

CREATURE OF THEORY: MATERNITY AMONGST THE GHOSTS AND STRANGERS

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CREATURE OF THEORY: MATERNITY AMONGST THE GHOSTS AND STRANGERS

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“Creature of Theory: Maternity amongst the Ghosts and Strangers” uses a personal account of the maternal relation to disrupt conventional narratives of birth. Typically, birth is understood to be a discrete, singular event of origin and genesis that closely binds woman and child. This understanding constrains definitions of maternity and regulates political and philosophical assumptions of belonging. “Creature of Theory” challenges this view, joining personal anecdote and critical theory in a phenomenology of maternity that foregrounds the repetitions and hauntings of birth, undoing the temporalities and identities this act is presumed to produce. Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s “The Intertwining—The Chiasm” and other highly influential philosophical arguments on touch, this dissertation suggests that moments of skin-to-skin repeat and replace birth as a site of origin, while troubling the body’s material bounds. Along with Merleau-Ponty, it uses Jacques Derrida’s theory of hospitality to emphasize the strangeness of the infant, transforming maternity into an encounter characterized by haunting and strange dwelling. In addition, this dissertation brings together Elissa Marder’s concept of photographic writing and Michel Foucault’s notion of care of the self to describe how the act of writing recreates the effects of birth, complicating its singularity and naturalness. By challenging common understandings of birth, “Creature of Theory” alleviates concerns of essentialism in relation to the subject of maternity and resists its political appropriation. Moreover, the chiasmic modes of subjectivity that “Creature of Theory” describes alter and expand the time and space of ethical encounter. This phenomenology not only challenges dominant ideologies and representations of motherhood, but also re-frames highly influential theory, showing its place in this intensely close and tactual relation.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Nicolette Bragg grew up in Namibia, South Africa, and Bahrain. She achieved her Bachelor's degree after many years, between schools in China, Scotland, South Africa, and the United States. She earned her B.A. from Clemson University, SC. She earned her M.A. and Ph.D. in English Language and Literature from Cornell University.

For Christy and Shelley, for helping me keep it all together

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Introduction:

Maternity's Ghosts and Strangers

Every day I clear my work space. I gather up socks, scattered paper, and toys from around and under my desk, peeling off stickers from its surface. Each day brings this creep and flow of stuff onto my desk, and each day requires a complete reset of the environment. As I bend and stand, organizing my desk and chair, feeling for stuffed toys and books, reposting reminders on my desk, hunting for pens, I consider the role that the maintenance of boundaries plays in my work, thinking that my project is, in fact, an articulation of processes of boundaries and space and that my writing happens within and as this process. It feels strange to clear this space, knowing that I sit down to write precisely in order to re-clutter it. I sit down to write precisely because thinking sometimes takes place as cluttering, as the intrusion of things that will not be cleared away, as the sign of things that remain in spite of all this clearing away. The failure of boundaries and the unexpected effects of intrusion and the out-of-place are at the heart of this project.

For all that this cluttered life represents a kind of disorder that calls out for organization and management, it has had a productive effect: living with these things out of place disrupts practices of compliance and integration. The effect of these moments and this matter out of place—all this *stuff*—has altered my relationship to the places and things over which I have attempted to exercise some form of control. The out of place feels like a relief, like the touch of the outside. A scrawl of marker across a typed sheet of paper is not a scribble or a mess, but a reminder that there is someone beyond me who can take up and streak a bold line across my

thoughts. These bright lines remind of the precarity of my disciplined spaces, of how they can become the material and backdrop for another's creative emergence, transformed into something different.

My writing also shows this clutter. When I write late at night and I hear my daughter calling for me, my thinking is interrupted. Even after I have returned from her bed to my desk, I am unable to keep the inflection and claim of her voice out of my writing. When she climbs onto my lap as I type and interrupts the pages of my notes with a sequence of tapped out letters spelling nothing, I want to preserve these interruptions. They make a claim beyond coherence and communication. They trouble the coherence I presume my work to have, and they challenge my argument. Keeping her typed run of letters and punctuation marks feels like the reminder of what can be let in, of pliability, of emergence. Including them would make this a different genre of work.

Although I would resist this clutter because it *gets in the way*, it opens up other ways to think. Writing with these unintended and unplanned juxtapositions, communications, and differences helps me think beyond the expected. I come to depend upon these to move me beyond my habits of thought. It is as if the very possibility of an end—the very possibility of thinking something through without interruption—itself undermines the effect and the possibility of thinking. Sometimes, it is the very absence of a room of one's own that brings one to thinking. The solitary room without the clutter of the other and without the demands of the other leaves one with the smooth limits of one's own thoughts and expectations and none of the deviations that characterize the arrival of another. The solitary room excludes her from my act of thought, excludes her in the very attempt to make sense of what she brought.

If I write about clutter—if I clutter my thinking—it is because clutter does more than suggest a disorder or a haphazardness; it states an ethics. I let this other in and her presence remains. Clutter is a form of ghostliness, an overlap, one life spilling forth onto another. Clutter represents not a lack of order, but the yielding to the haunting presence of another, a reminder of the limits of the self. Clutter is linked to the possibility of the other, the positive effect of not being able to maintain one's borders, the joy of this, its potential, its openness to thought—the difficulty it can cause—the way it moves one and pushes one in a different direction. To put it in the terms with which Judith Butler describes the effects of relationality upon the self: I am brought into relation with another and this relation “clutter[s] my speech” (*PL* 23).

In writing about maternity, I attempt to keep this clutter and to trace its effects. It has long been difficult to say anything on the subject of the mother. In 1976, when Adrienne Rich published *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Institution and Experience*, the difficulty derived from established conceptions of the place of women and the meaning of motherhood. The subject is enmeshed within patriarchal institutions, gendered divisions of labor, philosophical hierarchies between body and mind, and the idealization of the mother. These are only a few of the considerations, and they are not fully extricable from each other. In spite of the decades of scholarship since *Of Woman Born*, it remains difficult to affirm a maternal experience or to use the experience as a source for philosophy. Robyn Ferrell writes in her 2012 *Copula* that “it is striking that when one looks back to literature considered to be at the inception of the present movement—for example, Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born*—one still finds the material there as fresh as ever” (2). What remains fresh for Ferrell is the problem of “the accommodation of maternity into an intellectual practice, or even into a feminist practice” (2).

In “New Directions for Motherhood Studies,” tracing the wax and wane of feminist scholarly interest in the subject of maternity in the decades following Rich’s book, Samira Kawash illuminates some of this difficulty. She says in relation to the decline of interest in the subject in the 1990’s:

No one was denying that mothers, their needs and experiences, their struggles and desires, were central to feminist thought. Giving voice to the experiences of motherhood and recognizing the subjectivity and agency of mothers were clearly crucial feminist aims. And yet, as the decade progressed, such attention to mothers seemed increasingly suspect, aligned with conservative “family values” agendas that conflicted with feminist goals. (971-972)

Philosophy that does center on the subject of maternity commonly addresses this point. In *Womanizing Nietzsche* (1995), Kelly Oliver argues that “Many feminists are wary of emphasizing the mother or the maternal function. They are suspicious of theories that return to the mother because maternity and reproduction have traditionally been used to oppress women” (165)

Shifts in intellectual frameworks further de-centered the mother as a subject for feminist scholarship. Kawash argues that “The deconstruction of ‘woman’ and the poststructuralist accounts of gender and power left motherhood to the side, an embarrassing theoretical relic of an earlier naive view of the essential woman and her shadow, the essential mother” (972). In her 2003 *Cool Men and the Second Sex*, Susan Fraiman focuses on some of the implications of this skeptical alignment, exploring how it has impeded scholarship on the subject within progressive critical theory. She argues that theory denigrates the maternal as “biological destiny” or as “fixity

and conformity” (120, 127). The mother emerges as the “Other” of this discourse of progressive fluidity and anti-normativity.

The perception that there is an opposition between maternity and progressive theory remains common. Twenty years after Oliver first voiced her concern about maternity in relation to feminism, Adriana Cavarero echoes the sentiment in relation to theory: “every time the exercise of thinking human relationality in terms of vulnerability and dependency involves the maternal figure, the accusation of reinvigorating a patriarchal image of women inevitably surfaces, forcing the operation to fail” (“Child,” 24). In her 2012 *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption*, Lisa Baraitser assures her readers that she is not writing about the “joys of motherhood” (7). She suspects that the “deliberate valorization of the generative potential of maternity may appear to be a rather alarming aim; a reactive or cheerful attempt to celebrate motherhood . . . a return perhaps to the rather jubilant maternalist sensibilities of some feminist writers of previous generations” (7). Maternity seems the incorrect frame for a theoretical argument, as the very subject seems inextricable from its representation.

This dissertation attempts to say something about maternity by addressing one of the issues that make this subject difficult to talk about: the significance of birth as a presumed site of origin and the measure of maternity. The topic of birth in relation to the mother has long raised concerns. While there is substantial scholarship within feminist philosophy on this subject, it still rings alarm bells for those working on motherhood and for those skeptical of the subject. For one, birth is often taken to define the maternal relation. In this regard, birth is seen as a privileged site of maternal relation that de-legitimizes other ways in which one becomes a mother, determines identity, or develops a connection to another. For another, the mutual presence of woman and child at the event of birth is taken to offer incontrovertible proof of their

relation—if I gave birth, I must be the mother—giving rise to essentialist theories of maternity. To add another layer to this problem, when understood as an origin, birth is taken to initiate narratives of development, in which an infant body grows and develops into an adult. Birth is associated with processes of socialization, in which one body becomes responsible for the social wellbeing and belonging of another. Another narrative that birth produces is that of inheritance, in which the mother passes on genetic material, tradition, names, and social status to another. Furthermore, as a sign of origin, genesis, and belonging, birth operates as genealogical and territorial guarantee. As an origin and in its presumed relation to nature, birth has become central to political narratives of possession and belonging and nationhood.

In these narratives, birth is an assertion of a connection between bodies that trumps all others; it is an encounter with vulnerability; it seamlessly joins and separates two bodies and their relationship to one another. These narratives generate and support the idea that birth determines maternal identity or that connections between bodies cannot develop in the absence of this bond. These narratives are narrow and linear, disavowing forms of connection that can develop beyond the intimacy of this connection, beyond the bloodlines of belonging.

A frequent goal of theory is thus to decenter birth by exploring other modes of connection. Take Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto," which is "suspicious of the reproductive matrix and of most birthing" (181):

Every story that begins with original innocence and privileges the return to wholeness imagines the drama of life to be individuation, separation, the birth of the self, the tragedy of autonomy, the fall into writing, alienation; that is, war, tempered by imaginary respite in the bosom of the Other. These plots are ruled by a reproductive politics—rebirth without flaw, perfection, abstraction. In this plot women are imagined either better or

worse off, but all agree they have less selfhood, weaker individuation, more fusion to the oral, to Mother, less at stake in masculine autonomy. But there is another route to having less at stake in masculine autonomy, a route that does not pass through Woman, Primitive, Zero, the Mirror Stage and its imaginary. It passes through women and other present-tense, illegitimate cyborgs, not of Woman born, who refuse the ideological resources of victimization so as to have a real life. These cyborgs are the people who refuse to disappear on cue” (177)

While attempting to move modes of belonging and resistance away from the damaging limitations of birth, Haraway’s prioritization of regeneration does not take into account the degree to which reproduction itself has been constructed through narratives of nature. Her criticisms of narratives that rely on the metaphor of birth do not analyze the construction of that metaphor.

It is these narratives that “Creature of Theory” would interrupt, narratives of birth that have limited and reduced the significance of those who emerge in relation to it. Rather than denying the significance of this event completely, “Creature of Theory” examines how maternity itself disrupts and undoes the framing and governing narratives of reproduction and the implication between close bonds, birth, and belonging. Rather than simply denying the significance of this event, I challenge some of the ways in which it is understood.

Conventionally, birth is conventionally thought in terms of origin, genesis, and procreation. It is thought in terms of belonging and connection. It is thought as a discrete event that is bound by time, finite, and so representable and intelligible. It is thought as the singular act that both connects and separates two bodies. Decentering this event as the determination of a relation, I

reframe its meaning, situating it within broader understandings of the relations between bodies that begin to challenge some of the binaries that birth is assumed to affirm.

My argument takes up from Freud's response to Otto Rank's *The Trauma of Birth*. Challenging that birth is a site of original trauma, Freud argues that "There is much more continuity between intra-uterine life and earliest infancy than the impressive caesura of the act of birth would have us believe" (*SE* 20:138). "Creature of Theory" explores the way in which birth continues past this caesura and across bodies. At the same time, it explores the effects of this upon the identity of the mother. While Freud maintains the continuity of the mother—"just as the mother originally satisfied all the needs of the fetus through the apparatus of her own body, so now, after its birth, she continues to do so, though partly by other means"—his complication of birth as a "impressive caesura" opens alternative narratives. Different bodies can continue birth, taking up its effects, undergoing its exposure.

Rather than removing the act of birth from definitions of maternity—although I agree with the need to do so and with the limitations and potential harm of such a definition—I propose that maternity itself decenters and disrupts the narratives that constrain the representation and discussion of this experience. Maternity—as the encounter with the infant—disrupts its own narratives, undoes its own linearity, exceeds its own origin in birth. Over the next three chapters, I propose birth to be the site not of connection, but of strangeness, interrupting narratives of legacy, inheritance, genealogy, and identification, and foregrounding the strangeness of the event and its temporal disjunctions. Doing so, I suggest birth to be the figure for the encounter with the stranger, suggesting this supplants desires for self-preservation and exclusion.

In focusing on birth, I unsettle its definition as an event in the past intimately related to one's own subject formation. This angle is often used in order to disrupt ideals of sovereignty or self-sufficiency. For example, in *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Elissa Marder points out that "Sigmund Freud famously derives the psychoanalytic notion of the uncanny (the disturbing convergence of what is most familiar and most strange) from the etymology of the German word "Unheimlich" (or "unhomelike") and associates this figure with the passage through the mother's body in the event of being born" (1). To the adult looking back, birth is an event to which he does not have access. Judith Butler argues that birth is that which individuals struggle to overcome in their formation as sovereign subjects. Of Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, she writes, "the story he reaches for says something about his authorial ambitions and desires, clearly meant to counter and displace the infant's passivity and the lack of motor control, a resistance perhaps to needing to be in the hands of those he never chose, who turned out to care for him more or less well" (SS, 4). As a formative event, the inaccessibility of birth continues to haunt theories of subject formation and individuation.

The event of being born not only affects the subject throughout their life but also frames their perception of the mother. The mother is there at the scene to which the subject has "no direct access" (Marder, 4); she is both related to birth and is blurred by and formed through the occasion of this event. In "'The Night Watch' (over the book of himself)" Jacques Derrida argues that the act of being born not only haunts the individual, assuring of contingency and conditionality, but that the very undeniability of this event has produced the idea that there is a determinable and immediately known "real mother" (91). He argues that advances in technological reproduction make this association impossible. Taking a phrase from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, he argues that the mother is, like the father, a "legal fiction," subject to

substitution. Womb transplants, in vitro fertilization, surrogacy all challenge the idea that the mother is the one who gives birth:

If today the unicity of the mother is no longer the sensible object of a perceptual certitude, if maternities can no longer be reduced to, indeed if they carry us beyond, the carrying mother, is there can be, in a word, more than one mother, if ‘the’ mother is the object of calculations and suppositions, of projections and phantasms, if the ‘womb’ is no longer outside all phantasm, the assured place of birth, then this ‘new’ situation simply illuminates in return an ageless truth. The mother was never only, never uniquely, never indubitably the one who gives birth—and whom one sees, with one’s own eyes, give birth. (99)

In addition to asserting that the identity of the mother extends beyond birth to adoption, community, and constructed connections, Derrida challenges the idea of the womb as that whose singularity certifies a place of one’s origin.

In *The Theorist’s Mother*, Andrew Parker elaborates implications of the possibility that there is no “real mother”:

Discussions of motherhood across the humanities, social sciences, and medical sciences often deliberately ask “what is a mother?”—a sign that the question is not as simple as it first may appear. This question has always been complex—kinship theory has long recognized that “mater” and “genetrix” are analytically distinct categories—but more recently the mother’s definition has passed from the complicated to the “impossible.” (11).

Such is the “lexical complexity” that “Theory (of all kinds, feminist and queer included) has yet to catch up” (11). Derrida and Parker disrupt the idea of the singular mother, challenging

narratives of certainty, belonging, and origin, all of which have been used to legitimate belonging.

Although also considering the potential of more than one mother, “Creature of Theory” focuses upon the act of birth, illustrating how this act exceeds its definition as a singular, finite event that begins and ends with delivery. In this way, I respond to Derrida’s provocation on the subject. In his interviews with Elisabeth Roudinesco, Derrida argues that “The theme of birth, with all it implies, does indeed call for a singular thought—singular first of all because it does not reduce birth to either genesis or creation or beginning or origin” (*FWT* 61). Acknowledging the inevitable familial bond around birth, he nevertheless asks:

But what is it ‘to be born’? If we distinguish it rigorously from the origin, the beginning, provenance, etc, ‘birth’ is perhaps a question of the future and of arrival, a newly arrived question. Philosophy is much more prepared to work on questions of the origin and the end, of life and death. But philosophy (and no doubt science too, most often, and in any case psychoanalysis) has given little ‘thinking’ attention to what, in birth, does not fall under these categories. (*FWT* 40)

Through the frame of maternity, “Creature of Theory,” explores what “does not fall under these categories,” presenting temporal and spatial effects of birth that de-center its singular eventfulness, presenting it as a haunting that extends beyond the woman undergoing the act.

I describe the forms of touch and interaction that develop within the maternal relation as modes and effects that continue and extend birth and that can take place in relation to bodies other than those involved in delivery. Attending to my own experience, and drawing on phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and philosophy, I demonstrate how superficial experiences of touch, the strangeness of the infant, and care’s extension to a form of life de-center birth from

determinations of maternity, disrupting the perceived temporality and connection of this event. Rather than a narrative of procreation that repeats and re-inscribes notion of subjectivity, belonging, and family, I focus on smaller, superficial events that follow it. These small moments of touch, of friction, of tension that repeat and return the event of birth generate an alternate time of interaction that overwhelms or stands to the side of narratives of birth as origin.

Rather than birth, I discuss surfaces of the body that become subject to touch and pressure. I dwell on a blemish that emerged after I gave birth and that attracts my daughter. This small freckle, one of many that emerged after I gave birth, provide a view of this event beyond reproduction or kinship, throwing into relief the way in which this relation expands and enriches embodied subjectivity. Or I address the effect of a fever that encompasses the small body of my daughter, tracing the way in which this fever alters my experience of her body, asserting a compactness and finitude that alters my own body and the nature of our connection or difference. This heat is an aspect of embodiment that disrupts habits of sense. Rather than claimed by one another and identified by name and blood, we become related to each other through shared and confused forms of interdependencies.

I show how maternity de-centers birth as an origin, generating alternative modes of temporality and connection. I highlight the haunting of maternity, foregrounding the ghosts and the disjunctive temporality of maternity; I illuminate the strangeness of the other, describing her effects upon home and self; I describe the undoing that results from the other and the way in which care entails a struggle with a self-sufficient subjectivity. While maternity is often thought in terms of kinship and relation, I foreground the strangeness of the infant, arguing that the event of birth cannot overcome this strangeness, presenting maternity as an exposure to the arrival of

another. While care is often thought in terms of an individual ethics, I shift its subject to a form of undoing and extend it to the form of one's life.

From the specific and the personal—a mole that makes a texture uniquely mine—I foreground and detail a relation between subjectivity and selfhood that emerges as a mode of theoretical thinking. Contradicting the supposed opposition between these discourses, I turn to three influential theorists to elucidate the ways in which maternity undoes the meaning of birth and generates alternative forms of subjectivity. I turn to Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault in order to explore the alternate time and space of maternity beyond the body and its matter. I examine Derrida's interest in hospitality, focusing on his lectures in *Of Hospitality*, Butler's interest in precariousness, concentrating on *Undoing Gender* and *Precarious Life*, and Foucault's interest in the care of the self, closely reading the final lectures he presented at the Collège de France. In each chapter, I turn attention to experiences of maternity that can be understood as extended examples and productions of birth, thereby denying it to be a singular act, denying its belonging to the mother, and denying its centrality to the maternal relation.

My first chapter, “‘Beside Oneself’: Maternal Haunting and Embodied Subjectivity,” challenges and complicates one of the dominant frames for maternity: its materialism. Acknowledging the physicality of the maternal relationship, I argue that it leads to a sense of disembodiment. Focusing on the sense of self as a necessary but contingent experience that is not always aligned with the material contours of the body, I argue that a maternal sense of self echoes Judith Butler's explication of dispossession in “Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy.” I examine a mole that emerged shortly after I have birth and that becomes pivotal to my daughter, a site that she rubs when ill-at-ease. Beginning with this mole, I turn to the act of

touch, highlighting how it disrupts ideas of how things go, of who we are, and of what can become of us. This millimeter of skin interrupts the narratives of temporality, development, and embodiment that have come to frame the maternal relation.

Beginning from this mole, I not only begin from a point of punctuation, midway in an assumed narrative, but I grapple with the complexity of overlapping forms of temporality that emerge within the maternal relation. Drawing on Gayle Salamon's account of proprioception in *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality*, I then explore how this rubbing between bodies interacts with the haunting boundaries of pregnancy to generate a felt sense of the body that extends beyond one's own material bounds. Through this formulation of a subjectivity, I call attention to the limits of a materialist discourse, showing the place of theory, showing how subjectivity can incorporate other times and spaces, moving us beyond self-possession. In this, birth has a different function, offering a mode of memory and containment that continues to disrupt the present. I present the event of birth as a process of ghostly encounters and undoing, of haunting, of certain impossibilities, of occupying different forms of embodiment.

My second chapter, "Raising Derrida: Strange Dwelling of the Arrival," responds to one of the events that prompted this dissertation. I had developed the habit, when my daughter was very small, of reading while she slept on me. Her body warm against mine disarmed the criticality or distractedness that so often interfered with simple reading pleasure. For her first few months, I would read at the odd hours created by the rhythms and patterns of her sleeping. So, I read Derrida's *Of Hospitality*—"Let us say yes to who or what turns up, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any identification, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new

arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female” (77)—at some late hour of the night, leaning back, one arm awkwardly in front of me, one hand touching the curving, fragile, incomprehensible body of this creature.

Of Hospitality includes two of Derrida’s lectures on hospitality—“Foreigner Question and “Step of Hospitality”—both of which elaborate the paradoxes of hospitality, the interplay it demands between accommodation and violence, and the foreignness of the question, which always comes from the other and so is always subject to translation. Interspersing the published pages of Derrida’s seminars is Anne Dufourmantelle’s invitation, a response to the lectures that accentuates the poeticity of Derrida’s prose, heightens its ontological resonance, and underlines the repeated inducements of these seminars to de-centralize the self, to see oneself as an other, and to de-prioritize reason.

This reading scene prompted “Creature of Theory.” The reading scene became characterized by a confusion of encounter and reception. My daughter affected my reading of Derrida; Derrida affected how I understood my encounter with my daughter. They re-framed each other. Given my daughter, I could not so easily critique the excessiveness or the limitations of Derrida’s ethics. I could not dwell on its impracticality. Given my daughter, I had to encounter—to undergo—the simultaneous tenderness and brutality of a theory that is driven by the responsibility brought by the other and that proclaims the impossibility of self-integrity. Reading Derrida, I had to encounter more keenly the self-estrangement, the un-suspicious, undistracted openness to the other that preceded childbirth. Reading Derrida, the pain and loss of the constraints of work, physical and financial resources, societal demands surfaced more clearly as the effect of not being able to let my daughter be. Reading Derrida, I turned attention to the disruptive aspect of maternity, the degree to which the infant diverges from adult

temporalities and expectations. There seemed a dialogue between maternity and hospitality that altered both.

