

**(UN)NATURAL BODIES: REPRODUCTION, DISABILITY,
QUEERNESS**

By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation arises from an interdisciplinary attention to the categories of embodiment, otherness, and the “abnormal.” In deconstructing a “normal” versus “abnormal” binary, I focus specifically on establishing intersections between disabled and/or queer bodies, those commonly categorized as monstrous. By way of feminist science studies and cultural studies theoretical frameworks, I postulate that the connections between disabled and/or queer bodies can be read through the practices of biological, cultural, and queer reproduction(s).

Chapter One is concerned with examining how disabled and/or queer physical reproduction highlights and troubles a heteronormative and able-bodied normative time line. I consider Michael Bérubé’s memoir *Life As We Know It* and Barbara Kingsolver’s novel *The Poisonwood Bible* in order to hypothesize a notion I term “queer-progress,” a time line that works in opposition to a linear progressive movement of bodies in time.

In Chapter Two, I investigate the process of cultural and social reproduction. What kinds of attitudes, beliefs, and storylines are perpetually recreated and reproduced around disabled and/or queer bodies? How is the disabled and/or queer body positioned against a “normal” body? I study Alice Munro’s short story “Child’s Play” and Lois Lowry’s young adult novel *The Giver* with the aim to expose how socio-cultural reproductive policing technologies seek to maintain able-bodied and heteronormative privilege by way of the normalization and reproduction of negative affect towards monstrous bodies.

Chapter Three analyzes texts that envision queer reproductive stories, both biological and cultural, for disabled and/or queer subjects. I examine the question of what happens when disabled and/or queer bodies bear reproductive fruit, both physically and in the form of cultural change. I explore Larissa Lai’s novel *Salt Fish Girl* and Allyson Mitchell’s art installation *Ladies Sasquatch* and posit that these texts offer alternative manifestations of reproduction, community, and kinship formations.

This project places different dialogues in conversation with one another—feminist thought about reproduction, disability and reproduction, queerness and reproduction, disability and queerness and how the “normal” body is created and maintained. In sum, I build on existing work in feminism, disability studies and queer theory to develop the notion of “reproduction” in an interdisciplinary fashion.

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INTRODUCTION

(Un)natural Bodies: Reproduction, Disability, Queerness

Despite the fact that homosexuality and disability clearly share a pathologized past, and despite a growing awareness of the intersection between queer theory and disability studies, little notice has been taken of the connection between heterosexuality and able-bodied identity. Able-bodiedness, even more than heterosexuality, still masquerades as a nonidentity, as the natural order of things. (McRuer, *Crip Theory* 1)

The law is on the side of the normal. (Woolf, *On Being Ill* 23)

In early 2008, CBC Radio's *Sounds Like Canada* completed a six part series on CBC radio producer Ing Wong-Ward's high-risk pregnancy. Host Shelagh Rogers conducted a conversation-like interview over the course of several months with Wong-Ward, contextualizing and discussing the pregnancy and how Wong-Ward's life had changed as a result. Wong-Ward has spinal muscular atrophy, a disability that keeps her in a wheelchair. She has rods in her back "to help her sit up" (Wong-Ward). Because of her disability, her pregnancy is at a higher risk of complication than the pregnancy of an able-bodied woman. It is this—the "riskiness" of Wong-Ward's circumstance—that warrants committed radio time. Highlighting an overall theme of the series, a central phrase that emerged from Wong-Ward's first session with Rogers was "disabled people do procreate, and they do have reproductive systems" (Wong Ward). This notion is interesting because Wong-Ward also emphasized that many women in her situation are told, "you must have an abortion" and "you cannot have a child"

(Wong-Ward). Throughout the six-part series, Rogers and Wong-Ward discussed a plethora of interesting topics: heteronormativity, pre-natal testing, genetics, “random acts of nature,” the fundamental uncertainty of life, ideas of the “normal” versus the “abnormal” body, Wong-Ward’s relationship with her able-bodied husband Tim, the importance of a support system, the medicalization of pregnancy, not needing to “be fixed” as a person with a disability, the successful delivery process, and the recovery period for her body after delivery (Wong-Ward). Wong-Ward is a disabled woman delivering a child, and at the same time, she can be read as a queer reproducer: she demonstrated to the listening audience that disabled people are sexual, can be mothers and have families, and can produce a queer kin group. I amplify my use of the term “queer” below. For now, I offer the following brief definition in the words of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: queer works “to make invisible possibilities and desires visible” (3).

My dissertation arises from an interdisciplinary interest in the categories of embodiment, otherness, and the “abnormal.” I focus particularly on the intersections between disabled and queer bodies, which are commonly categorized as monsters or monstrous: “the traditional characterization of monstrosity in terms of excess, deficiency or displacement suggests not only bodily imperfection, but an improper being” (Shildrick 12). I connect these monstrous disabled bodies with queer bodies by way of the theme of reproduction. Reproduction is employed in this project in three distinct, but related ways, all of which arise in the story of Ing Wong-Ward’s high-risk

pregnancy. Most obviously, I consider biological reproduction. On another level, I discuss social or cultural reproduction where ideology, in Althusser's formulation, is constituted by those ideas that define the social climate necessary to reproduce prevailing relations of power (so stories like Ing-Wong Ward's reproduce some ideologies while contesting others). Finally, what Ing Wong-Ward's story illustrates most clearly is the way these two senses of reproduction converge, in historically specific ways, around practices of conception and birth specifically, but also surrounding structures of desire, sex, and descent.

Biological reproduction—who can and “should” do it, by what means and under what circumstances, and with what desired outcomes—is regulated by culture.

Wong-Ward's story makes explicit the point made by Haraway and others:

As any feminist knows who has survived the biopolitical wars about structures and relationships below the diaphragm in human female bodies, “reproduction” is a potent matter. ... Where reproduction is at stake, kin and kind are torqued; biographies and systems of classification warped. (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 138-9)

Thus reproduction still carries much currency in feminist studies and mainstream society today, and I argue, similar to Haraway, that “symbolic and material forces” (*When Species Meet* 139) operate in tandem to transform biological and cultural norms about the physical body's or society's reproduction(s). Haraway further suggests, “every technology is a reproductive technology ... ways of life are at stake in the culture of science” (“Promises of Monsters” 299). Even though Haraway displaces “reproduction” for “generation” later in “Promises,” that she flags reproduction's ability to put “ways of life” “at stake” (“Promises of

Monsters” 299) points to just how integrated biological and cultural forms of reproduction are in twentieth and twenty-first-century Western culture. Similarly, in *Figurations: Child, Bodies, Worlds*, Castañeda explains that: “reproduction is neither simply a cultural phenomenon nor a natural fact, but instead lies somewhere between the two” (85). Castañeda highlights the fact that “many different technologies come together to produce different kinds of bodies” (85) and that “this understanding of reproduction links human reproduction, embodiment, and cultural meaning together” (85-6). Reproduction cannot be understood as *only* “natural” or biological. Reproduction happens in a variety of ways, both biological and cultural, and these reproductions are inevitably linked.

Some feminist science studies and cultural studies scholars emphasize biopolitics when it comes to understanding the overarching role of reproduction in twentieth and twenty-first-century Western culture. Broadly, disability studies and queer theory have often focused on Michel Foucault’s estimation of the biopolitical—“an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 140)—as central for understanding the regulation of all life. Foucault’s double focus on biopolitics and disciplined bodies is fruitful for thinking about the effects of reproduction(s) on disabled and/or queer bodies. In the introduction to *Foucault and the Government of Disability*, Shelley Tremain describes how disabled people are understood “scientifically”—and “even come to understand themselves” (5-6)—in these detrimental classificatory and normalizing ways.

These classifications are enforced through a variety of subjugating techniques: asylum creation, “regimes of rehabilitation,” “prostheses,” and “prenatal diagnosis,” just to name a few (Tremain 5). In effect, disabled and/or queer bodies become “abnormal” through biopower’s operation. Not surprisingly, many of the above-listed techniques involve limiting and controlling sexuality and reproduction specifically.

Feminist scholars have taken Foucault’s conceptualization of the biopolitical very seriously in discussions of women’s bodies and their reproductive capacities. Jana Sawicki in *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body*, argues that biopower:

must also have been indispensable to patriarchal power insofar as it provided instruments for the insertion of women’s bodies into the machinery of reproduction. And if claiming a right to one’s body only makes sense against the background of these new life-administering forms of power and knowledge [public health agencies and the like], then the history of modern feminist struggles for reproductive freedom is a key dimension of the history of biopower. (68)

Thinking about reproductive freedom as a part of biopower’s “history marked by resistance and struggle” (Sawicki 80) becomes important when considering that women (which, in my usage, includes heterosexual women, lesbians, trans-men) have always had to negotiate their reproductive abilities and capacities in the culture. Sawicki argues, in a contemporary context:

New reproductive technologies clearly fit the model of disciplinary power. They involve sophisticated techniques of surveillance and examination (for instance, ultrasound, fetal monitors, amniocentesis, antenatal testing procedures) that make both female bodies and fetuses visible to anonymous agents in ways that facilitate the creation of new objects and subjects of medical as well as legal and state interventions. (83-4)

Similarly, in *Global Nature, Global Culture*, Franklin, Lury and Stacey note that their project is focused on technologies “in the Foucauldian sense of technologies of the self” (6) where elements of the “same” are maintained or “naturalis[ed] through forms of embodiment” (6). The constellation of ideas I am working with in this project—reproductive politics, normalization (or naturalization), and embodiment—become traceable through both disabled and/or queer bodies where the biopolitical effects of exclusion are particularly apparent. In fact, Franklin, Lury and Stacey argue that the “effects” of “nature and culture” becoming “increasingly isomorphic” (9) are such that “both nature and culture appear to become self-generating, *to be able to reproduce themselves*” (10). In other words, while nature and culture retain “their distinctiveness” (Franklin, Lury and Stacey 9) they are also overlapping much more seriously. The “assisted” (9) nature of a variety of medical technologies, for example, blurs the line between nature and culture. “Nature is no longer fixed,” Franklin, Lury and Stacey suggest, while “culture can now be reproduced biologically” (10). I align my thinking about reproduction with Franklin, Lury and Stacey’s in that it is precisely the incorporation and intertwining of nature *and* culture, biology *and* constructivism that I mobilize in my discussions of reproduction.

Reproduction is theorized in a multitude of ways in feminist science studies and cultural studies. In 2009, the journal *Feminist Theory* published a special issue on the topic of feminism and reproduction indicating the still-pressing nature of the subject. In the Introduction to the issue, Gerodetti and

Mottier note that their editorial project “was prompted by the belief that recent developments in research and public debates around new reproductive technologies signal the need for renewed feminist attention to the politics of reproduction” (147). They also note that “reproduction has constituted a central theme for second-wave feminist theory and practice” (147) and suggest that “as 20th-century history has shown, female sexuality and reproductive choice have been the object of ... collective preoccupation and popular management” (147). In another article in the same issue, “Popular Culture and Reproductive Politics,” Latimer suggests that films like *Juno* and *Knocked Up* have reopened the pro-life/pro-choice question in contemporary popular culture, a question that she asserts “continues to be so repetitive” (212). Latimer argues that while second-wave feminism “was a defining time for reproductive politics in Canada and the US” (213), she also emphasizes the remarkably “cyclical nature of reproductive politics” (214). My dissertation’s focus on reproduction in many guises—including prenatal testing and transgendered reproduction, for example—would suggest that reproductive politics’ most current cycle is happening as we speak.¹

When I began researching for this project I decided to inquire at Hamilton Health Sciences’ Regional Prenatal Diagnosis Service at McMaster University

¹ Gerodetti and Mottier note that the “selection of articles” in their special issue “reflects the range of submitted articles rather than a deliberate decision ... not to include articles [on certain topics]” (151). In fact, one of the topics they refer to as being an important development in reproduction studies that remains unaddressed by their issue is “the first birth by a transman; signaling, perhaps, the need for future feminist theory to develop an in-depth analysis of the transgender politics of reproduction” (151), a topic I address, at least in part, in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

Hospital as to whether or not I could view the routine amniocentesis video shown to expectant mothers (and sometimes fathers) about the procedures and implications of the diagnostic test. Even though I was not pregnant the staff were more than happy to accommodate my request, and even provided some of the literature that is customarily given to expectant mothers. Upon watching the amniocentesis video, and reading the supplementary literature provided for “patients,” I was struck by how the twenty-minute film crystallized the main tenets of my project. The video begins by following an expectant mother to her doctor’s office. Her doctor explains the amniocentesis process. The risks are outlined—amniocentesis can cause miscarriage—and the woman undergoes the procedure. The physiology of reproduction is thematically central to the video (considering that the video is made for women who are expecting a child). To this end, the biological making-of-babies and the issues associated with pregnancy are discussed, such as gender outcomes as well as the possibility of finding out the likelihood of a fetus having genetic “abnormalities” such as Down syndrome. Cultural reproduction plays an equally central role in the video because the desired outcome of any prenatal screening, including amniocentesis and its attendant risks, is palpably that of a “normal” child. It becomes quite clear while watching the piece that disability, most notably Down syndrome, is the “negative” outcome of prenatal testing. The video strenuously assures expectant mothers that the odds of a Down syndrome diagnosis is quite low. In fact, the accompanying pamphlet reassures: “most do not have Down syndrome” (The Ontario Maternal

n.pag), again reiterating that the chances of “abnormality” are slim. In these first two instances, the video focuses on medical and technical aspects of reproduction; the obvious undercurrent in the video, which is echoed in the pamphlet, is: “consider what to do if the result is not normal” (The Ontario Maternal n. pag). The video thus emphasizes that the disabled child is not the desired child either biologically or culturally.² These foci then *lead to* cultural or social replications of the “normal” or the “abnormal” body, the “acceptable” or the “unacceptable” body.

The amniocentesis video ends with the expectant mother receiving the positive “normal” results of her test. Upon learning of the desired outcome, she phones her husband to tell him the “good news.” This gesture of calling her *husband* reproduces and enforces the heteronormative, able-bodied family—the “ideal” outcome scenario in a variety of ways. The overt desire for the able-bodied child here meets with the slightly less blatant, but just as present, normalization of the heterosexual nuclear family model. Thus, the video’s example is that of the “happy” outcome, while the not-so-happy outcomes are left to the shadows, off-screen. Even if the odds are “low,” some women will have—or choose not to have—a child with a disability. I raise this example of the meanings and implications of the amniocentesis video because, in some ways, each of the texts I study discuss in my thesis explore what happens when the

² The queer child is not the desired child, either. Medical science has not yet found a way to determine if a fetus is queer, though, and thus, the (potentially) queer child cannot be chosen or rejected in advance.

normalized and desired outcome presented in the video—but also replicated by a network of news items, official medical and governmental bodies, conservative politicians, and popular culture—*does not* come to pass. I explore the directive that comes up candidly in the pamphlet and indirectly in the video—“consider what to do if the result is not normal” (The Ontario Maternal n. pag)—in three categories in this project: medical/technical reproduction, cultural/social reproduction, and an alternative to heterosexual, able-bodied reproductions, queer reproduction. In the informational film, the “negative” outcome does not come to pass: but if it did, what would happen? In asking this question, a complex set of pedagogical and ethical questions emerge. My goal, then, is to connect issues that in mainstream culture are not usually looked at in tandem. We are not encouraged to understand disability and/or queerness as part of the same constellation of reproductive exclusions in twentieth and twenty-first century society. Consequently, my study aims to underscore the connections here via the notions of biological, constructivist, and queer reproductions.

The centrality of reproduction emerges in various manifestations in each of my chapters. Chapter One is concerned with thinking through how disabled and/or queer physical reproduction highlights and troubles the heteronormative and able-bodied “[time]-frame” (Butler, *Frames of War* 1).³ Butler argues that “the epistemological capacity to apprehend a life is partially dependent on that life being produced according to norms that qualify it as a life or, indeed, as part of

³ I elaborate on the temporal aspects of this framing below.

life” (*Frames of War* 3). The frames, then, of able-bodiedness and heterosexuality dictate the understandability of disabled and/or queer bodies and lives in the sphere of the “normal.” In Chapter Two, I examine the process of cultural and social reproduction. What kinds of attitudes, beliefs, and storylines are perpetually recreated and *reproduced* around disabled and/or queer bodies? How is the disabled and/or queer body positioned against a “normal” body? I am concerned here with thinking through the social scripts of monstrosity, “otherness” and violence that are often perpetuated around disabled and/or queer bodies. Chapter Three examines texts that envision new kinds of reproductive stories, both biological and cultural, for disabled and/or queer subjects. These new reproduction stories position queer kinship as an alternative to the able-bodied and heterosexual “frame” (Butler, *Frames of War* 1) or family. I examine the question of what happens when disabled and/or queer bodies bear reproductive fruit, both physically *and* in the form of cultural change. Overall, I argue that reproduction can be read through disabled and/or queer bodies in several ways: one, as a technique that perpetuates the able-bodied, heterosexual family and time line; two, as a way to maintain “normal” affective responses to disabled and/or queer bodies, and by extension killing that body, sometimes quite literally; and three, as a potentially “frame”-changing (Butler, *Frames of War* 5; Quayson 18; Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 21) response to oppression. I suggest, in this last sense, that if mobilized for disabled and/or queer bodies’ interests, alternative forms of reproduction, or ways of seeing reproduction *differently* can

begin to alter the normalizing (heterosexual and able-bodied) frames of what constitutes “a life” and what does not (Butler, *Frames of War* 7).

I study mainly literary texts in this project—Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible*, Michael Bérubé’s memoir *Life As We Know It: A Father, A Family, and An Exceptional Child*, Alice Munro’s short story, “Child’s Play,” Lois Lowry’s *The Giver*, Larissa Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl*—as well as Allyson Mitchell’s art installation, *Ladies Sasquatch*, to explore the above questions in a contemporary context. This wide range of Canadian and American texts, which includes three novels, a short story, a memoir, and an art installation, foreground the strong presence of disabled and/or queer viewpoints and themes emerging across contemporary Canadian and American literary and artistic work. I approach these texts through a feminist science studies and cultural studies lens that focuses specifically on how disabled and/or queer bodies complicate both a notion of the “normal” body and “normalized” ideas of reproduction. Insofar as disabled and/or queer bodies can be read in tandem in order to question different kinds of reproductions of norms, they can also be read together as “*tak[ing] place ... outside the frame furnished by the norm*” (Butler, *Frames of War* 7-8). I focus on mainly literature here because I believe that literature is a fruitful place for opening up questions, studying the material effects of affects, and for imagining alternative future possibilities. Contemporary literature can tell us something about how disabled and/or queer subjects are characterized in and by contemporary society. Literature can serve the complicated role of breaking

through official discourses of tolerance that go through the motions, in some ways, of making space for disabled and/or queer bodies, without addressing the tangled knots of fear, fantasy, anxiety, and desire that continue to make these subject positions so hard to inhabit in real life. I surmise that literature's ability to delve complexly into real and imaginative scenarios offers the hope that we might be able to move past the "ugly feelings" (Ngai 1) that still operate to exclude and punish.⁴

Reading Disabled and/or Queer Bodies Together: Theoretical Framework

My thesis discusses the aspects of reproduction I have touched upon above by utilizing pivotal trajectories in the fields of disability studies and queer theory, with particular focus on where I see the theoretical frameworks converging.

While I will return to my specific foci after this theoretical section, for now I will note that I see concepts in disability studies and queer theory converging by way of three main routes: efficiency and time; intimacy and touch; and alternative or queer kinship formations. Some work has been done to bridge disability studies and queer theory, but it remains sparse. I am most influenced by Robert

⁴ Interestingly, in *Aesthetic Nervousness* Ato Quayson suggests, "aesthetic nervousness is seen when the dominant protocols of representation within the literary text are short-circuited in relation to disability" (15). He comments that a reader of a particular text "where disability plays a prominent role ... is also affected by the short-circuiting of the dominant protocols governing the text—a short-circuit triggered by the representation of disability" (15). The acknowledgment of this aesthetic nervousness on the part of *the reader* of a text may be one avenue by which reactions to the disabled and/or queer body have changed, over time, in the literary.

McRuer's *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. McRuer makes connections between disabled and queer bodies by unpacking how “compulsory able-bodiedness and heterosexuality are produced and secured where queerness and disability are (partially and inadequately) contained” (3). McRuer also notes that “compulsory heterosexuality is intertwined with compulsory able-bodiedness; both systems work to (re)produce the able body and heterosexuality” (31). This focus on the compulsory nature of both able-bodiedness and heterosexuality and the fact that these compulsory identifiatory locations *reproduce* able bodies and heterosexuality strikes at the heart of the trajectories that I take up in the chapters of this work.

McRuer calls his work of connecting disabled and queer bodies “crip theory” (2), and notes that crip theory holds “a necessary contestatory relationship to...identity politics” as it also “talk[s] back to ...disability studies...and queer...culture” (71). McRuer's project as a whole suggests that:

we need a post identity politics of sorts, but a post identity politics that allows us to work together, one that acknowledges the complex and contradictory histories of our various movements, drawing on and learning from those histories rather than transcending them. We can't afford to position any body of thought, not even disability studies, as global in the sense of offering the subject position, the key. (202)

McRuer's work brings together disabled queers and queer disabled people; he analyzes cultural texts for what they are saying about disabled and queer subjectivities; and he proposes a new theoretical framework—crip theory—to examine intertwined categories and subjectivities. McRuer's work is useful as a starting point because he points out how disabled and queer people have

commonalities arising from comparable modes of oppression and how oftentimes one of the two subject positions informs the other. For instance, the disabled queer body suffers compounded oppressions and abjections. My work develops from McRuer's in that I discuss the connections between disabled and/or queer bodies; we differ in that I situate these connections by way of the feminist science studies and cultural studies scholarship on reproduction as I outlined above. With reproduction as the organizing framework for my work on disabled and/or queer bodies, I additionally suggest that these bodies can reproduce affective norms and/or generate hopeful empathy, depending on the context in which they appear.

Both disability studies and queer theory are interested in the norm and how the norm operates to include or exclude certain bodies. "To understand the disabled body," Lennard J. Davis argues, "one must return to the concept of the norm, the normal body" (9). Davis postulates that "the 'problem' is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way in which normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person" (9). Targeting the power relations involved in constructions of "normal" versus "abnormal," Davis emphasizes the fact that the disabled body only becomes problematic when compared to this fictional "normal" body. Similarly, the queer body becomes a "problem" when compared to the "normal" heterosexual one. Michael Warner's queer treatise, *The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* highlights the statistical hegemony of the norm where normal "came to mean right, proper, healthy" (57). Of course, queer bodies do not stereotypically fit into any of these

mainstream “normalized” categories.

Historically, it is also important to keep in mind that the norm—what is now otherwise understood as the *ideal* healthy, beautiful body—is a relatively recent construction. There is a difference between the norm and the ideal. The ideal, a prominent term in the seventeenth-century, was considered to be a “divine body...not attainable by a human” (Davis 10). It was only in mythology where “ideal human bodies [would] occur” (Davis 10). Thus, the ideal, in the seventeenth-century sense, was not the norm, but a kind of elevation; common everyday bodies and the ideal were two separate identities. However, through processes of modernization, industrialization, and legitimization, the idea of the average or the standard—a new way of saying the “ideal”—came into prominence, often through the employment of statistics. Davis notes the “rather amazing fact is that almost all the early statisticians had one thing in common: they were eugenicists” (6). Interestingly, though not surprisingly, “statistics is bound up with eugenics because the central insight of statistics is that the population can be normed” (Davis 6). Thus, thinking through who was considered part of the “normal” versus the “abnormal” populations was a part of the “larger intentions” (Davis 6) of statistics and their analyses. This acknowledgment of the modern ideal, the “norm,” takes precedence and interestingly the ideal body, over time, *becomes* the norm. The notion of the “average man” (Davis 11) takes hold through various processes that legitimize his being and his body. In this construction, the “abnormal” or disabled body

becomes the “abject” (Shildrick 55) that needs some kind of correction, destruction, resolution or cure.

Intriguingly, though, the human body must be “altered” and “denaturalized” (Shildrick 55) in order for it to become normalized. Davis notes that in the seventeenth-century, the inverse of the ideal was the grotesque. The grotesque signified “the people...common life” (Davis 10). Similar to Margrit Shildrick’s claim in *Embodying The Monster* that the human body is “always already unstable,” the grotesque operated under the assumption that “all bodies are in some sense disabled” (Shildrick 55; Davis 10). In fact, Shildrick argues, “it makes good sense to take the monstrous as the starting point rather than the end point of any enquiry into the lived body” (54-5). The human body, then, starts its journey into life as a monstrosity, and the body’s monstrosity must be contained if the “normal” body is to be achieved. Thus, the “implications of the hegemony of normalcy are profound and extend into the very heart of cultural production” (Davis 26). Even though it becomes evident that the normal body takes *work* and is always “fraught with anxieties” about its failure or eventual demise (Shildrick 55), it is still understood to be a prize. Disabled and/or queer bodies become the lens through which able and/or heterosexual bodies reject their own vulnerability, at the same time that able and/or heterosexual bodies need disabled and/or queer ones to maintain the illusion of perfect health. In this project I focus on the productive capacity of queerness to highlight the artificiality of “normal.”

Annemarie Jagose suggests that “Queer ... is an identity category that has

no interest in consolidating or even stabilizing itself” (“Queer Theory”). Just as sexuality is important for queer theory, so are “the intersections of sexuality, gender, and other identity categories that have long served as the basis for foreclosing, rather than pursuing, understanding of the lives of marginal persons” (Turner 34). The “queer” of queer theory works, conversely, to open up the field of identity and relationship politics. Sedgwick extends the multiple signification of queer in *Tendencies*, offering a definition of the term that aligns closely with the one I mobilize in this project. She argues that queer

can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically. (8)

While Sedgwick notes that queer certainly connotes “same-sex sexual object choice” (8), she argues that queer theory is simultaneously opening up in ways “that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all” (9). There are “*other* identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses” that can be included in the category of queer (9). She adds race, ethnicity, and postcoloniality as examples. Following McRuer, I would add disability here. Therefore, queer can signify sexuality, as well as having other, more expansive, resonances.

To clarify my terminology, then, I use the word “queer” in this thesis in at least two ways. I use the word queer in the sense of sexuality to categorize bodies that are homosexual, transgendered, or lesbian. Additionally, however, I am using queer in a broader political sense that Sedgwick gestures toward. In terms of identifying oneself as queer, Sedgwick notes that there are important senses in

which “queer” must act in the first-person (9). “Queer” signifies “more radically...on a person’s undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation” (9), which suggests agency when it comes to reproduction and relationships. Sara Ahmed’s formulation of queer phenomenology adds another complex dimension by moving away from queerness as identity towards perception, relationship, and movement. Ahmed suggests that there is an “orientation of sexual orientation” (“Orientations” 543) that needs to be explored when thinking about “how bodies take shape through tending toward objects that are reachable, which are available within the bodily horizon” (“Orientations” 543). Queer *becomes* queer because its objects of desire are not readily available as objects in the social field, or are turned away from when they are available. Heterosexuality, she insists, becomes the norm because it is what is offered around us as reachable and available. Most objects within our social lives are prescribed as heterosexual and so bodies “tend” (“Orientations” 553) towards these objects and experiences due to what is available in the sexual and social fields. A queer phenomenology is therefore a political move, offering objects in the social field that *are* queer. In Chapter Three, I connect queer repetitive bodily action with alternative mythologies in my exploration of “radical social transformation” (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 129) in visions of queer kinship. In this formulation, queer moves beyond *just* sexuality and into re-thinking norms of all kinds, including able-bodiedness.

Disabled and/or queer bodies can be connected, then, by remembering

McRuer's postulation that a post identity politics is one that "allows us to work together, one that acknowledges the complex and contradictory histories of our various movements" (202). Proceeding from McRuer's idea, I suggest that concurrently thinking about the concept of autonomy on the one hand, and interrelated or shared vulnerabilities on the other, reveals how "normal" and "abnormal" bodies are maintained *as such* through dominant discourses. In *The Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*, Lorraine Code defines autonomy as:

a contested ideal for late-twentieth-century feminists, many of whom claim that the Enlightenment ideal of "autonomous man" could only be realised by the affluent heterosexual men whose wives arranged the necessities of everyday life. (36)

Thus, "western child-raising practices nurture boys to become autonomous men, while they nurture in girls a caring connectedness" (Code 36). Code presupposes that autonomy "has evolved into an ideal of a radically self-contained, atomistic, unified self, maximally defended against connections that threaten self-sufficiency" (36). Consequently, a very gendered, heterosexist, and able-bodied version of autonomy is nurtured in childhood and continues to be enacted as a code of conduct in "normal" adult lives. At the same time, Code maintains, importantly, that "despite its self-centred connotations, autonomy still counts as an achievement that is as essential to the well-being of the marginalised as to the creation of a just society" (36). Accordingly, "women, blacks, refugees from totalitarianism, the poor, the disabled often rightly name autonomy as their overarching goal" (Code 36). Therefore, autonomy's legacy and history is conflicted because as much as its realization has historically been predicated on

the privileged (white, male, able-bodied) it is also desired by marginalised groups.

Code ends the description of autonomy by noting that:

Working within these tensions, feminists committed to autonomy's emancipatory promise attempt to erase its connections with excessively individualistic practices along with its ideals of a transparent and unified self ... They preserve the mutual concern and cooperation that are the overriding values for many women and other Others in articulating a *relational autonomy* that affirms the embodied and socially embedded nature of selves out of which responsibilities and commitments are enacted. (emphasis added, 36)

I quote Code at some length here because her simple but effective explication of autonomy highlights both the oppressive *and* emancipatory potentials in this discourse. Simultaneously, it suggests a kind of feminist re-writing of the original exclusive definition. Autonomy is now an acknowledgement of the “embodied and socially embedded nature of selves” (Code 36) within which human actors enable connections with one other—mutuality and relationality—rather than referring exclusively to individuality. In this way, then, a “relational autonomy” (Code 36) connects to McRuer's idea of a post identity politics where working together and working across Otherness is an aspiration. Furthermore, “relational autonomy” (Code 36) embraces vulnerability.

“Relational autonomy” (Code 36) can also be understood as working across kinds of interdependencies and vulnerabilities. In *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War*, as well as in the conversation she has with Sunaura Taylor in Astra Taylor's documentary film *Examined Life*, Judith Butler imagines the kind of world where interdependency and vulnerability become the preconditions for existing in the world together. All of the essays in *Precarious Life* discuss, in

some way, the contingency of life while noting our increasing interconnectedness in a globalized world. As Butler argues in the preface to the book, which was written in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, “One insight that injury affords is that there are others out there on whom my life depends, people I do not know and may never know. This fundamental dependency on anonymous others is not a condition I can will away” (xii). Here, it is clear that even though autonomy or independence may be *desirable*, its total realization is not actually realistic or plausible. She notes, of course, that “there are ways of distributing vulnerability, differential forms of allocation that make some populations more subject to arbitrary violence than others” (xii). Butler sees “a chance to start to imagine a world in which that violence might be minimized, in which an inevitable interdependency becomes acknowledged as the basis for global political community” gestating from the violences of 9/11, and the political openings those events allow (xii-xiii). While the scope of my project is not necessarily global, the suggestion that bodies could be autonomous/powerful *and* interdependent/vulnerable at the same time is an important prerogative for fantasizing about alternatives to bodily oppression.

Significantly, *Examined Life* enters the discussion of interdependency, recognition and shared needs via the specific identity locations of disability and queerness. In the film, Butler walks along the streets of San Francisco with artist and disability activist Sunaura Taylor. The conversation between Butler and Taylor ends *Examined Life* in an engaging fashion. They discuss the idea of

taking walks in general and Taylor notes that even though she is in a wheelchair she uses the language of taking a walk or a stroll in her everyday parlance. They also talk about gait and sexuality (how certain bodies are read as queer because of the way they move) and the idea of changing the question from: “What is a body?” to “what can the body do” (*Examined Life*)? Early in the conversation Taylor says that “help is something we all need and it is looked down upon and not really taken care of in the society. We all need help and we are all interdependent in all sorts of ways” (*Examined Life*). Butler’s response to Taylor is worth quoting at length:

What is at stake here is really re-thinking the human as a site of interdependency and I think when you walk into a coffee shop ... and you ask for some assistance with the coffee you are basically posing the question: Do we or do we not live in a world in which we assist each other? Do we or do we not help each other with basic needs? Are basic needs there to be decided on as a social issue and not just my personal individual issue and your personal individual issue. So there’s a challenge to individualism that happens at the moment in which you ask for some assistance with your coffee cup and hopefully people will take it up and say “yes; I too live in that world in which I understand that we need each other in order to address our basic needs.” I want to organize a social and political world on the basis of that recognition. (*Examined Life*)

It is the notion of interdependency—the fact that humans do need each other, and do need to *help* each other—that is crucial here. In a conversation that enacts the very interdependency they are talking about, Taylor and Butler recognize the fact that we are all in need of one another, whether disabled, queer, or otherwise.⁵

⁵ In the film Taylor suggests to Butler that they go into a clothing store so Taylor can get an article of clothing that would keep her warm. Butler agrees and once they are in the store Butler helps Taylor try on some clothes: she helps put the sleeves over Taylor’s arms and helps her negotiate with the cashier around

Even the so-called autonomous heterosexual male is a non-autonomous being after all (remember the fact that his wife is often assumed to be the one who arranges and supplements his everyday life). Remembering that our collective human survival depends on our acknowledgment of interdependency—in fact, our embracing of interdependency—is important. Equally important is the re-organization of the social body along the lines of this recognition of interdependency. Interestingly, a model of interdependency can be contrasted with models of utopia as perfection, which I expand upon below.

In this dissertation, I connect the ideas of interdependency and vulnerability that derive from Butler into a concept of a shared vulnerability for queer and/or disabled bodies, a relational location where a notion of interdependency complicates and in some ways supersedes the old definition of autonomy for collective human survival. Shared vulnerability is a vital way in which disabled and/or queer bodies can be theorized together, developing McRuer’s work. Thinking simultaneously through ideas of “work[ing] together” (McRuer 202), “relational autonomy” (Code 36), “interdependency” (*Examined Life*), and shared vulnerability allows for a discussion to flourish around vulnerable bodies and “the multiplicity of embodied difference” (Shildrick 3) in a way that refines conceptualizations of disability and queerness as fixed identity categories.

Donna Haraway’s work extends the possible modes and directions of “the

payment. The scene interestingly speaks to a kind of working together, relational autonomy, and interdependency in action.

multiplicity of embodied difference” (Shildrick 3) in ways that strongly inspire my project. Over the years, her focus on specific figures—the cyborg, the oncoMouse, the monster, and currently the companion species—grounds her analyses in distinct material realities, even as her analyses can sometimes be fantastical. I want to emphasize her focus on *making connections* in unlikely terrains, a trajectory that emerges in particularly interesting ways in her recent work *When Species Meet*. Here, Haraway’s proposes that the “principal Others to Man, including ... gods, machines, animals, monsters, creepy crawlies, women, servants, slaves, and non-citizens in general” (9-10) manifest in, and despite, modernity and reason. Additionally, she argues that “these “others” have a remarkable capacity to induce panic in the centers of power and self-certainty” (*When Species Meet* 10). Haraway hopes to find “alliances” and “queer kin group[s]” in far-fetched territory (*When Species Meet* 15). She warns, however, that unlikely encounters between groups have “no assured happy or unhappy ending, socially, ecologically, or scientifically. There is only the chance for getting on together with some grace” (*When Species Meet* 15). This “getting on together” (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 15) implies both coexistence and also a (queer) movement forward together, which is at the heart of my work of reading various reproductive strategies from the lens of disabled and/or queer subjectivities at the same time. Without focusing on disabled and/or queer subjects explicitly, Haraway makes room for both, in work that leans in the direction of *hopeful* connection, even when that connection seems difficult: “My

hope for companion species is that we might struggle with different demons from those produced by analogy and hierarchy linking all of fictional man's others" (*When Species Meet* 309). Like Allyson Mitchell's "familiar" that appear in the *Ladies Sasquatch* exhibit, which I will address in Chapter Three, Haraway's companion species form a kind of solidarity that takes into account, but does not particularize, or idealize, difference (see Appendices 1-7). For Haraway, accountability manifests with a simple touch (36).⁶

Efficiency, Time, Queer-Progress

Virginia Woolf's comment that "the law is on the side of the normal" (23) succinctly offers an entry point for this dissertation's questions in general and more specifically into the work I pursue in Chapter One. Included in a broad definition of "law" would be scientific advances in medical and reproductive technology that prioritize and legitimate able and straight bodies over disabled and/or queer ones. Disability studies, at least to some extent, seeks to counter "the notion of disability as intrinsically negative" (Kumari Campbell 223). On a larger socio-cultural scale, perceptions of disability as "personal medical tragedy" are rampant

⁶ Haraway argues: "My premise is that touch ramifies and shapes accountability. Accountability, caring for, being affected, and entering into responsibility are not ethical abstractions ... Touch does not make one small; it peppers its partners with attachment sites for world making. Touch, regard, looking back, becoming with—all these make us responsible in unpredictable ways for which worlds take shape ... Touch and regard have consequences" (*When Species Meet* 36). I follow up Haraway's claim in Chapter Two where I discuss Marlene and Charlene's fear of touching disabled Verna in the first instance, and their murderous touch as the story ends.

