Tota mulier ex utero: An Empathetic Reading of Contemporary French Abortion Narratives

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our names do not appear.

- Adrienne Rich, *Diving into the Wreck*

Abstract

This dissertation analyzes various forms of fiction, life-writing, and film that put into words the historically "unspeakable" experience of abortion, taking abortion from the margins of culture, and refusing to allow the stories of women to be relegated to the abject realm of silence. Focusing on empathetic readings of these diverse narratives, my work argues for the importance of art, literature, and film as a means of imparting speak-ability and cultural coherence to a feminine reality that long lingered outside the limits of representability. The authors in my corpus draw attention to the (often off-putting) physical aspect of abortion, highlighting and forcing the reader or viewer to recognize the current deep lack of a cultural language with which to address head-on the reality of abortion. These works open up new discursive spaces whose feminine consciousness creates a linguistic space for the coherent expression of a reproductive experience whose cultural absorption has long been stifled by anti-feminist political and religious discourse.

My first and second chapters analyze auto-fiction and film by Annie Ernaux and Mariana Otero that foreground the physical body as a bearer of psychic identity, through the lens of feminist epistemology and ethics. In the third chapter, I analyze fictional and autobiographical narratives that foreground abortion-related loss and mourning, thus creating a space with the capacity to speak to the possibility of physical and emotional loss during the procedure. By working with a broad corpus that combines literature, film, and history, I demonstrate how these works acts as a rebuke of dominant cultural attitudes and contemporary political categories continue to define abortion in the public sphere.

Introduction

As a topic of conversation, abortion remains today a perhaps unparalleled landmine. The mere verbalization of the word seems like an inherently political invitation to express one's opinions of its practice at large – the admission of a personal connection to abortion is often a deep breach of the norms of politesse. As Kristen Luker puts it, "it is not surprising that the abortion debate has generated so much heat and so little light."[1] Literary language has often struggled to make sense of this perennially heated subject as well. In her landmark investigation of the cultural subjugation of femininity, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Simone de Beauvoir voiced her distaste for the hypocritical repression of abortion's artistic representation: "Qu'un écrivain décrive les joies et les souffrances d'une accouchée, c'est parfait; qu'il parle d'une avortée, on l'accuse de se vautrer dans l'ordure et de décrire l'humanité sous un jour abject."[2] Though abortion had yet to be legalized in Beauvoir's France, this negative and visceral reaction to abortion as a literary motif hasn't much evolved in the years that have followed. Over sixty years later, journalist and author Colombe Schneck anachronistically echoed Beauvoir's sentiment in a 2015 memoir about her own abortion: "l'avortement," she writes, "ce n'est pas un beau sujet de littérature."[3] We may rejoice at the announcement of pregnancy, express grief and sympathy in face of the admission of miscarriage or the death of a child, but the Western world has never seemed interested in cultivating an empathetic or coherent script for talking about, or becoming aware of, the reality of abortion.

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[1] Kristen Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of* Motherhood (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 215.

[2] Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe (Tome II)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 331.

[3] Colombe Schneck, *Dix-sept ans* (Paris: Grasset, 2015), 14.

And yet, as long as women in recorded human history have been getting pregnant, they have also been finding ways to prevent their pregnancies from coming to term.[4] References to herbal abortifacients and natural abortion techniques, including the ingestion of pennyroyal, tansy, and the insertion of herbal vaginal suppositories, can be found in Egyptian papyrus scrolls and the writings of Greek and Roman thinkers like Plato and Pliny the Elder.[5] The temple of Angkor Wat contains a bas-relief depicting demons performing "massage abortions" on groups of women, and medical texts of the Han Dynasty in China recommended using quicksilver (or, mercury) to aid in the return of one's menses.[6] The discourses of regulation and criminalization that have so dominated conversations about abortion in the modern and contemporary periods have deep historical roots as well. Hammurabi's code decrees punishment for those who cause a woman to miscarry a pregnancy. Allemanian laws from c. 600 distinguished punishments for abortion based upon both the stage of a pregnancy and the presumed sex of the fetus.[7] Certain abortive methods are forbidden by Hippocrates in his medical oath – a historical detail that has

[4] In the words of late American reproductive rights advocate Shirley Chisholm, "No matter what men think, abortion is a fact of life. Women have always had them; they always have and they always will. Are they going to have good ones or bad ones? Will the good ones be reserved for the rich, while the poor women go to quacks?" from "The Abortion Question" in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: The New Press, 2011), 392.

[5] John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 57-87. Though many ancient contraceptive methods and abortifacients are distant and strange artifacts today, a surprising number of them are still considered in some, perhaps naively hopeful or desperate, circles to possess abortive properties – and even are sometimes referenced in contemporary art. Pennyroyal, for example, appears in a 1993 Nirvana song, "Pennyroyal Tea," whose narrator drinks the beverage to "distill the life that's inside of me."

[6] Martha Campbell and Malcom Potts, "History of Contraception," *Gynecology and Obstetrics* 6, no. 8: (2002), 1-27.

[7] John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 109.

sometimes been interpreted in the modern period as a normative statement about the medical ethics of the practice in all contexts.[8]

Despite its historical universality, abortion has remained a taboo and polemical topic in the modern and contemporary Western period. Sociologist Luc Boltanski affirms in his 2004 study that though abortion is "*universellement connu* dans sa possibilité et sans doute également très fréquent dans sa pratique,"[9] it lingers on the margins of culture as an "objet de *réprobation*" and as something "dont on ne parle pas ou dont on ne parle qu'avec gêne et, le plus souvent, avec le souci de montrer clairement que, bien que l'on sache que 'cela existe,' une telle pratique ne peut concerner….le collectif auquel on appartient."[10] Boltanski's words point to the everlasting paradox of abortion in cultural language; though we remain undeniably aware of its existence, to invoke it as a possible option for women who find themselves pregnant continues to be a deep sociolinguistic taboo. If abortion must continue to exist, we prefer that it do so in the shadows. Rarely throughout the long history of women terminating pregnancies have we desired to hear the voices of women who have abortions or considered what the practice might mean to them.

In the contemporary period however, approximately one in three women in France and the United States will have an abortion at some point in her lifetime. This in turn suggests that it would be a statistical improbability for an individual in either country to have no relationship whatsoever with a woman who has chosen the procedure.[11] As Boltanski's words suggest

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Luc Boltanski, *La Condition Fœtale: une sociologie de l'engendrement et de l'avortement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 38.

[10] Ibid., 30.

[11] Recent studies suggest that French abortion rates had been steadily increasing throughout the early 2000s, despite a concurrent decrease in capable providers, though it seems as if they have begun to fall again since

however, abortion's place in culture continues to be treated at best as a distant anomaly; at worst, it is seen as a selfish evil that must be stamped out by the regulations of a government that understands the purpose of a woman's reproductive body better than she does. Political and public language have proven time and again to be ill-suited to making sense of what it is like to experience abortion, and what the procedure means to women who choose to undergo it. All too often, we fall back onto malicious and fallacious caricatures when discussing abortion in these spheres. Regardless of these representational difficulties, and whether we want to admit it, women continue to terminate pregnancies for a wide variety of reasons – as they always have, and as they perhaps always will until the dawn of now unforeseeable medical technology.

In light of this representative lack, I have been led to examine the ways in which contemporary artistic language has been able to address abortion's place in women's reproductive lives and choices to an extent that public and political language still fail to approach. In this dissertation, I analyze works by women writers and filmmakers, in post-1968 metropolitan France, who have created what I term "abortion narratives." These narratives radically remove abortion from the margins of culture and bring it to the fore in stories, both about and by women, that have long been stifled and devalued by anti-feminist political and religious discourse. The shift in cultural attitudes that accompanied and facilitated abortion's legalization possible in France also ushered in a wave, if not an entirely cohesive one, of literature and film centered on the experience of abortion, sometimes clandestine, resisting the patriarchal moralizations that had long discouraged those who sought it and cast out the practice

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2015: Clémentine Rossier, Laurent Toulemon, France Prioux and Madeleine Grieve, "Abortion Trends in France, 1990-2005," *Population* (English Edition) 64 no. 3: (2009), 443- 476. The Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques has put together the most recent statistics on abortion rates in France: http://www.epsilon.insee.fr/jspui/bitstream/1/61775/1/er1013.pdf

as evil and unpatriotic. I examine how contemporary French writers and artists have turned to various forms of fiction, life-writing and film in an effort to create new discursive spaces that put into words and images the historically unspeakable and un-representable experience of abortion. These products of a post-legalization era that privilege a specifically feminine consciousness towards abortion make up the corpus of this project.

This project focuses on four primary works on the topic of abortion: Mariana Otero's 2003 documentary *Histoire d'un secret*, Annie Ernaux's 2000 *récit*, *L'Evénement*, Louise L. Lambrichs's 1993 novel *Journal d'Hannah* and Colombe Schneck's 2015 autobiography *Dix-sept ans*. My analysis demonstrates how the dually-layered feminine consciousness of these works, by and about women who shed light upon a deeply female experience, directly confront the lack of a cultural language with which to address abortion. Focusing on empathetic readings of these diverse narratives, my work argues for the importance of literature, art, and film as a means of imparting speak-ability and coherence to a feminine reality that has long been excluded from public language and misrepresented within political debate, but that has also lingered beyond the limits of artistic and cultural representability.

At its core, the purpose of my project is to demonstrate how these works situate abortion as a legitimate reproductive experience that deserves a place in cultural language, and whose continued repression from this realm causes harm to women who choose it. Here, I define a reproductive experience as what a woman goes through leading up to, or in the wake of, any decision that she makes affecting her reproductive life in the present or future; this includes pregnancy, abortion and miscarriage, in addition to fertility-related issues and the decision to abstain from having children at all. Different from a "choice" or a "decision," a reproductive experience is, effectively, the lived and embodied experience of the reproductive event itself,

including its termination. While some of these reproductive experiences are certainly understood as "legitimate" or at least sympathetic ones in the present-day, it should also be noted that abortion is far from the only reproductive experience that has been the subject of cultural reproach, mistrust, or a visceral repulsion that renders it "unrepresentable." For example, when a pregnancy does not result in a birthed child to be raised by the woman who carries it, our language especially begins to falter, and its inadequacy in face of these experiences can become harshly exposed.

Throughout this project, I refer to the works that comprise my main corpus as "abortion narratives." I define an abortion narrative as a work of literature or film whose protagonist has an abortion, and in which her abortion acts as a main plot device that is either itself the climax of the narrative or is instrumental in bringing about the narrative climax. In other words, for a work to count as an "abortion narrative," its narrative must effectively center on the fact of having an abortion. This definition thus excludes from my study the examination of works by some of the more popular names in contemporary women's literature, including Marie Darrieussecq, Camille Laurens, Marie NDiaye, and Violette Leduc. Because these women incorporate the motif of abortion in brief or allusive terms in their own writing, I only make reference to their works here in passing, in order to note their similarities to my main corpus. While the works analyzed in this study situate their narratives in time periods that span from the Second World War to the 1980s, I only focus on literature and film that was produced around or after the legalization of abortion in France in 1975. Later in the introduction, I explain how these contemporary narratives about abortion mark a definitive and significant stylistic departure from the kinds of narratives about abortion that historically preceded them.

Furthermore, this project only focuses on narratives produced by women artists, writers, and filmmakers. The majority of the authors of my corpus have at least some kind of stated personal connection to abortion, having undergone it themselves or knowing a family member who did; only Lambrichs has never publicly mentioned a personal connection to the procedure. Though I recognize that there are certain French male artists, like Claude Chabrol, who have treated the motif of abortion in their own works in ways that are similar to the works examined here, this project is consciously focused on the capacity of women artists to speak to this uniquely female experience.[12]

The image of a literary lineage rooted in the feminine experience is central to this project, and itself serves as a running thread throughout my three chapters. In her recent study of new women's auto-fictional writing, Adrienne Angelo, for example, has evoked the concept of a "matrilineage of those female writers whose own literary creations pushed the boundaries of their day."[13] As the feminine has long been repressed from cultural language as both abject and excessive, women writers have been inventing new ways to impart intelligibility to these obscured parts of their own lives. French women artists of the contemporary period have tapped into the narrative power of genres like auto-fiction and life-writing to articulate intimate and unspoken aspects of femininity that have been historically treated as unfit for public articulation. Scholars have, in turn, noted that the practice of women's writing about the specificities of

[12] Chabrol most notably focused on abortion during the Vichy regime in *Une affaire de femmes* (1988). However, the procedure is also referenced in one of his first films, *Les cousins* (1959), sometimes cited as one of the first explicit references to abortion in French film.

[13] Adrienne Angelo, *The Fourth Generation of French Feminist Writers (1985-2010): From Fictionalized Text to Fictionalized Author* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 4.

women's bodily experiences, or that are most commonly associated with the feminine, merits closer investigation.[14]

Though there is much renewed scholarly interest in contemporary French women's writing about the body, and despite the recent surge of French literature and film foregrounding representations of abortion, academic scholarship on abortion narratives and their specificity remains largely uncharted. Thus, I situate my project within this ever-developing field of literary criticism, as I dig into what has made abortion such a trans-historic and trans-cultural pariah. In the following section, I will situate the importance and scholarly basis for this focus on women who create art about their own experiences or that which can only be experienced by their own sex and demonstrate the ways in which a focus on French women's abortion narratives are a valuable contribution to this field of study.

Literary and Cinematic Representations of the Female Body

The boom of women writers in France of the 1990s produced a significant amount of scholarly interest in the relationship between literature about women and by women, as well as the real lives of French women who may consume these works of literature. The past few decades have seen a considerable amount of edited volumes, most notably published in the United Kingdom and the United States, which group together various aspects of women's fiction, life-writing and film that are forming a kind of artistic opposition to traditional narratives about both femininity and womanhood. Though French academic circles may still seem stubbornly disinterested in the recognition of the gendered difference and critical importance of

[14] This can include writing about menstruation or pregnancy, but also problems like domestic violence, anorexia and infertility – the latter group of course comprising issues that individuals of any gender can experience, but that especially impact women.

women's contributions to auto-fiction and autobiography, scholars in both the United States and Great Britain have been successfully investigating the many meaningful critical links between the products of women writers and filmmakers who focus their art on their own experiences, or those of their feminine peers.[15]

What makes an interest in women's writing specifically about women's experiences a field that merits closer examination? Largely, it comes from the ability of this kind of literature and film to coherently express those kinds of experiences with which women are deeply familiar, that influence our own ways of seeing ourselves and the ways others view us, but that have often lingered in the margins, without articulation in the cultural sphere. Gill Rye and Amaleena Damlé state that "the study of writing by women offers crucial – and unparalleled – insights into women's lives, experiences and creativity…[as] women writers are responding to and reflecting upon women's experiences in a rapidly changing world."[16] Shirley Jordan agrees that contemporary women writers often "erode tacit rules about which aspects of women's physical lives are fit for articulation and which are not. The authors bring to language familiar aspects of women's experience which, since they are by and large considered inappropriate for public airing, remain linguistically unappropriated by women themselves."[17] As Jordan's words imply, the "linguistically unappropriated" experiences for which women writers are creating new discursive spaces often specifically refer to women's experiences as being physically embodied and the ways in which these lived bodily experiences differs significantly from those of men.

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[15] For a more in-depth investigation of this unfulfilled French context, see Shirley Jordan, "Autofiction in the Feminine" in *French Perspectives* 67, no. 1 (2013): 76-84, and Nathalie Morello and Catherine Rogers, *Nouvelles écrivaines, Nouvelles voix?* (New York: Rodopi, 2002).

[16] Gill Rye and Amaleena Damlé eds., *Women's Writing in Twenty First Century France: Life as Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 3-4.

[17] Shirley Ann Jordan, *Contemporary French Women's Writing: Women's Visions, Women's Voices, Women's Lives* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), 53.

New women's literature and film treats the physical body as a crucial bearer of meaning in the formation of one's identity - especially as it lays bare the difference of women's experiences as reproductive and sexual beings. While dominant patriarchal attitudes have created narratives about the place of the female body in the public sphere that have often devalued women's own subjectivity, these works create a broad counter-narrative that privileges those parts of women's lives that have been historically coded as "unfit" for broadcasting.

As interest in these works stems in part from their capacity to speak clearly about the truth of everyday women's experiences, the relationship between reality and art within these works is also embedded in their form, rooted heavily in genres of auto-fiction, life-writing, new techniques in filmmaking and autobiography. While there are of course many women writers and filmmakers whose projects stem from stories that are completely invented, scholars note that contemporary French women artists – including notable women like Christine Angot, Camille Laurens and Virginie Despentes – are often not satisfied to create products that are entirely fictional and draw on their own real-life experiences using "original and innovative narrative techniques…as they strive to engage in self-narrative."[18] Adrienne Angelo's book on new French women's writing, for example, analyzes and examines the processes by which female authors of auto-fiction "create" the selves that they put on their pages, and Gill Rye has taken note in her study of narrating motherhood of the increasing "blurring of genres in contemporary women's writing, especially with its large-scale turn to an auto-fictional mode over the last decade or so, makes it increasingly difficult to separate autobiographical and fictional genres."[19] As we will see in this project, these novel narrative techniques would seem to contribute heavily to the

[18] Nathalie Edwards, *Shifting Subjects: Plural Subjectivity in Contemporary Francophone Women's Autobiography* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 13.

[19] Gill Rye, *Narratives of Mothering* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 17.

capacity of women artists to impart coherence to once unspeakable experiences. Indeed, all of the works in my corpus are firmly engaged with the blurring of narrative boundaries: Otero plays with the borders between fiction and truth by manipulating the narrative structure of her documentary, Ernaux's and Schneck's works draw on the writers' own abortions, and Lambrichs's novel is told exclusively through the hyper-personal format of the protagonist's diary. Furthermore, as we come to understand the ways in which abortion continues to be viewed as an abjection relegated to culture's margins in the contemporary, this project will demonstrate the importance of this focus on the blend between lived and written or filmed experience.

We can also see how a study of abortion narratives fits neatly into preexisting scholarship on the power of women's writing and art to challenge existing societal barriers that impede the expression of the nuances of real women's reproductive lives. While scholars are becoming increasingly interested in literature about the broad spectrum of women's reproductive paths and choices, abortion's examination in existing scholarship remains unfulfilled, though not for a lack of interesting artistic products on its subject. Christine Détrez and Anne Simon warn in 2006 that although abortion was becoming "un nouveau topos littéraire," the "résurgence de l'IVG sur la scène médiatique, éditoriale et artistique ne doit ainsi pas masquer le silence qui entoure en général l'avortement en tant que tel."[20] Shirley Jordan also notes of the abortion motif that "this very common experience is still a relative challenge to language and a scarcity in fiction,"[21] that seems to "resists representation, and the words to say it have been found by few writers."[22]

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[20] Christine Détrez and Anne Simon, *A leur corps defendant: les femmes à l'épreuve du nouvel ordre moral* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 143-144.

[21] Shirley Ann Jordan, *Contemporary French Women's Writing: Women's Visions, Women's Voices, Women's Lives* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), 53.

[22] Ibid., 230.

Perhaps accordingly, writers who do brave this polemical topic are often fueled by "political, ethical and personal [motivations]."[23] In other words, a writer's decision to treat abortion within her text is not one made lightly, or without awareness of the social context in which she produces her work. Rather, it is often actively enmeshed with the personal desire to bring light to a heated cultural conversation overrun by disingenuous caricatures.

In the decade since Jordan, Détrez and Simon recognized both the growing trend of works about abortion by French women artists and the potential political power of their academic recognition as a cohesive group, scholarship on abortion narratives remains scattered within studies that examine experiences that I label as "abortion-adjacent," but that do not address the complex specificity of what it means to in fact be a woman who finds herself in the position of terminating a pregnancy. In *Narratives of Mothering*, Gill Rye notes that as women writers have increasingly come to privilege the previously overlooked subjectivity of the mother figure herself – often a distant and foreboding figure in literature relegated to the background – they are also beginning to interrogate the "traumatic social contexts into which these narratives and the body are inserted."[24] Rye even mentions the abortion motif alongside the direct subject of her study, maternity itself, stating that "pregnancies and births – and miscarriages and abortions – have begun to appear with increasing frequency in French women-authored literature."[25] Julie Rodgers echoes Rye's work on the subjectivity of those who birth and raise children, noting an uptick in narratives about "transgressive mothers" who do not take pleasure in their new maternal roles and who deal with emotions of self-loathing and loneliness as they raise their new

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[23] Ibid., 53.

[24] Gill Rye, *Narratives of Mothering* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 56.

[25] Ibid.

child.[26] Importantly, Rodgers remarks that these kinds of narratives have been praised in the public sphere for their "honest" depiction of the diverse ways in which women experience motherhood. Meanwhile, when Annie Ernaux published *L'Evénement* in 2000, she claims to have been met with a critical "silence" and felt as though there was a moratorium on speaking about the forthright depiction of her own rejection of motherhood. If readers are beginning to welcome literature admitting that motherhood is not always the joy societal norms portray it to be, they remain squeamish towards embracing a more unpleasant refusal of that motherhood via abortion.

On the other end of the spectrum, scholars are also interrogating what we can learn from works that privilege the subjectivity of women who lose children (in miscarriage or untimely death), or who decide not to have them at all. Florence Ramond Jurney and Karen McPherson's 2016 edited volume, the aptly titled *Women's Lives in Contemporary French and Francophone Literature*, is dominated by contributions on the subject of fictional and auto-fictional texts about both women without children, and women who are post-menopausal and thus can no longer bear children. Natalie Edwards' recent monograph on narratives about voluntary childlessness finds that women writers who portray this decision both "develop narrative techniques that generate new practices of life writing…[and] manipulate a specific sub-genre of autobiography to create a new form for their female identity beyond reproduction."[27] She briefly touches on the abortion motif, but largely focuses on other works for the obvious reason that to have an abortion hardly

[26] Julie Rodgers, "Contesting the Mommy Myth: *Un heureux événement* (Eliette Abécassis) as Maternal Counternarrative" in *Irish Journal of French Studies* 12 (2012): 46-63. Rodgers touches on similar themes in Linda Lê's work in *Women's Lives in Contemporary French and Francophone Literature*, Eds. Florence Ramond Jurney and Karen McPherson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[27] Nathalie Edwards, *Voicing Voluntary Childlessness: Narratives of Non-Mothering in French* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), 31.

means that one is, or will remain, childless. An earlier version of this project's third chapter will be included in an upcoming special issue on parental mourning after the death of a child in the *Irish Journal of French Studies*, though the link between narratives about post-abortion mourning and the mourning of the death of a child is an equally thorny one that could rightfully be scrutinized.

This is all to say that despite an abundance of critical examination of reproductive experiences that may be similar to going through an abortion, and the new narrative techniques women writers use to articulate them, a close investigation into the specificity of abortion itself has been lost in the fray. Abortion is, of course, not a form of motherhood, as it effectively acts to prevent one from becoming a mother. But nor is it the refusal of motherhood; to terminate a pregnancy, or even multiple pregnancies, does not preclude one from carrying another to term. More importantly and perhaps more frequently, it does not mean that one is not already a mother, and (or) has already carried a pregnancy to term. Likewise, the loss of a fetus – as traumatic as it may be for some – is simply not the death of a child. Despite abundant scholarship produced in the past decade on the subject of the reproductive and sexual body in contemporary French women's literature and film, it seems as though scholars have not quite known where to place works that focus on the experience of abortion.

In part, it is important to note that when it comes to literature or film about abortion, the stakes are simply higher than they would be with respect to motherhood, the decision not to mother, or the untimely death of a child. Other, sometimes abject, sites of the feminine reproductive experience, such as the death of a child or the assumption of the role of mother, have certainly been the site of governmental and medical regulation and cultural controversy over the years. However, no reproductive experience has ever quite held the place that abortion

has – constantly teetering between differing states of legality and regulation as it does. Women are always technically free to not become pregnant or to have complicated feelings about the living products of their reproductive labor. But their ability to terminate an already growing pregnancy remains firmly contingent upon the whims of their government.

In her study of North American reproductive narratives in literature and film, Heather Latimer notes that "fictional representations…not only reflect and engage with reproductive politics but help produce them, shaping and influencing how these politics are understood popularly and culturally…first and foremost through their ability to help define what is knowable."[28] In a similar fashion, Détrez and Simon hope that new literature about having abortions will be able to "influencer le corps médical, encore souvent très culpabilisant en France, pour des femmes dont les décisions sont implicitement remises en question."[29] As the words of these scholars suggest, the nuances of artistic language have the ability to shift the boundaries of what is considered "representable" in the cultural sphere, and thus to push public attitudes towards sensitive political issues like abortion in an empathetic direction. To be able to locate abortion in the artistic productions of one's culture is in turn to be able to recognize the procedure as one that has cultural coherence and, to an extent, civic legitimacy.

Abortion in France: The Historical Narrative Frame

Boltanski's notion of the double helix of abortion's universal presence and simultaneous repression from the public consciousness runs throughout French legal and literary history.

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[28] Heather Latimer, *Reproductive Acts: Sexual Politics in North American Fiction and Film* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 11.

[29] Christine Détrez and Anne Simon, *A leur corps defendant: les femmes à l'épreuve du nouvel ordre moral* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 144.

Historian Wolfgang P. Mueller situates the first criminal prosecutions of abortion in French kingdoms somewhere in the late 14th and early 15th centuries.[30] Throughout the premodern period, theologians continued to ponder the point of a fetus's "animation." In 1764, Jean Pontas wrote that although abortion was always a mortal sin, the practice was only a homicide if the fetus was animated.[31] As the criminalization of abortion would only become more severe in France as the centuries moved on, we can at least recognize that the internal logic of Pontas's argument holds; the murder of a human being can only be said to occur if indeed the "deceased" is a human being in the first place. And although the ecclesiastical terminology of "animation" has a decidedly unempirical ring today, the question of the point at which a fetus becomes sufficiently "human" remains a significant aspect of legal barriers to late-term abortion in France and elsewhere in the modern Western world.[32]

The Napoleonic Code of the early 19th century later solidified abortion's status as a criminal act, though enforcement remained varied and uneven throughout the century. At the dawn of the 20th century, France found itself in the midst of a reproductive quandary: Neo-Malthusian ideology was increasing in popularity, while birthrates were falling. The spread of the neo-Malthusian ideology and declining birthrates were countered with a large sweep in pro-natalist sentiment that sought to tether women's identities to their status as birthing beings.

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[30] Wolfgang P. Mueller, *The Criminalization of Abortion in the West: its Origins in Medieval Law* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 2.

[31] André Burguière and François Lebrun, *La Famille en Occident du XVIe au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 2005), 30.

[32] If a woman in France wishes to abort after twelve weeks of pregnancy in France, a doctor must certify that the abortion is "medically necessary" – or in other words, that the quality of life of the mother still outweighs the possibility of life for the fetus. The United States has relied on the standard of "viability" since *Roe v. Wade*, or the point at which a fetus is believed to be able to survive outside of its carrier's womb. However, viability is difficult to medically determine, and anti-abortion statutes in many states render the procedure virtually inaccessible to women past the first trimester.

Karen Offen argues that in response to falling birthrates in *fin-de-siècle* France, "the debate on population and women's issues intensified…[and] little support was forthcoming from republican men for the autonomous existence of women."[33] Angus McLaren concurs that whatever may have truly been causing birthrates to drop, "commentators attributed a key role to abortion…[during] nineteenth-century discussions of France's declining birth rate."[34]

The (first) violent world war that would soon dominate the national and international consciousness only increased pro-natalist anxiety over still declining birth rates, and a 1920 law banned outright not just contraception and abortion, but their mere advocacy. Christophe Capuano has detailed the international rise of groups that focused on augmenting birth rates and strengthening the image of the family in European society during the interwar period. Though divided into arguing factions in the years between 1927 and 1939, those who were calling themselves "*natalistes*" began fashioning themselves as "les chantres du patriotisme, voire du militarisme…[et] ont ainsi construit leur argumentaire sur le lien entre le poids démographique d'un pays et sa puissance militaire dans un esprit de rivalité entre Etats européens."[35] A trans-Atlantic *Comité international pour la vie et la famille* was formed, and with it,

> Une lutte contre le féminisme et les organisations féministes…s'ajoutent au combat contre le néo-malthusianisme…Le relèvement démographique occupe une place essentielle alors que l'Europe voit sa population décliner durant l'Entre-deux- guerres – déclin qui s'ajoute aux pertes humaines directes et indirectes de la Grande Guerre. Cela suppose des actions à tous les échelons, nationaux et internationaux, en faveur de la natalité et des politiques natalistes ainsi que des oppositions systématiques aux arguments néo-malthusiens.[36]

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[33] Karen Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France," *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (1984): 668.

[34] Angus McLaren, "Abortion in France: Women and the Regulation of Family Size 1800-1914," *French Historical Studies* 10, no. 3 (1978): 461.

[35] Christophe Capuano, "La construction des politiques natalistes et familiales durant l'Entre-deux-guerres: modèles et débats transnationaux," *Revue d'histoire de la protection sociale* 1, no. 5 (2012): 34.

[36] Ibid., 35.

The opposition between feminist and pro-natalist movements, and the increasing political dominance of the latter over the former, reveals a deep patriarchal anxiety in the face of women's reproductive difference, and the possibility (indeed, the reality) of their ability to exert control over this difference. While the bodies of young men could be drafted into wars, the bodies of their female counterparts could not be "drafted" into maternity in a similar fashion. France, like the rest of Europe, was increasingly anxious about its (self-imagined) need of more citizens. Only the bodies of women who were willing to do so could fill this demand.

The Second World War was of course even more devastating than the first, and only continued to add fuel to the anxious pro-natalist fire. If burgeoning pro-natalist groups in turn-of-the-century and interwar France had not quite figured out how to erase the distinction between "woman" and "mother," and make it so that the only possible recourse for a sexually-active woman was motherhood, their successors happily accepted this challenge. The organization *Alliance nationale contre la depopulation*, in its nascent stages during the interwar period, was energized at the end of the Third Republic by its new, highly evangelical leader Fernand Boverat, who was determined to stamp out the practice of abortion in France. For example, he enthusiastically attributed a drop in abortions in Germany to Hitler's internment of abortionists in concentration camps – an aspirational model for the France he envisioned.[37] Cheryl Koos convincingly argues that many of the rabidly anti-abortion policies that came to fruition in wartime France were the direct result of governmental consultation with the *Alliance nationale contre la dépopulation* – a relationship that began before the fall of the Third Republic and would continue after the rise of the *Etat français.*

Koos writes that this organization "did more than participate in the abortion debate

[37] Jean-Yves Le Naour and Catherine Valenti, *Histoire de l'avortement XIX au XX siècle* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2003), 184.

between 1938 and 1944; through an intensive propaganda and legislative campaign, its leaders cultivated much of the public's and government's fixation on the issues…their contributions critically shaped popular and official attitudes and policy."[38] In 1939, Prime Minister Daladier would appoint Boverat to a special council called the *Haut-Comité de la population*, which granted the propagandist access to the ear (or, eye) of top government officials. Boverat regularly sent propaganda materials to the likes of the *Ministre de l'intérieur* and the *Garde des sceaux*, along with breathless information on suspected hotspots of clandestine abortion throughout the French provinces.[39] The office of the *Ministre de l'intérieur* sent Boverat's organization information on suspected abortion rates by province on multiple occasions, and the *Ministre du commerce* exchanged letters with Boverat concerning the suspected importation of "anti-conception" materials, assuring him that the government was firmly dedicated to keeping abortive materials out of French territory. Most importantly, Boverat and the *Haut-Comité de la population* drafted the section of Daladier's 1939 Family Code that "expanded upon the 1920 [anti-contraception and abortion] laws by adding increased prison terms and monetary fines to the punishment [for procuring or facilitating abortion]."[40] The only official and legal way to speak about women's reproductive autonomy at the end of the Third Republic was in terms of a criminality imparted to it by a group of (non-elected) men.

One of the *Alliance*'s most provocative and widely distributed pamphlets was the audaciously titled *Le Massacre des Innocents*, whose cover depicts a sitting infant with wide,

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[38] Cheryl Koos, ""On les aura!": the Gendered Politics of Abortion and the Alliance Nationale contre la Dépopulation, 1938-1944," *Modern and Contemporary France* 7, no. 1 (1999): 22.

[39] AN F/60/601;606.

[40] Cheryl Koos, ""On les aura!": the Gendered Politics of Abortion and the Alliance Nationale contre la Dépopulation, 1938-1944," *Modern and Contemporary France* 7, no. 1 (1999): 28.

round eyes that beg the reader to meet its gaze. First published in 1938, the pamphlet was reprinted and redistributed in 1943, now without the first version's anti-German caricatures and with the aid of Vichy administrators.[41] If the premodern church wasn't sure at what point an abortion became a homicide, the *Alliance* and their governmental compatriots ceased to find this question an interesting one. The pamphlet laments that "au moins 400.000 avortements par an, sans doute davantage…ce sont 400.000 petits Français que l'on empêche de venir au monde."[42] Unsurprisingly, no mention is made in the pamphlet, or in the many correspondences between the *Alliance* and Republican or Vichy government officials, of the conditions into which these "lost children" would have been born – or if they would have even been allowed to survive into adulthood depending upon the ethnic and religious identity of their parents.[43]

Moreover, the pamphlet gives a suspect and decidedly inaccurate description of fetal development, claiming that "l'embryon humain présente, dès les premières semaines qui suivent la conception, toutes les caractéristiques d'un être vivant, et non point celles d'un être quelconque, mais bien d'un être de la race humaine…Il est devenu, au bout de deux mois, un véritable enfant, possédant déjà presque tous les organes dont il se servira après sa naissance."[44] Their rhetoric had no place for voices of women who felt the need to terminate pregnancy – not even to express regret for having chosen the procedure. As such, public and legal discourse about abortion became dominated by extremist rhetoric whose only interest was in the personhood of

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[41] AN F/60/601. Correspondence between the *Alliance* and the *Ministère de l'Information Services Techniques de la Propagande* of the *Etat français* found in AN F/41/291.

[42] AN F/60/601

[43] In my third chapter, I explore Louise Lambrichs's 1992 novel *Journal d'Hannah*, whose WW2 era Jewish protagonist is pressured into terminating a pregnancy by her Resistance fighter husband, who fears that to go through with a pregnancy could threaten to reveal her ethnic roots, and thus put her life at risk.

[44] AN F/60/601

the fetus and never that of its carrier. As both citizens and government administrators consumed the widely available literature of this pro-natalist organization, a clear, normative message about choosing abortion comes out: abortion is a monstrous act whose possible motives are not worthy of moral investigation, and the kind of person who would take the life of a fully formed member of the human race does not deserve empathy. To have, and especially to facilitate, an abortion is to commit murder.

Boverat fled at the fall of the Republic, though he would be repatriated before the end of the war. But his compatriots at the *Alliance* who stayed in France were welcomed with open arms by the newly-instated *Etat français*, who did not rescind the Republic's invitation to collaborate directly with government officials. Indeed, in 1942 the Vichy regime took the abortion-related penalties of the Family Code even further and upped the ante by designating abortion a crime against the state; to refuse to bring children into the world, and indeed to do so via the only method truly available to most women, was to commit the deepest kind of betrayal to one's country and home. Despite the drastic changes in regime, pro-natalist and anti-abortion forces enjoyed a major continuity in governmental support and interest between the Third Republic and the Vichy state. To once again quote Koos, the enactment of this law was a personal victory for the *Alliance*, as it was "in essence, the realization of the alliance's harshest rhetoric, particularly that which equated abortionists with political traitors and advocated the same penalty: death."[45] Though actively complicit in innumerable deaths and deportations during the war, Vichy determined that to aid a woman in exercising autonomy over her own body was to commit a treasonous offense.

[45] Cheryl Koos, **"**"On les aura!": the Gendered Politics of Abortion and the Alliance Nationale contre la Dépopulation, 1938-1944," *Modern and Contemporary France* 7, no. 1 (1999): 25.

Furthermore though, Miranda Pollard has argued, for example, that not only did Vichy policies towards the end of the war mark the zenith of French pro-natalist fervor, but that the administration's decision to prosecute abortion in the *tribunaux d'état* forged a new shift in the frightening narrative of repressing abortion. Trying abortionists and women who had abortions in the same courts that tried other more obvious "traitors" to the state, like communists, meant that abortion's place in the public sphere became "[not] just about individual acts, abortion became an activity that was antisocial, antinational, a crime that resulted in unquantifiable collective injury."[46] Without consideration of why one may choose to abort or to help others do so, the *Etat français* made it so that those who both sought out and performed the procedure could be put to death for their choices.[47] So, the designation of abortion as treasonous and subsequent placement of abortion cases in the *tribunaux d'état* were a continuation of Republican interests in treating abortion as a criminal act with serious and enforceable legal consequences. Vichy has for many years been treated as a dark aberration. But we can see that when it comes to the politics of reproduction, the administration was most notably taking the existing anti-abortion sentiment that had been brewing throughout the entirety of the century to its logical end. If birth is a civic duty, then to prevent (or, interrupt) a birth is an unquestionably treasonous act.

Though abortion would not remain a crime against the state after the war, the fall of Vichy could not erase its repressive imprint on women's reproductive autonomy. In fact, the number of convictions of abortionists actually increased after Vichy's fall; over 5,000 were convicted post-Vichy in 1946 and as late as 1964, some 700 abortionists were arrested for

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[46] Miranda Pollard, *Reign of Virtue: Mobilizing Gender in Vichy France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 178.

[47] For an in-depth look at the innumerable socioeconomic difficulties mothers under Vichy did face, see Miranda Pollard, *Reign of Virtue.*

terminating pregnancies.[48] Gone were the executions and indefinite prison sentences, but Vichy transformed abortion from a national frustration into a criminal act with real legal consequences that continued to impact women in the years after the regime's implosion. Women were prosecuted for having abortions (and both genders for performing them) throughout the presumptive "*trente glorieuses"* years that followed the Second World War, and as even into the early 1970s.

Of course, totally absent from these abundant collaborations between anti-abortion propagandists and pro-natalist governmental bodies is the perspectives of anyone who had or facilitated an abortion. Jean-Yves Le Naour and Catherine Valenti argue that "contrairement à leurs prédécesseurs de la première moitié du siècle, et c'est une différence notable, les répopulateurs vichystes dans leur ensemble n'éprouvent aucune pitié pour l'avortée, qui leur semble presque aussi coupable que l'avorteur."[49] When it came to the harsh cultural and legal repression of abortion, the voices of women who chose it resolutely did not matter. In fact, the only place where we do begin to locate the voices of women who actually came in to contact with abortion is in the official Vichy trial records against abortionists held in the infamous *tribunaux d'état*, where the testimony of women who sought out and had abortions was regularly used to convict those who facilitated the termination of their pregnancies – and indeed, where one woman would be executed for performing an action she likely did not know to be a crime in the first place.

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[48] Melanie Latham, *Regulating Reproduction: A Century of Conflict in Britain and France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 86. For more on the continued prosecution of abortion-related crimes after Vichy, see Fabrice Cahen and Christophe Capuano, "La poursuite de la répression anti-avortement après Vichy: une guerre inachevée?" *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire* 111 (2011): 119-131.

[49] Jean-Yves Le Naour and Catherine Valenti, *Histoire de l'avortement XIX au XX siècle* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2003), 193.

The 1943 trial of abortionist Marie-Louise Giraud, one of the last women to be guillotined in France, saw her former clients and compatriots enumerating in perhaps surprising detail their interactions with her on behalf of the state, and as evidence of her crimes.[50] What emerges from these testimonies is a haunting mix of women caught in between impossible situations for which there was no legal solution, and who saw dangerous clandestine abortion as their only (or best) option. Women describe in detail being raped, with no mention of any consequences for their aggressors, of finding themselves once again pregnant right after the German invasion of Cherbourg, of taking a lover while their husbands were imprisoned across the continent – and ultimately of seeking out, or agreeing to, the services of Madame Giraud. Women came to Giraud after clandestinely hearing her name or being scouted in Cherbourg by either Giraud herself or her cabal of fortune-teller compatriots, and there was no woman whose circumstances would cause her to be turned away from Giraud's table. It is not out of the question for us to speculate that Giraud and the fortune-tellers who brought her clients possessed an intuition for which pregnant women in their community were not as enthused to carry out the natalist civic duty as their government expected them to be.

Though present-day eyes are of course better attuned to the moral nuances of these women's situations than were those of their contemporaries, it is clear that all testimony of those who took advantage of Giraud's services, offered to help make the state's case instead of the defendant's, were given as evidence of the depths of her criminality. That she would approach pregnant, unmarried women of Cherbourg unsolicited and offer her services to them at discounted prices was not indicative of her ability to sense the obvious pain of such a situation, but of her insatiable appetite for evil. Her willingness to knowingly rid women of the evidence of

[50] All details from the trial found in AN 4W/13. Citations are omitted in accordance with the French government.

extramarital affairs was not a professional interest in personal privacy, but greed and complicity with sin. Women's voices were not consulted to bring nuance or understanding to the abortion question, but to remind the men who judged them – in closed chambers, with no jury – of their moral deviance and need for masculine authority.[51] In the aftermath of all this testimonial evidence, the *tribunal d'état* imposed on Giraud its harshest sentence yet for the crime; though she was housed in the Petite Roquette prison amongst other women who had both performed and undergone abortions, she was the only woman executed for an abortion-related offense.[52] Still, in spite of this stated and intentional narrative of the criminality and deviancy of abortion's practice, another more subversive narrative lurks in between the lines of these trial transcripts. Vichy may have tried and often succeeded at tethering women to the reproductive role of mother. But despite its harsh laws, and the threat of treason, an underground network of women who felt comfortable speaking to each other about abortion, having abortions and facilitating them persisted.

Abortion in France: The Literary and Cinematic Frame

The longstanding criminal status of abortion did not mean that the practice had no representation in artistic language prior to legalization. Indeed, literary references to women who voluntarily terminate pregnancies date back to the medieval period. In the 14th century poem *Le voeu du heron,* a medieval queen threatens to rip her child from her womb if her husband does not agree to declare war on their enemies. Her threat is a supremely violent gesture that reminds

[51] To add insult to injury, the judge who presided over Giraud's trial, Paul Devise, was on the precipice of retiring in 1943 and was declared senile and insane after the liberation of France. Florence Montreynaud, *Le XXème siècle de femmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), 322.

[52] France Hamelin, *Femmes dans la nuit: L'internement à la petite Roquette et au camp des Tournelles 1939-1944* (Paris: Renaudot et Cie 1988), 177-178.

the reader of women's unique capacity both to give life and prematurely take it away. 18th century giants Montesquieu, Rousseau, and (unsurprisingly) de Sade all make reference to the termination of pregnancy.[53] Pascal Noir has explored the appearance of infanticide, abortion, and quasi-intentional miscarriage in *fin de siècle* decadent literature, penned by J.K. Huysmans, Jean Lorrain, and Rachilde, that positioned itself "à l'opposé d'une littérature béate qui érigerait l'enfant comme le sacre de l'amour conjugal. Les récits clament l'abolition des valeurs bourgeoises."[54] However, the emergence of these motifs in decadent literature was likely less attributable to any sort of interest in the concurrent feminist political activism of the period as much as it was simply to an ideological continuity - given that "la Décadence haïssant toutes les formes de naïveté ou d'ingénuité, rien d'étonnant à ce que les victimes émissaires soient souvent des enfants."[55] Nonetheless, Noir also explains that these works were still highly controversial and sometimes kept from the public eye via state censorship, given that "toute une polémique sur l'avortement agite l'époque."[56]

Perhaps more interesting for our purposes are those works that positioned the healthy birth of a child not as a bourgeois value, but as a civic duty. Leonard Koos has, for example, linked together a number of plays, essays, and novels from turn-of-the-century France whose plots tended to follow a similar format: a young, innocent woman is taken by the advances of a

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[53] Montesquieu in *De l'esprit des loix*, Rousseau in *Emile, ou l'éducation*, and de Sade in *La philosophie dans le boudoir.*

[54] Pascal Noir, "En haine de l'enfant ou le Massacre des Innocents dans la littérature décadente (1880-1900)" in *Les mères et la mort: réalités et représentations*, ed. Elisabeth Lamothe, Pascale Sardin and Julie Sauvage (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2008), 190. Indeed, the "Massacre des Innocents" to which Noir's article's title refers is the title of a *nouvelle* that Lorrain published in an 1890 edition of *L'Echo de Paris*; it is unclear if Boverat was aware Lorrain's *nouvelle* when creating his own pamphlet of the same title in 1938, referenced above.

