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REPRESENTATION OF ABORTION IN SELECTED FILM AND TELEVISION

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts.

Johannesburg, 2016

ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that the representation of abortion provides a platform which reveals women's societal and gendered positions, and provides a critique of the hypocritical attitudes to which societies subject women. I will be considering various representations of abortion in six films and two television shows. The films are Alexander Kluge's *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave* (1973), Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (2007), Mike Leigh's *Vera Drake* (2004), Fruit Chan's *Dumplings* (2004), The Pang Brother's *Re-Cycle* (2006) and Ridley Scott's *Prometheus* (2012). The two television shows are FX's *American Horror Story* (2011—) and ABC's *Grey's Anatomy* (2005—). Each text provides a unique representation of abortion, often situating the issue within particular physical, social, political and cultural locations. In presenting a close reading of each text, I will show how the representation of abortion in each chapter relates to differing social, political and cultural ideologies. I will argue that there is a developing sense of the lived realities of women, which include, but are not limited to, issues of alienation, autonomy, agency and identity. Such lived realties, I will contend, are constructed within societies that, aware or not of the fact, are dominated by patriarchal influences.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before any other degree or examination in any other university.

_____

Claire Barrington

14th day of March 2016

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

4 Months	*4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days*
Horror Story	*American Horror Story*
Grey's	*Grey's Anatomy*
Part-Time Work	*Part-Time Work of A Domestic Slave*

This list of abbreviations is intended to show those titles which have been shorted after the initial use of the full title in each chapter.

INTRODUCTION

When engaging in debates about abortion, the discussion is often reduced to the now popular antithetical ideals of the 'pro-life' and 'pro-choice' movements. In doing so, discussions are often limited to personal moral values that leave no substantive room for an understanding of the complex issues surrounding abortion. The very nature of abortion, it being an act that exemplifies the absolute termination of potential life, lends itself to becoming a personal matter for all involved. Nevertheless, abortion is more than just a personal matter, and has historically been linked to ways of controlling both women and nations. Socially and personally, the issues that abortion represents go beyond the immediate populist rhetoric, which dictates the moral 'high ground' through slogans such as 'all life is sacred' and 'my body, my choice'.

This dissertation presents an exploratory study into various representations of abortion using the mediums of film and television. Spanning five countries and several genres, this exploratory study seeks to identify particular issues raised in the material through the stylistic, contextual and narrative choices of the creators. It is a study of representations, in which abortion has been depicted in relation to political and social issues, but is also linked to certain culturally specific ideologies in relation to women's roles in society. This dissertation explores the representation of abortion in relation to the politics of gender and of space for women, giving specific consideration to the explicit political spaces that are depicted in the films and television shows — those particular social, political and historical contexts that provide information about the issue of abortion. Although the political debate is activated by many of the views found in the choice of films and television shows, such issues, while significant, are not the primary topics of the dissertation. It is the exploration of representations of abortion, which is of interest to the dissertation. The analysed material does become political, but is not politically programmatic in relation to abortion.

In popular culture, abortion has been widely represented in both fictional and non-fictional works. Novels such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Richard Yate's *Revolutionary Road* (1961) and John Irving's *The Cider House Rules* (1985) are perhaps some of the more popular narratives containing abortion. The latter two novels have successful film adaptations, with A-rated actors, such as Kate Winslet,

Leonardo DiCaprio and Michael Caine, while Atwood's novel is set to be released as a television series in 2017. Between 1916 and 2013 there have been over 300 films and television series produced that deal with abortion as a topic in America alone (Sisson and Kimport 415). Given the political ideologies surrounding the topic, most narratives including abortion tend to reflect the cultural preoccupation with moral and ethical implications regarding abortion. In her analysis of abortion in American prime-time television, Celeste Condit argues that often the subject of abortion is demonstrative of political and cultural atmospheres at the time of the show's airing (Condit 123). Condit's argument demonstrates how abortion narratives reflect the social and political anxieties of a society, rather than an active attempt to lead and direct discourse. She identifies three primary archetypes of abortion narratives within prime-time television that include shows that fit into the categories of 'pro-choice', 'anti-abortion', or 'pro-abortion'. In their own analysis which picks up where Condit leaves off, Andrea Press and Elizabeth Cole argue that the abortion narratives presented in prime-time television are essentially representations of normative social influence, where class discourse becomes the dominant factor in the acceptability of abortions, potentially depoliticising abortion within the context of popular culture (Press and Cole 26-28). In Sisson and Kimport's statistical summary of abortion in American visual media, there is an 'overrepresentation' of deaths relating to women who contemplate or obtain an abortion, as well as an exaggerated number of adoptions as alternatives to abortion. Such alternatives or outcomes to abortion in popular media have the potential to negatively inform the audiences' opinion of abortion in relation to their own social context (Sisson and Kimport 417).

Just as there have been many novels, films and television series that take up the subject of abortion, so too have there been many studies on abortion in popular media, with a large body of work being dedicated to the politicisation of abortion. Considered within this category are texts that deal primarily with abortion rhetoric. Karen Weingarten's *Abortion in the American Imagination* (2014), for example, considers how modern abortion discourse — those who use the populist terms 'life' and 'choice' — serves to obscure the social issues, which span from biopolitics and eugenics to gender, by immediately placing them into the philosophical realm of morals. Expanding, only slightly beyond the parameters of the politicisation of abortion are works such as Heather MacGibbon's *Screening Choice* (2007). MacGibbon's analysis compartmentalises

abortion, not as Condit has done via the presentation of the politics of abortion, but rather through the archetypal development of the typical female and male characters within twentieth-century film. Nevertheless, MacGibbon still frames her analysis from a political perspective. Meg Gillette's PhD thesis M*odernism's Scarlet Letter* (2007) examines how the context of the American narrative 'invests abortion as a fulcrum in broader social, economic and cultural struggles, loading it with heavy political significance' (Gillette 12). Another PhD thesis, Lesley Broder's *Challenging Maternal Inevitability* (2009), considers 'transatlantic' representations of abortion between the years 1879 and 1939 focusing on the 'type' of woman who challenges the hegemonic stereotypes of the mother.

My examination of films and television series follows an exploration into representation of abortion from a general perspective, and in so doing touches on issues of power, space, agency, alienation and identity, in both micro- and macro-narratives. The goal is to provide an explorative study of various representations of abortion, rather than a study of hypothesis. In order to achieve this a total of eight texts have been chosen, three from America: *American Horror Story* (2011—), *Grey's Anatomy* (2005—) and *Prometheus* (2012); one from England: *Vera Drake* (2004); one from Germany: *Part-Time Work of A Domestic Slave* (1973); one from Romania: *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days* (2007) and two from Hong Kong: *Dumplings* (2004) and *Re-Cycle* (2006). While this might be considered a large and diverse selection of texts, they have been chosen because they represent a broad scope of narratives dealing with abortion, thus allowing for a more comprehensive examination of the representation of abortion in film and television than had I chosen material from a single medium or country. Not only have the texts been chosen for their multinational origins, but also for their lack of overtly political dogma regarding abortion politics. Each of the texts utilises abortion as either a primary or secondary plot device, giving rise to a wealth of issues, including personal and national identity, ideology and hegemony. In doing so, the explorative study considers the complexities of abortion discourse with regards to women, and their place in society.

Structurally, this dissertation has eight chapters, with each featuring a particular film or television show that addresses issues relating to abortion. These are followed by a conclusion chapter. Chapters One, Two and Three examine the films that provide the strongest historical representations of abortion. Films examined in these chapters include

Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave, *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days* and *Vera Drake*. Each film is set in Europe during a specific historical period when abortions were unlawful. As such they provide particular socio-historical portrayals of abortion that explore political ideologies of alienation, power and agency. The dissertation then moves from these historical representations to those of the Gothic. Chapter Four explores a film from Hong Kong titled *Dumplings*, which while still heavily embedded in the social and political representations of abortion, considers the act within the context of the Hong Kong/Chinese national identity. Chapter Five's *American Horror Story*, which is also the first of two television shows included in this study, shifts the focus from political to cultural issues of abortion prevalent in American society. Staying within the cultural context of America, Chapter Six addresses the more personal, and thus emotional and sentimental representations of abortion through the television show *Grey's Anatomy*. Chapter Seven then returns the discussion to another film produced in Hong Kong titled *Re-Cycle*, which maintains the sentimental and emotional depictions of abortion present in *Grey's*. *Re-Cycle* also demonstrates a return to the Gothic, which is continued in Chapter Eight with the film *Prometheus* that considers an entirely different representation of abortion as it is a science fiction film that removes itself from any direct cultural or social context. Here, the representation of abortion is shaped by the film's preoccupation with the mythic through a patriarchal creation myth that presents, within it, a possible rendering of abortion as a space for autonomy and agency.

Due to the study's concentration on the various representations of abortion, it can appear to have too wide a scope. This limitation in the study has been weighed up in relation to the intentions of the study. Because the dissertation is not examining a particular aspect of abortion, such as the depiction of political ideologies, or the role of female abortionists, a true reflection of representation needs to be as expansive as possible. This provides two challenges for the study. The first is providing a wide enough scope to present adequately an exploratory study into representation. This concern has been addressed through the examination of eight texts from five countries. While this is only a small representation of the possible texts from a global context, it is a respectable number of film and television representations for the size of the study. Indeed, even eight texts have produced a rather large document. Secondly, the focus of the study on representation means that the study of abortion representation changes from text to text. This has been addressed, to a certain degree, by informally grouping similar texts

together. Those chapters, which examine the historical films, are placed first, followed by the chapters that examine texts that are Gothic in nature. The next two chapters consider those two texts that provide the most sentimental and emotional representations of abortion. Finally, the last chapter examines a futuristic mythic film that includes a representation of abortion. Still, the width of scope and focus on representations suggest ways in which the study can be extended further into other avenues, such as looking at abortion representation in only one country, or examining films and shows which come from counties that have not been included in this study. By structuring the dissertation in this manner, the intent is that as each text is examined in detail, through the use of various theoretical frameworks and a detailed close reading, common themes will emerge, which while slightly disconnected by the separate readings of each text, will allow for a greater understanding, not only of abortion in specific socio-cultural contexts, but also a deeper and more sensitive reading into how narratives involving abortion are represented in film and television.

Titled "Contradicting Hegemony in Alexander Kluge's *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave*", Chapter One examines Alexander Kluge's 1973 German film through the theoretical framework of Marxism. The film narrates the story of part-time abortionist, Roswitha Bronski, who is also a wife and the mother of three children. Her husband Franz is a chemical engineer who refuses to work, forcing his wife to provide for the family through her illegal abortion clinic. Roswitha is dominated by her husband, having to forgo her own intellectual pursuits to accommodate his. Although she is first depicted as a clumsy and subservient woman, her illegal abortion practice demonstrates her ability as a competent and successful woman. Set within an abortion syndicate, Roswitha's clinic is eventually discovered by the police after she intervenes and saves the life of the client of an abortion competitor. Although she is able to escape being charged, Roswitha's abortion clinic is shut down and her husband is forced to get a job at a chemical plant. The rest of the film shows Roswitha as she attempts to develop herself intellectually and socially. Kluge, through his own Marxist ideologies, has created a film about the alienation of women from themselves as well as from society. The chapter examines how Kluge uses abortion to interrogate women's bodily, social and political alienation, and in so doing challenges the German hegemony of the 1970s through issues of space, agency and power.

Like the issues of alienation raised within Chapter One, Chapter Two, "Written on the Body: Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*" discusses a film which addresses issues of bodily-politics. Set in Romania during the last few years of Nicolae Ceaușescu's communist era, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* is a film that depicts the conditions under which women had to live during the Ceaușescu regime. The film presents the story of two university aged women, Otilia and Găbița, as they seek out an illegal abortion in a period when women's reproductive capabilities had become 'national treasures'. The narrative follows the protagonist Otilia as she navigates the numerous black-markets, purchasing contraband products such as soap and cigarettes, until she eventually helps purchase an illegal abortion from a man named Bebe. Being placed in a desperate position, Otilia and Găbița are forced to sell their bodies to Bebe as payment for the abortion. As a result of director Cristian Mungiu's stylistic choices which make the film visually reminiscent of surveillance footage, which serves to emphasise the issues present in a police state, the chapter analyses the film by considering Foucault's theories of the Panoptican, and of the body-politic. In so doing, this chapter moves away from the more socialist analysis which viewed Roswitha as representative of a repressed class of women, to a narrative which focuses on the plight of women, suggesting a solidarity between them, and the physical power struggle regarding bodily control. As such, the chapter will argue that this film deals with the issues of power, agency and bodily ownership in a far more direct manner.

Chapter Three titled "Mike Leigh's *Vera Drake*: The Politics of Women" moves from Romania in the 1970s to post-War 1950s England. *Vera Drake* continues to raise similar questions to those raised in the two previous chapters. The film focuses on Vera, who, despite being a respected and contributing member of her society, performs illegal abortions in secret for women in need. Coming from a lower to middle class family, Vera is depicted performing a number of abortions throughout the film, until one abortion sends her client to hospital. She is then arrested, ostracised by her friends and family and is eventually imprisoned for her crimes. The film, through the story of Susan Wells, considers the hypocrisy of the patriarchal system that, while prohibiting abortions for the poor, has in place rules and regulations allowing for the legal abortions of wealthy women, as long as they are willing to degrade themselves by claiming mental instability. While all the chapters consider a space in which women are able to challenge the system — one removed from the acceptable patriarchal hegemony — it is *Vera Drake* which

closely considers, through the micro-narratives of the women who Vera performs abortions for, how space is used as a position of solidarity, and of exclusion. Through a reading of Simon de Beauvoir, the chapter considers how Leigh positions women in the space of the Other, which suggests a form of constrained agency where women are able to find spaces of resistance against hegemony.

Chapters One, Two and Three are focused on socio-historical representations of abortion within specific European contexts. As such, they form part of a discussion that considers not only space for women's agency, but also particular political contexts, which represent specific patriarchal hegemonies. These three films also seek to normalise the act of abortion by removing the sensational and the spectacular, which the following chapters magnify. In Chapter Four, "Fruit Chan's *Dumplings*: Cannibalising One's Self", abortion is presented in a Gothic film from Hong Kong. *Dumplings*, directed by Fruit Chan, follows Mrs Li, a middle aged retired film star from Hong Kong, who is on the verge of losing her husband, and thus her wealth and status, to a younger woman. Desperate to find a way to reclaim her youth and beauty, she hires Mei, a dumpling chef, who claims to hold the secret to everlasting youth and beauty. Mei's secret is that the filling of her dumplings contains aborted foetuses that originate from China, courtesy of the state's one child policy. Not satisfied with the results of her foetus filled diet, Mrs Li demands that Mei find more potent foetuses to speed up the rejuvenation process. Mei eventually performs an abortion on a teenage girl, Kate, who is five months pregnant. Kate dies from the abortion, but Mei and Mrs Li have Kate's aborted foetus, which is the most potent available, being not only five months 'old', but also a product of sexual abuse and incest. The film, much like the previous films, is dominated by social issues. The difference, apart from *Dumplings* being the first Asian film considered, is that it is not a historical film, but one which examines present concerns regarding both China's and Hong Kong's national identities and their unbridled consumerist societies. Although *Dumplings* presents abortion in a particularly repulsive manner, the film's social context goes some way to humanise the characters. Because the film is tinged with the Gothic this chapter frames the discussion of the film's representations of abortion through Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject.

Chapter Five, "The Gothic Satire of FX's *American Horror Story*" examines the first American text present in this dissertation, which is additionally an anthology

television series. The primary focus of the chapter is on Season One, titled *Murder House*, a reference to the history of the Los Angeles mansion in which the season is set. Despite being temporally fragmented, the narrative, for the most part, follows the Harmon family as they move into the mansion and gradually discover the house's gruesome past that is revealed to the audience through the Montgomerys' narrative involving their illegal abortion practice in the 1920s when Charles and Nora Montgomery begin performing illegal abortions in their basement. During this time, their baby, Thaddeus, is kidnapped and murdered by an enraged father of one of the aborted foetuses. Charles brings Thaddeus back to life, but only by creating a monster. Nora reacts by killing both Charles and herself, after first attempting to kill the monster-infant. The other three prominent representations of abortion in the show are incidental inclusions, such as Season One's Hayden/Ben plot in which Hayden contemplates an abortion, and then in Season Two and Season Five, where two women attempt to abort, only to have the abortions fail. As with the previous chapters, there is a focus on the spatial within the season, this time in the form of the mansion and its basement. The abortion representation is structured around and inside the physical house, emphasising the hypocrisy of American culture regarding abortions. The chapter considers how the Gothic genre reduces abortion to the horrific, removing all humanising factors — in fact transforming most of its characters into monsters of one sort or another — leaving a grotesque and spectacular representation of abortion, which satirises America's cultural incongruities regarding the issue.

Chapter Six titled "ABC's *Grey's Anatomy*: Locating the (M)other" also examines an American television series and follows two dominant representations of abortion found within the decade long show. On the whole, *Grey's Anatomy* focuses on the surgeons of the fictional hospital Seattle Grace, based in Seattle, Washington. The show first presents abortion through the narrative of Doctor Addison Montgomery–Shepherd, an obstetrical, gynaecological and neonatal surgeon, a specialist in maternal and foetal 'bodies'. Addison has already had the abortion by the time she enters the show at the end of Season One, but the narrative is only presented in Season Three, on what would have been the infant's due date. Season Three explores the consequences of Addison's abortion, and her continued desire for a child. The second abortion narrative presents itself through the character of Cristina Yang. During the show, Cristina, a surgical intern at Seattle Grace, considers aborting twice; first at the end of Season One and the beginning of Season Two. Before she can go through with the abortion, she

miscarries due to an ectopic pregnancy. Then in Seasons Seven and Eight, Cristina discovers once again, that she is pregnant. At this point she is a successful surgeon and married, when she seeks out and this time obtains an abortion. The process of obtaining the abortion is emotionally traumatic for her, as her husband objects to the abortion and abandons her, only to return moments before the procedure is due to be performed. Like Addison, Cristina also suffers as a result of the consequences of her choice to abort throughout the rest of her time as a character on *Grey's*. While Chapter Five's *American Horror Story* considered American cultural perceptions of abortion, *Grey's* provides an alternative approach to the representation of abortion. The spectacular becomes a sensational and emotional depiction of abortion. Unlike all of the other chapters, Chapters Five and Six are less theoretically dense with the focus being on those aspects of American culture that the representations of abortion expose. Although Chapters Four and Five provide examples of representations of abortion that are spectacular in various ways, Chapter Six, through an examination of the societal roles of women, considers the questions that *Grey's* raises about women's bodies, their personal autonomy and their social roles, through a sentimental reading that touches on the personal and micro-narratives, like those seen in Chapter Two and Three.

Such sentimentality is exacerbated within Chapter Seven "Recycling the Traumatic the Pang Brother's *Re-Cycle*". *Re-Cycle* returns the study to the Gothic by presenting another film from Hong Kong, this time with supernatural elements. The film tells the story of a young author Ting-yin, who, while pregnant, is abandoned by her boyfriend and procures an abortion. Now a successful author, with one of her novels adapted into a film, Ting-yin is faced with the return of her ex-boyfriend who seeks to rekindle their previous relationship. With his return comes the return of the unresolved trauma of her abortion. In writing her next novel, Ting-yin is transported into the realm of the abandoned, where she is rescued from zombie-like ghosts by a little girl. The girl agrees to lead Ting-yin out of the abandoned realm, all the while being hunted by the zombie-like spectres. Ting-yin eventually comes across a cavern of 'the aborted' and later learns that the little girl is one of the foetuses who were abandoned in the cavern when their mothers aborted them. By the time the pair reach the realm's exit, Ting-tin has named the girl Ting-yu, after herself, and discovers that the child is actually her own aborted foetus. She eventually escapes the abandoned world, but not without confronting her past. The chapter endeavours to read the emotional elements of the present in abortion

narratives, where abortions, due to societal ideologies, are repressed and ignored. In order to do so, it will make use of Sigmund Freud's The Uncanny (*Das Unheimliche*) including his discussion on doppelgängers, and Cathy Caruth's trauma theory.

Having examined socio-historical representations of abortion within Chapters One to Three, and then Gothic representations in Chapters Four and Five, Chapter Six begins to consider a representation of abortion which focuses on the emotional experiences of women. Chapter Seven, through a story of cyclical repression and denial, continues this representation of abortion as a deeply emotional personal experience leading to feelings of sentimentality. The final chapter, Chapter Eight, titled "Conversations about Gender in Ridley Scott's *Prometheus*", examines how Scott's film, embedded in the patriarchal mythic, removes itself from any possible realm of the real, and situates itself within a Gothic science fictional world.

Prometheus presents a world where humanity has been created by beings known to the protagonist Elizabeth Shaw, only as 'the Engineers'. These giant alien men came to Earth thousands of years before to sow the seeds of humanity, through the sacrifice of one of their own. Finding numerous archaeological digs depicting the same star constellation, Elizabeth and the crew of the ship Prometheus head out to the only habitable moon in that constellation. There they discover the Engineers, who have been dead for over 2000 years, killed off by some mysterious virus, which in fact is a biological weapon that begins to kill the crew. Elizabeth is eventually impregnated in an act instigated by the AI David, and attempts to surgically self-abort the foetus after David denies her request to terminate the pregnancy. David discovers one lone Engineer survivor, who eventually kills most of the remaining crew. The surviving crew, apart from David and Elizabeth, sacrifice themselves to destroy the escaping engineer. In doing so they prevent him from mounting a biological attack on Earth. Elizabeth eventually survives at the film's end, and with the decapitated but otherwise mentally functional AI, David, leaves the moon in search of answers to the questions that the Prometheus expedition has raised. Considered through the lens of creation mythology, specifically Plato, and embodiment feminist theory of Elizabeth Grosz and Rosi Braidotti, the chapter examines the film's representation of abortion in a conversation about gender roles, engaging with issues of agency and personal autonomy in a framework which deals with questions about existence and male dominated creation mythologies and ideologies.

While *Prometheus* considers issues that are like those raised in the films where abortion has been denied to women, Elizabeth's representation of abortion is set within a mythic realm, creating a metanarrative that encompasses generalised patriarchal hegemony and ideology. It thus returns the study to issues of resistance and space, but in ways which are less socially and culturally specific — although it is still predominantly a Western patriarchal myth — and places questions of gender, power, agency, space and resistance in a more theoretical conceptual framework, that challenges the traditional mythic narratives through Elizabeth's rebellion and her abortion.

CHAPTER 1

CONTRADICTING HEGEMONY IN ALEXANDER KLUGE'S *PART-TIME WORK OF A DOMESTIC SLAVE*

After being accused of botching an abortion by her emergency on-call doctor, Roswitha Bronski (Alexandra Kluge) takes a sledgehammer to his car. This scene, which takes place in the first half of Alexander Kluge's *Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave* [*Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin*] (1973), is part of a developing pattern in the film, where the male characters generally speak over and look down on the female characters, Roswitha included. Set at night, the scene opens with Roswitha rushing her rival's client to an emergency surgery, where Doctor Genee accuses her of 'butchery' claiming that she should be 'reported for manslaughter' suggesting that she has '[pushed her] (Roswitha) ladle right into her (the client's) belly'. Giving her no time to explain her actions he grabs the nape of her neck, and manhandles a stumbling Roswitha down the stairs and out the door. The camera, which was set at a high-angle shot aimed at the stairwell, indicating Roswitha's lack of power, lingers a few moments on Genee as he slams the door behind her. The camera then cuts to a long-shot of a darkened pathway as Roswitha walks out of the property, where she begins to vandalise Genee's car, smashing the taillights and denting the car's bodywork. Like most of Roswitha's actions in the film, this reaction is removed from the sight of any male observers as she works in a dimly lit street with only a flashlight to illuminate the direction of the blows of the sledgehammer. Genee, like most of the characters in the film, is willing to profit from her abortion practice, but quick to rebuke and condemn her work. Kluge's *Part-Time Work* is a film that attempts to reveal the contradictions of 1970s West German society, which sought to place women in a controlled and confined space that supported a patriarchal ideology, while still giving the overall appearance of female agency.

Kluge, a German lawyer, author and filmmaker of the Frankfurt School of thought, utilised abortion within his black and white German independent film *Part-Time Work* to emphasise the plight of West German women. The protagonist, Roswitha, exudes a pragmatic business-like manner regarding the act of abortion, which is most visible through her establishment of an illegal abortion ring, which she uses to support her family. The absence of horror with which this film approaches the topic of abortion

renders the act banal and routine, allowing the film to focus on certain social realities and address the question of what a woman's position within society affords her in terms of freedom of movement, employment and reproduction. It appears that Kluge's intention in producing such a film was to establish a discourse regarding women and their societal positioning as part of a wider discussion regarding *öffentlichkeit*, the public sphere (Schlüpmann "Femininity" 70). The film, and Kluge, incurred protestations over both the representation of abortion and women, especially those women who, at the time of the film's release, were battling to rescind Paragraph 218 of the penal code of the Federal Republic, which outlawed abortion (FDR c. 16 s. 218). The fallout over the film's reception had Kluge attempting to repair his reputation with the German women's rights groups as a critically relevant filmmaker and feminist (Schlüpmann "What Is Different" 130).

Part-Time Work is a film that examines ideologies, one that attempts to interrogate the hegemonic powers in relation to the private and public spheres of womanhood, through the use of procreation and abortion as aspects of feminised 'modes of production'. Having been schooled in the Frankfurt school of Marxist thought, Kluge appears to incorporate Marxist theory as a framework through which he expresses his own ideologies, with his goal being to generate an awareness in his audience 'of [an] "industrialisation of consciousness" […] to encourage them to reassess their concept of experience and reality in order to recognise the ever-present possibility for emancipation' (Gibson 2). Here Kluge actively opposes what he calls the 'pseudo public sphere', which is owned and controlled by the bourgeoisie (Kluge "On Film" 40). One method Kluge used to distinguish himself from his more mainstream colleagues was to introduce the montage technique into his film. Within *Part-Time Work*, Kluge incorporates a number of external elements into his montage, including German fairy tales (*Kuhle Wampe*), clips from the Soviet Russian film *Chapayev*, and quotes and images (Rich 32), in order to produce a realist text which challenges the ideological constructs of the time.

Kluge closely followed Marxist theory regarding the modes of production within his film. Karl Marx based his theory on the interpretation of the nature of humanity and society from societal developmental history, thus aligning himself with the Hegelian concept of alienation of the self (Tucker *xxi*). What is important to consider is Marx's deliberation on material production, those of the modes of production, and the individuals

who are integral to that production within capitalist society. The modes of production concerns the different ways in which humans throughout history have produced various items and objects, which sustain that particular society's standards and modes of living. Marx claimed that capitalist society had created a split between two primary economic groups: the 'Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat' (Marx 474). Alienation of labour is defined by Marx in four different ways: Firstly, alienation from the process of work; secondly, alienation from the production of work and from the worker as a producer and creator; thirdly, alienation of the worker from the product of his labour; and finally, alienation of the worker from other workers (Marx 474-8). Each form of alienation is related to the modes of the means of production, which in a capitalist bourgeois society involves the means of production and the finished product being owned by the bourgeoisie, thereby leaving the proletariat, the worker, with no invested interest in the making of, nor in the end-product.

By focusing on women within *Part-Time Work*, Kluge attempts to use them and their bodies as the central 'mode of production'. In doing so, he depicts the German's hegemonic social construct as being incompatible with the actual bodily and lived experiences of women. *Part-Time Work* includes two abortion scenes in the first half of the film, although the second scene is just a glance (*Part-Time Work*). The most detailed abortion scene, graphic yet clinical, is presented in the early stages of the film. Roswitha, despite her fumbling and bumbling nature (and perhaps because of the dramatic change from clumsy housewife to efficient and professional abortionist), raises elements within her character associated with that of the monstrous-feminist, which she both is and is not. While it is problematic to argue that Roswitha fits the definition of the monstrous-feminist who is meant to horrify, it is exactly this site of contradiction which Kluge has sought to propagate within the text which causes her to be contradictory herself. She is mother, the subject dominated by patriarchy, and rejected-mother, as an abortionist, where, purposefully or not, she threatens the patriarchal law.

The role that women occupy in Kluge's films has been taken up by Katrin Polak-Springer in her doctoral thesis *The Haunted Public Sphere* (2012), which also considers his use of montages as a way to '[alienate] between the concrete and the abstract perspective' (Polak-Springer 8). Polak explains that the social and historical contexts make up the concrete elements of perspective, while the abstract elements consist of those

bourgeois ideologies which exclude all domains of reality that do not correlate with the dominant ideology. Such ideologies are propagated through the mainstream media, by seamlessly manipulating the concrete contexts of the society (Kluge "On Film" 40). By dividing the concrete and the abstract from one another, the authenticity that the mainstream media produces becomes impossible to accept as reality. By using women as primary characters and in particular as 'female modes of production', Kluge seeks to distance the heteronormative ideologies of a society controlled by the bourgeoisie from the actual bodied experiences of women, exposing the societal flaws within the German state. This, Springer argues, creates a space within Kluge's films for 'intellectual protest energy' which opposes ideology with a bodily 'lived experience' (Polak-Springer 8).

The film opens with a close-up of Roswitha's face and a full orchestral score promising drama, while above the music a narrator gives the film an expectant air, filled with possibilities. 'Roswitha', exclaims the narrator 'feels an enormous power within her' (*Part-Time Work*). Part of Kluge's methodology ensures that the camera's physical presence is always discernible. Akin to his use of the voiceover as the noticeable primary narrator and intermediary between the audience and Roswitha, his transitions between scenes are harsh. In his interview with Gary Indiana, Kluge defends his use of these jarring transitions by saying that he does not believe that pictures have anything to do with one another, 'They don't carry information, the information is carried by the cut, the splice' (Indiana and Kluge 46). Such visible editing is a central feature of Kluge's use of the German aesthetics of realism.



Fig. 1.1 *Part Time Work* 00:00:10
The opening scene is of a close-up of Roswitha, her hair pulled back and covered in a head scarf. She stares at the camera unflinchingly — an action which is repeated throughout the film, especially when Roswitha's subjective power is challenged.

Bertold Brecht, Kluge's contemporary and part-inspiration, believed that realism was not only 'an issue for literature', but that there were political, philosophical and practical issues surrounding realist aesthetics, that 'must be handled and explained as such — as a matter of general human interest' (qtd. in MacCabe 7). Brecht, Kluge and

their films contemporaries understood the genre of realism as being a style of constructing representations of reality where 'reality' is considered a product of ourselves. Within

> the German philosophical, it has always been clear that reality is a product of the mind or of language, [and] not given to our perception 'as it really is' […] the truth always lies deeper, below the surface, in abstract laws of nature and society. But this truth was often [within philosophy and society] conceived in idealistic terms, denying real social contradictions. (Bruck 59)

Within their realist texts, Brecht and Kluge began to break down popular idealised perceptions of reality and, in Marxist fashion, produced works that delved into the social contradictions present in an imperfect society. Whilst Brecht sought to widen the scope of realism 'as a confronting of a many-sided, contradictory (and often hidden) historical reality' which then presents the hegemonic ideologies through contradiction (Lunn 86), Kluge produced realist Marxist texts through fragmentation, the use of montage and association.

Central to Kluge's notion of radical realism is association. Here the audience is not asked to accept what is being produced and portrayed as a reproduction of the realities of the world. Rather, it is being asked to construct, through association, a perception of reality, returning to Brecht and the German philosophical tradition, the connections between language, images and the mind. It is for this reason that the narrator's declaration of Roswitha's discovery of her potential power is followed by a seemingly random shot of a forked road, the left road narrower than the right, while above, dark rolling clouds indicate that a storm is brewing (*Part-Time Work*). The forked road and oncoming storm foreshadow the uneven and difficult path Roswitha will eventually take. The camera then cuts to a scene of an old war film that Kluge had inserted into *Part-Time Work*. Two Russian men talk of ruling the world, if only they could speak foreign languages. To re-emphasise Kluge's argument for intellectual development, the camera then cuts to a still of a quote by Fredrick Engels: 'All that sets men in motion,' the quote reads, 'must first pass through their minds, but the form it takes in those minds depends mainly on



Fig. 1.2 *Part Time Work* 00:00:16
The fork in the road, a symbol of Roswitha's own emerging awareness.

circumstances' (*Part-Time Work*). Here, Kluge associates Roswitha, with her newly discovered power, to the limitations represented by the two Russian men and Engels's quote. The implication is that Roswitha must first recognise her social context before she is able to adequately utilise her individual power.

Part-Time Work is divided into a two part narrative with the protagonist Roswitha as the transitional character; she straddles the sections and so creates continuity. The first half of the film is dedicated to Roswitha's role as wife, mother and part-time illegal abortionist (the section of the film of interest in this chapter). The second half of the film presents her as having lost her abortion practice, and becoming steadily involved with revolutionary politics directed against her husband's bourgeois-capitalist employers. Kluge explains of *Part-Time Work*, that '"[a]bortion [is] for the others, and for myself, many children." If you [the audience] take this as the principle of the world you have a description, a metaphor, which fills everything', encompassing all social ills (Indiana and Kluge 50). Kluge uses abortions and the abortionist as representations of those subaltern and excluded social constructs, who do not fit into the prevailing hegemonic ideologies of the period. It is for this reason that Roswitha does not see the irony in her actions as a domestic housewife, who finances her household through her illegal abortion clinic. This incompatibility of the hegemonic socially constructed individual and the actual lived individual is the primary site of contradiction within the film. Kluge seeks to present an awareness of such contradictions in *Part-Time Work*, relating them to the issue of abortion, which itself acts as a metaphor for 'conveying [the] existing attitude' of society toward women during the 1970s (Dawson and Kluge 52). He does so by representing the contrary nature of the female abortionist who in this case also happens to be a mother, and by depicting an illegal syndicate of abortionists, which is so readily sought out by women, that it has emergency procedures for botched abortions and a rivalry among competitors.

Returning to Kluge's use of montages as spaces of intellectualism, these elements in the film also introduce the notion of historicism into Kluge's work. Both the quote and the old war film clip are means of 'activating his [Kluge's] readers in their historical present […] to subvert the "modern myths"' (Polak-Springer 8). History is extremely significant in Kluge's work, with the Second World War occupying a position of particular import because it greatly influenced Kluge and the German people. Engels's

quote attempts to merge the ghost of history into a more intellectualised and rationalised Marxist approach, which might encourage the target audience to realise the dogma present in the private and public spheres of society. The quote also reiterates Kluge and Bretch's radical realist approach where everything that is understood to be real, must first be filtered through the mind. Of course, how that filtration is achieved, how it comes to create meaning, is based entirely on 'historical materialism' (Polak-Springer 90).

This film, based as it is on the Marxist notions of modes of production and ownership, is specifically dedicated to the female modes of production. Roswitha's home life is chaotic, despite the initial appearance of a division between the public and the personal spheres as indicated in the opening sequence. The camera is directed at the windows of the Bronskis' home, while the family is safely enclosed behind double glazed windows to fend off the cold. The narrator introduces the Bronski family through a series of segmented frames. Two of the three children are seen first, then Roswitha, then the third child and finally her husband, Franz (Bion Steinborn). These characters are depicted in close-up shots as they peer out of a window into the snowy street below their flat. The camera is situated outside the flat and the only sound is an orchestral piece, made up of wind instruments playing a tranquil melody, although slightly high-pitched, thus indicating an undercurrent of tension. The narrator's comment on the weather, that 'inside it is warm, outside it's cold', not only refers to the German winter outside but to the division between the individual and the social, and the contradictions inherent in such divisions (*Part-Time Work*).

In an interview about *Part-Time Work*, Kluge commented that 'Inside, the warmth; outside, the cold. Auschwitz never disturbed the idyll of happy family life in the Germany of the Thirties' (Dawson and Kluge 52). Here Kluge makes the association between this scene that sets up the divisions of inside and outside, of private and public and Auschwitz's brutal reality, which is indicative of what he considers to be an active and willing blindness of people to the ideological realities of society. Springer notes Kluge's awareness of this dichotomy in her own reading of Kluge, where the images he presents are distortions of reality. However, they are so because 'discourse, stereotypes, and assumed "truths" have reality effects and constitute the world we live in' (Polak-Springer 9). The comparison suggests that Auschwitz is a hyperbolic version of Kluge's modern Germany. Behind this 'idyllic' domestic scene, a particular brand of chaos reigns

where Roswitha is in her own personal sphere, a slave. She is a slave to her husband, who wishes her also to be the breadwinner of the family and she is a slave to society, forced to divide her life between home and work, leaving no time between her duties to enrich her own life.

The peaceful background music that represents the external perspective of the family yields to an interior made up of rapid shots and purely diegetic sounds. Children play with glass bottles and Roswitha drops a number of plates to the floor, all of which shatter (*Part-Time Work*). The contradiction present within the narrator's commentary on the weather is expanded into the private sphere where the family's seemingly tranquil existence turns chaotic as soon as the camera cuts to inside the flat. The serenity previously depicted changes into crying children and an infuriated husband. Here Roswitha's three children, two playmates and her own friend are in a cramped kitchen, its white tiled-walls give the appearance of encroaching on to any available space on the black and white screen, with the white table blending into the background, adding to the restrictive sensation. Her husband, eventually having had enough of the noise, comes to protest, only adding to the chaos and Roswitha's problems. He yells at Roswitha, demanding silence, and acts as if he is the victim who has to deal with a troublesome and burdensome family (*Part-Time Work*). Throughout the film Roswitha is continually belittled by the men surrounding her, and it is only through her illegal abortion operation that she is able to demonstrate her competency.



Fig. 1.3 *Part-Time Work* 00:03:38
Roswitha, in the midst of her chaotic household, appears clumsy and meek, subservient to her husband's wishes.

Roswitha and her clients are women who do not fit the stereotypical roles presented to them. Franz, who is representative of the overwhelming patriarchal reach, is blatantly against her abortion practice. Irrationally — acting out against Roswitha because she represents a threat against his power — he demands she stop performing abortions, while at the same time reminding her of her role as a mother and provider for her family, while offering no alternatives was of generating the income the family needs.

FRANZ. I forbid you to spend time with that Sylvia, or take the kids to her place.
ROSWITHA. Where else, then?
FRANZ. — There's the rub! Getting rid of the kids isn't as important as raising them.
ROSWITHA. I'm not getting rid of them, just having them cared for, when I'm with clients.
FRANZ. Your clients! I won't have that either! (*Part-Time Work*)

This scene occurs after the audience has witnessed Roswitha performing an abortion. After the children are fed and put to bed, Roswitha and Franz have a discussion about her role in the family.

Franz is framed just right of the centre of the frame, sitting in his high back chair, one leg casually swung over an armrest with shelves of books behind him. He appears to be the pinnacle of the modern, knowledgeable, male authority as the camera cuts between a close-up and a medium long-shot (*Part-Time Work*). The books, however, belie his status, for his demands are counterintuitive, given his own reluctance to find gainful employment. Roswitha is cut from the scene until the end, where a close-up of her face as she stares into the camera, silent in the wake of her husband's demands, has the effect of reinforcing the ridiculousness of Franz's notions, as well as stressing Roswitha's own lack of power. Later in the film, Franz accuses Roswitha of performing 'criminal acts' which he 'is against' (*Part-Time Work*). Roswitha is puzzled and hurt by her husband's comments, unable to understand how Franz can accept the monetary gain from her occupation as an abortionist while demanding that she cease her work and look after the children.



Fig. 1.5 *Part-Time Work* 00:09:53
Franz appearing the confident authority figure as he chastises Roswitha on her parenting skills and her abortion operation.

The idea of a self-serving abortionist is not one that is new to cinema. Nevertheless, it is the primary concept of killing children to feed one's own that is most prominent within this text. Similarly, as much as Franz is against abortions, he has been, up until his and Roswitha's near arrest, happy to use the income earned by his wife rather than find employment himself. His reaction, which comes after the abortion scene, places

the actual abortion sequence between two negative episodes, both providing pejorative connotations to abortion while suggesting a reluctant acceptance of the operation. The male narrator's depiction and Kluge's own reluctance both subvert the basic presentation of abortion as being purely a metaphor, for the contradictions of life and a means of representing women's 'liberation' from a capitalist Bourgeois slavery.

Kluge reproduces the anxieties of alienation from the means of production through the invocation of what Springer-Polack terms 'female mode of production' (Polak-Springer 3). Merging feminism and Marxism together, is not as easy as Kluge's representation of a Marxist critique of womanhood suggests. Firstly, as Heidi Hartmann argues in her criticism of Marxism and Feminism: 'the marriage of Marxism and feminism has been like the marriage of husband and wife depicted in English common law: Marxism and feminism are one, and that one is Marxism' (qtd. in Sargent *x*). Marxism, according to Carol Ehrlich, has traditionally been blind to patriarchy. Marxist Feminists have attempted to emphasise the pervasive entrenchment of patriarchy in both capitalist societies and Marxist theory. Because Marxist theory is erected on the historical modes of production, and those histories happen to be the same histories that have developed and continue to maintain the patriarchal society, attempting to construct a feminist Marxist approach is equivalent to merging feminism into a patriarchal analytical framework, and hoping that some form of equality will emerge (Ehrlich 111). An additional aspect of the relationship between Marxism and feminism is that due to the nature of Marxist theory — that it interrogates oppression through the means of production — it essentially focuses on the relationship of man to the capitalist society. Incorporating feminism within this framework only substitutes 'man' with 'woman' within the equation, leaving 'out the elements of patriarchy: the fact that women are oppressed *because they are women*' (Ehrlich 111).[1]

Within *Part-Time Work*, the female mode of production considers the alienation of the woman, not because of her role as mother, but because of the role that society imposes on her as a producer of people. Through the use of the female body as producer, the women who own those bodies suddenly have fewer options regarding their own individually lived experiences. As Kluge himself states:

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[1] Emphasis in original text.

> [Women] produce the right things: human beings. But there's always the conservative element, they're defending their private mode of production. Women, like the working class, can only emancipate themselves if they use the means and the motives of all classes.
> [The relationship between mother and child is not] *non*-alienated. *Without* alienation. It's surrounded by alienation and determined partially by alienation, but it itself is not completely alienated. (Dawson and Kluge 52)[2]

For Kluge, it is not in the mother/child relationship that alienation is found, it is in the societal restrictions and expectations of motherhood, the social concept, where the alienation of women can be located. This is what Kluge's abortion 'metaphor' is meant to contend with. Roswitha and her work, as both an abortionist and a social activist, are attempts at negotiating a woman's position in a dualistic world. Kluge speaks of Roswitha's abortion practice as 'the idea of helping her children live by killing other people's [and it being] merely a concentrated expression of the contradiction that exists in any family' (Dawson and Kluge 52). Abortion is not merely a metaphor for the social oppression of society, as there is within her occupation as an abortionist a comment on the ownership of the means of (re)production as well as one of the examples of contradiction visible within the film.

The first abortion scene begins with a handheld camera that follows Roswitha through a short but dark tunnel. The narrator opens the scene by stating that, '[her] surgery's in another part of town' and then elaborates soon afterwards, explaining that 'to afford more children of her own, Roswitha carries out abortions' (*Part-Time Work*). From the outset the audience is aware of her occupation. The implication, that, ironically, Roswitha kills other children to feed her own, has an almost Darwinian impact on the film. Her extraordinary will to survive, depicted repeatedly in the film (within both the first and second part), plays to this notion of 'kill or be killed' and serves to emphasise women's threatened position within society. This scene in particular, merged with the later scene where Franz displays his displeasure with Roswitha's underground abortion practice, all serve to emphasise how women do not fit the expected societal roles that have been assigned to them in the 1970s Germany. Kluge situates the protagonist outside respectable society by having her work as an illegal abortionist, and depicts her business

[2] Emphasis in original text.

as a successful one, with a large clientele searching for alternative and illicit methods of obtaining abortions. In doing so, Kluge's film portrays a society that is not one that is inclusive to women and their real needs.

Kluge seeks to distinguish between the hegemonic concept of what a woman should be and the actual embodied experiences of women. To achieve this distinction, the actual abortion scenes play out as if they were part of a documentary. The style is enforced with the use of a voiceover narration which is typically found in documentaries. In this way he brings in two components of his film theory. Kluge believes that documentaries add authenticity to a film while fictional works 'seek to impose the [hegemonic] structures' on individuals (Hansen 49). Both fiction and non-fiction are, regardless, designed to sell messages to the audience. Given that his intention is to antagonise mainstream depictions of people, Kluge uses a 'crossing of documentary and fictional modes' which challenges the way in which the media sells messages to their public (Hansen 49). The use of abortion in *Part-Time Work* is beneficial to the Marxist critique of ownership of production because it provides an immediate and fundamentally physical representation of (re)production and the body's status as object or individual. It also becomes the site where Kluge defies expectations by refusing to sensationalise the abortion scenes.

The way in which Kluge has directed the scene reduces the emotional impact of what would otherwise be a highly distressing sequence. The documentary style adds credence to Roswitha's work as a competent abortionist (*Part-Time Work*). The woman having the abortion is shown draped across a table, her sweater sliding off her shoulders and a despondent look on her face. She is naked from her waist down, and her legs are strapped on to the table top. This particular scene is important when looking at the different ways in which the physical act of abortion has been presented. Very few films contain similar scenes when depicting abortions, preferring to reduce the visibility of the abortion, which further adds to its



Fig. 1.6 *Part-Time Work* 00:06:52
One of the less graphically visual shots within the abortion scene. The varying reactions between the characters suggest that they view the experience as expedient and clinical.

taboo status within society. The abortion presented here is not horrific or traumatic, but rather extremely clinical.

The visual focus is on the abortion with the camera frequently cutting between Roswitha's work and close-ups of the vaginal area and the surgical equipment. One cut shows Roswitha inserting the tools to scoop the foetus out of the cervix. With no soundtrack to distract from the metal on metal sound of the tools and high contrast and extreme low lighting, there is nothing within the scene to divert the audience. The silence of both the characters and the narrator, together with the style of presentation, creates a distance, a division, between the action depicted and the audience. This division seems to be repeated throughout the film, stressing the notion of segmentation, and is particularly visible in relation to the abortion. Here, the audience is literally held captive by the sequence of the abortion. The film plays on the absolute normality of the abortion scene by presenting it as routine. The camera follows Roswitha and her assistant as they buckle a woman's bare legs into leg braces in a medium close-up. The camera then cuts to a close-up of a tea trolley, upon which cotton wool, a tea pot, a bottle of liquor, two shot glasses, a cup of tea and gynaecological instruments are laid out.

As Roswitha is methodical in her preparation, so the camera seems to linger on the mise-en-scène of each shot, long enough so that the scene becomes uncomfortable. For Roswitha, abortion is an everyday event and a pay-cheque; to the women who seek her out, it is a means to an end. Despite the narrator's judgmental introduction within this scene, the film is itself non-judgemental. It does not debate the morals, nor are there any attempts at exploring the various reasons that could justify abortions. The scene hides nothing because there is nothing to hide. The camera and its visual representation are all that are allowed to comment, with the abortion being depicted plainly. The possible contradictions, the implicit commentary about abortions not being in the scope of the law, and Kluge's own morality, which views abortions as objectionable, can all be read in the sequence. This is particularly evidenced

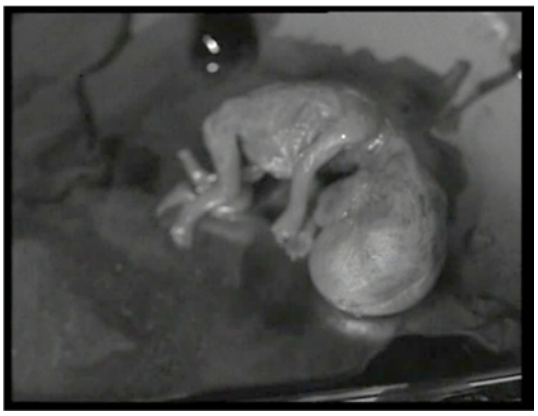

Fig. 1.7 *Part-Time Work* 00:07:10
Although Kluge is careful to remove any voice from the abortion scene, the camera's gaze lingers upon the aborted foetus, suggesting an undertone of restricted reluctance within the scene.

in the camera's lingering gaze on the newly aborted foetus, as the foetus is discarded in the medical tray along with bloodied tools. Roswitha tosses the used tools on top of the discarded foetus, ignoring the slight quivers the camera captures. Stripping off her gloves, she hands her patient a shot of liquor and helps herself to a cup of tea. Roswitha's movements are precise and methodical, and her lack of interest in the foetus points to a mechanical nature rather a human one. However, Kluge reins in the pedagogical sermon, which could easily have been presented within the scene, and instead presents the abortion matter-of-factly.

The treatment of the body within this scene also indicates a breach of expectation and tradition. Here, the aborted body, which may be understood as being parallel to the female body, is not hidden and there is no apology for the explicit scene. Both the abortion and the visible female body are in complete opposition to the traditional representations of women in film and of abortions. The point Kluge makes here, is similar to his objectives of revealing the hegemonic state's ideology. By obstinately avoiding the spectacle within the abortion scene, Kluge comments on the extreme sentimentality of popular films. By using Marxist theory, Kluge's intimate use of the body functions as a bridge between the ownership of production and of the mode of production, for the 'production' here can just as easily be reinterpreted as reproduction, considering the topic of the film's first half. The use of female modes of production within the abortion plot is a subtle mockery of the patriarchal capitalist society that wishes to regulate Kluge and his work, just as it regulates women and their bodies. Kluge is torn between his own ideological perception of what a woman should be, and his need to present women as owners of their own means of (re)production, which was noted by the German film theorist Heide Schlüpmann in an argument concerning Kluge's problematic depiction of women. In his interview with Dawson, Kluge maintains his position when he says:

> I don't think abortion is a legal question or something you can stamp out by legislation. And therefore I'm in favour of abolishing Paragraph 218 of the Criminal Code. On the other hand, I think that society, and women especially, can hardly feel friendly toward abortion. I don't think abortion is a friendly thing for human beings. And in a matriarchy, certainly, an abortion would be an absurd act. (Dawson and Kluge 57)

In some ways the abortion scene, depicted as it is, as an ordinary daily occurrence is ironic. Kluge is excessively visual in his representation of abortion, hiding nothing,

despite the actual act being illegal and Roswitha's attempts to keep her practice concealed. Added to this idea of criminality are the shadows surrounding the building where Roswitha has situated her practice. Women, Roswitha and Sylvia included, are often seen walking or running quickly through a shadowed passage. Their hurried figures bathed in shadows suggest that their activities are less than legitimate. Kluge experiments with the open and honest depiction of the abortion and the legality of abortion through such visual cues. The lengths to which Roswitha goes in order to keep her practice hidden are also representative of this as she transforms the abortion clinic into a veterinarian's clinic while she is under investigation by the authorities. A neighbour's Alsatian dog is left to run wild in the building for added emphasis. The secretive nature of Roswitha's practice is also remarked upon by a client of hers, who pleads for assistance after experiencing a botched abortion from a competitor, and explains that 'you [Roswitha and Mrs Willek] are enemies' (*Part-Time Work*). The details of Roswitha's underground abortion practice seem to be common knowledge around the city, and Roswitha has no trouble tracking down some of her clients when need be.

