The Maternal Assemblage: Nonprocreative Maternity as Contagion and Resistance

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Abstract: This article analyzes the consistent problematic of nonprocreative maternal identity, specifically its positioning in a heteronormative symbolic framework as the antithesis of biological or "real" motherhood. Using Lee Edelman's work on the queer body's relationship to a futural horizon, the first part addresses how the epistemological framework whereby nonprocreative maternal bodies are subjected to the image of the Child, a fantasy of wholeness, thematizes the nonprocreative maternal body as deviant and enacts a logic of repetition that supplements a heteronormative future. The second portion of this essay illustrates how, due to the monomaternalist matrix's refusal to accept it as legitimate, the nonprocreative mother is effectively cast *outside* the symbolic network of heteronormativity, thereby affording it a heightened level of interconnectivity with other "deviant" bodies.[1] This, as the article demonstrates, results in the formation of a maternal assemblage, a collection of disparate bodies connected by contagion, rather than in the reproduction of a heteronormative future. In the concluding section, this essay argues that the nonstratified maternal assemblage produces a queer child, an offspring that does not reorient and supplement the heteronormative structure but instead challenges it by infecting the futural horizon the child inhabits with alterity and difference.

Keywords: motherhood, adoptive maternity, Deleuze (Gilles), Edelman (Lee), queer studies, monomaternalism, heteronormativity

In her web article for *NBC News*, "Commentary: My Experience with Second-Parent Adoption as a Same-Sex Parent," columnist Lyndsey D'Arcangelo (2017) discusses the legal hurdles surrounding the adoption process for nonprocreative, specifically nonheteronormative, maternal bodies.[2] D'Arcangelo articulates that, despite having spent the past two years "burping, feeding, changing, clothing, hugging, rocking and singing [her daughter] to sleep," because she was not the child's biological mother, she was forced to pursue second-parent adoption in order to be legally recognized as a parent to her daughter. Designed specifically for LGBT-parent families, second-parent adoption is the process whereby a couple can "add an additional parent while maintaining the status of the original parent" (Shapiro 2013, 301); it is both similar to and unlike stepparent adoption, where the nonbiological parent takes on the legal status as parent, which results in the rights of the "former" parent being dissolved (Harris-Short and Miles 2011, 683).[3] In both cases, the nonbiological parent is required to undergo a rigorous process bent on determining their "qualifications" as a parent: D'Arcangelo and her wife had to submit, specifically, "fingerprints, an inch-thick application … a signed note from our fertility doctor, and a signed note from our regular doctor" (D'Arcangelo 2017).

What is perhaps even more telling than D'Arcangelo and her wife's legal struggle to be recognized as the "real" or legitimate parents of their child is the photograph she uses to preface her article. The picture displays the author holding her daughter amidst sepia tones and shrouded in shadow. We do not see

D'Arcangelo's face, only that of her infant daughter, whose head rests on her shoulder facing the opposite direction. The picture seamlessly articulates not only the nonprocreative mother's mercurial identity, a figure that performs a specific maternal role yet struggles to be recognized as a maternal subject in the symbolic economy, but also the complex relationship between a "deviant" mother and child.[4] Though recent studies have elaborated on the performative nature of maternity, as well as illustrated the shared experiences of varying types of maternal bodies, there still exists no positive, intelligible identity for the adoptive or queer mother itself beyond its reciprocal relationship to "true," biological maternity that casts it in the form of "deviant" other. What the picture of D'Arcangelo and her child symbolizes is the perceived gulf between the nonprocreative mother and child due to a lack of biological connection and a subsequent lack of subjective and political agency within the economy of repronarrativity. In the following, I address this continued problematic of maternal identity formation as it pertains to nonprocreative mothers, specifically the consistent positioning of the nonprocreative body as the "recognizable Other" (Bhabha 1984, 126) of the biological mother. Given that maternal identity is centered on an ideologically saturated and phantasmatic image of the Child that engenders a binary opposition between "real" and "adoptive" mothers, this essay addresses the question of how the nonprocreative body might subvert this topology.

Attempts to construct a positive maternal identity *within* the economy of the monomaternalist matrix, what Shelley M. Park defines in *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood* as an "ideological doctrine" centered on biological connection to the child and the "notion that children must have one and only one mother" (2013, 6–7), only serves to reify and stratify the "deviant" status of the nonprocreative body and to closet other maternal bodies. Due to the fact that the Child as the structuring principle of maternal identity retains and perpetuates this binary opposition between those *participating* in mothering and individuals who *are* mothers, the former are reterritorialized as the adoptive mother, the nonprocreative mother, essentially retaining the distinction between mother and not-mother. Given the inability of the nonprocreative mother to be recognized within the monomaternalist matrix as anything other than the negative pole of maternal identity, I seek to explore the possibility of this "deviant" subjectivity. Lee Edelman's work in queer theory will be used to illustrate that, like the nonheteronormative body, the nonprocreative maternal body is subjected to a future embodied by the spectral image of the Child, enacting a logic whereby the future appears as a continual renewal of sameness. I will argue that attempts to embody the prototypical ideal of maternity in a nonprocreative body serve only to reinforce monomaternalism and "closet" the plethora of identities that take part in the constitution of the child's identity. More importantly, I will claim that resistance to monomaternalism should take the form of a perverse disavowal of maternal identity as a whole in exchange for a collective assemblage of maternity that works through the inclusion of other deviant maternal bodies. By embracing a maternal politics centered on inclusion, the maternal body radically contests the validity of monomaternalism through the production of a "deviant" child, a queer offspring that destabilizes and exposes the structural impossibility of the heteronormative Child that serves as the lynchpin of the sociosymbolic.

