

## *What You Learn About the Baby*

### *Idle*

You learn how to be idle, how to do nothing. That is the new thing in your life—to do nothing. To do nothing and not be impatient about doing nothing. It is easy to do nothing and become impatient. It is not easy to do nothing and not mind it, not mind the hours passing, the hours of the morning passing and then the hours of the afternoon, and one day passing and the next passing, while you do nothing.

### *What You Can Count On*

You learn never to count on anything being the same from day to day, that he will fall asleep at a certain hour, or sleep for a certain length of time. Some days he sleeps for several hours at a stretch, other days he sleeps no more than half an hour.

Sometimes he will wake suddenly, crying hard, when you were prepared to go on working for another hour. Now you prepare to stop. But as it takes you a few minutes to end your work for the day, and you cannot go to him immediately, he stops crying and continues quiet. Now, though you have prepared to end work for the day, you prepare to resume working.

*Don't Expect to Finish Anything*

You learn never to expect to finish anything. For example, the baby is staring at a red ball. You are cleaning some large radishes. The baby will begin to fuss when you have cleaned four and there are eight left to clean.

*You Will Not Know What Is Wrong*

The baby is on his back in his cradle crying. His legs are slightly lifted from the surface of his mattress in the effort of his crying. His head is so heavy and his legs so light and his muscles so hard that his legs fly up easily from the mattress when he tenses, as now.

Often, you will wonder what is wrong, why he is crying, and it would help, it would save you much disturbance, to know what is wrong, whether he is hungry, or tired, or bored, or cold, or hot, or uncomfortable in his clothes, or in pain in his stomach or bowels. But you will not know, or not when it would help to know, at the time, but only later, when you have guessed correctly or many times incorrectly. And it will not help to know afterwards, or it will not help unless you have learned from the experience to identify a particular cry that means hunger, or pain, etc. But the memory of a cry is a difficult one to fix in your mind.

*What Exhausts You*

You must think and feel for him as well as for yourself—that he is tired, or bored, or uncomfortable.

*Sitting Still*

You learn to sit still. You learn to stare as he stares, to stare up at the rafters as long as he stares up at the rafters, sitting still in a large space.

*Entertainment*

For him, though not usually for you, merely to look at a thing is an entertainment.

Then, there are some things that not just you, and not just he, but both of you like to do, such as lie in the hammock, or take a walk, or take a bath.

*Renunciation*

You give up, or postpone, for his sake, many of the pleasures you once enjoyed, such as eating meals when you are hungry, eating as much as you want, watching a movie all the way through from beginning to end, reading as much of a book as you want to at one sitting, going to sleep when you are tired, sleeping until you have had enough sleep.

You look forward to a party as you never used to look forward to a party, now that you are at home alone with him so much. But at this party you will not be able to talk to anyone for more than a few minutes, because he cries so constantly, and in the end he will be your only company, in a back bedroom.

*Questions*

How do his eyes know to seek out your eyes? How does his mouth know it is a mouth, when it imitates yours?

*His Perceptions*

You learn from reading it in a book that he recognizes you not by the appearance of your face but by your smell and the way you hold him, that he focuses clearly on an object only when it is held a certain distance from him, and that he can see only in shades of gray. Even what is white or black to you is only a shade of gray to him.

*The Difficulty of a Shadow*

He reaches to grasp the shadow of his spoon, but the shadow reappears on the back of his hand.

*His Sounds*

You discover that he makes many sounds in his throat to accompany what is happening to him: sounds in the form of grunts, air expelled in small gusts. Then sometimes high squeaks, and then sometimes, when he has learned to smile at you, high coos.

*Priority*

It should be very simple: while he is awake, you care for him. As soon as he goes to sleep, you do the most important thing you have to do, and do it as long as you can, either until it is done or until he wakes up. If he wakes up before it is done, you care for him until he sleeps again, and then you continue to work on the most important thing. In this way, you should learn to recognize which thing is the most important and to work on it as soon as you have the opportunity.

*Odd Things You Notice About Him*

The dark gray lint that collects in the lines of his palm.

The white fuzz that collects in his armpit.

The black under the tips of his fingernails. You have let his nails get too long, because it is hard to make a precise cut on such a small thing constantly moving. Now it would take a very small nailbrush to clean them.

The colors of his face: his pink forehead, his bluish eyelids, his reddish-gold eyebrows. And the tiny beads of sweat standing out from the tiny pores of his skin.

When he yawns, how the wings of his nostrils turn yellow.

When he holds his breath and pushes down on his diaphragm, how quickly his face turns red.

His uneven breath: how his breath changes in response to his motion, and to his curiosity.

How his bent arms and legs, when he is asleep on his stomach, take the shape of an hourglass.

When he lies against your chest, how he lifts his head to look around like a turtle and drops it again because it is so heavy.

How his hands move slowly through the air like crabs or other sea creatures before closing on a toy.

How, bottom up, folded, he looks as though he were going away, or as though he were upside down.

*Connected by a Single Nipple*

You are lying on the bed nursing him, but you are not holding on to him with your arms or hands and he is not holding on to you. He is connected to you by a single nipple.

*Disorder*

You learn that there is less order in your life now. Or if there is to be order, you must work hard at maintaining it. For instance, it is evening and you are lying on the bed with the baby half asleep beside you. You are watching *Gaslight*. Suddenly a thunderstorm breaks and the rain comes down hard. You remember the baby's clothes out on the line, and you get up from the bed and run outdoors. The baby begins crying at being left so abruptly half asleep on the bed. *Gaslight* continues, the baby screams now, and you are out in the hard rainfall in your white bathrobe.

*Protocol*

There are so many occasions for greetings in the course of his day. Upon each waking, a greeting. Each time you enter the room, a greeting. And in each greeting there is real enthusiasm.

*Distraction*

You decide you must attend some public event, say a concert, despite the difficulty of arranging such a thing. You make elaborate preparations to leave the baby with a babysitter, taking a bag full of equipment, a folding bed, a folding stroller, and so on. Now, as the concert proceeds, you sit thinking not about the concert but only about the elaborate preparations and whether they have been adequate, and no matter how often you try to listen to the concert, you will hear only a few minutes of it before thinking again about those elaborate preparations and whether they have been adequate to the comfort of the baby and the convenience of the babysitter.

*Henri Bergson*

He demonstrates to you what you learned long ago from reading Henri Bergson—that laughter is always preceded by surprise.

*You Do Not Know When He Will Fall Asleep*

If his eyes are wide open staring at a light, it does not mean that he will not be asleep within minutes.

If he cries with a squeaky cry and squirms with wiry strength against your chest, digging his sharp little fingernails into your shoulder, or raking your neck, or pushing his face into your shirt, it does not mean he will not relax in five minutes and grow heavy. But five minutes is a very long time when you are caring for a baby.

*What Resembles His Cry*

Listening for his cry, you mistake, for his cry, the wind, seagulls, and police sirens.

*Time*

It is not that five minutes is always a very long time when you are caring for a baby but that time passes very slowly when you are waiting for a baby to go to sleep, when you are listening to him cry alone in his bed or whimper close to your ear.

Then time passes very quickly once the baby is asleep. The things you have to do have always taken this long to do, but before the baby was born it did not matter, because there were many such hours in the day to do these things. Now there is only one hour, and again later, on some days, one hour, and again, very late in the day, on some days, one last hour.

*Order*

You cannot think clearly or remain calm in such disorder. And so you learn to wash a dish as soon as you use it, otherwise it may not be washed for a very long time. You learn to make your bed immediately because there may be no time to do it later. And then you begin to worry regularly, if not constantly, about how to save time. You learn to prepare for the baby's waking as soon as the baby sleeps. You learn to prepare everything hours in advance. Then your conception of time begins to change. The future collapses into the present.

*Other Days*

There are other days, despite what you have learned about saving time, and preparing ahead, when something in you relaxes, or you are simply tired. You do not mind if the



house is untidy. You do not mind if you do nothing but care for the baby. You do not mind if time goes by while you lie in the hammock and read a magazine.

#### *Why He Smiles*

He looks at a window with serious interest. He looks at a painting and smiles. It is hard to know what that smile means. Is he pleased by the painting? Is the painting funny to him? No, soon you understand that he smiles at the painting for the same reason he smiles at you: because the painting is looking at him.

#### *A Problem of Balance*

A problem of balance: if he yawns, he falls over backward.

#### *Moving Forward*

You worry about moving forward, or about the difference between moving forward and staying in one place. You begin to notice which things have to be done over and over again in one day, and which things have to be done once every day, and which things have to be done every few days, and so on, and all these things only cause you to mark time, stay in one place, rather than move forward, or, rather, keep you from slipping backward, whereas certain other things are done only once. A job to earn money is done only once, a letter is written saying a thing only once and never again, an event is planned that will happen only once, news is received or news passed along only once, and if, in this way, something happens that will happen only once, this day is different from other days, and on this day your life seems to move forward, and it is easier to sit still holding the baby and staring at the wall knowing that on this day, at least, your life has moved forward; there has been a change, however small.

*A Small Thing with Another Thing, Even Smaller*  
Asleep in his carriage, he is woken by a fly.

#### *Patience*

You try to understand why on some days you have no patience and on others your patience is limitless and you will stand over him for a long time where he lies on his back waving his arms, kicking his legs, or looking up at the painting on the wall. Why on some days it is limitless and on others, or at other times, late in a day when you have been patient, you cannot bear his crying and want to threaten to put him away in his bed to cry alone if he does not stop crying in your arms, and sometimes you do put him away in his bed to cry alone.

#### *Impatience*

You learn about patience. You discover patience. Or you discover how patience extends up to a certain point and then it ends and impatience begins. Or rather, impatience was there all along, underneath a light, surface kind of patience, and at a certain point the light kind of patience wears away and all that's left is the impatience. Then the impatience grows.

#### *Paradox*

You begin to understand paradox: lying on the bed next to him, you are deeply interested, watching his face and holding his hands, and yet at the same time you are deeply bored, wishing you were somewhere else doing something else.

#### *Regression*

Although he is at such an early stage in his development, he regresses, when he is hungry or tired, to an earlier stage,

still, of noncommunication, self-absorption, and spastic motion.

#### *Between Human and Animal*

How he is somewhere between human and animal. While he can't see well, while he looks blindly toward the brightest light, and can't see you, or can't see your features but more clearly the edge of your face, the edge of your head; and while his movements are more chaotic; and while he is more subject to the needs of his body, and can't be distracted, by intellectual curiosity, from his hunger or loneliness or exhaustion, then he seems to you more animal than human.

#### *How Parts of Him Are Not Connected*

He does not know what his hand is doing: it curls around the iron rod of your chair and holds it fast. Then, while he is looking elsewhere, it curls around the narrow black foot of a strange frog.

#### *Admiration*

He is filled with such courage, goodwill, curiosity, and self-reliance that you admire him for it. But then you realize he was born with these qualities: now what do you do with your admiration?

#### *Responsibility*

How responsible he is, to the limits of his capacity, for his own body, for his own safety. He holds his breath when a cloth covers his face. He widens his eyes in the dark. When he loses his balance, his hands curl around whatever comes under them, and he clutches the stuff of your shirt.

#### *Within His Limits*

How he is curious, to the limits of his understanding; how he attempts to approach what arouses his curiosity, to the limits of his motion; how confident he is, to the limits of his knowledge; how masterful he is, to the limits of his competence; how he derives satisfaction from another face before him, to the limits of his attention; how he asserts his needs, to the limits of his force.

## To Room Nineteen

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**T**his is a story, I suppose, about a failure in intelligence: the Rawlings' marriage was grounded in intelligence.

They were older when they married than most of their married friends: in their well-seasoned late twenties. Both had had a number of affairs, sweet rather than bitter; and when they fell in love—for they did fall in love—had known each other for some time. They joked that they had saved each other "for the real thing." That they had waited so long (but not too long) for this real thing was to them a proof of their sensible discrimination. A good many of their friends had married young, and now (they felt) probably regretted lost opportunities; while others, still unmarried, seemed to them arid, self-doubting, and likely to make desperate or romantic marriages.

Not only they, but others, felt they were well-matched: their friends' delight was an additional proof of their happiness. They had played the same roles, male and female, in this group or set, if such a wide, loosely connected, constantly changing constellation of people could be called a set. They had both become, by virtue of their moderation, their humour, and their abstinence from painful experience, people to whom others came for advice. They could be, and were, relied on. It was one of those cases of a man and a woman linking themselves whom no one else had ever thought of linking, probably because of their similarities. But then everyone exclaimed: Of course! How right! How was it we never thought of it before!

And so they married amid general rejoicing, and because of

their foresight and their sense for what was probable, nothing was a surprise to them.

Both had well-paid jobs. Matthew was a subeditor on a large London newspaper, and Susan worked in an advertising firm. He was not the stuff of which editors or publicised journalists are made, but he was much more than "a subeditor," being one of the essential background people who in fact steady, inspire and make possible the people in the limelight. He was content with this position. Susan had a talent for commercial drawing. She was humorous about the advertisements she was responsible for, but she did not feel strongly about them one way or the other.

Both, before they married, had had pleasant flats, but they felt it unwise to base a marriage on either flat, because it might seem like a submission of personality on the part of the one whose flat it was not. They moved into a new flat in South Kensington on the clear understanding that when their marriage had settled down (a process they knew would not take long, and was in fact more a humorous concession to popular wisdom than what was due to themselves) they would buy a house and start a family.

And this is what happened. They lived in their charming flat for two years, giving parties and going to them, being a popular young married couple, and then Susan became pregnant, she gave up her job, and they bought a house in Richmond. It was typical of this couple that they had a son first, then a daughter, then twins, son and daughter. Everything right, appropriate, and what everyone would wish for, if they could choose. But people did feel these two had chosen; this balanced and sensible family was no more than what was due to them because of their infallible sense for *choosing* right.

And so they lived with their four children in their garden house in Richmond and were happy. They had everything they had wanted and had planned for.

*And yet . . .*

Well, even this was expected, that there must be a certain flatness. . . .

Yes, yes, of course, it was natural they sometimes felt like this. Like what?

Their life seemed to be like a snake biting its tail. Matthew's job for the sake of Susan, children, house, and garden—which

caravanserai needed a well-paid job to maintain it. And Susan's practical intelligence for the sake of Matthew, the children, the house and the garden—which unit would have collapsed in a week without her.

But there was no point about which either could say: "For the sake of *this* is all the rest." Children? But children can't be a centre of life and a reason for being. They can be a thousand things that are delightful, interesting, satisfying, but they can't be a wellspring to live from. Or they shouldn't be. Susan and Matthew knew that well enough.

Matthew's job? Ridiculous. It was an interesting job, but scarcely a reason for living. Matthew took pride in doing it well, but he could hardly be expected to be proud of the newspaper; the newspaper he read, *his* newspaper, was not the one he worked for.

Their love for each other? Well, that was nearest it. If this wasn't a centre, what was? Yes, it was around this point, their love, that the whole extraordinary structure revolved. For extraordinary it certainly was. Both Susan and Matthew had moments of thinking so, of looking in secret disbelief at this thing they had created: marriage, four children, big house, garden, charwomen, friends, cars . . . and this *thing*, this entity, all of it had come into existence, been blown into being out of nowhere, because Susan loved Matthew and Matthew loved Susan. Extraordinary. So that was the central point, the wellspring.

And if one felt that it simply was not strong enough, important enough, to support it all, well whose fault was that? Certainly neither Susan's nor Matthew's. It was in the nature of things. And they sensibly blamed neither themselves nor each other.

On the contrary, they used their intelligence to preserve what they had created from a painful and explosive world: they looked around them, and took lessons. All around them, marriages collapsing, or breaking, or rubbing along (even worse, they felt). They must not make the same mistakes, they must not.

They had avoided the pitfall so many of their friends had fallen into—of buying a house in the country *for the sake of the children*, so that the husband became a weekend husband, a weekend father, and the wife always careful not to ask what

went on in the town flat which they called (in joke) a bachelor flat. No, Matthew was a full-time husband, a full-time father, and at night, in the big married bed in the big married bedroom (which had an attractive view of the river), they lay beside each other talking and he told her about his day, and what he had done, and whom he had met; and she told him about her day (not as interesting, but that was not her fault), for both knew of the hidden resentments and deprivations of the woman who has lived her own life—and above all, has earned her own living—and is now dependent on a husband for outside interests and money.

Nor did Susan make the mistake of taking a job for the sake of her independence, which she might very well have done, since her old firm, missing her qualities of humour, balance, and sense, invited her often to go back. Children needed their mother to a certain age, that both parents knew and agreed on; and when these four healthy wisely brought up children were of the right age, Susan would work again, because she knew, and so did he, what happened to women of fifty at the height of their energy and ability, with grownup children who no longer needed their full devotion.

So here was this couple, testing their marriage, looking after it, treating it like a small boat full of helpless people in a very stormy sea. Well, of course, so it was. . . . The storms of the world were bad, but not too close—which is not to say they were selfishly felt: Susan and Matthew were both well-informed and responsible people. And the inner storms and quicksands were understood and charted. So everything was all right. Everything was in order. Yes, things were under control.

So what did it matter if they felt dry, flat? People like themselves, fed on a hundred books (psychological, anthropological, sociological), could scarcely be unprepared for the dry, controlled wistfulness which is the distinguishing mark of the intelligent marriage. Two people, endowed with education, with discrimination, with judgement, linked together voluntarily from their will to be happy together and to be of use to others—one sees them everywhere, one knows them, one even is that thing oneself: sadness because so much is after all so little. These two, unsurprised, turned towards each other with even more courtesy and gentle love: this was life, that two people, no matter how



carefully chosen, could not be everything to each other. In fact, even to say so, to think in such a way, was banal; they were ashamed to do it.

It was banal, too, when one night Matthew came home late and confessed he had been to a party, taken a girl home and slept with her. Susan forgave him, of course. Except that forgiveness is hardly the word. Understanding, yes. But if you understand something, you don't forgive it, you are the thing itself: forgiveness is for what you *don't* understand. Nor had he *confessed*—what sort of word is that?

The whole thing was not important. After all, years ago they had joked: Of course I'm not going to be faithful to you, no one can be faithful to one other person for a whole lifetime. (And there was the word "faithful"—stupid, all these words, stupid, belonging to a savage old world.) But the incident left both of them irritable. Strange, but they were both bad-tempered, annoyed. There was something unassimilable about it.

Making love splendidly after he had come home that night, both had felt that the idea that Myra Jenkins, a pretty girl met at a party, could be even relevant was ridiculous. They had loved each other for over a decade, would love each other for years more. Who, then, was Myra Jenkins?

Except, thought Susan, unaccountably bad-tempered, she was (is?) the first. In ten years. So either the ten years' fidelity was not important, or she isn't. (No, no, there is something wrong with this way of thinking, there must be.) But if she isn't important, presumably it wasn't important either when Matthew and I first went to bed with each other that afternoon whose delight even now (like a very long shadow at sundown) lays a long, wandlike finger over us. (Why did I say sundown?) Well, if what we felt that afternoon was not important, nothing is important, because if it hadn't been for what we felt, we wouldn't be Mr. and Mrs. Rawlings with four children, et cetera, et cetera. The whole thing is *absurd*—for him to have come home and told me was absurd. For him not to have told me was absurd. For me to care or, for that matter, not to care, is absurd . . . and who is Myra Jenkins? Why, no one at all.

There was only one thing to do, and of course these sensible people did it; they put the thing behind them, and consciously, knowing what they were doing, moved forward into a different

phase of their marriage, giving thanks for past good fortune as they did so.

For it was inevitable that the handsome, blond, attractive, manly man, Matthew Rawlings, should be at times tempted (oh, what a word!) by the attractive girls at parties she could not attend because of the four children; and that sometimes he would succumb (a word even more repulsive, if possible) and that she, a goodlooking woman in the big well-tended garden at Richmond, would sometimes be pierced as by an arrow from the sky with bitterness. Except that bitterness was not in order, it was out of court. Did the casual girls touch the marriage? They did not. Rather it was they who knew defeat because of the handsome Matthew Rawlings' marriage body and soul to Susan Rawlings.

In that case why did Susan feel (though luckily not for longer than a few seconds at a time) as if life had become a desert, and that nothing mattered, and that her children were not her own?

Meanwhile her intelligence continued to assert that all was well. What if her Matthew did have an occasional sweet afternoon, the odd affair? For she knew quite well, except in her moments of aridity, that they were very happy, that the affairs were not important.

Perhaps that was the trouble? It was in the nature of things that the adventures and delights could no longer be hers, because of the four children and the big house that needed so much attention. But perhaps she was secretly wishing, and even knowing that she did, that the wildness and the beauty could be his. But he was married to her. She was married to him. They were married inextricably. And therefore the gods could not strike him with the real magic, not really. Well, was it Susan's fault that after he came home from an adventure he looked harassed rather than fulfilled? (In fact, that was how she knew he had been *unfaithful*, because of his sullen air, and his glances at her, similar to hers at him: What is it that I share with this person that shields all delight from me?) But none of it by anybody's fault. (But what did they feel ought to be somebody's fault?) Nobody's fault, nothing to be at fault, no one to blame, no one to offer or to take it . . . and nothing wrong, either, except that Matthew never was really struck, as he wanted to



be, by joy; and that Susan was more and more often threatened by emptiness. (It was usually in the garden that she was invaded by this feeling: she was coming to avoid the garden, unless the children or Matthew were with her.) There was no need to use the dramatic words "unfaithful," "forgive," and the rest: intelligence forbade them. Intelligence barred, too, quarrelling, sulking, anger, silences of withdrawal, accusations and tears. Above all, intelligence forbids tears.

A high price has to be paid for the happy marriage with the four healthy children in the large white garden house.

And they were paying it, willingly, knowing what they were doing. When they lay side by side or breast to breast in the big civilised bedroom overlooking the wild sullied river, they laughed, often, for no particular reason; but they knew it was really because of these two small people, Susan and Matthew, supporting such an edifice on their intelligent love. The laugh comforted them; it saved them both, though from what, they did not know.

They were now both fortyish. The older children, boy and girl, were ten and eight, at school. The twins, six, were still at home. Susan did not have nurses or girls to help her: childhood is short; and she did not regret the hard work. Often enough she was bored, since small children can be boring; she was often very tired; but she regretted nothing. In another decade, she would turn herself back into being a woman with a life of her own.

Soon the twins would go to school, and they would be away from home from nine until four. These hours, so Susan saw it, would be the preparation for her own slow emancipation away from the role of hub-of-the-family into woman-with-her-own-life. She was already planning for the hours of freedom when all the children would be "off her hands." That was the phrase used by Matthew and by Susan and by their friends, for the moment when the youngest child went off to school. "They'll be off your hands, darling Susan, and you'll have time to yourself." So said Matthew, the intelligent husband, who had often enough commended and consoled Susan, standing by her in spirit during the years when her soul was not her own, as she said, but her children's.

What it amounted to was that Susan saw herself as she had been at twenty-eight, unmarried; and then again somewhere

about fifty, blossoming from the root of what she had been twenty years before. As if the essential Susan were in abeyance, as if she were in cold storage. Matthew said something like this to Susan one night: and she agreed that it was true—she did feel something like that. What, then, was this essential Susan? She did not know. Put like that it sounded ridiculous, and she did not really feel it. Anyway, they had a long discussion about the whole thing before going off to sleep in each other's arms.

So the twins went off to their school, two bright affectionate children who had no problems about it, since their older brother and sister had trodden this path so successfully before them. And now Susan was going to be alone in the big house, every day of the school term, except for the daily woman who came in to clean.

It was now, for the first time in this marriage, that something happened which neither of them had foreseen.

This is what happened. She returned, at nine-thirty, from taking the twins to the school by car, looking forward to seven blissful hours of freedom. On the first morning she was simply restless, worrying about the twins "naturally enough" since this was their first day away at school. She was hardly able to contain herself until they came back. Which they did happily, excited by the world of school, looking forward to the next day. And the next day Susan took them, dropped them, came back, and found herself reluctant to enter her big and beautiful home because it was as if something was waiting for her there that she did not wish to confront. Sensibly, however, she parked the car in the garage, entered the house, spoke to Mrs. Parkes, the daily woman, about her duties, and went up to her bedroom. She was possessed by a fever which drove her out again, downstairs, into the kitchen, where Mrs. Parkes was making cake and did not need her, and into the garden. There she sat on a bench and tried to calm herself looking at trees, at a brown glimpse of the river. But she was filled with tension, like a panic: as if an enemy was in the garden with her. She spoke to herself severely, thus: All this is quite natural. First, I spent twelve years of my adult life working, *living my own life*. Then I married, and from the moment I became pregnant for the first time I signed myself over, so to speak, to other people. To the children. Not for one moment in twelve years have I been

alone, had time to myself. So now I have to learn to be myself again. That's all.

And she went indoors to help Mrs. Parkes cook and clean, and found some sewing to do for the children. She kept herself occupied every day. At the end of the first term she understood she felt two contrary emotions. First: secret astonishment and dismay that during those weeks when the house was empty of children she had in fact been more occupied (had been careful to keep herself occupied) than ever she had been when the children were around her needing her continual attention. Second: that now she knew the house would be full of them, and for five weeks, she resented the fact she would never be alone. She was already looking back at those hours of sewing, cooking (but by herself) as at a lost freedom which would not be hers for five long weeks. And the two months of term which would succeed the five weeks stretched alluringly open to her—freedom. But what freedom—when in fact she had been so careful *not* to be free of small duties during the last weeks? She looked at herself, Susan Rawlings, sitting in a big chair by the window in the bedroom, sewing shirts or dresses, which she might just as well have bought. She saw herself making cakes for hours at a time in the big family kitchen: yet usually she bought cakes. What she saw was a woman alone, that was true, but she had not felt alone. For instance, Mrs. Parkes was always somewhere in the house. And she did not like being in the garden at all, because of the closeness there of the enemy—irritation, restlessness, emptiness, whatever it was—which keeping her hands occupied made less dangerous for some reason.

Susan did not tell Matthew of these thoughts. They were not sensible. She did not recognise herself in them. What should she say to her dear friend and husband, Matthew? "When I go into the garden, that is, if the children are not there, I feel as if there is an enemy there waiting to invade me." "What enemy, Susan darling?" "Well I don't know, really. . . ." "Perhaps you should see a doctor?"

No, clearly this conversation should not take place. The holidays began and Susan welcomed them. Four children, lively, energetic, intelligent, demanding: she was never, not for a moment of her day, alone. If she was in a room, they would be

in the next room, or waiting for her to do something for them; or it would soon be time for lunch or tea, or to take one of them to the dentist. Something to do: five weeks of it, thank goodness.

On the fourth day of these so welcome holidays, she found she was storming with anger at the twins; two shrinking beautiful children who (and this is what checked her) stood hand in hand looking at her with sheer dismayed disbelief. This was their calm mother, shouting at them. And for what? They had come to her with some game, some bit of nonsense. They looked at each other, moved closer for support, and went off hand in hand, leaving Susan holding on to the windowsill of the livingroom, breathing deep, feeling sick. She went to lie down, telling the older children she had a headache. She heard the boy Harry telling the little ones: "It's all right, Mother's got a headache." She heard that *It's all right* with pain.

That night she said to her husband: "Today I shouted at the twins, quite unfairly." She sounded miserable, and he said gently: "Well, what of it?"

"It's more of an adjustment than I thought, their going to school."

"But Susie, Susie darling. . . ." For she was crouched weeping on the bed. He comforted her: "Susan, what is all this about? You shouted at them? What of it? If you shouted at them fifty times a day it wouldn't be more than the little devils deserve." But she wouldn't laugh. She wept. Soon he comforted her with his body. She became calm. Calm, she wondered what was wrong with her, and why she should mind so much that she might, just once, have behaved unjustly with the children. What did it matter? They had forgotten it all long ago: Mother had a headache and everything was all right.

It was a long time later that Susan understood that that night, when she had wept and Matthew had driven the misery out of her with his big solid body, was the last time, ever in their married life, that they had been—to use their mutual language—with each other. And even that was a lie, because she had not told him of her real fears at all.

The five weeks passed, and Susan was in control of herself, and good and kind, and she looked forward to the holidays with a mixture of fear and longing. She did not know what to expect. She took the twins off to school (the elder children took them-

selves to school) and she returned to the house determined to face the enemy wherever he was, in the house, or the garden or—where?

She was again restless, she was possessed by restlessness. She cooked and sewed and worked as before, day after day, while Mrs. Parkes remonstrated: "Mrs. Rawlings, what's the need for it? I can do that, it's what you pay me for."

And it was so irrational that she checked herself. She would put the car into the garage, go up to her bedroom, and sit, hands in her lap, forcing herself to be quiet. She listened to Mrs. Parkes moving around the house. She looked out into the garden and saw the branches shake the trees. She sat defeating the enemy, restlessness. Emptiness. She ought to be thinking about her life, about herself. But she did not. Or perhaps she could not. As soon as she forced her mind to think about Susan (for what else did she want to be alone for?), it skipped off to thoughts of butter or school clothes. Or it thought of Mrs. Parkes. She realised that she sat listening for the movements of the cleaning woman, following her every turn, bend, thought. She followed her in her mind from kitchen to bathroom, from table to oven, and it was as if the duster, the cleaning cloth, the saucepan, were in her own hand. She would hear herself saying: No, not like that, don't put that there. . . . Yet she did not give a damn what Mrs. Parkes did, or if she did it at all. Yet she could not prevent herself from being conscious of her, every minute. Yes, this was what was wrong with her: she needed, when she was alone, to be really alone, with no one near. She could not endure the knowledge that in ten minutes or in half an hour Mrs. Parkes would call up the stairs: "Mrs. Rawlings, there's no silver polish. Madam, we're out of flour."

So she left the house and went to sit in the garden where she was screened from the house by trees. She waited for the demon to appear and claim her, but he did not.

She was keeping him off, because she had not, after all, come to an end of arranging herself.

She was planning how to be somewhere where Mrs. Parkes would not come after her with a cup of tea, or a demand to be allowed to telephone (always irritating, since Susan did not care who she telephoned or how often), or just a nice talk about something. Yes, she needed a place, or a state of affairs, where it would not be necessary to keep reminding herself: In ten

minutes I must telephone Matthew about . . . and at half past three I must leave early for the children because the car needs cleaning. And at ten o'clock tomorrow I must remember. . . . She was possessed with resentment that the seven hours of freedom in every day (during weekdays in the school term) were not free, that never, not for one second, ever, was she free from the pressure of time, from having to remember this or that. She could never forget herself; never really let herself go into forgetfulness.

