

THE PERFORMING MOTHER: MATERNAL ETHICS BEYOND  
EMBODIMENT

by

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Abstract

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The rich and diverse history of maternal thought is at once a response to the Western philosophical tradition's relegation of the maternal to the material abject, as well as a renegotiation of the maternal body as a site of empowerment capable of destabilizing the foundations of the symbolic economy. Understanding the material and historical conditions that subject these bodies and work to construct maternity, as well as their mediating position to authentic ethical activity, reveals that maternity offers a salient schemata for, not only viewing the fundamental operations of power, but the possibilities of ethical interaction. This study focuses on, not only theoretical texts dealing with the maternal body, but in science fiction and horror works in order to highlight the possibility of discursive transcendence for non-procreative bodies achieved through performance. This project argues, initially, that the maternal body is subjected to an ideologically pervasive and historically saturated ideal of motherhood in order to produce

sanctioned forms of maternity that secure the reproduction of the very conditions and structure that legitimize their subjection. Secondly, this essay posits that discursive transcendence – meaning the possibility of signifying and identity beyond the prescribed monomaterialist ideal – can be achieved immanently through the institution of a masochistic contract and the infinite performance of the masochistic fantasy shared between mother and infant. In Chapter Four, I argue that Deleuze’s theory of masochism, derived from Leopold Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs*, offers an interesting framework for viewing the subjection of biologically reproductive mothers, as well as a vibrant ground for the development of a theory of maternity based on performance. Finally, in Chapter Five, I argue for a reevaluation of the way in which we conceive non-procreative maternal identity and outline how the non-reproductive body takes part in the same masochistic disavow as the biological mother, yet the result is not the creation of a new and distinct identity, but the complete dissolution of the self where the past is infinitely severed from the trajectory of the future, the previous form of the subject obliterated.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Maternal Embodiment and Performance

In maternity what signifies is a responsibility for others, to the point of substitution for others and suffering both from the effect of persecution and from the persecuting itself in which the persecutor sinks. Maternity, which is bearing par excellence, bears even responsibility for the persecuting by the persecutor.  
Emmanuel Levinas *Otherwise Than Being*

In “Performing Breastfeeding: Embodiment, Ethics and the Maternal Subject,” author Rhonda Shaw claims that “in Western culture, men and women, generally speaking, have a problem talking seriously about breastfeeding,” a prejudice that “stems from the accepted view that because breastfeeding is such an immanently somatic, in-the-body practice, it is often viewed as morally, philosophically, and politically insignificant” (100). In the article Shaw illustrates that this stereotype is derived from the association of women with the domestic sphere, along with the specific performative acts that comprise it, as well as the pro-natalist view, which implies an emphasis on biological reproduction, to collapse maternity with pregnancy, gestation, and lactation, each of which contributes to the preconception of the politically sterile nature of any ethics derived from the maternal body (100-102). However, Shaw argues that “breastfeeding is part of a process through which a maternal subject is constituted,” suggesting that maternity is constructed through a bodily performance that supplements the formation of a maternal identity (101-12).

Central to Shaw's labeling of breastfeeding as a performative action is a poster of Lucy Lawless breastfeeding her child, a picture that was released by *Women's Health Action* and which Shaw argues, due to the fact that the caption under the poster reads "Breastfeeding-my best role ever," contributes to the view of breastfeeding, and one could argue maternity as a whole, as performative due to the fact that it plays on Lawless' role as an actress (106-8). Shaw's article is important to this particular discussion because it touches upon a number of key points regarding the maternal subject; it not only alludes to the relationship between the maternal body and ethical interaction, as well as subjectivity that can be seen throughout the western metaphysical tradition, but also the tendency of philosophical inquiry devoted to maternal studies of viewing motherhood as culturally and discursively produced through ubiquitous representations endeavoring to interpellated maternal bodies. These images, posited by the mainstream media, as well as being dispersed by medico-juridical institutions, although illustrating the necessity of representations that emphasize the bodily nature of the maternal ethical relationship, nevertheless establish lines of demarcation between "real" and non-reproductive mothers by grounding maternity in the morphology of the female body.

Shaw's article also, though it takes great pains to insist on the non-essential and performative roles of subjective positions like gender and maternity, falls into this tradition by claiming that despite the fact that males have the ability

to undergo hormone treatment so to afford them the ability to lactate, breastfeeding is a gendered act that is culturally attributed to the domain of the feminine and the biologically reproductive body (105). By arguing that breastfeeding, something that Shaw claims is fundamentally restricted to the female body, is pivotal to the constitutional framework of maternal subjectivity she contributes to the corpus of feminine studies that has created a representational economy of its own, in place of a strictly phallic schema, that does not allow for non-biological mothering to exist as a distinct identity. Despite the fact that articles like Shaw's illustrate how contemporary scholarship has begun to view maternity, not only as a performative practice, but as a way in which to achieve a distinct identity outside the phallogocentric representational economy through ethical interaction, it nevertheless continues to locate the political performances in the strictly feminine body.

It is due to this growing recognition of the political potency of maternity that authors such as Shaw have noted, as well as its performative nature and the way in which it offers the possibility of constructing an identity for oneself outside of the heteronormative matrix through an immanent ethical engagement with an unknowable other, that makes it a salient model for the development of a revolutionary praxis that can be implemented by all subjects, male or female. This study will comprise philosophical works focused primarily on feminist and gender theory, but also theories of ethics and power in order to shift the focus of maternal

thinking and the type of ethics associated with it beyond maternal embodiment. This in turn will make it possible to develop a schema of ethical activity that takes into consideration non-reproductive mothers and the normalizing potential of socio-historical forces that construct and limit identity. By locating the production of this identity primarily within performative action it affords all subjects the possibility of transcending the heteronormative molds that restrict authentic signification by subjecting individuals to prescribed identities. This type of transcendence will be achieved through the performing body and because it takes into consideration the very discursive power structures that shape identity, it will therefore be a strictly material transcendence. In “Transcendence, Materialism and the Re-enchantment of Nature: Toward a Theological Materialism” Patrice Haynes argues that the very transcendence that philosophers have associated with and located within the maternal/feminine body “is politically irresponsible” because it “refuses to address the realities of material immanence: the social and historical conditions of women and men’s lives” (56). For Haynes, transcendence can be retained in conjunction with immanence, a point she shares with philosopher Luce Irigaray, but what both authors tend to overlook is that any theory that offers the possibility of transcendence must take into account the socio-historical values and norms that are inscribed upon the body and psyche of the subject, and which inevitably forestall an immanent connection by reducing the Other to a knowable subject (56).

This study argues that the ethical relationship between infant and mother that characterizes maternity provides a framework for what Haynes has referred to as a materialist transcendence, where transcendence implies the ability of material to signify beyond the phallogocentric and representational economy that is established and retained by discursive power structures. Rather than approaching transcendence and immanence as dichotomous, I argue that transcendence, when viewed in this way, is only achievable through an immanent bodily connection with the wholly Other. Luce Irigaray's conception of the sensible transcendental argues for a similar transcendence, one that is achieved through the body, however her reliance on strict feminine morphology to develop the maternal as a representation of the divine feminine and a metaphor for non-appropriative ethical interaction reinstates a transcendental element that refuses to take into account non-reproductive bodies and the role of socio-historical forces at play in the shaping of difference that must be engaged with for a more material transcendence to be possible. This project incorporates the work of Irigaray, Emmanuel Levinas, and Gilles Deleuze, theorists that exemplify transcendental and immanent ethics, but also Michel Foucault in order to argue that power is inscribed upon the subject's body, specifically the maternal body, in the form of heteronormative identities and mediates between the mother and infant in the form of medico-juridical institutions that posit a projected ideal of maternity. One of the primary purposes of this project will be to explicate the way in which the

very transcendental elements that philosophers such as Irigaray and Deleuze retain is actually manufactured by power working immanently through numerous institutions. Therefore, this implies that for any authentic ethical engagement to occur between the mother and infant there must be a recognition of the alterity of this projected historicized ideal manufactured by power. This will inevitably lead to my main conclusion that a material transcendence is possible through the creation of a masochistic contract established between the maternal figure and child, and enacted through the performative action of the mother. It will be shown that this performance, which will be referred to as maternal masochism and is derived from Gilles Deleuze's theory of masochism conceptualized as distinct from sadism, that the maternal subject is able to construct an identity that is produced through infinite responsibility to the child.

This introduction will explore the trajectory of feminist theory's thought as it pertains to the maternal body, focusing specifically on the designation of maternity as a site for the potential subversion of the representational economy. This chapter will also explore the ways in which feminist theory's focus on the maternal body is a response to the phallogocentric tradition's association of the maternal body with immanence and the mundane, while sectioning off the possibility of transcendence only to men. Though the initial focus of this section will be concerned with maternal embodiment, the primary purpose of this introduction will be to illustrate the necessity of grounding a theory of maternal

ethics beyond the maternal body in order to illustrate the possibility of transcendence for all subjects through performative action. This is not meant to imply that theories regarding embodiment do not provide an applicable outline for an ethical model, but that by viewing maternity strictly within the confines of feminine morphology it negates the possibility for transcendence for non-reproductive or deviant mothers and other subjects who perform the role of mother. This chapter will begin with a brief explication of the western philosophical tradition's treatment of the maternal body and its relationship with transcendence as established by Plato and Descartes respectively. This section will progress to the work of Julia Kristeva and her conception of the semiotic and the abject in order to illustrate the attempts of post-structuralist feminist theory of establishing the maternal body as an extra-linguistic site that both supports and disrupts the phallogocentric representational economy, therefore illustrating the subversive potentiality of maternity. Subsequently, this chapter will look at Irigaray's theory of the sensible transcendental and her reliance on strictly feminine morphology in order to argue that, in response to Martin Heidegger's treatment of the female body, she unwittingly establishes a representational economy of her own that structurally occludes non-reproductive bodies, thereby foreclosing their access to transcendence. Finally, this chapter will conclude with an exploration of the contemporary shift in continental thought of viewing

maternity as constructed through disciplinary measures and achieves through ritualized performative action.

### 1.1 The Feminine and Transcendence

In the western philosophical tradition stemming from Descartes which initially established the dichotomous, and often antagonistic relationship between objectivism and subjectivity, the masculine has typically been associated with reason and rationality, those aspects of the mind that can be acquired through a type of self-transcendence of the bodily passions and irrationality that in turn are collapsed with the feminine, and more often than not, the maternal. In Plato's *Timeaus*, where the origins of the world and the cosmos are delineated, the word chora is introduced and described as "both receptacle and nurse," as well as "the container and the producer, of what the universe is before and as anything exists" (McAfee 19). Above all else the chora is identified with the maternal and a topological space that engenders all possibility of representation and is "likened to a mother because of its receptivity to impression; the father is the 'source or spring' – the eternal forms which 'enter' and 'stir and inform her'" (Bordo 101).

The space, according to Plato, is characterized as that

which exists always and cannot be destroyed. It provides a fixed site for all things that come to be. It is itself apprehended by a kind of bastard reasoning that does not involve sense perception, and it is hardly even an object of conviction. We look at it as in a dream when we say that everything that exists must of necessity be somewhere, in some place and occupying some space. (Plato 52b-c)



Plato's characterization of the chora is careful not to delineate it as passive, but as a generative space, an amorphous dimension in fact that takes in the paternal "forms" in order to produce and enable becoming. But, as Lynne Huffer has illustrated in *Maternal Pasts, Feminist Futures*, the chora cannot be precisely defined as a place, for "things take place precisely because the chora is not a place and has no place or form that is proper to it," it "exists because it displaces itself in order to make space" (80). As Plato goes on to comment:

Now as the wetnurse of becoming turns watery and fiery and receives that character of earth and air, and as it acquires all the properties that come with these characters, it takes on a variety of visible aspects, but because it is filled with powers that are neither similar nor evenly balanced, no part of it is in balance. It sways irregularly in every direction as it is shaken by those things, and being set in motion it in turn shakes them. And as they are moved, they drift continually, some in one direction and others in other, separating from one another. They are winnowed out, as it were. (52d-53a)

Most importantly, as Daniela Vallega-Neu points out in *The Bodily Dimension in Thinking* and as Kristeva will utilize in her formulation of the semiotic, is that the chora gives rise to not only the origin of all creation, but of language as well as that which "was there before any creation according to a noetic logos" and "more primordial than the distinction between the eternal selfsame and becoming, between original image and copy" (Vallega-Neu 8). What the aforementioned will illustrate is that the chora, a pre-linguistic "space" before or outside of the symbolic order of language, has served as the only available form of transcendence afforded to the feminine, something that, unintentionally perhaps,

has had both positive and negative ramifications for women. It has contributed, at least in part, to the relegation of the feminine to the “outside” of representation, which has both been a site of liberation, but also as a contributor to the abjection of the feminine body as something unknowable and chaotically opposed to the symbolic, both of which will be explored by Kristeva and touched upon later in this chapter. Key to this discussion is the point that the only transcendence afforded to the feminine is essentially opposed to the discursive nature of representation and therefore unable to provide a framework for authentic political action through ethical engagement because it doesn’t allow for feminine, and I would argue, maternal subjectivity. However, as we will see, tentative as it might be, even this form of transcendence, which is before rather than beyond the realm of the representative economy, has been coopted by the masculine western philosophical tradition.

As we have seen in the previous paragraphs Plato’s *Timaeus* establishes the framework for viewing the feminine transcendental with his conception of the chora, something that Kristeva will adapt to fit a psychoanalytic mold, and locates in the maternal body a metaphor for the “receptacle” that engenders all life. What we see with Descartes in the seventeenth-century is what Susan Bordo refers to in *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* is the “masculinization of thought” where objectivity, the acquisition of knowledge by the rational mind purged of subjective passions in turn associated with the

feminine, is established as the ultimate horizon of transcendence (101-3). During this time period we also see the mechanization of the earth, characterized as something inanimate, non-sentient, and, most importantly, something to that the subject must both conquer and distance themselves from in order to transcend the body to the point of supreme rationality. Carolyn Merchant illustrates in *The Death of Nature* the changing landscape of the way in which the world was viewed during the seventeenth century:

Minerals and metals ripened in the uterus of the Earth Mother, mines were compared to her vagina, and metallurgy was the human hastening of the living metal in the artificial womb of the furnace...Miners offered propitiation to the deities of the soil, performed ceremonial sacrifices...sexual abstinence, fasting, before violating the sacredness of the living earth by sinking a mine. (4)

Here, as Bordo notes in *The Flight to Objectivity*, the appropriation of specifically feminine imagery, namely that of Mother Earth, as something to be “shaped by the ‘effective and active’ element, the semen of the male,” rendering the maternal feminine as a passive body (102). This marks a radical shift from the medieval episteme where this very passivity that is associated with the maternal body is characterized as an openness to the object, an ethical engagement, that doesn’t abolish its nature or even retain the subject/object duality, but instead takes part in what Bordo calls a “sympathetic thinking” where the “objective and subjective *merge*, participate in the creation of meaning” (103).

The view held by those in medieval period is in deep contrast to the extreme objectivity of Descartes' that establishes the influential link between objective knowledge and subjectivity (103). In *Discourse on Method* Descartes begins his treatise on the *cogito* by claiming that "good sense is, of all things among men, the most equally distributed" and "the power of judging aright and of distinguishing truth from error, which is properly what is called good sense or reason, is by nature equal in all men" (3). For Descartes "we systematically distort our beliefs and ideas, attributing sensed qualities to bodies, mixing together ideas of corporeal and thinking natures in our ideas of ourselves, and failing to have any clear idea of the nature of mind or the nature of body" (Broughton 56). Descartes' method is reliant on a system of doubt, where any perceived knowledge that contains the slightest bit of hesitation by the subject regarding its validity is almost immediately falsified. In Descartes view "the method of doubt with help us to notice our mistakes and to correct them by cultivating a habit of detachment from the senses," a removal of the mind from its situatedness and the passions of the body (56). What is most important to derive from Descartes's method of detachment is the way in which the senses and the body are characterized as feminine. As Leslie Heywood illustrates in "When Descartes Met the Fitness Babe" the senses "that Descartes distrusts, all that he labels 'uncertain' and therefore casts aside, are the 'deceitful mistress.' The body, gendered female, can not be trusted in its inscrutable feelings, needs, and desires" (267-8). We have the

culmination here of a number of themes that are crucial to this study of femininity and transcendence: the denouncement of the feminine as associated with the passions and therefore something that must be expunged in order for the knowing subject to emerge and, arguably most importantly, the relegation of the feminine to the role of the “unknown,” which will in turn be collapsed into the unknowable Other of language that facilitates and grounds representation.

As Adrianna M. Paliyenko explains in “Postmodern Turns Against the Cartesian Subject: Descartes’s ‘I,’ Lacan’s Other” Descartes envisioned “the ‘I’ as a conscious, knowing subject” and although it can be construed that this is a “genderless” subject, his *cogito* “excludes the particular subject that has a sense of locatedness within a sociocultural and individual ‘body,’ and thus does not exist apart from being gendered,” and this gendered subject is a specifically masculine one that is able to detach himself from the world (159-160). However, it is the way in which the very unconscious or unknowable terrain of the mind, that which is associated in Descartes’s philosophy with the feminine, is elaborated on in the psychoanalytic framework of Jacques Lacan and subsequently the work of Julia Kristeva that will mark a shift in thought regarding the maternal body. It is Lacan’s formulation of the unconscious as the domain of the Imaginary that Kristeva will adapt in her theory of the disruptive and subversive potentiality of the semiotic, that which is derived from Plato’s account of the chora and which is associated with the rhythms and movements of the mother during the gestation

period. With Kristeva we see one of the first instances of imbuing the corporeality of the maternal body with subversive potential.

## 1.2 The Semiotic and the Subject:

It is beyond the scope of this particular project to delineate the whole of Lacan's contribution to the constitution of subjectivity and the way in which he incorporates Saussurian linguistics into his study of the unconscious. However, due to the fact that Julia Kristeva, who will be instrumental in drawing out the liberating potentials of the feminine, not to mention the maternal body in her theory of the semiotic, works within the Lacanian conception of the Real, it is necessary to briefly explicate his theory of the three orders: the Symbolic, the Real, and the Imaginary.

Lacan's most vivid description of the Imaginary, the order of projected images, is contained in his essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function," where he inverts the Cartesian cogito by illustrating how the ego is a false projection of the subject. In his essay Lacan argues the following in regards to what he terms the "mirror stage," the period that occurs between approximately six and eighteen months in the life of an infant and which signals the development of the ego:

It suffices to understand the mirror-stage in this context *as an identification*, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [*assume*] an image – an image that is seemingly predestined to

have an effect at this phase, as witnessed by the use in analytic theory of antiquity's term, 'imago.' (76).

As Lacan explains further this image of the body as a totality is the "ideal-I" or ego-Ideal and this "form situates the agency known as the ego, prior to its social determination, in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible for any single individual.." (76). As we have seen "Descartes' subject who says 'I' corresponds to the level of the ego, a constructed self taken to be the master of its own thought and whose thoughts are believed to correspond to 'external reality' (Fink 43).

The Lacanian subject is distinguished by a dual discourse, the first being the conscious talk stemming from the ego and that of the unconscious that is always the discourse of the Other that is language (Fink 3-5). For Lacan, the entry in the Symbolic Order, which is the order of language and representation, is marked by a distinct alienation, for initially a child is "born into a preestablished place in its parents' linguistic universe, a space often prepared many months, if not years, before the child sees the light of day" (5). The alienation that Lacan locates is a submission to a discourse that exists prior to the subject and one that he/she enters in order to take up their place a "subject of language" (49). For Lacan "*the unconscious is language*, meaning that language is that which makes up the unconscious," implying that the structure of the unconscious is beholden to the same syntagmatic rules of language and that "the same kinds of relationships

exists among unconscious elements as exist in any given language among the elements that constitute it” (8). As we will see, when the child acquiesces to the Symbolic Order following the mirror stage, this “coincides with the primal repression of desire (union with the mother and displacements of desire), which then lingers on, embedded in the subject and his or her language” (Stoltzfus 20). These desires and the bodily rhythms that the child shares with its mother during the time of gestation and up until the acquisition of language are repressed in signification, but are nevertheless cemented in the unconscious which supplements language and constantly threatens to seep into conversational discourse.

For Lacan “the individual enters the symbolic network, the order of signifiers where he is represented for another signifier,” yet “this representation ultimately fails: there is a lack of a gap between the subject and its representation” (Newman 138). In Lacan’s view of the subject, the subject of enunciation, the subject that is speaking, must “use the language of the other,” of a language that is not its own, in order to assert its identity in the Symbolic Order (Jackson, Jr. 140). Therefore, asserting one’s identity through language, for instance by using the personal pronoun “I,” the “real” subject, the material individual, is abolished by the signifier (Fink 40-41). In this process of signification there is always “an excess or surplus of meaning produced by this failed interpellation – a radical gap of absence between the subject and meaning” (Newman 138). In denying the



Cartesian cogito that posits a self-knowing subject, Lacan claims that “the subject is the *subject of the lack*: it is the name given to this gap or void in the symbolic structure, this fundamental misrepresentation” (139). This excess or the “residue of symbolization,” and that which “interrupts the smooth functioning of the law and the automatic unfolding of the signifying chain” Lacan designates as the object *a* or the object cause of desire (Fink 83).

Conflicting with the Symbolic is the order of the Real which Lacan defines as “that which resists symbolization absolutely” and that which “refers to those forces inside and outside of the subject that are not only radically unsymbolizable but also un-image-able, and that disrupt the Symbolic and Imaginary orders in various ways” (Bracher 191). As Bruce Fink explains, the Real can be seen to correspond to the infant’s body before symbolization, prior to being “progressively written or overwritten with signifiers” (24). Prior to entry into the network of signifiers that is the Symbolic Order, the body is “a sort of smooth, seamless surface or space” that is continuously undifferentiated, but language is acquired it creates “divisions, gaps, and distinguishable entities,” engendering separation through the process of naming (24).

The aforementioned discussion of Lacan’s major concepts, albeit brief, provides a necessary introduction into the work of Julia Kristeva. Kristeva, in the tradition of her contemporary, “agrees that the symbolic order occurs post-oedipally when a child enters into language and social relations,” however her

most important argument stems from a disagreement regarding Lacan's characterization of the dialectic relationship between the symbolic and the imaginary (McAfee *Habermas* 67). Kristeva holds that there are essentially two modes of signification, that which is the expression that coincides with the established conventions of meaning and language that is "a discharge of the subject's energy and drives," which she designates as the symbolic and the semiotic modes respectively (*Kristeva* 15-16). As we have seen with Lacan's formulation of signification "the symbolic is a mode of signifying in which speaking beings attempt to express meaning with as little ambiguity as possible," however there is always a residue of the Real that resists symbolization, an unconscious aspect that is repressed yet never completely abolished (17). As Kristeva sets down in *Revolution in Poetic Language* "all discourse, that is to say everything within the field supported by the distinction symbolic/real, depends on and refuses the realm of the 'not yet symbolized' in which the inside/outside boundary, and so subject-and-object positions – which is to say 'separation' – are not yet established" (Beardsworth 44). Semiotic language on the contrary, which does not attempt to suppress ambiguity and which is more akin to poetic discourse, seeks to voice the "double aspect" of our language by expressing "the drives and 'pulsions' that seep out of the unconscious" (*Habermas* 68). Most importantly it is the distinction and contradiction between the symbolic and semiotic modes that makes signification through language possible and poetic

language, which is emblematic of the latter, “displays the process through which signification is possible” (Oliver *PK* 24).

In Lacanian psychoanalysis the entry of infant into the Symbolic Order and the acquisition of language is characterized by a lack produced through the alienation brought on through symbolic representation. Desire, which is co-substantial with lack in the Lacanian schema “gains its first orientation in the infant’s relation to the face-image of the nurturing primordial mother, a mother is experience as a being without lack (the phallic mother)” (Barrett 35). In order for the child to submit to the Symbolic Order of language this phallic mother “must demonstrate that she is a desire (and thus also a lacking and alienating) subject, that she too has submitted to the splitting/barring action of language, in order for us to witness the subject’s advent” (Fink *LS* 53-4). As Bruce Fink explains further “the child devotes considerable effort to filling up the whole of the mother’s lack, her whole space of desire; the child wants to be everything for her,” but the child soon realizes that it cannot occupy the whole of the Other’s desire and upon this realization the child discovers that “one signifier comes to signify that part of the parent’s desire which goes beyond the child (and by extension, their desire in general) (*LS* 54-101). This is the phallus, the “signifier of the Other’s desire” (*LS* Fink 102) and it is that which “denotes the power of the signifier to bring the signified into being, that is, the signifier’s creative power (Fink *Lacan* 139). Lacan characterizes the phallus as the following:

The phallus is the privileged signifier of that mark where the share of the logos is wedded to the advent of desire. One might say that this signifier is chosen as what stands out as most easily seized upon in the real of sexual copulation, and also as the most symbolic in the literal (typographical ) sense of the term, since is the equivalent in the relation of the (logical) copula (*Feminine Sexuality* 82).

The phallus is overall “*the signifier of lack*” because it signifies the “primordial loss” of its connectivity to the mother.

What is particularly crucial to this particular discussion is the way in which the phallic function becomes determinate in Lacan’s formulation of sexuation. As we have seen “man’s desire never goes beyond the incestuous wish, impossible to realize, as that would involve overstepping the father’s boundaries” (*LS Fink* 106). The primordial father who has access to jouissance and is the object of the mother’s desire, has the function of “rupturing the mother-child union” and “to introduce the law of the language system, under which the child becomes a subject and enters culture” (Etchegoyen 27). The relation the subject has to the phallic function determines the ways in which they are sexed in the symbolic order: the man “can be seen as bounded or finite with respect to the symbolic register,” meaning they are determined by the phallic function and castration, whereas the female does not fall completely under the phallic function and the signifier (Fink *LS* 106-7). Whereas men are limited to what Lacan refers to as “phallic jouissance,” implying that which “involves only the organ designated by the signifier,” the feminine subject “can experience both [phallic

jouissance] *and* another kind of jouissance which [Lacan] calls the Other jouissance” (LS106-7). This is precisely why Lacan, in *Seminar XX*, identifies women as “not-whole,” because the term “grounds itself as being not-whole in situating itself in the phallic function” (Lacan *XX* 72).

Lacan’s formulation of jouissance, which is designated as surplus enjoyment, is crucial to the way in which Kristeva advances the liberating potential to the semiotic. As we saw early in the sexuation of the masculine and the feminine the former is defined as those individuals that are determined by the phallus that grounds the Symbolic Order, whereas the latter are subjects that are not “limited” by the phallic function and having the capability of moving “beyond the boundaries set by language and beyond the pittance of pleasure language allows” (LS Fink 106-7). Phallic jouissance, or that which is customarily attributed to the masculine subject is designated as commonplace enjoyment and “when we think we possess our object of desire – be that another person, a new possession or even a difficult idea we have been struggling to get ahold of,” despite the fact that our satisfaction or jouissance is always deferred (Homer 104). The second type of jouissance that is defined in conjunction with the feminine is “outside” the symbolic register and therefore, because speech supports the Symbolic Order, cannot be spoken of (104). Lacan’s example comes from the statue of Saint Teresa by Lorenzo Bernini mentioned in *Seminar XX*, where he explains:

[I]t's like for Saint Teresa – you need but go to Rome and see the statue by Bernini to immediately understand that she's coming. There's no doubt about it. What is she getting off on? It is clear that the essential testimony of the mystics consists in saying that they experience it, but know nothing of it. (qtd. in Homer 105)

As Russell Grigg illustrates in *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy* “jouissance and transgression form a couple: There is no jouissance without transgression” (111) because the Law of the Father that supports the Symbolic Order is precisely what attempts to bar and what is usurped by the Other's jouissance (Freeland 130). But most importantly, this Other of phallic jouissance is “also the Other of the exception, the Other of what is the exception to that domain, not inscribed within it, neither castrated, nor alienated, *jouissance* in its “*infinitude*,” the ‘Other than the phallic *jouissance*,” namely the “*jouissance feminine*” (132). Feminine jouissance, which will be so central to Kristeva's formulation of the chora, is marked by an attempt at transcendence, but one that is wholly linked to the maternal body as we will see.

Kristeva's adaption of Plato's chora that he outlines in *Timeaus* is, as we have seen, marked by the infant's bodily connection with the mother before the advent of language and the child's entry into the symbolic register. As Kelly Oliver illustrates in *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-Bind* “prior to its constitution as a subject, let alone a speaking subject, the infant makes ‘music’ as a direct release of drive” which occur in in a semiotic space that Kristeva terms the semiotic chora (*RK* 35). The semiotic chora is essentially a pre-linguistic state

before the entrance in the Symbolic Order of language, not to be confused with Lacan's conception of the Real, but an unsymbolizable point of stasis that is comprised of the rhythms and movements of the body according to its drives (Beardsworth 44). As Kristeva herself describes this space in *Revolution in Poetic Language*:

Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his developments, they are arranged [*se disposent*] according to the various constraints imposed on his body – always already involved in a semiotic process – by family and social structures. In this way the drives, which are 'energy' charges as well as 'psychical' marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a mortality that is a full of movement as it is regulated. (25)

The regulation of drives comes under the jurisdiction of the maternal body, which is the "organizing principle of the semiotic *chora*, because the *chora* is the space in which the mother's body regulates the oral and anal drives" (RK Oliver 46). Because the *chora* is the regulation of the drives in accordance with the maternal body and because it is instituted prior to the mirror-stage, the maternal body "is a mediator of the symbolic, for the whole corporeal exchange between mother and child conveys familiar and social imperatives to the body of a subject, where neither the body nor the subject is constituted as such" (Beardsworth 44-5). The semiotic *chora* and regulation by the maternal body is a law or regulatory entity before castration and the paternal Law of the Father and Kristeva claims that "the paternal prohibition will never completely succeed since the semiotic makes its

way into signification” because it is “both the space that supports the Symbolic and an essential element of signification” (RK Oliver 47). The semiotic that is manifest in poetic discourse “represents the flow of jouissance into language” and therefore disrupts and makes signification possible in the Symbolic Order (Jantzen 199). It is this very signifying element of the semiotic, which is beyond yet co-substantial with the Symbolic Order, that traditional representation tries to repress and structure.

The importance of the maternal body, at least the imaginary relations that comprise it, to subject formation is a crucial aspect of Kristeva’s work, especially in her explication of her theory of the abject that she develops in *Powers of Horror*. For Kristeva the abject is that which symbolizes or demarcates that which is exterior and threatens the stability of subjectivity. It is what signifies “the possibility of not being” and that which is “swallowed by the Other” (Keltner 46). For Kristeva, the process of abjection “is a presymbolic moment in subject formation, necessary for separation, and shows what an upsurge of abjection means for social and symbolic meaning” (Beardsworth 76). Kristeva likens the abject to a necessary negativity that the subject must abandon in order for identity to be possible and characterizes it as such:

A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death – a flat encephalograph, for instance – I would understand, race, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live.



These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death.  
(Kristeva *PH* 3)

In Lacanian psychoanalysis the infant, in order to take up its place in the Symbolic Order of language, must extricate itself from the maternal body in order to become a definable subject, an entity that is distinguishable from the maternal body that has regulated it from the moment of conception. In this way the maternal body is the ultimate example of the abject for Kristeva and, because the abject is never truly expunged and hovers on the fringes of consciousness, not unlike the semiotic register, there is always the fear of the subject that it will be lost in the ambiguity of the maternal body (McAfee 48). It is precisely the way in which the maternal body is associated with the semiotic and the abject, as something that both makes possible and destabilizes the logic of the symbolic, that it must be denounced and abjected. The maternal body then is transformed into either a gross representation of the corporeal body that marks the demarcation of being or an idealized masculine projection of femininity that supports the phallogocentric order.

This is precisely the question that Kristeva focuses on in her essay on the cult of the Virgin in “Stabat Mater” where she argues that “we cannot simply turn to motherhood as something that definitely attributes existence to woman: for ‘motherhood’ turns out ‘to be an adult (male and female) fantasy of a lost continent’” (“Stabat” 40). For Kristeva, the maternal body is comprised of a

duality, it is both subject and object, but one that contains within it a subject-in-process, the unborn child. In her essay Kristeva writes in two columns in order to express this duality, a binary relationship that reflects the symbolic and semiotic registers, where in one column she speaks poetically about the lived experience and real conditions of her own pregnancy, where she is an Other to herself and immanently connected to another, not-yet-constituted being. In the other column, which reflects the structure of the symbolic she discusses the representations of the maternal feminine, especially the Virgin Mary, and their function in Western society:

Man overcomes the unthinkable of death by postulating maternal love in its place – in the place and stead of death and thought. This love...psychologically is perhaps a recall...of the primal shelter that insured the survival of the newborn. (“Stabat” 252)

Kristeva is speaking indirectly of Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, as Noelle McAfee who positioned maternal love in the place of inevitable death, exemplifying that “man needs a representation of maternal love in order to deal with our mortality,” there illustrating that the representations of maternity, which are split between the virginal and the secular, are a fantasy constructed in order to function as supports for patriarchal law (*JK* 82). For Kristeva, the representations of femininity, those constructed by men and adopted by women, are “an idealization of primary narcissism” (Kristeva “Stabat” 99) and “feminists have rejected these as oppressive and confining, but in so doing have then denied the entire ‘real

experience' (Kristeva's words) of maternity that Kristeva wants to address" (Kaplan 40). The difficulty then for Kristeva is the formation of a representation of maternity that takes into account the visceral and corporeal aspects of maternity that are explicitly denied by the Symbolic Order and patriarchy, and for women to reconstitute an image of maternity that is not an idealization that does not work towards supporting patriarchal oppression:

Feminine perversion *pere-version*, a play on the French word for father is coiled up in the desire for law as desire for reproduction and continuity; it promotes feminine masochism to the rank of structure stabilizer (against its deviations); by assuring the mother that she may thus enter in an order that is above humans' will it give her reward of pleasure. (Kristeva "Stabat" 260)

Kristeva's deconstruction of the idealized representations the maternal feminine are compelling, yet she is hesitant to offer a counter-representation of a metaphor that would take into account the lived experience and semiotic relationship the mother has with the child. However, and what is crucial to this particular discussion, is the way in which she argues that "no one can actually occupy the position of 'Mother,' because it represents merely a patriarchal function" and goes on to endorse a semiotic relationship between mother and daughter, similar to Alison Stone, where there is a "reunion of a woman-mother with the body of *her* mother" (qtd. in Kaplan 41). During pregnancy, Kristeva contends there is an "unrepresentable (because outside of culture) biological movement" (qtd. in Kaplan 41) that "actualizes the homosexual facet of motherhood, through which a

woman is simultaneously closer to her instinctual memory, more nugatory of the social, symbolic bond” (Kristeva “Stabat” 239). This “reunion” with the mother through an unsymbolizable act forms the basis of a bodily representation of the maternal feminine that “does not imply a reaffirmation of the phallus but rather a subversive movement” where women are afforded an identity that is outside of the phallogocentric economy (Kaplan 41). In this way Kristeva establishes the maternal body, through its association with the semiotic chora and the way it both grounds and threatens to subvert the phallogocentric Symbolic Order, as a metaphor that offers the possibility for a distinct feminine, and especially maternal, subjectivity *outside* of the patriarchal symbolic register. However, as E. Ann Kaplan explains in *Motherhood and Representation* “how can motherhood ever be non-patriarchal, non-complicit? Honoring the mother’s subjectivity, the mother’s voice, may be important in a culture where that subjectivity and voice have been silenced; but the question is: what precisely is it possible for the mother to *speak as* in a patriarchal culture?” (40). Though, as Kelly Oliver explains, Kristeva takes great pains to insist that maternity is a “function” rather than a reified identity, the constant association of the chora with the morphology of the maternal body, though relatively successful in establishing a topological place for the feminine, nevertheless is, as Judith Butler contends, homogenous and universalizes the maternal body (Oliver *RK* 7). Kristeva’s invocation of the pregnant maternal body does in fact challenge the representations of maternity

established by the cult of the Virgin, but by drawing out the visceral images of pregnancy and the feminine body she unwittingly constructs a model of maternity that is centered on reproduction.

### 1.3 Irigaray and the Sensible Transcendental:

In a vein similar to the tradition of Kristeva's semiotic chora, which attempts to articulate a non-representational depiction of primordial origins located within what she calls the semiotic chora, a pre-linguistic register prior to subject formation, Irigaray endeavors with equal vigor to counter the western metaphysical trend and its "reliance on the trope of woman as other in order to sustain an ideal representation of the masculine subject" (Deutscher 28). Irigaray's response to the purposeful forgetting or flight from the maternal feminine and the positing of the female subject as the masculine Other that makes possible his self-representation (Robinson 90), is the formulation of sexual difference as a concept that seeks to recognize the sexual distinction between the masculine and the feminine. Irigaray's sexual difference, although refusing to offer a specific and biological feminine identity that would only work within the structure of the phallogocentric economy of representation, seeks instead to emphasize the material and bodily nature of the feminine, not unlike Kristeva, in order to illustrate the way in which philosophical discourse has utilized the female body as a ground for man's transcendence, but more importantly provide a method of transcendence for the feminine that is achieved through an immanent

bodily connection. The following will explore the way in which Irigaray conceptualizes her theory of sexual difference in the hopes of formulating an ethics of non-appropriative recognition between the sexes that destabilizes the binary opposition between subject and object. Secondly, this section will analyze how Irigaray reconfigures transcendence as something that can be achieved through a bodily connection, therefore making it something that can be attained by both men and women alike. In order to fully understand the way in which Irigaray formulates her version of transcendence through the body, it is necessary to explicate her critical assessment of Martin Heidegger's own interrogation of western metaphysics reliance on representational thinking.

In the introduction to his seminal work on ontology *Being and Time*, which works to establish the fundamental structure of Being, Heidegger begins by posing the question "do we in our time have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word 'being'?" Heidegger's development of his fundamental ontology is essence a response to metaphysical tradition stemming not only from Plato and Aristotle, but the whole of Greek philosophical strain of the Sophists, that has overlooked or "forgotten" the question of being and proclaimed "the question about the meaning of Being to be superfluous" (Heidegger *BT* 2). For Heidegger, fundamental ontology was to attend solely to the question of what it means to be and which is distinguishable from the "regional ontologies" that "are characterized by the fact that they investigate a

specific kind of beings, or, to be more precise, that they question beings from a pre-given perspective,” rather than the formal structure of being itself (de Beistegui *Heidegger* 9). What Heidegger presupposes in *Being and Time* is that western metaphysics is beholden to the Platonic tradition that has forgotten the “difference between Being and beings, by treating the question of Being as the search for some kind of absolute ground for beings” (Fried 79).

One of our first tasks will be to prove that if we posit an “I” or subject that which is proximally given, we shall completely miss the phenomenal content [Bestand] of Dasein. *Ontologically*, every idea of a ‘subject’ – unless refined by a previous ontological determination of its basic character – still posits the *subjectum* along with it, no matter how vigorous one’s ontical protestations against the ‘soul substance’ or the ‘reification of consciousness’. (Heidegger *BT* 72)

The metaphysicians quest to “understand Being qua Being is lost in oblivion” (*BT* 79) because it relies on the fallacious notion, according to Heidegger, that Being can be cognitively grasped and represented in its totality by a self-knowing subject (Buckley 237). This type of metaphysical abstraction, or what Heidegger terms “representational thinking,” begins by forming “‘objects’ in the first place, which first allows us to assume the attitude of a subject over and against an object” and “takes the world as something that can be ‘placed before’ (*vor-gestellt*) the subject, just as one places a picture before oneself” (236). For a subject to conceptualize and represent Being, as Plato does with the concept of the Idea, it would require an onto-theological logic where Being is outside of the

human domain, which is impossible due to the fact that “the unfolding of history and the thoughts about beings are inseparable from the being within history, both are *within history*” (Jacobs 14).

Due to the contingent nature of all knowledge the subject that is irreducibly intertwined in history is unable to thematize Being and in turn Being, as John D. Caputo illustrates in *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought*, must be thought “as the ground for every being” and “not grounded by anything else” (69). Instead of subjecting the phenomena to representational thinking, Heidegger claims that being is revealed through a process he labels “letting-be” (Davis 34).

Previously letting something “be” does not mean that we must first bring it into its being and produce it; it means rather that something which is already “a being” must be discovered in its readiness-to-hand, and that we must thus let the being which has this being be encountered. This “*a priori*” letting-something-be-involved is the condition for the possibility of encountering anything ready-to-hand (Heidegger qtd. in Davis 34)

In Heidegger’s formulation Being is revealed through an openness to others as things that reveal their being when Dasein refrains from preconceived abstractions that thematize their being. Therefore, proximity is central to the constitution of Dasein because, as Lawrence J. Hatab explains, Dasein “is being-in-the-world, is ekstatically *there* in circumstances, is involved and immersed in its concerned dealings and social relations, prior to reflective distance that instigates various divisions between mind and world, self and other” (138). The ekstatic element of



Dasein is further explained in Heidegger's example of equipment where he claims that "the kind of Being which equipment possesses – in which it manifests itself in its own right – we call '*readiness-to-hand*' [*Zuhandenheit*]" (Heidegger *BT* 98). The Being of Dasein on the otherhand is made manifest in the use of the tool through the determination of its function and of the situational and temporal moment of existing with the tool and the production of labor. However, as Hatab further explains, the constitutional element of Being is being-with-others, where "other Dasein's are not person-things but likewise concerned being[s]-in-the-world" and experience the exact "finitude and possibility that marks existence" (251). Heidegger's "existential analytic does not first posit the individual Dasein as a given and then construct its relation to others and to the surrounding world" (Fynsk 28), but instead develops the term *Dasein-with* (*Mitsein*) to denote the Being of Dasein as contingent on its communal proximity with Others (Heidegger *BT* 155). For Heidegger, others are not "encountered as person-Things present-at-hand within-the-world" as equipment in his discussion of tools that makes its Being manifest through its function, instead Heidegger claims we encounter others "primarily in their Being-in-the-world" so that their Being is disclosed to us (*BT* 156).

Heidegger's chief concern in *Being and Time* was to delineate fundamental ontology, the question of Being, as the essential inquiry of philosophical thinking, illustrating that metaphysics in the Platonic tradition

“involves a ‘constructive violation of the facts’ which rips the thing out its context of significance and hence forgets being” (White 134). The task of philosophy is to interrogate Being as its own ground that is nevertheless without ground, as something that is revealed or unconcealed to beings prior to representational conceptualization. In *Parmenides* Heidegger characterizes this mode of thinking being as a “leap into the groundless from the habitual ground upon which for us beings away rest,” for to remain in representational thought, or the search for a ground for Being, we “never carry out the leap into Being or leave the familiar landscape of the oblivion of Being” (*Parmenides* 150). Heidegger explains that “in the closest proximity to the most inconspicuous beings there already dwells the openness of the possibility of explicitly thinking the ‘it is’ of beings as the free, in the clearing of which beings appears as unconcealed” (*Parmenides* 150). For Heidegger “the unconcealment of beings requires first an unconcealment of the most fundamental, essential aspect of entities that makes them what they are,” and this unconcealment occurs in what Heidegger terms the clearing or the open, a “domain or structure which allows there to be things with properties and characteristics, or modes of being” (Wrathall 339-40). The clearing is a “space of possibilities” where the essence of Being is made manifest to beings. As Heidegger himself illustrates:

The security of the open does not provide a place of refuge through which man could acquit himself of his essence. The open itself secures the essential abode of man, provided man and only he is

that being to whom Being illuminates itself. Being, as the open, secures in itself every kind of unconcealment of beings. Hence, in securing, the secure open also conceals the primordial decision by which Being bestows on man unconcealment, i.e., the truth of beings as a whole. (*Parmenides* 150).

The clearing itself, as Mark A. Wrathall points out, is not an entity nor substance, so therefore not a ground, which would result in the positing of yet another metaphysical concept (340). Instead it is an event “in which being appropriates being-here to itself and constitutes the presencing and absencing of beings” (Dahlstrom 72). This opening, which is groundless, is nevertheless filled with light and, as Heidegger argues in “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” purely “by virtue of light, i.e., through brightness, can what shines show itself, that is, radiate” (“The End” 384). As Penelope Ingram explains “Heidegger suggests that we see only what is present in the opening and the presenting of that presence, but not the opening or presence itself,” so that it is impossible to claim that either the light that fills the opening or the clearing that is illuminated by the light is prior grounding (*Signifying* xxi).

Irigaray’s critique of Heidegger, not unlike Kristeva’s reworking of the Lacanian psychoanalytic tradition, emphasizes the way in which metaphysicians in the strain of Plato and Descartes have purposefully forgotten the material origins of the subject that is located in the morphology of the maternal feminine body. Like Kristeva, Irigaray sees the emergence of subjectivity as predicated on the abjection of the mother, claiming in *Speculum of the Other Woman* that:

The ban upon returning, regressing to the womb, as well as to the language and dreams shared with the mother, this is indeed the point, the line, the surface upon which the ‘subject’ will continue to stand, to advance, to unfold his discourse, even to make it whirl.  
(140)

Irigaray locates striking similarities between Plato and Lacan, and “parallels Lacan’s privileging of the symbolic as the origin of the speaking subject with Plato’s ascription of originary power to the Forms,” drawing a comparison between Lacan’s m/Other with the semiotic chora mentioned in Plato’s *Timaeus* (Jones 147). As we have seen in the previous section in *Seminar XX* Lacan claims, due to the fact that the Symbolic Order is structured according to the Name of the Father, that “when any speaking being whatsoever situates itself under the banner ‘women,’ it is on the basis of the following – that it grounds itself as being not-whole in situating itself in the phallic function” (72). For Lacan “there’s no such thing as Woman” (72) because she is not encapsulated under the phallic function and therefore “there is no signifier for her, or essence of, Woman as such” (Fink *LS* 115). As Fink further illustrates, Lacan’s purpose in denoting women as not-whole is “related to the fact that a woman’s position in our culture is either automatically defined by a man she adopts as a partner or is defined only with great difficulty” (116). Irigaray’s main project in her works such as *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, *This Sex Which is Not One*, and *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* is, not unlike the work of Kristeva, to uncover the way in

which the maternal feminine has been overlooked, but also carve a space for the feminine to be represented without being coopted by a phallogocentric economy.

In *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* Irigaray's central claim is that "there is a hidden element in Heidegger's thought that acts as the condition for the possibility of language, namely, air," which Heidegger overlooks even as he claims in his analysis of Parmenides' poem that western philosophy has forgotten the opening or clearing where Being emerges (Cimitile and Miller 269). As mentioned in the previous section Heidegger claims that western philosophy has forgotten the essential ontological difference between Being and beings, and more importantly, overlooked the opening where Being is disclosed to beings. This opening, where Being is revealed, Irigaray likens to air and the maternal body where "woman functions as the ground, that which enables representation and with it the self-knowing subject" arguing that "man's transcendence has been made possible through this forgetting of the ground and with it the woman" (Ingram *Signifying* xxiii). Whereas Heidegger in "The Origin of the Art Work" claimed that "the gap between what there is and what there is thought to be is an ever diminishing one," identifying the trend in western philosophy to eradicate the difference between the noumenal and phenomenal world, Irigaray "identifies Heidegger's construal of the earth as an unknowable starting point for human existence as a residual metaphysical reduction." (Hodge 206). For Irigaray, Heidegger's "insistence on the earth imposes a basic image of fixed rigidity, not

one of flux” and therefore “invites metaphysical recuperation,” that denies any alterity or difference (206). By positing the earth in this way Heidegger, according to Irigaray, falls into the same metaphysical trap that reduces all being to sameness “which might be held in play by insisting on a relation between earth and air,” or, as she will develop more fully in her later work, the irreducible sexual difference between the masculine and the feminine (206).

Irigaray’s focus on air initiates one of the most important aspects of her work as it pertains to this specific project; the development of an ethics of sexual difference that emphasizes being as the byproduct of an ethical encounter between two sexed beings. In *Restoration of Breath: Consciousness and Performance* Nair Sreenath explains that “the presence of Heidegger’s thinking is activated and reinforced by an invisible *other*, his breathing,” however “breath is the ‘temporal extension’ of our being and we ourselves ‘happen to belong’ on this edge, the edge of breathing” (43). As mentioned previously, Irigaray identifies air as the irreducible element that makes all representation possible, claiming that it is symbolic of women, that which is “irreducibly constitutive to the human faculty of perception and the knowledge to recognize it” (44). For Irigaray air becomes present through the act of breathing and “the philosophy of breathing is the philosophy of living, a feminine act of ‘remembering’,” specifically an act of locating conceptually “breath as the other of Being,” but also of recalling the debt to original ethical relationship between mother and infant (44). As Irigaray points

out “breathing corresponds to the first autonomous gesture of the living human being” and “to come into the world supposes inhaling and exhaling by oneself. In the uterus, we receive oxygen through the mother’s blood. We are not yet autonomous, not yet born” (qtd. in Sreenath 45). As we have seen, for Heidegger “language is the house of being,” whereas Irigaray chastises him for forgetting the original ethical encounter between mother and infant in the womb where it is “the air which the mother breathes for the foetus in the originary relation that brings us into being and allows us to speak” (Jones 181). What Irigaray derives from this particular engagement with Heidegger is that “if ‘[t]he way to speaking is present within language itself,’ we need to find ways of allowing language to speak our debt to the mother, to the specifically *female* body that brings us into the world, and hence, into language” (181).

In *This Sex Which is Not One* Irigaray makes the argument, similar to that elaborated on in *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* and subsequent texts, that western philosophy has functioned according to a binary system of syntagmatic association where the feminine in the phallogocentric economy is always relegated to the anti-thesis of masculine representation. Similar to theorists like Susan Bordo, Irigaray illustrates in her text that femininity, or an authentic female representation is impossible in language because it is essentially masculine and femininity is always associated with a negative, or corporeal status that must be abandoned. As Margaret Whitford explains:

...the practical value of these principles, without which rationality would be inconceivable, is so evident that it appears unquestionable. The logic of identity is the prerequisite of any language or society at all. However, the point is that there will always be a residue which exceeds the categories, and this excess is conceptualized as female. (qtd. in Hass 80)

Irigaray is concerned with the fluidity of female sexuality, the way in which it both supports representation and eludes it simultaneously. As Marjorie Hass indicates “rather than remake feminine identity so that it is subject to the *intention* of the law of identity, Irigaray opts to create a new possibility: a feminine identity that is loyal to the *substance* of the law of identity – that is, that respects the multiplicity inherent in any attempt to state the law of identity” (80). Like Helene Cixous Irigaray wants to develop a language that uses the feminine morphology, a “metaphorics of fluidity within which feminine subjectivity can be expressed,” therefore emphasizing the body as the ground in which to establish a new language that is beyond the phallogocentric framework (80).

In “Place, Interval,” Irigaray’s critique of Aristotelian metaphysics, she argues that the feminine “is allied with place in the same way that she is allied with matter against the masculinity of form, and place resembles form in several crucial ways, but is not reducible to it” (Salamon 191). As Gayle Salamon notes “there is an impossibility of place for the feminine: place is what the feminine is for the masculine, but what the masculine can never be for the feminine, or indeed, what the feminine can never quite be for herself,” however, it is the



charge of women to “find or to become a place for herself and thus find herself in place for the masculine” (192). Key to understanding Irigaray’s formulation of the feminine place is the understanding of sexual difference where “Irigaray proposes that that the masculine and feminine poles of life should be reconceived as autonomous thresholds of becoming,” pure ontological status that are irreducible (Hill 114). In this way “the maternal-feminine would no longer function as the repressed ground of knowledge, because thought would begin from the *sexuate relation or interval* between man and woman,” the place between the two sexes that is not a negative space or void, but a generative interval that engenders thinking and subjectivity (114). What is important to note here is that the differing poles of the *sexuate relation* “would not be given as static concepts; they would be constituted through the differentiating movement of the interval,” of the play of differences inherent in the ontological sexual identity that is irreducible (114). This a reformulation of the Hegelian dialectic in regards to the negative that will be addressed at length at a later point in time of the study, but for now it is important to add that sexual difference, which is marked by the “impassible” interval between two sexed beings “is not longer a contradiction to be overcome but rather a limit to be respected. Each gender is determined by the other in recognizing its existence as a limit of its claim to represent being” (Martin 128). What is key to grasp here is that from the recognition of the other as the infinitely Other, something that Irigaray develops from the philosophy of Emmanuel

Levinas, the sexuate being “is therefore obliged to recognize its own finitude and to realize its gender in becoming and fulfilling that gender” (128). It is this dialogue, this respect between two beings that becomes the main function of Irigaray’s immanent transcendence that is laid down in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. As mentioned earlier, like other post-structuralist feminists Irigaray has identified the ways in which the western philosophical tradition has denied the maternal feminine and her formulation of sexual difference as an ontological grounding is a way in which to carve out a space for the feminine that is irreducible to the masculine representational economy. With her theory of the sensible transcendental establishes a framework for transcendence that allows both male and female subjects the ability to recognize each other in their sexual difference in an ethical and non-appropriative encounter.

Irigaray’s “immanent transcendence,” which she labels the “sensible transcendental” in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* is essentially an attempt at the reconciliation of the two dominant strains of ethics, namely the transcendental ethics of Emmanuel Levinas and the immanent ethics of Gilles Deleuze that is derived from Baruch Spinoza and Friedrich Nietzsche, in order to allow women and men to carve out their own subjectivity and achieve transcendence through their embodied sexuality (Irigaray *Ethics* 129). In *Totality and Infinity*, as well as “Diachrony and Representation,” Levinas claims that transcendence is engendered through the dative relationship between the Same, the ego of the self,

and the Other, a non-reductive encounter where the Other is not absorbed by the ego of the same as in the Existential phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Jean-Paul Sartre. For Levinas, “infinity is produced in the relationship of the same with the other” so that “the I, nonetheless contains in itself what it can neither contain nor receive solely by virtue of its identity” (*Totality* 26-7). In the radical alterity of the absolute Other, that which is in relation yet beyond totalization, it is the face of the Other that “puts into question the sufficiency of my identity as an ego” and holds the subject hostage, and “binds me to an infinite responsibility with regard to the other” (Levinas *CP* 85). A distinguishing factor for Levinas’ transcendental ethics, as he illustrates further in later work *Otherwise Than Being*, is that in the dative relationship there is always a “third party” that is co-substantial with the face (Levinas *OB* 16). This “third term,” which is produced through the ethical encounter with the face of the Other, is equivalent to a transcendental concept in the tradition of a Kantian ideal, and “provide[s] the interpretative keys that allow us to transform unintelligibility into intelligibility, allow[s] us to identify the world as part of a meaningful whole” (Katz 392). It is precisely this neutral third term, which Levinas is content to contribute to the divine, that Irigaray critiques, claiming that the feminine other is absorbed and reduced by the “masculine economy of the same,” which is in face not neutral, but “the criterion of the masculine itself” (Sandford *ML* 134).