[55] Ibid., 185.

[56] Ibid., 187.

charming and irresistible male suitor, who impregnates her.[57] Instead of performing her civic duty and carrying the child to term, she turns to a monstrous *faiseuse d'anges*, the most common term for those who performed clandestine abortions, who takes pleasure in violently terminating the life of the potential citizen and child. Perhaps the most well-known example comes from Emile Zola's 1899 novel *Fécondité*, whose abortionist Madame Bourdieu is described as a "une terrible femme, l'étouffement sans violence, le coup de pouce silencieux rejetant au néant la vie qui n'est pas encore."[58] Correspondingly, the pregnant woman would seem to act as little more than a cypher, whose lack of character gives way to the overpowering evil of the bloodthirsty abortionist. Unsurprisingly, little to no time is spent interrogating what it would truly mean for the woman seeking an abortion to carry her pregnancy to term, and she often dies as a result of the procedure – an obvious normative conclusion that serves to remind young women that abortion is a deadly and immoral act.

Turn-of-the-century radical feminists like Madeleine Pelletier did provide a few counterexamples to this literature.[59] For example, the introduction to Pelletier's 1911 essay for *La Suffragiste*, titled "Avortement et Dépopulation," would hardly seem out of place in radical feminist circles of the 1970s. She writes, "[l]a femme a le droit de se faire avorter, parce qu'elle seule est propriétaire de son corps…les partisans de la repopulation sont, le plus souvent, des hommes d'opinion rétrograde."[60] Still, Koos' investigation into dominant early abortion

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[57] Leonard Koos, "Making Angels: Abortion Literature in Turn-of-the-Century France," in *Confrontations: Politics and Aesthetics in Nineteenth Century France* eds. Kathryn Grossman, Michael E. Lane, Bénédicte Monicat, and Willa Z. Silverman (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2001), 259-273.

[58] Emile Zola, *Fécondité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1899), 172.

[59] For more on Pelletier's fascinating and revolutionary activism, see Felicia Gordon, *The Integral Feminist: Madeleine Pelletier, 1874-1939: Feminism, Socialism and Medicine* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990).

[60] Madeleine Pelletier, "Avortement et Dépopulation," in *La Suffragiste*, May 1911. http://www.marievictoirelouis.net/index.php?id=273&auteurid=251

literature demonstrates the creation of an important trend through their general anti-abortion narrative threads. Namely, pre-war and pre-legalization artistic representations of abortion worked largely as a friendly companion to dominant patriarchal attitudes that demonized the procedure. Karen Offen asserts that because of Zola's celebrity and closeness to high-up political figures like George Clémenceau, this "evangelical" novel "contributed to the linkage of nationalism, depopulation, and feminism" in the sociopolitical sphere.[61] If women in turn-of – the-century or wartime France were to go in search of any sort of artistic representation that might realistically or empathetically describe the act of going through with termination of a pregnancy, they would likely come up short.

Post-war and post-legalization abortion narratives still retained some interest in the procedure's facilitator whose image so captivated their legal and literary predecessors. Annie Ernaux, for example, dedicates *L'Evénement* to the *faiseuse d'anges* who facilitated her own abortion in the late 1960s. But when we recognize that pre-legalization public and legal conversations about abortion were so overwhelmingly male-dominated, and so narrowly focused on abortion's criminality, we must ask ourselves how representations of the practice evolved once the only official language with which to speak about abortion was no longer limited to its criminality or its need for regulation. In their respective examinations of the trial and execution of abortionist Marie-Louise Giraud, both Miranda Pollard and Mireille Le Maguet point out that for years after the war, the only narrative that persisted of her prosecution – and indeed, of Vichy's prosecution of abortion in general – was Vichy's own legal narrative left behind in

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[61] Karen Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France," *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (1984): 663.

preserved trial transcripts.[62] In the late 1980s, this finally changed. In his Oscar-nominated 1988 film *Une affaire de femmes*, Claude Chabrol cast his longtime collaborator Isabelle Huppert as a fictionalized version of Giraud, based upon Francis Szpiner's 1986 account of the abortionist's life.[63] For our purposes, the film provides an interesting case study of the capacity of artistic language to correct cultural amnesia towards the marginalized parts of history, as it retells an existing story of criminalization and repression from a wildly different vantage point.

Chabrol's film not only puts on screen what was a truly forgotten story of the Occupation, but creates a mood that is uncompromisingly disinterested in the protagonist's status as "good" or "bad" woman. Though the events depicted Chabrol's film often quite remarkably mirror the court record of her real life – from the drunk husband, to the romantic affairs with German men, to the housing of prostitutes and the details of the abortions themselves – it would be virtually impossible for a viewer of his film to come to the conclusion that she deserves her execution. Chabrol's camera does not study its protagonist with a moralizing eye, but with a distance that highlights in tandem both her caring and careless sides, in addition to her political resistance and personal collaboration. To obsess over her personal morality is to miss the point. By focusing on a woman who often makes unsympathetic or uncomfortable individual choices, the film demands that we take on the burden of moral interpretation and forces the viewer to think critically about what it means to care about individual women's bodily autonomy. This film, nestled well within Chabrol's realist oeuvre, helps us see the trouble in speaking in

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[62] Miranda Pollard, *Reign of Virtue: Mobilizing Gender in Vichy France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 180. Mireille Le Maguet, *Une "faiseuse d'anges" sous Vichy: le cas de Marie-Louise Giraud*, Thesis, Institut d'études politiques de Grenoble, 1996, 15.

[63] For some of Chabrol's other fictional representations of complicated and criminal historical women, see *Violette Nozière* (1978) and *La Cérémonie* (1995), based on the real-life cases of a teenager who killed her parents and two live-in maids who killed their mistress respectively. Isabelle Huppert also figures into both of these films.

metonymy and metaphor, or creating symbols and caricatures, in discussion of those parts of feminine experience without cultural representation.

In turn, I see the film's neutrality towards Giraud's actions as a subversive call to empathy; neither saint nor monster, she is a complicated and contradictory individual making the best of a world that doesn't quite view her as a person. The film burdens us with difficult work of confronting our own prejudices about what kinds of women we believe to be deserving of empathy. This small aside on Chabrol's film helps us set the stage for the parameters and the stakes of the narrative investigation of this project's three chapters. If we are in search of an empathetic understanding of narratives about abortion, it is not enough to empathize with women who abort in the most dire or extreme kinds of cases. Rather, we must be able to accept the complex, diverse, and even mundane individuality of the full spectrum of women who make the decision to terminate a pregnancy. Indeed, this diversity of experience with abortion is put on display throughout the narratives examined here, which call out for those who consume them to accept abortion as a legitimate reproductive experience for all women.

Chabrol's film is primarily focused on its recreation of Giraud, and little time is spent interrogating the subjectivity of the women who were actually experiencing the abortions she facilitated. Unfortunately, the voices of women who do in fact go through the process of terminating a pregnancy are ones that have long been of little interest to the historical record. As fascinating, and as historically important, as may be the interior lives of those women (and men) who risked and sometimes gave their own to help women terminate their pregnancies, the legalization of abortion in France has also given rise to a different kind of artistic consciousness: one that privileges the perspective of the person who is the subject of an abortion. No longer tossing aside the aborting subject as a passive and empty vessel onto whom to project national

fears, these new works seek to examine, through the eyes of the subject herself, the once unspeakable experience of finding oneself pregnant, and having to find a way to terminate it. Three of the four main works of my corpus are told explicitly through the point of view of the subject who undergoes an abortion: the exception being Mariana Otero's documentary *Histoire d'un secret*, which is told from the point of view of the daughter of a woman who died as a result of a clandestine abortion, and who seeks with her film to honor her mother's humanity that was once denied to her by the French government.

Moreover, the historical details comprising the reality of this shift in artistic representation towards the recognition of women's own subjectivity are of immense importance to this project. After the cultural sea change of 1968, legal and cultural attitudes towards abortion swiftly began to change, and a coherent path towards its legalization was forged. The fight for the legalization of abortion in France was won by the voices of women who had actually chosen to undergo abortions themselves, and who forced the French government and public to recognize their bodily truths. In 1971, *Le Nouvel Observateur* published the *Manifeste des 343*, a manifesto signed by as many women including Simone de Beauvoir, Catherine Deneuve, and Agnès Varda, each claiming to have undergone a clandestine abortion at some point in her life and demanding the procedure's immediate legalization. The message was clear: if you think that choosing abortion is reserved for evil women whom you don't know and with whom you have nothing in common, you are sorely mistaken.

One year later, reproductive rights advocate and lawyer Gisèle Halimi defended in court teenager Marie-Claire Chevalier and her family on charges of procuring an abortion; the girl decided to abort her pregnancy after being raped by a classmate who himself turned Marie-Claire

into the authorities to avoid jail time for an unrelated offense.[64] The shocking "not-guilty" verdict of this now famous *procès de Bobigny* was treated as a sign that empathy for those who chose the procedure was beginning to take hold in the legal and cultural spheres. French parliamentary resistance to the legalization of abortion died down as legislators came to realize that the general public was no longer interested in keeping abortion illegal. Public ambivalence towards the procedure, and of course the tireless activism of feminist (and female-led) groups like the *MLF* and *MLAC*, suddenly came to overpower Catholic and pro-natalist opposition in the court of public opinion.

In 1975 after several unsuccessful parliamentary attempts, Simone Veil introduced the legislation that finally legalized the practice and also introduced the now dominant term "IVG," or *interruption volontaire de grossesse*, into the French legal code.[65] While the procedure had previously been referred to in laws that repressed its practice as "avortement," the introduction of the term "IVG" took hold in the cultural sphere as well, and it remains today the most common term for the procedure in the French language.[66] Though not necessarily an accurate description of what abortion does – terminating, rather than interrupting – this hyper-technical term at the very least forces the semantic recognition of abortion as a legal medical procedure, rather than a politicized linguistic bogeyman. Furthermore, it empowers abortion's subject by inscribing her will into its legal terminology; abortion is a procedure dependent on the "volonté" of she who

[64] Halimi gives a detailed an impassioned account of the Bobigny trial in *Le Procès de Bobigny: choisir la cause des femmes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), and her autobiography that details her own experience with clandestine abortion *La cause des femmes*, originally published in 1973.

[65] Jean-Yves Le Naour and Catherine Valenti *Histoire de l'avortement XIX au XX siècle* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2003), 12.

[66] The French government's official webpage for information on "l'IVG" contains an informative timeline concerning contemporary legislation on abortion in France that also demonstrates the timeline of the linguistic shift from "avortement" to "IVG.": https://ivg.gouv.fr/ivg-un-droit-garanti-par-la-loi.html

chooses it. When Veil passed away in June 2017, her interment in the Pantheon was a symbol of the massive impact of her legacy on French society and culture at large.

Ultimately, it was the recognition of the voices of women in the public and political spheres that won legal legitimacy for the right to terminate a pregnancy. To look these women in the face – on a television screen, in a newspaper, or indeed in person – was to gaze upon the everlasting reality of abortion in women's lives. Likewise, the works of my corpus perform a similar form of advocacy, as these women artists write and film the experience of abortion from the inside out. If literature and film are reflections of culture, and if artistic representation reflects what can and cannot be represented in cultural language, then the practice of creating art that depicts the diverse ways in which women may experience abortion forces at least some kind of cultural recognition of it. So long as narratives of abortion are left out of conversations about the feminine reproductive experience, they can continue to be cast off as immoral anomalies that are not representative of the life of a "normal" woman – a patriarchal assertion that does not, and has never, reflected reality for women in France, in the United States, or in any part of the world.

Chapter Outline

My first chapter focuses on Mariana Otero's 2003 documentary *Histoire d'un secret*, about the clandestine and fatal abortion that the filmmaker's mother underwent when Otero was a child. This chapter explores the problem of the absence of women's bodies within contemporary debates about abortion and analyzes the film's poetic reinsertion of the female body into the visual debate about abortion. I argue that as the legalization of abortion in France has become increasingly removed from the present psyche, women's bodies have all but disappeared from cultural discussions about the morality and ethics of abortion – which has in

turn permitted anti-abortion activists to gain virtually total dominion over the powerful visual realm. Otero connects her family's person and painful story of a pre-legalization abortion to a broader political story about the repression of abortion's reality in post-legalization and present-day France; her film seeks to correct these injustices both personal and political, and to create a humanizing portrait of women who choose to terminate pregnancies.

My second chapter focuses on Annie Ernaux's watershed work of auto-fiction, *L'Evénement* (2000). Here, Ernaux draws on her own experience with abortion prior to its legalization in France to create the first-person account of a working-class university student in 1968 Paris who finds herself pregnant and must go through the arduous odyssey of figuring out how to rid herself of the unwanted and alien presence inside of her. Though it is not Ernaux's first narrative portrait of a young woman who chooses to terminate a pregnancy, it remains today one of the most explicit and candid representations of the procedure within French literature. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the legal barriers that prevent the narrator from speaking frankly about her abortion to those around her acts also as an ethical impediment to her capacity for full self-conception; because she is unable to speak about her bodily dilemma, she becomes unable to fully understand her body and herself. Accordingly, as the reader is effectively consuming and understanding the supposedly "unspeakable" experience of abortion, we begin to "interpret" the unsayable aspects of abortion in a way that facilitate abortion's entry into the lexicon of public language. To read Ernaux's narrative forces us to assert that abortion does have some sort of place in our cultural language, as her words represent in clear and unmistakable terms an experience that once could not be represented at all.

Finally, I end with an analysis of two works that explore feelings of guilt, morning, and loss in the wake of an abortion: *Journal d'Hannah* by Louise L. Lambrichs (1993) and *Dix-sept*

ans by Colombe Schneck (2015). As feminists and pro-choice activists have fought to create a sympathetic public vision of the decision to terminate a pregnancy, the problematic question of what to do with the fetus still looms large. In their endeavor to combat the anti-abortion cries of "murder," these groups often swing too far in the opposite direction, treating the discarded fetus as a morally neutral object that should mean nothing to women who terminate pregnancies. On the contrary, the protagonists in Lambrichs's and Schneck's narratives grapple with painful and even haunting emotions in the wake of their abortions and find that there is also not a linguistic space for them in which to give expression to these feelings in an empathetic context, which them instead to internalize feelings of shame and, even more ominously, a psychic breakdown resulting in violence. As both protagonists, one fictional and one real, grapple with their complicated feelings of grief, mourning, and a connection to the fetus that they willingly decided not to imbue with life, we are lead to the conclusion that an empathetic view of abortion, and an empathetic reaction to women who choose to abort, must also make room for the many women who do feel a moral attachment to the lost fetus. Furthermore, these works implore us to recognize that that the expression of feelings of grief and loss in abortion's aftermath do not necessitate the facile moral conclusion that the procedure is immoral or should be illegal to access.

Finally, it is important to note that of the four works that comprise the corpus of this dissertation, three of them take place prior to legalization and speak directly to this now distant and forgotten danger to women's health – at least, for those women who have the privilege of living in a country like France where the procedure is legal. Otero's documentary treats the real-life death of its subject as a result of the dangerous clandestine procedure, Lambrichs's protagonist is rendered sterile by her abortion and the self-induced miscarriage of Ernaux's

narrator causes her to lose so much blood that she nearly dies. An interest in the ability of these works to speak to a broader cultural consciousness does of course remind us that when we forget the often-violent genesis of legal rights that we believe to be inalienable today, the door opens back up for those who wish to restrict those rights and to normalize their rhetoric tomorrow. In the United States, abortion remains perhaps the divisive social issue *ne plus ultra*, even though it has technically been a legal right for nearly fifty years. On the contrary, the procedure is significantly less controversial in present-day France, despite still temperamental access to it and continued opposition by Catholic groups and certain segments of the political Right.

But as Simone de Beauvoir once warned, "Il suffira d'une crise politique, économique ou religieuse pour que les droits des femmes soient remis en question. Ces droits ne sont jamais acquis. Vous devrez rester vigilantes votre vie durant."[67] In other words, cultural silence in the present day around rights that women once had to fight to gain should never be taken as an indication that these rights cannot be taken away.[68] Indeed, over 130 abortion centers in France have closed since 2015, and advocates fear that there are currently not enough centers to meet the demands of women who wish to terminate pregnancies. In the wake of Simone Veil's death, the current president of the *Planning familial* organization lamented to interviewers, themselves newly interested in the topic of abortion, that the procedure remains "le parent pauvre de l'hôpital: lors des restructurations d'hôpitaux, les services IVG sont en général les plus fragiles et les plus susceptibles de disparaître…Les structures de proximité disparaissent à grande vitesse

[67] These words have been widely attributed to Simone de Beauvoir, but their context and genesis remain unclear.

[68] Perhaps the clearest and most famous artistic representation of a reproductive dystopia is Canadian author Margaret Atwood's 1986 novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, in which a totalitarian religious state in the near-future enslaves fertile young women and forces them to bear the children of the empowered class. The novel was adapted for television in 2017 on streaming site Hulu, with many noting possible echoes between the rhetoric of the novel's government and that of the current United States government.

alors que c'est ce dont nous avons le plus besoin."[69] Though the European Union has its own charter that guarantees certain basic human rights to all its citizens, women across the European Union do not all have equal access to the procedure – and some are prevented from accessing it at all in their country.

While we keep this in mind as we forge ahead to examine these abject stories, I believe that it is also important to recognize that the sordid and oppressive side of abortion's history does not tell the whole tale. Certainly, these works lay bare painful stories of oppression and repression, and the consequences of living a reality about which one is often not able to speak. But on a different note, the works of my corpus are also the stories of women's ability to persist in the face of this oppression, and to refuse the legal denial of their bodily agency, no matter what the consequences may be. If our centuries are marked by the widespread repression of reproductive rights, they are also marked by a continuous and active lineage of women helping each other regain control of their reproductive autonomy. Governmental and religious restrictions may ebb and flow throughout history, but no matter when or where they are, women have always been finding ways to terminate pregnancies, and help one another do so.

After her death in the summer of 2017, *Le Monde* republished a 2005 interview with Simone Veil, who had this to say when asked about the idea of feminine solidarity: "j'y crois beaucoup. Sur les questions essentielles de la vie, les femmes sont spontanément solidaires. Cela n'exclut pas des rivalités dans la vie professionnelle, mais le réflexe d'entraide est le plus

[69] Véronique Séhier, "Plus de quarante ans après la loi Veil l'IVG est le parent pauvre de l'hôpital," Interview with Margot Cherrid, *Le Monde* 5 July 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/sante/article/2017/07/05/plus-de-quarante-ans-apres-la-loi-veil-l-ivg-est-le-parent-pauvre-de-l-hopital_5156230_1651302.html

naturel. Je l'ai maintes fois constaté."[70] Though not in a monolith, women have, do, and will work with each other to ensure that our bodies remain ours, on our own terms. Narratives on the subject of women who were physically or mentally wounded, harassed, or who died in the search of abortion can of course inspire pity. But as this study will demonstrate, these stories are also the site of an immensely powerful resistance that anchors a kind of agency that women have always had, into a language that all must recognize.

[70] Simone Veil, "Simone Veil raconte la loi sur l'avortement," Interview with Annick Cojean, *Le Monde*, March 20th, 2005. http://www.lemonde.fr/a-la-une/article/2005/03/20/simone-veil-raconte-la-loi-sur-l-avortement_384894_3208.html

Chapter One

The Missing Body in *Histoire d'un secret*

"As we retrospect, we model a future on the basis on our present situation as it is mediated by how we *now* understand our past situation. As we retrospect, we construct a story (*histoire*) from our present perspective but mediated by what we now understand of past events in the plot to which we contribute in 'the story thus far'." Bill Nichols[1]

In her award-winning 2003 documentary *Histoire d'un secret*, filmmaker Mariana Otero takes on the role of both director and subject as she sets out to uncover the life story of her late mother Clotilde Vauthier, a painter that Otero grew up believing to have died of appendicitis during the filmmaker's childhood.[2] Indeed, for nearly the first hour of the film, the viewer is presented only with this version of her mother's demise until Otero's father, who was left to raise Mariana and her younger sister alone after Clotilde's death, reveals on camera to the documentarian that her mother's death was in fact the result of a clandestine abortion; she sought to terminate her third pregnancy in order to further her career as an artist.

In the wake of this revelation, the film's personal narrative opens up into a broader interrogation of the sordid and still largely unexplored history of clandestine abortions in contemporary France, as we watch the director delve into historical archives and pursue those who both provided and underwent these "back-alley" procedures. The filmmaker's investigation, as political then as it is personal, culminates in an exhibition of Clotilde's paintings that acts as homage to both a career and a life cut short by a political system that kept women tethered to their biology. Notably, Otero's exhibitions of her mother's art continue in the present day, and

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[1] Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 118.

[2] *Histoire d'un secret* won Best Documentary at the Valladolid International Film Festival in 2003.

Otero still shows her mother's paintings in travelling exhibitions across Europe.[3] As Brigitte Rollet has noted, Otero often blurs the line between "strict documentary" and "created narrative," drawing heavily from both from elements of fiction and non-fiction.[4] The filmmaker has confirmed the documentary's fictional undertones in one of her only interviews on the film, where she repeatedly confirms that though its interpersonal conversations and interviews were not scripted, the work was still "vraiment écrit comme une fiction."[5] Indeed, towards the end, it is subtly indicated that the filmmaker was not ignorant of the true cause of her mother's passing at the outset of the film, as previous portions of its narrative lead the viewer to believe. Even the viewer is not necessarily surprised at the film's climactic tale of the details of the fatal abortion, whose revelation is in fact displayed on the back jacket of the DVD.

With the metanarrative interplay between raw truth and created narratives in mind, this chapter analyzes how the film acts not just as an indictment of the secrecy with which Otero's individual family treated her mother's truths, but furthermore how it seeks to upend the culture of secrecy that still shrouds abortion (clandestine or otherwise) within French society at large. I will demonstrate the ways in which Otero's film recuperates her mother's image both by reconstructing her body that was destroyed by clandestine abortion and by giving new life to her lost body of artwork that so often depicted the nude female form. Clotilde's corporeal body is reanimated through the documentary's exploration of her lost self, and through the exposition and aesthetic exploration of her lost body of paintings. I contend that the film's recuperation of Clotilde's artistic representations of the female form leads the viewer to an empathetic

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[3] Information on the expositions can be found at Otero's website, http://clotildevautier.org/, a large archive of her mother's life and paintings that Otero created after the release of the documentary.

[4] Brigitte Rollet, "Quand les femmes filment l'Histoire: Histoire d'un secret (Mariana Otero, 2003)," *Studies in French Cinema* 10, no. 3 (2010): 259.

[5] Mariana Otero, Interview with Bénédicte Pagnot. Rennes, France, October 23, 2003.

understanding of Clotilde as a woman and a human being who made the decision to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. Finally, I argue that this exploration into her personal story asks us to consider and recognize abortion as a legitimate reproductive experience for all women.

Familial Secrets and the Ownership of Truth

In her ground-breaking text on epistemology and gender, *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Sedgwick states, "Insofar as ignorance is ignorance *of* a knowledge…these ignorances, far from being pieces of the originary dark, are produced by and correspond to particular knowledges and circulate as part of particular regimes of truth."[6] Nancy Tuana has also expounded upon the notion of regimes of truth and of ignorance as they relate to the female (sexual) body, noting in her own study of feminist epistemology that "ignorance should not be theorized as a simple omission or gap but is, in many cases, an active production…and actively preserved."[7] From this angle, "women's bodies and pleasure provide a fertile lens for understanding the workings of power/knowledge-ignorance in which we can trace who desires what knowledge."[8] These epistemological frameworks help foreground the broader implications of the filmmaker's journey to reveal the secrets of her mother's life, that in turn diagnose a deeper culture of secrecy about the female sexual body. Throughout, the film demonstrates the ways in which history has treated certain bodies as ones that are not worthy of consideration, and then brings to the fore the political urgency of the cultural consideration of these bodies and their truths. As Sedgwick and Tuana suggest, the ongoing mystery of Clotilde, and of women like her who chose clandestine

[6] Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2008), 25.

[7] Nancy Tuana, "Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the Epistemology of Ignorance," *Hypatia* 19, no. 1 (2004): 195.

[8] Ibid., 198.

abortion, is not a sad accident or an isolated incident within the Vautier/Otero clan. Rather, the film will unmask it as a symptom a cultural epistemological "regime" that treats certain bodily truths as unspeakable abjections, undeserving of empathy or understanding.

The relationship between truth and secrecy is one of the primary narrative foundations of Otero's documentary. While the revelation of Clotilde's death acts as the catalyst for the exploration of a much more widespread culture of secrecy with respect to clandestine abortions in contemporary France, the original "secrecy" that concerns the filmmaker is intra-familial. The film begins, and remains for quite some time, shrouded in darkness, and its original darkness (or, its "originary dark") aesthetically grounds the entrenched familial secrecies surrounding the life and death Clotilde Vautier. The opacity of the deceased woman's true self to her surviving relatives is cemented in three journeys that the filmmaker takes at the outset of the film: to an empty home containing her mother's paintings, to the home of her mother's sister, and to the home of the filmmaker's own sister, Isabel. Fittingly, its first shots are of the filmmaker driving alone in the dark of the evening to an unidentified home. While she passes through the house gate, the camera remains behind the barrier, thus distancing the viewer from both the filmmaker and her destination; she crosses into a world to which we are not yet privy. Once inside the dimly lit home, Otero begins to remove (also unidentified) paintings, later understood to be her mother's work, from cabinets. We watch her brush copious amounts dust off of the canvases – a clear signal to the viewer that they have not seen the light of day in quite some time. As the paintings are removed from the darkness of their storage, natural light spills into the room from a nearby window. The external light that illuminates the shot inside the home provides the first example of the film's many contrasts between physical darkness that keeps its subjects in the unknown, and light that illuminates the truth. Though we know nothing yet of the paintings, their

state at the film's outset quite clearly indicates that they have long been deprived of an appreciative gaze.

It is important to note that these first shadowy glimpses of her mother's artwork depict a variety of subjects, with houses and landscapes appearing alongside the bodies that will dominate the bulk of the film's exploration of Clotilde's art. This brief reveal of variety suggests that the film's later preference for painted bodies is not just circumstance, but a conscious decision to foreground one aspect of Clotilde's art. The sight of the unexplained art may pique the viewer's curiosity, but from this we are immediately transported to another scene of darkness and of secrecy. Otero takes her vehicle down yet another a dark path, heading for a nighttime arrival at the home of an unnamed relative, who appears to be the sister of her late mother. Though the film's dialogue is largely dominated by conversations between the filmmaker and relatives or friends about her mother's life and death, her interlocutors are rarely identified to the viewer. This is just yet another of the film's idiosyncrasies that blurs the line between documentary and narrative film. Instead of being presented as the subjects of official interviews, her relatives become supporting characters in her narrative quest to illuminate the image of her mother.

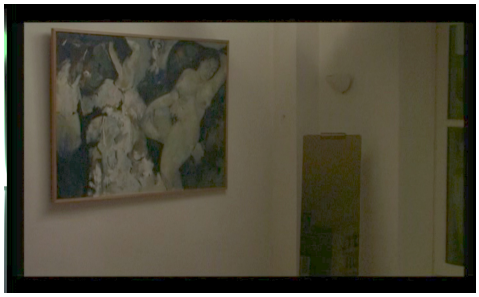
It is during these first moments of dialogue in the film that the viewer begins to grasp the depth of the familial secrecy surrounding Clotilde and her death. Importantly, these initial conversations also serve as the viewer's introduction to the film's late subject Clotilde, who was not mentioned in the previous, silent scenes. Otero's aunt recalls that after her passing, the family astonishingly kept the deceased woman's daughters in the dark about their mother's death for weeks; they apparently told the young girls that their mother was on an extended trip to Paris to showcase her art. Her aunt recalls having at the time the deep impression that "il ne faut leur rien dire," and she marvels aloud at how strange it seems today that she and those around her agreed

to keep this secret from Mariana and her sister. However, she also quietly adds that "c'était comme ça, on en parlait pas. C'était un secret." From the very beginning of the film, her presence is shrouded in secrecy, lies and confusion.

So even before mention of Clotilde's abortion enters into the film, its narrative presents the time period in which she died as one where it was better to hide truths than to reveal them. This delayed surprise that the adults were able to keep the secret of Clotilde's death from her children in the weeks that followed it is remarked upon at several points throughout the film, even though no one seems to question why or how the decision was made in the first place. As Otero's aunt suggests, this was just the way things were. These introductory scenes in which Clotilde's relatives sit in the dark and recall not her life, but her death, constructs a vision of a world in which all was to be kept quiet. Furthermore, it suggests the kind of divide between past and present epistemologies that will underscore the broader investigation into clandestine abortion dominating the film's second half. To the film's older characters (or, interviewees), the notion of secrets or truths about which one simply could not speak – or, for which there were no words – is an uncontroversial if distant reality. Meanwhile, the younger director attempts to put into words, or at least into images, these buried and forgotten bodily realities.

Otero's next journey is again taken in the darkness, down another winding road in the middle of the night, to a house in which she seems to have grown up. In the film's first scenes shot in broad daylight, Otero walks around the home with her sister Isabel. Strikingly, the documentary doesn't mention that Isabel works as an actress, and thus as a subject who can herself walk more consciously between the line of documented subject speaking her unfiltered truths and character playing a part within a narrative film. The women move inside, and Otero's camera once again draws its focus to their mother's paintings, which adorn the walls. While the

film's first shots of the paintings kept them at a distance, the camera now inches closer to them, lingering and thus permitting the viewer to consider their contents as if we were in an art gallery. As stated above, the first shots of Clotilde's paintings contained a multitude of subjects, but these new shots focus solely on her depictions of the nude female form. As the camera's gaze remains on the painted bodies, we come closer to understanding the feminine materiality at the center of the film. Marlène Monteiro notes of this physicality that "Clotilde's technique and Mariana's close-ups coalesce into matter and physicality, one sustains the other."[9] Ultimately then, the coalescence of the two artistic forms, film and painted canvas, work to pull the viewer in towards the ethical project of the film. To recognize the humanity of the women behind the films art metonymically urges us to consider the humanity of women like Clotilde who chose to terminate unwanted pregnancies.



The sisters discuss the point at which, as young girls, they were finally informed that their mother was not in Paris, but dead, and both find themselves largely unable to recall their emotions at the time – perhaps having been consumed by the youthful incapacity to understand the permanency of death. In the scenes that follow, Mariana and Isabel turn to the subject of their mother's body itself. Just as the sisters struggled to recall their emotional responses to Clotilde's death, their discussions about her life are equally void of emotional memories; they do not muse

[9] Marlène Monteiro, "The Body as Interstitial Space between Media in *Leçons de Ténèbres* by Vincent Dieutre and *Histoire d'un secret* by Mariana Otero," *Acta Univ. Spaientiae, Film and Media Studies* 7 (2013): 117.

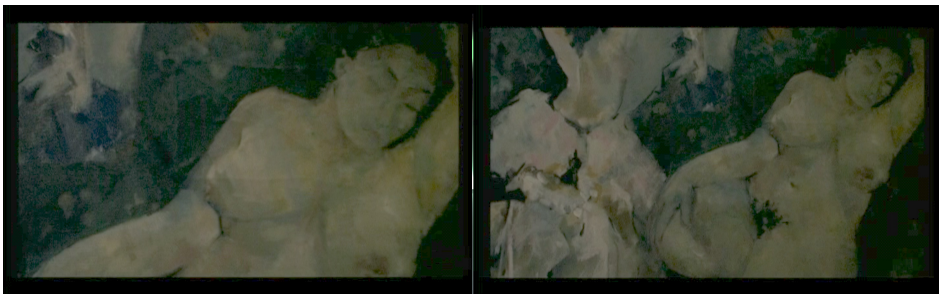
about their late mother's disposition or recall memories of the things that they would do together. Instead, what Mariana and Isabel do discuss is another "gap" in their shared (lack of) memory of their mother: that of her touch, with both women struggling to recall maternal displays of affection such as touches or hugs from Clotilde during their youth. Though both women know that their mother was a person that existed in their early lives, all evidence of this existence would appear to have been wiped clean from both the outside world and from their minds. Memory of Clotilde and evidence of her existence are gone, and the image of Clotilde as a human being has been interred with her body.

Emotional memories of their mother may be depleted, but once the women focus on the image of her physical form, they are finally able to find an uncanny sort of recollection. To their surprise, both share, for the first time to each other, individual memories of their younger adult selves seeing apparitions of their mother around the cities in which they lived and having to stop themselves from approaching older women on the street who they mistook for their lost mother, recognizing in their hearts that these women could not be Clotilde. Isabel curiously uses "vous" as she recounts imagined conversations with these re-found mothers, thus perhaps suggesting a continued psychic distance from her mother even in this fantasy scenario in which she is discovered alive. Both the absence of memory of their mother's physical touch, and the recurrent false apparition of their mother as an older woman serve to highlight the physicality of Clotilde's absence throughout each woman's life. It is of course not just a theoretical "maternal figure" that is missing for them, but the physical presence of her body as well. These uncanny street encounters experienced by both women represent their repeated failure to reconstruct the memory of her physical existence. Again, though "truthfully" both women learned of the true cause of their mother's death long before these filmed conversations, Otero's above-mentioned

interview also indicates that both women were well into adulthood when this truth was revealed to them. In death, Clotilde is a missing and amorphous being, and the reality of her embodied existence remains opaque.

This missing maternal body becomes an even more explicit presence (or absence) when Mariana takes one of their mother's dresses out from storage, which Isabel of course cannot recall her mother wearing. The dress is draped next to the sisters on the couch on the couch, creating the visual suggestion that their mother sits there beside them. Throughout the sequence, their conversations have attempted, and largely failed, to "reanimate" the image of a living Clotilde, as they remain unable to produce substantial memories of her reality. In contrast, this new shot would seem to invite the viewer to anticipate the specter-like apparition of her body, giving life and physical form to the limp dress on the couch. The failed reanimation of the maternal body is reinforced as Mariana suggests to her sister's shock and mild disgust that Isabel try the dress on. Isabel remarks that "ça me fait du bien de lui parler, de lui dire des choses, mais non pas de mettre sa robe!" Isabel's uneasiness again points to the creeping attempts to insert Clotilde's physicality into the film. She refuses to put on the dress because she knows her mother's now-dead body once touched it, and as such demonstrates her unwillingness to substitute her own body for that of her dead mother. This is not the Freudian quest to become one's mother, but to rediscover a separate maternal figure who has been hidden away. Isabel's adamant refusal to embody her mother accentuates this separateness upon which she insists. Difficult as she is to remember, everyone is of course aware that Clotilde did once exist in a tangible physical form.

However, Isabel's refusal also denies the viewer the opportunity to fulfill the specterly anticipation of an imagined embodiment of the deceased woman. Thus, we effectively become inserted into the film's narrative quest as we begin to question and thus desire an image of her as a real woman. Fragments of Clotilde's existence and her identity are slowly beginning to edge their way into the scenes, in the form of her paintings, her dress, and the few unsatisfying details of her life revealed in interviews. But thus far, these pieces are so haphazard and unsatisfying that the viewer begins to crave a more substantial portrait of the film's mysterious subject; now, we too wish to unlock the mystery of Clotilde's life and death. The camera cuts from the women on the couch back to an extreme close-up of one of Clotilde's painted bodies, and this new shot focuses on the upper torso of its curvy female subject, closing in on her ample breasts, and then zooming out to show the viewer her full naked body. The woman is languidly stretched out, offering her hips covered in pubic hair towards the paintings center. As is the case for many of Clotilde's paintings, this area of the body serves as the piece's focal point.



In a different context, the camera's gaze on the painted body could be interpreted as a lascivious one, as it pointedly centers on these erotic corporeal points. However, Isabel's vocal narration, in

tandem with the camera's gaze upon the canvas, explains that her mother completed the painting during the time when she herself was growing in Clotilde's belly, and that she had later chosen to hang it above her bed as an adult. Isabel recounts dreams in which the painting spoke to her, sometimes even with an umbilical cord surreally coming out of the painting. In her study of female and feminist filmmakers, Kate Ince draws on the work of Luce Irigaray to argue for the power of women directors who privilege this kind of female relational subjectivity:

> It is important to focus on female subjectivities in relationship in film narratives and viewing situations, paying particular attention to a feminine inter-subjectivity understood as the dynamic between two female subjects rather than as any kind of subject-object relationship. This is of course exactly what Irigaray's concept of female/feminine genealogies refers to, making a brief reminder timely of what she argues is at stake in the recovery and construction of such 'vertical' and 'horizontal' relationships between women.[10]

Irigaray's theories of feminine subjectivity, that focused on the capacity of the feminine subject to form its identity through its non-objectifying relationship with the Other, provide a rich lens through which to view this scene.[11] Otero establishes the figure in the painting not as an object to be sexually consumed, but as a maternal subject watching over her lost children. So, what we gaze upon here is an image of the feminine erotic that refuses patriarchal categorizations of her form, and whose subjectivity as it is defined through Isabel's words renders this kind of objectification nonsensical. In a sense, Clotilde's body begins to take shape in this very painting as the viewer, who has not yet seen an image of Clotilde herself, is invited through Isabel's maternal comparison to draw an aesthetic association between the painting's subject and its creator. Though Isabel has just denied us a visual recreation of her mother's corporeal form by

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[10] Kate Ince, *The Body and the Screen* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 42.

[11] Irigaray contends, "The feminine subject constructs itself through a relation to the other, the masculine subject through the manufacture of objects and worlds starting from which it is possible for him to exchange with the other." Translated interview referenced in: Kate Ince, 15-16.

refusing to don her dress, her filmmaker sister now subtly steers us towards an erotic reconstruction of the lost maternal body.

From this attempted expression of truth among family members, the film plunges back into the realm of secrecy that clouded Mariana's conversation with her older relatives. She meets with an unnamed and unidentified man in a café, whose identity is never revealed to the viewer; his relationship to the Vautier/Otero family remains unexplained, and he doesn't seem to bear any biological relation to them. Otero begins the conversation by "reminding" the man that he had long ago told her that her mother's untimely death was not in fact caused by appendicitis. Though this is again not necessarily new information for the viewer, it is the first time the film explicitly suggests an alternate cause of death for Clotilde within the parameters of its narrative; Mariana doesn't discuss this possibility with her sister, and she doesn't press her aunt on her mother's cause of death, even when the woman mentions the supposed appendicitis. But whatever information this man may have once revealed to Otero (likely, not in the presence of a video camera), he is totally uninterested in, and outright refuses to, speak about the subject of Clotilde's death.

As Mariana attempts to elicit information from the man, he accuses her of trying to "me faire dire des choses que je n'ai pas envie de dire" and asserts that he will never reveal his secret. The repeated apparition of the word "secret," which of course also appears in the film's title, is a return to the problematic relationship between past and present epistemologies that Otero's interviews are beginning to illuminate; though no longer limited by a world where he "cannot" speak of abortion due to legal impediments, something continues to prevent him from asserting this truth in their absence. Here, we can return to the suggestions of Sedgwick and Tuana above, who argue that cultural ignorance about abject bodily truths is rarely, if ever, the product of

"organic" ignorance, but of an enforced and epidemic repression of the dissemination of knowledge. Accordingly, this man quite explicitly creates and enforces ignorance with his defiant silence. His hostile refusal to speak is indeed another suggestion that Clotilde's death has not just been misremembered, but that it carries a sinister backstory in need of active repression. He asks outright, on the possibility of an alternate cause of death: "Est-ce que c'est important?" and his tone suggests that the answer should be a rhetorical no. Beneath his clipped interrogative dismissal of Mariana's curiosity lies a more insidious proposal: what could be so important about something that happened so long ago, when whatever did cause her death cannot be reversed? Their conversation ends shortly thereafter. But while the truth of Clotilde's death has yet to be revealed, this sequence provides the turning point within the film in which the sham narrative of appendicitis begins to fall apart; we have become certain that there must be more to the story.

Because this mystery man does not end up "revealing" what he knows about Clotilde's death, it should be noted that he may not in fact be privy to her actual cause of death. Perhaps, for example, he believes her to have died of a miscarriage and wishes not to speak of her sexual health at all. But his borderline hostile responses to her questioning clearly demonstrate that he has no interest in, and feels no moral burden to, take part in this filmed project of truth-telling with respect to Clotilde's life and death. His flippant demand to know if she really believes her investigation to be "important" is furthermore demonstrative of his attitude towards the legacy of these deadly clandestine abortion in the present day; for him, they're a footnote of the past that aren't worth lingering upon, that do not import significantly on the present day. This conversation also introduces what I will establish to be the film's gendered binary opposition between truth and secrecy: while the film's women do the work of uncovering and shedding light on the difficult truth of clandestine abortion, the men that Otero interviews come to represent the

cultural desire to keep these stories hidden and secret. Whatever his actual knowledge of Clotilde's death may in fact entail, this interview establishes within the film the existence of a (deadly) secret that must be revealed. Again, this scene only gives the viewer an unclear fragment of the truth not just of Clotilde's life, but now her death, and we are left with the desire for more knowledge about her mysterious existence.

This tense interview furthermore introduces one of the film's other central questions about truth and secrecy: when it comes to difficult truths, especially about the body and the fraught subject of abortion, whose duty is it to reveal them? With Clotilde obviously long gone, and without any suggestion from those who knew of her situation at the time, it is of course impossible to know how she would have felt about her intimate medical history being revealed on screen. However, the potentially problematic wquestion of her mother's personal privacy is one that the film never addresses, and it does not seem to be one that Mariana has given much consideration. When the film later opens up from personal story to political history, we will see that there are certainly still plenty of families that believe this information belongs within the realm of the private.

From this terse reassertion of silence, Otero moves on to another interview with a man who comes to represent secrecy: her father Antonio, who at this point in the film is ostensibly the only person privy to the whole truth about Clotilde's abortion. As they meet, Otero once again suggests secrecy with her camera direction, filming the first shots of the scenes with her father in a shadow. Now, we are so away far from them and at such an angle that both subjects are totally black and they walk away from, instead of towards the camera, which does not follow them. The distance between filmed subject and camera thus suggests both a respect for the familial intimacy

of the secrets to be revealed, and also serves as the continued indication of the film's aesthetic usage of darkness to underscore the depth of such secrets.

The filmmaker never displays anger towards her father during their multiple discussions that follow, but this introductory conversation with him certainly takes on an accusatory tone when they begin to discuss Clotilde's paintings. As Mariana remembers it, her father not only kept her mother's work hidden from view, but locked in a cupboard to which she and her sister did not possess a key. Stowed away with her paintings was apparently also the image of her mother's face; she claims her father kept no photographs of Clotilde in the house, thus leaving her image to wither away into mere abstraction in her daughter's mind.