In my second chapter, I use aspects of this work on hospitality to foreground the strangeness of the infant. A topic of “burning” importance, to use Judith Still’s words, hospitality is a political, ethical, and philosophical question, central to cultures across the world (1). As an ethics, it offers a way to move beyond self-preservative tendencies. The act of taking in a stranger, providing a contrast to the work of borders and boundaries, offers another way in which to relate to one another. Rather than privileging sovereignty, security, and borders, hospitality asks that one put the guest before oneself, welcoming him or her in, and giving beyond obligation.

Of Hospitality complicates this account, arguing that hospitality in the conventional sense is regulated by obligation, duty, and right, and belongs to a patriarchal order that requires sovereignty and possession and mastery over one’s home; it is therefore limited and potentially reductive and violent in that it imposes forms of identification upon the newcomer. Conventional hospitality welcomes the stranger whose otherness and similarity has been structured by an already established framework—a legal system or family, for example—and who is thus recognizable. Derrida says in “Foreigner Question,” “No hospitality, in the classic sense, without sovereignty of oneself over one’s home, but since there is also no hospitality without finitude, sovereignty can only be exercised by filtering, choosing, and thus by excluding and doing violence” (55).

Although disputing the ethics of conventional hospitality, Derrida does imagine another form of hospitality that would be ethical. This form, “Unconditional hospitality,” would be given without any expectation of anything in return. It would require that “I open up my home and that

I give not only to the foreigner . . . but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names” (25). Rather than setting the conditions of who can come and who can stay, hospitality, to be such, does not presume the being and time of the arrival. Upon that arrival, it requires the suspension of any knowledge; it requires the suspension of presumption, expectation, even of language.

Unconditional hospitality seems to call for a maternal comparison. Although appearing impractical, unconditional hospitality is not simply a standard for ethics; it is not a measure of hospitality that we can, with effort, care, and sacrifice, achieve. Unconditional hospitality blurs the division between self and other, reconfiguring one’s own relation to home. Involved in hospitality is not only the care for another, but also the effect of that care on oneself.

Unconditional hospitality details an encounter that privileges the other over self-preservation and that accentuates the transformative effects of this encounter. Focusing on the arrival of an unknown other, exploring how to let the other arrive and to minimize the violence of conditions—acknowledging that conditions can be violent—unconditional hospitality describes and enunciates a mode of self-habitation and contestation that is entwined with the interruptive arrival of the other and that is therefore linked to passivity, yielding, and the loss of self-possession to generate responsibility.

However, rather than comparing maternity to hospitality, I use Derrida’s discussion of the absolute other to discuss the strangeness of the infant. Emphasizing this strangeness and this intrusion, I present alternative narratives to maternity. Derrida conceives of birth as an “arrival,” a disruptive, singular entrance of a disruptive, singular being, which releases the mother from narratives of reproduction, biology, or essentialism. He recognizes the way in which birth, as an

arrival, interrupts the linearity of narratives of reproduction and the frameworks of identity. This transforms the significance of maternity. Rather than the assurance of identity and belonging, maternity is a radical exposure to arrival. The infant is a stranger, an anonymous other, whose absolute strangeness we are only beginning to fathom. Birth thus disrupts the narratives of reproduction by which it is commonly contained. The thought and possibility of an intrusion at once displaces birth from the determination of the mother and undoes its narratives of assured belonging.

One of the biggest obstacles to this chapter was Derrida's substantial interest in the mother, which spans many of his texts and includes his own relationship to his mother. Derrida's extended interest in birth and the figure of the mother creates a minefield of potential paths that either distract from or enrich this argument. Feminist philosophers have long been interested in Derrida's use of maternity, including his discussion of chora as it relates to hospitality and the degree to which representations of the mother are tied to the de-stabilizing and un-fathomable effects of one's birth. As I discuss in my second chapter, my argument departs from Derrida's. I concentrate on his description of the strange arrival, arguing that this description maps onto the arrival of the infant. Tracing this correspondence, I explore the implications for how we think of birth. Strangeness does not cease but continues. Associated with strangeness, the infant continues to come and brings forms of haunting that exceed the relationship.

My third chapter, "Speaking of Care: Michel Foucault and the Technē of Photographic Writing," engages with the lectures Michel Foucault gave at the Collège de France in the first few years of the 1980s, shortly before his death. These lectures develop his thinking on biopolitics, presenting a mode of care of the self that is oriented around the formation of the subject. I use this formulation of care to challenge Derrida's argument that writing and maternity

are opposed. Derrida advances this argument in his preface to Jacques Trilling's *James Joyce ou l'écriture matricide*, a psychoanalytic reading of James Joyce's *Ulysses* that foregrounds the desire to kill the mother. Responding to Trilling's argument about the cruelty of self-inventive writing, Derrida expresses a desire to quit writing that aligns this retirement with loving the mother.

To challenge this opposition, I argue that writing cares for the maternal effects I describe in my first two chapters. Writing cares for what extends beyond oneself and for one's own haunting. It cares for the event of being "beside oneself" and for strange modes of dwelling. Foucault's theory of care helps me to elucidate the possibility of caring for oneself against oneself, of creating a *technē* that would allow oneself to exceed oneself. I then use Marder's concept of "photographic writing" to explain how mimetic descriptions of my daughter resemble and exceed the technology of photography. They return not a lost body but my own sense of being beside myself. As such, they are a *technē* of the self that allows me to exceed myself, a writing of the other that returns ghosts. Rather than oriented around the self, rather than a practice of self-invention, writing enables the emergence of the other.

By drawing on these theorists, I provide an overview of a maternal relation with two goals in mind. One is to reframe birth, disavowing the existence of a singular, finite event that acts as a measure for maternity and as a site for origin and genesis. I do this by concentrating on effects of touch and on the strangeness of the infant. The other is to explore the way the close relationship with this other reveals the limits of a materialist framework that prioritizes self-possession. Though my description of maternity, I demonstrate the possibility of subjective forms that exceed the present and the material, positioning these—though unstable—as the sites for ethics and responsibility. I argue that the very instability of these sites extends the subject of

ethics, demanding that we think not only of the matter to hand, but of the time and sense of lived embodiment.

To sum up, through these chapters, I foreground the way in which experiences of touch and strangeness extend the event of birth beyond delivery, challenging its portrayal as an event of origin, genesis, or connection. Doing so, I disassociate it from notions of certainty and identification. At the same time, I argue that its effects haunt everyone, not only the woman who delivers. Focusing in this way on birth emphasizes maternity as an experience of relationality that moves one beyond the embodied subject, calling attention to the place of illusion within our sense of the self. It extends subjectivity across time and space, opening up alternative frames for responsibility, ethics, decision, and care.

My conclusion addresses the implications of using Derrida, Butler, and Foucault to illustrate maternity. It may seem strange to use three theorists whose work is often in tension with one another to discuss different aspects of maternity. These discourses seem antagonistic, one tracing the close relationship with another, the other exploring social construction, fragmentation, and uncertainty. Rather than defending maternity against arguments from progressive theory that it is essentialist and conservative, my conclusion uses maternity to defend theory against claims that it is impractical and irrelevant. I use maternity to highlight what is necessary in theory and how this mode of thinking otherwise relates to everyday life. Theory takes shape as the articulation of otherwise pathologized elements as the re-articulation of the world. Theory, in other words, challenges representations of reality that enable the view of alternatives to come into being. Yet, theory also articulates barely sensed effects that impact lives. It draws on and foregrounds this dimension to another that exists and exceeds what is to hand and what is visible. It is an aspect of bodies and time and the effect of touch and the place

of limits. Thinking of theory in relation to subjectivity—as that which challenges dominant regimes of the subject, for example—and as a mode of thought that transforms negative characteristics through creative exercise, I use maternity to foreground its address to the possibility of caring for an Other.

Doing so, I address a growing discontent with critical theory emerging in literary studies and in relation to queer theory. Discussing Eve Sedgwick, Bruno Latour, Rita Felski, Mari Ruti, and the recent turn towards materialisms, I identify key sites of dissatisfaction with critical theory. I then explore how the subject of maternity reframes these sites. Butler, Derrida, and Foucault become an ideal focus for this discussion as they often feature within criticisms of theory. To paint in broad brush strokes, Butler is taken to de-materialize the body, Derrida is considered abstract and hyperbolic, Foucault is thought to dwell too much on the loss of the subject and on the irresistibility of regulation. Maternity complicates these assessments, becoming a framework within which to reconsider the methodological legacies of poststructuralism.

While maternity provides a new perspective to the loss of the subject, uncertainty, and language, it also challenges styles of thought tied to post-structuralist thinking. Rather than detached, skeptical, defensive, or paranoid, maternity calls for exposure, courage, and the insistence of unverifiable needs. Maternity thus complicates the turn against theory, both endorsing this turn and refusing it. Maternity defends theory as a necessary idiom for the angle or fragments or ghosts of being that otherwise escape notice. Maternity turns attention not only to what could be fixed, but to the spaces between bodies, showing them to be much more than mere absence of a body, but to be that for which we can yearn, becoming part of who we are and not to be dismissed, changing how we manage our bodies and how we react to events.

The Distinction between Maternity and Motherhood

While “Creature of Theory” uses an experience of maternity to unsettle dominant representations of the act of birth, this experience is individual and specific and not intended to provide a measure or frame for motherhood. Indeed, maternity need not be related to motherhood at all. Maternity describes a response to another that does not profess to be universal, but that interrupts dominant theories of birth and calls attention to their fractures. It does not define or explain or shed light on motherhood. It enters in as the possible disruption and unsettling of this relation, of how it is perceived.

Rather than describing motherhood, rather than describing an identity that emerges through procreation, maternity describes an exposure to the emergence of another. It explicates an encounter, the appearance of a stranger, and the forms of connection that come from this stranger. The maternity birth ushers in is not inevitable, nor is it restricted to birth. Maternity is the encounter with aspects of body, self, and subject that undoes their veracity, and it is a mode of relationship to another that undoes distinction and connection as modes of analysis. Maternity is an event extracted from the conditions of giving birth that presents it in a new light without necessarily becoming an attribute of giving birth. What I explore is the effect of an encounter with what does not belong that takes place within material conditions and then generates a new attitude toward these material conditions. This enables a dimension to birth to come into view that escapes narratives of reproduction and procreation. It is worth addressing this aspect as its unintelligibility and invisibility has led to the mother’s management and control and to forms of social organization that can violate bodies without leaving recognizable wounds.

Maternity does not belong to the mother, nor does it describe the mother; the overlap between them is a coincidence, a contingent, historical, and cultural circumstance. The cultural

enforcement of the conditions of the mother—who is frequently bound to the home, to precarity, to domesticity—both invite (or force) and frustrate maternity. As the vulnerability to maternity varies by context, time, culture, so it varies by child, by age, need, number. The mother’s exposure to maternity can be fatal. It is a debilitating condition even as it wondrous. It wavers between fatality and wonder. The mother’s potential exposure to maternity is unstable. To speak of the mother is to speak of this instability, this un-quantifiability and un-generalizability. Although the conditions of birth and mothering expose the mother more immediately to maternity, which is why maternity reminds tied to the mother, it is not automatic, nor is it the only mode of exposure.

Nevertheless, maternity adds a layer to how we think of the mother. Maternity redefines the “mother” in terms of a tenuous, momentary stillness of relational contexts, appearances, bodies, and borders. In the shadow of maternity, the mother is a subject dependent upon variation who appears as an absolute identity. The susceptibility of the mother to a maternity varying over time is not accessible to sight. Derrida is right that there is no single mother, no pure origin, no unique, unified, pure mother. This construct of the mother is that of the self who can imagine autonomy and who has fashioned a relationship between oneself and one’s origin as between two definite and finite objects. Derrida’s argument that the identity of the mother has always been an illusion, that the advances in reproductive technology that challenge our view of the identity of the mother have enlightened us to an ageless truth, has value. The mother is indeed plural; she is indeed impossible.

The Place of the Personal

While I draw on my own experience, I do not do so to revise motherhood, foregrounding my experience over others. Patricia Hill Collins argues that the dominant ideology of

motherhood—specifying the effect of “gender symbolism of White Americans”— is linked to patriarchy and is uncharacteristic of the lives of women of color: “For Native American, African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-American women, motherhood cannot be analyzed in isolation from its context. Motherhood occurs in specific historical situations framed by interlocking structures of race, class, and gender” (311). In other words, there cannot be a measure of motherhood, as it cannot exist in any form unrelated to these structures.

While my argument is personal and specific, I use it as an example of a failed narrative of birth, suggesting the possibility of alternatives. My daughter and I inhabit a particular time, place, race, culture, social standing, class structure, relation to colonialism; we are haunted by personal, familial, national traumas and successes; we have a language; we have a habitus. I am stricken by close quarters, while she hates to be alone. We are specific and privileged but constrained by the experiences and events of our lives and being. We have these specific skins, of color and history, whose histories and patterns of touch govern our relationship. She has a groove on her head that I worried about for a while. She has a sensitivity to texture to which I must train myself to attend. I am very distant. I have habits of thinking, hiccups or repetitions, that follow a similar path, that exist always in relation to this path. I have matter in my body from all over the world. She has ways of running and holding herself and carrying herself that comes from me, my history, from others, the books she reads, our furniture.

Our relationship is intelligible and visible and acknowledged, which affects my capacity to write about it. Although it suffers indignity and disavowal, it is legible. I gave birth to her and she lives part of the week with me. I am white, and I am a citizen of the United States. I am single, and my family lives abroad, and so I know about finances and worries and support networks, but I also know the benefit of being able-bodied, of health, of the very capacity to be

able to work, to support myself by some means. Although fear lingers and there is isolation, we have more toys than is healthy for us, we have meals, and we are afforded more dignity than most. I fall apart, sometimes, when I step a little too far beyond my limit and must exist to support her in a state of disarray, intervening in everybody's life, being shouted at, dismissed. I feel my anxiety keenly sometimes, when funding stretches only a few months in advance. But I have appreciated the warmth of neighbors. I have addressed forms of loss that seemed to suck dry the very potential of a future, that seems indefensible, unstoppable, a kind of force against which I was impotent. I have felt the shame of this, the failures of myself, the intimacy with my own limits, forms of unbearability, the foolishness of decisions, the bad decisions, the disrepair, the lack of care. These, however, are at once a small part of what many go through, and they are also what is bound up with being human. Knowing loss and being unable to survive it. The unbearable.

These, all of these, limit, condition, and frame this dissertation. However, my daughter and myself are not the subjects of this dissertation. It is not about us. It is not about what we can teach anybody. It is not about our example. It is not about the structures in which we found ourselves. It is not a critique of these structures (not directly, at any rate); it is not about motherhood, or the mother-daughter relation.

It is far more specific. This dissertation is about a blemish on my skin, how it affects my skin, and how it affects my daughter. It is about the texture of my skin. It is about how something insignificant to me can become crucial to her. From this close and detailed explication of my own skin, I offer an additional lens to the situation of parents and of any intimate encounter: what is it to be an Other for another? What is it to be in another's world as their margin? What is it to be shaken free of habits of thought by the simple presence of another? These were the

questions generated by my daughter. From this writing for another, finding myself needing to write for another, making this wrong decision, I attempt to write an account of a way of inhabiting the world in relation to another that is linked to thought and that is linked to the intimacy of bodies.

Chapter One

“Beside Myself”:

Maternal Haunting and Embodied Subjectivity

Shortly after I gave birth, small red moles scattered over my chest, midriff, and thighs. I barely notice them, but, being small breaks in my surface, they interest my daughter. One on my right breast draws particular attention. My daughter discovered it when she was two, and it soon became for her a site of comfort and attachment that she would actively search for, her hand brushing against my skin in search of its resistance. She would stroke it whenever she felt ill-at-ease or nervous. Stroking me, she was soothed. Soon, she claimed the mole as her own. My mole, she would say, “Where’s my mole?” The mole was hers and she moved instinctively towards it, a nervous tic that played out at the surface of my body. I would carry her on my hip, and she would lean across my body and, in this arrangement, we would walk together, my left arm growing stronger, her left finger brushing my skin under my top. Not mine, not her, it was a patch of skin to which we both had a relation.

This shared relation to a millimeter of my skin interrupts narratives of maternity that have developed around the act of birth as a site of beginning and connection. Although these moles are associated with the event of birth, emerging along with other material alterations to my body, they also de-center this event from our relation. Rather than determined through the act of birth, our relationship becomes oriented around the temporality and connection created through this rubbing of my skin. Soothing one body and irritating another, this touch not only denies the assumed a-reciprocity of our relation, but also reformulates the function, nature, and temporality

of the surfaces that form the borders of and between our bodies. Through this touch, my body comes into being as something that matters to another. My skin no longer divides, but confuses us, merging *her*, not-her, and this specific body, mine. After a time, as I continue to become part of her embodied existence and continue to learn my own texture, my body begins to feel incoherent, otherwise than it was. I sense another sensing me, and I sense myself beyond my borders.

The act of touch has often been associated with the troubling of ontological assumptions about the body. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's discussion of his own two hands touching each other is a classic example. As Merleau-Ponty illustrates through the act of touching his hand as it touches the things of the world, self-touch blurs the dualism between subjective experience and objective existence. Describing how "my hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible, for my other hand," he shows how the subject that touches becomes the object that is touched, a crossing that complicates dualistic thinking of the body (133). The body is a "chiasm," a subject intertwined with object, never settling fully into either position (130). Merleau-Ponty's description of a chiasm resembles the touch between my skin and the tip of my daughter's finger, this act of rubbing bringing forth a related experience of intertwining. To use D.W. Winnicott's name for the beloved toy or blanket that helps a child negotiate his or her separation from a care-giver, my own surface and the site of my own interaction with the world becomes, also, her "transitional object" (2). I move from subject to object, sensing the necessity of myself as this object to the being of another, the act of rubbing enacting the possibility of being the body of another.

This chiastic interchange also takes place in relation to time and language. Rubbing de-centers birth as the primary, defining event of our relation; it diverts time's passage from this

event and brings into view other modes of connection. Moreover, this rubbing challenges the very idea of a linear passage of time. It is a material event that recalls previous dependencies, invokes its own ghosts, and creates its own futures. The repetitious touch on this surface recalls histories unrelated to the act of birth; it generates affects and mandates a bodily comportment that influences where I go, how I go, and what I do. In addition, this touch gestures to the possibility of an inter-embodiment that calls into question the very identities supposedly produced out of the event of birth. Confusing the ownership of our bounds, this rubbing calls for a language of possession that extends the speaking subject beyond its body: “My mole,” she says.

Against tendencies to think of maternity in terms of procreation or in terms of material embodiment, this chapter presents an account of how this intensely intimate relationship complicates the close association of materiality with embodied subjectivity. In *Assuming a Body*, Gayle Salamon argues that there are modes of embodied subjectivity that cannot be accounted for “within a theory that understands the body to be a plenitude of materiality and meaning, a substance without rupture or discontinuity” (3). She adds that it can be impossible for “the problem of correspondence between a subject’s felt sense of the body and its corporeal contours [to] be addressed within a strictly materialist framework” (3). Asserting that transsexual and transgender narratives demonstrate the function of fantasy and sense within embodied subjectivity, Salamon asks “how a consideration of trans bodies might help us understand how relations between the phantasmatic and the material can be embodied and lived” (2). Salamon asserts the importance of the felt sense of the body to lived reality; she argues, in other words, that a felt sense of the body that exceeds its material contours must be affirmed as a condition of livability.

Disrupting common narratives of maternity that develop around the act of birth as a singular event initiating a relationship, I argue that the surface effects of this relationship produce a mode of lived embodiment whose verification and understanding similarly expose the limits of a materialist framework, especially if this framework privileges possession. To do so, I draw on Salamon's discussion of proprioception and her assertion that this "felt sense" of the body, the unconscious grasp of the body's space and the interaction of its parts, might not correspond with its ostensible, material subject (2). As I am rubbed, my belonging to the specifically textured and claimed "things" of the world of another alters my relation to my own, material borders. In addition, this sense coexists with another: I am haunted by the physical containment of my daughter's body. I sense her close to me even when she exists at a distance from my body, an illusory proximity that expands and extends the bodily space I sense myself to occupy. Although this evokes pregnancy, it also disrupts the very forms of temporality that birth supposedly indexes. Birth is not an originary event, nor is it restricted to one act, nor are its effects restricted to the one who underwent this act. In the relation to the other, the event of giving birth can haunt anyone.

While it appears that I am describing a maternal subjectivity, my goal is somewhat different. Given the instability of dependence and distance between two bodies each with their own history and time, processes of loss and dispossession would be as integral to this relationship as processes of formation. It is hard not to think of this relationship without the threat of the unbearable. In addition, it is difficult to imagine a mode of embodiment characteristic of enough examples of relationality that it could viably be called "maternal." If anything, I describe a maternal *de*-subjectivization. While maternity is often thought at odds with the inclinations of progressive theory to challenge normative understanding of subjectivity, this

close relationship undoes existing forms of subjectivity. Through the touch and need of this other body, through its very emergence, habits and modes of being are called into question. The material contact takes place within and disrupts the time and space of one's own body.

Rather than describing a subjectivity common to the maternal relation, I focus on how this relation pushes beyond and thus calls attention to the limits of a materialist framework in relation to embodiment. Composed of ghostly contours and shared surfaces, this sensed experience complicates self-possession as a center for theories of embodiment. It brings to embodiment the potential of disruption, a living with uncertainty, an openness, a dependence on what is beyond one. It implicates the empty space between bodies within the conditions of embodiment.

Focusing on my own experience, presenting anecdotes of touch in terms of its self-disruption and self-expansion, I sketch an ephemeral felt sense of the body that could form the basis for an embodied subjectivity that exceeds temporal, material, and spatial possibilities of that body. I trace an embodied subjectivity that is produced through one's haunting by another. Along with Salamon's theory of proprioception, I draw on Judith Butler's work on precariousness, adapting her description of dispossession articulated in "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy." A mode of embodied subjectivity that grapples with the time and dependence of the other, this exceeds one's temporal and spatial location, disrupts narratives of birth, and calls attention to the limits of a materialist framework. I describe this embodiment as feeling "beside oneself." I argue for being "beside oneself" as a mode of embodiment oriented around one's texture and touch. Doing so, I not only reframe the maternal relation and the act of birth, but I provide a new vantage for the temporality and space of ethics and embodiment.

The Self of the Skin

The centrality of touch and the surface of the body to the infant decenters birth in the origin story of the bodily subject. In “Malebranche and the Sense of Touch,” Butler uses infancy to emphasize the place of susceptibility and dependence within subject formation. She argues that “our inability to ground ourselves is based on the fact that we are animated by others into whose hands we are born and, hopefully, sustained” (62). The argument has a number of implications both for maternity and for theories of subject formation. Not only do we depend upon the touch of others—not only are we susceptible and impressionable, our sovereignty compromised from the beginning—but we are animated by touch and by possibly impersonal hands. The act of touch not only decenters the act of birth from the narrative of subject formation, but it also disarticulates the one who provides this creative beginning from the one who gives birth.

As the psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu has argued, the surfaces of the body and the events of touch that take place there are bound up with the possibility of subject formation. Anzieu entangles surface and subject, finding the one impossible to discuss without the other. Rather than focusing on interiority, Anzieu develops the notion of the Skin Ego, “a mental image of which the Ego of the child makes use during the early phases of its development to represent itself as an Ego containing psychical contents, on the basis of its experience of the surface of the body” (40). The Skin Ego focuses on the function and location of the biological skin. The experience of being held, of being carried and touched, establishes the sense of containment that first generates the idea of envelope for the shape of the psyche. The psyche does not only have a metaphorical dependence on the skin but remains connected to and influenced by the physical skin that acts as interface between world and body. The skin bears a close relationship to the psyche, so that the psyche is thought in terms of the skin, and the effects of the skin affect the

psyche. The skin ego also implicates the act of touch in psychic formation. As Jay Prosser puts it, “The self derives from the skin, from those first touches in childhood that create a sense of ourselves as contained and social” (53).

