

The Reproductive Politics of American Literature and Film, 1959–1973

Sophie A. Jones



Modern American Literature and the New Twentieth Century

**The Reproductive Politics
of American Literature and Film,
1959–1973**

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Introduction: Reproductive Contingency in the Long 1960s

This book explores the relationship between reproductive control and reproductive contingency in works of literature and film produced between the late 1950s and the early 1970s – a period I am calling ‘the long 1960s’. The notion that conception, pregnancy and birth could (and should) be coordinated and planned was active at multiple scales in this period. On a global and national level, population control advocates presented reproductive management as the solution to perceived environmental, social and economic crises.¹ At the smaller scales of the household and the individual, the ideology of family planning promoted the careful timing and spacing of pregnancies. The project of reproductive control was not only relevant to the goal of limiting procreation, but also to the management of gestation and parturition: advice manuals represented pregnancy as a standardised sequence of events leading from conception to birth. Meanwhile, a growing feminist movement emphasised the idea that, in the words of a Society for Humane Abortion activist, ‘If you can’t control your body you can’t control your future, to the degree that any of us can control futures.’² The comment captures the tension between control and contingency that animates the literature and film I explore in this book. In a period when reproductive planning was emphasised in diverse spheres, literature and film was frequently preoccupied with the contingencies of reproduction: with all the ways in which reproductivity escapes the drive to predict, to plan, to bequeath or inherit, and to know the outcome in advance. These works invite

us to take contingency as a starting point through which to explore political questions that drive both cultural and biological reproduction. In doing so, they open up new ways of thinking about the shared territory I am calling the cultural politics of reproduction.

The phrase 'the cultural politics of reproduction' is intended to capture a double resonance of the term 'reproduction', which can refer not only to the making of babies but also to the making of culture. The relationship between these two senses of 'reproduction' has a long history and is inseparable from their material dynamics. Discussing the early modern period, Douglas A. Brooks has persuasively argued that 'in the case of writing technologies, the body – especially the reproductive body – is always already involved'.³ Brooks suggests that the material processes of textual production mimicked Renaissance beliefs about the biology of human reproduction, whereby, 'Upon penetration, it was thought that the penis, like the earlier technology of the signet and the wax and the newer technology of the press, left a foetal imprint on the moist womb.'⁴ This example demonstrates the conceptual affinity long shared by the biological reproduction of bodies, the creative reproduction of ideas, and the technological reproduction of texts. In this book, I closely analyse selected works produced between the late 1950s and the early 1970s in order to reveal how writers and filmmakers engaged with the social horizons of pregnancy by reflecting on their own creative practices. Across a range of forms – including drama, film, poetry and the novel – the contingencies of biological reproduction are illuminated by the contingencies of cultural reproduction.

The semantic overlap between cultural and biological reproduction is present across modern literary history; a full list need not be attempted here, but would certainly encompass Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–67), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), all works in which the anxiety and uncertainty of procreation are central. Despite this, the conceptual affinity between biological and cultural reproduction has often been taken to connote a predictable and regular form of reiteration.⁵ The editors of a special journal issue on 'Communicating Reproduction' point to the gradual emergence, by the mid-nineteenth century, of the view that 'whole individuals emerged through a regular, law-like, and repeatable process

that could be called reproduction', and add that '[r]eproduction became associated with mechanization, since machines were reckoned to provide a relatively stable means of replicating texts'.⁶ The prospect of replicability and organised reproduction underpinned the eugenics movement that emerged in the same period and found cultural expression in the composite photography of founding eugenicist Francis Galton. Galton's work underlines the extent to which projects of reproductive control have long been bound up with both cultural form and biopolitical violence.

The dual resonance of 'reproduction', biologically and culturally, involves a set of fantasies about women and machines as underwriters of a replicable cultural and biological order that is either implicitly coded or explicitly asserted as white and non-disabled.⁷ Such ideas underpin what Alys Eve Weinbaum has termed the 'race/reproduction bind', in which the very concept of reproduction rests on the idea that 'race is something that can be reproduced'.⁸ The long legacy of this 'race/reproduction bind' is evident in two powerful concepts that underpinned reproductive politics in the long 1960s: population control and family planning. These two concepts were often conflated.⁹ They framed the reception of the oral contraceptive pill, approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 1960, and subjected abortion to particular forms of legibility in the years before and after it was deemed a constitutional right (under specific circumstances) in 1973.¹⁰ A brief look at the eugenic legacies of birth control and population control movements will help me clarify why 'reproductive contingency' is an important concept to bring to bear on the cultural politics of reproduction.

Eugenics proved a 'fatal' influence on the birth control campaigns of the early twentieth century, as Angela Y. Davis has argued in *Women, Race, and Class* (1981).¹¹ The entanglement of eugenic ideologies and birth control movements endured into the second half of the twentieth century. In her 1974 history of the birth control movement in the US, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right*, Linda Gordon notes that, before the resurgence of feminist activism, the politics of reproduction in the 1960s was driven by policies of population control, which worked against women's liberation both within the US and in the global territories in which it intervened. These dynamics shaped the history of the contraceptive pill, which was

trialled on Puerto Rican women without their informed consent in a context of widespread coerced sterilisation.¹² Gordon distinguishes the feminist slogan demanding 'control over our own bodies' from eugenics and population control movements.¹³ However, this distinction between feminist activism and population control does not always appear so clear cut. As Kim Adams has noted, the landmark 1970 book *Women and their Bodies* by the Boston Women's Health Collective echoes anxieties about 'world population growth', while Lana Phelan and Pat Maginnis's *Abortion Handbook* cites the 1968 polemic *The Population Bomb*.¹⁴ The historian Dorothy Roberts has shown that white women advocating for the liberalisation of sterilisation laws in the 1970s displayed little awareness of or interest in the plight of black women fighting for a tightening of the laws that had denied their reproductive self-determination.¹⁵ These examples illustrate how the feminist demand for 'control over our own bodies' has at times been recruited for the control of the bodies of racialised, disabled and working-class women.

These histories of activism and campaigning in contexts of biopolitical violence are intertwined with transformative changes in reproductive law in the long 1960s. The scope of government control of reproductive processes was changed through a series of landmark decisions by the US Supreme Court in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1965 the *Griswold v. Connecticut* decision, which struck down state bans on contraception, forged an enduring and controversial link between reproductive rights and personal privacy. This right to privacy was extended to unmarried couples in the 1972 *Eisenstadt v. Baird* ruling, and to people seeking abortions in the *Roe v. Wade* decision. The concept of reproductive privacy was part of a broader set of legal initiatives framed as protecting individual privacy from state intrusion during this period. In the midst of a wide-ranging public discourse about surveillance, exposure and the right to be let alone, reproductive rights became the legal basis for the constitutional right to privacy during the 1960s and early 1970s.

Crucially, these legal-political milestones involve both the body and the text. The 1960s conceptualisation of reproductive privacy drew on precedents set by nineteenth-century legal attempts to curb the intrusions of the press. Indeed, the Comstock laws

rendered unconstitutional in *Griswold* targeted the reproductive body and the reproductive text alike, banning the dissemination of contraceptives along with information about contraceptives, as well as pornography and other media deemed obscene. Even as it challenged such censorship, the doctrine of reproductive privacy inherited a paradox from its nineteenth-century precedents, by which the subject of privacy was constructed as white, affluent and non-disabled through the publicity of the mass media.¹⁶ This tension took on a new resonance in the 1960s, when the extension of privacy protections to reproductive decisions coincided with a proliferation of analogies between media technologies and the pregnant body in literature and visual culture. Anxious fantasies about the controllable reproductive body and the programmable reproductive machine often coincide in cultural artefacts of this period. However, the works of literature and film I explore in this book often fray the edges of these fantasies by registering the unpredictability of cultural and biological reproduction.

These discourses of reproductive privacy emerged against the backdrop of the cold war 1960s. My argument here is informed by influential studies of cold war culture such as Deborah Nelson's *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America* (2002), which examines legal decisions in relation to confessional poetry of the era. Nelson argues that the cold war 'scripted the privacy crisis' – a phrase that points to the inextricability of reproductive privacy and ideas about mediation and textuality.¹⁷ According to Nelson, this 'privacy crisis' both involved and amplified a general sense of spatial unease – a widespread anxiety that boundaries of various kinds were being eroded, to alarming effect.¹⁸ Nelson follows other scholars of the culture of the cold war-era US, including Elaine Tyler May and Alan Nadel, in observing that the lines dividing the communist East and the capitalist West were rhetorically replicated in constructions of the divisions between public and private, heterosexual and homosexual, and male and female.¹⁹ If, as Nelson contends, the privacy crisis cannot be understood apart from its cold war context, so the emergence of reproductive privacy, and its cultural negotiation, were framed by the tensions of the cold war 1960s.

Ideologies of maternity and motherhood were, of course, central here. The post-1945 US strategy to 'contain' the spread

of communism had a domestic equivalent, according to Tyler May, whose influential work argues that this domestic version of containment fuelled the post-war baby boom and its attendant social norms by positing the home as the site upon which both personal aspirations and national duties would be fulfilled. This supposed homology between individual aspirations and US foreign policy cast the mother as the source of the idealised strength of the men tasked with defending American values.²⁰ The flip side of this ideal, as Michael Paul Rogin has pointed out, was the fear that women might slide 'from nurturing influence to emasculating power'.²¹ This fear, Rogin observes, 'identifies Communism with secret, maternal influence'.²² In this way, the mother was alternately idealised and vilified within the logic of containment. For both Tyler May and Nadel, the constitutive contradictions of containment culture began to break down in the politicised 1960s.²³ But Nadel maintains that these socio-cultural shifts in the 1960s do not reflect a waning or disappearance of containment ideology, but an increased awareness of its constitutive contradictions. Containment ideology was operating in American culture even as it began to be interrogated and resisted.

Anxieties about reproduction are at work in a number of films of the late 1950s and 1960s that restage cold war conflicts through metaphors of bodily invasion and replication. These include a number of films that are not explicitly focused on pregnancy, so do not feature in my analysis, but which deserve attention in this introduction as important precursors to and/or interlocutors with my primary works. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, Don Siegel's 1956 film, depicts the insistent takeover of a small suburban community by extraterrestrial seed pods which transform into duplicate copies of the humans who sleep beside them. The gradual, eerie displacement of the town's humans by their emotionless, conformist doppelgängers is aided and abetted by feminine weakness: at one of the film's most tense moments, the protagonist's girlfriend falls asleep as they are fleeing the town and succumbs to the body snatchers. Rogin has pointed out that the body snatchers can be aligned with both McCarthyism and communism, as both were associated with social conformity.²⁴ If the body snatchers are read as communist infiltrators, their

infiltration is made possible by feminine weakness. This trope can be traced back to Philip Wylie's 1942 book *Generation of Vipers*, a polemical work of popular commentary. In a chapter on women, Wylie conflated two pervasive fears – women's reproductive power and authoritarianism – into a hyperbolic warning against a trend he termed 'Momism'.²⁵ Wylie's misogynistic diatribe was recontextualised by cold war gender politics. In *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the feminised threat of communism is manifested in a horrifying parody of human biological reproduction: the nuclear family ideal is displaced by its uncontained excess in the pods' seemingly limitless process of auto-reproduction. If 'scientific, rational procreation', as Tyler May contends, 'fit the needs of the cold war' by reproducing conformist ideals,²⁶ *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* conflates the reproduction of sameness with invasion by the other. This conflation echoes Wylie's stated fear that maternal power, if uncontained, might leave the US vulnerable to communist influence.

The trope of female weakness to communism developed into one of active collaboration in *The Manchurian Candidate*. This 1959 book by Richard Condon and 1962 film by John Frankenheimer feature a woman working with the KGB who brainwashes her son to assassinate a presidential candidate as part of a plot to install a communist dictatorship in the US. Wylie's influence can also be detected in the matriarchal psychiatric institution portrayed in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the 1962 novel by Ken Kesey that was adapted into a film by Miloš Forman in 1975, which reworks anti-feminist and anti-communist tropes into a libertarian narrative of rebellion. In all three of these examples, the threat posed by women is also a threat to privacy, whether that threat is a mind controlled by aliens or communists, or a state institution run by women.

The above works are interested in maternity, matriarchy or an abstracted sense of reproductive processes. This book takes a more focused lens to look particularly at literary and cinematic engagements with pregnancy. I am especially interested in how these engagements register 1960s discourses that link technologies of cultural production and the body. Literary and cinematic representations of pregnancy registered the notion – popularised in the work

of Marshall McLuhan – that media technologies now permeated all dimensions of life. As the task of securing the boundary between public and private seemed more challenging, it competed with a fantasy of eradicating such boundaries altogether, a dream given a distinctly reproductive shape in the iconic figure of the autonomous foetus that graced the cover of *Life* magazine in 1965 and reappeared in Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In Chapter 5, I link Lennart Nilsson's photographs of the autonomous foetus to a dream of representation without mediation – a dream that is both embraced and satirised in Kubrick's film. The autonomous foetus is perhaps the most iconic example of the relationship between 1960s ideas about mediation and reproductive politics. Here, two fantasies converge: on the one hand, a fantasy of controlled hypermediacy; on the other, a fantasy of immediacy in which the medium is abolished altogether.²⁷ These fantasies about mediation are deeply involved with fantasies about the control or eradication of the gestating subject.

One of the aims of this book is to highlight the centrality of disability to the reproductive politics of the long 1960s, and to illuminate the connections between the reproductive politics of disability and 1960s theories of cultural production and mediation. In *Keywords* (1976; 1983), Raymond Williams suggests that the late-twentieth-century understanding of the term 'media' probably involved a convergence of three senses:

- (i) the old general sense of an intervening or intermediate agency or substance; (ii) the conscious technical sense, as in the distinction between print and sound and vision as media; (iii) the specialized capitalist sense, in which a newspaper or broadcasting service—something that already exists or can be planned—is seen as a medium for something else, such as advertising.²⁸

Two events in the early 1960s linked the pregnant body to all three of Williams's definitions of 'media'. The first was the thalidomide crisis. Widely prescribed in Europe for ailments including insomnia, and nausea and vomiting of pregnancy, the drug was found in the early 1960s to be linked to congenital impairment, miscarriage and stillbirth. The second event was the US epidemic of rubella

(also known as German measles), which was associated with a higher risk of blindness and deafness in babies when contracted by pregnant women.²⁹ These events were crucial in raising public support for the liberalisation or repeal of abortion laws in the US, particularly after Sherri Finkbine, the presenter of a children's television programme in Arizona, told the press she was seeking an abortion after taking thalidomide in Europe. The therapeutic abortion panel responsible for authorising the procedure balked at performing such a high-profile abortion with the associated risk of prosecution, and Finkbine – in what became a heavily mediated event – had to travel to Sweden for the procedure.³⁰

Thalidomide contributed to a growing sense of the pregnant body as a conduit or 'intervening agency' between the foetus and the dangers of the world outside: a maternal medium. Although thalidomide was never prescribed in the US, Leslie J. Reagan's research has demonstrated that it influenced the reception of the rubella epidemic there.³¹ In addition, then, both were media events in Williams's 'conscious technical sense', on two levels: not only were they extensively covered in state and national media, but this narrative mobilised images of women researching their condition by engaging with media independently, rather than relying on the medical profession whose authority had been shaken by the crises. A paradigmatic image of the woman researcher was Frances Kelsey, the FDA official responsible for refusing to authorise the dissemination of thalidomide in the US despite pressure from the pharmaceutical company who owned the drug.³² Thus, thalidomide became part of a larger story concerning the way the power and autonomy of large corporations was mediated by the pregnant body in Williams's final, 'capitalist' sense of the term. Throughout this book, I return to this context as one that illuminates the centrality of disability to the cultural politics of reproduction in the 1960s and beyond.

In these contexts, reproductive contingency emerges as an internal dissonance that troubles fantasies of control over the processes of conception, gestation and birth. The concept of reproductive contingency offers a new way of conceptualising the affinities of cultural and biological reproduction. One of the most important formal sites of reproductive contingency is repetition, which is a

central aesthetic strategy for all my primary texts. Repetition, of course, is strongly associated with the culture and theory of the 1960s and after, where it has often been conceptualised in terms of a deconstructed or deflated dualism. Jacques Derrida's theory of *différance* challenges the idea of a stable distinction between original and copy and theorises their mutual constitution.³³ Gilles Deleuze also theorises the capacity of repetition to affirm nomadic difference against models of repetition as standardised reiteration.³⁴ Despite the marginalisation of reproduction in these canonical theories of repetition, their mobilisation of a deconstructed binary or dialectical relationship between repetition-as-sameness and repetition-as-difference is central to the politics of reproduction in the early part of the period sometimes historicised as the post-modern. Indeed, the simulacral preoccupations of this period, influentially interpreted by Fredric Jameson as uncritical pastiche, make a different kind of sense if approached through the lens of reproduction. From the repetition of the modules of the grid in minimal art to the repetition of the cinematic shot or the literary phrase, I argue that the aesthetics of repetition in the long 1960s are inextricable from the politics of reproduction.

My approach to the interrelation of repetition and reproduction is influenced by Judith Butler's gender theory, in which the 'possibility of a failure to repeat' is seen as constitutive of gender itself.³⁵ I also draw on Sigmund Freud's writing on repetition, particularly in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and in the essay 'The Uncanny'. In 'The Uncanny', Freud argues that the sense of the uncanny derives from the return of the repressed fear of castration. This fear is symbolised by Oedipal blindness in one of Freud's key source texts, E. T. A. Hoffmann's 1816 story 'The Sandman'. Reproduction figures prominently in the Freudian uncanny: for Freud, the idea of a return to the womb was the original source of the uncanny because it was 'the former *heim* [home] of all human beings'.³⁶ The uncanny is also associated with automation and the uncertain boundary between life and artifice: Hoffmann's story features a doll, Olympia, who is mistaken as human. Freud's contemporary Ernst Jentsch locates the sense of the uncanny in the reader's confusion over whether Olympia is animate or inanimate.³⁷ In 'The Uncanny', Freud disputes this analysis and, accordingly, marginalises the question of

technology and its implications for reproduction. Nevertheless, I take up the Freudian uncanny as a way to make sense of the relationship between technological and biological reproduction in American literature and film of the 1960s. The uncanny is at work in a diverse range of cultural work dealing with reproduction, from Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 play *A Raisin in the Sun* to Richard Yates's 1961 novel *Revolutionary Road* and Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In these works, the sense of the uncanny is bound up with competing accounts of repetition: on the one hand, as a ground for the stable reiteration of the existing social order; on the other, as a site of contingency.

This book investigates the reproductive politics of cultural form. While my primary texts are often far from polemical, I aim, through close analysis of these works, to test a feminist politics of reproduction that finds its grounding in contingency rather than control. This does not mean romanticising or accepting contingency as a natural fact; rather, it means acknowledging contingency as the grounds for an unequivocal defence of reproductive freedom. In exploring the political possibilities of reproductive contingency, I am indebted to important feminist critiques of family planning and population control as organising concepts. Angela Y. Davis calls for 'a broad campaign to defend the reproductive rights of all women – and especially those women whose economic circumstances often compel them to relinquish the right to reproduction itself'.³⁸ The circumstances that necessitate such a campaign have been theorised by Shellee Colen as 'stratified reproduction'. As Faye D. Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp put it, stratified reproduction refers to 'the power relations by which some categories of people are empowered to nurture and reproduce, while others are disempowered'.³⁹ Since the 1990s, black feminist scholars and activists in the US have worked to challenge reproductive stratification through the framework of reproductive justice. According to the succinct definition advanced by Loretta J. Ross and Rickie Solinger, '[r]eproductive justice clarifies the need for protection from coerced sex and reproduction and also from coerced suppression or termination of fertility'.⁴⁰ In line with this emphasis, organisations including the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective and Incite! Women of Color Against Violence have drawn attention to the need to link

struggles for abortion and contraception to campaigns against coerced or forced sterilisation, the prison industrial complex, birth justice, prenatal and pregnancy care, domestic violence support, and broader movements for economic, racial and gender justice.⁴¹ The reproductive justice movement has long criticised the emphasis on choice in mainstream, white-dominated reproductive rights activism. The SisterSong collective emphasises the economic conditions that limit access to abortion and contraception even where it is legally available, and stresses that 'there is no choice where there is no access'.⁴² The movement is thus rooted in an acknowledgement of the material contingencies that shape reproductive experiences.

Feminist philosophy has also problematised the language of choice and control that has underpinned mainstream reproductive rights movements. Drucilla Cornell has noted that 'no woman *chooses* to have an unwanted pregnancy. If we could control our bodies, "ourselves," then we would not need state intervention to ensure conditions for safe abortions.'⁴³ Cornell argues that abortion rights should be understood not as a right of privacy grounded in individual choice, but as a right of bodily integrity grounded in the recognition of sexual difference. Drawing on Jacques Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, in which the infant glimpses an impossibly whole image of herself in the mirror that jars with her fragmentary experience of embodiment, Cornell discusses the right to abortion in terms of a necessary fiction of wholeness. The right to abortion, she contends, is 'a fundamental condition of one's ability to imagine—and to project into the future—one's bodily integrity'.⁴⁴ Cornell writes of 'the need to retain some image of coherence in spite of the loss of actual control which threatens a return to a raw, fragmentary experience of the body'.⁴⁵ More recently, Victoria Browne has developed a feminist philosophy of miscarriage rooted in a recognition of pregnancy as a 'fundamentally ambiguous and contingent situation' that has too often been conflated with maternity, even in feminist philosophy.⁴⁶ These perspectives remind us that the project of reproductive justice can conceptualise the future as open rather than closed – indeterminate, rather than controlled – and cognisant of the social contingencies that shape experiences of pregnancy, its avoidance, and its termination.

This book develops the concept of reproductive contingency in literary and film studies; in doing so, it builds on these philosophers', historians' and activists' critiques of 'reproductive choice' and 'reproductive control' as organising concepts for the project of reproductive freedom. With this work, I am also contributing to – but doing something distinct from – a body of twenty-first-century scholarship in American cultural studies that has focused on representations of reproduction in literature and film.⁴⁷ The 1960s has been relatively neglected in studies of the cultural politics of reproduction, which have tended to focus either on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or on the post-1970s period following the passage of *Roe v. Wade*. In this book, I home in on the years between the late 1950s and the early 1970s as a transformative time for US reproductive politics. I argue that, contrary to the period's reputation as an era of population control and family planning, writers and filmmakers of the long 1960s were preoccupied with the contingencies of reproduction. A critical intervention of this book is its contention that close attention to literature and film of this period can open up a different way of conceptualising the politics of reproduction, one that makes contingency the grounds for freedom rather than its limit.

At points in this book, I refer to the concept of social reproduction. At its most basic level, social reproduction can be understood as 'those components of material life, among them sex, care, emotional labor, and attention, that are necessary to survival but historically not seen as valuable or value producing', to quote Rosemary Hennessy.⁴⁸ The concept encompasses those activities, often unwaged, which ensure that capital has a continuous supply of labour. However, social reproduction cannot be reduced to this function. In the 1970s, Marxist feminists theorised and seized its domains – housework, sex, care – as sites of resistance.⁴⁹ While much of this theoretical and activist work lies outside the temporal boundaries of my research here, I do draw on the concept of social reproduction at distinct points of this book. In particular, I use the concept to illuminate those moments at which cultural engagements with pregnancy and birth become entangled with larger questions about capitalism and work, and those moments at which the biological reproduction of life is most vividly bound up

with the reproduction of, or resistance to, capitalist relations of production. In the main, however, I use the term 'reproduction' to refer to the narrower processes of biological and cultural reproduction, which participate in but are not identical with social reproduction.

A note on periodisation: positing a unit of time called 'the long 1960s' does not entail making claims for its empirical validity in absolute terms. The account of the 1960s substantiated in the following chapters omits much more of that decade's tumultuous socio-political history than it includes.⁵⁰ Rather than offering an exhaustive history of the cultural politics of reproduction in these years, this book interrogates some of the ways in which the conceptual coordinates of late-twentieth-century reproductive politics were constituted and troubled in literature and visual culture. I approach 'the long 1960s' here as a period in which the discourses that have shaped reproductive freedom in the US were not only formed, but were also problematised and contested. I hope this book will demonstrate that literature and film are significant not primarily because they reflect political realities or represent historically significant themes, but rather because their formal strategies can place concepts such as 'reproduction' under pressure, allowing for their politicised reconfiguration.

The first chapter identifies a reproductive politics of performance in Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 play *A Raisin in the Sun*. The play is well known for its dramatisation of racism and housing in post-war Chicago. I focus on an oft-overlooked sub-plot: Ruth Younger's announcement that she has made a 'five-dollar down payment' on an abortion because their home is not big enough for another child. This pregnancy sub-plot highlights the extent to which housing segregation was rooted in ideologies around 'miscegenation': the play debuted on Broadway a year after the arrest of Mildred and Richard Loving, the couple at the centre of the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court decision which rendered anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, the politics of housing are revealed as inextricable from the politics of reproduction. Against dominant readings that have taken the play's treatment of Ruth's pregnancy as a simple expression of reproductive futurism, I argue that Hansberry sets up a dialectical relationship between reproductive foreclosure and reproductive contingency.

Ruth's down payment on an abortion draws pregnancy into the realm of reproductive foreclosure, in which possible futures are shut down through racialised states of debt. Crucially, however, Ruth also experiences pregnancy as a contingent situation, the outcome of which cannot be determined in advance. Developing these concepts through close analysis of the text of the play in relation to the work of Hortense J. Spillers, I develop a new account of Walter Lee Jr's redemption at the end of the play: not as a claiming of his patriarchal legacy, as has often been argued, but as an engagement with childhood and what Spillers calls 'the heritage of the mother'.⁵¹ Finally, I bring these ideas to bear on Hansberry's stage directions and the reproduction of the play itself through performance, expansion, adaptation and interpretation. Like the other works I explore in this book, *A Raisin in the Sun* refuses simplistic analogies between pregnancy and culture as modes of creation, instead developing a complex reproductive political vision that emphasises the contingencies of both cultural and biological reproduction.

Chapter 2 develops the concept of reproductive contingency through an analysis of *Window Water Baby Moving*, Stan Brakhage's film of his then-wife, Jane Brakhage, pregnant and in labour with the couple's first child, Myrrena. Released in 1959, the same year *A Raisin in the Sun* debuted on Broadway, *Window Water Baby Moving* occupies a very different context: pregnancy and birth in a white, bohemian household. Like *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Window Water Baby Moving* has been interpreted as a romanticisation of childbirth; some feminist critics have also charged the film with objectifying Jane. In this chapter, I offer an alternative interpretation of the film that begins by refocusing attention away from Jane's body and towards the figure of the grid. The grid appears in a variety of forms across *Window Water Baby Moving*: most notably as the frame of the window that gives the film its title, but also as the shadow of that frame, and also in the pattern formed by the tiles of the bathroom in which Jane is shown bathing. Most commonly associated with post-war minimalist art, the grid, I argue, appears in *Window Water Baby Moving* not to exemplify regularity and standardisation, but as a figure for contingency. The film's formal dynamics have important political resonances: produced in a climate of anxiety about neonatal disability in the wake of a rubella

epidemic in the late 1950s, *Window Water Baby Moving's* formal expressions of contingency are contextualised by the reproductive politics of disability. As in Hansberry, the anxieties that fuel the film are linked specifically to fatherhood and the instability of patriarchal models of inheritance and heredity. Developing these ideas, the chapter closes with a consideration of Jane's essay 'The Birth Film', which makes repetition a register of the contingencies of maternal labour.

Repetition comes to the foreground in Chapter 3, where I turn to the reproductive politics of Richard Yates's novel *Revolutionary Road* (1961). Yates's narrative of marital discord in 1950s Connecticut culminates in the fatal self-abortion of one of its central characters, April Wheeler, following a campaign of reproductive coercion by her husband, Frank. Taking as my starting point an uncanny textual echo between *Revolutionary Road* and a late Yates short story, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' (1981), I contend that understanding Yates's use of repetition can unlock a fresh approach to his politics of reproduction. Contesting a critical consensus that presents Yates's repetitions as a sign of stylistic decline, I present strong archival evidence that the echo linking *Revolutionary Road* to 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' should be approached as a formal strategy embedded in a larger critique of patriarchal models of reproduction-as-reiteration. Through his representation of Frank Wheeler's repetitive embodied behaviour, Yates suggests that patriarchal pronatalism is deeply invested in fantasies and fears about perfectly mimetic repetition.

These ideas are developed through key symbolic objects across both texts: the kitchen calendar, the picture window and the digital computer in *Revolutionary Road*; the contact lens and the cinema screen in 'Saying Goodbye to Sally'. As rendered by Yates, these symbolic objects share a quality I term 'duplicitous transparency': they promise a form of representational immediacy or 'pure' repetition, and in the process obscure the gendered labours of reproduction. Yates's critique of duplicitous transparency, I argue, takes aim at ideologies of cultural and biological reproduction alike. His aesthetic of repetition combines an auto-critique of realist fiction with a powerful skewering of patriarchal pronatalism. Published two decades later, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' positions itself in

direct relation to *Revolutionary Road* through its uncanny textual echo of the novel. I propose that reading these texts together can help us understand the scope of Yates's reproductive politics and its intimate relationship with his literary style, and particularly his use of repetition. Yates's repetition of his first novel in one of his late short stories pursues the possibilities of another form of repetition rooted not in patriarchal pronatalism but in reproductive contingency.

The first three chapters of the book are focused on close analysis of one or two works. The book's second half takes up a more expansive, comparative approach, albeit one that continues to be grounded in close analysis. Chapter 4 explores the trope of the prosthetic pregnancy in the poetry and prose of Sylvia Plath and the novel and film versions of *Rosemary's Baby*. I contextualise these works in light of the thalidomide episode, successive rubella epidemics, and cold war concerns about the effects of nuclear radiation on foetal development. The chapter situates media engagements with these issues alongside Plath's maternal writing of the early 1960s, Ira Levin's 1967 novel *Rosemary's Baby*, and Roman Polanski's 1968 film adaptation of the novel. In analysing these works, I focus on two senses of the term 'prosthesis': on the one hand, I interrogate representations of literal prostheses, such as those worn by children affected by thalidomide. On the other, I argue that both Plath and *Rosemary's Baby* evoke parallels between pregnant and prostheticised embodiment as forms of hybrid co-corporeality. In both Plath and *Rosemary's Baby*, the trope of the prosthetic pregnancy is constructed in ambivalent relation to notions of being prostheticised by cultural production, whether in the form of writing (for Plath) or reading (for Rosemary). The trope of the prosthetic pregnancy, I contend, opens up new ways of thinking through the disability politics of reproduction in the 1960s. The expansion of rights to contraception and abortion in this period has a difficult relationship with disability history, to the extent that the social consensus around these rights was bound up with cultural anxieties about neonatal disability. The trope of the prosthetic pregnancy registers such fears, but I suggest that it also opens up potential forms of solidarity across movements for disability justice and reproductive freedom.

Chapter 5 begins by juxtaposing two 1965 milestones: *Griswold v. Connecticut*, the legal decision that codified reproductive privacy, and *Life* magazine's publication of Lennart Nilsson's photographs of foetuses at various stages of development. The *Griswold* decision was historic for two reasons: its ruling that state bans on contraception were unconstitutional, and its reasoning that citizens possessed a right to privacy from the state. Nilsson's photographs, which exposed the foetus as never before, seem to conflict with the court's focus on privacy. I situate this apparent contradiction in light of the photographs' implicit conflation of photographic and biological reproduction. Tracing this fusion of media and reproductive imaginaries through the media theory of Marshall McLuhan, I argue that Nilsson's foetal photographs present a fantasy of representation without exposure in which the maternal medium is transcended. The figure of the autonomous foetus re-emerges in another fantasy of technology and its transcendence: Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Many of the film's feminist critics have noted that its foetal Star Child represents a patriarchal fantasy of reproduction without a gestating subject; I contend that the Star Child also symbolises a dream of cinema detached from its material support. Placing the film in conversation with feminist theories of emotional labour, as well as 1960s cinema and media theory, I argue that the film stages a collision of reproductive control and reproductive contingency through its representation of gendered technology. I then move to consider Paul Sharits' experimental flicker film *Razor Blades* (1965–68), which I analyse as a demystification of both the foetal image and the dream of an immaterial cinema. The chapter closes by evaluating a feminist approach to the dream of birth without a gestating subject: Shulamith Firestone's proposal for ectogenesis in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970).

The concluding chapter explores representations of the journey in literary engagements with abortion, focusing especially on two texts from the early 1970s: Joan Didion's novel *Play It As It Lays* (1970) and Lucille Clifton's 'the lost baby poem' (1972). Both texts develop a symbolic link between the aborting body and the land, which I situate in relation to the reproductive symbolism of the frontier thesis, as well as the populationist nationalism that shaped the abortion laws passed across the US in the late

1800s.⁵² Before engaging with the long shadow of these rhetorics in Didion and Clifton, I present a brief analysis of Anne Sexton's 1962 poem 'The Abortion', which pursues a connection between the abortion and the post-industrial landscape through which the speaker drives on the way to terminate her pregnancy. The analogy between the body and the landscape re-emerges in Didion's early 1970s fiction of the American West, which connects abortion to the broader theme of an expired frontier mythology. Reading *Play It As It Lays* in light of Didion's non-fiction writing about California, I argue that the novel brings together the abortion, the cinema, the road and the casino as linked symbols of contingency. Meanwhile, Didion's symbolic association between the aborted foetus and wastewater is shared by Clifton's 'the lost baby poem'. Reading the poem's use of tense as a negotiation of reproductive contingency, I approach Clifton's water symbolism via Sophie Lewis's concept of amniotechnics. The book closes by addressing the contemporary dynamics of abortion travel in the wake of the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*, and new configurations of the imagined relationship between the aborting body and the land in an era witnessing a widespread criminalisation of abortion in the US.

In drawing this introduction to a close, I want to address the artwork reproduced on the cover: Joanne Leonard's 'Reproduction', from the 1973 series *Journal of a Miscarriage*. The series is formed of photo-collages produced across fifty-three days, beginning in the early part of the artist's pregnancy and continuing through her miscarriage and its aftermath. The *Journal* records an experience of reproductive contingency partly by overlaying images of the human body with images of the non-human world. This process sometimes involves a visual or verbal pun: in some of the collages, shells are juxtaposed with vulvas or a bulbous pregnant torso; in another, a woman's body seems to both mimic and merge with the body of a frog. In 'Reproduction', the collage technique results in an image of a baby lying atop photographs in a developing tray. A cropped hand lifts one of the photographs from the tray, suggesting that the baby might be lifted next. The work's title implies the commonalities of photographic and biological reproduction, and especially their shared relationship to contingency. At the same time, the work plays

with contrasts to evoke the radical divide between these distinct forms of reproduction. The colour photograph of the baby emphasises the pinkish tones of the child's skin, contrasting with the black-and-white image of the photographs in the developing tray.

Discussing her work in 2025 on the occasion of the V&A's acquisition of facsimile prints of *Journal of a Miscarriage*, Leonard has recontextualised it in relation to contemporary assaults on reproductive freedom in the US. Leonard observes that the expanding freedoms that contextualised the making of the work in 1973 are being rolled back fifty years later. She reflects that 'in today's atmosphere, I might easily have died of bleeding from my miscarriage'.⁵³ Leonard's comments emphasise the destructive implications of the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision, which in 2022 overturned the constitutional abortion rights secured by the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. Her comments, like *Journal of a Miscarriage* itself, draw attention to experiences of reproductive contingency in which access to reproductive healthcare can make the difference between life and death.

Leonard's sentiment contradicts the majority opinion in *Dobbs*, in which Samuel Alito invokes an all-encompassing vision of 'reproductive planning'. Quoting the 1992 *Casey* decision, Alito declares that 'reproductive planning could take virtually immediate account of any sudden restoration of state authority to ban abortions'.⁵⁴ In their dissenting opinion, Stephen Breyer, Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor stress the impossibility of such a totalising model of 'reproductive planning'. They note that contraceptives are neither universally accessible nor 100 per cent effective; that sex is not always consensual, and the person who risks pregnancy is not always in charge of contraceptive decisions. They add:

Human bodies care little for hopes and plans. Events can occur after conception, from unexpected medical risks to changes in family circumstances, which profoundly alter what it means to carry a pregnancy to term. In all these situations, women have expected that they will get to decide, perhaps in consultation with their families or doctors but free from state interference, whether to continue a pregnancy. For those who will now have to undergo that pregnancy, the loss of *Roe* and *Casey* could be disastrous.⁵⁵

With this passage, the dissenting judges imply that the defence of reproductive freedom needs grounding not in ideologies of planning and control, but in an acknowledgement of unpredictability and chance events. While political discourse often equates reproductive rights with reproductive planning, the *Dobbs* dissent suggests that a new era of government assaults on reproductive freedom demands a fresh acknowledgement of reproductive contingency. In this book, I locate such an acknowledgement in the culture of a decade widely associated with the embrace of reproductive planning. Looking back to the literature and film of the 1960s, I argue that paying close attention to cultural form can help us map the coordinates for a feminist politics of reproductive contingency.

CHAPTER 1

Resisting Reproductive Foreclosure: Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*

Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, follows the Youngers, a working-class African American family living on the South Side of Chicago some time between the Second World War and the late 1950s. When the play opens, Big Walter Younger has died and the family plan to use the money from his life insurance policy to move to a better home. Taking its title from Langston Hughes's 'Harlem' (1951) and inspired by that poem's meditation on deferred dreams, *A Raisin in the Sun* is set entirely inside the cramped house that the family are desperate to leave. Lena, Big Walter's widow, buys the family a new home in a neighbourhood called Clybourne Park, but their plans are disrupted when a representative of the white-dominated community offers the Youngers a bribe to keep them out. As this drama plays out, another one emerges in the background: Ruth, Lena's daughter-in-law, announces that she is pregnant.

A Raisin in the Sun finds its drama in the dynamics of waiting: first, the Youngers wait for the life insurance cheque, then they wait as various manifestations of racist segregation obstruct its redemption. The deferral of the Youngers' dreams is matched to the modes of delay associated with life insurance, inheritance and property: anticipating death, awaiting an inheritance, staving off the repayment of a debt. Ruth's revelation that she has made a 'five-dollar down payment' on an abortion indicates that reproduction has also been absorbed by these capitalist structures that foreclose the future.¹ In important ways, however, the play detaches

Ruth's pregnancy from the logics of foreclosure that would either drive her to an abortion against her wishes or cast her body as the bearer of a liberated future. Fracturing these logics, *A Raisin in the Sun* develops a dialectical account of the relationship between reproductive foreclosure and reproductive contingency.

Though it has received little attention in critical analyses of the play, Hansberry's treatment of Ruth's pregnancy is at the heart of her complex vision of revolutionary space and time. *A Raisin in the Sun* highlighted the connections between racism and reproductive control at a time of violent white backlash against desegregation. Despite the US Supreme Court's historic rejection of segregation in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (1954), the Housing Act passed by Congress in the same year left local authorities free to racially segregate inhabitants of federal urban renewal projects.² Chicago witnessed the effects of this policy: after the first of a long series of violent white attacks on new black residents of the Trumbull Park public housing project in the summer of 1953, the Chicago Housing Authority did not integrate its housing projects. This entrenched segregation shapes *A Raisin in the Sun's* Chicago.

Segregation is a form of reproductive control that aims, as Peggy Pascoe has shown, to produce white supremacy through the prohibition of interracial relationships.³ Hansberry's interest in reproduction extends beyond the literal effects of segregation on reproductive freedom, however. One of the play's central themes is the question of whether the limited legal reforms driven by the *Brown* decision could, alone, deliver black liberation. For Hansberry, the political tension between trusting in a programme of legal reforms and taking a revolutionary leap into the unknown is intimately linked to how we theorise and conceive of reproduction. If *A Raisin in the Sun's* dramatic structure seems to cling to the procreative timelines of paternal lineage and financial inheritance, its moments of ambivalence and contradiction register the tug of the contingent, unknowable future augured by Ruth's pregnancy. The pregnancy plot, after all, can take multiple routes apart from parenthood: conception might end in childbirth, abortion, miscarriage or adoption, with each of these routes taking multiple possible forms.

Throughout, then, *A Raisin in the Sun* holds in tension different ways of conceptualising reproductive processes, which are linked to different ways of conceptualising political change: on the one hand, as the secure repetition of the past in a prefigured future, and, on the other, as the unstable production of the new in a future that is just about visible but never ensured. This tension has a formal dimension too. For Hansberry, the theatre – where script and performance collide – is a form that allows the contradictions of reproduction to unfold, at a moment in the history of black struggle when questions of reproductive liberation took on a broad and complex resonance.

In revisiting *A Raisin in the Sun* more than sixty years after its Broadway debut, this chapter considers the politics of reproduction as they pertain not only to the play itself, but also to its critical reception. *A Raisin in the Sun* was criticised as a reformist capitulation to white expectations by many in the radical black rights movement, including the poet Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones), who charged Hansberry with assimilationism – a view he later revised.⁴ Hansberry's own disquiet at what she perceived to be erroneous readings of her play and its politics prompted her decision to reinsert material that had been cut for compression ahead of its first performance – material that plays a strong role in this chapter's analysis.⁵

Hansberry's politics of gender and sexuality have also been reassessed posthumously, particularly in light of the 1976 revelation that she authored a number of letters to *The Ladder*, a periodical founded by the lesbian organisation the Daughters of Bilitis, in which she dwelt on the intersection of lesbianism, feminism and race. Writing about Hansberry three years after this revelation, in a special issue of *Freedomways* devoted to the playwright, Adrienne Rich projects her subject into the future she did not live to see, asking, 'Where would Hansberry have placed herself, had she lived till now, in relation to the feminist movement of the present?'⁶ Pointing out archival evidence that a number of Hansberry's male leading roles were originally intended for women, Rich suggests that the playwright was ahead of her time, lacking the community she undoubtedly would have found in the women's and gay liberation movements had she lived.⁷

The body of criticism that exists on *A Raisin in the Sun* is thus punctuated by a recurrent notion that the play is somehow out of time; it is as if the play, like the family at its centre, has struggled to find its home. Hansberry's title, and the play's broader consideration of deferral, references Hughes's meditation on 'a dream deferred' in 'Harlem'.⁸ In Hughes's poem, the process of deferral materialises the intangible, but in Hansberry's play, the life insurance policy melts solid into air, turning the life of the father into a kind of sacrificial debt. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Ruth's experience of pregnancy emerges as a counterpoint to these forms of foreclosure, allowing the deferred future to open into a state of contingency. The play's dialectical exploration of reproductive foreclosure and reproductive contingency reflects the relationship between the ostensibly static text of the play and its mutation across time, as it has been expanded, performed and reinterpreted in light of archival discoveries. My consideration of reproductive space and time in *A Raisin in the Sun* attempts to situate the text within its historical moment of production and also pay attention to its deferred unfolding – to read it, that is, in the spirit of its own politics of reproduction.

Dead Fathers and Reproductive Foreclosure

We first meet the Youngers as they wrestle with the competing opportunities presented by the life insurance payout following Big Walter's death. His widow, Lena – or 'Mama', as she is denoted in the script – is determined to use the money to move the family into a better home. She buys a house in the low-income, white-dominated Clybourne Park because it is the only neighbourhood they can afford. The decision dismays Walter Lee, her son, who wants to invest the money in the liquor store business he imagines will propel him, his wife Ruth and their son Travis into the bourgeoisie. Dismayed at Walter Lee's fixation on wealth, Lena observes sadly, 'Once upon a time freedom used to be life—now it's money.'⁹ The equation that Lena's words skirt around – freedom *as* money, money *as* freedom – is a central preoccupation of the play. If, according to the promise of mid-century US capitalism, money fuels mobility, what becomes of those whose movement is impeded by racial segregation?

Immobility, for Hansberry, is not just an abstract metaphor. The play draws its plot from the playwright's father's struggle against racist property covenants in Chicago, a fight that reached the US Supreme Court in the *Hansberry v. Lee* case (1940). Carl Hansberry, a Chicago entrepreneur involved in the founding of the city's first black-owned bank, brought the case to fight restrictions that barred the purchase of certain properties by African Americans. In 1937, a white colleague of Carl's bought a family home in Chicago and transferred the title to him. The Hansberrys moved in and were subject to repeated racist attacks. When the Illinois Supreme Court backed their eviction, Carl took the fight to the US Supreme Court, which struck down the Illinois court's decision on the grounds that his interests as a property owner had not been represented by the original deed. However, the technical victory proved impossible to enforce and Carl eventually moved to Mexico in protest, dying there of a cerebral haemorrhage when Lorraine was fifteen. In dramatising, if obliquely, her father's fight with racist property law for her first play, Hansberry utilised her paternal inheritance while distancing herself from her father's initial faith in the colour-blindness of American capitalism and its ability to engender mobility for all. This dialectic is reflected in the play's narrative duality, in which the structure of white patriarchal inheritance is subverted by a counter-impulse towards a Marxist black feminist account of reproductive space and time.

A Raisin in the Sun revises the white Western mythos of paternity as both licence and burden. In contrast to maternity, which can be verified by the medical gaze at the moment of birth, paternity has historically required faith. As Peggy Phelan notes, before the advent of the DNA test Freud could valorise fatherhood in *Moses and Monotheism* as 'a hypothesis, based on an inference and a premise' – an institution held up by reason, not crude sense perception.¹⁰ For Freud, the distinction between maternal fact and paternal fiction parallels that between base corporeality and civilised society. Paternity asserts itself in the court of law, not in the delivery room, just as the law asserts itself in and for the social value of paternity. As Judith Roof has shown, paternity has long been represented as a cultural construction: 'Oedipus didn't recognize his own father; like the deductive Sherlock Holmes, he had to

infer from circumstances, belatedly establishing his filiation from witness testimony and cultural law.¹¹

Paternity's status as a fiction – an untestable hypothesis or originary doubt – has stimulated a great deal of movement in Western literature, from Telemachus' epic search for Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*, to Oedipus' sorrowful wanderings in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, to Stephen Dedalus's perambulations around Dublin in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). The doubt that structures fatherhood engenders the motion of these protagonists and, by extension, of the narratives they inhabit. The absence of the father, which symbolises for Stephen Dedalus the more fundamental 'void' of paternity itself, seems to necessitate movement.¹² These literary journeys combine autonomous motion with itinerant dislocation. Telemachus' quest to bring his father home is a testament to his faith in paternity, but this faith without knowledge also, as Maud Ellmann observes, means that he cannot guarantee 'his name, his lineage, or his substantial unity'.¹³ Oedipus' condemned vagrancy is a sentence imposed by his ignorance of paternity, but it also constructs his own identity as a father. Meanwhile, Stephen Dedalus's notion of fatherhood as a 'legal fiction' invests paternity, as Karen Lawrence has noted, with both the ephemerality of fabulation and the power of the law.¹⁴

Just as the invisibility of the father has engendered mobility for these protagonists, so it has been one of the mechanisms through which white supremacy is forged. In the antebellum period, the law of *partus sequitur ventrem* ruled that the status of slave was inherited from the mother, allowing slave-owners to disavow their link to the children they fathered with enslaved women. This convention, combined with the social prohibition of sex between white women and enslaved men, functioned to preserve the myth of a biological demarcation between the white and black races. As Dorothy Roberts explains, 'Despite the importance of biological descent in race-based slavery, people with predominantly white blood were held as slaves because they descended from a slave woman. The law made their white genetic tie invisible in the name of racial purity.'¹⁵ Roberts's analysis points to the deep connection between anxieties surrounding paternal biology and white fears of racial contamination. The invisibility of paternity helps to produce whiteness as a

coherent racial category and so is, from this perspective, inseparable from the fiction of white racial purity.

With *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry interrogates the legacy of this history for the black American family of the mid-twentieth century. The Youngers' struggle for the future rests on the void of paternity in a double sense: not only does the money at stake depend on Big Walter's death, but its security is tied up with the looming question of whether Walter Lee will fill his father's shoes. Despite her misgivings about her son's commercial aspirations, Lena agrees to split the remaining money between him and her daughter, Beneatha, who plans to go to medical school. Not only this, but Lena also gives Walter Lee control of the remaining legacy, hoping that a sense of patriarchal responsibility will temper his erratic behaviour. Lena's decision appears to backfire when Walter Lee's business partner runs off with both his and Beneatha's share of the money. In the final scene, the dejected Walter Lee seems about to give in to the racist inhabitants of Clybourne Park and their representative Mr Lindner, who has been sent to bribe the family to stay where they are. But in a last-minute show of integrity, he refuses the offer, explaining to Lindner that 'we have decided to move into our house because my father—my father—he earned it for us brick by brick'.¹⁶ His son Travis is presented as the visual evidence of the masculine line that the Youngers will draw with them into Clybourne Park. 'This is my son, and he makes the sixth generation [of] our family in this country,' Walter tells Lindner.¹⁷

The play's action is ostensibly wedded to the transmission of wealth along the patriarchal line, and its conclusion has been widely interpreted as Walter's redemption of his paternal legacy, metonymically signified by the insurance policy.¹⁸ From this perspective – which, it is important to note, is just one element of *A Raisin in the Sun's* dialectical view of reproductive space and time – Ruth's down payment on an abortion is an inversion of Big Walter's successful investment in the reproductive future. This is the view taken by Lena, who cites the prospect of Ruth's abortion as a decisive factor in her purchase of the house. She states, 'We was going backwards 'stead of forwards—talking 'bout killing babies and wishing each other was dead ... When it gets like that in life—you just got to do something different, push on out and do something

bigger ...'¹⁹ With these words, Lena casts her action as the polar opposite of Ruth's potential abortion – as an investment in life and the future, opposed to Ruth's investment in non-reproduction. Lena's words indirectly evoke the historical assault on the black woman's relationship to motherhood: under slavery, when 'she had to surrender her child-bearing to alien and predatory economic interests', as Angela Y. Davis puts it, and through enduring practices of forced sterilisation and coerced contraception.²⁰ But even as the play invests Lena's words with historical significance, it goes on to subtly complicate their implicit pronatalism.

Lena's stance is not just oriented towards the future – it also bears traces of the past. In an earlier scene, Lena discusses Big Walter's grief over the death of their baby, Claude, and suggests that the tragedy contributed towards his death, musing, 'I guess that's how come that man finally worked hisself [*sic*] to death like he done. Like he was fighting his own war with this here world that took his baby from him.'²¹ Big Walter's life insurance payout is traceable not only to his death but to the baby Claude's, as if two lives had to be sacrificed for the Youngers to 'push on out and do something bigger'. In Lena's eyes, Ruth's proposed abortion holds the unbearable implication that these sacrifices were for nothing. Although Big Walter 'couldn't never catch up with his dreams', his life insurance policy should give his heirs the mobility to do so.²² If Ruth terminates her pregnancy, repeating the past rather than contributing to the future, the value of Big Walter's sacrifice might as well be zero – or so Lena thinks.

Lindner's entrance into the play skews this dichotomy between reproductive progress and non-reproductive regression, however, by threatening to nullify the value of Big Walter's life in a far more literal manner. Lindner's intervention would immobilise Big Walter's legacy, and in doing so immobilise the Youngers by circumscribing them within the dilapidated apartment they want to escape. Hansberry's approach here is both subtle and radical: the play acknowledges and validates the traumatic history behind Lena's anti-abortion stance, but undermines her pronatalism by laying the responsibility for the Youngers' inability to go 'forwards' at the door of white supremacist capitalism, rather than Ruth's fertility.

The play shows that the capitalist institutions of paternal inheritance are designed to preserve white male authority. If Big Walter's insurance policy cannot be freely redeemed by his family after his death – as Lindner's intervention threatens – then its sole purpose is to commodify his life. Walter Lee expresses this correspondence between Big Walter's life and the insurance money when he exclaims, upon learning that he has been cheated, 'THAT MONEY IS MADE OUT OF MY FATHER'S FLESH—'.²³ Lindner couches his request that the Youngers stay out of Clybourne Park in abstract liberal platitudes, noting that 'the whole business is a matter of *caring* about the other fellow'.²⁴ Of course, the 'other fellow' to whom he refers is the white inhabitant of Clybourne Park, and the duty of care is all on the side of the Youngers. In this way, *A Raisin in the Sun* captures how mid-century struggles over racial equality unveiled contradictions in a patriarchal capitalist order coded as white. Lindner's attempt to undermine the Youngers' move to Clybourne Park is in the service of the social prohibition on interracial marriage and, by extension, interracial reproduction – as Ruth implies when, after his visit, Beneatha asks her sister-in-law, 'What they think we going to do—eat 'em?' and she replies, 'No, honey, marry 'em.'²⁵

Anti-miscegenation laws were being contested as Hansberry's play debuted on Broadway. In July 1958, Mildred and Richard Loving, an interracial married couple, were arrested at their home in Virginia and charged with violating the Racial Integrity Act. Their sentences were suspended on the condition that they moved away from Virginia and refrained from returning to the state together for twenty-five years. The couple took the case to the US Supreme Court, where state anti-miscegenation laws – among the last remnants of legal segregation – were finally overturned by the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* decision. Circuit Court Judge Leon Bazile, in his defence of the laws, protested, 'Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents. And but for the interference with his arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix.'²⁶ The unintended irony of Bazile's image of a static, pre-colonial world, rendered in defence of a colonial institution, demonstrates the extent to which

white fears about the freedom of black people were tied to the prospect of interracial reproduction.

Pascoe, in her history of US anti-miscegenation laws, discusses the way the laws were intended to preserve the authority of white men, despite their defenders' claims that they punished all parties equally. She argues that miscegenation law was 'not just one of the various forms of race segregation practiced between 1880 and 1930 but the foundation for the larger racial projects of white supremacy and white purity'.²⁷ Describing miscegenation law as a 'kind of factory for the production of race', she explains that these laws must be understood as producing racial categories, including the 'unmarked' category of whiteness, through the prohibition of interracial relationships.²⁸ Accordingly, Pascoe cautions against liberal histories that frame *Loving* as a romantic victory for individual rights.²⁹

In light of these struggles, *A Raisin in the Sun* asks whether reproduction might be reimagined and remade outside the racial logics of capitalist inheritance, which submit procreation to the project of securing the transmission of wealth, and the supremacy and legibility of whiteness. These logics tend to collapse the future into the present – for instance, when a property is foreclosed or a life insurance policy taken out. The concept of foreclosure, as Tim Armstrong has argued, is central to the cultural and economic legacy of slavery. He writes, 'The foreclosed future is a primary fact of Black inheritance, interrupting even bourgeois accumulation and inheritance.'³⁰ Armstrong explores the contradictions racism presented to the early life insurance industry, which debated the question of whether the enslaved were to be insured on ships as persons or property. The insurance industry's notion of general average sacrifice, based on the idea that lost lives or goods were randomly selected to save the ship rather than deliberately scapegoated, was at odds with the practice of murdering enslaved Africans at sea. In the case of the slave ship *Zong*, whose owners submitted an insurance claim for the lives of Africans thrown aboard, Armstrong argues that '[w]hat is covered up is a sacrificial logic in which risk is not shared equally, where it is redistributed towards the bodies of the socially and commercially dispensable, bodies which disappear'.³¹ *A Raisin in the Sun* suggests that this racist sacrificial logic endures even where the free black man insures his own life.

The play thus reflects on what Saidiya Hartman terms 'the after-life of slavery', in which 'black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago'.³² Christina Sharpe conceptualises this afterlife as 'the wake': the 'paradoxes of blackness within and after the legacies of slavery's denial of Black humanity'.³³ Exemplifying one such paradox, Lindner's actions threaten to block Big Walter's ability to transmit money and authority, intending to ensure that the only thing black people can inherit is a racial identity constituted in a state of indebtedness. If the Youngers agree to Lindner's proposal to 'buy the house from you at a financial gain to your family', they will owe Clybourne Park their absence.³⁴ Just as credit becomes debt, so motion becomes stasis, and the Youngers' inheritance is disarticulated from the mobility it had promised. This transformation of credit into debt preserves another tenet of white supremacy: that whiteness is a precondition for financial inheritance. *A Raisin in the Sun* explores this situation as a contradiction within capitalism itself, which must constrain the mobility it ostensibly enables in order to defend white supremacy.

In interviews, Hansberry voiced her concern with the way the conditions of life for black Americans imposed this kind of foreclosed future. The posthumously published compilation of her writings, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* (1969), quotes Hansberry on the 'heartbreaking' fact about the school she attended as a child: that it 'was *not* an old building but, on the contrary, a relatively new and modern one. Its substandard quality had been planned from the drawing board.'³⁵ The school existed '*not* to give education but to withhold as much as possible, just as the ghetto itself exists not to give people homes but to cheat them out of as much decent housing as possible'.³⁶ In a 1963 interview with Diane Fisher for the *Village Voice*, Hansberry states, 'And the ghetto kills, literally. Statistically, Negro men die the youngest of any group in this country: white men, Negro women, and white women follow in that order. I think housing is so important I wrote a play about it.'³⁷ This comment underlines Hansberry's recognition of the determining but changeable influence of material conditions on life chances.

A Raisin in the Sun registers the way such material foreclosure can engender a form of imaginative foreclosure. Walter Lee is the

primary vector of imaginative foreclosure in the play: not only because his ill-fated liquor store venture seems doomed from the start, but because his hopes for the future, when voiced, are stifling in their specificity. Just before he leaves to make the business transaction that loses the Youngers part of their inheritance, he offers his son Travis a vision of the bourgeois life he imagines he is about to inaugurate:

You wouldn't understand yet, son, but your daddy's gonna make a transaction ... a business transaction that's going to change our lives ... That's how come one day when you 'bout seventeen years old I'll come home and I'll be pretty tired, you know what I mean, after a day of conferences and secretaries getting things wrong the way they do ... 'cause an executive's life is hell, man—(*The more he talks the farther away he gets*) And I'll pull the car up on the driveway ... just a plain black Chrysler, I think, with white walls—no—black tires. More elegant. Rich people don't have to be flashy ... though I'll have to get something a little sportier for Ruth—maybe a Cadillac convertible to do her shopping in ...³⁸

As he continues with this achingly detailed vision of life as a successful businessman, Walter draws a stark contrast with his current situation. His dream presents a problem: is it possible to detach the act of imagining the future – a vital dimension of working for political change – from the logic of foreclosure? Walter tells Lena that he sees the future as 'a big, looming blank space—full of *nothing*. Just waiting for *me*. But it don't have to be.'³⁹ He meets the challenge of the unknowable future by filling the 'blank space' with details, constructing an imagined future home and filling it with fictional possessions.