The lack of photographic proof of her mother's existence further contributes to the problem of Clotilde's missing body. Otero confesses to that because she never saw photographs of her mother in her youth, Mariana not only couldn't recall what Clotilde looked like, but didn't really know who her mother was as a person. This visual missed connection is highlighted in a previous scene, in which a series of full-screen, black and white photographs are shown in sequence without narration or subtitles to explain their content. They appear to be photos of the Vautier/Otero clan, but are shown in such rapid succession that it is only upon multiple viewings of the scene that the viewer able to recognize the familiar face in all of them that must belong to Clotilde.

The photographs are not just of groups of people, but of groups containing multiple women, and the viewer is struck with the same sentiment as were Mariana and Isabel in their youth, as we search through a quickly dissipating crowd of faces for that of Clotilde. The fleeting montage of still shots that suggest, but never confirm, Clotilde's image is a reminder that for the filmmaker, the inability to recognize her mother's bodily image was the inability to recall who she was as a human being. In turn, the denial of bodily recognition and the inability to reflect upon her mother and conjure up the image of her face subsequently gave Mariana the impression that she didn't know her mother at all. The film's mission to become a space that uncovers her mother's whole truth at all cost is unmistakably rooted in this very problem: this time, Clotilde will not fade into the crowd.

Mariana reproaches her father not just for hiding photographs of her mother, but also for locking up the paintings about which Clotilde was so passionate. Their exchange is a short window into the trauma of a man whose compulsive secrecy clearly acts a manifestation of his own unspeakable pain. Though the paintings clearly represented a taboo to Mariana, her father's memory presents a different version of the story. According to Antonio, he did not lock up the

paintings to keep them from his daughters, but from himself, and denies ever having forbidden them from looking at them. He further maintains that the paintings were kept in storage in an effort to best preserve them and asserts that if they were locked up during the girls' youth, it was to keep them from damaging the precious art. A measured and fair response, to be sure, but her father's logic is a reminder that for him, the best way to preserve the memory of Clotilde was to keep her hidden. What felt like a taboo secret to a young Mariana was a painful memory for Antonio, who perhaps did not wish to burden his daughters with the heavy reality of what happened to Clotilde. Though the film gives Antonio's secrecy a largely empathetic treatment, his silence still covers up the truth about Clotilde, which the film is determined to reveal no matter the cost. Emma Wilson says

> Clotilde has been withdrawn and withheld from her daughters in her death, and also in the layers of secrecy that surround it in the denial of knowledge and memory. Memories of her embodied presence and affection are missing. In the face of this, Otero seeks to push against the constraints of her visual medium and to create a relation to Clotilde through tactility in the cinematic medium, a form of haptic art.[12]

The adulthood feeling of never having "known" Clotilde is thus rooted not only in the inherently traumatic nature of her death, but also in the fact that any tactile tools with which to cope with the loss were inaccessible to Mariana and her sister. They are unable to speak about their mother and her traumatic loss in part because they had no visual cues to spark their memory of her, and all evidence of Clotilde's existence was buried by their pained father. Still, these first scenes of her father certainly paint a humanizing portrait of a man who was also deeply affected by Clotilde's "missing body," albeit in a very different manner than his daughters. Mariana and Isabel struggled to form a memorial connection with their mother's physical form, and her once-taboo paintings are the only hard evidence of her existence that they have in their adult life. So,

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[12] Emma Wilson, "Museum Spaces in Palliative Art: Mariana Otero's *Histoire d'un secret*," *L'Esprit Créateur* 51, no. 1 (2011): 115.

to give new life to her mother's paintings, and to take them out of the secretive darkness of her family's cupboards, will metaphorically help the filmmaker to give new life to her mother.

According to Monteiro, "what is at stake [in the film] is not Clotilde's consciousness of her own body for she is dead; but her suffering, which is implicitly relayed by the paintings and their materiality, harks back to the reality of her existence, of her *having-been-there*, by opposition to her death which may have seemed unreal to Mariana."[13] As suggested here, the film and its director are of course incapable of a literal resuscitation or resurrection of Clotilde Vautier. However, Otero's narrative will go on to demonstrate that an empathetic appreciation of her humanity can be drawn out through the recuperation, and thus the "revival," of the lost paintings of women that Clotilde left behind in her death. Clotilde's paintings will serve as catalyst that allows the film to unlock the secret of her death, and ultimately, to speak to the larger truth of the patriarchal terror of clandestine abortion.

Collisions between Art, History and Power

Familial secrets and personal pain have dominated the first part of the film. But as we will soon come to see, the personal is hardly the crux of what is at stake in Otero's film, whose deeply political foundations will soon be revealed. In her article "Fetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction," feminist scholar Rosalind Petchesky details how, since the 1990s, anti-abortion activists have effectively come to dominate the visual domain surrounding the debate about abortion. She writes, "[t]he strategy of antiabortionists to make fetal personhood a self-fulfilling prophecy by making the fetus a *public presence* addresses a visually oriented cultured. Meanwhile, finding 'positive' images and symbols of abortion hard to

[13] Marlène Monteiro, "The Body as Interstitial Space between Media in *Leçons de Ténèbres* by Vincent Dieutre and *Histoire d'un secret* by Mariana Otero," *Acta Univ. Spaientiae Film and Media Studies* 7 (2013): 113.

imagine, feminists and other prochoice advocates have all too ready ceded the visual terrain."[14] As anti-abortion activists launch their attacks often primarily through highly visual mediums like protest posters depicting maimed fetuses and graphic films such as *The Silent Scream* – translated into French as *Le Cri silencieux* – the realm of the "visual" within the debate about abortion has quickly come to privilege the fetus in need of saving, while the mother is pushed into the background. She is cast off, as Petchesky argues, as the mere "environment" in which this more important person grows. Feminist pro-choice groups, on the other hand, seem only to lay claim to totally symbolic images when working in a visual medium. The most well-known (and perhaps, the only) symbol that is truly associated with pro-choice movements in mainstream Western culture today is likely the famous image of a fist striking through the astrological symbol for woman, which hardly necessitates the direct consideration of the female body as such. Accordingly, pro-life groups have come to have essentially total dominion over the utilization of real physical bodies within their campaigns.

This anti-abortion domination of the visual realm by the fetal image of course has important consequences for what kinds of bodies matter to our world. The pro-life movements of the United States that began to gain national attention in the late 1980s and early 1990s were the first, and certainly the most vocal, groups to use guerilla fear tactics outside of abortion clinics: shoving graphic protest signs and screaming in the faces of women entering clinics, doctors, and the media who covered their ever-growing presence. But it is important to recognize that in the wake of these American movements, their French counterparts began to make their mark and were directly influenced by the language and methods of the Americans. Movements like *S.O.S. tout-petits* and the now slightly infamous serial protestors like Claire Fontana and Xavier Dor

[14] Rosalind Petchesky, "Fetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction," *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 2 (1987): 264.

were instrumental in promoting the domination of the fetal image in the visual realm of the abortion debate in France in this time period. A 1992 article in the feminist review *Nouvelles questions féministes* describes the growing threat of these protestors, whose slogans often contained messages such as "avorter, c'est tuer" and the more shocking epithet "arrêtez l'holocauste des enfants français":

> Les premiers utilisent autocollants, prières, manifestations, pèlerinages, colloques, diffusent le film Le cri silencieux, afin de populariser leur opinion; les autres négligeant la propagande et la légalité, organisent des interventions dans les hôpitaux pour perturber, voir bloquer les services…les militant/es essayent de culpabiliser la mère potentielle; l'état maternel est glorifié, "revalorisé"; la mère donne la vie, éduque les générations à venir et possède plus que d'autres la puissance créatrice de vie.[15]

These bold anti-woman statements have deep connections to Petchesky's argument about cultures that are "visually-oriented." While the Veil law has largely been accepted by and incorporated into mainstream French attitudes and values in the present day, women's bodies have all but disappeared from French pro-choice activism in the forty years after the legalization of abortion. But historically speaking, this has not always been the case. In 1971, *Le Nouvel Observateur* published the *Manifeste des 343*, signed by prominent, celebrated women including Simone de Beauvoir, Catherine Deneuve, and Agnès Varda, who all claimed to have undergone a clandestine abortion at some point in her life and demanded its immediate legalization. Bibia Pavard calls the document "un manifeste novateur," that forced the French public to come face to face with an explicitly feminine intellectual and political agenda by foregrounding the image of real bodies of highly respected and well-known women.[16] The manifesto effectively created a

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[15] Gaëlle Erdenet, "RU 486, Le chiffre de la Bête. Le mouvement contre le droit des femmes à l'avortement en France," *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* 13, no. 3 (1992): 30.

[16] Bibia Pavard, *Si je veux, quand je veux: Contraception et avortement dans la société française (1956-1979)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 140.

link between the bodies of the women who signed it to the widespread reality of abortion in France; the procedure's impact on and place within women's lives could no longer be denied, and the Veil law legalized abortion four years later.

So, it is not that feminists have never been able to foreground the female body in their arguments against the repression of abortion. It is rather, as Petchesky's post-legalization article argues, that they have given up their claim to the body's visual power much too quickly to groups that seek to deny subjectivity to the bodies of women. The dark side of the liberalization of abortion in France has been the erasure of abortion's deadly history, and in turn, the false sense of political security that threatens to give way once again the aggressive extremism that capitalizes on this historical lack of consciousness; we will return to this point below, as Otero interviews an abortion activist and gynecologist later in the film. Descriptions of anti-abortion protestors such as the ones found in *Nouvelles questions féministes* demonstrate the growing presence of groups whose scare tactics revolve around situating the fetus as a victim, who could be saved by women if only they would accept their "natural" role as mother. In light of this dark side, Otero utilizes the medium of documentary film to help us see the consequences of cultural amnesia with respect to this small part of French history, and to connect past to present. Just as a document like the *Manifeste des 343* inserted abortion into the visual realm of the cultural and historical record by associating it with the bodies of real, recognizable women, Otero's film uses Clotilde's paintings of nude women, the only available artifacts with which to represent her mother's body, to confront the humanity of women who chose abortion.

Women in Clotilde's day could not abort in hospitals for fear of very real legal repercussions, and they consequentially saw dangerous clandestine abortions as their only option. If one of the primary goals of anti-abortion activism has been to "bring to life" the image

of the fetus, and to render it a *person* so much so that its maternal carrier is effectively *dehumanized* and removed from the visual realm, Otero's film can be viewed as an active foil to this kind of anti-woman discourse. It raises consciousness for a part of the past that has too quickly been forgotten – not just by her own family, but by her country as well. By privileging both the image of her mother's physical form, and that of the bodies she once painted, Otero's film reclaims the visual realm surrounding the debate about abortion by forcing the viewer to come to terms with the humanity of women who choose abortion: not just a vessel for a more important life, but a body and a life unto herself. Monteiro states that "Mariana…feels the need to make her mother's life (and death) real and visible, and endeavours to bring her body back to the surface – metaphorically, that is."[17] Otero echoes this sentiment herself in the interview, explaining that she did not want to "réduire ma mère à sa mort, je voulais raconter sa peinture et sa vie sans pour autant faire son portrait, je voulais faire sentir sa présence, la ressusciter."[18] If we can recognize Clotilde as a real person – as a body in the flesh – that once existed, then her existence and her gendered pain cannot be denied. In a way she will be, as her daughter imagines, brought back to life.

On this note, it seems crucial to point out that there is little to no reference in the film to the fetus that was lost, except to explain the pregnancy as a hindrance to Clotilde's painterly ambitions; Mariana never muses about the idea of a "lost sibling" and neither does anyone else. As such, the film is self-consciously meant to be consumed as an unequivocal homage to a mother and a woman lost too soon. Though largely narrated by and mediated through her two daughters and the father of her children, *Histoire d'un secret* is perhaps paradoxically not at all

[17] Marlène Monteiro, "The Body as Interstitial Space between Media in *Leçons de Ténèbres* by Vincent Dieutre and *Histoire d'un secret* by Mariana Otero," *Acta Univ. Spaientiae, Film and Media Studies* 7 (2013): 113.

[18] Mariana Otero, Interview with Bénédicte Pagnot. Rennes, France, October 23, 2003.

the story of Clotilde as a mother. Rather, it is the story of her as a woman and a person, who made a choice that did not fit within the parameters of the gendered barriers set up by the world that she inhabited. Accordingly, the film actively pushes back against anti-abortion discourse that would seek to ground feminine identity in a woman's potentiality for maternity, and not in desires or ambitions for her own self, as it tells the story of woman as human being.

Otero's film has thus far established her mother's body as a lost artifact in need of recovery, and perhaps as one whose stakes will reach far beyond private familial bonds. While the sisters' conversation about their respective memories of their mother is certainly impeded by the inability to recall those elements of their relationship with her that have been lost to time, they are clearly attempting to reveal truths about life with their mother, and not to shroud her life in secrecy as others have done. If they fail to reanimate a coherent image of their mother's form, it is largely due to the familial secrecy that prevented them from nurturing the faint memories they had of their mother in the first place. So, in order to recuperate their mother's image, it will be necessary to create a space in which a coherent memory of her can be formed.

The Reclamation of the Painted Body

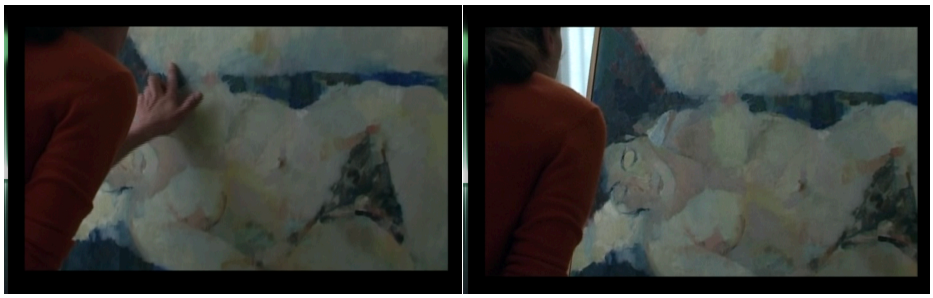
Now, the relationship between paintings as physical objects and their metaphysical capacity to reveal the truth begins to come into focus. We return once more to the notorious cupboard that has housed the forbidden paintings, and Otero begins to pluck them out of their tomb - this time for good. Again, though we have already seen a similar scene earlier in the film, the variety in the paintings' subjects that was murkily presented at the film's start is jettisoned for what is now an almost exclusive interest in representations of the nude female form. The focus on depictions of women's exposed bodies marks the start of its journey to bring Clotilde's

own embodied existence out from the bowels of secretive and taboo (H)istory. Otero takes the paintings to a (female) art appraiser, who mounts them on a wall. This gesture may appear and in fact be a routine one for the art professional, but it also serves as the first step in legitimizing Clotilde's art, which now merits space on a wall in plain view of others. Significantly, the scene is shot in full and clear daylight. The newfound background of light is of course a subtle aesthetic indicator of the scene's interest in truth and remembrance as opposed to the shadowed and secretive scenes that precede it.

As we learn later in the film, Clotilde died more or less for the love of her art; she made the decision to terminate her pregnancy because she desired to further her career as an artist and felt that another child would have likely forced her to end her career. In this sense, although Antonio's decision to lock the paintings away is understandable within the context of his own trauma, it was one that not only did a disservice to his curious children, but to the memory of Clotilde herself. Accordingly, the inclusion of this appraiser, who by profession judges and validates art, effectively jump-starts the recuperation of Clotilde; her "missing body" will be reclaimed and restored through the exploration of her artistic self. Indeed, the art appraiser gives professional-grade validation to Clotilde's art, noting various conscious attentions to detail, stylistic choices by the artist, and most of all her promising talent.

But on a psychic level as well, the appraiser demonstrates the relationship between a tactile memory of Clotilde and the sensory experience of touching her paintings. As we recall from previous scenes, the inability of the Otero sisters to touch their mother's paintings in their youth or to look at photographs of her contributed to their shared impression in adulthood that they didn't really know who their mother was as a person. Now, the art appraiser walks amongst the paintings of naked women, who are of various shapes and sizes, laying her hands on their

painted breasts and genitals. As her fingers graze the canvases, the camera follows behind her and continually zooms to close-ups that give the viewer a clear view of raised texture that Clotilde's brushstrokes have created on their canvases. This filmic attention to the paintings' texture does not just permit the viewer to consider their status as material objects, but furthermore suggests their three-dimensional quality – a quality that, of course, that reminds us of the three-dimensional materiality of a real, physical body.



Emma Wilson notes that this scene "wraps together meanings in the film," as it establishes this kind of artistic attention as a form of bodily contact with the memory of Clotilde.[19] The woman laughs as she remarks Clotilde's obvious fondness for pubic hair, and indeed as she narrates her remarks, the camera moves to extreme-close ups of the paintings that all display the decidedly natural, distinctly "un-airbrushed" physiques of plump women, coupled with large mounds of pubic hair. In many of the paintings, women lie with their hips thrust out in positions that are sensual, but seem to suggest a position of repose rather than sexual invitation. Moreover, we can remark that these women are largely positioned in the same fashion as the ethereal maternal figure that once hung above Isabel's bed. Although this link of the completely nude subjects to a kind of maternity certainly does not de-eroticize their figures, I argue that it denies the viewer the opportunity to reduce this scene to one of the sexual objectification of the female form.

[19] Emma Wilson, "Museum Spaces in Palliative Art: Mariana Otero's *Histoire d'un secret*," *L'Esprit Créateur* 51, no. 1 (2011): 118.

The hands of the art appraiser on Clotilde's women and her appreciative words for their forms are thus also a return Irigaray's call to feminine subjectivity. Her unmistakably erotic touch, coupled with her assessment that recognizes the intentional sexuality of the paintings, do not diminish the bodies to objects that exist just for her pleasure, but situates them as the embodiment of Clotilde's worth and talent as an artist. The regular focus of Clotilde's paintbrush on natural and copious pubic hair obviously imparts onto them a certain sexuality and connection to the erotic. But their sexuality is a fully transgressive one, as it suggests a kind of feminine sexual subjectivity that eludes masculine objectification of the feminine form. Bataille's schema of sensuality and eroticism, for example, provides a vision of feminine beauty as "the more ethereal the shapes and the less clearly they depend on animal or on a human physiological reality."[20] This schema strips the idea of a feminine erotic of a realistic physicality so that most beautiful female form doesn't look like a woman at all. Clotilde's art may quite "erotically" focus the body's erogenous zones, but its eroticism refuses masculine desire and approaches Bataille's "animal aspect," revealing the hairy erotic that masculine objectification attempts to suppress. They are openly erotic in both form and content, but resist taking on the "ethereal" lack of realism that encourages a masculine kind of objectification. Clotilde's painted women do not exist as objects to be consumed by others (or by an Other), but to be appreciated as subjects existing unto themselves.

Monteiro interprets a sort of pain in these portraits and believes that "it is hard not to see in the curvy nudes an implicit hint at maternity and, by extension, an unwitting metaphor for her own undesired pregnancy. As such, the paintings thus bear the hidden clues as a result of her

[20] Georges Bataille, *Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo* (Walker and Company: New York, 1962), 143-146.

failed abortion."[21] Perhaps it is possible to interpret the depiction of a kind of maternity in Clotilde's paintings of decidedly not pregnant subjects; indeed, this is more or less what Isabel once did when she admitted to speaking (and listening) to one such portrait as if it were a maternal figure. But the suggestion that the image of a curvy woman should or does imply a "hint at maternity" would seem to negate the very essence of Clotilde's paintings. Rather than slimming her subjects or erasing their imperfections to allow them to better conform to cultural standards of feminine beauty, the artist represented women as they were, and not as they supposedly should be. There is no logic that dictates one must view these bodies as maternal as a byproduct of their round shapes no more than we need view Clotilde's body as one that must accept maternity by virtue of its female sex; maternity need not be an inherent imprint on the female sexual body.

To this end, I rebuke a mournful interpretation of the paintings, and understand them rather as a triumph of the female form existing for itself and to its own ends. In this sense, Clotilde's art is able to achieve what the artist herself was ultimately unable to; they are the everlasting pictures of women whose forms do not exist just for sexual excitement (or for maternity, for that matter). Clotilde's body was swallowed by the sexist injustice of her world, but the bodies of her subjects live on for eternity. Their *jouissance* is a defiant reclamation of Petchetsky's visual realm, as they express an erotic, feminine body that exists to its own end. Accordingly, the camera that brings the viewer to the closest kind of contact possible to these triumphant figures begins to allow for the restoration of their creator's lost body.

With the paintings as artistic objects given a proper analysis, Otero turns to an exploration of the artist as a subject herself. She purchases an apartment in which the family

[21] Marlène Monteiro, "The Body as Interstitial Space between Media in *Leçons de Ténèbres* by Vincent Dieutre and *Histoire d'un secret* by Mariana Otero," *Acta Univ. Spaientiae, Film and Media Studies* 7 (2013): 113.

briefly resided when she was a child, and that her mother had used as a studio space. In the scenes that follow, Mariana transforms the apartment into a sort of memorial space for her mother. Here, her image will not passively fade into the annals of forgotten history, and her existence as a worthy individual can finally achieve active remembrance. Otero covers the furniture and the walls in ivory sheets that cover the entire apartment, casting the entirety of the background of scenes shot in the apartment in a luminous white. This is likely a sort of practical and preservative measure, but it also further symbolizes the space's purpose as a place of truthfulness and truth telling. Unlike the shadowy rooms where Clotilde's paintings were hidden away, where Mariana and Isabel couldn't remember the details of their mother, or where a man who knew Clotilde accuses Mariana of bringing up things that should remain buried, the apartment becomes a space where others who knew Clotilde actively remember her existence as both painter and woman; it is in this space that Clotilde begins to take shape as a real human being that once existed in the world. Finally, it is the space in which her father will finally reveal the truth of Clotilde's death, and where we are asked to come to terms with her humanity as a woman who chose abortion.

The first visitor that Otero brings to her mother's artist's den is Isabel. As we recall, the sisters' first conversation revolved mostly around their inability to remember their mother's actual body and person. Now however, Isabel suddenly delves into an extremely detailed description of her mother's body as she walks around the small apartment. The camera follows her through the apartment, suggesting that she is organically discovering the newfound space and its memories along with the viewer. When she sees a room in which she remembers her mother once changing clothes, she is suddenly struck with the capacity to describe the vivid memory of seeing her mother naked for the first time. Isabel details the image of cellulite on her mother's

skin and recalls the distinct and direct awareness that she "had a fat mother." Isabel's fixation on her mother's weight may seem mildly cruel, and it may indeed seem curious that the filmmaker decides to include this comment in a film so focused on recuperating her mother's image.

But just as Isabel's painting and the flashes of family photos gave at least some idea of Clotilde's corporeal form, this description of her real physical self also begins to allow her body to take shape within the film. Though Mariana neither verbally agrees with nor refutes her sister's near obsession with the idea that their mother was overweight, one cannot help but draw a link between the image that Isabel's words paint of the real Clotilde with the voluptuous figures that she painted. This new description would again seem to refute the link that Monteiro draws between a subconscious maternity and the bodies in the paintings; fittingly too, as Isabel muses on her mother's corpulence, she remarks that Clotilde's figure was "un peu comme dans ses tableaux."[22] The connection between the bodies in Clotilde's art and her own lost body are evident in both the film's visuals and in the dialogue of its subjects, and again points to the capacity for the recuperation of this art to result in truthful and honorary remembrance of Clotilde herself.

After Isabel's introductory visit comes a line of more friends of the family, who happily continue filling in the contours of the lost memory of Clotilde. One of her male friends from art school marvels at how much more talented Clotilde was than he, recalling her raw gift and intuition. In his words, she was "beaucoup plus mûre que tous les autres étudiants." His personal descriptions of the lost woman serve to build up Clotilde as not just the ethereal mother figure that she was to her daughters, but as a fully-fledged human being outside of her maternal duties,

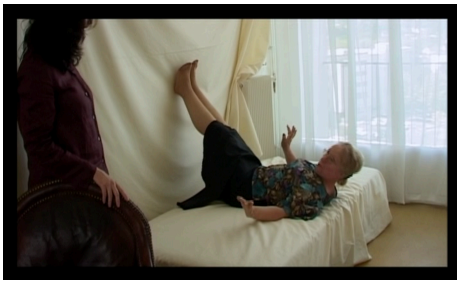
[22] Otero's camera does cut briefly to a few close shots to unfinished sketches of infants. It is unclear who they represent. If there is an aspect of Clotilde's art that could be a metaphor for her unplanned pregnancy and fatal abortion, as Monteiro suggests of her paintings of women, it is certainly these sketches that suggest an attempt at artistic connection with maternity that remained unachieved and ultimately abandoned.

with independent personality, direction and talent. Clotilde was more than her maternity. Standing in front of an easel that holds up one of Clotilde's nude portraits, the art school friend demonstrates to Mariana what he remembers to be her mother's style of painting, mimicking the way she would flick and brush paint onto her canvases. Though the camera moved with and behind Isabel through the apartment, it now stands still as it captures the man's lively reanimation of Clotilde's corporeal self as a painter, and his movements in front of her easel give the viewer the impression of receiving a window into Clotilde's own physicality as she once would have painted. With this highly animated scene of recollection, we are a long way from the missing body that the Otero sisters once sought on the streets of Paris, or the dress that Isabel feared to inhabit. A short exchange within the film, the inclusion of this person who is not just acquainted with Clotilde the artist, but with the professional side of the medium of painting, further serves to validate the memory of her art; she was a true talent, whose work deserves to be fully recognized and not lost to the vacuum of family secrets.

The next visitor to illuminate the space with memories of Clotilde's presence is a female friend who modeled for her vaunted nude portraits, and once again, the visitor's body is illuminated by the brightness of her surroundings. She stands with her back to a gauze-covered window that allows light to spill in, and the ivory sheets covering the walls next to her and Mariana are a continuation of the placement of set design and camera angles that highlight the space's luminosity. Just as with the art school friend, the model's animated body takes center stage, and she positions herself in the real poses in which Clotilde had once painted her. Mariana zooms out to a wider shot that puts the easel in the forefront of the shot, and the woman instructs Mariana to stand in front of her late mother's easel. The filmmaker walks into the shot and takes a spot in front of the prop – and so just as the male art school friend has just done,

metaphysically takes the place of her artist mother. Previous visuals like Clotilde's uninhabited dress on Isabel's couch highlighted Clotilde's absence in the present-day world; these filmed bodies give us the impression of a physical body on screen is standing in for Clotilde's missing one and the sensation that Clotilde's spirit looms within the apartment.

While the limp dress that the Otero sisters had laid on the couch represented a failed attempt to reanimate Clotilde, the apartment scenes use the physical bodies of its subjects to fill its space with her presence. Another model friend becomes emotional as she gazes upon the parts of the apartment in which she once sat for and with Clotilde. Where the sisters struggled earlier to conjure distinct memories of their mother, this woman fills the room with the spirit of Clotilde's presence, and expresses that she remembers her late friend "perfectly": "il y avait tellement de bons souvenirs avec elle" she says, spiraling into long, intimate stories of the time she spent posing for and chatting with Clotilde in the apartment. While the interviews that failed to revive her memory were categorically shot in dim light, these new interviews that give us a clear understanding of Clotilde's personal identity are accentuated by the striking clarity and luminosity in which they are filmed. The memories of Clotilde's old friends create a definitive and unmistakable reconstruction of her existence as human being and begin to allow her lost body to leave the realm of ghostly abstraction, and finally take shape.



To this end, I understand this apartment as a memorial space for Clotilde as a woman and as a painter. A film whose interviews were initially conducted in darkness trades secretive shadows for the lightness of active remembrance. It is clear that the memory of her life and of her death have been shut away for far too long and was hidden away in stories that were either too painful to tell, or seen as not worth telling at all. But of course, it is not only Clotilde's life that is in need of recollection, but her still mysterious death, to which those who have visited the apartment thus far have only made somber and short references.

The painted bodies of Clotilde's canvases and the art school friends certainly have powerful stories to tell about her life, but it still stands that the truth of Clotilde's death has up to this point belonged to men: the mystery man in the café, her gynecologist (a dismissive figure who appears later on in the film), and of course to her father. In the eyes of each of these male figures, it was better to keep this truth hidden rather than to reveal it to anyone; indeed, each man explicitly speaks to the lack of utility of making known the reality of Clotilde's death. For them, what is done is done, and the fact that speaking to Clotilde's abortion will not literally bring her back to life is enough reason to close the book on the story of her death. Again, to this end, the film acts as a demonstration of what happens as the burden of this truth is passed on from men to women. Mariana takes on the burden of discovering and knowing what happened to her mother, one that her father once carried alone and takes care to privilege the female voices of those that knew her, and to cultivate an empathetic and feminine understanding of the legacy of abortion in France. If the apartment is a space where the truth of her mother's self is being revealed, it is only right that this deepest and darkest of truths come to the surface therein. Now, Mariana's camera will tease the somber story of her mother's death out of its keeper: her father.

The Imprint of Abortion on the Body

The apartment's final visitor is Antonio. The camera signals his impending arrivals as it jump-cuts to close-ups of a series of portraits that all appear to be of the same man, just before cutting to medium shots of his real, physical body. These portraits slightly destabilize our consumption of Clotilde's art in their departure from the paintings of women, as the viewer has come to understand her oeuvre as a space for feminine liberty. But on a narrative level, this thematic destabilization serves to signify that an important change is about to come. After having met with him before in the neutral space of a car, Mariana brings him into the sacred apartment space where Clotilde is memorialized as an artist and remembered as a human being. The bodies that she painted, which often either resemble or represent her own form, are strewn throughout the apartment. Though they once were symbols of a memory too painful and traumatic to face, Antonio is now confronted with the material representations of his wife's ultimate sacrifice. Walking among the paintings, he verbally confirms himself to be the subject of the portraits just flashed on screen, thus providing another sensory link between his person and the art. He even comes upon a depiction of his own nude form pressed up against that of Clotilde and rather joyfully offers up to Mariana the details under which it was composed; the man who once hid these paintings away now is now offering up their intimate revelations. In essence, everything is now out in the open, both body and soul, and Antonio now finally begins to delve into the real story of his wife's death.

Her father's confession of the true cause of her mother's death is divided between two scenes: first, within the apartment and then later in a different home. Both scenes share the same dim lighting, and the division between the two halves of his story is not given narrative explanation. Here, I analyze together the two scenes that work in tandem to unmask the truth of

Clotilde's death. The beginning of Antonio's confession is almost certainly prefaced with a question from his daughter, but we only ever hear Antonio speak on camera. The memory of Clotilde's death obviously still weighs heavily upon him. He struggles to speak outright about what actually happened to his late wife, but begins by mentioning the apparition of the unwanted pregnancy in their lives. Perhaps surprisingly, this is the first time that a pregnancy is mentioned at all within the film, and the reference to it at first feels like a non-sequitur. Though he is standing when he begins to speak, the camera cuts to a new sequence, wherein he is notably seated with his back to us. Not even his profile is visible to the spectator and of the many interviews contained within the film, this is the only one in which the speaker does not face the camera. Instead, in his line of sight lies an empty easel. As the film and the apartment itself have been flooded with examples of Clotilde's material paintings, and with highly animated scenes in which bodies utilized said easel as a prop, the easel's striking and sudden emptiness now sharply brings us back to a consideration of the traumatic absence of Clotilde's body.

At first, Antonio's language skirts around mentioning abortion, and he instead uses words like "non prévu," "inconvenience," and "grave" to describe the pregnancy. However, his speech also gives us the first verbal mention of the word "abortion." The story he tells is a familiar one for anyone acquainted with the testimonies of women who underwent clandestine abortions before legalization.[23] The couple was both financially and emotionally unable to welcome another child into their life, but the doctors that they contacted refused to help them actually perform an abortion, even clandestinely. Antonio recounts that their doctor friends were only willing to provide them with the tube, or "sonde," expecting Clotilde to do the miscarriage-

[23] These testimonies can be found in a number of historical sources but have been mostly notably procured by feminist scholar Xavière Gauthier in her multiple books that have documented the testimonies of women who underwent clandestine abortions before its legalization.

inducing insertion herself. When things went wrong, the couple felt forced to lie to their doctor about Clotilde's bleeding. Antonio never mentions the laws that kept them and the doctors around them in fear, but he doesn't need to; the long-buried history of clandestine abortion looms implicitly behind his words. As his wife's condition worsened in the hospital to which she was finally admitted, there was no one to whom he could turn in his time of pain, knowing there were very real legal repercussions for the couple's decision. Not only did Antonio keep his silence to the doctor, but to other friends and family as well.

The revelation of the true cause of her mother's death immediately transforms the film from the personal story of maternal loss into a larger political statement about women and abortion in contemporary France. Notably, there is no voice over narration or textual explanation on screen that justifies the film's subsequent departure from the story of her mother's secret death.[24] Instead, the film simply cuts abruptly from her father's moving confession to a shot of Otero deep within an unidentified historical archive. The jarring jump-cut gives the viewer the impression that the move away from the personal towards the political was so urgent, that there was simply no time for narrative explanation. The scenes in the archive are perhaps the film's most physically dark; the filmmaker wears all black and is surrounded by wall-to-wall shelves filled completely with black folders containing the archives. Otero makes no attempt to remedy this darkness with a separate source of light, and so the archival space again serves as a reminder of the cultural and historical secrecy with which stories of clandestine abortion are treated at

[24] According to Otero's interview, she originally planned to mediate the film using a "voix-off" throughout, but ultimately deleted the voice-over narration because it often felt too "personal" and that it "empêchaient le spectateur de rentrer dans une dimension plus générale et plus universelle." This artistic choice of course furthermore highlights the political dimension of the film, which is not the simple revelation of a family secret, but an indictment of a disturbing cultural amnesia.

large. In other words, it isn't just her family that chooses to lock its historical reality away in the darkness, but French society itself.

The camera films Otero in a static sequence where she scans through newspaper articles from the 1950s and 1960s that begin to form a short history of abortion in France around the time of her mother's death. Cross-cut into shots of the filmmaker are full screen images of newspapers and other historical documents that tell the stories of parliamentary debate around the procedure and of abortionists caught and fined. With this, the larger historical record that lurked behind Antonio's personal recollection of Clotilde's traumatic journey to abort is explicitly brought to the surface and face-to-face with the viewer. The forgotten and buried reality of abortion's deadly past cannot be denied as it is depicted in large, unmistakable words on the screen.

Otero also sifts through articles on public record whose tales mimic that of her mother's long buried secret story, about women who also died as a result of a clandestine abortions gone wrong in the years prior to legalization. From here, again with no narrative explanation for her actions, Otero begins to telephone people that she believes to be relatives of the women that she finds in these articles. Here, the documentary appears to quite unambiguously breach generally-accepted ethical boundaries of documentary film-making, ignoring principles of informed consent, and treating these real subjects as means to her film's own ends.[25] Rather shockingly,

[25] Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 1-20.

the filmmaker even opts to include the full names of the people she contacts and goes so far as to include subtitles on screen for her sometimes-hushed conversations. This move effectively puts the viewer face to face with the names of these living descendants of women who were victims like Clotilde, and who like the filmmaker herself, have perhaps grown up with different versions of the deaths of their female relatives.[26]

Otero fixates on the story of one woman who, like her mother, died of a clandestine abortion in the 1960s. However, while Clotilde's story remained a total secret until the present day, Otero finds the story of this woman's fate in a newspaper clipping detailing her cause of death and proceeds to attempt to contact her living relatives. The filmmaker is hung up on, told never to call again, and even informed by the woman's sister that the family never told her children how she died and that they would like to keep it that way – a direct parallel, of course, to the situation of the Vautier/Otero family. But moreover, the interaction perhaps helps the viewer to reframe the curious remarks of Otero's aunt at the beginning of the film, who had admitted that it was not unusual to have kept even the basic fact that Clotilde had passed from her daughters in the weeks that followed her demise. In exchanges such as these, the film suggests the depths of a cultural framework under which certain kinds of truths are not meant to be shared, even with family. With the filmed telephone call then, Otero upends these epistemological barriers and forces once buried bodily truths out into the open.

Still, this scene calls into question the ethical implications of this kind of epistemological quandary: to whom does the burden of bodily or "reproductive" secrets like that of these clandestine abortions belong? Are there truths that are so politically urgent that they must be told

[26] It is unclear whether or not those mentioned in the film legally agreed to have their names mentioned on camera. It is equally unclear whether or not Otero contacted other families that she chose not to mention – only one is given screen time. Whatever the case may be, the film is edited in such a way as to suggest that those she does contact to not wish to be a part of the film, in which she includes them anyway.

at any cost? To return to Sedgwick and Tuana's epistemological frameworks outlined at the outset of the chapter, we must recall that in the years following Clotilde's death, there quite literally was not language with which to truthfully (or empathetically) speak about what happened to her. Now that there does exist a kind of language with which to talk frankly about the historical reality of abortion, as taboo as it may remain, Mariana seems disinterested in what its ethical boundaries may be. While her film suggests that she didn't exactly learn about the true cause of her mother's death on her own terms, the viewer must also confront the uncomfortable reality that should any of this other woman's children happen upon her film, they are in for an overwhelming and potentially traumatic discovery. If men such as the family friend and her father can be seen as unfairly locking Clotilde's story away and misjudging it as one that is best left lost to history, Otero's search for the truth of women like her mother may now to swing too far in the other direction. Though her film may have the noble goal of shedding light on the gendered injustices that women suffered under misogynistic French regimes, the film does nothing to address the other kinds of personal costs that can accompany the revelation of political truths.

This troublesome interpretation of Otero's investigatory prowess aside, the film obviously does not seek to present her revelatory findings as problematic. Rather, it regards stories that mirror Clotilde's as a continuum of the cultural erasure of lives that are deemed as "unworthy" of being understood, be they too far in the past to matter or too painful to be revealed to the outside world. While the director's decision to include in her film the stories of people who would clearly rather be left alone may certainly be an invasion of privacy, the refusal of other families to talk about the clandestine abortion of their own female relative serves as a narrative reminder of the still deeply engrained shame around this procedure; if, for example, the

woman had died of appendicitis, or even of a more similar cause such as miscarriage, one can hardly imagine them responding to Otero's inquiries for comment with such rancor. Perhaps, it is here that we can begin to truly understand the power of the Otero's medium in the shedding of historical lack-of-consciousness with respect to abortion. Bill Nichols writes of the relationship between documentary film and historical consciousness that:

> The contemporary search for alternative forms of representation parallels a waning of historical consciousness itself. It accompanies a new dimension to historical questioning. The modern event…eludes traditional historical understanding. Questions arise that traditional storytelling techniques cannot answer. Too much of that excess magnitude we invoke by saying "history," too much noise or dissonance, too many loose ends and dangling uncertainties remain … Some of the most pressing [questions] – part of the dissonance or noise within traditional historiography – involve the border zones of realism and the figures of subjectivity and consciousness we find inhabiting them.[27]

History, French or otherwise, has rarely been kind to women. In the possible "excess" of past injustices and inequalities that continue to impact women's place in the contemporary world, the small section of (H)istory related to abortion, and its clandestine practice prior to legalization, perhaps understandably becomes lost in the fray. If traditional (and perhaps, ethical) storytelling techniques have failed to empathetically grapple with the legacy of clandestine abortion, Otero's hybrid narrative techniques are working to do just this. This film's recurrent marriage between fictional narrative and documentation of facts creates an "alternative" way of bringing abortion back into the visual realm, that refuses the waning of public consciousness about its reality in women's lives. The many parallels between personal stories and political ones help the viewer draw political meaning from the late Clotilde's art as they bring forgotten pieces of French history out of the shadows.

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[27] Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 118-121.

As Antonio demonstrates, the past of abortion was a literally unspeakable one that removed the word from the cultural realm by real legal boundaries. But if it remains within the realm of the "unspeakable" in the present day, it is only because the story of abortion has been historically imprinted as one that doesn't merit being told. Indeed, the *histoire d'un secret* that gives the film's its title is exactly the story of the secret of Clotilde's abortion: this is a film that reinserts abortion both into the visual realm and into the historical record. To take these once unspeakable stories them from those "border zones" of traditional historiography, and to resituate them as ones that *must* be told, is to "model a future" in which abortion is not a taboo shame, but a reproductive experience that deserves cultural empathy.

In the first half of the film, we were introduced to the ways in which Clotilde's body has been erased from her family's memory and the extent to which this trauma imports on the truth-telling mission of the film. As Otero investigates the broader secretive history of clandestine abortion as a practice at large, the importance of Clotilde's abortion in the understanding of her personal life story also begins to truly come into focus; a complete restoration of her image cannot be one that still buries portions of the truth of her existence. To continue to leave out the narrative of her abortion would be to continue to assert that it is a reproductive experience too abject to insert into the realm of language.

So, as the film pieces back together the many lost facets of its subject's short life, we see that the full display of her identity as a woman will also necessitate the uncovering of this uncomfortable and long unspeakable bodily truth. The story of Clotilde has been "missing" from the lives of her descendants. But the larger story about abortion in which she is only a small piece equally remained equally hidden from the collective historical consciousness. This artistic exploration into both the personal life of a woman who lost her own to an abortion serves as a

conduit through which the filmmaker is able to explore questions about abortion that have remained on the margins of culture. So while this sequence may push past certain ethical boundaries, the filmmaker pulls the focus of her film's story away from the narration and exploration of person trauma in order to direct its rhetorical energy to the explosion of the boundaries that clearly still prevent an empathetic cultural understanding of abortion. The "past situation" that has resulted in current silence must be confronted to create a future in which abortion is not treated as unspeakable abject.

Medicalizing History

The largely patriarchal power structures that have reinforced widespread cultural silence about abortion are confronted head-on when Otero turns to interview the male gynecologist that cared for her mother around the time of her death. While he helped birth both Mariana and her sister, he had no part in the abortion. The gynecologist is happy to answer her facile and friendly "warm-up questions" concerning these previous pregnancies, but begins to falter when she moves towards a discussion of the third and fatal one. In an attempt to demonstrate the moral importance of their conversation, Mariana notes another reminder of abortion's place on the margins of traditional historical consciousness, remarking that "ça reste une histoire cachée… même trente ans après, c'est une histoire difficile à raconter." Her declaration is an inherently normative one that obviously suggests her position that this story does not deserve to remain hidden or untellable in the supposedly more liberal present day.

However, the response of the gynecologist largely mimics that of the man she spoke to in the café; he questions the utility of speaking about what happened to Clotilde over 30 years after her death, and also wonders, what difference it makes how she died when there is nothing that

can be done today to change it. It is clear that for him, there is little, if any, relationship between the clandestine past of abortion and the present in which it is legal, and that there is no instrumental value in reflecting upon a sad subset of history that cannot be altered. The gendered interplay between keeping secrets and revealing truths is again underscored in this exchange, where the female director directly confronts a man who is confident that abortion narratives like Clotilde's aren't worth investigating or talking about. Now, he may not, and may never have, disdained the practice of abortion itself. But his unwillingness to consider the broader implications of his late patient's story, that mimics similar dispositions displayed by the interviews in the archival scenes, is an attitude that continue to import on what kinds of reproductive experiences are still understood as legitimate in the French cultural "story so far," to return to Nichols's historical language.

Obviously not satisfied with leaving the political side of her mother's story hidden beneath the veil of history, Otero again emphasizes the narrative power of this gendered contrast between truth and secrecy as she cuts to an interview with a female doctor. The woman's name is never given, as has become custom within the film, but the discerning viewer may recognize her as Joëlle Brunerie-Kauffmann, a gynecologist and activist who partook in televised debates advocating for the legalization of abortion in the early 1970s, and who also signed the *Manifeste des 343*.[28] The interview takes place in an overwhelmingly and almost uncomfortably bright hospital room. As the dimly lit interview with the male gynecologist once more demonstrated the continued secrecy surrounding the historical realities of abortion in France, the impassioned

[28] This is truly to the detriment of the casual viewer, as one must be familiar with the woman's face already in order to understand the significance of her presence in the film. For more information on Ms. Brunerie-Kauffmann and her activism, see Bibia Pavard, *Si je veux, quand je veux: Contraception et avortement dans la société française (1956-1979)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012).

words of this medical activist in a stark white space will bring us face to face with the political urgency of its cultural consideration.

