

Pregnant Bodies – Embodied Pregnancy

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The field of pregnancy studies is dominated by research on topics such as reproductive rights, fetal life as well as the female or maternal relationship to the unborn. The workshop drew attention to a rarely discussed aspect of pregnancy: the pregnant bodies themselves and embodied pregnancy as an experience. The relationship between gender and pregnancy, specifically the question why, both in public discourse and in academic research, pregnancy is consistently understood as a solely female experience was an important issue that drove the organization of the workshop.

Following an interdisciplinary perspective that links theoretical approaches with field studies, this workshop brought together scholars from the fields of Social and Cultural Anthropology and Sociology, German Studies and Modern German Literature, Feminist Studies and History. The lectures and discussions focused on mainly three perspectives. The first focus was placed on embodied pregnancy, emphasizing that the body itself cannot be thought without its social and environmental surroundings.

Keynote speaker SALLIE HAN (Oneonta, NY) picked up on this point by drawing attention to the embodied and material realities of pregnancies. Embodied pregnancy as an experience also refers to the dialectic relationship between the pregnant body and the unborn. This angle was well illustrated by CLAIRE E. SCOTT (Gambier, OH), who discussed a performance of the German artist Annegret Soltau, which addresses an uncomfortable relationship between the artist and her pregnant body.

A second focus of the workshop referred to the relationship between pregnancy and technological development. As EVA SÄNGER

(Cologne) pointed out, technology such as in-vitro-fertilization or ultrasound do not only influence the experience and practices of pregnancy, it can moreover transform the embodied experience of pregnancy. Insights into research on trans pregnancy by Sallie Hines will be added to the conference proceedings.

The third perspective can be summarized as literary and media discourses on pregnant bodies and pregnancy. CHRISTINE KANZ (Linz) analyzed the novel *Mafarka the Futurist* (1909) by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, which describes a male pregnancy. LISA MALICH (Lübeck) presented her research that reflected upon the history of knowledge surrounding the concept of human nesting.

The workshop resonated around five major recurring topics: (1) multiplicities, (2) ambivalence, (3) the creation and visualization of a pregnancy identity and the negotiation of motherhood, (4) pregnancy as a gendered, classed, racialized and historical experience and (5) the notion of being between bodies and building up a life-transforming connection. In the following we will give a short summary of the specifics discussed along these lines.

The notion of *multiplicities* was introduced by Sallie Han with the idea to move away from a dialectic thinking of pregnancy as a solely biological happening and in terms of the maternal/fetus dial. Instead, she suggested the understanding of a fetus as borderless and stated, „pregnant bodies contain and constitute multiplicities“. By this she implied that the pregnant body embodies its environmental surroundings and thus raised awareness to the interrelation of reproductive and environmental injustices. She further highlighted that pregnancy does not only involve the mother or two parents, but also their parents and ancestors as well as the overall surrounding social context.

This argument was taken up by Eva Sängner. In her ethnographic fieldwork about ultrasound images she observed temporal pregnant communities that are established during pregnancy. These communities, which surround pregnant bodies, come together to view the ultrasound images. She described doctor's appointments as shared events and hence referred to the constitution of multi-

plicities by pregnant bodies and embodied pregnancy. By sharing and distributing bodily sensations through ultrasound images, the experience of pregnancy goes far beyond the maternal/foetus dial.

Claire E. Scott pointed out Annegret Soltau's reconfiguration and reframing of pregnancy, which entails a broader understanding of the pregnant body. At the beginning of her video installation *schwangersein II* (1981), Soltau turns external violence into self-harm and thus controls the violence happening to her body. This scene forces the question of body limits on the viewer and implies that one never acts alone or is a whole but rather multiple. Soltau also addresses the transgenerational moment of pregnancy and questions the limits of her own pregnant body and the embodied experience. Last but not least, the notion of multiplicities appears in the way Soltau performs a strong interaction with her surroundings and consequently expresses multiple feelings, such as despair, alienation and ambivalence.

The topic of *ambivalence* recurred throughout the workshop. As Scott analyzed, Soltau emphasizes an ambivalent relationship to her pregnant body and the fetus. Throughout her performance, Soltau embodies both power and struggle. When looking at an ultrasound picture, she panics, not only because of seeing the fetus but also because of seeing her own body. Eva Sanger explained that the cultural practice of sharing and distributing sonograms reinforces only positive emotions. Such practices restrict certain feelings, such as ambivalence.

Furthermore, the novel *Mafarka the Futurist*, presented by Christine Kanz, depicts a thoroughly ambivalent figure: the Egyptian ruler Mafarka. According to Kanz, his pregnancy can be read as representing male birth fantasies as an expression of pregnancy envy. There were several ambiguities presented in the analysis, one is exemplified in the notion that birth is the opposite of creativity. However, the novel follows the analogy of male birth being an art production, which is underlined by the fact that the pregnant body itself is not described and the child is nurtured in an artificial womb outside of Mafarka's body. Kanz followed a biographical analysis of the

novel, which, from our perspective, would have benefited from a critical discussion of the heteronormative representation of male birth fantasies, especially, if it was to be read in a queer perspective as Claire E. Scott demanded in the discussion.