A Barred Future

In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman addresses how our social reality—the Symbolic Order—is organized around the pervasive and often-invoked image of the Child that "fixes identity through identification with the future of the social order" (2004, 25).[5] The futural image of the Child, one of persistent innocence and "rigid sameness of identity," is a horizon of "Imaginary fullness" that structures

and secures all identity in the Symbolic (21). Edelman claims that all queer bodies are subjected to this politically potent reproductive futurism, where the figural Child "comes[s] to embody for us the telos of the social order" (11), becoming synonymous with an ideal heteronormative future and therefore establishing a binary opposition whereby "*queerness* names the side of those not 'fighting for the children'" (3; original emphasis). The Child, that which we misrecognize ourselves in order to organize our social reality, as a structuring principle "impose[s] an ideological limit on political discourse," thereby assuring the "absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of queer resistance" (2). Edelman's claim is that in attempting to build a "more desirable social order," this reproductive futurism "works to *affirm* a structure, to authenticate social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child" (2–3), constituting a social body that is anchored by a futural image that coordinates and reterritorializes all identity according to a phantasmatic projection.

In response to a discursive system that structures queer bodies to signify a threat to reproduction and life itself, Edelman does not endorse the rejection of "this ascription of negativity to the queer" but rather encourages those bodies to "consider accepting and even embracing it" (2004, 4). Cast outside the domain of political discourse, an unsymbolizable nonidentity, queerness comes to serve as the "remainder of the Real internal to the Symbolic order," something that supports reproductive futurism as its other and threatens it by "embodying that order's traumatic encounter with its own inescapable failure, its encounter with the illusion of the future as suture to bind the constitutive wound of the subject's subjection to the signifier, which divides it...." (25–6). Edelman compels queer bodies to "withdraw [their] allegiance" from propagating a future that does not recognize their positive identity, and instead take the "Symbolic's negativity to the very letter of the law" (5). The queer body, in Edelman's words, must therefore "inhabit the place of meaningless associated with the sinthome; to figure an unregenerate, and unregenerating, sexuality" (48); and in doing so, it comes to figure as that very place where the fantasy of the Symbolic breaks down. The queer, then, in traversing the fantasy of reproductive futurism, subscribes to the Freudian "death drive," which figures as the "substance of jouissance itself, the Lacanian lamella," the very thing the Symbolic fantasy of futurism "constitutively forecloses" (48). The fantasy of the Symbolic centered on the figure of the Child is dissolved in the face of the nonheteronormative body, which reveals its nothingness, its inability to serve as a stable signifier of hope and meaning, thereby destabilizing "(hetero)sexual rapport" (65).

Edelman's observations regarding the pervasive nature of reproductive futurism and the way in which the queer body challenges the reterritorialization of the abject in order to ensure the "order of the same" has interesting implications for the nonprocreative maternal body situated amidst monomaternalism (2004, 151). The figure of the Child is the lynchpin of the monomaternalist matrix, a "grid of intelligibility," to use Michel Foucault's term, that posits biologically reproductive mothers as legitimate, positive identities, while relegating nonprocreative maternal bodies to the negative pole of deviancy (Oksana 2005, 129). Nonprocreative mothers would do well to embrace their identity as the symbolic remainder in very much the same way as Edelman's nonheteronormative body, as doing so would constitute a perverse act of disavowal that, far from reproducing the prescribed codes of maternity and reproduction of sameness, holds the possibility of destabilizing the trajectory of the future.

Maternal Guilt

In *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood*, Park posits the now well-accepted sentiment that, due to the fact that biologically reproductive mothers undergo a similar intense observation and optimization as nonprocreative mothers, they are no more "natural" or biologically preconditioned to mothering than their nonreproductive counterparts (208–10). Park makes the point that biologically and nonbiologically reproductive bodies are produced in many of the same ways, "through multiple social pressures—exerted by families, friends, neighbors, churches, schools and the media (for example, parenting advice books and television talk shows)" (207). Yet, for all of the similarities between biological and nonprocreative maternity, each of which dispels the "naturalness" of motherhood completely, Park does acknowledge the epistemological differences in regard to the structure of motherhood and maternal identity. The Child, that futural image that serves as a component of the Absolute Subject of maternity, comes to figure as a phallic signifier of desire to which all maternal identity is libidinally attached.[6]