The film suggests that there exists an underground syndicate built around the selling of illegal abortions. For those cases which are too complicated, Roswitha refers her clients to 'competent doctors' who then pay her a commission for her services. Doctor Genee, one such physician, refuses to pay Roswitha her due and for the first time, Roswitha displays an excess of emotion in response to his rebuff. She confronts the doctor twice, insisting that he pay her 6,500 marks for six months of commissions:

> ROSWITHA. I have a family to keep, but you couldn't care less!
> GENEE. I've already told you I don't need the business I get from you.
> ROSWITHA. It may be a matter of money to you. But I insist on you paying me my due, right this minute. (*Part-Time Work*)

The other visible character involved with the abortion syndicate is Mrs A. Willek, 'the city's number one abortionist' and Roswitha's competitor. It is Willek who alerts the authorities to Roswitha's abortion practice when, after Willek botches an abortion, Roswitha is asked to help, despite the pair of abortionists 'being enemies'. Roswitha then takes the woman to Genee, who blames her for the botched abortion and throws her out of his surgical practice. Later, Roswitha blackmails Willek into recanting her accusation against her (*Part-Time Work*). The prohibiting of abortions within Germany at this time is one of the most visible ways in which the society had regulated and in a sense excluded

women from participating fully. As such, women like Roswitha, Willek and their clients have created their own society, one that is better suited to their needs and wants.

Roswitha's role as an abortionist is one that suggests a return of the means of (re)production to women — a return that needs to reject both the legislative means of control as well as the patriarchal voice of the hegemony. Still, the blurring of the borders between Kluge's personal ideology and the presence of an underground abortion clinic (Kluge maintains that he does not 'impose a moral standpoint [while at the same time he makes] a plea for this aborted child' (Dawson and Kluge 57)) which is well run and supported by other members of the community, is a disruptive force within the narrative, and is one that is felt through the staging of the abortion scenes. Schlüpmann reasons that Kluge's literary response regarding criticism of *Part-Time Work*, referring to the 'female modes of production', is inadequate, citing four main points of contention:

> 1. Kluge never differentiates between femininity and 'motherliness' [considering] the entire problematic of feminine productive force and social existence only from the perspective of the mother/child relationship.
> 2. Kluge subordinates the question of women's emancipation to the Marxist categories of productive force, relations of production, and class.
> 3. Femininity and sexual difference are never mentioned […]
> 4. […] 'feminine' and 'masculine' do not ultimately classify persons, but […] are present in varying degrees in every human being.
>
> (Schlüpmann "Femininity" 72)

Within Kluge's own ideology, which is visible within *Part-Time Work*, women are expected to become mothers and the possibility of a 'non-mother', of a woman separated from her predetermined role as biological producer, is a difficult concept to accept. Kluge's own moral and ethical dilemma about the acceptability of abortions is illustrated in Roswitha's abortion practice. He argues for a liberation of women from the alienation of their own modes of production, yet still holds the belief that women would not seek out abortions, that it would be contrary to a woman's nature. The female mode of production is further complicated by the considerations of alienation. By performing underground abortions, Roswitha is subverting the patriarchal order that traditionally seeks to alienate and fragment the means of production into small isolated parts. Kluge creates a narrative which places abortion as one of the ways in which woman are alienated from their lived experiences, by forcing them to go outside of the system to find what

they need. Ruby Rich considers the gendered imbalance displayed within *Part-Time Work* in relation to the authoritative voices of the narrator and Kluge. Both are dominant voices intended to represent oppression:

> In a film such as *Part-Time Work*, in which the filmmaker and narrator are male and in which the protagonist is a woman, the sexual politics are sharply etched within the film's form. The narrator, 'in league with' the author (Kluge) whose point of view he comes to represent and whose words become inflective in the intertitles [undermine] the film's female protagonist by a process in which the audience is actively complicit.
>
> (Rich 32)

The various layers of acceptability are then embedded in Kluge's mischievous portrayal of abortion. The audience is able to accept the layers of Roswitha's society, her family and herself. the film presents a feminist challenge by incorporating Roswitha's position as salve with the unrepentant abortion scene. Her underground abortion practice, created as a means to feed her family, now transcends the monetary conceptualisation and becomes, as is her political activism later in the film, a form of rebellion against her oppressive masters. With the practice of abortion Roswitha and other women find a form of resistance. This is in keeping with the second half of the film where Roswitha rebels against the hegemony.

CHAPTER 2

WRITTEN ON THE BODY: CRISTIAN MUNGIU'S *4 MONTHS, 2 DAYS AND 3 WEEKS*

Kluge's *Part-Time Work* provides a representation of abortion that is specifically situated within a Germanic society that is hypocritical in its treatment of women. Roswitha's abortion practice provides a space in which to consider issues of agency and the power of women. Like the previous chapter, Cristian Mungiu's Romanian film *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* [*4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile*] (2007) is set in a society where the hegemony seeks to repress and regulate women. As such, similar issues of women's agency alienation and power will be considered within *4 Months*. Here abortion is a part of the small isolated moments of rebellion against Romania's Ceaușescu dictatorship. Common elements that represent those moments in the film are black markets and youthful solidarity. The students at the university, Otilia Mihartescu (Anamaria Marinca) and her friend and dorm-mate Gabriela (Găbița) Dragut (Laura Vasiliu) attend gatherings to barter and sell Western contraband merchandise. Olitia roams the hallway of her dorm, looking to buy the American soap brand Lux, as Găbița has asked for 'Lux' and 'definitely not Palmolive'. The camera tracks her movements throughout the dorm with shaky close-ups and darkened long-shots, with only diegetic sounds added to the scenes. Such camera work and editing techniques become the norm in *4 Months* and signal the mimetic effect of a surveillance video, which is important to the overall aesthetic and political commentary of the film. In one scene, Otilia and her supplier stand in the corridor of her dorm, discussing the availability of American soap and cigarette brands. In another room, four girls and Otilia surround a table filled with banned cosmetics and perfumes, smuggled in from Germany and Hungary (*4 Months*). These scenes, found in the first ten minutes of the film set up the Romanian society of the 1980s as one that monitors its population, particularly women, very closely. Despite this surveillance Romania's citizens, especially its youth, manage to circumvent the system and find spaces for resistance. One such space is female agency, found through the purchase of an illegal abortion.

Abortion in Mungiu's film *4 Months* is an incidental inclusion, although the film's marketing punted it as an 'abortion film'. Like *Part-Time Work*, Mungiu's *4 Months* meaning is interconnected with its explicit socio-cultural context directly relating to

women's embodied realities. While Kluge sought to demonstrate the hypocritical conditions of a women's position within society by focusing on the alienation of women from their reproductive capabilities, Mungiu uses abortion as a means of glimpsing the Romanian people's social-historical circumstances under the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu. In doing so, he produces a film, which like Kluge's, addresses gendered and political questions of agency and power located within a specific European context. Cristian Mungiu employs abortion as part of the wider concern about surveillance in the Romanian state. His use of abortion is intended to contribute to a social exploration of a police state and the ability of its citizens to eke out some form of personal autonomous existence. The prohibition of abortion is seen, through the primary characters, Otilia and Găbița, as representative of all the restrictions employed by the state to control its population. Such personal and social limitations, presented through the film's topic and action, are challenged and rejected by those upon whom these limitations are imposed.

Cristian Mungiu successfully implies that an oppressed state leads to reactionary movement on all levels, although his direct concern is with the impact that such a Panopticon state has at a microcosmic level on the individual, rather than on a macrocosmic, social level. Through such representations, the texts may then be considered more social than personal in terms of their explorations. *4 Months* is a historiographical text, which considers the positions of power and space concerning the relationships between individuals and society. The film is deceptively simple in its presentation of two friends, Otilia and Găbița, as they seek out an illegal abortion through Viarel Bebe (Vlad Ivanov). Covering a window period of twenty-four hours, a handheld camera follows Otilia, around the city, presenting an opportunity to witness everyday life under the Romanian totalitarian regime through a series of shots that give the impression of surveillance footage (*4 Months*). *4 Months* concentrates on the individual, on abortion and its meaning when contextualised by communist Romania. By focusing on two college aged women in Romania during 1987, Mungiu indicates a certain sense of vulnerability of the individual within a society that hunts its own, representing the misfortunes of the Romanians during the last years of Ceaușescu's dictatorship.

Often thought of as bearing similarities to Stalin, in terms of his economic policies and the ever increasing violent and repressive regime, Nicolae Ceaușescu along with the Romanian Communist Party came to power in Romania in 1965 (Tismaneanu 11). In 1966,

in an attempt to boost the population and encourage economic growth, Ceaușescu signed into law Decree 770, which illegalised abortion for essentially all women under the age of forty-five (Romania 770/1966; Kligman 53-8). Benefits were put in place for large families and increased taxes were implemented for those over twenty-five who did not have children. Also included within the law was the banning of contraceptive sales and distribution. These laws were strictly controlled and monitored by the Romanian Department of State Security, because Romania boasted one of the largest and most complex secret police forces in the countries of Eastern Europe (Smith "Eastern"). The law had two essential effects. The first was a sudden increase in unwanted children, leading to the creation of Romania's infamous orphanages. The second, was a rapid increase in the number of illegal abortions (and maternal deaths), as individuals began finding methods of circumventing the restrictive system put in place (Lataianu 7-8). As a result of the growing illegal abortion market, all women with the capacity to reproduce were forced to undergo monthly examinations in order to ensure that any pregnancy could be recorded and monitored. Secret police and surveillance of individuals' private lives became a common occurrence. Aesthetically, *4 Months* is all wide-angles, long lenses and handheld shots, avoiding personalised close-ups as much as possible. Such cinematographic choices by Mungiu and his cinematographer Oleg Mutu are designed to encourage emotional distancing of the viewers through the camera lens, a choice which is assisted by the lack of the non-diegetic sound within the film (Porton and Mungiu 39). The purposefully bleached-out look achieved through the development of the 'negative and through the use of digital intermediates' produces a grey and bleak visual presentation of the cityscape (Uricaru 13). The camera follows the protagonist Otilia as she barters for black-market goods, borrows money from her boyfriend, Adi Radu (Alexandru Potocean), and books hotel rooms. As Otilia is busy organising the as yet unknown abortion, her pregnant roommate, Găbița, waxes her legs and packs and unpacks her bag, eventually forgetting a strangely important plastic tablecloth in the process. Such a depiction affords a sombre and threatening atmosphere, which is maintained throughout the film.

The historically traumatic narrative positions the reproductive body at the centre of an ideological and socio-political conflict while the film actively engages with the surveyed subject both from a cinematographic and topical perspective. In the film, Otilia and Găbița arrange to obtain an abortion from Bebe, unaware that he will demand sex as payment for the abortion. Without any other alternative the women are forced to comply with his

demands. The rape scene demonstrates the vulnerability of the women and the limited resources available for their attempted reclamation of their bodies. The actual abortion scene, which begins on screen and ends off-screen while Otilia is forced to spend time with her boyfriend's family, provides an interesting depiction of the normalisation of Ceaușescu's ideology while juxtaposed with Otilia and Găbița's rejection of those same beliefs. By the time Otilia returns to Găbița, the abortion is over and Otilia is left to dispose of the foetus. Because of the normalisation of the state's ownership of the body, *4 Months* uses of the female body as the central point of political and subjectificational contention.

An exploration of relations between power and body are central to French philosopher Michel Foucault's societal critique. According to Elizabeth Grosz, Foucault is a historical philosopher who theorises that the body is a blank object upon which social, moral, ethical and ideological views are inscribed. Such forming of a socialised subject is often determined by some form of hegemonic power (Grosz *Volatile Bodies* 116). Following Foucault's argument, Kasper Kristensen explains how the influence and expectations of society are imprinted upon the body and imposed through two forms of bio-politics: Bio-power, seeks to regulate and control the production of individual and societal subjects, and normalise ideologies through discipline and surveillance (Kristensen 18). Foucault's theories span across his volumes of works, however, his considerations of the bodily-politics are, for this analysis, primarily taken from his works *Discipline and Punishment* (1975) and *History of Sexuality* (1976). Through a close historical reading of the modes of discipline, Foucault traces the progression of the control and containment of individuals from the modes of physical torture and the spectacle of torture, to modernised non-corporal punishment. Throughout history and within modern society, the body has become the centre of power relations of control, discipline and social conscription. By exploring the history of knowledge, power and body relations through genealogy, Foucault proposes to impose a bodily form which is influenced by the present, and which is determined by the past. The ongoing transformation of the various forms of discipline and punishment throughout history, is, according to Foucault, a continual refinement of the ways in which state powers subjugate the individual (Foucault *Discipline*).

In an interview, Mungiu explains how *4 Months* was the result of his 'desire to tell a story that had relevance for this period [the Ceaușescu era] and great emotional intensity'. This desire led to the development of *4 Months*, and considering how abortion 'was also

pertinent for […] a generation of Romanians who are now on earth because abortion was illegal', it was chosen as the primary narrative within the film (Porton and Mungiu 36). His choice of presenting an abortion narrative had more to do with the focus on his country's history and female power, than it did on any real desire to create an abortion dialogue. Within the film the representation of abortion is a critique of the Romanian communist state, with particular consideration being given to the treatment of women during Ceaușescu's era. The depiction of the abortion and the abortionist seems to redefine the film from a Western perspective, which is preoccupied with the ethics of abortion. For Mungiu, abortion itself is not a topic that is controversial, as he explains: 'Abortion is not an issue any more [in my country] — in any sense' (Porton and Mungiu 37).

In *4 Months* abortion is used to consider the political restrictions that negatively effect the private sphere by redefining the borders of the body-politic and state ownership of women's bodies. The film contends with the purchasing of black-market abortions for desperate women under a government which has, by this time in history, done everything possible to regulate women to the role of state-controlled (re)producers. Indeed, Kluge's Marxist approach in *Part-Time Work* is more relevant within this film, which represents women's plight under, ironically, a communist state. Considering how in the 1980s Romanian women's bodies were reduced to their potential (re)productive roles, the questions of agency and embodied experience are raised. The country's laws essentially removed ownership of womens wombs giving it to the state to guard. In *4 Months* abortion is located as the site where those very questions of agency and ownership become related to power and politics.

The film opens with a pitch-black screen, save for the opening credits that appear and disappear, while the sound of a slowly ticking clock makes its way into the foreground. Briefly, to the bottom right of the screen, the caption 'românia, 1987' appears and the scene cuts to a frontal handheld shot of a table, filled with crockery, papers, money, a fish tank and a lit cigarette. The cluttered table, framed by dark drapes, indicates cramped conditions, and the continued ticking from the now visible alarm clock is symbolic not only of time, but of limitations and boundaries, which are shared by a steadily receding cigarette and the goldfish, trapped in the small grimy glass-tank which is filled only one-third of the way, is devoid of all décor. The clock, the cigarette and the goldfish all symbolise the progressively constricting elements in the film, both in terms of time and space. Indeed, the film's very

title is indicative of an awareness of time, and this accentuation of temporality is given additional weight through a countdown: *4* months, then *3* weeks and finally *2* days, signifying a limitation to the concept, a fallibility of there not being enough time and of running out of time. Such recognition of the limits of time also, just as with the spatial concerns of the film, brings forth apprehensions regarding control (*4 Months*).

The unbroken and unedited shot establishes a stressful tone to the opening scene, which the overall silence, apart from the ticking clock, underlines. A hand reaches into the shot for the cigarette, gently tapping the ash off before drawing itself and the cigarette back towards its owner, the camera shakily pulls back until Găbița's figure is visible, as she takes a long drag from the cigarette, her brown on brown clothing a match for the milieu's muted colour scheme, implies that the setting's bleakness encroaches on its inhabitants. The hum of the air circulating and slight sounds from the road outside penetrate the enclosed space of the room where the only light source emanates from the filthy window in the background. The audience is flung into the middle of the action through the final moments of a conversation between an unknown woman and Găbița. A vague 'Ok' is heard from behind the camera, returned with a short 'Thanks' from Găbița, who looks slightly apprehensive as she fiddles with her cigarette. The dialogue, brief and lacking context serves to unsettle the audience who are unaware of what Găbița and her friend have agreed to. The conversation also raises the implication of space, that unseen (and unknown) by the audience, there is another person in the room (*4 Months*). Elaborating on his choice of opening scene Mungiu states that 'I wanted very much to start the film with silence that occurs in a conversation right after you have asked somebody for a little more than you should have' (qtd. in Uricaru 12). The unedited sound effects intensify the viewers' awareness of the film's silence.

Otilia, Găbița's roommate moves into the camera's line of sight when Găbița asks her to 'give [her] a hand' with clearing the table. This immediately establishes the relationship between the women that will continue throughout the film, Găbița making requests and Otilia, however, reluctant, acting upon them. The two begin to clear the table of its contents, pulling the plastic sheet off and folding it to one side. Again, the only sounds are those within the scene, loudly audible as Găbița lifts crockery and shuffles paper (*4 Months*). There is a subtle jab here at the illegality of the act of abortion, and watching the film for a second time, the unconscious centring of the narrative on the plastic sheet

provides an unstated claim: it begins and ends with the plastic sheet. It is that which acts as a barrier between the act and the invisibility of the abortion, by protecting hotel bedding from becoming evidence of the illegal activity. The plastic sheet represents the safety, not from the physical dangers, but from the legal dangers of opposing the state in this matter.



Fig. 2.1 *4 Months* 00:06:06 (a) & 00:55:33 (b)
Above: Găbița places the plastic sheet back on the table as she prepares for a visit from her father.
Below: Having to make do, Găbița uses a plastic packet in place of the sheet she left at the dorm

It says something about Găbița that of everything she does wrong, from lying about the extent of the pregnancy, not confirming the booking of the requested hotel room, sending Otilia out to find money and arrange details, and not meeting Bebe as he specifically requested; what is repeatedly stressed, in various ways, is that she forgets the plastic sheet. Găbița begins to pack the suitcase making an offhand remark that someone needs to feed the fish. Otilia, assisting Găbița as they clean and pack away the plastic table cloth, tells her friend that the fish will 'be fine without food for two days' (*4 Months*). The casual disregard for the fish implies an irresponsibility which Găbița embodies, particularly since they '[are] not the same fish', having been replaced at least once already.

The banter between the pair about their habits of storing money in wallets and back pockets suggests an established routine which, throughout the film, finds Otilia running after Găbița. Găbița, on the other hand, appears, even from the beginning, befuddled and somewhat vain, as she provides Otilia with a list of tasks to perform while she settles down to wax her legs — those same legs will be exposed later in the film, raised on a bed, a catheter inserted into her as she waits for an induced miscarriage, a small torn plastic packet underneath her instead of the plastic sheeting which was meant to protect the secrecy of the abortion. All the while, as the women move back and forth, the camera pans out, providing an even larger field of view for the audience, of what appears to be a narrow dorm-room, every inch of space filled with books or beds. The relationship between Găbița and Otilia is both dramatically and ideologically important. The familiarity displayed within the opening scene, even with the underlying tension and ignorance of the audience is suggestive of a trust between the pair. This is later emphasised when Otilia, forced into

revealing Găbița's abortion to her boyfriend, aggressively and defensively exclaims that if it were she who was pregnant it would be Găbița from whom she would seek assistance. There is also a developing awareness within the film of the youthful solidarity between other youths Otilia's age against the state. One such example is the quick provision of a bus-pass for Otilia by another passenger, just as an inspector reaches her. Such moments present in Otilia's generation demonstrate a growing awareness of the solidarity. The small acts of solidarity witnessed in the film, however, important they might be to the overall theme of political and personal resistance against the state, are not reliable when confronted with the women's struggle for their bodily autonomy.



Fig. 2.2 *4 Months* 00:09:15
A youth (bottom right) quickly hands Otilia (centre) a ticket stub as the inspector (left) makes her way to the front of the bus.

According to Foucault, power is a fluid form of relations through which humans develop social norms. True power is not a one sided totality, but is rather both acted upon and acted by individuals (Kristensen 15). Foucault argues throughout *Discipline* and *History* that power is enacted upon individuals through a number of technologies, allowing for the normalisation of certain ideologies that then become a part of an individual's subjectification. Kristensen argues that for Foucault, power is depicted in two aspects: Biopower, a form of 'power over life' where bodies are regulated and manipulated within societies and biopolitics, which are the disciplinary and surveillance techniques used to normalise the ideologies of a society (Kristensen 18, 20-21). Foucault further develops his theory of the body-politic in *History*, introducing the term 'biopower'. He postulates that the technology of power is imposed on to the body via various forms of control mechanisms (Foucault *History* 140). Foucault scholar, Thomas Dumm summarises the connection between biopower and discipline in the following way: 'The transformation of disciplinary society into something other than itself depends, as [Foucault] suggests, on the triumph of a particular kind of relationship of the body to power, the triumph of a particular form of "biopower"' (Dumm 21).

What is important in Dumm's reading of biopower is that the social system's regulation of the power of sexuality on macrocosmic and microcosmic levels, essentially transforms how the hegemonic powers control bodily functions, life and death. The

macrocosmic level presented here is of a society, but one which uses discipline, the surveillance of the Panoptic, and other modes of normalisation to maintain control. The modes of normalisation are those mechanisms that society uses to employ its own ideological control. 'The power of the Norm appears through the disciplines': from the hospital, the government, the educational and the disciplinary systems, normalisation is designed to create docile beings who are readily subjugated (Foucault *Discipline* 184). It is an invasive procedure, which seeks to stop any opposition or dissent, by making the hierarchical power controls of the system standard, with the punishment that attends 'non-conform[ance]' an additional incentive. Perhaps the most successful mode of normalisation is the notion of the Panopticon. The Panopticon is a mode of surveillance, where a single observer can oversee prisoners without the observed being aware, or certain about his/her status as monitored (Foucault *Discipline* 201). Such surveillance techniques are all encompassing because of the anxieties caused by the uncertain status of the subject under surveillance: This brings with it questions concerning whether or not the subject is being watched, and if so by whom, as well as how one should regulate behaviour in order to conform to those observing. Within modern society, Foucault argues that power, through the culmination of power imposed through the modes of normalisation, is a generative force, 'a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death' (qtd. in Dumm 129).[3] Because Mungiu has chosen to centre his analysis of Romania through an abortion narrative, power, and the negotiation of power, between the state and the individual becomes paramount.

Decree 770 had the essential effect of nationalising women's wombs, locating 'their wombs as national spaces' and as a result, relocated them as 'the place for dissidence' (Cazan 94). The audience's awareness, through the hyper-realist direct sounds of on-screen and off-screen action, suggests that Otilia and Găbița's tale is but one of many microcosmic forms of dissent in a macrocosmic world of state sanctioned repression that is most dangerous to women. Such forms of power are depicted through the rape and abortion scenes which suggest that both women are, due to the anti-abortion laws, placed in a precarious position regarding power relations. Emma Wilson, a film academic, notes of *4 Months* that it 'is a film that, from its opening shots, always seems to encompass more than we actually see on-screen' (Wilson 18). Although she considers how this affects the

[3] Emphasis in original text.

spectators of the film, leading to a virtual hyper-awareness of what is not shown, she does not consider the way in which, structurally, the limited field of view which progressively widens but never presents a complete holistic perspective, suggests an active reconstruction of a surveillance technique. This is particularly the case with the rape and abortion scenes which are presented as off-screen action, Having completed her tasks, Otilia meets up with Bebe and takes him to Găbița at the hotel. Bebe confronts both Otilia and Găbița in the room, chastising Găbița for not following his instructions. The camera manages to capture Otilia's stressed body language as she sits in the middle of the frame, pushed to the background as Bebe and Găbița surround her, their figures in the foreground as they battle for power, however passive that struggle may be on Găbița's part (*4 Months*). Up to this point Otilia, who has been comfortable running around town, catching buses illegally while organising an abortion as she purchases cigarettes from a street hawker, displays both a familiarity with and understanding of the black market, but is unprepared for the black market of underground abortions. The scene, like the opening sequence, adds diegetic sound effects to build tension. This time it is not the ticking of a clock. Rather it is the droning of the air-conditioner which creates a dull throbbing sound behind the stilted conversation, separated by moments of quiet which do nothing to alleviate the tension between the characters.

Like *Part-Time Work*, where abortions come to represent pockets of societal space where women are attempt to reclaim at least some form of control over their reproductive bodies, the dissent presented in Otilia and Găbița's choice to seek out an abortion is suggestive of the spaces between normalised society where women are forced to make compromises in order to define their own bodily experience and act upon their power, to such an extent that they are able. There are a number of differences in the way in which each film chooses to depict its socio-political commentary. While *Part-Time Work* utilises abortion to demonstrate how women are alienated from their own bodies by presenting the abortionist and abortions as a means of reconnection to women's own (re)production abilities, *4 Months* provides no such place of safety. The women in this film are constantly under threat, and as the handheld camera shots suggest, always under surveillance.

Even within the privacy of the hotel room, there is always the threat of discovery, and the underground abortion operation orchestrated by Bebe is completely different from the one run by Roswitha, who had an entire syndicate dedicated to the provision of illegal

abortions. Bebe is forced to leave his identity document at reception, and stresses how Găbița's bungling of the hotel bookings has placed him at greater risk of discovery (*4 Months*). The shots within the hotel room, which like many others in the film, are long uncut frames, positioned in corners and walls with unedited sound that mimics a surveillance recording. Mungiu's film is designed to unsettle so that the audience becomes part of the surveillance theme — as if the majority of what is presented has been recorded from surveillance cameras rather than being a cinematographic construct. Such a production evokes the presence of surveillance within the very constructs of the film's visual and auditory manifestation. The film presents 'Nothing', as Ioana Uricaru notes in her review, which could 'distract us from the story or make our spectatorship easier' (Uricaru 13).

As the interaction between the three progresses, and more of Găbița's untruths are revealed, Bebe controlling and manipulative nature begins to emerge. As the truths are exposed and Găbița becomes increasingly desperate, Bebe's persona changes from a controlling and somewhat paranoid abortionist to a manipulative rapist. Găbița lies to him again, stating that she is three months pregnant, while she is well into her fourth month. Bebe, who up until now has been severe but professional, then suggests that payment for the abortion will not be monetary, using the young women's desperation to terminate the pregnancy as a means of coercing sex from them. As with the majority of stationary scenes in the text, the camera techniques here are the long continuous single framed shots. The overall effect traps the audience inside the room alongside Găbița and Otilia as the tension, and Bebe's anger, builds. Including only Bebe and Otilia in the shot, Găbița is removed from the frame as she begs him to perform the operation:



Fig. 2.3 *4 Months* 00:40:50
In an unedited shot of nearly five minutes, Bebe (left) explains to Otilia (right) and Găbița (out of frame) that his payment will not come in the form of money.

> GĂBIȚA. *Please*
> BEBE. 'Please' is fine. But everything in this world has its price.
> GĂBIȚA. We'll pay! […]
> BEBE. […] I don't judge you for what has happened. In life, we all make mistakes. I asked you nothing. […] I've hidden nothing. […] If the police come, they'll get me first. I'm risking my freedom.

> […] So if I'm nice to you, if I help you, you should be nice to me too, right? That's how I see it.
>
> OTILIA. Wait… I'm not sure I understand.
>
> BEBE. I can wait. You're the one in a hurry. […] What did you think? I'd risk ten years for 3, 000 lei? […] If it's yes, tell me who goes first. If it's no, I get up and go. It was you who came to me for help. (*4 Months*)

Their attempts at negotiation, frantic upon the realisation that he is selling abortions for sex, are rejected. Bebe seems to display not only a controlling personality, but an unstable one as well. Bebe refuses to negotiate with Găbița. Otilia's offer to find 5, 000 lei causes him to scream at them. In one of the only close ups within the film, the camera is slightly lower than Bebe, who slouches forward and fills the frame. The shadowed background behind Bebe casts an even darker atmosphere on the already taut scene (*4 Months*). The young women eventually agree with Bebe's demands after he threatens to leave without performing the abortion. Otilia moves to the bed as the camera, positioned by the bedroom door, displays both Bebe and Otilia removing their clothes before the camera jumps to a shot of Găbița, as she dashes out of the room and into the hallway beyond, to collect herself. Again, although it is Găbița who has instigated the interaction with Bebe, it is Otilia who becomes the active participant, agreeing to Bebe's terms and deciding to 'go first' (*4 Months*). Although similar to the abortion scene, which is both visually detailed and yet mostly depicted off-screen, the rape scene occurs completely off-screen and the audience must watch as first Găbița, and then Otilia hide in the bathroom, as one and then the other, is raped as payment.



Fig. 2.4 *4 Months* 00:47:09
Bebe's furious figure dominates the frame as he screams at Otilia for attempting to find a way out of his proposition, while still obtaining the abortion.

From the opening scene, Mungiu raises the aspect of silence within the film. This silence has a duality to it, in that it is both the weapon of the oppressor and the space in which dissent is possible. In all forms of dissent, whether casual acts or active engagements with criminal entities within Romania, silence is used as a method to create discomfort within the audience, but also as a technique that provides the space for the action to be considered. The ethics of legalising abortions is raised, for had abortion been legal Otilia and Găbița would not have had to resort to commandeering the services of an underground abortionist who demanded sexual favours as payment. Considerations of the oppression of

the individual and the body as a mechanism of state control are present, as is the subsequent dissent against such attempts. Such issues are assimilated into concerns of the gaze of both the state and the audience. Valerie Palmer-Metha and Alina Haliliuc provide a detailed exploration of how Mungiu uses silence within *4 Months*, focusing on how the silence in a performance space, acts as a means of transferring and imposing what is witnessed on to the observer, creating a transitional space which demands understanding (Palmer-Mehta and Haliliuc 117). It is partly this demanding insistence which is responsible for the discomfort of the audience, for while the visual cues mimic those of a surveillance video and in so doing suggest a distance denoting a level of reality, the silences which accompany these shots are often contrary, in that the gaps within the audible narrative demand to be heard, while still fitting in with the film's aesthetic structure of observational distance.

The camera follows Găbița as she enters the room and hides in the bathroom. The sense of claustrophobia, which the film has so far portrayed through surveillance — limited camera movement, and the use of time as a restrictive force — is exemplified within the scene. Trapped in a small bathroom, the cool blue tiles reach all the way to the ceiling of the room. The enclosed space, along with the wide angled lens, has the effect of reducing space, while the blue of the tiles delivers a colder and harder texture to the scene. Once Găbița turns the tap on, this cold small space is filled with the sound of running water, which has two effects. The first is to add to the cold atmosphere of the scene, where Găbița is isolated from Otilia, as the water echoes throughout the room, making it seem both small and cavernous at the same time. The other is to remind the audience of Găbița's inability to run any further, opening the tap to allow the water to run for her, still ineffectually hoping to outrun her problems. Eventually Otilia bursts into the room as she too, attempts to run from what has just happened. As Găbița turns the tap off, Otilia has already turned the bathtub tap on, and the sound of running water continues as Găbița's and Otilia's positions are swapped.



Fig. 2.6 *4 Months* 00:50:22
Găbița, trapped in the bathroom as off screen, Otilia is raped in partial payment for Găbița's abortion.



Fig. 2.5 *4 Months* 00:51:18
Otilia, head bowed with her back once again facing the camera. Above the sound of water, a ticking clock can once more be heard.

This time the scene is not as drawn out and a sobbing Găbița returns to the bathroom, in direct contrast to Otilia's stoicism, which further emphasises the differences between the two women. Once he has received payment, Bebe returns to his persona as the threatening but professional man whom Otilia met in the car, as he rattles off instructions to both Găbița and Otilia.

Of particular interest here is how Palmer-Mehta and Haliliuc's reading of silence within the rape and abortion scenes add to the overall power relations between the women, the state and Bebe. Taking on the terminology of the Romanian communist propaganda Palmer-Mehta and Haliliuc consider both silence and language within the film:

> Dubbed 'wooden language' […] a special jargon meant to constitute a depersonalised and submissive socialist subject by hindering individual critical thinking [which would] produce 'forced identification' between the reified leadership and the equally reified 'nation' through its focus on the collaborative rather than the individual. (Palmer-Mehta and Haliliuc 115)

Palmer-Mehta and Haliliuc indicate that Bebe uses the language of the state on the women, coercing them through propagandist language, into having sex with him (Palmer-Mehta and Haliliuc 119). For all Bebe's words, both he and the women speak in 'euphemisms' throughout the scene and the words rape or sex are never directly mentioned by either party. '[F]raming what is about to happen as an exchange of services, he [Bebe] takes license to inflict violence upon bodies he was expected and paid to surgically unburden from the state's forced reproduction' (Palmer-Mehta and Haliliuc 119). His demand for sex as payment is a betrayal of the women, but it is also an example of Foucault's biopower and biopolitics. Here such concepts are three dimensional. They relate to the state's and Bebe's biopower, both of which are restrictive and threatening to the women. Then, such concepts are related to the women themselves, who, while limited in options are still able to arrange a successful abortion.

Foucault argues that modern societies maintain control through 'power over life', a power relation which focuses on '*regulatory controls: a bio-politics of the population*' that politicises the body by equating it with its biological functions of sexuality, procreation and mortality (Foucault *History* 139).[4] While the state imposes control over women and their

[4] Emphasis in original text.

ability to procreate, Bebe imposes his own control on to the women through a merging of the state's control and sexual violence. The abortion, despite the cost, remains Găbița and Otilia's way of reclaiming their bodies from state ownership. As Bebe offers his deal in innuendoes, so too do the women talk around the subject of the abortion, as if fearful about the act in which they are about to illegally participate. Bebe's proposition of coerced prostitution, in exchange for that freedom from the state, results in a different form of alienation and appropriation of the women's bodies. It also has the added effect of disassociating them from their bodily agency once more, as even in their acts, Bebe makes it clear that he is the one performing the abortion. Both women, even in their active resistance, are relegated to passive participants in the abortion by a male authority, just as they have been regulated to passive receptacles, important only for their capacity for reproduction.

By now the slow and extended shots that have lent emphasis to the dramatic tone of the film, have transformed the audience into observers, which adds credence to the surveillance theme that Mungiu hopes to explore. The restrictions of movement, represented by the shaky handheld camera techniques, are also visible in the lengthy shots. In both sections, the audience are placed within the position of surveillance, producing a binary effect within the film's commentary on state restrictions. The length of the shots, furthermore, increases the level of restrictions as both the audience, as observers, and Otilia and Găbița, become trapped within a set of actions over which they have no control. Removing the rape scene from the screen itself only emphasises the horror of Bebe's actions and the tragedy of the entire situation. Going one step further, the film, which has used the act of organising an illegal abortion to consider how individuals negotiate around a restrictive system, then depicts the beginnings of the abortion on screen. Unlike the rape that is enhanced by its absence, the only horrific part of the abortion scene is how the women bartered for the procedure, desperate as they were.

The abortion scene begins with the camera providing a close-up of Bebe's battered briefcase as Otilia rummages through it clumsily. The frame only captures her torso and hands, and neither Găbița nor Bebe are to be seen. What seems to be idle curiosity turns to panic as Otilia stumbles over a large pocket knife as the door to the bathroom begins to open, signalling Bebe's return. Unable to close the knife in time to place it back, she quickly shuts the briefcase and rushes off screen. Although the shot is continuous, Otilia's



Fig. 2.7 *4 Months* 00:56:29 (a) & 00:56:00 (b)
Above: Bebe as he prepares the 'probe' which will be used as an abortifacient.
Below: Găbița laid out on the bed as Bebe prepares a water solution which will be injected into the probe.

unexpected discovery continues the film's habit of setting the audience on edge (*4 Months*). Considering the previous scene's action, as the opening for the actual abortion scene, this does not bode well for either of the women. Bebe replaces Otilia in the shot. His torso and hands are all that are visible as he prepares his tools. The practised ease of his actions suggest that he does this on a regular basis and raises the question of how many women he has taken advantage of over the years. He lays out the tools that he will use for the abortion on the table in clear view of the audience, and begins to sterilise them as the scene cuts to Găbița, laid out, in similar fashion to the tools, on the bed (*4 Months*). Considering Bebe's actions, the similar visibility of both Găbița and the tools suggests a certain correlation between the two. For Bebe, both are tools that he uses to his advantage. By juxtaposing the rape scene with the abortion scene the audience's expectations are challenged. What is expected to be a traumatic affair for Găbița is done in under five minutes with no difficulties or problems.

Within *Part-Time* W*ork* Roswitha's practice is just as illegal as Bebe's, yet Kluge's film presents abortion as a normal and unspectacular act. It is this very depiction that allows the act of abortion to become the space for women's embodied reclamation. Bebe's rape of both women in *4 Months*, reinforces the women's isolation and vulnerability and is difficult to reconcile with his practised movements when he performs the abortion. The ease with which the abortion scene is depicted encourages the notion that abortions are, once more, common and unremarkable. The scene itself is like the abortion scene within *Part-Time Work* in that it is clinical and precise, although the technique is different. Indeed, Bebe takes the time to explain what he is doing to Găbița when she asks. Although Găbița is naked from the waist down, this scene is less graphic than the one in *Part-Time Work*, which does not shy away from the detail of the surgical abortion. In comparison to the rape scenes, the abortion scene is emotionally muted. It is treated as a normal procedure, to be commented on, but not necessarily to be considered outside of the norm. This habitual nature of Bebe's actions plays a large role in this sense of regularity, and the observational

element of the scene again implies that it is not the abortion which is in question, rather the black-market means which are forced on to the women.

Once done, Bebe indicates that Găbița not move until the probe triggers a miscarriage, stating that this could happen any time between one to three days. He also gives Otilia detailed instructions about how to dispose of the foetus:

> BEBE. Don't throw it in the toilet. It will block it. Whole or in pieces. And don't bury it where dogs can dig it up. Wrap it up nicely, take a bus, get off at a high rise, go to the tenth floor and throw it down the rubbish chute. (*4 Months*)

He then takes his leave, with an offer to return to check up on Găbița, although both women reject the offer. After he leaves, Otilia leaves Găbița to attend a birthday celebration for her boyfriend, Adi's mother.

Her absence, along with the audience's, provides a space in which the abortion could still go awry. This increases the tension between the women and the audience. Otilia's worry over Găbița is visible in her interactions with her boyfriend and his family, where she sits, centred in the frame as eight middle aged men and women speak over her, ignoring her input and generally talking down to her. Here, as with the previous scene between Bebe and the women, the party scene represents an alternative mode of biopolitics that is used by the state to exercise control. Adi's mother and her friends are perfect examples of the Romanian communist government, as they rattle off platitudes for the 'simple folk' whom Otilia, and by extension Găbița represent, those people whom the Radu family mock and belittle (*4 Months*). The discussion at the table takes on a patronising air as comments such as how the lower classes 'often have better sense than the educated' but that sense 'depends on where you put them'. Throughout the discussion around the table of education and marriage, it is clear that for Adi's family, the ideology of the state has become the norm through various disciplinary apparatuses of individualisation and subjectification through the state sanctioned institutions of marriage and education. That Otilia is talked around,



Fig. 2.8 *4 Months* 01:17:10
Otilia (centre) with Adi (left of centre) as around them the 'older' generation complain about how the modern youth have an easy life. They are completely oblivious to Otilia's day and what she and Găbița had to sell to maintain some form of control over their bodies.

belittled and ignored, serves to resituate her within the Ceaușescu government's politics where women have no real power. After all she has done throughout the day, Otilia, side lined and marginalised as she is, has no desire to be a part of a society that encourages and normalises the restrictions that the state imposes.

Interestingly, it is Otilia who is the main protagonist within *4 Months*, not Găbița who has the abortion, nor Bebe, the abortionist. Such a choice suggests a sisterhood of personal and micro-narratives of dissent rather than mass social rebellion. Even after all of Găbița's monumental lies, omissions and mismanagement of the entire debacle, Otilia still remains steadfastly loyal to her seemingly obstinate, passive and irresponsible friend. This despite the fact that Găbița's actions led to the rape of both her and Otilia. The rape is permitted because of their desperation for the abortion, leaving them with no other choice but to 'be nice' to Bebe. Despite all Găbița's misdemeanours, Otilia trusts Găbița more than her boyfriend. After his mumbled suggestion of 'maybe marriage' to a hypothetical pregnancy, after stating that he does not 'like abortions', Otilia scathingly informs Adi that 'Găbița would help me [obtain an abortion]' (*4 Months*). Otilia's choice to exclude him from her and Găbița's plans for the abortion until it is too late for him to interfere seems to have been the correct one, as Adi acts as a barrier for Otilia, other women and society as a whole. Although he appeared at first knowledgeable about the black market, informing Otilia where to buy a specific brand of cigarettes, now Adi with his parent's behaviour as contextual background seems to be a part of the social problems forcing women into the situation in which Găbița and Otilia find themselves. To make it worse, Adi's rejection of abortion in favour of state sanctioned marriage, demonstrates his lack of awareness of the price that both women have, an hour or so before, paid for the abortion. The difference in Otilia's behaviour, the change in her demeanour from being an equal in the dorm to being subservient to her boyfriend, coupled with the hidden abortion, denotes a double barricade for women, one shrouded in silence and isolation. It is one that causes them to be cautious and hesitant when dealing with their gendered roles, both socially and reproductively.

Otilia returns to the hotel room to find that Găbița has aborted the foetus and is asleep. Her journey back to the hotel is shot in a similar manner to all of her other excursions throughout the city. A handheld camera follows her as she walks, and runs, through the streets. The lack of artificial lighting and sharp jerky movements of the camera display what the long unedited stationary scenes presented subtly: the act of observation and its

relation to power. Bebe's own caution regarding the policed surveillance, especially concerning the potential punishment of the abortion, becomes Otilia's. The sequence depicts Otilia as hyper-vigilant, glancing in every direction and walking quickly, sometimes running (*4 Months*). Her expression is apprehensive, even as she attempts to appear innocuous while hastening back to Găbița. As she enters the hotel she is accosted by police and the concierge who demand to see her identification. Otilia's travels back to the hotel room and her interaction with the police reorientate the audience to the idea of surveillance and its role as a mechanism for power and bio-politics. The normalisation of the bodily control dictated to the population is, through the use of surveillance, visibly at odds with Otilia and the crime she is in the middle of participating in.



Fig. 2.9 *4 Months* 01:29:33
The back of Otilia's head as she runs down a dark alley. The shot is blurred and distorted as the handheld camera jumps and sways. The effect is one of an observer who runs to keep up with Otilia as she makes her way through the city.

Not having her identity documents with her, Otilia convinces the concierge to allow her to go and obtain it from her room. Entering the room, Găbița informs her that the foetus is in the bathroom. Otilia begins the process of removing the foetus. The telephone rings, a reminder to Otilia and the audience of the intensified precariousness of her situation as the result of Găbița's and her rebellion towards the state and reclamation of their bodies, is lying on the floor, while downstairs there are two police officers (*4 Months*). The request for her identification is a reminder of the state's control over the individual, and such a reminder when combined with the surveillance technique of the cinematography, produces the Panopticon-like feel of the film. Otilia's worry about being followed and observed increases as, carrying the illegally aborted foetus in her bag, she wanders the streets. Visibility and space become central in the last moments of Otilia's rebellion. All shots within this scene are entrenched in darkness, suggesting not only a blindness of the watchers (and audience), but of Otilia herself. Here, her own ability to see



Fig. 2.10 *4 Months* 01:33:51
The camera focuses on the aborted foetus before tilting upwards where Otilia and Găbița appear emotional. Mungiu indicates that not providing the evidence of the abortion was unthinkable. The foetus becomes a symbol of the absolute control of Ceaușescu's state and a reminder of the bodily inscription such control demanded of the female body.

clearly is played upon, as she walks backwards and forwards through streets, searching for a safe drop location, while maintaining a vigilance over potential spies who might uncover her secret. She is silent, except for her heavy breaths, but every slamming of a door or backfiring of a car suggests a threat in the near total darkness. Having finally disposed of the foetus, she makes her way back to the hotel, the camera no longer mimicking an observer, thus implying that Otilia's resistance against the state is, for now, over.

The nearly pitch black streets provide the film with the cover that Otilia has been seeking throughout the narrative, allowing for a final moment where the evidence of the abortion can be safely disposed of. Even as the handheld camera seeks to mimic surveillance footage of a crime, the darkened street helps hide Otilia from her possible pursuers, and suggests that the Panopticon like method of surveillance used to enforce discipline and compliance is not nearly as absolute as the threat implied throughout the film. Indeed, Foucault argues that power is fluid and constantly changing. While Foucault argues that ideologies which control the population are normalised, he indicates that it is a 'power [that] comes from below' through those mechanisms of the various institutions of society (Foucault *History* 94). This means that for power to be maintained it needs, through individualisation and subjectification, to be accepted by those upon whom it is enforced. By organising the abortion, Găbița and Otilia have successfully rejected the state's power.

CHAPTER 3

MIKE LEIGH'S VERA DRAKE: THE POLITICS OF WOMEN

As with *Part-Time Work* and *4 Months*, Mike Leigh's independent film *Vera Drake* (2004) is a socio-political film set within a specific historical context. *Vera Drake* uses abortion as a means of connecting multiple women within 1950s post-World-War Two London, from the upper middle class to the lowest of prostitutes, by displaying fragments of their singular stories. Arrested for performing an illegal abortion in England in 1950 Vera Drake (Imelda Staunton), the protagonist and namesake of *Vera Drake* attends two hearings, one for bail and another for sentencing. In both scenes, Vera, looking frail and broken, is placed in the dock; while around her the court is filled with men, including police officers, journalists, administrators and the judge. Both proceedings follow a similar pattern, Vera weakly stutters out a reply to each session's questions (where she lives and how she pleads) and is then reprimanded by the judge who demands she speaks clearly. She is then promptly silenced as first the police detective, and then in the next scene the prosecutor and defence barrister, give an account of the investigation and subsequent findings. The camera, in both scenes, focuses on Vera, with extreme close-ups of her face and a medium long-shot that centre's on her slumped body posture. The male voices of her accusers and defenders fade in and out of hearing as the camera focuses closer on Vera and her visible emotions. In the end, the voices mean very little, for Vera has committed a crime against the patriarchal establishment, and will be punished accordingly. In the first scene, bail is set at £50, a hefty sum for the 1950s and financially devastating to a lower class family. Her sentence, over two years in prison, is severe as the judge wishes Vera's sentence to serve as a 'deterrent for others' (*Vera Drake*).

Up to this point, the films under consideration, *Part-Time Work* and *4 Months,* have dealt with gendered and political issues in relation to alienation, and the political and physical control of the female body. Both films provide a space for the alienation of women from their reproductive capabilities, and in so doing, state control has resulted in abortive practices. The representations of abortion, then seek to challenge ideologies of the German and Romanian societies. Such representations of abortion have questioned and challenged specific ideologies that focus on women and women's bodies as sites of control and contention. While *Part-Time Work* singles out Roswitha as a symbol of this challenge, *4*

Months centres on two women as representative of their gender in a particular socio-historic context. However, it is in *Vera* that one experiences a narrative that allows for the articulation of a multitude of female voices through the act of abortion. The hypocrisy demonstrated by Roswitha's position is duplicated in Vera, and so too is the narrative of solidarity seen in *4 Months*. As a film, *Vera Drake*, addresses and politicises the space in which women function within particular societies to a greater extent than either *Part-time Work* or *4 Months*. The various micro-narratives belonging to the women in *Vera Drake* combine to present the dynamics of power and the methods used by women trying to seize agency in a world that seeks to deny them self-determination. In Leigh's film, abortion becomes demonstrative of political resistance and the process of othering. Independently produced by Leigh's production company 'Thin Man Films' and funded by the UK Film Counsel and Studio Canal, *Vera Drake* is a display of Leigh's artistic inclination to pursue the topic of abortion without interference, subsequently formulating a socio-political film that facilitates discussion around the place of women within a restrictive patriarchal society (Lawrenson and Leigh 12).

Bearing several similarities to both *Part-Time Work* and *4 Months*, *Vera Drake* is a film about an illegal abortionist, who in her spare time helps young women in trouble. Vera's narrative of abortion unfolds between her life as a mother and wife, working in upper class homes as a housecleaner, and her services to her community. After one of her abortions goes wrong, Vera is arrested and charged with having contravened Section 58 of the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861, which illegalised any and all forms of abortion and labelled both the pregnant woman and the abortionist as 'guilty of Felony', and therefore subject to a maximum 'penal servitude for Life or any Term not less than Three Years' (GB c. 100 (Reg. 24, 25 Vict) s. 58) Nearly a third of the film is focused on Vera's sentencing, which serves to enforce the political power that the patriarchal state has over Vera, by visually presenting her as smaller and more isolated in comparison to the men in power, who become larger and increasingly unified during the proceedings (*Vera Drake*).

Leigh maintains that although '[the] film is set in England, … it's not about England' (Quart and Leigh 37). He argues that his films are intended to be 'poetry bound by social reality' rather than realist texts. The same argument can be made about his inclusion of abortion into the narrative. Abortion is used to consider the positioning of

women as other, and to resituate their own alienation from their bodies. By presenting the text in a period when abortion was illegal, it becomes a literal manifestation of women's attempts to regain understanding of and familiarity with their own lived experience. By using a number of smaller micro-narratives, the representation of abortion becomes about women's lives, rather than about the politics of abortion. Leigh explains that he 'has a basic preoccupation with life and how we lead our lives' (Lawrenson and Leigh 16). In another interview he explains that he has included abortion in a number of his films, because it 'is a part of the general business of living and dying — of having children or not having them' (Bowen and Leigh "Midwife"). For him the film is there to present the moral dilemmas regarding the legal status of abortion, and its significance in relation to women's social positioning. The film is more emotionally wrought than his previous films because Vera is 'doing something [that] she knows is criminal on a certain level', but that she personally does not think of as 'a criminal activity' (Cardullo and Leigh 15).

Vera is introduced to the audience as she walks out of the shadows of post-war London, a soft classical string ensemble, made up mostly of harp, viola and double base, softly sets a gentle and sedate tone for the film. The music present in the opening scene is soft and slow, having a cheerful undertone, a melody suggestive of Vera herself, who is a woman of average height, in her late forties to early fifties with rosy cheeks and a content smiling face. Dressed in neat and utilitarian clothing, her posture is erect and her steps are quick yet sure as she makes her way into one of the residential buildings. This connection between Vera and the string music is continued throughout the first half of the film, regardless of what she is doing at the time, be it cooking for her family or cleaning the homes of the rich. At times, she seems to incorporate the music into herself by humming a tune like her theme music while she is busy, and in doing so transforms the music into a leitmotif. The music seems to present all the positive aspects of Vera's persona to the audience and initially matches her discernible conduct. The film's opening depicts Vera as a Good Samaritan, following her as she visits her paraplegic neighbour George and offers him tea, invites Reg (Eddie Marsan), a shy bachelor, to dinner, and greets another neighbour



Fig. 3.1 *Vera Drake* 00:01:40
The camera fades into a shot of Vera Drake as she walks through the London Estates. This Vera, while middle aged looks healthy and content, sure about her place in the world.

in the street. This Vera, who walks with confidence, gently humming to herself as she offers tea, dinner, and goodwill, is vastly different from the woman she becomes by the film's end, one who shuffles down a prison corridor, back bent in surrender.

