THE NEW INQUIRY FAMILY PLANNING

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NORMAN ROCKWELL, *DUMONT NETWORK*, 1950
ALBERTO GIACOMETTI, *CUBIST HEAD*, 1933

ESSAYS

REVIEWS

COLUMN

EDITORIAL NOTE

"THE MOST MERCIFUL thing that a family does to one of its infant members is to kill it." Thus wrote Margaret Sanger, the mother of birth control and founder of Planned Parenthood, in a 1922 pamphlet entitled "The Woman Rebel." It has stayed with us as a popular bit of anti-abortionist propaganda, illuminating the supposedly depraved underpinnings of family planning. And yes, family planning was enlisted in quite a lot of projects: not just women's rights but also "poverty reduction"—eugenics for, in Sanger's own words, "a cleaner race." The utopian aims of such projects were linked to heavy-handed efforts to control social "pollutants"—low IQs, too little money, too many people—through the disciplining of the family. For a better world, let the state help you make your family just the right size, shape, and color.

In this issue, our writers consider family planning—the intersection of care and social control, of love and fantasies of the future. Whose future? Whose fantasies? Elliot Aguilar looks at the growing trend of genetic self-discovery and the myriad programs that offer consumers glimpses of their heritage in African nations or ancient Rome. Aguilar untangles the threads of genetic identification, investigating the suitability of DNA evidence for creating families, tribes, and identities.

But often, the choice is not ours. In the efforts to create clean streets and healthy families, somehow poor bodies are always in the way. The legitimate fear of poor communities is that institutional racism will deny them families. In North Carolina, involuntary sterilization of poor women, mostly African American, ceased only in the 1970s. During India's mid-1970s state of emergency, as Kartik Nair details in "Temple of Womb," underclass urban men were bribed and coerced into "voluntary" sterilization programs. Ironically, the same cheap video technology that spread the boiling fear of underclass virility would also permit the uncontrollable propagation of B movies and other entertainment regarded as subversive by the state.

As Sophie Lewis notes in "Labor Pains," Indian women are now contracted to serve as wombs for white Western children, becoming entrepreneurial proprietors of their alienated reproductive function, undermining the possibility of a commons that might unite women across geographical and class lines. Instead one group of women is made to serve another, and must threaten self-harm and infanticide to mark their resistance. How does one strike for better terms when the only way to halt work would be to destroy the body?

In "Prescription Strike," Ayesha A. Siddiqi explores another kind of Western occupation and the distrust it engenders: the deployment of U.S. intelligence in

Pakistan. Aid workers have been murdered abroad for providing polio vaccinations and some families reject aid altogether. Siddiqi points out that popular perceptions of aid workers are intertwined with perceptions of that other "for your own good" force: Western interventionism. "The families refusing vaccines do so with the logic that a country launching drones with one hand, can't be trusted offering aid with the other."

A woman, wrote Sanger, "goes through the vale of death alone, each time a babe is born." You would think family planning would address the burden of her carrying this risk alone. Yet behind much family-planning intervention is not female empowerment but the underlying assumption that women can't be trusted with something so momentous as reproduction. (In Monty Python's *The Meaning of Life*, a woman in contractions is wheeled into a hospital room crowded with machinery. "Doctor, what do I do?" "Nothing dear! You aren't qualified.") For this issue, Maya Gonzalez interviews filmmaker Irene Lusztig about *The Motherhood Archives*, an experimental documentary-in-progress exploring propaganda directed at pregnant women.

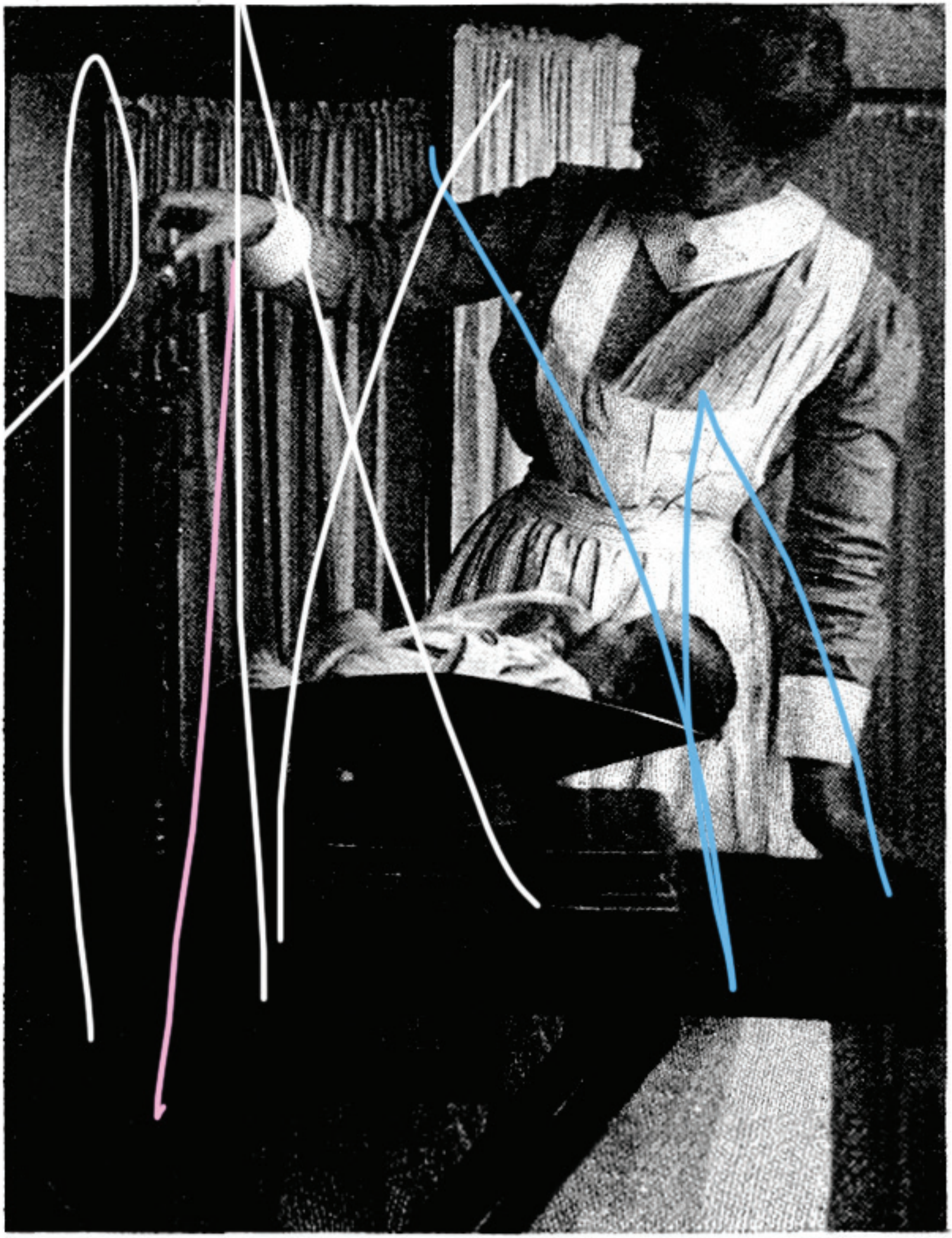
Before a woman ever becomes pregnant, however, she is a Young-Girl. Is motherhood the cure? With misogynistic irony (or is it ironic misogyny) the Tiqqun collective's *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* offers the Young-Girl as the ideal consumer subject of neoliberalism. Moira Weigel and Mal Ahern flip the manifesto on its head with "Further Materias Materials Toward a Theory of the Man-Child," which likens Tiqqun to timid, indecisive male-graduate-student types who shy away from now mandatory affective labor and posits the figure of a motherly Grown Woman as these Man-Children's dialectical counterpart. Why not, instead of irony and disavowal, a recognition of the positive potential of social reproduction and care work; why not a *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of Motherhood*?

Hannah Black, in her "Theory of the Hot Babe," delineates the alternative, a subjectivity both blank and self-regarding, incapable of conceiving or participating in a family, plastic and wombless.

In the reviews section, JW McCormack takes on book two of Karl Ove Knausgård's epic autobiographical *My Struggle*, subtitled "A Man in Love." Love and family are for him a freely chosen insanity. The writer claims "we are most unalike as children and most similar when dead. In the middle, love restores the madness we are born with and gradually cured of."

But for younger people, family may be an asylum in a more literal sense. *Hikikomori*, regarded by its first diagnoser Saitō Tamaki as a "family disorder," describes the severe withdrawal into homebound silence by an epidemic number of young Japanese people. Max Fox reviews *Hikikomori: Adolescence Without End*, published by Tamaki in 1998 and finally available in English, exploring the connection of *hikikomori* to the labor market and to the invention of adolescence. Have we all become as disposable as a teen bagging groceries, as a teen sent to war?

In the end, the family is less a haven in a heartless world than an arrangement that has focused a hundred efforts at social improvement on the locus of relationships supposedly spun of love and affection. We take up only a handful of the resulting tensions and contradictions. It will take more than a village to sort them out for good. ■



The Birth of Motherhood

IRENE LUSZTIG *interviewed by* MAYA GONZALEZ

It takes a lot of propaganda to make mothering seem natural

***MAYA GONZALEZ: What is your project exactly*—The Motherhood Archives?**
IRENE LUSZTIG: *The Motherhood Archives* is a history of childbirth. I would call it an ideological or institutional history of childbirth that repurposes a giant archive of maternal education, maternal-training films, industrial films, and medical-training films. These films are spaces of training and education for forming women as they become mothers, and I try to look historically at these films. Who's telling women how to give birth and how to be mothers and why? For me, it's been a way to think about childbirth and maternity using this deep history, to see it in a much bigger context and trace the history of the language and the ideas that we use to talk about these things.

The film project is almost all found footage. It comes out of an archive of about a hundred and something training films that I've found in different places. Some are from eBay; some are from real archives. And out of that material I built a film that episodically looks at certain moments in time where childbirth is discussed in a new way, or the pain of childbirth is discussed in a new way.

What was the reason you started this project? What's your background and how did it lead you to work on this archive?
I got pregnant. I'm a filmmaker; I've worked a lot with propaganda and archives—my background is in communist, postcommunist stuff, and my previous work is a trilogy of films in China, Romania, and Russia that thinks through that set of historical questions and engagements, a lot of it through

propaganda material. I'm very attuned to propaganda. So when I was pregnant it became immediately, abundantly obvious to me that almost everything I was reading or seeing or being exposed to was telling me how to give birth or how to be pregnant or how to mother or look after my child. It was clear to me immediately that all of this is an intense space of propaganda.

I have a very archival and historical turn of mind. I wanted to know, What's the history of these conversations? Where is this coming from? Why is it such an intense space of ideology? So I started buying films on eBay. There's a lot of weird stuff kicking around on eBay. A lot of libraries now sell off their 16mm educational collections. After a year or so of doing that, I started going into the archives, and it started feeling like it could be a real project rather than a strange hobby. But it came out of an attempt to think through that experience of being pregnant and encountering spaces of maternal training.

Did it change the way you perceived your own experience over those nine months? You were looking at things that are supposed to educate you, often in an autodidactic way, but ...

I guess I was sort of self-educating in a weird way. I just found it helpful and reassuring to think through the intense ideological space of "the right way to give birth," "the right way to mother," "the right way to do this or that with your child." There's a constant idea that you're failing, you're doing it wrong—so for me I just found it hugely reassuring to understand that these things are completely culturally bound, historically bound. There is no wrong way to give birth.

It both is and isn't a personal film in the end. The question of voice came up a lot in conversations. As I was showing the film as a work in progress, at different points it was more explicitly personal, in the first person, and people would disengage from the film by saying, "You must have had a really hard time with your pregnancy or your birth" or "You must be trying to work through some problem that you're having." I was really troubled by the "you, you, you" of that conversation, because this isn't about me.

They don't even know you have a child.

Right. Sure, I have a child, I'm part of this conversation, perhaps. But this isn't a piece of work about me. So I spent a lot of time struggling and puzzling through what kind of voice the film has, and I ended up with a sort of weird, transhistorical voice that the voice-over uses in the film.

Can you tell me about that? There are times when you use the word "you," and then there are times that you use "we." I felt like the "we" pertained to a "we who are being educated." At the same time, the "we" was speaking to a community of women potentially "out there somewhere." Yet "you" would be used to address an individual consumer—someone who might purchase a series of related commodities. The contrast is striking: It's like the individual "you" is

separating "us" from being a "we." And still "we" is always problematic.

Yeah, yes. The "you" and the "we"—those films, the didactic films are constantly in the "you": "You" will experience this, "you" will experience that. "You" will do this, "you" will be in the hospital, "you" will meet "your" doctor, "your" body can do this. So there are a couple of points in the film where it redeploys the "you" voice, but most of the time it's this "we." I did think of the "we" as like the woman who is being educated. It's the voice that responds to the "you" voice.

The question of who's included haunts every conversation about feminism. It was very deliberate to not use "I." It's not a film about me. I'm certain it's about me on some level, or made for personal reasons, but the voice of the film is not "my" voice.

What has making the film revealed, and what are the things that surprised you?

The history of Lamaze surprised me. Lamaze is a very clear case study of how childbirth is propagandized. It exposes how it's so clearly spoken about in a completely different way as it moves from Soviet Russia to France to the U.S. I was amazed to learn that there was this whole Marxist discourse of labor pain, which I hadn't known about. And as Lamaze leaves this kind of Socialist-Marxist labor system and moves to the U.S., that language is completely erased—but it's still the same techniques. It lays bare the way that these things are undergirded by nationalist ideologies, state ideologies.

I guess the most important discoveries I found were histories of obstetrics and obstetrical anesthesia. I was trying to think through how we've thought about pain at different points in time because that's a really fraught space.

And twilight sleep was probably the most interesting discovery of the project. Twilight sleep is a moment in the teens where internationally, wealthy women began traveling to Germany to a clinic where there's a drug protocol given to laboring women, an almost homeopathic dose of morphine that doesn't really take the pain away in any significant way, coupled with scopolamine which induces amnesia. So the experience of laboring in twilight sleep may be intensely painful, but the women forget it as they're experiencing it. The interesting thing historically about twilight sleep is that it became a real activist cause in the U.S., and the activists who were supporting and trying to bring it to the U.S. were all feminists and suffragettes. So the early 20th century history of women being really strong advocates for medicalized childbirth, for hospital birth, for drugs, for anesthesia, is an interesting forgotten history.

What was the position for advocating twilight sleep? Was it for equality, mainly?

That the pain of labor is an abject experience of very intense pain. The language that's used in these books and articles that feminists wrote advocating twilight sleep is basically human-rights discourse: Society has the obligation to give us women this thing that will take away this devastating pain that we

experience. It's a human-rights discourse of equality for women in the form of pain relief. Which is incredibly interesting set next to today's feminist conversation which is all about natural unmedicated childbirth being the correct, feminist way of giving birth. For me that was a discovery.

It seems like feminists had to deal with this antinomy between "we" as equals to men in order to obtain equal rights, and at the same time "we" must also advocate for difference. Childbirth is something that would clearly be a "difference" in this regard and yet is a socially constructed difference in relation to rights. I guess what I'm trying to say is that your film is really good at demonstrating that the seemingly natural is historical.

And even that word is so problematic—that there is a natural and therefore also an unnatural way of giving birth. That medication is unnatural, that pain is natural.

It creates a whole structure of thinking.

But also, that pain is unnatural—that if one were to accept a natural childbirth, one would not experience pain.

It's very complicated.

But there's a number of different ways of opting out of pain or trauma, neutralizing it or through hypnosis, not experiencing it. In a social-historical way, this sort of loss can be re-experienced as repression that comes back. There seems to be somewhat of a theme within the archive of an attempt to repress that.

I think the opposite of that is the discourse of natural childbirth. That it's empowering and self-actualizing for a woman to be fully present in that experience of pain, that that's a really desirable state. To me that's really problematic.

Well, it's punishing.

We're talking about incredibly intense pain! So I guess for me, one of the animating questions going into this project was, Is natural childbirth really that great? Is it empowering? Is it self-actualizing? I don't think women were always speaking that way about pain.

The film makes clear that it is not at all natural, the experience of pain.

What pain is is also very mysterious. The film starts where the history starts, and it could've gone back much further in history. But I chose to start the film in the late 19th century when anesthesia was discovered. Anesthesia comes into fashion, and that's the first moment where there's a conversation about pain because suddenly pain can be taken away. Pain is no longer inevitable but something you can choose to experience or choose not to experience.

That brings up all these really big questions about pain: Where does it come from? What does it mean? Is it wrong to take it away? There's an argument in 19th century medical discourse against anesthesia that says if you amputate a limb without anesthesia and a patient screams, that's really valuable information for a surgeon. Intense pain is important information for a doctor, and getting rid of it is a huge problem for medical practice.

