for refiguring the subject.

In particular, the current discussion of pregnancy is articulated by a rhetoric of "choice," the result of 1973's *Roe v. Wade* ruling. My first chapter considers how this legislation in part deters a critical, historicized reading of pregnancy: the dialogue articulated by "choice" itself rhetorically perpetuates a limited context of pregnancy. Choice references a legally acknowledged "right," and as such the ruling has indeed provided enumerable advancements for women by legalizing abortion and reframing aspects of women's reproductive rights. Nevertheless, choice also suggests a kind of neutral, objective access to pregnancy and reproduction despite lived realities and disparate privilege to the contrary. My project seeks to inform this argument by interjecting narratives of non-hegemonic pregnancies and mothering radically to shift and to recuperate the potential of pregnancy narratives – particularly as they offer alternative articulations of embodiment.

In advancing this exploration, the next three chapters of "Conceptions of Pregnancy" incorporate narratives from decidedly different positions of non-normative pregnancies. Chapter 2 engages the unique aspects of Black women's historical reproductive politics in American slavery. I engage Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), along with Toni Morrison's neo-slave narrative, *Beloved* (1987), to explore how the female protagonists are subversive in and ultimately empowered by their pregnancies and maternity. In a system that relied on commodifying these women and their labors, not the least of which were their own children (as future slaves), slavery exposes very different narratives of motherhood in which strategic maternity afforded these women access to "personhood" categorically denied them. Their enactment of motherhood in the texts transgresses in part their objectified, oppressed non-identities as slaves. In turn, Chapter 3 engages pregnancy and motherhood within the context of Southern gothic literature, a tense intersection of racism and classism in the mid-20th century. I consider William Faulkner's Depression era *As I Lay Dying* (1930) alongside the more contemporary re-membering of the story in Suzan-Lori Parks' *Getting Mother's Body* (2003). Both center on narratives of deceased mothers, with troubled relationships to "normative" maternity, alongside their daughters' developing, "illegitimate" pregnancies. These generational mothers and mothers-to-be share parallel narratives that disrupt concurrent notions of normative pregnancy, down to the (impoverished) language they have to articulate their burgeoning maternity.

Lastly, Chapter 4 builds on the previous chapters to reconsider subjecthood outright: particularly in the context of dis/ability. In this chapter, I grapple with the parallels between "Othered" pregnancies and dis/abled embodiments. In particular, I include Anne Finger's memoir, *Past Due: A Story of Disability, Pregnancy, and Birth* (1990), grounding my discussion in the larger conversation of Critical Disability Studies. Finger insightfully raises uncomfortable questions at the intersection of disability and pregnancy, arguably the tense juncture that will inform future, bio-technologically advances in reproductive politics. As an abortion clinic worker and feminist activist, Finger is also ostensibly identified as a disabled

woman due to the lingering effects of a childhood bout of Polio. Her decision to have a child, and to discuss this with other critical feminists, brings to light many current conflicts in feminist conversations. Under the sway of biopolitics, as well as the continuing cultural trend to cast women as caretakers, the intersection of potential disability and pregnancy illuminate the highly public aspects of "choice" in American pregnancy. Both embodiments help conceptual alternative understandings of "dependency" and "autonomy." It is here I suggest the radical conversation of pregnant embodiment be resumed: by addressing this intersection not as an opportunity to replicate past arguments but as a rife space to continue to pressure ideas of the "subject" and embodiment. Furthermore, it also provides potential to refigure subjects that acknowledge and value the porous boundaries between the "self" and the "Other." Here, at this intersection of radical consideration of pregnant and dis/abled embodiments, we find space to splinter current ideas of the subject (which enduringly applied to no one) and in their stead re-imagine a new kind of relational "I."

Table of Contents

Introduction

"What we need… is a redefinition of what we have learned to recognize as being the structure and the aims of human subjectivity in its relationship to different, to the 'other.' " – Rosi Braidotti, "Mothers, Monsters, and Machines" (77)

I. Potential in Pregnant Embodiment

In a dissertation particularly focused on pregnancy, I cannot resist beginning with the inception of this project. The propelling problematic I explore – ultimately, how might pregnant embodiment/s (specifically those enacted notably "at the margins" of normative pregnancy) provide radical reconsideration of a woman and in-utero fetus that can be extended to a broader concept of individual-communal relationships? In other words, how might pregnancy be rearticulated and reclaimed as a space by which to chisel away at the elusive, yet still pervasive, Enlightenment subject?

These questions first began to materialize during my graduate program in Women's Studies. At the core of our disciplinary inquiries, we sought to dismantle wholesale signifiers of gender, race, sexual orientation, class – oppressions articulated by the "-isms." I remember a professor outside the department once asking me, quite curiously, "So, I suppose it must be odd to study a field whose ultimate goal is its own demise?" I had not quite considered it in this manner, but I conceded truth there. Our project did seem to be one of continually wielding "the master's tools" and, as best as we could, dismantling each proverbial "master's house" in sight.

Nevertheless, a seminar in Critical Disability studies jarred my perspective. As I fairly soon learned, through the works of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, the rhetoric of Otherness itself that remains pervasive across discourses still relies heavily on the pejorative "dis/ability" trope. Difference read in the body – from the monstrous, to the excessive, to the hyper-sexualized, to the lacking – has consistently been used to derogate a subject to oppression. And it has likewise been conveyed in a language of disability. Consider "female" in this context, articulated from Aristotelian thought to Freud's Victorian prose, as a kind of "deformed" male. Saartjie ("Sarah") Baartman, the so-called "Hottentot Venus," provided spectacle in 19th century exhibitions to uphold exotic, hyper-sexualized narratives of African women; and again, her narrative not being one restricted to a short time period, for her vulva remained on display in a French museum until the 1970s. Women's bodies have been pejoratively Othered in their differences from the Western, white male subject.

Nevertheless, the largely poststructuralist turn of our theoretical underpinnings sometimes fell short of acknowledging this flesh, these materialities – of these differences under deconstruction – particularly those at the basis for "physical disability." Often it felt just as we were acknowledging these claims to difference, however culturally scripted they were, we lost grounds to articulate them with any authority. Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* engages this very critique, yet seems to replicate its oversights:

> it must be possible to concede and affirm an array of 'materialities' that pertain to the body, that which is signified by the domains of biology, anatomy, physiology, hormonal and chemical composition, illness, age, weight, metabolism, life and death. None of this can be denied. But the

> undeniability of these 'materialities' in no way implies what it means to affirm them… these are *both* persistent and contested regions (66-67).

Yet, even here, her bodily differences fails to mention "disability" or to contextualize such a substantial, historical signifier.[3] For me, it brings to mind a thoughtful query she raises in the same text:

> How will we know the difference between the power we promote and the power we oppose? Is it, one might rejoin, a matter of 'knowing?' For one is, as it were, in power even as one opposes it, formed by it as one reworks it, and it is this simultaneity that is at once the condition of our partiality, the measure of our political unknowingness, and also the condition of action itself. The incalculable effects of action are as much a part of their subversive promise as those that we plan in advance. (241)

And while this quotation brings me even less certainty, it nonetheless energizes me in its ambiguity. If the "goal" of our discipline, or perhaps what would be more accurately articulated as the larger theoretical efforts in our field among others, was its "own demise," might it not require that we disconnect our own reliance on this "dis/ability" trope? (How much of our normative critique has elided the disparity in *whose* normative it described?) Otherwise, were we not reliant on merely shape-shifting the problem, throwing shadows into the proverbial corner in poor attempts to distance ourselves from a rhetoric itself once used to categorize "woman"?

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[3] For more consideration of the previous quotation and the materialities of disability, see Ellen Samuels's article, "Critical Divides: Judith Butler's Body Theory and the Question of Disability" in Vol. 14, No. 3 *NWSA Journal* (Autumn 2002). Likewise, there has since been made (2010) a fascinating film of Judith Butler and Sunaura Taylor as the latter traverses her "every day." They discuss Deleuze's "What Can a Body Do?" as they encounter the lived realities, daily maneuverings of Taylor as an ostensibly disabled woman. Significantly, they land on the subject of "assistance" as a disruption to "individualism." Butler asks do we live in a culture that acknowledges we help one another, not based off personal beliefs, but larger social understandings?

II. Critics of the Normative: Equal Opportunity Critique?

While these larger theoretical issues were stirring, I encountered a significant story about expectations of pregnancy that enacted them – that *embodied* them. My professor, Dr. Nirmala Erevelles, shared a particular anecdote from her own research findings. Some time in the past, she had been interviewing a young woman with Down's Syndrome. Professor Erevelles asked the woman multiple questions, but one in particular leaps to memory: she asked the woman what her hopes were for her future. Though the woman's verbal communication was at times difficult to understand, she made her intentions clear. She gestured toward her left ring finger and said, "children, family." As Professor Erevelles related this story to us, she admitted her own knee-jerk reaction: despite accessibility issues of difference, it seemed that the normative narrative about a "woman's place" had prevailed! But Professor Erevelles' mind changed a bit when, later, she had the opportunity to speak to the woman's mother. When she shared the interviewee's response about "family," her mother became extremely emotional and sad. She told Professor Erevelles that, due to the woman's disability, she had had (unknown to her) a hysterectomy at a young age. She had never in fact menstruated, and she would not biologically be able to bear children. And implicit in these arrangements furthermore was the fact this woman with Down's Syndrome had largely been stripped of her own sexual autonomy.

Here we can address the two responses: first, the impulse to interpret the interviewee's prospective plans as merely a byproduct of traditional feminine cultural roles. And while this remains not entirely untrue – for such roles are prevalent and dispersed widely – the problem lies in stopping short here. For in her case, we have to acknowledge

such cultural roles never intended to include her in the first place. She had been medically sterilized so as to make them an impossibility in fact, a normative narrative of which she had most certainly been written out. Likewise, the medical procedure gestured toward the socially presumed asexuality of many disabled individuals, their reproduction as well as sexual identities considered culturally taboo and intensely policed in the public sphere. These realities suggest strains of eugenics, historicizing disability alongside parallel scenarios of monitored race, nationality, ethnicity, and class reproduction issues (and even gender – for, worldwide, a baby's birth as a female can still serve as a death sentence).

I continued to pursue this unraveling, this paradigm rupture caused by the woman's experience, and came to appreciate the heightened policing surrounding pregnancy and reproduction. Increasingly, I realized more exclusions from the normative narratives of pregnancy and maternity lack critical consideration in mainstream feminist circles. Here, for example, we can see an overlap with Angela Davis's critique of white Second Wavers and their large oversight of institutionalized racism in the pro-choice movement: they largely failed to acknowledge the vastly different historical narratives informing the reproductive politics of American women of color. In their stunted access to the "Compulsory Motherhood" of white mainstream culture, women of color had not simply "a desire to be free from pregnancy, but rather the miserable social conditions which dissuade them [particularly Blacks and Latinas] from bringing new lives in the world [as well]," resulting in these women's marked "absence" from the birth control movement of the 1970s ("Racism, Birth Control, and Reproductive Rights" 87). The realities of these claims continue to assert themselves, in reparations for Black women and Latinas forcibly sterilized, or recipients of "Mississippi appendectomies," during the 20th century (often throughout the 1970s, a decade

widely heralded for feminist legal advancements in reproductive politics).[4] Locating reproduction, pregnancy, and mothering within the narrow context of their so-called normative iterations, or articulating these ideas persistently as decontextualized "choices" in feminist circles, neglects these lived materialities, these stories, only offered here in brief.

III. Radical Embodiments, Feminisms… and Pregnancy – an Impossible Triumvirate?

Grounding my project here, I turn specifically to the intersection of pregnancy and feminist disability theory to reconsider these vast oversights. I locate three particular focuses of inquiry that guide this larger project: 1) How does feminist theory largely replicate oppressive, normative practices of the patriarchal culture it critiques? Namely, for the purposes of my interests, why must "pregnancy" be largely jettisoned from critical, recuperative consideration (particularly, as we have shown, with its neglected diverse iterations)? Its considerable oppressive legacy notwithstanding, pregnancy remains the means by which all human beings enter life as we currently understand it. Likewise, its association with the body seems less a reason for its oversight and more so a trait in its favor,

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[4] For instance, Scott Neuman, in his article "North Carolina Set to Compensate Forced Sterilization Victims" for National Public Radio (http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2013/07/25/205547272/north-carolina-set-to-compensate-forced-sterilization-victims), notes that the state of North Carolina agreed to pay $50,000 retribution to individuals forcibly sterilized between the 1920s and mid 1970s. The so-called Eugenics Task Force (part of the Office of Justice for Sterilized Victims, see http://www.sterilizationvictims.nc.gov), charged by Governor Bev Perdue, sought out some 2,000 survivors of sterilization in North Carolina and interviewed them for their loss. Most of these individuals, the first group like them to be compensated despite the fact that over three dozen states once followed similar practices, were Black women who had been ruled as young, "unfit" parents at the time of their forced operation. Additionally, discussed in a May 2013 article by Vivianne Schnitzer entitled "Latinos Disproportionately Sterilized for Decades in California" (http://www.ns.umich.edu/new/releases/21493-latinos-disproportionately-sterilized-for-decades-in-california), the University of Michigan reported a study that identified what it characterizes as a "disproportionate amount" of women and men sterilized between 1907 and 1980 – 1/3 of the 60,000 forcibly sterilized – had Spanish surnames. Tellingly, most of these Latina individuals had likewise been ghettoized to psychiatric or "developmentally disabled" homes. Rationales for sterilization included: "sexual deviance, 'feeble-mindedness,' epilepsy, out-of-wedlock adolescent status, and an IQ of 70 or lower." Nevertheless, the general ignorance surrounding these individuals and their experiences – indeed, in a nation that continues to divide issues of reproductive politics into the simplified rhetoric of pro-life and pro-choice – prevails, including the undercurrent of eugenicist rationale that elides institutional influence and rather posits responsibility with the individual. (The study, completed by Lira and Stern, is currently under review in *Chicana/o Studies Journal*.)

highlighting its potential as we continue to theoretically contextualize "the body" (long subject to mind-body split dualism). Otherwise, are we not committing a similar derogation by either facilely sweeping pregnancy aside or leaving it to be largely shaped by dominant patriarchal institutions, as they have been doing for some time? 2) The subject of pregnancy remains one of the primary topics still acceptably explored in "how to" guides, reminiscent of 19th century conduct manuals. Instead, in the spirit of "her-story" and standpoint theory, how might we extend this project by resuscitating diverse women's voices on their own pregnancy and mothering experiences? The shift from midwifery to professionalized medicine (1847), from homebirths to the hospital[5] – all figure changes best interrupted by a reclamation of women's stories and narratives themselves. I pose a potential "poetics of pregnancy" to provide an alternative space for these articulations outside of dominant discourses. 3) Lastly, how can these narratives of American non-hegemonic pregnancies inform, via a critical feminist disability lens, a larger shift in how we articulate difference and radically rethink the idea of "dependence" and "autonomy" (recontextualized both in the womb relationship as well as through alternative embodiments within dis/ability)? Pregnant embodiments and physical disability share many common underlying narratives about the "body" and the "subject" in general. For instance, disability recipients as well as incorrectly stereotyped "welfare queens" share a stigma surrounding "dependence" where fault is popularly ascribed to the individual devoid of his or her larger cultural and institutional contexts. How can uniting these narratives invite a broader examination of the vilification of dependence, acknowledging in fact its prevalence from our "originary" relationships to our realistic life expectations as we age?

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[5] Note, here I do not state this without acknowledgement of the significant advancements institutionalized care has promised women, but to draw attention to the disconnect created by moving pregnancy and birth from the site of the mother and her body to institutionalized, public spaces.

Methodology

My approach likewise takes its inspiration from my own "click moment" as I have shared: a story. Fortunately, as I work within the literary field, it is no stretch for me to consider the power of poetics in articulating the otherwise "unspeakable" – the gaps, pauses, struggles themselves to lay claim to identity "outside" of scripted roles. Pregnancy itself comes as such a hyper-vigilantly managed narrative – and here I reference the kind of monolithic notion of pregnancy that is maintained foremost through medical science discourses and upheld through legal recourse. Placing, in their stead, these personalized narratives of pregnancy that openly wrangle with the mainstream expectations of "expecting mothers," I argue, starts this project by fracturing monolithic pregnancy in the first place. These narratives raise significant questions: whose choices are these? What social conditions frame these choices? What do we find when we historicize these choices, and how does this often overlooked context(s) remain nonetheless prevalent in choices?

IV. Outline of Chapters

This dissertation attends to these questions in four chapters. First, in Chapter 1, "On the Non-Subject of Pregnancy," I establish my theoretical framework for the larger project. Much of my analysis considers the language and history resulting in the bedrock of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling, along with the subsequently developing rhetoric of "choice" and "privacy." The chapter then turns to the alternative articulation of pregnancy offered in Luce Irigaray's essay "On the Maternal Order" from *Je, Te, Nous.* Here, in a dialogue with Hélène Rouche, the two women discuss the imposition of competitive, patriarchal discourses on the womb to explain the woman-fetus exchange. Rather than forcing this originary relationship into man-made terms, they reverse the reading. Instead, they suggest a "placental economy"

in which the placenta mediates beneficially to both parties: "without recourse to differential combat—the female body engenders with respect for difference" (42). Irigaray's inquiry sets the tone for challenging the narrative framework of normative pregnancy throughout this dissertation.

Next, Chapter 2, "Choice, Transgressive Pregnancy and Re-membering Motherhood: Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved,"* moves to historicize pregnancy within the American institution of slavery. First, I consider how the politics of slavery uniquely characterized Black women's relationship not only to their own subjecthood (as they were legally denied personhood by law), but also how this influenced their connection to the domestic sphere or "homeplace," and particularly their children. In particular opposition to contemporary critiques of queer theorists' projects, which resist kinship associated with heteronormativity, narratives of slavery expose that in fact subjecthood and identity were specifically denied slaves on the grounds of lacking familial connection and autonomy. Harriet Jacobs's 1861 slave narrative relates her own struggles to reclaim personhood, which she uniquely frames in a gendered context. The sexual politics of Black women in slavery were predominantly rape; Jacobs suggests her attempt to have a child with Mr. Sawyers, rather than her lusty master Dr. Norcom, was a possible way to evade this violence and claim subjecthood. Morrison's *Beloved* is in part a fleshy rendering of Jacobs's story, presenting the politics of lactation and maternity, and the living violence of slavery's intervention at the very personal level of the "self" and "family." Likewise, both texts contextualize the larger struggles of slave mothers, their inability to secure their children as their own, and how normative narratives of pregnancy and motherhood have historically been constructed and maintained along racial lines.

In a more contemporary vein, Chapter 3 "Southern Gothic Pregnancy and 'the gaps in people's lack': William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Suzan-Lori Parks' *Getting Mother's Body*" extends this conversation through the prevalent racism, recast, and classism of the 20th century. This chapter works through the grotesque rendering of pregnancy and motherhood through spaces "outside" of normative motherhood as rendered in the Southern gothic literary spirits. In *As I Lay Dying,* Addie Bundren speaks as at once both a mother, a physical body that pervades the piece, but also as a disembodied voice beyond death. Her critique of motherhood centers on what she identifies as the inarticulate dynamic of pregnancy and motherhood (the "gaps in people's lacks"). Her daughter Dewey Dell's hidden pregnancy raises considerable issues concerning poor whites in the South during the Great Depression. Alongside this text, I consider its 2003 re-imagining, Suzan-Lori Parks' *Getting Mother's Body.* Set in Civil Rights era Texas, the text shifts narrators parallel to Faulkner's text, focusing at times on young Billy Beede's "baby belly" as well as her deceased mother's thoughts, expressed in blues-like poetics. The inverted quest motif of both of novels complement the specific language they enlist to upset normative notions of maternity, marginalized by socio-economics and race.

Chapter 4, "Pregnancy as Other: Cyborgs, the Monstrous, and Anne Finger's *Past Due: A Story of Disability, Pregnancy and Birth*," turns to contemporary context. The chapter extends discussions of the preceding chapter's grotesque, encountering the monstrous. I explore the technological advancements of technology informing the changing parameters of the mother-fetus relationship, starting with the 1965 *LIFE* photo-essay first to feature fetuses in utero. From here, I extend this conversation to the intersection of pregnancy and disability, an ongoing space of contention. In particular I enlist Anne Finger's

now out-of-print memoir, *Past Due: A Story of Pregnancy, Disability, and Birth* (1990), further contextualized by the larger debate between feminist and disability theorists. This chapter aims to consider reframing the pervasive ableist trends common in pregnancy narratives, from amniocentesis to abortion, and extends a final push toward alternative embodiments figured there.

Chapter 1 - On the "Non-Subject" of Pregnancy

"Religions and various fundamentalisms have so brutally assigned women to reproduction alone, and, in counterpoint, female liberation movements have so ferociously opposed this 'repression' that – against all evidence – it seems difficult to speak of motherhood today without being accused of normative thinking" (54).

- *Julia Kristeva,* Hatred and Forgiveness

As a limited narrative, the dominant language of mainstream "pregnancy" in the United States textually erases diverse women's experiences while perpetuating a perspective of oppressive limitations within pregnant embodiment. Women have historically been confined to a restrictive role of "mother" in patriarchal cultures. As a result, feminist theoretical engagements of pregnancy have sought frequently to distance women in their inquiries from this oppressive legacy. As a result, pregnancy remains a largely monolithic production, predominantly shaped via medical and legal discourses. Informed by vestiges of traditional patriarchal pregnancy, these perspectives largely fail to challenge the restrictive narrative of pregnancy and the diverse women's lives it informs. Despite these restrictive and traditional renderings, I argue that pregnancy can offer alternative ways of re-imagining the subject-in-process. From its vantage of being both the subject and at once "decentered, split, or doubled," it offers a "radical challenge to dualism" (Young 47-8). By critically contextualizing pregnancy beyond these limited dominant narratives, we find potential renderings of the body and the self that radically reconsider ideas of in/dependence, dis/ability, and Otherness.

Much like the gestational process itself, pregnancy in its cultural consideration often becomes a process to define something else: the origins of the "subject"; gendered sexual mores; or specific reproducible values of a "body politic." As Rickie Solinger notes in *Pregnancy and Power*, pregnancy and reproductive decisions have historically been about "how to solve certain large social problems facing the [United States]" (4). Fundamentally,

critical discussions on pregnancy reveal anxieties concerning the boundaries of the "subject" in legal, medical, and cultural articulations. Pregnant embodiment stands in opposition to this neatly static ideal. In a sense, then, pregnancy and a woman identified by her pregnant embodiment occupy a kind of "non-subject," critical to the subject's formation yet ever Othered from it.[6]

For this fundamental reason, feminist theoretical analyses frequently approach pregnancy and impending motherhood in the spirit of critique. They acknowledge pregnancy's traditional association with oppressive gender roles and the lingering cultural echoes of the Freudian mantra "destiny is anatomy." Pregnancy and maternity are grouped with heteronormativity. For these compelling associations, Dion Farquhar in her essay "(M)Other Discourses," goes so far as to suggest that "a key part of any feminist reproductive project should be the disarticulation, not only of maternity – which spans a complex social relation of desire – from women and women's bodies, but also of maternity from pregnancy" (214). Women have long been restricted in their agency due to their cultural associations with mothering and childbearing, and this feminist theoretical resistance has culminated in numerous, significant shifts in women's relationship to their reproductive politics and identities in the public sphere.