Resentment. It was poisoning her. (She looked at this emotion and thought it was absurd. Yet she felt it.) She was a prisoner. (She looked at this thought too, and it was no good telling herself it was a ridiculous one.) She must tell Matthew—but what? She was filled with emotions that were utterly ridiculous, that she despised, yet that nevertheless she was feeling so strongly she could not shake them off.

The school holidays came round, and this time they were for nearly two months, and she behaved with a conscious controlled decency that nearly drove her crazy. She would lock herself in the bathroom, and sit on the edge of the bath, breathing deep, trying to let go into some kind of calm. Or she went up into the spare room, usually empty, where no one would expect her to be. She heard the children calling "Mother, Mother," and kept silent, feeling guilty. Or she went to the very end of the garden, by herself, and looked at the slow-moving brown river; she looked at the river and closed her eyes and breathed slow and deep, taking it into her being, into her veins.

Then she returned to the family, wife and mother, smiling and responsible, feeling as if the pressure of these people—four lively children and her husband—were a painful pressure on the surface of her skin, a hand pressing on her brain. She did not once break down into irritation during these holidays, but it was like living out a prison sentence, and when the children went back to school, she sat on a white stone near the flowing river, and she thought: It is not even a year since the twins went to school, since *they were off my hands* (What on earth did I think I meant when I used that stupid phrase?), and yet I'm a different person. I'm simply not myself. I don't understand it.

Yet she had to understand it. For she knew that this structure—big white house, on which the mortgage still cost four

hundred a year, a husband, so good and kind and insightful; four children, all doing so nicely; and the garden where she sat; and Mrs. Parkes, the cleaning woman—all this depended on her, and yet she could not understand why, or even what it was she contributed to it.

She said to Matthew in their bedroom: "I think there must be something wrong with me."

And he said: "Surely not, Susan? You look marvellous—you're as lovely as ever."

She looked at the handsome blond man, with his clear, intelligent, blue-eyed face, and thought: Why is it I can't tell him? Why not? And she said: "I need to be alone more than I am."

At which he swung his slow blue gaze at her, and she saw what she had been dreading: Incredulity. Disbelief. And fear. An incredulous blue stare from a stranger who was her husband, as close to her as her own breath.

He said: "But the children are at school and off your hands."

She said to herself: I've got to force myself to say: Yes, but do you realize that I never feel free? There's never a moment I can say to myself: There's nothing I have to remind myself about, nothing I have to do in half an hour, or an hour, or two hours. . . .

But she said: "I don't feel well."

He said: "Perhaps you need a holiday."

She said, appalled: "But not without you, surely?" For she could not imagine herself going off without him. Yet that was what he meant. Seeing her face, he laughed, and opened his arms, and she went into them, thinking: Yes, yes, but why can't I say it? And what is it I have to say?

She tried to tell him, about never being free. And he listened and said: "But Susan, what sort of freedom can you possibly want—short of being dead! Am I ever free? I go to the office, and I have to be there at ten—all right, half past ten, sometimes. And I have to do this or that, don't I? Then I've got to come home at a certain time—I don't mean it, you know I don't—but if I'm not going to be back home at six I telephone you. When can I ever say to myself: I have nothing to be responsible for in the next six hours?"

Susan, hearing this, was remorseful. Because it was true. The good marriage, the house, the children, depended just as much on his voluntary bondage as it did on hers. But why did he not

feel bound? Why didn't he chafe and become restless? No, there was something really wrong with her and this proved it.

And that word "bondage"—why had she used it? She had never felt marriage, or the children, as bondage. Neither had he, or surely they wouldn't be together lying in each other's arms content after twelve years of marriage.

No, her state (whatever it was) was irrelevant, nothing to do with her real good life with her family. She had to accept the fact that, after all, she was an irrational person and to live with it. Some people had to live with crippled arms, or stammers, or being deaf. She would have to live knowing she was subject to a state of mind she could not own.

Nevertheless, as a result of this conversation with her husband, there was a new regime next holidays.

The spare room at the top of the house now had a cardboard sign saying: PRIVATE! DO NOT DISTURB! on it. (This sign had been drawn in coloured chalks by the children, after a discussion between the parents in which it was decided this was psychologically the right thing.) The family and Mrs. Parkes knew this was "Mother's Room" and that she was entitled to her privacy. Many serious conversations took place between Matthew and the children about not taking Mother for granted. Susan overheard the first, between father and Harry, the older boy, and was surprised at her irritation over it. Surely she could have a room somewhere in that big house and retire into it without such a fuss being made? Without it being so solemnly discussed? Why couldn't she simply have announced: "I'm going to fit out the little top room for myself, and when I'm in it I'm not to be disturbed for anything short of fire"? Just that, and finished; instead of long earnest discussions. When she heard Harry and Matthew explaining it to the twins with Mrs. Parkes coming in—"Yes, well, a family sometimes gets on top of a woman"—she had to go right away to the bottom of the garden until the devils of exasperation had finished their dance in her blood.

But now there was a room, and she could go there when she liked, she used it seldom: she felt even more caged there than in her bedroom. One day she had gone up there after a lunch for ten children she had cooked and served because Mrs. Parkes was not there, and had sat alone for a while looking into the garden. She saw the children stream out from the kitchen and



stand looking up at the window where she sat behind the curtains. They were all—her children and their friends—discussing Mother's Room. A few minutes later, the chase of children in some game came pounding up the stairs, but ended as abruptly as if they had fallen over a ravine, so sudden was the silence. They had remembered she was there, and had gone silent in a great gale of "Hush! Shhhhhh! Quiet, you'll disturb her. . . ." And they went tiptoeing downstairs like criminal conspirators. When she came down to make tea for them, they all apologised. The twins put their arms around her, from front and back, making a human cage of loving limbs, and promised it would never occur again. "We forgot, Mummy, we forgot all about it!"

What it amounted to was that Mother's Room, and her need for privacy, had become a valuable lesson in respect for other people's rights. Quite soon Susan was going up to the room only because it was a lesson it was a pity to drop. Then she took sewing up there, and the children and Mrs. Parkes came in and out: it had become another family room.

She sighed, and smiled, and resigned herself—she made jokes at her own expense with Matthew over the room. That is, she did from the self she liked, she respected. But at the same time, something inside her howled with impatience, with rage. . . . And she was frightened. One day she found herself kneeling by her bed and praying: "Dear God, keep it away from me, keep him away from me." She meant the devil, for she now thought of it, not caring if she was irrational, as some sort of demon. She imagined him, or it, as a youngish man, or perhaps a mid-dle-aged man pretending to be young. Or a man young-looking from immaturity? At any rate, she saw the young-looking face which, when she drew closer, had dry lines about mouth and eyes. He was thinnish, meagre in build. And he had a reddish complexion, and ginger hair. That was he—a gingery, energetic man, and he wore a reddish hairy jacket, unpleasant to the touch.

Well, one day she saw him. She was standing at the bottom of the garden, watching the river ebb past, when she raised her eyes and saw this person, or being, sitting on the white stone bench. He was looking at her, and grinning. In his hand was a long crooked stick, which he had picked off the ground, or broken off the tree above him. He was absent-mindedly, out of an absent-minded or freakish impulse of spite, using the stick

to stir around in the coils of a blindworm or a grass snake (or some kind of snakelike creature: it was whitish and unhealthy to look at, unpleasant). The snake was twisting about, flinging its coils from side to side in a kind of dance of protest against the teasing prodding stick.

Susan looked at him, thinking: Who is the stranger? What is he doing in our garden? Then she recognised the man around whom her terrors had crystallised. As she did so, he vanished. She made herself walk over to the bench. A shadow from a branch lay across thin emerald grass, moving jerkily over its roughness, and she could see why she had taken it for a snake, lashing and twisting. She went back to the house thinking: Right, then, so I've seen him with my own eyes, so I'm not crazy after all—there is a danger because I've seen him. He is lurking in the garden and sometimes even in the house, and he wants to *get into me and to take me over*.

She dreamed of having a room or a place, anywhere, where she could go and sit, by herself, no one knowing where she was.

Once, near Victoria, she found herself outside a news agent that had Rooms to Let advertised. She decided to rent a room, telling no one. Sometimes she could take the train in to Richmond and sit alone in it for an hour or two. Yet how could she? A room would cost three or four pounds a week, and she earned no money, and how could she explain to Matthew that she needed such a sum? What for? It did not occur to her that she was taking it for granted she wasn't going to tell him about the room.

Well, it was out of the question, having a room; yet she knew she must.

One day, when a school term was well established, and none of the children had measles or other ailments, and everything seemed in order, she did the shopping early, explained to Mrs. Parkes she was meeting an old school friend, took the train to Victoria, searched until she found a small quiet hotel, and asked for a room for the day. They did not let rooms by the day, the manageress said, looking doubtful, since Susan so obviously was not the kind of woman who needed a room for unrespectable reasons. Susan made a long explanation about not being well, being unable to shop without frequent rests for lying down. At last she was allowed to rent the room provided she paid a full night's price for it. She was taken up by the manageress and a



maid, both concerned over the state of her health . . . which must be pretty bad if, living at Richmond (she had signed her name and address in the register), she needed a shelter at Victoria.

The room was ordinary and anonymous, and was just what Susan needed. She put a shilling in the gas fire, and sat, eyes shut, in a dingy armchair with her back to a dingy window. She was alone. She was alone. She was alone. She could feel pressures lifting off her. First the sounds of traffic came very loud; then they seemed to vanish; she might even have slept a little. A knock on the door: it was Miss Townsend, the manageress, bringing her a cup of tea with her own hands, so concerned was she over Susan's long silence and possible illness.

Miss Townsend was a lonely woman of fifty, running this hotel with all the rectitude expected of her, and she sensed in Susan the possibility of understanding companionship. She stayed to talk. Susan found herself in the middle of a fantastic story about her illness, which got more and more impossible as she tried to make it tally with the large house at Richmond, well-off husband, and four children. Suppose she said instead: Miss Townsend, I'm here in your hotel because I need to be alone for a few hours, above all *alone and with no one knowing where I am*. She said it mentally, and saw, mentally, the look that would inevitably come on Miss Townsend's elderly maiden's face. "Miss Townsend, my four children and my husband are driving me insane, do you understand that? Yes, I can see from the gleam of hysteria in your eyes that comes from loneliness controlled but only just contained that I've got everything in the world you've ever longed for. Well, Miss Townsend, I don't want any of it. You can have it, Miss Townsend. I wish I was absolutely alone in the world, like you. Miss Townsend, I'm besieged by seven devils, Miss Townsend, Miss Townsend, let me stay here in your hotel where the devils can't get me. . . ." Instead of saying all this, she described her anaemia, agreed to try Miss Townsend's remedy for it, which was raw liver, minced, between whole-meal bread, and said yes, perhaps it would be better if she stayed at home and let a friend do shopping for her. She paid her bill and left the hotel, defeated.

At home Mrs. Parkes said she didn't really like it, no, not really, when Mrs. Rawlings was away from nine in the morning until five. The teacher had telephoned from school to say Joan's

teeth were paining her, and she hadn't known what to say; and what was she to make for the children's tea, Mrs. Rawlings hadn't said.

All this was nonsense, of course. Mrs. Parkes's complaint was that Susan had withdrawn herself spiritually, leaving the burden of the big house on her.

Susan looked back at her day of "freedom" which had resulted in her becoming a friend of the lonely Miss Townsend, and in Mrs. Parkes's remonstrances. Yet she remembered the short blissful hour of being alone, really alone. She was determined to arrange her life, no matter what it cost, so that she could have that solitude more often. An absolute solitude, where no one knew her or cared about her.

But how? She thought of saying to her old employer: I want you to back me up in a story with Matthew that I am doing part-time work for you. The truth is that . . . But she would have to tell him a lie too, and which lie? She could not say: I want to sit by myself three or four times a week in a rented room. And besides, he knew Matthew, and she could not really ask him to tell lies on her behalf, apart from being bound to think it meant a lover.

Suppose she really took a part-time job, which she could get through fast and efficiently, leaving time for herself. What job? Addressing envelopes? Canvassing?

And there was Mrs. Parkes, working widow, who knew exactly what she was prepared to give to the house, who knew by instinct when her mistress withdrew in spirit from her responsibilities. Mrs. Parkes was one of the servers of this world, but she needed someone to serve. She had to have Mrs. Rawlings, her madam, at the top of the house or in the garden, so that she could come and get support from her: "Yes, the bread's not what it was when I was a girl. . . . Yes, Harry's got a wonderful appetite, I wonder where he puts it all. . . . Yes, it's lucky the twins are so much of a size, they can wear each other's shoes, that's a saving in these hard times. . . . Yes, the cherry jam from Switzerland is not a patch on the jam from Poland, and three times the price . . ." And so on. That sort of talk Mrs. Parkes must have, every day, or she would leave, not knowing herself why she left.

Susan Rawlings, thinking these thoughts, found that she was prowling through the great thicketed garden like a wild cat: she

was walking up the stairs, down the stairs, through the rooms into the garden, along the brown running river, back, up through the house, down again. . . . It was a wonder Mrs. Parkes did not think it strange. But, on the contrary, Mrs. Rawlings could do what she liked, she could stand on her head if she wanted, provided she was *there*. Susan Rawlings prowled and muttered through her house, hating Mrs. Parkes, hating poor Miss Townsend, dreaming of her hour of solitude in the dingy respectability of Miss Townsend's hotel bedroom, and she knew quite well she was mad. Yes, she was mad.

She said to Matthew that she must have a holiday. Matthew agreed with her. This was not as things had been once—how they had talked in each other's arms in the marriage bed. He had, she knew, diagnosed her finally as *unreasonable*. She had become someone outside himself that he had to manage. They were living side by side in this house like two tolerably friendly strangers.

Having told Mrs. Parkes—or rather, asked for her permission—she went off on a walking holiday in Wales. She chose the remotest place she knew of. Every morning the children telephoned her before they went off to school, to encourage and support her, just as they had over Mother's Room. Every evening she telephoned them, spoke to each child in turn, and then to Matthew. Mrs. Parkes, given permission to telephone for instructions or advice, did so every day at lunchtime. When, as happened three times, Mrs. Rawlings was out on the mountain-side, Mrs. Parkes asked that she should ring back at such-and-such a time, for she would not be happy in what she was doing without Mrs. Rawlings' blessing.

Susan prowled over wild country with the telephone wire holding her to her duty like a leash. The next time she must telephone, or wait to be telephoned, nailed her to her cross. The mountains themselves seemed trammelled by her unfreedom. Everywhere on the mountains, where she met no one at all, from breakfast time to dusk, excepting sheep, or a shepherd, she came face to face with her own craziness, which might attack her in the broadest valleys, so that they seemed too small, or on a mountain top from which she could see a hundred other mountains and valleys, so that they seemed too low, too small, with the sky pressing down too close. She would stand gazing at a hillside brilliant with ferns and bracken, jewelled with

running water, and see nothing but her devil, who lifted inhuman eyes at her from where he leaned negligently on a rock, switching at his ugly yellow boots with a leafy twig.

She returned to her home and family, with the Welsh emptiness at the back of her mind like a promise of freedom.

She told her husband she wanted to have an *au pair* girl.

They were in their bedroom, it was late at night, the children slept. He sat, shirted and slippers, in a chair by the window, looking out. She sat brushing her hair and watching him in the mirror. A time-hallowed scene in the connubial bedroom. He said nothing, while she heard the arguments coming into his mind, only to be rejected because every one was *reasonable*.

"It seems strange to get one now; after all, the children are in school most of the day. Surely the time for you to have help was when you were stuck with them day and night. Why don't you ask Mrs. Parkes to cook for you? She's even offered to—I can understand if you are tired of cooking for six people. But you know that an *au pair* girl means all kinds of problems; it's not like having an ordinary char in during the day. . . ."

Finally he said carefully: "Are you thinking of going back to work?"

"No," she said, "no, not really." She made herself sound vague, rather stupid. She went on brushing her black hair and peering at herself so as to be oblivious of the short uneasy glances her Matthew kept giving her. "Do you think we can't afford it?" she went on vaguely, not at all the old efficient Susan who knew exactly what they could afford.

"It's not that," he said, looking out of the window at dark trees, so as not to look at her. Meanwhile she examined a round, candid, pleasant face with clear dark brows and clear grey eyes. A sensible face. She brushed thick healthy black hair and thought: Yet that's the reflection of a madwoman. How very strange! Much more to the point if what looked back at me was the gingery green-eyed demon with his dry meagre smile. . . . Why wasn't Matthew agreeing? After all, what else could he do? She was breaking her part of the bargain and there was no way of forcing her to keep it: that her spirit, her soul, should live in this house, so that the people in it could grow like plants in water, and Mrs. Parkes remain content in their service. In return for this, he would be a good loving husband, and responsible towards the children. Well, nothing like this had been true of

either of them for a long time. He did his duty, perfunctorily; she did not even pretend to do hers. And he had become like other husbands, with his real life in his work and the people he met there, and very likely a serious affair. All this was her fault.

At last he drew heavy curtains, blotting out the trees, and turned to force her attention: "Susan, are you really sure we need a girl?" But she would not meet his appeal at all. She was running the brush over her hair again and again, lifting fine black clouds in a small hiss of electricity. She was peering in and smiling as if she were amused at the clinging hissing hair that followed the brush.

"Yes, I think it would be a good idea, on the whole," she said, with the cunning of a madwoman evading the real point.

In the mirror she could see her Matthew lying on his back, his hands behind his head, staring upwards, his face sad and hard. She felt her heart (the old heart of Susan Rawlings) soften and call out to him. But she set it to be indifferent.

He said: "Susan, the children?" It was an appeal that *almost* reached her. He opened his arms, lifting them palms up, empty. She had only to run across and fling herself into them, onto his hard, warm chest, and melt into herself, into Susan. But she could not. She would not see his lifted arms. She said vaguely: "Well, surely it'll be even better for them? We'll get a French or a German girl and they'll learn the language."

In the dark she lay beside him, feeling frozen, a stranger. She felt as if Susan had been spirited away. She disliked very much this woman who lay here, cold and indifferent beside a suffering man, but she could not change her.

Next morning she set about getting a girl, and very soon came Sophie Traub from Hamburg, a girl of twenty, laughing, healthy, blue-eyed, intending to learn English. Indeed, she already spoke a good deal. In return for a room—"Mother's Room"—and her food, she undertook to do some light cooking, and to be with the children when Mrs. Rawlings asked. She was an intelligent girl and understood perfectly what was needed. Susan said: "I go off sometimes, for the morning or for the day—well, sometimes the children run home from school, or they ring up, or a teacher rings up. I should be here, really. And there's the daily woman. . . ." And Sophie laughed her deep fruity *Fräulein's* laugh, showed her fine white teeth and her

dimples, and said: "You want some person to play mistress of the house sometimes, not so?"

"Yes, that is just so," said Susan, a bit dry, despite herself, thinking in secret fear how easy it was, how much nearer to the end she was than she thought. Healthy *Fräulein Traub's* instant understanding of their position proved this to be true.

The *au pair* girl, because of her own commonsense, or (as Susan said to herself, with her new inward shudder) because she had been *chosen* so well by Susan, was a success with everyone, the children liking her, Mrs. Parkes forgetting almost at once that she was German, and Matthew finding her "nice to have around the house." For he was now taking things as they came, from the surface of life, withdrawn both as a husband and a father from the household.

One day Susan saw how Sophie and Mrs. Parkes were talking and laughing in the kitchen, and she announced that she would be away until tea time. She knew exactly where to go and what she must look for. She took the District Line to South Kensington, changed to the Circle, got off at Paddington, and walked around looking at the smaller hotels until she was satisfied with one which had *FRED'S HOTEL* painted on windowpanes that needed cleaning. The facade was a faded shiny yellow, like unhealthy skin. A door at the end of a passage said she must knock; she did, and Fred appeared. He was not at all attractive, not in any way, being fattish, and run-down, and wearing a tasteless striped suit. He had small sharp eyes in a white creased face, and was quite prepared to let Mrs. Jones (she chose the farcical name deliberately, staring him out) have a room three days a week from ten until six. Provided of course that she paid in advance each time she came? Susan produced fifteen shillings (no price had been set by him) and held it out, still fixing him with a bold unblinking challenge she had not known until then she could use at will. Looking at her still, he took up a ten-shilling note from her palm between thumb and forefinger, fingered it; then shuffled up two half-crowns, held out his own palm with these bits of money displayed thereon, and let his gaze lower broodingly at them. They were standing in the passage, a red-shaded light above, bare boards beneath, and a strong smell of floor polish rising about them. He shot his gaze up at her over the still-extended palm, and smiled as if to say: What

do you take me for? "I shan't," said Susan, "be using this room for the purposes of making money." He still waited. She added another five shillings, at which he nodded and said: "You pay, and I ask no questions." "Good," said Susan. He now went past her to the stairs, and there waited a moment: the light from the street door being in her eyes, she lost sight of him momentarily. Then she saw a sober-suited, white-faced, white-balding little man trotting up the stairs like a waiter, and she went after him. They proceeded in utter silence up the stairs of this house where no questions were asked—Fred's Hotel, which could afford the freedom for its visitors that poor Miss Townsend's hotel could not. The room was hideous. It had a single window, with thin green brocade curtains, a three-quarter bed that had a cheap green satin bedspread on it, a fireplace with a gas fire and a shilling meter by it, a chest of drawers, and a green wicker armchair.

"Thank you," said Susan, knowing that Fred (if this was Fred, and not George, or Herbert or Charlie) was looking at her, not so much with curiosity, an emotion he would not own to, for professional reasons, but with a philosophical sense of what was appropriate. Having taken her money and shown her up and agreed to everything, he was clearly disapproving of her for coming here. She did not belong here at all, so his look said. (But she knew, already, how very much she did belong: the room had been waiting for her to join it.) "Would you have me called at five o'clock, please?" and he nodded and went downstairs.

It was twelve in the morning. She was free. She sat in the armchair, she simply sat, she closed her eyes and sat and let herself be alone. She was alone and no one knew where she was. When a knock came on the door she was annoyed, and prepared to show it: but it was Fred himself; it was five o'clock and he was calling her as ordered. He flicked his sharp little eyes over the room—bed, first. It was undisturbed. She might never have been in the room at all. She thanked him, said she would be returning the day after tomorrow, and left. She was back home in time to cook supper, to put the children to bed, to cook a second supper for her husband and herself later. And to welcome Sophie back from the pictures where she had gone with a friend. All these things she did cheerfully, willingly. But she was thinking all the time of the hotel room; she was longing for it with her whole being.

Three times a week. She arrived promptly at ten, looked Fred in the eyes, gave him twenty shillings, followed him up the stairs, went into the room, and shut the door on him with gentle firmness. For Fred, disapproving of her being here at all, was quite ready to let friendship, or at least acquaintanceship, follow his disapproval, if only she would let him. But he was content to go off on her dismissing nod, with the twenty shillings in his hand.

She sat in the armchair and shut her eyes.

What did she *do* in the room? Why, nothing at all. From the chair, when it had rested her, she went to the window, stretching her arms, smiling, treasuring her anonymity, to look out. She was no longer Susan Rawlings, mother of four, wife of Matthew, employer of Mrs. Parkes and of Sophie Traub, with these and those relations with friends, school-teachers, tradesmen. She no longer was mistress of the big white house and garden, owning clothes suitable for this and that activity or occasion. She was Mrs. Jones, and she was alone, and she had no past and no future. Here I am, she thought, after all these years of being married and having children and playing those roles of responsibility—and I'm just the same. Yet there have been times I thought that nothing existed of me except the roles that went with being Mrs. Matthew Rawlings. Yes, here I am, and if I never saw any of my family again, here I would still be . . . how very strange that is! And she leaned on the sill, and looked into the street, loving the men and women who passed, because she did not know them. She looked at the down-trodden buildings over the street, and at the sky, wet and dingy, or sometimes blue, and she felt she had never seen buildings or sky before. And then she went back to the chair, empty, her mind a blank. Sometimes she talked aloud, saying nothing—an exclamation, meaningless, followed by a comment about the floral pattern on the thin rug, or a stain on the green satin coverlet. For the most part, she wool-gathered—what word is there for it?—brooded, wandered, simply went dark, feeling emptiness run deliciously through her veins like the movement of her blood.

This room had become more her own than the house she lived in. One morning she found Fred taking her a flight higher than usual. She stopped, refusing to go up, and demanded her usual room, Number 19. "Well, you'll have to wait half an hour,



then," he said. Willingly she descended to the dark disinfectant-smelling hall, and sat waiting until the two, man and woman, came down the stairs, giving her swift indifferent glances before they hurried out into the street, separating at the door. She went up to the room, *her* room, which they had just vacated. It was no less hers, though the windows were set wide open, and a maid was straightening the bed as she came in.

After these days of solitude, it was both easy to play her part as mother and wife, and difficult—because it was so easy: she felt an imposter. She felt as if her shell moved here, with her family, answering to Mummy, Mother, Susan, Mrs. Rawlings. She was surprised no one saw through her, that she wasn't turned out of doors, as a fake. On the contrary, it seemed the children loved her more; Matthew and she "got on" pleasantly, and Mrs. Parkes was happy in her work under (for the most part, it must be confessed) Sophie Traub. At night she lay beside her husband, and they made love again, apparently just as they used to, when they were really married. But she, Susan, or the being who answered so readily and improbably to the name of Susan, was not there: she was in Fred's Hotel, in Paddington, waiting for the easing hours of solitude to begin.

Soon she made a new arrangement with Fred and with Sophie. It was for five days a week. As for the money, five pounds, she simply asked Matthew for it. She saw that she was not even frightened he might ask what for: he would give it to her, she knew that, and yet it was terrifying it could be so, for this close couple, these partners, had once known the destination of every shilling they must spend. He agreed to give her five pounds a week. She asked for just so much, not a penny more. He sounded indifferent about it. It was as if he were paying her, she thought: *paying her off*—yes, that was it. Terror came back for a moment when she understood this, but she stilled it: things had gone too far for that. Now, every week, on Sunday nights, he gave her five pounds, turning away from her before their eyes could meet on the transaction. As for Sophie Traub, she was to be somewhere in or near the house until six at night, after which she was free. She was not to cook, or to clean; she was simply to be there. So she gardened or sewed, and asked friends in, being a person who was bound to have a lot of friends. If the children were sick, she nursed them. If

teachers telephoned, she answered them sensibly. For the five daytimes in the school week, she was altogether the mistress of the house.

One night in the bedroom, Matthew asked: "Susan, I don't want to interfere—don't think that, please—but are you sure you are well?"

She was brushing her hair at the mirror. She made two more strokes on either side of her head, before she replied: "Yes, dear, I am sure I am well."

He was again lying on his back, his blond head on his hands, his elbows angled up and part-concealing his face. He said: "Then Susan, I have to ask you this question, though you must understand, I'm not putting any sort of pressure on you." (Susan heard the word "pressure" with dismay, because this was inevitable; of course she could not go on like this.) "Are things going to go on like this?"

"Well," she said, going vague and bright and idiotic again, so as to escape: "Well, I don't see why not."

He was jerking his elbows up and down, in annoyance or in pain, and, looking at him, she saw he had got thin, even gaunt; and restless angry movements were not what she remembered of him. He said: "Do you want a divorce, is that it?"

At this, Susan only with the greatest difficulty stopped herself from laughing: she could hear the bright bubbling laughter she *would* have emitted, had she let herself. He could only mean one thing: she had a lover, and that was why she spent her days in London, as lost to him as if she had vanished to another continent.

Then the small panic set in again: she understood that he hoped she did have a lover, he was begging her to say so, because otherwise it would be too terrifying.

She thought this out as she brushed her hair, watching the fine black stuff fly up to make its little clouds of electricity, hiss, hiss. Behind her head, across the room, was a blue wall. She realised she was absorbed in watching the black hair making shapes against the blue. She should be answering him. "Do you want a divorce, Matthew?"

He said: "That surely isn't the point, is it?"

"You brought it up, I didn't," she said, brightly, suppressing meaningless tinkling laughter.



Next day she asked Fred: "Have enquiries been made for me?"

He hesitated, and she said: "I've been coming here a year now. I've made no trouble, and you've been paid every day. I have a right to be told."

"As a matter of fact, Mrs. Jones, a man did come asking."

"A man from a detective agency?"

"Well, he could have been, couldn't he?"

"I was asking you. . . . Well, what did you tell him?"

"I told him a Mrs. Jones came every weekday from ten until five or six and stayed in Number 19 by herself."

"Describing me?"

"Well, Mrs. Jones, I had no alternative. Put yourself in my place."

"By rights I should deduct what that man gave you for the information."

He raised shocked eyes: she was not the sort of person to make jokes like this! Then he chose to laugh: a pinkish wet slit appeared across his white crinkled face; his eyes positively begged her to laugh, otherwise he might lose some money. She remained grave, looking at him.

He stopped laughing and said: "You want to go up now?"—returning to the familiarity, the comradeship, of the country where no questions are asked, on which (and he knew it) she depended completely.

She went up to sit in her wicker chair. But it was not the same. Her husband had searched her out. (The world had searched her out.) The pressures were on her. She was here with his connivance. He might walk in at any moment, here, into Room 19. She imagined the report from the detective agency: "A woman calling herself Mrs. Jones, fitting the description of your wife (et cetera, et cetera, et cetera), stays alone all day in Room No. 19. She insists on this room, waits for it if it is engaged. As far as the proprietor knows, she receives no visitors there, male or female." A report something on these lines Matthew must have received.

Well, of course he was right: things couldn't go on like this. He had put an end to it all simply by sending the detective after her.

She tried to shrink herself back into the shelter of the room,

a snail pecked out of its shell and trying to squirm back. But the peace of the room had gone. She was trying consciously to revive it, trying to let go into the dark creative trance (or whatever it was) that she had found there. It was no use, yet she craved for it, she was as ill as a suddenly deprived addict.

Several times she returned to the room, to look for herself there, but instead she found the unnamed spirit of restlessness, a pricking fevered hunger for movement, an irritable self-consciousness that made her brain feel as if it had coloured lights going on and off inside it. Instead of the soft dark that had been the room's air, were now waiting for her demons that made her dash blindly about, muttering words of hate; she was impelling herself from point to point like a moth dashing itself against a windowpane, sliding to the bottom, fluttering off on broken wings, then crashing into the invisible barrier again. And again and again. Soon she was exhausted, and she told Fred that for a while she would not be needing the room, she was going on holiday. Home she went, to the big white house by the river. The middle of a weekday, and she felt guilty at returning to her own home when not expected. She stood unseen, looking in at the kitchen window. Mrs. Parkes, wearing a discarded floral overall of Susan's, was stooping to slide something into the oven. Sophie, arms folded, was leaning her back against a cupboard and laughing at some joke made by a girl not seen before by Susan—a dark foreign girl, Sophie's visitor. In an armchair Molly, one of the twins, lay curled, sucking her thumb and watching the grownups. She must have some sickness, to be kept from school. The child's listless face, the dark circles under her eyes, hurt Susan: Molly was looking at the three grownups working and talking in exactly the same way Susan looked at the four through the kitchen window: she was remote, shut off from them.