We've all moved very far away from that moment, but it's the first moment where there can be this conversation. If you can take pain away, what is the point of it?

The film doesn't go into this that much, but this early conversation about pain is a very Christian conversation. There's centuries and centuries of thinking and writing about labor pain, which is that it originates with God's punishment of Eve. Grantly Dick-Read is the British obstetrician who coined the term *natural childbirth* and wrote the first books about it. His writing is a very explicitly Christian appeal to the experience of being inside the pain as a form of spirituality. It's a Christian thing to do. That history has also been erased. It's kind of ironic that the space feminists occupy now is a redeployment of this incredibly Christian and misogynist argument about women's bodies.

The film also tells a narrative about the commodification and marketization of of childbirth, culminating in these birthing centers. You say that in these centers "the messiness of birth is excised from this perfectly appointed home away from home. The image of the cache of medical supplies behind the domestic facade is the image of an era in conflict; an unresolved historical moment suspended between two ideas." What is that unresolved historical moment?

The birth center is this phenomenon that's on the rise where hospitals are building this kind of—it looks like a Super 8 Motel or something. I first saw a birth center when I was on a hospital tour. I was pregnant and it immediately struck me as this incredibly weird unresolved, compromised space that's trying to be home, but it's not home. It's homey, and homey is signified by chintz bedspread and floral art. So it's not a home birth, it's a home-like birth. They have all this furniture where they've hidden equipment behind mirrors and picture frames.

The space feminists now occupy is a redeployment of this Christian and misogynist argument about women's bodies

The effort to erase the trace of the medical, erase the idea of pain ... it's

this kind of neutral hotel-like space, but the whole thing is that it's in a hospital, or it's next to the hospital, so you can go to the hospital if you have an emergency. It's a very uneasy space of negotiating these two different ideologies or discourses around childbirth. It does feel like a space that's very uncomfortable, where all the emergency equipment is there, but it's behind a picture of Monet's water lilies.

There was something so right about that image as saying something in particular about the way in which the home is brought within this unnatural sterilized space and then renaturalized.

It's such an unnatural home, right? Nobody's home actually looks like that.

You continue in that passage, "The archive tells us that childbirth is both natural and pathological: two opposite things inside of one that intertwine through history."

People have asked me about the word *pathological*. People think of that as a very bad word, but it comes directly out of earlier writings about childbirth. There's a huge body of writing from the mid-20th century that precisely describes childbirth as pathological or a pathological process, a destructive process. It comes out of doctors struggling with incredibly high maternal mortality rates and high infant-mortality rates, incredibly high rates of vaginal tearing and bad maternal side-effects from birth, prolapse and all these things that still happen, actually.

Joseph DeLee, who was a big obstetrician in Chicago in the 1920s and '30s—he uses the word. His basic position is that childbirth is pathological, it's a medical situation, it's one that requires intervention, it's one that requires doctors. That position is really rejected now, especially in this pro-natural childbirth space, but it's complicated. There are still women who die in childbirth, there are still things that happen that require medical intervention; the birth center is straddling the precise intersection of that really uneasy in-between space of not wanting to be aware of the medical, but it's still there hidden. It's true that there are also a lot of unnecessary C-sections. I don't know what the statistics are, but there's probably equal numbers of medical C-sections that save babies and save mothers, so I think disavowing this completely in a conversation about childbirth is problematic.

It was interesting to me also as a luxury experience.

Well, class is the other thing that we haven't talked about, but all of this is incredibly class-bound.

I think it's class-bound, and it's to give this middle-class experience. You bring out the normative fantasy: It's not exactly just for the middle class, and at the same time it's—

It's an aspirational experience.

Yeah, or like a honeymoon experience.

You give birth, and you have the celebration meal afterward! ■

Further Materials Toward a Theory of the Man-Child

by MOIRA WEIGEL AND MAL AHERN

Theory's response to the feminization of work has been to cry for mommy

VIRGINIA WOOLF POINTED out in *A Room of One's Own* that, for most of history, if a piece of writing was signed "Anonymous," its author was usually a woman. Recently, however, we have noticed that more and more unsigned publications coming from the left are written in what sounds like a male voice. From the boy bandit aesthetics of the anarchist magazine *Rolling Thunder* to the Guy Fawkes masks and Internet vigilantism of the hacker collective Anonymous, the protagonist of contemporary radical politics styles himself as a *him*.

In some cases, anonymity itself, which was supposed to express solidarity, abets sexism. Take Tiqqun. Founded in the late 1990s and dissolved after the 9/11 attacks, the French journal of radical philosophy attracted media attention when one of its founders, Julien Coupat, was arrested in November 2008 in connection with plans to sabotage the TGV train lines.

Semiotext(e) published translations of Tiqqun's *The Coming Insurrection, Introduction to Civil War,* and *This is Not a Program* between 2009 and 2011, and the anarchist press Little Black Cart books distributed *Tiqqun 1* and *Theory of Bloom* in 2011 and 2012. Though their cops-and-robbers bombast sometimes raised our eyebrows, we read these with interest. Then, late last year, Semiotext(e) put out its next Tiqqun

installment. Enclosed in a bright pink cover, and bookended with what looked like low-grade xerox collages of glossy magazine ads and soft porn, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* confirmed all that we had begun to suspect.

Theory of the Young-Girl opens with a 10-page excursus sketching the "total war" that contemporary capitalism wages against anyone who dares oppose it. Echoing the work of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, Tiqqun argues that capitalism compels individuals to internalize its imperatives to live (and thus consume) in certain ways. Because the entire conflict is invisible, Tiqqun professes that "rethinking the offensive for our side is a matter of making the battlefield manifest," revealing the processes by which contemporary society compels us to commodify even our intimate lives. Where can they best expose the front lines where capitalism is waging its invisible war? The "Young-Girl," a figure Tiqqun invents to play both the exemplary subject of and the agent reproducing this system.

Tiqqun claims it has lady members and seems eager to reassure us that it does not hate us. "Listen," Tiqqun writes. "The Young-Girl is obviously *not* a gendered concept ... The Young-Girl is simply the *model citizen* as redefined by consumer society." When early 20th century capitalism realized that, to reproduce itself, it would have to colonize social life, it particularly targeted the spheres of "youth" and "femininity": the young, because they needed and wanted things, and did not yet work; women, because they governed social reproduction, i.e., had and raised kids.

The majority of what follows consists of a Situationist-ish collage that, in a series of vacillating typefaces and font sizes, presents the Young-Girl as a scapegoat as much as a victim.

> *Deep down inside, the Young-Girl has the personality of a tampon: she exemplifies all of the appropriate indifference, all of the necessary coldness demanded by the conditions of metropolitan life.*
>
> *In love more than anywhere else, the Young-Girl behaves like an accountant.*
>
> *There isn't room for two in the body of a Young-Girl.*
>
> *It appears that all the concreteness of the world has taken refuge in the ass of the Young-Girl.*
>
> *There are beings that give you the desire to die slowly before their eyes, but the Young-Girl only excites the desire to vanquish her, to take advantage of her.*

Like the nice guy from your grad-school program who tries to cover up his hurt feelings by concocting a general theory that explains why he never got a text after his one-night stand, the book portrays the Young-Girl as vain, frivolous, and acquisitive. She serves the traditional female role of reproducing the population and social order, but here, the social order is corrupt. Therefore, Tiqqun suggests, their intervention *requires* an ironic performance of misogyny. The question remains: Why is misogyny their only option? And why are so many thoughtful people ready to accept

that a layer of irony suffices to turns hateful language into the basis of a sound critique?

We believe that Tiqqun has mistaken its object. The real enigma of our age is not the Young-Girl, who, we submit, has been punished enough already for how commodity culture exploits her. It is, rather, her boyish critic. Forms of crypto- and not-so-crypto misogyny have proved startlingly persistent not just within the radical left but also in the bourgeois-left spheres of cultural production: the publishing world, the museum, and the humanities departments of liberal-arts universities. We propose that a particular type is responsible for perpetuating such bad behavior. Call him the Man-Child.

IT IS NOT that we cannot talk Tiqqun talk. Look:

> *The Man-Child has two moods: indecision, and entitlement to this indecisiveness.*
>
> *The Man-Child tells a racist joke. It is not funny. It is the fact that the Man-Child said something racist that is.*
>
> *The Man-Child wants you to know that you should not take him too seriously, except when you should. At any given moment, he wants to you to take him only as seriously as he wants to be taken. When he offends you, he was kidding. When he means it, he means it. What he says goes.*
>
> *The Man-Child thinks the meaning of his statement inheres in his intentions, not in the effects of his language. He knows that speech-act theory is passé.*
>
> *The Man-Child's irony may be a part of a generational aversion to political risk: he would not call out a sexist or racist joke, for fear of sounding too earnest. Ironically, the Man-Child lives up to a stereotype about the men from the rom-coms he holds in contempt: he has a fear of commitment.*
>
> *The Man-Child won't break up with you, but will simply stop calling. He doesn't want to seem like an asshole.*
>
> *He tells you he would break up with his girlfriend, but they share a lease.*
>
> *The Man-Child breaks up with you even though the two of you are not in a relationship. He cites his fear of settling down. You don't want marriage, at least not with him, but he never thought to ask you.*
>
> *The Man-Child can't even commit to saying no.*
>
> *Why are you crying? The Man-Child is just trying to be reasonable. This is his calm voice.*
>
> *The Man-Child isn't a player. Many a Man-Child lacks throw-down. He puts on a movie and never makes a move.*
>
> *Is Hamlet the original Man-Child? No: the Romantics made him one.*
>
> *Just as not all men are Man-Children, neither are all Man-Children men.*
>
> *Lena Dunham may be living proof that the Man-Child is now equal opportunity. That is, the character she plays on* Girls *is. A real man-child would never get it together to get an HBO show. As we watch Hannah Horvath pull a splinter out of her ass, we wonder: Is this second-wave feminism? Or fourth? It is no accident that Judd Apatow wrote the scene. The mesh tank Dunham wears over bare tits is isomorphic with the dick joke.*

The hipster and the douchebag may be subspecies of the genus Man-Child.

If the Man-Child could use his ironic sexism to build a new world, would you want to live in it? Would anyone?

WE COULD GO on like this. Others have. Since *Theory of the Young-Girl* appeared in France in the late 1990s, the Man-Child has wandered far afield from the barricades, turning up more and more often in the mainstream liberal press. When Hanna Rosin published her widely discussed *Atlantic* essay and subsequent book, *The End of Men*, proposing that "modern, postindustrial society is just better suited to women," she inaugurated a genre. A spate of articles lamented how the "mancession" was discouraging even nice boys from fulfilling the roles traditionally expected of them—holding a job, taking girls on dinner dates, eventually choosing one to marry, outearn, beget kids with, etc.

"The End of Courtship," which the *New York Times* ran in January, is exemplary. "It is not uncommon to walk into the hottest new West Village bistro on a Saturday night and find five smartly dressed young women dining together—the nearest man the waiter," its author concludes. "Income equality, or superiority, for women muddles the old, male-dominated dating structure." Meanwhile, an online panic-mongering industry thrives by offering more or less reactionary advice to female page-viewers about how to turn whatever romantic temp work comes their way into a long-term contract.

Mancession Lit portrays the Man-Child as pitiful, contrasting him with women who are well-adjusted and adult. But it rarely acknowledges the real question that this odd couple raises. Namely, are women better suited to the new economy because they are easier to exploit?

In the mid-1970s, Italian Marxist feminists attempted to integrate an account of "immaterial labor" into their critique of capitalist society. They argued that when a shop attendant smiles for a customer, or a teacher worries too much about her students, or a parent does housework, they perform real labor. No accident that their examples came from spheres traditionally occupied by women. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt later used the phrase "affective labor" to describe the emotional exertion that white-collar jobs increasingly require. Employers in economically dominant countries now primarily demand "education, attitude, character, and 'prosocial' behavior." When job listings ask for "a worker with a good attitude," what they want, say Hardt and Negri, is a smile.

In the culture sector, economic precarity constantly reminds employees of their expendability and, therefore, the importance of their investing affect in their workplace. To gain even an unpaid internship or a barely paid entry-level position in journalism, publishing, museums, or higher education, dedication is a must. Many jobs that used to be meal tickets for starving artists are now considered covetable and require "love." A college freshman recently told us: "I have a passion for marketing." A journalist friend recounts how, when she was still in college,

a magazine editor approached her at a party with the line: "Yo, you should be my *intern*." We imagine her smiling, as if to flatter his delusion that there were any print-media jobs still worth sleeping your way into; in any case, she did get a gig there.

Women's long history of performing work without its even being acknowledged as work, much less compensated fairly, may account for their relative success in today's white-collar economy. This is, at least, the story of the heroine that the new Mancession Lit has created. Call her the Grown Woman. A perpetual-motion machine of uncomplaining labor, shuttling between her job and household tasks, the Grown Woman could not be more different from either fat-year brats like Carrie Bradshaw, or Judd Apatow's lady Man-Children. The Grown Woman holds down her job and pays for her own dinner. The Grown Woman feels like a bad mom when she sees the crafts and organic snacks that other moms are posting on Pinterest. She wonders whether feminism lied to her, but knows she will inherit the earth. Could this be because she is better than the Man-Child at performing what current economic conditions demand? She is certainly more practiced. Who among us hasn't faked it, if only to make him stop asking?

TIQQUN KNOWS AND says what the Lifestyle section does or cannot: Today the economy is feminizing everyone. That is, it puts more and more people of both genders in the traditionally female position of undertaking work that traditionally patriarchal institutions have pretended is a kind of personal service outside capital so that they do not have to pay for it. When affective relationships become part of work, we overinvest our economic life with erotic value. Hence, "passion for marketing." Hence, "Like" after "Like" button letting you volunteer your time to help Facebook sell your information to advertisers with ever greater precision.

In the postindustrial era, work and leisure grow increasingly indistinguishable: We are all shop girls now. From this "feminization of the world," Tiqqun writes, "one can only expect the cunning promotion of all manner of servitudes." At times, Tiqqun speaks of this exploitation sympathetically. More often, however, they blame the Young-Girl for opening the floodgates by complying with her own exploitation, thus making it easier for control capitalism to make her attitude compulsory for everyone.

Though its anxieties are of the moment, Tiqqun lifts its language from a long intellectual tradition that uses "woman" as shorthand. You can trace this line to Goethe's *Faust* and the "eternal feminine" or Friedrich Schiller's "Veiled Statue at Sais," where "a youth, impelled by a burning thirst for knowledge," pokes around Egypt looking for a busty sculpture of Isis that he calls "Truth." Nietzsche continues using "woman" as a metaphor for the metaphysical essence that philosophers looked for beneath the surface of mere existence. But he borrows the language of his predecessors only to show how their quest failed—proposing, for instance, in *Human, All Too Human* that "women,

however you may search them, prove to have no content but are purely masks." Nietzsche's point is that the woman called Truth was always already a cocktease: Nothing except existence exists.

Tiqqun offers an edgy update to such misogynist metaphors deployed for the purposes of demystification. At times, it speaks longingly of women who have not been utterly corrupted by capitalism. But when it learns what it knew all along—there is no outside; all human relationships have become reified—its disappointment at finding no one authentic to grow old with intensifies its vitriol. "It wasn't until the Young-Girl appeared that one could concretely experience what it means to 'fuck,' that is, to fuck someone without fucking anyone in particular. Because to fuck a being that is really so abstract, so utterly interchangeable, is to fuck in the absolute." Tiqqun's language may be obscene, but its point is nothing new. The failure to see women as "anyone in particular," or as subjects endowed with their own ends, has allowed men to fuck women over for centuries.

TIQQUN CAN INSIST, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that the Young-Girl is "obviously not a gendered concept" because it knows that we know that it knows this. Tiqqun uses works of Continental philosophy in the same way that schoolyard bullies use in-jokes: as passwords that grant access to a protected inner circle. Tiqqun assumes that readers will assume that writers so well versed in texts that have spoken truth to power could not *really* hate women. The prestige of the theoretical vocabulary that Tiqqun's members have mastered bolsters their credibility.

At the same time, *Theory of the Young-Girl* adopts a playful pose that prevents real Young-Girls, or any Grown Women who might find time to read books published by Semiotext(e), from calling them out. Because Tiqqun's collage does not attribute sources, we can read any given passage in disavowing quotation marks, as a lightning bolt of original insight, or as both. Publishing anonymously is only a backup measure for evading responsibility. Lift out any one line to object to it—"Wait a minute, how has all the concreteness of the world taken refuge in my ass?"—and you would be sure to look foolish, even if you did know whom to ask.