Brunerie-Kauffmann provides a vital foil to the male doctor and his case for keeping the reproductive past in the past; she appears to be approximately his age and also worked in hospitals during this period of secrecy and shame. Importantly, she has no discernable personal connection to the Vautier/Otero family, and the insertion of her narrative into the film once again solidifies its connection to a larger narrative about political truths. Mariana seeks to recuperate her mother's image, yes, but her film also serves as an unambiguous reminder that when it comes to reproductive realities such as abortion, the personal and the political are inextricably intertwined. While the male doctor has little to say about the tragedy of Clotilde's death, and exactly nothing to say about clandestine abortion as a practice itself, Brunerie-Kauffmann is overflowing with detail and passionately recalls the graphic harm that women would inflict upon themselves in the hopes of terminating unwanted pregnancies.

Importantly at first, Brunerie-Kauffmann does not use the word abortion as she opens up a testimonial window into its past. She recalls her time as a young hospital worker under the supervision of nuns, at first unable understand the euphemistic language young women would use to describe their "conditions." Her indirect language forces the viewer to interpret her words in a way that again highlights the "unspeakability" of the word abortion and its practice. In a way, she briefly immerses the viewer in a world where frank discussion of abortion wasn't possible, and in which it was necessary to be able to speak (or interpret) the coded language that could unlock its secret. Like Clotilde and Antonio, the women she came into contact with were forced to communicate their bodily and reproductive problems through euphemism or outright lie, risking both their lives and their freedom to do so. The truth of their situations was simply

incapable of being put into language. While the male gynecologist saw fit to leave such stories forgotten and unturned, this woman's recollections corroborate the experiences of women who have chosen abortion throughout French history: her testimony validates the existence of both the abortions that women underwent and the humanity of the women themselves.

Brunerie-Kauffmann describes the "sondes" that women (including Clotilde) would insert into themselves, a technique she situates as a part of "tout ce qu'on a trouvé dans la littérature depuis des siècles." This reference to a recordable history of clandestine abortion's successful methodology is a subtle reversal of the epistemologies of ignorance that have been unraveled by the film thus far; her words suggest that its knowledge has been consciously hidden from the public by women and their allies in order to keep the practice possible, and off the radar of those who would suppress it. But even given this network of knowledge, there was nearly no way to tell who would be sympathetic or privy to this countercultural parlance. She says that for those who came to her seeking help after botched or incomplete abortions, "il y avait une telle peur…un tel tabou." This fear paralyzed not just the women who underwent abortions, but doctors like her as well, who were explicitly instructed *not* to help women finish their abortions under penalty of law.

With this in mind, we can perhaps extend some residual sympathy for the male gynecologist, who may still feel "conditioned" to keep such stories quiet. But the reminder of the former, repressive role of the law furthermore underlines how politically powerful stories like Brunerie-Kauffmann continue to be. While the word abortion doesn't even enter into the conversation with the family gynecologist, this female doctor now uses it repeatedly, thus forcing the viewer to come to terms with not just the abstraction of a "secret history" of women, but with the actual procedure for which so many died. While the fear that once plagued women

who sought abortions has dissipated to a large extent in the present day, the film shows that its "taboo" nature is hardly a thing of the past.

Her testimony furthermore gives a different perspective on the film's political message, and on the importance of articulating the smaller histories that "elude traditional understanding" and work against the "waning of historical consciousness" put forward above by Nichols. Otero remarks during the interview that the world has "tout fait pour oublier" the sordid history of clandestine abortion. This is certainly true, but Brunerie-Kauffmann contends that women who abort today do not even consider that the decision to end a pregnancy was something that they could once have died for. Thus, she puts the animus of understanding history on present-day women and families, as opposed to a broader authority such as the government. She remarks that the truth and cover-up of Clotilde's cause of death is not an anomalous family secret of the Vautier/Otero clan, but a small piece of a much bigger culture of silence and ignorance with respect to clandestine abortion and admits that she is personally aware of a number of families that have performed the exact same form of cover-up. Both Mariana's (borderline unethical) telephone conversations in the archives and her interview with Brunerie-Kauffmann solidify our understanding of the epistemology of ignorance with respect to the historical story of abortion. It has been willfully buried by both government and citizens and cast off as "unsayable" and "unknowable." If women in contemporary France are unaware of the frightening past of clandestine abortion, it is in large part because this history has been kept secret.

The film may have shifted in tone from an intimate familial story to a broader sociopolitical one, but it turns to one last interlude of personal remembrance. Mariana's conducts her final interview with the same set of relatives who served as the film's first interviewed subjects, and who do truly seem to be under the impression that Clotilde died of appendicitis. As

she begins to explain to her relatives that they do not actually know Clotilde's true cause of death, she lets slip that her father only informed her of it, "il n'y a pas longtemps…quand j'avais trente ans." The filmmaker's words fleetingly reveal the film's central artifice. Her father's previous confession, which appeared to be a dramatic disclosure to the filmmaker, was rather a constructed plotline whose purpose was to push the viewer through the same odyssey that she once lived. She hesitates to speak the truth to her relatives before relenting, thus verbally mimicking her father's own struggle to put the abortion into words earlier in the film.

They are surprised to learn what killed Clotilde, but quickly add that of course, truthfulness would not have been an option for Antonio. This reaction plunges us back into the "originary dark" that clouded an active remembrance of Clotilde at the film's beginning, where the abortion was an unspoken taboo; to them, it is obvious, and hardly outrageous, that Mariana's father was unable to speak to even Clotilde's closest family members about his wife's death. While the film may have opened up to a broader conversation about the practice at large, the intimate nature of the film's final interview is a reminder that when it comes to polemics such as abortion, the political cannot be extricated from the personal. Indeed, their immediate understanding of Antonio's need to be untruthful about his wife's deadly situation recalls the words of Brunerie-Kauffmann, who helped women who felt trapped in the same impossible position. Mariana has seen firsthand the pain that the weight of this secret had caused her father, and she points out that speaking about it would have likely been therapeutic to him – a concern her family members quickly dismiss by reminding her that at the time, abortion was not yet "dans les moeurs." Antonio could not speak of his wife's traumatic death because it was caused by a procedure that did not exist in the moral structure of his world.

As Brunerie-Kauffman suggested above, the idea that seeking out an abortion was a deadly prospect for French women in the not so distant past is nearly incomprehensible in today's world.[29] Even so, it is certainly understood in contemporary France that abortion was not always legal, and most French citizens are familiar with the "loi Veil" just as most Americans are familiar with *Roe v. Wade*. However, it is less widely known that the Veil law was contingent on continual renewal and that abortion remained in the Code Pénal until 1994. It was not until a 2014 provision that the language of the Veil law was changed from demanding that women who wish to abort be in a "situation de détresse" to simply being "qui ne souhaite pas poursuivre sa grossesse": a distinction which technically meant that until almost the present day, women in France had the legal obligation to prove that pregnancy would cause them distress.[30] With the epistemological frameworks of Tuana and Sedgwick in mind, these legal-linguistic details matter immensely. Abortion cannot *entrer dans les mœurs* even in the contemporary so long as it is burdened with the stain of criminality. While Brunerie-Kauffmann speaks rather dismissively about women in the present day and their lack of understanding of the political urgency of abortion rights, other contemporary sources would seem to tell a different story. The feminist review *Pro-choix* has recently lamented that:

> L'Avortement admis dans certaines circonstances, n'est donc toujours pas reconnu comme une pratique légitime…Seule la libre disposition de notre corps sera une réelle victoire. Quand ce corps sera enfin débarrassé des connotations péjoratives qu'y attache notre société…Quand chaque femme aura le choix devant la maternité.[31]

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[29] This post-legalization disconnect with abortion's deadly and dangerous past will be echoed in Colombe Schneck's memoir *Dix-sept ans*, in which she recounts the legal abortion she had as a teenager. I discuss her work in a following chapter.

[30] This is another spot where the United States has curiously been more liberal with respect to abortion in France; women in the United States have never been legally required to give a "reason" for choosing abortion.

[31] "L'ONU, le Vatican, les pro-lifes et Peking" *Pro choix* 14 (2000): 11.

This very year, *Le Monde* referred to abortion (or, "l'IVG") as "un sujet extrêmement sensible," with recent presidential elections only serving to "[réveiller] les passions" of both sides of the political spectrum.[32] Abortion may be far from the cultural taboo that it once was, but as de Beauvoir warned, the lack of vigilance lamented by an activist like Brunerie-Kauffmann is exactly what precedes the disappearance of women's rights.[33] Thus, Otero's exploration of her mother's life and death attempts to upend both the individual and the cultural repression of abortion's reality, as she urges the viewer to recognize her mother's abortion as a conscious and informed decision that was a part of who she was. Accordingly, the film's wider investigation into the history of reproductive rights is far from a morally neutral inquiry about a forgotten part of the past. Rather, it is a normative demand to extend this empathetic understanding to all women who choose abortion.

Respectful Remembrance of Body and Person

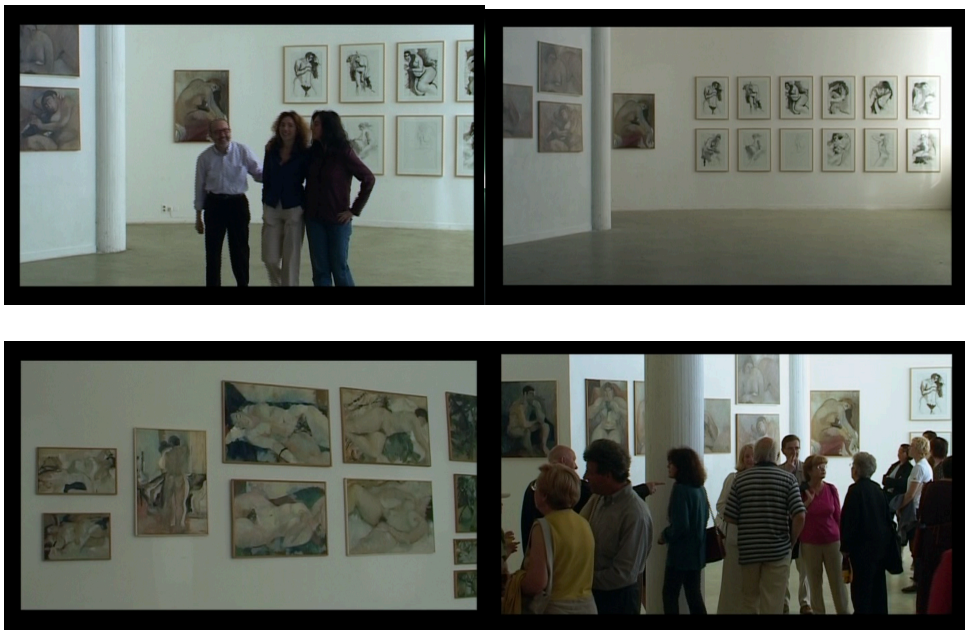
With this understanding of the final missing piece of Clotilde's corporeal existence in place, the reality of her body is epistemologically solidified, and the film can proceed to its final movement: the exhibition of Clotilde's painted sensual bodies. Antonio actively helps Mariana prepare for the exhibition of Clotilde's lost paintings. He is shown taking the paintings out of storage and gently preparing them for transportation; his careful desire to preserve the paintings still present, he now takes part in the act of showing them to the world instead of leaving them in

[32] "A l'Assemblée, la question de l'IVG reste un sujet sensible," *Le Monde,* December 3, 2016. http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/12/03/la-defense-maladroite-de-l-ivg_5042868_3224.html.

[33] "Il suffira d'une crise politique, économique ou religieuse pour que les droits des femmes soient remis en question. Ces droits ne sont jamais acquis. Vous devrez rester vigilantes votre vie durant." attributed to Simone de Beauvoir.

the darkness of the painful past. As he and Marian drive, ostensibly towards the art exhibition, he speaks once more of the guilt that has consumed him over the years and reveals to Mariana his wife's last words: "et ce bateau…où va-t-il?" The revelation of her last words, that imply a poetic sort of movement, would seem to be the last step in putting Clotilde to rest; her life and her body have been completely brought out of the shadows, and the film is ready for its final movement of respectful remembrance of her life's work.

No longer locked away in dark cupboards, her art is displayed for all to see. Real, present-day bodies now come face to face with her painted and everlasting ones. We are not just looking at the work of a real person who existed, but a real artist who, thanks to the excavatory work of her equally artistic daughter, is finally receiving the recognition she was not able to achieve in her lifetime. The walls of the exhibition space are a luminous white that mimics the apartment space in which Clotilde's self began to take shape. Clotilde's painted bodies are hung on its walls, covering the gallery. In the film's final shots, Mariana walks down the hall of these painted bodies, and is joined by her father and her sister. Surrounded by Clotilde's paintings, the family is finally together again: three physical bodies enclosed by Clotilde's artistic one. This intimate family gathering opens up to a larger exhibition, and the room is filled with the appreciation of her artistic corpus. The bodies of women who choose abortion have been repressed from the visual realm and hidden from historical consciousness. Through the medium of film, Otero reanimates her mother's hidden body and asks us to come to terms with the humanity of a woman who lost her life through an unspeakable procedure, for her own individuality.



Through her daughter's investigations, Clotilde's missing body is found and restored. She lives on now in Mariana's continued efforts to showcase her art and her life both online and in physical art exhibitions. The field of aesthetic philosophy has, for example, long grappled with the question of the moral responsibility of art: can such a burden truly exist – and should artists care if it does? Otero's film serves as an emphatic yes, through its investigation into the cultural cover-up of narratives of clandestine abortion, that also gives value to her mother's life. From a film brimming with moral accusations and conclusions, I turn to a writer with a different, perhaps complicated, relationship to the moral responsibility of art: Annie Ernaux, and her auto-fictive abortion narratives. Ernaux' graphic body as depicted in her text will push the limits of representations of abortion in art.

Chapter Two

The Graphic Body: Words for the Unsayable in Annie Ernaux

In Otero's documentary, the imprint of abortion on the body is presented as a secret that must be uncovered by a younger generation. Its excavation in the works of Annie Ernaux, however, relies on the animus of the aborting subject herself to accomplish the same task. Ernaux has done an enormous amount of work as both writer and subject (of her own writing) for the visibility, and even the possibility, of abortion as a literary topos in French women's writing. As Christine Détrez and Anne Simon remark,

> Le but de l'écrivaine sera précisément, dès 1974, avec son premier roman de combler cette lacune politique et artistique et de rendre compte d'une réalité qui n'existait pas encore dans le champs littéraire: il s'agit donc de lui accorder une reconnaissance symbolique, avant qu'Ernaux n'y revienne pour réinscrire par ricochet l'avortement dans le vécu.[1]

To be clear, Ernaux was not the only woman writing about abortion in the years that preceded its legalization in France. Notably, lawyer and abortion advocate Gisèle Halimi detailed her own experience undergoing a clandestine abortion as an adult in the 1960s in her autobiography, *La cause des femmes,* published a year before Ernaux's first novel *Les armoires vides*. But as younger writers like Lorette Nobécourt and Colombe Schneck have remarked, Ernaux's auto-fictional accounts that describe in accurate detail the *épreuve* of abortion were monumental and highly visible steps towards putting into words what was, as Détrez and Simone remark, a practice without literary representation. Ernaux's narratives, produced by one of the most notable faces of contemporary French women's writing who also underwent abortion herself, dug out a

[1] Christine Détrez and Anne Simon, *A leur corps defendant: les femmes à l'épreuve du nouvel ordre moral* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 145.

path for later women writers like Nobécourt and Schneck to put their own experiences into words.

Annie Ernaux's two pieces about abortion, *Les armoires vides* (1974) and *L'Evénement* (2000), are widely different narratives, but the stories their protagonists tell are painted upon almost identical backdrops; they are both first person accounts of a university student from a working-class family who undergoes a clandestine abortion in the 1960s. *Les armoires vides* tells the tale of Denise Lesur, the brilliant daughter of unhappy working-class parents who own a grocery. She becomes pregnant by her bourgeois boyfriend, who takes for granted that she will go about the dangerous task of procuring an abortion. While the novel begins and ends with Denise on the clandestine "medical table" of a *faiseuse d'anges*, the bulk of its narrative is dedicated to other facets of the protagonist's investigation into self-discovery. In a sense, *L'Evénement* tells a parallel story from a much different vantage point, whose homodiegetic narrator now shares her name with its author. The story is formatted as a kind of memoir, in which she recalls the months surrounding the abortion she had as a college student, including flashbacks and peeks into the journal that she kept at the time. The young Annie, like Denise before her, also finds herself pregnant by a disinterested university paramour and recounts the details of her arduous journey to locate someone who would perform an abortion, of the procedure itself, and of its complicated aftermath that left her forever changed.

While one could finish *Les armoires vides* (or Otero's film, *Histoire d'un secret*, for that matter) without much understanding of what a clandestine abortion entailed (and can still entail) on a physical level, Ernaux leaves nothing to the imagination in *L'Evénement*, whose reader comes quite graphically face-to-face with the mechanics of clandestine abortion. Though scholars, and the author herself, agree that *L'Evénement* should not be viewed as a simple

continuation or more detailed version of *Les armoires vides*, the narrative similarities between the two cannot be denied.[2] While *Les armoires vides* is about a woman who has gone through an abortion – to be sure, a precarious premise for a novel at the time of its publication, before the legalization of abortion in France – *L'Evénement* is about the abortion itself, and the effects of both unwanted pregnancy and its termination on the female body.

Effectively then, the events recounted within *L'Evénement* are almost exclusively related to the narrator's abortion and her desperate quest to procure it. Throughout, Ernaux's prose carefully, and often quite clinically, details the effects of this quest on not just the narrator's mental state, but on her body as well. At the narrative's close, she writes that her goal has been to "mettre en mots ce qui m'apparaît comme une expérience humaine totale, de la vie et de la mort, du temps, de la morale et de l'interdit, de la loi, une expérience vécue d'un bout à l'autre à travers du corps."[3] Taken out of context, and if unaware that she was speaking about abortion, one could imagine that the narrator is referring to almost any formative experience that could happen to any person: a totally human experience, if not a slightly taboo one, to which any person could relate on some sort of psychic level. As I begin my analysis of the work as a whole, I take this closing statement to be the backbone of the political thesis of the text. Not only will she present abortion as a possible part of the human experience, but as one that is lived and felt *à travers du corps*: via the physical body itself, and as such, an experience that requires us to empathize with the situation of the body just as much her emotional state.

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[2] Loraine Day has, for example, noticed that not only do the accounts of undergoing abortion in the two works not contradict themselves, but that they are narrative parallels to the (brief) references to abortion recounted in other works by Ernaux, including *Se perdre* and *Ce qu'ils disent ou rien* in "L'écriture dans l'entre-deux temporel: une étude de L'Evénement," in *Annie Ernaux: un œuvre de l'entre-deux*, ed. Fabrice Thumerel (Arrais: Artois Presses Universitaires, 2004), 57-70.

[3] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 111-112.

As I will detail below, abortion has, even after its legalization, long lingered as an abjection on the margins of culture: not to be spoken of and thought to be undertaken only by certain kinds of immoral women. In other words, abortion continues to be understood as a feminine anomaly undeserving of the empathy or understanding of the general public. In this chapter, I demonstrate the ways in which the graphic bodily language of *L'Evénement*, that delineates the growing loss of the narrator's self-understanding during her pregnancy, implores the reader to recognize, and thus to empathize with, the place of the physical body in the creation of a personal identity and sense of self. We come to see that this general materialist argument has specific, gendered meaning for women who intend to terminate an undesired pregnancy. I argue that as the text presents the case that her bodily state whilst seeking out abortion becomes "morally unknowable," we simultaneously become privy to the sort of epistemic unmooring of identity that accompanies her unknowable state. Thus, our reading and understanding of the narrator's situation as presented in the text acts as an "interpretation" of her once unspeakable experience, thus asserting the recognition of abortion in the sociocultural order. This graphic body of work and its highly corporeal language ask us to come to terms with the humanity of women who abort and the ways in which they as individuals never fit into the easy political categorizations that have long dominated cultural conversations about abortion and the women who choose it.

Truth for a Hidden Reality

As with all of Ernaux's narrative works, there is much to be said about the form of *L'Evénement* and the relationship between truth and fiction within it. The narrative's text can be divided into roughly two parts: first, a sort of meta-narrative taking place many years after the

abortion, in which the narrator is now "documenting" the memory of her experience, understood to be taking place in the present. This metanarrative is woven into a second narrative taking place in the time period during which the memories upon which the narrator is reflecting occurred, expressed in the past tense. Ernaux has resisted usage of the term "auto-fiction" to describe her works, but the effects of the writer's actual clandestine abortion are indelibly and undeniably woven into the narratives of both *Les armoires vides*, published boldly before legalization, and *L'Evénement*, published long after it.[4] The protective cloak of fictional narrative deployed in *Les armoires vides* is largely shed in *L'Evénement*, which Ernaux calls in her seminal set of interviews, *L'écriture comme un couteau*, "moins autobiographique que auto-socio-biographique."[5]; not an autobiography, but a document influenced by her own experiences that seeks to give a truthful window into this socio-historical moment in the long-fought battle for women's reproductive autonomy in France.

It is important to take note of *L'Evénement*'s status as a sort of "social autobiography," especially as its narrator obsessively and continually makes reference throughout to the truthfulness and unflinching accuracy of her words. She often pauses to muse on her decision to only use the initials of the people she describes in the narrative, who allegedly "ne sont pas des personnages fictifs, mais des êtres réels."[6] In our reality outside of the text, this declaration of privacy can serve as a reminder that even though the people described within the narrative do not "exist" as such in the real world, people like them – the unsympathetic doctor, the hateful hospital attendant, the cold but caring *faiseuse d'anges* – did populate this cultural moment in

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[4] Joël Zufferey, *L'autofiction: variations génériques et discursives* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia/L'Harmattan, 2012), 7.

[5] Annie Ernaux and Frédéric-Yves Jeannet, *L'écriture comme un couteau* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 21.

[6] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 55.

which abortion was not a morally "knowable" or speak-able experience. Just as Ernaux herself admits to treating her journals from the time period "comme des documents historiques" while writing *L'Evénement*, her narrator too utilizes reference to her diary entries as "proof" that the narrative's documentation of her past experience is both true and accurate.[7]

The narrator's obsession with absolute accuracy as she documents her memories even pushes her to "résister au lyrisme de la colère ou de la douleur" in the construction of the narrative, so as not to "faire dans ce texte ce que je n'ai pas fait dans la vie à ce moment-là."[8] In other words, this is not a text that will take aesthetic liberties in order to push its reader towards a single moral conclusion. Rather it will brutally bring us to the clinical truth of the matter in all of its abjection. However, scholars including Simon Kemp and Siobhán McIlvanney have pointed to Ernaux's tendency in her more recent works, like *L'Evénement*, to "align reader's interpretations with Ernaux's intentions…and discourage any reading 'against the grain'" which is interpreted as a manifestation of the author's anxiety about the status and reception of her work.[9] Perhaps the detection of an authorial anxiety is fair, and *L'Evénement* is certainly crafted so as to align the reader with the narrator rather than with the many other characters who judge her. Even as we recognize these tendencies within *L'Evénement,* it is nevertheless crucial to remain equally recognizant of the sociopolitical importance of such a narrative tactic within a text about the clandestine abortion of a sexually promiscuous young woman who feels no moral or emotional attachment to her fetus. To encourage the reader's alignment with the narrator's point of view, and to discourage interpretations that "go against" its grain, is to itself subvert the

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[7] Annie Ernaux and Frédéric-Yves Jeannet, *L'écriture comme un couteau* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 38.

[8] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 95.

[9] Simon Kemp. "Contamination Anxiety in Annie Ernaux's Twenty-First-Century Texts," in *Women's Writing in Twenty-First-Century France: Life as Literature*, ed. Amaleena Damlé and Gill Rye (University of Wales Press, 2013) 169. Note: Kemp cites McIlvanney and her book on Ernaux's narration heavily in this article.

still largely dominant cultural narrative about women who terminate pregnancies– a narrative which remains misaligned, pushed outside the bounds of cultural language, and reduced to easy stereotypes. To align the reader with her story is accordingly to align us with a story that has been actively repressed from cultural narratives about proper and representable feminine reproductive experiences.

As I will detail below, a vital component of Ernaux's account will be its ability to put into words, and to carve out a space in language for, an experience that so many women have had, but have long been unable to voice. As such, we can understand the narrator's obsession with "truthfulness" as a call to the urgency of the reader's recognition of the narrative's ties to the social world; to read *L'Evénement* is to come to terms with the reality of abortion as such within it. By not just writing into existence a character that undergoes an abortion, but also by meticulously detailing the experience of the actual procedure, Ernaux situates abortion as a legitimate reproductive experience, and pushes us to question the ways in which it has been systematically excluded from language.

If Ernaux has resisted the idea of her writing as "auto-fiction," she seems less hostile towards the term "life-writing" – itself a genre most often used in reference to works by women authors.[10] Suzette Henke has expanded on the capacity of women's life-writing to put into words experiences with which women are so intimately familiar, but continue to struggle to coherently express through language, arguing that the genre "in particular may be the articulation of a haunting and debilitating emotional crisis that for the author borders on the unspeakable. What cannot be uttered might at least be written."[11] Scholars such as Shirley Jordan, Gill Rye, and

[10] See, for example: Mariana Ionescu, "De l'écriture 'comme un couteau' à l'écriture 'dans le vif': Le vrai lieu d'Annie Ernaux," *Nouvelle Revue Synergies Canada* 10 (2017): 1-7.

[11] Suzette Henke, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing* (New York:

Carrie Tarr have all additionally pointed to the capacity of women's auto-fiction and life-writing to illuminate specifically feminine and "unrepresentable" abject experiences in ways that underline their role in women's self-understanding, and the urgency of their integration into language and culture.[12] As I will demonstrate, Ernaux's narrator does not have the language, nor consequentially the epistemic capacity, to understand what is happening to her body. But by writing through the details of her narrator's traumatic saga, Ernaux offers up a literary interpretation of this long "unintelligible" bodily experience that has so little representation in literature and whose apparition in literary language pushes us to reconsider the boundaries of artistic representability. Ernaux harnesses the power of a literary genre for which she continues to serve as the very public French face, that has long been a conduit for women to articulate the realities of their lives that have been denied their proper place in language.

The Loss of Bodily Knowledge

From the start of *L'Evénement*, the troubled sexual body is already at the forefront of the narrative. The introduction offers an unsettling image of a Proust-like reverie, where sentiments that the narrator feels during an upsetting doctor's office visit in the present day serve as the catalyst that psychically transports her back in time to the doctors' offices that she visited in the months surrounding her search for a clandestine abortion. Here in the narratorial present, she is being tested for HIV after an unprotected sexual encounter in the 1980s. Accordingly, before the narrative even comes into contact with the story of abortion, the association between abortion and a deadly venereal disease causes the reader to associate abortion with a kind of trauma that is

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Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), xix.

[12] See the introduction to this dissertation for an enumeration of these scholars' positions on women's writing and the traditionally "unrepresentable."

itself linked to death. Though the narrative will certainly not go on to posit abortion as inherently traumatic, the dread and personal destabilization that the narrator feels in the HIV clinic is a precursor to the dread and destabilization of identity that will dominate her quest for abortion. Likewise, the fear of a life-altering and even deadly infection during the wait for her HIV test creates a subtle connection to the notion of pregnancy as a sort of infection that appears equally life-altering and deadly to the narrator.

The fear of infection is not the only link between past and present provided by the introduction. The guarded distrust of men, and implicit trust of women that will soon appear as a dominant narrative thread, is carefully spun into this tangentially related encounter in a doctor's office. As she anxiously awaits her test results, the narrator cannot help but think back to her fateful sexual partner that she fears has infected her, and she bitterly imagines that "cet homme…n'était venu d'Italie que pour me donner le sida."[13] Certainly, this remark is angry and irrational, but it also immediately casts out the male sexual body as an insidious and untrustworthy one that has perhaps implanted her with an unwanted microorganism. Furthermore, her words are a subtle dehumanization of the unnamed man that render his image in the text as that of a (foreign) pathogen or even a predatory monster. Because the narrative largely takes place before abortion's legalization in 1975 (and contraception's in 1967), we are brought to a consideration of a time when *women* were largely a dehumanized political class, transformed by the state into receptacles for children and not persons unto themselves. On the contrary, the narrator's gendered derision towards her Italian lover is already a sly subversion of coded norms about, to borrow Julia Kristeva's terms, clean and proper bodies.[14]

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[13] Annie Ernaux, *L"Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 15.

[14] Julia Kristeva, "Powers of Horror," in *The Portable Kristeva: Updated Edition*, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 222.

But the narrator learns only a few lines later that her conspiratorial paranoia was just that; her test results are negative. Annie takes care to note that the female doctor immediately "smiles widely" at her patient upon entering with the test results – an almost indubitably intentional gesture whose purpose is to deftly soothe the nervous protagonist as quickly and as smoothly as she can. Annie underlines the intentionality of the previous gesture by noting that, upon revealing the test results, the doctor "avait l'air joyeux et complice."[15] Here, the doctor clearly works on the side of her patient and not in opposition to her. Though she is of course just reading off test results, and had no part in manipulating them, the doctor's warmth towards the narrator is an introduction to a complicit feminine consciousness shared by the text's women; in *L'Evénement*, women want to, and work to, help other women in a world full of men who refuse to do so. This female doctor serves as an immediate foil to the negative and masculine image of the medical establishment as a whole that will figure within the text, and the reader is given early-on in the text the capacity to compare the treatment of a female medical professional towards her patient to the very different and much less sympathetic reactions of male doctors to the narrator's unwanted pregnancy years ago.

So, this medical scene of sexual (though, not quite reproductive) anxiety serves as catalyst in the narrator's memory to transport both her and the reader back to October 1963, where she recalls herself to have been desperately awaiting the now very late arrival of her menses.[16] Annie aborts about three months after this first missed period, and it should thus be noted that even today, her decision would be on the cusp of legality in France, where abortion

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[15] Annie Ernaux, *L"Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 15.

[16] This is likewise the exact time period during which the writer herself has situated the real clandestine abortion she underwent in interviews. Accordingly, only a span of approximately four years separates Ernaux's successful clandestine abortion from Clotilde Vautier's fatal one that was explored in the last chapter.

remains legal only at up to the 12th week of pregnancy.[17] So even as Annie purports to be reporting on a "totally human experience," and does so long after the procedure's decriminalization in France, it should be noted that abortion is not coded as a morally neutral reproductive experience even today. Rather, in the many years after legalization, it can still be a solitary and alienating experience whose socio-moralistic taboo suppresses its admission behind the curtain of un-speakability.

Additionally, the delayed and ultimately absent monthly blood of menstruation that forges the narrator's original distress is a motif that reverberates far beyond the confines of her individual story. Indeed, the anxious expectation of one's period echoes throughout both narrative works about abortion and in the real-world testimonials of women who have undergone the procedure – whether in French or otherwise.[18] Though women may sometimes speak of strangely "feeling" or intuitively "knowing" that they are pregnant after or even before amenorrhea, the disruption of the feminine physical ritual of noting one's natural monthly blood flow is still clinically regarded as the most obvious early signifier of pregnancy. Acting as it has as an indicator of normalcy and equilibrium within her body, the symbolic role that the now missing physical stain has played in the grounding of her personal identity and bodily understanding comes into focus. She begins to meticulously and obsessively document her

[17] As it stands today in France, if a woman wishes to abort after the 12th week of pregnancy, she must have a doctor certify that the termination is medically necessary. On the contrary, *Roe v. Wade* ruled abortion in the United States legal up to the point of "viability" – a still nebulous term that is generally accepted to occur around 24 weeks of pregnancy. But unlike in France where such legal mandates are made only at a national level, individual states in the U.S. can and often have passed unnecessary restrictions for clinics and for women seeking abortions that render the procedure at any stage a practical impossibility for their residents.

[18] Documentation of this can be found in Luc Boltanski's *La Condition Foetale* and Xavière Gauthier's multiple collections of testimonies of women who have terminated their pregnancies. Additionally, anxiety over the late arrival of one's menses, even and especially if they do return, is a recurring topos in literature and film about women's lives across virtually all genres.

ominous amenorrhea in her journal, which she signifies only with the world "RIEN."[19] Even before she undergoes it, abortion is already tied to bodily sensations that are both extremely intimate and abjectly feminine. Accordingly, this unintentional alteration of the expected course of her body's interior mechanisms signals the first textual link between understanding of the body and understanding of the self. As her body will continue to diverge from its normal cyclical path, the destabilization of her intimate and personal self-conception will only deepen.

Furthermore, the text's description of Annie's menstrual waiting game again recalls the specific physicality of the feminine reproductive experience: blood, so often a signifier of death and of injury, is instead an indicator of reproductive normalcy for fertile women who aren't attempting to conceive. Far from being repulsive or unhealthy, it is a sign of relief and regularity. As Cathy McClive notes, doctors dating as far back as the early 17th century regarded menstrual regularity as a sign of sexual health, and medical practitioners asked women to document their cycles on their own, as "women were perceived to own knowledge about their bodies, and thus their menstrual habits…women would keep track of their menses for practical reasons."[20] When the Vichy-era *tribunaux d'état* were in the throes of trying men and women who performed clandestine abortions for crimes against the state, the women who sought their services and then testified against them often would only refer to their unwanted and terminated pregnancies while under oath by speaking of their desire to make their periods return – a subtle but clear manifestation of a pre-legalization French sociocultural linguistic order that did not contain words for abortion.[21] These historical examples demonstrate that the cyclical and sanguine

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[19] Annie Ernaux, *LEvénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 15.

[20] Cathy McClive, *Menstruation and Procreation in Early Modern France* (London: Routledge, 2015), 103.

[21] AN 4W/12-4W/13. Citations are omitted in accordance with the French government.

regularity of one's menses has acted as a longstanding and key component of bodily knowledge for women and perhaps even as the primary path through which their status as a reproductive being is understood.

So although the narrator may not be conscious of it, history has already cemented her words within an existing sociocultural context with respect to what can be said about the reproductive body. Just like the narrator's painstaking documentation of amenorrhea in her journal, women before her also wrote about their menses outside of medical contexts, in the legal contexts mentioned above, but also in letters to family members and partners "about the appearance or lack of menses, and the possible meaning of this depending on their circumstances."[22] Her corporeal journaling thus also situates her in a feminine context where the documentation of one's bodily mechanisms manifests self-understanding. Menstruation has, and has always had, meaning. As such, its cyclicality cannot just be understood as a medical fact about the female body, but as a process that has long, and perhaps always, been deeply imbued with social significance. In turn, the disruption of this cycle in the text sets in motion the unmooring of the narrator's bodily knowledge and understanding, before the parasitic pregnancy is even confirmed. Just as the abortion itself creates a psychic connection between Ernaux's narrator and those who have sought out the procedure before her, the nervous documentation of her amenorrhea grounds her within a medical and social context that has always put immense importance on the meaning of this feminine monthly blood; its absence is both a physical and metaphysical indication that something is not right.

If the female doctor who joyfully "grants" Annie freedom from a seropositive diagnosis is a reassuring female friend, the first male doctor that she consults in amenorrhea is a bearer of

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[22] Cathy McClive, *Menstruation and Procreation in Early Modern France* (London: Routledge, 2015), 116-117.

bad news. His words create a horrifying and stark contrast to the rush of relief she feels in the HIV clinic, as he almost immediately diagnoses the stomach sickness that has begun to plague her as the onset of pregnancy. The sense of unspoken understanding between the female doctor and her patient is nowhere to be found in this interaction between a man and a woman who finds herself in a situation that he cannot comprehend. When the female doctor smiles at Annie, it instills a warm sense of "complicity" in the young woman. Conversely, the male doctor also smiles at her as he states his quite divergent diagnosis during their meeting and follows it with the jovial observation that "les enfants de l'amour sont toujours les plus beaux" – a statement that leaves her (understandably) with a sense of horrified alienation.[23] Though of course no one desires to be seropositive, it doesn't occur to this doctor that an unmarried college-aged woman would not be happy to learn that she is pregnant. More accurately, he is uninterested in empathizing with, or even recognizing, this obvious possibility. In his world, the only knowable, viable option available to this patient is to go through with the pregnancy. Importantly, this is also her only legal option, as her story takes place over a decade before abortion was legalized in France.

Ethical Constraints to Bodily Knowledge

In her book on ethics and epistemology, philosopher Miranda Fricker defines what she calls "hermeneutic injustice," through which marginalized subjects experience "the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource," and are thus

[23] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 21.

subjected to "prejudicial exclusion from participation in the spread of knowledge."[24] In other words, her argument articulates the injustice of a subject's lack of access to structures, linguistic or otherwise, within their culture to interpret experiences that diverge from what has been deemed "hermeneutically" acceptable on an unspoken level. During this first interaction with a medical professional, who *chooses* not to recognize her obvious distress and to *only* interpret her pregnancy as a joyous occurrence, it is already clear that the narrator is coming to experience such an epistemological injustice; the idea that she would be able to discuss the desire for abortion with her doctor is, in her world, an epistemic impossibility that limits her ability to coherently process what her body (and her self) is beginning to undergo. Though of course both the narrator and her doctor are "aware" that abortion is a procedure that exists in the world, the legal structures that govern their communication prevent it from ever being formally recognized as such. As Fricker notes, "[w]hen you find yourself in a situation in which you seem to be the only one to feel the dissonance between received understanding and your own intimated sense of a given experience, it tends to knock your faith in your own ability to make sense of the world, or at least the relevant region of the world."[25] The obvious consequence of not having the tools to process one's own lived reality is the deep destabilization of personal identity.

At this stage in the narrative, we are only privy to the germination of such intimate and psychic dissonance, but the effects of this hermeneutic injustice on the narrator's understanding of her body and self will soon dominate the narrative. The protagonist's lived reality will quickly

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[24] Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009), 154, 162. The book is also largely dedicated to what she calls "testimonial injustice" in which a subject is not believed when they talk about experiences that they have actually had, due to lack of social standing and as such of epistemological power. Though this sort of injustice does not play a significant part in Ernaux's narrative, I will note that it certainly plays a part in larger cultural understandings about abortion narratives and women who abort.

[25] Ibid., 163.

place her outside the parameters of speak-ability in her social world, and the epistemological injustice of her situation weighs deeply on her capacity to make sense of both her physical body and her psychic self. Largely then, this account of abortion, written so many years after its events take place, seeks to correct this epistemological injustice and to create a linguistic space for the admission of abortion within the social literary realm. Moreover, the ethical and epistemological constraints that are put upon the narrator also remind us just how integral the text's emphasis on the corporeality of her experience is to our comprehension of the narrative: to understand her story, and to come to terms with it, is to recognize that it is happening to a body in an inherently social context. The text implores the reader to confront and thus empathize with her body's abject state, which in turn permits us to accept her experience as one that is a part of both language and of culture.

At the heart of the narrator's bodily confusion also lies a deep betrayal by the body towards the self. She admits that "je ne croyais pas que 'ça puisse prendre' à l'intérieur de mon ventre," even though she knew herself to be, fertility-wise, "dans une période de risques" during her sexual encounters.[26] Again, the words she chooses to articulate the surprise of her pregnancy explains said surprise through the physical body and solidifies her increasing incapacity to understand this part of her self. The narrator's body is operating in ways that feel, and that ultimately are, out of her control, and that had never previously felt imaginable (or, conceivable). An impossible "thing" has taken hold of her insides, whose mechanics are no longer intelligible to her.

Though the narrator's surprise at pregnancy's capacity to "take hold" of her body may seem naïve, it is important to note that this sort of shock has been well documented in the

[26] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 22.

testimonies of women who abort due to an unintended pregnancy – especially in young women, and especially in women who abort without legal access to birth control, or abortion for that matter.[27] Moreover, the declaration also functions as a bold demonstration of the young woman's cavalier attitude with respect to her sexual health, as it indicates that she didn't view her body as a *female* body, but just as a body like any other in the world. Now, this is catachrestic insofar as she of course recognized the significant, physical sex differences between her own body and those of the men around her. But she clearly did not feel the apparent corresponding obligation for it to move about the world in a different manner than those of her male counterparts: "[d]ans l'amour et la jouissance, je ne me sentais pas un corps intrinsèquement différent de celui des hommes."[28] Once again, we see the manifestation of the narrator's sense of "self" expressed through her physical body, which acts as a metonym for the entirety of her full being in the text.

It may seem strange that the narrator would have such a progressive view of sexual relations during this historical period. Abortion, of course, was illegal and the loi Neuwirth would not legalize contraception until 1967, four years after the abortion in Ernaux's text (and, approximately, in her real life).[29] But if viewed from a Foucauldian perspective, as Judith Butler notes, "the body is not 'sexed' in any significant sense prior to its determination within a discourse through which it becomes invested with an 'idea' of natural or essential sex. As an instrument and effect of power, the body only gains meaning within discourse in the context of

[27] See again Xavière Gauthier's multiple collections of testimonies from women who have aborted both clandestinely and legally.

[28] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 22.

[29] However, the controversial law was not actually put into place until 1972, after multiple administrative stoppages. Likewise, the Veil law that decriminalized abortion was not put into effect until 1979 – four years after it was voted into law.

power relations."[30] The narrator's unwanted pregnancy throws her consciousness into a cultural and sexual hierarchy of the valuation of bodies from which she had earlier been somehow shielded. Furthermore, as she loses the "positive," and seemingly *a priori*, kind of bodily knowledge that has allowed her to make sense of her place within her own world, she is simultaneously gaining the socialized bodily knowledge that to inhabit a female body is much more fraught than to inhabit a male one – reproductively speaking, at the very least. Her sexual body, previously no "different" than that of her sexual partners, is now inscribed with a meaning that she does not have the tools to interpret. Despite the status of her menstrual cycle as a primary metric of her body's cyclical normalcy, the narrator seems to have also remained capable of evading the weight of the deep sexual difference that defined her world; in essence, she was able to make sense of her body because it belonged only to her. With the loss of her period and the realization of her pregnancy, her body is both no longer her own, and no longer the body that she has long known.

Perhaps more importantly for our reading of the text, the admission of her sexual carelessness likely does not intuitively lead the reader to an empathetic connection with her condition – and it could even serve as ammunition against an empathic case for women who abort. As the anti-abortion argument goes, if women (especially, unmarried ones) don't want to get pregnant, then all they need do is abstain from sex; if they do become pregnant, then they should own up to the consequences. Accordingly, the inclusion of this admission of sexual irresponsibility brings the reader explicitly face to face with the possibly reckless abandon that leaves the narrator in her undesirable state. Ernaux could have chosen to omit the sexual relationship that resulted in her narrator's pregnancy and undoubtedly could have left out the

[30] Judith Butler, "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva," *Hypatia* 3, no. 3 (1989): 116.

detail of knowing they were having sex at a time when her body was at its most fertile and vulnerable. Though it would be aggressively uncharacteristic of the author, she could have even created a more sympathetic backstory for her protagonist, in which she perhaps uses protection and keeps her sexual encounters within the parameters of fertile safety. But as we will see, this is not a work interested in facile forms of empathy; rather, it is one that forces us to recognize the complicated and multifaceted reality of those who choose abortion.