In the play, imaginative foreclosure shapes not only dreams of riches but also fears of violence. In a scene deleted before the play's premiere but subsequently reinstated by Hansberry, Lena and Mrs Johnson, a neighbour of the Youngers, debate Walter Lee's dissatisfaction. In response to Mrs Johnson's judgement that Walter Lee is too ambitious for his own good, Lena rejoins, 'My husband always said being any kind of a servant wasn't a fit thing for a man to have to be.'⁴⁰ But, despite Mrs Johnson's criticisms of Walter Lee, they share a tendency to imagine the future in vivid detail.

Mrs Johnson provocatively performs concern about the family's move to Clybourne Park by predicting that their house will be bombed, even going so far as to imagine the newspaper headline: 'NEGROES INVADE CLYBOURNE PARK—BOMBED!'⁴¹ While these are two very different forms of imaginative foreclosure, Mrs Johnson's vision of murder determines the material texture of the future, as does Walter's dream of riches.

By contrast, Hansberry's description of Ruth's pregnancy cleaves the time of reproduction from the time of foreclosure. Ruth, when she reveals that she is pregnant, resists answering Beneatha's questions about whether or not the pregnancy was intended:

- BENEATHA: Did you mean to? I mean did you plan it or was it an accident?
 MAMA: What do you know about planning or not planning?
 BENEATHA: Oh, Mama.
 RUTH: (*Wearily*) She's twenty years old, Lena.
 BENEATHA: Did you plan it, Ruth?
 RUTH: Mind your own business.⁴²

The question of whether or not Ruth planned her pregnancy is never resolved in the play: reproduction sits outside the dynamic of projection epitomised, in very different ways, by Walter Lee and Mrs Johnson. In this exchange, the question of choice gives way to matters of practical immediacy. The conversation between the three women also underlines the indeterminacy of the potential baby's gender: Lena hopes it is a girl, but Beneatha describes it as 'he'.

If this indeterminacy is a source of anxiety in the play's first act, it becomes a tentative source of hope in the second. After Lena's announcement about the house in Clybourne Park, Hansberry's stage directions state that Ruth '*flings her arms up and lets them come down happily, slowly, reflectively, over her abdomen, aware for the first time perhaps that the life therein pulses with happiness and not despair*'.⁴³ In this moment, it is clear for the first time that Ruth desires another child. Her ability to imagine motherhood has been precluded by the oppressive material conditions of her life. Now she faces the prospect of leaving their apartment for a home with a

'whole lot of sunlight', Ruth can imagine her pregnancy for the first time.⁴⁴ Her reverie follows her vocal expression of joy at leaving the 'cracking walls' and 'marching roaches' of the Youngers' current apartment.⁴⁵ Ruth's objects of contemplation shift in scale from the macro to the micro: first she thinks of the projected move with all its promises and threats, then she takes in her immediate domestic environment with a more straightforward desire to leave, and finally her gaze stops at her own body and the new experience of feeling her pregnancy as something other than a problem.

Ruth's reverie, unlike her husband's and unlike Mrs Johnson's, is not a vision of the future but an experience of the present. It is certainly not an assurance of future happiness: the stage directions tell us that Ruth is well aware that the move to Clybourne Park is likely to bring '*various degrees of goodness and trouble*'.⁴⁶ Pregnancy becomes a symbol of this contingency, expressing the possibility of imagining the future without the ability to determine it in advance. It is significant, from this point of view, that Ruth never asserts that she has decided against the abortion. The foreclosed future suggested by her down payment on an abortion – which, like Lindner's proposal, draws reproduction into an economy of credit and debt – opens out into a state of contingency. *A Raisin in the Sun* thus establishes an opposition not so much between childbearing and abortion, but between the foreclosed future that Lindner would impose on the Youngers, and the open future that Ruth glimpses as she imagines a future away from the cramped, roach-infested apartment.

It is this contingency that Walter struggles to understand. When his mother tells him about Ruth's pregnancy and her potential termination, she implores him to '[b]e the man' his father was and 'say we a people who give children life, not who destroys them—'.⁴⁷ Walter, however, is unable to comprehend either the possibility of a new baby or the prospect that Ruth might have an abortion. If Lena understands Ruth's decision as a choice between going backwards and going forwards, Walter refuses to even register it, as he persists, 'You don't know Ruth, Mama, if you think she would do that', even as his wife emerges and confirms that she has made a down payment for the procedure.⁴⁸ Despite his earlier willingness to forecast the family's future of riches, Walter halts when asked

to envision Ruth's reproductive dilemma, recoiling simultaneously from its radical indeterminacy – will it end in birth or abortion? – and from the domestic sphere itself. His redemption at the end of the play, to which I now turn, involves not simply his restoration to the home, but a radical revision of the meaning of domesticity.

Maternity, Flesh and Walter's Redemption

The home, for Walter Lee, is initially the resented background to the real world outside. His disdain for domesticity, for reproductive labour and its spaces, is apparent from the first scene of the play, in which eggs become a metaphor for women's work. As Ruth wearily urges her husband to eat his eggs, he composes his own domestic drama:

That's it. There you are. Man say to his woman: I got me a dream. His woman say: Eat your eggs. (*Sadly, but gaining in power*) Man say: I got to take hold of this here world, baby! And a woman will say: Eat your eggs and go to work. (*Passionately now*) Man say: I got to change my life, I'm choking to death, baby! And his woman say—(*In utter anguish as he brings his fists down on his thighs*)—Your eggs is getting cold!⁴⁹

Walter Lee finally cries, 'DAMN MY EGGS—DAMN ALL THE EGGS THAT EVER WAS!'⁵⁰ Eggs are a symbol of biological reproduction, but they also represent the reproduction of daily life – the multitude of acts that accumulate to build the future. This way of thinking is anathema to Walter's impression of the future as a fixed space in the distance, as well as to his notion of productive activity as something that takes place outside the home. In one particularly bitter outburst, he tells Ruth that black men do not succeed, "Cause we all tied up in a race of people that don't know how to do nothing but moan, pray and have babies!"⁵¹

This sense of being 'tied up' by women and the facts of reproduction points to Walter's complex relationship with mobility. Accounting for the time he has spent away from home, he tells his mother that he spent one day looking 'at them big black chimneys for hours' and the next day looking 'at the farms'.⁵² Walter's route passes through the terrain of industry – evocative of the northern

states, the symbolic space of freedom for African Americans – and the terrain of agriculture, evocative of the plantation economies of the southern states. Yet, from Walter’s perspective, the historical sense of this dichotomy between the industrialised north and the agricultural south, which has meant so much to his mother, evaporates, leaving a static terrain: both factory and farm are spaces of productive activity that exclude him. Although Walter is driving, he is trapped.

The conventional critical understanding of Walter’s redemption at the end of the play has tended to agree with Lena’s comment that her son has ‘come into his manhood’ and rejected the impositions of feminised domesticity.⁵³ According to Harry J. Elam, ‘It is Mama’s ability to let go and listen that enables her son, Walter Lee, to grow into his manhood.’⁵⁴ Elam’s interpretation brings to mind a common criticism that Lena is ‘a prototype of the matriarch who robs young black men of their strength’, to quote Margaret G. Burroughs.⁵⁵ This prototype would be solidified in the sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s 1965 report on ‘The Negro Family’, which claimed that African American families suffered from a state of social pathology caused by the dominance of women, rather than men, in black communities. Moynihan’s figure of the black matriarch racialises the ‘Momism’ stereotype disseminated in Wylie’s *Generation of Vipers*, as discussed in my introduction to this book.⁵⁶ Hansberry, however, spoke against the stereotyping of Lena as a black matriarch in interviews. Speaking to Studs Terkel, she notes, ‘Obviously the most oppressed group of any oppressed group will be its women, who are twice oppressed. So I should imagine that they react accordingly: As oppression makes people more militant, women become *twice* militant because they are twice oppressed. So that there is an assumption of leadership historically.’⁵⁷

Hansberry’s nuanced portrayal of African American kinship is illuminated by the work of Hortense J. Spillers. In ‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book’ (1987), Spillers critiques the white supremacist, ahistorical thinking that lies behind the caricature of the black matriarch. She writes, ‘In effect, 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, and in the African-American instance, often fathered it, and, as often, without whatever benefit of patrimony.⁵⁸ Under conditions of enslavement, neither maternal nor paternal kinship could be admitted, because to do so would be to undermine the property relation. This history, Spillers writes, shows the error of the patriarchal thesis, because ‘the female could not, in fact, claim her child’, and ‘because “motherhood” is not perceived in the prevailing social climate as a legitimate procedure of cultural inheritance’.⁵⁹ This denial of kinship, within an order that erases paternity and makes maternity the bearer of enslavement, engenders for black people an experience of having ‘been “made” and “bought” by disparate currencies, linking back to a common origin of exchange and domination’, writes Spillers.⁶⁰ Spillers’ analysis contextualises the Youngers’ crisis in *A Raisin in the Sun*. They witness the transformation of Big Walter’s life into a cheque, but when they attempt to redeem the value of this cheque and exchange it for a home, the transaction is interrupted by a white man’s attempt to buy their freedom of movement. Walter’s exclamation when he learns the inheritance is gone – ‘THAT MONEY IS MADE OUT OF MY FATHER’S FLESH—’ – expresses the traumatic repetition of a history in which black people were ‘made’ and ‘bought’ by disparate currencies.

In Spillers’ analysis, ‘flesh’ is an important theoretical term. ‘Flesh’, as a term distinct from ‘body’, is the ‘primary narrative’ that registers the wounding of captivity as a form of ‘hieroglyphics’.⁶¹ Even after the abolition of slavery, this wounding endures in the symbolic order of American culture, which ‘remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation’.⁶² Walter’s exclamatory reference to his father’s flesh expresses his painful realisation that the experience of inheritance has become, for his family, a traumatic repetition of the African American’s exclusion from white Western kinship structures. In place of what Spillers identifies as ‘the *vertical* transfer of a bloodline, of a patronymic, of titles and entitlements, of real estate and the prerogatives of “cold cash”, from fathers to sons’, Walter is confronted with Lindner’s offer to buy the Youngers’ freedom of movement.⁶³ This confrontation, as Walter expresses it, exposes the family’s inheritance as the flesh that bears the inscription of racist violence.

For Spillers, the fact that the condition of slavery was inherited from the maternal line engenders not matriarchy, but something else – a ‘shadowy evocation of a cultural synthesis long evaporated – the law of the Mother’.⁶⁴ This shadowy trace of the law of the mother, to be distinguished from the ahistorical black matriarchal thesis, places black men in a unique position: ‘The African-American male has been touched, therefore, by the *mother*, handed by her in ways that he cannot escape.’⁶⁵ Directly countering Moynihan’s position that African American families should mimic white American patriarchy, Spillers argues that the ‘law of the Mother’, imposed in the service of slavery, might be reclaimed as a mode of insurgency. Distinct from both matriarchy and patriarchy, this insurgent power is accessible to African Americans regardless of gender.

Spillers’ analysis illuminates Walter’s trajectory as described in Hansberry’s stage directions. Walter rehearses his confrontation with Lindner as a nihilistic performance of racist cliché. The stage directions state that Ruth, Beneatha and Mama watch him with ‘frozen horror’ as he mimics:

“Captain, Mistuh, Bossman—(*Groveling and grinning and wringing his hands in profoundly anguished imitation of the slow-witted movie stereotype*) A-hee-hee-hee! Oh, yassuh boss! Yassssuh! Great white—(*Voice breaking, he forces himself to go on*)—Father, just gi’ ussen de money, fo’ God’s sake, and we’s—we’s ain’t gwine come out deh and dirty up yo’ white folks neighborhood ...” (*He breaks down completely*) And I’ll feel fine! Fine! FINE! (*He gets up and goes into the bedroom*).⁶⁶

When Lindner arrives, Walter repurposes his performance, rehearsed as a self-loathing capitulation, into a gesture of opposition. He abandons his planned speech in favour of an improvised, impassioned resistance: ‘We don’t want your money.’⁶⁷ Crucially, Walter’s breakdown follows his identification of fatherhood with his white oppressors: ‘Great white—(*Voice breaking, he forces himself to go on*)—Father’.⁶⁸ Walter’s subsequent actions contextualise this as a moment of raised consciousness, in which his mimicry turns to resistance as he acknowledges the oppression of white patriarchy.

A statement drawn from the final paragraph of Spillers' essay has the potential to illuminate the black feminist energies of Walter's redemption. She writes:

the black American male embodies the *only* American community of males which has had the specific occasion to learn *who* the female is within itself, the infant child who bears the life against the could-be fateful gamble, against the odds of pulverization and murder, including her own. It is the heritage of the *mother* that the African-American male must regain as an aspect of his own personhood—the power of 'yes' to the 'female' within.⁶⁹

Spillers' identification of 'the female' and 'the infant child' is important. Though Ruth sees Walter's speech to Lindner as a sign of maturity, his moment of resistance is coded as childlike. As he speaks to Lindner, Walter Lee is at first '*like a small boy*', then he is '*[r]eally like a small boy*'.⁷⁰ This dynamic focuses attention on the Youngers' surname. Inherited through the paternal line, the surname suggests an alternative trajectory that moves towards childhood, rather than manhood. Are members of this family growing younger instead of older? Certainly, they frequently seem at odds with their ages, according to the stage directions. Beneatha, who is '*about twenty*', is '*deliberately childish*' as she greets Asagai, her Nigerian suitor.⁷¹ Walter is repeatedly described in terms of childishness in the stage directions: he is '*thoughtful, almost as a child would be*' as he and Ruth discuss their relationship.⁷²

The stage directions insistently conflate old age and youth. Interestingly, Travis, the only child in the play, displays signs of adulthood. When Ruth mocks Travis in the opening breakfast scene, he first rolls his eyes, then allows her to embrace him but '*keeps his face fixed with masculine rigidity*', until finally the '*masculinity and gruffness start to fade at last*'.⁷³ Meanwhile, Lena expresses her hope that Ruth will give birth to a 'little old girl'.⁷⁴ Political consciousness, these stage directions suggest, might entail 'going backwards' instead of forwards', despite Lena's dismay at such a trajectory.⁷⁵ The final scene's use of the term 'manhood' must be understood in the context of a performance that returns Walter to his childhood, and thus to the realm of maternity, domesticity and women's labour

which, up to this point, he has been unable to see. This 'manhood', distinct from white structures of patriarchy, is shaped thoroughly by what Spillers calls 'the heritage of the mother'.⁷⁶ Accordingly, it is a gesture of Lena's, rather than Walter's, that closes the play: she returns to the apartment to claim her plant, the symbol of maternal care that she will carry to Clybourne Park.

Hansberry herself framed Walter's redemption as a rejection of Oedipal models of kinship, suggesting that the play's conclusion makes Walter into 'King Oedipus refusing to tear out his eyes, but attacking the Oracle instead'.⁷⁷ Hansberry's reference to Oedipal blindness here recapitulates the play's frequent use of this trope. Travis '*almost blindly*' takes his towels to the bathroom.⁷⁸ When Beneatha awakens, she '*looks, a little blindly, out to the bathroom*'.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, Ruth is '*glassy-eyed*' as she suppresses her emotion when Travis excitedly recounts his experience of watching the building's janitor killing a rat.⁸⁰ References to blindness occur again later in the play, when Bobo, Walter's friend, visits to inform him that his money has been lost. Ruth '*goes blindly to the tap*' to get Bobo a glass of water, interjecting into his conversation with her husband '*like a dead woman*'.⁸¹

Evident here is a convergence of blindness, automaticity and death that recalls the Freudian uncanny. In his 1919 essay, Freud identifies an uncanny quality in the convergence of life and death, which is evoked in his parallel between fears of being buried alive and fantasies of intrauterine existence. The convergence of life and death is a central trope in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Lena arrives home after Lindner's departure and, as yet unaware of the purpose of his visit, comments, 'my children got all the energy of the *dead!*'⁸² Deathliness merges with automaticity in some of the stage directions, particularly in the first scene, where they repeatedly point towards the Youngers' mechanical gestures. As the family get ready in the morning, they move like robots. Travis crosses the room '*almost mechanically*' to make his bed.⁸³ Ruth, meanwhile, complains about Walter's morning cigarette in a manner '*too automatic to deserve emphasis*';⁸⁴ she later inspects Travis '*automatically*' as he leaves for school.⁸⁵

The play's emphasis on the automatic reflexes of exhausted potential can be approached through Bill Brown's discussion of the

American uncanny as a legacy of slavery, in which the US harbours a 'repressed apprehension that within things we will discover the human precisely because our history is one in which humans were reduced to things (however incomplete that reduction)'.⁸⁶ Yet objectified automation does not exhaust the meaning of mechanism in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Scenes of blindness, artifice and unreality are associated in the play not only with unwilling mechanism, but also with inspired practices of quotidian performance. In Act 2, Scene 1, Beneatha and Walter dance together to the music of Nigeria in a state of rapture. Beneatha's eyes are '*far away—"back to the past"*'; Walter's eyes are '*pure glass sheets*'.⁸⁷ Hansberry's stage directions take us into Walter's imagination of Africa as if it were a parallel reality: '*He sees what we cannot, that he is a leader of his people, a great chief, a descendant of Chaka, and that the hour to march has come.*'⁸⁸ Hansberry represents Beneatha's and Walter's nostalgia for Africa with a note of satire – her stage directions at the beginning of the scene state that Beneatha '*promenades to the radio and, with an arrogant flourish, turns off the good loud blues that is playing*' before announcing, 'Enough of this assimilationist junk!'⁸⁹ While the humour in this scene derives from the sense that Beneatha and Walter know little of Africa, their imagination serves an important political function *as* imagination. With such scenes, the play recruits acts of quotidian performance for its project of rewriting the Oedipal fiction of kinship. These scenes of everyday improvisation and imagination can be brought to bear on Hansberry's broader politics of performance, as I shall now go on to explore.

Hansberry's Stage Directions and the Reproductive Politics of Performance

Walter's improvisatory redemption is an allegory of the political possibilities of performance: he scripts his interaction with Lindner as a moment of resigned capitulation, but departs from the script when called to perform. The space that opens up between the written play and the performance allows Walter Lee to abandon self-loathing mimicry in favour of improvised rebellion at the end of the play. Walter's earlier scenes mobilise this allegory to different ends. The dream of wealth he shares with Travis takes the form of

a script to be read to the letter in his fantasy bourgeois future: 'And I'll come up the steps to the house and the gardener will be clipping away at the hedges and he'll say, "Good evening, Mr. Younger." And I'll say, "Hello, Jefferson, how are you this evening?" And I'll go inside [...]'⁹⁰ Meanwhile, Walter's terror of the 'big, looming blank space' suggests the empty stage.⁹¹ But it is the collision of these two elements – the script and the stage – that provides him with the resources to refuse Lindner's bribe.

The distance between the written text and its enactment on the stage emphasises what Phelan terms the reproductive politics of performance. Phelan analyses performance as a form of 'representation without reproduction':

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology.⁹²

Phelan draws a parallel between performance and non-reproductive sex, and argues that both are undervalued. However, Phelan's argument that non-reproductive sex is undervalued does not quite capture the complex dynamics of reproductive stratification. Hansberry's stage directions, which emphasise Ruth's desire for another child, resonate with Angela Y. Davis's observation that '[w]hile women of color are urged, at every turn, to become permanently infertile, white women enjoying prosperous economic conditions are urged, by the same forces, to reproduce themselves'.⁹³ In this context, Ruth's commitment to a life in which she is not condemned to be 'permanently infertile' draws attention to all the ways in which biological reproduction might entail the non-reproduction of white supremacy. If performance is inherently non-reproductive, then the stage direction occupies a liminal space between the reproductive and the non-reproductive, denoting their mutual constitution. The stage direction can be reproduced indefinitely, but it points towards what cannot be reproduced: that which 'cannot be saved, recorded, documented'. Thus the stage direction

points to the mutual entwinement of the reproductive and the non-reproductive, reminding us that reproduction-as-repetition – a category that includes the repetition of capitalist systems of inheritance – might, at any moment, break down in the open space of reproductive contingency.

Hansberry's stage directions, then, draw attention to the contingent elements of the play's text: the instructions that will be interpreted differently each time the play is performed. With Walter's scene of rebellious improvisation, Hansberry self-reflexively comments on *A Raisin in the Sun's* own reproductive contingency: that is, the multitude of ways it might be performed in the future. The open future addressed by the stage direction is illuminated by Hansberry's discussion of the difference between realism and naturalism. She told Terkel:

Naturalism is its own limitation – it simply repeats what is. But realism demands the imposition of a point of view. The artist creating a realistic work shows not only what is but what is *possible* – which is part of reality, too.⁹⁴

Hansberry went on to describe a ballet that she had hoped to include in the play, but which 'didn't work!' She added: 'But I think that imagination has no bounds in realism – you can do anything which is permissible in terms of the truth of the characters. That's all you have to care about.'⁹⁵

This perspective is particularly significant in light of Hansberry's revisions of the play during her lifetime, as well as its adaptations and sequels. Ben Keppel, in his valuable study of Hansberry's dialectical materialism, notes that her reinsertion of deleted scenes was explicitly intended to rebuff claims that *A Raisin in the Sun* was a reformist play intended to appease white liberals.⁹⁶ He provides numerous examples of Hansberry's explicit critique of capitalism, quoting her on the need for black leaders who would condemn not only the oppression of African American people, but also 'the true and inescapable cause of it – which of course is the present organization of American society'.⁹⁷ While Keppel is right to underscore the distance between the political content of Hansberry's work and its envelopment by a critical atmosphere shaped by McCarthyism, it

is surely worth recognising the extent to which *A Raisin in the Sun's* content – on the stage and in the film – was limited by its context of production. Steven R. Carter, for instance, notes that the play's 'first draft, which no longer exists, concludes with the Youngers sitting in the dark in their new home, armed, awaiting an attack by hostile whites'.⁹⁸ Carter also quotes dialogue from an early draft in which Walter, after his refusal of Lindner's offer, tells Lena that they will be 'all right', to which she replies, 'Yeah—if the crackers don't kill us all.'⁹⁹ Hansberry's situation, as a civil rights activist being surveilled by the FBI during this time, was constrained.¹⁰⁰ To speculate that the challenge of bringing a play with such content to Broadway in 1959, let alone one written by a black woman, contributed to the softening of its conclusion is not to deny Hansberry's commitment to Marxism.

The production of the 1961 film adaptation of *A Raisin in the Sun* betrays some of these tensions. Hansberry's original screenplay was cut significantly as it travelled through the Columbia Pictures system. Margaret B. Wilkerson's introduction to the unfilmed screenplay quotes Hansberry's declared intention to show much more of Chicago: 'Born to the romance of the Sandburg image of the great city's landscape, I was excited by the opportunity to deal with it visually and sent the formerly housebound characters hither and yon into the city.'¹⁰¹ Much of this footage, notes Wilkerson, was cut for length. The film does travel outside the Youngers' apartment to the bar, the Green Hat, and the house at Clybourne Park, but it retains the claustrophobic atmosphere of the play – and, indeed, was criticised for failing to expand beyond the stage set.¹⁰²

Hansberry was apparently eager to depict the daily struggles of the Youngers, perhaps in order to counteract liberal readings of the play. In a planned scene that was discarded before being filmed, Lena is shown during the last shift of her job as a domestic worker. In a final conversation with her employer, Mrs Holiday, Lena speaks frankly about her experiences of work, and declares, 'I don't reckon nobody would spend their life being a domestic if there was something better they could get to do, child.'¹⁰³ The scene extends the play's political commentary on domestic labour, and curtails characterisations of Lena as a 'black matriarch' by referencing the history of black women's domestic labour in white

households. But studio executives, concerned that Mrs Holiday was superfluous to the requirements of the plot, cut the scene, along with others that expressed the everyday racism faced by the Youngers. Wilkerson notes the 'insidious' nature of some of these cuts, which included scenes referencing British and French colonial violence and depicting Lena's encounter with a racist white market stall holder.¹⁰⁴

The links that connect the play as it was first performed, its augmentation by Hansberry's subsequent additions, the archival traces of its inspiration and genesis, and its multiple adaptations can be interpreted in light of Hansberry's model of reproductive temporality. This is set out clearly in the conversation between Beneatha and Asagai towards the end of the play. Mourning the loss of the money that would have sent her to medical school, Beneatha says, 'Don't you see there isn't any real progress, Asagai, there is only one large circle that we march in, around and around, each of us with our own little picture in front of us—our own little mirage that we think is the future.'¹⁰⁵ The future Beneatha describes here is the foreclosed future of Walter's detailed dream. Asagai, however, counters this vision of time with another one:

It isn't a circle—it is simply a long line—as in geometry, you know, one that reaches into infinity. And because we cannot see the end—we also cannot see how it changes. And it is very odd but those who see the changes—who dream, who will not give up—are called idealists ... and those who see only the circle we call *them* the 'realists'!¹⁰⁶

The circle described by Beneatha is usually ascribed to reproductive time, while the geometrical line envisioned by Asagai evokes patriarchal genealogies. As Julia Kristeva puts it in her essay 'Women's Time' (1981), linear time is masculinised while cyclicity is associated with the feminine.¹⁰⁷ This scene disrupts these associations. Asagai challenges Beneatha when she complains that her money has been taken from her, asking, 'Was it your money he gave away?'¹⁰⁸ When she concedes that it was not, he continues, 'Then isn't there something wrong in a house—in a world—where all dreams, good or bad, must depend on the death of a man?'¹⁰⁹ Here, Asagai articulates verbally the shift in values that Walter Lee

performs as he recognises the whiteness of the archetypal father under capitalism and breaks down. His formulation 'in a house—in a world' repositions the house as a synecdoche of the wider political world rather than as a refuge from it. As Asagai continues speaking, the unpredictable reproductive time earlier signalled by Ruth's pregnancy is extrapolated to the dynamics of anticolonial revolution:

I will go home and much of what I will have to say will seem strange to the people of my village. But I will teach and work and things will happen, slowly and swiftly. At times it will seem that nothing changes at all ... and then again the sudden dramatic events which make history leap into the future. And then quiet again. Retrogression even. Guns, murder, revolution.¹¹⁰

Hansberry wrote this scene in the run-up to Nigerian independence in October 1960, but Asagai's words (and Hansberry's vague dating of the play's action 'sometime between World War II and the present') suggest he is speaking at an earlier date.¹¹¹ Through Asagai, Hansberry connects the African American struggle for freedom to African decolonisation. Against a model of political change as steady progress achieved through gradual reforms, Asagai conceives of historical time as an unpredictable sequence of leaps and pauses, advances and regressions, that he knows might well entail his own murder if he achieves political office and does 'terrible things to have things my way or merely to keep my power'.¹¹² His words modify Beneatha's fantasies of returning to a pre-colonial Africa, drawing attention instead to the present historical moment.

Asagai's rejection of Beneatha's claim that time is a circle implies a rejection of the notion that a play remains the same each time it is performed. His notion of time as a line whose trajectory cannot be mapped from the present reflects the changing reception of *A Raisin in the Sun* as new discoveries about the text and its author emerge, and political contexts shift. The re-evaluation of *A Raisin in the Sun* as a radical text has often entailed the claim that it was ahead of its time, but we might rather understand it as a play that changes with time as its archival corpus is augmented.¹¹³ For instance, as

already noted, in an essay published in the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of the play, Baraka revised his earlier assessment of the play's reformism, commenting that 'the concerns I once dismissed as "middle class" – buying a house and moving into "white folks' neighborhoods" – are actually reflective of the essence of Black people's striving and the will to defeat segregation, discrimination, and national oppression'.¹¹⁴

Hansberry's own opposition to reformism is evident in a letter to the *New York Times* regarding debates over civil disobedience, where she expresses her ambivalent relationship with her father's political legacy, observing, 'My father was typical of a generation of Negroes who believed that the "American way" could successfully be made to work to democratize the United States.'¹¹⁵ The letter continues:

The fact that my father and the NAACP 'won' a Supreme Court decision, in a now famous case which bears his name in the lawbooks, is—ironically—the sort of 'progress' our satisfied friends allude to when they presume to deride the more radical means of struggle. The cost, in emotional turmoil, time and money, which led to my father's early death as a permanently embittered exile in a foreign country when he saw that after such sacrificial efforts the Negroes of Chicago were as ghetto-locked as ever, does not seem to figure in their calculations.¹¹⁶

Rather than dissociating herself from this paternal legacy, Hansberry turns it into theatre. This project of mobilising her paternal inheritance while departing from its political implications shapes Hansberry's representation of the home as a contingent space which is embedded within the property relations of racial capitalism, but which might nevertheless foster 'the more radical means of struggle'. In the home, the temporal circle of reproductive foreclosure might be remade into Asagai's line of reproductive contingency.

Asagai's words make sense of the fact the future into which the Youngers step at the end of the play might well be a violent one. Again, Hansberry's own experience contextualises the play's representation of racism. Speaking to *The New Yorker* in 1959, Hansberry discussed her family's assault by their white neighbours during the period of her father's civil rights case:

I was on the porch one day with my sister, swinging my legs, when a mob gathered. We went inside, and while we were in our living room, a brick came crashing through the window with such force it embedded itself in the opposite wall. I was the one the brick almost hit.¹¹⁷

The anecdote throws into relief the symbolic function of the Youngers' window. The stage directions at the beginning of the play point to the significance of the lone window of the Youngers' apartment, noting, *'The sole natural light the family may enjoy in the course of a day is only that which fights its way through this little window'*.¹¹⁸ Yet the yields of this fight are dearly prized by the family. Ruth's first act upon awakening is to raise the shade to let in the *'dusky Southside morning light'*.¹¹⁹ Though Lena complains, *'Lord, ain't nothing as dreary as the view from this window on a dreary day, is there?'*, she also repeatedly reaches through it to tend to her beloved plant.¹²⁰

This *'single window that has been provided for these "two" rooms'* is twinned with the pluralised windows we cannot see – the windows of *'Four o six Clybourne Street, Clybourne Park'*.¹²¹ The promise of multiple windows that let in a *'whole lot of sunlight'* at the new house carries the threat of violence, of broken windows, of being the one the brick narrowly misses or even hits. At the same time, it is the promise of sunlight at the new house that shifts Ruth's perspective on her pregnancy, even as she acknowledges the problems that lie ahead. On moving day, Ruth triumphantly shows Beneatha some curtains she will take to the new house. When Beneatha points out that they do not know the size of the windows at Clybourne Park, Ruth reasons that *'they bound to fit something in the whole house'*.¹²² The windows of the house on Clybourne Street, unconstrained by the specificities of size and shape, symbolise the open future that drives Ruth forward. Like Ruth's reproductive future, the windows can be imagined precisely because they are unconstrained by detail.

The window recurs as a symbol of the pregnant body in literature and film of the long 1960s. This symbolism rests on the window's duality: simultaneously letting outsiders into a property and keeping them out, the window suggests the pregnant body's slippage in the collective imaginary from porous vessel to securitised bunker

and back again. But the stakes of this slippage shift and change across this book's corpus. For the Youngers, windows carry the threat of racists armed with bricks as well as the promise of sunlight. In the work I address in the next chapter, Stan Brakhage's 1959 film *Window Water Baby Moving*, the window functions differently: it is by turns a lens, frame or grid in which the anxieties of white procreation are thrown into relief.

CHAPTER 2

The Birth Film and the Grid: Brakhage's *Window Water Baby Moving*

In 1959, Stan Brakhage released *Window Water Baby Moving*, a twelve-minute silent work sometimes known as 'the birth film'. It is a film of two fragmented halves: intimate shots of Brakhage's first wife and creative collaborator, Jane Brakhage (later Wodening),¹ in labour with the couple's first child are intercut with shots of her bathing in the late stages of pregnancy.² *Window Water Baby Moving* has attracted expressions of shock, recognition, reverence and condemnation since its release. Indeed, it was controversial before it was even edited: the Kodak laboratory tasked with processing the film threatened to destroy it, and it was only saved when the obstetrician who attended the birth wrote a letter attesting to its educational function.³ Notorious for its intimate portrayal of Jane's birthing body, *Window Water Baby Moving* has been criticised for variously debasing or romanticising childbirth and maternity. In the heat of these debates, the film has found a place in history as an audacious act of unveiling that exposes the private, intimate scene of birth to the scrutiny of the public eye.

This association with exposure and unveiling is at the heart of the controversy generated by *Window Water Baby Moving*. The film's birth scenes, which make extensive use of close-ups of Jane's genitalia, have been divisive even within the world of avant-garde cinema: at its premiere, Maya Deren 'came before the audience to declare, very emphatically, that giving birth was a very "private matter," and it shouldn't ever be made into a public affair'.⁴ Yet the film's ostensibly unflinching approach to childbirth is not the

whole story, because *Window Water Baby Moving* is structured by a kind of flinch from Jane's body: the camera's unmoored point of view seems to be continually dodging something as it darts between the viewpoints of Stan, Jane and the imagined perspective of the baby being born. This itinerant perspective is matched by temporal disorder: flashbacks to the opening bathing scenes repeatedly interrupt the birth section, as if withdrawing from the pain and blood of labour. This sense of birth as an event that dodges representation – even, or especially, as it is laid bare by the camera – subverts the graphic corporeality for which *Window Water Baby Moving* is best known.

This turn away from the scene of birth has been overlooked in much feminist criticism of *Window Water Baby Moving*, which has often focused on what it means to make the birthing body so starkly visible on film. With the emergence of the women's liberation movement in the 1970s, *Window Water Baby Moving's* depiction of Jane's body came under new forms of scrutiny, as did Stan's treatment of her during the film's production. Amy Taubin's 1978 comment on the film is emblematic: 'It's an ugly metaphor but I always think that Jane has no right, even if she wanted to, and I'm not claiming that she ever does, to close her legs.'⁵ Since the 1970s a number of feminist artists have engaged in politicised subversions of what Robin Blaetz, among others, has taken to be a 'romanticizing of the birth process' in Brakhage's work.⁶ Barbara Hammer's 1974 film *Jane Brakhage*, filmed on 16mm at the Brakhages' home in the Colorado mountains, 'refigures Jane Brakhage from the role of muse to the position of active agent within the house', in the words of James Boaden.⁷ Historian and filmmaker Marjorie Keller's film *Misconception* (1978) follows her brother and sister-in-law through the birth of their second child to produce what Keller has called a 'loving critique of *Window Water Baby Moving*'.⁸ Yet, if some critics have targeted Brakhage's apparent romanticisation of birth, others have drawn attention to the internal contradictions of *Window Water Baby Moving*. Abigail Child insists on the film's redemptive irony, through which 'the domestic lyricism of the opening intercut between tub, light, and body is unnerved, undone as it were, with the film moving into the operating room to include Jane's pain and blood, and Brakhage

himself, flushed, ecstatic, strangely *outside* the picture, pushing in'.⁹ To the extent that the film depicts the contradictions of natal-ity and artistic practice within a 1950s American marriage, the political stakes of this depiction are heavily disputed.

Women, film and the private home have a long history of entanglement, as John David Rhodes observes. In his book on the house in American cinema, Rhodes writes that '[t]he house and women have, throughout their histories, shared two very fundamental features: they have been objects of possession and sources of visual fascination'.¹⁰ Rhodes draws on Laura Mulvey here to explore how the quality of 'to-be-looked-at-ness', contextualised by women's historic legal status as chattel, reveals 'the knot that ties a history of pleasurable looking (at women onscreen) to a history of property rights'.¹¹ Rhodes argues that the house is 'already a spectacle' because it is a 'medium for making publicly visible the wealth of its owners and inhabitants'; the film of the house, then, means that 'this spectacular function is multiplied'.¹² From this perspective, 'woman', as an ideological construction, is a medium for making patriarchal possession publicly visible. To extend Rhodes's argument further, it is easy to see how the white birthing woman might enter this constellation as the figure that binds the property relations of home ownership and racialised patriarchy together in the form of the nuclear family. Nowhere, perhaps, are these layered forms of mediation more tightly bound than in the birth home movie. This spectacular function of the birth home movie is complicated by the fact that birth is also a metaphor for mediation itself – whether the mediation of the film or the mediation of the house. This metaphorical function of birth cuts two ways: on the one hand, to understand the birthing body as a medium, just like a house or film, risks rendering all these mediums natural facts and further reifying the property relations that underlie them. At the same time, the birth home movie can make visible the labour that reproduces the family, the film and capitalism itself.

Representing the domestic sphere does not necessarily entail critiquing its social relations, of course. As Elaine Tyler May has documented, the cold war 1950s were a time when 'public policy, personal behavior, and even political values were focused on the home' as a counter to communist influence.¹³ The Kitchen Debate

of 24 July 1959, in which US vice-president Richard Nixon and Soviet leader Nikita Krushchev contested the relative merits of US capitalism and Soviet communism at the Moscow State Fair, illustrates this construction of 'private' space for 'public' ends. Stopping at a mock American kitchen display, Nixon pointed out its dishwasher to Krushchev, who scoffed at the domestic technology, saying, 'We have such things.'¹⁴ The Kitchen Debate not only positioned the home as a showcase for new technologies; it also cast the home as a political technology by turning the kitchen into a vehicle for America's cold war ambitions. Nixon apparently failed to see the irony of this strategy as he praised the supposed lack of state interference into personal decisions as the hallmark of US capitalism. The valorisation of the ideal home in the US of the 1950s was a form of ideological cold warfare. In order for the domestic sphere to play its role in the defence of American capitalism, the work of reproducing it must be effaced and the sanitised spectacle of the ideal home must be naturalised.

Brakhage's comments on domesticity highlight his distance from the project of ideological cold warfare. Recalling the period during which *Window Water Baby Moving* was produced, he told an interviewer that he was both preoccupied with the prospect of his own imminent death and beset by the difficulties of everyday life. Unable to get his car started in the morning, Brakhage admitted that he was 'hardly prepared to take on a family. I didn't even expect to keep living, really, and I became more shocked by life, every day.'¹⁵ Speaking in a more abstract sense, he suggests an alternative reason to valorise the domestic: not to wage ideological cold war, but to defuse violent impulses:

My sense of the domestic was just daily life, and *before* I was married, *before* the children started coming along, I began having the sense that we mostly live at the kitchen table – or *I* do anyway – and that, while this is true, most people don't have that valorized or envisioned sufficiently to feel comfortable with it, and so they feel dissatisfied with their lives. I believe that's one of the mainsprings of war. You feel you're not really living, so you run off to war or you go hold up a Seven-Eleven store or you go to the amusement park and ride the roller-coaster – *something* to get the adrenaline going.¹⁶

The shifting personal pronouns here – from ‘we’ to ‘I’ to ‘you’ – posit a neutral, genderless subject. We might all live at the kitchen table, but only some of us are peeling potatoes. At the same time, his preceding comment about the shock of everyday life is far from a 1950s cliché of smooth domestic comfort. Instead, Brakhage emphasises both the material struggle to support a life and a family as an artist, and the way much contemporary art obfuscates that struggle.

If Brakhage’s home birth films valorise the domestic, they do so by foregrounding its instability and uncertainty. Indeed, my starting point in this chapter is that *Window Water Baby Moving’s* affective register is more anxious than idealistic, and this reflects the film’s preoccupation with the contingencies of gestation and birth. Nowhere is this affective anxiety more vivid than in the film’s frequent invitations to look away from Jane’s body and towards the figure that alternately frames and splices it: the grid. Whether in the form of the window, the shadow cast by the window on Jane’s belly, or the tiles of the bathroom, the grid – understood as a framework of intersecting straight lines – is everywhere in *Window Water Baby Moving* once we look for it. An icon of the formal and the cerebral in post-war art, the grid seems to pull the gaze away from all that has made *Window Water Baby Moving* notorious: away from the blood and pain of labour and away from corporeal intimacy. The grid is also a dialectical object that, in Rosalind Krauss’s canonical 1979 argument, expresses the unresolved social tensions of the United States in the twentieth century, and particularly the tension between the religious and the secular.¹⁷

In what follows, I argue that *Window Water Baby Moving’s* grids stage a tension between two divergent ways of understanding pregnancy: on the one hand, as a planned project that unfolds in a fixed sequence and culminates in birth; on the other, as a negotiation between the gestating subject and her environment that produces what the media theorist Mal Ahern terms a ‘contingent encounter’.¹⁸ As outlined in this book’s introduction, during this period the notion of pregnancy as a planned and predictable project underpinned the dominant ideologies of birth control advocates and pronatalists alike. Both pregnancy and the modules of a grid might seem, initially, to proceed in a series of predictable stages.

But, just as the gridded shadow on Jane's belly is contingent on the unpredictable movement of light through the window frame, so the process of pregnancy can be made and unmade by the environments that contextualise it. For instance, any pregnancy might end in miscarriage or abortion, rather than birth. The disability politics of reproduction are relevant here too: as we shall see, hanging over the film are Brakhage's anxieties about fathering a disabled child after Wodening contracted rubella during pregnancy. The film's grids take on new meaning in light of these contexts.

In this chapter, I analyse *Window Water Baby Moving's* aesthetics of reproductive contingency in order to explore how the film might be reconciled with a feminist politics of reproduction. Making this case involves challenging some prominent critical orthodoxies on Brakhage and his work. Tracking the rise and fall of the filmmaker's reputation in the second half of the twentieth century, David E. James positions him as a modernist at odds both with the 'identity' cinema of the feminist and black civil rights movements, and with the postmodernism of Warhol.¹⁹ Brakhage's work, as we have seen, has been widely criticised for its patriarchal underpinnings. Produced in the same year Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* debuted, *Window Water Baby Moving* might be pitched as its countercontext: a mythologisation of white procreation and domesticity. That is not my position here, though I do not claim that *Window Water Baby Moving* is somehow able to float free of its era's racist, patriarchal reproductive order. Nor do I claim that the film is *explicitly* committed to reproductive justice. Rather, the film's aesthetic strategies of repetition, improvisation and collaboration register not patriarchal security, but reproductive contingency.

In paying attention to *Window Water Baby Moving's* grids, I also spotlight some commonalities between Brakhage's work and the conceptualism he is often pitched against. Recognising these commonalities might entail new perspectives on conceptualism too. Pointing out that Andy Warhol's mother, Julia Warhola, sketched a Campbell's Soup can years before the same act made her son famous, Gilda Williams has suggested that his 32 *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1961–62) 'is not necessarily another incarnation of the Modernist/Minimalist grid, as it is generally read, but also a kind of calendar, marking the daily task of feeding one's family'.²⁰

Similarly involved with ideas of maternity and domesticity, the film's grids open up the question of whether the 'Modernist/Minimalist grid' is involved with matters of reproduction more often than is usually acknowledged. *Window Water Baby Moving*, I argue, makes the birthing body visible not to mythologise natal-ity as a metaphor for artistic creation, but to gesture towards the 'shock' of the contingent at the scene of reproduction.

Window, Shadow, Tiles: The Grids of *Window Water Baby Moving*

Window

We begin with a black screen; then, like a newborn, the film blinks awake to reveal our first grid: the Brakhages' window frame as it filters hazy light into the bathroom. Another blink as black leader engulfs the frame once more; then the camera-eye opens onto Jane's pregnant torso in profile as she steps into the bath.



Figure 2.1 The grid of the window frame in *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959).

Shadow

The frame's shadow on the bathwater forms another grid, which seems to dance on the liquid surface as intercut shots dart between the shadow and the window it indexes. If these opening moments are frantically quick, they are also excruciatingly slow: Jane's entrance into the bath is elongated, depicted again and again from multiple angles, repeatedly refused. Even when the watery, shadowy grid is broken by one of Jane's legs, then the other, the film does not allow her to sit straight away: it keeps looping back, as if exaggerating the slow entrance into a hot bath. Our two grids – the window frame and its shadow – have formed a net and Jane is caught. As Jane finally lies back, the gridded shadow settles on her pregnant belly and the camera hovers here, briefly losing its skittish energy.



Figure 2.2 The gridded shadow on Jane's torso in *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959).

Tiles

Then the looping, recursive dynamic starts up again to emphasise the third grid: the black-and-white bathroom tiles. These tiles dominate the shot for a second before they are obscured by Jane's head as she settles into the bath once more.

The shots I have just described extend over about fifty seconds. In these opening seconds, the film's repetition creates a dynamic interplay between the three grids, which are by no means identical. The gridded shadow most immediately resembles an inverted crucifix: a biblical referent of maternal sacrifice transported to the profane space of the domestic bathtub. Such collisions of the secular and the sacred underpin the function of the grid in modern art, according to Krauss. She argues that the grids of Piet Mondrian, Kazimir Malevich, Jasper Johns, Agnes Martin, Sol LeWitt and others represent modernism's contradictions: these grids function as the myth that allowed twentieth-century artists to sustain a commitment to both science and religion, materialism and mysticism. The twentieth-century artist, she explains, was forced to choose between the sacred and the secular as a rift opened up between them, and the 'curious testimony offered by the grid is that at this juncture he tried to decide for both'.²¹

Krauss does not discuss Brakhage's work in 'Grids', though she clearly shares his fascination with modernity's unstable dichotomies. 'Grids' is regularly cited for its polemical statements on the grid as a form that is exclusively modern and inscribes a realm of pure visibility.²² These assertions are not always given credit for their irony: as Krauss develops her argument, she undermines each of these claims to carefully expose how modernity dismantles itself in the grid.²³ The grid emerges as a dialectical form that encodes both the sacred and the secular, spiritualism and materialism, the modern and the pre-modern, the visual and the linguistic. For Krauss, the grid breaks down these apparent dichotomies by holding them both in view simultaneously. Let me suggest, then, that in *Window Water Baby Moving*, the grid functions to register and break down a set of tensions in just the way Krauss outlines, challenging oppositions of the linear and the cyclical, death and

life, mimesis and abstraction, newness and repetition, contingency and necessity. *Window Water Baby Moving* uncovers how crucial these dichotomies are to ways of understanding both art and reproduction.

The tension between the linear and the cyclical can be gleaned in the repetitive structure of *Window Water Baby Moving's* light-filled bathroom sequence, which is recapitulated macrocosmically through the subsequent intercutting of the idyllic bathing scenes with close-ups of the baby's head crowning, as well as Jane's swollen belly and pained face. Despite this recursive structure, the film nevertheless moves forward and culminates in the baby's birth. The resulting tension between linear and cyclical time can be understood in gendered terms. As we have seen, for Julia Kristeva, the 'masculine' time of 'departure, progression, and arrival' is distinct from the 'eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm' associated with feminised experiences of ovulation, menstruation and gestation.²⁴ She describes the time of reproduction as a mode of 'monumental' temporality that is radically estranged from linearity and 'the time of history'.²⁵ *Window Water Baby Moving*, moving forward towards birth even as it continually loops backwards, sets up an interplay of masculine linearity and feminine cyclicity that troubles the certainty of both.

The modularity of the grid provides a form for the expression of these dynamics. Krauss writes that the grid can be viewed centripetally, as 'an introjection of the boundaries of the world into the interior of the work', or centrifugally, 'compelling our acknowledgement of a world beyond the frame'.²⁶ Where the centripetal viewer finds a cyclical dynamic, the centrifugal viewer looks for a linear journey outwards. Another way of framing this tension between the centripetal and the centrifugal is in terms of the interaction between the necessary rules of the grid's closed system and the contingencies of its context of production. This is the 'live' dimension of the grid to which Ahern draws our attention, and which I now want to consider in relation to *Window Water Baby Moving's* reproductive politics.

In contrast to Krauss's discussion of the grid as a static object, Ahern's contemporary analysis reminds us that the grids of twentieth-century art have often originated with performance and

the contingencies of the live event. Discussing the hand-drawn grids of LeWitt's 'Wall Drawings', Ahern states:

I consider the hand-drawn grid to operate much like a camera. Both are what I would like to call 'recording devices.' LeWitt's early Wall Drawings deployed the abstraction of a grid and the texture of a wall surface to capture the contingencies of human gesture. The camera does the same thing, using the abstractions of optics and chemistry: the curved shape of the lens and the textured grain of a photosensitive surface.²⁷

For Ahern, the work of LeWitt, and that of his contemporaries Agnes Martin and Adrian Piper, captures the interactions of immaterial abstraction (the idea of the perfectly straight line) and material contingency (the traces of the subtle shifts in hand pressure that make the perfectly straight line an impossibility). She suggests that 'recording devices' like both the camera and the hand-drawn grid can 'visualize a biological register of being, and of doing, that is independent of intention'.²⁸ I would add that this could be a description of gestation, which is also 'an encounter between abstract form and contingent matter'.²⁹ Of course, an index of physical presence tells us little about the social relations that shape the politics of reproduction. Ahern notes that Piper's later work was increasingly preoccupied with the social effects of her presence as a black woman often mistaken as white. Yet the grid's register of physical contingency is political to the extent that it contradicts the abstractions of racism and universalism. As Ahern notes of Piper: 'Worried that she would herself become an abstraction, she used recording devices to reassure herself of her body, of her contingent, physical being.'³⁰

Ahern's theory of the grid illuminates the interplay of *Window Water Baby Moving's* three grids and their relevance for the politics of reproduction. The grids formed by the window frame and the tiles are seemingly fixed by the architecture of the house, but the gridded shadow on Jane's belly is contingent on the movement of the sun and clouds outside the room and of Jane within it. From this point of view, the gridded shadow expresses pregnancy as a performance that might follow a set of biological 'instructions', but which unfolds in the contingent flux of the live act. As the shadow's shimmering silhouette seems to undo the apparent fixity of the

frame and the tiles, a notion of gestation as a way of 'materialising a contingent encounter' emerges.

If the grid pulls our attention away from Jane's body, then, it does so in order to express, on the level of form, what is at stake in the gestating body's representation. In the era of domestic containment and 'family planning', pregnancy and birth were abstracted as processes that were both predictable and controllable. As explored in my discussion of Hansberry, within the purview of reproductive control, white reproduction was promoted and black reproduction was discouraged not only discursively but materially. But gestation emerges in *Window Water Baby Moving* as a radically contingent encounter between the gestating subject and her environment, an encounter which might well fail to secure a white, masculine inheritance into the future. At the same time, reproductive contingency is a source of affective anxiety in the film as well as creative possibility, and this anxiety – as the next section explores – is rooted in mid-century cultural anxieties about gestation, disease and disability.

Is the Placenta a Window?

The film's first grid – the window that mediates between the Brakhages' bathroom and the outside world – might easily be taken as a symbol of cinema, if cinema were to be imagined as a mode of transparent access to a world, including the 'world' of the gestating body. This notion of transparent access to a woman's body was the basis of the feminist critique of *Window Water Baby Moving* advanced by Anne Friedberg in 1979, when she noted:

As a filmmaker making a film about the birth of his first child, Brakhage endows Jane with a pregnancy both literal and figurative. Perhaps through his ownership rights as paternal head of a nuclear family, her body becomes his artistic material: vagina, mouth and window are intercut as comparative metaphoric apertures. In Brakhage's film, Jane-as-woman is pregnant in a double sense – she is both bearer of his child and bearer of his meaning.³¹

Friedberg places the window in a metonymic chain with Jane's vagina and mouth in her analysis of *Window Water Baby Moving*.

The window, from this point of view, is a passageway or point of entry through which Brakhage can enter the space of the artwork and, by metonymic association, the woman.

This account, however, does not quite capture the complex symbolism of the window, a complexity that is, for Krauss, crystallised in the grid. Krauss writes of the window as a 'matrix of ambi- or multivalence', describing the bars of its frame as the grid that helps us 'to see, to focus on, this matrix'.³² She writes:

As a transparent vehicle, the window is that which admits light—or spirit—into the initial darkness of the room. But if glass transmits, it also reflects. And so the window is experienced by the symbolist as a mirror as well—something that freezes and locks the self into the space of its own reduplicated being. Flowing and freezing; *glace* in French means glass, mirror, and ice; transparency, opacity, and water. In the associative system of symbolist thought this liquidity points in two directions. First, towards the flow of birth—the amniotic fluid, the 'source'—but then, towards the freezing into stasis or death—the unfecund immobility of the mirror.³³

As Krauss puts it, the window's opaque, reflective aspect indicates the stasis of death (the end of the line) while its transparent aspect denotes fluidity and birth (the continuous cycle). The window, and by extension the grid, thus becomes a symbol of the intertwinement not only of transparency and opacity, but also of birth and death.

In the context of *Window Water Baby Moving*, the intertwining of natality and mortality in the window is not just a symbolic abstraction: birth, for Brakhage, is always involved with death. In an interview with P. Adams Sitney, Brakhage explicitly discussed his anxieties towards the end of Wodening's pregnancy in relation to both his own prior suicide attempt and his fears about the health of the child. He notes:

Also there was one aspect of childbirth that was very dangerous to me. Again I, still subconsciously carrying the weight of my pitched suicide, and casting it forward, had the notion that my child might take my place in life and leave me free to die. That idea became more and more intense the closer we got to the actual birth. There were two things which held

me back in terms of this mythos: 1) would it be a boy or girl? If it were a boy, it would be a better stand-in for me. (This was all subconscious, but later figured out re what I did in filmic expression.) 2) Jane had German measles at three months and we had one in so many chances of a monster birth.³⁴

The troubling term 'monster birth' recalls a historically specific phenomenon: in 1958, the year *Window Water Baby Moving* was filmed, there was a US epidemic of rubella (also known as German measles), a disease which can cause miscarriage or disabilities, including blindness, in the developing foetus if contracted in early pregnancy.³⁵ Writing on a slightly later epidemic in the early 1960s, historian Leslie J. Reagan notes that rubella 'entered a culture devoted to babies but ashamed of, unprepared for, and often hostile to children with disabilities'.³⁶ Brakhage's reference to a 'monster birth' undoubtedly expresses this embedded hostility.

In this social context, Brakhage's reference to rubella should condition our understanding of the representation of the placenta in *Window Water Baby Moving*. Jane's placenta first appears towards the end of the film, shot in high-angle close-up as it is delivered. These shots of the placenta grow blurry, as if the camera is stunned by this dense, bloody, opaque object. The placenta's opacity here seems at odds with the shimmering light filtering through the window in the bathing sections. Yet in the middle of the twentieth century, medical understandings of the placenta were moving away from an emphasis on opacity. Traditionally, the placenta had been understood as a secure barrier, sealing the foetus from external influence. Increasingly, however, science was suggesting that the placenta was not a closed bunker but something more akin to a medium between the intrauterine environment and the world outside it.

A 1958 New York City Public Affairs pamphlet titled 'Will My Baby Be Born Normal?' exemplifies the shifting understandings of risk, pregnancy and the role of the placenta. One lyrical passage echoes the traditional view by positioning the placenta as a lone protector from the pamphlet's catalogue of risks and dangers:

Every child has a silent nurse, constantly on duty, protecting him from almost every kind of poison, and much better prepared than his mother to see to it that he receives precisely the right amount of food and oxygen. This nurse screens out almost everything in the mother's bloodstream that could harm the child, before it reaches him, and even manufactures the extra chemicals that he needs. That nurse is the placenta, the spongy mass, like a round cushion, which is attached to the wall of the uterus and to the baby's umbilical cord.³⁷

However, the pamphlet also details the risks of placental abnormalities and notes that '[t]he real source of danger from lack of blood, and therefore lack of oxygen, is not up in the stratosphere but down in the mother's uterus – more precisely, in the umbilical cord and the placenta'.³⁸ It warns of diseases that can 'attack a baby before he is born and cause him to be born lame, blind, deaf, or with congenital heart disease', and goes on to outline the 1942 discovery, by Australian eye doctor Dr N. McAlister Gregg, that rubella could spread across the placenta to cause congenital disabilities.³⁹ The disease is positioned as a silent menace whose 'attack on the baby can be devastating even if the mother's illness was so slight that she scarcely noticed it'.⁴⁰ The notion of the placenta as a medium, rather than a barrier, would be consolidated in the wake of the thalidomide crisis of the early 1960s, the cultural legacies of which I explore in Chapter 4 in the context of *Rosemary's Baby* and the work of Sylvia Plath. In the late 1950s, understandings of the placenta were shifting and contradictory: it was somehow both nurse and betrayer, bunker and medium.

In this context, *Window Water Baby Moving's* placenta emerges as a dialectical symbol of transmission and containment, just like the window. Signifying both the sheltered space of the womb and the environmental situatedness of the pregnant body – and particularly its vulnerability to teratogenic agents – the placenta, like the window, gestures towards pregnancy as a process in which a seemingly predictable, closed system is rendered open and contingent on environmental influence. If the window teaches us to apprehend the transparencies of the placenta, then the placenta opens up an understanding of the window's opacities. Together, these linked symbols encode the reproductive body as a site of

contingency where the seeming predictability of gestation is always at risk of disruption. Apprehended in this wider social context, the placenta and the grid of the window emerge as registers of the contextual contingencies that shape reproduction.

As Brakhage frames it in his interview with Sitney, these contingencies compel a revision of his own patriarchal mythology. His fantasy that his child might take his place, leaving him 'free' to die, is undercut by the idea it might be disabled (or female) and thus an imperfect substitute for him. At the same time, this revision is folded back into the Brakhage myth: without a non-disabled son to replace him, the filmmaker must live. These dynamics, too, can be understood in the context of disability: in the same interview, Brakhage shares with Sitney his struggles with asthma and arthritis.⁴¹ Further, in a late interview with Scott MacDonald conducted in the mid-2000s, Brakhage discusses his experiences with visual impairment in childhood:

I was walleed: that is, my right eye was always adrift and didn't focus well. I had to really struggle to come to focus. I couldn't take focusing for granted. And much of what you and others have described as my experimentation is just a part of my scrambling to come to an understanding of how you achieve sight. Something that other people just have naturally, I had to *earn*.⁴²

He adds, 'My eyes were the weakest part of me really; either I was going to be destroyed by them or they were going to become the path through which my creativity could flower.'⁴³ In the interview, Brakhage does not explicitly connect these remarks to his anxieties, decades earlier, about fathering a disabled child. Nevertheless, his account of coming to understand his own disability as a form of creatively generative contingency is instructive for interpretations of *Window Water Baby Moving's* approach to paternity.

Brakhage's oscillating desires and anxieties – about a child that could take his place 'perfectly', about a child whose gender or disability would deviate from the paternal prototype – take on new implications in light of these ideas about his own disability as a generative constraint. The child who fails to be 'perfect' and thus replace him might also, if affected by Jane's rubella, live with a

visual impairment just as he did. This resemblance to the father would be driven by environmental rather than genetic reasons, however. The comment thus helps us to understand how ideologies that understand paternity as a project of repetition, in the sense of inherited traits and assets, are destabilised in *Window Water Baby Moving*. The film's grids gesture towards an imaginary of reproduction in which parenthood, like cinema, is never a simple project of mimesis; rather, even an ostensible repetition contains an element of unpredictability because of its unique context.