Theory of the Young-Girl shares a rhetorical strategy with texts that have been far more widely diffused and discussed. Their quips about tampons and Young-Girls' body parts, which they insist are "not gendered," resemble the cringe-inducing song about seeing actresses' "boobs" that Seth MacFarlane wrote for the Oscars and Daniel Tosh's much-discussed off-the-cuff rape joke. In each case, a speaker insists that he is not saying what he says. If we accept a standard definition of verbal irony as saying one thing while meaning another, the comedians and Tiqqun both appeal to their identities to control the contexts in which they are understood. Claiming that its mastery of the misogynist philosophical tradition entitles it to do this, Tiqqun steps into

what looks a lot like an old-fashioned patriarchal role.

Even when adopted by radical theory, this knowing posture is conservative. Knowingness is the attitude that allows sexism to persist in progressive institutions that you would expect to know better, *precisely because you would*. When casual sexism pervades leftist theory, one assumes it is ironic; when progressive institutions ignore gender politics, one assumes this is because struggles for equality have already been won, or must be deferred so we can attend to more pressing political needs. Intellectuals tend to show class allegiance, bracketing or ignoring casual sexism in their own circles. They project misogyny *outward*, onto Middle America megachurches and racialized others, or onto the powerful men that pander to those masses.

When we look at the comment sections where men fantasize about violating and decapitating female bloggers, or OkCupid diaries where they rant about dates who spurned their sexual advances, we recognize immediately that the Nice Guy doth protest too much. Typos make it easy to call a sadsack sociopath a sociopath. But we imagine that our male colleagues at cultural institutions are aware of how women have been exploited historically.

So when one asks whether we would like to co-author a paper, undertaking all the translation for it because he does not "*do* languages," we try to shake it off. He cannot really imagine that we spent years of our adult lives mastering foreign words and grammar just so we could do the tedious housework of gathering sources while he takes credit for the conceptual heavy lifting. (Even his verb choice—"*do*"—makes it sound like this was a hobby, like tourism, as if we just happened to get off on playing with textbooks.) When the co-organizer of an exhibition calls to ask, on a few hours notice, whether he can borrow sheets for the futon on which he volunteered weeks ago to put up a visiting artist—it was just coincidence that he called us and not Patrick or Andrew, right? We want to believe this. And yet, we look at the female faculty who seem to participate in every committee and conference and supervise over half the dissertations in their departments, and we feel afraid.

The figures that Mancession Lit presents as adversaries are in fact symbiotic. In institutions that reward competence with more unpaid labor, the Man-Child needs the Grown Woman to take care of him, and she needs him to need her. Man-Child attitudes, of the kind Tiqqun adopts, perpetuate the "feminization of the world" in the places where we most ardently hoped to find alternatives. Even the messy style of *Theory of the Young-Girl* ends up creating more unacknowledged labor: the exegesis it requires. In his glamorous obscurantism, the Man-Child cries for a dutiful interpreter to come and tidy up.

IN MANY RADICAL political groups in the 20th century, sex and gender were treated as issues for "after the revolution." Tiqqun regards matters of "personal identity" as secondary to a generalized process by which capital shapes individuals. When

we accept the knowingness that the Man-Child trades in, we put off thinking about how differences of gender, sex, and sexuality operate in diverse lives. That sort of thinking takes work, work that many of us would often rather avoid. Because utopia never arrives, this labor gets passed on to the exploited, who do not have the choice of temporarily ignoring the question. In many workplaces, including academic departments, this means that race becomes the "job" of people of color; sexual politics the "job" of people who are female and/or queer and/or transgendered.

We cannot refuse the hard work of thinking about difference, nor can we step into the Grown Woman role that late capitalism has devised for us. We cannot finally embrace the Man-Child; he is inertia itself. But we can look for new figures. Perhaps irony felt like a vehicle for radical critique in the late 1990s when Tiqqun was writing. Then, bullish readers who were confident that the West had reached the end of history needed to be shown all the shortcomings and hypocrisies of their golden age. Now, translated for the postcrash era in which everyone sees how badly our social contract has been broken, the gesture feels like a cliché designed to help its speaker avoid responsibility and risk.

Tiqqun resembles the mainstream Man-Child to the extent that everything that it does is a delaying tactic, a way of putting off the future. The rhetorical strategy of *Theory of the Young-Girl* is to remain *undecidable*: Its self-ironizing speaker refuses to settle the question of whether the book is in fact sexist or just impersonating someone sexist in order to make its point. The trait that everyone has recognized as endemic among men, and many young women, of our generation is *indecision*.

Both postures spring from a fearful refusal to take a position, to make a choice among alternatives that feel compromised. The bourgeois Man-Child who refuses to "grow up," refuses to mate, and refuses domestic labor resembles the radical who wants to bide his time until capitalism collapses from within. Perhaps the most extreme example of Man-Child politics is the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement, which proposes that doing nothing might be the only way left to save the world. And yet, it is hard not to see these apocalyptic scenarios as cop-outs, typical of the compensatory fantasies of a disorganized left that, having given up on actually existing politics, daydreams about nature's taking over where it left off.

Doing so, Man-Children overlook the fact that social reproduction—the work of having and raising kids—is not mere replication. It can be *creative*. That is, it might offer opportunities for social transformation. What would *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of Motherhood* look like? Maybe instead of more smarter-than-thou critiques, we need more imagination, more courage. In place of obscurantism, clarity and organization. In place of indecision and irony, a praise song and a program. Tiqqun is at the tail end of a radical tradition that has largely exhausted its usefulness. ■

Theory of the Hot Babe

by HANNAH BLACK

The Hot Babe is no one in particular, and neither are you

LET'S SAY THE Hot Babe is the fully human being of the future, apparently lacking all interiority, super-connected, ultra-contemporary, without guilt or grief. Self-assemblance (the Hot Babe) is the objective subjectivity that has yet to find its true social form. Her deauthenticated body is not emptied or washed clean of subjectivity; it is subjectivity's historical precondition.

The Hot Babe is a gendered concept. *She* is a radical (non-)subjectivity, thrown out of the wage relation only to reappear at the market's core. Those who look at her and see only a machine are the machine of her becoming. Polemically: those who see in the limbs of women the pistons of the factory are superior to those who see in the poor the swarming of rats, but only insofar as misogyny goes unnoticed even where other forms of division fail. In any case, the ecstatic machine and the swarming rats are more beautiful than those who condemn them.

Today the "authentic" self of ideology requires a surplus made up of selves that are not perceived as "authentic"—among them is the Hot Babe.

Many feminisms have theorized objectification as the commodification of women. In a different sense of making-object, communism, as promise, proposes to make human life objective to itself. Let's conflate these two forms of objectification for the purposes of

taking the Hot Babe's claims about herself seriously: She objectifies herself "for herself" ("I do it for myself because I enjoy fashion, it makes me feel like me"—Beyoncé), but also "for all women" ("I think that women feel akin to me in a way because I'm so incredibly honest about who I am as a person"—Jenna Jameson), and evidently for all men ("…"). The image of her being describes the contours of the life we may not live long enough to live. But, as with all prophets, no one believes her.

Who is she? No one. Her characterless character drinks desire like a matte surface repudiates light or stores it for a later date. Like on a hot day the asphalt stores the heat and radiates it at dusk—but what does the Hot Babe care for these fragments of childhood memory? She walked two inches above the asphalt, buoyed on the current of the general desire. Who? No one. She has no traits, but her essence becomes an image and withdraws itself from sight.

Public services are privatized and private life is public. Once, only the professional Hot Babe adorned all major media outlets; now social media makes of everyone a Hot Babe, should they be willing. What is private, secret, is not the detail of the life but the disappearance at its core. I mean something that is always in the process of disappearing. That's what the Hot Babe feels like to touch, although you are not strictly permitted to touch her; it would only be two nothingnesses touching, nothing touching nothing. The Hot Babe is no one in particular, and neither are you.

She "maintains her image," but not any particular image. The condition of the Hot Babe is invisibility or (the same thing) pure contentless visibility. Her image is the appearance of what cannot appear. Image, which is impossible, is itself a taboo on the impossible. All impossibilities (image, love, desire, sex) must be played out as possibilities: The Hot Babe volunteers to perform this necessary self-abasement. The Hot Babe is the embodiment of the flatness and emptiness of the image, but the very flatness and emptiness of the image, any image, is its uncanny fullness. (If I write a sentence the Hot Babe wouldn't have the patience to read, I'm at fault and not her.)

In the era of the Hot Babe, under the emancipatory sign of the Hot Babe, all art will be obsolete or generalized into nonexistence: "That's hot, that's hot, that's hot". The humans of the future reject your messy and in-grown subjectivities, or, like the hero of Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, you reject them, you cannot bear their terrible perfection.

The Hot Babe is not good or rational political praxis, or does not seem to point to any current ideas of good or rational praxis—"organization," "demands"—yet she is the image of the desire of the object of that praxis, as a class.

Looking down on the Hot Babe should give you vertigo: All qualities dissolve in her. In the end it's you who disappears in the hard blue of her eyes, which are always blue, even if the Hot Babe's particular eyes are green or brown. Tell yourself the eyes of the Hot Babe are merely their color, flat and

doll-like, to avoid the penetrating judgment of her stare: She does not care for you, your threadbare autobiography, although always the faint promise that in other circumstances her sympathy would be infinite.

Neither productive nor reproductive, where the Hot Babe does not successfully embody transience, she must stand for destruction. For patriarchy woman is womb but the Hot Babe is wombless; she does not cook, she does not "love children." She is the much-vaunted machine that comes to replace the mother.

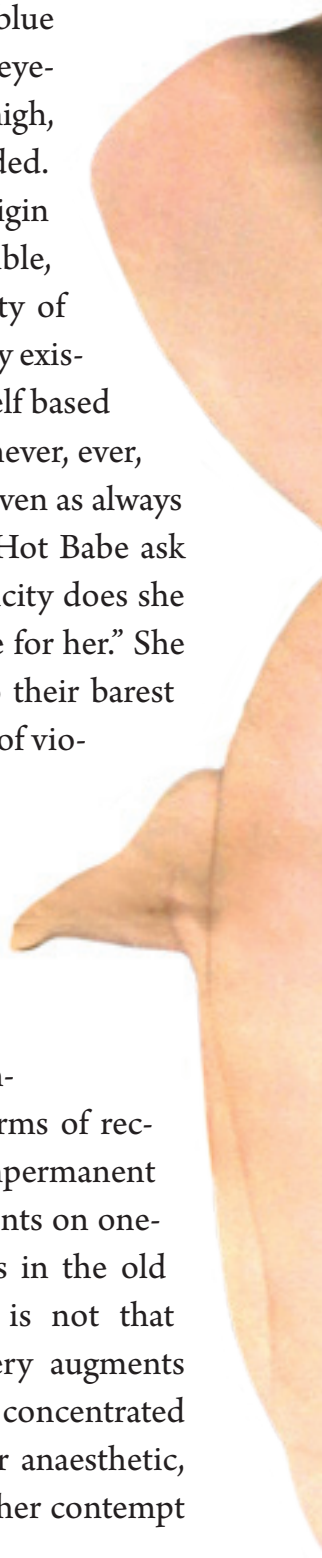
Yes, it could be that no new form of social organization will solve the problem of desire, the gap between desire and its object, the irreducible constitutive gap—but we can make some observations about how desire is put to work right now, about the surplus suffering, the surplus enjoyment presently extracted from desire. In personifying desire without assimilating it ("My boyfriends tell me I'm sexy but not sexual"—Paris Hilton), the Hot Babe *heroically* attempts to reconcile the imageless and unimaginable future with the desire for futurity.

The Hot Babe's actions appear as only the appearance of action; from the point of view of ideology, she "does nothing," though in fact she articulates the present state of desire—articulation, not as in speech but as in the movement of a joint. When she speaks, the Hot Babe's speech extends her silence.

Collectivity: connection must of necessity be joyful and mutually assured destruction. The Hot Babe is her own self-abolition.

To ascertain whether or not the Hot Babe has any interiority, you must penetrate her, although nothing is proved there either; you have to reach for Bataillean excesses, a blue eye winking from a pussy, an eyeball rolling in the gutter of a thigh, and the question is still undecided.

In her love's impossible origin all origins are rendered impossible, especially her own—the beauty of the Hot Babe, on which her very existence as such is founded, is itself based on this absolute ban: that she never, ever, fully requite the desire she is given as always already unrequited. Does the Hot Babe ask for love? No, nor in her specificity does she get it. It is not possible to "care for her." She pares sexual relations down to their barest bones and ends up with forms of violence; her laughter rings out in this reliquary, over the orgiastic clacking of bone on bone, and at this extreme, it is only her laughter that stands for "more life."



The Hot Babe will not answer questions of love; the forms of reconciliation she offers are impermanent and thin, like the two-story fronts on one-story houses in frontier towns in the old wilderness-defeating west. It is not that Photoshop or cosmetic surgery augments her, but that her "true" "self" is concentrated in these augmentations. Under anaesthetic, she dies and comes back with her contempt for life and death reinforced.

Her "I" is generalized; although appar-

ently totally individuated, without a shred of interest in collective life, the Hot Babe is always plural. The particular Hot Babe is always passing out of existence (age, weight gain, depression, death), only to be renewed in general, in another effectively identical body. When she says, "I", she means, regally, "we"—with this failing or achievement she launches her attack on ideological subjectivities; something opens up at the center, a bloodless wound, a point of contact. She will admit to no emotions beyond the automatic—"suffering" apparently leaves her as cold as "pleasure," but this is a tactical retreat: Why should she construct authentic being in her spare time to satisfy those who have deprived her of the conditions for it? The Hot Babe, thus hermetically self-vindicated, is a blank field on which you can read the inscription or instruction or warning, WOMAN—the crack in the present state of things.

And yet even this is not sufficient to describe her.

The counterpart to the slave who has flesh but no body (Wilderson), she has no flesh, only a body. Her body is not made of flesh: It is a collection of parts, a collage, a series of images. In her, functions of the flesh disappear and reappear as erotic or repulsive absurdities: two girls, one cup; 2 million girls, one body.

The Hot Babe is both universally available and entirely unattainable. She accepts love, hatred, envy, or jealousy without interest or comment: they have no meaning but nor are they fully meaningless; for the Hot Babe, surface and meaning are arranged horizontally on a flat and apparently infinite plane.

On the high street the plate-glass window is the perfect transparency through which the commodity appears in all its apparent availability. Plate glass, the closest thing to no barrier at all, appears as if it has already vanished. The commodity offers itself to you, through the glass. It is yours on condition that you do not take it, it is fully yours on condition that it is not yours. The hot babe is not commodity but the glass: "First you break the window, then you become it." No, the hot babe is not the glass but the moment of glass breaking, a splintering YES, a fracturing NO: "Whatever."

The commodity is "hot," permanently available; the commodity is "hot," stolen goods. The hotness of the Hot Babe is frozen, cold, zero degrees. The Hot Babe is the red cross marked on every door. ■

flower-draped body: "Nothing would hurt [her] soul more than the occurrence of violence" BALDEV—SYGMA

Temple of Womb

by KARTIK NAIR

India's mid-1970s state of emergency and its ghoulish "family planning camps" inadvertently spawned an uncontrollable technology of dissemination

ON OCTOBER 31, 1984, Indira Gandhi was shot and killed by her bodyguards, ending one of the most controversial careers in modern Indian politics. Today, Gandhi is remembered as the only woman to have served as Prime Minister. Less prominent is her role as the only Prime Minister to have suspended India's democratic process. On June 26, 1975, she imposed a state of emergency on the country, a 21-month period of exception in the world's largest democracy. Dissidents were jailed, the press was heavily censored, and the poor were subjected to violent developmentalist fantasies concocted by the political elite, including mass demolition drives and resettlements. Most nightmarishly, the Emergency featured a "voluntary" sterilization campaign, which offered the urban poor money, land, and trinkets in exchange for their fertility.

Eclipsed in memory by Indira Gandhi's bloody assassination and its aftermath, the mass violence of the Emergency has never figured prominently in histories of India. Its traumatic effects can still be traced, however, in a legacy of black-market video parlors and B-grade horror films. These remained an outgrowth of the grotesque visions of family planning and cinematic control enacted through state violence. A residue of the infrastructure for a new way of seeing stayed in place after the Emergency ended. Audiences

the state had created to imbibe propaganda now demanded more video, and the technologies deployed to teach them were repurposed to avoid the film censors' decency regulations." In this climate, the new genre of low-budget horror film resonated with dispossessed audiences, linking the Emergency "plan" with the era of unplanned emergence that followed.

Less than two weeks before Gandhi was killed, *Purana Mandir* ("Ancient Temple") by Shyam and Tulsi Ramsay opened in cinema halls in Delhi and Bombay. In *Purana Mandir,* a monster curses an aristocratic family: Every woman descended of this family will suffer a horrible death in the process of giving birth, her body doomed to lacerating, instantaneous implosion. Will the latest inheritor of the curse overcome it? How will she and her lover vanquish the monster? As audiences lined up to find out, *Purana Mandir* unexpectedly became one of the biggest hits of the 1980s and threatened to bring the traumatic moment of the Emergency back to the forefront of Indian life. But the film, its makers, and its audience are lost in the shadows of Bollywood's big-budget star-driven melodramas.