But then, just as Susan imagined herself going in, picking up the little girl, and sitting in an armchair with her, stroking her probably heated forehead, Sophie did just that: she had been standing on one leg, the other knee flexed, its foot set against the wall. Now she let her foot in its ribbon-tied red shoe slide down the wall, stood solid on two feet, clapping her hands before and behind her, and sang a couple of lines in German, so that the child lifted her heavy eyes at her and began to smile.

Then she walked, or rather skipped, over to the child, swung her up, and let her fall into her lap at the same moment she sat herself. She said "Hopla! Hopla! Molly . . ." and began stroking the dark untidy young head that Molly laid on her shoulder for comfort.

Well. . . . Susan blinked the tears of farewell out of her eyes, and went quietly up through the house to her bedroom. There she sat looking at the river through the trees. She felt at peace, but in a way that was new to her. She had no desire to move, to talk, to do anything at all. The devils that had haunted the house, the garden, were not there; but she knew it was because her soul was in Room 19 in Fred's Hotel; she was not really here at all. It was a sensation that should have been frightening: to sit at her own bedroom window, listening to Sophie's rich young voice sing German nursery songs to her child, listening to Mrs. Parkes clatter and move below, and to know that all this had nothing to do with her: she was already out of it.

Later, she made herself go down and say she was home: it was unfair to be here unannounced. She took lunch with Mrs. Parkes, Sophie, Sophie's Italian friend Maria, and her daughter Molly, and felt like a visitor.

A few days later, at bedtime, Matthew said: "Here's your five pounds," and pushed them over at her. Yet he must have known she had not been leaving the house at all.

She shook her head, gave it back to him, and said, in explanation, not in accusation: "As soon as you knew where I was, there was no point."

He nodded, not looking at her. He was turned away from her: thinking, she knew, how best to handle this wife who terrified him.

He said: "I wasn't trying to . . . It's just that I was worried."

"Yes, I know."

"I must confess that I was beginning to wonder . . ."

"You thought I had a lover?"

"Yes, I am afraid I did."

She knew that he wished she had. She sat wondering how to say: "For a year now I've been spending all my days in a very sordid hotel room. It's the place where I'm happy. In fact, without it I don't exist." She heard herself saying this, and understood how terrified he was that she might. So instead she said: "Well, perhaps you're not far wrong."

Probably Matthew would think the hotel proprietor lied: he would want to think so.

"Well," he said, and she could hear his voice spring up, so to speak, with relief, "in that case I must confess I've got a bit of an affair on myself."

She said, detached and interested: "Really? Who is she?" and saw Matthew's startled look because of this reaction.

"It's Phil. Phil Hunt."

She had known Phil Hunt well in the old unmarried days. She was thinking: No, she won't do, she's too neurotic and difficult. She's never been happy yet. Sophie's much better. Well, Matthew will see that himself, as sensible as he is.

This line of thought went on in silence, while she said aloud: "It's no point telling you about mine, because you don't know him."

Quick, quick, invent, she thought. Remember how you invented all that nonsense for Miss Townsend.

She began slowly, careful not to contradict herself: "His name is Michael" (*Michael What?*)—"Michael Plant." (What a silly name!) "He's rather like you—in looks, I mean." And indeed, she could imagine herself being touched by no one but Matthew himself. "He's a publisher." (Really? Why?) "He's got a wife already and two children."

She brought out this fantasy, proud of herself.

Matthew said: "Are you two thinking of marrying?"

She said, before she could stop herself: "Good God, *no!*"

She realised, if Matthew wanted to marry Phil Hunt, that this was too emphatic, but apparently it was all right, for his voice sounded relieved as he said: "It is a bit impossible to imagine oneself married to anyone else, isn't it?" With which he pulled her to him, so that her head lay on his shoulder. She turned her face into the dark of his flesh, and listened to the blood pounding through her ears saying: I am alone, I am alone, I am alone.

In the morning Susan lay in bed while he dressed.

He had been thinking things out in the night, because now he said: "Susan, why don't we make a foursome?"

Of course, she said to herself, of course he would be bound to say that. If one is sensible, if one is reasonable, if one never allows oneself a base thought or an envious emotion, naturally one says: Let's make a foursome!

"Why not?" she said.

"We could all meet for lunch. I mean, it's ridiculous, you sneaking off to filthy hotels, and me staying late at the office, and all the lies everyone has to tell."

What on earth did I say his name was?—she panicked, then said: "I think it's a good idea, but Michael is away at the moment. When he comes back, though—and I'm sure you two would like each other."

"He's away, is he? So that's why you've been . . ." Her husband put his hand to the knot of his tie in a gesture of male coquetry she would not before have associated with him; and he bent to kiss her cheek with the expression that goes with the words: Oh you naughty little puss! And she felt its answering look, naughty and coy, come onto her face.

Inside she was dissolving in horror at them both, at how far they had both sunk from honesty of emotion.

So now she was saddled with a lover, and he had a mistress! How ordinary, how reassuring, how jolly! And now they would make a foursome of it, and go about to theatres and restaurants. After all, the Rawlings could well afford that sort of thing, and presumably the publisher Michael Plant could afford to do himself and his mistress quite well. No, there was nothing to stop the four of them developing the most intricate relationship of civilised tolerance, all enveloped in a charming afterglow of autumnal passion. Perhaps they would all go off on holidays together? She had known people who did. Or perhaps Matthew would draw the line there? Why should he, though, if he was capable of talking about "foursomes" at all?

She lay in the empty bedroom, listening to the car drive off with Matthew in it, off to work. Then she heard the children clattering off to school to the accompaniment of Sophie's cheerfully ringing voice. She slid down into the hollow of the bed, for shelter against her own irrelevance. And she stretched out her hand to the hollow where her husband's body had lain, but found no comfort there: he was not her husband. She curled herself up in a small tight ball under the clothes: she could stay here all day, all week, indeed, all her life.

But in a few days she must produce Michael Plant, and—but how? She must presumably find some agreeable man prepared to impersonate a publisher called Michael Plant. And in return for which she would—what? Well, for one thing they would make love. The idea made her want to cry with sheer exhaustion.

Oh no, she had finished with all that—the proof of it was that the words "make love," or even imagining it, trying hard to revive no more than the pleasures of sensuality, let alone affection, or love, made her want to run away and hide from the sheer effort of the thing. . . . Good Lord, why make love at all? Why make love with anyone? Or if you are going to make love, what does it matter who with? Why shouldn't she simply walk into the street, pick up a man and have a roaring sexual affair with him? Why not? Or even with Fred? What difference did it make?

But she had let herself in for it—an interminable stretch of time with a lover, called Michael, as part of a gallant civilised foursome. Well, she could not, and she would not.

She got up, dressed, went down to find Mrs. Parkes, and asked her for the loan of a pound, since Matthew, she said, had forgotten to leave her money. She exchanged with Mrs. Parkes variations on the theme that husbands are all the same, they don't think, and without saying a word to Sophie, whose voice could be heard upstairs from the telephone, walked to the underground, travelled to South Kensington, changed to the Inner Circle, got out at Paddington, and walked to Fred's Hotel. There she told Fred that she wasn't going on holiday after all, she needed the room. She would have to wait an hour, Fred said. She went to a busy tearoom-cum-restaurant around the corner, and sat watching the people flow in and out the door that kept swinging open and shut, watched them mingle and merge, and separate, felt her being flow into them, into their movement. When the hour was up, she left a half-crown for her pot of tea, and left the place without looking back at it, just as she had left her house, the big, beautiful white house, without another look, but silently dedicating it to Sophie. She returned to Fred, received the key of Number 19, now free, and ascended the grimy stairs slowly, letting floor after floor fall away below her, keeping her eyes lifted, so that floor after floor descended jerkily to her level of vision, and fell away out of sight.

Number 19 was the same. She saw everything with an acute, narrow, checking glance: the cheap shine of the satin spread, which had been replaced carelessly after the two bodies had finished their convulsions under it; a trace of powder on the glass that topped the chest of drawers; an intense green shade in a fold of the curtain. She stood at the window, looking down, watching people pass and pass and pass until her mind went

dark from the constant movement. Then she sat in the wicker chair, letting herself go slack. But she had to be careful, because she did not want, today, to be surprised by Fred's knock at five o'clock.

The demons were not here. They had gone forever, because she was buying her freedom from them. She was slipping already into the dark fructifying dream that seemed to caress her inwardly, like the movement of her blood . . . but she had to think about Matthew first. Should she write a letter for the coroner? But what should she say? She would like to leave him with the look on his face she had seen this morning—banal, admittedly, but at least confidently healthy. Well, that was impossible, one did not look like that with a wife dead from suicide. But how to leave him believing she was dying because of a man—because of the fascinating publisher Michael Plant? Oh, how ridiculous! How absurd! How humiliating! But she decided not to trouble about it, simply not to think about the living. If he wanted to believe she had a lover, he would believe it. And he *did* want to believe it. Even when he had found out that there was no publisher in London called Michael Plant, he would think: Oh poor Susan, she was afraid to give me his real name.

And what did it matter whether he married Phil Hunt or Sophie? Though it ought to be Sophie, who was already the mother of those children . . . and what hypocrisy to sit here worrying about the children, when she was going to leave them because she had not got the energy to stay.

She had about four hours. She spent them delightfully, darkly, sweetly, letting herself slide gently, gently, to the edge of the river. Then, with hardly a break in her consciousness, she got up, pushed the thin rug against the door, made sure the windows were tight shut, put two shillings in the meter, and turned on the gas. For the first time since she had been in the room she lay on the hard bed that smelled stale, that smelled of sweat and sex.

She lay on her back on the green satin cover, but her legs were chilly. She got up, found a blanket folded in the bottom of the chest of drawers, and carefully covered her legs with it. She was quite content lying there, listening to the faint soft hiss of the gas that poured into the room, into her lungs, into her brain, as she drifted off into the dark river.

For love of little Gennaro, Lila began to go out again. She put the baby, dressed in blue or white, in the cumbersome, enormous, and expensive carriage that her brother had given her and walked alone through the new neighborhood. As soon as Rinuccio cried, she went to the grocery and nursed him, amid the enthusiasm of her mother-in-law, the tender compliments of the customers, and the annoyance of Carmen, who lowered her head, and said not a word. Lila fed the baby as soon as he cried. She liked feeling him attached to her, she liked feeling the milk that ran out of her into him, pleasantly emptying her breast. It was the only bond that gave her a sense of well-being, and she confessed in her notebooks that she feared the moment when the baby would separate from her.

When the weather turned nice, she started going to the gardens in front of the church, since in the new neighborhood there were only bare streets with a few bushes or sickly saplings. Passersby stopped to look at the baby and praised him, which pleased her. If she had to change him, she went to the old grocery, where, as soon as she entered, the customers greeted Gennaro warmly. Ada, however, with her smock that was too tidy, the lipstick on her thin lips, her pale face, her neat hair, her commanding ways even toward Stefano, was increasingly impudent, acting like a servant-mistress, and, since she was busy, she did everything possible to let Lila understand that she, the carriage, and the baby were in the way. But Lila took little notice. The surly indifference of her husband confused her more: in private, inattentive but not hostile to the baby, in public, in front of the customers who spoke in tender childish voices and wanted to hold him and kiss him, he didn't even look at him, in fact he made a show of disinterest. Lila went to the rear of the shop, washed Gennaro, quickly dressed him again, and went back to the gardens. There she examined



her son lovingly, searching for signs of Nino in his face, and wondering if Stefano had seen what she couldn't.

But soon she forgot about it. In general the days passed over her without provoking the least emotion. She mostly took care of her son, the reading of a book might last weeks, two or three pages a day. In the gardens, if the baby was sleeping, every so often she let herself be distracted by the branches of the trees that were putting out new buds, and she wrote in one of her battered notebooks.

Once she noticed that there was a funeral in the church, and when, with the baby, she went to see, she discovered that it was the funeral of Enzo's mother. She saw him, stiff, pale, but she didn't offer her condolences. Another time she was sitting on a bench with the carriage beside her, bent over a large volume with a green spine, when a skinny old woman appeared before her, leaning on a cane; her cheeks seemed to be sucked into her throat by her very breathing.

"Guess who I am."

Lila had trouble recognizing her, but finally the woman's eyes, in a flash, recalled the imposing Maestra Oliviero. She jumped up full of emotion, about to embrace her, but the teacher drew back in annoyance. Lila then showed her the baby, said proudly, "His name is Gennaro," and since everyone praised her son she expected that the teacher would, too. But Maestra Oliviero completely ignored the child, she seemed interested only in the heavy book that her former pupil was holding, a finger in the pages to mark her place.

"What is it?"

Lila became nervous. The teacher's looks had changed, her voice, everything about her, except her eyes and the sharp tones, the same tones as when she had asked her a question in the classroom. So she, too, showed that she hadn't changed, she answered in a lazy yet aggressive way: "The title is *Ulysses*."

"Is it about the Odyssey?"

"No, it's about how prosaic life is today."

"And so?"

"That's all. It says that our heads are full of nonsense. That we are flesh, blood, and bone. That one person has the same value as another. That we want only to eat, drink, fuck."

The teacher reproached her for that last word, as in school, and Lila posed as an insolent girl, and laughed, so that the old woman became even sterner, asked her how the book was. She answered that it was difficult and she didn't completely understand it.

"Then why are you reading it?"

"Because someone I knew read it. But he didn't like it."

"And you?"

"I do."

"Even if it's difficult?"

"Yes."

"Don't read books that you can't understand, it's bad for you."

"A lot of things are bad for you."

"You're not happy?"

"So-so."

"You were destined for great things."

"I've done them: I'm married and I've had a baby."

"Everyone can do that."

"I'm like everyone."

"You're wrong."

"No, you are wrong, and you always were wrong."

"You were rude as a child and you're rude now."

"Clearly you weren't much of a teacher as far as I'm concerned."

Maestra Oliviero looked at her carefully and Lila read in her face the anxiety of being wrong. The teacher was trying to find in her eyes the intelligence she had seen when she was a child, she wanted confirmation that she hadn't been wrong.



She thought: I have to remove from my face every sign that makes her right, I don't want her to preach to me how I'm wasted. But meanwhile she felt exposed to yet another examination, and, contradictorily, she feared the result. She is discovering that I am stupid, she said to herself, her heart pounding harder, she is discovering that my whole family is stupid, that my forebears were stupid and my descendants will be stupid, that Gennaro will be stupid. She became upset, she put the book in her bag, she grabbed the handle of the carriage, she said nervously that she had to go. Crazy old lady, she still believed she could rap me on the knuckles. She left the teacher in the gardens, small, clutching her cane, consumed by an illness that she would not give in to.

### Maternal ethics

What is this longing for motherhood to hold the generative, surprising and unexpected? Why not allow it to be a diverse yet patterned experience, both individually located and yet differing historically, culturally and particularly in relation to class, 'race' and ethnicity, constantly in play with dominant and normative discourses, traditionally those of patriarchy, and more recently those of our post/neo-colonial culture? Why not let motherhood alone as a particular or new experience, and join with those who now speak generically of 'parenting', or even abandon our studies of motherhood in preference for the new turn to fatherhood? Why allude to a potentially transhistorical, transcultural notion like ethics in relation to one of the most locally produced, specifically experienced, and simultaneously heavily regulated practices of all?<sup>2</sup>

In part, my longing for, and wish to articulate the generative, surprising and unexpected in relation to the maternal is a deliberate strategy at both a theoretical and personal level. I understand it as a kind of ethics in itself, an aspirant reaching out towards the good (the difference, that is, between what is and what ought to be). 'The mother' after all, is the impossible subject, *par excellence*. Caught in an ever widening gap between her idealization and denigration in contemporary culture, and her indeterminate position as part object, part subject within the Western philosophical tradition,<sup>3</sup> the mother has always been left hopelessly uncertain, with all the death-like and dreadful connotations that the abject possesses. In some senses she is everywhere, our culture saturated with her image in its varied guises, and yet theoretically she remains a shadowy figure who seems to disappear from the many discourses that explicitly try to account for her.

Perhaps this is unsurprising given that we all, as infants, may have needed to conjure up an ever-present fantasy mother whom we are told must find just the right balance of presence without impingement (Winnicott 1963: 86), and who needs therefore to remain partly in the shadows, and then gradually but appropriately 'fail' (Winnicott 1963: 87), and finally sort of . . . fade away. As the psychoanalyst Erna Furman put it, motherhood is the lifelong process of 'being there to be left' (Furman 1982: 15), one, in her view, that is the hardest and most psychologically threatening to women who mother, one that never ends, that is repeated with each child and constantly stirs up early infantile experiences of separation from our own mothers. While feminist psychoanalytic thinkers have concerned themselves with articulating how the twin poles of idealization and a defensive scorn and denigration of the maternal-feminine covers over a deep-seated fear of a powerful, envied and terrifying mother on whom we were all once dependent, there has been a real struggle to rescue the maternal subject from she who is purely 'there to be left'.<sup>4</sup> However, just as maternal subjectivity is on the cusp of being articulated within the psychoanalytic literature, for instance, the mother appears to slip back into some manifestation of her traditional object-position as container, mirror, receptacle for intolerable feelings, a body with bits attached, or with supposedly vital bits missing, an object to be repudiated, hated or feared, the one who bears destruction and abandonment and still remains intact, more recently an effective and reliable cortisol manager,<sup>5</sup> but ultimately she who must to some degree be left, or more forcefully abjected or killed off, in order that 'the subject' (so often the child in psychoanalysis, gathered up retroactively by the child-now-adult through the process of analysis) can emerge unscathed. Due to her necessary function in the developing world of the infant, and due perhaps to our continued needs for our mothers to remain simultaneously present and yet to disappear, maternal subjectivity persists as ontologically puzzling, both necessary and suspect. Jacqueline Rose (1996: 421), commenting on Kristeva's famous naming of the maternal as 'that ambivalent principle that . . . stems from an identity catastrophe that causes the proper Name to topple over into the unnameable' (Kristeva 1977: 161–162), describes the catastrophe as the simple fact that there is an unconscious, that is, there is a limit to knowledge, and that the name that we give this limit is the mother. The question that then follows is 'what does thinking about mothers do to thinking?' (Rose 1996: 413). To think about mothers is to think about the vanishing point of thinking, to do violence then to what remains resistant to knowledge, to Christopher Bollas' 'unthought known' (Bollas 1987). No wonder we may not really want to know about her, not want to tease out what kind of 'she' is 'there to be left', or who has the capacity to materially produce others, or who somehow continued to love us despite our destructive attacks. My contention is that despite the vast and expanding research field on maternal practice, maternal relations,

maternal embodiment and maternal representation, on the new technologies of birth and reproduction and their implications for women, and on the currently rapid rate of change that family structures and parenting patterns are undergoing, the maternal remains haunted by her link with the impossibility of knowing, and hence remains somewhat unspeakable.

In a similar but more forceful vein, Kristeva (1987a) suggests that the simultaneous presence and absence of the mother within the symbolic, thought broadly as the realm of signification, arises from our inability to commit a necessary 'matricide'. In *Black Sun*, she writes:

Melancholy persons are foreigners in their maternal tongue. They have lost meaning – the value – of their mother tongue for want of losing the mother. The dead language they speak . . . conceals a 'Thing' buried alive. The latter will not be translated in order that it not be betrayed.

(Kristeva 1987a: 53)

Instead of being able to accept the loss of the mother which would entail bearing matricidal guilt in order to achieve autonomy, the melancholic negates maternal loss, cannot murder the mother, and instead buries the maternal Thing alive within the symbolic. This unrepresentable Thing is at once lost and present in that the loss is foreclosed but not mourned or worked through in such a way as to render the mother symbolizable. She is therefore preserved in her absence and takes up a position in the symbolic only as an incarnation of the Real in the place of the Other. This gives rise to the classic characterization of the mother as the unthematizable, unrepresentable and unrecoverable presence that haunts each subject. And we can perhaps see some of this simultaneous preservation of the lost maternal thing in the way that those of us who write about maternal subjectivity appear to mourn the disappearance of the mother theoretically without seeming to be able to do anything to recover her. We are perhaps psychologically invested in maintaining her as lost for fear of having to murder her, mourn her, and move on. In addition, Paes de Barros (2004) writes:

The reality of the maternal body – its biological contingencies, its vast capacity for radical change, its evident sexuality and utility – make it truly Lacan and Žižek's 'Symptom.' That maternal body harbors the inexpressible Real.

(Paes de Barros 2004: 90)

It makes some sense, then, that our dealings with the maternal may attempt to keep her at bay by rendering her as either a function or object in the developing inner world of the child, a metaphorical figure used to signify

particular representational modes, or an individual who engages in a set of socially controlled practices and ideologically driven fluxes of power, thereby leaving her struggling to consolidate anything that may be thought of as agency, desire or choice.

### Escaping abjection

To escape the tendency for abjection to cling to the maternal we may need to deliberately approach maternal subjectivity from a position that engages with the generative, surprising and unexpected, a strategic valorization of what is excessive (but *not* monstrous) in maternal experience in order to counteract a discourse so mired in loss, murder and melancholia. Kristeva's position seems to destroy the potential for maternal subjectivity at the point that it appears to rescue mothers from their silence. All that may be left to us is a strenuous 'leap' of the imagination. This is akin to the excessive strategy found within Irigaray's project that seeks to run with, flaunt perhaps, feminine alterity as a way to challenge and expand both the masculine symbolic and the masculine imaginary from within. As I argue later, Irigaray's fusion of the feminine and the maternal leads to some difficulties with holding onto the specificity of maternal subjectivity, but the sensibility of this current work is nevertheless indebted to her radical imagination. My longing, then, for Bobby Baker's performance to have marked the maternal with the unexpected, surprising and generative is in part an ethical commitment to rethinking the maternal as a potentially life-changing event brought about by a certain response to an other whom we come to name as our child; a way to counteract the binary options – melancholia or murder.

This deliberate valorization of the generative potential of maternity may appear to be a rather alarming aim; a reactive or cheerful attempt to celebrate motherhood despite the profound psychological, emotional, relational, and financial crises (to name but a few) that it so clearly provokes in so many of our lives, a return perhaps to the rather jubilant maternalist sensibilities of some feminist writers of previous generations.<sup>6</sup> However, my aim is certainly not to write an account of the joys of motherhood. Nor do I advocate elevating the maternal as a specifically feminine bodily or socio-sexual experience, the ultimate sign of sexual difference. Nor am I attempting to chart in any global sense the ways motherhood changes our lives – though I would not deny that it does so. Instead my aims are deliberately more myopic. If we shift from a female subject position to encompass a maternal one when we have a child (be that an adoptive, birth, foster, community or surrogate child, or any other relationship in which one comes to name another as one's child), then we must surely contend with the notion that motherhood produces something new. The questions that concern me are about how we might theorize this newness as a way to claim

back something for the maternal that escapes the melancholia-murder binary. Does thinking in terms of changes in internal object-relations, self-image, self-representation, identifications, or social and cultural practices and locations suffice? Or are there other ways in which we could think about these changes, ways that have something more to do with the nature of the encounter between a mother and the one she names and relates to as her child?

Toni Morrison once wrote:

There was something so valuable about what happened when one became a mother. For me it was the most liberating thing that ever happened. . . . Liberating because the demands that children make are not the demands of a normal 'other'. The children's demands on me were things that nobody else ever asked me to do. To be a good manager. To have a sense of humour. To deliver something that somebody else could use. . . . Somehow all of the baggage that I had accumulated as a person about what was valuable just fell away. I could not only be me – whatever that was – but somebody actually needed me to be that.

(Moyers and Tucher 1990: 60, quoted in Bassin et al. 1994: 2)

Morrison's point is that the 'other' previous to motherhood had interpolated her as a certain kind of person (sensual, attractive, intelligent). The child demands something else, asks different kinds of questions, draws a different kind of 'her' out of her. Though I would want to problematize the notion that motherhood strips us down to 'who we really are', Morrison's reflections are well taken. In part, this book seeks to instigate a dialogue, or at least manage an uneasy tension, between a notion of subjectivity that comes into being through our relation of obligation to an inassimilable otherness in the figure of the child, and a psychoanalytic and feminist tradition that has worked assiduously to flesh out mothers as desiring, fantasizing, remembering, culturally imbued, sexual, agentive subjects in their own right.

### Maternal encounters, philosophical perspectives

I begin by drawing on Levinas (1947a, 1961, 1974) in seeking to understand subjectivity as that which emerges out of an encounter with an inassimilable otherness, which I explore in the figure of the child. Here the subject emerges at the point it responds to the Other that it cannot colonize, and ultimately cannot know. To reverse the link between the maternal and the vanishing point of knowledge, I argue that one formulation of the maternal is as an emblematic and enigmatic formation of this subjectivity 'called into being' through the relation to *the child* as 'other'. I contend that this interrupting, tantruming, crying, demanding, questioning, loving, unpredictable

and ultimately unknowable other that is a child, can be thought of as a particular other for the mother, the response to whom calls us, as maternal subjects, into being. I end, however, with an almost polar opposite view of subjectivity; one drawn from Alain Badiou's notion that subjectivity happens only to some of us, some of the time, and arises not out of an encounter with alterity, but out of our fidelity to an 'event' that occurs in the realm of the Same through a 'chain of autonomous actions within a changing situation' (Feltham and Clemens 2003: 6). An event can retroactively be named as such only after the event (Badiou 2001, 2003, 2004) and we attain subjectivity by dint of our ability to make a wager that, by acting as if the event has happened, it does turn out to have been one. In other words, by acting as if something has changed our lives, it may just turn out to have been true. Somewhere in between these dichotomous versions of subjectivity, the former premised on ethical relations with the Other, and the latter a rejection of the ethics of Otherness with a focus on the potential for radical innovation in every situation, I believe an articulation of the maternal subject becomes possible. For it is almost impossible to think the maternal without reference to a dependent yet constantly changing other, and yet there is no maternal subject without understanding how this new and transitory subjectivity comes to arise. And just to be clear, like motherhood, this tricky balancing act, this holding in tension, this straddling of philosophical positions, this 'impossibility', *will no doubt end in tears*.

So, despite my attachment to, and gravitation towards, a variety of post-structuralist perspectives, in trying to keep my sights on the radical innovation of maternity and its capacity to produce change other than through repetition or reiteration of the Same, the *sensibility* of the book, its desire and longing, is to work against the grain of repetition compulsion, of my own psychoanalytic attachments. It represents a refusal to deem those years 'lost years' or to fully engage with the poignancy of a subject characterized by emptiness, lack and loss. As Clément writes: 'I do not exclude meeting Freud, even less encountering Lacan, but that is not enough – or rather, it is no longer enough for me' (Clément 1994: 19). This sensibility perhaps theoretically finds itself akin to a philosophical tradition that can be traced from Spinoza through to Deleuze and within this work is evidenced both in Bruno Latour's work on the ethics of objects (Latour 1988, 1992, 1995, 1997) and to some degree in Badiou's work on love. However, emerging out of my own psychodynamic clinical practice with mothers, I do not fully abandon a particular strand within psychoanalysis that continues to hold open the encounter with the 'unknowable' other as formative of the self. Much in keeping with Jessica Benjamin's articulation of holding in tension complementary theoretical views, I aim to try to bear the uncomfortable tension between a view of subjectivity founded on loss, lack and alterity, and one founded on something a little stronger, and which Badiou makes a claim for as 'truth'.



### The feminine and the maternal

Christine Battersby, in *The Phenomenal Woman*, sets out to think about models for personal and individual identity by taking the embodied female subject as the 'norm':

Rather than treating women as somehow exceptional, I start from the question of what would have to change were we to take seriously the notion that a 'person' could normally, at least always potentially, become two. What would happen if we thought identity in terms that did not make it always spatially and temporally oppositional to other entities? Could we retain a notion of self-identity if we did not privilege that which is self-contained and self-directed?

(Battersby 1998: 2)

The five features Battersby isolates as marking out the female subject position as both lacking and excessive if the male subject is taken as the norm are: natality (the potentiality to become two); relationships with dependent others in which inequalities and power-dependencies are basic; the emergence of the self from the intersection of self and other; 'fleshy continuity' (premised, in part, on the capability of birthing new selves from within the embodied self); and what she terms 'monstrosity' (a passive thing-like embodiment that is set up in opposition to the rational male subject) (Battersby 1998: 8–14). Her aim is to think about identity if such features are taken as the 'norm'. What strikes me is how fundamental maternity is to her notion of what marks the female subject position as specific. There are instances in what follows where I try to tease out similar conflations of the feminine and the maternal, arguing for the retention of a specifically maternal subjectivity. To fail to do so leaves the mother's particular concerns and paradoxes hopelessly unarticulated. Instead of tying female subjectivity to maternity, and then, as Battersby suggests, investigating identity by taking this female subject position as the norm, my intervention is to adjust Battersby's project by a minute degree, and think about subjectivity by taking maternity as if it were the norm. This would repeat the second-wave move to uncouple maternity and femininity which I believe is vital, not this time for the sake of the feminine, but for the sake of the maternal, and in addition, move us beyond a conception of maternity as the embodied potentiality to become two, towards an account that can include the staggering complexity of what happens for a mother after 'birth'; what arises for mothers during the day-to-day, ongoing and relentless experience of mothering, whether that is with their birth, adopted, fostered, community, surrogate or 'other' children. In other words, what would happen if we took seriously the notion that a 'person' was someone

who lived in an ongoing relation to that peculiar species known as a child? Sara Ruddick, one of our exemplary mothers of maternal research, talks of a child as an "'open structure" whose acts are irregular, unpredictable, often mysterious' (Ruddick 1980: 352). What happens to us when, not only do we live in close proximity to this irregular, unpredictable and mysterious other, but also we are somehow responsible for them too? What kind of subjectivity emerges? And what might happen to our understanding of subjectivity if we took this subjectivity as if it were the norm? Although I would want to resist replacing one norm with another, the exercise would be a deliberate imaginative engagement with what it is like to live alongside this other life form, *as if it were normal!*

### Becoming unaccommodated: an anecdotal theory

One of the ways I therefore wish to proceed is by asking the question, 'What is it like to stay alongside a child?' What is it like to be exposed to incessant crying, incessant demands, incessant questioning, incessant interruption? What is it like to love a child? What is it like to bear witness to a child in the grip of a tantrum? What is it like to be physically burdened by a child and their 'stuff', to negotiate the child-plus-buggy-plus-changing mat-plus-nappies-plus-bag-plus-juice bottle around the urban cityscape? What do these experiences feel like and do to us? To ask what experiences are like is to already eschew attempts to build new conceptions of the subject. Instead I try to home in on key moments in which we are disturbed or dislodged by motherhood, but perhaps in very minor, transitory, mundane, silly or occasional ways. I have steered away from big moments, grand realizations or epiphanies. Rather, I have tried to keep my eye on the miniscule and rather overlooked instances in which we are wrong-footed or undone by mothering. Drawn from personal experience, and anecdotally recounted, I argue that these moments have in common a capacity to disrupt, producing a small 'blank' in experience that at once arrests and provides new points of departure. They have the quality of a shudder, or a hiccup in our self-experience, close to what Catherine Clément has called 'syncope'.<sup>7</sup> Although these moments unsettle us, and can be experienced in unusually intense and painful ways, I do not believe they are wholly unpleasant. I think they are experiences of 'becoming unaccommodated', to borrow Steven Connor's phrase (Connor 2008).<sup>8</sup> I argue that, if we are to refer to a specifically maternal subjectivity, then we would have to understand it as a transitory state, revealed through numerous 'hiccups', or unaccommodations in the daily lived experience of mothering.