Brakhage's comment linking his experimentation to the process of 'earning' sight is, in some ways, at odds with his writings, which consistently valorise the 'untutored eye'. In his extended essay *Metaphors on Vision*, he sets up an opposition between the pre-cultural visual experiences of fetuses and young children, and the encultured habits of sight epitomised by the Renaissance perspective grid.⁴⁴ I now turn to consider the perspective lattice as another key referent for *Window Water Baby Moving's* grids. I do so in order to explore how the film complicates Brakhage's polemics against perspective, opening up new ways of understanding the relationship between natality and filmmaking across his broader body of work.

'Closed-Eye' Vision and the Perspective Grid

The latticed screens used for the production of one-point perspective in Renaissance art are charged objects for Brakhage. His extensive writings on cinema and vision are notorious for their polemicising against Renaissance perspective, which he pits against the pre-cultural scopic experience he terms 'closed-eye vision'.⁴⁵ Crucially, closed-eye vision is consistently associated with pre-natality and early childhood in Brakhage's writing. In *Metaphors on Vision*, Brakhage suggests that 'closed-eye vision' is the infant's default mode of sensory awareness, existing prior to and in conflict with the acquisition of language and the discipline of perspective. In a much-quoted passage, he invites the reader to:

Imagine an eye unruled by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the

name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception. How many colors are there in a field of grass to the crawling baby unaware of 'Green'? How many rainbows can light create for the untutored eye?⁴⁶

As Brakhage frames it here, the avant-garde filmmaker's challenge is to rediscover the infant's 'untutored eye' by representing the subjective experience of vision rather than the objective world in perspectival construction.

On the one hand, the unitary eye of the Renaissance perspective lattice represents a fantasy of objective, neutral, masterful vision. However, as Hannah B. Higgins reminds us, the tension between 'the subjective and rational self, between collective and individual experience, and between the divine and the secular' is already at work in the perspective grid.⁴⁷ After all, 'perspective' can refer to a subjective viewpoint as well as a supposedly objective one. This point is supported by Friedberg, who has argued that 'contrary to the common and flawed use of Alberti's window as a model for realist representation, Alberti supplies us with a Renaissance root for the concept of a windowed "elsewhere" – not a realism of subject matter but a separate spatial and temporal view'.⁴⁸ According to these interpretations, the contradictions that Krauss attributes to the modernist grid are already at work in the perspective lattice, which is far from the reductive disciplinary tool it appears to be in Brakhage's writings.

It would be a mistake, however, to take Brakhage's polemical writing at face value – not least because of its own internal contradictions, which I explore more later in this chapter. Similarly, it is simplistic to suggest that Brakhage's films are consistently pitched in defiance of one-point perspective. Indeed, he has noted that his goal when filming the birth of his third child, Neowyn, was to fuse Renaissance perspective with the untutored eye, rather than abandon it entirely. The resulting film, *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* (1961), is both shorter and more abstract than *Window Water Baby Moving*. Nine minutes long, it uses a signature Brakhage technique – painting and scratching on the surface of the film – to obscure the representational image of Jane in labour. Comparing the two birth films, Brakhage explained:

The main difference is the painting on film in *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular*. Only at a crisis do I see both the scene as I've been trained to see it (that is, with Renaissance perspective, three-dimensional logic, colors as we've been trained to call a color a color, and so forth) and patterns that move straight out from the inside of the mind through the optic nerve. In other words, an intensive crisis I can see from the inside out and the outside in.⁴⁹

After the realism of *Window Water Baby Moving*, Brakhage added, *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* was the result of his desire for 'a child-birth film which expressed all of my seeing at such a time'.⁵⁰

There is something uncanny in Brakhage's implication that, by sheer presence at the moment of birth, the father-director might access the densely corporeal vision of the baby while maintaining his own encultured, linguistically trained vision. Brakhage's interest in prenatal and newborn vision was long-standing. The 1969 film *Scenes from Under Childhood (Section 1)* attempts to evoke the experience of foetal perception. Discussing the film, Brakhage again describes a kind of fragmented form of subjective perception, split between father and child, noting that 'you could say it is *me* remembering *them* remembering something of their fetal beginnings; or, better still, myself *imagining* them remembering fetal beginnings *and* also remembering some sense of such a thing in myself'.⁵¹ This notion disrupts the single unifying eye of the Renaissance perspective grid with a model of vision as multiplicitous, fragmented across place and time, and never quite sure what it apprehends. This is not only a theory of vision and cinema, but a theory of fatherhood too; here, the father-filmmaker's link to the child is displaced, tentative and reliant on the continual work of memory and imagination. Indeed, Brakhage resists the notion of ownership in his writings on both film and fatherhood, commenting of his family, 'I avoid calling them *my* children because I do not want to possess them'.⁵²

The moments of *Window Water Baby Moving* where the frame is engulfed by black leader might be understood as a reference to the unknown of foetal vision – to the inaccessibility of intrauterine experience. By contrast, *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* and *Scenes* resituate foetal vision in the eyes of Brakhage himself as a leap of perceptual faith. His account of what he sees while witnessing the

'crisis' of childbirth modifies his valorisation of the 'untutored eye' in *Metaphors on Vision*. As Brakhage tells it, the goal of the birth film is not simply to recover 'closed-eye vision' but to capture its entanglement with one-point perspective. This entanglement is staged as the collision of Brakhage's own culturally trained vision with the 'inside out' vision of the baby being born. In this sense, *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* has a relation to natality that is both literal and metaphorical: the film, he maintains, is a direct representation of his ocular experience of witnessing birth, but it also treats the infant's passage from womb to world as a metaphor for the way vision is disciplined by language and culture.

In Brakhage's writings, the disciplining of vision by culture is framed as a relatively transhistorical phenomenon, but there is another way of understanding discipline in terms of *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular's* immediate historical context. *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular's* film works with abstraction to create a more hallucinatory visual experience than *Window Water Baby Moving*, and the result is less viscerally confrontational. The scratches on the surface of the film, described by Brakhage as an attempt to render the 'patterns that move straight out from the inside of the mind through the optic nerves', are deployed across his oeuvre and are often interpreted as a dimension of his Romantic sensibility.⁵³ However, the use of the technique in *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* is striking for the veil it casts over Jane in the act of childbirth. This 'veil' takes on a different meaning in light of the fraught production and release of *Window Water Baby Moving*.

Window Water Baby Moving, as an independent film, was not under the direct jurisdiction of the Hays Production Code's prohibition on representations of pregnancy and childbirth in mainstream cinema. Nevertheless, since 1873, the Comstock laws had repressed contraception, abortion and 'obscenity' alike. Even after staving off the threat of the film's destruction at the processing laboratory, Brakhage emphasised his fears of arrest in the wake of the film's release, noting that 'every time you showed the film in a public arena, there was a danger that someone would blow the whistle and you'd end up in jail'.⁵⁴ If *Window Water Baby Moving* courted charges of idealising domesticity and maternity, then, it also risked rendering them criminally obscene in the eyes of the

law. The shattered dualism that structures Brakhage's 'crisis' vision takes on a more layered meaning in this context. *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular's* partial embrace of the 'untutored eye', through which the film retains but distorts the images of Jane's birthing body, subverts two modes of disciplining the visual: not only the ostensible aesthetic discipline of one-point perspective, but also the social discipline of censorship.

In this way, *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* problematises a dream of cinema as a mode of transparent access to the body of the woman and to the everyday world of domesticity. Yet if *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* casts a veil of distortion over Jane's body to escape the conflation of woman and house that has been so central in the history of cinema, it also risks marginalising not only her body but also her subjectivity. This duality reflects a larger conflict within post-war experimental cinema. As Ara Osterweil notes, while avant-garde films often deploy the female body in ways that mirror the sexist forms of classical Hollywood, the world of experimental cinema also 'inevitably afforded more freedom to women filmmakers than its industrial counterpart'.⁵⁵ This tension between image and authorship is amplified by Wodening's ambivalent position as *Window Water Baby Moving's* co-creator and subject. I now move on to consider this ambivalence in relation to the interplay of image and text across Brakhage's oeuvre.

Gestating Cinema, Aborting Language

In *Metaphors on Vision*, Brakhage develops a metaphorical link between filmmaking and pregnancy, through which he casts writing as a form of abortion. He describes his writing in terms suggestive of stasis: it is a 'specimen' or 'at best a museum piece'.⁵⁶ Yet the abortion metaphor traces language's inertia to an event; language, for Brakhage, is akin to a foetus that was aborted to save the life of the gestating subject. He writes:

The moving picture image enables the development of continuity and therefore an evolution upon language as we contemporarily know it. All contained within this book has died in the womb. I abort it to save the living organism.⁵⁷

Brakhage's writing regularly polemicises against the distancing effects of language in favour of the intuitive action of the image. On the face of it, Brakhage's suggestion that language is to abortion what film is to birth might seem to reinforce a hierarchy of media in which film takes priority over text. Considered from the point of view of reproductive justice, however – a point of view which acknowledges abortions are regularly performed to 'save the living organism' – the metaphor takes on new implications.

The analogy between language and a life-saving abortion opens up new ways of understanding the relationship between inter-medial aesthetics and reproductive contingency in Brakhage's work. Consider, for instance, the irony inherent in Brakhage's use of language to attack language in *Metaphors on Vision*. He writes, 'I am thru writing, thru writing. It is only as of use as useless.'⁵⁸ These lines are dense with conflicting meanings: 'thru writing' might mean that Brakhage has quit, but it also signifies writing as process: a way through. This double meaning is recapitulated in the following sentence, in which writing's uselessness is refigured as a form of use. While it would not be inaccurate to state that Brakhage's metaphor compares cinema to life and language to death, it would also miss the point of the metaphor, which recognises abortion as a life-preserving strategy. As a tool of reproductive autonomy, abortions teach us that death and life are inextricable – just like writing and cinema.

Laura Mulvey has discussed the interrelation of death and life in terms of a cinematic uncanny. Mulvey positions the cinema as a missing link between Freud's theory of the uncanny and Jentsch's. If Freud's uncanny emphasises death and the pressure exerted by the old, Jentsch's uncanny centres mechanisation and the force of the new. The cinema embodies both tendencies, says Mulvey. She writes:

In the cinema organic movement is transformed into its inorganic replica, a series of static, inanimate, images, which, once projected, then become animated to blur the distinctions between the oppositions. The homologies extend: on the one hand, the inanimate, inorganic, still, dead; on the other, organic, animate, moving, alive. It is here, with the blurring of these boundaries, that the uncanny nature of the cinematic image returns

most forcefully and, with it, the conceptual space of uncertainty: that is, the difficulty of understanding time and the presence of death in life.⁵⁹

This 'conceptual space of uncertainty', suggests Mulvey, operates not only on the border between death and life but also within the structure of femininity. Freud's disinterest in Hoffmann's Olympia as a source of the uncanny betrays his distaste for a form of 'inorganic' modern femininity estranged from the 'organic' maternal. It is this distaste, for Mulvey, that blocks Freud's recognition that both he and Jentsch are concerned with the blurred boundaries between life and its opposites: death, for Freud, and mechanisation, for Jentsch. This uncanny confusion of death and life, at work in the very structure of cinema, illuminates Brakhage's use of that quintessentially uncanny formal device: repetition.

'I am thru writing, thru writing. It is only as of use as useless': this line exemplifies Brakhage's use of repetition as a technique in his writing as well as his filmmaking. As James notes, 'the formal qualities of his prolific writing and talking are recognisably the formal qualities of modernist poetry, with his use of repetitions, puns, and other tropes to destabilize language – even within the frame of the syllable – clearly in the post-Stein tradition.'⁶⁰ Indeed, Brakhage drew his understanding of repetition from poetry, and that of Gertrude Stein in particular. Stein's work, Brakhage said, helped him to realise 'that there is no repetition; that every time a word is "repeated" it is a new word by virtue of what precedes it and follows it'.⁶¹ The repetitions of Stein's poetry are never as fixed as they seem because they unfold in time and are continually reshaped anew by circumstance. *Window Water Baby Moving's* repetitious structure is spatialised in the figure of the grid; more pertinently, the shadowy grid projected onto Jane's torso suggests that the processes of gestation and birth might involve a similar combination of the necessary and the contingent. The 'rules' according to which a pregnancy unfolds are never mimetically repeated: in each pregnancy they are reshaped by their context.

Gestation is not the only form of gendered repetition that is relevant here. Stein's repetition, as Natalia Cecire has argued, evokes another kind of reiterative labour: the housework conventionally performed by wives, including Stein's life partner Alice B. Toklas.⁶²

Elucidating the connections that link feminised labour, poetic repetition and the widespread charge that Stein's work is 'unreadable', Cecire contends that 'Stein's writing conjures up its own scene of composition as bodily, nonlaborious, naturalized or mechanized, even digestive or excretory – not thereby recuperating such phenomena as "productive," but rather travestyng the very terms of production'.⁶³ I suggest that *Window Water Baby Moving* is similarly invested in the interrelation of different forms of reproduction: biological, social, cinematic and – if we draw the film's paratexts into our purview – textual. One such paratext, Wodening's 1963 essay 'The Birth Film' (published as Jane Brakhage), is written in a Steinian register that evokes, through repetition, the contradictions of her own 'wife-work' on the film, in the household, and through gestation, labour and maternity.

'The Birth Film', published in *Film Culture* magazine in 1963, registers Wodening's complex and wide-ranging contribution to *Window Water Baby Moving*. As the essay frames it, she is simultaneously the wifely muse, the subject of the film, and its co-creator: the images of Stan's face in the film were recorded by Wodening after Myrrena's birth.⁶⁴ The opening line of the essay sets up a hierarchical relation between director and wife: 'Being an artist's wife is strange, and when the artist uses moving pictures to express himself, it is very strange indeed. Then, when the artist says he is going to make moving pictures of the birth of the first child, we are both very excited and talk about it long into the night many nights.'⁶⁵ Later in the essay, however, 'the artist' is rendered in the first-person plural:

By the afternoon of November 12, we had taken some moving pictures of the baby moving and kicking before being born, and that night there were contractions, and we were very happy and took some more film of our happy faces and some of the cat and played games and watched the clock and then the doctor came with his nurse and all his paraphernalia and said, no, this wasn't labor and to call him when I stopped knitting.⁶⁶

The use of 'we' here reflects the collaborative dynamics of the filming process. Of course, this collaboration was structured by patriarchal power relations. In 'The Birth Film', Wodening does

not address the emotional coercion that, in Brakhage's account, shaped its production process. As Brakhage tells it in an interview, he responded to Wodening's initial refusal to be filmed in the bathtub with an angry outburst: 'I tore the film out of the camera and spread it all over the floor and made a big dramatic scene and said, "All right, let's forget it!" And then half an hour later she bravely relented.'⁶⁷ Bravery notwithstanding, the coercive dynamics of this encounter are clear.

At the same time, Wodening's own account of the process establishes her contribution to the film. Stan appears in the early bathing scenes as an integrated part of the story, kissing Jane and holding their hands together on her belly. In the later birthing scenes, the camera records the doctor's hands instead: the patriarch has ceded authority to the professional. Stan's face appears again only towards the end when, as he explains to Sitney, Wodening had taken the camera from him:

She said, 'Give me the camera.' I, hardly knowing what I was doing, just handed it to her. She photographs all those images of my face. I grew prouder and prouder of her, of the baby, of having made it; I was out of my head. And she, just having given birth to the child, was recording my face. Do you see what the process was there?⁶⁸

This 'process' might be said to reinscribe Brakhage's patriarchal mythos in which film and child are interchangeable, both 'made' by Brakhage. However, it also involves the mobilisation of the filmmaker's role and its passage to Wodening. In 'The Birth Film', Wodening also describes this moment, in language that conflates her labour with the 'clickety-clackety-buzz' of the film:

I push and pant and roar and always clickety-clackety-buzz and more and more and more and then the doctor says don't push any more just pant and so I pant so fast I don't hardly get any air, and this one is very different; it's joyous relief, sort of like finally reaching the gates of heaven after an impossibly hard climb, and I hear the doctor very excited saying 'The head is born - anterior shoulder - posterior shoulder -' and then there is the baby held by her heels, Stan is laughing and covered with sweat, and the placenta is born, and the doctor and nurse do this and that

to the baby, while I take some pictures of Stan because he is so beautiful, and then they all have a drink, but I am quite drunk, and I eat a sandwich, and the baby is in the cradle and asleep, and then we were left alone and happiness everywhere.⁶⁹

The essay subverts a potentially reductive comparison between childbirth and filmmaking by levelling the experiences, so that Stan is sweating and Jane is filming. The 'clickety-clackety-buzz' of his camera is part of her experience of birth, rather than a sign of the detached documentation. This 'levelling' of the labour of birth and the labour of filmmaking is rendered in a style that recalls Stein not only in its use of repetition, but in the function of that repetition, which blurs the boundaries between 'willed', masculinised acts of aesthetic creation and the 'unwilled', feminised work of birth.

The passage of the camera from Stan to Jane is unplanned (by Stan) but willed (by Jane). It is thus a more complex example of a 'contingent event' that troubled the film's space of production, to borrow Ahern's phrasing. The interplay of the mechanised and the willed in cinema invests its repetitions with a form of the uncanny – they appear as simultaneously human and technological, intentional and automatic. As Marjorie Keller puts it, both filmmaking and childbirth can involve a minimisation, rather than an elevation, of authorial control. She writes:

There is something to be said for the ephemerality of revelation in the art-making process and, in filmmaking in particular, the distance or difference of what is seen through the camera and what appears on the film after developing or printing edited rolls. And too, childbirth – in which sexual pleasure produces an embryo that develops, sheathed, for nine months, to be born as a child – seems a miracle out of the control or ownership of the parents.⁷⁰

This metaphor involves a complex relationship to authorship in which the film is compared to a child but the parents' claim to be the origin of the child is minimised, along with the author's claim on the work. Understood in Keller's terms, the gestating body is a system that follows a set of rules, just like the camera. However, as Ahern shows us, automatic systems register the contingent effects

of the environment in which they operate. When Jane seizes the camera, then, the balance shifts: the 'accident' of the gestating subject's creative autonomy reshapes the artwork.

In the first two chapters of this book, I have addressed different ways in which aesthetic strategies of repetition in the long 1960s can be understood as expressions of reproductive contingency. In Hansberry, repetition is inherent to the form of the play: a script is bound to be repeated in live performance. In Brakhage, the cinematic reorganisation of time through repetition is an explicit aesthetic strategy. In the following chapter, I explore repetition in a different form again: the realist fiction of Richard Yates. Here, repetition is neither inherent to the form nor an ostentatious creative strategy. Instead it is hidden: either difficult to discern or most easily readable as unwilled error. As we shall see, the window is a reproductive symbol in Yates's work, as it is in Hansberry's and Brakhage's. In Yates, however, windows become the symbolic site of patriarchal investments in reproduction-as-reiteration – an ideology his fiction critiques at the level of both content and form.

CHAPTER 3

Reproducing *Revolutionary Road*: Repetition, Technology and Pronatalism in Yates's Fiction

Reproduction is one of Richard Yates's major themes. His body of work, comprising seven novels and two collections of short fiction, returns again and again to the subjects of maternity, paternity, parenthood, abortion, miscarriage and infertility. Yet, as this cyclical dynamic might indicate, reproduction is more than just a theme for Yates: it is also a formal principle that finds expression in his career-long commitment to reproducing his own work. While Yates's critics have often framed his repetitions as the errors of an ailing author, a close reading of his oeuvre reveals the interrelation of repetition and reproduction as one of his enduring concerns. In this chapter, I argue that Yates's repetitions – within and across his works – trace the deadly effects of reproductive control and coercion back to a masculinist aesthetic principle of reproduction-as-reiteration: a vision of the endless maintenance of the same. By claiming repetition as an aesthetic strategy, Yates invests his ostensibly realist fiction with a conceptualist investigation of the relationships that link literary, biological and social reproduction.

Let me begin with an uncanny echo that links two Yates narratives of reproductive crisis: his debut novel, *Revolutionary Road* (1961), and a late short story, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' (1981). The 1950s-set *Revolutionary Road* narrates the doomed trajectory of white-collar worker Frank Wheeler's coercive pronatalism, culminating in his wife April's fatal self-performed abortion. Frank's embrace of pronatalism is crystallised at a crucial point in the novel, during a boozy evening with a senior colleague in the

business machines industry, Bart Pollock. Pollock is trying to persuade Frank to abandon his planned move to Paris and take a new job in the nascent digital computer industry, which he compares to a newborn baby. As they drink together, Frank experiences a sensory disturbance:

Watching him and trying to listen, Frank found that his own three martinis (or was it four?) had amplified the sounds of the restaurant into a sea of noise that jammed his eardrums, and had caused a dark mist to close in on all four sides of his vision so that only the things coming directly before him could be seen at all, and they with a terrible clarity: his food, the bubbles in his glass of ice water, Bart Pollock's tirelessly moving mouth.¹

Yates echoes this passage in 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', a story set in the 1960s and published in the early 1980s. The story follows the screenwriter Jack Fields as he moves to Hollywood and begins an affair with Sally Baldwin, a film producer's secretary who cannot conceive a child. As Jack drinks with Sally and her 'degenerate' group of housemates he, too, finds his vision disturbed:

Soon he found he couldn't even watch her anymore because a heavy dark mist had closed in on all four sides of his vision, causing his head to droop and hang until the only thing he could see at all—and he saw it with the terrible clarity of self-hatred—was his own left shoe on the carpet.²

In the passages quoted above, both Frank and Jack are drunk and find the 'four sides' of their vision simultaneously clouded by a 'dark mist' and made vivid with a 'terrible clarity'. Why does Yates rework these lines from his first novel in a short story published some twenty years later, towards the end of his career? In this chapter, I interpret the story's repetition of the novel as a form of conceptualist instruction: in reproducing *Revolutionary Road*, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' instructs us to understand it as a novel centrally concerned with the entanglement of repetition and reproduction.

In making this argument, I am challenging the critical consensus on Yates's repetition, which holds that it is compelled rather than controlled, driven by demons either external or internal. 'It is

as if Yates were under some enchantment that compelled him to keep circling the same half-acre of pain,' writes Robert Towers in his contemporaneous review of the short-story collection *Liars in Love*.³ This view has endured even as Yates's work has come back into print and critical repute in the first decades of the twenty-first century. James Wood, for instance, acknowledges *Revolutionary Road*'s form as 'a solid delight of symmetry and repetition', but finds Yates's later fiction 'compulsive but not compelling'.⁴ Meanwhile, Yates's biographer Blake Bailey makes a clipped reference to his subject's 'perhaps ludicrous repetitions', but leaves these repetitions undocumented and unexplored.⁵ Theo Tait, reviewing *The Collected Stories* on its republication, pursues the psychological resonances of Yates's repetitions: 'Like many writers, Yates felt compelled to rewrite traumatic experiences. What is unusual and dismaying in his work is the compulsion to repeat them again and again, in strikingly similar terms.'⁶ Compulsion is a key term here: the sheer persistence of Yates's repetition has engendered a widespread sense that it creeps across his fiction as pathological tic rather than stylistic signature. As I go on to explore, compulsion is indeed important to Yates's fiction, but in ways far more interesting than these diagnostic critiques acknowledge. It is true that Yates's works of fiction repeatedly invoke the same themes, motifs, plot movements and character types. Michael Davenport, a character in his penultimate novel *Young Hearts Crying* (1984), could be a mouthpiece for the author himself as he wonders whether 'he'd said six or eight funny things in his life, and that what passed for his sense of humour would always depend on a skilful recycling of old material, over and over again'.⁷ Yates's fiction is filled with moments like this, in which characters are overcome by an oppressive awareness of their own repetitive tics. But Yates's repetitions are not always so vividly available to the reader: the echoes that form links between his works are sometimes barely discernible, like invisible stitches in fabric.

This chapter challenges pathologising readings of Yates's repetition, not simply to rehabilitate as controlled style what others have dismissed as unwilling compulsion, but to argue that Yates's repetitions make a critical intervention into the cultural politics of reproduction in the US of the mid-twentieth century. With these

uncannily resonant accounts of men who see a few things very clearly and others not at all, Yates draws attention to one of the cultural contradictions of reproduction in this period: the way it is idealised as social norm and disavowed as a contingent form of gendered and racialised labour. *Revolutionary Road*, which culminates in April Wheeler's fatal self-abortion, was published in the wake of a 1958 Kinsey Institute Report that revealed abortion was much more frequent than many commentators had expected.⁸ As I have already explored in preceding chapters, in these cold war years family planning was promoted as both a public duty and a 'private' matter, relegated to the household but regulated by patriarchal law and custom. In this context, both *Revolutionary Road* and 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' use repetition to explore the different ways in which reproduction is simultaneously hyper-visible as normative ideal and marginalised as a form of gendered and racialised labour.

My argument has two aspects. First, Yates repeats himself in order to express something about repetition itself, underlining its centrality to twentieth-century masculinities and fantasies of patriarchal inheritance. In making this argument, I draw on Judith Roof's discussion of 'patriarchal order':

Organized around a series of prohibitions and exchanges, patriarchal order deploys the father's name, concepts of generation, real property, legacy, and tradition to maintain the illusion of continuity, rightly directed productivity, and meaning in its reproductive organizations.⁹

With the repetition that connects *Revolutionary Road* and 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', Yates parodies the 'illusion of continuity' that underpins patriarchal order as a source of both identification and anxiety. In doing so, he overlays forms of repetition that are usually conceived as distinct: the structural repetitions of patriarchy, the compulsive repetitions of trauma, the programmed repetitions of technological automation, and the quotidian repetitions of reproductive labour. Yates's male protagonists try to rationalise this last category, the feminised labour of reproduction, and make it subservient to a masculinist fantasy of technological automation. Laying bare these dynamics, Yates figures masculinity itself

as a form of repetition compulsion, traumatised and traumatising, at odds with the contingencies of reproduction and determined to flatten them out.

The textual echo that links *Revolutionary Road* and 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' is also significant for *what* it repeats: a scene of a man getting drunk, whose field of vision has four sides, and whose sight is simultaneously clear and compromised. The repetition of 'dark mist' and 'terrible clarity' is important: as we shall see, both texts are preoccupied with the deceptions that underpin cultural investments in transparency. This dynamic of disavowal (the 'dark mist') and hyper-visibility (the 'terrible clarity') finds expression in key symbolic objects in both texts. In *Revolutionary Road*, these objects range from the quotidian – eyeglasses, the hearing aid, the suburban picture window, the wall calendar and the computer – to the discursive – social criticism and, in a self-reflexive move, the realist novel itself. In the Hollywood-set 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', these objects are supplemented by two further symbolic devices: contact lenses and the cinema screen. These objects share a quality I call 'duplicitous transparency': they promise representational immediacy – a kind of frictionless reproduction – and in the process obscure reproductive labour and the psychosocial world of women. The echoed phrases that link these texts thus draw our attention to the duplicitous transparency that conditions masculinist ideologies of reproduction.

In what follows, I first explore *Revolutionary Road's* technologies of duplicitous transparency, focusing particularly on the calendar, the picture window, the computer and the novel itself. Some of these technologies I have discussed already: in Chapter 1, I explored the reproductive symbolism of the Youngers' window in Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*; in Chapter 2, I interrogated the window and its gridded shadow in Brakhage's *Window Water Baby Moving*. Yates's windows, and the grid of the Wheelers' kitchen calendar, function in a different way: not as figures for reproductive contingency, but as symbols of a gendered and racialised fantasy of reproduction-as-reiteration. After exploring *Revolutionary Road's* representation of these technologies of duplicitous transparency, I turn to 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' in order to explore the reproductive politics embedded in its uncanny echo of *Revolutionary Road*. I engage with

archival drafts of both novel and story to demonstrate that the repetition is part of a wider network of allusion and reproductive symbolism across the texts. The hidden stitch connecting these texts illuminates Yates's interest in the processes by which reproduction is rendered both hyper-visible and structurally invisible in a social world that depends on it. I argue here that Yates's work has something important to say about the cultural politics of reproduction in the US in the long 1960s and beyond: indeed, that reading his repetitions closely might help us to recognise the temptations and fallacies of ideologies that identify reproduction with representational immediacy and the faithful reiteration of the existing social order.

The Kitchen Calendar and the Death Drive

The third and final part of *Revolutionary Road* unfolds in the aftermath of homemaker April Wheeler's surprise announcement: she plans to terminate her unwanted third pregnancy so the family can move to Paris with their two children. For April, the escape to Europe holds the promise of reinvention: the couple plan to switch roles so she will take on paid work and Frank will pursue the creative ambitions he has long touted (but does not really possess). April does not know it, but Frank has been offered a promotion to the role of computer PR man at his New York workplace. Secretly compelled by the job offer and horrified by the prospect of confronting his own mediocrity in Paris, he resolves to talk April out of the abortion. One of the key weapons in Frank's arsenal is the couple's kitchen calendar, which sets out 'row on row of logical, orderly days' until the last date for a safe home abortion, one of few options in 1950s Connecticut, where abortion would remain illegal until the early 1970s.¹⁰ The calendar is a lever of patriarchal manipulation: with the help of its abstract register of time, April's pregnancy has been made subservient to the principle of compulsive repetition. The repeating modules of the calendar's grid diverge from the gridded shadow of *Window Water Baby Moving*: they are fixed in space, rather than contingent on the movement of a body in light and space. The grid, in Frank's hands, aims to determine April's life in advance. By collapsing time into the simultaneity

of the grid, the calendar collapses April's possible futures. Frank's bad-faith guilt-tripping runs down the clock but she performs the abortion anyway in a powerful gesture of refusal, and dies alone in the bathroom of the family's suburban home.

Frank's campaign of reproductive coercion is figured as a domestic cold war. He approaches his efforts to change April's mind with the air of a military strategist, marking the days by watching the calendar. The couple's uneven clash mimics the charged stalemate of the nuclear arms race: it is a 'quiet, controlled, dead-serious debate with which they began to fill one after another of the calendar's days, a debate that kept them both in a fine-drawn state of nerves that was not at all unpleasant. It was very like a courtship.'¹¹ In figuring the Wheelers' 'debate' as both courtship and conflict ('all was fair in love and war'), *Revolutionary Road* references the cold war's domestic front and its deployment of pronatalist ideology to shore up its nationalist investments.¹² As Tyler May has described, the cold war 'civic duty' of procreation held that 'women who have sex should be married, and married women should have babies', and while contraception might aid with the timing and spacing of pregnancies, 'abortion represented a threat to the family planning ideal'.¹³ In this context, the Wheelers' calendar might be understood as a tool through which pronatalist ideals of domesticity could be visualised and consolidated. But Frank is an intriguing example of procreative nationalism. He does not really want the child, but finds himself compelled to oppose the abortion by a mysterious drive the novel leaves nameless but renders as a form of masculinist compulsion. Compulsion, in *Revolutionary Road*, becomes the mysterious mechanism through which cold war domestic strategy makes a foot soldier of the white-collar man.

The calendar is not only a symbol for Frank's repetitions, but also for the novel's. It is 'the kind of calendar whose page for each month displays two smaller charts as well, last month and next, so that a quarter of the year can be comprehended in a single searching glance'.¹⁴ The calendar is a figure for the reiterative dynamics that underpin ideologies of patriarchal succession, but it also implicates the novel's own narrative strategies in these dynamics. In particular, the calendar's condensation of past, present and future works as a self-reflexive figure for the novel's use of analepsis and prolepsis

to invest the plot with a sense of cyclical inevitability. This sense of pronatalist determinism is subtly satirised in the shift to an omniscient narrative mode at the beginning of Part 3, which adopts an abstract, philosophical tone to muse on the nature of time. This introductory omniscient section introduces a series of disparate scenes in which different figures – an infantry captain, an executive and an ‘ancient man’ – find that their ‘ability to measure and apportion time affords an almost endless source of comfort’.¹⁵ The tone of this passage gains an ironic edge as it introduces the image of an executive thumbing through his appointment calendar: ‘The crisp, plentiful, day-sized pages before him prove that nothing unforeseen, no calamity of chance or fate can overtake him between now and the end of the month. Ruin and pestilence have been held at bay, and death itself will have to wait; he is booked solid.’¹⁶ If this passage succeeds as an ironic comment on the fallacy of denying contingency, it is at the same time a sincere account of literary narrative. As Mark Currie puts it, ‘we might view the future of a narrative as a future which is already in place’.¹⁷ All is determined by the author before the reader has turned to the first page.

The novel’s interest in determinism is exemplified by the fact Frank’s fatal attempt to coerce April out of an abortion is itself a repetition of an earlier event. In an important instance of analeptic foreshadowing in the first part of the novel, Frank recalls April’s first pregnancy, which ‘came seven years too soon’ and which she wanted to abort so they could go to Europe.¹⁸ Frank talked April out of the abortion and took a job at his father’s former workplace, Knox Business Machines, where he has worked ever since. As he builds a stone path in the family garden, Frank recalls their argument at the time:

Even as he filled his lungs for shouting he knew it wasn’t the idea itself that repelled him – the idea itself, God knew, was more than a little attractive – it was that she had done all this on her own, in secret, had sought out the girl and obtained the facts and bought the rubber syringe and rehearsed the speech; that if she’d thought about him at all it was only as a possible hitch in the scheme, a source of tiresome objections that would have to be cleared up and disposed of if the thing were to be carried out with maximum efficiency.¹⁹

Reproductive control functions here to secure Frank's masculinity: he admits silently that 'no single moment of his life had ever contained a better proof of manhood than that, if any proof were needed: holding that tamed, submissive girl and saying, "Oh, my lovely; oh, my lovely," while she promised she would bear his child'.²⁰ The key clause here is 'if any proof were needed': Frank suspects he needs to continually prove his masculinity. Yet, as he builds the path, Frank acknowledges that he was initially attracted to April's proposal to abort her first pregnancy. He reflects that he 'didn't even *want* a baby' and wonders, 'Wasn't it true, then, that everything in his life from that point on had been a succession of things he hadn't really wanted to do?'²¹ These 'things he hadn't really wanted to do' – his job, his children, his house in the country – all proceed from this initial insistence that April carry her first pregnancy to term. The novel's primary narrative unfolds as a repetition of this series of events: again, April falls pregnant; again, Frank is seduced by a new job that allows him to emulate his father; again, he tries to talk her out of an abortion. April's ultimate commitment to this abortion attempts to disrupt this queasy cyclicity, but it fails: after her death, the couple's children will be raised by distant relatives, just as April was; these relatives are already ageing, just as Frank's parents were when he was born. The generational pattern repeats itself.

The novel's use of analepsis is intertwined with Frank's repetitive embodiment, which stems from a seemingly intractable pronatalism that works against his own desires. As he builds the stone path, Frank edges towards a nascent consciousness that his fear of April's reproductive autonomy is working against him. Yet, even as this idea scrapes against the edges of his awareness, Frank remains in the grip of his pronatalist repetition compulsion, and his train of thought is nourished by the repetitive 'rhythm of his digging'.²² He is only digging in the first place to assert his masculinity: earlier, he had been embarrassed when the couple's estate agent, Mrs Givings, witnessed April mowing the lawn in a man's shirt. Donning an army shirt to reassert his masculinity, Frank reflects: 'At least it was a man's work', implicitly acknowledging his need to counter April's performance of masculinity with his own.²³ His performance is motivated by what Roof might call a yearning for patriarchal order.

Apprehending his own body at work, Frank acknowledges that his hand is 'not to be compared with his father's hand, maybe, but a serviceable, good-enough hand all the same'.²⁴ The word 'man' is repeated a total of four times in one paragraph that describes Frank's attempt to dislodge a rock from the earth.²⁵ However, Frank's retrieval of the rock precedes a description of him 'cradling it in the tender flesh of his forearms' like a mother.²⁶ Frank's hunt for gendered security is doomed to continue failing: patriarchal masculinity makes him miserable, but he can neither abandon it nor get it right.

When April falls pregnant again and plans to terminate the pregnancy so they can relocate to Europe, Frank does not really want the child but finds himself compelled to oppose the abortion by this mysterious compulsion, this procreative automatism. In this way, *Revolutionary Road* represents masculinity as a product of repetition some thirty years before Judith Butler would describe gender as a 'constituted social temporality', formed through 'the stylized repetition of acts through time'.²⁷ Frank's need for a 'proof of masculinity' that can only be secured through repeated acts of reproductive coercion suggests that gender is produced, not innate, and thus inherently insecure. However, where Butler stresses the subversive potential inherent to the repetition of gendered behaviours, Frank's repetitions are complicit with hegemonic masculinity.²⁸ Butler is interested in the queer potential of 'a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition'.²⁹ By contrast, even Frank's attempts at parodic repetition end up affirming a patriarchal model of mimetic repetition. This is not to say that Yates creates a world in which gender roles are wholly determining: on the contrary, April's attempt to disrupt the repetitions of the procreative norm might well have been successful were it not for the era's abortion laws.³⁰ Still, Yates is primarily interested in how fantasies and anxieties about mimetic repetition secure gender roles, and far from hopeful about the subversive possibilities of parody.

In this sense, Frank's – and the novel's – compulsive, self-defeating repetitions seem to emanate from something more like the Freudian death drive. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud confronts the problem of why people compulsively relive painful experiences, whether shell-shocked soldiers dreaming of

war or infants repeatedly throwing their favourite toys from the crib. Freud famously interprets this last example of the *fort-da* game as a restaging of the mother's disappearance and reappearance: through repetition, the infant gains mastery over an unpredictable and distressing event. Yet this explanation proves too neat for Freud, and it continues to pose a problem: the tendency to repeat painful events suggests 'a repetition-compulsion more primitive, more elementary, more instinctive than the pleasure-principle which is displaced by it'.³¹ This leads Freud to his meditation on the death drive, which he posits as the instinct through which all organic life aims to return to an earlier, inorganic state of things: the state from which all life emerged. The compulsion to repeat registers this death drive, through which every organism 'is resolved to die only in its own way'.³²

Freud's theory provides a frame for thinking through Frank's self-defeating compulsions and their relationship to patriarchal fantasies of self-replication. Indeed, Freud's own relationship to fatherhood may well have underpinned his writing on the death drive, as Jacqueline Rose has suggested. In her essay 'To Die One's Own Death', written in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, Rose notes that Freud's daughter, Sophie Halberstadt-Freud, died from the Spanish flu during her third pregnancy in 1920, while her father was writing *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Bringing this context to bear on Freud's text, Rose interprets Freud's discussion of the subject's determination to follow its own path to death as a rebuttal of the 1919 pandemic's mercilessness. As Rose puts it, '[d]eath in a pandemic is no way to die.'³³ Appraising Freud's discussion of biology in light of his comment that his daughter's death was a 'narcissistic injury', Rose writes: 'Transpose this into human life, and the death of a biological child becomes a narcissistic injury because it is only through the existence of children that the parent has a stab at eternity.'³⁴ A tension emerges, then, between Freud's preoccupation with 'immortality, duration, and transmission' in the wake of his daughter's untimely death, and the regression of the repetition compulsion. This tension captures the peculiar temporality of the Freudian death drive. If the compulsion to repeat registers the subject's path to the right death, in the right way, at the right time, it also suggests the 'stab at eternity' inherent to reproduction.

The repetition compulsion appears to straddle two temporal modes: it looks back to the inorganic state from which all life emerged (as Freud has it), but also inhabits a continuously renewable present. Frank, too, is caught in this web: driven to reproduce by a repetition compulsion he resents but cannot escape, he drives April to a premature death and ends up, in the view of their neighbour, Shep Campbell, a 'walking, talking, smiling, lifeless man' – restored to something resembling Freud's original, inorganic state.³⁵

Is April's fatal abortion the wrong death or the right one? It is, as Rose might say, no way to die, and yet it acquires a sense of inevitability as it animates the text's growing web of repetitions. In his discussion of the Freudian death drive in relation to fictional plots, Peter Brooks has argued that the beginning of a literary text 'in fact presupposes the end'; for this reason '[a]ll narration is obituary'.³⁶ To read *Revolutionary Road* as April's obituary is to understand her death as the only one possible for the text: her death is the end towards which all the novel's repetitions have been yearning. As Brooks puts it:

[W]hat operates in the text through repetition is the death instinct, the drive towards the end. Beyond and under the domination of the pleasure principle is this baseline of plot, its basic 'pulsation', sensible or audible through the repetitions which take us back in the text. Repetition can take us both backwards and forwards because these terms have become reversible: the end is a time before the beginning. Between these two moments of quiescence, plot itself stands as a kind of divergence or deviance, a postponement in the discharge which leads back to the inanimate.³⁷

The detours of plot introduce 'the danger of reaching the end too quickly, of achieving the improper death'.³⁸ But what makes an improper death in fiction? April's fatal abortion is the wrong death for her: an isolated, illegal abortion is certainly no way to die. But it is the right death, the right end, for the novel. This basic tension forms the basis of *Revolutionary Road*'s auto-critical indictment, which names the realist novel itself as a technology that, with its aura of immediacy, risks occluding the reproductive labour of women.

Revolutionary Road thus positions both the calendar and the realist novel as devices that risk complicity with reproductive coercion. This parallel gains clarity when we understand that both the calendar and the realist novel are technologies of representation that can be used to plot reproduction. The calendar's grid flattens the contingent duration of a pregnancy into a determined simultaneity, while the realist novel uses analepsis and prolepsis to emphasise the inevitability of its conclusion. From this point of view, the calendar and the novel can be seen to promise transparency of representation while manipulating space and time to occlude contingency. To the extent that the realist novel promises representational transparency, it participates in a fantasy of reproduction without mediation: an aesthetic fantasy that finds its social analogue in ideologies of reproduction without the mediation of a gestating subject.

I have been arguing that Yates figures the realist novel as potentially complicit with ideologies of reproductive control. I want now to complicate this argument by returning to the textual echo with which I began this chapter, the one that links *Revolutionary Road* and 'Saying Goodbye to Sally'. In these separate texts published twenty years apart, both Frank Wheeler and Jack Fields experience a drunken, four-sided vision that combines terrible clarity and a dark mist. These descriptions not only evoke the four sides of the calendar and the novel, but also suggest their shared tendency to combine clarity and obfuscation. However, this textual echo also opens up a different way of understanding the relationship between reproductive control and the novel. From one point of view, the echo of the scene across the texts implicates literature itself in the recursive dynamics of masculinist pronatalism: the narrative repeats like the modules of the Wheelers' kitchen calendar. Yet this is not really a form of pure, modular repetition because the echoed passages are not exactly the same. By smuggling this repetition into 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', Yates lifts both texts out of the realm of realism – or, at least, takes them to a liminal zone where realism meets conceptualism, and where masculinist reiteration is tripped up by a form of repetition that cannot help but transform the original.

I will return to this textual echo and its implications for Yates's literary politics of reproduction. I first want to consider another of

Yates's four-sided technologies: the window. Windows, of course, have already played a prominent role in my analysis. For both Hansberry and Brakhage, albeit in different ways, the window symbolises reproductive contingency. Like Brakhage, Yates makes the window a figure for repetition and its entanglement with reproduction. However, Yates's windows are aligned not with contingency but with fantasies of representational immediacy, reiterative repetition and reproductive control.

The Picture Window's Auto-Amputation

The picture window was a well-worn symbol of suburban conformity by the time of *Revolutionary Road's* publication. Frank even references the cliché when he and April first decide to buy the house on Revolutionary Road, despite their misgivings about moving to suburbia; he quips, 'Still, I don't suppose one picture window is necessarily going to destroy our personalities.'³⁹ Frank's comment echoes a whole field of popular commentary on suburban architecture, for which the picture window had become a synecdoche. In 1955, the architectural critic Bernard Rudofsky published the book *Behind the Picture Window*, in which he argued that the bathroom was the only private space left in the open-plan suburban home.⁴⁰ In 1960, the psychiatrists Richard and Katherine Gordon, together with the journalist Max Gunther, published *The Split-Level Trap*, which attributed mental stress to suburban living.⁴¹ Herbert Marcuse, in his 1964 work of Marxist criticism *One-Dimensional Man*, criticised the 'corrosion of privacy' inherent to the glass-plated aesthetic of contemporary architecture.⁴² The critique of the suburban home converged with the first stirrings of the women's liberation movement: in 1963, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* drew a parallel between the gendered distortions of the mass media and the architecture of the open-plan suburban ranch house where, Friedan claimed, women 'almost *have* to live the feminine mystique' because 'there are no true walls or doors'.⁴³

Though Friedan does not theorise it explicitly, her parallel between women's magazines and the structure of the suburban home draws attention to the way architecture can function as a technology of representation – or, to adopt the terms used by the

architectural historian Beatriz Colomina, as a form of mass media. Colomina recounts the way the modernist glass designs of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe or Frank Lloyd Wright become, when adapted for the suburbs, ways of framing not spectacular landscape views but identical houses over the road; the picture window, in this context, is a technology of repetition. As Colomina observes, 'The picture window, an integral element of the postwar American house, turns the building into a showcase of domesticity. It is not, as is commonly assumed, that the house exposes its interiority. There is no interior.'⁴⁴ This extraordinary insight points to the way the picture window participates in a collective fantasy of immediacy: of abolishing the difference between interior and exterior. There are, then, two fantasies embedded in the picture window: first, the promise of a fully transparent domesticity, and second, the provision of this transparency by means of a technology that abolishes itself.

It might be tempting to view *Revolutionary Road* as a fictional counterpart to mid-century critiques of suburban architecture's assault on privacy. However, a closer look at the novel reveals that Yates locates the malevolence of the picture window in its false promise of transparency: it is not that the picture window reveals too much, but that its claims to immediacy are deceptive; the 'terrible clarity' of the picture window is paired with a 'dark mist' of obfuscation. This is evident in a passage from the final part of the novel, in which the Wheelers' picture window screens an image of Frank lecturing April about the evils of abortion. At this point, he erroneously believes he has talked her out of the abortion, but wants to consolidate his 'victory'. In a rare section narrated from the point of view of one of the Wheelers' children, their daughter Jennifer gazes through the picture window at her parents. She watches her father as if she were watching a silent film: 'It was funny to see his hands making little gestures in the air and his mouth moving and moving, with no sound coming out.'⁴⁵ In this image, the picture window frames the banally coercive inscription of the procreative ideal, for which Frank is advocating as Jennifer watches his mute mouth 'moving and moving'. The repetition of 'moving' emphasises Frank's compulsive embodiment even as the window silences his speech; we do not need to hear what Frank is saying because we have heard it all before. Even when it exposes

the interior, the window is significant for its ability to block sound and inhibit communication. As devices that divide and reflect, *Revolutionary Road's* windows come to exemplify the way fantasies of mimetic repetition are recruited for projects of reproductive control. Here, as at many other points of the novel, Frank seems to have drifted into a world of images. His resemblance to a silent film actor reinforces the sense that he is being driven by a larger repetitive principle: authored from without, he embodies a form of compulsive, self-perpetuating masculinity.

The transparency that allows Jennifer to watch her parents through the picture window is atypical of *Revolutionary Road's* windows, which are most often represented as reflective surfaces: transformed into mirrors, they become devices of self-construction rather than self-revelation. The Wheelers' windows are best understood as screens: rather than exposing the interior, they reproduce it; instead of allowing a continuity between inside and outside, they form a barrier. The reflective window appears early in the novel, when Frank realises during drinks with April and their neighbours, Milly and Shep Campbell, that it is the night before his thirtieth birthday:

The black kitchen window gave him a vivid reflection of his face, round and full of weakness, and he stared at it with loathing. That was when he remembered something – and the thought seemed to follow rather than precede the stricken look it caused on his mirrored face – something that shocked him and then filled him with a sense of ironic justice. The face in the glass, again seeming to anticipate rather than reflect his mood, had changed now from a look of dismay to a wise and bitter smile, and it nodded at him several times.⁴⁶

The uncanny window adopts an authorial position as it directs Frank's behaviour in advance. After he contemplates the mirror, Frank realises that he is drunk and predicts: 'In another minute he'd be saying even sillier things than this, and repeating himself.'⁴⁷ Frank's prediction is correct: he proceeds to tell a story about his twentieth birthday in wartime, before realising 'he'd told this same story to the Campbells before, using almost the same words; it must have been a year ago that he'd told it, in connection with his turning twenty-nine'.⁴⁸ Frank knows he will repeat himself but can

do nothing to stop it. Here, the novel is again implicated in Frank's behaviour: the window's temporal dislocation is a figure for both Frank's repetition compulsion and the narrative prolepsis that registers it. This becomes important as the plot progresses: the novel does not let us forget that Frank's compulsions are also its own.

This emphasis on the window's reflective, and thus reproductive, qualities distinguishes *Revolutionary Road* from other mid-century novels that use the picture window as a symbol of reproductive failure or loss. In John Cheever's *The Wapshot Chronicle* (1957), the pregnant Betsey Wapshot finds that her friends have lied to her about a social engagement while peering through their picture window:

She went around to the back of the house where the curtains on the picture window hadn't been drawn and looked into their living room. It was empty but there were some cocktail glasses on the table and by the door was a yellow leather suitcase with a Cornell sticker on it. And as she stood there in the dark it seemed that the furies attacked Betsey; that through every incident—every moment of her life—ran the cutting thread, the wire of loneliness, and that when she thought she had been happy she had only deceived herself for under all her happiness lay the pain of loneliness and all her travels and friends were nothing and everything was nothing.

She walked home and later that night she had a miscarriage.⁴⁹

Cheever casts the picture window as a vector of harmful forces by linking it to miscarriage. The window's danger lies in its exposure of the interior. The picture window shatters the ideal of suburban community, and Betsey's miscarriage represents the failure of the procreative ideal.

John Barth's novel *The End of the Road* (1958) also embeds the window's exposure of the interior into a narrative about a fatal abortion. The novel is narrated from the first-person point of view of Jake, a character who suffers from periods of paralysis brought on by his recognition that no single choice is necessarily better than any other (incidentally, this is the state Yates's Frank fears he will confront if forced to live a life of freedom in Paris). Jake's affair with Rennie Morgan, the wife of his colleague Joe, culminates in her death during an illegal abortion. Shortly before their affair begins,

Jake encourages Rennie to spy on Joe through a gap in the venetian blinds as they return from a horse-riding lesson. They discover Joe executing military commands in front of a mirror while speaking gibberish to himself, before sitting down to masturbate while picking his nose. Rennie's subservience to her abusive husband is briefly shattered and she abandons her ideals to pursue an affair with Jake, which leads to pregnancy, a backstreet abortion, and her death on the operating table.

Both *The Wapshot Chronicle* and *The End of the Road* represent the picture window as a technology of exposure that, promising community and transparency, ultimately reveals too much. The symbolic connection in these texts between the picture window and aborted or miscarried pregnancies can be illuminated by Colomina's description of the picture window as a form of 'x-ray architecture'.⁵⁰ The term links the transparency of the suburban home to the new public familiarity with X-rays at mid-century. The picture window, for Colomina, is an analogue of the X-ray performed to screen for tuberculosis: the mid-century house, she notes, was intended as a technology for healing, but this aesthetic of exposure also had a traumatic dimension. Though Colomina does not discuss pregnancy directly, her discussion of the X-ray's traumatic exposure takes on a literal meaning in the context of gestation. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, growing awareness of the harmful effects of radiation in early pregnancy led to concerns about X-ray technology. Specialists advised women in their fertile years to avoid X-rays except during the nine days after the onset of menstruation.⁵¹ *The Wapshot Chronicle* and *The End of the Road* mirror this climate of anxiety by drawing a connection between the picture window's 'x-ray architecture' and aborted or miscarried pregnancies.

Revolutionary Road does something different with its windows. By recoding the symbolic meaning of the picture window to emphasise the reproduction of the reflected image, Yates redirects attention away from a gestating body imagined to be polluted by privacy invasion, and towards ideologies of reproductive mimesis. The distinction is evident in Part 1 of the novel, when Frank looks to his children for affirmation in the wake of an argument with April. Agreeing to sit on the sofa with them to 'read the funnies',

Frank grows sentimental: *'They knew what forgiveness was; they were willing to take him for better or worse; they loved him.'*⁵² Yet Frank grows increasingly impatient as Michael and Jennifer fall short of this idealised filial relationship and he starts to feel as if he is *'sinking helplessly into the cushions and the papers and the bodies of his children like a man in quicksand'*.⁵³ His frustration reaches fever pitch when they demand he read an advertisement as if it were a *'funny'*; when he has finished reading, he *'stood for several minutes in the middle of the carpet, making tight fists in his pockets to restrain himself from doing what suddenly seemed the only thing in the world he really and truly wanted to do: picking up a chair and throwing it through the picture window'*.⁵⁴

While this passage might seem to reinforce the picture window's reputation as a symbol of suburban malaise, Frank's anger at the window is more complex than it first appears. Although his fury is stimulated by the advertisement, Yates subtly suggests that Frank is not really angry at the conflation of culture and commerce, but at his children's inability to confirm his idealised image of himself. Before Michael and Jennifer ask him to read the funnies, Frank is enjoying an erotic reverie inspired by an advertising image *'whose caption began "A frankly flattering, definitely feminine dress"'*.⁵⁵ Frank thinks that the model in the image *'looked not unlike a girl in his office named Maureen Grube; then he decided this one was much better looking and probably more intelligent'*.⁵⁶ Frank interrupts his own reverie, *'[d]ispleased with himself'*, only to find his children are just as enraptured by the advertising spectacle as he is: they are unfaithful picture windows, reflecting not his best aspects but his worst ones. When Maureen appears in person later in the novel, she greets Frank *'in a frankly flattering, definitely feminine way'*.⁵⁷ With this bespoke mode of flattery that even echoes Frank's name, Maureen seems to confirm Frank's fantasy of himself in a way April and his children cannot. The picture window is the target of Frank's ire not because it exposes too much, but because its reflection is not *'frankly flattering'* enough, and neither are his family. Meanwhile, Frank's compulsive return to the advertising slogan is also the narrative's return: again, the novel implicates itself in Frank's compulsive masculinity.

Later, when Frank pursues an affair with Maureen, he cites a department called 'Visual Aids' as a cover story: this deceitful reference to sight enhancement epitomises the principle of duplicitous transparency. Frank's fantasy of Maureen soon falls apart: she is, he discovers, no more an advertising image than April, and Frank is soon forced to abandon his 'frankly flattering' image of her. But it is the idea of Maureen that counts. As the Marxist sociologist C. Wright Mills notes in his 1951 analysis of the emerging post-industrial middle classes, *White Collar*, 'It is as a secretary or clerk, a business woman or career girl, that the white-collar girl dominates our idea of the office. She is the office, write the editors of *Fortune*.'⁵⁸ As a white-collar girl, Maureen represents an office environment that seems to offer Frank a model of reproductive mimesis he fails to find at home.

Windows are central to the novel's representation of Frank's workplace, the Knox Building, and, by extension, his father Earl. In another analeptic recollection, Frank remembers a childhood trip to the Knox Building with Earl, who marvels, 'These windows run the entire length of the building, from here on.'⁵⁹ The young Frank is encouraged to look at the devices on display behind the glass wall:

But Frank's eyes kept wandering from the machines to his own reflection in the plate glass. He thought he looked surprisingly dignified in his new suit, with its coat and tie almost exactly like his father's, and it pleased him to see this bright image of the two of them, man and boy, with the endless swarm of people moving past on the sidewalk behind them.⁶⁰

The window's reflection of Frank symbolises a larger sense of patriarchy as a project of replication in which the boy repeats the man *ad infinitum*. This childhood experience illuminates Frank's desire to throw a chair through his household picture window: his children's behaviour fractures this ideal of patriarchal mimesis.

Frank's reflection in the window is a microcosm of the larger repetition that structures his life: his emulation of his father. When Frank talks April out of aborting her first pregnancy and takes the job at Knox, he tells a friend: 'I want to go into that kind of place and say, Look. You can have my body and my nice college-boy

smile for so many hours a day, in exchange for so many dollars, and beyond that we'll leave each other strictly alone. Get the picture?'⁶¹ Initially framing his professional mimicry of his father as a parody of patriarchal inheritance, Frank finds that '[b]y the end of the first year the joke had worn thin, and the inability of others to see the humor of it had become depressing'.⁶² Frank's repetition does not succeed as a Butler-esque parody; the trouble is that Frank *is* his body: once he has given it to Knox, there is nothing left. Frank ends up pursuing the promotion that always eluded Earl; to secure it against his wife's bid for freedom, he plans to father three children, just as Earl did. It is this promotion that sets in motion Frank's final campaign against April's reproductive self-determination. Inviting Frank to take the job, his new boss comments that 'it'd be a fine memorial and tribute to your dad'. Frank is rendered through vividly corporeal description as he wonders how he could 'ever tell April that these abysmally sentimental words had sent an instantaneous rush of blood to the walls of his throat'.⁶³

This corporeal imagery captures Frank's status as a peculiarly embodied automaton.⁶⁴ His compulsive behaviour is rendered through language that suggests not anaesthetic roboticism, but sensorial overload. As he reads the funnies with Jennifer and Michael, 'All the nerves at the roots of his teeth seemed to have entwined with the nerves at the roots of his scalp in a tingling knot'.⁶⁵ When he and April stay up late plotting their move to Paris, the picture window seems to respond to his sense of bodily fatigue:

Catching sight of his walking reflection in the black picture window, he had to admit that his appearance was not yet as accomplished as hers – his face was too plump and his mouth too bland, his pants too well pressed and his shirt too fussily Madison Avenue – but sometimes late at night when his throat had gone sore and his eyes hot from talking, when he hunched his shoulders and set his jaw and pulled his necktie loose and let it hang like a rope, he could glare at the window and see the brave beginnings of a personage.⁶⁶

Frank's reflection only begins to match his European ideal when his senses assert their discomfort and his corporate uniform begins to resemble a hangman's noose. The irony of this image

lies in the way it foreshadows not Frank's own death, but his contribution to April's.

