

Re-visioning the Pregnant Body: Engaging with Elizabeth MacKenzie's Installation *Radiant Monster*

Susan Gingell

ABSTRACT

Radiant Monster, a multi-media work by Canadian artist Elizabeth MacKenzie, is situated within a larger Western feminist multi-disciplinary project of re-thinking the pregnant body. The installation's ambivalence about pregnancy is tied to the control patriarchy exercises over pregnant bodies, especially through verbal and visual representations, including those of medical technology.

RÉSUMÉ

Radiant Monster, une oeuvre multi-média par l'artiste canadienne Elizabeth Mackenzie, est située à l'intérieur d'un plus grand projet féministe occidental qui réfléchit encore un coup sur le corps d'une femme enceinte. L'ambivalence de l'installation au sujet de la grossesse est reliée au contrôle que la patriarchie exerce sur les corps de femmes enceintes, surtout par l'entremise des représentations verbales et visuelles, y compris celle de la technologie médicale.

Enter the gallery where Elizabeth MacKenzie's *Radiant Monster* (1996) is up and running, and you will hear the whooshing tom-tom beat before you see the installation. When you walk into the exhibition space, your eye surveys the large architectural structure of two-by-fours, suggesting a house when the framer's work is done but the finish carpenter won't be needed for some time yet (see figure #1). You notice the filmy beige drapery that softens the rough pine lumber of this room within a room, and through this translucent skin can make out the projectors, cassette player, speakers, and lighting equipment that make *Radiant Monster* technically functional. Yet your eye is drawn to the larger-than-life photograph of a cupped hand at whose fingertips rests a moving ultrasound fetal image displayed in a blunted pie-wedge shape, familiar from the radar screen (see figure #2). This house, no ordinary house then, for its large glass-less window frame offers the marvel of a window on the womb. So you wonder what MacKenzie's making the technology that runs *Radiant Monster* discernible means. Is it her way of reminding you that although medical technologies have blurred the boundaries between the inside and

outside of the woman's body and helped make the fetus seem virtually autonomous, the show would not go on, the pregnancy advance and reproductive cycle reach its ending/beginning in birth without the complex inter-workings of the mother's many systems?

Dwelling on the fetal image of the ultrasound scan, your mind finds confirmation of your first impression that the whooshing sound is like the fetal heartbeat heard on the monitor in the hospital's labour room. Then you re-focus on the photograph below the radar screen: the image of a cupped hand, luminous on its upper surface and ambiguous in gender. The juxtaposition of moving and still pictures prompts the mind to creative connection. Is this hand, strangely familiar, the inverse image of the penile digit of God reaching out to touch Adam into life in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel painting of the creation? Who might be in the palm of whose hand, even if the connections are not visible? Control, after all, works better when it operates unseen.

The most fascinating part of what *is* seen in MacKenzie's installation, however, is the image of human life *in utero*, so your eye dwells for a

space on the ribs, until the image shifts again to reveal ... a face. A human face in the womb. Yet visible through the wonders of medical technology. And another form of that technology delivers up to you the unchanging whooshing rhythm that you hear as the marvel of a tiny heartbeat, magnified and insistent with life. But wait a minute. This is a fetus, a not yet human baby, and images like this are central to anti-abortion Right-to-Life propaganda that has sought to make the fetus "a public presence [in our] visually oriented culture" (Petchesky 58) by externalizing it from the mother's body. Alerted, you ask, so where is the mother in

all this? And where, for that matter, the father? And that tom-tom sounds relentless after a time. The steady throbbing suddenly seems to you like the persistent demands of young children on the mother. And you look for her, and *her* human face is not there. Displaced, replaced by the fetal face, a shift created and countenanced by that medical technology just moments ago wondrous, now more ambiguous.

...



Figure # 1. Elizabeth MacKenzie, *Radiant Monster* (1996), installation at The Photographer's Gallery, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Photo by Judy Bowyer.



Figure #2. Elizabeth MacKenzie, detail, *Radiant Monster* (1996), installation at The Photographer's Gallery, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Photo by Judy Bowyer.

And what have *I* displaced in attempting both to facilitate an engagement with *Radiant Monster* for those who have not had an opportunity to experience it first-hand and to renew engagement for those who have had such an opportunity? As I have produced multiple potential referents for the pronoun *you* - the *you* whom I have imagined as reader and as audience for the installation, as well as my remembered self responding to the work, I know I have displaced onto imagined others my

own responses to *Radiant Monster* when I first encountered it walking into the Photographers Gallery in Saskatoon in the fall of 1996. I know, too, that my remembered reactions are necessarily conditioned by my location as a white, middle-class, feminist, heterosexual mother and academic; thus it is time to end this fiction of a singular, universalised sequence of responses, even as I want to take you back into the flow of my responses to the work to show how the mind is kept mobile by the multiple indeterminacies and ambiguities of MacKenzie's installation.

