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The Ghosts of Infertility: haunted by the realities of reproductive death

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THE GHOSTS OF INFERTILITY:

HAUNTED BY THE REALITIES OF PROCREATIVE DEATH!*

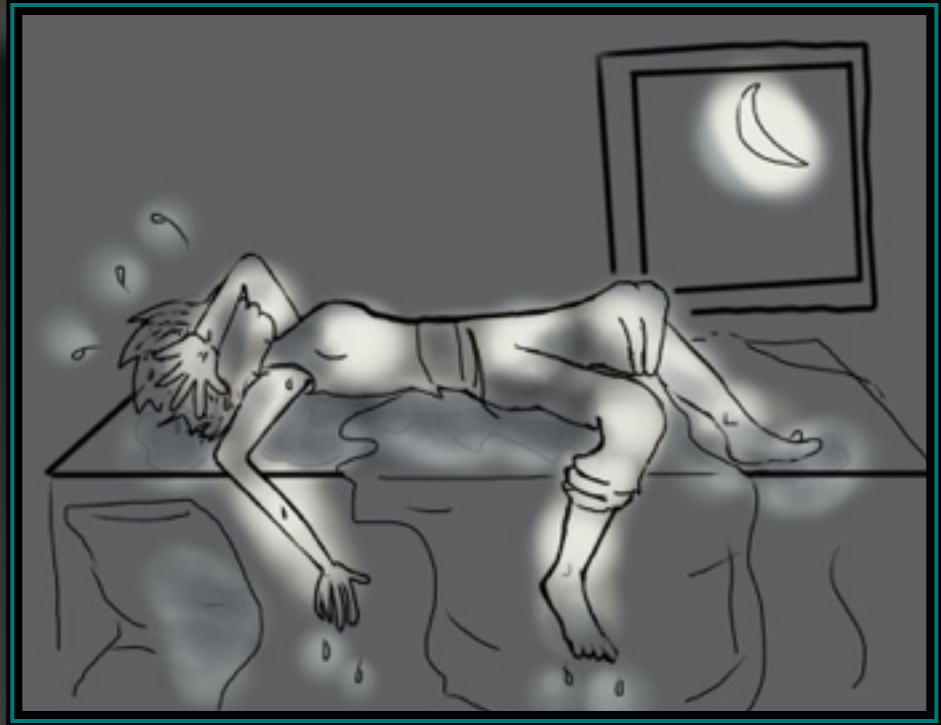
A COMIC OF CYCLES BY AMANDA E. GARRISON

SHE GOT THE "NIGHT SWEATS" FIRST.

"NIGHT SWEATS" ARE PART OF THE RECOGNIZABLE SYMPTOMATICS OR THE ONSET OF MENOPAUSE....

THE END OF A FEMALE BODY'S ABILITY TO REPRODUCE BABY HUMANS.

BABY HUMANS THAT WILL EVENTUALLY BE WORKERS...EARNING WAGES, CONSUMING PRODUCTS, PAYING TAXES, AND FOLLOWING THE RULES.



HER BREASTS HAD BEGUN TO BE TENDER TOWARD THE TIME HER MENSTRUAL CYCLE BEGAN...AND LITTLE CYSTS TROUBLED HER SENSE OF HEALTH...

SHE WAS CONVINCED THAT, AT 39, HER BODY WAS WINDING DOWN ITS ADVENTUROUS DANCE WITH THE ALWAYS-PRESENT POSSIBILITIES OF ACCIDENTAL PREGNANCY.

AFTER ALL, PUBERTY IN HUMAN BEINGS BEGINS LONG BEFORE ANY PHYSICAL SIGNS ARE OBVIOUS...THE SHUTDOWN - MUCH LIKE THE START-UP - OF A REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM WILL, IN MOST, TAKE SOME TIME (FAUSTO-STERLING, 2012).