This is to say that even in the contemporary period long after the legalization of abortion, public conversation would seem to continue to demand a certain kind of emotional narrative from women who choose to terminate pregnancies, and that deviation from this narrative is still treated as political proof that the procedure should remain restricted. Though the writer herself has never commented on it, *L'Evénement* was published in the midst of what has so far been the most contested and polemical legal and cultural debate about abortion in France of the 21st century, of whether or not to increase the legality of abortion from 10 to 12 weeks of pregnancy. Though this change did officially become law in 2001, forceful parliamentary opposition came not just on the often-cited basis of the *banalisation* of abortion, but on the stated fear that Socialists were writing "eugenics" into French law.[31]

The equation of this very small extension of abortion rights with the Holocaust, whose stated genocidal goal *did in fact* cost the lives of thousands of French citizens only decades beforehand, serves to underhandedly demonize women who abort as selfish monsters – and perhaps even as a very specific kind of Neo-Nazi.[32] So, Ernaux's narrative that endeavors to

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[31] Jean-Yves Le Naour and Catherine Valenti, *Histoire de l'avortement: 19ème au 20ème siècle* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2003), 311-312. For a longer history of fears of *banalisation* in the abortion debate in France, see Le Naour and Valenti, p. 286-300.

[32] Furthermore, it is perhaps interesting to note that anxiety about "*banalisation*" in French culture has also quite famously applied to debates about the remembrance of the Holocaust; as such, it is ironic that those who fear the banalisation of abortion the most so often make their case by "banalizing" the Holocaust.

"align" its reader with the perspective of its narrator can therefore be understood as another way to raise consciousness for the myriad of narratives of women who choose abortion and whose experiences mimic those detailed by Ernaux. Indeed, Ernaux has said that a text as intimate as *L'Evénement* is meant to "dévoiler des mécanismes ou des phénomènes plus généraux, collectifs…je voudrais que tout ma vie devienne quelque chose d'intelligible et de général, se dissolve complètement dans la tête et la vie des gens."[33] This is not the banal story of someone who doesn't understand what she is doing or why she is doing it; this is the human story of a person making a choice, and who knows exactly why she wants to make this choice. The borderline carelessness and graphic abjection put forth in a story by this very public figure urge the reader to consider the massive diversity of women's experiences with abortion – thus giving, as Ernaux suggests, intelligibility to those unintelligible aspects of the feminine collective experience. Consequentially, a reading of abortion narratives is not significantly "empathetic" if it only shows empathy for women who abort under only the most poignant and dire of circumstances. Rather, it requires that we understand abortion to be a legitimate reproductive possibility and its access as an integral part of women's bodily autonomy, regardless of what a woman may feel or not feel in its wake.

In a special issue on the philosophical liminality of miscarriage, Alison Reiheld addresses our "clear cultural scripts for pregnancy, which is not liminal, but entails well-established social roles and interactions," while contending that scripts for reproductive experiences that do not result in a birthed child remain "dismissive, [and] reinforce sequestration and isolation."[34] In the

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[33] Annie Ernaux and Frédéric-Yves Jeannet, *L'écriture comme un couteau* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 43-44.

[34] Alison Reiheld, "'The Event that was Nothing': Miscarriage as a Liminal Event," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 46, no. 1 (2015): 13-14.

same special issue, Ann J. Cahill argues that due to the simple and incomplete nature of our cultural scripts for addressing reproductive path that do not result in pregnancy, we struggle to empathetically connect with those who do experience them.[35] Ernaux may not be creating a new "cultural script" for talking about abortion in culture, to be adopted by those who have not experienced it – and who thus, may struggle to empathize with the idea of it. But she is most certainly giving us a clear window into the negative effects of the lack of a cultural script for it on women who are the subjects of an abortion and arguing for the need for better ways to address the reality of the desire to terminate a pregnancy. To erase or gloss over the uncomfortable aspects of abortion narratives is to deny the individual humanity of those who undergo the procedure. And to return to the narrator's endnote, this is, after all, a totally human experience.

The Unintelligible Female Body

The continued absence of the narrator's menses haunts her as the narrative moves along. The obsession of "not knowing" what delayed them becomes the obsession of "knowing" that her menses were not to return, and even of fearing that her mother would "know" that she was pregnant from the lack of menstrual stains in the laundry she brought home: "je savais que mes règles ne reviendraient pas."[36] The rupture of this feminine ritual that indicates such an intimate form of bodily knowledge upsets the epistemic equilibrium of her self-knowledge. Menstrual blood signified a reassured self-knowledge and bodily normalcy, and its absence sends this intimate understanding of the body into a tailspin. Speaking of the recognition of the abject in *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva writes that it is:

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[35] Ann J. Cahill, "Miscarriage and Intercorporeality," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 46, no. 1 (2015): 46.

[36] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 18-19.

> A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me.[37]

The absence of menstrual stain causes Annie to no longer totally recognize her body as her own. This physical absence would perhaps signify joy in an "opaque and forgotten life" wherein she desires pregnancy, as suggested by the words of the doctor who preemptively diagnoses her condition. But in the actual world in which she finds herself, it separates her from a core aspect of her self-understanding. Thinking back to the days before going to the doctor, she envisions herself – her body – sitting in cars, in the park, in cinema chairs, and realizes "une seule signification: j'étais là et je ne savais pas que j'étais en train de devenir enceinte."[38] Such a scene produces the literary sensation of a sort of out-of-body experience on the part of the narrator, as if she is now gazing upon a now totally foreign version of her "self" that was not burdened by the alien physical presence within her that she can now no longer deny; reflecting upon this "other" Annie, she finds someone that she can no longer recognize. Not only is her body no longer entirely her own, but it is one whose interior mechanics she no longer controls nor understands; the bodily knowledge that fueled psychic self-recognition is gone, and the narrator is no longer "herself" – but a bifurcated "something" that she does not recognize as a thing, taken hold of by a presence that she must not recognize, lest it annihilate her totally.

The narrator's body continues to confuse her when she finds a small stain in her underwear that she documents as a sign of victory; its quasi-triumphant discovery is almost

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[37] Julia Kristeva, "Powers of Horror," in *The Portable Kristeva: Updated Edition*, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 227.

[38] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 18.

immediately followed by a phone call from her doctor, confirming the pregnancy. The "certificat de grossesse" that he sends to her the next day contains both her name and the expected date of arrival for this mass of betrayal and confusion that lies inside her womb. With the arrival date inked into an inerasable medical record, her existence is effectively bifurcated. She documented above the previous physical sensation of "walking" about in the world believing herself to be a whole, indivisible body. Now though, she has now been torn into two and is invaded by a presence from which she cannot legally detach herself. Effectively then, her now unknowable and unrecognizable body undergoes a doubled sort of epistemological change: not only does she no longer "know" her own body, but in order to regain the psychically knowable body that she has lost, she must undergo an experience that is itself politically "unknowable" in the form of her abortion. This illegal procedure, that bears no meaning to the male sexual body, will in turn inscribe her body with an experience about which she is unable to speak. She tears up the certificate, but the piece of paper is only a symbol that denotes what is no longer anxious confusion about the state of her body, but a change cemented in the heavy reality of her sex. Annie is not free as she once thought herself to be.

From the existential confusion that her now undeniable state has created, the narrator will soon turn to her quest to return her body to a psychically intelligible state as she now ends the first portion of the narrative. Before beginning the narrative's second act that will detail the procuration of the clandestine abortion, Ernaux reprints, without comment or alteration, an excerpt from a 1948 *Nouveau Larousse Universel* that outlines the legal punishment for doctors who performed abortions in that era. This epigraphic passage reminds us that as the body and the text that tells its tale interlock throughout the narrative, these kinds of legal codes were also in a sense inscribed upon the bodies of both its narrator and author. The text's short, historical

references like this one effectively pull the reader out of the present day, in which abortion is legal in France, to the world of the 1960s in which it was both illegal and dangerous, and where speaking in public about the procedure could lead not just to shame and scorn, but to imprisonment.

Further, the inclusion of this historical source refuses the possibility of an "ahistorical" consumption of her literary body, as it weaves her physical one back into the socio-historical fabric that defines it. Lorette Nobécourt, a writer who like Ernaux has both undergone and written about abortion, notes that "[o]n avorte donc dans un espace, un environnement, et dans un temps donnés jamais dans l'absolu."[39] Ernaux is acutely aware of the interplay between textual and physical body within the narrative, reminding herself in a parenthetical that once the book is finished and published, she will have "plus aucun pouvoir sur mon texte qui sera exposé comme mon corps l'a été à l'Hôtel-Dieu."[40] While the reader may feel inclined to judge a young woman who had unprotected sex while most fertile, and who mistook her feminine body for a masculine and thus sexually irreproachable one, the narrative transports us back into this era that defined the limits of her body without her consent. Just as the abortion was and still is a part of her existence, so were these laws that punished the feminine body for its physical difference. As the body of the narrator is exposed upon the pages of the text, in tandem with these printed historical words, the ethical stakes of the exposition of this reproductive reality come into focus.

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[39] Lorette Thibout, *L'avortement: vingt ans après* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), 238. Nobécourt published this study of abortion in French culture in the twenty years after the Veil law under the assumed name Lorette Thibout. She has used a number of different aliases in her writing, but this is indeed the same woman who has utilized abortion as a motif in her fiction, including within *Nous* and *La Conversation.*

[40] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 106.

Though I have posited both the narrator's bodily experience and her physical body itself as "unintelligible" within the text, it should likely be noted that such descriptions may again veer into the territory of catachresis. There is of course a sense in which abortion was a "knowable" experience that could be expressed in available existing terms. Indeed, when she finds herself pregnant, the narrator is fully aware that the procedure is available to her, albeit clandestinely, and language to name and describe abortion existed in the French language long before the 1960s.[41] Still, the text makes it clear that in a more politically urgent sense, the experience of abortion was unknowable and unspeakable, and that the narrator's changing body is unintelligible both to her and to her cultural surroundings.

Working with this understanding of bodily intelligibility, Butler argues that it should "still [be] possible to raise the critical question of how such constraints not only produce the domain of intelligible bodies, but produce as well a domain of unthinkable, abject unlivable bodies," if we recognize that "the latter domain is not the opposite of the former… [but] the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside."[42] To raise the question of a body's intelligibility within its cultural framework, as does *L'Evénement*, is thus to question the interpretive limits of that framework. However, we should also note that up to this point, the narrator's bodily unintelligibility has manifested itself *internally* as opposed to *externally* – it is *she* who attempts and fails to interpret her body's new mechanisms, and not necessarily the

[41] According to the website of the *Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales*, the term "avortement" (or, a version of it) dates back to c. 1190.

[42] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 2011), xi.

people around her. With this, the narrative now turns to the protagonist's determined quest to rid herself of the alien presence inside of her.

The Quest to Interpret the Body

Annie never speaks of any sort of moral waver in her choice to abort. But no matter how sure she is of the righteousness of her decision, she remains equally conscious of the secretive sensitivity with which she needed to treat it; no longer the free-wheeling and sexually open young woman that she was before, she now finds her body at extreme odds with the exterior world. Determined to find a way to abort, the first person to whom she reveals her intention is a fellow student: a married man and pro-contraception (importantly within this narrative, different from pro-abortion) activist for the then-nascent *Planning familial* organization to whom she refers as "Jean T."

When they meet, the narrator's admission of her intentions comes "sous une forme détournée," which at first blush, perhaps points to the inherent danger of explicitly admitting to her condition aloud.[43] But it is also a reminder of the lack of language for talking about abortion at the time; she was seeking out a quite literally unspeakable procedure that legally did not exist, and was thus attempting to explain a condition that had no place within the linguistic order. This linguistic lack is echoed during her multiple, unsuccessful visits to male doctors. In one instance, she reports in the text her intention to ask one doctor to help her abort, but once in the clinic, suddenly finds herself unable to say the actual words. She can only manage to beg him to "me faire revenir les règles, à tout prix."[44] Again, though able to imagine herself asking the doctor for

[43] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evenement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 33.

[44] Ibid., 44.

the procedure, and the specific words that she might use, she is unable to verbally make contact with the abjection of abortion, and can only voice her desires in terms of normalcy, referencing that physical indicator of feminine reproductive regularity, her menses.

After a later visit with a different doctor, she again remarks upon the pressure of the epistemic impossibility of her desire to abort: "ni lui ni moi n'avions prononcé le mot avortement une seule fois. C'était une chose qui n'avait pas de place dans le langage."[45] Annie and her male interlocutors speak about her body without really speaking about it as they dance around the moral-medical epithet of "avortement." If the young woman is losing her identity and sense of self as she reports above, it is not just because her body is invaded by an unwanted physical presence, but because the only way for her to rid herself of this alien presence is to undertake an experience that cannot be expressed in language that is legal. Again, the narrator's struggle to express herself brings us back to the hermeneutic injustice of her situation: her lived reality exists outside of the parameters of the social and moral boundaries of her culture and can only be admitted to through convoluted terms that must subsequently be "interpreted" by her conversation partners.

However, the masculine medical establishment she encounters is only partially willing to recognize the plea behind her words. The first doctor prescribes her a medication intended to prevent miscarriage, while the other prescribes her penicillin. Though these are quite divergent responses, their medical gestures are, importantly, a subtle reminder that though medical professionals like themselves may have chosen to externally refuse to interpret or recognize the pain of the narrator's undesired pregnancy, they were well aware of what she was willing to do to rid herself of it. Meanwhile, her friend Jean is much more sympathetic, but his reaction to

[45] Ibid., 60.

Annie's coded confession is telling: "Instantanément, il lui est venu un air de curiosité et de jouissance, comme s'il me voyait les jambes écartées, le sexe offert. Peut-être trouvait-il aussi son plaisir dans la subite transformation de la bonne étudiante d'hier en fille aux abois."[46] "Instantly," as she remarks, the narrator undergoes a sort of ontological transformation in the eyes of her classmate. No longer just another person with whom he enjoys speaking, she is reduced to a sexual body whose purpose is to be devoured; indeed, he takes her to the home he shares with his wife and attempts to instigate sexual relations when his wife steps out to run an errand.

Jean's wife remains mostly in the background before exiting, but the few gestures that she does perform in the narrator's presence once again force Annie to confront Kristeva's uncanny "opaque and forgotten life." Jean's wife feeds their child, puts the child to sleep, and afterwards serves a meal that she alone cooked for her husband and their guest; if she speaks, the text doesn't report on it. In this moment, she is the picture of traditional domesticity, and the narrator becomes nauseous as she consumes the fruit of this woman's domestic labor. Her sudden sickness is likely the product of her changing physical state, but it is also a product of pregnant Annie's capacity to see the potential transformation of her (diminishingly) liberated body into this chained one of wife and mother. Pregnancy does not only change the parameters of her physical body, but also contains the capacity to alter the parameters of her social identity. Now more than ever, she knows she must return her body to its original state.

However, the knowledge of this new bodily split that she seeks to sew back together isn't the sort of change that interests Jean. For him, her pregnancy is only important to their interpersonal relationship insofar as it renders her even more sexually attractive to him. The

[46] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 34.

narrator is cognizant of his belief that he had gained some sort of new and relevant knowledge about her body, as he could mentally shift her from "la catégorie des filles dont on ne sait pas si elles acceptent de coucher à celle des filles qui, de façon indubitable, ont déjà couché" which made a significant difference "[dans] une époque où la distinction entre les deux importait extrêmement et conditionnait l'attitude des garçons à l'égard des filles."[47] Again, the abject difference of the female reproductive body is brought to the fore. For Jean, the most interesting, and only relevant, aspect of his friend's pregnancy is the newfound sexual availability he believes to have gained from her condition. This interaction serves to demonstrate yet another way in which during her pregnancy, her body is no longer her own and again inscribes her body with a negative social meaning that she didn't feel it carried before. Even though Jean, an activist for contraception, agrees to give her the address of another female friend who has aborted and who may know a *faiseuse d'anges*, he refuses to give her financial aid she also requests for the procedure, citing moral grounds. Jean is happy to take sexual advantage of her condition, but draws the line at making sure she has the means to overcome it.

The narrator has trouble locating this friend of a friend who has undergone an abortion, and the sense of solitude and confusion growing inside her continues to take hold of her psyche. She once again turns to her journal where she has been documenting her intimate and unspeakable thoughts. From the saga of "nothingness" in her underwear, the next set of journal entries that she narrates turn their focus to the uncanny "something" that has replaced it: "il faut que cette chose-là parte," she writes.[48] Here, it is important to note that even in the privacy of her diary, the narrator struggles to express both what is inside of her body and what she wishes to

[47] Ibid., 36.

[48] Ibid., 39.

happen to it. It would thus seem as though the narrator's true linguistic quandary is not that she possesses the language to coherently process her reality, but is just legally forbidden from doing so. Rather, legal and social boundaries have barred her from any sort of hermeneutics framework through which to truly grasp what is happening to her. Here, we can return to the reminder in this chapter's introduction of the narrator's continual obsession with "truthfully" reporting both facts and her emotions to the fullest extent that she is able. If her pain remains unspoken in the intimate journal space, it is not that she has the words to voice her pain but dares not externalize them, but that she totally lacks a framework through which to make sense of it. Though she unable to name this "thing" that is taking hold of her body, her language in this passage gives it a curious agency, suggesting that she hopes it will "leave" her body all on its own – perhaps, imagining that this "thing" will recognize that it doesn't belong.

So far, the only other people aware of Annie's condition are men: her doctors and her classmate Jean, with the latter being the only one to vocally affirm that he comprehends her ultimate intentions. Accordingly, and importantly, the only characters who know of her pregnancy and of her desire to terminate it are people who do not possess the physical capacity to find themselves in her situation and who thus are not able to imagine the burden of the choices she finds herself making. With the unwanted pregnancy, she is imbued with a set of facts about her bodily state that she wishes she did not know, that she and those around her are unsuccessful at interpreting. If she wishes to survive then, it is imperative that she locate an Other capable of speaking the language of her abject body.[49]

[49] See Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray for (French) feminist interpretations of the philosophical Other.

The Body's Feminine Language

Though Ernaux's narrator (and, the reader) is of course conscious on some level that many women before her have aborted, she still feels suffocated by a deep sense of solitude. As her pregnancy continues, the narrator's body becomes more and more foreign to her, and she begins to truly lose her sense of self. In the privacy of her journal, she details her "déchéance invisible" and designates her suffering as a kind that is "indicible." Faced so far only with the sexual callousness and careless naiveté of men, it is clear that at least one aspect of the immense burden she carries is that no one is there to help her make sense of her changing body.

As such, the student of literature turns to books hoping to find a realistic, or at least coherent, description of experiencing abortion that may help her interpret her own unintelligible feelings. She seeks, plainly, an empathetic or at least non-judgmental description of what would happen to her body during an abortion. Though she remarks that there is certainly no shortage of literature (or film) that makes reference to women who abort, she discovers that instead of ever describing the experience of abortion itself, there is "entre le moment où la fille se découvrait enceinte et celui où elle ne l'était plus…une ellipse."[50] The only descriptions of actual abortions that she is able to locate are medical literature on the subject of "avortement criminel," suggesting that what she is attempting to locate can only be articulated by measure of its criminality. This passage specifies the formal unintelligibility of her body as it lingers outside the boundaries of, to paraphrase Butler, "bodies that matter." Annie's reality is one that only seems to exist within the inexpressible realm of ellipsis, which in turn keeps her body unintelligible both to the narrator herself and to the world around her. She lacks, as Fricker would say, the hermeneutic framework to make sense of herself.

[50] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 40.

Furthermore, she is quickly discovering that the only linguistic framework through which to interpret her state is a masculine one of criminality and shame. Luce Irigaray, along with philosophers like Kristeva and Hélène Cixous, has theorized the ways in which the women's experiences has been excluded from language and thus from the symbolic order, preventing the feminine existence from achieving cultural understanding and acceptance. She writes:

> Si nous n'inventons pas un langage, si nous ne trouvons pas son langage, notre corps aura trop peu de gestes pour accompagner notre histoire. Nous nous fatiguerons des mêmes, laissant notre désir en latence, en souffrance. Rendormies, insatisfaites. Et rendues aux mots des hommes. Qui, eux, savent depuis longtemps. Mais pas notre corps.[51]

As demonstrated above during her interactions with male doctors, the word abortion may be littered throughout *L'Evénement*, but never does it enter into any of the work's actual dialogue. Abortion, both as a term and as an experience, remains outside of the symbolic order of language. Though Annie has spoken to multiple people about her desire to abort, it has *always*, up to this point, been in euphemistic terms. Neither the narrator nor those around her bring themselves to use the actual noun or verb that explicitly describes the act. The ways in which abortion remains both implicitly expressed and yet totally unsaid solidifies our understanding of the epistemological constraints upon the feminine bodily experience within the text, and the cultural unintelligibility of its deviation from scripted and acceptable reproductive paths.

In light of this bodily unintelligibility, the corporeal language of the text directly confronts the masculine epistemological repression and refusal of the expression of this feminine reality, as attempts to express the body's truth. Ernaux has thus far presented the reader with a female protagonist who is unable to make sense of her body and thus her self. But to return to the interplay between textual and physical body, the reader's consumption of the body of work that makes up the text inherently requires us to begin doing the work of interpreting the narrator's

[51] Luce Irigaray, "Quand nos lèvres se parlent," *Les cahiers du GRIF* 12 (1976): 24.

heretofore unintelligible body. The writer's narrative "body" of work, then, lays bare these culturally unknowable feminine realities, and in turn forces their linguistic recognition. As we read and understand them, we find ourselves facing the abject limits of literary representability. Indeed, the narrator echoes the words of Irigaray in her assertion that "si je ne vais pas au bout de la relation de cette expérience, je contribue à obscurcir la réalité des femmes et je me range du côté de la domination masculine du monde."[52] Before the abortion, the narrator's body is trapped in an unspeakable "ellipsis" for which there do not seem to be words. To keep the expression of the experience of her abortion locked within this ellipsis in the years after it would be to force those women who follow in her footsteps to also remain trapped in the realm of the unspeakable and unintelligible. In other words, to stay silent would be to unethically deny other women who terminate pregnancies the ability to locate the expression of their reality in literary language.

Now, Ernaux may not be creating a new "feminine language" in the ways that we attribute to the ethereal prose of Irigaray and Cixous; indeed, Irigaray's idea of a feminine language would seem to call out for a currently nonexistent and nearly impossible to imagine framework. But her text most certainly affirms the linguistic and existential presence of an untellable feminine experience. Her corporeal, if often detached and clinical, prose responds to Irigaray's call to put the feminine body into words, and to no longer allow it to be manipulated by – or "rendue à" - the language of men. In Ernaux's text, unwanted pregnancy casts the feminine bodily self into unintelligible disarray; by putting this dislocated self into words so many years later, the writer imparts knowability to the experience for others.

The stakes of carving out a space in which to articulate experiences "without articulation" are both aesthetic and philosophical. Much of the philosophical theory mentioned above – from

[52] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 58.

the analytic thinkers Fricker and Cahill, to the continental tradition of Irigaray and Kristeva – only present the *problem* of the unintelligible feminine body and the negative consequences following the fact of its repression in the linguistic realm. Ernaux's narrative is certainly dominated by the explication of the problem of feminine bodily unintelligibility. But I contend that the narrative's mere existence, and its publication, act as monumental steps towards the creation of a solution capable of correcting the epistemological-ethical quandary of the cultural unintelligibility of alternative reproductive experiences like abortion. In her just-released monograph on the ethical implications of treating fictional narratives as products that are culturally mediated and in need of interpretation, Hannah Meretoja posits that the ability of storytelling and artistic language to expand our sense of "what is possible" may be embedded in their nature, arguing that "narrative fiction can explore the ethical complexities of the impact narratives have on our lives in richer terms than abstract moral philosophy."[53] By reading Ernaux (not-very fictional) narrative, we are forced to recognize that women will terminate pregnancies no matter what their legal context may be; abortion is a fact of our reproductive cultural context. So, once the culturally unintelligible experience of unwanted pregnancy is indelibly put into the written word, consumed by the public and placed into libraries, abortion as an imaginable reproductive experience cannot be denied.

Towards a New Bodily Language

While it may seem as though the narrator is mentally withering away, she regains strength by willing herself to harness the power of the cast-off, culturally unincorporated

[53] Hanna Meretoja, *The Ethics of Storytelling: Narrative Hermeneutics, History, and the Possible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 22.

feminine abject. As she walks through Paris *en route* to another doctor who almost certainly will not help her, she is internally struck by the remembrance of the melody of a popular song by a nun, Soeur Sourire. In a long parenthetical aside, the narrator describes learning of the signer's suicide in the early 1990s. The religious singer had apparently hidden an internal life as an alcoholic and a lesbian, and the narrator describes the odd kinship she felt with this woman as she walked through the streets of Paris as a young and solitary student before the termination of her pregnancy: two women "unies par une déréliction simplement décalée dans le temps."[54] More importantly, the narrator situates the nun into the larger feminine consciousness within which she is beginning to locate her self and her story:

> [Elle] fait partie de ces femmes, jamais rencontrées, mortes ou vivantes, réelles ou non, avec qui, malgré toutes les différences, je me sens quelque chose de commun. Elles forment en moi une chaine invisible où se côtoient des artistes, des écrivaines, des héroïnes de roman et des femmes de mon enfance. J'ai l'impression que mon histoire est en elles.[55]

The aside is an added reminder to the reader of the power and importance of literature with respect to marginalized feminine experiences. In this "invisible chain" of women to whom she feels bonded, Annie places literary characters alongside real women: the feminine experiences recounted in fiction make an equally important impression on her life as do those of women in the real world. As men continue to treat her condition as either a sexual excitement or a deserved consequence of feminine carelessness, the women around her, both real and imagined, are figures that recognize and allow her recognition of the humanity that she is increasingly being denied.

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[54] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 43.

[55] Ibid.

She also turns her attention from individual actors who have refused to recognize her humanity to the source that has most explicitly taken away her bodily autonomy: the French law, which she acerbically designates "un improbable médecin." The narrator plays Socrates to her own Euthyphro as she finds herself "[d]ans une impossibilité absolue d'imaginer qu'un jour, les femmes puissent décider d'avorter librement. Et, comme d'habitude, il était impossible de déterminer si l'avortement était interdit parce que c'était mal, ou si c'était mal parce que c'était interdit…on ne jugeait pas la loi."[56] Here, the power of Ernaux's situational "alignment" between reader and narrator once again comes into focus. Her language is crafted in such a way as to suggest that others in the text are interpreting the narrator's body as an immoral one only because it is decreed so by a government that equates womanhood with motherhood – and not because there is anything inherently immoral about abortion. The intrinsic hypocrisy of the masculine legal institution treated as obvious fact, and not as a taboo hypothetical.

Although published many years after the legalization of abortion in France, such passages also serve as a reminder that continued cultural discomfort towards abortion, or the lack of a "coherent cultural script" to address it, is perhaps much less influenced by any sort of metaphysical characteristics of the procedure, but more significantly by longstanding and widespread medical and legal maligning of it and those who seek it. By (re)creating a world in which women's bodily autonomy is defined and decided by patriarchal medicine and the law, Ernaux pushes the reader to come to terms with the political urgency of women's agency with respect to their own bodies.

Pregnancy continues to manifest itself as a parasitic invader, sucking away at her sense of self and beginning to result in a total loss of identity. The daily nausea and alternating craving for

[56] Ibid., 47.

and revulsion to food that are regular but ultimately marginal annoyances to willingly pregnant women drive her to abject horror. As she eats, she describes the hyper-physical sensation of feeling food "se [décomposer] dans ma bouche, révélant leur future putrefaction."[57] The language of this carnal description of the menial task of eating explicitly conjures the image of a rotting and decomposing corpse, which brings the reader back to the abject nature of Annie's physical state: just as the promise of life is beginning to blossom in her womb, its presence is a constant reminder of the death of her former self, of which she seeks to violently rid herself. More uncomfortably, it is a reminder of the "death" that she wishes upon the mass inside of her. Again, we are forced to confront perhaps the most unnerving contradiction of the state of her body: she who has the capacity to give life, but chooses to take it away before it can truly begin.

It is mid-December, and Annie realizes that she must now be two months pregnant. She attributes her difficulty to recall how far along her pregnancy is to the "effacement de l'avenir" that her condition has produced. Yet again, her language suggests a hitch in her self-understanding, as her condition leaves her unable to imagine the physical and psychic continuation of her existence. She has mostly referred to the fetus growing inside her using impersonal and indefinite terms such as "ça" or "cette chose-là." By contrast, she has openly rejected the deployment of words like "enfant" or even "enceinte" to describe her condition, which for her "contenaient l'acceptation d'un futur qui n'aurait pas lieu."[58] It is clear that even as this "thing" inches closer and closer to viability – to its capacity to leave her body as an autonomous entity – she is still unable to conceive of it as a concrete reality, and certainly not as something that has any place within the limits of her individual body (and self). Her body gives her constant physical reminders, with her nausea and the swelling of her belly, that something is

[57] Ibid., 51.
[58] Ibid., 30.

there, but she resists any psychic connection to it. Again, if she can't bring herself to truly confront her body's reality, it is perhaps because there is no hermeneutic framework through which to envision a future where she both rids herself of what is inside her, and herself makes it out intact and alive.

Julia Kristeva describes the abject as "…death infecting life…something rejected from which one does not part…it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."[59] Both Ernaux and her narrator admit that this story is one that can inspire irritation and revulsion; it can hardly be imagined as neutral content. These sorts of passages reveal the double helix of abjection and the bodies of women who choose abortion: for her, the "thing" that she cannot name inside her is the abjection – an impossible reality from which she cannot yet untangle herself. It is a death that refuses to respect the border she has drawn around her living individual self. But to the world around her, *she* is understood as the abjection: an "in-between" body that violates the established Butlerian order of intelligible bodies, who insidiously infects the healthy nation with the almost-death that she wishes upon her own body. With this in mind, I turn to the last part of Ernaux's text, in which her narrator confronts the reader with the abject expulsion of her fetus that she will not allow to melt into literary ellipsis.

I have demonstrated above the ways in which men in the text are represented as unsympathetic characters who refuse to comprehend both the gravity and the humanity of the young protagonist's situation. Though Annie has described a metaphysical feminine community to which she feels connected and that gives her strength through the ordeal, she has rarely come

[59] Julia Kristeva, "Powers of Horror," in *The Portable Kristeva: Updated Edition* ed. Kelly Oliver. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 225.

face-to-face with other women up to this point in the narrative. Finally though, another woman enters into the text, and her interactions with the narrator illustrate to us the depth of the gap between the abilities of men and of women to empathize with the feminine abject. The woman about whom Jean had spoken to Annie appears and is referred to in the text only through her initials, L.B. As the two women speak, this text riddled with anxiety, confusion, and fear starts to introduce words that were previously completely unseen: L.B. smiles at the narrator, perhaps the first time any sort of display of joy is mentioned in the work, and she gladly and willingly provides the address of the *faiseuse d'anges* who had performed her own abortion some years ago. She offers to lend Annie the money for the abortion without even being asked – again a direct contrast on the part of a female quasi-stranger to the response of Annie's supposed friend Jean, who refused on moral grounds.

Maybe even more significant than the sharing of the address, however, is L.B.'s explanation, "avec tranquillité, enjouement même, la façon de procéder…à l'aide d'un spéculum, [la faiseuse d'anges] introduisait une sonde dans le col de l'utérus."[60] The unspoken and unspeakable ellipsis whose content she had spent so much time attempting to locate in literature is finally put into words. For the first time in the text, "tout paraissait simple et rassurant – après tout…elle s'en était sortie."[61] L.B.'s physical presence and her healthy, breathing, post-abortion body that stands directly in front of the narrator's fearful pre-abortion one serves as definitive proof both that abortion exists within their world, and that it is a survivable experience that can be comprehended on some level. Even if abortion does not have a place in the patriarchal linguistic order of the outside world, women create their own subversive *langage* with which to

[60] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 67.

[61] Ibid.

defiantly express its existence amongst themselves. To return to Irigaray, L.B.'s body and words prove that she has not been *rendue à* the language of men, and their hermeneutic framework that only accepts feminine reproductive realities that result in the birth of a child.

Ernaux uses no quotations, only free indirect speech, to relay the exact content of the dialogue between the two. But the frankness of L.B.'s short description of the procedure renders her a much better medical ally to Annie than the doctors who could not even bring themselves to say the word abortion and who moreover, explicitly told the young woman that they didn't want to know any more details of her medical journey. The official medical professionals within the text allow themselves to be blinded by misogynistic moralizations and legal codes that ultimately prevented them from recognizing both the ontological difference of the female body and its ethical status. With the introduction of the *faiseuse d'anges* that brings the narrator to the end of her journey, we see that a woman who takes on the role of medical professional is the person who is finally able to interpret Annie's abject body as a human one.

The narrator meets the abortionist in her Paris apartment and only refers to her by the initials, "Mme P.-R." Her careful use of initials, utilized to protect the privacy of those mentioned, is also subtly gendered; while L.B. and Mme P.-R. have their names completely condensed, Jean T. must read his full first name upon her pages that indict his character. Climbing up the stairs to the apartment building, the narrator once again feels swept up in the chain of women that has given her internal strength throughout this ordeal: "Des milliers de filles ont monté un escalier, frappé à une porte derrière laquelle il y avait une femme dont elles ne savaient rien, à qui elles allaient abandonner leur sexe et leur ventre."[62] The corporeality of her language in this waking dream is central, giving us the image of a body that follows a physical

[62] Ibid., 77.

line (or chain) of many others. She highlights the physical gestures that they made and reminds that by offering up their "sex" and their "bellies" to abortionists, they were also offering up their psychic self. Through the lens of Irigaray's words, these women "give up" their bodies to a resistant feminine language, preventing themselves from being swallowed up by that of the masculine, patriarchal law.

Though the doctor that the narrator consulted at the beginning of the text was one she has known for much of her life, this woman *dont elle ne savait rien* proves to be the only person to whom she can entrust her bod, and is much more of a medical professional than any certified doctor to whom Annie has spoken thus far; she speaks to the young woman in a neutral, professional manner, and her questions about the pregnancy are only to judge whether it was "time" to terminate or not. Her apartment creates the kind of sterile medical context for abortion that did not yet exist in the official legal world and is thus perhaps the only space in the text where the female body is recognized as an acting subject, and not as an object onto which legal codes and moralizations may be hurled. Barbara Havercroft adds that "ce passage du statut d'objet (du mépris des autres, d'une situation d'impasse) à celui du sujet agissant s'effectue à la fois sur le plan de l'énoncé de 'l'événement' lui-même, et sur celui de l'énonciation, l'acte de narrer cet 'événement' si difficile."[63] Again, her agency is regained not just by *surviving* the event of abortion, but by writing through and bearing witness to its place in her own self-identification.

The *faiseuse d'anges*, herself the subject of so much cultural revilement, is the only person that takes Annie's bodily reality seriously. In a metanarrative reflection, the narrator

[63] Barbara Havercroft, "Subjectivité féminine et conscience féministe dans *L'Evénement*," in *Annie Ernaux: une œuvre de l'entre-deux*, ed. Fabrice Thumerel (Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2004), 127.

wonders if the utility of their interactions was more reciprocal than she had imagined in the moment, musing that the woman likely benefited from "un sentiment d'être utile aux femmes…[et] la satisfaction secrète d'avoir…le même pouvoir que les médecins qui lui disaient à peine bonjour."[64] This is a crucial reminder that in this socio-historical moment, women were not only marginalized on a reproductive level, but in almost all aspects of life. Likewise, as patriarchal attitudes imparted hierarchal moral meaning upon women's bodily and supposed psychic differences in order to marginalize them, women banded together to assert the feminist power of their difference. The aside further solidifies the narrator's place within her own mental image of a chain of women who help each other survive; she is not an object that is just passively "given" help by others within the text, but is a subject who helps to give meaning and value to the life of a woman who lacks them.

The procedure requires two tubal insertions into her uterus, and after the second, she begins to regain the ability to make sense of herself. Throughout the entire work, Annie has spoken of feeling consumed by the singular loneliness and solitude that her unspeakable condition produced. But upon returning to her university dormitory, this anxious solitude takes on a knowing calm: "je n'avais besoin de parler à personne. Dans mon souvenir, pas de peur, une certaine tranquillité."[65] The notion that her pregnancy is near termination, and that she is on the cusp of expelling the "thing" that sent her sense of self into a tailspin, now permits a tentative return to a certain self-understanding. While the fetus inside her has been described as a "thing" and an "abstraction" to which she cannot form a connection, the tube that will flush it out seems

[64] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evenement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 80.

[65] Ibid., 96.

to her like "un objet qui faisait partie de mon ventre, une alliée."[66] Though the physical make-up of the tube is obviously more "foreign" to her body than that of the fetus – the latter literally being made up of the narrator's own cells – the fact that its place inside her acts in her own self-interest permits her to imagine it as a "truer" part of herself. She allows it to fuse with her physical self and invites it to become a part of her corporeality, thus once again subverting the notion of motherhood as a woman's "natural" role in her final moments of pregnancy.

Even if she will be forever changed by this personal *épreuve*, things are beginning to return to normal for the narrator, on both physical and emotional planes. When she goes to check her underwear now, she finds that it is covered with blood – finally, a signal that her body is returning to a normal and comprehensible state. Nausea has plagued her since the inception of her pregnancy, but she is now overtaken with it and vomits: an abject indication that the process of actually aborting is about to begin. As this chapter's title makes reference to the "graphic" body displayed in Ernaux's text, it is effectively this scene that hones in most precisely on the most uncomfortable aspects of the female body as it aborts. But the graphic frankness with which Ernaux describes the abortion is central to the moral power of the text. Pascal Sardin remarks with respect to *L'Evenement* that "Ernaux…[knows] that language has a moral dimension built into it, that telling stories is intimately linked with the drive to evaluate, criticize, in other words to judge."[67] As stated above, Ernaux is one of the first authors to write candidly in French about a woman who experiences abortion, and *L'Evénement* is perhaps the first narrative in the French

[66] Ibid., 97.

[67] Pascale Sardin, "Towards an Ethics of Witness, or the Story and History of 'Une Minuscule Détresse' in Annie Ernaux's *L'Evénement* and Nancy Huston's *Instruments des Ténèbres*," *French Studies* 62, no. 3 (2008): 306-308.

language to truly delve into the "ellipsis" of time in between "seeking" and "already having had" the procedure. Abortion is both the how and the why of the narrative.

The abortion, which she is forced to begin in her dorm room, mimics both a birth and a burial. While the narrator has resisted linking the term "enceinte" to her condition, she is now unable to escape connection to a birthing scene; her roommate, who helps her through the ordeal, coaches her to breathe "comme les femmes dans l'accouchement" and cuts the narrator's umbilical cord once the fetus has exited her body.[68] Just as she was unable to imagine that "ça puisse prendre" inside of her, she now remarks post-expulsion both that "je n'avais pas imaginé avoir cela en moi" and exhibits what almost seems like a sense of pride that "j'ai été capable de fabriquer cela."[69] The abstraction that she once refused to recognize as a thing is now a concrete being in her hands that she has no choice but to face and process as real.

The soothing and knowing calm that had begun to rush back into her body with the tubal insertion is markedly absent in this scene where abjection and confusion once again take hold of her. By contrast, the abortion is "une scène sans nom, la vie et la mort en même temps."[70] Her words draw us back towards the problem of bodily incomprehensibility, as she is essentially recognizing here that she does not have the linguistic framework necessary to totally process what she has just been through. As noted above, Kristeva reminds us, and Butler echoes, that the necessary linguistic and conceptual tools with which to readily and easily confront the abject are not accessible in our cultural language, and even for the most sympathetic of readers, the passage describing the abortion of Ernaux's narrator is difficult to digest. Accordingly, the abortion scene

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[68] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evenement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 100-101.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., 102.

will demonstrate the consequences of this discursive lack for this woman who is plunged directly into a situation of unspeakable reproductive abjection. Her body may again be whole, but it has now been imprinted with an experience and a memory for which there are not words.

So between the tubal insertion by the *faiseuse d'anges* and her actual miscarriage, an ontological doubling-back would seem to occur; though the tube's presence inside of her imbued her with calming knowledge of impending normalcy, its expulsion along with the fetus once again brings her to face a bodily change – and importantly, a *part of her body* – that she does not have the tools to make sense of. Even as she holds it, the expulsed fetus is neither person nor child within the text. During and after its miscarriage, she calls it a "baigneur," a "poupée indienne," and finally a "pierre" when she puts it in an empty bag for disposal; the closest she comes to recognizing its humanity is through the term "foetus," which she does use as she holds the corpse in her arms. Though the narrator and her roommate shed tears together, she also notably flushes the remains down the toilet unceremoniously without bidding it goodbye.

Here, it is crucial to note that though the narrator will eventually end up in a hospital, she does not dispose of the fetus there. Accordingly, the moralizing medical establishment, that has judged her harshly at multiple turns throughout the ordeal, is never forced to come to terms with abortion itself in any meaningful way. Although the narrator, and by extension her readers, confront head on the messy in-between of life and death of her abortion, the medical world as described within the text is never obligated to fully grapple with its meaning and manifestation. While medical consensus clung to the notion that a fetus was a separate human being that deserved arguably more rights than the maternal vessel that carried it, Annie still knows that it was never a real or recognizable part of her body even after coming into direct contact with its physical manifestation. The gap between the two realms of cognition could not be wider.

Barbara Havercroft argues that while the narrator's euphemisms for the fetus throughout the text are largely indirect, those she uses to describe the abortion scene, "réussit néanmoins à en préciser certains détails avec une exactitude saisissante," and that "cette précision, qui diffère nettement des euphémismes employés ailleurs dans le texte témoigne de l'importance capitale de l'événement."[71] With the narrator's continued insistence that she is recounting her tale in the most accurate possible detail that she is able, we cannot accuse her of "withholding" detail or falling into euphemism because it is somehow "easier" to do so. While the euphemisms of the abortion scene do perhaps signal their importance, I sense that they are much more linguistically disruptive than what Havercroft proposes. To be more precise, we must recognize that she expresses the miscarriage in mostly euphemistic terms exactly because there are not actual words for the details of what she has been through. If the narrator does not know how to speak about what now lies outside of her body, it is because she has no linguistic tools to do so. I contend rather that the narrator's not quite euphemistic language when referencing her body's physical loss is a demonstration of our collective linguistic incapacity to truly confront the physical and psychic reality of abortion and its aftermath: for what exactly has the narrator expulsed from her body? What words and what language do we have – in English, in French, in any language into which the work has been translated – to truly and accurately describe either her body or the body that she has expelled? It is not dead because it never lived or took a breath; it was never a child and it is no longer a fetus. Its existence, between *someone* and *something*, was always entirely liminal.

The narrator echoes the idea of a universal linguistic lack for dealing with the product of abortion as she flushes the bag containing her not-quite-child no-longer-fetus: "[a]u Japon, on

[71] Barbara Havercroft, "Subjectivité féminine et conscience féministe dans *L'Evénement*," in *Annie Ernaux: une œuvre de l'entre-deux*, ed. Fabrice Thumerel (Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2004), 135.

appelle les embryons avortés 'mizuko,' les enfants de l'eau."[72] If we acknowledge our lack of language to describe what she has lost, perhaps we can interpret such a remark as the quasi-articulation of a coherent way in which to process or give a name to her loss. The patriarchal fear of and revulsion towards the feminine abject of our language has turned us to refuse the linguistic recognition of abortion and its aftermath; we can speak the term, but are barely capable of articulating its details. I argue that here, she embodies Irigaray's notion of a feminine excessive disruption that cannot be recognized by the masculine linguistic order, to whom it "emerges within the system as incoherence disruption, a threat to its own systematicity."[73] Her designation of this as a "scene without a name" is thus hardly euphemistic, as the very specific sort of space between life and death produced by abortion remains unrecognized by our linguistic order.