(Kumari Campbell 223). The negative associations that accompany disability are reinforced in medical and biomedical models of care,⁷ bolstered by a history of eugenic thinking and practice. Working within the law and also serving scientifically to legitimate it, “medicine has operated as the primary paradigm not only for the treatment of disabled bodies, but has also shaped the way decision makers, legislators, families and society in general *think* about and *sense* disability” (Kumari Campbell 221). It is imperative to remember that Western culture’s overarching structures—medicine, the law, the family—deem the disabled susceptible to correction where possible, management where not. Unconventional bodies are conceived to be less efficient than conventional ones. But the equation is not simply mathematical. If we stretch “efficiency” to mean, additionally, “productivity” (and the terms are often used synonymously), then it becomes obvious that ideology is at play. “Normal” bodies are not just those that work efficiently; they also work and live along heteronormative, patriarchal lines of reproduction (Edelman 2; Ahmed, “Orientations” 555). On the simplest level, this imperative is based on economics and productivity. Kumari Campbell goes so far as to argue, “even though medicine would deny it, medicine operates on a

⁷ While medicine is defined as “the science or practice of the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease” (“Medicine”), biomedicine is “the dominant organizing framework of modern medicine” (Kalitzkus and Twohig 1) and “is built on the foundational concept that disease is linked to some injury to the body, usually in the form of a pathological lesion” (Kalitzkus and Twohig 1). Biomedicine in the context of culture is interesting in that it, as Burri and Dumit argue: “reconfigure[s] the boundaries not only between nature and culture in the life sciences but also in society in general when reencoding the categories of health and illness, of normality and pathology” (1).

metaphysics of efficiency” (235) as a fundamental paradigm.

Following from this standard of able-bodied and heterosexual (re)productivity comes a focus on time and with that a focus on ideal time lines, trajectories, and future scenarios in the dominant societal discourse of living a “normal” life. Predominant conceptualizations of the future *reproduce* heterosexual and able-bodied outcomes. Like Sara Ahmed’s notion that we are “oriented” in certain ways and by certain “objects” (*Queer Phenomenology* 1), bodies are similarly authorized into the future by way of their allowability as bodies in the first place. The shared vulnerability and difference of disabled and/or queer bodies is crucial for understanding their denunciation in conventional life time lines. Lee Edelman, for example, argues that the reproduction of children is seen as acutely normal. What Edelman does not directly mention is that the children *must* be able-bodied as well as heterosexual. The “absolute privilege of heteronormativity” (Edelman 2) and by extension, heterosexual reproduction in our society is endemic.⁸ This heterosexual reproduction produces children, yes, but at the same time it results in a certain level of legitimacy and a legitimating time line for those children: heterosexual and able-bodied efficiency as the children grow. Pre-natal testing, then, or barring queer people from having children, to name just two biomedical or technological

⁸ Historically, patriarchal laws of descent allow legitimacy to carry forward through the inheritance of property as well as the inheritance of certain familial and cultural pedigrees. Disabled and/or queer reproductions disrupt this normalized reproductive routine and wrench the patriarchal reproductive time line.

approaches to controlling disabled and/or queer populations, seeks to erase disabled and/or queer children, and thereby erase their futures. Those who do not fit in to the ideal scenario—the disabled children, the queer ones—are not guided seamlessly into the same future as the privileged ones. While Bond Stockton’s suggestion that we need “to prick (deflate, or just delay) the vertical, forward-motion metaphor of growing up” (11) is important to consider for a political practice resistant to heteronormativity, it is also crucial to remember that the queer child, “who by reigning cultural definitions can’t ‘grow up’ grows to the side of cultural ideals” (Bond Stockton 13) is a child normatively viewed as “failed” (Snyder and Mitchell 186) and as not conducive to progress.⁹ Biomedical technologies specific to detecting perceived imperfections in fetuses and finding cures for already-existing disabilities, additionally, point toward a future where an ideology of progress and efficiency seeks to eclipse anyone who does not fit into an agenda of normative relations and systems. Contemporary culture’s focus on “family values” does much the same thing.¹⁰ As the texts I engage in this study

⁹ Snyder and Mitchell’s idea of disability as a kind of “failed humanity” stems from their work on feral children where they argue that the feral child offers a “combination of failed humanity and primitive hope” (186). A paradox, yes, they note that “historically disability has represented both an example of faulty human organisms and the promise of a body that might teach us something about “ourselves” (noting that “ourselves” does not include people with disabilities)” (186-7).

¹⁰A concept I develop in Chapter Three, “family values” is interesting to consider here because it elicits thinking about what constitutes a family and what constitutes value. In *Tendencies*, Sedgwick explicates a long list on what a “family” amounts to. Some include: a sexual dyad; an economic unit of earning and taxation; a mechanism to produce, care for, and acculturate children; a daily

are concerned to explore, however, birthing a child who is disabled or parenting a child who is queer need not become a failure of progress or efficiency, a blight on time or the future.¹¹

Historically, eugenics has fueled the destruction of disabled and/or queer bodies, in the names of progress and efficiency. Eugenic science took hold of American and European culture between the late eighteenth-century and the end of World War II. While eugenic science—“the science of racial purification and the elimination of human ‘defects’” (Snyder and Mitchell 100-1)—was more explicitly focused on race and disability, non-heterosexual people were also a part of those deemed “inferior in every aspect of their humanity” (Snyder and Mitchell 118). In fact, gay people were “sentenced by Nazi courts” and “sent to concentration camps after serving their regular prison sentences” (Niewyk and Nicosia 50). This noted, Snyder and Mitchell argue that “[w]hile fears of racial, sexual, and gendered ‘weakness’ served as the spokes of this [eugenic] belief system, disability, as a synonym for biological (or in-built) inferiority, functioned as the hub” that connected ideologies around “a ‘healthy’ body politic” (Snyder and Mitchell 101). With its focus on “health,” the science of eugenics attempted

routine (6). Values are the things that are held dear on personal and cultural levels. On cultural levels, the dominant values are usually those of the most privileged. Some include: heterosexuality; reproducing children in a heterosexual dyad; aligning your gender with your sex; working hard to make money; rugged individualism.

¹¹ We can also rethink our associations with time lines altogether. Are notions of efficiency and/or the future the most important criteria for a culture to strive for?

to “manage” disabled populations, those regarded as “‘defective’ humanity” (Snyder and Mitchell 102). It did this in a number of ways, including disallowing disabled people’s “participation in public institutions and privileges, such as marriage, reproduction, the labor market ...” (Snyder and Mitchell 113). Snyder and Mitchell argue that as eugenic philosophy became familiarized “attitudes towards disability grew increasingly less tolerant of human differences” (118), culminating in the Holocaust:

The destruction of disabled people resulted from the implementation of an oppressively narrow conception of human value based on aesthetic criteria ... such murderous campaigns were performed under the guises of “mercy” and economic utility. (Snyder and Mitchell 122)

The science of eugenics posited that the destruction of certain “others” was for the “health of the nation” (Ordover xvii) where “national character was biologized and quantified” (Ordover xvi). Further, ridding the populace of “defectives” attenuated “institutionalization as a burden upon the national economy” (Snyder and Mitchell 122). Clearly, the thinking and practice of eugenics focused on notions of efficiency and “progress” through the elimination of those considered unworthy. Such ideas still resonate today in the realm of the biopolitical.

While overt eugenic practices are now widely condemned, it is still plausible to suggest that prenatal testing practices (as I discussed at some length above regarding the amniocentesis video, and as I will discuss further in Chapter One) are part of the legacy of these procedures. Couched in medical rhetoric then as now, the termination of fetuses that *might* have a disability or *might* have a medical issue is a widespread practice. In *Defiant Birth: Women Who Resist*

Medical Eugenics, Melinda Tankard Reist describes “the ideology of quality control and the paradigm of perfection” that prevail in contemporary practices of giving birth (1). She further argues, “eugenically influenced medical advice appears to have become the norm” (3). Similar to Shildrick’s desire for “a multiplicity of embodied difference” (3), Tankard Reist states the important fact that “people who acquire disabilities in later life such as in adolescence and adulthood vastly outnumber those who develop a condition as children ... disability is part of the human condition” (7). Prenatal testing, as just one of eugenics’ successors, is a flawed tool that is dubiously legitimated through its associations with the idea of progress.

Progress is the overarching ideology of the “perfecting” or “improving” predisposition in medical and cultural milieus. The notion of progress is often tied to scientific or technological advances that are supposed to improve life for individual people and also for the “nation” (Snyder and Mitchell 109). Almond, Chodorow, and Pearce ask the searching question: “Are science and technology really ‘progressive’ and beneficial in their consequences? Have they led to the enhancement of welfare, greater happiness, and moral improvement” (1)? It is difficult to answer this question precisely because progress for one person or one group is not necessarily progress for another person or another group. Wright suggests, in the publication of his CBC Massey Lectures, *A Short History of Progress*:

despite certain events in the twentieth century, most people in the Western cultural tradition still believe in the Victorian idea of progress, a belief

succinctly defined by the historian Sidney Pollard in 1968 as “the assumption that a pattern of change exists in the history of mankind ... that it consists of irreversible changes in one direction only, and that this direction is improvement” (3).

Wright also notes: “In both its capitalist and communist versions, the great promise of modernity was progress without limit or end” (6). As Snyder and Mitchell argue, “Western notions of modernity are bound up in utopian fantasies predicated on social drives toward perfected homogenous communities” (111). Interestingly, the constellation of eugenics, progress, and utopia become interconnected as each informs the other. For the eugenicists, the elimination of “imperfections” constituted progress, steps on the road to a social utopia.¹²

¹² “Progress” is not always unequivocally conservative, either. We must remember that while first-wave feminists such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Nellie McClung were advocating for women’s rights, they were at the same time advocating for eugenic practices of sterilization for nonwhite and disabled groups. Asha Nadkarni argues that it is precisely Gilman’s racism that works alongside her feminist socialist utopia:

Gilman does away with the separation between the public and the private by locating the most important site of production within the female body. Because this reproductive economy is always under threat from pollution in the form of racial mixing, the national feminist subject must be protected from miscegenation through a eugenic mechanism. In developing her feminist theory through and around the idea of eugenic reproduction, Gilman creates a feminist politics that is always already embedded in discourses of race. (223)

Tommy Douglas, in the Canadian context, who completed “his Master’s degree in Sociology from McMaster University,” wrote a thesis that argued that “those deemed ‘subnormal’ because of low intelligence, moral laxity or venereal disease be sent to state farms or camps while those judged to be mentally defective or incurably diseased be sterilized” (“Tommy Douglas”). In his later political life, on the other hand, Douglas created Medicare, the precursor to Canada’s universal health care system.

What I go on to call queer-progress¹³ in Chapter One can be a constructive way to rethink traditional conceptualizations of progress that only move “in one direction” (Wright 3) as well as offer an alternative to the dominant narratives of time that privilege the heterosexual and able-bodied. Accordingly, I suggest that the timescale or temporality of disability and queerness can be conceptualized as queer-progress. Queer-progress connects queer reproductions, where queerness and disability are imagined as *desirable* scenarios, and proposes that this desirability re-evaluate how disability and queerness manifest in future times. Queer-progress encompasses a notion of backward/forward time. Backward/forward time holds the key to acknowledging the legacies of the past (such as the eugenic practices I have just outlined) and, at the same time, the mysteries and proliferations of the future. The consummate move forward, the move that privileges the “normal” human at all costs, that efficient, allowable body, forgets the backward: the gesture that looks at what has already happened and what is currently happening without the sole aim of perfecting the future. This turn backward examines the lingering material importance of the past while also looking forward, into the future. By examining the value of looking at *both* the backward *and* the forward and questioning the ideology of progress at any cost, as well as examining another dead-end direction, Edelman’s notion of embracing “no future” (13), my suggestion is that the backward/forward notion of queer-

¹³ I have hyphenated queer-progress to indicate that I am using the words together as a “term” deliberately complicating categories of being, feeling, and doing in this work.

progress can be a crucial timeframe for disabled and/or queer bodies and subjects.

Walter Benjamin's classic look at the "angel of history" (257), one of his most important and oft-referenced images, epitomizes the notion of looking backward and forward. In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin describes the concept and its origins,

A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past... The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (257)

The complicated position of the angel of history is apparent; he looks to the past and the wreckage there, trying to make sense of things; he is also caught up in the speed of the storm of progress, the pull of the future. The fact that the angel cannot close his wings suggests that his fluttering toward progress is inevitable and sweeps him forward. This said, the angel's desire to look back toward the past (and his action of looking back) suggests that even when the blaze toward the future and rational progress is fast and seemingly uncontrollable, the acknowledgment of history nonetheless needs to be prioritized: contextualizing the present and future can only happen with a consciousness of past events. Benjamin's metaphor is an essential reference point for disabled and/or queer backward/forward time because he equates progress with a violent storm, notes the difficulty in maintaining the backward/forward position, while also suggesting

that it is important to remember the casualties of that relentless forward movement, as we move ahead.

The importance of backwardness for a non-normative or queer history that is always already under the attack of forgetfulness or “cure” resounds in Heather Love’s work in queer theory. Love asks important questions about progress by critiquing what she calls queer theory’s “affirmative turn ... in order to dwell on the ‘dark side’ of modern queer representation” (4). She argues that even though progress for queers is necessary, forgetting queer history (and I would argue, any marginalized history) is important for what I call queer-progress. Following Love, and against Edelman, I suggest that queer-progress establishes a future time that is polymorphous and multiple, rather than a “no future” (Edelman 13) that only counters heteronormative reproductive futurism. This queer-progress embodies a future that understands queer and disabled time and the conception of *queering* and *disabling* time. Very similar to Jacques Derrida’s reading of Hamlet’s call: “the time is out of joint” and his articulation that out-of-joint time is “disarticulated, dislocated...beside itself, disadjusted” (Derrida 18), queer-progress provides an alternative to heteronormative and able-bodied progress and efficiency. Additionally, Judith Halberstam’s notion that queer “has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space” helps in rethinking conventional time lines (2). Queer time, “develop[s] ... in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction” (1). This kind of queer-progress that I envision in dialogue with Love and Halberstam reforms

ways of imagining past and future, as well as modifies understandings of efficiency in regards to time.

A polymorphous future, or queer-progress, then, interconnects disabled and/or queer bodies while at the same time imagining the kinds of futures that are allowable outside of heteronormativity, compulsory able-bodiedness, and their stereotypical reproductions. As I mentioned earlier, McRuer notes that both heterosexuality and able-bodiedness have become “compulsory” (2) and asserts that these systems are interrelated. To fail at fitting into the compulsory heterosexual and able-bodied system is to fail at “inhabit[ing] orderly, coherent...identities” (McRuer 5). A fundamental trajectory of queer-progress manifests when we begin to see “queerness and disability as desirable” (McRuer 5) rather than abhorrent or abnormal.

Let me suggest that the compulsory normalization described by McRuer can be connected to the drive to colonize and improve on nature. Ecological writer Wendell Berry argues that science (including the biomedical sciences) has an ever-present desire to tackle its version of the frontier, a mythology that has lasted for centuries but that, depending on the context, shifts and changes (“Faustian Economics” 38). Scientists, Berry argues, want to forge into uncharted territory—they are usually at the helm of any notion of medical progress¹⁴—and

¹⁴ Of course, scientists’ research agendas are shaped by the market economy as well as the privatization of universities where only “leading edge” research that “advances knowledge” secures funding. This in mind, it becomes more understandable as to why particular frontier-esque research projects are proposed and executed.

hence have been a part of the quest and desire for genetic “improvements” as well as genetically improved humans. Following Berry, I am suspicious of how the medical establishment, culture, family, and the law routinely look upon medical and biomedical advances with an undiscerning eye. Berry argues elsewhere that it is important to make “ourselves as answerable to the claims of eternity as to those of time” (*Life is A Miracle* 6), a claim that I think has as much to do with evolution as it does with Berry’s obvious Christian framework. This broad scope of time connects explicitly to a perspective of queer-progress: there are millennia behind us that must be factored into a future equation. Both of Berry’s perspectives are helpful in understanding the complexity of time.¹⁵ I supplement my readings of Berry with those of Donna Haraway. Haraway’s focus on making connections in unlikely terrains (*When Species Meet* 10), as discussed earlier in this Introduction, is one way in which I can imagine biomedical advances maintaining an ethical relationship to past legacies and knowledges while still embracing the possibilities of the technological future.

Competing Intimacies: Affects and Effects

The road to efficient progress does not, as we have seen above, include disabled and/or queer reproductions. That medicine, biomedicine, and science continue to pursue ways in which to eliminate “imperfections” at a biological

¹⁵ While I find Berry’s approach useful (and implement it in places in Chapter One) it is also exceedingly conservative in particular ways. He relies on tradition, nostalgia and religion in many places, and seems to be entirely *against* change.

level is only one part of the ideas that I pursue in this work. The body is always already “monstrous” (Shildrick 54) and there is no amount of pre-natal testing that can eliminate the “unpredictab[ility] and open-ended[ness]” (Grosz, *Time Travels* 49) of the lives of bodies. In addition to the fact that biologically diverse bodies continue to be seen as “subnormal” (Snyder and Mitchell 102) and inefficient, I suggest in Chapter Two that there is little room for unconventional “orientations” (Ahmed, “Orientations” 543) in the form of affect or attachment. “Child’s Play” and *The Giver* are examples of literary texts that demonstrate how intimacies are managed and even destroyed in the name of culturally reproducing able-bodied and heterosexual norms. In particular, intimacies with or between disabled and/or queer bodies do not comply with efficient notions of progress or heterosexual familial reproduction(s). When disabled and/or queer bodies are emerging—and both texts I study in Chapter Two are squarely set in the adolescent time period—the intimacies they produce or repel solidify what kinds of intimacies are allowable in the framework of the “normal.” Extending a eugenic narrative that centers on the biological, cultural norms are replicated through and by the normalization of particular affects and affective responses to disabled and/or queer bodies.

Responses—such as fear or disgust—continually reposition non-normative embodiments as defective or undesirable. It is a central claim of this thesis that negative affective responses to disabled and/or queer bodies both reinforce and are reinforced by “normal” able-bodied and heterosexual bodies. The effects of

negative affect toward disabled and/or queer bodies silence difference and curtail disabled and/or queer reproductions, sometimes through actual murder, as in the cases of both texts I study in Chapter Two. Repeatedly, neither disability nor queerness is understood as a desirable outcome in the mainstream imaginary. Mainstream culture, while slowly beginning to “accept” queer people due to what Lisa Duggan calls “the new homonormativity,” still largely regards queer youth as abhorrent (qtd. in Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* 19).¹⁶ Sedgwick reminds us that:

everyone who does gay and lesbian studies is haunted by the suicides of adolescents ... queer teenagers are two to three times likelier to attempt suicide, and to accomplish it, than others; that up to 30 percent of teen suicides are likely to be gay or lesbians; that a third of lesbian and gay teenagers say they have attempted suicide; that minority queer adolescents are at even more extreme risk. (1)

Suicide is a form of self-policing around unconventional intimacies. Additionally, the intimacies that disabled and/or queer bodies maintain are under threat of attack from institutions and individuals who operate in biopolitical service to

¹⁶ Homonormativity is “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them” (qtd. in Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* 19). Duggan’s argument proposes that queer people are only considered legitimate and worthy if they replicate the heteronormative family and cultivate “a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (qtd. in Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* 19). This version of queer life capitulates to, and even embraces, norms around family, private life, and consumer culture, instead of organizing against these embodiments and actions and/or living alternatively. In essence, homonormativity strips queerness of its “queer” constitution and, in my view, is seldom emblematic of queer-progress. While I agree with Duggan that homonormativity is thriving politically, I think it materializes mainly in affluent, high-density urban locations: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Toronto, etcetera. There are many queer youth living in rural, low-income, and small-town geographical spaces that suffer at the hands of homophobia.

norms, knowingly or not. Ways of extinguishing the “multiplicity of embodied difference” (Shildrick 3) is evident here on three levels—abortion, murder, and suicide—in large part due to reactions to “abnormal” or unconventional affect.

Disability theorist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson draws significant attention to affect when she says about the disabled body: “the exceptional body seems to compel explanation, inspire representation, and incite regulation” (*Freakery* 1). Garland-Thomson’s acknowledgment of the ways in which the “exceptional body” (1) can induce particular responses or reactions in individuals and the collective suggests quite clearly that when disabled and/or queer bodies exist “they disrupt the placid visual relation that we expect between foreground and background” (*Staring* 166). In other words, their lack of “normality” prompts reaction or discussion; they rarely remain unseen. Ato Quayson calls the compulsion to react to the “exceptional body” (Garland-Thomson, *Freakery* 1) “aesthetic nervousness” and explains how this process becomes entrenched affectively in social relationships around disability (Quayson 15-17). Aesthetic nervousness arises when able-bodied subjects realize—through the encounter with disability—that “every/body is subject to chance and contingent events” and that “this radical contingency features a primal scene of extreme anxiety whose roots lie in barely acknowledged vertiginous fears of loss of control over the body itself” (Quayson 17). As noted in Shildrick’s work, which I cited above, few bodies last in perpetual good health, and, as Quayson further suggests, being confronted by the disabled body reminds the able-bodied of their own

vulnerability. Importantly, Quayson argues that this recognition is “not solely a philosophical one ... but is also and perhaps primarily an emotional and affective one” (17). Affective responses such as “anxiety, dissonance, and disorder” (Quayson 17) are interesting because they situate reactions to disabled and/or queer bodies as regularly reproducing and perpetuating the solidification of norms. By extension, then, it is affect, at least in part, which works to maintain and reproduce corporeal normality again and again in the social sphere.¹⁷

Both texts I discuss in Chapter Two suggest that there is little to no room for queer feeling in “normal” frameworks, specifically for adolescents, whose volatility makes them susceptible to extra vigilant policing—including self-policing. For disabled and/or queer bodies the management of intimacy is particularly heightened during adolescence. In “Child’s Play” regulation occurs through biopolitical internalizations of “normal” and “abnormal,” whereas in *The Giver*, regulation is systematized through an autocratic rule system. Insofar as “intimacy ... poses a question of scale that links the instability of individual lives to the trajectories of the collective” (Berlant 283), it is revealing and important to examine how intimacies and affects create and reproduce material effects for bodies that do not align with the “norm.”

¹⁷ I am drawing a link between biological and constructivist notions of reproducing norms here by acknowledging that at the levels of both science and culture, norms are reproducing and reproducible. In response to disabled and/or queer bodies, it is often affect that regulates “normal” and “abnormal.” Of course, there are instances where “aesthetic nervousness” can generate something other than the norm. I consider these alternative scenarios in Chapter Three.

“Child’s Play” and *The Giver* are both stories that deal with time. “Child’s Play” describes a tragic past where unconventional “others” are repudiated—a condition that we have not necessarily moved beyond in the contemporary social sphere—while *The Giver*’s dystopic narrative ends on a note of equivocal hope for the future. Considering that I study a dystopic novel in this project, as well as employ queer utopic theorizations in Chapter Three, it is important that I address the dystopic and the utopic here at the outset as both conceptions become part of the overall tenor of this project. Utopias and dystopias often have some connection to affective freedom or affective regulation as part of the imaginary world’s atmosphere. *The Giver* is very much in alignment with the quintessential dystopia, Huxley’s *Brave New World*, where in both cases reproduction is managed and drugs are administered to quell any pain or boredom. Carter F. Hansen suggests that “Lowry’s world [in *The Giver*] is a Utopia gone wrong due to its extinction of aesthetics and personal choice” (45). As I noted earlier, eugenics and utopia have historically been part of the same composite of ideas that sought to eliminate “defectives” (Snyder and Mitchell 104) in the name of progress. It is often the case that utopic and dystopic literature replicates eugenic ideologies. Depending on the author’s political leanings, they may adhere to these ideologies (such as in Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*) or they may be trumpeting a warning call to their readers about them (such as in *The Giver*).

Ronald Wright wryly notes that “one of the dangers of writing a dystopian satire is how depressing it is when you get things right” (122). This said, Wright declares that the decisive feature in utopia or dystopia is “hope” (123). For it is hope in the case of either utopia or dystopia that can create positive change and/or facilitate destruction: “hope drives us to invent new fixes for old messes, which in turn create ever more dangerous messes” (Wright 123). Hope expedites stereotypical progress and instigates social utopias predicated on eliminating the “inherently deficient” (Snyder and Mitchell 106). The problem with utopia is that the concept is not entirely resolvable as either favourable or catastrophic. Just as the idea of utopia has been detrimental to disabled and/or queer populations, it has also been mobilized in the name of imagining worlds where disabled and/or queer people are respected, accepted, and are full members of society. José Esteban Muñoz’s recent work on queer utopia suggests that, “we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds” (1). While Muñoz acknowledges that a “fear of both hope and utopia, as affective structures and approaches to challenges within the social, has been prone to disappointment, making this critical approach difficult” (9), he also reminds his readers that “queerness is primarily about futurity and hope ... queerness is always on the horizon” (11). Thinking about queer utopia leads me into the last leading concern this thesis probes: the reproductive possibilities for disabled and/or queer communities even given the biological and cultural constraints I have just outlined.

Leaning Toward Community: Alternative Visions

One of the problems, of course, with thinking through the idea of utopia is the fact that it often delineates what the future world should look like. Queer critics who discuss utopia are quick to note that visions of future worlds cannot be determined in advance. While Muñoz is patently in favour of galvanizing utopia for queer community, other disability and queer critics that I engage in this thesis echo a queer utopic tendency even though they do not actually use the word utopia. Butler talks passionately about the “radical social transformation” (*Undoing Gender* 129) that is necessary “for a collective future” (*Undoing Gender* 226) even as she asserts that we cannot “know [the future’s] direction in advance, since the future, especially the future with and for others, requires a certain openness and unknowingness” (*Undoing Gender* 226). McRuer, similarly and in the context of connecting disabled and queer bodies, posits that being “critically queer” and “severely disabled” (28) would be locations to strive toward that could “call out the inadequacies of compulsory able-bodiedness” (31). This “critically queer, severely disabled” (28) classification is

about collectively transforming (in ways that cannot necessarily be predicated in advance)—about crippling—the substantive, material uses to which queer/disabled existence has been put by a system of compulsory able-bodiedness, about insisting that such a system is never as good as it gets, and about imagining bodies and desires otherwise. (McRuer 32)

There is the desire on the part of disability and queer theorists to consider and envision the possibilities of a future where disability and/or queerness do not

require biological cure or do not invoke disgust. It is a future “that is attentive to the past for the purposes of critiquing the present” (Muñoz 18); a future where we “welcome the disability to come ... that we will, collectively, somehow access other worlds and futures” (McRuer 207-8). A disabled and/or queer utopia would encourage a notion of queer-progress as well as underscore that such a utopia, while it could not be delineated in advance, might include, as Muñoz, Butler and McRuer suggest, disabled and/or queer “community” (Muñoz 10). I take up this prerogative in Chapter Three.

It should be clear by now that disabled and/or queer reproductions are not seen to be conducive to efficient progress *or* able-bodied and heteronormative affective ease. This said, “radical social transformation” (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 129) is always the hope for a politically motivated project. My dissertation’s last chapter offers texts that lean in the direction of transforming biological and constructivist limitations around reproduction, and suggests that disabled and/or queer reproductions are occurring, in some spheres, as an alternative to the able-bodied and heterosexual family. Queer critics, in particular, have focused on the ideas of queer community and queer kinship as ways in which to problematize able-bodied and heteronormative reproductive time lines and structures. Muñoz asserts that his book “is a polemic that argues against antirelationality by insisting on the essential need for an understanding of queerness as collectivity” (11). Muñoz uses the word “cohort” (18) to talk about queer community and connection and notes that “we can even venture to feel utopian in the here and

now” (17-18) when connected to a cohort. Queer-progress reemerges here by acknowledging the ways in which queer reproductions can occur and new versions of the family are possible.

In Chapter Three, I examine alternatives to the able-bodied and heterosexual family, alternatives to the woman in the amniocentesis video calling her husband with the “good news” of an able-bodied child on the way. My goal in the concluding chapter of the dissertation is to investigate creative manifestations of alternatives to the norms I have outlined as so detrimental to disabled and/or queer bodies through the first two chapters. The texts I study in Chapter Three—Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl* and Mitchell’s *Ladies Sasquatch*—provide representations of alternative models of living life and accepting “others.” They provide another story, and as Muñoz suggests, “other ways of being in the world” (1). Both texts, as well as the introductory example I analyze in Chapter Three, the case of the “pregnant man” Thomas Beatie, provoke ways in which to think about *queering* able-bodied and heteronormative reproductions. These texts differently configure time, family, and generations. They queer reproduction on the biological and the constructivist levels. To my eye, these texts offer hope in Muñoz’s sense of the word—as both a “critical affect and a methodology” (4).

While I will return to these ideas in full in Chapter Three, a few introductory words about queering reproduction and by extension queering kinship would be useful here. Biologically, it is important to note the biomedical queering of reproduction. Medical technologies facilitate tests that can determine

whether or not a child has a higher chance of being disabled; it also gives people who have difficulty biologically conceiving a child more options than they had previously, including artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization. The same technologies that determine what kind of lives are worth birthing can also aid queer and disabled people in bringing new life into the world. The same technologies that afford heterosexual couples options if infertile can be used by queer people as an option, too, to have children and reproduce, though the technologies do not always operate within the same privileged parameters as they do for those who are a part of a heteronormative family structure.

Using medical technology as an option for queer reproduction and for propagating the queer family is the project Laura Mamo takes up in her book *Queering Reproduction: Achieving Pregnancy in the Age of Technoscience*. Mamo analyzes the particular complexity of “queering reproduction” for lesbians in her book and argues that “reproduction without sex” (225) denaturalizes pregnancy and femininity so that what is considered natural and legitimate begins to shift, even if ever so slightly. Even though it is apparent that there are “normalization processes embedded within fertility and infertility medicine” (Mamo 227) the fact that disabled and/or queer bodies are making inroads into this charged domain (by a kind of queer-progress) suggests that a consideration of alternative kinship relations coming out of lesbian, gay, and transgendered reproductive configurations and affiliations is intensifying. In the constructivist reproductive vein Mamo asks: “What constitutes a family? What and who is a

mother, a father, a parent? In what ways are the boundaries between heterosexual parenthood and queer parenthood regulated” (246)? Mamo describes the notion of “queering kinship” for the lesbian family and says that “lesbian families created through alternative insemination are at once similar to those formed in heterosexual unions (as biogenetic connections), yet also in opposition to those biological relations” (94) while further noting that queer families operate within a “new kinship tie forged on the basis of choice and love” (94). Likewise, David Eng challenges the “feelings of kinship—the collective, communal, and consensual affiliations as well as the psychic, affective, and visceral bonds” (2) people form with one another in a variety of milieus and contexts. In fact, Eng cites Kath Weston’s definition of queer kinship as “families we choose” (Weston qtd. in Eng 3) as an important part of situating thinking about alternative families and communities. The element of choice in alternative familial compositions, in addition to a focus on the reorganization of affective bonds and their normative routes, is a fundamental feature of queering reproduction and its outcomes.

For some people, gay marriage might arise as the way in which kinship gets reconfigured away from heterosexuality, embodying a “new norm, a norm for the future” (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 109). But in a chapter entitled “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?” Butler calls for an entire re-working of the family/kinship system, because “extending” the “norm” of marriage to gay people also “foreclos[es] options” for others (*Undoing Gender* 109). Butler’s suggestion is that we must “rework and revise the social organization of friendship, sexual

contacts, and community to produce non-state-centered forms of support and alliance, because marriage, given its historical weight, becomes an ‘option’ only by extending itself as the norm” (*Undoing Gender* 109). I am in alignment with Butler in surmising that we must envision alternatives to the able-bodied and heterosexual marriage dynamic. Butler concludes that:

a more radical social transformation is precisely at stake when we refuse, for instance, to allow kinship to become reducible to “family,” or when we refuse to allow the field of sexuality to become gauged against the marriage form. (*Undoing Gender* 129-30)

Queering reproduction in biological and constructivist terms allows for a future that can be re-claimed from biomedical technologies that will re-inscribe the norm if mobilized in ways that only support compulsory able-bodiedness and heterosexuality. A queer utopic future is one that allows for an inclusive “critically queer, severely disabled” (McRuer 28) community that works to open up options for everyone regardless of where they fall on the spectrum of “the multiplicity of embodied difference” (Shildrick 3). *Salt Fish Girl* and *Ladies Sasquatch*, in different ways, convey alternative models of future communal relations, social transformation, and queer reproductions of biological and social bodies. Both texts are situated, at least in part, in future scenarios, and allow for queer ways of reacting and responding to the “other” as they offer non-proscriptive examples of imaginative models of community and kinship. These texts offer what I call a leaning into accepting and celebrating “multiplicity” (Shildrick 3) while also assisting in the move away from disgust towards

sympathy or empathy with the other, the (blocked) move I analyze in Chapter Two.

A Note

I want to highlight the role of ambivalence in this project. Many of the technologies of reproduction that I discuss, whether they are physical, social, or queer, can be viewed in “positive” or “negative” lights depending on several factors. For instance, I argue that one way in which to view pre-natal testing is as a technique of diminishing the numbers of disabled people in the world. At the same time, I am staunchly pro-choice, and respect the right of any woman’s choice when it comes to having or not having a baby. Another example of this ambivalence would see that a suggestion to re-write the scripts of social reproduction (heterosexuality or able-bodiedness) would look different to different people and depend on the context. Lastly, there is an ambivalence in my encouragement of McRuer’s “critically queer, severely disabled” (32) utopic vision. While I foster this notion in some places in this thesis, I acknowledge the anxiety many people, including the parents of disabled children, might feel about the call the celebrating and hoping for the birth of the “severely disabled” (McRuer 32). As became irrefutably clear during the Robert Latimer case, ethical quandaries arise when considering the suffering that can sometimes accompany

the severely disabled body.¹⁸ I suggest that these instances of ambivalence, when they arise, add to the project's overall tenor of candidly questioning norms and offering some analyses and connections around "abnormality" in the norm's wake.

¹⁸ Robert Latimer reached a level of notoriety after the October 1993 murder of his disabled daughter, Tracy, who had a severe form of cerebral palsy. Latimer was tried for first-degree murder in 1994 and was found guilty of second-degree murder (Selley). The verdict was appealed and Latimer was re-tried in 1997 (Selley). Latimer argued that he killed Tracy because he did not want her to continue to suffer. It has been documented that Tracy "could not swallow well and would so often vomit her parents kept a bucket nearby while feeding her. She had to be kept in diapers. She had five or six seizures—sometimes severe—a day. She could not control her limbs or sit up in a wheelchair" (Schneider). At the end of the second trial, the "judge hand[ed] down a precedent-setting sentence of one year in prison and one year's house arrest, on grounds that the statutory 10-year minimum would amount to cruel and unusual punishment" (Selley). Disability advocate Catherine Frazee argues "it is horrifying, the extent to which others consider our lives not worth living" (qtd. in "Support for Robert Latimer"). The Latimer trial is a consummate example of a case that is ethically distressing.

