

Motherhood and Violence

Kaitlin White



motherhood

and violence



The maternal body

“We weren’t supposed
to live past 18 and
now we’re both moms.
What the Hell?”



Birdie

The analogy I use to describe my mother goes like this:

She likes puppies, not dogs. She neglected every childhood dog we had growing up. Once it wasn't a puppy anymore she stopped caring. Once we weren't little anymore, she checked out.



When there's no choice in a "choice"

But nobody who wants to be a mother goes into it wanting to be a shitty mom.

Not everybody gets the choice, either. I'm not talking about them.



Imago

She was always terrified of ending up like her own mother.
She doesn't talk to her mother. Now, none of us talk to her.

She didn't want to be a shitty mom.
I don't want to be a shitty mom.

But it's like a ripple.



Thou art that

We all love the way we know to be loved.

MAR 16 AT 2:35 PM

Her best
friend, who
also doesn't
talk to her
anymore.

That is a really good point now that I see she isn't even talking to you and blew a chance with Hailey after so many years. She cried on the phone to me about how much she missed not having a relationship with her and Wyatt. She has done exactly what her mom has done. It's tragic really. This is what love is for her and it is just so hard to understand it.



Zephyr and Dad

When I didn't want to get an abortion:

"You're fucking up, Kait."

-Dad



Zephyr

How do you not be a shitty mom?

How do you not fuck it up when your entire entrance to motherhood is called a fuck up?



Zephyr

How do I give love that isn't dysfunctional when all the love
I receive is dysfunctional?



A ghost

Every now and then you pick me up
Just like the rocks along the river's edge
For a moment I'm held in the safety of your hand
As you think of what to do
But like the river rocks
I am never kept
I am skipped across the river
Catching the current
Until I sink
And drag along the riverbed

I never make it across



Formations of the I

WITH 1 CHARGE
CC264(2)(B) UNLAWFULLY HARASS/STALK
VICTIM NAME/NOM DE LA VICTIME:
OFFENCE DATE: 2022/07/01
ADDITIONAL CHARGES/AUTRES INCULPATIONS: 0



Cousins

Is it possible to raise non-violent sons in a violent world?



Trump

"The problem originates in the relation between the world and the male ego: a power relation in which pleasure is taken in violating whatever displays itself as living."¹



Two sons

"The fascist gives new form to the language of desire...

... What his desire says is, 'and this can be joined to me...
and this cannot be joined to me.

... this is the discourse... of the son who is cloven in two,
who has no boundaries, who has been violently ripped from his
previous "wholeness" and now searches for his other half."²