A change in not-quite menstrual blood once again acts as signifier that something has gone wrong. The narrator now quickly realizes that she is losing too much blood and is rushed to a hospital. Though the actual abortion, the expulsion of her fetus, both began and ended outside of the official medical system and in the feminine world of the clandestine, she is unable to escape medicalized judgment in these final moments: "le sang-froid de la première partie de la nuit n'avait donc servi à rien; cela finissait à l'hôpital."[74] While other doctors in the text showed mostly disinterest and mild derision towards her, the attending doctor at the hospital screams at her in an aggressive disgust. Though bound by oath to not let her die simply because of her perceived immorality, the male doctor's anger with the state of her body as it is presented to him

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[72] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 102.

[73] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 2011), 39. For Butler's explication of Irigaray, from which I draw my own analysis, see p. 37-49.

[74] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 105.

is another vital representation within the text of the patriarchal repudiation of women's autonomy. The doctor refuses to explain the surgery to her, and she is left wondering "si on m'avait enlevé les ovaires."[75] Again, this medical interaction destabilizes the sense of internal strength and understanding that she had recovered after expelling the fetus and pushes her body back towards the state of unintelligibility; the incomprehensibility of her body is echoed when she glances at her medical chart and sees the euphemisms used to describe her condition – "*uterus gravide*" – and she realizes that "on ne voulait donc pas dire ce que j'avais eu."[76] Even after she has survived the procedure, her reality cannot be incorporated into the prescribed language of the patriarchal medical establishment.

But the narrator's obsession with unflinching accuracy and truthfulness also reappears in this passage where she compares her memory of the experience as she writes it, and the words she used in the past as she actually lived it. She recounts in another parenthetical going back to her journal, where she purports to have used the exact same language to describe the doctor's callousness there as she does in the metanarrative, and muses that the identical passages, "cette impossibilité de dire les choses avec des mots différents…me [semble] la preuve que j'ai *réellement* vécu *ainsi* l'événement."[77] Despite the traumatic hospital encounter, the indignities she undergoes there cannot change the fact that she has survived the abortion and no longer carries the fetus that upended her dignity so. The previous incapacity to speak about her condition in "real" and tangible terms is transformed into the impossibility of altering the memory of this real experience.

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[75] Ibid., 108.

[76] Ibid., 109.

[77] Ibid., 105.

These unchangeable words act as a further testament to the power of literature to impart coherency to experiences that have remained unappropriated by language. She has shattered abortion's literary ellipsis and opened up a previously nonexistence discursive space in which this "event" or "happening" is concretely put on the page. The reality of abortion as an experience that is both possible and real within the world can no longer be denied. Pregnancy turned her body into an unintelligible entity; "writing" through and effectively bearing witness to the changes that her body underwent make her body human and real again.

Conclusion

Once away from the hospital, the narrator reflects upon what she has just been through and yet again feels herself "prise dans une chaîne de femmes par où passaient les générations."[78] Though she may not possess the language to exactly articulate each detail of what she has been through, the narrator is at least comforted by the knowledge that her body resembles, and is psychically linked to, those of so many other women. And for the first time in the text, a true sense of community appears, with her friends – including L.B. and Jean T. – who take her home to care for her. Even the family doctor that she visits post-abortion, conscious of what she has done, excitedly asks her where she was able to get the procedure; ironically, the first time the medical profession makes any reference to the reality of clandestine abortion is once the narrator is no longer in need of it. Though her body is of course forever changed, it is once again able to be understood by the exterior world as it leaves the realm of abjection and regains a comprehensible state of normalcy. Of course, her body has not been returned to its original state, but has taken on a new one, and she subtly marks her exterior body with this difference and

[78] Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard 2000), 114.

newness - trading in her glasses for contacts, cutting her hair and, importantly, getting a diaphragm. She acknowledges her regained self-knowledge while still recognizing the lingering un-speakability of her *épreuve*, describing herself as "dans un état fébrile de conscience pur, au-delà du langage…ivre d'une intelligence sans mots."[79]

Ernaux has now successfully put into words a detailed account of the "totally human experience" of terminating an unwanted pregnancy. Perhaps, for a reader who comes to the text with an already unsympathetic view of abortion, Ernaux doesn't do much to sway their vision of the procedure's morality. Still, her text most certainly does force them to confront the physical reality of clandestine abortion, and to recognize the psychic harm its repression from cultural language does to those who are in need of it. By highlighting the unintelligibility of the narrator's bodily experience, the text requires that the reader perform the interpretive work of situating the aborting subject within the framework of cultural intelligibility. That is to say, the consumption of Ernaux's text requires *prima facie* understanding of abortion as an experience that is both representable and represented within literature. By putting the abortive body on graphic display in a totally unapologetic fashion, the author establishes abortion as a possible experience for the female body: a human body, after all, and one that does have a place within the linguistic symbolic order.

On abortion as a literary motif, Christine Détrez and Anne Simon remark that it is "ainsi un motif ambivalent, parce que, socialement, il est porteur de contradictions, oscillant toujours entre officieux et officiel, privé et public, espace domestique et espace médical, silence et parole: ce sont ces contradiction que mettent en mots les auteures."[80] Ernaux's narrative does not

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[79] Ibid., 117-118.

[80] Christine Détrez and Anne Simon, *A leur corps defendant: les femmes à l'épreuve du nouvel ordre moral* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 150.

"solve" the cultural question of abortion and its place in our world. But it most certainly makes us question the parameters that have long forced it outside of the boundaries of legitimacy. The political power of abortion narratives lies, at least in part, in their capacity to return individual nuance to the experience of abortion, and to refuse hyperbolic political categorizations that have long defined the procedure. In this next chapter, I turn to narratives of abortion that address this uncanny loss through apostrophe.

Chapter Three

Between Your Body and Mine: Loss and Grief in Abortion Narratives

"It is often said, in literary-theory circles, that to focus on undecidability is to be apolitical. Everything I have read about the abortion controversy in its present form…leads me to suspect that, on the contrary, the undecidable *is* the political. There is politics precisely because there is undecidability. And there is poetry." Barbara Johnson[1]

In this dissertation, one of the most publicly debated ethical questions regarding abortion has so far been skirted: that of the relationship between the subject of an abortion (the woman), and its "object" (the fetus). The moral status of the fetus has unquestionably acted as the cornerstone of public discussion over the ethics of abortion in the last century. Anti-abortion rhetoric has long endeavored to "isolate" the fetus from its carrier in order to erase her humanity in public language and rescind her rights. But pro-choice attempts to reverse this linguistic isolation have also mischaracterized the critical moral dimension of the fetus on the other end of the spectrum, often suggesting that a fetus has no ethical bearing at all.[2] When speaking about abortion, the fetus is certainly not everything – but it is not nothing either.

With this in mind, we may wonder what it would mean to foreground the fetus during the search for an empathetic response to the choice to terminate a pregnancy. Ann J. Cahill argues that while "[it] certainly matters, for example, that the two entities involved in the relationship are not both subjects; embryos/fetuses lack many of the capacities and traits traditionally associated with subjects," it is also true that the "interdependence of identity goes the other way

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[1] Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 35.

[2] For a detailed description of the rhetorical success of anti-choice movements, we can recall Rosalind Petchesky's discussion of the isolation of fetal image in the visual realm in Chapter 1. Additionally, though I mention the rhetoric both pro- and anti- choice movements in the same breath, by no means do I mean to equate the moral weight of their opposing arguments.

as well: the identity of the pregnant person is intertwined with the existence of the embryo/fetus, and to attempt to isolate the pregnant person from the embryo/fetus conceptually is also to make a significant error."[3] In other words, to totally ignore the fetus during a close examination of abortion is to render said examination incomplete; the fetus is a primary and necessary facet of the entire equation. Thus, a study that contends to investigate the multifaceted ways in which women handle the voluntary termination of a pregnancy, and indeed the ways in which artistic language has been able to illuminate previously unspeakable aspects of this experience, would be incomplete without a consideration of what artistic language may have to empathetically say about the relationship between abortion's subject and its object.

The narratives I have examined thus far have been decidedly uninterested in the problematic status of the lost fetus. As we have seen, they focus solely upon the individual subjectivity of women who have abortions to make the case for an empathetic understanding of the procedure's place in our linguistic and moral world. Two works clearly address the notion of physical loss: Mariana Otero's film, *Histoire d'un secret*, investigates the loss of her mother's body after the abortion, and Annie Ernaux's narrator in *L'Evénement* recounts the experience of disposing of the uncanny fetal remains that her body expelled while completely alone. Neither work shows interest in the potential humanity of the "object" of abortion, and neither takes on the possibility of emotional loss that may occur once the fetus has exited the body of she who will not be its mother. Otero's film does not address the lost fetus at all, and though Ernaux's work does confront its existence head-on, the narrator outright refuses to impart any humanity onto its physical form.

[3] Ann J. Cahill, "Miscarriage and Intercorporeality," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 46, no. 1 (2015): 53.

Central to my analyses of Otero and Ernaux has been the idea that the political power of abortion narratives lies, at least in part, in their ability to recognize the individual humanity of women who choose abortion, and to refuse the kinds of hyperbolic political categorizations of selfish and unthoughtful "banalisation" that have long defined the procedure.[4] Accordingly, a study of empathy for these nuanced stories would be incomplete if it did not turn towards works that do address the complicated feelings of emotional loss or grief that may occur in the aftermath of an abortion. In a 1986 article, Barbara Johnson explores the utilization of literary apostrophe by Anglophone women poets who have had abortions themselves. She begins with a commentary on traditional poetic use of literary apostrophe as a rhetorical device in poems like Baudelaire's "Moesta et Errabunda," and Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," which "involve the direct address of an absent, dead, or inanimate being by a first-person speaker." Through this kind of direct, lyric address, "the absent, dead, or inanimate entity is thereby made present, animate, and anthropomorphic."[5] As such, the rhetorical deployment of apostrophe not only creates (or assumes) a relationship between a poet and the object of his animation, but also between this object and the poem's reader, who must take part in the animation for apostrophe's rhetorical function to prove effective. In consequence, apostrophe gives rise to the poetic meta-question of "whether its rhetorical strategies can be effective," and even of whether or not "loss [can] be healed through language alone."[6]

If successful, apostrophe anthropomorphizes a non-existent entity, or metaphorically resuscitates a dead one. Therefore, the literary implications of a poet whose work animates a

[4] See chapter 2 of this project for a discussion of the history of this word's repeated appearance throughout the abortion debate in contemporary French politics and culture.

[5] Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 30.

[6] Ibid., 31.

(potential) being whose life she has prematurely cut off herself has implications that extend far beyond those simply of aesthetic lyricism. This curious and provocative usage of literary animation certainly calls into question the link between figurative language and the seemingly unanswerable, or "undecidable," questions about life and death that abortion inherently poses. Johnson finds that the poetry of authors like Adrienne Rich and Gwendolyn Brooks who employ this rhetorical device to directly address an aborted fetus in verse "attempt the impossible task of humanizing both the mother and the aborted child while presenting the inadequacy of language to resolve the dilemma without violence."[7] She argues that when women poets use apostrophe to animate a fetus:

> [T]he question of animation and anthropomorphism is thereby given a new and disturbing twist. For if apostrophe is said to involve language's capacity to give life and human form to something dead or inanimate, what happens when…the lyric speaker assumes responsibility for producing the death in the first place, but without being sure of the precise degree of human animation that existed in the entity killed? What is the debate over abortion about, indeed, if not the question of when, precisely, a being assumes human form?[8]

The questions Johnson poses above serve as the interrogative backbone of this chapter. Johnson reminds us that autobiographical and auto-fictional works about abortion exist precisely because a child does not. Consequentially, they give a literary figuration to a being that never took on the fully human physical form that it could have assumed. As this analysis will demonstrate, figurative and literary language, with an emphasis on apostrophic animation, are perhaps uniquely capable of addressing the violent rift caused by abortion in ways that extend beyond the representational limits of political and public language.

I focus here on two first-person narratives: the fictional *Journal d'Hannah,* published in 1993 by Louise L. Lambrichs, and the autobiographical *Dix-sept ans,* published in 2015 by

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[7] Ibid., 33.

[8] Ibid., 32.

Colombe Schneck. Though largely divergent in both setting and content, these works directly address the feelings of loss and grief that their narrator feels in the wake of her abortion. In both, the protagonist's confrontation of these feelings acts as a focal point in the narrative, thus underlining the importance of their recognition in her self-conception and rejecting the idea that such emotions are fleeting or unimportant. *Journal d'Hannah*, set during WWII, takes the form of the diary of a Jewish French woman, Hannah, who begins documenting her life therein after learning that she is pregnant. She is convinced by her Resistance-member husband to undergo a late term clandestine abortion. In the procedure's aftermath, Hannah's dreams are overtaken by an alternate reality that reanimates her aborted daughter, one into which the girl is born and subsequently grows up in real time. With the recurring image of this lost daughter suspended in her dreams, Hannah begins to neglect her "other" living daughter and her responsibilities in the external world. She suffers from a deep psychic break, and afterwards struggles to cross back into the reality outside her dream world.

At first blush, the link between the fictional Hannah and the actually-living Colombe Schenck may seem tenuous. Schneck's narrative is a first-person autobiographical account of the abortion she had as a high school student in 1980s Paris. First and foremost, this of course means that her abortion was legal and was accordingly much less dangerous or physically traumatic than the illegal ones performed under the cloak of wartime clandestinity. To keep the comparison going, teenage Schneck is immediately certain of her desire to abort the pregnancy, and this certainty never wavers as she nears the termination – unlike Hannah who is instantly traumatized by the abortion that she only reluctantly undergoes. And yet, Schneck dedicates the work's conclusion to a multi-page apostrophic address to the fetus, in which she tackles the emotional toll that the absence of the lost child has taken on her in adulthood. Schneck's recognition of

feelings of loss in the years after her abortion, and her corresponding inability to voice these feelings to others, creates a significant link between these two narratives about two very different experiences with abortion.

Of abortion's rare apparition in literature, and the increasing attempts of French women writers to fill this void, Shirley Jordan writes that the delicacy of representing abortion in literature lies in part in the fact that it is "difficult to know how to write about abortion in a sufficiently even-handed way to leave space for a complex range of readerly reactions (empathy, sadness, perhaps disgust and anger) without appearing gratuitously provocative or providing excess ballast to pro- or anti- choice camps."[9] Both of the works analyzed in this chapter confront head-on the complex and unvoiced expressions of grief and mourning experienced by their narrators in the wake of the voluntary termination of their pregnancies. Moreover, both works ask us, directly in the case of Schneck's, to consider the failure of language to grapple with what is lost during an abortion in a way that does not also make an attempt to tell us how we should feel about the lost entity or abortion at large. As these works show, whether or not abortion is legal does not seem to matter with regard to the ongoing "Western difficulty in providing language or sufficient recognition" for the inherent interdependency of identity between subject and object that a pregnancy produces, regardless of whether a child is produced.[10] It is important to recognize that these works do not fill in this linguistic gap, and it is (tautologically) difficult to imagine what such a work would be like. Rather, they give us clear artistic representations of women attempting to psychically fill in this gap for themselves and make sense of abortion's place in their self-conception.

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[9] Shirley Ann Jordan, *Contemporary French Women's Writing: Women's Visions, Women's Voices, Women's Lives* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), 230.

[10] Ann J. Cahill, "Miscarriage and Intercorporeality," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 46, no. 1 (2015): 54.

As Johnson suggests, the admission of negative feelings after an abortion should not lead us to conclude *prima facie* that "no case *for* abortion can take the woman's feelings of guilt and loss into consideration, [or] that to take those feelings into account is to deny the right to choose the act that produced them."[11] I argue that Lambrichs's and Schneck's narratives both make strong, clear cases for such a principle. These otherwise dissimilar narratives bring to the fore reactions to abortion that are rarely found in contemporary abortion narratives and that, as Johnson suggests, are indeed enormously taboo to acknowledge outside of anti-abortion circles. Consequently, I find it fruitful to analyze Lambrichs's novel and Schneck's autobiographical text together.[12]

The works explored in my previous chapters have also been ones that clearly and often explicitly directed their readers and viewers towards pro-choice conclusions and asked directly that we understand the right to abortion as an integral facet of women's bodily autonomy. In a similar vein, Schneck has given multiple interviews where she speaks about the political animus behind the publication of *Dix-sept ans* that situates her text as staunchly pro-choice, despite its direct address of the lost fetus. Curiously though, and perhaps due to discomfort caused by the apostrophic address, the work has so far seemed to elude any sort of academic literary criticism. On the other hand, scholarly reception of Lambrichs's novel has been considerably mixed and controversial, although it was shortlisted for both the Prix Renaudot and the Prix Femina. Referring to the protagonist's complacency with her role as domestic housewife, Wendy

[11] Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, Abortion," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 33.

[12] As noted in the introduction, I separate the kinds of contemporary abortion narratives analyzed within this study from previous artistic representations of the procedure that painted it as demonic and immoral. Of course, a story about a woman who regrets her abortion, or who feels grief in its aftermath, would not be out of place in this sort of literature.

Greenberg concluded in her 1995 review, for example, that Lambrichs is "clearly not a feminist."[13] American pro-life researcher Jeff Koloze includes the novel into his own study of the abortion motif in European novels. In it, he diagnoses fictional Hannah as being afflicted with the equally fictitious "post-abortion syndrome" and uses her mourning and psychological decline to draw broader conclusions about the supposed immorality of abortion and the danger to women that its free access poses.[14]

This sort of anti-abortion conclusion is likely to be expected in response to a novel that speaks so directly to abortion-related grief and mourning. If abortion as a reproductive experience continues to retain a certain "unspeakability" that keeps it on the margins of culture, the expression of grief or mourning in its wake remains even more inexpressible. To voluntarily terminate a pregnancy, no matter how fraught the circumstances, would seem to require the forfeiture of a right to acknowledge any resulting psychic loss. However, I will argue something quite different. For if we are to acknowledge abortion as a legitimate reproductive choice and path for all women, then we must accept that all women do not come to terms with this identity-shifting experience in the same manner, as is the case with all reproductive choices.

Drawing on Barbara Johnson's above-mentioned exploration of the poetics of loss and abortion, I argue against equating the vocalization of post-abortion mourning with "a simple case for the embryo's right to life" and contend instead that such works need not force us to conclude "that a woman who has chosen abortion does not have the right to mourn."[15] In this chapter, I

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[13] Wendy N. Greenberg, "*Journal d'Hannah* by Louise L. Lambrichs: Review," *French Review* 68, no. 4 (1995): 749.

[14] Jeff Koloze, "European Abortion Novels: Documenting a Fidelity to the Milieu," *Life and Learning* 11 (2001): 143-169.

[15] Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, Abortion," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 33.

situate Lambrichs's work not as an anti-feminist indictment of abortion, as some have understood it, but instead as a challenge to open up a discursive space that enables an empathetic understanding of the diverse ways in which women deal with the voluntary termination of a pregnancy. Then, I move on to an analysis of Colombe Schneck's autobiographical narrative, making the case that the legalization of abortion has not undone the complicated feelings of loss and guilt that can accompany the procedure, which Schneck's narrative shows to be inadequately recognized in the public debate about abortion today. These works certainly do not "resolve" the tension of the confusing liminal space between life and death that abortion creates. There is perhaps no language that could accomplish such a herculean feat. Rather, they work to confront this ontological unknown in a way that serves to question the limits and the ethics of abortion-related mourning or grief. It is in their frank confrontation of abortion's "undecidabile" aspect that their political power can be found.

Liminal and Unspeakable Grief in *Journal d'Hannah*

While Lambrichs has never spoken of a personal connection to abortion, as have many of the other authors in this project, she has explored different but perhaps equally controversial reproductive topics in other novels, including incest and cloning. Though fictional, the bulk of the narrative of *Journal d'Hannah* is told through the hyper-personal medium of the narrator's diary. In the context of this project, we can consider the novel's diaristic format as a kind of rhetorical echo of the life-writing genre, which is often told through journaling or, like Ernaux's work, is based upon reflections contained within an author's own personal journal. As Susan Henke notes, the alternative mediums favored by life-writing permit women "to fashion an enabling discourse of testimony and self-revelation, to establish a sense of agency… to articulate

their personal histories in diary, memoir, and fiction form, re-inscribe the claims of feminine desire onto the texts of a traditionally patriarchal culture."[16] Though of course fictional, Hannah's diary puts into words a side of her that remains otherwise inexpressible, as it testifies to personal experiences and emotions she is unable to reveal to the outside world. The patriarchal world has, in a sense, substituted its own voice for hers in the social realm, and the diary writing acts in contrast as a way of speaking for, and to, her own self in an attempt to reclaim the reproductive agency that both her family and her government have taken away.

Hannah begins her diary in January of 1943, right in the middle of the Second World War. She never speaks of a specific impetus behind the drive to document her thoughts, but the diary's first words are an invocation of her pregnancy: "Je crois que je suis de nouveau enceinte."[17] Though her words direct the reader to imagine a future where a new person will exist, the death that surrounds Hannah in her current wartime circumstances is also manifested in the entry. She admits to attributing a three-month bout of amenorrhea not to the possibility of life in her womb, but to the stress of life in wartime Paris, "aux événements, à cette vie insupportable que nous menons…cet enfer."[18] We can contrast her reaction to amenorrhea with those of Ernaux's narrator and later to Schneck, who both immediately intuit it as evidence of an unwanted pregnancy. Already, the circumstances of the potential child's existence are shrouded in an eerie and lamentable uncertainty.

The pregnancy has been confirmed by her next entry, written shortly after a visit with the family doctor. In the first entry, Hannah gives no indication of her feelings towards the

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[16] Suzette Henke, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), xvi.

[17] Louise L. Lambrichs, *Journal d'Hannah* (Paris: La Différence, 1993), 9.

[18] Ibid.

possibility of pregnancy outside of her reference to the hellish state of her environment. Perhaps, the medical corroboration solidifying the reality of a physical presence growing in her womb drives Hannah's now emotional reaction to the pregnancy, which paints a much different picture than her bleak first entry. While that entry detailed the "hell" outside their home, the confirmation of pregnancy fills her with so much joy that she wonders to herself "[c]omment tant de bonheur est-il encore possible?" and writes that she now feels as if she is carrying "hope" inside of her.[19] The affirmation of her pregnancy even seems to bear regenerative powers. Hannah notes, for example, that she leaves the doctor's office feeling "nettoyée du malheur accumulé toutes ces années…plus jeune, plus vivante. Euphorique, presque."[20] In other words, the future life inside of her creates an escape from the death and destruction that plagues daily life in the external world.

Hannah's positive reception of her pregnancy is also manifested in the ways in which she references the fetus, who she immediately begins to call an "enfant" and her "bébé." Willing and able to imagine the realization of the pregnancy full-term, Hannah is accordingly capable of imagining the fetus inside her as something that can and will become an independent being outside of her own body. Someone like Ernaux, for example, speaks of unintentional pregnancy as if it was a sort of alien invasion that has landed with parasitic and malicious intentions inside of her. But Hannah revels in the notion that her body is no longer just her own. Not an unwanted invader, the fetus is an ally and a promise of hope for the future world.

Once her husband does return to the family home, Hannah notes that his mood has completely changed from its regular and placid state, and she finds him distant and difficult to

[19] Ibid., 10.

[20] Ibid.

talk to. Still, while Robert is unwilling to bond with his wife upon his return, Hannah remarks that his loving relationship with Colette remains unchanged. Hannah is happy to watch him lovingly read her a bedtime story and takes the exchange as proof that he will welcome the news of a second child. And yet, this scene of paternal bonding from a distant maternal vantage point creates an already palpable distance between the father and daughter, and the mother/wife who possesses a knowledge that they do not. This scene thus introduces the "separation" of the two parts of the family that will dominate the post-abortion part of the narrative and that will serve in part as the impetus for Hannah's psychological decline. Hannah, and by logical extension her fetus, stand apart from Robert and Colette, who are both still unaware of the new child's existence, and who will remain ignorant of the ways in which this fetus will continue to "grow" inside of Hannah in the years to come.

Robert's changed mood is a surprise that causes Hannah to struggle to find the words with which to announce the happy news. If the word "abortion" was often a difficult one to speak aloud in a pre-legalization world, Lambrichs's novel presents us with a kind of inverse situation in which pregnancy is the inexpressible term. Its importance to Hannah would seem to exist *beyond* words. To bring the reality of the pregnancy into the linguistic realm is not abject, but approaches a Kantian expression of the sublime. She is incensed when he asks her if she had "something to tell him," lamenting his incapacity to sense the gravity and importance of the "something" that she wishes to externalize to him. Just as the fetus is to her not a "thing," but a "baby" and her "child," the announcement of its presence and impending arrival are not just "something" to say: "pas une chose mais un être…un événement capital qui le touchait au premier chef, engageait notre vie commune."[21] Again, Hannah refuses to accept the idea of

[21] Ibid., 20-21.

language that would deny personhood to her fetus. She begins to cry at his indifference to this monumental moment, and he angrily goes to bed before she is able to share the news with him. His incapacity to sense the weight of the "something" that his wife needs to tell him is a subtle indication of the wildly conflicting ways in which he and his wife will understand the proper place of the fetus in their world. With this scene, the inhospitable reality of the external world and the familial optimism of her internal imaginary world already begin to diverge.

The next day, Hannah finally finds the words with which to announce the pregnancy, and her husband's reaction deepens the chasm between the familial bliss of which she dreams and the reality of bringing an unplanned pregnancy to term in wartime Paris: "Et comment comptes-tu faire?...Voyons, Hannah, tu ne t'imagines tout de même pas que nous allons garder cet enfant?"[22] Harsh as his reaction may be, Robert's participation in the Resistance indicates that he is well aware of the practical danger of bringing a child into their world. However, it is also important here to note Robert's rapid switching of pronouns as he reacts: addressing Hannah, he asks what "you" are going to do about the pregnancy, but then immediately asserts that there is no way "we" are going to keep the child. His pronoun swapping is a meaningful indication of the divergent ways in which abortion and pregnancy are respectively addressed and understood in our linguistic order. Though a man like Robert can understand himself as a part of the pregnancy, despite the fact that he doesn't wish to keep it, his language actively removes him from a relationship with the act of terminating it; it is up to Hannah alone, the "you" in his sentence, to take care of the problem of "our" pregnancy. Before the reality of not bringing her pregnancy to term has even been realized within the text, Hannah is alone in coming to terms with the termination of her wanted child.

[22] Ibid., 20.

Hannah's emotional response to Robert's definitive disinterest in continuing the pregnancy largely mimics the shock and helplessness with which the protagonists of other abortion narratives process the revelation of their pregnant state; though she desires an opposite conclusion than theirs, Hannah feels just as robbed of her reproductive agency and of her right to imagine her reproductive future as do they. While she perhaps does not exactly pick up on the nuance of her husband's pronouns, she rejects his encroachment on her liberty in the private haven of her diary: "si, justement, je l'imaginais…je voulais pouvoir y croire. Avoir ce droit."[23] She may not have the ability to declare her independence as such in the outside world, but her diary demonstrates that this does not mean she is not aware of the kind of bodily autonomy she *should* be able to access. As a Jewish woman living in the midst of war and genocide, the joy of bringing a child into the world was not one that she could allow herself.[24]

Though the right to abortion has long been theorized as a right to privacy, philosopher Drucilla Cornell has drawn upon Lacan's theories of the social and symbolic creation of self to invoke the right to what she calls the "imaginary domain," through which she elucidates the relationship between reproductive autonomy and political equality. She argues that the "denial of the right to abortion should be understood as a serious symbolic assault on a woman's sense of self precisely because it thwarts the projection of bodily integration and places the woman's body in the hands and imaginings of others who would deny her coherence by separating her

[23] Ibid.

[24] While I only briefly touch on Hannah's Jewish identity in this chapter, its role in the novel and her personal trauma is not insignificant. For a more in-depth analysis that engages with the intersection of Hannah's hidden ethnic identity with her guilt and responsibility for the abortion, see: Gill Rye, "The ethics of aesthetics in trauma fiction: memory, guilt and responsibility in Louise L. Lambrichs' *Journal d'Hannah*," *Journal of Romance Studies* 9 no. 3 (2009): 48-59.

womb from her self."[25] Thus, she concludes that "the denial of the right to abortion can and should be understood as a symbolic dismemberment of a woman's body."[26] In other words, we are only able to view our bodies as whole if others project this belief back onto us; to be robbed of bodily integrity is to be robbed of the right to self-understanding and self-possession.

Now, Hannah has already begun to view her body as no longer being exclusively "her own," as she welcomes the presence of the child growing inside of her. As we see, this is not an abrogation of personal autonomy that impedes her self-conception. Rather, to return to Cahill's words above, she embraces the interdependency of identity that her pregnancy creates, which is often forcefully rejected in other narratives about abortion. While it is clear that the presence of the fetus does not obstruct her capacity to imagine her body as she wishes, it is equally obvious that her husband's demand that she terminate the pregnancy does just this. Robert's refusal to allow this being that her body has begun to nourish to develop and become a full person would seem to not just symbolically, but almost literally, separate Hannah's womb from her self, as he impels her to remove from her body a part of her womb that she had already begun to subsume into her identity.

As the fetus begins to fade from a potential child into a burden that must be destroyed, the precariousness of the novel's historical setting comes back into focus. While Hannah had joyfully confirmed her pregnancy with the family doctor just days ago, her husband now makes an appointment with the same doctor to relinquish this joy. Importantly, Hannah's pregnancy has already advanced to at least the four month mark, and the doctor advises the couple that they will need to travel to Switzerland for the procedure, where abortion was already legal and as many

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[25] Drucilla Cornell, *The Imaginary Domain: Abortion, Pornography and Sexual Harassment* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 38. Cornell expands on the Lacanian basis of her argument in p. 38-43.

[26] Ibid., 38.

French women were forced to do in the years before their government legalized abortion.[27] He ominously adds that "quatre mois, c'est très risqué."[28] Clandestine abortions, such as the ones frequently performed in 1940s France, of course carried (and do still carry) a certain amount of danger at all stages of a pregnancy, but its risk to the life of the mother rose exponentially with the development of the fetus.[29]

As Otero's film reminded us in the first chapter, the deadly and dangerous historical realities of abortion in pre-legalization France may not be immediately obvious to a consumer in the 20th and 21st centuries. In her own article on Lambrichs's novel, Gill Rye examines the possibility of understanding "Hannah's own progression of guilt and responsibility [as a mirror to] that of postwar France."[30] She argues convincingly that as Hannah works through her own culpability for the abortion, "the novel bears witness not only to an individual trauma but also to the trauma…of a culture."[31] In turn, Rye concludes that "the ones who bear witness, the readers (particularly though not exclusively French readers), are invited to take an active part in the ethical process of working through...our own responsibility in relation to the wars and atrocities that are still proliferating in our time."[32] In other words, the ethical power of the text lies in its

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[27] For first-hand accounts of this often-arduous journey see: Xavière Gauthier, *Paroles des avortées: quand l'avortement était clandestin.* (Paris: Editions de La Martinière, 2004). It should also be noted that social class determined who, like Hannah, was able to travel to Switzerland to abort and who was forced to fend for themselves with back-alley abortionists in metropolitan France.

[28] Louise L. Lambrichs, *Journal d'Hannah* (Paris: La Différence, 1993), 21.

[29] This fact is of course poetically displayed on screen in Otero's *Histoire d'un secret*, explored in the first chapter. Though there is a 30-year gap in between the setting of Lambrichs's novel and Clotilde Vautier's real abortion, clandestine methods for terminating pregnancies did not significantly change between these time periods.

[30] Gill Rye, "The Ethics of Aesthetics in Trauma Fiction: Memory, Guilt and Responsibility in Louise L. Lambrichs's *Journal d'Hannah*," in *Journal of Romance Studies* 9, no. 3 (2009): 54.

[31] Ibid., 57.

[32] Ibid.

ability to shed light on France's contemporary reticence to grapple with its traumatic history, and bring readers to reflect on their own duty to act ethically in their cultural context.

Rye's analysis is focused mainly on the metonymic potential of Lambrichs's use of the abortion motif in her novel; I do not approach its intrigue in the same way, but am interested in studying Hannah's abortion as important at face value. But as this study focuses on the specificity of abortion, it can be useful to apply Rye's logic and method towards the contemporary politics of abortion and our own ethical relationship to them. Clandestine abortion and the arduous transnational journey to procure a legal one may no longer be a reality for French women, but it certainly continues to have an impact on many of their European counterparts – and of course innumerable women across the globe.[33] And as I will detail below, the voluntary termination of a desired pregnancy is an abject reality whose trauma transcends historical boundaries. Rye imagines that Lambrichs's novel can bring us to consider the relationship between historical responsibility and contemporary complacency, and I too believe that it can. If so, then an approach to its ethics from a different angle, focused on abortion as a real practice and not a metonym, can perhaps also brings readers – particularly though not exclusively French ones – to consider our responsibility towards a situation like Hannah's that mimics that of too many women across Europe and the globe today.

[33] In 2016, two Irish women made international headlines when they live-tweeted their journey to a British clinic to terminate their pregnancies under the hashtag #twowomentravel, tagging Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny in each of their tweets. Abortion remains accessible in 40 of the 47 members of the European Union, though multiple additional states have put up barriers that render its practical access difficult for many female citizens. In a December 2017 report, the Council of Europe's Commissioner of Human Rights, Nis Muiznieks, denounced the continued lack of access to abortion for all female members of the European Union – but no sanctions have been posed or actions taken. His full report may be found here: https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/women-s-sexual-and-reproductive-rights-in-europe

Hannah laments that learning of the abortion's potential danger to her health has no effect on her husband; she writes that "Robert avait pris sa décision."[34] Her language in this passage is of monumental importance to the ongoing question of her bodily agency. She sometimes speaks of the pregnancy in earlier passages as if it is "hers" but also and more frequently as if it is "ours" – belonging equally to her husband as it does to her. In this moment, she does not question the notion that the decision to abort this pregnancy would lie solely in the realm of her breadwinner husband. The government has placed broader legal restrictions on her bodily autonomy that prevent her from accessing contraception, and that would render the abortion she feels obligated to pursue an immense danger to her physical health, whereas her husband has shut down the possibility of negotiating her reproductive autonomy on a much more personal level.[35] It seems clear that Robert believes himself to be making a decision that is morally right. Though he is the one who "decides" to terminate the pregnancy, he also accompanies her across the border to Switzerland and makes multiple efforts to console her after the procedure. His status as an active member of the Resistance indicates that he is well aware of the practical danger of bringing a child into their world, and he reminds her of the very real possibility that the family may have to flee their home at a moment's notice – a task that would be rendered immeasurably more difficult while pregnant.

On this note, one could furthermore make the case that the hostile environment in which Robert feels a pregnancy would not be safe also serves as a masculine impediment to Hannah's self- conception; while she actively imagines a world in which her child would be loved and

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[34] Louise L. Lambrichs, *Journal d'Hannah*, (Paris: La Différence, 1993), 21.

[35] Contraception is not mentioned in Lambrichs's novel, but was outlawed in France in 1920, in wake of pro-natalist fears of depopulation after the First World War. The second war that followed, of course, did nothing to assuage these fears, and contraception was not legalized in France until 1967.

cared for, the men who govern her reality have waged a violent war whose consequences threaten the safety of civilian citizens like Hannah. Because she is Jewish, to go through with the pregnancy would also be to endanger the unborn child, whose life would almost certainly be cut short were she to be deported. Regardless of her secret heritage, giving birth under the Vichy regime with a husband who was often away was hardly a safe endeavor.[36] Here, we can see the unspoken double helix of Hannah's situation, whereby both her pregnancy and its termination pose threats to her mental and physical health. While the abortion that she does not even desire is a danger to her physical health, it could be argued – indeed, as her husband does – that to go through with the pregnancy would be just as dangerous to the health of mother and unborn child. This impossible situation thus solidifies her interior dream realm as the only space where she can find peaceful self-fulfillment. Nowhere in the real world of France in the 1940s is her child safe, but in the dream world there is no war. So, her self-understanding becomes bifurcated between real world and dream world in a way that will deeply disturb her ability to coherently situate herself (and her self) in her sad and dangerous reality.

Hannah's next entry, dated nearly a week later, is our first window into her post-abortion psyche. No explanation is given for her silence during the trip to Switzerland, and the reader is thus given almost no information about the abortion itself. The only detail that Hannah conveys is that the extracted fetus was female: "[u]ne fille, mon dieu, c'était une petite fille."[37] Hannah does not directly indicate how she came to know the sex, but suggests that she was told this post-

[36] Though the Vichy regime arguably represents the apex of pro-natalism in the history of France, it was also a time when women were explicitly instructed by the state to fend for their social welfare alone, and when their husbands were often not available to provide. For a detailed look at the status of women as mothers and workers under Vichy, see Miranda Pollard, *Reign of Virtue: Mobilizing Gender in Vichy France*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) and Sarah Fishman, *We Will Wait: Wives of French Prisoners of War, 1940-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

[37] Louise L. Lambrichs, *Journal d'Hannah* (Paris: La Différence, 1993), 23.

abortion as opposed to coming so close to the corpse that she observed the sex herself. The depth of the trauma of this revelation is clear. She writes that "j'aurais voulu que ce bébé reste plus abstrait, un bébé sans sexe, sans avenir," and that the knowledge that this potential child *was*, or at least *would have been* a girl "lui donne une réalité qui me rend cette perte plus insupportable encore."[38] While her pre-abortion language indicated that she had quite clearly already imbued her fetus with at least some sort of meaningful personhood, the capacity to now imagine a girl who would grow up to be a woman moves the fetus from the realm of the abstraction to a concrete reality whose capacity to flourish has been cut short.

While pro-choice rhetoric generally refuses the idea of fetal personhood, Hannah continues to refer to the fetus as "mon bébé" and laments repeatedly throughout the diary that it is now "un enfant mort." Though her "child" never took a breath, Hannah is adamant in her diary that a death, even a murder, has occurred. But unlike the death of a living and birthed child, this is a kind of death that Hannah knows she does not have the right to outwardly mourn or even label as a "death" in the company of those around her. Hannah's insistence on the personhood of her aborted fetus undoubtedly complicates the possibility of understanding the novel as not anti-feminist, or at least not anti-abortion. However, if we remove the anti-woman political baggage of this emotional response from the equation, we can again deploy Rye's method of ethical examination to connect this story to present-day linguistic blank spaces of women who terminate desired pregnancies. The details of Hannah's narrative are of course fictional and situated in an extremely fraught historical context. But even today, many years after abortion's legalization has rendered the procedure safe and effective at all stages of pregnancy, late term abortions continue

[38] Ibid.

to have a higher chance of being done in the case of a desired pregnancy.[39] While abortions performed in the first trimester of pregnancy are often, though not necessarily, sought out by women who did not wish to be pregnant in the first place, abortions like Hannah's at the later stages of pregnancy are much more likely to be done out of medical necessity, in the case of fetal abnormalities or a threat to the life of the mother.

Now, women who find themselves pregnant and intend straight away to terminate their pregnancy may give little to no moral consideration to the possible humanity of their fetus. This idea is quite clearly articulated throughout Ernaux's *récit* examined in the previous chapter, where the narrator is immediately certain of her decision to abort and firmly resists the personification of the alien mass in her womb. But as Hannah's story reminds us, abortion is not always so clear cut for the subject who undergoes it. A termination of pregnancy like Hannah's, undesired but somehow necessitated, bring us to consider the space between life and death that abortion creates in a way that those depicted in a narrative like Ernaux's perhaps do not.

Alison Reiheld explores the idea of labeling certain reproductive events as "liminal" in her article on the experiences of women who miscarry.[40] She notes, for example, that while we have "clear cultural scripts for pregnancy, which is not liminal but entails well-established social roles and interactions,"[41] other reproductive experiences can create an eerie ontological space in-

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[39] Diana Green Foster and Katrina Kimport, "Who Seeks Abortions at or after 20 Weeks?" *Perspectives on Reproductive and Sexual Health* 45, no. 2 (2013): 210-218. Again, as mentioned above, the fact that modern medicine has developed safe and low-risk methods for terminating pregnancies does not mean that all women are able to access safe or sterile abortions – even in countries like France and (especially) the United States, where these methods are legal.

[40] Alison Reiheld, "The Event that was Nothing: Miscarriage as a Liminal Event," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 46, no. 1 (2015): 9-26. Reiheld also gives a comprehensive history of the term "liminal" towards the beginning of the article. Additionally, she contends that while miscarriage constitutes a "liminal" event, abortion is, like pregnancy, a "clear" one – an assertion with which I deeply disagree, as demonstrated in this analysis.

[41] Ibid., 13.

between life and death. In turn, these events "raise not only the specter of death and thus become shrouded in secrecy, but also cause deep confusion…Did someone die? Was there a loss of potential life or a loss of life? For many people, this is not clear. For others it is."[42] As political and public language endeavor to force perhaps impossible answers to these questions, women whose reproductive paths do not result in a birthed child can find themselves "trapped in liminality [which] is often excruciating…especially because of the isolation it entails."[43] These women, who have already begun to envision the fetus as a separate and individual entity and who, perhaps like Hannah, have already felt its physicality within their womb, may find that there is no language with which to express their grief, as the termination of pregnancy forces them to confront the highly symbolic and incomplete nature of pregnancy-related language.

For it is culturally acceptable, and expected even, that a pregnant woman refer to her fetus as a "baby" or a "child" months before it exits her body, and even to do so long before the fetus could viably survive outside of her womb. Indeed, Hannah (and even Robert) quite naturally does just this when speaking of the pregnancy before the abortion in the above-mentioned passages. But once this possibility of life is cut off, no matter the rationale, the idea that a "death" has occurred is treated as a linguistic overreach. As a result, the debilitating isolation theorized by Reiheld can limit one's ability to cope with the termination of pregnancy and absorb its reality into her self-understanding. This once again points to the ethical implications of the lack of language with which to address abortion-related grief and mourning, of which Lambrichs's protagonist provides a clear-cut example. Though on neither a biological nor a linguistic level, Hannah has not really lost a child as such, the text clearly demonstrates that

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 14.

she does not feel as though she has lost "nothing" or just the mere "possibility" of something. But the taboo emotional pain that Hannah expresses in her diary demonstrates that there isn't much of a cultural script with which to address what she has lost either. Pregnancy-related language impels women to imagine themselves as mothers before we really believe that this term accurately applies to them. But if the potential for life is prematurely cut short, our linguistic order struggles to face the possible ways in which women may respond to this end. As Schneck's narrative will demonstrate later, the legalization of abortion in France has done little to resolve this tense isolation.

Importantly, scholars in the social sciences are beginning to, at the very least, recognize the long-ignored existence of this linguistic void for women who become pregnant, but who do not carry their pregnancy to term. Yris Ertugal uses data from the *Association Nationale des Centres d'IVG et de Contraception* to grant that though to "donner au fœtus les statut d'un enfant, c'est mettre l'avortement en péril," we should still recognize that "la perte d'un fœtus affecte des femmes qui se sentirent mères, ne serait-ce que le temps d'une courte grossesse."[44] While we can certainly acknowledge that there are still expedient political reasons to avoid the hard equation between "fetus" and "child" in the linguistic realm, this does not change the fact that the experiences of some women who terminate pregnancies (or miscarry) continue to fall into an abject linguistic void. They are not just losing a physical presence with the termination of pregnancy, but the possibility of an entire, desired future that fits into their subjective self-conception.

[44] Yris Ertugal, *Le désir de la maternité et la mort: depuis la légalisation de la contraception et de l'avortement* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012), 102.