Shortly after inviting Reg to dinner the following day, Vera returns to her home where she and her family have their own dinner. Sitting around a small table, Vera, her husband Stan (Philip Davis), her grown son Sid (Daniel Mays) and daughter Ethel (Alex Kelly) display a warm and loving relationship, where the cramped conditions do not affect the family's interactions. In the first half of the film, Vera, is presented as being a community conscious woman, one who loves and is loved, and her decision to, as she explains it, 'help put young girls […] to get their bleeding started again' is perceived by her as an obligation. Not only is Vera depicted as a strong community and family oriented individual, but also a hard working one.

There are a number of scenes that display Vera in her work settings. The day after the Drake family dinner, Vera is found cleaning the house of a wealthy upper class family, the Wells. This scene is particularly important as it introduces the audience to the protagonist of a sub-plot, Susan Wells (Sally Hawkins), who from the beginning of her tale, is awkward and shy. As she cleans, the camera pans around Vera, keeping an avant-garde statue of a tall woman in the centre of the frame, until the camera turns its focus to Susan and her mother. The statue's posture is daring, her arms flung out behind her, chest pushed forward in an almost casual challenge as she drapes a shawl in her arms. The camera's focus changes from the statue and Vera to Susan and her mother as the soft stringed-theme music changes to a soprano choir. Susan's mother ignores her daughter's awkward attempt at a conversation in order to criticise her looks. Mrs Wells comments on Susan's flat chest, concealed in formal clothes. In comparison to the statue, which depicts a strong, overtly sexual woman, Susan and her mother are both overly formal. Susan, in particular lacks the confidence the statue displays, instead appearing awkward, withdrawn and desexualised. That very night Susan is raped by a drunken David and later finds that she is pregnant. Having realised her



Fig. 3.2 *Vera Drake* 00:07:09
Vera (right) cleaning around the statue (far right) as Susan and her mother (left) pan into view. The scene comapres Vera's class status against the opulance of the Wells.

predicament, she chooses to have a legal abortion, which is made possible by her socioeconomic status and family connections.

For those women who are neither respectable enough nor wealthy enough, it is Vera who is able to assist them. Wearing the same floral print apron worn when cleaning the houses of the rich, Vera performs backstreet abortions for those who do not have access to legal avenues. Within the film, Vera performs six abortions on screen. The first abortion occurs twenty minutes into the film, after having introduced Vera's brother in law, Frank (Adrian Scarborough) and his wife, Joyce (Heather Craney), as they attempt to have a child of their own. The couple's situation is in direct contrast to those who Vera helps and Joyce's reaction to Vera's abortion practice — and outright rejection of her — provides a comment about the potential value of the life of a foetus. Joyce, however, is depicted as fairly materialist, asking Frank to purchase her a new washing machine as a reward for being pregnant. At this point, the film has suggested a number of times that Vera is an ideal representation of the modern 1950s woman. She is family oriented, dedicated to her husband, children, and her ailing mother. (Joyce, is the opposite, focusing on moving in to a bigger home and keeping up with the latest fashion.) At the same time, she is caring towards her community and dutiful in her work. Vera it seems can do no wrong, and the only real foreshadowing of the trouble to come emerges from the conversation between Frank and Joyce, when she cautions her husband against Vera's habit of interfering with other people's business: 'She [Vera] wants to mind her own business. She's a little busybody. Bless her. She's going to get herself in trouble one of these days' (*Vera Drake*).

Having walked through the narrow and shadowed alleys of London, Vera enters the house of a timid young blonde woman, (Sinead Matthews) and makes her way to the kitchen, with the woman trailing behind her, turning to say 'Right then, dear. First thing we've got to do … is put the kettle on'. It is an action that Vera has performed before in the film, but this time she does not use the kettle to make a cup of tea instead she asks the woman for a bowl and a towel. The change of action indicates that Vera is not performing her usual neighbourly duties here. Adding to the sense that something is different, the scene is not shot in the same way that the Drake's dinners have been, where the camera is crowded into the dining room, making the audience at once comfortable with the scenery and aware that they are observers separate from the family. In this instance, the shot is set up so that the camera is looking through the doorframe into the kitchen, removing the audience

completely from the scene. The distance of the camera from the action, the slumped inward posture of the 'Blonde' and her awkward shuffling increases the viewers' acknowledgement of that discomfort and leads to the growing realisation that they are about to witness a private act.[5] Such awareness perverts the viewing of the scene.

As Vera and the 'Blonde' walk across the camera shot into a bedroom they become hidden in the shadows, silhouetted, so that there is an even greater emphasis on body language. The 'Blonde' curls inward, more protectively, and there is a child-like quality to her that is accentuated by Vera's motherly behaviour. She takes the young woman's hands and leans inward, as if imparting a secret, 'Don't you be upset. Because I'm here to help you, aren't I? And that's what I'm going to do'. At this point the audience is aware that Vera is about to perform an abortion, the only thing left to reveal is the method that she will use. The camera pans across the passage way to follow Vera into the kitchen where she sterilises a syringe and mixes up a bowl of hot soapy water. The scene cuts between the 'Blonde' and Vera each preparing for the approaching abortion. As Vera walks back into the blonde's bedroom she closes the door on the audience, once again reminding us that our presence is not welcome (*Vera Drake*). This is not the last time in the film that a door is closed, and the deliberate exclusion of the audience and other characters indicates that a perimeter is being erected between those involved with terminating an unwanted pregnancy and those who are not.



Fig. 3.3 *Vera Drake* 00:21:44
Vera (right) comforting the blonde (left) before the abortion is performed. Here the women are bathed in shadows as they speak euphemistically of what is to take place..

Although the audience is shut out, the scene cuts into the room and the audience is witness to the abortion being performed. Although the scene is not visually graphic, it does still manage to increase the viewer's distress. Leigh focuses on close-ups of the 'Blonde' and the audience is witness to her evident terror in spite of Vera's attempts to calm her. As Vera leaves, after the 'Blonde' slams the door on what appears to be her boyfriend, the

[5] Leigh never provides the names of Vera's clients, with the exception of Vera's last client, Pamela Barnes whose name is learnt when the young girl is admitted to hospital. As such I have labelled them by their most visible characteristics: The 'Blond'; the 'Jamaican'; the 'Wife'; the 'Socialite' and the 'Adulteress'.

high-pitched choir music, so far only associated with Susan (who by this time has been raped), creeps into the scene. Vera's unlawful actions, as well as the act of abortion, have made the audience as uncomfortable as Susan was during her introduction. This music is an acknowledgment to that discomfort as it develops into a new leitmotif associated with the act of abortion. That the camera and therefore the audience are present for the abortion itself indicates Leigh's reluctance to position either himself or his viewers on either side of the divide. It would appear that Leigh's decision to make the audience spectators for the entity of the film is one that has been taken in order to force the audience to consider what is being presented before taking action.

Vera chooses to perform abortions, not for money, but because she believes that it is the 'right thing to do' (*Vera Drake*). In a society where abortions were illegal, and women's lives were often restricted to the private sphere of childrearing and housekeeping, the inability to terminate an unwanted pregnancy becomes representative of a lack of personal agency. By performing abortions for these women, Vera is attempting to gain agency for herself and for her clients. Indeed, in the interview conducted by the detective, it is revealed that Vera herself once had an abortion. As such, while she assumes a professional manner (as far as possible since she is not an abortionist by profession,), Vera tries her best to calm each of the women and reassure them that they will be fine after a few days. For the most part, the audience, like Vera, is unaware of the fate of her patients, which signifies a gap in her knowledge, and raises questions regarding Vera's level of understanding of her own actions. Within each scene, Vera, through her dress and demeanour, is set apart from the women she helps. Always standing or moving and dressed in her apron, Vera is never overly social with her patients, preferring to spend as little time as possible with them. This is to both protect her anonymity and to avoid becoming overly involved with the women that she helps. Vera leaves immediately after she has performed the abortion, usually saying something that at first glance appears to suggest caring such as 'take care of yourself dear' or 'make a cup of tea, you'll feel better for it'. As far as she is concerned, her social responsibility is fulfilled as soon as she has performed the abortions.

During the course of her interaction with the 'Blonde', Vera informs her that 'it'll all come away'. Perplexed, the young woman asks 'What do you mean, "it will come away"?'. Similarly, the Jamaican girl questions Vera by asking, 'What is it I'm waiting for? … all you used was a little bit of water'. Both express their fears to Vera, 'I won't die, will

I?' and 'What happens if something go wrong?', in the hope of some kind of consolation. The 'Blonde' seems pacified by Vera's platitudes, the Jamaican, however, seems even more miserable than ever, much to Vera's dismay (*Vera Drake*). Despite helping women without any compensation (though the audience eventually finds out that Lily (Ruth Sheen), Vera's friend and contact charges Vera's patients without her knowledge), Vera's interaction with each patient begins to feel so well-rehearsed that any attempt to comfort the women sounds hollow. The efficient method she has developed can be easily equated to her husband's explanation of his job as a car mechanic, as Stan explains to Reg, 'they bring 'em in. We mend 'em, push 'em back out again'.

In between the 'Blonde' and the 'Jamaican' are two other clients. The first is a mother with seven children. Here, it is not Vera who slams the door closed, but her patient. Although having organised the abortion for a time that her husband was meant to be at work, the 'Wife' (Tilly Vosburgh) finds herself hiding in their bedroom while her husband is settled in the sitting room, at home because he's ill. She slams the door in his face simultaneously briskly saying 'Go back to sleep you're ill', when he asks what she is doing in the bedroom. The choir music is once again present, adding a dangerous and desperate sense to the already harrowing scene. The ensemble of voices reaches its peak as the wife slams the door, barricading herself inside. The camera once more jumps into the bedroom and the 'Wife', looking frazzled and exhausted expresses her desperation in the tiny room:

> WIFE. I haven't told him, you see? […] Can't have no more kids, see? I've got seven already. I ain't having no more … It'd kill me. (*Vera Drake*)

The next abortion that Vera performs balances out the others in terms of the degree of sympathy that the women have so far received from Leigh. The scene opens with two well-dressed socialites (Elizabeth Berrington and Emma Amos) offering Vera a drink, a play on Vera's own constant offerings of cups of tea. Eventually, the Socialite asks of her friend 'why don't you make us all a cup of tea?', to keep her busy while the procedure is performed. The women drink martinis and smoke while waiting for Vera to get ready, idly talking about hair styles. There is casual disregard given to both Vera and the abortion as can be seen in her dismissive response to Vera's questions about previous abortions: 'Yes, as it happens'. The two women then toast the abortion and her friend leaves with a 'good

luck' (*Vera Drake*). Unlike the previous abortion scenes, this one does not use the characters' discomfort and fear as a source of the audience's discomfort. The composition of the shot displays, in comparison to the previous dwellings, a rather large well lit room with lightly coloured floral wall paper and an ornate fireplace. The setting suggests that these two women are upper-middle class, and given that this is the Socialite's second abortion, the women have little to no sense of distress. Here the blasé attitudes of the women and their lack of distress upset the balance that has been established through the previous abortion scenes. The attitudes of the women, while representive of women seeking abortions in the era, suggest an irresponsibility that the more sympathetic narratives of the nervous young girl and tired overburdened wife do not display. This scene provides no closed doors, the lack of which seems to imply that these women are, at least, unrepentant in their behaviour.



Fig. 3.4 *Vera Drake* 00:34:09
The two socialites (left) salute the abortion with cocktails as Vera (right) prepares. Confident in their positions, the women appear to use abortion as a form of contraceptive, having had at least one abortion before now.

That the 'Jamaican' woman then follows enhances the bleakness of her situation. Here the choir song begins at the end of the previous scene where Susan, having paid £100, is admitted to a clinic, which looks more like a hotel, for her own abortion. Although Susan is privileged enough to obtain a legal abortion, the process required to purchase the abortion has been regulated and dominated by men who seek to judge her. In her interview with the physician, the emphasis is on David's opinion; 'what does the father say?' is the question, which Susan determinedly refuses to answer (*Vera Drake*). The doctor, much like the psychiatrist after him stares down at Susan over his spectacles. Susan looks more like a school girl facing punishment than a victim. Both scenes use the desk as an object of division. This is similar to the way doors are used in the scenes involving Vera. Here the desk symbolises the power of the patriarchal rather than the matriarchal. The doctors on one side of the desk are learned; Susan on the other, hands clasped in her lap, is like one awaiting sentencing. The psychiatrist's scene displays this particularly well: The desk sits in the centre of the frame, its dark wood dominating the shot. Susan, sitting on the edge of a chair to the left of the screen is tense and timid. The doctor sits deep in his chair, which,

like the desk, takes up quite a lot of space. As with the physician, the psychiatrist pays more attention to Susan's male relations than to Susan herself. In order to obtain agreements from both a doctor and a psychiatrist, Susan must suggest that she is mentally unstable and that her family has a history of suicide. She is granted the abortion, but at the loss of her self-respect, what little she had before David had raped her.



Fig. 3.5 *Vera Drake* 00:39:25
Susan sits opposite the psychiatrist in his stark and sever office. In order to obtain the abortion, Susan has to claim suicidal tendincies run within her family and in doing so, imply that she is mentally unstable.

The scene cuts from Susan sitting on an expensive bed, pulling out blue satin slippers, to Vera walking up a rickety staircase. As the music reaches a crescendo, the camera jumps into a room in time for the audience to see Vera opening the door, shutting it as she enters the room. Of all the women Vera has helped, the 'Jamaican's' case is presented with the most sympathy. Completely isolated and, based on the state of her near barren apartment, extremely poor, her situation is heartrending. When she finds out that Vera is going to leave her after performing the operation, she becomes nearly frantic with fear. This time, when Vera leaves, the door is closed on one of the women, rather than one of the men, and the camera lingers on the 'Jamaican' girl, sitting in the centre of a bare bed with her stockings and underwear at her feet (*Vera Drake*). An apprehensive feeling surrounding Vera's side operation appears within this scene. Vera's usual speech about how 'it'll all come away, you'll be right as rain' is not reassuring and Vera's own hesitance to leave belies her assurances regarding the health of the young woman in front of her. Once Vera has left, she curls in on herself and sobs and at this moment, it is hard to find any support for Vera and what she does.



Fig. 3.6 *Vera Drake* 00:42:34 (a) & 00:44:18 (b)
Above: Susan, as she awaits her legal abortion in a clinic in the country.
Below: This scene is contrasted to the Jamaican woman who is left huddled on a bed in an abandoned room.

Vera's next patient is an adulteress. Comparable to the 'Socialite' she is also depicted in a way that limits the audience's commiseration. She falls pregnant while her husband is fighting overseas and requests assistance from Lily, Vera's friend and procurer of black market goods including abortions, and Vera herself. While with Vera, she becomes hysterical and her guilt at cheating, the abortion and fear, seem to wage an uncontrollable war inside her. Vera is torn between feeling sorry for her and feeling uncomfortable at the display and the audience is encouraged to share the discomfort as the camera jumps between close-ups of Vera as the 'Adulteress' sobs outside of the camera's scope, to the 'Adulteress' herself. As the camera changes angles from Vera to her patient, the audience is presented with a view of the room's door, which is closed, once again demonstrating how both Vera and the 'Adulteress' are a part of the Other. Of course, due to her actions, the 'Adulteress' is far more removed from society's accepted norms than any of Vera's other clients, save perhaps for the 'Socialite'. The 'Adulteress's' room is like the middle class room of the 'Socialite' and again the sympathy for her predicament is lessened by the link between the women. The scene cuts before the actual abortion, seemingly not having the patience for the distraught woman.

The final abortion that Vera performs is for a young girl, Pamela Barnes (Liz White). Pamela lies on the bed with her mother sitting next to her facing the camera. Vera is on the other side of the bed with her back to the camera (*Vera Drake*). Both mother and daughter continually question the safety of the abortion and that, coupled with Mrs Barnes recollection of working with Vera, and identifying Vera by name, foreshadows the inevitable illness that Pamela develops, eventually leading the police to Vera's doorstep. The fear expressed first by the 'Blonde', then the 'Jamaican' and then by the 'Adulteress' is finally realised when Pamela, a teenager, develops sepsis after the abortion and Vera's world comes crashing down as a result. Although neither the 'Adulteress' nor the Barnes physically close doors, Vera's operation on Pamela can be seen as a metaphorical closing of her backstreet operation.



Fig. 3.7 *Vera Drake* 00:54:08
Vera (right) performs an abortion on Pamela (left) with Mrs Barnes (centre) holding onto Pamela's hand.

Although Vera's clients, through closed doors and whispers, are spared the judgement and condemnation of society, Leigh plays with the concept of dramatic irony when the audience is shown the fate of Pamela Barnes just as Ethel, Vera's daughter, is engaged to Reg, and Joyce reveals that she is pregnant. Unaware that Mrs Barnes, the only one of Vera's clients who can identify her, is being questioned by the police, Vera and her family celebrate their good news. This makes the scene at Ethel and Reg's engagement party, which is interrupted by two plain clothes detectives who arrest Vera, all the more dramatic. Vera, having spared numerous women the fate of social judgement will, from this point forward, be stripped of her family and her livelihood. Her very presence is dramatically altered, she seems to age a decade in the time it takes to present to the detectives the equipment used to induce abortions. With no one to protect her, Vera is left exposed to the scorn and judgement of the law, and most importantly, her family. This awareness of the girl's fate also forces the question of the fate of the other women. It is at this point that Vera's hesitation regarding the Jamaican girl becomes relevant particularly as a gesture towards the potential for misfortune when performing an act such as abortion, which after the events that have led to her arrest, leave the audience to consider the fate of all those women who Vera has tried to help.

Each interaction the micro-stories presented increases the restrictive social position women find themselves in by demonstrating the various lives lived by women and their being forced to seek abortions outside the mainstream society. Such examples also serve to comment on the multiplicity of the varied levels of privilege presented by the women, from those like Susan, who can obtain a legal abortion; Joyce, who wants and can afford a child; to the women who, by representing different classes and 'types' of women, from married to single, poor to middle class, all of whom seek out abortions for their own reasons. Nevertheless, regardless of social positioning, all of the women within the film are dominated by a patriarchal society that reinforces its position through medical and legal institutions. Because the film is a period drama depicting abortion in 1950s England, where abortion had been illegal since the introduction of the Offense Against the Person Act of 1861, the narrative is situated within the power relations of a patriarchal society, whose structure had been fundamentally altered because of the two world wars. According to Leigh '[P]ostwar Britain was at once a very familiar world and a very alien one' and the trauma present in a recovering society is noticeable within the film on a number of levels,



Fig. 3.8 *Vera Drake* 01:35:56
Vera seen at her trial is surrounded by male authoritarian figures who will judge and condem her for breaking the law. It is implied that they judge all women who seek to challenge the patriarchal system which respricts their reproductive choices and forces motherhood on women who cannot or do not want the child.

from the men's hushed discussions to their silences regarding prisoner of war camps (Bowen and Leigh "Midwife"). It is this tension between trauma and silence, witnessed in the parallel narratives of the men's experience in the war and the women's experience with their reproductive concerns, which strengthens the film as one relating to the lived experiences of women. Leigh presents abortion as a social norm, although hidden, by focusing on the character of Vera, who chooses to help secretly abort unwanted pregnancies without the knowledge of her family. Vera's choice is one that has been made rationally. She has a pattern of behaviour for her 'patients' which minimises her interaction with them, in order to ensure her anonymity and safety.

As with *Part-time Work* and *4 Months*, women often need to go outside of the law in order to find any semblance of bodily autonomy. In their own way, *Part-Time Work*'s Roswitha and *Vera Drake's* Vera strive to create a space in which they are able to exercise control over their own lives and the lives of other women. Roswitha, and perhaps one should include *4 Month*'s Bebe, appear to be more qualified in performing abortions than Vera is. Although each of them is an independent abortionists, Roswitha's syndicate of other abortionists and doctors provides some form of support for her patients should anything go wrong with the operation. Bebe too, offers to return to check on Găbița to ensure that she is healthy. Vera does not even consider how the abortions might go wrong and has no safety net for her clients. Another difference between the three abortionists is their interaction with their clients. Roswitha has a long standing reputation as a good abortionist and Bebe repeatedly reminds the women that he hides nothing from them, using his real name and providing a direct contact number. Each of them has some form of protection against being betrayed. As part of a well-known underground group of abortionists, Roswitha, even when she is eventually reported to the authorities by a colleague, finds ways of escaping the charges, and Bebe uses Găbița and Olitia's own precarious positioning as co-conspirators to silence his clients. Vera has only her good will and limits her time spent with her clients so as to protect her anonymity. This makes her position in society more precarious than Roswitha's or Bebe's, and her subsequent arrest

and imprisonment after a botched abortion only underlines the lack of personal, social and legal support. Vera's vulnerabilities, while only revealed within the last half of the film are not limited to her alone. All of the women that the film focuses on are restricted in their capabilities by a patriarchal government and society. Even Susan, the only upper class woman presented in the film, is used and abused by the male figures in her life. Those whom Vera performs abortions for are further marginalised and removed from mainstream society. In spite of this it is still within the patriarchal constructs that women find the means to take back some of their agency.

Stephen Brooke, Professor of History at the University of York, argues that gender and class relations during the post-war period remain mostly unexplored. Nevertheless, he explains that the 1950s witnessed the '[destabilisation of] established understandings of working class masculinity and femininity' where there was a 'growth in the number of married women workers, [a] decrease in family size, the increased companionability of working class marriages and the emergence of an apparently reformed working class masculinity' (Brooke 774-75). For Brooke, the gender ideology had previously depicted men as the providers, while women were relegated to domestic work in the household and were considered 'non-skilled'. He reasons that the introduction of women into the workforces was a 'catalyst in the confusion of gender identities' which fractured the accepted ideology of the masculine as the skilled worker, and that the social uncertainty which first emerged after the Great War, and continued after the Second World War, centred around 'work' and 'maternity' (Brooke 776).[6] *Vera Drake* focuses on the depiction of women within this period of gendered contention. In this sense, the film is about the becoming of women as subjects and their particular negotiation of the still rigid patriarchal laws, which were intended to maintain their status as second-class citizens. The gradual representation of the becoming of women, which the film presents, is framed by abortions, and by the abortionist, Vera Drake.

Jennifer Worth, author and nurse, is quick to point out that amongst Leigh's realistic reconstruction of the 1950s, medically, the film is inaccurate regarding the way in which

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[6] Most of the work written on post-war and gender relations often examines these themes in a Cold War context, see Frank Mort, *Scandalous Events* (2006), or focuses on feminist claims of the 1950s housewife's anxiety and depression. See Ali Haggett, *Desperate Housewives' and the Domestic Environment in Post-War Britain* (2009).

Vera performed her abortions (Worth "Deadly"). It is Worth's opinion that Leigh is guilty of presenting an almost idealistic representation of an abortionist within Vera. Yet, as the film progresses, Vera is reduced to 'Drake'. In the last few minutes, after she has been found guilty and sentenced, we find her transformed, old and weak. This 'Drake' is nothing like the energetic woman from the film's opening who survived World War Two and was a pillar for her community. Worth argues that the entire representation of abortion is unrealistic, from Vera's near saintly persona to the method used to trigger a miscarriage (Worth "Deadly"). What Worth fails to address is that it was Leigh's intention to produce a realist film, rather than a documentary about abortion in the 1950s. Vera is portrayed as a fundamentally virtuous individual and the choice of abortifacient goes towards the most sympathetic and least graphic representation. This allows space for Leigh's true considerations of the social restrictions placed on women within this period, which force them to seek out desperate measures such as the backstreet abortions that Vera performs. While there are other ways to depict the abortions, the 'sense of togetherness, [the Drakes] wholesomeness, [the] positive kind of innocence' which he embeds in the story only serve to strengthen the physical and emotional collapse of both Vera and her family in the last half of the film (Lawrenson and Leigh 12).

The film is made up of numerous comparisons and juxtapositions. Vera the humanitarian is starkly contrasted with Vera the criminal; Vera's working class family, the Drakes, are compared to the Wells, a middle to upper class family whom Vera serves, and whose daughter, Susan (Sally Hawkins), has an abortion after being raped. The small dark flats of the working classes become warm and inviting while the large open rooms of the rich contain a far more sinister and restrictive quality. The Drake household is also compared to that of their in-laws', Stan's brother Frank and his wife, who are examples of the newly emerging working middle class. Susan's class privileged abortion narrative is contrasted to the narratives of Vera's lower working class clients. Most importantly, Leigh divides men and women physically with doors and wars. The wars here are representative of both a subdued acknowledgment of the Second World War, and the unacknowledged and hidden 'war' waged by women in their homes. Even Vera's leitmotif is awarded its own counterpart through a high-pitched choir, first introduced with Susan and later superimposed on to Vera who by that point has been transformed through her trial into 'Drake'. The film provides the various associations to assist in Leigh's delicate balancing act, between the notion of abortion concerning law and abortion as a moral issue. It is clear

within the film that Leigh sees a society that forces women to take such drastic measures as illegal and potentially deadly abortions, as problematic. However, he does not attempt to promote a position regarding abortion itself.

For many feminists, Beauvoir's T*he Second Sex* (1949) is considered a primary work in the development of feminist theory. Although there are many criticisms regarding Beauvoir's text largely stemming from the negative representation of the female body, as well as Beauvoir's oft-times contradictory statements, *The Second Sex* remains an important work because Beauvoir argues that the body is a situated social construct. Beauvoir divides her text into two 'books', the first titled "Facts and Myths" is her reconstruction of women's positioning within patriarchal societies, through the perspective of male dominated reasoning. It is divided into three primary sections which are defined by their specific justifications for confining and determining the definition of women: these are; biological, psychological, historical and literary (or 'myth') categories. The second 'book' is an examination of how women experience their own bodies under patriarchy and gradually moves towards a theory of human transcendence, in other words human freedom, with the last part of book two titled "Towards Liberation" (Beauvoir 5-6). Beauvoir recognises women's position as Other, as one which is ambivalent, especially when she compares women's othering, to the othering witnessed in colonial periods, racial divides, and minority groupings. She argues that women have, historically, always been in the position of the other, who is submissive to the one: 'He [man] is the Subject, he is the Absolute — she [woman] is the Other' (Beauvoir 16).

The most obvious form of othering, present in *Vera Drake*, lies in the silences that revolve around the 'wartime' plot. The first instance of this is the dinner that Vera hosts for Reg, where Stan, Sid and Reg swap stories about their time in the army. It is a world where men like Stan, Sid and their neighbour Reg sit down with tea and cigars and compare war stories. Although their conversations are, like most conversations in *Vera Drake*, subdued, when they are juxtaposed against the absolute silence of Vera, Susan and the women regarding



Fig. 3.9 *Vera Drake* 00:08:01
Stan (left), Reg (centre) and Sid (right) have a smoke, while Ethel and Vera (far right) clean the dinner table and make tea. The roles of all charaters in this scene reinforce the gendered roles women were supposed to confrom to.

their own traumas, Leigh's positioning of the film in that particular post-war, pre-legal abortion period, compares the two distinct and particularly gendered traumas. The acceptance and tolerance of one trauma and the negation and rejection of the other, immediately sets up an area of conflict within the film. Vera and her daughter Ethel are only able to contribute briefly to the conversation regarding the London Blitz, while Stan and Reg speak softly about those friends and family who were 'P.O.Ws', or prisoners of war, but 'won't talk about it' (*Vera Drake*).

The theme of the war and silence continues in a scene halfway through *Vera Drake*. By this time, Vera has performed a number of abortions that the audience is privy to. Unbeknown to Vera at this time her last client, Pamela Barnes has been taken to hospital where the doctor has informed the police about a botched abortion. In this scene, Vera and Stan share a quiet moment in their bedroom just before Vera is arrested. Curled up around each other, Stan shares details of the war with Vera and they both comment on how lucky they are to have each other. The light bedclothes and lamp-light within the tiny room provide a homely feel to the scene and the camera slowly zooms in to a close-up of Vera and Stan as soft strings play in the background. Here Vera is supportive and encouraging about Stan's experiences in the war, just as she had been during the scene between the three men earlier in the film. All the while, Vera keeps silent about her own experiences. Unlike the post-war plot which provides the space in which the men are, at once, able and unable to speak of their experiences during the war between genders, there is really no space for women's experiences to be articulated within a patriarchal system. Even during the actual abortion scenes the characters talk around the abortion, explaining their choice in stilted phrases. Vera herself is never very descriptive about the abortion and always talks about it in the vaguest of terms. The only space that allows for a woman's perspective is the action in the film, where the various examples of the abortions performed, provide a glimpse into the lives of the women who the film represents. In this way, women make their own spaces within the patriarchal system where they may resist their othering. That Stan is able to talk about the bleakest moments of the



Fig. 3.10 *Vera Drake* 00:59:00
Vera (left) and husband Stan (right) as they share stories late at night. Stan opens up about the war, even while Vera keeps silent about her own secrets.

war with his wife, and not have to reciprocate that trust is indicative of the power relations between men and women, and the limited space in which women could manoeuvre.

> STAN. We were sitting by the side of the road. There were bodies everywhere, stink of petrol. I'd had enough. I couldn't do nothing. Couldn't run away. Couldn't cry. Couldn't feel nothing. Just sat there… (*Vera Drake*)

Once Vera is arrested, she is reduced to quiet mumbles and stuttered phrases for the rest of the film. Unlike Stan's confession, Vera whispers hers to Stan, making it inaccessible to the audience who has witnessed the men's confessions throughout the film. Her confession to her husband is then presented to the audience through Stan as he informs his brother Frank of the charges against Vera. This secondary confession dislocates Vera from her position as speaker:

> STAN. […] She's been helping young girls out.
> FRANK. How do you mean?
> STAN. What find themselves in the family way.
> FRANK. You mean …? I don't believe it.
> STAN. She told me herself, in front of the cops. (*Vera Drake*)

Vera's loss of voice, which has always been comforting and sure, is suggestive of the absolute loss of power due to her arrest. The judgemental nature of the patriarchal society is seen even in her husband's horrified reactions to what Vera has done. It is no coincidence that Vera loses her voice just as the male voices, who represent those of familial and authoritarian positions, begin to become overwhelmingly loud. During her hearings, Vera is overwhelmed by the official voices in the court room, to the point where all that is discernible is the deep tone of the voice, which indicates a male presence, the words unimportant because Vera is, and has always been in the position of other. More than once, the camera zooms in close to her face, and the voices around her fade in and out as the camera zooms in to an extreme close-up of Vera. The court, the law and her family (specifically, her male relations) talk above and around her, just as they talk above and

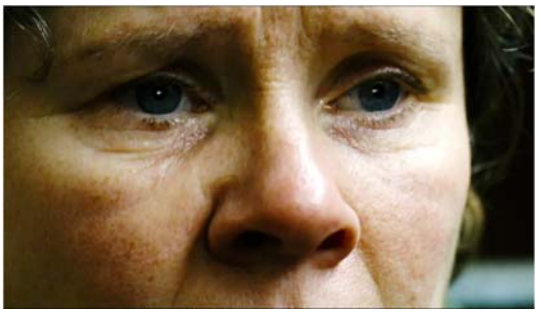

Fig. 3.11 *Vera Drake* 01:25:24
An extreme close-up of Vera as the Detective Inspector in charge of her case speaks over her to the court.

around women like Susan. Only Reg provides some form of defence for abortion, as he demonstrates a practicality born of a large poor family:

> REG. It don't seem fair. Look at my mum. Six of us, in two rooms. It's all right if you're rich. But if you can't feed 'em, you can't love 'em, can ya? (*Vera Drake*)

What little Vera does have to say about her abortions is always framed by the male dominated dialogue which controls the discussions. Apart from her initial confession at her home to Detective Inspector Webster (Peter Wight) where she leads the conversation, explaining how she 'knows why you're [the police] here […] because of what I [Vera] do […] I help young girls out'. All other discussions about her abortion practice are directed by the male speakers or are spoken through the male speakers. Apart from Stan and Frank's discussion, Inspector Webster reads his account of his interview with Vera to the court:

> WEBSTER. She said, 'I know why you are here, I help young girls who are in trouble. I help them to start their bleeding.' I said, 'Do you mean you perform abortions?' She said 'That's not what I call it. I just help them.' (*Vera Drake*)

Stan and Sid also have a conversation about Vera performing abortions, without Vera there to defend herself. Although Stan is supportive of his wife, both men condemn her actions:

> SID. So, how many's she done over the years then, eh? Dozens? Hundreds? And all right, fair enough. She kept it from me and Ethel. But she didn't even tell you.
> STAN. If she had, I'd have put a stop to it, wouldn't I.
> SID. Well ain't ya angry?
> STAN. 'Course I'm bloody angry, you silly bugger. (*Vera Drake*)

During both of the instances that Sid confronts Vera about her actions; the dialogue is once more directed by Sid as representative of the male hegemony:

> SID. How could you do those things mum? I don't understand it.
> VERA. I don't expect you to, Sid.
> SID. Why'd you do it?
> VERA. I had to
> SID. It's wrong, though, ain't it? Eh?
> VERA. I don't think so.
> SID. Well, course it is! (*Vera Drake*)

Each of these three films, *Part-Time Work*, *4 Months* and *Vera Drake* presents abortion as an act that occurs outside of the law, removed from 'acceptable' society. The terms 'back

alley' and 'underground' abortions are suggestive of the spaces in which these illegal acts must take place, the only real spaces in which these women can regulate their lives in some small way, and claim some form of agency for themselves. By condemning his wife's abortion practice Vera's husband reveals just how unyielding the English patriarchy are.

As much as Vera is legally guilty, it is in the courtroom of her own home where judgement falls most harshly. After Sid condemns her, Vera begins to lose more and more of herself as she turns into 'Drake', an old battered woman. Her attempts at defending herself do not expand to explanation and justification; she only tells Sid 'I don't expect you to [understand]'. The conversation between Sid and Stan is even more revealing. Despite being supportive of Vera, Stan's declaration that he would have stopped her '[if] she'd told me', indicates the lack of space for women to have a discussion about abortion, and therefore about their othering by men. Instead, Sid, Stan and the court, despite being at times sympathetic towards Vera, are the voices of the patriarchy, which dominate Vera and the women she represents.



Fig. 3.12 *Vera Drake* 01:43:47
Vera sinks into the furniture as Sid (right) dominates the frame, shamed and horrified by his mother.

By eliminating men from the illegal abortion narrative and placing the act within the realm of women, the film portrays women as communal, unofficial legislators, working outside the law so as to benefit their gender. In this way, *Vera Drake* at once challenges and conforms to Beauvoir's presentation of women as other. Moi writes:

> For Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, human transcendence — human freedom — is always incarnated, that is to say that it always presents itself in the shape of a human body. My body is a situation, but it is a fundamental kind of situation, in that it founds my experience of myself and the world. This is a situation that always enters my lived experience. This is why the body can never be just brute matter to me. Only the dead body is a thing. (Moi *Woman* 63)

When a woman is othered, then the experiences which make up the understanding of self and the world, becomes distinctly alienated. Kristana Arp argues that the two most important elements of Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* are her construction of the body, and women as alienated from their bodies (Arp 162-65). 'Woman, like man, *is* her body' avows Beauvoir, 'but her body is something other than herself' (Beauvoir 57). By positioning

women as other, the body, as the site of understanding and experience of the world, becomes not only the location of the alienated self, but also the location from which resistance can be played out.

In the changing world of the 1950s England, where the social and gendered ideologies were being challenged by the inclusion of women into the skilled labour force, it was only natural that, seeing how the othering of women was initially a social construct, that too would be challenged. In light of this, the restriction of the knowledge of abortions to women only and the silence surrounding the abortions begins to develop commonalities amongst women, which Beauvoir feared they did not have. To be sure, the positioning of women as other is in itself an ambivalent act. Returning to an earlier argument presented regarding the 'ambiguity of female subjectivity [being] a political strength and a weakness' (Moi "Independent" 84), Moi indicates that there are within patriarchy a number of contradictory spaces from which to undermine the system. Although women are isolated within their positioning as the other, there are many othered women. The largest problem for Beauvoir's considerations of women's resistance to the status of the other is that there are no 'clear cut' revolutionary ideals from which to build solidarity. Instead, as *Vera Drake* demonstrates, solidarity is built between the spaces of patriarchy, in the gaps of a discourse that traditionally silences women.

The distinction between how men and women talk and behave regarding the act of abortion indicates the disparity between their freedom of speech and actions. While the men appear hesitant to speak of the war, they are socially able to do so. Women, in comparison will discuss abortion over tea, allowing the film to comment on abortion with a certain aura of normalcy, and yet, they can only speak of abortions with each other, behind closed doors, or through whispers. Abortions, like pregnancies, are a potential in women's lives. Vera, for example, is given her appointments by Lily while buying sweets for Ethel, and Susan seeks the councel of her friend in a tea room. In contrast, even the discussions of abortion with a sympathetic Reg, an angry and defensive Sid and a shocked Frank, indicate a break from the norm and a tense/uncomfortable tone is present. Sid's outrage at his mother's actions is especially telling when compared to his own behaviour. Sid's conversation with his two friends suggests that he is guilty of casual relations with women, and yet no indication is given of his concern for the women themselves. He uses the potential for sex as a bartering tool for Italian nylons 'How you doing, darling? Fancy a

turn? Slip her a pair — happy days!' is the pitch he sells to Ronny (*Vera Drake*). This disregard for women reveals how pregnancy is particularly a woman's problem, but abortion is not an acceptable means of remedying it.

The judgement upon Vera, which is meant to act as a deterrent for others, is contrasted with Vera's experience in jail where she meets two other prisoners who unabashedly claim to have been imprisoned twice. They advise Vera to 'Cheer up,' informing her that she will 'be out before you know it', suggesting that the harsh punishment, intended to be a deterrent to others, does not hold the same significance to the women as it does to the law. The women's dismissal of Vera's sentencing is in stark contrast to the court's ruling and implies a bigger issue at work than illegal abortions — a lack of social accord between the legislative body and the women it seeks to represent. The film's ending echoes the beginning of the film where Vera Drake was introduced to the audience as she walked out of an enclosed space. Her posture was upright and she had a small smile on her face. The screen slowly lightened with soft strings playing in the background and Vera had a strong presence. In contrast, the ending sees Vera shuffling away from the camera, back bent and looking ten years older than when she was first introduced. Her once cheery demeanour has transformed into a stuttering mess. She nearly bumps into a warden who calls out to her, 'Watch where you are going Drake' The score is not the soothing tones that were first heard, but high-pitched crescendo choir voices, which merges Vera's shattered sense of self with a tight almost claustrophobic sense of the prison. As seen throughout the film, Leigh plays on the idea of space. The smaller the room, the Drake's dining room being the smallest, the more comfortable the scene is. The more open a space is, the greater the sense of oppression and distress. This is because the spaces, which *Vera Drake* represents, are closed and safe spaces for women. An open space conversely, means that the safe spaces have been removed, and women are left in the space of the patriarchal rule. The prison is large, and as Vera walks away from the camera, the scope of the shot accentuates the size of the building making Vera appear even smaller than she already is.



Fig. 3.13 *Vera Drake* 01:55:01
Vera in prison now answers to "Drake" as she heasetatingly makes her way up the stairs – a disparity to the open scene's Vera who climed up the stairs with a straight back and happy demeanour.

It is indeed, within the silent spaces in which women gather, that the undermining of their otherness becomes apparent. Beauvoir argues that with othering, the body becomes alien. In her conclusion, Beauvoir claims that in women there is a 'conflict' between herself as an active Subject, who is the Self, and her gradual training from childhood, which is 'her objective self, her "being-the-other"', which causes her to internalise the othering and become the object which, as Beauvoir had previously argued in her introduction, is 'simply what the man decrees' (Beauvoir 295, 15). A part of the ambiguity of women's position is that they both allow and are subjected to the label of other, and as such, they do and do not resist. The women of *Vera Drake* resist by sharing and negotiating their individual positioning as other with each other, as best they can. Regardless of the risks Vera and her kind provide, Susan, unlike the women who Vera helps out, is forced to reveal her situation to two men who sit in judgement of her. While she eventually obtains a safe abortion, Susan has been defiled in other ways and has been dominated by men throughout her ordeal. Vera and her actions allow women a way to circumvent the patriarchal system of which they are a part.

Vera's interaction with the women in the film is starkly contrasted against the interaction with the men. Women's creation of a space in which to negotiate their own bodily power, through the performing and obtaining of abortions, is an example of their attempts to construct a Subjected Self which is not defined and confined to the othering which their patriarchal society dictates. Beauvoir, as discussed, argues that the status of women as other is a cultural phenomenon and not inherently inscribed on to women. Because it appears natural, due to the lack of specific historical events which then produced the patriarchal system responsible for the othering of women, women's resistance to being othered comes in the form of silent and hidden disobedience. *Vera Drake* then provides a window through which one may observe this subversive action against the hegemonic powers. This period drama presents the ambiguous beginnings of women's acclimation to a transforming society, which steadily allows for the navigation of a new woman.

CHAPTER 4

FRUIT CHAN'S *DUMPLINGS*: CANNIBALISING ONE'S SELF

Midway through Fruit Chan's horror film *Dumplings* [餃子 / Jiǎozi] (2004) Mei (Bai Ling) performs an abortion on Kate (Miki Yeung), a teenager who is five months pregnant with her father's child. Kate's legs are hoisted up on the sink in the kitchen in which Mei prepares her aborted foetus-filled dumplings for her rich clients. Mei induces a miscarriage using only a catheter, without any medication. In doing so Kate becomes the most visible victim in the film of a consumerist world that values and objectifies women based on their youth, beauty and reproductive capabilities. Mei tells Kate and her mother that 'We women must defend ourselves', and then order's Kate's mother to 'take care of [her] child and don't let this happen again' (*Dumplings*). Hours later Kate has died, having haemorrhaged as a result of the traumatic nature of the abortion. As Kate lies dying in the middle of a road, Mei serves Kate's aborted five month old foetus to her client Mrs Li. Within *Dumplings* unborn babies and aborted foetuses are bartered for monetary gain. Women who grow old are replaced with the 'latest model' and desperate women go to any length to remain young, as Mei rationalises, 'For youth and beauty, we women are always busy fighting our age'. *Dumplings* is a film about excessive consumerism, and uses cultural representations of cannibalism and abortions to situate its political and social critique within the borders of Hong Kong and China. *Dumplings* shares similarities with the previous films examined in this dissertation in that they are all situated within specific political and social contexts, with each engaging with the politics of gender and space for women. Chan's film, while including such issues, is more preoccupied with the encroachment of China's political ideologies on Hong Kong during the transitional stages of China's assimilation of the mega-city back into its borders.

Born in China, yet raised in Hong Kong, Chan's films often consider the tension between the two lifestyles of the more traditional Chinese culture and Hong Kong's modern capitalist culture. Chan has, during the course of his career, considered this tension which arose as a result of China's eventual incorporation of Hong Kong into her borders. In 1997, after 154 years under British imperial rule, Hong Kong was formally handed over to China as a special administrative region. Chan's films often examine how Hong Kong's change in status has affected the relationship between the two areas and groups of people.

Dumplings continues this tradition while critiquing Hong Kong society's obsession with appearance, aging and consumerism. Pitting the propaganda of communist China's ever encroaching powers against the more capitalist metropolitan city of Hong Kong, the film plays on the macabre and the grotesque through the use of aborted foetuses as the main ingredient of life-prolonging dumplings, to produce dark satirical commentary regarding the two countries.

Dumplings uses elements of the gothic and finds its place within the genre of horror, particularly with its grotesque depictions of human nature. The narrative revolves around Mei, both abortionist and antihero, who sells her dumplings, made of aborted foetuses to the rich and affluent of Hong Kong, as a rejuvenating agent. One of these clients is Mrs Li (Miriam Yeung), a middle aged ex-television star whose husband (Tony Leung Ka-fai) is engaged in an affair with a younger woman, the masseuse Connie (Pauline Lau). Faced with her husband's betrayal and unable to conceive a child of her own, Mrs Li fears the loss of her beauty and her marriage. After an indefinite number of sessions, Mrs Li, believing that Mei's dumplings are insufficient for her needs, urges Mei to find more potent ingredients for the dumplings. Mei eventually finds what she and Mrs Li have been searching for in Kate, a five months pregnant teenage girl, who has been raped and impregnated by her father. Mei performs an abortion on Kate, who dies hours after the botched operation. After eating the five month old foetus, Mrs Li feels rejuvenated and seduces her husband back into her bed. Despite her youthful appearance, Mrs Li begins to rot from the inside and emits a fish-like smell. Her husband, Mr Li, overhears Mrs Li confronting Mei over the phone. Mr Li seeks out Mei for answers, and seduces and in turn is seduced by Mei. Refusing to help Mrs Li any longer, Mei intends to further seduce Mr Li, but is interrupted by the arrival of the police, alerted to Mei's abortion practice by Kate's mother's (So-Foon Wong) attack on her husband after her daughter's death. Mei flees Hong Kong and Mrs Li begins to make her own dumplings, eventually purchasing Connie's five month old foetus (*Dumplings*).

In terms of its political and social commentary on both Hong Kong and China, *Dumplings* is like the films previously discussed. However, it differs in that the previous films are socio-political films that closely examine the search and attainment of women's autonomy and agency. The three previous films have all sought to normalise and de-stigmatise abortion by presenting the act as a means of achieving self-determination for

women who have been regulated to small and limiting social roles, and where the prohibition of abortion has become representative of the lack of social and personal power. *Dumplings* offers a critique of the two different governmental structures present in Hong Kong and China, those of capitalism and communism respectively. The film uses the numerous, often forced, abortions produced by China's one child policy as a metaphor for the self-termination of the state, just as Mei uses the foetuses of those abortions as food that she and others consume in order to maintain their beauty and youth. This cannibalism is then situated within the capitalist Hong Kong society, where constant consumption and instant self-gratification become another form of cannibalism.

China's one child policy was originally introduced to reduce the exponentially growing population in the country (Pletcher "One-Child"). China's Law on Maternal and Infant Health Care act of 27 October 1994 states that a foetus may be terminated legally if it is suffering from a genetic disease, a serious defect, or if the pregnancy may jeopardise the mother's safety (PRC Act 27.10.1994). In 2002 forced abortions and sterilisations were made illegal, allowing the Chinese government to state that it is 'opposed' to forced abortions (Meredith 46; Taylor "China"). In 2003, a year before *Dumplings* was released, China had performed a total of 7 140 588 abortions in comparison to Hong Kong's total of 17 420 abortions for the same year (Johnston "People's Rep. Of China"; Johnston "Historical Abortion").[7] China's one child policy has caused numerous problems, including but not limited to a greatly reduced female population due to sex biased abortions, and a large discrepancy between the generational population numbers. There is also the issue of China's forced abortion and sterilisation programme (that occurs despite the party line),[8] which is of great controversy both inside and outside of the country. In early 2015 China relaxed the one child policy, and the majority of families may now have two children

[7] While abortions in Hong Kong are not at the centre of the film's critique directed towards Hong Kong, it must be noted that the laws regarding family planning in Hong Kong differ greatly from those in China. Hong Kong does not limit the size of one's family (although a 1970s campaign 'Two is Enough' made a two child family the norm — see "Family Planning Milestones" from *The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong*'s (FPAHK) website) — and abortion is fairly easily attainable with a few restrictions. Section 47 of the Offences Against the Person Ordinance (Chapter 212) states that there must be two medical practitioners willing to sign off on the abortion, and that unless there are extraordinary circumstances, the abortion must be performed within 24 weeks of pregnancy (FPAHK's unplanned Pregnancy page).

[8] Forced abortions in China are widely reported on; one such example comes after the one child policy was relaxed when on the 11th of September 2015 British newspaper *The Telegraph* reported that a woman was being forced to have an abortion eight months into her term. See *Forcing a woman to have an abortion at eight months: Welcome to 21st century China* by Yuan Ren.

(Worrall “Backfired”). Through its particular engagement with abortion, *Dumplings* links China’s one child policy to mass abortions and then systematically links the Chinese abortions, and the ideologies it suggests, to Mei.

The film introduces Mei in the opening sequence as she crosses into Hong Kong from China’s Mainland. As she returns home, the camera focuses on dilapidated buildings, suggestive of the rundown quality of her surroundings. This sequence, one of two trips between Hong Kong and China in the film, takes care to emphasise the journey that Mei makes with her lunchbox. Once inside her flat, Mei begins to prepare a meal, unpacking a lunchbox that she has brought with her across the border into Hong Kong. This scene reveals that the lunchbox is the way in which Mei smuggles the aborted foetuses into Hong Kong from her contact at Shanghai Hospital. Dressed as she is in body hugging bright sequined clothing, with her hair in styled disarray, Mei has an eccentric sensual appearance. This sensual quality is one that she uses to great effect in her interactions with Mr and Mrs Li. The camera tracks down her figure, and settles on a small bowl containing the aborted foetuses. The music that accompanies this scene contains an electronic thrumming noise over a sharp metallic grating, creating a disconcerting atmosphere. Mei picks up one of the foetuses and it slips out of her grasp, she catches it and eats it raw. The camera cuts to an extreme close-up of her face, capturing an expression of bliss, while the grotesque sound of her chewing is audible over the dangerous thrum of the still palpitating music.



Fig. 4.1 *Dumplings* 00:20:41
A close-up of Mei, as she consumes one of the foetuses in the opening sequence.

Overall, the opening sequence is an unsettling one. A combination of sexuality and cannibalism provides the film’s first foray into the perverse consumption which dominates the narrative. With the introduction of Mrs Li, it is revealed that Mei is actually selling the foetuses as a delicacy that will rejuvenate and revitalise an individual. The mythology behind the eating of the foetuses is never revealed aside from Mei’s monologue about cannibalism near the film’s end, when she seduces Mr Li into eating her dumplings and sleeping with her:

> Mei: Cannibalism shouldn't even be considered immoral in China. It has existed since history began. Li's *Herbalist's Handbook* clearly stated that human flesh and organs are admissible ingredients for medical recipes. During famines, neighbours traded and cooked each other's children for survival. The famous chef Yi Ya heard that his Emperor wanted to try human flesh. He butchered and served his son as a dish to the monarch. Tales abound of caring sons and daughters cutting off flesh for their parents' medicine. The classic *Water Margin* depicted heroes who savoured their enemies. One even served buns with a filling of human flesh. The Japanese have definitely eaten many Chinese. You think our country could have got through all these wars and famines without consuming human flesh? What about out of pure hatred? To skin you and eat you alive? Our national hero, Yue Fei, once wrote, 'Pep up with a meal of the invaders' flesh. Celebrate with a drink of the invaders' blood.' (*Dumplings*)

Set as a voiceover, the scene is a repetition of the same action from different angles as Mei sets a bowl of dumplings before Mr Li,[9] the transparent orange blouse, tilt and close-ups of Mei's body not only allude to her attractiveness, but are a direct link between cannibalism, the foetuses and renewed sexuality. KR Chong, Assistant Professor of History at the University of Main argues that cannibalism in China was, as with many other societies, connected to a variety of beliefs and social constructs. One of those was that human flesh was said to have medicinal properties (Chong *ix*; Travis-Henikoff and Turner 145; Petrinovich 6). The 'Li' whom Mei mentions is an actual sixteenth century doctor and his text *Bencao gangmu* (Ming Dynasty), which Mei calls the '*Herbalist's Handbook*', did include the consideration of human flesh as part of medicinal ingredients. The '*Water Margin*', officially published in 1589,[10] is also an actual book that references an inn that served customers 'human meat dumplings' (Nappi 130). It is interesting how Mei calls these men 'heroes' when those who sell the meat are the actual villains of the text and those who eat the meat are unaware of the origin.