In the summer of 1975, faced with intensifying opposition from trade, student, and government unions—and the stench of a court conviction over electoral misconduct—Gandhi had a state of "internal emergency" declared. In middle-class memory, the next 21 months are recalled as that rare time in postcolonial India when the streets stayed clean and trains ran on time. It was the last gasp of truly centralized state control, the climax of Big Government, the paroxysm of the plan—with the poor at the receiving end.

Among the many technologies unveiled during the Emergency were "family planning camps" across India. Here, citizens (mostly lower class, mostly male) were encouraged, pressured, and often forced to undergo vasectomies. This coercion—the preferred term was "motivation"—occurred in more than one way: Sometimes whole villages were rounded up and hauled to these camps; other times, men were offered "gifts" in exchange for sterilization.

In cities, family planning dovetailed with slum demolition. The poor were promised plots of land if they agreed to move out of the slum and submit to "voluntary" sterilization. In the paper trail of official documents left behind by this black market, Emma Tarlo, in her *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of the Emergency in Delhi,* finds "documents in which 'family planning' is defined as 'sterilization' and 'sterilization' is defined as voluntary even before the person has begun to fill out the form. What we find in this small piece of paper is a fragment of the dominant Emergency narrative—a token of official family-planning euphemisms in action at a local level."

Families would vacate their slum dwellings, which would be razed by bulldozers roving the city. Fathers and young men from these families would enter makeshift tents to have their tubes tied up and leave with pieces of paper in hand. Often the very poor would sell these promissory notes to interested parties in exchange for cash once

outside the tent. It has been estimated that millions of men were drawn into this urban black market.

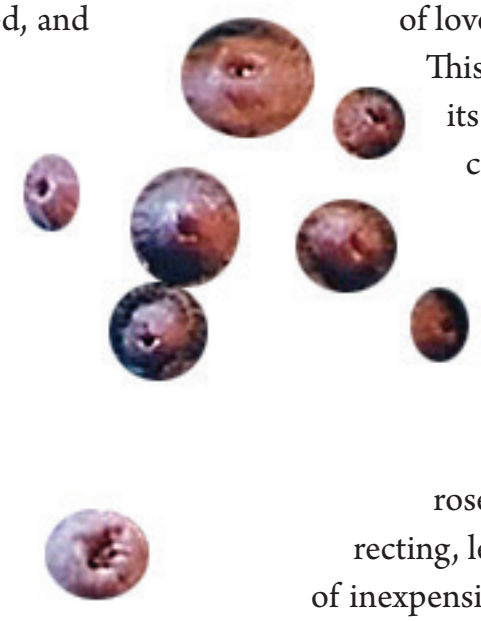
Meanwhile, different technologies were being operationalized for use on the rural poor. During the Emergency, the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (or SITE) began using satellite technology to disseminate rural-development programming to thousands of television sets in villages across the country. While television had been around since the late 1950s, the small number of terrestrial transmitters had limited the reach and range of TV signals to Delhi and its surroundings. SITE's success positioned television as a tool for uninterrupted mass schooling, literally and figuratively from above. Long after the Emergency, Gandhi's government was keen on furthering its pedagogic agenda; in the early 1980s, it championed the introduction of videocassette technology into the country as a cheap and easily reproducible medium through which to synchronize rural education. The state was the one to detonate the information bomb of the 1980s, but it couldn't control the force of the explosion or see past the smoke of its own grand plans.

The state was the one to detonate the information bomb, but it couldn't control the force of the explosion or see past the smoke

Consumer video became internationally available the same year as the declaration of emergency, 1975. Between then and 1982, when the Indian government loosened its restrictive trade regime, the first VCRs reached early adopters through the region's black-market network. They were status symbols, signaling affluence to one's guests and neighbors, and predictably sparked a middle-class rush for VCRs from whatever source possible. Eventually, local manufacturing would enable a domestic supply of machines at lower prices, but VCRs remained out of reach for the majority. For the poor there were video parlors, small rooms outfitted with a VCR, a projector and a screen, with 30 or 45 seats at two rupees a show. By some estimates, Bombay alone had 50,000 video parlors by 1985, all of them illegal.

India's mass market for video from its beginnings was a black market. VCRs and videocassettes were assembled using supplies smuggled from Southeast Asia or made by unlicensed local manufacturers. Video parlors, along with video vans, video coaches, video clubs, video coffeehouses, and video snack bars, operated in a zone unmapped by copyright law, censorship, municipal authorities, or the technocratic elite. The state had long administered its hostility to popular cinema by censoring films before exhibition and taxing them after. Video's contraband images irritated the state, which had officially introduced the technology into the

country but was now watching it unspool into a zone of untaxed, uncensored, and unmonitored sensation.



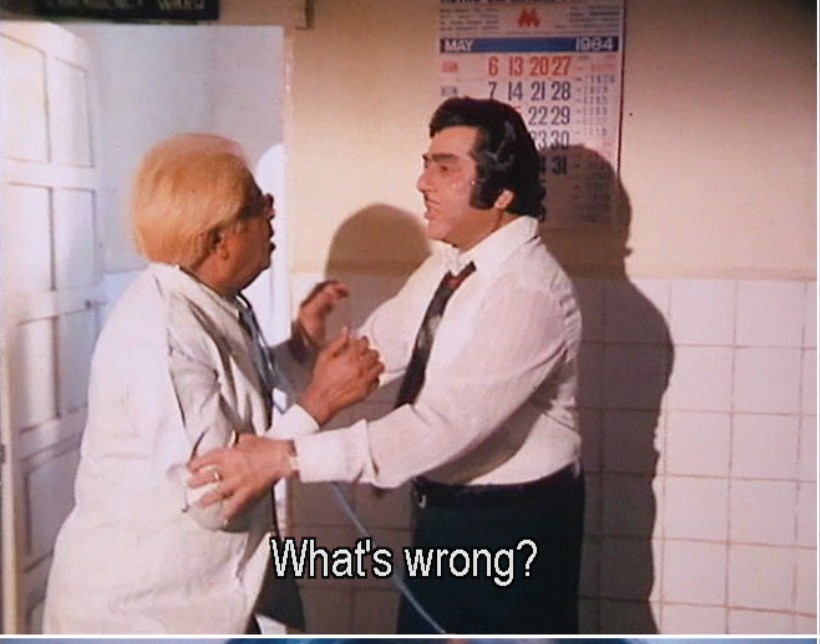
Neither, for that matter, did the cinema hall seem to be able to compete with the pleasures of the video parlor. In big cities, inflation and price gouging were driving audiences to video. In small towns, which had been at the bottom of the traditional film-distribution pyramid and were often years behind in the fare they screened, video parlors replaced movie theaters. In smaller villages still, video created audiences where theaters were yet to arrive. Video moved into India's temples, factories, restaurants, hotels, homes—and slums: at least 30 video parlors were sighted in Bombay's Dharavi slums in 1984.

Ordinances and amendments were enacted to manage the images, bodies and monies set into motion by video. Failing these measures, there was always the handy battery of police raids, assaults, and confiscations to try and maintain state control. But it was too late. Video had broken the state's monopoly over what, when, and how India consumed moving images, and cultivated a new appetite for unchecked cinematic sensation.

Almost as a reflex, the 1980s witnessed the rampant growth of B-grade cinema in the Bombay film industry. Action thrillers and horror films retailed sex and violence not usually associated with the idea of Bollywood and its song-and-dance melodramas of love, marriage, and family ritual. This was a B-cinema not only in its subject matter but also in the circuits it travelled, addressing the masses who were previously trapped within technocratic fantasies. The Ramsay brothers were pioneers of this B-cinema circuit—seven siblings who rose to prominence writing, directing, lensing, and financing a series of inexpensive horror films. In their biggest hit, the Ramsays took audiences back to an ancient curse—and the recent past—of unplanned families.

In *Purana Mandir,* the monster Samri is about to be executed by royal decree when he makes a makes a vow to return to life once again and curses the King's female heirs with horrible deaths incurred in childbirth. Centuries pass. The latest descendant in the royal line is an attractive girl of college age, Suman (Arti Gupta), in love with the strapping, poor Sanjay (Mohnish Bahl). The two can barely keep their hands off each other, which sets alarm bells ringing for Suman's father, the Thakur. At first he feigns objection to Sanjay's lower class status and his "*sheher key kisi naali*", his "in-a-city-sewer" origins. Failing to break them up, the Thakur reveals the *shraap,* or curse, that has followed their family.

In a pivotal moment in *Purana Mandir*, the Thakur revisits the horrific night of Suman's birth, flashing back to the hospital



where his wife has gone into labor. As he paces the hall outside the emergency ward, nurses and doctors come running out. Presumably horrified by what they have seen, they suggest the Thakur go have a look for himself. He discovers his wife in a state of postpartum pustulation, oozing warts and all. She lumbers out of the bed and towards him, then collapses and dies, leaving him a baby. This monstrous (double) birthing is the traumatic past of the film. But convinced that the curse is nothing they can't overcome or explain, Sanjay and Suman leave the city to return to the rural backwoods. Here, they encounter and overpower the living corpse of Samri; in short order, Sanjay burns the monster at the stake, the *shraap* is lifted, the couple is married, the film ends.

It ends! *Purana Mandir* doesn't close with the joyous birth of a child but with Suman's marriage to Sanjay. Strange, because the *shraap* never prevented the lovers from wedding in the first place. The curse presiding over Suman's womb is effectively revealed as a euphemism for the true horror: Sanjay's seed, which threatens to divert

the aristocratic bloodline into a city sewer. In displacing his agency from the realm of heterosexual productivity, *Purana Mandir* ventilates the Emergency-era imagination of the urban-underclass male as a figure of threatening virility that must be checked. In classic ideological fashion, the film gives him an action-hero narrative and a villain to emasculate. But it also confusingly recirculates the figure of the urban-underclass male as traumatized by the technologies of the Emergency.

The curse is utterly contemporary; right next to where it says "Emergency Ward" hangs a calendar. The flashback to monstrous birth is not remote: The year is 1984. In the years following the Emergency, the promises of land often came to naught for the men who had been sterilized; many were left childless and homeless, their futures emptied out. Once he has vanquished the monster, Sanjay gains a family. "I'm proud of you, my son," the Thakur sniffs, as he marries them off. *Purana Mandir* recovers the promise of spawn from the curse of sterility as it elliptically projects fertility beyond the end credits.

And proliferates off screen. So popular was *Purana Mandir* that it was diverted to the black market the week of its release. Police recovered copies in a raid on a video parlor in a Bombay slum, along with the rudimentary technology being used for exhibition. The film had already been certified "Adult" by the Central Board for Film Certification, so imagine the surprise of the police when they entered the parlor to find that "many children were seeing the film at the time of the raid." The state may be out to "save" our families, but the unsupervised child of the slum emerges alongside the unplanned copy of the film. Like the journey into the Emergency Ward, the raid on the Bombay video parlor uncovered a horrific scene of unseemly reproduction.

Purana Mandir was packing audiences into theaters and video parlors across the country when, four days later, Indira Gandhi was assassinated on her front lawn in Delhi. Tulsi Ramsay, the director of *Purana Mandir*, was in the city when it happened: "There was a hold on film exhibition. But on Friday the film resumed. By then the city was burning. But I was ignorant, I was happy with my success." *Purana Mandir* would end the year as the second-highest grossing film nationally, an accomplishment that barely figures as a footnote in '80s history. But in its onscreen and offscreen itineraries—its many virtual and material reproductions, its unplanned family—one can discern a perverse pulse for profusion at odds with the State's sterile imagination. ■

In the years following the Emergency, the promises of land often came to naught for the men who had been sterilized

Labor Pains

by SOPHIE LEWIS

When Western women rent other women's wombs to carry their children, it undermines the unifying potential of the reproductive commons

THERE WERE ONCE two New Jersey doctors named Stern, one of whom—a biochemist—lost his family to the Holocaust and desperately wished to procreate. But the other, his pediatrician wife, could not safely conceive. This, at least, is the scenario laid out in the 1989 ABC TV true-life docudrama, *Baby M*, a sensationalized recounting of the Sterns' employment of high school dropout Mary Beth Whitehead. In what is now called a traditional surrogacy agreement, Whitehead, a working-class woman from Brick Township, New Jersey, signed up to be the genetic mother of the Sterns' child.

Whitehead agreed to have her womb implanted with Dr. Bill Stern's sperm in 1986 to "give the gift of life" in exchange for $10,000 ($21,000 today, adjusted for inflation). She needed the money to keep her two pubescent children clothed and fed, as her husband's work as a garbage collector hardly constituted a "family wage."

The *M* in Baby M, the first surrogacy court case to thrill the nation, stood for Melissa, the name the Sterns gave to the baby. Whitehead, for her part, "kidnapped" the baby back shortly after birth and had the child baptized with a different name, Sara Whitehead.

The surrogate had absconded, had changed her mind about relinquishing Baby M, or S, to its IPs—"intended

parents" in surrogacy-industry lingo. Whitehead had resorted to cold-calling the Sterns with suicidal and infanticidal threats. Soon, there was a warrant out for her arrest, heralding a full-blown woman hunt. Whitehead and her husband's assets were frozen. The baby was counter-kidnapped—reappropriated—by the FBI, and after a years-long court battle, Whitehead got only very limited visitation rights.

These state interventions earned Whitehead considerable, albeit two-faced, support from the media. The French translation for the TV movie was *L'Instinct d'une mère* ("A Mother's Instinct"), a phrase that must have been particularly galling for the real-life Betsy Stern, whom the film depicts moping over a fully kitted-out bourgeois baby bedroom. Headlines included: HOUSEWIFE REJECTS $10,000, WANTS DAUGHTER INSTEAD (*Washington Post*); BABY M TESTS FIGHT BETWEEN LOVE AND LAW (*Sunday Times*); PLEA BY BABY M'S MOTHER IS RECALLED (*New York Times*); JUST WANTED MY CHILD, SURROGATE MOTHER SAYS (*Washington Post*); BIRTH CHANGED MY MIND, SAYS SURROGATE MOTHER (*Courier-Mail*); and GIVING UP BABY LIKE LOSING ARM (*Sydney Morning Herald*).

In *Baby M,* Mary Beth is shown learning about the idea of surrogacy from her TV screen. She hears a woman in an advertisement gushing: "There are people who walk on the moon or discover a cure for some disease or get elected to Congress. I can't do any of those things. But I am a woman. And I'm healthy. And I can carry a baby. That, right now, is more important than an IQ of 180."

By the time Mary Beth asks herself *for whom* she is working, it's too late: A job she cannot halt, nor sabotage without hurting herself, has been initiated.

FOR MARY BETH Whitehead in 1986, surrogacy had proved self-annihilating; the worker's relation to the fetus intensified through workplace rebellion. On screen, history's first notable commercial surrogate exceeded the gynophobic discipline of the witch hunt. Whitehead cannily deployed maternity's mystique of being more than a contract against the liberal patriarchy's judicial righteousness and invoked a necro-political kind of counterpower. At the melodramatic apex of *Baby M,* a shadowy Mary Beth whispers down the phone: "I gave her life. I can take her life away. That's what I'm going to do, Bill ... Why do you keep saying 'my', 'my', 'my', 'my'? She's *our baby*. *Say it*. *Our baby!*"

Whatever one may think of Whitehead as hammily fictionalized terrorist, her assertion of control over her living product deftly exposes the stakes of reproductive laborers' oppression. It is a grim political field in which babies are bargained or blackmailed with seeming inevitability. After all, for surrogates to withdraw labor, to suspend production is to kill. The life-or-death entanglements of conception, birth, and kinship are thus a partially unenclosed commons, a source of joy yet to be penetrated fully by the market, and the very building blocks of

private property and the work ethic.

But that commons is under assault. Today, surrogacies in the U.S. are managed by profitable "voluntary" clinic-agencies speaking the language of the "gift." The labor (no pun intended) that commercial surrogates perform in the U.S. is not legally recognized as work but as volunteerism, though surrogacies cost at least four times the 1986 sum—whether they be traditional, in which the surrogate is impregnated with a client's sperm, or, as is increasingly the case, gestational, in which an in-vitro-fertilized embryo is transferred to the surrogate's womb. Strict means-testing is used to assess a surrogate's independent wealth, purporting to check for authentic "voluntariness." This effectively bars working-class American women from entering surrogacy agreements. The U.S. surrogacy industry prefers to cast surrogacy as akin to basket-weaving or amateur pottery, not assembly-line factory work.