Nevertheless, as an additional result, the recuperation of pregnancy by feminists remains a tenuous project – despite the fact that pregnancy remains a biological, social, and

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[6] While I consider my project directed toward a different vein, specifically the relationality of pregnancy and stories by which it is articulated, it must be noted that both Nietzsche as well as Derrida query "woman" as an alternative subject space to challenge dualisms. For instance, in *Spurs* (1978), Derrida notes that "the question of the woman suspends the decidable opposition of true and non-true and inaugurates the epochal regime of quotation marks which is to be enforced for every concept belonging to the system of philosophical decidability" (107). Diana Fuss in *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, & Difference* (1989) points out, however, about these attempts that "one has to recognize that positing woman as a figure of displacement risks, in its effects, continually displacing real material women" (14). I hope to suture this loss through the poetics of pregnancy explored in Chapters 2-4.

personal experience unique to women.[7] Pregnancy and mothering remain ubiquitously bound up in women's cultural identities for, as Nancy Chodorow notes in *Reproduction of Motherhood*, "women's mothering is one of the few universal and enduring elements of the sexual division of labor" (3). Their prevalence demands continuing critique but also reconsideration: pregnancy warrants to be a central focus of feminist inquiry. Pregnancy, foremost, has complicated history of its own that continues to inform different women's identities on a personal level. Also, the kind of relationship pregnancy poses between subjects offers radical potential. Without pressuring dominant narratives, however, pregnancy remains subject to limiting, normative narratives – as do the women whose lives are impacted by them.

Pregnancy: Challenge to Enlightenment Thinking

One of feminisms' greatest projects remains deconstructing the Enlightenment subject. In particular, Enlightenment claims loosely adhere to the following: universality of certain truths, independent of their context or place in time; the privileging of the mind and rationality (in contrast to the atomized body); the neutrality possible within science, and furthermore the discipline's ability to liberate human thinking from restrictive mythology and folklore; and that "false knowledge is the result of corruption of power" (McLaughlin 7). Feminist inquiry broadly interjects by: illustrating the influence of positionality on an individual (and even how said "individual" is constituted); contextualizing, both socially and historically, knowledge and rationality; demonstrating that discourses of science are not unadulterated or free from other mitigating narratives of belief; and showing that knowledge

[7] I pause here to note that "women" is likewise a term of reconsideration within feminism (articulated most memorably in Simone de Beauvoir's "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman") recognizing that it is not a static term free of cultural construction itself. I highlight this association mainly to show that pregnancy and maternity constitute a significant point of inquiry for feminists for these reasons.

is always already subject to power relations (7). Considering these feminist responses to the Enlightenment subject – which nonetheless remains an enduring paradigm in American liberal society – pregnant embodiment offers a great point of departure.

Pregnancy and "the body": Feminism and Deconstructing Dualism

Parallel again to dominant pursuits of feminist inquiry, pregnancy calls into question the neat, dualistic vestiges of the Enlightenment subject by revealing its contradictions; in Matryoshka-like nesting terms, the pregnant woman brings to the fore multilayered anxieties about "the body" in general. The mind-body split bears out several tenets: first, that the body is merely the "alien, as the not-self, the not-me" and merely the "enveloper for the inner and essential self"; that, in keeping with the texts of Plato, Descartes, and Augustine, the body be "experienced as confinement and limitation," in opposition; and lastly, that "the body is the locus of all that threatens our attempts at control" as it "overtakes, overwhelms… erupts and disrupts" these efforts (Bordo 92).

The hypervisible and fleshy pregnancy, on the other hand, pressures these fictions concerning the integrity of "the body" (as a static, closed, independent entity or as some clear indication of a subject's boundaries). Often mythologized as the receptacle for the self, the body and its boundaries are in fact always under constant transformation. Pregnancy dramatically exposes this fluid reality, bringing to the fore potential perspectives on porous, ever-changing boundaries at the site of the body. Removed from this already elusive normative body ideal, a pregnant woman illustrates that, indeed, there is "no 'natural' body" (92). Secondarily, as a "mother-to-be," she as subject(s)-in-process exhibits the fluid ability to be both self and Other; to straddle the demarcation between the "multiple" and the

"singular"; and to embody both the statically "independent" and the pathologically cast "dependent."

Situating pregnancy as an entirely biological concept suggests a pre-discursive body, and neglects the many social and cultural constructs that "map" the body as we understand it (Fuss 6). A woman with a telltale swollen abdomen signifies, then, not only new life underway, but multiple layers of subject construction: she is both the site of active human procreation as well as social re-creation, symbolically bound up in "regulating reproduction as a means to ensure reproduction of the social order" (Siegel 149). As an ostensible mother-to-be, she is likewise cast as a "pivotal actor in the sphere of social reproduction" (Chodorow 11).

Nevertheless, rights are "inherently static and abstracted from social conditions… [often] staked within a given order to things" (Petchesky 107). They furthermore "do not challenge the social structure, the social relations of production, and reproduction" (107). Therefore, interwoven into these seemingly objective and dominant discourses are the significant historical legacies of race, ethnicity, nationality, class, sexual orientation, dis/ability – of plural differences and disparate privileges – that "mark" bodies at the periphery of the hegemonic "subject." The body itself hinges on historical constructions, for "a body to have meaning for us… it must be signified within an historically specific discourse of meaning" (Butler via Hekman 254). Conceptions of pregnancy then, despite their biological bases, likewise do not occur in a vacuum.

Rather than being left as the undesirable detritus of patriarchal, dualist thinking, pregnancy may be seen as the significant moment about which the struggle between ideas of the "self" and "Other" continues. Pregnancy similarly occupies one of the consistently most

complicated yet ubiquitous spaces for contesting and policing the meaning of these terms in American society. Or, as Battersby puts it in *Phenomenal Woman*, let us consider pregnancy as a default:

> a 'person' could normally, at least potentially, become two. What would happen if we thought identity in terms that did not make it always spatially and temporally oppositional to other entities? Could we retain a notion of self-identity if we did not privilege that which is self-contained and self-directed? (2).

How then can we reconsider our understanding of the self, how we interpolate the self, in such a way that more accurately captures embodied, lived identity? In particular, how can we wrangle with notions of "autonomy" and the "individual" that allow these uncertainties to be considered, unresolved? For as Iris Marion Young notes in "On Female Body Experience," "pregnancy… reveals a paradigm of bodily experience in which the transparent unity of self dissolves and the body attends positively to itself at the same time that it enacts its projects" creating a loss of firm boundaries between "where my body ends and the world begins" (47, 50). This experience stands in contrast to the notion of a subject's autonomy in which, as Margrit Shildrick outlines: "the body must appear invulnerable, predictable, and consistent in form and function, above all free from the possibility of disruption" (232). Pregnancy itself, I believe, offers a powerful and potentially radical reconsideration of the body as it forces these potential characteristics – those that trouble any seemingly simplified idea of the individual self – to be reckoned with.

As Rosalind Pollack Petchesky notes in "Beyond 'A Woman's Right to Choose,'" a "woman's reproductive situation is never the result of biology alone, but of biology mediated

by social and cultural organization" (107). Pregnancy extends beyond physical embodiment as a locus of cultural mores, socio-economic factors – as an historically informed, political narrative(s). In this sense, the language of *Roe v. Wade* risks perpetuating a problematic "hegemonic" – namely, a white, middle-class, able-bodied, heteronormative – relationship to pregnancy.

***Roe v. Wade* and "Choice": the Source of Contemporary Pregnancy Rhetoric**

Reproductive rights are articulated in the post-1973 *Roe v. Wade* age as "choice"; it has come to "fully replace the language of rights soon after [the Court ruling], first in legal discourses and then in popular feminist and public discourse" (Thoma 411). This rhetoric of choice is often presented neutrally, as a right carefully carved out in the legal ruling and bolstered by medical knowledge of human development. In the context of feminism particularly, *Roe v. Wade* is indisputably a groundbreaking ruling that has established and defined federal, legal abortion rights for women. My project here does not contest this reality. I do, however, wish to pressure the limits of the ruling's advancements in order to see what inequities they continue to elide and perpetuate; it's use of choice and privacy "abstracts the conflict from the social context in which judgments about abortion are formed and enforced" (Siegel 152).

We have already discussed in part the prevalence of Enlightenment language in the US, and *Roe v. Wade* remains reliant on it. While neo-liberalism has witnessed the considerable broadening definition of this "subject" (from its original 18th century American iteration, the white male landowner) and the rights which one can claim, there is a marked lapse in corresponding access and privilege. Rights rely on the residual Enlightenment subject and, despite their purported "universality," have never been extended to all

"subjects." Or, in a sense, they have worked to limit which individuals could claim this subject status. Furthermore, feminist critics have widely debated their universality, noting that "recent history proves that it is not feasible to obtain universal rights within the liberal state" (McLaughlin 30), as the liberal state "becomes ever more transparently invested in particular economic interests, political ends, and social formations" (Brown 392).

"Choice" then can be raised as a suspect term, and one for our particular reconsideration around the history and social contexts of diverse American women's pregnancies. Choice remains in part a product of patriarchal law, even as it troubles more traditional boundaries. Judith Butler articulates this kind of replication through law in *Gender Trouble*:

> Juridical power inevitably 'produces' what it claims merely to represent; hence, politics must be concerned with this dual function of power: the juridical and the productive. In effect, the law produces and then conceals the notion of 'a subject before the law' in order to invoke that discursive formation as a naturalized foundational premise that subsequently legitimates that law's own regularity hegemony. (5)

Despite the gains of *Roe v. Wade* – not the least of which include the legalization of abortion in particular circumstances and legally protected right of "privacy" – we can see that its enduring language of choice jeopardizes more critical considerations of reproductive politics. In part, it contributes to a kind of mainstream, seemingly objective narrative about pregnancy and abortion that writes out "difference." Revisiting our discussion in the previous section about Enlightenment claims and feminist rebuttals, we can see then that uncritically referencing "choice" falls in the former category.

For as much as "choice" highlights the rights of the individual, it does so at the expense and reality of diverse people's lives. By creating a seemingly universal and transparent "right," characterizing the individual as the site of agency par excellence, it denies the institutional power dynamics and historical differences that privilege certain people. The illusion of equality is extended and homogenously applied, but its material outcomes remain disparate. Here, we may consider the spirit of Butler's admonishment: "Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of 'women,' the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought" (5).

On the one hand, we have the liberation of choosing *not* to carry a child to term. This larger understanding of "pro-choice" relies on the specific history and context of "privileged women [white, affluent, able-bodied, heterosexual]… often treated as reproducers of the species – and of the nation" (Ehrenreich 7). These socially encouraged mothers-to-be have furthermore been subjected to pronatalist norms, "norms that often require them to sacrifice their own interests (in career, health, or personal fulfillment) in order to fulfill their duty to produce (and care for) the nation's children" (7). 19th century American notions of Republican Motherhood for women of privilege – women associated with these "hegemonic pregnancies" – illustrate the repressive legacy of reproduction for white women and the significance of a rhetoric of "choice" that would arise out of *Roe v. Wade*.[8]

[8] While perhaps more detailed than warranted by the scope of this essay, specific legal and medical discourses of the mid-19th century through the 20th century may be traced to show this larger project underway: i.e. *Muller v. Oregon* (1908): "reproductive capability of working women became the basis for justifying prevailing labor practices. Her maternal strength and the quality of the baby she produced were the concerns of the nation" (Solinger 89).

However, as we have noted, these reproductive politics bear unique contexts. In his ruling, almost as an afterthought, Justice Blackmun hints at macrocosmic factors influencing choice. In the introduction of his closing remarks, he states:

> We forthwith acknowledge our awareness of the sensitive and emotional nature of the abortion controversy, of the vigorous opposing views, even among physicians, and of the deep and seemingly absolute convictions that the subject inspires. One's philosophy, one's experiences, one's exposure to the raw edges of human existence, one's religious training, one's attitudes toward life and family and their values, and the moral standards one establishes and seeks to observe, are all likely to influence and to color one's thinking and conclusions about abortion.
>
> In addition, population growth, pollution, poverty, and racial overtones tend to complicate and not to simplify the problem. (14)

Even in his facile acknowledge of contexts, Blackmun continually frames them in terms of the individual. He references a litany of "one's…" own convictions, and concludes with a brief list of the potential societal implications of the ruling – "population growth, pollution, poverty, and racial overtones" (14). Here, he reveals the residual, patriarchal understanding of the "subject" and indicates that *Roe v. Wade* remains predicated on it. Nevertheless, in my continuing discussion of diverse women's pregnancies, many of the elisions lie with the concluding line – with the larger implications the ruling has on diverse societal differences and their histories. Justice Blackmun's reference to "population growth" and "racial overtones" suggest the prevalence of biopolitics only in passing, despite a national history founded on, in part, reproductive violence, eugenics, and reproduction as privilege.

Nevertheless, these historically prevalent pregnancy norms for privileged women implicitly relied upon constructed spaces of marginalized women – those outside the bounds of Republican Motherhood, seen as poor reproductive receptacles for the nation's future sons. Citing this history, Angela Davis notes in her essay "Racism, Birth Control, and Reproductive Rights" that "the ranks of the abortion rights campaign [in the early 1970s] did not include substantial numbers of women of color" (86). Issues of choice among women of color and lower socio-economic background were complicated by privilege and racist politics: "when Black and Latina women resort to abortions in large numbers, the stories they tell are not so much about the desire to be free of their pregnancy, but rather about the miserable social conditions which dissuade them from bringing new lives into the world" (87).

Contemporary to *Roe v. Wade'*s 1973 inception, we can find further contradictions to its neutrally posited right of "choice." The ruling coincided with a revival of sterilization, then "the most rapidly growing form of birth control in the United States… rising from 200,000 cases in 1970 to over 700,000 in 1980" (Roberts 90). Juxtaposed against the rhetoric of choice, these sterilizations were often involuntary and disproportionately performed on women of color and low socio-economic status. "Mississippi appendectomies," a common nickname given to hysterectomies administered to Black women in the South, were widespread. Likewise, sterilization campaigns "left more than 25% of Native American women" and "one-third of the women of childbearing age in Puerto Rico" infertile during the 1970s (Roberts 94-5). As justification for their sterilization, poor women were legally identified as incapable of rational judgment – again in the spirit of the

Enlightenment subject.[9] In contrast, considerable documentation indicates that contemporary white women of middle-class standing who sought tubal ligation or hysterectomies were often deterred from these operations (Roberts 94).

As much as we have the limitations of choice, we can extend this critique to its legal foothold: the right of privacy. Despite the fact that "privacy" itself is absent from the United States *Constitution*, in *Roe v. Wade* the right to privacy derives from a reading of the Fourteenth Amendment's "due process clause" (in instances of "fundamental rights"):

> **Section 1.** All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Here, the implied notion of privacy suggests certain fundamental individual rights remain beyond the immediate jurisdiction of the state "without due process of law." By way of privacy, and pertinent to our consideration, the ruling extends a level of reproductive control – the right to abortion – as a "fundamental right" of humankind. Nevertheless, with this suggestion of privacy the case ruling additionally sets up provisos for the right's override by the State.

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[9] There are considerable examples of these efforts, predicated on enduring stereotypes such as "welfare queens." For instance, in the state of Louisiana, the state's constitution punished the "poor choice" of illegitimate motherhood with "citizenship rights… women with out-of-wedlock babies could not vote" (Solinger 189). Solinger furthermore makes a hypothesis that in the wake of a slowly disintegrating Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, welfare became a new means for oppressive measures (with clear racial and economic biases) (Solinger 188-9).

Necessarily in the legal extension of "privacy" rights, the Court explicitly establishes what is *not* private. Regularly throughout the case proceedings, Justice Blackmun clearly indicates the transience of "privacy" rights and their ultimate subservience to the rulings of law:

> The Court's decisions recognizing a right of privacy also acknowledge that some state regulation in areas protected by that right is appropriate. As noted above, a State may properly assert important interests in safeguarding health, in maintaining medical standards, and in protecting potential life…. The privacy right involved, therefore, cannot be said to be absolute (29)…. A pregnant woman cannot be isolated in her privacy … it is reasonable and appropriate for a State to decide that at some point in time another interest, that of health of the mother or that of potential human life, becomes significantly involved. (31)

We can see that the private/public spheres' separation is illusory. As Rickie Solinger notes in her historical analysis *Pregnancy and Power*, "reproductive politics clarifies the way that 'the public' is always penetrating 'the private,' and vice versa" (15). Furthermore, "how can 'private' decisions be made without being shaped by 'public policies' " (16)? However, returning to the case, we can see specifically how this transient space of "privacy" further limits a woman's choice by legally upheld, medical definitions of time. Women's "privacy right to make decisions about abortion" becomes a "right to be exercised under the guidance of a physician" (Siegel 151). Her privacy then bears an expiration date. Of course, I note this not without acknowledging the aging process of the fetus and biological processes that do indeed transpire with time. I am more interested, however, in how time is configured here

as a "natural" interruption to human rights, as a signifier to the boundaries of the self, and yet as one that can only be read uniquely through the privileged lens of medical and legal discourses. Time, then, becomes an incontrovertible entity as it ultimately defines the outline of the self – when the woman's singularity is trumped by the developing fetus's viability.

Here we can further contextualize time, which has a far from neutral or immutable history in dictating women's subjecthood at the site of pregnancy. Pregnancy bears a unique relationship to temporality and potential reconsideration of the subject, as Julia Kristeva notes, "pregnant existence entails… a unique temporality of process and growth in which the woman can experience herself as split between past and future" (239). However, medical jurisdiction over a mother-to-be, as her fetus[10] comes to term, has inversely increased with respect to women's ability to define "how far along" they are. Through the mid-19th century, and prior to the professionalization of the male-dominated medical field in 1847, the American Medical Association understood woman's pregnancy by a different narrative of time – one in which she was uniquely aware and an active participant in interpreting. "Quickening," or the first feeling of a fetus's movement within a woman's womb sensed by the mother-to-be, was widely understood to signify the time in which she had an "Other" within (Reagen 80). Prior to this development, to which she alone remained absolutely privy, her use of abortifacients were legal and considered to be socially benign. Rather than "terminating" her pregnancy during this time, the remedies that effectively induced miscarriages did not acknowledge a developing baby; they promised instead to "recommence" menstruation (80).

[10] Furthermore, as we will see in Chapter 4, medical jurisdiction similarly labels when "embryo" and "fetus" are applied and what significance are imparted to each.

By discrediting quickening in the mid-19th century, and subsequently outlawing abortion, the American Medical Association not only granted professionalized doctors a particular credibility in terms of scientific knowledge (Reagen 82). It also reconfigured and privileged a different time scale by which a woman's pregnancy and subsequent fetus's development was and is formally understood. The controlled creation of privacy serves only to reify this intrusion at the site of women's developing pregnancies. Notably, this temporality removed credibility from women's own embodied experiences. It also was done in response to increasing anxieties over changing gender roles via industrialization and racial, classist concerns as immigrants' numbers continued to increase around the turn of the century. The insistence of pregnancy became articulated through outside gauges.

Irigaray's "On the Maternal Order": Reconceptualizing Pregnancy

"Placental economy… equally respects and supports the life of both [mother and fetus]… without recourse to differential combat—the female body engenders with respect for difference." – Luce Irigaray

In our extended discussion of choice and privacy, we have established how dominant discussions of reproductive politics replicate particular Enlightenment concepts. Even those heralded by feminism fall short of fully contextualizing the differences women encounter in American reproductive politics. In her essay "On the Maternal Order" from *Je, Te, Nous*, Luce Irigaray offers an alternative way to articulate pregnancy.

At the core of her critique, Irigaray poses a tension between the "individual" and the Other or "external" as they are particularly established in pregnancy. She challenges what she contends to be the two dominant behavioral models in patriarchal human culture: the Darwinian and Pavlovian models (37). She furthermore illustrates that these models are forcibly imposed on a pregnant woman, her womb, and the developing fetus. For instance, she notes that in the Darwinian model, "we are said to be always struggling against the

external environment... and with other living beings" (37). Alternatively, in the Pavlovian course, she instead notes that culturally, "we [are] trained in repetition, to adapt to a society's systems, and educated to do *like*, to be *like*, without any decisive innovations or discoveries of our own" (37). She summarizes that "we are struggling against all forms of others to be able to live, and we are still subject to conditioned social rules that we confuse with freedom" (38).[11]

Irigaray speaks to the tension of the liberal Enlightenment subject, the ideological paradigms that temper and shape understandings of the "self" and the "freedoms" afforded said self. Through a dialogue with a biology professor of the Lycée Colbert, Hélène Rouch, Irigaray forges a model that contests our working understanding of the competing self and other. She does so around the site of the overtly biological: the placenta.

Some feminists may be inclined to balk at this turn toward the body as a kind of essentialism – essentialism of the womb and pregnant woman, or of pregnancies in general. In fact, this larger reticence to reconsider pregnant embodiment as a potential model can feel like a recession back to "mother Earth" and goddess feminists, where the female body is valorized as somehow a superior, peaceful, more "natural" space than others. However, as I will further explore in chapter four, the potential for Irigaray's consideration extends well beyond this restricted space but instead encompasses diverse embodiments and lived relationships in the era of the cyborg. And, as Emily Martin reminds us all in her "The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-

[11] This questioned framework may be further illumined by Zillah Eisenstein's *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* in which she notes, "One of the major contributions to be found… is the role of the ideology of liberal individualism in the construction of feminist theory. Today's feminists either do not discuss a theory of individuality or they unself-consciously adopt the competitive, atomistic, ideology of liberal individualism…. Until a conscious differentiation is made between a theory of individuality that recognizes the importance of the individual within the social collectivity and the ideology of individualism that assumes a competitive view of the individual, there will not be a full accounting of what a feminist theory of liberation must look like in our Western society" (29).

Female Roles," the narratives used to articulate and make meaning of biological processes are porous and ever-informed by the cultural space in which they are constructed. With Irigaray, we may see how our perceptions of something "biological" have already been predetermined by culturally prevalent, dominant systems (such as Darwinian and Pavlovian relationships). How might these dominant systems continue to dictate perspectives regarding pregnant embodiment, mother and fetus relationships, and in turn extended to human interactions and characterizations on a broad scale?

Irigaray and Rouche identify the placenta as third entity and mitigator that makes readings of "self" and "Other" inadequate and reductive, which furthermore challenges these competitive dualist systems. They suggest a placental economy, which troubles temporally self-contained notions of "self" and "Other" while likewise overriding contemporary mainstream narratives of pregnancy and woman/fetus relationships. In her discussion, Rouche clarifies that "the placenta... cannot be reduced either to a mechanism of fusion (an ineffable mixture of the bodies or blood of mother and fetus [Pavlovian]), or, conversely, to one of aggression (the fetus as foreign body devouring from the inside, a vampire in the maternal body [Darwinian])" (39). By way of referencing these dominant narratives, she exposes the potential to refigure the placenta – and the metaphoric but significant placeholder as it has served in these narratives. She concludes that "these descriptions are of imaginary reality and appear quite poor indeed – and obviously extremely culturally determined – in comparison to the complexity of biological reality" (39). In other words, medical discourses and cultural understandings of human relationships frame the placental economy – and originary relational space of pregnancy – always already in constricting terms.

As an alternative, Rouch characterizes the placental economy as one of constant negotiation (41). The organ itself is at once both "a formation of the embryo" and yet "behaves like… [it] is practically independent of it" (39). The placenta thus mediates between woman and fetus, "establish[ing] a relationship between mother and fetus" (39). Markedly, Rouch does not suggest a veritable merging of the two entities: there is a clear "recognition of the other" (41). In fact, she furthermore notes that this recognition "of the other, of the non-self, by the mother, and therefore an initial reaction from her" is necessary "in order for placental factors to be produced" (41). In this way, the difference between "self" and "other" occurs but is not a rigid division – instead, it remains a fluid connection, one being "continuously negotiated" (41).