As I intend to show here, these effects are reciprocal, the animating act of holding the infant affecting at least two bodies, at least two bodies drawn into this altered space and temporality of the hold. With a body at the tips of my fingers and in the cradle of my arm, in frequent contact with another, my borders become unavoidably present and the nature of my touch becomes unavoidably clear. This weaves my surface into my center, my edge into her containment. Her presence interrupts my own, undoing any stories I might have invented of my touch, reminding me of my impact. I am brought close to my own touch; I am brought close to my touch as that which belongs another. This proximity and de-centering generate the effect of feeling “beside oneself.”

The process is one of confrontation and of interweaving margins. Care for Juliet takes place at the point of my impact on the world, where it is central to her, at the very edge of myself, where she begins. It brings home—makes unavoidable, makes front and center—the way in which I touch. When I lift her out of her bath and turn her to me, wrapped in a towel, and she stands on my knees and starts patting and stroking my face, I am given the return of my own touch. I had washed her face just so, a minute ago, rubbing the soap between my hands before touching her face. When she rubs her hands together and pats and strokes—and hits, slaps—my face, she is mimicking me. It is unnerving now how she slaps my face, and how invasive I find this slap. I think back. How is her body receiving my care? How does my touch feel? How gentle am I? Am I gentle enough? She looks into my eyes, turning her head to side, and pushes it against mine laughing. In this encounter, I confront the nature of my touch; I confront its ethics,

its responsibility, its limits, and its effects. I am aware of and I am tested on my body's tenderness or roughness, gentleness or abruptness. These become implicated in the life of another.

More aware of my touch, I also know myself as her exterior. In *Corpus*, arguing against the possibility of self-touch, Jean-Luc Nancy maintains that one is always an outside for oneself: "I have to be an exteriority in order to touch myself. And what I touch remains on the outside" (128-129). Nancy presumes this condition of being "outside" to be a destabilizing denunciation of the possibility of presence and self-knowledge and a refutation of the interiority of the body. However, this position of exteriority also aptly describes the condition of the care-giver. Having touch that forms the infant, I inhabit a position of exteriority. Formatively touching the other is a disjunctive experience that repudiates self-possession and self-identity and in which one becomes resolutely exterior: "The body is always outside, on the outside. It is from the outside" (128). The way in which I touch, my effect upon the world, becomes central, a measure of myself. To totalize even further, as *Corpus* also declares, "'I' is a touch" (131). I come to know myself as a touch. I have and I am a limit that touches.

Not only does my surface become newly central, but it becomes the site of my impact and the site of my implication in another. In the experience of touching and being touched by my daughter, I know myself as an outside for another, as another's outside, and this is an experience that decenters me. This touch coming to the surface is dislocating. It reminds that I have a surface, and that the sensation at this surface affects me and allows access to the histories of touch that took place there. My skin, in other words, surprises me with myself. I am jarred by the self I find myself to be at my fingertips. My texture and my impact become dominant characteristics of this surface once known at a distance as my limit. I am therefore set to the side

of my impact and to the side of my surface. I am set to the side of another. The surfaces of the body that had once appeared to be my end become trumped by their place in relation to another, by their external effect, and by their failures to contain. I am decentered through this experience of learning how I touch, inclining towards an absent center, interrupting my own coherence, re-aligned with my surface as it belongs to another.

In *Undoing Gender*, writing about the way in which our desire or our grief for another overwhelms us, arguing that identity begins as and through a form of undoing, Butler uses the phrase, “beside oneself,” to illustrate the sensed effects of one’s constitutive relations to another. To feel “beside oneself” is to undergo the ecstatic effects of grief, rage, and desire, all of which reveal the body’s and identity’s dependence on and origination in relation. Rather than a negative account of losing control, the idiom betrays a constitutive non-sovereignty and foregrounds the un-deniability of connections and binds between bodies:

It won’t even do to say that I am promoting a relational view of the self over an autonomous one or trying to re-describe autonomy in terms of relationality. Despite my affinity for the term relationality, we may need another language to approach the issue that concerns us, a way of thinking about how we are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them as well (24).

In short, “beside oneself” is a figurative phenomenology of dispossession that relates the experience of a first person *I* that no longer maps onto a possessed body and that can no longer maintain its status as an identity. It describes this state in which it is not clear who is saying *I*; it is not clear to whom *I* refers. “Beside oneself” designates the effect on a sense of self of belatedly learning its dependence on another. “Beside oneself” addresses what lies beyond the matter of the body, its possession, and its corporeal contours. The attempt to explain oneself

takes on the grammar of the sentence in order to articulate its own sensed de-centralization. Rather than signifying a simple dispersion or explosion of the self, “beside myself” portrays a tension between two relations to the body: the subject—the I and the oneself—and its stretch and elongation to another form, its implication, and its undoing.

Butler uses this notion of beside oneself to propose limits to autonomy as a measure for and goal of political struggle. Her use of “beside oneself” stresses the way a focus on the body calls into view an interdependence that undoes autonomy: “The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence. The body can be the agency and instrument of all these as well, or the site where ‘doing’ and ‘being done to’ become equivocal” (21). Putting social embodiment in tension with hopes for autonomy, her focus on the body’s impressionability foregrounds dependence and vulnerability as her provocation: “Given over from the start to the world of others, bearing their imprint, formed within the crucible of social life, the body is only later, and with some uncertainty, that to which I lay claim as my own” (21). Butler’s descriptions of the implications of the self with the other—I am beside myself; I am outside myself—express one’s own de-centralization and the constitutive relation to another in the first person; they turn figures of speech into literal renderings of the residual and formational sense of one’s own body and the undeniable claim made upon it by another.

My account of maternity is an altered version of being “beside oneself.” In this encounter, my body is undone—I have lost a governing sense of interiority—and my surface has become sensed as another’s. This awareness of my extension and my implication in another decenters myself. I feel “beside myself” in the sense that the borders which once marked my limit now become central to me, and they occupy me, and they link me to another body.

As Eve Sedgwick explains in *Touching Feeling*, the act of being beside another is not an assurance of solidarity or consensus, but a process of disruption and friction. As she uses the preposition to highlight the theoretical stakes of her collection of essays:

Beside is an interesting preposition also because there's nothing very dualistic about it; a number of elements may lie alongside one another, though not an infinity of them. *Beside* permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object. Its interest does not, however, depend on a fantasy of metonymically egalitarian or even pacific relations, as any child knows who's shared a bed with siblings. *Beside* comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations. (8)

As Sedgwick suggests, *beside* is bound up with a non-dualistic, non-teleological conception of selfhood and relation. It complicates the question of belonging and origin—which of us is first? Which of us is object and which subject?—and it asserts the effect of the other. I am beside myself because I am beside another who rubs and claims the skin I call my own.

As a description of embodied subjectivity, “beside myself” implicates touch within one's sense of one's own embodiment. This sense of embodiment would include the other, highlight the touch that thickens and animates borders, and re-animate these borders. This is an embodied subjectivity in which my skin and my touch as the limits of my body include their effect upon another and the effect of another upon myself. It is a thinking at the edge of myself, with the awareness of the other against me, knowing that the other is of me. Thinking not for the maintenance of the self, but for the possibility of touch and in awareness of the vulnerability of

the body, a necessary and cautious opening and wrapping, a holding.

Haunted Proprioception

The reciprocal effects of a relationship that intensifies the act and the function of touch that lead to one feeling “beside oneself” are heightened by the way in which the event of birth continues to haunt this relationship. For many nights when my daughter was small, I would wake up in bed and would reach out my hand to check for her presence. When I encountered bare sheets, I would be thrown into brief terror. The sheets were not a reminder of her translocation—she was sleeping in her crib—but the cold horror of an absent certainty. I had been certain to find at the end of my stretch the sleeping body of my daughter. I knew she was there, as I knew my own arm would be there if I had reached out to touch it. The absence is not only the absence of another I would touch, but the absence of a reciprocation, the jolt of an absent part of myself. As I groped for her, I not only traced an absence and an error, tracing the absence upon the haunted body, but I also re-traced my own boundaries, seeming to extend myself now to these sheets.

While this experience appears to re-assert the role of birth in the maternal relation, it also undoes the temporality that typically defines the event, and it produces a felt sense of the body that disavows the distinction this event supposedly initiates. For one, it denies that birth is an event bound in time and suggests that it is an ongoing process. Birth’s haunting shifts the event from an origin and suggests it to be a disjunctive interruption of the present. Rather than promising a futurity, birth haunts, returning the past, folding the past into the present. Birth interrupts and refuses the present. Furthermore, this haunting is not limited to the one who underwent the event. When I hold her body, repeating the containment of birth, the experience of containment haunts me. As she rests against my chest, head against my heart, I am haunted. What is more, this haunting unsettles the distinction between our bodies, calling into question

even the modes of embodiment visible within the act of birth. Our separation and her mobility now dis-orient me, making me uncanny, making the limit of my body a disavowal of my felt sense of my body. While my border is hers, she also marks the limit of a border haunting, her body carrying the ghost of mine.

Rather than an illusion to be corrected, this haunting affects the felt sense of the body, altering the temporal and spatial confines of embodied subjectivity. Adapting Merleau-Ponty's description of intersubjective embodiment in *Phenomenology of Perception*, this haunting—a new kind of hauntology—produces or is related to a mode of embodiment that exceeds the materiality of the body. Describing the tension between material bounds and those that haunt, this suggests a subjective embodiment that bridges bodies and times and exceeds material contours and their possession. This embodiment complicates our relationship—interfering with the reproductive narrative—but it also opens up different concerns in the field of livable, repairable forms of embodiment.

One way to explain the effect of this haunting is through Salamon's response to Merleau-Ponty's discussion of transposition. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty describes transposition in terms of a reaching out to some object: "When I move my hand towards a thing, I know implicitly that my arm unbends. When I move my eyes, I take account of their movement, without being expressly conscious of the fact, and am therefore aware that the upheaval caused in my field of vision is only apparent" (195). Focusing on the relation between body and desire, Salamon highlights that this event of reaching for another or turning to look at another not only challenges our sense of being centered in our own bodies, but also restores us to our bodies:

In the desiring look, the eye that comes to rest on an object finds there a still point, an anchor that grounds vision itself and transforms it so that what is, factually speaking, a blurring upheaval in the visual field is sensed as an unremarkable shift of focus through this process of transposition. My look has an object, and I trust that object to ground my look and thus know that the world itself is not turning, that the “upheaval” that occurs when I turn my head and look at something is both occasioned by that desired object and quieted by it. This experience, though entirely mundane and unremarkable, is a decentering of the self that happens because I turn toward another, and yet that other magically restores me to myself by persisting as the focused and sustained object of my look. (53)

In this account, the subject is de-centered—lost to itself—yet, in the moment of stillness when it settles upon that object, it is restored. One finds oneself through the very possibility of the other. One emerges as an embodied subject through the tumultuous effects of desire and its object.

In the haunted time of the infant, this sense of decentering and focus is complicated by the unexpected absence of that object towards which one turns and that would still the shifting world and restore one’s self. As I reach for her, knowing as I do so that this reach has an unknown texture and pressure, I settle not upon her, but upon her absence, signaled by the presence of another, alien object. In this event, the world continues its shift and upheaval, the decentering has no focus or quieting; it focuses upon an object that does not restore the self, but that contradicts its felt sense. One is owned by a sensation beyond the self, but one is also oriented toward and inclined toward a possible absence. While this results in a suspension of self-certainty, it also reframes the self. This decentering builds uncertainty into one’s reach, inclines one without end. This absence interrupts the coming into body Merleau-Ponty describes,

creating instead a dependence on other surfaces, a temporal suspension of restoration, an extension. One's body feels out of time, its restoration delayed.

In this case, my material contours seem themselves to be undoing the felt sense of my body. I feel myself to be living dualistically, embodying two temporalities. I have a recognized form of embodiment with which I move through the world. At the same time, this felt sense is haunted by another. Or, to put it more accurately, this evidence of my embodiment haunts my felt sense, disrupting it and challenging it. Although social dependency haunts the self-possessed, the reverse is also true. The material body is perhaps haunting its own implication. The material surface of the body haunts the illusion of an extended surface and the connection to the other. While this seems to align with much of the tendency of thinking about the body—that its coherence is a fiction materiality dispels, or that material coherence is a fiction the skin dispels—it also suggests the way that one's sense of self can exceed a body's material contours, incorporating the surface of another's body. This raises the possibility of a subjectivity extended across time and space. I feel borders long breached; I depend for security on what is mobile and what is distant. I do not depend on the close-to-hand or the material. I turn to the textual and phantasmatic. I do not deny the sense of others based upon what I can know and see. Bodies reach across time and space.

A journal entry that I wrote a few months after I gave birth gestures to the possibility of an ephemeral formation that emerges out of undoing. In this entry, after months of sleep-deprivation and exhaustion, I profess a desire “*for smooth lines, for smoothness, no dirt, calmness, no bumps or ridges, nothing to irritate, to touch the skin.*” I would have “*Nothing to bother, to shake up. Clean, smooth, fresh-smelling lines that sooth.*” The entry clearly centralizes the skin, describing a sense of becoming undone through the effects of touch and sensation. As it does so, however, it

also aligns these undone surfaces with others beyond my body. The lines I discuss are those of the house—cluttered now—the lines of my body, and the lines of writing. I am yearning for the possibility of writing and reading, for the possibility of integrated thinking, for the ease of a well-crafted sentence.

While the entry is clearly revealing of my personal history and the spatial and temporal rupture of childbirth, it also calls attention to the strength of the links between thinking, writing, and the surfaces of the body. There is an echoing confusion between my skin, the surfaces upon which I rest, the world as a surface I move against, the page on which I write, and time. I feel the sentences on the page as against my skin and the irritation is registered on my thought. I judge writing with my skin, which is linked to my thinking. Everything must be as I would have my skin be: long smooth stretches of time, sheets, pages, writing. My writing encrusts my hope for my skin.

Rather than an ideal for my skin, my yearned-for “smoothness” reflects a discomfort with an intensification of touch. In *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick discusses Renu Bora’s theory of texture:

Going from Victorian plush to postmodern shine, Bora notes that “smoothness is both a type of texture and texture’s other” (99). His essay makes a very useful distinction between two kinds, or senses, of texture, which he labels “texture” with one x and “texxture” with two x’s. Texxture is the kind of texture that is dense with offered information about how, substantively, historically, materially, it came into being. A brick or a metalwork pot that still bears the scars and uneven sheen of its making would exemplify texxture in this sense. But there is also the texture—one x this time—that defiantly or even invisibly blocks or refuses such information; there is texture, usually glossy if not positively tacky, that insists

instead on the polarity between substance and surface, texture that signifies the willed erasure of its history. One consequence of Bora's treatment of the concept: however high the gloss, there is no such thing as textural lack. (14-15)

My impossible desire for smoothness suggests that my surface sensitivity has increased, and that I have, indeed, developed or resuscitated a sensitivity that recalls the body in touch. It suggests that this touch is traumatizing. I am yearning to not be touched, in this way, to return to my own distance from my touch. It also suggests a coming into relation. The world was "smoother" before the arrival of the other, attempting to refuse "information about how, substantively, historically, materially, it came into being," a "willed erasure" of history.

The entry also recalls Butler's discussion of the failures of narration that emerge from this undoing. In *Undoing Gender*, Butler writes of the effect of grief: "One does not always stay intact. One may want to, or manage to for a while, but despite one's best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of touch, by the memory of feel" (24). This feeling prohibits the possibility of its narration, unsettling the *I* who would narrate this story through her own interdependence, her own undoing:

I might try to tell a story here about what I am feeling, but it would have to be a story in which the very 'I' who seeks to tell the story is stopped in the midst of the telling; the very 'I' is called into question by its relation to the Other, a relation that does not necessarily reduce me to speechlessness, but does nevertheless clutter my speech with signs of its undoing. I tell a story about the relations I choose, only to expose, somewhere along the way, the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations. My narrative falters, as it must. (23)

In my journal entry, faltering takes place through the act of touch and becomes manifested

through the sense of the *I* coming undone. My speech becomes cluttered with images of the skin and with ideals of the skin uninterrupted. However, the effect is not a flaying. The journal suggests the emergence of texture, smoothness giving way to substance. In addition, while the lost containment signals the disruption of one mode of embodied subjectivity, others emerge. What is undone is the idea that smoothness is the only possible mode of livable embodiment.

The final line of my entry offers an alternative to this embodiment and to its narration, aligning surface, self, and other in a confused expression of presence. Although repeating this desire for smoothness, it suggests a substitute for my own lost surface. Falling from narrative and giving up the grammar of the sentence, the line loses the subject only to bring the other into my possession: I write, *Smooth sheets self of my skin*. The turn of phrase recalls Anzieu's theory of the skin ego, in which the surface of the body becomes confused with the self. However, it augments this theory, substituting this skin with another surface. This line aligns an external surface with my skin and inverts self and skin. In this final line, the borders of my body that would enable a sense of coherence, integrity, and comfort are not my own. A clear description of a strange sense of dispossession articulated in terms of skin, the final line of my entry is, in the face of a faltering narrative, a metaphorical expression of selfhood and being that does not make sense of but describes a being beyond self.

As I try and articulate my thoughts they shift from my body, centralized in my life, to the surfaces close but removed that conform to and take the place of my skin. To move through the rupture, to address the memories and space recalled by the continuous contact with a body different than my own, I produce and smooth external surfaces, created as such from time, writing, and thinking. "*Smooth sheets self of my skin*" aligns an external surface with my skin, while confusing my self with my skin. The coherence and boundary of my body depends on

characteristics of external surfaces. I have been given over to the smoothness of that which I encounter, dependent on them. In “*smooth sheets self of my skin,*” my self has been switched with my skin, even as smoothness becomes the remedy for a surface reawakened to the Other’s touch. Although unable to be bound—whether in form or in direction—maternity shows that bodies can differently be affirmed.

Conclusion

Describing being “beside myself” and being haunted as modes of embodied subjectivity that overlap and complicate each other, I attempt to do two things. The first relates to understandings of maternity that depend upon the act of birth. On the one hand, limiting maternity to the act of birth reduces this experience and effaces the variety of different forms this relationship takes. The act of giving birth should not be considered a condition or a verification of maternity. On the other hand, the act of giving birth is a significant event that alters one’s sense of self. Rather than simply separating maternity and birth, I alter the meaning of birth, describing it as an ongoing event that can move from one body to another. At the same time, I interrupt notions of reproductive temporality. Rather than an origin or a genesis, I describe birth in terms of its haunting, and I describe maternity in terms of animating surface sensations that take over from and decenter this event.

My second goal is to argue for the possibility of an embodied subjectivity that shows the limits of a materialist framework as well as the limits of self-possession. In his theory of psychic development, Anzieu intimately relates the psyche and the surface of the body. While Anzieu’s emphasis on containment is problematic, his implication of fantasy within psychic development supports the possibility of an embodied subjectivity conditioned upon sensed borders that do not correspond to the material. The skin ego is a “mental image,” deriving from a material surface

itself brought to matter through the way it is touched. This skin ego enables communication and touch between the surface of the body and the psyche. It is conditioned upon the confusion of matter and metaphor. The “skin ego” is a space entangling psychic, material, and intellectual processes that allows the ego to align and communicate with the material surface of the body. While Anzieu’s theory focuses on the mother as a holding environment, it directly links the ego and thought to surface and touch and brings forward the skin as the device which connects and confuses all of these. The skin ego enables the link between body and mind that reconsiders the importance of touch to thinking.

In this event, the mole’s relevance becomes clear. Anzieu attests to a plane between mother and child that suggests the infant’s responsiveness and agency. A key aspect of the theory of the skin ego is the infant’s phantasy of a skin common to herself and her mother. Contradicting accounts of the mother-child relationship that perceive an asymmetrical relationship marked by dependency and passivity, Anzieu attests to a plane between mother and child that suggests the infant’s responsiveness and agency, a plane he links to “a phantasy—unknown to the experimentalists—of a skin shared by mother and child. This phantasy has the structure of an interface of a particular kind, which separates two areas of space having the same regime and between which it therefore creates a symmetry” (59). This interface, “the phantasy of a common skin,” derives from a “continuity of contact” between child and the surface of the containing figure. Touch creates a skin common to another that functions, on one hand, to lend the child her containment, but also, and this Anzieu forgets, to give to the mother an inversion of touch, a sense of her edge. The skin ego’s ability to be linked to the bodily misinformation of the logic of touch opens up thinking beyond the self at the center.

In other words, her argument, “my mole,” is a verbal claim over my body that invokes her own self-formation. Fantasy is at the heart of this claim, as is the other’s body. The interaction amongst fantasy, the other’s body, and one’s self is neither clear nor stable, but it suggests that sense will always offer a space beyond the material contours that calls for care in relation to embodied subjectivity. The link between skin and ego enables the bodily misinformation of the logic of touch to generate new senses of the self. The skin, assumed to mean the body, linked to the psyche, can belong to another, can seem to change in shape and intensity. Rather than the limit to the body, the skin can also form a contraption the self co-authors with the infant: a stretched self, a moon in orbit, a new gravitational pull, a new structure of support, a new shock of absence, a new bereavement, an extra sense, a welcome otherness, a strange displacement.

Salamon’s discussion of trans embodiment is useful in describing this event as it affirms the place of sense within a viable embodied subjectivity. As Salamon argues, projects such as Merleau-Ponty’s “must then be read as a radical unsettling of the Cartesian tradition that understands me to be a subject only to the extent that I am distinct and separate from others, where physical confirmation of that separateness can be found in the perfect boundedness of my body” (46). Subjectivity can derive from bodies differently in contact and differently in touch. Subjectivity can derive from confusion. Maternity entails, in part, the metaphorical undoing of self, an undoing of reproduction, a temporal distortion. Maternity is a form of dispossession but is at the same time a chiasmic experience of bodies that exceeds material contours, that links with another, that somehow touches at a distance.

A final example illustrates this felt sense and its temporal and spatial effects. One day, as I stood beside my daughter, she a toddler unsteadily occupying self and body, I watched her walk away, and, tired myself, I stretched and yawned, my elbows out and my head falling back. As I

turned back toward her, and she, too, turned to head back toward me, she stopped on her way to mimic my yawn. It is at this point, as I arch my back, my elbows bent, and as she copies my body's arch, that I feel in my stretch an alignment with her own stretching. I not only recognize, but I *feel* the similarity of our stretch—the way of our arc—and the stretch seems to belong more to her than to me. It was no longer mine, this stretch; it was an unclaimed stretching of a fatigued body, itself too much bent over, hunched as a matter of course, out of alignment, always leaning over. My own body's response to its tiredness sensed these movements to take form through her body, and it brought me into her space: a brief touch in arc, in pose, a kinship in pose that brought me again to her.

The stretch was an echo and not simply a reaction to my tiredness; it was a copy, a reply to her stretch, a kinship motion that interrupted and disturbed my relation to my own body. The only breach in this overlay between us were the elbows whose sharpness was only mine, jabbing, my sharp bend to my own body. I was otherwise an extension of her action, a taking up and continuing of a stretch that began with her and that I recognized as hers. It unfolded over time, a kind of stretching time itself that imprinted the moment, that image of us turned toward each other, me stretching and finding myself once again in some extension or memory of her, through this very motion.