*THE USE OF "PROCREATIVE" AND "REPRODUCTIVE" ARE PLACED SIDE-BY-SIDE IN THIS ARTICLE TO ILLUSTRATE THE WAYS IN WHICH THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF "PROCREATION" - PREGNANCY, BIRTHING, AND CARE - ARE CONGENITALLY SET APART FROM THE BIOLOGICAL SYSTEMS OF "REPRODUCTION" - INCLUDING SCIENTIFIC AND MEDICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ORGAN FUNCTION AND AGE.

IT BECAME OBVIOUS, AS SHE TOLD HER STORIES OF NIGHT SWEATS AND SORE BREASTS, THAT THE SUGGESTION OF "MENOPAUSE," FROM HER MOUTH, WAS UNEXPECTED.

THE MENTION OF NATURAL INFERTILITY, MAYBE UNCOMFORTABLE...

SHE ASKED HER DOCTOR ABOUT THE SYMPTOMS - THE CYSTS, NEVER-BEFORE EXPERIENCED..

AND THE NIGHT SWEATS...

SHE NEVER IMPLIED A PROBLEM...SIMPLY A CURIOSITY..



BUT HE ASSURED HER WITH A SMILE THAT SHE WAS "TOO YOUNG" FOR MENOPAUSE...AND WITHOUT UTTERING A SINGLE RUDE WORD, REMINDED HER THAT SHE WAS STILL IMPORTANT.

AND SO, SHE QUESTIONED..

WAS THERE AN UNSPOKEN RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HER ABILITY TO HAVE BABIES (BIO-YOUTH) AND HER FUNCTION IN THE MACHINE OF FREE-MARKET CAPITALISM?



WAS THERE A COMPLICATION WITH DRIFTING INTO "NATURAL INFERTILITY" WHILE REMAINING VISIBLE AND AUDIBLE TO THE MAKERS OF THE MARKET?

ACCORDING TO NANCY LESKO (2012), THE INEXTRICABLE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN YOUTH AND SEXUALITY RUN DEEP IN THE SAME VEINS AS DEMOCRACY, FREEDOM, AND CONSUMPTION (125). WAS MENOPAUSE THE DEATH OF HER SEXUAL ALLURE? WAS HER PROCREATIVE DIMINISHMENT THE FADING OF HER YOUTH - AND THEREFORE, A FADING OF HER?

SHE WOULD BE THE PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR SHOPPING, COOKING, WORRYING OVER FEEDING AND CARING FOR HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN IN A "FAMILY," AFTER ALL (SMITH 1999, PG 159).

THE FEMALE-BODY IS SUBJECT TO THE JUDGMENTS OF THE SOCIAL WORLD, WHOSE EDICTS SEEM TO, MUCH LIKE THE DISCOURSES OF "NATURAL SCIENCE," ORGANIZE THE EXPERIENCES OF THE BODY AROUND PROCREATION...

BUT... YOU'RE SO YOUNG!

TEEN PREGNANCY: LESKO QUESTIONS THE "BEFORE THEIR TIME" TREATMENT OF TEENAGED FEMALE-BODIED PEOPLE IN THE EVENT OF PREGNANCY. THIS PREGNANCY RESULTS FROM PRE-MARITAL SEX. THE LEGITIMACY OF THE CHILD (BLOOD) IS COMPROMISED BY SEX HAPPENING BEFORE MATRIMONY (LARGELY HETEROSEXUAL FRAMEWORKS) WITHOUT A SECURE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN: THE END OF A TEENAGER'S LIFE (LESKO, 138).



HER "LIFE" IS OVER!



ABORTION: FEMALE BODIED PEOPLE ARE SUBJECT TO LAWS AT STATE AND FEDERAL LEVELS THAT REGULATE THEIR ABILITIES TO HAVE AGENCY OVER THEIR OWN BODIES. OFTEN FEMALE PEOPLE ARE SUBJECT TO WAITING PERIODS, DEADLINES, RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS TO FACILITIES, AND OTHER CHIPPINGS THAT WILL LEGALLY COLLAPSE THE WAYS IN WHICH BABIES **MUST** BE BORN, OR THE PREGNANT BODY MUST BE INJURED OR WORSE, KILLED BY SANCTION.