In India, the reverse is true. There are upwards of 3,500 so-called womb farms in the country, in which conscripted women offer the vital force of black flesh considered untouchable at home to incubate white children destined to be shipped back to Denmark, Israel, or the U.S. It's a "purely economic arrangement" with a "mere vessel," explains Dominic and Octavia Orchard of Oxfordshire, UK, a commissioning couple featured in the *Daily Mail* in 2012. To couples like these, surrogates are presented as transnational reproductive-service workers, their job description posted online and accompanied by detailed terms of service.

So forget the hysteric Mary Beth Whitehead! $10,000 to $50,000 now "buys" someone who is pretty, professionally inert, grateful for economic opportunity, stringently surveilled, and contractually guaranteed not to smoke, drink, or have sex with her (mandatory) husband—nor run around after her (mandatory) pre-existing kids—throughout the nine-month job. Unlike the traditional surrogate of yore who "gave up" the baby, the commercial gestational surrogate *biologically* abdicates claims to the child.

Blogs proliferate with personal surrogacy accounts, mostly couples, plus a few single fathers: Chai Baby, Baby Masala, She Wasn't the Mother, She was Just the Stork, Our Journey to India, and so on. A gay couple in Seattle tweeted a montaged video of their journey to Delhi to meet their newborn twins, in which the birth mother was neither figured nor alluded to. The Switzers, a middle-class Texas couple in the documentary *Made in India* (Haimowitz and Sinha, 2010), receive a sonogram by email and erupt in tearful jubilation.

Made in India makes much of the charmingly ingenuous, veiled, illiterate Aasia, a prospective slum surrogate, who initially laughs at the Switzers' proxy proposition, perhaps because, as in most Indian surrogacy contracts, the money her body's fertility would earn her ($7,000) would in fact keep her at the poverty line in the medium term. But her breathless discovery of science's miracles form part of her accession to self-responsible entrepreneurship and neoliberal subjectivity. "I didn't believe … ! A child without …

[back-and-forth hand gestures] *a man!?* How could a child be conceived…?" The subtitles for Aasia's speech convey her profound happiness at the opportunity to sacrifice for her *own* children's better tomorrow—the same motive Whitehead had.

A notable number of surrogates cite their own kids as their direct motivation for entering surrogacy agreements. In what Silvia Federici has dubbed the new international division of labor, we thus find reproductive labor *within* reproductive labor, kids born under multimillion-dollar medical scrutiny so that other kids, born as a populational "surplus," may barely live.

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL division of labor describes the redistribution of reproductive work that has divided potential gendered allies by conscripting migrant and subaltern classes of women in the service of metropolitan, citizen, and bourgeois women.

Assistive reproductive work as it's regulated today appears to be not only outside women's control but actively corrosive to the possibility of surrogate mother–midwife solidarity: Each role becomes professionalized and narrowed, precluding alliances and shared responsibilities that undergird gender as a form of class-consciousness. The redistribution of baby-carrying creates new and deeper divisions among women, strengthening hierarchies inherent to the original sexual division of labor.

The divisiveness of surrogacy is masked with social tropes lauding the entrepreneurial "creativity" of the practice as nothing less than a sisterly form of practiced feminism. In the U.S., surrogates can rate in online forums the experience of commercially gestating a particular individual's sperm (or given couple's zygote). *Can you recommend acting as "surro-mama" to the Duchamps, or can't you? What was donor so-and-so's sperm like, how did the child turn out?* Yet marketized in this way, all gestators become strangely *un*-creative: discursively degraded as undifferentiated or machinic. Be it one womb or another that is fed with a given informational blueprint, the industry assures customers that the result will be the same.

The surrogacy industry in the West trades on a well-worn and powerfully gendering dyad, the idea of "doing it for love" rather than "for money." For example, the Center for Surrogate Parenting showcases videos of "Breena, Maine" or "Rebecca, California" insisting beatifically that "I enjoy being pregnant." "It's a calling in life." "I feel blessed that as a couple you would trust me to take care of something so precious," and so on. But most tellingly, the script now emphasizes: *"I'm not giving anything away*: I'm giving something *back* that they were so gracious as to allow me to spend nine months

For surrogates to withdraw labor, to suspend production, after all, is to kill

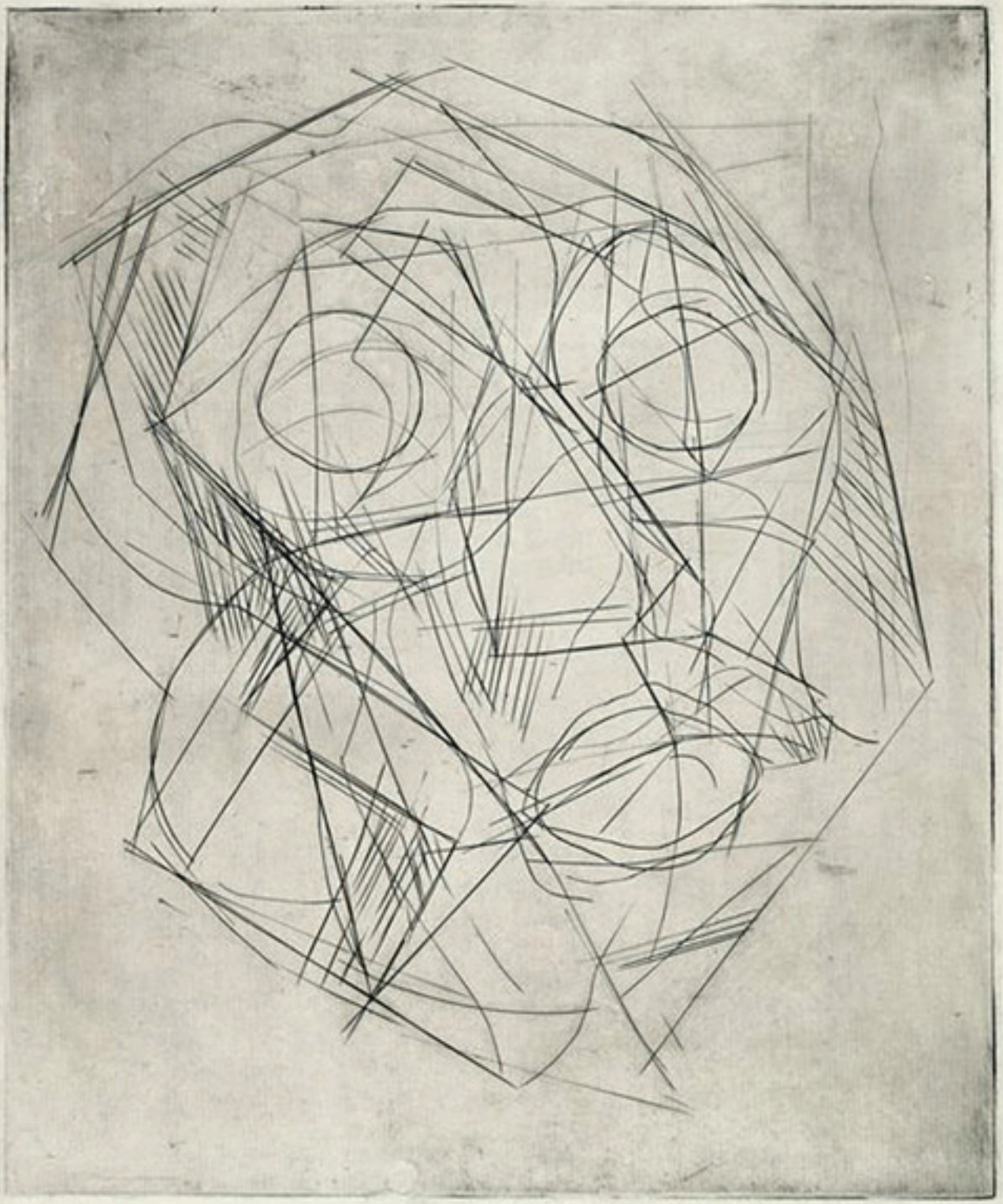
with." For love, not money, then, insofar as it's Breena instead of Aasia.

Yet at the same time, this is love cocooned in a contract and so, it whispers reassuringly, it operates for money, too—not love. Surrogacy breaks those boundaries entirely, commoditizing affective labor that formerly belonged to the commons, and rendering real love—particularly between women separated by social class and geography—all but impossible.

Sadly, the "reproductive commons from below"—the revolutionary collective reclamation of life's labors to which Federici calls us—cannot be announced and sustained simply through the recognition of a tiny singularity in the fetus, or through the mere *belief* that a utopian nonpossessive web of nurture ought to spring up spontaneously around it. The truth was that the Sterns and Whiteheads would not freely associate after the birth. They could not agree on who it was they were even fighting for. And outsourcing gestation across oceans makes any sort of continual association over a child near impossible.

JUST AS "WAGES for housework" is a struggle against both housework and the wage relation, disobedient surrogacy implies the valuation of the vital embodied processes of child bearing and then, necessarily, a revolt against value itself. In *Baby M,* Whitehead's words—"That's what I'm going to do, Bill"—open the question of whether well-worn labor strategies of striking and organizing can be transposed from the office or factory floor to the maternity ward or the newborn's body. In forcing the father to say "our" instead of "my," the surrogate confronts the proprietary character of the haloed liberal nuclear family with the idea of a reproductive commons from below.

Because women's bodies *are* squatted by biocapital in fetal form, women's struggles for freedom will, heartbreakingly, come into conflict with the lives of infants, as they did in *Baby M*. While Shulamith Firestone saw the oppression of women and children as linked and analogous, it is worth reflecting, too, on her decisive pessimism about the gendered reproductive condition as a whole—that is, the social arrangement of pregnancy, vis-à-vis our hopes for authentic feminist emancipation. In an age of assisted reproductive technology, Firestone's call for the universalization of randomized test-tube gestations is too swiftly mocked by modern feminists. With the feminism of the familial sitting stagnant, it's time to ask ourselves what a commercial surrogate strike would look like. ■



Prescription Strike

by AYESHA A. SIDDIQI

The CIA's use of vaccine programs as cover for covert operations in Pakistan has endangered aid workers and undermined the fight against polio

"We went into a camp to inoculate some children. We left the camp after we had inoculated the children for polio, and this old man came running after us and he was crying. He couldn't see. We went back there, and they had come and hacked off every inoculated arm. There they were in a pile. A pile of little arms. And I remember ... I ... I ... I cried, I wept like some grandmother. I wanted to tear my teeth out; I didn't know what I wanted to do! And I want to remember it. I never want to forget it ... I never want to forget. And then I realized... like I was shot... like I was shot with a diamond ... a diamond bullet right through my forehead. And I thought, my God... the genius of that! The genius! The will to do that! Perfect, genuine, complete, crystalline, pure. And then I realized they were stronger than we, because they could stand that these were not monsters, these were men ..."

—Walter E. Kurtz, *Apocalypse Now*

THE FATAL ATTACKS on health workers vaccinating against polio push the limits of even the most ungenerous vision of a "barbaric" Pakistan. Understandably provoking disgust and awe, headlines announcing the murders reinforce faith in the sound judgment of Western intervention.

But you would have to be an almost quaintly classic racist to believe these attacks are simply the violence inherent to brown men with long beards rather than the product of a specific set of circumstances. With the discovery of a covert CIA war operating behind their back, rural Pakistanis are

increasingly wary of any kind of Western presence, including medicine. The real threat to Pakistan's anti-polio campaign is a lack of immunity to the War on Terror.

There was a time when Pakistan's mission to eradicate polio was thriving. In 2007, opposition to the vaccine declined in western Pakistan, home to the highest rates of polio. That year, a government-coordinated campaign, working with local religious leaders to inform locals about the vaccine, reached more than 30 million children. Compared with the 2006 immunization, recorded refusals were down almost 20 percent in North-West Frontier province. And in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), nearly 50 percent of parents who had initially refused the vaccine opted to allow it.

Now, vaccine refusal is once again chronically high. For rural regions already skeptical of outsiders offering free medicine, U.S. foreign policy shrouds Western aid in suspicion. America is engaged in one war in Afghanistan, one in Iraq, and in a drone war in Pakistan. It regularly threatens a war in Iran and is home to a network of Islamophobia so potent, it inspired a massacre in Norway. It isn't so surprising, then, that medicine even tangentially related to the U.S. is often assumed to be yet another American effort to kill Muslims.

At a recent conference on "Polio eradication in the light of Islam" hosted by the International Islamic University, Islamabad, and designed to dispel anxiety over the vaccine, scholar Samiul Haq told the crowd, "People of Pakistan, especially in the KP [Khyber Pakhtunkhwa] and tribal areas, assume that there must be some hidden interest of the West in the polio campaign because it is killing us through the drones and … giving us the vaccine on the pretext of eradicating polio."

Both the vaccinations and the drones are foreign intrusions, and the violence of the latter undermines faith in the former. Last summer, Mullah Nazir, a Taliban commander in South Waziristan famous for signing a peace pact with the Pakistani military, issued a pamphlet declaring, "Polio and other foreign-funded vaccination drives in Wana subdivision will not be allowed until U.S. drone operations in the agency are stopped." The pamphlet cited 2011's CIA fake vaccination plot as evidence that "infidel forces are using media, education, and development as a tool to gag Muslims." Many other Taliban Shuras, or councils, issued similar bans on anti-polio programs conditioned on the end of drone strikes. The pamphlet stated, "In the garb of these vaccination campaigns, the U.S. and its allies are running their spying networks in FATA which has brought death and destruction on them in the form of drone strikes." In January, a drone strike killed Mullah Nazir.

Both the World Health Organization and the United Nations have halted vaccine campaigns after a series of fatal attacks on volunteers. Killed under suspicion of being covert operatives for the U.S., they're victims of a precedent set by the CIA.

The vaccination plot Nazir referenced in his pamphlet was an intelligence-gathering mission under the guise of a hepatitis B

vaccine campaign that ended up being neither. In the poorer part of Abbottabad, children were given only one of the required three doses before workers were directed to move closer to Osama bin Laden's compound. At this point the CIA already knew Osama bin Laden's whereabouts but wanted to confirm his DNA. If and how the CIA managed to procure DNA samples through the administration of vaccines isn't clear.

The CIA mission for bin Laden used Pakistani faces at every level of the plot except the actual kill. Shakil Afridi, a health official in the tribal area bordering Afghanistan, was paid to spearhead the hoax. He spread word of the campaign with posters advertising a Pakistani medicine manufacturer. He bought the cooperation of local government health workers. He trained Pakistani nurses to administer the vaccines. These nurses promptly lost their jobs after Pakistan's investigation into the Osama bin Laden raid revealed the hoax. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said that Afridi "was not in any way doing anything that would have undermined Pakistan." After all, Pakistanis have never been a priority in America's war on terror; they're the collateral damage.

The U.S., desperate for closure, celebrated the death that supposedly justified two wars, and the Pakistani government bristled at yet another unilateral U.S. mission conducted without Pakistan's consent or knowledge. To convict Afridi of treason would have meant calling the U.S. the enemy. Instead, Afridi was quietly charged under a tribal code for providing supplies to the militant group Lashkar-e-Islam. Secret proceedings found him guilty, and the U.S. Senate responded by cutting $33 million in aid to Pakistan—$1 million for every year of Afridi's sentence.

U.S. Congressman Dana Rohrabacher introduced a bipartisan resolution in the House of Representatives to declare Afridi a hero, saying, "he paid a terrible price at the hands of our so-called allies—the Pakistani government." Afridi became proof of everything Americans suspected about Pakistan's loyalty and everything Pakistanis suspected about America's honesty.

THE FALLOUT HAS been ongoing. More than 30 health workers have died trying to administer polio vaccines in Pakistan since the CIA's field trip into Abbottabad.

Javed Akhter is the executive director of Support With Working Solutions (SWWS), a Pakistani aid group dedicated to improving conditions for women and the poor. In January, his team of seven was shot down on their way back from working in Sher Afzal Banda, a village in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where SWWS had built a clinic and a school. SWWS had been a presence in the region since 2010, and their list of successful social, economic, and educational projects is formidable. When I asked Akhter if he thought the attack was precipitated by the CIA's covert war, he said "Yes, absolutely."

In Pakistan, America's War on Terror isn't an abstraction for stump speeches, but a deadly reality. In the FATA province health workers find themselves in an undeclared war zone, one between "the Pakistan army, CIA, and

over a dozen militant groups (some of which are at odds with one another)," says Middle East Institute scholar Arif Rafiq. "There is the fundamental absence of trust. Suspected CIA and ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence, Pakistan's intlligence service] spies are executed in the streets."

The paranoia isn't unwarranted. In January 2011 CIA contractor Raymond Davis killed two allegedly armed Pakistani men in Lahore. When he phoned for backup, the American Consulate sent an SUV that then sped the wrong way down a one-way street, killed another Pakistani man, and drove off.

