

‘The eye could literally not follow her’: Deviant Girlhood, Reproduction, and Meat Animals in  
Twentieth-Century American Literature and Culture

by

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## Abstract

This project follows fictional girls in American cultural texts as they move within and sideways to spaces of meat production and animal agriculture, negotiating their reproductive futures alongside the animal allies they find in these spaces. What might happen when industrial meat production, animal domestication and the girl are held together? I assert that the intimacies between girls and domesticated agricultural animals are sites through which these girls work through not only their fraught relationship with animality but also with America as a white supremacist, patriarchal, and settler-colonial project. I thus ultimately ask how they gesture towards alternate futures at odds with their contemporary American empires.

Chapter One centres Ona who labours in the sausage room and in childbirth to show how her womb troubles the efficiency of meat imagined by Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, which I demonstrate is also intimately tied to reproduction. Chapter Two turns to Tillie Olsen's *Yonnondio From the Thirties* to follow Mazie's coming of age, which I argue takes place sideways to three spaces: the home, the slaughterhouse, and the depleted Prairie landscape. Chapter Three looks to Charles Burnett's film, *Killer of Sheep*, to ask how the character of Angela, who first appears to us in a dog mask in a threshold space, blurs boundaries between the home and the slaughterhouse as well as between dogs, sheep, and humans. Chapter Four moves to occupied Hawai'i, looking to Lovey and Toni, the Japanese Hawaiian girls who narrate Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* and *Heads by Harry*. I question how both girls negotiate menstruation, pregnancy, and their sexualities alongside domesticated animals being violently mounted, killed, and consumed. Chapter Five reads Bong Joon Ho's film, *Okja*, for its representation of Mija and Okja's interspecies intimacy as queer. I also argue that the film positions Mija as a flexible acrobat who transacts herself transnationally. Finally, three interludes

punctuate this project to tug at questions of girlhood, domesticated animals, abortion, and American literature. Together, I assemble a chorus of girls and their animal allies who speak across a century of American texts, centring love and care in a landscape of violent empire.

## Acknowledgements

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	4
List of Figures .....	6
Introduction: Queer Girls and their Animal Allies .....	7
1 Ona: The Womb Troubles of Sausage Girls .....	34
1.5 Interlude 1: Dewey .....	72
2 Mazie: Depression Era Girlhood, Mass Animal Death, and the Prairie Landscape .....	82
2.5 Interlude 2: Billy .....	117
3 Angela: The Looks of Black Girls, Dogs, and Sheep in <i>Killer of Sheep</i> .....	127
3.5 Interlude 3: Esch .....	168
4 Lovey: Animal Breeding, Japanese-Hawaiian Girlhood, and the Violent Projects of American Empire.....	180
5 Mija: Super-pigs, Acrobatic Girls, and Transnational Capitalism in Bong Joon Ho's <i>Okja</i> ....	223
Conclusion: "All from a good place": The Futures of Girls and the Ends of Meat?.....	268
Works Cited and Consulted.....	277

## List of Figures

Figure 1 “Swinging Sausages” .....	10
Figure 2 “Roaming Cold Cuts”.....	10
Figure 3 “Woman’s Long Hours Advertisement” .....	54
Figure 4 “Bird’s Eye View of Armour & Company” .....	83
Figure 5 “Dorothea Lange Photograph from ‘Toll of Uncertainty’ Series”.....	111
Figure 6 “Cover Image <i>Yonnondio from the Thirties</i> ” .....	111
Figure 7 “Still from <i>Killer of Sheep</i> ” .....	148
Figure 8 “Film Still <i>Okja</i> ” .....	239
Figure 9 “Advertisement Dairy Farmers of Manitoba.” .....	268

## Introduction: Queer Girls and their Animal Allies

Children are flooded with animal figures.

– Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child*

Choreography was an art, a practice of moving  
even when there was nowhere else to go [...]

it was an arrangement of the body to elude capture,  
an effort to make the uninhabitable livable.

– Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*

This project begins with a quite simple observation: that literature, film, and popular culture abound with representations of girls alongside animals, especially animals in spaces of meat production and consumption. I see this curious alliance everywhere. It might be strange, you think, to pair girls with slaughterhouses since meatpacking – in both literature and scholarship – has long been seen as the realm of men, with meat and masculinity often thoroughly linked, when in fact their coupling arises again and again. I also assert that meat and domesticated animal agriculture have been central to the settler-colonial project of America.<sup>1</sup> By looking at meat and girlhood, I contend that America upholds itself not only through acts of oppressive domestication on stolen Indigenous lands, but also through the violence of animal agriculture. This dissertation sets out from the position that, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue, “capitalism and the state are technologies of colonialism,” and thus part of the colonial project which, according to Patrick Watson, is not an event but a structure (Tuck & Wang 4n2).<sup>2</sup> I also assert, following Nicole Shukin, that animals are inextricably bound up with capital and that, according to Cedric Robinson, capitalism is always already racial capitalism (Shukin 15; Robinson in Jackson 104). Furthermore, Eva Kasprzycka, Chloë Taylor, and Kelly Struthers Montford make the link between racial capitalism and species extinctions, writing that “not only have settler colonialism and racial

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<sup>1</sup> In “Toward a Theory of Multi-Species Carcerality,” Kelly Struthers Montford makes a similar claim that “animal agriculture in the settler contexts of Canada and the United States is a distinctly colonial project” (280).

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Watson is quoted in the Tuck & Wang piece on page 5.

capitalism reordered nature, but they have also directed life in service of capital, fundamentally altering ecosystems and our conceptualizations of animality and social relations” (3). Taking all of these assertions together, this project thinks through animals, racial capitalism, and colonialism together from the standpoint of an anti-colonial and anti-racist critique. As the girls in these chapters move alongside animals in spaces of meat production, I ask how they gesture towards alternate futures at odds with their contemporary American empires.<sup>3</sup> What happens or might happen when industrial meat production and animal domestication and the girl are held together?

Perhaps I was attuned to this pairing because I had been searching for my own answers about how my own experience of coming into my body as a girl was tied up in my relationships to meat and animal consumption. When I think of my own relationship to meat, feelings of disgust, anger, and sharp hungers stick out painfully. I wonder, though, how this relationship might have also held the sparks for defiance, joy, and liberation that have led me to who I am today. In this way, these girls have served as guides as I work through my own tender feelings about animal flesh. I wonder also how these fictional girls might look to domesticated agricultural animals as allies who might offer them a way out of the expected lines of their own domestic, heteronormative futures.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The futures they gesture towards, as I will return to at the end of this project, may not have clear answers to what the abolition of the world of meat looks like. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, in their call to think beyond decolonization and to name the ways white supremacy co-opts decolonization, propose instead that we hold onto what is incommensurable, the discomforts that arise between social justice projects or subject positions. To hold incommensurability is to ask questions without answers, to imagine futures without firm boundaries, keeping open what the world might look like when we repatriate the land to Indigenous peoples and counter the various structures that are part of the colonial project (35).

<sup>4</sup> Megan Birk outlines what she calls the “poor placed-out girl” of the early twentieth century in North America who was essentially an orphaned or poor girl used as indentured labour on farms (353). Birk highlights the labour these girls performed alongside animals and even notes that they were often gifted an animal by the family for whom they worked (367). This particular history points to an actual manifestation of girls and domesticated farm animals labouring alongside each other as a sort of ally.

Manitoba-based artist, Julianna Zwierciadlowska-Rhymer's mixed media art installations, mostly ceramics and textiles, raise similar questions about girlhood, animal agriculture and consumption, and the possibilities for play within the patriarchal structures that frame both girlhood and meat. Her photographs "Swinging Sausages" and "Roaming Cold Cut," both of which feature sewn plush objects that were a part of her exhibition, *Stuffed*, consider the forms of violence inherent in animal production and consumption as well as the possibilities for allyship between girls and these animals. Although age-wise, the figures in these photographs are not girls, I argue that the use of soft pink, the sense of play, and the fact that Zwierciadlowska-Rhymer uses plush toys and textiles as her medium, signal girlhood and girliness. I begin with these photographs as they resist a certain graphic telling of animal flesh that is typical of meat and slaughterhouse narratives whose aim often seems to be to shock and expose the horrors of meat production.<sup>5</sup> Although these images resist this aesthetic, I would argue that they still surface a violence in the discomfort produced between the meat-like shapes, the girlish body adorned in pink, and the plushy exterior of the meat objects. How does their cuteness and playfulness grapple with the violences of meat production in a different way?<sup>6</sup> Do these photographs align girliness with feeling like a piece of meat?<sup>7</sup> In playing with her meat does the girl in the photograph, who is the

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Sue Coe's book of activist prints, *Dead Meat*, (1996) the documentary exposé style of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, (1906) or film documentaries like *Dominion* (2018) or *Cowspiracy* (2014) whose aims are to shock audiences into choosing veganism.

<sup>6</sup> Sianne Ngai, in "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde," writes that "cute objects have no edge to speak of, usually being soft, round, and deeply associated with the infantile and the feminine" (814). Furthermore, Ngai posits that, because of their diminutive characteristics, cute objects often produce "ugly or aggressive feelings," wherein the desire to cuddle or touch the object can turn violent (816). However, precisely because of how cuteness has to do with power and what Ngai calls "minor affects," the cute object is equally as volatile, with Ngai, for example, noting the proximity of Japanese words "*kawaii*," meaning cute," and "*kawai*," meaning scary (822). Knowing the ways in which a cute object can be "*helpless and aggressive at the same time*," helps me think through Zwierciadlowska-Rhymer's cute plush meat objects as signifying a domesticity or certain vulnerability placed upon girlhood at the same time as these objects signal the ways girls might thwart these very structures, challenging their consumability by 'biting back,' one might say (italics in original 823).

<sup>7</sup> Carol J. Adams will come up a lot in this project, but this statement about "feeling like a piece of meat" deserves a nod to her. In her pivotal work, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams demonstrates how the oppression of animals and women are linked through a shared "cycle of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption" (73). Adams

artist herself, resist the consumption and objectification that await both her and the piece of meat, wherein the meat becomes a companion in play to swing around or carry tenderly on one's shoulder? Does this plushifying or cute-ification of meat tug apart the heteropatriarchal order of meat? Finally, what ideas and ideals around white girlhood, innocence, the rural, and nation-building emerge here?



Figures 1 and 2. Zwierciadlowska-Rhymer, Julianna. “Swinging Sausages” and “Roaming Cold Cut,” Photographs, received from and included with permission from the artist.

This dissertation takes seriously the movements and motives of girls who labour, disrupt, and find allies in and near fictional spaces of meat production in twentieth-century American texts. It addresses the ways in which farmed animals and meat proliferate in narratives of girlhood, surfacing anxieties around reproduction – in the sense of menstruation and pregnancy – and race, while also working through their fraught relationship with animality.<sup>8</sup> I explore how intimacies between girls and domesticated agricultural animals are sites through which America emerges as a white supremacist, patriarchal, and settler-colonial structure, each facet of which

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notes how “‘Meat’ becomes a term to express women’s oppression, used equally by patriarchy and feminists, who say that women are ‘pieces of meat’” (75).

<sup>8</sup> My use of the phrasing “fraught intimacies” comes from Joshua Bennett in his book, *Being Property Once Myself*, in which he explores the “fraught proximities” between livestock and enslaved Black subjects that bind their existences together in both liberatory and contradictory ways (3). More generally, Bennett also explores the entanglements between Blackness and animality. I will return to his theorization often throughout this project.

rests on historically contingent narratives of family, reproduction, and nation. I argue that the proximity of girls and farmed animals – both represented as bodies in transition – might rearrange and undo the spaces, species categories, temporalities, and literary forms that they occupy. Each chapter takes up particular ways fictional girls position the animal as an “ally of resistance,” theorizing how girls and agricultural animals might animate each other’s reproductive futures and resistances (Stockton 97).

As the title of this dissertation suggests, I read the movements of these girls as deviant. I use this word to (1) gesture toward how girlhood – especially Black girlhood– is policed for its movements and motives which are read as deviant; and (2) to position girlhood as a necessarily wayward and willful capacity, in which survival looks like moving sideways to, or deviating from, socially expected lines.<sup>9</sup> In my reading of these girls coming of age alongside meat, I ask how they are mobilized as figures to sell or tell a particular story of meat – one to make meat-eating more palatable, to serve as a salve to the violences of animal slaughter. At the same time, though, the presence of these girls in spaces of meat threatens this carnophallogocentric story and order, raising urgent questions about girlhood and disposability, race and animality, reproduction and intimacy, and queer time and crisis – capitalist, ecological, and ontological.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> My use of the term “wayward” follows Saidiya Hartman, who establishes this term as a method for Black girls living within categorical and spatial incarceration. Often described as “wayward” by sociological narratives meant to survey and limit their movements, Hartman seeks to “recover the insurgent grounds of these lives” that yearned toward “existing otherwise” (xiv; xv). My use of this term also follows Sara Ahmed’s notion of willfulness, tied often to girls who “refus[e] to be straightened” or are misaligned (3).

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Derrida establishes the term carnophallogocentrism to explain the link between masculinity and meat-eating which creates the dominant Western subject who holds power as a thinking and reasoning subject (Calarco 40). Consuming animal flesh is therefore bound up in patriarchy.

## I Fields

This project intervenes in a variety of fields, some overlapping. First, I engage with the field of Critical Animal Studies and the related field of vegan studies. As fields dominated largely by white scholars, I tug at their whiteness and prioritize scholars like Billy-Ray Belcourt, Maneesha Deckha, and Kelly Montford Struthers who insist on the necessity of thinking settler-colonialism, critical race studies, abolition, and animal studies together.<sup>11</sup> Belcourt, for example, explicitly names industrial agriculture as a settler-colonialist and white supremacist institution that operates from the “simultaneous exploitation or destruction of animal and Indigenous bodies” and Critical Animal Studies as a field that “operate[s] within the ‘givenness of the white supremacist settler-colonial state’ for its failure to centre an analysis of settler-colonialism. I wonder how the girls in these texts might prompt us to imagine industrial agriculture otherwise (“Animal Bodies” 3; 2)? Furthermore, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, in *Becoming Human*, challenges the tendency in Critical Animal Studies to equate Blackness with animality and to presume that the category of ‘the human’ is available to all (16). Coming from a Black feminist perspective, Jackson highlights the necessity of recognizing that “humanity is often cast as debatable or contingent” when it comes to Black subjects and thus, the question of the human-animal binary needs to ask “how the question of the animal bears on the question of hierarchies of humanity” (16). Jackson refuses to simply suggest that “some members of humanity bear the burden of ‘the animal,’ rather she names the necessity of sitting with the entanglements of race, species, gender,

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<sup>11</sup> I return to all three of these scholars throughout this project but see the following articles for their framing arguments: Billy-Ray Belcourt’s “Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects: (Re)locating Animality in Decolonial Thought,” Maneesha Deckha’s “Toward a Postcolonial, Posthumanist Feminist Theory: Centralizing Race and Culture in Feminist Work on Nonhuman Animals,” and Kelly Montford Struthers and Chloe Taylor’s “Toward a Theory of Multi-Species Carcerality.”

and reproduction (12). Jackson's theorization is thus pivotal in how I read these entanglements in each of the texts I take up.

I am also invested in how the spatial and species breaches enacted by the girls in these texts make visible these violent structures that underpin the domestication, production, and consumption of American meat. Some scholars have already analyzed the various spaces of meat production and consumption, both physical and literary, notably but not exhaustively, Nicole Shukin's *Animal Capital*, to which I return to often as a frame for how to read together animals and capitalism, Sune Borkfelt's *Reading Slaughter: Abattoir Fictions, Space, and Empathy in Late Modernity*, which asserts that "literature has something to tell us about slaughterhouses," and Sean McCorry and John Miller's anthology, *Literature and Meat Since 1900*, which offers a variegated survey of literary grappings with meat in the twentieth century (Borkfelt 2).

As a project interested in the politics of meat-eating, this dissertation also converses with the field of vegan literary studies, looking to how these fictional girls ask readers to consider more compassionate attachments to the animals we consume, enacting what Sune Borkfelt deems "a vegan sensibility" that may or may not result in the vegan practice of abstaining from all animal products (94).<sup>12</sup> Laura Wright distinguishes vegan studies from animal studies for its necessary activist praxis and argues that it centres "listening (rather than speaking for) animals" ("Doing Vegan Studies" n.p.).<sup>13</sup> While I am not arguing that the texts I analyse are all necessarily vegan texts, my work still converses with this field and "draw[s] attention to absences and silencings – of animals and humans [...] illuminat[ing] underlying and invisible linkages that are

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<sup>12</sup> For a longer discussion of "vegan sensibility," see Chapter 4 of this dissertation where I discuss Lois-Ann Yamanaka's protagonist in *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*' vegan sensibility.

<sup>13</sup> For more discussions of vegan studies see Laura Wright and Emelia Quinn's edited volume, *The Edinburgh Companion to Vegan Literary Studies*, Laura Wright's *Through a Vegan Studies Lens: Textual Ethics and Lived Activism*, Emelia Quinn and Benjamin Westwood's *Thinking Veganism in Literature and Culture: Towards a Vegan Theory*, and Eva Giraud's *Veganism: Politics, Practice, and Theory*.

often overlooked in more deconstructive analyses of power and oppression” (“Doing Vegan Studies” n.p.). In this way, my project contributes to the field of vegan literary studies. One of the most significant ways this project intervenes in the fields of critical animal studies and vegan studies is in my reading of the relationship of girls and animals to patriarchal frames and forces.

Carol J. Adams, in her vastly cited *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, suggests that women and animals are linked in their oppression by the heteropatriarchal structures of meat: a “structure of overlapping but absent referents links violence against women and animals” (*Sexual Politics* 67). While Adams may clearly name this structure and the cycles of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption by which it is upheld, she nonetheless fails to tend to the ways that race, gender, and animality intersect. I want to sit with the weight of this claim of shared oppression: what do girls do with this knowledge once they name it? I ask *how* and *in what forms* these girlish protagonists navigate their reproductive futures intimately alongside these animals-becoming-meat as well as *what* this relationship might promise and dislodge. Ultimately, I illuminate how these fictional girls navigate and mobilize this knowledge of their consumability alongside domesticated meat animals who act as their guides, companions, and unruly allies.

I thus also engage with the overlapping fields of girlhood and childhood studies, tugging at “the enduring centrality of a white, able-bodied, Western heteronormative girlhood” in girlhood studies (Brickman vii). Nazera Sadiq Wright’s *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century*, while specific to a temporal frame beyond my scope, serves as a model for how to engage critically with the historical terms of girlhood, asking how girlhood is itself historically and racially contingent. Wright reads an archive of nineteenth-century representations of Black girlhoods in literature and popular print culture, tracing what she calls a “genealogy of black girlhood” that shows the rifts between how Black girls imagined themselves and how others

placed political meanings and moral and social expectations upon them. I admire Wright's commitment to creating a theoretical language that centres "what black girls are actually doing, thinking, and dreaming" (179). My following of fictional girls alongside meat animals attempts to show something similar, asking how their desires and sophisticated inner lives emerge in these texts as much as we might read these girls as figures holding larger promises or ideals about American futurity and domesticity/domestication. Robin Bernstein's *Racial Innocence*, also taking up nineteenth-century American texts, helps me establish a clear frame for how children helped mobilize racial projects at the same time as they complicated these very projects (4). Both Wright and Bernstein's works make a case for "the centrality of girls and girlhood to U.S. racial formation" and model how to keep in mind the flexible scales of innocence, threat, maturity, and possibility that are racially contingent (Bernstein 19).

In a different way, Kathryn Bond Stockton's *The Queer Child* is pivotal to how I read girlhood as always already potentially queer. Stockton posits "delay as central to defining childhood" and figures the child as a particularly queer figure whose temporal and spatial frames have the potential to grow sideways (52). Furthermore, Stockton spends significant time looking at how animals often act as a delay or offer horizontal movement in the face of the pressures of (re)productive heteronormativity and thus become allies for queer girlhood (223). She writes, "the animal allows girls to run a gamut of emotions from ecstatic commitment to bewildered sorrow to determined pause in the face of a future not careful of their pleasure," identifying animals as allies for girls feeling out and through ways to grow other than growing up and into heteronormativity (53). Finally, Rebekah Sheldon's *The Child to Come* allows me to establish the link between the child and futurity, especially in the face of ecological collapse and

apocalyptic sentiments that have grown in America since the “atomic 1960s” (Sheldon 13).<sup>14</sup>

Sheldon clearly articulates ways in which the child and promises of the future have been historically linked, noting particularly how “through the child, concerns over reproduction merge with and emerge through the social production of norms” as well as through careful biopolitical regulation (4). How does the figure of the child articulate generational anxieties around reproduction, including eugenicist ones, and how might this figure thwart the very promises of futurity she bears, disrupting the reproductive lines set out for her in a queer refusal of the ends of the world brought forth by the harms of capitalist, patriarchal, and imperialist projects?

This project is not a historical overview of women in meatpacking; rather it is a dissertation about fictionalized girls moving through and disrupting these spaces. It draws on scholars, however, who rigorously document the historical presence of women in meatpacking and their efforts in labour organizing from a more historical or sociological standpoint.<sup>15</sup> While it is also not a history of meat or even meat-eating in America, my work attempts to trace certain representational shifts ideas about gender, meat, and reproduction. This project centres girlhood in a study somewhat aligned with what Annie Potts deems “meat culture” and what Sean McCorry and John Miller call “meat critique,” for the ways in which it asks how the meat

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<sup>14</sup> For other core girlhood studies texts see Leigh Gilmore and Elizabeth Marshall’s *Witnessing Girlhood: Toward an Intersectional Tradition of Life Writing*, Sarah Projansky’s *Spectacular Girls: Media Fascination and Celebrity Culture*, Whitney Monaghan’s *Queer Girls, Temporality, and Screen Media: Not ‘Just a Phase*, Claudia Mitchell and Carrie Rentschler’s *Girlhood and the Politics of Place*, Clare Bradford and Mavis Reimer’s *Girls, Texts, Cultures*, and Aria S. Halliday’s *The Black Girlhood Studies Collection*.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Ann L. Sittig and Martha Florinda Gonzalez’s *The Mayans Among Us: Migrant Women and Meatpacking on the Great Plains*, Bruce Fehn’s “African-American Women and the Struggle for Equality in the Meatpacking Industry, 1940-1960,” Roger Horowitz’s “‘Where Men Will Not Work’: Gender, Power, Space, and the Sexual Division of Labor in America’s Meatpacking Industry, 1890-1990,” and Deborah Fink’s “What Kind of Woman Would Work in Meatpacking Anyway?: World War II and the Road to Fair Employment.” There are also many fantastic overviews of meatpacking labor more generally without the focus on women. See for example, Timothy Pachirat’s *Every Twelve Seconds*, Deborah Fink’s *Cutting into the Meatpacking Line*, and Kristy Nabhan-Warren’s *Meatpacking America: How Migration, Work, and Faith Unite and Divide the Heartland*

industry upholds itself at the same time as holds its very ends, all through the figure of the girl.<sup>16</sup> As I draw contours around what this project is and is not, I want to acknowledge the texts and girls that did not quite make it into this project but were nonetheless on my mind. I summon them here as inadvertent, minor guides I undeniably carried with me. First, I could have written about Lynda Barry's *Cruddy*, which follows a teenage girl, Roberta, the daughter of meatpacking father who has inherited a crumbling meat empire. *Cruddy* articulates a profoundly abject white girlish teenage body whose abjectness materializes alongside rotting meat, a bloody butcher's knife, and the flies that constantly circle her.

I could have also written about Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, which sheds light on the Black women who labored in slaughterhouse yards doing "something men don't want to do" post-emancipation in the South (Morrison 170; 217). Sethe describes the "Saturday girls working the slaughterhouse yard" who would come "when the shift changed on Saturday when the men got paid and worked behind the fences, back of the outhouse," hidden from sight and thus forgotten (241). When Sethe leaves prison, she describes how "the step to the slaughterhouse would have been a short one" (241). Furthermore, *Beloved* shows the entanglements between industrial agriculture, the 'breeding' of enslaved women, and the exploitation of enslaved labour in the South, all considered "property that reproduced itself without cost" (269).<sup>17</sup> Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* is another text that did not quite fit the specificity of my focus on girls but its

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<sup>16</sup> See Annie Potts's *Meat Culture* and the collection of astute essays edited by Sean McCorry and John Miller, *Meat and Literature Since 1900*.

<sup>17</sup> Post-emancipation, Paul D and other Black men work in Cincinnati in a pork processing plant as underpaid workers in unsafe conditions: "Sheep, cows and fowl too floated up and down that river, and all a Negro had to do was show up and there was work: poking, killing, cutting, skinning, case packing and saving offal" (182). Morrison describes how "the craving for pork was growing into a mania in every city of the country," showing how mass animal death accompanies this still violent post-emancipation landscape of the American South, wherein Black subjects are haunted by the ongoing effects of slavery (182). Indeed, one way this haunting manifests itself is through the smell of pork processing: "so wet and hot Cincinnati's stench had traveled to the country: from the canal, from hanging meat and things rotting in jars; from small animals dead in the fields, town sewers and factories. The stench, the heat, the moisture – trust the devil to make his presence known" (303).

themes of reproduction, meat production, and American nation building certainly overlap with the texts I take up. Furthermore, Ozeki's novel grapples with questions of how to document the space of the slaughterhouse as well as how cultural texts manipulate their narratives to sell the story of meat.

I chose these five texts – *The Jungle*, *Yonnondio: From the Thirties*, *Killer of Sheep*, *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*, and *Okja* – for their variegated representations of girls moving alongside and into spaces of animal production but there is a resounding gap in representation that I must address. Even though Latinx subjects make up approximately 34.9% of meatpacking labourers in the United States, none of my texts address this experience (Stuesse).<sup>18</sup> This is because there are very few Latinx aesthetic texts that dwell in this particular space or subject. I note this gap in aesthetic representation to acknowledge the precarity of this workforce and their disproportionate representation. It is also worth noting that, since the rise in Federal immigration raids in the late 2000s which deported many undocumented Latinx subjects, other migrant and refugee communities also make up a large percentage of North American meatpacking labour, which are also not represented in the texts I have chosen.<sup>19</sup> While this project will not go into depth on the current state of meatpacking labour and its exploitation of a largely racialized and/or displaced workforce, I do feel it important to acknowledge this gap in the representation offered in my chapters.

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<sup>18</sup> The Economic Policy Institute reported this statistic based on a 2018 survey. See “Who Are America’s Meat and Poultry Workers?” by Angela Stuesse and Nathan T. Dollar.

<sup>19</sup> See Bronwyn Bragg and Jennifer Hyndman’s “Family Matters: Navigating the Intentional Precarity of Racialized Migrant and Refugee Workers in Canadian Meatpacking” in which they note the reliance on migrant and refugee labor in meatpacking and the way the sector uses “intentional precarity” to “maintain a docile workforce” (9). Despite these precarious conditions, made worse with the COVID-19 pandemic, Bragg and Hyndman argue that family and kin networks act as protection (9). See also Shae Frydenlund and Elizabeth Cullen Dunn’s “Refugees and Racial Capitalism: Meatpacking and the Primitive Accumulation of Labor” for a more generalized discussion of the ways in which the meatpacking industry is, at its core, a racist, capitalist institution (1). They argue that “‘essential’ meatpacking work in the United States is based on a conjecture where racism meets conditions of statelessness and unequal citizenship rights” that then “anchors ‘prohibited’ refugees to meatpacking work” (2).

## II Terminologies

At this point, I want to clarify my use of certain terms whose meanings I will build throughout this project. First, I use the term “queer” often in this project. While I lay out more specific theorizations in certain chapters, I want to summon the broader sense of what I mean. Mel Y. Chen’s definition of queerness as “the social and cultural formations of ‘improper affiliation’ [wherein] queerness might well describe an array of subjectivities, intimacies, beings, and spaces located outside of the heteronormative” frames my thinking through of the affiliations between girls and agricultural animals (104). My use of this word also aligns with bell hooks’s explanation as “‘queer’ not as being about who you’re having sex with – that can be a dimension of it – but ‘queer’ as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and that has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live” (“Are You Still a Slave?”; 1:27:16-1:1:29:00). Queer as in not belonging, as feeling out of place or out of pace with the world. In a similar way, Billy-Rey Belcourt writes that queer is “knowing your body is both too much and not enough for this world” (*This Wound* 30).

Whitney Monaghan puts forth a theory of the queer girl as “a temporal rhetorical figure” in film, wherein her queerness is often felt and manifested as being “untimely” or “out of sync with normative time” (14). Elizabeth Freeman’s concept of queerness as being out of pace, unbound by capitalist time overlaps here, too. Freeman establishes the concept of chrononormativity as a “temporal regulation” that binds individual human bodies together, regimenting them along productive capitalist time, a sort of “orchestration of time” (3). As much as my use of queerness involves time, I am also very much invested in its spatiality. Thus, my use of the word “queer” is also informed by Sara Ahmed and Kathryn Bond Stockton’s theorizations that take space, orientation, and sideways movements into account. Ahmed

wonders if “sexual orientation might [...] be a matter of residence, of how we inhabit spaces, and who or what we inhabit spaces with” (“Orientations” 543). This project proposes animals as one possible “who,” as companions of queer inhabitation. In this vein, Stockton’s theorization of the queer child as “growing toward a question mark” or “hanging in suspense,” often alongside animals, greatly informs my readings of the fictional girls I follow (3). Put simply, their affiliations with animals disrupt heteronormative mappings of time and space.

Finally, by queer, I mean to summon the vast horizons of possibility and yearning theorized by José Esteban Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia*. If Freeman articulates how queerness comes to matter as “temporal dislocation,” in which being “out of joint” with time both hurts and produces “new orientations of desire,” Muñoz sees queerness as a future horizon that arrives never not quite yet (16; 14). Muñoz writes that “queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (1). Engaging thoroughly with Ernst’s Bloch’s theorization of utopia, Muñoz claims that, despite the anti-social and negative turn in queer theory and its often preoccupations with death and mourning, “queerness is primarily about futurity and hope” (11).<sup>20</sup> I find Muñoz’s theorization of queerness as a not yet horizon – “a longing that propels us onward” – compelling as I hold girls and animals together as companions attempting to feel out places outside of heteronormative structures. I want to hold onto hope as I tend to this relationship because often the spaces in which these girls and their animal allies find themselves seem without hope – slaughterhouses or death-ridden agricultural schemes. Hope becomes a necessary survival tactic in the face of this violence and harm. If, as Muñoz posits, queerness points us in the direction of what is missing or not yet here, as “that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, perhaps the two most pivotal anti-social or anti-relational queer theory texts: Lee Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* and Leo Bersani’s *Homo*.

missing,” then queerness, I would argue, directs us toward repair and care, too (1). For the girls I follow, animals point them to what they may not be able to yet articulate as needing or knowing but that is nevertheless on the horizon. Animals are therefore queer thresholds in the time of girlhood that is also a sort of not quite, not yet time. But how to define the terms and contours of girlhood itself?

Following Saidiya Hartman’s method in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, I draw contours around these girls with the aims of recuperating girlhood as a flexible category, or perhaps not even category at all, rather as a flexible form, an acrobatic feat, girlhood as an ungraspable gesture, an unmoored species, a queer inhabitation of time.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the category of the girl is a necessarily flexible thing: Christine Hume and Christina Milletti name the girl as “transitive,” while Kathryn Bond Stockton tends to the girl as a sideways figure (Hume 3; Stockton 52). Karishma Desai similarly posits the “category of the girl [as] unstable and contested,” wherein its “meanings and its boundaries have varied historically and geographically” (102). This project refuses to capture girls into categories and grapples instead with the idea, as felt out by Saidiya Hartman, of the chorus of girls who, when taken together, articulate a way of being, surviving, bearing and carrying life across temporal and spatial bounds. For Hartman, the chorus articulates “the ceaseless practice of black radicalism and refusal,” of Black girls “elud[ing] the law and transform[ing] the terms of the possible” (348;

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<sup>21</sup> It is hard to pinpoint one quote to sum up how Saidiya Hartman’s book helps me theorize girlhood – the book itself is a methodology in how to hold and work through historical archives, and as I stretch it, to literary texts. I return to it often throughout these chapters. For Hartman, she sees the Black girls she follows “elud[ing] frames,” “refus[ing] the frames of visibility imposed upon them” (18). Her book is a model in how to take emancipatory movements and liberatory gestures into account even as these subjects move within institutions and structures that attempt to limit visibility, expression, existence. It is a study in the violences of categorization and the ways that love still exists within the many carceral structures that informed the movements, relationships, and expression of Black girlhood in post-Emancipation Philadelphia and New York.

349). Hartman's articulation of the chorus of girls helps me get at the sense of yearning I locate in the girls I follow.

How can I theorize girlhood as a sort of plural space for becoming, a threshold space of transformation, "both encountered and embodied" (Hume and Milletti 3)? As I follow the movements of these fictional girls alongside meat, I also ask how they make visible the ways in which girlhood is contingent on race. Michelle Bae-Dimitriadis claims that contemporary discussions around girlhood, agency, and subjectivity "center predominantly on White middle-class girls...and rely on a coherent rational subject" (371). Furthermore, as Robin Bernstein outlines in *Racial Innocence*, nineteenth-century American girlhood was tied to whiteness, purity, and innocence, even as it relied on Black girlhood to ensure its construction (63). Bernstein shows the intimate links between configurations of white and Black girlhood set against each other, drawing lines between "who is a person and who is a thing," and narratives of the American nation upheld by the innocence of white childhood, and as Bernstein posits, especially white girlhood (243; 63). Writing on the girl in their introduction to *American Book Review's* special edition titled "Girlhood," Christine Hume and Christina Milletti propose that "even when we recognize girls, it seems, we only look obliquely at them"; they flicker between "disappearance and hypervisibility" (3). This holds especially true, as Christina Sharpe reminds us, for Black girls.

While American girlhood seems to stick to white girls, Christina Sharpe identifies the word *girl* as an instance of the "anagrammatics of blackness" (77). In the weather of antiblackness, the grammatical meaning of girl does not hold when paired with Blackness; instead, it signifies felon, prostitute, criminal (77). Black girlhood, therefore, exists as a sort of oxymoron, designating a subject position that cannot exist because of the ways in which society

marks Black girls, as well as Black boys, as always already adult and never children. Aimee Cox and Aria Halliday echo Christina Sharpe's calling out of the lack of visibility or recognition of Black girlhood, with Cox noting how Black girls remain "illegible," without a language to articulate their existences, and Halliday noting the under-theorization of Black girlhood in academia (Cox vii; Halliday 1). My theorization of girlhood dwells in this gap, questioning the intersections between race and girlhood, paying particular attention to how the spatial and temporal movements of girls articulate their racial positions.

### III Method + Process

This project primarily uses close reading analysis and historical materialism to read these slaughterhouse texts oppositionally, tending to the minor figures of girls and seeking the bonds and breaks between them.<sup>22</sup> I am interested in reading these texts for what they hold of their time and space, naming their aching presents while anticipating futures – the hum of the horizon, the muted and minor tones.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, I very much posit aesthetic and literary texts as a form of theory. My method is also committed to a sort of self-ethnography, excavating my own relationship with these texts as a white cis-gendered settler on Turtle Island, but also as a girl with her own sharply tender history with meat. Two theoretical texts that I have carried with me

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<sup>22</sup> My use of the term "minor figures" is from Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*. By minor figures, I mean to highlight the work my project does to bring the overlooked or unseen figures of girls into sight. It is not that these girls are minor in their capacities or significance but that the structures in which they find themselves position them as minor figures. Hartman sifts through the meagrely archived lives of young Black women living in Philadelphia at the turn of the century who were "destined to be [...] minor figure[s]" in their own stories (62). To attend to the minor "is to attend to other forms of social life, which cannot be reduced to transgression or nothing at all, and which emerge in the world marked by negation, but exceed it" (Hartman 62). The girls I follow are minor in the way that they come up against the very smallness this term connotes.

<sup>23</sup> My use of "muted and minor" here is also a nod to Cindi Katz's theorization of "minor theory." Katz writes that "thinking in a minor key opens many spaces of betweenness from which to imagine, act, and live things differently" (597). For Katz, "minor theory is *not* a distinct body of theory, but rather a way of doing theory differently, of working inside out, of fugitive moves and emergent practices interstitial with 'major' productions of knowledge" (598). Minor theory is about moving within the major or dominant but with an attentiveness to how "spatialities [and] temporalities are embodied, situated and fluid" (598).

to guide my method and reading practice are Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* and Katherine McKittrick's *Dear Science*. I hold many lessons from McKittrick's text and I return to this book often as I write as a model for how to experiment with academic form and grapple with heavy histories and lived experiences with care with its reminder to ask "how I know what I know, where I know from, who I know from, and what I cannot possibly know" (14). These questions seem at odds with the form of the dissertation and my method aims to make palpable, at the level of form, this discomfort at making resolute claims. Inspired by both McKittrick and Hartman, I follow the figures of girls in their textual overlaps and flights from each other, knowing that withholding is a form of protection against categorization, knowing that I might gesture toward a reading but in no way does that seek to pin them down or reveal something hidden. I want to sit with the fact that the form of this dissertation asks me to give evidence, analyze, explain, as if some of the truths these girls and their texts name are complex and somehow hidden from sight when in fact perhaps we are simply afraid for naming what is glaringly in front of us.<sup>24</sup>

These questions are on my mind and have become a part of how I have moved through these texts because I cannot seem to keep my work here separate from all that has happened in the world as I faced this desk day after day. This project came together as the world felt like it was falling apart and was indeed punctuated by protests, all of which asked me to face these texts differently and left their mark on my writing and thinking: Black Lives Matter; rising anti-Asian hate alongside the COVID-19 pandemic; MMIWG2S and calls for landfill searches; rallies for

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<sup>24</sup> Katherine McKittrick asks: "What if we taught and wrote not as problem solvers who count and assess variables [...] but as intellectuals who, with all our hearts, believe in opacity and giving on and with rather than finding, grasping, and having?" (117). I think about bringing all my heart here. I try and think about the language I use to avoid replicating that of the colonizer: I know, I find, I claim. It is hard, though, when the form of this dissertation requires a certain form of grasping. How badly I want to hold this tension, tentative.

trans kids to counter anti-trans hate; Free Palestine and calls for a ceasefire. Furthermore, I wrote this project on Treaty One Territory and, as much as I can acknowledge the stolen land on which I work and live, I have been grappling with how this never will be enough. This land acknowledgement signifies the aftermath of violent theft and the ongoing harms of settler-colonialism that continue to be felt by Indigenous communities in Canada. As a witness to the genocide in Palestine, I reflect on my own role as an ally in this call to do anti-colonial and anti-racist work to make happen the abolition of racist institutions and structures.<sup>25</sup> As I try to reclaim a certain space in my body and its sharp relationship with meat and men at tables – one that might be more tender and soft, I surface again and again to grief and hard spaces. It hits me how much of girlhood comes as a violence – puberty, sex, rape, patriarchy, angry fathers, meat – all of these things harsh against the heavy work of building an interior world, a fortress to soften all that she faces. I keep coming back to this question of love, which we so often are afraid to utter in scholarly work – this love that makes up the alliances and intimacies between girls and animals. How love seems to save their worlds, to offer other worlds or futures. So, if I had to put things simply, I would tell you that my method is grounded above all in love.

Finally, Katherine McKittrick's focus on the geographic and spatial in her Black feminist theorization also informs part of my method as I am attuned to the particular ways that these girls move through spaces of meat production and animal domestication. Taking "a combination of material and imagined geographies," McKittrick posits that Black women in particular

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<sup>25</sup> I think often of this quote from Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang: "Solidarity is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict" (4). I think of being an ally as a constant untangling of one's position and privilege, of sitting in discomfort, of learning what is hard even when it hurts.

manipulate geographic space, exposing the “livability of the world” and creatively intervening in the production of geographies that seek to limit Black life (*Demonic* xxiii; 138).<sup>26</sup>

The five girlish protagonists whom I follow all move through spaces of meat in their own specific ways: Ona stands at the sausage machine; Mazie grows up in the stench of the Armour's slaughterhouse; Stan's daughter in *Killer of Sheep* attentively inhabits domestic corners and crosses streets as the meatpacking plant at which her father labours hangs heavy in the family interior; Lovey comes of age in a Hawai'i made abject by the violences of American empire and cares for animals in her backyard, in National Parks, and in the wild, questioning how to kill and consume with love; and finally, Mija disrupts the narrative space, transnational separations, and production line of 'ethical' meat in her queer interspecies intimacy with genetically modified superpig, Okja. In tracing their movements, I attend to the affects that propel them or hold them in pause, their particular racialized, classed, and gendered positions that influence their capacities to move in a certain way, and finally, I attend to the animals who they encounter in these spaces.

#### IV Chapter Organization

Sune Borkfelt notes that “the abattoir is, however, characteristically in the social imaginary as unimaginable, that is, a place which is disavowed and only reluctantly imagined” (*Reading Slaughter* 208; 181). It is a space punctuated by absences or an inability to look or conceive. This project positions girls as particularly apt guides through this space; however, I contend that these girls offer ways of entering this space that do not adhere to what Borkfelt identifies as the dominant expository impulse behind slaughterhouse narratives that “help lift concealment” (8). Instead, these girls ask us to enter and hold these fictional renditions of the

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<sup>26</sup> Ruth Wilson Gilmore's thinking on space, geographies, and abolition also inform my conceptualization of space. See for example *Abolition Geographies: Essays Toward Liberation*.

slaughterhouse or scenes of agricultural production differently. How might she deviate from her role as a ‘guide,’ disrupting the reproductive line both she and the meat animal are expected to follow in order to ensure the continuance of consumption? Positioning these girl guides as minor figures, I contend that their presences in and amidst spaces of meat urge readers and viewers to look, to attend to, in a non-expository or voyeuristic way. Each chapter proposes a different way of theorizing girlhood in relation to meat and thus draws on quite disparate frames and fields.

My movement from chapter to chapter, from girl to girl takes place as a sort of line of inheritance between girls— of passed-down and gathered willfulness, of troubling and troubled wombs – whose voices are akin to a gathered chorus throughout twentieth-century American literature. Saidiya Hartman imagines the chorus as a way to think through how Black girls, in nineteenth-century America, choreographed spaces of survival and fugitivity in conditions of constant policing, categorization, and enclosure. Hartman reminds us that “the Greek etymology of the word *chorus* refers to *dance within an enclosure*” (347). The chorus is enclosed yet moving, as finding motion despite being held in close spaces. I focus on how the girls in these texts of meat speak and dance across time to perform survivals within a life enclosed and alongside animals enclosed: “they draft a blueprint: move, escape” (Hartman 347). They ask us to think through meat differently, tugging at issues of reproduction, birth control and abortion that become sites of affiliation or alliance between girls and the meat animals who labour alongside them. As a careful witness to this chorus of girls, their wombs, and their animal comrades, I ask how each girl’s surfacing might itself be a theoretical offering – a way to think with, a lesson in love, care, and consumption.

Each chapter close reads a single text and pulls to the centre the figure of girl, following and historicizing her movements through the spaces and infrastructures of meat. I organize these

chapters chronologically, beginning with *The Jungle* in 1906 and ending with *Okja* in 2017. In a peculiar way, as these texts move temporally through the century, the scale expands, from the highly local to the transnational. I thus map out how these girls, on a corporeal and affective level, also navigate the scales of capitalism that articulate themselves as spatial scales: from *The Jungle*'s localized scale attuned to the brute forces of industrial capitalism to *Okja*'s transnational scale attuned to the more dispersed tones of neoliberal capitalism. How might the deviant movements and intimacies of these girlish protagonists across species and spatial lines dislodge these scales of meat and capitalism? Finally, three interludes punctuate my chapters, taking the form of shorter more creative pieces. These interludes also move away from the slaughterhouse explicitly to sideways texts that take up alliances between girls seeking abortions or navigating pregnancies amongst domesticated animals. I posit that each of the girls in my Interludes, Dewey Dell in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Billy Beede in Suzan-Lori Parks's *Getting Mother's Body*, and Esch Batiste in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*, might be read as conversing across time; the chorus of girls continues.<sup>27</sup> The Interlude as a break, a detour, a necessary rest, as interruption, as transition, as turning sideways, as a threshold between.

The first chapter follows Ona from Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) and places her and her womb troubles at the centre of this novel often read for its representation of masculinity as it relates to labour, capitalism, and socialism. I assert that the link between the labour troubles of the slaughterhouse and those of women bearing children out of their "womb troubles" is central to the literature and language of industrial meat production. Using Sianne Ngai's

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<sup>27</sup> In fact, scholars have pointed out how Parks's and Ward's novels both might be read as echoes or remixes of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. See, for example, Christopher Leise and Eleanor Gold's reading of *Getting Mother's Body* in "A Toast to Mr. Smiles: Chiasmus and Comitragedy in Suzan-Lori Parks's Signified Faulkner" and Sinéad Moynihan's "From Disposability to Recycling: William Faulkner and the New Politics of Rewriting in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*."

theorization of ugly feelings as well as Sara Ahmed's writings on willfulness and laboring limbs, I show how the pregnancies and wombs of *The Jungle's* sausage girls trouble this text. I explore three ways that Ona's body troubles the text: (1) as an immigrant body whose fertility threatens the whiteness of the narrative centre; (2) as a trembling, nervous, and ill reproductive body whose womb agitates the narrative's control of affect and bodies; and (3) as a labouring body whose presence in the sausage room thwarts the optic control of the slaughterhouse's spectacular production of meat. What runs through all three of these positions is Ona's refusal to move or be moved. While Jurgis and the male labourers are marked by their capacity to move, we might say that Ona does not move in the way she is meant to, marking her therefore as a deviant or willful subject.

The second chapter follows Mazie Holbrook from Tillie Olsen's *Yonnonddio From the Thirties* (1974), a girl of a migrant family living in a meatpacking town in the 1920s Midwest. Using Paula Rabinowitz's work on laboring women, I demonstrate that this text mobilizes poor white migrant girlhood and meat simultaneously to tug at stories of the social, reproductive, and industrial projects of the Great Depression. I balance queer theory – such as Kathryn Bond Stockton's notion of queer childhood and sideways movement and Sara Ahmed's queer orientations – with a more historical materialist close reading of the child, gendered, classed, and racialized, in Depression era projects. This chapter is divided into three sections, moving outward in scale: the home, the slaughterhouse, and the Prairies. In the first section, I follow Mazie's movements away from the home, arguing that her rejection of motherhood gets articulated through the consumption and expulsion of animal bodies. In the second, I examine how Olsen juxtaposes Mazie alongside the Armour's slaughterhouse, a space that slowly emerges as material – the sausage girls swelter “where men will not work” – and metaphor – as Mazie's

future too-fertile womb in need of controlling by the burgeoning welfare state (Olsen 166). How does the space of the slaughterhouse help Mazie navigate her own reproductive futurity? Finally, the third section turns to two paratexts: the cover image of a Dorothea Lange photograph and an epigraph of a Walt Whitman poem. These paratexts help me establish the third space that Mazie moves through – the Prairie landscape that she unearths to be profoundly violent – with multiple forms of extraction, occupation, and extinction marking its emergence. Ultimately, Mazie demonstrates the profound links between the home and expectations of girls to follow reproductive lines, the mass killing of animals in slaughterhouses, and the genocidal projects of the Prairie landscape.

The third chapter follows Angela in Charles Burnett's film *Killer of Sheep* (1978) and her movements inside the home and in the streets of Watts, which are cut with scenes of her father laboring in a meatpacking plant. The chapter revolves around a moment in the film in which Angela appears in a doorway wearing a dog mask. Drawing from scholarship on the Black interior and Black girlhood, such as Saidiya Hartman and Valerie Sweeney Prince, as well as Kevin Quashie's notion of "quiet" and Black interiority, I trace how the film gestures toward Angela's imaginative interior through the use of a dog mask, a surrogate to her witnessing. Furthermore, placing Colin Dayan and Joshua Bennett in conversation about dogs, property, and interiority as well as Nazera Sadiq Wright's concept of Black girlhood as "prematurely knowing," I ask how Angela, whose Black girlhood historically has existed at the margins of archives and of sight, comes into focus alongside dogs and sheep (Wright 10). Max Nelson notes that Burnett's films "meander to the edges of the spaces they show," highlighting the importance of peripheries and minoriness to Burnett's style (18). I thus propose that Burnett's film urges us

to follow the girl at the threshold, asking what her quiet but persistent observations reveal about the reproduction of Black life in Watts in its quiet yet revolutionary ways.

The fourth chapter moves away from the slaughterhouse to family tables and taxidermy shops, following Lovey in Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* (1996) and, briefly, Toni from Yamanaka's later *Heads by Harry* (1999). Both Lovey and Toni are lower-class Japanese Hawaiian girls who navigate their reproductive futurity in the form of menstruation and pregnancy alongside domesticated animals being violently killed, consumed, and mounted in their everyday spaces. Animal death and coming into girlhood are thus intimately entwined. Furthermore, the setting of Hawai'i – violently occupied by America—presses and impresses itself on Lovey and Toni's movements in the form of harmful masculinity, national projects of 'conservation,' and animal breeding. The desires of girls, when articulated alongside animal death, ultimately expose America for what it is: rotten, abject, and ruthless in the projects that make up the constantly reproduced structure of settler-colonialism.<sup>28</sup> This chapter is divided into three parts: first, I take up Lovey's affiliation with female animals that helps her navigate her relationship to sex, pregnancy, and sexual identity; second, I focus on how Yamanaka uses animals to undo the lines between wild and domesticated, categories that underpin colonial and racist discourses, ultimately "spoil[ing] the scenery" of Hawai'i (Yamanaka 175); and third, I take up Yamanaka's pairing of pigs, girls, pregnancy, and patriarchy in *Heads by Harry*. Taken together, these sections demonstrate the entanglements between projects of animal domestication, American imperialism and patriarchy. The girls in

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<sup>28</sup> This is a nod to Patrick Wolfe's powerful assertion that "settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event" (2). Wolfe therefore points to settler-colonialism as an ongoing series of racist projects, practices, and ideologies.

Yamanaka's novels, I argue, find allies in the animals whose deaths pepper the landscape, becoming guides toward queer horizons.

The fifth and final chapter faces the slaughterhouse in perhaps its most graphically rendered form, following Mija in Bong Joon Ho's film *Okja* (2017) to question how it positions Mija as a girl from a pastoral "far from New York" to tell its story of a new "ethical meat" (*Okja*). Conversing with Rachel C. Lee's theorization of the choreographed Asian American female body, Aihwa Ong's notion of flexible citizenship, and Vivian L. Huang's theorization of queer Asian American inscrutability, I argue that Mija's promise, as "an extraordinary little girl...the fearless pig rider from across the globe," is in fact tied to her acrobatic body – capable of translating and transacting herself between Asia and America (*Okja*). The intimacy between Mija and superpig, Okja, animates the story of 'ethical' meat at the same time as it unmoors the species, spatial, and racial divisions needed to tell this story. Using Mel Y. Chen's work on "animacies," I tend to the ways that Mija and Okja's interspecies intimacy is coded as both queer and racialized, both promise and threat. This chapter centres the love between them as a revolutionary affect and thus takes seriously the bonds between girls and animals as a force that might dream up anti-capitalist and anti-colonialist worlds.

To return to the minor once more, this project asserts that it is here, in the minor figures of girls, that expansive structures like capitalism, colonialism, and white supremacy, might be tested. Minor figures in minor spaces. Indeed, I return to this question often: how do animals, girls, and capitalism become inextricably enmeshed, even as animals and girls come together to undo capitalism's very core? There is thus urgency in thinking girls and animal agriculture, a settler-colonial project wherein animal death is capital, together. But this project, as I hope this introduction has shown, also reaches for the joyful and hopeful possibilities in this alliance

between girls and domesticated animals.<sup>29</sup> If colonialism is a sort of severing of relation, redefining terms of intimacies, then I wonder how the insistence of these girls to hold animals close, choosing care over violence, threatens the structures that require severance, separation, and violent ruptures to maintain their existence. As animals bred to die, loving them fiercely becomes a radical act. What affects, scales, or temporalities of capitalism do these girls dislodge in their devotion to animals who are always already on their way to being killed? This love, I argue, is a profoundly disruptive act between two subjects – girls and animals – both categorized as deviant in different ways. Alexis Pauline Gumbs asks “how can we listen across species, across extinction, across harm?” (15). The girls in each of these chapters and interludes offer models for doing this work of listening and loving across.

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<sup>29</sup> Alexis Pauline Gumbs, in *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, has been a guide for how to centre love and joy throughout this project while still naming the violent structures that attempt to sever these bonds. The adaptations required to move with love in harmful spaces, these questions of choreographing “love on a scale we can survive” (57). Her tender listening to marine mammals, honouring their movements, allowing them to evade ‘meaning’. I truly could go on and on.

## Chapter 1

### Ona: The Womb Troubles of Sausage Girls

The woman worked so fast that the eye could literally not follow her, and there was only a mist of motion, and tangle after tangle of sausages appearing. . . she stayed right there – hour after hour, day after day, year after year, twisting sausage links and racing with death”

– Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*

Laura Coodley, in her 2019 biography of Upton Sinclair, positions his 1906 novel, *The Jungle*, as a work whose impact “merit[s] him, [Sinclair], a place in American history” and furthermore posits its publication as the “birthing moment” of investigative journalism (xi). Indeed, since its publication 118 years ago, *The Jungle*, according to its critics, has come to stand as “one of the great novels of working-class life in America” and is cited by some as the first or foundational proletarian novel (Pickavance 87).<sup>30</sup> I begin here, with this “great novel of the Chicago meatworks” by a white man, written about largely by white male scholars, to call out a gaping omission in the scholarship of this novel: the figure of the girl as both meatpacking labourer and labouring womb (McCorry and Miller 10).

Why is it so hard to look here? Following my epigraph, Ona, one of the girls “contrived to give an endless chain of sausages, one after another,” is figured as an object – a “part of the machine she tended” – meant not to be lingered on with the readerly gaze (160). This quoted passage continues, in fact, to position readers as tourists moving through the slaughterhouse: “the visitor would suddenly notice the tense set face... the ghastly pallor of the cheeks, and then he would suddenly recollect *that it was time he was going on. The woman did not go on: she stayed right there*” (emphasis added; 160). The reader, who Sinclair aligns with the male gaze, simply moves on. Is this why, for so long, no one has dwelled on Ona, the “mere child [...] not quite

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<sup>30</sup> See Robert Birdwell and Michael Brewster Folsom for readings of *The Jungle* as a foundational proletarian novel.

sixteen” whose labour in the sausage department causes her deadly “womb trouble” (6; 76; 130; 226)?

I want to think about what this refusal to look at these sausage girls might mean both for constructions of American girlhood as well as stories of industrial meat production. I hold fiercely to this particular overlooked figure of the girl, who will lead to this project’s other girls, arguing that the promises, anxieties, and disruptive rebellions she embodies make visible the intimate interstices of girlhood, reproduction, and meat. I choose to read this novel “against the grain,” a method I learned from Xine Yao, tugging at that which is present in Sinclair’s text yet not quite articulated.<sup>31</sup> In this way, I do not mean to necessarily criticize Sinclair for his representation of women rather I ask what the text can do if we follow the girls and women laboring in its centre. As I follow Ona’s movements as both a labouring and birthing body in and adjacent to Chicago’s Stockyards and slaughterhouse operations, I tend to the ways in which her womb *troubles* the text’s form and division of spaces as well as species, surfacing anxieties around the rampant reproduction of immigrant bodies. How exactly does her womb trouble the text and what sort of work does this troubling do? This chapter argues that Ona’s body troubles the text in three ways: (1) as an immigrant body whose fertility threatens the whiteness of the narrative point of view; (2) as a trembling, nervous, and ill reproductive body whose womb agitates the narrative’s control of affect and bodies; and (3) as a labouring body whose presence in the sausage room thwarts the optic control of the slaughterhouse’s spectacular production of meat. What runs through all three of these positions is Ona’s refusal to move or be moved. While

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<sup>31</sup> Xine Yao, in *Disaffected: A Cultural Politics of Unfeeling* outlines a method of reading American literature from the long nineteenth century “against the grain” (3). This phrase indicates an attentiveness to refusing dominant, and thus white, “cultures of sentiment” and instead excavating the “racial and sexual politics” that surface not from “oppression from above but as a tactic from below” (3). By conjuring this spirit of “against the grain” I remain curious yet critical of Sinclair’s position, questioning how we might rebelliously read this text.

Jurgis and the male labourers are marked by their capacity to move, we might say that Ona does not move in the way she is meant to. Instead, I argue that she becomes a deviant figure whose womb emerges throughout, mobilizing the narrative's anxieties around controlling birth and breeding, both animal and human.

Indeed, in over one hundred years of criticism, no scholar has taken seriously the fleshy presence of women and girls labouring and giving birth in Sinclair's representation of Chicago's Packingtown at the turn of the century. I want to tug at why so many have focused on the male labouring body in its meaty industrial setting while suppressing the presence of the young women labouring alongside them in the sausage-room and as mothers in the sinking Back of the Yard homes.<sup>32</sup> The persistent focus on the whitened immigrant male labouring body, with some slight turns to Ona and Elzibeta and to the Black bodies whom Sinclair criminalizes, upholds a reading of the slaughterhouse that prioritizes whiteness without questioning *how* this whiteness, historicized in early twentieth-century Progressive era sentiment, is reproduced.<sup>33</sup> I aim to go further than the conclusion, as proposed by Michael Duvall, that "women [ in *The Jungle*] become a means to an end, and when the end is reached they disappear" (45). Michael Moghtader claims that Sinclair's novel holds a "triple significance" for literary scholars, identifying three ways that this novel has been commonly read and almost admitting to a stagnancy in criticism of *The Jungle* (13). These three ways include the following: as a muckraking novel, as an example of American naturalism, and as socialist propaganda (13).

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<sup>32</sup> For readings that focus on the male labouring body and masculinity see Scott Derrick, Michael Duvall, Adam Mack, and William Scott.

<sup>33</sup> I position the immigrant bodies here as whitened/white because of the ways in which the narrative hierarchizes them as superior to the Black labourers, whom the narrator deems "savages" (328). Jurgis, as a Lithuanian immigrant, although racialized, can still access American citizenship, and in fact does toward the end of the novel. Toni Morrison, in her 1993 article, "On the Back of Blacks," names the ways in which certain immigrant bodies become whitened by "pressing African Americans to the lowest level of racial hierarchy...as noncitizens." Whitening is therefore a relational process.

In the first way, scholars read it as a foundational muckraking novel that leads directly to Progressive reform of the American food industry. These scholars might read Sinclair's text for its documentary realism that "hit [the public in] their stomach" or they might do work in placing it in its historical context (Sinclair, *Autobiography* 126). I.P. Thomas Courtney's chapter in *In Food We Trust*, for example, asserts that consumers who were "made physically ill" by the novel's graphic descriptions put pressure on Roosevelt's government to pass the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act and Meat Inspection Act (18). This first way of reading also includes those who read Sinclair's text alongside the burgeoning "consumer consciousness" in early twentieth-century America (Pickavance 90). Jason Pickavance, for example, deems the novel "gastronomic realism" as it demonstrates the emergence of a self-aware American consumer that is intimately tied to realism and questions of representation (89). For Pickavance, the novel is not so much about class consciousness as it is about consumer consciousness and the reforms it spurred, mostly fueled by the middle class in the Progressive era (90). Pickavance thus argues that Sinclair's novel is concerned not only with consumption, but with realism – of food, words, and advertising – which leads to the second way scholars tend to read *The Jungle*.

This way of reading *The Jungle* places it within the American naturalist tradition. These readings often focus on Sinclair's use of determinism to portray characters as trapped within the fated ends of their class and condition, but many also argue that Sinclair's novel does not fit neatly as a naturalist novel. Moghtader, for example, argues that even scholars who read it for its naturalism cannot quite find a way to reconcile the third part of the novel that turns explicitly into socialist propaganda (14). Christopher Taylor argues that Sinclair's novel, instead of following the contours of American naturalism, emulates the French roman à these (176). Taylor argues that Sinclair's novel actually grapples with the false binaries between art and didactic

propaganda, noting that *The Jungle* contains “modernist complexity, aesthetic experimentation, and political ambiguity” (176). In a less forgiving reading, Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin positions the novel as naturalist, but a failed attempt, criticizing Sinclair for “assault[ing] the reader with the message he wants to carry, subordinating plot, character development, and verisimilitude to propaganda” (9). For scholars who try to place *The Jungle* neatly into the naturalist tradition, the final socialist turn must therefore be read as a failure: “his political idealism was doomed to destroy his naturalism” (Tavernier-Courbin 10). This pull between Sinclair’s novel as an aestheticized text and political tool is a main site of contention among scholars, so much so, I argue, that any bodies other than the white male labourer disappear.