I wonder what it means that that which is aural has been transformed by ultrasound mechanics into the visual, in a way that effaces the mother.¹ The maternal torpedoed by a technology born in the theatre of war.² A different kind of operation altogether than that which takes place in the examining rooms and operating theatres of the contemporary hospital. Or is it? I think of the human body spied on in its most intimate places (Big Brother is watching. So a form of the Father, if not the father, comes clear), the body bombed with cobalt, assaulted by drugs, invaded, mutilated.

But I remind myself that recovery is the goal, and remember that despite the surveillance and control of women made possible by the new technologies connected with prenatal care, those technologies are much more than simply tools for reproducing oppressive power relations. I know that many women find ultrasound scanning a positive experience, some reporting it facilitates bonding with their future child, and others that it helps to cement the nuclear family when the father is also present for the scan (Hyde cited in Yoxen 282). Most agree to scanning to allay anxieties about the health of the fetus and to fulfil the responsibility they feel to do everything they can to minimize the risk of giving birth to a less than perfect baby. Thus prenatal diagnostic scans have become normalized in our society precisely because the very availability of the tests makes choosing not to have them far from a neutral act, and pregnant women feel pressured to conform to the prescriptions of scientifically based medicine (Browner and Press 309). Fetal ultrasound creates

a Catch 22, then, because it is a technology designed to allay anxiety created in significant part by the intense surveillance of the pregnant body culturally prescribed as "a condition of health" (Cartwright 155) for pregnant women. So, might the lack of purchase that MacKenzie's photographed hand has on the ultrasound scan then be understood as the tantalizing but never fulfilled desire for reassurance that pregnant women in our culture experience?

Alternately, the gap between the hand and the scan may signify the lost centrality of touch in a world that increasingly takes as a criterion of reality that which is visible to the naked eye or is made visible through technological means. In a society driven by what body historian Barbara Duden calls the *libido videndi*, "the ravenous urge to extend one's sight" (15), the pregnant woman's formerly necessarily private feeling of the unborn's aliveness and her once crucial testimony of her pregnant state that came at the time of quickening has been supplanted by the technogenic production of the public fetus.

The fingertips' cradling of the fetal scan, for all the hand's lack of direct contact with the ultrasound image, also counters the idea of the fetus floating free in space that has been part of the North American public consciousness since the 5 June 1962 photo-essay in *Look* magazine "The First Nine Months of Life." This article initiated the now familiar series of images of the fetus as tiny spaceman, dangling alone in the air or the space-capsule of its amniotic sac with "nothing to connect it to any life-support system but 'a clearly defined umbilical cord'" (Petchesky 61).³ The public's perception of the pregnant woman's inner space as an analogue of outer space was further shaped by the August 1990 *Life* photo-essay "The First Days of Creation" with its highly suggestive captions: "Like an eerie planet floating through space, a woman's egg or ovum ...has been ejected by one of her ovaries" (cited in Duden 12) and "The blastocyst has landed! Like a lunar module, the embryo facilitates its landing on the uterus with leg-like structures composed of sugar molecules on the surface" (14). Michelangelo's primogenitor is here succeeded by a technogenitor, and the idea of

the maternal environment as an alien if not hostile planet is inescapable. Thus, MacKenzie's gentle cupped-shaped hand also seems to suggest nurturing and to be a reminder of the necessary support and sustenance the mother provides to the unborn.

Still the size of the hand needs to be explained, and I wonder if the larger-than-life representation might be a counter to the huge fetal images that appeared first in the 1960s publications of Nilsson's photographs in *Look* and *Life*, next making the cross-over to popular film in the dazzling special effects of the closing sequence of Stanley Kubrick's 1968 movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In a visual echo of Michelangelo's God stretching to pass life to Adam in the Sistine chapel *Creation*, rapidly ageing astronaut Dave slowly raises his finger to point at the black monolith that has come to represent non-human intelligent life, and after a burst of soaring sound, the film shows a star child fetus floating virtually autonomously in space, albeit in an amniotic sac-like capsule. Such over-blown images were then used in anti-abortion propaganda like the 1977 American film *The Silent Scream* and Knights of Columbus billboards to impress the idea on the consciousness of viewers that what they are seeing is undeniably human, rather than pre- or even potentially human.