Maternal bodies, both biologically reproductive and nonprocreative, are structured according to a logic of determinacy and matrix of intelligibility, not unlike gender identities, which results in an alienated subject that is divided amongst itself. Gender, as Judith Butler tells us, is a "reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established," and this performance is "effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame" (1990, 140). Individuals acquiesce to and perform prescribed norms of gender behavior in order to become symbolically intelligible subjects, thereby taking part in a ritualized performance of preconceived traits. In the case of maternal identity, this "interior" essence is doubled or, to use Foucault's terminology, "folded" to create an imaginary exteriority, but unlike gender performance maternal identity is predicated on an external image, that of the figural Child (Deleuze 2000, 104). Like Foucault's soul in *Discipline and Punish*, the Child is the "effect and instrument of a political anatomy" (1995, 27) working through medico-juridical institutions on the maternal body itself in order to produce the fold. In this instance, the "inside is an operation of the outside; the exterior produces the interior by a doubling, a folding, a reflection back on itself" (McLaren 2002, 84). The figure of the Child is a medico-juridical product that is used to justify the stratification of the mother's "bodily norms and techniques for observing, monitoring, and controlling bodily movements, processes, and capacities" (Sawicki 1991, 83). The discursively produced image of the Child reflects the subjective identity of the mother; therefore, when the "ideal" Mother is categorized as, according to Susan Chase and Mary Rogers, "white, able-bodied, middle-, upper-middle-, or upper-class, married heterosexual," it is because the imaginary Child is coded as such (Chase and Rogers 2001, 31).[7] Chase and Rogers continue by making the now well-accepted point that the "good mother's success is reflected in her children's behavior" (30), and I would extend this to say that maternal identity as a whole is achieved, or barred, through a misrecognition of symbolic identity constituted *through* the Child.

The Child, then, allows for the coordination and categorization of the present through a thematization of the future, "enacting a logic of repetition that fixes identity through identification with the future of the social order" (Edelman 2004, 25). The future, as Edelman points out, takes on the form of a phantasmatic promise of innocence and rebirth in the figure of the Child, an image that serves as one of the many enumerations for society as a whole but is the chief reiteration for the mother, as the Lacanian *objet a* or the object-cause of desire. As Aron Dunlap makes clear in *Lacan and Religion*, following castration and the acquisition of language, the "real becomes that which is lost and which pops up in various guises as *objet a*, simultaneously the 'it' we are looking for and 'no being'" (2016, 64). The *objet a* is that phantasmatic object whereby the "trauma of void is simply camouflaged," offering the promise of completeness, and,

most importantly, "ideological symbolisation through the fantasy we invest in *objet a qua* elusive residue or excess that surreptitiously gives body to the gap between ideology and its empty place of inscription" (Vighi and Feldner 2007, 209). The fantasy of the Child plays out for all society as that entity before the acquisition of language, a "before" symbolization and castration that is a complete ideological fantasy, but which, in making the future known, ensures a return of the same.

The Child is completeness and wholeness, a fantasy of a subject without lack, and what it "returns" to the mother in its reflection is guilt. Butler makes the point in *The Psychic Life of Power*, addressing specifically Louis Althusser's treatise on ideological interpellation, that in order for subjection to take place, there is an "openness or vulnerability to the law … an identity through identifying with the one who has broken the law" (1997, 108). Butler claims, regarding the emergence of subjectivity, that subjection to the Law is "marked by a figure of turning, a turning back on oneself or even turning *on* oneself" (1997, 3) in a similar type of folding mentioned previously. She maintains that all subjection to the Law stems from a feeling of guilt and desire to prove one's innocence continually throughout ritualized submission:

> "Submission" to the rules of the dominant ideology might then be understood as a submission to the necessity to prove innocence in the face of accusation, a submission to the demand for proof, and execution of that proof, and acquisition of the status of the subject in and through compliance with the terms of the interrogative law. To become a "subject" is thus to have been presumed guilty, then tried and declared innocent. (1997, 118)

The "guilt" of the maternal subject is assumed, just as "reproduction of relations is prior to the subject who is formed in its course," as the mother is inundated immediately with rituals of behavior that it must perform (Butler 1997, 119). This, in essence, is the primary functioning of repronarrativity which, according to Michael Warner, purports the "notion that our lives are somehow made more meaningful by being embedded in a narrative of generational succession" (1991, 7). This guilt, as with Butler's homosexual melancholic, stems from an entrance into a symbolic economy centered on the Child and, along with it, as Edelman alludes, a prohibition against all those not-for-the-child (Butler 1997, 142). Here the maternal subject is that very thing that must be repudiated in the face of the Child; the mother must at all times be-for-another, reject all individual desire for the desire of another. This why the Child is symptomatic of the *objet a*—because it is the other's desire, legitimizing the consistently invasive medical procedures and constant surveillance, where the Child offers a way of absolving oneself. One need only reference the foremost example of maternity, the Virgin Mary, a transcendent figure that, as Julia Kristeva argues in "Stabat Mater," epitomizes the "qualities of the desired woman and the holy mother in a totality as perfect as it was inaccessible" (1985, 141). The Madonna has been analyzed extensively as a discursive patriarchal ideal of motherhood for all maternal bodies, yet she lays claim to the quintessential image of maternity not merely because she presents an impossible masculine dream of a virgin mother but primarily because her offspring is the securer of redemption, a forgiver of sin not only for the mother but for all humankind.