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[9] While Mr Li is not the focus of this analysis, it must be said that he is the ideal representation of patriarchal dominated consumerism and rule. All characters, including Mr Li engage in societal behaviour and consumption that only reinforces the patriarchal mores. The CEO of an unnamed company, Mr Li has had a number of affairs with twenty year old women and has already been divorced a number of times. While Mrs Li chases the return of her youth through medicinal means, Mr Li does so through his affairs with younger women. Both characters buy into the various societal ideologies presented to them.

[10] According to Edwin H. Lowe's Prefix to Tuttle's 2011 edition of *The Water Margin*, authorship is questionable (but widely assumed to be the work of Shi Nai'an), and was probably written between 1296 and 1400. See Shi Nai'an *The Water Margin* (2011).

What is most noticeable in Mei's monologue is that even though she currently resides in Hong Kong, and Mr Li is presumably a citizen of Hong Kong, Mei uses expressions such as 'our country' and 'Our national hero'. She groups the two regions together, politically, historically and socially. A problematic stance given that Hong Kong is, in the twenty-first century, still semi-independent from China. Mei's wording suggests her own ideological loyalties are to China and its control and ownership of Hong Kong. This supports Hong Kong Baptist Universities' Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh and Neda Hei-tung Ng, who argue that *Dumplings* struggles with the Chinese' propaganda that Hong Kong has 'been framed as a long lost [child]' returning to the 'motherland' (Yeh and Ng 5-6). Certainly, Mei is depicted in numerous scenes as a seductress and a temptress, which situates her as the film's antagonist who lives in Hong Kong while supporting certain ideologies found within China. Her use of Chinese cannibalistic mythology and her training and practise as an abortionist in China all serve to link her back to her homeland and symbolically suggest that she represents the encroaching threat of Hong Kong's assimilation into China.

The most obvious of these links are Mei's travels back to the Mainland to procure the foetuses for her customers. One scene finds Mei in Shenzhen Hospital, China, where she meets her contact for the sale of the foetuses. Her old friend warns her of Hong Kong reporters stirring up trouble with the abortions that the hospital performs, '[wanting] pictures', and suggests that Mei avoid the hospital for two weeks. It is no coincidence that Hong Kong is blamed, as it sets up an opposition between the two counties with which Mei is associated and the film uses the drastically different abortion practises to stress the differences. The camera jumps to a long-shot of the pair, as Mei slips her friend money. The scene, in a fit of black humour shows the pair struggling covertly to swap the tub of aborted foetuses for money in the middle of a hospital corridor. Their absurd actions, with Mei dressed in her typically flamboyant clothing, are another example of how the grotesque emerges and is presented in the film. The framing of the scene interrupts the visual field of the pair, by positioning the camera behind doorways, walls and trolleys. This forms a barrier between Mei and her associate, and the camera's point of view. The audience is once again asked to bear witness to an illicit trade of goods. If the observation of the illegal sale of aborted foetuses for the purpose of consumption is not enough to unsettle one, Mei's conversation with her associate over her ex places the act of abortion, and thus the foetuses she is buying, into perspective.

Mei's ideologies are quite clear when she tells her friend that that her ex-fiancé, Doctor Wang, ended the relationship because:

> MEI: He hated the one child policy. But I was aborting over 10 foetuses a day. That was 3000 a year. 30000 in 10 years. He was afraid I would have a cursed child because of all the deaths I caused. [laughs]
> FRIEND: It *is* national policy.
> MEI: I was only serving the people! (*Dumplings*)

Mei's claim that she was 'serving the people' is suggestive of her belief in the one child policy governing abortions in China. Later in the film, Mei reveals her past as a surgeon in China to Mrs Li, proudly explaining, 'Only the best minds in China could study medicine. My forte was surgery with no bleeding. […] Nothing is left when I'm done'. The film persistently links mass abortions and the foetuses Mei uses to the Republic of China, and it does so in a cruel way. Both the investigative journalists from Hong Kong and Wang's distaste over the vast volume of abortions Mei has performed indicate an uneasiness about the policies which Mei is so proud to serve. It is possible that such unease originates from the knowledge of forced abortions and for Wang, Mei's enthusiasm for the practice of abortion seems to have been a disconcerting notion. Her unapologetic nature is founded both in her righteous nationalism, and in the steady source of foetuses that she gains from the policy. Her claim of serving the people appears specious as, unknowingly, the people serve Mei in her quest for immortality. There is gallows humour present in the ambiguity of the statement 'serving the people', as Mei literally serves people foetuses.

Other examples of Mei's ideologies are found within her home, particularly visible when the camera focuses on some of the figurines displayed on a dressing table. Amongst the figurines are a fisherman, a Mao Zedong statue, the Virgin Mary, a number of fertility figures from many religions, another fisherman and a few cat figurines, the latter often shown catching or eating fish. The fishermen and the cats may easily be understood as representations of Mei as she is a predator and an opportunist. The cat and fishermen figurines are also associated with a song *Hong Hu Shui Lang Da Lang* (*After Waves in Honghu Lake*) about a beautiful and idyllic lake in China



Fig. 4.2 Dumplings 00:21:09
Figurines of deities, fishermen and cats sit on Mei's table.

which surpasses Heaven in perfection, bountiful, with plenty of fish to eat. The song, from Mei's 'youth' and one that she sings to her customers, is from a revolutionary period in China's history. Taken from an opera about a woman leading an attack on China's enemies, it symbolises Mei's strong loyalty to China's principles.

The song itself is used a number of times in the film, and implies that what Mei is doing is 'fishing' for initiates' for her own ideology, as well as for aborted foetuses to consume. This song, like the room's contents, has two primary functions. The first connects Mei, her past and present abortions with Chinese ideologies. The second is to extend a link between Mei's recipe of aborted foetuses to the notions of fertility, life and youth — all with the ultimate goal of displacing these attributes from the young to the elderly, through the act of consuming the unborn. The religious statues symbolising fertility link back to Mei's comment about needing to 'start from the inside' of the female body (the womb) to achieve everlasting youth, implying that the common notion of giving life has a different and more nefarious connotation for Mei than producing and carrying to term a healthy baby. Finally, the Mao Zedong statue is a more direct connection to Mei's past in China, which provided her with the opportunity to discover her trade secret because of the one child policy and its use of abortion as a form of forced birth control.[11] Mao, as the Republic of China's founder, is revered by Mei, as are the women who 'create' and abort her much sought after foetuses.



Fig. 4.3 *Dumplings* 00:21:09
Additional figurines include the Virgin Mary and Mao Zedong, the founder of the Republic of China.

The political allegory present in *Dumplings* is concerned with the tension between the multitude of binaries that exist in the two regions. By presenting these binaries through the visually unsettling medium of a film about abortion and cannibalism, two of many societies' most sacred taboos (which later includes a third taboo — incest), is a demonstration of the level of disquiet upon which present Hong Kong is constructed.

[11] Mao Zedong founded the Chinese Communist Party (CPP) in 1921. After a civil war, Mao and the Chinese Communist party were successful in defeating their primary opponents, the Kuomintang Nationalist Party. Mao founded the People's Republic of China on the 1st of October 1949, thus setting China on the path of Communism. See Ross Terrill, *Mao: A Biography* (1999).

According to Jennifer Brown there are a number of ways that the trope of cannibalism might be used (Brown *ix*). One cannibalistic narrative is that of the urban city itself — the threat that people of the city will cause their own extinction by symbolically consuming all that sustains them. Often at the centre of cannibalistic narratives are elements of the disintegration of humanity. This is particularly the case in those stories dubbed 'baby eaters', which are more common in texts that deal with the representation of societies that are dystopian and near-devoid of all redemptive qualities.[12] Conclusively, cannibalism is the ultimate form of consumption that humanity has, just as abortion is often represented as the beginnings of the termination of humanity (Brown *ix*). Within a world with a growing population, dwindling resources and growing ecological concerns, eating, indeed, consuming becomes a rather poignant issue to tackle.

There are two types of consumption within *Dumplings*, each tied to their specific geographical regions. Both the abortions and the cannibalism depicted in *Dumplings* can be seen as representations of the fear of annihilation. For China, this self-annihilation stems from the multitude of abortions that were performed as a result of the one child policy. The policy contributed to a large elderly population that needs to be supported by a significantly smaller youthful population (Hesketh, Lu and Xing 1174). The largest concern is the sex ratio, where parents wanting male children opted for sex-based abortions, leaving the demographic unbalanced with 13 percent more male children than female (Ebenstein 88). This has had substantial consequences for future population stability, as a large proportion of men from the one child policy generation will remain single, signalling a further reduction in population.

As an immigrant to Hong Kong, Mei performs the role, not just of seducer but also of corruptor within the capitalised and westernised city. The spread of cannibalism witnessed within the film suggests that there is an encroaching danger of Chinese traditions that might overwhelm Hong Kong's identity. Those who represent Hong Kong also are representations of a cannibalistic society, one which is perhaps more subtle in its own self-

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[12] One of the best representations of this trope is Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), where cannibalism is witnessed on many levels. The protagonist and his son resist the urge by scavenging food and wherever they can, while the world around them descends into chaos and anarchy. Most poignant within the novel is the baby-eaters scene, where two men and a woman, who has just given birth in a post-apocalyptic world, use the new born infant as an instant source of fresh meat for the three. Similarly, within the 1995 film *Judge Dredd*, directed by Danny Cannon and starring Sylvester Stallone, the appearance of cannibals, in the form of a band of scavengers on the outskirts of the *abandoned*, is symbolic of a disintegrated society.

destruction. Being a former colony of Britain, Hong Kong holds many Western ideas and policies. Anthropologist Gordon Mathews argues that people within Hong Kong often divide themselves up between those who are 'Chinese' and 'Hongkongese', with the typical belief that Hong Kong represents a 'global cultural supermarket' that is superior to China, despite having many cultural roots in China (Mathews 278, 309). It is a mega-city built on capitalism, and its people are ruled by a consumerist society revolving around money.

This consumerism, depicted predominantly by Mrs Li, has a grotesque and perverse cruelty to it as she becomes more and more obsessed with buying her youth back at any cost. Having at first consumed foetuses originating and aborted in China, Mrs Li, and later Mr Li become, just as Mei originally is, symbols for the invading Chinese ideologies. While consumerism suggests the possibility of social and personal mobility, the act of consumption also suggests a reinforcement of ideologies which are presented to the consumer (Todd 49-50). Any time that someone consumes, they also consume 'information and ideas' that in turn shape who they are (Mathews 288-9). When Mrs Li begins to consume foetuses originating in Hong Kong, it suggests that the invasion of Chinese nationality into the Hong Kong identity has been successful, as 'Hong Kong is one of the few places where international identity is being eroded by national identity' (Mathews 309). This type of consumerism corresponds closely with Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject. Kristeva scholar Kelly Oliver asks, 'How can we be bodies separate from our mothers when it is her body which we eat?' (Oliver "Speaking Subject" 71), referring to Kristeva's theory of the abject, where part of 'becoming' a functional human means having an emotional and physical rejection of the 'mother' figure and essentially becoming an independent individual.

Because cannibalism is the eating of other human beings, by 'extension' the act then 'symbolically [connotes] eating oneself' (West 236). In *Dumplings* China and Hong Kong are guilty of such excessive consumerism without adequate (re)production that they do indeed begin to cannibalise themselves. In doing so, they begin to realise the threat of annihilation which is first suggested through consumption via cannibalism, and enhanced by the cannibalism of the already terminated lives of the aborted. The extent of both regions' cannibalistic nature suggests that each area attempts to maintain its present status quo, disregarding future generations. Consumption in *Dumplings* then becomes all encompassing. Cinematographer Christopher Doyle's saturation of the film with colour and

light presents a direct confrontation with the dark nature of the film's primary characters. This is indicative of how the film brings to light the 'abject' consumerism of both societies.

Kristeva argues for the goal of 'abjection', a rejection of the abject, where subjecthood is attained through the 'violent, dark [revolt] of being, directed against a threat' (Kristeva 1). Food is linked with the abject and in particular, the abjection of the maternal, as it is seen as a potential pollutant that can disrupt the formulation of the subject. The consumption of food then is framed by the abject through its potential for being a 'polluting object', and it is noted that, 'all food is liable to defile' (Kristeva 75). Thus, for Kristeva cannibalism ruptures those perimeters separating the abject from the identified subject who maintains meaning. *Dumplings*, through the use of cannibalism, suggests a revealing of the abject which permeates Hong Kong and China respectively. It does this, not only by using the political system of China against the societies, but also through the grotesque and the horrific. Mrs Li, and later Mr Li, never just eat, they consume, and what they consume are aborted foetuses.

There are three primary sequences that depict Mrs Li eating the aborted foetuses. The first is an introductory scene, set up to emphasise eating. This is a long drawn out scene, with close-ups of Mrs Li's jaw and neck as she chews the dumpling and swallows. The chewing noises are audible above Mei's voice as she sings her song. This scene is intended to be revolting to watch, especially with the knowledge that Mrs Li is eating human foetuses. In the second scene Mrs Li is, shot after consecutive shot, shown shovelling dumplings into her mouth; the camera's various positions and Mrs Li's change of attire are all that display the passage of time. The sheer volume of cuts within this sequence, as well as wardrobe changes, disturbingly suggest the number of dumplings, and thus, human foetuses that she consumes, and the hyperbolic, unhurried, methodical tracking of her acts of consumption once more provide, within the film, the sense of the grotesque. In these shots, over the background music the diegetic sounds of chewing on the dumplings, sometimes followed by the crunching of cartilage are heard. Again this scene is intended to emphasise what Mrs Li is eating, while demonstrating



Fig. 4.4 *Dumplings* 00:22:56
One close-up of Mrs Li as she eats Mei's dumplings. The camera cuts from meal to meal as Mrs Li eats more and more dumplings with fervour.

her voraciousness for the promise of youth that these dumplings buy her. Her hunger for youth transforms Mrs Li into a cruel and grotesque individual.

Kristeva links cannibalism, the eating of one's kind, to the body, through the act of defilement. Ordinarily, rituals of purification, witnessed within a multitude of societies, protect against the defilement of the self. Many such rituals are present in the form of prohibitions, and are often targeted against the maternal body, which Kristeva argues is the primary site of the abject (Kristeva 77). Kristeva uses the example of the Fore people who have forsaken a number of purification rites in order to reproduce at any cost. The lack of abjection, which would assist in the creation of a stable subject, within the society then results in cannibalism, which is an extreme form of assimilating the abject and not, as needed for a stable subject, the violent and physical rejection of it. Within stable societies, Kristeva argues that the rejection of the abject would prevent cannibalism, claiming: 'I give up cannibalism because abjection (of the mother) leads me toward respect for the body of the other, my fellow man, my brother' (Kristeva 79). The 'reproduction at any cost' which Kristeva speaks of is a form of excess, and in *Dumplings*, it is excess which is present through the mass abortions in China and Mei's own particular brand of consumerism, as well as one which dominates the capitalistic consumerism of Hong Kong witnessed in Mrs Li.

Always the consumer, Mrs Li begins to demand that Mei acquire a five month old foetus that will produce the fastest regenerative results. Once more her thoughts are only oriented towards 'quality' and monetary value: 'Money isn't an issue' she tells Mei over the phone (*Dumplings*). Of course, part of the grotesque reality of the film is that, although Mrs Li, her husband and her society's thought processes are ruled by money, the real cost of Mei's product are the lives that are terminated and consumed. The film very rarely displays any form of actual production to sustain the consumption of its characters. There are the rich, such as Mr and Mrs Li, who it appears, live to consume, and those who work for them. This lack of actual production is also displayed in the role of reproduction. Mei and Mrs Li are both childless. Kate, the unlucky teenager who meets Mrs Li's requirement for a five month pregnancy, and Connie, Mr Li's current mistress, are the only two within the film's narrative who are in any form or manner (re)productive. Still, both have their productive capabilities interrupted by Mei and Mrs Li's rampant consumerism. In the first instance, Kate loses her life to Mei's botched abortion; in the second, Mrs Li outbids her

husband for Connie's child and organises an abortion at a clinic at five months into the pregnancy.

That the cannibalism within the film is not restricted to the eating of human flesh, but of aborted foetuses, extends the considerations of Kristeva's abject to the extremes. Abortion has a role in the film that surpasses its function as the origin of the ingredients that Mei needs for her own continued youthful appearance and monetary gain. Kristeva considers the abject to be already an extreme that threatens the subject. Where the developing subject is repulsed by a mother's milk, the idea of an already developed subject consuming that which, for Kristeva, would be something already expelled from the body — and in being expelled, already a physical manifestation of the pollutant that is the abject — is beyond revolting (Kristeva 3, 17). Her presentation of the defilement, the abject presented through the impure excretions of the body which must be separated and removed, rejected, isolated and if possible, hidden and repressed, within *Dumplings* renders the act of cannibalism even more alarming because Mei and her disciples are not just cannibals who eat human flesh. They eat the aborted, that which has already been expelled and is thus, according to Kristeva, already abject.

By using this circular process of eating what has been expelled, the film once more returns to the issue of national identity. First is the problematic notion of the Hong Kong/China identity where Hong Kong occupies the status of a colonial state, first of the British then the Chinese. The reclamation of Hong Kong by China reads very much like the eating of the aborted foetuses, expelled from the main body, only to be forced back into the body. In consuming the abject, the aborted foetuses, there seems to be a magnification of the abject. Secondly, Mei, the antihero, the abject, is recognisably representative of the threat of Chinese ideology to Hong Kong. This is best presented through her character's status as a Chinese immigrant who, having settled in Hong Kong, is reduced from a successful gynaecologist and surgeon, to plying her medical training in abortions for a questionable market. Although it is never mentioned within the film, critics argue that at least part of Mei's descent into her role as evil abortionist and cannibal, is due to Hong Kong's denial of Chinese professional credentials (Yeh and Ng 9; Khiun 7). This is, at least partly, a result of what Mathews identifies as Hong Kong's automatic ideological superiority in relation to China. Mathews argues that citizens of Hong Kong see themselves as being 'more' than their Chinese counterparts (Mathews 295). Mei has given up

performing legal abortions and practising medicine. Her support for her cannibalistic lifestyle is rooted in Chinese myth and historical acts, in addition to her immigrant status within Hong Kong.

The characters' consumption of the terminated future, for regenerative purposes, is suggestive of a breakdown, not only of individual subjecthood but also, of a society. Here, cannibalism assumes a (post)colonial narrative as the historical and present identity, and political anxieties are metaphorically witnessed through the act of eating oneself. The broadening of such acts from a microcosmic representation to that of a macrocosmic one, suggest that Hong Kong and China are both cannibalising themselves. The threat does not come from outside society but from its very core — a core shared, given the global metropolis that is Hong Kong, by all of humanity. No one here, not the city itself, its population, China, its ancestral 'mother' figure, nor the Western powers who have left their mark on the city, is free from this self-destructive act. For this reason, the film uses food, its preparation, along with the scenes of consumption, as a location of the revolting. The level of detail presented regarding the preparation of Mei's dumplings is often exaggerated. With extreme close-ups of a dull and rusted meat cleaver dicing the filling of vegetables, eggs and meat, foetuses included. These scenes are anything but pleasant to watch.



Fig. 4.5 *Dumplings* 00:06:39 (a) & 00:20:35 (b)
Dumplings is often specific regarding the presentation of the food's preparation, making it as colourful and detailed as possible in order to heighten the visual repugnance of Mei's cooking.

The only time that Mrs Li is seen eating something not made by Mei is at a dinner party that she hosts after eating the five month old aborted foetus. Mrs Li, radiant from the effects of the restorative dumplings, hosts a dinner for her friends. As her guests settle down with Mrs Li to eat, they begin to smell something rotten and at first attribute it to the food:

> FRIEND ONE. The food smells fishy…
> FRIEND TWO. Is it the beef?
> FRIEND THREE. There is a strange smell.
> FRIEND FOUR. I smell it too. What's wrong?

FRIEND ONE. It's not the fish but it really stinks! (*Dumplings*)

As the commentary gains momentum and the bad smell infiltrates the dinner, Mrs Li begins to realise that the smell is coming from her, an indirect effect of eating a five month incest-produced foetus which Mei procured for her at the cost of the teenage non-mother's life. The relation between the aborted foetuses and the effects of their consumption goes further than just a simple rejuvenating recipe. The eater is imbibing all attributes of the aborted, including those 'monstrous' ones of incest and rape. Later, Mrs Li begins to develop rashes on her body; the only cure for which is the continued consumption of the foetuses. Here, Mrs Li becomes the embodiment of the abject, in that she literally begins to rot from within. That she is becoming 'fishy' is a literalisation of Mei's fishing metaphor where Mrs Li has become caught by Mei and her ideology.

Considering the importance of the relationship between Mei and Mrs Li, and their relationship to food, the film situates Mei and her primary customer, Mrs Li, at the centre of the repulsive within the film. By presenting Mei as a medical doctor, Chan symbolically places her in the position of the 'learned-man' who begins her own search from within. She finds the secrets to her continued health and vitality within and from her own female body, which is another form of the abject. Mei, is successful because she learns how to use the natural cycle of reproduction to her advantage, and the unnatural interruption of that cycle, which enables the transfer of life-force, maintains the physical traits of youthful beauty through this transference from the foetus to the adult consumer. Her solution to eternal life comes not from scientific research but from the mythology of her people. It reverses, interrupts and ruptures the natural cycle of birth, life and death, through the mass consumption of the aborted foetuses, which are representative of the anxieties of the termination of not just life but existence. Mei is, to be precise, the physical embodiment of the abject and she seeks to spread her ideologies through her disciples.

This notion of Mrs Li as a disciple of Mei is explored throughout the film as she progresses from a customer, to active participant, to a chef in her own right. As Mrs Li's meetings with Mei grow in number, the film begins to focus on Mrs Li's transition from reluctant consumer to active participant, and the fishing metaphor, present in Mei's song *After Waves* is continued. Desperate for the most potent solution to aging that Mei can provide, Mrs Li asks Mei to acquire the foetus, whatever the cost. In a medium close-up two-shot of Mei and Mrs Li, Mei begins to explain eagerly why a five month old foetus is

the most potent ingredient for the best results. She gleefully describes why this is the case, as her face lights up while Mrs Li listens seemingly giving great thought to Mei's explanation:

> MEI. It's best in the fifth or sixth month. Extract it by breaking the water sac and slide it. It's covered by a layer of creamy fat. The colours are defined and you can see the cranium. And the little hands and feet moving around (laughs) […] The fifth month is perfect, kitten-like and most nutritious. (*Dumplings*)

Mei hands Mrs Li a magazine, showing her a picture of a youthful model. Standing up from her crouched position, Mei explains, 'Even if you are eighty, after eating them you feel eighteen again'. Mei leaves Mrs Li to ready the dumplings for her client, while Mrs Li holds the magazine in front of her. The medium close-up locates her to the far left of the screen while she tilts her head from side to side, clearly contemplating Mei's presentation. Although Mei has presented her 'sales pitch' to Mrs Li before, the inclusion of the magazine highlights the consumerist nature of the entire enterprise. Magazines present a tantalising image of society's ideal figures, and suggest through advertising that the consumer, via 'consumption' is able to 'transform', to fit with society's often impossible standards (Todd 49).

Dumplings positions women in a patriarchal society where they are continually inferior to men. Mrs Li is trapped in a consumerist society that demands women fit the stereotypical standards of youth and beauty in order to maintain social (and economic) standing. In buying into Mei's ideologies, Mrs Li reinforces the patriarchal ideologies that dominate China and Hong Kong. Within Hong Kong (and China to an extent) women are encouraged to identify with ambition and social advancement in relation to physical attributes:

> pursuit of beauty could be regarded as a 'buffer zone' in which a hierarchy (the more good-looking, the better) is allowed (if not reinforced) for females. As such, females' desire to be outstanding is made acceptable. (Fung 329)

Traditionally, Chinese and Hong Kong societies are based on the Confucian culture which focuses on the family as being at the centre of social harmony. Within this particular culture, women are seen as 'perpetual minors' who have no real social standing (qtd. in Fung 322). Although the British colonisation of Hong Kong led to many traditional values being altered or abandoned, to some extent it is still very much a patriarchal society that

inhibits the social and personal development of women. Mrs Li fights to regain her youth because it is the only commodity that she is allowed to use to buy back her husband's affections. In doing so, she pits herself against the survival of Kate, just as her survival is pitted against Connie's position as her husband's mistress. In the end, she eats both Kate's and Connie's aborted children, ensuring that she survives at the expense not just of Kate, but also of the future generation.[13]

Kate and her mother represent an alternate example of the patriarchal societal structures. While most of the aborted foetuses have their origins within China's mainland, the two abortion scenes depicted onscreen are from Hong Kong. This shifts the commentary away from China's assimilation of Hong Kong and directly confronts both Hong Kong's consumerist society and its treatment of women. Kate's mother seeks help from Mei to terminate her child's pregnancy in the fifth month. Mei recommends 'a Shenzhen hospital' due to the potential complications arising from such a late abortion. Kate's mother raises the issue of the cost of traveling to China for the abortion. In Hong Kong, abortions are affordable, and despite the requirement of having two doctor's signing off on the abortion, relatively easy to access. Section 46 and 47 of the "Offences Against the Person Ordinance" indicates that legal abortions can be obtained up to 24 weeks of pregnancy and must be performed at a clinic or hospital (HK c. 212 s. 46, 47). Since abortion was legalised in Hong Kong, women have often used it as a 'family planning procedure' and there is little to no politicisation of or against abortion within the region (Pui-lan et al. 243-44). However, the ease of access to abortions in both China and Hong Kong, does not mean that there has been success in altering the 'unequal power' relations between men and women (Pui-lan et al. 259).

Kate's predicament is indicative of Hong Kong's gendered and family politics. Kate's mother pleads with Mei to perform the abortion, indicating that she cannot afford to go to China for the operation, and follows that statement with a confession: 'Her dad did it; we can't keep it'. Statistically, instances of familial abuse in Hong Kong are underreported, and violent assaults such as rape can often be met with victim blaming.

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[13] The *Three … Extremes* (2004) anthology's version of *Dumplings* excludes Connie's narrative. Instead, in this version Mrs Li, having been a client of Mei's for a while, falls pregnant just as Mei is forced to flee Hong Kong as a result of the botched abortion she performed on Kate. Because there is no Connie from whom to procure a new foetus for consumption, Mrs Li performs an abortion on herself at the short film's end, the implication being that she will eat her own aborted child.



Fig. 4.6 *Dumplings* 00:29:48
Mimicking Kate's and her mother's shame, the camera avoids framing Kate directly. Often the camera provides glancing shots of her, too fast to show much. Other shots, such as this one, frame the mother daughter pair using a reflective screen as a medium.

Spousal abuse is at worst still viewed as an accepted part of the Chinese tradition, and even if not, reports of abuse are rare because they demonstrate internal family discord, which shames both the victim and the family (Lau et al. 1171; Cheung et al. 212-14). Sexual abuse of a minor, especially of an incestuous nature 'remains a taboo locally, [with] disbelief [being] a common reaction'. The occurrence of such acts is often silenced amongst family members because of the shameful nature of the act. Also attributed to the lack of reporting of these acts is the 'subordinate position of children [which makes] disclosure difficult and adults less receptive' (Ho and Kwok 599). Kate, and perhaps her mother, have kept the abuse a secret for some time now and no longer qualify for a legal abortion within Hong Kong without their family's shame becoming public.

As her mother claims in a final effort to appeal to Mei's sympathetic side, the baby is 'a monster', an important remark considering its incestuous origins. This aspect of the pregnancy raises negative social implications of shame, which force the teenage girl into seeking a black market abortion for her father's five month old foetus. By the end of the scene, Mei has yet to answer Kate's mother, and the issue is left unresolved. That is, until Mrs Li, fearing for her marriage and social status, becomes more insistent that Mei find the most potent foetus. She brings Mei to her home, which is undergoing renovations, the opulent house an indication of Mrs Li's wealth, implying her ability to pay Mei whatever price is requested. Mei's greed, after seeing the Lis' wealth finally overcomes her caution.

The abortion scene is visual and grotesque. Mei induces labour by inserting a catheter into Kate's uterus, rather than using any chemicals to assist with the abortion. This disregard for Kate's physical pain, as well as the health risks involved in a catheter-induced abortion, presents the film's greatest critique of the expendability of individuals in the face of financial gain and consumism. Performed in Mei's grimy kitchen, on the table where she chops up human foetuses on a regular basis, the scene is an odd mixture of Mei's professionalism as an abortionist with the grizzly and visually disturbing nature of the scene and the framing of the act as an illegal abortion. To make matters worse, this scene is later

contrasted with another abortion of a five month old foetus, this one done, again at the behest of Mrs Li, but through hired doctors in a clean white-washed operating theatre. Kate abused, under age and desperate does not have the opportunity of having Mrs Li pay for her abortion at a sanitary clinic. The camera, across from Mei is situated so that Kate's suspended legs frame Mei's body as she begins to insert the catheter.

The scene lacks any atmospheric music, creating a silence that emphasises the clanking of Mei's medical tools and the sound of the catheter entering Kate. Like the diegetic sounds of Mrs Li crunching her way through foetus filled dumplings, in the abortion scene, diegetic sound and mise-en-scène are used to increase the discomfort of the viewer. This discomfort increases in the next frame. Eighteen hours have passed and Kate is shown leaning on her mother, her face bathed in sweat as her mother begins to panic. As soon as the induced labour begins, Mei's focus is oriented towards the object of her client's desire, the foetus, which immediately goes into the fridge with a sigh from Mei, 'Beautiful' she says, 'So fresh'. On the way home after the abortion, Kate haemorrhages in the middle of an abandoned alley with her desperate mother beside her (*Dumplings*).



Fig. 4.7 *Dumplings* 00:00:00
Mei as she inserts the catheter into Kate. The scene is a strange mixture of sterility (Mei wears gloves and cleans everything with sterile gauze) which is undermined by the gritty filth of Mei's kitchen.

Incest, for Kristeva is a 'taboo' and is prohibited by paternal law (Kristeva 58-10). Although Kristeva uses the incest taboo in direct relation to the rejection of the maternal through Freud's Oedipus complex — where the focus is on the mother/son relationship — it is the abject which incest represents which is of interest here. The abject is a threat to identity and meaning, but also to death — which is the ultimate form of the loss of self. In seeking an abortion, Kate and her mother become objects of abjection. What they reject is the father's incest, but also the resulting abject of the disintegration of the prohibition. The foetus is the physical manifestation of the abject. Kate's mother calls it a 'monster', and later Mei tells Mrs Li that she smells fishy because the foetus was 'cursed', which is what makes the foetus even more potent as a restorative (*Dumplings*). By performing the abortion, Kate and her mother are performing their own purification ritual, which Kristeva argues is one of the ways that societies keep 'clean' and 'pure' against the defilement of

the abject. Level of moral, ethical decay and the disintegration of identity in Hong Kong and China are so great that — through the disappearance of society's prohibitions, as demonstrated by the unbridled consumerism and the internalising of the abject — the abortion fails to purify the family of the abject and Kate dies as a result.

Interspersed with Kate's death scene, Mei treats Mrs Li to the speciality she has been asking for with a good bottle of wine. Within this scene, Mrs Li is dressed in a conservative yet flattering white pants suit, which accentuates the length of her body. She has also restyled her hair in a more youthful manner. The scene begins with a close-up of Mrs Li's back, her left hand caressing her shoulders while in the background Mei can be heard chopping up the ingredients for the dumplings. In this scene, Mrs Li's transformation, which commenced at the beginning of the film, is complete. Yet her sudden youth seems to come with a hidden price as her movements begin to appear sudden and jerky. Her body language is far more aggressive and alien than it has been in the past and there is a sense that Mrs Li is aroused by the thought of the upcoming food. Mei, dressed in the same clothes she wore during Kate's abortion, walks in and out of the living room. Mrs Li follows her into the kitchen where she is confronted with an almost fully developed foetus, clearly recognisable as a human baby.

Non-diegetic horns buzz roughly in the background as Mrs Li runs out of Mei's apartment, only to collect herself and return to find Mei caressing herself, not unlike Mrs Li had done moments before. The music changes to a more determined drum and flute piece with an unsettling rhythm in the background. A mirror is used to negotiate Mei and Mrs Li's relationship as the camera angles itself to view Mei's erotic self-love, which essentially is the most honest image of Mei portrayed in the film. Shot with a medium close-up, Mei's top is pulled down low enough to view her cleavage as her hand glides from her mussed hair, down her shoulder to cup her breast. The music gains momentum as Mrs Li enters behind Mei, her face set, as she tilts her head, her eyes darting up and down Mei's body as if admiring Mei's physique. Here the narcissism, displayed on the part of both characters, is



Fig. 4.8 *Dumplings* 00:45:09
Mrs Li (left) and Mei (right) as Mei caresses herself in front of a mirror. Mrs Li is completely caught in Mei's trap. Infatuated with Mei and what she represents as well as her own potential eternal youth she begins to lose the last vestiges of herself.

yet an additional form of the abject. As with Kristeva's use of the incest taboo, her usage of narcissism has a very specific role in her theory of the abject. According to Kristeva, narcissism is an important part of the development of self-distinction for a child and abjection 'is a precondition of narcissism' (Kristeva 10). However, Kristeva's argument for narcissism being a necessary developmental step of the 'subject' only goes so far in that it requires the rejection of the abject, both being 'coexistent' (Kristeva 15). John Lechte, Professor of Sociology, suggests in his reading of Kristeva, that:

> Ovid's Narcissus before his pool is precisely not an example of the narcissistic psychic structure […] Narcissus wants otherness: he is in love with his image […] the youth beside the pool is frozen [and his] death is the sign of the failure of psychic space to form due to the failure of a sense of loss to form as the basis for love — a love which would make the other essential to one's own psychical makeup. (Lechte 30)

The narcissism displayed by Mei and Mrs Li is reflected in their obsession with their youth and beauty. Just as Narcissus' obsession with his own beauty led to his death, the women's narcissism in *Dumplings* is closely connected to their lack of abjection. Mrs Li's continued transformation, is a correlative one of outer beauty and inner perversion due to the internalisation of the abject and the continued disintegration of the subject's identity, displayed by her increasingly reptilian behaviour as she jerks and twitches in anticipation of eating the foetus.

Mei is once more portrayed as a temptress. This time Mrs Li is a match for Mei in her corruption. Previously, in each scene between Mei and Mrs Li, the physical aspect of the aborted foetuses was limited to small whole round pink objects, or those same objects chopped up. The gruesome quality of those scenes is limited in its effect when compared to this last cooking related scene shared between the pair. The mirrored reflection allows the viewer to see both Mrs Li's appreciative glance and Mei's reaction to it. The camera cuts to a long-shot of the pair as they glance towards the table where the medium shot's depth-of-field focuses on the women, blurring the foreground's mise-en-scène, including the foetus in the bottom left-hand corner. A soft clang signifies that Mei's final battle with Mrs Li is secured. In this



Fig. 4.9 *Dumplings* 00:45:25
Mrs Li and Mei (far right) pictured with Kate's aborted foetus at the bottom left of the screen.

shot, the differences between the two women, their dress and mannerisms are muted by their mutual narcissism and their desire for eternal youth.

In this scene, the sight of both women as they appreciate each other's bodies, as well as the anticipation of gaining their prize, instils an iniquitous atmosphere. A stiltedness in their movements dehumanises them further than their cannibalistic nature has already done. Mei allows Mrs Li into the kitchen as she prepares the dumplings and they seem to bond over the baby boy on their food platter. Once more the grotesque is demonstrated as the women celebrate the restorative properties of the foetus. The perverse cruelty that is present in the way they 'coo' over the foetus — much like one would 'coo' over a live infant — is reminiscent of Mei's actions right after Kate's abortion, where she gazes longingly at the foetus, murmuring 'beautiful'. The camera angle and shots within the kitchen are from a handheld camera. The frames themselves are blurred and set at an extremely low-angle with the overall effect being a perverted perspective of an infant's point of view; this one is dead and about to be eaten. The camera comes into slightly better focus as Mei and Mrs Li celebrate the 'beautiful and rare' foetus, laughing and drinking. The blurring of the shot is the result of a glass dish on which the foetus is placed, which is between the camera and the women.

Once more, China's large number of abortions is the focus. This time the commentary is gendered, with Mei's comment of how 'in China only girls are aborted'. The fragmented, blurred and disfigured depictions of the pair, their similarly sexualised, and yet, reptilian movements are part of the film's regular representation of the grotesque. The visual distortion and Mrs Li's growing mechanical motions are suggestive of the destabilisation of the borders that not only identify them as individuals (for Mrs Li begins to mimic Mei), but also as humans. Kristeva's examination of borders, the abject and subjecthood, along with Creed's analysis of the monstrous-feminine, are ultimately, witnessed within this scene, of which all previous ones have been but a whisper of the destabilisation, which is present here.[14] The scene cuts to Mei serving the dumplings to Mrs Li as a soft flute melody plays.

[14] Barbara Creed considers how the female and maternal body is depicted as 'monstrous'. See *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993).

True to the shamed and secretive nature of Kate and her mother's life, as well as the lack of consideration and acknowledgement of society, it is, ironically the mother's attack on the husband which leads the police to Mei, and not the illegal abortion which killed a fifteen year old girl. This attack is symbolic of Kate's mother's 'defilment', as the scene in which the police discover her shows her slumped against the family's front door, splattered with blood and competely broken. It too is a scene of attempted abjection, much like the abortion was to be the absolute rejection of the father's breaking of the prohibitions of the incest taboo, Kate's mother tries one last time to physically reject the abject. This is like Oedipus's actions of abjection, where upon learning that he has married his mother, he blinds himself, so that he cannot look upon her, and then exiles himself from his kingdom of Thebes (Davis 11). This other attempt at abjection by Kate's mother also fails, for when the police reach her husband he is still alive. As a result of the attack, and not Kate's death, the police raid Mei's home, but not before she packs up and moves to China with her dog to continue selling her dumplings.



Fig. 4.10 *Dumplings* 01:18:33
Kate's mother, seen here after trying to kill her husband. Grief striken and covered in blood, she reflects absolute desolation.

It is not until this moment when Mei flees the country as a fugitive that Mrs Li finalises her transformation from dependant consumer into an active participant. She 'casts her own net', as Mei had advised her. Mrs Li acquires her desired foetus from her rival, for her now routine cannibalistic needs, with the added bonus of cutting off Connie's access to her husband. Following Mei's guidance, given to her while they bonded over the previous foetus, Mrs Li insists that labour should be induced via a catheter and that no medications should be provided. Still being a consumer, Mrs Li pays a local doctor to perform the illegal abortion in a clean sterile environment. A medium close-up of Mrs Li, who is once more off centre, focuses on her face as she directs the doctor to preserve the foetus so that it is 'pure'. A mirror is positioned behind her to reflect the masseuse and the doctor's reaction to Mrs Li's insistence on keeping the foetus as a trophy, 'the world's most expensive trophy' as she says, once more returning to the idea of consumerism so out of control that it is destructive in its nature.

After this scene, the film return's to Mei's character. The camera cuts to a busy street while in the background, an operatic version of *After Waves* plays. Mei walks into the scene, a stark contrast to the Mei presented throughout the film so far, wearing muddy brown pants and a matching top and hat. She is carrying with her a large paint-tin, its sides burnt black. Acting as a lid are a large frying pan and a red shopping basket. The camera follows her as she makes her way through a tunnel-bridge, her act of crossing over symbolic of her moving on. Still in China, Mei has access to the ready supply of aborted foetuses thanks to the one child policy. This indicates that while Mei's situation might have changed, her ability to procure and use aborted foetuses has been unaffected. Her song, a metaphoric depiction of her 'catching' both the aborted foetuses and disciples, indicates a growing influence and the continued need for her services within a society driven by greed, social status and consumption. The song continues to play as Mei walks away from the camera, the scene fading, leaving her narrative open ended, indicating her endurance.

The scene then returns to Mrs Li, and her latest purchase of Connie's aborted foetus. The vocal song changes to an orchestral version while the camera begins to focus on a hand caressing a bowl containing a foetus, then moving on to focus on Mrs Li's face, depicted, once more, from a low-angled shot. As Mrs Li stands above the foetus, her eyes widen with comical madness as she caresses a cleaver against her forehead, then swings it down towards the camera. The film's closing scene presents Mrs Li as the 'dumpling maker' instead of Mei, presents the final act as one of further development. The camera, set at a low-angle, portrays Mrs Li in a position of power, which matches the regal celebratory music, which trumpets in the background. As the cleaver smacks into the foetus, a spray of blood splatters onto the camera, over Mrs Li's face, indicating her complete transition into a beautiful monster, and the screen cuts to black.



Fig. 4.11 *Dumplings* 01:24:59
Below: The scene cuts between the foetus in the bowl and Mrs Li's hand as it polishes the cleaver. This final close-up shot of Mrs Li, as she holds the cleaver against her forehead is indicative of the monster she has finally become.

The camera then opens to a black and white video of Mrs Li's wedding day as four bridesmaids ask her for three wishes, which she dutifully replies, 'happiness […] youth and beauty' to which her friends laugh with a joke 'of course, beauty first'. The juxtaposition of the scenes is positioned as a reminder of the cost of Mrs Li's commercial and consumerist obsession with buying beauty at a tremendous cost of life, morality, identity and humanity. The soon-to-be Mrs Li beams happily into her reflection and then turns and runs out of the room, her veil trailing behind her and balloons floating out of her way, adding a dream-like quality and a sad, remorseful atmosphere to the film's closing. *Dumplings*' ending presents the obsession society has with youth and beauty, indicating how the modern societal notion, that equates youth with both monetary gain and happiness, leads only to a spiral of destructive tendencies. As with everything about the film, abortion is situated in the horrific and the gratuitous. While focusing on the grotesque nature of the characters, *Dumplings* simultaneously humanises and dehumanises the horrific, placing it within two societies trapped in a spiralling pattern of rampant consumerism and self-destruction, and confronts, criticises and associates the mass abortions of China with the mass consumerism of the global metropolitan of Hong Kong. Both societies are representations of those who accept the abject, through the use of the aborted foetuses as the magical ingredient of Mei's dumplings, and destroying their identities. This form of cannibalism seduces consumers into supporting a corrupt system, which suggests social mobility while maintaining the status quo.

CHAPTER 5

A GOTHIC SATIRE OF CULTURE IN FX'S *AMERICAN HORROR STORY*

In sharp contrast to all of the previous films that have been examined thus far, the anthology series *American Horror Story* (FX 2011–) uses its representation of abortion predominantly as a shocking yet satirical representation of the culture from which it derives its title. In the finale of season one *Murder House* (2011), the ghosts of the mansion herd the house's new owners, Miguel (Anthony Ruivivar) and Stacy Ramos (Lisa Vidal) into the basement. The scene is an example of *Murder House*'s often macabre and burlesque Gothic presentation. The ghost Ben Harmon (Dylan McDermott) is joined by his wife Vivian (Connie Britton) who berates him for 'preying on the new meat' ("Afterbirth"). Vivian explains to the Ramoses that Ben 'used to be my husband' before she stabs him with a knife, dragging it down his abdomen and disembowelling him. Vivian turns towards the Ramoses, a bloodthirsty look on her face as she exclaims, 'You have no idea how long I've been wanting to do that'. Ben, who had staggered away from Vivian, pivots towards her, a revolver suddenly clasped in his hand and shoots her in the head at point-blank range. As Vivian collapses, Ben echoes his wife comment, 'You have no idea how long *I've* wanted to do *that*' before he too collapses ("Afterbirth"). The scene, as ridiculous as it is horrific, is an example of the style the show has chosen to use when dealing with its Gothic presentation of American culture, and of abortion. Rather than raising questions about gender and politics, as the previous chapters have done, *Murder House* presents questions of cultural spatiality and of how horror is constructed around and on, a deliberately shocking representation of abortion. [15]

Being the first American narrative presented in this dissertation, as well as the first television series, this chapter will deviate from the previous format in a number of ways. Apart from the structural differences of film versus a television production, the European

[15] Because the abortion narrative is dispersed achronologically throughout the season, I would like to list the episodes in chronological order here. Caption labels will use the shorthand S01E00 to indicate season number then episode number. Episode One: "Pilot"; Episode Two: "Home Invasion"; Episode Three: "Murder House"; Episode Four: "Halloween Part 1"; Episode Five: "Halloween Part 2"; Episode Six: "Piggy Piggy"; Episode Seven: "Open House"; Episode Eight: "Rubber Man"; Episode Nine: "Spooky Little Girl"; Episode Ten: "Smouldering Children"; Episode Eleven: "Birth"; Episode Twelve: "Afterbirth".

and Asian representations of abortion were situated in specific cultural and historical contexts. Because of this, the films allowed for the analysis of representations of abortion in directions that were politically or socially aware. Issues of body politics, of women's rights and of space for women and cultural specificities, including national identity, became the focus of the inclusion of abortion in the narratives. *American Horror Story*'s context has no such presence of specific context, rather providing a generalised American contextual history from which to draw its considerations. While there are discussions of power and agency demonstrated in the broader sense of the show, its representation of abortion functions predominantly as a satire of American cultural opinions of abortion (as the show itself is a satire of American culture). The show is hyperbolic in nature, and takes its intertextual representation from many of America's iconically terrifying historical moments. The best display of intertextuality is in season one where *Murder House* references the Columbine High School shooting,[16] the infamous 'Black Dahlia' murder,[17] the serial rapist/murderer Richard Speck,[18] and the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby.[19] These events are transformed into episodic histories of the house's occupants. The most influential cultural reference present in Season One is its representation of abortion, which is integrated into the fragmented temporality of the narrative, as each episode jumps from the present to the past in a series of flashbacks. Abortion is presented in Season One predominantly through the Montgomery narrative, and is the focus of Episodes Three "Murder House", Four "Halloween Part 1" and Seven "Open House".

Abortion in *Murder House* is presented in a disjointed narrative with the show making reference to isolated and sensationalised historical events used to foreground its melodramatic depiction of cultural America; that thrives off the theatrical to the point where the satire and mock-Gothic narrative contained in *Murder House*, straddles the Gothic in its possibility of a serious social critique by embracing and delighting in the excess of

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[16] Originally planned as a mass bombing (of 600 plus people) by Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the 1999 Columbine School shooting killed thirteen people and injured many more. The act garnered media attention and has been incorporated into American mythology. See Larkin, *Comprehending Columbine* (2007).
[17] One of most gruesome and infamous unsolved murders was of Elizabeth Short in Los Angeles in 1947. The 'Black Dahlia' has become the basis of many works of fiction including films and novels. See Nelson and Hudson, *Exquisite Corpse* (2008).
[18] Richard Speck is famous in American serial killer history. He raped, tortured and killed eight student nurses in 1966. See Flowers and Flowers, *Murders in the United States* (2007).
[19] Charles Lindbergh, Jr. was abducted from his home at 20 months of age in 1932 and was found murdered months later. The story became a national sensation and was the reason America's Federal Kidnapping Act was passed into law. See Roensch's *The Lindbergh Baby Kidnapping Trial* (2003).

American Horror Story. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the depictions of abortion. America's legal and social battle regarding abortion has been a long drawn out one. Before the 1973 Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade*, abortion was illegal in America unless there was a direct threat to the mother's life, and women would often seek out abortions through backstreet abortionists or attempt self-abortions using various tools, most often a coat hanger (Schwarz and Latimer 165). There are two main polarised political and ideological groups in America regarding the abortion debate: The 'pro-life' and the 'pro-choice' groups. The 'pro-lifers' use 'grisly pictures of aborted foetuses' while the 'pro-choice' group uses images of 'the coat hanger' to represent their causes (Mouw and Sobel 916-17). After the *Roe* case, abortion was legalised up to 24 weeks of pregnancy under all circumstances, while being legal in the second trimester under certain circumstances. In the third trimester, pregnancies were legally to be carried to term, unless a medical emergency dictated the termination of the foetus (*Roe*). Since the *Roe* case a number of Supreme Court decisions and state and federal laws have slowly dismantled sections of *Roe* while still maintaining the basic right to obtain an abortion up to 20 weeks.[20] The legal battles that see *Roe* constantly challenged and new laws introduced, repealed, reinstated and challenged again, are representative of America's own cultural views on abortion. It is a highly polarised and divisive topic. *American Horror Story* makes use of both the pro-life and pro-choice rhetoric, taking advantage of the highly charged and incongruent attitude towards abortion to increase the shock and awe factor of the show.

American Horror Story is a Gothic television series that uses fragments of America's cultural history to build a sublime satire from which it takes its intertextuality. The show is shockingly horrific in its blasé representation of American culture and violence, making the series fall into the ludicrous, part of the comical and humorous

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[20] A number of these laws, *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* (1989), *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* (1992), *Federal Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act* (2003), *Texas Medical Providers Performing Abortion Services v. Lakey* (2011) and *Isaacson v. Horne* (2012), to name a few, work off the principle of stare decisis, which essentially sets a precedent for previous law to have an impact on cases. While *Roe* set a legal precedent allowing abortion, *Webster*, another Supreme Court decision, argued that Government had no legal obligation to assist women in obtaining abortions. *Webster* also argued that the states had an obligation to protect life, even if it were before the viability of a foetus. As such, the 1989 ruling, although upholding the basic right to abortions in the first trimester, set a precedent for future cases to begin regulating access to abortion on a state level. As such access to abortions, although legal in all states, has become more difficult to obtain due to constraints placed on both abortion providers and those seeking abortions. The Supreme Court is set to hear the case Woman's *Health v. Cole* mid-2016, which will, depending on the outcome, will ratify or nullify *Roe* completely. *See A History of Key Abortion Rulings of the U.S. Supreme Court* (2013) by David Masci.

spectrum that is, according to English Professors Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, part of the Gothic:

> It is best to think of Gothic writing as a spectrum that, at one end, produces horror writing containing moments of comic hysteria or relief and, at the other, works in which there are clear signals that nothing is to be taken seriously. (Horner and Zlosnik 330)

The Harmons' haunting scene in "Afterbirth" becomes more ridiculous, when the Ramoses, frozen in fear after having witnessed a double homicide, are unprepared when the Harmons, their mortal wounds still visible, appear to rise from the dead. When Vivian tells them to 'Run', Miguel and Stacy bolt from the house, and not far behind them, having escaped his own haunting, is their son. The majority of the action in this sequence between the Harmons and the Ramoses takes place in the mansion's basement, a fitting location for the Harmons to make their stand against the house and its more nefarious inhabitants, considering that it is, throughout the season, associated with horrific acts, including numerous abortions. Celebrating the spectacular and the theatrical, aligns itself with Horner and Zlosnik's argument that the Gothic, although 'still function[ing] within Gothic as a critique of modernity', within *American Horror Story*, also boarders on the ludicrous (Horner and Zlosnik 323).