Immediately preceding the capture of Osama bin Laden, the Davis scandal confirmed what many Pakistanis were afraid of: that the U.S. had filled the country with covert operatives for dubious reasons, and they didn't care if Pakistanis died. Pakistan's alliance with the U.S. has meant tolerating a proxy war within its borders. Simultaneously, U.S. politicians and pundits have voiced constant skepticism about Pakistan's status as an ally. It's tempting to think America's misgivings about Pakistan are at least partially rooted in the knowledge no other country would accede to such a relationship without resistance.

When Pakistan was founded in 1947, tribes in the region now known as the FATA province pledged loyalty to the state on the condition that they would maintain their autonomy. "The Pakistan army entered the area for the first time ever after 9/11, under the pretext of combating al-Qaeda," Rafiq explains. "The traditional system governing FATA was reliant on tribal leaders. It has been obliterated by over a decade of conflict. FATA is in disarray. Hundreds of thousands of locals in FATA have been displaced by conflict. Some have fled to nearby districts or have migrated all the way south to Karachi."

Rafiq goes on to say that "attacks on polio workers have risen after former CIA director Leon Panetta admitted on *60 Minutes* in January 2012 that Dr. Shakil Afridi worked for the agency … These attacks take place in Pashtun-populated areas throughout the country, and so it is in the context of the war on terror in which these workers are targeted."

The stateside reports on the mounting deaths of health workers provide the number killed, with the cursory reference to the Taliban

or local militants as likely perpetrators, and Western readers shake their heads in contempt. But what could the shadowed violence of a U.S. presence in Pakistan encourage besides more chaos, more violence? The attitude that Pakistani lives are expendable—Obama has yet to apologize for the hundreds of children killed by drone strikes—leaves Pakistanis resisting with the only targets available to them: health workers that symbolize Western money.

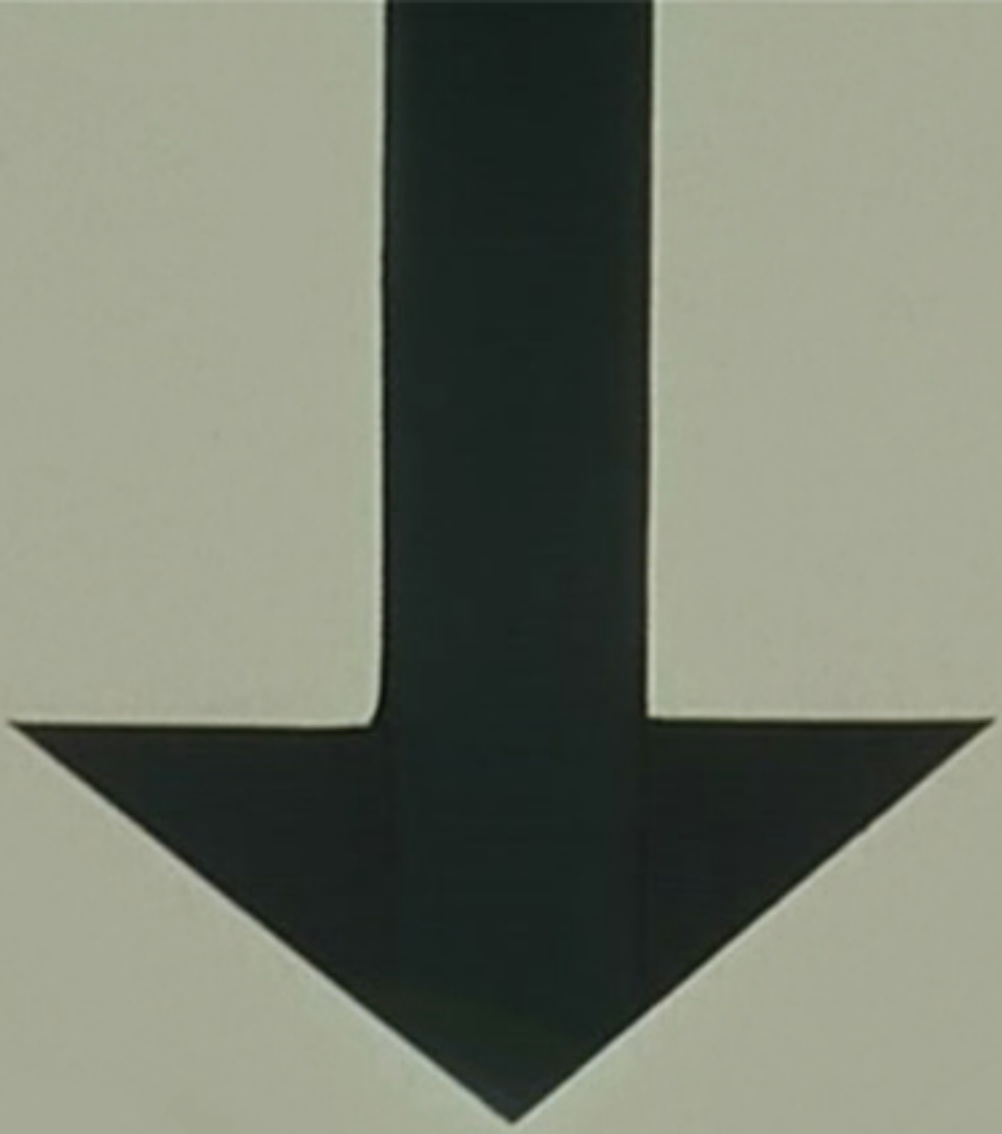
Each of the three countries left with endemic polio—Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Nigeria—endure sustained U.S. involvement. For each, security is the top challenge to humanitarian aid, and for each, myths about the goals of polio vaccines persist.

Chief among these myths is the idea of vaccines as a method of sterilization. Belief in such a conspiracy is encouraged by the U.N.'s keen and vocal interest in slowing Pakistan's population growth, expressed most recently in *Capturing the Demographic Dividend in Pakistan,* a book launched last month at an event organized by the U.N. Population Fund. As much as Pakistani health workers try to convince families of the vaccine's benefits, their efforts are undermined by the perception that the program may be U.S. funded. NGOs are often viewed as nothing more than support infrastructure for foreign agents.

In Pakistan, NGOs are often viewed as nothing more than support infrastructure for foreign agents

The skepticism and fear exhibited in Pakistan's autonomous areas are understandable for a region that found itself the unwitting host of a foreign war. Families refusing vaccines logically conclude that a country launching drones with one hand can't be trusted to offer aid with the other. President George W. Bush has said, "You're either with us or against us." Rural Pakistanis can do little else but acknowledge they are *not* us and want nothing to do with us.

Identity is the primary resource in a war against an idea. The distrust "they" in Pakistan have for "us" reflects the distrust "we" have for "them." How many drone attacks, CIA scandals, and covert operations does it take to cast vaccine workers as foreign threats? How many terrorist attacks did it take to warrant the search of every brown man at the airport, the spying on Muslim Americans, the launching of two separate wars? We conflate large swaths of Asia into a single Muslim enemy that lurks in deserts and caves; we retroactively label every "military age" male killed by drone a militant. They conflate all Western initiatives into a single operation bent on their demise, every health worker a potential spy. Meanwhile, Pakistani children die of polio and Americans ask, "Why do Pakistanis hate us? We're only trying to save them." ■



Selling Roots

by ELLIOT AGUILAR

Can DNA tests really tell us anything about our ethnic identity?

IN A SHORT film on the website of African Ancestry, a "genetic genealogy" company that targets a primarily African-American clientele, actors respond to a series of questions asked by an off-screen narrator. In these staged man-on-the-street interviews, we meet a fair-skinned white woman stretching before a run, a Latino man sawing wood at a carpentry bench, and an African-American barber, among a handful of others. Asked where they're from, the characters answer with the cities and states in which they were born. Then the narrator asks about their deeper origins: "But what about your family, your ancestors—where are *they* from?" "They're from Ireland," the white woman offers perkily. The Latino man explains that his relatives are Mexican. Another man tells us that his family is "mostly from India." The black characters, however, are vexed by the question. Most make diffident admissions of ignorance. The desultory answer of a school-age boy: "Somewhere in Africa, I guess."

African Ancestry, which provides mitochondrial and Y-chromosome DNA tests that provide information about maternal and paternal lines of descent, respectively, claims to have "freed" more than 30,000 families with the results of these tests. Among the numerous advertised benefits are the opportunities to finally learn which country in Africa your family "comes from" and to

establish "a cultural identity for you and your kids." The insinuation is that because of slavery, blacks know less about their ancestors. Yet few people of any race know much about their forebears. It's unlikely, for example, that the "Irish" girl in the video would be able to name a single ancestor from Ireland. Never mind: If she could, the company suggests, she would be saying something important—something fundamental—about herself. And so the video's deeper implication is that we can answer the complex, emotional question of personal and ethnic identity—*who am I*—with an empirical test describing who our ancestors are.

This, at least, is the information the tests appear to give. What they actually provide is something far more limited: the speculative origin of only a small portion of our genetic material. It is the nature of genealogies, after all, to continually branch—that is the very reason we refer to them as family "trees." As you count your forebears further back in time, the number doubles at each generation: You have two parents who each had two parents and so on. Go back 10 generations (roughly the year 500 B.C.) and the number of your ancestors is larger than the population of the planet. One fact reins in this exponential growth. Further in the past, the world's population was smaller. Because the number of our ancestors can't exceed the number of people who have ever lived, some individuals make multiple appearances in our family trees. And those individuals must also appear in everyone else's family trees. It is as though each of us is a fisherman casting his net into a sea of ancestors, dragging in however many grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on. As long as the sea is large, it isn't likely that any two fisherman's nets will become entangled. But as we travel further back in time to more remote ancestors, the sea dries up until all that is left is a small pool, narrower than the breadth of each net. Now every fisherman is casting into the same pool, dragging up the same ancestors. What's more, that sea dries up rather quickly. In fact, there is likely a point in time within the past 10,000 years when some fraction of the population comprised the ancestors of everyone alive today, and the remaining fraction left no descendants in the present. Go back far enough, and all our family trees completely overlap.

Yet even though we all have the same ancestors if you reach deep enough into the past—even though the story our DNA tells is ultimately one of inclusion—genealogies tend to get used as a means of creating exclusive group identities, for example by demonstrating a connection to a single individual or tribe. These group identities presume a level of similarity among the members. We can learn something about ourselves, the thinking goes, by identifying the group we belong to. But what we really learn from genealogies is that there is no such group. Our genomes are made of long strings of molecules tangled into structures called chromosomes. They are physical objects that take up space, that can be weighed. They are finite. There is only so much room in a genome for the contributions of all our ancestors. The further back

we go in time, the less any single one of our ancestors is likely to have contributed to our genomes. What's more, the genetic contribution a single ancestor has made to any one of us will vary widely.

A true accounting of our genealogy, then, would record not only all of our ancestors but what genetic material, if any, we've inherited from each of them. While this is impossible for the whole genome, some forms of DNA are special. Unlike the rest of our genome that resides in the nucleus of every cell, mitochondrial DNA is held in the mitochondria, the organelles that provide energy for the cell. When sperm and egg join at fertilization, the sperm's mitochondria are chemically tagged for destruction. As a result, you inherit this form of DNA only from your mother, who received it from her mother and so on. Similarly, the Y-chromosome, which is found only in men, is inherited exclusively from the father.

Thanks to the sex-specific inheritance of these parts of the genome, we can learn more readily about the matrilineal and patrilineal lines of our ancestry than any other lines. Because of this, these lines represent "privileged" lines of ancestry in modern gene-based genealogical research. Yet they are only two of the vast number that exist. Consider, for example, your mother's father's mother's father's mother's line: Who knows what influence this great-great-great-grandmother may have had on who you are today?

Giving priority to particular lineages in our ancestry is nothing new. Surnames similarly privilege a specific line of ancestors, and for many, the inheritance of wealth and status along these lines has been significant in determining the circumstances of their lives. These privileged lines are also a primary basis for constructing individual or national identities, as the African Ancestry video suggests. But simply because we've singled them out doesn't mean they bear particularly more weight. A child may carry her father's surname, but it is unlikely that she considers herself any less her mother's daughter.

H.L. MENCKEN ONCE wrote that the "quasi-science of genealogy" was "directed almost exclusively toward the establishing of aristocratic descents for nobodies." Across the pond, genetic-ancestry companies seem happy to provide just this service. A trio of related companies, BritainsDNA™, ScotlandsDNA™, and IrelandsDNA™, founded by the historian Allistair Moffat under the scientific direction of Jim Wilson, a geneticist at the University of Edinburgh, aims to achieve "a new understanding of … a people's history." To date, they've been better known for discovering exotic genealogical connections. In 2012 they reported that actor Tom Conti was a relative of Napoleon Bonaparte. Later Moffat claimed to have identified British descendants of the Queen of Sheba. In the 2013 televised documentary *Meet the Izzards,* comedian Eddie Izzard was told that he is a descendant of Viking invaders to the British Isles.

But there are no genes that uniquely identify specific populations of humans. The most we can do is locate certain variants of

genes that are more or less common, or even absent, in groups that have historically interbred very little. When two populations show similar frequencies for variants of a gene, it might reasonably be inferred that there has been interbreeding between those populations at some point.

If we observe a gene variant in a population, and we know from recorded history that this population was once invaded by another group of people among whom that gene variant is very common, we might infer that this variant entered the population in numbers with the invaders. The more samples we have, the stronger we can make these kinds of claims. While the prevalence of genetic similarities between populations is reasonable evidence for historical connections, telling any one person the story of *how* they inherited particular genes is nearly impossible. What looks like Viking ancestry may as well be a forgotten Norwegian great-great-grandfather.

My own family history offers an example. In 1574, amid the Wars of Religion, a Huguenot nobleman named Frederic de la Tranche, "finding he must renounce either his conscience or his station," fled war-ravaged France for the relative safety of Protestant England. He settled in Northumberland, where over time his descendants—with the anglicized surname of Trench—rose to "the highest rank among the noblest in their land of adoption." I was born in Brooklyn some 400 years later, to a father who had emigrated from Belize and a mother whose parents had emigrated from Belize and Suriname. My family's immediate roots are in colonial backwaters—tranquil, obscure places far from the clamor of European history. But my maternal grandmother was born a Tranch. Her father, born in 1895 in a far-flung corner of the British Empire, was a patrilineal descendant of pious Frederic. We have almost nothing in common, but a not-so-winding genealogical path leads you directly from Monsieur de la Tranche to me.

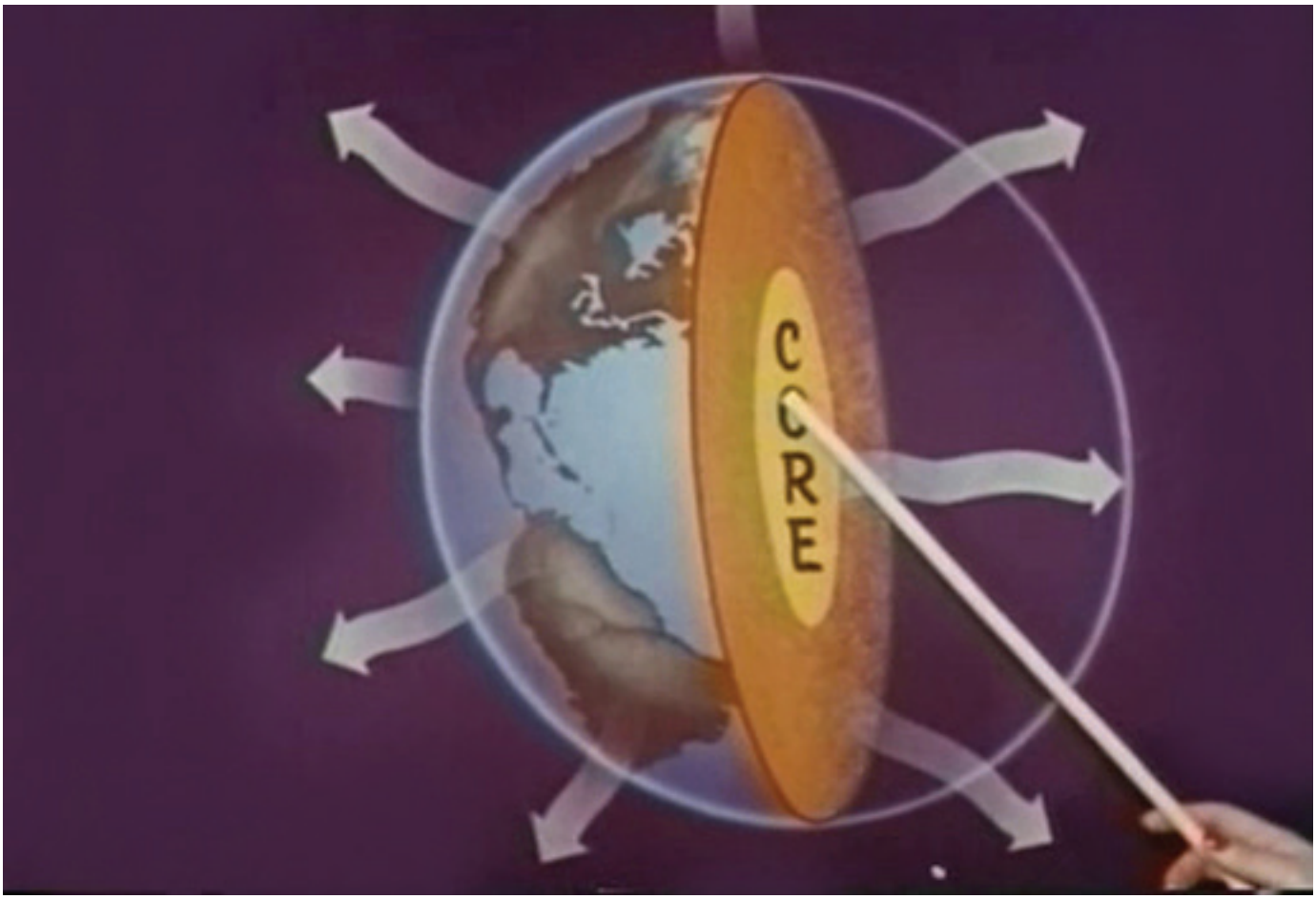
All of us have similarly improbable ancestors. The Vikings who pillaged Britain shared ancestors in common with today's Khoisan of the Kalahari. The young black boy in the African Ancestry ad has ancestors who were peasants in Roman Gaul. The branches of all our family trees eventually tangle.