My method for an investigation into the maternal is a little odd, to say the least. I'm not sure I can make a claim for it being a method at all. I could, after all, have interviewed a range of mothers, asked them about their experiences, transcribed their responses, tracked the twists and turns

of their stories, and re-presented their storied selves. There are many fine examples of this type of work in the literature (e.g. Bailey 1999, 2000, 2001; Pollock 1999; Miller 2005; Reynolds 2005). However, I was more inclined to heed to John Law's call for 'quieter and more generous methods', for a kind of spreading or diversification of approaches to method, a refusal or desisting of a hierarchy of method, or the adoption of what Law calls 'symmetry'; a way of thinking about all methods in the same terms, whether or not these fit the normative rules of social science or indeed humanities methodologies (Law 2004). He calls for other metaphors for imagining our worlds and our responsibilities to these worlds – for, as he says, that is what methods, or 'method assemblages' do. They call forth worlds, helping us both imagine and take responsibility for them. His metaphors for imagining our worlds and our responsibilities to those worlds are: 'Localities. Specificities. Enactments. Multiplicities. Fractionalities. Goods. Resonances. Gatherings. Forms of crafting. Processes of weaving. Spirals. Vortices. Indefinitenesses. Condensates. Dances. Imaginaries. Passions. Interferences.' They are metaphors for what he calls 'the stutter and the stop' (Law 2004: 156).

Why begin with an anecdote? Jane Gallop (2002) has evoked the term 'anecdotal theory' to describe a kind of writing that takes the recounting of an anecdote as its starting point. Working from the bottom up, she mines anecdotes for theoretical insights that may be recuperated from them (Gallop 2002). Gallop's anecdotes are themselves about 'theoretical moments' drawn from two decades of working in the academy, making a nice neat link between anecdote and theory. Coming from a perspective that fully embraced the 'theory moment' in the mid-1980s, Gallop continues to blur the distinction between reality and text, approaching her anecdotes as textual fragments that can be unravelled to find within them theoretical insights, while at the same time using them to evoke a relation with what she refers to as 'lived experience' (Gallop 2002: 2). If, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an anecdote is understood as a 'short account of some interesting or humorous incident', then to juxtapose 'anecdote' with 'theory', Gallop (2002: 2) claims, is to cut through the usual connotations whereby 'humorous is pitched against serious, short against grand, trivial against overarching, specific against general'. Anecdotal theory would then 'produce theory with a better sense of humour, theorizing which honours the uncanny detail of lived experience' (Gallop 2002: 2). Anecdote appears to be used by Gallop as a way to dislodge theory from its perch, to try to get it to think about lesser, more mundane matters, and perhaps have a laugh at itself along the way. There is some uneasiness perhaps with the notion that an anecdote somehow brings us closer to 'lived experience' just because it is a recounting of a minor incident that may have actually occurred. In some senses anecdote may take us further away from the original experience. An anecdote, after all, is often recounted orally rather

than textually, and usually in expansive circumstances (at weddings, after-dinner speeches, a night in the pub). Told well, it involves embellishment and exaggeration. It may, after all, not even be true. And, while being presented as a fragment, something minor or inconsequential to a main story, it takes on a special significance through being singled out. The anecdote, like its teller, is somewhat pumped up through the process of being told, revealing perhaps the paltriness of the telling experience, which is why it must be told and retold, again and again. To accord anecdote the status of text is perhaps more than it can bear. This may be Gallop's point. Rather than the anecdotal merely performing a 'thumbs up' at theory, Gallop also uses theory to sober up anecdote. Gallop takes herself through a process of systematic reflection on her anecdotes, subjecting them to a level of analysis that they do not, at first glance, appear to warrant. What this renders is a kind of self-analysis, similar to a psychoanalytic procedure that would not wish to censor anything on the grounds of its inconsequentiality, but rather, look in particular detail at that which is relegated to the margins of the main story.

In this book I perform an approximation of an anecdotal theory. As described earlier, I try to isolate key moments of maternal experience that I consider disruptive, but in relatively minor ways. These moments are recounted as short accounts of something that has interested me about motherhood. They are all originally autobiographical, although I no longer really know how true they are, having been embellished, altered, tampered with and edited in the process of recounting. They have been essentially 'overwritten' in the way Bobby Baker's performance drew on her experience of motherhood quite literally, using food. However, rather than subjecting myself to a detailed self-analysis which would seek to uncover unconscious motivations, hidden meanings or agendas, I have used the anecdotes more variously; at times to illustrate, at times to contradict, inform and dislodge the theoretical investigations that form the main body of this work. In doing so, I try to retain something of the indigestibility of maternal experience by leaving these small, unintegrated and perhaps undigestible nuggets of maternal writing within the more formal academic reflections, as well as using them to interrupt myself, or, as much as possible, throw myself off the subject – especially my own tendency to be drawn back towards the relative safety of theory.

I do not mean to make any radical claims for such an approach. Mindful of Blau DuPlessis' dry observation about feminist autobiography, 'but (and) many people have reinvented the essay' (Blau DuPlessis 1990: 175), on the contrary, what I am doing appears to me a throwback to an era in which feminine autobiographical writing, or more experimental writing practices generally, were being explored as ways to escape the closure of subjectivity, with varying degrees of success.<sup>9</sup> In addition, it resonates with many hundreds of years of maternal diary writing, charting women's

experiences of attempting to mother alongside writing and the particular tensions, anxieties, joys and despairs that this has produced (Olsen 1978). Though not a justification for such a strategy, I do, however, retain a nostalgia for, and ongoing commitment to the possibility of writing what Blau DuPlessis describes as:

writing as writing. Writing as praxis. Ongoing. Curious. Situated. Rapid. Rabid. Marked with one's markings. Not uniform. An exposure. Incomplete. Unsafe. Even deplorable.

(Blau DuPlessis 1990: 61)

This notion of a writing 'marked with one's markings', a praxis that does not explore or illustrate the personal, but through which the personal takes place has parallels with the notion that the emergence of maternal subjectivity occurs through the details of maternal praxis. When Kristeva identifies poetic writing, psychoanalysis, and maternity as three types of praxis in which the heterogeneity of the drive breaks through the symbolic, putting the 'subject-in-process/on-trial' (Kristeva 1975: 103), there is a sense in which subjectivity itself arises through negativity, but a negativity that does not entirely destroy the fabric of the symbolic. However, I would see my writing strategy as something much more minor than either the emergence of the maternal subject-in-process/on-trial through poesis, or an attempt at a kind of Deleuzian account of 'becoming mother' through paying attention to the multiplicities and intensities that may pervade the maternal. Instead I simply use small incidents that 'stick out' for me in my experience of mothering as curious, odd, enigmatic or surprising, providing me with starting points for thinking about some of the curious, odd, enigmatic, surprising and therefore *new* experiences that motherhood prompts. Anecdotal writing allows me to begin.

There has been some recent theorizing of what has been termed 'mother-writing'. Juhasz (2003), for example, has posited maternal writing as a site for structuring maternal identity. Juhasz discusses how maternal subjectivity can be achieved through the creation of points of coherence by seeing mother-writing as a creative space that can promote recognition for the mother-author who uses writing to navigate a plurality of self-positions, for the reader who also acts as surrogate mother to the mother-writer, and for the text itself (Juhasz 2003: 395). By bringing together 'multiple maternal identities' within the same textual space, she argues a 'grammar' (Juhasz 2003: 400) can be established, and with it, the possibility of viable relationships among different maternal positions. Though Juhasz emphasizes multiplicity, creativity and recognition, her account rests on a core notion of 'self' onto whom these 'multiple identities' are pinned. She explicitly rejects positions that valorize decentredness. She argues instead that maternal work consists of the twin tasks of caring for the child and simultaneously trying to

organize diverse aspects of the self so that they 'seem coherent, viable, or to possess continuity' (Juhasz 2003: 406). Writing, she believes, can create a semblance of coherence out of the self that is fragmented by splitting due to the inherent ambivalence of the maternal. It can help the mother recognize the work she does to hold in tension disparate facets of herself.

In contrast, I do not come to 'mother-writing' to hold in tension disparate facets of myself. Although my anecdotes are autobiographical, I do not wish to use such writing to create the semblance of coherence by patching the self's fissures. Anecdotes are also 'secret, private or hitherto unpublished narratives or details of history' (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989). We could equally think of secret histories as those imbued with trauma rather than erotic energies, histories that remain private, unpublished and possibly unspeakable because they are resistant to codification in language. Stories about motherhood often have this quality. I suggest, however, that motherhood lends itself to anecdote rather than the grand narrative of 'mother-writing' due to the constant attack on narrative that the child performs: literally breaking into maternal speech, and as well as her own self-narrative which is punctured at the level of constant interruptions to thinking, reflecting, sleeping, moving and completing tasks. What is left is a series of unconnected experiences that remain fundamentally unable to cohere. Secret, private and certainly unpublished, they resurface as anecdote – often in the form of funny stories we tell each other about silly or charming things our children did or said.

Working between the mundane and theory is also in keeping with a broadly phenomenological perspective. If phenomenology seeks to describe conscious experience from a first-person point of view, then human subjectivity is understood as not existing in some space outside of lived experience, but rather, that the space of human subjectivity is produced by embodied or lived experience (Merleau-Ponty 1962). This embodiment occurs at the level of perception, imagination, thought, emotion, desire, volition and action. Though a post-modern feminist perspective would reject a crude notion of a specifically female lived experience (Weedon 1998), there has certainly been a recuperation and engagement with an embodied feminine otherness or difference as a site of both resistance and transformation, particularly in the work of Irigaray, Kristeva, and Clément.<sup>10</sup> Given the almost intractable difficulties with separating the maternal subject from the pregnant body, and then from the maternal body that the child uses in a myriad of actual and fantasized ways, a phenomenological perspective that keeps maternal experience in its sights may help with these delicate processes of separation.

This book is also, then, an attempt to write a necessarily partial phenomenology of motherhood, paying particular attention to some moment-by-moment experiences of being with small children. To ask the question 'What is it like?' rather than 'What does it mean?' in this context is reminiscent of

Steven Connor's notion of 'cultural phenomenology' (Connor 2008) which would 'home in on substances, habits, organs, rituals, obsessions, pathologies, processes and patterns of feeling. Such interests would be at once philosophical and poetic, explanatory and exploratory, analytic and evocative' (unpaginated webpage). Likewise, this work aims to be at once academic and personal, rigorous and oblique, welcoming the delightful in experiences that are also clearly very grim. If my argument is that, out of the kind of Beckettian tragi-comedy that motherhood is ('I must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on', Beckett writes at the end of *The Unnameable*), a new subjectivity is called into being, then to describe this would entail a particular attentiveness to what this experience is like. It recalls Susan Kraemer's words when she writes of the necessity of asking about 'how the mother feels about what she feels and what she does with how she feels' (Kraemer 1996: 768).

As I have noted above, there is something excessive in this approach. Gallop tells us that the notion of excess is related both to the exorbitant, and the real. She notes that the exorbitant is a term Derrida uses in his early text, *Of Grammatology*, as a way to justify his interest in rare and marginal texts (Derrida 1976). The exorbitant is related to exteriority, exits, departures, attempts to get out of ruts. Of Derrida's use of the term, Gallop (2002) writes:

The rut he wants to get out of is the rut philosophy is in, the metaphysical rut which separates philosophy (or what we could call theory) from empiricism (the link to the real, the here and now). Derrida connects the exorbitant with the attempt to get outside the metaphysical closure that sequesters theory from the real.

(Gallop 2002: 8)

To some degree, this rut is particularly deep when it comes to the maternal; the mother is both the supreme object through which subjectivity is thought, as well as profoundly unable to extricate herself from the empirical. However, I propose that the maternal subject both embodies this rut, this split between philosophy and empiricism and that the lived experience of such a split has a subjective spin-off for the mother, providing both a theoretical and an actual exit from this rut. Both Kristeva (1977) and Battersby (1998) argue that the maternal subject is peculiar in that her subjectivity is premised on being both for herself and for another. Kristeva's notion of *herethics* is that the mother is at once ethical, heretical and feminine (Kristeva 1977: 185), constituting what Kelly Oliver has called an "'outlaw" ethics' (Oliver 1993a: 15) in which the mother sees herself as responsible for the other's life to the point of her own disappearance, which places her outside of the law of the symbolic. My interest is in an account of maternal subjectivity in which something comes back from the encounter with the child. I try to understand the maternal subject as arising out of the

paradox of the one who sees the world from the point of view of there being two, which in its turn retroactively produces the one. The experience of loving a child is understood as a momentary flooding of subjectivity arising out of a mother's capacity to attend to the truth of the disjuncture that there are two. Something excessive to the split between philosophy and empiricism breaks out.

In sum, though this work aligns itself with anecdotal theory, feminist autobiographical writing and cultural phenomenology, it does not knit these approaches into a quasi-methodology, but aims at something more tenuous than any of these approaches suggest. It uses whatever it has to hand to ask the question, 'What is it like to encounter a child?', in the hope that the answer to such a question may provide us with an articulation of a specifically maternal subjectivity.

### Protagonists

Having homed in on key moments of disruption, I attempt to think about such events through the work of an eclectic group of theorists: Julia Kristeva, Catherine Clément, Luce Irigaray, Jessica Benjamin, Judith Butler, Emmanuel Levinas, Alain Badiou, David Appelbaum, Jean Laplanche, Jerome Neu, Bruno Latour and Elaine Scarry. Taken together, their work does not constitute a coherent research field, and although Kristeva and Benjamin have written on motherhood, it is not a theory of maternal subjectivity that I look to them for. Instead I try to draw out from diverse sources a nexus of ideas about *transformation and change, alterity, interruption, disjunction, love, crying, syncope, objects and ethics*: the particular elements of subjectivity that I believe pertain to the maternal through the everyday experience of mothering, and are shown up in the key moments of disruption that I describe. If there are similarities between these theorists' work, they could perhaps be described as a broad commitment to thinking about ways subjectivity emerges 'otherwise' than the conscious workings of either an autonomous, auto-affective, rational male subject, or his post-modern counter-part; the traumatized, split, mournful, abject (still male) subject. So, for example Kristeva's notion of the heterogeneity of the drive, Clément's exploration of syncope and rapture, and Laplanche's reinstitution of the seduction theory to describe the way the unconscious is formed by an encounter with the 'alien' other of the mother's unconscious, share an interest in articulating disruptive forces that lie at the edge of the symbolic. These forces are usually associated with the feminine, the excessive, the exotic and the unrepresentable, but provide the conditions for the emergence of a subjectivity thought of as 'otherwise' to the traditional male rational subject. We might say that psychoanalysis, certainly from a Freudian or Lacanian perspective, has always kept one eye on the inherent instability of the subject, and the way that the ego is constantly undermined



from within. In part, this book represents a wrangle with psychoanalysis about what it does about the subject undermined in a very concrete way from 'without'; how disruption by the other shifts our internal psychic structures, not only during childhood, but also throughout our lives, and therefore how it accounts for the emergence of the new, the unexpected, the surprising or the generative. Motherhood is offered as a model for exploring how the new, at times radically, and painfully, emerges.

This is not to deny the psychoanalytic insight that we come to the encounter with a child from a position of both knowing and unknowing. I would characterize such knowing as what we already carry within us from our own experiences and unconscious fantasies about our mothers and mothering. As well as conscious memory, thoughts, feelings and associations that we have with our own mothering, we carry, following Laplanche, our mother's enigmatic signifiers that give rise to our own unconscious (Laplanche 1999). These we then, in our own turn, unconsciously pass on. This latter unconscious element could be thought about as a kind of 'unknown known' in that the enigmatic signifier is not just 'unthought' in the sense of Bollas' 'unthought known' (Bollas 1987) but coming from the other, it remains totally impossible to decode. This, perhaps, is a way of thinking about the distinction Laplanche makes between the other thing (*das Andere*) that is maintained in its radical alterity only by the actuality of the other person (*der Andere*) (Laplanche 1999: 71) but this time from the perspective of the mother rather than the child. Over and above the child's developing unconscious (*das Andere*) is the radical alterity of the other person (*der Andere*) who, for the mother, is the child. This surely offers the mother something she cannot anticipate, and to which she too responds.

The book does not aim to present a systematic critique of the main protagonists. Nor does it set itself up within either philosophy or psychoanalysis in order to make critical contributions to these fields. Rather, it enacts a heterogeneous foray into unfamiliar terrain, looking for scraps that may help articulate, understand or describe maternal moments of undoing, remaining with the mother in a marginal relation to these main bodies of work. In *The Philosophy of the Limit*, Drucilla Cornell draws on Walter Benjamin's figure of the *chiffonnier*, the nineteenth-century rubbish collector, whom she uses as a model for her ethical subject, picking her way through the refuse of philosophical ideas for bits or scraps that she can re-collect, use or recycle (Cornell 1992). Though drawn towards this ideal figure (especially as she merges with a familiar stereotype of the mother, creatively making what she can with what little she has so that her children don't go hungry), it also calls into question my own relation to both philosophy and psychoanalysis. If, as Deleuze suggests, to philosophize is to attempt to write the autobiography of a spiritual automaton, then this work could be thought of as a kind of philosophizing. And in ways that I hope to substantiate as I go along, maternity shows up the limit of

psychoanalysis, calling psychoanalysis into question at the point it gives way to ethics. Though I come to philosophy as a willing amateur, I am impelled to look there for different answers than psychoanalysis can provide to the questions I have, and where I find philosophical answers, I am impelled to loop back to psychoanalysis as my own 'first philosophy' to reinterrogate them from a perspective that always reminds us to hold the child in mind. My hope is that in placing itself in proximity to both psychoanalysis and philosophy, this work attempts to overcome the limits of its own specialization, that of maternity, as well as using maternity as a model to ever-so-slightly ruffle the limits of both psychoanalysis and philosophy.

### Terms and conditions: the gendering of the maternal

Of whom do we speak when we talk of mothers and what do we denote when we refer to mothering, motherhood, maternal subjectivity, or the maternal more generally? What have the contours of these terms come to signify across different disciplinary domains, what are their genealogies, and where now may 'a mother' begin and end? It is generally accepted that the maternal refers to not only the material and embodied experience of pregnancy, childbirth and lactation, but also to identities and meanings of mothering, the ongoing emotional and relational work of being with children and others, the daily material practices of childrearing, the social locations and structural contexts within which women mother; indeed, to the whole range of embodied, social and cultural meanings, practices and structures associated with reproduction and parenting (Arendell 2000). From an interdisciplinary perspective however, I think it is possible to locate a particular tension between accounts of the maternal that focus on maternal work, thought of as a coherent set of ethical tasks and functions that centre around the preservation of a child's life, the fostering of their growth and the development of a capacity for social acceptability (Ruddick 1989) and accounts that focus on unconscious intersubjective dynamics (Hollway 2001), and the mutual development of 'mother' and 'child' through another kind of maternal work that entails containment and reverie (Bion 1962) (that peculiar psychoanalytic form of thinking), and managing both the child's and one's own ambivalence (Parker 2005). From this latter perspective, maternal subjectivity is a term used to refer to the ways 'fantasy, meaning, biography and relational dynamics' inform how each woman takes up a position in relation to a variety of discourses about mothering (Featherstone 1997: 7), acknowledging not only what we bring to mothering from within and without, but also how the relational dynamics of mothering itself has transformational potential in terms of both the self and the social fabric.

However, although 'parenting' and the 'parental body' is being used more and more to reference childrearing practices that can, and indeed are,

performed by both men as well as women, there are difficulties with collapsing the distinction between parenting in the masculine and in the feminine. Sara Ruddick (1997) argues that maternal and paternal practices remain distinct. Although she understands parenting as the 'complex ongoing work of responding to children's needs in particular economic and social circumstances', work that is not *prima facie* associated with either sex, the younger the children and the more physical their demands, the more likely this work will be assigned to women (Ruddick 1997: 206). To talk only of parenting 'denies the history and current practice of female mothering – including women's disproportionate responsibility for child-care' (Ruddick 1997: 206). And, as Shelley Park has pointed out, it is not only an issue of maternal practice. Paternal bodies are not mediated by the same cultural expectations and norms as maternal bodies (Park 2006: 207). She advocates using the way adoptive maternal bodies are rendered 'queer' by pronatalist perspectives, to critique dominant views of mothering without losing sight of the differences between maternal and paternal bodies. Wendy Hollway (2006) makes a different point. Drawing on early debates begun by Nancy Chodorow (1978) in *The Reproduction of Mothering* and extended by Jessica Benjamin (1995), she argues that fathers do not 'mother', but can develop a capacity to care, based, as she sees it on whether fathers, as boys, 'were able to retain their positive identification with maternal capacities to care for them, while at the same time coming to terms with being boys' (Hollway 2006: 99). She argues that maternal subjectivity arises out of a woman's position in relation to 'the absolute, unconditional demands of a dependent infant, especially if that infant has been a part of her' (Hollway 2006: 64). Though she raises the issue of biological mothers having a more immediate experience of embodied subjectivity through the experience of pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding, she is careful to distinguish biological mothers from maternal subjectivity, the latter being open to what she terms 'non-mothers' who remain available for transformative experiences through the practices of childcare. The maternal subject is understood, then, as a gendered subject who is structured by a relationship to a child (Hollway 2001). Mothering becomes parenting in the feminine not only due to the particular experiences of pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding, but also because of the uses the child makes of sexual difference.

Susan Kraemer also uses the term maternal subjectivity to include the 'grimmer experiences of "ordinary" maternal hate, aggression, and failure' (Kraemer 1996: 767). Her emphasis, however, is on how the mother comes to own and tolerate the broadest range of subjective responses to her baby or young child that include hate, anger and aggression. It is all very well granting the mother subjectivity, she claims, but it is an examination of what experiencing her subjectivity *means* to her that we need to engage in. In discussing, for example, the maternal analytic metaphor of the container,

she proposes that we move beyond caricatured portrayals of the maternal container as either 'empty' (Hirsch 1987; Aron 1991) or 'omnipotent' (Mitchell 1988). Instead, she suggests that:

these conceptualisations of the maternal container are in themselves artefacts of fantastic stereotypes about the selfless, self-denying or powerful, dangerous mother. We need, alternatively, to construct maternal containers that are neither devalued nor feared, neither sanctified nor vilified, but are simply subjectively alive and struggling, as ironically, the analytic holding mother is sometimes viewed.

(Kraemer 1996: 769)

Being 'simply subjectively alive and struggling' is the way Kraemer wants to try to hold on to the mother's subjectivity without it being thought about purely in the service of the child. However, one of the tensions in Kraemer's definition of maternal subjectivity is the plea for the mother to have a subjectivity she can call her own, while her subjectivity is thought about as arising through a relationship to a child that is characterized by a one-way, non-negotiable dependency. Maternal subjectivity emerges in her account as a way to describe the experience of managing intense emotional states thrown up by an ongoing relationship to this absolutely dependent other. It suggests that mothering is fundamentally about a particular kind of asymmetrical relationship in which the mother manages the feelings provoked in her by the 'ruthless' infant. Kraemer's work points us towards an understanding of maternal subjectivity arising directly out of the lived encounter with the child as she actively struggles to manage ambivalence or act as container or mirror. While I think this approach is vital in reminding us that mothers have emotional experiences of mothering that are complex and are inflected by unconscious dynamics including ambivalence, and that it may involve a non-negotiable relationship with a dependent other who is one's child, I think there is a real question about sustaining an account of maternal subjectivity out of the mother's ability to recognize and ultimately hold together feelings of love and hate. The mother is still figured as a container, even if she is now one who has some feelings about what she is being asked to do. My suggestion would be that we need accounts of maternal experiences that move the mother away from containers and receptacles altogether, that have other shapes and contours, and which may allow us to think about other things mothers do for and alongside their children.

At the end of a decennial review of scholarship on mothering; Arendell (2000) highlights some gaps in the literature and asks a series of pertinent questions: How do various women feel about being mothers; what meaning do they ascribe to mothering; how are women's sexual lives, desires and

experiences affected by mothering activities and the status of mothering; what is the mothering project, as mothers see it; what is the character of the relationships between particular mothers and their children; what exactly, do mothers do; what is the character of mothers' daily lives; how do mothers negotiate the activities of childrearing; how are women affected by mothering; how do women actively resist the dominant ideologies of mothering a family? These questions have a different kind of slant than the question Ann Snitow (1992) posed, which highlighted the tension between motherhood as institution and identity. They are more concerned with subjective experience, more focused on feelings and meanings thrown up by motherhood, more focused on the detail of lived experience and on agency in relation to maternity. They highlight the direction of current research; a willingness to engage in mother's subjective experiences of mothering while holding in view the context in which such subjectivities emerge, are structured and also impact in their turn on such a context.

Though I want in no way to exclude any of the multiple and complex ways in which people inhabit maternal relations, nor put myself in a position in which what I write would be tantamount to denying anyone a claim on those relations when they feel that claim is their due right, this book explores a very specific area of maternal experience; the experience of rearing young children who are present in a mother's life in a fairly regular way. However, I use the maternal to signify any relation of obligation between an adult who identifies as female, and another person whom that adult elects as their 'child'. It signifies relations between women and their birth children, adoptive children, foster children, community children, family members or children of friendship groups for whom they have informal or formal parental responsibilities, and many other constellations beside; relations in which the adult involved takes on partial responsibility for the preservation of life, growth and the fostering of social responsibility for that other whom they name and claim as their child.

When I talk of 'maternal subjectivity' however, I am attempting to point towards an experience that resides 'otherwise' than, or is excessive to maternal identities, thought of as emerging at the intersections particularly between gender, class and 'race'. Paradoxically arising, I argue, out of the mundane and relentless practices of daily maternal care, maternal subjectivity presents us with particular philosophical and ontological conundrums, not only in terms of the pregnant and lactating body that is both singular and multiple, disturbing notions of unity and the bounded self, but also because maternity is an experience that I maintain is impossible to anticipate in advance, one that unravels as it proceeds, and that one is always chasing the tail of, never become expert at, or even competent, and that always eludes our attempts to fully understand it. It involves relations with a particular and peculiar other whose rate of change is devastatingly rapid, who is always, by definition, 'developing', shifting, changing, and yet

it is another to whom one is 'linked' in an equally particular and peculiar way, a way that has something to do with larger issues of responsibility and care but played out in the most seemingly ridiculous forums; those of the daily 'thinking' about feeding, sleeping, dressing, manners, routines, good stuff, bad stuff, schools, friendships, more stuff, influences, environments, time, responsibility, freedom, control and so on. This book attempts to debate the nature of this link, the 'ethics' that is, of motherhood, but for the very specific purposes of understanding what this linking means for women who mother. My concerns are with trying to understand how an encounter with a child, the one we come to name as the child for whom we are responsible, is experienced from the asymmetrical position of being a mother; what this experience may 'offer' a mother that opens her onto the generative, surprising and unexpected; how motherhood indeed makes us anew.

In working from a few isolated personal experiences, I am speaking from the most narrow and particular location one could conceive. I have, for instance, two sons and no daughters. I live in an urban, British city. My partner has played an active role in parenting, and because of the flexibility of my own work arrangements, I have been able to spend considerable periods of time with my children when they were small, despite working full-time, though perhaps at enormous cost to my psychological and physical well-being. I have my own gendered, raced and class relations that are continuously at work in all the choices I make, and fail to make. There is no 'outside' of these experiences, and they deeply affect the ways I read theory, and understand and hear the maternal experiences of others. I do not believe, however, that the specificity of this account invalidates it. In many ways, it functions to keep reminding myself of my specific locations, of the particular ruts I find for myself, and find myself in. And in some ways it is its very specificity that permits the writing of a phenomenology of motherhood at all. I offer it, not as an example of a mothering experience that others may relate to, but its opposite; as what 'sticks out' of just one mothering experience, that may give pause for thought.

# Wages against Housework

They say it is love. We say it is unwaged work.

They call it frigidity. We call it absenteeism.

Every miscarriage is a work accident.

Homosexuality and heterosexuality are both working conditions . . .

but homosexuality is workers' control of production, not the end of work.

More smiles? More money. Nothing will be so powerful in destroying the healing virtues of a smile.

Neuroses, suicides, desexualisation: occupational diseases of the housewife.

Many times the difficulties and ambiguities which women express in discussing wages for housework stem from the reduction of wages for housework to a thing, a lump of money, instead of viewing it as a political perspective. The difference between these two standpoints is enormous. To view wages for housework as a thing rather than a perspective is to detach the end result of our struggle from the struggle itself and to miss its significance in demystifying and subverting the role to which women have been confined in capitalist society.