YOU MAY NEVER HAVE ANOTHER CHANCE...!

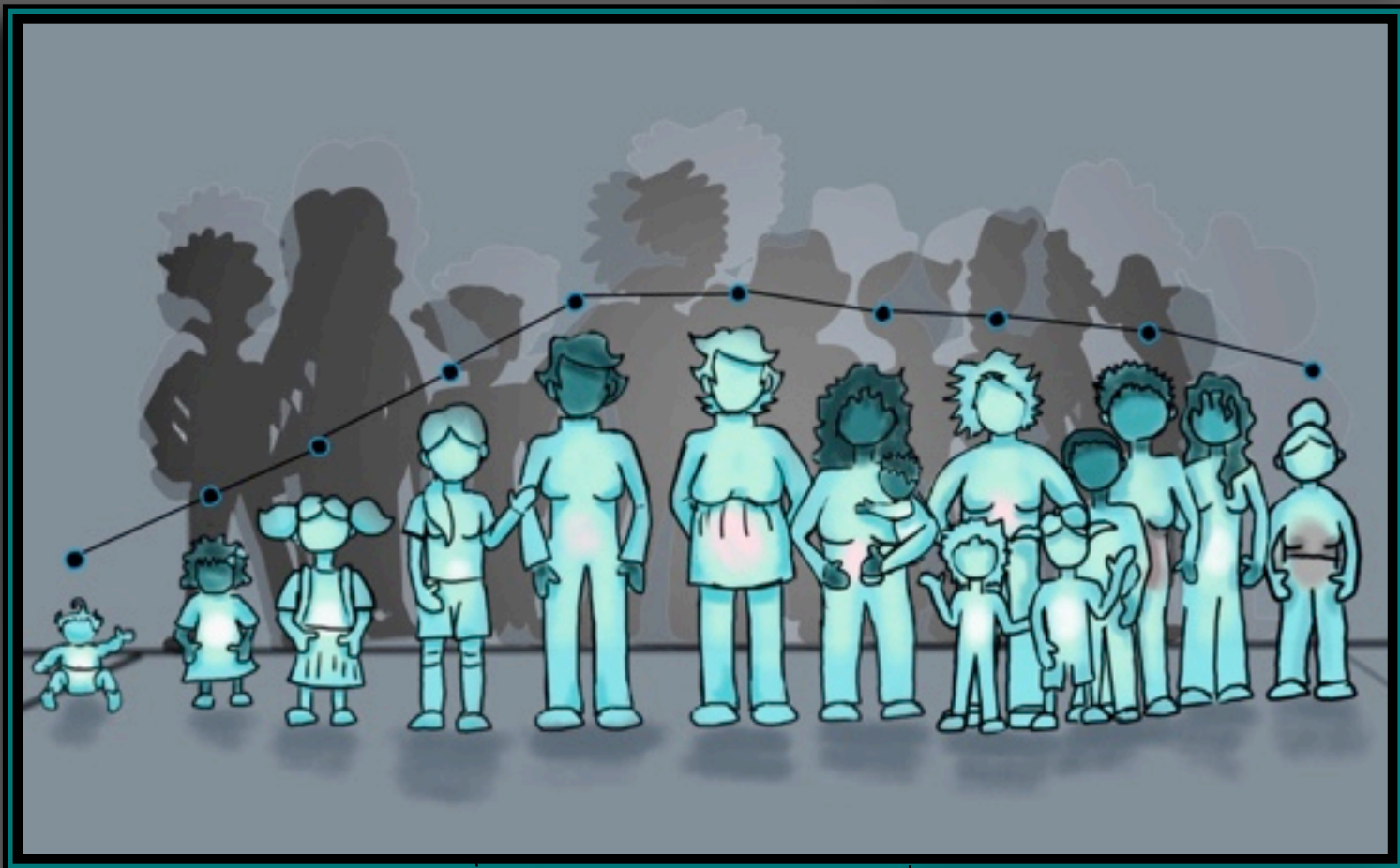
TUBAL LIGATIONS, BIRTH CONTROL, AND EVEN BREAST AUGMENTATIONS CALL INTO QUESTION THE "RATIONALITY" OF THE FEMALE-BODIED PERSON WHO "CHOOSSES" TO HAVE HER REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS REMOVED ("BUT YOU'RE SO YOUNG..."), OR WHO QUESTIONS THE POSSIBILITIES IN TAKING DAILY HORMONE TREATMENTS TO OPERATE IN THE EVERYDAY WORLD OF WORK. THE FEMALE PERSON FACES SCRUTINY AND DOUBT WHEN "OPTING" FOR BREAST REDUCTION (IMPACTING BREAST FEEDING) OR VOLUNTARY MASTECTOMIES....