Yet if various technologies in our visually dominated culture have served to make the mother disappear, might we look to artistic visual culture to recover her? American installation artist Judy Chicago tried such a recovery in her collaborative *Birth Project*, one precursor of MacKenzie's own work about the pregnant body. In one image from Chicago's series *Hatching the Universal Egg* (1984), she conceived of the birthing mother as generic and therefore without individualizing features, headless. She is, in fact, all trunk: lactating breasts and swollen egg-shaped belly fractured and flowing. Her facelessness, read in the context of the three faces of those she nurses, signifies, according to Chicago's New Zealand needlework collaborator Pippa Davies, the irony that the one who nurtures the identity of others in patriarchal culture pays the price of her own identity (98).

MacKenzie's pregnant woman is equally

without identity. Under the filmy skin that clothes the spare frame of *Radiant Monster*, I discern the bonehouse that gives room to the fetus, but this is more rigid structure than organic form. More "maternal environment" than mother? as Ruth Hubbard put it in explaining the degrading effects of fetal imaging on pregnant women in the 1980s (cited in Petchesky 70). More ecosystem for a vulnerable "life" (Duden 53) for the nine months of pregnancy than a mindful kinaesthetic body at what Duden, framing alternate visions of the pregnant woman, calls "a high point of...carnal knowledge" (8)? Also more motherhood than mother? I wonder, as Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* surfaces in my mind. Motherhood, the institution within which the individual mother's experience of being a mother occurs, constraining her, giving a shape to her days and nights, a shape engineered primarily by patriarchy. (The Father found out again.) The lumber uprights now are bars that hold the invisible mother prisoner. And that sound is beating, beating, in my ears till I think of a mother Emily Martin interviewed for her book *The Woman in the Body*, who connected her first hearing of her baby's heartbeat to the noise of "someone building a house boom, boom, boom" (Martin 72). The fetus creating houseroom for its own existence within the frame of the pregnant mother until she can feel crowded out.

And so I recall the unease and guilt that had accompanied a shift in how I felt about carrying a child in the final weeks of my own last pregnancy: the joy I knew in feeling the baby move inside me and the sense of never being more alive, giving way to feelings of awkwardness, ungainliness, and discomfort as the baby took up more and more of the space I needed to breathe and to digest, and I had longed for my body to myself again. Then came the heart-stopping fear lest my wish have magic power, fear that I might be the answer to the question Canadian poet Lorna Crozier asks in "Stillborn":

who
looped the cord
around his fine new neck

who
hanged him
in my bone gallows my
beautiful son
blue as the blue
in Chinese porcelain ("Stillborn" 1-9)

But in *Radiant Monster* it is the mother who is invaded, inhabited by an alien other, as the scanner that travels again and again over the fetal shape in the installation finds a body so different from the mother's as represented here that it might be a tiny monster that has taken up residence in it. Judy Chicago's *Birth Project* surfaces again as antecedent, for she reported that many pregnant women and mothers she listened to in preparation for her work feared what was growing within them and what it was doing to their bodies. Thus her *Birth Figure #4* (1982) was titled "Terrified She was Growing a Monster." But if Chicago's work foremothers that of the Canadian MacKenzie, the American artist's gynocentric representations of the experience of pregnancy are more naturalistic and mythological than that of MacKenzie, whose abstracted mother is mediated by the surveying technologies of contemporary medical science. I recall Martin's account of women angry that these technologies alienate them from the being that they experience as an extension of themselves, effecting a sudden rupture of that unique and precious experience of *inter*-subjectivity that is simultaneously *intra*-subjectivity. Technologies that therefore prematurely play out the process that Julia Kristeva sees as naturally occurring at the frontier of birth, a frontier which divides the pregnant woman's body and makes "an expatriate of her child" so that "What was mine...is now irremediably alien" (112). MacKenzie challenges the way medical science marginalizes the pregnant woman by technologizing both the male gaze that focuses on the fluctuating fetus and looks through the woman's otherwise obscuring corporeality, and the ear that as stethoscope can sound her somatic block and gain access to the fetus. So I remember the woman who reported to Emily Martin that she wasn't as excited as her husband at hearing her baby's heartbeat for the first time because it was the

doctor who had "given" it to her by saying "Here's the heartbeat." "I wanted to do it myself," she said, resenting the intervention (Martin 72).