While not in the vein of naturalism, Michael J. Duvall’s reading makes an important theoretical move regarding the novel’s racial politics. He argues that, within the narrative’s economy, it must eliminate certain bodies as waste – Black labourers, women, and impoverished children – in order to meet the efficiency required for the American capitalist machine even as it strives toward socialist utopianism (38). Duvall calls this the “alimentary logic” of *The Jungle* that collapses the boundaries between body and machine and associates certain bodies as waste in need of “trimming,” ejecting them from the mechanical, labouring, and national body (31). He locates the “used body of the immigrant worker,” notably the male worker, as the one body that “falls beyond the limit of the packing system” (41). Alternatively, in this chapter, I locate another more unassimilable body: the birthing, “troubled,” and troublesome wombs. Ona’s body is troublesome in a way that criticism has overlooked, sidelined by the radical force of the male labourers mobilizing as socialist brothers.

This brings us to the third way the novel is commonly taken up: as a proletarian novel that reveals the workings of capitalism and the labourer’s turn to socialism and class

consciousness. William Scott and Adam Mack, for example, focus on Sinclair's representation of the male labouring body, noting how Sinclair's turn to socialism gets articulated through this body using particular settings, literary devices, and forms. Andrew Ball shifts his focus to Sinclair's representation of socialism as a religious conversion (221). Some scholars, like Robert Birdwell, read Sinclair's representation of Socialism and the proletariat alongside explicit Marxist ideas. Birdwell reads *The Jungle* alongside Georg Lukács's notion of the classless society and the politics of recognition, arguing that Sinclair's novel, while radically utopian in its representation of socialist conversion, actually fails to fully realize and represent the proletariat (52). Instead, Sinclair's proletariat is fragmented across racial lines (54). But Birdwell does not dwell here for long – in the blatant issue of race that permeates Sinclair's Packingtown, emerging in anxieties around reproduction and miscegenation, criminality and poverty. Discussions of race, especially an intersectional analysis of race, gender, class, and sexuality, are not thoroughly sustained in scholarship on *The Jungle*.

Two more recent scholars begin to shift this focus. First, in his 1995 study, Scott Derrick focuses on masculinity as it relates to race, anxieties around reproduction, and population growth. While some of Derrick's observations overlap with mine, such as those about the "threatening fecundity" of Packingtown and the anxieties around birth, my reading diverges because it refuses to continue centring white labouring masculinity (86). Derrick's work leads to Robert Myers's reading that ties together Sinclair's representation of immigration, animal breeding, eugenics, and socialism. Myers argues that the novel makes visible the ways in which both capitalism and socialism manipulate natural spaces to discipline bodies – both animal and human – into hierarchies of economic, labour, and reproductive value to the nation (60). Myers aptly picks up on the "eugenic concerns" of *The Jungle*, highlighting the masses of children,

poor immigrants, and Black strike breakers who populate the novel as excessive “stock” in need of reproductive control (66). While my reading of *The Jungle* also picks up on these anxieties around reproduction and the American nation, I shift the focus to the figure of the girl – most notably the character of Ona – whose presence haunts this text, her “womb troubles” surfacing alongside animals being magically turned to sausage. The girl is an important figure because of the multiple spaces and anxieties that converge in her body as she moves alongside and within spaces of meat production.

A final thread worth noting, which has recently been picked up, is an eco-critical reading of *The Jungle*. These scholars question how Sinclair positions class in relation to environmental degradation as well as how he represents urban and industrial capitalist ruin in relation to rural pastoralism.<sup>34</sup> These readings mark an important shift in thinking about *The Jungle* as a novel concerned with the end of time, in which meat marks a crisis already felt in 1906. Reading this text now, I am interested in whether this crisis *feels* the same. The space and text of *The Jungle* have continued to exist, and have in fact intensified, despite the exposure of the exploitative and violent business of meat, “the spirit of Capitalism made flesh” (Sinclair 376). I argue that following the girl through *The Jungle* asks us to enter, dwell within, and render this space differently.

### I Ona’s Birthing Body

Upton Sinclair’s 1906 *The Jungle* begins with an excess of babies. As the narrator guides readers through the animated crowds of Ona and Jurgis’s wedding feast, his gaze returns often to

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<sup>34</sup> See more recent articles by Agnes Kneitz and Steven Rosendale for eco-critical readings of *The Jungle*. Sideways to this eco-critical turn, which is worth a brief mention, is Ryan Phillips’s 2019 chapter, “A Vegan Rhetorical Approach to Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*”. Phillips questions why so few have read Sinclair’s novel with a focus on the animal suffering and asks if, rhetorically, it is a vegan text at all.

the babies, sleeping “three or four together” (7). The text immediately frames the numerous children and babies present in this “thirty feet square” space as excessive and overflowing the proper hygienic bounds of the home (7). In fact, this densely populated domestic space is a microcosm of the Back of the Yards itself, of which “the most uncanny thing about this neighbourhood was the number of children... there were so many children to the block in Packingtown that nowhere in its streets could a horse and a buggy move faster than a walk!” (36). Readers are set apart from the scene through the narrative framing, in which the narrator looks on the scene, hailing readers as secondary spectators through the use of “you”. This framing immediately sets up the architecture of the text – in terms of form as well as optics – as one governed by a white all-seeing yet self-effacing I/eye.<sup>35</sup>

This narrative frame behind the “you” thus embeds white anxieties in the novel’s narrative architecture, notably anxieties around controlling immigrant populations. In his reading of *The Jungle*, Robert Myers highlights the eugenic sentiment – fuelled in part by the rising popularity of Darwinism as well as the dropping white birth rate coupled by a rise in immigration – suffusing Sinclair’s novel as well as turn of the century America (56). While eugenics in America gained a wide audience in the 1920s and arguably reached its peak in the 30s and 40s, anxieties about “race suicide and the overpopulation of the ‘unfit’” were undeniably present in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Peiss 308). Sinclair was therefore not alone nor

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<sup>35</sup> While I recognize that part of this omniscience and self-effacement is just a part of how third-person narration works, I want to dwell in how the narrator’s direction of affect, categorization of bodies, and mapping of spaces and structures mark his body as white. Naming this is important, I think, in reading this text against the grain, seeing and naming the whiteness – and its concurrent anxieties around controlling immigrant and Black bodies, especially when it comes to reproduction. Sara Ahmed’s theorization of whiteness in “A Phenomenology of Whiteness” as what is behind might help here. She writes: “white bodies are habitual insofar as they ‘trail behind’ actions: they do not get ‘stressed’ in their encounters with objects or others, as their whiteness ‘goes unnoticed’. Whiteness would be what lags behind: white bodies do not have to face their whiteness; they are not orientated ‘towards’ it, and this ‘not’ is what allows whiteness to cohere, as that which bodies are orientated around” (157). This is why I read the narrator as a white self-effacing I/eye.

exceptional in articulating this eugenic sentiment in literature. Allison Pasinella, in her dissertation titled “Becoming (Post)Human: How H.G. Wells, Upton Sinclair, and D.H. Lawrence Tried to Alter the Course of Human Evolution,” also picks up on the prominence of issues of reproduction, birth control, and controlling immigration in Upton Sinclair’s body of works, notably his 1921 publication, *The Book of Life*. Sinclair advocates for birth control as a method to control “the problems of over-reproduction” and to protect humanity from “the blind and insane fecundity of nature” (in Pasinella 146). Sinclair further explicitly locates this unrestrained reproduction in immigrant populations who “multiply like rabbits” (in Pasinella 147). Compared to “rats” in *The Jungle* – immigrants, “like rats...were piling in every day” – and rabbits in *The Book of Life*, immigrant bodies, and particularly birthing immigrant bodies, are likened to pests who threaten the “wonderful efficiency” of the meatpacking plant’s processes (83; 42). Scott Derrick, in his reading of masculinity in *The Jungle*, notes that the narrative articulates a “fear of a world swarming with disreputable life” which “coalesces into a fear of family life...and fears of women and their reproductive power” (86). But how does this fear articulate itself alongside meat?

I argue that for Sinclair, the controlled processes of the slaughterhouse and its breeding operations still produce scientifically measurable and quantifiable animal “stock,” even as they produce life in excess.<sup>36</sup> This agricultural measure thus offers a way to organize, divide, and control the reproductive lives and futures of the Lithuanian immigrants who he follows through the Yards. In his reading of *The Jungle*, Robert Myers includes two photos – one of immigrants

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<sup>36</sup> Nicole Shukin makes clear the link between economic and animal (live)stock. In *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times*, Shukin details how animals circulate as both metaphoric and material currency, rendered in various forms of ‘stock’: film stock, livestock, financial stock (14). On “the market’s double stock in animal life,” she writes, “if animal life is violently subject to capital, capital is inescapably contingent on animal life” (24). Further, she notes that “one task of the critic of animal capital, then, is to make their contingency visible” (emphasis in original; 24). This is part of the project I take up.

corralled in stockades at Ellis Island in 1904 and one of a multitude of cows held in wooden stockades at the Chicago Stockyards in 1909 (58-59). While Myers does not comment on the striking echo of these two photographs' spatial organization of life, I do think, while uneasily and unevenly mapped, they make visible how *The Jungle's* narrator takes 'stock' of both immigrant and animal life. The narrator's omniscient movement throughout the text works to order life by both spatial and species divisions, wherein his need to meticulously account for the "aggregation" of livestock and labouring bodies gives way to a desire to control and account for the labouring immigrant bodies who share the space of meat (51). What is striking, however, is how this anxious accounting – which formally appears in sentences that run-on like lists, breaking down the slaughterhouse processes – does not hold. Rather, it heaps around the endless and everchanging swathe of immigrants living, labouring, and giving birth in the Back of the Yards. This eugenic sentiment around "stock," which brings the animal, economic, and genetic together, is complicated, I argue, by the female immigrant bodies, particularly Ona, who trouble this text.

If we return to the opening of the novel, we might note how readers are thrown into this space – the narrator grasps for footing, repeatedly trying to fix readers in the sea of immigrant bodies – animated, dancing, and loud – but unsuccessfully so. The series of "yous" in this opening passage attempt to anchor the gaze as women emerge from the steam of the kitchen, carrying food in excess. This gaze, however, is repeatedly thwarted by the babies crowded in corners. Indeed, by the mere fourth page of the novel, the narrator has returned twice to these babies, marking them as an excess in need of controlling. The narrator describes:

There was no other place for the babies to be, and so part of the preparations for the evening consisted of a collection of cribs and carriages in one corner. In these the babies

slept, three or four together... Those who were still older, and could reach the tables, marched about munching contentedly at meat-bones and bologna sausages. (7)

The babies are clustered like a brood of animal young, spilling out of their nests to ferally munch on “meat-bones” (7). Uncontrollable in this contained space, the narrator maps animality onto these babies who are constantly consuming, cannibalistic, even (8). This first scene, overpopulated with babies, thus already signals Ona’s future, in which her body will be consumed by the babies she births. The narrator first introduces Ona by lingering on her smallness: “She was so young – not quite sixteen – and small for her age, a mere child” (6). Offset by her husband, Jurgis, “with the mighty shoulders and the giant hands,” her smallness positions her as a sort of marvel. She first emerges in a doorway, “painful to look upon,” with a “light of wonder in her eyes” (6). This first entrance articulates Ona’s presence as an ambivalent one: as too little and too much, marked by trembling appearances and miraculous disappearances. This first encounter also establishes her as a figure who troubles the narrator’s own looking and accounting. After I dwell in how she ‘disappears’ from this text, I will loop back through the text to her trembling presence between her entrance and exit, tending to how her birthing body complicates clear distinctions between the slaughterhouse’s kill floor and the beds of women giving birth.

The second time Ona gives birth takes place near the centre of this novel and is arguably the most affectively laden and bloody scene of the novel; however, very few critics linger here. In fact, as the narrator guides readers through the slaughterhouse’s multiple processes, easing them through as if spectators on a tour, this scene with Ona is punctuated by a lack of lighting, heaps of matter, and the confoundingly fleshy presence of the midwife, Madame Haupt. The spatial disorganization and darkness as well as the unruly outpouring of affect that Ona’s birthing

body provokes stands in sharp contrast to the clean breakdown of the slaughterhouse chain. While critics such as Kara Wentworth have dwelled in the sensory excess and sensational economies of the slaughterhouse scenes, I want to think about how Ona's birth/death, here, unsettles this register.<sup>37</sup> Her body multiplies sensorially to the point that it cannot be rhetorically captured; instead, leaking, her body dissipates into the surrounding space and text.

Scott Derrick, whose article about masculinity in *The Jungle* takes up this scene, states that it is the "single most wrenching scene in the novel" (87). Derrick argues that this scene reveals a gynophobic "aversion to the body and all of its fluids, smells, and processes" (87). While Derrick's reading picks up on anxieties around the reproductive body, noting, for example, the proliferation of womb-like spaces and enclosures that Jurgis finds himself claustrophobically trying to escape, his reading still centres the male labouring body (88). Instead of asking what her womb might reveal about male anxiety and misogyny, I ask: what might it tell about how the survival of girls articulates itself alongside the death of animals in the slaughterhouse?

In the fifteen-page span that documents Ona's death in childbirth, the narrator struggles to look fully upon her body; instead, she is displaced sensorially and affectively. Sinclair's narrator reveals how witnessing mass animal death requires a careful optics: the slaughterhouse tours manage sight and spectacle, highlighting what Timothy Pachirat locates as the spatial architectures of slaughter— walls, windows, catwalks, ramps – as well as the "linguistic leap[s]" and ontological distortions and divisions that work to conceal the "totality of the work of killing" from both labourers and tourists (Pachirat 30; 239). Even though Sinclair maps the

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<sup>37</sup> In "Sensing Sentience and Managing Microbes: Lifedead in the Slaughterhouse," Wentworth tends to the ways in which the slaughterhouse, both actual and as represented in *the Jungle*, attempt to manage the messy categories of animal life and death.

slaughterhouse onto this birthing scene through the butcher-midwife character of Madame Haupt, the optics of this scene are markedly different than those that take place in the slaughterhouse: there are no controlled sight-lines; instead there is shift from the visual to the sonic and, while Sinclair has metaphorically linked the immigrant's labouring bodies with animals throughout, this is one of the few scenes where he calls upon the "monstrous" (217). Of the nine times this word appears in the text, it appears three times in relation to Ona's body.<sup>38</sup> The "monstrous" thus becomes attached to Ona's pregnant body, which Jurgis describes as a "dreadful thing ris[ing] up in her" (178).

To return to sound, readers hear Ona's cries before they see her: Jurgis could "hear Ona from the street" and, as he enters Aniele's home where she is labouring in the attic, her "cries" leak into the living space below. Jurgis exclaims: "she was being torn to pieces! Listen to her – listen! Why, it was monstrous" (217). Being asked to listen instead of look, the sound of Ona fills the space of the home, leaking even into the streets. Ona's presence permeates the space in its very inability to be shown: her monstrous presence amplifies in the absence of its visibility. When we finally do see Ona, the house is shrouded in darkness: readers arrive to the home with a sole "light burning in the kitchen window and the blinds [...] drawn" (225). Ona's birthing body suffuses this scene with a Gothic feel; the house is haunted from within by the monstrous birthing body which the narrator deems "unthinkable" (217).

Indeed Charles L. Crow, in *American Gothic*, writes that naturalism and the Gothic are linked, sharing similar tropes such as "a universe of vast forces that...overwhelm...the individual," "the kinship of humans and beasts" and spaces of entrapment (102-3). As a novel

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<sup>38</sup> The other instances of the word "monstrous" appear in relation to the hogs (45), when Jurgis regrets letting Ona work (187), when they lose their home (213), in moments where Jurgis feels dragged down by injustice (214), to describe Master Freddie's bulldog (288), and, finally, when the socialist speaker refers to social parasitism as a "monstrous disease" (402).

that is commonly read as part of the American naturalist tradition, this turn to the Gothic is generically fitting. Crow also postulates that the American Gothic provides the generic and aesthetic grounds to “confront the failures, margins, and anxieties of [the American] dream” by dwelling in issues of reproduction, family, inheritances, and race (“Fear” 130; 131). By tugging at the Gothic elements at play in *The Jungle* we might begin to see how this novel, through the immigrant birthing body in particular, anxiously grapples with how to secure an American future that is being ‘threatened’ by the mass of immigrants. What I want to dwell in, though, is how the Gothic emerges in and around Ona’s “monstrous” pregnant body, whose skeletal corpse saturates the space around it with Gothic sentiment. This is perhaps most evident in the midwife, Madame Haupt.

While Derrick claims that the narrative displaces “its distaste for the female body and its biological processes” onto the midwife figure of Madame Haupt, I want to think about how she acts as a sort of reverse-double to Ona, wherein Ona’s excess finds an embodied presence (87). Ona, as a body constantly deferred, surfaces itself through sound and affect. This deferral gives her presence a sort of latency, inhabiting a sort of Gothic queer time that is not-yet, reproducing itself in babies and as doubles. I argue Madame Haupt functions as a sort of externalization of what Ona’s body bears on this text, surfacing the anxiety that trembles throughout: that the rampantly reproducing bodies of immigrant women might be the most troubling “process,” threatening the dreams of an industrial food production that “doesn’t waste anything” and a socialist utopia in which the “scientific breeding of men and women” produces a society without waste in the form of “degenerate” bodies (42; 406).

Madame Haupt, whom the narrator describes as “enormously fat” – the only immigrant body, as Derrick notes, that consumes food in excess – is the reverse of Ona, whose body is

described repeatedly as small and fragile (Sinclair 219; Derrick 87). As Ona's body hides from sight under heaps of blankets in the attic, Madame Haupt descends the ladder from the attic, full flesh: "She had her jacket off, like one of the workers on the killing beds. Her hands and arms were smeared with blood, and blood was splashed upon her clothing and face" (226). It is in this scene of birth, midwived by Madame Haupt, that the slaughterhouse – as mass animal killing in the name of meat production– is superimposed onto the birthing bed – the domestic site of reproduction and new life. Her body and apron "smeared" and "splashed" with blood stands in for Ona's childbirth (226). If the midwife is the meatpacker, then Ona's body is likened to the cattle or hogs, a part of the "steady stream of carcasses" left to bleed out (49). While the narrator describes the meatpacking labourers making precise "specific cuts...so swift that you could not see it," Madame Haupt's apron, a mess of blood, points to a sort of uncontrollability of this process of childbirth, which stands in contrast to the "business-like" control over volatile animal life/death at Durham's meatpacking plant (49; 44). Ona's birthing body, as it labours alongside animals being made into meat, emerges as the most deviant, "monstrous" body of all.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "midwife" as "a person or thing who helps bring something into being". Furthermore, as a verb, midwife can indicate bringing "something hidden [...] to light, or [...] into being or into public view". In this sense, Madame Haupt does not displace Ona's body; rather, her excessive, fleshly presence functions as a reverse-double whose presence amplifies Ona's own Gothic inhabitation of this text as a trembling, sonically haunting body. While Ona's body is drained by endless childbirths, Madame Haupt has a vampiric presence, consuming, dripping with blood. As both meatpacking labourer and midwife, Madame Haupt embodies this link between industrial meat production and childbirth, turning in the

Butcher's knife for her hands full of "goose grease" (222).<sup>39</sup> Madame Haupt midwives into view what the narrator anxiously cuts from his sight: that the immigrant home – and, more specifically, the young girls giving birth within – is perhaps the most unassimilable body of all. To the white narrator this body is monstrous and not animal, endlessly reproducing in ways that cannot be taken 'stock of'. Ona's body cannot be assimilated into the American nation and thus must be anxiously unseen (Duvall 31). Indeed, the socialist vision of this novel requires, as Robert Myers and Michael Duvall point out, the elimination of certain bodies – notably Black labouring subjects and women immigrants, who are both labelled as deviant for the threats they pose to the racial purity of the socialist America that is rallied at the end of the novel (66).<sup>40</sup> While one way to read Madame Haupt would be to argue that her body makes visible the sexual politics of meat, rendering Ona's exploitation visible through its metaphoric linking to meat animals, I am more curious in how her presence makes palpable the Gothic sentiment that clings to Ona's figure – the girl giving birth as a biopolitically deviant body, her reproductive body a spectre that lingers even when it has left.<sup>41</sup>

When we finally see Ona, she is barely visible on a "pallet of rags and old blankets" in the corner of a dimly lit garret, a space that architecturally limns the home (227). Her body "was so shrunken...she was all but a skeleton, and as white as a piece of chalk" (227). The deathly

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<sup>39</sup> Suzan-Lori Parks, in her play, *Fucking A*, first produced in 2000, reverses this image of the midwife as Butcher in her depiction of a back-door abortionist as a Butcher-like figure – her apron is splattered with blood and she is set in relation to a character named simply "Butcher" who prepares meat onstage.

<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Sinclair's text articulates a fear of racial mixing, notably in the narrator's description of the strike-breakers at Brown's meatpacking plant (328). In this scene, the narrator observes, "brawny negroes stripped to the waist...while a howling throng of three or four thousand surged about, men and women, young white girls from the country rubbing elbows with big buck negroes with daggers in their boots" (328). Likened to "an army of fifteen or twenty thousand human beasts...a square mile of abominations," these Black bodies pose a particular threat to the "young white girls," who are to carry the future stock of America.

<sup>41</sup> Carol J. Adams theorizes the term sexual politics of meat. This term, as she succinctly describes, signifies the various means and structures by which "the woman [is] animalized; the animal [is] sexualized" (4). This term highlights the shared oppression of women and animals and thus will necessarily surface often in this project.

whiteness of this last appearance echoes the pure whiteness of the first entrance of Ona, in a “conspicuously white” muslin dress for her wedding day (6). Alicia Mischa Renfroe, in her reading of Rebecca Harding Davis’s “Second Life” as a Naturalist Gothic narrative, argues that Davis’s version of the Gothic heroine, who, as a Gothic trope, is often a “spectacle of desire,” instead functions as a *spectre* – “a living ghost that haunts the narrative” (206). Indeed, Ona’s presence, as I will discuss in the next section, trembles throughout, “getting paler everyday,” with “her ghastly white face and her haunted eyes of terror” (147; 173). As a body limned in the attic, arising in sounds instead of sight, she thus functions as a Gothic spectral presence, which Renfroe claims “provide[s] a powerful reminder of cultural anxieties that resist easy solutions and clear-cut narrative closure” (206). While critics such as Scott Derrick read Ona’s horrific birth scene as “sentimental,” I argue that it leans instead toward the Gothic, wherein the metaphors of haunting and vampiric “drains” cling to the immigrant female body whose reproductive capacities threaten both the naturalist and socialist plot of this narrative (87). By centring Ona’s girlish birthing body, the Gothic emerges as a sideways tone in relation to what is commonly read as sentimental. The sentimental, I argue, only holds when the perspective of Jurgis is centred. This scene, rife with Jurgis’s melodramatic exclamations of “Ona!” builds until the life in Ona breaks, her eyes opening one last time and meeting his in “a flash of recognition” (227). The narrator asks readers to feel Ona’s death through Jurgis’s exclamatory anguish – “Ona! Ona”; “dead! dead!” (228). His body is the one animated and feeling as “she fade[s] from him...slip[s] back and [is] gone” (228). But this fading is also a refusal to leave because her body – as a skeleton-like corpse – in fact bleeds into the next chapter, haunting the corner it inhabits. Ona, “the still, white figure...only a girl...barely eighteen” persists into the next chapter as a corpse, a troubling presence refusing to disappear after her scene’s end (228).

Through Ona, the immigrant home – which is constructed on the untenable grounds of Bubbly Creek, the body of water into which the waste of the slaughterhouse processes festers – and its reproductive processes emerges as the most pressing point of crisis, overshadowing even meat (115). The immigrant woman’s body, most fully represented by Ona, becomes the feared body endlessly reproducing – birthing endless babies who populate the streets, literally inhabiting the dump, which is “sprinkled over with children...rak[ing] it from dawn til dark” (37). Her womb thus troubles the text’s yearning toward mechanical perfection – it is what cannot be contained or rendered, more elusive even than the “hog squeal” which is the only material wasted, resistant to capital (42). I argue that the “womb troubles” – the trembling illness that bears on Ona and the other women who labour – positions the non-American-born girlish body as disordered. As a girl, Ona thus holds disruptive power over the masculine order of the text. Moving in and out of the sausage room and home, Ona’s womb *troubles* the narrative’s attempts at disappearing and discarding the immigrant female body.

## II Womb Troubles and Troubling Wombs

This troubling takes a corporeal form in the “womb troubles” that surface repeatedly throughout *The Jungle*, a condition affecting “the great majority of the women who worked in Packingtown,” including Ona (131). An elusive illness which can include “one of the thousand ailments that women group together under the title of ‘womb trouble,’” the narrator takes time to detail the ways in which this ailment bears on Ona’s body, a direct result of her giving birth and then immediately returning to work sewing hams at Browns, so much so that “she was never again a well person as long as she lived” (Sinclair 131). As I historicize womb troubles, I ponder this link between womb troubles and labouring women, which, in *The Jungle*, has meat in the

middle of it all. How do these womb troubles mark Ona's body as both deviant – as a trembling body both physically and psychically – and as something incomprehensible – “a dreadful thing to contemplate” (168)? How do these womb troubles position Ona as what cannot be seen, as a crisis or limit of thought?

The phrase “womb trouble” appears on two different occasions, in addition to one other allusion in the text. The phrase is first used in passing reference to another labourer, Jadvyga, who “fears she had womb trouble” (76). The narrator goes on to make clear the link between her ill body and labour, stating that “It was not fit work for a woman, handling fourteen-pound cans all day” (76). Indeed, Laura Hapke, in *Tales of the Working Girl: Wage-Earning Women in American Literature, 1890-1925*, draws attention to the anxiety around female laborers, which was fully fledged by the end of the nineteenth century in America (9). This anxiety, she suggests, pertained to the threat their wombs posed to their work – in that either their wombs would disrupt the efficiency of the factory line or that the demands of both intellectual and industrial labour would disrupt their duties as mothers (9). This recurrent eruption of “womb trouble” positions the immigrant female labourers of Durham's Meatpacking Plant as potentially threatening and in need of careful control and surveillance. While their overly fertile reproductive capacities are a source of anxiety throughout, their added presence on the factory line becomes yet another layer of “suspicion” (Hapke 9). Hapke explains the turn of the century sentiment around working girls, writing that, “by exposing themselves to the hazards and fatigue of the unsanitary workplace, these future wives were 'unsexing' themselves by endangering their unborn children and 'denying their maternal functions'” (8). Sinclair's text is indeed highly attentive to the ways in which women's bodies labour – their wombs trouble the factory and the factory troubles their wombs. At one point, the narrator notes that, for Ona,

[T]he accursed work she had to do...was killing her by inches. She was not fitted for it – no woman was fitted for it, no woman ought to be allowed to do such work; if the world could not keep them alive any other way it ought to kill them at once and be done with it. They ought not to marry, to have children. (169)

As a working girl, Ona is already poised as sexually, morally, and reproductively deviant before she even gives birth. The narrator aligns Ona's body with what is "unfit" for American futurity because of this coupling of work and childbearing. This is the real threat – that her womb, troubled by the labour of meat, will continue to reproduce children, who are themselves "unfit," thus becoming troubling bodies to the American future of the "fit".

Sinclair's text therefore follows in the figuration of what Hapke calls the "virtue betrayed" narrative, in which working girls, especially immigrant working girls, are corrupted by and corrupt the workplace (9). Hapke explains: "The worst fate to befall girlish innocence was, of course, its corruption; the 'virtue betrayed' theme permeates the prose literature and the fiction of detractors and defenders alike" (9). The proximity of the womb – as a deviantly reproducing thing – to the meatpacking plant thus poses a problem. Its unknowability and corruptive powers threaten the mechanical (de)production of the animal body. If we follow Ona's womb troubles that emerge alongside meat, might she begin to amplify, in ways that the male labouring body cannot, the crisis of both industrial meat production, especially as it is made up, and still today made up, of migrant subjects?<sup>42</sup> Is this why we are asked to not linger here, in the troubling womb, because it is in fact the girl who might disrupt these dreams of mass meat for a white American future?

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<sup>42</sup> I use the word migrant, here, to signify their tenuous hold on American status, the threat of deportation and forced movement overwhelmingly present. Furthermore, the search for labour largely defines their movement. The Economic Policy Institute, for example, notes that, as of 2018, of the 37.5% of foreign-born workers who make up the American meatpacking workforce, 70.1% of them are noncitizens (Stuesse).

But what exactly does the narrator mean by “womb trouble”? Sinclair includes two quite lengthy passages that detail Ona’s womb trouble, positioning this condition as both a negation and overwhelming definition and diagnosis. The first, which appears a page after Ona births “an unusual sort of baby,” begins as such (130):

It is difficult to convey in words all that this [womb trouble] meant to Ona [...] ‘Womb trouble’ to Ona did not mean a specialist’s diagnosis, and a course of treatment, and perhaps an operation or two; it meant simply headaches and pains in the back, and depression and heart-sickness, and neuralgia when she had to go to work in the rain. The great majority of women in Packingtown suffered in the same way and from the same cause, so it was not deemed a thing to see the doctor about. (131)

This passage first positions “womb trouble” as something inarticulable in words – illegible, unspeakable. As a horizon beyond the rational, it is beyond the grasp of the narrator’s bounds – “difficult to convey” (131). It is framed instead as something that requires a different register of expression – perhaps affective, perhaps corporeal. Furthermore, the narrator can only explain this trouble by what it “did not mean”: through negation. When the narrator can finally find the words to describe these troubles, he diminishes their significance by stating that “it meant simply” (131). As both meaning simply and not meaning anything, Ona’s womb troubles fall in the long line of the inability or reluctance to see women’s pain, especially when it comes to reproductive matters, and especially when it is tied to racialized bodies.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Dorothy Roberts, in *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, thoroughly details America’s long history of criminalizing Black mothers and enacting violent measures to regulate Black bodies and their reproductive capacities (xi). Roberts notes the Black “maternal mortality crisis,” pointing to both the denial of Black women’s pain, epigenetics, and barriers to accessing prenatal care as factors in this crisis (xiv). For more general discussions of the medical system’s failure to believe women’s pain see Gabrielle Jackson’s *Pain and Prejudice: How the Medical System Ignores Women – and What We Can Do About It*.

Indeed, “womb trouble,” as a phrase, appeared often in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century American print culture, mostly in advertisements for over-the-counter pharmaceutical remedies, like in the advertisement below for Lydia Pinkham’s Vegetable Compound. Sarah Stage, in her comprehensive account of Pinkham’s long-lasting legacy, notes that the emergence of this home remedy which was “purported to cure female complaints - the catch-all nineteenth-century term for disorders ranging from painful menstruation to prolapsed uterus,” was fueled in part by nineteenth-century sentiment, which was “marked by medical controversy, public dissatisfaction with doctors, and an obsessive concern with woman’s weakness” (27; 89). This advertisement locates working girls whose toiling “breaks down her delicate organism” as consumers in need of this remedy. As a word that circulated in a similar way to “women’s trouble,” “women’s complaints,” or “female complaints,” “womb trouble,” operates as a flexible, one might say, wandering, signifier, taking on the qualities of the very body and organ to which it is attached.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the list that appears at the end of this advertisement reads uncannily similar to that in *The Jungle*, identifying head and back aches, the “blues” or depression, as well as “nervousness,” or, as Sinclair deems, “neuralgia,” as symptoms of womb trouble (Sinclair 131).

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<sup>44</sup> Early diagnoses of womb trouble in ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Chinese texts preceding formal diagnoses such as hysteria, located the “wandering womb” as the source of these ‘hysterical’ symptoms (Koerber 23). Amy Koerber further claims that this idea of the womb moving around the body lasted for several centuries (27). Christopher A. Faraone notes Plato and Hippocrates as two thinkers who popularized the notion that the “womb moved freely about a woman’s body” (1). What is even more interesting are the ways in which sentience and animal qualities cohered around this wandering womb. In *Timaeus*, Plato writes, for example, “the wombs and so-called uteruses in women – there being in them a living animal desirous of childbearing, whenever it is fruitless for a long time beyond its due season, being distressed it carries on with difficulty by wandering in every direction throughout the body” (in Faraone 3).

WOMAN'S LONG HOURS.  
 She Toils After Man's Day's Work  
 Is Done.

What She Has to Contend With--Work  
 That Sooner or Later Breaks Down  
 Her Delicate Organism.

The great majority of women "work to live" and "live to work," and as the hands of the clock approach the hour of six, those employed in stores, offices, mills and factories, ha'll closing time with



joy. They have won their day's bread, but some duties are yet to be performed, and many personal matters to be attended to. They have mending to do, and dresses or bonnets to make, and long into the night they toil, for they must look neat, and they have no time during the day to attend to personal matters.

Women, therefore, notwithstanding their delicate organism, work longer and more closely than men.

They do not promptly heed such signs as headache, backache, blues, pains in the groins, bearing-down, "all gone" feeling, nervousness, loss of sleep and appetite, whites, irregular or painful monthly periods, cold and swollen feet, etc., all symptoms of **womb trouble**, which, if not quickly checked, will launch them in a sea of misery.

Fig. 3. "WOMAN'S LONG HOURS.: SHE TOILS AFTER MAN'S DAY'S WORK IS DONE. WHAT SHE HAS TO CONTEND WITH--WORK THAT SOONER OR LATER BREAKS DOWN HER DELICATE ORGANISM." *Massachusetts Ploughman and New England Journal of Agriculture (1842-1906)*, vol. 56, no. 11, Dec 12, 1896, pp. 6. Public Domain.

In fact, Sinclair buries a reference to a home remedy similar to Pinkham's Vegetable Compound in a string of advertisements surrounding the Rudkus's newly leased home in Packingtown, all of which are "adapted to the peculiar population" (67). In what seems like a passing mention, Sinclair includes a reference to "Dr. Lanahan's Life Preservers" (67). The presence of this advertisement points to the ways in which the text positions Ona's increasingly troubling womb as in need of diagnosis and medical control. At the same time, however, its

indefiniteness returns us once again to an illness that is both everything and nothing. Hailing readers, the advertisement reads, “‘Is your wife pale?’ it would inquire. ‘Is she discouraged, does she drag herself about the house and find fault in everything? Why do you not tell her to try Dr Lanahan’s Life Preservers?’” (67). This advertisement quietly summons Ona, anticipating the “fearful nervousness [...] frightful headaches and fits of aimless weeping” that make up her womb trouble (169).

This description seems like a remedy to an ailment that echoes Ona’s demeanour, who, from her very first entrance, is marked by “great emotion [...] all the tremor of her form” (6). Positioned as troubled or troubling from the moment she emerges, in attentively following Ona we might also notice how, as the text and her womb troubles progress, her body continuously emerges as ill, “getting paler everyday” (147). Directly linked to her pregnant body – “a woman was subject to such things when she was pregnant” – she takes up space at the same time as she takes flight from space as a hysterical female body beyond the control of the spaces she inhabits – “she was quite beside herself and hysterical” (169). Indeed, one might even argue that her womb troubles are what characterize her as a haunting Gothic presence in this text – draining her of life, with “her ghastly white face and her haunted eyes of terror” (173).

Her womb trouble, with the absence of medical cure or treatment, can only but accumulate until it reaches Gothic, monstrous proportions which also spread, as if a contagion, to the women labouring alongside her. As her only hope, the narrator, in a continuance of the description of her womb troubles on page 131, notes that,

Instead Ona would try patent medicines, one after another, as her friends told her about them. As these all contained alcohol, or some other stimulant, she found that they all

did her good while she took them; and so she was always chasing the phantom of good health, and losing it because she was too poor to continue.

There is something exhausting about these womb troubles – the women search for a cure, trying the patent medicines “one after another” only to be thwarted by poverty: “too poor to continue,” exhausted by these acts of survival (131). This womb trouble surfaces as something highly embodied and – in the detailed descriptions of this historicized female complaint – as something elusive, constantly thwarting diagnosis, moving about in the body and text. I therefore want to think about this womb trouble as a corporeal and fleshy presence in the narrative – emerging in and alongside scenes of meatpacking – as much as it is an affective one. To linger a little longer in *The Jungle*'s description of Ona's womb troubles, I want to think about how this “ailment” works along the lines of Sianne Ngai's theorization of ugly feelings, notably what she names stuplimity, for the way in which it exhausts, building up only to challenge “dominant systems of sense making” altogether ( Ngai 251).

Ngai theorizes stuplimity as a negative affect that, through a formal “material buildup of language,” draws attention to questions of how aesthetics *move* us – politically, affectively – by an overwhelming inability to move or make sense (251). Stuplimity, through fatigue, accumulation, and the uses of repetition as well as tedium, reveals the limits of knowing and grasping the totality of systems and aesthetic texts (262). Furthermore, for Ngai, stuplimity often arises in formal instances of “thick language” or “agglugative” strategies that alter “normative syntax and prose structure,” as featured in, for example, Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* (249; 251). I am not arguing that *The Jungle* is akin to a Steinian aesthetic but I do think that the text, in its representation of both the Stockyards and women's womb trouble especially, works along the lines of stuplimity in the way that meaning heaps around yet never

adheres to these bodies or spaces. There is a way that, formally, Sinclair's hyperbolic use of exclamation points and list-like sentences, especially in the passages of the Stockyard tours, are, as Ngai writes of stuplimity, an "experiment in duration and endurance" – underscoring the confounding inability to grasp the totality of the spaces of meat production which stretch "as far as the eye can reach" (Ngai 253; Sinclair 40). These spaces and processes of meat production are intimately entangled with the reproductive labours of Ona – the making of meat and childbirth superimpose onto each other. If stuplimity is what stops or thwarts rational meaning-making precisely through a formal building up or tugging downward of sense, then Ona's womb troubles, I argue, are troubling precisely for the ways in which they cannot be consolidated or contained within the narrative frame of understanding.

Indeed, to return to the narrator's attempt to define "womb trouble," after he circles the definition first as something "difficult to convey in words"; second, by listing what it is not; and third, by diminishing it as "simple," and "not [...] a thing to see the doctor about," womb trouble finally becomes a heap of things, with the narrator listing it as comprising of both physical and mental ailments – "headaches and pains in the back, and depression and heart-sickness, and neuralgia" (131). Comprised of a "thousand ailments," womb trouble positions bodies with uteruses as both uncontrollable and in need of controlling (131). Like the "inexhaustible" sensory, spatial, and statistical reach of the Stockyards, there is something in this female ailment that can only be quantified in imprecise numbers and definitions (Sinclair 32). Anxiety gathers here in this womb that is at once wandering and stubbornly staying put. In this chapter's final section, the womb is at work in the sausage room – itself a sort of mechanical birthing factory, where women ease out "tangles of sausages," heaping onto the slippery floor (160). The female labouring body cannot be heaped, however. Instead, she stops the reader's/tourist's gaze and

stays there, unmoving, a blockage, a lingering trouble in this space of mechanical precision. This work of blockage that Ona's womb performs creates the conditions, I argue, for ugly feelings such as stuplimity – “negative affects,” as Sianne Ngai posits, that arise out of “a general state of obstructed agency” (3). Can we read Ona's body and its “suspended agency” as opening up a different way of inhabiting the slaughterhouse and its meat operations (Ngai 2)?

To clarify, I read ugly feelings at work here because of the text's tonal and generic instability. While it turns, in part, on sentiment, on the power of *exposé* and shock, which seem counter to the “non-cathartic” conditions Ngai locates for ugly feelings – I argue that Ona, and the other birthing bodies in this text, trouble this very catharsis (9). Critics such as Scott Derrick have argued that Ona poses a threat to Jurgis's masculinity or, as Jordan Von Cannon argues, she is a fallen woman who is “discarded” by the text's end (Derrick 88; Von Cannon 51).<sup>45</sup> I propose, however, that by taking her seriously as a minor figure, this “tiny creature” of “not quite sixteen” presses on the text's cathartic demands (129; 6).<sup>46</sup> Ona and Elzibeta's appearances in the sausage room, in the epigraph that begins this chapter, is one such moment of how they create discomfort in the spectator's stare– if you linger long enough, her motions will stop time,

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<sup>45</sup> In “Prostitution, Primitivism and Performativity: The Bare Life in Stephen Crane's *Maggie* and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*,” Jordan Von Cannon argue that the immigrant women in *The Jungle* “attempt to transcend their ‘primitive’ states” by performing middle-class identity only to fail, becoming “fallen women,” and resort to prostitution, dragged down into the urban “cesspool” and cast from their homes (42). I contend with this reading, however, because it oversimplifies the complexities of survival on the part of these women who, I argue, have no home to be cast out of to begin with. The grounds on which their homes are built are literally sinking and, from the outset, readers are positioned in a way that reads their presence as “drains” to society. His reading of their “deviant sex work” devalues and diverts us from the survival work of these women in Packingtown, for which “there was no place a girl could go” to begin with (Von Cannon 43; Sinclair 129).

<sup>46</sup> Roger Horowitz, in his article “‘Where Men Will Not Work’: Gender, Power, Space, and the Sexual Division of Labor in American's Meatpacking Industry, 1890-1990,” details shifts in gendered divisions in the meatpacking industry. Horowitz notes that female meatpacking labourers occupy an “auxiliary” position both spatially and in the process of meat making, working often in rendering (189). This idea of the auxiliary works with this idea of the “minor”. Indeed, Horowitz points to the strategic spatial efforts to *not* see some of the female departments, such as the offal room in which Black women laboured. We might think about the optical and rhetorical feats taken to *not* see women in meatpacking as an attempt to put forth a particular narrative of meat headed by the knife-wielding male Butcher. But what happens when we do follow these minor, auxiliary figures? In my use of the word “minor,” I also call on Sianne Ngai's notion of “minor” feelings and Saidiya Hartman's following of “minor” figures, here, which I outline in my Introduction.

troubling the pace required to keep the “great packing machine,” as well as capitalism, grinding on (Sinclair 124).

### III Tangles of Sausages

In the uncensored version of *The Jungle*, to which Sinclair made several alterations and cuts before the Doubleday publication, it is Ona, and not Elzbieta, who becomes “the servant of a sausage-machine” (123). This small difference does the work of drawing attention to the politics of sight in the slaughterhouse that strategically attempt to limn Ona’s labour. Placing her here positions her at once as a spectacle looked at by tourists as well as a thwarting agent of sight. Her endurance and immovability – “she stayed right there” – threaten to dislodge the temporal progression and spectacular optics of the slaughterhouse tours (160). How does her body – and the work it does to juxtapose scenes of birth and abortion with the making of meat – ask us to move through this space of mass killing differently? Her presence in the sausage room also draws further attention to the toll this labour takes on her body and contrasts her giving birth to babies to the act of turning out tangles of sausages, themselves phallic “creatures” eased out by Ona’s hands – at once birthing body and midwife (160). The scene in the sausage room is crucial to the novel’s insistence on the entanglements between birth and slaughter. Additionally, looking to two other scenes that bring together birth and the slaughterhouse, I grapple with how the wombs of girls trouble the whiteness of the narrative frame as well as its patriarchal foundations by surfacing alongside meat animals as leaky bodies whose disorder exceeds the narrative’s attempt to account for and control bodies, especially as they are consuming and reproductive ones.

Chapter 13 of *The Jungle*, which begins with a tour of Jurgis's new space of labour – the fertilizer room – ends with a tour of Elzibeta/Ona's space of labour – the sausage-room, in which the sight of women working at the sausage machines is “perhaps the most wonderful things in the entire planet” (159). In this room, the human, mostly female, labourers – like camouflaging “ptarmigan[s]” and “chameleon[s]” – become near indistinguishable from the product they render. Noting the uncanny similarity of the human labourers with their product, the narrator tells us that, in the “dark hole” of the sausage department, they “were precisely the colour of the ‘fresh country sausage’ they made” (159). While the machines are posited as marvels and, indeed, as this passage continues, the “wonderful” machines are central while the women are minor disembodied hands, the narrator quickly directs *how* readers are meant to visually and temporally move through this space. He claims, “the sausage room was an interesting place to visit, for two or three minutes, and provided that you did not look at the people” (159). I argue that, although the narrator directs a moving on, it is precisely through the immovability and stasis of the female labouring hands at the sausage machine that a crucial contradiction emerges – she stays while we “move on” and, while some might read that as simply highlighting the injustice of her poverty keeping her stuck, I read it as an invitation to profoundly reorient oneself in this space both temporally and spatially. Once again, this deviant occupation of space is made possible by the womb – a reproductive organ that threatens the efficiency of mass production and the purity of American futurity, as held and imagined by whiteness. She does not *move* but instead endures in space and time. This scene ends, after all, with the following act of refusing both the normative progression of time as well as refusing to acknowledge the staring spectators: “never an instant for a glance” (161). Sinclair writes:

The woman did not go on; she stayed right there – hour after hour, day after day, year after year, twisting sausage links and racing with death [...] never an instant for a glance at the well-dressed ladies and gentlemen who came to stare at her, as at some wild beast in a menagerie. (161)

This scene of women labouring at the sausage-machines echoes those of Ona giving birth in the narrative attempts to “move on” at the same time as it positions women’s bodies as animalized spectacles: “wild beast[s] in a menagerie.” Furthermore, women’s labouring bodies are positioned as both midwife and magician. Attempts to package them into consumable spectacles, however, are thwarted by the ways in which their bodies surface as both spectral and flesh, as both disappearing and resolutely in place. I quote this passage nearly in full to take seriously its depiction of sausage girls as midwives, albeit potentially willful ones, of the sausage-machine:

The stuffing machines “were tended by women [...] she would press a lever, and a stream of sausage meat would be shot out [...] Thus one *might* stand and see appear, *miraculously born from the machine*, a wriggling snake of sausage of incredible length. In front was a big pan which caught these creatures, and two or more women who seized them as fast as they appeared and twisted them into links. This was for the uninitiated the most perplexing work of all; for all that the woman had to give a single turn of the wrist; and in some way she contrived to give it so that instead of an endless chain of sausages, one after another, there grew under her hands a bunch of strings, all dangling from a single centre. It was quite like the *feat of a prestidigitator* – for the woman worked so fast that the eye could literally not follow her, and there was only a mist of motion, and *tangle after tangle of sausages appearing*. (emphasis added; 160)

The use of the conditional “might,” places this scene as not quite happened, as just a little removed from a solid reality. The narrator anchors spectators in space by directing how long they should look but also distances spectators from the uncomfortable proximity with the process, products, and labourers at hand. The phrase, “one might stand,” softens the immediacy of this witnessing at the same time as the narrator details a process so “miraculous” that one cannot look away. While the narrative frame attempts to manage and manipulate the sights and sensations of the scene, the movements of the women at the sausage-machines challenge this control – she “worked so fast that the eye could literally not follow her” (160). Her motions become mist – her body both flesh and spectral. The narrator’s attempts to organize and order lines of sight rub up against the magical quality of these female labouring hands, which are posited as both “prestidigitators” – illusionists who practice sleight of hands – and midwives who birth sausages, catching them as they fall and twisting them into tangles.<sup>47</sup>

The phrase “miraculously born from the machine” further blurs the process of sausage-making as both production and reproduction. This passage uses birthing imagery throughout, which confuses the sentience of the sausages, posited as “creatures” that grow out of a single centre, multiplying endlessly (160). The sausages are both phallic – “wriggling snakes of sausages of incredible length” – and umbilical – “an endless chain of sausages...that grew under her hands” (160). If we read the sausages as umbilical, then it holds even further that this passage positions Ona, Elzbieta and the other female labourers tending the machines as midwives, catching the “creatures” being “shot” out of the machine. Foretelling Madame Haupt’s goose-greased hands that attempt to birth Ona’s premature fetus, these labouring hands collapse the distinction between midwife and meatpacker, between sausage-making and human birth.

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<sup>47</sup> This definition for “prestidigitator” is taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Sara Ahmed, in *Willful Subjects*, locates the labouring limb as a particularly apt site for willfulness. To be willful, Ahmed offers, is to get in the way of what is willing, to refuse to “will in the right way” (4). To be willful is to be non-productive, non-reproductive; a willful body “get[s] in the way of an action being completed” (147). In my next chapter, I write about Mazie, in Tillie Olsen’s *Yonnondio of the Thirties*, as a “willful girl-child” who, with the slaughterhouse’s breakneck disassembly line as her background, enacts a “refusal to be straightened” into normative motherhood (Ahmed 21; 3). Ona and her fellow female labourers, here, anticipate this willfulness in their hands. This brings us to the hands of the sausage girls: although they continue to ease out tangles of sausages, they also bear the possibility of birthing something different – perhaps an orientation to time that resists the pace of the sausage-machine, perhaps a confrontation of the tourist gaze that lays bare the truths that hover in the mist, in the “perplexing work” of their quick hands (Sinclair 150). The labouring hands, as Ahmed outlines, become the limb that stands in for the labouring body, simultaneously individual and collective. They are defined by their hand, as if “these hands were *for* work before they even were” (Ahmed 107). However, in this limning/limbing, willfulness comes to reside in this part. Ahmed writes, “if capital is assumed as the lifeblood of the whole social body and laborers provide that body with limbs, then the will of laborers might become tied to their limbs” (106). The willful labouring hand can halt production. The hands of the girls, twisting out “tangle after tangle of sausages” may seem to be performing mechanically, motions not their own, but they also surface the possibility that, with “a single turn of the wrist,” the sausages might stop – there is a *might* here, this is all it would take (160). Furthermore, in the layering of birth imagery with the production of sausages, the womb – itself a troubling, one might even say, willful thing – presences itself here. As both midwives and meatpackers, their hands thus hold the possibility to

continue birthing sausages – making meat – or to abort with the smallest sleight of hand – halting the smooth running of the meat production line.

In fact, this superimposition of meatpacking and womb labour becomes even more pronounced in a scene that was actually omitted from the Doubleday published version that is most widely available.<sup>48</sup> In this scene, a female meatpacking labourer gives birth on the kill floor. I wonder about how, in a novel full of moments meant to shock and move to feeling – intended, as Sinclair writes, “to shake the popular heart” – this scene was deemed inconsumable (in Gottesman xvii). In the published version of *The Jungle*, Chapter 10 ends with a description of the plight of women in Packingtown – the perilous yet swift fall from sausage girls to prostitution – and closes with the birth of Ona’s son and subsequent womb trouble upon her return to work (129). In the uncensored version, to which cuts were made before the circulated publication, this sequence of events is interrupted by a “horrible incident” witnessed by Marija in the factory (*The Jungle: The Uncensored Original Edition* 97). This incident involves an unmarried girl, labouring in the meat factory, who gives birth to a baby boy, a mere paragraph before Ona herself gives birth to an “enormous baby boy” (97). Indeed, the narrator wonders if “perhaps it was because of this incident, which sent a shock through all the yards, that Ona had no difficulty in getting off when her own time [birth] came” (97). In this cut scene, the narrator, relaying Marija’s own witnessing, details how:

one of the women, an unmarried girl who had been coming day after day when she ought not to have come, crept away at last into a dark passage and gave birth to a baby boy; and not knowing what to do with him, and in terror of losing her place, she crept up to the

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<sup>48</sup> I would not have known about this omitted scene had it not been for Tony Widdicombe’s review in *Utopian Studies of The Jungle: The Uncensored Original Edition*, published by See Sharp Press. I am grateful for this review that points out this important omitted scene.

floor above and dropped him into one of the carts full of beef, that was all ready for the cooking-vats. It was by the merest chance that some one heard the baby cry, just as the cart was in the act of being dumped. They took this woman to the hospital – what became of her after that no one ever knew. (97)

Once again, in the dark corners of this already dark space, the pregnant body puts pressure on the industrial aesthetic, urging it toward the Gothic. The fear of this “horrific incident” turns on the fear of human flesh mixing with meat, blurring boundaries of both species and proper consumption. The anxiety, however, is in fact embodied in the pregnant woman who, on the production line “when she ought not to have come” poses the risk of slowing its efficiency and tainting its product (97). While Sinclair’s narrative does, on other occasions, work to expose the “endless horrors” of the meat industry, including the mention of an incident that echoes this one in which labourers fall into the open vats “till all but the bones of them had gone out to the world as Durham’s Pure Leaf Lard!,” this scene places moral judgement on this labouring girl who, “unmarried” and pregnant and thus unfit for work, endangers the production line (115; 122). While the mixing of animal and human flesh is narrowly avoided, this human baby, alive in a cart of dead meat that acts as a cradle tugs at the ontological lines between animal and human, consumable and non-consumable, alive and dead. This scene, which ends right as Ona gives birth, therefore intimately links the violent spaces of meat production with that of the home and childbirth.

Finally, the ending of this scene and the woman’s disappearance brings us back to a central inquiry of this chapter: why is it so hard to follow the girl? She exits the text with the following phrase: “They took this woman to the hospital – what became of her after that no one ever knew” (97). No one ever knew. In a resistance to this pronounced narrative motion to move

on, I tend closely to the multiple surfacings of their womb troubles, midwiving capacities, and Gothic birthings. To end this chapter, I turn to one final scene that will help bring coalesce the links between birthing women and animals in the space of the slaughterhouse.

In a brief scene that appears on the page across from the first mention of “womb trouble,” the narrator describes a “sinister incident” in which Jurgis takes part (77). Characterizing this moment wherein a “slunk calf” makes it to the kill floor as a “sinister incident” echoes what the narrator deems, in the uncensored version of *The Jungle*, the “horrific incident” of the woman giving birth on the kill floor. The adjective “slunk,” according to *Oxford English Dictionary*, means, “Of calves: cast prematurely”. This scene outlines one of Jurgis’s duties as a “shoveller of guts,” in processing what the narrator deems “slunk calves” who make it to the kill floor, even though “any man who knows anything about butchering knows that the flesh of a cow that is about to calve or has just calved is not fit for food” (77). Framed as yet another exposure of the meat industry’s horrific malpractice, the narrator details how, while the boss distracted the government inspector, “in a trice the carcass of the cow would be cleaned out, and the entrails would have vanished” (77). Using the conditional tense throughout this passage posits this event as not quite unfolded, or always already unfolding. In a moment akin to the tangles of sausages “miraculously” appearing by the prestidigitator-like fingers of the labouring women, the labourers empty the fetuses from the calves in a linguistic and corporeal vanishing, with the text reading, “and the entrails would have vanished” (77). From fetus to entrails and then to meat, Jurgis’s task is to slide the pregnant cows, “calves and all,” into the trap, dropping them to the floor below so that “these ‘slunk’ calves” could be butchered “for meat [...] even the skins of them” (77). This process, whose vanishing act is over “in a trice,” surfaces in the text as a minor moment, barely seen.

Indeed, the spatial arrangement of the kill floor – wherein the pregnant cows and their slunk calves must be emptied on the “floor below” further points to the ways in which this moment – both spatially and textually – is aborted before it is fully birthed. How do we hold this moment – the vanishing of the pregnant animal body – for all the violences it surfaces, all the slippages between birth and life, meat and fetus, animal and human it materializes, only to vanish them? How does this moment, when taken alongside the unnamed female labourer who gives birth on the kill floor mingle the flesh and fates of the birthed human baby and aborted calve fetus who might both become meat?

I want to dwell in these overlapping moments in two ways. First, to show how they frame both the immigrant reproductive body and the pregnant cow as bodies who thwart measures of controlled breeding or meat production. These scenes show how reproduction is central to the vision of American futurity articulated in this narrative: through meat making and controlling immigrant populations. Second, both scenes articulate an anxious fear around racial mixing, animated by the medium of meat tainted with human flesh. Taken together, these scenes help cohere what Ona asks us to see – that the womb, as a willful, troubled thing, returns throughout this text in this juncture between the bodies of immigrant girls and animals becoming meat to surface another crisis being told: that America’s white future, even a socialist one, can only be grasped through a carefully maintained body – of the individual, the industrial, the animal, and the nation. The wombs of the girls who labour in the space of the sausage room as well as in the space of the home in scenes of birth, are one such site of crisis, unassimilable subjects who both cannot be rendered or reasoned. Ona, and the other immigrant girls’ wombs trouble the “proper” divisions between species, matter, and spaces needed to maintain this body. As a “quiver[ing],” “monstrous” thing,” the womb asserts its deviant reproductive capacities, putting pressure on the

vision of American futurity urged forth by the narrative frame: one that seeks to maintain its whiteness – and masculinity – through dreams of “breeding schemes,” eliminating the “waste” of racialized bodies just as Durham’s renders waste into product (178; 217; 406).

While Michael Duvall, as I previously mentioned, begins to tease out what he calls the “Progressivist hygienic ideology” of this novel, making the important observation that “*The Jungle’s* narrative grows out of a fertile crossing between socialist and hygienic ideology,” I have shown how this ideology is under threat precisely from Ona’s womb (42). I refuse, though, to read Ona, or her womb for that matter, simply as a “threat” to masculinity that is a sort of disembodied “claustrophobia” pressing on the text (Derrick 88). Instead, I have tried to centre her body as taking up space and willfully remaining. This chapter has offered three ways that Ona’s body troubles the text: (1) as an immigrant body whose fertility threatens the whiteness of the narrative point of view; (2) as a trembling, nervous, and ill female body whose womb agitates the narrative’s control of affect and bodies; and (3) as a labouring body whose presence in the sausage room thwarts the optic control of the slaughterhouse’s spectacular production of meat. This chapter has argued that bodies linger – as Gothic spectres, as undefinable “womb troubles,” as sausage girls stopping the comfortable gaze of the tourist, as birthing bodies thwarting both the efficiency of the disassembly line and the controlled “breeding scheme” of America’s future. Following Ona and her counterparts as they move through urban and domestic spaces as well as through spaces of industrial meat production, I ask how they might find ways of survival or resistance alongside the killing of animals in the slaughterhouse. By dwelling in these interstices between moments like slunk calves being slaughtered and Ona dying in childbirth with a butcher/midwife at her side, potentially uncomfortable intimacies, perhaps queer, perhaps insurgent, arise.

Echoes of Ona will continue throughout this project, especially in the next chapter in which I follow Mazie Holbrook, a young girl of a migrant family growing up in the heavy shadow of the slaughterhouse in the 1920s Midwest in Tillie Olsen's *Yonnondio: From the Thirties*. Threads about eugenics and birth control that I have begun to pull out as Progressivist Era causes find another form in the burgeoning welfare state of the 1920s. Here, anxieties emerge again around policing immigrant motherhood and the cleanliness of the American home, thought out alongside spaces of industrial meat. Olsen locates these curious convergences in Mazie, the girl through which she focalizes part of her narrative. With this project's chorus of girls in mind, I move from the "open-eyed and wondering" Ona to the "knowing" and "wondering eyes" of Mazie Holbrook (Sinclair 36; Olsen 52).

Interlude:  
Dewey Dell

But the curiouesest thing was Dewey Dell.

-William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*

The road is a straight line, long, belonging  
to the futures of men, wooden coffins with  
rigid corners. Dewey Dell, though, carries something on this road  
heavy with yearning, a womb full under a tightening dress.

*And then the road will begin, curving away  
into the trees.*

*empty with waiting.*<sup>49</sup>

This road is unforgiving.

In William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Dewey Dell's movement and motive run alongside and potentially threaten what is often seen as the novel's central narrative trajectory or project: to bury Addie Bundren in Jefferson, as per her wishes, giving Anse, in the end, the power to augment his masculinity through a new wife and new teeth. Dewey Dell, however, bears a different project on this road: to get an abortion. Her project punctuates the narrative's forward movement, grappling with a non-future-oriented temporality. I like to think that Dewey Dell breaks the form of the novel's rigid divisions, her body aligned with cows and fertile earth rather than the rigid lines of wooden coffins and mapped-out roads.

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<sup>49</sup> All of the italicized portions are direct quotes from *As I Lay Dying*, some which I have slightly altered punctuation or repeated words or lines to pull out meaning.

A beacon of persistence,  
 a willful arm fanning –  
 an if, a might.

Dewey Dell's body thrums with rage in the dark and maybe  
 this is the only way to feel it.

It being a body, a future, a desire, a hunger for  
 elsewhere and everything.

*I feel like a wet seed*  
*wild*  
*in the hot blind earth*

Dewey Dell and the natural world, particularly animals, share a peculiar affinity in *As I Lay Dying*. Christopher T. White argues that animals haunt Faulkner's text, asserting "animal signs and signals proliferate" (84; 82). Animals announce themselves materially and sensorially in the text, especially through sound – in "groans, snuffings, lows, and cries" (81). For White, these animal presences operate within modernity's discourses of animal magnetism and telepathy, "expose the limitations of *logos*," and unsettle the supremacy of the human (82). Furthermore, White argues that animals often emerge in moments when a character's "identity and self-coherence are at stake," for example when Dewey Dell shares a moment with the cow in the barn (86). This moment with the cow, though, also has to do with time. The cow alerts something to Dewey Dell about the future pressing down on her – her womb bearing what is to

come, a future that she attempts to abort, shaking up the wooden world of patriarchy she finds herself in by severing the generational line of women as breeders. White reads Dewey Dell's affiliation with the cow as "a retreat," an act of concealment and secrecy (White 89). But what if she goes there because it is the only place where she can be seen, her feelings pouring out in an erotic moment of self-centring with the cow?

While the cow waits impatiently to be milked, Dewey Dell says, "What you got in you aint nothing to what I got in me, even if you are a woman too" (Faulkner 63). What White does not linger on, however, is how the animal offers another future for Dewey Dell, even as the cow, as livestock, also highlights their shared status as domesticated subjects. Both Addie and Dewey Dell describe pregnancy and imminent motherhood as something that happens *to them*, as out of their control, as if they, like the cow, are industrialized mothers birthing endlessly to feed the nation.<sup>50</sup> The cow, at the same time, is an ally in her search for a different line that leads to self-expression and a future beyond the heteronormative. In this way, Dewey Dell's affiliation with the cow, in its opening up of an alternate orientation toward both time and sexuality, might be read as queer.