FOR YOU SEE, HER BODY SEEMS SUBJECT TO THE RULES OF LEGISLATION, ESPECIALLY IN STATES WHERE GOVERNORS ARE "CORPORATE CONSERVATIVES," WHO PASS LAWS PREDICATED ON "FAMILY VALUES" DISCOURSE: THE FAMILY WILL STAY TOGETHER IF SOMEONE COOKS DINNER FOR EVERYONE AND SERVES IT AROUND A TABLE...IF SHE IS WORKING WITHOUT PAY TO MAKE "THE FAMILY" HAPPEN (SMITH, 169).

THE "LIFE-CYCLE" OF A FEMALE-BODIED PERSON IS MAPPED OUT VERY DIFFERENTLY THAN THAT OF A MALE-BODIED PERSON (FAUSTO-STERLING, 18).

THE VAST MAJORITY OF A FEMALE PERSON'S LIFE IS PRESUMED TO BE ONE OF "HEALTHY FERTILITY."

FEMALE-BODIED PEOPLE ARE SUBJECT TO THE NATURE OF THEIR HEALTH BEING STRICTLY RELATED TO THEIR ABILITY TO REPRODUCE. ...A MARKER OF GENDERED YOUTH.



AT THE SAME TIME, BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE PREDICTS THE DECLINE OF THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM.

AND OTHER DISCOURSES WORK TOGETHER TO CREATE DESIRE, DESTINY, AND THE INEVITABILITY OF PROCREATION AND YOUTH FOR THE FEMALE-BODIED (FOUCAULT 1990, 1157).

THE "BIOLOGICAL" FEMALE PERSON IS ENCOURAGED TO HAVE CHILDREN AT A YOUNGER AGE TO ENSURE THE VIABILITY OF THE FETUS (BUT NOT TOO YOUNG).

SO THAT WHEN OR IF THAT PERSON DOES NOT WANT TO BIRTH BIOLOGICAL CHILDREN... THERE IS A QUESTION ABOUT "HEALTH."

SCIENCE DISCOURSES GIVE US THE BIOLOGICAL CLOCK, TICKING ITSELF DOWN FROM PUBERTY TO REPRODUCTIVE DEATH TO INITIATE ANXIETIES IN SOME, REGARDLESS OF THEIR DESIRE TO PROCREATE OR NOT.

IN OTHER WORDS...BEYOND "WANT"...

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONSUMER ALSO EMERGES IN THE QUESTION OF AGING...

SO THAT, WHILE THE FEMALE-BODIED PERSON EXPERIENCES THE BIOLOGICAL REALITIES OF THE INEVITABLE IN REPRODUCTIVE SHUT-DOWN, SHE MIGHT ALSO SEE HER OWN DISSOLVING IN THE GAZE OF THE ARTIFICIAL "PUBLIC EYE" OF THE MARKET MEDIA.... SHE MIGHT DISAPPEAR INTO THE END OF THE LIFELINE WHEN SHE CEASES TO BE RECOGNIZED BY THE CONSUMER MARKET AS ONE WHOSE IDENTITY CAN BE CONJOINED WITH CONSUMPTION.