As if in confirmation of this woman's voice insisting on the mother's centrality, I discover other traces of the mother in *Radiant Monster* in the words projected from slides on a screen below the film of the fetus and the photo of the hand. Her voice made visible but inaudible, drowned out by the beat of the being whom sound makes visible. Yet as I read the text displayed line by line, I think I might be able to begin to reconstruct the mother who names this tiny being occupying the territory that is her body.

Invisible Stranger Mine
 This Radiant Monster
 Her Dreaded Beloved
 That Enchanting Tyrant
 Our Dangerous Angel
 These Dazzling Fictions
 Adorable Demon You

Here, I can discern the voice of a mother like the one in Daphne Marlatt's "An economy of flowers," a mother who is aware of the patriarchal scopopic economy as the context in which she as pregnant woman is looked at "in full bloom they said seeing me large as a pod, a fruit, ripe and already taken" ("An economy of flowers" 1-2). Yet this mother remains joyful at her condition and quite prepared to ironize her relation to the Ideal Mother: "the mother flowers in me. Hydrangea. Blue as a virgin gone to seed" (2-3). That Marlatt is equally prepared to take from the Christian narrative those aspects of the experience of pregnancy that resonate with her, is evident in that she goes on to write a third-person commentary on the mother's state: "*it was a kind of grace...that had brought her to such fruition...crying with child, with her child: with her was the miracle*" (4-5, 11).

Like Marlatt's mother, MacKenzie's clearly marvels at women's procreative power, and so she recalls to me yet another mother, this one in M. Nourbese Philip's poem "Planned Obsolescence," who, facing a tubal ligation, laments:

Not again the skin stretched taut,
 urgent,
 not again the waxing moon
 belly,
 not again to create world in microcosm
 and be well pleased
 not again to feel future
 in gut.

("Planned Obsolescence" 6-13)

In MacKenzie's verbal text, both sides of the sonographic story are told, I notice, mindful that the once invisible "Stranger" is made "Mine" for some pregnant women when they can see the fetus (Petchesky 72), perhaps because their consciousnesses have been shaped by a Western "middle-class culture that values planning, control and predictability" (74), all of which are fostered by sonographic surveillance. But the hegemony of the visual also has its role to play in the creation of any mother's desire for a fetal photograph, Petchesky suggests when she argues that such pictures are culturally embedded forms of desire continuous with the infant's and child's pictures in the family album the mother keeps up (75).

The other strand of the story, however, concerns MacKenzie's incorporated Stranger, Monster, Tyrant, and Demon, the one who disrupts the previously more or less fixed boundaries of the woman's body as she once knew them. The installation's negatively named figures recall other women's accounts of their fearful harbouring of an alien being. Among them, Crozier again, unreeling the mother's nightmare section of the "The Foetus Dreams," presenting images of the mother consumed by the fetus that tears or sucks its nourishment from its host body:

The woman turns in sleep,
 the foetus turns. She dreams
 a thing inside her.
 It eats her heart.
 It chews through her belly.
 It splits her in two
 like an avocado, a stone
 rolls out. It is a fish
 with teeth, a bird with spurs,

a plant that roots in her lungs.
It rides out of her
on a black horse,
it cries *Mother*.

("The Foetus Dreams" 103-15)

The darker side of the ambiguity of incipient motherhood represented by Crozier and by the oxymorons in virtually every line of MacKenzie's verbal text in *Radiant Monster* are contextualized by the still harsher view of the pregnant body in Margaret Atwood's "Christmas Carols." This poem unceremoniously topples from patriarchy's pedestal the idealized mother promoted by Christian discourse in a variety of media:

Children do not always mean
hope. To some they mean despair.
This woman with her hair cut off
so she could not hang herself
threw herself from a rooftop, thirty
times raped & pregnant by the enemy
who did this to her. This one had her
pelvis
broken by hammers so the child
could be extracted. Then she was thrown
away,
useless, a ripped sack. This one
punctured herself with kitchen skewers
and bled to death on a greasy
oilcloth table, rather than bear
again and past the limit

("Christmas Carols" 1-14)

Then interrupting the flow of Atwood's words in my mind come those of Jamaican-born Canadian dub poet Lillian Allen in "Nellie Belly Swelly." Her thirteen year-old Nellie is the carefully tended rosebud in her mother's garden until "lust leap the garden fence / pluck the rose bud / bruk it ina the stem" ("Nelly Belly Swelly" 9-11). But the rape and resultant pregnancy are not all that Allen's Nellie endures, because her community attaches its own patriarchal meaning to her pregnant body as sign of her moral degeneracy:

knowing eyes blamed her

Nellie disappeared from sight
news spread wide
as the months went by
psst psst psst Nellie belly swelly
Nellie belly swelly Nellie belly swelly
children skipped to Nellie's shame
(27-33)