With the Child posited as the locus of maternal identity, legal and political discourse has established an epistemological framework that deprives the nonprocreative maternal body's symbolic recognition as Mother by refusing to recognize nonbiological ties to a child as constitutive of maternal identity. In "Parental Rights Doctrine: Creating and Maintaining Maternal Value," Annette R. Appell illustrates that "parent-child-like relationships that are based only on nurture, and not on biology and nurture of the child or the biological mother, are insufficient to establish legal parenthood over the claims of fit, legal parents who have not legally consented to the formation of the relationship" (2009, 125–6). Park notes considerable

legal barriers to nonbiological mothers being recognized as a Mother, explaining that "the legal status of lesbian mothers at the turn of the twenty-first century was improved 'only to the extent that these rights overlapped with their biological status as parents and therefore fit with heteronormative understandings of family structure'" (2013, 79). In terms of signification and symbolic status, this establishes a binary opposition of Mother/not-Mother, where the nonprocreative maternal body occupies a tenuous position signifying finitude and sheer materiality.

The adoptive or nonprocreative mother's "guilt" is easily seen; in choosing to mother, the nonprocreative body submits to the logic of repronarrativity and is immediately categorized, both legally and symbolically, as deviant or nonheteronormative, thereby becoming forced to continually reproduce its innocence through the production of a heteronormative child. However, in doing so, the nonprocreative mother comes to occupy a unique place in the monomaternalist symbolic economy. In regard to the trajectory of symbolization, the nonprocreative mother exchanges one subjective identity, that of Woman, for the role of Mother; yet, due to the structure of the monomaternalist matrix, it is refused recognition. The nonprocreative mother, therefore, is caught between two poles of identity, Woman and Mother, in a state of flux and lacking referentiality. With this in mind, the nonprocreative mother comes to figure as something akin to the Lacanian *lamella*, the "remainder of Life-Substance which has escaped the symbolic colonization," at least in part because the symbolic economy of maternal subjectivity has *refused* to fully incorporate it (Ruti 2012, 113). The very monikers used to categorize the "adoptive" Mother—nonprocreative, nonbiological—all signify its association with death, as that which is infertile or deviant and therefore not fully included in what Žižek calls "symbolic colonization" (quoted in Vighi and Feldner 2007, 226).

The result of the overcoding that creates the *lamella*, that persisted nonsubjective existence between the two poles of Woman and Mother, is the production of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari refer to in *A Thousand Plateaus* as a line of flight. Deleuze and Guattari claim that "we are traversed by lines, meridians, geodesics, tropics, and zones marching to different beats and differing in nature" (1987, 202). These are the lines of flight that, as Deleuze and Guattari outline, traverse the individual and society and are constitutive of the "pure difference that lies beneath and within the constituted identities of segmentary lines and the partially constituted identities of molecular lines" (May 2005, 137). These lines essentially come to map the individual and, as Deleuze and Guattari are quick to point out, "are imposed on us from outside, at least in part" (202), creating segments such as "rich-poor, young-old, health-sickness and so on, which dominate the easily visible and communicable aspects of our social lives" (Lundy 2012, 88). Contrasting with segmented and striated lines, like those that traverse the individual, there are also lines of flight that are characterized as ruptures:

> Lines of flight, for their part, never consist in running away from the world but rather in causing runoffs, as when you drill a hole in a pipe; there is no social system that does not leak from all directions, even if it makes its segments increasingly rigid in order to seal the lines of flight. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 204)

In the movement from Woman to Mother there is a deterritorialization followed by an immediate reterritorialization into a static, segmented identity. For the biological mother, as I have argued elsewhere (Hicks 2017), there is a double-articulation that results in a "determinate identifiable entity" recognized as mother (Jagodzinski and Wallin 2013, 23). The biological mother has the luxury of assumed connectedness in the eyes of the Law; therefore, unless they create a line of flight, a rupture, through the creation of an a-phallic child, their original break is reterritorialized.

But the nonprocreative maternal body, having chosen to mother a child, assumes no positive identity, and the line of flight is not reterritorialized by the monomaternalist system that refuses to accept it. As Deleuze and Guattari make clear, "there is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organizations, the resonance apparatus, and the overcoding machine" (1987, 216). The nonprocreative is produced in this rupture, this deterritorialization, and there is an immediate attempt by the axiomatic to reterritorialize maternal identity to create the segmented Not-Mother (217). Monomaternalism creates numerous lines of flight in the coding and overcoding of maternity; there is an intense reterritorialization of not only the adoptive Mother but the birth-Mother, the spouse, and so on. The only danger here, which works in favor of segmentation, is that "having broken out of the limits imposed by the molar forms of segmentarity or subjectivity, a line may fail to connect with the necessary conditions of creative development, turning instead into a line of destruction, generating a passion for pure and simple abolition" (Patton 2001, 1153). These individual lines of flight are only productive and creative if in fact, by way of the "intersection and assemblage of individuals," they form the maternal assemblage (Holland 1999, 123).