AND IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UNITED STATES, WHERE IDENTITY AND CAPITALISM HOLD HANDS TIGHTLY, IF SHE DOES NOT PURCHASE IN HER SOCIAL POSITION AS ALWAYS BECOMING "MOTHER," THEN SHE SERVES NO PURPOSE FOR "AMERICAN PROGRESS" (LESKO, 119-120).

MEANWHILE...IN A KITCHEN SOMEWHERE...

"THE FEMALE BODY" IS NOT A FOCUS OF TRADITIONAL BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES, SO THERE IS MUCH THAT IS UNKNOWN ABOUT THE PROCESSES OF LIFE WITH A UTERUS AND OVARIES (FAUSTO-STERLING, 16-17).

OUR PUZZLING HERO DISCOVERED THAT, IN HER TELLING OF HER EXPERIENCES AND THE RELATING TO MENOPAUSE, SHE MET THE SAME KIND OF COMFORT SHE'D RECEIVED FROM HER DOCTOR...

NO MATTER HOW SHE APPROACHED THE CURIOSITY ABOUT HER BODY...OR THE BODIES OF OTHERS...



SHE WAS "FAR TOO YOUNG" FOR MENOPAUSE TO BE PART OF HER REALITY...

THE PRIVATIZED MEDICAL BODY WAS THE KNOWLEDGE PROPERTY OF THE QUALIFIED, SO THAT THE AGES FOR MENOPAUSE WOULD HAVE HER BODY WAITING UNTIL 45, 46, 47, OR OLDER...(FOUCAULT, 1976).

EVEN IF SHE'D STARTED MENSTRUATING AT 12...AND HAD BABIES AT 20...

ALL OF THESE STORIES OF HER DELUSIONS - HER MADNESS, WERE RELATED TO REMAINING A PROCREATIVE VIABILITY (LESKO, 120), WHILE NO ONE SEEMED TO WONDER HOW SHE FELT ABOUT ANY OF IT...

THEIR REACTIONS TO HER QUESTIONS MIGHT, HOWEVER, HAVE HER ANXIOUS OVER AGING...OVER INFERTILITY...OVER DEATH...

HISTORICALLY, MEDICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISCOURSES, LIKE THOSE IN THE **DIAGNOSTIC AND STATISTICAL MANUAL OF MENTAL DISORDERS (DSM, 1952-2013)**, CAN BE USED TO CREATE GENDERED KNOWLEDGE...

IN OTHER WORDS, THE KNOWLEDGE THAT IS CREATED IN PATRIARCHAL OR HEGEMONIC CULTURES IS BLURRED TOWARD A PARTICULAR TRUTH, SPOKEN BY VERY PARTICULAR PEOPLE - LIKE SCIENTISTS...OR DOCTORS.

AND THIS TRUTH, CREATED BY THOSE IN POSITIONS OF POWER TO MAKE DEFINITIONS OF PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES, IS ONLY SPEAKABLE BY THOSE WHO HAVE MADE THE KNOWLEDGE ITSELF THE TRUTH (FOUCAULT 1990, PG 1156).

"HYSTERIA," WHILE NOT SOLELY DIAGNOSED IN THE FEMALE-BODIED, COMES FROM THE GREEK WORD THAT TRANSLATES INTO "UTERUS"...

AND WHILE "HYSTERIA" WAS NEVER REFERENCED INDEPENDENTLY IN THE **DSM**, CONVERSION DISORDER ENCOMPASSED THE CHARACTERISTICS KNOWN FOR DECADES AS A DISORDER MOST LIKELY TO AFFECT THE FEMALE-BODIED.

CONVERSION DISORDER, ROUGHLY TRANSLATED, IS A DISCONNECT FROM REALITY IN TERMS OF BODY - A DISEMBOIMENT THAT MIGHT VERY WELL RENDER THE INQUISITOR BLIND TO "MADNESS!"



HYSTERIA!
HYPOCHONDRIA!
CONVERSION!
SOMATIZATION!