Hannah fully recognizes that that she cannot voice her pain to the outside world, acknowledging in her diary that "d'elle, personne ne parlera jamais. Il n'y a que moi qui puisse m'en souvenir."[45] For Hannah then, there is no space to grieve her loss because she is not permitted to recognize the termination as the real loss of a child – neither on a cultural level, nor on a linguistic one. The transgressive nature of her mourning and her lack of language for "what/whom" she has lost inform her involuntary compulsion to reanimate her daughter in the dream world. She cannot mourn the loss of her daughter in the real world, or even call what occurred a death. So, she must turn to an imaginative space in which the death never actually occurred. Mourning is an impermissible abjection, and in the dream world, there is nothing to mourn.

Hannah's transgressive mourning only intensifies in the weeks that follow the abortion, as vivid dreams where she is still pregnant with the aborted child become interspersed with long bouts of insomnia. She consciously chooses not to inform anyone of these disruptions to the rhythm of her sleep, once again suggesting her comprehension of the social impermissibility of her continued mourning. Though she attempts to keep her depression hidden in the private diary space, its effects seep out into the real world, and her doctor suggests a trip to the country as a cure for her obviously altered mood. Though initially sympathetic to the idea, Robert quickly abandons it, and the message in his silence is clear; the time for thinking about the pregnancy, and by extension the fetus, has passed, and it is now time for everyone in the family to move on with their lives. The physical fetus and the promise of life that it held are not a part of the reality of the physical world.

[45] Louise L. Lambrichs, *Journal d'Hannah* (Paris: La Différence, 1993), 34.

Before the abortion, Hannah dreamed of the child as a sort of abstraction in her womb whose image was "à la fois réaliste et fantastique."[46] After the abortion though, this amorphous abstraction takes on an uncanny physicality, as she is repeatedly jolted awake with "une tristesse insondable [au ventre]" from dreams where she is once again pregnant with the child.[47] As she continues to "feel" the child inside of her in the dream world, its physicality in the external world transforms into an ever-present kind of absence. Like a ghost-limb, it haunts her as it reminds her of the future that never was. Finally, the daughter is "born" into the dream realm. In this natal dream, Robert appears at Hannah's side and names the girl Louise – thus still controlling an important aspect of the girl's identity. Even in the idealized space of the dream world, Hannah does not have full control over the product of her own reproductive labor that only she truly desired.

Still, Hannah remains at least privately accusatory towards her husband in the wake of the abortion, as her thoughts still return to "la mort de Louise, ce meurtre que nous partagions mais dont [Robert] portait plus que moi la responsabilité."[48] As she struggles to come to terms with the loss of her pregnancy throughout the narrative, the word "murder" returns to her thoughts again and again. In part, her language point to her incapacity to reconcile her own role in the abortion. Hannah's recognition of her role in the abortion does sometimes rear its head in the diary – she refers, for example, to "cette petite fille qu'avec son père j'ai tuée, volontairement."[49] However, she also repeatedly shifts blame for the abortion onto her husband

[46] Ibid., 12.

[47] Ibid., 32.

[48] Ibid., 57.

[49] Ibid., 34.

and doctor. In turn, the apparition of her daughter in her dreams keeps her from confronting the lasting consequences of her choice to terminate her pregnancy - even if that choice was perhaps not so voluntary. Dead in the real world, Louise is alive in the dream realm that Hannah allows to seep out into reality as she documents its details in her diary.

However, Hannah's refusal to confront her ultimate decision to abort the pregnancy also highlights the rhetorical utility of the dream realm, a point I will expound upon later. To return to Barbara Johnson's words, the lyrical reanimation of an aborted child can be a rhetorical outlet through which the mother "can keep from finishing with the act of killing [her child]."[50] Because she cannot do this by way of any sort of public language, Hannah's reanimation of her daughter's body comes about internally as she dreams, and privately as she documents the content of these dreams in her diary space. The alternative safe haven that keeps Louise alive in the dream world allows Hannah to reject the external, real world in which this murder, for which she is a complicit party, has occurred in favor of one in which she was able to control her reproductive destiny and bring the pregnancy to term.

Nevertheless, the dream birth establishes what Hannah calls her "double life," in which she becomes caught between the dream world in which Louise is happy and healthy and the reality into which she was never born and cannot be grieved. Though the diary entries make no note of the pregnancy's effects on her body post-abortion, Hannah dreams of breastfeeding her child, which subtly reminds the reader that someone who aborts in their second trimester could very well produce breast milk.[51] Entirely independently of the dream world, her body reminds

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[50] Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 34.

[51] The narrator of Annie Ernaux's *L'Evénement*, for example, notes with horror after her abortion that she is lactating, and expresses surprise that her pregnancy was far along enough for her body to begin the process.

her of the aborted pregnancy and the child that never was. Though her dreams do haunt her to some extent, they most importantly "me réconcilient avec moi-même, m'apportent une paix que je n'ai pas goûtée depuis longtemps," and the stress that she felt at work and in social situations begins to fade as her bond with Louise grows stronger.[52] This internalized reconciliation suggests that the dreams are beginning to heal not only the emotional "loss" that the abortion produced, but also the guilt that accompanied it. So long as she can retreat to this idealized dream space in which Louise is safe from harm, Hannah can resist confrontation with the truth of the girl's annihilation from the real world and the role she played in the pregnancy's termination.

But the flourishing dimension of the dream world is not an uninterrupted bliss for the almost-mother and her not-quite child. As Hannah takes pleasure in "raising" Louise in her dream life, her relationship with her real and tangible daughter Colette, who does in fact exist, becomes strained. While Hannah puts herself in charge of caring for Louise in the dream world, Colette is primarily taken care of by a nurse. Though Hannah admits to feeling guilty for the emotional neglect of her "older" daughter, this neglect takes an ominous turn when Colette casually reveals to her mother that she has named a new doll "Louise" – the same name that Hannah (or Robert) has given to her aborted child in her dreams. Hannah becomes angry, almost violent, as she questions her daughter about the origins of the name. Colette fearfully takes refuge in her father's arms, unable to understand the source of her mother's sudden rancor. Once again, the family is torn in two by the ways in which Hannah has taken to mourning her abortion.

The uncanny exteriorization of the interior dream world by her living daughter provides another example of the disquieting nature of Hannah's love for the daughter she aborted. An act that, in a different context where Louise had been born, would have been the loving gesture of an

[52] Louise L. Lambrichs, *Journal d'Hannah* (Paris: La Différence, 1993), 47.

older sister naming a doll after her newborn sibling is transformed into the uncanny "theft" of a name and of a person that does not belong to Colette. If Hannah has felt silenced by her inability to publicly mourn Louise, she now violently refuses the girl's apparition in the waking physical world. Hannah alone underwent the pain of aborting Louise, and accordingly, Hannah alone is permitted to love her memory and grieve her loss. This child, who left her mother's body in death, and is only now kept "alive" inside of her mother's mind, has no place in the physical world in which she must be shared with others.

Hannah recognizes that she is being torn in two by these different manifestations of maternal love, even if she is unable to reconcile them. Though she derives immense joy from her time in the dream world with Louise, she does not wish to linger in it eternally. She writes that the dreams must be a sort of "passage, une sorte de retour obligé sur un événement trop douloureux."[53] This hope that her dreams are nothing more than an "in-between" and a way of coping with the too-difficult reality of her child's passing again underlines the liminality of Hannah's situation to the reader. Medical ethicist Ronald Carson notes that for trauma patients, "liminal space is a place of ambiguity and anxiety, of no-longer and not-yet."[54] The notion of this uncomfortable mental space and state informs Hannah's inability to leave behind the dream realm. She is psychically "stuck" between a comfortable pre-pregnancy consciousness to which she can no longer return and a seemingly unobtainable post-abortion one not (yet) incapacitated by grief– one that, by the way things are going, she may never find.

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[53] Louise L. Lambrichs, *Journal d'Hannah* (Paris: La Différence, 1993), 52.

[54] Ronald Carson, "The Hyphenated Space: Liminality in the Doctor-Patient Relationship," in *Stories Matter: The Role of Narrative in Medical Ethics*, eds. Rita Charon and Martha Montello (New York: Routledge, 2002), 180.

Neither the passage of time that brings the end of the war, nor a four-year break in journaling, allow Hannah to "pass" from dreams of Louise to the reality of Colette, nor do they permit the grief of the loss of Louise to fade into the memory of lost possibility. Hannah even suffers a psychotic break one Christmas and wakes up days later in a psychiatric hospital, where she is forced to spend weeks recovering from a violent episode during which she attacked Colette. She has no memory of the incident's details and finds instead that "à la place de la réalité, c'est mon rêve qui me revient à l'esprit, Louise."[55] In other words, a troubling and significant detachment from the real world does not come with the desire to reattach herself to it and is met instead with the desire to return to her dreams. To love Louise is to unmoor herself from the real world into which she was never born and to love Colette is to cut ties with the dream world. She is not, in fact, a mother to Louise, as much as this may pain her. But she is most certainly a mother to Colette, whom she has lost the ability to prioritize in the wake of the former's apparition in her dreams. Faced with the abjection of reality, she chooses the realm of Louise.

Thus, the dream world has only become more vivid with the passage of time, and Louise continues to grow up as if had she had been born: "elle grandit….mon rêve la représentait à l'âge exact qu'elle aurait eu, si elle avait vécu."[56] Both her physical form, "elle a un corps mince et musclé, la peau très blanche," and the emotional impact of her spirit on her mother dominate both the narrative and Hannah's psyche; no matter what is happening in the real world, "c'est encore Louise qui m'apporte le plus de joie."[57] As the hold of Louise and the dream world

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[55] Louise L. Lambrichs, *Journal d'Hannah* (Paris: La Différence, 1993), 142.

[56] Ibid., 60.

[57] Ibid., 163.

continue to grow stronger, Hannah learns that she is sterile – almost certainly as a result of the unsafe abortion. With this revelation, the dream apparition of her aborted child is transformed into more than just a symbol for her individual loss, but for the loss of Hannah's capacity to bring future life into the world. The significance of the dream world only becomes more profound for the now never future mother. Now more than ever, Hannah cannot face the reality of the external world into which she has only been able to birth one child.

Hannah's guilt and grief obviously stem from a multifaceted trauma whose roots extend beyond the scope of this study. But as the diary demonstrates, one of the obvious primary sources of trauma is her compulsion to completely internalize it, and to only admit to its extent in the total privacy of her diary. As noted above, Hannah knows how people in her life would react were she to be truthful about the ongoing "existence" of Louise and understands the social impropriety of her alternative universe. Throughout her journals, she often documents the desire to lift the weight of her silence about her grief, only to find herself mute with fear, and the burden of "ce mensonge dont je ne puis me défaire, ce mensonge qui est ma vérité."[58] No one else is aware of the existence of Louise, or even of the emotional toll that the abortion continues to take on her well-being. Thus, we can understand Hannah's incapacity to push past the dream world partially as the product of her corresponding inability to externalize her grief. The lack of language through which to express what she has lost compounds the transgression of her mourning.

[58] Ibid., 129.

Dreams, Death, and Liminality

The irregularity and unrelenting frequency of her dreams further signal the depth of the break from sanity caused by Hannah's inability to properly mourn her aborted child. Though we generally believe that the content of our dreams bears at least some connection to the real world, dreams are fragmented windows into our consciousness whose narratives never quite make sense once we awaken. They do not – or should not – create a parallel universe structured in accordance with the linear time that defines our waking world. As such, the linear and alternative timeline through which Hannah keeps her daughter alive stands out to the reader as not just socially transgressive, but deeply unnatural. Victoria Best interprets the abnormal structure of Hannah's dreams and her compulsion to internalize them using psychoanalytic theory, and argues that "the story of this curious dream life is really the story of a psychic breakdown," where the dream world represents a "pathological mourning…understood as a kind of mental indigestion whereby the introjected symbol resists the mind attempt to break it down and remains instead autonomous, separate."[59] She thus contends that "the fascination of Lambrichs's novels lies less with the medical issues [they explore] and more with the psychological perspective she adopts."[60] To be sure, it is likely no coincidence that Lambrichs, trained in psychoanalytic theory herself, chose to couch the manifestation of her Holocaust-era protagonist's trauma within the woman's dreams.

However, interpretations of Hannah's dream world that focus on its connection to psychoanalytic theory erase the specificity of the abortion's place in her trauma, and so too the

[59] Victoria Best, "Louise L. Lambrichs: trauma, dream and narrative," in *Women's Writing in Contemporary France: New Writers, New Literatures in the 1990s*, eds. Gill Rye and Michael Worton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 34-35.

[60] Ibid., 29.

novel's potential to shed light upon the abject confusion that abortion can evidently produce for its subjects. Johnson contends in the epigraph to this chapter that the undecidable – what we may think of here as the "in-between" – is deeply political. Abortion's ethical inscrutability (its liminality, and its undecidability) is the foundation of its political intrigue. If we approach Lambrichs's text from this angle, then this in turn shifts how we approach the function of the dream realm in the text. I posit that with a focus on the ways in which the novel addresses the topic of grief that stems from an abortion, we can rather view the suspension of Louise (and, to an extent, Hannah) in the dream realm as a rhetorical continuation of abortion's suspension of a fetus in between life and death.

For as dreams put us into an unconscious and involuntary state, they are also a kind of "liminal space" all their own; the dreamer is "no longer" conscious, but still living and thus "not yet" completely robbed of his capacity to regain it. Hannah documents the content of her dreams in her diary while conscious and awake, but she does not voluntarily create said content. Her (involuntary) compulsion to reanimate her aborted daughter has allowed her to avoid dealing with her role in the girl's not-quite death in the real world. Now, her guilt for the abortion may be understandable and multidimensional. But it is also true that we do not have an adequate cultural script, to return to Reiheld's words, with which to address Hannah's post-abortion grief or to empathetically recognize what happened to her fetus. So, a focus on the ways in which the novel addresses the topic of abortion-related grief illuminates the complex and disjointed psyche of her narrator in a way that speaks to a broader understanding of women's reproductive autonomy and choices.

Though political language dares not make amends with this undecidability, Lambrichs's text demonstrates the ways in which poetic language retains more liberty on these matters.

Hannah's not-quite-child left the world in a space between life and death, before she was able to live, so that she never exactly died. Louise remains "stuck," then, in a liminal space that can only be metaphysically accessed by a being that was the object of an abortion, and that in turn lies beyond what we as living beings can coherently imagine or access. Likewise, Hannah's imagined reanimation of her aborted daughter's physical body suspends its restoration in a realm that has long been rhetorically imagined as a space between life and death: that of sleep. Because she is forbidden from externalizing her sadness in the wake of her loss, Hannah is only able to reattach herself to the girl while in the sole realm between life and death that is accessible to a living being like herself, as she sleeps. When viewed as an artistic representation of abortion's "undecidability," as referred to by Johnson, or what Carson and Reiheld call the "liminal," the role of Hannah's suspension of Louise in the dream world in her mourning process can be viewed a literary device as much as it is a psychoanalytic plot point.

A consideration of artistic language's historical treatment of the curious world of our dreams further supports this reading. To draw on the motif of rhetorical animation, artistic and literary language frequently "animate" sleep in order to note its suspicious similarity to death. Greek mythology imagined Hypnos, the god of sleep, as the twin brother of Thanatos, the god of death – the absence of life thus formed in the womb alongside the absence of consciousness. Shakespeare employed apostrophe to address sleep as "thou ape of death," and often labeled it "death's counterfeit."[61] With this literary lineage in mind, I argue for a teleological understanding of the dream realm that draws not on its potential connection to psychoanalytic theory, but upon its rhetorical power that is rooted in a longstanding artistic interest in the liminal

[61] This first line comes from *Cymbeline* (1611), Act II, scene 2, line 31. Shakespeare uses the line "death's counterfeit" in *Macbeth* (1605), Act II, scene 3, line 81, and "death-counterfeiting" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1595-96), Act III, scene 2, line 363. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the former commits suicide upon mistaking the unconscious body of the latter for dead.

nature of our hours spent in the realm of unconsciousness. If we can recognize the dream world as a liminal space itself, we can further begin to interrogate the problematic repression of abortion's own liminality and the potential effect of this in-between space upon women who undergo it. If Hannah loses her grip on reality in the wake of her abortion, it is not because the termination of pregnancy is an inherently traumatic or immoral event. Rather, her grief is the traumatized product of a linguistic order that has not allowed for a space in which to confront women's diverse reactions in the aftermath of this liminal event.

As Hannah's grief has stemmed from its seemingly inexpressible and taboo nature, its eventual externalization effectively proves key to her ability to overcome it. Though time does not cause Louise to fade away from Hannah's dreams, it does begin to repair her relationship with Colette, and the two later approach a "normal" kind of mother/daughter relationship. At one point, a teenage Colette even asks her mother why she never had other children. Instead of responding with another psychotic break or violent episode, Hannah produces the text's first significant externalization of the abortion in the years since it took place. Not only does she admit to having had an abortion, but adds that though she did not desire to terminate the pregnancy, "si j'avais voulu avoir cet enfant, ne l'aurais-je pas eu? Ton père ne m'a pas trainée chez le médecin par le cou, tu sais."[62] This is of course a serious departure from her earlier proclamations of murder, and it is the first instance in which she documents a capacity to come to term with the reality of the procedure and her role in it.

With this revelation, Hannah realizes that "en lui répondant comme je l'ai fait...l'histoire avait changé, s'était reconstruite."[63] The abortion did happen, and a child was not born. To put

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[62] Louise L. Lambrichs, *Journal d'Hannah* (Paris: La Différence, 1993), 220.

[63] Ibid.

into spoken word the finality of these two acts undermines the hold of the liminal space and begins to allow Hannah to cross back over onto solid psychic ground, as it brings linguistic clarity to what she has been through. Indeed, Louise becomes gravely ill in the dream world in the wake of Hannah's externalization of the circumstances of her real-world "death" to her only actual daughter. If the dream world suspends Louise in a safe space, the admission of her annihilation in the real world destabilizes the structure of this haven. Louise is, to return to Johnson's words, only "kept alive" so that Hannah can keep from "finishing the act of killing her," and to refuse the end of Louise that was brought about by the abortion. So, for Hannah to admit to her role in the abortion, and to admit that it did happen and is now over, is to begin to come to terms with the fact that Louise is not anywhere.

Finally, Hannah meets with a psychiatrist to seek a remedy for her still crippling insomnia. When he demands that she speak honestly with him about its roots, she surprisingly does just this. In what she calls "une espèce de vomissement entrecoupé de larmes, comme si tout mon corps participait à l'expulsion de ce rêve impossible," she admits to the details of the grief that she has kept inside for the past twenty years.[64] Instantly following the session, Hannah's insomnia is gone, and she regains the ability to sleep dreamlessly with no further apparitions of the impossible Louise. Hannah brings her grieved daughter out of the dream world into the external world on her own terms, in her own language. As a result, Hannah herself crosses the bridge over the liminal space that held her captive for so long and returns to the real world. Importantly too, the soothing effect that the verbalization of Louise has on Hannah would again seem to counter the charge of anti-feminism or anti-abortion sentiment in the novel. It was

[64] Ibid., 239.

not the abortion that was traumatic, but Hannah's incapacity to verbalize and thus grapple with its place in her life.

Dream-world Louise does not die in the narrative, but she does fade away completely – perhaps locked away and "safe" in a part of Hannah's psyche that she no longer needs to access. Once Hannah finds her ability to admit not only to her role in the abortion, but to the pain that the pregnancy's termination caused her, the burden of the neurotic dream world is lifted. In the end then, it is this exteriorization of Louise, and of Hannah's pain, that allows her to move on from the image of her aborted child. On a purely aesthetic level, this seemingly simple and shockingly quick fix for such a deep and long embedded psychological trauma leaves much to be desired. One could argue, as some have, that Lambrichs's manner of terminating the narrative largely serves to undo the complexity she had spent so much time building. Gill Rye (justifiably) criticizes it as "too neat," while Wendy Greenberg is dissatisfied with the ways it appears to return power to the male medical establishment against which the narrative had previously seemed to push back.[65] Even so, it is the only ending that the reader is given. In the context of this project then, I believe that her sudden exteriorizations of Louise (and Louise's termination) and the emotional relief that follows them are further exemplary of the ethical resonances of abortion's cultural invisibility and taboo nature.

The liminal aspect of abortion, that makes people on both ends of the spectrum so uncomfortable, may be embedded into its ontology. But the acknowledgment of this philosophical possibility, or even probability, does not mean that we cannot empathize with stories that draw our attention towards the in-between, rather than push it away. With this

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[65] Gill Rye, "The ethics of aesthetics in trauma fiction: memory, guilt and responsibility in Louise L. Lambrichs' *Journal d'Hannah*," *Journal of Romance Studies* 9 no. 3 (2009), 55.; Wendy N. Greenberg, "*Journal d'Hannah* by Louise L. Lambrichs: Review," *French Review* 68, no. 4 (1995): 749.

difficult and controversial novel, Lambrichs points to the ability and practice of women's writing to put into words the facets of the feminine reproductive experience that have continued to linger outside the boundaries of speak-ability. In essence, abortion itself need not be imagined as an inherently traumatic event in a woman's life – but the burden of carrying its reality alone perhaps is. Though the government-enforced secrecy of Hannah's context certainly contributes to the trauma of her loneliness, we will see with this next work that an ability to speak about one's abortion without legal repercussions does not necessarily translate to a less isolating experience.

A Space for Grief in a Post-Legalization World

From the fraught world of clandestine abortion and fear of deportation to which Lambrichs's novel transports the reader, Colombe Schneck situates her autobiographical narrative, *Dix-sept ans* (2015), in a much different historical setting. Now, we find ourselves in 1980s Paris where abortion is not only legal, but is no longer the immense social taboo it once was. At the very least, it is a word can be verbalized without fear of legal repercussions or immediate social stigmatization. Schneck's story is that of a young woman who legally and voluntarily procured an abortion, who has never regretted doing so. However, it is also that of a person who has carried the burden of an unspeakable emotional loss with her in the years that followed the procedure.

As noted above, Schneck's narrative has yet to become the subject of any sort of academic analysis, even within literary criticism that recognizes the emergence of abortion as a burgeoning motif in French women's writing of the extreme contemporary.[66] In light of its

[66] Strangely however, it is one of the only entries under the "Littérature" tab on the French Wikipedia page for *Interruption volontaire de grossesse* – Annie Ernaux is not mentioned at all. The "Cinéma" tab, on the other hand, is much more fleshed out, with references to both Otero's *Histoire d'un secret* and Chabrol's *Une affaire de femmes*, among other titles.

omission from scholarship, I seek to demonstrate that *Dix-sept ans* is a vital addition to a comprehensive understanding of French abortion narratives. I will analyze this autobiographical work in three parts: first, the highly political prologue that links her experience with abortion in the 1980s to current political debate over its morality. Then, I move on to the second part of the narrative that describes the time period surrounding Schneck's abortion when she was a teenager. Finally, I end with an analysis of the narrative's closing apostrophic address to the fetus that was lost during Schneck's abortion. I will argue that Scheck's narrative brings its readers to the conclusion that an empathetic view of abortion, and the political view that it should be both easily and safely accessible to all women, must also include those women who come to feel an emotional connection to the fetus.

Much like the prologue of Ernaux's *L'Evénement*, Schneck's prologue is written in the present tense and present-day, from the vantage point of an adult woman preparing to reflect upon an abortion she had many years ago. From the first words of the prologue, Schneck's narrative is deeply personal and tinged with sadness. The writer admits in the prologue that "[n]i ma famille, ni mes plus proches amis ne savent ce qui m'est arrivé au printemps 1984."[67] Clearly, the reality of her abortion is a part of her life that she struggled to make sense of in the years that followed it. The most obvious interpretation of Schneck's statement is that until this published and public written narrative, she had never spoken about the abortion to friends or family. However, the narrative's subsequent chapters directly contradict the assertion that her family is not aware of the abortion; a large portion of the narrative is dedicated to the complexities of her relationship with both her mother and father, with whom she openly

[67] Colombe Schneck, *Dix-sept ans* (Paris: Grasset, 2015), 15.

discusses the abortion on several occasions.[68] Though neither was alive to see the publication of *Dix-sept ans,* the narrative makes clear that both were aware that she underwent the procedure.[69]

We can perhaps attribute this discrepancy to the pre-publication deaths of her parents – that while she was writing *Dix-sept ans*, her living family was not aware of her abortion. However, I believe that we can alternatively view this statement as the admission that she has never spoken of the feeling of loss that accompanied her abortion, even to the few people who did know that she underwent the procedure. Though she needed not fear legal repercussions after the termination of her pregnancy as a teenager, the social parameters of her world had no space for the expression of sadness in its aftermath – especially not a sadness unaccompanied by regret or the desire to reverse the procedure. The prolonged and self-enforced silence that she describes in the prologue is one of the text's few concrete references to the still present shame and secrecy that enshrouds abortion in a post-legalization world; it is not something to be discussed with even close family and friends.

Also appearing in the prologue is the most famous literary face of abortion in France, Annie Ernaux. Ernaux and her frank abortion narratives are direct influences on Schneck, who incorporates multiple direct citations from *L'Evénement* into *Dix-sept ans* and makes continual references to Ernaux's writing about abortion in general. Here in Schneck's prologue, she recalls the scene in *L'Evénement* in which the pregnant narrator searches through literary texts for an empathetic description of abortion, only to come up empty handed. As Schneck reminds us, between Ernaux's pregnancy and post-pregnancy, a truthful description of "le passage entre les

[68] Moreover, the work is dedicated to her father – and conspicuously, not her mother.

[69] As of 2001, minors in France no longer need parental consent to obtain an abortion. Most states in the US require either parental consent or notification for a minor who terminates a pregnancy.

deux états restait toujours elliptique."[70] Though Schneck includes direct citations from *L'Evénement* in later passages, it is important to note that she does not do so here, simply paraphrasing the work. In turn, we can understand this text as a complement to Ernaux's that assumes the reader's knowledge of the prior work.

As we recall from the preceding chapter of this dissertation, the protagonist of Ernaux's narrative is paralyzed by her solitude not only because what she was doing was illegal, but because her experience was one that had no representation within literature; there were no words to describe what she was going through. This return to Ernaux in a story about a legal abortion further suggests that legality has not necessarily welcomed the establishment of a coherent literary discourse through which to fill in the "ellipsis" of representation that so troubled Ernaux's narrator. Schneck concludes this paraphrased reference to her literary predecessor with the observation that "si l'avortement est inscrit dans la loi, il est toujours en marge de la littérature…ce n'est pas un beau sujet de littérature."[71] In other words, though legalization may separate Annie Ernaux's abortion and that of Colombe Schneck, and despite the watershed publication of *L'Evénement* in 2000, the general reading public has not become more receptive to confronting the reality of abortion head-on, even in recent years. Schneck's meta-textual commentary, that remarks upon the abjection of writing about abortion within a text about abortion, begins to question the bridge between legal language and literary language and the limits of both. Legality has obviously made abortion much easier to obtain and has lifted linguistic barriers that once prevented women from speaking openly about it with their doctors. However, this statement also suggests that legality has not transformed the procedure into an

[70] Colombe Schneck, *Dix-sept ans* (Paris: Grasset, 2015), 15.

[71] Ibid., 14.

easily representable subject within literature, and that to write about abortion is still a fraught task that runs directly into the limits of representability. Although it is no longer a crime, and is on the contrary a *legal right*, abortion remains a subject that lingers on the margins of literary representation and whose reality continues to be undermined by political language that erases the never-monolithic facets of women's experiences.

Schneck is, by profession, a journalist before she is a literary writer. This fact shines through perhaps most clearly in the prologue that sometimes reads more like a confessional and accusatory op-ed. She bitterly muses upon current, broader European disinterest in defending abortion rights, confronting the cultural and legal discourse about abortion happening outside her text:

> Alors qu'en Europe les législations sur l'interruption volontaire de grossesse sont remises en cause, quand on continue de parler de banalisation de l'avortement, qu'on invente jusqu'à la notion d'avortement de confort, je dois raconter ce qu'a signifié et ce que signifie encore pour moi cette "événement." Ni banal, ni confortable.[72]

Though she does not yet name any names in this lament against conservative European politics, it will become clear later in the narrative that her scorn is at least partially directed at statements made by former prime minister François Fillon. In 2014, as the French government was preparing to remove the provision of "détresse" from its abortion laws, Fillon called the proposal a "faute morale et politique" that he feared would "risque[r] de banaliser l'avortement."[73] In short, abortion may be a legal right, but it is one that women should be ashamed taking advantage of, and that should weigh heavily on the conscience of those who use it.

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[72] Ibid., 15.

[73] "IVG: François Fillon dénonce une double 'faute' morale et politique du gouvernement," *20 Minutes* January 20, 2014. *http*://www.20minutes.fr/politique/1276499-20140120-20140120-ivg-francois-fillon-denonce-double-faute-morale-politique-gouvernement. This provision and its removal from French law in 2014 are discussed in Chapter 1.

Though Fillon's charges of abortion's banalisation, that have again become the subject of controversy as of late, are likely the most publicized in France today, he is far from the first, or only, male politician to invoke it in defense of restricting abortion access.[74] It is not insignificant that terms like "banalisation" have dominated fearful political debate about abortion in the post-legalization decades, and their repetition throughout history implies that the only "correct" way to experience is abortion is in a state of deep shame. It further implies that male lawmakers not only know what is best for women's bodies, but that they know best how women should feel about their own bodies. Thus, for a female writer to speak so openly about her experience with abortion is to make an inherently political statement. Shirley Jordan writes that in the contemporary period,

> The political dangers of universalizing and thus overlooking specificity and differences between women have become a primary concern…the question for feminist writers in the postmodern era is how to hold on as they think, write and read, to some politically meaningful sense of sharedness within which the specific makes sense, and which does not alienate any of those to whom they attempt to speak.[75]

Schneck is hardly making the case that all women who have abortions do, or should, consider the lost fetus in the way that she has. But she firmly rejects the idea that the experience does not make at least some kind of identitarian imprint on those who choose it. So what is the utility of such an aggressively politicized prologue? The pages that follow demonstrate that our interest in her starting words can perhaps stem from the ignorance of her youth, detailed within the narrative's second act.

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[74] During the first round of presidential elections in 2017, Fillon was brought to task by his challenger Alain Juppé for more recent anti-abortion comments made during private campaign events. Though initially publicized, this affair was quickly overshadowed by controversy concerning the splashier "Affaire Fillon," over governmental payments to Fillon's wife for falsified work assignments.

[75] Shirley Ann Jordan, *Contemporary French Women's Writing: Women's Visions, Women's Voices, Women's Lives* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), 34.

As explicitly political as the prologue may be, the narrative that follows introduces us to the writer in her youth as a decidedly apolitical subject. Now, the reader is transported back to 1984 in the months just before the writer's abortion. The younger Schneck begins her story with mostly surface descriptions of herself and of her surroundings: she gives her age and the kinds of clothes that she wears, the music she listens to and the films that she likes, and notes that the Left is in power. Thus, she paints the picture of a young woman who is fundamentally enmeshed with the social and political ways of her world, albeit perhaps superficially. Her personal descriptions also implicitly connect her individual narrative to the sociopolitical world in which her decision, and in turn the decision of any woman who decides to terminate a pregnancy, is judged. The ways in which she is – and alternatively, is not – able to process what the abortion means to her is directly influenced by larger cultural narratives about the respectability and imagined (im)morality of abortion as a medical procedure and reproductive experience.

She grounds her identity in a statement that will often come back throughout the narrative that defines her self-understanding through her personal freedom: "Je suis une fille libre."[76] Importantly, we see that she defines this liberty as the direct product of the sociopolitical context of her world where, for example, "la révolution féministe est, je crois, presque achevée."[77] The notion of a feminist revolution that has achieved its goals and is no longer needed serves as a clear influence on the young woman's understanding of herself as a "free" and individual being. If a Foucauldian view of the sexual body treats it as the product of a hierarchized discourse of power, we see that teenage Schneck (whose abortion took place in the year of Foucault's death) has been conditioned to believe the opposite: the body's narrative is self-chosen and created of

[76] Colombe Schneck, *Dix-sept ans* (Paris: Grasset, 2015), 17.

[77] Ibid., 19.

its own volition. As a young woman who need not fight for her right to contraception and abortion, as did someone like Ernaux who had legal access to neither, Schneck's surroundings do not constantly remind her of her body's gendered difference. Thus, it is not until the abortion that the young narrator becomes conscious of this deep corporeal difference and of the complicated nature of her personal autonomy.

It is clear that the ways in which the narrator defines her liberty are intrinsically tied to her capacity to draw coherent borders around her individual and individualized body, and her belief that her decisions come organically from her own conscience instead of from cultural constraints or boundaries to her personhood. In turn, her self-conception is firmly grounded in a social context that emphasizes equality between the sexes, while minimizing their respective differences: "On m'a élevée ainsi: les garçons et les filles sont à égalité. Je suis aussi libre que mon frère, ma mère est aussi libre que mon père."[78] If her self-conception can be divided into a "pre" and a "post" abortion one, it is this false sense of equality that primarily defines the young woman in her teenage years before the procedure.

We have seen that the French feminists of sexual difference like Irigaray and Kristeva, who have provided a rich theoretical thread throughout the entirety of this study, treat the body as "the political, social, and cultural object *par excellence*…[and] a cultural interweaving."[79] On the other hand, the words of this teenage French woman usher in a new era of theorizing (or not) the place of the feminine sexual body in culture. Diane Lamoureux writes that as we find ourselves "à l'ère du 'post'…postmoderne, poststructuraliste, post-colonial," the emergence of

[78] Ibid., 41.

[79] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 18.

"une nouvelle génération qui est venue au féminisme à l'ère du *backlash*, lorsque l'idéologie dominante serine que nous vivrions dans une ère postféministe," has reared its head in response.[80] The post-feminist praxis of these (relatively) new movements situates them in a linear state that is "after" or has "moving past" those previous institutions that are no longer useful or coherent; we can easily see how this framework applies to teenage Schneck. Nothing about her experience in the social world has suggested that she possesses the feminine "otherness" so theorized in feminist philosophy. [81] Why would she listen to those older "holdovers" of the previous generation who would seek to convince her otherwise, raised as she is in a context that claims the achievement of sociopolitical parity between the sexes?

From the Kristevan perspective, there is an ominous undertone to young Schneck's faith in the linear ability of a social movement, a feminist one at that, to achieve and move past its goals. Three years before teenage Schneck had her legal abortion, Kristeva published an essay entitled "Women's Time," situating the cyclical ("gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm") and monumental ("all-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space") time of feminine subjectivity in opposition to the linear time of the masculine.[82] "As for time," she writes, "female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilization."[83] There is an undoubtedly positive side to the narrator's youthful assertion that her

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[80] Diane Lamoureux, "Y a-t-il une troisième vague féministe?" *Cahiers du genre* 3, no. 1, (2006): 59.

[81] For a helpful explainer on the rise of "post-feminism" in the United States, the multiple different meanings of the term, and the problematic relationship between feminism and linear time, see Misha Kavka, "Feminism, Ethics, and History, or What Is the "Post" in Postfeminism?" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 21, no. 1 (2002): 29-44.

[82] Julia Kristeva, Alice Jardine, and Harry Blake, "Women's Time," *Signs* 7, no. 1 (1981): 16.

[83] Ibid.

body *is* (and not just *should be*) politically identical to those of her male counterparts. But this kind of post-feminist disinterest in the historical context of such attitudes does not account for the ways in which women bodies eternally, cyclically, oblige us to face reproductive questions that men biologically cannot. Indeed, the narrator's situation will soon demonstrate this very principle to her, and its aftereffects will stay with her for years to come. The teenage narrator's carefree sexuality does not exist in a vacuum, but is the byproduct of a hard-fought battle – one never fully won, always regenerating – whose stakes she has yet to confront.

If younger Schneck's liberty has thus far been defined by her capacity to psychically individuate herself, the first sign of the abrogation of this liberty is a bodily betrayal. After a few weeks of imperfect birth control use, the narrator finds herself alone one night, overtaken by "des larmes que je ne connais pas" and "quelque chose que j'ignore."[84] Thus begins the unraveling of the fully realized understanding of her body and self, now acting in a way that she does not recognize, rooted in a change that she cannot comprehend. And yet, this bodily incomprehensibility is immediately countered with a fearful intuition about her body: "Je pleure parce que, j'en suis sûre, je suis enceinte. Et je suis seule."[85] The juxtaposition of the incomprehensibility of the source of her tears with the certainty of her pregnancy highlight the anachronistic kind of knowledge that grounds Schneck's understanding of her pregnancy. In this moment, her existence is a paradox, as she possesses a kind of bodily certainty whose details are completely incomprehensible to her; the freedom of her sexual body that has served as the defining factor of her self-understanding is shattered. As Kristeva writes, "female subjectivity as it gives itself up to intuition becomes a problem with respect to a certain conception of time: time

[84] Colombe Schneck, *Dix-sept ans* (Paris: Grasset, 2015), 35.

[85] Ibid., 36.

as project, teleology, linear…time as departure, progression and arrival – in other words, the time of history."[86] Schneck's intuition of her pregnancy, not yet based upon any empirical evidence, throws into sharp relief Kristeva's notion of cyclical feminine time. As the narrator will come to see, there is no sexual revolution that can make her body move about in the world in the same way as the men around her. Our bodies always catch back up to us.

Importantly, we can note that her "knowledge" of the pregnancy comes to her entirely independently of the medical establishment upon which she has relied (and will still depend upon later within the text). Before she has even taken a pregnancy test or consulted a doctor, the mere notion that she could be, and likely is, pregnant causes an immediate change in the narrator's conception of her self and her world. This change comes at her "d'un seul coup, et voilà que je suis éjectée de 'mon monde.' J'entre dans un monde différent…de vie et de mort, de ma vie, de mon avenir, de ma liberté, de ce qui se passe dans mon corps, qui peut être la vie ou rien et dont je suis responsable."[87] Though the word abortion is not spoken here, the uncomfortable liminality that it entails now rears its head to the narrator – the promise of life has begun to grow inside of her, even as she knows it cannot continue to develop and must be cut off. Again, it is important to note the legal context of the narrator's words. She ostensibly understands that abortion is perfectly legal and that she needs not fear the judgment of her parents or immediate community. The termination of the pregnancy will be a simple and safe outpatient procedure that puts her health at a minimal risk – a far cry from the often-deadly tables of the *faiseuses d'anges*. Still, the idea of pregnancy totally overwhelms her sense of self. Even in a world where abortion is not a physically traumatic event, it remains one that leaves an indelible mark on the narrator's

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[86] Julia Kristeva, Alice Jardine, and Harry Blake, "Women's Time," *Signs* 7, no. 1 (1981): 16-17

[87] Colombe Schneck, *Dix-sept ans* (Paris: Grasset, 2015), 37.

body and psyche. To return to the language of her introduction, unwanted pregnancy and abortion are hardly "banal" occurrences in a woman's life.

Furthermore, we see that the intuitive realization of pregnancy forces the narrator to question the status of her individual liberty for perhaps the first time in her life and to recognize the unfair repercussions of her bodily difference; because she chose to act upon her youthful sexuality, she is now obliged to confront the relationship between the creation of life in her womb and the kind of "death" that must occur – and make a very "adult" decision concerning this abject relation. As she quickly learns, her sexual partner is hardly "ejected" from his comfortable world of youthful carelessness in the way that she is, despite the fact that he is equally complicit in the creation of the fetus as she. This unexpected shake-up of her belief in gender equality destabilizes her, and she asserts that: "Ce n'est pas mon genre d'être enceinte, de ne pas choisir de ne pas être libre."[88] The fundamental basis of her self-understanding is that she is a free and autonomous being, and an unintended pregnancy leaves one decidedly not very free. The narrator's identity, defined as it is by her bodily integrity, is sent into a tailspin: if she is not free, then what exactly is she?

The distinction between what the narrator understands to be the "past" of feminism and her mostly apolitical or "post-feminist" present begins to collapse as she realizes the betrayal of her body to her once free self. If her personal liberty was once defined by a belief in her *a priori* equality to men, she must now confront her "new" un-liberated self: "et me voilà, à dix-sept ans, enceinte, comme tant d'autres filles, comme Annie Ernaux…comme Marie-Claire, l'adolescente jugée en 1972. Je suis rattrapée par ma condition de fille…je suis une fille normale."[89] The

[88] Ibid., 39.

[89] Ibid., 48.

hidden fiction of her previous self-identification as a "fille libre" is now illuminated by the pregnancy, throwing her into the cyclical femininity theorized by Kristeva. She is just another "normal" young woman, completely capable of becoming pregnant unlike her male counterparts.

It must be said that the safety of legality prevents young Schneck from experiencing the trauma of undergoing prosecution for her abortion, as did Marie-Claire, or near death in the case of Ernaux.[90] Though easily and legally able to terminate this pregnancy, she likens her own condition to that of some of the most well-known faces of clandestine abortion in France, thus again upending the notion that legality has given the procedure significant cultural intelligibility. In this passage, we can furthermore locate the resonances of Ernaux's motif of the *chaine invisible* of women described in *L'Evénement*, who have overcome gender-based obstacles and with whom she feels kinship.[91] Now, we are presented with an abject echo of this "chain of women" as Schneck is forced to reconcile her place in the long line of women who have been made to question the extent of their control over their own reproductive bodies.

I do not believe that it is possible to fully understand the power of Schneck without having read Ernaux. Here then, it is helpful to once again to pull back and emphasize the textual importance of Schneck's repeated references to Ernaux. In the previous chapter, I focused on the ways in which the social context of Ernaux's protagonist renders her body totally unintelligible, both to others and to the narrator herself. This put her in an ethical bind that in turn hindered her

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[90] A detailed look into the famous Bobigny trial, for which Marie-Claire was the defendant, can be found in Gisèle Halimi's 1974 autobiography *La cause des femmes*; Mme Halimi served as council to Marie-Claire who was put on trial for undergoing a clandestine abortion, and whose "not guilty" verdict is generally accepted as a turning point in the push towards the legalization of abortion in France. The outcome of the trial also influenced public opinion of the impending Veil law that would decriminalize the procedure.

[91] As quoted in the previous chapter, "ces femmes, jamais rencontrées, mortes ou vivantes, réelles ou non, avec qui, malgré toutes les différences, je me sens quelque chose de commun. Elles forment en moi une chaine invisible où se côtoient des artistes, des écrivaines, des héroïnes de roman et des femmes de mon enfance. J'ai l'impression que mon histoire est en elles." Annie Ernaux, *L'Evénement* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 43.

ability to make sense of her situation. Now, in Schneck's text, the destabilization of identity and sense of self is repeated, but crucially, in a vastly different socio-historical context. Schneck's reproductive body retains at least some kind of unintelligibility, as evidenced most clearly by her emotional and frightened reaction to the pregnancy. But we must recognize that it is certainly much more intelligible than those bodies of women who terminated pregnancies before legalization, and who could not even pronounce the word "abortion" aloud without fear of legal repercussion. Again, if we return to the Butlerian (and at its base, Foucaldian) premise that gender is not an intrinsic part of identity, but constructed through power relations, it is necessary to recognize that legally, no one is really "asserting" any power over her. Despite this, the identitarian quandary still holds, and her words point to the notion that her body has been "gendered" by the pregnancy in a way that she did not have the ability recognize before experiencing what it was like to be unwillingly pregnant. She is not like her brother, her father, or her lover. She is a woman whose body presents her with "choices" that these masculine bodies will never face and cannot understand.