CHAPTER ONE

Forward and Backward: Physical Reproduction and Productive Monsters

[E]volution is a fundamentally open-ended system which pushes toward the future with no real direction, no promise of any particular result, no guarantee of progress or improvement, but with every indication of inherent proliferation and transformation. (Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels*, 26)

Mothers have forever transmitted, often unbeknownst to themselves, a kind of future. (Nicole Brossard, *Yesterday at the Hotel Claredon* 191)

“In many parts of the world, especially the wealthier parts,” argues Carolyn Burdett, “advances in biotechnology are transforming the processes of human reproduction” (7). Some medical and technological procedures—“prenatal testing and screening procedures, genetic counselling, birth control, and in vitro fertilization” (Burdett 7)—have become common and even routine. More intricate reproductive technologies are in process or seem imminent.¹ In this chapter, I argue that such advances in medical and reproductive technologies function, in part, to repetitively entrench “normal” physical bodies in the culture. Sustained striving for the “normal” body remains a large part of Western culture, so much so that I surmise here, alongside other critics, that “eugenic thinking never really went away” (Burdett 8). The acknowledgement that disability is “a personal medical tragedy” (Kumari-Campbell 223) is extremely pervasive in

¹ Burnett notes the following biotechnologies, some currently occurring, DNA profiling and databanks, egg donations, frozen egg cells, sperm banks, extra-uterine experimentation, preimplantation genetic diagnosis, gene-modification, genetic therapeutics, stem-cell research, organ-breeding, the ability to harvest large numbers of embryos, germ-line engineering, reproductives, “designer babies,” human cloning. (7)

reproductive medical care. “Normal” physical bodies are the goal and the achievement; at first, this “normality” is cultivated in terms of trying, through selective abortion, to eliminate the “risk” of disability. Later in life, corporeal “normality” is pursued alongside “normal” sexual orientation.² In this chapter I take up Michael Bérubé’s *Life As We Know It: A Father, A Family, and an Exceptional Child* and Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible*. In these texts, I examine how “unconventional” bodies—disabled and/or queer bodies—are judged as less efficient than able-bodied and heterosexual ones by a medical model that reproduces “normality” through its practice. I further suggest that this “inefficient” designation ultimately connects to futurity as contemporary eugenic practices aim to suppress or eradicate disabled and/or queer bodies that are considered slow or less ideally (re)productive. By extension, able-bodied and heterosexual reproductions are focused on futures that neither acknowledge their

² Increasingly we are seeing the medicalization of queerness via biological research that seeks to undercover a genetic predisposition for queerness. Undoubtedly political, these kinds of studies look for a biological “origin” story for queerness. For some in the media this comes down to the question: “Is homosexuality, or is it not, a choice?” (Brookey 31). Some gay rights groups see the genetic argument as helpful in that, politically, an argument could be made that queer people “should not suffer discrimination because of their sexuality” (Brookey 31). Much of the time, though, the biological argument works through the undercurrent of “male homosexuality as pathology” (Brookey 33). The biological argument is quite worrisome when examined from the starting point of queerness as pathology. As I have established with disability, when “perfectibility” and biology enter the framework together, “cure” or “elimination” are often the desired results. Similar to the contemporary eugenic model of disability, then, finding “normal” and “abnormal” sexualities within the genes becomes another scientific location where “choice” could lead to the termination of queer bodies or non-normative bodies.

eugenic predecessors nor make the times to come hospitable to disabled and/or queer bodies. Lastly, I suggest that a notion of queer-progress could allow for alternative possibilities and desires to emerge where physical reproduction is concerned.³

Before I commence my textual analysis of *Life As We Know It* and *The Poisonwood Bible*, I want to take a step back and develop in more detail the process by which reproductive norms become entrenched in the physical reproduction process. It is important to consider here that having children is understood, in a heteronormative culture, as essential for life and for progress. To this end, Edelman suggests that “the pervasive invocation of the Child [is] the emblem of futurity’s unquestioned value” (3-4). Thus, “the future” and “the Child” become enmeshed in this cultural configuration. Edelman draws a connection between the reproduction of children (both physically and culturally) and the reproduction of a conservative future. There is an undercurrent and a social anxiety in North American culture about the necessity of children to continue the legacy of heteronormative reproductivity (Edelman 17), on the one hand, and the notion of the heterosexual and able-bodied family, on the other. Childlessness is rarely seen to be a viable option, unless, of course, you are disabled and/or queer, in which cases having children is considered an affront to family values.

The heteronormative and able-bodied family asserts its plausibility and

³ I have discussed some of the hypotheses I pursue in this chapter in my Introduction. See p. 26-38, “Efficiency, Time, Queer-Progress.”

reproduces itself even when the surrounding circumstances are less than ideal. To this end, Heather Latimer's case studies of *Juno* and *Knocked Up* are interesting because in *Juno* abortion is declined in favour of a teen giving her baby up for adoption and in *Knocked Up* abortion is renounced and a one night stand leads to romantic love and familial ties (211). Another popular film that Latimer does not discuss but that maintains a similar message about the importance of reproducing children is *The Back-Up Plan* where a thirty-something single woman decides to be artificially inseminated because she wants to have children. Of course, she meets the "man of her dreams on the very same day" ("The Back-Up Plan"). She then has to negotiate pregnancy and love when the two do not happen in the "proper" sequence, "the traditional courtship, love, marriage, parenthood sequence of events has really been turned on its head" ("The Back Up Plan"). The fact that the Hamilton Public Library had, on the date I attempted to request it, 617 holds for *The Back-Up Plan* says something quite telling about the popularity of such material. In all three films, as long as the heteronormative and able-bodied dynamic has a *chance* to succeed it is cultivated. It is because of this chance that Latimer suggests that abortion "is either sidestepped or easily dismissed as an option" (211) in the films and that the "romantic love" scenario wins each time. Importantly, "the films actually suggest something ironically similar: give me children, so I may flourish" (217). What these films advocate is that physical reproduction—when it *can* fit into the heterosexual and able-bodied frame—is desirable and can lead to "compassion, maturity, and romantic love"

(217). For able-bodied and heterosexual adults, having children equals progress, while choosing to remain childless is a kind of degeneration. My work in this chapter enters the nexus of reproductive debates at the level of the physical and the biological by considering what happens when the opposite of the above scenarios presents itself. How do disabled and/or queer bodies agitate the heterosexual and able-bodied life and familial time line? How can thinking through an alternative narrative of time and efficiency, exemplified by the queer-progress I talked about in the Introduction, amplify future possibilities for disabled and/or queer bodies?

One way of imagining the “multiplicity of embodied difference” (Shildrick 3) other than as “failed” and not conducive to progress is through Elizabeth Grosz’s lens of “productive monstrosity,” characterized by the “the deformation and transformation of prevailing models and norms” (*Time Travels* 30). For Grosz, productive monstrosity “is precisely what generates change,” positioning the unpredictable evolutionary process as intrinsic to the “diversification” of life, an understanding that I see as necessary for reassessing the value of disabled and/or queer bodies (30). Grosz notes that bodies move in time and space in insecure ways (29-30). In fact, she says that, “evolution represents a force of spatial and temporal dispersion, rather than linear or progressive development” (30). Strikingly similar to the notion of backward/forward time that I develop in this chapter, Grosz’s conceptualization of

evolution sees past and future as intermingled, a designation that is essential to understanding physical reproduction and embodiment's mystery:

Beings are impelled forward to a future that is unknowable, and relatively uncontained by the past: they are directed into a future for which they cannot prepare and where their bodies and capacities will be open to recontextualization and reevaluation. It is only retrospection that can determine what direction the paths of development, of evolution or transformation, have taken and it is only an indefinitely deferred future that can indicate whether the past or the present provides a negative or positive legacy for those that come. (29-30)

However a body presents itself in a pre-natal test, for instance, or within an already existing disability, cannot be the sum of its future incarnations. Disabled and/or queer bodies are not fixed in time, as such, by their embodiments; rather they can facilitate a thoroughly innovative approach in which to view “abnormal” and/or unconventional bodies, to understand the past and/or the future.

Reproductive technologies, for all of their successes (for instance, in vitro fertilization, queer possibilities for reproduction⁴) raise the question: when we intervene in human reproduction, how much are we modifying the evolutionary “nature” of nature's own process?⁵

⁴ See Chapter Three.

⁵ Given the feminist critical theory framework of her argument, Grosz posits a counter-intuitive relationship between nature and culture. Challenging the prevailing view that associates nature with essentialism, Grosz's conceptualization of nature says that it is actually *culture* that “narrows down and simplifies” nature (*Time Travels* 52). She asks a searching question that could significantly disrupt the field of cultural studies: “What would ... cultural studies look like if nature was regarded as framework and provocation of culture rather than its retardation” (*Time Travels* 52)?

Grosz's description of the "productive monster" is crucial for both of the texts I assess here: for Bérubé's in thinking about the value of disabled bodies and for Kingsolver's in that the character Adah depicts disability as a kind of illuminative gift. Both the Bérubé memoir and the Kingsolver novel uncover deeply fixed assumptions of heterosexual and able-bodied efficiency that seek to circumvent bodies that are imagined as slow, less ideally (re)productive, or otherwise deficient.

"Normal" And "Abnormal" Bodies: Bérubé's *Life As We Know It*

Michael Bérubé's memoir of his Down syndrome son, Jamie, begins with Bérubé recounting his son's love of lists: "food, colors, animals, numbers, letters, states, classmates, parts of the body ..." (ix). Bérubé deploys Jamie's love of lists during difficult travel in order to have things run more smoothly while the two are in airports and on trains. This is one of Bérubé's tactics for living with his three-year-old child with Down syndrome, a child different from the able-bodied children imagined and delivered in the films I mentioned earlier in this chapter. Jamie is not the child that emerges into the stereotypical family scene so that people "can flourish" (Latimer 217). Jamie, rather, "has no idea what a busy intersection he's landed in: statutes, allocations, genetics, reproduction, representation—all meeting at the crossroads of individual idiosyncrasy" (xix). Bérubé writes about Jamie and his family's life, in part, I think, to rectify what has been called "the personal tragedy of giving birth to a child with a disability"

(Place), the pervasive negative narrative of disability I have been establishing in this thesis.⁶

Bérubé's account of Jamie tackles questions around pre-natal testing in depth. Since pre-natal testing has become more and more customary and available, children born with what is considered a "preventable" genetic difference have become increasingly seen as the individual responsibility of parents:

It is not surprising that the mother of a child with Down syndrome is likely to be seen as having brought the suffering on herself—of having had choices—tests such as amniocentesis and CVS—but of having failed to take control, failed to prevent the suffering of her child. (Place)

The medical pressure placed on a woman to undergo pre-natal testing in the first place and to "terminate immediately" (Place) if the results indicate a high probability of Down syndrome is intense. Fiona Place writes specifically about the experience of being the mother of a child with Down syndrome and argues that her experience is "different to those experienced by mothers who give birth to children with other disabilities. ... The mother who has a child with autism or cerebral palsy is usually viewed as a victim—as having had no choice." Bérubé's account as a father echoes some of Place's concerns. Bérubé's wife, Janet, did

⁶ Canadian journalist Ian Brown wrote about his son Walker Henry Schneller Brown in his 2009 Charles Taylor Prize winning book *The Boy In The Moon: A Father's Search For His Disabled Son*. Brown's book was published after I had completed most of the research for my study so I was unable to discuss the text in a direct way. *The Boy In The Moon* shares *Life As We Know It's* searching tone, even though Brown's son's disability is an "impossibly rare genetic mutation, cardiofaciocutaneous syndrome, a technical name for a mash of symptoms" (1). Brown asks many of the same questions about pre-natal testing, congenital disability, and parenting a disabled child as does Bérubé.

not choose to have amniocentesis, and he says that “this constituted a ‘passive’ decision to carry the pregnancy to term if the child did in fact have something like Down syndrome” (46). Bérubé suggests: “health care professionals [should not] have any business strongly advising patients to take either course [termination or not], except when the mother’s life is at risk” (80). The detection of fetal “abnormalities,” Bérubé argues, might yet become “more coercive than descriptive” (70) for expectant families.⁷ *Life As We Know It* is a treatise that expands on Place’s comment that she had to deal with the fact of Down syndrome individually; due to the fact that the predictive technology exists: “it was my choice to have [the child] and therefore my fault, my problem” (Place).⁸ This

⁷ Consider the amniocentesis video I described in the Introduction. The video shows the pre-natal testing process as couched in the rhetoric of choice, the trajectory of the video, in which a negative (i.e. “normal”) amniocentesis result signals the “okay” for proceeding with pregnancy, has two implications: first that, *pace* Bérubé, amniocentesis can convey some certainty about the outcome of the pregnancy and second that, an “abnormal” amniocentesis would/should trigger the opposite choice: termination of the pregnancy.

⁸ Bérubé’s memoir, similar to Brown’s memoir and Place’s first person article, are all written from the perspective of the *parent* of a disabled child. For me, these stories say something more about a parent’s experience of making decisions around and caring for a disabled child than they do about the child’s actual corporeal experience. Fudge Schormans asks her readers to remember the question, “Whose auto/biography is it” (124)? She also suggests that accounts of disabled bodies that are “written almost exclusively from the perspective of the non-dis/Abled ‘expert’” need to be questioned for legitimacy and power dynamics (116). Tellingly, Fudge Schormans argues “speaking persons labeled intellectually dis/Abled ... ha[ve] their own understanding that frequently diverges from that of their families and/or the professionals involved with them” (114). Memoirs by parents of disabled children, in some ways, use those children as “objects of knowledge” (Fudge Schormans 109). Bérubé acknowledges “representation matters” (255) at the same time that he wants to be an advocate for his son. Bérubé expresses the hope that “Jamie will someday be his own

reproductive ideology is particularly interesting when we consider “norms.” Embedded negative assumptions in the medical system about disabled and/or queer bodies, especially the disabled child that *could have been* prevented, do nothing to question “the disability as suffering paradigm” or the “prenatal tests are routine and essential paradigm” (Place). Medical science, as is demonstrated historically, has continually installed the “normal” and the “abnormal” body in Western culture.

I have established that able-bodied and heterosexual reproductions are ultimately desired in Western society. If a pregnancy and subsequent birth can instigate familial strength and love, as suggested in *Juno*, *Knocked Up*, and *The Back-Up Plan*, on the one hand, or shame and suffering, on the other, it becomes clear that the fact of pregnancy itself is an ambivalent jumping-off point or defining factor for analysis. The body-in-question—whether it ends up being “monstrous” or “normal”—is a location of unease (Shildrick 55).⁹ Able-bodied and heterosexual physical norms are lodged in our culture as prevalent ideals, and, in all likelihood, a “normal” child becomes more important for affirming family

advocate, his own author, his own best representative” (264). I read Bérubé’s story as that of a parent, not of a disabled person.

⁹ The complexity of emotion surrounding pre-natal testing is pronounced when scrutinizing heated debates around whether or not pregnant women should test for Down syndrome and other “genetic disorders.” A *Globe and Mail* opinion piece, “A Difficult Choice and the Follow-Through,” tracks one 40-year-old woman’s choice to terminate her pregnancy when prenatal testing shows that the baby she is carrying has an extra chromosome (Smyth A16). The article touches on the emotional complexity involved in pre-natal testing, abortion politics, and the futures for children with disabilities.

and heterosexual love. In the Introduction, I noted that disabled and/or queer reproduction destabilizes the “normal” progressive time-frame. Here, I mean to say that this “[time]-frame” (Butler, *Frames of War* 1) becomes *noticeable* when disabled and/or queer bodies enter that frame. By extension, the “[time]-frame” (Butler, *Frames of War* 1) troubles disabled and/or queer bodies because these “unconventional” bodies call into question the dominance of the heteronormative and able-bodied position as ideal. If Shildrick’s notion that bodies “are always already unstable” (55) is true (and I agree with her that it is) then the normal/abnormal binary can be exposed as a definitive regulatory tool. *Life As We Know It* questions the legitimacy of the “normal” body through an exposition of Jamie.

What is “normal,” though, does partially shape material reality for disabled and/or queer bodies. Shildrick notes that the “always already unstable corpus” undergoes a process of “managing—often clinically—what is inherently unruly. It is a practice of normalisation, albeit one fraught with anxieties” (55). Children are conceptualized as people-in-progress—blank slates upon which cultural norms can be written. Neil Postman, for example, interprets John Locke’s suggestion that, at birth, a child’s mind is a blank slate, a *tabula rasa*. A child, then, moves from being understood as an “unformed” subject to a being who enters into subjectivity and civilized adulthood through “literacy, education, reason, self-control, and shame” (Postman 59). Children must be able-bodied and heterosexual, taking the appropriate steps on the road to a legitimately productive

adulthood. This very linear process creates uniformity among *acceptable* childhood experiences and marks a traditional movement from childhood to adulthood. This conceptualization of childhood, in practice, typically excludes many children from its fold: disabled, poor, non-white, queer, and non-male children, for example, the stereotypically “abnormal” groups.¹⁰ Claudia Castañeda argues that in the conceptualization of the child as tomorrow’s citizen lies the assumption that the child is “a potentiality rather than an actuality, a becoming rather than a being: an entity in the making” (1). Part of the reason, then, that Bérubé’s son Jamie, and other Down syndrome children, are not considered “normal” is that they are seen as unable to live up to able-bodied and heterosexual “norms” of reproduction, productivity and efficiency. Bond Stockton argues that, “‘growing up’ may be a short-sighted, limited rendering of human growth, one that oddly would imply an end to growth when full stature (or reproduction) is achieved” (11). It is largely assumed that Jamie cannot be sexual and reproduce the “normal” family in the same way that an able-bodied person can.¹¹

Women, both historically and contemporarily, have been given the task of bearing “normal” children. Silvia Federici focuses on women’s reproductive

¹⁰ The effects that this set of exclusions has on the affected groups is not commensurate.

¹¹ Men with Down syndrome cannot usually father children, and women with Down syndrome “demonstrate significantly lower rates of conception relative to unaffected individuals” (“Down syndrome”). Even if a child is conceived and brought to term, the “normal” family idea is still shattered (remember the example of Wong-Ward from the Introduction).

history and articulates a feminist analysis of Marx's primitive accumulation (8). In the seventeenth century, married women *had* to reproduce in order to create workers, "picturing [the offspring] as just raw materials, workers and breeders for the state" (88). Birth control was penalized, as was non-reproductive sex (88). Severe penalties were imposed on women who used "contraception, abortion, and infanticide" as ways in which to abstain from having children (88). Pregnancies had to be "register[ed]," and women were routinely killed on the charge of infanticide (88). Rather than being a private and woman-centered affair, as child-bearing had been in the Middle Ages, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries "wombs became public territory, controlled by men and the state" (89). Federici notes that state control did not end in the eighteenth century. Even today, she says, "the state has spared no efforts in its attempts to wrench from women's hands the control over reproduction, and to determine which children should be born, where, when, or in what numbers" (91).

Today, pre-natal testing can be read as a monitoring and enabling device, helping to decide upon the kinds of children that are born—healthy, and thus still useful children, of course—as much as it can be read as giving women a choice regarding whether or not to follow through with a pregnancy. In *Exploding the Gene Myth*, Ruth Hubbard notes the difference "between a woman having an abortion because she does not want a child and having an abortion because she does not want *this one*" (emphasis added, 30). To some extent, the question needs to be asked: Do women not want *this one* due to certain cultural

constructions of worthiness—remember the deep shame that Place describes about bringing a Down syndrome child to term—and/or due to medical prognoses regarding the baby’s ultimate health? In both cases, women’s bodies are used as vehicles for a particular kind of desirable future, or forward movement of progress. Whether that future is a multitude of workers, or a multitude of healthy bodies reproducing an ideal, a biopolitical dynamic is unmistakable.

Value and Efficiency: Who Decides?

The central question of *Life As We Know It* is clearly echoed in Di Brandt’s *So this is the world & here I am in it*: “Should genetically “defective” fetuses be aborted” (160)? Ruth Hubbard quoting Hannah Arendt echoes this same question: “Who has the ‘right to determine who should and should not inhabit the world’” (*Exploding the Gene Myth* 195)? The questions Brandt and Hubbard raise are the kinds of questions that Bérubé asks when he imagines what would have happened if he and his partner had gone ahead and had the amniocentesis procedure:

Who has a right to know about possible fetal abnormalities, and what should be done (and by whom) when abnormalities are detected? What about “quality of life” for the parents and the child? ... Should some forms of prenatal testing be mandatory—or prohibited? (47)

“Normal” and “abnormal” are deconstructed throughout the memoir and *Life As We Know It* is full of searching questions that problematize disabled bodies representations as “abnormal,” when the designation of “abnormal” could mean, as expressed in the memoir’s subtitle, exceptionality. For Bérubé, “if we’re

talking about human behavior, achievement, and value, then “normal” is a category constructed only by humans” (208). Broadly, humans agree upon particular designations that fit within the realm of “normal” and “the normal body is materialized through a set of reiterative practices that speak to the instability of the singular standard” (Shildrick 55). There is no “one” quality that constitutes “normal,” these designations are, as Shildrick states, unstable.

Further expounding on the arbitrary and subjective designation of what is considered “normal” and what is not, Bérubé admits that, “within the ‘norm’ there can be all kinds of variety, which is why ‘regular’ classrooms normally contain such a smorgasbord of abilities, proclivities, and learning styles” (208). This ultimate variation in bodies creates hierarchies among people—who is considered productive and advantageous to the whole and who is deemed ineffective or weak. Bérubé’s memoir underscores a conundrum in thinking about disabled bodies: “the construction of the non-normal becomes ... the philosophical precondition for the predication of the “normal” ... *we* secure our normality by institutionally constructing *their* deviance from the norm” (209). The “us” versus “them” distinction is just as pronounced in today’s Western society, through prenatal testing and genetic manipulation, as it was during older eugenic practices. The difference is that the “‘new eugenics’ is characterized above all by individualism and consumer choice” (Burdett 8) rather than state sanctioned control.¹²

¹² As I have already discussed, there is yet an element of state sanctioned control in the contemporary eugenic process, but it relies on those internalized feelings of shame and disgust to operate. A doctor cannot force parents to

Bérubé questions pre-natal testing, noting the way in which pre-natal testing, including amniocentesis, concretizes our notions of “normal” and “abnormal.” He asks himself and his reader: “What if we’d been told, upon receiving results of amniocentesis, that our baby would never be able to live a “normal” life” (46-7)? The assumptions of “abnormality” that are embedded in the category of disability, which occur through the *accepted* representation of the disabled person as “abnormal,” are highlighted through the efficiency model in biomedical practice, as well as through the scientific and technological authority of medicine. The social model of disability reframes the problem to focus on the (in)actions of society towards people who have some form of impairment: thus any ensuing problem lies with the society, not the individual” (Armer 92). On the other hand, Armer notes, “the view implicit in eugenic thinking, that individuals are themselves ‘the problem,’ is diametrically opposed to this social model construction” (92). While Bérubé does not directly reference the social construction model, he does argue that the danger of widespread pre-natal testing to eliminate the possibility of disability creates the “danger” of a society that leans toward “eugenics” and the elimination of those people who are considered “unproductive” (52-3).

The distinction between “productive” and “unproductive” citizens relies on economic models of efficiency and inefficiency, most notoriously mobilized in Nazi Germany where “the fundamental argument for forcible euthanasia was

terminate a wanted pregnancy due to predicted disability, but recklessness gets attributed to parents who choose to proceed (see my discussion of Place, above).

economic: Euthanasia was justified as a kind of ‘preemptive triage’ to free up beds” (Proctor 39). People who were considered “subnormal” (Snyder and Mitchell 102) were disposable. The legacy of this euthanatizing protocol continues to exist today in prenatal testing models that position the disabled as unworthy of life. Linguistically, the prevalence of words such as “slow,” “retarded,” “developmentally delayed,” “challenged,” or “backward” in reference to disabled bodies, position disability as inefficient or unproductive, while at the same time emphasizing normative development as progressive or quick.¹³ As we saw in Place’s account of her experience of mothering a child with Down syndrome, a level of shame and/or guilt is attached to the decision to see a fetus to term. Desirable reproductions are fostered in the ability/disability hierarchy, and value and efficiency play substantive roles in deciding what is desirable. Bérubé calls for us to sidestep efficiency and speed, in favour of fostering what I am calling “queer”-progress (52-3).

While Bérubé does not use the terminology of the productive monster, I suggest that Grosz’s notion of the teratological variation could be useful for viewing the “vulnerable” or “abnormal” body anew. In fact, Bérubé suggests something along the same lines when he discusses a theory as to why “older

¹³ There is a difference between physical and intellectual “slowness” here where physical slowness relates to the actual corporeality of the body and its movements, and, intellectual slowness relates to the perceived ability to comprehend and express ideas in a “normative” speedy and linear fashion. Practices of discrimination against disabled bodies are nuanced in relation to the two categories where intellectual slowness is seen to be “worse” than physical slowness. A detailed treatment of these differences is beyond the scope of this thesis.

women are more likely to have children with Down's" (22). Bérubé notes that one of the hypothesized reasons for this greater probability is the "with age comes wisdom theory," the notion that suggests that "what happens as women get older isn't that their chromosomes get stickier but that their uteruses get more tolerant of fetal abnormality. The body starts taking a more liberal attitude towards difference, perhaps" (22). To my ear, this theory connotes a positive perspective on what Bérubé suggests is the "tolerance towards difference" hypothesis. As Grosz argues, "'monstrosities' ... may be regularly produced, but only those that remain viable and reproductively successful, and only those that attain some evolutionary advantage, either directly or indirectly, help induce [sustainable variation]" (20). Geneticists cannot know which bodies make a "positive contribution to society" (Armer 93).

Further, the "costs" to society are just as ambiguous: Why does paying for disabled bodies' care mean a "financial drain on society" (Armer 89)? Power dynamics are at play here and "norms" dictate the physical and economic sustainability of disabled and/or queer bodies. Bérubé suggests that, "'Value' may be something that can only be determined socially, by collective and chaotic human deliberation; but individual humans like James are compelling us daily to determine what kind of 'individuality' we will value, on what terms, and why" (xix). The key question seems to be: What kinds of individuals does our society value? And further: How are "obligations to others" conceptualized and how do we "imagine" these obligations occurring (xix)? Bérubé's suggestion

that obligations are important echoes Butler's claim that shared vulnerability can be a new way for bodies to interact with one another. Bérubé argues that "the creation of a society that combines eugenics with enforced fiscal austerity" is a circumstance that Western culture needs to be concerned with (52). How can disabled and/or queer children or adults thrive in a rigid system where heteronormative (re)production and able-bodied efficiency are "valued" and where disability and/or queerness is a failure? Bérubé's memoir opens up several questions that do not have easy answers but one thing is clear: "the question of the value of life is far too important to leave to geneticists" (British Council of Disabled People qtd. in Armer 93). Why is biomedical science focused on perfect bodies who can live in a perfect future, and how can we re-think this obsession?

Inevitably, when disabled bodies (and especially the potentially disabled bodies that pre-natal testing seeks out) are discussed the question turns to the future. Will these bodies "thrive" as they grow? What are the social costs? Will disabled bodies be able to make a "positive contribution to society" (Armer 93)? These kinds of foci, on future corporeal development and the effects on society, are intrinsically tied to able-bodied and heteronormative lifelines and eugenic undercurrents of efficiency and productivity. In some ways, the focus on the future is warranted for disabled bodies. As Bérubé notes, "Jamie will always be 'disabled' ... his adult and adolescent years will undoubtedly be more difficult emotionally—for him and for us—than his early childhood, ... we will never *not* worry about his future, his quality of life ..." (xi). There are practical everyday

concerns that must be attended to with disabled bodies; in some cases, parental, medical, and institutional care continues well beyond childhood. Bérubé's memoir looks at the complications that scientific progress—the forward move without the practice of considering the past—means for his son's future even when “with Jamie there was plenty of future to worry about” (135). Whereas the “normative” and desirable child is imbued with its potentiality, its ability to move forward relatively independently, and its linear productivity and progress, the disabled and/or queer child, and her/his family, tend to need to look forward and backward. Bond Stockton's terminology suggests that instead of “growing up” (11) people can enjoy a “sideways growth” that “refer[s] to something related but not reducible to the death drive; something that locates energy, pleasure, vitality, and (e)motion in the back-and-forth of connections and extensions that are not reproductive” (13). Disabled and/or queer children interrupt, by way of their inability to fit seamlessly into it, the linear able-bodied and heteronormative lifeline that consists of childhood-adolescence-adulthood-parenthood.

Worries about the future notwithstanding, when thinking about time and outcomes, Bérubé notes that pre-natal testing cannot actually predict the value or circumstances of a life, “If anyone thinks that amniocentesis can screen out the vicissitudes of chance, they'd do well to think again. No amount of fetal testing can guarantee parents the birth of perfect children” (53). Disability is a condition that most people will encounter at some point in the life cycle and to focus on fetal “abnormalities” is particularly one-dimensional. There is a

“fetishism of genes in popular culture” (Lindee and Nelkin qtd. in Tankard Reist 52) that insinuates the belief that something can be done about the “instability” of the human body when this is not true (Shildrick 55). In any case of pregnancy there is the element of the uncertain—“the impulse [is] toward a future that is unknown” (Grosz, *Time Travels* 19).

One Leg in the Forward, One Leg in the Backward: Adah’s Backward/Forward Perspective

Barbara Kingsolver’s 1998 postcolonial novel, *The Poisonwood Bible*, considers the body’s instability from the perspective of physical impairment rather than congenital disability. The novel is an epic narrative that tells the story of an American Baptist missionary family who travel to what was then the Belgian Congo on a task to “liberate,” or, in other words, “vanquish” (Kingsolver 9) the Congolese.¹⁴ The novel employs multiple perspectives and is told from the varying voices of the four daughters of the family—Leah, Adah, Rachel, and Ruth May. Occasionally, the perspective of their mother, Orleanna, emerges. Orleanna is aggrieved from her journey to the Belgian Congo with a religiously fanatical husband, Nathan. Orleanna characterizes her experience of the trip as being “afflicted with Africa like a bout of rare disease, from which I have not managed a full recovery” (9). She is judgmental of her husband and his motives, “I’ll even confess the truth, that I rode in with the horsemen and beheld the apocalypse, but

¹⁴ The Belgian Congo is now called The Democratic Republic of the Congo. See *From Zaire to the Democratic Republic of the Congo* for a chronology of the name changes of the country and their political underpinnings (5).

still I'll insist I was only a captive witness" (9), but is unwilling to overtly admit her role in the Western familial dynamic. Orleanna's passages in the novel are rife with suppressed guilt about the religious colonialism her family enacts on the Congolese. We read the perspective of their alienated father and husband, Nathan, only through the chronicles of these five female characters.

Even though *The Poisonwood Bible* is fiction, in contrast to Bérubé's memoir, I argue that the two texts are comparable in their representations of disability, efficiency and time. Notwithstanding the fact that *The Poisonwood Bible* divides its narrative primarily between the four daughters, I argue that the novel's central ethical character is Adah, the physically impaired child of Orleanna and Nathan, and identical twin sister to Leah. While *Life As We Know It's* focuses on pre-natal testing and disability, the locus of Adah's story lies in its emphasis on already-existing disability's "cure."¹⁵ I suggest that Adah's narrative

¹⁵ There are some notable differences between the kinds of disability considered in the two texts I study in this chapter. Jamie in *Life As We Know It* has an "incurable" developmental disability whereas Adah in *The Poisonwood Bible* has a physical impairment. The most significant difference here is the relationship that each has with being "cured." There is no "cure" for Down syndrome whereas, as we see in Adah's storyline, she does undergo "cure," even if she is conflicted about it. Disability scholars Snyder and Mitchell acknowledge the difference between impairment and disability where disability is situated in the culture as "tragic embodiment" (9) and impairment can be understood as "neutral bodily difference" (10). I argue, in alignment with Snyder and Mitchell that an "understanding of impairment [can be] encompassed by the larger, politicized term *disability*" (10). Thus, Jamie and Adah have differing relationships to becoming or being "normal." If the body in question is deemed "fixable" medical science seeks to "cure" it. This idea of curability is interestingly connected to the elimination of disability via the murder of disabled Verna, explored in Chapter Two. I discuss Adah's "cure" below.

connects disability and perspicacity, while at the same time offering a marked critique of the role of disability in Western society. Jeanna Fuston White suggests that *The Poisonwood Bible* “is an ambitious critique of the white patriarchal tradition that authorized western colonization of Africa and legitimated the subjugation of women” (131). At the same time, she argues that the text “situates disability, alongside race and gender, as a locus of oppression” (131).¹⁶ My reading of *The Poisonwood Bible* is very much in alignment with Fuston White’s in that I read the disability of Adah’s character as central to the overall narrative. Rather than positioning disability as a peripheral concern of the novel, secondary to race and gender, much explored already by other critics,¹⁷ I propose that Kingsolver’s discussion of disability through the character of Adah exposes Western narratives of progress *via the body and its desired perfectibility*, alongside the more obvious critique of progress that Nathan Price seeks to exact for the Congolese through his religious mission.

¹⁶ Fuston White’s article, “The One-Eyed Preacher, His Crooked Daughter, and Villagers Waving Their Stumps: Barbara Kingsolver’s Use of Disability in *The Poisonwood Bible*” was published after I had completed much of my preliminary research and writing on the book. Stephen Fox also addresses disability in *The Poisonwood Bible* in his article, “Barbara Kingsolver and Keri Hulme: Disability, Family, and Culture.”

¹⁷ See Koza’s “The Africa of Two Western Women Writers: Barbara Kingsolver and Margaret Laurence”; Jacobs’ “Translating the ‘Heart of Darkness’: Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Contemporary Congo Book” and Roos’ “‘Earthly Paradise’ or ‘Scorched Earth’? Perspectives on the (Belgian) Congo in Women’s Writing.”

Adah's disability stems from her gestation in the womb with her twin sister, Leah. In her narrative, Adah states of her physical impairment,

Officially my condition is called hemiplegia. *Hemi* is half, hemi-sphere, hemmed-in, hemlock, hem and haw. *Plegia* is the cessation of motion. After our complicated birth, physicians in Atlanta pronounced many diagnoses on my asymmetrical brain ... and sent my parents home over the icy road on Christmas Eve with one-half a set of perfect twins and the prediction that I might possibly someday learn to read but would never speak a word. (34)

Until the end of the novel, when physicians attempt an experimental rehabilitation process, Adah inhabits what I call a backward and forward embodiment *and* perspective. Arguably, even after she encounters this rehabilitative "cure," she still personifies the backward and forward. Adah describes her narrative: "That is the name of my story, forward and backward" (Kingsolver 135). Because of the hemiplegia Adah walks with a limp, her "dragging right side" (439) while her left side moves "normally." Adah is compared with her twin sister, Leah, whose "perfection" is apparent in her ability to abide the able-bodied and heterosexual norms of Western culture. Leah is efficient, dexterous, and capable, while Adah is "slow," mute, and impaired (Kingsolver 34). Leah furthermore personifies stereotypical progress as she speedily adapts to heterosexual life and reproduction (she births a child after she marries a Congolese man) while Adah is characterized as being "left behind" both physically and socio-culturally. Interestingly, Leah's marriage is an example of the heteronormative and able-bodied family structure asserting itself where it can, regardless of race or culture. Kingsolver's liberal feminist style in *The Poisonwood Bible* to some extent cultivates a

multiculturalism-is-good tone and emphasizes the heteronormative and able-bodied family structure through Leah's storyline. Kingsolver juxtaposes Leah's "normality" with Adah's non-normativity, body bodily and sexually, which I discuss in more depth below.

Even though the twins have "the same dark eyes and chestnut hair" (34), Adah is characterized as deficient and "abnormal" due to her impairment, the less-than-perfect identical twin. Adah imagines that Leah turns to her in the womb and says, "Adah you are just too slow. I am taking the nourishment here and going on ahead" (34). In truth, we do learn that her sister overtakes Adah's very life in the womb and that Adah "was born with half [her] brain dried up as a prune, deprived of blood by an unfortunate fetal mishap" (33). In a passage that demonstrates that Adah is very much cognizant of the embodied disparity between herself and her twin sister, Adah pronounces, "[Leah] grew strong and I grew weak. And so it came to pass, in the Eden of our mother's womb, I was cannibalized by my sister" (34). The word "cannibalized" is particularly noteworthy here because of the dual significance it portends. On the one hand, Leah's body literally cannibalizes the life-blood necessary for a relatively able-bodied embodiment for Adah, and on the other, the use of "cannibalized" in a novel about white missionaries in the Belgian Congo suggests a deeper acknowledgement of the "conquest" of racialized bodies by religious and political force (Kingsolver 9). It is especially interesting that Adah physically *and* affectively epitomizes a backward and forward manifestation. Both in her bodily comportment and her emotional barometer she

maintains her “backward code” and “the way of the slow, slow body” (Kingsolver 137).

Adah sometimes expresses displeasure with the slowness of her body—“this is what it means to be very slow: every story you would like to tell has already ended before you can open your mouth” (Kingsolver 139); elsewhere she conceptualizes her impairment as a gift rather than a detriment. Adah is complexly characterized as embodying the forward and the backward and this precarious embodiment is represented as advantageous. Where Leah moves forward towards marriage and family, Adah “stopped, slowly turned, looked back” (Kingsolver 139) while still moving forward chronologically. Adah is dually twinned—she is the identical twin to Leah and embodies a twinned subjectivity within herself (backward and forward). This backward and forward detail aligns with a queer-progress that honours “disadjusted time” (Derrida 18) and a future that is “riotous” (Cunningham qtd. in Halberstam 3). Adah’s elaborate “[time]-frame” (Butler, *Frames of War* 1) details her character in a way that is not possible for Leah, for instance, who embodies an uncomplicated relationship with progress “that moves in one direction” (Wright 3). Adah’s embodiment acts in opposition to an ethic of efficiency that prioritizes able-bodied and heterosexual norms over the truth of the “instability” of bodies (Shildrick 55).