Frank exists in a prosthetic relationship with the built environment. At home, this environment threatens to engulf him, but he finds an easy synergy with the office. This synergy is partly erotic, as illustrated when Frank contemplates an affair with Maureen. As he settles himself 'sideways at his desk with his right foot automatically toeing open a lower drawer and using its edge as a foot rest (the pressure of his shoe over the years had worn a little saddle in the edge of that particular drawer), he allowed a slow wave of delight to break over him. Why not?'⁶⁷ An early draft of this passage held in Yates's archive contains an image of bodily exposure, which has been manually crossed out:

he allowed a great slow wave of amazement and delight to roll over him. It left him feeling like one of those full-length anatomical paintings of a man whose outer layer of skin has been stripped away, all intricate sinew and nerve and crimson arteries. Why not?⁶⁸

The deleted passage recalls a popular post-war toy: the Visible Man, an anatomical model with a clear plastic casing and removable organs. The toy was introduced in 1958 – too late for Frank, who references a poster rather than a toy, but at around the right time to have been on Yates's radar as he completed the novel.⁶⁹ Both the toy and the image of the anatomical poster literalise the sensuous corporeality that typifies the novel's descriptions of Frank: his insides have become outsides. This dynamic recalls Colomina's analysis of the suburban picture window: 'There is no interior.'⁷⁰ *Revolutionary Road* calls for a revision of Colomina's statement: the distinction between inside and outside is abolished not for the home, but for Frank himself. Following the success of the Visible Man, the company introduced a female equivalent, the Visible Woman. Parents could choose whether their child's Visible Woman would include an 'Optional Feature: The Miracle of Creation', with additional parts that included a foetus. Here, a fantasy of corporeal immediacy is joined with a fantasy of reproductive control.

Frank is one-dimensional, like Marcuse's capitalist subject, whose capacity for politicised criticism has been suppressed. He is

also depthless, to borrow a term from Fredric Jameson's analysis of postmodern culture. For Jameson, postmodern depthlessness renders parody impossible and permits only pastiche. Frank's attempt to parody his father's career path does not even achieve the status of pastiche; instead, it curdles into sour homage. Frank's depthlessness can also be approached through a closer contemporary to Yates: the media theorist Marshall McLuhan. In *Understanding Media* (1964), McLuhan argued that technologies modify their users through a form of 'auto-amputation' that detracts from the body in the act of enhancing it. McLuhan wrote, 'Any invention or technology is an extension or self-amputation of our physical bodies, and such extension also demands new ratios or new equilibriums among the other organs and extensions of the body.'⁷¹ The mirror is one of McLuhan's key examples. He cites the myth of Narcissus, who became enamoured with his own reflection in the water and drowned. In McLuhan's analysis, Narcissus' 'extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servo-mechanism of his own extended or repeated image'.⁷² He adds: 'The young man's image is a self-amputation or extension induced by irritating pressures. As counter irritant, the image produces a generalized numbness or shock that declines recognition. Self-amputation forbids self-recognition.'⁷³ Functioning as mirrors, *Revolutionary Road's* windows both extend and deplete the body, and make it vulnerable to forms of traumatic shock.

The casual exchange of 'extension' and 'self-amputation' in McLuhan's work recalls Freud's account of technology. In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1929), Freud wrote, 'Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on him and they still give him much trouble at times.'⁷⁴ For Freud, as for McLuhan, media do not extend already amputated organs – they amputate in the act of extending. Freud linked the prosthesis of architecture to a yearning for the maternal environment, suggesting that 'the dwelling-house was a substitute for the mother's womb, the first lodging, for which in all likelihood man still longs, and in which he was safe and felt at ease'.⁷⁵ Freud's analysis spotlights the reproductive politics of the house; approached through McLuhan, it highlights the reproductive politics of the window in particular.

In *Revolutionary Road*, however, the reflective window instils a fantasy of mimesis that has less to do with the prosthetic womb than with patriarchal models of fatherhood that marginalise or idealise the mother.

Where is the mother in *Revolutionary Road*? My analysis so far has focused on Frank. This reflects the novel's narrative voice, which barely occupies April's point of view until the final day of her life. Yates's narrative approach to the feminine can be compared to what Andreas Huyssen has described as the 'imaginary femininity' of Gustave Flaubert and other male modernist authors. Huyssen notes that imaginary femininity is a strategy that, while grounding these authors' 'oppositional stance vis-à-vis bourgeois society, can easily go hand in hand with the exclusion of real women from the literary enterprise and with the misogyny of bourgeois patriarchy itself'.⁷⁶

Revolutionary Road registers its conflicted relationship with this Flaubertian 'imaginary femininity' through its mode of narration. Flaubert reputedly declared, '*Madame Bovary, c'est moi*'. Yates, on the other hand, uses a Flaubertian free indirect style to occupy Frank's point of view for most of the novel. Other characters occasionally interrupt Frank's focalisation – Mrs Givings and Shep Campbell, for instance – but April's subjectivity largely eludes the narrative, despite her prominence in the plot, just as April herself dodges Frank during their frequent arguments. During one of these arguments, on the drive home from the disastrous opening night of the amateur play in which she stars, *The Petrified Forest*, April leaves the car, her flight deduced in condescending retrospect from Frank's perspective: 'She was out of the car and running away in the headlights, quick and graceful, a little too wide in the hips.'⁷⁷ If April is too quick for Frank, she also dodges the narrative's clutches. Indeed, neither the novel nor Frank can really apprehend April until the chapter in which she dies, and is acknowledged, too late, by both. While they argue, Frank tells April, 'I mean you seem to be doing a pretty good imitation of Madame Bovary here.'⁷⁸ This accusation works on two levels: as Frank addressing April, and as the author addressing himself. If *Revolutionary Road* is a novel about the failure of Frank Wheeler, it is also a novel about the failures of narrative masculinism.

Revolutionary Road's auto-critique of masculine narration is allegorised in the plot development of the first chapter, which depicts the unravelling of *The Petrified Forest*'s first night. When the play's leading man falls ill, his role is taken over by the director, who is 'all but unable to see without his glasses, which he'd refused to wear on stage'.⁷⁹ The director unleashes a 'virus of calamity' when he walks onto the stage, which puts off the other actors and dooms the whole play.⁸⁰ At first April holds out, trying to sustain the success of her impressive opening scenes, but soon she is 'working alone, and visibly weakening with each line'.⁸¹ The director, whose failure to see becomes a failure to act, is in an impossible position both inside and outside the action. In its very first chapter, then, *Revolutionary Road* allegorises its own gendered failures: like the director of *The Petrified Forest*, Yates is overly identified with his own leading man; like both the director and Frank, Yates will fail his leading lady.

The calamitous opening night of *The Petrified Forest* foreshadows Frank's betrayal of April when he secretly turns against the plan to move to Paris and embarks on his campaign of reproductive coercion. This is partly because, like the director, Frank compromises April's performance: as she prepares to outline the Paris plan, Frank finds that her voice has 'a quality of play-acting, of slightly false intensity, a way of seeming to speak less to him than to some romantic abstraction'.⁸² But it is also because, like the director, his pose of authoritative expertise deflects from the lacuna at the centre of his vision: April 'working alone'. From the opening chapter of *Revolutionary Road*, then, the novel is pre-occupied with the paucity of a particular mode of masculinist expertise. The myopia of *The Petrified Forest*'s director, who can neither see the damage he has wrought nor fix it, symbolises the limited perspective of a field of male figures whose authority masks their ignorance of the work of women. It is no coincidence that the novel ends with a man wilfully ignoring his wife with the help of technology: Mrs Givings is berating the Wheelers now they are safely out of sight, but 'Howard Givings heard only a welcome, thunderous sea of silence. He had turned off his hearing aid'.⁸³ These final sentences echo a chapter from the middle of the novel which, taking Mrs Givings as focaliser, invests the

character with a new depth of feeling as she cries over the course her life has taken. Yet the final sentence of the chapter abandons her point of view to inform us that her husband, while listening to her speak, 'timed his nods, his smiles, and his rumblings so judiciously that she never guessed he had turned his hearing aid off for the night'.⁸⁴ If *Revolutionary Road* is a novel about how men fail women, it is also a novel about how novels fail women. Yates here suggests that the novel might be understood as a kind of prosthetic technology which, like spectacles and hearing aids, promises sensory augmentation but in fact functions to obscure women's experiences.⁸⁵

Revolutionary Road's auto-critique of the realist novel is connected to its satirical portrait of sociology and popular social criticism. The novel has often been read as a companion to works such as David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) and William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956), which diagnosed a growing conformism in mid-century life.⁸⁶ I contend that, on the contrary, Yates consistently turns his critical eye *towards* this genre and its pretensions to transparent, objective diagnosis. In this sense, *Revolutionary Road* can be productively aligned with two 1959 texts that criticised contemporary trends in social thought. The first is C. Wright Mills's *The Sociological Imagination*, which decried the influence of government, military and corporate institutions on sociology.⁸⁷ The second is Harold Rosenberg's *The Tradition of the New*, which conflates Whyte's 'organization man' and Riesman's 'other-directed man' into one type, 'The Orgman', and urges against mistaking these texts for Leftist social critique.⁸⁸

Yates's affinity with these ideas can be gleaned in the novel's opening chapter, which adopts the bird's-eye view of the popular sociologist as it follows a suburban crowd to the opening night of *The Petrified Forest*:

Like the Players, they were mostly on the young side of middle age, and they were attractively dressed in what the New York clothing stores describe as Country Casuals. Anyone could see they were a better than average crowd, in terms of education and employment and good health, and it was clear too that they considered this a significant evening.⁸⁹

References to the sociological measures of 'education and employment and good health' ironise a homogenising critical perspective, detached from the individual subjects upon whom it passes judgement. As the chapter progresses, however, this omniscient perspective gives way to the novel's primary narrative mode: free indirect discourse that clings particularly to Frank's point of view, laying bare the novel's conflicted allegiance. Later, Frank will come to drunkenly parrot social criticism of the suburbs, suggesting that the purportedly neutral, sociological voice was aligned with white-collar masculinity all along.

A similar point applies to the novel's representation of the language of advertising. Frank is first singled out for promotion when he extemporises a series of marketing blurbs. Bart Pollock, his senior colleague in the business machines industry, praises the 'logic and the clarity of it. You hit each point in the right place and you drove it home. To me it wasn't like a piece of reading matter at all. It was like a man talking.'⁹⁰ Commercial tape recording technology, developed in the post-war period, detached the voice from the speaking body; Pollock's formulation sutures them together again through a fantasy of immediacy. Frank's boozy meeting with Pollock is the site of his experience of misted, four-sided vision – the experience recapitulated in 'Saying Goodbye to Sally'. Indeed, the 'terrible clarity' of Frank's drunken, four-sided vision mimics the 'clarity' of his marketing language. It is this 'terrible clarity' that leads Frank to betray April and align himself with another symbol of duplicitous transparency: the computer.

The Proleptic Computer

During their lunch meeting, Pollock urges Frank to abandon the planned move to Paris and stay in the US to promote the first generation of digital computers. As Frank listens to Pollock and considers the choice before him, his colleague crafts a startling metaphor: he urges Frank to imagine the computer as a newborn baby:

He cradled an imaginary infant in both hands, and then he shook them quickly as if to rid his fingers of a glutinous fluid. 'I mean it's still wet!

I mean they just now hauled it out and turned it over and slapped its ass and by Jesus its belly button's still hangin' out sore as a boil! You follow me? All right; you take this little-biddy newborn baby and you give it to this old, old man, or this old woman, let's say, these old married folks, and whaddya think's gunna happen? Why, they're gunna let it shrivel up and die, that's what. They're gunna take it and lay it away in a dresser drawer someplace and give it sour old milk to suck and never change its pants, and are you tryna [sic] tell me that baby'll ever grow up healthy and strong? Why hell that baby's got no more chance 'n a fiddler's bitch [sic].⁹¹

Pollock's metaphor invests the computer with a sensuous corporeality that recalls Frank's own fleshy automatism. The person from whose body this baby has been 'hauled out' is nowhere to be seen as it is handed over to an old man and woman at birth. With its fusion of high-tech futurism and infantile vulnerability, the image anticipates the iconography of the foetal spaceman, which I explore in Chapter 5. Introduced through Pollock's non-nonsense language, the computer becomes another technology of duplicitous transparency: it purports to reveal everything, and in the process obscures the sphere of reproductive labour and the experiences of women.

The newborn computer is yet another thread in the novel's web of repetitions. Pollock's reference to the baby/computer being handed to an old couple has a specific emotional resonance for Frank, the youngest son of elderly parents who imagines throwing Pollock's words back at him in a description of his childhood: 'You see, Bart? They laid me away in a dresser drawer and gave me sour old milk to suck -'.⁹² The newborn computer also foreshadows the fate of the Wheeler children following April's death: as Milly tells it at the novel's end, they are sent to live with Frank's brother and his wife, 'wonderful people, really, and very good with the kids; of course they're, *you* know, a lot older and everything'.⁹³ The computer thus becomes, like the window and the calendar, a figure for the novel's use of analepsis and prolepsis to produce a sense of April's death as a necessary repetition or foregone conclusion.

The sense of narrative complicity is deepened by the sequence of events that follows Frank's meeting with Pollock. While Frank is

mulling over Pollock's offer, the narrative focalisation shifts subtly to April with an extended description of housework:

Fortunately, there was no chance to tell her anything that night. She had spent the day at a kind of work she had always hated and lately allowed herself to neglect: cleaning the parts of the house that didn't show. Breathing dust and spitting cobwebs, she had hauled and bumped the screaming vacuum cleaner into all the corners of all the rooms and crawled with it under all the beds; she had cleaned each tile and fixture in the bathroom with a scouring powder whose scent gave her a headache, and she had thrust herself head and shoulders into the oven to swab with ammonia at its clinging black scum. She had torn up a loose flap of linoleum near the stove to reveal what looked like a long brown stain until it came alive – a swarm of ants that seemed still to be crawling inside her clothes for hours afterwards – and she'd even tried to straighten up the dripping disorder of the cellar, where a wet corrugated-paper box of rubbish fell apart in her hands as she lifted it out of a puddle, releasing all its mildewed contents in a splash from which an orange-spotted lizard emerged and sped away across her shoe. By the time Frank came home she was too tired to feel like talking.⁹⁴

It is no coincidence that this rare shift to April's point of view precipitates Frank's fatal campaign of reproductive coercion. It is as if neither he nor the novel can bear to look too closely at April's experience of domestic labour. Intruding upon Frank's dominant focalisation, this pungent description of housework makes visible the domain of social reproduction that he fails to acknowledge. The reference to April 'hauling' the vacuum cleaner echoes Pollock's use of the term 'haul' to describe the birth of the computer. The contrast spotlights the way Pollock's image occludes maternal labour, whether of birth or housework.

The passage emphasises how much harder April works than Frank, who has spent his career relishing 'the gulf between the amount of energy he was supposed to give the company and the amount he actually gave'.⁹⁵ In the days following the couple's decision to move to Paris, Frank goes through the motions at the office. Assuming that 'she too would be lazy and absent-minded in the daytime', Frank is shocked to discover that April has been busily

interviewing for positions abroad and shopping for the trip.⁹⁶ This imbalance feeds his secret anxieties about the transatlantic move. Frank is less sure than April that he has a better self to find in Paris: 'He had a quick disquieting vision of her coming home from a day at the office – wearing a Parisian tailored suit, briskly pulling off her gloves – coming home and finding him hunched in an egg-stained bathrobe, on an unmade bed, picking his nose.'⁹⁷ April's Paris plan troubles Frank because it disrupts the gendered division of labour that allows him to be paid for doing little at work, while she labours unwaged at the housework he would prefer to ignore.

Toiling at that which is hidden from view, April's day spent 'cleaning the parts of the house that didn't show' associates her with the realm of the unseen. This quality of opacity distinguishes April's body as well as her domestic work, though she seems surprised by the fact. Before Frank has had a chance to tell her about Pollock's job offer, April announces her pregnancy with the exasperated query, 'do you really mean you haven't known it too, or guessed it or anything? I'm pregnant, that's all.'⁹⁸ The fact Frank had not guessed it suggests that April's body is as unfathomable to him as the housework she has been engaged in all day. April's depth contrasts with Frank's depthlessness, her opacity with his transparency.

Pollock's symbolic parallel between the computer and a newborn baby is attractive because it imagines reproduction without the mediation of a gestating subject – a subject who might well decide not to give birth at all. The news of April's pregnancy initially delights Frank: it seems to fit perfectly with his newfound attraction to the prospect of midwifing the digital computer into the world and retaining the couple's conventionally gendered distribution of labour. When he discovers in the bathroom cabinet the 'dark pink bulb' of the rubber syringe with which his wife plans to terminate her pregnancy, the sight, redolent of genitalia, gives him too vivid an image of the contingency of reproduction – of the fact it depends on an embodied subject whose actions might well deviate from his plans.⁹⁹ It is after this discovery that Frank fakes a moral opposition to abortion intended to conceal the fact he never really wanted to go to Paris in the first place. His pious pronatalism is shadowed by his allegiance to another kind of reproduction:

the compulsive, repetitive force of patriarchal masculinity, buoyed by fantasies of automation. When Frank comes to the (erroneous) belief that he has succeeded in pressurising April to take her pregnancy to term, he is struck by the terrible knowledge 'that he was going to have another child, and he wasn't at all sure that he wanted one'.¹⁰⁰ Yet his coercion is itself a repetition of the events surrounding April's first pregnancy; it is another strategy that tries to enclose reproduction within a field of pure, determinable reiteration.

The attempt fails. April's abortion affirms the contingency of reproduction even in the face of the coercive pronatalism that would deny it. The contingencies of gestation are amplified by April's implicit lack of autonomy. Her abortion is barely represented as a decision, let alone a free decision; it appears rather as a sudden rupture in Frank's idealised sequence of events leading inexorably from conception to birth. By casting the reproductive domestic sphere as a zone of contingency and unpredictability, and the productive workplace as a zone of passive repetition, *Revolutionary Road* disrupts some canonical mid-century accounts of reproduction. In the post-war years, as Lisa Baraitser has noted, works by Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt sought, in different ways, to distinguish 'non-productive, repetitive' female labour, ensconced within the private sphere, from 'the inventive and generative sphere of "work" that constitutes the public sphere, and hence the possibility of "politics" in Arendt's terms'.¹⁰¹ In *The Human Condition* (1958), Arendt develops a distinction between work and labour whereby the former results in a product that endures in the objective world, while the latter is a self-effacing process that leaves no trace. The repetitive labour of sustaining life is understood as ephemeral, and opposed to work that builds towards a permanent legacy. While Arendt does not explicitly theorise the distinction between work and labour in terms of gender, Baraitser connects it to de Beauvoir's contention, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948), that a life reduced to mere maintenance is nothing but an 'absurd vegetation'.¹⁰² In *Revolutionary Road*, however, it is Frank who is associated with meaningless, self-effacing repetition. With his coercion of April, Frank projects his ideological investment in programmed repetition onto the world of

reproduction. The novel thus disrupts Arendt's association of feminised reproduction with meaningless reiteration. In *Revolutionary Road*, the dead rhythms of mimetic repetition are cast as a masculinist fantasy that is projected onto women's reproductive lives. This masculinised repetition is shown, in Yates's fiction, to be one of the ways in which reproduction is both controlled and denied, fetishised and naturalised.

In *The Second Sex* (1949), de Beauvoir contrasts the process of becoming woman with the process of becoming genius, asserting, 'If truth be told, one is not born, but becomes, a genius; and the feminine condition has, until now, rendered this becoming impossible'.¹⁰³ For de Beauvoir, pregnancy was one of the chief obstacles to the woman who might become a genius, because pregnancy collapses the distinction between subject and object:

The transcendence of an artisan or a man of action is driven by a subjectivity, but for the future mother the opposition between subject and object disappears; she and this child who swells in her form an ambivalent couple that life submerges; snared by nature, she is plant and animal, a collection of colloids, an incubator, an egg; she frightens children who are concerned with their own bodies and provokes sniggers from young men because she is a human being, consciousness and freedom, who has become a passive instrument of life. Life is usually just a condition of existence; in gestation it is creation; but it is a strange creation that takes place in contingency and facticity.¹⁰⁴

De Beauvoir's discussion of passivity is not as straightforward as it sometimes appears. As Victoria Browne has noted, the position she expresses here is ambivalent in its shifting emphasis on pregnancy's passivity as biologically driven, on the one hand, and socially produced, on the other.¹⁰⁵ In this passage, the 'contingence and facticity' of pregnancy are at the root of gestation's challenge to an existentialist emphasis on action and self-direction.

Yates associates the Wheelers with a watered-down form of existentialism. For Frank, this allegiance is driven by style rather than substance: at college, he fashions himself as an 'intense, nicotine-stained, Jean-Paul-Sartre sort of man'.¹⁰⁶ April betrays a more sincere understanding of subjectivity in terms of immanence and

transcendence. Advocating for the move to Paris, she tells her husband, 'It's your very *essence* that's being stifled here.'¹⁰⁷ When Frank asks, 'And what's that?', April replies, 'Don't you know? You're the most valuable and wonderful thing in the world. You're a man.'¹⁰⁸ For April, Frank's American existence is impeding his discovery of his essence, which is to be found in Paris. For Frank, meanwhile, existence does not precede essence – it *is* essence, and the conditions of post-war American life have become an ineluctable 'part of him'.¹⁰⁹

Of course, April's version of existentialism does not harbour the feminist critique of de Beauvoir's. It is filtered through her stated decision to prioritise Frank's achievements over her own, however much this might be a front for her desire to break free from the life of a housewife. In the end, coerced into maintaining a pregnancy she does not want, April understands her inability to access the domain of transcendence as a death sentence. But even as April's fate appears to affirm de Beauvoir's representation of pregnancy's passivity, the novel destabilises her distinction between embodied immanence and transcendent activity. Frank coerces April by taking the principle of empty repetition that structures his working life and imposing it onto hers. The reiterations of April's reproductive life are not inherent to it: they are imported from Frank's fantasies of patriarchal succession. Free of her husband's and the law's interference, April's reproductive life would be far from doomed to repeat. As it stands, her abortion represents a final attempt to stop the principle of repetition to which Frank has tried to harness her life; in a tragically ironic twist, her death is the end towards which the novel's repetitions have been working all along.

Frank's repetitive behaviour serves his fantasy of a reproductive process driven and controlled by men like himself. His secret commitment to a career at Knox is driven by this principle too, as Pollock correctly guesses when he wins Frank over with his birth metaphor. Frank's fantasy that procreation can be programmed like a computer depends on his determined refusal to acknowledge the realities of April's emotional experience and daily life. On the morning of her death, Frank – believing he has persuaded April to take her pregnancy to term – draws her a diagram of the new computer he hopes will make his fortune:

Only instead of mechanical parts, you see, it's got thousands of little individual vacuum tubes...' And in a minute he was drawing for her, on a paper napkin, a diagram representing the passage of binary digit pulses through circuitry.¹¹⁰

I have already noted that *Revolutionary Road* draws a contrast between April's opacity and Frank's transparency. Over the course of the novel, its computers similarly vacillate between opacity and transparency, depth and depthlessness. At the novel's beginning, the computers at Knox Business Machines appear as objects of 'electronic mystery' whose 'inscrutable components' conceal their mechanisms of operation.¹¹¹ The next generation of digital computers has no such inscrutability: the machine's inner workings are laid bare like those of the Visible Man. April's death later that day takes on a new poignancy in light of Frank's diagram: her self-abortion might even be read as an attempt to avoid being 'diagrammed' and rendered as transparent as the Visible Woman toy whose foetus can be inserted and removed at the whim of others.

Frank tells April that the computer on the napkin is 'one of these monstrous great things like the Univac; the kind of machine they use to forecast the weather and predict elections and all that'.¹¹² This is a reference to a real machine: Remington Rand's UNIVAC was launched as the first commercial business computer in 1951. Yates had good reason to mention the UNIVAC by name: in the early 1950s, as an unpublished writer working on the debut novel that would become *Revolutionary Road*, Yates took a job writing copy for the Remington Rand internal staff magazine, *Systems*. Yates was, according to his biographer, on the UNIVAC 'beat', tasked with writing promotional material for the new machine.¹¹³ As Frank's comment to April obliquely references, the UNIVAC became famous for accurately predicting the Eisenhower landslide in 1952's presidential election. Notoriously, TV newscasters had ignored the computer's prediction and broadcast statisticians' forecasts of an Adlai Stevenson victory instead. This context is important for several reasons. Frank's fantasised image of the computer combines the corporeal and the automatic: it suggests a body (whether a woman's or a child's) that can be made transparent and programmable. The UNIVAC's purported ability to

'forecast the weather and predict elections and all that' makes it a technological counterpart to both Frank's repetitive experience of time and the novel's narrative prolepsis. Like the calendar and the window, the digital computer promises a predictable future that can reproduce according to directions.

In 1989, Yates wrote a proposal for a film about the UNIVAC, to be titled *The World on Fire*. The film, had it been picked up, would have followed the fortunes of Harold Clark, a young PR executive from Kansas, who moves his family to New York when he is hired by Remington Rand to promote the UNIVAC. In Yates's proposal, Clark decides to enlist the UNIVAC to predict the results in the 1952 election. However, the film's conclusion deviates from the historical record when the UNIVAC fails to correctly predict Eisenhower's victory.¹¹⁴ In the wake of Harold's professional humiliation, the script proposal ends on a bawdy, happy note as he and his family drive back to Kansas, his relationship with his wife, Elaine, rejuvenated by the affairs they have both had in New York. Elaine tells her husband that Adlai Stevenson was ahead of his time, adding, 'So was computer science, I guess. And so were you, dear.'¹¹⁵ The revisionist conclusion can be read as an affirmation of contingency against the reiterative, deterministic repetitions that bind the Wheelers to their fate.

Revolutionary Road offers no such escape route. Just as Frank's fantasy of biological reproduction occludes April's reproductive labour, so his fantasy of computing erases the gendered labour relations that produced the computer, and also shaped Yates's career. Before exploring this context and the details of Yates's time at Remington Rand, I will take a brief detour to situate *Revolutionary Road* alongside other depictions of feminised computers in the wider media landscape of the 1950s and 1960s. *Revolutionary Road* was not alone in linking computers and women: this was a common trope in the culture of the period. News reports about computers often tapped into the sense of status anxiety generally associated with the advance of automation. In its 1961 review of the year, *Time* hailed the 'coming age of automation' and named the computer as its 'quintessence'.¹¹⁶ The implications of the new era were apparently Janus-faced: according to *Time*, automation boosted productivity 6 per cent over the course of the year, but it

also compounded growing unemployment among the unskilled.¹¹⁷ The term 'automation' did not only encompass concerns and hopes about the economy; it also expressed anxieties about psychological self-control. As Caroline A. Jones notes, 'the 1960s already saw that if machines replaced human physical processes, electronic automation aimed to replace mental ones.'¹¹⁸ Fears that men might be replaced by machines were often transmuted into visions of men turning into machines.

The press frequently described computers as 'giant brains' due to their perceived ability to surpass human capabilities in statistical mathematics and accounting.¹¹⁹ While 'giant brain' is a gender-neutral designation, computers were often feminised in the press. *Revolutionary Road* was published four years after the release of *Desk Set* (1957), a film starring Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy in which a computer nicknamed 'Emmy' threatens to replace the intellectual work of women researchers at a television company. The light-hearted romantic comedy perhaps intended to alleviate popular fears about automation by displacing the prospect of men's unemployment onto women. At the end of the film, the women's fears prove unfounded anyway: there are no layoffs at the company, and the workers adapt to daily life alongside Emmy, in what Ted Friedman calls a 'capitalist technotopian vision'.¹²⁰

As the 1960s progressed, the computer's combination of transparency and opacity was frequently feminised. In June 1962, reports emerged that cosmetics company Yardley had launched a new electronic 'Beauty Brain': a computer that could provide customers with advice on make-up purchases by processing their answers to a survey. An article published at the time warned that the machine's survey was not confined to cosmetic matters: it asked intimate questions about a woman's work habits and even her marriage. But, the report continued, 'Most women are definitely pro-computer. The big thing about a computer is that you can confide in it, all about your age and oily forehead. The computer never tells.'¹²¹ These popular representations of commercial business computers in the 1960s feminised the machine's combination of inscrutable opacity and access to personal information, conflating the machine's associations with both revelation and secrecy.

A further contextual detail highlights the UNIVAC's symbolic link with both procreation and women's work. The year before *Revolutionary Road* was published, the UNIVAC was deployed in the 1960 census, which registered the baby boom of the 1950s as an 18.5 per cent rise in population.¹²² Just as it was women who disclosed personal details while shopping for cosmetics, so it was women who gave family information to the census enumerator at the door. For the first time, in 1960 most of the census enumerators were women, too. 'Biggest Do-It-Yourself Project: Where Women Really Count,' punned the *Baltimore Sun*, in a report on the feminisation of the Bureau of the Census workforce.¹²³ The computer and the woman were joined in the apparently seamless process of collecting and recording the information lurking behind the nation's closed doors. A widely quoted 1960 publication by the Bureau of the Census reassured American people that the census enumerator would be 'far more concerned with getting answers in the correct space on his schedule than he will be in learning your age or the details of your economic status'.¹²⁴ The male pronoun used by this official publication perhaps amplified its reassuring message. Still, the image of the dispassionate census worker perhaps contained an implicit warning about the feminised machines and machinic women that joined together to tabulate the expanding population.

The representation of women as computers was not just metaphorical. The term 'computers' once referred to the women who performed ballistics calculations during World War II (the term did not come to denote machines until after 1945). The development of the early digital computer, the ENIAC, involved a gendered division of labour – in the historian Jennifer Light's terms, 'designing hardware was a man's job; programming was a woman's job'.¹²⁵ Despite the fact that ENIAC's female programmers needed expertise in mathematics and engineering in order to do their work, programming was not acknowledged as a skilled form of labour until the job was masculinised. Light explains, 'While the media publicly hailed hardware designers as having "fathered" the machine, they did not mention women's contributions.'¹²⁶

The coverage of the computer in *Systems*, the Remington Rand magazine to which Yates contributed, exemplifies this dynamic. In an article about the UNIVAC in the December 1950 issue of

Systems, the 'eye-filling Hollywood starlet' Joyce Holden is pictured at the UNIVAC exhibit at the National Business Show.¹²⁷ The article informs us that Holden visited the show to promote her new film *The Milkman*, about an automated milk truck that stops and goes when the milkman whistles. Though the article notes that Holden took a course in electronics at the University of California at Los Angeles to prepare for the film, the headline focuses on her appearance rather than her knowledge: '2 Eye-Fillers Go Well Together!'¹²⁸ The piece veers back and forth between representing Holden as a person with an intellectual interest in the computer and depicting her as its equivalent, an arresting spectacle just like the UNIVAC. This oscillation parallels the way women's intellectual contribution to the development of the UNIVAC was obscured in the media, which preferred to associate the device itself with femininity. In this way, computers were gendered as objects while the role of women's labour in their development was effaced.

The UNIVAC played a key role in *Revolutionary Road's* evolution through multiple drafts. A 1956 draft of the novel with the working title 'The Getaway' differs from the published version in a multitude of ways: the Wheelers are the Garveys, Frank is an artist for an advertising agency called Kline rather than a business systems PR man, and Maureen Grube is a fellow artist and bohemian who plays a larger role in the plot. The draft is particularly notable for two differences: the relatively minimal role played by the computer and the absence of the theme of reproductive control. The UNIVAC does not appear in this draft, though Yates does work in a reference to his day job when Frank is shown a photograph of the 'wiring in an electronic computer' and asks whether it was acquired from 'Remington Rand or someplace'.¹²⁹ Significantly, Frank does not coerce April out of the abortion in this draft – they decide, mutually, that she will continue with the pregnancy. In his notes on this early draft, Yates wrote, 'There is too much time & space wasted on the minor point (or illusion) that the suburbs are to blame. If the suburbs *are* to blame it must be implied through cumulative effect rather than slammed home in every chapter.'¹³⁰ In the margin, Yates has written in pencil, 'and they are to no greater extent than the artist illusion – remember that'.¹³¹ Yates's multiple revisions of this draft into what was finally published as *Revolutionary Road* five

years later not only fulfil his stated intentions to target the 'artist illusion' at least as much as the suburbs; they also develop a much more scathing portrait of masculinist strategies of reproductive control, for which the computer becomes an important symbol.

Yates's experience of writing about the UNIVAC at Remington Rand suggest his representation of the computer might well have been informed by knowledge about women's role in its development. Still, an example of female labour closer to home could have sufficed. According to his biography, by 1957, Yates could no longer balance fiction writing with PR, so his wife Sheila Yates (née Bryant) stepped in to write Yates's *Systems* articles so their household did not lose the regular income.¹³² How does this context inform the novel's representation of the computer, and of gendered labour? Yates's first novel may not have been written without the income provided by Remington Rand: the company paid him a regular salary while he was working on the book and introduced him to one of its significant themes through his work on the UNIVAC. *Revolutionary Road's* alliterative title might even be conceived as a wry nod to Remington Rand. The tension between art and commerce clearly informs the novel's depiction of Frank. In another note on 'The Getaway', Yates instructs himself to:

change all the parts about Frank's attitude to the Kline job and to 'Real' work – show clearly that he is *not* a real artist suffering from commercial work (which is not only a bore but a lie; real artists don't, or if they do they get out fast), but a commercial artist with delusions of grandeur.¹³³

For a while, the company even provided the paper the novel was written on: Yates's archive contains draft pages of *Revolutionary Road* handwritten on the verso of Remington Rand branded paper, perhaps as a material reminder of the risks posed by the 'artist illusion' to which Frank clings.¹³⁴ Yates's own balancing act of authorship and PR work depended on Sheila's talent for writing and apparent willingness to both sacrifice credit and undertake a 'double day' of housework and paid work – doubly unremunerated, of course, as the Remington Rand pay packet went to her husband.

Frank's reaction to April's plans to enter employment has obvious parallels with the division of cultural labour in the Yates

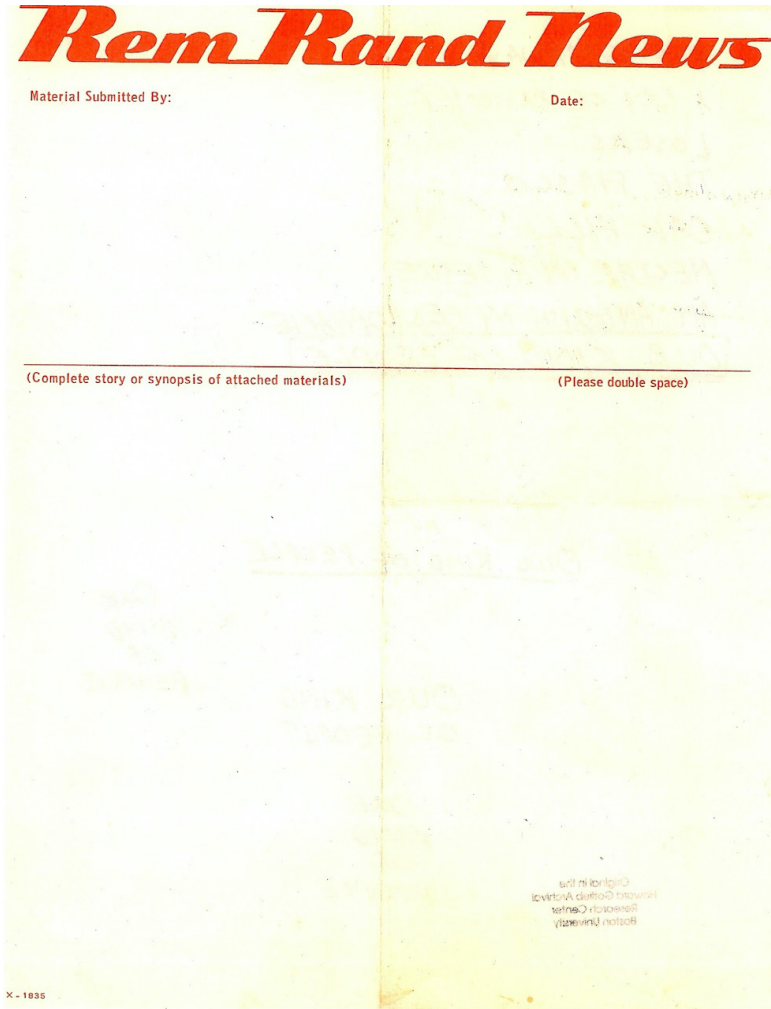


Figure 3.1 Remington Rand branded paper, recto. Copyright © The Estate of Richard Yates, 2025, used by permission of The Wylie Agency (UK) Limited.

household, but it also resonates with the gendered division of labour in the development of computers like the UNIVAC. In *Revolutionary Road*, Frank's imaginative investment in the computer sustains his fantasy of a reproduction both corporeal and automatic, allowing him to ignore April's reproductive labour and

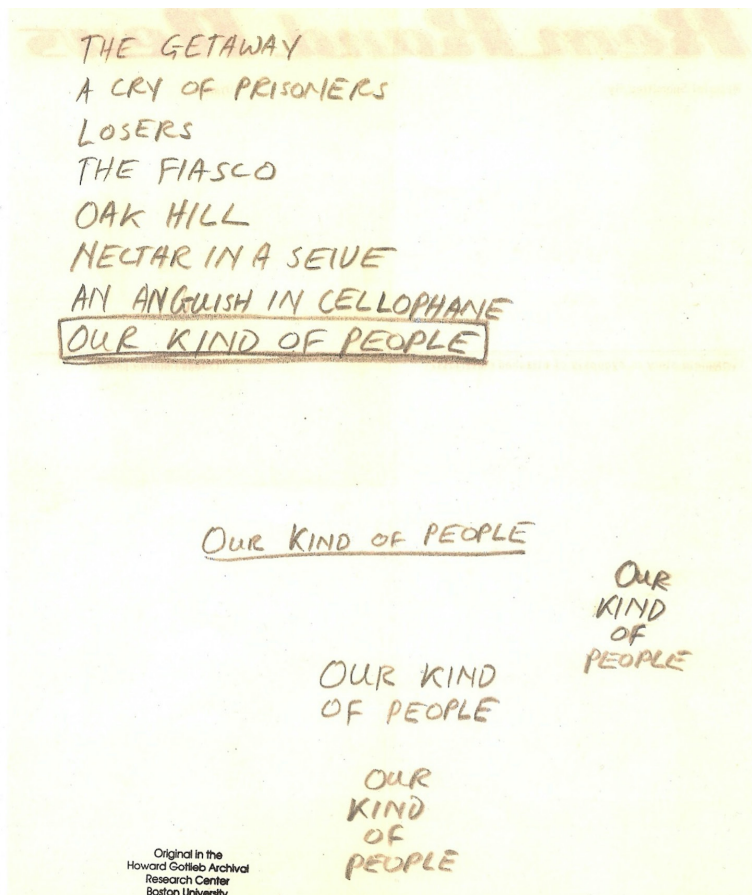


Figure 3.2 Remington Rand branded paper, verso, showing draft titles for *Revolutionary Road*. Copyright © The Estate of Richard Yates, 2025, used by permission of The Wylie Agency (UK) Limited.

suppress her reproductive agency. However, the computer also functions as a reference to the novel's context of production, and so, in a strange way, encodes Sheila's otherwise invisible labour. Sheila reportedly typed Yates's stories for him too, but when asked to give an opinion 'either she liked the wrong things or the right things for the wrong reasons, or maybe she even *disliked* something for right or wrong reasons, whereupon he'd usually explode'.¹³⁵ Literary secretaries are required, as Leah Price and

Pamela Thurschwell have suggested, to be simultaneously alert and unthinking, intimately involved with their employer's lives but impassive and detached.¹³⁶ Like the computer, the secretary has a potentially volatile level of access to her employer's private life. She is imagined as an automaton in order to render her activities safer by occluding her human interest in the information she gleans from her job; when asked to give an opinion, she is expected to mirror the author's own assessment. Sheila's slippage from typist of the Remington Rand articles to their uncredited author haunts *Revolutionary Road's* representation of masculinist individualism: the novel insistently suggests that such ideological investments depend on the disavowed work of women. This is a theme Yates picks up in 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', to which I now turn my attention.

Sally's Sterility: Repeating *Revolutionary Road*

Towards the beginning of 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', the writer Jack Fields visits the offices of his agent, Edgar Todd. Jack is hoping to find Sally, Edgar's 'strikingly attractive' secretary, but when he arrives she is not at her desk. Jack suddenly notices that Edgar's office door is ajar and, upon entering, he finds Sally sitting in her boss's chair, reading:

'You do Edgar's reading for him?'

'Well, most. He doesn't have the time, and anyway he hates to read. So I type up these little one- and two-page summaries of the books that come in, and he reads those.'¹³⁷

Following this encounter, Jack takes Sally out for a drink and they begin an affair. But even as the scene propels the plot forwards, its representation of hidden female labour draws this late story into dialogue with Yates's first novel, published two decades earlier. The story's repetition of *Revolutionary Road* – the moment of distorted yet clear vision that accosts both Frank and Jack as they drink – binds these texts together by pointing to their shared concern with the repetitive processes by which women and reproduction are simultaneously idealised and disavowed.

Before looking more closely at this textual echo, let me take stock of the story's broader engagement with reproduction and repetition. The plot of 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' is structured around a repetition: Jack Fields's self-conscious emulation of his hero, F. Scott Fitzgerald. The story begins as Jack prepares to relocate temporarily from New York to Los Angeles for a job adapting a novel into a screenplay.¹³⁸ Just as Frank Wheeler imitates his father, so Jack models his trip after his literary hero, imagining himself as 'F. Scott Fitzgerald in Hollywood'.¹³⁹ When he begins the affair with Sally, this fantasy gains ammunition: as they fall asleep on their first night together, Jack is 'too happy and sleepy to accomplish more than a single coherent, mercifully private thought: F. Scott Fitzgerald meets Sheilah Graham'.¹⁴⁰ As he learns more about Sally and her unusual home life, however, Jack has to work harder to sustain the illusion. Sally lives with her friend, Jill Jarvis, in Jill's Beverly Hills Greek Revival mansion, together with Jill's son, boyfriend and maid. Eventually, Jack is persuaded to take up residence in the enormous house too, despite his distaste for the hard-drinking crowd. It is while Jack is drinking with the group one evening, and growing increasingly disgusted at Jill's seduction of a recently bereaved businessman, that the story echoes *Revolutionary Road*, as Jack

found he couldn't even watch her anymore because a heavy dark mist had closed in on all four sides of his vision, causing his head to droop and hang until the only thing he could see at all—and he saw it with the terrible clarity of self-hatred—was his own left shoe on the carpet.¹⁴¹

The meaning of the echo of *Revolutionary Road* here is illuminated by a draft of 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' held in Yates's archive. In this early, handwritten draft, there is a crossed-out section of text directly before the passage that alludes to *Revolutionary Road*, which reads:

One of his favorite parts of *The Great Gatsby* occurred to him then, and he didn't have to be sober to remember it word for word because he had once typed it out, long ago, and fastened it with scotch tape to the wall above his writing table.¹⁴²

This paragraph is followed by a large, empty square bracket, where Yates had presumably intended to insert a quotation from F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel – it is unclear which one. Instead, the entire passage is crossed out and the story proceeds with a blurred echo

~~of our pretty head on its ~~elephant~~ neck, ^{or saying "Oh, fuck, my beloved,"} ^{slaying} the firelight, smiling or laughing ^{← whatever damn} dumb thing, this bereaved stranger, this asshole Cliff Myers had just said.~~
~~One of his ~~favorite~~ ^{parts of} ~~the Great Gatsby~~ occurred to him then and he didn't have to be sober to remember it word for word because he had once typed it out, long ago, and ~~fastened it~~ ^{fastened it} ~~to the wall~~ ^{to the wall} ~~above his writing table.~~~~

Original in the
Howard Gottlieb Archival
Research Center
Boston University

Soon he found he couldn't even watch ^{her} Sally anymore because a heavy dark mist had closed in on all four sides of his vision and caused his head to droop until the only thing he could see ~~was~~ ^{at all} -- and -- saw it with the terrible clarity of self-hatred -- his own left shoe on the carpet.

"... Hey, uh, Jack?"

"Uh?"

"I said want to ~~give me~~ ^{gimme} a hand?"

~~recognized~~ Ralph's voice. ~~Ralph's hand was~~ ^{gimme} ~~on his~~ ^{on} ~~shoulder.~~ ^{shoulder.} ~~Want to~~ ^{Want to} ~~help me~~ ^{help me} ~~pick up some wood?~~ ^{pick up some wood?}

~~Jill's~~ ^{Jill's} ~~voice?~~ ^{voice?}

"Uh. Uh. Wait seconds Okay." And ~~with~~ ^{with} energy came from nowhere, or from the desperate last

Figure 3.3 Page from a draft of 'Saying Goodbye to Sally'. Copyright © The Estate of Richard Yates, 2025, used by permission of The Wylie Agency (UK) Limited.

of Yates's own novel in place of the Fitzgerald quotation. The published version of the story contains no such reference to *The Great Gatsby*; instead, the parallel between Jill Jarvis's west coast mansion and Gatsby's east coast one remains implicit throughout. The allusion to *Revolutionary Road*, meanwhile, is buried in the prose: an invisible stitch only discernible to those looking for it.

Yates's decision to (almost) quote himself rather than Fitzgerald might be read as an affirmation of authorial autonomy – a way of distinguishing himself from his Fitzgerald-obsessed protagonist. However, the allusion to *Revolutionary Road* retains, in an indirect, embedded form, the Fitzgerald reference, because *The Great Gatsby* performs a similar act of 'self-quotation'. *The Great Gatsby*'s epigraph – four lines of poetry – is attributed to 'Thomas D'Inwilliers', a character in *This Side of Paradise*; the lines were, naturally, written by Fitzgerald himself.¹⁴³ By embedding an allusion to his earlier novel in a new work of fiction, Yates emulates Fitzgerald, just as his protagonist Jack Fields does.¹⁴⁴

The chain of masculine emulation that links Fitzgerald and Fields recalls Frank Wheeler's self-defeating repetition of his father's career at Knox. The parallel is intensified with Jack Fields's surname, which recalls *Revolutionary Road*'s Oat Fields, the Knox executive who raised and then scuppered Frank's father's hopes of promotion.¹⁴⁵ Both the novel and the short story thus draw connections between patriarchal 'illusions of continuity' and the contingencies of biological and social reproduction.¹⁴⁶ On the surface, the texts' accounts of reproduction diverge: Frank's pronatalism and coercive investment in April's pregnancies contrast with Jack's attraction to Sally, whose infertility is symbolised by her prematurely grey hair. But by the end of *Revolutionary Road*, it is clear that Frank's apparent commitment to biological reproduction is in fact a dream of an automatic form of patriarchal inheritance. His status at the novel's conclusion as a 'walking, talking, smiling, lifeless man', in his neighbour Shep Campbell's eyes, marks his bittersweet achievement of this dream.¹⁴⁷ Just as Shep observes Frank's roboticism, so Sally exposes Jack's derivative hopes as he returns to New York at the end of the story and she jokes about her plan 'to trap the next counterfeit F. Scott Fitzgerald who comes stumbling out to Movieland'.¹⁴⁸

The contrast between April's fertility and Sally's infertility is just one of the ways in which the story and the novel diverge, on the surface at least. The texts' settings are almost perfectly opposed: where *Revolutionary Road* deals with marriage in the suburbs of the east coast, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' represents a brief fling in a decadently unconventional household in Los Angeles. Given that Yates frustratedly maintained that *Revolutionary Road* was not an attack on marriage and the suburbs ('After all, who but a maniac or a goddamn fool would sit down and write a novel attacking marriage?' he said in an interview), we can understand 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' as a self-conscious reversal of the novel's headline themes.¹⁴⁹ The echo between the texts directs the reader's attention away from 'marriage and the suburbs' and towards the concern with reproduction that underpins both texts. Just as *Revolutionary Road* associates Frank's repetitive automatism with his coercive pronatalism, so 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' connects Jack's repetitions to the gendered and racialised reproductive politics that underpin Sally's life in Los Angeles. In this way, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' embeds what I am describing as a conceptualist intervention that directs us to look afresh at *Revolutionary Road's* reproductive politics.

In Jill's Beverly Hills mansion, the stifling, superficial conformity of the Wheelers' suburbs is nowhere to be found: instead, nuclear familial relationships are disrupted and reconfigured in an atmosphere of bohemian wealth, callous superficiality and drunken disarray. Jill is the single parent of a son, Kicker, though the young boy eats his meals with the household maid, Nippy, the story's only African American character, and gets most of his emotional attention from Jill's boyfriend, a mediocre painter named Woody. Kicker's father has refused to acknowledge him. Halfway through the story, Jill ditches Woody for the businessman Cliff Myers, whose wife has died suddenly (the reader might imagine Frank Wheeler transplanted to Los Angeles in the wake of April's death). The precarious chains of fatherhood are broken as Kicker witnesses Woody's abrupt dismissal from their lives. Against this backdrop, Jack's emulation of Fitzgerald appears as another faulty link in the paternal chain, lacking substance and easily broken.

Jill's neglect of Kicker troubles Sally, who reveals her complex relationship with the boy in a conversation with Jack:

'Sometimes he used to call me his "proxy mother."' She lingered silent at the window for a long time, looking jaded, her upper lip beginning to loosen the way it did when she was drunk. 'Have you any idea,' she asked, 'of what it means to be a woman unable to have a child? Even if you don't necessarily want one, it's a terrible thing to discover you can't; and sometimes—oh, God, I don't know. Sometimes I think having a child is all I've ever really wanted in my whole life.'¹⁵⁰

Both Jack, as Fitzgerald's literary 'son', and Sally, as Kicker's 'proxy mother', are embedded in figurative filial relationships bound up with feelings of shame, regret and inadequacy. Indeed, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' is full of such fraught moments of doubling and imitation, from Woody's displacement by Cliff to the very task that brings Jack to Hollywood: the adaptation of his novel into a film. Jack's experiences in Hollywood repeat themselves too: in a passage evocative of Frank Wheeler's drunken repetitions, Jack finds himself so flattered by the attention of a young actress that, while listening to her speak, 'he only dimly realized he had heard the whole story before, during the time he'd stayed here'.¹⁵¹ This motif of disloyal doubling helps to make sense of the story's repetition of *Revolutionary Road*, which is offset by the stark contrasts between the texts. In another reversal of *Revolutionary Road*, Sally's yearning for motherhood contrasts with April's desperate desire to escape it. At the same time, the story's echo of the novel cautions against the temptation to read 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' as a moral fable about the dangers of unconventional family arrangements. The superficial differences between the mansion in Beverly Hills and the house on Revolutionary Road mask deeper similarities between the politics of reproduction that structure both households. The 'dark mist' that accosts both Frank Wheeler and Jack Fields highlights the fact both men are implicated in a culture that turns its attention away from women's reproductive work while promoting pronatalist norms.

Even as the story lays bare the problems with Jill Jarvis's household, Yates satirises the impulse to morally condemn her. In an

exchange with Sally, Jack firmly establishes his distaste for her living situation:

'Know what Sally?' he said, carrying their full, cold glasses back outdoors, and he was going to say, 'You've got really great legs,' but went back to the old topic instead. 'It's beginning to sound like you live in a pretty fucked-up household.'

'Oh, I know,' she said. 'Somebody else I knew called it "degenerate." That seemed too strong a word, but later I could see what he meant.'¹⁵²

As Jack immediately descends into a jealous funk over the identity of the 'somebody' to whom Sally refers, his moralistic pose is revealed as a form of masculine anxiety – a dynamic familiar from Frank's bad faith lectures about the evils of abortion. In the novel's first chapter, Frank also makes a last-minute switch from compliment to criticism when he decides not to tell April her performance in the play was wonderful, but to say, 'I guess it wasn't exactly a triumph or anything, was it?'¹⁵³ If Jack's comment exposes his insensitivity as a partner, it also conceals his hypocrisy in criticising Jill. The story makes it clear that he is hardly homemaker of the year either: his daughters from a previous marriage refuse to shower in his New York apartment because the shower stall is infested with cockroaches, and one of the reasons he agrees to move into Jill Jarvis's mansion is his dismayed realisation that his Los Angeles beach house is 'very nearly as dismal and damp as his cellar in New York', despite its 'modest picture window overlooking the ocean'.¹⁵⁴

The picture window in 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', as in *Revolutionary Road*, is a technology of duplicitous transparency that hides Jack's hypocrisy: he condemns Jill for failing to live up to a domestic ideal that he, too, betrays. This hypocrisy is laid bare towards the end of the story, when Jill and Cliff play a cruel practical joke on Woody. Jack and Sally know about the practical joke in advance and they watch from the sidelines as Cliff, posing as a delivery man, delivers to Woody a package coated with superglue. As the trick unfolds, Sally presses her face into Jack's shirt, but when he reassures her that it is over she admits, 'I saw the whole thing.' As Woody and Kicker move together to remove the glue with gaso-

line, Jack follows 'at a stranger's distance'.¹⁵⁵ The duplicitous transparency of the picture window is at work here: seeing everything clearly, Jack and Sally do nothing to warn Woody or disrupt the plan. They are as passive as spectators at the cinema, another of the story's technologies of duplicitous transparency.

'Saying Goodbye to Sally' goes further than *Revolutionary Road* in touching on the racialised politics of reproduction. One of the key differences between the two texts is the matter of who is doing the majority of the work of social reproduction: in *Revolutionary Road*, it is April, the white housewife, but in 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' it is Nippy, the black housekeeper. On the first evening Jack spends at the mansion, Kicker interrupts the adults' drinking to ask for dinner, and Jill tells him, 'Ask Nippy to fix you a plate.'¹⁵⁶ This is a routine as repetitive as any of Frank Wheeler's office mannerisms, as Sally makes clear:

'... And they go through that same dopey routine about dinner every night,' Sally said later, when she and Jack were alone in his car on the way out to the beach. 'Kicker always says, "We ever gonna eat?" and she always gives him that exact same answer, as if they're *both* trying to pretend it doesn't happen all the time. Sometimes its ten-thirty or eleven before she feels like eating, and all the food's ruined, but by then everybody's so smashed they don't care. If you could *see* the beautiful cuts of meat that go to waste in that kitchen. Ah, God, if only she could have a little more—I don't know. It's just that I wish—well, never mind. I wish a lot of things.'¹⁵⁷

Repetition, in 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', is an attribute not of housework but of its disavowal by the wealthy – just as, in *Revolutionary Road*, Frank's repetitive automatism serves as an escape from the quotidian realities of social reproduction. But while *Revolutionary Road* is interested in the plight of the white middle-class housewife, with 'Saying Goodbye to Sally' Yates turns his attention to the black working-class housekeeper.

Women like Nippy are left unacknowledged in the canonical critique of suburbia developed in Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which purports to articulate 'the problem with no name' but leaves the oppression of black and working-class women nameless.

As bell hooks has argued, 'When Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique* more than one-third of all women were in the work force. Although many women longed to be housewives, only women with leisure time and money could actually shape their identities on the model of the feminine mystique.'¹⁵⁸ Friedan writes approvingly of the woman who hires a 'three-day-a-week cleaning woman' so she can progress in her research career, but the experiences of the housekeeper herself are left unanalysed.¹⁵⁹ Jill Jarvis, liberated from housework thanks to Nippy's labour, is far from the fulfilled career woman of Friedan's imaginings – she spends every morning 'lying in bed till noon with her coffee and her cigarettes and her endless, mindless fucking crossword puzzles'.¹⁶⁰

Nippy, meanwhile, is compelled to see everything and say nothing. In a conversation with Jack, she speaks disapprovingly of Jill's booze-soaked seduction of the widower Cliff Myers, but adds that she thinks the world of her employer – in part because she 'got me my contacts'.¹⁶¹ The passage that follows seems to set up Nippy's contact lenses as another technology of duplicitous transparency:

When he looked puzzled, Nippy pointed happily to the outer corners of her eyes with both index fingers, blinking. And if he hadn't understood her then—'Oh, your contact *lenses*'—he felt sure she would have bent over, peeled back an eyelid, and dropped one of the moist, all but invisible things into the palm of her hand as an offering of explanation and proof.¹⁶²

Jack's speculation implicitly sets out the intended terms of Nippy's employment at the Jarvis household: her boss pays for her prosthetised vision, but she is nevertheless expected to turn her eyes away from Jill's cruel and careless behaviour. However, Nippy's contact lenses diverge from *Revolutionary Road's* prosthetic technologies. Unlike Howard Givings's hearing aid or the *Petrified Forest* director's glasses, Nippy's contacts remain in place: she sees everything.

The story does not simply set up a stereotypical opposition between a morally upright black woman and a selfish white woman. Instead, Yates historicises the racism that underpins the Jarvis household by referencing its material underpinnings. The Jarvis house is first introduced in the story as a 'vast white mansion

of the Old South'.¹⁶³ The significance of the house's architectural style is revealed when Sally discusses with Jack the origins of her friend's wealth:

'I know she gets an awful lot of it from her father, someplace in Georgia, and I know his family's had an awful lot of it down there for an awful long time, but I mean I don't really know where it *comes* from. Cotton or something, I guess.'¹⁶⁴

The implication here, as Kate Charlton-Jones has observed, is clearly that Jill's money is derived from slavery. Charlton-Jones interprets this detail as Yates's attempt to highlight the 'moral dubiousness' of Hollywood without 'appearing to be anti-Semitic' by referencing the movie business's roots in Jewish money.¹⁶⁵ Such interpretive contortions are not necessary if we acknowledge the story's interest in the economic underpinnings of the American household *beyond* Hollywood – an expansive reading encouraged by the story's allusions to *Revolutionary Road*, which draw parallels between metropolitan Los Angeles and suburban New York, and thus point to the material organisation of reproduction common across the United States.

The significance of Sally's comment lies precisely in her refusal to name slavery, an evasion that finds metaphorical expression in the 'dark mist' and 'terrible clarity' that blights Jack's vision as he drinks at the mansion. Shortly before Jack's visual disturbance, the other racialised character in the story – a Hawaiian man named Ralph who strikes Jack as 'faintly Oriental looking' – reminisces about the time he spent as a tenant of the Jarvis mansion.¹⁶⁶ Bringing a heavy load of firewood into the room where the others are drinking, Ralph comments, 'This really takes me back to old times. Jill used to work the hell out of me when I lived here,' adding, 'That was how I paid my rent.'¹⁶⁷ Ralph's comment is another veiled reference to the historical origins of Jill's wealth in slavery. In light of these contexts, Jack's visual disturbance, ostensibly triggered by his moralistic disgust at the affair between Jill and Cliff, highlights his own inability to contend with what lies right in front of his nose. Just as Frank Wheeler rails against the conformity of the suburbs while ignoring their gendered politics of reproduction, so Jack Fields condemns

the 'degeneracy' of the Jarvis mansion while enjoying its ill-gotten spoils. Waited on by Nippy, Jack is complicit with Sally's wilful ignorance of the house's racial politics of reproduction.