The example shows the sense of the self overleaping the body, becoming enmeshed within the atemporal memory of bodies in touch. This interrupts the linearity of the maternal narrative. The relationship between these bodies is not one of mimicry or reciprocation. It is no longer clear whose sensations are whose. Expressions come with doubt. With the yawn, who is tired? As I ask, at times, whose tiredness am I yawning? Whose stretch is this? Whose tension am I stretching? Can she stretch? Her skin is loose, without tension, without resistance. When I

put my finger to my lips and gently pull, I recognize the gesture as hers, which I have inherited. The mimicry has inverted and I find myself as her repetition. My sense has become diverted to another, confused. I am no longer certain of my body. I feel her, a confusion of experience that relates bodies not along their distinction, but along their overlap, stepping over time and space in order to interchange experience. Maternity not only entangles conceptions of exteriority and interiority, and security and undoing, but it emphasizes the importance of points of contact that destabilize the bodies they put in touch. The encounter calls into question habits and patterns by which the body is sensed. It changes them; it builds different ones; it utilizes them to establish a sense that exceeds one's body.

To be beside oneself is to be uncertain about what is going to happen next, or about why one responds as one will. As Butler emphasizes, being dispossessed includes acting on motivations that are not entirely clear. Our relations with others and the way we are bound up in the lives of others lead to actions and to states of mind and being that cannot be controlled. We fail to comport ourselves properly. However, this effect is not only negative. To be beside oneself is also to be beyond what one has planned to be; it is to discover what exists beyond the self and beyond one's plans.

Maternity responds to what liberal understanding of responsibility can obscure: the embodied dependency on intangible connections and formations and the responsibility and resistance of apparently incoherent, uncontained homes. The very capacity of matter and thought to intertwine and to affect each other enables the possibility of properly conceiving forms of responsibility and resistance that do not depend upon the integrity of a self, but that are nevertheless grounded in an appreciation of limits, conditions, and material needs. Maternity explores the possibility of thought, decision, and agency that do not depend on the construction

of a self-possessed individual or on the integrity of body, but that also do not simply valorize liminality and intersubjectivity. It brings into view the responsibility of apparently incoherent or passive performances. The materiality of the encounter calls into question habits and patterns by which the body is sensed, but it shows how constitutive these patterns and habits can be. It changes them; it builds different ones; it utilizes them to establish a body that exceeds one's sense. In spite of the materiality of the encounter with the infant body, intangibility, impressionability, and lack of control become foregrounded in the relation of self to body.

If subjectivity is always implicated with illusion and sense, we can surely imagine modes of embodiment that incorporate otherness and bridge temporalities. While such a subjectivity would itself call into question assumed consequences of birth—two bodies who relate to one another by virtue of their shared connection to this event—it also calls for an expanded understanding of ethics, livability, and care. If an embodied subjectivity incorporates haunted surfaces, or operates to the side of oneself, or shares one's surfaces, its viability and its protection cannot depend on the preservation of its material contours. The material contours of my body should not measure the limits of my embodiment. This means that approaches to our bodies should extend beyond the material, should include considerations of the touch of the other, of the importance of surfaces not one's own to the sense of security and well-being. If this mode of selfhood is in tension with the bound body, it gets lost in practices that care for this body. This undoing that allows the emergence of what extends beyond the body to re-formulate the time, space, and possession of the self calls for the kind of care that would see and recognize it, that would de-emphasize bounds and possession in order for it to come into view, that would allow its presence in tandem with the material.

One of the stakes of Anzieu's argument of the skin ego relates to thought. The ego constituted by the outside, he asks "what if thought were as much an affair of the skin as of the brain?" (9). Thinking begins on the outside. To Anzieu, thinking is "a matter of surfaces" (9). The concentration on the establishment of skin as a matter of thought raises the possibility that what changes in this affects how we think. Touch can pull this ego out of shape and generate new sites for thinking. What happens to thought when surfaces are capable of shifting, of casting us beyond ourselves, are subject to touch, and fail to confirm our limits? The limit, the pressure upon my edge, the rub of my skin pushes me to think, to resituate myself in my life, to reorganize my relationships to other. Thinking takes place at the skin, at a site that moves matters of the mind to the surface, to the periphery, to the point of our response to other's touch, a site that is close to one's own surface, that is in the service of the other, that is close to home.

Although the story of maternity thus always appears very personal, the memory of this time is never one's own. The memory is of the circuitry, an establishment of pressures against a surface, that work with a sense of self and the law of self-touch to set one to the side of oneself. It is a form of creature, comprised of surfaces connected only in thought, an imagined creature that nevertheless dictates thinking. The memory is of a strange machinery of surface that generates sensations beyond the reach of *I*.

Chapter Two

Raising Derrida:

Strange Dwelling of the Arrival

As she lies across my chest and unsteadily lifts her head to peer in the direction of my face, I am overwhelmed not only by her presence, but by her strangeness. She is a stranger, emerging visible and legible within my space. I am in awe of this creature, who has just turned up, it seems, and is flouting all the laws of possibility. It is not that I do not know her. I know her name, having given it to her myself, and I am familiar with her cries, her eyes, her touch, and the pressure of her body across my own. I have felt this body measured by a fever, a compact warmth that begins just below my chin and ends above my hips, marking the containment and finitude of this space of another's body. Yet, at the same time—and the sense of disjunction comes from the co-presence of these two experiences—she is a stranger. She is completely other, emerging within my world beyond what I could imagine or see, beyond what I could know. Another body, unlike my own, lying on my chest, as if I were open and welcome, lying against my border as if it were her home.

She is not a stranger in the sense of one whose characteristic signs of belonging and recognition happen to be absent. She is not Sara Ahmed's produced figure: "not that which we fail to recognize, but . . . that which we have already recognised as 'a stranger'" (3). A more apt comparison would be with Jean-Luc Nancy's heart. In "The Intruder," Nancy describes the strangeness of his heart transplant, dwelling on the implications for his sense of self. Through this heart, he describes the persistence and multiplication of the stranger's intrusion. Within his

body, welcomed and expected, the intruder's "coming does not stop: he continues to come, and his coming does not stop intruding in some way: in other words, without right or familiarity, not according to custom, being, on the contrary, a disturbance, a trouble in the midst of intimacy" (161). Nancy deems this intrusion inextricable from the stranger, revealing a "law of intrusion": "There has never been just one intrusion: as soon as one is produced, it multiplies itself, is identified in its renewed internal differences" (167). The arrival of the stranger always includes this sense of intrusion.

While our experiences are different, Nancy's attention to the strangeness of his heart offers another lens to the maternal encounter. The heart of Juliet inside me was first evident to me on a screen slightly to the left of the bed in which I was lying. Through a stethoscope, I could hear it beating as I gazed at her image beyond me. Now, when I listen to her heart—when she brings her body near to me so that I can put my hand over her chest to feel it beat—it is an uncanny replica of this technological disembodiment. Beating beyond me, it recalls its initial beating within me. The distance between us recalls the intimacy, the confusion of hearing what is within. Although hers, this heart intrudes upon me, and keeps intruding even after it has been welcomed and even after it has left. I remain scared for this heart that seems mine but that is beyond me. I will always have an ephemeral body not my own, a body once there, now gone, always sensed. There is an uncanny passage, a sense of lingering on, of surviving beyond oneself. We are ghostly.

This experience of her heart's strangeness unsettles the conventional meaning and significance of birth as a site of belonging, identity, origin, and connection. Sigmund Freud provides one of the clearest articulations of this assumption about birth. In "Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis," Freud quotes Georg Christoph Lichtenburg to argue that

‘An astronomer knows whether the moon is inhabited or not with about as much certainty as he knows who was his father, but not with so much certainty as he knows who was his mother.’ A great advance was made in civilization when men decided to put their inferences on a level with the testimony of their senses and to make the step from matriarchy to patriarchy. (233)

Freud is arguing that the identity of the mother is always immediately known, as the mother is clearly and visibly present at the event of birth, while the identity of the father must be inferred. As Kelly Oliver argues, Freud sees this shift “from the senses and the natural world and into representation and the cultural” as progress, thus generating a hierarchy between body and mind that has long affected women (66). This belief that birth determines the identity of the mother is also linked to the idea that the biological mother will experience a physical bond with her child, an assumption that has pathologized women who do not immediately experience this bond and generated undue anxiety about the well-being of the child.

Jacques Derrida has a strong critique of this position. Viewing this claim as exemplary of Freud’s “phallogocentrism,” Derrida argues that this certainty is an “illusion,” as the real mother is as “susceptible to substitution” as the father, and the idea that we know the mother when we give birth has always been a fiction.¹

However, there is another possible response, one which completely de-prioritizes certainty and the question of identity. I remember my delivery room full of strangers. Six people, not counting myself and Juliet, were present. It was a strange event, far from personal. I, myself, was a stranger there. The first thing I said after my daughter was born was, “That’s impossible.” Determining what constituted her arrival was impossible. Before her cry, her presence was

¹ For a full discussion of this, see “The Night Watch” (over the book of himself).” For further discussion on this subject see Andrew Parker, Michael Naas, and Christine van Boheemen-Saaf.

announced by a cessation of pain and internal pressure and by the resumption of a familiar closeness. Her presence was indistinguishable from a sensation of a self-separation that was simultaneously a self-resumption. She had arrived, and yet her cry came from a beyond I still kept inside myself. This arrival enacts a confusion of boundaries and a breach of self and of self-presence. The possibility of identification and determination seems, on the one hand, ontologically impossible, and, on the other, beside the point.

Rather than affirming belonging or identity—rather than defining a bond in terms of kinship and familiarity—the delivery scene foregrounds the degree to which birth is marked by and is oriented around an event of strangeness. There are photos of me in a hospital bed, weary and robed, holding my daughter in my arms. There have been acts of certification: naming and weighing and inscribing. There is proof of the event. And yet, what these all cannot manage to contain and disavow, what remains in spite of these, is her strangeness. In spite of this story, this delivery, these photos that show us together, there, on that same day, she is a stranger. She is foreign. While the child is known, she is also strange, and these two interact with one another. At the fingertips, held and supported, the infant exceeds comprehension. Her small, compact body, with a center so close to the surface, with toes so close to heart, brings the question of the other that estranges the home.

In this chapter, I foreground the strangeness of the infant by comparing the effects of her arrival to Derrida's account of the stranger in his seminars on unconditional hospitality. Departing from Derrida's discussion of hospitality, I emphasize the strangeness of the event, using this to provide a time and space of maternity that exceeds and overwhelms the narratives that accrue around origin, genesis, and reproduction. Rather than assuring of a relationship and a bond, birth is that whose force derives from the fact that it cannot be overcome and cannot

transcend the strangeness of the arrival. The strangeness exceeds the act and its narratives. On the one hand, it alters the significance of birth in the relationship to the identity of the mother. It shifts the question of who is the mother and how birth decides the mother to a question of the effect of the stranger and the effect of exposure to the stranger. At the same time, it changes the significance of maternity. As an act of exposure to or encounter with the other—the one who emerges to stare at one, to return one's stare, to not be seen, but to make visible one's way of looking—maternity foregrounds and entails the effects of the stranger. Furthermore, as an intrusion that does not cease, the arrival decenters birth as a visible event whose singularity decides the mother and dominates discussions of origin and belonging.

This builds on the argument of my first chapter. While my argument there focused on the body and on a sense of self that exceeds one's material contours, foregrounding a surface relation that decentered the act of birth, in this chapter, I explore how its strangeness further undoes the time of birth. While my first chapter coupled this decentering with an explication of a sensed embodiment that suggested the limitations in a materialist framework, in this chapter, I describe a strange dwelling that emerges from the restructuring of home and time. The strangeness overwhelming the narratives of birth also aligns maternity with disrupted temporalities, generating an encounter with both past and future. Maternity is dwelling with ghosts and strangeness, a dwelling that not only estranges the home, body, and self, but that brings into view their limits. A dwelling that depends upon constant intrusion and is at home with the vulnerability of one's borders.

Derrida and Maternity

As I describe in my introduction, Derrida's work on hospitality discusses its limitations as an ethics. Turning to Greek thought, to etymology, to state surveillance, and to contemporary

immigration and asylum policy, he not only foregrounds the conditions of conventional hospitality, but he links it to the production of sovereignty and to the re-assertion of power over another. Such an ethics is limited, he argues, as it determines in advance and refuses the strangeness of the guest. In response to this limited concept of hospitality, he describes an “unconditional hospitality,” which would entail welcoming whoever arrives. Supporting this form of hospitality, he urges, “Let us say yes to who or what turns up, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any identification, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female” (77).

This “unconditional hospitality” frames his discussion of the stranger as an arrival who productively disrupts the home. Although a mode of welcome, given by the host, unconditional hospitality also turns attention to the strangeness of the stranger, tracing how this affects the welcome. Its requirement—“Saying yes”—describes a mode of responsibility and thinking that privileges otherness and is oriented toward that otherness. In other words, as a welcome it is geared towards not undoing any of the newcomer’s strangeness. To put this in Nancy’s words, “If he already has the right to enter and stay, if he is awaited and received, no part of him being unexpected or unwelcome, then he is not an intruder any more, but then neither is he any longer a stranger” (161). If viewed in terms of the newcomer’s strangeness, unconditional hospitality becomes a way to move towards the stranger. To say yes to the unknown other links the self to the time and place of the other. To say yes is to affirm needs beyond one’s own frame of reference. In this regard, unconditional hospitality is a theory of being-altered by the stranger, laying out the potential implications to the self of this arrival.

Although I draw his work on the stranger from his theory of hospitality, my argument does not conform to Derrida's comparison of this act with the mother, which risks reinforcing an idealized version of maternity. To very briefly outline this comparison and its effects, I will draw on some of the feminist criticism that has pointed out its limitations. In her work on hospitality on Emmanuel Levinas and Derrida, Irina Aristarkhova comments on the resemblance between their theories of hospitality and the maternal relationship, arguing that both "seem to be systematically unaware and unable . . . to discuss the maternal as a foundation for their thinking on hospitality" (*Matrix* 43). She paraphrases their definition of hospitality in a way that stresses their resemblance to maternity: they "rely on an imagery of expectancy and anticipation for a guest who always comes unexpected, and from whom one will be separated again when s/he leaves" (*HM* 172). As Judith Still's translation of a section of a (then) unpublished seminar makes clear, Derrida's comparison of unconditional hospitality is explicit:

We can replace everything, gestation, fertilization, the breast, food, milk, we can replace all the replaceable parts of maternity but *we will call mother the irreplaceable, as solicitude: there where there is solicitude as irreplaceable, there is a mother*; and that solicitude which therefore is not at all natural in the sense of biological or generic . . . that solicitude insofar as it is maternal, insofar as it takes care in a disinterested fashion, of the newcomer, the new arrival, the child qua the one who needs to be welcomed, fed, sheltered, the one who is in principle, disarmed, infinitely vulnerable and needy, the absolute guest or arrival, well, *that solicitude, the mother, maternal solicitude is undoubtedly an absolute figure of hospitality . . .* (emphasis in original, 131).

While this foregrounds the maternal relation and showcases the creative and inventive forms of welcome of maternity, it also raises concerns. Given the frequent association of maternity with

sacrifice, passivity, and selflessness, the comparison is risky. To turn to maternity to model hospitality would necessitate looking away from the difficulty in mothering and from the impossibility of maintaining the “welcoming” conditions of pregnancy while mothering and raising a child. They also isolate the mother from her environment, neglecting to address the conditions that bolster or undermine such hospitality. Furthermore, these interpretations of the mother’s hospitality seldom incorporate the mother’s frustration and limitation. Not only does birth risk the life of the mother, but the demands of the child can exceed the resources of the mother.

As feminist philosophers have compellingly argued, this move risks reinforcing patriarchal and idealistic images of maternity. Penelope Deutscher argues that the metaphor idealizes the mother and neutralizes the risks and demands of motherhood. She asserts that Derrida’s and Roberto Esposito’s use of pregnancy as a model for a relation between self and other neglect the threat that the fetus, the pregnancy, and the child pose to the mother.² Still warns that:

mothers and (mother-love) can too easily be accommodated in a virile or androcentric model Whether mothers are dematerialized, reappropriated as metaphor, or are only too material, delivering heirs or reproducing the means of production, there are long histories of exploitation. Thus, to move hospitality away from the gesture made by the patriarchal master of the house, and away from the union of brotherhood, in order to redefine it as *motherhood*, cannot be an easy solution. (132)

² Deutscher finds Derrida less problematic than Esposito; although he does not attend directly to the ramifications and possibly threat of maternity, he does associate the *arrivant* with the possibility of monstrosity, thereby acknowledging that there is something negative and threatening in the arrival of the child.

As Lisa Guenther argues in her discussion of Levinas, comparing the mother to hospitality amounts to the desire to “appropriate one aspect of maternity—its generosity—without acknowledging women’s very particular, historical, and embodied experience as mother” (*GO* 122). Aristarkhova argues that “in the absence of a clearly developed concept of how the maternal figures as a constitutive element of hospitality, the whole discourse becomes entangled and engulfed in the mother as an abyss, as a kind of invisible glue that holds hospitality elements together: passivity, discreetness, equation of femininity and interiority, and hospitality as expectancy” (*HM* 173).

Another reason the comparison is troubling is because hospitality and maternity are very different experiences. Hospitality entails the invitation of a stranger or guest from without into one’s home for a limited period. Maternity entails the accommodation of a dependent infant into a world encapsulated by the limited arena of the house. When Levinas and Derrida use the mother to model a new form of hospitality, one which describes an unconditional, radical relationship between self and other, they depart from hospitality to describe an ethics of substitution. Thinking hospitality in terms of the mother, they transform the conventional relationship between host and guest into one of substitution. Even if we consider the arrival of the child to be an event, as Derrida argues it is, it is still not quite “hospitality” we offer.

Furthermore, thinking of maternity in relation to hospitality limits the experience of the encounter. Hospitality is not the only response to the encounter with the stranger. Solicitude is not the only response. Rather than dwelling on hospitality as the only possible response, rather than assuming an ethics that is bound to the act of giving birth or debating whether its association with this event complicates the possibility of a maternal ethics, I focus on the event of strangeness, tracing the effects of its presence upon time and space, tracing how it alters the

narratives of birth. Rather than privileging maternity as a hospitable response, I discuss maternity as the exposure to this stranger. Rather than presuming a mode or form of maternity, I focus on how some of the experiences that emerge out of the encounter with the infant trouble the narratives of birth that themselves frame this event.

In this way, my argument resembles those of Guenther and Lisa Baraitser, both of whom emphasize the event of birth as an encounter. Guenther, insisting on the feminist potential for an ethics of substitution, turns to the example of hagiography to review Levinas's argument that the host is "like a maternal body" (*OB* 67). As hagiography serves to inspire a striving for rather than an achievement of certain behavior, Guenther emphasizes that "To be *like* a maternal body even when you are one is to admit a gap between mothering as an ethical and political practice, and the mother as an ontological, biological, or social identity" (*GO* 132). This shows how the mother can emblemize without essentializing ethical substitution. Although she focuses on the act of mothering—which I do not do—her interest in defining maternity as other than biological turns attention to the view of birth as an Other: "If we understand maternity in this way, not as a fixed biological or even social identity but as the response to an ethical imperative from the Other, then maternity might become disengaged from a strict biological interpretation without being thereby disincarnated" (132). Although her emphasis is the ethics of substitution, showing that birth does not invalidate or preclude an ethical response, she foregrounds the arrival as an Other.

Similarly, in *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption*, Baraitser draws on Judith Butler, Emmanuel Levinas, Donald Winnicott, Jacques Lacan, and Julia Kristeva, among others, to propose a form of subjectivity that emerges out of relationship with and in response to an Other. Doing so, thinking of maternity as an encounter, she suggests that mothering generates

something new. She draws on “small incidents,” moments of mundane life, to “map a series of maternal constellations that we may retroactively be able to gather up into something we could name as *having been* a maternal subject” (14, 3). Baraitser insists on moving “beyond a conception of maternity as the embodied potentiality to become two, towards an account that can include the staggering complexity of what happens for a mother after ‘birth’” (10). The strangeness of the infant is emphasized over the familial relationship. While I am more ambivalent about a maternal subjectivity, I share Baraitser’s understanding of birth as an encounter. However, I use this encounter to further trouble narratives of arrival, describing it as an event that takes place in spite of birth. If maternity intersects with Derrida’s work on hospitality, it is not because it models a hospitality, but because it emerges as a response to a question or demand posed by an Other. Maternity puts one in the position of having to confront the other, of having to decide whether or not ask the other’s name.

Using the encounter with strangeness and its effects within Derrida’s theory of hospitality to foreground the strangeness of the infant, I describe the hauntings and disjunctions that overwhelm narratives of birth. I foreground the eventfulness and the encounter of birth, emphasizing what emerges with and decenters birth from defining the relationship between these bodies. I then examine strangeness as a mode of arrival and intrusion as a mode of thought. I trace the shock of arrival that is always other than and always exceeds plans, labor, and any capacity to know. Furthermore, I use this experience to propose the possibility of a strange mode of dwelling that de-prioritizes preservation and possession and that entails a re-encounter with one’s ghosts and that allows and lives with the intrusion of the other, a threatening and precarious mode of dwelling that productively reorients oneself from one’s habits, priorities, and

expectations. As strange dwelling, maternity is also the practice of living with another that de-prioritizes the bounds and preservation of one's own space and home.

Intimate Strangers:

As it does in my first chapter, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology provides an illuminating a point of departure for my argument about birth's strangeness. In my discussion of Butler and the haunting proprioception of pregnancy, I draw on Merleau-Ponty's concept of transposition to illustrate the implications of reaching out to touch my daughter and meeting only sheet. The effect of this experience almost, but not quite maps onto Merleau-Ponty's description of reaching out and touching the object of one's desire or love. As I describe in my first chapter, rather than finding myself restored through my contact with the other when I reach out to touch Juliet's body in bed next to mine, I find myself abruptly disoriented by her unexpected absence. While Merleau-Ponty elucidates the inter-relation between self and other—as reaching for the other brings about the emergence of the self—my experience shows how this interdependence and intertwining becomes entangled with a haunted proprioception that extends embodied subjectivity beyond the material contours of the body. Invoking Derrida, I describe this as a new mode of hauntology, in which one is haunted at once by material contours and by what one has produced, a haunting that confuses past and future and incorporates them within a lived embodiment.

In this chapter, I draw on and complicate another of Merleau-Ponty's arguments, in this case how his description of "how a thing or a being begins to exist for us through desire or love" (154). While emphasizing "love and desire," Merleau-Ponty highlights another point: that it is rare, difficult, and can be transformative when another comes to exist for us. The possibility of this existence is itself an event. Gayle Salamon clarifies the significance of the claim:

This is not only an acknowledgment of the difficulty that we have, as embodied subjects, in recognizing other embodied subjects as subjects, the sometimes surprising efforts required, both rational and affective, for us to recognize that this other who stands before me is like-me but not-me. I only become bound to this other through “desire or love,” and through that relation of desire or love the other comes to exist for me as a thing or being” (46).

As Salamon emphasizes, Merleau-Ponty argues that the very possibility of another is a form of disruption. The very possibility of another emerging for us an embodied subject brings wonder.

However, while the arrival of the child includes this disorienting and opening sense of the possibility of the other, the possibility of this embodied other comes not from one’s own love or desire. While his articulation of this coming to exist as a rare event is useful to describing the event of infancy, his reliance on love cannot capture the strangeness of the event. The arrival of the child is accompanied by a strangeness that exceeds love. The other comes to exist for me in excess of or in distinction from my love, in distinction from me in any way. It is marked by a disjunction. This disjunction is what accounts for the distance that emerges between myself and the other pressing against my chest, this “trouble in the midst of intimacy” (Nancy, 161). The existence of the child for me comes from without me, a process that situates my being for myself, too, beyond me, opening up this space beyond oneself. In other words, although not removed from love, maternity foregrounds the effects of and confrontation with another arriving in tension with their strangeness.