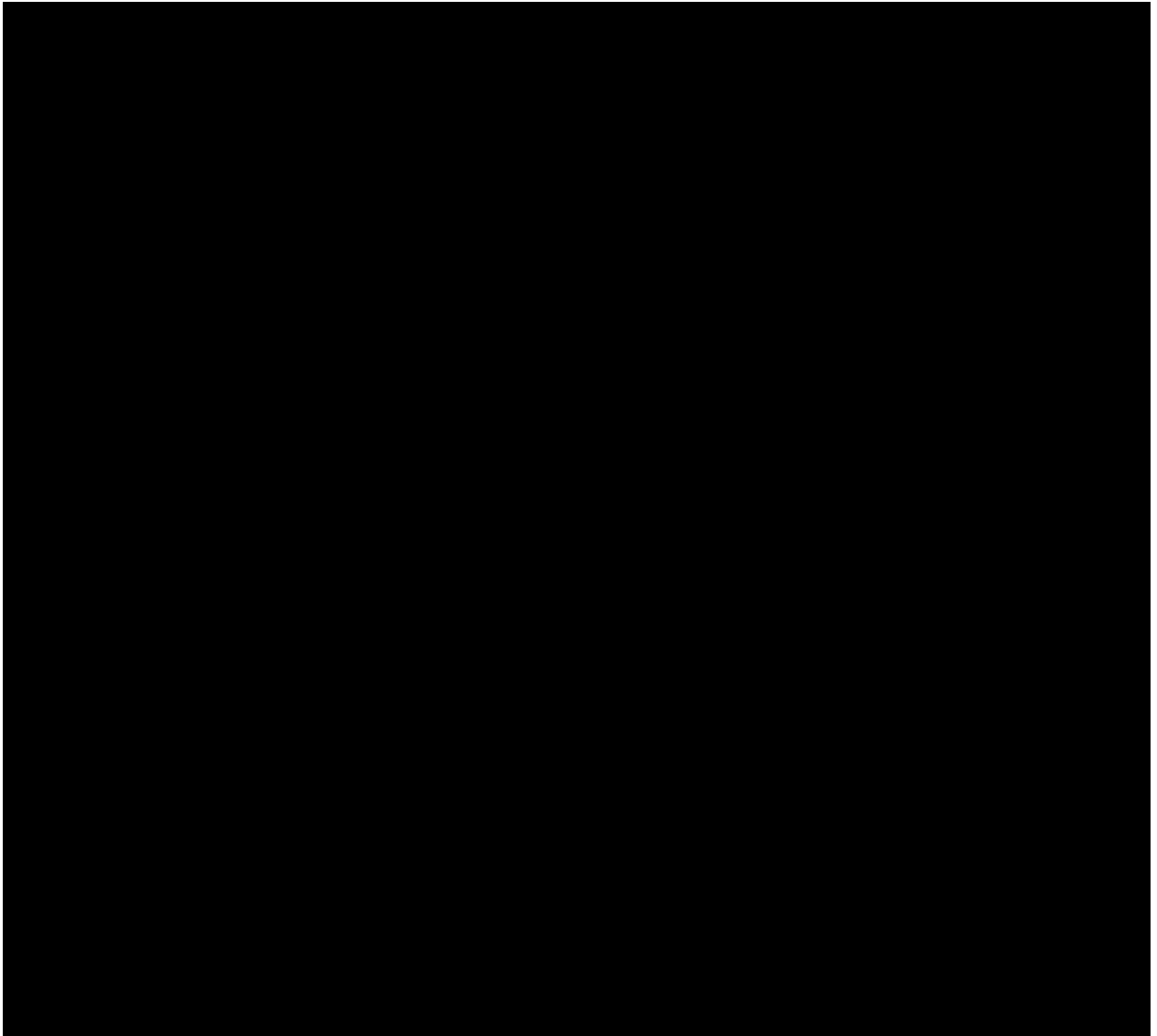
The Mirror Stage

Insofar as Lacan, all sons are cloven in two.
All sons lose their wholeness.



Zephyr

Is violence inherent to motherhood, then?



“Fly away on my zephyr
I feel it more than ever
And in this perfect weather
We’ll find a place together”³

Notes

1. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, trans. Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 2:422.
2. Ibid, 125.
3. The Red Hot Chili Peppers, "The Zephyr Song," 2002, track 6 on *By the Way*, Warner Brothers, 2002, compact disc.

Bibliography

1. Theweleit, Klaus. *Male Fantasies*. Translated by Erica Carter and Chris Turner. Volume 2. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
2. The Red Hot Chili Peppers, "The Zephyr Song." Track 6 on *By the Way*. Warner Brothers, 2002, compact disc.

I think of Klaus Theweleit a lot. He introduced his two-volume book, *Male Fantasies*, by describing his father and the beatings he'd receive from him. Importantly, he described the ambivalence of his mother towards those beatings. Later, in the second volume, he goes on to write the most formative quote of my academic career: "Thus the holy cow of motherhood was never slaughtered."¹ What Theweleit was saying is that the role of mothers in raising violent fascist sons has never been adequately explored or acknowledged. He's aware that this framing could be used to vilify women as sources of evil, but he also argues that for this to be possible then the inverse must also be equally possible: mothers as the source of production for nonviolent human beings.² So, is it possible for mothers to produce nonviolent sons, and if so, how? This project doesn't answer that question. Rather, through an exploration of my own experiences that have shaped my own self as a mother, and which will go on to shape my son's self, I ask that question.

This project was supposed to be something else. I had titled it People/Places, and it was supposed to be a self-portrait made up of the people and places that I've photographed. Instead, it became a story of motherhood when I created three frames that centered around my fear of becoming a shit mom.

I thought of Julie Kristeva a lot throughout this. I wanted to include her theory, but that didn't happen the way I wanted. It would have had to have been a different project that talked about language more, and likely more about desire. I realized, though that she is in it through *semanalysis*. The incorporation of bodies and images, along with the delivery of text in a way that is perhaps different, creates new meaning for this project in a way that traditional deliveries, like an essay, couldn't do. This is why the first image is labeled "The maternal body." An acknowledgement not only to Jess, who is pregnant in that picture, but to Kristeva, where the maternal body intersects with her work on linguistics.

However, since we discussed Jacques Lacan in class, I've been curious about his theory and motherhood. How much have I influenced my son's formation of his self, and how have I impacted the various stages of his self's development? If I've impacted his, then surely my mother must have impacted mine in some way. How are these experiences passed down? In this project I talk about mothers raising violent sons, and while I am not a son, I have a mother whose presence

¹ Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, trans. Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 2:384.

² Ibid.

and absence have both had impacts on me. Now, I pass these impacts down to my son as I grapple with raising him in a violent world.

Lacan discusses the mirror stage – where the body becomes fragmented.³ The infant becomes aware of the outside world and his separateness from his mother. He loses his wholeness. In class we talked about how there must be some kind of grief that an infant experiences because of this process, as rudimentary as it may be. But, can't grief be defined as a type of violence? In what ways does grief exist that does not feel like violence against the mind, body, and spirit? I don't think it does. We are all brought into this world and experience violence very early on.

After looking at my anxieties around motherhood, I move on to explore my experiences with love – my mother's love, which she has learned from her own mother, and two dysfunctional romantic loves. Does any of this matter in the end if it is the act of motherhood, and the subsequent loss of the wholeness that comes along with the fragmented body that forms as the self individualizes into its own I, that creates the violence in our sons?

³ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Routledge, 2005), 3.

Bibliography

Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Theweleit, Klaus. *Male Fantasies*. Translated by Erica Carter and Chris Turner. Volume 2.
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.