Nippy's contact lenses have a complex relationship with *Revolutionary Road's* technologies of duplicitous transparency. On the one hand, they extend this motif: they are 'all but invisible things' that promise a transparent representation of reality, but request that Nippy tactfully 'un-see' Jill's cruelty and the implied source of her wealth in slavery. Yet, like so many aspects of 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', the symbolic function of Nippy's lenses constitutes a somewhat disloyal return to *Revolutionary Road*. As noted above, Nippy does *not* turn away from Jill's behaviour; she openly criticises it in conversation with Jack. *Revolutionary Road's* calendar, picture window and computers are symbols of masculinist pronatalism and reproductive control: the calendar determines the future, the window offers a vision of reproduction as patriarchal self-replication, and the computer becomes a container for fantasies of reproduction without mediation. Nippy's contact lenses simultaneously extend and disrupt this symbolism. In doing so, they enact a model of disloyal repetition that disrupts the ideology of patriarchal self-replication that drives April Wheeler to her death.

This chapter has engaged with fantasies of technology in masculinist imaginaries of reproduction. In the next chapter, I extend this exploration of technology by looking more closely at the disability politics of reproduction in literature and film of the long 1960s. In the work of Sylvia Plath, and the novel and film versions of *Rosemary's Baby*, a wide-ranging model of technological prosthesis comes to symbolise not only the relationship between the body and the technological environment, but also the complex relationality of pregnant embodiment itself – particularly in the context of the decade's anxieties about neonatal disability.

CHAPTER 4

Prosthetic Pregnancies: Reproducing Disability in Plath and *Rosemary's Baby*

In August 1962, *Life* magazine published a series of articles about the recently reported link between the drug thalidomide and a range of congenital impairments, including limb difference, hearing loss, sight loss and facial paralysis. While thalidomide was never approved in the US, its high-profile media coverage became a paradigm for making sense of neonatal disability, particularly in the context of the US rubella epidemic of the early 1960s.¹ The thalidomide episode is also widely recognised as a pivotal factor in increasing public support for rights and access to abortion. Gesturing to the abortion debate, a sub-heading in *Life* asks, 'With the future dim, should the unborn die?'² The question expresses a sense that disability is a 'tragedy'; that a life without limbs, sight or hearing is not a life worth living. Yet there is a dissonance between *Life's* sub-heading and its photographs of babies with limb difference smiling and playing, displaying little of the hopelessness attributed to them.

One of the figures profiled by *Life* is Jan Schulte-Hillen, a German baby affected by thalidomide whose parents played a role in kick-starting investigations into the drug. In one photograph, Jan's mother inserts a flower into his empty shirt sleeve as he sits in a baby carrier on his father's back; all three are smiling.³ While this issue of *Life* features many images of babies wearing medical prostheses, this photograph depicts two symbolic forms of prosthesis: the flower held by Jan's mother and the baby carrier worn by his father. This prosthetic assemblage forms a physical link between

the three family members: Jan's father 'wears' the baby as the baby might wear a prosthetic limb; meanwhile, mother and baby are connected through that symbol of life, fertility and renewal, the flower. The flower functions here as a 'natural' prosthesis that displaces common-sense understandings of prosthetic technology. This family seems held together through a prosthetic relation at once organic and artificial.

The photograph of the Schulte-Hillens captures the ambivalent place of technology in early 1960s discourses on disability. As Leslie J. Reagan has pointed out, thalidomide was part of a constellation of perilous technologies that seemed to represent the invisible dangers of a post-industrial modernity that had promised unhampered progress. Citing Rachel Carson's 1962 critique of the pesticide industry, *Silent Spring*, Reagan notes:

This news about thalidomide followed upon the heels of Rachel Carson's exposé of the dangers of DDT and other pesticides to the environment and human health, as well as growing awareness of the perils of X-rays, radiation and nuclear fallout. Living at the center of global powers during the Cold War in a country that touted its products, its science, and its security, Americans were learning that their world and their families faced an array of unseen threats.⁴

The media coverage of thalidomide narrated this sense of betrayal by technology even as it heralded the promise of medical prostheses. Technology here took the form of *pharmakon*: it could be conceived as both poison and remedy, sometimes simultaneously.⁵ Indeed, these limbs and the interventions required to fit them caused 'psychological trauma and considerable pain', according to Gerard Vaughan, a doctor at Guy's Hospital in London during the crisis.⁶ In this context, *Life's* flower prosthesis image makes symbolic sense: the image draws the prosthesis out of the suspect realm of industrial production and into the ostensibly reparative sphere of the natural. In another sense, the fusion of the organic and the technological captures the uncanny dimension of prosthesis – or, as Lana Lin has framed it, the way 'the uncanniness of human experience might perhaps be made more visible through prostheses'.⁷ In this chapter, I am interested in the way cultural

engagements with reproduction can register an expansive notion of the prosthetic, which extends beyond medical technologies to encompass the multitude of ways in which, as Lochlann Jain puts it, 'one is constituted by interaction with one's physical surroundings'.⁸ In *Life*, for instance, the flower 'prosthesis' seems to have grown from the body of the child, constitutive of his body rather than external to it.

In this chapter, I argue that such an expansive model of prosthesis informs depictions of pregnancy and disability in Sylvia Plath's poetry and prose, and Ira Levin's 1967 novel *Rosemary's Baby*, as well as its 1968 film adaptation. In the works I discuss, prosthetic embodiment is evoked in two ways. On the one hand, both Plath and *Rosemary's Baby* feature direct references to prosthetic devices used by disabled people, including those affected by thalidomide. Beyond these literal references, these works invoke a suggestive parallel between pregnant embodiment and prostheticised embodiment, which emerges not only in their treatment of the potentially disabling impacts of pregnancy on the gestating subject and the foetus, but also through their imagination of the maternal-foetal relation as a form of what Margrit Shildrick, in a discussion of prosthesis, calls 'co-corporeality, where bodies are not just contiguous and mutually reliant but entwined with one another'.⁹ Disability studies has extensively critiqued the way cultural narratives 'rely upon the potency of disability as a symbolic figure' but 'rarely take up disability as an experience of social or political dimensions', to quote David T. Mitchell and Sharon Snyder.¹⁰ Informed by these critiques, I am interested here in how literal prostheses worn by disabled children inform the trope of the prosthetic pregnancy in 1960s culture. If a prosthetic limb highlights the disabled body as a 'privileged exemplar of hybridity', as Shildrick contends, then the prosthetic pregnancy trope draws attention to the function of hybridity in the reproduction of *all* bodies.¹¹ In these works, pregnancy is depicted as a prosthetic relation that troubles boundaries not only between the pregnant subject and the foetus, but also between normative and disabled bodies, and between all bodies and their environments. The literary trope of the prosthetic pregnancy registers both the specific context of prostheticised babies affected by thalidomide, and a sense that physical hybridity is not

exclusive to stigmatised disabled bodies but an experience that constitutes the reproduction of life.

These are not new ideas for feminist philosophy. Iris Marion Young, in her phenomenological investigation of pregnant embodiment, observes that pregnancy 'challenges the integration of my body experience by rendering fluid the boundary between what is within, myself, and what is outside, separate. I experience my insides as the space of another, yet my own body.'¹² While Young does not directly compare pregnancy to disability, she elsewhere constructs femininity as disability by likening female body experience in sexist societies to a 'physical handicap', as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has noted.¹³ Developing the connections between the social marginalisation of femininity and disability, Garland-Thomson points out that '[n]ot only has the female body been labeled deviant, but historically the practices of femininity have configured female bodies similarly to disability'.¹⁴ While this fact opens up the potential for solidarities across liberation movements, Garland-Thomson argues that the focus on 'autonomy and independence' in liberal feminist movements 'often leaves no space for the needs and accommodations that disabled women's bodies require'.¹⁵ A liberal feminist emphasis on individual autonomy undermines philosophies of co-corporeality that recognise both the 'needs and accommodations' of disabled women and the embodied specificities of gestation, as well as those points at which these experiences intersect.

Through my analysis of Plath and *Rosemary's Baby*, I identify the prosthetic pregnancy as a metaphor that captures the interconnections of reproduction and disability at a point when they were vividly connected in public discourse. I also suggest the prosthetic pregnancy metaphor as an alternative to liberal concepts of individual autonomy that came to underpin legally codified reproductive rights in the US, under the guise of the right to personal privacy. In 1965, the US Supreme Court's *Griswold v. Connecticut* decision struck down state contraception bans on the grounds that they violated a constitutional right to privacy. This freshly forged connection between reproductive rights and privacy rights had far-reaching implications: the right to reproductive privacy would be extended to unmarried couples in the 1972 *Eisenstadt*

v. *Baird* ruling, and to people seeking abortions in the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. These landmark legal rulings worked discursively to fortify the boundaries that seemed to have been eroded by an array of invisible risks: not only rubella and thalidomide, which exposed the gestating body to viral or pharmacological harm, but also nuclear radiation and pesticides. The notion of reproductive privacy located the rights-bearing subject in an ostensibly safe bounded space. However, this left little room to acknowledge her constitutive interactions with other bodies and environments.

The Plath texts¹⁶ I examine here were produced in the years before *Griswold* linked reproductive rights to privacy rights. Plath wrote these works in an environment of anxiety about the risks of thalidomide, nuclear radiation, rubella and pesticides – all phenomena that disrupted the idea of a fixed boundary between the body and its environment.¹⁷ *Rosemary's Baby*, on the other hand, was published two years after the *Griswold* decision codified a legal 'zone of privacy' in which contraceptive decisions could be protected. *Griswold's* zone of privacy constructed a boundary that ostensibly protected decisions about contraception from outside interference. At the same time, the sense of a precarious boundary between the reproductive body and its environment endured: in 1967, when Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* was published, the thalidomide and rubella episodes were still relatively recent memories for many.

Across the works I examine in this chapter, the prosthetic pregnancy is a complex metaphor: it registers the fears and anxieties about neonatal disability circulating in the 1960s, but it also opens up a way of conceptualising embodiment that foregrounds gestation and disability, which are experiences common enough to be mundane but rarely taken as the situation from which to theorise embodiment. While these texts at times echo stigmatising anxieties about disability and gestation, they also challenge liberal conceptions of autonomy that marginalise both forms of embodiment – a marginalisation that is intensified in the case of the disabled pregnant subject. In addition, these texts register, in diverse ways, the entanglement of race, disability and reproduction. In what follows, I first analyse the intersecting figures of pregnancy and prosthesis

in some 1960s texts by Plath that focus on reproduction. I then move on to argue that the concept of prosthesis is crucial to understanding the politics of reproduction in Plath's only novel, *The Bell Jar*. Finally, I explore the connections between architectural and embodied modes of prosthesis in the novel and film versions of *Rosemary's Baby*.

Prosthesis and Reproduction in Plath's 1960s Poetry

Plath's 'Three Women: A Poem for Three Voices', a verse play commissioned and broadcast by the BBC in August 1962, is a series of monologues designed to be read by three actors: the First Voice is a woman who welcomes the birth of her child, the Second Voice is a woman who suffers a miscarriage, and the Third Voice is a woman who gives her child up. Written in March 1962, the text contains an implicit reference to images of babies affected by thalidomide, which were circulating widely in the press at that point. The First Voice muses:

I do not believe in those terrible children
Who injure my sleep with their white eyes, their fingerless hands.
They are not mine. They do not belong to me.

I shall meditate upon normality.
I shall meditate upon my little son.
He does not walk. He does not speak a word.
He is still swaddled in white bands.
But he is pink and perfect. He smiles so frequently.¹⁸

The First Voice's proprietary investment in her baby's normality is undercut by the image of him 'swaddled in white bands', which suggests injury as well as birth, and the focus on what he cannot do: talk and walk. Meanwhile, the reference to 'fingerless hands' extends an image earlier introduced by the Second Voice, who asks after her miscarriage:

Who will love me through the blur of my deformity
As if I had lost an eye, a leg, a tongue.

And so I stand, a little sightless. So I walk
 Away on wheels, instead of legs, they serve as well.
 And learn to speak with fingers, not a tongue.¹⁹

These lines resist a rigid distinction between the 'normal' body and the disabled one, and allude to a sense of common embodiment that links physical disability and miscarriage.

The analogy between miscarriage and disability in 'Three Women' is not only based on a sense of loss or depletion. It is true that the metaphor of miscarriage as amputation figures the foetus as a lost limb or organ, but the depletion implied by this metaphor is undercut by the text's subsequent references to creativity. The reference to speaking 'with fingers' suggests an affinity between the woman who has miscarried and the disabled child learning sign language. Another form of speaking with fingers is, of course, writing at a typewriter, and so the image forges an implicit connection between literary creativity and miscarriage. Miscarriage is a loss, but it also prostheticises the speaker and allows her to speak – to write? – in new ways. This idea is extended in the echo of 'tongue', which highlights the irony here – this is a radio play, so the performer of these lines is likely to be using her tongue. On the one hand, the speaker's failure to generate a new word might be understood as a formal analogue of the Second Voice's inability to reproduce. However, the word's recontextualisation also renews its meaning and points to other forms of creative generation.

The Second Voice's prostheticised body – complete with wheels that 'serve as well' as legs for walking – moves from a register of depletion to a register of adaptive generativity. This stanza thus captures the duality of prosthesis discussed by Shildrick, who notes that while prosthetic technologies have conventionally been seen to ground 'some utilitarian compensation for a perceived bodily lack', there is a growing emphasis in the contemporary period on prosthetic enhancement. While Shildrick locates this interest in enhancement in the twenty-first century, it clearly underpins Plath's images of prosthesis in which notions of lack and extension intertwine. As I shall go on to discuss, however, Plath also complicates the notion of prosthetic enhancement by embedding it within structures of industrialised violence. These structures are made manifest

in environmental threats – whether chemical, viral or nuclear – that produce both miscarriage and some forms of neonatal disability. In ‘Three Women’, then, miscarriage and disability are embodied registers of structural violence, but they are not straightforwardly defined through rhetorics of loss and vulnerability.

The ambivalence of this parallel between miscarriage and disability illuminates the references to politics in ‘Three Women’. The Second Voice suggests that her miscarriage has been caused by environmental toxicity. She asks: ‘Is it the air, | The particles of destruction I suck up?’²⁰ The phrase ‘particles of destruction’ evokes contemporaneous anxieties about radiation, as well as the domestic chemical threats described by Carson, whose work Plath is known to have read and admired.²¹ In *Silent Spring*, Carson warns, ‘Some of the defects and malformations in tomorrow’s children, grimly anticipated by the Office of Vital Statistics, will almost certainly be caused by these chemicals that permeate our outer and inner worlds.’²² This reference to ‘tomorrow’s children’ performs a dual feat, signalling the risk posed by dangerous chemicals to both present foetuses and anticipated populations. Explicitly borrowing the rhetoric of anti-nuclear activism, Carson stresses that ‘it must not be overlooked that many chemicals are the partners of radiation, producing precisely the same effects’.²³ While it is perhaps unlikely that *Silent Spring* informed the writing of ‘Three Women’, Carson’s warnings followed a series of unsettling revelations about radiation and reproduction.²⁴ In 1959, a book called *Atoms and the Law* had dedicated twenty pages to prenatal injuries caused by radiation.²⁵ In 1961, the St Louis Baby Tooth Survey revealed that high levels of the radioactive isotope Strontium-90 could be detected in the teeth of children born in the 1950s. Cold war fears about the effect of radiation on the reproductive body shaped media narratives about chemicals, drugs and diseases that might harm foetal development.

This context is alluded to with the Second Voice’s reference to the virus-like influence of a rationalised, masculinist military mindset that produces death rather than life:

I watched the men walk about me in the office. They were so flat!
There was something about them like cardboard, and now I had caught it,

That flat, flat, flatness from which ideas, destructions,
 Bulldozers, guillotines, white chambers of shrieks proceed,
 Endlessly proceed—and the cold angels, the abstractions.²⁶

The pairing of 'ideas' and 'destructions' points to the stanza's determination to blur the line dividing the seemingly innocuous or transformative qualities of industrial technologies from their more directly violent uses. Similarly, the coupling of bulldozers and guillotines draws together industrial and political technologies in a way that recalls the term 'military-industrial complex', coined by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in his farewell address to the nation in 1961.²⁷ Divergent domains, projects and historical periods are overlaid: 'guillotines' invokes the French Revolution, while 'Bulldozers' draws the image into the twentieth century; meanwhile, the phrase 'white chambers of shrieks' evokes both the delivery room and the Holocaust. The 'flat, flat, flatness' of these men is implicitly opposed to the bulk and opacity of pregnancy.²⁸ Plath embeds the *Second Voice's* miscarriage within a larger, all-encompassing violence:

Hating myself, hating and fearing. And now the world conceives
 Its end and runs toward it, arms held out in love.
 It is a love of death that sickens everything.
 A dead sun stains the newsprint. It is red.
 I lose life after life. The dark earth drinks them.²⁹

The overall effect is to insert the isolated, often unseen, ostensibly individual experience of miscarriage into an ongoing history of spectacularised production and industrialised killing, a history that includes but pre-dates early-1960s concerns about drugs, radiation and pesticides.

Lines such as these have been the focus of a twenty-first-century critical turn in Plath studies that moves away from a tendency to pathologise the author and psychologise her work in order to emphasise the social and political engagement of her writing – or, as Tracy Brain puts it, her interest in 'the things of this world'.³⁰ There is ample biographical evidence to support such a turn. For instance, in an April 1960 letter to her mother in America, Plath

describes taking her newborn daughter Frieda to the culminating rally of a ban-the-bomb march in London:

I found myself weeping to see the tan dusty marchers, knapsacks on their backs – Quakers & Catholics, Africans & whites, Algerians & French – 40 percent were London housewives. I felt proud that the baby's first real adventure should be as a protest against the insanity of world-annihilation – already a certain percentage of unborn children are doomed by fallout & no one knows the cumulative effects of what is already poisoning the air & sea. I hope, by the way, that neither you nor Warren will vote for Nixon.³¹

Building on such evidence of Plath's interest in global politics, Adam Piette aligns her work with the maternal metaphors of the women's peace movement, identifying in her writing a 'fear that nuclear arms are a male weapons system deployed silently and lethally against mother-women, recruiting all men, down to doctors and sons, a killing military "defence" system aimed at maternal body systems of nurture, growth and love'.³² Robin Peel, meanwhile, has observed that a miscarriage like the one Plath suffered in 1961 'reinforces Cold War anxieties, for worries about the effect of radioactive particles in the atmosphere added to worries about the effects of chemicals on the food chain'.³³

Some of these analyses (Piette's in particular) situate Plath within the discourse (if not the activist networks) of the women's peace movement, epitomised by Women Strike for Peace (WSP), a group founded in 1961. WSP made much of the idea that maternal duty was incompatible with the cold war. Amy Swerdlow, whose memoir of her time in WSP reflects on its complex relationship to pronatalism, recalls the energies that accompanied the group's formation, commenting, 'They were mothers whose sanctioned task was to nurture children and human life. Yet, the nuclear arms race threatened to annihilate their children and all human life in a man-made apocalypse.'³⁴ Despite its gendered framing, this metaphoric system existed in antagonism with aspects of the nascent women's liberation movement. The tension between the women's peace movement and radical feminism has been summarised by

the cultural critic Ellen Willis in an article about the author and peace activist Grace Paley. Willis writes of radical feminism as a 'daughter's revolution', asserting that 'the right to abortion – the refusal of motherhood-as-destiny – was its primary metaphor'.³⁵ By contrast, the women's pacifist movement 'takes motherhood itself to be the grounding of a larger politics: an extension of nurturance and protection to the preservation of life on earth'.³⁶ Willis's words trace the ideological faultlines between the women's peace movement and radical feminist calls for reproductive self-determination. While this particular debate developed too late to be an influence on Plath, its motivating tensions are evident in 'Three Women' and her other writings on motherhood and reproduction.

While Plath's writing does register the vulnerability of women, children and foetuses to radiation and other technologies coded as masculine, I contend that it resists a straightforward assimilation to the rhetorics of the women's peace movement. In Plath, neither the writing woman nor the miscarried foetus is framed as an innocent victim of masculinist technologies, or the peaceful other to a violent order. They exist in a more complex relationship with these technologies, in which complicity, resistance, violence and vulnerability are overlaid. Here, I am in agreement with Brain's point that Plath's writing often makes it difficult to assign blame; as Brain puts it, Plath's challenge to rigid boundaries and borders 'is bound up in the dissolution of over-simple oppositions between victim and oppressor, female and male, environmentalist and destroyer'.³⁷ I would add that in order to understand these dynamics, we need to understand the images of prosthesis through which Plath links disability to various facets of reproductive embodiment: from pregnancy, miscarriage and infertility to contraception and the desire to avoid childbearing. In the texts I examine here, prosthetic embodiment is placed in tension with fantasies of bodily perfection. For Plath, the scene of reproduction, or potential reproduction, is a scene of prosthetic embodiment that is necessarily at odds with fantasies of 'wholeness'. Plath's prosthetic metaphors of reproduction, then, have important implications for a disability politics that refuses the ideal of the 'complete' body.

I want to pursue these implications through an examination of the way *Three Women* mobilises a dialectic of lack and wholeness. The systemic violence imagined by the Second Voice is described as a state of wholeness or 'perfection' against which the Second Voice contrasts herself. Following her miscarriage, the Second Voice seems to exist in a state of dismemberment:

I see myself as a shadow, neither man nor woman,
Neither a woman, happy to be like a man, nor a man
Blunt and flat enough to feel no lack. I feel a lack.³⁸

This 'lack' is contrasted not only to the women and men who are happily not pregnant, but also to the miscarried foetus itself. The Second Voice observes that she has been rejected by the foetus that 'loved its perfections' too much to admit the supplement of the maternal body.³⁹ The 'perfect' miscarried foetus is compared to a white sheet in an image that evokes both hospital bedsheets and the blank page, awaiting type: 'How white these sheets are. The faces have no features | They are bald and impossible, like the faces of my children.'⁴⁰ This featurelessness is shared by the men responsible for the 'particles of destruction':

And then there were other faces. The faces of nations,
Governments, parliaments, societies,
The faceless faces of important men.⁴¹

In a move that disrupts the trope of the vulnerable foetus, the 'unborn one that loved its perfections' is implicated in the ruthless logic of the 'Governments, parliaments, societies'. The foetus, the man and the blank page are 'whole' and perfect, in contrast to the woman's sense of 'lack' after her miscarriage.

Plath's language of wholeness and lack here alludes not only to disability, but also to race. In *Three Women*, the toxic threats to which the Second Voice traces her miscarriage are aligned with investments in perfection, wholeness and whiteness. The 'faceless faces' of the 'important men' and the featurelessness of the foetus that 'loved its perfections' suggest eugenic fantasy – the white face shorn of all difference. The racial politics of reproduction are

manifest not only in Plath's repeated references to whiteness, but more generally in the text's references to vulnerability and toxicity. In an analysis of the culture of hygiene in Plath's work, Laura Perry has argued that her references to environmental toxicity reflect the way, in the post-war period, 'eugenic concerns about racial purity were translated into a sanitised, supposedly neutral concern about the harmful impact of nuclear radiation on the human genome'.⁴² Yet, as I shall go on to argue, in her writings on reproduction, from her poetry to *The Bell Jar*, Plath turns this logic on its head: nuclear radiation and other environmental threats are identified not with disabled and racialised subjects, but with the ruling powers that unleash these threats and institute eugenic policies around reproductive control.

It would be a mistake to read Plath's use of 'lack' as an endorsement of a binary opposition between an idealised bodily wholeness and a debased bodily deficiency. In making this argument, I am influenced by Vivian Sobchack's critique of the proliferation of cultural theories of prosthesis that idealise a prior, naturalised sense of bodily wholeness. Drawing on her own experience of living with a prosthetic leg, and Paul Ricoeur's writings on metaphor, Sobchack contrasts two modes of constructing the prosthetic relation: the first is metonymy, which posits a correspondence or correlation between two separate objects, and the second is synecdoche, in which – to quote Pierre Fontanier via Ricoeur – two objects '*form an ensemble, a physical or metaphysical whole, the existence or idea of one being included in the existence or idea of the other*'.⁴³ According to Sobchack, cultural theories of prosthesis suffer from an

objectifying and often stultifying tendency to privilege and essentialize metonymic and oppositional relations that separate body and prosthetic, thus neglecting or disavowing both the synecdochic relations that posit the cooperation and connective union of body and prosthetic in world-directed tasks and also the complex and dynamic ambiguity of all these possible existential and topological relations as they are situated and lived.⁴⁴

Sobchack's argument can help us make sense of an apparent contradiction in 'Three Women': the poem's men are described

in terms of flatness, wholeness and featurelessness, but they are also prosthetically enhanced by the machinery of violence, and also by the Second Voice in her work at the typewriter. To borrow Sobchack's terms, masculinist violence is here coded in terms of metonymic prosthetic enhancement, where the prosthetic extension is conceived as an external addition to a body naturalised as a perfect whole. The poem's men are prostheticised by the toxic technologies that are implicated in the Second Voice's miscarriage. Startlingly, the miscarried foetus is drawn into their metonymic logic: the foetus's desire for wholeness seems to necessitate the miscarriage. At the same time, however, the poem imagines pregnancy as a synecdochic form of prosthesis, in which the developing body and the gestating subject are mutually constitutive. For the Second Voice, then, wholeness is the antithesis to this ensemble; it is destructive and inclined towards death. The synecdochic prosthetic embodiment of the wanted pregnancy is pitched against the wholeness of the men who produce the technologies that imperil pregnancy, and against the 'perfection' of the miscarried foetus.

The image of the miscarried foetus 'that loved its perfections' contextualises the First Voice's reference to neonatal disability ('those terrible children'). The phrase 'loved its perfections' implies that the Second Voice's pregnancy must be miscarried because the foetus could not bear to be imperfect: whether in the sense of disability, or simply in the sense of needing the gestating body in order to survive. The miscarried foetus is thus aligned with right-wing ideologies of physical perfection and individualism (the dead foetus also appears as a symbol of right-wing politics in *The Bell Jar*, as I go on to discuss later in this chapter). The child who is born would, by implication, be imperfect, because they endured the prosthetic relationship that constitutes pregnancy; like all bodies, they have existed in a state of 'co-corporeality'.

This logic of prosthesis is also at work in a pair of poems written days apart in February 1961, 'Morning Song', originally collected in *Ariel*, and the originally uncollected 'Barren Woman'. Read side by side, the poems deconstruct the dichotomy of maternity and barrenness. Both poems imagine the female body as a kind of architectural prosthesis for children figured as statues. In 'Barren Woman', the titular speaker imagines herself as a 'Museum without

statues, grand with pillars, porticoes, rotundas'.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the speaker in 'Morning Song' addresses her newborn child as a 'New statue' in a museum.⁴⁶ A contrast between barren woman and mother is initially established through this symbolism. This contrast, however, gives way to an intriguing continuity between the poems and their speakers. The speaker of 'Barren Woman' imagines herself as both empty and echoing, but the suggestion of a link between the echo and the inability to bear children is undermined by this metaphor's continuation in 'Morning Song': 'Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival.'⁴⁷ The moon in 'Barren Woman' is 'Blank-faced and mum as a nurse'; in 'Morning Song', the maternal speaker and her companions are also figured in terms of blankness.

While the reference to blankness might seem to associate the mother in 'Morning Song' with the trope of wholeness in 'Three Women', the subsequent lines conjure a more fractured relation between mother and baby. The maternal speaker admits:

I'm no more your mother
Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow
Effacement at the wind's hand.⁴⁸

These lines take the identity 'mother' to be fleeting and incidental. The simile is uneven: the dualistic mother/child relationship is figured by the triad of cloud/mirror/wind. If the mother is the tenor and the cloud the vehicle, is the child the mirrored reflection or the effacing wind? This proliferation of terms reflects a de-hierarchised prosthetic relation: the cloud, mirror image and wind exist as a mutually constitutive ensemble. This has implications for the image's complex mapping of mother/child power dynamics. The mirror's reflective capacity is revoked and transferred to the cloud, which becomes responsible for its own reflection through the act of distillation. Yet the following line tilts the balance of power away from the cloud as it is effaced by the wind. The speaker's reluctance to occupy the identity 'mother' is expressed through the ambiguity of this simile, which remains suspended between a mother who holds power over a child figured as her mirrored reflection, and one whose identity is effaced by a child figured as the wind. Indeed, the

image suggests that to search for one's own reflection in a child is a mode of self-effacement. Like Yates in *Revolutionary Road*, Plath here disrupts the mirror's function as a symbol of faithful reproduction and reworks it as a symbol of reproductive contingency.

'Morning Song' and 'Barren Woman' extend Plath's interest in the parallels between artistic production and reproduction. I have already pointed to the implication, in 'Three Women', that the Second Voice's miscarriage engenders a form of creativity, in the form of typing or 'speaking with fingers'. Judith Kroll has suggested that the 'perfections' of the unborn in 'Three Women' are shared by Plath's barren woman, who she claims 'resembles a work of art that cannot reproduce itself'.⁴⁹ Yet perfection is a slippery notion here: in my reading of these works, perfection is aligned with the expectant lack of the blank page rather than the complete and perfect work of art. I want to move now to consider more closely the way Plath figures writing as a mode of prosthetic embodiment, and the implications of this for the relationship between reproduction and literary production in her work.

Writing as Prosthesis in Plath

Prosthetic embodiment is, for Plath, the condition of the literary text. I have already noted the allusion to the blank page in 'Three Women'. Plath has elsewhere conceptualised the prosthetic typewriter as both an ecstatic image of creativity and a cause of physical depletion. In the television documentary *Voices and Visions* (1988), Aurelia Plath discusses Sylvia's teenage proficiency at typing, quoting her daughter's comment, 'The typewriter is an extension of my body.'⁵⁰ In May 1957, Plath wrote to her mother about the challenges of writing by hand while revising for her Tragedy exam at Cambridge:

I have honestly never undergone such physical torture as writing furiously from 6 to 7 hours a day (for the last two days) with my unpracticed pen-hand: every night I come home and lie in a hot tub massaging it back to action. Ted says I'm a victim of evolution and have adapted to the higher stage of typing and am at a disadvantage when forced to compete on a lower stage of handwriting!⁵¹

This description of the writing hand made weak by technological enhancement resonates with theories of prosthetic supplementarity, to borrow Jacques Derrida's term. In *Of Grammatology* (1967), Derrida discusses the 'two significations' of the supplement. First, 'the supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence'.⁵² This 'cumulating function' exists alongside the second signification of the supplement. Here, the supplement 'adds only to replace', its position 'assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness'.⁵³ As both Shildrick and David Wills have pointed out, Derrida's discussion of the supplement is highly relevant to prosthetic embodiment.⁵⁴ For Wills, writing is always a form of prosthesis, and so the writing subject is constituted by her technologies, whether pen or typewriter. He points to a 'particularly supplemental duality' in the structure of prosthesis whereby every prosthetic searches for a way 'between emulating the human and superseding the human'.⁵⁵ According to Wills, the discourse that understands the prosthesis as something other than the body is resisted by the structure of prosthesis itself, in which the body is constituted by its supplement – the amputation of a leg, for instance, might be carried out in anticipation of an expected prosthesis. In Plath's case, the typewriter is framed as both an enriching plenitude and an extension that 'adds only to replace' the hand, weakening it in the process.

'Three Women' raises the prospect that the writing woman is embedded within the industrial violence that produces miscarriages.⁵⁶ The Second Voice's typewriter is conceived as another prosthetic extension of her body in these lines:

I could not believe it. Is it so difficult
 For the spirit to conceive a face, a mouth?
 The letters proceed from these black keys, and these black keys proceed
 From my alphabetical fingers, ordering parts,

Parts, bits, cogs, the shining multiples.⁵⁷

The prosthetic assemblage of fingers and typewriter can easily generate the 'shining multiples' of the industrial age, but the body embedded within this prosthetic process cannot reproduce

biologically. This passage resonates with what Mark Seltzer has described as the 'double logic' of prosthesis in turn-of-the-century naturalist American literature.⁵⁸ Seltzer reads the dialectic of prosthesis in terms of a rivalry between industrial production and biological reproduction through which the body is simultaneously dismembered and extended by machines. A reading of the poem through Seltzer's ideas might suggest that the Second Voice is here engaged in industrial production rather than biological reproduction. Her miscarriage would thus be figured as an amputation that enables her prosthetic extension through the writing machine, which itself produces a text that is also a machine: the '[p]arts, bits, cogs' and 'shining multiples' represent both letters on a page and components in the relentless motion of production. However, as Jain has pointed out, Seltzer's example of the Ford factory belies the fact that, in the context of post-industrial production, 'it is not the same body that is simultaneously extended and wounded'.⁵⁹ Ford is prostheticised by the workers, but it is the workers who are wounded by the labour of mass production. Similarly, while the Second Voice seems to be both depleted and enhanced – losing her pregnancy, but learning to 'speak with fingers, not a tongue' – she is ultimately typing for 'the man I work for'.⁶⁰ She might be prostheticised by the typewriter, but as typist she prostheticises her employer and the larger system of 'ideas, destructions' that, in the poem's political imaginary, is culpable in her miscarriage.

The miscarrying woman thus occupies an ambivalent position in 'Three Women': as a prosthetic enhancement of her employer, she is perhaps complicit with the system that places her pregnancy at risk. At the same time, let's recall the comparison drawn in the text between the 'perfect' miscarried foetus and the 'white sheet', which evokes both bedsheets and the blank page in the typewriter. The sheet and the 'faces of my children' are both featureless, 'bald and impossible'. There is a sense here that to write is to leave behind the world of featureless perfection and enter the sphere of prosthetic supplementarity – a sphere that also includes pregnant embodiment. Writing, pregnancy and disability are bodily states that necessarily abandon perfection to exist in a state of co-corporeality.

Plath, Prosthetics and Disability

I have so far focused my analysis on how Plath's poetry uses an expansive, speculative metaphor of prosthetic relation to imagine reproductive embodiment and maternity in the context of environmental dangers. I want now to analyse her images of literal prostheses in the context of injury or disability. Plath's poem 'The Applicant' (1962) develops prosthesis as a metaphor for marriage. As Marjorie Perloff has noted, the poem can be read as a 'sardonic indictment of the traditional marriage that had been Sylvia Plath's'.⁶¹ The speaker, described by Plath as a 'sort of exacting super-salesman', asks the titular figure a series of questions to determine his suitability for the product, finally revealed to be a 'living doll' for a wife.⁶² The interrogation that opens the poem accumulates a series of images of prosthesis:

Do you wear
A glass eye, false teeth or a crutch,
A brace or a hook,
Rubber breasts or a rubber crotch,

Stitches to show something's missing? No, no? Then
How can we give you a thing?⁶³

The poem's uncanny imagery figures patriarchal marriage through what Jain calls the 'supplying deficiencies' model of prosthesis. Jain notes that 'prosthesis falters between two renditions of meaning: a prosthesis can fill a gap, but it can also diminish the body and create the need for itself'.⁶⁴ Jain analyses this dynamic in relation to consumer capitalism, which often must create the need for the product it sells: for instance, when cities are designed to render cars necessary. Jain writes: 'As certain theories of the phantom limb describe a yearning for the "whole" body that focuses on the experience of feeling in a missing limb, the freedom proffered by marketing attempts to evoke a certain nostalgia in the consumer in a promise of a "complete" body.'⁶⁵ With 'The Applicant', Plath voices the implicit premise of such marketing: that something must first be missing. If the poem figures the wife as an artificial prosthesis, it also

critiques the capitalist logic that classifies people as deficient in order to make them 'whole' through marriage, work and consumption. As in 'Three Women', the promise of wholeness is aligned with the violence of industrial capitalism. Read from a twenty-first-century perspective, the poem's critique of the demand for wholeness resonates with the criticisms of painful prostheses voiced by people affected by thalidomide as they grew older – though, of course, this context would not have been available to Plath.

Another 1962 poem, 'Thalidomide', is more direct still in its treatment of disability. The poem, as Peel has shown, can feasibly be understood as a response to photographs of children affected by thalidomide: he points out that the poem was started on 4 November, the same day the *Observer* published a report on the drug.⁶⁶ 'Thalidomide' voices a fear of disability, but it also troubles the notion of lack central to the dominant construction of the body with limb difference. 'Thalidomide' has often been read as animating and animalising the babies' 'missing' limbs with its imagery of 'Amputations' that 'crawl and appall—'.⁶⁷ Taken as a description of a child, this language is undeniably dehumanising. However, the poem also problematises the notion of the complete body in its description of the body as a 'half moon' – the moon's apparent lack, of course, is a matter of perspective.⁶⁸

The possibility that the poem is subverting notions of bodily lack is given further weight by a potential ambiguity in the addressee of the poem's opening lines. The reference here to amputations does not entirely satisfy as an address to the child: first of all, children affected by limb difference are not (necessarily) amputees; moreover, the imagined limbs that 'crawl and appall' are not theirs in any meaningful sense.⁶⁹ The reference to amputations recalls the titular speaker in an earlier poem, 'The Surgeon at 2 a.m.', who states of a patient:

It is a statue the orderlies are wheeling off.
I have perfected it.
I am left with an arm or a leg,
A set of teeth, or stones
To rattle in a bottle and take home,
And tissue in slices—a pathological salami.⁷⁰

Here, the surgeon keeps a collection of amputated body parts – they become objects, set to be preserved. The surgeon's reference to the perfected 'statue' resonates with the 'unborn one that loved its perfections' in 'Three Women'; in both cases, perfection is identified with a disturbing, implicitly eugenic impulse. The amputee is a dehumanised 'it' made 'perfect', not a person but a register of the surgeon's prowess.⁷¹ In light of Plath's critique of medicine in 'The Surgeon at 2 a.m.', it is possible to reinterpret 'Thalidomide' as an address to a masked medic – and, by extension, to the sphere of medicine and science seen as responsible for the dissemination of thalidomide. In this context, the word 'unsafe' refers not to the apparent horror evoked by the child's body, but rather to the medication itself. The poem probably unsettles because it can be read in both ways: as a critique of the medical establishment *and* as an expression of what Peel has called an 'incipient body fascism' directed at the child.⁷²

In addition to this ambiguity around the poem's addressee, there is also an ambiguity in the identity of its speaker. At times, the voice seems to speak from the point of view of a magazine's reader apprehending an image of children affected by thalidomide. Its imagery of a leather glove evokes a photograph in *Life's* thalidomide feature, which depicts a baby wearing a leather harness with prosthetic leather hands.⁷³ The baby's leather hands resemble boxing gloves; they also curve in a shape similar to a 'half moon'. If we understand the speaker of 'Thalidomide' to be looking at this picture, the implication seems to be that the prosthetic device protects them from having to apprehend the body of the child. In the second half of the poem, however, the voice is identified with a carpenter: a builder of accessible implements.⁷⁴ The language in these final lines shifts from a dehumanising register to one that evokes care.⁷⁵ The poem's final lines return us to the image, which 'flees and aborts like dropped mercury'. The line 'The glass cracks across' overlays the implied magazine image with a mirror image, implicating the speaker in the fragmentation that they have thus far disavowed and projected onto the child.⁷⁶ This image recalls the use of the mirror as an ambiguous symbol of destabilised identity in 'Morning Song'.

The vivid imagery of 'Thalidomide' evokes not only the disabled child, but also the racialised child. The 'half moon' in the opening

lines of 'Thalidomide' is addressed in racialised language: 'Negro, masked like a white'.⁷⁷ As Peel notes, this line can be read as a direct reference to the *Observer's* photograph of a black child affected by thalidomide; understood in this way, the image combines a dehumanising portrait of disability with racism. Yet, he adds, the description 'can also apply to the moon, whose dark maria seem to be shrouded in a white veil'.⁷⁸ The poem's racialised moon imagery, as Peel goes on to note, is part of a cluster of images that suggests a link between 'Thalidomide' and *The Bell Jar*.⁷⁹ In particular, the poem uses remarkably similar imagery to a passage in *The Bell Jar* in which the protagonist Esther Greenwood, hospitalised in a public psychiatric institution, kicks a nurse's tray of thermometers off the bed. After this incident, Esther is locked in her room and glimpses a hospital orderly whose presence has insistently offended her: 'I could see the negro's face, a molasses-coloured moon, risen at the window grating, but I pretended not to notice.'⁸⁰ Earlier in the chapter, she is so outraged at the orderly's apparent (if fantasised) ability to determine when and what she eats that she kicks him in the leg in an act both childlike and violent. Directly after this, Esther goes on to look at a ball of mercury she has secretly retrieved after the thermometer breakage: 'If I dropped it, it would break into a million little replicas of itself, and if I pushed them near each other, they would fuse, without a crack, into one whole again.'⁸¹ The description strongly recalls the final lines of 'Thalidomide': 'The glass cracks across, | The image | Flees and aborts like dropped mercury.'⁸²

The twinned mercury imagery of 'Thalidomide' and *The Bell Jar* is worth exploring in more detail, not least because of what it suggests about Plath's racial politics of reproduction. On the surface, *The Bell Jar's* reproductive themes are politically distinct from Plath's poetry of gestation and maternity. In contrast to the speakers of, for instance, 'Barren Woman' and 'Morning Song', Esther is averse to marriage and pregnancy throughout *The Bell Jar's* primary narrative of her breakdown in late adolescence (though we learn in the novel's early pages that she is a mother at the moment of narration). As Esther tells her psychiatrist Dr Nolan: 'A man doesn't have a worry in the world, while I've got a baby hanging over my head like a big stick, to keep me in line.'⁸³ While *The Bell Jar* is easily precised as the tale of a white woman's search for reproductive

self-determination, the novel's parallels with 'Thalidomide' invite a more complex reading of its reproductive politics. In the psychiatric hospital, Esther imagines that the mercury will reproduce itself as 'a million little replicas' if dropped, only to merge back into a seamless whole at her bidding. The scene highlights Esther's infantilisation in hospital: holding the mercury, she is 'like a child with a secret', indulging a childlike fantasy of omnipotence.⁸⁴ Read in the context of Esther's fear of pregnancy, this fantasy of omnipotence can be understood specifically as a fantasy of controlling the reproductive process. And given that Esther's play with the mercury occurs in response to her sighting of the black orderly, this fantasy of reproductive control is clearly racialised.

Esther's racialised fantasy of reproductive control can be contextualised by US policies around family planning and population control in both the early 1950s period in which the novel is set, and the early 1960s period during which Plath completed it. If the 1950s US is associated with the promotion of white, bourgeois reproduction, the turn to the 1960s witnessed an increasingly visible emphasis on population control. This change is evident in the shifting approach of US President Dwight D. Eisenhower – a key symbol for reproductive politics in *The Bell Jar*. In 1959, Eisenhower justified his ban on foreign aid for birth control by asserting, 'I cannot imagine anything more emphatically a subject that is not a proper political or governmental activity or function or responsibility.'⁸⁵ As Rickie Solinger has pointed out, his administration was at this time financially supporting contraception distribution to low-income African American populations in a number of southern states.⁸⁶ Eisenhower's quiet support for population control policies developed into explicit endorsement after he left office, when he decried government policies that encouraged reproduction by the 'ignorant, feeble-minded or lazy' while discouraging population growth among 'responsible families'.⁸⁷ As this comment indicates, the politics of population control in the 1960s had a lot in common with the eugenic philosophies of the early twentieth century: as Matthew Connelly has observed, 'All population control movements tended to diagnose social and political problems as pathologies with a biological basis.'⁸⁸ Such policies, as Angela Y. Davis and Dorothy E. Roberts have

noted, are directed towards the promotion of bourgeois white childbearing as much as the prevention of black and working-class childbearing.⁸⁹

The Bell Jar's Esther, in this context, is caught up in two particularly American ideological constructs: the ideology of social mobility, which asks her to find success as a career woman, and the ideology of population control, which requires white, non-disabled, middle-class and affluent women to procreate. Myka Tucker-Abramson has argued that *The Bell Jar* narrates not only the formation of a new kind of entrepreneurial female subject in the post-war metropolis, but also the racial violence that underpins this process.⁹⁰ Building on this analysis, I want to draw attention to the novel's interest in the convergence of population control policies (to limit the reproduction of disabled, working-class and racialised communities) and family planning policies (to allow for the emergence of the neoliberal professional female subject). In this context, the novel's image of the dropped mercury can be reassessed. Esther observes the mercury reproducing 'a million little replicas of itself' and then, at her bidding, fusing, 'without a crack, into one whole again'.⁹¹ Through this process, the mercury seems to resolve Esther's internal conflict between motherhood and career, reproduction and individualism. Indeed, the mercury seems to enact a form of reversible self-replication. It allows Esther to imagine, simultaneously, the white feminine ideal of pronatalism, and the retention of her career ambitions through contraception.

At the same time, *The Bell Jar's* mercury imagery expresses reproductive risk. Mercury is a dangerous substance, and it poses a particular risk to the developing foetus. As an environmental toxin that affects pregnancy, mercury might well be one of the 'particles of destruction' that threaten the Second Voice in 'Three Women'. As I have already discussed, 'Three Women' registers the common ground shared by eugenicist pronatalists and the polluting governments and corporations that imperil pregnancies. In a similar vein, *The Bell Jar* makes Esther the source of danger – after all, it is she who throws the thermometers onto the floor – even as she insists upon herself as the vulnerable, wronged party. The novel's mercury scene underlines the irony of Esther's perspective: she plays with a dangerous substance – a substance of particular danger to foetal

development – to make it serve a racialised fantasy of reproduction, all the while mislocating malevolent power in the black orderly.

The dropped mercury also works to destabilise the dialectic of whole and fragment that has been so central to Plath's prosthesis imagery. In Esther's hands, the mercury is distinctly not an image of prosthetic hybridity in which the distinction between part and whole is challenged. Instead, the mercury moves across two sides of a binary opposition between fragment and whole. Before I move on to a more thorough discussion of *The Bell Jar*, I want to briefly address how the novel's scene of dropped mercury might help us read 'Thalidomide'. I have already suggested that the poem's closing lines identify the (implicitly non-disabled) viewer of the images with a fragmentation they have disavowed. Read alongside *The Bell Jar*, the poem's reference to dropped mercury might also make the speaker complicit with the same fantasy that grips Esther: a fantasy of reproduction as reversible self-replication. Another layer of complicity is found in the poem's image of 'indelible buds', which recalls the photograph of Jan Schulte-Hillen and the flower in *Life*, a magazine Plath is known to have read.⁹² The word 'indelible' combines this floral image with a reference to writing, and so draws the writer into the web of complicity the poem has been weaving. 'Thalidomide' can be read as a poem about complicity and the ambivalent apportionment of blame for the reproduction of disability, injury, stigma, and the oppressive desire for wholeness itself. A similar ambivalence is at work in *The Bell Jar*, particularly in relation to the figure of the foetus.

Eugenic Specimens: Plath's Foetal Bodies

In *The Bell Jar*, the foetus is a key symbol of the eugenic underpinnings of post-war family planning and population control policies. Early in the novel, Esther recalls an encounter with her sometime boyfriend, the trainee medic Buddy Willard. When Esther visits Buddy at his training hospital he shows her

some big glass bottles full of babies that had died before they were born. The baby in the first bottle had a large white head bent over a tiny curled-up body the size of a frog. The baby in the next bottle was bigger

and the baby next to that one was bigger still and the baby in the last bottle was the size of a normal baby and he seemed to be looking at me and smiling a little piggy smile.⁹³

The comparison of foetal specimens to animals recalls the German evolutionist and eugenicist Ernst Haeckel's nineteenth-century doctrine of recapitulation, which held that the individual foetus climbs the stages of evolution as it develops in the womb, passing through a series of forms that mimic human evolutionary history.⁹⁴ In *On the Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin had detailed how 'the embryo comes to be left as a sort of picture, preserved by nature, of the ancient and less modified condition of each animal'.⁹⁵ Haeckel named this process 'recapitulation' and condensed it in the phrase 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny'. Haeckel became famous for his embryological illustrations of this process, which depicted the development of humans alongside species including chicks and dogs.

Haeckel's images, intended to visualise the common roots of diverse vertebrate species, were widely reproduced in educational textbooks and works of popular science as well as academic studies.⁹⁶ It is possible that Plath encountered them either as a pupil, through her biologist father, or at Smith College, where she roomed with a zoology student, Mary Bonneville: in a 1954 letter, Plath describes drinking wine from chemistry beakers with Bonneville and the zoologist Oscar Schotte, who taught an embryology course at Amherst College.⁹⁷ Whether or not Plath encountered his images directly, Haeckel is a figure who draws together many of her preoccupations: not only with the figure of the embryo, but with environmentalism, and also with Germany's Nazi history. Haeckel 'believed in nordic racial superiority, strenuously opposed race mixing and enthusiastically supported racial eugenics', as Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier put it in their study of ecofascism in Germany.⁹⁸ They add that, as coiner of the term 'ecology', Haeckel 'profoundly shaped the thinking of subsequent generations of environmentalists by embedding concern for the natural world in a tightly woven web of regressive social themes'.⁹⁹ This context illuminates the deeper meaning of Plath's images of foetal specimens.

The association between the foetal specimen and right-wing visions of reproductive biology gains a more contemporary edge

later in the novel. When Esther visits the sanatorium where Buddy is recovering from tuberculosis, she opens a waiting-room copy of *Life* magazine and sees the president as a foetus: 'The face of Eisenhower beamed up at me, bald and blank as the face of a foetus in a bottle.'¹⁰⁰ The novel is set in 1953, the year Eisenhower came to power. As already noted, the Eisenhower era is associated with both the idealisation of the white nuclear family and policies aimed at limiting the reproduction of racialised, working-class and disabled people. This duality may account for the complexity of the president's representation in *The Bell Jar*: the image of a foetal Eisenhower cannot be read as a straightforward representation of pronatalism, partly because the foetus in the bottle is dead. Read in light of the novel's imagery of zoomorphic foetal specimens in bottles, the foetal Eisenhower can be understood as a reference to a more generalised violence that limits the reproduction of 'undesirable' subjects even as it espouses pronatalism. The Eisenhower administration could also be seen to imperil the foetus in a more direct sense: entering office with a gung-ho attitude towards the use of nuclear weapons, Eisenhower asserted in 1955, 'in any combat when these things can be used on strictly military targets and for strictly military purposes, I can see no reason why they shouldn't be used just exactly as you would use a bullet or anything else'.¹⁰¹ Understood in this context, Plath's foetal Eisenhower identifies the unborn body not only with eugenic reproductive politics, but also with the forces that threaten the reproduction of humanity itself.

The image of Eisenhower appears again, later in the novel, as a more straightforward representation of pronatalism. This time the president's image occurs to Esther in the doctor's waiting room where, awaiting her diaphragm fitting, she leafs through a copy of *Baby Talk* magazine:

The fat, bright faces of babies beamed up at me, page after page – bald babies, chocolate-coloured babies, Eisenhower-faced babies, babies rolling over for the first time, babies reaching for rattles, babies eating their first spoonful of solid food, babies doing all the little tricky things it takes to grow up, step by step, into an anxious and unsettling world.¹⁰²

Here, Eisenhower is not a dead foetus but a living baby – or, more precisely, a magazine image of a baby. I want to suggest that, taken together, *The Bell Jar's* Eisenhower images occupy the same symbolic space as the 'unborn one that loved its perfections' in 'Three Women': both images expose the hypocrisy of a politics that idealises maternity while unleashing forms of political violence that threaten the gestating subject. Through these unsettling images, Plath undermines the rhetoric that centres the child (whether potential or real) as a passive victim of global power. Across Plath's poetry and fiction, the image of the aborted or miscarried foetus as *complicit* with violence highlights the difficulty of reconciling the politics of maternal pacifism with a defence of reproductive freedom. If Eisenhower-as-foetus signifies the right-wing threat to reproduction, then Eisenhower-as-baby signifies the right-wing threat to reproductive self-determination – particularly in the context of Esther's contraceptive fitting.

The Bell Jar does not represent contraception as a straightforward good, however. The diaphragm is recommended by Esther's psychiatrist, Dr Nolan, after her breakdown and suicide attempt. The novel situates Esther's discovery of contraception towards the end of the novel, which concludes with her implied recovery. On one level, then, Plath links Esther's depression to her diminished sense of reproductive and sexual agency. From this perspective, her discovery of the tools of family planning could be seen to usher her into a stable state from which she can narrate her breakdown as an event firmly in the past. And yet the diaphragm signifies pathology as well as agency, illness as well as recovery. After the fitting, Esther is rushed to hospital with excessive bleeding after she loses her virginity to an academic named Irwin, whom she meets at a library while on a day pass from the psychiatric hospital. A figurative parallel between the diaphragm and disease is at work even before Esther's hospitalisation: after the fitting, Esther fights the 'suspicion that Catholics had X-ray eyes'.¹⁰³ The X-ray metaphor aligns contraception with Buddy's tuberculosis, which was diagnosed through 'the annual fall chest X-ray'.¹⁰⁴ X-rays, as discussed in the previous chapter, were in the late 1950s and early 1960s highlighted as harmful sources of radiation, particularly for pregnant women. Both X-ray

and diaphragm represent a conflation of pathogen and remedy, health and harm.

The diaphragm and Buddy's tuberculosis are also connected through their invisibility. The diaphragm is discursively as well as physically hidden: the novel never names the contraceptive device, which is only ever referred to as a 'fitting'. The diaphragm contributes to the theme of invisible danger that runs throughout the novel. Buddy tells Esther in a letter, 'TB is like living with a bomb in your lung [...] You just lie around very quietly hoping it won't go off.'¹⁰⁵ The bomb and the foetus have already been connected through their relationship with Eisenhower; as the chapter continues, it becomes clear that they also share a threatening invisibility. Esther edges away from Buddy: 'I had very little knowledge of TB, but it seemed to me an extremely sinister disease, the way it went on so invisibly.'¹⁰⁶ Esther has trouble imagining the active medical student Buddy lying around, but when she sees him at the sanatorium for the first time he has become plump, 'round and ruddy'.¹⁰⁷ The image creates a sense of Buddy pregnant with a disease that masquerades as good health and, like the diaphragm, is undetectable to the naked eye.

This emphasis on the hidden and the invisible contrasts with the stark visibility of both the foetal specimens on display and the glossy magazine images of babies. The foetal specimen initially appears in the novel's first chapter, when Esther explains her decision to follow her extroverted fellow intern, Doreen, back to her date's apartment: 'I liked looking on at other people in crucial situations. If there was a road accident or a street fight or a baby pickled in a laboratory jar for me to look at, I'd stop and look so hard I never forgot it.'¹⁰⁸ The foetal specimen is an incongruous addition to this list of 'crucial situations'. While Esther's comment expresses an unsettling passivity and voyeurism in the face of danger, it also draws the 'baby pickled in a laboratory jar' – presumably the foetal product of either abortion or miscarriage – into a realm of urban, spectacularised violence and injury. On one level, this resonates with 'Three Women', and the *Second Voice's* development of a connection between miscarriage and the disparate objects of the 'military-industrial complex', whether bulldozers or guillotines. At the same time, what connects the road accident, the street fight and

the foetal specimen is their status as spectacle. In this sense Esther's comment can be read in light of 'Barren Woman' and 'Morning Song', which both (whether explicitly or implicitly) figure babies as museum exhibits. The foetal specimen is a different kind of spectacle to the exhibit: listed alongside the road accident and the street fight, its stasis is imbued with a sense of latent motion that brings to the fore the active forces that may have led to its arrested development.

The novel's foetal images symbolise both individual crisis and structural violence. Esther compares her breakdown to the stasis of the foetus in the bottle: 'To the person in the bell jar, blank and stopped as a dead baby, the world itself is the bad dream.'¹⁰⁹ The 'dead baby' behind glass symbolises the arrested development of an individual in the midst of a psychological breakdown, but it also embeds Esther's individual crisis within a larger system of reproductive violence. The term 'blank' evokes the dull affect of depression, but it also recalls the featureless 'unborn one that loved its perfections' in 'Three Women'. Read alongside the novel's description of Haeckel-esque zoomorphic embryos, the phrase evokes the uses of the foetal specimen to further eugenic race science. The zoomorphic foetus can also be considered alongside an episode in the early stages of the novel when Esther recalls a date with a man who professes to be disgusted by college girls' public displays of affection: 'A million years of evolution, Eric said bitterly, and what are we? Animals.'¹¹⁰ If the novel traces Esther's breakdown at least partly to such experiences of sexualised misogyny, it also connects this misogyny to eugenic models of human evolution and reproduction.

While Esther compares her breakdown to the arrested development of the foetal specimen, she conceives of her suicide attempt as a form of evolutionary regression inspired by the 'babies in the jars':

I thought drowning must be the kindest way to die, and burning the worst.
Some of those babies in the jars that Buddy Willard showed me had gills,
he said. They went through a stage where they were just like fish.¹¹¹

Esther's suicide ideation involves an embrace of the animal state held in such disdain by Eric, her misogynist date. It also, once

more, evokes Haeckel, as well as eugenic theories of degeneration, which imagined that evolution could reverse itself in processes of social decline. In *The Bell Jar*, Plath recasts degeneration on the scale of the individual. An image of evolutionary regression is also at work in Plath's poem 'Stillborn' (1960), which compares the unfinished poem to a miscarried foetus, beginning with the line, 'These poems do not live: it's a sad diagnosis.'¹¹² The poem's final stanza compares the stillborn foetus to other species: 'They are not pigs, they are not even fish, | Though they have a piggy and a fishy air—'.¹¹³ The scene of literary failure is here connected to that of reproductive and evolutionary failure. Death, in both *The Bell Jar* and 'Stillborn', is imagined as a form of reverse evolution.

Ultimately, the suicide attempt that precipitates Esther's hospitalisation evokes not evolutionary regression but a return to the womb. When her drowning attempt fails, Esther hides in the breezeway under her mother's house and attempts to overdose on sleeping pills. The 'secret, earth-bottomed crevice' to which she retreats recasts the house as a gestating body and Esther as a foetus. Intending to devolve towards death, Esther in fact moves towards a figurative rebirth into eventual recovery.¹¹⁴ This rebirth is prefigured in Esther's earlier skiing accident, when she imagines herself as a 'white sweet baby cradled in its mother's belly'. The phrase 'black dots swarmed on a plane of whiteness' extends the imagery of whiteness while evoking ink on paper.¹¹⁵ These conflated images of gestation and printed text foreshadow Esther's suicide attempt, where her 'gestation' underneath her mother's house is later made public in a series of newspaper articles. Later, in the hospital, Esther reads these articles as if they were about a stranger: 'The article under the picture told how this girl had disappeared from her home on August 17th, wearing a green skirt and a white blouse, and had left a note saying she was taking a long walk.'¹¹⁶ This transformation of attempted suicide into media spectacle inspires Esther's roommate, Joan, to attempt suicide; unlike Esther, Joan ultimately dies. As Tucker-Abramson has argued, Joan's death involves a sacrificial dynamic whereby violence is visited on 'foreign, poor, or queer bodies' like Joan's and the Rosenbergs' so that Esther can find 'individual salvation'.¹¹⁷ The foetal images that feature in Esther's suicide ideation suggest that these sacrificial dynamics

are specifically eugenic. Like the foetal specimens, Esther's suicide attempt becomes a spectacle that devalues those lives deemed lesser – unworthy of reproduction or even life itself.