Perverse Disavowal

Because the monomaternalist matrix is structured around the imaginary principle that is the Child, thereby creating a symbolic economy where the nonprocreative maternal body signifies little more than a gap or lack of hereditary connection to its children, the adoptive maternal body would do well to resist the impulse to embody the prototypical "ideal" Mother and instead identify with the very negative identity attributed to it. To identify with this negative pole is not only to accept the otherness of the child itself but to embrace the perceived lack of "ownership" and influence customarily attributed to the biologically reproductive body. More to the point, it is an embrace of other maternal bodies in the creation of a maternal assemblage and a perverse disavowal of the very Law that refuses to afford them a positive identity. This disavowal is very similar to Sara Ruddick's theory of "maternal humility" from *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*, which endorses a recognition of the mother's limits as it pertains to "her will and the independent, uncontrollable, and increasingly separate existences she seeks to preserve" (2002, 72). I would add to this that a resistance to monomaternalism begins with the inclusion of difference and the creation of a maternal assemblage, rather than the cultivation of a maternal identity.

Endeavors by nonprocreative bodies to embody the prototypical "good" mother in order to be recognized as "legitimate" mothers serve only to solidify their status as "deviant" bodies, while simultaneously supporting monomaternalism and repronarrativity. The "good" Mother, as Karen McCormack illustrates in "Stratified Reproduction and Poor Women's Resistance," requires subjects to adhere to a "middle-class definition of motherhood (coded as white)" that merely reproduces a "system that by virtue of their class and race is used to limit their power" (2005, 676). To be clear, this is not meant to imply that adoptive maternal bodies need abandon attempts at being attentive to their children, which is the most recognizable action of the "good" Mother, but that efforts to "mimic" heteronormative practices succeed only in supplementing an ideal image of maternity that defines motherhood as the origin of the child and a control mechanism of the trajectory of the child's narrative identity. For instance, open adoption continues to function in many ways as a "closeted" operation, creating an environment of "invisibility and silence," where there is a divide and lack of communication between adoptive and birth parents, as well as a collection of identities (adoptive parents, birth parents, and adopted children) structured around loss (Park 2013, 76). Though there has been progress with open adoption, many parents, adoptive and gestational alike, voice concerns regarding

interference and complexity. In "Open Adoption as a Family Form," Karen March and Charlene E. Miall indicate that some adoptive parents feel open adoption and the presence of biological parents would "create complexities and challenge adoptive parents attempting to raise their adopted child," as well as contradict the "rightness" of their approach to parenting (2005, 395). A persistent theme for adoptive parents is a fear of "reclaiming": that the biological parents, if allowed too much exposure to the child, will seek to have their child returned (396). Though this is a genuine concern, it also speaks to the pervasive insistence placed on all maternal bodies to be the point of origin for the child.

Monomaternalism and the politics of repronarrativity require one, in order for the nonprocreative maternal body to be recognized at all in the symbolic economy, to essentially perform a masquerade of motherhood that does little more than supplement the oppressive image of the "good Mother." As with Joan Riviere's conception of the feminine masquerade, whereby a feminine subject "has to enter into the *masquerade of femininity* … into a system of values that is not hers, and in which she can 'appear' and circulate only when enveloped in the needs/desires/fantasies of other, namely, men," the nonprocreative maternal body dutifully performs the heteronormative ideal as prescribed by society (Irigaray 1985, 134; original emphasis). This requires the nonprocreative maternal body to "appear," therefore, as the "sole" origin of the child because, as Park notes, the politics of monomaternalism require that "one relational dyad must be 'dissolved' in order to make room to embark on another relationship" (2013, 121). Practices of "closeting" adoption, whereby some adoptive parents refuse to reveal the "story" of their children's origins or resist the desire of the child to search out their birth parents, reveal the pressure of being the "sole" mother of a child; yet in attempting to fit this mold the nonprocreative body merely becomes more pronounced as "unnatural." In this way, it succeeds only in, to use Homi K. Bhabha's terms, mimicking an imaginary principle of motherhood, which serves only to create a "recognizable Other" that supports the fantasy of maternity (1984, 126).

Furthermore, because the monomaternalist matrix can only support the inclusion of one "real" mother, attempts by adoptive maternal bodies to become the sole origin of the child result merely in the exclusion of other mothers. Monomaternalism, like the state apparatuses that support it, works through inclusion and interiority, not unlike the chess pieces that Deleuze and Guattari use to illustrate the coded milieu of striated space. This essay has already addressed the coding and decoding that goes on during the process of second-parent adoption, whereby one parental body is accepted and codified, while the "original" parent's rights are dissolved. In "Termination of Parental Rights to Free Children for Adoption," Jeffrey J. Haugaard and Rosemary J. Avery discuss how in adoption "efforts must be made to locate a father who is not aware of the birth of his child so that he can choose whether to terminate his rights" even if the "mother is unwilling or unable to identify him" (2002, 136). In this instance, the state "recalls" the father in order to incorporate him and then, once he has relinquished his rights, endows the father with "an internal nature and intrinsic properties from which their movements, situations, and confrontations derive" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 352). The father's "movements" are now limited as the parental space becomes striated and bifurcated, and, as with chess, one parental figure replaces the other in the monomaternalist structure. Rather than attempt to embody the prototypical "good" Mother who is the sole origin and to acquiesce to the demands of monomaternalism, nonprocreative maternal bodies instead should disavow the very necessity of a positive identity.