Yet genealogies as we imagine them tell us something like the opposite. They confirm our fantasies of tribal identity, promising a relation to particular individuals who have somehow bestowed upon us through the ages the attributes which set us apart from others. These imagined clans have little basis in reality, and like the mythic genealogies once drawn for ancient kings, they are not intended to accurately represent history. To the extent that any of us belong to racial or cultural groups, these are transient identifications. Migration, the happenstance of history, and the gene shuffling of sexual reproduction will create new groups, new peoples, just as has been the case for the past 200,000 of our species.

In *DNA USA*, a recent book by Brian Sykes, the founder of Oxford Ancestors™ and a geneticist, the author relates the

story of a disgruntled customer who contested the results of a test he'd ordered. The man's Y-chromosome haplotype indicated supposed "Viking" ancestry. The customer, on the other hand, was sure he was a Celt, due to his dark hair and small stature. He insisted that the results were wrong and demanded his money back. After some discussion, Sykes finally relented. "DNA always struggles to reverse the deepest of psychological perceptions or identity associations," he explains.

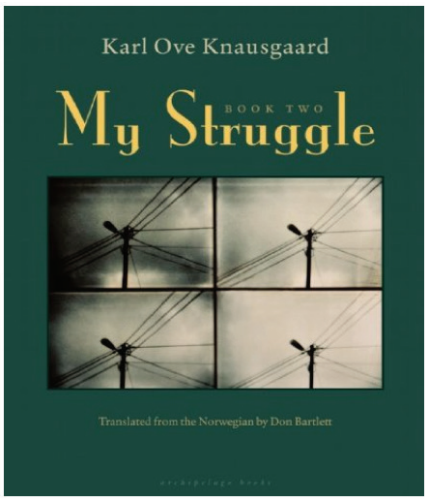
Sykes is right to note that there is often a clash between genetic evidence and what people desire that evidence to reveal. But he might also have told the customer that the man is neither a Viking nor a Celt but a resident of the British Isles whose ancestry is includes all kinds of people who arrived there in the past. He might have made clearer the difficulty of connecting genetic sequences to the linguistic or cultural groups we've identified in history. We inherit genes, not identities. Culture is not contained in the double helix but arises from our interactions with others. If we want to know who we really are we'll have to look beyond our chromosomes to the company we keep. ■



Fjordian Slip

By JW MCCORMACK

The second volume of Karl Ove Knausgård's epic exploration of the everyday, in all its glorious meaninglessness



Karl Ove Knausgård
My Struggle: Book Two
Archipelago

WARNING: ANY CONCLUSIONS that follow are premature. That's because it is currently only possible for English-language readers, along with most of the non-Nordic world, to enjoy a maximum of 1,003 pages of Karl Ove Knausgård's six-volume novel *My Struggle*—and yet, after finishing the second installment of Don Bartlett's translation from the Norwegian, I am very close to believing that the complete work will not only match sales in Norway, where the total copies sold equal a tenth of the population, but also become the sort of thing you see old people reading on the subway, freshmen using to bookend their dorm-room shelves, and house husbands discussing at the laundromat. Should this come to pass, Knausgård would not only become one of the most famous Norwegians in history—joining the Asgard of Hamsun, Munch, and the man who discovered leprosy—but, given the confessional nature of his project, one of the individuals we know the most about overall, certainly more than any other living author, quite possibly more than we know about our parents' childhoods, the inner lives of our friends, the day-to-day of our husbands and wives.

If by some chance I happen to be in

the ballpark regarding *My Struggle*'s unusual crossover potential, a big part of its appeal will rest upon Knausgård's willingness to do many things one is not supposed to do, among them write long prosaic sentences, emphasize commonplace objects and unremarkable events from the existence of a not-untypical middle-aged writer, and name his book after Hitler's. And yet the "controversy" mentioned in every account of *My Struggle*'s original reception appears to have more to do with a frank exhibitionism that is at odds with Norwegian standards of privacy but which, given the ubiquity of reality television and tell-all memoir in the States, hardly strikes an American reader as scandalous. What's more provocative is the *form* this autobiography takes, a mélange of personal essay, first-rate storytelling, and compulsive philosophy that winds up feeling truer and more artful, if you can believe it, than even the finest these capacious genres have to offer. Nor does this tension between the banal and sublime elude Knausgård, who throughout *My Struggle*'s second book returns to artifice's role in shaping a consensual reality. It's not always an uplifting thought. Norway may enjoy a high standard of living, but the other side of social harmony is stultifying gridlock—and what, Knausgård seems to wonder, is the point of producing art if we're all feeding from the same trough?

> We have access not only to our own lives but to almost all the other lives in our cultural circle, access not only to our own memories but to the memories of the whole of our damn culture, for I am you and you are everyone, we come from the same and are going to the same, and on the way we hear the same on the radio, see the same on TV, read the same in the press … Even if you sit in a tiny town hundreds of kilometers from the center of the world and don't meet a single soul, their hell is your hell, their heaven is your heaven, you have to burst the balloon that is the world and let everything in it spill over the sides.

There is much spillage in this second volume, even compared with the first, which effectively consisted of two extended set pieces bookended in youth and death: first, a formative New Year's party from the author's youth in the country and then his coming to terms, as an adult, with his father's death from alcoholism. It's harder to bind the content of *Book Two* to any given theme, though it is subtitled *A Man in Love* and spans roughly the period of six years during which Karl Ove meets his second wife, a poet named Linda, relocates to Stockholm, has two children, writes his second novel (*A Time For Everything*), and retreats to the smaller city of Malmö. But each milestone is embedded in dozens of episodes—a children's birthday party, occasional brushes with a cranky Russian woman who lives in the same building—so commonplace that I hesitate to even call them scenes. Here, swathed in rumination, speculation, and conversation, much of which is with Karl Ove's intellectual friend Geir, these minor incidents add up to something unlike a book and more like a hypnotically sustained feeling: a sprawling sleepwalk that takes us deeper the more it creeps into the borders of Karl Ove's consciousness.

Perhaps naturally for a writer, who is obliged to give a great deal of thought to what he does and does not aspire to, Knausgård's characteristically lucid insights often emerge out of aesthetic judgments. He also seems to be taking instruction, as much of what he says of Monet or Dostoevsky can be said of *My Struggle*. In the sparse domestic dramas of Ibsen (somehow neglected in my earlier list of famous Norsemen), he observes that "a kind of boundlessness arose, something wild and reckless. Into it disappeared plot and space, what was left was emotion … the very nucleus of life, and thus you found yourself in a place where it no longer mattered what was actually happening." He praises Tartovsky's films with their all-seeing eye

> which changed the world into a kind of terrarium, where everything trickled and ran, floated and drifted, where all the characters could melt away from the picture and only coffee cups on a table were left, filling slowly with the falling rain, against a backdrop of intense, almost menacing green vegetation, yes—then the eye would also be able to see the same wild, existential depths unfold in everyday life.

Most of all, Karl Ove returns to painting, art without words, "an area that was completely devoid of intelligence, which I had difficulty acknowledging or accepting, yet which perhaps was the most important single element of what I wanted to do." The novelist's usual pathways into our sympathies seem closed off for the late-30s Knausgård, though this realization does not come without some self-admonishment. "So why not just write fiction?" he wonders, "The truth did not, of course, have a one-to-one relationship with reality. Good arguments, but that didn't help, just the thought of fiction, just the thought of a fabricated character in a fabricated plot made me feel nauseous, I reacted in a physical way."

Here is where Knausgård differs from Proust, whose mention has been compulsory in the advance reviews of *My Struggle*. Knausgård is less interested in memory in itself than he is in how objects incubate certain moments in time and language determines environments. This trust that everyday life most reveals the forms that wear us down and, by and by, transfigure us explains Knausgård's comprehensive approach. Take a scene late in the book when, jostled on the metro, he drops his phone and only realizes after the fact that it had fallen into a woman's open purse. His friend Geir suggests he send a text to the lost phone, which is found by the woman's fiancé, who agrees, after an only slightly suspicious phone call, to return it. The encounter is certainly thematic, as the adjacency of strangers comes up again and again in *Book Two*. But let's get real: Not only is the cell-phone situation laughably extraneous and pretty much devoid of obvious narrative purpose, it's also told all the way through twice verbatim, just as, if it happened to you, you'd probably tell the story before you forgot all about it. But to leave it out would be to surrender to the petrified standards of modern literature: "When the movements art cultivated became static that was what you

had to avoid and ignore. Not because it was modern, in tune with our times, but because it wasn't moving, it was dead."

If *My Struggle* is a world removed from Proust, it resembles traditional memoir even less, where one's experiences are massaged into the shape of a guiding narrative. Instead, Knausgård takes himself as representative of both modernity and the welfare state, without giving in to the illusion that either is responsible for identity or can account for the differences between human beings. No, to find the cracks of difference along which our oppressive similarities are arranged, everything must be weighed and considered, everything must be placed in its correlative relationship with regard to everything else, for "it is not the case that we are born equal and that the conditions of life make our lives unequal, it is the opposite, we are born unequal, and the conditions of life make our lives more equal." Improbably, Karl Ove comes across in this six-volume collection of encyclopedic autobiography as almost indifferent to himself, making note of his reactions and desires as though transcribing readouts from a kind of phenomenological existing-machine.

As for the past, Knausgård confesses to being less interested in his own than in *the* past, history itself, with the 16th and 17th centuries being particular fixations: "Admittedly, that world was rough and wretched, filthy and ravaged with sickness, drunken and ignorant, full of pain, low life expectancy and rampant superstition, but it produced the greatest writer, Shakespeare, the greatest painter, Rembrandt, the greatest scientist, Newton, all still unsurpassed in their fields, and how can it be that this period achieved this wealth?" Perhaps because "death was closer." For Knausgård, it's death, not democracy or humanism, that is the contract that both unites us and makes the past a foreign language. Meanwhile, the present is meaningless. Accustomed to nearly every possible experience, we no longer ascribe to things the same significance as in our past, when they were new. In *Book One*, the difference between a child's reality and an adult's was sharply delineated by the quenching of youth's sensitivity "with the taste of salt that could fill your summer days to saturation, now it was just salt, end of story." But in *Book Two*, it's not the end of the story—when he kisses Linda, he catches the taste of salt on her lips.

If it is death, and the knowledge of death, that renders us undifferentiated and eventually indifferent, love is what sets us apart and individualizes—to a point, at least. Linda and Karl Ove's early days trace often destructive highs and lows. Early on, he slashes his face with a broken glass after she briefly rejects him; in Stockholm, Linda threatens to leave over small matters while Karl Ove navigates his separation from his first wife. They behave, in other words, like children. And still, the world is a changed place that lives again with the intensity of childhood:

> If someone had spoken to me then about a lack of meaning, I would have laughed out loud, for I was free and the world lay at my feet, open, packed with meaning, from the gleaming, futuristic

> trains that streaked across Slussen beneath my flat, to the sun coloring the church spires in Riddarholmen red in the nineteenth-century-style, sinisterly beautiful sunsets I witnessed every evening for all those months, from the aroma of freshly picked basil and the taste of ripe tomatoes to the sound of clacking heels on the cobbled slope down to the Hilton Hotel late one night when we sat on a bench holding hands and knowing that it would be us two now and forever ...

Of course, love too can be a matter of pragmatic routines—it too is subject to the sublimating undertones of modern life. But the love that surrounds even the most debasing rituals of family life in *Book Two* (I'm thinking of a "Rhythm Time" class Karl Ove is obliged to participate in with his daughter) makes this volume more uplifting than the first, where the realities of death were the main concern. In love, Karl Ove is "cast back to the time when my feelings swung from wild elation to a wild fury … and the intensity was so great that sometimes life felt almost unlivable, and when nothing could give me any peace of mind except books with their different places, different times and different people, where I was no one and no one was me. That was when I was young and had no options." Knausgård argues that we are most unalike as children and most similar when dead. In the middle, love restores the madness we are born with and gradually cured of.

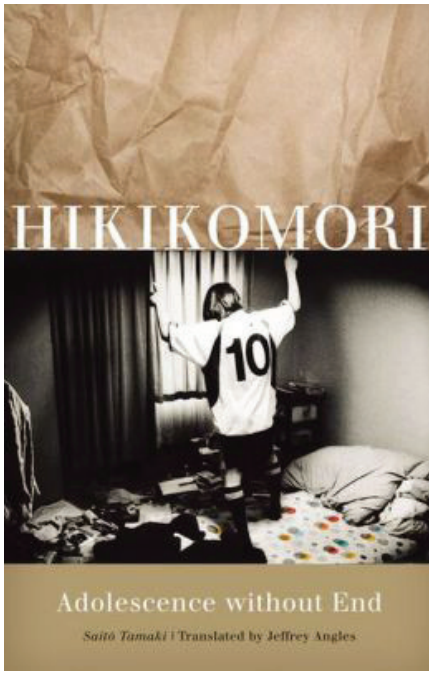
Life is not literature, for nothing lies beneath it. Knausgård's struggle is not a search for meaning or lost time, nor is it even really the story of his journey as a writer. It is an attempt to be, simply and calmly. Knausgård doesn't, as the cliché goes, wring meaning out of everyday life, he frees everyday life from the responsibility of having to seem meaningful. It is what it is. That isn't to say that he doesn't go some ways toward satisfying our craving for conflict and resolution ("Will Karl Ove finally lose his patience with the old Russian in his building?"). But the concerns of narrative or art or identity fall away *in the moment*, and the moment is what Knausgård is after. After a canon built on thinking and feeling, here is an authentic 21st century masterpiece dedicated to existing, existence being perhaps the briefest state of all and therefore the one hardest to be exhaustive about, even given six books to say, in essence, "there I was."

> There I was, walking through the crowds beneath the darkening sky, through falling snowflakes, past shop after shop with illuminated interiors, alone in my new town, without a thought as to how things would be here, because that made no difference, it really didn't make any difference, all I was thinking about was that I had to get through this. 'This' was life. Getting through it, that was what I was doing. ■

An Infantile Disorder

By MAX FOX

If jobs mean maturity, not everyone gets to grow up



Saitō Tamaki
Hikikomori: Adolescence Without End
University of Minnesota Press, 208 pages

THERE IS NOTHING more desirable than a dead teenager. As soon as teenagehood was defined as distinct around the turn of the past century, nations developed industrial techniques to kill them on a mass scale. In boy form, the dead teenager is still the defense industry's flagship domestic product. Fashion houses and magazines stalk it as a girl. And why not? Teenagers established themselves as a class by negotiating a confluence of unemployment crises, consumer-society-building, and war. What could anyone do with this pool of spillover at the entrance to the labor market? Their consumptive bodies, with uncurbed capacity to work, lay just this side of receiving a wage. Dead, they are demand without demands.