The entry of a third party that facilitates a universal ideal of responsibility and justice, and which mediates between the two wholly different identities, is the primary distinction between Levinas and Deleuze's ethics, and the essential point of divergence between all theories of ethics. Deleuze's ethics, derived primarily from Spinoza's *Ethics* and Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, is a movement away from the very transcendental ideals established by Levinas. Instead of "judging actions and thoughts by appealing to transcendent or universal values" it seeks to determine what limits and facilitates the power of "active affectation" (Jun and Smith 124-5). Whereas for Levinas immanence, or proximity, "refers back outside itself to God," Deleuze's immanence is material, never "immanent to a transcendent," but a mode of existence or ethics of difference that is characterized as a multitude of non-stratified flows that make up the plane of immanence (*WP* Deleuze 26). In *What is Philosophy?* and "Immanence: A Life" Deleuze claims that the plane of immanence itself is a "transcendental field," a "pure stream of a-subjective consciousness, a pre-reflexive impersonal consciousness, a qualitative duration of consciousness without self" (*WP* 26). For Deleuze, the dative relationship, where the same and other are mediated by a universal or transcendental third term, ruptures the plane of immanence because it creates an "object to which immanence is attributed," short-circuiting the "life flow" that binds individuals by instituting a type of vertical transcendence (*WP* 26-7). The emphasis here is place on authentic intersubjective communication between two

bodies without the limitations of structured identities or a mediate third term that restructures the desire emanating between them. With this in mind, the primary distinction between transcendental and immanent ethics is essentially the characterization of the third term, and this is precisely what Irigaray attempts to reformulate in order to develop her theory of the “sensible transcendental” (Irigaray *Ethics* 129).

To a certain extent Levinas anticipates the attempts to reconcile materialism and idealism in “Transcendence and Height,” claiming that “we are looking for a way out of idealism, but we do not find it by having recourse to realism,” illustrating that there must be a mediation between the idealist notion of absolute freedom and materialism’s claim that the body is wholly determined. Irigaray’s method for reconciling transcendent and immanent ethics in her immanent transcendence reflects this sentiment, endorsing a movement towards self-transcendence through immanent bodily connection that furthers the existential philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir established in *The Second Sex*. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* Irigaray describes the sensible transcendental as follows:

This creation would be our opportunity, from the humblest detail of everyday life to the “grandest,” by means of the opening of a *sensible transcendental* that comes into being through us, of which *we would* be mediators and bridges. Not only in mourning for the dead God of Nietzsche, not waiting passively for the god to come, but by conjuring him up among us, within us, as resurrection and

transfiguration of blood, of flesh, through a language and an ethics that is ours. (*ED* 129)

Hent De Vries illustrates that Irigaray's version of immanent transcendence "is located between humans rather than between humans and immortal beings" and that this "horizontal transcendence," which is reliant on intersubjective communication between two sexed beings, is dependent on self-limitation "which opens a place for the respect for other" ("Horizontal" 824). The idea of the limit stems from Irigaray's reconfiguration of the Hegelian dialectic where the negative between same and other, rather than constituting merely a void, is a generative and constituting space, an interval between two bodies. The limit that Irigaray references is a result of what she terms the "labor of the negative" where "each individual has its limits that define it in relation to the other" (Oliver "Vision" 131). Therefore, there is a chasm between the two sexes, a negative space, which retains the sexes as distinct and engenders transcendence through the recognition that the other of sexual difference cannot be absorbed into the order of the same.

For Irigaray, this irreducible gap between the male and female is multifaceted, both immanent and divine, so that she transforms Levinas' third term into a hybrid of bodily immanence and a horizontal transcendence. As she states in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*:

Between man and woman, whatever differences may be and despite the fact that the concept of the one, male or female, cannot envelop that of the other, certain bridges can be built, through two approaches:

that of generation,

that of God. (ED 93)

In the impenetrable chasm between the two sexes there is an interval, a gap, and “*desire* occupies or designates the place of the *interval*” (ED 8). This is essentially linked to her discussion of the sensible transcendental because she designates angels as “a fascinating mode of bodily comportment that allows bilateral passage between the divine and the mortal – the very *aporia* of Aristotelian metaphysics” (Winnubst 98). As Penelope Ingram explains in “From Goddess Spirituality to Irigaray’s Angel: The Politics of the Divine,” this conception of the “divine is both embodied in *and* transcendent of the human, it is a figure which is sexualized as neither masculine nor feminine yet at the same time it is both masculine and feminine,” it is comparable to the placenta as it is “neither one, two, nor three because as a sensible transcendental the divine resides within both woman and man and within their union, and *at the same time* embodies the horizon, the possibility of the infinite for each of them” (57-9). Though the figure of the angel in Irigaray’s text is complex it has commonly been collapsed into the divine that resides between the two sexed bodies, something that Ingram claims mystifies the ways in which Irigaray’s sensible transcendental “undermines the binarized basis of western philosophy” (“Goddess” 60). Ingram characterizes Irigaray’s vision of the angel as temporal, that which “prepare[s] the way for corporeal passage between persons and God” but nevertheless withdraws once an ethics of sexual

difference is achieved (“Goddess” 64). Most important for this particular discussion is the way Irigaray reconfigures the angel as something both corporeal and divine, and “relates it to maternity through the placenta” (Schwab “Mother’s” 366). As Gail M. Schwab notes “the mother/child relationship is always already mediated by the veil, by the placenta, which originated as we have seen in the genetic and cellular material of the embryo” (“Mother’s” 366). Therefore Irigaray conceptualizes the sensory connection between mother and child as a model for transcendence through immanence, one that reconceives of the divine as accessible through the corporeal, rather than viewing it as the antithesis of the body. Irigaray’s theory of the sensible transcendental has destabilized the binary logic of Western metaphysics, countering the patriarchal tendency to view the female body as something abject, but more importantly by reconfiguring transcendence as something achieved through immanence she has made it possible for women, especially mothers, to conceive of a subjective space in the representation economy through their bodies that is wholly of their creation.

#### 1.4 A More Material Transcendence

Luce Irigaray’s attempt at reconfiguring the immanence/transcendence binary opposition by way of locating transcendence in corporeal embodiment in her theory of the sensible transcendental marks a radical shift in continental philosophy that attempts to move away from a Kantian transcendental idealism to a form of existential self-transcendence. This emphasis on the ability of the body



to signify outside of the confines of the representational economy is addressed in Penelope Ingram's *The Signifying Body: Toward An Ethics of Sexual and Racial Difference*, where the author argues, not only for the co-substantiality of ethics and ontology, but also for the co-substantiality of ethics and ontology, and the ways in which physical signification is possible outside of the representation economy (118-121). Furthermore, she argues within in the text that due to the binary of sexual difference that Irigaray reinstates a representation economy and that ethics and ontology are "dependent on the development of a new language, one that escapes the grounding of representation" and that "such a language needs to be physicalized – it shows, it touches, it transforms itself, the speaker, the listener, and the reader" (120). Though Ingram's reading of Irigaray's sexual difference and the sensible transcendental alludes to a more materialist transcendence, a movement that stresses signification outside of the phallogocentric matrix and bodily representations of femininity, there remains a distinct problematic in Irigaray's discourse that must be addressed.

With Ingram's reading in mind it becomes clear that, despite the fact that Irigaray's sensible transcendental provides a salient model of ethical activity that affords the feminine the possibility of authentic representation, its reliance on female morphology reinstates a representational economy not unlike the phallic model she critiques and forecloses the possibility of signification for those that do not fit a particular mode. By positing sexual difference as an ontological

grounding and characterizing transcendence in strictly biological terms she occludes the socio-historical forces that contribute to a wide-range of differences beyond sex. Most importantly for this particular discussion, Irigaray's ethical model, which uses the placenta as an apt metaphor for the sensible transcendental, reduces maternity to a pro-natalist or biological framework that indirectly excludes queer and adoptive mothers. The following will illustrate that Irigaray's emphasis on sexual difference results in a mystification of the discursive elements that shape identity beyond sex and that her reliance on strictly biological terminology results in the development of a feminine representational economy that collapses all bodies into a pro-natalist framework. With this in mind, in order for Irigaray's sensible transcendental to provide a model for ethical activity, of achieving transcendence through an immanent bodily connection, it must be extended to consider differences beyond the sexuate model and contend with the historical forces that construct them.

As previously noted, Irigaray's main contribution to continental philosophy seeks not only to establish sexual difference as an ontological grounding for all subjects, but the development of a framework for encountering the other in his or her irreducible sexuality that refuses to view the other as an object of appropriation. As Irigaray states in *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*:

To refund society and culture upon sexual difference is also to radically put back in question the notion of the proper, of propriety, of appropriation that governs our mental and social habits. It is to learn, at the most intimate, at the most passionate and carnal level of the relation to the other, to renounce all possession, all appropriation, in order to respect, in the relation, two subjects, without ever reducing one to the other. (128)

For Irigaray “the most universal and irreducible difference, from this point of view, is the one that exists between genders” and “it appears as the empirical as well as transcendental condition for guaranteeing the possibility of a new epoch of History or, more simply, for assuring humanity a becoming” (*Ethics* 98). Due to the fact that Irigaray characterizes sexual difference as a transcendental status the necessity of recognizing the alterity of the sexually other becomes even more crucial to a society because, as Rachel Jones notes, because “unless we cultivate an ethics that respects sexual difference, we will not be able to respect other kinds of difference” (219). In Irigaray’s model because sexual difference is constitutive and founds all relations between subjects all other forms of differences are seen as ontic and secondary. This leads Irigaray to comment in *I Love to You* that “the problem of race is, in fact, a secondary problem...and the same goes for other cultural diversities – religious, economic and political ones” (*IL* 47).

In her chapter devoted specifically to Irigaray in *Immanent Transcendence: Reconfiguring Materialism in Continental Philosophy* Patrice Haynes claims Irigaray’s positioning of sex as an ontological grounding, although

far from devolving into essentialism, does run the risk of initiating “a state of alienation between men and women,” where the recognition of their irreducible sexuate nature does not necessary foster intersubjective communication, but instead impedes it (*Immanent* 118). Irigaray, as alluded to previously, does attempt to address the divide between men and women in her discussion of the abyss between them and the necessity of viewing nature as a mediating third term or bridge enabling recognition of alterity (*Immanent* 119). As Irigaray states in

*The Way of Love:*

An interval must be provided, and neither the one nor the other where each finds itself oneself again and finds the other again while avoiding the one simply overturning the other through what is revealed of them. This interval – and this medium – is first of all nature, as it remains left to itself: air, water, earth and sun, as fire and light. Being par excellence – matter of the transcendental. (18-19)

As Haynes explains further, in Irigaray’s philosophy “nature is the sensible transcendental for divine love between the two of sexual difference, ensuring their communion without obliterating their distinctiveness” (*Immanent* 119-122).

However, the transcendental nature of air “conceals the social conditions producing complex patterns of oppression in concrete, everyday lives of women (and men), and romanticizes nature in ways that risk disconnecting it from its materiality” (*Immanent* 119-122). Haynes is indeed correct when she surmises that by “undervaluing a range of other differences, such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion and economic status, that make up a person’s life and gives us

a thick concept of embodiment,” Irigaray’s material transcendence falls into the very trap of absolute alterity that characterizes Levinas’ work on ethics that she critiques (*Immanent* 122). As mentioned previously Irigaray takes Heidegger to task for his “metaphysical abstraction” when he characterizes the earth as a homogenous point of origin for all living beings. However, by positing sexual difference as transcendental category and nature which serves as the bridge that provides the possibility for recognition between the two sexes, she is unclear as to how intersubjectivity is possible. Her formulation of sexual difference as an ontological grounding merely duplicates the sameness that she criticizes Heidegger for by establishing a homogenous transcendental category that stifles the very multiplicity she hopes to allow. More importantly however, it is Irigaray’s use of constant metaphors, such as air, mucus, and the placenta, that establishes a hierarchical relationship between women that threatens to foreclose transcendence to non-procreative bodies.

To return specifically to the maternal body, we can see that the two most salient metaphors for Irigaray’s sensible transcendental, that which enables the recognition between man and woman in their sexual difference, are air, that which is breathed into the life of all sexuate subjects and therefore the material grounding for all ethical interactions, and the placenta, that which is a model for Irigaray’s ethics that symbolizes a non-hierarchical duality of non-appropriation. In “Subjectivity and Sexual Difference” Diane Perpich illustrates that Irigaray’s

reevaluation of the mother is an attempt, not to posit another idealized form that can be coopted by western civilization, but a material maternal that “is not sacrificed or used up, is not appropriated by the other, but remains autonomous even as she provides a means for the other’s transition to independent life” (174). The breath of the mother is crucial to Irigaray’s ethics because it is one of Irigaray’s many metaphors for the sensible that serves as a bridge between subjects that makes ethics possible and is at once material, as that which is essential to life, but also something that exists relatively unseen. As Perpich explains, air for Irigaray is “an element that undergirds intersubjective relationships between sexed subjects” and when Irigaray claims that “breath entails ‘an unpaid debt to the maternal’, she means, first of all, quite literally that each person who breathes on her own does so thanks to the mother who initially breathed for her by delivering oxygen through the bloodstream” (“Subjectivity” 174). Irigaray’s philosophy, not unlike Kristeva’s, hopes to unearth the liberating possibilities of the maternal body as a site of ethical interaction before symbolic castration that can be revisited in order to afford women the possibility of an identity that is not restricted by phallic representation. As Michelle Boulous Walker claims in *Philosophy and the Maternal Body* the “mother and daughter exists within a deadly immediacy” due to the fact that “their relation is not symbolized, has no symbolic language to accompany its gestures, they ‘remain and move in an immediacy without any transitional, transactional object’” (171).

The struggle between the mother and the daughter, where the latter views the maternal as something to be consumed and detached from occurs according to Irigaray due to the very lack of recognition of the intimate bodily connection between the mother and daughter that forms the ground for all subjectivity. As Irigaray herself writes:

...the struggle for superiority between two same persists in the absence of the discovery and valorization of a sensible-transcendental – a female transcendental against which each woman can measure herself rather than progressing only by taking the place of the mother, the other woman or the man. (qtd. in Walker 172)

Irigaray is quick to claim that the “fusion” between mother and daughter is not one where the daughter replicates the mother, for her mother is not strictly speaking the transcendental object to which she must strive towards (Walker 173). However, the exchange between the mother and daughter is crucial to subject formation for the female because in Irigaray’s philosophy there is always the impetus to “take up an active relation to the sexuate being that is disclosed in our own birth, and in particular in our relation to the mother from whom we are born” (Jones 192).

Because Irigaray claims that the daughter has no way of communicating to the mother within the symbolic register, which is crucial to subject formation, the philosopher offers the metaphor of the placenta as “a way for the child to symbolize its relations to the mother’s body,” as a union that is “imagined as

always already separate and at the same time life sustaining” (Weed 26). As Rebecca Hill claims in *The Interval: Relation and Becoming in Irigaray, Aristotle and Bergson* Irigaray “invokes the placenta as a threshold between the mother and the embryo. While this place is intimately related to the uterine mucosa of the mother’s body, the placenta remains separate from it” so that “woman is no longer collapsible into place” (69). Complimented by biologist Helene Rouch’s model, here the placenta, due to the fact that it is “formed by the embryo and imbricated in the uterine mucosa,” therefore “cannot be described as half-maternal and half-foetal because, although formed by the embryo, it behaves as if were [it] were relatively autonomous” (Martin 155). With this in mind the placenta allows for unencumbered exchange between mother and fetus that is unsymbolizable because it is located in the proximity of two bodies. For Irigaray “the placenta is ethical, because the placental relation implies the possible futures of the mother and the fetus that may be born and come to live as a subject” and though Irigaray, as Hill notes, is “engage in a reevaluation of motherhood beyond the construal woman-place as the envelope for ma-embryo,” the invocation of the morphology of the mother establishes a pro-natalist view of maternity that only allows a place for reproductive mothers (70).

In Elena Gomel’s “Hot and Wet: Luce Irigaray and the Fascist Body” the author argues that “Irigaray’s metaphorical picture of the fluidity of the female, particularly the maternal body, fails to appreciate how this image is historically



linked to ‘fascist rhetoric of the organic state’ in which it is race rather than sex that is the natural, essential difference” (Haynes *Immanent* 110). Gomel’s argument, as Haynes duly notes, is crucial to a discussion of the maternal body, not because it establishes race as an ontological condition as opposed to sexual difference, but because it illustrates that, perhaps unconsciously, Irigaray is establishing a strict and rather oppressive binary system in regards to the maternal that occludes in its attempts to establish the foundations of sexual difference. This view is echoed somewhat in Cristina Mazzone’s *Maternal Impression: Pregnancy and Childbirth in Literary Theory* when she claims that “the vocabulary of the prenatal connection, a vocabulary of body and body fluids, or desire and need, of love and knowledge, links Irigaray’s sentence to the tradition of maternal impressions,” of the location of an ethical model specifically in the morphology of the feminine/maternal body (48). In the place of a wholly phallic model that relegates women eternally to the other of the masculine, Irigaray has posited sexual difference as the ontological grounding for intersubjective communication, where a subject’s relation to a specifically pro-creative mother makes intersubjectivity and ethical exchange possible. Furthermore, not unlike Kristeva’s “semiotic,” Irigaray’s bodily metaphors, though successful in creating a maternal symbolism linked specifically to the feminine body, it nevertheless characterizes the placenta as something of a primordial grounding that is accessed in order to facilitate intersubjective communication. Although this reappraisal of

the materiality of femininity and maternity has achieved its goals in creating representations of femininity and maternity that do that endorse the rejection of the corporeal, it nevertheless, in its reliance on the body, occludes the role of performativity in identity formation.

### 1.5 From Embodiment to Performance

Thus far this study has concerned itself with illustrating the relationship between the role of the maternal body and transcendence, most notably the work of Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray and their attempts to explicate the way in which the metaphysical tradition has excluded the feminine and located in the morphology of the maternal body the possibility of transcendence for the feminine. The importance of Irigaray's concept of the sensible transcendental to feminist theory is undeniable, but as we have seen her invocation of the maternal body, similar to Kristeva, as both a grounding and metaphor for that which enables an immanent transcendence is problematic when adoptive or queer mothers, not to mention non-female mothering, is considered. The following section will illustrate a contemporary movement in feminist theory that focuses less on embodiment and more on performance in regards to subjectivity. This trend, as it pertains specifically to maternal theory, emphasizes the role of power, the media, and medico-juridical institutions in shaping and constituting the body and proclaims that the existence of non-reproductive bodies deconstructs the "naturalness" of the pro-natalist conception of "real" mothers.

Though critics have noted that Irigaray's biological essentialism, what Margaret Whitford has labeled "strategic essentialism," is not nearly as pronounced as it can be read in Kristeva's conception of the semiotic chora or Helene Cixous charge for the necessity of "writing the female body" found in "The Laugh of the Medusa," there is nevertheless the tendency in Irigaray's philosophy, especially that concerned with the maternal, of locating her ethics strictly in within a pro-natalist framework that only takes into consideration reproductive bodies. This point is echoed somewhat in Judith Butler's landmark text *Gender Trouble* when she claims that "categories of true sex, discrete gender, and specific sexuality have constituted the stable point of reference for a great deal of feminist theory and politics," a view that takes the body as a "passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as 'external' to that body" (128-9). Butler goes on to emphasize that this dichotomous relationship between the "inner" and "outer" body is "determined in large part by cultural orders that sanction the subject and compel its differentiation from the abject" and where the subject is made to adhere and conform to prescriptive behavior that signifies an essence that can be fully recognized (*GT* 135). Identity, in Butler's formulation, is the enacting of a regulatory norm imposed upon the body so that "words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *one the surface* of the body" (*GT* 136). These performative actions reveal the fictitious

nature of an internal or ontological grounding as illustrated by Butler's example of drag performances that expose the fact that gender is discursively produced. She claims that performances of this sort, or "practices of parody," could possibly lead to the "effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilizing substantive identity, and depriving the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality and their central protagonists: 'man' and 'woman'" (GT 146). This argument would add that by dissolving the phantasmatic configuration of "real mothers" that is employed in many cases as a representative of the sensible transcendental for a view of maternity that is based solely in its performative actions would work towards destabilizing the same foundations that impose a pro-natalist framework of regulation on queer or adoptive maternal bodies.

In *Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Maternal Subjectivity* Alison Stone, arguing in the tradition of the French feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, in similar fashion claims that due to the propensity of the Western metaphysical tradition to view the rejection of the feminine body, specifically maternal corporeality, as necessary for the emergence of subjectivity and transcendence, that "mothers cannot be subjects" (1). Stone conceives of subjectivity, in her own words, in "a more restricted sense," arguing that "to be a subject one must not only have or live through a particular experience, one must *author* the meaning of that experience, and one must exercise some *autonomy* in doing so, departing from given horizons of meaning to regenerate new meanings

adapted to one's own situation and history" (*Feminism 2*). Whereas Shaw hopes to illustrate that breastfeeding is far from being an inherent trait, but instead a learned process that is fundamental to the construction of a maternal identity, Stone extends the dialogue by contending that the ethical relationship between mother and daughter offers the possibility of a distinct identity. Stone's conception of transcendence for the feminine emphasizes an identity that signifies beyond the phallogocentric representational economy, outside of established binarized patriarchal models of femininity, which is achieved through actions directed at another body in an ethical encounter. In order to afford women this opportunity for transcendence, Stone is proposing a return to a "maternal past," claiming that "if breaking from the mother makes possible modern subjectivity in its typical form, conversely re-situating oneself within maternal body relations makes possible a different form of subjectivity" (*Feminism 5*). Stone goes on to claim:

...I suggest that for maternal subjectivity to be possible the *mother* must be able to assume a subject-position distinct from that of the daughter. Mothering is a variation on being a daughter, insofar as the mother replays with her child her own maternal past. Yet this replaying of the past is a replaying *with a difference*. This difference makes the maternal position a distinct one, and brings with it various further implication for the distinctive structure of maternal subjectivity. (*Feminism 5*)

Therefore, by revisiting the maternal body and its "psychical relations with others," namely the daughter, Stone argues that the mother authors a distinct

identity that stems from the pre-linguistic and semiotic space, or what Kristeva refers to as the “‘archaic maternal’ real,” that results in a partially non-mediated and relatively autonomous agency for women that is self-constituted (*Feminism* 5-7). Because, as Lynne Segal claims in *Why Feminism?: Gender, Psychology, Politics*, the maternal body offers “the subversive potential of the tactile, rhythmic semiosis of the pre-Oedipal, pre-symbolic, maternal murmurings and communications, in disordering the Symbolic Order” feminist philosophers have constantly employed it as “an imagined subterranean existence outside the phallogocentric laws of Man or God” (50). For Stone and Shaw both then, maternity itself is defined as an ethical responsibility to the wholly Other that is marked by performative actions, rather than solely physiological connection, that offer the possibility of transcendence from the representational economy, of accessing a pre-linguistic space through an immanent bodily connection with another subject.

As illustrated in the aforementioned section, for Stone the desire to revisit a maternal past stems from the matricidal tendencies inherent in a patriarchal and late capitalist culture identified by the French feminists, and although she alludes to how such a resituating of maternal subjectivity subsequently “make[s] it easier to re-imagine the paternal figure as someone who gives bodily, emotional, day-to-day care to young children,” Stone’s chief concern is elaborating the ways in which the ethical relationship between the mother and daughter opens up a

maternal space that provides a way for women to achieve a distinct subjectivity (Stone *Feminism* 6). As with Shaw's treatise on the political implications of breastfeeding, Stone's argument of a self-constituted identity, though undoubtedly relying on a performed action in a singular ethical encounter, is nevertheless confined to an action that stems directly from the specific morphology of the feminine body. As she illustrates in "Maternal Memory and Lived Time," where she describes the immanent and bodily connection between mother and infant, the "infant's affects and impulses are raw and visceral; its constant bodily closeness to the mother re-introduces her to smells, sounds, and sensation (breast milk, spit-up) that adults do not normally encounter" (12). This sensory experience in turn "prompts the mother to reproduce behavioural and emotional schemata from her early childhood specifically *as ways of being with the other*," referencing a phantasmatic past in the performance, rather than adhering strictly heteronormative frameworks of "appropriate" behavior ("Maternal" 12). Stone cites a number of case studies from Rosemary Balsam's article "The Mother Within the Mother" where mothers in therapy, almost sub-consciously, resituated their past experiences with their own mother into their relationship with their own daughter, imitating actions that they remembered as pleasant from their own time as infants and ignoring those that they felt were harmful (12-15). Both Stone and Balsam's emphasis on the mother-in-process, where the latter in *Women's Bodies in Psychoanalysis* claims that there is a "close and vital physically comparative

constructed fantasy connection between a mother's body and her daughter's," therefore not only locates the possibility of transcendence through immanence strictly between a mother and daughter, but also conceives of maternity in a strictly pro-natalist, or biological framework (Balsam 55).

Stone's theory of maternal subjectivity, of achieving transcendence through the maternal body rather than by rejecting it, has interesting implications for the development of an ethics based on maternity. Its emphasis on the performative nature of the daughter's mimicry of her relationship with her mothers opens up the possibility of a maternal ethics located in performative action. However, there exists within Stone's account of maternal subjectivity a distinct problematic that must be addressed if maternity is to be developed into a framework of ethical activity applicable to all subjects, both male and female, and extend beyond the mother-daughter dyad to include, not only sons, but also individuals with no biological connection. Aside from the fact that Stone locates the possible horizon of maternal subjectivity to the singular dative relationship between mother and daughter, a situation where the daughter constantly replays her experience with her own mother but with a difference, an aspect that Lisa Baraitser alludes to in *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* when she claims that maternal subjectivity should, and can only arise, from an ethical relationship with a wholly Other (8). Baraitser claims, in the tradition of Emmanuel Levinas, that "the subject emerges at the point it responds to the Other



that it cannot colonize, and ultimately cannot know” and that the “interrupting, tantrumming, crying, demanding, questioning, loving, unpredictable and ultimately unknowable other that is a child can be thought of as a particular other for the mother, the response to whom calls us, as maternal subjects, into being” (8-9). With this in mind, Stone’s account of maternal subjectivity not only collapses the role of the mother into a strict physiologically defined woman, as well as the figure of the daughter, but also neuters the alterity of the Other by transforming it into a knowable individual limited by a representational identity. The mother-daughter relationship is unable to provide a framework for authentic ethical activity outside of this particular dyad in its current formulation because the relationship between self and other is predicated on a knowing self so that all difference is eliminated in, as David Boothroyd labels, the “reflexive interlocution of the being of the same” (18). Stone’s theory of maternity offers a crucial contribution to a theory of ethics, not merely between the mother and daughter, but for all subjects. However, in order for maternity to provide such a model, one where the alterity of the Other is not neutered, it must be reconfigured to include non-biological mothers, such as “queer” or adoptive maternal bodies, and include ethical activity beyond individuals with a shared physiological heritage.

The relegation of maternity to strictly reproductive bodies and the way in which non-heteronormative forms of motherhood reveal the phantasmatic nature of conceptions of “real” or “good” mothers is a theme explored in Shelley M.

Park *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood*. Here the author claims that “a pronatalist perspective on maternal bodies defines motherhood as a natural, biological phenomenon including both a gestational and genetic connection to one’s child,” which in turn leads to the view that “there is something queer about any adoptive maternal body – a body that poses as, yet is not a ‘real’ mother; a body that presupposes, yet is defined in opposition to, procreative ability; a body that is marked as defective, yet is chosen as capable” (58). One can see the extension here of Kristeva’s argument in *Powers of Horror* where maternal body is necessarily abjected in order for subjectivity to be possible, yet here it is the non-reproductive body that is posited as the abject in order to clearly delineate the boundaries of maternal subjectivity. Parks’ main argument, derived from Foucault’s work on biopower, is that power constructs and engenders both of these maternal bodies, the biological and the deviant, and “through multiple social pressures –exerted by families, friends, neighbors, churches, schools and the media (for example, parenting advice books and television talk shows) – female bodies become the maternal bodies who coo softly at and sing lullabies to their infants...” (63).

However, these forces are not only society, but institutional as well due to the fact that non-procreative bodies are subjected to an ideal image of maternity that is defined by, amongst other things, “heterosexual privilege” that “exemplify traditional gendered division of labor” where the paternal and maternal roles are

strictly defined within a heteronormative framework (65). This creates an ideal family, along with a fantastical ideal maternal body, that non-reproductive mothers are defined against, which ultimately leads extreme scrutiny, especially when applying for adoption which is highly invasive and extremely expensive, therefore assuring the family fits both the heteronormative mold and the economic status the adoption agent feels is necessary (209). More importantly, as Jana Sawicki reveals in *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body* that new reproductive technologies, though potentially beneficial and liberating for women, actually work to discipline women in the same way Foucault identified in the carceral system. Sawicki claims that medical technologies fit the mold of disciplinary power because “they involve sophisticated techniques of surveillance and examination (for instance, ultrasound, fetal monitors, amniocentesis, antenatal testing procedures) that make female bodies and fetuses visible to anonymous agents” (83-4). These very forms of technology “isolate specific types of abnormality or deviancy, they construct new norms of healthy and responsible motherhood” that create a discursive body of knowledge that occludes non-reproductive bodies (84). Technologies such as these are what lead Park to argue that “doctors play the role of gatekeepers, determining how the good mother will act (she will eat only healthy foods, get adequate rest, take prenatal vitamins, refrain from smoking and drinking, avoid strenuous exercise, abstain from certain sexual practices, and so on).” (209-10).

What is most important to derive from both Park and Sawicki's commentary is that non-procreative bodies provide an important epistemological standpoint for viewing the "unnaturalness" of the biologically reproductive body. Non-procreative maternal bodies reveal the very fictitious dichotomy of "internal" and "external" that Butler discusses in regards to gender, where institutional and ideological forces regulate bodies according to a prescribed ideal, establishing norms of behavior, and clearly demarcated lines of normalcy. As Park illustrates, what "adoptive mothers know is that role-playing is *prescribed* by the dominant view of motherhood and that *all* mothers are playing a role as mandated by this script or, if refusing to conform to such a role, are still subject to its impositions by those who are gatekeepers to motherhood" (70). In this way the binary opposition between biologically reproductive and adoptive maternal bodies is positioned in such a way that it could easily be translated as "mothers" and "not-mothers," where the latter constantly serves as the grounding for representations of "true" maternity not unlike the way in which woman has always served as the other for man.

In order for adoptive maternal bodies to truly be considered as subjects of discourse as something beyond the others of biologically reproductive bodies, there must be a shift to a post-embodiment philosophy of maternity that emphasizes the performative nature of motherhood. This shift must begin with a study of the ways in which discursive power structures contribute the construction

of identity through disciplinary means that involve reproductive technologies and how power functions as a mediating factor in every ethical interaction between subjects. Viewing power in this way forces any theory of ethics that argues transcendence is possible through a bodily connection must be reformulated to contend with the discursive power that shapes these bodies. Only by making the transcendence that is customarily attributed to the maternal body for attentive to the material elements that comprise is it possible to formulate a type of transcendence for non-reproductive maternal bodies that is achievable through ethical interaction.

### 1.6 Scope of Study

Both horror and science fiction literature and film offer particularly revealing examples for this study not only because they reveal the inherent duality of maternal identity, both as something virginal and yet deviant, but also because they show the intersection between technologies of power and the human body. The horror text that I have chosen is Ira Levin's modern gothic novel *Rosemary's Baby* (1967), whereas the science fiction films that will be utilized with Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), James Cameron's sequel *Aliens* (1986), Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Alien: Resurrection* (1997). Each of these texts centers around differing forms of mothering, both biologically reproductive and performative, and the lived experience of these specific maternal bodies. Most importantly, these novels and films each provide singular representations of the ways in which discursive power

structures, medico-juridical, cult, or military, work to optimize the potential of the maternal body. Also, they each foreground the importance of authentic ethical interaction between mother and child, emphasizing the importance of ethics, along with power, to subject formation, as well as its liberating potential.

Horror and science fiction films, with their preoccupation with demonic figures and futuristic technology, present an interesting lens for viewing the way in which power observes and regulates the maternal body in order to fit into a heteronormative mold. As Barbara Creed has noticed in *The Monstrous Feminine*, the female body, and more specifically the maternal body, figures predominantly in science and horror fiction, staging masculinity's fear of the phallic mother and man's primordial origins in the womb in the figure of demonic women, alien predators, and hysterical mothers. More importantly, both of these genres are deeply preoccupied with the transcendental, drawing from Judeo-Christian sources and containing monsters that serve as corporeal manifestations of otherworldly elements outside of human knowledge. All of these projections, both the demonic and the alien, are imbued with power and furthermore, illustrate its transcendent and immanent nature.

Science fiction films such as those that make-up the *Alien* franchise exploit the trope of the primordial phallic mother that represents the fear of castration and the maternal body that is technologically supplement in order to construct the ideal figure of the mother. Cameron's *Aliens* specifically shows how

power posits this ideal projection of maternity as something to be strived for, therefore justifying the invasion of women's bodies as consequence.

Novels such as Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* exemplify the way power works immanently through institutions to produce a transcendental projection of both maternity and the Child, each of which are used to codify the desire of the maternal figure. This novel, with its emphasis on the demonic, shows how subjects are imbued with the residue of the very power that constructs them and therefore any ethical engagement between two beings must take into consideration this very residue. In chapters three through four I will use these texts to conceptualize the various forms of mother, both biological reproduction and "deviant" forms of mother such as adoptive maternity and fathers as mothers. Though many of these texts involve biological mothers, the main purpose of these texts is to illustrate the way in which power acts upon all maternal bodies and how maternity itself is comprised of performative action directed toward an other. In Chapter Two "Transcendence Forestalled" I address the question of a more material transcendence by establishing the theoretical framework of a discussion of ethics by elaborating on the transcendence and imminent ethics of Emmanuel Levinas and Gilles Deleuze respectively. This chapter will conclude with an exposition on Michel Foucault's formulation of power in order to elaborate on how discursive power structures work within these two dominant strains of ethics. The final section of this chapter will illustrate how power working immanently

produces a transcendent ideal and forestalls authentic ethical interaction. In Chapter Three, “The Crystalline Image of Maternity,” I will explore how horror and science fiction texts employ the gothic trope of both the monstrous and ideal maternal figure in order to stage the duality of the maternal body. This chapter will explore how the *Alien* franchise depicts the invasion of the maternal body by medical technologies in order to mold the maternal figure into a historicized ideal it projects. In Chapter Four, “Maternal Performativity and the Masochistic Contract,” I argue that in order for an immanent connection to occur between mother and infant the mother must first contend with the alterity of the virtual projections of both the ideal mother and the child. This chapter will look at the work of Gilles Deleuze and Leopold Sacher-Masoch in order to reformulate Deleuze’s concept of the masochistic contract, where desire is suspended infinitely and not attached to a historicized ideal, therefore allowing me to argue that the maternal figure establishes a similar contract with the infant that results in the creation of an authentic maternal identity constructed by way of ethical interaction directed at the child. This chapter will conclude with an analysis of Ira Levin’s *Rosemary’s Baby* as an example of a maternal ethics of self where the protagonist, Rosemary Woodhouse, slowly grows aware that she cannot ever attain the projected ideal of maternity, but nevertheless acts in accordance to the responsibility she has to an unknowable other, her child. Finally, in Chapter Five, “Adoptive Maternity and the Dissolution of Self,” will focus primarily on



adoptive and queer maternal bodies in order to argue that their subjection at the hands of medico-juridical institutions is exceedingly different than their biological counterparts. Unlike biological mothers, who are able to construct a positive identity, non-reproductive maternal bodies are barred from the future they reterritorialize. This chapter illustrates the necessity of reconceptualizing non-procreative mothering, not as embodiment, but as a performance that works through contagion in order to take part in a collective transcendence.

## Chapter 2

### Transcendence Forestalled

The illusions of transcendence are physical, material illusions. Because they are real, and indeed actual, it is easy to understand why they can so easily be mistaken for the causes. As such, the task of overturning onto-theology amounts to relating the effects of transcendence back to their immanent cause... -Miguel De Beistegui *Immanence: Deleuze and Philosophy*

In their book, *Transcendence and Beyond: A Postmodern Inquiry*, John David Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon identify two dominant treatments of subjectivity and ethical activity prevalent in the postmodern age: what can be labeled “hyperbolic transcendence” which is indicative of the philosophy of French metaphysician, Emmanuel Levinas and philosophies of immanence, such as those of Gilles Deleuze and Luce Irigaray (3). The first viewpoint, specifically for Levinas, holds that “the classical idea of transcendence is clearly not enough for it represents a movement that for him is trapped *within* being, and hence within a sphere of ‘ontological’ immanence, even if and especially when it asserts an ontology of supersensible being” (3). Levinas, in his opposition to the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and the ontological distinction posited by Martin Heidegger, contends that there must be a “movement beyond being and Being,” a transcendence that is otherwise than being that is engendered and produced by and through an ethical relationship with a wholly other that eludes totalization by Being (3). Traditionally, as Caputo and Scanlon go on to note, this

form of hyperbolic transcendence shares a pervasive commonality with Judeo-Christian theology where philosophers such as Jean-Luc Marion insist that that to think of transcendence as limited to being is to become trapped in an “ontological idolatry – and must give way to a certain ultratranscendence or more radical or hyperbolic transcendence beyond being” where the individual existent must transition outside the sphere of Being in order to conceptualize and understand an unmediated world (3).

The second standpoint, which can be traced directly to Friedrich Nietzsche’s critique of morality in *A Genealogy of Morals* and subsequently the influence of the French poststructuralists, is characterized by a tendency to view the aforementioned version of transcendence “as a kind of mythologization or alienation – taking what is our own and turning it into an alien force or power – that we need to get beyond in order to learn to dwell rightly upon the earth” (Caputo and Scanlon 3). Christian Kerslake, in *Immanence and the Vertigo of Philosophy: From Kant to Deleuze* formulates a definition of immanence by claiming that it “is a philosophy that does not appeal to anything outside the terms and relations constructed by that philosophy” and, more importantly to this particular discussion, is a philosophy that “promises that *thought* is capable of being fully expressive of *being*; there is no ‘transcendence’ of being to thought” (2). Kerslake admits that this criteria could be applied to any number of philosophies stemming from the Greek tradition, however it suffices to say that

immanent philosophy can be defined as diametrically opposed to transcendence in its denial of a possible ideal horizon beyond being and the impossibility of transcending or evacuating the material confines of the world (2).

One could maintain that the trajectory of French philosophy is, as Giorgio Agamben has intimated, a continual “contest between philosophies of transcendence and philosophies of immanence” (Perpich *Ethics* 21). As Patrice Haynes observes, contemporary philosophers of immanence, namely those such as Gilles Deleuze, Luce Irigaray, and Slavoj Žižek, argue transcendence “to be metaphysically untenable, given the idea of self-sustaining nature” and construe it “as problematic on ethical and political grounds” (*Immanent 2*). One of the most prevalent criticisms of philosophies of transcendence, as alluded to previously, is that it promotes a type of political sterility; unable to fully comprehend or contend with the natural world it envisions a horizon outside that is beyond representation. Philosophies of transcendence therefore, according to these viewpoints, cannot provide a framework for authentic ethical activity or political action because it resigns itself to abstraction.

Feminist scholars in particular have targeted philosophies of transcendence as indicative of patriarchy and deeply rooted in misogynistic principles that identify women with the material world and therefore deny them the possibility of transcendence. Most notably, Simone de Beauvoir identified transcendence as a specifically masculine concept, attainable only for men, and

something that has historically relegated women to the role of the unknowable Other (Simmons 56). If we understand immanence as remaining within the confines of the natural world it becomes clear how feminists such as Irigaray have attempted to formulate a schema wherein women, who have traditionally been linked to biology and the material, can achieve transcendence through immanence. This exemplifies a recent movement in contemporary continental philosophy, as noted by Patrice Haynes, wherein transcendence is retained and achieved through immanent ethical connections between two parties that is non-appropriative. As we have seen however in our previous discussion of Irigaray, though this version of material transcendence does not posit a vertical hierarchy with an absolute and unknowable divine, it nevertheless maintains a level of metaphysical abstraction through its allusions to metaphors such as air and nature as transcendental categories that provide a bridge between sexuate bodies.

Due to the fact that transcendence occupies such a key ground for this particular study this chapter seeks to provide an analysis of the hyperbolic transcendence of Emmanuel Levinas, from which perspectives such as those of Irigaray directly stem, in order to argue that the transcendence that Levinas explicates is the result of the existent's willing subjection to a *knowable* Other, rather than an entity comprised of absolute alterity, that is conditioned by a loss grounded in a primordial past. Due to the fact that it is one of the key purposes of this study to reformulate Irigaray's sensible transcendental beyond metaphysical

abstraction and reliance on feminine morphology to include non-biological mothers, this section will illustrate that Levinas's theory of transcendence, from which Irigaray's account is derived, takes into account the presence of discursive power and can be read as an account of the existent's subjection to the Law. This chapter claims that the Other and the infinity that characterizes it are projections of the subject's desire to return to the pure anonymity of Being and that this desire conditions the existent for infinite responsibility, not to the Other, but to the Law and discursive power.

The following will begin with a brief description of the way in which Irigaray's sensible transcendental is derived from Levinas's association between fecundity and transcendence, therefore illustrating how each envisions transcendence as a futural horizon projected from an unknowable primal scene. Most importantly, this chapter will illustrate that the importance that Irigaray's places on the "bridge," or that which facilitates the meeting between same and other, is directly related to Levinas's theory of metaphysical desire. Immediately following, this study will provide an extensive summation and evaluation of the influence of Husserl and Heidegger on Levinas's thought, as well as an analysis of the key concepts of his philosophy. The purpose of this study is not only to provide an exposition of the trajectory of Levinas's thought, but to illustrate how Levinas is eventually unable to completely leave a discussion of intentionality and Being respectively. Subsequently it will be shown, through a psychoanalytic

reading of Levinas's progression of ethical subjectivity that the subject is characterized by a primordial loss of Being that facilitates the construction of the Other's alterity due to the fact that the Other is internalized as a replacement for the originary loss of anonymity. Finally, this chapter will conclude with an analysis of Levinas's reformulation of the ethical encounter in *Otherwise Than Being*, which is an attempt to project ethics into the political sphere, in order to show how Levinas's introduction of justice and thematization into the ethical encounter facilitates a more "material" interpretation of the "bridge" as discursive power.

## 2.1 Eros and the Past

The previous chapter delineated the trajectory of a specific segment of feminist theory's thought as it pertains to the subject of transcendence, focusing specifically on the way the maternal body has served as a ground for transcendence through immanence. Due to the fact that Irigaray's discussion of the sensible transcendental is derived predominantly from the transcendental ethics of Emmanuel Levinas, it is necessary to illustrate a number of key points in the latter's philosophy. Along with her emphasis on the total alterity of the Other, Irigaray derives her formulation of the sensible transcendental from Levinas' discussion of erotic love and fecundity in *Totality and Infinity* in order to posit the possibility of an ambiguous, non-stratified subject projected infinitely into a future horizon that is not unlike Levinas' transcendence through fecundity.

Furthermore, this section will analyze the importance each philosopher places on the “bridge,” whether it is characterized as metaphysical desire or angels, which facilitates the ethical encounter between two existents. The following hopes to address the influence of Levinas’ thought on Irigaray’s transcendence through immanence and, more importantly, work to establish a framework for viewing Levinas’ transcendence as an endeavor to project a primordial past into the future.

In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas argues that the ethical encounter is characterized by what he terms metaphysical desire, a driving impulse that is distinguishable from need in that it is a desire for the infinite, for the invisibility and alterity of the unknowable Other (*TI* 33-5). As we will witness in the latter part of this section, this metaphysical desire for the infinite is conditioned by a primordial loss of ambiguity immediately prior to the ethical encounter. However, it suffices to say at this juncture that desire for the Other is non-erotic in that it is not a desire for the appropriation of the Other, but is asymmetrical and therefore described as ethical because it is defined by the infinite responsibility the self projects to the Other (Bergo 29). As Levinas argues in the concluding chapters of *Totality and Infinity* the “metaphysical event of transcendence – the welcome of the Other, hospitality – Desire and language – is not accomplished as love. But the transcendence of discourse is bound to love” (*TI* 254). It is Levinas’ endeavor throughout the latter chapters of the text to show how love is an essential factor in



the desire for the Other that leads to transcendence, yet nevertheless offers the possibility of falling into immanence (*TI* 254).

As John Llewelyn makes clear in *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics* the “transcendence that is desire, face-to-face presence and direct speech is opened through love to an ever more future future beyond the face, beyond discourse and beyond Desire” (121). However, love is defined by its paradoxical nature because “love’s transcendence toward the Other, toward Desire, is prone to gravitate toward an immanence in which the intentionality outwardly directed toward the beloved is inverted inward as if to the lover” (121). Levinas makes this paradox of love clear when he states:

The possibility of the Other appearing as an object of a need while retaining his alterity, or again, the possibility of enjoying the Other, of placing oneself at the same time beneath and beyond discourse – this position with regard to the interlocutor which at the same time reaches him and goes beyond him, this simultaneity of need and desire, of concupiscence and transcendence, tangency of the avowable and unavowable, constitutes the originality of the erotic which, in this sense, is *equivocal* par excellence. (*TI* 255)

In Levinas’ attempt to contextualize the movement of the self driven by metaphysical desire to the Other in a welcoming embrace he develops two distinct poles of love that are essentially indicative of the disparity between immanence and transcendence that Irigaray will target.

In his section entitled the “Phenomenology of Eros” Levinas characterizes the ethical encounter in strictly heterosexual terms, something that Irigaray will

take umbrage with, by claiming that the Other to which the same is drawn is characterized by an extreme fragility and vulnerability and that the “simultaneity or the equivocation of this fragility and this weight of non-signifyingness [non-significance], heavier than the weight of the formless real, we shall term *femininity* (TI 257). As Tina Chanter explains in “Feminism and the Other” the movement of love is “a movement which takes place both as voluptuosity and as fecundity” and “it is the difference between these two planes, voluptuosity on the one hand, and fecundity on the other, that the equivocation of the feminine is produced” (43). Voluptuosity for Levinas is the pole of eros that Levinas relegates to immanence and to the ego because in voluptuosity “love does not take the other as individual for its object, but rather delight in, enjoys, the voluptuosity of the other” (O’Connell 141). As Levinas states “the impersonality of voluptuosity prevents us from taking the relation between lovers to be a complementarity” and “hence aims not at the Other but at his voluptuosity; it is voluptuosity, love of the love of the other” (TI 265-66). In this movement, where love is defined by voluptuosity, the desire for the infinite is forestalled and located in between desire and need, but not desire for the Other and transcendence, but merely for the satisfaction of loving and being loved. This type of eros remains strictly within the ego, issuing solely from the self and directed toward an object and not infinity, so that it returns to the self and does not continually move toward the infinite.

Contrary to pure voluptuosity, which is nevertheless an essential movement in erotic love as a characteristic of the ethical encounter, Levinas places fecundity as that which does not return to the self in order to reorient and stabilize the ego, but is projected on into infinity where “it discovers the child” and “by a total transcendence, the transcendence of trans-substantiation, the I is, in the child, an other” (*TI* 267). In fecundity, which is the birth of the child that requires the feminine other, the parent has a relationship with infinity through the infinite future that the child embodies (*TI* 267-8). It is, as Rudolf Bernet writes, due to this relationship with the child, through fecundity, that “my life is inscribed in the perspective of the infinite” (98) so that, as Levinas illustrates “the I transcends the world of light – not to dissolve into the anonymity of the *there is*, but in order to further than the light, to go *elsewhere*” (*TI* 268). What is most important to derive from this exposition is that for Levinas the child embodies the desire of the father, a portion of him in the child. Yet, because the child is a distinct existent, both the father and wholly different, a portion of the self is essentially projected into the future so that the individual transcends the confines of their own interiority through the child’s lived experience.

Irigaray’s thought coincides with that of Levinas in regards to the alterity of the Other and the non-appropriation that takes place through the caress between two individuals. Most importantly, we see in Irigaray’s sensible transcendental the same reliance on a creation of the future through the past by way of an ethical

encounter that remembers the ambiguous subjectivity indicative of the maternal womb. Irigaray makes clear in her essay “The Fecundity of the Caress” in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* that through the caress there is an act of remembrance that recalls the relationship with the mother (Guenther 86). In her essay, Irigaray describes the “touch of the caress” as “prior to and following any positioning of the subject” and as something that “binds and unbinds two others in a flesh that is still and always untouched by mastery” (*ED* 186).

As Diane Perpich explains in “Sensible Subjects,” the caress does not envelope the other in mastery or appropriation, but instead “it is a relation that follows the contours of the other, helping to define them, to show them to themselves...” (304). Irigaray characterizes the ethical caress between lovers as something that harkens back to a remembrance of the womb:

As he caresses me, he bids me neither to disappear nor to forget but rather to remember the place where, for me, the most intimate life is held in reserve. Searching for what has not yet come into being for himself, he invites me to become what I have not yet become. To realize a birth that is still in the future. Plunging me back into the maternal womb and beyond that conception, awakening me to another birth – as a loving woman. (*ED* 187)

As Lisa Guenther explains, in the erotic caress the trace of the connection with the maternal body “passes through” so that in Irigaray’s formulation “love does not so much turn away from the mother and find a replacement for her, but rather transfers or transubstantiates a mother’s love to the Other –shifts it, carries it forward” (87). As with Levinas’ conception of fecundity where the father

achieves transcendence through the act of creating a son, in transubstantiating himself in the figure of the other that is his offspring, in Irigaray's caress the lovers are reborn together and through each other. As Perpich illustrates, "the caress gives birth to the self in the first instance," harkening back to the intimate bodily connection with the mother, and "the lover's caress enables new discoveries, new births of self" ("Sensible" 305). This is precisely the movement of Irigaray's sensible transcendental, where the alterity of the Other is preserved in the caress and, most importantly, the lover's transcendence through a "becoming within the sensible, with and through another" ("Sensible" 306). As we saw in the initial chapter, the primary function of the mother in the ethical encounter is to facilitate the meeting between two existents, providing a primordial experience that engenders transcendence through immanence.

Irigaray's version of transcendence relies on an interval that serves to bridge the gap between two sexuate beings. This interval takes on a number of names and formulations in Irigaray's thought, most notably designated by metaphors such as the placenta, mucous, and angels. As she mentions in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* "desire occupies or designates the place of the *interval*" and "desire demands a sense of attraction: a change in the interval, the displacement of the subject or of the object in their relation of nearness or distance" (ED 8). As Vanessa D. Fisher alludes to in "Beauty and the Expansion of Women's Identity" this preoccupation with desire and attraction that draws two sexuate existents to

each other is something that we see shared between Levinas and Irigaray (108). Whereas for Levinas it is the metaphysical desire for infinity that draws the existent to the absolutely Other, for Irigaray it is a similar desire or attraction “that leads to the caress” which becomes the foundation for becoming and transcendence (109). The very ontological fact of sexual difference creates a limit between the two sexuate beings that cannot be overcome, but this limit is not negative or a void for Irigaray as it is for Hegel, but a productive limit in regards to attraction and desire (Halsema 75). In Irigaray’s philosophy “only by recognizing my own limits, can I meet the other in respect for his or her otherness, and recognize him or her as other” and “recognizing this limit creates a space for the other, because he is no longer understood as the same, or destroyed” (75). As with Levinas’ notion of metaphysical desire, the place of desire and attraction for Irigaray is situated in the in-between of two existents and it is the product of their inherent ontological difference as sexuate beings.

Irigaray uses a number of terms in order to describe the “bilateral passage” between the two sexuate beings that makes the sensible transcendent possible while preserving the limits of alterity. For Irigaray the angels, only one of the many metaphors used to describe the movement of transcendence through bodily immanence, are “that which unceasingly *passes through the envelope(s) or container(s)*” and move “from one side to the other, reworking every deadline, changing every decision, thwarting all repetition” (ED 15). Angels for Irigaray are

“mediators of that which has not yet happened, of what is still going to happen, of what is on the horizon. Endlessly reopening the enclosure of the universe, of universes, identities, the unfolding of actions, of history” (*ED* 15). As Shannon Winnubst illustrates, angels represent Irigaray’s “placeless desire” between two sexuate beings and they “cross this interval, leaving both poles both intact and changed by their crossing” (99).