Derrida’s work on the arrival works well to elucidate maternity because of its strangeness. Maternity both anchors this theory, dramatizing an account of the arrival of the stranger, and this theory illuminates another dimension to maternity. Take the opening lines of

“Foreigner Question: Coming from Abroad / from the Foreigner,” the first seminar included in *Of Hospitality*, where Derrida foregrounds the relation between the arrival and the question of being:

the question of the foreigner is a question *of* the foreigner, addressed *to* the foreigner. As though the foreigner were first of all *the one who* puts the first question or *the one to whom* you address the first question. As though the foreigner were being-in-question, the very question of being-in-question, the question-being, or being-in-question of the question. (emphasis in original, 3)

Generated by Derrida’s reading of Plato’s dialogues—the “Greek situation’ of the problem of hospitality—this passage links the foreigner to the potential of a question that calls into doubt one’s own being, an unsettling question that can only come from beyond one. Challenging the idea that the first question of ethics should be one of identity and recognition, Derrida wonders whether ethics should begin with the refusal to ask this question: “does hospitality begin with the unquestioning welcome, in a double effacement, the effacement of the question *and* the name? Is it more just and more loving to question or not to question? to call by the name or without the name?” (29)

The arrival of the infant dramatizes and complicates this question. When Juliet’s face shifted into sharp, new focus through the event of naming, the question I was answering—“who are you?”—became returned, at that very moment, to me. From the beginning, from this first question, which was the first question she demanded and which took place after her arrival, the identifying response set in play the questioning of identity, the questioning of ownership and possession, the questioning of time and place. Far from settling anything, this was the first question whose answer would only extend it further and complicate it further. She put being-in-

question, insinuating into the act of naming the fractures of un-becoming, the assertion “non-being is.” In the naming, which was also a calling up, bringing her into specific being before me, I did not reduce her, but brought her into focus, calling her up to me, through this calling. In response, however, along with this process of certification, at the same time, the very nature of the question was inverted, the question coming from her, her calling me into question. Alongside the naming, this question continues its intrusion.

These fractures and questions from the embodied other who emerges encompasses the maternal relation, shifting it to something beyond a relationship that follows from the act of birth. She puts me into question through her emergence, which never stops. At night, as she lies with her small arm curled around my neck to make her claims about the day, she puts me in question. It is late, past when she should be asleep, and I need to work, and I am worried about her being tired, but when I am finally able to turn toward her, in her emergence there in her specificity, I am confronted with her: Short trousers, warm, soft pajamas, hair wet, eyes—even after our arguments—open, questioning, addressed, reaffirming, unassuming, checking, asserting herself in that look. The movement of her body, curling to mine in her sleep, racing around the bed, climbing the stair twice her height drags me along in her undirected wandering. I know her obstinacies and rebuttals: hair must be down around her face, clothes must be black and white, she must wear a skirt over her pants. I have seen a foreign body seeing mine and sensing mine, laughing, a collapsing face, the development of a quiet smile of acquiescence that make me crumple. She emerges, but not out of my love; she emerges in and as a proclamation of independent strangeness. To amend Nancy on the intruder, her “coming does not stop: [s]he continues to come, and [her] coming does not stop intruding in some way.”

Derrida's description of birth as an event and an absolute arrival more explicitly describes the dual capacity of birth to be both familial and strange. In "Artifactualities," describing the event, Derrida argues:

At the birth of a child, the primal figure of the absolute arrivant, you can analyze the causalities, the genealogical, genetic, or symbolic premises, and all the wedding preparations you like. Supposing this analysis could ever be exhausted, you will never get rid of the element [*l'alea*], this place of the taking-place, there will still be someone who speaks, someone irreplaceable, an absolute initiative, another origin of the world.

("Artifactualities," 21)

In this formulation, birth is a disruptive, transformative irruption that reconfigures the context out of which it arose. In spite of coming "from within," this itself disrupted by technology, birth is the unexpected arrival. While I spent my time before her arrival "in planning," all my preparations fell by the way side. Her arrival—tracked, measured, made visible, anticipated—altered the very terms by which I measured my planning and accommodation. In spite of its expectation and its certification, the child is unexpected and unknown and it exceeds these processes of identification.

This description is reflected in embodied practices of care. When I care for Juliet, I attempt to respond to the unknowable sensations of a stranger whose bodily functioning and relationship to time and space is not my own. Although I can test temperature and pressure and measure the weight of food and the time between feedings, I have no access to her comfort, pain, or hunger. The cries that insist upon response have no instruction. Her cry—"someone who speaks"—is an enunciation of a position, a disclosure, a qualification, a rhythm, a protestation of specific pain, acknowledgment, a recognition of specific pleasure, disagreement. To care for her,

I rely not on my own gauge of the world, but on the uncertain, unknowable gauge of another. I put myself in her place—physically, at this height, this level, this proximity—in the attempt to see and feel as she does. Caring for her thus involves the subordination of my realm of experience for an incompletely accessible other's.

However, this strangeness does more than complicate the meaning of birth. While affirming the strangeness of this encounter—which resists narratives of expectation and anticipation—the characterization of birth as an event also disrupts linear temporality. Although Derrida's account of the arrival of the stranger turns toward the abstract, the argument for the arrival of the child as "*still* . . . someone who speaks" does more than bring into relief the strangeness that is bound up with this arrival. The anachronicity of the definition of the event as "someone who speaks"—the term "infant" is linked to the absence of speech—further complicates its temporality. In later years, when there is, indeed, speech, time becomes something that must be translated, as narrations reveal a fabricated, elongated memory that precedes birth or folds in time so that events week apart appear in her speech in tandem, the past folding into the present to form a story. When I listen to her speak, I must alter my conception of time. I must renovate time and let go of temporal and spatial confines. When she asks me, for example, about the stranger now standing outside our window, and I turn and see no one there, I must remember the visitor last week who came to fix our blinds. I must address his presence now, after the fact, to fold my time to hers. The strangers keep coming, in new forms of strangeness.

This speech also disrupts past and present, bringing ghosts. When I was 11 years old, I fell off my bike, and flew over the handlebars, and plunged to the ground, continuing face first onto the shiny tar of the road. As my mouth was the first thing to hit the road, the impact

destroyed my front teeth. After this accident, I began to resist opening my mouth. My mouth held out of its customary shape got in the way of me talking. I would press my lips together, look down, turn away. I would talk with a lisp around teeth, and people would struggle to hear me. I remember the absence that shook me, the shock of my mouth's unfamiliarity. After I had my daughter, I realized the effect of this event when I saw that she was learning to smile as I was, her lips also curled over to hide her still absent teeth. In the curl of her mouth, inherited from watching me, my ghosts are not only passed on, but they return to me changed; they are grappled with anew. In spite of this passage of haunting, the temporally embodied inheritance of trauma around the possibility of speech. Through this inheritance, this passing on of trauma, there will finally be, there will still be "somebody who speaks." She speaks through the material residue of trauma—denying it—bringing me to speak. Ghosts return with the arrival of the other, as the other restores one to oneself. Body's disperse and come together again.

Living with the stranger thus entails the constant intrusion of this embodied other for myself, at once restoring myself to myself, but in forms of disruption, so that I am haunted, my sense of myself extending beyond my habituated sense of things, my past changing. The time of the infant interrupts narratives of development, progression, or linearity. As an arrival, the infant operates outside the frame within which we are habituated and by which we link and associate events. Infancy disrupts not only the order by which we manage our conception of time—meals, work, routines—but by the effects of time. Linearity, progression, narrative, development, and repetition all fail to contain, measure, or explain her appearance. Maternity entails this daily and ongoing remembering of this angle, of this space, which consists in turning to her and hearing her, going to her to see what she's about, in the midst of and in the face of the proper. As Nancy specifies, intrusion does not stop, but brings other strangers. In other words, this strangeness

continues and thus further disrupts narratives of birth that address a single event assuring connection and belonging.

Strange Dwelling

In my first chapter, after I examine how experiences of maternity challenge and undo narratives of birth, I also describe the possible emergence of an embodied subjectivity that calls materialist frameworks into question. I describe the effects of occupying a sense of self that is ‘beside,’ arguing that this sense reveals the degree to which embodiment always straddles times, ghosts, places, and bodies. I elaborate being “beside oneself” as a form of embodiment that incorporates the disorienting effects of relation and opens oneself up to the needs and intersubjectivity of the other. This form of subjectivity provides a new frame for maternity and the decisions it makes. It provides a new frame for how we see and respond to the other.

In this chapter, I describe a mode of a strange dwelling. Thinking of birth as an arrival highlights the strangeness and independency of birth, situating it not as proof of belonging and the consolidation of inclusive community, but as disruption. The arrival brings ghosts; it haunts. Although conventionally thought in terms of connection and family, maternity brings strangers who transform one’s home, stretching its time and place, possessing it. Far from expected, natural, or hinged to an identity, this requires a re-evaluation of one’s habits of thought and values and a re-measuring of space. Rather than a hospitality, I describe maternity as a strange occupation of one’s dwelling, characterized by changed relation to its borders and an awareness of the precarity and fragility of these boundaries. Not precisely occupying this dwelling, one exceeds it, or exists at an angle to it, or lives with its ghosts. Dwelling extends from the house to body and identity, capturing the effect of bringing another into one’s space and the forms of dwelling that emerge. The infant entails not only the physical restructuring of the home—the

opening of spaces, the rearranging of things other than by convenience, the cushioning, the decorating, the hiding—but the reorganization of ideological, cultural, and psychological understandings of the constitution and work of borders and boundaries. One dwells strangely within one's house. Or, one dwells within a strange house. One dwells with the strange.

After I gave birth, many of the material effects that rippled through my house were unplanned and occurred in response to her unanticipated demands and the capacity of my home to meet them. Beds lowered, mattresses moved around the house, cushions occupied different positions, spaces reorganized themselves, edges dulled, passages were blocked, others were discovered, cleaning rituals and priorities changed, sleeping patterns changed, posture, weight distribution, the rhythm and pattern of walking all changed, thighs strengthened, biceps grew, skin changed, counters became bare, locks increased, decorations became first scarce then abundant, glass became plastic. The home reorganized itself into a space in which she could be, accommodating itself, transforming itself, to allow her to be, to allow her infancy. These changes all derived from her; she called them up and ensured their repetition and maintenance. Without her, these routines would have ceased. The barriers would have fallen, the muscles slackened, the walking quickened and become regular. These changes she called up came from beyond me and called up my own transformation.

These changes—altering the planned function of the house—extend beyond this material space of the household. As the house changes form, showing other possible organizations and spaces possible, so time, space, and the body change. At the same time, I am caught up in the effects of her arrival, I, myself, intruding anew. Bearing her, I move through the world as other than myself, accounting for an additional weight, surface, area, exposure that is not my own and that I cannot assess. What becomes apparent is the startling tenuousness of the relationships I

assume between things. From the floor, from this use, things are seen anew. The infant displaces me provisionally, transitionally, from the context to which I have become habituated. She estranges me, disrupts my home, calls into question the boundaries I had set up, reorients me within the world, re-creates, indeed, that world. It sets me at another angle to this context, thus instigating a re-encounter. All my habits and routines change: my eating habits, drinking, sleeping, bathing, reading, writing. I begin again. My muscles have changed, my posture, my thinking, my patience, my walk, my voice, my hair, my eyes, my tastes. All is changing still. My tracks, what I leave, how I tread, my softness, my firmness, my presence, my noise, my breathing, my discipline, all pulled gently by a discipline, necessary, to feed, clothe, and protect a child. Caring for an infant entails an encounter with prior markers and habits of identity. I no longer quite inhabit my gender and sexuality, my job, my relationships, my self.

Dwelling is thus strange; it bridges two modes of inhabiting a space. It is not dictated by the constraints of the home, limited to this space, but it is differentiated from this space. It exceeds and overwhelms this space, extending this space, altering this space. I do not quite inhabit this space but exist to the side of it, as I explain in my first chapter, or at odds with it. Maternity is thus a relationship with another that de-centers oneself from one's own life. This de-centering comes from the arrival's combination of strangeness and sameness, and dependence and independence, which confuses my reach and comprehension of things. I am dragged out of my "home," which is also, at times, restrictive, a constraint, a grip of discourse.

In "The Night Watch," a preface to Jacques Trilling's argument about the matricide of writing, Derrida describes the "real mother" as a phantasm. Although he would puncture this phantasm, he describes it in great deal, creating a gothic, sensationalist image of sinister watchfulness:

maternity itself, maternity in its phantasm, survives. And it—or she—watches [*elle veille*], the night watcher or night vigil, the nightlight or vigil light [*Veilleuse*]. She—or it—survives [*survit*] and surveys [*surveille*]. Funeral vigil [*veillée funèbre*]. *Wake*. . . . It will never be done provoking writing. Watching over it and surveying it, like a specter that never sleeps. (88)

As a description, it is highly symbolic. As Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas elucidate in their translators' note, "The Night Watch," or "La Veilleuse" brings together vigil, light, protection, and death. The "Night Watch" suggests "a woman who keeps watch, who remain vigilant, who holds vigil—a 'Nighwatchwoman' or a 'Waking woman' (103). It is also linked to a light that stays on when everything else is dark: the little candle kept lit after the death of a loved one, a nightlight, and a pilot light. Indeed, linking light with vigil, "the semantic kernel of the word suggests a keeping watch, a standing by, a remaining awake or vigilant when everyone else has forgotten or gone to sleep, a remaining lit or illuminated when all other lights have been extinguished" (103). As Christine van Boheemen-Saaf emphasizes in her response to the preface, the figure is spectral, Derrida's ghost turned "female, ahistorical, and denot[ing], as we shall see, the effect generated by a certain self-conscious, linguistic-phenomenological wish to be free of contingency and the debt of generation" (185).

In spite of its clear link to the expression of a persistence phantasm that is problematically embroiled with other experiences of vigilance and survival, this "night watch" feels close to home. There is something dark and dangerous about maternity, something nocturnal, as if maternity, indeed, as Derrida suggests, awakens at night, working out in the dark what the constraints of day keep at bay. Maternity includes nocturnal care of children and frequently brings with it its own insomnia. The rocking in silence, the fear of not knowing this

other body and his or her welfare, the hand pressed against this sleeping body, in reassurance of her presence, her life, and your connection, the dim lamp of the peculiar solitude of this time with another, the “night watch” of reading, the insomnia of vigilance, the “waking” in fear of death: it is a nocturnal mode of knowledge.

At night, the semblance of routine and continuity of the day more easily dissolves. With fewer distractions, with silence, absence, and solitude, the child’s calls and needs merge more closely with time. At night, the sense of control is most tenuous, as not only sleep, but the infant is beyond command. Maternity is night care: it is insomnia, sleep deprivation, hallucinations, uncertainty, lost time, disorientation, the loss of language, the fumbled speech, the liminality of thoughts and dreams and reality, the breakdown of filters, the heady breakdown of inhibitions and sense, the promise of the breakdown in sense, the wonder of what’s seen when your reason gives in to a body. Maternity is the waking night, a treacherous line between wonder and trauma. This aspect of childcare—which entails moving from one bed to another, from one room to another, moving to become the body on which another can sleep—generates its own track of thought, one edged with sleep deprivation and solitude, a suspension from the time and space of the house. Maternity is a strange form of ghostliness, when one becomes one’s own haunting, making one’s dwelling strange.

The stranger, the foreigner, the arrival undoes the question of the mother’s identity, she undoes the time of the event, she intrudes and does not stop intruding, bringing not only the question of the future, as Derrida argues, but also the past, the stranger who estranges by returning to the home in all its strangeness, the stranger who undoes her own delivery to arrive. Maternity brings together two temporalities. The mother both assures the accommodation of birth within linear time—she remains through and after birth—but she is also subject to the

transformative effects of arrival that produces its own space and time. The maternal, beholden to another's presence and present, breaks from time and is always thus always at odds with time. Memory, hinting at a past, is an intrusion upon maternity, a strange and disturbing visitation. The mother appears out of time, anachronistically present, she engages with both a convergence of time—confronting the past, raising herself—and its divergence. It brings the future and it brings ghosts, pushing one from one position in time, bringing one into confrontation with the past, turning one again to view one's home.

Conclusion

Describing maternity in terms of a strange dwelling shifts the place of birth. Rather than a point of origin or genesis that determines the identity of the mother, birth also marks the arrival of another. In spite of the ostensible certainty, birth remains strange. As the narrative of an intruder whose strangeness cannot be effaced, the arrival of the infant not only disrupts narratives of birth that focus on family and promise a reproductive futurity but also decenters birth from the relationship of maternity. Not only is birth strange, but the infant is an intruder, and this strangeness persists in spite of the act of birth. Birth, in other words, does not erase this strangeness. Rather than the bond that links mother and child, assuring of the identity of the former, birth is that which cannot exceed the stranger's arrival, making the mother the one who is exposed to the stranger, through whatever manner this exposure takes place. It shows the link between the arrival of another and temporal disjunction. It shows how the embodied acts of care are accompanied with ontological disruption, the effects of encountering another that challenges one's frames of reference and ways of thinking.

Thinking of the infant as a stranger disentangles maternity from its appropriations. Foregrounding the strangeness of the infant not only reminds of the possible devastation of this

arrival—maternity threatens and risks the mother—but also intervenes in appropriations of the maternal metaphor that aim to legitimize belonging or exclusion through the supposedly “natural” event of birth and its symbol as a mode of connection, inheritance, or belonging. There is indubitably a strong political and theoretical allure to discrediting the singular mother.

Derrida’s argument against the naturalness and determinability of the mother does just this, mirroring those for construction over biology and for culture over nature. As such, his argument intervenes in problematic theories of an essential maternity or of the intrinsic belonging between maternity and femininity or sexuality. In addition, Derrida counters conventional thoughts that would politicize natality, belonging, and kinship, and that set the stage for xenophobic and purist nationalisms and territorialization.³ We can see how this operates in immigration discourse, where the citizenship of the mother influences responses to the citizenship of the child.

Furthermore, buffers against the material and familial disruptions of death, such as genealogy and inheritance, presume the singularity and certainty of the mother. All of these depend on an illusion of the naturalness of birth and of the “naturalness and purity of women [which is] even more resistant to interruption, questioning, or critique than the phallogocentric phantasm of the sovereign, engendering power of men” (Naas 171). In other words, in

³ In *Rogues*, Derrida criticizes fraternalism for privileging “at once the masculine authority of the brother (who is also a son, a husband, a father), genealogy, family, birth, autochthony, and the nation . . .” (58). As Samir Haddad points out in his reading of *Politics of Friendship*, birth both defines fraternity and lends it a seeming necessity. Thus, the reference to natural birth of all three of the processes by which citizenship can be achieved “is no accident” (citizenship is conferred through birth to parent citizens or on state territory; or citizenship is attained through a process of “naturalization”) (110): “Nature does important work securing the boundaries of this relation of belonging, and insofar as they are marked natural, such relations carry with them a force of necessity. They appear as determined and reversible, and their exclusions thus seem irresistible” (110).

disburdening the mother of her maternity, Derrida intervenes in political appropriations and ramifications of birth.

Thinking of the birth as a stranger and as maternity as strange dwelling deflates these possibilities. Although birth is held up as the claim of territory or belonging, the child is alien, a stranger who manages to appear. If birth is an arrival and the infant a stranger, maternity would be related to the emergence of difference and non-belonging and the community that must develop around this. Birth would be that which does not overcome the strangeness of the arrival; it would be the encounter with or exposure to strangeness. The mother would be thought not in terms of proving or privileging a site of belonging, and not in terms of her realness or singularity, but in terms of an exposure to the stranger.

Thinking of the infant as a stranger disrupts the idea of maternity as an act of giving towards one's own family. It portrays it as a response to a stranger, showing how this stranger can disrupt and overwhelm. It allows an alternative time to play across this relationship, an inverted time in which the child undoes its context and recreates its context, and in which the host is estranged from home and opens home. A stranger undoes the time of maternity, making maternity a mode of dwelling with questions and ghosts, of haunting, of the emergence of the other.

Birth in this way brings up the complexity of encounter, of the distinction between self and other, of responsibility to the other, all of which call into question understood and habitual formations and understandings of one's borders and constitution. The child exceeds and separates from the act that conventionally determines its name and belonging. It has the effects of an intrusion. The arrival of the other reminds that borders affect those they keep out, that self-preservative borders are spaces of interaction and pain. The connection to another calls attention

to the effects of that border—how we feel and who we affect—and reminds that the effectiveness and meaningfulness of the self can extend the body and be given by the demands of the other.

Chapter 3

Speaking of Care:

Michel Foucault and the Technē of Photographic Writing

Writing is often considered to be a form of struggle against the act of birth. In “The Night Watch (over ‘the book of himself’),” his preface to Jacques Trilling’s *James Joyce ou l’écriture matricide*, Jacques Derrida describes a desire to stop writing that highlights this common view. The preface responds to Trilling’s psychoanalytic reading of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* that argues writing should be characterized as inherently matricidal. Writing is driven by a desire to invent oneself, to undo the act of birth. Writing, as “the suicidal illusion . . . of giving birth to oneself . . .” is an attempt to invent oneself, an attempt at self-genesis (102). As Michael Naas puts it in his response to the preface, “Matricidal desire is thus a desperate, phantasmatic attempt to remake oneself all by oneself though writing, to use one’s birth and the light of day to be done with both birth and day, to fabricate one’s own birthday” (178). It does so as birth denies autonomy and self-invention: birth is “the very givenness or ineluctability of the origin, the always-already-givenness of the mark” (178). It seems that matricidal writing is driven a sovereign dream (of self-genesis) driven by a sovereign’s anxious response to his own birth.

To emphasize its relation to birth, Derrida calls this writing—this “suicidal illusion”—from which he would retire an “auto-parthenogenesis of a writing” (102). Forged of different languages and origin stories, this phrase foregrounds the relation of matricidal writing to philosophy, myth, and religion. The term is a run-on of beginnings that take the place of birth, that are examples of birth without birth, that span traditions of thinking. Auto: a prefix signifying

self-production as the end of the phrase itself. Genesis: the realm of epic and self-creation. Parthenon: the virgin's home, and the temple of Athena, born fully formed from her father's forehead. The phrase condemns, in its writing, the traditions to which it is linked, through language that fosters and supports its romance, and that reminds, at the same time, of the place of birth. It dramatizes matricide even as it demonstrates it reach. It condemns its own form of self-authorized writing that would fill the emptiness of a dreamt origin through the dramatization of its creative convolutions.

Although Derrida complicates Trilling's argument about the matricide of writing by distinguishing between the mother and the act of being born—there is no “real mother” to do away with (91)—he confirms and denounces the violence of this writing. While he argues that “it is indeed possible to kill the mother, to replace her, to substitute one ‘womb’ for another . . . what is impossible to expunge is birth, dependency upon an originary date, upon an ‘act’ of birth before any birth act or certificate,” he nevertheless affirms that writing is cruel, that the refusal to affirm the mother is cruel (including his own, perhaps), and that he would quit writing (91). It is this violence that makes him wish he could stop: “from now on no more writing, especially not writing, for writing dreams of sovereignty, writing is *cruel*, murderous, suicidal, parricidal, matricidal, infanticidal, fratricidal, and so on. Crimes against humanity, even genocide, begin [with writing], as do crimes against *generation* . . .” (102).

However, his very decision to quit turns on a distinction or opposition between writing and maternity. To Derrida, stopping writing entails loving the mother: it “would be a matter of beginning to love without writing, without words, without murder. It would be necessary to begin to learn to love the mother—and maternity, in short, if you prefer to give it this name” (102). The mother, in this professed desire, signifies love without writing; she loves without

needing to write. The mother is opposed to writing. Although affirming the mother, Derrida strengthens the conception of writing as oriented around self-invention, thus establishing a contrast between the two. The mother, associated with relationality and another's contingency and dependency, marks a site inaccessible and incommensurable with writing. Writing would always be the sign of an absence of maternity, her death, and the sign without love. Importantly, the opposition itself turns upon an understanding of birth as that which writing would displace.