For *Murder House*, the entire seasonal narrative is heavily influenced by the mansion. Because of Season One's complexities, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive synopsis, and as such, only an outline will be provided here, with detail added where necessary. The season shadows the Harmon family, Ben, Vivian and their teenage daughter Violet (Taissa Farmiga), as they settle into their new home in Los Angeles in 2011, anticipating that the move from Boston will revive their broken family. Vivien's late term miscarriage and Ben's extramarital affair with Hayden McClaine (Kate Mara) are the destructive events from which the family hopes to escape. These hopes are in vain when Violet kills herself in episode six "Piggy Piggy", and becomes another of the mansion's ghosts, only becoming aware of her new state in Episode Ten "Smouldering Children". Vivian dies in childbirth in Episode Eleven, "Birth", after delivering her twins, the result of a superfecundation pregnancy, where Ben and Tate (who raped Vivian in Episode One) are the fathers. Finally, Ben is killed by Hayden (who is murdered in episode three "Murder House") and two other ghosts in Episode Twelve, "Afterbirth".

Each episode moves back and forth between the house's current occupants, the Harmon family, and its previous owners, all of whom have met with tragic and violent endings and now haunt the house as ghosts. These include murder/suicide victims Nora (Lily Rabe) and Charles Montgomery, and their own Frankensteinian monster 'Infantata', who was once the Montgomery baby Thaddeus, all of whom died in 1926. A teenage boy, Tate Langdon (Evan Peters), shot and killed 15 students in 1994 and was killed by police in the mansion hours later. Also the Housekeeper Moira O'Hara (Alexandra Breckenridge / Frances Conroy) and Hugo Langdon (Eric Close) were murdered by Tate's mother, Constance Langdon in 1983. Constance, although alive, is relentlessly drawn to the house in which she, and her now dead children (and husband), once lived. In 2010 Chad Warick (Zachary Quinto) and partner Patrick (Teddy Sears) were murdered by Tate, and Hayden, Ben's mistress, is killed in late 2011 by another former occupant, Larry Harvey (Denis O'Hare). With its leaps between the past and present, *Murder House* plays on Gothic elements, with its haunted house, mad doctor and very own monster in the basement, to produce a satire of American culture. Threaded into the season are infidelity, sex, murder, hauntings, abortion and death.

The season does not begin with the Harmon family or any other occupant, rather the opening scene's attention is on the house itself. Episode One, "Pilot" situates the narrative in 1978 before proceeding to 2011, and sets the tone of the season by mimicking an Alfred Hitchcock film with high-pitched and scratchy string composition. The mansion, three stories high, towers over a small girl in a bright yellow and white dress as the camera zooms in towards the house at a low-angle, enhancing the foreboding presence of the house, emphasising how it looms over everything as the building becomes larger while the little girl, the young Adelaide Langdon (Jamie Brewer), Tate's sister, remains small ("Pilot"). As *American Horror Story*'s cinematographer, Michael Goi, said in an interview:



Fig. 5.1 *AHS S01E01* 00:00:14
The 'Murder House' mansion towers above a small girl (Addy) in yellow. Abandoned in 1978, the mansion has seen better days.

> [It] reminds me of what Roger Corman said about The Fall of the House of Usher [1960], when he was asked, 'Where is the monster?' He said, 'The house is the monster'. (Heuring and Goi "Old Dark House")

Corman, the director of the film adaptation of Edgar Allen Poe's (*the* American Gothic writer) Gothic story *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), intended to sell the horror film's monster as the personified house (Miller). Manuel Aguirre writes of the anthromorphisation of the Usher's house:

> [The] man is the building is the family is the title, all to itself. It generates its own atmosphere. [… Usher] claims that there is a *sentience* in the inanimate matter of the grey stones. If his mind is like a house, the house is like a living organism. (Aguirre 125-26)[21]

Throughout Season One, Goi's objective was to anthropomorphise the house, just as Poe and Corman had previously done, and to transform it into the most feared supernatural villain of the season. He does so by framing the house as the commonality between all of the characters, who in turn suggest that the house has its own foreboding personality, often speaking of the house as if it were alive. Moira warns Vivian about how an 'old house […] has a personality. Feelings' and she cautions, 'Mistreat it and you'll regret it'. Midway through the season Chad confronts Vivian claiming, 'It's not your house. We know it, you know it and the house knows it' ("Pilot"; "Halloween Part 2"). Such exchanges are intended to transform the house from an object into a living being. By positioning the house as a living entity, the show emulates Gothic characteristics through the deconstruction of 'boundaries and their instabilities, whether between the quick/the dead, eros/thanatos, pain/pleasure, "real"/"unreal," "natural"/"supernatural" …' (Horner and Zlosnik 321). Nevertheless, as Kate Ellis argues, regardless of a haunted house's threatening 'personality', it is the characters who are the source of any evil that the house might appear to embody (Ellis *ix*) which is certainly true for *Murder House*.

Episode One's opening scene proposes the existence of terror within the house by following a pair of identical twin boys as they begin vandalising the home while a 1950's song "Tonight You Belong to Me" (1956) sung by two girls, Patience and Prudence McIntyre, plays in the background. The song, a popular 'all-good-American' tune becomes a tool used to unsettle the audience, once it becomes associated with the boys' delinquent behaviour and their subsequent deaths in the basement. The basement sequence, framed as

[21] Emphasis in original text.

it is between the boys' wrecking of the abandoned house and then their deaths, begins the season's representation of abortion. Shot with low-key lighting allowing an extreme contrast between the dark basement and the boys' flashlights, the light is directed towards jars of babies' legs and heads, ears, brains and other unrecognisable items. The camera continuously cuts to a tray of abandoned gynaecological surgical tools, covered in rust and blood ("Pilot"). By continuously cutting back to the abandoned tools, in between shots of dismembered foetuses and babies, without even having to specify that the tools are used for abortions, the opening sequence creates, by association, the notion that abortion is utterly reprehensible. The utilisation of the dissected foetuses placed in jars is a cultural reference to the graphic foetal images American's are confronted with whenever the issue of abortion is raised in their society. The importance of the basement is accentuated within the opening credits of *Murder House*. Spanning a full minute of running time, the opening credits comprise unsettling images and sounds. The music, created by Nine Inch Nails band member Charlie Clouser and sound designer Cesar Davila-Irizarry, is a blend of electronic editing and various sound effects, such as dripping water and chainsaws, which create a distorted continuous cacophony of noise. The various images, worsened by the grating sounds of the theme music, are presented in the basement. Cut into the credits are, amongst others, multiple images of preserved foetuses in jars and the abandoned tray of bloodied surgical instruments — that same tray which is seen in the opening sequence of "Pilots". Placing the jars and the discarded tools in the basement also suggests a refusal or denial of acknowledgment towards the realities of abortion — a refusal that is demonstrated in Charles Montgomery's narrative.



Fig. 5.2 *AHS S01E01* 00:03:44
The continual return to the abandoned surgical tools, in the opening sequence, gives their presence more importance than any other object in the basement.

Although many of the perverse and horrific acts have been performed in the basement throughout the 89 years that the house has been standing, it is with the original occupants, the Montgomery family, where the troubles begin. After Vivien and Violet are nearly murdered by copycats of serial killer R. Franklin in Episode Two, "Home Invasion", Vivien in the next episode "Murder House", learns that the house is part of the 'Eternal Darkness Tour' of infamous Los Angeles landmarks. Joining the tour, Vivian begins to learn of the house's history through the tour guide, Stan (David Anthony Higgins) ("Murder

House"). As the bus pulls up in front of the mansion, the camera zooms in on to Stan as he declares, 'Our tour concludes with one of the most famous houses of horrors in the City of Angels ... better known as *the Murder House*'. Complementing guide's dramatic introduction of Vivien's home as the scene of multiple murders, are the background brass instruments, which begin to play segments of Wojciech Kilar's recognisable composition "Dracula: The Beginning" (1992). Connecting the episode and season with a notorious horror story compounds the sense of terror that will be associated, not just with the house, but also with the Montgomery legend and through that to the provided representation of abortion. As Stan continues, describing Charles as a drug addict with a 'terrifying Frankenstein complex', the scene cuts to the house and the slightly overexposed images give the scene an artificial age as the music's dramatic tone increases. As the brass and string ensemble climaxes, a woman's voice penetrates the gloomy household, 'Charles?'. The music continues to build as Nora's voice reverberates throughout the house until the camera catches sight of Charles in the basement. The camera becomes unsteady as it slowly zooms into the room where the doctor is situated, pitching left to right as it zooms in on jars full of pigs, bats and other dismembered creatures. The lens centres on the doctor, his white overalls grimy with blood as he stitches a leather-like wing onto the carcass of a two-headed pig ("Murder House").

Stan's description of Charles's tendencies as Frankensteinian, timed to the first chaotic depiction of the man, pays homage to another famous monster, as the harsh, abrasive melody of "Dracula" plays in the background. Here the season incorporates a level of intertextuality, assimilating historical fictional narratives into a new gothic story of America origin. Both literary figures of the Gothic cannon are mythical in nature and through science and magic, they raise the undead (as Dracula himself is undead). There is an immediate association between Charles and the worst and most famous monsters of the Gothic genre. The melodramatic flair with which the scene introduces Charles suggests a parody of the monsters in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1869). Indeed, the Gothic often 'self-



Fig.5.3 *AMS S01E03* 00:20:59
In this shot, only Charles's thick black rubber gloves are seen, the focus of the frame is the mutilated pig.

consciously uses Gothic's familiar plots and tropes for melodramatic effect, the result a farcical and ludicrous re-presentation of the Gothic' (Horner and Zlosnik 323).

Charles, with his black rubber gloved hands visible in the medium close-up of the scene shows him stitching the bat wing onto the already mutilated pig. Nora's voice is heard from off screen as she scolds him: 'Damn it, Charles. Are you down in the basement again? Charles?'. As the music reaches its climax, Charles yells up to his wife 'For God's sake, I'm working!'. Nora ridicules him, yelling back 'Working. I wish. Now come upstairs for dinner', before she dismissively slams the basement door and leaves Charles by himself. He petulantly mutters, 'You've ruined it', referring to his wife as he rips the wing off the carcass, and then drugs himself with a dose of ether ("Murder House"). The bizarre experiment, what he terms 'working', of creating a two-headed pig chimera with bat wings and Charles's thick black gloves that contrast with his white lab clothes, provide a cartoonish appearance which is enhanced by his childish behaviour. Nora's patronising and antagonistic behaviour also suggests that he cannot be taken seriously as a character.

It is also in this scene that *Murder House* begins to emphasise, through the dichotomy of the house and its basement, what has until now only been indirectly suggested. Vivian is told that Charles was the 'Doctor to the stars' and built the mansion in 1922 for his wife a 'prominent East Coast socialite'. The house is supposed to be a symbol of the Montgomerys' status as a successful upper middle class family. Charles builds the house '*exactly* the way [Nora] wanted it' and the obvious elements of capitalist critique enter the show with Nora's need to maintain her perfect home and status through the sale of her husband's less than conventional medical talents through the abortions, a business which is run out of the small family's basement. The grandiose style of the house is one that is often repeated by the homeowners, as well as the realtor Marcy (Christine Estabrook). They observe that the house has 'real Tiffany' chandeliers imported from New York, a luxurious expense in the 1920s and 'Louis Comfort Tiffany glass' windows, 'inspired by the iridescence of butterfly wings'. Also mentioned are the 'chestnut' wood floors and walls that add a 'warm' tone to the house ("Pilot"; "Murder House"). Throughout the season there are suggestions of restoring the house to its previous glory with the intention to sell at a profit. Chad and Patrick, as well as Ben and Vivian fall prey to this idea of monetary profit based on the house's 'magnificent' appearance, becoming trapped

in the house by the financial constraints that owning it costs, and eventually being killed by the ghosts who inhabit it.

The Montgomery dinner scene goes to great lengths to suggest an opulent and lavish lifestyle. Nora and Charles sit at opposite ends of a long dining table, crystal and silver dinnerware displayed throughout a large room with high dark walls. Nora is dressed in the height of 1920s fashion, her gold dress beaded and sequined while Charles is dressed in a smart three piece suit. Sitting between the pair is Thaddeus, dressed in expensive white lace. The scene, shot with a wide-angled lens, exaggerates the height and depth of the room ("Murder House"). The high-angled framing of the shot creates the perception that the Montgomery family is engulfed by the overbearing and threatening structure of the room, suggesting that the opulence is more of a 'gilded cage' rather than the product of wealth and prestige. The overhead shot cuts to a point-of-view shot: this angle is maintained while the camera focuses first on Charles and then on Nora while the pair squabble over Charles's lack of career, having lost his reputation to drugs and strange experiments, and progresses to the family's increasingly precarious financial situation. Despite the abundance of food on the table, neither the Doctor nor his wife eat, opting instead to fill their wine glasses to the brim. Their fight culminates in Charles hurling his wine glass across the room, shattering the crystal on the opposite wall and causing the baby to cry.



Fig. 5.4 *AHS S01E03* 00:21:24
Nora (left), Thaddeus (centre) and Charles (right) look small in this overhead shot. The frame's mise-en-scène displays an opulant and expensive household, while emphasising the isolation of the home owners through the legnth of the table.

This scene, juxtaposed with Charles's Frankensteinian nature in the basement just moments before suggests that the there is a duality within the household which is represented both by the characters' narcissistic and abhorrent behaviour, as well as the physical spatiality demonstrated by the house proper and the basement. While Nora and her obsession with outward appearance controls the house (and bemoans the fact that she only has two servants), Charles's basement becomes the locus for the repressed horror, which the house hides beneath it. This duality, of hiding, ignoring and repressing the horrific is frequently repeated in *Murder House*, and the abortions performed are just one, although arguably the most important, example of such an occurrence. Seeking to maintain her

public and respectable ‘face’, Nora organises an abortion for a young woman for ‘$60 cash [who is] in trouble [and] probably has friends’. Nora’s suggestion is that Charles, having ruined his reputation as a medical doctor, should turn to performing abortions as a way of supporting his wife’s lavish lifestyle.

Charles’s character is very much a caricature of the evil abortionist and mad scientist, with his addiction to ether, association with the ‘mad-scientist’ Doctor Frankenstein and connections to the darker undead monster Dracula. Despite his autonomous attempts at creating a chimera from dead tissue, he is almost completely subservient to his wife. The terror which Frankenstein and his monster are intended to inscribe on audiences is marred by the comically grotesque sight of Charles as he tries to bring to life the two-headed pig with bat wings as his wife yells down to him. The next day Nora takes the $60 from a young woman, drugs her and sends her down into the basement for the abortion. Alone at the top of the stairs, Nora leans on the door that marks the entrance to the basement and with shaking fingers pulls out a pill box and takes one of the pills (“Murder House”). In setting up the abortions, as a means to pay for her lavish lifestyle, Nora also becomes monstrous. The scene cuts from the past and focuses on the present with a medium close-up of Vivien’s horrified face, the mise-en-scène providing a glimpse of the tourists who gawk and flash cameras at the house in fascination, as Stan continues with his dramatic narration:



Fig. 5.5 *AHS S01E03* 00:24:16
Vivian, who is framed off centre, stares at her house in horror, while around her, tourists look at the house with facination.

> STAN. An estimated two dozen girls went under Doctor Montgomery's knife, thanks to his wife Nora. But the souls of the little ones must have weighed heavily upon them, as their reign of terror climaxed in a shocking finale in 1926. (“Murder House”)

That the basement is used for both Charles’s mad science experiments and abortion suggests that both are equally unacceptable in the sophisticated society that Nora represents, and the hypocrisy of that same society in its ability to ignore and repress that which might otherwise mar their perfectly constructed world. Stan’s narration of the Montgomerys’ abortion plot only serves to enhance the sensationalism of *Murder House*’s representation of abortion. By making it part of a tourist attraction, with Stan’s over-

dramatisation of the narrative, emphasising the destruction 'of the little ones', the narrative serves to highlight society's preoccupation with tales for their entertainment value, making use of the ludicrous and burlesque. In doing so, *American Horror Story* continues the Gothic tradition by placing an 'emphasis on fakery in the representation of the extremes of feeling and experience inevitably invites the ludicrous excess of further layers of fakery in the form of satire' (Horner and Zlosnik 328).

What Horner and Zlosnik mean by 'fakery' in the Gothic is related to the first recognisable English Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole. Here they argue that Walpole's novel is itself a hybrid of 'ancient romance [and] modern romance' and includes a heavy reliance on Shakespeare (Horner and Zlosnik 324). Jerrold E. Hogle also considers how *Otranto* is 'grounded in fakery', having initially been published as a translation of a manuscript written in sixteenth century Italy (Hogle 496). Hogle notes other examples of how the novel was 'fake' from its use of the incorrect buildings for its 'Gothic' atmosphere, to the narrative itself. The Gothic genre, from its beginnings then becomes a site of such fakery and intertextuality which has a habit of 'embracing surface rather than depth; for delight in excess: the result is "absurd" and "monstrous" works that make you laugh as well as cry' (Horner and Zlosnik 325). Stan, his 'Eternal Darkness Tour', and those who partake in it are part of a continuous layering of the self-satire of the American culture that *Murder House* represents. It at once depicts past abortions as part of a melodrama, celebrated through a superficial delight of the gruesome and horrific, while simultaneously repressing them in the basement along with Charles's other unwholesome experiments.

The emphasis on positioning the abortions in the basement is once more displayed in Episode Four "Halloween Part 1" where Stan and Vivian are replaced by Tate and Violet, as the Montgomery story is continued. Set on the eve of Halloween, Tate dares Violet that he can scare her with the history of the Montgomery family. Like Stan, Tate highlights Nora's need to maintain appearances, beginning his narration with the following explanation:

> TATE. [Charles'] wife, Nora, wasn't gonna let [Charles's addiction] get in the way of her lifestyle, so she set up a little secret side business. He would take care of girls who didn't want to be in trouble anymore. This went on and on until one day, one girl couldn't keep the secret to herself, and she told her boyfriend what happened.' ("Halloween Part 1")

The scene transitions from Tate and Violet to Charles, who is in the middle of an abortion. The camera circles around a young girl dressed in a white hospital gown, her feet lifted up into the stirrups of an examination table, while covered in a white cloth. The basement is dimly illuminated, filled with shadows. Juxtaposed with this darkness is the young woman, bathed in light and dressed in white, and situated not only in the centre of the room but also in the centre of the frame of every shot of the abortion scene. Charles is hidden in the shadows, his face obscured by a mask, hands once more covered with thick black rubber gloves, which give him a sinister yet cartoonish appearance ("Halloween Part 1"). There are always other objects between him and the camera, cutting his visible figure into segments. Unlike the scenes portraying his attempts at creating life through hybrid experiments, the abortion scene is not visually explicit, preferring to use the visual contrasts of light and darkness to create the established anxiety that has come to be associated with his medical practices.



Fig. 5.6 *AHS S01E04* 00:21:25
Charles (right) is partially hidden by his medical case. Wearing the same black rubber gloves he uses for his experiments, Charles prepares a woman for an abortion.

As with most of the scenes related to the representation of abortion in *American Horror Story*, the focus here is not on the actual abortion, but rather on Charles. This is predominantly because the show, unlike the previous films, does not use the issue of abortion as a platform for any particular discussion on gender and politics. The primary inclusion of abortion is for its sensationalistic possibilities and its shock factor. So far, the only other film that has represented abortion as a spectacle has been *Dumplings*, and it has done so to stress the mass forced abortions that were being performed in China, while also commenting on Hong Kong's excessively consumerist society. *Vera Drake*, *4 Months* and in particular *Part-Time Work* all seek to represent abortion as a normal everyday occurrence, which is performed and obtained by women, regardless of the illegalities of the act on a legislative level. *Part-Time Work* is especially interesting when compared to *Murder House* because the abortion scenes and the films' representation of abortionists are so different. The season sets up a distinct spatiality between the house and the basement. In doing so it has regulated abortions to the basement, to places that are unseen, with

Charles and his horrific experiments, creating associations between the two. Added to this are the images of blood covered gynaecological tools presented in the opening sequence and the dissected foetuses. Abortion has without being directly performed on screen, relied on implication and association to generate feelings of shock and horror. *Part-Time Work* does the opposite, by presenting a documentary style representation of a graphic abortion, the film actually normalises abortion, and removes any possible spectacular representation.

Tate's narration of the fate of the Montgomerys in "Halloween Part 1" continues to emphasise the link between abortion and the horrific. He explains to Violet how a client's boyfriend kidnaps the baby Thaddeus, after which he calls the Montgomery home, quoting Biblical scripture, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth', to Nora who picked up the telephone ("Halloween Part 1"). She discovers that her child has been kidnapped from his bedroom, taken through an open window. The abduction of Thaddeus — revenge for one of the abortions that Charles has performed — ends in tragedy. Returned home by two police officers, the toddler has been dissected, dismembered and jarred, like the specimens found in Charles's basement. Being returned in this fashion the connection between the abortions and Charles's experiments is strengthened. In killing and jarring Thaddeus's body, the series emphasises through shock and horror the connection between the abortions and Thaddeus's fate. The show takes the representation of abortion from the horrific to the ridiculous when, maddened by grief, Charles begins to delve into his Frankensteinian experiments once more. With the focus returning to Charles and his experiments, the "Dracula" non-diegetic music, is also resurrected.

Charles, already unstable, becomes fixated on recreating life and cheating death through his dead son. His basement is transformed once more into the mad-scientist's laboratory as he stiches his son's body back together using pigs' feet for the child's hands. While the show has created an expectation of the strange in Charles's experiments, within this scene, it is the site of both horror and the ludicrous, a representation of the incongruence that the Gothic represents, that is displayed in Charles's latest experiment: his son. Such an example, where the 'anti-expected happens' is



Fig. 5.7 *AHS S01E04* 00:22:39
Wearing the same gloves donned while performing abortions, the doctor sews a pig's foot onto the arm of his dead son. Behind him, Nora stares in horror at the actions of her husband.

where *American Horror Story* is most successful in its depiction of the shocking and horrific, to the point where it becomes ludicrous (Lewis 112). The camera cuts from the Montgomerys to Tate standing in the doorway to the basement. As the camera pans around his form, the Montgomerys' fade into history as Tate finishes telling his story to Violet:

> TATE. But what he created was ungodly, and monstrous. And even after their tragic end, that 'thing' remained, down here, to this day. ("Halloween Part 1")

The creature, which was once Thaddeus, becomes the monster in the basement, a literalisation of the metaphorical horrors that the basement holds secret. In continuing the Montgomery narrative in Episode Seven, "Open House", the season again accentuates the relationship between the fate of the Montgomerys and abortion. Back on the 'Eternal Darkness Tour' in Episode Seven, "Open House", sees Vivien and her sales agent Marcy hear the end of the Montgomery saga from Stan. The camera once more leaves the tour bus, and in a similar fashion to that of the first Montgomery scene in "Murder House", Kilar's "Dracula" plays in the background, thematically linking all of the Montgomery scenes with the monstrous, while also mocking them. The camera cuts to the house where Nora is viciously polishing her silver, the diegetic sound of paper on silver providing a light scraping sound to add to the effect of the scene as she gripes to herself, 'If mother could see me now, polishing my own silver' ("Open House"). The inclusion of this scene suggests that Nora is still, despite all that has happened; more concerned with appearances than reality. As soon as Charles appears in the dining room, having left his basement to speak to Nora, she begins to condemn him, 'Oh, I wish I were a widow, I certainly look the part'. Even her comments directed towards Charles's experimentations on their son are framed in such a way so as to indicate her obsession with appearances, 'because of you' Nora continues, 'and what you did … we'll have to forgo an open casket'. Charles explains that there will be no funeral and that her baby is waiting for her in the nursery. Nora leaves the dining room; the ever-present "Dracula" music playing in the background reaches its crescendo as Nora discovers the monster her husband has created from their deceased son.

The scene sequence moves to Charles, now located in the sitting room as he takes an inhalation of his ever present ether mask, the camera cutting to three different angles which display his white surgical scrubs splattered with blood and unshaven face. All these angles enhance his bedraggled appearance. Sarcastically, Nora hails him as a 'genius',

telling him that she was 'wrong' about him. Within this scene, Charles appears childlike in his mannerisms and his submission to Nora is absolute when he professes:

> CHARLES. How long I've waited to hear you say that. All I wanted … was, to prove myself. ("Open House")

He is unable to detect his wife's distress over her once-child, and therefore Nora takes a more direct approach telling him she tried to kill the baby after it ripped her breast apart.

> NORA. I thought he was hungry. I tried to nurse him, but it wasn't milk he was craving. We're damned, Charles. Because of what we did to those girls. Those poor innocent girls and their babies. That thing upstairs — it's … not *human*. I tried to kill it.
> CHARLES. No.
> NORA. I *tried*. I stabbed it with a letter opener, but *it clung* to life, Charles. ("Open House")

Her insistence that they are damned due to their roles in the abortions is a continuation of the negative and hyperbolic representation of abortion within the season. Nora considers the death of their baby and Charles's success in creating the monster as penance for all the embryos evacuated from so many wombs in the Montgomery basement. That the 'thing' as Nora calls it, contains the 'beating heart' of one of their 'innocent girls', only adds to the already highlighted catastrophe that is the Montgomerys', while creating a hyperbolic satire of the Gothic representation of abortion. Charles's objection to her attempt to destroy his creation is petulant, his tone of voice pouting as he declares, 'I finally succeeded at something!'. Moments later, Nora shoots Charles in the head with a revolver and then commits suicide, 'eating' her own gun ("Open House").

It is in this scene that the season *Murder House* climaxes on its horrific representation of abortion, through the monstrous figures of the gothic cannon — but also parodies them, and thus parodies abortion. The creature Infintata is a hyperbolic satire of the monster that Frankenstein created. According to Paul Lewis, 'the mock Gothic uses humorous irony and exaggeration to repudiate the encounter with the unknown and feared' (Lewis 118). The entire scene is ridiculous, pandering to the absurd as Nora stabs the



Fig. 5.8 *AHS S01E07* 00:23:41
Marcy (left) respond's glibly to Stan's narration of the mansions history to Vivian (right).

undead child with a 'letter opener' only for it to survive the encounter, while a drug-addled Charles attempts to verbally defend his creation. The ludicrous presentation of the scene is followed by a return to Stan and his melodramatic narration where he explains that 'the Montgomery murder/suicide was only the first of many to occur behind these bloody walls', after which, the camera provides a medium close-up of Marcy and Vivian as she whispers to Vivian, 'Let's not put that in the listing' ("Open House").

Charles's descent into the world of backstreet abortions is physically represented by his underground basement laboratory. This spatial awareness, which is demonstrated by the basement's positioning as both a literal and figurative underground abortion clinic, is also at least in passing, a comment regarding the illegality of abortion in 1920s America. Before the *Roe* case, society of the 1920s saw twenty percent of all pregnancies being 'intentionally aborted', across race, class and religions (Reagan 23). Although never admitting to procuring an 'abortion', women of the era were fairly open in their intention to obtain abortions, although never within view of the legal establishment. According to Harold Rosen, an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at John Hopkins in 1965, even doctors and hospitals performed abortions in an 'extra-legal' capacity, meaning that doctors would often perform abortions for reasons other than those stated by law and in doing so, would perform illegal abortions legally (Rosen 441).[22] Before the *Roe* case, the 1960s saw approximately 10 000 to 18 000 legal abortions performed per year. These were hypocritical acts which openly conflicted with America's anti-abortion laws, but were justified by medical and psychiatric recommendations. Illegal abortions surpassed those performed covertly by doctors, by 'twenty to thirty times' leading to over one million illegal abortions per year in America (Rosen 451).

Apart from the Montgomery narrative that is centred on abortion in the 1920s, *Murder House* briefly presents, abortion within 2011, a time where abortion is legal in America. Here, the narrative focuses on Ben and his mistress Hayden, who have continued their affair after the Harmons' move to Los Angles. In Episode Two, "Home Invasion", Ben leaves a newly pregnant Vivian to return to Boston and Hayden, after she informs him

[22] In 1969, years before *Roe*, the American Psychiatric Association officially adopted the position that 'a decision to perform an abortion should be regarded as strictly a medical decision and a medical responsibility. It should be removed entirely from the jurisdiction of criminal law' (Schwartz 843). See Richard A. Schwartz's *Abortion on Request: The Psychiatric Implications* (1971).

of her pregnancy and of her choice to abort. The scene is a short one, and demonstrates the ability of the show to represent abortion as appalling by depicting the abortion clinic that Hayden chooses to abort in as dull, lifeless and still. The mise-en-scène's focus on large grimy windows of the abortion clinic creates a dim and oppressive atmosphere, where a post-abortion woman sits listlessly in a wheelchair with a blank face ("Home Invasion"). Like Charles's abortion practice that uses the space of the basement to reduce abortion to the gratuitously spectacular, the abortion clinic here has its own form of hyperbolic representation, which situates it as a scene of horror. The transference from the basement in the 1920s to an abortion clinic in 2011, suggests that while abortion may be legal, the negative attitudes surrounding it — which were predominantly found in legislature previously — are still present in American culture. Indeed, the lifelessness of the woman after having undergone the procedure, suggests that the negative attitudes have been transferred from the realm of the law into more mainstream society, where abortion is accepted legally but at the same time is unacceptable morally. Hayden chooses not to abort the foetus, having been abandoned by Ben who returns to Vivian after hearing that his wife and daughter have been attacked in their home. Instead, in Episode Three "Murder House", she travels to Los Angeles, where she hopes to ruin Ben's marriage and win him back. She is then killed on the mansion's property, becoming one of the resident ghosts.



Fig. 5.9 *AHS S01E02* 00:37:22
A young woman (centre) is wheeled out of the operating area and into the waiting room, after having an abortion.

The hypocrisy, then, which *Murder House* underscores with the spatial divisions, is not specifically the fact that abortions were (and are) performed. Instead the focus is on the long history of abortions being performed within America, in some instances legally but most often illegally, whilst the establishment ignored the need and denied legal access to the majority of the population. As Rosen sums up in his paper:

> The responsibility for the decision [to abort], right or wrong, [is] already theirs. The extra-legal abortion rate shows that they have already illegally assumed it. It should be theirs legally. (Rosen 464)

That a small group of women could gain access to abortions legally, although at great expense, while other women had to seek out illegal abortion clinics or perform self-

abortions, only added to the hypocrisy of the system (Schwartz 842). It also, through the depiction of the modern abortion clinic, mocks the current society that, having won the right to abort, has become increasingly polarised concerning the act, suggesting that the hypocrisy of the past regarding abortion is still continuing in modern society. In this way, *Murder House*'s representation of abortion is fitting for a satirical Gothic text as 'both humour and fear are responses to incongruity', and the issue of abortion in America is one of its most incongruent (Lewis 112).

Charles Montgomery, in addition to being a caricature, is the perfect representation of all the negative representations of an abortionist, calling into question his medical abilities, in addition to his lack of moral and ethical convictions. Unlike the previous representations of abortionists, *Murder House* focuses on the personal failures of the individuals living in the house. Vera and Roswitha are both characters who have become abortionists because they have been side-lined and regulated within a patriarchal society. Bebe, is who he is because of the Romanian law's regulation of women's bodies as governmental property. Even *Dumplings*' Mei is the resultant embodiment of an ideology, imposed on her by both nationalism and patriarchy. They are all realist portrayals, linked very closely to their societal constraints. Charles seems to be the antithesis of all the previous abortionists. With references to the canonical Gothic monsters, Charles reflects very few of the humanising factors present in the other abortionists. His growing madness and his cartoonish behaviour all serve to render him as fictional a character as possible. As with Stan's narration, his presentation as a failed doctor and fallen man are exaggerated to the extreme. Charles's actions too, from sewing bat wings onto a pig carcass to sewing a pig's foot onto an infant's dismembered arm, disassociate him and his actions from any form of reality and humanity. Indeed, the possibility of the mad scientist for the modern audience is no longer fiction, but a reality and is reminiscent of medical experiments on prisoners of the Third Reich and Unit 731 in Japan.[23] In doing so, Charles presents in the Gothic series a form of self-satire of the genre, in the same way that the 'Murder House' is a tourist attraction. Yet it seems to go beyond this to a genuine fascination with the abhorrent, as well as the commodification and thus distancing between the conceptualisation in fiction of the act and the act itself. By reducing him in this way, and

[23] See *Unit 731* (2011) by Hal Gold and *When Medicine Went Mad: Bioethics and the Holocaust* (2012) by Arthur L. Caplan.

relegating the act of abortion to the basement, allowing for those above it to ignore the horrors that lie beneath them, the season successfully reduces the issue of abortion to a kind of Gothic horror. It is a Gothic text that is mocking in its representation, removing central debates — raised in previous chapters of this dissertation — concerning women's rights, politics and ethics, while still maintaining enough of a cultural presence that abortion is presented as a hidden sublimated reality that takes place in the basement, happening outside of acceptable society and the gaze of the legal establishment.

Although this chapter's focus is on *Murder House* there are two direct references to abortion in the other five seasons of *America Horror Story*, both of which follow similar Gothic theatrics present in Season One. Season Five, *Hotel* (2015) returns to the show's original setting (the 'Murder House') at the beginning of Episode Six "Room 33". In 1926, Elizabeth (Lady Gaga) infected with a virus, which will eventually turn her into a beautiful, but deadly immortal creature, seeks an abortion from season one's abortionist, Doctor Charles Montgomery. The scene, set in the past, has a slightly washed out effect as Elizabeth, under the name Mrs Johnson, reveals her distended abdomen to the doctor, all the while claiming to be three weeks pregnant. She is taken down into the basement of the house, the camera positioned as a point-of-view shot tracks her movements, providing a perspective view of the darkened corridor, and turns left into a room. Contained in the room is a small table, which the camera zooms onto, covered with a white table cloth, and holding a tray filled with surgical tools. Like the pregnancy itself, the entire abortion scene is unnatural, from Elizabeth's body temperature at 75 °F, to the three week evacuated foetus's status as being 'alive', according to the nurse, right before it rips her throat out ("Room 33").



Fig. 5.10 *AHS S05E06* 00:01:26
Elizabeth (left) shows Charles Montgomery (righgt) her abdoment. Looking to be in her third trimester, she claims to be in her third week.

In Episode Nine of Season Two, *Asylum*, journalist Lana Winters (Sarah Paulson) attempts to self-abort her own pregnancy inside Briarcliff Mansion, an 'insane asylum' where she is imprisoned after investigating the institution. Having been raped by a serial killer, Lana is denied an abortion by a demon possessed Sister Mary Eunice. She then attempts a self-abortion using the episode's titled object "The Coat Hanger", the camera

providing a close-up of Lana's legs, the straightened metal of the hanger between them, as blood begins to pool around her ("The Coat Hanger").

Both of these examples of *American Horror Story*'s choice to depict abortion in as shocking a manner as possible, present a satire of the typical abortion images that American's are exposed to. Elizabeth's abortion returns the audience to the basement, which in Season One was riddled with negative images of aborted foetuses and dead babies, a reminder of the physical cost of abortions: a potential life. Lana's self-abortion via a coat hanger is also a cultural gesture, this time towards the pro-choice's own rhetorical image of the coat hanger — an item representative of abortion's illegality and the dangers posed to women because of it. In addition, in these particular examples it must be noted that the abortions fail. Elizabeth's monstrous foetus is viable at three weeks, and Lana learns from the demonic Eunice that she still carries the foetus, a boy who eventually grows up to be a serial killer, a different kind of 'monster'. This association of the monstrous with abortion is one that was initially presented in *Murder House*. The basement that Elizabeth is guided down into for her abortion in Season Five is where in Season One, Charles Montgomery performed his abortions, as well as his Frankensteinian experiments.

Ultimately, it is in the representation of the house with its spatial divisions between the house proper and the basement, that society's hypocrisy is enacted. It is a satire of American culture, which includes the cultural 'war' regarding abortion, in relation to the spatial construction of abortion as being relegated to the basement — hidden, confined and ignored, until it can no longer be. *American Horror Story* borders on the boundaries of the burlesque, mimicking the thematic structure of the Gothic, while the hyperbolic nature of the text provides a mockery of the melodramatic and brooding mood upon which much of the Gothic genre is based. While the show provides a sample of American horrors, it is its representation of abortion, used predominantly to shock, which simultaneously provides a satire, and thus a critique of the incongruent American culture, as well as successfully reducing the issue of abortion to the gratuitous spectacular.

CHAPTER 6

ABC'S *GREY'S ANATOMY*: LOCATING THE (M)OTHER

Grey's Anatomy's (ABC 2005–), created by executive producer Shorda Rhimes, considers the issues raised in the previous chapter on *American Horror Story* from the personal, if somewhat emotional and sensational narrative of two characters, Doctor Cristina Yang (Sandra Oh) and Doctor Addison Montgomery–Shepherd (Kate Walsh). Whereas the previous chapters have moved from an examination of socio-political and historical representations of abortion, taking into consideration issues of alienation, body politics, agency and gender, to those Gothic representations of abortion that consider excessive consumerism and excessive needs to conform to societal norms, *Grey's* begins to ask questions about women's space and agency within a modern America, where despite popular belief, women are often reduced to their biological functions. In a build up to the final episode of Season Ten, *Grey's* presents a 'what if' episode. Shortlisted for a Harper-Avery Award,[24] the character of Cristina Yang ponders her future. Yang's voiceover opens the Seventeenth Episode titled "Do You Know?": 'Do you know who you are?' Yang asks, 'Do you know what's happened to you? Do you want to live this way?' The episode considers three different futures for Christina, finally choosing her career as a surgeon. The other two futures, the first exploring Christina as mother, then wife, then surgeon and teacher but never an award recipient; the second presenting her as a part-time lover, multiple time awardee, but social disaster, are both rejected. The episode's narrative which explores Yang's departure, is defined by her struggle to move beyond the gendered binary of woman-mother and into the realm of the other, who while woman, is not defined by her womanhood.

Entering its sixteenth year on prime-time television *Grey's* has managed to deliver one of the most talked about and successful television shows in the last decade. The show follows a group of new surgical interns as they begin their residency at Seattle Grace Hospital. As the season progresses and the characters develop, the interns become residents, fellows and eventually, attending surgeons at the hospital. The title, a play on both the lead

[24] The Harper-Avery award is a fictional award that features in the first season of *Grey's Anatomy*. According to the hype surrounding the award, it is considered to be one of the most prestigious awards a medical doctor can receive within the show.

character's surname Grey and the famous medical textbook *Gray's Anatomy* (1858), links the soap opera genre with the medical drama genre, producing a show where the attention is on the private lives of surgeons. While focusing on the personal lives of the interns and their supervisors, the medical plots depicted in each episode frequently mirror the personal challenges being faced by the characters, thus dramatising the personal issues of Seattle Grace's staff.

Whereas *Grey's* situates the various realistic abortion narratives within a society where, while profoundly divided on the topic, abortions are legal, *Dumplings* and *American Horror Story* provide representations of abortion that are spectacular. In doing so, the Gothic texts sensationalise abortion where the previous films, *Part-time work, 4 Months* and *Vera*, sought to normalise it. *American Horror Story* in particular presents abortion as a horrific spectacle by focusing on the abortionist, rather than the women seeking abortions. In the two instances where the representation of abortion is framed by women, specifically Elizabeth and Lana, the emphasis is more on the monster foetus than the abortion itself — although Lana is specifically associated with the 'coat hanger' image prevalent within pro-abortion discourse in America. In comparison the depiction of abortion throughout *Grey's* is one of sentimental naiveté in relation to the politics it seeks to represent by preferring to provide an emotional rendering of the political issues by embedding them into many of the characters' micronarratives. Although *Grey's* has a number of patient's narratives relating to abortion distributed throughout the show's seasonal episodes, what is of interest, and the primary concern of this chapter, is found within three particular representations of abortion.[25] (There are a number of sub-plots throughout the show's run which may be mentioned, but will not be explored.) This chapter's reading of *Grey's* examines how the representation and utilisation of abortion in the show raises questions around the meaning of womanhood. The show navigates the complexities of a modern multifaceted and opinionated society, exploring questions concerning the relationship between motherhood

[25] In chronological order the episodes from *Grey's Anatomy* which are mentioned in Chapter 6: Season One, Episode Seven "The Self Destruct Button" and Episode Eight "Save Me". Season Two, Episode One "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head" and Episode Three "Make Me Lose Control". Season Three, Episode Eleven "Six Days: Part 1" and Episode Twelve "Six Days: Part 2"; Episode Twenty-two "The Other Side of This Life: Part 1" and Episode Twenty-three "The Other Side of This Life: Part 2". Season Seven, Episode Twenty-Two "Unaccompanied Minor". Season Eight, Episodes: One "Free Falling", Five "Love, Loss and Legacy", Nine "Dark Was the Night", Twelve "Hope for the Hopeless", Fifteen "Have You Seen Me Lately?" and Seventeen "One Step Too Far". Season Ten, Episode Seventeen "Do You Know?" and EpisodeTwenty-Four "Fear (of the Unknown).

and womanhood, through its representation of abortion. The first and third arc, if chronologically presented, involve Cristina, who becomes pregnant twice during the course of the show, once in the Season One-Two arc and then again in the Season Seven-Eight arc. The second abortion narrative, though brief, is that of Addison in Season Three, the effects of which follow her into *Grey's* spin-off *Private Practice* (2007), which will not be discussed within this chapter.

Kelly Oliver opens her analysis of Julia Kristeva by quoting Freud: 'In "On Femininity," Sigmund Freud famously asked, "what does a woman want?" His answer, as we know, was a baby, and preferably a male baby' (qtd in Oliver "Julia Kristeva" 1). The notion of womanhood in contemporary society is varied and widely disputed. Considering the representation of women within popular culture, even in contemporary settings, womanhood is often understood and depicted within the confines of biological determinism. Women's gendered experiences are, according to Swedish researchers Helen Peterson and Kristina Engwall, always returned to the question of 'when will you have kids?', the notion that 'motherhood [is] the ultimate fulfilment for women and part of "hegemonic femininity"' (Peterson and Engwall 337). This one goal Freud and his ilk considered not only a duty of womanhood, but also an active desire, which all women had. The importance of *Grey's* is that it broaches the subject of motherhood through its antithesis: abortion, the active rejection of carrying a child to term or rejecting the very existence of that child. Beth Kendrick, author and critic provides a summary of motherhood within *Grey's* 2005-6 season. Between Cristina's pregnancy, Izzie Steven's secret child, Meredith's cold, demanding mother who suffers from Alzheimer's and Cristina's own socialite housewife-mother, Kendrick suggests that motherhood is looked upon from a threatening and cautiously negative perspective. Despite this rather negative presentation of motherhood, Kendrick argues that it is a valuable representation, an 'honest' perspective. She admits that 'women don't have the luxury of ignoring the realities of parenthood. […] Being a mother *is* exhausting, it *does* affect your job performance, and it *will* change who you are' (Kendrick 37).[26] Walking a fine line between being a dramatic television show and a space for challenging discourse about societal issues, *Grey's* succeeds in raising the questions of motherhood and non-motherhood through its abortion discourse.

[26] Emphasis in original text.

Being able to challenge the accepted discourse of what was, in early 2000, the near-taboo of presenting a successful abortion narrative during prime-time television — and which in many ways is still taboo — becomes difficult when one considers the purpose of entertainment television (Piazza "Abortion"; Erdreich "40 Years"). Philosopher Marty Fairbairn's paper *The Cinematic Gaze as Desire for Metaphysical Comfort* (1995), explores why people watch cinematic productions (here I have included television productions). He argues that due to the popular 'postmodern mode of thought' which destabilises and reduces 'truth' to an indefinable and fallible construct, audience members seek out some form of objective other upon which to connect and from which they can reaffirm their positions of being (Fairbairn 486). This mode of assurance is dependent on the other, which within Fairbairn's paper is used only to define that which is opposed to the isolated self, rather than the objectified and dehumanised Other. This 'other' fascinates the audience through the revealing and concealing of culturally specific truths which allow for that connection to greater societal constructs 'thereby [presenting] an effort at self-understanding through understanding the other' (Fairbairn 487).

By repeatedly returning to abortion, Rhimes attempts to address what she deems to be culturally relevant questions, while still endeavouring to maintain a level of accessibility and acceptability from an audience who seek to have themselves reflected in the show. Addison's narrative, which is a stereotypically clichéd depiction of a punishment narrative, allows those who are wary of or against abortion, a place within the story. However, because Addison does actually have the abortion, even if off-screen and before the introduction of her character, this affords those who are more accepting of such actions a presence within the show as well. Cristina's abortion narrative, which runs for multiple seasons, is a more complicated matter. Her eventual abortion later in the show revels in her right to choose, and yet the voice of her husband's discontent provides underlying commentary regarding the complexities of the politics of the modern abortion discourse in America. Cristina is not apologetic and as witnessed in her closing narrative at the end of Season Ten, Cristina, while woman (for she never rejects her gendered feminine and sexuality and in fact takes pleasure in her sexuality) is never mother.

Addison's narrative, ruminated on in the last half of Season Three, will be analysed first, as it is the shortest and least complicated. Addison, an obstetric, gynaecologal (OBG) and neonatal surgeon, is the ex-wife of neurosurgeon Doctor Derek Shepherd (Patrick

Dempsey). Derek moved from New York to Seattle after discovering his wife was having an affair with his best friend and plastic surgeon, Doctor Mark Sloan (Eric Dane). Derek is the primary love interest of Doctor Meredith Grey (Ellen Pompeo), protagonist of *Grey's* and surgical intern at Seattle Grace. For the period between Derek's arrival in Seattle and Addison's own introduction, Addison continues her affair with Mark, becomes pregnant and promptly aborts the child. Addison then follows Derek to Seattle in an attempt to repair her marriage, with a heartbroken Mark trailing not far behind. The audience learns of Addison's pregnancy and abortion when she confides in Doctor Callie Torres (Sara Ramirez) an orthopaedic surgeon, in Season Three, Episode Twelve, titled "Six Days: Part 2". Within the scope of Addison's abortion narrative, Derek is dating Meredith, and Mark, as of the previous episode "Six Days: Part 1", is not talking to Addison. In Episode Eleven, Mark turns on Addison after she makes a comment about his teaching skills. The camera zooms onto Addison and Mark's faces as he steps into her personal space. Mark, one of the taller actors cast in the show, towers over Addison, his anger permeable through the camera lens. Addison, who in previous episodes has displayed a fiery temperament, becomes even smaller in comparison to Mark when she backs down during the confrontation, allowing him the barb and accepting whatever judgement he has bestowed on her:



Fig. 6.1 *Grey's S03E11* 00:11:19
Addison's (right) resigned reaction to Mark's (left) dismissal of her, as behind her Alex (centre) is witness to only the outcome of Addion's choice to abort.

> ADDISON: Do you like abusing interns? Is it fun for you?
> MARK: Yes, it is. And in case you've forgotten, you don't get the high horse this week, Addison. Not this week. [Mark walks away]
> ALEX: He's an ass.
> ADDISON: Not this week. ("Six Days: Part 1")

No indication is provided as to why Mark is so aggressive towards Addison or why she accepts his behaviour, nevertheless Addison, acting the guilty party, offers an apology to Mark at the close of the episode:

> ADDISON: Mark. I'm sorry you're hurting.
> MARK: You're sorry I'm hurting or you're sorry? ("Six Days: Part 1")

Grey's Anatomy often depicts the actions of the characters as they walk through the halls of the hospital and perform surgeries. Frequently the camera will jump between the individuals and their activities, tracking them. Nevertheless, there are moments when the organised chaos, which the focus on movement in the scenes implies, seems to halt. The music used in *Grey's* contributes greatly to the tone of the scenes, and, depending on the intended outcome, the tune can agree with or contradict the composition of the shot. Fast paced popular music will slow to soft and paced melodies, at other times speeding up, and often no music will be present at all. Characters themselves transform from energetic beings, becoming still, often sitting or standing in place. The camera within these quiet scenes also seems to cut to different shots less frequently, strengthening the scene's motionlessness. This technique plays on the audience as a privileged spectator, which along with the opening sequence of each episode, and the soundtracks that belong to specific scenes and individual characters, allows for the framing of the intended message that the audience as spectator, is meant to recognise and internalise (Casetti 45). Although there are a considerable number of important action scenes, the static quality of the quiet scenes, where the camera and subject are still, provide a weightiness not obvious in those abounding in visual movement.

It is during one of these stationary scenes that Addison reveals her secret to Callie. The scene opens with a close up of Addison's meditative face. Cutting to a long-shot, Addison is situated in the centre of the hospital's outdoor café area as Callie joins her at a table. As is tradition for *Grey's*, the show uses pop-songs to provide the ambience and presently Regina Spektor's "Fidelity" (2007) saturates the scene:

> I never loved nobody fully,
> Always one foot on the ground,
> And by protecting my heart truly
> I got lost, in the sounds. ("Fidelity")

The song, with its quick jumpy beats, belies its subject matter within the first lines which are audible, drowning out all other noise from the scene except Callie's voice as she speaks of her crush on an intern Doctor George O'Malley (T.R. Knight), while Addison gazes past her laptop, her mind clearly somewhere else. The music as suggested by its titled "Fidelity", alludes to Addison's affair with Mark, while the lyrics refer to her current status as single and lost. The camera jumps to a mid-shot fitting both Addison and Callie into the frame, with Addison more centred. The camera's focus remains on Addison despite the fact that



Fig. 6.2 *Grey's S03E12* 00:08:04
Addison (left) stares into space as Callie (right) talks about her crush on intern George.

it is Callie who speaks, presenting Addison's distant facial expression and lax posture, while physically and emotionally side-lining Callie and her romantic entanglements, turning them into petty gossip in the face of Addison's confession. The shot is also in a perfect position so that as Callie sits at the table she cuts across the camera, calling attention from the spectator to Addison's daydreaming when once back in the frame, she has not reacted to Callie presence at all. Once Callie is settled the camera cuts to a mid-shot of her as she begins to apprise Addison of her budding relationship, stirring her coffee, all the while not noticing Addison's inattentiveness until, not hearing a response, Callie looks up at Addison, offended at her apparent disinterest:

> CALLIE: Did you not just hear a word I said? I'm pouring my heart out here. Jeez it's all about you. It's all about … Everything's about Addison.
> ADDISON: I aborted Mark's baby. ("Six Days: Part 2")

The camera provides a dramatic close up of both Addison and Callie in reaction to the news. Addison's face is full of fondness and exasperation as she recounts how Mark was excited about the pregnancy and her devastation over the due date which should have been 'today'. Callie is a supportive and concerned friend as she watches Addison break down in front of her:

> CALLIE: You didn't want a baby?
> ADDISON: I wanted Derek. I wanted to have a baby with Derek. I never thought I'd end up alone.
> CALLIE: You have not 'ended up' anywhere.
> ADDISON: You're right. I know. It's just that um … sometimes it feels that way, you know? This is one of those weeks it feels that way. ("Six Days: Part 2")

As the scene fades out, Spektor's "Fidelity", which faded into background music during the women's conversation, once again dominates the scene as the camera zooms out, distancing the audience from Addison's breakdown. The scene ends with Spektor's lyrics 'And it breaks my heart / It breaks my heart / When it breaks my heart' ("Fidelity"), reverberating into the next scene. Within this scene, the audience is exposed to the severity

of Addison's distress which has been compounded by the loss of Derek. Her intention of winning Derek back has failed and it cost her the baby. Clearly, with the chosen song, the scene is intended to provoke sympathy for Addison and her position as both childless and divorced. For those who are not convinced about Addison's choice to abort the child, Rhimes offers additional support for Addison's position with a confrontational scene between her and Mark.