Notably, this status of being "continuously negotiated" may be used to characterize the seemingly static, if not rigid, language currently applied to pregnancy in a legal and medical framework. Social and cultural factors, continually colliding with amended legal measures and technological advancements in medicine, betray the fluidity of "self" and "Other" at pregnancy.

Irigaray's "placental economy" complements our earlier discussion of pregnancy's potential as a radical embodiment. The way she and Rouche reframe discussions about pregnancy can directly impact how we view the relationship between a mother-to-be and the fetus; and it can be extended as an alternative (to, say, the Pavlovian and Darwinian models they mention) to discussing human relationships. With pregnancy, we have within one body the becoming of two with the placenta mitigating, benefiting all involved in the process. How could this model of relationality be used to challenge the vilification of "dependence" so prominent in American contemporary culture? In a sense, all humans are relationally

dependent, sharing community, yet our current framework that reveres the individual misrepresents and distorts this reality. We will return to these inquiries in upcoming chapters, particularly Chapter 4 which considers this narrative in a disabilities context.

"She is required to identity against herself": a Poetics of Pregnancy

Irigaray furthermore illustrates that pregnancy itself is a kind of narrative. Our analysis so far has explored how its cultural and social expectations have affected its legal and medical status, as well as how they have overshadowed varying lived experiences, embodiments, and identities. The dominant narratives of pregnancy are ones in which, problematically, a woman is "co-opted into participation in an experience from which she is explicitly excluded; she is asked to identify with a selfhood that defines itself in opposition to her; *she is required to identify against herself*" (Fetterley xii, emphasis my own).

This notion of being required "to identify against herself," or in other words to find an "I" within the text that is sympathetic, speaks to the larger narratives of "pregnancy" that still dominate mainstream discussions. Again, I do not seek to merely trouble and dismantle the usefulness of the "pro-choice" mantra that has deliberately sought agency for women long relegated silent on matters of the body, law, and medicine so intimately connected to their experienced lives. Nevertheless, even here, it is a struggle in rhetoric to reclaim something akin to a male-oriented identity, of a singular, static individual with neatly composed boundaries of self. Women, as with the case in other issues of liberal feminist advancement, have too long been restricted outside these normative subject boundaries, excluded from the daily rights, legal privileges, and self-autonomy they afford in traditional and contemporary western cultures. Nevertheless, this adoption of a problematic identity of self and individual "choice," though a politically strategic move of lesser evils, seems only to further embolden

the mythical idea of self, the original male identity, so longer heralded and observed as Othering, ultimate "self" (or subject, I).

Likewise, looking closer than the stories framing pregnancy and identity, we may consider the material implications of language itself. How does it limit those within and without? Much as Leonard Davis argues in "Missing Larry" on the poetics of disability, he "theorizes the ways that poetry defamiliarizes not only language but the body normalized *within* language. A poetics of disability might unsettle the thematics of embodiment as it appeared in any number of literary and artistic movements" (118). In a similar strain of reconsideration, Hortense Spillers contests the very language available for discussions in light of their historical legacy and context; responding to her essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," she notes how she wrote her essay to expand and create such a space: "Before I can get to the subject of the sexuality of black women I didn't see a vocabulary that would make it possible to entertain the sexuality of black women in any way that was other than traumatic" (301). Her project, rooted in not only reprimanding the Moynihan Report and its lasting interpretation of black paternity and maternity in the 20th century US, powerfully recognizes the narrative lapse the infamous report repeats. Spillers cites the lapse on a broad scale, rooted in hundreds of years of servitude, slavery, sexual and dehumanizing violence – all tantamount to an absence, a lack, of adequate language to discuss African American kinship, families, and sexuality in twentieth century US. In a sense, her radical disruption of the grammar used in this discussion goes hand-in-hand with a deliberate recuperation of a past where words such as "mother" gained unique, diverse meaning.

In this spirit, then, I strive to consider a kind of poetics of pregnancy – the narratives of its construction, its own narrative construction, and the undercurrent informing the very language used in its discussion. How do contemporary liberal efforts simply obfuscate, and in so doing, replicate narratives of pregnancy's past? How, then, can discussions of pregnancy productively expand to encompass a more radical and liberatory space if this conversation remains predicated on these narratives of self/identity, limited to this historical domain? After all, this notion of self has likewise been used as justification for slavery, for institutionalized otherness by race, embodiment, age, and perceived ability – perpetuating such a bodily model arguably (though visibly, if carefully considered) conscripts more bodies and lived experiences than it can ever hope to free.

In a sense, then, pregnancy becomes a significant point of inquiry, ubiquitous yet marginalized, for limitation placed on bodies. Pregnancy is figured as Other and outside – it is a constant and insistent reminder that current models of embodiment and understandings of the self are wholly inadequate. A woman perceived as pregnant, also in terms of countless additional variables such as her ostensible race, socio-economic class, orientation, age, dis/ability – a sampling of such categories, unfortunately offered here as a facile list, bear unique and nuanced elements connected to perceived "reproduction" within society.

On the one hand, then, I seek to discuss pregnancy as a narrative itself – via both the dominant texts that inscribe it regularly within society as well as alternative, poetic and literary texts that extend this conversation beyond typical boundaries of the "self" constructed in legal and medical discourses. Additionally, then, my project considers pregnancy as a narrative, but the potential of alternative narratives to refigure it and the experiences of diverse individuals at its site of embodiment. In alternative, I propose self-

acknowledged narratives of pregnancy: spaces outside, beyond, against, beneath, in opposition too these dominant narratives. In their overt acknowledgement, and then attempted disruption, I think we can locate here an historically-informed, context driven, and radical alternative sources for pregnancy narratives (in plural).

Chapter 2 Choice, Transgressive Pregnancy, and Re-membering Motherhood: Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Childbirth, then, may be painful, dangerous, and unchosen; but it has also been converted into a purpose, an act of self-assertion by a woman forced to assert herself primarily through her biology. – Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (160)

In 2010, the state of North Carolina founded The N.C. Justice for Sterilization Victims Foundation "to compensate victims who were forcibly sterilized by the State of North Carolina's Eugenics Board program" ("Sterilization Victims"). By 2013, the Governor had signed Senate Bill 402 to create the "Eugenics Asexualization and Sterilization Compensation Program." The program issued a brochure, also available on the state's website, that defines "eugenics" and provides the history behind the state's reproduction control efforts. The sterilization program ran from 1929 through 1974, impacted over 7500 individuals that were 85% female and over 40% minority (non-white) North Carolinians. While the Foundation is fairly unique, the policies it addresses were not discussed in American history: 32 states had similar eugenics politics in the 20th century (Severson).[12] The initial program offered sterilization as a "solution for poverty and illegitimacy," though it notes with the 1950s it dramatically increased its focus on African Americans and women "not in state institutions."[13] In 2012, however, these efforts were tabled. Among the concerns about the compensation budget, Republican Senator Chris Carney added, "If we do

[12] In the 1950s, as Rickie Solinger further notes in her text *Pregnancy and Power*, abortion related sterilization was also prevalent – 53% of teaching hospitals made "simultaneous sterilization a condition for abortion approval," whereas the figure was some 40% in other hospitals (163).

[13] The N.C. Office of Justice for Sterilization Victims has put together an historical archive of primary sources, to be perused on their website. In particular, it features pamphlets and articles dispersed to support the original sterilization efforts. One in particular is a 1947 reprint from the N.C. Social Hygiene Society's publication *Better Health*. Entitled "Better Human Beings Tomorrow," Dr. Clarence J. Gamble introduces sterilization as the plan for the future: "Tomorrow's population should be produced by today's best human material. Along with 27 other forward-looking states, North Carolina has written that conviction into her laws." Its primary focus is that of "feeblemindedness" – vaguely defined as including "mental defects" including illiteracy as well as "mental defects" – and individuals with epilepsy. He further notes that by the state's findings North Carolina "had the highest rate of rejectees among all the states."

something like this, you open up the door to other things the state did in its history… And some, I'm sure you'd agree, are much worse than this" ("Payments for Eugenics Victims are Shelved").

The United States' history certainly presents considerable options to satisfy Senator Carney's implication. Any discussion of efforts to deny human subjects' their full span of rights, no less in the reproductive realm, must nevertheless begin with slavery. The "peculiar institution" not only functioned on an economy of rape and sexual violence, but it likewise influenced racial reproductive politics for generations after its abolishment. While we have discussed the origins of our current "rhetoric of choice," the politics of choice in a sense have always been bound up in the hegemonic cultural ideals of America. The determination of "fit" mothers, of a child's and parents' rights, of the patriarchal line itself – all insistently indicate that reproduction remains bound up in capitalist aims and in preserving a particular white power-structure status quo.

While there have been notable shifts in American politics concerning women's reproductive rights, they obscure the continued trend of control over women's decisions: the language and the narratives of this lived reproductive politics discursively construct a narrow space of potential here. The movement from outright legal oppression to the scientific and medical restrictions (often complicit with seemingly more liberal legislation) continues to distort a solid conception of "voluntary motherhood" (Siegel 151). The fabricated, limited nature of "choice" – hinged clearly on privilege and accordance with society's notion of a "proper" mother – makes the lingering rhetoric not only misleading, but oppressive by eliding diverse women's reproductive politics and outcomes. Furthermore, as Reva B. Siegel

notes in "Abortion as a Sex Equality Right," this rhetoric "abstracts the conflict from the social context in which judgments about abortion are formed and enforced" (152).

The impoverished choices of reproductive politics in America may be found epitomized and outlined in the American institution of slavery that can, in many ways, serve to interrogate and complicate contemporary notions of "hegemonic" and "non-hegemonic" pregnancies about the issues of "privacy" and "choice." Despite its historical distance, the institution of slavery established specific lines of racial reproductive differences that pervade current societal inequalities to this day. While the overt policies – from the compulsions to reproduce, as during slavery, to the shaming rhetoric aimed at Black mothers in the 1965 Moynihan Report – have remained far from consistent, African American women's reproductive histories indicate the prevailing intrusion of legal and medical discourses in the private/public sphere on racialized pregnancies. Furthermore, their histories illustrate the complicated issues surrounding marginalized women's material existence at the site of pregnancy.

Black enslaved women's experiences of the 19th century severely complicate normative notions of the public and private spheres in the US. For Black female slaves, the private/domestic and public spheres' were entirely different from that of white privileged women. Dramatically different power dynamics and materiality informed their experiences, fracturing dominant understandings of the public and domestic. Treated as chattel and owned for their labor and reproductive purposes, Black women and their experiences far from paralleled the idealized setting of Republican Motherhood and the Cult of True Womanhood. Angela Davis in *Women, Race, and Class* posits that domestic life was important as "the only space where [enslaved Black women] could truly experience

themselves as human beings" (17).[14] In this sense, female slaves were "performing the only labor of the slave community which could not be directly and immediately claimed by the oppressor" (17); though the space remained vulnerable and could be "invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations" (Spillers 74). Whereas the domestic sphere was the relegated space for white women of privilege, it became a tenuous but transgressive space for African American women in slavery. Nevertheless, this realignment of the public and private spheres was predicated on an oppressive culture that defined slaves as laborers, their "subjecthood" legally denied as they were legally commodified as objects to be bought, sold, worked, and proliferated to serve the larger white American economy.

Reproduction politics for Black, enslaved women were vastly informed by an economy of rape. As Hortense Spillers' addresses in "Mamas' Baby, Papa's Maybe," "under conditions of captivity, the offspring of the female does not 'belong' to the Mother, nor is s/he 'related' to the 'owner,' though the latter 'possesses' it, …often fathered it, and, as often, without whatever benefit of patrimony" (74). African American women's reproduction during slavery did serve as a kind of "natural resource," albeit quite differently from that of white women. After 1808 and prior to Emancipation, Black enslaved women were made to produce and maintain the steady supply of laborers for the institution, often through sexual violation or forced reproduction by their masters. Black women's offspring served the larger institution of slavery, and for this reason, originating with the Virginia Colony legislation of 1662 "An Act Defining the Status of Mulatto Bastards," established that the children of

[14] bell hooks elaborates on this in her essay, "Homeplace": "Black women resisted [white oppression] by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world" (42). Again, the notion of the "home" became a symbol of something quite different from that for white housewives; Black women had been associated with labor outside of their own homes, thus the privilege of a "homeplace" takes on considerably different context.

enslaved women followed the status of their mother – a clear aberration from prevalent patriarchal law in the Colonies and eventual US. As such, Black women were forced to serve "as breeders with no formal rights or control over their own bodies, their sexual experiences, and their children constituted the ultimate degradation of enslaved persons and provided the foundation of the slavery system" (Solinger 30).

Narratives of pregnancy within the system of slavery further illuminate the complicated tableau of choices afforded enslaved women. In her 1861 memoir, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs expresses her struggle to freedom from slavery centering on her role as mother—critiquing both the violent sexual economy of slavery as well the institution's dehumanizing rupture of familial ties. Resisting the advances of her master, she chooses to reproduce with a independent white man beyond the bounds of her master's wishes or control, and she ultimately runs away and brings her children to safety in the North.

Jacobs uniquely frames her narrative in her preface, as a testimony for the collective of slave women in a push beyond herself or the individual:

> I have not written my experiences in order to attract attention to myself.… But I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing a sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse. (2-3)

Her appeal to this collective is two-fold. On the one hand, she offers her experiences by fluctuating between first and third person, providing generalizations and "a pattern of equivalence between her life and those of other female slaves" (Whitsitt 83). She likewise bolsters her gendered critique of slavery, in an appeal to her presumably freed, white female

audience, by suggesting the intense level of gendered sexual violence in the institution: "slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women" (66). Her testimony proceeds as a collective appeal, and it regularly acknowledges the multiple standards set in American society for different women – namely, enslaved women and freed, white women of privilege. For Jacobs as well as other women in slavery, "choice" remains bound up in these material differences and she recognizes her impoverished, limited choices with a humble appeal to her more privileged audience. Her narrative remarks on her inability to adhere to cultural gender norms of the day as not entirely a failing of the individual; she shows that the institution of slavery, an oppressive over-arching narrative itself, radically alters a woman's relationship to her own personal decisions and those available to her. As Novian Whitsitt suggests in "Reading between the Lines: The Black Cultural Tradition of Masking in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,"* Jacobs not only "endorses" cultural mores to demonstrate their absence for slave women's options. She likewise uses "masking" to tell her story parallel to them, allowing her "to compose an acceptable explanation of events" for her white, middle-class, female audience while "challeng[ing] an ideology that denied her existence as an authentic woman" (73, 78).

In the opening of her narrative, Jacobs highlights the objectifying role of slavery, characterizing herself as an "object" and one of many "God-breathing machines" (11). Here she candidly establishes the dehumanizing language of slavery particularly at the site of family and demonstrates that as "objects," slaves are denied the normative bonds of kinfolk and family likely valued by her white female audience. Her way in to the narrative specifically focuses on this rupture of human familial relations in slavery. She relates for instance that as a child, her own father sought to purchase her but never could – she was ever

too "valuable [a] piece of property" (9). She demonstrates the conflicting loyalties of slavery, when a child must answer to both his father as well as his master, through her brother Willie's struggles. And when her own father passes away, she is unable to mourn and is instead forced to spend the day gathering flowers for a social event of her mistress's.

Prior to her own pregnancy, Jacobs also primes her audience by exposing the uniquely "peculiar sorrow" of slave mothers to her audience (17). In preparation for the slave auction and separation, she addresses a mother's despair on New Year's knowing she will soon be parted from her children. Here, as throughout the text, Jacobs also introduces the idea of death as preferable to these cruel disruptions of family through an archetypal example of a slave mother:

> She sits on her cold cabin floor, watching the children who may all be torn from her the next morning; and often does she wish that she and they might die before the day dawns. She may be an ignorant creature, degraded by the system that has brutalized her from her childhood; but she has a mother's instincts, and is capable of feeling a mother's agonies. (17)

As she highlights the ruptures in domestic life, Jacobs likewise turns to the rampant sexual violence of slavery that again uniquely targets slave women. At fifteen, as her first narrative of romantic love emerges, Jacobs reflects on "Why does the slave ever love?" (33). Dr. Norcom, "the "hateful man who claimed a right to rule [her], body and soul" forbids her the love she desires. Her first love as a young woman results inevitably in heartbreak at her inability to marry: "when I reflected that I was a slave, and that the laws gave no sanction to the marriage of such, my heart sank" (34). Jacobs's experience illustrates the significant truth that slavery "established the right to choose a sexual and procreating partner as the

privilege of whites" and likewise that the heteronormative right to marry and raise (one's own) children has been historically informed by racial privilege (Solinger 37).

In her narrative, Jacobs grapples with this distinction, decrying her lack of access to the privileged Cult of True Womanhood that governed notions of respectability, and sexual chastity outside of marriage, for white women. She appeals to her legally free readers, "But, O, ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are protected by law, do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely!" (48). Again, a racially contextualized examination of the Cult of True Womanhood, retroactively cast as a vastly repressive and patriarchal system of social mores, illustrates that it was nonetheless denied to enslaved Black women. Jacobs proceeds to cast her impoverished state in terms of a lack of agency, of not only limited, but very differently, contextualized choices: "If slavery had been abolished, I, also, could have married the man of my choice; I could have had a home shielded by the laws; and I should have been spared the painful task of confessing what I am now about the relate; but all my prospects have been blighted by slavery" (48). [15]

Without the prospects of a sanctioned marriage with the man of her affections, Jacobs becomes "reckless in… despair" as she feels "forsaken by God and man" (48). And here, she settles on the only viable option she can find: the possibility of an affair with a freedman, Mr. Sawyers, for it is after all "something akin to freedom" (48). For Jacobs, her ultimate choice to become pregnant with Mr. Samuel Sawyer's children – safely securing her, for the

[15] It is worth noting that the freedom of choices enumerated by Jacobs, while far more likely to be available to white women of privilege, remains contentiously informed by other racial, classed, and gendered expectations. Certainly, not all legally "free" women of the 19th century had freedom to marry as they chose. Nevertheless, for the purposes of my discussion, Jacobs as a slave does speak from a far less privileged position of power that is not closely rivaled by white female citizen contemporaries. Again, "choice" holds nuance and, within the patriarchal discourses, works as a continuum upon which most women may be located rather than a neat binary of "choice" or absence of choice. She shows how "choice" functions in a complicated relationship to "normative" social roles.

time being, from her master's own sexual advances – locates her transgressively outside the bounds of prescribed slavery reproductive politics. Her master's responding anxieties clearly illustrate her level of subversion. Upon learning of her pregnancies, Dr. Norcom threatens that he will never sell her, acknowledging her desire to be bought by her lover. He furthermore offers her a chance for his forgiveness by severing her ties with her children's father, thus ensuring the appearance of his own control and autonomy over his slave and her progeny. Lastly, amid his threats and expressions of rage, he exerts dominance and reminds Jacobs that her "child was an addition to his stock of slaves" (53).

Jacobs's choice to have her children remains a troubled one for her in the narrative: she both struggles to maintain the notion of female virtue, and she likewise deals with the threat of slavery reclaiming her children. In part, as demonstrated by her pleadings to her audience, she struggles with the guilt and social reception of her own "fallen" character that is the result of her sexual relationship and pregnancies out of wedlock. She argues for her inability to follow standards set for chastity, her "outsider" status in relationship to white women's social mores, as a female slave: "I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others" (49). Additionally, she experiences torment concerning her future children's status as slaves. Her first son, born sickly, provides her with many diverging emotions concerning his well-being. She speaks of her love and adoration for him, but further notes "there was a dark cloud over my enjoyment. I could never forget that he was a slave" (54). Her access to contemporary sentimental narratives of motherly love again is evaded by her experiences, as she knows her children's future is marred by her own status as slave. Jacobs concedes that, mixed with her prayers for her son's improving health were troubled prayers for his death, for ultimately "death is better than slavery" (54).

Her conflicted emotions as a mother suggest that slavery, and reproductive politics of the public sphere, mitigate and inform even her most intimate emotional attachments to family.

I do not wish to demean these particular iterations of agency enacted by Jacobs or her female slave contemporaries. For Jacobs does enact a kind of autonomy and choice, to borrow the neo-liberal language of contemporary American reproductive politics, within the very limited space of her (non)subject position. Significantly, then, the argument of "choice" and its accompanying rhetoric need not be its outright absence, but the particular material, socio-economic conditions, and cultural mores that inform the kinds of "choices" available to specific women.

I likewise do not mean to suggest simplistically that bearing children necessarily affords a woman agency or freedoms, particularly in light of the slave economy's history, human commodification, and the rape culture it entails. However, in defying the economy that objectified and enslaved her, Jacobs uniquely claimed the product of her own labors: when her master grows desperate to sequester her in a cottage and overpower her with his sexual advances, she rebukes him by stating: "I will never go there. In a few months I shall be a mother" (49). Her choice to have her own children outside the condoned conditions of her master and the larger institution of slavery resonates as a kind of strategic reclamation: Jacobs's attains a kind of power over her own body.

Additionally, to further complicate this analysis, critics have come to question the validity of Jacobs's claim of avoiding Dr. Norcom's sexual advances. In his essay, Whitsitt references this "double voice" technique by casting Jacobs's with a "trickster-like disposition… bent [on] duplicity within the narrative" (81). In this sense, his critique suggests that Jacobs's exerts a power instead over her own *story*, for "well versed in the

standard style, content, and temperament of traditional slave narratives, Jacobs desired to construct her self-image outside of the victim status" (85). Whitsitt, along with theorists Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Gabrielle Foreman, deliberate the truth of Jacobs's ability to thwart Dr. Norcom. They instead posit the likelihood that her first pregnancy was a result of her master's rape, and that Jacobs sought an "intentional complicating of paternity" (74). For his discussion, Whitsitt significantly distinguishes between "Brent," the original pseudonym ascribed to Jacobs's at the narratives publication, and Jacobs herself to articulate the rhetorical strategy of her memoir's protagonist and the less "delicate" reality of her lived experiences as a female slave. Regardless of the paternity of her child, we can note Jacobs's strategic use of pregnancy as narrative provides agency and a partial path to her freedom.

Furthermore, Jacobs's relationship to what appears to be renegade heteronormative reproduction may actually also pressure contemporary theoretical ideas of the "post-humanist dream" where queer, non-traditional communities are celebrated as they demote heteronormative hierarchical narratives. In a sense, these contemporary queer readings seem to cast off maternity and pregnancy as simplistically part and parcel of repressive heteronormativity. How can we reconsider pregnancy and maternity within this radical spirit, rather than discard them as its easy and absolute antithesis? What becomes of women in particular as they are historically associated with the maternal? Jacobs's maternity in slavery help us reconsider this trend. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Judith Halberstam critiques this particular issue, noting the "risk of linking heteronormativity in some essential way to women, and, perhaps unwittingly, woman becomes the site of the unqueer: she offers life, while queerness links up with the death drive; she is aligned sentimentally with the child

and with ‘goodness,’ while the gay man in particular leads they way to ‘something better’ while ‘promising absolutely nothing’ ” (118).