When we view wages for housework in this reductive way we start asking ourselves: what difference could some more money make to our lives? We might even agree that for a lot of women who do not have any choice except for housework and marriage, it would indeed make a lot of difference. But for those of us who seem to have other choices—professional work, enlightened husband, communal way of life, gay relations or a combination of these—it would not make much of a difference at all. For us there are supposedly other ways of achieving economic independence, and the last thing we want is to get it by identifying ourselves as housewives, a fate which we all agree is, so to speak, worse than death. The problem with this position is that in our imagination we usually add a bit of money to the shitty lives we have now and then ask, so what? on the false premise that we could ever get that money without at the same time revolutionising—in the process of struggling for it—all our



family and social relations. But if we take wages for housework as a political perspective, we can see that struggling for it is going to produce a revolution in our lives and in our social power as women. It is also clear that if we think we do not 'need' that money, it is because we have accepted the particular forms of prostitution of body and mind by which we get the money to hide that need. As I will try to show, not only is wages for housework a revolutionary perspective, but *it is the only revolutionary perspective from a feminist viewpoint and ultimately for the entire working class.*

## 'A labour of love'

It is important to recognise that when we speak of housework we are not speaking of a job as other jobs, but we are speaking of the most pervasive manipulation, the most subtle and mystified violence that capitalism has ever perpetrated against any section of the working class. True, under capitalism every worker is manipulated and exploited and his/her relation to capital is totally mystified. The wage gives the impression of a fair deal: you work and you get paid, hence you and your boss are equal; while in reality the wage, rather than paying for the work you do, hides all the unpaid work that goes into profit. But the wage at least recognises that you are a worker, and you can bargain and struggle around and against the terms and the quantity of that wage, the terms and the quantity of that work. To have a wage means to be part of a social contract, and there is no doubt concerning its meaning: you work, not because you like it, or because it comes naturally to you, but because it is the only condition under which you are allowed to live. But exploited as you might be, *you are not that work*. Today you are a postman, tomorrow a cabdriver. All that matters is how much of that work you have to do and how much of that money you can get.

But in the case of housework the situation is qualitatively different. The difference lies in the fact that not only has housework been imposed on women, but it has been transformed into a natural attribute of our female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depth of our female character. Housework had to be transformed into a natural attribute rather than be recognised as a social contract because from the beginning of capital's scheme for women this work was destined to be unwaged. Capital had to convince us that it is a natural, unavoidable and even fulfilling activity to make us accept our unwaged work. In its turn, the unwaged condition of housework has been the most powerful weapon in reinforcing the common assumption that *housework is not work*, thus preventing women from struggling against it, except in the privatised kitchen-bedroom quarrel that all society agrees to

ridicule, thereby further reducing the protagonist of a struggle. We are seen as nagging bitches, not workers in struggle.

Yet just how natural it is to be a housewife is shown by the fact that it takes at least twenty years of socialisation—day-to-day training, performed by an unwaged mother—to prepare a woman for this role, to convince her that children and husband are the best she can expect from life. Even so, it hardly succeeds. No matter how well trained we are, few are the women who do not feel cheated when the bride's day is over and they find themselves in front of a dirty sink. Many of us still have the illusion that we marry for love. A lot of us recognise that we marry for money and security; but it is time to make it clear that while the love or money involved is very little, the work which awaits us is enormous. This is why older women always tell us 'Enjoy your freedom while you can, buy whatever you want now . . .' But unfortunately it is almost impossible to enjoy any freedom if from the earliest days of life you are trained to be docile, subservient, dependent and most important to *sacrifice yourself* and even to get pleasure from it. If you don't like it, it is your problem, your failure, your guilt, your abnormality.

We must admit that capital has been very successful in hiding our work. It has created a true masterpiece at the expense of women. By denying housework a wage and transforming it into an act of love, capital has killed many birds with one stone. First of all, it has got a hell of a lot of work almost for free, and it has made sure that women, far from struggling against it, would seek that work as the best thing in life (the magic words: 'Yes, darling, you are a real woman'). At the same time, it has disciplined the male worker also, by making *his* woman dependent on *his* work and *his* wage, and trapped him in this discipline by giving him a servant after he himself has done so much serving at the factory or the office. In fact, our role as women is to be the unwaged but happy, and most of all loving, servants of the 'working class', i.e. those strata of the proletariat to which capital was forced to grant more social power. In the same way as god created Eve to give pleasure to Adam, so did capital create the housewife to service the male worker physically, emotionally and sexually—to raise *his* children, mend his socks, patch up his ego when it is crushed by the work and the social relations (which are relations of loneliness) that capital has reserved for him. It is precisely this peculiar combination of physical, emotional and sexual services that are involved in the role women must perform for capital that creates the specific character of that servant which is the housewife, that makes her work so burdensome and at the same time invisible. It is not an accident that most men start thinking of getting married as soon as they get their first job. This is not only because now they can afford it, but because having somebody at home who takes care of you is the only condition not to go

crazy after a day spent on an assembly line or at a desk. Every woman knows that this is what she should be doing to be a true woman and have a 'successful' marriage. And in this case too, the poorer the family the higher the enslavement of the woman, and not simply because of the monetary situation. In fact capital has a dual policy, one for the middle class and one for the proletarian family. It is no accident that we find the most unsophisticated machismo in the working class family: the more blows the man gets at work the more his wife must be trained to absorb them, the more he is allowed to recover his ego at her expense. You beat your wife and vent your rage against her when you are frustrated or overtired by your work or when you are defeated in a struggle (to go into a factory is itself a defeat). The more the man serves and is bossed around, the more he bosses around. A man's home is his castle. . . and his wife has to learn to wait in silence when he is moody, to put him back together when he is broken down and swears at the world, to turn around in bed when he says 'I'm too tired tonight,' or when he goes so fast at love-making that, as one woman put it, he might as well make it with a mayonnaise jar. (Women have always found ways of fighting back, or getting back at them, but always in an isolated and privatised way. The problem, then, becomes how to bring this struggle out of the kitchen and bedroom and into the streets.)

This fraud that goes under the name of love and marriage affects all of us, even if we are not married, because *once housework was totally naturalised and sexualised*, once it became a feminine attribute, all of us as females are characterised by it. If it is natural to do certain things, then all women are expected to do them and even like doing them—even those women who, due to their social position, could escape some of that work or most of it (their husbands can afford maids and shrinks and other forms of relaxation and amusement). We might not serve one man, but we are all in a servant relation with respect to the whole male world. This is why to be called a female is such a putdown, such a degrading thing. ('Smile, honey, what's the matter with you?' is something every man feels entitled to ask you, whether he is your husband, or the man who takes your ticket, or your boss at work.)

## The revolutionary perspective

If we start from this analysis we can see the revolutionary implications of the demand for wages for housework. *It is the demand by which our nature ends and our struggle begins because just to want wages for housework means to refuse that work as the expression of our nature, and therefore to refuse precisely the female role that capital has invented for us.*

To ask for wages for housework will by itself undermine the expectations society has of us, since these expectations—the essence of our socialisation—are all functional to our wageless condition in the home. In this sense, it is absurd to compare the struggle of women for wages to the struggle of male workers in the factory for more wages. The waged worker in struggling for more wages challenges his social role but remains within it. When we struggle for wages *we struggle unambiguously and directly against our social role*. In the same way there is a qualitative difference between the struggles of the waged worker and the struggles of the slave *for a wage against that slavery*. It should be clear, however, that when we struggle for a wage we do not struggle to enter capitalist relations, because we have never been out of them. We struggle to break capital's plan for women, which is an essential moment of that planned division of labour and social power within the working class, through which capital has been able to maintain its power. Wages for housework, then, is a revolutionary demand not because by itself it destroys capital, but because it attacks capital and forces it to restructure social relations in terms more favourable to us and consequently *more favourable to the unity of the class*. In fact, to demand wages for housework does not mean to say that if we are paid we will continue to do it. It means precisely the opposite. To say that we want money for housework is the first step towards refusing to do it, because the demand for a wage makes our work visible, which is the most indispensable condition to begin to struggle against it, both in its immediate aspect as housework and its more insidious character as femininity.

Against any accusation of 'economism' we should remember that *money is capital*, i.e. *it is the power to command labour*. Therefore to reappropriate that money which is the fruit of our labour—of our mothers' and grandmothers' labour—means at the same time to undermine capital's power to command forced labour from us. And we should not distrust the power of the wage in demystifying our femaleness and making visible our work—our femaleness as work—since the lack of a wage has been so powerful in shaping this role and hiding our work. To demand wages for housework is to make it visible that our minds, bodies and emotions have all been distorted for a specific function, in a specific function, and then have been thrown back at us as a model to which we should all conform if we want to be accepted as women in this society.

To say that we want wages for housework is to expose the fact that housework is already money for capital, that capital has made and makes money out of our cooking, smiling, fucking. At the same time, it shows that we have cooked, smiled, fucked throughout the years not because it was easier for us than for anybody else, but because we did not have any other choice. Our faces have become distorted from so much smiling, our

feelings have got lost from so much loving, our oversexualisation has left us completely desexualised.

Wages for housework is only the beginning, but its message is clear: *from now on they have to pay us because as females we do not guarantee anything any longer.* We want to call work what is work so that eventually we might rediscover what is love and create what will be our sexuality which we have never known. And from the viewpoint of work we can ask not one wage but many wages, because we have been forced into many jobs at once. We are housemaids, prostitutes, nurses, shrinks; this is the essence of the 'heroic' spouse who is celebrated on 'Mother's Day'. We say: stop celebrating our exploitation, our supposed heroism. From now on we want money for each moment of it, so that we can refuse some of it and eventually all of it. In this respect nothing can be more effective than to show that our female virtues have a calculable money value, until today only for capital, increased in the measure that we were defeated; from now on against capital *for us* in the measure we organise our power.

## The struggle for social services

This is the most radical perspective we can adopt because although we can ask for everything, day care, equal pay, free laundromats, we will never achieve any real change unless we attack our female role at its roots. Our struggle for social services, i.e. for better working conditions, will always be frustrated if we do not first establish that our work is work. Unless we struggle against the totality of it we will never achieve victories with respect to any of its moments. We will fail in the struggle for the free laundromats unless we first struggle against the fact that we cannot love except at the price of endless work, which day after day cripples our bodies, our sexuality, our social relations, unless we first escape the blackmail whereby our need to give and receive affection is turned against us as a work duty for which we constantly feel resentful against our husbands, children and friends, and guilty for that resentment. Getting a second job does not change that role, as years and years of female work outside the house still witness. The second job not only increases our exploitation, but simply reproduces our role in different forms. Wherever we turn we can see that the jobs women perform are mere extensions of the housewife condition in all its implications. That is, not only do we become nurses, maids, teachers, secretaries—all functions for which we are well trained in the home—but we are in the same bind that hinders our struggles in the home: isolation, the fact that other people's lives depend on us, or the impossibility to see where our work begins and ends, where our work ends and our desires begin. Is bringing coffee to your boss and chatting with him about his marital problems

secretarial work or is it a personal favour? Is the fact that we have to worry about our looks on the job a condition of work or is it the result of female vanity? (Until recently airline stewardesses in the United States were periodically weighed and had to be constantly on a diet—a torture that all women know—for fear of being laid off.) As is often said—when the needs of the waged labour market require her presence there—'A woman can do any job without losing her femininity,' which simply means that no matter what you do you are still a cunt.

As for the proposal of socialisation and collectivisation of housework, a couple of examples will be sufficient to draw a line between these alternatives and our perspective. It is one thing to set up a day care centre the way we want it, and demand that the State pay for it. It is quite another thing to deliver our children to the State and ask the State to control them, discipline them, teach them to honour the American flag not for five hours, but for fifteen or twenty-four hours. It is one thing to organise communally the way we want to eat (by ourselves, in groups, etc.) and then ask the State to pay for it, and it is the opposite thing to ask the State to organise our meals. In one case we regain some control over our lives, in the other we extend the State's control over us.

## The struggle against housework

Some women say: how is wages for housework going to change the attitudes of our husbands towards us? Won't our husbands still expect the same duties as before and even more than before once we are paid for them? But these women do not see that they can expect so much from us precisely because we are not paid for our work, because they assume that it is 'a woman's thing' which does not cost us much effort. Men are able to accept our services and take pleasure in them because they presume that housework is easy for us, that we enjoy it because we do it for their love. They actually expect us to be grateful because by marrying us or living with us they have given us the opportunity to express ourselves as women (i.e. to serve them), 'You are lucky you have found a man like me'. Only when men see our work as work—our love as work—and most important *our determination to refuse both*, will they change their attitude towards us. When hundreds and thousands of women are in the streets saying that endless cleaning, being always emotionally available, fucking at command for fear of losing our jobs is hard, hated work which wastes our lives, then they will be scared and feel undermined as men. But this is the best thing that can happen from their own point of view, because by exposing the way capital has kept us divided (capital has disciplined them through us and us through them—each other, against each other), we—their crutches, their slaves, their chains—open the process

of their liberation. In this sense wages for housework will be much more educational than trying to prove that we can work as well as them, that we can do the same jobs. We leave this worthwhile effort to the 'career woman', the woman who escapes from her oppression not through the power of unity and struggle, but through the power of the master, the power to oppress—usually other women. And we don't have to prove that we can 'break the blue collar barrier'. A lot of us broke that barrier a long time ago and have discovered that the overalls did not give us more power than the apron; if possible even less, because now we had to wear both and had less time and energy to struggle against them. *The things we have to prove are our capacity to expose what we are already doing, what capital is doing to us and our power in the struggle against it.*

Unfortunately, many women—particularly single women—are afraid of the perspective of wages for housework because they are afraid of identifying even for a second with the housewife. They know that this is the most powerless position in society and so they do not want to realise that they are housewives too. This is precisely their weakness, a weakness which is maintained and perpetuated through the lack of self-identification. We want and have to say that we are all housewives, we are all prostitutes and we are all gay, because until we recognise our slavery we cannot recognise our struggle against it, because as long as we think we are something better, something different than a housewife, we accept the logic of the master, which is a logic of division, and for us the logic of slavery. We are all housewives because no matter where we are they can always count on more work from us, more fear on our side to put forward our demands, and less pressure on them for money, since hopefully our minds are directed elsewhere, to that man in our present or our future who will 'take care of us'.

And we also delude ourselves that we can escape housework. But how many of us, in spite of working outside the house, have escaped it? And can we really so easily disregard the idea of living with a man? What if we lose our jobs? What about ageing and losing even the minimal amount of power that youth (productivity) and attractiveness (female productivity) afford us today? And what about children? Will we ever regret having chosen not to have them, not even having been able to realistically ask that question? And can we afford gay relations? Are we willing to pay the possible price of isolation and exclusion? But can we really afford relations with men?

The question is: why are these our only alternatives and what kind of struggle will move us beyond them?

New York, Spring 1974

Daily, mothers think out strategies of protection, nurturance, and training. Frequently conflicts between strategies or between fun-



damental demands provoke mothers to think about the meaning and relative weight of preservation, growth, and acceptability. In quieter moments, mothers reflect on their practice as a whole. As in any group of thinkers, some mothers are more ambitiously reflective than others, either out of temperamental thoughtfulness, moral and political concerns, or, most often, because they have serious problems with their children. However, maternal thinking is no rarity. Maternal work itself demands that mothers think; out of this need for thoughtfulness, a distinctive discipline emerges.

I speak about a mother's thought — the intellectual capacities she develops, the judgments she makes, the metaphysical attitudes she assumes, the values she affirms. Like a scientist writing up her experiment, a critic working over a text, or a historian assessing documents, a mother caring for children engages in a discipline. She asks certain questions — those relevant to her aims — rather than others; she accepts certain criteria for the truth, adequacy, and relevance of proposed answers; and she cares about the findings she makes and can act on. The discipline of maternal thought, like other disciplines, establishes criteria for determining failure and success, sets priorities, and identifies virtues that the discipline requires. Like any other work, mothering is prey to characteristic temptations that it must identify. To describe the capacities, judgments, metaphysical attitudes, and values of maternal thought presumes not maternal achievement, but a *conception* of achievement.

Maternal thinking is one kind of disciplined reflection among many, each with identifying questions, methods, and aims. Some disciplines overlap. A mother who is also a critic may learn something about "reading" a child's behavior from reading texts or learn something about reading itself from her child. A believer's prayer or a historian's sense of causal narrative or a scientist's clear-eyed scrutiny may enliven maternal attentiveness, which in its turn may prepare a mother for prayer, historical insight, or experiment. Disciplines may, on the other hand, be undertaken quite separately without conflicting. An engineer may find the particular kind of reasoning required by engineering almost entirely different from that required by mothering, and each may provide welcome relief

from the other. Even though people's behavior is limited by the disciplines they engage in, no one need be limited to a single discipline. No person because she is a woman, no woman or man because they are mothers, should be denied any intellectual activities that attract them. A scientist cannot disregard evidence for the sake of beauty, but she may care differently at different times about both. If a mother is called on to decide an appropriate punishment for a child's misbehavior or to weigh the possible success of a medical treatment against its serious pain, she cannot compose a sonata in response. There is a time for composing and a time for maternal thinking and, on happy days, time for both.

Mothers meeting together at their jobs, in playgrounds, or over coffee can be heard thinking. This does not necessarily mean that they can be heard being good. Mothers are not any more or less wonderful than other people — they are not especially sensible or foolish, noble or ignoble, courageous or cowardly. Mothers, like gardeners or historians, identify virtues appropriate to their work. But to identify a virtue is not to possess it. When mothers speak of virtues they speak as often of failure as of success. Almost always they reflect on the *struggles* that revolve around the temptations to which they are prey in their work. What they share is not virtuous characteristics but rather an identification and a discourse about the strengths required by their ongoing commitments to protect, nurture, and train.

Identifying virtues within maternal thinking should not be confused with evaluating the virtue of maternal thinking itself. Though no less thoughtful, no less a discipline than other kinds of thinking, maternal thinking is also not free from flaws. For example, as I will show later, in training children, mothers often value destructive ways of thinking and misidentify virtues. This means that mothers not only fail but in certain respects mischaracterize what counts as success and failure.

If thinking arises in and is tested by practice, who is qualified to judge the intellectual strength and moral character of a practice as a whole? It is sometimes said that only those who participate in a practice can criticize its thinking. Accordingly, it might be argued that it is not possible to evaluate maternal thinking without

practicing maternal work or living closely and sympathetically with those who do. When mothers engage in self-criticism, their judgments presuppose a knowledge of the efforts required to respond to children's demands that those unpracticed in tending to children do not have. Maternal criticisms are best left to those who know what it means to attempt to protect, nurture, and train, just as criticism of scientific or — to use a controversial example — psychoanalytic thinking should be left to those who have engaged in these practices.

There are moral grounds for critical restraint. People who have not engaged in a practice or who have not lived closely with a practitioner have no right to criticize. Although any group might make this claim, the point is particularly apt for maternal thinkers. Mothers have been a powerless group whose thinking, when it has been acknowledged at all, has most often been recognized by people interested in interpreting and controlling rather than in listening. Philosophically minded mothers have only begun to articulate the precepts of a thought whose existence other philosophers do not recognize. Surely, they should have time to think among and for themselves.

In the practicalist account of reason, there is also a powerful epistemological check on criticism. Critical vocabularies and standards are themselves embedded in practices from which they arise. Even principles of logical consistency and coherence do not stand outside of practices, although any practice can be assessed in their terms. To many outsiders, contemporary physics, Christian theology, and theories of nuclear defense abound in contradiction. But as experiences with scientists, believers, and defense intellectuals suggest, the intellectual and practical contradictions are interpreted and their weight measured not by the outside observer but by practitioners reflecting on their shared aims.

This is not to say that even an outsider's charge of inconsistency is without force. Unless self-deceived or ignorant of the contradictions their thinking displays, most people find the experience of self-contradiction both disorienting and demoralizing. Indeed, political and philosophical critics charge people with contradictory thinking in the expectation of provoking them to change. I, for

example, hope that maternal thinkers will be affected by my claims that certain concepts of maternal thinking that arise from training are inconsistent with other maternal concepts and that preservative love is at least *prima facie* incompatible with maternal militarism (see Chapters 5, 6, and 8). But although my respect for consistency is not connected to mothering, my particular identification of contradictions within maternal thinking arises from my experience of maternal practice, and the effect of my criticism can be measured only by mothers' responses.

One should not, however, conflate epistemological restraint with critical silence. The practical origins of reason do not preclude radical self-criticism. Indeed, developing vocabularies and standards of self-criticism is a central intellectual activity in most practices. More important, although all criticism arises from some practice or other, interpractice criticism is both possible and necessary for change. It is common sense epistemologically that alternative perspectives offer distinctive critical advantages. A historian, medical ethicist, and peace activist — especially if they themselves were conversant with science — might claim to have a better sense than a scientist not only of the limits but also of the character of scientific discipline. Militarists criticize maternal thinkers for insufficient respect for abstract causes, while peacemakers criticize them for the parochial character of maternal commitment.

Interpractice criticism is possible and often desirable; yet there is no privileged practice capable of judging all other practices. To criticize is to act on one's practical commitments, not to stand above them. Maternal thinking is one discipline among others, capable of criticizing and being criticized. It does not offer nor can it be judged from a standpoint uncontaminated by practical struggle and passion.

The essays in this text are efforts to relate the problematics of gender and sexuality to the tasks of persistence and survival. My own thinking has been influenced by the "New Gender Politics" that has emerged in recent years, a combination of movements concerned with transgender, transsexuality, intersex, and their complex relations to feminist and queer theory.<sup>1</sup> I believe, however, that it would be a mistake to subscribe to a progressive notion of history in which various frameworks are understood to succeed and supplant one another. There is no story to be told about how one moves from feminist to queer to trans. The reason there is no story to be told is that none of these stories are the past; these stories are continuing to happen in simultaneous and overlapping ways as we tell them. They happen, in part, through the complex ways they are taken up by each of these movements and theoretical practices.

Consider the intersex opposition to the widespread practice of performing coercive surgery on infants and children with sexually indeterminate or hermaphroditic anatomy in the name of normalizing these bodies. This movement offers a critical perspective on the version of the "human" that requires ideal morphologies and the constraining of bodily norms. The intersex community's resistance to coercive surgery moreover calls for an understanding that infants with intersexed conditions are part of the continuum of human morphology and ought to be treated with the presumption that their lives are and will be not only livable, but also occasions for flourishing. The norms that govern idealized human anatomy thus work to produce a differential sense of who is human and who is not, which lives are livable, and which are not. This differential works for a wide range of disabilities as well (although another norm is at work for invisible disabilities).

A concurrent operation of gender norms can be seen in the *DSM IV's* Gender Identity Disorder diagnosis. This diagnosis that has, for the

most part, taken over the role of monitoring signs of incipient homosexuality in children assumes that "gender dysphoria" is a psychological disorder simply because someone of a given gender manifests attributes of another gender or a desire to live as another gender. This imposes a model of coherent gendered life that demeans the complex ways in which gendered lives are crafted and lived. The diagnosis, however, is crucial for many individuals who seek insurance support for sex reassignment surgery or treatment, or who seek a legal change in status. As a result, the diagnostic means by which transsexuality is attributed implies a pathologization, but undergoing that pathologizing process constitutes one of the important ways in which the desire to change one's sex might be satisfied. The critical question thus becomes, how might the world be reorganized so that this conflict can be ameliorated?

The recent efforts to promote lesbian and gay marriage also promote a norm that threatens to render illegitimate and abject those sexual arrangements that do not comply with the marriage norm in either its existing or its revisable form. At the same time, the homophobic objections to lesbian and gay marriage expand out through the culture to affect all queer lives. One critical question thus becomes, how does one oppose the homophobia without embracing the marriage norm as the exclusive or most highly valued social arrangement for queer sexual lives? Similarly, efforts to establish bonds of kinship that are not based on a marriage tie become nearly illegible and unviable when marriage sets the terms for kinship, and kinship itself is collapsed into "family." The enduring social ties that constitute viable kinship in communities of sexual minorities are threatened with becoming unrecognizable and unviable as long as the marriage bond is the exclusive way in which both sexuality and kinship are organized. A critical relation to this norm involves disarticulating those rights and obligations currently attendant upon marriage so that marriage might remain a symbolic exercise for those who choose to engage in it, but the rights and obligations of kinship may take any number of other forms. What reorganization of sexual norms would be necessary for those who live sexually and affectively outside the marriage bond or in kin relations to the side of marriage either to be legally and culturally recognized for the endurance and importance of their intimate ties or, equally important, to be free of the need for recognition of this kind?

If a decade or two ago, gender discrimination applied tacitly to women, that no longer serves as the exclusive framework for understanding its contemporary usage. Discrimination against women continues—especially poor women and women of color, if we consider the differential levels of poverty and literacy not only in the United States, but globally—so this dimension of gender discrimination remains crucial to acknowledge. But gender now also means gender identity, a particularly salient issue in the politics and theory of transgenderism and transsexuality. Transgender refers to those persons who cross-identify or who live as another gender, but who may or may not have undergone hormonal treatments or sex reassignment operations. Among transsexuals and transgendered persons, there are those who identify as men (if female to male) or women (if male to female), and yet others who, with or without surgery, with or without hormones, identify as *trans*, as transmen or transwomen; each of these social practices carries distinct social burdens and promises.

Colloquially, “transgender” can apply to the entire range of these positions as well. Transgendered and transsexual people are subjected to pathologization and violence that is, once again, heightened in the case of trans persons from communities of color. The harassment suffered by those who are “read” as trans or discovered to be trans cannot be underestimated. They are part of a continuum of the gender violence that took the lives of Brandon Teena, Mathew Shephard, and Gwen Araujo.<sup>2</sup> And these acts of murder must be understood in connection with the coercive acts of “correction” undergone by intersexed infants and children that often leave those bodies maimed for life, traumatized, and physically limited in their sexual functions and pleasures.

Although intersex and transsex sometimes seem to be movements at odds with one another, the first opposing unwanted surgery, the second sometimes calling for elective surgery, it is most important to see that both challenge the principle that a natural dimorphism should be established or maintained at all costs. Intersex activists work to rectify the erroneous assumption that every body has an inborn “truth” of sex that medical professionals can discern and bring to light on their own. To the extent that the intersex movement maintains that gender ought to be established through assignment or choice, but noncoercively, it shares a premise with transgendered and transsexual activism. The latter opposes forms of unwanted coercive gender assignment, and

in this sense calls for greater claims of autonomy, a situation that parallels intersex claims as well. What precisely autonomy means, however, is complicated for both movements, since it turns out that choosing one’s own body invariably means navigating among norms that are laid out in advance and prior to one’s choice or are being articulated in concert by other minority agencies. Indeed, individuals rely on institutions of social support in order to exercise self-determination with respect to what body and what gender to have and maintain, so that self-determination becomes a plausible concept only in the context of a social world that supports and enables that exercise of agency. Conversely (and as a consequence), it turns out that changing the institutions by which humanly viable choice is established and maintained is a prerequisite for the exercise of self-determination. In this sense, individual agency is bound up with social critique and social transformation. One only determines “one’s own” sense of gender to the extent that social norms exist that support and enable that act of claiming gender for oneself. One is dependent on this “outside” to lay claim to what is one’s own. The self must, in this way, be dispossessed in sociality in order to take possession of itself.

One tension that arises between queer theory and both intersex and transsexual activism centers on the question of sex assignment and the desirability of identity categories. If queer theory is understood, by definition, to oppose all identity claims, including stable sex assignment, then the tension seems strong indeed. But I would suggest that more important than any presupposition about the plasticity of identity or indeed its retrograde status is queer theory’s claim to be opposed to the unwanted legislation of identity. After all, queer theory and activism acquired political salience by insisting that antihomophobic activism can be engaged in by anyone, regardless of sexual orientation, and that identity markers are not prerequisites for political participation. In the same way that queer theory opposes those who would regulate identities or establish epistemological claims of priority for those who make claims to certain kinds of identities, it seeks not only to expand the community base of antihomophobic activism, but, rather, to insist that sexuality is not easily summarized or unified through categorization. It does not follow, therefore, that queer theory would oppose all gender assignment or cast doubt on the desires of those who wish to secure such assignments for intersex children, for instance, who



may well need them to function socially even if they end up changing the assignment later in life, knowing the risks. The perfectly reasonable assumption here is that children do not need to take on the burden of being heroes for a movement without first assenting to such a role. In this sense, categorization has its place and cannot be reduced to forms of anatomical essentialism.

Similarly, the transsexual desire to become a man or a woman is not to be dismissed as a simple desire to conform to established identity categories. As Kate Bornstein points out, it can be a desire for transformation itself, a pursuit of identity as a transformative exercise, an example of desire itself as a transformative activity.<sup>3</sup> But even if there are, in each of these cases, desires for stable identity at work, it seems crucial to realize that a livable life does require various degrees of stability. In the same way that a life for which no categories of recognition exist is not a livable life, so a life for which those categories constitute unlivable constraint is not an acceptable option.

The task of all of these movements seems to me to be about distinguishing among the norms and conventions that permit people to breathe, to desire, to love, and to live, and those norms and conventions that restrict or eviscerate the conditions of life itself. Sometimes norms function both ways at once, and sometimes they function one way for a given group, and another way for another group. What is most important is to cease legislating for all lives what is livable only for some, and similarly, to refrain from proscribing for all lives what is unlivable for some. The differences in position and desire set the limits to universalizability as an ethical reflex. The critique of gender norms must be situated within the context of lives as they are lived and must be guided by the question of what maximizes the possibilities for a livable life, what minimizes the possibility of unbearable life or, indeed, social or literal death.

None of these movements is, in my view, postfeminist. They have all found important conceptual and political resources in feminism, and feminism continues to pose challenges to these movements and to function as an important ally. And just as it no longer works to consider "gender discrimination" as a code for discrimination against women, it would be equally unacceptable to propound a view of gender discrimination that did not take into account the differential ways in which women suffer from poverty and illiteracy, from employment

discrimination, from a gendered division of labor within a global frame, and from violence, sexual and otherwise. The feminist framework that takes the structural domination of women as the starting point from which all other analyses of gender must proceed imperils its own viability by refusing to countenance the various ways that gender emerges as a political issue, bearing a specific set of social and physical risks. It is crucial to understand the workings of gender in global contexts, in transnational formations, not only to see what problems are posed for the term "gender" but to combat false forms of universalism that service a tacit or explicit cultural imperialism. That feminism has always countered violence against women, sexual and nonsexual, ought to serve as a basis for alliance with these other movements, since phobic violence against bodies is part of what joins antihomophobic, antiracist, feminist, trans, and intersex activism.