Halfway through "Six Days: Part 2", Mark challenges Addison's decision to have the abortion, implying that had she kept the child they would still be together and happy:

> MARK: If you had the baby, we'd be together in New York right now […] We'd be together and I would have a family instead of walking pneumonia and an ex-best friend who hates me. ("Six Days: Part 2")

The scene is vastly different in comparison to Addison and Callie's conversation earlier. Firstly, there is no music to pad the scene and the silence denotes a subdued tone. Whereas Callie and Addison were framed together, suggesting a supportive comradery between the pair, here the camera jumps back and forth between Mark and Addison, never presenting them in the same shot symbolising their estrangement. Addison walks in on Mark as he coughs over a cup of coffee, 'Oh my god, look at you' is Addison's reaction to a pathetic looking Mark. Again, in comparison to their last interaction where Mark towered over Addison, here Mark sits in a dark room while Addison stands over him, her frame lifted by the lights in the hallway behind her. Clearly the power relations within the scene reside with Addison, despite Mark's previously righteous anger. Even when Mark stands up, he does not tower over Addison. Instead with his head down, he looks beaten and lost, while Addison stands tall and justifies her decision:

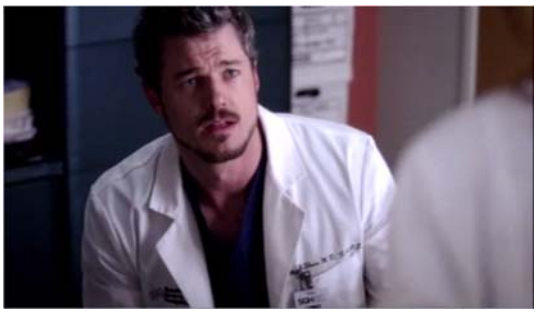

Fig. 6.3 *Grey's S03E12* 00:21:53
Mark (centre), sick and miserable, looks every part the victim in this frame. A sincere face framed by an over the shoulder shot places him in a subordinate position to Addison.

> ADDISON: No I did want a baby, Mark. That last woman you slept with? Before I left New York … You're rewriting history, Mark. We wouldn't still be together. We weren't a great couple and you would have made a terrible father Mark. I did want a baby, I did. I just didn't want one with *you*. ("Six Days: Part 2")

This scene substantiates Addison's decision to have the abortion, because not only was she still in love with Derek, but her relationship with Mark, idealised he made it out to be, was unstable and unsuitable for a child. Just as Addison believed that repairing her relationship with Derek would resolve all her problems, so too did Mark look to the idea of the child as a solidifying element for his and Addison's relationship. In "Save Me: Part 2", Addison's behaviour becomes increasingly erratic.

By deliberately positioning Addison as a woman who has had an abortion, but who also wanted a child, her narrative allows for the rhetoric that equates womanhood with motherhood, although such rhetoric becomes difficult because the show does not provide a set of fundamental values for the idealised mother. Dow identifies such an automatic association, of mother and woman equating, as problematic, because of how television naturalises women's roles as 'good mothers' and thus good women. Such naturalisation infers that, while women may subsequently embrace alternative positions within society, those roles are secondary or non-defining positions. Their primary and defining role is of mother, and of motherhood, which through naturalisation is subsequently glorified, but *Grey's* has a tendency to present motherhood as anything but glorified. Latham Hunter also draws attention to how *Grey's*, in the first three seasons, contains a substantial and near continuous stream of threatened pregnant bodily narratives (Hunter 324-5). She notes how the pregnant body, even before Addison's own abortion narrative is introduced, positions the body as a site of anxieties in which the mother, child, or both, are threatened by some form of malady. Sometimes the mothers are the only characters who survive, other times it is the infant who is left motherless. The bodies of both, cut, mended and separated are focused on as single and plural identities.

All these pregnant narratives are, ironically, only available as a result of the presence of Addison Montgomery–Shepherd, one of the few, and better OBG neonatal surgeons on the West Coast of America. That it is she who, performing and overseeing such delicate medical healing, has aborted her own wanted-but-not-wanted baby, opens up questions about her own bodily rhetoric and her status as a 'good' woman, as well as her status as a renowned medical practitioner upon which those judgments are made. Her affair and her resultant pregnancy — all with a man she does not love — inevitably lead to questions about her judgement. How can a medical doctor who specialises in neonatal medicine accidentally fall pregnant? And then how can that same neonatal specialist obtain

an abortion while saving other mothers and babies? This is a betrayal of her body against her medical training and herself. Although Hunter's focus is on mothers and pregnancy, and not on abortion, her reading of *Grey's* as a feminist text provides a point of departure:

> If […] women on TV have typically been equated with motherhood that is natural, and inevitable, then *Grey's Anatomy* poses a direct challenge to television's normative, essentializing treatment of motherhood. It creates scenarios where the genesis of motherhood — pregnancy — is an often debilitating, risky venture that is unflinchingly physical. Gory, even. Pregnancy ceases to be a mythic teleological predictor of motherhood as a conversion to total fulfilment and becomes a physical condition, and often a tricky one at that. (Hunter 325)

One must question, with all the bodied experiences happening in the realm of the pregnant, how Addison's own abortion will then be lived and represented through her own body. Her abortion, off-screen and silent, was an attempt to gain control over her lived experience once more. It is telling that her first act as a non-pregnant woman is to seek out and mend her relationship with her husband, a course of action that inevitably ends in failure. As her discussion with Callie suggests, her confession, which is as much about admitting it aloud, and in doing so opposing the imposed silence of abortion in American society, as it is conferring with a sympathetic friend. It is also a spatial endeavour: She ends 'up alone' and Callie responds, 'You have not "ended up" anywhere', refusing to accept Addison's initial perception if herself as being positionally isolated.

After "Six Days: Part 2", Mark and Addison attempt to rekindle their past relationship forming a pact of mutual six month celibacy. According to their pact if they both prove their ability to maintain control of their sexual urges they will then enter into a serious relationship. It is here that Addison begins to reposition herself and, returning to the body as the centre of her lived experience, the pair attempts a potential future. *Grey's*, being the soap opera it is, immediately has Addison break the deal between her and Mark by throwing herself at Doctor Alex Karev (Justin Chambers), a first year intern. To make matters worse, this incident happens just in time for Mark to witness the scene. Such an experience follows from Addison's inability to control her own body, which her affair and pregnancy suggest. Breaking off the deal with Addison, Mark moves on and she is left with her one night stand with Alex who makes it clear that he is not interested in a relationship. The situation with both Mark and Alex has Addison travelling to Los Angeles to visit her old friend, Doctor Naomi Bennett (Audra McDonald) a reproductive endocrinologist and

fertility specialist in Episodes Twenty-two and Twenty-three, “The Other Side of This Life: Part 1” and “Part 2”. Both episodes follow the theme presented in “Part 1” where Meredith’s voiceover (VO) links happiness with goals and dreams:

> MERIDETH VO: The dream is this: That we’ll finally be happy when we reach our goals … (“Other Side of This Life: Part 1”)

The loss of Derek, the effect of her abortion and then, the loss of Mark, leaves Addison reeling, and in “The Other Side of This Life: Part 1” and “Part 2” she appears strangely dislocated as she desperately seeks some form of happiness. All the while Meredith’s voiceover indicates the futility of such actions, ‘if this is the dream, then we'd like to wake up… Now, please’ she asserts. The way in which Rhimes has chosen to present Addison now has all the trademarks of a mid-life crisis. Addison is shown driving a bright red Porsche convertible. She stomps on the clutch and grates the gears of the car as the wind blows her hair in every direction. The camera jumps to various angles focusing on her fly-away-hair and her difficulty driving a manual vehicle. Upon arriving at her destination she actually walks around by herself while struggling to take off her jacket. Addison also appears slightly hysterical in these two episodes, and in the elevator scenes she persistently acts the fool, thinking the voice she hears is a hallucination on her part, calling it at one point, ‘Elevator God’. Finally, after admitting to getting lost ‘eight times’ Addison greets Naomi at her co-op practice. Naomi greets Addison sceptically, and in the privacy of Naomi’s office she confronts Addison about her presence in Oceanside Wellness Centre, the private practice where Naomi works:



Fig. 6.4 *Grey's S03E22* 00:02:37
Addison as she drives down the beach front of Los Angeles in a red convertible, her hair in her face as she grates the gears of the manual vehicle.

> NAOMI: So … why are you really here?
> ADDISON: You’re a fertility specialist, one of the best.
> NAOMI: You wanna have a baby?
> ADDISON: I wanna have a baby. (“Other Side of This Life: Part 1”)

Her declaration, captured by a close-up shot is followed by a blinding smile from Addison and then the screen fades to the *Grey’s* logo.

The next scene opens with the theme music of *Grey's* plays as the camera centres on candy-pink sock-covered feet, which swing back and forth as the camera pans upwards to reveal bare legs, wrapped in a pink bathrobe. The colour coordination, along with the swinging feet suggests a childlike naïveté that Addison represents at this moment. As the camera progresses upwards, Addison's voice enters the scene,

> ADDISON: I'm not getting any younger, you know, and I always planned to have one. It's just … well, now; *clearly* a man is not on the cards for me. I mean this is Addison, post-McDreamy, post-McSteamy and I just have to —
> NAOMI: Mc' what?
> ADDISON: Forget it. You know what, lets never Mc- anything. A baby: that is my answer. Find a sperm donor, have a baby. My new dream … a baby. ("Other Side of This Life: Part 1")

The McDreamy and McSteamy are the names that the interns in Seattle Grace have given to Derek and Mark respectively, and Addison's use of the idolised nicknames connects her desire for a child with the overly sexualised innuendos suggesting that the men's rejection, which she has not yet recovered from, has caused her to seek Naomi's skills as a fertility specialist. The conversation with Naomi's cautionary comments on how a baby is 'more of a crying, puking non-answer' than an 'answer' and Meredith's implication in her opening voiceover that the dream is really a nightmare, only foreshadows the results of the fertility tests. Later on, at Naomi's house, Addison is considering potential sperm donors as Naomi strikes up a conversation over Addison's decision, 'Are you sure you want to do this?' she asks Addison, 'your life is really gonna change'. The camera backs up from Addison, providing a long-shot of her walking to a wine bottle, 'that's why I'm doing this,' Addison argues, as the camera cuts to a close-up of her face, 'I want my life to change. I *need* … my life to change'.[27] Like Mark, Addison perceives the possibility of a child as a decisive moment in which her life will change for the better.

Considering the similarities between the two plots, it is discernible that Addison will not find the fulfilment she so desires, at least not in the form of a child. This understanding, for the audience, is brought to fruition when Naomi informs Addison that she is infertile. Again the audience is reminded of her disastrous relationships with Derek and Mark and her abortion, as Addison exclaims, 'I'm finally ready to have a baby, and I

[27] Emphasis in original text.

can't. That is so … *exactly* what my life is. Exactly what my life is'. "Part 1" ends with Addison in the elevator, the camera alternates between a mid-shot of her and an overhead shot, as she breaks down, screaming at the disembodied voice in the elevator to 'Shut Up! Shut up, shut up, Shut Up!'. Softly Brandi Carlile's song "Turpentine" (2007) begins to play. The camera shots and Addison's emotional state present her as very vulnerable at this point. As she slides down the side of the elevator to sit on the floor, Carlile's lyrics dominate the scene:



Fig. 6.5 *Grey's S03E22* 00:42:38
Addison as she is leaving the practice after finding out that she is infertile. Her reaction, contained and restricted to the space of the elevator is presented through a focus on her body, has she hits herself on her forehead repeatedly. She then slides down the wall, and rolls herself into a ball as if to find a way to maintain and contain her identity as yet again, her body betrays her.

> These days we go to waste like wine
> That's turned to turpentine.
> It's six AM and I'm all messed up
> I didn't mean to waste your time. ("Turpentine")

The impression is that, comparable to the 'wine' in the song that goes to ruin, Addison has wasted her fertile years with infidelity. The camera zooms into a close up of Addison as she huddles on the floor; she lifts her head, sniffs and closes her eyes for a moment, then nods slightly, as she says, 'Alright then', between the lines of the song and the scene fades to black with the lyrics, 'So I'll fall back in line / But I'm warning you we're growing up' ("Turpentine"). Addison, as the song indicates, is growing up. The next time that Addison enters the elevator is in the middle of Episode Twenty-three where she apologises to the Voice:



Fig. 6.6 *Grey's S03E22* 00:00:00
Addison's breakdown in the elevator continues as she crouches on the floor, her figure small and enclosed in an already small space. The overall effect is an encroaching depression which eventually transforms Addison from her child-like depiction (best witnessed in the episode's opening) to that of an adult-like temperament.

> ADDISON: Hello? Hello? Are you there … Elevator god? It's me, Addison.
> VOICE: What?
> ADDISON: Hi.
> VOICE: Hi.
> ADDISON: Okay, look, you may be a figment of my imagination, or maybe I'm going completely insane, I don't know. Or maybe … this is

> payback for my crimes on some ginormous karmic level, I don't know. I just … I just want to tell you I'm sorry for yelling at you. Okay?
>
> VOICE. Okay. ("Other Side of This Life: Part 2")

Her assumption that the disembodied voice she imagines, as well as her circumstances as being both single and infertile are 'payback for [her] crimes', indicates that she believes that her situation and thus her abortion are worthy of punishment. This calls into question Addison's choice of aborting the baby in the first place and the rejection of all the men in her life as retribution. With the loss of a baby Addison now needs to find an alternate 'dream' and "The Other Side of This Life: Part 2" begins and ends with Naomi offering Addison a position and partnership in the co-op practice. Meredith's voiceover presides over the episode's ending, explaining how 'we find ourselves faced with a fresh dream we never considered', indicating that Addison will be taking up the offer, and true to that expectation, Addison leaves *Grey's* at the end of the third season and joins the cast of *Private Practice*.

Addison's body, on a less visually gruesome level, then becomes the locus of the abortion narrative and its effects. Her continual search for control of her body and her urges, from affair, to pregnancy, to abortion, to affair, to an attempted pregnancy, are all demonstrative of her lack of bodily control which leads to a breakdown of self. Reminiscent of Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject, albeit in a rather nuanced and non-traditional usage of abjection, Addison is a physical representation of the abject in action. Her body rebels against her and yet, as "The Other Side of This Life: Part 1" and "Part 2" demonstrate, it is not only her body that she lacks control of, but also her mind and emotions. Defining herself as lover, wife, adulteress, not-mother and then potential mother, she begins to disintegrate in front of the audience. The elevator, an appropriately confining space, becomes representative of her own perceived subjectivity that is isolated and imprisoned. In some ways, Addison represents a kind of naiveté on a social level while the betrayal of her body and mind, represented by her affair, abortion, infertility and breakdown, can be seen as an attempt at depicting the politics of womanhood, which include the politics of reproductive rights at a sentimental and naïve level. She looks for simple and fast solutions to her problems by having an affair, obtaining an abortion and later by having a child. That none of these options resolves her immediate problems suggests that their oversimplification is representative of the oversimplification of the social and political issues revolving around women within American politics. Even in *Private Practice*, where Addison continues to

define herself based on her bodily ability to bear a child, brings to light the dichotomy of motherhood and womanhood.

Feminist Iris Young, applying philosopher Merleau-Ponty's theoretical construct of the lived body, considers pregnancy in her essay *Pregnant Embodiment* (1984). Young argues that pregnancy is an ambiguous form of subjecthood, which 'reveals a paradigm of bodily experience in which the transparent unity of self dissolves and the body attends positively to itself at the same time that it enacts its projects' (Young 46). The unity of subjecthood as a lived experience is not only fluid during pregnancy, when the position of subject/other is complicated by the status of the mother as 'other', as biological carrier rather than a 'subject', an autonomous being. The physicality of pregnancy is transposed onto womanhood before pregnancy, into the hegemonic discourse of fulfilment and attainment of the wants of women. Women become inherently (m)othered and in being defined as such, their capacity for erecting the borders of the subject/other which Kristeva deems so necessary for the attainment of meaning, through rejection of the abject, becomes twisted by societal norms (Young 48). Such norms, fashion upon the woman an identity of mother/other, while demanding that the bodies attain a certain level of self-subject. Addison negotiates this pathway by idolising the notion of motherhood, superimposing onto her own existence the ideological imperative that woman equals mother. The depiction of Addison's narrative is engulfed with emotional distress and sentimentality, and the chosen soundtracks assist in creating the devastating tone that becomes symbolic of Addison, her abortion and the after-effects of the decision. As her body becomes the centre of an ideological positioning of the (m)other, *Grey's* creates space to engage in abortion rhetoric, albeit in a rather simplistic fashion, by simultaneously allowing for the punishment narrative to resonate with those who perceive Addison's abortion as morally objectionable, while still attempting to consider the complexities of the embodied experience in which womanhood is defined.

Unlike Addison's narrative, which starts from the middle of Season Three and continues until its end, Cristina Yang (Sandra Oh) has two abortion narratives which influence and define a large portion of her story throughout the show's runtime. The first narrative originates in Season One, when Cristina, as a first year surgical intern begins a sexual relationship with her boss, Doctor Preston Burke (Isaiah Washington), the chief cardiothoracic surgeon at Seattle Grace. Cristina discovers that she is pregnant in Episode

Seven, “The Self Destruct Button” and schedules an appointment for an abortion in Episode Eight, “Save Me”. Given that the first season is only nine episodes long, the abortion is scheduled to take place in Season Two. The second abortion narrative involving Cristina begins in Season Seven and the fallout over it continues into Season Ten. For the purposes of this chapter, the focus will be on the last few episodes of Season Seven and then Season Eight, where most of the abortion related drama unfolds.

“The Self Destruct Button” sees Meredith and Cristina, both of whom are sleeping with their bosses, having to face the consequences of their actions. Meredith’s friends realise that she is sleeping with Derek, and Doctor Miranda Bailey (Chandra Wilson), upon discovering their relationship in the previous episode, begins punishing Meredith for her illicit relationship. Meanwhile, Cristina and Burk’s relationship is unknown to everyone in the hospital, making the challenges that Cristina faces more personal and secretive. The episode begins with Cristina thinking that she has the flu, and she accuses Burk of passing it onto her.



Fig. 6.7 *Grey's S01E07* 00:10:48
Cristina (left) as she accuses Burk (right) of passing the flu onto her.

> BURKE: Hey. Whoa. Got the flu?
> CRISTINA: Yeah, and thanks for it. It’s making my life so much easier.
> BURKE: I didn’t give it to you. It’s all over the hospital. You should be in bed.
> CRISTINA: Disease, diagnosis and prescription from one man. (“Self Destruct Button”)

The camera provides a tracking shot of Cristina and Burk as they walk down a hallway. A section of percussion instruments from *Grey*’s main theme plays in the background, adding a playful tone to the scene. The scene itself is humorous, playing on the lack of vital information — Christina’s pregnancy — through both the soundtrack and the dialogue. Burk, in this instance, did really ‘give it to [her]’, ‘it’however, was not the flu.

The realisation that she is pregnant occurs at the end of "The Self Destruct Button" as Cristina sits in the disabled bathroom holding a pregnancy test. The camera cuts from frame to frame nine different times during the scene showing Cristina's growing incredulity at her surprise pregnancy. Imbedded in the scene is pop-rock band Wilco's song "Hummingbird" (2004) which carols about existence, fleeting moments and pain. The camera tracks a close up of a used pregnancy test, then to Cristina's face, then jumps to a mid-shot of her, then further away, until at last the camera settles on a long-shot of Cristina as she scrambles for more test-sticks. The series of camera shots produce a feeling of panic, as if the camera, and thus the audience, cannot distance themselves far enough away from the new found crisis of pregnancy ("Self Destruct Button"). Here, the composition of the shots as well as the framing, mimic the hummingbird's sharp fluttering movements, adding to the overall effect of Cristina hovering over multiple pregnancy tests. Such a depiction gives credence to the expression 'take flight' and reflects her inward desire to react through the psychological 'flight response' while her physical positioning indicates how this is one predicament that she cannot easily escape from. The camera then cuts to an extreme close up of the test-stick, positioned in front of the upper section of Cristina's face, her eyes are wide as they stare down at the exposed test.



Fig. 6.8 *Grey's S01E07* 00:40:49
Cristina sits wedged in the corner of the disabled bathroom looking at a pregnancy test. Her location in the disabled bathroom is an allusion to Cristina's body, which through the pregancy reveals its betrayal, that is, for her, just as incapacitating as if she were disabled.

The sense of entrapment that was apparent in the disabled bathroom scene follows Cristina throughout Episode Eight "Save Me". First she is assigned to a psych-patient who claims to have visions that are, according to the doctors, actually seizures. During an exam, the patent, Mr Duff (Kevin Rahm), has a seizure and when he recovers, he turns to Cristina and says, 'I wouldn't have picked you for the mommy track, Nurse Betty. […] This pregnancy thing, you can't run away from it'. When she asks to be reassigned Doctor Bailey places her on her own case, Mrs Glass, a 47 year old woman with late-stage breast cancer, who, as it turns out, is pregnant. As soon as Bailey informs Cristina of the case's details the



Fig. 6.9 *Grey's S01E08* 00:12:21
An extreme long shot of Cristina (off-centre) after she is assigned the cancer case. Her still form, constrasting with the activity of her surroundings,is indicative of her emotional turmoil.

camera tracks into a mid-close up with a focus on Cristina's shocked and dismayed face and then cuts to an overhead shot of Cristina, motionless as the rest of the hospital's staff go about their business. In this shot, she looks small and isolated. In the background the music begins to sound like white noise, signalling a disruption in Cristina's attempts to escape the realities of her pregnancy and a potential breakdown of her own constructed reality ("Save Me").

Like Addison's emotional breakdown that causes her to disassociate from reality, Cristina begins to internalise the pregnancy and her body becomes a biological cage that she cannot escape. Elizabeth Grosz's developing theory of the embodied subject found within her body of work, but particularly evident in her *Volatile Bodies* (1994), begins with an attempt to conceptualise the outside of the body, inside. She uses theoretical bodies of work which focus on how the unconscious and conscious (the internal elements of ontology) are the centre of subjectivity, such as psychoanalysis, neuropsychology and phenomenology; she then moves to reread the embodied subject through the philosophical readings of Nietzsche, Foucault, Deleuze and other thinkers who inscribe on the body external elements to provide internal subjectivity (Grosz *Volatile Bodies* 27, 62, 86, 115, 38, 60). The intent is to rewrite the already known theory of the body and ontology, to reflect a rejection of mind/body dualism, or at least to further complicate such theory, especially with the incorporation of feminist theorists such as Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler.

Grosz argues that 'the body must be understood through a range of disparate discourses and not simply restricted to naturalistic and scientific modes of explanation' (Grosz *Volatile Bodies* 20). Both Cristina and Addison provide spaces within *Grey's* to explore the embodied experience, especially because they are trained in the medical profession, the origin of the mind/body binary which dictates that the body is, either a machine-like object which the mind controls through logic and order, or a blank slate upon which society writes its ideological and normative discourse (Grosz *Volatile Bodies* 31-2,

117-20). The importance of the progression away from such a dualistic theoretical construct for feminism, is depicted in both Addison and Cristina's unexpected pregnancies: The mind/body divide argues for the superiority of the mind that then controls the body. Kristeva and other feminist theorists note the ability of the female body to change drastically. Recalling Young's observations of the pregnant subject as ambivalent subject/other, the female body is depicted as one that morphs itself, in effect, mutating. Young recounts such destabilisation of both physical and ontological boundaries. Regarding 'a body subjectivity that is de-centred, myself in the mode of not being myself', where there is no clear sense of where the 'body ends and the world begins', pregnancy is the experiencing of the self as 'a source and participant in a creative process' (Young 48-9, 54). Given the naturalistic inclination of the dominate cultural norms which expect the woman to one day become the pregnant subject and thus the mother, such ambivalence towards subjectivity and identity as a singular entity or a dual one (here both mother and woman/mother and potential child) is pre-imposed on to the woman as already other to herself.

Cristina's pregnancy is only realised through her bodily existence, the 'flu' which she supposed she had. For Cristina, pregnancy is much like a cold, an impediment to her life and best 'handled' quickly and without much fuss. The parallel narrative of Mrs Glass and her diseased yet pregnant body, with Cristina's own pregnancy is important. In order to treat the cancer, the foetus will need to be, as Bailey explains, 'evacuated', a euphemism for abortion. Mrs Glass sees her pregnancy, after years of trying to become pregnant, as a miracle. At first, she decides to terminate the pregnancy and Bailey orders Cristina to perform the evacuation, which is ironic because to her own impending abortion. Before she can go through with the process, Mrs Glass changes her mind and decides to keep the child:

> MRS GLASS: My mom died of breast cancer when she was in her 40s. I have that cancer gene. My chances are pretty much lose-lose, whichever way you look at it, except for the baby. We're keeping it.
> CRISTINA: I'll call down a psych consult.
> MRS GLASS: Don't bother. I am going to get fat and happy, instead of skinny and bald.
> CRISTINA: Look, if you want to live …
> MRS GLASS: Honey, *that's* what I'm doing. ("Save Me")

Cristina is unable to reconcile Mrs Glass's decision with her own, as she has chosen her life as a surgeon over the life of the foetus she is carrying. Her question to Mrs Glass,

'whose life are you interested in saving?', is at this stage in the episode a rhetorical question, and aimed more towards Cristina than her patient ("Save Me"). Her anger at Mrs Glass has more to do with her own inability to want and have her own child, than as it does with the acceptance that Mrs Glass would rather die so that her child can live. The parallel narratives also allow space within *Grey's* for commentary on the multiplicity of an embodied existence — an acknowledgement that the body-in-location means that each individual's experience differs, being established as it is on their own embodied subjectivity.

Episode One of Season Two, "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head" finds Cristina informing Meredith of her pregnancy and her appointment, after being forced by the abortion clinic to select 'a person' to be available while the abortion is being performed. The episode opens with Cristina and Meredith in the bar across the road from the hospital. Meredith challenges everyone to a game of 'who's life sucks the most' as she tells Cristina of Derek's surprise marriage. Cristina counters Meredith's revelation with her own about the pregnancy. Also within this first episode of Season Two, Burk, anxious over his career should his relationship with Cristina be discovered, officially breaks up with her and both women find themselves in Joe's bar at the end of the episode ("Raindrops Keep Falling").



Fig. 6.10 *Grey's S02E01* 00:40:16
Cristina (left) and Meredith (right) commiserate over the each others loss in Joe's Bar at the end of the episode, while re-establishing their own personal bond.

Still waiting for her scheduled abortion appointment, Cristina's pregnancy causes a stir in Episode Three, "Make Me Lose Control". This episode is all about exposed secrets, and therefore, both Meredith's secret of her mother's Alzheimer's, and Cristina's pregnancy, are revealed in the most public manner possible. While everyone is trying to acclimatise to Meredith's secret after her mother is admitted to the hospital, Cristina is assigned to a surgery with Burk. Already awkward due to their recent breakup, Burk notices Cristina's dreamy countenance during surgery and he begins testing her regarding the technical aspects. The camera jumps between point of view shots from Cristina's perspective, which fade in and out, as if she is having difficulty focusing and quick shots of her surroundings that seem to be handheld sequences, lurching and unsteady. The blurring of images and the constant movement add to with the extreme brightness of the

lighting and overwhelm the senses, giving the audience an impression of Cristina's disorientation before she collapses. The music, Róisín Murphy's "Ruby Blue" (2005) is harsh to the ears, with a distorted bass guitar forming the melody of the song while Murphy's high pitched voice and rhythmic clapping enhances the pandemonium that Cristina's collapse causes. Cristina tells Doctor Izzie Stevens (Katherine Heigl), friend and fellow intern, that she is pregnant as she is wheeled away in a gurney, and Addison is called in to assess her condition. She discovers Cristina's ectopic pregnancy and rushes her to surgery. Cristina loses both the baby and fallopian tube ("Make Me Lose Control").



Fig. 6.11 *Grey's S02E03* 00:20:56
An over the shoulder shot, presenting Burks P.O.V of Cristina who appears inattentive and disinterested during open heart surgery in his OR.

Comparable to Addison's abortion narrative where we witness her numerous failed attempts to reclaim her body as a vehicle of control, which eventually places her in a state of disarray, both emotionally and physically, so too does control (and bodily control) appears to be the recurring theme between the pregnancy/abortion distinctions for Cristina. Because Addison's abortion happened off-screen, all that the audience are allowed to witness is the aftermath. For Cristina, the discovery of the pregnancy, the scheduling of the abortion and then, once more the betrayal of the body, again situates her within her bodily existence. Within this scene, like the pregnancy test scene in terms of the realisation of a loss of control, the soundtrack's cacophonic music, the overly bright lights and blurring of the visual field of the frame, constitute the camera's endeavour to situate the viewer within Cristina's bodily existence as well. This allows that feeling of loss of control to transfer from Cristina onto the audience.

Years later, Cristina is already considered a gifted cardiothoracic surgeon and is married to the head of trauma, Doctor Owen Hunt (Kevin McKidd). Therefore, when she discovers she is pregnant at the end of Season Seven, her decision to go ahead with an abortion is less socially acceptable than when she booked a similar appointment in Season One. Episode Twenty-Two, the last episode of Season Seven, "Unaccompanied Minor", where virtually every character experience failures of character. Meredith's tampering with a clinical trial while attempting to save the life of the Chief of Surgery Doctor Richard

Webber's (James Pickens Jr.) wife, is discovered. Her then-husband, Derek, promptly abandons her, just as a social worker declares them fit to adopt the baby Zola. Alex, in an attempt to win the position of Chief Resident from Meredith, is the one who exposes her deception to Owen. Cristina, having just found out that she is pregnant immediately informs Owen, expecting him to support her in the decision to abort; only to find out that he wants the child. Both refuse to listen to each other and their relationship promptly disintegrates. In between all the drama, the doctors wait in the trauma area of the hospital, for any possible survivors from a 747 plane crash. In the end, the only survivor is a young girl, an unaccompanied minor, who was on her way to visit her grandparents ("Unaccompanied Minor").

The episode as a whole, has a darker ambience than most of the episodes preceding it. One of the reasons for this is the lighting effects. Traditionally, *Grey's*, like most television dramas, has followed the three-point light set up, which helps separate the characters from the background, providing a constant light source which surrounds the actors from all sides. Within this episode, the backlight is often missing, and the characters are often hidden in the shadows, merging with the mise-en-scène. This is particularly true of the interaction between Cristina and her husband during and after the scenes where she informs him of her pregnancy. Cristina drags him into an unused trauma room. The lights are off and the blinds are closed. Without any preparation she blurts out, 'I'm pregnant' as the camera jumps to Owen. His expression moves from surprise to elation and he quickly moves to her side, reaching to place his hand over her womb. Cristina jerks away from his touch:



Fig. 6.12 *Grey's S07E22* 00:12:19
Owen (right) attempting to talk Cristina (left) into having a baby.

> CRISTINA. No, no. I-I am not this uh, uh, beautiful vessel for all that might be good about the future. I'm *not* carrying your hopes and dreams. *No*.
> OWEN. *I* get to talk. I'm here. There's two of us. We are a partnership. […] I know who you are. I know what you want. I love you. I don't love the incubating potential of your womb. I love you. […] But … I think there's a way …
> CRISTINA. No, *no*! ("Unaccompanied Minor")

Cristina keeps retreating from Owen as he advances towards her, pushing her back, with his body and words, until her back is, quite literally, against a wall. Owen talks about her impending motherhood as if it is fact and becomes dazed when she implies that an abortion is an option:

> CRISTINA. I don't want a baby.
> OWEN. Well, you have one.
> CRISTINA. Are … Are you getting all *life-y* on me?
> OWEN. How late are you?
> CRISTINA. That does not matter.
> OWEN. Of course it matters!
> CRISTINA. Okay, fine. You tell me when life begins. You know, I can't … I can't wait to hear this one. ("Unaccompanied Minor")

The tension between the married couple continues throughout the episode and Owen and Cristina meet twice more to discuss the pregnancy. The second time Owen seeks Cristina out, finding her outside the hospital. Even outdoors, the scene is dull, the backdrop bringing the grey walls of the hospital into stark focus in the scene as they tower behind Owen and his wife. Cristina and Owen sit on opposite sides of a dark green bench as Owen asks for a compromise. Cristina, incredulous, turns to her husband for the first time since he sat down, and spits out her rage filled exasperation:

> CRISTINA. You know what? There is no compromise. You *don't* have half a baby. I don't want one. Okay. I — it isn't about work. This isn't a scheduling conflict. I don't want to be a mother. ("Unaccompanied Minor")

The scene, first shot with a wide-angled long-shot of the two on the bench, cuts between both of them as they argue and then frames both of them together in a shot, which enhances the physical and emotional opposition that they hold towards the topic. The scene ends much like the previous confrontation between the two, unresolved and bitter ("Unaccompanied Minor").

The last scene involving Cristina and Owen is at the end of "Unaccompanied Minor". Cristina arrives home and, finding Owen already there, tells him that she has scheduled an appointment for an abortion. The lighting is even darker than the scene within the hospital trauma room, and Cristina and Owen are bathed in shadows. Added to that, they are both wearing dark clothing and the only visible parts of their bodies are their faces and hands. Distance plays a large role in this scene. Where previously, Owen had continued

to press into Cristina's personal space even as she avoided him, here neither character attempts to seek the other out. The camera often frames the couple with one in the foreground and the other in the background, blurred and non-descript, indicating the level of isolation their attitudes over the pregnancy have placed them in. There is also no background noise in this scene. Where the bench scene allowed for birds and cars to be heard, here the spaces between the dialogues are extended, enhancing the already palpable hostility. Both Owen and Cristina turn away from each other at some point during the conversation, unable and unwilling to empathise with each other. As Cristina turns her back on him, heading for the bed, Owen calls out to her, 'You don't decide this without me. Do you see me standing here?' With her back turned, she is not able to see him, nevertheless, the point is made silently, that even if she could see him in this moment, her position would remain the same regarding the abortion, and that is the problem. Owen calls on her to have the child, likening it to a sacrifice on her part. This attitude is also presented as problematic:



Fig. 6.13 *Grey's S07E22* 00:37:47
Cristina in the foreground after she tells Owen about the abortion appointment.

> OWEN. You *give* in a marriage. You make sacrifices. I've made many. And I am asking you to do something for me. Can you simply consider doing something for *me*?
> CRISTINA. Have a baby? This isn't pizza versus thai. You don't give a little on a baby. ("Unaccompanied Minor")

This idea of sacrifice is a problematic one regarding popular culture's notion of womanhood and motherhood, and is inclusive in Dow's arguments of naturalising womanhood to incorporate motherhood. Sacrifice is, accordingly, a part of being a good mother, and thus a good woman (Dow 90-91). Given the popular perceptions of the impact that working mothers have on children, the inclination is for women to adapt to their status as first pregnant and then mother, dedicating their attention towards their offspring rather than the public sphere. This abortion narrative is a great deal more socially 'improper' because of Cristina's positioning as being financially and socially (in her marriage at least) stable. Accordingly, her current circumstances present the optimal 'time' for her to accept her status of mother. Their inability to agree on the subject leads Owen to throw Cristina out of the house, and she flees to Meredith for support. By this point, Meredith has thrown

Alex out of her house for his actions against her, Derek has left her and social services has placed Zola, her adopted baby, in her care. Her house is empty save for the new baby when Cristina unlocks the door with her own keys.

> MEREDITH. Oh. I was hoping you were Derek. Sorry. Well, he took off. And the hospital gave *me* a *baby*. She's upstairs sleeping in some dead kid's porta-crib.
> CRISTINA. Wow … uh, I'm getting an abortion … And Owen just kicked me out of my house.
> MEREDITH. What? You're …
> CRISTINA. Pregnant.
> MEREDITH. And you're …
> CRISTINA. Getting an abortion. ("Unaccompanied Minor")

The parallel narratives of Meredith and Cristina converge at this point. Both have been abandoned by their husbands over actions that, while morally problematic, were ones they felt to be necessary. Both, in their own ways, are landed with a child that they were unprepared to deal with, Derek having originally pushed the idea of adopting onto Meredith, who is fearful of being a bad mother. Neither one of them is in any position to judge the other, even if they wanted to, which clearly they do not. The episode ends with Meredith's voiceover as Cristina sleeps on the couch, too emotional about her own pregnancy to be near Meredith's new baby, while, upstairs, Meredith rocks Zola to sleep as she unsuccessfully attempts to call Derek:

> MEREDITH VO: Losing love is like organ damage. It's like dying. The only difference is … Death ends. ("Unaccompanied Minor")

As mentioned earlier on in this chapter, there are parallels between the characters' narratives and the plot of the episodes. The more turbulent a character's issues within an episode, the more destructive and traumatic the general events occurring within the hospital are. The analogy of the Boeing 747 crash and the traumas experienced by the families and the hospital personnel who anxiously wait for survivors, serves to represent Cristina's pregnancy. Her determination to obtain an abortion, coupled with Owen's own reaction means that the event is, literally, equated to the devastation of the plane crash. More than a little hyperbolic, such a parallel returns the season and the show to the question of definitions of womanhood and motherhood. That Owen's first act after hearing about the pregnancy is to reach toward Cristina's abdomen, and then to declare that, 'There's two of us' is suggestive that there are, actually, three, but that Christina is now an amalgamation

of two individuals, becoming less than herself while her subjecthood is problematised by the subject/object binary of Young's investigation of womanhood and motherhood. Because Addison's abortion had already occurred, Mark's role as silent victim only focused on his lack of suitability as father, although, present in the episode is a wary acknowledgement regarding the judgment passed, as if the assumptions made about Mark might not be absolute. Owen, however, is a present participant and immediately begins to blur the border of Cristina's identity. Returning to Young's ambiguous presentation of pregnancy, in which she repetitively mentions the problematic distinction between the mother as subject and mother as object, and which I argue, is often pre-imposed upon the figure of 'woman' within Western cultural considerations, is seen within Christina's abortion narrative. As Young states:

> [Pregnancy and motherhood signal a] transition to a new self that she may both desire and fear. She fears a loss of identity, as though on the other side of the birth she herself became a transformed person, such that she would 'never be the same again' (Young 54).

Cristina is aware of this potential change, and as seen within Season Ten's 'what if' Episode Seventeen "Do You Know?", Cristina does have the capacity to become a mother and be happy, but she will no longer be the same Cristina Yang who lives for heart transplants and complicated medical procedures. Although there is no traumatic experience of abortion — indeed the show provides a straightforward beginning of the procedure before, which is in contrast to *Grey's* usual blasé attitude towards gore and death on the screen (including close ups of bursting spleens, rupturing hearts and impaled heads and torsos), it omits the actual medical sequence. The focus of Cristina's abortion, even with its momentary presence on-screen, is of the repercussions of having chosen to abort. There is glaring comparisons between *Grey's* as a medical drama, which deals with healing bodies, and saving lives, in comparison to both Addison and Cristina's abortion narratives. Addison and Cristina's narratives display different forms of bodily and social displacement of the characters. Both women also have a continued interaction with children — Addison with her neonatal practice and her search for a child of her own; and Cristina through her role as god-mother to Zola.

Season Eight opens as dramatically as Season Seven ended. Titled "Free Falling", Episode One commences with the collapse of a huge sinkhole in the middle of Seattle. As

the traumas roll into the E.R., the fallout from the last episode "Unaccompanied Minor" is still being experienced by all of the characters. Despite Webber's attempt to protect Meredith, the board fires her. When the social worker becomes suspicious about Meredith and Derek's relationship Zola is removed from their care. As Meredith fights to keep her child, Cristina is fighting to terminate hers. Owen, having thrown her out of their home in the last season, is unaware that she has yet to go through with the abortion. Later Cristina explains her hesitancy at obtaining the abortion to Meredith:

> MEREDITH. And maybe you want to be a mom, too, and that's why you can't go through with it.
> CRISTINA. I wish I wanted a kid. I wish I wanted one so bad, 'cause then this would be easy. I would be *happy*. I'd have Owen, and my life wouldn't be a mess. But I don't. I don't want a kid. I mean, I don't want to make jam. I-I don't want to carpool. I really, really, really don't want to be a mother. I want to be a surgeon, and please … get it. I need someone to get it. And I wish that someone was Owen. I wish that — that … that at any minute, he'll get it and show up for me, but that's not gonna happen. And you're my *person*. I need you to be there at 6:00 tonight to hold my hand,'cause I am scared, Mer, and sad, 'cause my husband doesn't get that. So I need you to. ("Free Falling")

The camera alternates between a mid-shot of Meredith and mid-shot to close up of Cristina as she delivers her soliloquy. At one point, Cristina turns away from Meredith to look at the children playing in the day-care room. The different framing shots help place Cristina's needs into better perspective, and despite the morbidity of inserting a shot of children playing, into the dialogue of Cristina's decision to have an abortion, it only intensifies the understanding and sympathy projected towards her ("Free Falling").

Eventually it is Meredith who confronts Owen about the abortion. She tells Owen that 'I was raised by a Cristina. My mother was a Cristina' and that the guilt her friend will feel, 'of resenting her own kid will eat her alive'. Owen appears to have listened to Meredith as he goes looking for Cristina. When they finally meet near the end of the episode, Owen looks at her, shakes his head and exclaims, 'You'd cut off my leg for me, wouldn't you?'

> CRISTINA. Well, I wouldn't botch it like that guy did. I'd leave you a good stump so you could get a prosthesis.
> OWEN. When's the appointment?
> CRISTINA. Uh, um … Now.
> OWEN. Okay.
> Cristina. Okay.

> OWEN. Let's go.
> CRISTINA. I … Oh, god. [cries] ("Free Falling")

Cristina, with the support of her husband, finally goes through with the abortion. Despite *Grey's* having a reputation of being overly graphic with its representation of surgeries, the actual abortion scene only presents the preparation of the abortion, rather focusing on the build-up to the operation. This suggests that the narrative and the show's focus is more on the sentimental and emotional renderings of the issues. The 'abortion scene' centres on close-ups of both Cristina and Owen, with an extreme close up of them clasping hands stressing Owen as the supporting figure, despite his devastation when the abortionist asks one last time if Cristina is sure. Again the scene is cast in low-key lighting, darkening the scene's overall distribution of light. Unlike in the previous Owen/Cristina scenes where such lighting has indicated a claustrophobic and aggressive environment, now such lighting is used to present an intimate and private scene between Cristina, her husband and the abortion. This is supported by the soft melodic background music of guitar, drums, piano and voice. Still, regardless of the overall gentle ambiance, Owen remains upset about the abortion, and the overarching darkness in the scene may indicate that, for him, his support cannot be equated with consent ("Free Falling").

For the first four months following the abortion Owen and Cristina appear, on the surface, to be mending their relationship. As Owen and Derek commiserate over their problematic wives in Episode Five, "Love, Loss and Legacy" Owen makes it clear he has yet to fully forgive Cristina.

> DEREK. Every time I think I've moved on. I've started to forgive her, something else comes up, and I'm right back where I was.
> OWEN. You know, Cristina and I, we just … We just we went through something, and I know how you feel. [sigh] It's not easy. You — *they* … don't make it easy. ("Love, Loss and Legacy")

Owen's resentment is also apparent when he watches Cristina interacting with an ill Zola, who has been brought in by the social worker. After having had surgery, Zola remains at the hospital overnight and Cristina agrees to watch her for Meredith and Derek. Cristina's interaction with Zola is exquisite and it is clear that Owen, who watches her, is imagining his own child being on the receiving end of Cristina's maternal actions. The camera centres on Cristina and Zola, with shots of Cristina holding Zola up so that they are face to face as the baby smiles and gurgles at Cristina ("Love, Loss and Legacy"). Owen situated in the

middle of the frame is distorted by the focal lens and as Cristina continues to talk to Zola the shot alters so that it is Owen who becomes the dominant figure in the shot and both Zola and Cristina's faces blur into the edge of the frame. His expression, a repeat of the one he wore during the abortion scene, is etched with despair, loss and helplessness as Cristina, having rejected his own child dotes on someone else's baby. Despite the stairwell confession with Derek and his painful observations of Cristina and Zola together, Owen does sincerely attempt to resolve his marital problems.

Despite this, matters start to unravel after Episode Nine, "Dark Was The Night", when Owen orders an ignorant Cristina to operate on her friend and mentor's husband, Henry. All the while, Henry's wife, Doctor Teddy Altman (Kim Raver), is operating on a heart in a nearby room. Cristina's surgery goes badly and Henry, whose face and identity are hidden from her, dies. Teddy blames Owen for placing the needs of the hospital over her own when he does not inform her until her own surgery is complete. She and a guilty Cristina begin chasing surgeries, as Owen grows increasingly frustrated with the pair. Eventually the fallout over Henry's death reaches its climax in Episode Twelve, "Hope for the Hopeless". Cristina steals the cardiac surgery of a man impaled through the heart for Teddy, despite Owen's direct command that both Teddy and Cristina are on stand down. When Owen confronts both women as they are performing the surgery they dismiss him.

By this time in the season, Meredith has her job back after Webber takes responsibility for her misconduct, Zola has been returned to her and Derek, and Cristina has been named godmother of the baby. After work, a number of Meredith and Derek's friends, including Cristina and Owen are invited to Zola's first birthday party. Upon arriving at Meredith's home, Owen finds Cristina once again playing with Zola and he immediately heads to the kitchen to pour himself a double shot of alcohol. "Easy to Love" (2011) by The Jezabels begins to play, with a fast heavy drum beat and female vocal, 'Well I was the one who showed you the sky / But you brought it down, down to my thighs' as Cristina enters the kitchen:

> CRISTINA. I know you're mad, and I'm sorry.
> OWEN. Sorry that you did it or you're sorry that I'm mad? ("Hope for the Hopeless")

Owen's question is like the one Mark posed to Addison in Season Three and, due to the build-up of scenes which demonstrate Owen's developing passive-aggression towards Cristina, the audience is prepared for the upcoming confrontation. Cristina is oblivious of Owen's true thoughts regarding the abortion and is baffled by his behaviour, 'This isn't about me!' she cries as Owen begins his tirade about how she never accepts the consequences of her actions. The camera jumps from Owen and Cristina's fight to the living room that is filled with co-workers and friends. Above the conversations and music, the pair's voices begin to encroach on the happiness of the party-goers. Even in the kitchen, the composition of the shots reminds the viewer of the birthday party in the background, with the occasional shot of a pink streamer or balloon. Eventually, Cristina realises that Owen has associated her conduct with Teddy with her decision to abort their baby, and shocked realisation dawns on her face,



Fig. 6.14 *Grey's* S08E12 00:40:58 (a) & 00:41:39 (b)
Above: Over the shoulder shot of Owen, with a pink balloon in the background, as he finally confronts Cristina about the abortion.
Below: Cristina's devastation is as palpable as Owen's anger as she realises the strength of the resentment over her decision to abort.

> CRISTINA. It all comes back to *this*?
> OWEN. Yeah. *Crazy*, right? That I would *ever* bring it up again!
> CRISTINA. Okay. Yes, okay? Yes. Yes! Okay, it was a horrible situation, but it's over. Is it too much to ask that we just try and forget it?
> OWEN. You *killed* our baby! You don't ever forget that! ("Hope for the Hopeless")

That camera pans to the left of Cristina after Owen's accusation settling on Meredith who has walked into the couple's argument, as she stands stunned in the doorway. The scene ends, fading to black as The Jezabels continue their song:

> Oh, let me go, let me go,
> let me go out into
> the sinful world that you know.
> That you really love
> Just let me be easy to love. ("Easy To Love")

For the rest of Season Eight, Cristina fights to keep her marriage. She and Owen attend couples therapy in Episode Fifteen, "Have You Seen Me Lately?". They start out sitting close to each other, yet by the end of the daylong session they are each squashed into the edges of the couch, with as much distance between them as possible. Owen cannot understand why Cristina does not want to be a mother, 'nobody *doesn't* want kids' he shouts at her, baffled and annoyed. Later he asks why, considering Meredith's baby, Cristina cannot want one as well. 'Twisted Sisters', the nickname for Cristina and Meredith is used as a slur by Owen while he implies that Cristina's illogical behaviour is unbecoming of a woman when even Meredith Grey, damaged and twisted as she is, has become a mother, especially when the pair 'do everything else together'. Cristina's response to Owen's onslaught is, 'I just don't want kids […] people can not want kids […] it's all right to never want kids. Some people don't ever want kids' ("Have You Seen Me Lately?").

The therapy session is a disaster as Owen constantly returns to the issue of the abortion, which was performed months before. As Cristina points out, 'You [Owen] held my hand while I exercised my right to choose'. Still, his revisiting of the same fixed point in their mutual history leaves Cristina powerless in the face of his accusations ("Have You Seen Me Lately?"). Owen becomes more distant, sleeping in the hospital rather than coming home and eventually Cristina begins to suspect that Owen is cheating on her in Episode Seventeen, "One Step too Far". Cristina eventually realises that Owen cheated on her to hurt her, as she hurt him with the abortion and she becomes inconsolable. She and Owen decide to separate, at least until Cristina has passed her board exams which are around the corner. By the end of the season, Cristina has decided to accept an offer for a fellowship programme in Michigan and to ask for a divorce from Owen. She does indeed go to Michigan for six months in Season Nine and then she returns to a much changed Seattle Grace. She re-marries Owen and then, upon realising how much Owen still wants a family, divorces him again, this time so that he can find a woman who is willing to have his child.



Fig. 6.15 *Grey's* S08E15 00:42:08
Cristina (left) and Owen (right) at the end of their couples therapy session.

Like Addison's abortion tale, Christina's narrative depicts the emotional prelude to her abortion, and the equally emotional fallout. Both women have their identities challenged. Addison's emotional breakdown in Episodes Twenty-two and Twenty-three "The Other Side of This Life", are based on her continued simplification of her troubles. Her body's repeated betrayal is symbolic of her emotional instability. As Carlile's song "Turpentine" suggests, it is time for Addison to grow up, and gain control of her life not by substituting her problems with temporary solutions, but by actually confronting her issues. She is somewhat successful in that she no longer thinks that a child will solve her problems. While Addison represents the archetype of the infertile woman as punishment for her abortion, Christina serves to challenge Addison's sentence by refusing entirely the role of 'wanting a child'. Infertility would not be a punishment for Christina, whose only interest is in her role as surgeon. Still, she baulks at the more conservative traditional roles of women and as such it is the gradual disintegration of her marriage to Owen that serves as her chastisement.