CONVERSION DISORDER CAN ALSO BE UNDERSTOOD TO BE THE IMAGININGS OF REAL, PHYSIOLOGICAL CONDITIONS AS RESPONSES TO TRAUMA THAT HAVE NO MEDICAL EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THEIR EXISTENCE.

THE DSM USES THE EXAMPLE OF FALSE PREGNANCY ("PSEUDOCYESIS")...THAT THE IMAGINING OF PREGNANCY MIGHT BE "A WISH FOR AND A FEAR OF PREGNANCY" (DSM-III, 244).*

CONVERSION DISORDER ALLOWS FOR THE FEARS OF THE PATIENT TO BE PROJECTED INTO A PHYSICAL DISABILITY - AND SOMETIMES FOR WHAT IS REFERRED TO AS A "SECONDARY GAIN!"

THE DSM-III DESCRIBES THE "SECONDARY GAIN" AS THE BENEFIT EXPERIENCED BY THE PATIENT WHEN CLAIMS ARE MADE OF DISABILITY, AND PEOPLE RESPOND (244).

IN OTHER WORDS, IF SOMEONE CLAIMS THAT THEY ARE EXPERIENCING AN ILLNESS, A DISCOMFORT, A DISABILITY (EVEN IF IN THE MOMENT), AND THERE IS NO EVIDENCE FOR THEIR CLAIM...

AND IF A MEDICAL DOCTOR OR OTHER QUALIFIED SPECIALIST CANNOT DETERMINE THE CAUSE OF THE CLAIM...

THEN, IT MUST BE ALL IN THE HEAD OF THE PATIENT...

THE OTHER BODIED...

THE AGED...

THE FEMALE...

THE CHILDLESS...

THE MOTHER...

**THE DIFFERENT EDITIONS OF THE APA'S DSM IN THIS ARTICLE SERVE TO HIGHLIGHT THE PERSISTENCE, THROUGH TIME, OF THE ASSOCIATIONS OF THE "IMAGINARY" SYMPTOMS SURROUNDING THE BIOLOGICAL AND THE FEMALE-BODY. THIS HISTORICAL CONTEXT PROVIDES A MEANS OF TRACING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DISCOURSE AND POPULAR CULTURE.*

MEANWHILE...ON A UNIVERSITY CAMPUS SOMEWHERE...

EVEN AMONG MANY OF OUR HERO'S COLLEAGUES AND FRIENDS, THE SENTIMENT DID NOT CHANGE.

SHE NOTICED NO QUESTIONS ABOUT HER EXPERIENCE - OR THE MYSTERIES AROUND AGE'S BIOLOGICAL "REALITIES..."

SHE ONLY RECEIVED THE COMFORT OF ONGOING, ALBEIT FADING REPRODUCTIVITY - THE COMFORT OF "BEING" YOUNG.



HER

DESTINY!

THE SIMILARITIES IN THE RESPONSES TO HER QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS AROUND HER AGING BODY PROVIDED INTERESTING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CONSUMPTION, FAMILY, AGE, BIOLOGY...



AND THE FEMALE-BODIED PERSON'S PLACE IN ALL OF THOSE SPACES...EVEN WHEN ITS END IS JUST A SUGGESTION FOR THE MOMENT, IN THE MURMURING OF MENOPAUSE.

...THE GHOSTS OF A FUTURE AND A PAST WHERE INVISIBILITY WITHIN SOCIETY'S LENS BECOMES A REALITY...HAUNTED BY WHAT WILL COME... BEYOND CONTROL.

IS THE COMFORT OF PROCREATIVE VIABILITY RELATED TO YOUTH, AN EXAMPLE OF A CULTURE THAT CONTINUES TO VALUE THE FEMALE-BODY PRIMARILY AS A DEVICE FOR REPRODUCTION - BIOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL? THE MAKER OF "THE FAMILY" ...? IS "INFERTILITY, WHETHER VOLUNTARY OR INEVITABLE, IN THE FEMALE-BODY, SOCIAL DEATH?"

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