It becomes clear throughout *The Poisonwood Bible* that Leah’s healthy body comes at the expense of Adah’s disabled one. The predominant perception

of Leah as “perfect” cannot exist without an opposite, the “abnormality” that allows for perfection’s existence. Remember McRuer’s argument that “compulsory able-bodiedness ... produces disability” (2). Adah’s characterization as backward and forward offers an alternative perspective on disability, one that conjoins the ability/disability continuum within one embodiment. The fact that Adah walks with a slant, and exists in an identical twinship with “perfect” sister Leah, exposes able-bodiedness’ fissure: “everyone is virtually disabled, both in the sense that able-bodied norms are ‘intrinsically impossible to embody’ fully and in the sense that able-bodied status is always temporary” (McRuer 30). In Adah, the reader sees the complexity of the ability/disability continuum in operation. In her connection to Leah, the reader acknowledges that Adah’s disability exists in association with Leah’s relative able-bodiedness. Leah’s “perfection” is contingent on Adah’s “imperfection.” This said, both physically and psychologically, Adah incorporates both the backward and the forward in her life: she understands her life and its losses as backward and forward and she values the alternative perspective her backward and forward body has allowed her. This is not to say, though, that Adah does not herself encapsulate aspects of the forward. Through her disability she is able to navigate the past and the future, the impaired and the healthy. For instance, Adah builds on her experiences as a child in a “slow” child in the Belgian Congo, “What I carried out of Congo on my crooked little back is a ferocious uncertainty about the worth of a life. And now I am becoming a doctor. How very sensible of me” (Kingsolver 443). One of

Adah's strength is her ability to clutch contradictions and live in an irresolute space. She has one foot in the backward and one in the forward. This "unstable" balance is her strength.

Being "left behind" organizes a deeply embodied subject position for Adah. While she is an individual subject, she embodies a dual perspective within her body and psyche. To this end, her gait suggests a literal manifestation of the backward and the forward: her left leg moves ahead while her right leg drags behind. On one hand, Adah's body is tied into the struggle between fast and slow, ability and disability, and on the other, her psyche is caught up a complex "[time]-frame" (Butler, *Frames of War* 1) where her missionary past is intermingled with her contemporary Western life and future. On a symbolic level, part of her body moves toward the future, and part of her body dwells in the past. As much as Adah walks in a backward and forward way, she concurrently thinks in a backward and forward fashion: "Walk to learn. I and Path. Long one is Congo. Congo is one long path and I learn to walk (135). This quotation suggests by its convoluted composition that, as much as Adah walks forward and backward, she also and reads backward and forward, forward and backward. She acknowledges that she perceives the world through her backward and forward lens: "Mother I can read you backward and forward" (305). Suggesting a thoroughness that is absent in the strictly forward or uniformly backward dwelling place, Adah's forward and backward embodiment and psyche demonstrates Adah's meticulous perception. She regards everything in the Congo, and the family's experience in

it, through dual lenses. In so doing, there is recognition of the complexity of time, progress, futures. Her slowness, in walking and in speech, says nothing about Adah's ample intelligence. Interestingly, when Adah is presented with the opportunity to "heal" at the end of the novel, to participate in medical treatment that would aid her in "losing [her] slant" and correct her gait, she is worried that she "will lose [her]self entirely if [she] lose[s] [her] limp" (439-441). For Adah, maintaining her limp maintains her valuable backward and forward, forward and backward perspective, and slowness is a factor in this particular embodiment.

An elective mute as a child, Adah spends most of her time in a world of her own creation. All is not lost, though, for a body that does not abide by able-bodied standards. In an article that discusses the mute protagonist Ada (strangely similarly named to Kingsolver's Adah) of Jane Campion's film *The Piano*, Molina argues that, "Ada's vocal 'disability' reflects her deliberate rejection of conventional forms of human communication" (267). The same is true for *The Poisonwood Bible's* Adah. Rather than wasting away as a body that has nothing to learn, tell, or give, Adah instead scrutinizes life around her, as well as her own self, from diverse slants. She declares her own self-knowledge; she develops her own linguistic codes that many others in the text cannot access. Stephen D. Fox argues that Adah is portrayed as a full subject throughout the course of the novel: "she is a total personality and she evolves" (410). He notes that Kingsolver's portrayal allows Adah—a "character with a disability"—"to emerge as a fully complex individual with a personal perspective on events and an evolution of

self” (411). Fox notes that Kingsolver’s portrayal of Adah counters typical portrayals of disabled people in literature, ones that are often “exploitative and highly limiting” (405). I add that Adah, because of her disability, has an atypically keen connection with the two parts of herself. She accesses the melancholic as easily as she does the rational. She embodies Eric Wilson’s “both/and” state (128-9), as she also operates outside of what Wilson calls the modern-day “wastelands of mechanistic behavior” (6). She is *thoughtful*.

In the last section of *The Poisonwood Bible*, entitled Exodus, the family has dispersed from the mission and moved in separate directions. Adah has returned to the United States with her mother and notes, “I have decided to speak, so there is the possibility of telling” (407). Adah says that “speaking became a matter of self-defense” (407) and she takes her college entrance exams. She ends up in the sciences in 1962 and by 1968 her body begins to respond to a medical “cure.” Even so, Adah resists the move toward normalization. For Love, writing in a queer context, the movement toward “gay normalization” is the most important thing to resist because resisting “means refusing to write off the most vulnerable, the least presentable, and all the dead” (30). Similarly, for Adah, re-writing her backward and forward self into a “cured” self, or, a simply forward self, enacts a similar kind of loss for herself, and for disabled bodies more generally. The new Adah asks: “How can I invent my version of the story, without my crooked vision” (493)? Adah’s story is particularly textured and nuanced and her worry about forgetting her family’s past is valid. She attributes

this ability to remember (in depth) to her backward and forward walk and psyche. Adah's reliance on her crookedness, her belief in its own kind of value, and the self-awareness it has afforded her subject position, are all threatened when Adah encounters "cure."

Adah enjoys a particular intimacy with herself when her backward and forward self is animated; she enjoys the particular kind of "wondrous paradox" that Eric Wilson argues can only be found and enjoyed when one embraces the difficulty and the brilliance of the "both/and" (Wilson 128-9). Adah's backward and forward parts of self, at the beginning of the novel, are integrated. Young Adah articulates, "When I finish reading a book from front to back, I read it back to front. It is a different book, back to front, and you can learn new things from it. It from things new learn can you and front to back book different a is it?" (Kingsolver 57). Nevertheless, Adah "grows up" and encounters a cure for her uneven gait by the end of the novel, and the simultaneous loss of her backward and forward perspective comes by way of a medical system that sees difference or disability as ever more fixable and in need of biomedical management. Bodily normalization, then, comes at a particular cost to Adah's doubly twinned subjective status. When Adah's movement from two into one within herself is complete, she concurrently mourns her lost second half, comparable to the mourning of Freud's lost object.¹⁸ This longing and mourning suggests that

¹⁸ Freud argues that when something we love is lost, a process of mourning and/or melancholia ensues. In Adah's case, her subjectivity is tied up in her backward and forward self (her disabled self) and when she loses that

disabled or differently-abled bodies are not *lacking*, but rather have an extra something that *can* be lost and mourned after, something that is valuable. Adah mourns the loss of her self-twinning perspective more deeply than she does her physical twin Leah, who in some ways she has lost much earlier to the movements of life, marriage, and adulthood, Leah's more normalized reproductions.

Finally, when Adah does lose her slant through biomedical intervention, she also, in no small measure, loses her self-described sense of backwardness. Adah's disability undergoes cure. In fact, by the end of the novel she studies to become a doctor and in so doing, meets a neurologist who decides he can reprogram Adah's ability to walk in the backward and forward fashion. The doctor is successful and Adah is then able to walk without her slant. In this process, Adah acknowledges that she is losing a deeply valuable part of herself and melancholia arises. Adah's move from a disabled subject—backward and forward—to a “normalized” subject suggests that when disability is cured in favour of normality, another kind of loss occurs, in addition to the loss of the disability.¹⁹ She loses her sense of self. An internal resistance, and a longing for her old body and perspective, occurs when she loses her slant:

subject position, she encounters the mourning process of the lost object. For the work of mourning to be complete, Freud suggested that “the subject needs to withdraw the libidinal investment in the lost object” (Carel 156). See Freud's pivotal essay, “Mourning and Melancholia.”

¹⁹ Mourning and melancholia are vast subject matters. In brief, as Brophy argues, “Distinguishing melancholia from the work of mourning, the work that produces closure and reintegrates the individual into the reality principle governing daily life, Freud characterized melancholia as emptying the ego of

I am still Adah but you would hardly know me now, without my slant. I walk now without any noticeable limp.... I find I no longer have *Ada*, the mystery of coming and going. ... Sometimes at night, in secret, I still limp purposefully around my apartment, like Mr. Hyde, trying to recover my old ways of seeing and thinking. Like Jekyll I crave that particular darkness curled up within me. Sometimes it almost comes. (492)

The Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde allusion is particularly telling. It seems to suggest that as much as Adah sees her lost self as desirable, she also sees it as somehow evil, a Mr. Hyde to her unslanted Dr. Jekyll. She talks literally of evil at other points in the text, when she thinks she is about to die from the “burning ants” (Kingsolver 306). Everyone is panicked and Adah notes, “Live was I ere I saw evil” (305). Notice, again, the backward and forward readings of live and evil here, suggesting that Adah’s aliveness connects to being evil. When she is saved from being eaten alive she says, “The wonder to me now is that *I* thought myself worth saving. But I did” (Kingsolver 306). Adah is conflicted about her value as savable and important. Her disability registers as a kind of self-disgust/self-love dichotomy.

When Adah’s body is taken up as a project for “an upstart neurologist” the entire apparatus of biomedical management inserts itself into Adah’s life to rid her of her duality (439). Rather than walking with a slant, Adah is reprogrammed to walk straight. She allows the neurologist to work with her, “mostly to prove

energy, leaving the individual incapable of functioning in a normal way” (80). Some argue that mourning can be resolved (like Freud); Derrida, on the other hand, maintains that mourning can never end (*Specters of Marx* 9). Adah encounters melancholia in direction relation to her new able-bodiedness. She is melancholic over the loss of her backward and forward embodiment and psyche.

him wrong” (439). She does not believe for an instant that her body will change. When she does begin to see that maybe she will begin to walk “normally,” she worries: “Will salvation be the death of me” (441)? Adah notes that the expectation of bodily “perfection” is the effect of a “cheerful, simple morality here in Western Civilization” (493), further exposing the dichotomy between the disabled person’s viewpoint and the indiscriminate viewpoints of the structures that rule. Years later, after she has been cured, Adah articulates the desire for her old body and the old way of being:

If you are whole, you will argue: Why wouldn’t they rejoice? Don’t the poor miserable buggers all want to be like me? Not necessarily, no. The arrogance of the able-bodied is staggering. Yes, maybe we’d like to be able to get places quickly, and carry things in both hands, but only because we have to keep up with the rest of you.... We would rather be just like *us*, and have that be all right. (493)

Here, an emphasis on the curing of disability is juxtaposed with the fact that there are disabled subject positions that are *desirable*. A dual perspective—backward and forward—is desirable. Thus, to be cured of a disability is not necessarily what every disabled person wants, nor should “cure” always and only be the end goal of able-bodied oriented medical and biomedical treatment.

Adah notes that she misses her other self but that: “No one else misses *Ada*. Not even mother. She seems thoroughly pleased to see the crumpled bird she delivered finally straighten up and fly right. ‘But I liked how I was,’ I tell her” (492-3).²⁰ Adah then asks: “How can I explain that my two unmatched

²⁰ While Adah’s name is spelled A-d-a-h, sometimes she refers to herself as Ada, A-d-a. No explanation is given in the text about why she does this, but

halves used to add up to more than one whole” (493)? This question indicates the full completeness of her two selves, and the value of the backward and forward. She mentions that when she was dual, she “was one-half...the crooked walker, and one-half...the sleek bird that dipped in and out of the banks with a crazy ungrace that took your breath” (493). Cured from being “always too slow” (Kingsolver 440), Adah begins to move in the quick able-bodied fashion. Whether or not this new movement is entirely “normalized,” it appears to be so, and thus she is more positively received by her family, the medical establishment, and the world at large. In a tone of deep longing for what once was, Adah, in the final chapters of her voice in the novel, recalls her disabled body and mind’s magnificence.

The loss that Adah experiences is the kind that “gives rise” to “longing” (Butler, “After Loss, What Then?” 467). It is in that longing that the “enigmatic trace” of loss makes its mark (Butler, “After Loss, What Then?” 468). Adah’s longing has her claim by the end of the book that “Tall and straight I may appear, but I will always be Ada inside. A crooked little person trying to tell the truth” (Kingsolver 496). Adah says she needs her “crooked vision” to understand and tell her own story (493). When she loses her ability to embody the backward, she loses a very valuable part of herself. When she cannot access the backward and forward vision, she feels like the deadened and straightened books on her

since this alternative spelling occurs when she is reminiscing about her backward and forward embodiment and psyche, I read this occurrence as the intensification and presence of her backward and forward self. A-d-a is palindromic, suggesting Adah’s love of her “crooked walker”/“sleek bird” (Kingsolver 493) self.

bookshelf, “fossilized, inanimate” (Kingsolver 492) an image similar to what we will see in the dystopic society of *The Giver*, in Chapter Two. Adah’s story concludes with a kind of coming to terms with her loss, in a way that suggests that even in that loss, she still has the perceptive ability to see through the mess of life: “I could not swagger if I tried. I don’t have the legs for it” (530). Her self-reflection ceases when she notes: “We are the balance of our damage and our transgressions” (533). Thus, even though Adah is more obviously forward than backward by the end of the text, she still looks back and takes stock. She returns, she observes, to the books of her past, her “old friends” (532), and attempts to access her old backward and forward self, even though it is elusive and difficult to find.

Adah is not considered sexual, and thus capable of heterosexual relations and reproductions, until she is “cured” from her disability. And it is exactly at this point (her moment of “cure”) that she becomes sexually desirable,

The famous upstart neurologist wanted to be my lover, it turned out, and actually won me to his bed for a time. But slowly it dawned upon my love-drunk skull: he had only welcomed me there after devising his program to make me whole! (Kingsolver 531)

She continues by pronouncing, “He was the first of several men to suffer the ice storms of Adah” (531). She indicates, however, that she holds deep regard for who she once was, and perhaps who she still is inside: “Any man who admires my body now is a traitor to the previous Adah. So there you are” (532). Because of this, she has “not married” (531). Most men cannot pass her test, “I imagine them back there in the moonlight ... Now, which one, the crooked walker, or the

darling perfection. I know how they would choose” (531-2). Able-bodied heteronormativity does attempt to assert its reign, and Adah markedly repudiates it. She says, “I am in a different region in the university altogether from married student housing. They are making babies over there, while over here we merely save them” (442). Obliquely, here, Adah renounces the heteronormative family system in favour of companionship that would acknowledge her “embodied difference” (Shildrick 3). Disability and sexuality are co-mingled here, as, in McRuer’s sense, “able-bodiedness, even more than heterosexuality, still largely masquerades as a nonidentity, as the natural order of things” (1). Adah rejects these privileged locations, in favour of childlessness; a “growing up” that is instead a kind of “growing sideways” (Bond Stockton 10). This established, Adah’s queer-progress only partially manifests. Insofar as she rejects heteronormative and able-bodied relations and stereotypical progress, she does not fully “queer” that progress either. She exists in a sort of liminal space, taking steps on the road to queer-progress. In Chapter Three, I examine texts where queer-progress is forcefully and explicitly manifested, exemplified by queerly utopic communities.

Adah experiences the complications that arise when biomedicine exclusively seeks to find “cures” for disability and/or impairment. In *The Rejected Body* Susan Wendell argues that “the drive to find ‘cures’ for disabilities can be seen, by those who appreciate disabilities as differences, to be as much an attempt to wipe out difference as an effort to relieve suffering” (83). Accordingly, Adah’s

disabled, dual, and backward and forward subjective status—what Shildrick argues is always already under attack by the singular “Who am I?” of Western subjectivity (51)—is obstructed by biomedical and social models of acceptable social life. Adah stakes her claim as part of the “physically vulnerable” (Shildrick 51). Since Adah’s “I” is already doubled, she she can be read as emblematic of Grosz’s “productive monster” (30). As a dual subjectivity within herself, Adah embodies so much more than she does as the apparently insular and reconstructed “I.” While the backward and forward subject position is understood as “abnormal,” for Adah, the opposite understanding is true: her duality or asymmetrical embodiment is a gift. The embrace of the backward and the forward and the forward and the backward is a temporality that separates subjects from biomedical efficiencies and supremacies and at the same time begins to support the notion of queer-progress.

Queer-Progress and Re-Thinking Technology: Futures With Disabilities

My notion of queer-progress proposes a backward and forward approach to time, whereas termination of disability in and of itself looks only to productive time, highlighting capitalist efficiency and “normal” bodily acceptability. Queer-progress is in alignment with Grosz’s notion that the process of evolution is transformative and alive, full of the “excellence of design” and the very real certainty that the forward move is uncertain, full of “chance” and “serendipity” (Grosz, *Time Travels* 25). In contrast, Edelman argues that “no future” is a politics that rests “on a truly hopeless wager,” a wager that abides *only* the

backward, a time-space that cannot work for moving backward and forward (3).

Doctors who want to forge *only* into new territory—those who want to be the ones who herald the “next big discovery”—observe the forward. This frontier mentality of (reproductive) science, the desire to be the first to find the way to conquer disability and weed out the “subnormal” (Snyder and Mitchell 102), conceptualizes movement in time as straightforward, sure, and “in one direction”: forward (Wright 3). The forward movement is brisk, certain, and confident, even if there is loss in its wake. A backward *and* forward approach attends to the chance inherent in moving ahead, while concurrently emphasizing the ways in which “backwardness” matters: through an ethical obligation to excavate the violent “backstory” that propels progress, in its attention to slowness; and in its capacity for reflectiveness and lateral thinking (remember Grosz’s description of evolution as embodying a “spatial and temporal dispersion” [30]).

Science’s desire to forge ahead into frontier territory without adequate referral to the past poses a threat to disabled and/or queer bodies. A frontier mentality rarely looks to legacy and rarely glances backward to see what is lurking there. Wendell Berry warns that Western culture has allowed scientists free reign and that we must remember that

the only science we have or can have is *human* science; it has human limits and is involved always with human ignorance and human error. It is a fact that the solutions invented or discovered by science have tended to lead to new problems or to become problems themselves. (*Life* 32)

Against an ethic of efficiency, speed, and certainty in moves toward futures that are only tangentially known, Berry notes that the future can only ever be known

by its inherent “mystery” and its “limits” (*Life* 36-7). While Berry is conservative in his premises, his ideas are surprisingly similar to Grosz’s queerly progressive explication of evolution as unpredictable and serendipitous. We are at a loss, then, when the science we put stock in has “asserted [a] ‘proprietary sense of the future’,” or when we forget our cultural inheritance in place of “a steady advance in progress” (Berry *Life* 36; “Wendell Berry”). Equating stereotypical progress with “the normalization of ... limitlessness” and “the desire to be efficient at any cost ... unencumbered by complexity” (Berry, “Faustian Economics” 41) is the circumstance faced by disabled and/or queer reproducing bodies embroiled in a biomedical technological system where reproduction is only allowable and desirable for “normal” people.

What the Bérubé memoir and the Kingsolver novel illustrate, I argue, are distinct but comparable representations of queer-progress. Stereotypical progress is intimately tied with romantic notions of individualism and discovery. William Cronon makes an argument about wilderness as the “last bastion of rugged individualism” (77) a part of the frontier mentality that rewards risk, new discovery, and the individual. Those who hold this point of view have a kind of “nostalgia for a passing frontier way of life” (Cronon 77), a way of life that is all but disappearing through modern civilization. Cronon notes that wilderness is a construct created *by* and *through* modernization; it is not an entity in and of itself (72-3). So what a frontiers-person wants to conquer is the “other” that he or she has created. The key point in Cronon’s piece is that this wilderness myth, which I

compare to medical frontierism, enacts an escape of history (79). He thus calls for a remembrance of the wild, “*wildness* (as opposed to wilderness)” which, he argues, “can be found anywhere” (89). Here, “honoring the wild” is a process that “remember[s] and acknowledge[s] the autonomy of the other” and does not escape history or the past (89). Cronon’s call to honour the wild is similar to Grosz’s call to honour the monstrous and Berry’s call to honour the unpredictability and mystery of evolution and reproduction. Simultaneously, Bérubé and Kingsolver articulate ways in which embodied narratives, too, hold the potential to transform derisive structural apparatuses by proffering alternative accounts of disability and queerness. Each of these writers suggests that there are aspects of futures that cannot be fully controlled while they also argue that we must “take responsibility for our own actions that history inescapably entails” (Cronon 90). Combining the backward and the forward—both history and the future—requires making choices and a deep consideration of the technologies of reproduction that medically and culturally infiltrate social life.

The future(s) of reproductive technology are rife with dystopian possibilities. The list of current and foreseeable technologies I mentioned at the start of this chapter, to include, “‘designer babies’ and human cloning” (Burdett 7) are a part of a “posthuman future” which is “potentially also a eugenic future” (Burdett 7). In the same vein, McKibben argues, “we stand on the threshold of changing forever what it means to be human” (257). McKibben echoes Burdett in naming technologies that are on the horizon in terms of human genetic

manipulation and reproduction. He warns about the implications for our world when this kind of technology—he calls it a kind of “reproductive revolution”—would become more and more common (260).²¹ He argues,

the vision of genetic engineers is to do to humans what we have already done to salmon and wheat, pine trees, and tomatoes. That is, to make them better in some way; to delete, modify, or add genes in developing embryos so that the cells of the resulting person will produce proteins that make them taller and more muscular, or smarter and less aggressive, maybe handsome and possibly straight. (258)

The forward movement, here, supplants pre-natal testing for a technology that professes to guarantee custom children. Children with a genetic edge would begin to far surpass children and other humans, bred by “natural” techniques.²² This vision of the future is only an extension of what is happening today. The stereotypical move forward into reproductive perfection is a move that is marked by the kind of predictability that is the most unpredictable of all.

A backward/forward approach to time offers an alternative approach to time as linear and progressive. Substituting “norms” and efficiency for “the multiplicity of embodied difference” (Shildrick 3) exposes linearity to the “temporal dispersion” (Grosz, *Time Travels* 30) that reworks conventional views

²¹ In this context, revolution’s meaning is standard: a huge change or transformation. McKibben is not associating any positive or socially “progressive” connotations in this use of word. In fact, everything in his article is a warning against this kind of societal change.

²² McKibben, much like Berry, espouses a conservatism in his environmental writings. This conservatism relies on the problematic assumption that a clear distinction exists between nature and culture. Additionally, McKibben’s argument suggests an opposition to technology in all instances.

of the life cycle. It also counters the increasingly accepted idea that older women should not have children. The future in queer-progress includes disabled bodies. In fact, we might go as far as to say that the human is disabled (“We Are All Pre-Diseased”).²³ Disabled bodies *cannot* be eliminated: the human body is fallible and imperfect even at its healthiest and to think that disability can be quelled before it even exists is ill-considered. Visions of the future rarely include mysterious allowances; they rarely consider the positive potential of the “productive monster” (Grosz, *Time Travels* 30). Instead of regarding disabled and/or queer bodies as aspects of physical reproduction’s failures, we can begin to underscore queer-progress where disabled and/or queer bodies generate productively monstrous outcomes and “multiple modes of becomings in the face of obstacles or problems of existence” (Grosz, *Time Travels* 33).

²³ There is a broad continuum of ability/disability in the experience of human bodies. From severely disabled to minimally disabled, each body has some “instability” (Shildrick 55). Circumstances vary depending on one’s position.

CHAPTER TWO

Regulating Affect and Reproducing Norms: Alice Munro’s “Child’s Play” and Lois Lowry’s *The Giver*

Remember? Remember you used to be scared of her? The poor thing.
(Alice Munro, “Child’s Play” 201)

The Giver looked at [Jonas] gravely. ‘You must stay away from the river, my friend ... I don’t know what the community would do if they lost you’ ... If you were to be lost in the river, Jonas, your memories would not be lost with you. Memories are *forever* ... All those *feelings*! [The community] never experienced that before.

(Lois Lowry, *The Giver* 144)

When the eugenic physical reproductive technologies that I discussed in Chapter One “fail” to purge disabled and/or queer bodies, other kinds of reproductive policing technologies step in to manage the able-bodied and heteronormative framework. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which mainstream socio-cultural relationships with disabled and/or queer bodies support the distinction between “normal” and “abnormal” embodiments. I focus in particular on affect, which operates in sometimes uneasy conjunction with more concrete ideological forms of discrimination.

Disabled and/or queer embodiments connect here through their historical and contemporary susceptibility to “cure”¹ as well as through the prevalent able-bodied and heteronormative agreement that these bodies should elicit disgust

¹ We must remember that the DSM only removed homosexuality as a “mental disorder” in 1973. As I mentioned in Chapter One, a significant minority of scientists continue to seek biological reasons for queer sexualities, possibly in order to legitimate “cure.”

and/or fear.² I suggest that the normalization of negative affective responses toward disabled and/or queer bodies predicates cruel behaviour, compelling contrasting reactions towards disabled and/or queer bodies or able-bodied and heterosexual ones. The two texts I analyze in this chapter, Munro’s short story, “Child’s Play,” and Lowry’s young adult novel, *The Giver*, illustrate the regulation of the ostensible unruliness of disabled and/or queer bodies through the mobilization of negative or controlled affective responses towards these groups.

As noted in the Introduction, affects or attachments can be socially and culturally suppressed where disabled and/or queer bodies are concerned.³ Before I delve into my examination of “Child’s Play” and *The Giver*, I must briefly explore how the aesthetic field of visual pleasure versus visual discomfort governs the reception of disabled bodies and queer expressions.⁴ Disabled and/or queer bodies disrupt the normative aesthetic field in ways that can be both emancipatory and destructive. I explore the emancipatory potential of aesthetic destabilization in Chapter Three, but here I suggest that reactions to the “radically unusual body”

² McRuer reminds us that “heterosexuality and able-bodiedness were wedded but invisible and in need of embodied, visible, pathologized, and policed homosexualities and disabilities” (2) for the solidification of their privilege.

³ See p. 38-44, “Competing Intimacies: Affects and Effects.”

⁴ I introduce the term “queer expression” to indicate the ways in which queer bodies engage in relationship and intimacy with one another to the displeasure of heteronormative rule. For example, seeing two men holding hands or two women kissing in public—what I am calling queer expression—disrupts the aesthetic field of heteronormativity and introduces an abject object into that field. Similar to the disabled or “freak” body evoking nervous reaction, queer expressions can arouse similar kinds of confusion in the normative aesthetic field.

(Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 166) evoke what Quayson calls “aesthetic nervousness” (15) and Garland-Thomson calls “cognitive dissonance” (*Staring* 166). Disabled and/or queer bodies and expressions unsettle normative visual patterns, and as mentioned in the Introduction, they “disrupt the placid visual relation that we expect between foreground and background” (Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 166). In other words, normative able bodies and heterosexual public displays are acceptable and expected in the visual field. When the aesthetic field contains disruptions or alternatives to these norms, “aesthetic anxiety” (Hahn qtd. in Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 199) can occur among able-bodied and heterosexual groups.⁵ I argue that this anxious response creates discord for bodies that do not exist, perform or *feel* in normative ways.

“Aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson 15), and its subsidiary component, “aesthetic collapse” (Quayson 25), is fundamental to my analysis in this chapter. “Aesthetic nervousness” can be defined as “what ensues and can be discerned in the suspension, collapse, or general short-circuiting of the hitherto dominant social protocols that may have governed the [literary] text” (Quayson 26). In other words, “monstrously embodied” (Shildrick 68) characters in literary texts create disjunctures and disconnections that occur upon the confrontation of

⁵ Living in a culture of discrimination, disabled and/or queer people sometimes internalize normative standards and can also experience the “aesthetic anxiety” (Hahn qtd. in Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 199) that becomes the normal reaction to disability/queerness from able-bodied and heterosexual people. To this end, filmmaker Bonnie Stein argues about her own disabled body, “at first I thought disability was hideous. I could not stand to walk by a mirror and see myself” (*Shameless*). Her film explores the unpacking of these internalized beliefs.

disability. “Aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson 15) is primarily “discerned in the interaction between a disabled and nondisabled character, where a variety of tensions may be identified” (Quayson 15). It can also occur within a text’s “symbols and motifs [and] the overall narrative or dramatic structure” (Quayson 15). On another level, aesthetic nervousness operates “between the reader and the text” (Quayson 15). On this level, “aesthetic nervousness overlaps social attitudes to disability that themselves remain unexamined in their prejudices and biases” (Quayson 15). In all cases, “aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson 15) motivates a “collapse” (Quayson 25) when the fact that *all* bodies are contingent and “insecure” (Shildrick 67) is acknowledged; a breakdown of feeling then ensues. A certain level of aesthetic—and bodily—certainty and composure is destroyed by the dynamic. This process of nervousness and breakdown clearly emerges in relation to the unconventional and/or monstrous bodies in “Child’s Play” and *The Giver*. I suggest that “aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson 15) functions in these texts not just as a by-product, but as a constitutive part, of a socio-cultural reproductive system that works by its exclusion of non-normative bodies. I mobilize “aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson 15) as a way to imagine affect’s *effects*, so to speak. I also use the concept to answer the question: when and why is it “allowable” to destroy the “other”? The “collapse” (Quayson 25) of feeling representative of “aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson 15) creates particular affectively driven responses in subjects who come face-to-face with “othered”

bodies.⁶ The protagonists of “Child’s Play” and *The Giver* have divergent negative responses to disabled and/or queer bodies and expressions of feeling, but they are comparable in that the eradication of “monstrous” bodies is understood as “profitable.” This understanding is complicated when it arises in relation to the protagonists’ own queer feelings and feared divergence from the “healthy” norm.

The comprehensive regulatory socio-cultural mechanisms present in both texts—girl culture, euphemism and bullying in “Child’s Play,” and systemic autocratic bureaucracy in *The Giver*—emphasize in their delineations of “normal” and “abnormal” that affects centered on intimacy and sexuality are two locations where collective rules about norms are enforced. Fear and disgust directed towards disabled and/or queer bodies in these texts find counterpoints in more-or-less sanctioned forms of violence: murder in the case of “Child’s Play” and euthanasia in *The Giver*. As Sara Ahmed argues, echoing Butler, “what bodies ‘tend to do’ are effects of history rather than being originary” (“Orientations” 553); this “history ‘happens’ in the very repetition of gestures, which is what gives bodies their dispositions or tendencies” (“Orientations” 553). This tendency to repeat the past (and thus reproduce its conditions of exclusion) is interesting because able-bodied and heterosexual bodies, through continually acting out affective norms, support the elimination of disabled and/or queer bodies and perpetuate the discomfort of these bodies for future times. As Ahmed suggests,

⁶ Collapse does not necessarily always attend “aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson 15), though. There may be some instances (and I examine these in Chapter Three) where “aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson 15) incites positive change.

“Even when orientations seem to be about which way we are facing in the present, they also point us toward the future” (“Orientations” 554). Constrained by a normative framework, “our life courses follow a certain sequence, which is also a matter of following a direction or of being directed in a certain way (birth, childhood, adolescence, marriage, reproduction, death)” (Ahmed, “Orientations” 554). We are made to *feel* that reproducing particular life courses is a “good” thing; and disabled and/or queer bodies are default dead-end options or outcomes. Ahmed articulates the conundrum of socio-cultural reproduction perfectly when she says,

When we see the line of the ground before us, we tend to walk on it, as a path clears the way. So we walk on the path as it is before us, but is only before us as an effect of being walked upon. A paradox of footprints emerges. Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created. The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: *they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions*, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition ... So in following the directions, I arrive, as if by magic. (emphasis added, “Orientations” 555)

In other words, that which is “normal” (able bodies and heterosexuality) is established and re-established as such by the mutual reinforcement of walking along the “normal” path. In continuing to walk on that path, the path becomes more obvious, and thus, more easily followed. In this scenario, queer feelings are routinely quelled in favour of acting in alignment with historical heterosexual norms. At the same time, “repeated studies show that the [non-disabled] majority ‘rejected intimacy’ with the disabled minority” (Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 199).

How does one become a subject when society is mobilized around your exclusion?

Considering that disabled and/or queer bodies are always already under threat of biological elimination or bodily “cure,” as I discussed in Chapter One, it is no surprise that a desire to “be normal” permeates some disabled and/or queer subjects and groups.⁷ Able-bodied and heterosexual subjects, with the support of the culture, can *feel their way* to reproducing norms in their lives (and “walk on the path” [Ahmed, “Orientations” 555]). Thus, the desire to “be normal” can produce conflict in bodies where individual desires do not align with the collective’s norms, “the wish for normalcy everywhere heard these days, voiced by minoritized subjects, often expresses a wish not to have to push so hard in order to have ‘a life’” (Berlant 285). The notion of the desire to “be normal” does not just apply to homosexual desire but also to “normal” subjects’ anxious responses (identifications and/or violent rejections) to disabled bodies. Competing desires of having or wanting what is unacceptable (disability and/or queerness) and wanting to “be normal” interact through what Berlant terms in a different context, “the shifting registers of unspoken ambivalence” (286). If particular embodiments and desires lead to negative outcomes—or “one’s own social negativity” (Berlant 286)—it becomes easier to understand why certain intimacies are cultivated over others, and why the desire to have “a life” (Berlant 286) without labouring extensively becomes an important consideration.

⁷ In Chapter Three, I will discuss the current debates in queer theory that question working with or against the “norm” for queer bodies.

In this chapter, I argue that Verna of “Child’s Play” desperately wants “a life” (Berlant 286) and instead is murdered due to her disability and its “disgusting” otherness. I suggest that Verna’s determined desire to live cannot overcome the strength of the desire that exists alongside the reproduction of the able-bodied and heterosexual social norm. Jonas in *The Giver* cannot imagine a life outside of the dystopian world’s totalitarian regime, until glimpses of a past world are revealed, one where intimacy can flourish (even in its unpredictability) and each citizen can be allowed to have “a life” (Berlant 286) no matter the stability of their embodiment. Both texts offer examples of how negative affective reactions to disabled and/or queer bodies consolidate and reproduce the distinction between “normal” and “proper” bodies versus “abnormal” ones. “Child’s Play” demonstrates how the socio-cultural normalization of certain affective responses can regulate practical actions in relationships with the “monstrously embodied” (Shildrick 68). The story concurrently illustrates how social norms are reproduced through a variety of means, including violence. In *The Giver*, society’s strong regulation of any kind of affect, the maintenance of what is called “Sameness,” performs regulatory and reproductive violences such that any unconventional embodiment or sexuality is excised from the culture. In both texts, the reproduction of able-bodied and heterosexual norms *through* the maintenance and management of affective responses and reactions reveals dystopic environments that generate “aesthetic collapse” (Quayson 25) as they

also perpetuate an able-bodied and heterosexual reproductive culture in disabled and/or queer bodies' wakes.

“Determined” Bobbing: “Ugly Feelings” Reproduce Norms

Alice Munro's "Child's Play," first published in *Harper's* magazine, and then again in *The Best American Short Stories 2008*, is a haunting story about what happens when pre-teens form solidarities against the "other." These are the kinds of alliances that lead to betrayal and violence. "Child's Play" is also an account of adults seeking personal atonement for past actions. Marlene is the able-bodied narrator of "Child's Play," and the narrative alternates between Marlene's adolescent past—and the relationship she then experienced with the aforementioned Verna—and her adult self who remembers that past. The remembered part of Marlene's narrative focuses on Marlene's account of Verna; particularly her "aversion" and "hat[red]" (Munro 206) towards Verna, upon first sight. Furthermore, the remembered part of "Child's Play" is partially set during a World War II era summer camp where able-bodied and disabled children are separated into two groups—the Normals and the Specials—categorizing children via euphemism and exclusion. Beyond this categorization working to secure privilege for the able-bodied, this separation also manages how intimacies between bodies can or cannot occur. Marlene cannot fathom even touching "Special" Verna. Such an intimacy is incomprehensible in part due to what is affectively "normal" in the scenario. Heteronormativity is implied in other forms of orthodoxy and obedience. Distancing herself from Verna's touch, Marlene

evokes a kind of homosocial disgust/desire dynamic that she does not want to address, complicated by the extraordinarily close relationship she has with the able-bodied Charlene.