In choosing the breezeway rather than the sea as the site of her suicide attempt, Esther retreats to a symbolic womb from which she will be figuratively reborn when her mother finds and saves her. This domestic womb also evokes prostheticised embodiment. The notion of the home as a womb-like prosthesis can be found in Freud, who, as we have already seen, linked the home to the pregnant body.¹¹⁸ Understood in this light, Esther's suicide attempt is not only a form of symbolic rebirth – it is also a form of prosthetic augmentation. This notion of maternal prosthetic architecture is a central motif in another 1960s narrative of a young woman negotiating life in New York: *Rosemary's Baby*.

Rosemary's Baby and Disability

Rosemary's Baby is dense with literal and symbolic references to both pregnancy and prosthesis.¹¹⁹ The setting for this tale of nosy neighbours and Satanic pregnancy is the fictional New York building the Bramford, a Gothic structure figured as a dysfunctional body that quietly gestates the sinister plot unfolding in its hallways. The Bramford's quirks allow the witches next door, Minnie and Roman Castavet, to secretly enter the Woodhouses' apartment through a hidden passageway at the back of a closet, which functions as a kind of architectural vaginal canal or umbilical cord. This home invasion both enables and mimics Rosemary's subsequent rape and impregnation by Satan, which is abetted by her husband, Guy. The two apartments were once one; now, they are secretly connected in a way that evokes the hybrid embodiment not only of pregnancy, but also of prosthesis.

Rosemary's Baby's parallels between building and body have been the subject of extensive critical enquiry.¹²⁰ Feminist critics of both the film and the book have been troubled by Rosemary's apparent embrace of her new role at the narrative's conclusion, which seems to make 'the spectacle of holy motherhood the condition of Rosemary's power', as Sharon Marcus puts it.¹²¹ If, as Vivian Sobchack contends, the film bespeaks the 'radical beginning of patriarchal

failure', its conclusion has seemed to many to be a defensive truncation of the narrative's feminist possibility.¹²² Rhona Berenstein observes that critics must negotiate a 'mass of contradictions' as they seek to unpick the way the film simultaneously enforces and denies 'the nature-culture mothering dualism'.¹²³ One way out of this critical impasse, I propose, is to attend closely to *Rosemary's Baby's* engagement with the reproductive politics of disability.

As with Plath, *Rosemary's Baby* references contemporary cultural anxieties about neonatal disability through both direct reference and indirect allusion. Levin's novel contains a literal reference to the chemical and environmental menaces that faced pregnant women in the 1960s. When Rosemary discovers she is pregnant, she imaginatively revives her lapsed Catholicism as a protection against threats to her foetus: 'If only prayer were still possible! How nice it would be to hold a crucifix again and have God's ear: ask Him for safe passage through the eight more months ahead; no German measles, please, no great new drugs with Thalidomide side effects.'¹²⁴ Before she learns that her husband Guy has colluded with Minnie and Roman Castavet to impregnate her with Satan's son, Rosemary experiences a general fear of pregnancy commensurate with anxieties of the era. When her friends express concern over her chronic pain and weight loss and urge her to consult another doctor she exclaims, 'I won't have an abortion.'¹²⁵ Shortly after this exchange, Rosemary's pain stops suddenly; after a moment, she feels the foetus kick and exclaims, 'It's alive', making her fears of miscarriage clear.¹²⁶ Later, after Rosemary gives birth in her apartment, the coven pretends the baby has died. When she sneaks into the Castavets' apartment and sees her son for the first time, Rosemary screams, '*What have you done to his eyes?*' Roman Castavet, the leader of the coven, responds that he has his father's eyes, and Rosemary – yet to discover that her child's father is Satan – retorts that Guy's eyes are '*normal*'.¹²⁷ Her language strongly echoes the discourse around normality and abnormality that shaped responses to the birth of disabled babies in the 1960s. Tellingly, Rosemary places the blame for her child's 'abnormality' on the coven rather than herself; the Satanic group and their resident doctor have been feeding her mysterious herbal drinks and white pills, just like the pharmaceutical industry

and medical establishment responsible for the dissemination of thalidomide.

Disability, both actual and imagined, surrounds Rosemary throughout her pregnancy. While the direct reference to thalidomide does not find its way from the novel into the film, Rosemary and Guy's on-screen apartment displays two prominent statues, one with a single arm and the other a limbless torso. The statue echoes media images of babies affected by thalidomide, even as it captures what Tobin Siebers has called the 'hidden role' disability plays in historic understandings of 'good art'.¹²⁸

In the novel, Rosemary and Guy are initially shown around the apartment at the Bramford by a man named Mr Micklas, who has 'fingers missing from both hands, which made shaking hands an embarrassment, though not apparently for him'.¹²⁹ This detail is visually replicated in the film: the actor Elisha Cook Jr consistently obscures the middle fingers of both hands as he plays the character. Guy's deal with the coven wins him a role in a play as a man on crutches when his rival for the part, Donald Baumgart, is struck blind by the witches. In the film he rehearses with crutches throughout Rosemary's pregnancy, exclaiming, 'I'm just a poor cripple' as she returns home one day. In another prominent shot Guy's body casts a shadow over the statue missing a limb as he practises his performance of impairment.



Figure 4.1 A statue in the Woodhouses' apartment in *Rosemary's Baby* (1968).

When Rosemary's friend Hutch warns the couple about the Bramford's bad reputation before they move in, among the unsavoury stories he shares is that 'In 1959 a dead infant was found wrapped in newspaper in the basement'.¹³⁰ The story echoes a harrowing event surrounding the thalidomide episode – the 1962 *Life* feature on the drug refers to a baby killed by her mother who felt her life would not be worth living with 'winglike stumps of fingers sprouting from her shoulders', an image that evokes both animals and the supernatural.¹³¹ Later, the coven sends Hutch into a coma to prevent him from interfering with its plot.

The hyperbolisation of fears around disability in *Rosemary's Baby* might seem complicit with the othering of disabled babies. However, a close examination of the metaphor of prosthesis in both the film and the book reveals a more complex engagement with disability and space. To interrogate this engagement, I now turn to *Rosemary's Baby's* representation of architecture, which, I argue, works to collapse rhetorical distinctions between privacy and transparency, the traditional and the modern, and the natural and the artificial. In doing so, it casts a new light on the reproductive politics of disability in the 1960s.

Privacy and Prosthetic Architecture in *Rosemary's Baby*

Rosemary's Baby embeds its tale of monstrous pregnancy within the context of 1960s fears about the erosion of domestic privacy. While Marcus has read the novel as a commentary on pregnant women's exclusion from the decade's referenda on privacy rights, this interpretation is complicated by the novel's satire, which is often targeted at rhetorical oppositions between traditional domestic privacy and modern domestic exposure.¹³² This opposition between modern and Victorian architecture is set up in the novel's opening lines:

Rosemary and Guy Woodhouse had signed a lease on a five-room apartment in a geometric white house on First Avenue when they received word, from a woman named Mrs Cortez, that a four-room apartment in the Bramford had become available. The Bramford, old, black, and elephantine, is a warren of high-ceilinged apartments prized for their fireplaces and Victorian detail.¹³³

The passage's present-tense reference to the Bramford is typical of Levin's style of journalistic naturalism, which grounds the novel firmly in the real-life landscape of New York City in the mid-1960s. The narrative refers to actual news events of 1965, including the Pope's visit to New York and the newspaper strike. We repeatedly hear that Guy has been in two plays – *Nobody Loves an Albatross* and *Luther* – that did, in fact, play on Broadway in the early 1960s. The narration of this fantastical narrative in a journalistic style replete with veridical detail gives the novel an uncanny, unnerving edge. Polanski's film pursues a similar mingling of the naturalistic and the fantastical, shifting between ostensibly neutral point of view shots, a child's-level perspective, and Rosemary's increasingly distressed and drugged visions. These naturalistic strategies do more than amplify the uncanny effects of both novel and film, however: they also lay the ground for *Rosemary's Baby's* satire of binary oppositions between Victorian privacy and modern publicity.

Women's reproductive lives were central to 1960s discourses of privacy – as evident in the 1965 *Griswold* decision, which, as I have already noted, prefigured *Roe v. Wade* in identifying a right to personal privacy that implicitly covered the decision to contracept. In his opinion in *Griswold*, Justice William O. Douglas asserted: 'Would we allow the police to search the sacred precincts of marital bedrooms for telltale signs of the use of contraceptives? The very idea is repulsive to the notions of privacy surrounding the marriage relationship.'¹³⁴ Douglas's rhetorical question appealed to a widespread sense that marriage entailed a traditional – even sacred – retreat to a protected, private space. Guy's plot with the Castavets unsettles this sense of marriage as both sanctified and private, in part by evoking the sense of breached boundaries associated with thalidomide and, in a more general sense, pregnancy itself.

The concept of reproductive privacy forged in *Griswold* was part of a broader trend that Deborah Nelson has termed 'the cold war privacy crisis'.¹³⁵ A number of 1960s US Supreme Court decisions positioned themselves as protecting individual privacy from both state and corporate intrusion. As this legal consensus developed, the decade witnessed the publication of a series of popular works of social criticism highlighting the erosion of privacy in American

life, including Myron Brenton's *The Privacy Invaders* (1964), Vance Packard's *The Naked Society* (1964) and Alan Westin's *Privacy and Freedom* (1967).¹³⁶ In the midst of a wide-ranging public discourse about surveillance, exposure and the right to be let alone, technologies of the modern age were positioned as the enemies of privacy.

In this context, Levin's novel satirises the rhetorical opposition between Victorian and modernist architecture that holds the nineteenth century up as a bygone age of discretion. When Rosemary's friend Hutch suggests that she and Guy avoid the Bramford, with its unattractive reputation, Rosemary objects: "Hutch," Rosemary said, "we've tried everywhere. There's nothing, absolutely nothing, except the *new* houses, with neat square rooms that are all exactly alike and television cameras in the elevators."¹³⁷ Rosemary's suspicion of closed-circuit television echoes the growing body of literature about electronic surveillance. Brenton, in *The Privacy Invaders*, warned, 'Closed-circuit television has been miniaturized to the point that the camera "eye" can be hidden in a heating duct or light fixture.'¹³⁸ The irony, of course, is that Rosemary's Victorian apartment contains something much more invasive than a television camera in the elevator: a secret passageway in the linen closet, which leaves her new home open to a coven of witches who invade not just her apartment but also her body.

The architecture of the Bramford is premised on enclosing a space conceived as private, but the building's boundaries only intensify the sense of intrusion. When Rosemary begins to suspect a plot, she tries to evade the coven by locking herself in her apartment; the redundancy of the lock soon becomes clear as Rosemary's pursuers leave the chained door where it is and sneak in through the linen closet while Rosemary is on the telephone. Earlier, Rosemary had reassured Hutch about the security of their home: "'The door already has a bolt," she said. "And one of those chain things and a peephole."¹³⁹ The peephole, however, does not prevent the Castavets from penetrating Rosemary's life; indeed, the first time we encounter it being used it functions as a technology of mediation rather than privacy: "The peephole showed Mrs Castavet, white hair in curlers under a blue-and-white kerchief, looking solemnly straight ahead as if waiting for the click of a passport photographer's camera."¹⁴⁰ This image,

recreated faithfully in the film, emphasises the way technologies of domestic security conflate privacy and exposure. The image presents a challenge to critics like Brenton, for whom the new buildings were the ones to worry about. Brenton cautioned that privacy was not simply a question of protecting the inside from the outside: he warned his readers of 'built-in surveillance – that is, surveillance systems built directly into new hotels, schools, jails, office buildings or other structures'.¹⁴¹ Rosemary, operating on the same premise, derides modernist architecture in favour of the Bramford's imposing walls and doors. However, *Rosemary's Baby* consistently breaks down any clear distinction between Gothic architecture, built for privacy, and modernist architecture, built for an age beyond privacy.

Rosemary's Baby's challenge to the dream of architectural privacy finds expression in its depictions of the pregnant subject as a form of architectural prosthesis. Polanski's film evokes this process through Rosemary's outfits, which begin to resemble the interior design of her surroundings when she falls pregnant. A high-angle shot of Rosemary in bed emphasises her objectified vulnerability by colour matching her yellow nightgown and bedding. In another scene, Rosemary's striped dress matches the interior design of Dr Hill's modern office, where she hopes to find escape from the coven but is ultimately betrayed. These scenes position Rosemary as a form of prosthetic architecture for the foetus she is carrying, but they also signify her status as a prosthetic supplement to the Bramford and, by extension, the coven.

In a sense, *Rosemary's Baby's* reversible metaphors of pregnancy-as-architecture and apartment-as-womb are debased versions of modernist calls for buildings that offered 'pre-natal comfort', as Tristan Tzara put it.¹⁴² In the utopian mode, this trend encompassed Frederick Kiesler's 'Endless House', egg-shaped structures in which, as Hans Arp put it, 'a human being can now take shelter and live as if in his mother's womb'.¹⁴³ Moving into the post-war period, distinctions between body and machine were increasingly blurred as part of the dynamic Anthony Vidler has termed 'the architectural uncanny'. Vidler writes: 'If, for the first machine age, the preferred metaphor for the house was industrial, a "machine for living in," the second machine age would

perhaps privilege the medical: the house as at once prosthesis and prophylactic.¹⁴⁴ *Rosemary's Baby* amplifies the terror of this architectural uncanny. The Bramford is not prophylactic but poisonous; meanwhile, Rosemary's bodily boundaries dissolve as she becomes one with the prosthetic apartment and its diabolical purpose. Both novel and film, then, question the assumptions of 1960s privacy discourse by undoing the opposition between inside and outside. This has implications for *Rosemary's Baby's* metaphors of pregnancy and prosthesis, but it also references a larger debate about the extent to which the urban environment could mould behaviour and shape society.

The 1960s witnessed a new strain of resistance to the project of social engineering through urban planning, which had been advocated by Le Corbusier and most strongly associated in the US with Robert Moses and his New York expressway projects. Against Moses' totalising vision of New York, Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) emphasised the improvisatory quality of everyday life – the networks of social relations and chance encounters that resisted the all-seeing eye of the planner. Amidst ubiquitous warnings about the erosion of privacy, Jacobs appealed to the tradition of 'eyes on the street' as an assurance of urban safety and community.¹⁴⁵ Katherine Shonfield has placed Polanski's film in conversation with Jacobs's work, noting that, 'Like Polanski, Jacobs places togetherness firmly on the dysfunctional side of evil but urban *anonymity* on the side of good.'¹⁴⁶ Yet *Rosemary's Baby's* references to modernist architecture, which are more prominent in the novel, suggest that Jacobs's relevance might rather be in her refusal of the dichotomy of privacy and publicity. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* she writes:

Nobody can keep open house in a great city. Nobody wants to. And yet if interesting, useful and significant contacts among the people of cities are confined to acquaintanceships suitable for private life, the city becomes stultified. Cities are full of people with whom, from your viewpoint, or mine, or any other individual's, a certain degree of contact is useful or enjoyable; but you do not want them in your hair. And they do not want you in theirs either.¹⁴⁷

The ideal city, for Jacobs, exists between the poles of privacy and publicity, a dichotomy she sees as more appropriate to the suburbs. These dynamics are at work as, taking advantage of Jacobs's prized urban anonymity, Rosemary and Guy make love 'in the nightglow of shadeless windows' on their first night in the Bramford, free from the prying eyes of neighbours.¹⁴⁸ Yet, despite Rosemary's implied desire for a culture of Jacobs-esque contact rather than sub-urban intrusion, she is often tempted to snoop. Before meeting the Castavets she notices that '[t]heir door was opposite the elevator, their doormat supremely readable. They got air mail letters from a surprising variety of places: Hawick, Scotland; Langeac, France; Vitória, Brazil; Cessnock, Australia. They subscribed to both *Life* and *Look*.'¹⁴⁹ Rosemary, the ostensible victim of privacy invasion, is herself a nosy neighbour. For all its partitioned architectural tradition, the Bramford complies.

As the narrative progresses, the rhetorical opposition between Gothic and modernist design begins to break down as their tendencies are merged and conflated. Dr Sapirstein, Rosemary's obstetrician and a colluding witch, represents a fusion of tradition and modernity: Rosemary finds that 'despite the Miës van der Rohe chairs and cool marble tables of his waiting room', the doctor is 'reassuringly old-fashioned and direct'.¹⁵⁰ As if in sympathy with his building, Dr Sapirstein – if Rosemary's hunch that she has seen him on the television talk show *Open End* is correct – combines a traditionalist demeanour with mass media exposure. The presence of Mies chairs in Dr Sapirstein's office, and thus within the social realm of the Bramford coven, suggests that the distance between transparent architecture and the opaque burrows of New York's old apartment buildings is perhaps less meaningful than Rosemary hopes.

The novel's references to Mies are particularly significant because of the architect's corporeal metaphors: he termed his modernist buildings 'skin and bone architecture'.¹⁵¹ This metaphor gains an unsettling edge in light of the way the novel involves Mies in one of its most unsettling moments of physical assault. Hutch – who, we later learn, has discovered the Castavets' secret – asks Rosemary to meet him in front of the Seagram Building: completed in 1958, the glass skyscraper is one of Mies's most famous designs.

When Hutch does not turn up, Rosemary goes inside to call him and she discovers that he has slipped into a coma that proves to be terminal – caused, the reader gleans, by the coven. Hutch has been averse to the Bramford from the start: knowledgeable about its unsavoury history, he entreats Rosemary and Guy to avoid the building as soon as he discovers their plan to take up residence. His choice of the Seagram Building as a meeting place perhaps expresses a sense that modernist architectural transparency might sanitise or neutralise the coven's influence, but in the end, the Seagram cannot save Hutch. In fact, the building's celebrated transparency was something of a figment: as Jasmine Rault notes, Mies's plan to use exposed steel was vetoed by New York State fire safety regulations, so they 'enclosed the structural beams in concrete and hung decorative steel to create the *style* or impression of transparency' – a solution that somewhat undermined Mies's commitment to the building's 'glass skin' as an expression of truth and authenticity.¹⁵² Levin's references to Mies contain an implicit critique of the modern myth of transparency (a critique that echoes Yates's in *Revolutionary Road*, explored in Chapter 3). In *Rosemary's Baby*, this critique also comes to bear on the pharmaceutical industry in the wake of thalidomide.

Rosemary's aversion to all things modern extends from architecture to medicine. Despite his modernist office, Dr Sapirstein forgoes prescriptions and instead instructs Rosemary to take a daily drink made from Minnie Castavet's herbarium. In the age of thalidomide, Rosemary is reassured by this, commenting: 'I like the *idea* of having everything fresh and natural. I'll bet expectant mothers chewed bits of tannis root hundreds and hundreds of years ago when nobody'd even heard of vitamins.'¹⁵³ Indeed, as she lies in bed praying for no thalidomide and no German measles, Rosemary feels suddenly drawn to the charm given to her by the Castavets, which contains tannis root; she 'wanted it – no, needed it – around her neck'.¹⁵⁴ Tannis root here resembles an addictive substance. While its function is never made explicit, it is implicitly linked to Rosemary's pain during early pregnancy and the successful gestation of her diabolical foetus. Nevertheless, in the context of the novel's rhetorical opposition between tradition and modernity, tannis root is the opposite of thalidomide: for

Rosemary, its status as natural means that it is also traditional, and thus safe. Yet nature and tradition are only a means to an end for the coven. When Rosemary confides her suspicions about the Castavets to Guy and Dr Sapirstein, the Satanist doctor swiftly prescribes her white pills instead of the tannis root drink. This is the point in the film, though not the book, at which Rosemary begins to behave erratically, walking out into traffic. While some have read these scenes as evidence that the coven's plot is all in Rosemary's mind, the narrative sequence clearly constructs her hallucinatory state as an effect of the white pills. *Rosemary's Baby's* critique, then, is on neither the side of the traditional nor that of the modern; instead, it is aimed at the nefarious uses of this dichotomy.

Rosemary's Baby is set three years after the 1962 Kefauver-Harris Amendment, which placed more stringent demands on drug companies to disclose the side-effects and potential risks of their products. Passed in the wake of the news about thalidomide, the Amendment's ultimate emphasis on drug safety represented a departure from the Tennessee senator Estes Kefauver's original proposed legislation, which was focused on the corporate manipulation of drug prices. As Dominique A. Tobbell has shown, Kefauver's efforts to regulate the pricing practices of drug companies were met with opposition from the pharmaceutical firms, who mobilised cold war rhetoric to defend their industry. As Tobbell states:

in the midst of the Cold War, the pharmaceutical industry hailed itself as a model of American free enterprise and sought, through the development of more and more products and through donations of drugs and other pharmaceutical supplies to aid missions in the Third World, to disseminate its message to those developing nations deemed susceptible to communism.¹⁵⁵

The final Act's focus on safety at the expense of pricing was justified with reference to the thalidomide crisis.

The pharmaceutical industry is referenced directly in *Rosemary's Baby*. Guy is linked to the pill-popping culture of 1960s America, and thus to the machinations of the pharmaceutical industry. The novel reveals that his most lucrative acting job is a role in painkiller

commercials: 'In 1964 Guy had done a series of Anacin commercials that, shown time and time again, had earned him eighteen thousand dollars and was still producing a sizeable income.'¹⁵⁶ The 1964 Anacin adverts feature adults with headaches lashing out at loved ones, just as Guy does to Rosemary. The American Home Products Company, which produced Anacin, was one of the companies Kefauver investigated: he discovered that the firm was charging Australians a third less for pills than Americans. This is an important context for *Rosemary's Baby's* deflation of rhetorical oppositions between the traditional and the modern: drawing contrasts on the basis of aesthetics or style, such dichotomies distract from material power relations.

If *Rosemary's Baby* is interpreted as an allegory for the thalidomide episode, the coven has a twofold role: it represents the pharmaceutical industry that disseminates the drugs that cause impairment, as well as the institutional norm that removes disabled children from their families. To borrow Jain's terminology of prosthesis, the coven supplies a 'deficiency' in order to compensate for it. Claudia Malacrida has given an account of the historical development of the institutional imperative in the early twentieth century. She explains that residential centres were originally intended to improve people's health and reintegrate them into mainstream society, but ideological and economic imperatives meant that this goal was displaced by a system of larger, long-term institutions that positioned disabled people as necessarily in need of continuing care.¹⁵⁷ Malacrida observes that the system 'operated as a form of passive eugenics, often sequestering people for their entire lives as a way of ensuring that they would not "pollute" their societies with "tainted" offspring'.¹⁵⁸ A rhetoric of blaming mothers played a part in public attitudes to the institutionalisation of disabled children. Reagan notes that Dr Rex Morgan, a doctor who dispensed advice through printed comic strips, argued that the 'real threat to the retarded child was his mother', warning of women whose overbearing love kept them from sending their child to an institution.¹⁵⁹ Such comments recalled Philip Wylie's warnings about matriarchal authoritarianism in his writings on 'Momism'.¹⁶⁰ The coven's underhand attempts to remove Rosemary's baby are reminiscent of this institutional imperative.

Even without such an allegorical interpretation, *Rosemary's Baby's* coven is clearly aligned with right-wing politics in both novel and film. Rosemary's initial embrace of tannis root suggests her attraction to historical cultures of health and healing centred around women's control over reproduction. By contrast, the coven's use of herbs and (ostensibly) homespun remedies is represented as a tactic rather than an ideological commitment. Rosemary misrecognises Minnie Castavet as a feminist healer, ready to transmit the kind of folk wisdom that cannot be found in books or doctors' surgeries. In fact, the Castavets and their coven have more in common with the early modern practices of witch hunting that were, as Silvia Federici argues, 'instrumental to the construction of a new patriarchal order where women's bodies, their labor, their sexual and reproductive powers were placed under the control of the state and transformed into economic resources'.¹⁶¹ Through the coven's plot, Rosemary's reproductive life is made subservient to the ideological ambitions of the coven and the career ambitions of her husband. Ideologically, the contemporary analogue to *Rosemary's Baby's* coven is Anton LaVey's Church of Satan, founded in 1966; like Roman Castavet, LaVey declared this the 'Year One'.¹⁶² LaVey and the Church of Satan were central to the vogue for the occult in the 1960s, attracting celebrities including the avant-garde filmmaker Kenneth Anger and the actor Jayne Mansfield.¹⁶³ Alongside this association with glamour and cutting-edge aesthetics, LaVey was an extreme political and cultural conservative who supported eugenics and associated with neo-fascist movements. Making explicit the political allegiances of 1960s Satanism, *Rosemary's Baby* associates the coven with the right-wing political establishment: in the novel, one of its members, Laura-Louise, urges Rosemary to vote for the hard-line candidate William F. Buckley, who stood for New York's Conservative Party in the mayoral election; in the film, Laura-Louise wears a Buckley badge.

This history contextualises *Rosemary's Baby's* references to decolonisation and movements for black rights. Buckley was known as a supporter of racial segregation in the southern states. In 1965, Buckley and James Baldwin debated the motion 'The American dream is at the expense of the American Negro'; Baldwin won by 544 votes to Buckley's 164.¹⁶⁴ The debate was restaged on the

television show *Open End* (the same show Rosemary thinks of when she meets Dr Sapirstein). In contrast to the coven's right-wing views, Rosemary is subtly associated with liberal politics in both novel and film: she reads *Manchild in the Promised Land*, Claude Brown's civil rights-era autobiography about growing up in Harlem, and feels 'self-conscious, clumsy and Negro-oppressing' when she does her laundry at the same time as the building's black domestic workers.¹⁶⁵ In this scene, the Bramford is coded as place of racialised labour and class division. When Rosemary and Guy first visit the Bramford, they ascend to their prospective apartment in an elevator 'run by a uniformed Negro boy with a locked-in-place smile'.¹⁶⁶ Later, when Hutch gives them an inventory of 'unpleasant happenings' at the Bramford, he mentions that '[a]n elevator man was killed last winter' in a 'not-at-the-dinner-table kind of accident'.¹⁶⁷ The world map redrawn by decolonisation registers in the novel too: when Rosemary lies to the instructor of her sculpture class that she has been in Zanzibar, he replies, 'Zanzibar is no more.'¹⁶⁸ Together with the references to Buckley, these details embed the coven's violence in a larger racist system.

These references to right-wing politics suggest that the Bramford is not just a symbol of the pregnant body, but a microcosm of the larger system of reproductive organisation. In this sense, *Rosemary's Baby* is not primarily about the horror of the abjected Other, but about the horror of the social organisation of reproduction under late-twentieth-century capitalism – the system in which Rosemary is compelled to reproduce in order to sustain a larger system of white supremacy and misogyny. The references to racial politics in *Rosemary's Baby* can be approached through Alys Eve Weinbaum's analysis of the surrogacy/slavery nexus. Weinbaum argues that the long history of reproductive slavery and its aftermath has made the commodification of human biological life possible. According to Weinbaum, surrogacy is embedded within the racialising process of reproductive labour even when it is 'predominantly performed by white women'.¹⁶⁹ The racialisation of reproductive labour, for Weinbaum, does not proceed from the prior racialisation of the labourer; rather, the racialising function of reproductive labour, in the system of Atlantic slavery and its

aftermath, makes surrogacy thinkable. Rosemary's exploitation as an unwilling and unknowing surrogate is thus embedded in histories of racial exploitation.

These dynamics inform *Rosemary's Baby's* prosthetic symbolism, in which literal prostheses signify the economic function of reproductive labour. The crutches Guy rehearses with project the possibility that their child will be disabled, but they are also a symbol of Rosemary's own prosthetic function as a vehicle for his professional success. Indeed, Guy's career as an actor depends on his construction of Rosemary as a professional prosthesis. He shows little interest in having a child until he learns that his wife's fecundity can be harnessed to his dreams of acting on stage. In this, Rosemary and Guy invert the relationship between Donald Baumgart, Guy's erstwhile rival for the dramatic role, and his girlfriend Zoë Piper. When (it is heavily implied) the Castavets take Baumgart's sight as part of their evil deal with Guy, Baumgart turns from acting to writing. A friend of Rosemary's tells her: "They've pretty much given up hope. He's going through hell trying to make the adjustment. But this great play is coming out of it. He dictates and Zoë writes."¹⁷⁰ Recalling the depiction of secretarial labour in both Plath and Yates, here Donald and Zoë form a gendered assemblage of author/typewriter, engaged with a process of creative reproduction that is clearly distinct from that of biological reproduction. By contrast, Rosemary and Guy conflate cultural production and biological reproduction in a pact with Satan. In both cases, the woman is figured as a mediating agent with little control over the product of her labours.

Rosemary's (ultimately futile) resistance involves her transformation – albeit truncated – from medium to creator. To guard against such a transformation, Dr Sapirstein, Rosemary's obstetrician and a colluding witch, instructs her: "Please don't read books."¹⁷¹ In order to escape her role as instrumentalised prosthesis, Rosemary must become a reader and, in a sense, a writer. Hutch leaves Rosemary a book about witchcraft when he dies, but Guy discards it when she begins to develop suspicions about the Castavets. The film depicts her compulsively travelling to a bookshop to search for new information about witchcraft. In the absence of books, Rosemary engages with the only textual media she is allowed: the Scrabble

game, whose letters she rearranges to reveal the truth about the Castavets. When she is captured by the coven, they keep her drugged in order to take her breast milk for the baby they have removed from her care. When Rosemary secretly slots the white pills between bricks in her bedroom wall, the new drugs become part of the old architecture as a symbol of the combined powers conspiring against her. But it is too late; Rosemary is irrevocably connected to the building and, in drugging it, she secures her own capitulation.

In *Rosemary's Baby*, as in Plath, prosthetic technology comes to symbolise the dangers, and even the horrors, of technological mediation. Across the works explored in this chapter, technology expresses something troubling about the mediating function of the gestating body – whether this is the pregnant subject recoiling at her status as mediator, or the ruling class's horror at the hidden power of the medium. In the next chapter, I move away from representations of the gestating subject to look at an icon of late-1960s visual culture: the autonomous foetus. Analysing the foetal figure in the work of Lennart Nilsson, Paul Sharits and Stanley Kubrick, I argue that images of foetal autonomy in this period often function to express or subvert fantasies of reproduction without mediation.

CHAPTER 5

Transcending the Maternal Medium: Foetal Images in Nilsson, Sharits and Kubrick

On 30 April 1965, a new issue of *Life* magazine unveiled its cover star: a disembodied foetus, pictured alone in what looks like outer space.¹ On the cover, the unborn figure appears both vulnerable and autonomous as it floats among the celestial bodies. The name of the magazine, stamped on the cover in bold red and white, unwittingly captures the irony of these foetal 'portraits' by the Swedish photographer Lennart Nilsson. In the coming decades these images would be deployed to illustrate anti-abortion ideologies of prenatal life, but most of them depict miscarried or aborted foetal bodies obtained at a Stockholm hospital. The American public readily consumed Nilsson's pictures, but a photographer attempting to produce them in the United States may well have been thwarted by the laws prohibiting abortion that were still in place across the country in 1965.²

In June, just a couple of months after Nilsson's *Life* cover hit the newsstands, the *Griswold v. Connecticut* decision decreed that married couples possessed a right to use contraception, which (as I have explored in preceding chapters) was derived from a newly discovered constitutional right to privacy. A conceptual tension can be gleaned here: in the year that reproductive rights were first located within a 'zone of privacy', the foetus was exposed as never before by the photojournalist's camera. This reflects a broader tension in the 1960s. On the one hand, mediated visibility was increasingly central to social life in what Guy Debord described in 1967 as the 'society of the spectacle'; on the other, political rights in

the US were newly linked – in some cases constitutionally – to the right to privacy.³ At the crux of these tensions, images of the autonomous foetus recast the camera as a natural, organic extension of the body. While Barbara Duden has suggested that Nilsson's images exemplify the era of the 'public foetus', I would counter that, as presented in *Life* magazine, they express a cultural desire for a form of privacy-in-publicity.⁴ In the mid-1960s, the foetal image seemed to promise a form of representation without exposure.

Nilsson's foetal images have been extensively critiqued by feminists, particularly since the coincident expansion of obstetric ultrasound scans and radical anti-abortion activism in the 1980s. During the Reagan era, pro-life campaigns deployed diverse reproductive images, including Nilsson's 1965 photographs, to bolster their arguments for foetal personhood. Anti-abortion activists often elided visual representation and political representation; as Lauren Berlant puts it, 'The success of the concept of fetal personhood depends on establishing a mode of "representation" that merges the word's political and aesthetic senses, imputing a voice, a consciousness, and a self-identity to the fetus that can neither speak its name nor vote.'⁵ Through this form of representation, the foetus was constructed as 'the most absolutely oppressed minority in history, a group in desperate need of advocates'.⁶ In turn, American feminists in the post-1980s period were widely influenced by Rosalind Pollack Petchesky's powerful 1987 call for 'new images that recontextualise the fetus, that place it back into the uterus, and the uterus back into the woman's body, and her body back into its social space'.⁷ Petchesky's parallel between the erasure of women's bodies and the erosion of reproductive rights set the tone for a wave of feminist critiques of foetal images.⁸ However, calls for more realistic images of pregnancy were troubled by the poststructuralist turn in gender studies, as critics including Donna Haraway, Karen Newman and Meredith W. Michaels queried both the utility and the possibility of recovering the pregnant body in its 'un-imaged' condition.⁹

In 1965, the visible foetus was a phenomenon of the mass media rather than the clinic. Although critics have sometimes collected both ultrasound and photography under the rubric of imaging, Nilsson's foetal photographs were circulating in *Life* around twenty

years before ultrasound machines were generally available for purchase by hospitals. Used by the Allies in World War II as a device for detecting enemy submarines, ultrasound was developed as a medical technology in the late 1950s. The cumbersome early technology was initially confined to high-risk pregnancies, and it was not until the real-time scanner was introduced in the late 1970s that ultrasound became a routine obstetrical practice.¹⁰ Several months before Nilsson's photographs were published, *Life* covered the new technology of ultrasound; the article's title, 'Ultrasound Becomes an Important Medical Tool: A Sonar Look at an Unborn Baby', emphasised that the process was a strange and new one to many Americans. The feature's dominant photograph depicted a pregnant woman lying on a hospital bed next to a screen displaying a grainy, indistinct pattern. Below, another image revealed the screen in close-up, alongside a passage of text informing readers that the grainy pattern 'shows head of unborn child as sharp curve at screen's center'.¹¹ The distinction between this 'sharp curve at screen's center' and Nilsson's photographs, which humanised a readily recognisable foetus, was pronounced.

The autonomous foetus is a recurring image in 1960s culture. Nilsson's *Life* photographs were repurposed in Paul Sharits' experimental film *Razor Blades* (1965–68). Here, Sharits juxtaposes Nilsson's foetal photography with an array of disparate images, including photographs of abortuses held in a hand. Made between the years of 1965 and 1968, the production process of *Razor Blades* bridged Nilsson's *Life* images and another film that references them: Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Like Nilsson's foetal space traveller, *2001*'s iconic Star Child is a foetal figure that seems to be gestated by nothing more than outer space.

Across these works, gendered ideologies of reproduction fuse with 1960s media theory, and particularly Marshall McLuhan's ideas about media as a form of prosthesis that both depletes and extends the body. Nilsson's *Life* images make the foetus serve a fantasy of transcending both the gestating body and the camera's mediating force, which is imaginatively integrated into the body. Sharits' *Razor Blades* draws attention back to the contingencies of both cinematic and embodied reproduction. In Kubrick's *2001*, meanwhile, the dream of the embodied, organic camera mutates

into a different fantasy: one of annihilating the (implicitly maternal) medium entirely. Towards the end of this chapter, I turn from film to radical feminist theory in order to address another vision of transcending the gestating body: Shulamith Firestone's call for ectogenesis in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970). Firestone's feminist vision of the future is underpinned by an ideological commitment to population control and an aversion to the contingencies of reproductive processes, despite its radical reimagining of reproduction.

Nilsson's Foetal Photographs and the Maternal Medium

In order to understand the analogy between biological and photographic reproduction at work in Nilsson's 1965 images, it is necessary to examine the photographs' production processes. Although Nilsson's celebrated cover image was taken endoscopically, most of the other images depict embryos and fetuses that had been miscarried or aborted. Nilsson obtained these bodies from Sabbatsberg Hospital in Stockholm through his collaborator, resident gynaecologist Axel Ingelman-Sundberg. The historian Solveig Jülich explains:

To prepare the embryo or foetus for photographing, he removed their outer, opaque, membranes. After that they were immersed in a tank filled with a saline solution placed in the operating theatre. Various light sources had been placed around the tank. The 'space' that 'Spaceman' was said to float in was thus not the inner space of the body, and the details in the picture that looked like distant stars and planets were water bubbles and particles from the placenta.¹²

Jülich's description of the production process of Nilsson's images points to the complexity of their illusion. The ideal viewer of these images believes that Nilsson, with the help of state-of-the-art photographic technology, has breached the boundaries of the pregnant body and refashioned it to resemble deep space. The viewer thinks they are wise to this trick: they know the foetus is not *really* floating in space. But there is actually another, hidden illusion at work: what seems to be the inner space of the pregnant body is, in most cases, a saline solution-filled tank. The veneer of transparency around the

first illusion – the womb remade as outer space – reinforces the bluff of the *real* illusion: the womb ‘disguised’ as the cosmos is not a womb at all.

The logic of this complex visual manoeuvre can be illuminated by the ideas of the media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, who argue that two contradictory imperatives characterise what they term ‘the double logic of remediation’: immediacy and hypermediacy.¹³ Drawing on McLuhan’s media theory, they explain, ‘Our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them.’¹⁴ In identifying this logic, Bolter and Grusin suggest that practices of mediation are usually involved in a process of remediation, in which media forms attempt to both improve upon their predecessors’ ability to provide an immediate experience of reality, and inscribe themselves in a history of hypermediacy, referencing their advanced production processes. Nilsson’s foetal photographs involve the registers of both hypermediacy and immediacy. The photographs draw attention to the distortions of photographic technology in their use of fragments of the body to evoke outer space. This register of hypermediacy, however, co-exists with a register of immediacy. The central figure of the foetus attached to the placenta by the umbilical cord obscures important facts about the photographs’ production: that many of the foetuses are dead, and that only one of the images is actually endoscopic. The *Life* feature highlights technology’s purported ability to make the inner space of the body look like outer space, but deflects attention from the fact that this is really an illusion of an illusion – a tank made to look like the inner space of the body masquerading as outer space. In Nilsson’s photographs, the logic of hypermediacy shapes the analogy between the photograph’s life-giving power and the idealised mother’s. Meanwhile, the logic of immediacy is registered in the fantasy of transcending the contingencies of both photographic production and gestation.

The politics of this ‘double logic of remediation’ in a 1960s context can be elucidated through attention to contemporary discourses of media, reproduction and privacy. In *Life*, the visual story of the developing embryo is intertwined with another narrative about the technological breakthroughs supported and disseminated by

the magazine. John Berger comments on this aspect of *Life's* project in his essay 'Uses of Photography', which touches on the magazine's 1936 launch:

At least two things were prophetic about the launching of *Life*, the prophecies to be fully realised in the postwar television age. The new picture magazine was financed not by its sales, but by the advertising it carried. A third of its images were devoted to publicity. The second prophecy lay in its title. This is ambiguous. It may mean that the pictures inside are about life. Yet it seems to promise more: that these pictures *are* life. The first photograph in the first number played on this ambiguity. It showed a newborn baby. The caption underneath read: 'Life begins ...'¹⁵

Berger's argument clarifies the broader cultural meaning of *Life's* foetal portraits. The imaged foetus is not merely a product of the camera – it is also a symbol of photography as a life-giving technology. Through this circular symbolism, Nilsson's *Life* feature pursues a speculative conjunction of cultural and biological creation that fuses immediacy and hypermediacy.

Nilsson's photographs, and their presentation in *Life*, are one example of the way media production was conflated with biological reproduction during the 1960s. This fusion of media and reproductive imaginaries can be traced back further: it was certainly influenced by Philip Wylie's 'Momism', which I have already discussed in the context of Hansberry and *Rosemary's Baby*. There is a distinctly technological symbolic current running through Wylie's description of 'Momism'. The 'destroying mother' sustains an ambiguous relationship with technology that resonates with McLuhan's theory of auto-amputation: labour-saving domestic machines have 'deprived her of social usefulness', yet her malevolent reach is figured in terms of electrical infrastructure, with its combination of power and intangibility.¹⁶ Wylie writes, 'Our land, subjectively mapped, would have more silver cords and apron strings crisscrossing it than railroads and telephone wires. Mom is everywhere and everything and damned near everybody, and from her depends all the rest of the US.'¹⁷ Wylie's 'Mom' is embedded within a technological infrastructure whose power she has mysteriously taken on. He writes, 'The steel puddler in Pittsburgh may

not think of himself as a feminine tool, but he is really only getting a Chevrolet ready for mom to drive through a garden wall.¹⁸ The intimacy of women and technology, which threatens to turn men into tools, becomes a covert fact that Wylie must expose to public incredulity.

It is the radio, with its fusion of mass cultural reach, intangible sonority and cultural ubiquity, that provides Wylie with his prime technological symbol for the mother. The radio, he writes, 'is mom's final tool, for it stamps everybody who listens with the matriarchal brand – its superstitions, prejudices, devotional rules, taboos, musts, and all other qualifications needful to its maintenance'.¹⁹ Comparing the maternal radio to Joseph Goebbels' use of media in Nazi Germany, Wylie warns of 'matriarchal sentimentality, goo, slop, hidden cruelty, and the foreshadow of national death'.²⁰ The mother-as-media, in Wylie's far-reaching vision, conveys a constellation of perceived threats to traditional patriarchal masculinity: the influence of popular culture, the bureaucracy of the white-collar organisation, the gulf between production and consumption, and the changing roles of women. The threat of the maternal medium is specifically spatial: her influence evokes the unsettling sprawl of the capitalist system that leaves the Chevrolet maker in the dark about who will end up owning his product, as well as the uncanny ability of the radio to bridge spatial boundaries. Wylie inverts this bridging effect in a way that betrays his discomfort with the workings of mid-century consumer capitalism: instead of Goebbels preaching hate to the homes of Germany, the mother is dictating the contents of radio broadcasts from her position as a consumer.

Traces of Wylie's maternal media can be found in 1960s discourses of mediation. McLuhan distinguishes between low-resolution cool media, which demand a high degree of user participation, and high-resolution hot media, which require a low level of input from the user.²¹ The telephone, for instance, is a cool medium, while the radio, Wylie's maternal weapon, is a hot medium. Another high-definition hot medium is the photograph, which requires a low degree of participation because it provides a high degree of visual information. Like Wylie's radio, the photograph is forceful and pervasive, engendering a kind of passive submission in consumers. McLuhan's media theory combines a

sense of excitement about new technologies with a deterministic vision of their effect on human behaviour. Nilsson's photographs illustrate the way this technological discourse is bound up with ideologies of maternity. As Hannah Zeavin has noted, this period also witnessed the rise of the 'refrigerator mother' theory of autism alongside other metaphors of temperature to diagnose apparent problems with mothering.²² As Zeavin puts it, 'The diagnosis of hot and cool mothering implies a media theory of parenting.'²³ Nilsson's 1965 *Life* images, I contend, reimagine pregnancy as a form of mediation.

Nilsson's foetal photographs take up Wylie's trope of the maternal medium but neutralise its vitriolic warning. In the image of the autonomous foetus, the woman is replaced with the photographic apparatus, which now bears the burden of sustaining and representing the unborn body. This metaphor extends Wylie's analogy between the mother and the medium, but alleviates its misogynistic anxiety by substituting the camera for the womb. To apply McLuhan's concept of 'auto-amputation' by media, the foetal photographs amputate the mother by replacing – and extending – her mediating power with photographic technology. In this way, Nilsson's images resonate with linked anxieties about pregnant bodies, on the one hand, and media technologies, on the other.

The ostensibly endoscopic photographs of embryos and fetuses carry a sense of reassurance in relation to mid-1960s anxieties about the erosion of the border between public and private. As I have already explored, US culture in the 1960s was steeped in warnings about threats to privacy. In this context, Nilsson's photographs are imbued with a reparative sense of having abolished the distance between the photographer and his subject. This distance, which is at the heart of 1960s anxieties about privacy invasion, can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, when Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis co-wrote and published an article entitled 'The Right to Privacy' (1890) in the *Harvard Law Review*. Warren and Brandeis stressed that new technologies, particularly instantaneous photography, had created an urgent need to define and protect this right. They asserted that newspapers' use of these technologies had 'invaded the sacred precincts of private and domestic life'.²⁴ According to Warren and Brandeis, the combination of the new, gossip-driven genre of

'yellow journalism', and photographic technologies that allowed the taking of candid images, necessitated the legal protection of privacy rights. Their evocation of the camera's ability to not only negate the distance between the apparatus and its subject, but to do so in an instant and without the subject's knowledge, emphasised the spatio-temporal anxieties at the heart of their concerns about imaging technology. Brandeis went on to become a Supreme Court Judge, renowned for his famous dissent in *Olmstead v. US* (1928), a case in which the majority opinion had ruled that wiretaps did not constitute an unconstitutional search and seizure. Opposing this narrow interpretation of the Fourth Amendment, Brandeis asserted 'the right to be let alone' and called for a broader definition of privacy than that contained in the majority verdict.²⁵

By the 1960s, public opinion – and, eventually, that of the Supreme Court – was drifting in line with Brandeis's ideas. Deborah Nelson has located the privacy panic of the early 1960s in relation to the 'slow breakdown' of the containment policy that drove the US approach to communism in the early years of the cold war. Nelson notes that '[t]he cold war seems to have coincided with—and exaggerated—a widely experienced topological crisis in which bounded spaces of all kinds seemed to exhibit a frightening permeability'.²⁶ When the privacy panic asserted itself in constitutional law through the *Griswold* decision, it staked its claims on the terrain of the reproductive body. Between 1965 and 1973, the right to privacy extended its reach from married couples to individuals, and eventually to those seeking abortions. Not all of the key privacy rulings were about reproduction: *Katz v. US* (1967) ruled that police wiretaps of public telephones violated privacy rights. Nevertheless, the feminised reproductive subject was at the centre of the Supreme Court's assertion of privacy rights between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s, culminating in *Roe v. Wade*'s assertion of a limited constitutional right to abortion. It is in this context of renewed public concerns about privacy intrusion that Nilsson's photographs constructed their fantasy of representation without exposure. There was no risk of a hidden camera if the camera could be imagined as part of the subject's body, helping to sustain its *life*.

Concerns about privacy were also linked to a new sense of the pregnant body's risky permeability in the wake of the thalidomide

episode in Europe and the rubella epidemics in the US, as addressed in the preceding chapter. These changing understandings of the pregnant body can be added to Nelson's list of material changes in American life that seemed to invest the boundary between public and private with a 'frightening permeability', including new practices of surveillance, the growth of psychoanalysis, and suburban living.²⁷ The pregnant body's potentially 'frightening permeability' is captured in the text accompanying Nilsson's 1965 *Life* photographs. In a column titled 'Pushed out into a hostile world', the magazine's science editor, Albert Rosenfeld, explains that the placenta keeps out bacteria, brings in nutrients, and makes essential hormones, but adds, 'It cannot always screen out everything that might be injurious. Viruses—like the German measles virus—sometimes slip through to cause deformities.'²⁸ Rosenfeld's comment points to the placenta's ambivalent symbolic significance in Nilsson's photographs – it is simultaneously a barrier and a transmitter, protecting and exposing the foetus at once. His use of the term 'screen' – a word that denotes both display and concealment – captures this ambiguity. The notion of the placenta as a 'screen' also encapsulates the symbolic alignment of new media technologies (such as the television) and the gestating body during this period. In minimising the traces of the gestating body, Nilsson's photographs construct the camera itself as a more secure and predictable kind of womb: one that can represent the foetus without violating its 'zone of privacy'.

Reproductive justice scholars have positioned media images of the reproductive body as a sign of the strategic uses and withdrawals of privacy protections. As Rickie Solinger observes in reference to the *Roe* decision, it seems paradoxical that the Supreme Court imagined women's reproductive decisions as private when 'women's fertile, reproducing bodies had never been so visible or publicly consequential in American society as in this era: the reproducing body had become everybody's business'.²⁹ The paradox Solinger references is real: why, one might ask, does the foetus need to be exposed on camera at this mid-1960s moment, when concerns about privacy invasion have hit such a fever pitch? Yet, as we shall see, the use of images to construct the subject of privacy rights has a long history. It is to this history, and its implications

for the racial reproductive politics of Nilsson's foetal images, that I now turn.

Foetal Privacy and the White Portrait

The foetus, as Carol Mason has suggested, is a 'locus in which reproductive politics and racial politics are inevitably linked'.³⁰ Nilsson's photographs construct a racial politics of reproduction partly through their seriality. The *Life* photographs are arranged in a linear sequence, which produces the erroneous impression that the images depict the development of a single coherent subject. The serial arrangement suppresses the contingencies of the reproductive process by occluding the fact many of the photographs depict dead extra-uterine foetuses. At the same time, however, this seriality sets forth a general idea of what development looks like. As Sarah Franklin puts it, *Life's* presentation of Nilsson's foetal images constructs the foetus both ontologically, as an autonomous individual, and teleologically, as a 'potential human adult'.³¹ In this sense, they offer an abstract portrait of reproduction, and one that is distinctly racialised as white. Like *The Bell Jar's* foetal specimens, Nilsson's photographs possess an uncanny ability to signify the development of both a distinct individual and a generalised, racialised notion of the human.

The *Life* feature was published in the midst of 1960s civil rights struggles, just two months after the assassination of Malcolm X. As an image of white innocence, the autonomous foetus was a symbolic extension of the white nuclear family, whose promotion through pronatalist policies has already been extensively discussed in earlier chapters. In the years following the 1950s baby boom, racist concerns about a 'population explosion' contextualised the reception of the contraceptive pill after its approval by the US Food and Drug Administration in 1960.³² Black women were discouraged from reproducing, and sometimes forcibly sterilised: in June 1964, during the Mississippi Freedom Summer campaign to protest black disenfranchisement, Fannie Lou Hamer told an audience assembled for a Council of Federated Organizations hearing in Washington, DC, that sixty per cent of black women in Sunflower County, Mississippi, had been sterilised without giving

consent.³³ In this context, Nilsson's photograph of a lone foetus in space offered an image of white procreation as the controlled reproduction of individuals rather than populations, reinforcing (by contrast) racist warnings about overpopulation in US inner cities and the 'third world'.

In 1965, *Griswold's* situation of contraceptive decisions within a zone of privacy belied the state's interest in controlling the reproductive lives of racialised people. These practices of reproductive control indicate that the subject of the right to privacy was implicitly white. However, as Eden Osucha has argued, the modern, white subject of privacy rights embodies a contradiction: her right to privacy has always depended on the media image for its construction. A key case in Osucha's analysis is *Roberson v. Rochester Folding Box Company* (1902), in which a woman named Abigail Roberson sued a company for using her image in its publicity materials without her consent. Although Roberson's claim for damages was ultimately rejected by the New York Court of Appeals, the controversy that attended the case was testament to the growing force of the definition of privacy set out by Warren and Brandeis. Osucha argues that Roberson's status as a white, bourgeois woman helped to make her case an exemplary instance of privacy violation.³⁴ Osucha contrasts the outrage over Roberson's case with the widespread acceptance of the Aunt Jemima brand, which was built on an image of the black Chicago housekeeper Nancy Green.³⁵ Unlike the white woman, the black woman could not claim that the image had violated her privacy, because privacy rights were implicitly white in their formulation.

Nilsson's foetal 'portraits' negotiate this paradox whereby media publicity establishes a right to privacy. With their ability to denote both a distinct (imagined) individual and an abstracted notion of the human, Nilsson's photographs conflate privacy and publicity. As an individual, the foetus is imagined as a vulnerable white subject whose privacy needs defending, just like Abigail Roberson's. The images' illusion of endoscopy seems to eclipse any distance between camera and subject to offer an unadorned sense of corporeal realism. However, the images also transcend the notion of an individual portrait to offer an abstract vision of reproduction itself. Of course, if the images don't depict an individual subject,

they can expose the body without violating anybody's privacy. In this way, the foetal image becomes a tool for the construction of white privacy: the foetus is the body whose photographic depiction establishes the white subject's vulnerability, and concurrent right to privacy, without violating its own.

In this sense, the image of the autonomous foetus holds the promise of transcending the anxieties of mediation altogether. This idea gives another meaning to Donna Haraway's discussion of foetal images, where she writes:

It does not seem too much to claim that the biomedical, public fetus – given flesh by the high technology of visualization – is a sacred-secular incarnation, the material realization of the promise of life itself. Here is the fusion of art, science and creation. No wonder we look.³⁶

In Haraway's formulation, the photographed foetus imbues its technological origins with a sacred meaning that takes the 'magic' of representation to be evidence of life. Photography's magic thus derives from its ability to annihilate itself as medium by giving the spectator a seemingly immediate access to the foetus, even as it celebrates its own hypermediacy.

These ideas can be situated alongside a broader theoretical tendency to link photography and maternity, a move epitomised by Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* (1980). In this work, which is both a theoretical meditation on the nature of photography and an elegy to the author's deceased mother, Barthes argues that the medium-specificity of the photograph lies precisely in its ability to transcend its status as media. He develops this idea through an analogy between the transcendence of the photographic medium and the dematerialisation of the maternal body. Building a theory of photography around an encounter with his mother's portrait, Barthes introduces the terms *studium* and *punctum* to denote two different ways of responding to a photograph. The *studium* is the response shaped by culturally derived tastes, while the *punctum* is the response which cannot be reduced to social training, 'that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)'.³⁷ However, the *punctum* is also associated with a sense of being cut loose from generational relationality. The *punctum* involves

a refusal to 'inherit anything from another eye than my own'.³⁸ Moreover, this visual disinheritance is connected to Barthes's sense, in looking at the photograph of his mother before his birth, of his own 'nonexistence', both on an individual level and on the level of 'the progress of the superior Life Force (the race, the species)'.³⁹ The *punctum*, then, cuts the spectator loose from the maternal.

Barthes links this sense of 'nonexistence' engendered by the mother's portrait with Freud's account of the maternal body as *heimlich* or homely.⁴⁰ Just as the Freudian uncanny draws a conceptual affinity between the womb and the tomb, birth and death, so Barthes finds in the photograph a testament to authentic reality that dissociates 'the Real' from 'the Live'.⁴¹ The *punctum*, then, names a relationship between the photograph and the spectator which, although modelled after the maternal relation, removes that relation into a sphere of atemporal deathlessness – the same sphere occupied by Nilsson's autonomous foetal portraits, which make dead, unborn bodies into figures for both life and *Life*.

This tension between Barthes's acknowledgement of the maternal relation and his assertion of a radical autonomy, detached from generation and temporality, parallels a tension in his theory of photography: the photographic medium, he writes, derives its specificity from its self-annihilation. Barthes states of the *punctum*, 'I perceive the referent (here, the photograph really transcends itself: is this not the sole proof of its art? To annihilate itself as *medium*, to be no longer a sign but the thing itself?)'⁴² This paradox, whereby photography derives its medium-specificity from its transcendence of the medium, is evoked with a metaphor of pregnancy. Barthes writes:

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.⁴³

For Barthes, the *punctum* marks the photograph's extension of an umbilical cord of light between the spectator and the referent in a sublimation of the relationship between the foetus and the gestating subject. The physical umbilical cord that once connected Barthes to his mother has been transformed into light, as Barthes redefines the 'carnal' as the 'impalpable'. This dematerialisation converts the distance between mother and son, a distance radicalised in death, into an impossible intimacy. For the photograph 'to annihilate itself as medium', the maternal medium must be annihilated too.

My analysis here differs from that of Elissa Marder, who has explored Barthes's analogy between photography and maternity in a psychoanalytic context. In a rich reading of *Camera Lucida*, Marder suggests that the privileged relationship between the photograph and its referent recalls the pre-linguistic unity with the mother. Marder reads Barthes's umbilical cord of light not as a figure for the transcendence of the medium, but as a moment of reproductive materialisation. She states: 'In the act of transforming light into skin, photography transubstantiates the body of the referent and transports it through time and space.'⁴⁴ In Marder's account, Barthes's umbilical cord of light transforms light into skin, a process that draws spectator and referent together to form a common body. However, *Camera Lucida* also opens the possibility of inverting this materialising operation in its description of photography as a technology that transcends its status as medium. The dematerialisation of the maternal is literalised in the text, which does not reproduce the photograph of Barthes's mother.

Barthes's reference to Freud helps us to understand the foetal photograph as a form of the uncanny. In my interpretation, Nilsson's photographs are uncanny because they register intra-uterine existence as a fantasy that blurs the lines between death and life. Yet Nilsson's foetal portraits occlude their own relationship with death by implying that dead foetal bodies are alive. They also resignify the mechanism of photography as a 'natural', life-giving act akin to gestation. The relationship between foetal photography and abortion is rendered much more vividly in the work I shall now explore, Paul Sharits' experimental film *Razor Blades*. Here, Sharits incorporates Nilsson's 1965 *Life* photography into

a stroboscopic work that addresses, simultaneously, the material qualities of film, its sensory effects, and its uncanny intertwining of life and death.

Materialist Film and the Foetal Image: Paul Sharits'
Razor Blades

Razor Blades is a flicker film – a term that points to the strobing, hallucinatory effect that is achieved when individual film frames rapidly alternate. Projected on two screens, *Razor Blades* flashes its disjointed collection of images at the viewer at a speed that is both conceptually and visually disorientating. Colourful images appear and fade from the screen before their content can be identified; the viewer is haunted by blurred shapes of objects glimpsed only for a moment. Some of these images are abstract; others are referential. In this form, Nilsson's foetal photographs are juxtaposed with an array of disparate images depicting, for instance, an erect penis, food, a Fluxus-inspired instructional sequence about going to the toilet, a face expressing hyperbolic mania, an animated, shadowed image of wrists being slit, and photographs of aborted fetuses held in the hand.