If you refuse to follow the line where do you go?

If you don't trust these walls where do you turn?

If you don't want to carry the load what do you hold?

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<sup>50</sup> Addie in particular likens motherhood to a sort of labour that she has not chosen, as inevitable within her conditions: "So I took Anse. And when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible" (171). Motherhood, for Addie, means that her "aloneness had to be violated over and over each day" (172). For Dewey, pregnancy is also a sort of fate that falls upon her: "And so it was because I could not help it" (27). Indeed, Heather Holcombe, for example, notes that "one of Addie's frustrations [...] is that her maternity is out of her control" (218). Furthermore, Holcombe notes how motherhood is tied into military-industrial forces, with Darl's devastation upon returning from the Great War that highlight Addie's role in feeding "the market's appetite not only for her labor, but for her children" (216).

Indeed, as Mel Y. Chen contends, instances of animal-human intimacies and kinships are often marked by queer affects and discourses of racialized animality, noting that “a theoretical kinship [is] frequently found between queerness and animality” (90; 14). So, when Dewey Dell remarks how the cow “nuzzles me, snuffing, blowing her breath in a sweet, hot blast, through my dress, against my hot nakedness, moaning,” she locates pleasure and liberation in the body of the female cow (61). It is here, in the darkness, skin to skin with a cow, that Dewey Dell comes into herself: “I feel my body, my bones and flesh beginning to part and open upon the alone, and the process of coming unalone is terrible” (61). Although she calls out “Lafe” as she lies in the darkness with the cow, I argue that the cow’s fleshiness and sensory presence – as moaning and snuffing, her breath against Dewey Dell’s body – is what brings Dewey Dell into this painful space of self-reflection that also reads like sexual self-discovery. When she aligns herself with the cow, she centres self-pleasure, thus countering the reproductive timelines placed on her. Although the cow represents a version of forced motherhood under domestication, the cow helps Dewey Dell find a way to articulate herself out of this bind. Aligned with the cow bursting with milk, a “tub of guts,” and “a wet seed wild,” Dewey Dell holds a wildness that can tear down the wooden structures and straight road of the novel’s heteropatriarchal economy (Faulkner 58; 64). Her affiliation with the animal and wetness further aligns her with rage and life, with flooding and the ecological forces that may end this stagnant world and bring in a new era.<sup>51</sup>

Dewey Dell knows what she must do.

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<sup>51</sup> Jeanne Ewert notes the etymological significance of Dewey Dell’s name, spoken aloud as “dewy dell,” means “damp, fertile valley” (231). Ewert mentions the quotation “I feel like a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth” as strengthening this meaning as well as her relationship with milked cows (231). Furthermore, Ewert details that a dell is in fact “a secluded valley, often hewn out by a periodically flooded river, and whose alluvial soil therefore produces rich fodder for cows” (231). Finally, Ewert adds that some “dell” was sixteenth-century slang for a “wench” or “a young girl of a ‘vagrant class’” (232).

When he sees her through the window he thinks her eyes blank as if waiting for a sign.

He reads her as if he can know her – *kind of dumb and hopeful*, he says.

He can tell she's in or just is trouble but

her eyes give something else – like she knows exactly what she wants.

Lafe says she can get something at the drug store but the pharmacist shrugs at her asking –

Oh, is that all, the female trouble?

So Dewey Dell carries her package, still

dreaming of nights alone with her thoughts and running fields of feverfew,

alive.

*A woman's place is with her husband and children, alive or dead.*

I got to do something I got to do something I got to do something I got to do something I got to

do something do something something something something something something I I I

I

Heather Holcombe reminds us that in the Depression Era setting of Faulkner's Bundren family, access to products as well as information about contraceptives, abortion, or birth control would have still been highly regulated by the 1873 Comstock Act (203-204). Holcombe argues that the women in *As I Lay Dying* – Addie Bundren, Cora, and Dewey Dell – all, in their own ways, “undertak[e] a commercially thwarted protest against forced maternity” (204). Kristin Luker, in *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, writes that “American fertility reached a

historic low” during the Great Depression and suggests that, based on historical accounts, “the practice of illegal abortion flourished” (41). Although Dewey’s attempts to get an abortion are unsuccessful, Holcombe argues that the novel “renders audible [...] the national maternal outcry otherwise silenced by the legal, discursive, and commercial environments of the Comstock era” (204). It is not that Dewey Dell does not have the words to ask for an abortion it is that her words are limited by the discursive systems in place. Faulkner shows her conversations with the two pharmacists to be rife with codewords and misunderstandings because the words cannot be spoken for what they directly are; phrases like “female trouble” or the shifting signifier of “something” stand in for “abortion”. Faulkner shows the danger in this impossible structure that leaves pregnant people vulnerable to exploitation and fraud.

*What the hell do you think this is?*

*A stud farm?*

How bad do you want something, he asks, a predator out for blood.

I got to do something. I got to do something.

Capsules, a treatment, an operation promised,

down in the cellar, something,

nothing

*A stud farm is an establishment for selective breeding of livestock. The word “stud” comes from the Old English ‘stod’ meaning “herd of horses, place where horses are kept for breeding”.<sup>52</sup>*

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<sup>52</sup> This definition is from the *Wikipedia* entry for “stud farm”. See Works Cited page for full citation.

MacGowan, the second pharmacist she approaches, gives Dewey Dell fake pills in exchange for her ten dollars and then rapes her in the pharmacy's cellar, telling her that this is where the 'procedure' will happen. Concealment is therefore what allows these dark exploitative practices to take place in the shadows, both figurative and literal. In *Certain Concealments*, Dana Medoro carefully tracks the language, narrative forms, and affects of concealment/visibility that punctuate Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne's texts to show how abortion – its practices and marketing “at once obvious and covert” – is central to these two canonical American authors' works (Medoro 20). Indeed, she argues that Hawthorne's novels suggest that “America itself is an abortive experiment” (6). I add Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* as another text that makes visible at the same time as it sidelines Dewey Dell's road to obtaining an abortion.<sup>53</sup>

He could fix it all right. If he just would.

He could fix it all,

right? If

he just would.

He could fix it.

Alright?

If he just would.

He could.

Fix it all right.

If he[']s] just.

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<sup>53</sup> Faulkner also addresses abortion in his later novel, *The Wild Palms*, formerly titled *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*, published in 1939. In this novel, Charlotte dies during an abortion performed at home by her partner, Harry, who is a doctor in training.

Would?

He could?

All right.

If.

In this argument that Dewey Dell's abortive project upsets the novel's 'main' project of its male characters to bury Addie's body, I also, following Medoro, highlight the incommensurability of abortion with nation (22). Medoro writes, "If the word 'nation' derives from the Italian *nascere* (to be born) and arrives in modernity as what Giorgio Agamben calls an 'integration of medicine and politics,' then abortion perhaps points toward its disintegration and makes possible the separation of the living from the state's classification of and capitalization on life" (22). Dewey Dell, in seeking an abortion, refuses to reproduce for the nation, thus defying its integrity and hold. For Dewey Dell, there is no future in the nation. For Dewey Dell, coming of age in the Depression era South, surrounded by her brothers, one of whom has been forever wounded by the Great War, and her father's patriarchal maw, the American road leads nowhere that she wants to go. In fact, the road does nothing but fail Dewey Dell, foreclosing her desires again and again. In choosing abortion, Dewey Dell therefore tries to sever the generational line, choosing a different line away from the future of the nation and its heteronormative ideals. In this way, as Medoro argues, "abortion tends in the direction of queerness and liberation" (xiv); "as a practice that disrupts reproduction and detaches women from maternity [...] [abortion] is countersigned, so to speak, by nonreproductive ways of being and thinking" (xiv). So, Dewey Dell turns to the cow, to consuming phallic but flaccid bananas, to the feeling of the earth pressing to her back, to pleasure and to a self ferally unbound to motherhood.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> For a thorough reading of the significance of the banana and its relationship to colonialism, transnational trade routes and plantation systems, as well as capitalism in *As I Lay Dying*, see David A. Davis's "'A Sack of Bananas':

*That's what they mean by the womb of time:*

*the agony and the despair of spreading –*

*bones, the hard girdle in which lie*

*the outraged entrails –*

If the novel ends and Dewey is still pregnant then does it really end?

Bearing open the hinges, Dewey eats bananas like air.

Her own project unfinished, hungry like the amniotic river that ravishes all that white men build.

In this interlude, I wanted to show Dewey Dell's persistence to get an abortion – the repeated lines, her 'I' demanding. This determination, however, is on course to fail, limited by the legal and linguistic regulations around abortion. To keep searching, though, is Dewey's only form of survival. Dewey's fanning arm that returns again and again in the first few chapters reminds me also of Sara Ahmed's willful arm – “the arm inherits the willfulness of the child insofar as it will not be kept down, insofar as it keeps coming up” (1).<sup>55</sup> Holcombe describes Dewey Dell's body as “sprawling” and I love this – her endless reach toward a horizon that holds something different, something wild and raging amidst this ecologically devastated and economically depressed landscape (216). I also wanted to capture the desperation in Dewey

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*As I Lay Dying* and Hemispheric Plantation Modernity.” Davis also suggests that, for the Bundren's, “on the margins of American consumer culture [...] the bananas signify an aspirational form of consumption, and their desire for bananas indexes their ruralism and their poverty” (138). My reading of the banana adds that, held in Dewey and Vardaman's hands, they become signifiers of a comic phallic failure, of consuming and centring joy in the face of patriarchy, of countering the hardness of wood often aligned with men in the novel with a soft flaccid end.

<sup>55</sup> This arm of the willful girl child coming up again and again is an image from the Brothers Grimm tale, “The Willful Child,” that Ahmed analyses in *Willful Subjects* (1). Of this tale, Ahmed writes, “the arm inherits the willfulness of the child insofar as it will not be kept down, insofar as it keeps coming up, acquiring a life of its own, even after the death of the body of which is it a part” (1-2).

Dell's run-on sentences and the breathless repetitions in Faulkner's prose. Her trying to conceal something yet also get something out. How do you articulate a self when the words feel impossibly limited within the world you inhabit?

I think about how words are insufficient, as Addie knows, for how I want to work out my relationship with Dewey Dell and also inadequate for Dewey Dell to articulate herself within where she finds herself. If she cannot ask for an abortion, then how could she ever get the life she desires? All I have, though, are words. So, if I could, I would gather wildflowers for Dewey so we could hold their healing in our hands, scattering the petals where our feet meet the earth. If I could, I would tear a down a house with Dewey, the wood slivering our hands, leaving lasting reminders of our rage. If I could, I would build a world anew with her, patching up the dark holes, softening the sharp edges so we would still know where the wounds are but they just maybe wouldn't hurt as hard.

If he just would.

If she just could.

She just could if

She just could.

She could.

If.

If.

## Chapter 2

## Mazie: Depression Era Girlhood, Mass Animal Death, and the Prairie Landscape

Ugly and ugly the earth. Patches of soiled snow oozing away,  
 leaving the ground like great dirty sores between, scabs of old  
 leaves that like a bruise hid the violets underneath. Trees, fat with oily  
 buds, swollen breasts of prairie. Ugly. She turned her eyes to the sky for  
 oblivion, but it was bellies, swollen bellies [...] Her mother. Night, sweating  
 bodies. The blood and pain of birth [...] She could feel words swollen big  
 within her, words coming out with pain, bloody, all clothed in red  
 – Tillie Olsen, *Yonnondio From the Thirties*

Tillie Olsen's *Yonnondio From the Thirties* is a novel set in the twenties, contrary to its title, and follows the Holbrooks – a migrant labouring family – from a Wyoming mining town to a tenant farm in Nebraska and finally to the packinghouse yards of what is most likely Omaha. The novel is focalized primarily through Mazie, a girl of six and a half years old “a-knowen” and “a-watchin” (5; 14). In a pivotal moment of Mazie's (dis)orientation toward girlhood, she finds herself staring up at “the shattered sun die in a sky of bruises over the decayed line of houses and buildings. Way down, like a hog, a great hulk of building wallowed. A-R-M-O-U-R-S gray letters shrieked” (100). These letters summon an actual site: Armour & Company, started by Philip Danforth Armour in 1863, which was one of the American Big Five meatpacking companies of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries known for its technological innovations in slaughtering techniques, rendering, canned meat, and refrigeration (*Britannica*).<sup>56</sup> Between 1870 and the end of World War I, meatpacking plants owned by Armour & Company were scattered across the Midwest, from Chicago to Omaha to Kansas City (Warren 14). In this moment where Mazie finds herself overwhelmed by Omaha's urban space and its masses of

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<sup>56</sup> For a more detailed history of the livestock and meatpacking industry in the Midwest, including the history of the “Big Five,” see especially Wilson J. Warren's *Tied to the Great Packing Machine: The Midwest and Meatpacking*. For a history of labour and union organizing in Midwest meatpacking, see Deborah Fink's *Cutting into the Meatpacking Line: Workers and Change in the Rural Midwest*. For a history of immigrant labour in Midwest meatpacking, see Ann L. Sittig and Martha Florinda Gonzalez's *The Mayans Among Us: Migrant Women and Meatpacking on the Great Plains*.

bodies – “the seething of people about her” – she anchors herself both optically and linguistically through the Armour’s meatpacking plant (98).



Fig. 4. “Bird’s Eye view of Armour & Company from balloon.” 1910.

<https://archive.org/details/notablemenofchi00chic>

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Armour\\_%26\\_Company.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Armour_%26_Company.jpg) Public Domain.

Disoriented and struggling to remain alert as “the street and people...entered into her like death,” Mazie looks to an architecture of death: the Armour’s building down(ed) “like a hog” (100). This phrasing manifests the interior processes of downing/slaughtering “hogs” in the exterior of this building whose name Mazie slowly articulates – “A-R-M-O-U-R-S.” As she faces this building, she spells out the letters on its façade and then forms them into a word, which becomes a repeated chant, an incantation she feels out with her tongue: “Armours, said Mazie over and over. Armoursarmoursarmours” (100). What is it about the façade of the well-known Armour & Company meatpacking plant that helps Mazie *see* and *name* her own place?<sup>57</sup> How does the space of the slaughterhouse and its processes help Mazie navigate her own reproductive

<sup>57</sup> Towards the end of the novel, Mazie expresses her frustration with having no place except in the home with her mother, already helping care for her younger siblings. For an eloquent reading of this moment, see Paula Rabinowitz’s article, “Between the Outhouse and the Garbage Dump: Locating Collapse in Depression Literature” and the chapter, “The Contradictions of Gender and Genre” in her book, *Labor and Desire*.

futurity? How does she move through this space, narratively set alongside it while working through an ambivalent affiliation with domesticated, birthing, and dead animal bodies? This is where I begin: with the slaughterhouse that haunts the Holbrooks and urges Mazie into spaces outside the heteronormative home. This visual of Armour's, "the great mass of packing house and stockyard" conjured by Mazie's spelling out of this space hovers throughout the novel; it is a "fog of stink" that wafts through their home's windows (112; 67). Furthermore, the phallic imagery of smokestacks locates patriarchy as something that presses down on Mazie. The slaughterhouse that she names into being – "A-R-M-O-U-R-S" – opens an alternative futurity for Mazie that might point to the very impossibility of a future at all.

While Ona enters and labours within the slaughterhouse of *The Jungle*; in *Yonnondio*, Mazie figures alongside the slaughterhouse, negotiating her relationship to her mother and the future of childbirth that presses already on her not-yet-come-of-age body. In a lateral and often dream-like triangulated movement between the home, the slaughterhouse, and the depleted land of the Depressed Midwest Prairies, Mazie embodies both the possibility and impossibility of American futurity. As a novel with no future— where Mazie does not complete the arc of the bildungsroman – her body, in its movements across these spaces of extraction, shows how the horizon is already limned. The land has been depleted through the mass genocide of Indigenous life – both human and animal – and the two industries Olsen situates Mazie alongside – mining and meat – violently mark the landscape, their processes ever-proliferating and polluting.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ann Pancake, in her article, reads the ways in which Olsen's novel challenges conventions of the bourgeois form of the bildungsroman, "calling into question popular assumptions about 'change' including teleology, linearity, vertical narrative movement, and temporal order" (292). She proposes that "the novel suggests no future for the Holbrooks and offers neither a bourgeois teleology of personal evolution nor a Marxist teleology towards class consciousness and revolution" (300).

How do Mazie's movements and motives sideways to the slaughterhouse invite us to enter this space differently? Tending to her movements between the home and the slaughterhouse makes visible the lack of divisions between these spaces: the reproduction of human life is caught up in the production of meat which is contingent on animal death. To read these movements, I use a methodology that pulls together queer theory, especially the thinking of Sara Ahmed on orientations and Katherine Bond Stockton on sideways movement, and a more historical materialist reading of the figure of the child, gendered and racialized, in Depression era texts. My methodology establishes a way of reading bodies as they occupy, move within, and share spaces. I close read textual elements such as form and rhythm as well as paratextual elements. Moving from prose to epigraphed poetry to image, I ask how the figure of the child – the whitened girl of a labouring migrant family, in particular – animates the interlocking crises of domestic reproduction, meat production, and the Prairie landscape. This landscape will emerge as a violently birthed entity, built on settler-colonial practices of extraction, erasure, and extinction.

This chapter is divided into three sections, moving outward in spatial scale, that position Olsen's figuration of Mazie's white girlhood in relation to three spaces of (re)production: the home, the slaughterhouse, and the industrialized Prairie landscape. In the first section, I take up Mazie's rejection of motherhood through the consumption of animal bodies in order to demonstrate how her queer sideways orientation tugs at heteronormative temporalities of the *bildungsroman*. Her movements away from the home lead to the slaughterhouse. In this second section I take up the modernist form, choreography and the labouring body in relation to delay, deferral, and dreams. Finally, the last section turns to two paratexts: the cover image – a Dorothea Lange photograph – and the opening and closing epigraphs from Walt Whitman's

poem that gives the novel its title. Taken together, they make visible the disappearing and dispossession of Indigenous human and animal life necessary for the construction of Depression era girlhood and the Dustbowl Prairie she inhabits, emptied of Indigenous life yet in excess of industrial toxicity and extractive projects. Through Mazie's witnessing, the Depression landscape emerges as a space of excess wherein the "fecund earth, overpowering" and its weathers (de)press the human, animal, industrial and geological into intimate and urgent crossings (Olsen 43).

My reading of *Yonnonidio* continues to centre, as many scholars do, the reproductive body but includes the slaughterhouse as a space through which the novel works through questions of reproduction, girlhood, motherhood, and meat. The majority of scholarship on *Yonnonidio* coincides with American Second-wave feminism in the early 1980s to 1990s. In a survey of these critical conversations, five main threads appear. First, critics grapple with the complicated creation and publication history of Olsen's novel: as a novel whose fragments are "from the thirties" but which Olsen later pieces together in the 1970s. These critics make important claims about the novel as a piece of documentary fiction that complicates notions of authorship. Second, critics position her novel in relation to proletarian literature, many noting how she tugs at this masculinist genre with her insistence on the domestic and reproductive labours of women. Third, feminist critics read the novel for its representation of motherhood and pregnancy in patriarchal homes, focusing on the body and language as sites of resistance and possibility. Fourth, and perhaps most important to my own project, are the critics who analyse its representation of welfare motherhood, noting the novel's engagement with issues of policing reproduction and hygiene along racialized and classed lines. Finally, are the critics who read Olsen's

representation of the body more generally, especially as it relates to modernist aesthetics and the grotesque.

Olsen's *Yonnonidio From the Thirties* is a complexly authored, produced, and published text. Scott Herring, in his article "Tillie Olsen, Unfinished (Slow Writing from the Seventies)," remarks the tone of lament that dominates critical conversations around this novel. He states, "over the years, the well-rehearsed tale of its delayed and incomplete publication has taken on almost mythological overtones" (82). He cites, for example, Joseph Entin, who theorizes the text as a "lament" that "mourns [...] the very possibility of its own textual completion" (82). John Vickery, on a related note, argues that *Yonnonidio* straddles modernist experimentation and romantic sentiment for the ways in which it "alerts us to a text that is deliberately incomplete" (99). Herring, however, counters this narrative of negativity and failure surrounding Olsen's novel and urges instead that we read reparatively, asking how its "unfinished status" is a "forceful political act" that challenges notions of completion and closure in three areas: education, genre, and proletariat history (84). Herring's argument marks a significant theoretical reframing in the ways that Olsen's novel is read for its temporal, generic, aesthetic, and political ambivalences.

Christopher Wilson takes a sustained look at Olsen's archival practices in reassembling *Yonnonidio* and urges that critics separate the Tillie Lerner of the thirties, who wrote the fragments that would become *Yonnonidio*, and the Tillie Olsen of the seventies, who then pieced together these "38 to 41 year old penciled-over scrawls and fragments" to assemble a manuscript in "arduous partnership" with her younger authorial self (Olsen, "A Note about this book" 196). Wilson argues that the novel poses "interpretative friction[s]" for attempts to classify its genre and periodization and thus challenges readerly expectations for wholeness and authenticity (50).

Similarly, Corinna Lee focuses on the radical potential of Olsen's practice of textual recovery, arguing that "Olsen uses the unique circumstances of *Yonnonidio*'s delayed publication to create a recovery framework around her book" (113). Linking the novel to the documentary form of the 1930s, Lee posits that the text's "anachronistic relationship to 1974 thus transform[s] her book of fiction into a material document of the earlier decade's unrealized political project" (113). Reading it as a documentary novel, itself a genre theorized by Barbara Foley, Lee positions it as a political project grappling with how to speak for and with the working-classes it seeks to make visible (123). For Lee, *Yonnonidio* centres the struggle for truth and representation while the proletarian novel centres conversion, revolutionary class consciousness, and collective organizing (123). Many critics, however, do locate Olsen's novel firmly within the tradition of the proletarian novel.

These critics often gesture biographically to Olsen's own involvement in the Communist Party of America and her experience in labouring and organizing in Midwestern factories, including meatpacking plants, in the early 1920s (Coiner 175). Catherine Coiner, for one, insists that the novel be read as "from the thirties" and focuses on the use of "narrative intrusions" akin to a Brechtian estrangement effect that provoke audiences to question capitalist systems of oppression (191; 183). In addition to functioning as a proletarian novel, Coiner also notes that the novel functions as a *kunstlerroman*: "the portrait of the radical artist as a young woman" (178). While she does not dwell here long, I am interested in this mingling of genres: the revolutionary proletarian novel and that of the female *kunstlerroman* for how they position girlhood in spatial, temporal, and corporeal terms.

Anthony Dawahare and Paula Rabinowitz fully face this question of the representation of domestic and reproductive labour in working-class fiction. While Dawahare looks at Olsen's

representation of working-class women in the home as well as the utopian pull in Olsen's novel, which he locates in the figure of the child, Rabinowitz, in *Labor and Desire*, thoroughly establishes the field of Depression era women's revolutionary fiction. As both a part of and apart from proletarian fiction, Rabinowitz argues that Olsen and her women author comrades frame their revolutionary working-class fiction narratives through bodies "that (re)produce through birth and labor" (69). *Yonnondio*, in particular, shows the complex relationships between girls and their mothers, between girls and industrial/reproductive labour, and between girls, their bodies, language, history, and desire.

Rabinowitz's reading leads to the third way that critics take up *Yonnondio*: as a feminist text. Many of these readings establish Tillie Olsen's literary and political life as a socialist feminist. Ann Pancake and Jenn Williamson, for example, examine how the novel works as a feminist bildungsroman, while also tugging at the middle-class aspirational conventions of this genre. Williamson examines how the novel "undermine[s] classic capitalist mythologies" by making visible the "complexities of class, capitalism, and social change in relation to the female body and self" (450; 452). Their focus on time and tense, as it relates to girlhood and the pregnant body, is helpful for my own reading. Michael Staub, in an important turn, moves from a focus on the body, space, and time to sound and silence. Describing *Yonnondio* as "a highly compressed catalogue of sounds and silences," he examines the ways in which particular spaces limit and confine women's voices but also argues that Mazie and Anna carve out intellectual and creative spaces for articulation (131). Elaine Orr also picks up on Olsen's interest in feminist voice, but frames Olsen's text as one guided by religious transcendence for its vision of hope. I wonder, though, how these readings that argue for characters finding "selfness" reveal a problematic interpretative desire for closure, character growth and development, and hopeful

resolution. Finally, in a markedly different take on girlhood and coming to a feminist ‘selfness,’ Chris Robé analyses Tillie Olsen’s representation of children as consumers of popular film to think through the complexities of audience identification, class, and gender. While many of the proletarian and feminist readings do dwell in the intersections between class and gender, race is largely absent from their readings.

The fourth way of reading *Yonnonidio*, however, dwells in the contingent relationships between race, class, gender and hygiene. Susan Edmunds, for example, counters the common reading of *Yonnonidio* as unsentimental, arguing instead that it operates as a modernist text that grapples with sentimental culture through its use of the grotesque to work through the racial, classed, and gendered contours of the American welfare state, especially as it pertains to working-class motherhood and what she calls the “domestic exterior” (125).<sup>59</sup> Following Edmunds, Kimberly Drake and Leah Pennywark focus on the space of the working-class home and the figure of the mother as policed sites of cleanliness. Looking at how “the discourse of hygiene and sanitation in the novel overlaps with racialized language,” Pennywark argues that the Holbrook family inhabits the peripheries of whiteness because of the home’s dirtiness and Anna’s monstrous “fecundity,” positioning her as “an infection to the national body” (310; 321). Claire Roche, who reads Tillie Olsen alongside Margaret Sanger’s writings on birth control, however, argues that Olsen “reproduc[es] the very system and affirm[s] the eugenic claims about the unfitness of the working class” in her representation of Anna (270). While I acknowledge that representation can be harmful, I think we must ask how and why Olsen’s particular

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<sup>59</sup> For descriptions of *Yonnonidio* as unsentimental, see Catherine Coiner (181), Michael Staub (132), and Catharine Stimpson (69). Susan Edmunds defines the “domestic exterior” as “a modern sentimental space developed to coordinate and moralize a triangle of relations emerging among market, home, and state” (12). Put simply, “the space of domesticity is repeatedly turned inside out” (5). In order to perform this turning inside out, Olsen must engage with sentimental discourses and tropes.

grappling with American eugenics, motherhood, class, and race, comes to matter. There is room to hold more nuance, here, as I will demonstrate in this chapter.

This fourth way of reading focuses on space and how particular bodies – gendered, racialized, classed– move through or are regulated within certain spaces; whether it be the space of the home as one where the public and political intrudes in the form of eugenic policies and welfare discourse or the “depressed area” of the dump that becomes, for Mazie, a “refuge for the imagination” (Rabinowitz, “Between the Outhouse” 21).<sup>60</sup> My project will add a new space by focusing more intently on the slaughterhouse that emerges in the final chapter of the novel. The fifth and final thread in critical conversations around Olsen’s novel takes up her representation of bodies. Joseph Entin claims that, “in Olsen’s fiction, bodies are texts” (71). Looking particularly to the proliferation of damaged and disfigured bodies, Entin categorizes *Yonnonidio* as a text of “monstrous modernism” that uses an aesthetic of “explicitly anti-capitalist surrealism” to show how “disfigured bodies serve as potent symbols of the limits of literary representation and experimental efforts to transcend those limits” (61; 74). This thread questions how industrial capitalism comes to bear on bodies and aesthetic expression.<sup>61</sup> While much critical attention has been brought to Anna’s body – depicted as monstrous in its repeated pregnancies – I turn to Mazie’s girlish body to ask how it is simultaneously positioned and policed as potentially reproductive at the same time as it is in need of protection from harsh Dustbowl labour and environmental conditions.

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<sup>60</sup> See also Matthew Lambert’s chapter, “The Postpastoral City” in the book, *The Green Depression: American Ecoliterature in the 1930s and 1940s*, which theorizes *Yonnonidio*’s latter half as a thwarted instance of the “urban pastoral” (112). Looking primarily at its representation of the dump, Lambert thinks about environmental toxicity and pastoral spaces of play and imagination within these toxic landscapes (111).

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Fahy, in his article, “Worn, Damaged Bodies in Literature and Photography of the Great Depression,” briefly mentions *Yonnonidio* in relation to Depression era documentary photography, such as that of Dorothea Lange or Margaret Bourke-White. Fahy argues that Olsen maps the Depression through the slow corporeal and psychological disfigurement of the Holbrook family and other industrial labourers who form the chorus of the novel (4).

## I The Home: Full Wombs and Refused Cradles

The first description of Mazie arrives through her mother's point of view: "Mazie for all her six and a half years was like a woman sometimes. It's living like this does it [...] makes 'em old before their time" (3). This introduces Mazie as temporally out of joint – "old before [her] time" – and with an already fixed future – "a woman". She is thus, very early, aligned with her mother, Anna, the other prominent voice in this novel; however, Mazie attempts to move away from this future already poised toward motherhood (3).<sup>62</sup> In her move away from the home, Mazie is positioned alongside animal spaces – the packinghouse and the domestic henhouse. How does the animal urge her away from the home? How does Mazie's entanglement with animals in (re)productive spaces help her work through her own reproductive future? Following Kathryn Bond Stockton's reading of dogs and the queer girl child – "the dog is a figure for the child beside itself, engaged in growing quite aside from growing up" – I ask how Mazie's turn toward animals is part of her queer turn toward horizons beyond the heteronormative home (90).<sup>63</sup> In addition to being temporally out of joint, Mazie also articulates how she "has no place" (178). These two askew postures position her as a queer child, following Stockton: "one can remember desperately feeling there was simply nowhere to grow [...] growing toward a question mark. Or growing up in a haze. Or hanging in suspense" (3). I argue that Olsen forges an intimacy between domesticated animals and domestic white girlhood to make visible the ways in which Mazie's occupation of time and orientation toward animal spaces refuses normative reproductive lines and thus presents a figuration of girlhood that puts in crisis the figure of the child as future, a promise commonly held in the project of Depression era America.

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<sup>62</sup> Paula Rabinowitz, in *Labor and Desire*, claims that "the relationship between Anna and Mazie[...] provides the central dynamic in the novel" (129). Rabinowitz offers a sophisticated reading of this relationship.

<sup>63</sup> Kathryn Bond Stockton theorizes the relationship between lesbian girlhood and the family dog by reading together Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, and Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*.

This link between the child and futurity has been a prominent thread in queer studies and, while tracing the development and conflicting theoretical readings of the child within queer studies is beyond the scope of this chapter, I do think that the prominence of the child, here, shows how the child and the future figure as temporal, spatial, and sexual horizons often thought together.<sup>64</sup> I argue that the domesticated animal body helps Mazie map out her desires that lay beyond the cradle she is expected to fill and tend to. Her attractions and affiliations move her toward peripheral and derelict spaces and bodies: Erina and Ginella, the two girls who inhabit the dump, the space of the dump itself, and the Armour's slaughterhouse that Mazie returns to verbally and metaphorically. These orientations are queer because, in them, Mazie turns away from the home and its inherited reproductive lines in order to turn toward bodies and spaces whose temporalities are *not* future-oriented, not willing to inherit the line (Ahmed, *Willful* 113). This is not to say that I read Mazie's queerness as having "no future," as Edelman would suggest, but rather that her orientation is toward a future horizon that is not yet, that is possibly and probably not human and certainly not a horizon limned by the heterosexual home.<sup>65</sup> This queer reading of spatial, temporal, and sexual orientation is informed by Sara Ahmed's notion of orientation as a practice of "tending toward" certain objects or "turning away" from particular objects, spaces, bodies, lines ("Orientations" 544). Queer orientations, Ahmed writes, are what

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<sup>64</sup> Lee Edelman and Kathryn Bond Stockton thoroughly think through the child and queerness. Edelman sees queerness and the child as opposed: queerness marks the end of the child and the child marks the end of queerness. He argues, "The Child...marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity" (21). Stockton, however, argues that all children are queer for the ways in which they embody delay and deferral (6). Other important articulations of the child which intersect slightly with queer theoretical discussions include Lauren Berlant's theorization of fetal/infantile citizenship in *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* and Rebekah Sheldon's *The Child to Come: Life After the Human Catastrophe*.

<sup>65</sup> My invocation of the horizon here summons Jose Muñoz's notion of queerness as a horizon, as articulated in *Cruising Utopia*: "queerness is not quite here;" "We may never touch queerness but we can feel it [...] [a] horizon imbued with potentiality;" "Queerness is a longing that propels us onward;" "Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that the world is not enough (11; 1). Muñoz's queer horizon is temporal, spatial, a feeling, a longing. This is what I conjure in the use of this word. Saidiya Hartman is here, too, in her theorization of choreography and the chorus of Black girls "creating possibility in the space of enclosure" through "experiments in living otherwise" (33).

allow “other ways of gathering in time and space, of making lines that do not reproduce what we follow” (570). When asked to inherit the space of the family home, Mazie instead inhabits animal spaces. Stockton proposes that “children are flooded with animal figures” and further identifies the animal as a particularly apt companion for the queer child: “one must grasp the ample, surprising role of animals in the child’s delay” (89; 90). The animal, therefore, gives Mazie somewhere other to go. When faced with her mother’s bloody birth, Mazie turns to the henhouse; when faced with disorientation and disembodiment, Mazie lingers her eyes and tongue on the Armours slaughterhouse. Through these orientations and tendencies, Mazie rejects the nation’s projected ideal of girlhood as promise, as “resource” that might save the future that, in the thirties, is uncertain (Sheldon 2).<sup>66</sup>

Mazie, whose girlhood is rooted in the Midwest of the 1920s, just before the onset of the Great Depression, negotiates her contradictory position as promising womb, mobilizer of public sentiment, and as a problem challenging the nation’s ideals for ‘proper’ heteronormative white girlhood. Steven Mintz, in his thorough history of American childhood, notes that one of the many crises of the Depression era was that of the child. In addition to the “Progressive Era’s preoccupation with child welfare, [which] was inextricable connected with an influx of immigrants unequalled in American history,” Mintz notes the many reform projects, sociological studies, documentary texts, and books about street children, runaways, child labor, and periled youth and adolescence that emerged during this era (200).<sup>67</sup> How do Mazie’s movements outside

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<sup>66</sup> I will return to Rebekah Sheldon’s theorization of the relationship between the figure of the child and futurity in the age of the climate crisis later in my project. In *The Child to Come: Life After Human Catastrophe*, Sheldon traces figurations of the child from the 1960s to the present, asking how “the child, the fetus, and the reproductive woman became subjects of intense discursive investment under conditions of planetary threat” (6).

<sup>67</sup> Texts listed by Mintz include G. Stanley Hall’s 1904 *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, and Edwin Markham, Ben Lindsey, and George Creel’s 1914 study of child labor in *Child Bondage* (196; 180). Mintz also lists reform projects such as building playgrounds to keep children off the streets, establishing nurseries and kindergartens for children, establishing standardized testing in schools, and pushing public health educational campaigns to reduce infant mortality as

the home position her as in need of policing – a wayward body outside of her place in the projected future of domestic reproduction and motherhood?

Mazie is figured alongside Anna, her mother who is pregnant twice in the two-year span of the novel. Many critics have taken up Anna as a representation of “institutionalized motherhood” whose reproductive labour posits her birthing “labor as her commodity,” even if it is a labor that is policed by the hygienic and moral codes of the welfare state (Coiner 181; Williamson 458; Drake 135).<sup>68</sup> Susan Edmunds argues that Anna is “tossed endlessly between the two poles of sentimental and grotesque maternity” (143). Edmunds further notes that “Mazie flatly refuses to identify with either position” (143). Indeed, she further notes that, “by the end of the novel, [Mazie] has fled the scene of working-class domestic femininity altogether” (143). While Edmunds locates the dump and its “shifting world of ‘make-believe selves’ inspired by the new mass-cultural icons of Hollywood” as the direction of Mazie’s flight, I argue that the henhouse and slaughterhouse are the pivotal sites that help Mazie – the girl who shouts “I don’t *have* no place” – find a space, one oriented toward meat and its animals (178).

Mazie’s movements to find this space are not without the threat of violence – in fact the threat of rape looms throughout the novel, with Olsen alluding to Anna’s own experiences of rape, one of which the reader witnesses through Mazie.<sup>69</sup> I want to move Mazie’s witnessing of

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“Progressive-era achievements” in child welfare (173). These projects, of course, blurred even further the lines between family and State and, of course, systematically labeled BIPOC families living in poverty as deviant and in need of ‘reform’.

<sup>68</sup> Anna, for example, recites phrases she has seen on posters at a public clinic: “Dirt, the poster said. Dirt Breeds Disease” (118). This sort of clinic, housing language around policing cleanliness and motherhood, would have been quite common in the 1920s following the 1921 Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act. Molly Ladd-Taylor writes that this Act “was arguably the closest the American government has come to the ‘rationalization’ of reproduction [...] aimed at reducing infant and maternal mortality by distributing matching funds to the states for prenatal and infant health education [...] Many child health advocates considered their work part of the eugenics movement and described their campaign for ‘better babies’ in the language of racial improvement” (329).

<sup>69</sup> Toward the opening of the novel, Mazie’s father wonders if Mazie has been raped, after he finds Sheen McEvoy dangling her over an open mine shaft, which Olsen describes as a “hungry mouth” (17). When he brings her home to Anna, uttering “‘The kid. She. Maybe...,’” the possibility of rape left unspoken, Anna concludes that “she hasn’t

her mother's rape, and other violences of domestic motherhood, into clearer focus. This witnessing is a violence that stirs Mazie's stomach, resulting in her own resistance to be interpellated into this maternal body. However, whereas on the street, Anna warns Mazie of the "bad people there that hurts girls," the home holds equal violence for Mazie as she witnesses her mother, "blood on the floor [...]her face like a corpse" after Jim, her father, rapes her (169; 108). To grapple with this future into which she is hailed, and to find another orientation, another inheritance, Mazie turns to domesticated and dying animal bodies. This chosen proximity is a promising intimacy, a queer orientation, a fierce refusal.

Moments before Mazie's father prompts their family's move to Omaha so he can "get on at the slaughterhouse," Mazie witnesses Anna giving birth (64). The slaughterhouse thus straddles this scene of birth. After being asked to help, Mazie escapes the space of the kitchen to the henhouse – an animal enclosure peripheral to the human domestic – so as "not to hear" (63). "Full and quiet in the darkness the house lay" as Mazie tries not to hear the sounds of her mother's labour (63). To navigate her feelings toward her mother's pregnancy – which is repeatedly posited as Mazie's future – Mazie moves sideways to an animal space of reproduction, orienting herself alongside the hens brooding over their eggs in an oblique posture to the home and its reproductive line already set out for Mazie. Mazie's relationship to these chickens nesting is one of both affiliation and rejection. In their animality, they offer Mazie a sideways space away from the home but their proximity to reproductive labour – indeed, the fact that their use is purely reproductive – unsettles Mazie's space of refuge. This ambivalence expresses itself as a corporeal rejection as Mazie, upon hiding in the henhouse, finds herself hungry. In a sort of reverse birth, Mazie ingests an egg only to expel it. Olsen juxtaposes this

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been touched. She'd have been all bloody if he had" (20). The threat of rape thus looms over Mazie in public spaces throughout the novel.

scene with Mazie's partial witnessing to the sounds of Anna's birth: while Anna births a baby, Mazie ingests a chicken fetus only to vomit it up.

Then, strangely, hunger came. Trickle of it in her mouth, battling under the nausea. Food – the smell of it yearned in her nostrils. She found an egg, warm. It slipped down her throat, then it was washing up again, spurting over the ground. Yes, Momma. I'm sick, Momma. (63)

While it may be a stretch to read this moment as an act of vegan refusal, the reflex/reflux that Mazie demonstrates is one of abjection and objection to consuming animal flesh, if only momentary. When Mazie's body rejects the warm egg, what else is she rejecting? Does this rejection of animal flesh result in an interspecies affiliation that allows her to refuse patriarchal expectations of her womb?

In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol J. Adams asks why there are so many historical instances and literary references to adolescent girls refusing to consume meat. She asks: "Is it possible that food [and, more specifically, meat] becomes the spoken language of dissent" in patriarchal worlds (213)?<sup>70</sup> Adams further asks: "Is the meat referring to their sexuality? or their own bodily experiences of bleeding? or have they restored the absent referent – the bodies of animals?" (212). I return to this part of Adams's work often. As a girl, I used refusal – first from meat, then from other to nearly all foods – as what I thought was a power. This girl was wise beyond her years yet unknowing as to how harm holds fast. I feel so close to Mazie in this moment: the witnessing of her mother's pain; her hungry mouth; her ingestion of life that is immediately followed by disgust, by vomit; her body choosing, from some unknowable place

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<sup>70</sup> Laura Wright further points out the representational disparity between veganism in men – often portrayed as "a striving for artistic understanding" – and veganism in women – often pathologized as disordered ("Veganism and Disordered Eating" 168).

within, to refuse animal flesh. In an absence of how to hold this witnessing of what lies before her – a future in which she will violently birth and face sexual and domestic violence like her mother – Mazie takes in an animal fetus, mirroring a pregnant body. But she quickly rejects this future, vomiting out the egg. In her proximity to her mother’s birthing body, Mazie (r)ejects an egg – an avian one rather than ovarian. This proximity is only partial: the space of the henhouse, being removed from the home, means that Mazie hears but does not see her mother’s gruesome birth – the scene thus emerges in a delay, a delirious, half-dreaming witnessing filled in by Mazie’s imagination.

I struggle to write about this scene because Mazie’s hunger is so palpable. To me, this scene is so clearly about hunger – a girl finding a way to feed her hungers, which, of course, brings us back to desire and willfulness. Mazie’s hunger, “strange” and inarticulable, is heavy and rageful (63). She both yearns for her mother and rejects her – the repetition of “Momma” shows this ache (63). Just before Mazie’s flight to the henhouse, she likens verbally articulating herself to a bloody birth, mirroring her mother’s labours as her own creative labours of expression: “The blood and pain of birth. Nausea groveled [...] She could feel words swollen big within her, words coming out with pain, bloody, all clothed in red” (61). As a sort of menstrual expulsion that also foreshadows a birthing womb, Mazie’s journey to self-expression is embodied and violent. These words that she cannot get out turn into rage as this moment ends with her “hit[ting] Will [her brother], hard, ferocious” (61). Mazie’s girlhood, entrapped within the home – “an especially tight enclosure” – is destructive in its inarticulability (Rabinowitz, *Labor and Desire* 127). Mazie – facing her mother’s birthing womb – already experiences her reproductive future as a violence. She births words at the same time as she rejects the egg she

ingests – her body willfully turning away from the domesticated future of the breeding/brooding of the hens to claim a self that is bound up in words.

To return to the scene that opens this chapter in which Mazie names the industrial slaughterhouse – “Armoursarmoursarmours” – words are once again how Mazie encounters and negotiates space. While Mazie physically enters the henhouse, she only linguistically enters the slaughterhouse: the exterior is all she needs to name its place, which is also, in a way, a naming of her place. I want to linger in this position: the sideways to, the set alongside, the juxtaposed, the peripheral. The narrative does not place Mazie inside the slaughterhouse; instead, her self and this space touch, their narratives crossing over, leaking into each other. In not entering this space, she insists on its omnipresence – just being in proximity is enough for her to enter and for it to enter her. In the next section, I will dwell in Olsen’s poetic rendering of the slaughterhouse in the final part of the novel, drawing attention to its sonic and rhythmic presence that is so unlike the usual visual spectacular representations of slaughterhouses in many texts. I think about how Tillie Olsen’s sensual, delirious, modernist, almost jazz-like representation of this space does not seek to expose meat production in the way that Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* set out to do. Instead, Mazie’s body – the way it looks up but does not enter, the way it mouths the name “Armours” in a whisper, quiet yet insistent – slowly articulates the slaughterhouse as a not-yet emerged space which holds the possibility of a form of embodiment for Mazie that rejects its reproductive processes. “Armoursarmoursarmours,” after all, emerges from the same mouth that expulses the chicken fetus in the egg.

Furthermore, the slaughterhouse is a space of both fear and curiosity for Mazie: “against the sky four great smoke stacks reared, so strong... she could not help it, her arms reached out as if to touch and embrace them” (112). In this moment, Mazie’s body mirrors the vertical reach of

the smoke stacks – there is something here for her, but what? I wonder if the industrial smoke stacks “rear[ing], so strong” offer another line for Mazie – this one hard, strong, perhaps phallic even, against the soft horizontal swollen growth of Anna’s ever-pregnant body.<sup>71</sup> In this extension, Mazie imagines another way of growing – a smoke stack to the sky, expelling the gaseous remains of animal death into the air already heavy with dust. While this growing is not a literal sideways movement, its temporal posture – in terms of timelines of childhood, of reproductive futurity – grows away from life and its linearity: growing toward the animal, the industrial, toward death. Thus, through her physical, emotional, and narrative alignment and intimacy with the Armour’s slaughterhouse, Mazie takes up arms – wilful and yearning – against the reproductive lines set out for her.

## II The Slaughterhouse: Sweltering Heat and Choreographed Bodies

While the slaughterhouse only emerges in the final section of the novel, delayed and deferred, it lingers throughout as a promise of labour, a smell, a sound, a haunting structure. In this section, I argue that Mazie’s growth occurs in the shadow of the slaughterhouse. The slaughterhouse fully emerges in Chapter Eight in a markedly modernist form that highlights the choreographed labouring body and surfaces, if only momentarily, yet another pregnant woman – like the unnamed labourer giving birth on the kill floor of *The Jungle* – in the slaughterhouse. The slaughterhouse is first explicitly named by Jim, who declares, as Anna gives birth, that they will leave South Dakota “soon as Anna’s fit to” so he can “get on at the slaughterhouse” (64). Its

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<sup>71</sup> ‘Armour is also an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century slang for condom. Thank you to Dr. Dana Medoro for making this connection. See *Cassell’s Dictionary of Slang*, which indicates that the phrase ‘in one’s armour’ or ‘to fight in armour’ meant “using a condom” (769). This meaning adds another layer of contraception to the already established themes of pregnancy. The phallic imagery of the vertical smoke stacks also nods to this alternative meaning for Armour.

presence, however, is felt from the very opening of the novel in the visceral prose style that Olsen maintains throughout. The second sentence of the novel, for example, describes how Mazie feels the sound of the mine whistle as “some guttural-voiced metal beast, tearing at her” (1). Olsen’s prose repeatedly enacts these slippages between the human and industrial. Both are bodies marked by violence. The human is always in proximity to the industrial. Their bodies and spaces leak into each other. As Mazie stands in the streets near the packinghouse, she describes the following atmosphere:

streetcars plunge, machinery rasps and shrieks. Far underneath thinly quiver the human noises – weeping and scolding and tired words that slip out in monosyllables and are as if never spoken; sighs of lust, and guttural, the sigh of weariness [...] A fog of stink smothers down over it all – so solid, so impenetrable, no other smell lies beside it. Human smells, crotch and underarm sweat, the smell of cooking or burning, all are drowned under, merged into the vast unmoving stench. (67)

Olsen’s prose takes away the breath, both in its string of parallel yet slightly askew phrases, and in its focus on the smell and sound of the space. The human “quivers” while the stench of the packinghouse is “impenetrable” (67). As this passage continues, Olsen places the packinghouse as the heart supplying life to the humans labouring, living, and loving alongside it, like the Holbrook family, at the same time as it is what drains them. Olsen writes,

the packing houses, heart of all that moves in these streets; gigantic heart – pumping over the artery of viaducts the men and women who are the streets’ lifeblood [...] bulging out the soiled and exhausted houses, and multiplying into these children playing so mirthlessly in their street yards where flower only lampposts. (68)

The verb tense here is hard to follow, bogged down in clauses; the packinghouse comes alive in gerunds. While Anthony Dawahare claims that this representation “shows how modern industry is like a ‘beast’ that nearly tears the Holbrook family to pieces,” I want to dwell more in this link between the packinghouse as body, the houses as bodies, and then that final leap to the “multiplying” children as bodies – all connected to this space pumping blood (263). The children, here, of course, lead us back to the home, its wombs, and State welfare measures to control certain deviantly reproducing bodies while protecting others. Following Paula Rabinowitz, I wonder how the packinghouse, as a pervasive space, “produce[s] distinct languages of the body for Mazie” (*Labor and Desire* 126). What do the block letters spelling out A-R-M-O-U-R-S on its façade solidify for Mazie in her own experience of her body?

It is significant that Mazie does not enter the packinghouse physically; rather it leaks into the environment that surrounds her, shifting and taking the form of her own anxieties. Olsen writes, “the wind shifted, blew packing house. Something whirred, severed, sank” (147). Like its previous characterization as a “gigantic heart,” these verbs position the slaughterhouse as an animate body (68). Mazie experiences this space as both an overwhelm and an anchor. She looks to this structure to help her find and name a place. She does not need to enter in order to expose it because she already knows and feels its interior and processes. The domesticated animal body is already a companion, a guide to understanding her future of violence at the hands of men and patriarchal institutions. Thus, as she stands at its walls, reciting the incantation, “Armoursarmoursarmours,” Mazie sounds out something not yet articulable on her horizon yet

something she knows deep within. Her attentiveness to the worlds of women around her and her intimacy with the slaughterhouse walls has shown her “Big Eyes” all she needs to know.<sup>72</sup>

This looming structure is where her anxiety around her mother’s multiple childbirths and miscarriages finds form. As she stands before the walls of Armour’s – “the great mass of packing house and stockyard” – she reaches out curiously, as if to embrace its structure, pulling it in to try and find her own place in a future that is not the place of her mother (112). An involuntary motion, a vertical reach as the horizon stretches beyond her – this body of the packinghouse – throat and heart and all – prompts “a shudder of quietness, and then tears” before she returns home to her mother and the new baby (112). This structure provokes movements and feelings in Mazie that, while not quite yet intelligible, bring her closer to something akin to self-knowledge, even if that self is left unresolved, its future not yet certain as this novel closes.

Just before the novel ends, the slaughterhouse fully emerges. Olsen juxtaposes the sweltering interior of the slaughterhouse with the Holbrook family home. As meatpacking labourers run the line of animal death, “breathing with open mouth[s]” as the heat climbs to 112 degrees, Mazie feverishly dreams “thoughts of death” as “air chokes thick (164; 162). This final section of the novel fully surfaces the bleed between the slaughterhouse, the home, and Mazie’s consciousness. There is a marked shift in aesthetics during this section, wherein the parts taking place in the slaughterhouse turn on a poetics that shares many qualities with jazz poetics – alliteration, an attention to the body – its senses, sounds, and motions – the use of refrain and

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<sup>72</sup> Jim, Mazie’s father, repeatedly calls her by his nickname for her, “Big Eyes” (20; 64; 112). This gestures to her attentive witnessing throughout at the same time as it highlights her innocence that perhaps witnesses a world before she is ready.

repetition, and, of course, a particular attention to rhythm and the sound of words.<sup>73</sup> The effect and affect of this aesthetic *move* Mazie into the slaughterhouse as the rhythm and motion of her body and the sounds of her home surreally merge with this space. To give a sense of this animated and dizzying style, this is how the first fragment that takes us into this space begins:

Choregraphed by Beedo, the B system, speed-up stopwatch, convey. Music by rasp crash screech knock steamhiss thud machinedrum. Abandon self, all who enter here. Become component part, geared, meshed, timed, controlled. Hell. Half-seen figures through hissing cloud vapor, the live steam from great scalding vats. Hogs angling, dancing along the convey. (165)

The prose mimics the breakneck speed of the disassembly line – “relentless, the convey paces on” – and laboring bodies are animated by repetitive motions, held in forceful verbs that return like refrains in a near-dance – “*Steamed boiled broiled fried cooked. Geared, meshed*” (80). This prose, which Ann Pancake describes as a “staccato, rapid-fire style,” bleeds into the juxtaposed scenes taking place in the Holbrook household (299). Olsen creates a confusion between spaces, establishing a continuity between the “Twelve o’clock noon. 106°” of the Holbrook home and the rising heat in the slaughterhouse a mere paragraph later – “In casings it is 110°” (179). Furthermore, the actions of meatpacking – Mary “stamping stamping the hides [...] everyone the same motion all the hours through” – echo the repeated domestic actions performed by Anna and Mazie’s bodies in their kitchen – Mazie “head hurting and hurting” as she “pit[s] and peel[s] the

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<sup>73</sup> For a historical overview of jazz poetics, its politics, and its shifting aesthetics see particularly Meta DuEwa Jones, *The Muse is Music: Jazz Poetry from the Harlem Renaissance to the Spoken Word*. Jones clearly establishes how jazz poetics and Black expression are intimately linked. For a broader overview, see *Moment’s Notice: Jazz in Poetry and Prose*, edited by Art Lange and Nathaniel Mackey. Finally, for a more specific reading of how jazz poetics were a key aesthetic of American modernism, see Jed Rasula’s chapter, “Jazz and American Modernism” in *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism*.

canning apples” and Anna “stirring the bubbling mass of jelly” (165; 167; 177). Williamson concludes that “the slaughterhouse conditions symbolically parallel her [Anna’s] labor” (458). While Anna is most certainly echoed here, I want to dwell more in how Mazie’s movements and motives also run sideways to this violent process, perhaps even more markedly so.

Mazie cannot face herself, I argue, without facing, albeit only in a juxtaposed prosaic representation, the interior (de)production processes of the slaughterhouse. More specifically, Olsen demonstrates how the production of meat intersects with human reproduction by featuring pregnant labourers on the line. Animal death helps Mazie face her womb, which is poised to bear life, following her mother. Olsen pulls women to the front of this slaughterhouse space, explicitly giving them names and calling attention to their specific roles. For example, Olsen describes, “breathing with open mouths, the young girls and women in casings, where men will not work” (166). Olsen highlights the fact that they are “young girls” and suggests that their work is set apart from that of the men in a room reeking of the “smothering stench from the blood house below” (166). You may remember this room and these women from *The Jungle*, with the girls birthing sausages from the machine. Olsen, though, names these women: Mary, Laurett, Lena, Ella, Peg, Andra, Philomena and Cleola (165; 179; 181). While she emphasizes their toiling labour, breaking down their precise movements in the scalding heat, she also foregrounds their reproductive capacities.

Lena, a labourer mentioned a few times, is pregnant. Olsen details how, after a steam pipe ruptures in the casing room, “Lena, pregnant, faints [...] Others tangle over her, try to rise, to help each other” (181). As they try to escape the casing room, the narrator remarks, in an unclosed parenthetical aside, how “the running scalded figures of horror (human? women?)” flee

like “disembodied shadows” (182). It is the women’s plight in this space that Olsen asks readers to see – human, women. In fact, Lena’s pregnant body refuses to disappear: “Carrying Lena out of the scalding fog, Jim sees plastered onto her swollen belly the SAFETY sign torn from the wall by the first steam gust” (182). This moment positions Lena’s pregnant body, plastered with a misplaced safety sign, both as something in need of protection and something unsafe. Unsafe might mean her womb is undesirable, marked by race, class and ability. This SAFETY sign, in all capital letters, draws attention to Lena’s labouring womb as a contested and conflicted site: labeled by a sign taken from the unsafe conditions of the work of animal killing, her womb becomes property and product of this industry. Reproduction is thus entangled with animal (de)production. This moment also points to what Susan Edmunds, Kimberley Drake, and Leah Pennywark pull out as pivotal themes in Olsen’s novel: hygiene, race and racial discourse, and the rise of the eugenics movement (Pennywark 310). Lena’s body labeled as both in need of ‘saving’ and unsafe, returns us to Anna, whose motherhood is policed by social workers for failing to meet ideal standards of middle- to upper-class whiteness. Pennywark claims that the narrator, taking on the morality of the welfare state, positions “Anna as a source of infection to the national body. Her apparent fecundity makes her bestial and immoral because she cannot care for her children by middle-class standards” (321). The SAFETY sign draped over Lena’s swollen belly marks her body as growing, a mass in need of controlling, and alerts us to the concern over the reproductive capacities of labouring women’s wombs, which would have been even more profound when it came to Black wombs.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> See especially Dorothy Roberts’s *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, Jennifer L. Morgan’s *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*, and Hortense J. Spillers’s “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book”. Morgan writes that Black “women’s lives under slavery in the Americas always included the possibilities of their wombs” (3). Dorothy Roberts writes that “a

As Lena and her other women comrades labour in the slaughterhouse, Mazie moves alongside: dreaming, dancing, and falling along with them. Even though Mazie does not enter, does she know what lies beyond these walls? The surreal delirium that she experiences alongside this slaughterhouse asks us to dwell in the possibility that they – Mazie, the women, and the animals in this space – are connected. Indeed, as the novel cuts back and forth between the slaughterhouse and the Holbrook home, Mazie’s movements anticipate and double themselves in Lena. Just three pages before Lena faints in the casing room only to be dragged out by Jim, Mazie, feverish, faints after a fit of rage. In a description akin to the staccato prose-style of the packinghouse paragraphs, Mazie, mirroring Lena’s fainting, is “Falling, Fainting” (179). Furthermore, just moments before she faints, Mazie throws her toy cradle, doll and all, taking it from her brothers who are “playing house” (175). Mazie explains to her mother that she took it, “swinging it as far as she could into the yard,” because “it was my [her] cradle, my very own I made” (177). However, it is not only a sense of ownership which leads Mazie to ruin this cradle, it is a profound sadness and anger that her brothers get to “play house” while she is required already to “keep house” like her mother (177). As her rage builds in the heat, trying to defend her actions, Mazie asks her mother, “‘Why couldn’t I get borned a boy?’” followed by “‘*Why don’t I have no place?*’” (177-78). As a girl, her place is expected to fill and follow that of her mother. Lena is yet another figure foreshadowing Mazie’s future. Doubled in the falling and fainting body of Lena, Mazie grapples with the cradle before her through the pregnant body of Lena in the casing room. Lena’s labour – as a reproducing and producing body – narratively runs

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persistent objective of American social policy has been to monitor and restrain this corrupting tendency of Black motherhood” (8).

sideways and then pours into Mazie's own reckoning and subsequent rejection of her place with the cradle and the home.

The repeated motions of the women slaughterhouse labourers, however, offer Mazie another rhythm to take up, another future, another dream. This section, after all, is where Mazie dreams the most: meat gives way to her own delirious dreams, her dreams bleed into meat production. This slaughterhouse scene gives way to a defining moment of Mazie's willful girlhood and queer childhood. Mazie, who is labelled as "contrary," turns away from the line set for her toward a disassembly line whose future is death, consumption, and endless rendering (132). This turn is queer in the sense that she turns toward a future not yet articulable, a future not premised on reproducing heteronormative lines or ways, a future shared with other species, like the chicken egg or the hogs of Armours. This turn, though, is also a turn toward violence, or toward a necessary surfacing and telling of truths about how the violence of white men – in the form of industrial production, in the form of settler-colonialism, in the form of patriarchy and rape – is omnipresent in Mazie's Midwest American Prairie landscape, both past and future. She cannot name her place without naming violence – her repeated call of "Armoursarmoursarmours" summons the violence of the slaughterhouse, the violence of her father, the violence of the making of the Prairies (100). This choice of non-normative lines for girlhood is experienced as a violence, an anger, and thus perhaps requires a turn to allies in the form of animal others – of which emerge more markedly so in the chapters that follow – to form bonds of compassion and care in order to name, negotiate, and navigate these irrefutable and inescapable violences.

### III The Prairies: Swollen Breasts and (De)pressed Bodies

I opened this chapter with a quote that positions the Prairie landscape as abject, marked by violence, and aligned with a pregnant body. Through Mazie’s eyes, images of “swollen breasts” and “swollen bellies” dominate this landscape – this body is “ugly” and oozing and bruised (61). In this last section, I argue that Mazie’s horizontal movements between the home – where she witnesses her mother raped, pregnant, and giving birth – and the slaughterhouse – where she faces its walls and enters only in prose – include a third space – that of the abject Prairie landscape – that makes up her negotiation of her future horizons. How does Mazie unearth the violences – in the form of industrial extractions, species extinctions, and the genocide of Indigenous peoples, all abuses of settler-colonialism and white supremacy – that created this landscape? How does Mazie’s own pressing up against this space – the “swollen breast of the prairie” – expose this landscape as irrevocably ugly in its histories? How does this text work through ideas of the future in crisis, wherein the white migrant child of the Depression is highly visible in textual, photographic, and political registers but only if other bodies are erased? To make this horizon line, the Prairies must be emptied of their violent histories, the animal body disappeared, the Indigenous and Black subjects and their labour and forced dislocations need to be erased.<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, Karina Vernon, in an October 2020 lecture held by the University of Winnipeg about her book, *The Black Prairie Archives*, reminds us that the prairie landscape is not a natural geography at all: it is artificial and constructed on violence, displacement, and depletion.<sup>76</sup> The

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<sup>75</sup> Tribes Indigenous to the Nebraska region in which this novel takes place include the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Missouri, Omaha, Oto, and Pawnee peoples (“Native Americans & Settlers”).