Angels, like the placenta or mucous, are a metaphor for non-appropriation and proximity without the obliteration of alterity, and as mediators that open up the possibility of transcendence and the merging of two bodies that are one, yet simultaneously distinct. Angels are ambiguous “neither male nor female, neither material nor immaterial,” so that they resemble the two differing poles of mediation in Levinas’ development of the third party; both as that which enables a figure of justice and is essentially material and that which preserves the infinity as a characterization of the divine (Beattie 262). Whereas transcendence for Levinas becomes synonymous with the production of a child, the embodiment of past in future, Irigaray’s sensible transcendental similarly engenders the metaphysical figure of the angel, an entity that is produced from the memory of the womb, yet encompasses the infinity of the unknowable future. To reiterate briefly, transcendence for both Irigaray and Levinas is an infinite horizon in the future, an alterity that is associated with not only the child and the angel, but also the divine and infinity. Each philosopher relies on a primordial experience and the existence

of a mediator or bridge in order to facilitate the ethical encounter. As we have seen, with Irigaray this bridge relates specifically to the maternal body and feminine morphology, creating a representational economy that excludes non-reproductive body. Because, as stated earlier, it is necessary to extend immanent transcendence beyond its reliance on metaphysical abstraction and biological connection, the following will argue that Levinas's theory of ethical subjectivity can be reformulated to include the presence of discursive power and the very historical forces that subject all individuals. With this in mind, the following sections hope to progress from this preliminary point that Levinas' transcendence consistently takes numerous forms, be it characterized as alterity, ambiguity, futurity, or infinity, yet each is always in some way conditioned and grounded by a primordial past that is present as a trace in the constitution of the Other.

## 2.2 Husserl and Intentionality

The philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, as set down most prominently in *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise Than Being*, is essentially an endeavor at preserving the alterity of the Other, the unknowable existent that is encountered in the dative relationship, from the Western philosophical tradition beginning with Plato and taking its most concrete form in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and the ontology Martin Heidegger. These philosophies, according to Levinas' corpus, reduce the pure exteriority of the Other to the ego of the same, severing its transcendence by identifying it as an alter ego that can be thematized and known,



which in turn forestalls the ethical encounter in a form of metaphysical violence. Levinas' main endeavor, aside from bulwarking the Other from phenomenological reduction, is to champion the ethical relation as the fundamental keystone of subjectivity and prior to the ontology developed by Heidegger. However, as we will see later on this chapter, it is a form of intentionality not unlike that identified in Husserl that Levinas cannot avoid.

In order to fully contextualize Levinas' contribution to metaphysics, and most importantly his development of ethical subjectivity, it is necessary to briefly explicate the very tenets of Husserlian phenomenology that Levinas critiques, namely Husserl's formulation of intentional consciousness and his conception of the transcendental or phenomenological reduction developed predominantly in *Logical Investigations* (1900) and *Ideas Concerning Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Reduction* (1913). To delineate the whole of Husserl's phenomenology is beyond the scope of this particular project; therefore what follows is a succinct explanation of Husserl's phenomenological or transcendental deduction and his characterization of consciousness as intentionality, each of which will be used as points of departure for Levinas in the development of his ethics that seeks to retain the alterity of the Other.

With the publication of *Ideas Concerning Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Reduction* in 1913 Husserl set out to formulate a solution to the transcendental idealism established by Immanuel Kant, specifically the

problematic relationship between subject and object, where “the entire world of things becomes a construction of subjectivity, with only the sense-data coming in from outside” (Moran 237). Husserl sought to establish phenomenology as a pure scientific method for the study of consciousness, which was to “correct” the transcendental subjectivity of Kant that did not derive from empirical evidence (Mayama 11-12). As David Woodruff Smith and Ronald McIntyre explain in *Husserl and Intentionality* Husserl’s endeavor in both *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas* is to illustrate how phenomenology – both as a philosophical theory of consciousness and as applied description of specific forms of human consciousness – simply is the theory of intentionality, pure and applied” (1).

As Husserl himself claims in *Ideas* regarding intentionality it “expresses the fundamental property of consciousness; all phenomenological problems...are classified according to it” (qtd. in Smith and McIntyre 357). Husserl’s phenomenology is the development of a system that is “filtered of all claims about reality other than that of intentional consciousness,” arguing that “all consciousness is a consciousness of something and that all mental acts have an object” (Mayama 12). What is most important to grasp here is that Husserl’s phenomenology rests on the assumption that our intentional consciousness directed at object takes part in the characterization of the object’s constitution because we actively perceive it and participate in its construction. In Husserl’s phenomenology the object and subject are both constitutive of each other,

however one of the primary purposes of phenomenology is to analyze the relation between the object and consciousness (Drummond 31).

Husserl's method for analyzing the way in which consciousness perceives, appropriates, and participates in the formation of the external world is referred to as the phenomenological or transcendental reduction. As John J. Drummond explains in "The Structure of Intentionality," the phenomenological reduction "can be characterized most briefly and simply as the suspension of our participation in the general thesis characteristic of what Husserl calls the 'natural attitude'" (36). The natural attitude "takes for granted the existence of the world to whose objects our ordinary experiences are directed" and Husserl's reduction, though not disputing the fact that objects exist in the external world, "instead transforms our *activity* by suspending our participation in the positing characteristic of our natural experiences" (37). Essentially, the transcendental reduction is the foregoing of the study of phenomena, or the appearance of objects in the natural world, focusing rather on the subjective mental processes of the individual conscious in order to focus on "the correlation between consciousness and the world in general and to the correlation between particular acts of consciousness and their intended objects" (37). What is of importance here is that, for Husserl, "knowledge has the structure of intentionality in so far as knowledge targets truth; intentionality, as an accomplishment of sense, is constituted *as consciousness*" (de Warren 22). As we have seen from the aforementioned

discussion regarding the intentionality of consciousness, Husserl posits that all consciousness is consciousness intended toward a specific object so that “thought is never without an object and consciousness always intends something other than itself” so that consciousness is therefore viewed as “a realm of absolute existence” (Mayama 13).

Most essential for this discussion, Husserl’s phenomenology reduction not only consists in a method that “*leads* our attention *back* from the straightforwardly intended object of the natural attitude to the act in which the object is intended in a determinate manner” (Drummond 37), but functions by excluding objects as they might appear outside of consciousness, including the possibility of other consciousnesses (Mayama 12). Husserl claims in *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* “this reduction to my *transcendental sphere of particular ownness* or to my transcendental concrete I-myself, by abstraction from everything that transcendental constitution gives me as Other, has an unusual sense...I ‘*alone*’ remain” (93). The implication, as Mayama indicates, is that in Husserlian phenomenology the “ego creates its world in an act of world-constitution” and that “the entire world is reduced to subjectivity” (13).

What is crucial to derive from this explication of Husserl’s phenomenological reduction is that in the meeting between ego and other the latter’s consciousness is already defined and thematized by Husserl as intentional.

Therefore “the other, in this intersubjective relationship, is considered present simply in an ‘objective sense’ and constituted as ‘co-present;’ because the other’s coming into the world is contingent with the subject’s intentionality” (13). Simply put, in Husserlian phenomenology the presentation of objects and other individuals is constituted through what he refers to as appresentation where the ego recognizes the other by constituting it as an analogy or alter ego of itself (Baker 72). In appresentation, according to Husserl, the self essentially thematizes the consciousness of the Other through abstraction of his or her own ego (Rodemeyer 142). As we will see, the critique of Husserl’s phenomenological method as a technique that results in the appropriation of the other and in the reduction of its alterity, forms the basis of Levinas’ critique and the foundation of his ethical subjectivity.

For Levinas, Husserl’s transcendental reduction, or *epoché*, is a form of intellectualism that abstracts consciousness from the lived experience that works to constitute it. As we have seen with the previous section, Husserl’s phenomenology dictates that the role of objects and others persons of intention amounts to little more than the lived experience they share with the subjects and “it is the subject’s very act of knowing that establishes the objects as objects, since they are only objects for consciousness” (Mayama 14). Levinas’ definitive argument against Husserl’s intentional consciousness can be summed up in his critique:

The intentionality of consciousness allows one to distinguish the ego from things, but it does not make solipsism disappear: its element – light – renders us master of the exterior world but is incapable of discovering a peer for us there. (qtd. in Overgaard 117)

Levinas, as he will be throughout the trajectory of his work, is concerned with those that negate the alterity of the Other by thematizing it under the concept of ego. Levinas' main critique is that Husserl's intentionality of consciousness appropriates the Other in its relation, making it merely a contingency of the ego and, in Levinas' view "if the relation with the other person, the social relation is understood in terms of observation or action, it cannot be understood as a relation with the *Other* at all" (116).

For Levinas, Husserl makes the object or other "a product of consciousness" (Levinas *TI* 123) when he claims that the "subject comes to know the object by identifying alterity with the same, or by reducing otherness to itself" (*Time* Chanter 62). In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas states that "the object of representation is to be distinguished from the act of representation...but does the theory of mental images, betraying a confusion of the act with the object of consciousness, rest uniquely on a false description of consciousness inspired by the prejudices of a psychological atomism" (*TI* 123). Here Levinas is making the argument that Husserl's intentionality is uniquely tied to representation and in the moment of intentionality "is the possibility for the other to be determined by the same without determining the same, without introducing alterity into it; it is a free

exercise of the same” (*TI* 124). By positing the Other as an alter ego, at least according to Levinas results in making the identity of the Other static and definable, which is something that Levinas ultimately feels becomes a form of metaphysical violence that does not allow the Other to participate fully in the creation of meaning and discourse in the intersubjective relation (Overgaard 119). For Levinas, the “movement proper to truth consists in the thinker being determined by the object presented to him,” for the same to have their own consciousness and interiority effaced by the approach of the Other (*TI* 124).

There are a number of key points that could be addressed here, but it suffices to say that the retention of the Other’s absolute exteriority is paramount in Levinas’ work throughout his corpus and his constant critique of intellectualism, or positing an identity for the unknowable Other, forms the foundation for his engagement with Heidegger, as well. Secondly, it is Levinas’ refusal to concede that the Other could quite possibly be an alter ego that is utilized by Jacques Derrida in order to challenge the absolute alterity that Levinas attributes to the Other. This critique by Derrida compels Levinas to reformulate his treatise on the alterity of the Other in *Otherwise Than Being* where he reconceptualizes his theory of the “third term” in order to allow for the recognition of the Other by the same through the mediation of justice. As we shall see however it is the very intentionality of Husserl, of the co-constitution of

the Other's identity by the ego of the self, that Levinas rejects that actually becomes the basis of the existent's approach and radical exposure to the Other.

### 2.3 Levinas and the Face

Compounding his critique of Husserl's phenomenology for its adherence to the intentionality of consciousness thesis, which he claims results in an intellectualism that neuters the alterity of the Other, Levinas endeavors in "Is Ontology Fundamental?" (1951) to further problematize the foundations of Western philosophy. In this text Levinas charges both Husserl and Heidegger, as well as their predecessors in the Platonic tradition, of forgetting the ethical relationship that is "irreducible to comprehension" and eludes the very thematic knowledge of Heidegger and the intentionality of consciousness established in Husserl's phenomenology, each of which, according to Levinas, subjects all alterity to ontology (Critchley 11).

In the essay, which begins as Levinas' primary critique of Heideggerian ontology, the philosopher claims "the renewal of ontology by contemporary philosophy is unusual in that the knowledge of being general – fundamental ontology – presupposes the *factual situation* of the mind that knows" ("Ontology" 2). Here, as Simon Critchley explains, Levinas is arguing that from the Platonic tradition onward "the relation to particular beings is always understood by way of mediation with a third term, whether universal form or *eidos* in Plato, Spirit in Hegel or Being in Heidegger" (11). Levinas locates in Western philosophy,



specifically Husserl and Heidegger, the association of being with knowledge or comprehension where, according to him, the “identification of the comprehension of being with the plenitude of concrete existence risks drowning in existence” (“Ontology” 3). Levinas continues with the following in regards to the relationship between comprehension and being:

The understanding of being will thus consist in going beyond that being into the *openness* and in perceiving it *upon the horizon of being*. That is to say, comprehension, in Heidegger, rejoins the great tradition of Western philosophy: to comprehend the particular being is already to place oneself beyond the particular. To comprehend is to be related to the particular that only exists through knowledge, which always knowledge of the universal. (“Ontology” 5)

As with Husserl’s intentional consciousness, Levinas claims that relating to the Other through the mediation of a universal term actually suspends its alterity. This intellectualism is concerned not so much with ethically engaging with the Other as it is appropriating knowledge of it. Therefore, Levinas contends that Heidegger, and the history of Western philosophy, functions through a totalizing system where, as Julie Piering explains, the “system enables one to make sense of each particular being within it by viewing the particular through the lens of the whole” (147).

For Levinas, to “comprehend our situation in reality is not to define it but to find ourselves in an affective disposition (“Ontology 4”). To comprehend being is to exist,” a statement that, as Levinas is fully aware, runs contrary to

Heideggerian ontology which relies on a preestablished framework of knowledge that makes recognition of the other possible (“Ontology” 4). The comprehension and intellectualism that is pivotal to Heidegger’s ontology, as well as Husserl’s phenomenology, is seen by Levinas as a form of metaphysical violence where “particularity is necessarily subjected to the universal” (Piering 147). In Levinas’ formulation, comprehension of being for Heidegger “rests on the *openness* of being,” so that the common universality of being that is shared between two existents make intersubjective communication possible by making the other knowable to the ego of the same (Levinas “Ontology” 4). However, this knowledge of being, where being is constantly mediating between the two existents, reduces the alterity of the Other to an alter ego of the same as in Husserl’s phenomenology, transforming it into a mere projection of the interiority of the self.

Levinas is well aware of the problematic established in “Is Ontology Fundamental?,” conceding that “one is forced, it would seem, to subject relations between beings to structures of being” and asks further “how, moreover, can the *relation* with *being* be, from the outset, anything other than its *comprehension* as being...” (6). Levinas admits that the kind of thematic knowledge promoted by Heidegger is permissible in regards to the objects of consciousness unless the intended object “is the other” (6). The argument here, which is essentially Levinas most profound contribution to western philosophy, is that “our relation with the

other certainly consists in wanting to comprehend him, but this relation overflows comprehension” due to the fact that this intended person “does not affect us in terms of a concept. He is a being and counts as such” (6). As Critchley explains, “if the other person were reducible to a concept I have of him or her, then that would make the relation to the other a relation of knowledge or an epistemological feature” (11). On the contrary in Levinas’ philosophy the Other is characterized as an interlocutor, a speaking other that interpellates the ego of the same with its vulnerability (11-2). As Levinas argues further in his essay:

To comprehend a person is already to speak with him. To posit the existence of the other through letting be is already to have accepted this existence, to have taken account of it, “to have accepted,” “to have taken account,” do not come back to comprehension and letting be. Speech delineates an original relation. It is a question of perceiving the function of language not as subordinate to the *consciousness* that one has of the presence of the other, his neighborliness or our community with him, but rather as the condition of any conscious grasp. (“Ontology” 6)

Levinas contends that before there is ever the comprehension of being in the encounter with the other there is speech or a greeting so that “before any participation in a common content by comprehension, it consists in the intuition of sociality by a relation that is consequently irreducible to comprehension” (“Ontology” 7).

The face-to-face encounter and the discourse that arises Levinas likens to religion or prayer because it is a conversation between beings without the mediation of being and is not dictated by the structure of being (“Ontology” 8).

The Other in Levinas' philosophy exceeds any possible domination by the consciousness of the same due to the fact that "he does not enter entirely into the opening of being where I already stand, as in the field of my freedom" ("Ontology" 8-9). As Levinas concludes "the relation with a *being* is the invocation of a face and already speech, a relation with a certain depth rather than with a horizon" where "the face *signifies* otherwise" ("Ontology" 10). The face of the Other resists appropriation and determination because it is not a sign and in its signification it "does not signal anything other than itself" (Kosky 20). The face of the Other for Levinas is not comprehended by vision because, as he will expound on later in *Otherwise Than Being*, "it is a trace of itself, a trace in the trace of an abandonment, where the equivocation is never dissipated" (*OB* 94). The face departs before it is comprehended but it leaves behind the trace and signification of a transcendental responsibility that grasps and takes hold of the ego of the same.

Levinas makes clear in *Totality and Infinity* that the face of the Other is indeed a human face, but maintains its absolute alterity by claiming that "the alterity of the Other does not depend on any quality that would distinguish him from me, for a distinction of this nature would precisely imply between us that community of genus which already nullifies alterity" (*TI* 194). The Other in the ethical relationship, as mentioned earlier, is an interlocutor rather than a passive existent whose being is revealed with a relative lack of autonomy to be absorbed

by the ego. The interlocutor that is the Other is defined by infinity and this infinity is due to the absolute difference between the same and other, that which characterizes this very infinity. As Levinas illustrates, “absolute difference, inconceivable in terms of formal logic, is established only by language” (*TI* 194-5). Levinas’ claim that discourse constitutes the relationship between same and other rests on a theory of language and signification that differs from Saussurian linguistics. The Other, which in its alterity can never be encapsulated thematically, due to the face that it constantly eludes any knowledge or conceptualization, is a transcendental signifier, a pure expression without context that structures all logos (Rohman 11). This relationship, as Levinas is quick to point out, is not solipsic, as in Heideggerian ontology where the ego is reified by negating the alterity of the other, but instead overflows the ego with more than it can possibly contain or thematize (Levinas *TI* 196).

In “Transcendence and Height,” which was published shortly after Levinas’ *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas claims that the encounter with the face invokes infinity so that “consciousness finds in itself more than it can contain,” more than the totality of its own being, and this infinity “consists in the impossibility of escaping my responsibility; it consists in the impossibility of coming to rest and in the absence of any hiding place, of any interiority where the I could repose harmoniously upon itself” (“Transcendence” 19-20). The face of the Other is the signifier for ultimate morality, a non-contingent Good in the

Platonic tradition that nullifies any semblance of freedom or autonomy in the ego of the same. The subject is not constituted here by freedom, as Levinas contends is evident in ontology, but is structured according to its moral responsibility to the unknowable Other:

This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, is his face, is the primordial *expression*, is the first word: 'you shall not commit murder.' The infinite paralyzes power by its infinite resistance to murder, which, firm and insurmountable, gleams in the face of the Other, in the total nudity of its defenceless eyes, in the nudity of the absolute openness of the Transcendent. (*TI* 199)

What is of crucial importance to grasp here is that the face does not signify the primordial message of morality, but is in fact the signifier for it. It is a primordial message that arises from the Other, not because he/she speaks it, but because they are the signifier for it. For Levinas, this message, the "resistance to murder," is not founded in reality, because then "we would remain within the idealism of a *consciousness* of struggle, and not in relationship with the Other, a relationship that can turn into struggle, but already overflows the consciousness of struggle" (*TI* 199). What the face ultimately discloses is humanity's primordial obligation and responsibility to the Other, to not harm him or her, which preexists any ontological condition because it in fact constitutes our very being (*TI* 200-01). It is essential that the message Levinas claims is signified by Other in the asymmetrical relationship is essentially primordial, not unlike the very experience of the maternal body utilized by both Kristeva and Irigaray. This point becomes

increasingly problematic when Levinas' characterization of the primordial past becomes clear in the following section and even more troublesome when the "call" of the Other becomes comingled with that of justice and the Law as presented in *Otherwise Than Being*.

#### 2.4 Heideggerian Death and Levinasian Birth

Although Husserl is a major influence for Levinas' development of ethical subjectivity, it is Heidegger's fundamental ontology that serves as the foundation for the majority of his critique in his mature work. In order to fully grasp Levinas' conception of ethics, essentially the emergence of being through an ethical encounter with an unknowable Other and the responsibility it entails, it is fundamental to illustrate the relation between death and Heideggerian ontology. The following section will outline Heidegger's formulation of the essential relationship between nothing and being in order to contextualize the way in which Levinas diverges with the development of the *il y a* or "there is." Most importantly, this section will argue that it is precisely the existent's experience in the *il y a* that makes alterity and the metaphysical desire that draws the self to the other possible.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that "care is that which forms the totality of Dasein's structural whole" and that "the primary item in care is the 'ahead-of-itself', and this means that in every case Dasein exists for the sake of itself" (BT 279). In Heideggerian philosophy "Death is a possibility-of-being,"

essentially an aspect of the fundamental structure of Dasein and the existent's reaction to the revelation of death denotes two possible modes of being: inauthentic and authentic (BT 294). As Peter Kraus illustrates in "Death and Metaphysics: Heidegger on Nothingness and the Meaning of Being" Heidegger's authentic Dasein "accepts that authentic death is not an occurrence that will happen sometime in the future, but is a fundamental structure inseparable from its Being-in-the-world" (88). The unease that arises when an existent approaches the possibility of its own demise Heidegger labels anxiety and distinguishes it from fear of one's own death (BT 295). The authentic existent interiorizes and accepts that the possibility of its death "amounts to the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein exists as thrown Being *towards* its end," and that this progression towards death serves as the foundation for Dasein (BT 295).

In this particular state of anxiety where Dasein conceptualizes the possibility of its non-existence the existent "finds itself *face to face* with the 'nothing' of the possible impossibility of existence," which is essentially an encounter with "*a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the 'they' and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious*" (BT 310-11). The encounter with nothingness promotes a "mood of anxiety" where Dasein "is forced to stand alone and unrelated to beings, and in this position nothingness appears out of the 'collapse' of the totality of beings" (Kraus 89). Similar to Husserl's phenomenological reduction, where the everydayness of the world and



the lived experience shared with others beings is transcendence, in Heidegger's logic Being and nothing are "revealed as two aspects of the same ground; a ground that is revealed in the nihilating of the everyday appearance of beings and, more positively, in the shining forth of Being as transcendence" (95). In Heidegger's formulation of transcendence, which is diametrically opposed to that of Levinas, the mundane and the community of beings is transcended so that Dasein is "released from its inauthentic reliance on – or 'lostness' in – being" and able to look out on the "totality of beings" and have being revealed to it (96-7).

The anxiety that Heidegger claims is anguished over by Dasein in the face of its own impossibility of being and that which reveals to it the totality of Being comes under scrutiny in Levinas' formulation of existence. For Levinas, it is not the nothingness that characterizes Being that engenders anxiety, but in fact Being itself and the anonymity that defines it that causes anxiety in the existent.

Levinas' condemnation of Heideggerian ontology as indicative of the Western philosophical tradition's egology or philosophy of the same is more pronounced in *Totality and Infinity*; however it is in *Existence and Existents* that Levinas provides the most salient exposition of his conception of being as positioned in contrast to Heidegger's account. It is the preoccupation of Heideggerian thought, according to Levinas, with being-towards-death as the ultimate horizon of Being, where Being is revealed to Dasein as it transcends the mendacity of everydayness that foregrounds Levinas' discussion of the *il y a*, the impenetrable anonymity of

pure Being before the interruption by the face of the Other that engenders transcendence through a call to responsibility.

As with many of Levinas' key concepts, the term that he uses to denote being in general, *il y a*, though not specifically derived from Heidegger, is nevertheless related to Heidegger's use of the German phrase *es gibt*. In *Being and Time*, specifically in the section regarding reality and care, Heidegger makes the statement that "of course only as long as Dasein *is* (that is, only as long as understanding of Being is ontically possible), 'is there' Being" (BT 255). Heidegger's use of the "is there" is commented on in Macquarrie and Robinson's translation notes where they explain that, given Heidegger's comments in the *Letter on Humanism*, that the "there is," which is derived from *es gibt* "should be taken literally as "it gives," where the "it" denotes Being and what is being given is the "essence of Being" (BT 255). Despite the fact that Heidegger's use of the term *es gibt* (there is/it gives), fluctuates throughout the trajectory of his corpus, the "it" of the statement can nevertheless be attributed to Being, where the indefinite noun is used, according to Macquarrie and Robinson, because the verb "is" cannot be attached to Being itself (BT 255).

Against Heidegger's conception of the univocity of Being as the ultimate ground and the claim that transcendence is an ascension beyond the restrictions of the material world, Levinas argues that it is in fact Being that must be transcended. In "The Incarnation of Consciousness and the Carnalization of the

World in Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy," Marito Sato explains that "Levinas grasps Being in general in Heidegger's sense as *il y a*, *Being without beings*" and characterizes the "experience of touching the *il y a* as 'horror', because the *il y a* eliminates the concreteness and multiplicity of beings and sublates them violently into the unity of Being" (11). Levinas' entire endeavor in *Existence and Existents* is "to approach the idea of Being in general in its impersonality so as to then be able to analyze the notion of the present and of position, in which a being, a subject, an existent, arises in impersonal Being, though a hypostasis" (*EE* 3). In the chapter "Existence Without Existents," which provides the most salient example of the *il y a* Levinas claims that "the discovery of the materiality of being is not a discovery of a new quality, but of its formless proliferation...matter is the very fact of the *there is*" (*EE* 51). Levinas retains Heidegger's characteristic of the "there is/it gives" by claiming that the "there is" "designates not the uncertainly known author of the action, but the characteristic of this action itself which somehow has no author," which coincides with Heidegger's conception of Being as an immanent cause (*EE* 52).

As Megan Craig illustrate in *Levinas and James: Toward a Pragmatic Phenomenology*, Levinas' "being in general" is "intimately related to insomnia" and "indicates a non-intentional persistence overflowing the bounds of the subject, rendering her anonymous" (16). Being in general "transcends inwardness as well as exteriority" according to Levinas and it denotes that undifferentiated

space before consciousness and before the existent has taken up an identity (*EE* 52). But unlike Heidegger's formulation of the *es gibt* as something that is presented through its absence, the *il y a* for Levinas "is in its turn a presence, an absolutely unavoidable presence" without any discourse which would signal an existent that would serve as a focal point for differentiating identity (*EE* 52-3). This is one of Levinas most paradoxical points given that the "there is" seemingly encompasses the very illeity and anonymity that is construed as the nucleus of the self's desire for the Other and a crucial element in transcendence.

Throughout the conclusion of the text Levinas takes great pain to invert Heidegger's form of transcendence, claiming that "the pure nothingness revealed by anxiety in Heidegger's does not constitute the *there is*" (*EE* 57). Instead of Being revealing itself in its purest form in the moment when Dasein conceptualizes itself as being-towards-death, for Levinas "there is horror of being and not anxiety over nothingness, fear of being and not fear for being; there is being prey to, delivered over to something that is not a 'something'" (*EE* 57-8). Most importantly, the "there is" for Levinas is "the primordial milieu in which (one) bathes" and "prior to the relation between Being and a being, because there is not yet any being recognizable or identifiable..." (Lawton 256). In this way the "there is" denotes the register prior to discourse and the ethical encounter that engenders subjectivity.

As Donna Brody notes in “Levinas and Lacan: Facing the Real,” the “impersonal zone of the *there is* uncannily exemplifies and operates as a virtually exact coordinate of Lacan’s conception of the real” (58). Brody goes on to claim that the “there is” encapsulates the Lacanian notion of the “primordial object of anxiety *par excellence*” due to the fact, as we recall from the aforementioned paragraphs, the *il y a* is not merely an absence, but a presenced absence that threatens to engulf the existent prior to subjectivization (58). With this in mind, I would argue further here that there is a direct correlation with Lacan’s appropriation of the Thing (*Das Ding*) which is “the place of an absence, of a void that invites but also eludes our discursive efforts to fill it with symbols” and Levinas’ immanent plane of pure Being (Barzilai 162). Just as the “there is” is an absence that has a constitutive role in preparing the existent for subjectivity, the experience of the Thing is a “primal scene” where the “child experiences a primary, highly jouissance-laden affect” and “therefore wants to remain in a proximal relationship with *das Ding*, but because getting too close to it results in a strong anxiety, ‘the subject keeps its distance’” (Swales 49). As Bruce Fink notes one way of illustrating the subject’s birth into the Symbolic Order “is as a defense against the jouissance associated with *das Ding*” (95).

Though it might seem contradictory to attribute a Lacanian notion of enjoyment to the anxiety and horror that Levinas uses to characterize the experience of the “there is,” this sensation is not unlike the very jouissance that

Lacan characterizes as destructive (Westerink 31). Both the “there is” and the Thing are an Other to the existent and “this nothingness of the thing in the Other, the locus of desire, *founds* the subject’s desire: the subject’s desire is the desire of the Other” (Julien 88). As Herman Westerink explains, the Thing “is the ultimate object of desire, a focal point around which are organized representations and desire regulated by the pleasure principle;” but due to the fact that it does not truly exist in reality, the subject constantly replaces it with mundane objects meant to fill the void (31-2). In order to cope with the lack in the Symbolic Order and the impossibility of attaining the Thing, the subject creates a fantasy object, what Lacan refers to as the *objet a*, that which the subject seeks and desire for brings him to the Other (Sunderland 79).

This has interesting implications when viewed in light of Levinas’ explanation of metaphysical desire, that which is a desire for the infinite that draws the subject to the alterity of the unknowable Other in the ethical encounter. In the opening chapter of *Totality and Infinity* Levinas begins, as in most of his works, with a critique of the Western philosophical tradition, specifically its predisposition toward ontology, claiming that “ontology, which reduces the other to same, promotes freedom – the freedom that is the identification of the same” which in turn “renounces metaphysical Desire, renounces the marvel of exteriority from which that Desire lives” (*TI* 42). Metaphysics, according to Levinas, is defined by the fact that it “is turned toward the ‘elsewhere’ and the

‘otherwise’ and the ‘other,’” and “it desires beyond everything that can simply complete it” (*TI* 33-4). Unlike in ontology, which is criticized by Levinas as being overly concerned with freedom, in metaphysics the existent is defined by their desire for the infinite, the unknowable Other that resists comprehension and appropriation because of its radical alterity and absolute difference. As Steven Gans explains “the desire for the Other is beyond need, and above enjoyment or happiness, although desire presupposes both attaining and non-attachment to my own enjoyment” (86).

Desire is essentially a primordial mover for Levinas, and it is characterized further in *Totality and Infinity* as a desire for the invisible, for the Other that is beyond representation (*TI* 34). If the Other was not beyond thematization, a transcendent entity, then the desire would be characterized by lack, a need to reorient and stabilize the I of the ego through reciprocity and appropriation (Ford 40). Seemingly contrary to the Lacanian notion of desire as lack, Levinas’ desire is productive, rather than negative, and the idea of Infinity “is produced as Desire – not a Desire that the possession of the Desirable slakes, but the Desire for the Infinite which the desirable arouses rather than satisfies” (*TI* 50). However, we must keep in mind that, as Philip Blond explains in “Emmanuel Levinas: God and Phenomenology” the infinity and radical alterity that characterizes the relationship with the face of the Other is so closely related to the unyielding anonymity of the *il y a* that it becomes clear that “Levinas’ whole

project of distancing himself from anonymity and an existence without existents has only succeeded in reiterating and reinstating an ever more exact and explicit form the domination of the *Il y a*" (115). There is a correlation between the absolute alterity of the face of the Other and the anonymity of the "there is" so that it begins to appear that, as Simon Critchley has intimated, that we cannot read the movement from the *il y a* to the illeity of the Other in necessarily linear fashion (77).

What occurs then is a cyclical motion that is of the utmost importance, the creation of nostalgic matrix, where the infinity of the "there is" becomes that which makes possible the trace of alterity we see in the face of the Other (de Vries 218). This is not dissimilar from Irigaray's formulation of the sensible transcendental where the ethical encounter is, at least in part, a remembrance of the maternal womb, an experience of anonymity that facilitates the meeting between two existents. As Levinas will constantly reiterate through the trajectory of his work in regards to the anarchic responsibility to the Other, the sensibility felt in proximity during the ethical encounter "describes the suffering and vulnerability of the sensible as *the other in me*" so that "the other is in me and in the midst of my very identification" (*OB* 124-5). I would argue here that desire for infinity that leads the self to the Other is conditioned by the loss of and alienation from the infinity and anonymity that is closely associated with the "there is." Despite the fact that Levinas consistently claims that the ego of the self



does not take part in the construction of the Other and that in the ethical encounter and substitution for the Other through radical responsibility it is precisely the desire for a primordial illeity that constitutes the alterity of the face of the Other in proximity. This primordial loss of illeity, I will argue in the following section, is internalized so that the self is comprised of this “turning back” that signals the originary subjection of the existent.

### 2.5 Hypostasis and the Psychic Life of Power

Thus far this discussion has been limited to an analysis of the key point of Levinas’ philosophy in the attempt, not only to explicate the tenets of ethical subjectivity as it pertains to transcendence, but to emphasize the relationship between the ethical dyad and infinity. Having established that the existent prior to the encounter derives from a primordial past characterized by illeity, and that this correlates with the very metaphysical desire that drives and moves the self to the Other, the following will illustrate how the existent internalizes the primordial loss and in so doing conditions itself for infinite responsibility to the Other.

In the opening a chapter of *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* Butler argues that the very trajectory of subjection mentioned previously “signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject” (*PLP* 2). Endeavoring to provide a psychoanalytic critique of Foucault’s theory of power, something that Butler feels is essential and significantly lacking in his corpus, she illustrates that “power that

first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject's self-identity" (*PLP* 3). This emergence of the subject is "marked by a figure of turning, a turning back upon oneself or even turning *on* oneself" where the subject is doubled, folding its interiority in order to transform its ego into an object of scrutiny, which in turn leads to the development of a conscience or a false sense of morality (*PLP* 3-67). This signals a movement of self-punishment and melancholy in the subject that actively conditions it for subjection to the authority of the Law so that the "internalization of punishment is the very production of the self" where the subject forms an emotional attachment to its own subjection (*PLP* 75-82).

Butler's formulation of the preliminary movement of the self as it "turns" inward and therefore internalizes a primordial guilt that conditions it for infinite responsibility to power and the Law resonates specifically with Levinas' treatise on the development of consciousness immediately prior to the ethical encounter with absolute Other. As alluded to earlier, Levinas concludes his description of the "there is" in *Existence and Existents* by claiming that there is a hesitation in pure being, of the immanent milieu of the *il y a*, where "consciousness appears to stand out against the *there is* by its ability to forget and interrupt it, by its ability to sleep" (*EE* 64). This movement of the self, this hesitation in being, Levinas designates as "hypostasis," an event that characterizes the transition from the

primordial ambiguity of the *there is* to the solidity of the nominal being that is not yet a subject (Craig 112). In its endeavor to extricate itself from the *there is* the subject “creates a distance from itself” in a psychic movement of “pure self-reference,” yet the self and the ego are never separated, but exist as a “companion or a partner” to each other (Levinas qtd. in Sealey 62). In *Time and the Other* Levinas likens the duality here between self and ego in hypostasis to paternity where the father is both distinct as an identity, yet infinitely linked to his child that is a projection of himself (*TO* 54).

In the state of hypostasis, where the self is chained to its own ego though aware of the duality, the existent subsists in solitude in its own materiality and is desirous of community with the exterior world. Levinas writes in *Existence and Existents* that “it is the duality of boredom, which is something different from the social existence we know in the world, to which the ego turns in fleeing its boredom; it is also something different from the relationship with the other which detaches the ego from itself” (*EE* 90). The sensation of boredom is not the radical negativity of Heidegger, but a presence linked to the constant return and reiteration of the *il y a* and marked by a desire to escape the solitude of interior existence (Visker 173). This experience of boredom, of the desire for community and to extricate oneself from the ego, is what conditions and readies the existent for the ethical encounter with the unknowable Other.

Desirous of pure exterior existence beyond interiority, yet prior to the ethical encounter, the existent takes part in material enjoyment. In order to combat boredom the existent takes part in the enjoyment of objects, the event signaling one of the preliminary movements from a nominal existent to an active subject.

As Levinas claims in *Totality and Infinity*:

Tools themselves, which are-in-view-of..., become objects of enjoyment. The enjoyment of a thing, be it a tool, does not consist simply in bringing this thing to the usage for which it is fabricated – the pen to writing, the hammer to the nail to be driven in – but also in suffering or rejoicing over this operation. (*TI* 133)

Enjoyment for Levinas, in contrast to Heidegger and Husserl, is not merely intentional or based solely on the discovery of the essence of the tool or the object of enjoyment, but in the lived experience of the task or act of enjoying. The object intended is never the object itself, but the desire, not for community precisely, but from anonymity from the self. This might seem contradictory given that Levinas takes great pains to characterize the horror of the *il y a* by way of anonymous existence, but nevertheless the aimless activity of enjoyment is a desire to exist anonymously from existence. In order to better clarify, as Rudi Visker illustrate using one of Levinas' examples, a cigarette is a "worldly object of enjoyment" that is enjoyed for no purpose and it could be argued that smoking "is indeed good for nothing: it is a way for the nothing to 'nothing' (*nichten*), to create an interval, a distance between the self and itself" (174). The existent enjoying the cigarette has created an interval between the self that is smoking and the self that

exists in a linear fashion, yet the self engaged in enjoyment has become anonymous to the trajectory of pure being by way of the interval produced through the act. The nominal “I” of pure reflection is, at least momentarily, lost in the performative action initiating a rupture between the self that is enjoying the object and the self that reflects upon this event.

What is of crucial importance to this particular discussion is that, as Levinas makes clear, the act of enjoyment through the utilization of objects always fails for the self cannot “successfully leave itself behind, to truly transcend itself” (Visker 174) due to the fact that “Being is essentially alien and strikes against us. We undergo its suffocating embrace...but it does not respond to us” (EE 28-9). The interval produced through the mode of enjoyment is temporal and cannot subsist infinitely against the threat of the *il y a*. More importantly, the encounter with the object of enjoyment is not a relationship with the object itself, but “enjoyment is the relationship with this relationship” so that the performance overtakes the self (TI 148). The object of enjoyment is inconsequential, merely a phantasmatic replacement for the originary loss of anonymity experienced in the “there is,” a void that can be filled with any material entity. This act of enjoying becomes the nexus of the existent’s willingness to subject itself to infinite performativity in the attempt at regaining the anonymity experienced in the “there is.”

Having established that the interiority of the self is constituted, at least initially, through an attachment to its own subjection formed through the internalization of the lost object, Butler goes on to comment that “conscience is fundamental to the production and regulation of the citizen subject” and that the “law redoubles that reprimand, however: turning back is a turning toward” (*PLP* 115). Butler utilizes Louis Althusser’s account of subject formation featured in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” where the latter claims that the subject is the locus of performed ritualization of social practices, in order to argue that the subject acquiesces to the Law in order to consistently and infinitely expose their innocence to a primordial feeling of guilt (*PLP* 117-8). As Butler makes clear:

“Submission” to the rules of the dominant ideology might then be understood as a submission to the necessity to prove innocence in the face of accusation, a submission to the demand for proof, and execution of that proof, and acquisition of the status of the subject in and through compliance with the terms of the interrogative law. To become a “subject” is thus to have been presumed guilty, then tried and declared innocent. (*PLP* 118)

As Kevin Floyd explains in *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism* the subject’s “turn” towards the Law initially “presupposes a desire for the subjection to the law that hails, a ‘passionate attachment’ to the law taking the form of guilt or conscience” (95). However, as Butler makes abundantly clear, it is not enough to be “declared innocent” and it is not “a single act but a status

incessantly *reproduced*” so that “to become a ‘subject’ is to be continuously in the process of acquitting oneself of the accusation of guilt” (*PLP* 118).

Butler’s exposition on the primordial guilt that is targeted during interpellation and the responsibility to prove one’s innocence resonates specifically with Levinas’ account of the radical exposure and anarchic passivity characteristic of the self’s encounter with the Other. As described in the previous section, the face of the Other is the signifier for a transcendent ethical imperative that nullifies any semblance of interiority or freedom in the existent. The self, conditioned by the lived experience of hypostasis, approaches the Other with an openness that is not “merely inactive in its nonconsciousness, but it indicates instead an ‘exposure’ to the other that lies prior to consciousness” (Todd 108). The face of the Other obliterates any interiority in the existent by overflowing the bounds of the self’s consciousness and it does so by interpellating the self through a primordial message of morality. The subject is not constituted here by freedom, as Levinas contends is evident in ontology, but is structured according to its responsibility to the unknowable Other:

This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, is his face, is the primordial *expression*, is the first word: ‘you shall not commit murder.’ The infinite paralyses power by its infinite resistance to murder, which, firm and insurmountable, gleams in the face of the Other, in the total nudity of its defenceless eyes, in the nudity of the absolute openness of the Transcendent. (*TI* 199)

It is a primordial message, or one could argue Law, that arises from the Other, not because he/she speaks it, but because they are the signifier for it. For Levinas, this message, the “resistance to murder,” is not founded in reality, because then “we would remain within the idealism of a *consciousness* of struggle, and not in relationship with the Other, a relationship that can turn into struggle, but already overflows consciousness of struggle” (TI 199). What the face ultimately signifies is humanity’s primordial obligation and responsibility to the Other, to not harm him or her, which preexists any ontological condition because this responsibility constitutes our very being (TI 200-1).

What the Other promises during this interpellative act is not recognition of innocence, for Levinas responsibility is infinite, but of an anonymity made possible by projecting the ego into the infinite future of responsibility. As Levinas states in “Transcendence and Height” the “putting into question” of the self that occurs in the ethical encounter, involves the overflowing of consciousness and is marked by a binding of the self with the Other through responsibility so that “to be I signifies not being able to escape responsibility” (“Transcendence” 17). Upon encountering the Other the self is no longer chained to a duality with the ego because, and this is crucial, it has been replaced by the figure of the Other and held hostage in infinite responsibility. As with the other objects of enjoyment that Levinas delineates, the Other becomes merely an object that stands in for the infinity and anonymity promised by the *there is*, however what makes it distinct is



that the responsibility to the Other can be carried on into infinity. The very nature of the Other, which Levinas consistently denotes as sacred, seemingly distinguishes it from the everydayness that characterizes the very objects of enjoyment he uses as examples. However, as we have seen sacredness for Levinas is consistently collapse with alterity, infinity, and God which are the very things that are severed with the intrusion of the third party.

The Other hails the self through language and brings it into subjectivity through communication, by signifying a responsibility that the self must incessantly perform (Butler *PLP* 10). In *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas characterizes this responsibility for the other, this being-for-the-other, as a form of substitution that “frees the subject from ennui, that is, from the enchainment to itself, where the ego suffocates in itself due to the tautological way of identity, and ceaselessly seeks after the distraction of games and sleep in a movement that never wears out” (*OB* 124). The subject is thrust into exteriority because it is no longer merely an ego and self, but a self and an Other who achieves anonymity by constantly substituting itself for the other. What is most important here for this particular discussion is the fact that Levinas’ explication of the movement away from the anonymity of pure being denotes a psychic process where the Other who seemingly promises the infinity that the subject desires due to being alienated from the “there is” becomes a stand in for the lost object. Though the alterity of the Other is at least partially made possible by a primordial illeity, the primordial

message of morality that the face of the Other signifies does not issue solely from the same primal scene, but is instead interrupted, as we will see in the following section, by the presence of justice that interrupts the asymmetry of the ethical encounter and transforms infinity.

## 2.6 The Third Party and Power

Up until this juncture this discussion has been limited to a psychoanalytic survey of Levinas' key philosophical concepts in order to illustrate the role the self has in the construction of the alterity of the Other. As we have seen, Levinas' ethics, not unlike Irigaray's, is beholden to a nostalgic primordial past composed of the very illeity the self attributes to the Other. Illustrating that the infinity that characterizes the Other is, at least partially, constructed by the self would seem rather innocuous if the Other was purely an individual to whom the self was responsible. However, as the following will show, the figure of Other is corrupted and made static by arrival of a third party that makes it recognizable. Most importantly, the following section will illustrate that the very mediator or bridge that is so crucial to Levinas's version of transcendence, as well as Irigaray's, is reformulated in *Otherwise Than Being* to include the existence of discursive power. To truly understand the possible political implications of Levinas' treatise on ethics and ethical subjectivity it is necessary to trace the trajectory of what the philosopher terms the "third party" (*le tiers*) whose arrival is depicted as co-substantial with the face of the Other itself (Sandford "Masculine" 196). Analysis

of the evolution of this Levinasian concept reveals a crucial turning point in transcendental ethics and introduces problems regarding the purity and asymmetry of the ethical encounter. More importantly, an exposition of Levinas' depiction of the third party and its role in the constitution of consciousness in the existent illustrates an attempt at negotiating the role of power and the State in the anarchic responsibility of the self for the Other.

As Robert Bernasconi, the preeminent Levinas scholar, indicates in his article "The Third Party: Levinas on the Intersection of the Ethical and Political" Levinas' account of the third party has only recently attracted widespread scholarly attention and is incredibly contradictory, evolving from an initial concept presented in "The Ego and Totality" and *Totality and Infinity*, to a more politically saturated formulation in *Otherwise Than Being* (45). The following will provide a brief introduction of the third party and its initial description in *Totality and Infinity* and progress to Jacques Derrida's critique in "Violence and Metaphysics" regarding the assumed alterity of the Other. This section will then show how Levinas' response in *Otherwise Than Being* recast the question in a political discourse and provides for a Foucauldian reading of power. Finally, the following will conclude that, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, Levinas' transcendental ethics assumes a radical exposure and anarchic responsibility that is never truly in response to an unknowable Other, but a subjection to the Law.

Levinas initiates his discussion of the third party in *Totality and Infinity*, specifically his section titled “The Other and the Others,” by making the statement “everything that takes place here ‘between us’ concerns everyone, the face that looks at it places itself in full light of the public order, even if I draw back from it to seek with the interlocutor the complicity of a private relation and a clandestinity” (TI 212). As we have seen one of Levinas’ chief concerns is explicating the way in which the face of the Other does not allow for the ego of the same to retreat into interiority, however here he extends his discussion by claiming that the face also resists the possibility of a private encounter restricted to merely two existents that is “forgetful of the universe” (TI 213). Levinas continues by arguing that in the encounter “the third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other – language is justice...the epiphany of the face qua face opens up humanity,” implying that what transpires in the ethical dyad has implications for the whole of society (TI 213). With this in mind the infinity that is produced in the ethical encounter, that which is engendered by the inability of the face of the Other to be thematized, is redoubled eternally because the existent is not only infinitely responsible to the Other, but to all possible others that comprise humanity (TI 213).

With the movement away from the ethical encounter comprised solely of two existents to that of an infinite plurality, Levinas simultaneously anticipates objections to the relevancy of an ethics based on a singular encounter involving

only two parties and establishes a problematic regarding to whom the existent is primarily responsible. As Bernasconi notes “if the third party was absent from the face to face, in the face of the Other I would be absolved from all of my commitments and obligations to everyone else,” however due to the fact that the face and the third party are co-substantial “the passage from ethics to politics is immanent” (48). Though the formulation is extended and changes significantly in *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas’ characterization of the third party as language makes it clear that he is attempting to address the presence and role of the symbolic register in the ethical encounter.

In this way the third party appears, in this early formulation, very similar to the Lacanian notion of the big Other, the Symbolic Order and that “foreign language that we are born into” and “the discourse and desires of those around us, through which we internalize and inflect our own desire” (Homer 70). For Levinas, the third party “comes to *join* me. But he joins me to himself for service; he commands me as a Master” and institutes the “prophetic word” which “doubles all discourse not as a discourse on moral themes, but as an irreducible movement of a discourse which by essence is aroused by the epiphany of the face inasmuch as it attests the presence of the third party, the whole of humanity, in the eyes that look at me” (*TI* 213). Here, as with Lacan’s Symbolic Order, the third party interpellates the individual through the face of the Other from an anonymous society that “forms an implicit backdrop, a sort of second nature, quietly yet

effectively governing the flow of the individual's life in socially and linguistically mediated reality" ( A. Johnston 48). The question that is left relatively unattended to and avoided is precisely how to act ethically in the face of the Other that stands in for the whole of humanity, a problematic that resonates in Lacanian discourse regarding the desire of the big Other (Schroeder 165). If the Other is always defined by its alterity, how is it possible for it to be recognized by the same in the ethical encounter?

Aside from the problematic established by Levinas' initial conception of the third party, the most prevailing question raised by critics regarding how the self is able to recognize the face of the Other when Levinas has taken great pains to stress its absolute alterity. As Levinas himself states in *Totality and Infinity* "the alterity of the Other does not depend on any quality that would distinguish him from me" and "remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign" (TI 194). Diane Perpich counters this statement by reiterating in *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* that the Other is "someone who counts as such" and that in order for the Other to be apprehended in such a way "must become *countable*, and here the betrayal of singularity inevitably begins as the other becomes just one more singular being amongst others" (70). By claiming that the Other "counts as such" institutes a circuit of comparison where the Other's alterity is betrayed by making it something that can be differentiated through a comparison with other existents. The thematization of the Other through the very metaphysical language that

Levinas apparently disavows throughout his corpus is precisely the basis of Derrida's deconstructive critique.

In "Violence and Metaphysics" Derrida notes, despite Levinas' constant reassurance that he is moving beyond the phenomenology of both Heidegger and Husserl, that there exists a common phenomenological element between the latter and Levinas. Derrida claims that in the *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl distinguishes between two different occurrences of totality that are crucial to the development of Levinas' ethics. Husserl, according to Derrida, makes the distinction between the transcendent thing, where its alterity "is such only because of the indefinite incompleteness of my originary perceptions" and the transcendent Other "which is also irreducible, and adds to the dimension of incompleteness (the body of the Other in space, the history of our relations, etc.)" (*WD* 124). As Perpich explains, the transcendent thing is such because, as an object distinguishable from a human person, a "perceiver cannot view all sides of an object at once, her perception of a thing is always partial" (*Ethics* 70). However, the transcendent Other, though defined by a similar alterity as the object, complements this alterity because it is comprised of non-spatial characteristics such as lived experience and singular perceptions (*Ethics* 71). As Derrida further illustrates "the stranger is infinitely other because by his essence no enrichment of his profile can give the subjective face of his experience *from his perspective*, such as he has lived it" (*WD* 124).

The crux of Derrida's argument is that, whereas Husserl "gives himself the *right to speak* of the infinitely other as such, accounting for the origin and the legitimacy of his language," Levinas on the other hand "*in fact* speaks of the infinitely other, but by refusing to acknowledge an intentional modification of the ego" (*WD* 125). Derrida's criticism of Levinas is the contradiction that runs through his work that presupposes to dislodge ontology as a first philosophy in the place of ethics, one however that nevertheless must revert back to the same phenomenological discourse that is evident in metaphysics throughout Greek philosophy (*WD* 125). In order for the Other to be recognizable at all presupposes some form of recognition between the two parties, but this is the very form of thematization that Levinas denounces.

Richard Beardsworth makes this clear when he explains that Derrida "takes a great deal of care pointing out that Levinas' thematization of the Other 'as' other presupposes the 'as'-structure of Heideggerian ontology," therefore Levinas makes the very alterity and non-totalizable identity of the Other recognizable through the metaphoric language that he previously denounced (134). As Beardsworth points out "to welcome the other *as* other, as *Autrui*, the other must come into form" so that "the 'as'-structure of being is the very condition of the appearance of the other 'as' other and therefore the very possibility of Levinas thematizing *Autrui* as non-thematizable" (134). Derrida's



response to the recognition between the same and the alterity of the other is as follows:

If the other were not recognized as a transcendental alter ego, it would be entirely in the world and not, as go, the origin of the world. To refuse to see in it an ego in this sense is, within the ethical order, the very gesture of all violence. If the other was not recognized as ego, its entire alterity would collapse...The other as alter ego signifies the other as other, irreducible to my ego, precisely because it is an ego, because it has the form of the ego. The egoity of the other permits him to say "ego" as I do...he is face, can speak to me, understand me, and eventually command me. (125-6)

In *Apparitions of Derrida's Other* Kas Saghafi makes clear the significance of Derrida's critique, not only in the deconstruction of Levinas' use of phenomenological language, but because it illustrates that it is the very originary symmetry between the same and other that makes recognition of the asymmetry, the irreducible difference, recognizable (15).

Though not precisely identical to the argument made previously in this study, Derrida's critique does allude to the very co-construction of identity that takes place between the self and the Other. I would argue however that it is the primordial grounding of undifferentiated Being, the "there is," that provides the possibility of initial recognition. If we recall, in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas makes clear that humanity, that which encompasses the third party in its initial formulation, is not bound to each other or grounded in a common resemblance, but is instead structured according to a monotheistic paternity that institutes

equality among humanity without denying its ultimate alterity (Llewelyn 150). It is important to remember that, for Levinas, God is comparable to the infinite and to total alterity, not necessarily to a strictly Judeo-Christian formulation of the divine. Therefore, there is a direct correlation between what structures and makes resemblance possible between two existents and the very originary anonymity and alterity that stems from the primordial scene of the “there is.”

As Levinas states, the fraternity that defines humanity “involves the commonness of a father, as though the commonness of race would not bring together enough” and “monotheism signifies this human kinship, this idea of a human race that refers back to the approach of the Other in the face, in a dimension of height, in responsibility for oneself for the Other” (*TI* 214). Recalling Levinas’ description of paternity from the earlier section of this chapter, where paternity is the projection of the ego into the unknowable future through fecundity, it becomes clear that, although it is seemingly beyond comprehension, it is the originary alterity and infinity of pure Being that brings the subject to the Other and makes recognition possible. To clarify this point, if the divine is complete alterity and that which provides a structure of recognition, the very commonality that makes the ethical approach of the self to the Other possible is a shared alterity. Though this addresses the “resemblance” shared between two existents, it does not however provide a solution to the problematic of how one’s desire for infinite responsibility can provide a model for living ethically amongst

other existents. Levinas is aware of this and it is his reformulation of the alterity of the Other in *Otherwise Than Being* that introduces a wholly new component to the ethical encounter.

In direct response to Derrida's critique in "Violence and Metaphysics" Levinas endeavors to address this contradiction in *Otherwise Than Being* regarding the apparent thematization and ultimate reduction of alterity of the Other. In the text Levinas asks "why would proximity, the pure signification of saying, the anarchic one-for-the-other of beyond being, revert to being or fall into being, into a conjunction of entities, into essence showing itself in the said?" (*OB* 157). Levinas, as Robert Bernasconi notes, addresses the problem of humanity outside of the dative relationship as he did in *Totality and Infinity*, by claiming that the problem of proximity reverting back to being would not exist if all the subject had to concern themselves with was the singular individual Other ("Third Party" 50). As Levinas explains, "if proximity ordered to me only the other alone, there would not have been any problem...it is troubled and becomes a problem when a third party enters" (*OB* 157). Initially, as with his previous text, the arrival of the third party appears synonymous with the whole of humanity and the institution of an ethical and universal law, a divine Good that preserves singularity while making recognition possible.