But some teenagers don't die. In Japan in the early 1990s, a young psychiatrist named Saitō Tamaki began seeing patients with a cluster of strange symptoms. Actually, he barely saw them at all; more often than not, other family members would approach him about a brother or a son who was afflicted with an unfamiliar state. Mostly men on the threshold of adulthood, they were retreating to their rooms, shrinking from all social contact or communication, and closing off into themselves, often for periods of a year

or more. Not wanting to kill themselves but unable to live in society, these youths folded inward in an attempt to fit themselves away. Saitō began calling them *hikikomori sainen,* "withdrawn young men," and in 1998 published a book with his findings called *Shakaiteki hikikomori—Owaranai Shishunki,* or *Social Withdrawal—Adolescence Without End.*

Saitō ventured a count: There were 1 million people in a state of withdrawal or *hikikomori,* about one percent of the Japanese population. Eighty percent of them were men; 90 percent were over 18. "Social withdrawal is not some sort of 'fad' that will just fade away," Saitō wrote. It is "a symptom, not the name of an illness," and "there has been no sign that the number of cases will decrease." His book became a best seller in weeks. *Hikikomori* joined *otaku* (a person with obsessive interests) and *karoshi* (death from overwork) as a loan word in English to describe a new social phenomenon that at first appeared uniquely Japanese. A few American authors have picked up on it as an enigmatic or convenient trope (in books like *Shutting Out the Sun: How Japan Created Its Own Lost Generation* by Michael Zielenziger and *Hikikomori and the Rental Sister* by Jeff Backhaus, most recently). But only now has Saitō's original work been translated, by Jeffrey Angles, published by University of Minnesota Press in March.

Culturally bound psychological phenomena always fascinate the press because they excite the categories of racism through a veneer of scientificity. But Saitō was explicit on this point: Though his patients' symptoms all emerged in some way through the Japanese social order, there was nothing intrinsically Japanese about the phenomenon. In fact, he had coined the term *hikikomori* to translate work that an American psychologist had done on similar cases of acute social withdrawal and later joined it up with the sociological category of NEETs (not in education, employment, or training) in Britain. His internationalism slyly made room for an astonishing claim: The structure of age itself was beginning to break down. Japan might have been early to the trend, but it was an effect of the market, not any particular culture.

Age is the most generic attribute a person can have, but each age is also irreducibly personal. Every 35-year-old has been 16, but no one has ever been 16 in exactly the same way. No surprise: The experience is deeply striated by gender, race, and class, and then again by the most intimate hazards of family history and endocrinology. Even so, maturation feels so natural it's hard to think about the work that it takes or that it could go any other way. But how you feel old is a historically recent development, embedded so close to our core we take it as synonymous with our selves.

The global spread of the teenager shows this. When the Sphinx had Oedipus solve the riddle of aging on his way to establishing the neurotic family, there were only three ages you could be in life: a child, adult, or old. But by the time the post-1945 social order was in place, the teenager stood apart, ready at hand to the market. Without a household of their own, they would consume and be thrown in

or out of work as the business cycle demanded it. The unique teenage consciousness that accompanied this economic development gives away the tight integration of age in the structures that govern our lives and teach us how to understand ourselves. Being a teenager is not about how old you are. Age is a social form attuned to the market. And though it's unevenly distributed, it operates supernationally.

Still, Saitō was curious. With touching excitement about the new possibilities opened up by the Internet (this was back in the late 1990s), he contacted colleagues abroad to see if they were seeing the same thing. Koreans wrote back: Yes, they said, and their compulsory military service had no effect on the spread of *hikikomori*. One French respondent wrote, No, his society would never produce withdrawal like that; another anonymously replied that it absolutely did but that in France, these people become homeless, not homebound. Jeffrey Angles chimes in too. In the translator's note to the American edition, he shares the story of a student of his who went through a period of *hikikomori,* dropping out of high school in his senior year. With therapy he was later able to pull himself back into society and to college, but without a name for his experience, he had no explanation for what made him lose that time. A Thai psychiatrist wondered, "What do people in withdrawal do about their living expenses?" It was a reasonable question. Saitō found that their parents cover them.

Saitō's book was otherwise modest in scope. It aimed to establish a working definition of the condition and provide practical steps for worried parents to follow. Without pathologizing withdrawn teens, Saitō suggested that the parents were equally implicated through their relationship with their child in what he called the "hikikomori system," a self-reinforcing state of disconnection between child, family, and society. "As the individual takes shelter from the social body, it holds both the individual and the family in its grasp," he says. But even though elective solitary confinement seems like it must stem from extreme trauma if not psychosis, Saitō insists that there is no mental illness involved. Instead, he links it to our "era of adolescence" and concludes that "'social withdrawal' is the pathology that best symbolizes our moment in time."

At base, the problem is one of mounting surplus populations. This is not the eugenicist fever dream of overpopulation but a concept that Karl Marx developed alongside a critique of Thomas Malthus. Essentially, since the working day can only be extended so far, increases in productivity happen only through labor-saving innovation. Extended across time and populations, this means fewer and fewer people must be employed to make a profit. More and more people become not only unnecessary but an impediment to fleet, low-cost production.[1] Like excess inventory,

1. In *Capital* Vol. 1, Marx argues: "The degree to which the means of production are means of employment for the workers lessens progressively as those means become more extensive, more concentrated and technically more efficient ... The working population therefore produces both the accumulation of capital and the means by which it is itself made relatively superfluous; and it does this to an extent which is always increasing."

their labor power cannot be sold, so it must be written off or destroyed.

Certain populations are written off a priori. For old people who can't work anymore, acute social withdrawal is not just expected, it's imposed. If they've been lucky, retirees will have savings to draw from, so they can keep consuming until they die. But bowing out from society isn't seen as illness or family shame. Likewise, a labor participation rate of 50 percent for Japanese women means that "people are less likely to see a woman withdrawing into the house as problematic behavior," Saitō offers. And childhood was not always a time of nonwork—it was a labor victory. Like the weekend, it had to be fought for to wrest it from bosses as time off. Child labor laws were the worker's movement's earliest wins, though they were conceded in exchange for compulsory schooling.

The problem, Saitō says, is that the *hikikomori* patient is not exempt, but still has no place in society. It's certainly not for discrimination or lack of qualifications: the demographic profile is overwhelmingly first-born sons, often academically well-seated. But in their understanding, they don't, and they drop out of school; they can't hold jobs; they have no friends; they often stop speaking. They take refuge in the home because "the household is the only place they feel like they belong." But it's also where someone will feed them. (It's not uncommon for *hikikomori* to hole up in a kitchen. The parents will sometimes construct a new one.) Because Saitō refuses a psychogenic explanation for the behavior, and because exclusion from society is taken as a given, the *hikikomori* phenomenon appears in his book primarily as a disorder of the home.

But a disorder of the home, however private, is still an economic disorder. The word *economy* derives from the Greek for slave owner's household, and household wealth, not individual net worth, remains the metric for evaluating national economic well-being. Though we understand ourselves to be a market society, the naturalness of the exclusion of some people from the labor market—some women, children, and the elderly—depends on their staying close to home. (Their evil counterparts, people who don't work or work the wrong way, are then understood as either homeless or from bad homes.) So if the social pathology that best sums up our moment in time is coming from inside the house, it's because the economy put it there.

It's not uncommon for *hikikomori* to hole up in a kitchen. The parents will sometimes construct a new one.

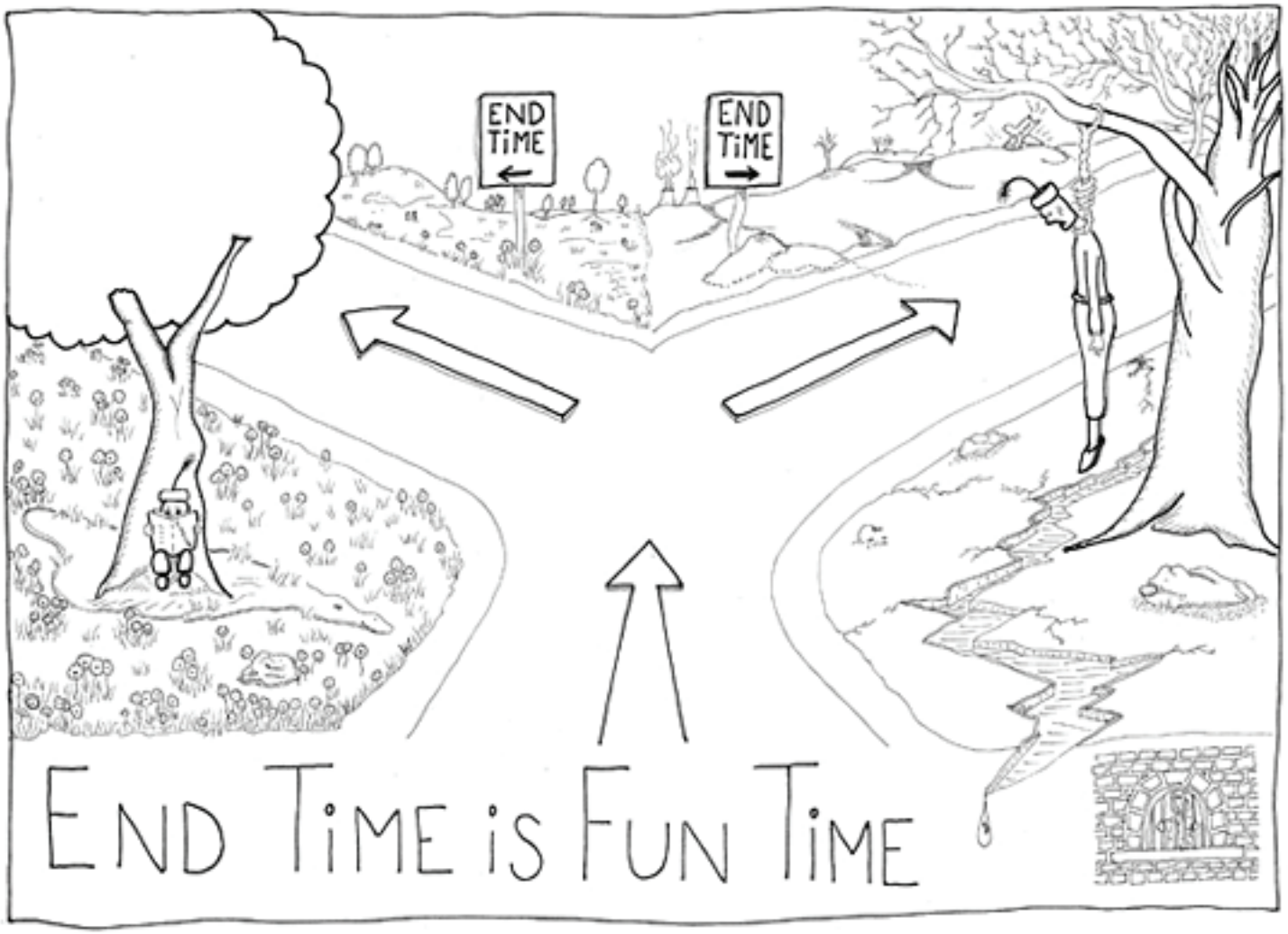
That's because these are still people; they have to eat and sleep somewhere. What do they do? Saitō notes that even when mute, the person in withdrawal pays extremely close attention to what his

family is saying. Well, the market speaks, too: You're better dead. *Hikikomori* emerges as one response to the threat of destruction. It is the nightmare edge of the trend, more and more prevalent across the advanced capitalist core, which inspires so many identical think pieces on millennials and their infuriating ways. *Kids these days—they live with their parents for so long! They don't make major purchases or form households!* Yeah, well. One 30-year mortgage ago, the labor market was fundamentally different. The markers of aging that corresponded to a programmatic course through it no longer hold. The adolescent condition of labor is generalizing.

Saito calls *hikikomori* "a pathology of adolescence," not adolescents. Teendom is spreading beyond its original cohort. The people who catch it may be in their 20s or 30s, but they're stuck with a teen's relation to the market, always at the entrance. Though he spends far more time cautioning parents to refrain

from castigating their adult children as lazy, Saitō does at one point identify a cause: "The reason that the child goes into withdrawal is not because he or she does not *want* to work, but because he or she is *unable* to work, even though he or she wants to." Since a job signals adulthood, being barred from one deranges the normal course of maturation, and manifests as psychic distress.

The family was the home of age. You arrived at your job already mature, supposedly, and left before a messy senescence. But with the entire category of work in crisis and family formation in terminal decline, age too is revealed to have been left open to the whims and ravages of the market. *Hikikomori* is a glimpse of the new moments in the life cycle wholly integrated into a system that breaks itself down as it grows. It's not a particularly heroic response to being called into being as surplus. But if it is pathological, it is so only in having decided not to die. ■



LATELY I'VE BEEN noticing an insidious efficiency leaking into my days and into my ways and altering my otherwise devil-may-care lifestyle—by which I mean not "heedless of caution" but rather "jovial and rakish in manner."

The overpowering desire for productivity and the overvaluing of organization in our society enables us to ignore the obvious evils of efficiency. I now find myself cutting corners and opting for the quickest route to my destinations. I'm getting to more places and I'm getting more accomplished, but what am I giving up? I think too much. I worry I'm losing my linger, no longer taking the time to tarry. I don't see the point of finally getting round to things if I have to lose my dawdle skills.

Being too alert or hyperaware can not only slow you down, but worse, it will limit your possibilities. We need to adopt more of a sleepish attitude to life. There is a reckless and rollicking abandon in our sleep time that we must try and bring into our waking hours. Our minds and our bodies do what they will without constraints when we enter the land of nod, and that is exactly how we want to walk the world till the end of days.

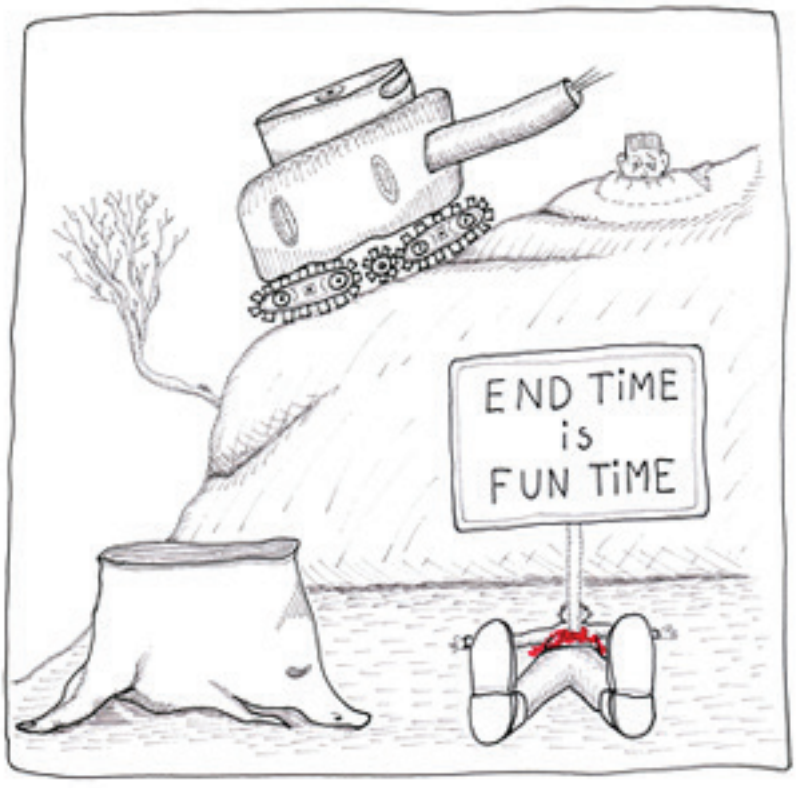
Think of yourself as a sphincter and just try and unclench—life with all its possibilities will surely begin to flow.

But there is no magic bullet to get you to that special state of vigorous languor that will bring out the best in you. You cannot achieve this state by simply cutting back on your snooze time. Everyone needs their sleep. Let me now remind you of what the great writer Thomas Wolfe's mother said: "You can't make up for lost sleep." So even if you can go home again, you must go right to your old room and have all 40 of your winks.

Along with this creeping competence that has threatened my way of life, I've noticed something else trying to stick itself into my spokes. A sort of misplaced morality is starting to worm its way into my brain. The other night I had what is commonly known as a sex dream. I am not usually a sexual slumberer, but when it does happen, it is always quick and aborted. This night of reverie was different: It involved a free and easy yet protracted night of sex with Rihanna, and I'm happy to say that everyone went home satisfied. After this erotic gift from Morpheus I should have woken up with that cat-who-swallowed-the-canary smile, thinking "the old boy still has it." Instead I'm worried about Chris Brown and what he'll think about it all. The horrible part is that I'm not worried about him hurting me or, worse, hurting her. No, I'm concerned about him getting sad, about him no longer being able to be the best Chris Brown he can be, and it's all my fault. I don't think I even have to point out that this is bad, bad thinking—bad for me, bad for you, and bad for society at large and certainly not worthy of an unsolicited advisor for the end of time or any time.

So I'm pledging to you now to be a better me and stay on the right path through what's left of our time together, and I hope I can help you to find your particular passage. That's the ticket. We all have our own paths, and we need our own maps to find them, and this is one map Google can't help you with.

When you think you don't know right from wrong, trust that you do, and if it turns out you don't, then try and get it right next time. But through it all, you've got to believe that a little fog will always help clear things up. ■



BEDROOM—Bed, bedside table, lamp, chest, dressing table with mirror, bench and baby doll.