But if Nellie cannot control her community's reading of her pregnant body in a context where "No sentence was passed / on this menacing ass / who plundered Nellie's childhood" (39-41), her own counter-hegemonic understanding of her pregnancy gives her primary agency in another kind of birth:

In her little tiny heart
Nellie understood war

She mustered an army within her
strengthened her defence
and mined the garden fence

No band made a roll
skies didn't part
for this new dawn
infact [sic], nothing heralded it
when this feminist was born.
(42-51)

The negations of Allen's poem summon Atwood's "Christmas Carols" again, for Atwood writes in the context of Christendom's most heralded birth for which skies do open and trumpets blow. So after re-visioning the pregnant body as a site of torture and oppression, Atwood explicitly contradicts versions of the patriarchal mother, whether she appear as Earth Mother, the Every(pregnant)woman as in a state of fruitful plenitude, or Virgin Mother:

Think twice then
before you worship turned furrows, or pay
lip service to some full belly
or other, or single out one girl to play

the magic mother, in blue
 & white, up on that pedestal,
 perfect & intact, distinct
 from those who aren't. Which means
 everyone else.

("Christmas Carols" 21-29)

Because "everyone else" includes those for whom abandonment and poverty condition their experience of the pregnant body, Allen's "Belly Woman's Lament" provides another important gloss on radiant motherhood. The poem gives voice to the pain and confusion of a woman abandoned after the "likkle seed" her lover implanted in her begins to "bloat her belly": "It noh know/ How it change / Mek life rearrange" ("Belly Woman's Lament" 10-15).

Even when the pregnancy is consonant with the woman's desire, the "beloved" can yet be "Dreaded," MacKenzie's installation asserts. Ambiguity, then, at the heart of pregnancy because of the bittersweet core of motherhood beyond pregnancy. By pointedly representing such ambiguity, Dorothy Livesay's poems "The Mother" and "The Three Emily's" help me read MacKenzie's work. Fear of the pregnant body understood as fear of the alien Other consuming artist mother, as the child feeds continually on the mother's attention, so that she cannot "wander lonely" as a way to feed her artistic hungers:

She cannot walk alone. Must set her pace
 To the slow count of grasses, butterflies,
 To puppy's leap, the new bulldozer's
 wheeze,
 To Chinese fisherman, balancing his pole.
 ("The Mother" 1-4)

Livesay records that words themselves are constricted by mothering, thereby making the impossibility of the mother's doing the poet's work more explicit: "She cannot think alone. Words must be / Poised to the smaller scope" (5-6). So is the scale of *Radiant Monster* a defiance of this pressure to adjust to a smaller scope and/or a triumphant assertion of finally having solidity, bulk, and substance in the eyes of a society that too often

trivializes women because of their allegedly characteristic weakness and daintiness?⁴

The fierce sense of love that motherhood in many conditions entails and the joyful fulfilment that women can experience in their mothering are acknowledged in Livesay's poem as she maps the course of the mother's much interrupted day and finds her at the end soothing her child to sleep, having "chosen here to stay" (13). These are the forces that generate the radiance, enchantment, and bedazzling effect the mother implied by MacKenzie's verbal text feels. The ways in which the child is the mother's beloved, her angel, and the object of her adoration counterbalance in MacKenzie's representation the ways in which the child is dreaded, dangerous, or demonic.

Both biological reproductive capacities and the work of cultural production are valued and honoured in both Livesay's and MacKenzie's visions; however, Livesay's "The Mother" details the satisfactions that proceed from the woman's choosing to become and actively remain a mother, while "The Three Emily's," Livesay's tribute to the Emilys Bronte, Dickinson, and Carr, makes most explicit the competing demands of artistic creation and motherhood. The poem notes first the childless, husband-less women "Walk alone, uncomforted," but Livesay soon turns her text to remark their consequent liberty, and how "From wandering lonely they could catch / The inner magic of a heath" ("The Three Emilys" 2, 11-12). The persona subsequently represents herself as "born to hear their inner storm" yet "mov[ing] as mother in a frame" (17, 21), so that she gives me another way to think about MacKenzie's lumber uprights: motherhood as frame-up, mother as framed, both held within the golden rectangle of the picture frame and forever set up to be convicted of not being that magic mother on Atwood's pedestal. Because Livesay's persona feels her arteries flow "the immemorial way / Towards the child, the man," she believes that "only for brief span / Am I an Emily on mountain snows" (23-24, 25-26). Her testimony to the penalty she pays?