However, Levinas' account of the third party in *Otherwise Than Being* transitions from the third party as the whole of humanity structured according to a

desire for the infinite and brings it closer to being synchronous with the political and the Law. For, as Levinas states in the text, the third party “is other than the neighbor, but also another neighbor, and also a neighbor of the other, and not simply his fellow,” making it clear that the third party in this later formulation is distinct from the objective onlooker described in *Totality and Infinity* (OB 157). Here, I argue, Levinas is not merely reformulating his conception of the third party, but illustrating how society operates according to a schemata of recognition instituted by power. Furthermore, Levinas goes on to add that “the third party introduces a contradiction in the saying whose signification before the other until then went in one direction,” alluding to the asymmetrical relationship between the same and the Other where the former projects infinite responsibility in one direction (OB 158). The arrival of this particular third party is the “limit of responsibility and the birth of the question: What do I have to do with justice? A question of consciousness” (OB 157).

As C. Fred Alford makes clear in *Levinas, The Frankfurt School and Psychoanalysis*, the entry of the third party, which Alford contends remains synonymous with humanity, “makes me an other to all the others, insuring that I too will not be sacrificed,” but nevertheless, and problematically “the third adds another other (actually, an infinite number of others) whom I must serve” (123). Though Alford remains convinced that the third party here remains congruous with Levinas’ previous description as the whole of humanity, there is a definite

shift in the philosopher's characterization. Here, the third party is not comparable with a monotheistic ethical equality, but a schemata of representation that reterritorializes the "essence," to use Levinas' term, of the existent and transforms it into the said of being.

However, I would argue that this not comparable to the anonymity of being that is described in Levinas' depiction of the "there is" precisely because it is reterritorialized into static representation. As Levinas states "the entry of the third party is the very fact of consciousness, assembling into being, and at the same time, in a being, the hour of the suspension of being in possibility, the finitude of essence accessible to the abstraction of concepts..." (*OB* 157-8). Here existence is suspended in the milieu of possibility and the "reduction of a being to the possible and the reckoning of possibles" so that the very future that Levinas' associates with infinity is forestalled here (*OB* 158). The arrival of the third party perverts the projection of infinity from the primordial past to a succession of possibilities that thwart the possibility of projecting the ego into infinity.

The distinction between the two definitions of the third party become even more clear when Levinas describes the arrival of the third party as a call to justice, which is far from synonymous with the ethical law formulated in *Totality and Infinity*:

Justice is necessary, that is, comparison, coexistence, contemporaneousness, assembling, order, thematization, the visibility of faces, and thus intentionality and the intellect, and in

intentionality and the intellect, the intelligibility of the system, and thence also a copresence on an equal footing as before a court of justice. Essence as synchrony is togetherness in a place. Proximity takes on a new meaning in the space of contiguity. (*OB* 157)

The arrival of justice, although necessary as Levinas' argues, nevertheless functions according to intelligibility, functional comprehension, and identification in order to create a system that ruptures the dative relationship where proximity and signification are asymmetrical and appropriation is forestalled.

What is of special interest here is Levinas' use of the word "place" in the aforementioned paragraph in order to describe the way in which justice makes all visible. The use of the word "place" alludes specifically back to Levinas' description of the stage of hypostasis, the period of stasis where the individual takes a position amidst the anonymity of the "there is" before the ethical encounter. As Michael D. Oppenheim explains in *Jewish Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* Levinas' is attempting to delineate the moment of self-consciousness "when one calculates what must (justly) be given to the proximate other, what must be given to third parties, and, finally, what must be given to oneself as the other's other" (128). One could add as well that, along with this moment of consciousness when all is visible due to mediation of justice, an individual placed into the schema of the world and relegated to a place in the framework of the community. With the institution of justice one is made

identifiable amongst other thematized individuals and given a position in the hierarchy of existence.

The shift in the characterization from the third-person outlook of all humanity as described in *Totality and Infinity* to that of justice in *Otherwise Than Being* that orders and reterritorializes being into a static representation that makes two parties recognizable to each other addresses Derrida's critique in "Violence and Metaphysics" regarding the alterity of the Other. However, further in his discussion of the third party Levinas anticipates a problematic in the dative encounter that Derrida will address at length as well. Levinas contends that with the arrival of the third party that institutes justice "the anarchic relationship with illeity is betrayed" due to the fact that justice works through the "comparison of incomparables" so that the two individuals are recognizable to each other and "the saying is fixed in a said" (*OB* 158-9). This betrayal of alterity leads to the problematic of whom the self is responsible to that Levinas has been concerned with up until now in *Otherwise Than Being*:

This way leads from responsibility to problems. A problem is posited by proximity itself, which, as the immediate itself, is without problems. The extraordinary commitment of the other to the third party calls for control, a search for justice, society and the State, comparison and possession, thought and science, commerce and philosophy, and outside of anarchy, the search for a principle. (*OB* 161).

As Diane Perpich illustrates in "A Singular Justice: Ethics and Politics Between Levinas and Derrida" the asymmetry of the face to face relationship is where the

other commands me to infinite responsibility and there is no reciprocal command the call to ethics and responsibility is relatively unproblematic do to the proximity of the two individuals (328).

However, as Perpich notes, the arrival of the third party, which is co-substantial with the face of the Other, the ego of the same is required to reflect on the numerous others that are hidden from its view, so that the result is that “the third brings about the instauration of relations of equality and reciprocity, of a political rationality which questions and compares, assembles and thematizes, making all the others, all the neighbors, visible and contemporaneous within the intelligibility of a system” (“Singular” 328). One point to be made here is that Perpich seems to insinuate through her description that the arrival of the third party institutes a type of class consciousness, where the ego attains consciousness of not only itself in the infinite continuum of all humanity, but of the necessity of justice (“Singular” 328). Despite the fact that Levinas contends that “consciousness is born as the presence of a third party” and that the “foundation of consciousness is justice,” I would argue that it is incorrect to assume that the third party is merely a form of consciousness that the subject is enveloped by, but something that is imposed upon all subjects (*OB* 160). The third party installs an intelligible system of reciprocity and equality, where all subjects are comprehensible to each other to a certain extent and places them all under an imposed universal law. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas envisions the third party



as that which encompasses the whole humanity structured according to a primordial scene of undifferentiated Being, however in *Otherwise Than Being* it is not infinity that provides the possibility of recognition, but the Law that becomes the structuring principle.

To a certain extent this anticipates the argument proposed by Derrida in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* where the problem of responsibility to both the other and the third party is addressed. As Derrida contends in his text, the third party serves to “reintroduce us, as if by force, into the place that ethics should exceed: the visibility of the face, thematization, comparison, synchrony, system, copresence” (*Adieu* 63). Derrida harkens back to Levinas’ discussion of the third party in *Totality and Infinity* where it is made clear that the entry of the third is synchronous to the arrival of the face, not subsequent, which leads him to comment that the “interruption of ethical immediacy is itself immediate” (*Adieu* 66) implying that the very immediacy of the ethical encounter where the infinity that comprises the Other, and that which engenders transcendence and infinite responsibility, is perverted from the very beginning (Perpich “Singular” 329). Levinas makes clear in *Totality and Infinity* that “language is justice” (*TI* 216), language and justice are synonymous in the way they territorialize the subject in the Said and short-circuit the process of infinity comprising the ethical relationship (Perpich “Singular” 329). This leads Derrida to contend that the third party “violates the purity of the ethical desire devoted to the unique,” the very

metaphysical desire for the Infinite that Levinas claims draws the same to the

Other (*Adieu* 66). Derrida continues in *Adieu* by claiming:

...if the face to face with the unique engages the infinite ethics of responsibility for the other in a sort of *oath before the letter*, a sort of unconditional respect for fidelity, then the ineluctable emergence of the third, and, along with it, of justice, would signal a first breach or perjury [*perjure*]. Such a breach, while silent, passive, and painful, is also inevitable; it is not accidental and secondary but is as originary as the experience of the face. (67)

This, at least for Derrida, introduces another contradiction, or paradox, in Levinas' ethics where the arrival of the third party that is justice that shortcircuits the Infinity of the Other constitutes a primordial and originary perjury; the self cannot claim pure fidelity or allegiance to the Other and the third party absolutely (*Adieu* 67-9). In typical deconstructive fashion Derrida posits that this is the very aporia or paradox that makes ethics possible, for if, as Christina Howells explains in *Derrida: Deconstruction from Phenomenology to Ethics*, there "were a rule to follow, ethics and justice would be a matter of determinism and technique not responsibility and 'hospitality'" (146).

The shift in Levinas' characterization of the third party from *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise Than Being* instills a problematic in his depiction of the progression of ethical subjectivity, specifically from where the newly instituted call to justice comes. The reformulation of the third party brings him closer to the work of Michel Foucault and his treatise on the way in which identity is a production of discursive power formations as well. Recall that Levinas illustrates

that the arrival of justice is characterized not only by proximity, but by knowledge, showing, and an intelligible system (*OB* 157-8). The movement where justice arrives on the scene of the ethical encounter is the birth of consciousness in regards to a fixed identity in the social sphere and “the cutting up of the continuity of space into discrete terms and the whole – out of justice” (*OB* 157).

This is not wholly dissimilar to Foucault’s treatise on the emergence of modern subject as depicted in his early work *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* where he argues that society’s modern conception of Man is above all a categorical object of knowledge, specifically in regards to the sciences where everything regarding the individual is brought to light (308). Within the text Foucault focuses primarily on the transition from the Classical to Modern episteme claiming, as he does subsequently in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, that “the epistemological subject was a contingent position within a particular discursive formation that had already undergone several mutations and reconfigurations since the Renaissance” (Johnston 74). What is crucial here in regards to Foucault’s exposition is the way that Man, as both a human being and an object of knowledge, enters into an intelligible system and becomes something to be known, something in which resides an essence of identity (Oksala 31). Foucault illustrates that in the Classical episteme the “task was to construct a universal method for analysis which would achieve a classification of

representations and signs in the form of a table...which would mirror the order of things in the world” (Smart 24). In their endeavors to chart the nature of the world in a systematic grid, man was essentially a transcendental figure that was “outside” of discourse so that “the personage for whom the representation exists, and who represents himself within it” and “he who ties together all the interlacing threads of the ‘representation in the form of a picture or a table’ – he is never to be found in the table himself” (Foucault *OT* 308). The grid that Foucault claims was so crucial to the Classical episteme, that which housed all of the natural order within it, did not include a conception of man due to the fact that he was considered the locus of representation (*OT* 308).

As we have seen, Levinas illustrates in *Otherwise Than Being* that the arrival of the third party engenders visibility, equality, and justice, propelling the existent into a grid of ordered representation. As Stephen David Ross comments, in *The Gift of Truth: Gathering the Good* Levinas compares justice to truth, to the arrival of a universal Good brought on by the confluence of both a material third party and a new relationship to infinity (188). As Ross notes, “truth demands infinite exposure and vulnerability to the abundance and fecundity of others,” not only in regards to the radical passivity that characterizes ethical subjectivity, but one could argue the full disclosure of the truth of the individual (188). With the arrival of the third party the radical passivity that Levinas claims characterizes the ethical encounter, where the existent signifies through complete exposure to the

Other, is precisely what the third party reconfigures into static identity that makes the existents known to each other. The saying of signification is solidified in the said in order for the law, which always works abstractly, to function (Kosky 53).

The emphasis Levinas places on signification and exposure, as well as its relationship to justice, parallels Foucault's conversation regarding the discursive nature of power and the importance of the confessional in the construction of identity. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* Foucault makes the point that despite the development of certain taboo sexual practices, such as sodomy or consanguine relationships, as well as the establishment of strict parameters regarding what was proper to be spoken, there arose a proliferation of sexual discourse during the seventeenth-century (*HS* 17-20). Foucault cites the confessional following the Council of Trent as an example of where the taboo of certain sexual practices such as "the postures assumed, gestures, places touched, caresses, and the precise moment of pleasure" were openly expunged to religious authorities (*HS* 19-20). For Foucault, this represents a movement in the discourse on sexuality where the body became a site where the violations of the soul could be read in matter; the sexual practices of a person were transformed, through constant exposure through discourse, as the interiority and truth of the individual (*HS* 20-21). Identical to the way in which Butler, in the same thread as Foucault, illustrates that submission to power requires the individual to constantly perform their innocence throughout ritualized actions in order to be recognized by society,

Foucault illustrates that in the seventeenth-century the increased discourse regarding sexuality led to the “nearly infinite task of telling – telling oneself and another, as often as possible, everything that might concern the interplay of innumerable pleasures, sensations, and thoughts which, through the body and the soul, had some affinity with sex” (*HS* 20). Whereas before the exposure, radical passivity and responsibility was directed at the Other in a relationship of pure proximity, with Levinas new formulation of the third party in *Otherwise Than Being* the relationship is no longer a dyad, but saturated with the power working discursively.

Consider for a moment if we extend Foucault’s example of the confessional even further in order to make the similarities between he and Levinas more pronounced. As Foucault illustrates, the Christian pastoral and confession established the framework for which a subject is made to produce the truth of their being which in turn led to the individual assuming “a subject position within discourse and to become *subjected* to the power and regulation of the discourse” (Weedon qtd. in Howe 29). In the situation of the confessional we have the individual compelled by the call of morality stemming from a religious authority, who is either seen or veiled, to offer the truth of oneself by entering in a prescriptive discourse regarding sexuality. As with Levinas’ formulation of the call of the other, where “I come to see my egoism as contingent, my solitary and spontaneous freedom as arbitrary, and I become self-conscious self on in my

response to the Other,” the individual in Foucault’s formulation becomes a subject wholly by accepting responsibility to a universal Good that forces them to confess to a set of behaviors that codifies and attributes to them a specific identity (Hughes 152). The face of the priest signifies a higher moral authority issuing a command to the individual for full exposure of their being, a responsibility to disclose themselves to an other. However, in this instance the religious authority is not merely an other who is unknowable in its alterity, but a figure imbued with immanent power so that the existent is not responding to the vulnerability of the Other, but submitting to power itself.

Levinas makes clear in *Otherwise Than Being* that the arrival of the third party is not a subsequent or material event in the dative relationship, but is something that is co-substantial with the face of the Other, and that its arrival institutes thematization and intelligibility (*OB* 157-8). The arrival of the third party and justice is engendered through the relationship between the self and the Other, and in this way it resembles Foucault’s characterization of power as relational (McLaren 219) and something that “must be understood in the first instances as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization” (*HS* 92). Levinas makes clear that “the entry of a third party would not be an empirical fact, and that my responsibility for the other finds itself constrained to a calculus by the ‘force of things’,” which would seemingly undermine the comparison of the third

party with power (*OB* 158). However, Levinas is making a distinction between justice as instituted by the third party and the force of institutions, just as Foucault is making a distinction between power “as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state” (*HS* 92). Power, for Foucault, is omnipresent because it is accessed everywhere as a product of social relations and it is immanent because it exists solely when exercised by individuals or institutions (*HS* 92-3). And just as the third party creates an intelligible system so that visibility replaces alterity, power constitutes subjectivity by constructing a static identity by compiling a body of knowledge established through disciplinary measures.

Levinas illustrates in *Totality and Infinity*, as we have mentioned, that the Other does not allow for interiority, but instead in the asymmetrical relationship when metaphysical desire and welcoming is directed at the Other there is no return to the self; the existent is not defined by an autonomous interiority or essence, but by an responsibility to an exterior other (Llewelyn 67). If we assume that power is co-substantial with the face of the Other, then this mirrors the way in which power produces an interiority in the subject through external forces.

Foucault claims in *Discipline and Punish* that “it would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect,” but instead “it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of power that is exercised on those punished” (*DP* 29). Foucault claims that the “soul is the effect



and instrument of a political anatomy,” a convergence of power, knowledge and relations that act upon the body in order to create, rather than expose or enact, a constructed interiority (*DP* 30). The soul for Foucault is one of the many ways of denoting interiority not unlike consciousness and the psyche, all of which he feels are material effects of the technologies of power. However, these technologies are not always oppressive and disciplinary, though they undoubtedly can be, but discursive. For instance, take Foucault’s famous treatise on the identity of the homosexual, which, before the nineteenth-century, did not exist (*HS* 43). According to Foucault, in the nineteenth-century the body of knowledge on “abnormal” sexual practices was compiled through endeavors of the human sciences, which in turn transformed the practice of sodomy into an essence or defining identity (*HS* 43). As Foucault states:

Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (*HS* 43)

In this situation, as Foucault illustrates, power codifies an individual by constructing an interiority discursively under a static header. Undoubtedly, one could argue that the essential difference that goes undetected here is the emphasis that Foucault places on the disciplinary nature of this codification. Yet, at closer glance it is not dissimilar than the way in which Levinas characterizes the approach of the Other as something that overflows the consciousness of the

existent and ultimately holds them hostage. Andrew Shepherd notes this very element when he illustrates that “making the subject a ‘hostage’ to this unknowable Other, seems to commit the very act of totalization and dehumanization [Levinas] is seeking to overcome” (43). The process whereby the third party makes the Other visible to the existent, and vice versa, is an act of thematization that is equally as disciplinary and results in the same end result; a static identity.

For Foucault then, as well Butler subsequently, interiority is a series of ritualized performances that have no intrinsic meaning until they are reterritorialized under an identity denoted by society. This version of the internal self coincides perfectly with Levinas’ characterization of enjoyment as the quintessential example of interiority before the arrival of exteriority of the Other. As we have seen, in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas illustrates that separation is necessary for the Other to be welcomed in the ethical relationship. This separation is characterized by an interiority that is defined as the individual appropriating objects in the world for its own use and enjoyment. This enjoyment characterizes interiority because it is essentially personal, but nevertheless it “is not some disembodied feeling felt by a conscious subject floating above the anonymous materiality of being” but is instead “involves an earthiness, a materiality” (Joldersma 47). The emphasis on materiality is important because it illustrates that interiority for Levinas is accomplished through corporeal activity, performances

and rituals that are endeavors to achieve the very anonymity experienced in the primal scene as indicated earlier in this chapter. Whereas once the existent sought to become anonymous through an infinite responsibility to the Other, it is now infinitely responsible to the Law that provides the subject with a false sense of self and interiority. It is a false anonymity that the Law promises; an infinite responsibility to a constructed identity that is wholly alienated from the subject. This is precisely how the third party makes the self an Other to the others; it creates a knowable identity through the deployment of knowledge and categorization, giving the self a constructed identity that takes its place in the schemata of the symbolic register. These constructed identities produced by power are precisely what are encountered in an interaction between existents whereby thematization stalls the possibility of alterity.

Levinas' new formulation of justice as that which is instituted by functionaries like the State and works through the thematization of identity seemingly forestalls infinity and therefore the transcendence brought about by the alterity of the Other. However, he nevertheless attempts to retain a level of transcendence by claiming that the illeity of the Other is not wholly diminished, but transformed. As Levinas claims, in regards to the arrival of the third party, there "is a betrayal of my anarchic relation with illeity, but also a new relationship with it" (*OB* 158). The institution of justice as a mediating third term in the ethical dyad is described by Levinas as a new relationship with illeity, with the Infinite

where the existent's becoming a subject of society is marked by "the passing of God" (*OB* 158). Robert Bernasconi claims that when Levinas argues that the betrayal of illeity and the anarchic relationship with Other is interrupted by the third party he is not insinuating that illeity or transcendence is wholly obliterated, but that infinity is in essence funneled through the prism of thematization and identity in order to make justice possible ("Third Party" 51). Undoubtedly, Levinas hopes to retain the idea of infinity in order to resist the totalization of the Other, however when he states that "in the indirect ways of illeity, in the anarchical provocation which ordains me to the other, is imposed the way which leads to thematization, and to an act of consciousness" we can assume that the relationship with the wholly Other and the subject is completely different than delineated earlier in *Totality and Infinity* (*OB* 16). It is this new relationship with infinity that is introduced with the arrival of the Law that will be the focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter 3

### The Crystalline Image of Maternity

To begin with, we live in a civilization in which the consecrated (religious or secular) representation of femininity is subsumed under maternity. Under close examination, however, this maternity turns out to be an adult (male and female) fantasy of a lost continent: what is involved moreover, is not so much an idealized primitive mother as an idealization of the – unlocalizable – relationship between her and us, an idealization of primary narcissism. Julie Kristeva “Stabat Mater”

What constitutes the crystal-image is the most fundamental operation of time: since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time...  
Gilles Deleuze *Cinema: The Time-Image*

The concluding scene of James Cameron’s 1986 film *Aliens*, the second film in the *Alien* franchise following Ridley Scott’s original film seven years earlier, finds Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) and Corporal Dwayne Hicks (Michael Biehn) on the alien infested planet of LV-426 trying desperately to reach their ship, the *Sulaco*, in order to escape the pursuing Alien Queen. What immediately follows is the climatic confrontation between Ripley, who stays behind to rescue Newt (Carrie Henn), the young traumatized girl she has adopted, and the Alien Queen who, similarly, has just witnessed Ripley destroy an entire host of her offspring. In this final encounter we have the meeting of two seemingly dichotomous creatures that share the similarity of being alternate versions of a maternal body, a duality that binds them together throughout the series and functions as the underlying thread that moves the narrative in each film.

As Lynda K. Bundtzen illustrates in “Monstrous Mothers: Medusa, Grendel, and Now Alien,” the Queen Alien constitutes a representation of a “primal mother defined solely by her devouring jaws and her prolific egg-production,” whereas her counterpart Ripley is “endowed with a more traditionally feminine trait: her loving, maternal nurturance of the young girl, Newt” (102). Bundtzen alludes to perhaps the most prevalent critique of the *Alien* films in her article, that the Alien Mother “quite literally embodies women’s reproductive powers” and that “she arouses primal anxieties about woman’s sexual organs and in her combination of multiple tentacles and oozing jaws is the phallic mother of nightmare” (104). However, I would argue that, although Bundtzen is indeed correct that the film focuses predominantly on two distinct signifiers of maternity, that the narrative itself is not solely concerned with showcasing the reproductive potentiality of the feminine body and its apparent destructive capacity, but also in illustrating how maternal subjectivity is formed through subjection to preestablished codes of femininity posited by patriarchal forms of dominance (106).

The maternal figure of Ellen Ripley and the *Alien* franchise as a whole has been the subject of numerous interpretations, most of them focusing, as the aforementioned article does, on the Alien Mother and her role as the phallic mother. In *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* Barbara Creed echoes this prevailing sentiment regarding the franchise, writing

specifically about Ridley Scott's *Alien* and claiming that it "presents a complex representation of the monstrous-feminine as archaic mother" and that "one of the major concerns of the sci-fi horror film (*Alien, The Thing, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Altered States*) is the reworking of the primal scene, the scene of birth, in relation to the representation of other forms of copulation and procreation" (17). Creed's primary concern in her text is to illustrate that science-fiction horror films, especially those that comprise the *Alien* franchise, draw upon the trope of the archaic mother to symbolize and represent anxieties regarding the womb and castration, as well as Freud's primal scene "where the subject imagines travelling back inside the womb to watch her/his parents having sexual intercourse, perhaps to watch themselves being conceived" (19). Indisputable as this may seem, it is problematic to argue that the narrative of the *Alien* films are driven solely by anxiety surrounding the phallic mother and castration due to the fact that this viewpoint mystifies the crucial distinction between the archaic and phallic mother, as well as the fact that the franchise also focuses on Ripley's subjection to the image of the phallic Alien Mother.

With this in mind this chapter will focus on the films that comprise the *Alien* franchise in order to argue that the representation of Ellen Ripley throughout the films comments on the way in which women are subjected to a specific image of maternity in order to be recognized within and by a phallogocentric economy of representation. The following will begin with an

analysis of gothic horror fiction in order to illustrate the genre's relationship with the maternal body and, more importantly, its emphasis on the body of the filmic monster. Contrary to traditional scholarship this study will argue that the body of the monster represents, not merely a surface to project societal fears, but what can be termed an image of "sanctioned monstrosity" which the protagonist must strive to embody in order to signify within the representational economy. Subsequently this chapter will analyze Ridley Scott's *Alien*, not only for the ways in which it depicts the primal scene, but also for how it showcases the primordial moment that prepares the existent for future subjection to the Law. The primary focus of this specific discussion will be to illustrate how the phallic mother, the Alien Queen is mobilized as an imaginary point of identity in order to code Ripley as lacking and subject her to numerous forms of patriarchal domination. This chapter will show that the maternal body is subjected to a unique image that is, using Deleuze's theory of the time image, a mobilization of virtual and actual elements that coalesce in a crystal image of maternity composed of the comingling of the trace of the phallic mother and the child. The use of the Deleuzian concept of the crystal image will serve to illustrate how the figure of the phallic mother, traditionally seen as merely an object of fear of masculinity, in fact represents a unique image of wholeness in that it encapsulates sanctioned elements of maternity, as well as traits that must be abjected in order to be recognized by the phallogocentric economy. Returning to Levinas and the ethical encounter, this



chapter will conclude by illustrating that this crystalline image of maternity is what characterizes the face of the Other in the meeting between mother and child, disrupting the asymmetrical relationship with the Other and rendering authentic ethical interaction seemingly impossible.

### 3.1 The Monstrous Body and Maternity

Before progressing to an analysis of the way in which the *Alien* franchise depicts maternity as an ideologically saturated image used to justify the technological optimization of the maternal subject, it is necessary to briefly explicate the relationship between the monstrous feminine and the gothic horror genre. Throughout the trajectory of science-fiction horror literature and film the maternal body is traditionally coded as a manifestation of abject horror, a monstrous body that is defined by its excess, either in its sexual voracity or its reproductive capabilities. The most prevalent examples of the monstrous maternal figure is that of the archaic and phallic mother who, according to Barbara Creed in “*Alien* and the Monstrous-Feminine,” represents a “force that threatens to reincorporate what it once gave birth to” and “gives rise to a terror of self-disintegration” (*Alien* 131). Creed distinguishes between the archaic mother, a figure who “does not depend for its definition on a concept of the masculine,” and the phallic mother who is “always represented in relation to the penis” (*Alien* 130). However, both phantasmatic projections figure predominantly in the science fiction and horror genres as monstrous bodies that mark the borders of

heteronormativity, arousing both fear and desire because they exist on the margins of the symbolic register and seemingly offer the promise or threat of wholeness and a reunion with the primordial mother before castration.

What is crucial for understanding the way in which science fiction and horror films situate the monstrous body, specifically that of the mother, as figure of terror is Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject developed in her seminal work *Powers of Horror*. In the opening chapter, "Approaching Abjection," Kristeva argues that "when I am beset by abjection, the twisted braid of affects and thoughts I call by such a name does not have, properly speaking, a definable *object*," for the abject "is not an ob-ject facing me" (*PH* 1-2). The abject is the "jettisoned object" that is necessarily expelled either from the body or the psyche in order for symbolic identity to be possible and, due to its existence as an imaginary object whose exclusion makes subjectivity possible, it "draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (*PH* 1-2). As Sylvia Mayer explains in "American Environmentalism and Encounters with the Abject," the abject "functions both in the processes of constituting subjectivity and identity and in the processes of creating and maintaining social and cultural systems" and the experience of abjection is precisely one of fascination and terror because "it calls into question the boundaries on which notions of self and society are founded – boundaries that are articulated in the realm of symbolic signification" (222). The abject, as Kristeva goes on to describe, is likened to "a wound with blood and pus,

or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay” which, far from pointing to a static object of fear within the Symbolic Order, signifies precisely that which threatens the stability of being and must be “thrust aside in order to live” (*PH* 3).

One of the most salient examples of the connection between the abject and the science fiction and horror genres is that of the corpse, that entity which “has ‘irremediably’ ‘fallen’ out of the symbolic order” and the “objective equivalent, indeed the sister, of the maternal body that can never be objectified” (Menninghaus 374). After alluding to all the manner of bodily excretions that must be “jettisoned” from the body in order to sustain life, Kristeva continues by claiming:

Such wastes drop so that I might live, until from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadre*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel. “I” is expelled. (*PH* 3-4)

The corpse, as well as other monstrous undead creatures, is featured extensively in science fiction and horror films, and the fear that they engender illustrates why Kristeva’s theory is so essential to this particular discussion. Barbara Creed claims that the abject is utilized primarily, though not exclusively, in three ways in science fiction and horror films. The first occurs in the way in which “horror film abounds in images of abjection, foremost of which is the corpse, whole and mutilated, followed by an array of bodily wastes such as blood, vomit, saliva,

sweat, tears and putrefying flesh” (*Monstrous* 10). Creed argues that there is a perverse pleasure in the experience of abjection that these images engender and, subsequently, offer the satisfaction of purging oneself of these images at the conclusion of the filmic experience (*Monstrous* 10). Secondly, that it is the concept of the border that is central to the construction of the monstrous in the horror film, as that which crosses or threatens to obliterate symbolic borders (*Monstrous* 10-11). This can be seen in numerous postmodern horror films, such as Jonathan Demme’s *Silence of the Lambs*, that are characterized by monstrous bodies that transgress or straddle the demarcated lines of sexual and human identity through performance of ambiguity (*Monstrous* 11).

With this definition of the abject as that which the self must extricate itself from in order to enter in the symbolic register, it is not difficult to see how the original and primordial repression, what is designated as the first expunged imaginary object, is that of the maternal body. As Kristeva illustrates, the abject “confronts us...with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity even before ex-isting outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language” (*PH* 13). As Stacy Keltner writes in *Kristeva*, “in order to become a subject, the *infans* must separate from its primary unity with the mother” so that there can be clearly delineated lines of identity, which is traumatizing “because the *infans* must separate from that which s/he is identified, i.e., the *infans* must reject that which forms an essential part of itself” (46). Kristeva claims that this separation from the

maternal body “is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling” (*PH* 13). With this in mind, at the core of Kristeva’s characterization of the feeling of abjection is the primordial archaic mother, the phantasmatic construct that represents the very threat of symbolic collapse by representing the semiotic and the unsymbolizable, the “outside” that marks the borders that helps to structure and support society and give symbolic identities meaning. As Kelly Oliver explains, “the most archaic boundaries of the clean and proper self, of course, are those regulated by maternal authority, in particular anal and oral drives” therefore furthering the connection between the feeling of abjection, the destabilizing feeling of alterity that threatens the borders of the self, and the original semiotic experience of becoming associated with the maternal body (*SWS* 31).

The maternal body is specifically coded within science fiction and horror films as the source of abjection, either in the form of something repulsive or a monstrous body that threatens the symbolic autonomy of the protagonist. The latter representation is found predominantly in horror films such as Brian De Palma’s *Carrie* and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* in “which the mother is the overpowering force who prevents the ‘normal’ development of the child (from entering the Symbolic)” (Arnold *Maternal* 75). Films such as Ridley Scott’s *Alien*, which will be discussed later in this chapter, are abound with representations of what Creed has identified as the Freudian primal scene,

depicting the traumatic and oftentimes extremely visceral birth of the subject from the maternal womb (*Monstrous* 13). As Creed identifies, these films and texts “represent the monstrous-feminine in relation to Kristeva’s notion of maternal authority and the mapping of the self’s clean and proper body” (*Monstrous* 13). Because “images of blood, vomit, pus, shit, etc., are central to our culturally/socially constructed notions of the horrific” they subsequently “signify the split between two orders: the maternal authority and the law of the father” (*Monstrous* 13). The materiality of the maternal body aligns itself with these very bodily acts precisely because, as Kelly Oliver indicates, they were regulated by the maternal body in gestation and the fear they engender harkens back precisely to the primordial scene of wholeness within the womb (*RK* 80). More importantly, however, is the fact that “horror film centers on the dual pleasure and terror elicited by these visual images,” so that, as discussed earlier, it is not merely repulsion that is engendered by the abject imaginary object, but a strange pleasure that draws the subject to the image itself (Starks 124). As Sarah Arnold explains in *Maternal Horror Film*, Kristeva likens the contradictory experience of ecstasy and terror located within the abject to jouissance, so that “whereas acts of prohibition and rituals function to make the abject tolerable for the subject, there exists in the subject simultaneously an inclination towards the abject (maternal)” (75-6). It is this very fascination and horror with the monstrous body, not merely

that of the abject maternal body, that alludes to a necessary reevaluation of the monster itself.

In *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* Judith Halberstam explores the trajectory of the monstrous body, both in film and literature, from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs*, in order to argue that the body of the monster featured so prominently in gothic horror fiction "reveal[s] certain material conditions of the production of horror, but they also make strange the categories of beauty, humanity, and identity that we still cling to" (*Skin* 5-6). Halberstam claims that traditionally the gothic horror fiction of the nineteenth-century was marked by a treatment of "subjectivity as a balancing act between inside/outside, female/male, body/mind, native/foreign, proletarian/aristocrat" (*Skin* 1). In contrast to the dichotomous representations presented in the nineteenth-century horror genre, Halberstam argues further that "postmodern horror films finds its place in what Baudrillard has called the obscenity of 'immediate visibility' and what Linda Williams has dubbed 'the frenzy of the visible'" (*Skin* 1-2). Halberstam's argument is that the postmodern horror genre employs a monster that is a hypereal projection that does not attempt to symbolize any duality, as with Stephenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*, but is merely a surface-level image in which the fear of society are written on the body (*Skin* 1-2). According to Halberstam, the progression of gothic horror fiction from the nineteenth-century onward reflects the very technologies of subjectivity

that Michel Foucault outlines in his treatise on institutionalized disciplinary measures in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, where medico-juridical institutions “shifted their gaze from the body to the soul” (*Skin* 2). Furthermore, Halberstam claims that gothic horror “is a technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known” (*Skin* 2).

Halberstam is indeed correct when she argues that gothic literature and film, and the monstrous bodies it employs “marks a peculiarly modern preoccupation with boundaries and their collapse” (*Skin* 22-3). We have already seen how the monstrous body is consistently coded as something abject, an entity that threatens boundaries and the stability of the Symbolic Order. However, her argument that the monster and the technologies that produce them achieve with the monstrous body “the perfect figure for negative identity” is slightly misleading (*Skin* 22-3). To arrive at the definition of the monster, as Halberstam does, as precisely “everything the human is not” in order to “make way for the inventions of humans as white, male, middle class, and heterosexual” is undoubtedly correct, yet it fallaciously characterizes the monster only as something to be feared and a creature that symbolizes the very marginalized identities of society (*Skin* 22-3). It is a common misconception in scholarship directed at science fiction and horror films, not that the monster represents the abject, but that the monstrous body functions solely as a negative identity that



serves as a symbolic principle that stabilizes the boundaries of heteronormativity. Monstrous bodies, such as those that characterize postmodern gothic fiction, are marked not only with a preoccupation with those negative identities regarding race, sexuality, and gender that must be expelled in order for subject formation to be possible, *but with those very positive identities that represent the very desired characteristics the subject/protagonist lacks.*

Consider briefly one of the most referenced postmodern horror films, Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* and its two central "monsters," Buffalo Bill (Ted Levine) and Dr. Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins). The prevailing sentiment regarding the film, as exemplified by Paula Ruth Gilbert in *Violence and the Female Imagination*, is that, specifically for Buffalo Bill, the fear that he engenders stems precisely from his explicit transgression of heteronormative boundaries of sexuality and gender, and the way in which he vacillates ambiguously between masculine and feminine poles of identity (83). The now infamous scene where Buffalo Bill literally transforms into a woman in front of the audience, coupled with his endeavor to become a feminine subject by making a suit of female flesh, frightens when viewed in this framework because it heightens his already ambiguous sexuality and gender, and destabilizes the foundations of normative identities. Halberstam claims that the scene, as well as the numerous other sequences that show Buffalo Bill performing femininity, illustrates that he "is prey to the most virulent conditioning heterosexist culture

has to offer – he believes that anatomy is destiny” (*Skin* 167). However, if we recall Halberstam’s discussion of gothic horror, it becomes clear that Buffalo Bill, and subsequently Hannibal Lecter, are not only victims of heteronormative coding, but fascinate and terrify particularly because they are structured within the narrative as subjects with ideal specifications that the protagonist, Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster), must embody in order to be accepted by her superior, Agent Jack Crawford (Scott Glenn) and recognized within and by the phallogocentric representational economy of the masculine dominated F.B.I.

In Buffalo Bill multiple identities and potentialities are totalized into the image of the filmic monster; he is at once a cross-dressing psychopathic killer and yet a white male who is exceedingly intelligent. Buffalo Bill has eluded the local authorities and the F.B.I. for such a lengthy period that their only recourse is to seek the aid of an equally intelligent killer, Dr. Hannibal Lecter. These two monstrous bodies, the cross-dressing killer and the culturally refined cannibal converge on the film’s protagonist, Clarice Starling. Lecter is far more intelligent and superior to Starling in every way, a projection of her lack as a woman who grew up relatively poor in a West Virginia coal-mining town. On the other hand, Buffalo Bill is precisely the strong and violent “woman” that would be accepted into the masculine matrix of the F.B.I. With this in mind, the fear that emanates from the film is comingled precisely with the desire to become a “monster” in order to be accepted in her society and be recognized as a subject within a

phallogocentric representational economy. Starling must perform, not merely abject, the qualities of both Lecter and Buffalo Bill in order to be recognized as a viable subject within the discourse of the F.B.I. If we can assume that the F.B.I. serves as a representation of power and authority, all forms of the Lacanian Big Other that structures discourse, then Buffalo Bill and Lecter are constructs that are formed by way of speaking them into existence. Both Buffalo Bill and Lecter are “spoken” into existence at the onset of the film by Agent Crawford as superior subjects in every way and whose traits Starling must not only abject, but ritually perform in order to be recognized by the Law.

What is witnessed in this particular instance is the paradox of the Law’s operation in regards to the interpellation of subjects; by subjecting an individual to a phantasmatic and essentially unobtainable image of ideal subjecthood the Law produces deviant, yet serviceable acolytes. For instance, in the early sequences in Demme’s film *Lecter*, prior to his escape, is consistently shown as separated from Starling by either the glass partition of his cell at the Baltimore hospital or the bars of his jail cell Tennessee. Viewed through these prisms constructed by the Law Lecter is represented as refined, a dangerous tool yet one that is able to exercise restraint. Through these lenses of power the institutional functionaries, such as the Baltimore hospital and the F.B.I. make visible the very traits embodied by Lecter that they wish Starling to perform. Furthermore, Dr. Chilton and Agent Crawford take great pains when detailing the atrocities of

Lecter's crimes, mapping the definite boundaries of what characteristics Starling must integrate into her own subjectivity.

The horrific reality of Lecter's violence coupled with his charismatic and cunning demeanor are precisely what make him a compelling and terrifying character due to the fact that they are totalized into one image. However, the impossibility of extricating Lecter's brutality from his image is precisely the impossible task that is asked of Starling; it is her failure to do so that makes her and even more pronounced effective member of the Law. This can be seen in Ridley Scott's sequel *Hannibal* where Starling (Julianne Moore) mirrors Lecter's ability for violence in a deadly assault on drug dealers in a fish market. Though effective in neutralizing the criminals, the Law cannot sanction the fact that she kills a mother who was holding her child at the time and she is disciplined as a consequence. In a performance that ironically repeats the progression of Demme's original film, Starling must study and analyze Lecter once again, further emphasizing the constant and repetitive nature of the construction of her identity. It is precisely this forced embodiment and performance of the monstrous body that we see in the *Alien* franchise, where the seemingly horrific projection of the phallic mother becomes the very ideologically saturated image of maternity that Ripley is forced to become.

### 3.2 Alien and Undifferentiated Being

The opening sequence of Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), the initial film in the *Alien* movie franchise, is composed of a tracking shot following the title credits that shows the Weyland-Yutani commercial vessel, *Nostramo* gliding in complete silence through the infinite darkness of space. The sequence involving the exterior of the ship appears exhaustively long due to the absence of supplementary objects and sound, creating an atmosphere of extreme isolation and ambiguity. Seamlessly, the shot transitions to the interior of the spacecraft, exposing tubular pathways and walls that give the impression of pulsating organic material. Although the sequence-shot, like that of the exterior of the ship, is elongated and essentially without noise, the audience has the impression of a presenced absence, the small metallic hums and blinking control panels creating an ambience within the preliminary moments of the film that indicates that the ship, although not quite alive, is nevertheless not inanimate. This is coupled later in the film with the fact that the ship is referred to as "mother" by the crew, further emphasizing the craft's dual purpose as a maternal womb. Finally, the camera pans past the ships ventilating systems and medical facilities, coming to rest on the stark white sleeping capsules that house the crew in a state of hyper sleep. The audience watches as Kane (John Hurt) awakens first, followed by the rest of his crewmates, literally birthed by the ship itself, further illustrating its role as a productive and undifferentiated absence.

In “*Alien* and the Monstrous-Feminine” Barbara Creed claims that science-fiction films such as *Alien* focus predominantly on “the reworking of the primal scene in relation to the representation of other forms of copulation and procreation,” further illustrating that “behind each of these lurks the figure of the archaic mother, that is, the image of the mother in her generative function – the mother as the origin of all life” (123). Critics such as Creed and Catherine Constable have noted that the opening sequence described previously, which is devoid of human life and physical interaction, illustrates one of the primary birthing scenes and is contrasted with that which occurs aboard the alien craft where “the topography of the ship suggests a female body, its outstretched legs positioned either side of a vaginal entrance” (Constable 175). The incessant replication of these birthing sequences leads Creed to surmise that the film is a “complex representation of the monstrous-feminine in terms of the maternal figure as perceived within a patriarchal ideology,” arguing that the maternal body is construed within the film as “the treacherous mother, the oral sadistic mother, the mother as the primordial abyss” (*Alien* 122).

While I agree with both Creed and Constable’s argument that the film is preoccupied with numerous representations of the Freudian primal scene, the following seeks to extend critiques such as these to show how the *Alien* franchise comments on subject development, specifically that of maternal identity, as the ritualized performance of a ideologically saturated image projected by power and

the Law. Jeffrey A. Brown in “Gender and the Action Heroine: Hardbodies and the *Point of No Return*,” claims that films such as those in the *Alien* franchise represent a shift where feminine images on screen are no longer passive sexual commodities and further makes the point that the progression of Ripley throughout the trajectory of the film is the maturation of a feminist ideal that is equal to her male counterparts (53-7). More importantly, scholarly attention directed at the film still retains that Ripley is an example of the “good mother,” whereas the Alien Queen represents the undesirable phallic mother of the primal scene that must be vanquished (Kawin 78). What the following seeks to illustrate is the way in which the film showcases the primordial scene of Emmanuel Levinas’ *il y a* as something that, not unlike the maternal body, threatens the autonomy of the existent’s subjectivity. This ambiguous existence of pure Being becomes the very thing that the subject must abject in order to take up their nominal existence as a subject within the symbolic register and, more importantly, the very psychic object that power targets in order to subject the existent.

The sheer topography itself of the metallic and essentially nonspecific spaceship *Nostramo*, flanked by the vast blankness and anonymity of space, recalls Emmanuel Levinas’ conception of the horror and intrigue of the *il y a*, or the “there is” of undifferentiated Being as developed primarily in *Existence and Existents* and *Totality and Infinity*. As discussed in the previous chapter, Levinas’ *il y a* is the anonymity of a absence that is nevertheless present, an event that is

not predicated on the actions of a subject. As Levinas illustrates “the indeterminateness of this ‘something is happening’ is not the indeterminateness of a subject and does not refer to a substantive” (*EE* 52). In this way the “there is” is characterized as Being in general and is construed “as a horizon of a continuous, indefinite being out of which the subject emerges” (Bergo 59). Being for Levinas, as we have seen, is infinitely different from the way in which Heidegger conceptualizes it; for the former it is an all-pervasive anonymity that overflows interiority and constantly threatens to engulf the subject in its indeterminacy. More importantly, as B.G. Bergo notes in *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics*, the “there is” is precisely a “surplus quality that overcomes us in its indefiniteness and, so is experienced as horror because it confronts us even as we find in exhaustion from enjoyment” (60).

The void of space presented as the beginning of the film and initial sequence-shots of the interior of the ship where the crew remain lifeless in stasis prior to their “birth” correlates with the way in which “even after the negation of all beings, there still remains the void or horrifying darkness which there is [*il y a*] in the absence of each and every being” (Kosky 193). Prior to the “birth” of the *Nostramo* crew the interior tracking shots show numerous mechanical instruments with pulsating lights that are blinking furiously. The ship is unquestionably “alive” yet remains an inanimate object, a non-entity that nevertheless directs the ship through space without the aid of the crew, an impersonal, yet distinctly



present entity that surrounds the existents. The ship itself represents the *il y a* as “the unreal, inverted city we find after an exhausting trip, things and beings strike us as though they no longer composed a world, and were swimming in the chaos of their existence” (*EE* 54). There is a dream-like quality to both the sequences on *Nostramo* and especially the alien planet itself, because there is no reference to the realistic quality of the actual world itself; everything takes place on a hallucinatory alien terrain that defies categorization. As Levinas makes clear, the nothingness of the “there is” is a horror which “is somehow a movement which will strip consciousness of its very ‘subjectivity’” (*EE* 55). The anxiety and fear of the *il y a* is essentially the fear of being “swallowed” by the anonymity of Being and of losing one’s subjectivity in pure ambiguity.

Along with threat of removing the existent of its subjectivity, the anxiety of the *il y a* is made manifest in the way in which “it makes things appear to us in a night, like the monotonous presence that bears down on us in insomnia” (*EE* 55). The primary examples of this anonymous presence of pure Being are the two incarnations of the alien being that emerges without discourse from the darkness of the void. The first occurs, following the discovery of the alien ship and the fertilized eggs that it houses, when Kane unwittingly becomes the host of the alien being. The audience watches as the crew of *Nostramo* attempts to surgically remove the alien parasite from Kane’s face, but soon discovers that the alien has penetrated his throat and is simultaneously keeping him in a comatose state and

facilitating his breathing. Creed argues that this is an “enactment of the primal scene in which Kane is violated in an act of phallic penetration” and that “Kane himself is guilty of the strongest transgression; he actually peers into the egg/womb in order to investigate its mysteries” (*Monstrous* 123). However the scene constitutes, not Kane “taking up the place of the mother, the one who is penetrated,” but a representation of the loss of subjectivity, of being stripped of one’s identity and torn from consciousness (*Monstrous* 123). The aptly named “face sucker” alien destroys any semblance of singularity that Kane possesses by fully covering his face, rendering him symbolically anonymous and forestalling the possibility of subjective existence. As Levinas intimates, the horror of the “there is” in regards to the existent is not merely “in lulling it into unconsciousness, but in throwing it into an *impersonal vigilance, a participation...*” (*EE* 55). Kane, in his comatose state is still alive, but is inseparable from the alien parasite that has forced him to become a participant in the birth of the alien creature, his body persisting but without subjective consciousness. Though Kane is breathing, the “face sucker” alien has destabilized his consciousness and caused him to slip back into the indefiniteness of pure Being itself. In this instance Kane has succumbed to the state of insomnia that Levinas uses to characterize the “there is,” that “senseless buzzing of being, consciousness without subjectivity” (Alford 68).

However, though the demise of Kane signifies the first instance of the crew's anxiety regarding the anonymity of pure Being, the correlation between the alien and Levinas' *il y a* becomes even more pronounced when the latter is viewed as a fully grown entity. Following the infamous "birth scene," where the alien that bursts from Kane's stomach and escapes, the alien exists primarily in complete invisibility, using the ship's ventilators as a way to move from one end of the craft to the other unseen and relatively unheard. In this way the alien literally becomes inseparable from the ship *Nostramo* itself, its dark and glistening body almost indecipherable from the dimly lit corridors and damp walls of the spacecraft. To return to Levinas' description of the "there is," he uses the example of the child attempting to sleep while they can hear the rumbling presence of their parents downstairs, acutely aware that existence is progressing without their participation (Craig 17). As Megan Craig illustrates further, for "the child, this coincides with the frightening realization that when he closes his eyes to sleep, the world does not therefore sleep with him" (17). The child that perceives, but does not see his parents and therefore is aware of the unceasing presence of Being is not unlike the very presence of the alien that is actively perceived by the crew as they attempt to defend themselves. The prime example of this unseen presence comes when Dallas (Tom Skerritt) enters the ventilations units in order to kill the alien, the rest of the crew monitoring the alien's movement through a heat sensitive device. As with the death of the engineer Brett

(Harry Dean Stanton) the alien creature is only indirectly perceived up until the final moment when it attacks, moving silently, yet distinctly present throughout the airways. The alien haunts the crew more so as a presence, a phantom so that “there is the atmosphere of presence, which can, to be sure, appear later as a content, but originally is the impersonal, nonsubstantive even of the night and the *there is*” (EE 59). The alien is pure Being incarnate, a “field of forces” that can appear at any moment and negate subjectivity (EE 59).

It would be remiss to collapse the *Nostramo* crew’s fear of the alien with anxiety regarding death as the entity does not specifically kill its victims, but instead harvests them in cocoon like pods to serve as vessels for reproduction. According to Levinas, “the horror of the night, as an experience of the *there is*, does not then reveal to us a danger of death, nor even a danger of pain” (EE 58). The horror of the *il y a* is the very trepidation of being enveloped by Being and losing one’s subjectivity in undifferentiated existence. Following Ripley’s confrontation with Ash (Ian Holm), the android, she finds Dallas, presumed dead, encapsulated in an organic web almost indecipherable from the wall in which he is attached. Like Kane, his features are mystified by the alien cocoon and, although he is conscious, he is no longer in control of his existence. Returning to the analogy of the sleepless child who perceived existence carrying on without his participation, Will Buckingham claims that the feeling of the *il y a* is one where “as we toss and turn, we have no power over either ourselves or the world; it is as

if the night has seeped into us, as if we have lost our boundaries” (61). The boundaries of what made Dallas a singular existent are no longer discernible from the organic cocoon that sustains him so that he begs Ripley to kill him. As Levinas claims, to “kill, like to die, is to seek an escape from being, to go where freedom and negation operate,” so that in Dallas’ desire to die is precisely to escape the anonymity of pure existence that awaits him; he will be a conscious and unwitting participant in the creation of new life, but without any control over his existence (*EE* 56).

What the aforementioned discussion hopes to illuminate, far from merely reconceptualizing the numerous readings and interpretations of the film and the way in which it correlates with the Freudian primal scene as observed by Barbara Creed and other authors, is the way in which these traumatic encounters with undifferentiated being constitute a primordial experience with abjection that conditions the individual, namely Ellen Ripley, for future subjection to the Law. Though the break from pure existence, as with the separation from the ambiguous duality of the maternal body, is painful and violent it nevertheless institutes a primary response to otherness that is a comingling of fascination and repulsion. As mentioned earlier, Levinas likens the experience of the *il y a* to insomnia, a horror engendered by a persistent ambiguity at the heart of being and the realization that the world continues unabated beyond and in spite of the existent.

However, this feeling of insomnia, as C. Fred Alford explains, is not only described as a horror by Levinas, but as a “type of ‘ecstasy’ that is utterly open to otherness because it neither knows nor categorizes, but just is, waiting for nothing” (68). Alford continues by claiming that this insomnia cannot be totalized as merely fear, but is “on the border between heaven and hell, the two dimensions of autistic-contiguous experience,” so that the existent finds themselves both attracted and repulsed by the anonymity promised by pure existence (68). This study has already discussed the correlation between the infinity and alterity of the “there is” and that which comprises that of the face of the Other in order to argue that the experience of the *il y a*, an event of pure ambiguity, allows the existent to recognize the alterity of the Other and makes the transcendence achieved in the ethical encounter possible. Alford makes a similar point by claiming that the *il y a* is not the antithesis of the infinity that the existent finds in the face of the Other, but “too much infinity too close, too much inhuman otherness too close to the center of my existence: this is the source of the ‘there is’” (69). With this in mind the alterity that comprises the *il y a*, prior to the differentiation of being, becomes the primary experience of anonymity that prepares the existent for the ethical encounter by making alterity recognizable in much the same way as the experience of abjection makes the object relations possible.

As Kristeva writes in *Powers of Horror*, the “abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that

all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundations of its own being” (5). The feeling of abjection, as we have seen, is an encounter with an imaginary object that threatens the identity and subjectivity of the individual, harkening back to the anonymity experienced in the maternal womb. As Darieck Scott illustrates in *Extravagant Abjection*, this feeling is “experienced in the realm where the development of object relations is belayed or strays – thus preventing, even if only transiently, the subject from making its ‘normal’ appearance” (15). Prior to separating from their mother the infant is a subject-in-process, and subject/object relations are non-existent because the differentiating process has not yet taken place. The maternal body, as Freud has intimated, is the original “lost object,” and by way of separated with the maternal body the infant is able to differentiate and recognize other objects. As with the alterity of the *il y a* that makes the recognition of alterity possible, so too does the primordial experience of separation from the maternal body allow for existents to appear as others to the self.

With this in mind we can begin to see that the very metaphysical desire that Levinas argues compels the self to the Other, that draws the existent toward the infinity and alterity of the face, is precisely an experience of abjection. The face of the Other overflows the consciousness of the self, cleaving it from its being, and this experience, like abjection, is “the joint connecting an apotropaic gesture with a prehistoric legacy of pleasure” (Menninghaus 375). It is a feeling

of jouissance that “transcends ‘desire’ and its objects” and transcends the binary of “symmetrical pleasure-unpleasure opposition” (376). The loss of undifferentiated being, which is essentially the loss of the originary object that is the maternal body, is essentially what the self experiences in the ethical encounter, a feeling of abjection and jouissance that is related to the primordial experience of alterity and which structures all imaginary relationships between subject and object. More importantly, as Kristeva argues, abjection “preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be – maintaining that night in which the outline of the signified thing vanishes and where only the imponderable affect is carried out” (*PH* 10). Both the experience of non-being and of separating from the maternal body are “preserved” psychically in the mind of the existent, internalized as an object of the ego and it is this very transference of the originary lost object that is targeted by the Law.