<sup>76</sup> Karina Vernon’s project meticulously gathers Black voices across the Canadian Prairies from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century to assemble an archive that asserts a Black presence on this space and connects this earlier archive to contemporary Black Prairie writers. Vernon argues that “this recovered Black prairie archive opens up the regional, national, and diasporic imaginations to a radically different construction of the prairies” (2-3).

evenly divided homesteads and farms, the horizon line clear of trees that stretches forever, are all results of settler-colonial practices of erasure, forced labour, extinction and extraction. In *Yonnonidio*, the Prairie landscape is in crisis: indeed, the novel's final images depict a "baking prairie" wherein "giant cracks ha[ve] opened in the earth" (187). This crisis, though, of the Dustbowl and the Great Depression, has already been present throughout the novel. The Prairie landscape, as Mazie's movements across it make clear, has been depleted by industrial mining, meatpacking, and intensive agricultural practices. As the title as well as opening and closing epigraphs of the novel suggest, these projects are extensions of racist projects of white settlers.<sup>77</sup>

"Yonnonidio" is in fact the title of a Walt Whitman poem which Olsen highlights through her inclusion of its fragments as opening and closing epigraphs. While Olsen subtitles her novel "From the Thirties," Whitman begins his poem by the same name with a parenthetical aside claiming that "the sense of the word [Yonnonidio] is lament for the aborigines". Ironically, Whitman's use of this word that communicates a problematic positioning of Indigenous peoples linguistically performs an erasure as Whitman misuses the word itself.<sup>78</sup> Olsen's use of the Whitman fragment, as Christopher Wilson argues, is part of the novel's "aura of recovery," which seeks to recover the lost voices of the proletariat, whom she likens to the "disappear[ed]" Iroquois tribe of Whitman's poem (52; 53). I am critical of this metaphoric layering over as it

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<sup>77</sup> Stephanie Coontz, in her study of nostalgia and American families, demonstrates the link between prairie farming and early settlers to violent government projects. She writes, "in reality, prairie farmers and other pioneer families owed their existence to massive federal land grants, government-funded military mobilizations that dispossessed hundreds of Native American societies and confiscated half of Mexico, and state-sponsored economic investment in the new lands" (73).

<sup>78</sup> While going into the linguistic history of this word is beyond this essay's scope, I did research its contested use in American literature, finding discussions about Whitman's word use, William H.C. Hosmer's use of the word in a long narrative poem from 1844, and the Iroquois use of the word. See "Translating Yonnonidio by Precedent and Evidence: The Mashpee Indian Case" by Gerald Torres and Kathryn Milun for a detailed discussion. For the Iroquois, "yonnonidio" was the word they used to refer to M. de Montmagny, of France. Furthermore, this word shifted to refer to subsequent Governor Generals of New France (Torres & Milun 626). Used as a greeting, this word held room for shifting power relations and gave way to a "cascade of meanings," with the word signifying differently for European versus Indigenous peoples (627).

erases historical specificity and positions both subjects – the proletariat and “disappear[ed] Iroquois tribe” as in need of a white voice to make them seen and heard in addition to positioning them as only existing in the past. These paratexts that act as a lobby to the text therefore surface the violence of white settler genocidal acts of removal, silencing, and appropriation.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, Olsen’s use of this word problematically performs the very violence it surfaces. Both Whitman and Olsen’s use of this word position Indigenous peoples as no longer living, as without a place in the American future, and as absented from the land that is theirs. The cover image of the 2004 edition also raises questions about the violence of the Prairie landscape through the body of the young white migrant girl, returning us to Mazie and her relationship with her mother, the future, and her labouring womb, once again.



Fig 5. Lange, Dorothea. Photograph from “Toll of Uncertainty” series captioned, “mother in California who with her husband and her two children will be returned to Oklahoma by the Relief Administration. This family had lost a two-year-old baby during the winter as a result of exposure,” 1938?, *History Place*, <https://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/lange/index.html>, Accessed 14 April 2022. Public Domain.

Fig. 6. Olsen, Tillie. Cover Image. *Yonnondio From the Thirties*, by Olsen, University of Nebraska Press, 2004.

<sup>79</sup> Toni Morrison, in her foreword to *Beloved*, writes about the beginning of her text as a ‘lobby,’ setting the tone of how readers might enter into the novel, which is also the entrance to the house that holds the novel’s characters. Morrison writes that the ‘lobby’ she builds is meant to make readers feel “kidnapped.... just as the characters were snatched from one place to another...without preparation or defense” (xviii). I think a lot about this framing – novels having this space before we enter, a place to put down what we need to and open the door.

The cover image is in fact a Dorothea Lange photograph that is part of the same series as her most famous photograph, “Migrant Mother”.<sup>80</sup> We might read it as sideways to or a shadow of this iconic photograph. Dorothea Lange’s hovering presence here does three things. First, it lends a documentary authenticity to Olsen’s text as “from the thirties”. Second, it opens questions of representation. A guiding question of the Farm Security Administration photography project of the 1930s was how to represent the working class, as if a photograph of a body, a home, a landscape, could mobilize social change. Third, in featuring a young white girl, it raises questions about this figure’s role in mobilizing promise and hope against the seemingly futureless Dustbowl. This photograph, which features a young girl, hands on hip, looking down while biting her nails, is untitled but its caption tells us that this is a “mother in California” who is on the move with her two young children and husband. The obvious reading would be that this image centres Anna as the main subject of this text – the mother on the move, waiting for the next shift in the wind. But I wonder, too, how this image directs us to Mazie – the girl poised already as mother. This photograph, before we even enter the text, maps Anna and Mazie’s bodies onto each other. In Lange’s original photograph, the Prairie horizon line is visible behind the girl. In Olsen’s reproduction, this horizon line is blurred. Nothing provides relief to this body, which is also tinted red like dust or blood, apocalyptic even, signalling a future in ecological crisis. This photograph highlights the labouring body instead of the Prairie landscape, positing the young white labouring woman as a mobilizer of sentiment, as articulating an aura of ‘the thirties’.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Roy Stryker claims that Lange’s “Migrant Mother” models all that New Deal photography aims to be (in Beeston 25). Stryker and Wood describe the power of this photograph: “She had all the suffering of mankind in her but all that perseverance too... You can see anything you want in her. She is immortal” (in Beeston 25). She is both flexible figure to be filled by “anything you want” and holds “all the suffering” – empty and full, solid and shifting.

<sup>81</sup> Alix Beeston, in her reading of particular photographs in Walker Evans’s body of work, who was a colleague of Lange, argues that they “situate the white woman as a visual icon of US commodity culture during the Depression”

There is a tension, therefore, between the much-circulated image of the child of the Great Depression and that of the depleted Prairie landscape that performs her relief. Even as the cover absents the horizon line from behind the girl's form, she takes up the entire frame, looking downward instead of up, her body slightly tilted to the side. Perhaps her horizons are too narrow to see, perhaps there is no future to be seen at all. Mazie's movements across the text and her corporeal inhabitation, though, have a way of bringing the Prairie landscape back to our attention. While some scholars have read Olsen's characters as (de)pressed by the Prairie and its industries that make up their landscapes – labourers pressed into lines at the packing house, the sun pressing down on bodies, the toxicity of their environments seeping into their homes – I want to think, too, about how Mazie presses on the landscape around her, putting pressure on its histories and futures.<sup>82</sup> On two instances, Mazie presses her girlish body against the “fecund earth, overpowering” (43). In this alignment with the agricultural, Mazie both dredges up the erased histories of this Prairie landscape and recognizes how her body might be more than a “swollen belly”. Olsen writes: “Mazie lay by the roadside, bedded in clover, belly down, feeling the earth push back against her” (45). The words here – bedded, belly, push – return us to the domestic and to her relationship with Anna's pregnant body at the same time as they feel like a sexual coming of age, self-pleasuring and erotic. For Mazie, these spaces of domesticated agriculture, whether the artificial Prairie landscape, meat production, or the henhouse sideways to the home, help her navigate her own consumability and expendability as a reproducing body. Mazie's body shows the crossings of agriculture and reproduction, of girlish wombs and the Prairie landscape

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(6) and were a significant figure alongside the white Southern tenant farmer in the symbolic register of the Great Depression (18).

<sup>82</sup> Matthew Lambert's reading of *Yonnonidio* focuses on the scenes depicting the dump to think what he calls the “urban pastoral” within urban cities in early 20<sup>th</sup> century America (111). He proposes that “*Yonnonidio* calls attention to the environmental precariousness of urban working-class neighbourhoods and their proximity to toxic landscapes” (111).

like a pregnant body. The depletion of this space, though, is articulated as a sort of excess – endless (re)production, swelling bodies, mass consumption. Mazie’s animation of the Prairie and its industries of meat and mining, then, positions the Great Depression as excess rather than scarcity. Furthermore, this act of pressing also aligns Mazie’s body with the Prairie soil – as a harmed body in crisis, whose future is uncertain. This soil, after all, holds the “myriads of carcasses” of bison and other Native species violently extinguished by colonizers in the years leading up to the Great Depression (Richard Dodge in Cockburn 24).<sup>83</sup>

Hannah Holleman argues that the Dust Bowl of the 1930s needs to be read not only as a social crisis but also an ecological one created by settler-colonial violence and global capitalism (234). The economic and environmental conditions of the Dustbowl are inextricable from “policies and practices, such as the accelerated seizure of Indigenous lands, legitimated and spurred by a ‘culture of conquest’ rooted in white supremacy” (234). She argues, therefore, that the national story of the Dustbowl, whose photographic and narrative registers are primarily white – *The Grapes of Wrath*, Dorothea Lange photographs, *Let us Now Praise Famous Men*, among others – needs to address the “white supremacist logic” of this framing and make visible the ties of the Dustbowl to American expansion to the West (250) Holleman further argues that this expansion was partially a reaction to the abolition of slavery wherein the settling of the Midwest, which was of course, a genocidal project, was needed to establish an abundant agricultural infrastructure to replace the cotton industry (250-51). Matthew J.C. Cella also highlights the fact that the Dustbowl was an ecological disaster brought about by industrial

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<sup>83</sup> Alexander Cockburn, in “A Short Meat Oriented History of the World” quotes Colonel Richard Dodge, describing in the 1870s the mass loss of animal life in the Midwest from waves of colonizers: “Where there were myriads of buffalo... there were now myriads of carcasses. The air was foul with sickening stench and the vast plain... was a dead, solitary, putrid desert” (in Cockburn 24). Cockburn further quotes Barry Lopez who estimates that “it is conceivable that 500 million creatures died” on the Great Plains (24).

capitalism and Manifest Destiny (139).<sup>84</sup> In his reading of *Yonnonidio* as an example of what he calls “Dustbowl pastoralism,” Cella argues that Olsen contends with the devastating effects of industrial capitalism and labour on the Prairies but searches “to reclaim the power of pastoralism” in a “postfrontier world” (140).

Mazie’s return and sideways alignment with the slaughterhouse asks us to include meat production in this list of capitalist projects that have violently marked the Prairie landscape in irreversible ways. While the ending of this chapter has moved outward in scale, away from meat and the slaughterhouse, I wanted to show how Mazie’s movements demand this variation in scale. Her attentive and careful witnessing of the slaughterhouse – the care taken in repeatedly spelling its name, the attention to sound and sensation – and her coming into her body, pressed in queer pleasure to the Prairie landscape, all facilitate the intimacies between the human, nonhuman, and animal. In her turn toward the slaughterhouse, which she enters in a delirious prosaic crossing over, toward the henhouse’s eggs, and toward the “fecund” yet depleted Prairie soil, Mazie attempts to find other spaces beyond the home, other labours beyond the cradle.

This turn toward spaces of meat and animal (re)production is also a turn toward the creative rather than procreative.<sup>85</sup> It is as if they bring her to language, as if the space of the packinghouse gives her the words – “Armoursarmoursarmours” (100). The spaces of animal death, which are, of course, full of animal and human births – the eggs of the henhouse, Lena’s pregnant belly crossed with the “SAFETY” sign – open Mazie to the world of words. Her mouth

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<sup>84</sup> Matthew J.C. Cella cites environmental histories by Donald Worster and Richard Manning to support this claim, writing that they establish that “commercial agriculture and the successes of preceding decades contributed to the ecological destruction of the grasslands during the 1930s and made the land vulnerable to the erosion of the soil, hence the spectacular dust storms” (139). Richard Manning powerfully asserts that the largest contributing factor to the Dustbowl crisis was agriculture: “Agriculture, not roots, was the disaster” (in Cella 139).

<sup>85</sup> For readings of childhood, Mazie, and the creative imagination in *Yonnonidio*, see Anthony Dawahare’s “That Joyous Certainty: History and Utopia in Tillie Olsen’s Depression-Era Literature” and Chris Robé’s “Saint Mazie: A Socialist-Feminist Understanding of Film in Tillie Olsen’s *Yonnonidio From the Thirties*”.

hungers, it ingests, it has “words swollen big within her, words coming out with pain, bloody, all clothed in red” (61). Moving laterally to the slaughterhouse – in her dreams, in her physical movements across urban space, and narratively – Mazie becomes one who births words instead of babies. The words that punctuate Mazie’s poetic voice are “embodied” and of the body (Rabinowitz, *Labor and Desire* 131). In fact, her gathered vocabulary echoes the words that cluster around descriptions of the slaughterhouse: Mazie’s poetic descriptions attribute swollenness, stench, blood, vomit, and death to the environment – both of the home and the Prairies – that she inhabits and poetically describes. Words give her a way to translate this violence that is omnipresent into the possibility of something akin to beauty. These words thus open her to the world beyond the violence of the heteronormative home. In the next chapter, Angela joins the chorus of girls coming of age alongside the slaughterhouse. In Charles Burnett’s film, *Killer of Sheep*, she will quietly inhabit corners of the kitchen, a witness to her father– who works killing sheep by day in a slaughterhouse – falling into despair.

Interlude:  
Billy Beede

“No I ain’t”  
Suzan-Lori Parks, *Getting Mother’s Body*

Don’t you try and tell Billy who she is –  
she ain’t. No she ain’t  
bound to Snipes and she ain’t Willa Mae’s girl or  
anyone’s and she ain’t pregnant but  
she is.

Seventy-three years after Dewey Dell graces the pages of Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, Suzan-Lori Parks, in *Getting Mother’s Body*, resurrects her movements with Billy Beede, a sixteen-year old Black girl in Texas in the summer of 1963 seeking an abortion. After Billy Beede learns that Snipes, a coffin maker and the fetus’s father, is actually already married, she takes to the road in search of an abortion.<sup>86</sup> Unlike Dewey Dell in Faulkner’s novel, Billy Beede’s voice opens and closes the narrative and is very much pulled to the centre. Parks undeniably engages with the narrative structure of *As I Lay Dying*, “with each chapter told in the present tense from an individual character’s point of view” but reverses the narrative action, with the family on the road to exhume the maternal figure’s body instead of burying it (Larson 87). A clear line exists between Dewey Dell and Billy Beede, though – the alliteration of their names, their syllabic echoes – and their tandem movements ask us to follow the persistent barriers they face to access abortion in the American South.

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<sup>86</sup> The name Snipes echoes Faulkner’s recurring Snopes family who appear in *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion*, with all three novels taking place in his fictional Southern Yoknapatawpha county (“Snopes Trilogy”). In fact, throughout Parks’s narrative, characters play on the name Snipes, fumbling over it: “Snipes, Snopes, Snaps?” (48).

Another significant change Suzan-Lori Parks makes is that Billy Beede is Black, coming of age near the peak of Civil Rights organizing in the summer of 1963. In *Getting Mother's Body*, this historical unrest is always in the background, with characters making reference to the Freedom Riders, lynchings, police brutality, the Klu Klux Klan, and Martin Luther King Jr.. Billy Beede and her family therefore cross the same roads traveled by the Freedom Riders on their way to the March on Washington in August 1963 and are met by the literal signs of segregation in their stops along the highways. Although Billy Beede's voice is central, it is clear that this landscape was not made for her: "the price of a Negro girl," in Texas 1963, is near nothing (Parks 129). Billy Beede and her mother Willa Mae move through narratives that overlap and reverse: Billy Beede is on the road to find an abortion and exhume her mother's body who died of a botched abortion and is allegedly buried with jewels that Billy wants to sell to fund her abortion. The lines between the cradle and the grave are in no way sturdy.<sup>87</sup> In this reverse echoing of Billy Beede and Willa Mae, Suzan-Lori Parks shows how incarceration, in various ways, defines the American experience for many Black women; Willa Mae, at one point, sings: "I guess I'll live in this great prison till I die" (176).<sup>88</sup> Although Billy cuts across Texas highways, there is a sense that wherever she goes there are walls.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Indeed, this proximity between birth and death features prominently in *Getting Mother's Body* with the character of Laz whose family owns a "cradle to grave" funeral business (37). Furthermore, Laz, short for Lazarus, tells us that he was "born not breathing," a reverberation of the biblical Lazarus whom Jesus resurrects (Parks 216).

<sup>88</sup> While Ruth Wilson Gilmore's *Golden Gulag* details the expansion of prison geographies in California in particular, it raises important questions and vocabulary about the prison industrial complex and infrastructures as well as abolitionist frameworks that might be applied to Texas. Furthermore, more specifically on Texas, Margo Tamez writes that "the prison complex of South Texas, open air containment warehouses designed in parallel with the extermination of Ndé and the industrialization of cattle production and slaughter, was always designed for the industrialization of death on a mass scale" (69).

<sup>89</sup> According to a piece by Mary E. Mendoza in *Time Magazine*, the first attempts at building a physical border or fence between Texas and Mexico began under Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman in the 1940s and 50s. After years of different forms of military border control, the wall began to take its most concrete form under President Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. Despite Donald Trump's very vocal support of building a more secure wall, he only succeeded in adding 85 miles of fencing. The Biden administration will add 20 more. There are currently 700 miles of fencing across the 1,951-mile border (Mendoza). Margo Tamez, writing as a Ndé Indigenous person living in occupied Texas, reflects on how the border wall between Texas and Mexico makes tangible the fact

*She's a Beede and it can't be helped* –<sup>90</sup>

because they did it and now it's done and

now the only way out is to get out there,

the road on and on and on.

There are no fathers in Texas.

The road is a symbol of the lack of abortion access and, for both Dewey Dell and Billy Beede, it represents a wall, a blockage, instead of a wide-open space of possibility. Ann Brigham, looking to road narratives in film and literature, makes the link between the road, nationalism, and freedom, asserting that “the promise of mobility has taken shape in a century’s worth of road films, novels, and nonfiction accounts that have popularized the road trip as a quintessential expression of Americanness,” even as these road narratives might interrogate the very terms of this mobility (3-4). For some the road is a forced movement; for some the road is yet another wall. Indeed, I would argue that the road is often only a site of privileged mobility for cis-gendered able-bodied white men in America. Parks’s novel takes place ten years before *Roe v. Wade* is passed and makes abortion more accessible; however, as Lori A. Brown demonstrates, even after *Roe* passed in 1973, Texas continued to be one of the states with the most legal and geographical barriers to abortion access (173). Brown writes that “Texas represents what happens when abortion is legal on paper yet inaccessible for a large population segment due to state restrictions that have produced massive clinic closures” (173). Therefore,

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that the genocide of Indigenous peoples at the hands of the American nation is not in the past: “genocide returns, comes back for more” (68).

<sup>90</sup> Like in the Dewey Dell interlude, text in italics are quotes often left intact but at times slightly altered.

Billy Beede's crisscrossing of Texas highways in search of an abortion makes visible the weight of this movement.

Billy Beede thus also shows how the sprawling roads of Texas that masquerade as possibility in fact make survival near impossible for many subjects, including young Black girls. The sprawl of highways horizons means no clinics in sight, the wide-open space is defined by an elaborate infrastructure of criminalization and incarceration for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous subjects – prison walls, border walls.<sup>91</sup> Perhaps this is why so much of Billy Beede's voice feels so fated – now and now, it just is what it is. Curiously, Billy Beede is often described as horse-like: June Flowers Beede, for example, says she looks like “a horse that's been running” (18). Domesticated, trying to run free, yet her feet are so heavy: “Clop clop. Like a horse” (12). I think of wrangling wild horses and cowboys and Texas and the massacres and genocide that closed the frontier. Margo Tamez names Texas and its layers of histories and geographies as a “deathscape”: “the killing fields, the prisons, the internment camps, the mega-ranches, monoculture cotton and citrus fields, and oil fields” (58-59). Billy Beede is a lesson in how to make life when moving according to your desires feels impossible. When you are a wild horse with heavy feet from years of pasturing, you long once again to run. When you cannot run, there is rage.

What do you inherit when the nation severs your line?

What is left of the cradle if your grave is already waiting?

Maybe an inheritance is a spill without a stop.

*we all end up in the ground but being a Beede means being able to bear the unbearable.*

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<sup>91</sup> Lori A. Brown, writing in 2019, claims that “Texas remains at the forefront of the country's incarceration, execution, and deportation rates” (178).

It feels unfathomable that Roe was overturned in June 2022, but many things that have happened since I started writing in May 2020 feel unfathomable. I don't know how to write about how time has felt but sometimes I wonder if any of this ever happened at all. And I think about Billy Beede feeling like the world simply happens to her – it happened because of this and then that. It happened because it is her inheritance as a Beede. The twinned journey to find an abortion and to exhume her mother, itself a result of the very barriers to abortion that Billy Beede faces in the present, urges the question: what would it even look like for Billy Beede to inherit something different? Time is looping and queer in this journey: life and death seem to fold back onto each other over and over; history repeats and revises itself as the future.<sup>92</sup>

Maybe this is why José Esteban Muñoz writes that queerness is “a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present” (1). In *Getting Mother's Body*, Suzan-Lori Parks renounces heteronormative time in this narrative confusion of past and present and gestures toward the possibility of non-heteronormative futures in the character of Dill Smiles, a queer pig farmer who was in love with Willa Mae Beede, Billy Beede's mother. Although Billy Beede chooses a heteronormative marriage plot at the end of the novel, having her baby and marrying Laz Jackson, this is merely indicative of the roads available to her: this ending is the best form of survival she has. Laz, too, is queer for the ways that he defies traditional masculinity and occupies a temporality somewhere between the living and the dead. When we first meet him, for example, he has “got [his] hands across [his] chest [...] all laid out to rest” and he and Dill traverse Texas in a hearse from his father's funeral business to

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<sup>92</sup> Suzan-Lori Parks calls this “Rep & Rev,” and it features prominently in her dramatic works. In *Elements of Style*, she writes that “Rep & Rev,” short for “repetition with *revision*” informs her way of staging Black American history (9). Inspired heavily by the Jazz aesthetic, “Rep & Rev” might look like a character repeating a phrase “once and again and again; etc. – with each revisit the phrase is slightly revised” (9). This repetition with slight difference shows how the present is a “literal incorporation of the past” (10).

follow Billy Beede (13). Turned away from an abortion, Billy Beede instead marries a man caught between the dead and the living in a dress paid for by her dead mother's necklace that Billy finds sewn into the hem of her mother's dress, a body freshly exhumed. This livingness, therefore, is always already tied to death in a world that Billy Beede was never meant to survive.<sup>93</sup>

*I ain't having this baby. It ain't gonna be at all. No I ain't. I ain't. I –*

From Lincoln to Texahoma to Gomez to LaJunta,

the numbers like columns of stone –

*10 from selling the empty box*

*-5 to Parker*

*-5 bus home and dinner in Midland*

*0*

It's never enough to get her there and get it out.

*I hold tight to the dress box and the candy and the chicken*

Karen Weingarten asserts, “indeed, the politics of abortion – is always tied to money” (96). The accounting never works for Billy Beede: numbers stacked in this “shadow economy” bound to fail her (Weingarten 97). So she holds tightly to all she has: the dress box, the candy, the chicken. To hold is to project a self into the future: *I hold tight; hold tight I*. This box, full of the consumable goods of capitalism, makes material the divide between what Billy wants – an

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<sup>93</sup> I conjure the line in Audre Lorde's poem “A Litany for Survival,” “We were never meant to survive” (283).

abortion – and the legal and economic bounds of abortion that make it impossible for her desires to be met. So this box is everything – a world bound by its container, a girl willing it to break open.

The pigs farrow.

Farrow, fallow – there’s something there isn’t there?

The messiness of birth and the unsown, the empty but soon  
it will be your time again.

*farrow – of a sow: to bring forth (young)*

*fallow – Ground that is left uncultivated after being ploughed and harrowed, in order to restore its fertility; a piece of such land.<sup>94</sup>*

Dill Smiles and his pigs stand out in *Getting Mother’s Body* as queer allies to Billy Beede; Billy Beede turns to Dill for help in getting out of Lincoln to get an abortion. A pig farmer who lives alone and is forever in love with Willa Mae, Dill Smiles also identifies as a man but is continuously misgendered as a woman throughout the novel. What I want to sit with, though, are the pigs. Indeed, Suzan-Lori Parks juxtaposes Billy Beede’s pregnancy with Jezebel, Dill’s sow, who has just farrowed a litter of pigs. This moment arrives near the centre of the novel, with Dill Smiles remarking that Jezebel’s “babies were born in the back room, same as you [Billy] was” (109). This creates a direct link between the now-pregnant Billy Beede and Jezebel and her litter of pigs. As Dill Smiles and Billy Beede stand and watch the piglets suckle,

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<sup>94</sup> Both definitions are from the Oxford English Dictionary. See Works Cited for full entry.

Billy Beede thinks “if my baby was gonna get born it would suck like the piglets do” (109). Watching the piglets suck Jezebel, though, reveals motherhood to be ferocious: babies “suck [...] the life” out of their mothers and sows protect their young –“one touch and Jez’ll bit yr arm off” (109). The pigs, therefore, show Billy Beede the violence in tenderness, the consumption of self that arrives with motherhood. They also make visible to Billy Beede how, as a pregnant Black girl, she will never fit the category of ideal mother.

The figure of Jezebel, who Dill Smiles’s sow is named after, as Dorothy Roberts elaborates, points to the ways in which, “from the moment they set foot in [America] as slaves, Black women have fallen outside the American ideal of womanhood” (10). Jezebel, the biblical wife of King Ahab, is a well-known figure of promiscuity often used to position enslaved women as “licentious temptress[es]” diametrically opposed to the “True Woman” – “chaste, pure, and white” (Roberts 11). In naming the sow Jezebel, Parks therefore points to this historical figuration that was used to “justify white men’s sexual abuse of Black women” as well as mark them as “bad mothers” (Roberts 11). The figure of Jezebel highlights the barring of motherhood – as a white ideal – from Black women, which, of course, is accompanied by other figures that criminalize Black motherhood, such as the Welfare Queen.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, when Dill Smiles shows Billy Beede the accounting book with its “rows and rows of numbers and names of sows, numbers of piglets per litter, price of things bought and sold,” Suzan-Lori Parks connects the accounting processes of agriculture to those of slavery (111). This connection between agriculture and slavery also demonstrates the proximities between animal breeding projects and

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<sup>95</sup> See Dorothy Roberts’s chapter in *Killing the Black Body*, “The Welfare Debate: Who Pays for Procreation?” for a discussion of the figure of the Welfare Queen and its historical contours.

the rape of enslaved women by white men as part of the larger breeding project of American slavery.<sup>96</sup> Billy Beede, in seeking her abortion, desires a different fate than Jezebel the sow.

To be herself is a fight, a no

no

no.

No I ain't. No I won't.

Because she is seen as an always already yes to men

even her cousins with their hands all up in her crotch no

no I ain't for that no is survival and no

I ain't no

I is who

I am

Billy Beede is willful and defiant. She defines herself not as what she is but what or whom she is not. In fact, Jennifer Larson claims that “Billy describes her identity exclusively as antithesis” (86). Billy Beede’s vocabulary is peppered with “ain’t”s and “no”s and I think about the exhaustion of this constant defiance needed to face the world of men who see her as a yes. I wonder how no is a sort of willful movement; an arm coming up again and again, urgent and sharp (Ahmed 1). These no’s are heavy, but Billy Beede is steadfast: “I put my head down on the

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<sup>96</sup> For the history of ‘breeding’ and selling enslaved Black women, see Ned and Constance Sublette’s *The American Slave Coast: A History of the Slave Breeding Industry*. They define the “slave-breeding industry” as “the complex of businesses and individual in the United States who profited from the enslavement of African American children at birth” (xiii). After the “federal prohibition of the ‘importation of persons’ as of January 1, 1808,” they argue that the American slave trade largely becomes a breeding project (xiii). In a way, this term, breeding project, softens the violence of what this project actually was: the theft of Black children and the forced reproduction of Black women, which was often the result of rape.

wheel but I don't cry" (Parks 221). I think about how Billy Beede's movement on this road toward an abortion that never arrives leads her to a sort of self-knowledge: a reckoning with her dead mother, a finding of voice amidst her inheritance, its burden unbearable. The novel ends with Billy Beede and Laz driving toward Lincoln, home, following a hearse: "My belly sat in front of me. In front of my belly, beyond the hood of the truck, was the back of Laz's hearse with Mother's body riding inside and the road unrolling ahead" (257). Billy Beede spatializes but also temporalizes here: in front, beyond, the back, inside. All of these prepositional phrases anchor Billy in a space and time suspended between past, present and future: her mother's death in front of her, her belly in front of her, the road unrolling. All that is before her is also history. There is nothing behind her. She does not look back because the future was always already here: "And if it already was then it was always gonna be" (Park 257).

Chapter 3: Angela: The Looks of Black Girls, Dogs, and Sheep in *Killer of Sheep*

Without children, there is no survival.

– Charles Burnett, *Charles Burnett Interviews*.

This black interior is a space for thought and action,  
for study and vandalism, for love and trouble.

– Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*

Nobody paid us any attention,  
so we paid very good attention to ourselves.

– Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

In Charles Burnett's film, *Killer of Sheep*, Stan, a Black man, labours in the slaughterhouse, struggling to find intimacy in his home, and sheep are killed, cinematically reanimated from carcass to live animal. Armond White aptly describes the film as a “quiet, elliptical storyline of a family in crisis” (28). Burnett's film is poetic and tender, narratively and aesthetically complex in its portrayal of Black domestic interiors and interiorities. It is heavy in its feeling and does not hold itself to singular meaning. The film tries to find emotion and motion in spaces that are characterized as much by deferral and stasis as they are by an abundance of life and joy. All the men are tired and things break; something is always in need of repair and care. With this in mind, I want to begin with what stopped me.

In the early moments of the film, the first time we enter the kitchen, a girl appears in the doorway, or rather between two doorways.<sup>97</sup> She is wearing a dog mask with drooping eyes, exaggerated, melting with sadness. This girl, viewers soon learn, is Stan's daughter, Angela. Sarah O'Brien describes this image as “riveting,” as if to convey a sense of the moment's fixity

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<sup>97</sup> In *Female Masculinity*, Jack Halberstam references a moment in Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding* in which Frankie Addams, the novel's tomboy protagonist, appears in a doorway: “Frankie was an unjoined person who hung around in doorways, and she was afraid” (McCullers in Halberstam 7). This moment, Halberstam argues, likens female adolescence to a state of being “unjoined,” at a threshold. This threshold marks female adolescence as a state of crisis in which moving towards ‘womanhood’ requires conforming to dominant expectations of femininity (Halberstam 6-7). Angela, in appearing so often in doorways, occupies a similar state of betweenness, refusing to give up a tomboy-esque girlhood.

as it extends to and arrests the viewer (“Revenons” 237). This threshold of dynamic stillness propels this chapter. Because it is here – with a masked girl in a kitchen’s doorway – that the film’s questions of reproduction and futurity articulate themselves. Black girlhood and animality, childhood and survival, beckon us to follow these questions and hold them open. I carry Christina Sharpe’s inquiry into a photograph of an unnamed girl – the word SHIP affixed to her forehead in the wake of the Haiti earthquake of 2010 – with me as I engage with this moment with Angela in the film. Sharpe asks “*What is the look in her eyes? What do I do with it?*” (44). What do I do with it? – this is the question that guides this chapter, whose hinge is a sticking image onto which meaning never seems to stick.<sup>98</sup>

In this chapter, I ask how this film’s representation of Black interiors, families, girlhoods, and everyday survival is grounded not solely in a social or historical reality but also in a longing, a projecting into a future not-yet. This is a chapter about looks and looking, about who is looked at but not seen, about the looks and longings of girls, about what a look might gesture toward, about how a look might hold a world, a future. Indeed, the two most direct stares – lingering looks that meet spectators looking on – come from the sheep heading to their slaughter and Angela, whose peripheral emergences and perpetual witnessing in hallways, windows, fences, and through dog masks, position her as a crucial interstice of this film. I thus argue that the film tends toward Angela, gesturing to the interior lives of Black girls even as it holds their futures in heteropatriarchal frames through which pregnancy and domesticity are projected as givens. Angela, through the surrogate of the dog mask that is held cinematically between scenes of the

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<sup>98</sup> Christina Sharpe names this the anagrammatics of Blackness (76-77). I will return to this later but a brief explanation may be needed here. The anagrammatics of Blackness recognizes that, for Black lives in the wake, some words do not stick or mean as they should – “*girl*, doesn’t mean ‘girl’ but, for example ‘prostitute’ or ‘felon’” (77). Anagrammatics is about how words signify but it also is about opening words to new possibilities, “putting pressure on meaning and that against which meaning is made” (76).

home and sheep slaughterhouse, anticipates another possibility through this juxtaposition of species and spaces. How do dogs, as masks and surreal companions, and the slaughterhouse, as a space her father labours in, act as interspecies guides to what Nazera Sadiq Wright deems the “prematurely knowing” of Black girls (10)?<sup>99</sup>

This chapter takes up three spaces: the slaughterhouse, Angela’s interiority, and the Black domestic interior. By placing Angela in the middle of these physical spaces, and between sheep and dogs, I demonstrate that her persistent witnessing positions her within the domestic realm yet resistant to its projected domesticity/domestication. I first establish Burnett’s representation of the slaughterhouse in relation to dominant cinematic portrayals of this space. Furthermore, I contemplate how Burnett places the slaughterhouse in relation to childhood and the home, arguing that it is not a simple alignment nor a juxtaposition but rather something to do with time and reproduction. I then take up Angela, with a close focus on the dog mask that she wears in two scenes. Conversing with Colin Dayan on dogs, interiority and prescience, as well as with Joshua Bennett on dogs and ownership, Blackness, and interspecies companionship, I propose that we might think through this mask in relation to Angela’s articulation of Black girlhood. What affiliation does this mask incite? How does this dog mask mediate between Angela, her father, and the sheep?

To address these questions of the interior lives of Black girls, I turn once again to Saidiya Hartman’s *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* and Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. Both of these texts offer ways to think about the (in)visibility, multiplicity, and complexity of

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<sup>99</sup> I will return to Wright’s theorization of “prematurely knowing” in relation to nineteenth-century Black girlhood later in this chapter. This phrase comes from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, in which Harriet Jacobs names the ages of fifteen and sixteen as “prematurely knowing” girlhood, “a common stage of transition when black girls were forced to become aware of adult concerns in relation to their own lives” (Wright 10). Throughout her book, Wright names the multiple ways that “slavery warped the timeline of maturity for them [Black girls],” in which their “prematurely knowing” became a resource for surviving unlivable conditions.

Black girlhoods. It is from them that I learn how to look and how to hold. The third section of my chapter continues to explore Black girlhood but opens up to the space she inhabits – the Black domestic interior. Using Kevin Quashie’s theorization of quiet in relation to Black subjectivity, imagination, and public and private space, I ask how Angela’s interiority is figured within a particular interior that also gestures to animal others. Saidiya Hartman and Valerie Sweeney Prince’s writings on Black interiors also help me situate Angela inside this space. Even though Burnett shows Angela watching and listening in the home, he complicates her by also showing how she inhabits the exterior. My interpretation rests on the dog mask as it is later echoed in the sounds of barking street dogs. Behind this mask, Angela slips between the domesticated and the wild. Here, Angela is both animal and human, existing beyond the frame temporally, spatially, and cinematically. The heteronormative and generative temporality that encapsulates this film – namely, pregnancy – is another frame that Angela yearns beyond and complicates.

I view this film as a white woman. I am drawn to it because I, too, was a quiet, deeply sensitive witness to the adults in my home. I feel a connection to Angela in this way but I recognize that I do not share this particular interior or history. I try to work through it with care, citing Black feminist thinkers and calling attention to my own distance. I acknowledge that the white gaze has long dominated film theory and criticism and that my reading participates in this history. bell hooks’s essay “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators,” for example, names the ways that, for Black female subjects, “the ‘gaze’ has always been political” and, thus their ways of looking and viewing film are acts of resistance to their being told not to look (197). I quote this passage in full as it offers a way into how we might read Angela’s repeated watchful looks in the film. hooks writes,

When thinking about black female spectators, I remember being punished as a child for staring, for those hard, intense, direct looks children would give grown-ups, looks that were seen as confrontational, as gestures of resistance, challenges to authority. The ‘gaze’ has always been political in my life. Imagine the terror felt by the child who has come to understand through repeated punishments that one’s gaze can be dangerous. The child who has learned so well to look the other way when necessary. Yet, when punished, the child is told by parents, ‘Look at me when I talk to you.’ Only, the child is afraid to look. Afraid to look, but fascinated by the gaze. There is power in looking. (197)

This passage positions the looks of Black girls as always already rebellious, dangerous and hungry—“afraid to look, but fascinated by the gaze” (197). hooks, and Morrison as well, both pull the acts of looking and witnessing, as well as the politics of visibility to the fore of coming into Black girlhood. However, Morrison also points to the damaging power of the “outside [white] gaze” – how a look can be internalized, how it feels to look and witness as “the persons no one inquired of [...] the girls themselves” (210; 214). In paying attention to Angela’s presence on thresholds, at fences, looking out windows, I take her looks seriously and thus see in her gaze an interior world imagining its own future that is held beyond the bounds of the film’s frame.

There are numerous thorough readings of *Killer of Sheep*, many of which were published after 2007, when the film was released to the public through Milestone films.<sup>100</sup> This scholarship reveals critics puzzled by how to place Burnett’s film and its aesthetic. Max Nelson writes: “No one seems to have known what to do with Burnett” (20). And yet, prominent themes emerge in

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<sup>100</sup> Charles Burnett originally produced *Killer of Sheep* as his Master’s thesis film at UCLA, completing it in 1977 (Wall and Martin 1). It screened at a few small film festivals after that but was never distributed. Because of the soundtrack and costs of obtaining rights to the music, the film was only released commercially in 2007, finally making it accessible to a larger public audience (2).

this scholarship. To sort through them, I set up four major approaches, even though there is certainly overlap. For example, all of them, in some way, take up the formal and aesthetic strategies of the film. But it is possible to start with the film's form and genre, asking how it positions itself in relation to truth and authenticity, to time, and to space. Next, I focus on the film's use of sound and music. In this vein, some scholars argue that *Killer of Sheep*, because of its episodic structure and use of sound as an affective register, "is constructed like a blues song" or like a "jazz or modernist narrative" (Maillard 323; Naremore 34). The third way of reading consists of the film's representation of the Black family, children, and masculinity, asking how these themes relate to larger issues of Black representation and survival. Some of these readings also think about the larger community and setting of Watts, Los Angeles, in which, as of the completion of *Killer of Sheep*, the aftermath of the 1965 Watts Riots could still very much be felt. In the fourth way of reading, I address the scholarship on the film's representation of the slaughterhouse and the symbolism of sheep.

Most scholars place *Killer of Sheep* somewhere between documentary and realism. Michael Martin and David Wall, for example, deem it neorealism, albeit with formal disruptions and interventions, because it "portray[s] as realistically as possible the social and material reality of a proletarian existence" (17). David James, alternatively, notes the film's "quasi-documentary verisimilitude of the representation" of the Black family but this is in tension with the "highly artificial montage effects," particularly through the use of nondiegetic sound (131; 135). Paula J. Massood describes *Killer of Sheep* as "'Black urban realism,' 'poetic realism,' 'subtle realism,' and 'neorealism'" and argues that it also shares the "political and aesthetic practices of Third Cinema" (149).<sup>101</sup> She argues, however, that documentary is equally as important to Burnett's

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<sup>101</sup> See Amy Abugo Onigiri's chapter, "Charles Burnett: A Reconsideration of Third Cinema" for a reading of how Burnett's films might be considered as part of this movement. Onigiri specifically focuses on how Burnett's

practice, noting the “observational impulse” that guides the film (160). Massood cautions, however, that this documentary impulse is not a recording of reality. Instead, Burnett’s film is a *refraction* of reality: “they dialogue with context, but they are not mimetic replacements for reality” (150). Massood, in addition to Amy Corbin, also highlights the neorealist techniques that abound in *Killer of Sheep*: it employs “restrained, naturalistic acting and an observational approach to documenting seemingly insignificant actions” (Corbin 34). While many scholars, Corbin among them, cite the Italian neorealist film movement as influential to Burnett’s style, Janet K. Cutler reminds us that Burnett does not agree with this categorization and instead posits documentary as his primary influence (81).<sup>102</sup> I wonder, though, about this preoccupation with *placing* Burnett at all – is there a way to hold nuance and ambivalence in the film’s form and feel?

Max Nelson articulates this possibility beautifully when he asserts that “Burnett’s best films, too, lack stable centers. They drift, digress, linger on stray details and meander to the edges of the spaces they show” (18). Nelson gets at the movement away from solidity and certainty that Burnett’s films perform. The importance of the periphery, here, informs my own reading of the importance of Angela – as a girl who inhabits liminal and peripheral spaces. These movements between spaces – inside and outside – and time – how the past is hovering, how the future is there, too – are some ways the film meanders. Eugenie Brinkema’s reading tugs at this yearning quality of the film and suggests that the tendency to read the film as truth – “as a quasi-documentary of the Watts neighborhood” (Povinelli in Brinkema 266) – limits how the film

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treatment of violence both comes out of and is a “reaction to the forces of production that created the Third Cinema movement and blaxploitation films in the sixties and seventies” (91). His use of the camera to “show the process that generates the problems” and its use of handheld cameras and amateur actors echo the aesthetics of Third Cinema, which emerged as an alternative to Hollywood (Espinosa in Onigiri 94).

<sup>102</sup> Janet K. Cutler also quotes Clyde Taylor and Chris Norton who claim that “the neo-realist period obviously influenced Burnett deeply” (Norton in Cutler 81).

moves and oscillates (267). Brinkema quotes Michael Gillespie, from his book, *Film Blackness: American Cinema and the Idea of Black Film*, who suggests that there is a link between Black film and expectations of truth, wherein the “value of a black film is exclusively measured by a consensual truth of a film’s capacity to wholly account for the lived experience or social life of race” (Gillespie in Brinkema 266). While Burnett’s film practice may indeed draw on elements of the documentary form, Gillespie and Brinkema note the limitations of reading Black film, especially when it deals with social issues, with an expectation of truthiness or authentic representation. Brinkema’s reading, I think, is important, as he connects this expectation of truthful representation to a sort of stagnancy in the film’s capacity to keep multiple possibilities, and I would add, futurities, in motion. Brinkema writes: “If the film is regarded as revealing what *is*, it loses its relation to the imaginative practice of contingency articulated by the aesthetic: an autonomous imaging of what *might be*” (265-66). Brinkema is thus highly focused on the aesthetic – *how* the film happens: “*it is an attestation of light, extensive and broken lines*” (italics in original 267).

Cutler, in her article that reads *Killer of Sheep* alongside Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*, is similarly concerned with the ways Burnett’s film “resist[s] linear time and continuous space,” in order to show how the family is in tension between the past – the South – and the present / future – the North (81). Cutler identifies three types of camera movements that demonstrate this tension in space and time. First, she notes the “hand-held, fluid shots of the slaughterhouse” rife with suddenly appearing bodies, both human and animal, “often viewed as body parts in close-up” which are “accompanied by classical, jazz, and blues recordings” (82). Second, she notes the “sweeping camera movements” that capture children at play on the streets, using the long shot to “momentarily liberate the subjects from the confines of their impoverished

lives” (82). Finally, she notes the “often claustrophobically framed sync sound footage shot in the interiors of Stan’s and his neighbors’ homes” that position characters as “trapped, surrounded by a hostile environment” wherein “dogs growl, sirens wail – just outside the frame” (82).

Cutler’s careful breakdown of Burnett’s different camera movements and frame compositions shows how the film positions characters in relation to time, space, the larger world, and other bodies. My chapter continues this focus on how the film moves characters through time and space but is particularly interested in how Angela is figured in relation to reproductive time.

The second way of reading the film is very much an extension of the first. These scholars pay particular attention to Burnett’s use of sound as it relates to the image. Inez Hedges, for example, argues that Black independent cinema often employs “signifyin’ [as per Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s concept] as a counterhegemonic strategy” (137). Hedges notes several ways that *Killer of Sheep* operates through signifyin’, but sheds particular importance on his use of sound and music, which she argues, gestures to the secondary meaning of images, creating ambiguity and decentering the spectator (140). James Naremore also picks up on the prominence of sound, among other aesthetic techniques of the film. He highlights “Burnett’s undoubtedly poetic feel for space, time, and tempo” and argues that the film’s soundtrack has a “degree of independence” from the image, with the musical soundtrack rarely mixing with diegetic sound (30; 26). Naremore, following Manthia Diawara’s study of Black independent cinema, calls its form “‘rhythmic and repetitious’ and its narrative style ‘symbolic’” (27). Diawara writes that Burnett’s symbolic style has more “in common with Black expressive forms like jazz, and with novels by such writers as Toni Cade Bambara, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison, which stop time to render visible Black voices and characters” (11). Making visible the Black family, childhood, and the domestic interior is the third focus of scholars of this film.

Many scholars remark the prominence of children in *Killer of Sheep*: “a great deal of the film centers on children,” writes James Naremore, who also suggests that “Burnett records the meanness of their [the childrens’] li[ves], but he observes them with tenderness and wit” (25; 30). Like my own reading, Naremore’s reading largely centres on Angela as “a key witness to adult behavior” (33). His analysis is one of the few to note Angela’s recurring presence, if only at the edges of the film. Many scholars focus instead on Burnett’s representation of masculinity within patriarchal family structures, questioning Stan’s relationship to and movement between work, the home, and his own identity. These readings of Black masculinity and the Black family, as Simone Drake aptly points out, often take on a tragic tone, noting their survival in conditions of poverty (34). Drake argues that “a focus on tragedy, hardship, and poverty significantly limits, if not erases, any way to read agency in the film” (34). Mary Maillard, for example, privileges despair and tragedy in her reading of *Killer of Sheep*, writing that, “in spite of Burnett’s intent, *Killer of Sheep* reveals a traumatized population and a new generation doomed to repeat the violence of 1965” (Maillard 326).

This brings us to the prominence of the film’s social context to many scholars’ readings of the film. Nearly all scholars address, in some way, the historical, social, and geographic setting of Watts, Los Angeles, in the 1960s as pivotal to the film’s meaning and aesthetic. In addition to the Watts Riots in 1965, this year also marks the assassination of Malcom X and the publication of the Moynihan report.<sup>103</sup> The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. follows in

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<sup>103</sup> Daniel Patrick Moynihan, working under President Lyndon Johnson, published *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* in 1965. This report pathologized the Black family, taking aim at its matriarchal structure, among other things (Roberts 16). Dorothy Roberts writes that “playing on the theme of degeneracy, Moynihan described Black culture as a ‘tangle of pathology’ that is ‘capable of perpetuating itself without assistance from the white world’” (16). Roberts argues that the language and views from this report continue in discourses surrounding Black single motherhood and “reckless Black fertility” (17). Even further, in her chapter in *The 1619 Project*, Roberts claims that “by attributing this urban crisis to Black family pathology instead of structural racism, Moynihan’s analysis promoted policies that tied poverty-relief programs to harsh crime-control interventions in Black

1968 – Burnett’s film thus coincides with what was perhaps felt as the height of the Civil Rights Movement in America (Drake 49; Nstolngela Masilela in Cutler 78). While this context certainly weighs upon the film, I agree with Drake’s questioning of this prevalent reading of an inescapable sense of tragedy and crisis inherent in this film.

Drake reads *Killer of Sheep* through the framework of a Black feminist methodology and post-nationalism in order to “complicate the notion of an inherent link between blackness, maleness, and crisis in the twenty-first century” (29). Drake tends to the much-overlooked sensitivity of Stan, which she argues portrays “Black men as emotional, feeling human beings whose greatest acts of agency are rooted in their own humanness, fallibility, and ‘weakness’” (29). Drake’s exploration of masculinity in *Killer of Sheep* also asks whether the film makes room for agency for Black women in its articulation of the family structure (33). Reading the film’s representation of the Black family in relation to the Moynihan Report, Drake concludes that, while Stan does offer another version of masculinity in contrast to ‘the angry Black man’ made popular by the blaxploitation film, with his sensitivity challenging the “‘tangle of pathology’ that Moynihan attributes to black families,” the film still upholds a “stagnant” representation of Black women (39; 46). The film, after all, as Drake points out, ends with pregnancy (49). Drake notes that Burnett’s film “counters the [Moynihan’s] pathological image of the Black family” by revealing the Black interior as a space of tenderness, sensitivity, and futurity (49). However, she notes that, even though reading the film through an “intersectional and post-national lens creates a liberatory space to rethink Stan’s character” as having agency, feeling and sensitivity, “those theoretical frameworks cannot erase the nationalist and patriarchal structures that Burnett sought to uphold” (49). While Drake’s reading points to the limits of

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neighbourhoods” (56). This sociological context is significant, therefore, to Burnett’s film which tends to the mundane life of a Black family.

Burnett's film, it also illuminates the many possibilities anticipated in the shadowy spaces of the film. It asks us to dwell in corners, to stay a while in the small moments, such as Stan embracing the teacup or Angela looking back out the car window toward what is both the past and future.

The fourth way of reading this film takes a markedly different approach, with Sarah O'Brien pulling sheep to the centre. Conversing with Jacques Derrida, O'Brien argues that the animals who "populate various registers of the film, yet [...] remain always at the periphery[.]" collapse species lines to create a "faltering, undecidable proximity" between humans and animals ("Revenons" 228; 216). Furthermore, O'Brien argues that the filmic and narrative movements between the sheep in the slaughterhouse and family in the home "make present the highly ambivalent relationships between the domestic sphere and the killing floor" (228). This is a thread I will continue to pull, arguing that it is through Angela that these questions of domestication and domesticity, girlhood and animality come into view. What is missing, however, from O'Brien's analysis, is a discussion of race and animality. My chapter continues to centre the relationship between animal and human spaces, bodies, and subjects in *Killer of Sheep* but uses Joshua Bennett and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's theories on Blackness and animality, asking how animal companions bring about necessary truths about property, proximities, intimacies, and plasticized humanity (Bennett 4; Jackson 3). What is held in the space between Stan, as a Black labourer, and the sheep becoming meat? How does race animate this space as well as the intimacies and divisions it produces between its species bodies? In the next section, I attend to these questions, moving through the slaughterhouse setting Burnett cinematically renders.

## I The Slaughter of Sheep

In *Killer of Sheep*, sheep cut across the film, appearing in various degrees of aliveness and animation. They are moved by labourers across the screen, unclear as to whether they are live sheep or already meat. Children also cut across the film, moving yet suspended, at play and in conflict, curious and questioning. They leap across the screen, undeniably alive, in constant motion. I propose that the presence of sheep – suspended between alive and meat – signifies in relation to Black childhood. While quite a few scholars interpret this relationship as a parallel – arguing that the film positions children moving in the same line toward mass death as the sheep – I want to dwell longer in this juxtaposition, taking it seriously as a complex relationship punctuated with ambivalences. Inez Hedges, for example, writes, “It’s never clear that the fate of the children is equated with that of the sheep – it’s just a nagging anxiety” (140). James Ponsoldt echoes this sentiment when he writes, “like the sheep in the factory watching their kin bleed from the ceiling, unaware that they’re next, the wait can be heartbreaking” (in Kapsis 152). Both of these readings directly align children with sheep, framing their lives as without a future, their lively presence as already dead.<sup>104</sup> In these readings, Black life is problematically framed as without a future and is aligned with animal life. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson cautions the long tradition of equating Black life with animality, writing that “antiblackness has sought to justify its defacing logics and arithmetic by suggesting that Black people are most representative of the abject animalistic dimension of humanity, or the beast” (3). Following Jackson, I argue for a more nuanced reading of race, animality, gender, and reproduction. Furthermore, these readings,

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<sup>104</sup> Christina Sharpe asks, “In the midst of so much death and the fact of Black life as proximate to death, how do we attend to the physical, social, and figurative death and also to the largeness that is Black life, Black life insisted from death?” (17). This question looms here. Sharpe proposes wake work as one way “to tend to the Black dead and dying [...] to Black people, always living in the push toward our death” (10).

especially Ponsoldt's, position both the sheep and Black children as "unaware" – without interiority or the capacity to intentionally project themselves into futures (in Kapsis 152).

Burnett does cinematically draw lines between the sheep and children, but I want to try and bring more nuance to their rapport. The camera captures sheep clumped together in chutes, climbing to their death. It also captures children huddled in alleys, climbing stairs, and leaping across buildings. In these corresponding lines I argue that Burnett positions both the animal and Black child as having agency in their motions– they are not presented as "unaware" in these lines and movements; rather he accords them with the ability to animate themselves in deft leaps across time and space. Burnett's careful attention to Black children's mundane scenes of play and quotidian interactions imparts them with rich interior worlds. The sheep, likewise, defy slaughter's logics, reanimated by Burnett's non-linear cuts to leave the audience with a harrowing stare, their eyes full of emotional depth. Burnett thus invites us to sit in this space between domesticated animal and child but I argue that he positions them in "fraught proximity" rather than in parallel (Bennett 3). While the sheep's movements are contained by the factory lines and chutes that enclose them, Black children seem to have no spatial limits – occupying the edges of urban spaces with an immense degree of imagination that animates these spaces of detritus.

Referring to Fredrick Douglass writing about his relationship with horses, Joshua Bennett describes what he calls the fraught proximity between Blackness and animality as an "unwieldy network of feelings that bind livestock and the enslaved together" (3). This "unexpected alliance," Bennett claims, poses a complex representational epistemological bind but, more importantly is, to many Black artists, authors, and thinkers, "a source of unfettered possibility [...] a promise" (4). This proximity between Black (child) life and white sheep being

slaughtered is thus heavy with nuance – the affiliation through their shared histories of exploitation and being property, once established, may fall apart; the bind, complex and knotted, may break. Burnett’s camera, in its attentiveness to the mundane, its resistance to spectacle, and its “meandering to the edges,” to borrow Nelson’s wording, holds this nuance, drawing not a direct line between sheep and Black children, but rather, opening up a fragile line between them to animate the interspecies worlds held between them (18).

Both cinema and slaughter, as Nicole Shukin claims, turn on spectacle as a form of capital (91). Sarah O’Brien further remarks that cinema and dead or dying animals have a peculiar affinity. In “Why Look at Dead Animals,” O’Brien “considers why and how cinema turns, if not with consistent frequency then with remarkable intensity, to the extinguishment of animal life” (33). O’Brien gestures toward a large archive of “slaughter cinema” films “that document violent animal death” (34). O’Brien makes two important arguments that pertain to this chapter: first, that the desire to film animals dying reveals a curious assumption about animal bodies and certitude; and second, that cinema is contingent on animal death, both literal and metaphorical.<sup>105</sup> O’Brien claims that, in cinema, “animal bodies are facts” at the same time as the camera marks them as an unintelligible signifying excess (45). They are “made to oscillate between metaphor and fact, and they are deployed as instruments of both didacticism and titillation” (35). The two films that O’Brien analyzes take place outside of the slaughterhouse

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<sup>105</sup> The second part of her argument, about how cinema – as an industry and technology – relies on animal death, is outside the scope of this particular chapter. Nicole Shukin, in *Animal Capital*, offers a detailed and compelling history of the entanglements between cinema and rendered animals. Citing Edward Muybridge’s animal motion studies as evidence that the origins of modern cinema turned on a fascination for capturing the animal body in motion and in death, Shukin also makes the argument that cinema’s reliance on the animal goes beyond metaphor: the cinema reel – through the use of gelatin in film stock – literally relied on the rendered animal body. She writes that gelatin “marks “a ‘vanishing point’ where moving images are both inconspicuously and *viscerally* contingent on mass animal disassembly, in contradiction with cinema’s framing semiotic of ‘animation’” (italics in original; 91). I write this footnote to remember this layer of animal death in film’s material presence.

and I wonder whether animal death perhaps signifies differently in this space, which, as Shukin posits, includes another level of spectacular manipulation.

In fact, Timothy Pachirat's reading of the physical space of the slaughterhouse seems to contradict O'Brien's claim that certain slaughter films have the "capacity to render visible this otherwise avisual threshold – to stare down gruesome animal death and to re/present it as a coherent, linear movement" (O'Brien 44).<sup>106</sup> Pachirat argues that the slaughterhouse is intentionally constructed to obscure the exact moment of killing from its labourers and consumers. He writes, "the work of killing is hidden even from those who participate directly in it [...] Distance and concealment shield, sequester, and neutralize" (9). Whereas O'Brien associates fact and evidence with cinematic renderings of animal death, Pachirat names the slaughterhouse as a space of "framing, forgery, and the inventions of legends and lies" (32). Paula Massood points out that the slaughterhouse scenes in Burnett's film are the most documentary-like and thus feel more like fact, with "footage of actual sheep being bled, skinned, and dismembered" (160). While it is true that Burnett filmed this footage in an actual slaughterhouse, I argue that Burnett's use of nondiegetic sound, lighting, and non-linear narrative complicates this representation of the animal body as fact, as signifying death laid bare.<sup>107</sup>

O'Brien notes that the slaughter film usually follows a linear narrative, documenting a clear transition from life to death ("Revenons" 214).<sup>108</sup> In a similar way, Nicole Shukin argues

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<sup>106</sup> O'Brien makes this statement in her analysis of Chris Marker's 1983 film, *Sans Soleil*, but she brings up this idea of cinema's capacity to mark or represent this exact moment of death throughout her larger argument (44).

<sup>107</sup> In an interview with David Lowery, Charles Burnett explains the obstacles they faced in obtaining access to an actual slaughterhouse to film the footage of Stan at work because "a lot of the vegetarians were also making movies, and they went to slaughterhouses and exposed a lot of the cruelty to animals" (in Kapsis 166).

<sup>108</sup> See also Sarah O'Brien and Nicole Shukin's co-authored chapter, "Being Struck: On the Force of Slaughter and Cinematic Affect" for a discussion of representations of slaughter in cinema. O'Brien and Shukin argue that slaughter and cinema are connected in the ways that both employ biopower. They write, "when cinema's aim is aesthetically and biopolitically formulated as *making feel* [...] its methods unexpectedly evoke those of slaughter" (187).

that “industrial slaughter emerges not only as a space of production [...] but also as a space of consumption and spectacle,” wherein the “the lineaments of cinema can arguably be glimpsed in the animal disassembly lines of Chicago’s stockyards” (91-92). Shukin thus argues that the slaughterhouse’s “sequential sequence” of the disassembly line – in the tours it offered to the public – prepared the viewing eye for the cinematic motion picture (100-101).<sup>109</sup> Burnett’s film, however, as O’Brien also notes, scrambles both the temporal and spatial norms of slaughter: we begin with skinned sheep carcasses, coming to us in an array of parts, and we end with very live sheep staring down at us from the kill chute (“Revenons” 215). This particular sequence of slaughter does not follow the disassembly line. Indeed, as the film progresses, the sheep become more alive, “appear[ing] to look back at – to witness – their future death and dismemberment,” while their death is always already present, hovering since the audience’s first encounter with the skinned sheep head (215). We know the sheep will die, from this first image, but Burnett’s film leaves us with sheep undeniably alive – a flurry of motion.

Burnett’s particular rendering of the slaughterhouse, therefore, complicates this question of animal death in the slaughterhouse: Does it ever arrive? Is it always already arrived, in the process of arrival? How do we hold animal death that begins as meat and ends as a moving, staring, animal? Instead of a clear progression from alive to dead, Burnett’s sheep come to us in pieces. This space is not given to viewers in full, or even in order: the door is never fully open to expose its processes, the animal is not fully opened up to offer its insides. This withholds the functions of both didacticism and titillation that animal bodies often cinematically, in tension, perform (O’Brien, “Why Look” 35). Amy Corbin picks up on Burnett’s fascination with limbs,

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<sup>109</sup> Shukin further references Noémie Vialles, who argues that “tours of slaughterhouses [...] follow the same insistent sequential sequence as the cinematic reel, a logic that frames the impassive stages of deanimating animal life as an inexorable progression” (101).

noting how close his camera focuses in on objects and bodies – “knees, legs, and arms fill the frame” (86). The bodies of sheep thus come to us in disorienting pieces, accompanied by a sweeping orchestral soundtrack instead of the sounds of slaughter. The disjointed hands of labourers are choreographed in a dance that feels more balletic than mechanical, more tender than cold.<sup>110</sup> Burnett thus withholds a certain documentary exactitude from these slaughterhouse scenes, imbuing them instead with a dreamlike surreality signalled in part by the steam obscuring the sheep and labourers, made opaque by the film’s black and white stock, and by the use of a soundtrack at odds with the violence of slaughter, with Dinah Washington and Paul Robeson’s yearning yet sorrowful voices haunting these scenes and orchestral music haunting others. In removing diegetic sound from all but one of the slaughter scenes, Burnett offers a slaughterhouse without one of its most sensational elements: the sounds, the squeals, the screams. Indeed, the “squeal” is what Upton Sinclair, in *The Jungle*, identifies as that which cannot be “mimetically managed” or made into capital (Sinclair 42; Shukin 95).<sup>111</sup> In taking away the sounds of slaughter, Burnett shifts the aesthetic of this space’s representation from spectacular to surreal.