Marlene meets Charlene at the summer camp, and the two become something like friends, but actually more like a coterie. Prior to Verna's arrival at the camp, Marlene tells Charlene about Verna, about the fact that she is "sickening" (205). Verna arrives at the camp unexpectedly, and Marlene becomes disconcerted and stunned. Charlene baits her, "Imagine. She's here. I can't believe it. Do you think she followed you?" (212). Charlene begins to establish protocols to make sure that Verna is kept away from Marlene. The culmination of their campaign occurs at the end of the camp session, when during the last swim of the year, Marlene and Charlene perform the almost unbelievable act: when Verna swims over to the two of them, and, after all the children are caught up in a wave from a passing motorboat, they forcibly keep Verna's head under water. Adult Marlene notes, "The whole business probably took no more than two minutes. Three? Or a minute and a half" (228)? Marlene's accounting, here, demonstrates how the smallness of a few moments can ripple into and influence so many lives. Verna's is extinguished, and Marlene, at least, seems to use the act as a motivating factor in her life's work as an academic and a writer on "the attitude toward people who are mentally or physically unique" (219), raising interesting questions about the academic unconscious, and the way affect, including shame and disgust, can be displaced into particular projects. Verna's

murder reveals several things. One, it can *only* happen because of the power Marlene and Charlene have cultivated over this “defective” girl. Marlene and Charlene’s intimacy with one another is fostered, at least in part, by their difference *from* Verna. Two, the combination of the “aesthetic anxiety” (Hahn qtd. in Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 199) that Verna’s disability evokes, as well as the queer desire/queer repulsion dynamic that seems to exist within the girls’ relationships, becomes a catalyst in Verna’s destruction. The act of killing Verna, then, reproduces certain knowable and obvious able-bodied and heterosexual norms. Marlene and Charlene’s actions are on one level shocking and unspeakable; if caught they would have been subject to legal sanction. On another level, their elimination of Verna, fuelled by a collective and unspoken welling up of affect makes a kind of “sense,” fulfills the unconscious mandate of her official “Special” (not normal) designation.⁸

The way into the “sensibility” of their decision begins when Marlene and Charlene establish a solidarity as soon as they meet each other at summer camp.

The similarity in their names begins the pairing:

⁸ Coral Ann Howells observes that Munro’s stories are often about “women’s bodies and the many casualties of the female life” (Howells 4). What is distinct in “Child’s Play” is disability’s emergence as a definitive way in which female bodies become casualties. I am attentive to the fact that “casualty” implies mishap or accident. Disability is not an accident but rather emerges as a subject position due to the structures that privilege bodies that can *do* or *act* in able-bodied ways. As I document in the analysis of the story, Verna *does* become a kind of casualty because her death *is* perceived as accidental rather than suspicious (i.e. she unfortunately drowns due to rough waters combined with the inconceivability of suspecting Marlene or Charlene as perpetrators). Verna is a casualty not of her disability, but of the stringent social structures that sanction her “accidental” drowning at the hands of Marlene and Charlene.

Marlene and Charlene. People thought we must be twins ... And then of course we—Charlene and I—had matching hats ... So we had those names and those hats, and at the first roll call the Counselor ... pointed at us and called out, “Hey, Twins.” (201-2)

Adult Marlene recalls, “Even before [the counselor called us twins] we must have noticed the hats and *approved* of each other” (emphasis added, 74). The girls form an alliance with one another based on the inconsequential similarities of names and hats, yes, but also something more portentous, what Batacharya calls, “hegemonic femininity” (63). “Hegemonic femininity” is the consequence of a process by which “racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and heterosexism place[s] girls in dominant and subordinate relationships to one another as well as contextualize[es] the violence they commit” (Batacharya 62-3).⁹ Marlene’s

⁹ Batacharya writes about “hegemonic femininity” (63) in reference to the 1997 drowning murder of fourteen-year-old Reena Virk at the hands of Kelly Ellard (and a group of accomplices). As Batacharya argues, “journalists, academics, and policy makers marveled at the fact that young (white) girls were involved in [Reena’s] assault and murder” (67). But, as Batacharya argues, the girls who killed Reena “could be demonstrating or vying for dominance and power over their subordinates” (68). Ellard is white and middle-class, and Virk was South Asian and overweight. Batacharya’s argument is compelling because she recognizes the power dynamics involved in girl violence. The violence against Reena Virk is not coincidental; rather, “violence occurs among girls along lines of systemic relations of power—race, class, nationality, language, body size and appearance, skin colour, and disability” (Batacharya 68). It is completely feasible that Munro is referencing the Reena Virk murder in “Child’s Play,” which was written ten years later. The similarities between the two cases are striking. While Verna is not given a last name in “Child’s Play,” the letters are all contained in “Reena Virk.” In both cases, more than one girl forms a connection against the “othered” girl. One account of Reena Virk’s demise notes, “Ellard held Reena’s head under water until she drowned” (Steinberg), an act that is echoed in Marlene and Charlene’s murder of Verna. I am indebted to Sarah Brophy for pointing out the connection between Munro’s story and the Virk murder.

affection for Charlene in the first instance is completely contrary to her first encounter with Verna in their home neighbourhood, “From the very beginning I had an aversion to her unlike anything I had felt up to that time for any other person. I said that I hated her” (206). In her description of Verna, Marlene observes, “She was skinny, indeed so narrowly built and with such a small head that she made me think of a snake” (206). Marlene characterizes Verna through language that gestures towards the monstrous. Her head is the focus of Marlene’s disgust; significantly it is the submersion of Verna’s head, in the last instance, that causes her death.¹⁰ At this point in Marlene’s re-telling, Verna and Marlene have hardly interacted and yet Marlene feels intensely that Verna is just “awful” (Munro 214). Marlene’s reaction to Verna’s being “*simple*” or “*a few bricks short of a load*” (208) is a social and discursive reproduction, influenced by (and influencing) the visceral and the emotional. Marlene and Charlene’s approval of one another as soon as they meet, then, is both an extreme contrast to Marlene’s reaction to Verna and a principal move in “Child’s Play” that establishes a power base against Verna when she finally does arrive at summer camp.

The casual misrecognition of Marlene and Charlene as “twins” highlights a closeness whose intensity, interestingly, threatens to tip over into the unnatural

¹⁰ It is interesting that much of Marlene’s description of Verna focuses on her head, throat, and face, particularly given that it is holding Verna’s head under water that extinguishes her life. Considering that the throat is the location of breath, consumption, and language (that which supposedly designates humanity), Marlene’s focus on these parts of Verna’s body suggests that she is disgusted by Verna’s very beingness or aliveness.

(a construction that resonates with *The Giver*, as I discuss below). Di Brandt argues that twins, whether identical or not, share an intimacy that is often difficult to replicate in non-twin relationships. In literature twins have been represented diversely, but many manifestations depict twins as “either identical and inseparable ... [or] ... as freaks” (Brandt 162-3). Interestingly, Brandt argues that Lansen’s novel *The Girls* portrays conjoined twins in a way that “sees twins as exemplary in the accomplishment of human intimacy” where “proximity, shared life experiences and acts of caring” compose intimacy’s “ingredients” (Brandt 163). At the same time, any discussion of an intense relationship of intimacy can be fraught as much as it can be joyful: “extraordinary intimacy ... comes at a very high price” (Brandt 164). The doubleness of intimacy is significant here: where there is proximity and care there is also a kind swallowing into one another or a loss of individual subjectivity, very similar to the dynamic Adah and Leah embody in *The Poisonwood Bible*. Conceptualizing the twin as freak acts “as representative of the universal fear of our own monstrosity” (Brandt 164), our own otherness or abjectness. In order to create distance from disabled and/or queer subjects, the “normal” subject positions that “other” as freak. Simultaneously, there is a kind of unmanageable intimate moment in the face of the “aesthetic collapse” (Quayson 25), where the non-disabled or non-queer body is confronted with an undeniable identification with the body of the other as “freak.”

Marlene and Charlene's intense intimate twinship does not position the girls as freaks (as is the case for twinship in *The Giver*, as I examine below). Their twinship has another layer in that early on Marlene sees that Charlene has more confidence, and thus more power, than she does: "Charlene had confidence that anyone would *want* to do as she asked, not just agree to do it" (203). Marlene looks to Charlene as a leader, and Charlene needs Marlene just as much as her protégé. Together they are able to act as a team at the end of the story to drown Verna, because of the cohesion formed early on. The friendship between Marlene and Charlene does begin to reveal differences between the girls, but these differences, despite being categorically spoken, are not monstrous enough to pose a threat to their solidarity with one another. Adult Marlene notes:

We applied ourselves to learning [our differences]. We both had brown hair but hers was darker. Hers was wavy, mine bushy ... We did not grow tired of inspecting and tabulating even the moles or notable freckles on our backs, length of our second toes (mine longer than the first toe, hers shorter) ... Both of us had our tonsils out—a usual precaution in those days—and both of us had measles and whooping cough but not mumps ... she had a thumbnail with an imperfect half-moon because her thumb had been slammed under a window. (203)

This passage bespeaks the kinds of differences that are acceptable enough not to cause dissolution of the connection or an aversion to one another. They inspect one another's bodies, in a sense, to secure their able-bodied positions. The tabulations they summon up—what is "notable" on their bodies—indicates a fear of disability and difference. The girls anxiously compare their differences and similarities in an effort to consolidate their "healthiness" and disavow "the multiplicity of embodied difference" (Shildrick 3). The girls are satisfied after

their explorations: they have established that the “truth” about themselves is that they *are* “good” and “healthy,” and their difference from Verna (in their own estimations) could not be starker. The kinds of illnesses they have had are “normal” enough—like measles or whooping cough—and are allowable as facts between the girls, as is the knowledge that their toes are different lengths. The “peculiarities and history of [their] bodies” (Munro 203) contained only differences that were made knowable, allowable, and acceptable, in Marlene’s remembering.

The differences between Marlene and Charlene, though, are important notations that help to establish the girls as complex individuals, where Verna is reduced to stereotype. Verna, with a head like “a snake” (Munro 206), voice “hoarse and unmodulated” (Munro 207), words like “chunks of language caught in her throat” (Munro 207), has the kind of body—“the skin of her face seemed as dull to me as the flap of our old canvas tent” (Munro 207)—that is unacceptable and unallowable for the “normal” pair of girls. Adult Marlene notes, in retrospective explanation of her revulsion of Verna, “Children of course are monstrously conventional, repelled at once by whatever is off-center, out-of-whack, unmanageable” (Munro 207). The suggestion that children could be “monstrously conventional” seems oxymoronic on the one hand, but utterly predictable on the other. The fact that children abide by the norms of the culture—norms that police unconventional bodies—is staggeringly palpable in a story that privileges able bodies. “When one person has a visible disability ... it

almost always dominates and skews the normate's process of sorting out perceptions and forming a reaction," Garland-Thomson argues (*Extraordinary Bodies* 12). One way of reading Verna's murder is that her "awful"-ness (Munro 214) is excisable because it does not fit into perceptible categories of beauty. She "disrupt[s] the placid visual relation that we expect between foreground and background" (Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 166). It is this disruption, this being "out-of-place" in the aesthetic field that leads Marlene and Charlene to the act that kills her. The "repetition of gestures" (Ahmed, "Orientations" 553) that allows for the discursive and affective reproduction of norms instigates affect's *effects* in this case: Verna's murder.

Verna's "awfulness" is established between Marlene and Charlene while they are sharing their similarities and differences with one another, a part of establishing their twinned intimacy, a twinship that works ever better because of their shared revulsion for Verna. Charlene tells Marlene of catching her brother having sex with his girlfriend: "She said they slapped as he went up and down ... It was sickening. And his bare white bum had pimples on it. Sickening" (205). In order not to be outdone by Charlene's disgusting admission, adult narrator Marlene notes: "I told her about Verna" (205). Verna is equally sickening. Marlene and Charlene, then, share their versions of repugnant secrets to seal their solidarity with one another as well as their mutual understanding of what is

acceptable and what is not.¹¹ Marlene is certain that Verna is “out to get her” in some way and she talks about this fear: “It is not physical harm ... that I feared in Verna’s case—so much as some spell, or dark intention” (206).¹² Interestingly, Marlene acknowledges that Verna’s “narrow slyness, her threatening squint” had a kind of “power,” a power that she thinks is “specifically directed at me” (211), a comment that perhaps suggests an element of intimacy at play. Even though she feels herself superior to Verna, Marlene is afraid of her at the same time. Marlene does not want anyone to think they are related or even friends. Living as they do in different parts of the same rental house leads some schoolmates to wonder if the two are cousins, much to Marlene’s horror.¹³

¹¹ The differences as well as the similarities between the two awful secrets are revealing. Even though Charlene characterizes the heterosexual sex she sees as “sickening” (Munro 205) she goes on to marry a man. Her girlhood aversion gets removed as she “arrives, as if by magic” (Ahmed, “Orientations” 555) to heterosexual maturity and “reproduce[s] the lines [she] follow[s]” (Ahmed, “Orientations” 555). Pairing Verna with the sex scenes suggests an element of desire in Marlene’s revulsion towards her. While the ambivalence is overcome, in the case of “normal” sex, it can only be exorcised, in Verna’s case, by violent elimination.

¹² Similar to Adah’s “evilness” in *The Poisonwood Bible*, disabled Verna is conceptualized as having some ability to invoke evil or darkness, just by her very existence.

¹³ The fact that Marlene’s family, as well as Verna’s, lives in a rental duplex indicates that both families are likely of the lower class. Verna’s very existence in the house confirms its state of dejection: “the yellow paint [of the house] seemed to be the very color of insult, and the front door, being off-center, added a touch of deformity” (209). Their co-habitation in this squalid environment compounds the imagined threat Verna poses to Marlene’s aesthetic sense, and belief in her own class mobility.

Many of the reasons for Marlene's disgust are obtuse and inconsequential—"I hated even the celluloid barrette that kept slipping out of Verna's hair" (76)—and even so these become the points of difference that establish Verna's unacceptability. Verna's body is continually located as a body "out-of-control," even her barrette cannot maintain its place on Verna's head. This abject body is not "'clean' and 'proper'" (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* 194). Marlene tries her absolute best to stay away from Verna, fearing, quite without reason, that Verna means to harm her, when in reality, as Marlene's mother notes, "She only wants to play" (209). Marlene is certain that her own fear of Verna was Verna's "[own] fault" and according to Marlene she is "certainly" the one to "blame" for her difference (208). In Marlene's perception, the onus of responsibility (in terms of how Marlene *feels* about Verna *and* in terms of Verna's disability in and of itself) lies entirely with Verna. When Marlene realizes Verna is at camp, she says to Charlene, "I can't look at her. I'd be sick" (213). Congruent with Garland-Thomson's assertion that "when we suddenly find ourselves face to face with ... our most dreaded fate—we look away" (*Staring* 79), Marlene repudiates Verna's presence in the act of averting her eyes.

I assert that Marlene and Charlene's treatment and subsequent murder of Verna in "Child's Play" occurs as a result of a prolonged episode of "aesthetic nervousness" (Quayson 15) and then "aesthetic collapse" (Quayson 25). Marlene reacts with disgust, and fear of contagion, in particular, when she confronts Verna. She remembers once, in the course of one of the games in which Verna

“interfere[ed]” (Munro 207), she accidentally “bunted [Verna] in the stomach” and in so doing “had actually touched bristling hairs on the skin of a gross hard belly” (Munro 209). This violence, which ends with Marlene “hollering” because she comes into contact with Verna’s “gross” (Munro 209) body, highlights Marlene’s feelings of fear about catching a disease from Verna. Moreover, if others saw Marlene touching Verna, it could be perceived as acceptance, as somehow desiring her presence. Perhaps Marlene and Charlene are so afraid to touch Verna because “touch ramifies and shapes accountability” (Haraway *When Species Meet*, 36), and to touch her would promote that burden among bodies. The disgust over Verna becomes ever more pronounced because of the twinges of enchantment that attend the dynamic. As soon as she arrives at the camp, the whole of Marlene and Charlene’s existence revolves around Verna, as they “tried to keep track of [her] whereabouts” (Munro 213). The allowability of Marlene and Charlene’s actions speak to the ways in which social norms become affectively entrenched within subjects, and gestures toward how the effects of these norms can make lives unbearable and even unlivable for disabled and otherwise othered persons or groups.¹⁴

Disgust has been theorized as the “ugliest of ugly feelings” (Ngai 335), feelings which include envy, anxiety, and paranoia. Ngai argues:

¹⁴ Social norms, in part, get consolidated through language. The euphemistic language of “Specials” in the story, for instance, both foregrounds and suppresses Verna’s obvious difference.

disgust is never ambivalent about its object. Whereas the obscuring of the subjective-objective boundary becomes internal to the nature of feelings like animatedness and paranoia, disgust strengthens and polices this boundary. (335)

Verna's apparent "otherness" is exemplified by the disgust that Marlene, and later Charlene, feels for her. Rather than a boundary collapsing, so to speak, between subject (Marlene and Charlene) and object (Verna) the void between them becomes ever stronger and more solid. Yet, it is the very permeability or flimsiness of the boundary that makes Marlene and Charlene try harder and harder to solidify it. In the end, their attempt to deny Verna's humanity can only be realized through her removal (murder). Ngai notes that disgust is never vague in its repulsion toward an object, "whereas the parameters of attraction are notoriously difficult to determine and fix" (335). Verna's being quite "awful" (Munro 214), in the view of Marlene and Charlene, fixes her as the obvious "other," as monster, as purely disgusting, and even contaminating, "If I wanted to go inside to the bathroom, or because I was cold" adult Marlene remembers, "I would have to go so close as to touch her and to risk her touching me" (Munro 208). The fact that Marlene sees any (possibility of a) touch from Verna as a "risk" (Munro 208) suggests that Verna's body is understood as dangerous and as a threat. Rather than Haraway's "touch[ing] across difference" (*When Species Meet* 14) that would forge connections and relationships that are "caring" (Haraway 36), Marlene's disgust toward Verna is "able transform its object [Verna] into a real ... monster" (Ngai 336).

Verna's "monstrousness" propels Marlene's remembrance and it is the disgust that Verna incited in the more "real" or legitimate community around her that anchors the tale.¹⁵ Charlene takes it upon herself to protect Marlene from Verna's "drooping snaky head" and her "sly and evil expression" (212), and Charlene does this with a kind of "horror and strange delight" (211). Due to the perception that Verna is not "normal" and therefore is disposable, and due to Marlene and Charlene's collectively supported superiority, making fun of and excluding Verna becomes allowable and enjoyable. It is a "strange delight" (Munro 211) that is possible due to Marlene and Charlene's "hegemonic femininity" (Batacharya 63) and their united front against Verna. The agreed-upon notion that Verna is disgusting, coupled with Marlene and Charlene's delight in exclusion, further concretizes the camaraderie of the able-bodied girls' twinship and at the same time indicates that this twinship operates, in some part, by excluding Verna as abject.

This notion of "strange delight" is also curious because it suggests that disgust is not entirely and only disgusting, but in fact is predicated by the *desire to call* the disgusting disgusting, the desire to categorize the disgusting as such and

¹⁵ Munro recounts Marlene's feelings when she sees Verna and the other Special at the summer camp: "There was a change, that last weekend, a whole different feeling in the camp ... all this seemed to have begun with the arrival of the Specials. Their presence had changed the camp. There had been a real camp before ... and then it had begun to crumple at the edges, to reveal itself as something provisional ... Was it because we could look at the Specials and think that if they could be campers, then there was no such thing as real campers" (214)? The significance here is around what constitutes "real" identity and membership in the "real" human community.

as different from the self. Disgust's ability to "expect concurrence" (Miller qtd. in Ngai 335), in other words, its need to fasten agreements between "proper" (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* 194) bodies against abject ones is evident through Marlene and Charlene's stark but pleasurable solidarity against Verna. Verna can be read as an "excessive sign that invites interpretation" (Quayson 14). Her disability and queer effect in the "placid visual field" (Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 166) creates a disjuncture in the aesthetic norms of a culture that reads disability and queerness through negative affective response and varieties of condemnation.

Disgust includes elements of contamination or infection that arise when the disgusted encounters the disgusting. Marlene and Charlene's actions toward Verna—their desire to always keep away from her and the fact that they are worried that they will "be sick" if she sees them (Munro 213)—hedges on the fact that they do not want Verna's body anywhere near them for fear of what it could do to them. The disgusting is "perceived as dangerous and contaminating and thus something to which one cannot possibly remain indifferent" (Ngai 336). Marlene retrospectively questions her own strong reaction, "What was the problem? Contamination? Infection? Verna was decently clean and healthy" (Munro 210-11). Marlene's "ugly feelings" (Ngai 1) suggest that she feels attacked by Verna, even though Verna only seems to want a friend. Charlene provokes Marlene, "Wouldn't it be awful to be in a tent with her at night" (214)? This query suggests that being in such close proximity to Verna would create the opportunity for touch and thus for contamination. Furthermore, it implies that

being with Verna in a tent, at night, could portend a closeness that neither Marlene nor Charlene wants to experience. Charlene proposes that Verna might “twist [her fingers] round [Marlene’s] neck and strangle [Marlene]” (214) and reminds Marlene that Verna carries the “look of menace” (214). Possible homosocial anxiety aside, the irony is that while Marlene and Charlene discursively construct Verna as “sly and evil” (214); in fact Verna does not do anything questionable to either of the girls and in the end we know that Marlene and Charlene are the ones to express “evil” in their choice to keep their hands on Verna’s “rubber [swimming] cap” (Munro 228).

Disgust’s affective purview, then, as well as the intimate relationship between Marlene and Charlene against Verna, allows for the violent “short-circuit” (Quayson 26) at the end of the story that is highly destructive for Verna (and arguably for Marlene and Charlene too). Adult Marlene is remembering as she narrates the story:

[We] did not decide anything in the beginning. We did not look at each other and decide to do what we subsequently and consciously did. Consciously, because our eyes did meet as the head of Verna tried to rise up to the surface of the water. Her head was determined to rise, like a dumpling in a stew. (228)

Verna’s head and body want to rise to the surface, she wants to take a breath and live and be in the world, though this desire is significantly construed in terms of animalistic instinct, or even inanimate matter, as opposed to the other girls’ rational consciousness. The mind/body hierarchy is maintained as adult Marlene conjures the feelings that she and Charlene experienced that day: “Charlene and I

kept our eyes on each other then, rather than looking down at what our hands were doing. Her eyes were wide and gleeful, as I suppose mine were too” (228). Marlene and Charlene, just as upon meeting one another they connect through the similarities and differences of their bodies, are connected here via their bodies acting in agreement. Their eye contact with one another, and their concurrent “ocular evasion” (Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 83) of Verna, solidifies their own subject positions while at the same time exposes their commitment to destroying what they perceive to be disposable garbage.¹⁶ Marlene recalls the “gleeful” (Munro 228) feelings she and Charlene were experiencing at the moment of holding Verna down, “[W]e were doing just what was—amazingly—demanded of us, as if this was the absolute high point, the culmination, in our lives, of our being ourselves” (228). In the midst of murdering Verna, this innocuous pre-teen girl, they feel fully *alive*. The intimacy between Marlene and Charlene established early on make possible this final violent act. As Ngai notes, “disgust expects concurrence” and is closely linked to “‘unsocial’ passions of resentment and hatred” where “there is a sense in which it seeks to draw others into its exclusion of its object, enabling a strange kind of sociability” (335-6).¹⁷ Neither

¹⁶ The emphasis on eye contact allows for an illustration of the role of affect through conscious or unconscious communication by eye contact, or by extension, the refusal of eye contact, in policing social relations and social connections.

¹⁷ The event recalls the Reena Virk murder, in which a group of mainly girls decided that it was okay to “swarm” Virk and beat and then drown her (Mulgrew). This kind of act is possible when a group of people is in agreement

Marlene nor Charlene could have successfully killed Verna on their own; they needed each other and their intimate social bond to reinforce the act's allowability and rationalization. An act of "hegemonic femininity" (Batacharya 63) over Verna also permits the deed.

The intensity of the act taking place within the pre-teen or adolescent timeframe is also significant. Adolescence is a period when establishing oneself and one's desires as "normal" and appropriate can seem paramount. Extinguishing Verna makes the able-bodied and normal Marlene and Charlene happy, in Ahmed's sense that "claims to happiness make certain forms of personhood valuable" ("The Happiness Turn" 10).¹⁸ They become even more secure in their own normalcy by choosing to drown Verna. The reproduction of the norm in that moment, interestingly suggests that "normal" is created through affect while simultaneously insinuating what needs to be destroyed for normal's success: the object that incites "ugly feeling" (Ngai 1). As Ahmed elucidates, "attributions of happiness might be how social norms and ideals become affective, as if relative over the "otherness" of the victim. Such a community is built upon the exclusion of the "other."

¹⁸ This happiness and security is complicated later on by parts of the story that suggest Marlene and Charlene have remorse for their murder of Verna, as they age. On her deathbed, Charlene is determined to confess her sins to a Catholic priest, presumably seeking absolution for killing Verna. Marlene's academic work also clearly seeks a kind of atonement. Marlene and Charlene's desire for absolution—much later on in their lives—could be seen as complicating the effects of the "aesthetic collapse" (Quayson 25) that led to Verna's murder earlier on. I wonder if and how atonement might operate as an affective register that shifts norms very subtly over time. Does guilt after the fact make any difference around what has happened "in that moment?"

proximity to those norms and ideals creates happiness” (“The Happiness Turn” 10). Marlene and Charlene’s “correction” to the aesthetic field, as a result of their “aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson 15), repositions bodily social norms *through affect*, particularly happiness in the face of the “reparation.” It is crucial to note Marlene’s acknowledgement that drowning Verna was the culmination point of Marlene and Charlene “being [them]selves,” reinforcing that able-bodied privilege and absolute subjectivity can only survive or thrive through the destruction of disability and/or queerness and thereby the reproduction of social norms around appropriate bodies. Additionally, this admission says something telling about how dominant affect can prescribe and allow inappropriate action while at the same time strengthening a perpetrator’s subjectivity. I read Verna’s “determined” bobbing head as the indication that she in fact *wants* to live. She *wants* to survive and thrive in her life. Despite being “monstrously embodied” (Shildrick 68), Verna’s determination to get her head above water shows that, whatever the circumstance, she desires to be a part of the world even though the collective does not categorically desire her presence. Too, Verna’s physical body is itself steadfast. Though it does not survive Marlene and Charlene’s assault, it does attempt to persist as more than “remains” (Eng and Kazanjian 1).¹⁹ Marlene and Charlene’s “wickedness” (Munro 228), though, ends the possibility of “a life” (Berlant 286), reproducing the assumption that disabled and/or queer people do

¹⁹ I discuss the notion of “remains” in more detail in the next section.

not have the same right as “normal” people “to inhabit the world” (Hubbard and Wald 161) or to live and reproduce.²⁰

Affective Dystopia: The Lack of Feeling in *The Giver*

With this analysis of “Child’s Play” in mind, I now turn to Lois Lowry’s novel *The Giver*. While “Child’s Play” highlights “the oppositional relationship between the categories of self and other, human and animal, normal and abnormal, ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Shildrick 68) through Marlene and Charlene’s “hegemonic” (Batacharya 63) relationship with Verna, Lowry’s *The Giver*, on the other hand, exposes how, when these “oppositions” are autocratically and systemically managed, those identified as “abnormal” are disposed of as a matter of protocol. Intriguingly, Lowry’s young adult novel portrays a society that attempts to manage everything in it: the body, individual and collective memory,

²⁰ There are many examples from the worlds of disability and queer subjectivity where it is obvious that “othered” people do not have the same right to inhabit the world, as do “normal” people. For instance, Brandon Teena and Matthew Shepard are two examples of queer youth who were brutally killed because of their queerness. It is also worth noting that while the storyline in “Child’s Play” leads to murder, reproductions of norms occur through a variety of regulatory devices, not just violence. Because Verna is understood by Marlene and Charlene to be *not quite alive*, their murder of her is more possible and allowable. This example is on the extreme end of a spectrum that regulates bodies in all sorts of ways: exclusion, particular kinds of language, the normalization of negative feeling toward the “other,” all of which come up in “Child’s Play” before the culminating moment of holding Verna’s head under water. From the queer angle, the ending of the “present-day” story, for instance, where Charlene has lived a life of upper-middle class heterosexual marriage and Marlene asserts her heterosexuality, even though she remains unmarried, replicates the heterosexuality as the norm and the ideal.

intimacy, sexuality, family, life and death. People do not have a choice about following a particular career as they are assigned tasks or life roles at a young age.²¹ There is no choice about the kinds of intimacies to nurture as heterosexual marriage partners are matched and assigned based on seeming compatibilities. Sexual activity and physical reproduction is not a part of a married couple's life. Children are given to families only after marriage partners have been successfully together for three years and after they have applied for a child; they are born from women who are designated "Birthmothers" (Lowry 21) as their life role. The society in *The Giver* is a society whose desire for perfection, "Sameness,"²² and uniformity is so deep and stark that anything that might provoke unruliness in its citizens is banished through controlled means.

The aesthetic environment in *The Giver* is extremely important to the overall evolution of the narrative. One of the most interesting strategies the society uses is the complete "neutralization" of the aesthetic field. Hills and valleys have been leveled and weather has been abolished, "it wasn't a practical thing, so it became obsolete when we went to Sameness" (Lowry 84). In such an environmental, those who are "monstrously embodied" (Sheldrick 68) and who evoke "people's fear and disgust factor" (Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 89) appear

²¹ Some examples are "Street Cleaners, Landscape Workers" (2) or "Birthmother" (21) or "Doctor" or "Engineer" (56).

²² I will deal with the meaning of "Sameness" to follow. Briefly, it is the way in which the society in *The Giver* maintains uniformity amongst its citizens, as well as control over any kind of difference, from the genetic, to the management of social customs.

more clearly in the aesthetic field and stand little chance of survival. In the name of Sameness, the earth itself has been flattened and leveling has already literally occurred. There are no longer any mountains or valleys, everything exists on a flat plane, “Why don’t we have snow, and sleds, and hills?” (Lowry 83), asks main character Jonas. All variations in the aesthetic field are stymied in a culture that exists without colour, weather, or sun. Everything appears in neutrals, “Once, back in the time of memories, everything had a shape and size ... but they also had a quality called color” (Lowry 94).

What we find in *The Giver* is the embellishment of a society Eric Wilson worries about in real life, where “mountains will soon be flattened, and valleys made level” (66). Wilson calls this “smoothness” (65) a “the postmodern horror show,” a society that is filled with “phantom creatures [and] zombielike beings” (68), apparitions who all look, feel and appear the same. Garland-Thomson’s work on aesthetics offers a crucial analytical tool here. She argues that “people need to manage an enormous amount of available sensory stimulation. They do this by filtering out *visual sameness* and directing their attention to ‘dissonance,’ ‘incongruity,’ and ‘differentness’” (emphasis added, *Staring* 166-7). Because *The Giver*’s society *centers on Sameness*, and because there is nothing that could be considered discordant allowed within the environment, any ambiguities are quickly filtered out and the way is aesthetically and affectively paved (“lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created” [Ahmed, “Orientations” 555]) for the maintenance and subsequent reproduction of

embodied norms and affiliations in a culture that controls everything in it, including the actual “relation between foreground and background” (Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 166). There are definitely no queer objects of desire available or in reach in *The Giver*’s aesthetic field. Furthermore, “aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson 15) can hardly enter the society’s design since “negative” feelings are pharmaceutically managed and thus silenced. This lack of feeling means that reproductive and kinship “norms” are unquestioned and thus consistently re-generated. The injustice in this scenario occurs on a deeply structural level where any opportunity that “aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson 15) *could* lead to the destabilization of damaging standards (filtering affective responses in different, potentially more empowering, directions) is also extinguished.²³

Building on a physical environment that “erases ... particularities” (Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 30) and creating a populace that “smooth[s] out ... human complexity and variation” (Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 30) is the penultimate foundation for social organization in *The Giver*. Just as physical reproduction is heavily regulated, so too are the norms about which bodies are acceptable and allowable. Maintaining a sexless society is assured through the medication given to all citizens from the onset of puberty through the rest of their adult lives. Sexual feeling—along with any other kind of “disruptive” affect—becomes a medical issue with a pharmacological solution. This important

²³ That “aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson 15) might not lead automatically to violent exclusion, but can function as a stepping stone to emancipatory changes, is a possibility I explore in Chapter Three.

example of the social control exercised on citizens has existed for so long in the society's collective memory that citizens perpetuate biopolitically these same dictums on themselves and each other.²⁴ Desire and other feelings are medicalized and given a name: "The Stirrings" (Lowry 39). When adolescents start to experience "stirrings," they are to report themselves and are then treated with pharmaceuticals that quiet desire (Lowry 37). The messiness of sex and the complications of relationship—or the perception of these—means that sex cannot have a role in this controlled society. When Jonas starts to experience sexual desire and tells his mother of his confusion, he receives treatment, and almost as soon as he does, "the feelings had disappeared. The Stirrings were gone" (39). Two important things take place in this dynamic: one, adolescent desire is quelled through pharmaceutical means, and all of the messiness of the life-stage gets shut down. And two, the overarching control of the citizenry's desires maintains the status quo and in so doing continues the replication of the ideologies that rule the culture.²⁵ Considering that sexual feelings get expelled before anything can come of them, potential "starting point[s] for orientation[s]" (Ahmed, "Orientations" 545)—heterosexual or queer—are also eliminated. In such a society,

²⁴ Martin Sullivan's notion that "medical power" (27) is "directed at producing a certain type of body—a governable and, hence, productive body" (27) is applicable to *The Giver's* highly regulated society. The bodies that are "unproductive" are assumed unnecessary and disposable.

²⁵ The exact timeline of how the dystopic society portrayed in *The Giver* gets established is not outlined in the novel, but we do know that it has been "many generations" (Lowry 83) since the society transitioned to Sameness.

homosexuality is not even mentioned, as it is so “abnormal” that it cannot even appear, like the heterosexual nuclear family does, as a facsimile reproduction of relationship or intimacy.²⁶ Queer feelings, in *The Giver* and in “Child’s Play” are unacceptable responses to bodies in the environment.

At the age of twelve (or “year twelve” as the novel designates it) Jonas is “selected” for the life role called “The Receiver of Memory” (Lowry 60). While most roles are fairly perfunctory in the management of the society in the novel, and are “assigned” (Lowry 60) to particular people, Jonas is given a special assignment and is “selected” (Lowry 60) almost as if his task is destined. The Receiver of Memory is trained to receive and feel all of the memories of the society that has forgotten its past.²⁷ The new Receiver “receives” all of the memories from the current Receiver (thereafter called The Giver, as in the Giver of memory), in this case, a very old man. With this one exception, the collective in a society bent on Sameness has systematically forgotten all memories good and bad. There is no true happiness within, no desire, and no real pain or intimacy with another. Group memory is non-existent; the culture does not remember war or violence, holidays or beaches. There is no individual legacy. Only The

²⁶ Remember that the heterosexual couples in *The Giver* are only copies, in Baudrillard’s sense of the word, of intimate relationships. These couples neither choose each other, nor do they engage in sexual relationship with one another.

²⁷ We can note some similarities between *The Giver*’s ‘Receiver of Memory’ and the narrative in “Child’s Play” that documents Marlene’s remembrance of childhood events. In both cases, the importance of memory is focused on as a way in which individual and/or communal movement towards responsibility can be acknowledged.

Receiver holds the society's past within him or herself, acting as a true container of that which cannot be altogether contained. He or she is encouraged to ask questions and will receive answers. He or she can tell lies. The Receiver, if we understand his/her role through Wilson's terminology, "see[s] through the stern networks of his culture to the teeming world beyond" (65), something that no other in *The Giver's* society can do. It is important to note, however, that the role of The Receiver is itself part of the mechanisms that control the society; since the society cannot remember the past, its memories need to be held somewhere.²⁸

Links can be made between the fictional world in *The Giver* and the contemporary American culture Wilson catalogs. Wilson worries that if American culture were "attuned only to contentment, then [it] would have settled for those lowest common denominators of experience, those ratios that flatten specific to general" (65-6). The contemporary world Wilson worries about is the world already starkly manifest in *The Giver*, one where humans have truly forgotten their depths and emotions.

Considering that *The Giver's* authoritarian society regulates affect, behaviour, and choice, concretizing visions of "normal" and "abnormal" bodies and feelings, following rules about what is "acceptable" becomes habitual and unquestioned. Even though the origins of the belief system is obscured in *The*

²⁸ *The Giver's* society sees the lack of individual and communal memory as efficient and productive instead of disadvantageous. This society cannot encourage the queer-progress of forward and backward time, because the present moment is its only anchor.