### 3.3 The Phallic Mother as Ideal Projection

Following Ridley Scott’s original production, James Cameron’s sequel *Aliens* (1986) opens approximately fifty-seven years following Ellen Ripley’s (Sigourney Weaver) escape from the ill-fated *Nostramo* and the alien life form that besieged the spacecraft. Ripley, the lone human survivor from the previous film, wakes from a preserved state of hyper sleep, not unlike the beginning of the previous installment, to find that her employer, the ominous Weyland-Yutani



Corporation, finds her account of what occurred on the *Nostramo* highly unbelievable and extremely suspect. Furthermore, following a lengthy review by the corporation, Ripley's employers seemingly completely disregard the existence of the alien creature until they receive a transmission that their terraforming colony on LV-426 is under attack and have no other recourse but to discharge a task force of colonial marines, guided by Ripley, in order to counter an alien invasion. The opening sequence of Cameron's film, which shows Ripley suffering from nightmares regarding her traumatic encounter on the *Nostramo* and ridiculed as the ultimate cause of its destruction by way of negligence, initiates a thematic structure that resonates throughout the trajectory of the narrative; Ripley's particular experience of abjection in the primordial milieu has created a situation where she has internalized the imaginary abject object as an extension of the ego and become emotionally attached to her inability, or more precisely her lack of ability to save her former crew. This comingling of lack and guilt that Ripley feels toward the lost object is precisely what power, represented within the film by way of the Weyland-Yutani Corporation, targets in order to subject Ripley to the form of maternity embodied by the phallic Alien Queen.

In "A Child is Being Eaten" Terrence Holt identifies the prevailing sentiment of the scholarship directed at Cameron's *Aliens*, arguing that the surplus of overt sexuality presented throughout the film, both masculine and feminine, that the Alien Queen exhibits, complete with "spiky foreparts, modeled apparently

after a praying mantis,” illustrates her role as the phallic mother within the film (224). As mentioned throughout this discussion the Alien Queen, in all the forms she embodies within the *Alien* franchise, has customarily been viewed as a figure representing a surplus phallicism and rampant sexuality, symbolizing the embodiment of unchecked and chaotic nature and the very destructive femininity that must be conquered by the technological advances of a patriarchal society. The extremely violent images of the Alien Queen, composed of numerous tentacles, flailing appendages, and a phallic mouth, that abound in Cameron’s production leave little doubt that the excessively virile and reproductive maternal body coincides with Freud’s conception of the phallic mother observed in “Medusa’s Head” where the “head with its hair of writhing snakes represented the terrifying genitals of the mother” (Creed *Alien* 132).

However, though Holt is indeed correct that the Alien Queen embodies the necessary traits to be labeled the phallic mother, it is incorrect to assume that, as this study illustrated in regards to the body of the monster, that this is merely a negative entity that serves to reinforce Ellen Ripley’s identity as the ideal mother by representing the abject qualities that must be expelled. In “Monstrous Mothers: Medusa, Grendel, and Now Alien” Linda K. Bundtzen argues that Cameron’s film seeks to showcase the duality of motherhood by way of emphasizing the contrast between the “instinctual and biological in the Alien, and the conscious, chosen, cultural motherhood of Ripley” (15). The Alien Queen, according to Bundtzen,

represents the phallic mother that exists on the fringes of the symbolic register, and is “represented as completely out of bounds, beyond civilizations controlling institutions,” whereas Ripley, more importantly, “chooses to mother; she is not programmed as female by nature to nurture other” (16). Indeed Ripley is not “programed” by nature so that she may be a nurturing mother, but programmed specifically by the representations of power within the film so that she may dutifully perform the role of the form of maternity prescribed by the Law. More precisely, the Alien Queen is specifically a perfectly totalized image of maternity, an ideologically saturated image imbued with overtly horrific traits that must be abjected, yet also structured as a figure possessing elements of motherhood that Ripley must perform. The following will illustrate that there are essential differences between the archaic mother, which is associated with the primordial milieu of undifferentiated being that must be abjected, and the phallic mother which is a patriarchal construction of maternity. The psychic internalization of the archaic mother as the lost object is precisely what the Law targets in order to produce the phallic mother, an Absolute Subject of maternity that is used to subject the maternal body. The Weyland-Yutani Corporation codes Ripley as lacking and subjects her to this totalized form of maternity, the phallic Alien Queen, so that she may become an instrument of phallic power within the patriarchal society.

Ripley's awakening from hyper sleep at the beginning of the film fifty-seven years subsequent to the events on the *Nostramo*, though it mirrors her arrival in Ridley Scott's original installment, neither denotes the rebirth of a new subject nor another representation of the primal scene as envisioned in the previous film. Instead, Ripley's emergence in Cameron's *Aliens* on the Weyland-Yutani Corporation station signifies the duality of existent conceptualized by Emmanuel Levinas and the events leading up to the rescue mission illustrate the precise point of the internalization of the lost object into the ego that signals the initial stages of subjection. The way in which Ripley awakens from her state of hyper sleep and takes part in material existence immediately harkens back to Levinas' conception of hypostasis in *Existence and Existents*, that transitional period subsequent to the experience of the "there is," or anonymous pure being. In Levinas' depiction of hypostasis there is "not only an enchainment to a character or to instincts, but a silent association with oneself in which a duality is discernible (*EE* 89). In hypostasis the existent, though not yet a subject, takes up a nominal position distinct from the *il y a* or mere existence, so that there is an identifiable otherness between the I and the ego (*EE* 89).

As Aniruddha Chowdhury explains in *Post-Deconstructive Subjectivity and History*, there is a "double movement" that occurs in hypostasis where the "subject has the dual character of having, through hypostasis, mastery over existence and a being burdened with the weight of existence" so that the "duality

or even paradox of the hypostatized subject lies in the fact that the subject cannot detach itself from itself” (63). Though the subject takes up a provisional nominal position in the face of the anonymity of the “there is,” this task is ongoing because the *il y a* constantly threatens to engulf the subject and “the ego, in its participation in the *there is*, remains enchained to its existence” (63-4). As Chowdhury illustrates the ego is inextricably linked to existence itself, so that when the “I” takes its provisional position it does so by cleaving itself in two, or becoming a subject other to itself. Tina Chanter explains that the “I – a provisional I, as we shall see, finds itself attached to being, unable to get away from itself, unable to jump over its own shadow...It is free, but its freedom is both limited (it has to exist, its contract with existence is irrevocable) and available to exploitation by others” (“Introduction” 13).

Despite the fact that Ripley awakens from hyper sleep at the beginning of Cameron’s film and takes part in menial tasks before leaving for the terraforming colony on LV-426, these material enjoyments do not signify the emergence of a subject, but an existent in a state of hypostasis, little more than a provisional existent vacillating between a conscious and unconscious state. As Elisabeth Louise Thomas illustrates in *Emmanuel Levinas: Ethics, Justice and the Human Beyond Being*, hypostasis, as we have seen, is that contradictory period where the existent is little more than an interval or a place that denotes the very difference between unconsciousness and consciousness (38). Levinas claims that during this

period there is “the localisation of consciousness” (*EE* 69), and “an instance of a folding back or doubling,” the ego perceived as a definite object of self-reflection that is separate, yet attached to the self (Thomas 37). We can clearly see the duality of Ripley’s existence in the way in which the film structures her character in the opening sequences of the film. She is plagued by nightmares of what occurred on the *Nostramo* in an unconscious state, the incessant flow of pure existence always threatening to overcome her nominal existence even in a conscious and waking state as a cargo-loader for the Weyland-Yutani Corporation. Though she takes up a tentative position as a provisional “I,” she cannot fully escape from the horrific separation experienced in the previous film, an experience she constantly relives internally as an object of the ego. Most importantly, what we are privy to in Ripley’s dual existence is the realization that the experience of abjection encountered in the primal milieu constitutes an essential part of her being, a portion of her psyche that engenders a type of self-loathing and guilt that prepares her for subjection.

As discussed at length previously, the experience of the *il y a*, that which is intricately linked to the ego of existent, is comparable to that of Kristeva’s formulation of abjection as something horrific and ambiguous, an imaginary object that doesn’t respect boundaries and must be expelled in order for the existent to take up a position as a self. The memory of the trauma onboard the *Nostramo* manifests itself in Ripley primarily as guilt and self-loathing, and her

mundane occupation as a cargo-loader is portrayed as a repetitive attempt to distance herself from the experience. To return briefly to the concept of the abject, Kristeva writes that “it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject” (*PH* 5). The similarities between the realization that the abject constitutes an essential element of the self and the constant threat of the return of the “there is,” that arrives in exhaustion are striking. More importantly, Kristeva writes:

The abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundations of its own being. There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded. (*PH* 5)

The primal scene, or the maternal body, is expelled solely so that the subject may differentiate itself as a subject, yet this very loss of the primordial milieu is internalized within the psyche and contributes to the very subjective makeup of the existent. As Winfried Menninghaus explains, Kristeva’s theory of self-abjection is the recognition of the abject within, that it is the other within the individual itself that, not only makes objects relations possible, but also includes the point where “the subject repudiates nothing other than its origin and its own (non)being in the maternal body” (375). Self-abjection is precisely the realization

that the imaginary abject object is inseparable from the self that leads to loathing and alienation (Moruzzi 144-5).

Ripley, as we seen in the preliminary points of Cameron's film, constantly attempts to combat her feelings of self-abjection by taking up menial tasks such as becoming a cargo loader that reinforce her nominal position as a self. As Howard Caygill describes in *Levinas and the Political* the hypostatic state is characterized by “‘the activity of inactivity,’ but not understood as a paradox or contradiction in which activity negates activity, but as the modal ‘movement in rest’” (63). Hypostasis denotes that period of materiality before the ethical encounter where the existent denotes the tension between the “there is” and ethical subjectivity, comprised of material enjoyment and labour (63). Ripley's existence at the beginning of the film is precisely a representation of this event or tension; she lives in a perennial state of fatigue, haunted by dreams of her traumatic encounter with Being, only to constantly renew her nominal position through material tasks (Joldersma 46). In the beginning of the film Ripley is in a constant state of self-abjection, a hypostatic state where she is merely a substance, a placeholder that is removed from the abject horror of the “there is,” her primordial milieu, but who stands in proximity to it as well so that it haunts her constantly, and, more importantly, becomes the very object targeted by power by placing a prohibition on the abject object itself.



As mentioned earlier, in the initial sequences of Cameron's film, Ripley is condemned by the Weyland-Yutani Corporation, the result of which is she is blamed for the death of her crew on the *Nostramo* and, more importantly, her pilot's license revoked. The removal of Ripley's license by the corporation, due to the fact that it is linked to events in space onboard her previous vessel, is essentially a prohibition placed on the return to the ambiguity indicative of pure experience and the maternal womb. As we have seen, the loss of her crew and her initial encounter with the alien life form is internalized as the originary lost object, the figure of the alien therefore serving as the Lacanian *objet a*, a "conceptual placeholder for the object that, in psychical terms, is inaccessible" and that which "represents what cannot be attained" that the subject nevertheless continually desires (Pettigrew 257). The alien life form signifies nothing intrinsic yet it is linked to Ripley's memory of a past life so that, as the *objet a* it is "represented by a memory trace, that is, it is symbolized, recorded into the register of signifiers" (Leikert 11). The prohibition placed on the existence of the alien life forms by the Weyland-Yutani Corporation gives imaginary resonance to the *objet a* and with it creates the "fantasy of symbiotic completion" and "figured as the proper object of Symbolic recognition" (Rosen-Carole 91-2). Though their existence is denied in the earlier portions of the film, Ripley continually attests to the existence of the alien life forms because they have been shaped into a symbolic representation of her legitimacy as a subject. The ideological apparatus that is the corporation

retroactive constructs Ripley's lost object so that it is embodied by the alien life forms and, in doing so, reterritorializes her desire in a way that allows her to be subjected.

As Judith Butler illustrates in *The Psychic Life of Power*, the prohibition placed on the lost object, be it homosexual desire as in her formulation or a return to the wholeness of the maternal body, does not result in the total abjection of the imaginary object, but "the incorporation of the attachment as identification, where identification becomes a magical, a psychic form of preserving the object" (134). Butler continues by adding that this "melancholic identification permits the loss of the object in the external world precisely because it provides a way to preserve the object as part of the ego and, hence, to avert the loss as a complete loss" (134). Though Butler is correct, I would add that the subject is assuaged, not only by the retention of the object within the psychic reserve, but the way in which the Law overlays the lost object with that of an imaginary identity in the symbolic register that offers the promise of completeness. This mirror image that is posited by ideology, as it pertains to identification and subject formation, is deeply specular, meaning that when confronted with the object the subject encounters a symbolic reiteration of the originary lost object and misrecognizes itself in the image. The Law targets this memory, the loss of the maternal body and archaic mother, precisely because it serves as an intense feeling of abjection that both terrifies and offers the false promise of wholeness.

Ripley's internalization of the lost imaginary object, specifically the primordial maternal body, and the melancholy that this procedure engenders conditions her to turn to Law, not only because her self-abjection and guilt makes interpellation possible, but because the Big Other of Lacanian discourse seemingly holds the promise of wholeness and symbolic recognition. As we have seen, the Law functions according to prohibition, specifically in this instance the prohibition against returning to the ambiguity of the maternal body. To return to the parallel of homosexual melancholy, Butler intimates that subsequent to the designation of homosexual desire as an internalized object of the psyche, society requires the renunciation of such desire in order to establish the normality of heterosexual desire (*PLP* 142-3). In this way, according to Butler, homosexual desire is retained, but only as an object of renunciation so that, paradoxically, gender is precisely the performance of the prohibition against homosexual desire.

As Butler explains further:

...masculine gender is formed from the refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love; a feminine gender is formed (taken on, assumed) through the incorporative fantasy by which the feminine is excluded as a possible object of love, an exclusion never grieved, but "preserved" through heightened feminine identification. (*PLP* 146)

Butler's position on homosexual renunciation posits that the "straight man *becomes* (mimes, cites, appropriates, assumes the status of) the man he 'never' loved and 'never' grieved" (145). The implication here is that the very innocence

that the subject performs in front of the Law is an exhibition of the law prohibiting homosexual desire. With this in mind, the very thing that the law abjects, that which threatens the stability of the symbolic register, is the very thing the subject must perform in order to be recognized within the representation economy (*PLP* 145). Butler's treatise on the performance of homosexual prohibition has interesting implications when viewed in light of maternity, specifically the progression of Ripley as a maternal-subject-in-process.

As we have seen in previous chapters, according to Lacan's formulation of sexuation, women are defined specifically according to their apparent lack in relation to the phallus. From the onset of Cameron's production *Ripley* is coded as a feminine subject, not because of her morphology, but because she is perceived as lacking; she is defined by the loss of her crew, her pilot's license, and her apparent mental instability that is seen as a threat to the patriarchal institutions around her. Because she is intricately linked to the shadowy figure of the alien race as the only human to have apparently encountered the life form and lived, she is a constant reflection of the impotency of the male subjects around her and, coincidentally, the potency of the alien life form. With this in mind, when the alien presence is no longer doubted and Ripley is given the opportunity to join the colonial marines in their attempt to rescue colonists on the terraforming community on LV-426 she is literally performing the very disavowed connection with her previous encounter with alien. As with Butler's formulation of the way in

which masculinity must perform the very prohibition against homosexuality by performing the role of the male subject they are barred from loving, Ripley must perform the role of the phallic Alien Queen, essentially the very alien life form whose existence was prohibited.

According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, the phallic mother is a phantasmatic figure retroactively posited by the child following the mother's lack of a penis that serves paradoxically as both a projection embodying the fear of castration and the promise that the phallus can be regained (Cornell *BWG* 52). As Drucilla Cornell illustrates in *Between Women & Generations* this "identification of the lack of the mother as the lack of the phallus promoted the fantasy object of the phallic mother as one of the many responses to the child's anguish over separation" (52). The phallic mother, the fantasy image of the maternal body prior to symbolic castration, is in possession of the phallus, on many occasions depicted as literally swallowing or consuming it, so that she on one level reflects the male infant's fear of castration due to the fact that she is in possession of a displaced and reintegrated phallus that is typically viewed as previously belonging to the father. In this way, the "male child may further fantasize that the mother has orally castrated the father and thereby augmented her own power with that of the paternal penis," inciting the fear that the mother might castrate the son as well (Gabbard and Gabbard 295).

However, the son's response to the phantasmatic phallic mother is essentially two-fold, due to the fact that she is construed as an element of unencumbered femininity, but also "a defense against castration anxiety that is aroused in the boy by his awareness of the absence of a maternal penis" (Spiro 118). Estelle Barrett argues in *Kristeva Reframed*, the phallic mother who is without lack is a fantasy of wholeness before symbolic castration and therefore exists outside of the symbolic register, a projection stemming from the primal scene who orients desire in regards to the infant (35). The fear that is engendered by the phallic mother is due to the fact that she threatens to destabilize the boundaries of identity by collapsing the symbolic register and the order of meaning and therefore is something that is necessarily abjected by the infant and exists on the margins of the symbolic, providing a foundation for meaning (Oliver *SWS* 60). The phallic mother is inarguably a fantasy of wholeness, but relegating her to the role of a negative image outside of the symbolic register is problematic, initially because it collapses the figure of the phallic maternal body with that of the archaic mother.

Traditionally the phallic mother has been consistently appropriated as a representation of unencumbered and destructive femininity, seemingly something to be feared due to the fact, as Butler illustrates in *Bodies That Matter*, she exemplifies "the negative fate of the phallus when attached to the feminine position" (102). However, as Justyna Sempruch makes clear, echoing the

sentiments of Barbara Creed, it is actually the archaic mother that “represents a terrifying fantasy of sexual difference, while the phallic mother is a comforting fantasy of sexual sameness” (66). According to Sempruch the archaic mother is that phantasmatic entity that serves as the “maternal figure of the pre-Oedipal semiotic,” whereas, as I would argue, the phallic mother is precisely the symbolic maternal figure filtered through the prism of patriarchy (66). It is the archaic mother that engenders fear because, as Barbara Creed illustrates, the “womb, even if represented negatively, is a greater threat than the mother’s phallus,” due to the fact that it emanates with power that is outside the symbolic and beyond the phallus, always threatening to swallow and destabilize (*Alien* 133). Therefore, the archaic mother can be associated more with the anonymous existence linked to the maternal womb discussed earlier in this chapter. She is precisely that which must be expelled in order to enter into the Symbolic Order and be recognized as a subject.

The phallic mother on the other hand is “the oral-sadistic mother, because they have been refigured from within the oedipal narrative, and thus can be rendered safe and more easily contained” (Starks 139). With this in mind it is not difficult to see that the archaic mother, the maternal body that exists in the semiotic and prior to castration, is precisely that lost object, the imaginary object or originary wholeness that is prohibited by the Law. As with Judith Butler’s illustration of homosexual prohibition, the archaic mother is internalized,

preserved by the ego and the subject forced to perform that very prohibition. However, though the archaic mother resides in the psychic reserve, it is precisely the phallic mother, the mother of the symbolic imbued with the phallus, that is posited by the Law as the fantasy object that offers the false promise of wholeness. According to Barbara Johnson in *Mother Tongues: Sexuality, Trials, Motherhood, Translation*, the phallic mother is “the ideal that everyone wants the mother to live up to, the ideal of perfect reciprocity, perfect knowledge, total response” (87). Furthermore, and most importantly, it “is not that people *know* that that is what they want, but that they suddenly notice they have lost something, and that if ‘castration’ is the name for that loss, the phallic mother must have once existed” (87). The important distinction between the archaic and phallic mother is precisely that the former represents unencumbered femininity and an unsymbolizable wholeness prior to castration, whereas the phallic mother, imbued with the phallus, signifies absence and lack. As Diane Jonte-Pace notes in “Situating Kristeva Differently: Psychoanalytic Readings of Woman and Religion,” Lacan’s conception of the phallic mother is in fact a “de-gendering of the archaic mother” which results in rendering maternity as absence “through association with the penis/phallus that erases her gender” due to the fact that the phallus “signifies the *false* sense of unity, fullness, reality, or presence in signification” (19). The phallic mother is a representation of absence and castration precisely because she is in possession of the phallus, the very imaginary



object that the female lacks. Therefore, the phallic mother is a distortion of the archaic mother, a phantasmatic projection of wholeness achieved through association and subjection to the phallus.

The phallic mother is a paradoxical figure precisely because she embodies characteristics that are both sanctioned and feared by the Law; she represents a chaotic force and unchecked femininity, yet a powerful reproductive tool in the service of patriarchy. The abject qualities of the Alien Queen, her horrific and ambiguous morphology and her predilection towards violence and destruction, are the very things that the Law retains in the image of the phallic mother in order to make the image recognizable to the subject. What draws Ripley to the Alien Queen is precisely the feeling of abjection first experienced onboard the *Nostromo*; the threat to autonomy and masculinity that the phallic queen represents are the very things that Ripley was forced to abject in the initial film. The very qualities of the archaic mother are demonized in the figure of the phallic mother, a perfect symbol of evil and destruction, yet an entity that is undoubtedly whole and an object of desire for patriarchy that it wishes to control. Though the Alien Queen is undoubtedly feared, she is constantly referred to throughout the film as a perfect biological organism, a reflection of everything that Ripley, as a female coded as lacking, does not have. The Weyland-Yutani Corporation, though it fears the reproductive and destructive nature of the alien race, nevertheless is more concerned in each of the films, not merely to capture a specimen, but to

create an ideal version under its control. The Alien Queen, the phallic mother, as we see later in Jean-Pierre Jeunet's final installment, *Alien Resurrection* (1997), is apprehend precisely so that she may breed a more powerful alien offspring to be used as biological weapons. This is the operation of power that is evident in the film; in symbolizing the ambiguity of the archaic mother it creates a horrific picture of monstrous violence, yet makes clear the very desired traits that the subject must embody. As a maternal figure and as a biological weapon the Alien Queen is essentially infallible, caring for her offspring with a preternatural predilection for the practice of mothering that is unequalled. Throughout the films the Alien Queen is posited as an Absolute Subject, not because her reproductive capabilities are not feared, but because it enables the representations of power to justify the disciplining of Ripley that will ensure the production of a subject under patriarchal control. In what follows this discussion will focus predominantly on the production of identity as it pertains to the projection of an Absolute Subject and, more importantly, the role this image plays, not only in subjection, but in the ethical encounter as well.

### 3.4 The Genealogy of the Image

This discussion has already focused on Michel Foucault's treatment of discursive power formations as they function in regards to the production of sexuality and gender, specifically the tradition of the Christian pastoral and its emphasis exposing the truth of one's self, in order to illustrate how the scene of

the confessional delineated in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* parallels Emmanuel Levinas' characterization of the radical passivity and exposure of the interiority of the self to the unknowable Other in the ethical encounter. The precedent that Foucault exposes in the description of the Christian pastoral, namely of the impetus of the individual to expose the truth of their being to power working immanently through religious and juridical institutions through the filtering of internal desires through the prism of preestablished codes of identity, establishes the first and initial movement of what Foucault labels the "deployment of sexuality" (*HS* 20-1). As Foucault notes, "toward the beginning of the eighteenth century, there emerged a political, economic, and technical incitement to talk about sex" that transitioned from the religious mode of the confessional to the secular realm of "analysis, stocktaking, classification, and specification, of quantitative or causal studies" (*HS* 24).

As Foucault explains, the mechanism of power was focused primarily in four areas, namely the "hysterization of women's bodies, the pedagogization of children's sex, the socialization of procreative behavior, and the psychiatrization of perverse pleasure" (*HS* 104-5). What Foucauldian discourse locates in the eighteenth-century is the origins of a burgeoning form of biopower in the State's growing preoccupation with birth rates, childhood sexuality, and familial relations, where there was a significant increase of the discourse on sexuality in all of its forms that worked to establish specific modes of sexuality that would

subsequently be used to interpret all forms of possible being. Extensive analysis of sexuality in the eighteenth-century leads to perceived knowledge of the interior life of citizens, therefore establishing sex as a casual factor in behavior.

However, despite the fact that Foucault alludes to how the acquisition through legal and medical observation and analysis provides an example of the initial movement where sex was deployed as a means to gain knowledge of the subject, he claims that the utilization of sex by discursive power has a second trajectory. Foucault claims that “it is through sex – in fact, an imaginary point determined by the deployment of sexuality – that each individual has to pass in order to have access to his own intelligibility” and “to the whole of his body” (*HS* 155). As stated in the conclusion of *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* the “notion of ‘sex’ made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures...as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning, a secret to be discovered everywhere” (154). Foucault treatise on the invention of the homosexual as a constructed identity serves as merely one example of the way in which sex becomes a discursively produced essence that is made exterior through forms of observation and analysis. The homosexual is an identity constructed from a number of behaviors and characteristics synthesized into a singular, yet imaginary identity that serves as a point of reference in the symbolic register.

In this way power focuses on a plethora, if not infinite amount, of possible potentialities and coordinates them into a coherent principle of identity that is above all socially intelligible. The only way in which a subject can be adequately recognized within the representational economy is to perform the behaviors attributed to a specific principle of identity. As Judith Butler illustrates in “Sexual Inversions” the “category of ‘sex’ thus establishes a principle of intelligibility for human beings, which is to say that no human being can be taken as human, can be recognized *as* human, unless that human being is fully and coherently marked by sex,” or, more importantly, adequately achieves that sex through ritualized performance (90).

This reified identity that is an assemblage of virtual potentialities territorialized into a static representation of principle identity is posited as an Absolute Subject that ideology uses to interpellate individuals. Consider Louis Althusser’s landmark text on ideological interpellation, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” where the author claims that “ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects...before its birth, the child therefore is always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is ‘expected’ once it has been conceived (1357). Using the example of Christian ideology in the formation of identity, Althusser goes on to argue that the way in which Christianity has instituted God

as “the Subject *par excellence*” reveals the specular nature of ideological interpellation (1359). As Althusser explains further:

We observe that the structure of ideology, interpellating individuals as subjects in the name of a Unique and Absolute Subject is *specular*. i.e. a mirror-structure, and *doubly* specularly: this mirror duplication is constitute of ideology and ensures its functioning. Which means that all ideology is centered, that the Absolute Subject occupies the unique place of the Centre, and interpellates around it the infinity of individuals into subjects in a double mirror-connexion such that it *subjects* the subjects to the Subject...(1359)

If we recall Butler’s discussion of Althusser in *The Psychic Life of Power* we see that this process of subject formation involves a “turning back” on oneself that is in actuality a “turning toward” the Law (*PLP* 115). As Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg explains the “act of turning is in fact specular: it occurs in a scene of conversion as recognition” where the subject recognizes itself identified in a moment of “reciprocal identification” with the Absolute Subject of the Law (7-8). The Law produces, or rather duplicates a reified subject, to which the individual misrecognizes himself or herself in and subsequently subjects themselves to it (Ferretter 90). The subject misrecognizes themselves in the territorialized identity posited by ideology and dutifully performs the normative behaviors that it represents, characteristics that are sanctioned by the Law itself.

To return to our discussion of maternity, the most profound and prolific Absolute Subject of femininity and motherhood posited by discursive power formations is that of the figure of the Virgin Mary, a construct that is the focus of

Julia Kristeva's piece, "Stabat Mater." Early in the text Kristeva identifies the way in which Western society has perpetuated a succession of images, the most abundant being the Virgin Mother, that restrict the multiplicity of female identity into reified representations, illustrating how women can only enter into the symbolic register and be recognized with the phallogentric economy by becoming mothers (133). More importantly, Kristeva illustrates how the figure of the Virgin Mary represents a totalizing image of maternity that is both secular and transcendent, a phantasmatic construction that "is not so much an idealized primitive mother as an idealization of the – unlocalizable *relationship* between her and us, an idealization of primary narcissism" (133). As Andrew P. Wilson explains Kristeva's primary narcissism "refers to that indefinite point of initial separation of infant child from mother and represents the passage from the semiotic to the symbolic realm" so that the transcendent figure of the Virgin Mary "appears to provide clear and safe passage back to 'primary narcissism'" (32).

In this way Kristeva establishes two crucial components of maternal subject formation that bear on our particular discussion: initially the figure of the Virgin Mary, a transcendent image that is linked to the divinity of Christ yet profoundly immanent in her figure as a mother, that epitomizes the "qualities of the desired woman and the holy mother in a totality perfect as it was inaccessible" ("Stabat" 139-41). Secondly, and arguably more important to this particular discussion, is the fact that the maternal subject is produced in the gap between the

very real maternal experiences of the mother and the idealized project that is inaccessible, yet desired due to the fact that it is a concentrated image of wholeness and unity. As Allison Weir illustrates in “Identification with the Divided Mother” the figure of the Virgin Mary “served to appease – to foreclose – the desire for the return to the mother, while ensuring both men’s and women’s identification with the patriarchal order” so that “it is not the mother herself but our memory of the relationship to her – the phantasied relationship of primary narcissism – which is idealized in our ‘consecrated’ representation of motherhood” (80-1). The Absolute Subject of maternity that is the Virgin Mary serves to foreclose the return to the mother precisely by reterritorializing it onto the image of the ideal mother, which offers the promise of a primordial unity with the archaic mother. This is accomplished through the creation of a masculine ideal of femininity that contributes to the subjection of women to an unobtainable ideal.

Kristeva’s formulation of the Virgin Mary as the idealized projection of primary narcissism that reterritorializes material experience into an ideal fantasy provides an apt framework for viewing the way the forced transition from woman to mother in patriarchal society. The very same trajectory of subjection to an idealized projection can be seen in the figure of the phallic mother, traditionally an image of fear, which nevertheless becomes the very masquerade that must be performed for mothers to become “true” or “real” maternal figures. As we have seen the phallic mother, not unlike Foucault’s homosexual, is the result of a



causal logic that attributes certain ideal and heteronormative characters to a unifying principle of identity. This causal logic is not dissimilar to the way in which sex is established as an interior essence that unifies the performed actions of a given individual that forms the basis of Judith Butler's "heterosexual matrix" which is the "assemblage of norms that serves the particular end of producing subjects whose gender/sex/desire all *cohere* in certain ways" in order to be culturally intelligible (Chambers and Carver 144). For Butler, as established in *Gender Trouble*, gender identity is a ritualized performance of previously established heteronormative ideals of behavior so that "the 'coherence' and 'continuity' of 'the person' are not logical or analytical features of personhood, but, rather, socially institute and maintained norms of intelligibility" and "assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality" (*GT* 17). Most importantly, the heterosexual matrix is not only possible because of a heterosexual ideal that is posited by power, but due to the fact that "certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist' – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not 'follow' from either sex or gender" (*GT* 17). Coherent identities such as masculine and heterosexual can only exist as normative principles because they are the antithesis of repressed symbolically identities such as feminine and homosexual that define the former through an imposed binary opposition (*GT* 77). In this way power posits an ideal model of identity encompassing a multiplicity of potential identities, but this very

model is made possible and recognizable in contrast to the unintelligible identities that are foreclosed by society. Therefore, the heteronormative ideal is always a comingling of allowed and foreclosed possibilities collapsed into one model.

Returning to our original discussion, it becomes clear that maternal bodies are subjected to the same causal logic of determinacy and matrix of intelligibility as sexual or gender identities. In the same vein as Foucault and Butler, Jon Simons, in “Foucault’s Mother,” extends Butler’s heterosexual matrix in order to arrive at what he terms the “maternal matrix,” an imaginary and ordering principle that relies on the following actualities:

(1) female anatomy; (2) desire to bear children; (3) preference for reproduction in secure heterosexual setting; (4) propensity and ability to rear children; (5) caring orientation to others; (6) predilection for domestic issues; (7) prioritization of children.  
(199)

As we have seen in previous chapters, according to Lacan’s conception of sexuation, women are defined by their lack and due to this maternity, as alluded to earlier, has traditionally been seen as a way in which for women to be recognized within the Symbolic Order, the child seen as a penis substitute that compensates for the absence of the phallus (Irigaray *TSWNO*). As with Butler’s formulation of the binary opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality, queer or adoptive maternal bodies, which are customarily rendered as infertile and defective, mark the existence of the prohibition that makes the coherence of the maternal matrix possible in the symbolic register.

As Butler states in regards to the prohibition against homosexual desire: for “heterosexuality to remain intact as a distinct social form, it requires an intelligible conception of homosexuality and also requires the prohibition of that conception in rendering it culturally unintelligible” (*GT* 77). This sentiment can be applied to the binary logic established between biologically reproductive bodies and adoptive maternal subjects, where the latter is structured as incoherent within the symbolic register due to the pronatalist paradigm’s reliance on female morphology. Postnatal representations of maternity are restricted to essentially two models of maternal identity, the “good” and “bad” mother, each encapsulating a multiplicity of identities in a singular representation that work in tandem to justify the subjection of all maternal bodies. As with Butler’s conception of causal logic, Simon’s “maternal matrix” works by establishing clearly delineated lines between biologically reproductive bodies and adoptive maternal bodies. As Shelley M. Park illustrates:

Because an adoptive maternal body lacks the obvious bodily connections to her children that ground a traditional conception of motherhood as based on a natural (and also, it is sometimes alleged, instinctual) bond, adoptive mothers are, *qua* mothers, deviant. The experience of adoptive mothering, thus, differs both phenomenologically and narratively from that of gestational and genetic mothers. (61)

Whereas, as Kristeva has identified, femininity is always subsumed under the identity of maternity, which in turn is then restricted to the cult of the Virgin Mary, maternal bodies are further subjected to a continuation of ideological

interpellation by being stratified as biological, or real mothers, or adoptive, and therefore bad mothers.

With this in mind, this is precisely why the phallic mother represents the ideologically saturated image in which all maternal bodies, real or adoptive, are subjected. The phallic mother, as we have seen, is not dissimilar from the Virgin Mary in that it is a projection of a patriarchal fantasy. As a deformation of the archaic mother it becomes the very unifying principle that the maternal subject must perform in order to be recognized within the phallogocentric economy. As with Butler's theory of homosexual prohibition, where the male repudiates the very "lost" love of the man he never encountered which subsequently forces him to perform that very ideal of masculinity, maternal bodies, both biological and adoptive, are formed through the prohibition of the original figure of the archaic mother (*PLP* 132-7). This identification with the phallic mother is a misrecognition that leads to subjection primarily because, like the Virgin Mary, the phallic mother is precisely that which is impossible and cannot exist. The phallic mother, as we have seen, represents a level of biological reproduction and virility that is wholly unobtainable. Nevertheless, it is precisely the desire to become the phallic mother, a subject without lack that leads to observation and optimization of maternal bodies by reproductive technologies.

Furthermore, the figure of the phallic mother represents a crucial paradigm for viewing the ways in which the maternal body is constructed within patriarchal

society precisely because she encapsulates performative mothering as well. The ideological deployment of maternity has essentially two movements that work to establish maternal bodies as lacking in order to perpetuate continual subordination. In one movement, the identity of the maternal body is limited to a range of embodied traits such as the biologically reproductive body, which is mobilized in one instance in order to establish adoptive or queer mothers as abject and at the same time justify the technological optimization of female reproduction. Secondly, power working through specific institutions posits the figure of the Child in order to incorporate and reterritorialize all the possible identities of the mother, both adoptive and biological, following gestation by defining maternity as a set of ritualized practices performed in an ethical relationship between mother and child. This movement extends the “good” and “bad” mother binary beyond biological reproduction so that it take *the behavior and identity of the child as the principle point that distinguishes the nature of the mother*. As Susan Chase and Mary Rogers illustrate:

We all know the ideal of the good mother. Above all, she is selfless. Her children come before herself and any other need or person or commitment, no matter what. She loves her children unconditionally yet she is careful not to smother them with her love and her own needs. She follows the advice of doctors and other experts and she educates herself about child development. (qtd. in Longhurst 117)

It is not difficult to see how maternity resonates with Levinas’ conception of the ethical encounter *par excellence* as a figure who approaches the child with radical

passivity and exposure, and, more importantly, is defined as a subject precisely by way of their infinite responsibility to the Other. As Chase and Rogers explain the “good mother’s success is reflected in her children’s behavior – they are well mannered and respectful to others; at the same time they have a strong sense of independence and self-esteem. They grow up to be productive citizens” (qtd. in Longhurst 117). The statement that the success of the mother is dependent on the behavior of the child is correct, but I would argue further that the identity of the maternal body relies on the Law’s recognition of the child so that the “ideal Child” becomes a component of that unifying principle that directs the behavior of the maternal body.

The maternal body is not only subjected to a totalized image of motherhood that is a reified ideal encompassing a multitude of possible experiences and attributes that are wholly unobtainable, but a similar projection in the form of the Child. In his book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* Lee Edelman claims that non-heteronormative bodies are subjected to what the author refers to throughout the text as reproductive futurism, delineating that the fantasmatic figure of the Child frames political discourse in a way that establishes a binary where “*queerness* names the side of those *not* ‘fighting for the children.’” (2-3). For Edelman the Child “has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust,” becoming synonymous with the ideal future and freedom of society, it

structures society according to those that do and do not adhere to the preservation of the figural Child (10-11). In this way the Child, like that of the Virgin Mary becomes that which structures all possible signification within the Symbolic Order, every action or performance attaining meaning in its relation to a figural image posited by power. Edelman argues that the power of queer sexuality lies in its ability to destabilize the fantasy of the Child through its ability to reject the idealized vision of the future and to expose how the figural Child is “more often than not employed as a cynical strategy – a shifting homophobic signifier – to give the orator a ‘moral’ advantage in condemnations of homosexuality” (Giffney 60). With this in mind the significance of the phallic mother as a patriarchal projection becomes even more pronounced. The phallic mother, as we see in horror films specifically such as *The Birds* and *Carrie* is that mother that will not allow their children to enter into the Symbolic Order, constantly trying to absorb them into the maternal womb. As we have seen in this discussion this is precisely due to the fact that the child must be recognized by the Law in order for the mother to speak within the phallogocentric economy. In this way the overbearing mother is merely trying to control and mold the identity of their child so that it may perform the very heteronormative role prescribed by the Law that will allow the maternal subject to be recognized.

There are two primary movements that signal Ripley’s attempts at embodying the phallic mother; the first is the infamous climax where she dawns

the cargo loading suit in order to challenge the Alien Queen and the second, which takes place in *Alien Resurrection*, where she is technologically modified in order to become reproductive. The first instance, where Ripley dons the exosuit in order to protect Newt from the Alien Queen, unabashedly signifies, what Bruce Isaacs has identified, as “Cameron’s protagonist-female metamorphoses into an organic/machinic hybrid through a symbiosis of organic and technological body” (234). As Isaacs continues, this harkens back to Ripley’s donning of the suit in the earlier portion of the film, both illustrating Ripley’s attempts at performing the masquerade for her male counterparts (234). The only way for Ripley to be recognized within the phallogocentric economy is to become the phallic mother herself by donning the suit and stripping the Alien Queen of her power by defeating her in hand to hand combat. In this sequence we see a perfect example of the way in which subjection takes place. Here Ripley must don certain characteristics sanctioned by patriarchy, namely the exosuit that serves as a phallic extension that compensates for her lack and makes her strength comparable to the Alien Queen. Yet, unlike the Alien Queen, Ripley’s use of the exosuit does not diminish her feminine qualities that the patriarchy sanctions; she is clearly visible as a beautiful white female. However, she must also literally abject the Alien Queen, repelling the unencumbered and uncontrolled femininity that she embodies and which is not approved by the institutions of power.



Terrence Holt is indeed correct when he posits that the dawning of the cargo suit signifies the way in which “Ripley accepts a phallogentric culture’s judgment of the female body as deficient, ultimately as monstrous as the queen itself” (224). However, Holt maintains that “this armor is only a temporary refuge: in her battle with the queen, she loses it, and it is expelled out the ship’s airlock with the alien,” whereby then, and only then, does Newt recognize Ripley by referring to her as mother (225). In fact it is Ripley’s performance of traits sanctioned by the Law and reflected in the Alien Queen that allows her to secure a relationship with her adopted daughter. More importantly, it is her embodiment of the Alien Queen that affords her the ability to seemingly secure a heteronormative future in the figure of the blonde white Newt. Furthermore, the argument that Ripley effectively sheds the persona of the Alien Queen is complicated when viewed in light of David Fincher’s *Alien 3*. Here the audience learns that Ripley is carrying an alien embryo inside her, an aspect that gives her relative protection from the marauding aliens that attack a penal colony because they are want to kill a host that is carrying one of her own. For Ripley the cargo suit can be expunged because she has literally absorbed an aspect of the Alien Queen. However, even though Ripley successfully performs certain traits of the Alien Queen, this is merely one instance of her subjection for, as we see in *Alien Resurrection*, in order to truly embody the phallic mother that will allow her to be recognized

within the phallogentric economy Ripley's body must be further enhanced so that she may be biologically reproductive as well.

### 3.5 The Crystalline Image of Maternity

Jean-Pierre Jeunet's final installment in the *Alien* franchise, entitled *Alien: Resurrection* (1997), begins two hundred years subsequent to the events that transpired in David Fincher's *Alien 3*. The film's narration largely follows the standard trajectory of its predecessors, showing Ellen Ripley and a collection of mercenaries attempting to escape the spaceship *Auriga* that is infested by alien life forms after a failed attempt by military scientists to harness the procreative capabilities of a captured Alien Queen. Having died in the previous film, the character of Ripley is merely a clone pieced together through DNA and blood samples by the military scientists on the *Auriga*, whereas the Alien Queen is the result of an egg extracted and harvest from Ripley's body. As Catherine Constable notes, due to the fact that the Alien Queen and Ripley are linked by their genetic makeup the latter's "identity is thus set up as an intersection point. She is altered by giving birth to the queen just as the queen will later display the nature of Ripley's bequest to her" (191). There is no longer the seemingly simple binary opposition between Ripley as human and the Alien Queen as monstrous body; Ripley, like the alien life forms has superhuman strength, preternatural senses, and acidic blood, whereas the Alien Queen is now capable of gestation without a human host. The result of the genetic manipulation conducted by the

military scientists becomes strikingly apparent at the conclusion of the film when the Alien Queen gives birth to a new alien life form, a bipedal creature that has characteristics of both the alien and human race. In the dramatic final confrontation Ripley, having led the group of mercenaries to safety aboard their ship, the *Betty*, encounters the alien/human hybrid in what can only be construed as a meeting between maternal subject and offspring.

In *The Cinematic Life of the Gene* Jackie Stacey, arguing in a thread similar to that of Catherine Constable, illustrates that Ripley's rebirth as a "transgenic clone" embodied with characteristics of the alien affords her a special relationship with both the past and future, allowing her to be "connected backward and forward in time to her kin" (50). According to Stacey, Ripley is not only "linked to the past through Newt, the child for whom she played surrogate mother in *Aliens*," but also "to the future through the mother alien who will grow up and reproduce, and to whom Ripley has just given birth – making her both the monster's mother and sibling" (50). Stacey's argument parallels Constable's claim that "the alien DNA is therefore reconfigured within Ripley to provide access to a specific relationship as well as to activate a species memory" and that the "capacity for instinctual memory does not dissolve Ripley into the alien queen, but sets up a point of intersection between the distinct characters" (191). For Stacey, the "transformation of Ripley's memory through her bodily mutation establishes a series of fluid exchanges between Ripley, Newt, and the alien queen,

demonstrating the need for a new model of subjectivity based on interrelationality” (51), one that specifically includes “productive points of intersection between self and Other...”(Constable 191).

Constable and Stacey argue that the film challenges the traditional human and inhuman binary through its representation of corporeal embodiment made possible through biological manipulation and, more importantly, that it places importance on Ripley’s relationship with her past and future in regards to subject formation (Stacey 51-2). However, the argument that the embodiment and comingling of human and non-human that is portrayed in the film leads to the possibility of “productive encounters with otherness” fails to take into account that it is this very link to Ripley’s past, embodied by the figure of the phallic Alien Queen, that prohibits her from intersubjective communication and ethical exchange with her biological offspring. What the audience views in the final encounter, where Ripley confronts the alien/human hybrid, her biological offspring, is the culmination of Ripley’s transformation into the phallic mother at the hands of the military scientists. Subjected to the ideological image of maternity Ripley is unable to establish any intersubjective communication with her offspring, recognizing in its face, not a primordial call to ethical responsibility, but merely a reflection of the phallic mother she has become that works only to reify her own identity as a patriarchal construction.

The optimization of Ripley's body, which was explored in the previous section, reaches its most extreme example in Jeunet's installment as the film showcases how medical and disciplinary measures enact the soul of the modern subject by focusing on the body. Foucault begins *Discipline and Punish* by arguing that the soul should be viewed as the "present correlative of a certain technology of power over the body" and that "it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished" (29). As mentioned earlier in *Alien Resurrection* Ellen Ripley is cloned by the United States Military so that they may extract the alien embryo growing inside her in order to raise an alien queen that will constantly reproduce. Ripley, following the extraction of the alien embryo, is kept in a cell not unlike Bentham's panopticon where, not unlike her counterpart the alien queen, she is consistently observed, her body and mind ceaselessly tested molded by doctors. In this way the Alien Queen, as we have seen throughout the trajectory of the franchise, becomes not dissimilar to the Foucauldian soul, "both an effect of normalizing judgment and its instrument, a means of inculcating individual calculability and its expression" (Orlie 46).

What the film ultimately showcases in the interpersonal relationship between Ripley and the figure of the Alien Queen in Jeunet's film, if not specifically all of the aliens taken as a whole, is type of panopticism not unlike that delineated by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. As Foucault explains in his

chapter regarding Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon the "panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and recognize immediately" (DP 200). Bentham's innovative prison was structured in such a way that the prisoner, while contained within a cell, is constantly viewed by the functionaries of power, but never able to view their guards due to the fact that they are enclosed in a central tower that doesn't allow them to be seen. In this way, as Foucault further explains, the prisoner is "seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject of communication" (DP 200). The strategic goal of panopticism is precisely for the subject, who is unaware of whether they are being surveyed or not, to internalize the normative principles and police themselves without direct repression or institution control (Chambers 23).

Foucault's theory of panopticism as it pertains to disciplinary measures and subject formation has interesting implication for our particular discussion regarding the relationship between the Alien Queen and Ripley. As we have seen Ripley is endowed, by way of experimental cloning at the hands of the military scientists, with an almost instinctual connection with the alien life forms due to the fact that they share a similar biological makeup. This psychic connection correlates with Butler's theory of subjection in *The Psychic Life of Power* where the prohibited lost object is internalized in order to assuage the originary lost, remaining in the psychological makeup of the subject until the prohibition is

performed (Lloyd 83-4). Like the psychic object the Alien Queen, with the exception of a brief sequence at the beginning of the film, is not visible to Ripley until she witnesses the birth of the alien/human hybrid near the film's climax. Nevertheless, Ripley is distinctly aware of her presence, a sensible attachment to the primordial object, going as far as to fall into a type of trance whenever alien life forms are near. These instinctual feelings aid Ripley in helping the mercenaries escape because they give her knowledge of the way in which the aliens think and act. As with Foucault's panopticism, Ripley is aware that the Alien Queen is present, not unlike the inmates in Bentham's prison are aware that they are being watched, and because she has been disciplined and biologically optimized she begins to perform the role of the Alien Queen. As she and the group of mercenaries are trying to escape Ripley performs the very role prescribed to her, she is physically able to defend herself against the aliens and at one point even begins to use her nose to sense potential danger.

The use here of panopticism is not arbitrary for it exposes the way in which power works according to a relationship between virtual and actual images or particles. In Gilles Deleuze's text, "The Actual and the Virtual," which is featured in *Dialogues II*, the author claims that "philosophy is the theory of multiplicities, each of which is composed of actual and virtual elements" (*DII* 148). Deleuze argues that "purely actual objects do not exist" due to the fact that "every actual object surrounds itself with a cloud of virtual images" (*DII* 148). In

*Bergson-Deleuze Encounters* Valentine Moulard-Leonard explains that “most generally speaking, the virtual coincides with an immanent plane of self-alteration that subtends and traverses all beings, thereby constantly informing and deforming the real” (4). If we recall from our previous discussion Deleuze refers to a plane of immanence as an a-subjective life flow and with this in mind the virtual is a “virtual field of vibrational potentials, of preindividual singularities out of which the thought of pure immanence must be produced” (3). As Deleuze makes clear the virtual and actual cannot be extricated from one another and exist simultaneously on the plane of immanence, where the “actual is the compliment or the product, the object of actualization, which has nothing but the virtual as its subject” (*DII* 149). The coupling of the actual and the virtual can easily be seen in Foucault’s description of the Panopticon and, more importantly in Levinas description of the ethical encounter.

As Foucault continues “Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable,” meaning that the “inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which is spied upon,” yet the prisoner “must never know whether he is being looked at at any moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so” (*DP* 201). To return to our original discussion of the ethical encounter and maternal subjectivity, the tower, which may or may not house functionaries of power, is an actual object that is surrounded by virtual images. It matters little whether or not there are actual



guards in the tower unseen watching the inmates because, as Todd May illustrates in *Gilles Deleuze*, there is an essential contrast between the coupling of the actual and the virtual, and the relationship between the possible and the real (48). The distinction arises because the virtual exists simultaneously with the actual object, whereas the possible “is what might become or might have become real, but as yet has not” (48). Secondly, as May goes on to explain, is “that the possible is a mirror of the real” (48) whereas an “actual particle has its virtual double, which barely diverges from it at all” (Deleuze *DII* 150). The Panopticon, viewed in this way, is not dissimilar from any actual image of an Absolute Subject of identity in that it signifies a reified principle of heteronormative behavior without attempting to represent. To expand, Michael Hardt explains that the “virtual is the Scholastic term to describe the ideal or transcendental; the virtual scholastic God is not in any way abstract or possible, it is the *ens realissimum*, the most real being” (17). As Althusser points out, God is the most prolific Absolute Subject that all subjects must ritually perform, yet one does not imitate a specific actual image of God, but the virtual properties that are unseen. Therefore, the prisoners do not perform the actual image of the Panopticon, but what the tower signifies, which is a heteronormative ideal, a virtual projection that in no way resembles the actual particle in appearance. This correlation becomes even more striking when the relationship between the virtual and the actual is transposed upon Levinas ethical

encounter, specifically the relationship between the immemorial call to responsibility and the face of the Other.

Despite the fact that the virtual is actualized in the real, it is not subsequently brought into existence, for it is necessary real because “virtualities are always real (in the past, in memory) and may become actualized in the present” (Hardt 17). What is key to understand here is the way in which Deleuze likens the relationship between the virtual and the actual to that of memory and lived experience, claiming that “memory is a virtual image contemporary with the actual object, its double, its ‘mirror image’” (*DII* 150). As Claire Colebrook explains “there is the past or impersonal memory which is virtual and the actual lines of lived time... a memory can interrupt the actual present only because memory is real and exists virtually alongside the present” (*GD* 33). Deleuze derives his conceptualization of the actual and the virtual from Henri Bergson’s virtual past, where Bergson claims “that a memory is not simply a faded or less complex version of an experience that once was present,” but a singular and distinct memory that exists alongside the actualized present (Bogue *DW* 55). Furthermore, during a present moment, which is never experienced as such, “time splits in two,” comprised of both the actualized present, an actual object of present experience, and a memory of the past (55). In this moment, which Deleuze terms “crystallization,” where the actual and the virtual collide, two domains are retained and intertwined, and “are indistinguishable during

actualization although they have unassignable limits, but exchange during crystallization to the extent that they become indiscernible, each relating to the role of the other” (Deleuze *DII* 151).

As Daniel Smith makes clear in *Essays on Deleuze* there is a contrast evident in Deleuze’s philosophy between the actual and the strictly present, where the latter “is what we are, and for that reason, what we are already ceasing to be,” whereas the actual “is not what we are, but rather what we are becoming, what we are in the process of becoming” (159). The actual occurs in the present then, in temporal time, but the present is always shifting and becoming the past, co-substantial with the virtuality of the past (Marrati 73). This co-substantiality of the past in the present, of the virtual in the actual “form a progressive movement, creating the future-as-becoming” (Gardner 14). With this in mind, consider then Levinas’ account of the meeting of the self and the Other in *Time and the Other* where he states that for the future “to become an element of time, it must enter into relationship with the present” (45). Levinas’ conception of the future, as we have seen, is intricately linked to the idea of infinity, where the infinite responsibility to the Other becomes the way in which to achieve transcendence by projecting the self into the unknown. He continues by arguing that the “relationship with the future, the presence of the future in the present, seems all the same accomplished in the face-to-face encounter with the Other” (45).

According to Levinas the encounter with the Other institutes time and “the encroachment of the present on the future is not the feat of the subject alone, but the intersubjective relationship” (TO 45). As Robert John Sheffler Manning makes clear in “Thinking The Other Without Violence?” is that during the period where the self is “chained to its own Being” in the “there is” it is linked to “its own constant presence of self, which is its present” and this present is continuous because there is no anteriority until the arrival of the Other which institutes time (297-8). This is not meant to imply that the Other is met in present time, which would be to reterritorialize the event in the said, but that the Other is in fact an actual image that is experienced in the present but which eludes representation because it is always in a state of perpetual becoming not unlike Deleuze’s actual particle. As Marie L. Baird illustrates “the other for whom we are responsible never meets us in the present time of intentionality” because “his or her otherness can never be gathered into this present time ‘inhabited’ by representational consciousness” (75). The self can never intend the Other as in Husserl’s phenomenological reduction, which would reduce it to a theme, it instead an actual image that is encountered that is always surrounded and enveloped by virtual multiplicities that constitute the very trace of the Other and the very call to infinite responsibility. The extent and the particular of this responsibility are unknown because they are projected into the infinite, yet they are very real rather than possible.

Levinas makes clear in *Otherwise Than Being* that in proximity to the Other, that which engenders subjectivity and consciousness in the self through infinite responsibility, the call of the Other issues from a primordial past that is anachronistic to temporal time and diachronic rather than synchronic. As he states “it takes apart the recuperable time of history and memory in which representation continues,” but in “proximity is heard a command come as though from an immemorial past, which was never present, began in no freedom” (*OB* 88). As with Deleuze’s virtual particles this past is not possible, yet very real and it is not of the same temporal sphere as that of the same and cannot be reduced to present experience because is always anterior and transcendent. As Levinas states in *Time and the Other* “the Diachrony of a past that does not gather into representation is at the bottom of the concreteness of the time that is the time of my responsibility for the Other” (112). For Levinas the face and the command of the Other in the ethical encounter are all traces that signify a responsibility to the Other, but are not thematizable or purely present in order to prove the self the opportunity for reflection (Baird 76). What we can derive from Levinas’ account of the immemorial past signified in the trace of the Other is that in the face the existent encounters a vision of time.