In the section about *creation and visualization of pregnancy identity and negotiation of motherhood*, Eva Sanger contributed with her research on ultrasound images. She clarified that the images have the function to make women feel pregnant and were therefore directly connected to notions of „delight, joy and enthusiasm“. Moreover, they are used to announce the pregnancy of a woman by showing them to other people. The presenter pointed to the additional explanatory activity that is needed to be given by the mother-to-be, because the picture itself is not self-explanatory. From her perspective, it has „seductive powers“ and appeals to the emotions of the audience, which results in the expectancy of positive emotions. Another aspect she mentioned is the correct or appropriate behavior of mothers and mothers-to-be that is bound in a set of standard rules. She exemplified this aspect through the „misbehavior“ of a female viewer commenting negatively on an ultrasound picture of her friend. Scott also reflected on the notion of sharing ultrasound images in regard to Soltau's performance. She pointed to the performance's first phase in which the pregnant artist stands in front of her own ultrasound images but actively hinders the viewer from seeing them. The presenter interpreted the artist's behavior as the rejection of sharing those personal emotions and the emotional expectations connected to them.

Several papers touched on the notion of *pregnancy as a gendered, classed, racialized and historical experience* and called for new strands of research centering this notion. Sallie Han recalled that the state of pregnancy is connected to recurring metaphors such as „being“ or „becoming“. But what she felt is important to focus on, are the embodied and material realities of pregnant bodies that become visible and traceable in the light of the Climate Crisis, racism or COVID-19.

Claire E. Scott as well as Lisa Malich pointed to the historical shifts that those in-

tersectional experiences of pregnancy were affected by in the past two centuries. Scott referred to the change of the cultural narrative of pregnancy in Germany, which transformed from the image of the strong German mother to images of vulnerable pregnant bodies since the 1970s. Malich located the peak of change in the history of nesting in the same period. According to her, prior to this shift the concept of nesting was originally designed and used solely within animal studies and was not gendered. Since the 1930s, changes within research in ethology could be noticed that started prioritizing species where the nesting activity was distributed along sharp gendered borders, e.g. the gray goose. This development then led to the sexual coding of nesting as a feminized instinct, which resulted in the nest becoming a gendered metaphor. Since the 1970s it has been used to connect the female instinct of nesting to the alleged natural responsibility of house and care work. Malich highlighted that the change in the gendered history of nesting has to be viewed in front of the second wave of the women's movement contesting traditional female gender roles.

The notion of *being between bodies and building up a life-transforming connection* was accentuated by Sallie Han who characterized the fetus as being a borderless entity. She further asked the workshop participants to search for new definitions when it comes to characterizing the connection between mother/parent-to-be and child-to-be. She highlighted the importance of questioning causal thinking that implies a disruption of the borderless relationship through the act of birth. From our perspective, a remarkable thought for future research on the topic of relating and being between bodies during pregnancy and beyond.

Through a different lens, Claire E. Scott pointed to Soltau. Her pregnancy creates an unfamiliarity with her own body, as she no longer inhabits it on her own. Therefore, the already mentioned scene of her performance, where Soltau engages with the possibility of abortion, has to be highlighted here as well. In conclusion, the artist challenges pre-given identity categories for pregnant people within her performance and works towards overcoming the fact that fetus image technology

largely ignores the mother's body.

Eva Sängér additionally highlighted the need to consider the connection between mother/parents-to-be and child-to-be as socially constructed. She pointed out that mothers-to-be do not necessarily feel a connection before they hear the heartbeat of their child-to-be. They are therefore in need of a material artifact resulting from a medical examination to get to that point. Nevertheless, within the narrative of the women and doctors, it seems codified that the bonding has already happened. However, ethnographic research has shown that the creation of a life-transforming connection with the child-to-be requires additional help and does not exist naturally. How this affects partners, considering that their relation and experience is not clearly defined and doctors actively encourage them to learn the bonding, remains an open question in urgent need of research.

Owed to the unpredictable circumstances of COVID-19, the remaining but unfortunately missing papers would have been important add-ons to discuss more profoundly the often touched upon topic of queer perspectives on pregnancy. However, the workshop successfully focused on pregnant bodies as well as embodied pregnancy as an intersectional experience. The conference can be seen as a starting point to engage in a new strand of research within pregnancy studies.

Conference overview:

Antonia Villinger (Bamberg), Sinah Kloth (Bonn), and Günter Blumberger (Cologne): Introduction

Sallie Han (Oneonta, NY): The Climate of Pregnancy

Claire E. Scott (Gambier, OH) Threatening Maternal Bodies: Annegret Soltau's Performances of Pregnancy

Christine Kanz (Linz): On Producing Male Mothers. Figurations of Male Birth in the Historical Avantgarde

Eva Sängér (Cologne): Sharing Sonograms. Visuality, Affect and Prenatal Sociality

Lisa Malich (Lübeck) The Nest of the Uterus and the Nest of the Family. A History of Nesting during Human Pregnancy

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