Nirmala Erevelles extends this critique by addressing the material reality of slaves, such as Harriet Jacobs. In her *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling a Transformative Body Politic*, Erevelles points out that “the release from normative (heterosexual, patriarchal, and nuclear) kinship ties [do] not necessarily signify a release from their oppressive constraints, nor [does] it enable enslaved bodies to form alternative anti-patriarchal, queer relationships unconnected by bloodlines via rhizomatic extensions” (55). Furthermore, she highlights that this disconnection from family directly resulted in their object status, as “they were transformed into commodity precisely because their exclusion from ‘natural’ kinship ties also denied their claims to sovereign subjectivity” (57). In other words, examining Jacobs’s “outlaw erotics” and resulting (relative) agency over her own children requires contextualization and a firm break with a neatly binarized understanding of “choice” as well as traditional, sentimentalist readings of pregnancy. Jacobs, as a slave, was clearly outside the domain of white female subjectivity (and human subjectivity at large) and, as a result, her relationship to her body and reproductive potential disrupt a mainstream understanding of women in the domestic sphere. She further illustrates that a woman’s “choices” are honestly rendered only when they are contextualized by their relationship to the hegemonic or dominant narrative of power.

Jacobs’s narrative significantly disrupts notions of reproductive politics and a slave woman’s relationship to her body, to her womb, and to her potential as a mother. Her case provides a formative example of how pervading, dominant narratives of pregnancy fail entirely to articulate her particular experience with maternity. Her regular pleading against

the valued judgments imposed by her readers, a presumably white female audience, provides consistent reminders of her distance and marginalized status that make dominant narratives of pregnancy disjointed and entirely inadequate to address her own relationship to her children, her partner, and her own affected identity. In part, we can continue in the spirit of her critique in contemporary iterations of normative pregnancy.

Re-membering Maternity: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Significantly, as voiced within the genre of 19th century slave narratives, Harriet Jacobs's memoir works both quite simply and quite complicatedly to humanize her. In "Defining a Genre: Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and Women's Neo-Slave Narrative," Guilliano Bettanin asks, as slavery qualified the enslaved as commodified objects rather than humans, how might former slaves recast themselves as "cultural and historical subjects"? The oft quoted line from Frederick Douglass's autobiography captures the particularly male, now male American, iteration of this claim: "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man" (92). Jacobs's narrative, as a slave woman's perspective even more rare in the American canon, attempts a similar kind of interpolation. In the economy of slavery, Jacobs's status as a female slave inevitably draws her reproductive potential to the fore. In an effort to carve out a space for a women slaves, she grapples openly with the limitations imposed on her by race and chattel status, and she further fragments the identity of the "self" and its complications in American history.

Such narratives as Jacobs' not only hold significant historical value, but they voice and respond to a disparity in racial reproductive politics that pervade to this day. Neo-slave narratives continue to be written and published to re-situate these African American identities, connected by a genealogy of violence. Bettanin remarks that, "if original slave

narratives aimed to recover history, neo-slave narratives re-invent history." The neo-slave genre, articulated as "a fictional mutation of the autobiographies of nineteenth-century Americans who lived as slaves" (Crossley 265), regularly relies on first-person narratives and fantastic sensibilities, all underwritten by a violent, material realism. Notably, these narratives often break with linear trajectories, suggesting an alternative, circular spirit of time and the significance of injecting their story in the contemporary moment. Interestingly too, many of the primary examples of the genre center around radical breaks in the dominant narratives of American pregnancy. They re-cast maternity and genealogy, offering alternative narratives of identity and self that are at once engaged with the contemporary moment as well as the past. They reinvigorate the slave narratives of the 19th century, suggesting the lingering if not haunting body of stories still to be told.

In Toni Morrison's 1987 neo-slave narrative *Beloved*, Sethe's story may be seen as a "fleshy" re-membering of Harriet Jacobs's own appeals: the novel posits the maternal ex-slave woman's body at its center, along with her daughters and mother-in-law, to convey the story of maternity, "motherwork,"[16] and infanticide. As Abdellatif Khayati further notes in his essay, "Representation, Race, and the 'Language' of the Ineffable in Toni Morrison's Narrative," "whereas old slave narratives exercised a willed omission of trauma as a defensive armor against humiliating or embarrassing memories, Morrison… seeks to disrupt" (315). From Baby Suggs's church of the flesh – "in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it" (88) – to Sethe's developing identity and understanding of the self through maternity, bodies are fluid here while central

[16] "Motherwork" is a term used by Andrea O'Reilly's *Toni Morrison & Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart* (2004) in which she argues that Morrison "defines motherhood as a site of power" (45). It references specifically the mothering and act of the maternal, while working to de-essentialize this notion.

to the story. Blood and breastmilk regularly flow and mix to give embodied substance to the reality of violence and oppression in slavery.

The novel's focus works, complementing the original 19th century slave narratives, by moving the (former) slave's subject position from "object" under slavery to "subject" as a human identity, uniquely through a relationship to maternity.[17] This tone of hyper-humanization that disrupts the oppressive objectification of slavery extends even to 124 the house itself, the first character fleshed out in the text—which Denver regards (as perhaps we readers should too) "as a person rather than a structure" (29). Furthermore, in these storytelling efforts to render full dimensions of humanness, we see distinctly the focus on the body and the embodied experience develop centrally. In her essay, " 'You just can't fly off and leave a body': the Intercorporeal Breastfeeding Subject of Toni Morrison's Fiction," Edith Frampton goes further to suggest that *Beloved*'s "engagement with fluidity operates not only at the level of the body's materiality but also at the level of subjectivity, *as the phenomenology of the flesh is represented as inseparable* from the psyche, from affect, spirituality, and history" (151, emphasis mine). In a sense, then, the story revisits the lived experiences of slaves in maternity, bringing the body and bodily functions to the fore. The narrative furthermore demonstrates how intimately connected these bodily bearings are on the spiritual and psychological underpinnings of slavery's legacy, which transcends generations. Much as Sethe notes about her own daughter Beloved, this neo-slave re-membering is compelled to "come back…in the flesh" (200).

In this unique focus on the construction of the subject through maternity, *Beloved* also relies on a circularity of the narrative as re-membering – both concerning the body as well as

[17] *Beloved* was in part inspired by the lived experiences of Margaret Garner, who tried to escape slavery and committed infanticide in 1856.

the firsthand memories recounted. Immediately, the story conflates the memories of birth and death with commodification and sexual violence: Sethe recollects sexual favors in a graveyard to have "Beloved" etched on a stone and wonders how she might have secured more. Likewise, the larger story itself turns on the metaphors of maternity and death, regularly referencing the pain of remembering but the necessity of it for rebirth: "anything dead coming back to life hurts" and "nothing heals without pain" (35, 78). Notably, these metaphorical narratives of rebirth and re-creation hinge on Sethe's relationship to the maternal as an (ex) slave.

The pain revisited in the novel centers largely around one recurring scene, which particularly captures the commodification of slave maternity: the white boys' violation of pregnant Sethe by forcibly nursing from her, in the barn at Sweet Home.[18] Sethe is already lactating for her first daughter, who has gone to live in freedom with Baby Suggs in Ohio. Sethe is pregnant with another baby, her future daughter Denver. Sethe and her breastmilk are violated, there in a barn alongside the cows; her status is clearly that of chattel, her milk stolen by the white men of Sweet Home when her body has created it uniquely for her own child. The scene holds resonance for many reasons revisited in the text, specifically as her breastmilk becomes a focus, an enduring symbol for her, and her reclamation of her children, her freedom, and a developing self-identity. It also informs her past relationship with her own mother, as Sethe reflects on her absence and the resulting neglect of her surrogate, Nan.

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[18] This scene inevitably figures as a perversion of the final and redeeming image in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Set in a humble barn as well, Rose of Sharon figures as a white, labor-class Madonna, breastfeeding a grown man who is not her child: "For a minute, Rose of Sharon sat still in the whispering barn. Then she hoisted her tired body up and drew the comfort about her. She moved slowly to the corner and stood looking down at the wasted face, into the wide, frightened eyes. Then slowly she lay down beside him. He shook his head slowly from side to side. Rose of Sharon loosened one side of the blanket and bared her breast. 'You got to,' she said. She squirmed closer and pulled his head close. 'There!' she said. 'There.' Her hand moved behind his head and supported it. Her fingers moved gently in his hair. She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously" (455).

Sethe remembers that Nan: "had to nurse whitebabies and I too because Ma'am was in the rice. The little whitebabies got it first and I got what was left" (200). Much as a slave woman's children were not her own, her breastmilk created on their behalf by her body was likewise not hers. A female slave who had recently given birth would oftentimes become a wet nurse to the master's children as well. Any nurslings on the property became fair game, and again the fundamental biological and psychological bonds between mother and child in slavery were severed.[19] The scene of the white boys at Sweet Home, suckling forcibly from Sethe, graphically depicts this violation openly – it is the crux of the novel as well as the scene in which Halle loses his sanity, his connection to his wife, and his humanness at large. Indeed, the politics of breastfeeding resound shortly after Beloved's murder scene, when Sethe feeds her remaining daughter still sullied by the act: "so Denver took her mother's milk right along with the blood of her sister" (152).

Harriet Jacobs conveys her story with a self-conscious decorum and politeness concerning maternity, a rhetorically sound move for her antebellum audience; Morrison's *Beloved*, on the other hand, re-members the fleshy, mother body in its rendering, making no hesitation in presenting its characters' grittiest reflections and violations. For Baby Suggs, a mother of eight now freed by her late son Halle, openly confesses to her own limited memory and how a mother in slavery must be vigilantly careful about such: "I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me," and she can remember that only of her first-born that "she loved the burned bottom of bread" (5). But Sethe reflects, "That's all you let yourself

[19] I add here that breastmilk also has a history of being communally shared, which continues with contemporary breastmilk banks (see the Human Milk Banking Association of North America). However, the compulsion and stealing that characterize the exchange of breastmilk during slavery indicates the considerable disconnect from the redemptive Rose of Sharon scene mentioned in the previous footnote. Instead, this denial of breastmilk autonomy extended the objectifying narrative of slavery that located slaves as secondary, denied nourishment, and furthermore disconnected from their own mothers as much as possible.

remember" for she herself "worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe" (5-6). And here, the limited political access slave mothers experienced with their own children becomes explicit in the psyche of each individual woman. These untraditional maternal sentiments and outright dehumanizing coping mechanims—such as strategically forgetting one's own children outside of mundane toast preferences—are the realities of maternity in slavery. Likewise, they become a method of survival for women trapped within this oppressive system, creating an entirely alternative, muzzled relationship between mother and child. Indeed, the gentle appeals of Jacobs regarding her own relationship to her children are voiced here, likened to pawns in a cruel game: slaves are "moved around like checkers" and the reality that "nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included [Baby Suggs] children" (23). The objectified status of slaves here directly counters any kind of kinship bonds, as previously discussed, shattering the context of the subject, of the mother, and any kind of relationship she may have with her own children.

Sethe goes on to discuss her ability to love her children, in contrasting terms with that of traditional, selfless motherhood. She specifies her experience relative to her own status as slave; becoming a legal human subject in freedom, she gains a likewise liberating dimension in relationship to her children particularly. Nevertheless, her relationship with motherhood is voiced in a way that contrasts sharply with the selflessness of the Cult of True Womanhood. She speaks of it as "a kind of selfishness I never knew nothing about before" in which she felt "big… and deep and wide and when I stretched out my arms all my children could get in between" (162). Sethe further suggests, as we have discussed, that familial love and communal attachment such as in motherhood becomes uniquely contextualized by her status as an enslaved woman: "look like I loved em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't

love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love" (162). She struggles to articulate her relationship to her children through an implicit reconsideration of herself as subject and through the nuanced context of politics and space.

The final climax of the text works to articulate Sethe herself as a subject (the "Me?" she struggles with in the conclusion) and in particular to articulate her maternity and relationship to motherhood that includes infanticide. At one point, Sethe seeks to explain her actions to Paul D, a former fellow slave of Sweet Home who has just recently learned of her past murderous actions. Sethe first tells him of her escape and runaway with her children, and of the sense of autonomy she felt in her actions. Sethe's thoughts complement the impoverished conditions in Jacobs's emotional struggles, as she seeks to claim something of her actions as "her own" and contextualized as a kind of "choice" within the distorted and violent institution of slavery:

> I did it. I got us all out. Without Halle too. Up till then it was the only thing I ever did on my own. Decided. And it came off right, like it was supposed to. We was here. Each and every one of my babies and me too. I birthed them and I got em out and it wasn't no accident. I did that. I had help, of course, lots of that, but still it was me doing it. (162)

Her repetitive use of "I" in her claims acknowledge a kind of primacy in self-agency – the identity she will question and attempt to articulate in the final lines of the novel. Nevertheless, Sethe acknowledges that she had help, gestures toward the collective, without seeing that as a detractor from the fact that "still it was me doing it."

She goes on to recount, in cryptic and fleeting imagery, her decision to murder her own child. She senses the potential chasm between her and her audience, the lack of

empathetic connection, that would render her actions unexplainable and unforgivable to many, "that she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. …but the truth was simple" (163). She sums up the "simple" truth by surmising, "Well, all I'm saying is that's a selfish pleasure I never had before. I couldn't let all that go back to where it was, and I couldn't let her nor any of em live under schoolteacher. That was out" (163). Paul D does not clearly understand, and he asks her if she succeeded; she replies simply, "It worked. … They ain't at Sweet Home. Schoolteacher ain't go em. …It's my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that" (165). Her admission parallels her earlier empowered "I" phrases with relationship to motherhood; it is here that we can see the two are not entirely incommensurate expressions in terms of her circumstances.

In her text *Toni Morrison and Motherhood*, Andrea O'Reilly notes that "*Beloved* speaks the hitherto silenced maternal narrative of slave women" by creating "an alternative, subversive, discourse of black motherhood" (128). In a sense, however, Morrison's novel does so predicated on the disruption caused by 19th century slave narratives such as Harriet Jacobs's. She suggests that an alternative framework for maternity must be constructed, in light of slave women's impoverished choices:

> O virtuous reader! You never knew what it is to be a slave; to be entirely unprotected by law or custom; to have the laws reduce you to the condition of chattel, entirely subject to the will of another. You never exhausted your ingenuity in avoiding the snares, and eluding the power of a hated tyrant; you never shuddered at the sound of his footsteps, and trembled within hearing of his voice. I know I did wrong. No one can feel it more sensibly than I do. The painful and humiliating memory will haunt me to my dying day. Still, in

> looking back, calmly, on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others. (49)

Jacobs's words complement Sethe's sentiment, particularly as Paul D confronts her with infanticide. She attempts to explain herself, but notes the circularity of it, "that she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn't get it right, she could never explain" (163). She contemplates the moment as "simple," of her immediate responses of "Nonono" and safety. Namely, when the promise of life regulates one to object status, death and freedom are the only choice. Jacobs's expresses her own attempt to explain this: "I wanted no chain to be fastened on my daughter, not even if its links were of gold. How earnestly I prayed that she might never feel the weight of slavery's chain, whose iron entereth into the soul!" (68). Her resolve, at the conclusion, parallels Sethe's as well: "Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage. I and my children are now free!" (164).

For Sethe's choice, to murder her own child, she demonstrates what maternity looks like in the warped space of slavery and racial violence. Hearing her story, Paul D recoils, desperate in his assurance that there must have been "some other way" (165). She resists. When she presses him, he instead offers a judgment on her actions that align her again with a beast of burden, her once enslaved status, and the pivotal scene of her violation in the barn: "You got two feet, Sethe, not four" (164). And, in that moment, "a forest sprang up between them; trackless and quiet" a division that clarifies even as Paul D fails to relate and understand Sethe's circumstances as a freed slave and mother. He, even a former slave, cannot fathom Sethe's choices and chooses instead to judge her by standards – human, social standards for a mother – that she has clearly demonstrated were not hers in the first place.

Her context, her choice, can only be read by others as a simplistic absolute and antithesis to mothering: "infanticide."

However, though we have worked through the critique and violence steeped in *Beloved*, we must in turn consider the redemptive scene in the novel: Sethe and Amy Denver, communing together at Denver's birth. As much as the narrative focuses on the legacy of pain enduring from slavery, it here offers a scene of healing, as Sethe labors with Amy's help. Often neglected in critical analysis, Amy Denver provides what Nicole M. Coonradt calls "one of Morrison's 'bridges' to deeper understanding" in the novel (169). For our analysis, the scene that culminates around her and Sethe's (and Denver's) communal labors offers us a glimpse of solidarity through pregnancy and birth.

As the novel predominantly features relationships across race lines as commodified ones – slavery, in short – Sethe initially hesitates with Amy: [narrated by Denver] "You could get money if you turned a runaway over, and [Sethe] wasn't sure this girl Amy didn't need money more than anything" (77). We can think back to Irigaray's essay, which summed up many human relationships in terms of competition and survival; there are plenty of reasons that Amy and Sethe's interaction might have conformed to such. Amy is impoverished, we learn, and fleeing to Boston for the seemingly ludicrous, yet luxurious thrill of velvet in Boston (a symbolic pleasure, of which we easily gather Amy has had few). But Amy Denver and Sethe's relationship is shaped by something markedly different.

Amy and Sethe instead become "two heroines [who] immerse themselves in the rituals of community," united by the circumstances defining their previous lives (Harding and Martin 40). Sethe, a Black runaway slave, and Amy, a white indentured servant with

"fugitive eyes," are both marginalized women (Morrison 78).[20] Though we know considerably less about Amy, we gather she is also orphaned as well born and raised in a culture of sexual violence: "Joe Nathan said Mr. Buddy [who had a "right evil hand" and whipped her often] is my daddy but I don't believe that, you?" (80). They are two "throw-away people, two lawless outlaws" that nevertheless create "something together appropriately and well" in delivering Denver (84).

With baby Denver, we see that Amy remains memorialized through her name as kin. Amy's name, from the Old French " 'Aimee'… or 'beloved,' " suggests her own connection and role as a poor white woman to the novel's redemptive response to pain (Coonradt 170). She evokes a kindness and tender love for Sethe when her body has become entirely bedraggled, by maternity and pregnancy and her flight to freedom. Amy's intervention, as she assists Sethe and Denver into the world, is one of grace. The deferential "miss" from Sethe, and Amy's recognition of Sethe's lower social status – "[Amy] wouldn't be caught dead in daylight on a busy river with a runaway" (85) – remind the reader that these women are not entirely equitable in their social background and privilege. Nevertheless, their vulnerabilities there on the margins/banks of the Ohio River unite them as they share this struggle for (re)birth: " 'Push!' screamed Amy. 'Pull,' whispered Sethe" (Morrison 84).

[20] It is worth noting that indentured servitude was made illegal in the XIII Constitutional Amendment – the same Amendment that outlawed slavery (Coonradt 171).

Chapter 3 Southern Gothic Pregnancy and "the gaps in people's lack": William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Suzan-Lori Parks' *Getting Mother's Body*

"[for] the hegemonic construction of subjectivity that feminists seek to displace… not by appealing to the real or the material, but by magnifying key aspects of that construction, turning them into grotesques"
– Susan Hekman's "Material Bodies"

The specter of Sethe and Amy Denver, working together toward Denver's birth on the symbolic banks of the Ohio River, guide us to a 20th century rendering of these women re-membered. While both of these characters fled north, the severe racial and class lines remained and transfigured anew with the new century: Jim Crow laws maintained segregation and supported racial violence; Social Darwin trends and eugenics movements sought to limit reproduction on a national level. For this chapter, we follow the genealogy of Sethe and Amy Denver's collective vulnerable subjects back into the South, where the Southern Gothic genre uniquely captures the policing, the violent silences, and the macabre of non-normative pregnancies in the mid-20th century.

Historical Tableau: Non-Hegemonic Pregnancy and Choice in the 20th Century

We return to the setting of our North Carolina Eugenics Board, seeing through the ideology that upheld its proliferation through the 1970s. Such practices were relegated widely across the South. In particular, the early 20th century was characterized by Social Darwinism and accompanying eugenics technology and research concerning reproduction. Reproductive politics saw new measures emerge in the US that openly attempted to maintain patriarchal, white dominance on a wide scale – in part through the eradication of the "unfit" from proliferating. Midwives were displaced, a trend that we see only recently beginning to

shift again on a national level,[21] and by the 1930s births started to occur with more regularity outside of the home.

Along with the shift from the home to the hospital, from an individual woman to the professionalized field of male-dominated medicine, pregnancy garnered political response of another nature. With the 20th century, concerns about immigration and the decline of whiteness in the United States became marked, contributing to the eugenics movement. Doctors maintained not only supposed superior knowledge to women concerning reproduction, but they had a vested interest in limiting particular women's access to abortion. Any challenges to the law of the father, or the traditional heteronormative family, came under strict censure for the doctor served as mediator between a (married) woman and the state. Doctors' arguments regarding women's health, particularly potential abortion, "focused on the physiology of reproduction, the structure of the family, and the dynamics of population growth," as "regulating reproduction…[became] a means to ensure reproduction of the social order" (Siegel 149).

Expressing the dominant white anxieties over increasing urban populations of immigrants and individuals of color, President Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed in 1905 that "racial purity must be maintained" (Davis, "Racism" 88). Leading up to the Great Depression, reproductive politics became overtly addressed in the public sphere and in legislature and judicial decisions: the National Origins Act (1924), which instated quotas for immigrants into the US; and various eugenics state legislations, upheld by *Buck v. Bell*

[21] Via the Midwives Alliance of North America (MANA, mana.org), midwifery licensing varies from state to state, and comes in three classifications: Certified Nurse-Midwives, trained in both nursing and midwifery who work exclusively in hospitals (they can legally practice in all 50 states); and both Certified Professional Midwives (or CPMS, who can practice currently in 28 states) and Certified Midwives (also CMs, who practice legally in three states), who are able to perform births in any setting of the states in which they are legal. Legislation in multiple states is underway to amend CPMs' legality and to adjust outdated laws on record or to address laws that attempt to reduce "competition" between doctors and midwives.

(1927). The Depression developed further need to control reproductive and population expansion.

Heightened issues of race and class again informed the politics of the era. Birth control alongside sterilization and eugenics policies further problematized hegemonic pregnancy – "choices" again were clearly informed by a woman's material reality, racial identification, and class standing. Furthermore, social mores prevailed in dictating "appropriate" mothers. In many senses, due to the increasing populations and urban growth, racism and classism influenced burgeoning feminism. Birth control as a "privilege" for white women shifted to a kind of "duty" for lower-classed women and women of color (Davis, "Racism" 88). Margaret Sanger's American Birth Control League, a predecessor to Planned Parenthood, exemplifies this particular intersection of race, class, ability, and prevailing biopolitics. While earlier First Wave feminists primarily pushed for women's suffrage but maintained traditional perspectives on women's nurturing and mothering potential, abortion and birth control became more central concerns to feminists in the 1930s onward. Sanger shifted her own rhetoric to align women's access to birth control in order to garner control from men and other general naysayers of women's reproductive freedoms. Her shift from a focus on individualized freedom in sexuality and reproduction, to a "campaign in eugenic terms" presented birth control as a means to further the "nation's interests" (Roberts 72). Issues of women's individual sexual autonomy and gratification were downplayed, and birth control was cast foremost as a means of population control. Those deemed "unfit" or, in Sanger's terms, "morons, mental defectives, epileptics, illiterates, paupers, unemployables, criminals, prostitutes, and dope fiends" were recommended for sterilization (Davis, "Racism" 89). Sanger's choice to side with eugenics

rhetoric in promoting her ideas of gendered liberation continues to fall under severe critique. The American (white, male) public at large found women asserting control over their own reproductive potential only palatable as it bolstered narratives of American whiteness and dominance, a trend that has not entirely subsided. By 1932, due to the prominence of the Eugenics Society, at least 26 states had compulsory sterilization laws on record – and "birth control" became dangerously affiliated with "population control" (Davis 89).