This immemorial past in which the command of the Other issues is almost identical to Deleuze formulation of the relationship between the virtual as “the

past that has never been present” and the actual that is in a state of perpetual becoming (Parr 297). As Deleuze himself claims:

It is as if the present is never really present to itself, haunted as it is by the past that it is in the process of becoming and by the future that it is in the mode of not yet being it. Present and past alike are haunted by an immemorial past which has never been. (qtd. in McLure 201)

The conclusion we arrive at with these two similar depictions is thus that the trace of infinity or God that signifies in its absences, in never truly being present, is a virtual image that surrounds the face of the Other. The face of the Other, as Levinas often reminds the reader, is a human face, an actual image that is objectively viewed by the self as he or she is impacted by the immemorial past, the virtual image that the face signifies. What Levinas ethical encounter truly depicts then is the actualization of the virtual image in the face of the Other in what Deleuze terms, as we mentioned earlier, the crystalline image (*DII* 150-1). As Deleuze claims in *Cinema 2* “the crystal-image is, then, the point of indiscernibility of the two distinct images, the actual and the virtual, while what we see in the crystal is time itself, a bit of time in the pure state, the very distinction between the two images which keeps on reconstituting itself” (*C2* 79). This institutes a play of meanings that are beyond the subjective and the objective “because it poses the simultaneity of impossible presents, or the coexistence of not-necessarily true pasts” (*C2* 127). The crystalline image, which is the actualization of the virtual image in real objects, is marked by indiscernibility or

becoming that is beyond static representation, not unlike the face of the Other which transcends thematization.

The alien/human hybrid that Ripley encounters at the conclusion of Jeunet's film is precisely the crystalline image of time recounted by Deleuze, a meeting of a virtual past encompassed by the phallic mother and becoming present that coalesce in an indistinguishable image (Gardner 35). In the face of the alien/human hybrid Ripley encounters, not strictly the immemorial past of the archaic mother, but the image of the phallic maternal body of the Symbolic Order and the roar of the monstrous life form is precisely that primordial call to responsibility that brings Ripley to the ethical encounter at the conclusion of the film. If we recall our previous discussion regarding Catherine Constable's critique of the film and the role instinctual memory plays in the formation of Ripley's identity, we begin to see that the very technological optimization that affords Ripley the biological connection with the Alien Queen serves as an example of the way in which power establishes a unifying principle of identity mentioned earlier in this discussion (191). The Alien Queen, the phallic mother lingers on the margins of Ripley's memory, implanted there as an ideal figure of maternity and, as a virtual image of an immemorial past is evident in the face of the alien/human hybrid as a trace of the primordial call to responsibility. The actual image perceived in the ethical encounter, namely the child in this specific formation, is a crystalline image that is a comingling of the virtual past and the present so that

Ripley performs in accordance, not to an ethical imperative signified by the face of the Other, but to an imaginary identity posited by the Law.

During the climatic confrontation between Ripley and the alien/human hybrid there is arguably the most intense moment of the entire film where both parties take part in what initially appears to be an ethical embrace. The alien/human hybrid has characteristics of both a human and an alien, a crystalline image of the phallic mother psychically preserved and the humanoid offspring of Ripley. In the face of the alien/human hybrid, as with the crystal image, “we get a circuit in which the two images are constantly chasing one another around a point where real and imaginary become indistinguishable” and the “actual and its virtual image crystalize, so to speak” (Deleuze qtd. in Marks 148). In the face of the alien/human other Ripley experiences the call to infinite responsibility, that overwhelms that of the child itself because the saying is reterritorialized into the said, an image of the phallic mother. There can be no transcendence through responsibility as with Levinas’ ethical encounter because the crystalline image, as a mirror, cleaves the asymmetrical signification of the Other, reflecting a virtual image projected by power.

Transcendence for Levinas is essentially the projection of the self into the infinite and unknown future, either as infinite responsibility where the self substitutes itself for the Other or, more specifically, in the relationship between father and son. As Claire Elise Katz and Lara Trout explain, this paternal



relationship, which is achieved through a fecund relationship with the feminine Other, results in the creation of a child that is a projection of the self into the future which constitutes the very otherwise than being, a transcendence of self without reverting back to negativity or a return to sameness (Manning 313). As Levinas explains in the opening sections of *Totality and Infinity*:

Transcendence designates a relation with a reality infinitely distant from my own reality, yet without this distance destroying this relation and without this relation destroying this distance, as would happen with relations within the same; this relation does not become an implantation in the other and a confusion with him, does not affect the very identity of the same, its ipseity, does not silence the apology, does not become apostasy and ecstasy. (*TI* 41-2)

The relationship between the “father and the son opens up infinite time. Not only the discontinuity of generations which promises continued youth, but also the transubstantiation of the father in the son, opens the subject to an other” (Manning 313). The son, which is both a portion of the father, yet separate, projects being beyond the confines of the finite, signifying outside of being into the future unknown.

What we witness in the conclusion of Jeunet’s film is the way in which power severs the possibility of an authentic ethical encounter through the installation of heteronormative ideals and prescribed behavior. In the face of the alien/human hybrid Ripley literally experiences, not the trace of alterity, but the crystalline image of the Law, the comingling of the virtual image of the phallic

mother and the actual child itself. Initially in the final sequence there is a moment where Ripley appears to empathize with the creature, its soft coos signaling that perhaps there is an unspoken connection between the pair. However, the bipedal creature's call to ethics is masked by the very qualities of unchecked aggression and chaos that Ripley is able to recognize and has been conditioned by the institutions of power to abject. More importantly, her response to the alien/human hybrid is not attentive to the existent's specific call to responsibility, but a prescribed form of behavior according to how she has been optimized by using her biologically enhanced body to burn a hole in the spacecraft with her acidic blood. In the final moments of the film, as the hybrid is sucked into the vacuum of space and literally disintegrates, Ripley secures and reaffirms a heteronormative future by disposing with a threat to the patriarchy.

## Chapter 4

### Maternal Performativity and the Masochistic Contract

We must conclude that the pleasure principle, though it may rule over all, does not have the final or highest authority over all. There are no exceptions to the principle but there is a residue that is irreducible to it; nothing contradicts the principle, but there remains something which falls outside it and is not homogeneous with it – something, in short, *beyond*...Gilles Deleuze *Masochism*

The concluding chapters of Ira Levin's modern gothic thriller *Rosemary's Baby* (1967) reveal that the seemingly paranoid fears of Rosemary Woodhouse, the novel's unwitting protagonist, that a satanic coven is residing in her and her husband's idyllic Bramford apartment building are indeed a reality (233-5). Throughout the latter half of the novel, Rosemary has been consumed by the suspicion that her spouse, Guy, her neighbors Minnie and Roman Castevet, and her doctor Abe Sapirstein have established a covert network in order to systematically observe and regulate her maternal body with the goal of optimizing her procreative abilities. Furthermore, Rosemary is plagued with the apparent psychic and semiotic knowledge that the unborn child inside of her is the offspring of Satan, an only partially human child that will bring about a reign of evil (235-7). During the novel's climax, as she gazes into her son Adrian/Andrew's black bassinet, Rosemary becomes hysterical as she is confronted with her abject child, witness to the fact that "his eyes were golden-

yellow, all golden-yellow, with neither whites nor irises; all golden-yellow, with vertical black-slit pupils” (235). The reader is undoubtedly meant to mimic Rosemary’s initial shock due to the fact that the novel’s trajectory hinges entirely on the vindication of her misgivings regarding her pregnancy. However, the impact of Rosemary’s revelation is secondary to her decision to accept the inhuman child, an infant resonating in demonic power and appearance, and her willingness to perform the role of a mother. The result is that Rosemary not only attains recognition from the coven, therefore emerging as a new subject, but more importantly establishes a relationship between herself and the infant that excludes the patriarchal Law of the Father.

The prevailing sentiment regarding Levin’s *Rosemary’s Baby* is that through the utilization of traditional gothic tropes the novel showcases and comments on the invasion of women’s bodies by way of hyperbolic representations of modern reproductive technologies. This argument is echoed by Sharon Marcus who claims that the novel “construes pregnancy as a hyperbolic invasion of Rosemary’s privacy – the result of a rape, the pretext for constant surveillance by her husband, neighbors, doctor, and an ongoing invasion of her body by a predatory, parasitical fetus” (Hoffman 131). More importantly, as Hoffman illustrates in “How to See the Horror: The Hostile Fetus in *Rosemary’s Baby* and *Alien*,” there is a critical thread running through scholarship directed at the novel, and Roman Polanski’s adaptation, that the central locus of fear that the

narrative evokes is located precisely in the fact that “Rosemary is a horrifying, or at least unorthodox, mother” (156). In opposition, Hoffman claims that these views are misguided precisely because the film refuses to visually acknowledge the infant as the offspring of Satan, something that the novel explicitly confirms (157). The result is that the film *Rosemary’s Baby* “horrifies us with the *potential* perversion of the unborn rather than the *visible* ‘perversion of motherhood’” that is undoubtedly present in Levin’s novel (157).

Though Hoffman is speaking exclusively about Polanski’s film, the emphasis that Renner places on the potentiality of the infant as the central element in the film’s evocation of horror can be applied directly to Levin’s novel. Though, unlike the film, the novel is unequivocal as it pertains to the infant’s identity as the Antichrist, the narrative nevertheless exposes the way in which maternal bodies are subjected to a possible and future image of the Child, a potentiality that serves as an imaginary point from which to judge and construct the identity of the maternal figure. For this reason Rosemary is undoubtedly a horrifying maternal subject precisely because her subjectivity is irremovable from the characteristics and possible behaviors of her son who is the pure embodiment of evil. More importantly, Rosemary is perverse precisely because she refuses to acknowledge these very characteristics in her son, instead choosing at once to simultaneously both accept and disavow the reality of her son’s heritage, a tactical and conscious

decision that works toward reconfiguring her son's identity and, ultimately, her own as well.

To return briefly to our previous discussion of the *Alien* franchise and its commentary on maternal subjectivity, the correlation between Rosemary's encounter with her inhuman offspring and Ellen Ripley's confrontation with the alien/human hybrid in *Alien Resurrection* is striking. The following chapter will argue that Levin's novel, not unlike the films that comprise the *Alien* franchise, reflects and exposes the way patriarchal society and institutions produce the maternal body and renders it docile through a discursive network of power relations that systematically categorizes and disciplines it in order to produce optimal subjects. Levin's text showcases how maternal bodies are subjected to an ideal form of motherhood in the form of an imaginary point of identity comprising a specular Absolute Subject that encompasses both the phallic and patriarchal mother, and the future Child. More importantly, as the following will illustrate, *Rosemary's Baby* illustrates how the oversaturation of the maternal body by power results in, not only a perverse subject, but facilitates the very ethical interaction it seemingly seeks to displace.

However, though Rosemary, like Ellen Ripley, is initially repulsed by her child and recognizes in its characteristics the markings of paternal power, she instead approaches him passively with the intent of creating a symbolic order that is centered on desexualization and perversion. This dutiful responsibility of the

mother arises, not from any exterior pressure from the coven, but from Rosemary herself and it marks the establishment of what will be referred to throughout this discussion as a maternal masochistic contract. This contract, established by the mother, *becomes the central locus of maternal performativity that originates from the maternal body and extends toward the infant Other, rather than the obverse, creating an interpersonal exchange whereby the maternal subject takes part in the reconstitution of not only the identity of her child, but her own as well.*

#### 4.1 Madness and Subject Formation

In Levin's *Rosemary's Baby*, the discursive power formation represented by the satanic coven led by the Casteverts establishes two distinct discourses that facilitate the observation and regulation of the protagonist's maternal body. These discourses, the productive sexuation and hysterization of Rosemary's body, are both justified by a structure of heteronormativity and work toward the construction of a child that contributes to the patriarchal order. The result of these discourses that are imposed upon Rosemary from without is a type of symbolic oversaturation, where the constant subjection that is intricate to the production of identity leaves only a minute residue in the way of an ideal maternal identity. The following will illustrate how Levin's novel showcases the production of maternal identity in order to transition into a discussion of how the protagonist, Rosemary Woodhouse, constructs a new identity through the establishment of a masochistic contract attached to the death drive.

Similarly to the way in which the films that comprise the *Alien* franchise illustrate the optimization of the procreative abilities of the maternal body, so too does Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* showcase the use of reproductive technologies in order to ensure the production of a patriarchal subject in the figure of the Child. The novel begins with Rosemary Woodhouse, a kind and attractive twenty-four year old woman with no aspirations beyond building a family with her husband, Guy, and securing a place of residence in the elegant Bramford apartments in New York City. Levin's text takes great pains to depict her as an "ideal" and quintessentially heteronormative mother-in-process, alluding occasionally to her strict Catholic morality and chastity, so that she resembles at times that very Western fantasy of sacred femininity that Kristeva describes in "Stabat Mater" (161). However, as the novel unfolds it becomes clear that the Woodhouse's ideal Gothic apartment is inhabited by a satanic coven that is presided over by Rosemary's neighbors, Minnie and Roman Castevet, the latter being the descendant of Adrian Marcato, an infamous Satanist. In exchange for a key acting role that eventually launches his career and results in the disfigurement of his competition for the part, Guy agrees to allow Rosemary's body, at the behest of the satanic coven, to become host to the son of Satan. After being drugged Rosemary is the subject of a ritual that results in her being raped and impregnated by Satan himself. Unaware that she is carrying the host of Satan, Rosemary's pregnancy is relatively uneventful, until she begins to lose significant amounts of



weight, something that Minnie Castevet treats with herbal remedies. Slowly, with the help of her friend Edward “Hutch” Hutchins, Rosemary begins to unravel the coven’s conspiracy to bring about the offspring of Satan, leading to the conclusion of the novel where she must make the decision to embrace the abject child of the devil or kill her son and herself.

In the case of Levin’s novel the traditional heteronormative structure of patriarchal society is represented by the dominant social formation of the satanic coven in the Bramford apartment and it is imperative to analyze the way in which the logic of rationality and normality is inverted in order to comment on the constructed nature of what is perceived to be “normal.” In *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject* Fabio Cleto identifies the plethora of ways in which horror fiction presents an inverse reality that corresponds to Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the “carnavalesque” (Cleto 30-1). Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque indicates “a unique instance in the social processes of meaning-making in which taboos are lifted and people are allowed to engage in what is otherwise culturally prohibited,” endeavoring primarily to destabilize the foundations of society and its arbitrary, and oftentimes oppressive, structure (Mathijs and Sexton 98-9). Cleto refers to horror fiction and film’s use of the carnivalesque as the “semiotics of camp,” where there is a specific deterritorialization and recontextualization of societal norms in order to comment and critique on their strictly performative nature (31).

What can be seen in *Rosemary's Baby* is this very recontextualization of normality where, within the confines of the Bramford apartment building, the dominant social formation, represented by the satanic coven, is presented as the locus of normality. The initial conflict within the novel is presented as Rosemary's struggle with the suspicion, alluded to earlier in this section, that her elderly neighbors, Roman and Minnie Castevens, are members of a satanic coven bent on producing the Antichrist. Because the Bramford serves as a type of closed symbolic circuit structured around the devil as an Absolute Subject and representation of paternal law, all activity and behavior not in the service of the corresponding ideology is deemed deviant. This subsequently reveals how conceptions of madness and rationality, and most importantly "good" and "bad" mothering, are all relative to the discursive network of power that structures reality. Rosemary's experience of pregnancy is seemingly far from normal: she has intense pains throughout her period of gestation, significant weight loss, and is instructed not to follow conventional methods of caring for herself and her unborn child, but to take herbal remedies provided by Minnie Castevens. Because the coven represents the structure this allows them to take part in a number of discursive practices that takes as its object Rosemary's seemingly "normal" maternal body and renders it as "deviant" in order to justify its systematic observation and regulation.

The first of these methods used by the satanic coven to optimize Rosemary's maternal body is an intensification in the discourse surrounding sexuality that results in the creation of a docile procreative body. As Sara Mills illustrates in *Michel Foucault*, "discourse does not simply translate reality into language; rather discourse should be seen as a system that structures the way that we perceive reality" (55). The initial discourse that is established in *Rosemary's Baby* by the satanic coven and Rosemary's husband, Guy, is one of sexuality that is utilized in order to facilitate the birth of the Antichrist and reproduce the means by which the structure is made possible. In the *History of Sexuality* Foucault illustrates that during the Victorian Era "sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction" (3). However, Foucault continues by claiming that contrary to popular belief, despite the fact that during the Victorian period sexuality was dominated by a level of silence and that there were strict regulations regarding what was considered imprudent behavior and discourse, "toward the eighteenth century, there emerged a political, economic, and technical incitement to talk about sex" (23). Discourse on sexuality arose in the eighteenth century as "sex entered the public domain with the population problem: population as wealth and manpower, population balanced between its own growth and the resources it could produce" (Sheridan 171). With the population problem it became an imperative to "analyse the birthrate, the age of marriage, legitimate

and illegitimate births, the precocity and frequency of sexual relations, the nature and extent of contraceptive practices, etc.” (172). This transition from the “silence” that dominated the sexual discourse of the Victorian period to a purposeful discourse on sexuality bent on reproducing the dominant social formation that Foucault locates is precisely what can be viewed in Levin’s novel in regards to Rosemary’s pregnancy.

The discourse on sexuality that arises within the novel successfully transforms Rosemary, who from the onset of the narrative is characterized as a woman defined by her idealism and naivety, to a docile body subjected to surveillance and discipline. Rosemary is by no means virginal in the traditional sense, but it is made clear that her identity centers solely on the desire to produce a family with her husband, a desire that is reterritorialized by the mechanism of the satanic coven. After moving into the Bramford apartment building Rosemary comments that “she was twenty-four and they wanted three children two years apart” (Levin 64). What is important to note here is that Rosemary, throughout the novel, desires to perform the role of mother and wife, and this desire essentially stems from her unhappy home life before moving to New York (14). This functions in a similar fashion to Ripley’s pilot license explored in the previous chapter as a lost object that is internalized and “phantamastically preserved in and as the ego” (Butler *PLP* 132). Initially this identification by way of the desire to be a mother is met with silence, especially in regards to her husband who refuses

to have children before he becomes a famous actor. Because a pregnancy would delay his ascension as an actor, Rosemary's failed attempts at getting pregnant comment on patriarchal control of female bodies.

Before being approached by the satanic coven Guy is a husband who "studied the calendar and avoided the 'dangerous days'" and who is reluctant to even engage in a discourse concerned with sexuality (Levin 65).

However, as the novel progresses, what we see is an intensification of the discourse surrounding sexuality that objectifies Rosemary and identifies her solely with her reproductive capabilities because, with the emergence of the satanic coven, her desire becomes precisely that which benefits the dominant social formation. Once it is established that the satanic coven wishes to use Rosemary's body as a host for the Antichrist and that Guy has willingly consented in exchange for a coveted acting part the once almost non-existent dialogue regarding sexuality and reproduction becomes a primary catalyst. Once Donald Baumgart, Guy's competition for the key acting role, is struck blind at the hands of the satanic coven, Guy and the Casteverts begin to systematically channel Rosemary's desire to have a baby for their own purposes. After revealing to Rosemary that he is *finally* ready to have a baby, Guy goes on to claim "I even figured out the right time to start. Next Monday and Tuesday. Red circles on the calendar, please" (76). Complementing Guy's attempts are those of Minnie Castevet who constantly makes allusions to Rosemary's prospective maternity,

offering incessant advice on the subject and reorienting conversations back to the subject of Rosemary's desire for a family. What is being done in this instance is the transformation of "sexual conduct" into a "concerted economic and political behavior" that hinges on the reterritorialization of Rosemary's desire (Foucault *HS* 26). This type of discursive network that observes and promotes sexual conduct for the benefit of the social formation is not merely oppressive, but on the contrary, through its exploitation of Rosemary's desire for a child she *willingly* participates, up to a point, in her own subjection.

Guy's acceptance of Rosemary's desire to have a baby is coercive in the way that it appears liberating. On the surface, at least to Rosemary, it appears that she now occupies a place of primacy, where before she was always secondary to Guy's desire to become an actor. An increase in the discourse on sexuality has constantly appeared liberating in society; however, it has consistently been uncovered as a tool wielded by patriarchal and heteronormative society in order to justify subjection. As Adrienne Rich illustrates in *Of Woman Born*, "the so-called sexual revolution of the sixties," which brought the advent of birth control, was revealed to be only a "mechanistic and patriarchal device" (73). The rise in sexual discourse, though commonly seen as liberating, has always been, in regards to the maternal body, a way to optimize the procreative abilities in order to promote the state and adversely a way to marginalize "defective" and non-procreative bodies.

Complementary to this discourse on sexuality is the way that the coven creates a discourse of reason and rationality that structures reality in such a way that it makes it possible to categorize Rosemary as hysterical and therefore legitimizes the regulation and control of her body. Once it is clear that Rosemary is pregnant she is coerced into visiting the obstetrician Dr. Abe Sapirstein, a member of the satanic coven, who then initiates a second discursive network that fixes its gaze on Rosemary's troubled pregnancy and her apparent paranoia, and categorizes it as psychotic. In *Madness and Civilization* Foucault illustrates that in Europe during the Middle Ages those that were diagnosed with leprosy "were confined in specific institutions, excluded from the community by virtue of their condition" (Smart 10). These practices of confining the individual and shielding them from society continued on into the seventeenth and eighteenth century where criminals and those that were considered "deranged" were placed in asylums and effectively segregated from society in the same manner as the leper (10). What is crucial to our understanding of Rosemary's pregnancy is that the medicalized discourse of the seventeenth and eighteenth century created a situation where the "mad" were defined by "their disruption of the rhythms of collective life and their inability to work" (11). Madness and deviance then are relative to the dominant social formation and the discursive networks they produce. Creating a discourse of madness was in fact a way for the dominant social formation to segregate those "classes of person deemed to be a threat to

social order and morality” (11). What we see in the case of Rosemary is once her actions begin to threaten the viability of the biological subject inside her and subsequently the dominance of the coven, she is deemed unproductive and deranged.

Once it has been established that Rosemary is in fact pregnant, Guy and the Castevets take great pains to shield her from what is considered the “inappropriate” method of caring for herself and her unborn child. Dr. Sapirstein systematically instructs Rosemary not to look at books concerned with mothering and not to “listen to [her] friends either” because such conflicting opinions will in fact challenge the rationality of the coven’s discourse (Levin 115). When Rosemary begins to have extreme abdominal pain and confides in Dr. Sapirstein that she thinks it might be an “ectopic pregnancy” he warns her again to dispense with all of her maternity books and assures her that the pain is normal (118). As Rosemary begins to suspect that the pain in her abdomen is not natural, that the counsel of Dr. Sapirstein and the advice of Minnie Castevet is in fact accentuating the pain, and that the rumors that there is a witches coven housed in the Bramford, she begins to resist and challenge the discourse of the dominant social formation. Also, her semiotic relationship with her unborn child becomes even more pronounced so that we see her communicating to it, not out loud, but in an interior dialogue that is beyond signification. Once Rosemary has committed herself to resisting Sapirstein and the coven, she says, “*Everything’s okay now, Andy-or-*



*Jenny. We're going to be in a nice clean bed at Mount Sinai Hospital, with no visitors...*" (Levin 210). Rosemary is both concerned with her own safety, but more importantly the safety of her child, who she believes at this time is slated to be a sacrifice to the devil in one of the coven's satanic rituals. However, her desires for a more traditional approach to giving birth, which includes medical care, and her growing suspicions of how the coven and her husband are planning to use her and her child are detrimental to the coven's overall purpose. The transition from passive coercion to overt discipline is noted by Elaine Showalter who illustrates that "those women who have rebelled against the social conventions and restrictions on women's behaviour have sometimes been labeled as mentally ill" and therefore must be subjected to confinement (qtd. in Smart 103). When it becomes clear to the coven that Rosemary is cognizant of the conspiracy against her, the discursive power no longer operates passively, but violently against the body. She is deemed mentally ill and drugged by Dr. Sapirstein before being confined to the Bramford apartment. It is at this juncture where Rosemary, according to the coven, is deemed deviant and a stereotypically incapable mother which allows the discursive network of power the ability to "cure" her of her deviance through regulation and discipline. By labeling Rosemary as mentally ill the coven is able to legitimize a more violent form of subjection by way of reproductive technologies.

Thus far we have discussed the way in which a discursive power in *Rosemary's Baby* takes part in the sexualization of the maternal body in order to enhance and optimize its procreative abilities and subsequently creates a discourse of reason and rationality centered on the well-being of the subject-in-process that is at odds with the semiotic experience of pregnancy. Now it is necessary to analyze the ways in which the discursive network that has successfully classified Rosemary as psychotic facilitates and engenders a set of disciplinary practices that act upon the maternal body in order to regulate its gestation period and produce a viable subject. Key to this analysis is the Foucauldian notion of “biopower” and its relation to reproductive technologies as they are applied to the maternal body. In *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body*, Jana Sawicki acknowledges that a function of biopower is “a knowledge of and power over the individual body – its capacities, gestures, movements, location, and behaviors” in order to “render the individual both more powerful, productive, useful and *docile*” (60). These reproductive technologies, which involve medical technology such as fetal monitors and ultrasounds, consist of “sophisticated techniques of surveillance and examination...that make both female bodies and fetuses visible to anonymous agents in ways that facilitate the creation of new objects and subjects” (83-4).

In the novel these reproductive technologies take the form of mystical elements and homemade remedies that are used to expedite the birth of Satan's

offspring. Initially we can see the early stages of Rosemary's pregnancy as dominated by a decentralized observation and surveillance within the Bramford apartment building. At the behest of Guy, Rosemary is rarely permitted to leave the domestic sphere for fear that any strenuous activity might jeopardize the health of the fetus. She is therefore relegated to the Bramford where she is subjected to constant surveillance by Minnie Castevet, her neighbor, who visits her constantly and who, as we learn later, has coerced Guy into reporting Rosemary's actions to her and Roman. In this way the Bramford apartment building becomes an "enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point...in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded" (Foucault *DP* 197). The Bramford becomes like a hospital where the deviant mother is subjected to tests that expose her "abnormality," while simultaneously attempting to "cure" it. But as the novel progresses, this seemingly benevolent surveillance of Rosemary by the inhabitants of the Bramford becomes overtly violent and coercive.

While inside the Bramford apartment Rosemary is constantly being viewed by her neighbors and by her husband so that she can never escape the gaze of the oppressive apparatus. However, even when she manages to escape later in the novel there is always the omnipresent gaze of the Bramford apartment and what it embodies that surveys her as well. The Bramford apartment, as stated earlier, is a Gothic trope as well and therefore is frightening because of the

conflict between its seemingly normal exterior and what it houses inside. It is historically a haven of witches, both the coven dominated by Minnie and Roman, but also his father, the famous Satanist Adrian Marcato. Also, as we learn later, it is a place that has been inhabited by Satan himself and a location that stands as a point where he can be summoned. In this way it becomes almost a literal embodiment of Bentham's Panopticon, a centralized tower composed of windows that houses a central authority that constantly sets his gaze on the unwitting mental patient (200). When Rosemary attempts to escape and seek the aid of her friend Hutch, we find that he is in a coma as a result of the satanic coven. We learn later that the "accidents" outside the apartment, the blindness of Donald Baumgart and Hutch's coma, are all the actions of the coven. But the witchcraft that causes them is decentralized and seemingly stems from the Bramford and the unseen and horrific power it possesses. Rosemary, no matter if she secludes herself inside her apartment or if she escapes to the city, is constantly under the surveillance of the satanic coven and the decentralized discursive network of supernatural horror.

The discourse of sexuality and rationality that we have seen stems from the surveillance that Rosemary is subjected to throughout the novel, but it also works toward establishing a structure of normative principles that coerces Rosemary into willingly participating in the discipline and regulation of her own body. The discursive power of the coven establishes, with the aid of Sapirstein, a

normative behavior of motherhood that categorizes Rosemary as deviant, but supplements this with, as Sawicki illustrates in regards to reproductive technologies, methods in which to “cure” the defective body (84). Eventually the observation of Minnie Castevet takes the form of direct intervention as she sets up a routine every morning where Rosemary will ingest a homemade “milkshake” that will aid her pregnancy. Following the conception of her child, “each morning at eleven Minnie brought over what looked like a watery pistachio milkshake. It was cold and sour” (Levin 117). When Rosemary asks what is in it Minnie refuses to reveal its specific contents, only implying that it will facilitate the birth of a son and not a daughter (117). The “milkshake” becomes a reoccurring theme throughout the novel and signifies the way that reproductive technologies, in this case something that aids in the production of a specific subject, strip women of what was once considered the locus of feminine power. The milkshake causes Rosemary to become dangerously emaciated to the point that she resists taking it. It is because of the discourse of the coven and her husband, who constantly reassures her that the weight-loss is natural and it is *she* who is acting irrationally, that she continues with the regimen. In this way it is not unlike the way “medical disciplines isolate specific types of abnormality or deviancy” in order to “construct new norms of healthy and responsible motherhood” (Sawicki 84).

The narrative of *Rosemary's Baby* is cyclical as we have seen, in that it begins with a woman whose identity and agency are intricately linked to a desire

to produce a child and have a family. This desire is appropriated by the dominant social formation and the maternal body is regulated to produce a being that will ensure the proliferation and consistency of the satanic coven. However, the conclusion of the novel is a study in the reclaiming of agency by a maternal body that subscribes to an adoptive maternal ethics as a way in which to resist the oppressive aspects of power over women's bodies and perform an identity that is not socially constructed. In *Post-Queer Politics* David Ruffolo addresses one of the most prevailing questions regarding Foucauldian philosophy, specifically the possibility of resistance in the face of decentralized power. As Foucault illustrates, power is not inhabited by a specific institution or individual, but rather exercised by specific entities (Ruffolo 59). With this in mind, resistance is problematic because it implies a binary relationship where power is monolithic, something that resistance can be directed at (59). A proper method of resistance against discursive power cannot then take the form of direct rebellion against power, but only through an embodiment of power through an assertion of agency and performative identity. In *Foucault Beyond Foucault* Jeffrey Nealon characterizes this form of agency in the following way:

Agency, in short, is not simply action or the emergence of something that wasn't there before, a happening: rather, agency is a code word for a subject performing an action that matters, something that changes one's own life or the lives of others. Agency is doing something freely, subversively, not as a mere effect programmed or sanctioned by constraining social norms. (102)

Towards the conclusion of Levin's book, the power relations and their motives are revealed to Rosemary and she, along with the audience, becomes aware that her now infant son will not be used in a ritual sacrifice, but is in fact the son of Satan. Upon this realization and being exposed to the abject infant her first reaction is to murder the child. She plans to "wait till they were all sitting at the other end, then run over, push away Laura-Louise, and grab it and throw it out the window" so that she could "save the world from God-knows-what. From Satan-knows-what" (Levin 240-1). However, as Rosemary soon realizes, this type of resistance that is directed at the discursive network is futile because it will only serve to reinforce her identity as a "deviant" maternal body. Instead Rosemary chooses the role of the adoptive mother of Andrew, her son, as a site of resistance in the face of discursive power. At the conclusion of the novel, instead of trying to escape the gaze of power by rejecting her maternal role, which in essence is impossible, Rosemary begins to perform the role of mother, not as it was constructed by the coven from the onset of her pregnancy, but as an act of agency. This tactical and performative action, which disavows the reality that her son is in fact the son of Satan, forms the basis of our theory of maternal performativity that is derived from Gilles Deleuze reformulation of the sadism/masochism binary and will be explored in the following sections.

## 4.2 The Three Syntheses of Time

In order to fully comprehend Deleuze's conception of masochism and its relationship with his reformulation of Freud's death drive, it is necessary to briefly explicate the way in which he conceives of time as a series of three essential passive syntheses. Primarily discussed in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze's philosophy of time seeks to overturn the Kantian notion of time as unfolding linearly and instead argues that "times are made in multiple synthetic processes," and furthermore "times is the result of the syntheses and not the other way around" (Williams *GDPT* 3). As Jay Lampert indicates in *Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy of History*, Deleuze's purpose in developing a theory of time is "to consider whether a form of difference precedes unity, totality, and identity" and to explicate the way in which "repetition is not primarily memory, reflection, or conscious understanding, but a 'synthesis of time'" (13-5). This attempt at defining time as synthesis involves three essential movements, the first being the "living present," which "determines processes in the past and in the future such that the present process changes the past and the future by synthesising them in a novel manner" (10). The third, and final synthesis of time, is the event, which "is a cut or caesura in a series because it divides them according to its arrival and its effects on the series" (15).

In *Difference and Repetition*, specifically the section titled "Repetition for Itself," Deleuze attempts to counter the primacy of the Freudian pleasure principle



as a primordial impulse with the argument for an originary repetition (Deleuze 96). The pleasure principle, as devised by Freud, indicates a primordial predilection towards satisfaction that drives our actions so that repetition of a habit is subsequent to the excitation it causes (Faulkner 62). Deleuze claims that the Id is “a field of individuation in which differences in intensity are distributed here and there in the form of excitations” and the process by which “the chaotic flow of energy” that comprises the Id becomes bound to a habit or action is precisely the first synthesis of time (*DR* 138). Deleuze’s first synthesis of time is “the living present” or *habitus* that is composed of contemplations, which implies that the synthesis “is constituted by elements that are not centralized in the mind,” but are linked to “principles of associations such as contiguity, resemblance, and causality that provoke a certain liveliness” (De Bolle “Passive Synthesis” 136). For Deleuze, human nature is comprised of these very habits and associations, or what he labels contractions:

We are made of contracted water, earth, light and air – not merely prior to the recognition or representation of these, but prior to their being sensed. Every organism, in its receptive and perceptual elements, but also in its viscera, is a sum of contractions, of retentions and expectations. (*DR* 73)

The first synthesis of time as it relates to the human organism therefore is the binding or contracting of numerous and distinct phenomena into an organized strata that constitutes the “living present” (Turetsky *Rhythm* 144). Deleuze labels this synthesis of time passive precisely because “the future is in the form of

organic expectation or need, the past as cellular heredity” and each of these dimensions of time “are divided infinitely in both directions” (Lenco 82). The first synthesis of time passes in to the second precisely because it “cannot explain the passing of the present into the past or the imaginary” (De Bolle “Passive Synthesis” 138), due to the paradox that “if the present passes away first, then it cannot constitute the past, since the present is already gone and a new present must constitute the past” (Williams 53). As Turetsky explains, the first synthesis of time is the passive synthesis of habit, where repetition gives rise to the binding and contraction of “independent presentations” in order to form the “living present” (146). However, these “contractions produced by habit can only extend so far before fatigue sets in and they begin to unravel,” which contributes to Deleuze’s need for a second synthesis of time in order to explain why the present passes into the past (146-7).

Deleuze’s second synthesis of time is derived from Bergson’s work on memory and time, and serves as the ground for the passage of the present into the past (Voss 224). This particular synthesis of time is concerned primarily with memory, namely the difference “in nature between the active memory – this is the psychological memory that makes recognition, reflection and representation possible – and the passive memory,” which is the very “pure or virtual memory” discussed in the previous chapter (De Bolle “Passive Synthesis” 139). Active memory, as stated previously, is an operation of the mind that constitutes the past

subsequently following the passing of the present, where virtual or pure memory exists simultaneously with the present and “stands for a dimension that has released every bond to the materialistic universe” (“Passive Synthesis” 139). As Daniela Voss explains, the use by Deleuze of spatial metaphors to describe the relationship between the present and future and the virtual past makes it appear as if the pure past “is a kind of container *in* which the present passes” (224). Yet, the pure past is what exists as past in general, and is not the dissipation of the present into the past so that “the mode of being the pure past is not one of actual existence, but rather of ‘insistence’: ‘it does not exist, but it insists, it consists, it *is*’” (226). The virtual or empty form of time is never that which was once present and now is past, but that which is “the contemporary of the present which it is, in a frozen present; as though lacking on the one hand the part which, on the other hand, it is at the same time; as though displaced while still in the place” (Deleuze *DR* 102). It is precisely this virtual nature of the pure past, as Deleuze makes clear, that illustrates why “virtual objects exist only as fragments of themselves: they are found only as lost; they exist only as recovered” (*DR* 102). This is precisely why Deleuze can make the statement that Lacan “discovers the ‘phallus,’ understood as a symbolic organ, behind these virtual or partial objects” due to the fact that it is a symbol that is “the always-displaced fragment, standing for a past which was never present: the object=*x*” (*DR* 103). And, to return briefly to our primary discussion, like the phallus the archaic and primordial mother is

precisely that virtual object that pre-exists and never enters into the dimension of the present; she exists in a “virtual, eternal, intense, pre-individual and positive series which each actualized present repeats,” forming the patriarchal phallic mother (Colebrook “Queer Theory” 17). With Deleuze’s formulation of the second synthesis of time, it is clear that it relates the very same principles of the virtual and actual object, due to the fact that “the virtual past differs in nature from the actual present, but at the same time it constitutes, with the actual present, one and the same event” (De Bolle “Passive Synthesis” 140). Most importantly, the virtual or empty form of the past that is inaccessible in its purest state is that which makes all singular, active memories possible (Burns 80).

Whereas the first synthesis is concerned primarily with illustrating that repetition serves as its own ground, Deleuze’s second synthesis, as the pure past, endeavors to expose the “truth” of an individual’s libidinal attachments by detaching them from their “first objects” (Ferenczi and Rank qtd. in Faulkner 46). As Keith W. Faulkner explains, the process of liberating libidinal attachments from “repressed objects of the pre-genital series” is accomplished when the “patient comprehends the ‘truth’ of this attachment and the pattern of repetitive behavior that follows from it” (46). In order to separate the libidinal drives from “original” objects the patient must realize “the impossibility of fulfilling the demands of his infantile libido and contents himself with the other things which life offers” (Ferenczi and Rank qtd. in Faulkner 46). Deleuze repeatedly uses

Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* in order to illustrate how, in order for one to remove libidinal attachments, one must install "oneself directly in the past" in order to have the fantasy of wholeness revealed as a falsehood (Faulkner 47-8). This "forced movement" into the past, Deleuze claims, "exposes a pattern of behavior and manifests an 'event'" that "evades recognition; it swells up from the struggle between resonance and forced movement" (48).

Deleuze's first two syntheses involve the development of habitual behavior in the living present and, subsequently, the movement of the present into the past; the third synthesis of time is concerned primarily with the future where the "subject is undermined by the self, but then the subject returns as the actor reuniting past and future in an action that symbolises them" (Williams 94). The third synthesis of time is composed of the eternal return of pure difference that is dependent on a cut or a fracture in time that reconfigures the multiplicity of past selves comprising the subject that are "shattered by the structure of the third synthesis that makes them past in relation to a future they cannot determine" (94). In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze claims that "time signifies a fault or a fracture in the *I* and a passivity in the self, and the correlation between the passive self and the fractured *I* constitutes the discovery of the transcendental, the element of the Copernican Revolution" (86). This cut or caesura in time that constitutes the third synthesis is an ordering of time within the dimension of the future and is explained by the fact that, as Deleuze argues, "time itself unfolds (that is,

apparently ceases to be a circle) instead of things unfolding within it (following the overly simply circular figure)” (88). As Clayton Crockett explains in *Deleuze Beyond Badiou: Ontology, Multiplicity, and Event*, “the fracture in the I is a caesura, a cut that becomes a passage because it drives the third synthesis, that of the future” so that “we repeat, become different, only by dying to our identity and becoming subject to Deleuze’s reformulation of the eternal return: only what becomes returns” (36). Deleuze, as Daniela Voss illustrates, defines the cut as a revolutionary or “excessive act” that separates the past from the future; in this formulation the past is “The time where one is not yet capable of the act,” the present is a period of “becoming-equal to the act and a doubling of the self, and the projection of an ideal self in the image of the act,” and the future denotes the period in which the excessive act returns to the subject and dissolves its identity (235-6). As we have seen, repetition for Deleuze “*is a condition of action before it is a concept of reflection*” so that “we produce something new only on the condition that we repeat – once in the mode which constitutes the past, and once more in the present of metamorphosis” (*DR* 90).

This pure and empty form of time that Deleuze associates with the third synthesis of time and the future is death due to the fact that it “is the disjunction of life, the fracture or split within the living being, that cannot be reduced to negation or limitation” (Crockett 134). As Crockett further explains, death is what “splits time into past (active synthesis, memory) and present (passive synthesis,

habit), and it's what gives a future" (134). Death is not the material death of the body, but the destruction and dissolving of the unified I in the face of pure difference and "the collapse of a given structure in the face of some kind of pure becoming" (Somers-Hall 95). For Deleuze, death is what underlies all of life and "cannot be reduced to negation, neither to the negative of opposition nor to the negative of limitation," and for this reason Deleuze links it primarily to the Freudian death drive (Deleuze *DR* 112).

#### 4.3 The Death Instinct and Masochism

Deleuze's conception of the death drive, or death instinct as he consistently refers to it, is essentially a reformulation of the primacy of the Freudian pleasure principle in relation to the death drive which, according to Deleuze, is the underlying law that governs repetition (Pearson 74). In *Life and Death in Freud and Heidegger* Havi Carel explains that Freud's conception of the pleasure principle established in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* relies on the formulation that "organisms in general, including humans, seek pleasure and seek to avoid unpleasure," and furthermore that the "aim of the organism is to lower the level of unbound excitation, excitation being defined as unpleasure and its discharge as pleasurable" (15). For Freud unpleasure is "an increase in psychic tension brought about by the free, unbound energy issuing from the drives or from external stimulation that threatens the ego's homeostatic system of bound

energy,” and pleasure is defined precisely as those actions that “discharge” these psychic intensities (Iversen 74). However, the organism’s tendency toward repetition is not fully explained in Freud’s conception of the pleasure principle, leading him to surmise that “people who repeatedly return to unpleasurable experiences are not masochists nor are they acting in accordance with the reality principle, but are victims of an alien, so it seems, compulsion to repeat,” a tendency that is “more primitive than, and independent of, the pleasure principle” (Carel 16). Freud labels the death drive as that very aggressive and sometimes harmful impulse predating and underlying the pleasure principle “whereby organized forms tend to revert to less organized ones, organic life to inorganic, and so on” (Iversen 74). The death drive (Thanatos) and the pleasure principle are constantly intertwined due to the fact that the “attainment of pleasure is itself a discharge that relieves tensions and restores the organism to a state of quiescence” (Singer 118). As Pentti Ikonen and Eero Rechartt explain in *Thanatos, Shame and Other Essays*, the pleasure principle, as the driving force behind self-preservation, and the death drive are co-substantial precisely because “any external object or source in the self experienced as disturbing can be calmed down by destroying it” (95).

Though, as Leen De Bolle indicates in the preface to *Deleuze and Psychoanalysis*, Deleuze appreciates Freud’s conception of the death drive as “a cosmological principle that governs all living creatures,” as well as his



formulation of repetition as “an original movement that is no longer related to the psychological experiences of the empirical,” he disagrees with Freud’s “materialistic model” where this repetition “tends to return to a stage before life, to a stage of death as unanimated matter” (12). Whereas Freud was primarily concerned with the dualistic opposition between desire and death, namely death as the antagonist of desire, Deleuze reformulates the schema of the death drive to arrive at the death instinct, which “stands for impersonal energy of ‘a life’ that transcends the conflicts of a particular life” (12). The death instinct for Deleuze then, if we recall our previous discussion, indicates a virtual plane of immanence that transcends the experiences of personal and material life. It is, as Beistegui illustrates, “an experience of pure time, or *pure form without matter*, in which the ego does not die as such, but experiences ‘the state of free difference when they are no longer subject to the form imposed upon them by an I or an ego...’” (*Immanence* 131). Death then, according to Deleuze, has two essential and contrasting aspects, beginning with “the disappearance of the person, the reduction to zero of this difference that constitutes the ego,” but more importantly:

a state of free floating differences that are no longer submitted to the form of the ego or the person. The first aspect is person. It concerns the death of the person. It is the death that can be confronted by the ego in a struggle or in an experience through which everything passes. The second aspect has no relation to the ego. It is an impersonal death that is “always coming, the source of

an incessant multiple adventure in a persistent question.” (De Bolle “Preface” 13)

What is crucial to gloss here is the contrast between Freud’s conception of the death drive as a strictly material impulse to return inanimate matter and Deleuze’s conception of death as that which “always comes from without, even at the moment when it constitutes the most personal possibility, from the past, even at the moment when it is most present” (*DR* 113-38). Death for Deleuze, as we have seen, is that transcendental field, though not distinct from life, that can be defined as “the state of free differences when they are no longer subject to the form imposed upon them by an *I* or an ego” (*DR* 113). The correlation between the death instinct and the third synthesis of time is their transcendental nature, where in both instances it indicates an independent future that “cuts all bonds with the memories, the virtual objects, and the infantile phantasms” that contract the multiplicity of the self into a fictitious unified whole (De Bolle “Passive Synthesis” 149). The death instinct is essentially that form of endless repetition that has removed all connections or associations with libidinal attachments; it is repetition for and in itself, and therefore leads to transcendence.

For Deleuze, Thanatos, or the death instinct, is always “beyond the ground, the abyss of the groundless; beyond the repetition that links, the repetition that erases and destroys” (*M* 114). In *Masochism* Deleuze reiterates a point made earlier in the text that “repetition came before the pleasure principle as the

unconditioned condition of the principle;” however, this is experienced in the inverse in reality “since we tend to repeat what has been found pleasurable, or is anticipated to be” (115). Though Eros and Thanatos are always interrelated and inextricable, the purpose of the former is to “bind the energy of Thanatos and to subject these combinations to the pleasure principle in the id,” precisely because the death instinct is always formalized as exterior to consciousness and is not encountered in lived experience (115-6).

As Leen De Bolle explains, Deleuze argues that Freud “needs desexualization for the constitution of the narcissistic self and the formation of the super-ego” (“Passive Synthesis” 147) whereby a “certain quantity of libido (Eros-energy) is neutralized, and becomes undifferentiated and freely mobile” (Deleuze *M* 116). In *The Ego and the Id* Freud claims there are “two crucial stages in psychic development in which desexualization of libido takes place: the formation of the narcissistic ego and the formation of the superego” (Bogue *DG* 50). For Freud the desexualization of libido is “succeeded by neurosis (in which case resexualized libido takes the ego or the superego as its object) or by healthy sublimation (in which case the ego and superego can enter into a properly functional relationship)” (*DG* 50). Deleuze, however, is unsatisfied with Freud’s two distinctions and argues:

Is there no other solution besides the functional disturbance of neurosis and the spiritual outlet of sublimation? Could there not be a third alternative which would be related not to the functional

interdependence of the ego and the superego, but to the structural split between them? (*M* 117)

For Freud perversion is essentially the failure to “integrate the components of the self – specifically the ego and the superego – in a normative, fully Oedipalized manner,” yet for Deleuze perversion is precisely “one set of techniques for negotiating the complexities of experience, not a failure of negotiation” (*Mattessich* 117). Perversion, and the desexualization of objects of libidinal attachment, is one of the ways of forcing the “event” that leads to infinite repetition and the third synthesis of time.

Furthermore, Deleuze claims that desexualization as formulated in this way impacts the pleasure principle in the following ways: “either it introduces functional disturbances which affect the application of the principle, or else it promotes a sublimation of the instincts whereby pleasure is transcended in favor of gratifications of a different kind” (*M* 116). Beyond the two alternatives identified by Freud for the diffusion of energy identified as neurosis and sublimation, Deleuze argues that in perversion desexualization “is accompanied by *resexualization* which does not in any way cancel out the desexualization, since it operates in a new dimension which is equally remote from functional disturbances and from sublimations” (*M* 117). As Deleuze explains further, it “is as if the desexualized element were resexualized but nevertheless retained, in a different form, the original desexualization; the desexualized has become in itself

the object of sexualization” (*M* 117). Most importantly, the desexualization process, whereby the libidinal investment in an object is renounced, “itself becomes the object for resexualization” (Cotter 120), and in Deleuze’s formulation of masochism this process is defined by disavowing pleasure which allows for endless repetition and “an intrinsic transformation of energy” where “it becomes neutralised by a movement of deterritorialization in order to find a free and endless circulation” (De Bolle “Passive Synthesis” 149). Essentially an object of attachment, such as the phallus, is desexualized and resexualized simultaneously, but the resexualization process is one where the object is retained precisely in the form of disavowing the object, which is essentially the structure of Deleuze’s formulation of masochism.

For Freud masochism “is a form of aggression directed toward the self” that is distinguished from sadism in the transformation of aggressiveness initially directed toward an exterior, to an inward punishment (Gutierrez-Albill 70). In Freud’s account the superego “is the internalized locus of the law of the father” so that masochism “is derivative of the incestuous wishes of the son, the fantasy in which the father is all-powerful and potent, beats the son, punishes him, possesses the mother, and makes her inaccessible for ever” (70). However, Deleuze disagrees with the relationship between the superego and the ego in Freud’s formulation, arguing that the structure represents the essential distinction between masochism and sadism. In the latter “the ego is expelled, rejected as the superego

achieves exclusive power in the father,” and this is precisely why the sadist is intent on punishing rather than being punished (Studlar 17). Masochism on the contrary is “a utopian affair between a severe maternal mother and her son, a pact to disavow the father’s phallus and the mother’s lack and write the father out of his dominant position” (Ramsay 159).

Deleuze claims that the “desexualization process in masochism is equally the precondition of instantaneous resexualization” where the traditional “passions of man” such as all of those objects that are fetishized in the pleasure principle “are transformed and put at the service of masochism” (*M* 118). It is not the case, according to Deleuze, that pain is sexualized to the point that it becomes the object of the pleasure principle as it is retained in masochism, for “the objective of masochism is not pain or humiliation,” for “these only constitute the price the masochist pays to postpone satisfaction in favour of an unlimited energy that circulates on an endless plane of immanence” (De Bolle “Passive Synthesis” 148). There is instead, in the performance of the masochist, an inversion of the pleasure principle, where “instead of repetition being experienced as a form of behavior related to a pleasure already obtained or anticipated, instead of repetition being governed by the idea of experiencing pleasure, repetition runs wild and becomes independent of all previous pleasure” (*M* 120). Pleasure is “disavowed” by the masochist, “better to be recovered as a reward or consequence, and as a law” so that in this instance the masochist has traversed through the pathway of the third

synthesis of time where “Eros is desexualized and humiliated for the sake of a resexualized Thanatos” (*M* 120). The infinite forestalling, or disavow of this pleasure, creates a situation where “desire becomes a *super-sensual* pleasure that operates in a new order, in which the father is denied and the mother becomes the instance of the law” (De Bolle “Passive Synthesis” 148).

#### 4.4 Masochism and the Mother

As we have seen, Deleuze’s theory of masochism is distinguished from sadism specifically in its reliance on fantasy and its transference of the paternal law embodied by the superego to that of the maternal in an infinite act of repetition that forms the essential dual movement of desexualization and resexualization of pleasure. Key to Deleuze’s masochistic formula is the maternal figure who, as a representative of the law within the symbolic order of the fantasy created by the masochist, embodies the man’s desire “to restore identification and oneness with her [the mother, a figure of idealized wholeness] and be reborn into a ‘new man devoid of sexual love’ who represents the denial of sexual difference and rejection of the father’s sexuality” (Studlar 43). This rebirth that results in the “new” a-phallic man is crucial, because it is the production of a creature outside and beyond the phallic order and who, unlike their predecessors, is not subjected to the same libidinal attachments.

The importance of the maternal figure is emphasized in Deleuze’s seminal work on masochism, *Masochism*, where he makes the remark that despite the

plethora of feminine subjects in Masoch's corpus, they all are essentially permutations and variations of a singular female figure with an established set of characteristics: "she wears furs, she wields a whip, she treats men as slaves and she is both my creation and the true Sarmatian woman" (Masoch qtd. in Deleuze *M* 47). However, despite the fact that there is an underlying thematic correspondence between each of these different manifestations of the female torturer, Deleuze claims that "beneath these apparent uniformity we may distinguish three very different types of women," which will correspond with a triumvirate of distinct maternal images (47).

The first variation of Masoch's women according to Deleuze is a paradoxical figure of unencumbered feminine freedom embodied by a surplus of sexuality. She is encompassed by "that of the Grecian woman, the pagan, hetaera or Aphrodite, the generator of disorder" who "believes in the independence of woman and in the fleeting nature of love; for her the sexes are equal; she is hermaphrodite" (47). The Aphrodite character is a picture of the ideal woman for the female subject precisely because "she is modern, and denounces marriage, morality, the Church and the State as the inventions of man, which must be destroyed," therefore personifying for the tortured man a sensual threat to patriarchy and sexual difference (48). In her hermaphroditism she not only exemplifies the very wholeness and unity that is crucial to the rebirth of the



masochist as a “new man,” but also as an example of the masochist’s disavowal of castration that is a crucial component of resexualization (Rado 50).

Whereas Deleuze’s first permutation “practices an unconstrained sensuality, creating havoc through her liaisons with multiple partners,” the second feminine figure is the “sadistic woman” who “dominates man through eroticized violence” (Bogue *DL* 17). The second woman is a patriarchal construct who “enjoys hurting and torturing others, but it is significant that her actions are prompted by a man or otherwise performed in concert with a man, whose victim she is always liable to become” (Deleuze *M* 48). The sadistic woman is spurred on to violent behavior by the character Masoch refers to as “the Greek, or indeed Apollo, who intervenes as a third party to incite the woman to sadistic behavior” (*M* 48). In Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs* the Greek is the “third term” who is introduced into the dyad by the heroine and who destroys the masochistic fantasy by brutally whipping Severin (Mennel 156). The Greek not only represents a sadistic figure that threatens to disrupt the masochistic fantasy, but also an object of affection for the heroine that evokes the “hope of a rebirth of the new man that will result from the masochistic experience” (*M* 66). The Greek, as we will see, becomes that very figure of paternal law that represents the disruption of reality upon the symbolic order created by the masochistic contract.