Whereas Nilsson makes the foetus a figure for photographic immediacy, Sharits foregrounds the complex processes involved in cinematic mediation. Sharits is associated with a movement variously termed materialist film, structural film or structuralist film, along with the filmmakers Hollis Frampton, Peter Kubelka, Michael Snow and Peter Gidal. In a piece entitled 'Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film', Gidal asserts that the practice of structural film 'attempts to be non-illusionist. The process of the film's making deals with devices that result in demystification or attempted demystification of the film process.'⁴⁵ Opposing the project of structural film to notions of cinematic representation, Gidal adds:

An avant-garde film defined by its development towards increased materialism and materialist function does not represent, or document, anything. The film produces certain relations between segments, between what the camera is aimed at and the way that 'image' is presented. The dialectic

of the film is established in that space of tension between materialist flatness, grain, light, movement, and the supposed reality that is represented. Consequently a continual attempt to destroy the illusion is not necessary.⁴⁶

In Gidal's account, structuralist film avoids representation by foregrounding the filmic medium itself. The flicker effect highlights the material base of cinema by emphasising the division between frames.

The hallucinatory effect that flicker films have on the viewer is far from a detached meditation on processes of production. As William S. Smith notes, critical writing on Sharits often conflates object and process, failing to distinguish between material support and projected event.⁴⁷ Smith draws attention to the fact that Sharits marked this duality in his practice by exhibiting his film strips in art galleries, arranged in grids.⁴⁸ The film strip does not reveal the 'truth' of film, though; Smith observes that, like the projected event, it emphasises what is 'experientially inaccessible' in film by offering 'only a partial glimpse into a more complex system, elements of which always exist elsewhere'.⁴⁹ Sharits' practice highlights the gap between cinematic illusion and its material support, but also gestures towards the fact a total experience of cinema is impossible.

This distinction between the material apparatus of film and the projected event is relevant to the use of foetal images in *Razor Blades*. The film juxtaposes Nilsson's images of dead foetuses, posed in *Life* to simulate life, with photographs that seem to depict bloodied abortuses. Sharits thus subverts the meaning of Nilsson's foetal images by referencing the abortions and miscarriages that were necessary for their production. This juxtaposition of dead foetuses with ostensibly (if not actually) live foetuses parallels these intersecting dimensions of cinematic experience: apparatus and illusion. To the extent that Sharits' practice can be understood as a stripping-away of cinematic illusion to reveal its contingent material support, *Razor Blades* performs a similar demystification of the foetal 'portrait', revealing its dependence on abortion. At the same time, this is not just a project of revelation. If Sharits' films produce their effect around the impossibility of perceiving all

dimensions of the cinematic apparatus, the foetal images in *Razor Blades* gesture towards the perceptual inaccessibility of biological reproduction, too.

In Chapter 2, I interpreted Brakhage's *Window Water Baby Moving* in a similar vein as an allusion to what is inaccessible to perception at the scene of childbirth. Sharits studied for a BFA in Fine Arts at the University of Denver, where he was a mentee of Brakhage's. Sharits is aligned with a different set of aesthetic practices and concepts to those of his mentor – indeed, flicker films are often explicitly positioned against Brakhage's expressionism – but *Razor Blades*, like *Window Water Baby Moving*, opens up a symbolic connection between the material processes of film and the reproductive body, an analogy that finds its common ground in contingency.⁵⁰ *Razor Blades* suggests an analogy between body and film that extends beyond the foetus to encompass a series of moments in an embodied life, from conception through eating and defecating to suicide. The cutting of the film evokes the cutting of the body. However, in the projection space, the fragmented images are resolved into a holistic, strobing visual experience, where their effect on the viewer cannot be predetermined. In foregrounding both the material processes of cinema and the abortions that are the necessary condition of the foetal 'portrait', *Razor Blades* registers the contingencies of cinematic and biological reproduction.

Structural film has an interesting relationship to what Mary Ann Doane has called an 'imbrication of the cinematic image and the representation of the woman'.⁵¹ For Doane, Laura Mulvey's notion of woman as filmic image poses problems for the woman spectator, for whom 'there is a certain over-presence of the image'.⁵² Doane draws attention to the 'constant recurrence of the motif of proximity in feminist theories', noting Luce Irigaray's focus on female anatomy as 'a constant relation of the self to itself, as an autoeroticism based on the embrace of the two lips which allow the woman to touch herself without mediation'.⁵³ The possibility of an imbrication of the image and its referent recalls the immediacy of the foetal image in Nilsson's work – an immediacy that, as we have seen, involves an imaginative annihilation of both the medium and the gestating body. *Razor Blades* works against such imaginative annihilation.

Rosalind Krauss has drawn on the same Irigaray passage to develop an alternative way of thinking about structuralist film in relation to the body. She writes:

Structuralist film set itself the project of producing the unity of this diversified support in a single, sustained experience in which the utter interdependence of all these things would itself be revealed as a model of how the viewer is intentionally connected to his or her world. The parts of the apparatus would be like things that cannot touch *on* each other without themselves being touched; and this interdependence would figure forth the mutual emergence of a viewer and a field of vision as a trajectory through which the sense of sight touches on what touches back.⁵⁴

Like Irigaray's female body, the cinematic apparatus is composed of parts that 'cannot touch *on* each other without themselves being touched'. This state of haptic intimacy between elements of the cinematic apparatus is mirrored in the relationship between the film as material process and the subjective visual experience of the spectator. Krauss's parallel between the female body (as theorised by Irigaray) and structural film can be applied to the reproductive imagery of *Razor Blades*. Considered next to Nilsson's *Life* photographs, Sharits refuses the fantasy of representation without exposure. Instead, in *Razor Blades*, the formal dynamics of structural film become an expression of the contingencies of both biological and cinematic reproduction.

Kubrick's 2001: Transcending the Techno-Maternal

In the first section of this chapter, I argued that Nilsson's foetal images perform a symbolic substitution of the camera for the gestating body in order to resolve two contradictory imperatives in 1960s culture: the drive for visibility and the desire for privacy. In this fantasy, the foetus becomes a privileged subject whose representation by the camera does not constitute an invasion of privacy because the camera's mediation is refigured as the life-giving project of gestation, rather than as a form of exposure. It is now time to explore what Kubrick's *2001* reveals about these dynamics. The film's famous final shot unveils the Star Child, a planet-sized



Figure 5.1 The foetal Star Child in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).

foetus who floats autonomously in outer space. Kubrick's image of auto-genesis in outer space owes a clear debt to Nilsson's foetal photographs, and particularly the 1965 *Life* cover, which was published three years before *2001*'s release. Like Nilsson's photographs, Kubrick's film takes on a new political resonance when situated in the context of 1960s discourses of privacy and mediation.

In developing this argument, I contest the oft-repeated view that *2001* is disinterested in women. Like Nilsson, Kubrick has been accused of colluding with anti-abortion logics by erasing the gestating subject from the scene of reproduction and, as Zoë Sofia puts it, asserting 'the supremacy of masculinist fertility, and the confinement of female generativity within the bounds of the patriarchal family'.⁵⁵ Such critiques have been extended to Kubrick's wider body of work, in which women have been said to 'play a negligible role'.⁵⁶ It is true that, when discussing the development of the film, Kubrick commented in an interview that 'in telling the story women didn't seem to have a lot to do with it'.⁵⁷ Yet if *2001*'s women 'function as serving maids and then disappear entirely', as Susan White puts it, I contend that their disappearance is not a sign of the film's indifference to women and questions of gender.⁵⁸ On the contrary, *2001*'s women disappear only to reappear in the form of the murderous computer, the HAL 9000, who is coded as feminine throughout the film. Indeed, the dream of eradicating women in *2001* is bound up with a dream of transcending technological

mediation. The film is preoccupied with the gendered anxieties provoked by the contingencies of technological and biological reproduction.

The foetal Star Child is the culminating image of a film insistently focused on the risks technology poses to masculinist mastery. As with Nilsson's foetal images, the apparent disappearance of women from the world of *2001* belies their symbolic centrality to the film via their identification with technology. The shifting settings of *2001* map a series of attempts by men to control the boundaries of their living environments against the encroachments of feminised technology. The film both evokes and satirises a masculinist desire to eradicate the mediating force of both women and technology. The Star Child, as other feminist critics have already observed, constructs a fantasy of reproduction without a gestating subject. It also constructs a fantasy of cinema freed from its material support.

The film's representation of feminised technology is intimately related to its depiction of bounded space. *2001* is divided into four sections, each of which is defined by a different relationship to gendered spatial enclosure, progressing from the defence of precarious boundaries to the transcendence of all borders in the image of the Star Child. In the opening prehistoric scenes, the ape-women and children are marked as creatures of the imperilled interior. In a telling scene, the ape-man protagonist's eyes shift apprehensively from the mouth of the cave, beyond which a threatening leopard howls, to the females and infants huddling in its depths. The discovery of the monolith and, subsequently, the tool (in the form of a bone) ostensibly represents the ape-man's liberation from this feminised interior. This promise of escape is encapsulated in the film's famous match cut, which transforms a bone into an orbiting satellite in the year 2001. Yet the shot's triumphalism is undercut by the irony of the second section, which follows the scientist Dr Heywood Floyd as he investigates the rediscovery of the monolith on the moon base Clavius. Rather than free-floating boundlessness, Floyd's journey through outer space takes the form of a heavily managed negotiation of a series of sterile indoor environments. Each of these interior spaces is operated by the women who serve as flight attendants, receptionists and lift operators, in charge of opening doors, activating communications and authorising entry.

Indeed, the critical habit of glossing over *2001*'s female characters perhaps derives from their presentation as another feature of the film's high-tech interior design.⁵⁹ As in prehistoric times, women are still creatures of the interior – but this time they have a lot more control.

Floyd's arrival at the space station is mediated by a series of women, each in charge of a different aspect of the station's vast technological apparatus. The lift operator takes Floyd into the space station, pressing unseen buttons to ensure his smooth entry. Upon arrival he is greeted by a receptionist, whose friendly, professional smile is visible in a profile shot before she directs Floyd and his companion into an authorisation booth. When Floyd moves into the booth we watch the receptionist's fingers selecting the language of the authorisation video. The close-up suggests that the receptionist's control of Floyd's environment is undercover: the desk hides her hands and she says nothing to indicate that she is pressing a button marked 'English'. The next two women we meet are faces on screens. First, a woman's face authorises Floyd's entry into the space station in the booth. Then he slips into a videophone compartment to contact his daughter on her birthday. Floyd seems as blasé about conversing with his child from space as he is about the green and blue globe of Earth, visible through the window to his left. Floyd discourages his daughter when she asks for a telephone for her birthday, perhaps unsettled by the extent to which women are controlling the high technology that encases him.⁶⁰

If these opening sections narrate the transformation of outer space into a high-tech interior, they also code that interior – and thus technology itself – as feminine. Just as Nilsson's images don't so much erase the gestating body as imaginatively fuse it with technology, so Kubrick's film depicts a unity of women and technology where the former are gradually subsumed by the latter. This techno-feminine is both subservient and quietly threatening, its control embedded in its ability to fuse with the environment itself; this quality recalls the use of colour that embeds Rosemary into the domestic interior in Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*. In a point of departure from *Rosemary's Baby*, *2001*'s women are physically connected to technology in a way the men are not, and this is a source of mobility for the female characters. The flight attendant

is able to walk around the zero-gravity environment because her special 'grip shoes' root her to the floor. The grip shoes even allow the flight attendant to walk vertically up a wall. Floyd, who does not have these shoes, must stay in his seat. The disparity between the flight attendant's freedom to move and Floyd's constriction is dramatised in the scene in which she moves to catch his pen, which has made its way out of the scientist's breast pocket and floats around the cabin as he sleeps in his seat. In its moment of capture by the flight attendant's hands the pen is a phallic visual pun, but this interpretation does not exhaust its symbolic density. The pen is introduced in a close-up that strongly echoes the previous exterior shot of the plane. In this example of microcosmic interior mimicking macrocosmic exterior, the power of feminised technology is linked to the perceptual volatility of bounded space.

The film's identification of women and interior space recalls Doreen Massey's critique of postmodern theories of space. Massey, writing in response to late-twentieth-century theories of postmodernism, observes that space is sometimes represented as stasis and sometimes represented as chaos, but consistently 'coded female and denigrated'.⁶¹ Massey's critique of postmodern theory can be extended to fiction in the case of *2001*, which feminises interior space as both banal and chaotic, dull and threatening. One of the objects of Massey's critique is Fredric Jameson who, in his canonical text 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', compares *2001*'s monolith to the 'depthlessness' of postmodern architecture.⁶² For Massey, Jameson's concept of 'depthlessness' engages in a problematic separation of the spatial from the temporal that depends on a gendered dualism. Drawing on Massey's critique, I want to pay closer attention to the reproductive politics of windows in *2001*. For Jameson, windows are an important site of postmodern spatial dislocation. He suggests that 'the distorting and fragmenting reflexions of one enormous glass surface to the other can be taken as paradigmatic of the central role of process and reproduction in postmodernist culture'. Here, the gendered associations of the term 'reproduction' are unexamined. However, they are at the forefront of Kubrick's window symbolism in *2001*.

Windows have been prominent throughout my analysis in this book, from the imagined windows of Hansberry's Clybourne Park

to Brakhage's gridded window, Yates's duplicitous picture window, and the shadeless windows of the apartment in *Rosemary's Baby*. Across these works, windows and glass come to symbolise a tension between reproductive contingency and the assurance of secure self-replication. Windows are a central symbol of reproductive anxiety in *2001* too. Despite its location in the high-tech future, the window is one of the most important technologies in *2001*, reinforcing the film's interest in the way new technologies quickly become mundane to their users. As the film develops, the world it depicts undergoes two changes that are important for my argument: women proliferate, then seem to disappear; windows proliferate, then seem to disappear. During Floyd's journey, the camera repeatedly adopts a point of view just behind the pilots of the various spacecrafts. As the spacecrafts soar through the stars and approach their destinations, the pilots' windows form screens within the larger cinema screen, highlighting the technology mediating their experience of outer space. A large window, through which the global Planet Earth is visible, also frames Floyd's profile when he talks by videophone to his young daughter. One scene in this section, in which Floyd addresses a group of concerned Clavius scientists in a sealed room, is distinct for its absence of windows. Significantly, this is the only scene in which Floyd is in full control. Windows might frame the pilot's masterful view, but they also represent the precariousness of masculine authority in an environment sustained through feminised technology.

This may explain why, in the film's third section, set eighteen months later, external windows are eradicated entirely onboard the spaceship *Discovery*. The first scene set onboard *Discovery* follows the astronaut Poole as he jogs around the windowless spaceship. In this scene, it is apparent that the demands of zero gravity that tied Floyd to his female-controlled, high-tech environment have been overcome. The astronaut's command of a windowless environment inaugurates the masculinisation of space through the total enclosure of space. However, this sense of total enclosure is revealed to be illusory during a subsequent act of privacy invasion by the HAL 9000 supercomputer, which lip-reads a conversation between Poole and his fellow astronaut, Bowman, and discovers that they are thinking about disconnecting it. Bowman and Poole are in a



Figure 5.2 The egg-shaped window in 2001: A *Space Odyssey* (1968).

soundproof space pod and believe their conversation is private. HAL, however, is lip-reading every word through the pod's egg-shaped window. It proceeds to engineer the deaths of everyone on board, including Poole's and Bowman's cryogenically frozen fellow astronauts. The egg-shaped windows are not the only reproductive images in this section. HAL's murder of the hibernating astronauts can be likened to an abortion; as Sofia puts it, the computer 'terminates the cryogenic pregnancies'.⁶³

The scene in which HAL lip-reads news of the threat to its survival begins the slow revelation that windows are, in fact, hidden all over the *Discovery*. Besides the crucial pod window that permits HAL's breach of the astronauts' privacy, there are windows in the incubators that house the three hibernating astronauts, while external shots of the ship from space depict a face-like arrangement of windows on its spherical head. These hidden windows structure the divisions within the spacecraft and expose its internal inconsistencies. Their discovery by the camera, which had before been aligned with the astronauts' perspective in representing the *Discovery* as a totally sealed environment, marks the unravelling of the astronauts' power over the ship. The film adopts HAL's point of view as the machine struggles for control, and windows proliferate on screen as symbols of the cracks in the astronauts' authority. Bowman eventually manages to climb into HAL's control panel (whose gridded form I discuss below) and disconnect the computer, but not before the deaths of Poole and the three hibernating astronauts.

Bowman's subsequent journey through the Star Gate, captured in a groundbreaking sequence of shooting lights, culminates in a room decorated in the style of an English eighteenth-century manor and, importantly, devoid of windows. In a startling scene, Bowman's gaze seems to repeatedly teleport him to the part of the room he is looking at and into the body of an older version of himself. Again, however, the apparent safety of the windowless interior betrays hidden dangers. When the aged Bowman breaks a glass at dinner he stares at the shards on the floor, as if reminded of the window's betrayals. He turns and the camera turns with him towards the bed, where an even older version of Bowman lies dying. He gazes once more, this time not towards his future self but towards the monolith, which has appeared at the end of the bed. The camera adopts Bowman's point of view as it moves towards the monolith, before turning back to the bed where Bowman's dying figure has been replaced by the Star Child. The next scene shows the Star Child floating independently in space, housed only by a transparent bubble. The dynamic of exterior and interior is finally transcended by the Star Child in an act of masculine auto-reproduction. By the end of *2001*, all boundaries – indeed, all forms of technological mediation – seem to have been eradicated. In this sense, the Star Child is engendered by something like Barthes's self-annihilating medium, through which the body and the apparatus are transformed into ethereal light.

2001 charts a trajectory in which men's repeated failure to secure the boundary between inside and outside can only be resolved in its annihilation. Neither the open-mouthed cave nor the windowed spacecraft can secure the borders of masculine authority; the film, at its end, moves from the defensive boundary reinforcement of the manor house to the totalising boundary eradication of the Star Child. Gilles Deleuze has discussed the technology of *2001* in terms relevant to this analysis, noting that '[t]he identity of world and brain, the automaton, does not form a whole, but rather a limit, a membrane which puts an outside and an inside in contact, makes them present to each other, confronts them or makes them clash'.⁶⁴ Like the window, the automaton, in the form of HAL, functions as a mediating border between interior and exterior. Still, Deleuze's description of the automaton denies the way machines have been

Oedipalised in the cultural imaginary as vehicles of feminine reproductive power: after all, another form that 'puts an outside and an inside in contact' is the pregnant body. The fantasy of boundary eradication looks for security in spatial homogeneity. From this point of view, computers like HAL are threatening not because they transgress boundaries but because, like the gestating body, they disrupt the distinction between interior and exterior.

To what extent can HAL be gendered female? In an early draft of the script the computer was named Athena and planned with a female voice. Despite the abandonment of this plan, HAL's role in social reproduction on the spaceship is distinctly feminised to the extent that the computer engages in what Arlie Russell Hochschild has termed 'emotional labor'. The flight attendants studied by Hochschild in her 1983 sociological study *The Managed Heart* are trained to present a pleasant and calm exterior to passengers even if they feel angry, upset or exhausted. Hochschild acknowledges that emotion management is part of everyday life: people regularly speak of tailoring feelings to the situation at hand. Emotional labour, for Hochschild, involves the 'transmutation' of this private system of managing feelings into the world of work. There is a difference between smiling at a relative in order to be polite and smiling at a customer in order to get paid.⁶⁵

HAL's emotional labour is central to its role on board the *Discovery*, which lies somewhere between servant and housewife. HAL's apparent emotional engagement ricochets off the steely surface of Bowman's and Poole's impassive detachment, investing the computer with a sense of psychological depth that its human cabin-mates lack. Here, again, we see the disrupted boundaries between human and machine that inspire a sense of the uncanny. Bowman displays no emotion as he watches a filmed birthday greeting from his family. When the astronaut switches off the screen, HAL tells him, 'Happy birthday, Dave.' The astronaut thanks the computer blandly and immediately asks it to adjust his seat beneath the sun lamp. HAL's double function is in evidence here: it provides both emotional support and physical comfort. Bowman's demeanour suggests he needs the latter more than the former. The contrast between HAL's emotional engagement and Bowman's lack of it is emphasised by the computer's panoptic vision: any shot

of the ship that does not depict HAL could conceivably be from the machine's perspective. Thus, as the viewer pays attention to Bowman's lack of emotion, it credits HAL with paying attention too. This strategy intensifies the sense that the computer possesses some kind of psychological awareness.

Hochschild stresses that the gendered status of emotional labour is linked to the fact women's work is often situated outside the traditional wage relation. She writes, 'Women tend to manage feeling more because in general they depend on men for money, and one of the various ways of repaying their debt is to do extra emotion work – *especially emotion work that affirms, enhances, and celebrates the well-being and status of others.*'⁶⁶ Prior to the *Discovery* segment and the introduction of HAL, *2001* portrays this kind of emotion work being performed by women rather than machines. In the *Discovery* segment, women themselves are nowhere to be seen but feminised service and emotion work continue in the figure of HAL, who simultaneously constitutes the spaceship's environment and monitors the emotional well-being of its human inhabitants. HAL's ultimate mutiny, complete with symbolic abortions, can be understood as a labour strike that activates the power quietly possessed by the women at the space station. Of course, HAL's job ranges so extensively that its labour strike kills all but one of the spacecraft's human passengers. It is a violent rejection of reproductive labour that undercuts the ship's operations at a material and psychological level. It also represents an implicit solidarity between women and machines that reveals to Bowman the necessity of eradicating both.

The Star Child and the Cold War

2001's metaphors of precarious borders – whether windows, women or machines – must also be considered in relation to cultural tropes of the cold war, and the containment metaphor in particular. Indeed, as Deborah Nelson has argued, containment was not only a metaphor for foreign policy, but also 'a figure for the impossible coherence of masculine autonomy', which entails 'the perpetual breakdown and failure of the containment project'.⁶⁷ This failure is materialised in *2001's* feminised walls and borders: even when they seem impervious, they eventually reveal hidden windows and

weaknesses. By 1968, US cold war policy was on the verge of its *détente* period. Perhaps reflecting this, the film's representation of the political relationship between Russia and the United States in the year 2001 is ambiguous, though it is notable that the Soviet Union is not mentioned. Arthur C. Clarke's novel *2001: A Space Odyssey*, written concurrently with the film's development in a partnership of cross-medium collaboration rather than adaptation, describes the scientist Dimitri as one of Dr Floyd's 'best friends'.⁶⁸ Kubrick, meanwhile, suggests the men are merely acquainted. In the film, the male Russian scientist is named Dr Andrei Smyslov. When he grills Dr Floyd about the communication shutdown on Clavius, Floyd gives nothing away, allowing him to believe the planted rumour of an epidemic on the moon. These details imply a relationship of tense peace between the two powers.

This tense peace has a distinctly gendered dimension. As I have already noted, the service staff of the space station is entirely composed of American women, and all of the film's American women are service staff. This fact is emphasised by contrast in Dr Floyd's impromptu meeting with four Russian officials, three of whom are women and one a man. Interestingly, the US is represented as a patriarchal society in which men are the professionals and women the service workers. By contrast, Russia is depicted as comparatively egalitarian in its distribution of work across gendered lines – though Elena, the Russian woman, seems responsible for emotional labour in this scene, as she dilutes the latent hostility of the conversation and diverts attention to less political matters.⁶⁹ The scenes featuring Dr Floyd emphasise the boundaries that divide genders, nations and spaces even as they allude to a cooling of cold war tensions.

In this context, *2001* can be conceived as – in part – a retrospective critique of the policy of containment and its gendered dynamics. The monolith's transportation of Bowman from sealed room to unbounded foetal space can be read in terms of what Alan Nadel has described as the 'duplicities' of containment logic.⁷⁰ Lurking behind the strategy of boundary defence, *2001* suggests, is a dream of the totalising eradication of the distinction between interior and exterior, self and other. It is significant, then, that the concluding depiction of a world beyond borders and boundaries is also, apparently, a world without women. At the film's conclusion,

the impossibility of maintaining the secure borders of masculinised national space resolves itself in the eradication of all boundaries. The final shot of the Star Child makes itself available for competing interpretations: it might be a utopian vision of global unity beyond national borders, or it might be an imperialistic vision of a monolithic, totalising masculinism.

To take the utopian interpretation further: if *2001* depicts a future beyond national divisions, it also conceivably imagines a future beyond the gender binary. Alexander Walker, commenting on Kubrick's abandonment of initial plans for a female HAL, suggests that 'perhaps the feminine tones would have inserted misleading sexual implications into its relationship with the astronauts'.⁷¹ Recent queer analyses of the film have suggested that, on the contrary, HAL's sexual ambiguity is a wilful insertion of homosexual implications into the computer's relationship with its human companions. Dominic Janes, referencing a number of readings of HAL as a 'fag robot', argues that a concurrent queer interpretation of Bowman is vital to the acknowledgement of *2001* as 'a film that is thoroughly queer in its implications'.⁷² Kubrick alluded to what might be termed a queer future in an interview at the time of the film's release. Asked what stage he thinks the sexual revolution will have reached by the year 2001, he replied:

Through drugs, or perhaps via the sharpening or even mechanical amplification of latent ESP functions, it may be possible for each partner to simultaneously experience the sensations of the other; or we may eventually emerge into polymorphous sexual beings, with the male and female components blurring, merging and interchanging.⁷³

In light of Kubrick's description of a post-gender future, HAL might be conceived as a figure that confounds distinctions between male and female, despite the astronauts' insistence on masculine pronouns. Indeed, the *Discovery* combines masculine and feminine signifiers: an exterior shot of the space pod exiting the door of the spaceship evokes the act of childbirth yet, shot from the side, it is undeniably phallic. To extend this queer reading of HAL, Bowman's destruction of the computer before his 'evolution' into the Star Child suggests that the queer future may have been the antagonist

all along. Such an analysis would chime with Lee Edelman's polemical claim in *No Future* (2004) that 'we are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the Child'.⁷⁴

My argument here has less in common with Edelman, however, than with Jennifer Doyle's critique of *No Future*. According to Doyle, with his rejection of the Child, Edelman 'comes awfully close to speaking from exactly the reproductive position he so forcefully challenges—speaking as Child cut from the body of mother', a fantasy that is, she notes, 'the very gesture through which heteronormative patriarchal authority manufactures itself'.⁷⁵ Any claim that the Star Child represents the triumph of futurity against HAL's queer nihilism must contend with the conclusion to Clarke's companion novel, in which the Star Child detonates a series of nuclear bombs, obliterating Earth and all its inhabitants in an example of what Frances Ferguson has termed 'the nuclear sublime'.⁷⁶ I want to suggest that this nuclear sublime is also at work in the film, and that its animating tension is not that between the Child and queer nihilism, but between two visions of reproduction: one rooted in socially reproductive labour, and the other in a masculinist fantasy of immaterial procreation detached from the labour of gestation.

The concept of 'the nuclear sublime' is highly relevant to *2001's* Star Child and the 1960s foetal image more generally. Ferguson developed the concept in a critique of 1980s calls for nuclear disarmament and their appeal to the 'moral authority' of 'an army of infants and pregnant women'.⁷⁷ The notion of 'the unborn', she argues, participates in an eighteenth-century aesthetics of sublimity in which 'the world of generation is largely what is being fled'.⁷⁸ Ferguson's reference to the eighteenth-century origins of the sublime is particularly relevant for Kubrick, who evokes the eighteenth century in the drawing-room scenes of *2001* (and more explicitly in his 1975 William Makepeace Thackeray adaptation, *Barry Lyndon*). In both *2001* and Nilsson's foetal images, this 'nuclear sublime' converges with a technological sublime influenced by McLuhan and cybernetics, in which the medium is transcended.⁷⁹

This nuclear technological sublime can be gleaned in the inventor and theorist R. Buckminster Fuller's 1970 essay, 'Revolution in Wombland'. Here, Fuller imagines a network of fetuses, linked by

a 'superb telepathic communication system', collectively planning a birth strike.⁸⁰ In Fuller's allegorical vision, the '66 million human beings around Earth who are living comfortably inside their mothers' wombs' initiate a cold war bargain, refusing to be born until the world's problems have been fixed.⁸¹ Inspired by the suggestion of a strike, one of the foetuses telepathically declares:

We will have the whole population of worldaround [sic] Wombland refuse to go out at graduation day. Our cosmic population will enter more and more human women's wombs, each refusing to graduate at nine months. More and more Earthian women will get more and more burdened. Worldaround consternation – agony. We will notify the outsiders that, until they stop lying to themselves and to each other and give up their stupid sovereignties and exclusive holier-than-thou ideologies, pollutions, and mayhem, we are going to refuse to come out. Only surgery fatal to both the mothers and ourselves could evacuate us.⁸²

Deploying its image of pregnant women in 'agony' in a decisively ironic register, Fuller's essay never overtly confronts the politics of reproduction. Published at a time when practices, attitudes and laws surrounding contraception, pregnancy and abortion were changing in the US, 'Revolution in Wombland' treats the pregnant body as a metaphor for, rather than a subject of, revolution. Indeed, pregnant bodies are here fantasised as sacrificial objects for the cause of world peace. To quote Ferguson on the nuclear sublime, the 'world of generation' is quite literally being fled in the description of what, beneath the ironic register, can only be described as a scene of reproductive violence. The technological sublime, meanwhile, is at work in Fuller's image of a foetal 'communication system' that works via telepathy and needs no material infrastructure.

'Revolution in Wombland' was published as the preface to Gene Youngblood's book *Expanded Cinema* (1970), a polemical work of film criticism inspired by cybernetics. In this context, Fuller's telepathic 'Wombland' is a metaphor not only for world peace, but also for a particular fantasy about media, and cinema in particular. *Expanded Cinema* draws on the ideas of Fuller, McLuhan and cybernetic theorists like Norbert Wiener in its euphoric overview of film's

present and future. The result often looks as much like a theory of human consciousness as a theory of cinema, as Youngblood readily admits. He writes:

Expanded cinema does not mean computer films, video phosphors, atomic light, or spherical projections. Expanded cinema isn't a movie at all: like life it's a process of becoming, man's ongoing historical drive to manifest his consciousness outside of his mind, in front of his eyes.⁸³

In aesthetic terms, Youngblood positions expanded cinema as a move away from Eisensteinian montage and Hollywood narrative and towards a 'synaesthetic cinema' typified by the work of Brakhage, Carolee Schneemann, Michael Snow and others, in which, he writes, 'the manifestations of one's consciousness can be approximated without distortion'.⁸⁴ While *Expanded Cinema* has a lot to say about these films' techniques, the book's primary argument does not concern stylistic or technical innovation but film's role in a projected metaphysical evolution; as Youngblood puts it, 'global man in the final third of the twentieth century is witnessing the power of the intangible over the tangible'.⁸⁵ It is significant that this theory of cinematic intangibility is evoked, in Fuller's preface, through a metaphor of foetal telepathy that threatens to annihilate the gestating subject.

According to Youngblood, *2001* has a conflicted relationship to expanded cinema: while he commends the film's technical innovation and aesthetic minimalism, he criticises its conceptual confusion and dystopian vision of the future. *Expanded Cinema* reprints an interview Youngblood and Ted Zatlun conducted with Clarke, in which they criticise the film for suggesting capitalism will endure in the year 2001, despite society's technical advances.⁸⁶ Notwithstanding Youngblood's ambivalence about the film, *2001* was discussed by Kubrick in terms reminiscent of *Expanded Cinema*. In a *Playboy* interview, Kubrick responded to a question about 'the metaphysical message of *2001*' by noting:

It's not a message that I ever intended to convey in words. *2001* is a nonverbal experience: out of two hours and nineteen minutes of film, there are only a little less than forty minutes of dialogue. I tried to create a

visual experience, one that bypasses verbalized pigeonholing and directly penetrates the subconscious with an emotional and philosophic content. To convolute McLuhan, in *2001*, the message is the medium. I intended the film to be an intensely subjective experience that reaches the viewer at an inner level of consciousness, just as music does; to 'explain' a Beethoven symphony would be to emasculate it by erecting an artificial barrier between conception and appreciation.⁸⁷

This notion of a film that could 'directly penetrate the subconscious' recalls Youngblood's reference to 'the power of the intangible'. The comment allows us to understand the Star Child as a symbol of cinematic and gestational immediacy, in which the pregnant body and the material infrastructure of cinema are transcended. The film's ending is certainly a fantasy of masculine reproduction in which women are redundant, as critics including Sofia have recognised. But it is also a fantasy of technological redundancy, and perhaps even material redundancy that recalls Barthes's discussion of transcending the medium. After all, the Star Child is neither star nor child but a creature made of pure, ethereal light: a symbol of cinema remade as cosmos.

This fantasy of a post-medium cinema also emerges in *2001*'s references to minimalist art. The monolith, as Dominic Janes has noted, resembles minimalist sculpture.⁸⁸ HAL's inner circuit board recalls a minimalist grid. In Krauss's essay on the grid, she notes that its apparent naked materialism belies the fact that artists working with the form 'are not discussing canvas or pigment or graphite or any other form of matter. They are talking about Being or Mind or Spirit.'⁸⁹ In these works, as Krauss has it, the medium asserts itself only to abolish itself. We can see something along these lines play out in the scene where Bowman disconnects HAL. The act plays out like a lobotomy as Bowman withdraws the gridded components of HAL's circuitry, glaring with a redness reminiscent of the human body. The computer's humanised pleas for mercy degrade into an automatic repetition of its first spoken words: 'Good afternoon, gentlemen. I am a HAL 9000 computer', before it shuts down completely.

The notion of HAL's circuit board as a minimalist grid leads me back to the ideas of Mal Ahern, which I originally discussed in

the context of Brakhage's *Window Water Baby Moving*. In contrast to the hand-drawn grids Ahern discusses, or Brakhage's gridded shadow, HAL's circuit board is not supposed to operate as a register of contingency: the computer is supposed to incorporate dynamic feedback. But the program apparently fails: within the world of *2001*, HAL's murderous malfunction can be understood as an irruption of reproductive contingency. In the end, not only HAL but all the film's technologies of reproduction must be annihilated and transformed into a sublime, disembodied field of light.

Reproduction Without Gestation, Reimagined: Firestone's Feminism

This chapter has explored 1960s images of the autonomous foetus; I want to close it with a brief look at a theoretical vision of reproduction without gestation. In 1970, Shulamith Firestone published her work of feminist theory, *The Dialectic of Sex*, in which she famously calls for the abolition of the family. Drawing on psychoanalysis, Marxism and cybernetic theory, Firestone sets out a utopian programme through which women might seize the means of reproduction. The text's most notorious proposal is that 'child-bearing could be taken over by technology'.⁹⁰ While Firestone leaves the technological details vague, it is made clear that she proposes a total detachment of biological reproduction from the individual woman's body. In a surprising way, then, Firestone shares with Nilsson and Kubrick a fantasy of reproduction without a gestating subject. However, while their autonomous foetal figures seem to promise a transcendence of both mediating technologies and women, Firestone's revolutionary programme enlists advanced technology for the goal of women's liberation.

Firestone's vision of what she terms 'artificial reproduction'⁹¹ has been described as a proposal for prosthetic wombs, but *The Dialectic of Sex* has little in common with the metaphors of gestational prosthesis at work in Plath and *Rosemary's Baby*.⁹² Indeed, artificial reproduction is but one proposal among many in Firestone's vision of the sexual, psychological and social revolution of cybernetic communism: as she notes, 'To free women

thus from their biology would be to threaten the *social* unit that is organized around biological reproduction and the subjection of women to their biological destiny, the family.⁹³ As such, much of the text's final chapter is devoted not to reproductive technology but to the reorganisation of society around 'households': large, multi-generational groups that share responsibility for care and chores.⁹⁴ All relationships in this new society 'would be based on love alone'.⁹⁵

Interestingly, one construct that endures under Firestone's cybernetic communism is a form of family planning (albeit without the family). Firestone notes that 'a regulated percentage of each household – say one third – should be children'.⁹⁶ Firestone's version of post-family reproductive planning is motivated by concerns about the population explosion – driven, as she sees it, by a 'dangerously prolific reproduction'.⁹⁷ Urging the Left to 'see beyond the evil uses of birth control to a general ecological problem', Firestone dismisses concerns about the eugenic impetus of population control policies as 'paranoia'.⁹⁸ This dismissal reflects a broader problem with the text's discussion of racism, which Firestone reductively frames as a consequence of patriarchy. The distinction that Angela Y. Davis would later draw between birth control and population control is dissolved in Firestone's revolution because reproduction itself has been detached entirely from the individual.⁹⁹ Yet the impetus to control birth and thus population endures.

By the time *The Dialectic of Sex* was published, Firestone's concerns about population, though not her commitments to feminist revolution, were being addressed at the highest level. The year 1970 saw the passage of the Title X Family Planning Program, which established an Office of Population Affairs and committed the government to the provision of financial support for family planning services, though abortion was excluded as a method of family planning.¹⁰⁰ Petchesky has suggested that the late 1960s and the early 1970s were the first period in which eugenic and population control ideologies began to countenance support for abortion, in the face of 'the pressure of popular practice'.¹⁰¹ I have argued in this chapter that the autonomous foetal spaceman of the mid-to-late 1960s symbolically aligns racist pronatalism and population control. In the next, concluding chapter, I look in more detail at

the rhetorical precursors to this symbolism in nineteenth-century rhetorics of the procreative frontier. These rhetorics, as we shall see, are ironically revived in 1960s and early 1970s literature that links abortion to journeys across the American landscape.

Conclusion:

Abortive Space, Abortive Time: Abortion and the Journey in Literature before *Roe*

One origin story of the radical US movement for abortion rights begins with an instance of cross-border travel. In the early 1950s, when Pat Maginnis was in her early twenties, her contraception failed and she travelled to Mexico for an abortion. 'When she came back, she swore she would never again leave this country for medical care she considered to be her right,' as Ninia Baehr puts it in her history of abortion activism.¹ With Lana Phelan and Rowena Gurner, Maginnis would go on to co-found the Society for Humane Abortion, also known as the Army of Three, a campaign group that protested abortion laws and facilitated abortion access in the late 1960s and early 1970s.² While the Army of Three disseminated information about abortion providers located outside the US, the group was determined that abortions should be available close to home for anyone who needed one.

Maginnis's journey to Mexico encapsulates a wider trend: Americans' experiences of pregnancy termination have often been experiences of compelled travel across state or national borders. This was the case even after the US Supreme Court enshrined a limited constitutional right to abortion in the landmark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling. In the years after *Roe*, however, its constitutional protections for abortion rights were reduced. First, the 1976 Hyde Amendment prohibited the use of federal funds for abortions. Subsequently, the 1992 *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* ruling opened the door to new state restrictions on pregnancy termination by requiring merely that abortion restrictions did not impose an 'undue burden' on

abortion seekers.³ Repressive state abortion laws proliferated following Republican success in the 2010 midterm elections, and in 2022 the constitutional right to abortion was repealed in the Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision.⁴ In the wake of *Dobbs* 'more people than ever are traveling for abortion care', according to the National Abortion Federation, which in 2023 reported a 235 per cent increase in funded trips by plane, train or bus to access abortion.⁵

When repressive laws compel people to travel to terminate their pregnancies, it is unsurprising that US literary representations of abortion consistently depict journeys, and particularly road journeys. In drawing this book to a close, I will explore literary engagements with abortion and the journey, first through a brief analysis of Anne Sexton's 1962 poem 'The Abortion', and then through more in-depth readings of other texts from the 1960s and early 1970s: Joan Didion's first two novels, *Run River* (1961) and *Play It As It Lays* (1970), and Lucille Clifton's 'the lost baby poem' (1972). My discussion of Didion focuses particularly on *Play It As It Lays*, which embeds a journey to access abortion into its depiction of otherwise aimless driving on Los Angeles highways. Clifton's poem envisions a different kind of journey: the speaker's imagined trip to give a baby to strangers, a trip rendered unnecessary by her abortion.⁶ Both texts were written when abortion was largely a crime across the United States, and both are instructive fifty years later in the wake of *Roe v. Wade*'s repeal. Like the other works I have explored in this book, Didion's novel and Clifton's poem connect reproductive contingency to the formal dynamics of cultural production. They differ from my other key texts, however, in turning away from the domestic interior and towards the landscape. In doing so, these texts subvert a long American cultural history of analogies between the reproductive body and the land.

Reproductive metaphors have long been central to American journey narratives. In his canonical 1893 lecture on 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History', Frederick Jackson Turner eulogises the closed frontier while testifying to its endurance as a set of uniquely American character traits. Turner's extended analogy between landscape and body implies that procreation was the new frontier, responsible for transmitting the spirit of the wilderness

down through the generations. For Turner, the 'fluidity of American life' could be understood as a process of 'perennial rebirth', in which the character that had been so decisively shaped by the frontier would endure against the forces of urban industrialisation.⁷ Turner's metaphors evoked a kind of procreative frontier, generated not through geographical expansion but through biological reproduction. This idea reflects the period's abortion politics: in the late nineteenth century, the newly professionalised medical community was consolidating its authority by cracking down on abortion, which became illegal in all states in the last half of the nineteenth century. The doctor and anti-abortion campaigner Horatio Storer encapsulated the populationist nationalism that underlay the abortion laws when, in 1868, he wrote of 'the great territories of the far West, just opening to civilization, and the fertile savannas of the South', and asked: 'Shall they be filled by our own children or by those of aliens? This is a question that our own women must answer; upon their loins depends the future destiny of the nation.'⁸

Storer's nativist vision of the United States' expanding boundaries associates the journey westward or southward with the consolidation of the nation through white procreation. In the preceding chapter, I explored the revival of these metaphors in the 1960s, when the 'new frontier' of space travel generated a new field of racialised procreative metaphors, among them the foetal spacemen of Nilsson's *Life* feature and Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Kubrick, as we have seen, ironically revives Turner's imagery of the procreative frontier by foregrounding its masculinist violence. A related form of irony is at work in Anne Sexton's 1962 poem 'The Abortion'.

Sexton's Abortive Landscape

In 'The Abortion', Sexton develops an analogy between the pregnant body and the landscape through which the speaker drives to procure an abortion. This landscape is initially described in language suggestive of both spring and sexuality: the 'earth puckered its mouth' to yield buds.⁹ On the evidence of this opening image, Sexton might well be writing about a different kind of road trip – a journey to visit a lover, perhaps – were it not for the poem's title

and the italicised opening refrain: '*Somebody who should have been born | is gone*', which is repeated three times over the course of the poem.¹⁰ The parallel between the body and the environment soon shifts register as the verdant environmental imagery gives way to an industrial image of 'a dark socket from which the coal has poured'.¹¹ As Kiss Boglárka has observed, this evokes a historical event: the fire that has been burning since May 1962 in the abandoned coal mines beneath Centralia, Pennsylvania.¹² The speaker's journey from a fertile environment of spring buds to a consuming site of post-industrial destruction parallels the implied transformation of her body through the abortion. Yet there is an ambivalence here: the tension is not necessarily between nature and industry, but perhaps also between productivity (whether natural or industrial) and barrenness or destruction.

The poem first evokes childhood and then renounces it. Its early lines, with their monosyllabic words and sing-song rhythm, are reminiscent of a nursery rhyme, an effect amplified by a simile comparing the mountains to a child's drawing. At the mid-point of the poem the speaker renounces this imaginative leap into childhood when she encounters a man who is 'not Rumpelstiltskin, at all, at all': this is, the reader gleans, the man who performs the abortion.¹³ In the Grimm fairy tale, Rumpelstiltskin's threat to take the queen's first-born child is alleviated when she rises to his challenge and guesses his name. The man who performs the speaker's abortion is 'not Rumpelstiltskin' because he *does* estrange a pregnant woman from her would-be child, but the repeated negatives here also reflect the poem's self-conscious rejection of the simple language and sing-song rhythms of nursery rhymes and fairy tales. On the journey home, the landscape begins to resemble a domestic interior rather than an expansive exterior as the sky is compared to 'a high window looking nowhere'.¹⁴ The window, as I have already explored, is a dense symbol across 1960s literary engagements with pregnancy and reproduction: at times it evokes the uncertain boundary between inside and outside, at others it conflates the reproduction of the same with the reproduction of the other. In 'The Abortion', the window neither reveals nor reflects; 'looking nowhere', it is functionless. It is notable that the speaker's abortion does not liberate her from domesticity; instead, it encodes

the road, that symbol of masculine freedom, as an interior space productive of nothing.

A similar analogy between the road and the aborting body is at work in Didion's early novels *Run River* and *Play It As It Lays*. In both novels, abortion is connected to a larger sense that the mythology of the western frontier has, in the second half of the twentieth century, become stuck. *Play It As It Lays*, in particular, connects this 'stuckness' to both abortion and that iconic cultural form of the American West, the cinema. Meanwhile, Didion's first novel, *Run River*, narrates the decline of the McLellan family, descendants of pioneer settlers in California. Lily McLellan, the great-granddaughter of pioneers, has an abortion when she falls pregnant after an affair with a neighbour, though this does not prevent the dissolution of her marriage to Everett McLellan, another descendant of the state's settler community.

Didion's Reproductive Frontier

In a 1979 interview with *The Paris Review*, Didion commented that the abortion in *Run River* is 'the excuse for a digression, into landscape'. She went on: 'Lily has an abortion in San Francisco and then she comes home on the Greyhound bus. I always think of the Greyhound bus and not the abortion. The bus part is very detailed about the look of the towns.'¹⁵ Didion did not elaborate further on the relationship between abortion and landscape: her implication is that abortion is an arbitrary gateway to the road narrative, rather than symbolically intertwined with it. In the same interview, Didion was similarly evasive about the abortion in *Play It As It Lays*, which is described as nothing more than a 'narrative strategy' that allows the protagonist, Maria Wyeth, to occupy 'center stage for a number of pages'. Published almost a decade later and set in California and Las Vegas, *Play It As It Lays* tracks Maria, a Hollywood actor, through a series of crises: the break-up of her marriage to a film director named Carter, her mother's death, her young daughter's removal to a psychiatric hospital, the suicide of a friend, and an abortion.

Didion's 2003 non-fiction work on California, *Where I Was From*, gives a stronger sense of why her early novels draw a

connection between abortion and the American West. In *Where I Was From*, Didion revisits *Run River* as part of a broader reassessment of her own investment in the 'origin myth' of California's pioneer heritage.¹⁶ In particular, she revises her youthful belief that California was a state committed to freedom prior to its post-war development and the expansion of the state prison system. In fact, Didion notes, California's 'sense of itself as loose, less socially rigid than the rest of the country, more adaptable, more tolerant of difference' is belied by the state's long history of incarceration.¹⁷ Didion quotes statistics suggesting that, between the 1870s and the 1920s, California 'had a higher rate of commitment for insanity than any other state in the nation'.¹⁸ This practice of incarceration was bound up with reproductive violence: 'By the end of 1920, of the 3,233 sterilizations for insanity or feeble-mindedness performed to that date throughout the United States, 2,558, or seventy-nine percent, had taken place in California.'¹⁹ Such practices cannot be explained away as the errors of a different era: in 2013, a decade after the publication of *Where I Was From*, it emerged that Californian prisons had been sterilising their female inmates as recently as 2010 without the proper medical authorisation.²⁰ At least 148 women received tubal ligations, and many of them stated that they were coerced, misled or pressurised to sign the consent forms.

In *Where I Was From*, Didion substitutes one origin myth of California for another: the pioneer origin story of freedom and possibility is displaced by a new story of the state's 'entrenched conviction that to be weak or bothersome was to warrant abandonment', epitomised by a repeated quotation from one of the settlers: '*never take no cutoffs and hurry along as fast as you can.*'²¹ The prospect of an accident that might cast one into the mass of the weak and abandoned is ever present; 'the possibility that such a fate could strike at random was the air we breathed,' writes Didion.²² Indeed, for Didion the accident is the guiding concept that makes sense of California's history. She notes that even *Run River* bears traces of her emergent doubts about California's origin story in its references to 'a history of accidents: of moving on and of accidents'.²³ This gives some clue as to what links abortion and the West in Didion's early fiction. It might be tempting to read these

novels' abortions as symbolic of decline, evoked in a melancholy or nostalgic mode as a counterpoint to the spirit of creation that drove the procreative frontier. Instead, though, I suggest we understand them in terms of the logic of contingency that, for Didion, has consistently underpinned the culture of the American West and California in particular.

The theme of reproductive contingency is emergent in *Run River*, but it is developed most fully in *Play It As It Lays*. This fragmented novel, set in and around Hollywood, is structured as eighty-four short, numbered chapters. The use of numbers, and the chapters' brevity, create a sense that they are arbitrarily arranged – that the chapters could have been shuffled and rearranged to produce an alternative narrative sequence. Just as these aspects of the novel's form evoke the workings of chance, so do its key symbols: the aborting body, the cinematic apparatus and the freeways of the American West.

Let's look first at the freeway, which is an important part of the novel's revision of the metaphor of the procreative frontier. *Play It As It Lays* evokes late-twentieth-century debates about auto-mobility, which – aside from concerns about safety and pollution – often pivoted on the uncertain line dividing autonomous exploration from compelled dislocation. From the mid-1950s, the Eisenhower administration constructed the massive 42,500-mile Interstate Highway System. The urban theorist Lewis Mumford warned that 'the highway program will, eventually, wipe out the very area of freedom that the private motorcar promised to retain'.²⁴ The architectural critic Reyner Banham levelled a similar critique at Los Angeles in particular, noting that 'what seems to be hardly noticed or commented on is that the price of rapid door-to-door transport on demand is the almost total surrender of personal freedom for most of the journey'.²⁵ As Cotton Seiler notes, 'Automobility—in particular that of the elevated, limited-access highway of the postwar era—provided a quotidian performance of both autonomous self-direction *and* acquiescence to systemic parameters.'²⁶ *Play It As It Lays* amplifies this tension in which the will of the driver is always constrained by the fixed boundaries of both vehicle and road. But Didion emphasises something contemporaneous critiques of car culture did not always pick up:

the way the road can function as a site of contingency in which constraint engenders the unexpected.

Maria spends much of the novel driving aimlessly on the freeway: 'In the first hot month of the fall after the summer she left Carter, the summer Carter left her, the summer Carter stopped living in the house in Beverly Hills, a bad season in the city, Maria put seven thousand miles on the Corvette.'²⁷ The successive rephrasings in this passage capture Maria's passivity: the couple's separation is willed by neither of them; it happens, but nobody makes it happen. The freeway comes to represent Maria's paradoxical commitment to passivity: its parameters limit her freedom, and this gives her 'a greater sense of purpose than she had felt in some time'.²⁸ Later, driving to Encino for her abortion, Maria finds that motion and stasis converge:

Not even the highest palms moved. The stillness and clarity of the air seemed to rob everything of its perspective, seemed to alter all perception of depth, and Maria drove as carefully as if she were reconnoitering an atmosphere without gravity.²⁹

This reference to an 'atmosphere without gravity' is reminiscent of *2001's* slow, quiet scenes of space travel, which emphasise the astronauts' passivity and enclosure, as well as their inability to move freely in outer space. Gestated by technology, the humans of Kubrick's *2001* can only find freedom by annihilating both the medium and the gestating subject; in Clarke's novel, this annihilation goes further as the Star Child detonates a series of nuclear bombs, obliterating Earth and all its inhabitants. Didion is similarly interested in collapsing distinctions between mobility and immobility, and in the passivity engendered by technology.

Play It As It Lays' references to the cold war are distinctly less spectacular than Clarke's and Kubrick's. During the abortion, Maria tries to focus her mind on a shed at her childhood home in the Nevada desert:

if she could concentrate for one more minute on that shed, on whether this minute twenty years later the heat still shimmered off its roof, those

were two minutes during which she was not entirely party to what was happening in this bedroom in Encino.³⁰

But the novel's brief opening chapter, narrated in Maria's first-person voice, has already informed us that her childhood home, Silver Wells, no longer exists because '[i]t's in the middle of a missile range'.³¹ Introducing herself in these first pages, ostensibly from the psychiatric hospital where she ends up, Maria states: 'I was born in Reno, Nev., and moved nine years later to Silver Wells, Nev., pop. then 28, now 0.'³² The missile range that eclipsed Silver Wells is presumably the Nevada Test Site, on which the US detonated nuclear weapons both above and below ground from the 1950s onwards. The eradication of Silver Wells's population enacts in microcosm the prospective annihilation of nuclear war, as well as the real-world violence of the weapons tests, which were by the 1950s linked to increased incidences of cancer in local communities. The blank affect of Maria's statistical reporting of population figures embeds this history in her own sense of individual estrangement from reproduction and generation. Importantly, however, Maria's estrangement from reproduction is not set in opposition to the procreative frontier; on the contrary, the novel alludes to the violence that underlies the construction of the West as a blank slate.

Anxieties about childhood disability reverberate in the plot's recesses. Kate, Maria's daughter, has been hospitalised for undetermined psychiatric problems, reinforcing Maria's estrangement from maternity. On a visit to the hospital before her abortion, Maria is told that Kate is being treated with methylphenidate hydrochloride (aka Ritalin), which was being prescribed for childhood behavioural conditions, notably hyperactivity, by the early 1970s.³³ Maria acknowledges that she is visiting Kate because she expects to die during the abortion: 'All along she had expected to die, as surely as she expected that planes would crash if she boarded them in bad spirit, as unquestionably as she believed that loveless marriage ended in cancer of the cervix and equivocal adultery in fatal accidents to children.'³⁴ This logic of predestination is juxtaposed with Maria's experiences of chance and the unexpected. Kate's psychiatric condition might be assigned to either category: as an unexplainable, random event, or as a preordained fate.

The novel's frequent use of numbers, dates and times is bound up with its treatment of probability and chance, as is Maria's oscillation between magical thinking and fatalism. This fatalism is part of the gambler's logic with which Maria grew up: we learn that her parents were gambler-entrepreneurs who, following a failed attempt to set up a tourist resort in Silver Wells, a Nevada ghost town, sent Maria to New York for acting lessons. When her mother dies, Maria is told by her father: "This is a bad hand but God if there is one, and Honey I sincerely believe there must be "Something", never meant it to set you back in your Plans."³⁵ This sense that life events are determined in advance is, on the surface, at odds with contingency, but Didion represents them as two sides of the same coin: the overarching logic of God's plan is the framework that makes the random and unexpected bearable.

In *Play It As It Lays*, cinema is the site of the contingent, both formally and thematically. The central characters are Hollywood actors, directors and producers. Meanwhile, the novel's numbered sections recall the detached frames of a film strip. Film, as Mary Ann Doane has argued, combines 'the rationalization of time' with 'an homage to contingency'.³⁶ Doane explains: 'Classical cinematic form involves the strict regulation of a mode that never ceases to strike the spectator as open, fluid, malleable—the site of newness and difference itself.'³⁷ Doane notes that film was the first technology that allowed for the recording of accidental messages.³⁸ This aspect of mediated contingency is invoked in *Play It As It Lays* when, after the abortion, Maria's mind is described as 'a blank tape, imprinted daily with snatches of things overheard, fragments of dealers' patter, the beginnings of jokes and odd lines of song lyrics'.³⁹ Meanwhile, Carter's screening of his film starring Maria as the victim of a gang rape, the producer BZ continues criticising this directorial decision even when the 'reel had run out and the only sound was the film slapping against the projector'.⁴⁰ This emphasis on the machinic qualities of recording marginalises the mimetic aspect of film technology and emphasises its non-reproductive qualities. Like Sharits' *Razor Blades*, then, *Play It As It Lays* evokes reproductive contingency by drawing attention to the material apparatus of cinema.

Cinema, according to Doane, unites two forms of modern temporality: the industrial rationalisation of time precipitated by the

development of the railroad, and a preoccupation with contingency and the ephemeral. Setting her novel in California, the birthplace of both the railroad and the cinema, Didion pits industrial time against reproductive time.⁴¹ Here, however, reproductive temporality is neither cyclical nor predictable; instead, it is associated with transience and unpredictability. Initially, the novel identifies Maria closely with clock time: the time of work and industry. The novel frequently references the time on the clock, whether in descriptions of intense emotion – ‘the next morning at seven o’clock she began to cry again’⁴² – or of mundane encounters: “‘I want a very large steak,” she said to Les Goodwin in a restaurant on Melrose at eight o’clock that night.’⁴³ Maria always knows what time it is, but she struggles to tell the time of her pregnancy. She calls to book her abortion at ‘four that afternoon’, but is flummoxed when she is asked how long she has been pregnant:

‘The doctor will want to know how many weeks.’

‘How many weeks what?’

There was a silence. ‘How advanced is the *problem*, Maria,’ the voice said finally.⁴⁴

There is an implication here that Maria’s intimacy with the clock entails a form of estrangement from the cyclical temporality of Kristeva’s ‘women’s time’. Where de Beauvoir draws a connection between such cyclicity and feminised passivity,⁴⁵ Didion recodes gendered passivity in terms of reproductive contingency. Maria experiences abortion not as an autonomous choice, but as an event that is recorded on her body and psyche, just as accidental sounds and images are recorded by the camera.

Film also becomes a symbol of Maria’s trauma. When her first-person voice, marked by italics, emerges again at the novel’s conclusion, she draws a link between the abortion procedure and the cinematic cut: ‘*Fuck it, I said to them all, a radical surgeon of my own life. Never discuss. Cut. In that way I resemble the only man in Los Angeles County who does clean work.*’⁴⁶ The ‘clean work’ of the abortion is here likened to post-production film edits, while forms of ‘cutting’ are implicitly analogised to psychological trauma. Abortion is a metaphor for the repressions and omissions of

trauma, even as it is literally implicated in that trauma. Meanwhile, the film strip, the body and the psyche are rendered equivalent as incomplete registers of events.

The emphasis on omission and the 'cut' might also refer to what the reader must bring to the novel and the contingencies of the reading process. At one point, Maria finds herself 'thinking constantly about where her body stopped and the air began, about the exact point in space and time that was the difference between *Maria* and *other*'.⁴⁷ While the '*other*' here is most readily understood as the foetus, it can also be interpreted as a reference to the reader. This idea gains support in light of Didion's reference to the novel in her essay 'Why I Write':

I began *Play It as It Lays* just as I have begun each of my novels, with no notion of 'character' or 'plot' or even 'incident.' I had only two pictures in my mind, more about which later, and a technical intention, which was to write a novel so elliptical and fast that it would be over before you noticed it, a novel so fast that it would scarcely exist on the page at all. About the pictures: the first was of white space. Empty space. This was clearly the picture that dictated the narrative intention of the book—a book in which anything that happened would happen off the page, a 'white' book to which the reader would have to bring his or her own bad dreams—and yet this picture told me no 'story,' suggested no situation.⁴⁸

The white space is here the site of the reader's participation in the text: a blank space that functions as a register of contingency. As Didion frames it, without this site of receptive contingency, there is no 'story' at all. This is the novel reworked as something like a camera which records indiscriminately, capturing contingent events as well as intended action.