These scenes do not expose this space, following the dominant impulse of slaughterhouse cinema to somehow unveil a reality in all of its “unfaked visual horror” (Giles in O’Brien, “Why Look” 35). Instead, Burnett’s slaughterhouse is veiled in shadows and unintelligible substances; it lingers on detail – edges and limbs – and moves back and forth in time. Burnett, I argue, draws not only on documentary realism, but also on surrealism. Burnett’s depiction of this space is in

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<sup>110</sup> I can’t help but think of Tillie Olsen’s description of the work of labour as a sort of gracefully choreographed dance in *Yonondio From the Thirties*. She writes, “dancing along the convey [...] Mary running running [...] To the shuddering drum of the skull crush machine [...] everyone in the same motion all the hours thorough” (165). See Chapter 2 for further discussion.

<sup>111</sup> Timothy Pachirat also documents the sounds of the slaughterhouse in prose, making visible how the soundscape of this space comes to bear on the humans and animals in the space. He reproduces these sounds in onomatopoeia: “The air hisses as it leaves the hose and makes a diffuse *pop* as it hits the metal rails. *Hiss, hiss, pop. Hiss, hiss, pop.* Finally, there is the *splink, splink, splink* of water hitting the bloodied metal carts as they are rinsed” (124).

fragments; he does not show us, like Upton Sinclair does in *The Jungle*, the expansive process in all its awe. With a strong symbolic register, Burnett's film cuts between disparate spaces, lingers on pools of undefined substances, and focuses on labouring and animal bodies at different stages of slaughter, drawing on elements of surrealism to defamiliarize this space.<sup>112</sup> This resistance to a spectacular exposure of this space of living animals, antemortem in a complex way, reveals a certain care and intention in showing the ways in which violence unfolds as ongoing, as unexposable because of the ways it defies logics of time and space. Aesthetically sophisticated in its soundtrack yet utterly banal in the visuals of labouring hands repeating motion upon motion, Burnett's representation of this space maintains that the lines between species are shadowy and uncertain, complicated and messy.

The sheep – in the camera's lingering on their fathomless stare toward the end of the film – are both held alive – as living and feeling worlds – and as always en route to death. When the camera lingers on Stan's eyes in this space, the tired lines of his face, tenderness arises for the interminable, violent motions he must follow to survive. When the camera then shifts to the sheep's dark eyes, Burnett gestures toward a tenuous affiliation held in this touch, in the "fraught proximity" between Stan and the sheep he must kill in order to survive (Bennett 3). While viewers see Stan move from the space of the home – the kitchen, the living room, the bedroom, the porch, the family car – to the disassembly line, children never physically cross over into this second space. The cinematic montage positions them in relation to but never inside this space. This is yet another edge on which Burnett balances and meanders.

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<sup>112</sup> Georges Franju's 1949 French film, *Le Sang des Bêtes*, may be one film that shares some of the surreal elements of Burnett's film. This film also features nondiegetic music akin to Burnett's soundtrack as well as sweeping shots of desolate landscapes.

In order to explore this edge, a third space must be brought up. If Burnett repeatedly shows children at play in urban spaces in fraught proximity to scenes of sheep being slaughtered, the home and the domestic reproduction of life is also present. While it is only Stan who moves physically between the home and slaughterhouse, Burnett metaphorically draws a line between these spaces, “mak[ing] present the highly ambivalent relationships between the domestic sphere and the killing floor” (O’Brien, “Revenons” 228). Burnett questions how these two spaces – the home and the killing floor – can coexist. How can the mundane intimacies that make up everyday survival and the reproduction of life in the domestic space that Stan and his family inhabit coexist with the cold motions Stan must perform on the kill floor? What does the reproduction of life have to do with meat production and the death of animals? Burnett raises these questions without answers when, for example, the soundtrack from one space bleeds into the other. Paula Massood remarks how, in many fading shots that move from the domestic to scenes of slaughter, music bridges the scenes, synchronizing these spaces (162). In one of the most intimate and sensitive moments of the film, for example, “This Bitter Earth” plays as Stan and his wife hold onto each other in the bedroom – the space of reproduction – swaying together but not quite as Stan’s eyes are affixed elsewhere. This scene ends with Stan’s wife, alone, framed in a window to the outside world. In the final scene of the film, “This Bitter Earth” returns. Dinah Washington’s voice is yearning and warm, singing:

This bitter earth  
Well, what fruit it bears.  
What good is love,  
Mm, mm, that no one shares?

The setting, though, is markedly different than the first one that this song accompanies. Instead of a bedroom, this song plays as Stan moves sheep along the lines of chains, downing them,

herding them to death. In a different sort of dance, framed not by windows but by fences, walls, and pens herding the sheep to their death, this song connects Stan's labour in the slaughterhouse with that of the home.

The labour of the home, as the film gestures toward in the moment right before the film fades to the final scene of the slaughterhouse, is reproductive labour. Pregnant women and the 'fruit' they will bear despite bitter conditions straddle this cut from home to slaughterhouse. The final scene features a woman from the community visiting Stan's home, sharing the news that she is pregnant. The scene ends with her tracing the circular shape of her future belly with her hand – a future that dissolves into the final scene of Stan's slaughterhouse labour. The screenplay reads: "*There is a close-up of the crippled girl's stomach. The next scene is dissolved over. The music of Dinah Washington comes in. Stan is herding sheep to the kill floor*" (in Martin & Wall 265). The connection between reproductive labour and the labour of killing sheep may not be fully articulated, but Burnett's film nevertheless gestures toward a line between them, even if it may be hazy, dissolving just as we think we can grasp it.<sup>113</sup>

In the next section, I show that Angela complicates this line between the slaughterhouse and home, between sheep and children, between meat and reproduction, even more through her surrogate alignment with dogs. The dog, which I argue becomes enmeshed with Angela's movements, is an essential hinge between domesticated sheep, domestic pets, and the ways in which Black girls occupy the domestic. I posit that the dog might help us think through this fraught proximity the film stages between Black children and sheep. Mary Maillard hints at the film's triangulation between sheep, children, and dogs, when she notices the inclusion of a

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<sup>113</sup> Species categories are also entangled with reproduction. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, for example, argues that "historically, the delineation between species has fundamentally hinged on the question of reproduction" (4). Mel Y. Chen echoes this sentiment when she writes that "species difference itself is fraught with anxieties about race and reproduction" (148).

children’s nursery rhyme that emerges twice in the film, “This Old Man” (324). This song plays during a significant transition as the camera moves from the interior of the slaughterhouse to its exterior façade, reading “Solanos Meat Company” and then fades to Stan’s wife preparing a meal in their kitchen. Maillard quotes the line, “knick knack, paddywack, give a dog a bone,” and claims that “paddywack is another name for the ligament in the neck of the sheep that supports their heads” (324). Furthermore, she notes that “dried paddywack is commonly sold as a dog treat”.<sup>114</sup> This minute yet curious detail gestures toward the importance of dogs in this negotiation between the slaughterhouse’s sheep and the dog at home, who, in this film, is conjured through Angela’s dog mask. Might the dog offer an alternative time and space to the slaughterhouse’s linear movement toward death? How might the dog, for Angela, offer a way to resist the future of domestication, which the sheep represent, and inhabit the domestic as an attentive witness with an interior, imaginative world that matters? How does the dog accompany Angela in her shapeshifting through different spaces?

## II The Interiority of Dogs + Black Girls



Fig. 7 Still from Burnett, *Killer of Sheep* (9:45)

<sup>114</sup>Upon further research, I can confirm that paddywack is indeed a term used by meatpackers to refer to the neck ligament in cattle and sheep (“nuchal ligament”). Because it is tough and chewy, it is commonly sold as dog treats. Paddywack derives from the Old English word, paxwax, which held the same meaning (“paxwax”). However, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, “paddywack” has other meanings as well. It is also a derogatory term for an Irish man and can also mean to whack or beat.

This image is the moment around which this chapter turns. Nine minutes into the film, Angela appears in this mask. Framed between two open doors – on a threshold – she is silent, watching and listening to the adults in the kitchen. This shot is composed of lines and grids. The steady grid of the kitchen tile, the lines on her shirt, and the rectangles depressed into the doors set Angela’s figure in relief – she stands out in this small opening between two doors. She stands, hands clasped below her stomach, pointing us perhaps toward the pregnant future upon which this film ends. As the camera cuts between her father having a conversation with his friend while fixing the sink, her hands go to her mouth, conveying innocence and an infantile quality. She is in the kitchen but not quite, occupying a vestibular space between one living space and another.<sup>115</sup> The dog mask, even more so, stands out against this hyperlinear composition of this liminal space as a surreal imposition – perhaps comic, defiant to insert an element of surprise to the certainty of grids.<sup>116</sup>

Furthermore, the dog mask appears genderless. We only learn that beneath this melancholy mask is a Black girl after about two minutes, when a boy offscreen calls “Angie” and Angela leaves the kitchen to meet him by the fence, still masked and silent. I am thus interested in how Angela appears on multiple thresholds, held in this interior even as the film gestures toward her exceeding the domestic interior through her affiliations with animal others – sheep and dogs. Furthermore, I claim that the profound ambiguity of this moment gestures toward Angela’s imaginative interiority and capacity for what Saidiya Hartman describes as the

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<sup>115</sup> Saidiya Hartman’s description of the hallway comes to mind here: “The hallway is a space uneasy with expectation and tense with the force of unmet desire” (*Wayward Lives* 23). I also think of Audre Lorde’s doorway in “A Litany for Survival”: “for those of us who cannot indulge/ the passing dreams of choice/ who love in doorways coming and going” (lines 4-6).

<sup>116</sup> Thank you to Dr. Andrew Burke who drew my attention to the cartoon dog, Droopy Dog, summoned by Angela’s mask. Droopy Dog was an animated character from the 1940s (“droopy”). While beyond the scope of this chapter, it is significant to think of the questions of anthropomorphism and animatedness this reference raises.

“ambulatory possibility” of the wayward despite the lines and grids of the domestic interior (227). What does the dog open up for her in this moment and how does it open viewers up, tethering us to her presence, asking us to follow her in her quiet lurkings?

In this section, I will establish the substantial links between Angela and the other animals who occupy the peripheries of this film and are central to these edges and cuts upon which the film hinges. While I do not argue that Angela and the animals can be easily mapped on to each other, I do want to acknowledge Zakiyyah Iman Jackson’s argument that “Black female flesh persistently functions as the limit case of ‘the human’ and is its matrix figure” (4). Angela’s relationship with dogs and sheep, therefore, positions her within this figuration. From there, putting Kevin Quashie’s concept of quiet, attentiveness, and Black interiorities, Joshua Bennett’s reading of Blackness and animality, and Colin Dayan’s meditations on dogs, temporality, and interiority, into conversation, I ask how we might read this triangulation between Angela, dogs, and sheep. How does Angela demand to be seen at the same time as, in her persistent watching and shapeshifting, refuse to be limited or framed by domestic walls or domesticating practices?

While the mask tethers Angela to dogs, she is pulled in relation to sheep in two ways. First, as noted above, the film cuts between sheep being slaughtered and children at play. The motions of sheep and children are held together in their shared horizontal movements and horizons of meaning left open. In its cinematic cuts between the spaces of children – at play in the streets or at the kitchen table of the domestic home – and spaces of meat production, the film forges a bleed between these spaces in the ways that sounds repeat or spill over as well as in the ways the film symbolically strings them together. Second, the film figures her in intimate proximity to her father – she accompanies him on his mundane errands and she is the only one who touches him tenderly with his sensitive reciprocation. For example, in a doubling of the

bedroom scene between Stan and his wife, Angela massages Stan's shoulders and strokes his face at the kitchen table. While he turns away from his wife's embrace, he looks resolutely at Angela, demonstrating the tender connection between them. I thus argue that her coming of age, while not the sole focus of the film, happens in the shadows of her father and his meatpacking labour.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, James Naremore notes that Stan's son "drops out of the last part of the film" while Angela reappears again and again (32). "A key witness to adult behavior," she follows her father on his quotidian movements around the neighbourhood and through their home (33). Therefore, even though Angela never physically breaches the slaughterhouse space, the film figures her in relation to it and its animals through this alignment with her father. That is not to say, however, that motherhood and the heteronormative lines for girlhood do not press on Angela. Even as the film gestures towards other ways of being for Angela through her alignments with animals and her father, Burnett also, for example, shows Angela singing to her white doll alongside her mother putting on makeup, showing how her girlhood articulates itself within these expected performative frames.

Angela's continued presence in this film asks viewers to follow her as a significant figure at the same time as it points to the difficulty in seeing her – she occupies a threshold. Her peripheral position on the threshold points to the ongoing history of Black girls in America not being seen as children or not being seen as mattering at all. Nazera Sadiq Wright, in *Black*

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<sup>117</sup> Close relationships between girls and their meatpacking fathers is a recurring theme I have been following throughout these meatpacking texts, which are also often coming of age texts in some way. I am curious about the prominence of fathers in these texts. While I will pick up on this thread later, especially in Chapter Four, a few other more contemporary texts are worth mentioning here. See Lynda Barry's illustrated novel, *Cruddy* (1999), which follows Roberta's movements across the abject American Midwest in the steps of her father, heir to a meatpacking plant. Roberta navigates her relationship to her own body, which is often positioned as abject, meat-like and surrounded by flies, in relation to her father's knife. See also Sarah Rose Etter's *The Book of X*, a novel written in verse in which Cassie, a girl with a knot in her stomach, finds her way in the violent world of men. She labours with her father on their family meat farm, although this meat farm is a dystopic operation, in which they must mine for meat under the surface of the earth. *The Book of X* makes strange and surreal both meat and the bodies of girls.

*Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century*, remarks that, “during slavery, black women were not protected in their girlhood” and that, as a category, girlhood did not even really exist as “slavery warped the timeline of maturity for them” (6; 10). At the same time, though, Wright argues that nineteenth-century Black writers often took up questions of “racial inequality, poverty, and discrimination through the prism of black girlhood,” positing her an important figure for thinking through the future (1). Wright further notes that, “as raced, gendered, and youthful figures, black girls occupy a space of in-betweenness, like Hortense Spillers labels ‘not-yet’ subjects: they are not yet citizens and not yet women” (10). Although Wright’s thorough research into representations of Black girlhood in literature and print culture focuses on a century before Angela emerges in *Killer of Sheep*, its argument for “black girlhood as an analytical index” whose “power often takes the form of “premature knowing” still comes to bear considerably on this text (17; 13).

Within the context of 1960s Los Angeles, Angela’s minorhood in the film points to how white supremacy sidelines Black girlhood from categories of childhood at the same time as it points to her possibility for disruption.<sup>118</sup> Christina Sharpe writes of what she calls “blackness’s signifying surplus,” in which “meaning slides [and] signification slips, when words like *child*, *girl*, *mother*, and *boy* about blackness [...] Black children are consistently seen as being older than

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<sup>118</sup> My use of minorhood, here, holds Toni Morrison and Saidiya Hartman in its fold. See my introduction of this dissertation for more on the minor. When I write minor, I conjure Morrison’s words, in the Afterword of *The Bluest Eye*, on the narrative “draw[ing] the connection between a minor destabilization in seasonal flora and the insignificant destruction of a black girl. Of course, ‘minor’ and ‘insignificant’ represent the outside world’s view - for the girls [Claudia and Frieda], both phenomena are earthshaking depositories of information they spend that whole year of childhood (and afterward) trying to fathom, and cannot” (214). Morrison illuminates these ‘minor’ lives with such care and tenderness to show the attentive worlds within them. In a similar way, Saidiya Hartman’s *Wayward Lives* offers an extraordinary model for how we might follow “the minor lives” of Black girls who have been “appended” in history’s archives (15). The minor as a register of feelings, the minor as an optic for arresting movement or erasure, the minor as a mode of possibility.

they are and are therefore, never really considered children” (80).<sup>119</sup> Charles Burnett’s film shows Black children playing, watching, leaping, teasing, listening, looking out windows in deep thought, but the rocks they throw and the way the camera tracks their movements show how the criminalization and policing of their bodies is always already looming. In a 1981 interview, Burnett stresses the importance of children to *Killer of Sheep*:

Without children, there is no survival [...] When you’re growing up, it [experience] poses some moral problems. You become more and more insensitive: the only thing that matters is survival [...] survival implies a great deal of mistrust [...] That’s why I show these children in *Killer of Sheep* always there, attentive to what their parents are doing, witnesses of everyday drama. (in Kapsis 8)

It is significant that it is Angela, and not Stan’s son, who is the watchful one, listening in order to survive, haunting the world of adults by her persistent presence.

Both animals and Angela exist on the peripheries of the film. Sarah O’Brien writes, “animals populate various registers of the film, yet they remain always at the periphery [...] Through choices of sound, framing, and editing, the film explicitly codes its nonhuman subjects as marginal. Yet it does so precisely to fold the underlying logic of this move back on itself” (“Revenons” 228). O’Brien tends to the ways the sheep, in what she calls the “penultimate slaughterhouse sequence,” confront viewers with their look to the camera, “direct” and “unnerving” even as they occupy the peripheries of the film (214). This look, among other formal and aesthetic strategies used by Burnett, positions sheep and nonhuman animals in

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<sup>119</sup> Nicole King, in a virtual conversation with Kandice Chuh, titled “Fictions of Black Childhood” expresses that Black childhood, and particularly Black girlhood, is often denied. She notes a tendency to see Black children as older than they are. White supremacy’s denial of Black childhood has violent and harmful effects. Treva B. Lindsey, in *America, Goddam*, for example, notes the many violences against young Black girls that punctuate American Civil Rights history as well as our present moment, claiming that America “forces Black women and girls into unlivable living” (9).

“undecidable proximity” with human life, urging audiences to reflect on their ethical relationship with animal others (216). I argue, however, that race and Blackness, which O’Brien does not address, are essential in calculating these species intimacies and “undecidable proximit[ies]” (216).

David C. Wall and Michael T. Martin, for example, point out how sheep and Blackness intersect, especially in the image of the Black sheep, who is seen at the end of the film in the sea of white.<sup>120</sup> Another entangled history is the racial discourse of nineteenth century pseudo-scientists who, in their descriptions of ‘Africans,’ ascribe them with animalized characteristics, among them, “woolly hair”. In *New Growth: The Art and Texture of Black Hair*, Jasmine Nichole Cobb notes that this discourse intensifies in America with the rise of Darwinism and evolutionary discourses which, in their search for common origins, are just as concerned with positing whiteness as superior to the “savagery” and “animality” of Blackness (78). Cobb directs us to the archive of advertisements for freedom seekers compiled by Graham Russell Hodges and Alan Edward Brown in “*Pretends to be Free*”: *Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey*, which reveals that descriptors of “woolly hair” were commonly used by enslavers in these Southern newspaper advertisements (78).<sup>121</sup>

Furthermore, reading this entangled history through Joshua Bennett’s lens helps us attend to the entanglements between sheep as livestock and enslaved Black subjects – both forced to

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<sup>120</sup> Wall and Martin write, “The sheep embodies and expresses a myriad of discourse that carry the burden of history for Black America” (14). Some examples of discourses the list include their “containment” within a “corralled” space, “the oppressive and alienating nature of surplus labor within capitalist relations,” and “the nature of innocence, experience, and redemption” (14-15).

<sup>121</sup> These descriptions come up again and again in pseudo-scientific texts of the nineteenth century. See, for example, Peter A. Browne, an American pseudo-scientist attempting to divide the human race into species according to their hair samples, who writes, as summarized by Thomas F. Gossett, that the hair of the African race is “more like wool than like the hair of a white man” (in Ernest 185 ). Furthermore, he notes that “the hair of the white man *will not felt*, but the wool of the Negro *will felt*” (italics in original; in Ernest 185).

reproduce and labour in captivity while existing as property.<sup>122</sup> Even though Burnett's film is post-slavery, slavery undeniably haunts its spaces. Bennett remarks "a kinship forced in unthinkable violence" between livestock and Black subjects, noting the "the all-too-fraught proximity between the enslaved black person and the nonhuman animal [who are] positioned [...] as *twin* captives, affixed by modernity's long arc" (1-2). Although positioned as proximate, Jackson also reminds us "animalization is a privileged method of biopolitical expression of antiblackness; however [...] binaristic frameworks such as 'humanization versus dehumanization' and 'human versus animal' are insufficient to understand a biopolitical regime that develops technologies of humanization in order to refigure Blackness as abject human animality," with slavery being one such regime (20). There is violence in this proximity between Stan, Angela and the slaughter of sheep as it points to their shared histories of forced labour, reproduction, and entertainment. Bennett, however, proposes that "unfettered possibility" might arise out of this proximity" (2; 4). For Black creators and thinkers, the animal poses significant theoretical, aesthetic, social, political, and emotional possibilities, with Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* being one such text (3). Significant frictions arise between Black girlhood, sheep as livestock who are bred and domesticated, and the dog as the wolf's descendent, straddling domestic and wild. What do these two animals afford Angela in terms of her capacities for temporal and physical movement, for interiority and building an interior that perhaps opens a threshold beyond the frames of pregnancy that hold this film in its open and close?

While the sheep's "arresting gaze" is O'Brien's focus, the dog, with Angela masked, is another hold that demands attention ("Revenons" 216). The sheep and the Angela in the dog mask are both held in frames – the sheep within the various fences, lines, walls, and enclosures

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<sup>122</sup> For the history of 'breeding' and selling enslaved Black women, see Ned and Constance Sublette's *The American Slave Coast: A History of the Slave Breeding Industry*. See also footnote 95 on page 125.

of the slaughterhouse and Angela within domestic frames of doorways or windows. If the sheep's direct look to the camera disrupts the species frame, what sort of disruption does Angela's dog mask pose? O'Brien claims that the moment of Angela meeting audiences for the first time, staring through the dog mask, is the most surreal moment in the film. This moment, she argues, blurs boundaries between waking and dreaming, between animal and human, even more so than the jarring cuts between the slaughterhouse, children, and the home ("Revenons" 237-38). O'Brien writes: "The splicing of human and animal in Angie's mask produces an inscrutable image, yet one that we can at least begin to read in the context of the film's sustained acknowledgement of an incalculable human-animal reciprocity" (237). O'Brien even draws comparisons between this image and surrealist works of art which "splice [...] [the] human and animal," depicting half-breeds and hybrids," arguing that "these figures are alike in their resistance to overt metaphorization or narrative causality" (237-38).<sup>123</sup> This interspecies splicing, though, means differently when affixed to a Black girl. Furthermore, it is attached very specifically to the dog – a species whose conjuring, I argue, is significant for the ways in which their sentience and interiority are figured.

In appearing to audiences first with the head of a dog with drooping eyes, exaggeratedly melancholy features, Angela forges an intimacy with an animal other than the titular sheep of the film whose deaths we witness in jarring cuts.<sup>124</sup> In this move away from the sheep who are central to the film, Angela aligns her motive – her future – with the dog. This dog, who occupies a threshold, like Angela, between the domestic and the street, figures Angela into a frame askew

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<sup>123</sup> O'Brien references René Magritte's inverted mermaid in *The Collective Invention* (1934) and Man Ray's *Minotaur* (1933) as two examples of surrealist visual works that Angela's presence in the dog mask recall.

<sup>124</sup> As I pondered the link between Angela and dogs, I discovered the Californian urban legend of "The Dog Woman of Watts". In 1961, there were repeat occurrences of residents witnessing "a strange dog-like creature with a woman's face" over the span of a summer's day ("The Dog Woman of Watts").

to those that the film foreshadows for her at the same time as it offers a way for Angela to shape-shift, figuring out a way to listen, see, and be seen.<sup>125</sup> Angela's dog mask disrupts these frames – between species, spaces, and of expected reproductive futures – to articulate a threshold space where anything seems possible. Does Angela need this dog mask to be seen? Is it easier to see a dog than a Black girl?

Angela and the dog mask come together to form a sort of minor space – a hallway, a threshold, an edge whose minorness tugs at the centre of this film, an opening, an otherwise. The dog mask alerts us to the dogs barking in the background of the film. One way we might read the barking is as an echo, a hesitation between foreground and background, pointing Angela toward a queer horizon. That is, the presence of the dog in the mask and the sounds from elsewhere stop us – creating a delay and subsequently carving out a time for Angela that perhaps leads her in a direction away from domesticity, away from the reproduction of her mother's role. Kathryn Bond Stockton notes that the dog and the queer girl share a curious literary entangling. In reading *Mrs. Dalloway's* portrayal of Elizabeth, Clarissa's daughter, and her relationship with her dog, Stockton argues that this relationship points to Elizabeth's queer turning away from her mother's heteronormative trajectory. Stockton writes, "One gets the sense of the dog as delay – the dog as pause – as marking Elizabeth's space for suspension and lateral movement on the threshold of adulthood, which makes the dog [...] an ally in the schemes of resistance" (97). For

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<sup>125</sup> I conjure Aimee Cox in my use of the word "shapeshifting". In her book, *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship*, Cox frames her study of the lived experiences of Black girls at a Detroit homeless shelter. I am drawn to how she uses this term as a form of choreography – how Black girls shift space as acts of survival, self-definition, resistance, and love. Cox explains that she is most inspired by the definition of shapeshifting taken from puzzle solving – "defined as a method used to 'find solutions, master concentration, recall, recontextualize ideas, and map out plans'" (Schreiber in Cox 28). Cox further writes, "the emphasis on memory and mapping is significant because they reflect the ways in which young Black women mobilize history, whether officially documented or bricolaged through recall and desire, to give new meaning to social contexts that engender cartographic capacities beyond particular physical or ideological sites" (28). Angela, in her use of the dog mask inside and outside of the home, she shapeshifts to be seen, yet unintelligibly.

Angela, the dog mask signifies a departure from how we might expect to first encounter her. The dog, I think, functions similarly to how Stockton reads Elizabeth and her dog in that Angela and her dog mask are physically suspended on the threshold – close enough to the kitchen to watchfully witness the adult conversations taking place but not quite at the table, still with the capacity to move laterally toward a different space and way of being. Furthermore, Angela and her dog mask enact a sort of “pause,” fixing audiences in this surreal moment, asking us to stay in this delay of the question it poses but defers any answers.

For Stockton, the dog acts as a “time-machine,” facilitating movements into non-heteronormative time for its human companions. Elizabeth, in caring for “her dog most of all” articulates how she “cannot be in mother-time” (Stockton 97). Angela’s first apparition in the dog mask also positions her in a queer time that is characterized by the delay about which Stockton writes. Angela is poised on thresholds – suspensions of space and meaning – stopping audiences with her masked yet inquisitive look (95). Does the dog, appearing with her on this threshold, offer her a horizon beyond a pregnant future – which both opens and ends the film? Does the dog offer a queer horizon not articulated through the film but through a mask, an interspecies crossing? The dog mask holds Angela open to multiple futures. It also allows her to move beyond the domestic space. Finally, it positions Angela as a figure who we cannot look away from yet cannot quite seem to see.

In the span of Angela’s appearance in the mask the dog moves with her from the hallway to the alley to alongside a fence, all threshold spaces. Right before she is called outside by a whistle, much like a dog, her brother and then two men jostle her mask, ignoring her protestations to stop. The mask is protection to the world of men. Angela runs out the door to the fence facing the back lane. She stops and stares directly at the camera, in a shot composed

perfectly by the rule of thirds so that she commands our gaze.<sup>126</sup> The camera follows her as she runs alongside the fence, one hand in her mouth, one hand grasping the fence so she can hit her hips against it. She says nothing. She looks to the boy who has called her out. She looks away and then to the camera. Again, the mask is protection against the world of men.

Even though Angela rarely speak in the film, the dog mask facilitates her resistance at the same time as it positions her as imaginative and inquisitive. Angela witnesses domestic scenes of disrepair and mundane actions through the dog mask, quiet and minor yet undeniably affixing our attention, and thus claims, as I argue, an interiority for Black girlhood beyond the white supremacist frames and roles set for her. Colin Dayan’s meditations on living with dogs illuminate the ways in which the dog, like Angela, is an attentive witness at the edges of various thresholds – a “bridge,” as Dayan theorizes, that “joins persons to things, life to death” and, I would add, the wild to the domestic (xiii). Through Dayan’s artful words, dogs emerge as graceful yet fierce witnesses to violent human worlds. For example, Dayan describes a scene in a Jacques Cousteau film in which seamen slaughter sharks en masse and, at the end, the only “nonhuman creature [that] remains alive as a witness [is] a dog” (xi). Dayan goes on to describe how, after this scene of bloody violence,

only the dog responds with what we can interpret as spot-on in its gentle, unremitting regard [...] a kind of consideration that is not contemptuous or peremptory [...] muteness pregnant with meaning, the dog’s regard matters, even though viewers don’t know what to make of it. (xii)

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<sup>126</sup> The rule of thirds is used in photography and visual art and signals the ideal composition for an image. This composition divides an image “evenly into thirds, horizontally, and vertically” (Nashville Film Institute). Ideally, you would place the focal point of the image at an intersection of the grid.

Angela's quiet witnessing of the world of *Killer of Sheep* may be read in this way as well. The violence she witnesses is not the kind of bloodbath described by Dayan but violence is undeniably embedded in the structures she must survive. Through this droopy dog mask, we see a Black family building and making joy, despite carrying the weight of histories of enslavement, the demonization of the Black family and breaking of kinship bonds, police violence, and structural racism. Life may be deferred by tires popping on their way to the fairgrounds, life may be exhausted by labours in the slaughterhouse, but play prevails and so does love, tenderness, and sensitivity. When Burnett cuts back and forth from Angela in the dog mask to the adults talking and fixing sinks in the kitchen, the camera angle is low, as if from the point of view of Angela, a child.

The dog, summoned by the dog mask, thus acts as a guide to Angela, helping her name what she sees and knows but cannot quite articulate. Dayan's theorization of canine companions and temporality offers a way of reading Angela as a threshold figure.<sup>127</sup> Dayan writes, for example, that "dogs sense change. They know the irretrievable before bad things come to pass. They can sense the future but they also remember" (37). Angela's presence on thresholds and at fences – two transitional or border spaces – coupled with the dog mask imbues her, I would argue, with this same prescience, or, as Dayan describes of dogs, she "bears the burden of

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<sup>127</sup> For another theorization of dogs as companions, see Donna Haraway's "The Companion Species Manifesto." In this piece, Haraway theorizes dogs as "companion species" with whom our lives are intimately entangled. Haraway stresses our entanglements with companion species, of which dogs are an example of, but also argues for the recognition of difference in these acts of relating: "we are training each other in acts of communication we barely understand. We are, constitutively, companion species. We make each other up, in the flesh. Significantly other to each other, in specific difference" (94-95). Haraway takes seriously the fleshy presence of dogs, attending to the specificity of their genetic histories and species difference, writing that "dogs are not surrogates for theory [...] They are here to live with" (97). While I acknowledge Haraway's prominence in the field of critical animal studies, I have chosen not to engage primarily with Haraway's figuration of dogs and companion species because I believe that Joshua Bennett's figuration of animals alongside human others tackles race with a complexity and care that Haraway lacks. I also have chosen to focus more on Colin Dayan's engagement with dogs. In Dayan I found the creative and affective potential of dogs as inner worlds of their own compelling in a way that I do not quite find in Haraway's more scientific and technological focus.

revelation” (xiii). Like dogs with their “unprecedented and peculiar attentiveness,” Angela plots herself into a future, carving out her own epistemological interior, even as she inhabits domestic frames (Dayan 10). Angela in the dog mask stops the time of the film – a delay that stays viewers in its heavy stare. I still feel like I cannot articulate what all this image holds but I maintain that, if anything, it fixes Angela as a minor edge that tugs at the film’s dispersed centre; the dog mask is resistant to closure, quiet and unsettling. Furthermore, this image, which “requires paying attention in a different way,” locates this film within what Kevin Quashie calls the “aesthetic of quiet” (6). Quiet is how this chapter will end. <sup>128</sup>

As I follow Angela through my many viewings of this film, I cannot help but think of Claudia and Frieda in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*: how they notice this difference between looking and seeing, their attentiveness to the adult worlds and words that they cannot yet articulate but undeniably know are unjust. <sup>129</sup> Morrison matters, here, and I hold Claudia and Frieda as literary figures who might help theorize Angela’s watchful presence in Burnett’s film. bell hooks, writing on her experience of reading *The Bluest Eye* in *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood*, writes, “and most of all she [Morrison] gave us black girls who were critical thinkers, theorizing their lives, telling the story, and by so doing making themselves subjects of history” (xii). While Angela’s narrative takes place on a visual rather than literary or linguistic register, the narrative she plots – in her alignments with dogs, sheep, and thresholds – is a way of telling a certain story of Black girlhood as it is lived in interior spaces through a rich interior world. Manthia Diawara even notes that Burnett’s “symbolic narratives” share an affinity with the

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<sup>128</sup> “Quiet as it’s kept” is how Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* begins. This phrase always stops me as I enter that text. I think of it always as I write the word quiet and I summon its power here.

<sup>129</sup> See *The Bluest Eye* on Claudia and Frieda’s witnessing of the adult world: “We do not, cannot, know the meanings of all their words, for we are nine and ten years old. So we watch their faces, their hands, their feet, and listen for truth in timbre” (15). And, “Or maybe we didn’t remember; we just knew. We had defended ourselves since memory against everything and everybody, considered all speech a code to be broken by us, and all gestures subject to careful analysis; we had become headstrong, devious, and arrogant” (191).

expressive novels of Toni Morrison, among other Black feminist writers, because of how they “stop time to render audible and visible Black voices and characters that have been suppressed by centuries of Eurocentrism” (11). Angela’s, along with Claudia and Frieda’s, persistent witnessing points to her attentiveness, which, in turn, gestures toward her rich interior and imaginative world. Put another way, her quiet watchfulness and her threshold status gesture toward a puzzling undecipherability that demands attention at the same time as it protects her from being categorized. This brings us to Kevin Quashie’s notion of quiet.

### III The Quiet Interior

I argue that Burnett’s film is a quiet text, following Quashie’s theorization. Burnett’s careful attention to the Black interior – its domestic space, its everyday gestures, its mundane joys – and his vigilant yet tender following of Angela – a Black girl whose minor appearances on thresholds, in dog masks, and alongside her meatpacking father articulates a consideration for her capacities for shape-shifting into futures beyond frames that hold her make this film a quiet text. I contend that the image of Angela poised on the threshold of the kitchen, watchful in her dog mask with its melancholic eyes, positions Angela as a quiet subject, whose “capacity to notice and appreciate is her agency” (Quashie 50).<sup>130</sup> Burnett’s representation of Angela makes Black girlhood visible at the same time as it remains beyond the frame – it hungers, its “interior is expansive, voluptuous, creative” (Quashie 21). The final section of this chapter asks how Burnett uses particular cinematic devices, notably the use of episodic structure, low camera angles, and the composition of interior space, to develop a quiet aesthetic in which the Black

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<sup>130</sup> Quashie, here, refers to the titular protagonist of Gwendolyn Brooks’s *Maud Martha*, whose life is told to us in vignettes that tend to the small things that make up a life. See his chapter 3: “Maud Martha and the Practice of Paying Attention”.

interior and Angela as a Black girl with profound interiority, emerge as subjects and spaces for possibility.

Quashie notes the limits to dominant representations and frameworks for Blackness in popular cultural texts in that Blackness “is often described as expressive, dramatic, or loud” (3). Quashie writes that “much of the discourse of racial blackness imagines black people as subjects with identities formed and articulated and resisted in public [...] the idea of quiet, then, can shift attention to what is interior” (8).<sup>131</sup> For Quashie, quiet is a Black aesthetic that pushes against this limiting understanding of Blackness and its aesthetics as always political, loud, and public. Instead, quiet is an attentiveness to the interior and its capacities for creativity, thought, and imagination in the quotidian. Quashie explains that interior is a “slippery” concept but that it signifies “a quality of being inward, a ‘metaphor’ for ‘life and creativity beyond the public face of stereotype and limited imagination” (21). Essentially, “quiet is the syntax of possibility, the capacity of the inner life” (134). Kevin Quashie takes up multiple texts in which the form and/or characters are quiet – Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Gwendolyn Brooks’s *Maud Martha*, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, and Julie Dash’s film, *Daughters of the Dust*, which is, in fact, often read alongside *Killer of Sheep* (132). *Beloved*, *Maud Martha*, and *Killer of Sheep* also all take place within the home, featuring detailed descriptions of mundane life and interior spaces.

Burnett’s film, I argue, is another example of a quiet text: its form is quiet and its characters, notably Angela and Stan, are quiet in their gestures and inhabitations of space in that they are attentive, watchful and sensitive. Burnett’s film, as Paula Massood notes, is made up of “a series of dramatic narrative vignettes” – wherein scenes are disconnected, strung together by a

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<sup>131</sup> Simone Drake’s aforementioned reading of Stan’s sensitivity as a counter to dominant representations of Black masculinity aligns with reading this as a quiet text.

symbolic rather than linear narrative thread, and it attends to the “rhythms of everyday life” (153; Corbin 36). Whereas many slaughterhouse films use montage to build a powerful affective response in viewers, Burnett’s strung-together scenes do not amount to anything. Although disjointed, there is a softness and sensitivity to the way that, in their threading together, they are somehow stagnant at the same time as everything seems possible.<sup>132</sup> As scenes cut to others, action is left unresolved, moments left wide open with nuance, as if the camera has moved on to another subject without placing or ascribing meaning to the last. Quashie similarly describes the form of *Maud Martha*, which he deems a quiet text, as “episodic” in that “no one moment dominates another” and as concerned with “small actions of living” (53; 51). Like the narrative structure of *Killer of Sheep*, the composition of space using camera angles and movement also makes this film a quiet text.

In this composition, Burnett centres Black life within these interiors as complex, intimate, and introspective. In an interview with bell hooks, Arthur Jafa likewise states that Burnett “takes black people's complexities as a given, and he starts from there” (183). Space unfolds with this same complexity in the film; it quivers with life. Early in the film, for example, the camera follows children playing in a long take that demonstrates the aliveness and motion in what seems to be a desolate landscape of dust and abandoned industry. In the home, we hear a child humming along to an Earth, Wind and Fire song. The camera turns a corner to show Angela brushing her white doll’s hair while humming. The camera lingers but also shows her mother in the bathroom, readying her makeup, watching Angela. This space develops slowly, a

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<sup>132</sup> Nicole Shukin and Sarah O’Brien explore this link between animal slaughter and the montage effect perhaps most intensely used by Soviet filmmakers of the 1930s, calling them the “biopolitics of moving images and slaughter” (187). They reference, for example, Sergei Eisenstein’s 1925 film, *Strike*, that affectively moves audience to political action by ‘striking’ spectators with images not only of human laborers organizing, but of cattle being struck down in slaughter (188).

quiet composition in which characters, through their small acts of everyday love and survival, unfold this space around them.<sup>133</sup> It is telling that the home and the family are where Burnett locates a future – despite the stalled cars and broken sinks, the space of the Black interior is full of motion and endurance. bell hooks’s words have weight here: “Whatever the shape and direction of black liberation struggle...domestic space has been a crucial site of resistance” (*Yearning* 47). Valerie Sweeney Prince, furthermore, also locates the home as a central space in African American literary representations (2). She writes, “home is ubiquitous and nowhere at the same time,” noting that often representations of the home use “the language and sentiment of the blues” to articulate these “paradoxical associations” (2). On Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, Prince writes that “the home is untenable – yet it must be defended”: this is “the blues paradox of holdings its opposite within itself” (9). Burnett’s depiction of the home fits this paradox – things break yet there is an undeniable sense of togetherness, the mundane overwhelms yet there is a playfulness and unpredictability, especially in the figure of Angela. Angela’s quiet presence in the shadows of adults asks us to consider what other horizons – beyond heteronormativity perhaps, beyond following her mother – are possible.

Let us return to Angela in the dog mask in the doorway. You may remember that she stands without speaking, her eyes surrogated by the dog staring on at the adults in the kitchen. You may remember that she stands between two thresholds, a droopy dog-eyed mask interrupting the grid of straight lines behind her. Quashie reminds us that quiet is not silence: “Silence [...] is about withholding, absence, and stillness. Quiet, on the other hand, is presence [...] and can encompass fantastic motion” (22). While silence often signals someone watching –

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<sup>133</sup> I carry Saidiya Hartman’s writings on the Black interior here. In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, she writes, of tenement housing, “The black interior is a space for thought and action, for study and vandalism, for love and trouble” (23).

where the reason for silence may be their presence— Quashie contends that “the aesthetic of quiet is watcherless” (22). Quiet places the agency in the act of watching: the watchful listener awaiting in hallways, poised on thresholds, hiding around corners. We might remember, too, Dayan’s descriptions of the dog and their “peculiar attentiveness” (10).

Quiet, as Quashie theorizes, also has something to do with projection, as an interior presencing and imagining of the self into the future through small acts of attentiveness and expression in the present. Quiet is about possibility and, in *Killer of Sheep*, that possibility rests in the figure of Angela: in her gaze through windows, fences, her presence in doorways, and, most importantly through the dog mask. Angela claims quiet as a sort of agency within the frames of the domestic in that her interior is a form of motion or motive that allows her to inhabit the domestic as a creative and private rather than procreative or public space. The dog, who is a threshold being as well as a domestic companion who, as this film shows later on, also inhabits the street as feral, scrappy, semi-wild – is an ally to Angela’s making of space.

Even though this film ends by reasserting its patriarchal frame, as Drake points out – with Stan’s unnamed wife hosting a gathering of neighbourhood women where one guest announces her pregnancy right before the film cuts to the final scene in the slaughterhouse – I argue that Angela can be read as a site of resistance to these frames (49). Burnett’s film thus points to the domestic interiors and structures limiting her movement – both physical and imaginative – at the same time as her movement within these spaces in masks that confound clear categorization points to her capacity to build an interior world that, while gestured toward in her attentive watching, is unavailable to audiences. Quiet. Hers to keep and hold. Protected and private. By following Angela, Burnett invites us to practice a quiet reading of Blackness and, more particularly, Black girlhood.

While scholars have drawn a link between children and sheep in the film, I argue that Angela is figured more prominently alongside dogs. The dog, both figurative and literal, is what ties Angela to a queer turning away from heteronormative time. The dog points to her prescience akin to Wright's notion of prematurely knowing Black girls whose capacities to resourcefully protect themselves in harmful spaces help them "secure their futures" (13). The dog is a mechanism for projection at the same time as protection. By projection I mean that Angela is unbound from the film's temporal and spatial bounds – her figure follows us, moving her into a future that is held open to possibilities beyond the film's pregnant ending while carrying with her the weight of all she has witnessed.

By projection I also mean to propose that Angela, through the way the film pulls her into semi-alignment with sheep, brings forth something of the past. If the dog points to a future not-yet, the sheep point to the "fraught proximities" between livestock, as domesticated and bred animals, and enslaved Black subjects (Bennett 3). Indeed, her mobility within and outside of the home, even though sometimes limited by walls or windows, sets her apart from the sheep who, throughout the film, are corralled in chutes and moved along lines on hooks. While Angela appears first masked in a threshold, the second to last scene of the film captures Angela in another doorway, this time unmasked, hands on her hips in a defiant posture. The last to enter the house after her parents, Angela stands there one moment longer, framed in the doorway, looking directly at the camera. This moment returns us to her first appearance but in a markedly different way. The final time we see Angela, she is opening the door, looking back once more as her head pokes out to the unknown held in that opening. Her quiet presence on thresholds in this quiet film that holds ambiguity open positions her silent watchfulness as oppositional, as a resistance

to dominant representations of Black life at the same time as she asserts a presence for Black girlhood, making it visible but through a protective mask.

Interlude:

Esch

I wanted the language to be what the question was. I wanted the language to simply hold it.

– Toni Morrison, 1993 Charlie Rose interview

What is it to enact care in a non-place?

– Billy-Ray Belcourt, *A History of My Brief Body*

She is a mother so many times over.

– Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones*

After the end of the world there is silence and light and I  
see it all. My stomach springs forward,  
a yearning seed,<sup>134</sup> bearing the weight of all that was and  
all that will be –  
mother maybe.

*My stomach was its own animal* –<sup>135</sup>

But the first day there is China, turned  
insides blooming blood stained

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<sup>134</sup> The name “Esch,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary translates to grayling, a common freshwater fish, in German. In Old Germanic, it also means a seeded field (“Esch”). Both of these meanings position Esch as a bearer of the living. Indeed, she often refers to the fetus in these natural terms, as a “tadpole grown to the confines of its egg” or as a “tiny wet seed,” for example (77; 122).

<sup>135</sup> Just as in the first two interludes, text in italics are direct quotes from *Salvage the Bones*.

against red earth. Blood lines

sluice sideways, leaks

between here, now, then, when.

Jesmyn Ward, in *Salvage the Bones*, closely binds Esch Batiste, a Black girl, pregnant as Hurricane Katrina draws near, her mother whom Esch witnesses dying in childbirth, and China, a white pit bull terrier who has just given birth to a litter of puppies. While *Salvage the Bones* may not fall as easily as *Getting Mother's Body* as an iteration of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, I argue nonetheless that Esch forms a part of the chorus encompassing Dewey Dell and Billy Beede. Indeed, Sinéad Moynihan claims that Jesmyn Ward "recycles" Faulkner's text, highlighting the political nature of her engagement with Faulkner (551). Moynihan positions Faulkner as a "vehicle" for Ward, in which she takes bits and pieces of Faulkner's form and fictional family, setting it in contemporary Mississippi during Hurricane Katrina, featuring "African-American characters that are subject to 'the biopolitics of disposability' that has resulted from neoliberal and neoconservative incursions on the US welfare state over the past thirty years" (Moynihan 551). There are numerous crossings between Faulkner and Ward's text – for example, Dewey and Esch emerge as the clearest twinned characters, an ecological crisis thwarts motions and motives, the mother's remains haunt both families – but these are not necessarily the reasons I include Esch into the chorus with Dewey Dell and Billy Beede.<sup>136</sup> She, like the two other protagonists, asks us to sit with this uncomfortable yet tender alliance between pregnant girls and domesticated animals: Dewey and the cow, Billy Beede and Jezebel the sow, Esch and China the

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<sup>136</sup> Although both families face ecological crises and are haunted by a dead mother, one of the departures that strikes me the most is the difference in movement between the Bundrens and the Batistes. While the Bundrens move, taking to the road, continuing forth despite facing obstacles, the Batistes stay resolutely in place despite government orders to leave. Sinéad Moynihan highlights the Batiste's lack of mobility: "The Batistes do not heed the evacuation not because they are irresponsible and negligent, but because they have nowhere to go" (555). The Bundren's hold enough privilege that they can move while the Batiste's must salvage what they can of home by staying where they are.

fighting pit bull terrier. Their wombs bear unto each other; both girl and animal are forever changed.

*Salvage the Bones* opens with China giving birth; Esch watches as she “turn[s] herself inside out” (4). It is significant that Ward begins with a dog. Indeed, Esch emerges with China at her side: she wonders if China “made me get it [the pregnancy test]” and, as she comes to accept her pregnancy, she looks to China to negotiate the tangled lines of care and harm that make up her understanding of motherhood (Ward 30). Esch draws horizontal lines between herself and China: “You are pregnant. I am pregnant” (36). She tethers their fates together as they both face pregnancy and birth on the threshold of a hurricane. China offers one such future of mothering in which a fierce protection is needed in the face of imminent loss. And this “I” in which Esch resides matters, too. As Moynihan aptly points out, “Ward narrows Faulkner’s fifteen narrators down to one, thus privileging Esch’s voice and experience” (552). Esch’s “I” comes into being through her “eye”: her power lies in her capacity to see the poetic minutia of her small but lush world. She is resolutely in her body and keenly empathetic to the bodies around her; “bodies tell stories,” she says, and she is the one who gives these stories body (83). Although Esch takes up space narratively by holding the sole focal point, and indeed narrating this world with ornate prose, she takes up little space in the world she inhabits – her dialogue is sparse, she is quiet, on the fringes of her brothers and the boys of Bois Sauvage.<sup>137</sup> Chiara Margiotta argues that Esch has a “shaky sense of self [that] is illustrated [...] through her frequent identification with animals” (147). I argue that it is in fact the animals who bring her so closely to herself, helping her see a future as a mother. Animals show Esch models for mothering, demonstrating the tricky

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<sup>137</sup> Zsuzsanna Lénárt-Muszka makes a similar observation about Esch as a prominent yet “decentered” narrator (136). Noting the few lines Esch actually speaks aloud, Lénárt-Muszka claims “her perspective might be central, but she herself is not” (136).

lines between care and harm – a cat licking her kittens, a dog killing her pup because there is no other way. In witnessing China painfully become a mother to puppies she knows will follow her line as fighters bred for profit, Esch learns that “this is love, and it hurts” (94).

No, but before the first day there is Mama, torn  
open on the couch, her last words I love –  
A tender touch first thing in the morning, the same  
hands that twist the necks of chickens, Mama  
holding together as you tear us apart.

*The body of a mother is a body that can no longer hold itself together.*

Skeet is a mother, too, tending  
his beloved China and her brood.  
But also a master breeding a line  
of fighters, suckling razor blades, bone  
white, *bounded by blood.*

*She will know that I have kept watch, that I have fought. China will bark and call me sister.*

*She will know that I am a mother.*

It matters that China is a pit bull terrier, a breed that Joshua Bennett reminds us is considered “*low life*,” as “always already criminalized [...] a pit bull but also fighting dog, a double outlaw” (154). Bennett attributes the interspecies connection between Esch and China to their “shared exclusion from the realm of the proper” (154). They also, though, share being subjects whose wombs are not their own. Colin Dayan turns the name of this breed around in a way that strikes me as so telling of Ward’s novel: “a dog bred for the pit” (81). Esch and her brothers, of course, call the land on which their home stands the Pit. With connotations of the low and discarded, Esch narrates the Pit as full of life or the potential for new life: objects in disrepair are salvaged, nothing left behind, and, as Skeet tells us “everything deserves to live” (213). So China, the pit bull terrier, gives birth to a litter of puppies in the Pit. She and the Batiste family are already fighting against categorization that sees them as disposable, as not worthy of salvation. Salvation, salvage, savage.

Colin Dayan outlines the “old Cajun rules” of dog fighting, noting that “the dogs continue fighting until one of them ‘turns,’ which is defined as turning the head and shoulders away from the opponent” (82). This turn away is the first sign of defeat. Indeed, Esch is impeccably attuned to these slight turns or movements of the body. As a sort of invisible presence in this world of brothers and boys, she sees how light hits their figures, she sees their slight glances and the tenderness in their movements despite their wildness. Joshua Bennett describes her as having “a keen attention to the way categories fold onto and over one another and never without the potential for loss” (151). Esch’s attention to what is in relief allows both objects and subjects an uncertain fixity in space – they are never quite pinned down, they are held but for a moment, in motion, in her descriptions. Esch is thus also held in a sort of threshold; self and other, human and animal, lover and beloved, mother and fetus, are never quite

distinct beings or categories. Perhaps this is because, as Sarah Hopkinson suggests, the Batiste family operates according to “horizontal kinship networks” (13). Hopkinson looks to Hortense Spillers’s assertion that slavery created the conditions for these forms of kinship networks (13). Because slavery legally and geographically severed vertical kinships by blood line, it “forc[ed] captive communities to build ties ‘*across* the landscape to others,” and I would add, across species (Spillers in Hopkinson 13).

Furthermore, Joshua Bennett, in his reading of Carl Phillips’s poem “White Dog,” which he reads alongside *Salvage the Bones*, argues that Phillips “models for the reader a vision of belonging without ownership, kinship against the logic of private property” (145). In a similar way, Bennett claims that *Salvage the Bones* works through “distinctly *wild* kinship relations” in which love is almost always also destruction and leaves hurt on the surface (152). Bennett elaborates that these “wild kinship relations,” like those between China, Esch, and the Batiste siblings, “have emerged in the wake of the loss of potential for a nuclear family,” a relation haunted by the ghosts of mothers lost yet held in possibility by mothers becoming (152). However, the non-nuclear family in *Salvage the Bones* does not follow the dominant stereotype of the pathologized Black family. Instead, despite the breakages that surround, Esch is continuously supported by her brothers – love lasts beyond the end of time marked by the hurricane, it is the staying and putting back together of pieces. Alive at the end of the world, this family persists, with Esch leaving the last page with a long string of sentences in the future tense. In the wake of what was, we are left with a series of ‘wills’ (Ward 258). Esch repeats the phrase, “alive, alive, alive,” a testament to the futurity of the Black family and community. Esch leaves us with a world that will, that is still, alive and hopeful – she carries a seed of the future that is

also the past, with the intent to name her future daughter Rose, after her mother. Another girl at the end of the world with animals at her side.

There is Medea, too, in the mythological before –  
 after she gives and gives, he leaves her  
 nothing, no place.<sup>138</sup> Grief and rage are consuming  
 companions to carry in a wild heart. Heavy  
 weather necessarily breaks.

*China is bloody-mouthed and bright-eyed as Medea. If she could speak, this is what I would ask her: Is this what motherhood is?*

Both China and Esch are mothers against their will, in different ways. China is the prized fighter of the family who is bred for profit. She is a breeder. Esch describes China “draw[ing] blood” as Kilo, the prized fighter father to her pups, impregnates her (95). Conception is always already a violence. Even though Esch and Manny had consensual sex, she is pregnant because of the barriers to accessing birth control for young Black women in the South. Chiara Margiotta highlights this point in her analysis of Ward’s representation of Black teenage motherhood, arguing that her pregnancy “is enforced figuratively by forms of state-sanctioned neglect” of the reproductive rights of Black women (144). Esch underscores the lack of birth control or abortion access when she says: “I wouldn’t be able to find [...] the birth control pills; I’ve never had a

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<sup>138</sup>Medea emerges in Ward’s novel as Esch has been assigned the myth of Jason and the Argonauts as summer reading. This myth returns in bits and pieces but what is striking is that Esch does not even arrive to the aftermath of this myth, wherein Medea kills her children. Instead, Esch is stuck on the moment where Medea kills her brother.

prescription, wouldn't have the money to get them if I did, don't have any girlfriends to ask for some, and have never been to the health department" (Ward 103). She knows her options are "narrow to none" (Ward 103). Dorothy Roberts details the many barriers, historical and contemporary, to Black women's reproductive rights and the "legacy of punishing Black motherhood" – from the barring of enslaved women's rights to their children to the much higher likelihood of pregnancy-related complications in Black women to the forced sterilization of Black women in the South, at its peak in the 1970s, to the increased barriers Black women face in accessing abortion services in their communities than white women (xi; 32; xiv; 122; 234). Roberts also makes visible the criminalization of Black motherhood, as seen in the stereotype of the welfare queen (18). But Margiotta, following Sinéad Moynihan, argues that "Ward subverts this notion of Black teenage mothers as 'waste'" or disposable (143). The relation between Esch and China tugs at these categories, showing how Esch's future as a mother is always already tied up in questions of breeding and property, of domestication and demonization. For Esch, a Black girl policed and pathologized by frames of dangerous mothering, China offers an ally in this fight to be seen otherwise.

Indeed, Esch's narration of China's birth of her puppies likens it to a fight: "Her sides ripple. She snarls, her mouth a black line [...] Everything about China tenses and there are a million marbles under her skin, and then she seems to be turning herself inside out" (4). This description mirrors the language Esch uses to describe China and Kilo fighting: "her jaws are shut," "her ribs billowing and clenching" (171; 173). China is at once a rageful and loving mother; how else is there to be when your existence is to be bred and fought for profit? For China, love always has the risk of loss – her puppies are not her own; they will be sold for the worth of their blood line – and thus her form of care is a fierce protection that necessarily looks

like a violent ruthlessness. This is the version of motherhood that opens this novel and that helps Esch negotiate how she will bear life in a world in which her life is framed as disposable. Joshua Bennett describes China's complex inhabitation of the category of mother as "a kind of unrelenting cruelty that doubles as the condition of possibility for Esch and the rest of her family to continue to live" (Bennett 152). Perhaps the love between dogs and humans helps us, as both Joshua Bennett and Colin Dayan suggest, reimagine the very contours of what love looks like. Colin Dayan, writing on the love between dog-fighting men and dogs, argues this word, love, necessarily needs to be reimagined: "love needed to be exhumed, not just remade, taken out of its comfort zone and pushed beyond what could simply be comprehended. Something about viscera and blood and heat and closeness more intense than what can be easily borne" (96). Indeed, Ward's portrayal of Skeetah, Esch's brother who loves China at the same time as he breeds her, who devotedly sleeps by her side at the same time as he turns razors over in his cheek, embodies this visceral, violent love. From China, from Mama, from Skeet, Esch must define her own path toward motherhood. In the wildness of Bois Sauvage, in the destruction of the final mother in the text – Katrina – in the feral horizontal kinships between dogs and girls and brothers and land, Esch knows one thing: she will bear a future in the form of a child who will continue her story. In the final pages of the novel, Esch projects herself into this future, telling of her plans for the shards of glass she collects in the wake of Katrina: "I will tie the glass and stone with a string, hang the shards above my bed, so that they will flash in the dark and tell the story of Katrina" (255). From the ruins left behind, she will piece together language into a story that will last past the end of time just like the myths she holds throughout.

Daddy's hammering arm marks the time before

she hits, air heavy, the sun stuck on the horizon.  
 She has been waiting to pick us up by our necks, a  
 kiss, a bite, only to deliver us, glimmers  
 of aliveness in ruin.

But I still see the Spanish moss, tired arms stretched thin, the  
 pine trees like Grecian columns, the  
 swamp myrtle and switch grass, the pink mimosa flowers  
 falling to a ground, made rust from blood.

I am watching, quiet, for the minor flora blooming in the wake.<sup>139</sup>

*the light comes from everywhere and nowhere*

Esch figures Hurricane Katrina as “the mother that swept into the Gulf and slaughtered” (255). Katrina, like China and Medea, is a mother’s grieving rage, a caressing bite that severs lines that need to be severed. Esch, with China and other mothers sideways to her, will follow, her watchful I salvaging a future from what is before and behind. Sarah Hopkinson argues that Ward’s novel shows how disaster can be temporalized as continuous rather than an event. She

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<sup>139</sup> After China wins the fight against Rico, Esch notices “pink mimosa flowers drifting and falling on the breeze” (176). The pink dusts the boys’ and dogs’ shoulders. Ward is attuned to how bodies are coloured or changed by what surrounds them, bodies are always in relief of the environment: whether it be the salvaged objects scattered amongst the Pit or the lush florals of Bois Sauvage or the bones of houses after Katrina. The presence of flowers noticed by an attentive Black girl reminds me so much of *The Bluest Eye*. Toni Morrison, on the opening of *The Bluest Eye*, which I will never stop thinking about, writes, “it draws a connection between a minor destabilization in seasonal flora and the insignificant destruction of a black girl” (214). Minor for the ways the white world fails to see Black girls and for the ways only Claudia and Frieda seem to be attuned to the small shifts in seasons or language or expression that hold meaning beyond what they can grasp. Minor as tending to the small, what is deemed insignificant.

writes that *Salvage the Bones* “reimagin[es] disaster as persistent,” in that it “emerges as an endemic rather than fleeting condition” (2). Ward’s novel counters the dominant representations of Hurricane Katrina in the media that spectacularize Black suffering and shows clearly the links between racial capitalism and ecological devastation (Hopkinson 4). I think, too, that Ward’s novel turns time around in a way that collapses it – showing how fallible it all is. Indeed, everything happens within the span of the first chapter: China gives birth, Mama dies, the storm is somehow already arrived. We are held in suspense of something we already know will happen, the stretched-out time of waiting, the quietness and slowness of catastrophe. We are held in this fold between temporalities, between moments – China birthing puppies, Mama dying in birth, the storm birthing a new world, Esch standing on the threshold of birth – just as we are held in the bridge between species. Despite the chapters that cleanly separate time into “The First Day” to “The Twelfth Day,” time is not easily marked, moving in all directions: what was, what is, what will be.<sup>140</sup>

Zsuzsanna Lénárt-Muszka reads *Salvage the Bones* for its representation of what Christina Sharpe calls the wake and writes that, “in *Salvage*, the acute, tangible danger of the hurricane is imposed on the chronic, quotidian state of being a Black (pregnant) girl in an already poverty-stricken region” (Lénárt-Muszka 126). Anti-Black racism, which Christina Sharpe conjures in the form of the weather, takes a literal form in Ward’s representation of the hurricane. Christina Sharpe layers definitions of all that is held in this word ‘wake’ – the gathering that follows a funeral, the “track left on the water’s surface by a ship,” “a region of disturbed bow,” something “in the line of recoil of (a gun),” being awake” – its meanings accumulate in cyclical returns (Sharpe 21). Jesmyn Ward practices “wake work” in *Salvage the*

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<sup>140</sup> Esch narrates these words when Manny turns away from her: “I am crying again for what I have been, for what I am, and for what I will be, again” (Ward 147).