CHAPTER 7

RECYCLING THE TRAUMATIC IN THE PANG BROTHERS' *RE-CYCLE*

Like *Grey*'s the Pang Brothers' film *Re-Cycle* [*鬼域* / *Gwai wik*] (2006) presents abortion through the personal experience of protagonist, author Tsui Ting-yin (Angelica Lee). The film uses the horror genre to give expression to the emotional trauma suffered by Ting-yin as she battles unresolved associations related to the abortion that she had had eight years before. Having fallen into the realm of the abandoned, Ting-yin comes across an old man at a deserted carnival. Desperately, she asks him what 'this place' is? The old man glances towards her and instead of answering her asks, 'How did you get here?'. Misunderstanding the question, Ting-yin disjointedly recounts the events of the past hour. As the conversation progresses, the rides at the carnival begin to mysteriously move up and down and a child's voice repeatedly cries out 'Mommy?'. The old man pulls out crumpled sheets of paper from his pocket, hands them to Ting-yin and asks again, 'Don't you remember?'. Ting-yin looks at the discarded notes of her new novel, then back to the old man, murmuring, 'It all started after I'd begun writing *Re-Cycle*.' The scene, set midway through the film is important, not only because the old man provides context for the strange world that Ting-yin finds herself in ('You created this place' he discloses, '[…] this is a dimension for the abandoned […] We are here because we have been abandoned.'), but he also symbolises Ting-yin's disassociation from her past, present and future self (*Re-Cycle*).

Shadowing Tin-yin as she attempts to write her new supernatural novel 'Re-Cycle', the film mimics concepts of narrative on various levels, with the intention of disrupting and distorting reality, and revealing the politics of narrative as well as the bodily-politics of women. This is done on a sentimental level by primarily focusing on Ting-yin's emotional state. Immersed in the realm of multiple realities, the film leaves an unsuspecting Ting-yin to face her darkest secrets — an affair, an abandoned love and a reluctant abortion — which bleed out from the alternate world into the real one. The film uses all opportunities to twist the expectations of its audience while foreshadowing almost every event, as her preternatural writings open channels for movement between dimensions. Employing ideas related to existence, alternate realities, disassociated worlds, and the afterlife, connected through the motif of the aborted, *Re-Cycle* uses the literary device known as framing to produce a film about cycles, re-cycles and reincarnations.

Unlike *Grey's* which uses its representation of abortion to question women's roles within American society, *Re-Cycle* considers the emotional repercussions of refusing to deal with an abortion. The film shares some similarities with *Grey's* particularly in the construction of Ting-yin's narrative. Like *Grey's* Addison, Ting-yin has her abortion before her story begins, and both characters regret being in the position where they felt that they needed to have the abortion. It is important to point out here that neither Addison nor Ting-yin are apologetic or regretful about the abortion itself, only that they found themselves in a situation which demanded the it. Still, both of these women struggle with their choice to abort, finding themselves isolated from their male counterparts in societies that expect them to gladly sacrifice something of themselves to raise their children. Where *Grey's* focused on the cultural implications of its female character's choices to abort (although in Addison's case, there was a focus on her internal emotion state), it is in the representation of Ting-yin that one finds a consideration of the psychological implications of obtaining an abortion, which while not necessarily wanted was needed.

Following the success of her previous trilogy, Ting-yin struggles to write her next novel. Her latest work 'Re-Cycle' is about the supernatural, which as Ting-yin writes, appears to materialise slowly in the real world, taking the form of a haunting spectre. While Ting-yin grapples with formulating her novel, her ex-lover returns to Hong Kong after an eight year absence. His return signals the merging of reality and the fictional world when Ting-yin is pulled into the realm of 'the abandoned', populated by zombie-like creatures existing in an abandoned city. She is eventually rescued by a little girl who volunteers to take her to the 'transit', a location in the abandoned realm where Ting-yin can escape back into her own world. Ultimately, it is revealed that the girl is the product of an abortion, having been abandoned by her mother before her birth eight years ago, and that her mother is Ting-yin. Ting-yin successfully escapes the abandoned world, but only after reconciling with her aborted daughter, and through that with herself. Upon returning to the real world, Ting-yin is confronted with her original self, who, having written Ting-yin's bildungsroman, has deleted the far too personal narrative and, in so doing, rejected the self-discovery of her fictional self. The film ends with the pair staring at each other, while the haunting presence of the unresolved abortion begins to reappear (*Re-Cycle*).

Ting-yin's status as a successful author questions the available space for the narration of a traumatic history that is taboo. As a personal narrative of loss and haunting,

questions regarding the capability of the traumatised to create personal narratives are broached. That, by the film's end, Ting-yin the author has rejected her narrative, hints at problematising both the personal and social forms of narrative freedom. After the separation between the realms occurs off screen, Ting-yin is removed from the real world and is placed within the dimension of the abandoned. Ting-yin of the abandoned dimension enacts the narrative unknowingly written by her creator/self in the real world, and in doing so is able to confront the silence that imprisons her. The importance of narrative, of creating and telling a story, is highlighted within the United Kingdom's 'Cine du Monde' distribution label's trailer for *Re-Cycle***,** which markets the film with the tag lines 'Fantasy becomes Reality; Memory becomes Monstrous; Terror becomes Destiny; The only way to face the past is to relive it' (Cine duMonde "Recycle Trailer").

The film centres on storytelling, and whether a story can or cannot, may or may not, be told. For example, after the opening scene and credits, we are introduced to Ting-yin who expresses concern over her writer's block and the difficulty of writing another novel. She feels pressured by her publicist (Lawrence Chou) to write her next 'bestseller', just as a film adaptation of her novel 'My Love' propels her into stardom. Adding to the stress of newfound fame and writer's block, Ting-yin's former lover Yuk Ling (Viraiwon Jauwseng) returns to Hong Kong after eight years in America, recently divorced and seeking to rekindle their relationship. The writer's block suggests that she cannot give 'birth' to a new work, and as the film progresses, it is revealed that this particular version of writer's block is the result of the unresolved trauma, associated with her abortion. The camera cuts to a cinematic adaptation of the last book of her popular trilogy. Bearing similarities to William Shakespear's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), the adaptation follows two lovers who 'having met at the wrong moment, their paths *cross again*'.[28] Moments later, just as they embrace, a gunshot is heard and the camera in a 'bird's eye view' shot spirals outwards, around the corpses of the dead lovers, until it pans away from the display towards a panel of men and women in an interview room (*Re-Cycle*). Already, through the opening sequence, the line



Fig. 7.1 *Re-Cycle* 00:06:09
The dead lovers from the cinematographic adaptation of Ting-yin's novel 'My Love'.

[28] Emphasis added.

between reality and fiction is blurred. In the interview which precedes the screening, Ting-yin, answering a question from the audience, admits that although not autobiographical, 'some of it [the narrative] was my [her] own experience'. 'When I am writing,' Ting-yin explains, 'I subconsciously put myself into the character' (*Re-Cycle*). Later on it becomes clear that the star-crossed lovers' untimely and fatal end is representative of her own irreparable relationship and is a symbolic attempt to kill herself and her ex-lover.

The romantic sentimentality associated with the *Romeo and Juliet* narrative is transposed on to the death of the lovers, and to the metaphorical death of Ting-yin's creative self. It is not just a romantic tale of lost love, but rather a reflective one of lost life. It is that loss of life, which is of particular importance in the film which the Pang brothers use to create a spectacular Gothic trauma narrative embedded with emotional sentimentality. Loss of life is present at various levels within the film and assists in blurring the confining neatness of definitions to which humanity seems partial. This is one of the elements that make the film so uncomfortable, yet riveting, to watch. At this stage, Ting-yin is drastically isolated from her creativity (*Re-Cycle*). This presents the point of departure for Ting-yin from her own history, through her imagined death. The completion of the trilogy, which places her in a space of limbo, allows her unrecognised past to begin to demand her attention. While Ting-yin symbolically commits suicide in her trilogy, in real life she obtained an abortion, after her boyfriend left her

The film's opening sequence begins with the camera slowly zooming out of an extreme close up of the back of Ting-yin's head, and a soft piano melody lingers in the background. As the camera zooms out, Ting-yin is centred on the screen with her attention being focused on a whiteboard filled with writing (*Re-Cycle*). The scene introduces the importance of Ting-yin, the act of writing, and the association between them. As the shot reaches a medium close up, the depth of field deepens and the writing becomes sharper, clearer. She begins to erase it from the board; still the soft piano thrums in time to her movements. As she reaches for a new pen, the piano music is subtly replaced by an electronic grinding hum that grows louder, as a fast beat is introduced. The camera angle changes as Ting-yin moves to write on the whiteboard, positioning itself so that the camera lens becomes the whiteboard. The composition of the frame, through a shallow focus lens, situates a blurred Ting-yin in the background, while her right hand and the red marker are



Fig. 7.2 *Re-Cycle* 00:01:37
While Ting-yin is relegated to the background in this depth of field shot, it is her writing which is given precedence within this scene. The dark lighting and jarring electrical thrum of the music create a tense and threatening atmosphere, which follows the writing and Ting-yin throughout the film.

in sharp focus. While this shot captures Ting-yin as she concentrates on her writing to the exclusion of all else, it also indicates how essential her writing is to the development of the film's narrative. As the pen nears the whiteboard, the noise pulsates with nervous energy (*Re-Cycle*). When the marker's tip meets the board, which is the screen, the screen begins to fade to black, except for a spot of red. What the audience (who now become the metaphorical pages of a novel) is watching from beginning to end is the narrative she is writing.

The framing here has the added effect of gesturing towards the multiple levels of writing within the film, which become visible as the film progresses. First is the actual film itself, with the overarching metanarrative. The screening of 'My Love' at a press conference, and Ting-yin's attempt at writing her historical trauma within her supernatural novel, present two other forms of narrative, one fictional and the other confessional. The final form of narrative incorporation is found within Ting-yin's journey through the realm of the abandoned. As an author Ting-yin transfers her terminated future-mother-creator-self into her art, with no small measure of success. The level of isolation propagated within the film is visible from the opening scene, which stresses a block in the creative process with her successful self-killing narrative. The screening of 'My Love' is even more telling in that the characters do not speak, having subtitles (yet more writing) to provide context before the pair, lost in their love, are murdered or commit suicide without being able or willing to speak. Once more there is embedded ambiguity. In this scene, while Ting-yin's abortion narrative is not hinted at, it still manages to make its way to the foreground, furthering the repetition of the trauma, which will haunt all of the other narratives.

As already mentioned, Ting-yin's new novel is set in the realm of the supernatural, and as she delves deeper into her writing, so aspects of the novel begin to come alive in her apartment (*Re-Cycle*). Ting-yin creates those who will haunt her, and she begins the cycle

that will eventually lead her back to herself, albeit in an enigmatic manner. This is why the first spectre that is introduced often inhabits the same space as Ting-yin. Instead of seeing her own reflection in a glass door, Ting-yin often glimpses a figure with long black hair. In a scene that takes place fairly early in the narrative, we see Ting-yin leaning over an answering machine (*Re-Cycle*). As she straightens up from leaning over the answering machine to listen to a strange message, the camera lingers in the same position long enough to glimpse the spectre who follows her movements. She has supplied her own doppelgänger, the first of which with its spectral presence threatens in its unfamiliar and often insubstantial manifestation.



Fig. 7.3 *Re-Cycle* 00:24:56 (a) & 00:24:57 (b)
Above:Ting-yin bends over the phone's speaker to better hear the strange sounds originating from it.
Below: The doppelgänger to appear in the film, taking the form of the spectre, invades Ting-yin's space.

Such framing suggests that because they both occupy the same space, one corporeal, the other non-corporeal, the spectre is her 'double'. Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny, the strange and unsettling familiarity of something known and yet unknown, stems from the 'circumstance of the "double"' (Freud "Uncanny" 87). The 'double' for Freud, is the manifestation created to protect the ego and is a survival mechanism which 'becomes the ghastly harbinger of death' after the development of the ego (Freud "Uncanny" 86-87). As a 'harbinger', the double becomes a threatening, imposing force that was once part of the self. As such, the uncanny, the eerie feeling arising out of the unfamiliar and the forgotten, is presented through the 'double', the disassociated part of a subject which returns, haunting and threatening, thus Freud's term, 'return of the repressed' (Freud *Moses* 197; Freud "Uncanny" 87-8). The spectre that is only glimpsed on screen with fast blurry motions, marks the beginning of Ting-yin's experience with the uncanny, symbolising the return of her repressed emotions regarding her abortion.

As Ting-yin's writing progresses, so evidence of the ghost's presence increases, growing in strength whenever Ting-yin changes or deletes a section of her work. Clearly, there is a link between the progress of Ting-yin's new novel, the spectre and the idea of her

discarding obsolete ideas as she attempts to construct her new protagonist, which alludes to the film's title *Re-Cycle*, which is also the folder on a computer where deleted files are sent. Essentially, she writes her repressed experiences into being. These then take the shape of the monstrous because they are both difficult to articulate and taboo. The 'monster' provides a frightening shape, giving credence to the felt fear and desire to further repress the experience. It additionally serves as a means of positioning the spectre in relation to Ting-yin as more than just a malevolent spirit. Often one positions herself in front of the other before the camera, as if they both exist in the same space, if only for a moment. The spectre is an aspect of Ting-yin, one that has been denied a voice. However, with the return of her old lover Ling, her history can no longer be silenced, no longer be metaphysically killed off. The ghost story that the Pang Brothers have then created is a haunted narrative of past deeds, rather than past people, and this reading of the film is certainly supported by Ting-yin's literal descent into the world of the abandoned by way of her apartment building's elevator. This descent, like the creation of the dark haired 'double', is instigated by Ting-yin's own writing. This long haired apparition,is not the only ghostly element within the Pang Brothers' film. Ting-yin is also haunted by phone calls, both preceding and following her journey to the abandoned realm. These mysterious phone calls build on each other, all containing heavy breathing, static and the distant wails of an infant. Each time one of these phone calls occurs, the cries of the baby grow louder, until a recording on her answering machine captures the shrill cries of the infant, isolated from the rest of the noise (*Re-Cycle*).

Ting-yin's writing creates a bridge between realities and allows her to be pulled into the world of the abandoned. As Sally warns her friend, 'Writing about spirits brings them to life' (*Re-Cycle*). The boundaries between the worlds unravel as Ting-yin continues to write and the presence of the long-haired phantom doppelgänger and the unearthly phone calls increase. As she travels from her original reality to this new one, Ting-yin is followed by the secrets that haunted her. Following the footsteps of her protagonist, Ting-yin takes the elevator from the tenth to the ground floor. Ghostly happenings occur within the elevator, as a young girl and her grandmother enter on a different floor. As they ride down, the girl appears fascinated by Ting-yin and starts to follow her out of the building, before the grandmother calls her back: 'We're not there yet. One more floor down'. Ting-yin watches horrified as the girl and grandmother slowly sink into the floor of the elevator. A loud banging sound with an echo effect add to the otherworldly quality of the pair's actions



Fig. 7.4 *Re-Cycle* 00:36:09
Ting-yin's point of view shot as the pair of ghosts sink into the floor.

and spurs the electronic music, present throughout the scene, forward into the new scene, as Ting-yin turns to run (*Re-Cycle*). The camera cuts a number of times as Ting-yin makes her way out of the building and into the streets, until she skids to a halt. Rhythmic drums beat out a march as the camera zooms out while a wind begins to howl, presenting the first images of a barren city. A dull rust tint to the scene is effective in adding to the desolate atmosphere, as the camera takes in both the crumbled buildings stacked on top of one another and the broken cast-iron stairwells (*Re-Cycle*).

Not only is the elevator ride symbolic of her journey into her repressed trauma, but it also symbolises the next divergence within the already fragmented multi-narrative. Unknown to the audience and Ting-yin, while she descends and walks the deserted passageway that leads to her confrontation with her double, there is, sitting at the computer writing, another Ting-yin — the original Ting-yin (*Re-Cycle*). Now located within the world of the abandoned, Ting-yin becomes abandoned once more (for she had already abandoned herself once, during the abortion), the second doppelgänger, and the third example of the reoccurring trauma appears. Apart from the obvious descent into the underworld motif within the elevator scene, the appearance of the child is important for a number of reasons. The repeated wails of an infant during the phone calls, Ling's use of his wife's pregnancy and now the ghost child who stares at Ting-yin with fascination, all foreshadow Ting-yin's own abortion narrative. The generation gap, where both the grandmother and girl are dead and Ting-yin, old enough to be the child's mother, is alive, implies a break in the natural order, a break that is reiterated through Ting-yin's discovery of the unnatural world outside her apartment building.

The particular dissociation from the self which Ting-yin experiences is best explored through the uncanny doppelgänger hauntings that the film presents. The shadowy figure, whose likeness to Ting-yin's fictional protagonist is indisputable, is superimposed on Ting-yin in the real world, suggesting some deeper connection between the pair than simply that of haunter and haunted. Emphasising this connection are Ting-yin's pre-abandoned writings, in which her latest protagonist, like her protagonist in 'My Love', is a

rewriting of herself into fiction. The repetition of the notion of writing the self into fiction is unspoken in the spacing of Ting-yin and the spectre. Freud argues that doubling may occur in a number of different ways, one of them through fictional story telling, for it is a representation of the imagined material of reality. In writing 'Re-Cycle' Ting-yin enacts the 'involuntary return to the same situation' which, for Freud, hints at notions of fate, co-incidence, eerie, and uncanny happenings, which leave the subject feeling helpless, perplexed and uncomfortable (Freud "Uncanny" 87).

This return then of what was once concealed, contained and repressed, now makes its way to the foreground of the subject's existence. The resurfacing of the repressed is, due to its very nature, a source of helplessness and fear, and therefore is a threat to the subject. For this reason, Freud argues that a large portion of the uncanny is often sourced within the grotesque (Freud "Uncanny" 91). For Ting-yin, this return takes the form of her abortion and the potential life she lost through the act, the doppelgänger and the phone calls. Moments into Ting-yin's entrance into the realm of the abandoned, zombie-spirits fall from the sky and the double from Ting-yin's apartment returns to haunt her. Although now corporeal and in its own realm, the face of the spectre is not only obscured by hair but it is also blurred, making all features indistinguishable while the half rotted faces of its companions' are clearly visible (*Re-Cycle*). By portraying the antagonist as a faceless foe, the being can literally be anyone. The anger, directed specifically at Ting-yin is extremely personal, and while the zombies within this world will attack at random, this creature actively pursues Ting-yin within the world of the abandoned and across planes of existence.



Fig. 7.5 *Re-Cycle* 00:39:26
The spectre who, in Ting-yin's world appeared as an incorporeal, shadowy figure, has a stronger and more physical presence in the abandoned realm.

It is possible to argue, as I do, that this ghost is a physical manifestation of all Ting-yin's repressed and ignored emotions. Still, as incomplete as the spectre is in its corporeality, it appears to be a solid figure (*Re-Cycle*). That is until its confrontation with Ting-yin at the transit site, where the zombie-ghost, who was previously faceless and voiceless, gains both attributes. Yet, within this revelation scene where all secrets come to light, so too is the ghost's physical presence exposed as being fragmented and spliced,



Fig. 7.6 *Re-Cycle* 01:32:42
Moments before Ting-yin recognises her aborted daughter, the spectre who has haunted her is frozen revealing a fragmented presence. Ting-yin is forced to accept her abortion, and make peace with her past. This act causes the rupturing of the transit area and allows Ting-yin, finally, to be pulled into the 'real' world.

constructed so that it only looks solid, and then only from a specific point of view. Having been frozen in place in a leaping mid-air attack, the spectre's true visage is revealed when the camera pans to the side of the being, from where it appears to have been segmented. With all the revelations within the transit scene, the idea of being able to correctly perceive reality, to be connected and be able to make the necessary associations, is raised (*Re-Cycle*). Such problems of seeing and perceiving are connected to the film's tendency to problematise the issue of certainty, through its use of ambiguity. One such ambiguity is found in the labelling of the spectre, which haunts and hunts Ting-yin. Katarzyna Ancuta argues that in their depiction, 'traditional representation[s]' of 'Asian spirits retain their corporeal characteristics [making them] easy to 'explain' as zombies' (Ancuta 431).

These perceived 'zombie-spirits', these others, and more specifically, the faceless spectre, are all manifestations of Ting-yin's own self from which she has become removed. Further evidence of the fragmentation of self is provided, when, despite having two conversations with an 'old man' in the abandoned realm, Ting-yin does not recognise him as her grandfather. This lack of recognition indicates that the severance of self is more profound than her current existence suggests, actually cutting into her future and past. That the spirit leads the others on a hunt for Ting-yin through the abandoned world provides a sense of just how futile her attempted escape from her past is. The most significant aspect of the haunting/hunting trope is the juxtaposition of Ting-yin's journey through the 'abortion cavern' with that of the spectre. Ting-yin's guide, who has already saved her twice in this threatening world, advises Ting-yin to jump into a well, after the pair attract the attention of some of the other denizen's. The scene plays out in a similar fashion to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1855) as Alice falls down the rabbit hole. However, Ting-yin's fall does not have the connotations found within Carroll's metaphor

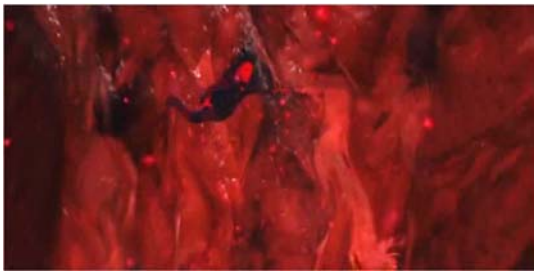

Fig. 7.7 *Re-Cycle* 01:06:49
Ting-yin's rapid decent is slowed when she enters the 'organic-bodily cavern' system.

of pursuing adventure and new ideas. Rather, Ting-yin's escape from the others by falling down the well seems like a calculated manipulation by the little girl, directing her unenlightened mother towards a gradual location of confrontation with her trauma. Ting-yin free-falls downwards, as slowly the rock face takes on a red hue and she breaches a barrier that slows her descent (*Re-Cycle*). The last moments of Ting-yin's fall into the cavern make her appear suspended in a red tinted liquid. The display's eerie appearance with its red asymmetrical walls and fluids suggests that it is organic, as if Ting-yin has dropped into the organs of a body, possibly a womb.

Ting-yin walks through with dawning horror as she begins to see what the cavern contains. Reaching upwards, she plucks a foetus off the wall and holds it in her hand. It convulses and, in fright, she drops it to the floor and runs, only to look further into the cavern where numerous foetuses either hang suspended in mid-air or are attached to the tissue-like walls and ceiling. Upon further inspection, those walls appear to be composed of foetuses, contained in flesh. Each foetus is of a different age: from days old, to weeks and months. Some are deformed, others appear healthy, and the combination of the various ages and physical conditions, implies that Ting-yin is standing in the middle of a cavern of aborted and thus abandoned foetuses. As she walks past, they twitch and moan, the camera alternately cutting from different foetuses to Ting-yin, while the sound of multiple heartbeats begins to build in the background. Becoming frantic at the gruesome sight in front of her, Ting-yin begins to panic, the heartbeats only adding to her internal disorientation and fear. One advanced foetus opens its eyes, the skull warped and tumour-filled, and sees Ting-yin. It gives a shrill cry, which causes the other aborted foetuses to stir. The camera's cuts begin to increase in speed, and the shots are brief and jarring, with close-ups, fast paced zooming and blurring all contributing to the overall discomfort and terror that the scene inspires. Horrified by her surroundings, she does not look down at her feet and steps on one of the foetuses, which then begins to cry (*Re-Cycle*). This marks a change within the cavern, as the foetuses become more active, reaching out to seize Ting-yin. Shocked and sickened, Ting-yin desperately searches for her guide and a way out of the cavern. Eventually, with the assistance of the little girl, Ting-yin is guided through the cavern's exit and



Fig. 7.8 *Re-Cycle* 01:10:00
Ting-yin carefully lifts her boot off the small foetus on the floor.

into a forest beyond. Later, the spectre who is hunting Ting-yin rampages through the cavern, ripping its way through the walls of foetuses. The fast paced and jerky movements of the camera, added to the spectre's violent actions, reverberate its hate and rage directed at Ting-yin. The continuous shot of the spectre's journey is barely a few seconds long and interrupts the bonding sequence between Ting-yin and her young guide.



Fig. 7.9 *Re-Cycle* 01:17:52

Below: Unlike Ting-yin's journey through the cavern, which was detailed, the phantom's passage is careless and rushed. She/it rips through any foetus which might impede her/its progress to catch up with Ting-yin.

In between Ting-yin's escape from the abortion cavern and the spectre's own journey through it, Ting-yin learns more about the mysterious world in which she has found herself. Using a forest as a place of reprieve, the still nameless child explains the abortion cavern to Ting-yin:

> CHILD. Still scared?
> TING-YIN. What were those things?
> CHILD. They were aborted foetuses. I feel sorry for them.
> TING-YIN. Aborted foetuses?
> CHILD. They continue to grow here. When they become adults, they have to leave there and go to a dimension where they belong.
> TING-YIN. Don't leave me alone again. You promise? I'm confused. You say the abandoned things all end up here. But why do they become so frightening? (*Re-Cycle*)

The answer to Ting-yin's question is embedded in the film's use of the abandoned and the notion of the repressed trauma, which returns in uncontrolled forms to threaten the individual. For the spectre-doppelgänger, who is so like Freud's threatening double, the deliberate rejection and repression of Ting-yin's abortion have left it furious. Its rampage through the abortion cavern is, apart from its confrontation with Ting-yin at the film's end, the most physically threatening depiction. As such, there is a definite connection between Ting-yin, her abortion/past and the haunting and hunting presence of the spectre. As Ting-



Fig. 7.10 *Re-Cycle* 01:16:12
Evoking the dead lovers within 'My Love', the camera spirals around the child and Ting-yin as they relax in a bed of wild flowers. The connotations between the two scenes indicate that, for now, Ting-yin has found what had caused her to write her metaphorical suicide within the novel.

yin and the child continue the expedition both grow weaker: Ting-yin from being in a realm where she does not belong; and the child because she is nearing the transit. Still, the child shares what strength she has with Ting-yin. Stumbling into a field of wild flowers, both take the opportunity to relax, recover, and bond. After picking wild flowers, the pair settles down in the field, to rest and talk. The camera spirals over them, reminiscent of a similar shot at the film's beginning of the dead lovers. This scene is not filled with the silence of the voiceless and the dead. Ironically, here the dead are actually given a voice, and it is that voice which assists in the reconnection of Ting-yin with herself. Strengthening the association between the losses symbolised through the lovers' deaths in 'My Love' and Ting-yin's gradual rediscovery of herself, she confesses to the child that she seems familiar:

> TING-YIN. For some reason, I feel I've seen you before. (*Re-Cycle*)

The child rolls her eyes before responding and then explains to Ting-yin how 'that's impossible', quickly changing the subject:

> CHILD. Why don't you give me a name?
> TING-YIN. All right. Then I can call you by it. How about Ting-yu? How is that?
> CHILD. Ting-yu? Good. Sounds pretty.
> TING-YIN. Ting-yu, Ting-yu. My name is Ting-yin. I like it. (*Re-Cycle*)

The naming of Ting-yu not only creates a strong connection between the two by naming the unknown daughter after herself, but in doing so, Ting-yin also names herself: 'My name is Ting-yin' she tells Ting-yu and, as such, she begins to re-establish her identity. The entire scene abounds with small examples of Ting-yin's reconnection to herself, even if she has yet to make the connection with her abortion (which, in fact is only actually disclosed to the audience during the transit scene) and her child-guide. In this way, Ting-yin of the abandoned dimension becomes the doppelgänger for Ting-yin the author, who is, at this time at her computer typing out the narrative that is unfolding on screen. Nevertheless, here she is not the threatening doppelgänger of Freud's making. Rather, doppelgänger-Ting-yin resonates with Dimitris Vardoulakis's theory of a therapeutic doppelgänger. Vardoulakis contends that the double can be read as being 'allowed to make a contribution toward an ontology of the subject' (Vardoulakis 100). Here, the doubling spoken about by Freud is not limited to a threatening subject of the repressed, which is a demonic and evil creature, meant to disseminate fear, and feelings of uncanniness, which

the return of the repressed within the uncanny is want to do. Removed from the society that led to her self-imposed isolation and dissociation from herself, Ting-yin is finally able to confront and deal with her traumatic past. That she is able to reconcile herself with her history in such a threatening environment, reveals just how alienating and threatening her original world is in relation to her silent traumatic history. It is also at this point that Ting-yin becomes more protective of Ting-yu and begins to contemplate taking Ting-yu with her when she leaves. She even asks a weakened Ting-yu if she could come with her as they arrive at the edge of the transit, only to be told that

> TING-YU. If I go to your dimension, I'll become a wandering spirit. It will be the end of me.
> TING-YIN. What should I do? I can't leave you behind.
> TING-YU. Don't worry. I belong here. (*Re-Cycle*)

As the allusions of connectivity between the spectre, Ting-yu and Ting-yin's past grow stronger, so Ting-yin is presented as becoming a more stable and stronger character. By the time they reach the transit, Ting-yin has assumed the role of guide and supporter — a role that was initially Ting-yu's. She seems to have unconsciously made the connection between Ting-yu and her abortion. The ambiguities presented within the film, are predominantly present within this transit scene. With a frozen army of ghosts at her back, Ting-yin cradles an incapacitated Ting-yu, protecting the child from those who have hunted her since her entry into the abandoned world. Here, these others also condemn her as the creator of the world: 'You created us,' the spectre cries, 'and then discarded us' (*Re-Cycle*). Such a sentiment is the first subtle insinuation that all is not as it appears. The sudden immobilisation of the attack indicates that something else is occurring behind the scene. Ting-yin shakes her charge awake to ask for her insight, only for Ting-yu to tell her, 'We've reached the ending she's written'.



Fig. 7.11 *Re-Cycle* 01:31:33
Having caught up with Ting-yin, the spectre gains recognisable facial features, although these are more rips and tears sutured together. The still suggests at once a deep repressive urge (to stich up), all the while presenting an image of rupture and breaching.

The spectre is an element of Ting-yin's writing and therefore part of herself, as had been subtly suggested within the writing scene. Being ignored and denied, as with all of the

beings within the world in which Ting-yin finds herself, it too finds itself within the realm of the abandoned and neglected. The 'ghost', which I argue is really her unconscious projection of her repressed doppelgänger, is the double which Freud discusses as being a threat to the self, the 'double' which seeks to destabilise and destroy, and here is filled with rage and hatred for Ting-yin as it screams its abhorrence, From this point it becomes apparent that the true nature of the abandoned world is, at least to an extent, fictional, being written by Ting-yin herself. Originally created by Ting-yin, the shade is a reflection of a part of her that needs to be confronted in order for her to escape the world of the abandoned. Once more, there is a doubling in the narrative, for the doppelgänger is a manifestation of the repressed trauma, forgotten and deliberately abandoned by the creator, making its rage — her rage — even more ferocious.

Ting-yin begins to demand more answers as she looks at the fragmented spectres from a perspective that is critical instead of fearful. 'Who are you?' she demands of the small girl, her face already indicating that she knows the answer as the camera cuts to a close up of Ting-yu, 'Mommy' the girl mutters.

TING-YIN. What did you call me? (*Re-Cycle*)

The camera cuts to a flashback of Ting-yin's dinner with Ling, where she admits to having an abortion shortly after he abandoned her: 'Eight years ago,' Ting-yin states, 'I was pregnant, too. I don't want to hear your excuses. Don't worry. I had an abortion. Did you know how hard that decision was?'. The camera cuts back to a low angled shot of Ting-yin staring down at Ting-yu as her daughter explains how she 'asked the old man why mommy didn't want me anymore' and how the old man explained that to her how '"everyone had things they wanted to forget"'. Ting-yu continues her revelation to Ting-yin as she asks of her not-mother: 'You didn't mean to abandon me, did you mommy?'. The cavern of the aborted is revealed as the place where Ting-yu grew up, scared and alone.

Although the scene, when connected with the abortion cavern and the abandoned world's fury at Ting-yin, appears to have negative connotations the film remains true to Ting-yin as a positive doppelgänger, following through with a more sentimental and emotionally enlightening narrative. This scene is utilised as a moment of revelation to

complete her confrontation with her past. Here, Ting-yin, having been saved, guided, and protected by her aborted daughter, has in turn, named, protected, and grown close to Ting-yu. Subconsciously, she recognised her daughter halfway through the narrative and began to adopt a more motherly disposition towards the girl. After so many years of avoiding the history of her abortion, causing her to become a stagnant, isolated individual, disassociated from herself due to her shame and silence — a shame and silence that has been encouraged by her society. Now, Ting-yin has arrived at the point where she is able to confront her silenced history and acknowledge what she has lost, but also what she has gained. The camera's overexposed sequence adds an artificial light to the scene. The implications of such a choice of lighting are symbolic when, throughout the film, colour and light have taken harsh and dark tones of grey, rust and blood red.



Fig. 7.12 *Re-Cycle* 01:30:13
Ting-yin hovers protectivly over Ting-yu.

As Ting-yin comes closer to her personal revelation, her self-redemption and subsequent creation of a whole and stable ontological self, at peace with her past and able to acknowledge and recognise it, the scene grows even brighter. A soft guitar score plays in the background. The tune is a melody that has previously been used to connect Ting-yin and Ting-yu during their journey to the transit and represents their developing relationship. Ting-yin brokenly whispers to her daughter, 'It's not that Mommy didn't want you. I'm so sorry. Mommy was …' Ting-yin trails off. A melodic female voice joins the guitar and the musical duo produce a wistful tune as the camera cuts to flashbacks of Ting-yin and Ting-yu together. It cuts to an explosion of the transit from which a blinding light emanates, which then begins to gradually pull Ting-yin into it (*Re-Cycle*). The light transforms, becoming flakes of light and swirls around Ting-yin. This is the point where Ting-yin sees the 'old man', her grandfather emerge in a ghostly form, the swirling light adding to the ethereal tone of the scene.



Fig. 7.13 *Re-Cycle* 01:38:04
Bathed in light, Ting-yin's revelation that Ting-yu is her aborted daughter is a painful, yet cathartive experience. The ambience of the scene provides a sense of forgiveness which emanates from the aborted daughter and from the not-mother, who until this point, never allowed herself the space to speak of the abortion, and therefore, the space to heal from the experience.

> TING-YIN. Grandpa!
> GRANDFATHER. Recognise me now, don't you? She wanted you to come here. Wanted to ask you in person. […]
> TING-YU. You want me to be with you? I could have been with you. But you abandoned me. You gave up that opportunity. (*Re-Cycle*)

As Ting-yin clings to her daughter, the transit explodes once more, its light sweeping across the clearing, and dissolving the still frozen spectres. The guitar music is replaced by an orchestral piece, with a strong string section and soft choir backing, presenting an air of success and transformation. Ting-yin regrets having the abortion, and apologises to Ting-yu. Her explanation to Ting-yu, that 'it's not that Mommy didn't want you', enhances the discussion which abortion raises about necessity, autonomy and acceptance (*Re-Cycle*). As much as Ting-yu wants answers regarding her abandonment, so Ting-yin needs to confront and recognise her social position at the time of the abortion. She was abandoned by her lover, who with promises to return divorced, vanished to America, only to return eight years later, just as Ting-yin has psychologically situated herself into the 'unconsciousness of leaving' where history then emerges to trigger her traumatic journey (Caruth *Unclaimed* 22). The subsequent destruction of the spectres, who represented Ting-yin's threatened and repressed past, which, in her case literally returnes to haunt her, becomes obsolete. Such elements within the film's narrative encourage a redemptive reading of the film's abortion narrative, a narrative, which considers the emotional trauma, suffered within a society that shames and stigmatises those who have abortions.

As Ting-yin finally recognises her history and the negative impact that it has had on her, she is pulled back into her original world. These last few moments within the abandoned world present a transformed Ting-yin. As the spectres are destroyed by the transit's explosion, a crescendo of brass instruments begins to play. As the melody builds, a choir joins in, then chimes, and bells. In the background, the sound of the wind is heard and the overall effect is of resolution and liberation. A low camera angle frames Ting-yin as she stands up. The long shot captures only her head and her torso, as the shot utilises 'deep space', a cinematographic technique that



Fig. 7.14 *Re-Cycle* 01:39:45
Ting-yin, having completed her transformation into a subject whose history is no longer unacknowledged. As she is slowly pulled into the transit, there is a sense of peace about her which has been missing for most of the film.

emphasises Ting-yin's new-found stature, as she stands tall. Such a technique also displays the open space around her, which has contributed to her development. Still, having found her daughter, Ting-yin is reluctant to leave. She fights the transit's pull, shouting out her love for the child she was never able to have and was never able to mourn, yelling out to Ting-yu, 'Remember your name!' (*Re-Cycle*). Ting-yin's last words to her daughter are important, for the act of naming is a part of the recognition of her history. Naming her daughter also indicates a break from the silence of Ting-yin's history, admitting to Ling and then later to herself, that she aborted her child not because she wanted to, but because she needed to. Naming too, is a part of storytelling, and once more, the film's narrative returns to the issues of having a story and of telling a story.

Above all, *Re-Cycle* is a film about emotional trauma that has been repressed and ignored. Cathy Caruth's understanding of trauma, in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), considers the questions about silenced narratives, which *Re-Cycle* contemplates in great detail. For *Re-Cycle*'s Ting-yin, who had an abortion eight years before the action of the film, trauma plays a very real part in the narrative. Despite the location of the trauma being imposed onto the abortion, as the narrative progresses through Ting-yin's confrontation and reconnection with her history, it becomes clear that it is the silence surrounding abortion where the trauma is truly located. It is in this silence, where the film's deliberation of narratives and the space and ability to speak or write those silenced narratives are introduced. Nevertheless, there are elements within the film that are suggestive of a criticism of the prevalence of abortions within Hong Kong (and perhaps China, considering their geographical and political relationship).

There is very little official research available on cultural attitudes towards abortion in Hong Kong, which in and of itself suggests how embedded the silence and stigma regarding abortion is. Nevertheless, it is possible to look at Ting-yin's social position at the time of her abortion — alluded to in the dialogue between her and Ling — that situates her as a pregnant single young woman in Hong Kong. Elizabeth Rudowicz's research on single mothers in Hong Kong found that there is substantial stigma surrounding single mothers, which negatively influences them socially, economically and emotionally (Rudowicz 77). Having been abandoned by Ling, Ting-yin, had she kept her child, would have had to accept that status of 'single mother' and the stigma that went with the label. To make her situation worse, the pregnancy is a result of an extramarital affair with a married man. In a study

regarding family values in Hong Kong, researchers Nelson Chow and Terry Lum found that 90 percent of their focus group viewed extramarital affairs as immoral and unacceptable, and 69 percent viewed the nuclear family as 'ideal' (Chow and Lum 8, 23). Ting-yin would have had the added burden of the stigma associated with having had an affair with a married man. As such, if she were to have any future, her best and only option is an abortion — reluctant as she is. *Re-Cycle* suggests that Ting-yin's internalisation of her emotional trauma after aborting a wanted child, due to her social circumstances, is a debilitating experience. However, her emotional trauma is not all that she has internalised. Ting-yin has also internalised the cultural ideologies, for 'stigma is more a reflection of a given culture […] who perpetuate their conceptions of stigma through social learning and socialisation processes' (Rudowicz 65). Considering that the film's narrative is situated within the action of writing, of telling the (taboo) story, thereby giving it a voice, writing and narratives must be seen as being essential to healing the trauma.

This kind of departure, 'in full force of its historicity, remains at the same time in some sense absolutely opaque' as the film plays on the uncertainty of Ting-yin and the audience, as well as the ambiguity of the multiplicity of time, within a text in which reality and self are questioned (Caruth *Unclaimed* 22). The second narrative, concerns Ting-yin's writing of 'Re-Cycle' and then at the film's end, her rewriting of it. Her rewriting is a deliberate rejection of her own narration (her own history) and a further cause for repression, and thus an increased return of the repressed that is presented most obviously by the film's doppelgänger. The use of the doppelgänger is of great importance to the film, both in terms of Freud's 'return of the repressed' and for Caruth's investigation of trauma. There are, as with the use of narratives, multiple doppelgängers in the film. Ting-yin of the abandoned world is one such doppelgänger, who returns to the realm of the real, only to find that she is already there. The return of her doppelgänger appears as Caruth's traumatic 'unclaimed experience', which has yet to be claimed. Then there is the visual narrative which the audience witnesses, Ting-yin's (the doppelgänger's) journey through the world of the abandoned, which depicts a forced confrontation with her aborted child, her future, and through the shame of her actions, the reconciliation and subsequent rejection of her past.

The traumatic repetitions depicted within the film fall into the realm of the doppelgänger. This manifestation of Freud's double (of the repressed) enhances the film's

status as an uncanny text. The doubling within the film, apart from the appearance of the doppelgänger, is found within the duality of the 'world', there being a 'real' world and an alternate world of the abandoned. (The positioning of this 'world' as an actuality is ambiguous within the film as it potentially exists exclusively within Ting-yin's fictional world within her novel, or it may be an actual reality.)

These two examples are then accentuated through the use of the multiple forms of 'narratives' with which the text as a whole deals. Part of Caruth's theory of trauma is linked to the title of her text: *Unclaimed Experience*. Focusing not only on the text as a site for reoccurring and re-experiencing trauma, but on the 'voice' that emerges within the subject and the audience, allows for the possibilities of 'reading and of listening that both the language of trauma and its *silence of its mute* repetition of suffering demands' (Caruth *Unclaimed* 9).[29] In re-analysing a narrative that Freud uses for the explanation of the repetition of trauma, Caruth explains that the repetition (and return) of the trauma means that 'for the first time […] a voice … cries out' and is witness and subject of the trauma. This voice can be internal or external to the subject for whom the trauma is reoccurring. Nevertheless, the voice is still 'other' and retains the memories of the original trauma (Caruth *Unclaimed* 9).

There are two major points to be drawn on from Caruth's consideration of the 'voice of the other'. First is the ability to narrate and to listen to the story of the trauma, a way to claim back the traumatic experience, to '[resituate] it in our understanding'. The second are the questions: What can and cannot be told? What traumas can be given a voice and which ones are inarticulable? Who has the power to tell such stories? Who has the ability to listen? Most importantly, 'what might become possible within a discourse that is not simply about [the trauma], but within an encounter that takes place *at* […] a spoken discourse […] *on the site of a catastrophe*' (Caruth *Unclaimed* 11, 34).[30] Caruth considers this appeal for connectivity with the other when she provides a reading of *Hiroshima mon amour* where two survivors of World War Two, a French woman and a Japanese man, meet and become lovers, and in the process begin to share their personal histories of trauma with each other. This connectivity is one of multiplicity within *Re-Cycle* and attempts to reconnect Ting-yin

[29] Emphasis added.
[30] Emphasis in original text.

with herself, through the reconnection to her history and the recognition of her choice to abort. In fact, within the film, as a result of the shame that Ting-yin experienced, she has isolated herself so effectively that one may state with certainty that her past is as dislocated from her as her future is — yet another form of doubling presented within the film.

To continue with Caruth's 'voice of other', which seeks connections through the story, the primary considerations depicted within the film are broken generations, existence, time and in particular, the idea of futurism. Such ideas are closely associated with Ting-yin's abortion, and through both the spectre and the appearance of Ting-yin's aborted daughter, the voice of trauma, of which Caruth speaks, is present. This film blurs the lines between life, death, afterlife and the undead, and it disturbs the notions of time and space through a fragmented narrative. The film's title is also the title of the novel that Ting-yin is attempting to write and both narratives, her book and the film itself, run parallel so that the narrative being set out is also — presumably, for nothing in the film is certain — the developing plot for Ting-yin's book (*Re-Cycle*). This allows for a play on merging realities, where Ting-yin's writing produces and lays open the possibility for supernatural intervention because by the film's end, that is exactly what she has written about. This framing of the text also creates a paradox within the film.

Ting-yin's progression and development within the world of the abandoned are only made possible once she has abandoned herself within reality. Yet the film's ending suggests that while she has not abandoned herself, she has certainly ignored aspects of herself and her possible development. Due to the nature of her novel 'Re-Cycle', a cyclical unending effect of the return of the repressed begins so that the progressing growth of Ting-yin's positive double, her doppelgänger, and she herself, occupy the same reality but are no longer the same person. Ting-yin of the abandoned world also faces the confrontation, not just with her past and aborted daughter, but also with the second doppelgänger, who, I argue, is the spectre of herself. This second double is closely related to Freud's double who becomes the threat to existence and is the manifestation of Ting-yin's repressed trauma.



Fig. 7.15 *Re-Cycle* 01:43:52
Ting-yin (left) has just returned to her original world, only to discover that she was there all along. Ting-yin (right) has just completed her latest novel, having discarded her personal narrative for something less revealing.

Indeed, if we follow Caruth's interpretation of Freud's notion of trauma, 'it is only in and through inherent forgetting that this [trauma] is first experienced at all' (Caruth *Trauma* 6). This forgetting means that she also abandons herself through isolation and the rejection of her own historical narrative. Nevertheless, Ting-yin's confrontation with her past also presents the return of the repressed in the form of her unborn and terminated child. Within the world of the abandoned, the nameless girl-child volunteers to be Ting-yin's guide to the 'transit', a break within the realm that will lead Ting-yin home. Although we expect this transit to be a location, it is actually a psychological space where Ting-yin allows herself to recognise the girl-child as her daughter, and the 'old man', who acts as the keeper of knowledge in the film, as her grandfather. The transit then becomes the site of negotiation with herself.

Re-Cycle is an example of the complex production of an uncanny text, which, despite its inclusion of an alternative realm (the fantastical), has its roots in reality. The abandoned realm, in which Ting-yin finds herself, is brimming with anything and everything, which reality has abandoned, sacrificed, discarded, and forgotten. This other 'realm' is where the redundant and unwanted find their place. While the majority of the film's action takes place outside reality in the fantastical abandoned dimension, the multi-framing effect, which the narrative and the structure of the film produce, constantly connects the abandoned dimension back to the realm of the real. In doing so, the narrative's progression becomes ambiguous, simulating a traumatic, uncanny narrative, where what is repressed returns to haunt the living.

CHAPTER 8

GENDERED CONVERSATIONS IN RIDLEY SCOTT'S *PROMETHEUS*

Having travelled light years from Earth, the expedition team of the Prometheus have found the alien species, from which humanity originated, the 'Engineers'. Thinking that all of the Engineers are dead, the android David (Michael Fassbender), humanity's own creation, discovers the alien ship's control room in the build-up to the film's climax. David takes the seat of the Engineer just as, in another part of the ship, his own creation is taking shape in the womb of expedition leader Doctor Elizabeth Shaw (Noomi Rapace). By placing himself in the chair of a race whose name is synonymous with creating, David supersedes the 'Engineers' and humanity as the next generation of 'creators'. Within the film, David forms part of a long line of male creators, beginning with the Engineers who create through biochemical manipulation, then David's own creator, Peter Weyland (Guy Pearce), who builds and creates through technology, and finally David himself, who unknowingly uses the methods of the Engineers to impregnate an infertile Elizabeth Shaw. David, and Elizabeth are part of a larger creation myth which the film embodies. In providing a mythic film that includes within it a representation of abortion, the final chapter of this dissertation seeks to bring to a close the discussions surrounding abortion by removing it from the 'realm' of reality and placing it within the realm of mythology. The study now moves from the more emotional renderings of abortion representation to the analysis of *Prometheus* (2012), which provides an analogous science fiction experience, exploring ontological questions, including those relating to sexual difference and embodied subjectivity.

The previous chapters have considered how representations of abortion result in various discussions of ideology. Chapters One, Two and Three have examined representations of abortion relating to particular cultural and historically specific political ideologies. In doing so, issues concerning women's social positioning, their agency and autonomy were raised. Also considered in these chapters were issues surrounding the alienation of women from their bodies and their lived experiences. The next chapters examined cultural aspects of ideology, with Chapter Four focusing on the various threats to Hong Kong and Chinese identity. Exploring the use of satire, Chapter Five presented a critique of the ideologies present in America that hyperbolise cultural opinions regarding abortion. Chapter Six further explored American cultural ideologies, by examining the

lived experience of women in a post-*Roe* society that still seeks to define them through their ability to be mothers. As such Chapter Eight raised similar gendered issues to those that had been raised in the first three chapters. The penultimate chapter, Chapter Seven, considered how ideologies are internalised and how social taboos have the potential to silence an individual's lived experience. Finally, Chapter Eight will examine how *Prometheus* challenges a predominantly patriarchal creation myth through a feminist discourse of power and ownership.

Although critically contested for his narrow definition of the mythic, Robert Rowland's essay "On Mythic Criticism" (2009) provides some useful commentary on the subject. Using theories posited by Bromislaw Malinowiski, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell, Rowland suggests that myths perform the following, possibly simultaneous, functions:

> [Myths] function as 'a reality lived' and serve as […] moral paradigm structuring society. [… Myth] is one of our most powerful cognitive instruments for making sense of the world. [Additionally] myth serves as a means of helping people deal with crises of life. […] The function of myth is [therefore] to transcend ordinary life and provide meaningful grounding for that which cannot be supported rationally. (Rowland 102-03)

For Michael Osborn a myth must be crafted in such a way that the narrative must 'convey the sense of the sacred in time, place, and symbol [while providing a sense of] *magnification*' of the story to allow for it to consider grand epistemological issues (Osborn 121).[31] While the theorists of the mythic tend to disagree on what texts make up the field, they all appear to agree that a mythic text is one that presents narratives where the narrative structure provides a grandiose tale dealing with humanity's most basic moral, ethical and existential questions. Northrop Frye considers mythic texts to be those in which there is 'no consistent distinction between ghosts and living beings' and argues that '[m]ythology projects itself as theology' (Frye 50, 62). Frye, and his counterparts are arguing for an interpretation of mythic that distinguishes itself from those texts which are closely tied to reality. Even *Dumplings*, *American Horror Story* and *Re-Cycle*, with their supernatural tendencies are based within reality and therefore do not correspond to the mythic criteria agreed upon by theorists. *Prometheus* however, itself originating from one of the iconic

[31] Emphasis in original text.

Greek myths, is a film that addresses some of humanity's most basic concerns: the creation of humanity and the meaning of life and death.

The film follows the crew of the space ship Prometheus as they set out to discover humanity's creators, in the hopes of finding answers to the fundamental questions of existence. Instead the crew — made up of scientists including Elizabeth Shaw and her partner Doctor Charlie Holloway (Logan Marshall-Green), mercenaries including the captain Janek (Idris Elba), businessman Peter Weyland and his daughter and second-in-command Meredith Vickers (Charlize Theron), and the Artificial Intelligence Android David[32]— discover an abandoned spaceship on a hostile moon, light years from Earth. The pilots of the alien ship, humanity's creators (later named 'Engineers'), are all dead, save for one who remains in a stasis pod until the film's end. The crew of the Prometheus are slowly killed off, either as a result of the biological weapon belonging to the Engineers (manifested as a black organic fluid), or the newly awakened Engineer himself. Only David and Elizabeth are left alive by the film's conclusion, both incidentally being the pair involved in creating the latest generation of beings within the film called Xenomorphs.[33] Drawing on the themes of creation and destruction, and the myth of Prometheus, the film develops into a creation myth of its own, one that challenges and problematises traditional gendered roles, particularly through the plot's representation of Elizabeth's abortion.