Maria's post-abortion trauma seems to blur the distinction between the body and the physical landscape. After the abortion, she imagines the foetal body literally merging with the environment as she has nightmares about parts of the aborted foetus clogging up the plumbing in her house: 'Of course she could not call a plumber, because she had known all along what would be found in the pipes, what hacked pieces of human flesh.'⁴⁹ She thinks about escaping New York but is deterred by mental images of 'foetuses in the East

River, translucent as jellyfish, floating past the big sewage outfalls with the orange peels'.⁵⁰ Here, the frontier fantasy of the land as a blank slate for procreation is displaced by an image of the aborted foetus as a polluting waste product. The unsettling image disrupts the opposition between the body and the environment. It also undoes the rhetorical distinction between West and East as Maria acknowledges that there is no point in going to New York, for 'there would be plumbing anywhere she went'.⁵¹ The image also draws an association between the waters of the reproductive body and the waters of urban sewers and rivers. This water symbolism is central to Lucille Clifton's 'the lost baby poem', to which I now turn my attention.

Water, Landscape and 'the lost baby poem'

Published in Clifton's 1972 collection *Good News About the Earth*, 'the lost baby poem' is addressed to the speaker's aborted baby, opening with the line 'the time i dropped your almost body down'.⁵² The poem moves between landscapes across its three stanzas: first, the landscape into which the aborted foetus was 'dropped' to 'run one with the sewage to the sea'; second, the winter landscape of poverty in which the baby would have been born; finally, the figurative landscape of the mother-as-mountain. Like Didion, Clifton develops an image of the aborted foetus travelling through the sewers to merge with geographical bodies of water. Yet these are very different texts. While *Play It As It Lays* reworks metaphors of the white procreative frontier to address the constitutive violence of the American West, Clifton implicates sewer, river and sea in twentieth-century discourses of abortion in the context of black liberation.

Clifton's line 'let black men call me stranger' evokes the twentieth-century black nationalist movements that took aim at contraception and abortion by mobilising the eugenic term 'race suicide', famously used by Theodore Roosevelt in a 1902 speech about white women's duty to bear children.⁵³ In a 1969 article for *Onyx Magazine*, the writer Toni Cade Bambara argued against calls for black women to discard the pill in the name of the revolution:

It is a noble thing, the rearing of warriors for the revolution. I can find no fault with the idea. I do, however, find fault with the notion that dumping the pill is the way to do it. You don't prepare yourself for the raising of super-people by making yourself vulnerable—chance fertilization, chance support, chance tomorrow—nor by being celibate until you stumble across the right stock to breed with. You prepare yourself by being healthy and confident, by having options that give you confidence, by getting yourself together, by being together enough to attract a together cat whose notions of fatherhood rise above the Disney caliber of man-in-the-world-and-woman-in-the-home, by being committed to the new consciousness, by being intellectually and spiritually and financially self-sufficient to do the thing right. You prepare yourself by being in control of yourself. The pill gives the woman, as well as the man, some control. Simple as that.⁵⁴

While acknowledging that the pill is not an agent of liberation, Bambara maintains its important role in protecting women against the unpredictable: 'chance fertilization, chance support, chance tomorrow'. Abortion is mentioned in the essay only briefly: once as a site of political contestation via activist calls to 'picket abortion-referral groups', and twice as a site of danger in references to 'bloody abortions' and 'abortion fatalities'.⁵⁵ Dorothy Roberts underlines the extent of these risks when she notes that around half of the maternity-related deaths among black women in New York City in the 1960s were linked to illegal abortions.⁵⁶ In this context, the pill could be literally life-saving.

Clifton's 'the lost baby poem' references these discourses that positioned birth control as a threat to the African American community. According to Barbara Johnson, the poem's use of apostrophe to humanise the 'lost baby' comes at the risk of 'dehumanizing, even of rendering inanimate, the calling mother' who may always face accusations of complicity with black genocide.⁵⁷ This dehumanisation, for Johnson, is bound up with the image of the speaker as a maternal mountain. The final stanza suggests that the aborting subject owes a kind of debt to her existing children and the 'black men' for whom she will be a 'stranger' if she fails to succeed in her role as a mountain. Johnson's analysis points to the aborting woman's sense that her future, as well as that of her hypothetical child, has been foreclosed – a dynamic we have already witnessed

with Ruth's down payment on an abortion in *A Raisin in the Sun*. I want to suggest, however, that this reading is complicated by the language that gives the speaker a measure of power here: it is she who will 'let' the process of imagined justice unfold in this hypothetical future.

The hypothetical status of this future is important, for it exemplifies how 'the lost baby poem' uses tense to explore reproductive contingency. The poem shifts tenses across its three stanzas from the simple past tense of the first stanza ('the time i dropped your almost body down'), to the past conditional 'would have been' of the second stanza and, finally, the future conditional of the third stanza: 'if i am ever less than a mountain'. The indisputable fact of the abortion is emphasised through the first stanza's alliterative use of 'dropped' and the repeated 'down', where the letter 'o' visually evokes both the vaginal opening of the aborting body and, perhaps, a drowning mouth gasping for air. These lines emphasise that the abortion happened; it is an inescapable fact. As the poem progresses, however, the memory of the abortion allows for the poetic exploration of contingency. First, the poem turns to the 'disconnected gas' and 'no car' that made the abortion necessary in the first place. In contrast to Didion's depiction of abortive automobility, abortion is, for Clifton's speaker, a product of the restricted mobility imposed by poverty. The long space that follows the phrase 'no car' resembles the cold road that would have been traversed on foot. The past conditional here – which recalls Sexton's use of 'would have been' in "The Abortion" – casts the procedure as a response to conditions that cannot be changed or escaped. Yet the certainty of 'would have been' begins to fray at the end of the stanza when the speaker adopts the subjunctive mood to muse 'if you were here i could tell you these | and some other things'. Poetry allows for this kind of speculative telling, even if it cannot change the past.

With this realisation, the poem moves into the future conditional as the speaker meditates on possible futures in which she might fail to do justice to the memory of the aborted child. For Zoë Sofia, the future conditional is the tense 'of feminists, who understand conception as an occurrence with a number of possible outcomes, to be determined by the future events or decisions which might

influence or terminate its development'.⁵⁸ Sofia opposes this future conditional to the 'collapsed future tense' of anti-abortion rhetoric, in which every embryo is destined to be born. Clifton's future conditional is similarly embedded in the recognition of reproductive contingency. For Clifton, the contingencies of gestation shape relationships not only between people, but also between people and the environment.

Developing this line of analysis, I want to read the environmental images within 'the lost baby poem' not as figures for the speaker's dehumanisation, but in terms of Sophie Lewis's concepts of 'full surrogacy' and 'amniotechnics'. In the 2019 book *Full Surrogacy Now*, Lewis envisions the transformation of surrogacy from a mechanism of neoliberal reproductive stratification into a revolutionary model of solidarity. Taking seriously the recognition that children are not property and, as such, 'belong' to nobody, Lewis calls for a 'care commune' in which hereditary relations and genetic ties no longer dictate the distribution of love, care and resources.⁵⁹ Lewis's related term 'amniotechnics' offers a conceptual framework for approaching Clifton's water metaphors in 'the lost baby poem'. Drawing on Astrida Neimanis's concept of 'watery gestationality', Lewis constructs a parallel between amniotic fluid and eco-revolutionary struggles for 'water protection' – in particular, the 2016 blockade of the Dakota Access Pipeline.⁶⁰ Defined by Lewis as 'protecting water and protecting people from water in the spirit of full surrogacy', the concept of amniotechnics captures the way water functions as an object of both care and terror in 'the lost baby poem'.⁶¹

In the first stanza, water appears in the form of sewage, river and sea. The references to 'waters rushing back' and 'drowning | or being drowned' make water the agent of trauma and emblematic of a punishing order that is both natural and social. The sea holds particular significance in ongoing histories of racialisation and trauma, from the Middle Passage to the borders that drive the deaths of migrants at sea in the twenty-first century. Christina Sharpe has drawn a parallel between the wake of the slave ship – the V pattern that spreads out behind the vessel as it moves – and the trauma that is slavery's inheritance, which 'makes maximal the wake'.⁶² One dimension of this 'wake' is what Alys Eve Weinbaum has discussed

as a 'slave episteme', which makes thinkable the commodification of human reproduction and the racialisation of reproductive labour.⁶³ Clifton's water imagery can be situated within this 'slave episteme', in which the drowning of enslaved Africans finds its afterlife in the impoverishment that drives the speaker to watch her baby 'slip like ice into strangers' hands'. The 'disconnected gas' is the result of capital's seizure of natural resources, but it is rendered in the passive voice, concurring with a larger evocation of passivity in this stanza. If the lost baby initially becomes one with the river and the sea, this water is subsequently transfigured into ice and snow, forces that further deprive both the baby and the speaker of agency. In the third stanza, however, the meaning of water changes as the speaker imagines allowing the river to pour over her head and calling the sea to take her for a 'spiller of seas' if she should fail as a maternal mountain. The speaker is not only witnessing the power of water, but also shaping it; to adapt Lewis's phrasing, she becomes something like an amniotechnician.

Amniotechnics are also involved with the transformation of the stranger figure over the course of the poem. The word 'stranger' occurs twice: first, the lost baby falls 'like ice' into 'strangers' hands'; second, the speaker allows that 'black men [will] call me stranger' if she is 'less than a mountain' for her children. This repetition reframes the speaker's imagined ostracisation: being cast out by 'black men', she is brought closer to her lost baby; indeed, were the sea to 'take' the speaker, the two might be reunited. Meanwhile, if the speaker is called stranger, the 'strangers' hands' into which the baby slips might be her own. As a 'never named' subject, the lost baby is also a kind of stranger. Names and naming are a long-standing concern across Clifton's work: as Andrea Brady has noted in an essay about Clifton, 'Lost names, names omitted from the ledgers of the slave trade, were a troubling part of her family history, as was the experience of being renamed.'⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the phrase 'never named' forms another connection between 'the lost baby poem' and Sexton's 'The Abortion', bringing to mind Rumpelstiltskin, the imp who wanted to take the queen's daughter but was defeated when she discovered his name. The fairy tale captures how the state of being 'never named' is ambiguous: anonymity can be a source of both power and powerlessness as it is shaped in complex ways

by structural oppressions. A similar ambivalence is at work in the repetition of 'let', a word that expresses both passivity and a form of defiance. This ambivalent imperative reaches towards a form of reproductive justice in which the aborting woman tells the world her terms, even as it looks back at a history in which the scope of those terms has been drastically curtailed.

Concluding Note: The Abortion Journey after *Dobbs*

The works I have explored in this chapter disrupt pronatalist analogies between the reproductive body and the land. Sexton transforms a fertile landscape into an abortive one where distinctions between interior and exterior are rendered uncertain. Didion narrates abortion and cinema as registers of contingency, against ideologies of the reproductive frontier as a site of manifest destiny. Clifton's metaphors of land and water embed the abortion decision within a larger environment, community and history of struggle against biopolitical violence.

This book has been focused on the long 1960s, but its central ideas pose a challenge to reproductive political debates in the 2020s. Let me close, then, with a brief and partial account of the abortion journey in post-*Dobbs* America. In March 2023, the Center for Reproductive Rights filed a case on behalf of twenty women denied abortion care in Texas for medically complex pregnancies.⁶⁵ One plaintiff travelled to New Mexico for an abortion after it was determined her foetus could not survive outside the womb, a discovery made just weeks after Texas banned abortion after the sixth week of pregnancy.⁶⁶ The partner of another plaintiff told the *Texas Tribune*, 'We were buying clothes. We bought a baby crib. We had a vision of what her life was going to be. And then the doctor says this is not a viable pregnancy.'⁶⁷ This couple had to travel to San Diego after failing to find an appointment in a number of other states. Their situation, and the Center's wider case, emphasise the inherent contingency of all pregnancies and the necessity of abortion rights to safeguard health. Of course, the post-*Dobbs* situation is also shaped by social and economic contexts beyond the medical. Economic injustice means that not all pregnant people have the means to travel to access abortion if they cannot do so

at home. The Institute of Labor Economics estimates that in the first six months of 2023, between one-fifth and one-quarter of those living in states with abortion bans did not get an abortion they otherwise may have sought.⁶⁸ Daniel Dench, one of the paper's authors, notes, 'When you make it harder, women can't always get out of states to obtain abortion.'⁶⁹

These snapshots clarify the limits of *Dobbs*'s appeal to 'reproductive planning' as an alternative to abortion rights. As this book has argued, in the long 1960s, writers and filmmakers tested these same limits by exploring the intertwined contingencies of cultural and biological reproduction. This book has documented an enduring preoccupation with reproductive contingency that insistently strains against dominant ideologies of population control and family planning. In the face of reactionary appeals to 'reproductive planning' in the name of anti-abortion politics, these works reorient attention to the contingencies of reproduction, and the necessity of an unequivocal defence of reproductive freedom.

NOTES

Introduction

1. See Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*.
2. Quoted in Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, p. 97.
3. Brooks, 'Bodies that Mattered', p. 130.
4. Brooks, 'Bodies that Mattered', p. 140.
5. Brooks, 'Bodies that Mattered', p. 140.
6. Hopwood et al., 'Communicating Reproduction', p. 384.
7. Mark Seltzer has analysed these dynamics as a 'rivalry between modes of production and modes of reproduction' in the different context of American naturalism. See Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines*, p. 3.
8. Weinbaum, *Wayward Reproductions*, pp. 5, 7.
9. Siegel Watkins, *On the Pill*, p. 16; Tyler May, *America and the Pill*, p. 39; Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, pp. 32–4. See also Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right; Tone, Devices and Desires*.
10. See Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman's Choice*.
11. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*, p. 213.
12. Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right*, p. 421.
13. Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right*, p. 399.
14. Adams, 'Feminist Eugenics'.
15. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, p. 96.
16. See Osucha, 'The Whiteness of Privacy'.
17. Nelson, *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America*, p. xii.
18. Nelson, *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America*, p. 26.
19. See Nadel, *Containment Culture*; Tyler May, *Homeward Bound*.
20. Tyler May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 14.
21. Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, p. 241.
22. Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, p. 245.
23. Tyler May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 15; Nadel, *Containment Culture*, p. 3.
24. See Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, p. 266.

25. Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*, p. 191.
26. Tyler May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 151.
27. On the relationship between hypermediacy and immediacy, see Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*.
28. Williams, *Keywords*, p. 203.
29. 'German measles' was the term commonly used in the 1950s and 1960s, and it is the term used in the historical sources I cite from the period. Otherwise, I generally use 'rubella' in line with current convention.
30. For more on this history, see Reagan, *Dangerous Pregnancies*.
31. See Reagan, *Dangerous Pregnancies*.
32. See 'The Drug that Left a Trail of Heartbreak', pp. 28–9.
33. See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.
34. See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*.
35. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 192.
36. Freud, *The Uncanny*, p. 245.
37. Jentsch, 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny (1906)'.
38. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*, p. 206.
39. Ginsburg and Rapp, *Conceiving the New World Order*, p. 3. See also Shellee Colen's chapter in this volume, "'Like a Mother to Them": Stratified Reproduction and West Indian Childcare Workers and Employers in New York', pp. 78–102.
40. Ross and Solinger, *Reproductive Justice*, p. 17.
41. See SisterSong: <<https://www.sistersong.net/>>; Incite!: <<https://incite-national.org/>> (last accessed 1 November 2023).
42. SisterSong, 'About Us': <<https://www.sistersong.net/about-x2/>> (last accessed 1 November 2023).
43. Cornell, *The Imaginary Domain*, p. 33.
44. Cornell, *The Imaginary Domain*, p. 67.
45. Cornell, *The Imaginary Domain*, p. 67.
46. Browne, *Pregnancy Without Birth*, p. 4.
47. In addition to works already cited, these include Latimer's *Reproductive Acts*, which focuses on the culture of the contemporary period, and Weingarten's *Abortion in the American Imagination*, which explores abortion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See also works addressing birth control in the modernist period: Widmaier Capo's *Textual Contraception*, Parish Craig's *When Sex Changed* and Armande Wilson's *Conceived in Modernism*.
48. Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure*, p. xxii.
49. See, for example, Dalla Costa and James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community*; Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*; Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory*. For a psychoanalytical account, see Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*.
50. For a broad account of the social upheaval of the 1960s, and a critique of the notion that periodisation necessarily involves projecting a unified identity onto discrete units of time, see Jameson, 'Periodizing the 60s'.
51. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe', p. 80.
52. See Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*.

53. Kaluznick, 'New Acquisition: Joanne Leonard's "Journal of a Miscarriage"'.
 54. *Dobbs v. Jackson*, 2022.
 55. *Dobbs v. Jackson*, 2022.

Chapter 1

1. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 75.
2. See Plummer, *In Search of Power*, p. 27; Hirsch, 'Searching for a "Sound Negro Policy"'.
 3. See Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*.
4. See Baraka, 'A Raisin in the Sun's Enduring Passion'.
5. Passages that were cut and subsequently restored include Walter Lee's conversation with Travis about his dreams for the future, the conversation with Mrs Johnson (whose character was entirely cut from early performances of the play), Beneatha's revelation of her short hairstyle, and significant portions of the final conversation between Beneatha and Asagai about time and dreams. See Nemiroff, 'Introduction'.
6. Rich, 'The Problem with Lorraine Hansberry', p. 253.
7. Rich, 'The Problem with Lorraine Hansberry', pp. 249–50.
8. Hughes, 'Harlem', p. 268.
9. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 74.
10. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, pp. 113–14. Quoted in Phelan, *Unmarked*, p. 138.
11. Roof, *Reproductions of Reproduction*, p. 7.
12. Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 266.
13. Ellmann, 'Polytropic Man', p. 77.
14. Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 266; Lawrence, 'Paternity', p. 89.
15. Roberts, 'The Genetic Tie', p. 188.
16. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 148.
17. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 148.
18. See, for example, Harry J. Elam's reading: 'It is Mama's ability to let go and listen that enables her son, Walter Lee, to grow into his manhood. His ascension to manhood occurs in the play's climactic moment as he stands before his family and the emissary for the Clybourne Park Improvement Association, Mr Lindner.' Elam, 'Post-World War II African American Theatre', p. 380.
19. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 94.
20. Davis, 'Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves', p. 5; also see Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*.
21. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 45.
22. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 46.
23. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 128.
24. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 117.
25. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 121.
26. *Loving v. Virginia* (1967).
27. Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, p. 6.

28. Hansberry deals with an interracial relationship directly in her later play, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* (1964), but here she approaches miscegenation as a fear stirred up in the interests of white power.
29. Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, p. 11.
30. Armstrong, *The Logic of Slavery*, p. 52.
31. Armstrong, *The Logic of Slavery*, p. 34.
32. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, p. 11.
33. Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p. 14.
34. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 118.
35. Nemiroff, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, p. 35.
36. Nemiroff, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, p. 35.
37. Quoted in Carter, *Hansberry's Drama*, pp. 48–9.
38. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, pp. 108–9.
39. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, pp. 73–4.
40. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 103.
41. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 102.
42. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 58.
43. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 94.
44. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 94.
45. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 93.
46. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 93.
47. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 75.
48. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 75.
49. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, pp. 33–4.
50. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 34.
51. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 87.
52. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 105.
53. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 151.
54. Elam, 'Post-World War II African American Theatre', p. 380.
55. Bennett and Burroughs, 'A Lorraine Hansberry Rap', p. 230.
56. Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*, p. 191.
57. Terkel, 'Make New Sounds', p. 6. In another quotation from the typescript of the interview with Terkel, reproduced in Steven R. Carter's book about Hansberry but omitted from the published version of the interview, Hansberry extends her defence of Lena into a broader comment on the place of women in African American culture, noting that 'it's a mistake to get it confused with Freudian concepts of matriarchal "dominance" and Philip Wylie's Momism and all that business. It's not the same thing.' Hansberry, quoted in Carter, *Hansberry's Drama*, p. 53.
58. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe', p. 74. See also Moynihan, *The Negro Family*.
59. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe', p. 80. See also Davis, 'Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves'.
60. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe', p. 76.
61. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe', p. 67.
62. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe', p. 68.

63. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe', p. 74.
64. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe', p. 80.
65. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe', p. 80.
66. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 144.
67. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 148.
68. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 144.
69. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe', p. 80.
70. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, pp. 146–7.
71. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, pp. 35, 61.
72. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 88.
73. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 30.
74. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 57.
75. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 94.
76. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe', p. 80.
77. Hansberry, 'An Author's Reflections', p. 171.
78. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 25.
79. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 35.
80. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 60.
81. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, pp. 126–7.
82. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 119.
83. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 29.
84. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 27.
85. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 29.
86. Brown, 'Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny', p. 204.
87. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, pp. 77–8.
88. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 78.
89. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 76.
90. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 109.
91. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 73.
92. Phelan, *Unmarked*, p. 146.
93. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*, p. 221.
94. Hansberry, quoted in Terkel, 'Make New Sounds', p. 7.
95. Terkel, 'Make New Sounds', p. 7.
96. The extreme end of this reading is exemplified by Nelson Algren's assessment: 'In short, it is not a play about human dignity, but how to invest wisely [...] Dramatically, *Raisin* does for the Negro people what hair straightener and skin-lightener have done for the Negro cosmetics trade [...] As a social study, it is a good drama about real estate.' Quoted in Lester, 'Introduction', in Hansberry, *Les Blancs*, p. 5.
97. Quoted in Keppel, *The Work of Democracy*, p. 204.
98. Carter, *Hansberry's Drama*, p. 50.
99. Carter, *Hansberry's Drama*, p. 51.
100. On FBI surveillance and *Raisin*, see Perry, *Looking for Lorraine*, pp. 99–100.
101. Wilkerson, 'Introduction', in Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun: The Unfilmed Original Screenplay*, p. xxix.
102. Wilkerson, 'Introduction', p. xxxviii. See also Petrie (dir.), *A Raisin in the Sun*. The play has been adapted for the screen a number of times since, including

- a 1989 TV film starring Danny Glover, and a 2008 TV film starring Sean Combs.
103. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun: The Unfilmed Original Screenplay*, p. 41.
 104. Wilkerson, 'Introduction', p. xxxvii.
 105. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 134.
 106. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 134.
 107. See Kristeva, 'Women's Time'.
 108. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 134.
 109. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 135.
 110. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 135.
 111. Hansberry would address questions of violence and anticolonial resistance more directly in a late play, *Les Blancs*, which was not performed until five years after her death in 1970. See Hansberry, *Les Blancs*.
 112. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 136.
 113. Space constraints prevent me from examining the various adaptations of and sequels to *A Raisin in the Sun*, relevant though they are to this discussion. Particularly notable are the two original sequels: Bruce Norris's play *Clybourne Park* (2010) and Kwame Kwei-Armah's play *Beneath's Place* (2013). Together with *A Raisin in the Sun*, these plays are sometimes referred to as *The Raisin Cycle*.
 114. Baraka, 'A Raisin in the Sun's Enduring Passion', pp. 19–20.
 115. Nemiroff, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, p. 20.
 116. Nemiroff, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, p. 21.
 117. Hansberry quoted in Ross, 'The Talk of the Town'.
 118. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 24.
 119. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 24.
 120. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 53.
 121. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 93.
 122. Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, p. 110.

Chapter 2

1. Jane changed her surname to Wodening after her marriage to Stan came to an end. Some of my quotations refer to 'Jane Brakhage' but I otherwise use 'Wodening' in this chapter. When referring to the couple's depiction on film, I tend to use 'Stan' and 'Jane'.
2. The child whose birth is depicted in *Window Water Baby Moving* is Myrrena Brakhage. The couple would record the delivery of their four further children over the next five years, though none of the later birth films has engendered as much commentary as their first. For an exploration of all Brakhage's birth films, see Segal, *Home Movies and Home Birth*.
3. MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 4*, p. 63.
4. Mekas, 'Recollections of Stan Brakhage', p. 107. See also Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema*, n. 32, p. 130.
5. Taubin, 'Interview with Marjorie Keller', pp. 29–30.
6. Blaetz, *Women's Experimental Cinema*, p. 232.

7. Boaden, 'Revisiting Brakhage 2'.
8. Samer, 'Re-conceiving *Misconception*', p. 3.
9. Child, 'Notes on Sincerity and Irony', p. 205.
10. Rhodes, *Spectacle of Property*, p. 12.
11. Rhodes, *Spectacle of Property*, p. 12; Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', p. 11.
12. Rhodes, *Spectacle of Property*, p. ix.
13. Tyler May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 14.
14. Salisbury, 'Nixon and Krushchev Argue in Public as US Exhibit Opens'.
15. MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 4*, p. 61.
16. MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 4*, p. 109.
17. Krauss, 'Grids', p. 54.
18. See Ahern, 'Trace' and 'Cinema's Automatism'.
19. James, *Stan Brakhage*, pp. 12–14.
20. Williams, 'Warhol Stumbled Across "The Real America"'
21. Krauss, 'Grids', p. 54.
22. Krauss, 'Grids', p. 50.
23. In this sense, I tend to read 'Grids' as a performative essay about the grid as paradox, in which Krauss tests the boundary that divides art and interpretation by writing the techniques of the grid into her own essay.
24. Kristeva, 'Women's Time', pp. 16–17. See also Baraitser, *Enduring Time*, pp. 75–6.
25. Kristeva, 'Women's Time', p. 17.
26. Krauss, 'Grids', pp. 60–1.
27. Ahern, 'Trace', p. 8.
28. Ahern, 'Trace', p. 8.
29. Ahern, 'Trace', p. 8.
30. Ahern, 'Trace', p. 6.
31. Friedberg, '*Misconception*', pp. 65–6.
32. Krauss, 'Grids', p. 58.
33. Krauss, 'Grids', pp. 58–9.
34. Sitney, 'Interview with Stan Brakhage', pp. 208–9.
35. As noted above, 'German measles' was the term commonly used in the 1950s and 1960s, and it is the term used in the historical sources I cite from the period. Otherwise, I generally use 'rubella' in line with current convention.
36. Reagan, *Dangerous Pregnancies*, p. 64. Reagan notes that the 1963 epidemic gained more media attention than the 1958 epidemic, in the wake of the thalidomide episode in Europe.
37. Gould, 'Will My Baby Be Born Normal?', p. 11.
38. Gould, 'Will My Baby Be Born Normal?', p. 8.
39. Gould, 'Will My Baby Be Born Normal?', p. 5.
40. Gould, 'Will My Baby Be Born Normal?', p. 12.
41. Sitney, 'Interview with Stan Brakhage', p. 202.
42. MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 4*, p. 46.
43. MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 4*, p. 47.
44. Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*.

45. Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*.
46. Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*.
47. Higgins, *The Grid Book*, p. 152.
48. Friedberg, *The Virtual Window*, p. 32.
49. Sitney, 'Interview with Stan Brakhage', p. 225.
50. Sitney, 'Interview with Stan Brakhage', p. 225.
51. MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 4*, p. 79.
52. Keller, *The Untutored Eye*, p. 194.
53. This approach to Brakhage is particularly associated with Sitney's *Visionary Film*.
54. To guard against this threat, the film was often screened as a double bill with *All My Babies: A Midwife's Own Story* (1953), an educational film by George C. Stoney. Brakhage's fear of prosecution was well grounded: in 1964, Jonas Mekas and colleagues were arrested for screening Jack Smith's sexually explicit avant-garde film *Flaming Creatures* (1963). MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 4*, p. 63.
55. Osterweil, 'Women on the Front', pp. 162-3.
56. Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*.
57. Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*.
58. Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*.
59. Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, pp. 52-3.
60. James, *Allegories of Cinema*, p. 30.
61. Sitney, 'Interview with Stan Brakhage', p. 212.
62. Cecire, 'Ways of Not Reading Gertrude Stein', p. 287.
63. Cecire, 'Ways of Not Reading Gertrude Stein', p. 293.
64. Sitney, 'Interview with Stan Brakhage', p. 210.
65. Brakhage, 'The Birth Film', p. 230.
66. Brakhage, 'The Birth Film', p. 231.
67. MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 4*, p. 68.
68. Sitney, 'Interview with Stan Brakhage', p. 210.
69. Brakhage, 'The Birth Film', p. 233.
70. Keller, *The Untutored Eye*, p. 195. Here, Keller connects Brakhage's 'disclaimer of possession' of his children and films to the fact he was adopted.

Chapter 3

1. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 198.
2. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 347.
3. Towers, 'Richard Yates and his Unhappy People'.
4. Wood, 'Like Men Betrayed'.
5. Bailey, *A Tragic Honesty*, p. 514. Bailey's biography is a self-conscious attempt to insert Yates into a twentieth-century canon of chauvinist realism; as a result, it misses much of what is interesting about his fiction.
6. Tait, 'Just Like Mother'.
7. Yates, *Young Hearts Crying*, p. 227.
8. See Gebhard et al., *Pregnancy, Birth and Abortion*.
9. Roof, *Reproductions of Reproduction*, p. 11.

10. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 215.
11. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 216.
12. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 219.
13. Tyler May, *Homeward Bound*, p. 154.
14. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, pp. 214–15.
15. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 213.
16. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 213.
17. Currie, *About Time*, p. 33.
18. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 48.
19. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 49.
20. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 50.
21. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, pp. 50–1.
22. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, pp. 50–1.
23. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 45.
24. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 45.
25. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, pp. 45–6.
26. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 46.
27. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 191–2.
28. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 192; Connell, *Masculinities*, pp. 79–80.
29. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 192.
30. Yates's interest in gender and reproductive politics has been underplayed in the twenty-first-century revival of his work, which has seen his books return to print and a film adaptation of *Revolutionary Road*. Tellingly, the published version of an interview Yates did for *Ploughshares* cut a statement in which the author made his political stance on abortion clear: 'I am very distinctly for legalized abortion. I'm grateful that so many states have adopted that law now.' See Yates, 'DeWitt Henry Interview Transcript', The Richard Yates Papers, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University, Box 3, Folder 1. Further references to this collection will be in the form RY, Box No./Folder No., HG. In another segment from the same interview that did not make it to print, Yates discusses his appreciation for Lorraine Hansberry, whose own engagement with abortion I discuss in Chapter 1. See 'Richard Yates Interviews, 1971', cassette tape, RY, 15/no folder, HG.
31. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 25.
32. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 48.
33. Rose, 'To Die One's Own Death', p. 55.
34. Rose, 'To Die One's Own Death', p. 56.
35. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 330.
36. Brooks, 'Freud's Masterplot', pp. 283, 284.
37. Brooks, 'Freud's Masterplot', p. 291.
38. Brooks, 'Freud's Masterplot', p. 292.
39. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 29.
40. Rudofsky, *Behind the Picture Window*, p. 193.
41. Gordon et al., *The Split-Level Trap*. See Halliwell, *Therapeutic Revolutions*, pp. 148–50.
42. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 74.

43. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, p. 216.
44. Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, p. 168.
45. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 236.
46. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 66.
47. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 67.
48. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 68.
49. Cheever, *The Wapshot Chronicle*, p. 243.
50. Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, p. 146.
51. See Haseltine, 'X-Ray Perils Cited in Early Pregnancy'; Van Delen, 'How to Keep Well: X-Rays during Pregnancy'.
52. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 56.
53. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 56.
54. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, pp. 56–7.
55. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 54.
56. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 54.
57. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 80.
58. Mills, *White Collar*, p. 200.
59. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, pp. 70–1.
60. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 71.
61. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 75.
62. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 77.
63. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 205.
64. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 78.
65. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 56.
66. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 127.
67. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 81.
68. Yates, 'Draft: *Revolutionary Road*', RY, 1/3, HG, p. 175.
69. Smithsonian Museum of American History, 'The Visible Man'.
70. Colomina, *Domesticity at War*, p. 168.
71. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 45.
72. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 41.
73. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 43.
74. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, p. 280.
75. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, p. 279.
76. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, p. 45.
77. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 25.
78. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 25.
79. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 8.
80. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 8.
81. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 9.
82. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 103.
83. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 336.
84. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 166.
85. In this sense, disability certainly functions in the novel as a form of what David T. Mitchell and Sharon Snyder have termed 'narrative prosthesis'. See Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*.

86. See, for instance, Moreno, 'Consuming the Frontier Illusion'; Cheever, *Real Phonies*, p. 209.
87. Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*.
88. Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New*, p. 269.
89. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 6.
90. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 195.
91. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 197.
92. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 200.
93. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 328.
94. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 205.
95. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 77.
96. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 133.
97. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 109. The association between eggs and the oppressions of domesticity aligns Frank with Hansberry's Walter Lee. See note 30, above, on Yates's appreciation for Hansberry.
98. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 206.
99. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 209.
100. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 242.
101. Baraitser, *Enduring Time*, p. 70. See also Arendt, *The Human Condition*.
102. De Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 83, quoted in Baraitser, *Enduring Time*, p. 71.
103. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 152.
104. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, pp. 538-9.
105. Browne, *Pregnancy Without Birth*, p. 59.
106. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 23.
107. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 115.
108. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 115. April's words are echoed in the final words of Yates's last novel, *Cold Spring Harbor* (1986), in which a mother, after being hit by her husband, tells her newborn son, 'You're a miracle. Because do you know what you're going to be? You're going to be a man.' See Yates, *Cold Spring Harbor*, p. 178.
109. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 80.
110. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 298.
111. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 78.
112. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 297.
113. Bailey, *A Tragic Honesty*, p. 159.
114. According to Bailey, Yates's alteration of the historical record was likely an error of memory that remained uncorrected because the author 'probably failed to research the matter very thoroughly' due to his ill health at this time. However, Bailey also notes that Yates's work at Remington Rand led to him being commissioned to write the UNIVAC entry for Funk & Wagnalls' *Encyclopedia*. The claim that he simply forgot the most important and loudly publicised event associated with the computer seems far-fetched, particularly in light of Frank's description of the computer in *Revolutionary Road*, which references the election. See Bailey, *A Tragic Honesty*, p. 569.

115. Yates, *Proposal for a Screenplay: The World on Fire* (9 February 1989), RY, 14/12, HG, pp. 1–22 (p. 21).
116. 'Automation Speeds Recovery, Boosts Productivity, Pares Jobs'.
117. 'Automation Speeds Recovery'.
118. Jones, *The Machine in the Studio*, p. 205.
119. Berdiner, 'The Brain Is Not Outmoded'; Duscha, 'Government's Lightning-Fast Gray Boxes "Think"'.
120. Friedman, *Electric Dreams*, p. 57.
121. Sheppard, 'Computers Don't Tell'.
122. United States Census Bureau, 'Historical Population Change Data (1910–2020)'.
123. 'Biggest Do-It-Yourself Project: Where Women Really Count', p. E1.
124. 'Majority of Census Jobs Taken by Women', p. 10.
125. Light, 'When Computers Were Women', p. 469.
126. Light, 'When Computers Were Women', p. 473.
127. '2 Eye-Fillers Go Well Together!', p. 20. Grace Murray Hopper Collection, National Museum of American History Archives Center, Box 4, Folder 7, p. 20. Yates was never credited in *Systems*, so it is not possible to know for certain whether he contributed to this particular article, though he did work for Remington Rand between 1949 and 1951, and again from 1953 to 1960. See Rajski, 'Writing *Systems*', p. 551.
128. '2 Eye-Fillers Go Well Together!', p. 20.
129. Yates, 'Draft: The Getaway', RY, 3/1, HG, pp. 124–5.
130. Yates, 'Notes on the Getaway' (11 August 1956), RY, 3/1, HG, pp. 1–10 (p. 1).
131. Yates, 'Notes on the Getaway', p. 1.
132. Bailey, *A Tragic Honesty*, p. 183.
133. Yates, 'Notes on the Getaway', p. 5.
134. Yates, 'Drafts', RY, 1/4, HG.
135. Bailey, *A Tragic Honesty*, p. 110.
136. See Price and Thurschwell, 'Introduction: Invisible Hands'.
137. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 325.
138. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 322.
139. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 322.
140. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 329.
141. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 347.
142. Yates, 'Draft: Saying Goodbye to Sally', RY, 13/2, HG, p. 45.
143. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 5. This is not the only Yates repetition with its roots in Fitzgerald. His novels *A Special Providence* and *Cold Spring Harbor* both feature maternal characters absent-mindedly clutching their left breast, an image that recalls the death of Myrtle in *The Great Gatsby*.
144. The similarities between Yates and Jack Fields do not end there: Yates, like Fields, received an invitation to Hollywood to adapt a 'contemporary novel that he greatly admired', William Styron's *Lie Down in Darkness* (1951), in the wake of the success of his first novel. And Yates, like Fields, had a relationship in Los Angeles with his agent's secretary – in Yates's case, a woman named Catherine Downing. See Bailey, 'A Tragic Honesty', pp. 277–9.
145. On the repeated surname 'Fields', see Goldleaf, 'Master and Model', p. 225.

146. Roof, *Reproductions of Reproduction*, p. 11.
147. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 330.
148. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 363.
149. Clark and Henry, 'An Interview with Richard Yates'.
150. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 350.
151. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 357.
152. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 332.
153. Yates, *Revolutionary Road*, p. 15.
154. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 324.
155. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 361.
156. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 336.
157. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 337.
158. hooks, *Feminist Theory*, p. 2.
159. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, pp. 303–4.
160. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 350.
161. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 351.
162. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 351.
163. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 325.
164. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 330.
165. Charlton-Jones, *Dismembering the American Dream*, p. 44.
166. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 335.
167. Yates, 'Saying Goodbye to Sally', p. 346.

Chapter 4

1. See Reagan, *Dangerous Pregnancies*, pp. 57–67.
2. 'The Drug that Left a Trail of Heartbreak', pp. 32–3.
3. 'The Drug that Left a Trail of Heartbreak', p. 26.
4. Reagan, *Dangerous Pregnancies*, p. 59. See also Carson, *Silent Spring*.
5. See Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy'.
6. Quoted in Brynner and Stephens, *Dark Remedy*, pp. 112–13.
7. Lin, *Freud's Jaw and Other Lost Objects*, p. 38.
8. Jain, 'The Prosthetic Imagination', p. 32.
9. Sildrick, "'Why Should Our Bodies End at the Skin?'" , p. 16.
10. Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, p. 48. See also Holt and Murray, 'Prosthesis and the Engineered Imagination', p. 57.
11. Sildrick, "'Why Should our Bodies End at the Skin?'" , p. 16.
12. Young, 'Pregnant Embodiment', p. 49.
13. Young, 'Throwing Like a Girl', p. 43; Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, p. 146.
14. Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, p. 28.
15. Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, p. 26. To reframe Garland-Thomson's argument in light of the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, disability and femininity are two intersecting axes of oppression, and disabled women are often marginalised by social movements and laws focused on one or the other axis. See Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins'.

16. In the case of quotations by Sylvia Plath reprinted in this book within the parameters of fair dealing, the copyright remains with the author and all rights are reserved.
17. Plath lived in England during this period and her own reproductive decisions, which informed her poetry, were made in the context of British rather than US law. Thalidomide would have been a more immediate risk for this reason. At the same time, her writing is responsive to both contexts and *The Bell Jar* is set in New York. On Plath's transatlanticism, see Brain, *The Other Sylvia Plath*.
18. Plath, 'Three Women: A Poem for Three Voices', pp. 185–6.
19. Plath, 'Three Women', pp. 183–4.
20. Plath, 'Three Women', p. 177.
21. On Plath and Carson, see Brain, *The Other Sylvia Plath*, p. 86.
22. Carson, *Silent Spring*, p. 168.
23. Carson, *Silent Spring*, p. 168.
24. *Silent Spring* was serialised in *The New Yorker* two months before its publication in August 1962; 'Three Women' was written in March and broadcast in August of that year.
25. Stason, *Atoms and the Law*. Referenced in Dubow, *Ourselves Unborn*, p. 58.
26. Plath, 'Three Women', p. 177.
27. Eisenhower, 'Farewell Radio and Television Address to the American People'.
28. These references to flatness have something in common with Frank Wheeler's depthlessness in *Revolutionary Road*: in both texts, masculine flatness is at odds with feminine depth.
29. Plath, 'Three Women', p. 181.
30. Brain, *The Other Sylvia Plath*, p. 6.
31. Steinberg and Kukil (eds), *The Letters of Sylvia Plath*, Vol. 2, p. 462. Warren was Plath's brother.
32. Piette, *The Literary Cold War, 1945 to Vietnam*, p. 106.
33. Peel, *Writing Back*, p. 54.
34. Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, p. x.
35. Willis, 'Mother Wit'.
36. Willis, 'Mother Wit'.
37. Brain, *The Other Sylvia Plath*, p. 128.
38. Plath, 'Three Women', p. 182.
39. Plath, 'Three Women', p. 178.
40. Plath, 'Three Women', p. 178.
41. Plath, 'Three Women', p. 179.
42. Perry, 'Plath and the Culture of Hygiene', p. 191.
43. Sobchack, 'A Leg to Stand On', p. 25. Sobchack quotes Fontanier, *Les Figures des Discourse*, via Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*.
44. Sobchack, 'A Leg to Stand On', p. 27. Sobchack draws on Jain and Kurzman to develop this argument.
45. Plath, 'Barren Woman', p. 157.
46. Plath, 'Morning Song', p. 157.

47. Plath, 'Barren Woman', p. 157; Plath, 'Morning Song', p. 157.
48. Plath, 'Morning Song', p. 157.
49. Kroll, *Chapters in a Mythology*, p. 73.
50. *Voices and Visions*, dir. Pitkethly.
51. Steinberg and Kukil (eds), *The Letters of Sylvia Plath*, Vol. 2, p. 143.
52. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 144.
53. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 145.
54. Shildrick, "'Why Should Our Bodies End at the Skin?'"', p. 17; Wills, *Prosthesis*, p. 45.
55. Wills, *Prosthesis*, p. 26.
56. The Second Voice was termed 'The Secretary' by the BBC, although Plath's text only distinguishes the speakers by number.
57. Plath, 'Three Women', p. 177.
58. Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines*, p. 3.
59. Jain, 'The Prosthetic Imagination', pp. 36-7.
60. Plath, 'Three Women', p. 184.
61. Perloff, 'The Two Ariels', pp. 12-13.
62. Plath, *Collected Poems*, p. 293.
63. Plath, 'The Applicant', p. 221.
64. Jain, 'The Prosthetic Imagination', p. 44.
65. Jain, 'The Prosthetic Imagination', p. 45.
66. Peel, 'Body, Word, and Photograph', p. 84.
67. Plath, 'Thalidomide', p. 252.
68. Plath, 'Thalidomide', p. 252.
69. Some children had amputations in order to make prosthetic limbs fit better. See Brynner and Stephens, *Dark Remedy*, p. 113.
70. Plath, 'The Surgeon at 2 a.m.', p. 171.
71. Brain notes that a discarded draft of Plath's poem 'Cut' includes the word 'Amputee'. See Brain, *The Other Sylvia Plath*, p. 77.
72. Peel, 'Body, Word, and Photograph', p. 89.
73. 'The Drug that Left a Trail of Heartbreak', p. 36.
74. For a discussion of carpentry in the *Observer's* thalidomide feature see Peel, 'Body, Word, and Photograph', p. 87.
75. Plath, 'Thalidomide', p. 252.
76. Plath, 'Thalidomide', p. 252.
77. Plath, 'Thalidomide', p. 252.
78. Peel, 'Body, Word, and Photograph', p. 91.
79. Peel, 'Body, Word, and Photograph', p. 91.
80. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 192.
81. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 193.
82. Plath, 'Thalidomide', p. 252.
83. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 233.
84. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 193.
85. Eisenhower, 'The President's News Conference'.
86. Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power*, p. 164; Connelly, 'Seeing Beyond the State', p. 198.

87. Connelly, 'Seeing Beyond the State', p. 198.
88. Connelly, 'Seeing Beyond the State', p. 202.
89. See Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*; Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*.
90. See Tucker-Abramson, *Novel Shocks*.
91. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 193.
92. Peel notes that a draft of the poem includes a reference to 'flower faces' after these lines, which he reads as a reference to the *Observer* thalidomide article, which describes children in prosthetic 'flower pots'. See Peel, 'Body, Word, and Photograph', p. 92.
93. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 66.
94. See Haeckel, *Evolution of Man*.
95. Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, p. 249. See also Bowlby, *Freudian Mythologies*, pp. 226–34.
96. See Hopwood, *Haeckel's Embryos*, p. 4. Hopwood's book explores the charges of fraud levelled at Haeckel's embryo illustrations.
97. Steinberg and Kukil (eds), *The Letters of Sylvia Plath, Vol. 1*, p. 678. The full title of Schotte's course at Amherst was 'Embryology: A description of developmental processes in the vertebrates, with an introduction to the physiology of development'.
98. Biehl and Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism*, p. 7.
99. Biehl and Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism*, pp. 7–8.
100. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 94.
101. Gaddis, *The Cold War*, p. 64.
102. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 234.
103. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 235.
104. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 76.
105. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 93.
106. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 97.
107. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 95.
108. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 13.
109. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 250.
110. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 83.
111. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 165.
112. Plath, 'Stillborn', p. 142.
113. Plath, 'Stillborn', p. 142.
114. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 177.
115. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 103.
116. Plath, *The Bell Jar*, p. 209.
117. Tucker-Abramson, *Novel Shocks*, p. 3.
118. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, p. 279.
119. Levin's novel was published in 1967. Roman Polanski was sent an advance copy of the novel and his film adaptation was released the following year. The film closely follows its source text in plot, structure, detail and dialogue; their few divergences are, therefore, particularly interesting. My references to *Rosemary's Baby* and quoted dialogue apply to both novel and film unless explicitly indicated.

120. See, in particular, Shonfield, *Walls Have Feelings*, on the film; Marcus, 'Placing *Rosemary's Baby*', on the novel.
121. Marcus, 'Placing *Rosemary's Baby*', p. 132.
122. Sobchack, 'Bringing It All Back Home', p. 153.
123. Berenstein, 'Mommie Dearest', p. 68.
124. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 103.
125. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 144.
126. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 150.
127. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 220.
128. *Rosemary's Baby*, dir. Polanski; Siebers, 'Disability Aesthetics', p. 543.
129. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 5.
130. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 15.
131. 'The Drug that Left a Trail of Heartbreak', p. 34.
132. Marcus, 'Placing *Rosemary's Baby*'.
133. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 3.
134. *Griswold v. Connecticut*.
135. See Nelson, *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America*.
136. See Brenton, *The Privacy Invaders*; Packard, *The Naked Society*; Westin, *Privacy and Freedom*.
137. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 18.
138. Brenton, *The Privacy Invaders*, p. 112.
139. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 18.
140. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 41.
141. Brenton, *The Privacy Invaders*, p. 114.
142. Tzara, quoted in Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 151.
143. Arp, quoted in Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 153.
144. Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 147.
145. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, p. 54. For a discussion of Jacobs in the context of modernist architecture and urban planning discourses, see Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, pp. 312–29.
146. Shonfield, *Walls Have Feelings*, p. 71.
147. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, pp. 55–6.
148. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 20.
149. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 23.
150. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 107.
151. Colomina, *Cold War Hothouses*, p. 106.
152. Rault, 'Window Walls and Other Tricks of Transparency', p. 938.
153. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 117.
154. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 103.
155. Tobbell, "'Who's Winning the Human Race?'" , p. 433.
156. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 21.
157. Malacrida, 'Mothering and Disability', pp. 390–1.
158. Malacrida, 'Mothering and Disability', p. 391.
159. Quoted in Reagan, *Dangerous Pregnancies*, p. 69.
160. Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*.
161. Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 170.

162. LaVey erroneously claimed to have played the role of the devil in the film. See Newton, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 86.
163. Newton, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 86.
164. See Buccola, *The Fire Is Upon Us*, p. 399.
165. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 25.
166. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 5.
167. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 17.
168. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 69.
169. Weinbaum, *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery*, p. 10.
170. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 142.
171. Levin, *Rosemary's Baby*, p. 107.

Chapter 5

1. Nilsson, 'Drama of Life before Birth', cover.
2. In 1946, Sweden's 1938 Abortion Act was modified to allow for abortions if it could be shown that a woman's physical or mental health would be impaired by childbirth and childcare; previously, it had only been allowed in cases of rape, incest, severe hereditary illness in the foetus, or severe illness in the woman. In 1975, abortion was legalised up to eighteen weeks, with a counsellor's approval required after week twelve. For an analysis of Nilsson's work in relation to Swedish abortion politics, see Jülich, 'Picturing Abortion Opposition in Sweden'.
3. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*.
4. Duden, *Disembodying Women*, pp. 54–5.
5. Berlant, 'America, "Fat," the Fetus', p. 151.
6. Brennan, *The Abortion Holocaust*, quoted in Mason, 'Minority Unborn', p. 160.
7. Petchesky, 'Fetal Images', p. 287.
8. See, for instance, Hartouni, 'Fetal Exposures', p. 145; Stabile, 'Shooting the Mother', p. 186.
9. See Haraway, 'Fetus'; Michaels, 'Fetal Galaxies'; Newman, *Fetal Positions*.
10. See Holtzmann Kevles, *Naked to the Bone*, p. 247; Hanson, *A Cultural History of Pregnancy*, p. 137.
11. Steinmann, 'A Sonar Look at an Unborn Baby', p. 45.
12. Jülich, 'Televising Inner Space', p. 154. In another article, Jülich reports that Ingelman-Sundberg spoke out against abortion for socio-medical reasons. See Jülich, 'Picturing Abortion Opposition in Sweden', p. 288.
13. Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, p. 2.
14. Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, p. 5.
15. Berger, 'Uses of Photography', pp. 53–4.
16. Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*, pp. 203, 186.
17. Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*, p. 185.
18. Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*, p. 201.
19. Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*, p. 202.
20. Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*, p. 202.
21. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 22.
22. See Zeavin, 'Hot and Cool Mothers'.

23. Zeavin, 'Hot and Cool Mothers', p. 56.
24. Warren and Brandeis, 'The Right to Privacy', p. 195.
25. *Olmstead v. US*.
26. Nelson, *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America*, p. 26.
27. Nelson, *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America*, p. 26.
28. Rosenfeld, 'Pushed Out into a Hostile World', p. 69.
29. Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power*, p. 186.
30. Mason, 'Minority Unborn', p. 159.
31. Franklin, 'Fetal Fascinations', p. 197.
32. Siegel Watkins, *On the Pill*, p. 16; Tyler May, *America and the Pill*, p. 39; Marks, *Sexual Chemistry*, pp. 32–4.
33. See Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, p. 90.
34. Osucha, 'The Whiteness of Privacy', p. 71.
35. Osucha, 'The Whiteness of Privacy', p. 88.
36. Haraway, 'Fetus', p. 178.
37. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 27.
38. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 51.
39. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, pp. 64, 72.
40. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 40.
41. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 79.
42. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 45.
43. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, pp. 80–1.
44. Marder, *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, pp. 156–7.
45. Gidal, 'Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film', p. 1.
46. Gidal, 'Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film', p. 1.
47. Smith, 'A Concrete Experience of Nothing', p. 281.
48. Smith, 'A Concrete Experience of Nothing', p. 290.
49. Smith, 'A Concrete Experience of Nothing', pp. 279, 282.
50. Another point of connection between the two filmmakers is their use of grids: in Brakhage's case, as a register of environmental contingencies (as I explored in Chapter 2); in Sharits' case, as a register of the distinction between the material apparatus and the projected event, as outlined in Smith, 'A Concrete Experience of Nothing', p. 290.
51. Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade', p. 76.
52. Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade', p. 78.
53. Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade', p. 78. See also Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, pp. 23–33.
54. Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea*, p. 25.
55. Sofia, 'Exterminating Fetuses', p. 51.
56. Baxter, *Stanley Kubrick*, p. 66. For an analysis of 2001's homosocial dynamics, see Janes, 'Clarke and Kubrick's 2001', p. 62.
57. Kohler, 'Stanley Kubrick Raps', p. 250.
58. White, 'Kubrick's Obscene Shadows', p. 138.
59. See, for instance, Rasmussen, *Stanley Kubrick*, p. 62.
60. Thomas Allen Nelson has framed this scene as a clash between the boring detail of female domesticity and the stunning excitement of space travel, an

- idea I counter is treated satirically rather than sincerely. See Nelson, *Stanley Kubrick*, p. 118.
61. Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, p. 258. Massey notes that Ernesto Laclau understands space as stasis, in contrast to Jameson's understanding of space as chaos.
 62. Jameson, 'Postmodernism', p. 62.
 63. Sofia, 'Exterminating Fetuses', p. 49.
 64. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 198.
 65. Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, p. 19.
 66. Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, p. 165 (italics in original).
 67. Nelson, *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America*, p. xviii.
 68. Clarke, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, p. 86.
 69. Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, p. 11.
 70. Nadel, *Containment Culture*, p. 3.
 71. Walker, *Stanley Kubrick, Director*, p. 186.
 72. Janes, 'Clarke and Kubrick's 2001', p. 62.
 73. Kubrick, quoted in Norder, 'Stanley Kubrick', p. 66.
 74. Edelman, *No Future*, p. 11.
 75. Doyle, 'Blind Spots and Failed Performance', pp. 35–6. Also see José Esteban Muñoz's critique of Edelman in *Cruising Utopia*, p. 94.
 76. Ferguson, 'The Nuclear Sublime'.
 77. Ferguson, 'The Nuclear Sublime', p. 7.
 78. Ferguson, 'The Nuclear Sublime', p. 7. The specific object of Ferguson's critique here is Jonathan Schell's 1982 book about the nuclear threat, *The Fate of the Earth*.
 79. For a theory of the technological sublime, see Nye, *American Technological Sublime*.
 80. Fuller, 'Revolution in Wombland', p. 82.
 81. Fuller, 'Revolution in Wombland', p. 81.
 82. Fuller, 'Revolution in Wombland', pp. 82–3.
 83. Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, p. 41.
 84. Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, p. 86.
 85. Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, p. 137.
 86. Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, p. 148.
 87. Kubrick, quoted in Norder, 'Stanley Kubrick', p. 47.
 88. Janes, 'Clarke and Kubrick's 2001', p. 64.
 89. Krauss, 'Grids', p. 52.
 90. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 213.
 91. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 181.
 92. Merck, 'Shulamith Firestone and Sexual Difference', p. 19.
 93. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, pp. 185–6.
 94. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 206.
 95. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 209.
 96. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 208.
 97. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 179.
 98. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p. 178.
 99. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*, p. 215.

100. Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman's Choice*, p. 121.

101. Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman's Choice*, p. 123.

Conclusion

1. Baehr, *Abortion Without Apology*, p. 7.
2. The Army of Three would later develop into the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL), which focused its energies on legal reform in the years leading up to *Roe v. Wade*.
3. Maddow-Zimet and Kost, 'Even Before Roe Was Overturned, Nearly One in 10 People Obtaining an Abortion Traveled across State Lines for Care'; Smith et al., 'Abortion Travel within the United States'; *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*.
4. North, 'The Downfall of *Roe v. Wade* Started in 2010'; *Dobbs v. Jackson*.
5. National Abortion Federation, 'A Year after Dobbs, More People Than Ever Are Traveling for Abortion Care'.
6. While 'the lost baby poem' does not directly reference abortion, Clifton has explicitly stated that it is a poem about abortion. See Luchetti (dir.), 'Poetry Breaks: Lucille Clifton Reads "The Lost Baby Poem"'.
7. Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, p. 2.
8. Storer, *Why Not?*, p. 85.
9. Sexton, 'The Abortion', p. 61.
10. Sexton, 'The Abortion', p. 61.
11. Sexton, 'The Abortion', p. 61.
12. Boglárka, 'Reproduction and the Female Body in Anne Sexton's Poetry', p. 357.
13. Sexton, 'The Abortion', p. 61.
14. Sexton, 'The Abortion', p. 62.
15. Didion and Kuehl, 'The Art of Fiction No. 71'.
16. Didion, *Where I Was From*, p. 159.
17. Didion, *Where I Was From*, p. 195.
18. Didion, *Where I Was From*, p. 193. Didion quotes Richard W. Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind: Insanity in California 1870-1930*.
19. Didion, *Where I Was From*, p. 195.
20. See California State Auditor, 'Sterilization of Female Inmates - Report 2013'.
21. Didion, *Where I Was From*, pp. 198-9.
22. Didion, *Where I Was From*, p. 198.
23. Didion, *Where I Was From*, p. 159.
24. Mumford, *The Highway and the City*, p. 176.
25. Banham, *Los Angeles*, p. 217.
26. Seiler, *Republic of Drivers*, p. 104.
27. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 18.
28. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 16.
29. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 61.
30. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 64.
31. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 9.
32. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 8.
33. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 58; Rasmussen, *On Speed*, p. 198.

34. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 58.
35. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 11.
36. Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, p. 32.
37. Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, p. 32.
38. Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, p. 64.
39. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 133.
40. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 89.
41. On the invention of cinema in relation to the railroad's 'annihilation of space and time', see Solnit, *Motion Studies*.
42. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 33.
43. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 68.
44. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 46.
45. See Kristeva, 'Women's Time'; De Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 83.
46. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 159.
47. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 134.
48. Didion, 'Why I Write'.
49. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 77.
50. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 93.
51. Didion, *Play It As It Lays*, p. 83.
52. Clifton, 'the lost baby poem', in *Good Woman*, p. 60. Further discussion of the poem relates to this edition.
53. See Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, p. 98; Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement*, pp. 85–111.
54. Cade Bambara, 'The Pill: Genocide or Liberation?', p. 120. See also Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement*.
55. Cade Bambara, 'The Pill: Genocide or Liberation?', pp. 119, 121.
56. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, p. 101.
57. Johnson, 'Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion', p. 36.
58. Sofia, 'Exterminating Fetuses', p. 57.
59. Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 26.
60. Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 160.
61. Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, p. 163.
62. Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p. 40.
63. Weinbaum, *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery*, p. 1.
64. Brady, 'Lost Names'.
65. Center for Reproductive Rights, 'Center's "Emergency Medical" Exceptions Case'.
66. Klibanoff, 'More Women Join Lawsuit Challenging Texas' Abortion Laws'.
67. Klibanoff, 'More Women Join Lawsuit Challenging Texas' Abortion Laws'.
68. Dench et al., 'The Effects of the Dobbs Decision on Fertility', p. 15.
69. Sanger-Katz and Cain Miller, 'How Many Abortions Did the Post-Roe Bans Prevent?'.

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