And so the whole that I possess
 Is still much less

They move triumphant through my head:
I am the one
Uncomforted.
(27-31)

The pregnant mother's bone house in *Radiant Monster* is, then, also the artist's fear of being "much less," of being reduced to skeletal remains of her former self, specifically her artistic self, after childbirth. In a culture built on the Cartesian mind/body split, the anxiety of the artist-mother might well be rooted in the sense that if the body has become the medium of her creativity, then there will be no energy left for the mental creativity of her artistry.

Yet thinking about the relation between reproductive and artistic creativity need not be negatively inflected; the relation might also be construed as analogic. The radiance of MacKenzie's monster suggests a more positive vision of the two types of creativity, and it seems important to recognize that in this installation, as in so much of MacKenzie's work of the last decade,⁵ motherhood has become the centre of her artistic vision, as it is an important dimension of her subjectivity in other respects. Pregnancy as doubled condition then: a metaphor for artistic creativity as well as the state that threatens it. The more positive relation figured in the patient nurturing and expected birthing of an artistic idea is what poet Pat Lowther's "How Can I Begin" prompted me to see in *Radiant Monster*. "How can I begin?" her persona asks, given that there are "So many skins / of silence upon me" ("How Can I Begin" 1, 2-3). The as yet unarticulated skeleton, limbs and features of the embryo/fetus thus serve as analogue for the poem taking shape inside her that cannot be rushed into the world:

I have become
accustomed to
walking like a pregnant woman
carrying something
alive yet remote.
My thoughts,
though less articulate than image,
still have in them

something like a skeleton,
a durable beginning
waiting for
unpredicted flesh
and deliverance.
(5-18)

...
As I leave the gallery, the fetal image continues to move, alive and at the centre of attention for as long as the installation remains in the field of my vision. Fetus as fetish fore-grounded in this highly political work. The first and last impressions I have are those of the sound I have heard as the fetal heartbeat. In a telephone conversation with MacKenzie, I later discover that the intra-uterine audiotape records the sound of blood moving through the mother's arteries - her body's lullaby to the fetus, a security blanket of sound that pediatricians think will comfort the newborn launched into the alien world beyond the mother's body - but I find too that MacKenzie has anticipated this misinterpretation, calculated this effect of the radical uncertainty at the interface of the organic and the technological in the space of pregnancy. Still I made my own sense of this disembodied sound just as medical technology has made its meanings from sound waves it transforms into wavering visible outlines. The image dances, jerky and vague, as if there were a thin, beige curtain over the camera lens.

Radiant Monster thus seems to me a response to the challenge thrown out by Rosalind Pollack Petchesky at the end of her study "Foetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction" when she states that the problem for women in the face of the current generation and interpretation of fetal images is to find ways to "change the contexts, media, and consciousness through which fetal images are defined" (78). She offers as one of her potential solutions the following process: "we have to restore women to a central place in the pregnancy scene. To do this, we must create new images that recontextualize the foetus: that place it back into the uterus, and the uterus back into the woman's body and her body back into its social space."

Moreover, as the *work* of artist and mother

Elizabeth MacKenzie the installation strikes me as a triumphant contradiction of the idea that pregnancy is just a bodily condition that reduces the woman from active agency to passive expectancy. Sara Ruddick has re-conceived the maternal body as thinking body in contradistinction to the Western philosophical tradition that has "explicitly and metaphorically contrasted 'rational' thinking with the kinds of particularity, passionate attachment, and bodily engagement expressed in mothering" (29). Thus she re-visions the pregnant body as mindful body and hopeful paradigm for new, more peaceful and healthfully interdependent modes of being in the world. She sees pregnancy and motherhood as challenging the distinction between self and other both physically and conceptually. The woman's relationships as birthgiver to fetus and later mother to child, Ruddick hypothesizes, may "foster [her] capacity to 'wonder,' to marvel at without possessing [her] own emergent and finally separate creation" (43). Both birthing and mothering thereafter aim, Ruddick says, for "a differentiation that does not deny, but rather is sustained by caring, careful dependence."