On a national level, President Theodore Roosevelt lamented the possible "race suicide" or the trend of privileged, white women opting out of motherhood; in 1905, he instead demanded that "racial maturity must be maintained" (Davis 87). In turn, the "privilege" of birth control for the bourgeoisie became a "duty" for those marked as by lower socio-economic or non-white status (88).

Southern Gothic Pregnancies, or Where the Normative Becomes Unfamiliar

In light of these social shifts, coupled with the heightened racial and class anxieties of the region, the Southern Gothic's focus on, if not outright nurturance of, the peculiar, the Other, and the monstrous provides a shadowed, recasting of the "familiar" in the family, home, and small town. This unsettling of the familiar can be as jarring as it is complementary to a reconsideration of romanticized visions of domesticity, of which pregnancy and motherhood comprise the hallmark. In this chapter, I extend this discussion of non-hegemonic pregnancies by looking to texts within the tradition of 20th century Southern gothic literature: Eudora Welty's "The Petrified Man," which recasts and defamiliarizes an arguably normative pregnancy narrative; then, to a dialogue on the inarticulate or illegible maternity in the "gaps" and respective "holes" of marginalized class

and race experience, in both William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Suzan-Lori Parks' *Getting Mother's Body* respectively.

Already a site of Otherness, American Southern gothic literature bears a significant relationship to outcast, grotesque bodies – as an ongoing genre struggling itself as a severed Other from dominant American identity. In her text *Dirt and Desire,* Patricia Yaeger describes this propensity in Southern narratives: "in a [culture] dealing with crisis, unable to handle changes in the course of everyday life [here, referencing segregation struggles, Jim Crow legacies, and a continued "behind-ness" celebrated and steeped in tradition – what Yaeger touts as "arrested systems of knowledge"]… change erupts abruptly, via images of monstrous, ludicrous bodies" (4). Centered around this struggle against change, the reproductive body in particular proves significant, a rife space to reconsider what it is that is being reproduced and by whom. A place of transition, yet one at once engrained in tradition, Southern Gothic texts' consideration of pregnancy has a particular kind of currency for discussing change and larger challenges to normativity. To continue in this vein, Yaeger notes that, "when new ideas are born, when new practices and ideologies make their way into public discourse against resistance, what emerges is the figuration of monstrosity" (4-5).[22] Pregnancy raises to the fore sexual mores and racial stigmas, classist perceptions alongside forbidden desires and miscegenation – what better space to unsettle notions of the individual than at the site of the forbidden yet visibly defiant Southern, swelling pregnant body?

The Southern Gothic genre in particular casts the darkened side of public surveillance of the private sphere. In a space of taboo mixings, where reproduction and recreation of a

[22] The notion of the "monstrous" furthermore complements a discussion of margin and center, which will be explored in a particular dis/ability context in chapter four. In *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Abledness*, Fiona Kumari Campbell notes that: "the 'monster' is a neologism for 'boundary-crossing,' crossing boundaries of acceptability" (161).

new identity were rife, the anxieties and conventions of larger American culture reveal themselves. Notably, too, in the spaces afforded for women's voices – and in their notable gaps or ephemeral qualities – the articulation of pregnancy finds an alternative space that, perhaps in its ambiguity, gains proximity to being articulating beyond the limiting bounds of proscriptive medical and legal discourses. To foreground this Southern Gothic space and the issue of reproductive politics, I first enlist Eudora Welty's well-known short story, "The Petrified Man." For my own consideration I find the story to refigure the anxieties and surveillance of reproductive politics all neatly contained within a beauty parlor visit. This short story offers itself as a direct antithesis and disruption to the nesting refuge of female solidarity and comfort so famously captured in Robert Harling's southern play, *Steel Magnolias* – in which the seasonally advancing narrative also revolves around the space of the beauty parlor. In Welty's story, rather than a gendered refuge, this space serves as a microcosm for the impotent struggle of women to claim autonomy over their own identities, reproductive politics, and power in small-town Southern culture.

Next, I consider two novels in conversation with one another around the site of the pregnancy "at the margins" – William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* alongside Suzan Lori-Parks' more contemporary reconsideration of the narrative, *Getting Mother's Body*. In both texts, the phantom of the matriarch's body looms and speaks, or riffs in lines of the blues, alongside the unfolding narrative of her teenage daughter's "illegitimate" pregnancy. The scrapes of class (and near absence of race within *As I Lay Dying*) speak to the overt racism tackled alongside poverty in *Getting Mother's Body*. Both, together, capture a Southern Gothic rendering of pregnancy and the world of a teenaged woman's possibilities and limitations – and where a mother speaks most candidly from the grave.

Policing the Normative: Southern Gothic Reproductive Politics in Eudora Welty's "The Petrified Man"

Southern Gothic literature remains centrally focused on space. The beauty parlor setting of Welty's "The Petrified Man" for instance clearly establishes its stakes and scope: it is a significant and tense exchange point between the elusive private and public spheres. The beauty parlor serves as a transformative space for one's personal performance to be brought into compliance with a pronouncedly public (here, beauty) standard. Here, among the accouterments of beauty and female socialization of the salon, is the intimacy of woman's hair dye and style secrets, brought to bear on the public expectations of femininity and the limits of individual power. Ultimately, the parlor and women's interactions within reveal the power of narrative: women share here their own stories, others' stories (unbeknownst to them, by way of gossip), and the stories of their own imaginary creations, all combined in an attempt to exert a sort of narrative agency over their own lives. For my purposes of analysis, I locate Mrs. Fletcher's pregnancy as the telling focal point around which this tense struggle is waged: the fluidity of her identity construction and how it is narratively wrought and communally (however invidiously) composed.

For my consideration in particular, the stories center around Mrs. Fletcher's recently secret pregnancy and both its public perceptions and growing narrative life, beyond her control, which reframe her as expectant mother. The space suggests female intimacy and a blurring of public and private matters as women both commiserate and prevaricate. The indirect power struggles and dissembling betray themselves in fleeting moments of banal subtleties, as when Mrs. Fletcher "looks expectantly at the black part in Leota's yellow curls as she bent to light the cigarette" (52). The masking of her hair color suggests Leota's own

duplicity, soon revealed in the text. The very potential of changing one's appearance and self in a beauty parlor proves to be not entirely left to one's choosing. Lastly, the unclaimed son who has the final word – a defiant cliché that resounds at the end of the story – suggests an ominous future for self-autonomy.

The tone of futile struggle is set with the opening line: despite the fact that Mrs. Fletcher visits Leota for her services in the form of a haircut, Leota is first to deliver a command. Power, and the ability to enact agency, is apparently muzzled and tenuous at best here – enacted in the weak attempts for the women's pauses and actions to struggle over dominance. This power struggle reaches a fever pitch, somewhat offhandedly by Leota, with regards to Mrs. Fletcher's "delicate condition."

Mrs. Fletcher's full name is never revealed, and her identity remains predicated on her married status and her husband's name. For the reader, she evokes the idea of normative wife and woman. She then also falls within norms of viable pregnancy, but the narrative unfolds to reveal her lack of power in shaping her experiences with it. She first admits that she finds her hair to be unruly, particularly riddled by dandruff. "I couldn't of caught a thing like that from Mr. Fletcher, could I?" she nervously asks Leota, expressing an anxiety surrounding a biological mixing with others and its social implications; even if it is her own husband, she conveys it all in the disgusted language of infection. Yet Leota, who on the surface attempts to allay Mrs. Fletcher's fears, reframes her concern in an even more tenuous manner. She first assures, "it just ain't your fault" for, though she "doesn't mean to insinuate or anything…" she lets slip that "Thelma's lady just happ'med to throw out… that you was p-r-e-g, and lots of times that'll make your hair do awful funny" (53). Rather than being the

problem, the dandruff becomes the symptom – and the conversation reveals a level of commonplace surveillance over the most intimate of conditions.

Leota's admission creates considerable irony in Mrs. Fletcher's concerns of having contracted something undesirable from her husband. Now the stigma of poor personal hygiene, potentially suggested by her dandruff, loses its sting as Mrs. Fletcher focuses on who first outted her pregnancy. There is pregnant pause, as it were, in which she and Leota lock eyes in the mirror; the multifaceted truth of identities, constructed in the slippery narratives of Others', is nevertheless shared in this combative visual exchange. The mystery intensifies as the other beautician, Thelma, is of little use remembering – mirrors abound, along with the strangeness and misrecognition of self. She herself is jarred by her own reflection: "I forgot my hair finally got combed and thought it was a stranger behind me" (54). Self-recognition and power seem both in question, as Mrs. Fletcher in part becomes familiar with her "self," the gossiped mother-to-be, which she had previously kept closeted to herself. She tries to rein in this idea futilely, as the confusions mount.

When Leota presses to find out "how far gone" Mrs. Fletcher is, she further replies, "Why, I just barely knew it myself!" While it becomes Mrs. Fletcher's primary focus to determine who spread word of her pregnancy, the selection reveals the kind of alienation a woman experiences from her own body, perceived responsibility and choice, as public policing radically changes her understanding of herself; while she may have been biologically pregnant before, she now becomes *publicly* pregnant in this moment and scripted uniquely by that publicly known signifier. Her understanding of herself, her interpolation as a pregnant woman, comes not from her own realization but rather from one imposed by those around her.

Mrs. Fletcher, who confesses she does not much care for children, notes that "it wouldn't be too late, even now" to change her status. But Leota notes the limitations, as growing awareness about the pregnancy hem in Mrs. Fletcher's options: "Mr. Fletcher would beat you on the head if you didn't have it now… after going this far" (54). Relayed by gossip and imposed by surveillant social mores, the time for Mrs. Fletcher to maintain agency over herself diminishes. Leota urges surrender: "you just get you one of those Stork-a-Lure dresses and stop worryin'. What people don't know don't hurt nobody, as Mrs. Pike says" (54).

Layered atop this focus on Mrs. Fletcher's pregnancy is the fantastical construction, or at the very least fallible recollection, of Leota's new friend Mrs. Pike. Alongside her unfolding narrative, filled with many inconsistencies and outright contradictions, Leota spins not only Mrs. Pike's story but brings up the "travellin' freak show" (55). Mrs. Fletcher, in a moment that she seems to reclaim some control over her rogue identity, pertly renounces any interest in declaring, "I despise freaks" (55). As a pointed return to Mrs. Fletcher's vulnerability, and in an at once snide comparison of pregnancy (and Mrs. Fletcher) to the monstrous in one offhand comment, Leota encourages her client, "Aw. Well, honey, talkin' about bein' pregnant an' all, you ought to see those twins in a bottle [at the 'freak show'], you really owe it to yourself" (55).

The morbid description that follows defamiliarizes, and distances, the experiences of pregnancy and birth by discussing the congenital, "Siamese" twins. They were born full-term, though now deceased and preserved, and their "freak" disability is attributed to the fact that "their parents were first cousins and all like that" (55). Raising the incest taboo again

strikes a blow at Mrs. Fletcher, who flares up in her jarring protest: “Me and Mr. Fletcher aren’t one speck of kin” (55).

Critic Terry W. Thompson conceptualizes the preserved twins as a reference to the myth of Janus, the “two-headed Roman god of new beginnings” (228). On the one hand, they reinforce the recurring spirit of “two-faced” personalities in the beauty parlor and the duplicitous nature of the characters in the story. Thompson goes on to suggest that as Mrs. Fletcher’s pregnancy becomes a “subject of community dialogue” (230), she is neatly presented with two choices herself: an illegal abortion to terminate her pregnancy or the decision to have the child. Nevertheless, I argue that the contexts of choices for Mrs. Fletcher become far more nuanced here and contrast to the “peace” Thompson cites in Mrs. Fletcher’s final “fixed smile” (231). For, as Mrs. Fletcher openly laments: “If a certain party hadn’t found [the pregnancy] out and spread it around, it wouldn’t be too late even now” (58). Perhaps rather than just the subject of pregnancy being under contention, we might see this dialogue of the subject extends most broadly to “subject” itself. Pregnancy here becomes a significant way of casting a person’s relationship to the fluidity of identity in subjectivity itself. She is always in a flux, her decisions qualified before fully available; and should we doubt this pervading struggle, even as Mrs. Fletcher acknowledges her loss of choices, she is very nearly muzzled and straitjacketed: “Leota was almost choking her with the cloth, pinning it so tight, and she couldn’t speak clearly. She paddled her hands in the air until Leota warily loosened her” (58).

The silences, pauses, sideway glances, and misattributed information trouble this articulation of pregnancy and raises broader questions about individual identity and how much control over it one has. The ambiguity about identities, and where people’s power falls

and to what extent it is shaped by others and outside perceptions, regularly reverse. The recognition of the title character, "the petrified man" – or Mr. Petrie, the carnival spectacle who turns out to be a man wanted for raping four women – occurs because the elusive Mrs. Pike thought "he just looked familiar" (60). The resolve, and reward, collides with the only male character to speak in the entire piece: Billy Boy, the child wreaking havoc on the salon. Mrs. Fletcher catches him and, precluding Leota's public paddling of him, notes, "I guess I better learn how to spank little old bad boys" (61). The spanking, accompanied by his "belittling screams," creates a parallel spectacle in the beauty parlor that summons onlooking women. In a sense, Mrs. Fletcher validates herself in the public gaze by implicitly accepting her role as mother (and, inevitably, to a male child). He returns violent kicks to Leota and Mrs. Fletcher – "as hard as he could" – but Mrs. Fletcher remains unmoved, now wearing "her new fixed smile" (61). Her identity has been regulated and, for the time, reined in and she has performatively succumbed to the forcible role of normative "mother-to-be," imposed by the salon community.

The entire vignette raise issues of spectacle, the monstrous, fear of intermingling and integrity of the self – who outlines the self? Where are her parameters, and how much agency does she exert over them as opposed to what extent is she at their mercy? The narrative power harnessed in this space, particularly by Leota, suggests both the vitality and necessity to create meaning from realities in the form of stories – but likewise, how so much truth may be constructed in lies. Mrs. Fletcher, known always by her married name, still reveals the haunting concern about sexual intermingling (at first framed by her concern for dandruff) and the significance of the social environment to exert and attach meaning to her experience and status. The theme of both the familiar and unfamiliar, shifted from Mrs. Fletcher's own

resistance to her body and identity's public reading ("pregnant") parallel that of the carnival spectacles – the babies preserved in the jar, or the white make-upped face of Mr. Petrie, the "petrified man," parallel alongside Mrs. Fletcher's role as pregnant woman.

This outside Otherness centers around Mrs. Fletcher's developing pregnancy. The mundane setting contrasted with the extraordinary spectacle of the grotesque in the traveling carnival – and connected through the sexual violence enacted by Mr. Petrie ("petrified") – illustrate the marginality. The Southern Gothic genre allows us to read pregnancy, even within so-called normative restraints, as constrained and muzzled construction.

Pregnancy at the Margins: *As I Lay Dying* and *Getting Mother's Body*

While our discussion has largely focused on pregnancy, here we will deliberately parallel the unfolding narrative of motherhood within the context of developing pregnancy.. One may not be born, but become a woman; yet, as Roosevelt Beede matter-of-factly remarks in *Getting Mother's Body*, "Without a mother, you don't get born" (50). I would like to begin by grounding my discussion of the "mother" as a subject-in-process position: not only a fruitful place to reconsider the Enlightenment subject (what does it mean, to at once be both the subject and the object, the dialectic that resolves to be "two" individuals?), but specific women's relationships to the position of motherhood. So often, "the mother" is discussed as though as it is a kind of monolithic idea to which a woman, once she has borne a child or nurtured a comparably dependent human being, is attached. Even diverse narratives about motherhood often still simplistically reference "the (archetypal) mother" as though it is some static, overarching signifier that references that woman's entire entity.

Not only am I interested in pushing beyond this reading – that itself is nothing new. Seeing women as wombs, while culturally persistent, prompts the heart of feminist critique

of patriarchy and sexist oppression. Yet, perhaps with more nuance, I want to look at the idea of "the mother" as a transient space, about which the self may be defined and related, even as it is attached to singular women's lives. As a contested space that is still largely imbued with as the meaningful "beginning" of the self, the ultimate parameters on consciousness, what does it mean for a woman herself to travel in and out of this space of "mother"? How does pregnant embodiment locate a woman distinctly "at the margins"?

In particular, I would like to consider two texts that construct a dialogue around this notion of the Southern pregnancy and the mother: William Faulkner's 1930 novel *As I Lay Dying* and Suzan-Lori Parks' responding text, *Getting Mother's Body,* from 2003. These texts' intertextuality, particularly considering the clear and deliberate effort of the latter to reimagine and reconsider Faulkner's text centered around African Americans' experiences – notably absent in Faulkner's original story – provides a host of analyses. At the core of these two texts, we have both the disembodied voice of a mother (either dead or dying) accompanied at some distance by her lingering materiality and physical body (often seen as a "burden" – evidenced in Faulkner's matriarch Addie Bundren's very name); and a teenaged woman, her daughter, driven by her own burden: a socially viewed illegitimate pregnancy underway. In each texts' commentary, however, they share an interesting perspective on this idea of the mother as a subject-in-process and the unique spaces she fills and relative to the other characters. I read them both as providing radical reconsiderations of women's relationship to pregnant embodiment and their status as mothers.

Both texts, *As I Lay Dying* and *Getting Mother's Body,* encounter illegitimate teenage pregnancy, with significantly different valences of race and class, but all neatly outside the constraints of socially accepted pregnancy. Likewise, the presence of the mother – both the

physicality of her body's burden as well as her disembodied, haunting voice – directs the narrative. The retelling and remembering of these bodies, to reconsider these narratives, mark time in much the way Yaeger addresses Southern women writers' work. While the texts work within a particular Southern tradition, they are still notably "outside" of Yaeger's focus. Nevertheless, I feel that the evocation she mentions below resonate and illuminate the texts considerably:

> Repetition – with stories that will not go away, that keep repeating themselves endlessly, helplessly, in a kind of literary stutterance that creates a rich field of intertextual neurosis, while black lit about the South contributes to the exorcism of this repetition by ringing these stories backwards, providing white mammies for black babies and digging children out of ditches as fast as white culture flings them in. (13)

Faulkner's 1930 novel *As I Lay Dying* moves primarily through its male characters' actions – yet, notably, they arguably move about what Marc Hewson has called "the almost absent center of the novel," Addie Bundren (551). Central as both the dying woman and, later, corpse that motivates her family's struggles to bury her, Addie likewise unites the family even in her unconventional presence as its matriarch. While she remains largely at the margins of the story per se – only one chapter affords her the space to speak in the novel – her body and the roles bound up in its earthly existence nevertheless shape and direct the text's and other characters' actions thoroughly. In the token chapter of *As I Lay Dying* in which Addie Bundren does narrate, she speaks from beyond the confines of mortality and the restraints of her matriarchal body and role in marriage.

Critics largely complicate Addie's role in the text, fluctuating between a reading of her maternity and, almost alternatively, her materiality. As the matriarchal figure, Addie may be construed as steering her family's movement through mother nature-like forces, which are matched by their natural surroundings and disasters of the journey, to be sure. On the other hand, the specter of her death and her grotesque corpse loom over the story's unfolding, much as does her oddly disembodied narration at the core of the text. Engaging these two readings, however, demonstrate not only how the text interrogates motherhood and Dewey Dell's developing pregnancy, but it also reconsiders the marginality of maternity – for Addie Bundren complexly remains both "outside" the definitive text but likewise shapes, directs, and even connects the slippage of her family's story as direct result of her matriarch position.

Not surprisingly, these two contrasting positions, of body and margin, complement Addie's character further; as the mother of the family, she is the literal source of life for the family members. Interestingly, while she creates the basis for shared community between the (mostly male) Bundrens, her voice expresses an urge toward individuality.[23] Nevertheless, her presence overshadows all by its connection to her imminent death. In her essay on the novel, "Extremities of the Body: the Anoptic Corporeality of *As I Lay Dying*," Erin Edwards posits a fascinating consideration of Addie Bundren's role as this matriarchal corpse. Edwards discusses Addie Bundren's role in the language of "necropoetics," which is "an experimental and vertiginously uncertain tropology through which the body is composed and decomposed, becomes *the defining mode of corporeal experience* in the novel" (739-40,

[23] Cinda Gault, in her essay "The Two Addies: Maternity and Language…," notes that Katherine Henninger observes in Faulkner's work, "the tension between men's desire to have women represent collectivity, and women's desire to assume the perceived power of individualism is embodied in the battle for control of bodily reproduction" (440).

emphasis my own). In a sense, she grounds her discussion on the two dominant readings of the body in the text: that of the Foucauldian body "produced or 'inscribed' by social power" and some notion of a body whose "materiality precedes the influence of culture" (740). She sees the narrative reaching beyond these limitations, extending the constant question of, "What is a body?" and contesting such borders through the prevalence of Addie as corpse.

To this end, she posits Addie Bundren as the extension of this question, noting that as a corpse, Addie "inaugurates the strange life of a previously unaccountable corporeality." For Edwards, the phantom and physical presence of Addie's dead body, of the speaking corpse and fetishized burden of her family's trek to fulfill her dying wish – for, as Tull notes, "She wanted it. She come from it. Her mind was set on it" – disrupts the larger discursive-materialist debates of the body. Edwards goes so far as to suggest that Faulkner reverses Judith Butler, "revealing an emergent ontology of the body, continually reiterated and reformed." Nevertheless, as largely neglected by Edwards' critique, the specificity of the *maternal* body undergoes a kind of reversal here. We have the unique situation of a dead *mother* – a symbol of birth, and life's beginnings, but likewise the division between the self and the other. These women's narrations suggest the mother's subject position as both ever-present (in the at times macabre struggles with the coffin and family's journeys) but also ever-elusive, as she herself articulates near the center of the novel, from a space just "beyond" the constraints of time and embodied mortality. What does it mean to have the voice of maternity, the matriarch of a family, the site at which traditional individuation has been suggested to occur, speak from the dead? To have the elusive idea of a "mother," something both larger than and contained with Addie Bundren's identity, with which she and her family grapple? Not only does Addie trouble "what is a body?" through her narrative by

"trac[ing] the contours of containment for mothers in [her society]" (Gault 441), but she furthermore pressures further the question, "whose body?" This question, mystified by Addie's removal from the text, can be seen as guided by Dewey Dell's emerging pregnant embodiment that concurrently develops in the text.

While other critics have expounded at length on Addie's role as mother (see Hewson, Holcombe), they often discuss pregnancy as secondary to language. Many inscribe the neat life/death binaries to Addie's life, noting for instance that "as a giver of life she is made weak, yet as a corpse she is strong (445). By imposing this kind of starting and stopping, a linearity to life that seems defied in the text foremost by the fact that a woman "speaks" despite being dead, negates the alternative generational space suggested in the text. Her subject position, as both one with a voice and one who is dead, may be construed as a position that evades a neat life and death subject-position. In part, this too gestures toward the potential of the larger critique offered in Addie's words. For instance, Deborah Clarke observes in *Robbing the Mother* that "one needs oral expression to challenge, and possibly hold off, maternity" as exemplified through Addie Bundren's experience (44). While it is important to note the politics of voice, it seems naïve to impart to it such great value – even when granted it, in her immaterial state, Addie Bundren uses words and their lacks to critique the system therein. It is not only the access to language and expression of self that oppresses her; it is the languages themselves that threaten in their evasion to limit her expression and confine her experiences as mother and woman. She offers a critique not only of the power structure responsible for her impoverished choices with regards to reproduction and social roles – the matriarch that she is – but she seems to struggle at the margins *with* the margins. Rather than having access to something within, she demonstrates the futility of the

framework itself. All individuals enter life via some understood construction of pregnancy or motherhood, at the very least from a biological experience – how telling is it that she insinuates such a concept nevertheless remains evasive and twice removed ("gaps in people's lacks") from expressing a kind of authentic meaning?