*Bones* by creating a narrative space in Esch, “inhabiting a blackened consciousness that would rupture the structural silences produced and facilitated by [...] Black social and physical death” (Sharpe 22). If the weather is the anti-Black racism and racial capitalist structures that create the conditions of the Batiste’s particular experience of Hurricane Katrina, Esch’s wake work is what seeks out joy and beauty, what holds onto love, what tugs at the lines between care and harm, what holds onto livingness and future horizons in this weather.

*Bois Sauvage* – Wild woods will  
of God I mean girl whose  
horizon is the eye of the storm I  
mean she pulls it all in, a net, not if  
but when.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> The final lines of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes were Watching God*, another novel framed by a hurricane, read, “She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see” (193).

Chapter 4  
 Lovey: Animal Breeding, Japanese-Hawaiian Girlhood, and the Violent Projects of American Empire

*Don't talk dead animals around me.*

*I can't take it.*

– Lois-Ann Yamanaka, *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*

If you are thinking of visiting my homeland, please do not.  
 We do not want or need any more tourists, and we certainly do not like them.

If you want to help our cause, pass this message on to your friends.

– Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter*

Cause, kiddo, it ain't easy out there. It's a man's world.

And a haole man's world more worse.

– Lois-Ann Yamanaka, *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*

The three preceding chapters follow fictional girls who move inside or sideways to the slaughterhouse, showing how they labour and live alongside these spaces of meat production, which, of course, are also spaces of mass death and violence. This chapter takes a slight step away from the slaughterhouse to look closely at other forms of animal (re)production: the low-scale domestication of animals, agricultural breeding projects, and the capture and preservation of animals through hunting and taxidermy. Looking to Lois-Ann Yamanaka's novel, *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* and, briefly, *Heads by Harry*, I make this shift to show how meat production does not begin nor end with the slaughterhouse and need not be industrial. Indeed, in *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*, meat, animal domestication, and animal breeding are

everywhere, yet there is no slaughterhouse to be found. Instead, animal reproduction and death happen in domestic backyards, in national parks, in family kitchens and family businesses.

Lovey Nariyoshi, the young adolescent girl who narrates *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* in the first-person, learns to name the structures that align her own body and racialized identity with the animals being violently killed, consumed, bred, and mounted within her everyday spaces. How do these intimacies between animal death and coming-into-girlhood matter when played out on the Hawaiian landscape, itself marked with the violences of American imperial occupation?<sup>142</sup> Yamanaka's works critique American white supremacy but, as scholars such as Carmen Nolte-Odhiambo point out, they perform their own problematic erasure of Indigenous Hawaiians and their rights to sovereignty (379). I take this criticism seriously and contend that Yamanaka takes up the complex interracial histories that make up Hawai'i in ways that, at times, cause harm to racial communities in Hawai'i who hold less power than Japanese-Hawaiians even as she does the important work of making visible Japanese Hawaiian girlhood. Ultimately, this chapter follows the entanglements between animal death and girls grappling with their complex desires amidst violent and harmful masculinity. I argue that this pairing shows how America is itself rotten – a violent project whose invasions in the name of expansion are bloody and ruthless. Lovey witnesses the heteropatriarchal, classed and racialized settler-colonial structures of Hawai'i most explicitly through agricultural animal practices, which are tied up in American imperial conquest even if Lovey cannot yet name this as such. This observation follows Billy-Ray Belcourt's assertion that "animal domestication, speciesism, and other modern

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<sup>142</sup> I bring up empire in relation to America's colonization of Hawai'i because it was a theft that did not end at the continental frontier but extended America into the Pacific. Furthermore, America's occupation of Hawai'i was an act of empire as it was seen as a strategic military and economic post to further America's global power. Kyle Kajihiro, for example, writes that "It is impossible to understand Hawaii today without knowing the processes of U.S. imperial formation and militarization in the islands. It is also impossible to understand how the United States became an empire without knowing Hawaii's pivotal role in that process" (Kajihiro and Keko'olani 249).

human-animal interactions are only possible because of and through the historic and ongoing erasure of Indigenous peoples and the emptying of Indigenous lands for settler-colonial expansion” (“Animal Bodies” 3). It is through the animal body and animal spaces, therefore, that dismantling white supremacist and settler-colonial structures might take place.<sup>143</sup>

This chapter is divided into three sections, with the first two following Lovey in *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* and the third turning briefly to Toni, the protagonist of Yamanaka’s later novel, *Heads by Harry*, which closes the trilogy that *Wild Meat* opens. While this turn may feel uncomfortable, departing from my previous chapters’ sole focuses on individual girls, it allows me to gesture toward two possibilities: first, that Lovey and Toni are extensions of each other, bound together by their relationships with their hunting and taxidermist fathers, each surfacing a different experience of lower-class Japanese Hawaiian girlhood; and second, that, within this larger dissertation, these girls are unbound from space and time, forming a chorus across chapters. This chorus speaks to how these girls – wayward in their own ways – perhaps anticipate each other, how the future is held already in these moments past and present, how resistance and refusal accumulate in sideways, non-linear possibilities gathered in these affiliations across species, spaces, and time.

The first part of this chapter dwells in the proximities between animal breeding and Lovey’s developing understanding of pregnancy, sex, and her own sexual identity. I propose that the instances in which Lovey witnesses the violent mounting of female animals subtly take place in relation to women harmed by the hands of men. This witnessing urges her to turn away from heteronormativity and toward a queer horizon. In this attentive witnessing, Lovey also grasps for

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<sup>143</sup> Belcourt asserts that “decolonization is only possible through an animal ethic that disrupts anthropocentrism and settler-colonialism” (5). Belcourt’s theorization is quite complex and the article, “Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects: (Re)Locating Animality in Decolonial Thought” is worth reading in full.

a way to name the contingencies of agriculture, reproduction, and colonialism, which I will theorize using Kelly Struthers Montford's "analytic of agricultural power" (223). Lovey witnesses animals violently killed by men yet she articulates her own practice of care and love for the animals with whom she shares space. In Yamanaka's novels, animals are abject for the ways their bodies leak, spoil, and stain but they are also intense sites of affect, their lives and deaths heavy with grief, pricking sharply throughout this text. The second section continues to surface the animal bodies, dead and alive, adjacent to Lovey but shifts the focus to how Yamanaka uses animals to blur lines between wild and domesticated, asking what affects stick to these categories and how these categories underpin racial and colonial discourses. I question how animals "spoil the scenery," as Lovey so aptly pronounces, alerting readers to the violence embedded in Hawai'i's landscape, both past and present (175). I also dwell in the entanglements between class, race, labour, and proximity to animal life and death, looking to Colleen Lye and Mel Y. Chen's work on Asian American racial forms and animacy, respectively. How does Lovey's intimate affiliation with these animals – often on the cusp of the feral and domestic – open up the possibility for her own defiance of legibility and national 'domestication' or assimilation?

The final section pulls patriarchy to the fore, as the frame within which the recurring pairing of girls and pigs take place. Yamanaka's third novel in her trilogy, *Heads by Harry*, shows how pigs signify in relation to girlhood, sex, and Hawai'i. Returning to Carol J. Adams's sexual politics of meat to theorize how women are sexualized as pigs, I ask how Toni, the protagonist in Yamanaka's third novel, uses this affiliation to find agency. While her experience working at Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park for the pig eradication project demonstrates the trauma of patriarchy, her work in her father's taxidermy shop preserving animals, including pigs,

leads her to finding and naming her own “gumption” and guts, which is inextricable from her relationship with the animals she preserves and so carefully sews up (151). I thus ask how pigs point to the larger project of American imperialism in Hawai’i – revealing the devastating ecological impacts of species introduced by colonial means – and become a site of possibility for Toni and Lovey. Each must find a way to have the guts to exist in a world of men.

Three main threads inform how scholars have taken up the novels of Lois-Ann Yamanaka – consumption, coming-of-age, and race and colonialism. In *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*, consumption comes up in the form of food, for example when Lovey’s family consumes ‘wild’ meat instead of store-bought meat. Consumption also arises and in the form of capitalist objects – Barbies, tape recorders, furniture – that Lovey desires, all articulations of her desire to be haole.<sup>144</sup> In her book, *Filthy Fictions: Asian American Literature by Women*, Monica Chiu explores the relationship between animals, class, race, and gender, with a focus on categories of the abject, filth, and dirt. She argues that “animals announce an economy of dirt and defilement that lends itself to complicated interpretations of the relations between animals and humans” (86). Chiu’s chapter on Yamanaka asks the questions that I have been circling around throughout this larger project: what to make of the proximities and intimacies between animal bodies and girls coming of age? What affects, racial forms, and classed and gendered constructions do these animals articulate and how do these animals and their complex significations help these girls name and navigate the structures that surround them? Chiu not only examines how “food is intensely stratified across class lines” but also notes how degrees of cleanliness and filth, which emerge along lines of food and animals becoming food, are racialized, gendered and classed (97). Lovey is pulled into these questions of dirt and its proper

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<sup>144</sup> Carmen Nolte-Odhiambo clarifies that, although ‘haole’ can be used to refer to any foreigner to Polynesia, it is typically used to refer to a white person (392n.1).

containment when she is in proximity to animals. While I am more interested in issues of animal breeding as they relate to girlhood, my chapter is nonetheless concerned with consumption, especially meat consumption, which makes Chiu's chapter significant to my reading. Furthermore, Chiu spends considerable time analysing how pigs figure into Yamanaka's works, which directly relates to the final part of this chapter.

Jennifer Ann Ho, like Monica Chiu, places Yamanaka in conversation with other Asian American writers who take up themes of consumption, but she specifically focuses on coming-of-age narratives. In these narratives, she argues, food and consumption are particularly significant sites in which Asian American adolescent and child protagonists negotiate their identities. Ho argues that food and labour are intimately linked in Asian American history "since Asians in America have been coded by and through their relationship to the food they cultivated, picked, packaged, and served" (11). Ho therefore looks to how Yamanaka represents Lovey's own relationship to her Japanese Hawaiian identity and family history as well as her class position as articulated through her consumption of food, mass-produced consumer objects, and American media culture (51). Ho's exploration of this relationship between wild and domesticated consumption helps me think through how Lovey uses the animal body, both alive and consumable as meat, to articulate her fraught relationship to America. Indeed, Ho identifies something inconsumable about Yamanaka's narrative in the ways it resists commodifying Hawai'i as an exotic tourist locale but also for the ways in which Lovey resists her own consumption or assimilation into America (50). Ho's reading prompts my own ideas about how this narrative is hard to stomach in many ways – for its portrayal of girlhood as abjectly entangled with domesticated yet always somewhat wild animals, for its portrayal of rotting landscapes and histories.

The next thread overlaps with Ho's chapter with scholars who focus on Yamanaka's novels as working within or breaking with the bildungsroman. Rocio G. Davis, for example, locates *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* as both a short story cycle and coming-of-age narrative. Davis argues that "Yamanaka subverts a traditional American literary form in order to formulate a renewed manner of presenting local realities, perspectives, and styles" (231; 237). Davis proposes that Yamanaka dwells in the interstices between the short story cycle and bildungsroman in order to articulate the complexity and hybridity of Lovey's identity as a third generation Japanese-Hawaiian, which is itself fragmented and in perpetual formation (237). Yamanaka's use of the bildungsroman and child perspective, as Davis points out, allows her to work through the contingencies of nation, history, race, class, and language that punctuate Lovey's lived experience in Hawai'i (233). Davis focuses on Lovey finding her 'place' within her family and a 'home' within the larger community or nation (237). What I find particularly useful in Davis's reading of Yamanaka is how she theorizes the novel's non-linear temporality of the short story cycle's form (234). I am interested in how this "episodic and unchronological method of oral narration" gestures toward queer horizons as well as decentres human time (234). This focus on time returns even more prominently in Yoon Sun Lee's chapter on Yamanaka in *Modern Minority: Asian American Literature and Everyday Life*.

Drawing on narrative theory and Marxist theory, Yoon Sun Lee traces the prominence of the mundane and the minor in Asian American literature, which privileges a sort of anti-capitalist time made of "everyday duration and repetition, rather than anticipation and closure" (23). Lee's larger project looks to Asian American realist texts that work through this position of the 'minor' or 'ordinary' by foregrounding scales of the everyday as "empty and non-cumulative" narrative

time (5).<sup>145</sup> She focuses on two related textual emergences of minoriness: “a minimal narrativity – one thing after another – and a minimal sociality: the side-by-side” (4). In her chapter on *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*, Lee argues that Yamanaka articulates a distinct concept of the local by turning to the everyday as a basis for identity and as a minor economy of objects (23). Yoon Sun Lee’s concept of Yamanaka’s “aimless and intimate everyday time” is useful for my own theorizing of Yamanaka’s intersecting temporalities of girlhood, animal domestication and death, and colonial violence and how this relates to futurity and reproductive time (154). For Lee, Yamanaka drastically revises the coming-of-age narrative, wherein the episodic fragments of Lovey’s first-person short story cycle are “neither a beginning or an end but [...] a middle point in an unspecified, ongoing series” (155). These moments, although seemingly minor, accumulate into Lovey’s sense of identity (154). The body, Lee argues, is the “quintessential everyday object” in *Wild Meat*, establishing a bond between the body as a site of identity and the body as a lived-in surface of duration, history, affect, and intimacy “bearing the ambiguous influence of time” (166). Throughout my own project, bodies serve as essential guides, which makes Lee’s chapter helpful as I follow Lovey and the many animal bodies adjacent to her.

Incoronata Inserra also argues that Yamanaka’s trilogy breaks with the traditional bildungsroman form, showing the girl protagonists navigating patriarchal and racist structures in order to come to self-awareness (197). She writes that, “by choosing to observe life through the eyes of Japanese American girls who live in poor Hawaiian suburbs, Yamanaka clearly poses a challenge to the European tradition of Bildungsroman and to its spatial and ideological

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<sup>145</sup> Yoon Sun Lee argues that the ordinary is, in fact, “deeply interwoven with specificities of time and place, with historically changing forms of labor, and leisure, and with modernity’s modes of presence and absence” (3). She further writes, “both exotic and banal. familiar and foreign, neither reliably racial or merely ethnic, their [Asian Americans’] position relative to the material and ideological bases of American ordinariness continues to shift in response to national and global exigencies” (3). Scales of ordinariness and the everyday are thus entangled with Asian American identities.

traditions" (222). Inserra proposes that *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*, *Blu's Hanging*, and *Heads by Harry* be read as the trajectory of a single, but multi-voiced, character whose narrative travels "both in space and in time" (198-99). Reading all three of these novels at once, Inserra focuses primarily on how Yamanaka follows these girls as they come to terms with their bodies – getting their periods, witnessing sex, having sex – in a patriarchal society (203). Inserra covers a lot of ground, addressing themes of haunting, narrative temporality, sight, ethnic identity, and the use of Pidgin as a form of resistance.<sup>146</sup> Following Candace Fujikane's critical reading, Inserra concludes that "although their perspective is in many ways divergent from that of the European *Bildungsroman* [...] Yamanaka's novels paradoxically continue its agenda of repressing other voices and their right to self-expression in the exclusive interest of the affirmation of the dominant subject" (226).<sup>147</sup> Yamanaka's Japanese Hawaiian protagonists become visible subjects while others remain invisible.

On this note, the final thread that scholars take up is that of race and colonization. These scholars address pressing questions about what it means to claim a 'local' identity as a settler and issues of Indigenous sovereignty and erasure. Most notably is Carmen Nolte-Odhiambo's "'I be home': Childhood Belonging and Un/becoming in Hawai'i" in which she argues that *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* shows Lovey finding a home in Hawai'i as a racialized subject, even as she is critical of white normativity, but does so by "un-homing" Native Hawaiian children from this place (379; 382). Nolte-Odhiambo argues that Yamanaka's novel critiques American imperialism and shows how racialized childhood is barred from national belonging and futures

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<sup>146</sup> Pidgin, or Hawaiian Creole English (HCE), mixes English, Hawaiian and sometimes Japanese terms. It is a product of the plantation era in Hawai'i (Nolte-Odhiambo 383). Inserra also writes that "although it is the everyday language spoken in the archipelago, it is generally opposed by authorities and regarded as 'broken English'" (215). Inserra further claims that, for Toni especially in *Heads by Harry*, "Pidgin becomes an important means of self-defense and self-expression" (215).

<sup>147</sup> See Candace Fujikane "Reimagining Development and the Local in Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre*".

(386). Nolte-Odhiambo's article shows how Lovey's visibility is paired with an absence of Indigenous voices and representation and thus "enacts a local entitlement to Hawaiian lands while disregarding the dispossession of Kānaka Maoli that is inevitably bound up with such settler claims of the islands as home" (385). Nolte-Odhiambo wonders, though, if Yamanaka's representation of the land refusing, at times, to fully give access to Lovey, might do some work of unsettling in a decolonial sense (387).<sup>148</sup> She writes, "even as Yamanaka draws heavily on the importance of land in order to effectuate Lovey's homing, it might be this very land that also 'unsettles,' and affirms resistance to, local claims of belonging in the novel" (387). Nolte-Odhiambo's reading is a model for how I engage critically with Yamanaka's text. I also pull in Iyko Day's theorization of the "triangulation between the symbolic positions that include the Native, the alien, and the settler" (23-24). This positioning adds to the complexity of Asian subjects in Hawai'i, first brought for cheap labour, in relation to Hawai'i's particular configuration of settler-colonialism. By moving non-human animals into this frame, particularly as they surface alongside Lovey's coming into girlhood, I argue that their presence unsettles and points to a grief that saturates Lovey's family history as Japanese-Hawaiians living on the stolen land of the Kānaka Maoli.<sup>149</sup>

This grief leads us to Crystal Parikh reading of racial melancholia in *Blu's Hanging*, which she pairs with R. Zamora Linmark's *Rolling the R's* as an important counterpart for its representation of Filipino subjects, from the perspective of a Hawaiian Filipino author. These two texts articulate Hawai'i as a haunted space indelibly marked by multiple traumatic losses.

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<sup>148</sup> Nolte-Odhiambo returns often to Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's description of decolonization: "decolonization is necessarily unsettling... Settler colonialism and its decolonization implicates and unsettles everyone" (in Nolte-Odhiambo 387).

<sup>149</sup> Throughout this chapter I will mostly refer to Indigenous Hawaiians as Kānaka Maoli. If a scholar uses a different term, I will match their wordings in my discussion of their reading.

These texts are thus “remappings of consumption and desire as racial melancholia, as, that is, a strategy for cultural survival for local populations” (201). Parikh’s insights about human and animal bodies marked by mourning and the enduring affects of racial melancholia help frame my own readings of bodies in *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*. I will return to Parikh often as I work through the ways bodies carry trauma and grief and to help me navigate the relationship between “Asian,” American,” and “Hawaiian,” which she notes have “played vexed and often contradictory, albeit mutually necessary, roles in relation to each other” (200).

Rob Wilson also positions Lois-Ann Yamanaka within Hawai’i’s literary context, pulling out the main themes and critical interventions her works offer. Comparing representations of Hawai’i in the global, and more particularly, American mainland imaginary – the likes of James Michener or *South Pacific* style idealizations – Wilson argues that Yamanaka is part of a local literature that challenges these representations, “coalescing into something like a kind of oppositional regionalism” (163). Wilson cites Yamanaka as part of what he calls “Bamboo Ridge” writers and argues that this group of emerging local authors in the late twentieth century resisted “symbolic domination” in the midst of a globalizing economy and spectacularizing imagination that flattened Hawai’i into a tourist icon and “Edenic backdrop,” worked to preserve local Pidgin languages, and enacted a profound “bond to place,” a term introduced by Raymond Williams (169; 164).<sup>150</sup> *Wild Meat* was published in 1996, making it part of this literary move to ‘voice’ Hawai’i. Yamanaka, however, also writes as the Hawaiian sovereignty movement begins

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<sup>150</sup> Rob Wilson reads Bamboo Ridge as both “place and cultural symbol” (177). He notes that the actual space of Bamboo Ridge is “in the middle of one of the most heated real estate markets in the world” on the Pacific Island of O’ahu (177). This island is thus marked with a long history of land possession and theft. With this in mind, Wilson proposes that “adhering to the nexus of locality at Bamboo Ridge posits a way of *reimagining* relationship among region, nation, and globe in which difference is not negated nor reified by constructed, negotiated, and affirmed” (179). Bamboo Ridge is also the name of a prominent literary journal and publishing company founded in 1978 on O’ahu (xiii). Brenda Kwon notes that Bamboo Ridge has faced criticism for its privileging of Local over Native voices (15). Yamanaka’s first published work, the book of poems written in Hawaiian Pidgin, *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre* (1993), was published by Bamboo Ridge Press.

to gain public attention, leading to the United States government issuing the Apology Resolution of 1993.<sup>151</sup> Yamanaka thus is writing as issues of Indigenous sovereignty are highly visible yet, as scholars such as Nolte-Odhiambo point out, Indigenous characters and contemporary discussions around land claims are glaringly absent in her texts (379). Wilson moves through different authors and histories, including Yamanaka, to show how a distinct set of aesthetic strategies emerges in Hawai'i in the 1970s and develops into the 90s, arguing that "the 'local literature' movement at Bamboo Ridge would produce, in effect, a countermemory to such white-washed histories of this Pacific place and its literary and cultural productions" (186). I am critical, though, of Wilson's romanticization of the 'Pacific' as a space in which identities mix and come together to form a distinct body he calls the 'local'.<sup>152</sup> What of the particular positionalities of these authors grouped into this local regionalism and the complicated histories between racial groups in Hawai'i? Does he rest enough in the painful breakages in this bringing together?<sup>153</sup>

Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Okamura's theorization of the Asian settler is a helpful counterpart to this idea of the 'local'. In a Hawaiian context, they deem "all Asians [...]"

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<sup>151</sup> The Apology Resolution was adopted in the United States Congress under President Bill Clinton November 1993. This resolution lists acknowledgements of harm enacted by the United States government, "apologizes to Native Hawaiians on behalf of the people of the United States for the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai'i on January 17, 1893 with the participation of agents and citizens of the United States, and the deprivation of the rights of Native Hawaiians to self-determination," and urges reconciliation ("United States Public Law 103-150). This Resolution, however, had no actionable reparations tied to it, economic, territorial, or in terms of sovereign rights.

<sup>152</sup> Trask places this important distinction between 'native' and 'Native' in a footnote in *From a Native Daughter*. It is worth going to read it in its entirety. In this footnote, she explains her capitalization of 'Native, writing, "I capitalize it to emphasize the political distance between that which is Western and that which is Native [...]" the capital letter reminds the reader that some of us are not immigrants" (54n1).

<sup>153</sup> While Wilson's book does work through this idea of Asia/Pacific in depth I do not think he does enough to address the pressing issue of Indigenous sovereignty. Furthermore, I question his privilege to move and cross boundaries with what he cites as a sort of Kerouacian, postmodern, or "schizophrenic" sensibility, which results in a softening of the complicated relationships between and within these borders (280). The last paragraph of his book demonstrates this romanticization of 'peaceful' racial mixing and border crossing: "This is where I want to live, work, and love amid the makings of culture and poetry during my coming years on earth: inside those 'borderlands' and space of flows where two or more cultures can clash and mix, abiding on islands where different races can occupy the same territory in peace, respect, and coalition; where different classes can touch, flow, and move" (282).

including those who do not have political power [...] as settlers who participate in U.S. settler colonialism” and thus have an “obligation to the Indigenous people of Hawai’i and [...] their struggles for self-determination” (6;7). They clarify that this is not to discount the histories of trauma and exploitation held by different Asian communities in Hawai’i but to claim that “early Asian settlers were both active agents in the making of their own histories and unwitting recruits swept into the service of empire” (7). I thus read Lovey and her family as settlers; however, Iyko Day makes an important distinction between what she calls settlers, Natives, and aliens, categories which are “by no means stable or fixed” but that help make the distinction between settlers – who have access to land, property, citizenship, and legal power and protection – and those subjects who do not (23; 33). The third term, alien, gestures to a category equally as necessary in the maintenance of the settler colonial state in which “unsovereign alien status was a *precondition* of their exploitation and intersects with multiple economic logics that require and reproduce alien-ness in settler colonies” (24). Asian American laborers, Day argues, fall into this category of alien whose primary relationship to settlers is that of labour and who do not hold the same privileges as settlers (31). This framing of Lovey and her family as alien to America yet settlers on Hawaiian land guides my reading.

Indeed, Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s own position within Asian American literary circles is a precarious one. *Blu’s Hanging*, the middle novel of Yamanaka’s trilogy, was met with public controversy because of her representation of Filipino characters. This controversy erupted after the novel was awarded the Fiction Award by the Association for Asian American Studies in 1998, especially since Yamanaka’s previous works had received criticism, with a complaint against her representation of Filipino characters in her 1993 award-winning book, *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre* (Feuerstein, “The cats” 168). The award for *Blu’s Hanging* was

later revoked but this controversy caused rifts in the Asian American Studies community.

Candace Fujikane details this controversy and argues that it is representative of the larger issue of systemic racism in Hawai'i that "renders some 'truths' more visible than others as a matter of power" (173).<sup>154</sup> Fujikane takes issue with the fact that Yamanaka's text conforms to rather than challenges harmful stereotypes of Filipino men as sexual predators and thus "reinscribes existing conditions of racism" (178). It is crucial to approach Yamanaka's work with a keen attentiveness to racism's insidiousness, especially as I read her works as a haole outsider who is a settler on the stolen land of Turtle Island.

#### I "This is what I have seen": The Breeding of Animals and Bleeding of Girls

Lovey witnesses two harrowing occurrences of animals being mounted by male animals and she recounts each with resounding detail. The title of this section is pulled from the first occurrence, wherein Lovey begins each paragraph of her account with "This is what I hear" and "This is what I have seen," anchoring herself firmly in the position of a witness to Lani, her female rabbit's, domination by Clyde, the male rabbit (71). These rabbits have been given to Lovey "to mate and breed" – an economy she understands as part of her family's survival (71). Throughout the novel, however, she grapples with how to love and care for these animals who must also be killed (71). Lovey raises Lani and her litter as "my beautiful babies," bringing them

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<sup>154</sup> See "Sweeping Racism under the Rug of 'Censorship': The Controversy over Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Blu's Hanging*" by Candace Fujikane for a thorough discussion of the controversy, including a timeline of its events. See also Darlene Rodrigues's "Imagining Ourselves: Reflections on the Controversy over Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Blu's Hanging*". This article is powerful for the ways in which Rodrigues writes as a Filipina scholar, articulating the ways literary texts carry harm beyond their pages. Rodrigues argues that, while Yamanaka's novels show the Japanese-Hawaiian community as full of life, resilience, and humanity, "the community that I know and am a part of, however, is nowhere to be found in *Blu's Hanging*. This is not just the case of 'gone missing': it's a complete erasure of the diversity and richness of Filipino communities" (200).

into the house “so they get tame and don’t buck or scratch when carried” (72). When Lovey witnesses Clyde mounting Lani it translates into a lesson for herself:

I see Clyde on Lani’s back. Her eyes pull out of her head. His claws dig into her side. Her ears pull back and her head too as Clyde moves up and down. Clyde dominates. Lani recessids.<sup>155</sup> When he’s through, Lani runs to the corner and her cage very scared. She breathes hard in and out with flaring nostrils. Clyde sits there and rubs his face with his paws. *Never, never let someone dominate.* (73)

Lovey tells Lani and Clyde’s movements quite matter of factly, without subjectively qualifying the actions: eyes pull, claws dig, ears pull back, moves up and down. It is only when “he’s through” that Lovey reads fear in Lani when she runs to the corner of her cage, breathing to steady herself. Lovey can read Lani’s fear in being so violently mounted, but she cannot understand anything but detachment in Clyde: “Clyde sits there and rubs his face with his paws” (73). Lovey therefore aligns herself with Lani: her devotion and proximity lead her to feel *with* Lani. This mantra that emerges at the end of her description – “*Never, never let someone dominate*” is spoken for Lani but more so for Lovey as she tries to figure out where she, as a girl on the cusp of menstruation, fits in to this sexual schema of domination and ‘recessid’.

The violence of Lani’s mounting is intensified by what happens the following night: “I do not see or hear: wild dogs late that dark night steal into my yard and kill all of my rabbits. In the morning, bodies are splayed all over the yard, stretched-out rabbit bodies, broken necks and

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<sup>155</sup> Lovey uses the word ‘recessid’ in a way similar to recessive but it also signals passivity. I am not sure if this is an instance of her Pidgin English or that she applies her understanding of the word to a different context. Just before she uses it in the quote being discussed, she talks about how her father has taught her all she knows about “dominate and recessed jeans,” or we might write, based on contextual hints, dominant and recessive genes (72). She then goes on to explain how this works and that she keeps this in mind when breeding her bunnies: “How pea flowers that are red and white make red flowers. Or white flowers. Sometimes pink” (72). Her understanding of the word “recessid” is thus tied to breeding but, as she uses it in her witnessing of Clyde and Lani, it comes to mean a more passive or receding position.

blood” (74). Reproduction and death are thus violently intertwined. Through her affiliation with Lani, Lovey questions whether it is possible to love, to mother, to reproduce without violence. Throughout her narrative, Lovey will witness other animals breeding and humans having sex – these encounters are always violent, never tender. It is through her animal companions that Lovey tries to understand how love and violence are bound together. Nanny Goat is another female animal who Lovey raises from birth only to witness male goats circling and pressing against her. In the chapter, “My Nanny and Billy the Kid,” Lovey tells of two goats her father rescues while hunting, “tak[ing] these two babies home and rais[ing] um like your own” (179).<sup>156</sup> Remembering the day they first arrive, “Nanny with her umbilical cord still stuck to her,” Lovey recounts their lives tangled up with her family’s everyday moments, that is until Billy the Kid starts destroying the yard with his ramming and Nanny Goat consumes all of their grass (179; 181; 184). Lovey tells us, unflinchingly, how her father and his friends “shoot him [Billy] up the ass [...] They wanted his front quarters for mounting [...] They wanted his hindquarters for smoke meat. And they made Jerry, Cal, me and the older boys watch” (183-84).<sup>157</sup>

Lovey’s capacity to witness this animal death, along with the boys, is one of the many moments in the novel where she aligns herself with her father, striving for his acceptance, wanting to be seen as more than “just one little girl” (290). Killing animals is therefore tied to Lovey’s understanding of masculinity, which, although she witnesses its many harms and violences, represents the power that she does not hold. She is reminded by her father’s repeated

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<sup>156</sup> The name Billy the Kid summons the American Old West – cowboys and Manifest Destiny – to Yamanaka’s Hawai’i, referring to the mythic Western outlaw known for his youthful appearance, his killing of men, and the ensuing efforts of police, notably Pat Garrett, to track him down across New Mexico (G. Roberts, n.p.).

<sup>157</sup> Masculinity is very much tied to homophobia in all of the novels in Yamanaka’s trilogy. The character of Larry, for example, in *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*, repeatedly labels Jerry and Lovey as queer, using a variety of derogatory words that I will not repeat here. See, for example, pages 106, 132-23, and 174. For Larry, at least, part of what drives his harsh treatment of people around him, namely Lovey, Jerry, and Crystal, as well as his frequent violence toward animals might be read as a violent anxiety towards homosexuality.

insistence that “It’s a man’s world. And a haole man’s world more worse” (168). Although she does not flinch at Billy the Kid’s death and is grouped in with the boys witnessing this act, this chapter begins and ends with another animal scene, this one not a death but another instance of a female animal being mounted. Lovey begins the chapter describing a scene playing on home movie reels: “I watch the billies surround my Nanny in the large goat cage at the zoo. I watch me watching her, my Nanny, get circled and smelled. And press up to the side of the fence and look for me and bleat that way” (178). In this doubled act of witnessing, where Lovey watches herself watching Nanny, Nanny’s look back to Lovey signals an affiliation. Nanny “looks for” Lovey in this moment of pain while Lovey looks to Nanny to guide her through her future to come as a girl who will very soon face men circling and pressing.

Lovey not only sees Nanny but feels her: “Animals, they know when something is not right. And Nanny, I could feel her heart beating. I knew her so well. I knew she didn’t want to live here” (178). It is not that Lovey sees herself as Nanny Goat or Lani – vulnerable to being mounted and entered – but that witnessing these female animals caught up in a relentless and violent cycle of breeding both captivates and liberates Lovey. Lovey sees their pain and does not want to be mounted. She wants the power to name and hold, to be the one who sees and controls being seen. She wants to have the power to stop what is happening to Nanny Goat, to “spit on the billy’s head” and “lead her by the leash into the car and home” (186). But instead, she must watch as “the billies surround her like a gang of wild thieves. They smell her ass [...] she’s pressed against the fence, her face turned and bleating the most aching cry as one of the goats suddenly mount her [...] But I can’t do a thing – stand there and watch” (185). These moments of witnessing female animals being mounted make palpable what Carol J. Adams explains as “a structure of overlapping but absent referents link[ing] violence against women and animals”

(67). Indeed, the world that Lovey inhabits operates according to the sexual politics of meat, as Adams defines.<sup>158</sup> It is not just that Lovey feels an alliance with these female animals but that, as an ally, she cannot seem to do anything to help but consume their suffering as a witness. There is no structure or economy in which her love for them can counter the violence. Therefore, these passages convey a helplessness. These female animals act as guides to Lovey who wrestles with the knowledge of what it means to be “a woman now” in a “man’s world” (138; 168). For Lovey, being a woman is bloody and means that violence will soon follow.

In the chapter, “Rags,” for example, Lovey narrates her first period in a verse-like form with fragmented sentences and repeated phrases. While menstruation is most central in this chapter, five crescent moon symbols break up the book, appearing within the numbered sections, gesturing toward a menstrual future. “Rags” is located directly after a moon symbol and begins with Lovey stating, “Everybody knows. / Everybody can see” (136). Menstruation means being seen and, for Lovey, this visibility is “perceived as a terrifying experience” (Inserra 201). This being looked at also positions her similarly to the animals she looks at, the only other bodies who bleed in this novel.<sup>159</sup> Her anxiety around being seen as “Bloody Mary” is intensified with her sister’s repeated chants proclaiming Lovey “full of tomato sauce” and the reverberation of her father’s “Oh. So you’re a woman now” (137; 138). Lovey repeats variations of these phrases

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<sup>158</sup> Adams identifies three components to the sexual politics of meat: the bond between virility and meat eating, the structure of the absent referent, and the positioning of both women and animals as overlapping absent referents (“Derrida” 160). Maneesha Deckha, however, reminds us to take caution that the link between virility and meat eating is not universal, rather a specifically Western notion (540). These three components are present in Yamanaka’s novel: Japanese Hawaiian masculinity coheres around acts of hunting, animal domestication and killing, and meat eating. Yamanaka raises questions about the absent referent when Lovey’s father warns them not to name their cow, who they will later refuse to consume (92). And, in these scenes of Lovey witnessing animal breeding, Yamanaka shows the shared recognition of violence and harm between Lovey and the female animals, all caught in patriarchal structures of meat, consumption, and objectification.

<sup>159</sup> In the chapter “Dead Animals Spoil the Scenery,” in which Lovey lists dead animals that she encounters in her everyday, she tells of an instance where, at the Lei Stand, she stands up and notices “a dark brown spot on my shorts” (171). Jenks asks if she “ha[s] her rags”. After this instance occurs multiple times, they realize that the blood is coming from a dead mouse with “X’s for eye and bleeding from its mouth and ears” that she has been sitting on (172). This moment further links animals, especially dead, leaking animals, to menstruation.

throughout this chapter, which Inserra argues highlights her anxiety (201). These repeated words that haunt Lovey also point to her own attempts at finding her own voice and relationship to her newly menstruating body. If “puberty entails [her] future submission to men’s abuse,” then how might her turn toward Lani and Nanny Goat’s experiences of the violence of male animals help her see and then refuse these patriarchal and heteronormative structures (Inserra 203)?

The bond between Lovey and the animals who live and die in her backyard thus helps her move toward self-determination, finding a way to follow her father yet diverge from his understanding of animal-human relationships. Lovey sees how projects of animal breeding are saturated with violence and, in the case of Lani, how being mounted is followed by a gruesome death. Lovey’s understanding of sex, therefore, cannot be separated by the violence and death she witnesses. As she grapples with her own sexuality, these animals turn her sideways toward a queer future that holds space for friendship, love, and interspecies kinships amidst the violence and breakages in her community and larger Hawaiian landscape she inhabits.<sup>160</sup> Lovey works out her sexuality alongside her best friend, Jerry, the set of Barbies they share, and his older brother, Larry, who constantly labels their relationship as “queer,” using homophobic slurs to deem them both out of line (131-32). Throughout the novel, Larry anxiously affirms his masculinity through displays of animal abuse, which Lovey witnesses.<sup>161</sup> She also witnesses Larry and his girlfriend, Crystal, having sex. In this moment, Yamanaka forges a connection between the violent animal breeding Lovey sees and this accidental witnessing of sex between humans.

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<sup>160</sup> This reading returns us again to Kathryn Bond Stockton’s theorization of intimacies and alliances between the queer child and animals, which I unpack with more thoroughness in Chapter 2 and 3. Stockton theorizes animals as “moving suspensions” that allow the queer child, and specifically the girl, to “grow sideways” in ways askew to heteronormative time and lines (53;89).

<sup>161</sup> Carol J. Adams draws a link between virility and meat eating, proposing that “where there’s (anxious) virility, one will find meat eating” (5). Larry displays his virility not by meat consumption but by violently killing animals.

When Lovey peeks into Crystal's window and sees them having sex, animals in the form of toys and literary similes pepper the scene. Lovey recounts the following: "I see Crystal's stuffed animals all over the pink carpet and Crystal, her beautiful long black hair strewn over the pillows. Crystal naked and kneeling on her bed, and Larry straddling her, pushing and pushing on her, his ass squeezed tight together. Like two dogs" (233). Before she fixates on Crystal, Lovey sees the stuffed animals. As markers of Crystal's childhood and innocence, they rub up against the roughness of this scene; like Nanny Goat "pressed against the fence," Lovey sees Larry "pushing and pushing on her" (185; 233). When Jerry and Calhoon, who are waiting under the window, ask her to tell them what she sees Lovey says "They was kissing. Thass all. I cannot believe. Like dogs. Like two naked dogs" (234). The dogs are all she has to understand this scene that she "cannot believe". She repeats this canine simile three times.

Just like the coupling of animal breeding with death, Lovey's witnessing of Crystal and Larry is followed by two violent incidents: the first one animal, the second human. Lovey witnesses Crystal and Larry in a chapter that begins with a description of Crystal's house, including its "koi pond in front and fat, golden-orange, white-gold, black, and bright neon-yellow koi swimming in and out of lily pads" and ends with an image of Lovey's mock koi pond, made using a bathtub to emulate Crystal's pond (231). Lovey's, however, is full of dead fish: "the red swordtails on the top of the water swirl round and round in the black water, no eyes in their heads, their mouths open" (240). Fish ponds thus encircle Lovey's witnessing of Crystal and Larry, standing in as a marker of Crystal's higher class status and a symbol of Larry's toxic masculinity whose displays of virility emerge in acts of animal violence.<sup>162</sup> By the end of the chapter, all the fish are dead from Larry's rage after discovering Lovey spying. Lovey explains

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<sup>162</sup> Monica Chiu further argues that "Yamanaka creates angry and frustrated characters whose violence against animals exemplifies their own frustration as disenfranchised citizens" (100).

this scene in exacting detail, focusing on the messiness of their leaking, the way their insides spill out: “One by one, he [Larry] grabs them and squeezes them by the head till black slime comes out of their mouths and their eyeballs pop out all shiny” (239-240). Lovey’s focus on his squeezing as well as the physicality of this scene recall Lovey’s description of Larry and Crystal, Larry’s “ass squeezed tight together” (233). Her description of Larry’s final action before walking away further links sex and violent animal death as “he rubs his slimy hands all over his crotch” (240). Larry’s constant interruptions to Lovey’s narrative, violent and homophobic, feel loud but Crystal’s presence emerges as a quiet yet haunting gap. Inside this gap, something louder echoes.

Embedded and nearly lost in Lovey’s narrative is the story of Crystal – a Japanese Hawaiian girl, just slightly older than Lovey but not as poor, who gets pregnant, is sent to Japan to get an abortion, and then commits suicide upon her return to Hawai’i.<sup>163</sup> Crystal’s story, and her affiliation with Lani and Nanny Goat in that Lovey witnesses all of them being ‘mounted,’ is muffled and murky in Lovey’s narrative.<sup>164</sup> The animals, and their subsequent mountings and deaths that surround Crystal, though, name quite clearly what Lovey can notice but not quite yet

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<sup>163</sup> Crystal’s suicide is embedded in a chapter titled “Wrong Words” as an interruption, brief and jarring, in a string of stories Lovey tells about learning to read and singing the wrong words to songs. Nestled between two moon symbols in a two-paragraph fragment, the narrative reads: “I like the smell of baby powder, old corduroy pillow shams, newborn-puppy mouth, fresh-struck match, and ripped lemon-tree leaf. I like the sound of water falling. I would like it at night, right outside my bedroom window. / Crystal hung herself from the pneumatic arm of her back door. Naked and dripping with water, long wet hair. The last thing she saw was probably Mauna Kea or maybe the sky. The door was open and the view was spectacular” (274). Crystal’s death surfaces minorly in the narrative yet it dislodges something in Lovey who does not witness yet imagines Crystal’s final moments, leaving her life as a horizon of possibility, the one open door in her story of closed doors, silences, and sending away.

<sup>164</sup> See also, Yoon Sun Lee’s reading of Crystal’s presence as fragments throughout Lovey’s story. Lee focuses particularly on the chapter in which Lovey strings flashbacks of Crystal along with tellings of her death. Lee notices that “the rambling, disconnected chapter is composed mainly of brief anecdotes and reminiscences concerned with two topics: signs and reading” (165). Lee relates Crystal’s shaky presence in the narrative to its preoccupation with broken signs – both in the sense of shifting signifiers but also literal broken signs on businesses. For Lee, Crystal points to the instability of meaning: “As a signifier, and despite the meaning of her name, Crystal is opaque and subject to change and defacement” (165). This reading points to how Crystal cannot surface in this narrative but in fragments and shifting signifiers. What this reading does not quite get to is how this circling around Crystal positions her as a significant point of rupture that both haunts and fascinates Lovey as she tries to articulate her own sexuality.

see: that men are dangerous. That agricultural practices of breeding, direct results of colonial occupation in Hawai'i, leave the landscape and the human inhabitants making life within these violent structures broken and barely living. That, within these structures, Japanese Hawaiian women have no place to survive.<sup>165</sup>

In fact, Lovey, after telling us that a “secret wish I have is being pregnant,” which she fulfills by playing pretend, changes her mind after witnessing her neighbour, Katy's, postpartum experience and hearing gruesome stories of birth (52). Aunt Helen, for example, tells Lovey how “every time one labor pain came, I dig my fingernails into the wall, then I scratch the wall like one dog” (54). Dogs appear once again as similes, just like Lovey's descriptions of Crystal and Larry having sex. Furthermore, Lovey's way of understanding Katy's prolonged absence at the hospital giving birth is by looking to dogs. Animals thus guide her through negotiating her desire yet fear around pregnancy:

By the third day I'm thinking maybe Katy didn't make it. Maybe it was so sore, the baby needing forceps to come outta Katy's fufu, that she died of the pain. Like Katy's little dog, Libby. When Libby gave birth, she ran around the house screaming crazy too. Then she hid in the dark closet... I remember Libby didn't know that the baby came outta her, so she screamed, then ran to the other side of the room with her baby still stuck in the black sac and she breathed hard. I remember. The scared look especially. (55)

This scene is visceral, harrowing, and sticks with Lovey: “I remember” (55). To understand Katy's absence giving birth, Lovey looks to Libby the dog, grasping the trauma of this moment

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<sup>165</sup> I highlight Japanese Hawaiian women here because that is Yamanaka's focus. But I would also add that Kānaka Maoli women, in their erasure from Yamanaka's text, are given no space either. Furthermore, because of Yamanaka's stereotypical portrayal of Filipino men, in which Filipina women, at least in *Blu's Hanging*, are also portrayed as perpetrators of violence yet also victims to that violence, I would argue that they are also shown to have no space.

by reading fear into Libby's running, hiding, screaming, and breathing. After remembering this scene, Lovey "thinks maybe I don't want a baby anymore" so she "stop[s] playing pregnant" (56). Lovey thus negotiates her future as a potentially pregnant body through the animals proximate to her as domesticated pets and backyard animals being bred for consumption and capital. If, as Gabriel N. Rosenberg, in "Roundtable: Animal History in a Time of Crisis," states, "agriculture is centrally and distinctively about reproduction," then how do girls, allied and intimately entangled with domesticated animal others, figure into this (462)?

Monica Chiu is the only other critic who takes up *Wild Meat and the Bully Burger's* representation of animal breeding. Chiu writes, "In all such cases, breeding results in profit, consumption, or both. The words *breeding* and *consumption* are inflected with negative connotations within Yamanaka's work" (103). Although Yamanaka demonstrates how these systems and structures of breeding and consumption are harmful, she does not provide an elsewhere, even though it is clearly there, in Indigenous ways of relating to land and animal kin (103). Chiu wonders, "perhaps if such a view had been acknowledged, a different system may have emerged" (103). The proliferation of dead animal bodies on Lovey's landscape makes visible the violence of the patriarchal and imperial structures underpinning America. In her affiliation with animals, Lovey gestures toward but does not quite name another way of relating.

Kelly Struthers Montford proposes an "analytic of agricultural power" as a way of conceptualizing the vast institution of agriculture by centring property as foundational to the relationship between human and animal (224). Struthers Montford argues that centring private property as its organizing relation of power makes visible the ties between agriculture, settler colonialism, land, and animal life. Writing specifically of Canadian and U.S. contexts, Struthers Montford argues that "colonists positioned animal agriculture as the civilized manner in which to

interact with animals” and was thus “historically rooted in a settler colonial project of territorialization” (228). In a similar way, Billy-Ray Belcourt theorizes a “politics of space” that “conceptualize[s] the ways in which settler moves to knowing and/or constructing animal bodies and/or subjectivities (re)locates animals within particular geographic and architectural spaces” such as (factory) farms (“Animal Bodies” 4). Animal agriculture is therefore a colonial project that “requires the disappearance of Indigenous bodies from the land” and whose anthropocentric logics also “militarize [...] racial hierarchies that further distance the white settler from blackness and indigeneity as *animalized* sites of tragedy” (Belcourt, “Animal Bodies” 5). Hawai’i has its own history in which American settlers claimed land for plantation and large-scale agricultural projects, violently displacing Kānaka Maoli people and their ways of relating to animals and land for one founded on property, extraction, and theft.<sup>166</sup>

With Lovey’s recurrent witnessing of animal breeding so closely linked to death, agricultural projects, and thus colonial projects, emerge as spoiled and failed. Through her, the entanglements between race, labour, animality, and girlhood, surface. As I argue in the next section, Lovey’s affiliation with animals renders her unintelligible or inassimilable within domestic borders at the same time as it serves as a means to negotiate her own ‘domestication’ as a girl in a world of patriarchal violence.

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<sup>166</sup> See ho‘omanawaniu, ku‘ualoha’s “Moamahi ā Pua’a Moe Poli: Nā Keiki a nā Hānaiāhuhu i ka Mo‘omeheu Hawai’i (Cherished Chickens to Chest-Cuddled Pigs: Children and Pets in Hawaiian Culture)” on Kānaka ‘Oiwī story and animal relations. ku‘ualoha writes of depictions of humans and animal pets in traditional Hawaiian literature as well as the prominence of animals in traditional mo‘olelo, Hawaiian myths or stories, especially in relation to children (96). These stories frame humans and animals in relationships of love and care, in “intimate kinship” (104). For a more political discussion of the Hawaiian concept of “‘āina,” meaning “earth, ‘that which feeds,” in practice, see Laurel Mei-Singh and Summer Kaimalia Mullins-Ibrahim’s chapter, “Fences and Fishing Nets,” which details the activist work of the Ka’ena Defenders and their efforts to protect the coastal ecosystem and its many creatures from invasive projects framed as environmental protection yet actually functioning to secure the area for tourism (271).

## II “Dead animals spoil the scenery”: Negotiating Domestication and Consumability in Hawai’i

Dead animal bodies pepper the landscape of Lovey’s everyday – unspectacular and mundane. Near the beginning of the novel, when tasked with writing her obituary for a class assignment, Lovey tells us: “Like I even care. Dead is dead. Can’t see or feel or care. I seen dead. Dead rabbits. Dead dogs. Dead goats. Dead sheep. Dead chickens. Dead fish. You name it, my father shown it to me” (18). These dead animals are part of her story, arguably, the most important part, even though they occupy the mundane margins of the novel.<sup>167</sup> Dead animals emerge at key points of Lovey’s coming into girlhood, serving two main purposes. First, as the previous section argued, they accompany her as companions as she turns toward non-reproductive horizons and away from the violence of heteronormative reproduction and projects of animal breeding. Second, Lovey’s affiliations with these dead animals, who challenge ‘easy’ consumption, offer a way for her to refuse legibility and assimilation into the American nation while also marking the ways the nation excludes her and her family as “aliens ineligible to citizenship” (Lye 5). These affiliations are charged with longing and desire. Lovey articulates her complicated relationship to her Japanese Hawaiian ancestry paired with an intense longing to be haole while holding the knowledge that she will always be ‘alien’ to America through these animals, trying to feel out her place amidst a rotting landscape of death and abject consumption.

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<sup>167</sup> There are numerous examples of mundane instances of animal death in *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*. For example, Lovey tells readers of her father jabbing pregnant geckos off their window screens and her mother killing slugs in the garden with Clorox (170-71). She tells us of goats drowning in a rainstorm, their bodies placed in garbage bags to rot, “bursting open” and bloated (173-74). On their way home from their summer job, Lovey and Jenks spot a dead cow “float[ing] away like a black, white, and pink balloon” in Mizuno Pond (175). These are just a few of many examples of how dead animals appear in Lovey’s everyday, told without shock as if they are just “part of the scenery” (174). For a more sustained reading of the mundane and minor in relation to Yamanaka and Asian American literature see Yoon Sun Lee’s *Modern Minority: Asian American Literature and Everyday Life*.

Animals therefore emerge at key interstices of Lovey's identity – entwining gender, sexuality, class, and race. Monica Chiu aptly proposes that “animals and their human(e) treatment assist the novels' Local Japanese girlish protagonists in arriving at sexual and self-realization, processes often inflected and impeded by economic circumstances surrounding their raced and female-gendered status” (85). In addition to serving as guides who help Lovey navigate her sexuality and reproductive futurity, I argue that animals also surface the entanglements between agriculture, labour, settler-colonialism, and what Colleen Lye calls the “Asiatic racial form,” wherein, as Iyko Day aptly summarizes, representational tropes of “economic efficiency [are] the basis for exclusion *or* assimilation” (7). This “economism” of the Asian American racial form appears in representational processes of abstraction, animalization, and mechanization (Day 6). Yamanaka, I argue, clearly establishes animals as the economy that supports, sustains, and comes to bear on the bodies of the Nariyoshi family. This economy of animals arises in two forms: as agricultural capital to be produced and consumed (as meat, as taxidermy) and as dead bodies, leaking and “spoil[ing] the scenery” (173; 175).<sup>168</sup> Taken together alongside Lovey, these animals surface the violence in both the creation of this colonial landscape and in the felt effects and affects of these racial forms that are tied to animality and labour.

Lovey's father still remembers his time growing up on the Kipu plantation, “full of ghosts,” tying three generations of Nariyoshis to the history of Japanese immigration to Hawai'i for agricultural labor, namely sugar and pineapple plantations (304).<sup>169</sup> Candace Fujikane and

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<sup>168</sup> In *Heads by Harry*, dead animals are capital, operating as the prime means of survival for the Yagyuu family in the form of taxidermy.

<sup>169</sup> See Hi'iilei Julia Hobart's “Local’: Contextualizing Hawai'i's Foodways” for a discussion of how sugar and pineapple plantations both devastated Hawai'i's ecological and foodway infrastructure, with the colonial effects of monocropping leaving Hawai'i in the precarious position of relying on importing 85-90 percent of its food (430; 428). Hobart writes that “this profound contradiction between abundance and scarcity is the product of a deeper

Jonathan Okamura mark 1852 as the beginning of extensive waves of Asian laborers to Hawai'i, with mostly Chinese laborers (18). Japanese laborers arrive in 1885 and by 1900 they are the largest settler group in Hawai'i amidst a complex interracial labor force on plantations (18). Although Yamanaka does not take us directly to the plantation, the looming presence of the Big Island Sugar Company Mill in the distance and the overabundance of animal carcasses on the landscape show the aftermath of plantation agriculture as ecologically devastated and rife with complex and painful racial rifts, countering popular representations of Hawai'i as a "timeless primordial paradise" (Yamanaka 119; Wilson 79).<sup>170</sup> Indeed, Yamanaka depicts the Hawaiian landscape as abject and far from a paradise in all three books of this trilogy, highlighting the ecological devastations of colonial occupation – from the introduction of new species to plantation agriculture to US claims to land for 'scientific' study.<sup>171</sup> Dead animals are part of this landscape and signify, for Lovey, a possibility to articulate herself as an inconsumable yet agential subject even as they also gesture toward the bounds of containment that surround her – barriers to self-representation, citizenship, and power.

As Lye traces historical shifts in Asiatic racial form in America, especially tied to agricultural laboring bodies, she demonstrates how labour and capitalism come to define representations of Asian American subjects, their bodies at once animal and mechanical, 'naturalized' and alien (9). While Hawai'i holds its own distinct history of Asian immigration, I

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social and political history" of "global capitalism, an indigenous population overtaken by an international labor force, and a Hawaiian monarchy overthrown by the American government" (428).

<sup>170</sup> Yamanaka further associates the Big Island Sugar Company Mill with imagery of the American South and its plantation system, making the allusion that the houses of the rich on Reed Island "look like *Gone With the Wind* or like the sugar plantation owners' houses on the cliffs above the Big Island Sugar Company mill" (119).

<sup>171</sup> Haunani-Kay Trask draws attention to the ways in which American occupation, in the form of the tourist industry, plantations, as well as scientific and military operations have left Hawaiian ecosystems and environments in disrepair. She cites, for example, that "more plants and animals from our Hawaiian Islands are now extinct or on the endangered species list than in the rest of the United States" (139). See also *Living on the Shores of Hawai'i: Natural Hazards, the Environment, and Our Communities* by Charles Fletcher, Robynne Boyd, William J. Neal, and Virginia Tice.

do think that the prominence of agriculture in this text and Hawai'i's history allows Lye's theorization to hold, with difference. If Asian American racial form is historically tied to agricultural labor – in the figuration of the coolie, for example – then the animal is also intimately tied to this form.<sup>172</sup> Indeed, Mel Y. Chen identifies “animality [...] as a primary mediator, or crux (though not the only one), for the definition of ‘human,’” arguing that it “played a visibly mediating role within the unstable landscape of racialization” (90; 107). Chen further establishes the idea of animacy as what polices the production of the human in its ‘properly’ bounded form, marking (im)proper intimacies and displays of affect in relation to queered and racialize bodies (9-10). Putting Chen in conversation with Lye's notions of Asian American racial form urges us to read “animality as a condensation of racialized animacy” that attaches itself to particular historicized forms and figures (Chen 14). Chen, for example, looks at visual representations of Asian American subjects in nineteenth-century American political publications, wherein Chinese labourers were often animalized as rats, a representation which also conjured fears of infection (110). While Yamanaka's novel does not explicitly position its characters within these histories of racialized animacy, I argue that Lovey's proximity to animals and agricultural labour brings her into contact with these histories of different sedimentations of Asian American racial form. Chen's attention to space, lateral movement, sexuality, and species and racial difference prompts my reading of Lovey's intimacies with these animals as both queer and non-domestic, both in the sense that they position her outside the nation and in the sense that they point to possible space outside of heteronormative domestic reproduction. This proximity, I

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<sup>172</sup> Colleen Lye identifies the “Chinese coolie” as “a familiar icon of American capitalist modernity” who “embod[ies] the ultimate logic of industrial subjection” (55). She writes that “the coolie signifies a different kind of monstrous presence” than another Asian American racial form, that of the Yellow Peril, whose monstrosity emerges from “the prospect of its mechanical abstraction” (56). The coolie is therefore tied to notions of labour but also of animacy in that they were defined by their “absence of nerves,” as both “biological impossibility and numerical abstraction” (55;57). Their representational ties to the mechanical and lack of affect therefore position them on Chen's hierarchies of animacy.

argue, is read by the *haole* characters, who have representational and economic power in Lovey's world, as improper, thus further coding this interspecies intimacy as queer and thus as an "improper affiliation" (Chen 104).<sup>173</sup>

Lovey's kinship with their pet calf, Bully is one intimacy that marks her class and racial position. Proximity to animals marks Lovey's family as other and not *haole*, which is a source of shame for Lovey: "Ashamed of my mother and father, the food we eat, chicken luau with can spinach and tripe stew" (10). Jennifer Ann Ho argues that "food is central to the novel's plot and character development, as consumption guides Lovey Nariyoshi's coming-of-age" (50). Through her consumption and refusal of Bully's meat, Lovey negotiates her complex racial longing for whiteness with a reckoning of her Japanese Hawaiian identity. Meat is thus tied up in shame and desire, with belonging and resistance. The titular chapter, "Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers" occurs about halfway through the novel and begins with the smell of animal death filling the Nariyoshi home: "sheep stew smells up the whole house" (90). Lovey tells us that her father and sister eat the stew with rice but she "skip[s] lunch and dinner" because the wild smell of the meat lingers (90).

There is little distance between Lovey and the meat her family consumes. She recalls in detail how she helps her father prepare the sheep meat: "I help my father grind the sheep meat with the meat cranker, which squeezes out fat fingers of ground sheep. Round, long coils of meat and gristle into the glass Pyrex bowl. Father will cook sheep burgers tonight, and if we're lucky, he'll mix it with store-bought ground beef" (90). For Lovey, store-bought meat signals a proximity to whiteness, which she associates with the privileged capacity to consume store-

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<sup>173</sup> One such instance occurs when Lovey and Jerry try to make a cassette tape of radio songs to play for their class but inadvertently pick up the sounds of animals – "dogs barking in the background, chickens crowing" – resulting in their class laughing at them (288).

bought goods. The negotiation of her relationship with wild meat, then, is a negotiation of her racial identity and belonging. If she aligns herself with ‘wild meat’ does that mean that she herself will be forever positioned as untameable, outside the bounds of the domestic, both in the sense of the home and American nation? Does she even want to be ‘domesticated’? Lovey’s ambivalence toward her father’s careful preparation of wild meat and its clinging taste and smell represents her own thinking through of where she stands in relation to those lines of national belonging: wild/othered and domesticated/assimilated.

The arrival of Bully, though, a young calf her father brings home, complicates these distinctions; like the wild meat her father hunts and prepares, Bully’s meat is difficult to consume. When her father prepares Bully, Lovey notes that “the faint smell in there [the kitchen] stays,” similar to the taste of wild meat – “he cannot kill the wild taste” (95; 91). For Lovey, wildness, which is associated with a distinctive strong smell or taste, is attached to proximity – the lack of distance between the raising and preparation of meat means that the meat, even though sometimes raised through small-scale domestication, is wild and thus hard to stomach. When her father brings Bully home – a young calf who they raise until ready to slaughter – Lovey refuses his meat. Despite his name, Bully is most known for his crying. This cry blurs the boundaries between animal and human and prompts an even stronger affective response to his killing. When they take him away from Lovey and Calhoon’s home to be slaughtered, he “cr[ies], not like a baby but like a grown man,” offering a sensitive version of anthropomorphized masculinity not seen in any of the novel’s human characters (93).

Lovey and Calhoon establish a bond of love with Bully, petting him as “he cries all night for two days” after being brought to their home (92). Even though they know his death is imminent, they bottle feed him, play with him in the honohono grass he so dearly loves to eat,

and sleep with locks of his hair under their pillows, tenderly “sweep[ing] it over [their] lips” (92). After their father eventually takes Bully away to kill, he re-enters their home, unknowing to Lovey and Calhoun, in the form of meat that their father prepares. Calhoun and Lovey first think their father is frying up “real hamburger” that they can fix up “all the way Big Mac” but the “faint smell in the kitchen” prompts them to question the ‘real-ness’ of what is actually ‘wild’ meat (94). The girls begin to notice that “the first bite tastes strange. Not sheep or goat. To me like honohono grass. To Cal like guavas and waiwi. She puts her hamburger down. ‘This is a Bully burger, isn’t it, Daddy?’” (94). Lovey and Calhoun have bonded so intimately with Bully – in these loving acts of keeping locks of his hair and mothering him from infancy – that they can taste his singularity in one bite. In naming the meat as a “Bully burger” these girls refuse to distance the animal from the meat and surface the violence held in this act of consumption, thus restoring the absent referent through language (Adams 93).