Giver (in that the citizens do not remember the past), in both this text and in “Child’s Play” social and bodily norms are reproduced through the respective societies’ agreement to rules of “proper” embodiment. There comes a point in *The Giver*, though, where striving for uniformity and Sameness ultimately becomes unsustainable. When Jonas begins to gain the memories of the collective’s past, he is outraged at the fact that the complexity of feeling has been excluded from his society’s experience. As Ruth Hubbard asserts on CBC Radio’s *Ideas* when talking about gene manipulation, pre-natal testing, and eugenics, “Life is complicated and we should keep that complication. Complication *is* life” (“How to Think About Science”). While this idea links specifically to the argument I made in Chapter One, it also connects to maintaining complexity in a social fabric, something sorely lacking in the society in *The Giver*. With so many rules to dictate movement, there is little room for intricacy and/or decision making processes. People must “check the rules” (Lowry 51) before doing anything, and in so doing, potentially productive “complications” are renounced before they can manifest. Wilson pushes his reader into the same kind of territory of complexity as Hubbard when he says that melancholia “pushes against the easy ‘either/or’ of the status quo” as it thrives “in unexplored middle ground between oppositions, in the ‘both/and’” (148-9). Instead of opposition, there could be a “dynamic concord” (Wilson 77), an acknowledgment of the paradoxical nature of life, rather than an easily understood security, embodied by the notion of Sameness in the novel. In *The Giver*, only the Receiver of Memory exists within the notion of a

dynamic tension—even though he/she is structurally essential to the society’s dystopic functioning—all others in the society are oblivious to opposites.

The way prohibition of affect in *The Giver* operates to eradicate disabled and/or queer bodies emerges particularly clearly in the dystopic society’s treatment of twins, which bespeaks a larger societal impulse to circumvent the complicatedness of an alternative or dual perspective. The society in *The Giver* expunges both the literal being-ness of twins and the figurative perception of duality. One of the rules of the society includes the regulated euthanizing of the smaller of two identical twins whenever twins are born, as a matter of protocol. This practice moves the society away from the encounter of difference, as it also makes an economical choice as to which twin will be more useful. Twins, if identical, are considered “human monsters” (Shildrick 55) in a society that consists only of uniformity and separateness. If two people were walking around the society who looked “exactly the same” (Lowry 137), how could control be maintained? Identical twinship, thus, in *The Giver*, becomes the very literal representation of something like Adah’s backward and forward perspective in *The Poisonwood Bible*. Twinship is representative of two perspectives; it is representative of the existence of difference or alternatives.²⁹ Euthanizing one of two identical twins reflects the desire for perfection and security in *The Giver*’s

²⁹ Identical twinship in *The Giver* is different than the destructive twinship established between Marlene and Charlene in “Child’s Play,” in that twins in *The Giver* are unnecessarily understood as evil. In both cases, though, identical twinship is connected to the messiness of unmanageable intimacy.

world, where twinship operates as a provocation of its own limited self-knowledge. Twinship becomes risky for the singular notion of the body, threatens the society's "security," and exposes the vulnerability of the society's systems of control. The fraught intimacy present in the twinship relationship is also a threat. In Wilson's terminology, to give in to the society that *The Giver* presents—to include its telling treatment of twins—is to forgo "the world's innate duplicity, its 'both/and'" (81).

Just like the myriad of medical "cures" for all pain—to include the pain of memory—the euthanizing of one of two identical twins is supposed to help the society to maintain equanimity and limit confusion. Like the call for "release of pain,"—"a daub of anesthetic ointment, or a pill; or in severe instances, an injection that brought complete and instantaneous deliverance" (Lowry 109)—the euthanasia of no-longer wanted humans comes with a similar procedure. To be "emancipated" from the society one must be old or the smaller of two identical twins. Once the euphemistic "release" procedure is completed—it is telling that the society puts a "positive" spin on the procedure so that citizens do not comprehend the severity of the maneuver—society continues "normally" and without unconventionally embodied citizens. Near the end of the novel, when Jonas is talking to the Giver about the fact that his father was "releasing" (Lowry 146) a newborn twin that day, the Giver says, "I wish they wouldn't do that" (Lowry 146) expressing the opinion of only one in the society who has insight and perspective. Jonas laughs, "Well, they can't have two identical people around!

Think how confusing that would be” (146)! Jonas, while learning about memory, history, and pain from the Giver is still in the process of watching his conditioning unravel. With the support of the Giver, Jonas asks to watch a tape of the release of the identical twin, in order to understand what the practice actually entails.

As Jonas watches the tape the reader acts as a witness to the unraveling of the lies that build the society. Jonas sees his own father—someone he trusts completely—weigh the two children, take the one who is smaller, and prepare the body for euthanasia. While Jonas is expecting a beautiful ceremony that guides the child into another community, he is faced with his father “filling [a] syringe with a clear liquid” and “very carefully direct[ing] the needle into the top of the newchild’s forehead, puncturing the place where the fragile skin pulsed” (Lowry 149). Once the syringe is empty, the newborn “wailed faintly” and finally “went limp. His head fell to the side, his eyes half open” (Lowry 150). Jonas understands the full breadth of what has occurred as he thinks, “*He killed it! My father killed it!*” (Lowry 150). The recording finally ends with Jonas’s father placing the dead baby into a carton and “load[ing] the carton containing the body into the [garbage] chute and [giving] it a shove” (Lowry 151). After this experience, Jonas understands what is truly meant by the procedure, that it is a ceremony of expunging the parts of society that are considered to be garbage, excess, or waste (Lowry 151). There is a marked clinical quality to the methodology, where we can recognize that the management of “unruly” or

“monstrously embodied” (Shildrick 68) populations is increasingly relegated to the realm of medicine, here, rather than the realm of the judiciary. Furthermore, the lack of affect and the absence of collective memory means that the citizens do not question the norms that continually reproduce the unembellished “Sameness” (Lowry 84) the society is founded on. This appropriately named “Sameness” (Lowry 84), as the word suggests, proliferates constant copies of the “Same” as it perpetuates reproductive and societal norms. The society’s built-in dearth of self-reflectivity leads to the maintenance of practices such as “release” (Lowry 7), the delineation of life roles such as “Birthmother” (Lowry 21), and, most importantly, the affective registers that confirm that these conventions are altogether acceptable.

The implications of killing the smaller twin are twofold. Firstly, the way in which intimacy is managed in a society that routinely kills that which is different or no longer useful highlights the which bodies are desirable in the society’s able-bodied and heteronormative structure. Secondly, the loss of the twin’s life by euthanasia brings with it an interesting metaphorical link to melancholia’s inherent doubleness and value.³⁰ Similar to the complex and “dynamic, interdependent opposites” that would form in the kind of melancholic society Wilson hopes for in *Against Happiness* (52), Di Brandt’s version of

³⁰ I am not talking about the larger scale of euthanasia in my work, as this is an ethical and political debate all its own. For my purposes, I am looking at the ways in which euthanasia in the case of killing of the “wasted” members of society in *The Giver* raises the question about which lives are worth living or allowed to live.

twinship recognizes that the tension found in twinship is rich fodder for any complex and inclusive society's success (170). The disposal of one of two identical twins in *The Giver* is an example of the length a society will go to in order to rid itself of "excess" or "waste," while at the same time accomplishing the elimination of the "deep desire for intimate lifetime companionship in everyone" (Brandt 170). The society in *The Giver* has rid itself of the intimacy of twinship, and in so doing, has encountered grievous loss by *not* encountering the "interplay, rich and terrific, between antagonisms" (Wilson 22). Literally, euthanizing one of two twins in *The Giver* is the slaughter of an independent human life. From a symbolic perspective, the annihilation of the smaller twin is representative of the removal of a heterogeneous perspective from the society as much as it is a dismissal of the "multiplicity of embodied difference" (Shildrick 3) that bespeaks the reality of a group of bodies. Rather than encountering the "both/and" (Wilson 122) of social life, the community in *The Giver* is one that leaves no room to encounter the "rich confusion over the things of the universe" (Wilson 42). This dystopic society has forgotten loss and *how* to grieve.

A prevailing way in which the society in *The Giver* obfuscates affect is through the pharmaceutical removal of melancholia from the daily affective equation of individuals in the society. Considering that melancholia is necessary for a culture's affective complexity, it is valuable to consider what happens when melancholia is eschewed in favour of a happiness that "supports social norms and ideals" (Ahmed, "The Happiness Turn" 12), especially when "the word 'normal'

has become one of the one most powerful ideological tools of the twentieth century” (Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 31). The ideological power of “normal” has infiltrated all aspects of natural and cultural life in *The Giver*’s society. Its happy “norm” filters out hills and valleys as well as abject and twinned bodies. Eric Wilson argues that contemporary American culture is separated from “the polarized flow of existence, that persistent dialogue between self and other, familiar and unfamiliar” (25). This happy American culture—filled with the sameness of malls and suburbs and people who desire “complete security”—becomes “a world of psychological stasis, a mental wasteland where nothing moves and lives” (Wilson 26). We can find Wilson’s dystopic vision already existing in *The Giver*. Instead of a melancholic perspective characterized as too much to handle, Wilson argues that a complexity of affect provides the richness of life.³¹ Without this full gamut of feelings, melancholia included, *The Giver*’s society cannot be expected to thrive.

David Eng and David Kazanjian’s introduction to the collection of essays entitled *Loss*, “Mourning Remains,” marks a valuable theoretical turn in the study

³¹ Wilson’s argument can surely be accused of a certain kind of romanticism about melancholia, about what could be called “the dark night of the soul.” I understand this to be the case, and I suggest that there are parts of his argument that are useful in considering *The Giver*’s society, an extreme example of a society that has attempted to rid itself of all kind of melancholic feeling, and thus, by extension, has created it in the extreme in one character. At the same time, I think that both texts I am studying in this chapter emphasize that the feelings of melancholia (a certain abiding with negative feeling) are necessary as a precursor to empathy. Marlene and Charlene both mourn their actions toward Verna when they are adults; and all of the characters in *The Giver* lose something valuable when they cannot feel melancholy, possibly their empathic ability.

of mourning and melancholia, and the theorization of what remains *after* loss has occurred. They argue that there is a materiality to the notion of “remains” (1) and that whenever there is loss, something gets left behind. They suggest that we can only know loss “by what remains of it” (2). On one level, in the case of the twin being disposed of in *The Giver*, what remains, and what is “remains,” is the child’s dead body, the body that gets left for waste, thrown down the garbage chute. In “Child’s Play,” Verna’s body, too, is left for waste: (“Is that not something out there in the water” [Munro 229])?³² Interestingly, the negation in this question from “Child’s Play” cancels out the comprehension that this “something” (Munro 229) might be a drowned human being. Personhood is already expired where Verna is concerned and she has easily become an object that is left behind as “remains” (Eng and Kazanjian 1). Moreover, what is lost is the “great polarity [between] life and death” (Wilson 149) or the fact of “the multiplicity of embodied difference” (Shildrick 3). The way in which melancholia or dualness does *not* operate in *The Giver* produces an even greater loss in the society at large than does embracing feelings of melancholia as they occur. When Jonas attempts to remedy his society by fashioning a plan to give memory back to the people, he gives his society “an invitation to participate in the great rondure of life,” the “both/and” (Wilson 122) of existence.

³² It is interesting that both disposals of bodily “waste” are secret. I suggest that there is a slippery slope between one disposal being state-sanctioned (*The Giver*) and the other being murder (“Child’s Play”). While they are different, they similarly engage in processes of maintaining and reproducing norms.

The fact that death is predetermined for one of every two twins in *The Giver* means that “naming the mysterious connections between antinomies” (Wilson 149) has no room to even begin to occur in this child’s life. Intimacy is foreclosed between the twins, and the “beauty” of the “dark and strange” (Wilson 128) of life is metaphorically suppressed. When Jonas realizes what is going on in the society he has trusted his entire life, he feels a “terrible pain” and “a ripping sensation inside himself” (Lowry 151); he is viscerally enraged at the consequences of the losses his society has allowed. His newfound memories act as another kind of “remains.” Eng and Kazanjian argue that we might begin to understand melancholia in a Benjaminian sense as encompassing “an ongoing and open relationship with the past—bringing its ghosts and specters, its flaring and fleeting images, into the present” (4).³³ Through the collective lack of a relationship with the past in *The Giver*, readers become witnesses to the disastrous consequences that purposeful and systemic forgetting generates. Instead of managing a complex “both/and” (Wilson 149) perspective, *The Giver*’s society operates with one eye closed to the materializing “remains” (Eng and Kazanjian 1) that create an ever more unbearable grief for its container: The Receiver of Memory.

The Giver ends with Jonas making a plan for the re-introduction of memory, and by extension the emotions of love, sorrow, complication, intimacy,

³³ In some ways, in *The Giver*, we might say that the Receiver of Memory is a kind of Benjaminian “angel of history” or, even, an angel of memory. Similarly, we might characterize the Receiver of Memory as a kind of scapegoat.

difference and sexuality, into the society of Sameness. The last straw comes for Jonas when a child that his family has been fostering for several months, Gabriel, has been scheduled for “release” (Lowry 114) due to the child’s inability to adhere to “normal” growth and behavioural standards (another reason for euthanasia). The one way that the society can begin to regain memory, and share in Jonas’ “remains” (Eng and Kazanjian 1), is for the current container of memory—Jonas, in this case—to die or leave the community. When this happens, all of “the memories come back to the people” due to the fact that “memories are forever” (Lowry 144). If the container is lost, it does not mean the memories are thus lost. With this in mind, the Giver and Jonas decide that Jonas will leave the community in the middle of the night, never to return, in order to return memory and life to the controlled society.³⁴ Anticipating the inevitable crisis that will occur, the Giver decides to stay behind to help the society integrate the newly recalled memories.

On their ensuing journey, Jonas and Gabriel begin traveling a familiar terrain: even and smooth landscapes dotted with spare trees. In their travels, Jonas notices “a subtle change” in the landscape, “hard to identify at first” (Lowry 170). There is no sign of human beings, and there is every indication in the text that his journey has been hard and long. Soon “trees become more numerous, and the forests beside the road were dark and thick with mystery” (170). As they

³⁴ Jonas takes Gabriel with him, in a last minute move, in order to save the child from death.

move across the new landscapes, Jonas notices a “waterfall” and is extremely excited to see that which he has not seen before: “wildlife” (171). “After a life of Sameness and predictability, [Jonas] was awed by the surprises that lay beyond each curve of the road” (Lowry 171). However, the “exquisite happiness” is juxtaposed with his “desperate fears” (Lowry 171) of starvation during the flight. By the end of the trek, Jonas encounters the “freezing mound” of “snow,” something only encountered in his newfound memory, something he had never experienced first-hand in a society that survived without weather (177). Jonas treks up a snow-covered hill and worries that they will freeze; but as they get to the top, Jonas begins “suddenly, to feel happy” as he realizes “[i]t would not be uphill anymore” (177). In a sort of magical twist to the final pages of the text, Jonas finds “a special sled that was waiting for them at the top of the hill” (Lowry 178).³⁵ Jonas and Gabriel board the sled and slide down the hill, finally making it to “Elsewhere” the place he knows is teeming with memories, both good and bad, a place that holds “their future and their past” (Lowry 178). Jonas experiences, finally, the “both/and” (Wilson 149). He has reclaimed the place of multiplicity as he has also reclaimed the place of a pronounced melancholia, another kind of complexity, in a society bereft of it. The happiness that Jonas feels, rather than the happiness of “norms and ideals” (Ahmed, “The Happiness Turn” 12) is the happiness of helping his society to facilitate a “refus[al] to invest in the good objects of the nation” (Ahmed, “The Happiness Turn” 12) as well as the

³⁵ This is an adolescent’s novel, after all.

happiness of “the ordinary and difficult labour of living that keeps us open to being startled” (Ahmed, “The Happiness Turn” 12).

The Complication of Complicated Feeling

This chapter began with my desire to answer the question: Why are disabled and/or queer people, still and all, considered abject, excess, or waste? There are many ways in which to answer this question, of course, but the one that makes the most analytical sense has everything to do with feelings and reactions, our affective worlds. Why do two girls want to rid the world of another girl, a girl they find disgusting and contaminating? Because she is disabled, her body an affront to able-bodied and heterosexual norms? Why is a society so afraid to feel anything at all, so afraid of difference, that they would excise underperforming children and citizens, and kill one of two identical twins? One answer lies in thinking about how affective response creates particular effects, or in Quayson’s terms “aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson 15). “Child’s Play” and *The Giver* are particularly worried about intimacies: encounters with “others” that have the potential to transform or disrupt everyday life. Marlene and Verna, for example, have a kind of intimacy that Marlene cannot stand: “We had an understanding between us that could not be described and was not to be disposed of. Something that clings, in the way of love, though on my side it felt like hate” (Munro 211). Marlene’s observation suggests that the connection she and Verna have cannot be relinquished, even as it is undesired. The two are bonded by the “hegemonic

femininity” (Batacharya 63) relationship that cleaves around the desire/disgust dynamic. The manifestation of “aesthetic collapse” (Quayson 25), disgust and fear of contagion, in particular in “Child’s Play,” leads to disastrous results for the forgotten “other” where empathy is eschewed for destruction. *The Giver*’s society’s use of euthanasia to dispel the potential for “aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson 15) in confronting an “other,” an intimate moment that could definitely be fraught and unpredictable, creates a society that is actually worse off for its loss. Grief or the recognition of loss cannot occur until Jonas reveals the depthlessness the society has been built upon, through his departure.

From different angles, both texts ask the pressing question: Why have intimacies with the other when the other is so “awful” (Munro 214)? Intimacy is complicated, and it sometimes goes awry. When a “multiplicity of embodied difference” (Shildrick 3) is categorically removed in favour of a more uniform or normalized point of view, as we see in *The Giver*, another kind of grievous loss occurs, the loss of human choice and agency, the loss of the ability to reproduce, physically and socially, bodies and ideas. Those “productive” monsters (Grosz, *Time Travels* 30) that can encourage societies into new and invigorating terrain—and can help those societies reproduce nature, culture and affect *differently* instead of “normally”—are conceded when “hegemonic femininity” (Batacharya 63) and tyrannous bureaucracy rule. The society in *The Giver*, in some ways, is the “Child’s Play” of a dystopic future. If “Child’s Play” presents a scenario where a short-circuit in the face of the other leads to a minute or two when two

girls can “consciously” (Munro 228) keep their “hands on her, on her rubber cap” (Munro 228), *The Giver*’s collective practices become the institutionalization of that short-circuiting, an institutionalization that hopes to quiet “aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson 15) before it can even begin to create collapse. What the society fails to see, though, is the even worse destruction its choices inspire. Confronting collective “aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson 15) around disabled and/or queer bodies and desires and questioning the affective registers that allow for violent short-circuiting in front of these bodies, as we also question social norms and how they are created, reproduced, and staunchly preserved through affect, is important because queer and disabled bodies, too, deserve “a life” (Berlant 286).

CHAPTER THREE

Re-thinking “Normal”: Queering Reproduction and Embracing Monsters

She watched the clouds and stretched her arms behind her into the future. (Larissa Lai, *Salt Fish Girl* 207)

I wish to argue that queerness is not quite here; it is, in the language of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, a potentiality. Alain Badiou refers to that which follows the event as the thing-that-is-not-yet-imagined, and in my estimation queerness too should be understood to have a similar valence. But my turn to this notion of the not-quite-conscious is again indebted to Bloch and his massive three-volume text *The Principle of Hope*. That treatise ... critiques an autonaturalizing temporality that we might call straight time. Straight time tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life. The only futurity promised is that of reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality, the spectacle of the state refurbishing its ranks through overt and subsidized acts of reproduction. (José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* 21-22)

In April of 2008 Thomas Beatie, a transgendered man, and his wife Nancy appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to talk about the fact that Thomas was pregnant. Oprah advertised the “*Oprah Show/ People Magazine* exclusive” (“The Pregnant Man”) quite extensively, emphasizing the shock factor. In the final clip of the preview Oprah asks Thomas and Nancy: “Is the world ready for something like this?” (“The Pregnant Man”) and then the clip fades to black. I bring in Beatie’s story, which first appeared in *The Advocate* magazine in April 2008, in order to examine my chapter’s central theme: queering reproduction and accenting queerly progressive and/or queerly utopian possibilities for disabled and/or queer bodies. Beatie’s example is interesting because of the combination of fascination and disgust that his choice to be a pregnant father triggers. Thomas insists that he

is “a pregnant person” (“The Pregnant Man”), and goes on to say, “being pregnant doesn’t make me feel any more female or feminine ... I am a man. I just happen to be a pregnant man” (“The Pregnant Man”). Beatie’s assertion notwithstanding, the mainstream media, from Larry King to Barbara Walters, in addition to the *Oprah/People* exclusive, were extremely interested in the story specifically because Thomas is male. Such responses to Beatie’s story derive from the belief that Thomas is understood to be doing something “unnatural.” He disrupts normative ideas of femininity, motherhood, and the uses of the male or female body, even though he notes, “it’s not a male or female desire to want to have a child. It’s a human desire” (“The Pregnant Man”).¹ Discomfort with queer desires and queer reproductions, as I outlined in Chapter One and Chapter Two, is amplified here as transgendered sexuality and reproduction enters the fray. This uneasiness works to sensationalize Beatie’s story.²

Before I explore how Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl*, and Mitchell’s *Ladies Sasquatch* begin to offer alternatives to the able-bodied and heterosexual norm, I want to use the example of Thomas Beatie’s pregnancy, and the media flurry

¹ Beatie’s assertion that the “desire to want to have a child” is a “human” one is a profoundly normative utterance. Not all human beings desire having a child and this kind of statement further iterates the cultural norm that physical reproduction is ultimately desirable.

² Recalling my earlier discussion of the expansive way in which I am defining queer: in addition to queer sexuality that refers to subjects who are homosexual, transgendered, or lesbian, I simultaneously use queer in the more political way that sees queer as disrupting norms. The normative background of heterosexuality and able-bodiedness creates monstrous bodies, but this would not be so if queer were the constantly iterated norm.

around it, to discuss in more detail how queering reproduction becomes a possibility when medical technologies are used for queer ends. More than just biological, though, queer reproduction also re-orientes cultural norms. Notwithstanding the queer re-orientations Beatie's case demonstrates, as Muñoz suggests in the epigraph above, queerness is "not quite here" (21). In other words, there is hopefulness about queerness' "potentiality" (Muñoz 21), yet it currently exists in fits and starts. As noted in the Introduction, biological and cultural reproduction can be mobilized for possible queer utopic futures.³ When the "families we choose" (Weston qtd. in Eng 3) become more and more visible and allowable, cultural norms begin to change. My goal in this concluding chapter is to explore creative and queerly utopic alternatives to the heterosexual and able-bodied norm. Later in this chapter, I situate Lai's novel *Salt Fish Girl* and Mitchell's art installation *Ladies Sasquatch* as texts that imagine disabled and/or queer futures where "queerness as collectivity" (Muñoz 11) is foregrounded. In order for a "multiplicity of embodied difference" (Shildrick 3) to have a chance of manifesting it is necessary that the ability to live "a life" (Berlant 286) is a possibility for everyone, not only for those who adhere to bodily and/or relational norms. *Salt Fish Girl* and *Ladies Sasquatch* question what is considered "normal" and, I suggest, generate intriguing re-directions in the designation, sometimes altering or obliterating it altogether. These texts offer non-proscriptive examples of queer futures as they concurrently speak back to the heteronormative and able-

³ See p. 45-51, "Leaning Toward Community: Alternative Visions."

bodied stories that have become standard, and even ideal, in the social sphere. Before analyzing these texts, I want to briefly unpack what Thomas Beatie's pregnancy tells us about queer reproduction, both biologically and culturally.

“I used my female reproductive organs to become a father”⁴: Desire's Fear and Moving Toward Queer Reproduction

Thomas Beatie, Nancy, and the multiple and varied responses that attend Thomas's pregnancies (after Thomas gave birth successfully to baby Susan, he became pregnant again) suggests that there are possibilities and limits within the available scripts in which to “give an account of oneself” (Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* 7). If, when telling one's story the “I” that “start[s] with itself” quickly finds out “that this self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration” (Butler, *Giving An Account of Oneself* 7-8), the storyteller meets her/his limit. Butler argues that this inability to easily tell one's story is interrupted by the fact that “the ‘I’ has no story of its own that is not also a story of relation—or a set of relations—to a set of norms” (*Giving An Account of Oneself* 8). Beatie *wants* to represent himself simply as a “pregnant person” (“The Pregnant Man”), without much fanfare. He does this, seemingly conflictingly, on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, one of the most popular television programs in the world. The culture around him, though, does not read

⁴ Thomas Beatie says this in his interview with Barbara Walters (Beatie qtd. in Raezler). The phrase complicates normative impressions of parenting and gender. It also queers normative assumptions of gender roles, parenting, and giving birth (Raezler).

his body in the same dispassionate way. Beatie’s experience, so scrutinized and dissected, is a representative example of the way in which the heteronormative culture offers multiple and oftentimes conflicting storylines around family life. Beatie’s story is centered on getting the facts “straight” around hormones, anatomy, and gender identification. Concurrently, Thomas and Nancy’s relationship is viewed as “abnormal,” even though they exist as “man and wife” (Beatie, Interview with King). While Beatie may desire to “give his account,” it is obvious that the bodily norms (i.e. “what is a body?” [*Examined Life*]) that dictate the culture intersect, and interrupt, its easily telling. Beatie’s story exists at the complex intersection of discourses that surround reproduction in our culture: physiology meets desire; technological advance meets heteronormative social scripts. Queer reproduction—and Beatie’s story is an example—*begins to* offer “queer slants” (Ahmed, “Orientations” 560) in an able-bodied and heteronormative world.⁵

Beatie’s pregnancy becomes a compelling site in which to examine the complex storylines that frame reproduction in contemporary North American culture. It helps us to re-think the “normal” body, track affective responses to the “other,” and frame the social contexts of queerness. Abiding or not abiding by stereotypical familial timelines and lifelines become ways in which bodies get shaped as “normal” or “abnormal”—where “growing up” happens when “reproduction is achieved” (Bond Stockton 11). Heterosexuality is thus

⁵ Remember the mourning process Adah experiences when she loses her slant in *The Poisonwood Bible*.

represented *as* the norm. Ahmed talks about “queer effects” (*Queer Phenomenology* 174), which are created when queer bodies exist against a backdrop of the heteronormative lifeline. Like the dissonance “between foreground and background” that Garland-Thomson argues is essential for understanding why the disabled body is perceived as monstrous (*Staring* 166), it is the fact that bodies are guided into “‘support[ing]’ straight lines” (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 174) that ultimately creates “queer effects” (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 174) when queer bodies emerge against a heterosexual “frame” (Butler, *Frames of War* 5; Quayson 18; Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 21). Queer bodies that appear in the social field “[risk] departure from the straight and narrow” (Ahmed, “Orientations” 554) and “follow a line” (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 16) that opposes the heterosexual one. Beatie’s somewhat ambivalent response to the sensationalism his story incites seems to produce “queer effects” (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 174). He is strikingly confident about his subjectivity and his position, at least in media representations. As I mentioned earlier, the *Oprah* interview, interestingly, is absorbed with getting “the facts” of Beatie’s pregnancy: what kinds of reproductive organs Thomas has, how he was inseminated. Queer affective life is gestured to, but mostly left out. Even so, Beatie brings a “queer subcultural form” (Cvetkovich, “Public Feelings” 466) into popular purview where the queer affective lives of love and desire are usually hidden or unrepresented. I suggest that Beatie’s encounter with the media spotlight, albeit sensationalized, begins to create “queer effects” (Ahmed, *Queer*

Phenomenology 174) in a heteronormative field, one of the first steps towards positive social change.

Queer reproduction is mobilized in several ways through Thomas Beatie's case. I began to explore the biological facets of queer reproduction in the Introduction. Noting the "normalization processes embedded within fertility and infertility medicine" (227), Mamo argues that there is an:

embedded discrimination by defining and classifying a normative (i.e. heterosexual) infertility user, constructing "normal" treatment options (those targeting biophysiological infertility) and applying standard protocols of care. (227)

Tellingly, the normative family is always already the heterosexual one (227). We might question here: what are "normal" treatment options? what are "standard protocols of care"? Within a technology that is remarkably neutral (i.e. procedures simply "do" something to the body) there are coded relations of who can or should be using reproductive assisting technologies and who should not. Especially problematic is the notion of "standard" medical treatment, when standard essentially translates into heterosexual and able-bodied. For example, Beatie notes that when looking for an OB-GYN to support his pregnancy process, "We've had a really hard time finding doctors to treat us and to help us get pregnant. We got rejected by our first doctor because he said that his staff felt uncomfortable working with someone like me" ("The Pregnant Man"). Finally, the Beaties were able to find a doctor. Thomas's doctor, appearing on *Oprah*, explained the reason the Beaties had such difficulty finding biomedical support: Thomas's pregnancy presents a "challenge to your thinking of what is normal,"

she says (“The Pregnant Man”). The Beaties’ biomedical process animates a social anxiety around the “othered” body as well as is an example of how ideological “norms” have oppressive consequences for those deemed “abnormal.”

Thinking about the ways in which the notion of the “family” is re-configured when disability and/or queerness enter the “frame” (Butler, *Frames of War* 5; Quayson 18; Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 21) is important for considering queer cultural reproduction. Alternative kinship relations take a variety of forms—including lesbian, gay, and transgendered configurations—and in Beatie’s instance, dualistic definitions of gender and sexuality are disintegrated, as well as the idea of the “natural” heteronormative family. Questions of legitimacy and authenticity arise when the queer family is not perceptible as a “true” family. Mamo argues that in queered kinship relations, “chosen ‘families’ combine people and forms of social connection in a variety of ways” (Mamo 94-5). Like the lesbian families that Mamo talks about, Thomas and Nancy Beatie do the work of queering kinship relations and familial ties. Beatie continually emphasizes that their family is based on love: “Different is normal and love makes a family” (“The Pregnant Man”).⁶ The child that the queer couple produces thus becomes a part of a new system of relationality, a different system of “family” that is yet to

⁶ Beatie’s comment here can also be read as fitting into the dominant social script in our culture around couplehood and reproduction: love needing to be the dominant currency, and Thomas and Nancy’s knowledge/desire to fit into this norm.

be fully legitimized or normalized.⁷ The Beaties, by virtue of their transgendered pregnancy, and the mainstream media circus their story perpetuates, fit into the heteronormative “illegitimate family” category even as they staunchly repeat that they are “a normal couple” when asked about their relationship (“The Pregnant Man”). The fact that the pregnancy is “big news” discussed on *Oprah*, though, and on many other mainstream news programs, points to the fact that they are in fact not “normal,” as much as they might wish they were. The push to perform their own normalcy suggests that rather than *being* normal they must *insist* that they are. This performance of normalcy emphasizes the tension that exists for certain bodies that desire the privileges of normative interaction and yet do not seamlessly fit into those dynamics. Furthermore, there may be a certain appeal for the Beaties to proclaim their normality, while also reveling in the attention they receive for telling their story on international television—an occasion afforded to them because of their “abnormality.” Again, the Beatie’s find themselves up against “a set of norms” (Butler, *Giving An Account of Oneself* 8) that interrupts their narrative.

⁷ Mamo argues in the conclusion of her book, although nothing within biology demands the cultural nuclear family form, in the United States today it is this family that represents social order, idealized kinship, and legitimate citizenship ... In refusing to honor normative kinship arrangements, not only do queer reproducers defy cultural ideals, but they can also be read as holding possibilities for the defiance of the social order and the state. (244)

This defiance does not necessarily depend on clear intentionality, but can work in ambivalent tension with a longing for normality like that expressed by Thomas Beatie.

When discussing his identity and his relationship with his wife, Thomas Beatie repeatedly emphasizes the fact that he is considered male by all the governing bodies: his social insurance number, life insurance plan, work benefits and passport all assert his masculinity (Beatie, Interview with King). Nevertheless, when the Beaties' first child was born, legal problems ensued in direct relation to gender identity. The hospital named Thomas and Nancy "parents" rather than "mother" and "father." Beatie emphasizes that he and Nancy are "not a same-sex couple;" in fact he makes sure to note that they are "legal man and wife" (Beatie, Interview with King). Thus, Thomas should have been deemed "father," and Nancy "mother," though this did not happen right away. Interestingly, then, there is a dynamic interplay between being "normal" and being "abnormal" at work in the Beaties' circumstance. Regarding same-sex marriage, Butler argues that "sexuality is already thought of in terms of marriage and marriage is already thought of as the purchase on legitimacy" (*Undoing Gender* 106). Thomas and Nancy articulate the desire to fit into this "legitimate" family form. Butler wonders if there is a place to exist "that is neither legitimate or illegitimate" (*Undoing Gender* 107). This "neither" space might become a substitute for the strict heteronormative marriage model that the Beaties strive to exemplify, even in their queerness. The fact that Thomas and Nancy must account for their normality, when no "natural" heterosexual couple must, means that the declaration of normality is really a spoken declaration of difference. In this case, even though Thomas and Nancy are not considered a "natural" heterosexual

couple, they still desire legitimation as such, and by extension, the privilege of not having to declare their normality. Can we perform or speak normality into being as Thomas and Nancy seem to be attempting to do?

The “pregnant man” classification instantiates two different perspectives regarding normality and legitimacy. On the one hand, Beatie is stating that he is a “legitimate” man, he is in a “normal” relationship, and his family is very stereotypical. On the other hand, the ways in which Beatie’s pregnancy is dissected by the culture suggests a deep questioning of the validity of the claim of “normal.” Beatie recounts something his brother said to him upon hearing that the first of his pregnancies was non-viable: “It’s a good thing [miscarriage] happened, because [the baby] could have been a monster” (“The Pregnant Man”). This sentiment conjures disgust around the apparent illicitness of Beatie’s reproductive desire. Further, the idea that the child of a transgendered man will end up being a monster gestures to a parent’s location of legitimacy or illegitimacy and interrupts—even before the fact, and always—the legitimacy of the unborn baby. What is “natural” comes into play here, as does the value of the baby based on the parent’s sexuality. Even though “reproduction without sex” (Mamo 225) can and does happen and does shift the terms of biological reproduction, these reproductions are still coded through able-bodied and heteronormative categories of privilege.

It is understandable that Thomas and Nancy want to be seen as “normal.” All of the privilege is caught up in the heteronormative relation, “[E]veryone must

let you into the door of the hospital; everyone must honor your claim to grief; everyone will assume your natural rights to a child; everyone will regard your relationship as elevated into eternity” (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 111). Thinking about configurations of queer reproduction and queer kinship, though, is important for people who want to experience the bodily and relational ease that exists for able-bodied and heterosexual people, to fit into an idea of the “norm.”⁸ Butler notes that for gay people to be legitimized by marriage, “is to displace the site of delegitimation from one part of the queer community to another or, rather, to transform a collective delegitimation into a selective one” (*Undoing Gender* 115). If gay people are finally seen to be acceptable through marriage, Butler asks, what about all those others who are not married (*Undoing Gender* 115)? For Mamo, queering means “subverting a norm,” and these norms shifting are “productive of social change” (243). Looking at the ways in which norms shift continues to be an important job fraught with irresolution and hope for a better future. Mainstream media’s difficulty in pinpointing the affective register⁹ of the

⁸ For many queer people, fitting into the “norm” is not a desire or a goal. As Judith Halberstam argues, “heteronormativity casts a long shadow and queer peoples are happy to live in that shadow” because “in the light it is just heteronormative” (“From Shadow Feminisms to Gaga Femininities”).

⁹ I do not think that the mainstream media necessarily understands that there are various storylines being offered regarding the Beatie’s story. There is no small part of confusion on the part of broadcasters and interviewers who are trying to figure out the “facts” of this reproduction as well as being a part of wanting to find ways of entering the story into the dominant social scripts of reproduction, love, family, and even heterosexuality. There is, too, the element of sensationalism, as I previously mentioned. The Beaties’ desire to be viewed as “normal” also instigates these difficulties in affective registering.

Beaties' story plays into the fact that there are no clear-cut answers here: norms shift based on the regulation of desire and disgust, political correctness, notions of "tolerance," and the liberal predilection for encouraging "difference" in the popular sphere.