I cannot help but think that her interrogation of the body may be paralleled usefully in the consideration of its maternal history. Addie's distance and connections to the other characters in the novel hinge on her role as mother. Significantly, her chapter devotes considerable attention to her connection to maternity and marriage. She candidly reflects on the oppressive roles of wife and mother that she has held. She speaks frankly on her struggle with maternity and life as a wife and mother, declaring that she "was not a true mother." These "un-mother-like" sentiments are expressed as she struggles to articulate the idea of motherhood, the language used and the very word itself:

> I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not… I knew that that word was like the others: just a shape to fill a lack… [and] that words are just the gaps in people's lacks. 172-174

Critics have considered at length Addie's soliloquy and relationship to the power of language – or *its* lack, and what it might mean that a woman can only speak freely with a disembodied voice, and in fact an ostensibly dead subject position. What I am interested in here, however, is this recurring idea of a space, of a vessel, of something twice removed – of a gap in a person's lack – and this articulates the absences in discourse to accurately articulate pregnancy and resulting motherhood. This excerpt of her thoughts suggest at once both space and absence, critical to Addie's story as well as her own instance of dis/embodied

disruption in the text. How might her words further illuminate this idea of maternity as the margins, of the margin that is pregnancy? Likewise, how does her struggle illuminate semantically, in their gesture towards absence and at once excess?

One the one hand, throughout *As I Laying Dying*, the Bundren men in particular struggle uniquely with Addie's death. Each one's story may be read as suggesting the "gap" in their unique lacks that she has filled, as they alternately place Addie literally or metaphorically within vessels or alternatively piercing or hollowing out these spaces. For instance, for Vardaman, it is captured in a chapter famous for its brevity as well as its density – his mother is, after all, "a fish." He realizes his own mother's mortality through the fish's that he has caught, and the simplicity of the equation, "My mother is a fish," alternatively fills the vacant page of words with extended meaning. For Cash, she is the reason and future inhabitant of his neatly beveled coffin, which he handicrafts outside the window of her sickroom. He painstakingly crafts this "space" for her, macabrely as she in part looks on. The space's significance is highlighted in the text as it is one of only two times Faulkner's novel manipulates the textual writing and surpasses the arbitrary system of language to convey meaning. Here in the novel, coffin is physically represented in the text with the outline drawn on its side, "clock-style," a picture iconic as a traditional coffin-shape captured there on the page. The image serves as an inverse to the womb, instead serving as the space in which Cash needs to confine his mother. Tellingly, furthermore, Addie is ultimately laid to rest upside down in the coffin, to preserve the integrity of her burial, or wedding, gown. Thus, the space manipulates her own, the dress given the wider, clock-like end so the dress will not be compromised by the narrower end of the box. Likewise, her modeling a head-first dive into death neatly parallels the ideal model of birth, with an infant's head exiting the

mother's birth canal first. Convention is broken and her own bodily form is made secondary to the preservation of a symbol, all in spatial parameters: of yet another placeholder, the beginning of her narrative as mother, her narrative as wife. Serving again these needs, these pursuits, the often empty rituals of the male Bundrens around her, Addie is not only laid to rest 10 days late and upside down in a box. She likewise suffers the mangling indignity of holes being pierced in her face while in the coffin, a misguided and macabre effort by Vardaman to provide her with air holes in his need to preserve his illusion of her as a living being.

Addie's attempts her own articulation of these subsequent containing and hollowing. She remarks of her own body, in reference to her status as a married woman and mother: "The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a [where, in the text, a blank space is deliberately preserved]" (173). Addie defines her identity in motherhood continually as a disparate collection of meanings, contained in that "space, vessel" or word "mother" – motherhood, rather than being her identity, becomes the space through which she has moved, by which she is defined and understood among the text's other characters. The title of the text itself suggests this: knowing that it references a dying woman, "laying" suggests the past tense yet ongoing action, the in-process of becoming that Addie tries to discuss. As both her story and Willa Mae's in *Getting Mother's Body* feature discussions of life from an out-of-time narrator associated with death, they refashion an idea of "motherhood" outside the conventional bounds of linear time.

In addition to filling these "gaps" and being made to suit the maternal needs of the Bundrens in life as well as in death, Addie's narrative itself works to highlight these absences. Likewise, her words become a foreshadowing frame to pregnant daughter Dewey

Dell's growing narrative in the text. Beyond the position of maternal, she critiques in part the position of maternity, of the "mother's body" at large. This aspect of Addie Bundren's narrative recalls Julia Kristeva's thoughts on maternity particularly as she notes that "pregnancy has no subject… it is a cipher" (79). Her use of "cypher" reflects the struggle between absence and excess once again, for one of cypher's definitions is "an arithmetical symbol or character (0) of no value by itself, but which increases or decreases the value of other figures according to its position." Likewise, this mathematically and spatial notion is extended to include "a person who fills a place, but is of no importance or worth, a nonentity, a 'mere nothing.' " Yet alternatively, along the vein of meaning making, a cypher can be "a secret or disguised manner of writing, whether by characters arbitrarily invented…, or by an arbitrary use of letters… intelligible only to those possessing the key." In a sense, then, it occupies a space yet constitutes nothing or likewise may be an arbitrary mode that nonetheless serves meaning making. The continuing slippage between what seem to be opposite dualities throughout the text – presence and absence; birth and death; meaning and a placeholder for meaninglessness – serve as textual guides to a rereading of maternity and pregnancy. They afford a stance of critique, voiced predominantly by Addie Bundren but likewise conveyed through absences – her own; the lack of support Dewey Dell seeks in her burgeoning pregnancy; the silences in the text like the holes in punctured (ultimately futilely) in Addie's coffin and face.

Dewey Dell takes up this gauntlet, as her own body both connects to her mother's and the larger notion of *a* mother's body, through her developing pregnancy. The transformation and sequence suggests the circular nature of maternity. In the proverbial and literal act of relocating Addie Bundren's body, her daughter Dewey Dell is undergoing an embodied

transformation as well which notably prohibits the acceptance of her own mother's passing. She notes, in her struggle, "I heard that my mother is dead. I wish I had time to let her die" (120). Struggling with her secret pregnancy, Dewey Dell's fearful thoughts tellingly fluctuate between acceptance of her mother's passing and her own approaching status as "mother." She, like her mother, occupies a kind of liminal space – but, again, in a play of inverses, Dewey Dell conveys the seeming opposite of her mother's death in her own fleshy excess. Though her thoughts are tempered throughout with this anxious secret, throughout the novel her pregnancy remains invisible to those around her. The insistence of time and her acquisition of a mother's body concern her. These fears become embodied, and are expressed in the telling form of a persistent heartbeat, suggestive of life itself – a sure metronome punctuating the insistence of time's passage and pregnancy's development: "too soon too soon too soon" (120).

Whereas the Bundren men each displace "their gaps," the empty space of Addie onto some fetishized object (a fish, a horse, a coffin, a new pair of false teeth), Dewey Dell physically and metaphorically moves into the space vacated by her mother. She likewise narrates about her own identity and materiality, waxing crudely raw in terms of her developing mother's body, referencing herself as a "little tub of guts" that clearly does have something "else important in it" (58). She wonders about the parameters of her self here in her emerging pregnancy, playing with ideas of aloneness, singularity of self, and her subjectivity. Her thoughts read curiously like a riddle, as she works through the frustrating articulations of self and not/self. First, she laments her aloneness:

> It's because I am alone. If I could just feel it, it would be different, because I would not be alone. But if I were not alone, everybody would know it. And

> [the doctor] could do so much for me, and then I would not be alone. Then I could be all right alone. (59)

Such a bewildering stream of existential thoughts, yet they are at once insightful as she reveals the faults in this narrative of the "I" and of the self. Early in her pregnancy, Dewey knows about her excess (and developing baby) through a *lack* only – the lack of menstruation blood. She longs "to just feel [the fetus]" as part of knowing – here, she references quickening and feeling the fetus move. She would not be alone, for she would have proof that her "little tub of guts" – her corporeal self – houses something Other than herself. And yet here, as she struggles back against this desire to feel and to know that she is not alone, she acknowledges the other alienating feelings that would arise. These social pressures force her to keep her pregnancy secret as well as to struggle for an abortion in private.

Historically, it is important to note the struggles of Dewey Dell are in large part enforced legally during the Comstock era. As Holcombe notes in his essay, "Faulkner of Feminine Hygiene, or, How Margaret Sanger Sold Dewey Dell a Bad Abortion," he argues that the primary female characters in the novel (Addie, Cora, and Dewey Dell) all "undertake a commercially thwarted protest against enforced maternity" (204). He calls all three women's efforts "failed maternal protests" further "exposing that motherhood is not a reserve for female agency under the terms in which [Dewey Dell] is obliged to engage in it" (217). He concludes by suggesting that Faulkner "makes visible the work of disciplining the potentially subversive power of the maternal body, work that is achieved by containing its generative capacities within a strict rubric of profitability enforced by denying women the language, the rights, and the means required to control their reproductive practices" (218). These arguments poignantly raise the oppressive legacies of pregnancy, to be sure – that

women denied these reproductive political abilities are fettered by their reproductive capabilities. Their names suggest the inevitability of their relationship to motherhood: Addie Bundren, whose name may easily be read as "adding" or ever expanding on "burdens," as her family inevitably proves to be; as well as Dewey Dell, whose name suggests clear sexual, fecund meaning (Kovesdy 261).

Nevertheless, while acknowledging the value of such a critique, I would like to extend this argument to consider a more fragmented conclusion. By framing these women's relationship to reproductive politics as one of either "failure" or "success" would seem to oversimplify the clear resistance in the text to accommodate neat binaries. The self/Other, as the ultimate binary that we likewise find at the cite of pregnancy, can likewise be seen to originate the broad spectrum of "gray" explored at length in both Addie's monologue and later, Dewey's thoughts. Never uninformed by the material conditions or historical politics of the Depression era in which these women reside, their experiences are framed by a much farther-reaching set of narratives that in their origination make discussion about pregnancy and identities evasive, elusive, and lacking in the first place (and, arguably, provide firm foundation for the *de jure* restrictions and lasting *de facto* discrimination that lingers to this day).

In her reflections, Dewey also reveals the alternatives to and of the space outlined by the "mother": rather than revealing the parameters of the self, she exposes the unraveling of such an idea. Dewey laments being "alone." Her aloneness comes as result of diverse narratives – her inability to articulate herself for fear of social upbraiding, and her own struggle to grasp herself as no longer a not-one. She cannot share her state, she has lost guidance (particularly in the form of her own mother), and sharing her state risks any sense

of community support which she direly needs – and tellingly, what she might have understood if she too had been privy to her mother's monologue that was otherwise told out-of-time and mortality. That, in one sense, her *not* being alone alienates her into solitude – her womb's content, the fetus or Other, limits her ability to share her state with others while likewise revealing the always already tenuous limits of her (the) self. Her anxiety here reveals a great deal about the ambiguity of the "self" only exacerbated, but not exclusive, to pregnancy.

She likewise gestures to the institutional narratives that construct her "aloneness" and how it can rightly be maintained or enforced. With outside assistance, in the form of (illegal) abortion from a doctor, she would ultimately return to a complete state of "being alone" – but "being all right alone," docilely brought back into line with the social sexual mores presumed of a young, single woman so long as it precedes a visible pregnancy. Dewey Dell's inheritance, then, of the mother subject-in-process illustrates the stark contrast of anxieties of the self, and their illusions; and her deliberations reveal not only the oppressive challenges to women's materiality in pregnancy – for, as we have established a poor, unmarried, white teenager in the Depression, Dewey surely falls "outside" the bounds of a socially acceptable mother-to-be. Her own struggles to identify her "self" and "Other" with satisfaction clearly connect back to the death of her own mother, the birth of herself. She struggles with this connection, the possibility of collectivity: "I feel my body, my bones and flesh beginning to part and open upon the alone, and the process of coming unalone is terrible" (62).

Billy Beede's Baby Belly and *Getting Mother's Body*

Bookending this struggle is Suzan Lori-Parks *Getting Mother's Body*. The title itself references the overt arc of the quest motif – the search for the grail, the womb in fertility

rituals. Furthermore, they are inverted again, in the spirit of Faulkner, by the macabre destination of a dead mother's body in her grave developed alongside the emerging pregnancy of her teenage daughter. Faulkner's text may be read as a struggle to bury a body, to trouble the distinctions of the self and the other in the phantasmic presence of a deceased matriarch in a wandering family displaced by modernity. Whereas, on the other hand, Parks' novel develops around the unearthing and resurrecting of a mother's body with her assets – playfully, the quest becomes a treasure hunt of sorts, a play on Addie's commodifiable children's names, Cash and Jewel. Both narratives form the backdrops against which a teenage daughter's pregnancy develops. In a sense, then, both consider what it means to apprehend, to develop, or (in the title of Parks' work) *to get* a mother's body as one's own.

While Faulkner's text continually returns to the idea of spaces, as words (in what feels like a grim structuralist critique among other things) and gaps for meaning and identity, *Getting Mother's Body* pursues this focus with its recurring notion of "the hole." We may consider this in correlation to the central effort of each text that is outlined by their titles: while Faulkner's "central conceit" is the "seeming impossibility of burying the dead and rotting body of Addie Bundren," or of containing her in a space(s) such as the grave or a neatly crafted coffin, Parks' text moves opposingly to inter the buried body of the mother, Willa Mae Beede (Wright 143). Notably, both struggles occur concurrent to the developing trajectory of a teenage daughter's unwanted and unexpected pregnancy. Additionally, both of these models contest the neat genealogical, teleological and forward movement from child- to motherhood. Instead, in their gaps and absences, they suggest a more nuanced and ambiguous understanding of lineage, birth, and death as well as the outlines of the self/individuality.

Importantly, Parks' piece address a notable gap in Faulkner's original novel: she continues the reflection on sexual mores and motherhood in poor, southern United States. Yet she contextualizes the discussion overtly by addressing race and the dense, historical legacy informing such mores for southern non-whites. In Faulkner's novel, the Bundrens are identified as poor, rural-dwelling southern whites. Racial diversity in the text is limited to, interestingly, off-hand comments about the Bundrens as they approach "blackness" in their remove from privilege.

While Parks' text stands of its own accord, and there is to be sure something problematic about continually harkening back to its male-written predecessor in comparison, the text is necessarily an homage, offshoot, and re-rendering of the original. To read it as such, so deliberately cast as it is, seems only to highlight the ideas that may be seen as conveyed by the text. Dewey Dell's and Billy Beede's narratives of pregnancy mirror the exchange made between the two texts and matriarchal figures: in *As I Lay Dying,* Dewey Dell's pregnancy remains in its early ("invisible") state yet persistent, known only to herself, Lafe, and her brother Darl. Billy Beede, on the other hand, bears ample evidence of her "getting (a) mother's body." She's ever characterized as "Billy Beede and her baby-belly and no husband" (48). For this, she gets to more candidly respond to others' dismay at her swelling, defiant body.

The idea of the "hole," *Getting Mother's Body* reply to Addie's "gaps in people's lacks" and even the visual omission on the page in her monologue that expresses where her hymen used to be. This is the inherited philosophy Billy Beede learned from her deceased mother. We see it in practice first, through Billy Beede, then hear the words of the dead Willa Mae in blues stanzas of a subsequent chapter explain it. It is telling that Billy first uses

it when trying to get a wedding dress for a reduced price – a moment when her maternity as well as her relationship as daughter are both featured prominently. Playing on Ms. Jackson's sympathies, Billy Beede reminds her of her "lack" of mother's status, even at the moment her growing status as a mother-in-process shows:

> "You make your dress yrself too?" I asked. "My mother made mine for me," Mrs. Jackson says. And then she goes quiet. The Hole shapes more words in my mouth, all I gotta do is let them out. "Willa Mae, you know, my uh –"
>
> "Your mother," Mrs. Jackson says, saying 'mother' out loud for me.

Finding this "hole" in Mrs. Jackson through an appeal to pathos – referencing both her own lack and excess as an orphaned mother-to-be – Billy Beede succeeds in getting the wedding dress for far less than its initial price. In return, there is a persistent "hole" in Billy's speech that Mrs. Jackson fills here – that of her mother. Then, the omissions in language become as telling as the present words. Further complicating this omission in the growing presence in Billy that signifies her own beginning pregnancy and connection to motherhood herself. Willa Mae suggests both the vulnerability and inevitability of the "hole" – referencing Addie's idea of words as spaces, or lacks:

> When I say Hole you know what I'm talking about, dontcha? Soft spot, sweet spot, blind spot, Itch, Gap, call it what you want but I call it a Hole. Everybody's got one, just don't everybody got one in the same place. …Not just a lack, now, but the craving too.

Here, the "Hole" becomes a way in – a person's lack always suggests a corresponding desire. And here, we return to Kristeva's text and the suggested space of the "mother" as a cipher – as that space, a non-entity, a hole that nevertheless suggests a way in towards meaning(s).

Willa Mae's phantom presence urges on treasure hunters; and her daughter's final decision to see her pregnancy through.

This idea of "hole" then becomes a flagrant space to reconsider how absences and presences work. How, in the sense (as modeled through Addie Bundren) a woman's pregnancy is both an acquired presence at the loss of a hymen (the "hole" or biological as well as cultural understanding that she is porous to the "Other," open and even available for invasion).

To be "the gaps in people's lacks" furthermore reckons with the idea that a woman suffers from lack – the fleshly penis in Freud's reading or the more elusive power of the phallus for Lacan. In either case, Addie's words extend the metaphor further to embrace the idea.

Both texts play off this notion of a hole, of an absence that at times is highlighted for its emptiness and need to be filled, and others. I am intrigued by this idea because it feels at once both a critique and an inversion of the idea of mother as womb, as receptacle. Rather than her containing the space, as something to be filled, as a child in utero, the texts reconceptualize her as shaped, contained, and fetishized within this space. Motherhood has been the serviceable, cultural "gap to fill people's lacks" – a cipher forced to contain and fill, yet hold, tenuous origins of the self/Other. In a moment that may be at times (however frustratingly) characterized as a post-feminist moment, reverting to discussions of the biological (so steeped in a history of essentialism and oppressive limitations) may seem suspect at best. But in continued critiques of the subject (of the Enlightenment tradition), I think pregnancy narratives (such as these, that challenge popular and cultural renderings of

the mother and that likewise capture socio-economic and racial disparities in the cultural idea of “the mother” are a rife space, for lack of a better word, to start.

Chapter 4 Pregnancy as Other: Cyborgs, the Monstrous, and Anne Finger's *Past Due: A Story of Disability, Pregnancy and Birth*

"And it is of course not only the pregnant woman but also the fruit of her belly that is affected by being discussed in the context of probabilities and risks which, strictly speaking, make sense only for groups; her unborn is transformed into the crumb of a population." (28) – Barbara Duden, *Disembodying Women*

As we have moved from the narrow discussions of pregnancy to alternative vocabularies for "non-hegemonic" pregnancies, I would now like to consider different narrative perspectives, alternative embodiments, to refigure pregnancy for future discussion. Here, the discussion leads us to consider pregnancy not only as Othered from normative subjects and embodiment, but now celebrate it at the margins and the radical potential it shares there with other marginalized bodies.

We have refigured motherhood, and now we look to the potential of identifying pregnancy as, and with, the utterly alien. Julia Kristeva remarks that, in pregnancy, "indomitable, there is an other. And no one is present within that simultaneously dual and alien space to signify what is going on. 'It happens, but I'm not there.' 'I cannot realize it, but it goes on.' Motherhood's impossible syllogism" (Kristeva, *Desire in Language* 238). What can come from locating "the abject" in pregnancy? Alternately, how does pregnancy complement discussions of the cyborg, further removing us from a notion of the organic, normative individual?

Boldly Go… Fetal Images, the Monstrous Maternal, and Cyborgs

In the April 30, 1965 edition of *LIFE* magazine, American readers were given their first sighting of a developing human life in the womb.[24] The photography of Lennart

[24] As noted earlier, impositions of time via medical and legal discourses continue to impart particular meanings to stages of human development aside from a pregnant woman's experiences. For clarification, "embryo" comes from the Greek work "to swell" and is used to identify developing human life until the age of roughly 7 to 8 weeks (in particular, as this article explains, the formation of the "first real bone cells that replace cartilage" mark the shift from embryo to fetus). Then, "fetus," meaning "young one" in Latin, is used.

Nilsson, and accompanying article entitled "Drama of Life Before Birth," captures colorized images of "humans in their natural embryo state." The photo essay creates a powerful connection through the visual narrative, with scientific copy guiding the viewer's identification of his or her own humanness in the developing embryo. First, at three and a half weeks, the spectators behold an "embryo so tiny – about a tenth of an inch long – that the mother may not even know she is pregnant."[25] Despite the fact that this initially unidentifiable entity is the developing embryo, the captions graft familiarity onto the earliest images: for instance, the captions urge the viewer to recognize "the bulge" at four weeks that "is the lower-jaw-to-be."

We can see in action, through these photographs, the significant visual shift marking the "personhood of the fetus." Revered by the pro-life movement, this narrative runs parallel to the rhetoric choice As many critics have noted,[26] setting a precedent for this narrative, there are minimal connections made in the captions as well as in the images to the mother's body and lived existence during pregnancy. Instead, offset by the disconnect of the black background, the embryos and fetuses appear in a vacuum, not unlike specimens floating in formaldehyde-filled bell jars. This effect accomplishes two unique outcomes: first, in disconnecting the fetus from the mother's body entirely, we see the fetus cast as the emerging

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[25] This aside indicates the full shift from the "quickening" model, discussed in chapter 1, maintained through the mid-19th century in identifying pregnancy. In the progression from the AMA's professionalization and claimed authority over pregnancy, we see with these fetal images the full arrival of the empirical, "clinical gaze" in the womb. The article suggests the woman's own uncertainty of her pregnancy, an aside which seems symbolically significant (in effect acknowledging that "we can see and know what a woman doesn't about her own body") more than factually so. (It clearly could not be the case of the unique embryo in question as that woman is having her womb intimately photographed.) It would seem rather to function as our, the audience's, induction into this authoritative gaze.

[26] In her essay "Renegotiating Reproductive Technologies: the 'Public Foetus' Revisited," Georgina Firth chronicles this shift noting that "vision has become the primary sensory experience of the pregnant woman" at the expense of a woman's "alienation… from her own body" (56). This shift has likewise occurred in opposition to the intimate tactile sense of touch.

"I" from the womb – an individual foraging for life (for the essay is entitled "life *before* birth," after all) in the Darwinian spirit of solitary and bleak wilderness. The copy at twenty-eight weeks notes that the fetus will soon open its eyes "on a lightless world." In her essay "Foetal Images," Rosalind Petchesky speaks to this disconnection between the fetal images and a larger and cohesive narrative to the origins of life: "foetal imagery epitomizes the distortion inherent in all photographic images: their tendency to slice up reality into tiny bits wrenched out of real space and time" (175). These "slices" of reality become even more apparent in, for example, the eleven weeks' photograph. A small insert image is offered – "[here] the fetus is practically enveloped by the blood-rich placental mass" – in which the viewer cannot discern a fetus at all but sees a spongy sphere afloat instead. In comparison, the larger image is offered with the lead, "but when the placenta is peeled away…" and the image of the fetus's face and upper body are recognizably exposed. Reflecting back on Irigaray's "Maternal Order" essay, it seems that the intrusion of the photographer not only requires obscuring the mother but the distortion of the fetus's state as well (and to its detriment, as the placenta "envelopes" the fetus for the exchange of nourishment). Interestingly, the probing eye of the gaze in these images extracts not only a fetal-centric narrative at the loss of the mother and of their shared duality, but it does so at the expense of the fetus's own integrity.