This refusal spreads across the kitchen: “My father looks at her for a long time, then puts his hamburger down too [...] Tonight, nobody eats. Nobody cleans the kitchen. The faint smell in there stays” (95). Although this refusal of meat is momentary – Lovey and her sister consume plenty of meat that they witness being prepared, seeing the “blood and brains” that accompany their killing – I argue that this moment, along with the surfacing of dead animals throughout, enacts a vegan sensibility (91). Indeed, Lovey’s movement toward adulthood is marked by these negotiations between the necessity of killing and consuming kin and kind with her desire to raise life with care, to nurture and name. Although she consumes and even kills many dead animals herself, she still grapples with these questions. While turkey hunting, for example, she expresses that “I want one bad to mount and eat but I can’t imagine dying such a death” (83). Lovey therefore directs our attention to the quotidian practices of violence that mark her landscape with

dead animal bodies: she must negotiate this violence each time she consumes.<sup>174</sup> Her own attunement to these bodies further demonstrates a commitment to feeling out a way to hold these animals with whom she finds herself in proximity with a tender questioning of how to consume with care, how to recognize and name their individuality, and how to forge her own identity as one intimately entangled with their deaths.<sup>175</sup>

Furthermore, Lovey's ambivalence about beef, in particular, is tied up with notions of American belonging and masculinity, the frontier and nation. America was built on beef, as Joshua Specht boldly claims, the land and its Indigenous peoples and animals violently cleared to make space for cattle and its subsequent infrastructures (258).<sup>176</sup> While Lovey's desire for store-bought hamburger signals a complicated longing to be haole, her refusal to consume a Bully burger, and the titular prominence this moment holds over the narrative, demonstrates an unwillingness to be assimilated into the American nation as "a red meat republic" (Specht 2). Indeed, in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century narratives around the Chinese Exclusion Act, meat becomes a signifier of "American manhood" defined against the mechanical "Coolie" whose 'alien' body need only "a handful of rice" (Lye 55-56).<sup>177</sup> Exclusion of Asian men,

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<sup>174</sup> As a turn away from meat, Lovey's veganism also functions as part of her queerness. Emelia Quinn argues for the reading of veganism and queerness alongside each other, noting that both enact a turn away from heteronormativity and the carnophallogocentric dinner table and therefore refuse to reproduce the nuclear family (262; 265). Quinn also argues that veganism offers a turn away from the centrality of the human often found in queer studies (262). Finally, drawing on Munoz, Quinn further posits "veganism as a horizon of becoming" (269).

<sup>175</sup> In a chapter that pieces together stories of Lovey learning to sew and her father sewing up animal hides, Lovey imagines a vest like her father's hunting vest that she would make if she could. In this vest, she names all the animals who have made her who she is: "I choose for the vest: Bully hide for the cow who wouldn't eat who cried like a man. Goat hide though it's not my Nanny, I wear it to scare away billies [...] Ewe hide for the black one from Mauna Kea who dragged herself with a bullet in the side [...] Rabbit hides for Clyde, Lani, and Hokulani on my shoulders, killed by dogs, but close to my face. To dominate. And no one – no one can name them but me" (228-29). Rocio Davis proposes that "her ability to name the animals in her vest and identify the scraps on the jeans signals [...] [an] exercise in agency" (243).

<sup>176</sup> See Joshua Specht's *Red Meat Republic: A Hoof-to-Table History of how Beef Changed America* for a sustained history of America's beef production, from nineteenth-century expansion tied to cattle ranching to the dominance of "The Big Four" beef corporations of the twentieth century. Specht confidently asserts that "America made beef modern at the same time as beef made America modern" (2).

<sup>177</sup> See Colleen Lye's chapter "Meat versus Rice: Frank Norris, Jack London, and the Critique of Monopoly Capitalism" in *America's Asia* where she quotes a 1902 American Federation of Labor campaign with the headlines

especially the Asian male labourer's humanity, in the form of legal barriers to citizenship and racist attitudes, stereotypes, and actions, was thus necessary in order to anxiously preserve American masculinity and its 'stock' in all of its vigor and virility, which was thought to be, in the late nineteenth century, in "danger of degeneration, [which] was closely articulated to the proximity or presence of racial alterity" (Lye 47).

Although Lovey is removed from this history temporally and spatially, with Hawai'i tugging at the limits of Asian America as a mode of categorization, as well as removed by her gender, this refusal, coupled with the prominence of agricultural labor and landscapes spoiled by the violence of agricultural practices, surfaces America's harmful exclusionary and extractive projects of Empire and asserts an identity apart from this nation. Yamanaka gives textual space to these dead animal bodies, marking Lovey's quotidian experiences of girlhood as entangled with these leaking bodies. Lovey notices and attends to these dead animal bodies as their presence builds and endures perhaps akin to an ugly feeling, as theorized by Sianne Ngai – as a minor or "negative affect" arising out of "a state of obstructed agency" that evades catharsis and whose "remarkable capacity for duration" leaves open and lingers the grief that marks this landscape and its peoples' specific experiences of racism, colonialism, and Empire (Ngai 3; 7). Dead animals thus mark the fragile bounds of the domestic nation and home. They are bodies that spoil, stain, bloat, and leak, as Lovey's list of "dead animals spoil[ing] the scenery" exhibits (174). These animals, furthermore, are placed in relation to Lovey's girlish body – itself leaking and staining, precariously positioned as reproductive. In this alignment, Yamanaka articulates

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"Meat versus Rice. American manhood against Asiatic Coolieism. Which Shall Survive?" (55). This campaign articulates an apocalyptic anxiety around the capacity of the Asian laboring subject to survive on "a handful of rice" at the same time as it positions them outside the realm of American citizenship and masculinity. The campaign elaborates. "What through the labor of the Coolie be cheaper than that of the stalwart men of our own race? [...] Who shall whiten the plains with their homesteads? Who shall form the families of the republic? The vigorous strength of Caucasian labor cannot be nourished with a handful of rice" (in Lye 56).

Lovey as a Japanese Hawaiian girl who refuses assimilation through her proximity to ‘wild’ and abject animals at the same time as she articulates a complex longing for belonging.<sup>178</sup> The dead and consumable animal body holds this tension for Lovey, as a racialized subject, between the desire and legal necessity to be legible and the possibilities for agency, movement, and self-expression that arise from remaining illegible and therefore never quite consumable.

Lovey negotiates what it means to be ‘consumable’ and what it means to consume through the many animals, dead or dying, that she encounters, ultimately feeling out an intimacy with these dead, domesticated, and birthing animals that gestures toward queer horizons not contained or containable within the bounds of the American nation. Monica Chiu argues that “the filth and stench embodied by many of Yamanaka's animals reflect [...] the socially constructed aspects that her female characters reject about themselves, contrasting a derogatory and socially constructed darkness against their Anglo neighbors' so-called clean and pristine whiteness” (100). While I agree with Chiu’s reading of how proximity to animal bodies racially marks Yamanaka’s characters, I argue that this affiliation holds promise just as much as it holds grief and harm. In these bonds, Lovey finds parts of herself. Even if it what she uncovers is shame, the animals alongside her help her name and face these parts in a way that I do not read as rejection aimed inward rather as a refusal projected outward that opens up a queer space – non-reproductive, outside the carnal heteronormativity of meat eating and animal violence. Furthermore, through these animals, many domesticated for agricultural projects, Lovey grapples with her family’s past as immigrant plantation labourers. The Hawai’i that emerges, as this final

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<sup>178</sup> Many scholars remark on the importance of Lovey’s use of Pidgin as a form of refusing intelligibility or easy consumption in the narrative. Rocio G. Davis, for example, argues that Pidgin “stipulates her [Lovey’s] place in the world” and language is how she attempts to make sense of her position and family history (241). Carmen Nolte-Odhiambo argues that Yamanaka’s use of Pidgin marks “a form of resistance to white normativity” and that Lovey’s eventual pride in her voice demonstrates how Pidgin, even as it is tinged with shame and sadness for the ways in which the American public school system in particular in Hawai’i attempts to ‘correct’ her language, is how she articulates her sense of home and belonging (383).

section will show, is itself bloody. The mundane reappearances of dead animals in Lovey's everyday points to a Hawai'i with little futurity – its idealized form as tourist paradise is stained by leaking animal bodies. By following these animal bodies, namely the pig in relation to girlhood, this final section tugs at the threads between girls, pigs, racial and species crossings, and patriarchal projects of Empire.

### III Girls, Pigs, Race, and Colonialism

The last part of this chapter, and indeed the entire next chapter, turns to pigs and their curious intimacies with girls in American texts. While many associate beef with white America, especially dominant white American masculinity, J.L. Anderson argues that pigs, in fact, were most central to the construction of American Empire (11).<sup>179</sup> J.L. Anderson argues that pigs brought over by colonists were “allies in European conquest,” displacing Indigenous peoples from their land for agricultural projects and competing for their resources of nuts and berries (34). Anderson follows pigs as they appear throughout key moments of American history, arguing, for example, that “to the extent that enslaved hands built much of the South, much of the South was made by pork,” including its role in feeding the enslaved, and that pork fueled industrial projects in the name of expanding the American frontier (73). Furthermore, Anderson argues that “pork fueled the gold rushes, the logging frontier, military posts, and the canal and railroad boom across the continent” (73). We might argue that pigs bring out the messiest parts of white supremacist America – metaphorically standing in for greed, consumption, and filth while literally playing a role in its imperial projects, such as taking over land and monopolizing

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<sup>179</sup> See Joshua Specht's *Red Meat Republic*, which I cite earlier in this chapter, for a thorough history of beef in America. Specht argues that “America made beef modern at the same time as beef made America modern” (2). He argues that beef played a significant role in Westward expansion as well as American capitalism's global reach (2).

food supply chains – and thus assume a particularly vexing symbolic hold. I am interested in what happens when girls find kinship in pigs, as the next chapter explores, or, in the case of Toni Yagyu, the main protagonist of Yamanaka’s *Heads by Harry*, how pigs might help a girl feel out her relationship toward motherhood, patriarchy, and America, naming her own agency in a world of pigs, both metaphorical and literal. If, as Lovey’s father proclaims “It’s a man’s world. And a haole man’s world more worse,” then how do pigs become allies to Yamanaka’s young girlish characters who must find ways to survive in this world? (168).

In *Heads by Harry*, pigs figure prominently. Yamanaka sets part of the novel in the Hawai’i Volcanoes National Park where Toni works alongside boys and dogs for the government’s pig eradication project. Toni, however, develops an affiliation with the pigs –at the same time as she is often called a pig by the pig hunting Santos brothers – and cannot accept the violence of this project of ruthless killing. Pigs, therefore, help Toni see and name the violence of American imperial and patriarchal projects and, at the same time, offer a possibility for survival within these conditions.

The first pig in *Heads by Harry* appears as early as page 7, as Toni tells of a hunting expedition with her father and his friend where she saves a piglet to take home. Toni is the first to hear the piglets amidst the “soft grunting” of the sow being hunted: “I hear the suckling” (7). After her father “shoots the sow near the head without warning [...] for smoked meat” and his friend skins the sow, her sounds continuing “until he skins a portion of her hide off the flesh,” Toni saves one piglet from being gathered into a burlap bag as they scramble around her (7-8). Toni takes the piglet home and mothers her: “When I put my knuckle to her mouth, she suckles it. Her mouth smells like a puppy’s, tuna fish and yeast” (8). The novel begins with Toni mothering a piglet and ends with her mothering a human child. Indeed, Monica Chiu remarks

that this opening scene foregrounds Toni's later pregnancy, mirrored with "the shooting of a sow with newly farrowed young" and notes that while the novel begins with the death of the sow, it ends with the birth of Toni's child (105). Chiu does not dwell long, however, on how this moment already positions Toni as a mother, taking in one of the piglets and naming her Fern.

Toni tells us in a list-like form, how,

I was a girl who wanted to pick berries for her father.

He shot a sow and smoked her meat.

I got a piglet.

I named her Fern.

Neither of us bothered to pick the berries. (8)

In this passage, Toni carves out a space that complicates the traditionally gendered binaries of hunting—"he shot"—and gathering—"I was a girl who wanted to pick berries" (8). By asserting her "I" and naming the piglet, Toni creates a third category to disrupt the gendered binary of subsistence: that of nurturer. In this naming, Toni creates the possibility that animal life might be something more than food.

The name, Fern, which Toni reminds us is after Fern Arable from *Charlotte's Web*, gestures to yet another narrative of a girl mothering a piglet. Curiously, however, Toni does not name her piglet Wilbur, like in *Charlotte's Web*, but gives her piglet the name of the human girl, Fern, who rescues Wilbur from being slaughtered but plays quite a small role in the narrative compared to the animals whose story the narrative weaves. Toni's naming of Fern, therefore, crosses species boundaries by assigning the name of Wilbur's human ally to her piglet. This act of nurturing, however, does not end well as the piglet soon outgrows their apartment above the taxidermy shop. As Toni reminds us after Fern is eventually killed and roasted, "there is never a

happy ending in stories with a child and a wild animal. E.B. White knew” (8). Although Toni as well as Lovey understand that hunting, consuming, and preserving animals are essential to their livelihoods, both characters attempt to advocate for a different way of relating with animals than their fathers. Lamenting her loss of Fern at the hands of her father, Toni writes, “I was such a little girl. And he gave this [slaughtering Fern] so little thought” (9). Yamanaka’s girls do give thought to the animals whom they bathe in strawberry shampoo, offer fingers for suckling, and gently feed with Evenflo bottles. They give thought because these animals, I argue, are a reminder of the status they share with girls as reproductive vessels at the same time as the affiliations these girls form with their animal others offer possibilities for resisting these structures in which they find themselves ensnared.

Pigs hold even more significance because of their history as ‘invasive’ species to Hawai’i. The first pigs in America were actually not those brought over by Europeans by early colonizers to the mainland but those brought to Hawai’i by Polynesians around AD 400, whose ancestry can be traced to Chinese domesticated pigs (Anderson 7). Captain Cook then brought over European swine to Hawai’i in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, which were much larger in size to increase agricultural yields (7). These two breeds of pigs eventually crossed, creating a feral pig ‘problem’ in Hawai’i, which Yamanaka foregrounds in *Heads by Harry*. Mr. Santos tells Toni that “the pigs my boys killing is not the Polynesian pig. They been interbreeding with the European pig for centuries” (63). Chiu argues that pigs, in *Heads by Harry*, are “a central metaphor of ecological imperialism and land rights” (86). Straddling the line between feral and domesticated, the Euro Polynesian wild pigs featured in *Heads by Harry* gesture toward the violent histories of empire that mark Hawai’i at the same time as their complex position in Hawaiian ecosystems and hunting practices raises questions of race, class, and Indigenous

sovereignty and land claims (Chiu 86). Chiu further notes that the language often used to describe pigs as non-native species in Hawai'i parallels that used to describe immigrants, particularly Asian immigrants throughout American history as "aliens [and] invaders" (93). Chiu writes, "the [pig] metaphors circle endlessly," sticking to bodies classed, gendered, and racialized (113).

Pig hunting, for one, is tied to notions of dominant masculinity, especially in the characters of Wyatt and Maverick Santos, the two brothers who Toni finds herself caught between. Toni, for example, is both attracted to and repelled by Wyatt's "old chain with a boar's tusk hung between his brown pecs," a trophy from his labours (41). When Toni gets a job pig hunting at the Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, heeding her father's warning that "'This ain't no women's work,'" her presence both complicates and affirms the patriarchal undertones of this space and labour (174). This space is hostile to Toni, as "the first girl pig hunter since they started killing all them pigs," a microcosm of a world of men who hunt pigs and degrade women to affirm their masculinity (170). Indeed, Wyatt's language conflates hunting pigs with how he treats women. He describes, "Women, they just like pigs. You hunt um. You sniff um. You poke um. You leave um" (68). Wyatt repeatedly calls Toni a "pig," simultaneously sexualizing pigs as he does women and animalizing women as he does pigs (Adams 4). Wyatt and Maverick's careless hunting of pigs – wherein they seem to get pleasure from their work – is thus tied to their sexualization of women at the same time as this labour is a direct project of American empire in the name of 'national conservation' and the creation of national parks as beacons of science and tourism.<sup>180</sup> Yamanaka thus make visible the links between pigs, patriarchy, and empire.

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<sup>180</sup> For more on this link between national parks, science, and empire see Ashanti Shih's "The Most Perfect Natural Laboratory in the World: Making and Knowing Hawaii National Park." Shih demonstrates how National Parks in

Further linking empire, patriarchy, and livestock, but this time with cattle, Chiu makes the important observation that both Maverick and Wyatt's names summon the American Wild West and its ties to Manifest Destiny and violent acts of Indigenous genocide in the name of the Frontier (115).<sup>181</sup> She further notes that "the relationship between American cowboys and Yamanaka's characters is ironic because the Hawaiian land on which they live is hardly theirs to claim and possess as once-colonized and then annexed territory" (115). It is therefore significant, then, as Toni repeatedly asserts, that "the pig-hunting job made me sick [...] The job itself made me sick" (171). It is not the landscape but the work itself that makes her vomit multiple times; sickened by both the workings of patriarchy and empire as they are intertwined. Toni is sick and refuses to participate in this labour because, as she witnesses these men hunt, especially Wyatt, it feels like a sexual violation that she also absorbs. Furthermore, the threat of male danger is everywhere. For example, as they drive in the truck to get to the pig hunting range, Toni describes trying to move "so that the gearshift wouldn't be between [her] legs" (171). Even more profoundly, Toni describes a typical day on the job where their task is to trap piglets from a sow Wyatt has just shot. Toni describes how Wyatt gathers the piglets and, "in one sharp stroke, cut off a hind leg of the first piglet. It screamed in a voice I felt in my whole body [...] I heard the piglet's wail in the 'ohi'a forest" (173). After Wyatt slices off its head, "slinging it in the bush," Toni throws up (173).

The affiliation she feels with the piglets manifests in her body as an expulsion of her disgust with the extent of male violence and misogyny. For Toni, her job entails witnessing the

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Hawai'i were created by the US government as natural "laboratories" for science and tourism (497). Furthermore, Shih makes it clear that the creation of these parks in the name of settler-colonial science, discredited Indigenous knowledge systems at the same time as they literally stole roughly 8% of the land area of Hawai'i from Indigenous Hawaiians. Another 5% is owned by the US military (Shih 495n6).

<sup>181</sup> Chiu suggests that Wyatt alludes to the notorious outlaw, Wyatt Earp, while Maverick means "a calf or yearling found without an owner's brand" (131n45).

violence of men, unable to perform this labor herself but unable to look away. Not only must she look, but she is constantly looked at by the male pig hunters, which places her in a similar sexualized and objectified position to the pigs being hunted. Toni tells us how, as she throws up, she could feel the male pig hunters' "eyes shifting over the landscape of my body" (174).

Although Toni connects with the piglets and sows and they foreground her eventual pregnancy and reckoning with motherhood, the male pigs also threaten her sense of safety in this space. Indeed, her encounter with one particular male boar in the National Park foreshadows her sexual experience with the Santos brothers in the forest. She describes her encounter in predatorial terms, as if the pig were circling her to mate:

I hid from him, pressing my back against the fibrous trunk. When I turned, he was gone, and for a moment I thought he was circling me. I smelled fresh pig shit and urine upwind, brackish pools of semen. I glimpsed sudden movement on the other side of the rise, and watched the boar's supple ass and engorged testicles retreating into the underbrush of 'akala. He lifted his snout and smelled the Hawaiian raspberries, amused, as though he knew I was watching him. And then he stopped and looked directly at me. (176)

There is danger, here, in the pig's direct look at Toni, a similar danger she feels to the constant misogynistic advances of the male pig hunters. Indeed, Toni describes having sex with the brothers in a similar way she describes wild pigs scavenging in soil: "He devoured me, piece by piece, rooting and scavenging into the crevices of my body [...] we continued on, dazed and bestial" (198). These two moments – with the boar and with the boys – demonstrate the slippages between threat and safety, between violence and pleasure.

These descriptions of pigs and sex come together in the Hawaiian mythological figure of Kamapua'a, a shapeshifting trickster who often takes the form of a pig ("Kamapua'a").

Kamapua'a first comes up when Toni is interviewing her father and his friends about pig hunting and the National Park eradication efforts for a school project. After her father tells her to bring in some of his taxidermized pig mounts, tusk necklaces, bones, and "rotten pig teeth," he ends with "And tell um about Kamapua'a" (62). Mr. Santos goes on to explain that "He was handsome, that Kamapua'a, with all his rippling pig muscles. And he like to make babies and eat and root" (63). The *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Myth* recounts the Kamapua'a myth, in which, "at the beginning of creation he rooted up the Earth from the mud at the bottom of the primordial ocean," shaping it to form mountains, lakes and rivers ("Kamapua'a"). Many of the stories involving Kamapua'a, which translates to "pig-child," portray him as "eager for sex," pursuing both goddesses and human women, with the most well-known story being his pursual of Pele, the fire-goddess tied to the island's numerous volcanoes ("Kamapua'a"). Yamanaka's inclusion of Kamapua'a, albeit brief, further solidifies this link between pigs and violent pursuits of sex, not always consensual, by men. Why do Toni and Lovey, then, find themselves so drawn to these moments when animals and sex collide – the goats and bunnies being violently mounted, the wild boars circling them, on the hunt for sex?

In these moments, the girls find themselves unable to look away at the same time as these moments unsettle them, bringing up feelings of fear, rage, solidarity, and curiosity. Perhaps in these complex pulls between repulsion and attraction Toni exposes something about how, despite Hawai'i's lush landscape, often associated with pleasure, fertility, and attractions, there lingers a profoundly abject and rotting core that is America's violent imperial occupation of this space and its peoples. Perhaps these moments show how the hungers and desires of girls have nowhere safe to go. Toni, however, also carves out a space in which she can articulate her own relationship with these animals that refuses to be violent and careless. In her father's taxidermy shop, Toni

sews up animals like “a loving caress,” asserting that the care she puts into mounting animals gives her “gumption” (228; 151). Toni claims her space in her father’s shop, despite his calls that “this ain’t no woman’s work” when she says: “I was the one who had gumption. All those years of hunting and hanging around the shop table, getting the skulls, washing out maggots, organizing the trays of glass eyes [...] I even named them [...] *Gumption*. I had more gumption and heart than Maverick Santos any day” (150; 151). It is therefore her attachment and heart that allows her to find a space within these patriarchal structures of impersonal and often harmful practices of mounting: “I took it [the animal being taxidermied] all inside myself” (233). Gumption is a softness while still having the guts to survive in this world of men.<sup>182</sup>

Yamanaka’s attention to the entwined lives of girls, pigs, and other animals being bred or consumed therefore insists on the ways that empire sustains itself through the forced reproduction of animal subjects and the controlled reproduction of Indigenous and racialized subjects. In the next chapter, we meet Mija and Okja, a young girl and her genetically modified super-pig whose queer intimacy threatens to dismantle the carefully constructed story of meat that upholds America. Whereas Lovey and Toni, as well as the girls of previous chapters, are witnesses to animals within various structures of consumption and reproduction, Mija is in direct relation with Okja – they connect through touch and Mija moves fearlessly across borders to protect Okja from her fated death.

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<sup>182</sup> As a sideways text, see also Kristen Arnett’s novel, *Mostly Dead Things*, which also follows a girl coming of age in her father’s taxidermy business.

Chapter 5:  
Mija: Super-pigs, Acrobatic Girls, and Transnational Capitalism in Bong Joon Ho's *Okja*

Maybe you already know her?  
An extraordinary little girl who raised her superpig in wild nature.  
The fearless pig rider from across the globe!  
–Bong Joon Ho, *Okja*

Intimacy, cognate with intimation, might be thought of as  
a temporalized notion insofar as it might provide  
a hint or prediction of the future.  
–Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies*

This final chapter continues to follow pigs and girls but returns fully to the slaughterhouse in what is perhaps, out of all of this project's texts, its most graphic depiction. *Okja*'s setting moves from the pastoral raising of pigs in the unspecified but Asian-coded countryside of "Far From New York" to the industrial mass slaughterhouse in America, vividly presented with its wired fences, cold walls, and shiny cutting machines. Bong Joon Ho's *Okja* takes up the twenty-first century world of meat production, set in the decade between 2007 and 2017. Claudia Gorbman aptly calls *Okja* "part *Lassie Come Home* (Fred M. Wilcox, 1943) with a girl and her giant pig instead of a boy and his loyal dog; part *Brazil* (Terry Gilliam, 1985)" for its dystopic vision of an already here capitalist future run by greedy corporations (21). While many critics focus on *Okja*'s representation of the meat industry and its place in contemporary late capitalism and the climate crisis, few spend considerable time on what is, I argue, central to the film: the relationship between Mija, a girl, and her super-pig, Okja.

This chapter insists on the girl as a figure of promise in the story of meat at the same time as her affiliation with animals challenges the very palatability of this story of meat. I read Mija and Okja's relationship as queer because it crosses 'proper' boundaries on various levels at the same time as Mija's choosing Okja constitutes a refusal to listen to her grandfather's plea to "stop playing with that pig all day [...] go to town, meet a boy". Furthermore, Mija and Okja

cannot be placed comfortably into categories and borders. Okja's appearance, for example, straddles multiple species – pig, hippopotamus, dog – and Mija moves transnationally between South Korea and the US with a flexibility that is both desirable and rebellious.<sup>183</sup> Dividing this chapter into three parts, I first ask what story of meat *Okja* tells. I argue that the film utilizes Mija and her intimacy with Okja to tell this story. Once again, the girl is used to story meat. Using Nicole Shukin's theorization of the "spectacle of interspecies intimacy" and "posthuman kinship," based on Gregory Colbert's *Ashes and Snow* exhibit, I question how Mija, as a racialized child, functions as a figure of "liberal longing for contact with animals," similar to the children in Colbert's photographs (188).

Second, I argue that Mija is an acrobatic figure. Nancy Miranda deems Mija the "fearless pig rider from across the globe," attributing her exceptionality to her relationship with Okja – as a pig rider – and her capacity to cross the globe, transacting and translating herself across international borders. Using Aihwa Ong's theorization of flexible citizenship, Tina Chen's notion of double agency, Vivian L. Huang's theorization of the reclamation of Asian American inscrutability as a "queer racial form of invisibility, silence, impenetrability, flatness/flexibility, distance, and withholding," as well as Rachel C. Lee's theorization of biopolitics, Asian American women's expression and "the perpetually girlish Chinese acrobat," I question how Mija's flexibility marks her simultaneously as a subject capable of labouring and dangerously inscrutable, with the text raising the trope of Asian inscrutability in its depiction of Mija (Huang 4; R. Lee 73). Mija's intimacy with Okja also raises common anti-Asian anxieties about toxicity and permeability between Asian and American borders and subjects. I propose that the pig, and Okja especially because of her genetically modified hybrid status, animates these anxieties about

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<sup>183</sup> Kristen Angierski observes that Okja is "a visible composite of many animals: a hippo, a dog, a pig, and a cow" (n.p.).

transnational infiltration and infection.<sup>184</sup> Mija's crossing between Asia and America in search of her pig also reminds us, however, that Asia makes up the largest market for the consumption of American pork; in fact, "US pig products are less likely to end up in US American than Chinese mouths overseas" (Blanchette in F. Lee 40).<sup>185</sup>

Third, I argue that Mija and Okja can be read as a queer interspecies intimacy and alliance.<sup>186</sup> Returning once again to Mel Y. Chen's theorization of racial mattering, nonhuman agency, and queer interspecies intimacy, I contend that Mija and Okja's relationship poses a threat to Mija's presumed marriageability symbolized by the gold pig that she will eventually use to 'buy' Okja instead of use as a dowry. Theorizing how Mija and Okja use touch as a primary means of intimacy, I follow Mel Y. Chen to argue that skin marks their intimacy as particularly queer for the potential transgression and transmissibility that their touch – between human and nonhuman animal – enacts. Both Mija and Okja raise significant questions about borders – between species, nations, bodies – and what happens when the artificial boundaries between

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<sup>184</sup> Miru Kim's, a Korean American performance artist, installation and photo series *The Pig that Therefore I Am* is worth mentioning here as a text that also brings up these questions of Asian Americanness, touch, and contagion, all thought through the pig. <https://mirukim.com/the-pig-that-therefore-i-am> Furthermore, Xu Bing, a Chinese artist, uses a pig, once again, to take up questions of interracial sex, animal-human relations, and cultural translation (Chen 144). Mel Y. Chen writes about his piece, "Cultural Animal," arguing that it "raises questions about the connection between various forms of trans- encounters, including transnational, transgender, and transspecies" (147). Both of these aesthetic attempts to think through race, transnational movements, sex, and interspecies encounters use the figure, and in both of these cases, the living being, of a pig. I thus wonder how these texts might help up think through *Okja*.

<sup>185</sup> For other texts that grapple with this relationship between US meat production and Asian markets see Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* as well as the K-Drama *The Good Bad Mother*. *My Year of Meats* tells the stories of two women whose lives are connected through a Japanese documentary television series sponsored by BEEF-EX, "a national lobby organization that represent[s] American meats of all kinds," whose aim is to sell the appeal of American beef to Japanese women (9). Thank you to Dr. Serenity Joo for her detailed explanation of the K-Drama, *The Good Bad Mother*, that takes up themes of motherhood and pig farming and shows transnational relationships between pork markets.

<sup>186</sup> My use of the term "interspecies" is informed by Jasbir Puar and Julie Livingston's definition. They write that "interspecies" names the "articulation of human/nonhuman binaries and human/animal/plant taxonomies as interrelated even as those continue to operate in both congealed and differentiated modes" (3). They read interspecies intimacies as "fragile and precarious," fraught with racialized, sexualized, and gendered situated histories and presents (4). They also posit "interspecies as a capacious analytic paradigm" that opens up new practices of reading and "forms of sociality" (12).

them are crossed. Furthermore, Mija and Okja's mutual protection, care, and love for each other challenges dominant human and animal relationships based on property and capital and thus threatens what the first part of this chapter establishes as already precarious: the story of 'ethical,' 'clean,' 'friendly,' and 'consumable' meat.

Nam Lee asserts Bong Joon Ho's popularity in Korea, and after his transnational films, *Snowpiercer*, *The Host*, *Okja*, and *Parasite*, the last of which one four Academy Awards in 2020 including Best Picture, he is now well-known globally (2). *Okja*'s audience, as Karen Han proposes, is particularly global in that, unlike Bong's earlier films which had limited release outside of Korea, *Okja* was distributed by Netflix and features a widely known to America cast, with Tilda Swinton and Jake Gyllenhaal, among others. Bong's films are recognized for their biting class commentary, which Nam Lee argues must be read within the context of the transition from Korea's military dictatorship of the 1980s to the democratic yet highly economically divided neoliberal capitalism of twenty-first century Korea (8). Another prominent feature of Bong's filmmaking is his "unruly mixing of genres," what Nam Lee calls "cinematic perversions" (Angierski np; Lee 39). Nam Lee characterizes Bong's techniques as "defamiliarizing, noting that "the swift and seamless blending of disparate elements is often motivated by his genre-bending impulses, which are, in turn, triggered by the desire to tell specifically Korean stories" (39). This reading is a common thread in most pieces written about *Okja*, which argue that it cannot be generically contained.<sup>187</sup> In the writing about *Okja*, critics also tend to highlight Bong's sense of play that gives his highly political films a markedly distinct tone. While the scholarship that already exists for *Okja* is sparse because of its quite

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<sup>187</sup> See, for example, Kristen Angierski who notes its "unruly mixing of genres" or Tony Rayns who claims that "the film rests all the usual categories" (n.p.). See also Nam Lee who establishes "genre-bending impulses" as a key element across Bong's films (39).

recent release date, the pieces that have been written are thoughtful and sharp. Much of this criticism focuses on Bong Joon Ho's representation of capitalism in *Okja*, in the form transnational capitalism, global capitalism, and neoliberal capitalism. The other dominant focus is on his representation of the Anthropocene, animals, and meat production. Finally, the other main type of criticism are movie reviews. I will address a handful that engage more critically with the film.

The first major theme that critics take up is Bong's representation of capitalism, especially as it relates to transnational relations, race, and neoliberalism. Travis Workman, for example, reads *Parasite* and *Okja* together as critiques of neo-feudalism; but argues that the actions of their protagonists fail to go beyond individual acts of revenge, leaving capitalist systems intact without any collective resistance (1). Workman draws heavily on Jodi Dean's definition of neo-feudalism as well as Italian Marxist Maurizio Lazzarato's theorization of resentment and his notion of "infinite debt" (3).<sup>188</sup> For Workman, Bong's films are powerful representations of class divides, showing that "we do not all occupy the same positions within capitalism, even if we all live there" (7). In his analysis of *Okja*, Workman highlights that Bong's representation of the Mirando corporation shows how, under neo-feudalism, technology and surveillance break down nation-state borders (7). Workman's article highlights Mija's tenuous hold on *Okja* – who is not her property but that of the corporation – and that her

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<sup>188</sup> Workman notes that Dean identifies four major components of neo-feudalism (4). First, Dean identifies "the parcelization of sovereignty," meaning that power rests in the hands of monopoly corporations while individuals are left without a sense of agency previously held in the neoliberal state (4). The second component is the "hierarchy and expropriation with new lords and peasants," meaning that society is starkly divided between "lords" who govern and own property and "peasants" who must rent, leading to everlasting debt (4). Third, Dean argues that neo-feudalism creates "desolate hinterlands and privileged municipalities," which result in divided and disparate political and social positions (4). Dean gives the example of "the stark urban-rural divide we see in contemporary US party affiliations" (4). Finally, the fourth component Dean identifies is "insecurity and catastrophe" whose effects are felt unequally across class and race. Workman argues that Bong Joon Ho dramatizes many of these elements of neo-feudalism in his films (1).

insistence on care over capital “refuses to recognize this [capitalism’s] contract” (7). Workman further frames their relationship as one of “affection and mutual aid [...] that occurs outside cycles of debt and exchange” (8). For Workman, though, this refusal falls short of revolution, with the film’s ending feeling more like what he deems “an allegorical fairy tale” (8). My reading will continue to think about Mija’s intimacy with Okja as anti-capitalist but I will also frame it as an act of queer refusal and resistance to heteronormative time. Fred Lee’s reading of *Okja* centres what feels glaringly absent from Workman’s reading of Bong’s grappling with neo-feudalism: race.

In “Bong Joon-ho’s *Okja*: Transatlantic Racism, Transpacific Capitalism, and Intimate Subversion,” Fred Lee “resituate[s] the transatlantic question of racial/species oppression in *Okja* within a transpacific analytic of global capitalism and US empire” (34). Doing so, he argues, makes visible how Bong Joon Ho “portrays the suffering of industrialized animals partially within transatlantic frameworks of race” (35). Lee draws heavily on Afropessimist theorist Frank Wilderson’s writings on white supremacy, anti-Black racism, and the human to explore “the intimacies and subversions of race, species, empire, and capital” in *Okja* (35). Lee’s argument is helpful to my own for his insistence that race and species be read together. My reading adds gender and sexuality to this intersection. Furthermore, Lee’s reading of *Okja* and the transpacific pork industry is crucial to my own attempt in holding animals for both their symbolic and literal presences (36). Lee argues that *Okja*, in its movements from Seoul to the US, makes visible the contingency of American pork production and Asian consumer markets at the same time as *Okja*’s “spectacular outburst” in the Seoul underground mall points to the precarity of this

relationship (41).<sup>189</sup> Lee therefore proposes that the film turns around a series of “contact zones” and intimacies which animate transpacific partnerships and relations (47).

Lee draws comparisons between enslaved Black people and agricultural animals as well as slaughterhouses and concentration camps. While there is value in pointing out that *Okja* invites us to think about the liberatory possibilities in shared oppression, the comparisons are not so simple (40; 42). Fred Lee’s reading, however, is helpful for the ways in which it establishes *Okja* as “fungible, disposable property” at the same time as the film portrays her as a feeling and thinking being (41). Lee also draws the important connection between animality, race, and labour, noting the “longstanding Western imagination of Asian – especially Chinese – workers as ‘filthy animals,’” notably pigs (42; 43).<sup>190</sup> This chapter will tend to the proximities between representations of racialized labour and that of racialized Korean girlhood and animals/animality. Finally, it will tend to the subversiveness of Mija and *Okja*’s “private language” about which Lee writes, which, as Asian subjects crossing national borders, places them within “familiar US discourses of ‘alien espionage’ and ‘internal enmity’” (49; 53). Overall, Lee’s conclusion that *Okja* shows how “animal-human intimacies have the potential to remake world, even if that transformation is ‘only’ at the household level,” is very much aligned with my own reading (57).

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<sup>189</sup> Fred Lee notes that China is the world’s largest consumer of pork, noting that “US pig products are less likely to end up in US American than Chinese mouths overseas” (40).

<sup>190</sup> Since the late 90s in both Southern and Midwest America, meatpacking has been increasingly made up of a largely Latina/Latino workforce. In their book, *Mayans Among Us: Migrant Women and Meatpacking on the Great Plains*, Ann L. Sittig and Martha Florinda González write that, according to UFCW statistics, the union that represents many midwestern meatpacking plants, in one representative plant, 95% of production workers are Hispanic, consisting of people from Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela (114). Furthermore, according to a study on COVID-19, race, and agricultural labor, Hans R. House and a team of researchers note that, nation-wide, meatpacking workers are twice as likely to be Black or Hispanic than in other US workforces (1016). As a workforce being paid much less than a livable wage, working in close proximity, and likely to face barriers to accessing healthcare, this article looks at factors that contributed to their conclusion that Black and Hispanic workers, at least in their Iowa study, were more likely to require emergency care and hospitalization for the wide outbreaks of COVID-19 infections in meatpacking plants (1017). This is just one example of how meatpacking is an exploited workforce.

This remaking, as I will show, rests on the specific nature of the girl-pig intimacy, racialized and queer.

Following Fred Lee's focus on transnational capitalism, Ju Young Jin reads *Okja* together with Nacho Vigalondo's *Colossal*, arguing that globalization and global capitalism might be read through the frame of monstrosity. Jin chooses to read these two films alongside each other because both work with the bildungsroman form and feature female protagonists "striving to achieve some sort of social integration either by dispelling or keeping the monster" (2). Both films also locate Korea as a particularly apt site to think through the transition from post-Cold War politics to contemporary globalization and capitalism (2). Jin develops the term "global monsters" to theorize how the films use monstrosity to "chart [...] the uneven development and mobility" of global forces at the same time as they make visible these forces of globalization, which, as Frederic Jameson theorizes, are often abstract and dematerialized (in Jin 2). In her reading of *Okja*, Jin prioritizes the representation of space, arguing that Bong Joon Ho represents South Korea as "fairy tale like," "discursively transformed from a historically and geographically specific space into the abstract and deracinated pastoral" (4; 5). This pastoral narrative of *Okja* and Mija's home is key to the Mirando corporation's storying of meat. *Okja*, and Mija, as Jin argues, become 'monstrous' only when they cross borders. Their mobility makes them dangerous at the same time as it is these acts of crossing spaces that reveal the inequities inherent in globalization, wherein only a privileged few benefit from capital's flows. This focus on mobility is important for my own reading as I question how Mija is positioned as acrobatic in her capacities to cross borders, in her abilities to communicate across species, and in her negotiation of her futures with inflexible corporations.

Yoon Jeong Oh's reading of *Okja* somewhat overlaps with the last in that she also centres space. Taking Bong Joon Ho's *The Host*, *Snowpiercer*, and *Okja* together, Oh proposes that Bong's cinematic representation of space makes visible the colonial underpinnings of geography and Anthropocene geology to demonstrate how "imperial space extends and transforms the construction of colonial space in the neoliberal age" (417). Yoon Jeong Oh argues that Bong cinematically works through how colonial space is produced. With *Okja* in particular, Oh questions how Bong moves toward a model of multispecies co-dwelling as an alternative to colonial constructions of space (417). While Oh spends considerably more time on the other two films, her analysis of *Okja* focuses on how temporality is mapped onto space, arguing that the representation of Mija and Okja's home in Korea uses a Miyazaki-esque pastoral aesthetic that establishes "an ironic ahistorical tone" (423). New York, however, exists in what Oh argues is a heterotopic space and time, neither past nor present but rather in a "fleeting, transitory" time (Foucault in Oh 424). *Okja*'s forced movement from Korea to New York is thus not only a spatial shift but a temporal one. Oh argues that *Okja* and Mija's movements reveal the "logic of inequality that runs through the rule of global capital," wherein their family is "excluded from the time of Man," positioned as Othered past (424). While Oh does not frame temporality in terms of queerness, my reading will add this layer to Oh's already apt reading of Mija and Okja's temporal positioning. My reading will centre how both of them are framed in terms of futurity, asking how their spatial and temporal flexibility, tied to their animal and racialized status, marks them as acrobatic subjects capable of transacting and translating themselves between and across transnational borders.

This brings us to the second way scholars often read *Okja*: for its representation of nonhuman animals and their entanglements with Anthropocene environments and agricultural

projects. Kristen Angierski argues that *Okja* draws on, yet also troubles, the genre of ecohorror, which she establishes dramatizes “the frightening and violent nature of which humanity is part” (n.p.). What is striking about *Okja*, she argues, is that it centres agribusiness as a site of “anti-pastoral” ecohorror and punctuates this normally quite serious genre with a juxtaposition of “high sincerity and the absurd”. Angierski clarifies that she uses the term “*anti-pastoral ecohorror*” to describe a filmic world that uses sentimentality and satire to critique factory farming as an ethical and environmental horror against which nonhumans and their human allies resist”. Important to my own reading, Angierski argues that “*Okja* makes the connection between masculinity, meat, and sexual violence” and “highlights the link between animal cruelty and sexual violence”. This is visible when, for example, Okja must mate against her consent; Bong renders the violence through the audible cues of pained squeals and cries instead of graphic visual registers. Angierski’s reading also importantly frames not only Mija, but Okja, as having agency to resist captivity, even if limited. She argues that *Okja* “foregrounds farmed animals’ capacity to protest”. The last helpful piece of Angierski’s argument is her discussion of how *Okja*, especially in the parade scene in New York, demonstrates the ways representations of animals in the form of imagery or symbols are used to sell ‘happy’ meat. Angierski’s reading is therefore significant for the ways in which it links environmental catastrophe in the Anthropocene to industrial agriculture and its violent reproductive practices whose harm is felt most by female animals.

Esben Nielsen follows Angierski’s focus on the Anthropocene but concentrates specifically on how *Okja* and two other “speculative narrative” films, *What Happened to Monday* and *Geostorm*, represent what he calls “Anthropocene technologies” (736). In each of these films, the attachments to these technologies differ slightly but all involve some form of

“cruel optimism,” a term theorized by Lauren Berlant that asks why we still find promise in objects that bring us harm (737). Nielsen argues that the film sets up *Okja* as a biotechnological “object of desire” while also encouraging audiences to identify with her, using close-up shots of her eye to resist reducing her to a mere object (739). Nielsen does not spend too much time analyzing *Okja* since the article compares three films but its focus on futurity and speculation is significant to my own thinking about *Okja*, *Mija*, and the temporalities they disrupt, promise, and make possible. Furthermore, Nielsen makes an interesting point about these three films and scale, arguing that *Okja* “focuses on the small scale of the individual organism” (749). I would add, though, that the film is also interested in thinking about the global scale of the meat industry and the climate crisis – from Asia to America most specifically – even if it is focalized through *Mija* and *Okja*’s relationship. Indeed, this very collapsing of scale – wherein the global reach of the meat industry is felt through a minor relationship between a girl and her superpig – is an impulse that I question throughout this project. What is it about girls, often held for their smallness and minoriness, that hold promise for articulating the vast scale of meat?

Michelle Gunawan shifts the focus from the meat industry and biotechnology back to animals. Gunawan takes a more legal approach to *Okja*, proposing that *Okja* problematizes “the legal categorisation of non-human animals and highlights the law’s double standards when regulating the treatment of animals” (264). Drawing on Foucault’s notion of power as well as legal practices and language around the treatment of non-human animals in Queensland, Australia, Gunawan reveals the contradiction that emerges in *Okja*’s existence as a subject. The film shows *Okja* as having a conscience and capable of love at the same time as she is undeniably positioned as a disposable and consumable object to the Mirando corporation. Gunawan discusses in detail animal welfare laws in Queensland, which is not very relevant to

my own project, but her discussion of legal categories for animals as they relate to power are helpful to my own thinking about *Okja*'s disruption of norms of intimacy, in particular. Gunawan argues, for example, that "*Okja*'s constitution and subjectivities confuse these distinctions between different categories of animal. She performs each of these 'identities' and negotiates a world where she was effectively commoditised as meat" (267). I find Gunawan's framing of *Okja* and Mija's actions as "negotiations" quite compelling. I follow a similar framing by adding the layer of "transactions" to their acts of negotiation between borders, species, legal categories, and levels of intimacy.

The third and final way that *Okja* is taken up by scholars is in the form of critical reviews. While many reviews are quite general, three are worth mentioning here for the unique perspectives they offer. First, Claudia Gorbman focuses solely on one scene in the film and its peculiar use of music. In "Bong's Song," Gorbman reads the scene where *Okja* charges through an underground shopping mall in Seoul as Mija tries to save her from the armed security trying to capture her for the Mirando corporation. This scene begins with "what sounds like some kind of Balkan klezmer bullfighting music" which then turns into John Denver's "Annie's Song" (22). Gorbman questions the discontinuity between this nostalgic country love song and the bustling action taking place visually (22). While many critics find this pairing "inexplicable" and stop there, Gorbman proposes that this song "is there to envelop the frenetic action in *love*," giving *Okja* and Mija's relationship validity and demonstrating the dissonance between *Okja* as a future meat product and *Okja* as a being who loves and is loved (22). Gorbman concludes that "Annie's Song" slows the action down "to show that Mija and *Okja* have inner lives and feelings" (23).

Tony Rayns's review, which also includes an interview with Bong Joon Ho, is less specific but it raises some significant points about the function of genre as well as the depiction

of capitalism in *Okja*. Rayns echoes the sentiments of many scholars of Bong's films, writing that *Okja* "resists all usual categories" (n.p.). Rayns further remarks on the curious mainstream appeal of *Okja* as a Netflix-produced film despite the fact that it is largely subtitled in Korean. Rayns's interview with Bong Joon Ho addresses topics such as vegetarianism and the film's theme of capitalism. Bong states that "in the film the fundamental issue isn't factory farming or genetic modification but capitalism itself". This statement comes to bear on the key inquiry of my project here, which is to ask how animals, girls, and capitalism become inextricably enmeshed, even as animals and girls come together to undo capitalism's very core.

Finally, Amy Taubin's review, "Free Range," pulls out some key moments of the film and highlights the importance of Mija and Okja's interspecies friendship. Their love, Taubin argues, is at the centre of the film's message about how we might live and eat well with animals (32). Taubin deems the film "a work of interspecies friendship, galloping satire, and monstrous truths" (29). Taubin further identifies touch and the gaze as key sites of care and communication between Mija and Okja; this is how the film demonstrates their inseparability (32). Taubin also emphasizes the abrupt shifts in tone – from love story to horror film – that pull audiences empathetically into Mija and Okja's orbit, feeling the horror alongside them as they realize Okja's fate (30). Despite the power of this tonal shift, Taubin proposes that the film does not necessarily put forth a straightforward vision of vegetarianism. Taubin points out, for example, that Mija and her grandfather eat chicken that they raise "free-range" alongside their home but Okja, to Mija and many audiences who witness their bond, is unequivocally not meat (31). Taubin concludes that "*Okja* is a condemnation, not of all meat-eaters, but of factory farming" (31). She further writes, "For Bong, the movie reflects what we might do in the course of a day. We bond with dogs and cats that live with us and then we sit down to a steak dinner, without a

thought about how that steak got onto our plate” (31).<sup>191</sup> Therefore, Taubin’s reading is significant for the attention it pays to the cinematic rendering of Mija and Okja’s relationship. Many reviews and articles about *Okja* centre capitalism and the meat industry in their readings, which, while significant, are overshadowed, I argue, by the prominence of Okja and Mija’s relationship. My chapter will centre love – interspecies, queer, rebellious, fiercely protective – as a force worthy of scholarly attention.

I “She can be the new face of the Mirando corporation”: Mija Stories Meat

*Okja* begins with Lucy Mirando, the newly inaugurated CEO of her family’s corporation, speaking to a crowd in an abandoned slaughterhouse “stained with the blood of fine working men”.<sup>192</sup> She announces, “today I reclaim this space to tell you a beautiful story,” sharing the plan to redefine the meat industry and solve the world’s food shortage by raising genetically modified “super-pigs” across the world, creating a “revolution in the livestock industry” with “these little piggies” who will “taste fucking good”. As she tells of the twenty-six farmers who will compete to raise the largest super-piglet “honouring traditional techniques unique to their respective cultures,” we begin to realize that this story is not a natural one rather it is masterfully staged and, quite simply, all artifice. The camera reveals, for example, the teleprompting screens that Lucy reads off as well as pans to Frank, her right-hand man, mouthing her words, showing that she has performed this speech many times. The film thus begins with an attunement to the

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<sup>191</sup> The disjunction between animals we keep as pets and those we eat is taken up often in critical animal studies. Melanie Joy deems this disjunction “carnism,” referring to “the invisible belief system” that posits meat consumption of certain animals as “a given, the ‘natural’ thing to do, the way things have been and always will be” (29). Annie Potts theorizes the specific lived and experienced everyday of carnism as “meat culture,” whose ideologies of which species are edible and which are not will differ (19).

<sup>192</sup> Quite a few scholars pick up on the uncanny ring between Mirando and Monsanto, wherein the M and tri-syllabic make-up of Mirando “remind in the audience of Monsanto, the world’s largest agricultural company whose scientists were among the first to develop genetically modified foods,” as Nam Lee notes, for example (119).

careful constructedness needed to tell a story of “eco-friendly, “natural,” and “non-GMO” meat, which are all words projected on a screen behind Lucy as she tells this story. The film ends, however, in a slaughterhouse with floors covered in blood not unlike the abandoned slaughterhouse where it all began. With Okja next in line for slaughter, Lucy’s sister, Nancy, proclaims to Mija that their continuous killing of superpigs is “as American as apple pie”. “This is business,” she says, implying that, in America, capitalism runs on animal death, no matter what story or spectacle of production it may tell its consumers. *Okja* thus dramatizes the horrific disparity between the spectacular story of meat – one that promises to be ‘friendly’ and ‘ethical’ – and its reality of being purely the business of ruthless animal killing.

The beginning of the film therefore establishes the “global range of the sovereignty of corporations”; the Mirando corporation controls the narrative of this new revolution in meat production but the film’s use of tonal shifts and forays into the absurd reveal the artifice behind this story (Workman 1). What is curious about this storying of meat is that it uses a particular figure: a girl. Mija, the young Korean girl who raises Okja, eventually becomes Lucy Mirando’s new “face of the Mirando corporation”. Indeed, Lucy needs to bring Mija into her marketing scheme in order to remedy the negative impact that the media attention around Mija’s attempted rescue of Okja has had on Lucy’s carefully crafted story of super-pigs. Even though, Fred Lee notes, “the company [Mirando] races, sexualizes, and commodifies Okja as a ‘piece of meat,’” they still need Mija to make this story palatable, countering the reality of the cruelty of their operations (40).

Ju Young Jin proposes that, “unfazed by Mija’s plan to rescue Okja, Lucy Mirando decides to capitalize on Mija’s potential as an attractive corporate mascot” (5). Jin quotes Lucy’s words from the film on Mija: ““She’s young, she’s pretty, she’s female, she’s ecofriendly, an

she’s global. She’s a godsend!’” (5). The first three qualifiers for Mija – young, pretty, female – establish her girliness as a key factor in making her a symbol of the ecofriendly and global.<sup>193</sup> What does Mija enable in Mirando’s storying of meat? I argue that it is not only Mija’s girlhood that is used to make consuming super-pigs more palatable but that, as a child racialized as Asian, she is positioned as both a future promise and as past colonial desire. How is Mija positioned as a figure who might mitigate the food shortage and climate crisis already happening in the world of *Okja*, at the same time as the Mirando company attempts to story her and her home of South Korea as nostalgically and pastorally non-coeval with that of capitalist New York? Put another way, what is it about Mija, in her intimacy with Okja, that makes this image – of a girl and her beloved pig – one that might be capitalized on for the desirable proximity its friendly interspecies companionship produces?

To theorize Mirando’s use of Mija alongside Okja to develop the narrative of meat, I turn to Nicole Shukin’s reading of Gregory Colbert’s *Ashes and Snow* exhibit and its use of racialized children alongside animals to articulate what Shukin deems an exoticizing and fetishizing impulse driven by an “imperialist nostalgia” (202).<sup>194</sup> Colbert’s *Ashes and Snow* exhibit travels globally in what he calls a “nomadic museum” and encompasses film, poetry, and photographs (Shukin 188).<sup>195</sup> The photographs are the most well-known piece of the project as they circulate

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<sup>193</sup> Lucy Mirando herself also crafts her appearance to be more girlish despite being an adult. Her blond hair in a bob, wearing pink and soft colours, a smile full of braces, and her childish demeanour contribute to her seeming more a girl, at odds with her power as a CEO.

<sup>194</sup> “Imperialist nostalgia” is a term theorized by Renato Rosaldo to capture the dominant nostalgic longing of “agents of colonialism [...] for the colonized culture as it was ‘traditionally’ (that is, when they encountered it)” (in Shukin 202). The irony is that this culture often no longer exists because the agents of colonialism have intentionally destroyed it.

<sup>195</sup> *Ashes and Snow*’s first exhibition was in 2002 at a Venice Shipyard. The exhibit consists mostly of photographs Colbert took during global expeditions that are housed in a portable structure designed by architect, Shigeru Ban, that consists of over 150 recycled shipping containers and paper-tube columns (Shukin 190). Shukin notes that the museum’s mobility and migratory sensibility also puts Colbert’s project in conversation with discussions of biomobility and global contact between species and cultures (188).

prolifically online.<sup>196</sup> My engagement will be solely with the photographs, one of which I include as a particularly apt comparative text to *Okja*'s representation of interspecies intimacy. The photograph I include features a girl holding her ear up to an elephant's trunk as if listening for an answer. I set this image alongside a film still of Mija in a strikingly similar pose, communicating with *Okja* in a way that audiences are not privy. What do these photographs articulate about how racialized girls signify in relation to animals, about their proximity and capacity for relating?



Fig. 8 Joon Ho, Bong. Film still from *Okja*. Image from “*Okja*: Big Love,” *Criterion Collection*, 5 July 2022, <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/7853-okja-big-love> Accessed 8 July 2023.

Shukin reads these photographs as depictions of “a liberal longing for posthuman kinship” which she posits as the affective inverse to the globalized world’s increasing biomobility, wherein animals cross international borders and viruses easily cross species lines (188). Shukin further theorizes that, in a world increasingly connected by transnational flows, “the crossing of species lines is produced not only as a pathological object of fear but also as an object of intense desire” (188).<sup>197</sup> Therefore, when Mija or the unnamed girl in this photograph reach out to touch their animal companions both fear and longing arise in the viewer. Similarly, when the Mirando company chooses Mija as their “new face” to help them sell their super-pig

<sup>196</sup> I could not obtain copyright permission to include a reproduction of the photograph. See a selection of them here, especially the image with the girl holding her ear to an elephant’s trunk.

<https://theforestmagazine.com/2014/01/gregory-colbert/>

<sup>197</sup> I will return to this idea of biomobility and the fear of zoonotic pandemic in the last section of this chapter when I focus on the skin-to-skin touch of Mija and *Okja* in their intimacy.

meat they identify her and Okja's bond as profitable and desirable at the same time as there is an underlying fear of the unruliness of their relationship. This is because Mija and Okja's intimacy, in its caring touch, counters and softens the violence of Mirando's meat operations.

Reading Mija against the Colbert photographs also highlights how she is figured by the film's frame and the corporation as non-coeval with the capitalist world of New York that Mirando occupies. The sepia-tone of the Colbert photographs, for example, is one indicator that they belong to a past time, or, as Shukin argues, signify "an ostensibly timeless spectacle of human-animal communion" (191). Shukin clarifies that this timelessness is tied to Colbert's fetishization of orientalism in which "'the East' [is] a timeless place apart from capitalist postmodernity," both "feminized and infantilized" (193; 195).<sup>198</sup> Is this, then, part of the promise of Lucy Mirando's spectacularization of Mija alongside Okja: that she meets the consumer desire to participate in capitalism's most bloody business while convincing themselves that the product has somehow been created outside of capitalist structures, in a land far away where the means of production are 'natural,' free from violence, built on love and care between girl and creature?

Colbert's photographs help make visible the film's framing of Mija and her raising of Okja as participating in a similar sort of "imperialist nostalgia" (Rosaldo in Shukin 193). The girl racialized as Asian – especially when placed alongside an animal body like Okja or the elephant in Colbert's photograph – also gestures to a sort of time outside capitalism where intimacy, communication, and kinship with animals is possible because the photographs frame its human subjects as out of this world. The animals are made to matter in these photographs – audiences

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<sup>198</sup> Shukin further proposes that Colbert's photographs offer "a new species of orientalism, or orientalism encoded in a discourse of species" (189). Colbert attributes this orientalism to the "exoticizing" impulse of the photographs that feature "'extraordinary interactions' of animals and brown-skinned humans" (192). On the photograph's relationship to capitalism, Shukin writes, "the love of animals that Colbert offers as an *antidote* to late capitalism is arguably also constitutive of it" (Shukin 189).

are reminded that these animals are in need of protection, disappearing – but the human subjects are positioned in a time non-coeval with the Western world.<sup>199</sup> This framing of racialized subjects as closer to nature and the past is consistent, Shukin reminds us, with an imperialist impulse wherein “the oneness with flora and fauna through which colonizing imaginaries frame[...] non-Europeans as having a surplus of nature and therefore a deficit of culture” (196). When the beginning of the film locates Mija and her grandfather’s dwelling in a land unidentified but by the title “Far from New York,” accompanied by a backdrop of misty mountains, she is framed as non-coeval with the time and pace of American capitalism at the same time as she remains out of reach, never quite fully intelligible. This partial intelligibility of Mija is necessary to her flexibility as a figure who will help story Lucy Mirando’s project of making super-pigs the new “eco-friendly” meat.

When the camera lingers, for example, on the closeness between Mija and Okja – Mija sleeping on Okja’s back, Mija feeding Okja persimmons by hand, Mija whispering in Okja’s ear – it plays on this trope of the racialized subject positioned outside of capitalist time and in close communion with animals. This lingering recognizes the liberal subject’s desire for a closeness to animal life – for the story of meat to be one of friendly kinship like that between Mija and Okja. As the face of the Mirando corporation, Mija embodies this closeness to animal life, like the unnamed racialized children in the Colbert photographs, and thus promises consumers that their meat has been raised with this companionship in mind, which, is of course, false. Sune Borkfelt articulates the relationship between rurality and the animal that is often used to sell ‘happy’ meat

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<sup>199</sup> Shukin also importantly notes that nowhere in Colbert’s descriptions or notes does he mention his “human collaborators” who appear in his photographs even as “he liberally acknowledges his animal collaborators by species name – Cheetahs, Elephants, Ocelots, Baboons, Tapirs, and so on” (197). Shukin draws the conclusion that this omission, on the part of Colbert, suggests “that there is no need to make a ‘speciesist’ distinction between Third World humans and animal species, given that they now constitute one global ‘family of animals’” (197).

wherein animals are cast in pastoral terms. Borkfelt writes, “in contrast to their relation to the city, ‘animals are central to how the rural is both materially and imaginatively constructed,’ and their lives and deaths in the countryside are consequently more easily naturalized” (151).

Furthermore, drawing on Raymond Williams’s theorizing of the rural and urban, Borkfelt reminds us that “the rural is most often cast as connected to what has been, or what is being lost” (153). Mija and Okja’s home in the mountains of South Korea highlights the loss of the rural or natural in America, which, in Bong’s representation, is hyperbolically capitalist and urban. While Mija is on the one hand framed as non-coeval, from “Far from New York,” which gives her this intimate bond with Okja, she is also positioned as spectacular in the Mirando corporation’s use of her as a figure. The Mirando corporation makes her Koreanness into a spectacle as well as her girlhood, using their intersection to market the super-pigs to the world.