Such a vision of the healing potential of re-imagined modes of being based on maternal relatedness also informs the closing lines of Margaret Atwood's "Christmas Carols," and these lines run through my head as I walk away from the Photographer's Gallery:

If mother-
hood is sacred, put
your money where your mouth is. Only
then can you expect the coming
down to the wrecked & shimmering earth
of that miracle you sing
about, the day
when every child is a holy birth.
(30-37)

Thus my encounter with *Radiant Monster* ends with my asking myself both whether the "Dazzling Fictions" in MacKenzie's verbal text might be an intimation of this re-visioning of the pregnant body as a model for utopian interdependence, and whether that body might be the ground of

revolutionary consciousness⁶ directed toward changing oppressive power relations as Lillian Allen suggests in "My Momma":

my Momma she says
any woman who can make a dot into a
child
inside of her
and bring it outside to us
is a model for a revolution
(*"My Momma"* 55-59)

ENDNOTES

1. Dr. Bernard Nathanson, the medical expert and narrator of *The Silent Scream* boasted to a *Newsweek* interviewer: "With the aid of technology, we stripped away the walls of the abdomen and uterus and looked into the womb" (cited in Pollack Petchesky 69). B. K. Rothman explains how the process of using ultrasound can quite literally cause the ultrasound technician or doctor to turn his back on the mother to turn toward the screen in order to view the fetal image. Thus Rothman asserts, "The technology which makes the baby/fetus more 'visible' renders the woman invisible" (cited in Petchesky 70). Ann Oakley (1984) sees processes like fetal scanning and amniocentesis as the most revolutionary of the professional medical techniques for managing human reproduction because, "for the first time, they enable obstetricians to dispense with mothers as intermediaries, as necessary informants on fetal status and life-style" (155).

2. Ann Oakley (1984) was the first feminist scholar to connect the military and medical histories of ultrasound. She observed that "Ultrasound, or 'sonar,'...developed originally as a technique for detecting submarines during the First World War in 1916-7" (156). In her later study "From Walking Wombs to Test-Tube Babies," she reports that the pioneers of ultrasound fetal scanning, Ian Donald and his Scottish research colleagues first thought of applying sonographic technology to diagnosing mysterious abdominal tumours in women, but when it occurred to them that "the commonest abdominal tumour in women is pregnancy" and that "there is not a lot of difference between a fetus *in utero* and a submarine at sea," they developed the new application for ultrasound (Oakley 44). Petchesky traces the military imagery forward into the verbal text of *Life* magazine's 1965 photo-essay on the embryo/fetus, remarking on the text that elaborates the caption "A Sonar 'Look' at an Unborn Baby": "The astonishing medical machine resting on this pregnant woman's abdomen in a Philadelphia hospital is 'looking' at her unborn child in precisely the same way a Navy surface ship homes in on enemy submarines. Using the sonar principle, it is bombarding her with a beam of ultra-high-frequency sound waves that are inaudible to the human ear" (68-69).

3. Ann Oakley's chapter "Getting to Know the Fetus" in her pioneering work *The Captured Womb: A History of the Medical Care of Pregnant Women* provides evidence of how this representation of the fetus as spaceman quickly crossed over into academic medical texts. She reprints a figure from P. Gruenwald's 1975 work, *The Placenta and its Maternal Supply Line*, the figure being captioned "The Fetal Cosmonaut" (Oakley 1984, 175). The spread of such images into advice manuals for prospective parents, such as Mirjam Furuhielm et al.'s *A Child is Born* (1966, rev. ed. 1977) and into educational texts for children, such as Sheila Kitzinger's *Being Born* (1986), both with photographs by Lennart Nilsson, gives some further idea of the lines of transmission these images travelled to reach widening sectors of the popular imagination.

4. Iris Marion Young cites Ann Lewis's *An Interesting Condition* (1950) to make such a point: "This bulk slows my walking and makes my gestures and my mind more stately. I suppose if I schooled myself to walk massively the rest of my life, I might always have massive thoughts" (Young 166).

5. For a retrospective view of MacKenzie's art, see Susan Gingell, "Bodies of Knowledge: The Counterdiscursive Art of Elizabeth MacKenzie," *Blackflash* 15.1 (Spring 1997) 4-8. The author gratefully acknowledges permission to reprint, in revised form, a few paragraphs from this earlier article.