We are again reminded of her body's achieved intelligibility when Schneck consults her doctor both to confirm the pregnancy and to have a frank discussion about her options regarding it. When the doctor asks her what she "wants to do," she responds without hesitation that "Je veux une IVG."[92] The idea of discussing abortion, and of speaking the word aloud, makes sense to everyone involved, and there is no skirting around the fact that it is an obvious path for the pregnant teenager. The use of this common medicalized term for abortion – an *interruption volontaire de grossesse* – suggests that the procedure has at least in part been subsumed into a sort of widely-accepted cultural language; the narrator is not afraid to use the term outright with

[92] Colombe Schneck, *Dix-sept ans* (Paris: Grasset, 2015), 44.

her doctor, who receives her wish with neutrality and professionalism. Though the narrator omits the details of the procedure, the text indicates that it is not a physically traumatic one. In other words, abortion is a reproductive reality that exists in her world and that is no longer relegated to the clandestine and abject shadows of illegality.

While the medical term for the procedure easily slips out during her visit to the doctor's office, her language becomes more stilted as she speaks to her boyfriend – the person who impregnated her and who is so close to, yet so distant from, what she is now experiencing. He is fully supportive of her decision, and it seems clear that she is honest about her intention to terminate the pregnancy to him. However, the deep bodily difference between the two almost future parents once again comes into focus. His relationship to the possibility of parenthood, and to the future of the fetus, is presented as tenuous and murky. She reminds herself internally that "il n'y a pas d'enfant, il n'est pas un futur père."[93] On the contrary, she imagines her own relationship to this possible future as solid and stained with regretful culpability: "Je suis enceinte, c'est ma faute."[94] He is not, and never will be, a father to the unborn child. To return to the language of Cahill and Cornell, his potential parenthood vanishes easily from the imaginary domain because his identity has not been modified by the physical intercorporeality of a dependent fetus. In this moment, exactly nothing physically ties him to the idea of future fatherhood. But the fetus's physical presence in her womb forces her body towards maternity in a manner that she cannot ignore. Her own bodily reality, of the fetus that she carries and of which she must rid herself, forbids her from distancing herself so easily from the pregnancy and its consequences. While both parties were of course physically "complicit" in the creation of the

[93] Ibid., 44.

[94] Ibid., 45.

fetus, its presence inside only her body leads her to bear all of the culpability for its existence and thus for its termination. Once again, she is alone in this ordeal.

Schneck underlines the permanency of this quasi-parental solitude in a passage where she recounts running into this boyfriend at a school reunion thirty years later. Seeing him across the room brings her back to "cet absent entre nous, qui serait un adulte aujourd'hui."[95] Her language gives the fetus a sort of psychic form, despite the absence of its physical one, that recognizes the lost possibility of maturation for its never-realized physical one. While the narrator ponders the emotions that her former boyfriend may have felt at the time of the abortion and in its aftermath, she concludes that it is best not to make contact with him at the event because, "rien ne nous lie, même pas cet absent conçu il y a vingt-neuf ans."[96] As such, the reader is reminded that the abortion was not an experience that "they" went through as a couple, but one that "she" underwent alone.

Importantly, this language pulls us to again consider the unifying language often employed by couples while speaking of desired pregnancies, and certainly when speaking of the children that such pregnancies produce: so often, "I" am not pregnant, but "we" are, and it is not "my" child, but "ours." The birth of a child would have eternally connected them in a way that abortion never could. Something did exit her womb, whether she gazed upon that something or not. On the other hand, her boyfriend wasn't even in the room during the procedure. As Cahill argues, "the person who realizes she is pregnant has no choice but to undergo a transformation, required by her bodily relationship with an embryo/fetus, in her embodied subjectivity."[97] Her

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[95] Ibid., 77.

[96] Ibid., 78.

[97] Ann J. Cahill, "Miscarriage and Intercorporeality," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 46, no. 1 (2015): 53. This passage however is, of course, not meant to suggest that to have an abortion necessitates the creation of a lifelong psychic burden – as innumerable women could testify is not at all the case.

body processed a physical loss that his own never came into contact with, which creates a relationship between her and the fetus that is impossible for her male partner to experience. Finally, this passage is our first true confrontation with the uncanny and continued presence of this "absence" in the narrator's life after her abortion.

According to Barbara Johnson, an artist's use of literary apostrophe is inherently based in the implication that "a poet has animation to give."[98] At the very least, we can interpret this assertion as the idea that there must exist a sufficient imagined relationship between the artist subject and the object that is "animated" by the artist's usage of apostrophe. Before turning to the final act that directly addresses the lost fetus, Johnson's premise recalls of the unique positioning of Schneck as its almost-mother. It would not be surprising if Schneck's former lover did not continue to feel the weight of the absent fetus in his adult life, because he was never forced to consider its moral weight as she did. In this rhetorical context, we can declare that he has no animation to extend to the lost child. The "solitude" of which Schneck speaks may emotionally cripple her, but it also positions her as the only one who can truly make contact with the memory of the lost child. The fetus physically exited her womb, but her words demonstrate that a part of it psychically remained inside of her. Thus, she is the only one who has the ability to bring on the reanimation of the lost fetus, which takes up the final portion of the narrative.

Rhetorical Animation and the Politics of Abortion

Schneck begins her textual animation of the fetus by envisioning an alternative reality in which she did give birth. Though the imaginary child is never given a name, she does give it a sex and invents a male child's future under the watch of a teenage mother: "C'est un enfant triste

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[98] Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 31.

que sa mère ne sait pas élever. Elle n'a pas la patience, ne se dévoue pas à lui entièrement. Et elle lui en veut de l'empêcher de voyager...de faire la sieste et la grasse matinée, de lui avoir enlevé son insouciance."[99] Here, Johnson's notice of the ability of poetic language to problematize our preconceived notions of the relationship between an aborted fetus and its carrier again come into play. In this scene, the image of the child is both animated and humanized in a way that also attempts to humanize the decision to erase his existence from the world. Thus, the fact that she chooses to rhetorically animate the fetus, and take its alternate life to its logical end instead of choosing a more passive way of recognizing it, is central to a quest for fully-realized empathy. Even if Schneck willfully brought about the loss of her fetus, this passage reminds us that she did not lose "nothing," but an entire future path for both her and the fetus. Clearly, this aborted future is a negative one. But she finds it textually important to flesh out its possibility anyway.

This look into a parallel and unwanted future ends with the work's most difficult realization, as she concludes that "peut-être, sa présence ne m'aurait pas empêchée autant de vivre."[100] Certainly, the public (and published) recognition that she could have carried the child to term brings us to the limits of representing what has traditionally been regarded as pro-choice sensibility. Abortion, as a practice and concept, brings to the fore the idea that the undecidable is deeply political. Schneck's address of both the fetus and the moral contradictions its loss as posed to her are demonstrative of the exceptional ability of rhetorical language to "dive into the wreck."[101] Instead of surviving her brush with the opaque, uncanny future life that never

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[99] Colombe Schneck, *Dix-sept ans* (Paris: Grasset, 2015), 84.

[100] Ibid., 85. This "parallel and unwanted" future again returns us to the idea of Kristeva's "opaque and forgotten life," explored in depth in Chapter 2.

[101] Adrienne Rich, "Diving into the Wreck," *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972* (1973).

happened by ignoring or repressing it, she pushes on in spite of it and even uses her text as a way to define the contours of its image. Instead of fearing or resisting the liminal presence of the lost child, she embraces it and creates a clear political statement out of her brush with the undecidable. The recognition that she could have, and likely would have, survived a teenage pregnancy is probably disturbing to any reader. The rhetorical creation of a life for the lost fetus obviously humanizes it to the reader. But the honest look at the details of this life, and her willingness to "bring to life" these details on paper, keeps the passage sensitive towards the subjectivity of women who abort just as much as it is towards the fetus.

For this passage is also the practical and realistic recognition that if she had birthed this unwanted child in her youth, with her equally youthful paramour whom she did not love, the child would have grown up without the love she knows it would have deserved. Indeed, the acknowledgement that one is not "ready" to take on the immense burden of motherhood – be it financially, physically, emotionally, or a combination of these factors – is at least in part one of the most common reasons that women choose abortion. Suitably then, this deeply personal admission also fits into our scholarly consideration of the ways in which contemporary French women artists are choosing to articulate not a coherent narrative of monolithic femininity, but a diverse spectrum of feminine experience. Gill Rye and Carrie Tarr contend that "the use of literary or cinematic techniques which emphasize the fragmented nature of women's bodily experiences [is]…both problematizing and extending the figurative power of the female reproductive body."[102] It seems more than coincidental, in this vein, that Schneck's apostrophic address to the child she did not birth bears striking similarity to the work of a French writer who has also apostrophized a non-born child in auto-fiction – Linda Lê.

[102] Gill Rye and Carrie Tarr, "Introduction," *Nottingham French Studies* 45, no. 3, (2006): 6.

In an article on Linda Lê's narratives of voluntary non-motherhood, Julie Rodgers argues that we should recognize the decision not to bring children into the world as a practical understanding of one's own position in a world. From this standpoint, such decisions "could be said to be based on consideration for the child…rather than being solely driven by self-interest and a lack of any maternal fiber. The idea of the non-mother as inherently selfish is subsequently overthrown…unlike her partner, she has reflected on the realities of raising a child."[103] I would argue then that Schneck's words demonstrate a complex kind of selflessness akin to that articulated by Rogers. Abortion may be a difficult choice to face, but it is the right one for her circumstances.

Ernaux and Otero refuse to consider the lost fetus in their quest to create empathy for women who chose abortion and push the fetus out of the picture in order to privilege the subjectivity of the female body that carries it. These narratives remind us that abortion happens not only to a fetus, but to a (fully formed and real) body, and thus to a person. But their focus on only the woman, abortion's subject, does not demystify the full spectrum of women's experiences with abortion; they shy away from the shame and guilt that can – though do not necessarily – accompany the procedure, lest the admission of either be used to argue for restrictions on its access. I contend that as Lambrichs and Schneck meet uncomfortable emotions of mourning and grief head-on, they extend the rhetorical power of the feminine reproductive body and challenge our aesthetic consumption of it, as Rye and Tarr suggest. The perhaps "fragmented" nature of women's reproductive realities does not mean that empathy for a diverse spectrum of reproductive paths need be regarded as incoherent. Schneck's narrative argues that a

[103] Julie Rodgers, "'If you don't have children, you must be…' Linda Lê's *A l'enfant que je n'aurai pas* and Voluntary Non-Motherhood," in *Women's Lives in Contemporary French and Francophone Literature* eds. Florence Ramond Jurney and Karen McPherson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 70.

fully empathetic recognition of the reality of abortion is one that is also capable of "facing" the fact of physical loss during the procedure. So, on a political and an ethical level, Schneck's narrative pushes us further than those of Otero, Lambrichs, and perhaps even Ernaux in its direct confrontation with the undecidable and liminal. It asks us to acknowledge and accept the decisions of women who abort, all the while refusing to push aside the equally difficult reality of the loss that may accompany the voluntary termination of a pregnancy.

Living with the Liminal

If Lambrichs's novel creates a space in which to understand the grief that follows an unwanted but perhaps necessary abortion, Schneck's narrative turns to the almost always overlooked fact that *something* is lost even during a desired and righteous abortion. But while Lambrichs's work has perhaps led some to question the motives of its author, and to coopt the novel's message for anti-abortion purposes, such perspectives become all but untenable with respect to Schneck's narrative. As sincere as her address to the lost fetus may be, the text's multiple, clear political asides significantly impede the potential desire to reduce it to the expression of an anti-choice adjacent kind of regret. This is in part because her lost child is, in fact, not the only recipient of a direct address in the narrative.

Before "speaking" to her child, she turns to confront a (and once, *the*) figure of the French conservative political movement: "François Fillon, ce corps, le mien, celui d'autres femmes, n'est pas le vôtre. Ce qui se passe à l'intérieur de ce corps ne vous concerne pas. Vous n'avez aucun droit moral, aucun droit de juger."[104] So, in tandem with the animation of her lost child comes the literary animation of the most prominent, "respectable" conservative and anti-

[104] Colombe Schneck, *Dix-sept ans* (Paris: Grasset, 2015), 70.

abortion voices in France today. As such, Schneck's text creates a perhaps on the nose example of Johnson's idea of the "political dimensions of the scholarly study of [the academic discipline of] rhetoric," and could even be viewed as a transgressive reversal of anti-abortion political rhetoric itself.[105] If the wrong of anti-abortion policies lies in the fact that they strip women of control over their imagined self, then Schneck's suspension of Fillon's image in the confines of a book about abortion undoubtedly goes against his own desired self-image. Though it is unclear whether or not Fillon is familiar with the narrative, her invocation of his name in the text and in multiple interviews surrounding it thus creates an inerasable and permanent link between her name, her story, and his.[106]

Her address to Fillon is furthermore situated amid the simultaneous evocation of her own body as a part of a collective feminine reproductive body. The juxtaposition of the individual male and collective female bodies (hers included) is a significant reversal of her previous disgust towards the gendered difference of her (reproductive) body. Once saddened to find that she was nothing more than a "fille normale" in her youth, she now places her normal female body alongside the bodies of other women in a powerful opposition to this male body who cannot understand their complexities. If she once believed that freedom was the capacity to outrun the supposed limitations of femininity, this statement suggests a different kind of freedom whose strength is located within a (monumental, not linear) chain of feminine solidarity. The address to Fillon is short and abrupt, but it above all is clear: those who do not have the capacity to find themselves with a fetus inside their own body do not have the right to tell women how they

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[105] Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 29.

[106] In the wake of Fillon's controversial 2014 comments concerning the "banalisation" of abortion, that Schneck has said inspired her to write *Dix-sept ans*, she also often took to tweeting at the politician and including his handle in her comments in an attempt to get his attention.

should process that presence. Though she addresses the lost fetus amidst feelings of guilt, loss and perhaps regret, the narrator refuses to allow this personal admission of the complexity of abortion to be subsumed into the anti-woman dialogue of those who would seek to cast off abortion as an immoral anomaly.

Schneck now turns from the address of Fillon to the final, direct address her lost child. The narrator "tells" her child that she did not speak of the abortion to her husband "pour toi," thus keeping intact the interiority of the bond between almost-mother and not quite child.[107] Though her husband is a part of the new pregnancies that she takes to term, he does not have the ability, or perhaps the right, to access this abject loss. There is a sense in which this passage reverses our traditional image of the mother who gives up all for her child and puts in its place that of a child who has given up everything so that its mother can exist as a free individual. She speaks lovingly of the children that she has birthed in the years after the abortion, writing "La terreur que je portais avec toi a disparu. Je suis prête,"[108] and indeed tells the fetus that she feels as though "[t]u t'es sacrifié pour eux."[109] Here, Schneck creates the provocative image of a male child who has truly given up all – including its chance at life – so that its mother could lead a selfish and full life, instead of the other way around.[110] Though the "present absence" of the fetus

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[107] Colombe Schneck, *Dix-sept ans* (Paris: Grasset, 2015), 87.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid., 90.

[110] The image of the "self-sacrificing child" who is also decided to be male creates another interesting link between Schneck's narrative and Linda Lê's body of work. Gillian Ni Cheallaigh notes that Lê's refusal of motherhood in Lettre à l'enfant represents "a refusal which here, crucially, is not enacted through the death or suicide of the woman writer, but the sacrifice is rather displaced onto the son." Indeed, the image of a male child who ceases to exist so that his mother may reach her full, individual potential – instead of the other way around – is a powerful and deeply transgressive one. "Linda Lê's Antigonal Refusal of Motherhood," in *Women's Lives in Contemporary French and Francophone Literature* eds. Florence Ramond Jurney and Karen McPherson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 70.

may continue to metaphysically orbit around her in a realm between life and death, she treats its absence in the real world as a sacrifice that permitted her to feel fully realized maternal love later in life. Somewhat paradoxically, abortion is what allows her to fully appreciate motherhood. In this sense, it is perhaps significant that the child is not given a name – as is, for example, the fetus that Lambrichs's protagonist loses. The never-born child resists the assumption of a fully-formed identity to accompany the fully-formed body that it lacks, while retaining in part the amorphous nature of the "absence" of which she also speaks.

Though the intimacy of her relationship with the absent fetus certainly does not approach that of Lambrichs's (mentally ill) protagonist, she still demonstrates a deep psychic bond with him. When Schneck's mother dies, she tells him that "tu es le seul à avoir deviné ma détresse, ma solitude, le seul qui voit le vaillant petit soldat souriant que je suis, cachant tant bien que mal ses fissures."[111] It is said, for example, that the tissue of a fetus, and of children brought to term, stay inside of the women who carry them for an amount of time after they exit the womb in which they are created; a part of them remains fused to their creator.[112] With these words, we see the poetic recreation of this kind of fusion, in which a "part" of the narrator's psyche remains with the unborn child, unable to be revealed to anyone else; the unborn child "knows" and keeps a part of her to which no one else has access. When she addresses this "you" that never truly became a part of the real and living world, she is also thus in part addressing herself – the "I." As "you" and "I" were never truly separated as are a real mother and her birthed child, the identity "absent" being has been fused to her own.

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[111] Colombe Schneck, *Dix-sept ans* (Paris: Grasset, 2015), 88.

[112] Gavin S Dawe, Wei Tan Xiao, and Xiao Zhi-Cheng, "Cell Migration from Baby to Mother," *Cell Adhesion & Migration* 1, no. 1 (2007): 19–27.

Certainly, there is guilt, grief, and perhaps even a tinge of regret in this passage of apostrophe. As explicit as the text's political mission may be, we must note that these are emotions that too often serve as dog-whistles to anti-abortion activists and politicians, who eagerly weaponize their expression against women who seek to terminate undesired pregnancies. But once again, her words upend the false and stereotyped dichotomy whose argument asserts that to express guilt, or any negative emotion after an abortion is to assume that the procedure should be highly restricted or illegal – and the contrary belief that to be "pro-choice" is to assume that abortion is a routine medical procedure devoid of any emotional response for women. Although her child's absence throughout her life may have been a difficult "presence" to reconcile, the address of the child permits Schneck to accept the abortion's place in her life and identity:

> Grace à la loi, ton absence n'est pas le résultat d'heures cruelles, de maltraitance, de sang, de peur, d'humiliation, de mépris. Cela n'a pas été de « gaité de cœur », ni confortable, ni banal, ni de convenance. Je n'étais ni en détresse, ni dans le drame, mais ce printemps 1984 a été, je le sais maintenant, 'une expérience humaine totale, de la vie et de la mort, du temps de la morale et de l'interdit' (*L'Evénement*).[113]

The raw emotion of her address to the never-born child may have lead the reader to forget the unwavering assuredness with which the narrator terminated her pregnancy. This statement both reinserts the looming political context of the book directly back into its narrative and reaffirms the ultimate politic of the text itself. There is, of course, no way for Schneck to know exactly what she would have done as a young woman had she found herself pregnant in a country where abortion was illegal – though the support and socioeconomic status of her parents suggest that a trip outside of the country would likely not have been out of the question. Still, this statement proposes that given this kind of counterfactual in which her reproductive choices were

[113] Colombe Schneck, *Dix-sept ans* (Paris: Grasset, 2015), 91.

limited, her pregnancy still would not have resulted in a live child and that somehow, she would have still sought an abortion. Indeed, as the stories of women like Annie Ernaux and Clotilde Vautier remind us, this has always been the case for women who do not desire to be pregnant. [114]

On the contrary, the passage explicitly thanks the laws, and by extension the women and activists who fought for them, that permitted her to terminate her pregnancy in an environment of medical empathy and in peace. One last time, she returns to the cruel conservative notion that women who seek out abortions are incapable of understanding the moral gravity of the procedure (and thus, that they need male politicians to counsel them on it), or that abortion should only be accessible in situations of deep distress. Neither banal nor done on a whim, abortion is a part of who she is today. As a final homage to the confessional writing that came before her, she cites Ernaux's conclusion to *L'Evénement* that describes abortion as a "human" experience. Certainly, we have seen that both Ernaux's and Schneck's work engage with the capacity of artistic or literary language to reflect upon culture, and to influence the self-conception of young women and their place within their own culture. Perhaps though, *Dix-sept ans* brings us to consider a different side of this humanity than Ernaux's work. To express sorrow and loss for something (or perhaps, someone) that one has voluntarily let go of – via a pregnancy that is terminated willfully – is not to assert that one should not have the right to have that difficult and complex experience. It should not lead us to conclude that women are too fragile to come out of this kind of *épreuve* with their psyche intact.

[114] A 2007 study by the World Health Organization found that abortion rates in countries where abortion is illegal are comparable to rates in countries where it is legal. This suggests that outlawing abortion is an ineffective deterrent for those who seek it out (http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/12/world/12abortion.html).

Concluding Remarks

Her final words: "Ton absence m'a permis d'être la femme libre que je suis aujourd'hui."[115] If unwanted pregnancy in her youth destabilized the narrator's self-image as an inherently free being, it would seem as if the cathartic admission of its termination in her adulthood imparts a different kind of freedom. As a woman, she is all too aware of the ways in which her body cannot be defined by the kind of individualistic freedom that perhaps defines the male bodies around her. But by expressing what abortion meant to her, in her own words and in her own time, she demonstrates that "femme libre" and "femme normale" are no longer mutually exclusive terms. Schneck's narrative is furthermore the assertive recognition of the fraught, and cyclical, nature of women's bodily freedoms – so hard fought, but so rarely fully subsumed into culture. On the contrary, the freedom of which she speaks brings us back to Cornell's notion of self-conception and the imaginary domain. The abortion, and the "sacrifice" of her fetus and potential child, permitted her to become the kind of woman she imagined herself to be, and later, to experience motherhood in the ways that she had always intended.

The "too-neat" end of Lambrichs's novel treats the "present absence" of Hannah's lost fetus as a weight that is easily lifted from the protagonist's psyche once she speaks it into existence. In the aftermath of her confession, Hannah's dream daughter seems to float away from her mother's conscience, never to be seen again. At the start of the narrative, Schneck admits that her story is one that she has never told before, and the reader imagines that the work is perhaps its first exteriorization. While there is an undoubted underlying catharsis in Schneck's confessional narrative, this apostrophic epilogue rejects the facile, psychoanalytic conclusion that to exteriorize the story of her loss is to erase, or to cure, its trauma and its role in her adult self-

[115] Colombe Schneck, *Dix-sept ans* (Paris: Grasset, 2015), 91.

conception. The present absence of her never-born child has admittedly been a sadness and a weight that has followed the narrator throughout her adult life. But her parting words demonstrate that the confession of the presence of the absent fetus is not necessarily, or at least not entirely, a shameful weight of which she hopes to rid herself through her words.

This chapter has brought an analysis of artistic works that dive head-on into the liminality between life and death embedded in abortion, and that prioritize questions about the status of the fetus – thus both problematizing and extending the power of the written reproductive body, in the words of Rye and Tarr, and pushing past a new limit of representability that the other narratives examined in this dissertation have skirted. These works of course do not "resolve" the tension embedded within this confusing liminal space that abortion creates. Indeed, this tension perhaps presents a kind of interrogative puzzle for which we might never find the language to truly solve. Maybe we need to just live with this tension. Rather, these works do something akin to what Johnson calls "[attempting] the impossible task of humanizing both the mother and the aborted children while presenting the inadequacy of language to resolve the dilemma without violence."[116] These works confront abortion's liminality in a way that serves to question the limits of reproductive-related mourning and grief, and to highlight the deep inadequacies of political and cultural language in addressing the questions of life and death that abortion inherently poses.

[116] Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 33.

Conclusion: Reproduction in the 21st Century and Beyond

Colombe Schneck's 2015 autobiography about her legal abortion presented us with a woman who is known in contemporary France primarily as a journalist, who decided that it was necessary to represent her abortion not in a newspaper column, a TV report, or a thread on social media, but through literary language in an account published by Editions Grasset.[1] Schneck published her experience with legal abortion in frustrated and exasperated response to the politicians who still make public, moral judgements about abortion with no interest in taking into account real women's experiences with the procedure. Last year in France, a situation strikingly parallel to this one emerged, the details of which are of interest to this study. In September 2017, Marc-Olivier Fogiel, a gay RTL-affiliated journalist, announced that he is preparing an autobiographical work based on his personal experience with the surrogacy process. Referred to in French as *GPA* (*gestation pour autrui*), surrogacy remains illegal in France.

His motivation for undertaking this work, as he explains it, is that "j'entends trop de clichés, de fantasmes, de délires sur le GPA. Le sujet est trop souvent caricaturé, cela en devient insultant."[2] In other words, Fogiel feels that a turn towards artistic language may be necessary in order to change the conversation around an important part of his reproductive life whose representation in the current public discourse of his country remains caricatured. Fogiel's frustration with unrealistic and unfair public notions about surrogacy quite neatly echoes the grievances voiced throughout my chapters by Annie Ernaux, Colombe Schneck, and Mariana

[1] Editions Grasset has also published the works of Virginie Despentes and Frédéric Beigbeder.

[2] Manon Bricard, "Marc Fogiel prépare un livre sur la GPA," *RTL France*, Sept. 28, 2017, http://www.rtl.fr/culture/medias-people/marc-olivier-fogiel-prepare-un-livre-sur-la-gpa-un-sujet-trop-caricature-7790265135.

Otero about the persistent dismissal of real women's voices in the debate about abortion – and in turn, to the ability of artists to create new discursive spaces in which to represent what resists representation.

In the introduction of this study, I noted that abortion has been subjected to regulation in ways that other reproductive experiences have not. Because of this, abortion's unique place in the collective legal and moral consciousness helps inform our understanding of ideas about the "rightful" place of the female body in public discourse and throughout the entire sociocultural order. While I do believe that this statement largely holds true, novel reproductive technologies, and the alternative options they create for people of all genders, have recently become the subject of rigorous public and legal debate in France. Procreation via IVF and artificial insemination, often referred to together in the French language under the more inclusive term *PMA* (*procréation médicalement assisté*), has long only been open to heterosexual couples; all women, including single women and lesbian couples, will just now gain access to it in 2018 according to the promises of gender-equality minister Marlène Schiappa.[3] The *Cour de cassation* first ruled against surrogacy arrangements in 1991, and France's first crop of laws in 1994 that specifically pertained to bioethics outlawed all forms of surrogacy. Current public opinion would imply that its potential liberalization will not come soon.

The language of the original *Cour de cassation* ruling against surrogacy rights gives succinct clarity to French cultural and legal distaste for the idea of a pregnancy carried by someone who has no future relationship with the contents of her womb; the practice of surrogacy "contrevient tant au principe d'ordre public de l'indisponibilité du corps humain qu'à celui de

[3] "PMA pour toutes dès 2018: Marlène Schiappa relativise," *Le Monde*, 17 September 2017. http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2017/09/17/schiappa-relativise-l-engagement-de-la-generalisation-de-la-pma-pour-toutes-les-femmes-des-2018_5186926_3224.html

l'indisponibilité de l'état des personnes."[4] The first issue is two-fold: if a woman is paid to carry another's genetic material, then it is her body that becomes commodified – if the surrogacy is altruistic, then it is the child who risks becoming commodified as a "gift" from carrier to adoptive parent, which can produce stress and strife for any and all parties involved. The second issue, on the opaquely-worded unavailability of the status of persons, is more indicative of how distrust in surrogacy remains gendered. As Allane Madanamoothoo, a researcher at the *Groupe ESC Troyes*, explains, the filial status of a child cannot be individually chosen or assumed by persons who are not the child's biological parent; this is a process that is done biologically through birth (or, through family courts via legal adoption). The birth of a child whose filial condition is not based in a biological connection is problematic because "according to French law and culture, the mother is the woman who gives birth to the child."[5]

In June 2017, the *Comité Consultatif National d'Ethique pour les sciences de la vie et de la santé* published an 80-page report on *PMA* and *GPA*, recommending the extension of *PMA* rights, while simultaneously solidifying its position against the legalization of surrogacy. Their recommendations are in line with the respective positions of current president Emmanuel Macron. The CCNE puts part of the ethical concerns for both practices in the following terms that draw on the status of persons:

> Avant la possibilité du don d'ovocytes, on était dans le registre du « mater certa est, pater incertus ». Avec le don d'ovocytes, on dissocie transmission génétique et filiation dans la lignée maternelle: en effet, la femme qui accouchera sera reconnue automatiquement comme

[4] Cour de cassation, Assemblée plénière, Pourvoi no. 90-20105. May 31, 1991. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichJuriJudi.do?idTexte=JURITEXT000007026778

[5] Allane Madanamoothoo, "Surrogacy Under French Law: Ethical, Medical, and Legal Issues," in *Legal and Forensic Medicine*, ed. R.G. Beran (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2013): 1549. Madanamoothoo's article gives more detail on the principles of the inviolability and unavailability of persons and, as her title suggests, gives a helpful overview of many of the ethical, legal, and medical concerns about surrogacy (and their contradictions) in France today. The question of filial status obviously intersects with the mechanics of legal adoption in France, an issue that extends beyond the scope of this study.

> mère par le droit de la filiation. Seule la technique permet une telle disjonction…avec une 'gestation pour autrui,' aujourd'hui interdite en France, une double incertitude, génétique et gestationnelle est créée. Tous les modes de transmission, tant maternels que paternels, deviennent incertains.[6]

In other words, new reproductive technologies begin not only to untie procreation from gestation and parenthood, but could someday render incoherent the relationship between the female reproductive body and the concept of maternity. In turn, medically-assisted procreation threatens to upend the current social order entirely – just as it was feared that abortion would do before it. There is much anxiety in France today over the idea of maternal filiation, and the tense unraveling of the link between "making a child" and "being a mother" helps create the basis for regulating, or outlawing, *PMA* and (especially) *GPA*.

Thus, that this uncoupling would be problematic in the first place is indicative of how current sociocultural attitudes towards the female reproductive body are still based upon the need to retain the link between procreation, gestation, and maternity in the social realm. As sociologist (and *PMA/GPA* advocate) Irène Théry has noted, we have essentially never insisted upon the idea of the male reproductive and sexual body as being inherently paternal – and easily divorce the idea of "géniteur" from the identity of "père." But as the CCNE report shows, there is deep reluctance to untie "gestatrice" from "mère" in the same manner. The surrogacy question is a rich and complex one, whose ethical intricacies merit the scholarly examination that they are beginning to receive.[7] Indeed, in their report on *PMA* and *GPA*, the CCNE remarks that because

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[6] Comité Consultatif National d'Ethique, "Avis du CCNE sur les demandes sociétales de recours à l'assistance médicale à la procréation," Avis no. 126, June 15 2017, 6.

[7] In November 2016, Irène Théry organized the first international scientific conference in France on the subject of GPA at the EHESS Paris. During the 2017-2018 academic year, Théry directed a seminar at the EHESS Paris entitled "Sociologie relationnelle du genre: maternité, PMA, GPA," exploring and problematizing the sociocultural relationship between "maternity" and "carrying a child" in contemporary France. In December 2017, I attended a session of this seminar and spoke with Mme Théry on the subject of these new reproductive paths. These conversations have significantly shaped my understanding of the *PMA/GPA* debate.

these procedures "touchent chacun dans ses valeurs et dans son rapport aux questions de l'origine, de la différence des sexes et de celle des générations, les débats que ces thèmes suscitent sont rapidement passionnés."[8] But the nature of this debate also points to the dependence of the social order on the regulation of women's reproductive power, in addition to fears of the brave new reproductive world its deregulation might bring.

Furthermore, as Fogiel's above remarks would suggest, the humanity of people who make the choice to pursue surrogacy, IVF, and artificial insemination is simultaneously being discarded in public language in favor of salacious arguments and fear-mongering. It seems no accident that the people who are most likely to be desirous of, or in need of, the surrogacy process are members of groups who have long been cast out of the sociocultural order and accused of perniciously transforming correct definitions of what constitutes a family; this includes same-sex couples, both lesbian and gay, single women who want to raise children without a partner, and women who do not have a uterus. According to a recent poll conducted by *Le Figaro*, for example, 61% of respondents were in favor of opening up surrogacy to heterosexual couples, while only 48% approved of the idea for same-sex couples.[9] While it is, for now, taken for granted in France that abortion will not be recriminalized, the legality of other alternative procreative choices is in a very public state of flux.[10] Because abortion is not presently as controversial in metropolitan France as it is elsewhere, I believe that an examination

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[8] Comité Consultatif National d'Ethique, "Avis du CCNE sur les demandes sociétales de recours à l'assistance médicale à la procréation," Avis no. 126, June 15 2017, 3.

[9] "PMA: 64% des Français favorables (sondage)," *Le Figaro*, September 22, 2017. http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2017/09/22/97001-20170922FILWWW00122-pma-64-des-francais-favorables-sondage.php

[10] When the mainstream newspaper *Le Monde* published a "get to know the candidates" article during the first round of the 2017 presidential elections, detailing their respective positions on important social and economic issues, abortion did not even make it onto their list – though both *GPA* and *PMA* did.

of newer, more publicly controversial reproductive paths could show us where the conversation in France about reproduction is headed, as could the relationship of expressive arts, particularly literature and film, to these heated debates.

Because when public and political language finds itself unable to make sense of changing definitions of the reproductive and sexual body, artistic language continues to step in to carve out spaces in which to confront their intricacies. Heather Latimer has pointed out that "reproductive debates have become cyclical, often continuing to rely on the same arguments that have structured conversations about abortion for over thirty years."[11] The nature of debates over *PMA* and *GPA* in France today seems to present solid evidence of this cyclicality. But we are not doomed to passively watch these debates replay themselves ad infinitum: "fiction can simultaneously address and challenge these cycles."[12] While I have hoped to demonstrate this principle in regards to (often not-quite fictional) French artistic representations of abortion, Latimer's idea of course extends beyond the abortion question. At this time, there are a number of narrative and documentary films, but fewer works of literature like that proposed by Fogiel, on the subject of *PMA* and *GPA* by French and francophone authors. [13] Strikingly, the questions they ask often intersect quite directly with those posed within the works treated in this dissertation. With this in mind, the questions explored in this study provide a fertile lens for

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[11] Heather Latimer, *Reproductive Acts: Sexual Politics in North American Fiction and Film* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 160.

[12] Ibid.

[13] These most notably include *Aria* (film, Emilie Jouvet 2017), *Naître père* (film, Delphine Lanson, 2013), *Melody* (film, Bernard Bellefroid, 2015), *Diane a les épaules* (film, Fabien Gorgeart, 2017), and *Une folle envie* (film, Bernard Jeanjean 2011). Interestingly, it seems as though most artistic works on the subject have been films about surrogacy. It should be also noted that many of these films on surrogacy and artificial insemination are directly concerned with queer subjectivity, as queer couples on both ends of the spectrum who desire children are particularly touched by legislative and sociocultural questions about artificial insemination and surrogacy. Artistic works about abortion, so majorly concerned as they are with pregnancies that are unintended, have often been far more the domain of heterosexual women.

examining cultural attitudes about newer alternative reproductive paths, and what it means to be a reproductive being in the 21st century and beyond.

This dissertation has examined the ways in which contemporary French women's literature and filmmaking about abortion can bring ethical clarity to the many ways that the procedure affects those who choose it. As I have attempted to demonstrate in my chapters, this is not necessarily to say that these works render the ethical core of abortion completely clear to us. In fact, this does not seem to be their project at all. As it stands, there is no formula that can easily solve the unique puzzle of a procedure that confronts us with the precarity of our life and the specter of our death in tandem. Rather, these works use hybrid narrative forms derived from real-life experiences that lead us to accept abortion as a legitimate reproductive choice and experience that deserves a place in our cultural language.

Otero's film (*Histoire d'un secret*) often blurred the lines between documentary and fictional narrative in order to make a political statement about France's continued reticence to recognize the depths of its dark past with clandestine abortion. Her film shows us how a culture lacking empathy for women who choose to terminate pregnancies creates a context of shame around the procedure with historically deadly consequences. Ernaux's narrative (*L'Evénement*) also blurred the lines between created narrative and lived truth. The writer draws on her own experience with clandestine abortion to fashion an indictment of the patriarchal interference with women's bodily autonomy that trapped so many in impossible situations and destroyed their sense of self before abortion's legalization. Colombe Schneck's autobiographical text about a legal abortion (*Dix-sept ans*) showed that legalization has not undone the shame and confusion that can follow abortion. Finally, Schneck's narrative and Lambrichs's novel (*Journal d'Hannah*) challenged the limits of an empathetic understanding of abortion by putting emotions

traditionally associated with anti-abortion arguments on full display. This included addressing the sadness and mourning that can follow the termination of pregnancies both desired and unwanted, in addition to a substantive consideration of the moral dimensions of the lost fetus. I argue that the expression of these emotions after an abortion does not inherently entail the long-argued conclusion that the procedure is morally wrong or should be heavily restricted.

The question with which we are left, however, is of the extent to which the public is ready to accept artistic representations of a procedure that remains a taboo subject of discussion in both public and private spheres. In an interview after the screening of *Histoire d'un secret* at a Rennes film festival in 2003, Mariana Otero lamented that she intended to make a clear, feminist statement with her personal and political film, but ran into obstacles disseminating this vision during the film's distribution. Although, as she said, "il paraît qu'il y a beaucoup de mères et de filles qui vont voir le film," distribution and critical reception remained problematical: "la presse féminine va passer à côte…la presse féminine en général n'est pas venue voir le film…Le film ne passera que dans une seule salle à Paris, mais durant 4 semaines."[14]

Though Otero is also conscious that she may suffer from a lack of name recognition, Annie Ernaux's description of the chilly critical reception of her own abortion narratives demonstrates that celebrity, and even notoriety, do not solve the problem of critical silence. While Ernaux has acknowledged the large amount of support and gratitude she received from women after the publication of *L'Evénement*, she has also been outspoken about what she believed to be an unfair media-centered "loi du silence [qui] l'a accompagné…l'accueil média a été épouvantable…alors que Bernard Pivot avait l'habitude de m'inviter, là il s'est abstenu…il y

[14] Mariana Otero, Interview with Bénédicte Pagnot, Rennes, France, Oct. 23, 2003.

a eu un consensus pour ne pas en parler."[15] As both women point out, the longstanding taboo of discussing abortion in the public sphere also extends to journalists and literary critics – whose job effectively is to be aware of and bring awareness to new literature and cinema. In consequence, their silence on literature and film about a polemical subject like abortion greatly impedes the ability of such narratives to do the ethical work they are meant to perform. If abortion is to be accepted as legitimate within cultural discourse, then it is simply not enough for art that represents it to simply exist; we must also be able and willing to think critically, and publically, about narratives that address it.

Abortion has, however, recently come back into the French national consciousness, due to the death of reproductive rights pioneer Simone Veil in June 2017. Journalists remembered her as an "icône de la lutte pour les droits des femme," "la grande conscience française du XXe siècle," and in the words of prime minister Edouard Phillipe, "le visage d'une République debout, humaine, généreuse."[16] Collective national remembrance of this women's rights icon even led the take-down of at least one anti-abortion website bearing Veil's name – an online practice that was made illegal in France just months before Veil's death.[17] The sudden uptick in

[15] Annie Ernaux. Interview with Mini Kaci, *L'Humanité*, Feb. 3, 2014. https://www.humanite.fr/annie-ernaux-jai-toujours-ete-persuadee-que-rien-netait-jamais-gagne-pour-les-femmes.

[16] For some examples of the French press's remembrance of Simone Veil, including those referenced above, see: http://www.lemonde.fr/mort-de-simone-veil/article/2017/06/30/mort-de-simone-veil-puisse-son-exemple-inspirer-nos-compatriotes_5153716_5153643.html, http://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2017/06/30/mort-de-simone-veil-icone-de-la-lutte-pour-les-droits-des-femmes_5153554_3382.html, http://www.lemonde.fr/mort-de-simone-veil/portfolio/2017/06/30/simone-veil-grande-conscience-francaise-du-xxe-siecle_5153666_5153643.html, http://www.liberation.fr/france/2017/06/30/des-aiguilles-a-tricoter-a-la-loi-sur-l-ivg_1580805.

[17] The 1993 *Délit d'entrave à l'IVG* law made the dissemination of false information about abortion, attempting to dissuade women from pursuing the procedure, punishable by either two years in prison or a fine of 30,000 euros. A March 2017 law expanded upon this to include to websites as well. Importantly, the French government has a webpage dedicated to information on abortion access – unthinkable at the federal level in the US – where it warns women to "Méfiez-vous de la désinformation sur l'IVG," and directs women to trusted websites for accurate information: https://ivg.gouv.fr/mefiez-vous-de-la-desinformation-sur-l-ivg.html

discussions of *IVG* in the public sphere has perhaps also lead to a momentary increase in awareness of the on-going roadblocks to its access in France, especially for always vulnerable low-income women.

But it remains to be seen whether this sudden consciousness will retain any sort of meaningful momentum, especially with ring-wing nationalism on the rise in France and elsewhere across the globe. In 2014, Bruno Perreau argued that "France has undergone a 'conservative revolution' in the past thirty years, in which political and intellectual life has been dominated by debate over how to preserve Frenchness…manifested through meticulous focus on the body."[18] On the question of abortion, the official implementation of the Veil law in 1979 brought an amplification of anxiety about the physical body and the "preservation of Frenchness." In 1980, ring-wing newspaper *Militant* called the law (that was, we must recall, drafted and put into action by a survivor of the Holocaust), "une loi raciste, anti-française…[qui] exclut de ses dispositions les femmes immigrées. Seules les Françaises sont donc les victimes de cette loi génocide."[19] At the end of the decade in 1989, the *Parti nationaliste français et européen*, a group so openly racist that it was formed by people asked to leave the *Front national*, concurred in their *Tribune nationaliste* periodical that "cette loi comme le métissage est un crime contre notre race."[20] With the "cyclicality" of reproductive debates in mind, the increase white nationalist sentiment in France and across the Western world – along with the all-too-real, thankfully avoided, threat of a *Front national* presidency in 2017 – impels us to wonder

[18] Bruno Perreau and Deke Dusinberre, *The Politics of Adoption: Gender and the Making of French Citizenship* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), xii.

[19] Gaëlle Erdenet, "RU 486, Le chiffre de la Bête. Le mouvement contre le droit des femmes à l'avortement en France," *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* 13, no. 3 (1992) : 38.

[20] Ibid. The *Parti nationaliste français et européen* has since disbanded.

whether it is only a matter of time until this rhetoric is resurrected in the public French debate about abortion.[21]

As we look onward to the future, questions about how we reproduce (or choose not to), who owns the products of our reproduction, and who is able to reproduce in the first place continue to diversify in often remarkable ways that have the potential to reorient the structure of our social order entirely. Thanks to a number of advancements in the 20th and 21st centuries, a woman can not only terminate a growing pregnancy by simply taking a pill, but turn a barren womb into a fertile one (through IVF) and make life for those who are biologically incapable of doing so (through surrogacy).[22] Though it seems unthinkable today, perhaps the time will come when reproductive technologies render abortion a long-forgotten oddity of the distant past. Today is certainly not that day. But no matter what, it seems as though the question of reproductive difference, and what this difference means to our communities and ourselves, will linger in eternity.

[21] The current position of the *Front national* towards abortion would seem to depend largely on its desire to present a more "public-friendly" image. Over the course of the decade, party leader Marine Le Pen has gone from stating that she believes social security reimbursement for the procedure should be rescinded, to her current (lack of) position that only recidivists are the issue. During Le Pen's 2016 presidential campaign, controversy was reignited when her niece, Marion Maréchal Le Pen (a députée in Vaucluse), stated publicly that reimbursement for abortion should be taken away. The party rushed to explain away the younger Le Pen's position as "isolated," but the French media rejoiced in speculating what this division between aunt and niece may mean for the party at large.

[22] The abortion pill, also known as RU 486, or mifepristone, was developed in 1983 by French laboratory Roussel-Uclaf, to unsurprising controversy in France and abroad. Melanie Latham reports in her 2002 study that in France, the abortion pill must be ingested in the presence of a doctor, and a woman must give her written consent to take it. Both requirements still hold true in 2018. See: Melanie Latham, *Regulating Reproduction: A Century of Conflict in Britain and France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 96-97.

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