Similarly to Edelman, Deleuze theorized the political potency of perverse disavowal, of the creative and disruptive force of the death drive, against oppressive forms of discursive subjection. For Deleuze, disavowal "doesn't negate or destroy but radically contests the validity of *that which is*—that is, it suspends

belief in the given in order to neutralize it, thus opening up a new horizon beyond it and in its stead through an exercise of the imaginary (that is, in Deleuze's terms, by creating an image)" (Gardner 2012, 121). In Deleuze's schema, the fetishist is a male who "takes the woman out of the movement of genital sexuality and isolates her in an imaginary world of frozen stills," specifically disavowing and suspending the revelation of castration and genital sexuality indefinitely (Geyskens 2010, 108). This results in a deterritorialization of libidinal attachment, where the Oedipal father is foreclosed from the imaginary network because the threat of castration is neutralized and disavowed (108). The fetishist, then, is reborn as an a-phallic creature, a subject outside of the phallogocentric network, because his subjectivity is no longer constituted through lack.

Adoptive maternity and the performance it subsequently entails involve a similar perverse disavowal; in choosing to detach libidinal desire from the ideal image of maternity, the nonprocreative mother embraces mothering not as a unified identity but as "an intense multiplicity" (Deleuze 1990, 297). As with Deleuze's fetishist, who disavows the trauma of castration in order to foreclose the Law of the Father and to be born anew, the "deviant" maternal body disavows the Absolute Subject of maternity and the necessity of biological connectedness. In the Deleuzian schema, the perverse individual "clothes" the female with "fetishized stand-ins," thereby hiding sexual difference (Gardner 2012, 121). For the nonprocreative maternal body, this takes the form of similar "synecdochical substitutes"; the "ideal" maternal body is clothed with the plethora of identities that participate in the nonprocreative maternal identity (Gardner 2012, 121). The *actual* mother is but one existent in a network of maternity, a collective enterprise that is assisted by family members, partners, and government institutions. According to March and Miall, "adoption creates a family that, in important ways, differs from the traditionally biologically related nuclear family" (2000, 359), not only in creating connections between disparate individuals but in regard to the inclusion of government agencies such as social services and postadoption services. These agencies provide not only assistance in the form of material items and clinical aid but also access to the child's medical records and those of the child's birth parents (2000, 360–2). Park touches on this idea when she likens the nonnuclear family to a "queer assemblage," a literal rhizomatic deterritorialization of the traditional family that, through the inclusion of multiple intersections of family, creates a "less recognizable (queer) form of kinship" (2013, 164–5).

Because these institutions and individuals contribute to the overall identity of the adoptive child, maternity can be viewed as a "qualitative transformation through 'unnatural participation'" revolving around the child, yet discernible only by the "lines and dimensions it encompasses in 'intension'" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 266–7). The Mother, therefore, is not one singular identity but legion, a "multiplicity without the unity of an ancestor," which does not "imply a filiation" (241) that takes part in the reproduction of the ideological constraints of maternal identity. The "unnatural participation" between the nonprocreative body and the other disparate elements that make up the maternal assemblage is connected by what Deleuze and Guattari outline as contagion, as the elements "proliferate by contagion, epidemics, battlefields and catastrophes" (1987, 241). Catastrophe here need not imply a negative but rather a schism, a trauma not unlike the trauma of birth that breeds connectivity between previously nonaffiliated elements. The birth mother who gives up her child for adoption occupies the same tenuous subjective status as the nonprocreative mother— neither Mother nor Woman—yet they do not occupy the same pole in the monomaternalist matrix. The birth mother's relationship with the nonprocreative mother is "neither genetic nor structural: they are interkingdoms, unnatural participations" and, as with Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of Go pieces, an assemblage on nonstriated space (1987, 242). Yet, more important than the collection of maternal bodies that move relatively "outside" the striated space of the monomaternalist matrix is the way in which the

contagion that defines them holds the possibility of infecting the future through the production of a queer, deviant child.

Queer Future

There is a wonderful scene at the conclusion of Richard Donner's classic horror film *The Omen* (1976), where, following the death of his adoptive parents, Robert (Gregory Peck) and Katherine Thorne (Lee Remick), Damien turns to the camera, breaking the fourth wall, and smiles demonically. As the scene at Robert and Katherine's gravesite unfolds, the audience learns that their family friends, who happen to be the President and First Lady of the United States, have adopted Damien, thereby unwittingly securing the future for the Antichrist. *The Omen* belongs to the long line of 1970s "evil child" films that articulate society's fear of a queer future, of an unknown, possibly nonheteronormative and non-Judeo-Christian framework in which their daily lives might have to operate. The ultimate threat of children like Damien or Adrian in *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) is not that they are evil but that they are "anti," representing the possibility of an alternative to the known future and the reproduction or resurrection of the same. What returns in the production of a nonheteronormative, queer child is not the familiar image of the Child but the return of the abject, a defamiliarization that threatens the boundaries of sociosymbolic stability.