Thomas and Nancy articulate that they would "rather tell the story than have it publicized for us" ("The Pregnant Man"), because of the intolerance that definitively arises. The implication that self-disclosure guarantees the production of an autonomous truth obviously fails to consider the myriad social scripts around gender and sexuality that constrain the story's telling. At the same time, the Beaties' story, in all its rhetorical awkwardness and contradictory significations, participates in the complex task of constructing alternatives to the able-bodied and heteronormative family. Queer reproduction re-claims futuristic timelines that are solely focused on able-bodied and heteronormative reproductions, as it also subverts the eugenicist tendencies of biomedical technologies that re-inscribe the norm (as noted in Chapter One). A queerly utopic future is one that allows for an inclusive community that works to open up options for everyone regardless of whether they are "normal" in any of that word's interpretations. Yes, this queer future is, as Muñoz states, always on the "horizon" (32), but it begins, always and already, in "present moment"

representations of queerness (Muñoz 22-3), something that Thomas and Nancy, however imperfectly, perform.¹⁰

The remainder of this chapter will analyze *Salt Fish Girl* and *Ladies Sasquatch* in order to show and suggest alternative models of future relatedness, social transformation, and new reproductions of physical and social bodies. Both texts are situated, at least in part, in future scenarios, and allow for queer ways of reacting and responding to the “other” as they offer non-proscriptive proposals of sorts for models of community and relationship. Both texts suggest a “radical social transformation” (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 129) by “imagining bodies and desires otherwise” in “other worlds and futures” (McRuer 32; 208). These cultural texts imagine communities or “counterpublics” (Cvetkovich, *An Archive* 15) where creative visions of “a life” (Berlant 286) can unfold. “Queer culture,”

¹⁰ A very interesting addendum to thinking about queer utopia, queerness as “horizon” (Muñoz 32) and queer futures is the “It Gets Better Project” that originated after the suicides of several LGBTQ youth received intensive media coverage in the United States (Savage). Dan Savage, prominent sex columnist and gay activist, started the online video project by creating its first video (with his partner) that told LGBTQ youth that “it gets better.” In only 3 months, the project “has turned into a worldwide movement, inspiring over 5000 user-created videos and over 15 million views” (Savage). Overtly referencing the future in its evocative name, the project is an amalgamation of video messages to LGBTQ youth from queer adults, celebrities, politicians and everyday people. The overall goal of the project is to tell LGBTQ youth that their queer lives are valuable and that despite the bullying they may be experiencing, their lives will in fact “get better” (Savage Love). The criticism of the “It Gets Better Project” suggests the project is another “normalizing” avenue for unconventional bodies and expressions. A post on the blog “Queer to the Power of” argues that, “we do not need a gay mainstream, a homonormative that we cannot achieve whether by body or creed or gender.” The author of this blog also suggests that “It Gets Better” “is potentially as dangerous as all the mean schoolmates in the world” (“Call to Action”). Deciding whether or not to offer role models for queer youth (and if so, what kinds of role models) is a fraught subject.

Berlant and Warner argue, is “a world-making project” (558) where the easy flow of heteronormativity’s reproduction is renounced. In particular, “the queer world is a space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternative routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies” (Berlant and Warner 558). A normative public “has founded itself by a privatization of sex and the sexualization of private personhood” (Berlant and Warner 559), whereas a queer counterpublic is a stickier space that “elaborat[es] a public world of belonging and transformation” (Berlant and Warner 558). While the “truth” of relationality is not as clearly dichotomous as Berlant and Warner suggest, there are definitely different possibilities apparent in public and counterpublics spaces. I discuss the counterpublic and community based potentials of *Salt Fish Girl* and *Ladies Sasquatch* in the sections that follow. *Salt Fish Girl* and *Ladies Sasquatch*, as fictional and artistic texts, are able imaginatively to push the boundaries in a different and freer way than the Beaties can, working to make the category of “normal” no longer exclusive or entirely workable. Perhaps queer affective life can become “more complexly visible” (Cvetkovich, “Public Feelings” 466), moving away from the sensational approach. How might such a queer future engender spaces where everyone is legitimate?

Salt Fish Girl: Queering Reproduction and Re-Thinking the Future

Larissa Lai's 2002 novel *Salt Fish Girl* exists within the science fiction genre. Half of the text imagines a biotechnological future world full of utopic and dystopic scenarios and possibilities. This half of the novel takes place between 2044 and 2062 in a world where biotechnology has run amok, social segregation is stark, and female clones work in shoe-making factories. Lai's text subverts the stereotypical science fiction genre in that half of the narrative exists in the past, beginning with the Pre-Shang dynasty in 1050 BCE moving into the late 1800s. Usually, science fiction is "free of the burden of the past" and "its primary orientation ... is towards the future" (Freedman 58). Lai shifts back and forth between the two narratives and two sets of characters who are intrinsically connected through time: the stories of Pre-Shang Nu Wa and futuristic Miranda Ching. The ways in which past and future temporalities are mobilized together, and in fact come together in many ways throughout the novel (in that the relationship between Evie and Miranda echoes the earlier relationship of Nu Wa and the salt fish girl), suggests a temporality reminiscent of the backward/forward time that exemplifies the queer-progress I outlined in Chapter One.

The criticism on *Salt Fish Girl* has centered upon tracking mythologies of the future, the role of biotechnology in the fictional future world, and the racialized position of the clones in the text. In "Stinky Bodies: Mythological Futures and the Olfactory Sense in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*," Paul Lai argues that *Salt Fish Girl* presents "alternative histories of the future" as it "allow[s] a productive reconsidering of genres and embodied olfactory knowledge" (167).

He pursues this line of inquiry by noting that the novel's dual narrative structure works to "challenge conceptions of science fiction that privilege a version of Western modernity in which scientific progress and rational thought occlude all other possible modernities and genealogies" (167). The very disjointedness of timelines in *Salt Fish Girl* underlies the other subversive qualities of the text, namely the queer reproduction that I follow up in this chapter. Paul Lai articulates how "the interrelatedness of humans with other animals, plants, and mythological beings" (168) surfaces in the text and argues that "a fishy genealogy of the mythological future that fuses disparate tales of beginning and births" is in operation in the novel (171). I extend Paul Lai's nuanced and comprehensive analysis of *Salt Fish Girl* in several ways. Most centrally, I broaden Paul Lai's discussion of the ways in which Larissa Lai unsettles myth through her dual-timed narrative, and in so doing, I suggest, Lai begins to write another future into being, one with queer-utopic elements that describes a kind of counterpublic sphere for queers. Tara Lee discusses biotechnology's role in *Salt Fish Girl's* futuristic gated city of Serendipity, where,

corporate interests run the world to such an extent that they have permeated the genetic makeup of society. Serendipity of 2044 is a place where bodies are vulnerable to the interventions of science ... and where the divisions between humans, animals, and machines have been all but dissolved by the work of biotechnology (Lee 94).

Lee's argument is interesting in that she focuses on biotechnology's ability to "push the limits of what is possible for the body" (Lee 100). Lee considers the contradictions within the cyborg position as demonstrated in Lai's novel. For

example, Lee argues that some of the cloned Sonias are “empty” (Lee) and unresponsive while others resist their subjugated circumstances. I focus specifically on how the cloned Sonias mobilize queer reproduction and replication in order to resist “the interventions of science” (Lee 94) in their attempts to subvert the oppressive system that created them.

Connections between racialized discrimination, queer intolerance and prejudice against genetically modified bodies are prevalent in *Salt Fish Girl*. In “What Does It Mean to Be Human?: Racing Monsters, Clones and Replicants,” Robyn Morris argues that *Salt Fish Girl* sees the “contestation of the visual designation of otherness by and at the level of the skin” (82). She further argues that “*Salt Fish Girl* functions as both an interrogation and a redefinition of conceptual paradigms that contain difference to otherness and equate humanness with a singularized white, western heterosexual male selfhood” (82). Morris’s argument comes from a critical races studies perspective that equates the cloned Sonias of Lai’s text with contemporary racialized others. Morris’s interpretation problematizes what it means to be human and how racialized people are given less-than-human status. I suggest that Lai offers a queer reproductive capacity as a central theme which functions to re-write the widely pervasive cultural story that says that white, male, heterosexual, and able bodies equate with the “human.” My reading of *Salt Fish Girl* traces the places where Lai portrays alternatives to that one kind of “human.” *Salt Fish Girl* uses a queer paradigm (embodied by Miranda and Evie’s queer pregnancy and the Sonias’ collective, both of which I

detail below) to imagine a world where disabled, queer, and racialized bodies are worthy bodies.

I read *Salt Fish Girl* as re-thinking and re-imagining origin stories and reproduction stories. The novel begins with a re-working of the genesis creation myth in Nu Wa's past storyline, and ends in the futuristic timeframe with the birth of a baby girl of lesbian parents and durian fruit reproduction. *Salt Fish Girl* does the complicated and magical work of imagining a future where queers reproduce without the need for any kind of heterosexual involvement. In so doing, it subverts the heterosexual norm and restructures the ways in which kinship is imagined. Beyond queering reproduction, which I explore at length in the analysis that follows, *Salt Fish Girl* also offers an analysis of the messiness of the combination of bodies and biotechnology, revealing the destructive consequences of the medicalization of bodies. Several of the characters have an unnamed disease that exists, in part, as an offshoot from quirky biotechnical advances, "It hasn't got an official name. It hasn't got official anything. None of the corporations want to acknowledge it. But some call it the dreaming disease, or the drowning disease" (Lai 100). Like Jonas' role as his society's living and embodied "memory" in *The Giver*, the "dreaming disease" in *Salt Fish Girl* (Lai 100) demonstrates that bodies themselves act as vessels for remembering past abuses leveled against them. The disease also exists as part of the connectivity where the people of the future are linked to experiences of the past, further forging the alliance between the text's two narratives. Thus the disease, and by

extension the body itself, acts a kind of memory system in a future society that wants to forget its mistakes (Lai 102). Those who can remember past times, or those who desire a different future scenario, seem to be the ones who have acquired the disease:

I did not understand my condition as a “condition,” nor did I know that there were others in other compounds ... who were afflicted with variations of the same bizarre symptoms, and whose bodies reeked of oranges, or tobacco, or rotten eggs, or cabbage. Or else of silk, of cotton, of coffee, of blood and carnage ... The disease had not yet reached the point of epidemic ... Its sufferers had not yet begun their compulsive march into the rivers and oceans, unable to resist the water’s pull. (70-1)

For some of its sufferers, the disease manifests an almost-melancholic remembrance of life before corporations took over and human policing became the norm. In the section that follows I focus on the way in which *Salt Fish Girl* offers examples of queer reproduction, but I concurrently insinuate here that the text acknowledges that bodies break down in relation to stereotypical notions of progress. The complexity of impulses in the narrative—including the dream of a future solidarity—comes about, in part, due to the violence against bodies and the illnesses that they suffer. Diseased bodies in *Salt Fish Girl* reveal the ambiguous implications and outcomes of technology and what it does and can reproduce.

Miranda and Evie engage in a queer relationship throughout the futuristic narrative. Lai skillfully makes suggestions that link Miranda and Evie’s¹¹ relationship with the relationship between Nu Wa and the Salt Fish Girl from the

¹¹ We find out halfway through the novel that Evie is one the “Sonias.” Evie is a pseudonym.

sections of the novel that take place in the deep past. Both narratives intertwine queer subjectivity with suggestively queer—almost mythological, and definitely imaginative—reproductive practices. Miranda and Evie’s queer desire leads to queered procreation; Nu Wa and the salt fish girl of the past are connected to this queer origin story and queer future by way of the fact that the temporality they exist within is itself queer. That which takes place in the past is connected with the story that exists in the future. For instance, Nu Wa re-appears in the future storyline, even though she has not aged a bit. Watching her mother swim in the water that suggests procreative life, Nu Wa thinks: “She watched the clouds and stretched her arms behind her into the future,” a line indicative of the queer timeline of the book (Lai 207).¹²

Near the end of *Salt Fish Girl* much of the complicatedness of the novel’s myriad themes and trajectories come together, I argue, in several important passages. Miranda gets pregnant after a lovemaking session with Evie, which is significant enough to quote at length:

[Evie’s] fingers moved over my skin, cool and tingly like ice water. I wanted to turn into water myself fall into her the way rain falls into the ocean. I moved through the cool dark with her, my body a single silver muscle slipping against hers ... tumbling through dark towards a blue point in the distance, teeth, lip, nipple, the steel taste of blood, gills gaping open and closed, open and closed, mouth, breath, cool water running piss hot against velvet inner thighs ... Afterwards [Evie’s] body burned, ember red in the blue dark woods. I lay beside her on the rot stick of decaying leaves and needles ... Perhaps it was at this moment that the child took root. (162)

¹² This line also gestures to the backward and forward perspective I discussed in Chapter One.

Before Miranda knows anything about the genetically engineered durian fruit that leads women to reproduce without heterosexual sex and before she even realizes that she *is* pregnant (which happens much after the above quoted passage), the narrator adds in the central and purposeful line above: “Perhaps it was at this moment that the child took root.” This line is meaningful because even if the durian fruit acts as a reproductive and species-mixing catalyst, Miranda’s impregnation occurs at exactly the time of the greatest love between herself and Evie. Lai suggests, then, even in the science-fiction frame and even with the fantastical biotechnological explanation of the durian fruit’s powers, that queer desire can lead to queer reproduction. Interestingly, the fact that the durian fruit is categorically considered “disgusting” by many in the text is countered by the fact that some consider the fruit desirable, as we see in Miranda’s mother. Disgust, then, cannot be entirely understood as negative affect that needs elimination. It is simply strong affect, as essential as (and tangled up in) desire. The queer pregnancy and the existence of this queer child offer a creatively queer alternative to understanding kinship. “Radical social transformation” (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 129) becomes an irrefutable possibility. Beyond the actual physical child that Miranda bears and, at the end of the text, births, Lai’s storyline here offers readers the possibility of thinking about producing and reproducing a queer future where the “multiplicity of embodied difference” (Shildrick 3) is more than just a dream.

The durian fruit that becomes the catalyst for non-heteronormative reproduction exists as a kind of species mixing that helps queer subjects reproduce. In fact, readers learn that “the fruit of certain trees could make women pregnant without any need for insemination” (258). Evie tells Miranda how positive this is because “Painted Horse and Saturna [the human cloning factories] manufacture only women” (258). The other vegetables that the women grow—the cabbages and radishes—“support and strengthen the fetuses” (258). Thus, lesbian and cloned women are able to reproduce through non-heteronormative and highly inter-special means to create “queerness as horizon” (Muñoz 32). Haraway argues that “queer kin group[s]” are possible and even desirable and that it is important to “imagine how alliances might be built” with those who seem unlikely partners: “gods, machines, animals, monsters, creepy crawlies, women, servant and slaves, and noncitizens in general” (*When Species Meet* 10-11). Lai adds fruit to this list, and I think Haraway would be happy with this addition. Once Miranda realizes that the durian fruit can impregnate women without heterosexual sex, she is stunned and curious. She asks Evie how the trees bearing this fruit came to be, and Evie answers: “They were implanting human genes into fruit as a fertility therapy for women who could not conceive. And of course the pollen blew every which way and could not be contained. ... Perhaps some natural mutations were also involved” (258). Lai’s suggestion that reproduction can happen outside of heteronormative relations and even outside of heteronormative means (i.e. no sperm) offers wondrous possibilities for imagining

alternative familial and kinship relationships, a “horizon” (Muñoz 32) world where queer desire is valuable and preferable, even if, in this case, it is fantastical.

Lai’s queer narratives in *Salt Fish Girl* make the text an exemplary example of an imagined alternative community, one that operates on desire and queer intimacy rather than conventional social norms. I suspect that it is this kind of queer community that Thomas and Nancy Beatie are seeking to manifest in their own real-life world, despite the difficulties they encounter in doing so. In *Salt Fish Girl*, Miranda finds out by the end of the text that the Sonias¹³ are a deeply subversive group of women who “were building a free society of their own kind from the ground up” (256). The Sonias use the durian fruit for reproduction, in an attempt to construct a solidarity large enough to free themselves from corporate control and bodily oppression. It is clear that Dr. Flowers and others in the futuristic community consider the Sonias “not human” and, therefore, as monsters that must be controlled. The only way the Sonias can gain some agency or control over their own lives and bodies is to begin to reproduce themselves and create their own queer kin group (Lai 256). The Sonias’ subversive solidarity is important because, as Morris argues, “the Sonias are coded as “other” not simply

¹³ There are hundreds of Sonias, made by Dr. Flowers in his lab, mostly for factory work. Evie tells Miranda the news: “My genes are point zero three per cent *Cyprinus carpio*—freshwater carp. I’m a patented new fucking life form.” Evie also admits that is “just about” illegal to be a clone, but it is not illegal to “mak[e] them” which raises the specter of illegal aliens, illegal immigrants, and lots of others ways in which people are seen to be not legitimate (158). The contemporary example of the activist group, “No One Is Illegal,” is a real-life example of efforts to interrogate and renovate the terms that determine who has the ability to exist peaceably and well in a society, without government sanction.

by their multitudinous solidarity, their motherless birth, their slave status, or even their human/fish genes, but by their dark hair and eyes” (83). This conglomeration of oppressions situates the Sonias’ desire to resist. I argue that the Sonias, in their resistance, form a counterpublic sphere.

Fraser argues that counterpublic spheres perform two roles. One, they act as spaces of “withdrawal and regroupment” (211), and two, they “function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics” (211). On both counts, the Sonias achieve these goals. They find a way to escape Dr. Flowers’ control and they perform subversive actions in the hopes of changing oppressive social structures. Once Miranda finds out about the solidarity, realizes that she herself is pregnant, *and* remembers that her mother ate a durian before she became pregnant with Miranda, she includes herself in the Sonias’ solidarity group: “[W]e are the new children of the earth, of the earth’s revenge ... By our difference we mark how ancient the alphabet of our bodies. By our strangeness we write our bodies into the future” (259). By evoking the “ancient” “alphabet of our bodies,” Miranda gestures to the past, the queer origin story that the novel is based upon. By writing “bodies into the future” we understand that it is through corporeality that a queer counterpublic directs queerness into the future. Again, a backward/forward temporality grounds *Salt Fish Girl’s* queer potential.

Genetically modified food technology has been connected to monstrosity since it appeared on the scene in the early 1990s. GMOs raise the questions: what

kinds of nature, food, animals, and places are fit for human consumption? if monsters are sustainable, how might this rewrite natural selection? which kinds of monsters are productive and not frightening? Thinking about genetically modified monster fruit is important here because the durian fruit in *Salt Fish Girl* has effects that move well beyond the scientific lab and suggests that the modification of “natural” items does not preclude side effects. Elizabeth Grosz’s chapter in *Time Travels*, “The Nature of Culture,” does interesting work to refashion the nature/culture binary, the one where culture is always in power and an active force, and nature is ever silent, subsidiary, and controllable. Grosz offers an understanding of culture that is explicitly linked to the natural and the biological, to the ways in which “nature does not contain culture but induces it to vary itself, to evolve, to develop and transform in ways that are not predictable in advance” (*Time Travels* 44), as I mentioned in Chapter One. For Grosz, “the natural is the repressed or unacknowledged condition of all cultural forms and the reason they vary from each other and from themselves” (*Time Travels* 44). Biological nature and the discourse of nature need to be understood not as the underbelly of culture, but in fact culture’s transformative inspiration. In *Salt Fish Girl*, nature “run amok” actually helps to create a feminist solidarity.

The ways that nature itself—as object of knowledge and as biology—and nature as animals, foodstuffs, and landscape correspond to abjection is crucial for an understanding of multitudinous monstrosity. Jill Didur, in “Re-Embodying Technoscientific Fantasies: Posthumanism, Genetically Modified Foods, and the

Colonization of Life,” argues that genetically modified foods (similar, rhetorically and biologically, to “genetically modified humans”) are marketed in such a way that “nature” is imagined as needing to move toward a state of “perfection.” This perfectionism, though, may hold wildly monstrous effects: the “stakes of high-tech genetic engineering” can be disastrous (Didur 100). For example, it is

the treatment of genetic material as disembodied information that legitimates the patenting and marketing of genetically modified plants and underpins biotech companies’ claims that their genetically modified products are no different than other crops that have been genetically modified in nature and by plant breeders. (104)

It is this sticky area regarding what *counts as* modification that troubles Didur. What happens when the non-genetically modified plant, animal, or human is viewed in the face of the genetically modified one? Two things: 1) monstrosity takes on its stereotypic role of destructibility in public discourse, against the purity of “natural” forms of life or 2) “regular” bodies and “typical” or conventional nature are eschewed for the perfected versions of the same. Didur, like Grosz, breaks down the nature/culture divide to reveal a world where they are inextricably entwined, in projects and assemblages whose social value cannot be determined by appealing to either extreme. As Haraway argues, the promises of monsters can only be unpredictable (“Promises” 326). In what can solely be a deliberately tricky playing on legitimate fears about out-of-control genetic crops, Lai’s novel describes how the Sonias use genetically modified by-products—“the pollen blew in every which way and could not be contained” (Lai 258)—to create

their monstrous communal group. This group, I argue, is a positive effect of an intentionally oppressive technology.¹⁴

With this discussion of nature and culture in mind, I ask: how can the “other” abide and hold space in counterpublic spheres so that disabled and/or queer bodies thrive? does a “perfect” humanity and anthropocentrism in regards to “nature” go hand in hand? what does Lai’s durian fruit suggest, then? Particularly ambivalent, the fruit creates “the dreaming disease” (Lai 100), the illness that afflicts Miranda and so many others. On the other hand, the fruit allows queer reproduction, outside of heterosexual intercourse. This is a queer utopia that has side effects, and no clear answers. The Sonias subvert technology in order to create their own solidarity and reproduce into a different future, a utopic future that “includes,” as Cvetkovich suggests, “hardship and violence and that offers strategies for survival” (“Public Feelings” 467). Morris argues, “Lai accords the Sonias a measure of power and autonomy through the control of their own reproductive capacities and their ability to live independently” (90). This power and autonomy is important because the Sonias are highly oppressed women who use what is available to them to attempt to create a new world. Similar to the

¹⁴ The durian fruit storyline, and genetically modified fruit more generally in *Salt Fish Girl*, are good examples of the ambiguous nature of biotechnology. The technology exists and *particular applications* of the technology create effects that are either considered positive or negative, depending on who is asked. In the case of the Sonias, they use the already existing technology to subvert their own subordination. They do so under duress and constant worry over being found out. The “frightening” monsters are those that oppress parts of the society and have implications that are disastrous for bodies and health. The monsters that challenge oppressions are those who have taken the technology and use it to form alliances with all sorts of “others” (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 10).

strange and “abnormal” bodies and reproductive capacities of the *Ladies Sasquatch*, which I expand upon below, the Sonias and those others produced through durian fruit reproduction, move from a past and into a future where difference and strangeness are the important and necessary parts of an origin story and a future story. Queer counterpublicity is created with queer intention and by using what is available or reachable in the social field for “queer effect” (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 174).

By the end of the novel, Miranda and Evie run away in an attempt to find refuge from Dr. Flowers and the other authorities that are trying to hunt them down. As the last pages of the novel unfold, Evie brings Miranda to the aquarium where the fish that is her “mother” can be found (the 0.03 percent carp), and then to one of Flowers’ labs where they, surprisingly, find the first cloned men “all fast asleep” (Lai 266). They see the “fridges where all the DNA was kept, the vials of fertilized and unfertilized eggs” (268). Miranda is intrigued and afraid of all that she sees. Fearing capture, the two hurry out of the lab and into a mountainous region. “[C]old and scared,” Miranda and Evie stumble on a “hot spring” (Lai 269) and find their place of refuge. The hot spring becomes the place where Miranda gives birth to the baby she has been carrying since she and Evie made love:

My body heaved and contracted. Blood streamed into the water, staining it. I howled with the pain of womb spasming deeply, and then a dark head emerged six inches below my navel, from an opening in my scaly new flesh. The head had a wrinkled human face. Evie reached under water, guided the thing out, black-haired and bawling, a little baby girl. (269)

The baby born out of queer love and genetically modified fruit ends Lai's text, a kind of subversion of the stereotypical birth scene at the end of a novel, play or film. Instead of the stock storyline ending with the birth of a child and the reproduction of the heterosexual family, this queer birth allows for a queer story to become both origin story and future story. A human-clone girl child ends the novel and begins a new story where difference is celebrated and acknowledged. A queer origin story begins *Salt Fish Girl* (in Nu Wa's creation myth past) and a queer origin story ends *Salt Fish Girl* (with a queer girl child for the future). Both strains of this queer community-making are important for alternative understanding of bodies and sexualities to emerge. Rather than Edelman's "no future" (13) declaration, Lai's positioning of the child born of queer reproduction offers a replacement reproduction story in lieu of the dominant heteronormative one. The monstrous community of the *Ladies Sasquatch*, which I focus on to follow, is the artistic embodiment of counterpublic queer space, a group with queerly-utopic intentions, but no clear trajectory.

Ladies Sasquatch: The Monstrous Community (to come)

Opening at McMaster University in January 2009, and then moving on to several other art galleries in Canada through to March 2010, Allyson Mitchell's *Ladies Sasquatch* exhibit consists of six monstrous female lesbian Sasquatch sculptural creations and a plethora of smaller creatures (called familiars) who are placed around the larger monsters (see Appendix One). Appendices Two through

Seven show close-up images of each of the *Ladies Sasquatch*. There is Maxy, the gigantic refrigerator-shaped lady; she is huge and has a peace dove tattoo on her arm. Tawny has her arms outstretched above her head in a lovely roar or scream. Silver Back, one of the first Sasquatches Mitchell made, is a mix of silver, black and white fun fur. Oxana is the teenager of the group and she is “based on a photograph that I found of a feral child” (Mitchell, Personal Interview). Oxana is younger than the rest of the group, “on all fours” (Mitchell, Personal Interview), and her ass is positioned—genitals exposed—to directly coincide with the entrance of the gallery. Oxana’s ass and genital area becomes the exhibit viewer’s first encounter and it compels involvement. Bunny is tall and huge and has a blond wig. Her mouth is open in a roar and she has luscious butt-cheeks. Midge is squatting down—“in mid-charge” (Mitchell, Personal Interview) and on a different eye level, “I did make two of the sasquatches shorter partly because I wanted to explore different body positions and I wanted them to be engaged with the audience” (Mitchell, Personal Interview). Mitchell says, “I made Midge so that she is eye-level with the average male height. She is confrontational and she is looking at the person who is looking at her ... she’s looking back” (Mitchell, Personal Interview). The *Ladies* are surrounded by various pink creatures called familiars who “also make contact in a way that the tall sasquatches do not” (Mitchell, Personal Interview).

Furthermore, the *Ladies Sasquatch*, as evidenced in Appendix One, are arranged in a circle facing one another, their faces appear to be in mid-roar or

mid-conversation. The familiars, on the other hand, are facing both inside and outside of the circle, in a kind of protective stance. A fake fireplace is at the center of the group, lighting what appears to be a community “meeting” or conversation. On a material level, Mitchell has constructed the *Ladies* out of a variety of very touchable substances. The predominant component of their composition is “fun-fur”—“also known as fake fur, the artificial version of the real thing, and Mitchell never tries to disguise its synthetic status or shy away from its possible associations with degraded or kitschy materials” (Cvetkovich, “Touching The Monster” 31). Fun fur invites viewers of the installation to touch the sasquatches, a practice that queers stereotypical museum protocol as well as instigates the viewer’s potential entrance into the community of *Ladies* and the familiars (remember the *Ladies* are facing one another and away from viewers). Additionally, the composition of the *Ladies*’ bodies are such that buttocks, breasts, and genitalia are exposed and blatantly provocative. They necessitate active viewer engagement with lesbian and/or monstrous sexuality. Because of the *Ladies*’ suggestive placement and fabrication, there is a queer erotics present in the *Ladies*’ obvious sexualities. The community of the *Ladies Sasquatch* is engaged with the audience in a myriad of ways: huge, confrontational, welcoming, inclusive, exclusive and radically queer.¹⁵

¹⁵ The dynamic between the *Ladies* and the audience is very interesting insofar as the affective responses that the *Ladies* induce vary widely. In the Museum Guide Book for *Ladies Sasquatch*, Ann Cvetkovich argues that the *Ladies* are “both scary and approachable” (“Touching The Monster” 29). I think that since the *Ladies* are art, the aesthetic nervousness that they might/can invoke

The *Ladies Sasquatch* encompasses a queer politics that is necessary for re-thinking “otherness.” They can also be read as an emblematic figural group for re-thinking communities of the future. The politics of the *Ladies Sasquatch* is one that embodies queer strength and well-being. The community is beautiful and scary; fat and smaller sized; old and young; they are stronger as a group than they would be alone; and, in sum, they are symbolic of the kind of community that welcomes a variety of bodies into its fold. They are all of these, but they do not exist only as the dismantling of binaries. The *Ladies Sasquatches*’ power comes in and through all of their multiple and connected subject positions: they are queer; disabled; animal; possibly racialized. They pulse with the attributes of metamorphosis and alchemy. I end this chapter, and this dissertation, with this community of feminist monsters because they do the representational work of imagining communities anew. Furthermore, as an embodied feminist monstrous solidarity, they are the artistic expression of the outcome of the queer reproductions I am discussing. Insofar as the *Ladies Sasquatch* offer us hope for a more inclusive future, and insofar as their bodies produce and reproduce a new political project, I argue that they envelop a “multiplicity of embodied difference” (Shildrick 3) into their community group.

Haraway’s definitive look at the cyborg—a being marked by gender, race, sexuality, class, ability and technology—forms an interesting parallel with the

is tempered by their status as representational. Furthermore, as Garland-Thomson argues, “by staring at figures with extraordinary scales and forms, we become strange to ourselves” (*Staring* 166).

Ladies Sasquatch's monsters. Both are considered "other" by the able-bodied and heterosexual norm and both disrupt this normative "frame" (Butler, *Frames of War* 5; Quayson 18; Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 21). Gretchen Legler draws a distinction between Haraway's cyborg and the more stereotypically feminine notion of the goddess, both of which are mythical narratives. The goddess, different than the cyborg, "erases difference in an attempt to unify" (Legler 72). The goddess is animated by innocence, romanticization, "pure" sexuality, and usually whiteness (Legler 72; see Appendix Nine). The cyborg and the goddess each write the landscape of nature from their specific locations of identity, whether these identities are marked or unmarked, privileged or unprivileged (Legler 72). For the cyborg, writing on the landscape consists of dissonance and discord rather than what is seen to be "natural" (whiteness, maleness) for a "natural" land (romanticized Thoreau-esque landscape) (Legler 72-6). This contestation around which bodies operate in and on a natural landscape takes shape: Haraway's politics of cyborgism as "wary of holism, but needy for connection" becomes central (Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" 477). If cyborg bodies exist in "nature," "nature itself becomes clearly marked as *non-innocent*, as politically and historically determined, as a contested idea" (emphasis added, Legler 84). That Mitchell is suggesting that "ladies" who are "sasquatches" belong on the land—in fact that they are growling and roaring in a sort of reclamation of their place on the land—offers an extension on the cyborg in "nature ... as non-innocent" story (Legler 84). The very presence of the *Ladies*

Sasquatches on the land provokes a re-thinking of that land's exclusivity. It is precisely this kind of political and historical determination, as well as this contestation, that becomes central for an *Ladies Sasquatch* politic.

The *Ladies Sasquatch* exhibit employs a “fake” natural landscape background in the gallery setting. Mitchell notes that the background is important to the larger work because the background's apparent naturalness presents a counterpart to culture. At the same time, the background evokes “histories of colonialism, civilizing projects, and savagery” (Mitchell, Interview with Cvetkovich). Mitchell also mentions,

it seemed like a really logical place to think about bodies outside of culture, to think about them in the wild, even though we know the wild is cultured. ... What would a feral, undomesticated, female sexuality look like? (Personal Interview)

As I mentioned earlier, the *Ladies'* aggressive sexualities greet the installation's viewers, in the first instance. These sexualities intermingle with the “fake” natural setting to invoke an alternative rendering of nature. Nature, then, as a contested space, can act as a productive formulation because placing the *Ladies* in a “fake” natural setting re-writes the logic and legitimacy of that space. We are meant to ask: what are the monstrous ladies doing in a landscape commonly associated with privileged maleness, whiteness, heterosexuality and able-bodiedness? In common legends about the elusive creatures, sasquatches have been hunted and searched for by men, “Bigfoot hunting has been my passion for over forty years. I'm convinced these creatures are out there to be discovered” (Coleman 1). In *Ladies Sasquatch*, Mitchell places the sasquatches in what

appears to be a hidden place in nature—away from those who might cause them harm—yet still accessible to those who abide by Deep Lez politics. We are almost transported into “another world” when we view the piece, where the supernatural is juxtaposed with nature. There is definitely the sense that the *Ladies*’ live in a world that is *both* mystical *and* real, in fact Mitchell argues that the sasquatches and the familiars “form a kind of mythical community” (Personal Interview). At the same time, the *Ladies* are very much present and material in front of viewers. They exist for us in more than a mythical fashion. Their material tangibility grounds a sense that they are “real.”

Correspondingly, Ahmed’s queer formulation of “orientations” works as another interpretive tool by which I consider the installation. Ahmed notes “spaces are oriented toward the straight body, which allows that body to extend into space” (“Orientations” 549). Queering a natural space through the *Ladies Sasquatch* works to bring about a new queer orientation (“Orientations” 563), or a new “natural attitude” that can extend into queer space (“Orientations” 549). The *Ladies*’ exposed genitalia, their mouths open in fierce communication, the ambiguity around power relations (in the relationships between the sasquatches, the familiars, and the viewers of the piece), subverts straight space and makes room for queer and unconventional bodies. A *Ladies Sasquatch* politic begins to create alternative orientations by offering something big and queer in the field of objects that comprise a space. The *Ladies* interrupt the “placid visual relation that we expect between foreground and background” (Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 166)

by appearing to be different or “abnormal.” This interruption can create a radical new story, or a new movement in an old storyline.¹⁶

The *Ladies Sasquatch* are doing “the great alchemical work” (Anzaldúa 103). I suggest that at their core the *Ladies Sasquatch* encompass a politics of betrayal *and* a politics of creativity and hope. What the *Ladies Sasquatch* betray is their own subservience to structure, power, or control, as they flaunt their monstrosity with a growl or a roar. They are, in many ways, uncontainable. Even though there are six sasquatches and quite a number more of the familiars, there is the sense that they are ever reproducing and compiling: more are quite possible, and their community can grow even larger. When Mitchell was interviewed at the McMaster Museum of Art about the exhibit, she said, “the sasquatches are growing: this is just the tip of the iceberg. There are bigger and hairier ladies all over the field” (Mitchell, Interview with Cvetkovich). In fact, the way the lit “fake” fire in the middle of the installation and the lighting in the museum worked the evening of the interview, shadows of the sasquatches appeared on the walls of the exhibition room; those shadows, Mitchell mentions, could also be “a part of the community” (Interview with Cvetkovich). Here, thus, installation viewers can

¹⁶ The placid visual relation between background and foreground interrupts the norm by placing the “abnormal” as reachable in the social space. Of course, there is always the worry that this configuration might further ostracize the “other.” It is here that I think the *Ladies’* fantastical embodiment helps because it can begin to offer a new story in the social sphere. As we saw earlier, in the discussion of Thomas Beatie, even as he wants his story to be read as “normal” and acceptable, he is caught up in the tangle of representational politics his story fits into. This “real-life” conundrum is why I think certain kinds of speculative art can create new storylines and mythologies and can begin to change norms (slowly) as a sometimes-anticipatory parallel to real-life activism.

be understood as part of the *Ladies Sasquatch* grouping, suggesting that even in the *Ladies*' apparent exclusivity (facing one another) there is the possibility that new additions to the lesbian monstrous community are allowable and welcomed.

The *Ladies Sasquatch* reference the hugeness and the ideological weight of conventional monsters (see Appendix Eight Ichthyostega) as well as the encompassing beauty of the goddess (see Appendix Nine Venus), but their power moves much beyond this merger as well. The *Ladies Sasquatch* do not strive for unity or universality. The *Ladies* form a coalition of a heterogeneous group of bodies—the “multiplicity of embodied difference” (Shildrick 3). A solidarity and community similar to the Sonias of *Salt Fish Girl*, the *Ladies Sasquatch*, are moving quite well into a transformed future. The kind of alchemy that the *Ladies Sasquatch* exudes is magical. There is hope within the *Ladies*' realm and the creativity necessary for future change. The *Ladies* hold “otherness” in their claws' grasp, but they do so (mostly) safely. In this claws' grasp, we might imagine that communities that have sustained various kinds of oppressions (ability violence, heteronormativity, racisms, for example) are being called into the *Ladies*' protective group. One of Bunny's arms, for instance, is positioned as facing outside of the circle, in what I interpret as a gesture of calling the “other” in to the fold. Also, the sense that the *Ladies* are yelling (likely loudly) suggests to me that particular compatible communities are being invited into the *Ladies*' meeting space, from afar. The *Ladies Sasquatch*, as an embodiment of a feminist monster ethic, explicates the potential for thinking about how we can imagine

communities of “otherness” and how we can think about solidarity among those who are usually disenfranchised. The future, though, for the *Ladies Sasquatch* is open and somewhat unpredictable, just as Grosz talks about in regards to evolutionary changes in the nature/culture dynamic.¹⁷

There is a transformative political, social, and cultural potential located in Mitchell’s installation. The *Ladies Sasquatch* embody a kind of generative violence or anger. I think the *Ladies*’ anger comes up in their facial expressions (of roaring or yelling) as well as in the fact that some of their arms are raised in what appears to be confrontational gestures. The fact that they are in an enclosed circle—while I have noted previously can be invitational in a variety of ways—also suggests that the *Ladies* are guarded and irate. Concurrently, the *Ladies* seem to embody an alternative, transformative, alchemical temporality. I discussed the similar idea of backward/forward time in Chapter One and positioned it as necessary for re-thinking timescales of progress. In terms of the *Ladies Sasquatch*, I focus more specifically on a transformative temporality that includes gestures toward queer *social* reproductions: through their constitution of the ever expanding communal and the hopeful queerly utopic future.¹⁸ To wonder about

¹⁷ The theorists I have been talking about throughout this chapter—Haraway, Butler, Grosz, Ahmed, Mitchell—all suggest that radical social transformation cannot be determined in advance, but it can exist as being made to be open to new possibilities.