Secondly, the macabre images also frame the fetus in a kind of monstrous tone. Particularly in the twenty-eight weeks' photo, where the copy editor waxed a more romantic tone, the fetal membrane "drapes like a veil," and the dull eyes soon to look upon (the

previously referenced) "lightless world" teem above a neck noosed by an umbilical cord.[27] The caption also makes reference that "the fetal membrane is the 'caul' of folklore." While it looks hauntingly like a shroud in the photograph, the occult reference summons a long list of cultural references of babies born still wearing the caul and having magical abilities or second sight as a result. All of these cadaverous elements arise interestingly just as the fetus appears most human, in the final section subtitled "A Thumb to Suck, a Veil to Wear." Interestingly, this morbid turn in the essay is amplified by the fact that photographer Lennart Nilsson later admitted that many of the fetuses photographed "had been surgically removed [from their mother's womb]… for a variety of medical reasons." Those that were not had similarly ominous fates; in the *LIFE* 50th anniversary homage to the piece, the article constructs a kind of eulogy on their behalf:

> not all of the embryos or fetuses seen… lived very long beyond the moment that Nilsson made their portraits. Doomed to a mortal end, they gained a kind of immortality through a photographer's inspired vision and tenacious pursuit of what so many, for so long, deemed the impossible.

This copy, published in 2005, concludes with an intriguing tone – the melodramatic language complements the suggestion of an unconquerable frontier. In this narrative, the embryos' and fetuses' lives are mourned as a kind of selfless sacrifice to a "vision."

This intervention of technology at the site of the fetus has been used in part to portray their singularity and "viability" at earlier developmental ages. However, as we bring the maternal body back into focus, we see that the pregnant body and mother-to-be's experience are also impacted by these advancements in medical technology. As a disruption to the static

[27] Despite the darker imagery, the article does diffuse the tone later by returning to more matter of fact tone and reassuring the reader that the umbilical cord, "seen here passing around the baby's neck" is "not uncommon" and that the fetus is "not in much danger."

singular self – which, though we have discussed at length in its contradictions, nevertheless gains new life in the "personhood of the fetus" narrative – we have the cyborg. Donna Haraway's "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" and subsequent work in the 1980s and 1990s on the cyborg work to challenge "natural" or "organic" ideas of the self-sustaining body. Her project is in part a narrative one that complements in part our previous discussion of Irigarary's "Maternal Order" for, as Haraway notes in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, "grammar is politics by other means" (3). At first glance, the cyborg may seem at odds with any argument rooted in the womb or fleshy narratives of embodied pregnancy. Nonetheless, I feel that the cyborg is pertinent here in our conversation as it poses not only an alternative notion of the parameters of the subject, but it does so critically by interpreting (albeit quite differently) the rise in technology that likewise contributes to the "personhood of the fetus." It broadens the understanding of the subject to a spectrum, which we will continue in our consideration of the monstrous as well as the Othered premise at the core of critical feminist disability theory.

Haraway establishes the narrative quality of the "cyborg" as it is both "a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century" (191). She grounds the premise of the cyborg on the "flaccid premonition" found in Foucault's biopolitics. Michel Foucault describes "biopolitics" as "a set of processes such as the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, [and] the fertility of a population," which focus broadly on the normalization of the general population ("Society Must Be Defended" 243). Within an era of biopolitics, the focus is on the broad "improvement of…human capital" ("The Birth of Biopolitics" 228). As theorist Jana

Sawicki notes, women's bodies and subjectivities thus are a crucial "dimension of… biopower" as they are the ostensible "reproducers" in society (191).[28]

Haraway's cyborg politics expand these dimensions considerably: "no longer structure[d] by the polarity of public and private," the cyborg furthermore "has no origin story in the Western sense; a 'final' irony since the cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic telos of the West's escalating dominations of abstract individuality, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space" (192). For our discussion, the cyborg offers a potential space to reconsider the limiting and fallacious narratives of "biological-determinist ideology" that attempt to hem in neatly the boundaries of the human and the Other. The boundary between the "physical" and "nonphysical" is exposed as a fluid one. While this project breaks in part with her proposed post-gender terms, Haraway opens up possibilities for further de-naturalizing the narrow scope of "the body" and showing the way different subjects can inter-relate (her suggestion of "affinity" over "identity").

While the cyborg looks forward, from science fiction to contemporary technology to embrace alternative embodiments and relationships, the monstrous harkens back to the grotesque, folkloric Other of horror. Rosemary Betterton, in her essay "Promising Monsters: Pregnant Bodies, Artistic Subjectivity, and Maternal Imagination," gestures toward this potential space of the monstrous. She discusses pregnancy in the defamiliarized language of the monstrous, an "otherness ['the other' being those things against we define ourselves] is enclosed in our bodies, as yet unknown… growing inside our own flesh and blood" – a time that ultimately creates "the body's alienation from itself" (81). Ultimately, for Betterton,

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[28] While Foucault's conception of biopolitics hinges largely upon the greater population, rather than the individual, it is worth noting that it likewise equips society to police the general site of pregnancy as both the actual and metaphoric space of reproduction.

"the embodied pregnant woman, like the monster, thus destabilizes the concept of the singular self, threatening to spill over the boundaries of the unified subject" (85).

This potential for the monstrous references a legacy of anxieties about women's reproductive capabilities and "maternal power" as perceived within a patriarchal society, which we have historicized in part. This artistic project suggested by Betterton borrows overtly from Rosi Braidotti's work on the reclamation of the monstrous. For her, "the monster is a process without a stable object. It makes knowledge happen by circulating, sometimes as the irrational non-object" (150). Furthermore, as we consider the potential of the monstrous in terms of pregnancy and alternative embodiments, we must do so with yet another renewed narrative from its historical legacy: **"the challenge that the hybrid, the anomalous, the monstrous others throw in our direction is a disassociation from the sensibility that we inherited from the nineteenth century, one which pathologized and criminalized difference" (Braidotti 213).**

Braidotti describes her project – "by MONSTERS, I mean a third kind of discourse" – as a means of creating this alternative way into "the history and philosophy of the biological sciences, and their relation to difference and different bodies" (61). Her interests combine at the intersection of both the "horrible" and the "wonderful," the bases for the Greek root word for monsters, *teras*. She weds these grotesque narratives with contemporary biotechnology, and finds pregnancy at their intersection:

> … the power of science over the women's body in favor of placing increasing emphasis on the rights of the fetus or of embryos. This emphasis is played against the rights of the mother – and therefore of the woman – and we have been witnessing systematic slippages between the discourse against genetic

> manipulations and the rhetoric of the antiabortion campaigners. *No area of contemporary technological development is more crucial to the construction of gender than the new reproductive technologies*. The central thematic link I want to explore between mothers, monsters, and machines is therefore my argument that contemporary biotechnology displaces women by making procreation a high-tech affair. (63, emphasis my own)

As we move from the cyborg to the monstrous, we continue alternative narratives of the Other that I feel lead to new developments in feminist disability studies. This core idea of Otherness, challenged by these diverse narratives haunting its margins, we have connected not only to pregnancy but found in diverse bodies beyond the single subject ideal. To continue this analysis, centered around a critique of this "pathologized" Other, I look to critical feminist disability theory. Furthermore, disability and pregnancy complement a critical reconsideration of the Enlightenment subject in two distinct ways.

Pregnancy and disability become mutually informative embodiments, both socially constructed and hemmed-in, yet biologically informed and present with a kind of insistence of the body's materiality. In her essay, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson suggests that "shape structures story" serves as the "informing principle of disability identity" (114). Garland-Thomson bases her argument off a previous one made by historian Catherine Walker Bynum. Bynum's proposition was that "shape or body is crucial, not incidental, to story. It carries story; it makes story visible; in a sense it is story" (qtd by Garland-Thomson 113-4). She further suggests that "shape (or visible body) is in space what story is in time…. Identity is finally shape carrying story" (114). At the heart of her query, and the one taken up by Garland-Thomson in her article, is "How can I be the same person I was a moment ago?"

(113). In other words, how can we neglect the inevitable change in the body and its immediate effect on the individual, on the concept of identity, and on the story at that moment in time? Such questions are central to the idea of narrative, as Garland-Thomson goes on to define as the "way of constructing continuity over time; it is a cohere knitting of one moment to the next" – making narrative "the link between time and human materiality" (113).

For Garland-Thomson's project, she highlights the prevailing "myth" of the "certainty and compliancy" of the human body (114). How does such a myth, predicated on ideas of the Enlightenment self previously discussed, continue to elide narratives of pregnancy? To shape and contain these narratives to conform to such a normative idea of the human body? Lastly, what does it mean to have such a perspective on bodies and narratives – what Garland-Thomson goes so far to describe as that "we would prefer to believe that story is independent from shape, perhaps we would even prefer to go as far as to claim that story structures shape" (114) – inform the diversity of narratives available on pregnancy? Pregnancy itself figures outside these embodied norms and rather than leaving it be inscribed by patriarchal and institutional norms, particular through legal and medical discourses, how might the radical, shape-driven stories of pregnancy be reconsidered?

Disability and Pregnancy in the Biopolitical Age: Anne Finger's *Past Due: A Story of Disability, Pregnancy and Birth*

As one of the foremost voices of feminist disability studies, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson situates the theoretical field as it "reimagines disability": "it aspires to retrieve dismissed voices and misrepresented experiences. It helps us understand the intricate relations between bodies and selves…. Disability, it argues, is a cultural interpretation of

human variation rather than an inherent inferiority, a pathology to cure, or an undesirable trait to eliminate" ("Feminist Disability Studies" 1557). Conceptions of disability inform the larger discussion of pregnancy as they are central to contemporary biopolitics. Despite women's expanded agency and gained reproductive rights over their own bodies, technological advancements and the current age of biopolitics place the female body – and the human site of reproduction – into a newly tenuous space.

With this emphasis upon reproduction, biopolitics informs the construction of subjectivities starting in the womb, dictating their "value" as "human capital" (Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* 229). This focus places particular pressures upon pregnancy, motherhood, and women's embodiment in general as producers for the "State." In many ways, this contemporary trend harkens back to the concept of "Republican motherhood," ingrained in eighteenth and nineteenth century American cultures. Nonetheless, with burgeoning technology and developments in prenatal care, women's role as producers has become arguably more problematic. In their article "Republican Motherhood Redux? : Women as Contingent Citizens in 21st Century America," Rose and Hatfield argue women face even greater societal pressures in recent years due to such advancements. Though they do not directly address Foucault's conception of biopolitics, Rose and Hatfield's findings are commensurate with his theory; they postulate the " 'de-volving' women's social and political citizenship rights to the states, where they will once again be highly variable and often contingent upon women's mothering status" (Rose and Hatfield 5).

While likewise placing female pregnant embodiment under greater scrutiny, bio-power further relegates the formation of "proper" subjectivities: demographically, who is fit to propagate in society, and what is their ideal progeny? Shelley Tremain addresses this

concern in her article "Foucault, Governmentality, and Critical Disability Theory," describing biopolitics as "a vast apparatus, erected to secure the well-being of the general population, [which] has caused the contemporary disabled subject to emerge into discourse and social existence" (5). Her argument thus suggests the formation of "disability" itself, in a contemporary context, attains meaning as a socially debilitating signifier through the advent of biopolitics. Significantly, at the locus of women's bodies and the site of reproduction, disability and the possibility of difference are policed keenly.

For this purposes of this chapter, I raise the particular issue of the disabled female reproductive body. Here, as a significant locus of difference and non-normative (non-masculine) reproductive embodiment, what are the politics of pregnancy here and how do they greatly inform the politics of difference? How might this proliferate feminist theoretical approach(es) to pregnancy? And could this particular intersection of differences, both rooted in the body but informed heavily by cultural constructivism, further complicate and confound understandings of reproductive rights, feminism(s), and constructions of difference? By way of a Foucauldian conception of biopolitics, infused with a feminist disabilities perspective, I seek to engage critically this contemporary site of pregnant embodiment. Furthermore, in keeping with feminist standpoint theory, I ground this discussion in narrative, Anne Finger's memoir of pregnancy as a disabled woman, *Past Due: A Story of Disability, Pregnancy and Birth*.

Historical Tableau: Female Embodiment(s) and Reproduction

Historically, the body – as a site of cultural construction, physical materiality, and lived embodiment – has remained a contentious subject of interrogation. In a struggle to reconcile human ability and reasoning, much of the patriarchal perspective on "the body"

remains marked by an element of somatophobia: an eagerness to distance (hu)man experience from the material limitations, needs, and parameters suggested by the lived experiences of corporeality itself. The lasting legacy of the Cartesian divide, stated simply by Descartes' well-known aphorism ("I think, therefore I am"), posits rationality as the distinguishing signifier of human existence. As such, traditional patriarchal philosophy has "established itself as a form of knowing… [achieved] only through the disavowal of the body… and the corresponding elevation of mind as a disembodied term" (Grosz 4). Likewise in her work *Dangerous Discourses of Disability, Subjectivity, and Sexuality*, Margrit Shildrick asserts that "to be a self—and more significantly a subject—with effective agency is, in every sense of the word, to be capable of exercising autonomy" (19). Thus, bodily functions that may seem to "detract" from the powers of the "mind" have been negatively derogated within philosophical discourse. Nevertheless, this conception of "autonomy" overtly discounts a variety of lived embodiments. Much as a result, individuals identified and Othered by their non-normative embodiment have been summarily marginalized as well.

While oppressive and discursively violent, such a broad scope of Otherness illustrates the "stable," self-reliant subject to be rare indeed. For as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson states – "we will all become disabled if we live long enough" – corporeal fluidity is part of the human condition (14). Furthermore, such a limited perspective on corporeality severely limits the interrogation of diverse embodiments – their differences made, by this model, to appear as pathologized "problems." Women's bodies and resulting subjectivities – as located outside the hegemonic "strong, well-informed, non-disabled, masculine body" (Hughes 400) – have long been marginalized and medicalized in this manner. Thus, much of feminist

theory politicizes and confounds these "problems" of the (non-normative) body in an effort to destabilize and subvert such an historical trend. Nevertheless, within this conversation, there emerges a necessary space for disability and so-called disabled embodiment.

While I posit pregnancy as an embodiment "outside" of normative conceptions of disability, I do so with a caveat: foremost, I do not seek to essentialize a definition of "disability" at large (for this chapter will counter such a myth directly).[29] Pregnancy may be read as complementary to an analysis of disability – as another site of non-normative embodiment. However, I do not group pregnancy with disability as I feel this could potentially elide the politics of difference and Otherness lastingly imposed upon those of "difference." While pregnancy brings to bear many cultural and social concerns – public policing of the mother-to-be, for instance – society generally ascribes acceptance to the concept of pregnancy, albeit problematically.[30]

Such a concern may be further highlighted by the social model of disability theory at the likewise problematic site of disabled embodiment. In her formative work *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson posits that "the disabled figure operates as the vividly embodied, stigmatized other whose social role is to symbolically free the privileged, idealized figure of the American self from the vagaries and the vulnerabilities of embodiment" (7). Here,

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[29] I realize I do so here, despite state law rulings to the contrary. For instance, in Florida and California, a new mother may file for temporary disability for her pregnancy. While in many ways this may be seen as a progressive, liberalist concession to pregnant embodiment, it still reifies the narrowed ideal of "stable, individual, singular" Enlightenment subject. Furthermore, it still problematically seems to graft "Otherness" onto an embodiment that is vastly responsible for the population's admittance into the world.

[30] Here, I myself commit an elision of controlled pregnancies – bodies already Othered by race, or socio-economically devalued by class, have been regulated from reproduction. The legacy of Margaret Sanger and the overt use of eugenics in the early 20th century, though beyond the particular scope of this paper, may not be overlooked. Ideally, a more lengthy discussion necessarily would address how such issues as these place pregnancy within a highly politicized context – one rife for the cytogenic testing within contemporary medicine, for example.

disability becomes the generalized foil to normative embodiment – which illustrates the problems of demarcating "disability" as it becomes a catch-all for socially ostracized Otherness. For this reason, Garland-Thomson defines disability as "the attribution of corporeal deviance—not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do" (6).

Notably, within history, differences have been grafted onto bodies – "raced" bodies, which challenged hegemonic whiteness; and likewise female bodies, so long presented as deformed or signified by a "lack." Contemporarily, and in contrast to different identity politics movements of the latter twentieth century, "disability" remains an often uncritically challenged signifier of difference within western society. This occurrence seems no less bolstered by the emergence and perseverance of the biopolitical state. Furthermore within this larger project of biopolitics and biopower, as Tremain states in a Foucauldian twist, "disability" is created by conceptions of bio-power rather than vice versa (Tremain 5); biopolitics create subjectivities of "normative bodies" to limit bodies' variation in general.

Thus, the significance of embodiment and non-normative corporeality, as sites for oppression and supposedly pejorative difference, warrants further analysis via feminist theory. In her work, Garland-Thomson goes on to further outline the complementary relationship between feminist and disability theories. While both broad signifiers of embodiment – "female" and "disabled" – fall outside Enlightenment norms of the stable, self-reliant, and implicitly masculine subject, they share further attributes in the broader tableau of difference. Feminism provides an "insistence on the relationship between the meanings attributed to bodies by cultural representations and the consequences of those meanings in the world" while disability studies proliferates feminist body theory analysis "so

that the bodily configurations and functioning we call 'disabled' will be included in all feminist examinations of culture and representation" (Garland-Thomson 21). Furthermore, feminisms' commitment to critique, for liberatory means, the construction and wholesale oppression of Otherness relies upon an "insistence that standpoint shapes politics; that identity, subjectivity, and the body are cultural constructs to be questioned" (21).

Reproduction, Discipline, and Biopolitics: Foucauldian Theor(ies) of the Body

Foucault illuminates the significant site of reproduction, a locus about which feminist theory and disability studies – as female and disabled embodiment – draw some significant findings on the body. In his *History of Sexuality Vol. 1,* Foucault notes a particular shift in power over life and death that prefigures an era of biopolitics. He remarks that through the Middle Ages the power of death and to kill served as a sovereign power "of the sword" (135). However, with social and economic shifts primarily rooted in the eighteenth century, Foucault suggests that such notions of power shifted to the right to life (135). With such a trend, he states, "one might say that the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death" (138). Here, he moves toward an understanding of contemporary approaches not only to "discipline" the body, but also to regulate and normalize bodies as population.

In his discussion of technologies of power, Foucault focuses upon two distinct varieties extant since the 18th century that both "center on the body" (*Birth of Biopolitics* 249). On the one hand, he notes the "disciplinary power" which accounts for the individualized body, malleable in its docility; here, the primary goal is to capitalize upon the usefulness of the body (249). Secondly, however, as a newer development informed by his particular focus on "biopolitics," Foucault examines how bodies are examined en masse, as

part of what he calls a "population" that can be quantitatively represented and empirically understood (249). This technology of biopolitics is one which "brings together the mass effects characteristic of a population, which tries to control the series of random events that can occur in a living mass, a technology which tries to predict the probability of those events" (249). Here, bodies are reduced to their "general biological processes" such as the "ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population…" (Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended" 249, 243).

This macrocosmic perspective nonetheless polices and disciplines at the individual level. I find that Foucault's analysis of biopolitics, and its exertion upon the development of society's "ideal" population, overlooks the highly politicized site of pregnancy itself. A feminist analysis, which seems necessitated by the concern of pregnancy itself, addresses this oversight between the micro- and macrocosmic. Taking the lived experiences, voiced by those within the biopolitical context, may provide further insightful perspective into the site pregnancy and constructions of difference therein.

Past Due: A Story of Disability, Pregnancy and Birth

My discussion of biopolitics, disability, and the site of female pregnant embodiment may be illumined by Anne Finger's *Past Due: A Story of Disability, Pregnancy and Birth.* The writer, in her own memoirs of disability and pregnancy, tells a narrative she finds far "past due" in its significant examination of her lived experiences: that of an ostensibly disabled, pregnant woman. As a woman who both works and is a patient within medicalized contemporary society, Finger's experiences illustrate with great clarity the breadth of Foucault's statements while providing a feminist standpoint perspective of one woman's individual feelings, struggles, and emotional responses. While Foucault's broader discussion

of biopolitics regularly posits the site of power and normalization with the population en masse, a reading of Finger carefully balances this macrocosmic view with a look into the individualized manifestation of biopolitics; as such, her narrative configures and maps upon Foucault a particularly feminist disability reading of biopolitics and pregnancy.

With her work in an abortion clinic, coupled with her own abortion in the past, Finger stands at the politicized position of a physically disabled woman with feminist politics. Thus her internal grappling, over the issues of pregnancy, reveals at this particular locus of embodiment much about the present issue of (specifically, reproductive) biopolitics, feminism, and disability within society today:

> Thinking about reproductive technology is hard for feminists: it's one of those issues that doesn't just divide the movement, but divides people within themselves. If we believe in the right of women *not* to have children, then do we also have to support the right of women to have children? To have access to technology that will help them to do that? What about the fact that the unequal distribution of resources within our society often means that middle-class women will have sophisticated medical techniques available to them, while poor women will struggle to get basic medical care? Can we get access to these technologies without increasing medical domination over women's bodies? Do these hamper our finding new ways for adults and children to have real connections beyond biological parenting and outside of the nuclear family? What about the very real pain that infertile women feel? Do we think about control of our bodies only in terms of freedom from state control, or do we also think of it in ways that are more active? (44)

Here, she seeks to articulate the contradictions found at the intersection of disability, feminist theory, and the material realities of embodiment. Furthermore, the subtext of her rhetorical questions unsettles status quo feminist readings of reproductive technology, neonatal politics, and how disabled women experience their reproductive and sexual bodies diversely. She disrupts a kind of mainstream feminist theory, suggesting pregnancy and motherhood are not necessarily traditionally imposed roles for all women – namely, just abled women as viable "reproducers" within society. What does it mean for a disabled woman, deemed "unfit for motherhood" (Thomson 26) by her visible embodied difference, to grapple with her own reproductive rights? I suggest that her monologue expresses the anxieties that arise within a Foucauldian conception of biopolitics, albeit on a personal and individualized level. Finger suggests the inadequacies of neo-liberalism here, questioning what rights one has and how these rights are enacting through society.

Past Due opens with a glimpse at Finger's life prior to her concluding pregnancy – a woman, visibly afflicted by polio, who works in an abortion clinic and thus regularly contemplates her own past abortion. Thus, the novel originates with overt issues of reproductive rights and technologies, and the conflicting personal emotions and experiences they have brought upon the narrator. Finger's narrative works to relate retroactively her pregnancy and labor. As a memoir, the story provides momentary lapses in chronology to recount details of Finger's disability and previous abortions. Prior to her pregnancy, Finger establishes herself as "a prisoner of medicalization," locating herself at the site of pathology and difference from which she works throughout the text (4). Thus, as she relates her story, Finger's work likewise investigates political issues while keeping the material experience of women's bodies at the fore of the text. Much like the abortion clinic in which she works –

which Finger describes in terms of female embodiment – the text itself remains closely connected to women's bodies and the emotional and physical pain therein. A palpable materiality, of fluidity concerning both reproduction and death, pervades the piece:

> By the end of the day, the rooms are thick with the smell like menstrual blood, but richer; the smell of the core of women. By the end of the day, the rooms are thick with mingled sadness and relief, and my head usually aches, and of course, my legs ache too. (5)

Finger continually juxtaposes women's bodily comportment, her own pain and physical experiences, alongside the larger contextualized issues she confronts within her memoir. Her narrative feels regularly disrupted – or powerfully edified – by her own physical pain and disability.