The queer child, which can include the adopted child, the homosexual adolescent, or the child of divorce, is the very thing, much like the nonprocreative maternal body, that the social order attempts to abject so that the pristine image of the heteronormative Child may exist as its sole structuring principle. The queer child offers the threat of a queer future, which is quite unknowable, a milieu that does not "properly" return an image of sameness, and that is precisely why heteronormativity attempts to totalize and stratify its narrative of succession. To illustrate, in their article "Adopted Adolescents' Preoccupation with Adoption," Julie Kohler, Harold D. Grotevant, and Ruth G. McRoy investigate the "adoptive identity" of queer children, a constructed identity that is exceedingly complex and comprised of difference (2000, 93). The authors argue that "identity formation—achieving a cohesive definition of self while individuating from parents or family—is thought to be the primary developmental task of adolescents" (93). This desire for cohesiveness is supplemented by medico-juridical institutions, which, according to Kohler, Grotevant, and McRoy, are concerned with continuity and with ensuring that an unbroken succession is maintained. For instance, despite the fact that, as we have seen, the adoption process can produce certain psychological effects, "state laws, agency protocols, and other factors often prevent adolescents from initiating a search for their birth parents" (Kohler, Grotevant and McRoy 2000, 94). This stems directly from the view, held by many opponents of open adoption, that the search for a child's biological parents "can cause confusion for young children by exposing them to two sets of parents with different value systems, increasing their risk of psychopathology and heightening identity conflicts" (2000, 95). Though I am not skirting the very real complications of adoption and adolescent development, nevertheless I wish to stress that a persistent theme of repronarrativity is not only the "sanctity" of biological reproduction but also ensuring an unbroken narrative of identity that makes codification possible.

The queer child, product of a queer, nonstratified maternal assemblage, is an existent not born under phallic law but produced of pure contagion and difference; therefore, it infects the future with alterity. According to Kohler, Grotevant, and McRoy, "although adolescents construct a global sense of identity, adoption adds an additional dimension of 'differentness' to integrate into one's overall sense of self" and it is thus that "adopted adolescents construct an adoptive identity—a unique meaning of what it means to be an

adopted person" (2000, 93). The future and the Child, if they are to sustain the social order, must maintain a sameness; therefore, the queer child is the very thing the social order cannot contain and attempts to abject. Park discusses at length the trials of "queer adolescents," speaking specifically about her daughter, Tomeka, who "has dropped out of school (despite my cajolings, insistings, and groundings) and has had numerous (fortunately, minor) run-ins with the police" (2013, 98). Park admits fearing that her daughter will "find herself living in the 'uninhabitable zones'" (200), that tentative position Butler describes in *Bodies That Matter* as the outside of the "exclusionary matrix" and which "constitute[s] that site of dreaded identification against which—and by virtue of which—the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life" (Butler 1993, 3). The queer child is a counterimage to the heteronormative Child that, like Tomeka, is definable only by transitions and movements, pockets of intensity that resist totalization because they cannot be located strictly by one line of succession but require many.

The queer child, as Park intimates, has the possibility of existing in the "uninhabitable zones," of moving back and forth in the "in between," like Deleuze and Guattari's nomad existing between "two striated spaces" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 384). The queer child moves seamlessly, not merely between two spaces but among many, and in their abject space they do "not respect borders, positions, rules"—not because they are products of "deviance" but because they are deviant subjects themselves and structurally incongruent to the "phantasy" Child, to use Kristeva's term (1982, 4). Like the abject, they threaten the boundaries between the "clean" and the pure, hovering on the margins and, occasionally, destabilizing the image itself. The state, as Deleuze and Guattari make clear, attempts to normalize this nomadic zone, to "vanquish nomadism … control migrations and, more generally, to establish a zone of rights over an entire 'exterior,' over all of the flows traversing the ecumenon" (1987, 385). However, though the nomadic child transitions between striated spaces, it "turns against them, gnawing away at the forest on one side, on the other side gaining ground on the cultivated lands, affirming a noncommunicating force or a force of *divergence* like a 'wedge' digging in" (384). The queer child does not communicate an intelligible, codified message to the social order, does not return to it an image of sameness that orients a stable identity; instead, it creates a wedge. Just as the abject object "threatens the unity and identity of both society and the subject" (Oliver and Trigo 2003, 14), the queer child threatens the supremacy of the Child, offering up its own image that comes to reflect the impotence of the Child.

In "Fear of a Queer Planet," Warner argues that repronarrativity's "totalizing tendency," which involves the structuring of the sociosymbolic around biological reproduction, "can only be overcome by actively imagining a necessarily and desirably queer world" (1991, 8). The queer child opens up the possibility of this world, and many others, by splintering the repronarrative with what Deleuze refers to in *Difference and Repetition* as a fracture or caesura in time, a splitting of time into irreconcilable parts. Deleuze characterizes this fracture or caesura as that which "may be expressed in many ways: to throw time out of joint, to cause the sun to explode, to throw oneself into a volcano, to kill God or the father" (1994, 89). The caesura is the product of the Deleuzian revolutionary act that alters the trajectory of time and produces something new, something with no correspondence to the past. The caesura, which reorders time, severing the relationship between the past, present, and future, is "born out of pure repetition and performance … causing a fracture between the past and the future where the unfolding of time is infinitely altered and the former self dissolved" (Lambert 2002, 105). As we have seen, nonprocreative mothering constitutes a similar type of perversity closely aligned with the death instinct that persists beyond symbolic identity, and out of this perverse action a queer child is produced, something "new" that threatens the stability of the sociosymbolic. Deleuze infers that in the production of the "new" the self is fractured, the caesura "smash[es] it to pieces,