Finally, the third woman in Deleuze’s formulation of the masochistic contract is precisely the heroine who achieves, by way of the fantasy, the

masochistic ideal. The heroine in the masochistic fantasy is not a sadist, despite the fact that she beats the masochist, but the epitome of the male's fantasy that is constituted between the two previously mentioned feminine figures. In Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* the heroine, Wanda, "sees herself at first as a Grecian woman and ends up believing she is a sadist," identifying first with the spirit of Aphrodite, yet "at the end of the novel she behaves like a sadist; under the influence of the Greek..." (M 48-9). For Deleuze, the "essential part of the story is enacted in between these two extremes" so that they "do not represent the masochistic ideal but rather the end points between which this ideal swings, like the span of the pendulum" (M 50).

According to Deleuze, the aforementioned figures of femininity present in the masochistic fantasy correspond to three distinct "images" of maternity that form a symbolic order that disavows the paternal function. Continuing with his description of masochism and its essential contrast with sadism, Deleuze contends that what characterizes the former "is a peculiar form of cruelty in the woman torturer: the cruelty of the Ideal, the specific freezing point, the point at which idealism is realized" (M 55). This ideal maternal figure, as we have seen, is produced precisely in the interval between the sadistic woman and the hermaphrodite in order to constitute the object of the masochistic fantasy. Deleuze claims that the three maternal figures can be identified as the following:

...the first is the primitive, uterine, hetaeric mother, mother of the cloaca and the swamps; the second is the Oedipal mother, the image of the beloved, who becomes linked with the sadistic father as victim or as accomplice; and in between these two, the oral mother, mother of the steppe, who nurtures and brings death. (*M* 55)

As with the Grecian woman, the hetaeric mother is chaotic and disruptive to the patriarchal order in her complete disavowal of masculinity, whereas the Oedipal mother represents the arrival of the paternal function and the castration necessary to enter the Symbolic Order (Carpentier 78). The hetaeric or uterine mother represents a surplus of sexuality, whereas her counterpart the Oedipal mother is the manifestation of utmost coldness and distance that is linked to the figure of patriarchal control (*M* 55). As Deleuze claims the third maternal image, the oral mother is the “ideal of coldness, solicitude and death, between the uterine and the Oedipal mother,” drawing characteristics from each spectrum of maternal behavior (*M* 55). The death Deleuze mentions is not a literal death, but the death of the “old regime,” of the dissolution of the self (*M* 49) because the constitution of the oral mother, is not a dialectic progression where the heroine slowly synthesizes the characteristics of the hetaeric and Oedipal mother, but “a single, momentary *Aufhebung* in which the oral mother transforms the son” (Bogue *DW* 111). Deleuze makes clear that the oral mother, as the ideal of the masochist, must take on the prescribed identities of the uterine and Oedipal mother and “in taking on these functions, she transforms and sublimates them” (*M* 63). As Suzanne

Verderber explains, the heroine achieves the place of the oral mother when she “combines coldness, cruelty, haughtiness, and sternness with maternal tenderness and sentimentality, contradictory traits that are embodied by a single woman” (107). What is crucial to understand from Deleuze’s conception is that the oral mother is as much a creation of this event as the a-phallic man due to the fact that the woman achieves the role of oral mother precisely by facilitating the rebirth. This rebirth is ultimately predicated on the adoption of these disparate techniques by the heroine in order to expunge the father from the masochistic fantasy.

In his chapter “Father and Mother” Deleuze identifies a central mistake in traditional scholarship directed at masochism and one that leads back to the problematic of collapsing masochism and sadism into a singular perversion. Deleuze illustrates that “it is argued that the overtness of the masochist’s conflict with the mother, his readiness to incriminate her, should convince us that it is not the mother but the father who plays the central role” (*M* 57). Deleuze claims that this is incorrect primarily because it would lead to the fallacious conclusion that “the masochist would start by wishing to take the place of the father and steal his potency (the sadistic stage); a feeling of guilt would then arise, and with it the fear of castration, leading him to renounce the active aim and take the place of the mother in soliciting the father’s love” (*M* 57). Deleuze claims that the paternal function, the father, is indeed present in the masochistic demonstration, but that he is hidden, not as actual object as the true image behind the maternal figure, but

as an image within the masochist himself who is beaten (*M* 60). As Deleuze makes clear, “what the subject atones for is his resemblance to the father and the father’s likeness in him: the formula of masochism is the humiliated father” and, furthermore, “a point of great significance in the fantasy of the three mothers is the symbolic transfer or redistribution of all paternal functions to the threefold feminine figure: the father is excluded and completely nullified” (*M* 60-1).

Because the paternal functions distributed to the three maternal figures are subsequently concentrated in the figure of the oral mother, the father figure is completely nullified by the female triumphant that expels him and creates a closed symbolic order where “the mother represents the law under certain prescribed traditions; she generates the symbolism through which the masochist expresses himself” (*M* 63). Yet, the father figure is only abolished temporarily from this symbolic order, functioning very much “in the order of the real” as in Lacanian discourse where “an object which has been abolished on the symbolic plane resurges in ‘the real’ in a hallucinatory form” (*M* 64). The paternal function returns in Deleuze’s analysis of Masoch’s formulation in the form of the Greek who “takes up the whip and thrashes Severin” so that the “supersensual charm quickly dissolves: ‘voluptuous dream, woman and love,’ all melt away” (*M* 64). This “return of what had been symbolically abolished” leads Theodor Reik to argue that “the ‘magic’ vanishes from the masochistic scene because the subject thinks he recognizes in the woman about to strike him a trait that reminds him of

the father” (*M* 65). Deleuze claims that this does not prove that masochism inevitably devolves into sadism, but merely that “it represents the constant threat from the side of reality to the masochist’s world and to the defenses that condition and limit the symbolic world of perversion” (*M* 65).

Deleuze continues by claiming that this intrusion of the paternal function as an element existing in the Real into the symbolic register constructed by the masochist is defended against by the development of a masochistic contract that transfers the paternal authority onto the oral mother (*M* 65). As Deleuze states “the masochistic hero must evolve a complex strategy to protect his world of fantasy and symbols, and to ward off the hallucinatory inroads of reality (or to put it differently, the real attacks of hallucination)” (*M* 65). The contract “is established between the hero and the woman, whereby at a precise point in time and for a determinate period she is given every right over him” in an attempt by the masochist to “ensure that the temporal order of reality and experience will be in conformity with the symbolic order, in which the father has been abolished for all time” (*M* 66). In this way the masochist, according to Deleuze, is able to protect the symbolic order in which the three maternal images exist without the intrusion of the father and, more importantly, “liberates himself in preparation for a rebirth in which the father will have no part” (*M* 66).

Deleuze claims that Freud’s formulation of sadism and masochism relies on a “theory that posits an original aggressive instinct followed by the turning

around of aggression upon the subject through the agency of the superego” (*M* 123). Therefore, this line of thinking would assume that “the transformation into masochism would take place by a transfer of the aggressive component to the superego, which would then cause sadism to be turned around upon the ego” (*M* 123-4). However, Deleuze contends that the apparent insufficiency and “weakness of the ego is a strategy by which the masochist manipulates the woman into the ideal state for the performance of the role he has assigned her” (*M* 124). The superego, the locus of morality and conformity, is projected onto the torturing woman, not in order to fully negate it, but to strip it of its essential power through a process of disavowing (*M* 125). To clarify briefly, Tomas Geyskens explains in “Literature as Symptomatology: Gilles Deleuze on Sacher-Masoch” that in the tradition of Freud “the Super-Ego is the heir of the father of the Oedipus complex, who excludes the child from the sexual relation between father and mother,” and furthermore “becomes the keeper of the incest taboo and of the morality of which this taboo is the kernel” (106-7). The very power of the masochist is in its desexualization of the paternal function through the disavowal of sexual difference precisely by suspending, rather than denying, the apparent lack of the female subject (107-8). As both Deleuze and Geyskens make clear, this is precisely why the female torturer is clothed in furs because it presents a frozen image of the woman before undressing, before the revelation of sexual difference (108). This “disavowal of the castration of the mother neutralises the Oedipal

father and his threat” so that he is “foreclosed and his power is transferred to the mother” (108). As Geyskens further explains:

My mother beats me, but not to satisfy my feeling of guilt or my need for punishment. The mistress humiliates and beats me because I still resemble my father, because I am still the bearer of this ridiculous sign of genital sexuality, the phallus. The mother does not so much beat the son; she beats the father in the son; she beats the father out of the son... The horizon of masochism is the rebirth of an a-phallic creature out of the mother alone. (109)

This disavowal, as Deleuze makes clear, initiates the creation of the maternal phallus and, more importantly, “entrusts the mother with the power to give birth to an ‘ideal ego’ which is pure, autonomous and independent of the superego” (*M* 127). This process of desexualization that results in the disavowal of the paternal function and the resexualization of the maternal through the construction of a maternal phallus is precisely what enters into that realm of beyond the pleasure principle through the inversion of Eros for “a resexualized Thanatos” (*M* 120). This is precisely Deleuze’s dissolution of self through endless repetition of the eternal return where the masochist, according to Marco Abel:

will[s] his punishment in such a way that he also wills its return, over and over again, in a (seemingly) infinite way... And he wills this infinite return as a means to extend and intensify the experience of inhabiting an interstice within which he is subjected to a sensation of himself as becoming-other to himself – a process of becoming that assumes a degree of consistency.... (127)

The type of repetition that takes place is not the repetition of the same, of an image of subjectivity to which the masochist and his heroine perform their roles accordingly. It is a resexualized repetition of the law that disavows and parodies



the phallic function, allowing the masochist, as well as the heroine, to emerge as completely different constructions of their own creation.

#### 4.5 Maternity and Masochism

At an initial glance masochism as a tactical and performed schema of behavior seems counterintuitive to any discussion of maternity endeavoring to provide a model for the liberating emergence of a new maternal subject outside or beyond paternal control. This is due precisely because of the fact that it seemingly justifies and extends the subjugation of the maternal figure to the Law of the Father behind the fantastical promise of transcendence achieved through a permanently forestalled *jouissance*. Julia Kristeva herself has argued in *Tales of Love* that what is commonly termed “maternal performativity” is a “form of anonymity that preserves social norms” (Charnon-Deutsch 170), commenting further that:

Feminine perversion is coiled up in the desire for law as desire for reproduction and continuity, it promotes feminine masochism to the rank of structure stabilizer (against its deviations); by assuring the mother that she may thus enter into an order that is above humans’ will it gives her reward of pleasure. Such coded perversion, such close combat between maternal masochism and the law have been utilized by totalitarian powers of all times to bring women to their side, and, of course, they succeed easily. (Kristeva *TL* 260)

What Kristeva identifies and objects to in regards to maternal performativity is an apparent passivity inherent in the structure of masochism that seemingly places the maternal figure in a subservient role to that of patriarchal and paternal control.

Ironically this is precisely how Frances L. Restuccia appropriates Kristeva's theory of the abject in *Melancholics in Love* where she uses Pauline Reage's *Story of O* in order to argue that the main character "merges" with the maternal body through a masochistic process that allows her to embody the abject, using "sadistic men to assist her in punishing herself, so as not to alienate, or destroy, the miring maternal object/abject, whose love she craves and all aggression toward whom she hopes to conceal" (68-9). The form of masochism delineated by Restuccia, with its reliance on the non-identity and the way the abject defies categorization, is what Kristeva is warning against when she claims that the feminine subject that takes part in masochism "allows herself a coded, fundamental, perverse behavior, ultimate guarantee of society, without which society will not reproduce and will not maintain a constancy of standardized household" (*TL* 260).

What these different permutations of maternal masochism have in common is the sustained presence of the paternal or masculine within the masochistic register, as well as an emphasis on anonymity and non-identity, both of which run contrary to the schema formulated by Deleuze and discussed previously. As we have seen, the debasement of paternal law by way of projecting authority onto the maternal figure is that which makes it possible for the masochist, assisted by the female torturer, to be reborn as an a-phallic subject. There is no place for the father in Deleuze's formulation of masochism, and in our

reconceptualization the removal of the father from the symbolic register allows, not for anonymity, but for the production of new identity through the child who functions as a perverse object. Kristeva claims that perversion, specifically feminine perversion, which is central to masochism in all of its forms, “does not reside in the parceling or the Don Juan-like multiplying of objects of desire; it is at once legalized, if not rendered paranoid, through the agency of masochism” (*TL* 260). However, what we are discussing specifically in our version of maternal performativity that is based on Deleuzian masochism is not the “multiplying of objects of desire,” but of recreating the originary connection between mother and child experienced in the semiotic that results in a libidinal attachment to the mother. As we have seen with the example of Rosemary’s baby, in the case of the maternal subject specifically, perversion is precisely the result of the law, of symbolic overcodification that makes masochism possible, which in turn results in the dissolution of the previous self in what Deleuze terms an “impersonal death,” a dissolution of the self and the subsequent rebirth of a new maternal subject through the establishment of a masochistic contract between mother and child.

One must be cautious not to confuse the passiveness that Kristeva locates in maternal performativity, an aspect that would reinforce the Western philosophical tradition of collapsing the feminine with nature, with our version of maternal performativity, which is more aligned with the maternal humility that

Sara Ruddick conceptualizes in *Maternal Thinking*. Ruddick's theory of maternal humility relies more on the recognition that "in a world beyond one's control, to be humble is to have a profound sense of the limits of one's actions and of the unpredictability of the consequences of one's work" (72). Ruddick locates in the humility of the maternal subject a particular subjectivity indicative to the practice of mothering that, far from being constituted through sheer subjugation either to paternal authority or the child, alludes to how the agency and identity of the mother is intertwined with that of the infant. In Ruddick's formulation of "humility" as it pertains to maternal thinking, the mother "respects the limits of her will and the independent, uncontrollable, and increasingly separate existence she seeks to preserve" (72). This theory of maternal humility brings us closer to a truer vision of maternal performativity precisely because, despite the fact that humility and passivity in the face of the child or any Other is necessary, it does not necessarily imply that the maternal subject must "relinquish control" (73). As Ruddick illustrates, due to the fact that "control is a preoccupying maternal issue, mothers come to think about control in distinctive ways," therefore conceiving of "maternal virtue" as a "respect for the independent, uncontrollable will of the other" (73). Ruddick's theory is crucial to any theory of maternal ethics for a number of reasons, yet most importantly for this discussion because she emphasizes relative control over the child that is other, yet control that refrains from pure dominance, claiming that "if her care is successful, a mother will

ensure the safety of someone whose will she cannot control” (73). What we can ultimately derive from Ruddick’s theory, aside from the obvious fact that maternal identity is intricately linked to that of the child, is a theory of maternal subjectivity that is developed through responsibility to the child that is both simultaneously active and passive.

With this in mind the following section would like to extend and adapt a theory of maternal performativity that is akin to Ruddick’s central idea of maternal humility, which she further defines as “a way of preserving and controlling in an exhausting, uncontrollable world,” as a foundation for the development of a theory of maternal ethics that is grounded in masochism (73). This theory of maternal performativity will be derived directly from Gilles Deleuze’s conception that, as discussed previously, is not a passivity in the service of patriarchal law that masks the oppression of women, nor is it an attempt to derive pleasure from the service to and pain caused by an other. The following will illustrate, using Ira Levin’s novel *Rosemary’s Baby*, that maternal performativity is a tactical performance of self-creation, a repetition that resexualizes subjugation and creates a closed symbolic circuit that unabashedly forecloses the paternal function. Similar to Deleuze’s formulation of masochism where the torturer takes on the role of paternal authority and therefore excludes patriarchal law, the maternal subject recreates the experience of the mother/child dyad in the semiotic and in doing so, not only takes on the role as an authority and

establishes a strictly maternal law, but reworks the child's libidinal investment so that results in the birth of an a-phallic subject, a "new man" whose desires are pre-genital, rather than Oedipal. Whereas in Deleuze's theory of masochism it is a male that occupies the role of masochist and a female the torturer, in our formulation of maternal performativity it is the mother who fulfills the role of masochist, regulating and accepting a subservient role to that of the child.

The subject of maternal performativity and the acceptance of a demonic offspring has specific implications for our discussion of *Rosemary's Baby* because, as Sarah Arnold proclaims in *Maternal Horror Film*, the heroine's acceptance of the demonic child at the conclusion of the narrative engenders discussions regarding the correlations between maternity and perversion (178). Arnold, speaking in regards to not only Roman Polanski's adaption of Levin's novel and Greg Spence's *The Prophecy II* (1998), both of which utilize the horror-film trope mentioned earlier of the demonic or divinely inspired child, claims the depiction of each heroine choosing to mother a child that is only partially their own biological offspring "masks an underlying assumption: that women's mothering is inevitable and 'natural'" (178). This, Arnold further contends, functions "on the level of a 'perversion' since such a representation oscillates between masochism and perceived empowerment (for example in the Virgin Mother as matriarch of sorts)" (178). In this instance masochism falls under the auspices of a perversion in the Lacanian sense so that it is viewed as

“strictly speaking an inverted effect of the fantasy, because it ‘is the subject who determines himself as object, in his encounter with the division of subjectivity,’” where the maternal subject takes pleasure in essentially being-for-the-other (Nobus 43). This traditional conception of masochism and perversion fails to address the fact that Rosemary, specifically in her acceptance of the abject child, is not perverse in the sense that she obtains pleasure from a perverted object, but a masochist that resexualizes her subjugation to the child, postponing gratification so that there is an endless production of desire without an object and the rebirth of a new subject. The pleasure or goal of the mother in the masochistic fantasy is not in the pain or anguish experienced as one-for-the other, but the repetitive and constant self-creation that is engendered through the performance of maternity.

As illustrated previously Deleuze locates two essential versions of maternity in the masochistic scenario that surround the heroine torturer; the hetaeric mother who represents the mother without lack and the Oedipal mother who is aligned with patriarchal control. The first image of maternity, the hetaeric mother, can easily be associated with the pre-Oedipal and archaic mother who exists outside the confines of the symbolic. As Deleuze illustrates, she “is hermaphrodite” and serves as that which “triumphs – as Omphale unmans Hercules with woman’s attire” (*M* 47). Yet, Deleuze is clear to emphasize that, although she is equal to her masculine counterpart in regards to strength and authority, she is not phallic, but is similar to that of Kristeva’s semiotic realm that

“transcends both masculine and feminine,” existing outside the symbolic economy of representation (qtd. in Ingman 54) and “creates havoc in the patriarchal family” (Deleuze *M* 48). She is unidentifiable and represents a lack of castration in that she is fluid and without static form, merely serving to give shape to the Oedipal mother as a counterpoint. In Levin’s *Rosemary’s Baby* it is Rosemary’s friend from New York, Edward “Hutch” Hutchins who functions within the narrative as the archaic or hetaeric mother, as that figure who is intricately linked to her memory and, more importantly, works to expose the coven of witches in the Bramford apartment that serves as an institution of demonic power (14). Despite the fact that he is a man, he serves as a maternal figure for Rosemary after her traumatic departure from her home city of Omaha where “she had left an angry, suspicious father, a silent mother, and four resenting brothers and sisters” (14). During her time before moving to the Bramford, Hutch had “bucked her up with strong tea and talks about parents and children and one’s duty to oneself” and “sent her to a night course in philosophy at NYU” (15). The emphasis that Hutch places on “duty to oneself” is one of the first instances of his intrusion and disruption of paternal authority as he constantly collides with Guy’s vision of how Rosemary should act. Throughout the novel Hutch is consistently that recollection for Rosemary that compels her not to conform to the prescribed identity set forth by the satanic coven and her husband, and he ultimately becomes



that “voice” of memory from outside the symbolic network that they have created that threatens to destabilize their plan.

However, though Hutch is a maternal figure for Rosemary in the early stages of the novel, it is his influence on the heroine after his death at the hands of the coven that truly emphasizes his connection with the hetaeric mother and Kristeva’s semiotic. As Judith Butler explains “language for Kristeva is understood as a system in which the symbolic remains hegemonic except when the semiotic disrupts its signifying processes through elision, repetition, mere sound, and the multiplication of meaning through indefinitely signifying images and metaphors” (“Body Politics” 167). As we have seen the Bramford apartment building serves as a closed symbolic register that is represented as an inversion of typical reality; Rosemary is consistently made hysteric by Minnie Castevet who shields her from the rational discourse of doctors other than Abe Sapirstein. Hutch is precisely a representation of the semiotic in this instance because he introduced a necessary counter-discourse into the hegemony instituted by the coven in the Bramford apartments, but one that is indirect and never merely a contrasting representation. From the moment that Rosemary and Guy decide to move into the apartment building Hutch is suspicious, not only of the Bramford itself, but of its occupants, leading him to give Rosemary a book titled *All of Them Witches* that details the history of Adrian Marcato, a nineteenth-century Satanist who is subsequently revealed to be the father of Roman Castevet, the leader of the coven.

Even after his demise, Hutch lingers within Rosemary's psyche, situated on the margins of her memory and informing her perceptions and actions as they pertain to the coven itself.

More importantly, Hutch's influence on Rosemary is framed within the novel, not so much as a "voice" in her head from the past, but as a feeling or impulse, a sensation that causes her to be suspicious of the coven as well. In this instance, the correlation between Hutch and the semiotic, as well as the archaic mother becomes more pronounced as all three function as that which introduces multiple meanings into language and disrupts signification. Prior to Hutch's intervention there was no ambiguity or counter-discourse to influence Rosemary and it is only through Hutch that there is a necessary disruption in the coven's symbolic order. However, it is important to keep in mind that Deleuze's hetaeric mother is not the masochistic ideal, which is a collaboration between the two essential maternal figures. The hetaeric mother represents disruption and chaos to the patriarchal order, yet, I would argue, she is a mother only in the sense that she gives birth to the child and not due to a responsibility to the Other. Masoch's hetaeric mother, March, disappoints and ultimately shatters the masochistic relationship because she embodies the role the masochist wants "up to a point, but which she stops playing when she refuses to wear the fox skin and wears instead 'prostitute' clothes, i.e., those of the hetaeric mother" (Sinzelle 169). The hetaeric mother, like Hutch, emphasizes "duty to oneself" rather than a

responsibility to the Other, which is necessary to counter the Oedipal discourse of paternal control, yet doesn't present an ideal model of maternity as a practice and as a performance (Levin 15).

Deleuze's second maternal figure is that of the Oedipal mother, that which we have already seen is associated with the violent and castrating phallic mother distinguished in the crystalline image of maternity. Like the phallic mother discussed earlier, Deleuze's Oedipal mother is the "sadistic woman" whose actions are directly influenced and constituted by the paternal function with which she is in concert (*M* 48). The sadistic Oedipal mother, in congress with paternal authority, represents the threat of sadism in the masochistic fantasy; she is cold and completely impersonal and promotes the ultimate goal of sadism which is "not to be sexually excited by torturing other people, but to put one's cold-bloodedness and insensitivity to the test of torture without regressing to cruelty or pity" (Geyskens 106). The result, if the heroine torturer is influenced too heavily by the Greek and paternal authority, is the complete destruction of the Ego at the hands of the Super-Ego where the masochist in turn becomes sadistic himself (106). Whereas the hetaeric mother represents the unencumbered sexuality and tenderness of the prostitute, the Oedipal mother is the rational and cold maternal figure that constructs the masochistic in the image of the father and reproduces paternal hegemony. The Oedipal mother in Deleuze's formulation is at once castrated and yet whole due to the fact that she possesses phallic power in relation

to the paternal figure and the Law of the Father, being that maternal image that has been constructed through the prism of patriarchy herself.

In Levin's novel the Oedipal mother correlates with the figure of Minnie Castevet, the elderly tenant of the Bramford apartments and the matriarch of the satanic coven who is not only associated with her husband, Roman, the leader of the cult, but the devil himself. As with Deleuze's Oedipal mother in the masochistic triumvirate where the "mother-representative is the accomplice and the young girl is the victim," Minnie is the representative of Satanic power within the novel, even more so than her husband, and Rosemary is that very mother-in-process, the victim, who is conditioned in the image of the phallic mother to bring forth the offspring of the devil (*M* 61). Minnie is represented as whole in several ways, most notably she is aware of how Rosemary's baby *should* be raised, constantly monitoring its progress during gestation, providing herbal remedies to ensure its health, and suggesting the proper obstetrician (Levin 117). It is precisely the Oedipal or phallic mother who is accompanied by the paternal function who impresses upon the heroine her sadistic traits, always threatening and attempting to condition the heroine to become a replica of her (Deleuze *M* 48-9). One cannot make the mistake of placing these two maternal figures, the hetaeric and the Oedipal mother, in the typical binary opposition of "good" and "bad" mothers. The hetaeric mother as we have seen is individualistic, the primitive mother that represents fertility who is chaotic and more concerned with

destabilizing the foundations of the patriarchy. The Oedipal mother on the other hand can easily be viewed as the “good” mother in that she produces a son in the image of the father and reproduces patriarchal control. However, each of these represents opposite ends of the maternal spectrum and present characteristics that the heroine, in our case Rosemary, must embody in order to truly construct her own version of maternity.

Crucial to a reformulation of Deleuze’s concept of masochism is a restructuring of the role and identity of the masochist in the symbolic economy created by the institution of the masochistic contract. In the Deleuzian schema the masochist is always figured as a masculine subject who asserts his agency through the construction of the female torturer’s identity and the establishment of a set of principles and actions that are repeated in an ongoing performance. The ultimate outcome of the masochistic contract is a transformation of subjectivity that results in the birth of an a-phallic subject that transcends the confines of the Law of the Father by ascending to the death instinct that is beyond the pleasure principle (*M* 66). Within the Deleuzian conception of masochism the female torturer figures only as a secondary performer in the contract and has little or no agency; her identity is established by the male masochist, as are her actions, and it is only the constant resurgence of the Law, represented by the figure of the Greek, that threatens to reconstruct her role as that of the phallic mother, rather than a mediation between the two maternal figures that Deleuze identifies. Though the

feminine figure embodies the law as a way in which to foreclose the entrance of paternal authority, this is nevertheless bestowed upon her by the male masochist who ultimately uses her in order to go beyond the pleasure principle and facilitate his own rebirth.

In our adaption of Deleuze's theory, it is precisely the mother who occupies the role of masochist, approaching an unknowable Other with a performance of passivity who she then reconstructs as a torturer in order to facilitate her own rebirth. This theory of maternal performance is informed directly by Levinas' theory of ethical subjectivity and radical passivity, where the individual is formed out of an encounter where the unknowable Other holds them hostage and their subjectivity is formed out of infinite responsibility and exposure (Buckingham 137). For Levinas, as we have seen, "subjectivity is the passivity of the rupture of enjoyment created by vulnerability and exposure," a vulnerability where the existent can no longer retreat to interiority because the Other "can and does enter this interior space as an unwelcomed, foreign irritant to the self's unity" (Joldersma 49). Levinas' radical passivity is characterized essentially in a two-fold manner: it is both an anarchic responsibility to an unknowable Other by the existent who is exposed to alterity beyond thematization and a vulnerability.

The radical passivity that Levinas discusses predominantly in *Totality and Infinity* is reconfigured in our schema of maternal performativity precisely because, as discussed in earlier chapters, the alterity of the Other has been severed

by the presence of the third party, of language and the law. Specifically in the case of the mother the alterity of the Other, which is the infinite future embodied by that of the child, is thematized into two essential maternal images, the hetaeric and Oedipal mothers to which the maternal figure is subjected. This is what we see at the conclusion of Levin's novel, *Rosemary's Baby* as Rosemary enters the room where her son Andrew/Adrian's bassinet is placed and immediately encounters his demonic features. The intrusion of third party here is evident as the child has horns and a tail, indicating the unmistakable markings of the paternal law represented by his father, the devil. Furthermore, the child is enveloped by images that signify the discursive network of power that has repeatedly subjected her throughout the novel as the coven surrounds her and the bassinette as she makes her first encounter with the child. Whereas, Levinas' radical passivity is essentially "the vulnerability of a response before knowing, a praxis prior to planning, and the-one-for-the-other before questioning," maternal performativity is instead a performed passivity because it is a chosen and anarchic responsibility to the Other despite the fact that the face of the child is thematized by paternal law (Tahmasebi-Birgani 63).

However, the fact that the alterity of the child is severed, or more appropriately redirected through the prism of constructed identity, does not alter the fact that Levinas' radical passivity is marked by a vulnerability of both the

subject and the Other. Initially, upon viewing her child Rosemary is compelled to kill both herself and her son:

The thing to do was kill it. Obviously. Wait till they were all sitting at the other end, then run over, push away Laura-Louise, and grab it and throw it out the window. And jump out after it. *Mother Slays Baby and Self at Bramford*. (Levin 240)

This, as Judith Butler illustrates in *Precarious Life* is reminiscent of the ethical imperative in Levinas' ethical encounter where, the moment where the Other "speaks" the commandment not to kill, also signifies the temptation, through the Other's vulnerability, precisely to murder (135-8). Rosemary desires at first to kill the child and herself, but ultimately convinces herself that "she *couldn't* throw him out the window" and that "it was a problem for the Church to handle. For the Pope and all the cardinals to deal with, not stupid Rosemary Reilly from Omaha" (241). Rosemary finds the thought of murdering her child unbearable precisely because, despite the fact that she sees the marking of power in the child, there is also the recognition of herself in him, indicated by her response that "how dear and sweet he had looked before he had opened those yellow eyes! The tiny chin, a bit like Brian's" (241). Rosemary can see a familial heritage in the baby, commenting that he resembles her brother, and this makes it so that she is unable to harm the child. This returns us back to Levinas, for whom the face of the Other "is what one cannot kill" precisely because "my ethical relation of love for the other stems from the fact that the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find



meaning within its own being-in-the world...To expose myself to the vulnerability of the face is to put my ontological right to existence into question” (Levinas qtd. in Butler *PL* 132). The previous statement illustrates that Rosemary’s recognition goes beyond merely familial heritage, but instead understanding that her identity and ontological makeup are attached to that of the child and, to murder the child would only work to legitimize her role and subjection as a deviant mother. This realization only further emphasizes the interconnectivity of the mother/infant identity, both of which are constructed and shaped by the mother’s performance of maternity.

The connection with Deleuze’s formulation of masochism, especially the performance of the law in order to subvert, becomes even more pronounced when we return to the controversial relationship between Levinas’ third party and the co-substantiality of a monotheistic God with the face of the Other. As Claire Elise Katz explains in *Levinas and the Crisis of Humanism*, Levinas “insists on the concrete, of not thinking God alone, but God as revealed in the face of the Other, a face that demands us to respond to it, a face that says ‘thou shalt not kill’” (160). The prohibition against murdering the Other is the original ethical demand placed on the existent by the face of the Other, both because it would signal the forfeiture of my own ontological existence, but also because “one cannot kill the living God, and Levinas’s Other is modeled in part on the incomprehensible and radically transcendent God...” (Potkay 44). Yet, as discussed in earlier chapters

the *illeity* and absolute alterity that God represents in Levinas' corpus is suspended and the relationship with the face of the Other made symmetrical with the entrance of the third party, the "source of society, justice, language and more" (Morgan 151). Levinas' third party, which he equates with justice, is indicative of the workings of power, as we have seen that thematizes the face and makes it knowable.

Furthermore, because the third party is that intrusive element that comes from without, who represents the symbolic order of language and identity imposed upon the individual, it brings us closer to the figure of Deleuze's "Greek" in the masochistic contract. As David Allen Grindstaff indicates in *Rhetorical Secrets*, in Deleuze's formation the Greek is precisely that figure who is linked to the patriarchal father and who "functions as a threat to the masochistic contract, a threat that must be overcome in order to fulfill the ideal expiation and birth" (40). The Greek is the threat of reality that is always present, removed from the masochistic scene and who consistently threatens to coax the heroine into become solely the Oedipal mother by transforming the performance of masochism into sadism (Fantina 52). The Greek, like the law, calls for the ego and the maternal to be abjected in place of a "father-identified superego run amok" and it is precisely the law that demands that the maternal figure work in conjunction with paternal law in the creation of an Oedipal child (Deleuze *M* 124). However, as we will see, the maternal figure takes the law onto herself in a performance of

authority that both humiliates and abjects the role of the father in the dyad between mother and child

This vulnerability is not only that of the Other, who signifies passivity by way of the face, but also that of the self, which Levinas describes as a nakedness, an exposure to the Other without the possibility of interiority (Clercq 84). In our version of maternal performativity the vulnerability that characterizes the state of the existent in its approach of the Other is akin to Deleuze's distinction between the two specific forms of death that he relates to the death instinct. If we recall, Deleuze claims in *Difference and Repetition* that death comes in essentially two forms: death as "the reduction of this difference that constitutes the ego" and death that is related primarily to the transcendental nature of the death instinct that is imposed from the exterior (13). Deleuze clarifies the distinction in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* when he claims that the former is "death from the inside or past," whereas the other is "death from the outside or the future" (209) and when one progresses from the initial death of the self we arrive at "the third synthesis of time where the future is conceived not only from the past but also from the future as such, the future of the eternal return of death and rebeginning" (Pisters 145). Deleuze's main example of the progression from the personal death to that of the death drive is the character that is likened to Lazarus, who "returns from death, from the land of the dead; he has passed through death and is born from death" then begins to move "inexorably towards a death from the outside, which comes

to him as the other side of the absolute” (CII 214). The subject in between the two deaths is “an instantiation of *a people yet to come*,” a zombie or undead creature that is “the actualization that something has both happened and is happening” (Wallin 266).

This initial and personal “death” occurs in Levin’s *Rosemary’s Baby* and the result of the aforementioned oversaturation of Rosemary by way of an imaginary identity results in none other than what Slavoj Žižek in *Interrogating the Real* designates the “intermediate space of the unrepresentable Thing” that is occupied by the “undead” that is our protagonist (170). The “undead,” in Žižek’s formulation, is intimately related to the death drive, something explored in previous sections in greater detail, and which can be defined as “the re-emergence of what was ostracized when the ego constituted itself by way of imaginary identification: the return of the polymorphous impulses is experienced by the ego as a mortal threat, since it actually entails the dissolution of its Imaginary identity” (144). Contrary to the Freudian perception of the death drive as a chaotic and destructive driving that characterizes all of life’s movements towards ultimate entropy, Žižek illustrates that what “re-emerges in the ‘death drive’ is ultimately *life itself*, and the fact that the ego perceives this return as a death threat precisely confirms its perverted ‘repressive’ character” (144).

It is important to note, as Žižek does, that the Lacanian notion of death here relates a binary opposition between two forms of death: “the first death is the

death of the ego, the dissolution of its imaginary identifications, whereas the second death designates the interruption of the pre-symbolic life flow itself” (144). Žižek cautions against conceiving of this intermediate space between the two deaths as a “pure life” that is pre-symbolic, but instead claims that it is the “*product* of symbolization, so that symbolization itself engenders the surplus that escapes it” (172). This intermediate point between the two deaths, the death of the ego and the actual death of the individual, is designated precisely as that figure characterized in modern horror fiction as the “undead,” or, as Žižek labels it, the “lamella, the indestructible-immortal life that dwells in the domain ‘between the two deaths’ that emerges as the ultimate object of horror” (173).

Lacan, as Žižek point outs, describes the lamella with the following:

It is the libido, *qua* pure life instinct, that is to say, immortal life, or irrepressible life, life that has need of no organ, simplified, indestructible life. It is precisely what is subtracted from the living being by virtue of the fact that it is subject to the cycle of sexed reproduction. And it is of this that all the forms of the *objet a* that can be enumerated are the representatives, the equivalents. The *objets a* are merely its representatives, its figures. The breast – as equivocal, as an element characteristic of the mammiferous organization, the placenta for example – certainly represents that part of himself that the individual loses at birth, and which may serve to symbolize the most profound lost object. (174)

Žižek goes on to describe the lamella in further detail as the alien creature from Scott’s *Alien*, the amorphous form that attaches itself to Kane’s face and represents the “irrepressible life beyond all the finite forms that are merely its

representatives...immortal and indestructible” (174). It is not difficult to see Rosemary as a similar figure representative of the lamella: her emaciated frame drifts in from the bedroom of the Bramford apartment and spies upon the satanic coven as they fawn over the antichrist laying in his bassinette (Levin 208).

Zizek is very clear in *Tarrying with the Negative* that the lamella is not the maternal body “but rather *placenta* – that part of the child’s body that, at the moment of birth, is lost by the *newborn as well as the mother*” (275). Yet, this is precisely the point regarding *Rosemary’s Baby* because by the time we reach the concluding pages of Levin’s novel and Rosemary has gone through the exhausting process of being oversaturated and overconstituted by the network of discursive power to the point where she is merely a reproductive vessel, what is left of her body after pregnancy is nothing more than the placenta, the lamella. As the placenta Rosemary represents that last remnant of the interpersonal connection experienced between her and her infant, before she has been interpellated by the satanic coven, and, as we will see, it will be used as the bridge between mother and infant in a recreation of the semiotic realm in order to construct a new maternal identity. To be clear, the lamella that is the result of Rosemary’s overcodification at the hands of the coven, which is indicative of maternal subjectivity, is not identical to Irigaray’s placental economy delineated in previous chapters. For Irigaray the placenta, similar to Zizek’s arguments regarding the lamella, “embodies the ‘in-between’ which both links and separates

two subjects during the process of gestation,” a form of mediation and ethical interaction that allows for the separation and connectivity of two distinct subjects (West 250). However, in Irigaray’s conception “mother and child are both fully-developed subjects from the outset,” whereas in our formulation the mother that had existed in the past is already dead, now nothing more than the placenta who embraces the child in order to serve as a bridge to the new mother they will both build by way of the masochistic contract (250).

The creation of this “bridge” facilitates an interpersonal connection with the Other which is precisely the creation of the Deleuzian “pure event” that inserts a fracture or caesura in time, a schism that promotes the eternal return of difference. As we have seen, for Levinas the encounter with the face of the Other “is not what limits my freedom as a subject,” but instead “is what, in summoning my freedom, interrupts the negativity of time, in-spiring time with infinity and pre-engaging it in this infinity” (Messina 207). The face-to-face meeting with the Other is, in Levinas’ philosophy, a meeting with the infinite future, but it is also a relationship with an immemorial past “that never was or is present” (Taylor 395). This is extremely similar to Deleuze’s conception of the second synthesis of time, or the pure past of involuntary memory, a virtual past that coincides, but is never present (Bogue *DF* 42). As Valentine Moulard-Leonard makes clear in *Bergson-Deleuze Encounters*, the effect of Deleuze’s involuntary memory, which is indicative of the passive synthesis of time, is “that it erases the ineluctable and

vital flowing of time that characterizes the Bergsonian duration” and reveals “where the pure past is saved for us” (131).

As Keith W. Faulkner makes clear in *Deleuze and the Three Syntheses of Time* the second synthesis is akin to a total regression to the ground, or more appropriately the groundlessness of repetition, in order to eventually force the revolutionary action that engenders the third and final synthesis (46). Faulkner claims that Deleuze promotes an action where a subject delves into the pure past in order to expose one’s libidinal attachments and the repetitive behavior that stems from them in order to “step in the direction of progressive repetition” (47). Both Deleuze and Faulkner use the example of Proust’s hero who “must fall in love with Albertine, re-play all the games of deception and separation, and then resolve to finally break with her” in order to free his “libidinal energies” (47). Most importantly, for Deleuze this is a “spontaneous act” that he characterizes as “*installing oneself directly into the pure past*, to make a living connection and to experience the full range of frustration and disappointment that it causes” (47).

In maternal performativity there is a similar process of mining the pure past, yet, unlike Deleuze’s conception, it is neither spontaneous nor has the ultimate goal of freeing libidinal attachment from its objects. This installation of the subject into the pure past in maternal performativity is a performance of the experience of gestation and the semiotic, where the mother, as the placenta, regulates the child’s identity and through the infant creates a new maternal



subject. If we recall from our previous discussion of the *Alien* franchise the argument was made that maternal identity was formed by the internalization of the originary lost object, the mother's body, which is projected by power as an Absolute Subject. This crystalline image of maternity, which is co-substantial with the face of the child, becomes that to which the mother is subjected, responsible primarily to a patriarchal conception and representation of maternity.

The maternal body which serves as the primordial milieu, as we have seen, parallels Emmanuel Levinas conception of the "there is," where the existent resides in an ambiguous state of pure Being, not yet a subject, and it is precisely the alterity and infinity experienced in the maternal body that conditions the subject to approach the Other. Most importantly, the unity with the maternal body represents the originary nexus for the construction of fantasy by power and is the very promise mobilized in order to legitimize subjection. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, from the early stages of the narrative it is clear that Rosemary's identity is encapsulated and formed through her desire to produce a family with her husband. After moving into the idyllic Bramford apartment she makes the comment that "she was twenty-four and they wanted three children two years apart," a goal that Rosemary approaches with diligence, emphasizing that "her plan was to get pregnant by 'accident'; the pills gave her headaches, she said, and rubber gadgets were repulsive" (Levin 64-5). Initially this identification with the desire to be a mother is met with resistance and silence, especially in regards to

her husband, Guy who refuses to have children before he becomes a famous actor. However, after being approached by the satanic coven, who propose allowing Rosemary to be the conduit for the Antichrist, Guy becomes obsessed with the prospect of childbirth and even goes as far to indicate on a calendar the days when Rosemary is most fertile (76).

As mentioned previously in this study, Kristeva's formulation of the semiotic chora pertains directly to the interpersonal relationship between unborn child and mother during gestation, encompassing the bodily movements experienced in pregnancy and the development of the child's primary drives. As Kristeva writes in *Revolution in Poetic Language*:

The theory of the subject proposed by the theory of the unconscious will allow us to read in this rhythmic space, which has no the and no position, the process by which significance is constituted. Plato himself leads us to such a process when he calls this receptacle or *chora* nourishing and maternal, not yet unified in an order whole because deity is absent from it. Though deprived of unity, identity or deity, the *chora* is nevertheless subject to a regulating process, which is different from that of Symbolic law...(26)

In the semiotic realm of the maternal body the drives of the unborn child are regulated, not by the paternal authority of the symbolic, but by the maternal law of the mother's body. As Kristeva writes in *The Subject in Process* "the *chora* is a *place* of a *chaos* which *is* and which *becomes*, preliminary to the constitution of the first measurable body... the *chora* plays with the body of the mother – of – woman, but in the signifying process" (SP 57).

The *jouissance* of pregnancy centers around its resemblance to the unity and ambiguous subjectivity of the originary maternal body. As Susan Hekman illustrates in *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of Postmodern Feminism* the semiotic “is nature, the symbolic culture; the semiotic is the realm of woman’s *jouissance*, a realm that escapes day-to-day temporality, the symbolic is the realm of masculine time, patriarchal ordering” (GK 89). The pleasure of the semiotic is constituted outside the phallic function and the symbolic, an “in-between state perhaps best, but not solely, represented by the mother-child dyad” (Trigo 124). Rosemary experiences this during her pregnancy as she comments “up until now [the baby] had been inside her; now *she* was inside *it*; pain was the weather around her, was time, was the entire world” (Levin 141). The semiotic realm indicative of gestation is the creation, albeit temporarily, of a world outside of the phallogocentric order as alluded to in Rosemary’s statement. As her semiotic relationship with her child becomes more pronounced we see her communicating to it, not linguistically, but in an interior dialogue that is beyond the symbolic register: “*Everything’s okay now, Andy-or-Jenny. We’re going to be in a nice clean bed at Mount Sinai Hospital, with no visitors...*” (210). What is important to note about Rosemary’s specific semiotic experience with her unborn child is that it predates her knowledge of his true identity. Rosemary is both concerned with her own safety, but more importantly the safety of her child, whom she believes at this time to be slated as a sacrifice to the devil in one of the coven’s satanic

rituals. In this particular world of gestation Rosemary can imagine any identity for the child she wishes as indicated by her labeling him both a traditionally male and female name, as well as developing a narrative concerning the coven's desire for him. Not only can Rosemary regulate her unborn child's drives biologically, but in the interpersonal exchange in dyad she is able to shape both his and her reality. By conceiving of her son as possibly female and as a victim, Rosemary is able to create an identity for herself as a protective and nurturing mother. Here Rosemary not only literally serves as a mediator and regulator of her child, but also is responsible for the creation of his world and his identity. It is precisely this structuring of the child's symbolic economy that is recreated in the masochistic contract at the conclusion of the novel.

In the masochistic contract, as it applies specifically to the conceptualization of a maternal performativity, it is structured so that it is the figure of the Child, rather than the woman torturer as in Deleuze's initial formulation, that occupies the space between the two opposite extremes of motherhood: the hetaeric and Oedipal mothers. Deleuze, as we have seen, takes great pains to illustrate that the heroine that is positioned in between the two polar opposite images of maternity is the masochistic ideal, always threatening to vacillate too far to either margin (*CC* 50). It is crucial to understand that there is no essential masochistic ideal that is uniform, but numerous variations of the ideal torturer in the masochistic fantasy so that "Martscha is described as being 'like an

Indian woman or a Tartar from the Mongolian desert,” whereas “Lola likes to torture animals and dreams of witnessing or even taking part in their executions” (*M* 50). In this way it is clear that the masochist specific to the contract takes part in the construction and constitution of the ideal, just as the maternal figure takes part in the formation of the child’s identity. As Gail L. Mortimer explains female infants in particular “establish their identity directly with the mother; a decisive separation from this crucial figure is not necessary to the process,” whereas “the male child’s identity must be formed in many ways in opposition to the feminine identity he originally found to be virtually omnipotent” (9). This is precisely what the audience witnesses in Levin’s novel when Rosemary initially begins to mother her child Adrian when, despite the fact that she was initially taken aback by his outward appearance, she begins to reformulate his characteristics to fit an ideal:

His eyes weren’t that bad really, now that she was prepared for them. It was the surprise that had upset her. They were pretty in a way...He couldn’t be *all* bad, he just *couldn’t*. Even if he was half Satan, wasn’t he half *her* as well, half decent, ordinary, sensible, human being? If she worked *against* them, exerted a good influence to counteract their bad one...(242-4)

Immediately a contract is established between Rosemary and her child where the former, in the role of the masochist, begins to regulate and reconfigure the identity of the child *in her own image*, rather than that of the father. This is precisely why the masochistic contract and performance is crucial because it is a reinstitution of the connection between mother and infant in gestation where the

mother is the mediating entity in the dyad. However, what we see in our performance of masochism is a symmetrical exchange: as the mother reconstructs the identity of the child, she is also reorienting her own subjectivity. The pain that envelops Rosemary during gestation is merely one of the prices the masochistic pays during the process of reconstruction. Rosemary's allusion that the pain she experienced during her pregnancy surrounded her, became "the entire world," is precisely what she recreates at the conclusion of the novel when she embraces her child (Levin 141). The two identities, mother and child, are inextricable, and the masochistic contract designates that they are the only two parties in the economy the mother has instituted. As with Deleuze's formulation of masochism Rosemary initially, before the construction of the masochist's symbolic order, scopically "clothes" the child in an ideal image that has no resemblance to the father, but instead takes on characteristics that the mother feels are ideal, tendencies stemming directly from the mother's identity. As the mother she asserts her role immediately in the contract, stating "in case you're curious, *I* happen to be the lady who's been supplying all that milk you've been drinking. I'll bet you thought it comes in bottles, didn't you. Well it doesn't; it comes in *mothers*, and I'm yours" (244). Rosemary, in this instance, by asserting her role within the contract takes part in a desexualization of the father, completely denouncing the role of the third party within the symbolic order she has created. This not only establishes a connection between mother and child through the assertion of authority, but

simultaneously while restructuring the identity of the child, Rosemary is also recreating herself as a figure of power through the infant.

The institution of the masochistic contract, in its transference of paternal authority solely onto the figure of the mother, constitutes what Deleuze's labels in *Difference and Repetition* as the fracture or caesura in time, that which "may be expressed in many ways: to throw time out of joint, to cause the sun to explode, to throw oneself into a volcano, to kill God or the father" (*DR* 89). The caesura or fracture in time "can be described as belonging to the order of time which no longer rhymes,' because it is distributed on both sides of an even that causes beginning and end, before and after, to no longer coincide" (Lambert 105). In short it is an action, "born out of pure repetition and performance, that reorders time, causing a fracture between the past and the future where the unfolding of time is infinitely altered and the former self dissolved" (105). As Ronald Bogue explains in *Deleuzian Fabulation and the Scars of History* the pure event or caesura occurs in the third synthesis of time and Deleuze's prime example is Hamlet's comment that "time is out of joint," that it is "demented" and perverted from the linear structure of the return of the same (41). At this moment, the "past takes on the characteristics of something that is 'too big for me'" and "in effect, there is always a time at which the imagined act is supposed 'too big for me'" (41). Most importantly, as Bogue continues, this is a Deleuzian moment of

becoming, of “becoming-equal to the act and a doubling of the self, and the projection of an ideal self in the image of the act” (41).

This is the very moment that Rosemary finds herself at the conclusion of Levin’s novel where, in taking part in the masochistic contract and taking on the role of mother, she becomes equal and the very action fractures time. This caesura that Rosemary creates is two-fold: it is not only schism in the trajectory of time in relation to the ascension of the Satanic cult, but in her own progression as a subject as well. By performing the role of mother to Adrian/Andrew she fractures the past and future of the rise of the satanic cult, completely severing its projection into the future. More importantly, her actions break with her previous self; she is no longer the passive and docile body of before, but someone who actively takes part in her own constitution, acting according to the very ideal of maternity that she creates for herself. As Deleuze illustrates, during the third synthesis of time “the event and the act possess a secret coherence which excludes that of the self; that they turn back against the self which has become their equal and smash it to pieces, as though the bearer of the new world were carried away and dispersed by the shock of the multiplicity to which it gives birth” (*DR* 89-90). As Daniel Voss illustrates in *Conditions of Thought* the cut is the “irruption of the virtual event (the unthought, the inexplicable, the incommensurable)” and this is precisely what we see in *Rosemary’s Baby*; the acceptance and mothering of the demonic child is precisely that inexplicable and utterly perverse action that



fractures the trajectory of time and severs the hold of the virtual images of maternity to which she was subjected (261). In this moment we see time in its totality, the “tearing apart of the image into two unequal parts,” this is encompassed by the satanic coven gathered around Rosemary, the past that is separated from the future by the infinite gap produced by the heroine (Crockett 95).

However, the imaginary constitution of the child by the mother in the masochistic contract is only one of the liberating facets of Deleuze’s formulation of masochism. The reconstitution of the child in the image of the mother by the maternal figure not only debases the father and banishes paternal law from the constructed symbolic order, albeit temporarily, but also works to transform the masochist into an a-phallic subject (*M* 66). Deleuze makes clear in *Masochism*, specifically his chapter “From Contract to Ritual,” that the violence directed at the masochist by way of the female heroine is intended to facilitate the masochist’s rebirth wholly from the maternal figure (*M* 98). As Deleuze states “in *The Siren*, Zenobia cuts off Theophan’s hair and exclaims: ‘At last I have succeeded in making a man of you’,” whereas in *The Divorced Woman* “Anna longs to be worthy of her task, to whip Julian and to be able at last to say to him: ‘You have been through the ordeal, now you are a man’” (*M* 98). The heroines in Masoch’s narratives are not beating the masochists in order to mold them into a paternal figure, but “obliterating his role and his likeness in order to generate the new

man” (M 99). We have already seen how Rosemary reconstitutes her imaginary relationship with her son by way of altering her perception of his physical attributes, however the way in which she transforms herself becomes all the more clear when she renames the infant, altering him as a signifier. Named by the cult Adrian Steven, Rosemary states:

“I understand why you’d like to call him that, but I’m sorry; you can’t. His name is Andrew John. He’s my child, not yours, and this is one point that I’m not even going to argue about. This and the clothes. He can’t wear black all the time”. (Levin 245).

In this instance Rosemary literally abolishes the name of the father, symbolically “beating” the role of Satan from the symbolic order she is creating with her son (M 99). More importantly, whereas in Deleuze’s formulation of masochism it is the masochist himself that is reborn as an a-phallic subject produced solely by the maternal figure, in this instance it is the mother that is reborn through the construction of the child. The result of Rosemary’s renaming is the cries of the coven chanting “Hail Andrew” and “Hail Rosemary, mother of Andrew,” illustrating that the rebirth of the two are intricately linked (Levin 245).

This act of renaming, of creating an interconnected web of identity that is relational between mother and child, is not unlike the naming practices of adoptive or queer mothers. As Julie Marie Thompson notes in *Mommy Queerest: Contemporary Rhetorics of Lesbian Maternal Identity*, in certain lesbian relationships “the couple bestow on the child a hybrid form of their last names,

either by giving the child a hyphenated last name or by creating a single name” and in doing so “ties the child’s identity to both mothers” rather than merely the birth mother (125). Thompson emphasizes that this practice is more symbolically weighted than legally as “it is all but ignored in public discourse,” but acknowledges that it is a custom commonly utilized in order to legitimize the adoptive family as a whole (125). This is precisely what we see in *Rosemary’s Baby* where, despite the fact that she has successfully molded the child in her image, the coven nevertheless chants “Hail Satan” and “Hail Rosemary” following the renaming, emphasizing that the Law is never fully abolished from the masochistic fantasy (Levin 245). What is crucial however, is that while the coven is chanting Rosemary is absorbed with her son saying “‘You didn’t like ‘Adrian,’ did you?’” completely oblivious to the figures around her, performing a perverse role that is anterior and ultimately outside patriarchal control (245).