This chapter challenges this opposition between writing and maternity by reconsidering the meaning of birth. Driven to write when my daughter was little, I found myself not recounting the events of the day, but instead describing her, writing down the mundane details of her day, bare of adjective. I would describe her hair against her forehead, a sidelong glance across her cheeks, her hand upon her leg, her inclination. In the place of narrative: mimesis. For some reason, this mimetic inscription was more suited to her memory than the technologies of photography. This inscription re-instated a relationality, a sense of being moved by another, a sense of another emerging within my space. As an alternative to the photo album that promised to return discrete and representable bodies, this writing addressed disruption and relationality, both of which challenge the bounds of the body. By describing the effects of this form of writing as a replacement for the photograph, I propose an interdependence between writing and maternity that calls into view the repetitions and elongation of the event of birth.

My previous two chapters describe effects that decenter dominant understandings of birth from narratives of maternity. In my first chapter, drawing on Judith Butler, I describe an embodied subjectivity that exceeds material contours. The effects I describe operate in tension with the materially embodied self, tracing forms of subjectivity that exceed one's own body. I attempt to bring into view modes of selfhood and subjectivity that exceed the material and the

verifiable, arguing that these broaden our understanding of harm, need, and the fragility of borders. In my second chapter, focusing on Jacques Derrida, I describe a mode of dwelling that responds to the emergence of a stranger. Not only does birth haunt, but it also brings a strangeness that denies it to be simply a form of connection, presenting this act as instead a mode of continuous intrusion. Rather than origin or genesis, birth is an ongoing, extended event that can encompass bodies beyond those involved in the delivery. As repetitions elongate the event of birth, they disrupt its place in relation to the mother. In this chapter, I argue that, in the wake of these effects, as time passes, as the self reforms itself, these effects require care. Keeping these effects, remembering them, maintaining the capacity to hear the other and to confront the other require modes of care that exceed the self and that, indeed, challenge the self.

This chapter argues that writing is this form of care. Writing interrupts the conventional understandings of birth by extending this act. Drawing on Elissa Marder's reading of Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, I use her account of "photographic writing" to explore how mimetic writing enacts a care of the self that undoes the self, which I then expand upon to discuss the care and the becoming-maternal of writing. I argue that this form of writing exceeds the function of photography, enabling the return of the body's disruption. Although frequently thought in terms of self-invention and solitude, the act of writing expands and repeats the act of birth, functioning as a form of re-haunting or prosthetic memory, altering the self that remembers. As a prosthetic memory or a re-haunting, writing emphasizes the effects of ghosts and strangers. In this way, writing cares for birth, dramatizing and supporting its repetitions and its relation to material embodiment and the other. Writing cares for the capacity to let another be, to hear another, and to not decide in advance the meaning or intent of the other.

To elucidate the nature of this care, I turn to the lectures Michel Foucault gave near the end of his life at the Collège de France. In these lectures, Foucault describes a technique of living that shifts care of the self from activities worked upon the subject to *bíos*, the form of a life. As he does so, he links care to modes of undoing the subject. By drawing on this version of care, I extend care of birth across a form of life, showing its extension, and I describe care as that which exceeds oneself. Navigating the effect this has on notions of healing—which presume the coherence of the individual, managing his or her wounds and ghosts—I present writing as that which cares for ghosts and for the other that undoes the self. Writing is a form of supplemental relationality that responds to one’s own textural importance to another, as well as to the modes of relation that at once undo and reform subjects.

The Subject of Care

I have a photo of my daughter when she is three months old, sleeping on a cushion. The photo is taken from above. She is on her back with her head turned slightly to the side, and her body bends slightly, her right arm and leg curving toward the same point. Her skin creases at her knees and elbows where they bend and her fingers curl into a loose fist. Although an act of memorialization, the photo undoes what it would document. The camera and the photo are interruptions of a relationality, the act of taking the photo a detachment from the moment required to capture it. Requiring and reflecting separation and exteriority, the photo cannot document the relationship between bodies that prompted the photo in the first place. In addition, the desire to not forget this time ignores her very disruption of the linear progression of time. Hovering above, privileging a misplaced memory over her time—what we want to remember is not this view—the camera gives its time to her, constructing time so that this image can represent in the future something past. Seeming to offer proof of a constructed temporality assumed to be

natural, the photo denies the disruptive time of maternity, the enriched and embellished creative time of the infant.

One of the functions of a photo album is to remind of a time past. After the event, after birth, after the child has left, after life has intervened to separate child and mother, the problem becomes one of keeping the event, of caring for the event and its disruptions. Photographs of infants and children remind of this time and profess to return it to us. Photographs track development and milestones, reminding of moments hard to acknowledge in the fast-pace and speed of the first few years of life. However, the photo album risks interrupting the present, capturing and privileging one instant in a way that effaces the time of the newborn.

As Marder explains, the technology of photography is intimately related to the act of birth. In *The Mother in the Time of Mechanical Reproduction*, Marder explores a relationship between mother and birth that grapples with the idea of birth as an event whose only certainty is that it happened. She focuses on the “meanings (psychic, cultural, political, philosophical, and literary) that become attached to the maternal body as it emerges as an uncanny figure for the primal (and perhaps even radically unthinkable) relation to our own birth,” showing how the unknowable and inaccessible event of birth produces “indelible psychic traces that return throughout one’s lifetime in the form of mechanical reproductions that to some degree remain radically indecipherable” (1, 5). She then argues that literary and cultural representations of the mother often include or manifest these returns by aligning or juxtaposing her with mechanical, non-human reproduction. Changing the name of birth to capture its technological representation, Marder calls this the “maternal function” (2). Through a reading of Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*, Marder uses this idea of the “maternal function” to align photography with maternity, representing photography as a form of “mechanical mother” that strives to give birth to its

subjects. As a technology, photography is a form of maternity that promises to return only a certain mode of embodiment, only a certain temporality.

Acknowledging that *Camera Lucida* already connects maternity and photography—being both an elegy for his mother and a meditation on photography—Marder argues there is an even closer connection. Recalling the problem of birth as an inaccessible event and dwelling on Barthes' argument that "the referent adheres to the photograph," Marder defines photography as a "mechanical mother" that usurps the act of reproduction and "mimics, distorts, and disrupts the maternal function" (150). Photography is like birth in that it ratifies what is unavoidable, unproveable, and most unnerving about birth: "the unspeakable but un-deniable fact that our bodies are the material residue of a prior passage through the mother's womb" (153). In other words, the certainty that it happened.

Marder further emphasizes photography as an act of birth that performs a "physical operation" on the subject through Barthes's account of looking at a photo of his mother as a young girl. This is the Winter Garden Photo, famously not included within his elegy. Barthes describes the effect of this photograph in terms that resemble birth:

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.

Reflecting on the maternal imagery, Marder argues Barthes presents photography as procreative, transubstantiating light into flesh to create "a new collective body that destabilizes the separation between past and present, subject and object" (157). Rather than representing a body,

photography reproduces that body. While this gives photography the power to connect people, as it does for Barthes, it is also harmful. Photography performs a “physical operation” upon its subject. In Marder’s words, photography fatally “seizes the body of the living subject, reproduces it, and then returns it as corpse” (157). Rather than representing people, it usurps the maternal function and instigates a fatal reproductive effect, a stilling procreation.

Barthes’s maternal gaze and concern for the subject of the photograph underlines the limits of the photograph of my daughter to return or remember a maternal experience. In the Winter Garden photo, Barthes’s mother, Henriette, is five years old, the same age as my daughter now. His language is maternal, describing the contact between bodies mediated by this photograph as an “umbilical cord.” His description recalls Anzieu’s theory of the skin ego, which I discuss in my first chapter, as photography generates from a matrix of light a common skin that allows bodies to touch across time. In other words, Barthes casts photography as reinstating a touch between bodies, enabling a touch between bodies that is maternal, that reaches across time and space to hold and support that other body, sustaining it and forming it. He suggests the possibility of photography returning and touching bodies. However, it is not clear, in this image, who is the maternal figure—Barthes’s gaze or the body of the “photographed thing”—and who the infant, and who is reproducing the mother.

The promise of the subject’s contact and presence obscures the effect of my photo on the body of my daughter. While the mechanical mother of the photograph purports to return her to me, asserting that she has been, this very maternal touch—the assertion that one has been there—repeats the logic of birth as an event. My absence is reproduced, me as viewer taking the place of myself, holding her now. Either photography or the claim it makes about time is at odds with or is incommensurable to infancy. The photo usurps not only the act of reproduction, but also my

maternity, sending the child into the skin of the future gazer, which returns, in the end, also the wrench of absence. This touch is the false claim of the child's photograph.

Not only is photography's maternal function potentially harmful, performing a "physical operation" on the body of the subject itself, but it is tied to birth as a singular, finite event and point of origin that produces a body. The photograph cannot return the absences and fractures of maternity, the destabilizing encounters between bodies, the points of contact, the shifting points of pressure and their interruption of time and space. The photograph cannot return the ties between bodies, the fold of time and experience, the de-centralization of oneself from one's life, the way in which thought, argument, and agency can be given by another precisely through her dependence. The photograph cannot return the effect upon the self that calls attention to the limits of materialism and self-possession. Indeed, the photograph denies these effects, affirming the possibility of a discrete body, existing without support, separated and existing as such through time.

Rather than photography, the return of these events would require a form of memory beyond the self that returns the haunting sense of exceeding oneself. The return of these events would require a form of commemoration that acts upon the self. This form of remembering what *has been*, to use Lisa Baraitser's formulation, would require a *technē* that reproduces the disruption of self-possession and self-coherence. Rather than a memory, the return of this sense of self and this emergence of the other would entail a self-transformation. Rather than marking a divide between past and present, it would alter the present through the return of the past. It would bring the other into one's own space. This memory would need to increase one's capacity to not settle into one's sense of things, increase one's precarity. It would return ghosts.

In *Sex, or the Unbearable*, Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman explore the nature of the unbearable as the encounter with otherness that breaks one from the self. The unbearable—a term that surely inviting a maternal reading—leads to forms of thought that would otherwise remain inaccessible. The unbearable provides “a view of the subject’s undoing and the wrongheadedness of any reparative politics that turns being undone into a symptom of an illness or a measure of injustice” (4). The event of not being able to cope brings about, ensures, and enables forms of life and modes of conduct that would otherwise not be visible. This is a thinking of the limit and of stepping beyond our own limits that can open otherwise unavailable modes of thought. Refusing the security of self-possession and self-preservation, the unbearable links the possibility of transformative thinking to modes of disruption, to loss of control, to threat.

A self-inventive memory would thus also engage with this sense of reaching one’s limit, of succumbing to encounter, and of undergoing one’s own disruption. The return of these effects would require a *technē* that both allowed one to exceed oneself and that acted upon oneself, a prosthetic return of these effects in the absence of the other. This memory would extend beyond the relationship, undo modes of selfhood, recognize at once the self’s limitations and the dangers of borders. Rather than a return, it would maintain the folding times of maternity. As she exists within past and future, responding to a caress from years ago, as she responds to the events from another time, as events carry her significance, prosthetic writing would need to replicate this duality of time, these co-existing and intertwining times. It would return her spaces, her fleeting constructs, her viscosity, the event. This *technē* would be oriented around birth as that which repeats and recurs. This would be a *technē* that, to use Derrida’s formulation in “The Night

Watch,” “begin[s] finally to love life, namely birth. Mine among others—notice I am not saying *beginning* with mine” (102).

Care of the Self

To elucidate this technē that would replace photography—and which I argue takes the form of writing—I turn to the series of lectures that Foucault gave during his appointment as chair of “The history of systems of thought” at the Collège de France, which he held from 1970 until 1984, in the last years of his life. In particular, I focus on his lectures on the care of the self. Although appearing complicit with neoliberal ideologies that link the formation of the self to one’s own strategies, and although paternalist and elitist, these lectures describe care of the self as a mode of technē able to transform the self and to replicate the effects of the other.⁴ While feminist scholars have used his theory to illuminate modes of subjectivity that deviate from dominant regimes, this affirmative technē, to use Timothy Campbell’s turn to the positive, also operates as way of undoing the self (119).

Viewed as a technē, care of the self is set in tension with the subject, caring for what exceeds it, caring as its excess. The lectures show care as that which one can implement against one’s habits of self, helping one make space for the other. Drawing on these lectures, I describe writing as a care of the self, a technē that operates on the self to transform the self, that can substitute for the effects of the other, act as a prosthesis of the other’s origin, to amend Derrida’s term.

Although overlapping the three published volumes of *The History of Sexuality* (first published in 1976 and 1984), Foucault’s lectures on a care of the self dominating Ancient Hellenic and Romanic culture orient his thought away from sexuality and biopolitics, presenting

⁴ See Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent’s *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, which considers the possibility that Foucault was seduced by neoliberal reason.

these not as his end but as nodes of a branching study of the relation between subjectivity and truth. When viewed in terms of his research trajectory, the lectures are typically classified in terms of method or theme and they are seen as deviating from his professed path, which was the elaboration of his theory of biopolitics. They also deviate from his focus on the regulation of bodies. As these lectures raise questions about his research trajectory—seeming not to follow on from his work on biopolitics and, indeed, to challenge some of his earlier claims—Foucault prefaces many of his later lectures with the explanation that he would not be building on his earlier work so much as creating new alignments or new axes of thought. The later lectures reframe his trajectory, setting up other points of entry and creating new forms of connection to his earlier work. In the opening lecture of *On the Government of the Living*, for example, he says that the lectures manifest

something of a slight shift in relation to the now worn and hackneyed theme of knowledge-power. That theme, knowledge-power, was itself only a way of shifting things in relation to a type of analysis in the domain of the history of thought that was more or less organized by, or that revolved around the notion of dominant ideology. So there are two successive shifts if you like: one from the notion of dominant ideology to that of knowledge-power, and now, a second shift from the notion of knowledge-power to the notion of government by the truth (11).

Foucault's lectures on care of the self depart from biopolitics, developing the implications for the subject of non-restrictive relationships between truth and subjectivity. It is this relationship that proves useful for my discussion of writing as care, as the relationship among truth, subjectivity, and discourse gives way to a multi-faceted exploration of care of the self that includes the

examination of a form of life as *technē* of self that can accommodate a way of caring for what undoes one.

Rather than an account of avoiding subjectivity and avoiding discipline, Foucault lays out a dispositif of subjectivity that is always changing and whose practices are subject to change and manipulation. Rather than simply identifying any of these as problematic and the sites of resistance, Foucault generates an apparatus of subjectivity within which different relationships to self can be explained and explored, a machinery that constitutes the space in which subjects live, their air, their formation, their parts. Rather than about the substance, reality, or content of discourse, Foucault traces a formative contingency not aimed at resisting a set mode of subjectivity, but in asserting the existence in itself of this relationship, whatever its concrete effect. While the effect of these discourses on an unrelated reality transform *bíos* such that existing within a code makes sense, it also moves away from the area of codification and to the nature and possibility of formation.

To demonstrate the range of his perspectives on this subject, I trace some of the different ways in which subjectivity and truth relate to each other, thereby explaining each of these objects not in terms of their value, their substance, or their isolated effect, but in terms of their relationship to each other. Take “Truth”: From a given truth about oneself that influences the subject’s experience of him or herself, truth comes to function as that which an authority must display about his power, that for which philosophers must transform themselves in order to access a knowledge about the world that situates the self within this world, an internalized prescription that prepares the self for work, and that which the subject must speak in order to form itself. Rather than a fixed item or an operation, truth is an object to which the subject is differently related. The nature of its relationship changes, so that its seemingly superfluous role

is nevertheless a site for change. It is something to which the subject will always be bound, but also something through which it can effect its own transformation.

The function of “subject” also changes. It is a soul, that which we renounce, that which we build up, that which we know, and that which we discipline. It is the object of care. At times, it serves to discipline that self and master the self. However, it is a part in the formation of a life which enables a complete relationship to oneself. The subject is negative and positive; it is a form of subjection and a form of agency. It is an object, that which is worked upon. It is the source of harm and the promise of action and change. However, as a leading and identifying term of a *dispositif*, it nevertheless is also a function of this *dispositif*, operating within this apparatus that governs the self’s relationship to world and to self, providing a potential machinery or *technē* for withstanding the barriers this relationship can generate.

When Foucault concentrates on Greek and Roman philosophy of the first two centuries A.D.—the “golden age” of the culture of the self—and lays out the sets of practices and habits that enable the construction of a subject, his view of care as *technē* becomes more apparent. It is here that the problem of care of the self undergoes shifts, provides the material for working through a machinery of subject-formation. As Foucault says of such care, it is related to transformation of subject, self, and soul: “from the point of view of acts of subjectivity . . . a relationship of exercise of self on self, elaboration of self by self, transformation of self by self, that is to say, the relations between the truth and what we call spirituality . . .” (*GL* 115). Care of the self entails “a number of actions exercised on the self by the self, actions by which one takes responsibility for oneself and by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself” (*GL* 11).

A crucial aspect of this care is that it becomes a form of life. Discussing the emergence of a culture of self and philosophy's spiritual exercise on the self, Foucault argues that

The care of the self is not something with which one must begin if one wishes to define properly a good technique of life. It seems to be that henceforth the care of the self not only completely penetrates, commands, and supports the art of living—not only must one know how to care for the self in order to know how to live—but the *tekhne tou biou* (the technique of life) falls entirely within the now autonomized framework of the care of the self. (HS 448)

Care of the self brings about “a style of life, a sort of form one gives to one's life” (HS 424). The “philosophical life” does not obey a *regula* (a rule): it submits to a *forma* (a form)” (424).

This form of life is distinct from the self, although created by the self. Drawing specifically on Donna Haraway and Judith Butler, both influenced by Foucault, Campbell emphasizes that Foucault's care of the self is concerned with “the self's complicity with the intensification of power relations” (137). The self's intensified borders, self-preservation, and desire for mastery are complicit with and supported by power relations. Care thus operates in tension with the self, altering its ends and temporalities, refashioning its functions and expectations. Although created by the self, it is at a distance. The self cares for an object it has not yet achieved and over which it will lose its own control. It is a form that will exceed the self. At the same time, it is the self's own construction of its undoing. The self would care for its own othering. Stretched over a life and oriented toward the undoing of one's boundaries, care is a form of *technē* one sets in place in order to disrupt oneself. While care would undo the subject, it also sets something in its place that cares for this disruption. The self, self-formation, the care of

a subject, the formation of a subject, operate, too, in order to prevent the self—the site of regulation and conduct—from closing off the uncertain effects of the other.

This means one can create practices that allow one to deviate from oneself. As Campbell asks, emphasizing the potential of a *technē* that would open oneself to others, “What itineraries can we imagine that allow us to elaborate a *technē* up to the demands for rejoining *technē* with *bíos*? What *technē* are available that would allow us to break the hold that the self as test continues to have over us?” (135) This form of care that operates against oneself lays the groundwork for an understanding of writing that, similarly, does not form the self, but undoes the self. The act of writing takes place as this form of care. Rather than inventing the self, this writing would function as care of the self, a *technē* that undoes the self. This would be a writing that does not “kill the mother,” but that, itself, “loves birth.” While Derrida would “love without writing” rather than attempting to birth himself, writing also functions as a *technē* that undoes the self. Shifted to an event that becomes stretched over one’s life, functioning to transform oneself, writing that would care for ghosts is a form of *technē* that upsets one’s boundaries and enables a subject formation. In this case, the subject would be embodied beyond oneself with open borders, aware of touch.

Foucault gestures to this goal in his discussion of his own writing. Questioned about his non-linear trajectory, Foucault describes his research not in terms of a field or theory, but in terms of his own transformation. Describing himself as an “experimenter” rather than a theorist or a philosopher, he confesses that he writes “in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before” (‘Experience-Book’ 27). Rather than communicating an argument, his books are “direct experiences aimed at pulling myself free of myself, at preventing me from being the same” (32). Writing, to paraphrase this rationale, is a transformation. Writing, in this

regard, is an act against oneself, preventing oneself from otherwise following one's own inclinations. The potential of writing to effect this change is the only thing that overcomes his fear: "If I had to write a book to communicate what I'm already thinking before I begin to write, I would never have the courage to begin it" (27). What gives Foucault the courage to begin is the prospect of pulling free from himself, of preventing himself from staying the same. He gets the courage to write from the possibility of thwarting his own inclinations.

Situating this understanding of *technē* as a substitute for that of photography, I describe how my mimetic writing returns a memory as a form of care of self that operates upon my self. Emphasizing the *technē* of writing—as that which acts upon the self—I link this to the capacity of bringing ghosts and strangers back into one's sense of the self. Not only does this understanding of writing's technological effects shift understandings of birth—from an event in the past one would undo to a haunting disruption—but it shows how to care for maternity.

Photographic Writing

Returning to Marder's reading of *Camera Lucida*, I draw on her notion of "photographic writing" to describe the effects of a mimetic writing of the Other. Through this concept, I foreground the way this writing can operate as care of the self, a *technē* that transforms the subject through the emergence of another. I describe this writing as a prosthetic memory that exceeds oneself and that overwhelms the self. As a mode of extending birth, writing birth, this writing not only moves beyond the finitude of the event, but it enables the maternal relation. Rather than self-invention, writing cares for the other. Maternity depends on the care of writing.

Marder develops her account of photographic writing through her innovative explication of Barthes's less studied *Alhambra* photo. She thinks the photo together with Barthes's commentary on it, focusing on the intertextuality and strangeness of Barthes's longing to inhabit

the landscape this image portrays. Beneath the image of a mosque with a young boy leaning by, Barthes's commentary professes his desire to inhabit the place of the photo:

Looking back at these landscapes of predilection, it is as if I *were certain* of having been there or going there. Now Freud says of the maternal body that "there is no other place of which one can say with so much certainty that one has already been there." Such then would be the landscape (chosen by desire): *heimlich*, awakening in me the Mother (and never the disturbing Mother). (qtd 165)

Marder refuses to isolate this commentary from the image, seeing their relation not as image and response, but as an inter-relational, continuous object. Arguing that they create a "fantasmatically constructed composite photo-word picture," she refers to photo and commentary together as "a new, quasi-photographic lexical reproduction that must now be read on its own terms" (168). Furthermore, pushing the possible meaning of the commentary beyond a simple desire to return to the mother's body, she focuses on the quotation of Freud to assert that this photo-word picture dramatizes what she calls "photographic writing," a mode of writing that draws on the fantasmatic desire to remember one's birth, to enact writing's capacity to return one to any place and time beyond the memory of the subject, that does not document, but "conjure[s] up a past prior to any subjective experience" (172).

However, she also explicates Freud's interpretation of the experience of *déjà vu* within dreams to propose the possibility of a form of writing that transforms the desired return to the maternal body into a re-writing of history. Significant about Freud's explication of *déjà vu* is that images of an unrelated subject become "memory traces of a real, lived, former existence of the mother's body [that] bear witness to the primal and foundational 'certainty' of that former life and, along with it, of the event of our own birth" (170). These images represent what they are

not. *Déjà vu* is not a dream image, but “a psychic ‘photograph’ that provides quasi-referential evidence to support the ‘certainty’ that we have once inhabited the body of the mother” (170). They are a “*mechanical reproduction* of an impossible image (the image of our birth) that was seen (but not by any subjective presence) without having been seen” (emphasis in original, 170). While the claim to return to the mother’s body appears to replicate Freud’s argument about the certainty of the mother and the uncanniness of birth, Marder uses his quote to open another possibility for this writing. While this mode of photographic writing is non-mimetic, only “quasi-referential evidence,” a photograph produced through other imagery, Marder expands its definition to include *Camera Lucida* as a whole.