¹⁸ The legend of the Sasquatch notoriously positions the creatures as rarely sighted by human eyes. Stereotypically, too, sasquatches are normally envisioned as male. These two beliefs in mind, we can consider how exactly queer reproduction might work for the *Ladies Sasquatch*. In this thesis I have discussed

the transformative potential of the *Ladies Sasquatch* for political movement and praxis is to wonder about their gestational capabilities for an alternative political state-of-being, to think about how change might be conceptualized differently in an exhibit that offers queer objects prominently, explicitly, and as reachable, in the social field.

The Ladies Sasquatch encompasses a community of “others” and can work for women, lesbians, disabled people, nature and animals. This is not an exhaustive list of whom or what the *Ladies* can include in their community, this is a preliminary grouping that could lead to other pulsations, gestations, and multitudes. The feminist monster continuously grows, as it offers new experiences into the social field. A re-orientation of norms can occur through the *Ladies Sasquatch* as they “refuse the inheritance” of heterosexuality and re-think that which “we are oriented toward” (Ahmed, “Orientations” 560) by offering different objects to touch and reach toward in the field. The pink familiars, for instance, subvert stereotypical associations with pinkness and smallness as even

both physical and cultural reproductions around heterosexuality and able-bodiedness. In this chapter I have discussed the queer physical reproductions of Thomas Beatie (through artificial insemination) and Miranda and Evie’s durian fruit queerly reproduced baby that ends *Salt Fish Girl*. The *Ladies Sasquatch*, in my estimation, fall on the side of queer cultural reproduction. While we cannot know for sure if the *Ladies* are able to queerly physically reproduce, we certainly can hypothesize that they have a reproductive ability that creates a queer kinship group that exists outside of purely physical reproduction. The shadows on the museum wall, indicating the proliferation and replication of the *Ladies Sasquatch* community in particular circumstances, demonstrates that there are queer reproductive strategies that fall outside of the physical for forming alternative community groups. On the other hand, the scarcity and mysteriousness of the creatures suggests a vulnerability around their continued existence. While the *Ladies* are fierce, their futurity is capricious.

though they appear to be “tiny, sweet, cupcake, pink, cute, perfection, squirrely little girls” (Mitchell, Personal Interview) “they are actually more vicious than the big creatures” (Mitchell, Personal Interview). These kinds of subversions made material in the installation offer different available objects to surround the social, and can begin to create new tendencies that allow for the desirability of queer and disabled bodies. The *Ladies Sasquatch* can be used as a figure, myth, or locational point in order to situate a queer politics of subversion, dissonance, disassociation and, seemingly conflictingly, but not so, solidarity, “especially as a collective, the Lady Sasquatches conjure up new imaginary worlds but ones that also exist in the here and now with their unmistakably huge presence” (Cvetkovich, “Touching The Monster” 29). The *Ladies* subvert the normative visual field and in so doing they work as a disruptive force to norms. The *Ladies Sasquatch* can be seen as propelling the work of shifting norms, of queer reproduction.

Gloria Anzaldúa’s discussion of Coatlicue (see Appendix Ten), the monster goddess, in *Borderlands: La Frontera* (69), forms an interesting intertext with Mitchell’s *Ladies Sasquatch*. Anzaldúa is speaking from a 1980s feminist perspective and thus provides a useful historicism with regards to the ways in which feminists have taken up monsters. Considering that heteronormativity becomes powerful “by virtue of ... refusals” (Edelman 28), refusals of homosexuality, queer identity, disabled bodies, it is important to acknowledge that a solidarity comprised of a “multiplicity of embodied difference” (Shildrick 3)

might emerge, at least theoretically or representationally, as a powerful force in the face of these refusals. Anzaldúa offers her reader the figure of Coatlicue; she is the “headless monster goddess” (see Appendix 10). Coatlicue “depicts the contradictory ... she is a symbol of the fusion of opposites” (Anzaldúa 69). Mitchell similarly suggests that the *Ladies Sasquatch* embody Deep Lez’s politics which emerges from the space of the “either/or and into the space of the both/and” (“Deep Lez I Statement” 12).¹⁹ Anzaldúa links Coatlicue to the “evolution of the soul” and the ways in which the evolution of the soul works through the processes of “germination” (69). The Coatlicue state “is equated with matter ... the germinal, the potential” (71). The pain of Coatlicue is also Coatlicue’s pleasure: she is both and neither, creator and destroyer, pregnant woman and queer reproducer, similar to Thomas Beatie and the Sonias of *Salt Fish Girl*. She is a powerful transformer and creator of new communities. The *Ladies Sasquatch*, like Coatlicue, *force* the claiming of self outside of the structures of power, they hold moments of alchemy and transformation from abjection and exception into un-unified solidarity and self-actualization. Anzaldúa’s work on Coatlicue is powerful—Coatlicue’s “vigilance, [her] thousand sleepless serpent eyes blinking

¹⁹ It can be argued that the *Ladies Sasquatch* engage in a lesbian separatist politics in that the exhibit imagines a community of “lesbian feminist monsters” (Mitchell, “Deep Lez I Statement” 12) living in a setting away from society. This said, as Mitchell notes, this politics “is mobilized to move radical lesbianism ... out of the realm of *either/or* and into the space of *both/and*” (Mitchell, “Deep Lez I Statement” 12) and has a welcome spot for anyone interested, “Anyone who is intrigued by this bell-bottomed fat-assed catch-all—whether they’re a dyke or not—is Deep Lez” (Mitchell, “Deep Lez I Statement” 13). I understand the exhibit, and the gatherings around it, to be a manifestation of a Deep Lez politics that forms solidarities between radical lesbians and all their allies.

in the night, forever open” (73)—acts as the watchdog that forces the necessary betrayals, the betrayals that create subversive understandings and alternative futures. Coatlicue, the monster goddess, prioritizes the oppressed, the “inappropriate/d” (Minh-ha qtd. in Haraway, “The Promises of Monsters” 299), she does not do this easily though, and she does not emerge without a fight.

Similarly, Allyson Mitchell’s grouping of six huge lesbian monsters enact comparable kinds of refusals and betrayals that can create a queer counterpublic sphere. Queer counterpublics are those that “document the queer subcultures that remain unrepresented by the media” (Cvetkovich, “Public Feelings” 466). Interestingly, the grouping of six, alongside the familiars, actually makes the alternative worldview seem more possible: there are all sorts of possibilities present. Cvetkovich calls “women-only space” (“Public Feelings” 466) a haven for “visionary thinking” (“Public Feelings” 466). The *Ladies Sasquatch* do form a sphere where alternatives are embodied and thought through. One of the most important aspects of the *Ladies Sasquatch* is the fact that they are a community of radical lesbian feminist monsters. Mitchell notes that:

in the mythology of the work, [the sasquatches and the pink creatures] live together in this community without competition but with co-operation and when they’re together in this space it is kind of difficult to tell who’s protecting who. (Mitchell, Personal Interview)

She also says: “I wanted them to be engaged with the audience” (Mitchell, Personal Interview) who, I argue, can become an extension of the community just like the shadows on the museum wall suggest even more sasquatches in the field beyond, a kind of queer reproduction without sex. There is a mythical component

to the *Ladies Sasquatch* that corresponds with the Sonias of *Salt Fish Girl*. It is through this mythological factor that a creative and queerly utopic story of queer reproduction emerges. Thomas and Nancy Beatie's story is necessarily written more conventionally and ambivalently than these fictional ones. The *Ladies Sasquatch* offer the viewer wild kinship, familial or community relationships, acting as "queer object[s]" in the heteronormative "field" (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 164, 120).

The *Ladies Sasquatch*, in a sense, are the amalgamation of all of the refusals that Edelman speaks of, but they also, crucially, move beyond refusal to something more. They are lesbian, they are queer, they are pregnant and reproducing perfect and un-perfect babies, they are disabled, they are fat, and they are more than all of that: they are a "validation vision" (Anzaldúa 109). They propel, as does Coatlicue, "new images of identity, new beliefs about ourselves" (Anzaldúa 109). The *Ladies Sasquatch*'s proliferation and their work is not certain for any politics that "relies upon the fiction of a unitary self and its autonomy; that politics will fail to do justice to the multiplicity of mutually irreducible struggles and 'identity points' at which we live our lives" (Phelan 90). It is through this multiplicity that the *Ladies Sasquatch* are able to represent several disenfranchised groups. Thus, the *Ladies Sasquatch* ask the audience to acknowledge the identity points and othernesses in their own struggles, and have viewers attempt to unify in un-unity and disparity.

From another angle, Mitchell's *Ladies Sasquatch* connote something complex about human/nonhuman interaction. Since the *Ladies* are seemingly half-human and half-animal (Oxana, the teenager Sasquatch is modelled after a feral child documented in Europe) there is yet another reading that can be offered around the *Ladies Sasquatches*' queerly-progressive potential: "species meet" in fun fur (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 4). The addition of the pink familiars in the woody meeting ground indicates an even further species co-mingling. The pink creatures have a "fake," fabricated quality to their make-up. They are also somewhat aggressive in stance; scowls on their faces convey their distance from the "norms and ideals [that] create happiness" (Ahmed, "The Happiness Turn" 10). Even so, there is a solidarity or a queer kinship relation operating within the community of *Ladies Sasquatch*: monsters and pink familiars alike. Rewriting culture's bandit—nature—as talkative, forceful, and generative, thus, is the work of the *Ladies Sasquatch* community, and by extension, the alternative community at large, the "other worlds and futures" that McRuer hopes for and the "radical social transformation" Butler desires (McRuer 208; Butler, *Undoing Gender* 129).

At the ends of all of the above-mentioned trajectories is the project of hope. In queer utopia, the hope for reworking the "straight lines" (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 174) predominant in the socio-cultural sphere becomes a major project. The *Ladies Sasquatch*, as the Sonias, as Thomas and Nancy, situate "a collective temporal distortion" (Muñoz 185) in "the here and now" in order to get us to a queer "then and there" (Muñoz 185). This queer "horizon" (Muñoz 32)

need not “return the debt of its life by taking on the direction promised by the social good” (Ahmed, “Orientations” 554) and instead helps in the creation of a “politics of hope in truly monstrous times” (Haraway, “The Promises of Monsters” 306). As Rebecca Solnit argues, citing Alphonso Lingis, ““Hope is hope against evidence. Hope arises in a break with the past ... Abruptly there’s a break and there’s an upsurge of hope, something turned toward the future”” (8-9). I think that a politics of hope is important in queer community building projects, but as Roger Simon suggests, “a community desirous of hope requires a transactive public memory, a sphere of memorial practice that includes the summons to witness past events that are beyond one’s memory” (93). In Simon’s terminology, hope needs to interact with “ethical pragmatics” that “depends on a responsiveness to others” and an “obligation and responsibility to, and for, the other” (93). In other words, we need to hope for the future with attentiveness to the past and memory. At the same time, our hope must be ethical and accountable to oppressed groups. *The Ladies Sasquatch* take on the scary kind of monsters and transform them into a politics that attempts to overturn able-bodied and heterosexual norms and offers a way forward into a queerly-progressive future. *The Ladies Sasquatch* are one manifestation of a queer politics of hope.

What happens when an amalgamation of different kinds of bodies enter the heteronormative and able-bodied “frame” (Butler, *Frames of War* 5; Quayson 18; Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 21)? If there is enough of a multitude of difference, would these bodies cease to be exceptional? Many oppressed “others”

can begin to find refuge in the *Ladies*, especially queer, disabled, and fat bodies, whose bodies are considered monstrous anyway. Insofar as the exceptional—the disabled, the queer—has a chance of supplanting the hegemony, there is a definite need to call attention to normality, to make it visible. There is the need to identify the privileged and give a voice to the inconspicuously silent. In the first two chapters, I outlined the ways in which norms are established and reproduced or maintained biologically and socio-culturally through the marginalization of unconventional body. In this chapter, I explore examples—real, literary and artistic—of counterpublic spheres and spaces, where alternatives to normalizing bodily “frame[s]” (Butler, *Frames of War* 5; Quayson 18; Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 21) can energize and motivate physical and socio-cultural queer reproductions. These queer reproductions hypothesize different ways of getting to “radical social transformation” (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 129) without dictating the way.

Conclusions

I started this chapter by examining the case of “the pregnant man.” I observed that Thomas Beatie’s ability to tell his story is predicated by the limits of the social (Butler, *Giving An Account of Oneself* 7-8). Even though Beatie desires to unemotionally describe his pregnancy and his family, heteronormative culture waylays these efforts and sensationalizes them. It is with this in mind that I temper the queerly utopic hope and desire I describe by way of *Salt Fish Girl*

and *Ladies Sasquatch* with a consideration of what needs to occur in real-life (rather than fictionally) to give the queerly utopic a chance of manifesting. In

Giving An Account of Oneself, Butler argues:

we must recognize that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human. To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance—to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient "I" as a kind of possession. If we speak and try to give an account from this place, we will not be irresponsible, or, if we are, we will surely be forgiven. (136)

Two things in this quotation tie specifically to what I have been talking about in this chapter. For one, ethically encountering the “other” always entails responsibility toward the “other.” In the case of the examples I am outlining in this thesis, these “others” are disabled and/or queer bodies, “monstrous” bodies. I have certainly left out much of what I could have said in this chapter, more about race, about class, about so many of the others who are considered, in some way, “abnormal.” Every project necessarily makes choices and fosters exclusions. I mostly hope (in the most responsible sense of that word) that the specificities that I concentrate on in this chapter around queer reproduction and community be understood within the frame of the larger question Butler poses: “How are we formed within social life, and at what cost?” (*Giving An Account of Oneself* 136). Second, I wonder about the potential for forgiveness in any equation of alternative politics or futures. Can I ask, under this frame of forgiveness: can I be forgiven (if I need to be, if I have been irresponsible) for any omission I have made?

Asking questions may in fact be a necessary component of “vacating the self-sufficient ‘I’ as a kind of possession” (Butler, *Giving An Account of Oneself* 136) and rethinking relationality, community and kinship. My intention in this chapter has been to use the discourse of queer reproduction to call to attention to the instances where biological and socio-cultural norms and structures can be overturned. Yes, queer utopia is always on the “horizon” (Muñoz 32), but this horizon is patently animated by the “utopian bonds, affiliations, designs, and gestures that exist within the present moment” (Muñoz 22-3). Being able to reach for queerness in the “heteronormative field” is a step toward creating new queer “line[s]”(Ahmed, “Orientations” 554). Moving out of exceptionality and into the project of hope, both in the natural world and in the cultural one, is important. And, as Grosz has taught us, these worlds are always in conversation with one another.

The queer reproduction of the Sonias, as well as the monstrous embodiment of lesbian feminist community in the *Ladies Sasquatch*, compel an alternative ending, one that, perhaps counterintuitively, has “no end in sight” (Minh-ha 150). Haraway argues that we must—in order “to change the maps of the world”—build “new collectives out of what is not quite a plethora of human and unhuman actors” (“Promises” 327). We must be open to the “realization of an unlikely hope. It’s not a ‘happy ending’ we need, but a non-ending. That’s why none of the narratives of masculinist, patriarchal apocalypses will do” (Haraway, “Promises” 327). She finally says, “There is no safe place here [in

racism, sexism, technoscience, tragedy]; there are, however, many maps of possibility” (326). Possibilities for new kinds of relationship and embodiment are evident when we reconsider togetherness. The *Ladies Sasquatch* (and their larger, shadowy, extensions) are large enough to hold “the multiplicity of embodied difference” (Shildrick 3), to form a new community. This community articulation will continue well past the conclusion of this chapter, well past any crafted end point. Thus, I challenge you, dear reader: look down onto the blankness below on this page, and think of the multitude of pulsations and gestations that transgendered men, cloned women, and the monstrous *Ladies* have (r)evolving there ...

CONCLUSION

Research Methodologies, The Role of the “Corporeal” Researcher, and Future Directions

How do we so easily come to the question of worth in the face of disease, illness, injury, and impairment? ... On what grounds are some lives made measurable, questionable, and even extinguishable? *How does all this obtain its sensibility?* (Titchkosky, *Reading and Writing Disability Differently* 114)

In June 2009, I attended the Society for Disability Studies annual conference, which was taking place that year in Tucson, Arizona. We planned a route to the conference that would see us (my partner Rob was travelling with me) flying to San Francisco, driving to Northern California to visit Rob’s extended family, driving back down the coast of California to see the ocean and then, finally, driving across the desert to arrive in Tucson. It was a trip that we hoped would take us hiking through several U.S. National Parks, enjoying various Southwestern U.S. sites, before being capped off by what promised to be an exciting conference program. We set off on this somewhat ambitiously planned journey expecting to enjoy the adventure. On the first morning of our trip, I decided to buy a few postcards for friends from a stand in the lobby of the Bed and Breakfast where we were staying. I began to walk across the lobby. Just as I was about to arrive at the postcard stand, I took one last step and instead of remaining on solid ground, I experienced the very frightening experience of falling. The floor that was beneath my feet just a moment earlier had somehow now disappeared. My body broke a solid wood stair on the way down and I

landed with a thump in what I later found out was a basement storage area, accessible only through a trap door. This door was left open for just a minute or two as an employee was accessing some materials in the storage unit. He had failed to cordon off the area, and my decision to purchase a few postcards at just that moment, led me exactly to the spot on the floor that had been opened up. As soon as realized I was falling, I began to scream. When I reached the bottom I was likely in shock but automatically knew that something had happened to my right foot and leg. I balanced on my left foot as dozens of bystanders peered down into the hole. When the ambulance arrived, the paramedics assessed my body and transported me to hospital. A strange confluence of events happening at what now feels like exactly the “wrong” time—excitement over being in San Francisco for the first time, desire to connect with people back home via postcard, and neglect on the part of the employee—intermingled such that instead of arriving on solid ground I fell seven feet into a concrete hole.

When I arrived in the emergency department of the hospital, the staff examined my now extremely swollen foot and ankle; performed x-rays; and assessed the damage. I was in acute pain and was prescribed Oxycodone for the severity. I decided not to take the strong pain reliever since I am allergic to many ingestibles (gluten and ibuprofen, for instance) and was worried that I would have an adverse reaction. I stuck with my old standby: Extra Strength Tylenol.¹ I

¹ Extra Strength Tylenol’s current slogan is, “You want fast, effective relief so that you can get back to normal... *whatever your normal is*” (“Tylenol Brand”). It is significant that “normalcy” (however flexibly defined) is central to

explained my allergic condition to the nursing staff, who were accommodating but skeptical about my substance sensitivities. They encouraged the use of a drug that I confessed to wanting to avoid—for “health” reasons! The doctor arrived and informed me that I had experienced a third degree ankle sprain, fundamentally a torn ligament. I was to stay on crutches and off my foot for a few weeks until I could slowly begin to put pressure on it again. I asked the doctor what I should do considering that I was away from the comfort of home and was to be travelling in a car for ten days. I was told to sit in the backseat, elevating and icing my ankle. When the doctor asked, in a conversational way, why we were in the United States, I told him about the Society for Disability Studies Conference. In a careless and offhand way he said something like, “Well look on the bright side, now you are a part of the group you study.” In that moment, even amid the pain I was feeling, I was more than incensed. Considering that I had not told him a thing about my area of research or my own embodiment, his comment was teeming with able-bodied assumption. Also, since I was with my male partner, and even though we consider ourselves to be “queer” in Sedgwick’s sense that queerness consists of, “lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (8), our heteronormative appearance secured an assurance of relative safety in the medical context. For the doctor, I appeared to be able-bodied

this advertising campaign, reinforcing the commonly held belief that there is a “normal” standard to which the body should adhere.

and heterosexual. In his reactions to my perceived subjective status, I understood ever more deeply the insidiousness of these normative categorizations.²

I bring up my experience in San Francisco because the medical treatment I received after the fall interestingly highlights how the discourse of ability permeates medical practice and mainstream culture. In a more muted way, in this example, heterosexuality is also exposed as another pronounced norm. What particularly piqued me about the doctor's comment, beyond the fact that it assumed my able-bodiedness, was a) he positioned disabled bodies as "objects of study" and b) by insisting on a "bright side" to the accident he inherently positions disability as "negative," while also suggesting that "as a part of the group" I would now be privy to some "insider" information at the conference. This small utterance infuriated me because, once and again, it reproduced the sense that disabled bodies are monstrous and other and forgets the truth that we are all "temporarily able-bodied" (Shildrick, *Dangerous Discourses* 4).

Instead of replicating the doctor's exclusionary and dichotomous discourse—of "normality" and "abnormality"—I hope my dissertation has been attentive to the ways in which texts, authors and theories can profess alternatives

² Due to multiple food allergies and a two-year experience of myalgic encephalomyelitis (otherwise known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome) at the end of secondary school, I have been living in a somewhat "unstable" embodiment (Shildrick, *Embodying The Monster* 55) for a number of years. Due to the relative "invisibil[ity]" of these conditions (Titchkosky, *Disability, Self, and Society* 36) I am usually able to "pass" as able-bodied. I acknowledge the privilege of this passing while also recognizing that I am "moving and living among the normals" (Titchkosky, *Disability, Self, and Society* 228) even though I rarely feel that I am.

to the able-bodied and heterosexual normative structure, in methodological practice. By this statement I mean that while some of the texts I study in this project—Munro’s “Child’s Play” for instance, or Lowry’s *The Giver*—employ plotlines that depict negative circumstances that the “physically atypical” (Garland-Thomson, *Freakery* 47) can suffer from at the hands of the “normals,” these texts also are about underlining that discrimination by calling attention to how, I argue, norms reproduce and are reproducible. In the last chapter I believe I have suggested some alternatives to these seemingly unrelenting norms. The essential preoccupation of my study has been to convey how able-bodiedness and heterosexuality act a “frame” (Butler, *Frames of War* 1) for what is considered an embodied “norm.” Shildrick’s work has been essential for my theorization that seeks to move away from the dichotomy of “normal” and “abnormal” and instead posits that something akin to a “multiplicity of embodied difference” (*Embodying the Monster* 3) must be employed in discourses that are commonly used on medical, cultural, and societal levels. In Shildrick’s most recent work she specifically concentrates on the affinity between disability and sexuality as she focuses on “the question of the disabled sexual subject” (*Dangerous Discourses* 5). In this work Shildrick quotes David Serlin who argues, “Disability studies and queer studies are ... allies in their shared commitment to demystifying the cultural and political roots of terms like *normal* and *healthy* and *whole* at the same time they seek to destigmatize the conceptual differences implied by those terms” (qtd.

in *Dangerous Discourses* 188). Shildrick and Serlin support my contention that rethinking (dis)ability is not just complementary but essential to queer-progress.

I draw my thesis to a close with particular thoughts about the role of the researcher in scholarly work. Haraway talks about the “modest witness” (*Modest_Witness* 23) as a scientific figure who “embodies” rationality in science. This observer is “the legitimate and authorized ventriloquist for the object world, adding nothing from his mere opinions, from his biasing embodiment. And so he is endowed with the remarkable power to establish the facts ... his narratives have magical power” (*Modest_Witness* 24). These narratives are understood as truth, and the “way things are.” Haraway is of course suspicious of this figure as she establishes that she will “queer the elaborately constructed ... civic man of reason in order to enable a more corporeal, inflected, and optically dense, if less elegant, kind of modest witness to matters of fact to emerge in the world of technoscience” (*Modest_Witness* 24). I am not sure I would have realized it at the outset of my project, but now I see that my work in this thesis has been driven, even above its content, by an allegiance to the second description of Haraway’s “modest witness” (*Modest_Witness* 24). There has been a definite corporeal element to this project, in its focus on “othered” and monstrous bodies, yes, but also in the corporeal self-reflexivity I have struggled with throughout this work.

Perhaps many humanities projects have an element of “personal investment” in their make-up. We saw that this was the case in Munro’s “Child’s Play” where adult Marlene’s scholarly work seems to be a kind of atonement for

the unspeakable act she commits as a child. While Marlene's investments may have seamlessly fit into Munro's fictional storyline, I am convinced that other academics sometimes "follow the line[s]" (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 15) that lead to their own sort of emancipation. All of this to say that I have organized this project with various personal investments at its core. In so doing, I expect that elements of my "corporeal, inflected" (Haraway, *Modest_Witness* 24) self have made their way to these pages. As Haraway argues, "the point is to make a difference in the world, to cast our lot for some ways of life and not others" (*Modest_Witness* 36). I have focused specifically on the connections between disability and queerness in this study in the desire to "cast my lot" for a world that acknowledges different kinds of embodied subjects and relationships. Above, I have outlined some of my own stakes in this subject area. I acknowledge that insofar that I have done this, I have left out other investments in drawing this line. Future work on this project might include delving into questions of other identity locations and how they also can be considered in relation to disability and queerness. For instance: how does the "normal" white body compare with the able-body or the heterosexual one? how does class operate? age? ethnicity? Other directions could encompass posthumanist discourse, for there is an increased cultural investment in reproductive technologies such as gene manipulation and cloning. The apocalyptic fetish in contemporary popular culture bespeaks a focus on what the body *would be able to do and not do* in catastrophic circumstances. It is also often fixated on heterosexual reproduction in order to re-populate and thus

“save” a dying world. Stemming from the apocalyptic tendency, there could be concerted work on the interconnections between environmental discourses of “nature” in conjunction to disability and queerness. While I have discussed the role of “nature” as it connects to “normal” at some length in this thesis, further inquiry into how environmental discourses on “nature” and “normal” permeate disabled and queer subjectivity is an avenue with which I would like to extend my work. The 2010 collection of essays, *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, is groundbreaking in its focus on environmental discourse’s often silent influence on “non-normal” bodies. Considering that the discourse of “saving the environment” is often couched in the rhetoric of “norms” and “health,” we again see in this discourse the ways in which norms are reproduced physically and culturally. In the collection, Di Chiro argues,

scratch a liberal environmentalist and you might find polluted politics enforcing ‘eco(hetero)normativity’ lurking underneath; disability becomes an environmental problem and lgbtq people become disabled—the unintended consequences of a contaminated and impure environment, unjustly impaired by chemical trespass. (202)

Thinking through the implications of “eco(hetero)normativity” is a fascinating and compelling way in which I would like to complete future research. How do environmental discourses of the “normal” earth interact with the normalizing desires of heterosexuality and able-bodiedness?

As I have discussed norms and standards at length in this project, it would perhaps be conspicuous if I did not address the norms and structures of writing a thesis in my concluding thoughts. Understandably, there are necessary standards

for achieving the highest degree in the university system. It is a grueling intellectual process, but also, more interestingly to me, an embodied one where Davis' notion of the "ideal" (as I discussed in the Introduction) becoming the "norm" or "standard" resonates in different context (10). A thesis irresistibly asks for its writer to reach for "excellence," no matter the cost to the body.

In a lecture at McMaster University in September 2010, organized by the graduate program in Gender Studies and Feminist Research, Judith Halberstam highlighted, for me, some of the complexity of this kind of theoretical work. Halberstam's primary argument in that lecture was that if success equals reproductive maturity and wealth, then we, as queer critics, must embrace failure rather than fear it ("From Shadow Feminisms to Gaga Femininity"). Of course, I understand that Halberstam's impetus is to illuminate the structures of power that always already equate queerness with failure, and thus, she calls for a kind of recuperation of that failure. This said, I am still suspicious of this theoretical tendency to posit a position that fetishizes the performance of "failure" in light of that failure's obvious success (by this I mean that Halberstam is a successful, presumably well-remunerated scholar, whose lecture was the most well-attended talk I have witnessed at McMaster). I bring up the doctoral thesis' standards and Halberstam's lecture in order to say that, in different ways, we are all caught up in systems that replicate normative oppressions even in our desire to overturn them. At the end of this project, I remain steadfast in my engagement with continuing to question my research, methodology, commitments to particular avenues of

inquiry, and role as a new kind of “modest witness” (Haraway, *Modest_Witness* 24). I do this in an attempt to persevere in this project’s insistence on queering physical and cultural reproductive norms that do anything but have us “think differently” or “feel differently” (Nietzsche qtd. in Shildrick, *Dangerous Discourses* 170) in a world where it is absolutely imperative that we do so.

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APPENDICES



Appendix 1 (Installation View. From *Ladies Sasquatch*)



Appendix 2 (Oxana. From *Ladies Sasquatch*)



Appendix 3 (Maxy. From *Ladies Sasquatch*)



Appendix 4 (Bunny. From *Ladies Sasquatch*)



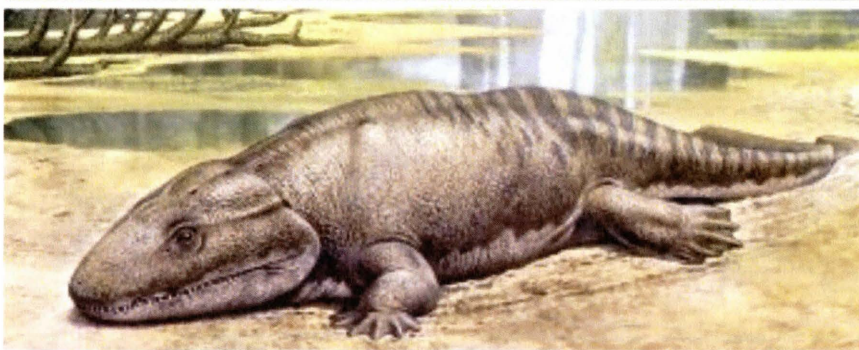
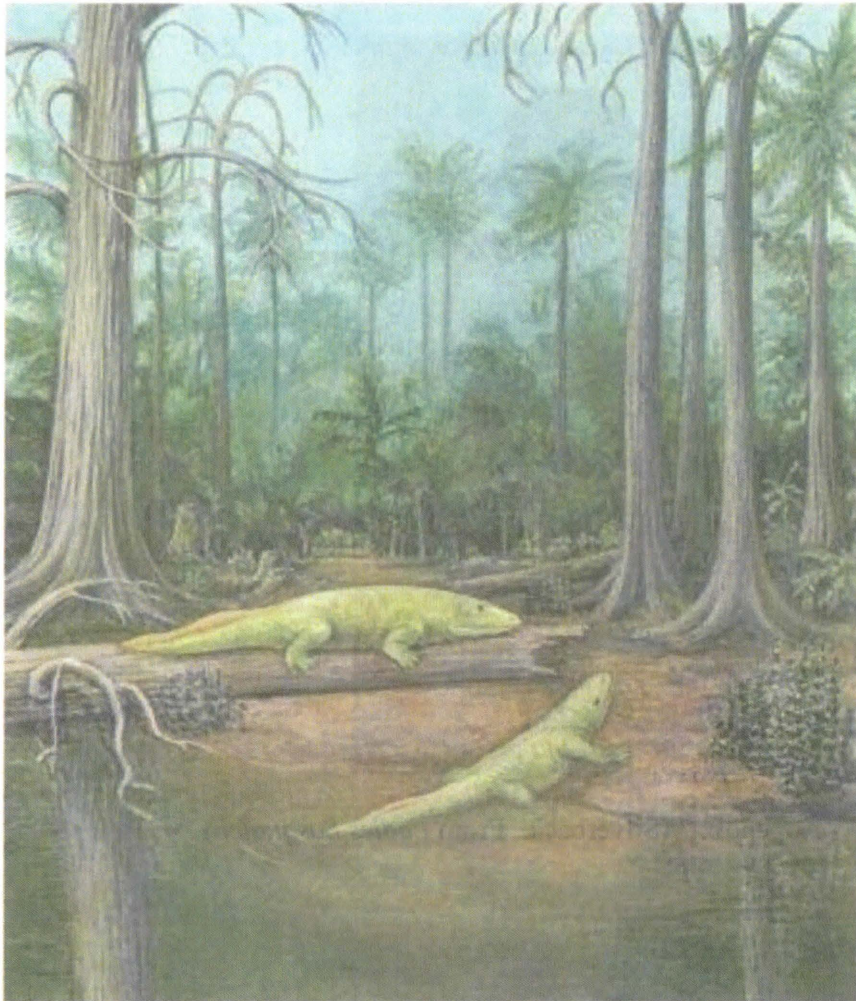
Appendix 5 (Midge. From *Ladies Sasquatch*)



Appendix 6 (Tawny. From *Ladies Sasquatch*)

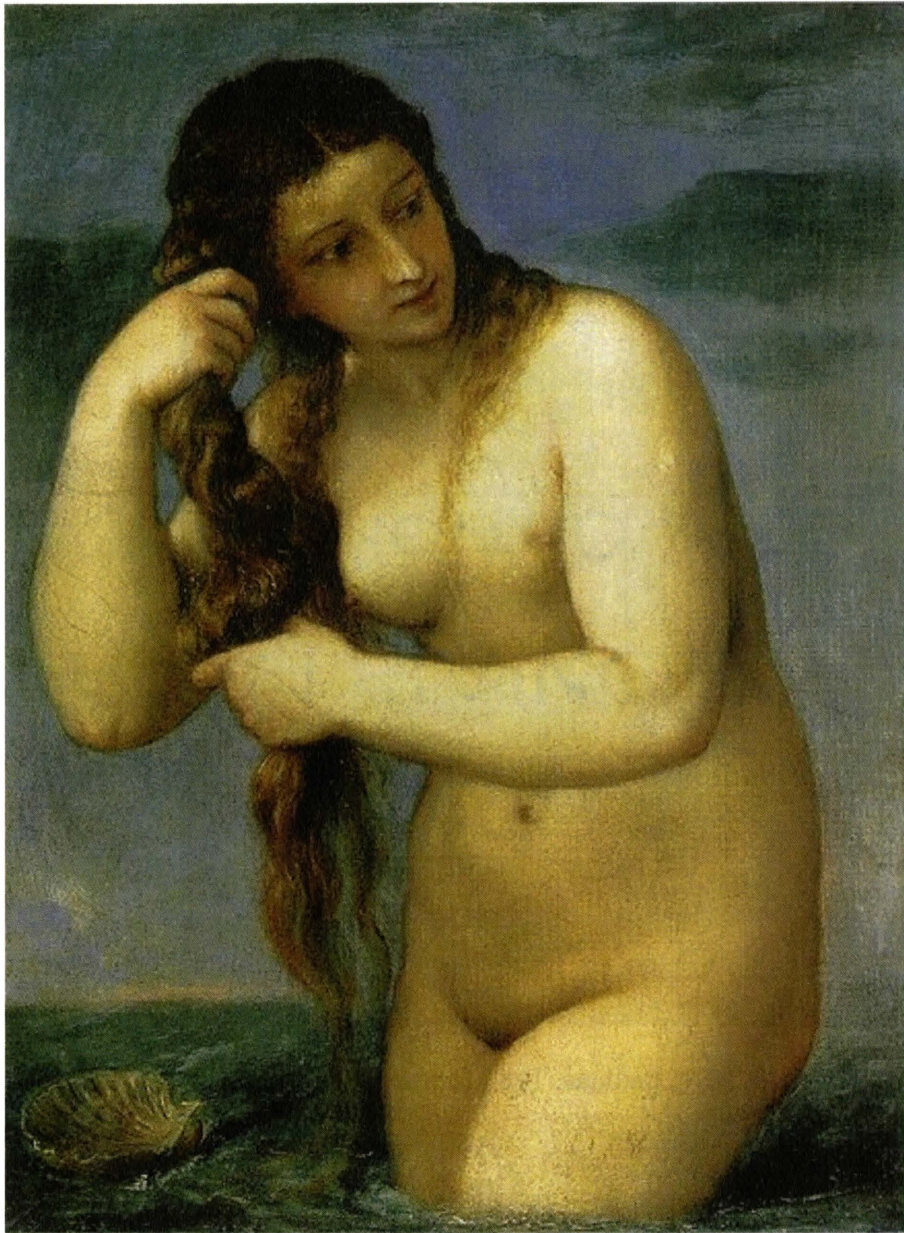


Appendix 7 (Silverback. From *Ladies Sasquatch*)



Two Versions of the Ichthyostega

Appendix 8 (Ichthyostega. The prehistoric monster: <http://universe-review.ca/I10-30-ichthyostega.jpg>)



Appendix 9 (Titian's Venus Anadyomene 1520, oil on canvas)



Appendix 10 (Coatlicue. The Monster Goddess)