Levin’s novel presents a protagonist that perfectly exemplifies the progression and possibilities of maternal subjectivity, from the way in which the subject is oversaturated with symbolic investment to the point in which they are rendered almost “inhuman,” to the way in which a masochistic contract offers the possibility of working within the patriarchal system in order to ultimately produce a new identity. Most importantly, the novel showcases the interconnectivity of mother/infant identity, so that it reveals how the reconstruction of both during the contract, where the father’s influence is desexualized, is able to sever the

trajectory of the past, bringing forth an eternal return of difference, rather than homogeneity. To return briefly to Ruddick's emphasis on the limited, yet crucial control of mother over infant, this is precisely what Levin's novel represents, namely the way in which maternal authority can and must work to establish an identity that is completely autonomous from the identity imposed by patriarchal networks of power. In the following chapter this study will look at the ways in which non-biological or adoptive maternal subjectivity differs from biologically reproductive bodies and, most importantly, how the performance of maternity for adoptive mothers offers the possibility of transcendence through immanence.

## Chapter 5

### Adoptive Maternity and the Dissolution of Self

Consequently, only a being arrived at the crispation of its solitude through suffering in relation to death is placed in a position where the relation with the other becomes possible... the future is absolutely surprising... it is what cannot be grasped, what befalls us and takes us over. The Other is the future. The relation with the Other is the relation with the future. Emmanuel Levinas *Time and the Other*

The opening chapter of this study has outlined how the rich and diverse history of maternal thought is at once a response to the Western philosophical tradition's relegation of the maternal body to the material abject, as well as a renegotiation of this body as a site of empowerment capable of destabilizing the foundations of the symbolic economy. Understanding the material and historic conditions that subject these bodies and work to construct the discursive representations of motherhood reveals that maternity offers a salient schemata for not only viewing the fundamental operations of power, but the possibilities of authentic ethical interaction. A theory of maternal performativity that is grounded in a perverse operation of masochism in relation to an infant positioned within the heteronormative matrix as the embodiment and securer of the future reveals the political potency and possibilities of maternity. Maternity, when viewed as a set of performative utterances, alters and ultimately reterritorializes the trajectory of discursive meaning, allowing the existent to resignify an identity of their own creation. This study has argued that, initially, that the maternal body is subjected

to an ideologically pervasive and historically saturated ideal of motherhood in order to produce sanctioned forms of maternity that secure the reproduction of the very conditions and structures that legitimize their subjection. Furthermore, it has been argued that discursive transcendence – meaning the possibility of signifying an identity beyond the prescribed monomaterialist ideal – can be achieved immanently through the institution of a masochistic contract and the infinite performance of the masochistic fantasy shared between mother and infant.

In the concluding sections I will explore the possibilities of this type of transcendence in relation to non-procreative maternal bodies such as adoptive or queer mothers in order to illustrate the necessity of reevaluating the way we view the possibility of transcendence through immanence in regards to these bodies. Initially, this chapter will outline the problematic relationship between the adoptive maternal body and the future, illustrating that the futural horizon that the child embodies is infinitely barred to the non-procreative body. Subsequently, this chapter will return to Luce Irigaray's sensible transcendental in order to comment on the possibility of its application to adoptive maternal bodies. This particular section will illustrate that the ethical imperative of adoptive maternal bodies is not the creation of an "adoptive maternal divine" similar to Irigaray's conception of the sensible transcendental, but in embodying the very negative identity discursively produced by the monomaterialist matrix. Finally, this discussion will conclude by reconceptualizing adoptive maternal transcendence, not as the

creation of a distinct identity outside of preestablished codes, but as the dissolution of the self in favor of joining a collective transcendence. Blending Levinas's theory of fecundity and Deleuze's commentary on the creation of the caesura, this section will discuss how the adoptive maternal body projects, not merely a trace of themselves into the future through the production of a child, but irreducible otherness that has the possibility of destabilizing the futural horizon.

### 5.1 From Past to Future

Historically the Western philosophical tradition can be regarded as a plethora of instances that illustrate an attempt by heteronormative systems of representation to associate the female body, and most specifically the maternal body, to the realm of the secular and the material. As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this study, Susan Bordo outlines this trajectory of thought in *The Flight to Objectivity*, noting the relegation of the feminine body to a receptacle, most notably in Plato's *Timaeus*, and the traditional association of the feminine with the passions in Descartes as something that must be transcended (101-3). A result of this discourse is the persistent notion that the feminine body, specifically the maternal body, serves as that which must be abjected in order to achieve transcendence and that the feminine body's access to this transcendence is only attained through a masculine subject or by prescribing to certain heteronormative ideals of behavior.

One of the many purposes of this discussion is to problematize the tendency of theories of maternal theory to consistently return and label the primordial scene, of a pre-symbolic relationship with the mother experienced during gestation, as the primary avenue for challenging and destabilizing the foundations of patriarchal systems of subjection. This is not meant to imply that the semiotic relationship between mother and child, male or female, is not necessary or essential, as we have seen the masochistic contract formulated in the previous chapter requires this very reiteration of this originary ethical interaction in order to construct a fantasy that enables the creation of an innovative maternal identity. More to the point, the problem arises when maternal performativity and the achievement of a distinct subjectivity is located solely in a maternal past, as Alison Stone does in *Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Maternal Subjectivity*, without fully enunciating the relationship this past has with the futural horizon that the Child embodies. Stone argues in her text that mimicking and recreating a maternal past is necessary for a “different form of subjectivity,” an identity that is created through performance, yet, as we have seen, this maternal past is the very kernel that power uses to subject the mother and infiltrate the interpersonal relationship with the child (5).

This is precisely why Deleuze’s synthesis of time is so crucial to this particular study, especially his discussion of the caesura and the co-substantial relationship between past, present, and future. Deleuze’s treatise allows us to view



the recreation and performance of the semiotic relationship as not merely an end-in-itself for biologically reproductive bodies, but a method of installing oneself in the past in order to alter the trajectory of the future by way of an ethical relationship with the child. By viewing the way power and heteronormative society constructs the identity of the mother by way of the child and seeks to reproduce itself through models of behavior that secures a specific patriarchal future, the importance of the relationship between mother and infant becomes even more pronounced. With this in mind, the perversity of the masochistic contract becomes a way to negotiate the relationship with the infant that is always mediated to some degree by the presence of power. This maternal masochism is not strictly a process of *denying* power, but of *disavowing* it, of recognizing its potency and mimicking it in a way that reterritorializes its very structure, and in doing so allowing for the emergence of a distinct maternal identity. The past serves as merely a way in which to reorient the trajectory of the future and secure a place for a distinct maternal identity that is created by the mother through ethical performance.

It is because the futural horizon presents such a crucial aspect to any theory of maternal performativity that its problematic relationship with non-procreative bodies must be explored in depth. The majority of scholarship directed at adoptive or queer maternal bodies has tended to focus primarily on the subjective position of the “deviant” mother in the monomaterialist matrix. Both

Judith Halberstam and Shelley M. Park in *Queer Time & Place* and *Mothering Queerly*, *Queering Motherhood* respectively, as well as a host of others such as Judith Butler, have directed attention at how queer bodies and non-heteronormative family structures “depart from the temporal and spatial structures of domestinnormative life,” as well as comment on the subject of these bodies and they expose the supposedly “natural” nuclear family (Park 154). However, it is imperative to build off of these theories in order to work towards conceptualizing and formulating how these bodies can, not only destabilize the very structures that oppress them, but break free from their restraints. In order to accomplish this task it is essential to articulate the way in which non-procreative bodies are structured within the monomaterialist matrix, which in turn reveals their problematic relationship to the futural horizon embodied by the child.

## 5.2 Adoptive Maternity and the Futural Horizon

Thus far this study has limited itself primarily to delineating the ways in which specifically biologically reproductive bodies are interpellated by a plethora of images of both ideal and deviant maternity postulated by medico-juridical institutions. These maternal images, as we have seen, coalesce in the figure of the Child, so that in the ethical encounter the mother figure essentially responds according to a set of prescriptive heteronormative characteristics embodied by the images of ideal maternity. This process of subjection not only reconfigures the formerly asymmetrical relationship between the Same and unknowable Other as

formulated by Levinas, resulting in the thematization and representation of maternity, but also establishes the Child as that phantasmatic point through which the mother's identity is cultivated. Therefore, the identity of the child and the mother are inextricably intertwined so that the infinite characteristics and traits that the child exhibits become the basis for judging the maternal figure.

Furthermore, it has also been shown how, in the previous section dealing with Levin's *Rosemary's Baby*, the procreative maternal subject is able to establish a masochistic contract with the Other that affords them the ability to debase and dispel patriarchal law and rework the identity of the child in her image. In doing so, because the child and mother's identity are co-substantial, the mother is able to reconstruct her own identity through the performance of ethical activity directed towards the infant. In our formulation of maternal performativity the mother is able to facilitate the rebirth of the Other as an a-phallic subject outside and beyond paternal law and, in doing so, embodies an image of maternity that is of her own creation by securing a future, by way of the child, that is not prescribed by patriarchal forms of domination. Maternal performativity, as it pertains specifically to biologically reproductive mothers, is the recreation, essentially the infinite performance, of the semiotic realm experienced in gestation, where mother and child are separate entities, yet the maternal body is nevertheless the regulating and mediating entity. This performance ultimately works to subvert the way in which the biologically reproductive body is, in short,

traditionally subjected to a future not-yet-to-come in the figure of the Child that discursive power formations seek to secure through the promotion of heteronormative mothering. In this structure established by power the Other, the child, which once embodied the alterity of the unknown and the infinite, is thematized to the point where the possible world it once represented becomes constructed and known prior to its formation. As I've argued, the biologically reproductive body is able to construct a new identity precisely by altering the trajectory of this futural world through a masochistic relationship with the child.

Critical attention has concluded that, due to the fact that biologically reproductive bodies undergo the same intense observation and optimization by way of reproductive technologies as adoptive or queer mothers, they are no more natural or biologically inclined to mothering than their counterparts. Similar to the way in which Butler's treatise on drag shows "reveals the performativity of gender as a norm that renders certain bodies intelligible as male or female" and "highlights the 'unnaturalness' of body/subjectivity unity," so too does the performance of mothering by non-procreative bodies expose the "unnaturalness" of the connection between biological reproduction and maternity (Wilcox 83). However, this does not diminish the fact that adoptive or queer maternal identities are formed and structured in regards to technologies of power and society in exceedingly different ways than their procreative counterparts. In "Nonbiological Mothers and the Legal Boundaries of Motherhood" Susan Dalton relates the

anecdote of four lesbian mothers who challenged the Uniform Parentage Act which resulted in the court claiming that “the nonbiological mother was not a legal parent” when the “appellate courts immediately chose to categorize the nonbiological mothers as simply single women seeking custody of children they had neither birthed nor adopted” (213). Dalton uses this account to illustrate that “this legal conceptualization of the family relies upon unspoken assumptions regarding both reproduction and parenting,” which assume “a family model based on the idea of biological reproduction – in other words, a family consisting of one father and one mother” (213). Furthermore, as Dalton continues, though “legal fictions may be used to replace a biological father with a social father, there exist no legal fictions that allow a biological father to be replaced with a social mother” (213-4). What the aforementioned section ultimately reveals is the primary distinction between biologically reproductive and adoptive maternal bodies; whereas the “naturalness” of the former is immediately assumed and molded to fit an “ideal” version of maternity, there is no recognition for the adoptive maternal body within both the symbolic and legal economy. Even though it can be argued that adoptive mothers are legally accepted as guardians, they are nevertheless consistently classified as distinct from the child’s biological mother.

The claim that the structure of consciousness indicative of adoptive or queer maternal bodies is different than their biologically reproductive counterparts is not meant to imply that either reproductive or adoptive maternal

bodies are more suited than the other to the ethical responsibility a child requires, or that the version of maternal performativity delineated previously is in some way foreclosed from what society has deemed “deviant” maternal bodies.

Nevertheless, the structure of adoptive maternal consciousness, most notably in the terrain of ethical interaction and subjection, is infinitely distinct due primarily to the fact that the very future and possible world that the figure of the Child embodies and is used to subject reproductive mothers is infinitely barred to adoptive and queer maternal bodies. The operation of the law, which relies primarily on biological connection between mother and infant, refuses to recognize within its symbolic register the legitimacy of non-procreative maternal bodies in an attempt to secure a heteronormative future. In coding adoptive or queer maternal bodies as lacking the law establishes clearly delineated lines between the present materiality of the non-biological mother and the future “world” of reproductive maternal body therefore making authentic ethical interaction seemingly impossible.

An initial distinction between procreative and adoptive bodies as it pertains specifically to how they are perceived socially lies in the fact that, whereas the identity of the reproductive mother is formed by way of her ethical interaction with the child, adoptive maternal identity is permanently linked to kinship ties, or lack thereof, and represents little more than a signifier of an absence. The subjection of procreative bodies to an ideal image of maternity is

predicated on the collective recognition by legal and medical institutions of biological kinship that facilitates the assumption of a natural and necessary bond between biological mother and offspring that is both legally and socially sanctioned. In “Parental Rights Doctrine: Creating and Maintaining Maternal Value” Annette R. Appell claims that the “jurisprudence presents childbearing as the parental paradigm and the mother as the anchor” in a number of ways, but most importantly by holding to the viewpoint that “parent-child-like relationships that are based only on nurture, and not on biology and nurture of the child or the biological mother, are insufficient to establish legal parenthood over the claims of fit, legal parents who have not legally consented to the formation of the relationship” (125-6). Appell notes that whereas the “legal category ‘father’” can denote “both genetic and non-genetic paternal relationship regarding the child,” the legal definition of mother is consistently linked to and defined by biological connection to the child (126). To reiterate, this is not meant to engage in a debate regarding biological essentialism and the naturalization of maternity, but only to illustrate that because kinship forms the primary legal ground for determining the rights and recognition of parents, specifically mothers, the procreative mother is afforded the ability to define herself primarily through interaction with the child. As we have seen, the ramifications of this assumed biological connection between the procreative parents and their children is precisely what legitimizes and makes possible their subjection. As Susan Chase illustrates the overt distinction between

good and bad mothers, the two identities afforded to biologically reproductive mothers, is predicated primarily on the behavior of the maternal figure, as well as that of the child; the good mother is infinitely attentive to her child, adheres to prescribed behaviors posted by medical officials, and is paired with a husband who allows for the occupation of a certain economic strata (qtd. in Longhurst 117). As oppressive and systemic as the good/bad mother dichotomy is, as well as racially and economically motivated, the legal paradigm nevertheless allows for the assumption of maternal identity, good or bad, given kinship ties between parent and child.

Yet, whereas procreative bodies are interpellated by projections of maternity that are distinguishable primarily by their differing maternal attributes, thus facilitating the dichotomy of the “good” and “bad” mother signifier, the adoptive and queer mother can only be viewed within the monomaterialist matrix as infinitely deficit and, I would argue, ultimately unthinkable. What is meant by the term “unthinkable” here is very similar to Lacan’s discourse on sexual difference which stipulates that “it is impossible for a man to understand a woman, and yet, on the other, woman is still understood as a not-man” in relation to the phallus (Bernet 54). The adoptive maternal body is unthinkable in as much as it is merely recognized as not-mother, or more precisely not-biological-mother. Although it appears that the “good” and “bad” mother dichotomy is based primarily on the performance of the mother, the underlying assumption is, as



Shelley M. Park notes, “good” mothers “are typically middle or upper class” and, more importantly they are a central component of “good” families that “enjoy heterosexual privilege” and “do not embarrass or ‘damage’ their children by participating in sexual or affectional relationships that depart from the norm” (65). The innumerable terms that are used to designate non-procreative bodies, such as adoptive, queer, or deviant, are merely monikers that serve to designate an absence that legitimizes the subjection of these bodies, while simultaneously working to substantiate and naturalize the existence of procreative mothers. This is not meant to imply that adoptive or queer maternal bodies are not subjected to the same ideologically saturated images as reproductive mothers. On the contrary, adoptive mothers are subjected to similar crystalline images of maternity as those described in earlier chapters due to the fact that the law’s primary concern is the production of a heteronormative future. The fact that the absolute subjects of maternity posited in the monomaterialist matrix are arguably more unobtainable to the adoptive mother only serves to further legitimize the subjection of these bodies.

As mentioned previously, in the monomaterialist matrix it is not difficult to view biological maternity as a sanctioned identity that is legitimized by the “impossible,” yet culturally intelligible identity of non-procreative maternity (Butler *GT* 77). In this way the relationship between biological and non-procreative maternity is not unlike that between heterosexuality and

homosexuality discussed by Judith Butler, where the latter is “culturally unintelligible” and “unthinkable,” yet nevertheless included within the discourse of the dominant social formation (77). Adoptive and queer maternity exist in cultural discourse, yet only as signifiers of lack, denoting within the monomaterialist matrix merely a non-identity without social recognition. As Barbara Yngvesson notes in “Negotiating Motherhood: Identity and Difference in ‘Open’ Adoptions,” the process of open adoption reveals the “law’s arbitrary and patriarchal construction of the family unit” and, more importantly “open adoption compels recognition of the place of an ‘other’ mother on whom one’s own mothering depends, the ‘identities’ it creates are nonidentical, defy legal categories, and provide potentially powerful insights...” (32). Yngvesson’s insights into open adoption not only deconstruct the arbitrary nature of the nuclear family, but also expose the way in which the very discourse the law is founded on openly refuses to acknowledge adoptive or queer maternal bodies as mothers and leaves no avenue for these subjects to signify as maternal bodies (33). Unlike procreative bodies, who are immediately viewed as natural, adoptive and queer mothers are viewed, not by their performance as a mother, but primarily through their lack of physiological connection with the child. The lack of kinship between adoptive or queer maternal bodies is precisely what these identities signify. It is the way in which these mothers are structured that binds them in a state of immanence and materiality that seemingly forecloses the possibility of

transcendence, when transcendence is understood discursively as the production of identity outside of heteronormative structures, through the operation of fecundity.

The relationship between non-procreative bodies and the child is addressed by Lee Edelman in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* where the author argues that the heteronormative structure of patriarchal society uses the figure of the Child as a structuring principle in order to categorize and deny existence to non-biologically reproductive citizens. Edelman claims that “the fantasy subtending the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political must be thought,” emphasizing that the Child becomes, not only for the monomaterialist matrix, but society as a whole as that which structures identity (2). Furthermore, this very logic which he terms reproductive futurism, encompasses political “terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations” (2). Edelman is arguing that this specific political milieu uses the figure of the Child as a structuring principle that makes the idea of queerness and non-reproductive sexual relations unthinkable specifically because, within the signifying and ideological systems imposed, it translates only as a lifestyle or behavior opposed to the creation of children (2-3). The Child then

becomes that which legitimizes the existence of the subject; those that adhere to the prescribed heteronormative behavior are naturalized and recognized within the symbolic order, whereas those that do not are categorized as non-entities.

Edelman's claims is that in attempting to build a "more desirable social order" political heteronormativity "works to *affirm* a structure, to *authenticate* social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child," creating a social body that is centered on a futural image that coordinates and reterritorializes all identity according to phantasmatic projection (2-3). What is important to gloss from Edelman's exposition here is, as argued previously, that the structure of society and the identities that they comprise revolve around a vision of the future that takes the form of possibility in the figure of the Child. More importantly, as Edelman illustrates, those bodies that do not adhere to this reproductive futurism are barred the possibility of this future and are structured within a striated space where their existence is strictly temporal. Edelman's treatise on the way in which queer bodies are subjected to an image of the Child speaks directly to our conversation about adoptive maternal bodies, specifically because, despite the fact that they are actively engaged in ethical activity that is explicitly for the child, they are nevertheless categorized as outside the structure centered on biological reproduction.

The relationship between the structure of society and the futural horizon of the child is further emphasized by the importance placed by patriarchal

institutions on securing a heteronormative future that results in a heightened otherness and temporality to the existence of the adoptive or queer maternal body. As Harold D. Grotevant, Nora Dunbar, Julie K. Kohler, and Amy M. Lash Esau illustrate in “Adoptive Identity: How Contexts Within and Beyond the Family Shape Developmental Pathways,” the monomaterialist matrix reveals that “Western society bases kinship ties primarily, if not exclusively, on blood relations” which subsequently “puts adopted persons in an awkward position, since their familial ties are grounded in social relations rather than biology” (381). Because kinship is so central to the pronatalist view in regards to maternity, adoptive and queer maternal bodies are subjected to a more pronounced level of legal intervention than biologically reproductive mothers. The very existence of these institutional measures, aside from being predicated on the “natural” connection between mothers and their biological offspring, reveals the attempts by heteronormative society and institutions of power to segregate and quarantine the lived experience of non-reproductive bodies. The purpose of these measures is not so much the production of an ideal mother, but the institution of prescribed forms of mothering that will produce a future that will reproduce the dominant social formation. This point is supplemented by Western society’s sustained prejudice regarding transracial adoptions that “center on the question of appropriate identity formation in a racist society or the right of children to grow up among their own people, especially where that people is targeted in terms of

discrimination” (Gailey 14). The aforementioned point further emphasizes the prevalent belief that adoptive and queer mothers not only lack an essential connection with their children, but most importantly that the child’s identity is negatively affected or at the very least problematized due to a lack of kinship.

The increased scrutiny and surveillance of adoptive and queer mothers, as well as the excessive legal stipulations regulating adoption, not only indicate an attempt by medico-juridical institutions to secure a heteronormative future, but also subsequently result in barring any possibility of transcendence for these maternal subjects by securing them in an eternal present. To return to Levinas briefly, the correlation between the child and the future, as illustrated in previous chapters, becomes the basis of Levinas’ transcendence in *Totality and Infinity*. Within the text paternity and fecundity are characterized as the ethical encounter par excellence, ultimately resulting in the “transubstantiation of the I” by way of the production of the child who is both the father and a separate being (Manning 313). In the text Levinas writes that “the relation with the child – that is, the relation with the other than a power, but fecundity – establishes relationship with absolute future, or infinite time” (*TI* 268). In the interval in time engendered by the production of the child, the son specifically in Levinas’ corpus, the past and the self of the “I” is projected into the future because the son is both autonomous, yet intricately linked to the father through kinship (*TI* 269-90). Fecundity and the transubstantiation that follows where the father is both the son and other, is

transcendence par excellence and the result of the ethical encounter between the father and the feminine other. Levinas makes the argument that:

The fact of seeing the possibilities of the other as your own possibilities, of being able to escape the closure of your identity and what is bestowed on you, toward something which is not bestowed on you and which nevertheless is yours – this is paternity. This future beyond my own being, this dimension constitutive of time, takes on a concrete content in paternity. (qtd. in Katz 132)

The possibilities of the child that are infinite and unknown, relegated to the realm of the absolute future, are both the father's possibilities and not. But more importantly, it is the child that allows the father to break free from the captivity of Being and identity. As Lisa Guenther illustrates, Levinas' argument that the child is both the father and not "does not express an identity between myself and the Other but rather a displacement of my own identity for the sake of the Other," so that in fecundity there is a process that "transforms the very substance of the self from a virile ego with abilities, interests, and powers into a responsible 'me' who responds to and for an Other" (78). Due to the fact that the time of the child is the time of the future, and therefore alterity, without the horizon of possibility that the child offers as a product of fecundity there is no possibility of alterity and, more importantly, no possibility of an authentic ethical encounter (Lyotard 143). Without the possibility of fecundity, of procreation, the existent is caught in a persistent materiality in a world foreclosed to the future. Due to the fact that heteronormative society refuses to acknowledge the non-biological connection

between the adoptive mother and child an interval is produced between these two existents. This interval represents the impasse that separates the non-biological mother from being able to project themselves into the future embodied by the child because the connection between the two is refused recognition in the symbolic economy.

With this in mind, the question remains as to the viability of the adoptive maternal body and the question of transcendence. Without the possibility of being recognized in the futural horizon due to their lack of biological connection, how is discursive transcendence a possibility and, if it is in fact attainable, what form does it take? In order to explore these possibilities I return to Irigaray's conception of the sensible transcendental in order to illustrate how it can contribute to a conversation of adoptive maternity. This involves, not the creation of an "adoptive maternal divine" but a recognition of the discursive limits of adoptive maternal identity and an acceptance of difference.

### 5.3 Return to Immanence

One of Irigaray's essential purposes in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* is to attempt to extricate the feminine body from its relegated place as the ground for a wholly masculine transcendence and to prompt women to "become autonomous, to become divine" (Joy 5). As Penelope Ingram illustrates in *The Signifying Body* Irigaray's reconceptualization of the divine so that it is accessible to women requires that they "develop [their] own ontology" and "celebrate the material, the



matter that she has been relegated to, as well as locating the celebrating the cosmic, the divine, and the transcendental in herself” (83). Attention to the sexuate nature of the female body, that “irreducible ontological reality inscribed in all of nature and demanding socio-cultural expression,” leads to the creation of this feminine divine (Haynes *IT* 97).

Crucial to Irigaray’s theory of the transcendental, which affords the female access to the divine through the body, is a recognition and respect of the inherent and transcendental fact of sexual difference between two beings. As we have seen, Irigaray’s transcendence is horizontal, existing between the two rhythmic poles of sexual difference, where nature serves as that mediating term that makes the recognition and respect of the absolutely other achievable. As Irigaray makes clear in *I Love to You*:

Transcendence is thus no longer ecstasy, leaving the self behind toward an inaccessible total-other, beyond sensibility, beyond the earth. It is respect for the other whom I will never be, who is transcendent to me and to whom I am transcendent. Neither simple nature nor common spirit beyond nature, this transcendence exists in the difference of body and culture that continues to nourish our energy, its movement, its generation and its creation. . . . The other of sexual difference is he – or she – towards whom it is possible to go as towards a transcendence, while remaining in the self, and without turning transcendence on its head in the guise of soul or spirit. (104-5)

As Patrice Haynes points out, Irigaray “suggests that the sensuous encounter with the sexuate other enables the self-transcendence of one’s *own* sexuate embodiment,” an ethical encounter that promotes the “conscious expression” of

sexual embodiment (116). Transcendence then for Irigaray is the creation of a sexuante, embodied divine, not at the expense of the masculine other, but a becoming achieved through attention to the very sexual difference that makes them irreducible to one another.

If Irigaray's sensible transcendental requires the ethical recognition of sexual identity as an ontological and irreducible difference, as well as the reclamation of one's own sexuante nature, how then is transcendence achieved by the adoptive maternal body? As we have seen, maternal subjective position is discursively produced, an identity constructed through consistent subjection to unlocalizable images of maternity coalescing in the figure of the Child. Adoptive maternity is not an embodied nor ontological identity that can be appealed to in order to carve out a specific identity the way in which Irigaray's sensible transcendental "provide[s] a transcendent horizon for female becoming" (Daggers 204). The current form of adoptive maternal identity is a *consequence*, at least in part, to the monomaterialist matrix's reliance on maternal embodiment which creates an impassable barrier between the non-procreative body and the futural horizon of the Child.

Unlike Irigaray's horizontal transcendence, which involves the production of "alternative depictions of female specificity" that she argues are a "pre-discursive reality that phallogocentrism both misrepresents and disavows to the advantage of men," there is no pre-discursive reality for the adoptive maternal

body (Haynes *IT* 91). For this very reason one of the many purposes of this project was to insist on the removal of maternity from embodiment, to emphasize the possibilities of performance in relation to a discursive transcendence that affords the mother the ability to signify outside of preestablished codes of identity. Yet, as we saw in the previous section, the importance the law places on the biological connection between the mother and child effectively occludes recognition of the non-procreative body. Adoptive maternal identity is recognized within the symbolic economy as the necessary inclusion of a negative pole, a non-identity that substantiates and legitimizes sanctioned forms of maternity.

Despite the fact that the term “adoptive maternity” denotes an identity that is discursively produced, rather than an ontological category, Irigaray’s emphasis on attentiveness to otherness is of immense importance. As authors such as Shelley M. Park illustrate, adoptive maternity requires a welcoming of otherness in the form of accepting the fact that the child will embody characteristics that are not possessed by the adoptive maternal body (80). I would extend this even further in positing that adoptive maternity requires the acceptance of otherness in the form of other existents that take part in the construction of the child’s identity. Whereas Irigaray calls for an attentiveness to the materiality of the female body in the construction of a feminine divine, I argue that a recognition and even an acceptance of the discursive category of “adoptive mother” is necessary for the possibility of transcendence.

The very term “adoptive mother,” as has been shown, denotes little more than the negative identity of “non-mother,” signifying a gap or lack of connection between the adoptive maternal body and the child. To accept this term is to accept, not only the otherness of the child itself, but a perceived lack of ownership and influence that is customarily attributed to the biologically reproductive body. This is very similar to Sara Ruddick’s theory of “maternal humility” from *Maternal Thinking* delineated in earlier chapters that endorses a recognition of one’s limits in regards to the control of the child (72). To identify with the discursive limits of adoptive maternity would be a recognition that the adoptive maternal body will ever be considered within the monomaterialist matrix as the sole “mother.” This would be the first step in a resistance that does not involve attempts to embody the “good mother” which, as Karen McCormack illustrates in “Stratified Reproduction and Poor Women’s Resistance,” involves “conforming to a middle-class definition of motherhood (coded as white)” that merely reproduces “a system that by virtue of their class and race, is used to limit their power” (676).

Furthermore, attempts at embodying the prototypical “good” mother by adoptive maternal bodies in order to be accepted as “legitimate” mothers serves only to make these “deviant” bodies more recognizable. This is not meant to imply that adoptive maternal bodies need to abandon attempts at being attentive to their children, which is the most recognizable action of the “good” mother, but

that attempts to “mimick” heteronormative practices succeeds only in “closeting” these maternal bodies (Park 76). To be clear, when I claim that attempting to perform the duties of the “good” mother results in “closeting” the adoptive maternal bodies, I don’t mean to imply that they become discursively imperceptible. Quite the contrary, by continually trying to embody the “good” mother the adoptive maternal body becomes “invisible” precisely because they hide the conditions of their existence, the very elements that render them deviant, and become even more pronounced as “adoptive” (75). This can be seen in adoptive mothers who refuse to reveal the “story” of their children’s origins or resist the desire of the child to search out their birth mother. By resisting to embrace these aspects adoptive mothers contribute to the heteronormative image of the mother as one who is the “origin” of the child and in control of the trajectory of their child’s “story.”

In an acceptance of this very negative identity that adoptive maternal bodies are relegated to lies the very possibility of affecting the trajectory of the very future they are barred from entering. As discussed previous, in *No Future* Lee Edelman illustrates how, in a symbolic economy centered on the image of the Child, queer identity can serve only as a negative identity that poses a threat to reproduction and life itself. Edelman takes the stance that “far from partaking of this narrative movement toward a viable political future, far from perpetuating the fantasy of meaning’s eventual realization, the queer comes to figure the bar to

every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form” (4). While identifying that political discourse in the symbolic hinges on the futurism embodied by the child, Edelman calls, not for a rejection of “this ascription of negativity to the queer,” but encourages those bodies to “consider accepting and even embracing it” (4). Furthermore, he compels queer bodies to “withdraw [their] allegiance” in propagating a future that does not recognize their positive identity and instead argues that “taking the Symbolic’s negativity to the very letter of the law...that turning the force of queerness against all subjects, however queer, can afford an access to the *jouissance* that at once defines and negates us” (5).

Similarly, adoptive maternal bodies would do well to remove their allegiance to the “good” mother identity, by embracing the very differences that make them unrecognizable. Park notes that attempts to hide the very aspects of adoptive maternity by “deviant” mothers only results in isolation from similar bodies that stems the creation of a community of non-heteronormative mothers and sustains prejudices against non-procreative bodies (76). To be clear, I am not endorsing the creation of an “adoptive maternal divine,” of making visible the aspects of adoptive maternity in order to construct a specific identity. Identifying oneself with the “stigma” of adoptive maternity is to disavow the very necessity of being recognized, of having and needing an identity at all. It is to relinquish

ownership of the child as the securer of the mother's identity and to revel in the fact that the child is not a reflection of their identity, but a multitude of identities.

Furthermore, Edelman claims that the ethical imperative of the queer in a society that refuses to recognize their existence is, as I have argued elsewhere in regards to the maternal body, to embody the death drive in order to challenge the very futurism that “generates generational succession, temporality, and narrative sequence, not toward the end of enabling change, but instead of perpetuating sameness, of turning back time to assure repetition...” (54-60). Edelman calls for queer bodies to “inhabit the place of meaninglessness associate with the *sinthome*” in order to embody the death drive that “refuses the calcification of form that is reproductive futurism;” this requires, as he describes, a disavowal and rejection of both the future and the child (48). Though it goes without saying that adoptive maternal bodies cannot abandon the child nor the future, despite the fact that the latter is forever restricted, I nevertheless contend that Edelman's argument for embodying and embracing the negative identity these “deviant” bodies share can affect the reproduction of an oppressive future. Just as Edelman encourages these bodies to direct their “queerness” on individuals, I would argue that embracing the plethora of differences inherent in adoptive maternity might result in creating a “contagion” of mothering that resists the symbolic structure and infects the futural horizon with irreducible difference.

#### 5.4 Collective Transcendence

As we have seen in previous sections, the future appears infinitely barred to the non-procreative maternal body, the positive identity of “mother” unrecognizable within the symbolic economy of the monomaterialist matrix. The horizontal transcendence of Luce Irigaray which, as delineated extensively, involves the creation of an ideal that is dichotomous and singular from its masculine counterpart rather than derivative, only serves as a negative image of the “deviant” maternal body that reinforces and help reproduce the very conditions of subjection it intends to counter. This being said, it would be remiss to end this discussion with merely the form in which maternal transcendence manifests itself for biologically reproductive bodies, concluding that this possibility is foreclosed to non-procreative mothers, without further exploring possibilities for these non-reproductive mothers. With this in mind, the following section will return to Levinas’s theory of fecundity, his example of transcendence par excellence, in order to illustrate the possibilities of conceptualizing adoptive maternity as the construction of a transcendental field to which the non-procreative mother takes part in a collective transcendence that builds a community under the act of “mothering.”

As we have seen, for Levinas, transcendence is essentially the event whereby the singularity of the same is dispersed into the unknowability of the future in the form of a child that contains both a trace of the same and yet is an



other. In Levinas corpus, transubstantiation – which is the “only transcendence that does not have the temporal form in which an I leaves itself and then returns to immanence” – is characterized as a “total transcendence” that is achieved through fecundity, the production of a child that carries the lineage of the parent into the future and on into infinity (Bergo 122). Transcendence then, for Levinas, is the creation of a community or fraternity that encompasses both the same and other, each embodied by a shared commonality, yet distinct. As Ephraim Meir illustrates in *Dialogical Thought and Identity*, it “is only in contact with the other that transcendence takes place” and, furthermore, it “is not the I that is capable of transcending itself, but rather that transcendence happens in the passing of the I to the other, which is made possible by the child” (110). The identity of the father in Levinas’s philosophy must be able to live on eternally in the being of the child as it moves toward an unknowable future that is outside of the father’s control.

However, though paternity seemingly involves the production of a biological child engendered through an ethical embrace, Levinas partially alludes to the possibilities of fecundity beyond biology. As John Drabinski notes in *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other*, Levinas’s theory of fecundity extends beyond what the philosopher refers to as the “*unique* son – the son who is only my own” (142). Attempting to extend his discussion of ethics and transcendence, Levinas moves from biological paternity to an emphasis on

fraternity where the child is uniquely the father's because the latter has been elected by the son, a unique and distinct existent (Buckingham 100). Furthermore, Levinas comments:

But the I liberated from its very identity in its fecundity cannot maintain its separation with regard to this future if it is bound to its future in its *unique* child...Paternity is produced as an innumerable future; the I engendered exists at the same time as unique in the world and as a brother among brothers...[F]raternity is the very relation with the face in which at the same time my election and equality, that is, the mastery exercised over me by the other, are accomplished. (qtd. in Drabinsky 142)

Here Levinas is specifically discussing “difference after death – which is here a matter of the death of the father and the life of the son,” yet Drabinski extends this to include “the death of the past (catastrophe) and the life of the future (what persists after the disaster)” (142). To explain, Drabinski notes that “I may want my son to be a reproduction of myself because I will die, but the ontological category of fecundity produces something different: difference differentiates across time,” yet nevertheless retains a “thread of continuity” (143).

Drabinski argues that in Levinas's revised conception of fecundity – which includes the non-biological son and fraternity – we “hear an echo of the problematic of beginning after catastrophe,” specifically Levinas's response to the status of the European Jew following the Shoah and his commentary on what occurs to filiation when it “ceases to exist in any significant way” (144). For Drabinski the Shoah represents that very event, or catastrophe that signals a break

from the past, opening up a future that is unknown yet nevertheless containing a trace of the past in itself (144). In the aftermath of this event what remains is a future that is infinitely distinct and incompatible with the past. Drabinski's characterization of the event brings us exceedingly close to the Deleuzian caesura, that significant event that occurs during the third synthesis of time that produces an impassable interval between older and emerging forms.

If we recall, the time of the event, of the third synthesis of time, is “essentially one of response and action, and hence a synthesis oriented toward the future” (Bogue *DF* 40). As Ronald Bogue indicates, in the third synthesis an “unclassifiable, disorienting time erupts” that “creates a new order, a caesura in time that establishes an incommensurable ‘before’ and ‘after’” (41). This “new order” that splits with the past and older form is the result of an action that reorients time, an event that Gregg Lambert in *The Non-Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze* likens to Hiroshima:

...we can immediately recognize the classification of Hiroshima under the category of the caesura. In other words, we can see that Hiroshima functions as a pure order of time, that is, a time that ‘orders’ the series of before and after. There is the age of Hiroshima, which divides all of time into two parts: there is the world before Hiroshima; there is the world after Hiroshima; between them, there is a modification that remains unconscious and unknowable. (105)

On a purely linguistic level the name Hiroshima itself is merely a paltry attempt at the thematization of an unrepresentable act or schism of time and the production

of the new. The moniker cannot stand for the totalization of the event because it stands for an action rather than a static entity due to the fact that the “caesura is the moment of the split of the subject and the instigation of an action” where there is no stable subject in which to represent (Bogue *DF* 41).

The decision to mother and the performance that it entails is no less a significant event, especially in regards to the difficulties surrounding adoptive mothers. Along with the consistent scrutiny and surveillance by medico-juridical institutions, and the exhausting adoption process itself, the adoptive maternal body is faced with a situation where their children experience “higher levels of externalizing disorders, academic problems, and more anxiety and social problems” (Priel, et al. 389). Being faced with this momentous task the adoptive maternal body experiences what Deleuze refers to as that “crisis of a disruptive summons to action” where the “past takes on characteristics of something that is ‘too big for me’” (Bogue 41). Not unlike biological mothering, the “deviant” mother’s choice to mother is a perverse action, a disavowal of the reality that they will be accepted within the monomaterialist matrix as anything but a negative identity and an “intrinsic transformation of energy” that “becomes neutralised by a movement of deterritorialization in order to find a free and endless circulation” (De Bolle “Passive Synthesis” 148). Furthermore, as illustrated in the earlier section, it is a disavowal of the necessity of a static identity and reterritorialization of the desire for a synthesized self. As with the masochist who continually defers

pleasure, the adoptive maternal body consistently defers totalization in exchange for becoming. The adoptive mother consciously, through the performance of maternity, detaches any libidinal investment and any hope of achieving recognition, and in doing so disavows the very authority that seemingly bars them from transcendence.

To be clear there is an immense distinction between the event or caesura that occurs between biological mothering, as we saw with *Rosemary's Baby*, and the adoptive maternal process. In the former the caesura denotes the origins of a reinstitution of a new maternal identity that is *beyond* the phallic system of representation, an image of maternity that is created through the ethical interaction shared between mother and infant. This relies, as we have seen, on the law's recognition of kinship and the way in which reproductive bodies are subjected to images of maternity that they must navigate in order to produce a singular maternal identity *within* the phallogocentric order.

Yet, with adoptive maternity, there is no production of an ideal maternal image because such an identity is not and cannot be recognized within the symbolic register. Unlike the catastrophe described by Drabinski, where what persists following the caesura is "the name of the father, which becomes the name of the son, which then becomes the name that makes fraternity and the infinity of time possible," the fracture produced by the adoptive maternal body does not extend the self, but obliterates it (144). Instead, in this form of mothering there

occurs, as Deleuze illustrates, a “becoming-equal to the act and a doubling of the self, and the projection of an ideal self in the image of the act” (89). This “ideal self” is the act itself, the act that replaces the former subject who is demolished because “the action itself allows no room for a stable self” (Bogue *DF* 41). As Deleuze claims that:

As for the third time in which the future appears, this signifies that the event and the act possess a secret coherence which excludes that of the self; that they turn back against the self which has become their equal and smash it to pieces, as though the bearer of the new world were carried away and dispersed by the shock of the multiplicity to which it gives birth: what the self has become equal to is the unequal in itself. (*DR* 89-90)

This process of becoming the act, of literally becoming-mothering can easily be seen in the multiplicity or assemblage of mothers that is created through the act of adoptive maternity.

Not to imply that the biological mother takes on sole responsibility of the child, but especially in regards to adoptive mothers the act of mothering denotes a multitude of identities that participate in the transformation of the future. The adoptive mother is but one existent that participates in this collective enterprise, assisted occasionally by family members that offer help both financially and in regards to childcare if the mother is required to continue working. In “Adoption as a Family Form” both Karen March and Charlene Miall indicate that “adoption creates a family that, in important ways, differs from the traditionally biologically related nuclear family,” not only in creating connections between disparate

individuals, but in regards to the inclusion of government agencies such as social services and postadoption services (359). These agencies not only provide assistance in the form of material items and clinical aid, but also access to the child's medical records and those of the child's birth parents (360-2).

The aforementioned discussion of the numerous institutions and individuals that participate in the process of adoptive mothering is not meant to overlook the fact that these entities can also serve as the main instruments of subjection for these bodies as well. Nevertheless it cannot be denied that these elements, good or bad, converge on and impress themselves upon the child, serving as an "intensive pulsating rhythm unique to that particular constellation of multiplicity" (Rae 127). Whereas the monomaterialist matrix's reliance on kinship traditionally views both the biological and social makeup of the child in direct correlation to lineage, creating a static image of maternity, the disparate elements that are actualized in the figure of the adopted child seemingly refuse this totalization. To view the institutions and individuals that contribute to the overall identity of the adoptive child is to conceptualize this perverse form of mothering as a "qualitative transformation through 'unnatural participation'" centered around the figure of the child, yet discernible only by the "lines and dimensions it encompasses in 'intension'" (Deleuze and Guattari *TP* 266-7).

Understanding the possibilities of adoptive maternity requires a reconceptualization of the way in which we view the process of identity formation

indicative of the adopted child. In their article “Adopted Adolescents’ Preoccupation with Adoption,” Julie Kohler, Harold D. Grotevant, and Ruth G. McRoy investigate the difficulties adopted children face in regards to identity development. The authors argue that “identity formation – achieving a cohesive definition of the self while individuating from parents or family – is thought to be the primary developmental task of adolescents” (93). Furthermore, the authors comment that “although adolescents construct a global sense of identity, adoption adds an additional dimension of ‘differentness’ to integrate into one’s overall sense of self” and “adopted adolescents construct an adoptive identity – a unique meaning of what it means to be an adopted person” (93).

This study has already commented on the way in which juridical institutions such as adoption agencies and social services attempt to secure a heteronormative future by positing a specific form of mothering to be performed in response to the infant. However, Kohler, Grotevant, and McRoy’s article reveals yet another pervasive strain of bureaucratic control as well. These institutions are not only concerned with producing a certain type of child, but in preserving a level of continuity and coherence, specifically in the adopted child’s life. For instance, the authors note that, despite the fact that the adoption process remains exceedingly difficult for potential parents, many times “state laws, agency protocols, and other factors often prevent adolescents from initiating a search for their birth parents” (94-5). This stems directly from the view, held by



many opponents of open adoption, that the search for a child's biological parents "can cause confusion for young children by exposing them to two sets of parents with different value systems, increasing their risk for psychopathology and heightening identity conflicts" (94-5).

Even though the authors conclude that the correlation between these afflictions and an adopted child's search for their biological origins is inconclusive, these findings nevertheless reveal the necessity to which juridical institutions place on limiting the influences that affect the identity formation of the child. For the law or power to function properly it requires a stable point, a coherent identity in which to pinpoint, which is precisely what the adopted child refuses to embody. The law looks to the child in order to totalize and categorize the identity of the mother, yet this operation is seemingly halted by the assemblage of mothering, the multitude of entities, itself include, that converge on the child. As Deleuze and Guattari illustrate in *A Thousand Plateaus* the State operates through a "form of interiority" that, like the metaphor of chess that the authors utilize, only allows for a set number or trajectory of movements (352). The State, represented by numerous institutions such as welfare and adoption services, create a binary opposition of maternity, integrating only mothers and non-mothers. Therefore, they are unable to recognize or, more importantly, contend with the multiplicity of maternity that influences the adopted child, which serves as a "nonsubjectified machine assemblage" of maternity (353). Just as the

Go pieces that Deleuze and Guattari claim “make the outside a territory in space; consolidate that territory by the construction of a second, adjacent territory,” the adoptive maternal body creates a network through “unnatural participation” that injects and introduces difference into the territory (353).

In regards to the adopted child, the adoptive maternal body takes part in a supremely ethical engagement, not only in accepting the irreducible difference of a child that shares no biological connection, but, more importantly, in introducing difference into the futural landscape the child embodies. As Shelley Park illustrates in *Mothering Queerly, Queering Maternity*, far from merely being required to negotiate the differences that an adoptive child introduces into the non-reproductive family dynamic, by “denying any necessary connection between childbearing, on the one hand, and pregnancy and childbirth, on the other, adoptive motherhood refuses ‘repro-narrativity,’ by complicating the narrative of generational succession” (80). By choosing to mother the adoptive maternal body does much more than illustrate that “the notion of reproduction must itself be reconceptualized” (80), it reorients the “sense of continuity and history created by the genetic tie,” creating that very Deleuzian caesura that severs the repro-narrative trajectory (Berg qtd. in Park 80). This is precisely what we see in the case studies alluded to earlier where the adopted child is seemingly unable to fully thematize and territorialize their lineage in a traditional narrative structure that would assist in the construction of a unified self.

Though I am not promoting or glossing over the very real complexities of adoptive identity and the emotional and social issues that arise when attempting to synthesize one's sense of identity, I nevertheless contend that the adopted child's inability to easily establish a level or continuity or impose a clear narrative on their identity is reflected in the law. The "identity exploration" that Grotevant and other authors note occurs in adopted children constitutes the destabilization of heteronormative society and reflects a concern with its inability to locate and orient itself (Grotevant, et. al 383). As with biological mothers who are subjected to an ideal, the law attempts to reproduce itself in the figure of the child by organizing the narrative of its existence and therefore guiding it toward a known horizon. Grotevant and others notice this in the imposition of a "family story" which the adoptive parents disclose to their children in an attempt to help them achieve a "stable" identity (383). This story is typically "influenced by what adoption professionals have told the parents about 'revelation' what should be told, how much, and when" (383). The law attempts to resist and counter, not only the values and norms conveyed to adoptive children by racial and sexually diverse parental configurations, in order to produce a "desired" subject, but map the child's identity through the inclusion and exclusion of what is totalized in its "story." It does this in order to bulwark itself against the threat of an unknowable future embodied by a child that cannot fully totalize its identity or encapsulate it in a "neatly" linear narrative. By embracing the many disparate elements, the

adoptive services, the birth mother, and family members, the adoptive maternal body “infects” the future with difference and unknowability.

Whereas the operation of masochism as it pertains the biological mother involves the disavow of the paternal function and subsequently the emergence of a distinct maternal subjectivity produced solely by the mother, the masochistic process indicative of adoptive maternity produces no such image. As we have seen, no adoptive maternal divine can be recognized within the monomaterialist matrix and only serves to reinforce the binary opposition between biological and non-procreative maternal bodies. As with Deleuze’s masochist, who “accepts the law to the letter, and ‘by scrupulously applying the law [she is] able to demonstrate its absurdity,” the non-procreative body subscribes to the very law that oppresses it, not merely to critique, but to subvert (Valentin 197). Similar to how Edelman claims that queer bodies should identify with the very negative subject position the law prescribes, the non-procreative mother embodies the “non-mother,” openly acknowledging that she is not the sole controlling force of the child. By performing the role of mother the adoptive maternal body not only reveals the absurdity of the monomaterialist matrix’s version of the “good” mother, but more importantly, disavows and abolishes the monolithic figure of the “ideal” mother and, in its place, posits a number of disparate bodies that all take part in mothering the child. The masochistic performance of the adoptive mother is a desexualization of the image of “ideal” maternity and of the child as

the securer of the future and the mother's positive identity that transforms the non-procreative body.

Unlike the biologically reproductive mother who "clothes" the child in an ideal image of maternity in order to create a distinct maternal identity, the non-procreative body clothes the child in a multitude of images in order to become indeterminate. As we have seen, in Deleuze's form of masochism the male masochist clothes the female torturer, whose performance helps bring forth the creation of a new a-phallic man born solely from a woman. Similarly, the biological mother symbolically abolishes the paternal function from her child in order to remake her image through the infant. However, in the masochistic performance of the adoptive maternal body the mother does not attempt to "clothe" the child in their image in order to embody a place of authority. Instead, through the inclusion of outside influences, namely social services, adoption agencies, family members, and on certain occasions the birth mother, they introduce elements into the makeup of the child's identity in order to dissolve any static image of maternity. The adoptive maternal body is but one player in the masochistic performance, each of which contributes to the child's ever-evolving identity.

By introducing a significant level of difference into the futural horizon, a child that embodies disparate characteristics formed by a number of differing origins, the adoptive maternal body not only alters the trajectory of repro-

narrativity, but dissolves as a subject. Accepting the inevitable forces that converge on the child's upbringing, whether they be legal or familial, the adoptive maternal body takes part in the process of becoming-mothering that is a beautifully rhizomatic operation, the conjunction of disparate elements, an "assemblage of connected multiplicities, without center or origin, and is always in the process of becoming" (Sprouse 83). This is one of the most crucial aspects of the masochistic disavowal; the adoptive maternal body foregoes the achievement of a singular identity in exchange for joining a collective, a continual becoming. Just as the Deleuzian masochist suspends pleasure indefinitely, so too does the adoptive mother defer the achievement of a static identity, choosing instead to occupy a nomadic space of becoming that resists totalization. Choosing to adopt and to mother is the creation of "a future that is different because it returns, or repeats" and the result for the adoptive maternal body is a personal death (Crockett 146). This is a demise that "does not lead to a future resurrection, but in fact it is directly resurrection" and "properly understood is the new, the different that emerges out of the process of repetition or iteration that becomes the future" (146). This resurrection is not the transformation of the adoptive maternal identity, but a pure resurrection of the future, an upsurge of unknowability that is not prescribed. This is the contagion or infection of the adoptive maternal process, to literally *infect* and *affect* the movement of the future through the production of a child that resists totalization, who is always in the process of becoming rather

than a static image. The adopted child who serves as the locus of maternal identity, the point at which the subjective position of the mother is determined, cannot be thematized or reduced to a specific origin. The child as an affirmation of the mother merely reflects and points to the great assemblage of maternity who are only discernible when they take part in the act of mothering. The adoptive mother, the birth mother, and a whole host of other existents and institutions have been absorbed and consumed under the act of “mothering.”

The characterization of mothering as an “unnatural participation” and a “contagion,” to use Deleuze’s terminology, is to remove it from its association with filiation and heredity. Conceiving of mothering as a becoming, as something that is a perverse repetition that is “always in the middle,” rather than an action that constitutes the emergence or reclamation of a specific and static identity, might bring us closer to the idea of transcendence as dissolution of personal identity (Sotirin 118). Park alludes to the fact that adoptive maternal bodies “make visible the irrelevance of consanguinity to family bonds and the reality of alternatives to conventional family structures,” emphasizing how non-traditional forms of mothering that are positioned outside the repro-narrative structure seemingly create a “space” for the adoptive maternal body to emerge (Beizer qtd. in Park 80). Yet, what emerges in this space is not a static identity, but an action like Hiroshima that resists all attempts at thematization. Every act of mothering promotes yet another caesura, another infection of difference, that signals the

“split of the subject and the instigation of an action” (Bogue *DF* 41). Adoptive maternity is an assemblage of discontinuous multiplicities, numerous individuals and institutions, and an infinite amount of minute utterances of mothering that are all held together only by their relational act of mothering (Coleman and Ringrose 9). The law attempts to look to child as the nucleus and the imaginary point of identity in order to construct the identity of the mother, but it cannot and will not recognize the non-procreative body, the queer mother, or the infinite amount of existents that participate in the creation of the child.

The assemblage that characterizes adoptive maternity is a plane of immanence, a machinic multiplicity “made of the repetition of contraction-habits repeating difference” a “haecceity of the ‘nows’ of contractions, habits, little spasms, laughters, smiles and cries, in a word of singularities that constitute a life” (Arsic 143). If we recall, Deleuze claims that the “transcendental field is an immanent transcendental,” so that the plane of immanence is a “virtual field – a movement of differential relations and intensities, of continuous variations and intensities” that “cannot be represented or known” (Haynes *IT* 61). Adoptive maternity is a plane of immanence because it encapsulates the singularities of each action of mothering that are internally differentiated and actualized in the figure of the child (Burns 15). To be clear, the virtual plane of mothering here should not be collapsed with the possible, an “image of the real, while the real is supposed to resemble the possible” (Deleuze qtd. in Shaviro 33). The child is an



actualization of this field, a differentiation of these singularities that impress upon it, but nevertheless it refers back only to the intensive and infinitely plural transcendental field of mothering. The contagion that is mothering is a repetition that opens up a future where there is a “dissolution of the identity of the self in favour of a system of little selves, of the man with no name and no qualities, the universal people or of diverse ‘becomings’” (Voss 236). Mothering is a collective transcendence, a foregoing of the I that is reified by the production of a child that serves to totalize my identity, in exchange for a dissolution of the self in the joining of a community discernible only by the act of mothering.

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