Marder uses Barthes’s written description of a photo of himself in the arms of his mother as an example. Barthes describes that when he is looking at “a photo in which she is hugging me, a child, against her, I can awaken in myself the rumpled softness of her crêpe de Chine and the perfume of her rice powder” (65). Marder argues that this written reproduction of a photo gives him over to “the unconscious photographic capacities within his own psyche . . . these latent inscriptions of a lost life (and perhaps not her or his)” that “enlarge the field of memory” (181). *Camera Lucida*, as photographic writing, depicts not only the dreamed return to a mother’s body, but also sensorial impression, memories beyond memory that exceed the subject’s. While photographic writing begins in relation to remembering an event impossible to remember and is oriented around the certainty of one’s birth, it shifts to something different. It becomes the possibility of remembering events that existed beyond one’s subjectivity, that trouble one’s subjectivity.

Mirroring Barthes’s description of the photo of himself and his mother, my mimetic descriptions of my daughter are not attempts to capture her likeness. Marder’s description of

photographic writing provides another way to think of such mimetic inscriptions. A photographic writing takes from photography what it could never achieve, the touch of bodies that moved the subject from one position to another, that exceeded the psyche. Photographic writing enables the grounded subject to remember being held up, supported, raised up by another. This sensation is alien to the subject, this suspension from the ground, in the arms of another, as an originating position, the ground, itself, and its firmness, being once unimaginable and to be learned.

Photographic writing relates beyond the writing subject. It entails an acting against oneself, a giving oneself over to what is not documented and what is not a body but is instead the traces of what cannot be remembered and which does not belong to oneself.

Mimetically producing her within my journal entry, I neither captured her nor comprehended her, but re-inscribed within my sense of self the experience of being interrupted. This photographic writing goes against the photograph, inscribing the time of that body into the text of the journal and the scene of my writing. If the journal is seen to be a way of creating coherence over the day, in this instance, it returns that which disrupts that coherence. My description of her is my trace of her effect on me. Mimesis becomes a mode of memorialization that moves beyond the subject represented and to her effect. An image rather than a narrative, inscribed in my place of daily reflection, this exercise made writing the site of what went beyond memory and beyond subject. It expanded the project and the subject of memory, reaching not for the image of her and for the memory of her body, but for the sensation of being-toward another. It directed my writing about myself into the presentation of another.

In his reading of Michel Foucault's care of the self, Campbell offers "attention" as a practice that does not reinforce the borders and desire for mastery of the self (119). Attention would be the act of reaching out to another without grasping them or mastering them. It would be

a way of coming to presence. Photographic writing repeats and continues this attention in the absence of the other. Describing her and remembering the curls at her forehead and making this my narrative of the day, I reaffirm the effect of her presence upon me. It is a form of memorialization of her emergence within my world. This writing allows what goes beyond the self to emerge; it allows the return of what was lost. Writing brings the other within practices of self-invention, inscribing within the day the emergence of the other. Writing becomes a care that is linked to the arrival of another, the possibility for another to create a space ungoverned by your own. In the aftermath of arrival, after the promise of a continued intrusion, care comes to substitute for the intrusion of the other. It is a becoming-maternity of writing.

Conclusion

One of the reasons photographic writing is a better mode of memory than photography is that, although the story of maternity always appears very personal, the memory of this time is never one's own. Once, I could share the folds in her time, her perception. I could imagine the story and desire behind the simplest requests, the simplicity behind the alarming, the peculiar focus, the sense of which she made of the world, her shifting perspective, the significance of a chain, the memory it was tied to, the response to change. Following her disruptiveness brought about a transformative non-sovereignty. To recall this period is a kind of invocation, I call forth something possessive that returns alien bodily sensation, and that foregrounds loss, that privileges loss over resilience, and therefore risks again the trauma that can accompany opening.

To remember a past not my own, I must keep myself undone. How do you keep yourself undone? How do you care for ghosts and strangeness, how do you care for the temporalities and narratives that interrupt one's own? How do you let the other be, which requires time and space, acts of listening, of seeing, of acquiescing, of letting oneself be decentralized, of being pushed,

of dropping accumulated beliefs and practices? How do you understand and maintain the relation between this letting be and the possibility of your own speech? How do you carry on and replicate this relationship? Caring against care is the address of ending, of exposure, of not belonging, of failure. It is the threat of going against the expected, of non-compliance. It is the terrifying insecurity. Caring against care is the possibility of love and the possibility of life that takes the form of self-wreckage, of wrecking oneself.

Writing, as a form of exposure, is similarly a care against care. The courage Foucault calls on to write is the maternal courage that refuses to know in advance what it will say in the hope for transformation. This writing becomes the whole of life, a join between one life and another, a habit and a counter-habit. It becomes writing that weaves together and holds together. This writing aims for and cares for the physical and material effects of childcare.

In “Practicing Practicing,” Ladelle McWhorter proposes the idea that philosophy moves beyond writing. She argues that

The principal activity of philosophers in our time is the production of essays, like the one I am writing now. And essays-as fostered, encouraged, or even demanded by academic institutions-are usually construed as tools of transmission, a kind of intellectual transportation; essays are the vehicles in which our truths ride from one mind to another.

She argues that this has little to do with “cultivating oneself as a site for the emergence of wisdom. (144)

As an alternative, hoping for the possibility of a feminist philosophy, she concludes with the answer that, in order for it to be, one must “live it so” (159). The act of writing would thus appear to be the opposite of ‘living it so.’”

This chapter qualifies this argument. Writing, in losing the subject, mimics the way in which the body, as touch, appears. Against the coherence of a subject, against the fully formed, well-articulated essay, against the possibility of a book, there is the sheet of words that differently connects them. Writing, itself, enables the loss of the self, makes possible the loss of the subject, makes possible maternity. Writing not only presents an argument, tracing its complexity and trying to attend to each detail, to capture it responsibly and to emphasize the particular nature of what you would say; it also undoes oneself. This writing has no direction. It has no introduction. It has no narrative, no direction, no reason, no plan, no argument. It is an image, a writing of the body, a writing of skin. It is writing that does not convince, but touches. This is writing that does not defend, but lays bare, taking place through the affirmation of another, refusing itself in its articulation.

Conclusion:

The Maternity of Theory

When Juliet was little and could not sleep, I would hold her and rock her until she settled. She had an electric swing that moved with the regularity of a metronome, and I would try to match its movement: sway, abrupt stop—pause—swing back the other way. Standing there, we would rock for hours. It would darken outside. I would be dimly aware of one of my dogs weaving around my legs and around the furniture. Through this all, her cries would continue. After a while, I would begin to lose sense of how long I had been standing there. As I rock, my body—aches, interests, need—no longer matter. It is not me, but my rocking that matters. My muscles ache and strain, but the rhythm instigated by myself over which I lose control takes over. Sway. Pause. Swing. Rocking, I respond, and the response overwhelms me so that, for a period, all I am is rocking. I rock, and I am myself held up by this rocking.

The frequency of these periods in which I seem to lose hold of my sense of self or am held up by something beyond my body troubles the common conception of maternity as an embodied relation. This is not an easy argument to make. Corporeality is one of maternity's most significant provocations. Consider Maggie Nelson's description of her son's body in *The Argonauts* as a "revelation" (2015, 42). Nelson professes surprise at what is presumed to be immediate. It is the surprise of the body: "A body! An actual body!" Moreover, corporeality has provided a rich source for feminist thinking and this easily extends to the maternal relation. The physical and physiological aspects of the experience of caring for another productively upsets dominant regimes of subjectivity that presume a bound, independent, self-sufficient body. The

very angle of the mother's body provokes thought, as Adriana Cavarero makes clear in her recent study of the slope and bend of the mother's body leaning over another in her recent book of philosophy, *Inclinations – A Critique of Rectitude*.

As the encounter of rocking suggests, however, matter and corporeality cannot quite capture the specific effects of maternity. There opens within maternity this space between bodies, which becomes filled with different forms of connection. As a substantial body of literature on the subject of skin has made clear, the surface of the body is a paradoxical site of containment and rupture. It marks the bounds and the breach of the body. Contours caught within a close relation to another can undergo changes and shifts in relation to the body. Maternity is subject to this confusion. While calling attention to skin-to-skin contact and the need to support another body—a relationship dramatically opposed to aggression—maternity nevertheless troubles the idea of a material body. It prompts something like a poetics of the body, tracing how the matter of the body becomes confused with illusion, how metaphors emerge, creating in the space between bodies figures of connection that frame new modes of being in the world. Rather than occupying a position and a time, the mother undergoes a sense of shifting or rocking, an experience that takes place through bodily relation.

This experience of rocking foregrounds an ambivalence between maternity and theory that not only troubles their opposition, but also re-frames the legacies of critical theory, the conventional sites of its generation, and its ends. The closeness and the emphasis on the bounds and surfaces of bodies within maternity would seem contrary to the spatial orientations and geometric dispersals of theory. Typically, theory is thought in terms of liminality, unsettling subjectivity, and transgressing boundaries. It is conventionally assumed to exceed limits and to form new connections that cut across the evident. Maternity, on the other hand, operates in terms

of proximity, intensity, confusion, closeness, and the ongoing pressure of one body against another. She leans against me, rolls against me, takes my face in her hands to laugh at. There is no doubt: Me. I am patted and rolled against and slept against and weighed down. I am traced against my borders repeatedly from many angles and directions, emerging as this body within her sense, created thus within this field of touch and pressure, proximity and distance. A shape, a creature: constructed, but nevertheless there. Without doubt: needed and known. A creature of certain texture, moving with her from place to place with a rhythm become hers. Without doubt: an identity, of some form.

As the example of rocking suggests, however, maternity's intimacy brings a loss of subjectivity. Although maternity is related to the presence and needs of bodies, it is also constituted through illusion and indecision. The body's contours can become aligned with another's and the self can exceed these contours, creating a sense of being and selfhood that stretches beyond the space one occupies. If anything, maternity would provide a way to imagine modes of thought oriented around the proximity of another body and how this other body directs habits, routines, and posture. Maternity thus seems related to theory in a way that troubles the way we think of both.

In this conclusion, I engage with the place of Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida within this dissertation. It seems strange to turn to these philosophers to illustrate maternity's challenge to narratives and approaches to birth. Examining their place within my argument, I lay out some current criticisms of theory, specify how Butler, Foucault, and Derrida feature in these criticisms, define what I mean by "theory," and explore how maternity resembles and responds to theory. In the end, rather than defending maternity against the accusations of theory—that it is essentialist and conservative—I defend theory. I use maternity to elucidate the

need for theoretical forms of thinking. Furthermore, I argue that maternity depends on and needs theory. As a specific form of confrontation with another, one that is characterized by proximity, intensity, duration, and exposure, maternity calls for modes of thinking theoretically. The struggle to let the other arrive can produce theoretical thought and make it the measure for decision.

Common Criticisms of Theory

The past few years have seen a growing impatience with tendencies and legacies of progressive critical theory. Although it is very difficult to adequately define this area of thought, scholars identify characteristic styles of thought and argument that can be traced back to the rise of post-structuralism within the United States in the 1970's and 1980's. Skepticism, paranoia, detachment, and negativity have all been associated with critical theory. Scholarship bemoans the attitudes and style of theory, arguing that this has infiltrated the humanities more broadly, limiting the potential for study and thought. Furthermore, scholarship continues to react to what has become known as the "linguistic turn," the shift to linguistic models of subject formation, an emphasis on discourse, and a focus on social construction. In addition, while the clarity, practical application, and specificity of theory has always been in question, what emerges now is a questioning of how its valorizations shut down thinking, leaving us with formulae and relics of thought that have little value and offer little potential for change.

In this section, I concentrate on a few examples of this criticism, focusing on the negativity of theory, its skepticism, its loss of subject positions, and its loss of bodies and specificity. I address how the three philosophers central to this dissertation feature in this criticism.

Criticisms of theory often acknowledge Eve Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling* and her "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is about You" as one of the first clear articulations of the limitations with critical theory. In her introduction, Sedgwick argues that theory has become focused on anti-essentialism:

For from Jacques Derrida to Judith Butler, the trajectory of literary and gender theory has angled increasingly away from (what might be called) the grammatical moment, or the grammatical impulse, in discussions of performativity. Let me oversimplify here in positing that both deconstruction and gender theory have invoked Austinian performativity in the service of an epistemological project that can roughly be identified as anti-essentialism.

Discussing her own work in queer theory, Sedgwick queries the dominance of paranoia as a practice of reading. She argues

Paranoia thus became by the mid-1980s a privileged object of antihomophobic theory. How did it spread so quickly from that status to being its uniquely sanctioned methodology? . . . Part of the explanation lies in a property of paranoia itself. Simply put, paranoia tends to be contagious; more specifically, paranoia is drawn toward and tends to construct symmetrical relations, in particular, symmetrical epistemologies. (126)

Sedgwick identifies a contagious methodology that comes to infuse and limit thinking, prohibiting theory's goal of illuminating other modes of thought. In this essay, she expresses a hope for reparative practices of reading and writing. This dichotomy between two reading practices continues to frame much of the response to critical theory.

Another influential essay, Bruno Latour's "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?" focuses on the capacity of theory to trouble grounds, loves, and attachments. He specifically

refers to “motherhood” as one of those issues, along with religion and national identity, that theory dismisses as naïve: “Remember the good old days when university professors could look down on unsophisticated folks because those hillbillies naïvely believed in church, motherhood, and apple pie?” (228). Postmodern theory has led to a greater distinction between lived experience and the explication of reality, it has privileged cleverness and unsettlement over the possibility of embodied experience. Its tendencies have been appropriated by conservative politics. The desire to unsettle has led to the absence of ground to stand on.

In *The Limits of Critique*, Rita Felski joins the growing number of scholars who express exhaustion with critique as a methodology. Felski follows Sedgwick in identifying a “*thought style*” of theory, a necessarily vague characterization of what constitutes a theoretical methodology that incorporates “a spirit of skeptical questioning or outright condemnation, an emphasis on its precarious position vis-à-vis overbearing and oppressive social forces, the claim to be engaged in some kind of radical intellectual and/or political work, and the assumption that whatever is *not* critical must therefore be *uncritical*” (2). She links this methodology to the construction of a persona and an orientation, showing how it infiltrates and affects response more generally. Critique calls for a persona that is “suspicious, knowing, self-conscious, hardheaded, tirelessly vigilant” (6). Transpiring or taking shape in terms of an orientation towards its subject or a disposition, critique entails a form of occupation, protection, and reinforcement. It requires: guardedness rather than openness, aggression rather than submission, irony rather than reverence, exposure rather than tact. . . . Like any other repeated practice, it eases into the state of second nature, no longer an alien or obtrusive activity but a recognizable and reassuring rhythm of thought. Critique inhabits us, and we become habituated to critique. (21)

Felski describes critique as a shelter—"a canopy, a dwelling, a resting place, a home" (50)—and ties it to defense: "Occupying the political and moral high ground in the humanities, it seems impervious to direct attack, its bulletproof vest deflecting all bursts of enemy fire" (118). Not only has this limited our responsibility, but it removes certain experiences from the realm of theorization.

In her books and articles on the subject, Mari Ruti bemoans what she calls the "bad habits" of progressive critical theory. As Ruti puts it, critical theory is beginning to rely on formulaic modes of thought that are reducing its innovation and possibility. These include a tendency to "leap from the (warranted) critique of the autonomous and sovereign subject of humanist metaphysics to the (in my view absurd) notion that all efforts at subjective re-centering should be discouraged," and the idea that "radical antinormativity—the flat rejection of the kind of normative ethics that relies on a set of a priori judgments about right and wrong—constitutes an adequate ethical stance" (5). While these once served a purpose, the move has now become automatic. Moreover, it is not feasible to live a life according to the lingering postmodern aesthetic of this theory, with decisions determined by "fragmentation, disintegration, decentering, disunity, fluidity, mobility, and volatility" ("Bad Habits" 8).

Ruti particularly laments the ongoing privileging of "de-subjectivization" as a transgressive, liberatory goal. "De-subjectivization" is the act of liberation from subjugating discourses and norms, considered to be a condition of thinking and the emergence of a mode of knowledge that troubles held beliefs. In *Are the Lips a Grave*, Lynne Huffer emphasizes the anti-foundationalism of de-subjectivization, distinguishing it from the mere complication of identity. As she puts it, with de-subjectivization there "are neither selves nor intersections, just an abyssal

ungrounding that not only trouble identity but undoes subjectivity itself” (17). This destruction of the self is one of Ruti’s main points of criticism:

Though I understand the historical reasons for the assault on the humanist subject, I wonder about the almost ritualistic manner in which the slaughter of ‘the subject’ gets undertaken from text to text, as if thinkers such as Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze somehow botched the job back in the 1960s and 1970s. . . . Of all the recurring themes of queer theory, the assault on the subject is what, for me, gives the strongest impression of empty speech, for it seems to have virtually nothing to do with the personal realities of those who advocate it, most of whom live semicoherent, semicontinuous lives in semiconsistent (usually tenured) life worlds. (*OO*, 39)

Ruti not only argues that the focus on the death of the subject is critically and politically significant unnecessary and empty—it has been accomplished—but that it ignores the real precariousness of subject positions: “queer theory’s repeated efforts to reiterate its hatred of this subject generate the kinds of ethical dilemmas that the field has not been able to resolve, including the tendency to call for the downfall of subjects who are already leading overly precarious lives” (9).

Ruti is not alone in her “fatigue with the field’s by now entirely habitual attempts to slay the sovereign subject of Enlightenment philosophy” (9). Many theorists are pointing out the limitations and the implications of critical theory. Many are tired. As these scholars argue, the desire to destroy the subject is not only repetitive and formulaic, but it privileges modes of being and presumed resources not available to everyone. Theory’s inclination to fall back on de-subjectivization and anti-normativity as inherently ethical inhibits its capacity to offer concrete

and viable paths forward. These habits are repetitive, thoughtless, unreflective. In spite of the promise of de-subjectivization, its focus on the self, and its possibility, feels absent.

Another concern with theory is its limited address of the matter and body. As Jay Prosser argues in *Second Skins*, post-structuralism's emphasis on fluidity and liminality has prevented the consideration of narratives of formation: "Is this paradox about the body—the body's materiality slips our grasp even as we attempt to narrate it—our inevitable poststructuralist legacy?" (13) Of late, the tension between post-structuralist theory and materialism has become commonplace, even as the nature of this tension continues to be evaluated for its complexity and volatility. The materialistic movement arose in part in response to the so-called linguistic turn, re-instating the specificity of bodies, de-centralizing the human, and examining the way matter is itself animated. Materialist theory changes the world post-structuralism left in its wake, re-invoking the limits lost in abstraction and a reliance of language.

The reasons for exploring this distinction differ. For some scholars the inscription of matter enabled evasions of claims of biological determinism and essentialism, as well as theorizations of invented connectivity that promised political and social resistances. Drawing on the legacy of biopolitics, Donna Haraway's cyborg celebrated the self's capacity to extend beyond the body. Responding to a sense that post-structuralist theory de-materialized bodies, some feminist theory explored the possibility of knowing the body, pointing to the impossibility of locating precisely the point of their meeting point. Debates continue within feminist scholarship on the place of biology. The complexity of this scholarship is far too much for this conclusion, whose focus is the basic premise this complexity leaves intact: that an abstract account of a physiological process is, rather than boldly anti-essentialist, forgetful of the body. The nature of the interrelation between matter and language continues to draw attention,

generating theories of their inextricability, their similarity, the instability of their presumed attributes. In these theories, language is material, and matter has agency.

On this subject, Butler's work emerges as a key point of reference. One of the most well-known criticisms of her work is that she neglects the materiality of the body. Indeed, on many occasions, Butler figures within feminism as the very emblem of this neglect. To give an example, in *Material Feminisms*, Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman acknowledge that "the tendency to focus on the discursive at the expense of the material has been particularly evident in feminist versions of postmodernism. Judith Butler, perhaps the most notable feminist postmodern, is frequently criticized for her 'loss' of the material, specifically the materiality of the body" (3). To cite another example, Sara Ahmed responds to criticisms that feminism resists biology by pointing out that Butler is "singled out as a primary example of a feminist who reduces matter to culture" (33).

The goals of new materialisms qualify this critique. In a response to Ahmed's criticism of new materialism's portrayal of feminism, Noela Davis specifies that Butler is singled out not because of any absence of interest in the material, but because her central interest is not the agency of bodies:

Even while expanding the notion of the social and very elaborately theorizing matter and materialization, ultimately the biological body is not the body that matters for Butler. She shifts the division between nature and culture but does not dispense with it. It is this closing off of investigation, the inability of risking that matter and bodies might actually be thinking, actively conversant, cognisant material that is, to generalize, the objective of new materialist critiques of Butler. (11)

Butler does not allow that matter can think, act, and converse beyond cultural inscription and representation, and it is this that signals her as a turning point for new arguments and foci on matter. In addition, the biology of the body is not Butler's focus.

So common is this criticism that Clare Hemmings argues that the frequent and repetitious identification of Butler with the loss of materialism of the body is a function of certain stories that feminist studies tells about the state of its discipline and politics. She somewhat deflates the claim that Butler is the emblem of a turn toward culture, arguing that this claim is, in part, a strategy. For materialism to have the force of a "turn," "postmodernism and poststructuralism need to be rendered as wholly abstract," and Butler becomes the face of this rendering (7). Whatever the degree to which her theory engages with the body, Butler has come to index an interest in construction, culture, and language over the provocations of embodiment and of matter itself. In *Why Stories Matter*, Hemmings argues that Butler's 1990's work on gender performativity has come to mark a divide between matter and discursivity that continues to drive debate even as current feminist scholarship calls this divide into question.

Given the lines of divide between theory and matter, it would seem that the sensible place for maternity would be in opposition to theory, tracing its limitations. After all, one letter distinguishes matter from *mater*. In name and language, the mother is already closely associated with the material. So close is this association that she seems literally superimposed upon the material. *Mater* lies within matter, doubling it, thickening it, and building upon it. *Mater* incompletely repeats matter. Philosophy has emphasized this association between mother and matter. Emanuele Bianchi's re-evaluation of the agency of matter points out Aristotle's identification of "the female as the source of matter for the offspring, while the male provides the principle of motion, generation, soul-principle, *logos*, and form" (2). Elissa Marder, examining

the representation of mother as dependent on the effect of birth, refers to the “the conceptual abyss between the apparently self-evident materiality of the maternal body and the radical unthinkability of the event of one’s own birth” (2).

This would seem to be a potential site for explication. Perhaps the matter of *mater* could be modified into an expanded lexicon of bodily relationality—flesh, touch, skin, caress, support—that subverts the original over-determination of the association. Perhaps the association is a prism, throwing into relief the exaggerated embodiment possible of maternity. Matter/*mater*: bodies pressing against one another, exposed bodies, surprising, unavoidable bodies, bodies with new blemishes and new pain, bodies calling into question the sex and gender of the mother—is the mother a woman?—bodies in communication, bodies tired, bodies held. Not only have mind and body been thoroughly entangled, their hierarchy gone stale, but matter is understood as vital, affective, and agentic. A changed terrain of inquiry has made new space for thinking the bodies that maternity materializes.

As my example of rocking demonstrates, however, it is not this simple. Maternity calls into view the place of theoretical arguments within close relationships. While it changes common claims of what theory is and what it does, it nevertheless insists on and requires this form of thought. While it de-prioritizes negativity, detachment, skepticism, violence, and cleverness, it nevertheless illustrates the continued relevance of theory. Moreover, while it appears opposed to the criteria of theory—its abstraction and idealism—maternity shows the attempt to live theory. Engaged with a relation to an Other that would confront the emergence of this Other and let this Other be, maternity attempts to live theory.