as though the bearer of the new world were carried away and dispersed by the shock of the multiplicity to which it gives birth: what the self has become equal to is the unequal to itself" (1994, 89–90). The queer child does not legitimize the existence of the nonprocreative mother, does not constitute a reorientation of positive identity through recognized fecundity, but instead points to the maternal assemblage. The queer or deviant child, unlike the typical biologically produced child with one "source" or origin, is "infected" with numerous tributaries of influence that are discernible only in the acts of "mothering."

By way of the production of a nonheteronormative child into the futural horizon, the nonprocreative mother alters the trajectory of repronarrativity, infecting the otherwise static image of the Child with a disruptive level of alterity. If the Child is a representation of a futural time of resurrection and the lynchpin of monomaternalism and repronarrativity, then the queer child offers the possibility of a "demented time," a time that "creates a new order, a caesura in time that establishes an incommensurable 'before' and 'after'" (Bogue 2010, 41). This "demented time" sits beside repronarrativity embodied by the Child, presenting an alternative to what Edelman refers to as "futurism's logic" and uncovering the "misrecognized catachresis" that supports the sociosymbolic (2004, 152). Most importantly, the potential of the queer child and the nonprocreative maternal body is to expose the queerness in all subjects. Edelman endorses something similar when he claims that queerness turned against repronarrativity and the logic of futurism draws out the "*inhuman*" and its "unintelligibility," which in short implies the deconstruction of the imaginary promise of wholeness that the Child embodies (2013, 152; original emphasis). The queer child does not merely counter heteronormativity but *exposes* inherent difference in the very future it reflects to the social order.

Conclusion

In *No Future*, Edelman endorses "turning the force of queerness against all subjects" (5) in order to expose the way in which the social order predicates itself on the subjugation of queer bodies, thereby unraveling the supremacy and innocence of the Child. In this essay, I have argued that the paradigm of monomaternalism is predicated on the very same image and a direct, biological correlation between mother and child that abjects the nonprocreative maternal body, casting it as the negative pole of identity that supports the apparent naturalness and legitimacy of biological maternity. In doing so, in incorporating, at least partially, the nonprocreative maternal body into its matrix, monomaternalism creates the very thing that threatens its stability: the possibility of nonfilial connection between disparate elements resulting in a collaborative deviant maternity. I have suggested that the "maternal others," those bodies that are caught in between poles of identity, such as birth mothers that have given their children up for adoption and stepparents, should not be closeted in attempts to embody a monomaternalist ideal but included in an assemblage of maternity. The assemblage that characterizes this deviant construction is a plane of immanence, a machinic multiplicity "made of the repetition of contraction-habits repeating difference," a "haecceity of the 'nows' of contractions, habits, little spasms, laughters, smiles and cries, in a world of singularities that constitute a life" (Arsic 2003, 143). This contagion of mothering is an abdication of singularity where there is "dissolution of the identity of the self in favour of a system of little selves, of the man with no name and no qualities, the universal people or of diverse 'becomings'" (Voss 2013, 236).

My claim is that this thriving multiplicity of maternity opens up the possibility of a queer future through the production of a nonheteronormative child, an offspring that moves through Butler's "uninhabitable zones," always threatening the image of the Child from the margins. The queer child is the caesura, the schism "determined in the image of a unique and tremendous event" that divides the image, "tearing [it]

apart … into two unequal parts" (Crockett 2013, 95). I suggest that with every queer child and every caesura the image of the Child begins to splinter, reflecting not a heteronormative future that the social order must embody in order to eventually resurrect, but a future marked by indiscernibility. Without a stable signifier looming in the futural horizon, a queer future might exist, a future that is incommensurate with the past because it is not an idealization of completeness and wholeness, but of alterity and difference.

Notes

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1. The pronoun "it" will be used throughout to refer to the nonprocreative mother.

2. The term "nonprocreative" will be used throughout to denote nonbiological mothers, including LGBTQ maternal bodies as well as heterosexual adoptive mothers.

3. It should be noted that consent from the legal parent, typically the biological father, is required for stepparent adoption. If it has not been obtained, the court must be petitioned (Harris-Short and Miles 2011, 683).

4. Here, "recognized" implies being accepted or signifying anything in the symbolic economy *other* than a mother without a biological connection to the child. The term "deviant" is used to denote all bodies deemed unacceptable (nonprocreative, LGTBQ, etc.) within the monomaternalist matrix.

5. The Child is distinguishable from the actual child of reproduction in that it is an imaginary point structuring identity, an ideologically saturated totalization.

6. Althusser defines the Absolute Subject of ideology as the "Subject *par excellence*," a specular mirror image that subjects the individual through recognition (2001, 1359).

7. "Mother" here denotes a discursive Absolute Subject distinguishable from the "mother" of reality.

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