Although some feminists have worried in public that the trans movement constitutes an effort to displace or appropriate sexual difference, I think that this is only one version of feminism, one that is contested by views that take gender as an historical category, that the framework for understanding how it works is multiple and shifts through time and place. The view that transsexuals seek to escape the social condition of femininity because that condition is considered debased or lacks privileges accorded to men assumes that female-to-male (FTM) transsexuality can be definitively explained through recourse to that one framework for understanding femininity and masculinity. It tends to forget that the risks of discrimination, loss of employment, public harassment, and violence are heightened for those who live openly as transgendered persons. The view that the desire to become a man or a transman or to live transgendered is motivated by a repudiation of femininity presumes that every person born with female anatomy is therefore in possession of a proper femininity (whether innate, symbolically assumed, or socially assigned), one that can either be owned or disowned, appropriated or expropriated. Indeed, the critique of male-to-female (MTF) transsexuality has centered on the "appropriation" of femininity, as if it belongs properly to a given sex, as if sex is discretely given, as if gender identity could and should be derived unequivocally from presumed anatomy. To understand gender as a historical category, however, is to accept that gender, understood as one way of culturally configuring a body, is open

to a continual remaking, and that "anatomy" and "sex" are not without cultural framing (as the intersex movement has clearly shown). The very attribution of femininity to female bodies as if it were a natural or necessary property takes place within a normative framework in which the assignment of femininity to femaleness is one mechanism for the production of gender itself. Terms such as "masculine" and "feminine" are notoriously changeable; there are social histories for each term; their meanings change radically depending upon geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining whom, and for what purpose. That the terms recur is interesting enough, but the recurrence does not index a sameness, but rather the way in which the social articulation of the term depends upon its repetition, which constitutes one dimension of the performative structure of gender. Terms of gender designation are thus never settled once and for all but are constantly in the process of being remade.

The concept of gender as historical and performative, however, stands in tension with some versions of sexual difference, and some of the essays included here try to broach that divide within feminist theory. The view that sexual difference is a primary difference has come under criticism from several quarters. There are those who rightly argue that sexual difference is no more primary than racial or ethnic difference and that one cannot apprehend sexual difference outside of the racial and ethnic frames by which it is articulated. Those who claim that being produced by a mother and a father is crucial to all humans may well have a point. But are sperm donors or one-night stands, or indeed, rapists, really "fathers" in a social sense? Even if in some sense or under certain circumstances they are, do they not put the category into crisis for those who would assume that children without discernible fathers at their origin are subject to psychosis? If a sperm and egg are necessary for reproduction (and remain so)—and in that sense sexual difference is an essential part of any account a human may come up with about his or her origin—does it follow that this difference shapes the individual more profoundly than other constituting social forces, such as the economic or racial conditions by which one comes into being, the conditions of one's adoption, the sojourn at the orphanage? Is there very much that follows from the fact of an originating sexual difference?

Feminist work on reproductive technology has generated a host of ethical and political perspectives that have not only galvanized feminist

studies but have made clear the implications for thinking about gender in relation to biotechnology, global politics, and the status of the human and life itself. Feminists who criticize technologies for effectively replacing the maternal body with a patriarchal apparatus must nevertheless contend with the enhanced autonomy that those technologies have provided for women. Feminists who embrace such technologies for the options they have produced nevertheless must come to terms with the uses to which those technologies can be put, ones that may well involve calculating the perfectibility of the human, sex selection, and racial selection. Those feminists who oppose technological innovations because they threaten to efface the primacy of sexual difference risk naturalizing heterosexual reproduction. The doctrine of sexual difference in this case comes to be in tension with antihomophobic struggles as well as with the intersex movement and the transgender movement's interest in securing rights to technologies that facilitate sex reassignment.

In each of these struggles, we see that technology is a site of power in which the human is produced and reproduced—not just the humanness of the child but also the humanness of those who bear and those who raise children, parents and nonparents alike. Gender likewise figures as a precondition for the production and maintenance of legible humanity. If there is important coalitional thinking to be done across these various movements, all of which comprise the New Gender Politics, it will doubtless have to do with presumptions about bodily dimorphism, the uses and abuses of technology, and the contested status of the human, and of life itself. If sexual difference is that which ought to be protected from effacement from a technology understood as phallocentric in its aims, then how do we distinguish between sexual difference and normative forms of dimorphism against which intersex and transgendered activists struggle on a daily basis? If technology is a resource to which some people want access, it is also an imposition from which others seek to be freed. Whether technology is imposed or elected is salient for intersex activists. If some trans people argue that their very sense of personhood depends upon having access to technology to secure certain bodily changes, some feminists argue that technology threatens to take over the business of making persons, running the risk that the human will become nothing other than a technological effect.

Similarly, the call for a greater recognition of bodily difference made by both disability movements and intersex activism invariably calls for a renewal of the value of life. Of course, "life" has been taken up by right-wing movements to limit reproductive freedoms for women, so the demand to establish more inclusive conditions for valuing life and producing the conditions for viable life can resonate with unwanted conservative demands to limit the autonomy of women to exercise the right to an abortion. But here it seems important not to cede the term "life" to a right-wing agenda, since it will turn out that there are within these debates questions about when human life begins and what constitutes "life" in its viability. The point is emphatically not to extend the "right to life" to any and all people who want to make this claim on behalf of mute embryos, but rather to understand how the "viability" of a woman's life depends upon an exercise of bodily autonomy and on social conditions that enable that autonomy. Moreover, as in the case with those seeking to overcome the pathologizing effects of a gender identity disorder diagnosis, we are referring to forms of autonomy that require social (and legal) support and protection, and that exercise a transformation on the norms that govern how agency itself is differentially allocated among genders; thus, a women's right to choose remains, in some contexts, a misnomer.

Critiques of anthropocentrism have made clear that when we speak about human life we are indexing a being who is at once human and living, and that the range of living beings exceeds the human. In a way, the term "human life" designates an unwieldy combination, since "human" does not simply qualify "life," but "life" relates human to what is nonhuman and living, establishing the human in the midst of this relationality. For the human to be human, it must relate to what is nonhuman, to what is outside itself but continuous with itself by virtue of an interimplication in life. This relation to what is not itself constitutes the human being in its livingness, so that the human exceeds its boundary in the very effort to establish them. To make the claim, "I am an animal," avows in a distinctively human language that the human is not distinct. This paradox makes it imperative to separate the question of a livable life from the status of a human life, since livability pertains to living beings that exceed the human. In addition, we would be foolish to think that life is fully possible without a dependence on technology, which suggests that the human, in its

animality, is dependent on technology, to live. In this sense, we are thinking within the frame of the cyborg as we call into question the status of the human and that of the livable life.

The rethinking of the human in these terms does not entail a return to humanism. When Frantz Fanon claimed that "the black is not a man," he conducted a critique of humanism that showed that the human in its contemporary articulation is so fully racialized that no black man could qualify as human.<sup>4</sup> In his usage, the formulation was also a critique of masculinity, implying that the black man is effeminized. And the implication of that formulation would be that no one who is not a "man" in the masculine sense is a human, suggesting that both masculinity and racial privilege shore up the notion of the human. His formulation has been extended by contemporary scholars, including the literary critic Sylvia Wynter, to pertain to women of color as well and to call into question the racist frameworks within which the category of the human has been articulated.<sup>5</sup> These formulations show the power differentials embedded in the construction of the category of the "human" and, at the same time, insist upon the historicity of the term, the fact that the "human" has been crafted and consolidated over time.

The category of the "human" retains within itself the workings of the power differential of race as part of its own historicity. But the history of the category is not over, and the "human" is not captured once and for all. That the category is crafted in time, and that it works through excluding a wide range of minorities means that its rearticulation will begin precisely at the point where the excluded speak to and from such a category. If Fanon writes that "a black is not a man," who writes when Fanon writes? That we can ask the "who" means that the human has exceeded its categorical definition, and that he is in and through the utterance opening up the category to a different future. If there are norms of recognition by which the "human" is constituted, and these norms encode operations of power, then it follows that the contest over the future of the "human" will be a contest over the power that works in and through such norms. That power emerges in language in a restrictive way or, indeed, in other modes of articulation as that which tries to stop the articulation as it nevertheless moves forward. That double movement is found in the utterance, the image, the action that articulates the struggle with the norm. Those deemed illegible,

unrecognizable, or impossible nevertheless speak in the terms of the "human," opening the term to a history not fully constrained by the existing differentials of power.

These questions form in part an agenda for the future that one hopes will bring a host of scholars and activists together to craft wide-ranging frameworks within which to broach these urgent and complex issues. These issues are clearly related to changes in kinship structure, debates on gay marriage, conditions for adoption, and access to reproductive technology. Part of rethinking where and how the human comes into being will involve a rethinking of both the social and psychic landscapes of an infant's emergence. Changes at the level of kinship similarly demand a reconsideration of the social conditions under which humans are born and reared, opening up new territory for social and psychological analysis as well as the sites of their convergence.

Psychoanalysis has sometimes been used to shore up the notion of a primary sexual difference that forms the core of an individual's psychic life. But there it would seem that sexual difference gains its salience only through assuming that sperm and egg imply heterosexual parental coitus, and then a number of other psychic realities, such as the primal scene and oedipal scenario. But if the egg or sperm comes from elsewhere, and is not attached to a person called "parent," or if the parents who are making love are not heterosexual or not reproductive, then it would seem that a new psychic topography is required. Of course, it is possible to presume, as many French psychoanalysts have done, that reproduction follows universally from heterosexual parental coitus, and that this fact provides a psychic condition for the human subject. This view proceeds to condemn forms of nonheterosexual unions, reproductive technology, and parenting outside of nuclear heterosexual marriage as damaging for the child, threatening to culture, destructive of the human. But this recruitment of psychoanalytic vocabularies for the purpose of preserving the paternal line, the transmission of national cultures, and heterosexual marriage is only one use of psychoanalysis, and not a particularly productive or necessary one.

It is important to remember that psychoanalysis can also serve as a critique of cultural adaptation as well as a theory for understanding the ways in which sexuality fails to conform to the social norms by which it is regulated. Moreover, there is no better theory for grasping

the workings of fantasy construed not as a set of projections on an internal screen but as part of human relationality itself. It is on the basis of this insight that we can come to understand how fantasy is essential to an experience of one's own body, or that of another, as gendered. Finally, psychoanalysis can work in the service of a conception of humans as bearing an irreversible humility in their relations to others and to themselves. There is always a dimension of ourselves and our relation to others that we cannot know, and this not-knowing persists with us as a condition of existence and, indeed, of survivability. We are, to an extent, driven by what we do not know, and cannot know, and this "drive" (*Trieb*) is precisely what is neither exclusively biological nor cultural, but always the site of their dense convergence.<sup>6</sup> If I am always constituted by norms that are not of my making, then I have to understand the ways that constitution takes place. The staging and structuring of affect and desire is clearly one way in which norms work their way into what feels most properly to belong to me. The fact that I am other to myself precisely at the place where I expect to be myself follows from the fact that the sociality of norms exceeds my inception and my demise, sustaining a temporal and spatial field of operation that exceeds my self-understanding. Norms do not exercise a final or fatalistic control, at least, not always. The fact that desire is not fully determined corresponds with the psychoanalytic understanding that sexuality is never fully captured by any regulation. Rather, it is characterized by displacement, it can exceed regulation, take on new forms in response to regulation, even turn around and make it sexy. In this sense, sexuality is never fully reducible to the "effect" of this or that operation of regulatory power. This is not the same as saying that sexuality is, by nature, free and wild. On the contrary, it emerges precisely as an improvisational possibility within a field of constraints. Sexuality, though, is not found to be "in" those constraints as something might be "in" a container: it is extinguished by constraints, but also mobilized and incited by constraints, even sometimes requiring them to be produced again and again.

It would follow, then, that to a certain extent sexuality establishes us as outside of ourselves; we are motivated by an elsewhere whose full meaning and purpose we cannot definitively establish.<sup>7</sup> This is only because sexuality is one way cultural meanings are carried, through both the operation of norms and the peripheral modes of their undoing.



Sexuality does not follow from gender in the sense that what gender you "are" determines what kind of sexuality you will "have." We try to speak in ordinary ways about these matters, stating our gender, disclosing our sexuality, but we are, quite inadvertently, caught up in ontological thickets and epistemological quandaries. Am I a gender after all? And do I "have" a sexuality?

Or does it turn out that the "I" who ought to be bearing its gender is undone by being a gender, that gender is always coming from a source that is elsewhere and directed toward something that is beyond me, constituted in a sociality I do not fully author? If that is so, then gender undoes the "I" who is supposed to be or bear its gender, and that undoing is part of the very meaning and comprehensibility of that "I." If I claim to "have" a sexuality, then it would seem that a sexuality is there for me to call my own, to possess as an attribute. But what if sexuality is the means by which I am dispossessed? What if it is invested and animated from elsewhere even as it is precisely mine? Does it not follow, then, that the "I" who would "have" its sexuality is undone by the sexuality it claims to have, and that its very "claim" can no longer be made exclusively in its own name? If I am claimed by others when I make my claim, if gender is for and from another before it becomes my own, if sexuality entails a certain dispossession of the "I," this does not spell the end to my political claims. It only means that when one makes those claims, one makes them for much more than oneself.

It is true that the ranks of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and transgendered parents grow larger every day, and that nothing intrinsic to the constitution of those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, or queer predisposes them to resist the appeal of futurity, to refuse the temptation to reproduce, or to place themselves outside or against the acculturating logic of the Symbolic. Neither, indeed, is there any ground we could stand on outside that logic. In urging an alternative to the party line, which every party endorses, in taking a side outside the logic of reproductive futurism and arguing that queers might embrace their figural association with its end, I am not for a moment assuming that queers—by which I mean all so stigmatized for failing to comply with heteronormative mandates—are not themselves also psychically invested in preserving the familiar familial narrativity of reproductive futurism.<sup>18</sup> But politics, construed as oppositional or not, never rests on essential identities. It centers, instead, on the figurality that is always essential to identity, and thus on the figural relations in which social identities are always inscribed.

To figure the undoing of civil society, the death drive of the dominant order, is neither to be nor to become that drive; such being is not to the point. Rather, acceding to that figural position means recognizing and refusing the consequences of grounding reality in denial of the drive. As the death drive dissolves those congealments of identity that permit us to know and survive as ourselves, so the queer must insist on disturbing, on queering, social organization as such—on disturbing, therefore, and on queering ourselves and our investment in such organization. For queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one. And so, when I argue, as I aim to do here, that the burden of queerness is to be located less in the assertion of an oppositional political identity than in opposition to politics as the governing fantasy of realizing, in an always indefinite future, Imaginary identities foreclosed by our constitutive subjection to the signifier, I am proposing no platform or posi-

tion from which queer sexuality or any queer subject might finally and truly become itself, as if it could somehow manage thereby to achieve an essential queerness.<sup>19</sup> I am suggesting instead that the efficacy of queerness, its real strategic value, lies in its resistance to a Symbolic reality that only ever invests us as subjects insofar as we invest ourselves in it, clinging to its governing fictions, its persistent sublimations, as reality itself. It is only, after all, to its figures of meaning, which we take as the literal truth, that we owe our existence as subjects and the social relations within which we live—relations we may well be willing, therefore, to give up our lives to maintain.

The Child, in the historical epoch of our current epistemological regime, is the figure for this compulsory investment in the misrecognition of figure. It takes its place on the social stage like every adorable Annie gathering her limitless funds of pluck to “stick out [her] chin/ And grin/ And say: ‘Tomorrow! Tomorrow! I love ya/ Tomorrow/ You’re always/ A day/ Away.’”<sup>20</sup> And lo and behold, as viewed through the prism of the tears that it always calls forth, the figure of this Child seems to shimmer with the iridescent promise of Noah’s rainbow, serving like the rainbow as the pledge of a covenant that shields us against the persistent threat of apocalypse now—or later. Recall, for example, the end of Jonathan Demme’s *Philadelphia* (1993), his filmic act of contrition for the homophobia some attributed to *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). After Andrew Beckett (a man for all seasons, as portrayed by the saintly Tom Hanks), last seen on his deathbed in an oxygen mask that seems to allude to, or trope on, Hannibal Lecter’s more memorable muzzle (see figures 1 and 2), has shuffled off this mortal coil to stand, as we are led to suppose, before a higher law, we find ourselves in, if not at, his wake surveying a room in his family home, now crowded with children and pregnant women whose reassuringly bulging bellies (see figure 3) displace the bulging basket (unseen) of the HIV-positive gay man (unseen) from whom, the filmic text suggests, in a cinema (unlike the one in which we sit watching *Philadelphia*) not phobic about graphic representations of male-male sexual acts, Saint Thomas, a.k.a. Beckett, contracted the virus that cost

him his life. When we witness, in the film’s final sequence, therefore, the videotaped representation of Andrew playing on the beach as a boy (see figure 4), the tears that these moving pictures solicit burn with an indignation directed not only against the intolerant world that sought to crush the honorable man this boy would later become, but also against the homosexual world in which boys like this eventually grow up to have crushes on other men. For the cult of the Child permits no shrines to the queerness of boys and girls, since queerness, for contemporary culture at large as for Philadelphia in particular, is understood as bringing children and childhood to an end. Thus, the occasion of a gay man’s death gives the film the excuse to unleash once more the disciplinary image of the “innocent” Child performing its mandatory cultural labor of social reproduction. We encounter this image on every side as the lives, the speech, and the freedoms of adults face constant threat of legal curtailment out of deference to imaginary Children whose futures, as if they were permitted to have them except as they consist in the prospect of passing them on to Children of their own, are construed as endangered by the social disease as which queer sexualities register. Nor should we forget how pervasively AIDS—for which to this day the most effective name associated with the congressional appropriation of funds is that of a child, Ryan White—reinforces an older connection, as old as the antigay reading imposed on the biblical narrative of Sodom’s destruction, between practices of gay sexuality and the undoing of futurity.<sup>21</sup> This, of course, is the connection on which Anita Bryant played so cannily when she campaigned in Florida against gay civil rights under the banner of “Save Our Children,” and it remains the connection on which the national crusade against gay marriage rests its case.

Thus, while lesbians and gay men by the thousands work for the right to marry, to serve in the military, to adopt and raise children of their own, the political right, refusing to acknowledge these comrades in reproductive futurism, counters their efforts by inviting us to kneel at the shrine of the sacred Child: the Child who might witness lewd or inappropriately intimate behavior; the Child who might find information about dan-

gerous “lifestyles” on the Internet; the Child who might choose a provocative book from the shelves of the public library; the Child, in short, who might find an enjoyment that would nullify the figural value, itself imposed by adult desire, of the Child as unmarked by the adult’s adulterating implication in desire itself; the Child, that is, made to image, for the satisfaction of adults, an Imaginary fullness that’s considered to want, and therefore to want for, nothing. As Lauren Berlant argues forcefully at the outset of *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, “a nation made for adult citizens has been replaced by one imagined for fetuses and children.”<sup>22</sup> On every side, our enjoyment of liberty is eclipsed by the lengthening shadow of a Child whose freedom to develop undisturbed by encounters, or even by the threat of potential encounters, with an “otherness” of which its parents, its church, or the state do not approve, uncompromised by any possible access to what is painted as alien desire, terroristically holds us all in check and determines that political discourse conform to the logic of a narrative wherein history unfolds as the future envisioned for a Child who must never grow up. Not for nothing, after all, does the historical construction of the homosexual as distinctive social type overlap with the appearance of such literary creations as Tiny Tim, David Balfour, and Peter Pan, who enact, in an imperative most evident today in the uncannily intimate connection between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort, a Symbolic resistance to the unmarried men (Scrooge, Uncle Ebenezer, Captain Hook) who embody, as Voldemort’s name makes clear, a wish, a will, or a drive toward death that entails the destruction of the Child. That Child, immured in an innocence seen as continuously under seige, condenses a fantasy of vulnerability to the queerness of queer sexualities precisely insofar as that Child enshrines, in its form as sublimation, the very value for which queerness regularly finds itself condemned: an insistence on sameness that intends to restore an Imaginary past. The Child, that is, marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism. And so, as the radical right maintains, the battle against

queers is a life-and-death struggle for the future of a Child whose ruin is pursued by feminists, queers, and those who support the legal availability of abortion. Indeed, as the Army of God made clear in the bomb-making guide it produced for the assistance of its militantly “pro-life” members, its purpose was wholly congruent with the logic of reproductive futurism: to “disrupt and ultimately destroy Satan’s power to kill our children, God’s children.”<sup>23</sup>

Without ceasing to refute the lies that pervade these familiar right-wing diatribes, do we also have the courage to acknowledge, and even to embrace, their correlative truths? Are we willing to be sufficiently oppositional to the structural logic of opposition—oppositional, that is, to the logic by which politics reproduces our social reality—to accept that the figural burden of queerness, the burden that queerness is phobically produced precisely to represent, is that of the force that shatters the fantasy of Imaginary unity, the force that insists on the void (replete, paradoxically, with jouissance) always already lodged within, though barred from, symbolization: the gap or wound of the Real that inhabits the Symbolic’s very core? Not that we are, or ever could be, outside the Symbolic ourselves; but we can, nonetheless, make the choice to accede to our cultural production as figures—within the dominant logic of narrative, within Symbolic reality—for the dismantling of such a logic and thus for the death drive it harbors within.

As the name for a force of mechanistic compulsion whose formal excess supersedes any end toward which it might seem to be aimed, the death drive refuses identity or the absolute privilege of any goal. Such a goal, such an end, could never be “it”; achieved, it could never satisfy. For the drive as such can only insist, and every end toward which we mistakenly interpret its insistence to pertain is a sort of grammatical placeholder, one that tempts us to read as transitive a pulsion that attains through insistence alone the satisfaction no end ever holds. Engaged in circulation around an object never adequate to fulfill it, the drive enacts the repetition that characterizes what Judith Butler has called “the repetitive propulsiveness of sexuality.”<sup>24</sup> The structural mandate of the drive,

therefore, could be seen to call forth its object or end, indeed, the whole register of sexuality itself, as a displacement of its own formal energies, as an allegorization of its differential force. But that force can never be separated from, can never be imagined as existing before, the Symbolic order of the signifier that it functions to transgress, which is why Lacan argues that “if everything that is immanent or implicit in the chain of natural events may be considered as subject to the so-called death drive, it is only because there is a signifying chain.”<sup>25</sup>

One way to approach the death drive in terms of the economy of this “chain of natural events” thus shaped by linguistic structures—structures that allow us to produce those “events” through the logic of narrative history—is by reading the play and the place of the death drive in relation to a theory of irony, that queerest of rhetorical devices, especially as discussed by Paul de Man. Proposing that “any theory of irony is the undoing, the necessary undoing, of any theory of narrative,” de Man adduces the constant tension between irony as a particular trope and narrative as a representational mode that allegorizes tropes in general. Narrative, that is, undertakes the project of accounting for trope systematically by producing, in de Man’s rehearsal of Schlegel, an “anamorphosis of the tropes, the transformation of the tropes, into the system of tropes, to which the corresponding experience is that of the self standing above its own experiences.” In contrast, as de Man makes clear, “what irony disrupts (according to Friedrich Schlegel) is precisely that dialectic and reflexivity.” The corrosive force of irony thus carries a charge for de Man quite similar to that of the death drive as understood by Lacan. “Words have a way of saying things which are not at all what you want them to say,” de Man notes. “There is a machine there, a text machine, an implacable determination and a total arbitrariness . . . which inhabits words on the level of the play of the signifier, which undoes any narrative consistency of lines, and which undoes the reflexive and dialectical model, both of which are, as you know, the basis of any narration.”<sup>26</sup> The mindless violence of this textual machine, so arbitrary, so implacable, threatens, like a guillotine, to sever the genealogy that narrative syntax labors to af-

firm, recasting its narrative “chain of . . . events” as a “signifying chain” and inscribing in the realm of signification, along with the prospect of meaning, the meaningless machinery of the signifier, always in the way of what it would signify. Irony, whose effect de Man likens to the syntactical violence of anacoluthon, thus severs the continuity essential to the very logic of making sense.

How should we read this constant disruption of narrative signification, a disruption inextricable from the articulation of narrative as such, but as a version of the death drive, which Barbara Johnson calls, in a different context, “a kind of unthought remainder . . . a formal overdetermination that is, in Freud’s case, going to produce repetition or, in deconstruction’s case, may inhere in linguistic structures that don’t correspond to anything else”?<sup>27</sup> If irony can serve as one of the names for the force of that unthought remainder, might not queerness serve as another? Queer theory, it follows, would constitute the site where the radical threat posed by irony, which heteronormative culture displaces onto the figure of the queer, is uncannily returned by queers who no longer disown but assume their figural identity as embodiments of the figuralization, and hence the disfiguration, of identity itself. Where the political interventions of identitarian minorities—including those who seek to substantialize the identities of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals—may properly take shape as oppositional, affording the dominant order a reassuringly symmetrical, if inverted, depiction of its own ostensibly coherent identity, queer theory’s opposition is precisely to any such logic of opposition, its proper task the ceaseless disappropriation of every propriety. Thus, queerness could never constitute an authentic or substantive identity, but only a structural position determined by the imperative of figuration; for the gap, the noncoincidence, that the order of the signifier installs both informs and inhabits queerness as it inhabits reproductive futurism. But it does so with a difference. Where futurism always anticipates, in the image of an Imaginary past, a realization of meaning that will suture identity by closing that gap, queerness undoes the identities through which we experience ourselves as subjects, insist-



ing on the Real of a *jouissance* that social reality and the futurism on which it relies have already foreclosed.

Queerness, therefore, is never a matter of being or becoming but, rather, of embodying the remainder of the Real internal to the Symbolic order. One name for this unnameable remainder, as Lacan describes it, is *jouissance*, sometimes translated as "enjoyment": a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law. This passage, toward which the pulsion of the drives continuously impels us, may have the effect, insofar as it gets attached to a particular object or end, of congealing identity around the fantasy of satisfaction or fulfillment by means of that object. At the same time, however, this *jouissance* dissolves such fetishistic investments, undoing the consistency of a social reality that relies on Imaginary identifications, on the structures of Symbolic law, and on the paternal metaphor of the name.<sup>28</sup> Hence, for Lacan there is another name that designates the unnameability to which *jouissance* would give us access: "Behind what is named, there is the unnameable," he writes. "It is in fact because it is unnameable, with all the resonances you can give to this name, that it is akin to the quintessential unnameable, that is to say to death."<sup>29</sup> The death drive, therefore, manifests itself, though in radically different guises, in both versions of *jouissance*. To the extent that *jouissance*, as fantasmatic escape from the alienation intrinsic to meaning, lodges itself in a given object on which identity comes to depend, it produces identity as mortification, reenacting the very constraint of meaning it was intended to help us escape. But to the extent that it tears the fabric of Symbolic reality as we know it, unraveling the solidity of every object, including the object as which the subject necessarily takes itself, *jouissance* evokes the death drive that always insists as the void in and of the subject, beyond its fantasy of self-realization, beyond the pleasure principle.

Bound up with the first of these death drives is the figure of the Child, enacting a logic of repetition that fixes identity through identification with the future of the social order. Bound up with the second is the figure

of the queer, embodying that order's traumatic encounter with its own inescapable failure, its encounter with the illusion of the future as suture to bind the constitutive wound of the subject's subjection to the signifier, which divides it, paradoxically, both from and into itself. In the preface to *Homographesis* I wrote that the signifier "gay," understood "as a figure for the textuality, the rhetoricity, of the sexual . . . designates the gap or incoherence that every discourse of 'sexuality' or 'sexual identity' would master."<sup>30</sup> Extending that claim, I now suggest that queer sexualities, inextricable from the emergence of the subject in the Symbolic, mark the place of the gap in which the Symbolic confronts what its discourse is incapable of knowing, which is also the place of a *jouissance* from which it can never escape. As a figure for what it can neither fully articulate nor acknowledge, the queer may provide the Symbolic with a sort of necessary reassurance by seeming to give a name to what, as Real, remains unnameable. But repudiations of that figural identity, reflecting a liberal faith in the abstract universality of the subject, though better enabling the extension of rights to those who are still denied them, must similarly reassure by attesting to the seamless coherence of the Symbolic whose dominant narrative would thus supersede the corrosive force of queer irony. If the queer's abjectified difference, that is, secures normativity's identity, the queer's disavowal of that difference affirms normativity's singular truth. For every refusal of the figural status to which queers are distinctively called reproduces the triumph of narrative as the allegorization of irony, as the logic of a temporality that always serves to "straighten" it out, and thus proclaims the universality of reproductive futurism. Such refusals perform, despite themselves, subservience to the law that effectively imposes politics as the only game in town, exacting as the price of admission the subject's (hetero)normalization, which is accomplished, regardless of sexual practice or sexual "orientation," through compulsory abjuration of the future-negating queer.

It may seem, from within this structure, that the Symbolic can only win; but that would ignore the correlative fact that it also can only lose. For the division on which the subject rests can never be spirited away and

the signifying order will always necessitate the production of some figural repository for the excess that precludes its ultimate realization of the One. In a political field whose limit and horizon is reproductive futurism, queerness embodies this death drive, this intransigent jouissance, by figuring sexuality's implication in the senseless pulsions of that drive. De-idealizing the metaphors of meaning on which heteroreproduction takes its stand, queerness exposes sexuality's inevitable coloration by the drive: its insistence on repetition, its stubborn denial of teleology, its resistance to determinations of meaning (except insofar as it means this refusal to admit such determinations of meaning), and, above all, its rejection of spiritualization through marriage to reproductive futurism. Queerness as name may well reinforce the Symbolic order of naming, but it names what resists, as signifier, absorption into the Imaginary identity of the name. Empty, excessive, and irreducible, it designates the letter, the formal element, the lifeless machinery responsible for animating the "spirit" of futurity. And as such, as a name for the death drive that always informs the Symbolic order, it also names the jouissance forbidden by, but permeating, the Symbolic order itself.

By denying our identification with the negativity of this drive, and hence our disidentification from the promise of futurity, those of us inhabiting the place of the queer may be able to cast off that queerness and enter the properly political sphere, but only by shifting the figural burden of queerness to someone else. The structural position of queerness, after all, and the need to fill it remain. By choosing to accept that position, however, by assuming the "truth" of our queer capacity to figure the undoing of the Symbolic, and of the Symbolic subject as well, we might undertake the impossible project of imagining an oppositional political stance exempt from the imperative to reproduce the politics of signification (the politics aimed at closing the gap opened up by the signifier itself), which can only return us, by way of the Child, to the politics of reproduction. For the liberal's view of society, which seems to accord the queer a place, endorses no more than the conservative right's the queerness of resistance to futurism and thus the queerness of the queer. While

the right wing imagines the elimination of queers (or of the need to confront their existence), the left would eliminate queerness by shining the cool light of reason upon it, hoping thereby to expose it as merely a mode of sexual expression free of the all-pervasive coloring, the determining fantasy formation, by means of which it can seem to portend, and not for the right alone, the undoing of the social order and its cynosure, the Child. Queerness thus comes to mean nothing for both: for the right wing the nothingness always at war with the positivity of civil society; for the left, nothing more than a sexual practice in need of demystification.