Defining Theory

A rich and complex field of thought, theory is difficult to define. Taking a broad approach, this dissertation thinks of theory as a confrontation with representations of reality that enable the view of alternatives to come into being. Theory takes shape as the re-articulation of otherwise pathologized conditions, drawing on this to bring into view others version of reality and being. Theory engages with notions of selfhood, subjectivity, and identity, calling into question the importance of unity, autonomy, independence, and the sense that one's relation to another and to the social is known and managed and can be protected and traced. Theory redraws parameters of harm, showing how the self itself, in its formation, can harm that self, exploring ways of surviving the self. Theory produces concepts that allow the relation to self to be rethought, including the cyborg, the multitude, the chaos, flesh, animacy, and the notion of becoming. It traces an unavoidable residue of repeated actions and patterns and unacknowledged implications in systems, socialization, and communication. However, while theory is often imagined as a transgressive extension beyond oneself, it is very often the settling in and return to self, the tracing of the harm against which the self builds itself.

The idiomatic possibilities of theory offer a way to explore the implications of the material and physical structures of one's reality, forging a link between phenomenology and ontology, metaphysics and deconstruction. Theory revises reality; it is a composition of different ways of beings and becoming, of otherness. It offers another means of occupying the world, a poeticity that, if nothing else, makes room to breathe, pushing against habits of thought and perception. Theory creates, imagines, and shows other modes and manners of being and relation, never fully marking the distinction between creation and elucidation. Theory resituates self in the world. Theory recalls the moments beyond the self, inscribing them again within the present, tracing their possibility in their absence. Theory is personal, a means for representing and

altering the world that is nearly always a form of memoir. Theory, as a prosaic description of one's poetic embedment, is lyric philosophy. It is a brush with the otherwise that allows the portrayal, projection, and occupation of alteration.

Yet, theory is also characterized by its distinction from practical application. Although one is proximate to it, exposed to it, and overwhelmed by it, theory is uninhabitable. The attempt to live theory fails. In other words, theorization is an incomplete project of self-disturbance and this is part of its style. Although theory animates a world, we do not survive theorization. Or, rather, we do survive theorization and this is the sign of its failure. We need ourselves to register our own disintegration. Theory is often presented as a possible future, something without guarantee.

Its Relation to Maternity

As the encounter with another, maternity shares theory's endeavors, trying to live within the world the infant creates, which, as a different body, revises the progression and time and the division of space. Even as it responds to a physical relationship, maternity engages in theoretical thinking. The surfaces of the body of the mother provide a template for a mode of thinking that resists disciplinary formations, refusing belonging in recognition of the fragility of bounds and of how the other's intrusion outlines the very origin of thought. The shared surfaces of the mother are a template for a mode of writing and thinking that suspends coherence and prioritizes touch. They entail one must remain always to the side of oneself, to the side of a discipline, to the side of an argument, a supposedly off-centered relation that nevertheless enacts and transpires as a form of transgressive thinking. Not only is this care a form of transgression—moving one beyond constraints and expectation—but it enacts a departure, calling for a mode of thinking difficult to recognize in its attention to the other. As an exit, it is not direct or clear; it rocks and

shifts, re-formulating boundaries and space, re-situating oneself within them. As the everyday, ordinary, hyperbolic, excessive response to an arrival, maternity is a theorization. It puts forward a theorization of reality, a revised description or understanding of reality.

Maternity brings about the loss of the subject. While it is not a pulverization of the subject, maternity enacts and requires a form of the loss of the subject, a “loss” that becomes preferable to one’s own subjectivity. This takes place through borders. One characteristic of the subject—as a mode of discreteness and boundedness—is a detachment from the effects and fragility of its affirmable limits. The subject’s formation depends on the capacity to not be breached, to be able to maintain untested limits. The subject is distanced from how these limits operate under stress, how they touch, how they inadvertently affect the potential of other modes of being. Further, this boundedness and detachment from limits is connected with self-mastery. To be mastered, one must be finite. Mastery begins at borders.

The loss of the subject is not only the vacating of space, time, and connection, but the reformulation of the work of boundaries. Whereas once a body was felt as whole—three-dimensional, with interior effects playing out upon its surface, with its surface chronicling the passage of time and events, with the exterior bearing some relation, however unreliable, to the person, identity signaled by that surface—in maternity, attention turns to what it means to have a surface and to how the body relates to the surface. The subject of maternity gives way to a surface. Rather than the coherence of the subject, there is its remapping beyond itself, its mapping within another mode of thinking. Could the subject not unravel and extend itself, shift to other surfaces, become layered?

The bounds of the body are the space of theory, tracing a shift in thinking and a shift in relation to the body. If theory is oriented toward troubling paradigms of thought related to the

idea of a bound body or an identity, then the act of holding another body, of attending to the specificities of that body, of asserting the specific needs and the specific limits of that body, itself epitomizes the act of thought. The unexpected compatibility of these two brings together two bodies differently constituted in theory and matter. This begins, perhaps, at the act of touch, when the surface of the body becomes to matter more than one's intent.

When Butler argues for the social dependence and vulnerability of bodies, she suggests that an awareness of a constitutional susceptibility would lead to a political order that exceeds concerns with rights and subjectivity. She asks, "Is there a way in which the place of the body, and the way in which it disposes us outside ourselves or sets us beside ourselves, opens up another kind of normative aspiration within the field of politics?" (2004, 26). It might be that bodies and selves require care that move beyond sense. This undoing that allows the emergence of what extends beyond the body to re-formulate the time, space, and possession of the self calls for the kind of care that would allow it to be seen and recognized, that would set aside the emphasis on bounds and possession in order for it to come into view, that would allow its presence in tandem with the material. The assertion of this self, its viability, and the relations it asserts between bodies, its point of view on distance, separation, and need calls for a language able to negotiate the possession over and rights over bodies.

The act of thinking theoretically—the act of questioning the autonomy of the body, of asserting the importance of connections to others, of attending to a poetics of body, and of dematerializing the body—cares for the maternity of bodies. For one, the possibility of a body and of a sense of self might depend upon the imaginative extension of modes of "having." It might depend upon a turn of phrase, a figure, or the syntax or rhythm of a passage. Butler's descriptions of the implications of the self with the other—I am beside myself; I am outside

myself—are forms of care. Expressing one’s own de-centralization and the constitutive relation to another in the first person, they turn figures of speech into literal renderings of the residual and formational sense of one’s own body and the undeniable claim made upon it by another. “Beside oneself” is the possible alliance of a figure of speech with a mode of being. In its deployment of a figurative disruption or extension of sense, it is also a care for a creature of illusory possessions, connections, and surfaces.

Against the desire for mastery and knowledge that would prepare us to act responsibly and ethically, that would provide us ground to stand on, maternity emphasizes a process of figuring out how to give way to something or someone else, to our capacity to yield, to our capacity to listen in ways that shake us or make us halt. In relation to my daughter, I was confronted with the project of learning the relation between my capacity to listen and to let be and to the formation of subjectivity that precludes this. I needed not learn more but rather unlearn. I needed to grasp what I did not know and could not know and let this dominate my relation to my daughter. I needed to hold on to my lack of knowledge and to have faith in it.

Rather than establishing groundlessness or denying certainty, the work of making space for another or of undergoing the effect of relations to another brings one into confrontation with what exceeds one. It allows one to reframe narratives of oneself or to trouble these narratives. Rather than needing to build self-sufficiency, rather than conforming and becoming more flexible, rather than teaching resilience, I am oriented toward the different times of lives, the different needs, the different spatial orientations, each of these a way of being whose emergence is often missed. This turn toward need and difference as emergence and possibilities rather than sources of shame and concern came not from my own knowledge or education, but from a process of undoing, of letting be, of yielding. An encounter that is highly corporeal and that

inserts the body's limitations and demands into daily life, maternity nevertheless gives rise to the encounter of the fictionality and illusion of the body.

One of the most compelling arguments against theory is that it does not found a place from which to speak, but rather erodes this place. It misses the everyday, embedded struggles in favor of theorization. However, the very capacity of matter and thought to intertwine and to affect each other enables the possibility of properly conceiving forms of responsibility and resistance that do not depend upon the integrity of a self, but that are nevertheless grounded in an appreciation of limits, conditions, and material needs. Maternity makes space for fictional or theoretical connections that do not align with the materiality of the body but that nevertheless extend the sense of the self. Maternity explores the possibility of thought, decision, and agency that do not depend on the construction of a self-possession individual or on the integrity of body, but that also do not simply valorize liminality and intersubjectivity. Maternity dramatizes theory's own part—in its collusion, collaboration, and suspension of material embodiment—in the construction of compensatory borders and support, fictional surfaces, intangible but nevertheless sensed extensions.

It brings into view the responsibility of apparently incoherent or passive performances. Maternity, indeed, stands in as a defining example of the interactions between the abstract and the material that suspend the interrogations of their distinction in order to explore the capacity of this interaction to re-organize the relationship among self, other, and responsibility. Maternity enables a vision of how responsibility and resistance come about precisely through a particular, uncontrolled relationship with another. By doing so, accentuating unthought dimensions to each, it can pose responses to questions of the mother in relation to feminist studies on the value of critical theory in an age of precariousness and dispossession. Doing so enables a theorization of

attachments with material effects, a theorization that examines the ontology of responsibility and repair, and de-pathologizes forms of coping, survival, and connection. Maternity transforms the dependence of the body on the abstract and the theoretical into a site of collaborative production, the self-critique and the recognition of boundaries able to produce sustaining fictional structures that move one beyond oneself.

While presented as a linear production of self-formation, maternity and childbirth also include an encounter that not only challenges or thwarts these very stories, but that also develops and takes another look at the value of self-disruption, moving it from pathologization to a form of being in the world that de-centralizes the self and, in so doing, enables new sites or positions for action, thinking, and relating. Although seemingly at odds with critical theory that challenges biological determinism, maternity, in the nature of its encounter with another, complicates theoretical positions. In addition, theory's emphasis on anti-normative relations that intervene in the dominance of bound and secure figures of agency helps explain and give language to maternity. Considering maternity as comprising a specific and peculiar form of encounter removes it from questions of sex and gender and emphasizes how it troubles notions of identity.

Maternity is thus destabilizing, transformative, and an example of theoretical thinking as it takes place beyond oneself through interaction with another. Maternity relates maternity to life, to the arrival of life, to the arrival of the arrival. Maternity attempts to animate theory as the structure within which we live, breathe, decide, and understand. Even as theory is uninhabitable, maternity attempts to live theory, to live according to its material effects and practices, to live by a comprehension of what is not immediately evident or recognizable. It is the making-life of theory. To be maternal is to be invested—to be drawn irrevocably, as if one's life depended upon it—into theory. It is the attempt (and the failure) to stay true to theory in ordinary life. It is, in

other words, the eradication of the name of theory. Finally, maternity presents the inhabitation of theory, a movement from a reading or thinking of relationality to an absorption into these relations. It is an example of the inhabitation of this theory. Maternity is the attempt to live theory, the material effects and practices of theory, how it takes place. Maternity exists with and, in its urgency, calls attention to this failure of theorization that is part of its constitution. This failure is mitigated, however, by the ceaselessness of arrival.

Maternity Expands the Place and Role of Theory

Derrida has said, “The task of the philosopher, and thus of anyone—of the citizen, for example—is to try, by taking the analysis as far as possible, to make the event intelligible up until the moment we touch the *arrivant*” (*Art.* 20-21) Within theory, the idea of holding anyone is also considered harmful. This is a guiding principle of theory, prioritizing the possibility and the effects of otherness and assuring of its opacity. As soon as we know the other, we have lost the other. As soon we try to bring in the other, we reduce the other. To even touch another can be harmful. In *Tactile Poetics*, Sarah Jackson calls attention to this, arguing that touching another always brings the risk of harming the other. Felski appears to gesture to this hesitancy in her discussion of literary analysis: “Inspired by a deconstructive hypersensitivity to the aporia and contradictions of language, such an ethics underscores our obligations as critics to respect the irreducible otherness of texts, to pay tribute to the ways they resist comprehension and trouble judgment” (28). The “hypersensitivity” of deconstruction finds any claim to coherence or to identification harmful.

Maternity brings another angle to this, showing how forms of theoretical thinking emerge from the acts of holding and touch, and from processes of handling and containment. When scholarship takes the relation among self, body, and skin as its subject, the conventional goal is

to highlight the implications of the skin's function as an apparent limit that in fact opens the body. As many scholars have emphasized, the function of the skin is highly ambivalent. The skin is taken at once to be the limit of the body, the surface of the body, a membrane across which substances move, a condition of touch, and a site of connection with another. The skin is a paradox, both conditioning subjectivity and implicating that subjectivity within various power relations. As Sheila Cavanagh, Angela Failler, and Rachel Alpha Johnston Hurst assert in *Skin, Culture and Psychoanalysis*, "We feel our skins intimately as our own, and yet they are continually shared by encounter and exchange" (Cavanagh et al. 2013, 2). Our skin is not our own, and we must deal with a dependency and dispersion that troubles our sense of self and troubles our conception of identity.

This scholarship also commonly uses the skin to disprove what it ostensibly represents: the bound body, marked by this material limit. As a boundary, the skin is fragile or false. The skin—surface, membrane, border—is taken to unsettle rather than affirm the limit of the body. In *Thinking Through the Skin*, Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey argue that the skin is a mediator between body and culture that requires a "recognition of the function of social differences in establishing the very boundaries which appear to mark out 'the body'" (Ahmed and Stacey 2001, 3). Indeed, it is the very capacity of the skin to appear a boundary that makes it so useful to scholarship, for the skin is precisely that which cannot "contain either the body, identity, well-being or value" (2001, 3). Rather than containing bodies, the skin implicates bodies with others. Right at this boundary, because of this boundary, bodies are transgressed and undone. In relation to the skin, it comes to mark or explain thinking beyond the body when it is called into question as the end of the story. Donna Haraway's provocative question in *The Cyborg Manifesto* clearly and concisely encapsulates the drive of scholarship that aims to unsettle the legacies of the bound

body and its relation to conceptions of subjectivity and agency: “why should our bodies end at the skin?” (1991, 220)

Maternity complicates this hesitancy towards ideas of boundedness. Skin that begins another—being another’s surface—supplements theories of the skin that would emphasize unboundedness by attending to the possibility that one’s skin forms the bounds of another. Not only the end to one’s own body, skin is also the surface of another’s, complicating the desire to simply deny this boundary. Along with a site of transgression, distinction, connection, and rupture, the skin also a site of confusion, formation, and exposure. If we begin at the skin, we must deal with the formative capacity of boundaries. If skin begins bodies, then Haraway’s push beyond the normative body takes place at the surface of the body and as an intimate encounter. If we begin at the skin, we must theorize a space that is otherwise difficult to attend to, where the surfaces that once appeared to mark the limit of one body become given to another.

In other words, the touch of another is not always constraining. Not only can the act of holding another support and enable another, but it can also release oneself from other restrictive holds. Holding another might be the mode of response to another that undoes the need for preservation, rendering us vulnerable to the change in thought and bearing we seek. Rather than causing harm, we might be most vulnerable when we hold another. When we hold another, we become open to whatever comes. Holding another can be a self-interrupting experience, the act of holding another not reinforcing a position, but, rather, bringing about its disruption. These effects exceed our own attempts at change, coming from the other. Although they are unpredictable, they bring about changes in thought and openness through the very act of making us, finally, vulnerable to the other.

For all that theory appears to focus on the risks to otherness, or to drive skeptical

thoughts, or rely on obscurity, or to talk of impossibility, theory also traces the effect of holding another, the desire to be vulnerable, the unexpected effect of holding another, this unraveling of perceived ways of being. Not only does theory offer modes of thought beyond critique, but theory pushes past post-critique, demanding we let go of the framework through which we measure, demanding we read for what we would otherwise refuse or toss out. Theory itself—in its very troubling of identity, its hypersensitivity, and its tongue-tied expressions—is a mode of thinking that steps beyond the fortified boundary. It is an expression of how we hold. Although these appear to forswear connection or vulnerability, the very tendencies and tropes that orient theory away from identity forge the possibility of being able to hold another.

Holding is a kind of rhythm. Dufourmantelle writes, responding to Derrida, “It is difficult to hear something of the rightness of a way of speaking without taking the measure of its step, which is to say its rhythm, and the time necessary to say it” (18). She will listen to the “‘how’ of Derrida’s thinking, rather than on the sterile exercise of commentary.” Listening for rhythm rather than content, feeling for time rather than sense, holding changes the pace of the self. Within the slowed or staggered “how” of communication, the self comes to differently inhabit spaces between words, moves, events, and bodies. In the act of holding another, one slows one’s self, or one holds oneself, undergoing a similar slowing of time, a similar listening. One takes the measure of one’s own step, again, while tracing that step, seeing how it relates to another. It slows speech and clarifies language, an exposure, the strange time of the infant.

Conclusion

Birth is central to the problem of how we think about the specificity of the mother. On the one hand, birth has been the subject of extensive debate. As Imogen Tyler puts it, “Over a 40-year period, feminist scholarship from a variety of disciplines has traced, uncovered and

critiqued masculinist appropriations of birth and the correlative abjection of maternal subjects from European histories of thought and representation (see Luce Irigaray, 1985; Iris Marion Young, 1990; Adriana Cavarero, 1998; Bracha Ettinger, 2004)” (2). It nevertheless remains one of the biggest challenges to thinking about and theorizing maternity. Although birth does not define the mother, and the maternal relation is not linked to biology, birth nevertheless brings about a specific, singular connection between bodies. This connection is at once specific and substitutable. The difficulty emerges around how to think both of these possibilities at once. Not only must we think about the many different modes of kinship, intimacy, and relation, but we must also think about the possibility of a singular connection whose disruption will undo the possibility of individual well-being.

One common argument about birth is that its association with the mother is reductive. For a time, birth was used to showcase the interconnectivity of lives. How do we think of birth? In the first place, as a biological event. Rothman argues that despite motherhood’s organization by the ideologies of patriarchy, capitalism, and technology,

We have in every pregnant woman living proof that individuals do not enter the world as autonomous, atomistic, isolated beings, but begin socially, begin connected. And we have in every pregnant woman a walking contradiction to the segmentation of our lives. . . .

Motherhood is the embodied challenge to liberal philosophy. (396)

Birth marks the false hinge between mother and child. Its definition as a possible point of connection confuses the issue, not only presenting each falsely to the other, but falsely linking the two, circumscribing the way each is thought. It gets in the way and starts to dominate the conversation. Thinking of birth as something other than a connection expands and enriches theories of non-biological attachment, while allowing the possibility of constitutive attachment to

enter more fully into discourse. As the association between mother and birth seems to immediately negate the possibility for thinking the mother, it is necessary to examine what takes place beyond birth, to separate them and disentangle them.

While the two need to be separated, however, avoiding birth as a subject rejects the possibility that moving through birth and re-theorizing birth might help work through some of the problems around this connection or divide. What if the connection between mother and birth entails not only examining the connection, but the nature of birth, itself? What if the significance of birth was not in the supposed biological connection it made between bodies, but the event of the emergence of another within one's perception of the world? When we avoid birth because it limits connection to biology, we miss the possibility that birth connects because of the fact that it includes an arrival. As with most issues, we need to return to it in order to address what this anxiety omits: that the issue of separation and connection is far more complicated and rich than our concerns about biological determinism and definition. To do so, however, we must focus on encounter, arrival, and event. In this way, the broadness and openness of connection can again come to the fore.

If birth is remarkable it is because one produces a stranger to oneself for whom one cares. The sight, the encounter, is the surprising, though-provoking aspect to birth. This experience occurs beyond physical birth, in the arrival of any. To see an arrival as Other and within the world is to experience a birth. Birth indicates the possibility of a connection in spite of the irruption of a stranger. Maternity is the event of coming face to face with another, a relation to otherness to which the mother is most often exposed. The situation of the mother is remarkable because she is caught up in this maternity, this encounter with otherness, which comes from this otherwise-than-ontological relationship that exceeds oneself, exceeds the body, this encounter

with dependence that is an event. The remarkable thing about birth is that an attachment forms with what appears a stranger. In other words, attachment has no biological basis and, yet, attachment can be linked to the event of birth. The attachment that takes place in birth is the same that takes place within any other area: a connection that transcends biology.

A whole new way of thinking needs to come about, so that the mother is both substitutable and not, so that the mother is both singular and not, so that attachments form between two unique bodies that can, nevertheless, be replicated, so that any attachment be affirmed, so that any form of attachment is supported, advocated for, pushed for, rather than being called into question, rather than being claimed as the one and the only, rather than being exclusive. Rather than beginning from a place of distinction—where fears and concerns dominate—we need to begin from the affirmation of attachment.

This attachment can be both acknowledged and addressed through writing. Juliet asks me to tell the story of how she came to be, the story of her arrival, stories of when she was a baby, before what she can remember. The request recalls Barthes, who defined History as that time before when he was born. She similarly refuses this time, insisting she existed forever in the limbo between this past and herself, the limbo of my body, as if she always was there. Still, however, she loves origin stories, narratives that hold her in the present by tracing and assuring of the past and its connection to her. The effect is heightened as these stories must often include her lying against me, holding her. As with Barthes's description of being held by his mother, describing a photograph, these narratives are not only of a past time, distinct from her, but tell through their form a bodily memory of being held. By reaching out to her, by touching her, you were this being and were held and you were close, and you slept on my chest, and, as soon as

you could you put your hand across my mouth when I sang, and I name you by naming how you were held and the two are inseparable.

I argue that birth, rather than a question of origin or genesis, is a question of the skin. Tracing the effects of separation along the surface of the body, I explore how writing can supplement or substitute for connection. Writing, a form of touch, can press against the contours of the body returning the sense of self lost in separation. While this is not repair and does not assert the necessity of a whole, complete body, it does assert the need for a sense of self. The sense, however, can come from elsewhere and does not need to be owned or possessed. Tracing this possibility, I propose another way in which to think of reading and of the role of fiction and narrative. Narrative takes the place of the mother, re-creating modes of touch and contact that would otherwise take place along the surface of the body. Narrative has a material effect; the contours of the body are fiction.

Steven Connors argues that skin requires a “material imagination.” Drawing on work of Michel Serres, he argues that “understanding the skin as a milieu requires a physics of the imagination that lies between the conditions of liquid and solid” (40). The skin entwines and confuses materiality and thinking. The skin thus relates other trajectories, paths, or movements for thinking, thinking that skirts around things, that feels the contact of things, that is tethered to exteriority and beyond oneself, at the other side of one’s limits, to what touches one. This thought of the skin should also be the thought of attachment. It would entail being able to grasp the substitutable specificity of attachment and the reparable event of separation.

The possible confusion between matter and fiction suggests the potential for narrative to function as a skin. At the same time, it recalls the nature of thinking, so that it appears as a surface, changing position, simulating the extended contours of the body, matching the capacity

of contours to depart from the material limits of the body. It is as if thinking, like narrative, presses against the surface of the body, against what the body touches, repeating the impressions of these moments within its own narrative. In the absence of coherence, in the refusal to pathologize, narrative mimics the touch and the malleability of skin, enacting the tangibility of skin, producing skin of its own, a reparative form of writing, a literary skin. Writing the touch of the other, reparation is built into the function of the narrative, in the form of a substitute skin, bringing together with the trauma narrative the potential of rearrangement, of hold.

This opens new ways to think about healing and repair. In the face of separation from a specific other, narrative can function as a form of repair. The narrative deploys the material, plastic imagination of Connors' theory of skin-thinking. It assures the need of a limit, assures that this limit depends on the specific touch of another, focuses attention on surfaces, and suggests that writing can substitute for this touch.

Writing this dissertation was a form of care against care. It does not care for me. It is the chosen topic that marks some form of end. As such, unable to write, terrified to write, terrified of time, of passage, of what has been lost, writing takes time. Writing ends. The aim of the dissertation was to end writing. Seized as it was half way through by the expression of the self, the return of the need for support, the very act for which it argues, the loss of what it argues, the dissertation became that care against care. Forcing itself to undo what it promises, it was a writing against writing. As such, it was at the same time a *technē*—a narrative—that cares for the creatures of theory.

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