6. It is remarkable that fellow West Indian-born Canadian poet M. Nourbese Philip also connects birthing with revolution in her poem "You Can't Push Now." Her persona resists the medical institution's attempt to regulate her delivery, just as liberal apologists for the Canadian state attempt to regulate the pace of social change. Thus competing liberal and revolutionary voices are heard in the poem's last lines:

But you can't push now
 For God's sake push
 You can't be that bold
 Put the revolution on hold
 You can't push
 Now
 Is not the time
 Starve a while longer
 For God's sake push! ("You Can't Push Now" 70-78)

REFERENCES

- Allen, Lillian. "Belly Woman's Lament", *Rhythm an' Hardtimes*. Toronto: Front Line Publications, 1982, p. 8.
- _____. "Nellie Belly Swelly" and "My Momma." *Women Do This Every Day*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1993, pp. 25-27; 28-30.
- Atwood, Margaret. "Christmas Carols", *True Stories*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1981, pp. 56-57.
- Browner, Carole H. and Nancy Ann Press. "The Normalization of Prenatal Diagnostic Screening", *Conceiving the World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction*. Faye A. Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp, eds. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of Berkley Press, 1995, pp. 307-22.
- Cartwright, Lisa. *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.
- Chicago, Judy. *The Birth Project*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985.
- Crozier, Lorna. "The Foetus Dreams" and "Stillborn", *The Garden Going On Without Us*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985, pp. 21-25; 79.
- Duden, Barbara. *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn*. Trans. Lee Hoinacki. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Furuhjelm, Mirjam, Axel Ingelman-Sundberg and Claes Wirsén. *A Child is Born*. Photographs Lennart Nilsson. Drawings Bernt Forsblad. New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1966; rev.ed. 1977.
- Hyde, Beverley. "An Interview Study of Pregnant Women's Attitudes to Ultrasound Scanning", *Social Sciences and Medicine*. 20(1986): 587-92.
- Kitzinger, Sheila. *Being Born*. Photographs Lennart Nilsson. London: Dorling Kindersley, 1986.
- Kristeva, Julia. "Stabat Mater", *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986, pp. 99-118.
- Livesay, Dorothy. "The Mother" and "The Three Emily's", *Collected Poems: The Two Seasons*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972, pp. 161; 202.
- Lowther, Pat. "How Can I Begin", *Milk Stone*. Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1974, p. 13.
- Marlatt, Daphne. "An economy of flowers", *Salvage*. Red Deer: Red Deer College Press, 1991, pp. 39-43.
- Martin, Emily. *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1987.
- Oakley, Ann. *The Captured Womb: A History of the Medical Care of Pregnant Women*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984.
- _____. "From Walking Wombs to Test-Tube Babies", *Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Motherhood and Medicine*. Michelle Stanworth, eds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pp. 36-56.
- Petchesky, Rosalind Pollack. "Foetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction", *Reproductive Technologies*. Michelle Stanworth, ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pp. 57-80.
- Philip, M. Nourbese. "You Can't Push Now" and "Planned Obsolescence", *Grammar of Dissent: Poetry and Prose by Claire Harris, M. Nourbese Philip, Dionne Brand*. Carol Morrell, ed. Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions, 1994, pp. 123-27; 127-128.
- Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1976.
- Ruddick, Sara. "Thinking Mothers/Conceiving Birth", *Representations of Motherhood*. Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey, and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan, eds. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994, pp. 29-45.

Stabile, Carol A. "Shooting the Mother: Fetal Photography and the Politics of Disappearance", *Camera Obscura*. 28 (1992): 179-205.

The Silent Scream. Narr. Dr. Bernard Nathanson. Distributed by Keep the Faith, Inc., 1977.

2001: A Space Odyssey. Prod., dir., and co-written with Arthur C. Clarke, by Stanley Kubrick. Special photographic effects designed and dir. Stanley Kubrick. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1968.

Young, Iris Marion. *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Yoxen, Edward. "Seeing with Sound: A Study of the Development of Medical Images", *The Social Construction of Technological Systems. New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*. Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch, eds. Cambridge, Mass./London, Eng: MIT Press, 1987, pp. 281-303.

"Gathering Blossoms Under Fire"
A Feminist Spirituality Conference
May 26-28, 2000

We dare to believe in a spirituality fueled by passion and lived out under fire.

Come join with your sisters, friends, your women's groups to experience each other and a weekend of workshops, ritual, celebration and displays.

Explore feminist spirituality and gather blossoms with **Marion Woodman, Maude Barlow, Sharon Butala, Ubaka Hill, Malaika, Katherine Zappone, Alexandra Caverly-Lowery and many others.**

For more information and Registration:

FINDERS KEEPERS

P.O. Box 1819

515 Richmond St.

London, Ontario Canada

N6A 5H9

Phone: (519) 435-0834

Fax: (519) 439-5664

Web: Finders-Keepers.org