But this is where reason must fail. Sexuality refuses demystification as the Symbolic refuses the queer; for sexuality and the Symbolic become what they are by virtue of such refusals. Ironically—but irony, as I've argued, always characterizes queer theory—the demystification of queerness and so, by extension, of sexuality itself, the demystification inherent in the position of liberal rationality, could achieve its realization only by traversing the collective fantasy that invests the social order with meaning by way of reproductive futurism. Taken at its word, that is, liberalism's abstract reason, rescuing queerness for sociality, dissolves, like queerness, the very investments on which sociality rests by doing away with its underlying and sustaining libidinal fantasies. Beyond the resonance of fantasy, after all, lies neither law nor reason. In the beyond of demystification, in that neutral, democratic literality that marks the futurism of the left, one could only encounter a queer dismantling of futurism itself as fantasy and a derealization of the order of meaning that futurism reproduces. Intent on the end, not the ends, of the social, queerness insists that the drive toward that end, which liberalism refuses to imagine, can never be excluded from the structuring fantasy of the social order itself. The sacralization of the Child thus necessitates the sacrifice of the queer.

Bernard Law, the former cardinal of Boston, mistaking (or maybe understanding too well) the degree of authority bestowed on him by the signifier of his patronymic, denounced in 1996 proposed legislation giving health care benefits to same-sex partners of municipal employ-

ees. He did so by proclaiming, in a noteworthy instance of piety in the sky, that bestowing such access to health care would profoundly diminish the marital bond. "Society," he opined, "has a special interest in the protection, care and upbringing of children. Because marriage remains the principal, and the best, framework for the nurture, education and socialization of children, the state has a special interest in marriage."<sup>31</sup> With this fatal embrace of a futurism so blindly committed to the figure of the Child that it will justify refusing health care benefits to the adults that some children become, Law lent his voice to the mortifying mantra of a communal jouissance that depends on the fetishization of the Child at the expense of whatever such fetishization must inescapably queer. Some seven years later, after Law had resigned for his failure to protect Catholic children from sexual assault by pedophile priests, Pope John Paul II returned to this theme, condemning state-recognized same-sex unions as parodic versions of authentic families, "based on individual egoism" rather than genuine love. Justifying that condemnation, he observed, "Such a 'caricature' has no future and cannot give future to any society."<sup>32</sup> Queers must respond to the violent force of such constant provocations not only by insisting on our equal right to the social order's prerogatives, not only by avowing our capacity to promote that order's coherence and integrity, but also by saying explicitly what Law and the Pope and the whole of the Symbolic order for which they stand hear anyway in each and every expression or manifestation of queer sexuality: Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from *Les Mis*; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital *L*s and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop.

## WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A BAT?

CONSCIOUSNESS is what makes the mind-body problem really intractable. Perhaps that is why current discussions of the problem give it little attention or get it obviously wrong. The recent wave of reductionist euphoria has produced several analyses of mental phenomena and mental concepts designed to explain the possibility of some variety of materialism, psychophysical identification, or reduction.<sup>1</sup> But the problems dealt with are those common to this type of reduction and other types, and what makes the mind-body problem unique, and unlike the water-H<sub>2</sub>O problem or the Turing machine-IBM machine problem or the lightning-electrical discharge problem or the gene-DNA problem or the oak tree-hydrocarbon problem, is ignored.

Every reductionist has his favorite analogy from modern science. It is most unlikely that any of these unrelated examples of successful reduction will shed light on the relation of mind to brain. But philosophers share the general human weakness for explanations of what is incomprehensible in terms suited for what is familiar and well understood, though entirely different. This has led to the acceptance of implausible accounts of the mental largely because they would permit familiar kinds of reduction. I shall try to explain why the usual examples do not

<sup>1</sup> Examples are J. J. C. Smart, *Philosophy and Scientific Realism* (London, 1963); David K. Lewis, "An Argument for the Identity Theory," *Journal of Philosophy*, LXIII (1966), reprinted with addenda in David M. Rosenthal, *Materialism & the Mind-Body Problem* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1971); Hilary Putnam, "Psychological Predicates" in Capitan and Merrill, *Art, Mind, & Religion* (Pittsburgh, 1967), reprinted in Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, as "The Nature of Mental States"; D. M. Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of the Mind* (London, 1968); D. C. Dennett, *Content and Consciousness* (London, 1969). I have expressed earlier doubts in "Armstrong on the Mind," *Philosophical Review*, LXXIX (1970), 394-403; "Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness," *Synthese*, 22 (1971); and a review of Dennett, *Journal of Philosophy*, LXIX (1972). See also Saul Kripke, "Naming and Necessity" in Davidson and Harman, *Semantics of Natural Language* (Dordrecht, 1972), esp. pp. 334-342; and M. T. Thornton, "Ostensive Terms and Materialism," *The Monist*, 56 (1972).

help us to understand the relation between mind and body—why, indeed, we have at present no conception of what an explanation of the physical nature of a mental phenomenon would be. Without consciousness the mind-body problem would be much less interesting. With consciousness it seems hopeless. The most important and characteristic feature of conscious mental phenomena is very poorly understood. Most reductionist theories do not even try to explain it. And careful examination will show that no currently available concept of reduction is applicable to it. Perhaps a new theoretical form can be devised for the purpose, but such a solution, if it exists, lies in the distant intellectual future.

Conscious experience is a widespread phenomenon. It occurs at many levels of animal life, though we cannot be sure of its presence in the simpler organisms, and it is very difficult to say in general what provides evidence of it. (Some extremists have been prepared to deny it even of mammals other than man.) No doubt it occurs in countless forms totally unimaginable to us, on other planets in other solar systems throughout the universe. But no matter how the form may vary, the fact that an organism has conscious experience *at all* means, basically, that there is something it is like to *be* that organism. There may be further implications about the form of the experience; there may even (though I doubt it) be implications about the behavior of the organism. But fundamentally an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to *be* that organism—something it is like *for* the organism.

We may call this the subjective character of experience. It is not captured by any of the familiar, recently devised reductive analyses of the mental, for all of them are logically compatible with its absence. It is not analyzable in terms of any explanatory system of functional states, or intentional states, since these could be ascribed to robots or automata that behaved like people though they experienced nothing.<sup>2</sup> It is not analyzable in terms of the causal role of experiences in relation to typical human behavior—

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps there could not actually be such robots. Perhaps anything complex enough to behave like a person would have experiences. But that, if true, is a fact which cannot be discovered merely by analyzing the concept of experience.

for similar reasons.<sup>3</sup> I do not deny that conscious mental states and events cause behavior, nor that they may be given functional characterizations. I deny only that this kind of thing exhausts their analysis. Any reductionist program has to be based on an analysis of what is to be reduced. If the analysis leaves something out, the problem will be falsely posed. It is useless to base the defense of materialism on any analysis of mental phenomena that fails to deal explicitly with their subjective character. For there is no reason to suppose that a reduction which seems plausible when no attempt is made to account for consciousness can be extended to include consciousness. Without some idea, therefore, of what the subjective character of experience is, we cannot know what is required of a physicalist theory.

While an account of the physical basis of mind must explain many things, this appears to be the most difficult. It is impossible to exclude the phenomenological features of experience from a reduction in the same way that one excludes the phenomenal features of an ordinary substance from a physical or chemical reduction of it—namely, by explaining them as effects on the minds of human observers.<sup>4</sup> If physicalism is to be defended, the phenomenological features must themselves be given a physical account. But when we examine their subjective character it seems that such a result is impossible. The reason is that every subjective phenomenon is essentially connected with a single point of view, and it seems inevitable that an objective, physical theory will abandon that point of view.

Let me first try to state the issue somewhat more fully than by referring to the relation between the subjective and the objective, or between the *pour-soi* and the *en-soi*. This is far from easy. Facts about what it is like to be an *X* are very peculiar, so peculiar that some may be inclined to doubt their reality, or the significance of claims about them. To illustrate the connection between

<sup>3</sup> It is not equivalent to that about which we are incorrigible, both because we are not incorrigible about experience and because experience is present in animals lacking language and thought, who have no beliefs at all about their experiences.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Richard Rorty, "Mind-Body Identity, Privacy, and Categories," *The Review of Metaphysics*, XIX (1965), esp. 37-38.



subjectivity and a point of view, and to make evident the importance of subjective features, it will help to explore the matter in relation to an example that brings out clearly the divergence between the two types of conception, subjective and objective.

I assume we all believe that bats have experience. After all, they are mammals, and there is no more doubt that they have experience than that mice or pigeons or whales have experience. I have chosen bats instead of wasps or flounders because if one travels too far down the phylogenetic tree, people gradually shed their faith that there is experience there at all. Bats, although more closely related to us than those other species, nevertheless present a range of activity and a sensory apparatus so different from ours that the problem I want to pose is exceptionally vivid (though it certainly could be raised with other species). Even without the benefit of philosophical reflection, anyone who has spent some time in an enclosed space with an excited bat knows what it is to encounter a fundamentally *alien* form of life.

I have said that the essence of the belief that bats have experience is that there is something that it is like to be a bat. Now we know that most bats (the microchiroptera, to be precise) perceive the external world primarily by sonar, or echolocation, detecting the reflections, from objects within range, of their own rapid, subtly modulated, high-frequency shrieks. Their brains are designed to correlate the outgoing impulses with the subsequent echoes, and the information thus acquired enables bats to make precise discriminations of distance, size, shape, motion, and texture comparable to those we make by vision. But bat sonar, though clearly a form of perception, is not similar in its operation to any sense that we possess, and there is no reason to suppose that it is subjectively like anything we can experience or imagine. This appears to create difficulties for the notion of what it is like to be a bat. We must consider whether any method will permit us to extrapolate to the inner life of the bat from our own case,<sup>5</sup> and if not, what alternative methods there may be for understanding the notion.

<sup>5</sup> By "our own case" I do not mean just "my own case," but rather the mentalistic ideas that we apply unproblematically to ourselves and other human beings.

Our own experience provides the basic material for our imagination, whose range is therefore limited. It will not help to try to imagine that one has webbing on one's arms, which enables one to fly around at dusk and dawn catching insects in one's mouth; that one has very poor vision, and perceives the surrounding world by a system of reflected high-frequency sound signals; and that one spends the day hanging upside down by one's feet in an attic. In so far as I can imagine this (which is not very far), it tells me only what it would be like for *me* to behave as a bat behaves. But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a *bat* to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task. I cannot perform it either by imagining additions to my present experience, or by imagining segments gradually subtracted from it, or by imagining some combination of additions, subtractions, and modifications.

To the extent that I could look and behave like a wasp or a bat without changing my fundamental structure, my experiences would not be anything like the experiences of those animals. On the other hand, it is doubtful that any meaning can be attached to the supposition that I should possess the internal neurophysiological constitution of a bat. Even if I could by gradual degrees be transformed into a bat, nothing in my present constitution enables me to imagine what the experiences of such a future stage of myself thus metamorphosed would be like. The best evidence would come from the experiences of bats, if we only knew what they were like.

So if extrapolation from our own case is involved in the idea of what it is like to be a bat, the extrapolation must be incomplete. We cannot form more than a schematic conception of what it is like. For example, we may ascribe general *types* of experience on the basis of the animal's structure and behavior. Thus we describe bat sonar as a form of three-dimensional forward perception; we believe that bats feel some versions of pain, fear, hunger, and lust, and that they have other, more familiar types of perception besides sonar. But we believe that these experiences also have in each case a specific subjective character, which it is beyond our ability to conceive. And if there is conscious life else-

where in the universe, it is likely that some of it will not be describable even in the most general experiential terms available to us.<sup>6</sup> (The problem is not confined to exotic cases, however, for it exists between one person and another. The subjective character of the experience of a person deaf and blind from birth is not accessible to me, for example, nor presumably is mine to him. This does not prevent us each from believing that the other's experience has such a subjective character.)

If anyone is inclined to deny that we can believe in the existence of facts like this whose exact nature we cannot possibly conceive, he should reflect that in contemplating the bats we are in much the same position that intelligent bats or Martians<sup>7</sup> would occupy if they tried to form a conception of what it was like to be us. The structure of their own minds might make it impossible for them to succeed, but we know they would be wrong to conclude that there is not anything precise that it is like to be us: that only certain general types of mental state could be ascribed to us (perhaps perception and appetite would be concepts common to us both; perhaps not). We know they would be wrong to draw such a skeptical conclusion because we know what it is like to be us. And we know that while it includes an enormous amount of variation and complexity, and while we do not possess the vocabulary to describe it adequately, its subjective character is highly specific, and in some respects describable in terms that can be understood only by creatures like us. The fact that we cannot expect ever to accommodate in our language a detailed description of Martian or bat phenomenology should not lead us to dismiss as meaningless the claim that bats and Martians have experiences fully comparable in richness of detail to our own. It would be fine if someone were to develop concepts and a theory that enabled us to think about those things; but such an understanding may be permanently denied to us by the limits of our nature. And to deny the reality or logical significance of what

<sup>6</sup> Therefore the analogical form of the English expression "what it is like" is misleading. It does not mean "what (in our experience) it resembles," but rather "how it is for the subject himself."

<sup>7</sup> Any intelligent extraterrestrial beings totally different from us.

we can never describe or understand is the crudest form of cognitive dissonance.

This brings us to the edge of a topic that requires much more discussion than I can give it here: namely, the relation between facts on the one hand and conceptual schemes or systems of representation on the other. My realism about the subjective domain in all its forms implies a belief in the existence of facts beyond the reach of human concepts. Certainly it is possible for a human being to believe that there are facts which humans never *will* possess the requisite concepts to represent or comprehend. Indeed, it would be foolish to doubt this, given the finiteness of humanity's expectations. After all, there would have been transfinite numbers even if everyone had been wiped out by the Black Death before Cantor discovered them. But one might also believe that there are facts which *could* not ever be represented or comprehended by human beings, even if the species lasted forever—simply because our structure does not permit us to operate with concepts of the requisite type. This impossibility might even be observed by other beings, but it is not clear that the existence of such beings, or the possibility of their existence, is a precondition of the significance of the hypothesis that there are humanly inaccessible facts. (After all, the nature of beings with access to humanly inaccessible facts is presumably itself a humanly inaccessible fact.) Reflection on what it is like to be a bat seems to lead us, therefore, to the conclusion that there are facts that do not consist in the truth of propositions expressible in a human language. We can be compelled to recognize the existence of such facts without being able to state or comprehend them.

I shall not pursue this subject, however. Its bearing on the topic before us (namely, the mind-body problem) is that it enables us to make a general observation about the subjective character of experience. Whatever may be the status of facts about what it is like to be a human being, or a bat, or a Martian, these appear to be facts that embody a particular point of view.

I am not adverting here to the alleged privacy of experience to its possessor. The point of view in question is not one accessible only to a single individual. Rather it is a *type*. It is often possible to take up a point of view other than one's own, so the

comprehension of such facts is not limited to one's own case. There is a sense in which phenomenological facts are perfectly objective: one person can know or say of another what the quality of the other's experience is. They are subjective, however, in the sense that even this objective ascription of experience is possible only for someone sufficiently similar to the object of ascription to be able to adopt his point of view—to understand the ascription in the first person as well as in the third, so to speak. The more different from oneself the other experiencer is, the less success one can expect with this enterprise. In our own case we occupy the relevant point of view, but we will have as much difficulty understanding our own experience properly if we approach it from another point of view as we would if we tried to understand the experience of another species without taking up *its* point of view.<sup>8</sup>

This bears directly on the mind-body problem. For if the facts of experience—facts about what it is like *for* the experiencing organism—are accessible only from one point of view, then it is a mystery how the true character of experiences could be revealed in the physical operation of that organism. The latter is a domain of objective facts *par excellence*—the kind that can be observed and understood from many points of view and by individuals with differing perceptual systems. There are no comparable imaginative obstacles to the acquisition of knowledge about bat neurophysiology by human scientists, and intelligent bats or Martians might learn more about the human brain than we ever will.

<sup>8</sup> It may be easier than I suppose to transcend inter-species barriers with the aid of the imagination. For example, blind people are able to detect objects near them by a form of sonar, using vocal clicks or taps of a cane. Perhaps if one knew what that was like, one could by extension imagine roughly what it was like to possess the much more refined sonar of a bat. The distance between oneself and other persons and other species can fall anywhere on a continuum. Even for other persons the understanding of what it is like to be them is only partial, and when one moves to species very different from oneself, a lesser degree of partial understanding may still be available. The imagination is remarkably flexible. My point, however, is not that we cannot *know* what it is like to be a bat. I am not raising that epistemological problem. My point is rather that even to form a *conception* of what it is like to be a bat (and a fortiori to know what it is like to be a bat) one must take up the bat's point of view. If one can take it up roughly, or partially, then one's conception will also be rough or partial. Or so it seems in our present state of understanding.

This is not by itself an argument against reduction. A Martian scientist with no understanding of visual perception could understand the rainbow, or lightning, or clouds as physical phenomena, though he would never be able to understand the human concepts of rainbow, lightning, or cloud, or the place these things occupy in our phenomenal world. The objective nature of the things picked out by these concepts could be apprehended by him because, although the concepts themselves are connected with a particular point of view and a particular visual phenomenology, the things apprehended from that point of view are not: they are observable from the point of view but external to it; hence they can be comprehended from other points of view also, either by the same organisms or by others. Lightning has an objective character that is not exhausted by its visual appearance, and this can be investigated by a Martian without vision. To be precise, it has a *more* objective character than is revealed in its visual appearance. In speaking of the move from subjective to objective characterization, I wish to remain noncommittal about the existence of an end point, the completely objective intrinsic nature of the thing, which one might or might not be able to reach. It may be more accurate to think of objectivity as a direction in which the understanding can travel. And in understanding a phenomenon like lightning, it is legitimate to go as far away as one can from a strictly human viewpoint.<sup>9</sup>

In the case of experience, on the other hand, the connection with a particular point of view seems much closer. It is difficult to understand what could be meant by the *objective* character of an experience, apart from the particular point of view from which its subject apprehends it. After all, what would be left of what it was like to be a bat if one removed the viewpoint of the bat? But if experience does not have, in addition to its subjective character, an objective nature that can be apprehended from

<sup>9</sup> The problem I am going to raise can therefore be posed even if the distinction between more subjective and more objective descriptions or viewpoints can itself be made only within a larger human point of view. I do not accept this kind of conceptual relativism, but it need not be refuted to make the point that psychophysical reduction cannot be accommodated by the subjective-to-objective model familiar from other cases.

many different points of view, then how can it be supposed that a Martian investigating my brain might be observing physical processes which were my mental processes (as he might observe physical processes which were bolts of lightning), only from a different point of view? How, for that matter, could a human physiologist observe them from another point of view?<sup>10</sup>

We appear to be faced with a general difficulty about psychophysical reduction. In other areas the process of reduction is a move in the direction of greater objectivity, toward a more accurate view of the real nature of things. This is accomplished by reducing our dependence on individual or species-specific points of view toward the object of investigation. We describe it not in terms of the impressions it makes on our senses, but in terms of its more general effects and of properties detectable by means other than the human senses. The less it depends on a specifically human viewpoint, the more objective is our description. It is possible to follow this path because although the concepts and ideas we employ in thinking about the external world are initially applied from a point of view that involves our perceptual apparatus, they are used by us to refer to things beyond themselves—toward which we *have* the phenomenal point of view. Therefore we can abandon it in favor of another, and still be thinking about the same things.

Experience itself, however, does not seem to fit the pattern. The idea of moving from appearance to reality seems to make no sense here. What is the analogue in this case to pursuing a more objective understanding of the same phenomena by abandoning the initial subjective viewpoint toward them in favor of another that is more objective but concerns the same thing? Certainly it *appears* unlikely that we will get closer to the real nature of human experience by leaving behind the particularity of our human point of view and striving for a description in terms accessible to beings that could not imagine what it was like to be us. If the subjective character of experience is fully comprehensible only from one

<sup>10</sup> The problem is not just that when I look at the "Mona Lisa," my visual experience has a certain quality, no trace of which is to be found by someone looking into my brain. For even if he did observe there a tiny image of the "Mona Lisa," he would have no reason to identify it with the experience.

point of view, then any shift to greater objectivity—that is, less attachment to a specific viewpoint—does not take us nearer to the real nature of the phenomenon: it takes us farther away from it.

In a sense, the seeds of this objection to the reducibility of experience are already detectable in successful cases of reduction; for in discovering sound to be, in reality, a wave phenomenon in air or other media, we leave behind one viewpoint to take up another, and the auditory, human or animal viewpoint that we leave behind remains unreduced. Members of radically different species may both understand the same physical events in objective terms, and this does not require that they understand the phenomenal forms in which those events appear to the senses of members of the other species. Thus it is a condition of their referring to a common reality that their more particular viewpoints are not part of the common reality that they both apprehend. The reduction can succeed only if the species-specific viewpoint is omitted from what is to be reduced.

But while we are right to leave this point of view aside in seeking a fuller understanding of the external world, we cannot ignore it permanently, since it is the essence of the internal world, and not merely a point of view on it. Most of the neobehaviorism of recent philosophical psychology results from the effort to substitute an objective concept of mind for the real thing, in order to have nothing left over which cannot be reduced. If we acknowledge that a physical theory of mind must account for the subjective character of experience, we must admit that no presently available conception gives us a clue how this could be done. The problem is unique. If mental processes are indeed physical processes, then there is something it is like, intrinsically,<sup>11</sup> to

<sup>11</sup> The relation would therefore not be a contingent one, like that of a cause and its distinct effect. It would be necessarily true that a certain physical state felt a certain way. Saul Kripke (*op. cit.*) argues that causal behaviorist and related analyses of the mental fail because they construe, e.g., "pain" as a merely contingent name of pains. The subjective character of an experience ("its immediate phenomenological quality" Kripke calls it [p. 340]) is the essential property left out by such analyses, and the one in virtue of which it is, necessarily, the experience it is. My view is closely related to his. Like Kripke, I find the hypothesis that a certain brain state should *necessarily* have



undergo certain physical processes. What it is for such a thing to be the case remains a mystery.

What moral should be drawn from these reflections, and what should be done next? It would be a mistake to conclude that physicalism must be false. Nothing is proved by the inadequacy of physicalist hypotheses that assume a faulty objective analysis of mind. It would be truer to say that physicalism is a position we cannot understand because we do not at present have any conception of how it might be true. Perhaps it will be thought unreasonable to require such a conception as a condition of understanding. After all, it might be said, the meaning of physicalism is clear enough: mental states are states of the body; mental events are physical events. We do not know *which* physical states and events they are, but that should not prevent us from

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a certain subjective character incomprehensible without further explanation. No such explanation emerges from theories which view the mind-brain relation as contingent, but perhaps there are other alternatives, not yet discovered.

A theory that explained how the mind-brain relation was necessary would still leave us with Kripke's problem of explaining why it nevertheless appears contingent. That difficulty seems to me surmountable, in the following way. We may imagine something by representing it to ourselves either perceptually, sympathetically, or symbolically. I shall not try to say how symbolic imagination works, but part of what happens in the other two cases is this. To imagine something perceptually, we put ourselves in a conscious state resembling the state we would be in if we perceived it. To imagine something sympathetically, we put ourselves in a conscious state resembling the thing itself. (This method can be used only to imagine mental events and states—our own or another's.) When we try to imagine a mental state occurring without its associated brain state, we first sympathetically imagine the occurrence of the mental state: that is, we put ourselves into a state that resembles it mentally. At the same time, we attempt to perceptually imagine the non-occurrence of the associated physical state, by putting ourselves into another state unconnected with the first: one resembling that which we would be in if we perceived the non-occurrence of the physical state. Where the imagination of physical features is perceptual and the imagination of mental features is sympathetic, it appears to us that we can imagine any experience occurring without its associated brain state, and vice versa. The relation between them will appear contingent even if it is necessary, because of the independence of the disparate types of imagination.

(Solipsism, incidentally, results if one misinterprets sympathetic imagination as if it worked like perceptual imagination: it then seems impossible to imagine any experience that is not one's own.)

understanding the hypothesis. What could be clearer than the words "is" and "are"?

But I believe it is precisely this apparent clarity of the word "is" that is deceptive. Usually, when we are told that *X* is *Y* we know *how* it is supposed to be true, but that depends on a conceptual or theoretical background and is not conveyed by the "is" alone. We know how both "*X*" and "*Y*" refer, and the kinds of things to which they refer, and we have a rough idea how the two referential paths might converge on a single thing, be it an object, a person, a process, an event, or whatever. But when the two terms of the identification are very disparate it may not be so clear how it could be true. We may not have even a rough idea of how the two referential paths could converge, or what kind of things they might converge on, and a theoretical framework may have to be supplied to enable us to understand this. Without the framework, an air of mysticism surrounds the identification.

This explains the magical flavor of popular presentations of fundamental scientific discoveries, given out as propositions to which one must subscribe without really understanding them. For example, people are now told at an early age that all matter is really energy. But despite the fact that they know what "is" means, most of them never form a conception of what makes this claim true, because they lack the theoretical background.

At the present time the status of physicalism is similar to that which the hypothesis that matter is energy would have had if uttered by a pre-Socratic philosopher. We do not have the beginnings of a conception of how it might be true. In order to understand the hypothesis that a mental event is a physical event, we require more than an understanding of the word "is." The idea of how a mental and a physical term might refer to the same thing is lacking, and the usual analogies with theoretical identification in other fields fail to supply it. They fail because if we construe the reference of mental terms to physical events on the usual model, we either get a reappearance of separate subjective events as the effects through which mental reference to physical events is secured, or else we get a false account of how mental terms refer (for example, a causal behaviorist one).

Strangely enough, we may have evidence for the truth of some-

thing we cannot really understand. Suppose a caterpillar is locked in a sterile safe by someone unfamiliar with insect metamorphosis, and weeks later the safe is reopened, revealing a butterfly. If the person knows that the safe has been shut the whole time, he has reason to believe that the butterfly is or was once the caterpillar, without having any idea in what sense this might be so. (One possibility is that the caterpillar contained a tiny winged parasite that devoured it and grew into the butterfly.)

It is conceivable that we are in such a position with regard to physicalism. Donald Davidson has argued that if mental events have physical causes and effects, they must have physical descriptions. He holds that we have reason to believe this even though we do not—and in fact *could* not—have a general psychophysical theory.<sup>12</sup> His argument applies to intentional mental events, but I think we also have some reason to believe that sensations are physical processes, without being in a position to understand how. Davidson's position is that certain physical events have irreducibly mental properties, and perhaps some view describable in this way is correct. But nothing of which we can now form a conception corresponds to it; nor have we any idea what a theory would be like that enabled us to conceive of it.<sup>13</sup>

Very little work has been done on the basic question (from which mention of the brain can be entirely omitted) whether any sense can be made of experiences' having an objective character at all. Does it make sense, in other words, to ask what my experiences are *really* like, as opposed to how they appear to me? We cannot genuinely understand the hypothesis that their nature is captured in a physical description unless we understand the more fundamental idea that they *have* an objective nature (or that objective processes can have a subjective nature).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See "Mental Events" in Foster and Swanson, *Experience and Theory* (Amherst, 1970); though I don't understand the argument against psychophysical laws.

<sup>13</sup> Similar remarks apply to my paper "Physicalism," *Philosophical Review* LXXIV (1965), 339-356, reprinted with postscript in John O'Connor, *Modern Materialism* (New York, 1969).

<sup>14</sup> This question also lies at the heart of the problem of other minds, whose close connection with the mind-body problem is often overlooked. If one understood how subjective experience could have an objective nature, one would understand the existence of subjects other than oneself.

I should like to close with a speculative proposal. It may be possible to approach the gap between subjective and objective from another direction. Setting aside temporarily the relation between the mind and the brain, we can pursue a more objective understanding of the mental in its own right. At present we are completely unequipped to think about the subjective character of experience without relying on the imagination—without taking up the point of view of the experiential subject. This should be regarded as a challenge to form new concepts and devise a new method—an objective phenomenology not dependent on empathy or the imagination. Though presumably it would not capture everything, its goal would be to describe, at least in part, the subjective character of experiences in a form comprehensible to beings incapable of having those experiences.

We would have to develop such a phenomenology to describe the sonar experiences of bats; but it would also be possible to begin with humans. One might try, for example, to develop concepts that could be used to explain to a person blind from birth what it was like to see. One would reach a blank wall eventually, but it should be possible to devise a method of expressing in objective terms much more than we can at present, and with much greater precision. The loose intermodal analogies—for example, "Red is like the sound of a trumpet"—which crop up in discussions of this subject are of little use. That should be clear to anyone who has both heard a trumpet and seen red. But structural features of perception might be more accessible to objective description, even though something would be left out. And concepts alternative to those we learn in the first person may enable us to arrive at a kind of understanding even of our own experience which is denied us by the very ease of description and lack of distance that subjective concepts afford.

Apart from its own interest, a phenomenology that is in this sense objective may permit questions about the physical<sup>15</sup> basis

<sup>15</sup> I have not defined the term "physical." Obviously it does not apply just to what can be described by the concepts of contemporary physics, since we expect further developments. Some may think there is nothing to prevent mental phenomena from eventually being recognized as physical in their own right. But whatever else may be said of the physical, it has to be objective. So

of experience to assume a more intelligible form. Aspects of subjective experience that admitted this kind of objective description might be better candidates for objective explanations of a more familiar sort. But whether or not this guess is correct, it seems unlikely that any physical theory of mind can be contemplated until more thought has been given to the general problem of subjective and objective. Otherwise we cannot even pose the mind-body problem without sidestepping it.<sup>16</sup>

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if our idea of the physical ever expands to include mental phenomena, it will have to assign them an objective character—whether or not this is done by analyzing them in terms of other phenomena already regarded as physical. It seems to me more likely, however, that mental-physical relations will eventually be expressed in a theory whose fundamental terms cannot be placed clearly in either category.

<sup>16</sup> I have read versions of this paper to a number of audiences, and am indebted to many people for their comments.

JUNE

New York. The East River surges past the New York Lying-In Hospital. In a dimension entirely different from the densities of steel and cement lining its progress on east and west, its waters move deliberately to and from the Atlantic Ocean.

I stand in a small white room beside a table on which my oldest child lies. Her belly is a mound of stretched skin, her belly button, stem of our common blood stream, is flattened to a disk. From smears of jelly on her stomach, two thin wires attach her to a black box. The doctor flicks a switch, and we hear an echo of the Malabar caves. "The baby's heartbeat is twice as fast as the mother's," the doctor remarks. The heartbeat is as impersonal in its rhythm as the river outside the window. The child's life is not as yet marked by human reliance on air. I am struck by a note of intent in the sound, as if I were listening to secret wisdom.