The climax of the film features a parade organized by Lucy Mirando in New York’s Times Square. As a giant pink pig balloon floats through the street and swathes of people dressed up as pigs, noses and all, flood the streets handing out samples of Mirando’s new product, Lucy puts on a show to reveal Okja as the best super-pig and to debut the corporation’s first super-pig product: Super Pig Jerky. Also debuting at this parade is Mija – whom Lucy has chosen as the new face of the Mirando corporation. As Lucy addresses the crowd in a pink *hanbok*, a clothing piece traditional to Korea, she introduces Mija to the crowd as “an extraordinary little girl, a local farmer who raised her beloved super-pig in wild and beautiful nature”. When Mija enters onstage, bewildered with only one goal – to find Okja – she is wearing a *hanbok* of the same pink shade as Lucy, except she wears pants, accentuating her tomboyishness. To cohere the spectacle of Okja as meat, Lucy emphasizes Mija’s Koreanness by dressing her in traditional costume. Kristen Angierski argues that, “embedded in the film’s critique of the use of animals in

entertainment, then, is a comment on the use of non-white, female, and children's bodies in global corporate marketing campaigns" (n.p). Lucy's racialization of Mija positions Mija in a temporality and mode of production apart from that of hyper-capitalist New York in order to tell Mirando's story of Okja's 'ethical' upbringing, wherein Mija has "raised her beloved super-pig in wild and beautiful nature" (*Okja*). Mija is meant to look out of place – exotic yet closer to nature – at the same time as Lucy positions her and Okja as spectacle, an "extraordinary" marvel to behold.<sup>200</sup>

I would also argue that this moment of Lucy and Mija appearing in twinned outfits – with Mija tokenized as a child brought into the white American 'family' of the Mirando corporation – gestures to a very specific history of post-Korean War America and Korea. Susie Woo details the Cold War era influx of Korean adoptees and Korean military brides to America, forced to move from Korea to white American homes (4). Woo argues, therefore, that the Korean child was hypervisible in American Cold War politics as a symbol of domestic relations, meant to soften the actual violence of American imperialism in Korea (4). Woo states that "Korean children and women became crucial to the transnational making of American empire in the Cold War" (4). Although Lucy Mirando may try to soften Mija's image – keeping her apart from America yet attempting to place her within the story of their corporate family – I argue that Mija resists being assimilated into this family, thus gesturing at once to this specific history and the acts of resistance on the part of Korean subjects. The Mirando corporation's attempts at domesticating Mija point to what Susie Woo calls "the intimate scales of empire," imperial practices that are enacted at the level of the everyday, the home, the family, the private sphere (21).

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<sup>200</sup> Lucy repeatedly calls Mija and her relationship with Okja "extraordinary," which emphasizes her spectacularity despite her smallness.

Sarah Projansky's theorization of spectacular girlhood is also worth bringing up here to think through why Mija is such an attractive figure to help sell the story of super-pig meat. In *Spectacular Girls: Media Fascination and Celebrity Culture*, Projansky attends to the "the discursive production and social regulation of the girl as fabulous and/or scandalous object on display, "looking to mostly twenty first-century representations of girlhood in film, magazines, sports (6). She outlines three meanings conjured by the term "spectacular girlhood": "First, the media incessantly looks and invite us to look at girls;" second, "some mediated girls are also spectacular, as in *fabulous*," with amazing athletic abilities and confidence; and "third, some girls are spectacles, or *scandals*" (5). Indeed, Mija falls into all three of these categories. She and Okja become global sensations after the video of their chase through the underground mall in Seoul goes viral on YouTube, demonstrating the media's fascination with looking at girls. The Mirando company also positions Mija as spectacular in her athletic and intellectual capacities to cross national borders and to miraculously communicate with super-pigs. Finally, Mija is positioned as somewhat of a scandal – her crossing into America and fiercely seeking out Okja, for example, give her a visibility tied to her transgressive acts. Mirando then attempts to spin this for their own corporate gain, softening her transgressions into their branding of her as a "fearless pig rider from across the globe". This phrasing locates her outside the frames of national belonging – she is from across the globe – and deems her both an athletic marvel – fearless pig rider – as well as an exotic spectacle to be looked at. Objectifying her as an "extraordinary" and exotic figure allows the Mirando corporation to regulate the threat she poses to American capitalism in her attachment to Okja even as their relationship constantly thwarts this softening.

According to Fred Lee, the film's representation of both Mirando and the Animal Liberation Front's use of Mija as a figure around which to mobilize sentiment makes visible "the

way US capitalism instrumentalizes all, yet especially non-White workers” (51). Furthermore, Lee emphasizes Lucy’s sexualization of Mija during the parade: “the Mirando public relations team, drawing on tropes of Asian female hypersexuality, even wants to make Mija over as ‘totally sexy, hot, tiny, perfect’” (53). Pushing Lee’s reading slightly further, I contend that, in their racialization of Mija, the Mirando corporation draws on tropes of Asian flexibility, acrobatics, and unfeeling to mobilize Mija.<sup>201</sup> Mirando markets her girlhood and smallness instead of solely focusing on her sexuality at the same time as their positioning of Mija as a marvel locates her in the long history of white subjects in power putting Asian women on display. It is thus important to return to the framing of Mija as “the fearless pig rider from across the globe” to theorize *Okja*’s articulation of the transnational flexible “perpetually girlish acrobat” (R. Lee 72). Mija’s flexibility holds promise for global capitalism but also allows her to transact herself across borders and move her body into illicit spaces through acrobatic feats. These movements, therefore, bring her into relation to Asiatic racial formations of the unfeeling coolie laborer, the ‘inscrutable’ surface, and the alien subject.

## II “The Fearless Pig Rider from Across the Globe”: Acrobatic and Species Crossings

When Lucy Mirando repeatedly announces Mija as “the fearless pig rider from across the globe,” she accentuates Mija’s flexibility as part of what makes her a promising figure for Mirando’s capitalist ventures. Yet her flexibility is also what allows her to infiltrate the

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<sup>201</sup> My use of this word is aligned with Xine Yao’s theorization of unfeeling. Yao writes that unfeeling is “not simply [...] negative feelings or the absence of feelings, but as that which cannot be recognized as feeling – the negation of feeling itself” (5-6). Yao looks to nineteenth century literary representations of Black and Asian subjects to demonstrate how they are figured along lines of unfeeling. Yao also, though, theorizes unfeeling as a “quotidian tactic of survival and a counterintuitive, sometimes counteractive, mode of care” for racialized subjects. As an “antisocial affect” not recognized along white registers of sentimentality, unfeeling therefore “may have insurgent potential that may not be legible or instrumentalized toward resistance” (6). I summon this use of unfeeling as I read Mija.

corporation to take back Okja, positioning Mija as a dangerous subject in need of surveillance. I argue that her flexibility poises her as an acrobat, which I theorize along the lines of Colleen Lye's notion of Asiatic racial forms.<sup>202</sup> With the categorization of acrobat, I also conjure the history of Chinese subjects in particular who have been and still are figured as acrobatic for white audiences who view their bodies as boundlessly flexible and incapable of feeling pain, as sources of labour, entertainment, and spectacle. Rachel C. Lee posits that "the Western attitude of amazement at Chinese endurance – i.e., appearance of equanimity and calm exterior while the body is being plied painfully – treats the Chinese as if they were all acrobats; in other words, it solidifies a repertoire and economy of the circus (and freak show)" (74). Indeed, during the parade scene in which Lucy Mirando spectacularly reveals Okja and Mija to New York consumers, Okja emerges from a red and white striped circus tent, alerting us to the history of both animals and Asian subjects exploited as entertainment. This history is of course also gendered, whereby Chinese women acrobats are stereotyped as small, impossibly flexible, and perpetually youthful, which all contributes to their sexualized objectification as entertaining spectacles.<sup>203</sup> Characters in *Okja* place Mija's extraordinariness as acrobatic at the same time as Mija uses this categorization to disrupt the very world that can only read her in that way. In this sense, therefore, I read Mija's acrobatics as a strategic agency that enables her to save Okja as

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<sup>202</sup> Colleen Lye traces a genealogy of what she calls Asiatic racial forms as they emerge and shift in American history. For Lye, the Asiatic racial form is not static yet certain representational strategies and stereotypes return again and again, such as the Asiatic racial form "as an economic trope" (11). I find Lye's theorization of racial form helpful for thinking through the ways representation is historically, socially, and aesthetically located, taking different forms in different spaces and times.

<sup>203</sup> I acknowledge that this specific acrobatic figuration is rooted in Chinese history while Mija is Korean. While I attempt to make the argument for a more general acrobatics required of and expected of Asian American subjects, I am wary of the danger of collapsing specificity that this argument and categorization holds. In this chapter, therefore, I attempt to name the particular relationships between America and Korea that might make for specific movements or resistances.

well as help her resist assimilation into the American capitalist empire that attempts to use her as a figure.

Rachel C. Lee, in *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America*, asks, “who or what becomes the Asiatic figure that can bear the shocks of post-Fordist biopolitics?” (37). She suggests that one such figure might be characterized by her biomateriality, giving the example of a Lois-Ann Yamanaka poem in which the Asian speaker cuts open her body, deliberately using her biomaterial, “bear[ing] suffering with a kind of nervelessness” (37). She also suggests that “the perpetually girlish acrobat,” and, more specifically the girlish Chinese acrobat, is another figure of biopolitical promise (72). Rachel C. Lee’s theorization of Asian American women, the fragment, and the biopolitical brings her to the figure of the coolie in nineteenth-century America, as theorized by Eric Hayot in “Chinese Bodies, Chinese Futures.” Lee notes that the coolie “prefigures the ideal type of laborer for modernity (i.e., Fordist capitalist production), one who can subsist only on rice, rather than meat” (13).<sup>204</sup> This “impossible biology” becomes a source of anxiety for white meat-eating subjects and thus the racialization of the coolie figure “transform[s] the laboring body into a machine” who is “both past and future, animal and superhuman” (Hayot in Lee 13). The coolie, as described by Arthur Smith in his 1894 *Chinese Characteristics* was imagined as emotionless and automaton-like, having “an ‘absence of nerves’, remarkable ‘staying qualities, and a ‘capacity to wait without complaint and to bear with calm endurance’” (Hayot 144). I am not arguing that Mija fits the figure of the coolie, rather I want to elaborate on the link that Lee suggests between the historicized coolie laborer and the acrobat – both Asiatic racial forms linked by their shared status as “biologically impossible,”

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<sup>204</sup> It is worth highlighting the prominence of meat in this figuring – that the coolie laborer’s lack of meat-eating in place of only rice positions them both as not-white and not-masculine and therefore a threat to fragile white masculinity. Meat eating is thus tied to white American masculinity in this sense.

“indifferen[t] to suffering, and “an ‘absence of nerves,’ [giving] remarkable ‘staying qualities’” (Hayot in Lee 13). Indeed, Lee argues that “the update to the coolie is the so-called nimble-fingered Asian female” [...] who likewise make intelligible the contradictory disequilibriums of post-Fordist, transnational capital and its flexible modes of production” (13-14). Mija embodies the acrobat as she seems to effortlessly cross borders to ultimately enter into the American capitalist market when she ‘buys’ Okja.

Rachel C. Lee further theorizes Asian American girlish acrobats and explores “the U.S. racialized and gendered history that figures spectatorship of Chinese women as edifyingly entertaining” by reading three texts by dancer Cheng-Chieh Yu: *Bowl Problems*, *My Father’s Teeth*, and *She Said He Said, He Said She Said* alongside P.T. Barnum’s “Chinese Lady,” Afong Moy exhibit of 1834 (67). Rachel C. Lee notes that, whereas the coolie posits the Chinese laborer as capable to “endure pain and suffering with calmness,” the Asian dancer “wow[s] with its plasticity and flexibility” (69). For Lee, “the choreographer [in this case, Cheng-Chieh Yu], updates and feminizes Hayot’s analysis of the coolie body, the Asiatic through her contortionist capacity to bear twisting and reshaping embodies the preferred laborer of post-Fordist flexible accumulation, the ‘whatever’ identity that must constantly adjust, mutate, and transform again” (81). The shadow of the coolie, as a ceaselessly repeating motor, thus morphs into the girlish acrobat of Asian America’s contemporary present. Indeed, Aihwa Ong claims that, for Asian American subjects, flexibility is central to their trans-Pacific identities, labour, and movements, writing that flexibility is a “bodily tactic that allows racialized bodies to accumulate power and capital” (3).<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Jack Halberstam, writing in 2005, proposes that we live in the “age of flexibility,” following Emily Martin’s book, *Flexible Bodies* (18). Halberstam quotes Martin who claims that “flexibility has also become a powerful commodity” (18). Halberstam lists several examples of postmodern flexibility, including “flexible citizenship,” “flexible accumulation,” and “flexible genders” (18). Furthermore, Halberstam, using David Harvey’s theorization

This is where I see overlaps of Lee's theorization with Mija, who performs acrobatic feats to save Okja which earn her the title of "an extraordinary little girl [...] the fearless pig rider from across the globe". Mija appears almost as a superhero, especially in the scene in which she breaks Okja free from the Mirando headquarters only to be chased through Seoul by guards attempting to get her back. In this scene, Mija nimbly leaps through traffic and throws herself fearlessly at Okja. Furthermore, it is not just physically that Mija fits into the figure of the acrobat but she is flexible in her capacity to translate as well as transact herself across international borders, moving deftly from Korean to English and even negotiating with Nancy Mirando, the most ruthless capitalist of all, to buy Okja, successfully transacting herself through capitalist means. These movements also help her evade the expected heteronormative reproductive frames placed upon her; her acrobatics offer another way of moving through the world. It is here, too, that Mija highlights how the figure of the acrobat might be read as a physical manifestation of what Aihwa Ong theorizes as "flexible citizenship".

Although Aihwa Ong's *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* was published in 1999 and, indeed, the transnational and cultural politics she describes have undoubtedly changed, Ong's framework is still relevant for thinking about transnational movements and labour. Ong focuses particularly on the experience of Chinese subjects in Hong Kong, arguing that, in Asia Pacific and Southeast Asia especially, "they are a people always in transit" (2). Ong goes on to theorize what she calls contemporary figures of "flexible citizenship," giving examples such as "the multiple-passport holder; the multicultural manager with 'flexible capital'; the 'astronaut,' shuttling across borders on business; 'parachute kids,'

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of late capitalism, links flexibility to contemporary capitalist practices. David Harvey "characterizes late capitalism in terms of 'flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products and patterns of consumption'" (in Halberstam 19). Halberstam further highlights that "increased flexibility [...] leads to increased opportunities for the exploitation by transnational corporations of cheap labor markets" (19).

who can be dropped off in another country by parents on the trans-Pacific business commute” (19). What all of these figures have in common is that their capacity to move transnationally using “practices favoring flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments, and cultural regimes” to help them navigate global capitalism (6). In *Okja*, Mija succeeds precisely because can perform acrobatic feats that move her from pastoral South Korea to Seoul to New York to an unidentified rural slaughterhouse, but she also succeeds because of her malleability in terms of the global market.

I want to think about how the figure of the “perpetually girlish acrobat” is one physical manifestation of this desire of flexible citizenship. If so, what does this tell us about the demands placed on Asian subjects in America, particularly young women, and the historicized racial formations that shape their precarious inhabitation of a nation? Even though Mija does not seek citizenship in *Okja*, with her goal always being steadfastly to return Okja to her home in South Korea, I read her transnational crossings as indicative of the more specific history of forced or voluntary movements from Korea to America and the legal barriers to citizenship that accompany those moves.<sup>206</sup> As a “perpetually girlish acrobat,” Mija summons both the model minority myth – she is flexible, small, quiet – and Yellow Peril discourse – her movements threaten to catch, sparking a larger activist movement, her flexibility lends to a sort of virality, which I will return to shortly.<sup>207</sup> Her figuration in the film’s narrative can thus be tied to

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<sup>206</sup> On this note of the movements between Asia and America in *Okja*, Fred Lee suggests that Mija’s journey to America in order to rescue and return Okja to Korea where they also pick up one more mini-Okja as they leave the slaughterhouse, adopting a child of sorts, “invert[s] tropes of US Americans ‘rescuing’ Korean adoptees” (54). Indeed, Mija, as an orphan, also, in a way, fits into this transnational relationship between Korea and America post-Korean War. Susie Woo notes that between 1953 and 1965, over 6,000 Korean and mixed-race adoptees and around 7,700 military brides were forced to immigrate to America (4).

<sup>207</sup> Colleen Lye argues that the model minority myth and Yellow Peril discourse exist on a continuum and work alongside each other (3). She writes, “yellow peril and model minority are best understood as two aspects of the same, long-running racial form, a form whose most salient feature, whether it has been made the basis for exclusion or assimilation, is the trope of economic efficiency” (5).

dominant rhetorics about Asian American subjects and the ways they are kept alien to citizenship even as they are encouraged to assimilate, another laborious demand of flexibility. Although various American characters in the film, notably Lucy Mirando, admire, praise, and then commodify Mija's acrobatic flexibility, this mobility is also framed as a potential threat. Nancy Mirando knows she must 'domesticate' Mija in order to contain her threat by rendering her image consumable, dressing her in a pink *hanbok* and continually referring to her as "small" or "a little girl". But what exactly is so threatening about Mija's flexibility? In an attempt to grapple with this question, I connect the flexible girlish acrobat to Tina Chen's concept of "double agency" and Vivian L. Huang's theorization of inscrutability and Asian American queerness.

Rachel C. Lee aptly paraphrases the crux of Tina Chen's theorization of double agency, writing, "the Asiatic is doubly instrumental, as a life form considered so alien that it is contained, and as so adept at change and assimilation that, as Tina Chen argues, impersonation is considered her/his very form of agency" (219). *Okja* highlights Mija's capacity to shift herself into new situations, for example, by showing her infiltrate Mirando's headquarters in Seoul to steal Okja or by showing her surreptitiously learning English. These acts are acrobatic at the same time as they locate Mija in what Tina Chen notes as the instrumental use of impersonation as agency by Asian Americans as a form of survival at the same time as they are negatively stereotyped as 'double agents' or enemy spies. Chen writes,

by thinking about impersonation and the options it offers for resisting the binary logics of loyalty/disloyalty, real/fake, and Asian/American, *Double Agency* attends to the possibilities of reading such acts as ones of *im-personation*, a performance by which Asian Americans are constituted and constitute themselves as speaking and acting

subjects. (xvii)<sup>208</sup>

For Tina Chen, although impersonation has a negative stereotypical hold on representations of Asian Americanness with lived effects on Asian American subjects, she also sees it as a “sign of multiple allegiances that Asian Americans have maintained in order to construct themselves as agents capable of self-articulation and determination” (xviii). Fred Lee notes that *Okja* shows how the Mirando corporation frames Mija’s transnational movements as dangerous or “subversive,” thus falling into “familiar US discourses of Asian ‘alien espionage’ and ‘internal enmity’” (53). I would argue that Tina Chen’s concept of double agency overlaps with Aihwa Ong’s concept of flexible citizenship as both articulate the representational promises and perils of being seen as lithely moving between spaces, cutting across nations, and negotiating the multiple identities, positions, or faces needed to navigate America as an Asian subject. Mija therefore makes clear that this work is acrobatic.

Mija and *Okja*’s transnational acrobatics are what afford them some degree of liberatory movement, but their acrobatics are also the crux of their commodification as spectacles meant to entertain. Mija’s extraordinariness is entangled with *Okja*, who is an extraordinarily large creature. *Okja*’s outstanding size even further accentuates Mija’s smallness as an acrobatic “little girl” and “special little lady”. Taken together, they are at once spectacular and enigmatic, impossible to look away from yet defying easy consumption. In this way, I add a final theoretical level to Mija’s acrobatics – inscrutability. Indeed, Asian subjects, as discussed earlier in relation to historicized forms of Asian America such as the coolie, have often been negatively portrayed as inscrutable through a “powerful Orientalist discourse” (Huang 2). Vivian Huang writes, “early

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<sup>208</sup> For example, Tina Chen analyzes how Sax Rohmer’s original depictions of the literary figure, Fu Manchu, participates in stereotypes of Asian villainy that position him as an imposter or fake (37). Chen, however, refuses to read Fu Manchu as “‘nothing more’ than a stereotype” and instead attends “to the ways in which impersonation can operate as a hermeneutic practice” (36; 37).

Asian immigrants to the United States were queerly unintelligible, [...] where the inconsistent taxonomy of Asian bodies rendered immigrants legally inscrutable. This was reinscribed through their legal classification as 'aliens ineligible for citizenship' and, in Mae Ngai's vernacular, 'alien citizens'" (6). Inscrutability therefore has created and still creates harm for the ways it holds legal, emotional, and physical ramifications for Asian American subjects. Huang, however, also sees possibility in this term when mobilized by queer Asian American artists (3). Huang's book "explores aesthetic modes of inscrutability through queer racial forms of invisibility, silence, impenetrability, flatness/flexibility, distance, and withholding" which counter "white nationalist frameworks that narrate Asian American life as white aspiration or nonexistence" (4). Mija's characterization falls into many of these aesthetic modes but especially those of flatness and flexibility, which, of course, are also acrobatic qualities.

Although I argue that the film posits Mija with a certain degree of inscrutability – for example, she barely speaks except for her cries of "Okja," her facial expression remains fairly monotone, and, despite her clear love for Okja, other characters in the film tend to read her as affectively flat and unfeeling – there is also a way that she and Okja animate each other.<sup>209</sup> Mija's inscrutability and acrobatic flexibility go hand in hand, positioning she and Okja as dangerous subjects whose capacity to cross international borders and successfully infiltrate the highly policed space of the slaughterhouse become threatening movements that the Mirando corporation must control. However, Mija's flexibility as an Asian subject is threatening on another level – that of viral contagion and biomobility – especially since she is tethered so tightly to an animal. Okja's border crossing from South Korea to America highlights the global scale of the meat industry, wherein the threat of zoonotic disease increases with more transnational

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<sup>209</sup> My use of the word "unfeeling" here is aligned with Xine Yao's theorization, which I explain in footnote 199 on page 245.

species crossings, a phenomenon Nicole Shukin deems “biomobility” (Shukin 182).<sup>210</sup> Shukin clarifies that, “while biomobility is suggestive of a radical ontological breakdown of species distinctions and distance under present conditions of global capitalism, it also brings into view new discourses and technologies seeking to secure human health through the segregation of human and animal life” (184). This discourse, she argues, often takes the tone of pandemic speculation and mitigation, thus imbuing both the animals crossing borders and the humans in close contact with pandemic potential (184). I argue that Mija’s acrobatic flexibility extends from simply a transnational reach to that of species, in which the flexibility she promises in terms of labour and marketability as a figure is always already tinged with the threat of species crossing.

Mija and Okja’s intimacy, which is framed in the film as pastoral, treading the familiar genre of “child and animal kinship narratives,” is thus also layered with threat (Angierski). Mija, whose Koreanness is often amplified as a site of difference that hinges in part on how she relates to and lives with Okja. For example, the film shows the lack of distance between her and her grandfather’s living space and those of Okja and their other domesticated animals, separated only by ramshackle walls. Mel Y. Chen elaborates on Asian racialization and animality, noting the ties between contagion and toxicity, animals and animacy, and Asian/Asian American subjects. Looking particularly to narratives of lead toxicity in children’s toys, Chen argues that these narratives, which often focus on the fact that these toys are made in China, highlight the racist “‘master toxicity narrative’ about Chinese products in general,” and as Chen further establishes,

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<sup>210</sup> Nicole Shukin defines “zoonotic disease” at its core, as “species-leaping disease,” capable of leaping from animal to human subjects (182). Shukin argues that there is “a fixation in pandemic discourses on zoonotic diseases, which is “symptomatic of how formerly distinct barriers separating humans and other species are imaginatively, and physically, disintegrating under current conditions of globalization” (46). The rise of zoonotic disease, such as the avian flu, indicate “the permeability of the species line in the current era of globalization” (46). The species line and interspecies intimacies, therefore, become sites fraught with conflicting affects of fear and desire (46).

of China more broadly, positioned as an “invasive danger [...] to the U.S” (164). Chen draws a line from this more contemporary narrative to Yellow Peril narratives, arguing that “anxieties about intoxications, mixings, and Chinese agents [...] echo the Yellow Peril fears articulated earlier in the twentieth century” (169).<sup>211</sup> This history emerges in Mija and Okja’s intimacy, wherein Mija’s tactile contact with Okja puts pressure on the distance between animals and humans required to maintain ‘safe’ species boundaries. When Mija sleeps curled up next to Okja, feeds her persimmons out of her bare hands, or taps Okja’s rear-end to help her defecate, she crosses into a threatening space of interspecies intimacy. In this way, therefore, Mija’s acrobatic flexibility extends further than her crossing national or linguistic borders; she crosses species borders as well. Her fearless lateral movements across the globe become a source of fear in need of containment by the Mirando corporation. As a result, Mija and Okja’s movements and intimacies also gesture toward a queer positioning inside violently delineated spatial, temporal, and species categories.

### III “I want to buy Okja”: Mija and Okja’s Queer Interspecies Intimacy

The queer interspecies love between Mija and Okja’s threatens the foundation on which Mirando’s carefully constructed meat industry stands, with its ideological investment in capitalist and heteronormative projects. Their bond is queer for the ways in which they disrupt heteronormative and capitalist conventions of time, proximity, species, and ‘proper’ intimacy.

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<sup>211</sup> Nicole Shukin also highlights how Asian subjects become negatively attached to zoonotic pandemic discourse when some practices, such as wet markets, which sell live poultry or wild animals, “are racially pathologized as zoonotic hotbeds in pandemic discourse” (209). In reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic, a large wet market in Wuhan, China, became targeted as the ‘source’ of the pandemic, leading to a surge in anti-Asian hate and racism (Pai 189). Gita V. Pai notes that some American news sources, even including the American president at the time, deemed the virus the “Chinese virus” (189). Anti-Asian hate increased considerably during the COVID-19 pandemic as well, as established, for example, in June Kim and Pratyusha Tummala-Narra’s “Asian Americans and the Impact of Anti-Asian Racism During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Part II” (315).

Conversing with Mel Y. Chen's theorization of animacy and intimacy, I demonstrate that Mija and Okja's intimacy is figured primarily through touch and proximity, making porous the borders between species, nations, and selves. *Okja* tugs girlhood into a radical space of queer love, anti-capitalist time, and willful resistance by placing Mija's growth and movements sideways to Okja's. It is through Okja that Mija is able to see and name a future that springs her outside of heteronormative marriage and reproduction, especially when Mija witnesses the violence of agricultural breeding.

Many scholars note how *Okja* plays on generic tropes of narratives featuring a child and their beloved pet. Fred Lee, for example, observes that Mija and Okja's relationship shares an "uncanny resemblance to the proverbial 'boy and his dog'" narrative (48). Okja, however, does not fit comfortably into the category of a pet since she is also a super-pig being bred for mass consumption. Okja thus asks us to think about the constructed divisions and hierarchies of value between domestic pet and objectified and consumable livestock.<sup>212</sup> As a companion species or even simply a being who falls into the category of a non-human animal, Okja, in her genetically modified status, tugs at species lines. Michelle Gunawan, for example, describes Okja as having a "hippo-like body, she resembles an elephant-sized puppy crossed with a manatee" (264). Kristen Angierski argues that Okja "is a visual composite of many animals: a hippo, a dog, a pig, and a cow". Okja thus confounds categorization, existing as a sort of threshold being – not quite animal, the only animated rendering in the film. Indeed, Ju Young Jin reads Okja as "a liminal being, the radical otherness, a super pig and a super pet at the same time" (5). What does it mean, then, for Mija to grow into herself alongside Okja, a being inhabiting the edges of

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<sup>212</sup> This question of why we love some animals and eat others has been taken up often in critical animal studies. Gabriel Rosenberg, for example, makes the compelling argument that "the pivotal question" of the difference between animals we love and those we eat "is less about the quality of our affect – be it love, desire, or cold apathy – and more about the relation of animals (and ourselves) to capital" (475).

categorization? How does Mija's intimacy with Okja position her as a girl who also challenges normative capitalist time, carving out a space between her and Okja for care that operates in a queer time of whispers, shared persimmons, and tender caresses?

The fact that Okja is labelled as a super-pig also positions her further as a liminal being – not quite pig, a marvel yet mass-produced. We might read Okja – as a genetically-modified being – and Mija – as an acrobatic girl – as occupying a form of what Mel Y. Chen deems “trans-being” as they are both characterized by “mobility [... and] border violation” as well as “transnationality, [...] translation, and transspecies” (128). Furthermore, Laura McMahon reads pigs as “a particularly unstable embodiment of being” (204). She quotes Susan McHugh who deems pigs “threshold creature[s]” (in McMahon 203).<sup>213</sup> Okja, therefore, inhabits multiple thresholds in which both she and Mija are positioned outside the frame of capitalist time and the American nation. As both pet and livestock, Okja complicates any attempts to quantify a ‘proper’ affective relationship – she is both companion and bound for consumption. Mija's affiliation with Okja, therefore, positions them both as potentially unruly subjects for the ways in which they defy normative categorization in terms of species and intimacy as well as through their movements across national borders. They upset the Mirando corporation's attempts to capitalize on their relationship to sell the false narrative of super-pigs as ethically and lovingly treated because of the ways that Okja and Mija protect their intimacy from being intelligible or consumable. There is always something about Mija and Okja that the Mirando corporation cannot quite cohere into their carefully constructed narrative. Their love resists capitalist time and, indeed, threatens the values upon which capitalism rests: property, ownership, and profit.

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<sup>213</sup> Susan McHugh makes this claim in a special issue of *Antennae* titled, *Pig*. In her piece, she clarifies what she means by “threshold creature,” writing that pigs “inhabit[...] an assortment of grey areas, whether between barn and home, pet and pork, or unclean and acceptable meats” (19). Pigs, she writes “are radical ruptures to representation itself” (19).

Nicole Shukin identifies interspecies intimacy communication as a prominent liberal desire in late capitalism (188). Indeed, animal-human communication is also a common trope in one of the genres that *Okja* intervenes in – that of “child and animal kinship narratives” (Angierski). The film lingers often on Mija and Okja’s particular way of communicating. A recurring image of Mija and Okja is that of Mija gently moving Okja’s large ear aside, sticking her head inside, and placing her hand before her mouth to conceal her whisper into Okja’s ear. Their language is left untranslated and unsubtitled, therefore inaudible to audiences, who, based on the fact that the film is produced by Netflix, were originally imagined as English-speaking Americans. Fred Lee remarks that “*Okja* establishes the leitmotif of an adolescent girl and a super-pig in hushed conversation. Unlike a typically speechless pet, Okja is a partner to intimate conversations” (49). The promise of animal-human communication is thus held open at the same time as it is withheld – “a ‘private language’ accessible neither to movie characters nor movie audiences” (F. Lee 49). Mija and Okja leave secrets suspended between them. Silence offers a protection for the world they have built outside of capitalism; unintelligibility is an armour. Amy Taubin notes how the film often uses close-ups to capture Mija and Okja’s moments of intimacy to show their inseparability, zooming in on Okja’s face and eye and, I would add, Mija’s hand against Okja’s skin (32).<sup>214</sup> The skin, as Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey propose, is a particularly queer site for the ways in which it “opens our bodies to other bodies” (6). They write, “through touch, the separation between self and other is undermined in the very intimacy or proximity of this encounter” (6). Cinematically, Mija and Okja’s intimacy is defined by proximity – a tender

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<sup>214</sup> Alice Walker, in *The Chicken Chronicles*, writes of a memory of her father tending his field, writing of his devotion: “this steadfastness is love” (155). I think of the work Alice Walker does of brooding over her chickens as a form of this steadfastness, the work of Mija and Okja crossing the world for each other as this steadfastness.

scale in opposition to the long panning shots of the fenced-in feedlot of super-pigs outside the slaughterhouse.

Mija and Okja's relationship therefore offers another temporal scale and pace to that of the Mirando corporation. As Karen Han observes, the camera slows down and becomes still during the scenes that bookend the beginning and end of the film, featuring Mija and Okja together in the forests of South Korea and becomes frantic and fast-moving in the scenes that take place in Seoul and New York. The temporal shifts, I argue, pull their relationship into what Jack Halberstam calls queer time. Halberstam writes: "queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. They also develop according to other logics of location, moment, and identification" (*In a Queer Time* 1). Halberstam further clarifies queer time as "the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence – early adulthood – marriage – reproduction – child rearing" ("Queer Temporalities" 182). By choosing to affiliate herself fully with Okja, Mija chooses a queer time by refusing the timeline of marriage and reproduction set out for her as a future expected. The time that Mija and Okja occupies is also queer for the way that it challenges linear futurity by instead privileging what Maria Puig de la Bellacasa calls "the temporalities of care" (23). Their inhabitation of time involves an attentiveness to how each of their bodies takes up space with care for their species difference. Much of this inhabitation takes place through the skin, where their intimacy is built with small gestures of Mija placing her hand on Okja to soothe, by Okja rubbing up against Mija with affection. For Puig de la Bellacasa, "care time" is non-normative time and inherently anti-teleological; it challenges heterocapitalist future-oriented as well as productivity and consumption-oriented temporalities (171). Therefore, Mija and Okja's turn toward care time is queer for the ways it refuses heteronormative and heterocapitalist lines. Mija

and *Okja* share intimate offerings that never quite directly translate to the American world and audience they inhabit. Mija and *Okja*'s intimacy invites another future to that of the captivity that awaits both of them. Their intimacy refuses the time of meat and the time of marriage and reproduction, centring instead a "temporality of care" and a queer elsewhere whose intimacy unfolds through the skin and in whispered intimations.

*Okja*, however, stages two vastly different types of animal-human intimacies. In the first, Mija and *Okja*'s relationship is built on protection, relational care, and tender communication that occurs in whispers and gentle touch that only they share. This bond of love is set in stark contrast to the intimacies inherent in meat production, which is the second type of animal-human intimacy. In Gabriel Rosenberg's words, "infrastructures of meat production interweave humans and animals through reproductive governance such that we can no longer think bestiality and meat agriculture as separate phenomena" (474). While I am not arguing that Mija and *Okja*'s relationship crosses over into bestiality, I am interested in how it gets figured alongside this precarious and highly regulated line between proper and improper animal-human intimacies. Rosenberg is interested in the development of laws and social beliefs around bestiality in America especially as they emerge alongside the intensification of animal agriculture and husbandry. For Rosenberg, animal agriculture – especially in its contemporary form featuring technologies such as artificial insemination – complicates any simple definition of bestiality because of the very intimacies required of these agricultural practices. There is thus an "underlying reproductive economy" to animal agriculture (499). Therefore, Rosenberg argues that "despite our insistent disavowals, the encounter of animal husbandry [and meat production] is inundated with intimate possibilities, fleshy entanglements, and visceral connections" (476).

*Okja* highlights the proximities required in meat production when they show the footage

the Animal Liberation Front obtains from Okja at the Mirando meat plant of Dr. Johnny preparing Okja to meet her “boyfriend”.<sup>215</sup> In this footage, audiences bear witness to the violent processes of reproduction that are a key part of Mirando’s project. We may only hear the sounds of Okja’s rape – audiences see the ALF members cover Mija’s ears as they watch the footage on a screen that we cannot quite see – but this moment stands in stark contrast to Mija’s intimacies with Okja. *Okja* establishes, therefore, through Mija and Okja’s allyship, an animal-human relationship that does not operate within capitalist notions of property or profit but steps into a “temporality of care” that is queer in its turn away from heteronormative time, from the capitalist pace of meat production, and from a fixed hierarchy of species.

The final part of this chapter demonstrates that, in choosing Okja, Mija chooses a queer future away from the lines of marriage and generational reproduction expected of her. This choice is tethered to Mija and Okja’s disruption of the slaughterhouse chain. In rejecting a future of meat, Mija, Okja, and the infant super-pig they rescue and return to Korea, articulate a horizon that may just hold the seeds of radical change in the face of *Okja*’s world in crisis. As Fred Lee suggests, *Okja* shows how “animal-human intimacies have the potential to remake the world,” placing this power in the bond between a fearless girl and a super-pig (57).

Not many scholars spend time analyzing the gold pig figurine that Mija carries throughout her movement from the mountains of South Korea into the heart of the slaughterhouse. I argue that this gold pig is central to Mija’s negotiation of not only capitalism but of heteronormativity. Indeed, what all but one scholar fail to mention is that this gold pig is

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<sup>215</sup> “Boyfriend” is the term Dr. Johnny’s character uses to refer to the male pig who is meant to breed with Okja. Kristen Angierski highlights the violence of this word, arguing that it “occludes the reality of the refusal of Okja’s consent, masking with language the fact that her desire for this other, unknown pig is irrelevant to those mating her”. “Boyfriend” therefore works as a euphemism meant to conceal the violence of animal breeding under the guise of young and playful love. Angierski further argues that the film “makes the connection between masculinity, meat, and sexual violence”.

in fact Mija's dowry. The first appearance of the gold pig occurs when Hee-bong, Mija's grandfather, gifts it to her at her parent's graveside, an object meant to stand in for the loss of the 'real' Okja who, at the time of this gifting, is being taken away by the Mirando corporation to America, unbeknownst to Mija. Hee-bong explains that "in the old days, the elders would give a gold pig to their daughters as a wedding gift" and he has purchased this for her because, even though she is "not getting married now [...] Okja is going far away so you can keep this gold pig instead". Fred Lee notes that, in this scene, Hee-bong expresses his wish for Mija to find a heteronormative relationship but her desire is singular: to find Okja so they can spend their days together (48). Indeed, Hee-bong's gifting of this gold pig to Mija is bound up in conversations about her being "a grown woman now" and the expectations that accompany it: "I don't like you playing with that pig all day. You should go to town, meet a boy and –," he says, only to be cut off by Mija throwing the gold pig to the ground and running off to find Okja.<sup>216</sup> The gold pig is therefore tied to expectations that Mija "meet[s] a boy": the first step to entering into the marriage economy. This step, however, requires that Mija stop "playing with [Okja] all day," which she refuses to do.

Amy Taubin is the only critic who mentions that the gold pig is a dowry of sorts for Mija: her grandfather gives it to her in hopes that she will go find a boy instead of follow Okja across the world. Instead, Mija will use this gold pig to buy back Okja from the Mirando corporation. Reading the scene in which Mija exchanges the gold pig with Nancy Mirando, Taubin writes that "Mija, now a woman of the world, buys Okja's freedom with the solid gold pig her grandfather intended for her dowry" (32). Mija uses her dowry to affirm that Okja is the partner she chooses,

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<sup>216</sup> In some Korean folk traditions, the gold pig symbolizes good fortune, fertility, and wealth ("Nat'l Folk Museum). Interestingly, in Korean, the Chinese characters for pig and money are both pronounced "don," which demonstrates the closeness of pigs and wealth ("Nat'l Folk Museum).

queering the marriage economy at the same time as she negotiates her way out of capitalist America through its very means: a pig, “100 percent real gold”.

Ju Young Jin picks up on the symbolism of the gold pig and transnational transactions of capital, arguing that Mija must learn the language of capital to “successfully negotiate [...] a business deal with Nancy Mirando” (6). This “ironic reversal” of Mija using a gold pig to buy Okja, a live pig, shows how Mija “learns the language of the first world, albeit not English: capital” (Jin 6). Furthermore, this reversal which metonymically collapses gold pig and super-pig demonstrates the workings of Nicole Shukin’s “animal capital,” which “signals a tangle of biopolitical relations within which the economic and symbolic capital of animal life can no longer be sorted into binary distinction” (Shukin 7). While Mija fights for Okja’s status as a subject rather than a commodity, as relation rather than property, the exchange of this gold pig signals Okja’s position in this very economy of animal capital. As an object, it also signifies the ways reproduction and heteronormative lines are entangled with meat production and animal consumption in that it also stands in as a dowry. According to Travis Workman, the gold pig is “magic capital, seemingly from nowhere, that brings order, normalcy, and comfort to the weighty issues of sovereignty, class exploitation, marginalization, and even apocalypse” (8). Mija repays her family’s “debt” through this gold pig, returning Okja to her home but, as Workman points out, the larger “system[s] of genetic engineering, animal abuse, and exploitation [are left] undeterred” (8). I contend that Mija’s disruption, while seemingly small in scale compared to the massive feedlot of super-pigs still awaiting slaughter in a machine that will still run, is radical for the ways it mobilizes heteronormative structures of marriage to fight for queer love.

Love, in Mija's case, is a refusal of heteronormative lines. Love is anti-capitalist, anti-agribusiness. Mija uses the gold pig, an object laden with the promise of a marriage contract, to buy her way out of the two dominant systems that govern America in *Okja*: mass meat production and consumption and heteronormative reproduction and marriage. The gold pig therefore becomes Mija's means of holding onto a queer girlhood, one intimately and fiercely entangled with *Okja*. Mija chooses *Okja* over the gold pig because she cannot fathom a life without *Okja*; Nancy chooses the "100 percent real gold" pig over *Okja* because she cannot fathom losing profit over a girl and her pig. While this gold pig demonstrates Mija's ability to negotiate her desires within a bloody capitalist system, her desire for *Okja* is at odds with the capitalist time of America and must ultimately return to Korea. Put another way, their queerness cannot survive in America. Although it is Mija's wish to return to the forests of South Korea so that she and *Okja* can play and live alongside each other as they did before, I would argue that they also must be relegated to this space because their relationship disrupts normative ideals of animal-human intimacy and expectations of consumption and relationships of profit and property in America. Their love is only acceptable in this pastoral land of "Far from New York".

Bong Joon Ho, however, still offers audiences this elsewhere, where queer time, which also intersects with racialized time, has "a shimmering presence," "less easily bound to capital or any other regimented time" (M. Chen 219). I want to end by wondering how Mija, as an endlessly flexible acrobat who crosses Asian and American borders with ease, reframes, along the lines that Mel Y. Chen theorizes of animacy, "the terms of intimacy itself" (218). By this, I wonder how Mija and *Okja* challenge the heteronormative temporalities of reproductive futurity. Their crossings in space showing how love abounds across borders of species, racial, genetic, and linguistic difference. Their love is also a form of abolition, gesturing to a future that centres

care instead of property, imprisonment, and profit.<sup>217</sup> If, as Chen reminds us, intimacy is tied to intimation, “a temporalized notion insofar as it might provide a hint or prediction of the future,” then Mija and Okja’s relationship built on touch despite the threat of toxicity, on whispers despite the fact that communication might fail, and on acrobatic feats of protection despite their vulnerability to threats of American military and corporate intervention opens a future not yet articulable within the frames of the film (218). A shimmer, a mist that hovers on the horizon of the opening and closing setting of the film.

Fred Lee echoes my conclusion that the film invites an elsewhere in its imagining of interspecies intimacy. Lee writes that the film’s conclusion “is that there will always be elseworlds, if only we know how to make them and know how to find them” (55). He identifies the South Korean mountaintop as one such elseworld: “a transpacific space less accessible to and hence less governable by global empires and corporations alike; it is a transpacific refuge at a remove from the transatlantic taxonomies of race and species” (55). For Lee, these elseworlds are forged through intimate exchanges that “secure spaces of reprieve from such conditions of racial/species domination” (45). Although Mija and Okja claim their space and time for love, there are a multitude of super-pigs left in captivity at the end of the film. Indeed, the last shot before the film cuts to the final scene back in South Korea is of the endless stretch of super-pigs in the feedlot outside the slaughterhouse, reminding audiences that the mass scale of meat production has been kept intact. Mija, Okja, and the baby super-pig Okja scoops gently into her mouth on their way out of the facility are just a seemingly insignificant handful among many

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<sup>217</sup> My understanding of abolition is greatly informed by Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s theorization, which, put simply, posits that “abolition is a movement to end systemic violence, including the interpersonal vulnerabilities and displacements that keep the system going. In other words, the goal is to change how we interact with each other and the planet by putting people over profits, welfare before warfare, and life over death” (Wilson in Bhandar 20). Abolition, for Gilmore, is also tied to place and space: making a world different than that of the prison industrial complex requires a reimagining of place, “a way of being in the world” (Gilmore 491). I wonder, too, how *Okja*’s ending, with its return to the Korean mountainside, might offer one version of this abolition geography.

who do not yet get to claim an elseworld. For the rest, the world is still running on capitalism, swiftly nearing, if not already feeling, its apocalyptic ends. *Okja* asks audiences to question our shared intimacy with other species in the age of the climate crisis, mass extinctions, and mass industrial production, all of which are of course tied up in issues of racial capitalism, settler-colonialism, and white supremacy.

To end, I want to think Mija and Okja's intimacy as inhabiting what Neel Ahuja calls "queer interspecies time" (378). For Ahuja, queer interspecies time accompanies a time of planetary crisis and extinction in which we live in "even more precarious intimacy with the shrinking number of living species" so much so that "we inhabit a queer atmosphere in which the ether of the everyday is marked by scenes of transformation and crisis" (377). Queer interspecies time "refigures[s] notions of intimacy and reproduction" and has the power to challenge the colonial ideals of property and expansion that have created the conditions of our present ecological crisis, of which the most profound effects are felt by racialized peoples (367). Using the border-crossing mosquito to think through this concept, Ahuja wonders if "a queer interspecies time, consisting of 'strange temporalities, imaginative life practices, and eccentric economic practices'" might show the entanglements between beings like humans and mosquitoes, like Mija and Okja, like humans and industrially produced meat animals. These entanglements "are often subjected to subtle precarities" that bind their lives into contingencies and shared futures (378).<sup>218</sup>

In *Okja*, it is a girl and her super-pig who acrobatically infiltrate the American slaughterhouse to show its insides to the world. But this act of exposing is not what I see as the film's radical work. What is radical is that Mija, despite all attempts to turn her into a corporate

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<sup>218</sup> Ahuja quotes Jack Halberstam's theorization of queer time in *In a Queer Time and Place* here with the phrase "strange temporalities, imaginative life practices, and eccentric economic practices" (in Halberstam 1).

object, to place her into negatively stereotyped historical forms of Asian American labourers or ‘inscrutable’ aliens, and to sexualize her, instead holds steadfast to Okja, asking us to believe in the elsewhere of their love. *Okja* does not ask audiences to give up eating meat; instead, the film asks audiences to reflect on what it means to share an atmosphere with other living beings and wonders what it could look like if we recognized this intimacy as a responsibility. In *Okja*, Bong Joon Ho shows us “what capitalism means on an interspecies scale” and then shows, through Mija and Okja, how interspecies intimacies might challenge the terms of capitalism itself, along with the racist projects that keep it going (Gumbs 101).<sup>219</sup> Mija shows us that we must let those we share space with roam, that we must whisper and ask permission, that we must touch tenderly and, above all, we must protect them with a fierce love that will extend itself in whatever ways needed.

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<sup>219</sup> In *Undrowned*, Alexis Pauline Gumbs also wonders, “what if sanctuary is a form of love that respects your organic boundaries?” (156). I see *Okja* and *Mija* as creating a sort of sanctuary in the forests of South Korea that is founded on a recognition rather than dissolution of their boundaries.

Conclusion: “All from a good place”: The Futures of Girls and the Ends of Meat?

Stories have endings,  
meals have meat

–Carol Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*

After we take stock of the ruins, after we acknowledge the annihilating violence of empire that resides at the heart of the intimate, what remains?

–Saidiya Hartman, “A Future Beyond Empire”



Fig 9. Advertisement Dairy Farmers of Manitoba, *Strategy Online*, October 2022, <https://strategyonline.ca/2022/10/07/dairy-farmers-of-manitoba-broadcast-good-intentions/>, Accessed 12 December 2023.

In the summer of 2023 as I neared the end of this project, I began to notice these billboards all over Winnipeg, including an enormous mural that graced the baseball stadium downtown. I passed this image a few times a week: girls and farmed animals followed me everywhere. My encounters with this billboard now remind me of where this project began: when I could not stop seeing fictional girls in proximity and as allies to animals on their way to becoming meat. While this advertisement is for dairy farming, I extend its sentiment to the meat industry in general because both create narratives about their animal products in attempts to soften the violences of their production. I wonder, what is the “good place” gestured to in this advertisement and how does the girl figured here, tenderly reaching out to the cow, help manifest that place? While this project has raised questions about how animals on their way to becoming

meat help fictional girls negotiate their reproductive capacities in a heteropatriarchal world, it has also raised questions about how the heteropatriarchal world of American meat negotiates the consumability of meat with girls. Girls story meat and meat stories girls.

This advertisement prompts me to wonder why, in the twenty-first century, white girlhood still holds as a way to sell a ‘clean’ or ‘happy’ story of meat. Just as the Mirando corporation in *Okja* attempts to mobilize Mija and her intimacy with Okja to sell the story of super-pigs, this advertisement uses the relationship between white girlhood and cows to soften its story – dairy is “all from a good place.” Part of that good place, then, is the girl: her overalls signify a rural timelessness, unanchored, and code her as a tomboy, potentially queer. Furthermore, the overalls and the scrunchie in her hair position her in adolescence – a category many of the girls in this dissertation also occupy. With adulthood on the horizon and childhood nearly behind her, this figure points to a not-yet – she inhabits a trembling threshold. Julian Gill-Peterson, Rebekah Sheldon, and Kathryn Bond Stockton write that “across the twentieth century [...] the child and the future circled each other with close reciprocity” (495).<sup>220</sup> As not-quite child, not-quite adult, the girl in this advertisement as well as many of the fictional girls who appear in this project offer something of the promise of futurity in the stories of meat to which they find themselves tethered. Furthermore, as this project has established, her presence alongside agricultural animals being bred into meat or other animal products also highlights her reproductive capacities – her potential fertility posits her as promise. However, I argue that it is this threshold, not-quite status that also posits these girls as always already potentially deviant,

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<sup>220</sup> Rebekah Sheldon, in her book, *A Child to Come*, more specifically links the figure of the child to that of promise, a resource, in the face of ecological catastrophe (3). Sheldon writes, “For all the heavy weather of global climate change and all the suffering born of industrialism – extinctions, droughts, melting ice caps, rising sea levels, oil spills, poor air quality, and ocean acidification, to name a few – much of the horror of ecological disaster comes from the projected harm to the future these things portend. And the future is the provenance of the child” (3). Sheldon positions the child as a “subject of biopolitical management” on whom society places hope for the future of the species (4).

dangerous, and willful. Even as this advertisement mobilizes white girlhood to soften the brutalities of meat production into a story of “all from a good place,” she also, in her alignment with the cow’s status as breeder and objectified commodity, dislodges the very boundaries needed to maintain this story. Her hand reaches across species, upsetting the very scales, sentiments, and stories of capitalism. Therefore, if she points to a future of meat “from a good place,” I argue that she also points toward an end of meat. But what might this end look and feel like?

This dissertation has followed five fictional girls – Ona in *The Jungle*, Mazie in *Yonnonidio From the Thirties*, Angela in *Killer of Sheep*, Lovey in *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*, and Mija in *Okja* – in their movements alongside and within spaces of meat production, tending to their intimate entanglements with the animals in these spaces. I have established that both meat and girlhood have been and remain central projects in the making of American empire. Moving chronologically through texts produced between 1906 to 2017, I have also tended to the shifts and specificities of each text’s particular historical moment and how the fictional girls are positioned and move within these frames. Following Joshua Bennett, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, and Mel Y. Chen, I have asked how animals sit differently in relation to racialized girls, attending to the particular histories of enslavement in America, settler-colonialism in Hawai’i, and Asian American diasporic experiences. My goal has been to pull these minor figures to the foreground, following what is at the margins, a method learned from Saidiya Hartman’s careful practice in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*.

These girls, in their tender alliances formed with animals, in their willful movements within and around the slaughterhouse, also centre queer intimacies and love above all, asking important questions of what it means to bear life in unbearable conditions, of how to navigate

desire in times of crisis, of what it means to centre love in violent realities of white supremacy, settler-colonialism, and patriarchy. Chapter One centres the ‘womb troubles’ in *The Jungle*, arguing that Ona’s laboring and birthing body makes visible the ways in which the twentieth-century slaughterhouse is as much a space of the violent reproduction of life as it is a space of mass killing. I establish that Ona’s body does not move in the way she is meant to – she lingers in corners, she and the other sausage girls stay put, she is anxiously elusive – and thus she disrupts the efficiency as well as species and spatial divisions needed for the slaughterhouse’s economy, which also runs parallel to the novel’s Progressive era eugenic sentiment of maintaining racial purity. Despite the narrative’s constant attempt to render Ona small or on the verge of disappearing, she comes up again and again, a willful arm, an irritation that upsets the awe of the slaughterhouse – “a thing as tremendous as the universe” (Sinclair 51).<sup>221</sup>

Chapter Two takes up Tillie Olsen’s *Yonnonidio From the Thirties* to follow Mazie’s movements sideways to the Armour’s meatpacking plant, to the domestic space she occupies with her mother, abusive father, and younger siblings, and her movements across the Depressed Prairie landscape, marked by violence and seemingly without a future. In this triangulated movement, Mazie negotiates her own relationship to the expected line from girlhood to motherhood, refusing the cradle always already pressed upon her. Therefore, animals – both dead and alive – and animal spaces urge Mazie away from the home, offering her a queer temporality or sideways growth, another inheritance other than the heteronormative home, which Olsen shows to be as much a space of harm as it is of care. I show how Mazie’s visceral narration makes visible the many violences– in the form of industrial extractions, species extinctions, and the genocide of Indigenous peoples, all abuses of settler-colonialism and white supremacy – that

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<sup>221</sup> “Willful arm” is a nod to Sara Ahmed and “irritation” is a nod to Sianne Ngai, the two theorists who inform the frame of Chapter One.

created the Prairie landscape. Animal spaces, for Mazie, help her name these violences but they also offer a sort of rupture in heteronormative temporality to make a creative life for herself otherwise.

Chapter Three turns to Charles Burnett's film, *Killer of Sheep*, to dwell in an image from the film that arrests me: Angela in a doorway wearing a dog mask. I posit Angela and her quiet witnessing as a resistance to the heteropatriarchal and domestic frames that attempt to limit her movement – she occupies a threshold with dogs as queer allies. Burnett triangulates Black girlhood, sheep being slaughtered, and dogs as prescient figures to draw out the intimate yet “fraught” proximities and possibilities between animality and Blackness and between Black girlhood and futurities (Bennett 3). Drawing on Joshua Bennett and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's theorizations of animality and Blackness, Colin Dayan's analysis of dogs and temporality, and Kevin Quashie's notion of quiet and interiority, I establish Angela as creatively projecting herself into spaces and temporalities beyond the heteronormative home that tug at species lines in a profoundly unsettling way.

Chapter Four moves to occupied Hawai'i to make the claim that Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* and *Heads by Harry* make visible the violent projects of American Empire – with animal agriculture being one such project – through the relationship between Lovey and Toni, the Japanese Hawaiian girl protagonists, and the many domesticated and wild animals with whom they share space. Engaging with Hawai'i's particular settler-colonial history and ongoing occupation, I argue that Yamanaka surfaces these structures by showing the animal body, as well as the ruined ecological landscape of Hawai'i, to be abject and in no way the paradise dominant American narratives describe it to be. Animals, alongside these two fictional girls negotiating menstruation, pregnancy, and their own sexual identities, leak,

spoil, and stain; they are sharp sites of affect punctuating these texts. Put simply, animals and animal death “spoil the scenery” (Yamanaka *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*, 175). Looking to Colleen Lye and Mel Y. Chen’s theorizations of Asiatic racial forms and animacy, respectively, I examine the ways Yamanaka tugs categories of wild and domestic out of their homes, questioning how Lovey defies legibility and domestication as an American subject. I end this chapter by dwelling fully in the intimacies between girls and pigs, arguing that they signify Toni’s sexual objectification within patriarchy, as per Carol J. Adams’s sexual politics of meat, at the same time as they are a site of possibility in which they find the guts to survive in a world made for men.

Chapter Five dwells in the steadfast love between a girl and a pig, this time a super-pig genetically bred to be a form of ‘happy meat’ in Bong Joon Ho’s film *Okja*. While many critics read this film for its ruthless representation of capitalism, corporate greed, and the climate crisis, I argue that the film’s most radical move is in its devotion to Okja and Mija’s interspecies intimacy that Bong Joon Ho positions as an anti-capitalist future. I also establish Mija as a figure whom the Mirando corporation uses to tell an ‘ethical’ story of meat at the same time as the boundaries she and Okja cross in terms of species, race, and nation, threaten to undo this very story. Part of her unruliness, I argue, also comes from her acrobatic flexibility, which I theorize using Aihwa Ong’s notion of flexible citizenship, Tina Chen’s double agency, Rachel C. Lee’s “perpetually girlish acrobat” and Vivian L. Huang’s concept of inscrutability as a “queer racial form of invisibility [...] and withholding” (R. Le 73; Huang 4). As the “fearless pig rider from across the globe,” Mija’s capacity to translate, transact, and traverse herself transnationally pose both promise and threat, demonstrating the ways American capitalist and imperialist projects are fuelled by anti-Asian racism. I end this chapter with a reading of Mija and Okja’s relationship as

queer for the way Mija uses Okja to refuse heteronormative marriage and for the way their mutual care and protection, tended through the skin, unintelligible whispers, and small extensions of persimmons, offers a horizon beyond relationships grounded in property and profit.

The girls in all five of these chapters turn towards animals and animal spaces as guides, allies, and beloved partners to create “elseworlds” to the heteropatriarchal futures they are expected to bear (F. Lee 55). The three interludes that punctuate these chapters add to the chorus by taking a slight step away from meatpacking spaces, centring instead girls who highlight the links between reproductive rights and domesticated agriculture. Dewey Dell, Billy Beede, and Esch Batiste find allies in animals as adolescent girls navigating pregnancy and abortion. These interludes were also a way for me to tug at the academic form in an attempt to show how I have carried these texts with me in a way that I sometimes cannot fathom how to articulate. Although this dissertation has been an intellectual endeavour, I wanted to show, in these interludes especially, how it has just as much if not even more been a work of love and devotion for how much literature holds me when I need it most. I wanted to show the act of carrying a text in your heart, to show my gratitude for all the words that have helped me fumble toward who I am. Taken together, these girls and their animal allies held in these chapters and interludes expose America as a violent project of white supremacy and settler-colonialism, of which agriculture forms one of its key infrastructures. I have followed these girls as they have disrupted the stories meat tells about itself. I like to think that they have asked us to face the ends of meat, which, in a way, might lead us to the ends of the world.

However, there is a glaring unevenness that I must acknowledge even in the radical ways these interspecies intimacies ask us to reimagine carceral, colonial, and capitalist infrastructures: in the end, even in *Okja*, animals are still being bred to be killed while the girl, even though she

may be limited by various structures that seem unlivable, lives. Survival comes to bear only on one subject: the girl. The only end for animals is to be killed. And so, what do I do with this? Can there be love and companionship and affiliation between girls and animals if the animals always become meat in the end? Are any of these intimacies enough? Turning to girlhood and the movements of girls with animals alongside, for me, felt like an answer, at least partially, to these frustrations because it allowed me to hold onto the joy of their gentle insistences, the hope of their imagining other worlds that, in a way, were always already here.

As much as this dissertation has been occupied with questions of futurities and alternate timelines or inheritances and sideways movements, I have been thinking about, and, indeed, I believe all these texts have been thinking about, the end of the time of meat. By following these girls I come up against the questions of how to imagine otherwise: what is the future of meat if but an ending? Where are these elseworlds of meat or animal intimacy that these girls usher forth? My impulse is to end this dissertation here, with questions unanswerable. I could say that Ona, Mazie, Angela, Lovey, Toni, Mija, Dewey, Billy, Esch, Okja, Bully, Fern, China, ask us to sit with this horizon, to linger in the threshold, to leave it open and in motion. I summon that possibility here but I also want to propose one answer as to what these girls suggest we might turn to, with animals at our sides, at the end of meat and at the end of the world: love.

The love that these girls inhabit, intimate, and enact is this elsewhere to capitalism, to a world utterly ruined by settler-colonialism and empire, to a world ravaged ecologically. They represent a steadfast, fierce kind of love and protection: the kind of love that is committed to the living animal; the love in tender touch and quiet whispers and sensitive looks; the queer love that they let lead them against tugging heteronormative lines. Love becomes repair in a world of harm. I think of the words of Kai Cheng Thom who posits love as the “only good option in this

time of apocalypse” because “what else do we have?” (10). Thom writes, “We can choose to consume each other, or we can choose love. Even in the midst of despair, there is always a choice. I hope we choose love” (91). For Thom, consuming and love are in opposition. When these girls enter or move alongside the slaughterhouse – a space of mass consumption – or tether themselves to animals on their way to becoming meat – they choose love. Love offers futurity in worlds where Black girlhood is made to be disposable, where Asian American girlhood’s flexibility is seen as both commodifiable promise and invasive threat, where Japanese Hawaiian girlhood is seen as abject, where white migrant girlhood is seen as a surplus in need of sanitizing and controlling.

The love between these fictional girls and their animal allies also underwrites the girls’ refusals of becoming breeding machines in the name of American empire. They refuse the ‘meat’ of capitalism: the endless, exploitative (re)production for profit. So, if a meal has no meat, then, does the story not end?<sup>222</sup> What does it mean for these girls, then, to refuse an end? In their own ways, each of the girls I have followed anticipate a future in which animals, who, as I have established, mirror something about the pressures of girlhood. These animals also figure as beings not to be consumed in excess or bred as profit by mass industrialized means but as beings to hold, to care with, to build other worlds less harmful than the present.<sup>223</sup> This is the answer to the end that never quite comes in these texts but is there nevertheless: hold these animals fast yet soft, lead with care, extend your reach with grace, practice love always.

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<sup>222</sup> This question is a nod to the Carol J. Adams quote that sits as an epigraph to this conclusion: “Stories have endings, meals have meat” (128).

<sup>223</sup> I should clarify that these girls illuminate the failures of the dominant Western meat industry as it stands today as a project whose infrastructure is built to profit off the mass killing of animal subjects. There are other configurations of meat consumption that are already anti-capitalist and anti-colonialist, namely Indigenous cosmologies. Billy-Ray Belcourt, in “An Indigenous Critique of Critical Animal Studies,” reminds us that Indigenous nations already have relational non-anthropocentric and anti-colonial views on animality (24). He cites, for example, Mary Robinson who tells of a Mi’kmaq cosmology that positions animals as kin, “shar[ing] a symbiotic form of personhood with humans” (in Belcourt 24).

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