Early in the text, the narrator reveals the historical details of her disability. As a child in 1954, Finger developed polio when she was three years old (11). She then wore a host of "crutches and braces" and underwent multiple corrective surgeries. She suggests that even the efforts at her rehabilitation functioned problematically upon an ableist-informed model of subjectivity; such corrective measures, mentioned likewise by Thomson in *Extraordinary Bodies*, illustrate medicine's pervasive efforts to focus upon a "cure" for pathologized disability. This further complements Foucauldian biopolitics – the anxieties of who will reproduce, who will compose the population, necessarily upsets the subjectivities of those (the "disabled") who are seen to embody ailments, disfigurements, and impairments.

After basing her discussion within this context, Finger writes of her continuing struggles as a grown woman. As permanently "afflicted" with polio in an ableist context, her movement remains non-normative and serves as reminder of her difference: "I walk with a

cane now, a rolling walker, my body moving not with legs doing their own job, but a collective of shoulders and side and stomach – one whole side hitches up and then I toss my right leg forward" (12). Her bodily comportment suggests her discussion of the body as whole – a unit nonetheless bound up in her own subjectivity. Her physical movement involves the utilization of not only a cane – a direct challenge to the Enlightenment subject, as a sign of dependency – but she furthermore enlists her entire body in mobility. Finger's story bears an element of phenomenology, a "rematerialization" of the body, that directs the remainder of the piece. Similarly, the mobility of her story remains dependent upon the narrative of her bodily comportment.

Thus, Finger's body and her subjectivity – situated amid the lasting legacy of mind/ body dualism – figures prominently in her text. Specifically, Finger complicates the issues of pregnancy and bodily reproduction in her discussion of body and mind, and how she as a disabled individual wishes to be categorized. In parts, her discussion illustrates that she has internalized the norms within her culture – and the embodied, lived experiences of biopolitics. With her thoughts about pregnancy, she wants to produce something with her body. At first, she discusses reproduction as a potential space of making something anew "out of [her] imperfect body" (18). Pregnancy offers her a unique chance to "have control over [her] body: instead of letting it grow more frail, letting it lose its power, I want to make it grow, to do more, not less" (18). Here, Finger reveals the social pressures for heteronormative reproduction, as well as reproductive bodies, and her anxieties about capitulating to them. Thus, she indicates that she is ideologically "within" the system – and thus views her body as problematically marginalized – by society.

However, while Finger's discussion of pregnancy problematically cites the dominance of biopolitics and its manifestations in her own view of her body, she also indicates the kind of significant transgressive potential of pregnancy. Finger notes that "the world tells me to divorce myself from my flesh, to live in my head" (18). Her friend Mary, a self-avowed quadriplegic, complains she is often offered, in conciliation, " 'You still have your mind' " to which she replies, "I still have my body" (18). This memory, evoked by Finger, speaks to the lasting dualism and oppression of viewing the body as separate, and lesser, for disabled individuals. The "monstrous," historically, as it indicates "disabilities do not simply mark evil, but function as menace in… prototypical villains" of literature and western culture (Thomson 36). Thus one's body became a mirror for one's mind and spirit. Contemporarily, in an era of biopolitics, disability becomes "pathological rather than evil or immoral," as a difference "fraught with assumptions of deviance, patronizing relationships, and issues of control" (Thomson 37). Thus friend Mary's frustration with the statement is clear; likewise, the transgression of her acknowledge ("I have a body") is also marked.

Finger reflects on Mary's predicament with frustration. She struggles herself with the powerful suggestion of not only *where* disabled individuals are within society, but also *how* they are to be interpolated. Foucault notes, in his lecture series *Abnormal*, that "disability may well be something that upsets the natural order, but disability is not monstrosity because it has a place in civil or canon law. The disabled person may not conform to nature, but the law in some way provides for him" (64). Despite the problematically flippant treatment of disability, Foucault nonetheless highlights the significant trend of liberalism to locate "disabled" individuals as marginalized, non-normative, but usefully "within" the system. Here, Mary and Anne's sentiments express this co-optation: their embodiment, as difference,

bolsters an understanding of able-embodiment. Nonetheless, they are encouraged to "overcome" this difference with their mental faculties, which all the while reifies their bodies' differences. Nonetheless, as Finger here indicates, this problematic gesture merely encompasses "disabled" individuals through a reification of their difference; within a Foucauldian reference, power is enacted through "productive constraints" as it "*enables* subjects to act *in order* to constrain them" (Tremain 4).

Much in the same vein as Mary, Finger wants her "power to be *physical*" (18). She wants to reclaim her body as a potential site of empowerment, productivity – all things that, as a disabled woman, society dictates she cannot do; that at best she may have these things *in spite* (in an overcoming) of her body, not through her body, and here Finger forces the boundaries imposed upon non-normative bodies. As she reflects on her own efforts at embodied agency, she likewise recalls an image of a US postage stamp with a man in a wheelchair, "peering into a microscope" (18). The timing of her memory is symbolic, as her thoughts are apropos to her political potential as a disabled woman. The stamp's representation of a disabled man is that of a solitary, deliberate, "preferably male, brilliant, fleshless… Mind," which shows the potential outlet for physical disabled individuals. In this moment, Finger decides she "[doesn't] want to be fleshless" (18). As such, she makes a gendered statement about her embodied difference as well; Finger is a woman, and not traditionally associated in a (gendered) fashion to rationality. In so doing, she reclaims her gendered identity and her disabled identity, both entangled with her identification with the "body" by the same patriarchal discourses, and enacts her subjectivity through them. She chooses to carry her pregnancy to term.

As a pregnant woman, Finger disrupts mainstream reproductive rights discourses by asserting the significance of disability so often overlooked therein. As an abortion clinic worker, Finger situates herself as a feminist of leftist leaning thought in terms of reproductive issues. Nonetheless, she stands "outside" of many such liberalist feminist discussions. She notes that "most reproductive rights activists take a knee-jerk position against the anti-abortionists, advocating 'parental choice' and 'the right to privacy' without examining the very real disability issues involved" in choices of abortion (Finger 25). Regularly, when confronting this viewpoint on disability, Finger laments her inability to state that "disabled people [are] as good as everyone else" – a basic assertion she finds difficult to convey to an ablest audience (25). While Finger necessarily supplants her discussion in terms of common liberal feminist arguments, infusing her discussion with an understanding of biopolitics further highlights the tension within her dilemma. Though she may feel she is countering positions of privacy, and rights to one's own body – but such a viewpoint in part neglects the pressures within larger society to be "proper" producers of healthy, "normate" children.

To further inform her discussion, I look to an article recently published by a disabled woman who, along with her lesbian partner, chose to have children and were politically stymied by issues of fetus disabled development. Their discussion highlights the multivalent intersection of feminist theor(ies), reproductive rights, and disability. In an article entitled "The Choice of Two Mothers: Disability, Gender, Sexuality, and Prenatal Testing," Chloe Atkins discusses her moral concerns with amniocentesis. A commonplace procedure, particularly for women aged 35 or older, amniocentesis has gained much support in contemporary medical discourse. In her first pregnancy as a "geriatric parent," Atkins and her partner elected to have amniocentesis. However, she states that for her second child she

chose not to, as "we came to the conclusion that prenatal screening for disability became indistinguishable from that for gender and, as such, the procedure became morally untenable for us" (107). She relates her internal conflict over the issue, citing conflicting global stances that outline disability, in the spirit of biopolitics, as somehow a markedly different sort of "difference." Atkins states that current "bioethical policies bar the use of technologies for determining a fetus's gender but remain silent about their potential use for determining a fetus's sexuality, and they actively endorse their use in screening for disabilities" (107). Through her own examination, Atkins determined that "disability as an ignoble trait is a cultural artifact" and thus begins to view it much as, historically, her own gender (female) and sexuality (lesbianism) have been construed and culturally constructed in a similar fashion (107).

Atkins also illumines concerns for reproductive technology within a biopolitics-informed context. As such, she speaks to the concerns voiced in Finger's text as well, as a fellow disabled woman aware of social pressures against non-normative embodiment. Atkins, along with a broader aegis of social disability theorists, suggests that

> physicians and most of the public… erroneously presume that the lower quality of life associated with disability is a consequence of an individual's variance from the statistical norm in terms of species' functioning. Instead, disabled activists argue they should focus on the role that prevailing attitudes and behaviors play in denigrating and isolating these 'abnormal' persons. (108)

Here again, Atkins highlights Foucault's argument that an era of biopolitics fixates upon the population as a whole, rather than individual bodies. By omitting certain "abnormalities"

from full-scale maturation, or terminating "defective" pregnancies, society curtails the individual subjectivities of those living with non-normative embodiments. Her words again evoke Foucault's: "*disallow* it to the point of death" (138). Discursively, for those alive as well as physically, for those who suggest a future embodiment of difference from the narrowly defined hegemonic norm of "able."

Thus, much as Finger laments of many pro-choice activists, liberalist concerns of "privacy" miss the very publicly policed bodies of difference – and such a perspective narrowly neglects an examination of "the very real disability issues involved" (25). Furthermore, within a Foucauldian context, such "privacy" and the array of choices protected by the "freedoms" of privacy look, upon closer scrutiny, more insidious than liberatory. Much as the transformation Atkins's understanding of "disability," Thomson suggests in her work *Extraordinary Bodies,* disability as a kind of socially constructed difference as gender or sexuality – and recognizes that, historically, she may have been classified by society. Significantly, Atkins and her partner make up a non-heteronormative family and their story may seem a first glance quite a progressive one; yet they are still confronted with "choices" which restrain their decisions within a liberalist context. Their pregnancy remains policed. And Atkins recognizes that not only does such policing limit her rights as a potential mother as well as the future rights of the gestating fetus, but likewise

> the screening and weeding out defective (i.e., disabled) fetuses invariably casts aspersions on those who are disabled within society because disabled existence is devalued and disdained, in fact, opted against. (108)

Atkins realizes that "disability" is shaped by culture and social perception. Her revelation appeals to Finger's earlier discussed frustrations with pro-choice advocates and other, perhaps inadvertently, ableist individuals. Much as Foucault suggests that a society's institutionalized offerings not only dictate who flourishes but who (albeit sometimes indirectly) suffers, Atkins recognizes social conditions rather than "natural" differences dictate the characterization of "disability."

Atkins' primary focus centers around the prolific use of reproductive technology to determine the "health" of a prenatally developing fetus. While Sawicki notes the potential promise of such technologies (194) – and Atkins and her partner's pregnancies may serve as one example – there clearly seems space for "disciplining" and problematically policing within a Foucauldian biopolitical context. As Bill Hughes notes in his article, "What Can a Foucauldian Analysis Contribute?", the significance of such "visualizing technologies" that "discriminate between the normal fetus and the pathological fetus" furthermore "produce disabling information and knowledge *in utero*" (81). Nonetheless, this kind of medicalization can prove ostracizing for an individual – in which the body is again placed problematically away from an idea of the "self" as somehow something to be reined in, repaired, rehabilitated, or cured.

Finger's larger narrative speaks to these details as well. She, as a disabled woman who has been hospitalized and medically treated regularly before her pregnancy, frequently discusses the alienation she has experienced under institutionalized medical care. For this reason, she elects to use midwifery rather than mainstream obstetrics with the goal of a home birth. She contextualizes this choice in terms of a particular nightmare she has had. Under the direction of a doctor (overtly characterized as "he" and thus removed from the pregnancy

experience by merit of his own gender and perhaps the larger patriarchal discourse of medicine), and gauged by a machine, she struggles to give birth. In her "push[es] against gravity" in the labor dreams, Finger indicates the mechanization and "unnaturalness" in her remove from the experience (72); her own numbness prevents her from making decisions for herself, from feeling, from pain, and with medical precision the child is removed from her. The dream tellingly concludes with the passive voice "she has been delivered" (72). As the child is simply characterized as an "it" in the preceding sentence – "it is held upside down for her to see" – I suggest Finger deliberately evokes the passive voice here to suggest her own lack of agency in the birth process. The "labor" of childbirth, via technology and the patriarchal discourses of medicine and biopolitics, has been outsourced to a depersonalized, removed position. The mother's body seems little more than a vessel, a womb, an alarming retreat back to historical readings of the female body as passive purveyor of progeny.

Finger concludes on a note of agency. Her pregnancy and childbirth narrative remain fraught with conflict and uncertainty – she is unable to have a homebirth, has a C-section; nearly loses her child's life to meconium aspiration; and is warned of her newborn son's potential brain damage. Despite his ultimately healthy development, her final thoughts directly grapple with her struggles, what she calls her decision to "take control of [her] body" (201). She reframes her choices, as a site of subversion, in terms of responsibility for one's body. Finger accepts that she understands "why people want to surrender their lives to someone else's power, to the power of the machine" (201). Nonetheless, she celebrates her own choice of "knowing the self [she] knew in an unmedicated, wild birth" (201).

Thus, Finger resolves on a note of resistance within an institutionalized, medicalized context that so closely governs pregnancy and much of females' bodies. Whereas much of

Foucault's theory has been critiqued for the lack of agency ascribed to subjects – "docile bodies" as they are – I suggest Finger's story provides such a space. Despite the biopolitical state's technologies, which "[try] to control the series of random events that can occur in a living mass" to "protect the security of the whole from internal dangers" (Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended"* 249), there are spaces to challenge or upset the macrocosmic lens of biopolitics. Disability, as arguably a creation of biopolitics in its contemporary and pathologized status, proves a useful theoretical lens "in" to the discourse(s) concerning the policing of bodies en masse. In as much as disability studies seeks to disrupt socially condoned oppression of non-normative embodiments, it likewise seeks to "valorize [the] voices, [the] embodied experiences, and [the] collective efforts to establish rights and overcome discrimination" for individuals within the disabled community (Hughes 79). But within an era of biopolitics, non-normative bodies become figures of primary focus, around which disciplinary measures are made to seem "natural" or "normal" or even beneficial for society at large. By taking the intersection of feminist theory and disability theory, via a standpoint perspective such as Anne Finger's memoir, a proliferating perspective on embodiment may be acquired.

Concluding thoughts: Narratives of Disability and Pregnancy

While bodies of difference may be historicized well beyond the modern era – defined within this paper as the eighteenth century onward, via Foucault's terms – the current trend of "disability" and the labeling of disabled bodies presents a cultural, ethical concern for feminism in particular. Through the continued exaltation of medical science as arbiter of objectivity, classification, and pathologization on human subjects, "disabled" has come to signify those who fall outside of a neatly narrowed scope of "normate" subject – which is

oddly reminiscent of the Enlightenment subject. Due to the biopolitical era, and the preoccupation with bodies as signifiers of difference (Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended"* 245), much of such social disciplining may be said to begin at the site of pregnancy. As a (thus far) inherently "female" site of embodiment, it would seem that this useful locus of difference and non-normative embodiment is a vital space for feminist inquiries.

Feminist theor(ies), then, must reckon with this cultural construction of difference as "disability" – so closely akin to the derogation of women's bodies as "Other" both within history and more contemporary moments.[31] Nevertheless this will require a critical examination of "female empowerment" at large, for "one of the most pervasive feminist assumptions that undermines some disabled women's struggle is the liberal ideology of autonomy and independence" which can leave "no space for the needs and accommodations that disabled women's bodies require" (Thomson 26). Much as white feminists have been critiqued for perpetuating, at times, their hegemonic racial privilege, ableist feminists must address their own biases. By resorting to an Enlightenment subject ideal, feminist movements adopt a lens that was initially premised upon the Othering of women's embodiment in the first place – and which risks the obfuscation and erasure of diverse lived embodiments. This may be addressed and in part reconciled by the incorporation the voices, lived experiences, and embodied realities of non-normatively bodied women.

Significantly, as in the case of Anne Finger and her text, voices of these experiences need to be shared and thusly heard. Nonetheless *Past Due: A Story of Disability, Pregnancy*

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[31] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, in her discussion of the complementary relationship between feminist theories and disability studies, discusses how "the practices of femininity have configured female bodies similarly to disability" (27). She notes that "foot binding, scarification, clitoridectomy, and corseting were (and are) socially accepted, encouraged, even compulsory cultural forms of female disablement…. Similarly, such conditions as anorexia, hysteria, and agoraphobia are in a sense standard feminine roles enlarged to disabling conditions, blurring the lines between 'normal' feminine behavior and pathology" (27).

and Birth, touted by Adrienne Rich as a text that reveals "the real meaning of the statement that the personal is the political," is currently out of print. Seal Press, the text's publishing company that claims on its website to have been founded "to provide a forum for women writers and feminist issues," no longer offers information on the book in its directory. While Finger's title suggests the overdue urgency of her unique narrative, and of the diverse experiences it interrogates and illumines, it is no longer easily accessible. While future feminist interrogations into disability may be diverse, I suggest the vitality of pregnancy as a site of investigation. Narratives such as Finger's further expand upon understandings of pregnancy and likewise challenge non-normative labeling and oppression: both vital points of interest for feminist theor(ies).

Here, again, the significant of "sighting" and a "site" conflate, much as my discussion between pregnancy and disability. In *Concerto for the Left Hand*, Michael Davidson argues that "disability may be a theater or a museum, a place where something is seen" (25), demonstrating the significance of the relationship negotiated between "subject" and "object," no matter how problematically inscribed. Pregnancy works similarly – a sight/site or "a series of locations and spaces where political economy, bioregional differences, cultural representations, and medical bureaucracies converge" (25). As Davis argues, via Foucault, the 19th and 20th centuries have witnessed a transformation from a "society of blood" and the sovereignty of kings to a "society of sex" based on the "medicalization of the body in the late 19th century" (42). Much as Judith Butler argues, "possibility for coalitional alliances" surface – material bodies at the site of normalizing discourses that, "in order to claim authority over their own bodies, have had to emerge from closets they never knew they inherited" (56).

Conclusion

"…community must not mean shedding our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist." - Audre Lorde (1984)

"Sure you can do anything when you talking or writing, it's not like living when you can only do what you doing. Some people tell a story 'n it don't make no sense or be true. But I'm gonna try to make sense and tell the truth, else what's the fucking use? Ain' enough lies and shit out there already?" – Sapphire's *Push*

Through the journey of this dissertation, we have considered multiple narratives that open up a space for a radical refiguring of pregnancy as narrative. We have accounted for the diverse circumstances that make a singular, normative rendering of "pregnancy" oppressively limiting; nevertheless, this normative reading largely prevails. Likewise, we have troubled the dominant rhetoric of reproductive politics, "choice." The fabricated, limited nature of choice – hinged clearly on privilege and in accordance with society's notion of a "proper" mother – makes the lingering rhetoric not only misleading, but oppressive by eliding diverse women's reproductive politics and outcomes. Furthermore, as Reva B. Siegel notes in "Abortion as a Sex Equality Right," this rhetoric "abstracts the conflict from the social context in which judgments about abortion are formed and enforced" (152).

From Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative to the advancements in biotechnologies, pregnant embodiment proves to have a diverse, multifaceted history that also provides rich space to reconsider subjects, relationships between individuals and communities, along with "dependence" and "Otherness." As Martha Albertson Fineman notes in *The Autonomy Myth*, there is "no autonomy to be found in motherhood" (169). Rather than focusing upon this point merely in conservative interpretations, how instead might we continue to reconsider pregnancy to further disrupt illusions of autonomy, of the neatly segmented "self" unit to which all fail to fulfill? Particularly in light of our discussion of critical disability, how could this beleaguered site of embodiment provide fresh insight into a host of "marginalized"

bodies and lived selfhoods that do not correspond to the idealized static, independent model? How can feminist efforts at gendered equality address, more directly, discrepancies within the family? A continued effort to catalog these diverse histories and engage their narratives offers a prime space to engage these complex questions and consider their extensive ramifications. Here, in the ultimate violation of individualized boundaries we are offered the foil for the individual – as well as the performative space about which the boundaries are first established legally, medically, if not metaphysically.

A Praxis of Non-Hegemonic Pregnancy Narratives

At the core of my inquiry, as literary student and teacher, I aim to open up otherwise muzzled conversations through these alternative narratives in dialogue. My research has developed in tandem with my teaching, and I have had the opportunity to share and learn from my students. We ground our conversations first in the mainstream vernacular. For instance, we consider the "pro-choice" and "pro-life" debate, which this dissertation has endeavored to prove inadequate for discussing American reproductive politics. Students identify discomfort in the sweeping binaries, even without the fully contextual history of "choice" which we explore.

Then, I provide a copy of Gwendolyn Brooks' "the mother." In the poem, the narrator struggles with the confinement of referential language, much as she does with the social pressures that have shaped her as "the mother." Her opening line, "Abortion will not let you forget," works against the normative maternal ideals evoked by the title itself. And from the outset, she cannot seem to speak as herself or of her relationship to the "children you got that you did not get" (2); along with the distance she creates through the use of second person,

she wrestles with the ambiguity of getting, receiving, and begetting – yet never seems to satisfactorily articulate her relationship to these children.

The poem encapsulates this tension between the "I" and the fetuses/babies, resorting to powerful enjambment juxtaposed alongside the meter of the poem: while the rhythm of the poem connects, the form and visual alignment of verse counteractively separates and disjoints it. Lines separate the identities of the poem as the verse openly struggles with the idea of life, death, the subject and the not-subject. She also draws on traditions of mythic or fairy tale type mother archetypes – though a troubling, distorted focus on a mother's consumption ("with gobbling-mother eye"). But she does so only to state that she will not experience them.

Her own struggles remain framed by a similarly problematic language. While in part she clearly addresses her decision to her "dead children," the speaker's admission that "believe that even in my deliberateness, I was not deliberate" again reckons with the tensions shaping not only her cultural circumstances and personal choices, but the larger context in which they are voiced. She struggles to assign blame and autonomy: "Though why should I/Whine that the crime was other than mine?" Yet she finds futility here: "Since anyhow you are dead./Or rather, or instead,/You were never made." She herself troubles all of these boundaries within her poem but not to their necessary resolve. Her poem establishes a tenuous kind of disparate connection, one that does not find resolve in the ruling of *Roe v. Wade*: the spaces delineated therein, the (negative) right assigned, the identities established along tenuous lines, feel far from structured and consoling in "the mother." Her inability to speak on and to a subject, a state of being, in which she has inhabited – she does not know how to metaphysically understand her "killed children" as "dead or never made."

This poem uses literary language to illustrate ambiguities within pregnant embodiment that defy our current narratives. This example provides just one instance that "narratives of pregnancy" can engage real women's materialities in a manner that is inarticulable in mainstream discourses, opening up a vibrant space to reconsider many subject positions. Much as the opening story in my Introduction – that of a young woman who wanted marriage and children but had been forcibly sterilized – ruptured my own uncritically accepted conceptions, these narratives powerfully provide voice and space to identities erased by normative narratives of embodied life.

Afterword: a process yet incomplete

Pregnancy: a process, an insistence that both defies and confirms time as a gauge and any idea of human identity as a static one; a becoming that posits the body at the center of the narrative yet again is always already shaped by cultural narrative – all while at once constituting a crude but indisputable "tub of guts" (Dewey Dell, *As I Lay Dying*). At once plural and not-one, yet sufficient and contained and mitigated: biologically, by the placenta; culturally, by multifarious lenses.

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