Alexandra and I leave the hospital and walk up and down

the streets of New York, happily stopping here and there to buy this or that for the baby. We walk arm in arm, close together—but not as close as my daughter is with her child.

WASHINGTON, D.C. Linked only the way yesterday is linked to the morning that rises around me as I write here in my studio, my life led to hers, as hers is now leading to her child's. Behind me *Portal*, a slim column, nine feet of pale, pale grays articulated just off white, looms in its packing. It is ready for shipment to Yaddo, where I will soon be going and where I will finish it. By analogy, I will then cut its umbilical cord and it will fall into place behind *First* and *Queen's Heritage*, *Landfall*, *Lea*, *Hardcastle*, and the other sculptures I have made, all synapses through which its life will have come into being.

I comfort myself with this construction, which has risen from my years as an artist, this fact of a continuing succession in my work that offsets a surprisingly bitter impression of having been cast aside. I am disoriented. My motherhood has been, I realize, central to my life as a stove is central to a household in the freeze of winter. I feel chilled. My sculptures are not my children. The construction of an analogy in no sense renders them alive. And I am accustomed to sustaining the effort of my work by offsetting it with the lovely affections of family life.

My mother was dead by the time I had my children. I have been moving for some months now, since the brilliantly sunny morning when we learned that Alexandra was pregnant, into uncharted territory. It so happened that Alexandra and I were alone on that day. We hugged one another in

celebration and then came out here to the studio. I worked for a while, painting one light coat of color after another on a column. Alexandra sat on the studio step. We talked. We were quiet. Somehow, quite without emphasis, a new life joined ours.

Now Alexandra and her husband, Richard, have moved through a series of decisions to their present position: They wait in their white-painted, neat apartment for their baby. The crib and the tiny shirts and the pretty cotton blankets are ready. They wait, lovingly, for they know not what.

I know what. I look back over telescoped years. I am waiting for Alexandra's birth, and for Mary's, and for Sam's. I think of vaporizers and suddenly peaked temperatures, of fretful days and long, long hours in parks and of happinesses unexpected and unpredictable. Of prides and disappointments, of angers and joys, of calls on endurance that had to be invented as events demanded it. And of pain, the inevitable pain that marks the mother, peaking into a watershed that cuts off forever the playing fields of childhood. I weep for Alexandra's travail. I brace myself to meet, once again, the knowledge that I cannot take the suffering of my children on myself. That is the essence of motherhood. *Stabat mater*: Mothers can only stand.

My own aspirations fall into a new place. Once again, as at my mother's death, I feel my own mortality, but in my grandchild's birth transmuted into a kind of colorless immortality. Colorless in that it seems to bear no relation to the spirit. I am startled by this fact of the transmission of genes, struck for the first time that matter proliferates from generation to generation without regard for the personalities



of the people involved. This new baby already has unimaginably innumerable ova or spermatozoa, some unknowable combination of Alexandra and Richard, of my husband and me, of Richard's parents, of unknown earthbound forebears. Depersonalized, we live on.

Now, I ask myself, what of the artist who has worked for so long? The steps up and down ladders, the wakings and the goings to sleep with my mind swinging with color, height, breadth, depth? I have only a modest answer: Certainly it does not become less real; certainly it continues. The scale, however, has in some critical way changed. A subtle crack between myself as artist and myself as human being worries me.

I find this situation humbling. I belong to this linked passage of life as unimportantly as the earthworm whose natural functions loosen the earth so that seeds can root easily.

The central emotional fact of my present state of mind—Alexandra's baby is due in about a week now—is not amenable to psychological ratiocination. Lodged like a dark bolus in my midriff is the certain knowledge that my daughter is going to suffer pain. She has never been in pain; she has never even really been sick. Her intact delicacy is like that of an apple blossom. She will be torn.

I turn for relief, for comfort, to my work.

NEW YORK. Richard telephoned this morning that Alexandra had just started labor, and I came right up here, returning to this hotel where, just a few weeks ago, Alexandra and I enjoyed a last visit to celebrate her coming delivery. I miss

her. My last glimpse of her, as I turned the corner in a taxi on my way to the station, was as she stood, rounded in front, at the hotel entrance waving to the last second an immense bunch of lilacs and peonies she had bought to bring cheer to my room. When we meet again—some unknown number of hours from now—she will be flat in front and changed by mysterious alchemy.

No: Alexandra just telephoned. She is in her private room. I can go to see her.

She and Richard and I hung out the window of her room watching the boats skim up and down the East River. Her contractions came and went as easily. The river current reversed while we watched, the ocean churning back up into it in marvelously intricate, wind-teased textures, curled white against silky blue as in a Chinese embroidery. When the time came for me to leave, we parted with gaiety, exhilarated by a common hope.

Alexandra and Richard have a son. They all three did well. "Incredible" was Alexandra's adjective when she spoke to me on the telephone after the birth. "The baby was crying," she said, and in her voice I caught the unmistakable quiver of motherhood. Reassured, she handed the telephone to Richard and prepared to sleep. She is satisfied with herself; it was a job and she did it well. No fuss and feathers. Richard's voice had the same note of parental responsibility.

They now have a hostage to fortune. Never again will they lean on a window sill as they did yesterday afternoon watching boats on a sunny river, so wholly at their own com-

mand. Their son, yesterday *in* them, is now *beyond* them. Born, he cannot be protected, and they will never again be carefree.

When, later, I clasped Alexandra in my arms, we both cried a little. Reunited as if after a long, long separation, a journey on which she had gone to a far country. It was to her limit, she said. During the whole labor and delivery, she did not cry out. I asked her if she prayed. She said not really; but at one point toward the end she thought, "If there is any mercy . . ." and felt the presence of the Lord, quite matter-of-factly.

My very first feeling on looking at my grandson's face took me aback. It was as if neither of us were present, as if I for a second lost myself and couldn't find him in some ineffable void. No feeling of recognition or of his belonging to me in any way. As I came to, my first articulated feeling was actually one of respect for him.

YADD0. I am writing in my familiar Stone South studio. Behind me the windows open onto the mowed meadow, which smells as sweetly as always. The blackberry bushes are flourishing and the purple martin houses still stalk the apple trees. This time I have my columns with me, eight of them, three already under way. I am soothed by the routine of my work.

In a dreadful nightmare last night, I found myself thinking. "Oh, this is *real*. I can *feel* this texture. I am *alive* here." A thin, thin thread held me to sanity, and with the utmost

effort I finally managed to cry out. I awoke in my familiar turret with "ma ma" strangled in my throat.

It is this that Alexandra has undertaken: a tie so powerful as to elicit a cry for help to a person long dead from a person fifty-seven years old, herself a mother and grandmother.

My drive to and from the University of Maryland, where I have been teaching since the fall of 1975, cuts through one of the poorest areas of Washington. One afternoon this year as I was coming home through the fading afternoon light, my eye fell on a man sitting in an aluminum-and-plastic chair on the front stoop of a drab apartment house: slumped, old, with one leg bound in bandages almost to the groin and stuck stiffly out like a pole on a slant to the cement; beside him a Pepsi can. Some resigned tilt of his head took me directly back to the wards of Massachusetts General Hospital, and all of a sudden it flashed across my mind that I had taken a wrong turn when I left the direct alleviation of pain implicit in psychological work and nursing. I saw my life as self-indulgent, full of willful delights. As I sailed past him in my car to my comfortable house and the prospect of a good hot dinner in my son's company—to the wide, varied landscape of my life—my heart contracted. What could my work ever mean to this man? A kind touch of my hand in a moment of fear or pain would have been more in his service than the endeavor of my whole lifetime.

This incontrovertible fact stuck in my craw for weeks and weeks. That area of my drive to and from work became charged with the man's presence; on rainy days I regretted that he would not be there; on fair ones I looked for him.

For a long period, he failed to appear at all, and I thought perhaps he had died. But one day he was there again and I was glad. The bandages had shrunk; he had a cane. By the end of the term, I saw him less frequently. I like to think he is now going about his business, but he remains in my mind, central to my thoughts about my life.

And to my recognition of limitation. In the range of my character at any given moment, I have acted in the only way it seemed to me that I could have acted. This in no way means that I have done what was right; only what was possible for me. Sometimes I have done what I knew was wrong, and have rationalized. But rationalization is a form of desperation. It takes kindness to forgive oneself for one's life.

In the narrowest meaning of the concept, it is touch, after all, that I am after in my work: the touch of my hand I hope to find transmuted into something that touches the spirit. I hold the structure neutral: a column. Painted into color, this wooden structure is rendered virtually immaterial. The color itself is thus set free into space and into the ever-moving sun, which marks time. And color is the least material of matter: vibration as light. A touch.

The most demanding part of living a lifetime as an artist is the strict discipline of forcing oneself to work steadfastly along the nerve of one's own most intimate sensitivity. As in any profession, facility develops. In most this is a decided advantage, and so it is with the actual facture of art; I notice with interest that my hand is more deft, lighter, as I grow more experienced. But I find that I have to resist the temptation to fall into the same kind of pleasurable relaxation I

once enjoyed with clay. I have in some subtle sense to fight my hand if I am to grow along the reaches of my nerve.

And here I find myself faced with two fears. The first is simply that of the unknown—I cannot know where my nerve is going until I venture along it. The second is less sharp but more permeating: the logical knowledge that the nerve of any given individual is as limited as the individual. Under its own law, it may just naturally run out. If this happens, the artist does best, it seems to me, to fall silent. But by now the habit of work is so ingrained in me that I do not know if I could bear that silence.

#### JULY

Alexandra and Richard, whom I have just visited in New York, are deepening in character. This change—Sammy was born one month ago—is marked in all sorts of infinitely touching ways. Some of them are familiar. Years ago Alexandra draped a scarf over a lamp in her room so Rose Primrose's kittens could sleep undisturbed; the other evening, as we left the baby peacefully asleep in his crib, she threw another scarf over another lamp with the nonchalance and grace of an habitual gesture. Her routine for bathing her son is a delight. She puts in the tub a small inflatable yellow raft marked "Tubby." In this the baby floats happily while she washes him all over with her hands, gently and leisurely, chatting to him in a lively lilt. She then splashes out the water and, turning on the faucet, gives him a sprinkling shower, turning him over on his stomach at some point so that his head and arms dangle off the soft round "Tubby"

rim. There he can turn his head about and wave his arms and kick in the sprinkle, sometimes against her palm so he springs up and down as if jumping.

I had forgotten how sensuous babies are—all skin and touch and need—and how central to their care is one's own sensuality. To watch this reciprocity between Alexandra and her baby, having rejoiced in it myself, gives me happiness for my daughter.

She and Richard are not, of course, getting enough sleep. And there are the inevitable rubs as a selflessness that can never be quite as natural as selfishness develops into habit. But in the evening, as we sat in the hot dusk, we felt content as families must have for millennia uncounted.

The new balance my children's maturity is bringing to my life makes me wonder about the differences that seem to be surfacing between the artist in me and the mother. The artist struggles to hold the strict position she has found keeps her work to a line she values, while the mother is trying to grow by adjusting to the rapidly changing conditions my children present me as they move out on what seems to my schematic mind a sharply rising trajectory: They are learning a great deal about a great many aspects of life very fast. What they apparently expect from me is a point of view. They ask questions and they want what answers I can give. The artist's answers are only rarely useful to them. And the positions from which they ask are often different from those I have been in myself, so I have to use my imagination to empathize. This is taxing. At the same time I must maintain a center in myself so that what I say is honest. In order to do this, I have

to examine and reexamine my own experience and apply it as best I can, inevitably at an angle oblique to theirs. What I am finding is that the artist is too strait and too self-centered, too idiosyncratic, and that the mother is not as useful as she once was. She is too nearsighted and wishes the children to remain within arm's reach. I am wondering now if some third person—who is neither artist nor mother, as yet unknown, unnameable—has developed behind my back. Perhaps the person whose first feeling when she saw her grandson's face was respect? If so, her mode of being is tentative.

#### SEPTEMBER

The pangs of labor are a metaphor for the startlingly painful and difficult process by which a child is delivered into adulthood. The curve of physical motherhood peaks over the watershed of labor into a shining Shenandoah, a broad valley that seems to new parents to stretch forever. For me it had the same smiling lavishness as the first days of delicately greening marriage: a lovely open space with brown-furrowed fields snugly bounded by ramparts of love on either side. It never forcefully occurred to me that the children would scramble up these very mountains out of the valley to see what lay beyond. Paradoxically, the more hospitable the valley, the more energetically they climb. The end of parenthood is implicit in its beginning: separation.

The first birth is documented. A doctor stands by; physical facts are readily available; literature abounds in accounts of birth. Folk knowledge hammocks the pregnant woman: she sways in a gentle wind of attention.



Not so with the second birth into adulthood. That is a solitary business for the parent. The course of events is not documented—cannot be, as each child tears the connective tissue differently. The process cannot be examined in advance and prepared for with specificity. One child of mine had her first menstrual period for two days without telling me; when tears came into my eyes at the news, she was astonished. It had seemed to her her own business, as of course it did to me once I had grasped this fact clearly enough to honor it. But a needle had by that time painfully pierced the amniotic sac in which I had, all unknowingly, been carrying my daughter. Another child appeared to become more and more indifferent to me. Instead of chatting—and we are a chatting family—the child turned laconic. I was lucky to be told, “Good morning.” Until I recognized this cutting off for what it was, I thought the child surly. Another simply ran in and out of my heart as if it were a drafty old barn with doors creaking in a desultory wind; only straw and shelter were needed.

The increasing independence of the child has to be met and matched by an increasing independence of the parent. I have found no other way to render this separation healthy for all of us. And it has seemed to me that, since I am the parent, the burden of foresight and consideration lies squarely on my heart and intelligence. Yet all of us, my children and I, work to regroup, they as much as I. One difference in our efforts lies in the fact that nature is on their side; they are naturally invigorated by their opening into the excitements and fascinations of adulthood. I, on the other hand, have to accept diminishment. This has been a little frightening. I thought at first that habitual patterns of feeling and

thought, no longer nourished by daily give and take, would have to atrophy entirely, that my Shenandoah would dry up into sand-stormed desolation. The landscape has indeed changed, but slowly and subtly. I homestead the valley. I tend. My children live, either physically or metaphorically, elsewhere. Occasionally it is lonely. I wander now and then, hearing the echoes of their voices.

But—and in this I have been blessed—the ramparts of the valley have never hemmed me in. I have often rejoiced to climb out, to look back lovingly and to return faithfully, steadfastly, and trustingly. I have only had to give a child a hand now and then over a hummock or up a scarp over my own tracks. The change I have had to make in myself is in the act of faith required to place my hand in one of theirs and my feet on their newly discovered paths, no matter how rocky and perilous they have seemed to me. Awkwardly, stumbling, trying not to point out (too often) my own well-trodden and cherished ways, I have earnestly tried, slowly—I need more time than they do; a reluctance of the heart persists stubbornly, inaccessible to reason—to trust their surefootedness. And my reward is that I have found myself set free to move farther than I had hitherto dared, my own freedom widened to the degree I have been able to confirm theirs.

It is the artist who reaps this reward, justly enough, as it is she who has climbed most often up the ramparts to see what lay on the other side. And it is she who has a real understanding—cross-grained as she is in relation to society in general—of the passion for independence that motivates my children. Yes, yes, she thinks, while the mother clutches

a teddy bear in some dim cave of a nursery; yes, yes, they need to go as I have always needed to go. And, yes, I want them to climb up and out; I am curious to see what they will do and how they will do it. The artist rejoices that her studio is a fact; she already has what she needs as much as her children could ever need anything they may find in their lives. It daunts the mother that the artist is so indifferent to the children's departure. Yet it is to the artist that the mother turns for relief as the car drives off bearing its cargo of phonograph, records, books, carefully pressed clothes, extra tidbits of money, and arms waving from every window. It is the artist who hurries the mother through the house cleaning after the departure and then forgets her as coolly as she waved farewell to the children, returning to her work, solitary, engaged.

It is becoming apparent to me that the mother and the artist do not speak much to each other, and when they do the speech is initiated by the artist who wishes to be off about her business. She chivies the mother to get herself time. Otherwise, she views her as a source of knowledge, but of knowledge already assimilated—and here it occurs to me that the artist is giving the mother short shrift in a way that strikes me at this moment as rude. She is hurting the mother's feelings as surely as the children occasionally do, and with a lot less justification. The artist could not have come into herself without the mother's experience: she owes her a debt of honor for all the layers and layers of hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, yearly knowledge of what life is. For the artist has grown out of that rich ground as surely as she has grown

out of the student, the wife, the nurse, the friend. The fact that the mother is bothersome, takes up the artist's time with her demands, in no way reduces this fundamental reliance on her wisdom. The artist also is more dependent on the mother than she likes to acknowledge, set as she is on her independence, for just as the mother turns to the artist for comfort so does the artist turn to the mother for nurture when her work gets her down. And the mother never turns her off curtly. Rather, she rushes in with nourishing soup, hot baths, and a tender hushing into night.

Yet a change is taking place—took place, I am beginning to believe—in that moment when I recognized in myself a new "I" who respected my grandson. I feel her as I write. She stands clear in a new dimension. She sees that the artist has already claimed the territory granted her by the departure of the children. With an objectivity untainted by pity, she observes the mother crouching over the family hearth and notices signs that the old habits of motherhood are beginning to pall; she foresees a time when they will become vestigial.

She sees, for example, that it is my reasonable obedience to my children that has gradually become a launching pad for them. In no way does this imply moral abdication on my part. On the contrary, my consent to their guidance confirms their moral fortitude as it expands the context of my own. Certain points have set the arcs for this slow change, which is in a fundamental way not so much a change as a development of my early determination to honor my children. When Alexandra and Richard brought their newly born son from the hospital, I wanted very much to be there in their apartment

waiting to welcome them all. Alexandra explained that Richard wanted to drive them home and settle them in alone, and that she agreed. They would telephone me, she said, when they were ready for me to come over. My feelings were hurt. I had a vision of warming their household. I obeyed, and we had a meeting at once peaceful and joyful, and only as I write do I realize that my presence in a welcoming role would have been an intrusion into their marriage—and a not unusual one at that: Generosity is often the stalking horse of control.

At home I eat the castor oil mixed into chocolate ice cream. I want what's inside to come out.

We'd been living together for just over a year when your mother received her diagnosis. She had gone to the doctor for back pain and was there told that she had breast cancer that had already spread to her spine, a tumor threatening to crack her vertebrae. Within months the cancer would reach her liver; within the year, her brain. We flew her out from Michigan when she became bedridden from radiation with no one to help. We gave her our bed, and started sleeping on our living room floor. We lived this way for months, all of us staring in dread and paralysis out at our mountain. We each anguished differently and severely: you wanted to give her the care she'd once given to you, but could see it was breaking our new household to try; she was sick and broke and terrified, utterly unwilling or unable to discuss her condition or her options. Eventually I, villainous, drew a line; I couldn't live this way. She chose to go back to her condo in the suburbs of Detroit and decline alone rather than accept the substandard care of a Medicaid facility near us—all her assets liquidated, a TV blaring from behind a neighbor's canvas curtain, nurses whispering about accepting Christ as your personal savior, you know the place. Who could blame her? She wanted to be at home, crowded in with her beloved Parisian-themed knickknacks—all her I LOVE PARIS plaques,

miniature Eiffel Towers. All of her passwords and e-mail addresses were variants on Paris, a city she would never see.

As her time grew near, your brother took her in. His family situation was under strain, but at least she had a bed there, her own room. It was almost good enough.

But really none of it was good enough, even though it was better than many get. When she began to lose consciousness, your brother had her moved to a local hospice; you flew there in the dead of night, desperate to get there in time, so that she wouldn't die alone.

Now I'm sick of these two clowns who aren't in pain. I say I want to go to the hospital because that's where they take the babies out. Jessica stalls; she knows it's not time. I begin to get desperate. I want a change of scenery. I'm not sure I can do this. We've spent hours on the red couch with a heating pad, in the tub kneeling on towels, in the bed with me holding Harry's or Jessica's hand. I have to think of something that will convince them that it's time to go to the hospital. "The baby feels low, and I'm having it at the hospital, and that's where I want to be," I growl. Finally they say OK.

The car is where the pain turns into a luge. I can't open my eyes. Have to go inside. Outside there is a lot of traffic; I squint and see Harry doing the best he can. Every bump and turn a nightmare. The pain cavern has a law, its law is black shudder. I begin to count, noticing each one takes about twenty seconds. I think, any kind of pain must be bearable for twenty seconds, for nineteen, for thirteen, for six. I stop making sounds. It is horrible.



Hard time parking, no one around, even though every other time we've been to the labor wing there has been a bevy of attendants with wheelchairs. I am going to have to walk. I walk as slowly as a person could walk, doubled over down the hall. Jessica greets some people she knows. Everything around me is normal and inside I am in the pain cavern.

We check into the labor wing. The nurse is nice. Freckled, heavy-set, Irish-seeming. She says five centimeters. People are happy, I am happy. Jessica tells me the hard part is over, she says getting to five centimeters is the hard part. I am nervous but relieved. Jessica asks for room number 7. The hospital is blessedly slow, quiet, empty.

Room number 7 is lovely, dark. We can see Macy's from the window. Whitney Houston has just been found dead in a hotel about ten blocks away, the Beverly Hilton. The nurses are talking about it in hushed tones as they come and go. Was it drugs, I manage to ask from the cavern. Probably, they say. In our labor room there is a bathtub, a scale, and a baby warmer. Maybe there will be a baby.

The pain luge continues, the counting, the dedication, the quiet, the panic. I am phobic about the toilet. Jessica keeps wanting me to go pee, but sitting down or squatting is unthinkable. She keeps telling me I can't stop the contractions by staying immobile, but I think I can. I lie on my side, I squeeze Harry's or Jessica's hand. I pee without meaning to in a slow-dancing position with Harry, then in the tub, where strands of dark red mucus have started to float. Incredibly, Harry and Jessica order food and eat it. Someone feeds me a red Popsicle, which tastes delicious. I throw it up moments later, fouling my tub's

waters. I throw up when the contraction hits bottom, over and over, tons of yellow bile.

The tub has a jets button we keep hitting accidentally, which is horrible. Jessica pours water over my body, which feels good.

They measure again: seven. That is good.

Hours later, they measure again. Still seven. Not so good.

We talk. They tell me the contractions are slowing down, getting less powerful. This could go on for hours. They say maybe five more hours, or more, to get to ten centimeters. I don't want that. It has been twenty-four hours of labor, maybe a little more. We talk Pitocin. The midwife says I have to be ready to get a lot more uncomfortable than I am now. I am scared. How deep can pain go.

But I want something to change. I want to do the drug. We do it. The pic line keeps getting bent, a small red alarm goes off each time, I am frustrated, the nurse keeps having to redo it. Twenty minutes go by. Then twenty more. They up the dosage once, then again. Turn into the new cavern, a cartoon turn. I grow very quiet and concentrated. Counting, counting. Jessica says breathe into the bottom and I can tell that's where the baby is.

*each of the volunteers told me that my job was to let my mom know that it was ok to go. i believe that i was unconvincing for the first 33 hours of my time with her.*

*however on the last night, i put a pillow under her knees, and i told her i was going to take a walk. that i would smell honeysuckle*

Harry

*and see fireflies, wet my shoes in midnight dew. i told her that i was going to do those things because i was going to stay on earth in this form. "but your work here is done mama." i told her that she had set us all up very well with her love and her lessons. i told her she had inspired me to become an artist. i told her that i loved her so much, that we all knew that she loved us too, that she was surrounded in love, surrounded in light. and i walked. after my walk, among other things, i told her i was going to go to sleep, and she should too. i said it firmly. i told her to not be afraid, to relax, that it was ok if she had to go. i told her i knew she was tired and that all accounts of heaven (from those who have so briefly visited) are that it is pure bliss. i told her not to be afraid. i thanked her. i said, "thank you mom." i leaked tears but tried to hide them from her now. i turned on the bathroom light and closed the door so a long foot thick rectangle of yellow reached her from feet to head. i touched her feet over the blanket, then her thighs, her torso and bare chest below her throat, her shoulders her face and ears. i kissed her all over her beautiful bald head and i said, "goodnight mama. you go to sleep." and then i laid down in my little chair bed there put my jacket over my upper body and silently cried myself to sleep. the sound of her breathing, deep and gulping and certain.*

It's very dark now. Harry and Jessica have fallen asleep. I am alone with the baby. I try to commit to the idea of letting him out. I still can't imagine it. But the pain keeps going deeper.

At the bottom, which one can't quite know is the bottom, one reckons. I've heard a lot of women describe this reckoning (it might also be called nine centimeters), at which one starts bargaining hard, as if striking a deal to save your conjoined lives. *I don't know how we're going to get out of this, baby, but word is that you've got to come out, and that I've got to let you, and we've got to do this together, and we've got to do it now.*

They tell me the baby is facing a weird way, I have to lie on my left side, with my leg elevated. I don't want to. They tell me twenty minutes this way. I see a collection of hands holding my leg. It hurts. After twenty minutes, he has turned.

They measure again. Fully effaced, fully dilated. The midwife is ecstatic. Says we're ready to go. I want to know what will happen next. Just wait, they say.

*at a certain point i woke up. i listened for her breath, which i heard after a moment. much shallower, faster. i became alert, just then the AC unit went on, aurally overtaking the sound of her. this had happened innumerable times before, and it was always a strange bardo for me. would the breath still be happening when the fan went back off? i strained to hear her breath over the grinding of the fan but couldn't. my torso leapt and sat up to check if her chest was moving. it didn't seem to be. the AC roared. her left hand puffed the sheet up suddenly, the tiniest, instant halloween ghost. her first movement—a signaling. i leapt to her, to that hand. her eyes were open now, illuminated, looking up, her mouth was now closed, her face no longer tilted, akimbo. she was beautiful. and dying. her mouth was in slow-motion rounding up little bits of earth air for her lungs, or just an echo of that i guess. her eyes were in light and open. she was jutting her chin in the sweetest, most dignified little coquettish juts. she was in the doorway of all worlds and i was in the doorway too. i forced myself not to disturb her, she seemed all at once to know where she was going and how to get there. her map. her job. the goal at hand. i cupped her warm hand in mine and let her go. i told her one more time, you are surrounded in love, you are surrounded in light, don't be afraid. and her neck was pulsing a little bit? her eyes were looking at something in another place. her mouth needed less air, less often and her chin moving more slowly. i never wanted it to end. i have never wanted*

Harry

*infinity to open up under an instant like i wanted that then. and then her eyes relaxed and her shoulders relaxed of a piece. and i knew she had found her way. dared. summoned up her smarts and courage and whacked a way through. i was really astonished. proud of her. i looked at the clock it was 2:16.*

They think my bladder is too full, that it's in the way. I can't stand up to pee anymore in the slow-dancing position. They put in a catheter. It stings. Then the doctor comes in, says he'd like to break the water, says it's enormously full. OK but how. He brandishes what appears to be a bamboo back scratcher. OK. The waters are broken. It feels tremendously good. I am lying in a warm ocean.

Suddenly, the urge to push. Everyone is thrilled. Push, they say. They teach me. Hold it in, hold in the air, bear down wildly, don't waste the end of the push. The midwife puts her hand in to see if I need help pushing. She says I am a good pusher and don't need any help. I am happy I am a good pusher. I want to try.

On the fourth or so contraction, he starts to come. I don't know for sure if it's him, but I can feel the change. I push hard. One push turns into another kind of push—I feel it outside.

Commotion. I am gone but happy, something is happening. The doctor rushes in, I can see him throwing on his gear: a visor, an apron. He seems agitated but who cares. New lights come on, yellow, directed lights. People around me are moving quickly. My baby is being born.

Everyone is watching down there intently, in a kind of happy panic. Someone asks if I want to feel the baby's head, and I

don't, I don't know why. Then a minute later, I do. Here he comes. It feels big but I feel big enough.

Then suddenly they tell me to stop pushing. I don't know why. Harry tells me that the doctor is stretching my perineum in circles around the baby's head, trying to keep the skin from tearing. Hold, they say, don't push, but "puff." Puff puff puff.

Then they say I can push. I push. I feel him come out, all of him, all at once. I also feel the shit that had been bedeviling me all through pregnancy and labor come out too. My first feeling is that I could run a thousand miles, I feel amazing, total and complete relief, like everything that was wrong is now right.

And then, suddenly, Iggy. Here he comes onto me, rising. He is perfect, he is right. I notice he has my mouth, incredible. He is my gentle friend. He is on me, screaming.

Push again, they say a few moments later. *You've got to be kidding—aren't I done yet?* But this one's easy; the placenta has no bones. I had always imagined the placenta like a rare fifteen-ounce steak. Instead it's utterly indecent and colossal—a bloody yellow sac filled with purple-black organs, a bag of whale hearts. Harry stretches its hood and photographs its insides, awed by this most mysterious and gory of apartments.

When his first son was born, Harry cried. Now he holds Iggy close, laughing sweetly into his little face. I look at the clock; it is 3:45 A.M.

*I spent another 5 hours with her body, alone, with the light on. she was so incredibly beautiful. she looked 19. i took about a hundred*

Harry

*pictures of her. i sat with her for a long long time holding her hand. i prepared a meal and ate in the other room and returned. i kept talking to her. i felt like i lived a hundred years, a lifetime with her silent, peaceful body. i turned off the AC unit. the ceiling fan above her was whipping air, holding the space of cycle, where her breath had been. i could've stayed another hundred years right there—kissing her and visiting with her. it would have been fine with me. important.*

*You don't do labor, I was counseled several times before the baby came. Labor does you.*

This sounded good—I like physical experiences that involve surrender. I didn't know, however, very much about experiences that *demand* surrender—that run over you like a truck, with no safe word to stop it. I was ready to scream, but labor turned out to be the quietest experience of my life.

If all goes well, the baby will make it out alive, and so will you. Nonetheless, you will have touched death along the way. You will have realized that death will do you too, without fail and without mercy. It will do you even if you don't believe it will do you, and it will do you in its own way. There's never been a human that it didn't. *I guess I'm just waiting to die*, your mother said, bemused and incredulous, the last time we saw her, her skin so thin in her borrowed bed.

People say women forget about the pain of labor, due to some kind of God-given amnesia that keeps the species reproducing. But that isn't quite right—after all, what does it mean for pain to be “memorable”? You're either in pain or you're not. And it isn't the pain that one forgets. It's the touching death part.

As the baby might say to its mother, we might say to death: *I forget you, but you remember me.*

I wonder if I'll recognize it, when I see it again.



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