Prometheus's opening scene frames the rest of the film as it introduces both the creationist narrative as well its association with the purely masculine. The film's opening sequence begins in space, a wide-angled lens focusing on the Earth as the Sun's rays strike the planet. Mark Streitenfeld's musical composition, titled "Life", is a full orchestral piece opening with a three note motif played by a single horn, which will recur throughout the film's soundtrack. As the scene builds in detail, a trumpeting horn is joined by soft drums and a choir. Music plays a significant role in the film, providing not only the ambiance but also enhancing the film's status as an epic narrative. The opening track contains overtones

[32] David is an android, who is given a humanoid appearance by his maker Weyland, as well as the artificial intelligence to surpass most humans. In essence, David mimics human behaviour lacking the ability to generate naturally occurring emotions and intelligence. In the film, robot's do not have the humanoid appearance and mimicry that David possesses.

[33] The Xenomorph is the popular term for the Alien creature within the first *Alien* franchise. The birth of the being is revealed in *Prometheus*, where it is shown to be the product of Shaw's abnormal pregnancy which was brought on by the interference of David. The being later assimilates with the last Engineer during the film's closing.

of a journey, and the horns suggest the arrival and the beginnings of accomplishment, which matches the opening scene's striking shots of vast mountain ranges, rivers and valleys. This stresses the wonder and majesty of nature. Eventually the camera rests on a cloaked figure at the edge of a waterfall, where associations between nature, creation and humanity tentatively develop and become clearer as the film progresses. A vast spacecraft hovers over the figure, as the music diminishes to a soft drum beat full of expectation while the diegetic sounds of the rapids and the waterfall overpower and blend in with the classical melody. The ship ascends from its position in the sky as a new melody begins to play (*Prometheus*).

As the Engineer disrobes, his massive form is exposed: he is clothed only in a loincloth; his skin is pure white; and his muscles bulge. The hum of the music continues as he opens a vessel, removes a small cup containing a black substance, and drinks. His body begins to disintegrate, dispersing black dust particles into the air. Unable to stand, he topples over the waterfall and into the river beneath, where his body continues to fragment. The remnants of his DNA and cells scatter through the water, where they begin to metamorphose into new DNA strands and single cells, which further split into more multi-celled organisms (*Prometheus*). The implications of this scene are clear: human life on Earth was a result of alien intervention. The alien's gender and race (male and white) propagates a heteronormative narrative, which, as the scene progresses, is indicative of a troubling 'truth' about the origins of humanity. Feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti comments on the strength of the patriarchal, such is the archetype of the 'man-white-Western-male-adult-reasonable-heterosexual' subject who becomes, in this case literally, the biotechnician of life (Braidotti 47). The emergence of the film's creation mythology is introduced within this scene, and is the first of many creation/destruction motifs present in the film. That the mythology is introduced through the presence of a physically powerful male figure situates it within a patriarchal narrative. Being heterosexual and powerful, the Engineer simultaneously disturbs the traditional Christian religious doctrine of creation (as he is alien) while reinforcing it.



Fig. 8.1 *Prometheus* 00:03:42
The 'Engineer', with his bulding musclesm is an undeniably male figure.

Having introduced the origins of humanity to the audience, the narrative travels into the future, where a group of human archaeologists are excavating a site in the Isle of Skye, Scotland in the year 2089 (*Prometheus*). The scene, apart from supplying contextual information, provides a physical comparison between humans and the Engineer from the previous scene. Whereas the Engineer was dressed in a thin cloak and loincloth, the humans are dressed in layers of warm clothing. They are also depicted as being small through the use of a wide angled shot where only a neon orange jacket attracts the attention of the audience. As small as the humans appear, Elizabeth is diminutive in comparison to her male counterpart, Charlie Holloway. From the very beginning, the film is distinctly aware of gendered roles. Elizabeth and Holloway discover a cave painting depicting a large man pointing to a star constellation, a map that eventually leads the crew of the Prometheus to their final destination. The man is symbolic of the dominant male within the film, who is not only creator but also guide, emphasising once more the privileged status of the male figure within the narrative.



Fig. 8.2 *Prometheus* 00:06:52
The rock painting found by Shaw and Holloway, of a male figure pointing to a set of star constellations: Shaw's 'map'.

Elizabeth and Holloway convince Peter Weyland, owner of Weyland Corporation, to fund an expedition to the coordinates found in the cave with the intention of meeting their 'makers'. Arriving at a small moon, they discover a structure, believed to be alien. A team consisting of David, Elizabeth, Holloway and two other scientists, Fifield (Sean Harris) and Millburn (Rafe Spall), are sent to explore the cavernous structure. Making their way through the tunnel systems, the expedition team stumbles upon the corpse of an Engineer near a large wall of hieroglyphic writing. David triggers the opening of a hatch while reading the glyphs on the wall, revealing a large cavern. Inside, murals of the Engineers are painted on the ceiling, while distinct carvings and large ampules are positioned symmetrically around a looming statue of a humanoid male head, recognisable in likeness to that of an Engineer. The enormous head is positioned in such a way as to be a dominant towering idol and faces the entrance, overseeing the actions of those within the room. The canisters found in the cavern are filled with a black fluid-like substance, like that which the Engineer drank in the opening scene, and which, as David's later experiment with the substance reveals, destroys and mutates DNA at a molecular level (*Prometheus*).

The Engineers, it appears, intended to return to Earth and once again change the evolutionary structure of life. Though never overtly stated within the film, it is possible to deduce that humanity was becoming a potential threat. What the Engineers did not anticipate was the black fluid amalgamating with the moon's own organisms.

As David walks through the cavern, the camera lingers on his boot print. In the centre of the frame is a worm, barely visible in the dirt as it crawls away. Opening the room after two thousand years triggers a change in the room's environment and contents, and adversely effects the murals that begin to disintegrate, and the canisters begin to leak. Elizabeth and her team are so focused on the decapitated head that they are unaware of what is taking place in the surrounds and do not notice David's interest, either in the canisters or in the black substance. Later on in the film two expedition members are trapped in the cave system overnight and seek shelter in the cavern. There Fifield and Millburn have the unlucky and fatal experience of meeting up with the fluid-altered life forms. Foreshadowing Fifield and Millburn's deaths is the scene where, as they try to make their way back to the ship, the pair stumbles across a number of Engineer cadavers, some of which show signs of being torn apart from the inside. Fifield describes their discovery as a scene 'out of some sort of Holocaust painting' (*Prometheus*). The image of the mass grave here is compared to those, which were common in the Second World War, and thus it gestures towards extreme brutality and violence of mass extermination.



Fig. 8.4 *Prometheus* 00:38:48
David inspects the black 'organic' substance which leaks from the vases distributed throughout the cavern.



Fig. 8.3 *Prometheus* 00:51:43
The pile of Engineer corpses across which Fifield and Millburn stumble.

Although not every male character within the film suggests complete patriarchal dominance, there is a strong theological narrative of male creation and destruction in *Prometheus*. Greek mythology, embedded in the film's title, the ship's name and the film's narrative, resonates with tales of violent and bloody feuds between fathers and sons. *Prometheus* is titled after the famous mythical figure of the first pantheon of Greek gods,

the Titans. In Greek mythology, the Titan Prometheus joined with the second pantheon of gods, the Olympians, in the Titanomachy war between the Titans and their children (the Olympians), who then defeated the elder gods and cast them out of Mount Olympus (Aeschylus 4). Zeus, considered the 'father' of the Olympian gods, was the youngest son of Titans Kronos and Rhea. Having overthrown his father, Kronos ruled the Titans. Still, he feared that he too would be deposed by his progeny and as a precaution, he would often kill off his children by consuming them. Zeus is said to have freed his siblings from their father's belly and then overthrown Kronos and the other Titans in the Titanomachy (Hard 68). *Prometheus*'s Engineers, it soon becomes clear, decided some two thousand years before, to return to Earth to destroy their creations. The data Elizabeth and her scientists collect from a corpse they find in the cavern system places the time line of the Engineers' attempted return around the first century BC in human history and the establishment of what later becomes the powerful civilisation of Christendom.

Despite the film's mythical Greek connotations, it contains several allusions to Christian mythology. Creation through destruction is established as a theme on a cosmic scale through the acts of the humanoid-alien, whose self-sacrifice in the film's opening is informed by Christian doctrine, so that new life forms emerge from the old. In Christian theology, sacrifice grants the human soul salvation, with the most notable biblical sacrifice being Christ's crucifixion, an act that would save the rest of humanity (Heim 21). The Engineer's sacrifice in the opening sequence situates him as the origin of mankind, and his race as the creators of humanity. This is similar to the way in which Prometheus is said to have created man out of clay (Brumble 279). Elizabeth later tests and compares the DNA of the Engineer's cadaver that she finds in the cavern with a sample of human DNA. She discovers that the Engineer's DNA predates humanity's and is an ancestral match. The presence of the enormous white male figure as the origin of humanity, as essentially our 'God(s)', is what establishes the film's creation myth along the lines of a patriarchal creation doctrine, be it Greek or Christian.

The crew of the Prometheus do not find the benevolent creators they had hoped for, instead they discover that the Engineers were wrathful beings who endeavoured to destroy their creations. *Prometheus* goes further still, by superimposing an Engineer onto a Christian theology of creation, the film provides a theme of invasion of the alien onto the human, as the Engineer becomes a substitute for the monotheistic deity, God. The idea of

the ‘creator’ is, apart from the Engineer/humanity mythic narrative, played out in two micro-narratives, the first between Weyland and David, the second David and Elizabeth. Weyland creates David, as well as building his own multi-billion dollar corporation. David, through Elizabeth’s partner Holloway, creates a new form of life, and in so doing supersedes the Engineers and Weyland as the third ‘generation’ of male creators. David infects Holloway using the black fluid found in the cavern who in turn infects Elizabeth, who, despite being infertile becomes pregnant after sleeping with the contagious Holloway. David discovers Elizabeth’s pregnancy during a sonogram performed on her after Holloway’s death, as a ‘contamination protocol’. Both pregnancy and death are caused by the contagion that David adds to Holloway’s drink (*Prometheus*).

Elizabeth is the heroine of *Prometheus* and by the film’s end, the lone human survivor of the expedition. Although she is emotionally more accessible than Ellen Ripley from *Alien*, *Prometheus*’s narrative suggests that Elizabeth is somehow reduced by her infertility. The other strong female lead, Vickers, with her cold and distant demeanour, is easily mistaken for an artificially intelligent life form like her ‘brother’ David, whom Weyland, Vickers’ father, considers a son, despite the fact that David is sexless and lacks certain human qualities. Both women have their identities as ‘woman’ questioned and are reduced to objects. The crew often makes sexual jokes about both women and Elizabeth sees herself as less than woman, because, as she explains: ‘I can’t create life’. Elizabeth automatically bases her value on her ability to reproduce. The captain, Janek, mockingly challenges Vickers’ humanity, asking if she is ‘a robot’, the implication of his questioning and Vickers’ response, in which she offers sex in response to his query, suggest that Vickers identity and humanity reside in her ability to have sex, which only serves to objectify and dehumanise her. Such a reductionism, when considered in relation to the humanisation of David, broaches questions much like Beauvoir’s question, ‘What is woman?’, extending such a question into ‘What is gender?’ and ‘What is human?’ (Beauvoir 14).

Elizabeth’s infertility and Vickers’ sexuality, are reductionist elements of their identities, and serve to objectify them. Hours after Holloway is killed in front of Elizabeth, David informs her of her pregnancy. Elizabeth’s incredulity at being pregnant is compounded by the fact that she had only slept with Holloway ten hours before, but the sonogram indicates that she is three months pregnant. In the sequence David seeks to control her pregnancy and attempts to impose on her the role of a passive maternal figure

which further emphasises the imposition of the male hegemony over Elizabeth's life. He tries to placate Elizabeth as she begins to panic about the foetus. Dressed in a white hospital gown when her cross, a symbol of her Christian faith, is removed, Elizabeth is unprotected from David's onslaught. The angle of the camera frames Elizabeth in the centre of the screen, while David towers over her, dominating her physical form. Elizabeth's small stature in comparison to David's own tall figure is indicative of the power relations between the pair in this scene. The cinematographic effects emphasise Elizabeth's height in comparison to David's, taking full advantage of low angle shots from Elizabeth's point of view and high angles shots from David's. All shots with both characters together are medium long shots and always composed alike, David standing, his short grey t-shirt revealing a toned muscled body, while Elizabeth in the unflattering hospital gown is positioned lower than he is. Being stripped of her uniform and dressed in a gown has the added effect of removing her status as 'project leader' and replacing it with 'test subject'. David's interference has cost Elizabeth not only her partner, but also her position and respectability amongst the crew. She has become an anomaly to be studied, just as the Engineer's severed head was, and at this point in the film is transformed, by essentially having her subjecthood removed thereby being reduced to an object. She asks to see the foetus and David turns the screen off, saying, 'I don't think that's a good idea' (*Prometheus*).



Fig. 8.5 *Prometheus* 01:16:33
Elizabeth (left) argues with David (right), wanting to see and then abort the foetus.

This links back to the idea which Braidotti addresses within her monograph *Nomadic Subjects* (1994), that of the 'gaze'. In her chapter "Organs Without Bodies", Braidotti queries the role of the body as 'the first manufacturer of technology in that it seeks for organic extension of itself' (Braidotti 42). She considers how the body might become an object that can be deconstructed into pieces, to be considered as 'detachable parts' of biotechnology that are discarded or used in a world of male privileged knowledge, specifically in relation to the female subject. Braidotti argues that discourse, specifically of a scientific nature, has always linked the notion of sight with knowledge. Visualisation, through the 'biotechnological gaze' is an important part of such a deconstruction, providing a visual sphere of understanding, both outside the human body, and inside it. Elizabeth's request to see the foetus and David's denial is a form of biopower, privileging David and

the audience above Elizabeth, as they are able to see the results of the sonogram even though Elizabeth's request is denied.

Braidotti considers what images denote in terms of knowledge and associates the visual with male privileged knowledge. Beginning with Plato she asserts that 'scientific discourse has always […] privileged [the] image of "the eye" as a metaphor for "the mind", that is, "I see" as a synonym of "I know"' which is, almost always, pitted 'toward/against the mother's body' (Braidotti 49). The gaze is deeply embedded in the film in a gendered form where not only is the audiences' gaze almost invariably determined by a male eye, but is projected most often on to the female form as object. In *Prometheus*, this notion of the 'gaze' is utilised within the very text itself as Elizabeth seeks to see what both David and the audience have already witnessed: the abnormal growth in her body. Braidotti presents a visual representation of the 'image that replace[s] and dis-place[s] the boundaries of space (inside/outside the mother's body) and time (before/after birth)' through medical technology like the sonogram and monograms which provide visual images of foetal development which encourages a mechanical dissociation of body parts (Braidotti 49). Braidotti argues that such visual aids seek to detach the mother and foetus, isolating the latter and providing it with potential personhood while removing the woman from the equation entirely.

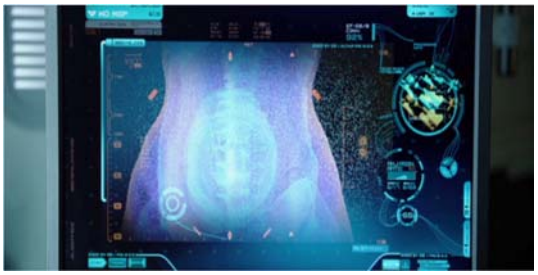

Fig. 8.6 *Prometheus* 01:15:46
The sonogram of the alien foetus inside Elizabeth which both David and the audience view, but she does not.

Prometheus's audience have, like David, already transposed Elizabeth from person to object, and she is now David's scientific experiment. Elizabeth's not being allowed to see her foetus is an additional marker that emphasises her lack of power. This lack of power extends further than her inability to see what is happening in her own body. Elizabeth begins to demand that 'it' be removed. 'I want it out' becomes her mantra as David rebuffs her every request.

> DAVID: I'm afraid we don't have the personnel to perform a procedure like that. Our best option —
> ELIZABETH: I want it out!
> DAVID: — Is to put you back on cryo-stasis.

ELIZABETH: David, get it out of me. Get it out of me! Please! (*Prometheus*)



Fig. 8.7 *Prometheus* 01:17:15 (a) & 01:17:17 (b) David stands above Elizabeth (b) after having drugged her. The high-angled and low-angled shots place David in a position of power over Elizabeth.

His control over her is seen in both his behaviour — denying her the abortion despite the dangers an unknown entity may pose, and his dominating physical presence. He drugs her, another form of control, and places her back on the examination table. The camera cuts between a high angle shot of Elizabeth lying on the table, and a low angle shot of David standing above her. The differing viewpoints indicate David's power over Elizabeth as he imposes his will on her, further violating and subjugating her by admitting to watching her dreams while she slept:

DAVID: It must feel like your God abandoned you.
ELIZABETH: What?
DAVID: To lose Doctor Holloway, after your father died in such *similar* circumstances. What was it that killed him? Ebola?
ELIZABETH: How do you--? How do you know that?
DAVID: I watched your dreams. (*Prometheus*)[34]

Drugged and pregnant as a result of David's interference, Elizabeth becomes a receptacle, a space in which male creativity might flourish. The Greek philosopher Plato, in his *Timaeus* (360 BC), writes a mythos of origins and the 'becoming' of creation. Within his creation myth, Plato designates a 'space' called the 'Receptacle' or *chôra* that is completely passive and lacks any defining characteristics (Bianchi 133-4). It exists only as a dimension where creation may happen. In order for creation to happen, Plato posits that:

> [We] must conceive of three kinds,—the Becoming, that 'Wherein' it becomes, and the source 'Wherefrom' the Becoming is copied and produced. Moreover, it is proper to liken the Recipient to the Mother, the Source to the Father, and what is engendered between these two to the Offspring. (Plato 50d-e)

[34] Emphasis added.

Although Plato insists that the *chôra* is a space that lacks definition, therefore allowing the imprinting from an original 'model' to be the only element in the receptacle to influence creation, he does use female metaphors to describe the location: he names the space 'Mother' and earlier in section 49b the receptacle is a 'nurse'. As the passive space in which creation occurs is automatically associated with the female form, so too the origin for this 'becoming' is seen as male, 'the Father' (Plato 49b). Elizabeth Grosz goes on to explain Plato's use of *chôra* within her criticism of traditional Western philosophy as being inherently binary. Within this dualistic world which Plato has formulated, the concept of the *chôra* is a placid and empty space, inherently female in nature which waits for the actions of a male being, 'in the transition necessary for the emergence of matter, a kind of womb of material existence […] an incubator to ensure the transmission' (Grosz *Space* 114). Plato links the *chôra* with the 'receptacle/space/mother', as Grosz terms it, and yet for all the effort Plato makes in defining this third dimension of existence, he reduces this space (this woman) to a passive pliant and subjugated role.

At this point in the film, Elizabeth fits the role of receptacle perfectly. Even her status as infertile suggests that any genetics that a fertile woman might have possibly passed on to her progeny will not be possible, because Elizabeth is at this point in David's creation narrative, the *chôra*, the space within which his experiment will develop and grow. Elizabeth's gradual loss of power appears complete when the crew reduce her to a child-like figure. Believing her to be drugged, Doctor Ford and another crew member are assigned to take Elizabeth to 'cryo-deck' where she is to be placed in stasis, still pregnant with the alien foetus. Positioned on the medical table, eyes closed, Elizabeth appears to be asleep as Ford pinches and slaps her cheek, calling, 'Doctor Elizabeth? […] Go to bed-e-byes. Doctor Elizabeth?' (*Prometheus*). Ford's tone and language are obviously better suited to a child than the leader of the expedition and symbolises Elizabeth's complete loss of authority and power. Ford dismisses Elizabeth as being neutralised by the drugs and is not prepared when Elizabeth attacks her and her colleague. That Elizabeth, still drugged and in pain due to the unnatural speed at which the foetus is growing, manages to knock Ford and her colleague unconscious is the first example of her rejection of the passivity of the blank receptacle. The pair's dismissive attitude towards Elizabeth allows her to escape the examination room and flee to the main corridors of the Prometheus. As she sprints through the corridors of the ship, the camera, tracking her movements, lurches unsteadily from side to side as she briefly hunches over, hand on her abdomen as an agonising scream

is torn from her. The audience is reminded once again that the organism growing inside her is developing at an alarming rate. Streitenfeld's soundtrack "Hello Mummy", is played, a mix of shrill wind instruments such as flutes and violins with fast paced drum beats and electrical music, in this scene, the rapid pace and tone adds to Elizabeth's own frantic pace as she races through the halls towards Vickers' apartments on the ship that contain a fully automated medical machine.

Elizabeth's escape scene lasts no more than 30 seconds, but is long enough to indicate that the alien foetus poses a threat. In Vickers' apartment Elizabeth uses the fully automated medical bay to perform an abortion. Drenched with sweat, she stumbles over to the machine and when requested to select a procedure she orders 'a caesarean'. Just as Elizabeth thinks that she has escaped the controlling male forces, the medpod rejects her request for a caesarean, its mechanical voice bleating out, 'Error, this med-pot is calibrated for male patients only. It does not operate for the procedure you have requested'. She then switches the controls of the pod to manual, selects 'Surgery. Abdominal. Penetrating injuries. Foreign body. Initiate' (*Prometheus*). Finally managing to obtain the correct instructions, she strips off the hospital gown and slides into the pod as her abdomen begins to expand and contract, demonstrating the activity of the foetus. Not once since the revelation of the pregnancy and the nature of the creature, has anyone other than David, suggested she keep the being. The tone of the music, a soft high pitched wind instrumental plays in the background eerily then suddenly changes to sharp deep electrical sounds while the diegetic sounds, from the medpod's mechanical sounds. The diegetic and non-diegetic sounds, in addition to Elizabeth's swelling abdomen, speak to the horror of the creature, and the audience cannot but agree with Elizabeth's decision. She did not ask to be a part of David's experiment and she should terminate the pregnancy as soon as she can.

Elizabeth's abortion scene directly confronts the struggle between agency and technology. This is demonstrated when she must pause to reconsider the choice of words that will allow her to proceed with an abortion. Braidotti's theory of the female subject as well as other embodiment theories have noted how Western dualism divides the mind from the body. This implies not only a reductionist perspective of the body, but also tends to consider the body as mechanical pieces of a whole, only functional because of the controlling centre, the mind. The mind/body duality of Western thought is also imposed on gendered constructs, privileging men who are meant to embody the 'mind' while women

represent the purely physical. Braidotti speculates that the ramification of privileging the mind implies the continual mechanising of the body into breakable usable and replaceable parts (Braidotti 48). In order to obtain her abortion, Elizabeth must find the correct language to articulate it if she is to have a voice within both the film and the society it represents. She needs to negotiate a part within a phallocentric language. 'Surely,' Beauvoir writes, 'woman is, like man, a human being; but such a declaration is abstract' (Beauvoir 14). Such limitations too, must be considered within the presence of a machine, programmed for a male patient which forces Elizabeth to consider her body as the male subject would, the way David does, as a receptacle rather than a unified whole. Thus her shift from female bodily thinking where she demands a 'caesarean' to 'Surgery. Abdominal. Penetrating injuries. Foreign body. Initiate', indicates that, even in the fragmented vocalisation of her final order, the mechanical surgical machine will only work once the body itself has been deconstructed.

The abortion scene is brutal. The music echoes that associated with the horror genre, with violins tugging high sharp notes, long drawn out, piercing, electronic sounds and rapid drumming. With Elizabeth's change from the passive object of David's experiment to the active subject, the film also provides her with the opportunity to gaze at the foetus herself and by doing so, she is granted the power of autonomy, which had been previously denied. The bass instruments add their own dark tone to the mixture, which creates a swirling atmosphere — one fitting with the mechanical noises from the medpod. As a laser cuts through Elizabeth's abdomen, Elizabeth herself loses all sense of coherence (*Prometheus*). Her pain-filled grunts and screams add to the cacophony of sound which peaks as the machine pulls the creature out of her abdomen, the camera cutting to a medium close up and then a close up as bit by bit the new life form is fully revealed, covered in blood and curled tightly into a ball. Still in its amniotic sac, but visible, is a curled appendage twitching as it is pulled out of



Fig. 8.9 *Prometheus* 01:19:41
A 'Bird's Eye View' shot of Elizabeth as she prepares for the operation, the walls of the medpod acting as the information screen, display the image of the foetus she was denied a chance to view earlier.



Fig. 8.8 *Prometheus* 01:23:55
Elizabeth and the newly revealed alien creature, forcibly removed from her womb.

Elizabeth. The sac bursts over her open wound and the creature is completely visible for the first time as it wiggles and jerks trying to escape the clutches of the medpod. The creature is reasonably similar in form to that of a giant squid and Elizabeth can only gape in horror at it, as the medpod staples her abdomen closed. At the first possible moment, Elizabeth slides out of the pod, seals it and uses the pod's contamination protocols to destroy the creature that is trying to escape. The next time David sees Elizabeth he remarks on her drive:

> DAVID. I didn't think you had it in you. Sorry, poor choice of words. Extraordinary survival instincts, Elizabeth. (*Prometheus*)

That she manages a successful surgery in spite of more male dominated obstacles such as the machine's calibration is a testament to the dramatic shift in perspective which the film undergoes within this scene.

The abortion scene then depicts Elizabeth as actively rejecting her role as receptacle. This is extremely important when one considers Plato's construction of the *chôra* as 'It/her' when it is the father who is attributed with the creation of new life, 'the source' (Archer-Hind 25). That the 'bioscience' of the objectification of the body for knowledge's sake is determined by the 'modern knowing subject' who is male, also means that the 'feminine' becomes, like the body 're-presented as a symbolic absence. It may signify a set of interrelated issues, but per se, it is not one notion, not one corpus. There is "no-body" there' (Braidotti 47). Braidotti considers the implications of artificial procreation, ruminating on the extremes of biopower where wombs are interchangeable; of 'Male pregnancies [and] Female mother-machines' which would render the female sex irrelevant, providing locations of further dislocation and absence for women (Braidotti 53). The primary creators within *Prometheus* are the male figures: whether alien, human or android. The Engineers create new life through a mixture of the black fluid and mitosis, a form of cell division. While Vickers is Weyland's biological child, he considers David 'the closest thing to a son I'll ever have'. David is a son whose achievements are not measured biologically (although his features are remarkably like Vickers), intellectually, socially or economically, but rather through immortality. David, Weyland tells the crew, 'will never grow old … and, he will never die' (*Prometheus*). Therefore Vickers will never be wholly accepted by Weyland because of her mortality — her humanity. As previously stated, Both Vickers and Elizabeth are defined by their fathers, their mothers being notably absent or

non-existent. In fact, *Prometheus*'s masculine creator narrative does its best to remove the possibility of female creation, through the exclusion of the mother figure and the objectification of the remaining women.

If, as indicated before, myths function as narratives that provide spaces in which to examine and theorise concepts and issues which cannot be done in reality, myths become 'true' works of fiction. This means, that within their narrative forms, mythic tales, while not historically accurate, provide certain abstract 'truths' about life which cannot be found anywhere else (Rowland 103). For *Prometheus*, in the original patriarchal creation myth, women are at worst absent and at best 'receptacles'. Elizabeth's narrative, which transforms her from a passive object to an active agent of her own body, not only serves to reject the patriarchal ideologies present in *Prometheus*, but introduces into the Mythic a new consideration of female agency.

The rest of the film sets out to re-establish Elizabeth as the authority figure. Now that she has overcome the impossible, she almost becomes the impossible — furthering Frye's analysis of the mythic hero archetype who must be 'superior in *kind* both to other men and to the environment of other men' (Frye 33). Having just undergone massive abdominal surgery, Elizabeth manages to escape the deadly rampage of the newly awoken Engineer. By the film's end Elizabeth is the sole survivor, since even David cannot wholly survive his decapitation. David's decapitation is a comment on his purely intellectual nature, as his head, the physical representation of his mind, is, after being removed from his body, still conscious and his intellect intact. That Elizabeth is alive and whole, while her adversaries (David included) are not, places her in the position of heroine.

The film is primarily a patriarchal creation myth, and as such is focused on the development of the male-creators. That stated, women are not in any way removed from the action of the narrative. Elizabeth is the lead scientist, strong in her beliefs and intellectually superior to all, perhaps with the exception of David. Vickers, too, is a strong female character and constantly rejects the limited role that she is permitted by her father and creator, Peter Weyland. The male creator within *Prometheus* is synonymous with destruction, which inevitably leads to cyclical destruction. The inherent imbalance between 'male as creator' and 'female as absent or receptacle' is bound up with notions of the mind/body dualism best represented with and through David. Even pregnant, Elizabeth is still infertile, yet the abortion scene rejects her status as both *chôra* (receptacle) and infertile

(less than woman). Elizabeth is never depicted as a creator, but rather comes to embody the opposite of the destructive male creator. She is the woman who survives and ensures the survival of the human race, when at the film's end, she orders Janek, the captain of the Prometheus, to make sure that the Engineer's ship containing the black-fluid does not reach Earth.

David and Elizabeth also begin to balance each other out, perhaps because Elizabeth's tenacity at overcoming the restrictions placed on her has provided David with proof that she is worthy of some level of respect. His comment about his surprise at her survival is one example of this within the last half of the film. He goes out of his way to warn Elizabeth about the approaching Engineer. Elizabeth, having survived the Engineer's rampage and the falling debris from the ship, is searching the lifeboat for supplies when David's voice crackles out from the radio. 'He's coming for you', is her only warning before the Engineer storms into Vickers' lifeboat (*Prometheus*). As the Engineer rams Elizabeth back into the craft, the door to the med-bay opens and the once-foetus emerges as a giant-squid-like monster. It wraps its tentacles around the Engineer and then extends its free tentacles in Elizabeth's direction. She barely escapes from its grasp while the two aliens battle for survival. She stumbles out of the lifeboat falling on to her back, stunned until David's voice offers salvation. If she retrieves his body and head, he can lead her to another of the Engineers' ships and escape the planet. As the last two crew members leave the moon behind, the camera cuts to the lifeboat — the Engineer, killed by the squid-monster, ruptures, and out of his abdomen appears the Xenomorph, the alien who will become the aggressor in the *Alien* franchise.

From the analysis, it can be understood that the abortion within *Prometheus* is used not only as a plot device to remove the foetus-monster from Elizabeth and our gaze, but also to serve a greater narrative purpose in redefining the film's mythic content from a patriarchal creation myth to one of female agency and embodied experience, without which the dramatic abortion scene would have continued to be a male dominated narrative. The abortion scene displays Elizabeth Shaw's development as an active and engaging subject, who rejects not only her dehumanised and objectified status as receptacle, of c*hôra*, but also the male determined creation narrative that originally subjugates her. The text then becomes a space for an ontological gendered dialogue, with the express purpose of challenging the predetermined notions of a patriarchal hegemony that removes or restricts

women to an inactive passive state. There are of course, still elements of the purely masculine. David, for example, still acts as Elizabeth's protector (as much as he can without a body) and he is the one who gives her purpose at the film's end. Nonetheless, he is no longer the flawless being who embodied traditional Western philosophical dualism. His experiment has ended in disaster. Just as the male-creators before him eventually failed, so too does David. Without his body, his isolation from the biological is written onto his being, just as Elizabeth, the perfect blend of body and mind, becomes the new and preferred melding of an embodied subject.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation set out to present an exploratory study on the various modes of representation of abortion. In all the examined texts, abortion has been used to consider a multitude of individual, social, cultural, political and ideological issues. It has not sought out one particular theme or issue to focus on, but rather has looked at each text's particular choices in representing abortion, and to provide some insights into those various representations. While some texts have similar themes, each is unique in its representation of abortion, and therefore provides a broad scope for the study of representation. There are clearly strong commonalities throughout the films and television shows presented in this dissertation. Given the nature of the topic, that of abortion and its various modes of representation, this study is invariably a discussion centred on gender. The representations of abortion provided here challenge the often hypocritical ideologies found in societies, those which objectify, alienate and regulate women into social and gendered positions, which, in reality, do not equate to their personal lived experiences. Through their various depictions of abortion, the texts demonstrate abortion's relationship with the broader social, political and gender issues of societies.

The largest limitation that this study has faced has been its own scope. In seeking to present a range of texts for consideration, and thus present numerous representations of abortion, the study has had to forego a closely constructed argument focusing on one particular area. It has done so for a variety of reasons. Firstly, as indicated in the introduction, there are already many studies of abortion relating to literary and visual texts, which are directed at a specific period, country, or ideological pursuit. Secondly, I wished to avoid the stereotypical ideological rhetoric of abortion, choosing instead to investigate a general representation. Such a study provides a better understanding of how abortion might be represented across cultures and genres. While two of the countries represented here, American and Hong Kong/China, provide more than one text, these are substantively different from one another and consider diverse and important representations of abortion that warrant their inclusion. While the texts are varied in their representation of abortion, there appears to be a predominant thematic development, as if the works were all considering similar gendered, political and social issues, in spite of coming from such diverse sources.

I have argued that the first three of the analysed films, *Part-Time Work*, *4 Months* and *Vera Drake* contained representations of abortion that, while socially and politically specific, present discourses about alienation, agency, bodily-power, resistance and space for women. These three films have, through their particular theoretical analyses engaged in legitimately specific representations where abortion has been outlawed, that raise discussions of gender, as well as social politics. They have also represented abortion in a way that removes the sensationalised and emotional elements from the act, suggesting that abortions are naturally part of a woman's social and bodily existence.

In my first chapter, I examined *Part-Time Work*, using Kluge's own inclination for Marxist critique to frame the discussion of abortion representation. My focus in this chapter was on how Kluge used abortion as a metaphor for the social contradictions that women faced within a patriarchal society. Abortion and the issues of reproduction were presented as being the Marxist modes of female (re)production, the prohibition of abortion symbolises the alienation of women from their lived experience and their social and intellectual development. What is interesting to note, although not the focus of the chapter, is that Kluge, while using abortion as a means of demonstrating the contradictions of female social roles — and in doing so, normalising the act of performing and obtaining abortions — is unable to accept abortions as anything other than contradictory to a woman's lived experience. Kluge, then, acts upon the very hypocrisy and ideology that he tries to reject in his film. Nevertheless, I argued that by presenting the protagonist Roswitha as the abortionist, the film begins to link the issue of alienation with those gendered and political questions of women's agency and space. *Part-Time Work* focused on the alienation of women from their socio-political power. In doing so, the film asks women to become actively engaged in their intellectual liberation from patriarchy and to cease being willing, if blind participants, in a society that does not have their interests at heart.

The alienation, which was presented in Chapter One, is further explored in Chapter Two's film analysis of *4 Months*, which is similarly embedded in a particular historical context. Set within the totalitarian state of communist Romania, the film extends Kluge's notion of the alienated body. Unlike the metaphorical representation that Kluge sought, this film is far more literal (such literalisation was not examined in detail, the focus being on the way in which Mungiu uses abortion to represent a totalitarian state). Mungiu presents a film set in an era where women have literally become reproductive slaves to the state. In

the Romania depicted in *4 Months*, women's bodies are regulated and controlled at every level. I have argued that by presenting a film styled upon surveillance footage and analysing the film through Michel Foucault's theory of biopower and the body-politic, alienation of the body develops into a literal location for a power struggle between women and the state that seeks to control them. The question of agency, which was present in *Part-Time Work*, is the dominant concern within *4 Months*, where alienation and surveillance have become the modes of inquiry. The black market abortion that Otilia and Găbița procure, in exchange for sex, reinforces the physical struggle for bodily autonomy and ownership that is explored in the film.

In Chapter Three, *Vera Drake* brought together the spatial aspects of Kluge's representation of the 'underground' abortion practice and the solidarity represented by the youth in *4 Months*. By positioning Vera as someone who helps people within a patriarchal society that readily condemns her for performing such a function, Leigh's period film of 1950s England once more comments on the ideologies of a patriarchal state. I asserted that the film considers how women are displaced within their society, and through the representation of six of the abortions that Vera performs, the film considers how these women make their own space, which accommodates the needs that are denied to them by the state. I suggested that *Vera Drake* is a text where women attempt to reclaim their bodily autonomy from the state and develop their agency as individual subjects through the spaces that undermine the patriarchal system. Indeed, Vera's imprisonment, itself an act of patriarchal dominance, displays how women view the restrictive system: The women she meets who are also imprisoned for practicing abortion, group together and share knowledge about how their abortions went wrong. The implication is that once released from prison, they will return to being abortionists, using their new found knowledge to improve and alter their techniques.

While these films share many similarities they have mostly been looked at in isolation. The arguments presented suggest that such period films consider the plight of women in a society which has ignored and neglected them at best, and at worst completely objectified and subjugated them. Because of the illegality of abortion in these period films, their representation of the act is relatively direct. In each such society, women have been dominated by a patriarchy that placed women's reproductive capabilities before their personal autonomy. As such, while the films' creators themselves have not sought to

provide texts that lend themselves to a particular political agenda regarding abortion, they display unambiguous representations of abortion that lead to discussions of not only alienation, agency, bodily politics, resistance and space for women, but also discussions of the hegemonic ideologies that sought to dominate women.

The more modern representations of abortion are not as unambiguous in their renderings of the issue. Situated in societies where abortion is legal, the ideological discourses in these texts are more subtle, and the representations of abortion, more creative. The discussions concerning patriarchal ideologies have also been expanded to include discussions of cultural ideologies. In the chapters presented after *Vera Drake*, abortion is considered through acts that are spectacular, sensational and emotive. Moving gradually away from the historical socio-political texts towards Gothic representations in Chapters Four and Five, the depiction of abortion transitions from realistic to fantastical. The socio-political context found in *Dumplings*, while making use of Gothic tropes, contains a deeply political commentary about national and personal identity in Hong Kong and China. Chapter Five's *American Horror Story*, explores how the television show hyperbolises Gothic traditions to the point of becoming ludicrous and farcical, in a bid to lay bare the polarised attitudes of American culture towards the issue of abortion.

In my fourth chapter, I broadened my analysis of the representation of abortion in two primary ways: by first introducing a non-European text and then moving away from the historical socio-political representation of abortion, to a socio-political representation with Gothic undertones. This chapter analysed *Dumplings*, a film from Hong Kong, and established that the film's choice of abortion representation, through dumplings filled with aborted foetuses, is predominantly a political allegory for the dangerous political and cultural habits of consumption within China and Hong Kong. Through the Chinese immigrant, abortionist and cannibalistic protagonist Mei, the film also presents the anxieties surrounding Hong Kong's national identity that is being slowly incorporated back into China. Being representative of Chinese ideology Mei becomes a threat to the national identity of those living in Hong Kong, who, because of their own problematic ideologies concerning youth and beauty, readily consume the dumplings that Mie provides. Although critical of the mass abortions performed in China, the film is sympathetic to the plight of Kate and her mother, and equally critical of the unbridled consumerism in Hong Kong that leads to Kate's death. While the primary focus of the chapter is on how the abortion, and

the cannibalisation of the aborted, is central to the argued interpretation, the film does present its own criticism of the patriarchal ideologies present in Hong Kong and China. Because this dissertation only briefly touches on this criticism, it may be worth exploring this further in a study which examines representations of patriarchal ideologies in China and Hong Kong through visual media.

While *Dumplings* worked as both an important independent study of the representations of abortion, and as a transitional chapter between the historical texts and the modern ones, Chapter Five's analysis of the American text *American Horror Story*, provides a discourse that is culturally specific. Here, the representation of abortion is constructed in four instances within the show's current five seasons. The lengthiest representation is portrayed within the narrative of Season One titled *Murder House*. I argued in this chapter that the show utilises Gothic techniques and conventions in such a way that it satirises American culture, and that its inclusion of abortion, both in its 'historical' and 'current' depictions, functions as a critique of America's incongruent cultural ideologies regarding abortion. I therefore focused my attention on how *American Horror Story* depicted space within the show in relation to abortion, particularly where the house was concerned. Because the show is so dense, I have only examined those scenes that are directly related to abortion. As such, the chapter provides a limited perspective of the television series and how abortion has been used. *Murder House* provides a narrative that closely links its representation of abortion, with pregnancy. The desire to have a child is seen in all of the adult female characters in Season One, and is extended into Elizabeth's narrative in Season Five where she looks after and loves the immortal monster-infant. There is a wealth of gendered and social commentary available within this television show, and my analysis of it has barely scraped the surface in terms of possibilities. I maintained that the show not only satirises American culture, but also succeeds in using abortion to create a spectacular horror.

While the Gothic texts portrayed stories of excess and barbarity, they have also managed to undo what the previous historical representations of abortion had sought to do, which was normalise the act of performing or procuring an abortion. These sensationalised representations took on a different significance in the next two chapters, which contained representations of abortion that focused on the individual experiences of women in modern societies. The sensationalism present in the previous chapters, depicted in the horrific acts

of, and surrounding abortion, becomes more of an emotional rendering of women's lives. The texts examined in Chapters Six and Seven exhibited such emotional and sentimental representations of abortion that, while still concerned with issues surrounding cultural ideologies, also returned to gendered discussions of women's space and agency.

Continuing with the analysis of American texts, Chapter Six examined the television show *Grey's Anatomy*. The show removed the sensational reading of abortion from the Gothic and placed it into the realm of the medical soap opera, focusing on the personal experiences of the characters, and rendering a more emotive discussion about abortion in relation to American ideologies. While the representation remains somewhat naïve and sentimental, the discussion presented in the chapter recognises the issues of women's spaces and personal identity in modern America. *Grey*'s specifically raises the issue of motherhood, and questions the roles of modern women in the twenty-first century. I argued that the show, through the narratives of Addison and Cristina, and the inclusion of abortions, challenges those patriarchal ideologies which — seen previously in Kluge's *Part-Time Work* — suggest that a woman's natural inclination is to have children. Both presentations of abortion narratives in *Grey*'s are entrenched in the rhetoric of the naturalised mother, which is steeped in gendered and patriarchal discourse. I also presented the representations of abortion in relation to two surgeons as being explorations of their bodily existence. While differing in terms of presentation and outcomes, both women's abortion narratives situated their experiences within a lived embodiment of the self, where their bodies defy them and society seeks to control and judge them. Both women are challenged in terms of their identities as 'women' through this problematic assumption of 'women as mother', and their abortions locate them in the realm of the (m)other, who is woman but not necessarily mother.

In Chapter Seven, I argued that the same sentimentality and emotional rendering of the individual's representation of abortion found in Chapter Six, takes on a more psychological role. While *Grey*'s moves away from the Gothic in its consideration of abortion, *Re-Cycle* returns to the Gothic and Horror genres. Chapter Six provided an analysis of the film through the specific theoretical framework of Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny and Cathy Caruth's reading of trauma (the previous two chapters, while using theory, had no predominant theorists or theories). I argued that in merging a trauma narrative about an abortion into a film whose protagonist is struggling to write her next

story, the representation of abortion within *Re-Cycle* is one that challenges the internalisation of societal ideologies which determine who can speak, and what can or should be spoken of. Ting-yin writes a novel about her abortion, and as she writes this novel, the audience, and her doppelgängers travel the fictional world of the abandoned, confronting Ting-yin's past, which includes her abandonment by her lover and her subsequent abortion eight years previously. I argued that in its representation, the film considers issues not only of an ideological nature, but also of agency and power. That Ting-yin can only experience the emotional effects of her abortion in a realm filled with abandoned objects and people, suggests a strong stigma and negative cultural ideologies associated with abortions, which she has internalised and is unable to completely escape.

Finally, in Chapter Eight I argued that *Prometheus* may be understood as a modern myth, which, instead of promoting the typical masculine creation myth — from which the film draws its name — presents a feminist myth. By being a mythic film, the representation of abortion, although only a small part of the film's detailed plot, transcends those previous texts based on reality. The film not only deals with the multiple creation myths (The Engineers, Weyland and David are all representations of patriarchal creators), but also presents multiple instances of termination, with the most important being the Engineer's desire to destroy the very beings which they had created — humankind. Just as the Engineers fail to destroy humanity, so too does Elizabeth Shaw fail to terminate the alien foetus. Unlike the Engineers, Elizabeth's 'failure' does not demonstrate inadequacy. It is through the very act of obtaining her abortion that she achieves her autonomy and agency. She does so, not only by defying David's will, but also through the caesarean section, which she had to obtain by demanding an 'abdominal' surgery from the medpod, thus bypassing the constraints imposed by the machine calibrated for male patients. Such limitations intended to impose on her the status of object, and her rejection of such, presents not only a feminist mythic film, but also openings for further conversations of gender within societies and myth.

While exploring the various representation of abortion in film and television series, the dissertation has centred on the issues of gender, and specifically the positioning of women within the societies which the texts represent. While there has been an informal grouping of the texts, all of the chosen films and television series present discourses about women, and their various personal, social and political contextual positioning. All of the texts present modes of representation of abortion that identify and challenge the gendered

norms of the depicted societies, and seek to demonstrate how abortion is part of an ideological system that is embedded in patriarchal hegemony. The various historical texts provide a more obvious critique about such male dominated societies, utilising abortion as a means of representing women's often restricted physical, social and political mobilisation, reinforcing established power relations within society, and how these power relations effect women and their lived realities.

Within the historical texts, the prohibition of abortion removed the power of self-determination from women. Such representations expose how societies established constructs of women's lived existence is often incongruous with their actual lived experiences. Such representations of abortion suggest that women are often relegated to their biological role as producer of people, through the hegemonic rule that illegalises abortion. Imposing patriarchal law on to women's bodily autonomy and their lived experiences lead women to seek alternative spaces in which they may better live their real experiences, which are in defiance of the law of the land. These representations of abortion have demonstrated a hypocrisy in relation to women and their positions in various societies. The hypocrisy was exacerbated through the women's methods of defiance: removed from their social power and bodily autonomy, women performed and obtained abortions as an act of desperation, and as a means of realising their rebellious power against those who would subjugate them.

Just as gender is at the centre of the more historically obvious texts, the more modern films and television series provide depictions of abortion representation which raise questions of women's positions in society, as well as the extent to which patriarchy still influences the lived experiences of women. By including *Dumplings* in this discussion of abortion in film, the various lived realities of women are suggestive of the gendered issuesof social acceptance, political power and personal autonomy, These are at the centre of the films' various representations of abortion and are extended into those societies which provide legal abortions, for it is not in abortion where the contention of ideologies is really situated. Abortion, legal or illegal, is a visible presentation of state and individual gendered power relations. Such representations of abortion seek to demonstrate the realities of abortion when societies choose to overregulate access to it.

The prohibition of abortion within the first three films suggests certain social and political realities for women, who, having been alienated from society and their bodies,

actively rebel and reject the often hypocritical ideologies which the patriarchy sought to impose upon them. As an alternative, *Dumplings*' representation of abortion does not seek to demonstrate how women would resist the ideologies imposed on them, but actually indicates the problematic situation of societies which actually accept those ideologies that force on them impossible and objectifying roles of existence. The struggle for autonomy presented against hegemonic ideologies becomes a warning against the acceptance of ideologies that are socially and individually damaging. Such a representation of abortion brings to light how women are, like the previous films, still relegated to specified roles which, while acceptable to the patriarchy, are ultimately damaging to women.

Dumplings, embracing such ideologies to the detriment of its characters, is significant because it suggests that the realities of women's lived experiences and their positions in society are still greatly determined by the patriarchal hegemony, despite the appearance of a continually developing social and gendered awareness. Such an awareness is exactly what *American Horror Story* utilises in its social critique of American culture. The denial of the hypocrisy within American society situates those issues presented within the historical films within a society that is unable, or unwilling, to actively acknowledge its innate hypocrisy regarding women. Although *American Horror Story* looks at abortion in the broadest of terms, the issues it presents — those of an unsure or ignorant society regarding women and their positions — is most prominent in *Grey's,* which challenges those very gendered, social and political issues which Kluge, Mungiu and Leigh demonstrated were realities for women in their societies

Such societal positioning, which regulates women to specifically acceptable positions within society, are best demonstrated through the more personalised depictions of abortion which closely consider women's ability for social and personal advancement, and how modern societies consider women in relation to their potential reproductive capacities. *Grey's* and *Re-Cycle* present representations that still position abortion at the centre of controversy. Abortion becomes a tool with which to challenge ideological constructs, which suggests that there is still a strong patriarchal influence on women's lived experiences — even when those lived experiences are presented in modern societies. By portraying abortions in societies where despite the act being legalised, they are still culturally problematic, *Grey's* and *Re-Cycle* both present the realities of cultural and social perceptions surrounding what women should be, in contrast to what women actually are.

This leap forward in time, from the 1950s all the way to 2015 — that includes all the texts analysed — highlights the ongoing problems of societies and their inability to separate their perceptions of deeply entrenched patriarchal constructs of women, as viewed by women themselves.

The films and television shows that locate abortion in a modern setting provide an echo of the lived realities which women had to deal with decades before, but the hypocrisy is even more embedded within society, because society is now able to deny that there is still an issue regarding women and their accepted position. Providing a futuristic narrative containing a representation of abortion, *Prometheus* sets out to re-emphasise gender inequality, both socially and politically. The film reiterates the still problematic role of patriarchal hegemony that dominates modern society. Those ideologies that have been normalised through centuries of societal development become obvious through the science fiction film that pits a male creation myth against the agency and autonomy of female positioning.

The analysis of abortion representation therefore, has throughout this dissertation, revealed the less obvious hypocrisy of patriarchal societies. The societal positioning of women, their bodily autonomy and their individual agency has, throughout, always been in a threatened or ambiguous position, and women always have their identities dominated by their potential to reproduce. The various representations of abortion examined here, exposed societal flaws regarding abortion, which disproportionately disadvantages women and limits female agency, autonomy and power. Those representations suggest that until acknowledged and confronted, these issues will continue to be at the centre of women's struggles for attainment of their own lived experiences, opposing those rights assumed by the patriarchal hegemony to deny women control of their own bodies and lives.

Abortion, as the dissertation's exploration into the various modes of representation has suggested, can be depicted through an unlimited number of ways. From an historical drama, to a science fiction film, the possible ways in which narratives involving abortion might be created is probably limitless. Nevertheless, while the texts presented here demonstrate how abortion is not limited to popular rhetoric, the continued theme of gender, with subthemes of power, agency, individual and bodily autonomy, is indicative of how intricate abortion is to the ongoing debates of gendered identity, both in terms of individuals, and in terms of societal positioning. The ongoing and continual development

of how abortion is represented within popular mediums such as film and television is representative of how complex this issue is. While the dissertation set out to explore the representation of abortion outside of the political, the political is indeed part of the discussion. The politics presented in the texts, however, is gendered, not ethical. The various representations consider not only women's — and men's — historical, contemporary and potential futuristic locations in various societies, but also include the considerations of the patriarchal discourse which is deeply engrained within those societal contexts.

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